Servant of Mut

Studies in Honor of Richard A. Fazzini

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A COLOSSAL STATUE BASE OF NEFERTITI AND OTHER EARLY ATENIST MONUMENTS FROM THE PRECINCT OF THE GODDESS MUT IN KARNAK

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Akhenaten and his family are perhaps not among Richard's best friends from ancient Egypt; in fact, with his inimitable turn of phrase, he likes to refer to them as "the Freak, the Freakiness, and the Freakettes." But when they make a surprise appearance at his favourite site, they cannot simply be ignored, and since he actually wrote an introduction to the art of the Amarna Period, albeit a long time ago, it does not seem wholly inappropriate to publish these finds here as a tribute to a great scholar, intrepid excavator, remarkable survivor, and treasured friend.

With the removal to the Karnak Open Air Museum of the two massive alabaster stelae set up by Ramesses II in front of what was once the First Pylon of Temple A, in the northeast corner of the Mut Precinct, it became possible for the Brooklyn Museum Expedition to resume the excavations in this part of the site, which had been begun in the late 1970s. At that time, it had already been established that the towers of the pylons, very little of which remains, were constructed of mud brick faced, at least on their interior (east) side, with reused limestone blocks, and that its threshold consisted of a very large reused slab of pink granite. In the early days of February 2005, excavations in the pylon entrance revealed some further blocks of pink granite immediately adjacent to the north side of the large slab and forming the north end of the threshold. One of these turned out to be the base of a statue, reused upside down to provide a flat surface. When it was turned over, three pairs of feet became visible, one large and two small. The extraordinary shape of the large foot in particular made it immediately obvious that we were dealing with a work of the Amarna Period, and shortly afterwards this was confirmed by a study of what remains of the inscription on the back pillar. A further granite block proved to be the very badly decayed remains of the head of a royal statue of the same period, and both pieces can probably be linked to a fragment found in the same general area in 1978 which bears an inscription mentioning the Gem-pa-Aten, the sd-festival temple built by Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten at East Karnak.

A. The Statue Base (Figs. 3-5)

The base (Excav. No. 19ME.1) is a fairly tall, rectangular block of granite 77.5 cm wide and 95 cm deep. The height of the base without the remains of the statues is c. 42 cm; the latter are

2 The one on the north is the famous Hittite Marriage Stela found in 1949-1950 by Maurice Pinet, while its southern counterpart was discovered by the Mut Expedition in 1979; see the account in Richard Fazzini et al., The Brooklyn Museum—American Research Center in Egypt Expedition to the Precinct of the Goddess Mut at Southern Karnak. Preliminary Report (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1979: 30-33 and figs. 44-47). The text published there, although it bears a preliminary character, is a remarkable achievement, since it was recorded bit by bit by tunneling under the 44-ton stela, which had fallen face down. Both stelae were carved from what was originally the side walls of a shrine of Amenhotep II from the Amun Precinct, which has recently been reconstructed at the entrance to the Open Air Museum by the Centre franco-égyptien d’études des temples de Karnak.
4 Detailed measurements of the base and the head have kindly been provided by Mrs. Elise Holmes Peck. In the description which follows, “left” and “right” refer to the figures’ proper left and right.
preserved to a maximum height of 15.5 cm, resulting in a total preserved height of 57.5 cm. The base originally supported three figures, a large one roughly in the middle, flanked by two much smaller ones. The large figure is broken off just above the ankles, although the feet themselves, shown parallel to each other, are also damaged. These feet are exceptionally long and narrow: they measure 47 cm from the most advanced (second) toe to the heel and their greatest width is 15 cm. The toes, too, are very long. Most striking, however, is the fact that the five metatarsal bones and the joints connecting them to the phalanges (toe bones) have been sharply defined on the top surface of the feet. Elongated feet are de rigueur in Amarna art, and in New Kingdom sculpture articulated metatarsals can occasionally be found in works from the end of the 18th Dynasty; but the exaggerated form shown here and the rendering of the joints are, to the best of my knowledge, unparalleled. They are matched, however, by similarly over-emphasized collar bones and neck muscles in some other early statues of Akhenaten, most famously perhaps in the magnificent alabaster torso in the Brooklyn Museum. These extraordinary feet may be seen as additional evidence for the theory, persuasively advocated by Ahwyn Burridge, that Akhenaten suffered from Marfan’s Syndrome, one of the symptoms of which is arachnodactyly (elongated extremities with slender, spidery fingers and toes). Skeptics have argued that the deformities shown in Akhenaten’s physical portrayal (and by extension that of his wife and children) are not to be read literally, and that “their common denominator is a synhetic gathering of all attributes of the creator god into the physical body of the king himself.” However, although more general aspects like the combination of male and female characteristics might be interpreted along those lines, it is hard to see how spidery feet could be a symbolic rendering of an aspect of the creator god.

