

ART ANCIEN



WOODEN STELE OF HERES-IB, DAUGHTER OF PA-DI-AMUN, SON OF HOR

Third Intermediate Period
Dynasty 22, ca. 945-900 BC.
Egypt, Thebes
25 x 22.5 x 2 cm
Without base: 15.3 cm

PROVENANCE

Collection of Henri Lefort des Ylouses (1882-1978), acquired from 'Delcourt' in 1930 [according to label on reverse and signed attestation from Eric Lefort des Ylouses].

Subsequently by descent to Daniel Lefort des Ylouses (1945-2022).

Subsequently by descent to Henri Lefort des Ylouses (born 1977).

A particularly finely painted wooden stele from the Third Intermediate Period, depicting Heres-ib, presenting offerings to Osiris.

A round-topped stele depicting an offering scene, framed by door-leaves, a celestial sky vault and red earth. Adorned in a diaphanous gown, with a perfume cone atop her head, Heres-ib stands with outstretched arms, presenting offerings of wine and bread to the mummiform god Osiris, depicted with a sun-disk. In the lunette lies another sun-disk, accompanied by two uraei, and flanked by offerings of incense and bread. On the table between them, further offerings of bread are depicted, and beneath, two jars of wine wrapped in the twisted stems of lotus flowers.

In front of the figure of Osiris, a single line of hieroglyphs reads: 'Osiris, may he give an invocation offering of bread and beer.' Facing this, another inscription confirms the name and title of the stela's owner: 'The Mistress of the House Heres, daughter of Pa-di-Amun, justified, son of Hor, justified.'



Funerary Art of the 22nd Dynasty

The Third Intermediate Period (c.1070-664 BC) was characterised by profound political and cultural change. Following the political fragmentation of the 21st Dynasty, in 945 BC, Egypt's throne passed to a powerful family of Libyan descent. Dynasty 22 brought about a reimposition of central authority followed by a period of inevitable cultural transformation, which also extended to burial practices.¹ With elaborate, decorated graves now almost completely abandoned, the deceased were often buried in existing tombs, repurposed for their journey to the underworld. As such, tomb furnishings also underwent significant changes. However, while everyday objects were no longer considered important funerary paraphernalia, the two objects which remained crucial to the burial rites were coffins and funerary stelae, and both adopted new significance during this period.²

Indeed, it was during this period that wooden funerary stelae reached their highpoint. Emerging in the First Dynasty as burial markers, from the Middle Kingdom onwards they became an integral part of burial furnishings, recording the names, titles and representations of the deceased to keep their memory alive. Furthermore, they played a particularly crucial role in the deceased's journey to the afterlife. Typically showing the stele's owner before an offering table, piled high with the goods they are presenting to the god opposite, the images and inscriptions served as powerful invocations to the gods, ensuring a safe transition for the departed from the mortal realm to the spiritual one. Stelae also marked the place where the living could come into contact with the dead, offering both physical remembrance and spiritual guidance to the family of the deceased.³

During their highpoint, the centre of wooden stelae production was in Thebes. Indeed, it is in the Theban necropolis where the majority of such wooden stelae have been found, or have since been attributed to on account of their fine style.⁴ In the few cases where the archaeological context has survived, it is suggested that stelae were free-standing objects, placed next to the coffin in the burial chamber.⁵



'Osiris, may he give an invocation offering of bread and beer. The Mistress of the House Heres, daughter of Pa-di-Amun, justified, son of Hor, justified.'

Iconography

This stela can be assigned to the Third Intermediate Period, probably Dynasty 22, on account of its unique decorative agenda. It is also particularly notable for its fine craftsmanship, as well as several delicate features which are rarely seen on others of the same period.

