

A Collection of Some Unpublished Funerary Stelae in the Ismailia Museum

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Summary

The subject of this study is a group of limestone tombstones that were discovered through forced excavations during the Israeli occupation of the Sinai Peninsula, which was carried out by Moshe Dayan, the Israeli Defense Minister at that time. This happened without a scientific method and he was keen to keep it in a group of other possessions in a personal capacity until it was known by his own name, but Egypt succeeded in recovering it, and it is currently preserved in Ismailia Museum. It is worth noting that the area of Tel Al-Khwainat area in which this group was discovered has not received scientific attention since then and is known only as the Greek and Roman tombs.

The importance of the research:

The research deals with studying and analyzing a set of four tombstones that had not been previously published. Since they were recovered with a group of antiquities recovered from Israel at the end of December 1994, no researchers have studied them. Perhaps what gives special importance to this study is the fact that these tombstones are made of local material and have in their general artistic style what resembles the human body in its simplest form, which is a head and body in a rare style that has not yet been found.

The aim of the study:

The aim of the study is to identify the meaning and significance of depicting tombstones in a symbolic or primitive manner, by studying the relationship between a source in which these four evidences were found and their impact on the Christian pagan conflict during the era of persecution, wherever modern Christians fled to the desert.

Study hypotheses:

- The technical characteristics and data of the group.
- The relationship of artistic features and political events and to what extent they are affected by them.
- Attempt to date the Tombstones through writings and inscriptions.
- A comparative study with tombstones in the interior regions of Egypt and to determine whether there is a similarity or difference between that group and its counterparts in Sinai, Alexandria, Kom Abobello, Fayoum, and Abydos in Sohag.

Study Approach:

A descriptive, analytical and comparative approach was followed.

Results:

- The collection of artistic features of tombstones found at Tel Al-Khwainat in North Sinai provides a unique example among all other tombstones in Egypt during the Ptolemaic and Roman eras. These tombstones provide some of the data imposed by the nature of the place, its location, the material used in the industry, the inscriptions and writings as a field for analytical study, although it is not possible to have peer examples for comparison with them.
- The style of the four tombstones came with a single artistic character, which is a semi-rectangular shape from which a circle emerges on which the features of the human face are simply engraved, as the eyes are two circles between the nose line with the eyebrows outlined, and the nose represented its end with two impermeable holes. This style is unique among the styles of tombstones in Egypt in general. If compared to the tombstones that were found in the cemetery of Tel Judaism in Sinai, the discrepancy in the content of the text and the order of mentioning the data of the deceased will appear, as the tombstones in Tel Judaism include the age of the deceased, his name and the date of his death. They also differ from the style of Alexandria tombstones, which are distinguished by the similarity in their style and characteristics to the attic ones. This may be due to the presence of Greek artists in Alexandria, and to the decree issued in Athens in 317 BC, which prohibited the manufacture of tombstones in Athens, which prompted the Greeks to manufacture tombstones in Egypt that reflect their identity and culture. These tombstones were distinguished by the use of engraving or drawing in their execution, and were made of limestone or marble. Most of them were characterized by the representation of scenes from daily life and were placed on top of graves, usually written on them the name of the deceased, his lineage and his place of origin. The tombstones that closed the burial openings (burial pots for preserving ashes) had gabled peaks spread across the eastern cemetery in Alexandria and its outskirts, and they symbolized the Greek temple and the oldest of these temples is the Temple of Artemis 600 BC.
- Tombstones in the inner cities and regions of the Delta and Middle Egypt during the Ptolemaic and Roman eras were distinguished by their being a mixture of Egyptian and Greek art, as in the case of the tombstones of Kom Abobello, Fayum tombstones and the tombstones of Abydos.
- The tombstones of Kom Abobello are distinguished by their unique artistic features in terms of representing the body of the deceased in several positions (reclining - burning incense - making offerings - Orans). The technique of decoration of these tombstones came in its beginning with the prominent sculpture influenced by the Hellenistic style, then the recessed carving adapted from Egyptian art appeared. The tombstones of Kom Abobello are considered one of the most important Greek and Roman-style tombstones, which show a kind of fusion between Egyptian art and Greek and Roman art.
- The tombstones of Abydos are distinguished by their numerous numbers, especially in the Roman era. Most of them were found in ruined warehouses in the Temple of King Seti the First, and were characterized by the emergence of many Egyptian artistic features such as the vaulted summit and Egyptian deities, as well as Greek artistic features such as Greek clothes and texts. These tombstones represent a stage of harmony between Egyptian and Greek beliefs. The tombstones of Abydos, are dated back to the Roman era, they were distinguished by the representation of more than one deceased person, that is, accompanied by others. They were

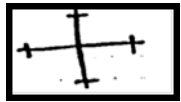

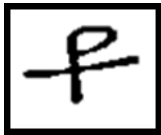
also distinguished by their lack of artistic quality, unlike tombstones which are dating back to the Ptolemaic period, which were characterized by precision and perfection.

- Egypt knew tombstones with vaulted tops spread in the cemeteries of Upper Egypt, where they symbolized the sky, especially if there was a sign of the sky below. There was a popular style with nautical tops divided into several forms: Square-shaped tombstones are characterized by the presence of two square pillars side by side that surround the main view on the tombstone, and the other in the form of an Egyptian temple in which the Egyptian elements are mixed with the Greek elements that combine the Egyptian temple façade and the decoration of the teeth, and the nautical rectangular tombstones sometimes they include an inscription at the top.

- With regard to the tombstones that are the subject of the study, which differ in shape and theme from all other tombstones in Egypt during the Ptolemaic and Roman eras, they are distinguished by their height ranging between one and one and a half meters, and their width is about half a meter, and this size and shape are one of the distinctive and rare features of these tombstones.

Religious slogans:

The first tombstone is devoid of any of the Christian religious slogans, while various models of the Holy Cross (Greek Cross - Latin Cross - Monogram of Jesus Christ) appeared at the beginning of the inscription, or within the inscription or removed from it, while the depiction of the holy aura around the head of the third tombstone appeared.

Cross type	Cross shape	Tombstone number	About it
Greek cross (equilateral)		289 [Image 3] 290 [Image 4]	This cross was used as a basis for planning churches with a central plan, especially in Byzantine architecture, and it spread in the Western Byzantine states and continued to appear until the Middle Ages.
Latin Cross		288 [Image 2]	It was used from the 5 th century until the Middle Ages and is still used today, specific to the Catholic doctrine.
Monogram		290 [Image 4]	The use of this cross was widespread in Byzantine and Coptic art since the fourth century AD. This sign was a symbol of good omen before it was used in Christian art, as it appeared on shields in Roman art since the era of Constantine.

Artistic features:

The face depiction is a symbolic depiction that depicts two large eyes and a vertical line between them representing the nose in the middle of a large circle representing the face. This circle is curved from the top and closed from the bottom with a straight line representing the shoulder. This is similar to a rudimentary drawing. Perhaps the artist adopted this artistic method under the influence of a religious belief that prohibits the depiction of the soul, or perhaps there was no professional artist in that region and entrusted the matter to an amateur who cared for engraving and ignored depiction due to the absence of skill.

Study of the inscriptions:

All the inscriptions are engraved in Greek bas-relief, and they all bore the same commonly used funerary phrases, which are "Take courage, soul No one is immortal."

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