To the left of the main figure are the feet of a much smaller figure, which are also shown parallel to each other, but although the proportions are more or less the same, there is no sign of the exaggerated articulation of the bone structure seen in the main figure. This small figure stands close to the left-hand edge of the statue base and quite far away (57 cm) from the front. On the other side of the main figure is an even smaller pair of feet. This figure, broken off halfway down the shins, is shown standing with its left foot advanced and is considerably further forward (at a distance of 31.2 and 32.8 cm, resp., from the front of the base) than its companion on the left. In good light, traces of vertical lines representing the pleating of a linen dress can be observed on the left leg. This figure does not stand close to the right-hand edge of the base, but some 15 cm away from it. This creates the impression that the whole group is off centre, although the feet of the main figure are in fact positioned in the middle of the base. This impression is strengthened by the fact that the back support that joins the three figures, at least at this low level, does not continue beyond the small figure on the right to encompass the full width of the statue base.

The back support originally appears to have been inscribed with a single column of text in incised hieroglyphs running down the centre behind the main figure. Unfortunately, only the lowermost parts of the very last signs survive (fig. 5), but these nevertheless provide an additional clue for dating the statue: the word in question is skb, written with a deeply cut sun-disk sign with uraeus and, indicated in shallow sunk relief, the antef sign hanging from it, a sure indication that we are dealing with a monument from the reign of Amenhotep IV-Akhenaten.

B. The Head (Fig. 6)

The head (Excav. No. 19ME.1a) found next to the statue base is in a very sad state; it has in fact been almost entirely reduced to an amorphous lump of crumbling pink granite. Only the left

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5 Large toe: 10.0 cm; second toe: 10.2 cm; third: 9.7 cm; fourth: 8.2 cm; fifth: 5.0 cm.
6 See, for example, the statue on a relief of Amenhotep III from the Luxor Temple cachette, Mohammed El-Saghir, Das Statuenwesen im Luxortempel (Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 1992), fig. 43, and 44, fig. 54.
7 John D. Cooney, Amarna Reliefs from Heliopolis in American Collections (Brooklyn, Brooklyn Museum, 1943), pl. 1a–1b.
10 Length of left foot: 9.7 cm, greatest width: 5.4 cm.
11 Length of left foot: 9.3 cm, greatest width: 5.1 cm.
12 It is 65 cm wide, leaving an “open” space of 12.5 cm to the right of the right-hand small figure.
13 Measurements: h. 60 cm, w. 35 cm, d. 20 cm.
side of the head with a relatively well-preserved ear and part of a nemes headcloth can still be discerned. Both the face and the nemes, particularly when viewed from the side, have the elongated form associated with the art of Akhenaten. The height of the ear is 17 cm and its greatest width 7.5 cm, which agrees more or less exactly with the measurements of the ears of the famous series of sandstone colossi of Amenhotep IV-Akhenaten found in 1923 at East Karnak by Henri Chevrier. If the proportions of our statue are similar to those of the latter, as seems very likely, then this granite colossus, too, may have stood to an estimated height of some 4.5 m. The nemes headcloth displays the usual horizontal stripes with a vertical line indicating the interior side of the lappets; the horizontal lines are narrower on the lappets than on the main part of the headcloth. Behind the head is part of a bridge connecting the statue to the back pillar.14