Heres and Osiris

On the right, an elite woman, the owner of the stela, is clad in an elaborate, diaphanous dress covered by a sheer mantle. Her clothing's sole adornment is the green broad collar, symbolic of her rejuvenation in the afterlife, and atop her head she wears a perfume cone, traditionally painted in red and white. The inscription identifies her as 'The Mistress of the House Heres, daughter of Pa-di-Amun, justified, son of Hor, justified.'⁶ Heres' name itself means 'She (i.e. a goddess) is satisfied.' In keeping with the canon of proportion used in New Kingdom art (c.1570-1069 BC), her shortened torso and elongated legs creates a slender and feminine figure which is further emphasised by the fall and elegance of the diaphanous dress and mantle.⁷ Particular care has gone into the depiction of the deceased, exemplified in the delicate addition of makeup, as well as the hatching scratched into the plaster to emphasise the lines of the dress and the sheer fabric. The dating of the piece is further consolidated by her accessories, and in particular the style of the perfume cone - broad at the base, divided in two blocks of colour, and surrounded by green vegetation - which is again in line with other depictions of the period.⁸ This green vegetation is particularly interesting to note, as it has been seen to represent the regeneration of the deceased in the afterlife.⁹



Heres stands, arms outstretched in adoration, opposite the standing figure of the bearded mummiform god, Osiris. The very depiction of Osiris confirms the dating of the stela to early in the Third Intermediate Period (probably Dynasty 22) as, by the 9th century BC, the deity was completely replaced by standing or seated figures of Re-Horakhty.¹⁰ However, it is his depiction here that is particularly unusual. Osiris is more traditionally depicted wearing the Atef crown, the white headdress of Upper Egypt, along with the symbols of his kingship and authority in the underworld, the crook and flail (Fig. 1). Yet on the present stela, the figure of Osiris, while holding his crook and flail, is adorned with a sun-disk and *uraeus* above his head.¹¹ This is a specific reference to Re, the sun god, under whose control Osiris exercised his power in the underworld. Indeed, in the New Kingdom and its aftermath, Re was believed to be in charge of both the sky and the underworld, while Osiris only had power over the latter.¹² The authority of the sun god is further emphasised by the central dominance of the sun-disk with flanking *uraei* in the lunette of the stela. That the complementary relationship between the two gods is depicted here is unusual, and is evidence of the complex and interchangeable nature of Egyptian symbolism. Indeed, in addition to these invocations of the sun god, the flesh of Osiris is painted a light green, reflecting his own identity as a god of vegetation and regeneration, and again emphasising the spiritual significance of the stela in ancient Egyptian funerary rites.

1 Wooden Funerary Stela of Padiamun, Third Intermediate Period, Thebes, Egypt. British Museum, EA8484. Showing Osiris wearing the Atef crown.





Bread and Beer

Standing between Heres and Osiris is an offering table, painted in blue and white, on top of which are offering loaves. Either side of the offering table, sealed jars of wine sit on low stands, and are embellished with lotus flowers symbolic of rebirth, twisted around the body of the vessel. This scene is mirrored by a single line of hieroglyphs in front of the figure of the deity, which reads: 'Osiris, may he give an invocation offering of bread and beer.'

With funerary wishes for beer and bread common to the burial rite, the specific depiction of other offerings was up to the discretion of the artist.¹³ Indeed, in the lunette, and to either side of the dominant sun-disk, are the unusual offerings of incense pots. This iconographic feature first occurs in the lunettes of stelae during the Middle Kingdom, where, in some examples, the incense pots are held by outstretched human arms, mirroring the hieroglyph for *henqet*, meaning 'offering(s)'.¹⁴ That these incense pots are meant as further offerings is confirmed by the presence of the bread-loaf hieroglyph, used for the letter *t*, below each incense pot, serving as feminine phonetic complement for the term for offerings.¹⁵

Gateway to Heaven

This scene of Heres and Osiris is carefully framed to heighten its symbolism, as well as to producing a carefully balanced and visually pleasing composition. Indeed, to the left and right of the scene door-leaves, painted in beige with fine red lines, symbolise the doors of Heaven.¹⁶ Their inclusion in the decorative agenda of stelae has been identified as a particularly rare one, and dated to the 7th century BC, although earlier examples do exist.¹⁷ Moreover, at their base, a simple band of red and black at the base represents the earth, while at the top, they hold up an overarching band of dark blue representing the vault of the sky. Highlighting the cosmographical setting of the main scene, this clever framing is perhaps also carefully constructed to reflect the journey from the mortal realm to the afterlife that the deceased must now undertake.



