



[22] Stela (“First Stela”) of Seti I

Beth Shean | Early 13th century BCE |
 Basalt | H: 246 cm W: 80 cm D: 30 cm |
 IAA | S-884

This round-topped stela commemorates a successful Egyptian military operation against a small group of rebellious Canaanite towns in the vicinity of Beth Shean during the reign of King Seti I (1294–1279 BCE) in the early Nineteenth Dynasty. The stela is one of two (conventionally

referred to as the “First Stela” and “Second Stela”) carved by Egyptian artisans, working in Canaan, of local basalt. Both were found reused in secondary contexts at the site. Most of the well-preserved, though broken, First Stela was discovered in 1923 in front of the northern temple of Level V, next to a stela of Seti I’s son and successor, Ramesses II; a small fragment belonging to the right side of the stela was discovered two years later in the southern temple of Level V. The initial phase of Level V began no earlier than the eleventh century BCE, thus significantly postdating the reign of Seti I as well as the demise of the Egyptian New Kingdom garrison at Beth Shean (the latter event probably occurring in the third quarter of the twelfth century BCE). Most scholars assume that the stela originally stood in a temple of Level VIII, a poorly dated level that probably should be assigned to the thirteenth century BCE, and for reasons unknown was moved at a later date to the temple in Level V.

At the top of the stela is a carefully drawn winged sun disk labeled “The Behdetite,” an epithet of Horus, the falcon-headed deity worshiped principally at Edfu, ancient Behdet, in Upper Egypt. Beneath this protective symbol stands King Seti I wearing a full kilt with a flaring front and a close-fitting wig with a circlet, from which rises the royal uraeus. The king offers incense and libation to a deity labeled “Re-Horakhty, the Great God, Lord of Heaven, May He Give All Life.” Re-Horakhty is shown with a human body and a falcon head covered with the royal *nemes* headdress and surmounted by a circular disk and a protruding uraeus symbolizing the ancient solar god Re. Between the king and the god are an offering stand, lotus flower, and

a label describing the action displayed in the scene, “Performing Incense and Libation.” Above the king is a cartouche that encloses his throne name, Menmaatre, “Eternal is the Justice of Re.” The cartouche is preceded by the standard royal epithets, “The Good God” and “Lord of the Two Lands” (i.e., Upper and Lower Egypt), and followed by the phrase “Given Life like Re.” Behind the king is the statement, “All Protection and Life Attend Him.”

The main body of the stela has 22 lines of neatly incised text, written from right to left. The inscription opens (line 1) with the date: Year 1, 3rd month of Shomu (summer), day 10. The five names that comprise the king’s full titulary occupy the remainder of line 1 together with lines 2 and 3. The first three names link the king to (1) Horus (called “Strong Bull, Who Appears in Thebes, Who Nourishes the Two Lands”); (2) Nekhbet and Wadjet, the patron goddesses of Upper and Lower Egypt (“Repeating Births, Strong of Arm, Who Subdues the Nine Bows”); and (3) the Golden Horus (“Repeating Appearances, Rich in Bows in All Lands”). The final two names, which are enclosed within cartouches, provide (4) the king’s throne name (or prenomen), Menmaatre, and the epithet “Made by Re,” preceded by “King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Lord of the Two Lands”; and (5) his birth name (or nomen), “Seti Beloved of Ptah,” preceded by “Son of Re, Lord of Appearances” and followed by “Beloved of Re-Horakhty, the Great God”). The following eleven lines (lines 4–14) offer effusive praise of the king of the sort routinely found in New Kingdom military



inscriptions, eulogizing the king's valor and success in battle and describing the fear he placed among Egypt's (defeated) Asiatic enemies.

The final section (starting partway through line 14) contains the historical crux of the text. Here Seti summarily recounts his army's capture of the town of Hammath, whose ruler had attacked and occupied Beth Shean and joined up with Pella to bottle up the loyal chief of Rehob in his town. Ancient Hammath is to be equated with Tell el-Hammah, about 16 km south of Beth Shean; Pella is at modern Khirbet Fahil, 10 km southeast of Beth Shean and east of the Jordan River; Rehob is at Tel Rehov, 5 km directly south of Beth Shean. Altogether, the king dispatched three divisions of his army to put down the revolt – the division of Amun to take the town of Hammath, the division of Re to recapture Beth Shean, and the division of Sutekh (Seth) to seize the town of Yeno'am, which evidently had joined the fray on the side of Hammath. The location of Yeno'am is uncertain: the most likely candidate for this place is thought to be Tel Yinam, located well to the north of Beth Shean and about 8 km due west of the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee. Seti closes the inscription with the claim that all of the towns fell to his army within the span of a single day, a boast that seems reasonable based on the short distances between Tel Beth Shean and Tell el-Hammah, Khirbet Fahil, and Tel Rehov, perhaps less so in the case of Tel Yinam if it is indeed the site of Yeno'am.

The repeated efforts of unruly Canaanite chiefs to secure independence from Egyptian domination and to seize

control or gain influence over their neighboring towns and territories were a regular feature of Egyptian-Canaanite relations during the Late Bronze Age. This stela documents the reassertion of Egyptian power in the vicinity of Beth Shean at the beginning of Seti I's reign. The late fourteenth century BCE – the era of the late Eighteenth Dynasty king Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) and his immediate successors – had seen some weakening of the Egyptian Empire in western Asia. Seti I restored Egyptian authority in Canaan and rebuilt the Egyptian garrison at Beth Shean, which had long served as Egypt's key military installation in central Canaan. The king recorded the Year 1 campaign on this stela and possibly on the Second Stela (see no. 23), as well as on the north wall of the Hypostyle Hall at Karnak in Upper Egypt. Whether the king directly participated in any of the military actions associated with the recapture of Beth Shean is debatable; it is just as likely that he gave marching orders to his division commanders from field headquarters elsewhere, but as was regularly the case with Egyptian military successes, the king claimed personal credit for the accomplishments of his commanders and field troops.

JW

References:

Brand 2000, 124–125; Davies 1997, 29–34; Hasel 1998, 124–29, 135–37, 146–48, fig. 12; Kitchen 1975, vol. 1, 11–12; Kitchen 1993a, vol. 1, 9–10; Kitchen 1993b, vol. 1, 17–19; Kruchten 1982; Rowe 1930, 24–29, fig. 5, pls. 41, 47:3.



[23] Stela ("Second Stela") of Seti I

Beth Shean | Early 13th century BCE |
Basalt | H: 177 cm W: 87 cm D: 34 cm |
IAA | S-885

The "Second Stela" of Seti I, like the so-called First Stela, was carved by Egyptian artisans, working in Canaan, of local basalt. It is badly worn and incompletely preserved. The top of the stela is lost. What remains of the right side of the vignette below shows the legs and feet of the king, who wears a long kilt and is facing the legs and feet of a god standing on a plinth. There probably was a matching pair of figures to