C. Inscribed Granite Block (Figs. 7–8)

As long ago as 1958, the Mut Expedition found a roughly square block of pink granite: “in the debris covering . . . the entrance to the temple forecourt,”15 i.e., the gateway of the First Pylon of Temple A. Because of its location, material, and date, it may well be associated with the two fragments just described. The piece, which measures 51.0 x 53.5 x 45.0 cm, is evidently a corner fragment of a much larger block. The front of the block and the adjacent right-hand side have a smooth worked surface. The former is inscribed in sunk relief with the remains of two columns of text (fig. B)16 giving the name formula of the Aten in connection with one of the early Aten temples at East Karnak: (1) “The great living [Aten] who is in the sol festival, lord of heaven and earth,” (2) “residing in the Gem-pa-Aten in the domain of Aten.”17 The inscription is thus virtually complete and the top of the fragment, although now weathered and damaged, may once have had a finished surface as well. The inscription is almost certainly one of an identical pair oriented towards a depiction of the Aten’s disk in the centre, i.e., to the right of the surviving inscription. Unfortunately, not enough of the fragment remains to enable us to determine from what kind of monument it derives. It cannot belong to the statue base described above, however, since this is complete on all four sides.18

Interpretation

The main problem posed by the statue base is to establish the identity of the three persons represented. That they are members of the royal family of Amenhotep IV seems certain, but which ones? One possibility is that the main figure is the king himself, the small figure on his left could then be Nefertiti, and the even smaller figure on his right their firstborn daughter Merytaten; or, alternatively, the two small figures could be Merytaten on the left and her younger sister Meketaten on the right. In favour of such an interpretation would be the head found next to the base, which is almost certainly Amenhotep IV because of the nemes headcloth; unlike the khat or ofjet headdress, which can be worn by both Amenhotep IV and Nefertiti,19 no examples can be cited for Nefertiti wearing the nemes. On the other hand, as the presence of the Gem-pa-Aten block in the pylons entrance demonstrates, the head and the base do not necessarily have to stem from one and the same statue. It is far more likely that two conveniently sized pieces were selected more or less at random from the mass of smashed-up statuary from the Karnak Aten temples that was available for reuse in various building projects of the post-Amarna pharaohs.

Two arguments militate against the interpretation of the large figure as Amenhotep IV-Akhenaten. It is true that, if the larger of the two small figures is Nefertiti, her size in relation to the king would be comparable to that of

14 Two large joining fragments of pink granite that may or may not be part of a back pillar were found with the statue base and the head; they are uninscribed.
15 From field notes compiled by Lisa Kuczman Sabban (1987). The piece does not appear to have been given an Excav No.
16 The column width is just over 4 cm.
queens on colossal statues in the traditional style both before and after the Amarna Period. Unlike these queens, however, Neferiti is never shown at such a diminutive scale when she is in the company of her husband, nor is it very likely that she would be, in view of the unusually important cultic role she plays in Akhenaten’s temples. In the Karnak talatat reliefs, she is usually depicted at between three-quarters and two-thirds of the size of her husband. In later Amarna art, she is shown both in relief and in sculpture in the round as only slightly smaller than him, possibly reflecting the actual difference in height between them. If the smaller figures on the statue base are the couple’s two oldest daughters, it is even more unlikely that the main figure could be the king for as Redford has shown, on the Karnak talatat (and at Amarna) the daughters are never shown in the company of their father alone, but always with their mother, reflecting “the spirit of the family hierarchy …, that is, the queen under the king’s authority, and the children under the queen’s.”

This leaves us with only one option, that the statue base once contained images of Neferiti flanked by Merytaten and Meketaten. The inscription on the back pillar, meagre as the traces may be, supports the identification of the main figure as Neferiti, for it is her name and titles, not Akhenaten’s, that are almost invariably followed by the phrase “thousands of……..” On the Karnak talatat, scenes showing Neferiti with both Merytaten and Meketaten are far less numerous than those with Merytaten alone, probably because most of the decoration of the new temples had been finished by the time Meketaten was born (or old enough to be shown participating in the cult). The statue therefore probably also dates from that time, i.e., not long before the move to Amarna.