Henri Lefort des Ylouses (1882-1978)

Born in 1882 into an artistic family, Henri Lefort des Ylouses was a Lieutenant in the 85th Infantry Regiment. He was a graduate of the Special Military School of St-Cyr, the most prestigious French military academy, set up in 1802 by Napoleon to train officers and generals. His interest in art was probably conditioned by his father, Arthur Henri Lefort des Ylouses (1846-1912), who was a painter, engraver, ceramist and sculptor. Receiving classical training at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, under the tutelage of painter Alexander Cabanel, he regularly exhibited in the Salon de Paris' ceramic section, and his work was rewarded with a silver medal at the Universal Exhibition of 1878.

Henri Lefort des Ylouses bought the present piece in Paris in 1930 from 'Delcourt', according to the inscription.

2 Arthur Henri Lefort des Ylouses, *Hercules and the Nemean Lion*, c.1898. Gypsograph, 59.8 x 26.2 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, No. 2009.526.

FOOTNOTES

1 J. Allen, & M. Hill, 'Egypt in the Third Intermediate Period (ca. 1070-664 BC),' *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 2004 (Rev. 2018), URL: https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tipd/hd_tipd.htm

2 M. Loth, "Thebanische Totenstelen der Dritten Zwischenzeit: Ikonographie und Datierung." In G. Broekman et al., eds., *The Libyan Period in Egypt. Historical and Cultural Studies into the 21st to 24th Dynasties: Proceedings of a Conference at Leiden University, 25-27 October 2007*, 219-230. Leuven: Peeters, 2009; J. Allen, & M. Hill, 'Egypt in the Third Intermediate Period.'

3 M. Loth, "Thebanische Totenstelen der Dritten Zwischenzeit..." 219.

4 M. Loth, "Thebanische Totenstelen der Dritten Zwischenzeit..." 219; see also, J. H. Taylor and N. Strudwick, eds., *The Theban Necropolis: Past, Present and Future*, (London: British Museum Press, 2003).

5 M. Loth, "Thebanische Totenstelen der Dritten Zwischenzeit..." 222.

6 A number of women named Heres are attested on monuments of the Third Intermediate Period but none can be associated with the owner of this stele: Report by Dr Stephen Harvey, Egyptologist and Director of the Ahmose and Tetisheri Project at Abydos, Egypt.

7 The proportions of the body in depicting women on funerary paraphernalia has been identified by J. Taylor, in 'Theban Coffins...' p.100, Fig. I, 4.

8 The differing style of the perfume cone has been identified by J. Taylor, in 'Theban Coffins...' p.101, Fig. 2, 2.

9 N. Cherpion, 'Le 'Cône d'onguent,' gage de survie,' *BIFAO*, Vol. 94, (1994), 84.

10 M. Loth, "Thebanische Totenstelen der Dritten Zwischenzeit..." 227.

11 M. Smith, *Following Osiris: Perspectives on the Osirian Afterlife from Four Millennia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 324-7.

12 M. Smith, *Following Osiris*, 324.

13 Email correspondence with Dr. Stephen Harvey, 26.03.24.

14 Report by Dr Stephen Harvey; R. Hölzl, *Die Giebfelddekoration von Stelen des Mittleren Reiches*. Beiträge zur Ägyptologie 10. (Vienna, 1990), 19.

15 E. Brovarski, 'The Doors of Heaven,' *Orientalia*, Vol. 46 (1977): 107-115.

16 D. Aston, 'Thebes', *Burial Assemblages of Dynasty 21-25. Chronology - Typology - Development*, (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 351, fn. 2915.