Colossal statues of both Amenhotep IV-Akhenaten and Neferiti once adorned the Aten temples and palaces at Karnak and Amarna. The best known are the thirty or so sandstone colossi found by Chevrier in 1925 on the south side of the Gem-pha-Aten colonnade. None of them has its feet or base preserved, probably because the statues were brought down by smashing the spindly lower legs, and the flat bases were subsequently reused elsewhere, like the example found by the Mut expedition. Chevrier’s excavations appear to have yielded only the front half with toes of one base, now in the basement of the Cairo Museum. The measurements of this base may provide an additional argument for assigning the Mut Precinct statue base to Neferiti: despite the fact that three figures were depicted on it, the width is only 77.5 cm as opposed to the 91 cm of the sandstone base in Cairo, which only supported a single statue. As the granite head of Amenhotep IV found by the Mut Expedition is roughly the same size as the heads of the sandstone colossi, our statue base is perhaps more likely to have supported the slightly smaller figure of Neferiti. In the absence of good parallels and with nothing more than the feet to go by, however, it is very difficult to estimate the original height of this statue.

Chevrier’s sandstone colossi all represent Amenhotep IV, although it has been suggested—wrongly, I believe—that an apparently “sexless” statue is actually Neferiti. Redford’s
A small piece of stone (Fig. 9) was found in a wall of the Building 719, which is located near the northeast corner of the temple area. The stone is approximately 0.5 meters long and 0.25 meters wide. It was found during the excavation of the temple area, and it is possible that it was part of a larger structure that has since been destroyed.

The stone is likely to have been part of a larger temple structure, possibly a part of the temple itself. The stone is made of a light-colored limestone, and it is decorated with a series of geometric patterns. It is not clear whether the stone was part of a larger temple structure, or whether it was part of a smaller temple or shrine.

The stone is not the only piece of evidence that suggests the presence of a temple in the area. Other pieces of evidence, such as the presence of a stone altar, suggest that the area was used for religious purposes.

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parallel to the top and bottom edges of the block but at an angle of about 15° to it. It was thus probably part of a balustrade leading up to a shrine or an altar, or even to a roof. Below the text are traces of two signs or objects, the first perhaps the top of a shrine (or possibly of a djet pillar), the other with a round top. These traces are parallel to the bottom edge. On the adjacent left-hand side of the block and at right angles to the front are the remains of a throne and the lower leg, ankle, and heel of a seated deity (fig. 11). Clearly this is the side that was visible after the block had been reused.

The inscription on the long side of the block is almost certainly part of the epithet ‘īm ḫrw-nꜢ which normally follows the cartouche of Amenhotep IV-Akhenaten (fig. 12), and the name of Re-Horakhty that follows it may be part of the didactic name of the Aten in its early form, not yet written in a pair of cartouches. Presumably the text called the king “[beloved of] Re-Horakhty [who rejoices in the horizon in his name of ‘Light which is in the Sundisk’].” The block thus derives from the first temple constructed at Karnak by Amenhotep IV at the very beginning of his reign, which was dedicated to what is in fact an early form of the Aten, then still depicted in the traditional form of the falcon-headed Re-Horakhty, and which was largely constructed not of talatat but of the traditional large sandstone blocks. Many such blocks have been found within the Tenth Pylon at Karnak, but the present block has clearly been reused in a wall somewhere in the Mut Precinct. No other blocks belonging to this Re-Horakhty temple have so far been found in the existing walls in the Mut Precinct, but it is hoped, at least by the present writer, that more will one day turn up either in the Brooklyn Museum excavations or in the work being carried out by the Johns Hopkins University expedition directed by Betsy Bryan in the centre of the Mut Temple.

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37 The width of this scene was originally 51 cm, but most of the leg of the deity has now disappeared and the present width is 40 cm; the height is 44 cm.

38 Smith, in The Akhenaten Temple Project 1, 43–46.
Fig. 1a. Statue base 19ME.1: just after its discovery.

Fig. 1b. Statue base 19ME.1: front.
Fig 2a. Statue base 19ME.1: back (photo: Mary McKercher).

Fig 2b. Statue base 19ME.1: inscription on the back pillar (photo: Mary McKercher).
Fig. 3a. Statue base 19ME.1: left side.

Fig. 3b. Statue base 19ME.1: right side.
Fig. 4a. Statue base 19ME.1: detail of the feet.

Fig. 4b. Statue base 19ME.1: detail of the feet.
Fig. 5. Remains of the inscription on the back of the statue.
Fig. 6a. Head of a colossal statue 19ME.1a: front.

Fig. 6b. Head of a colossal statue 19ME.1a: left side.
Fig. 7a. Inscribed architectural fragment: front.

Fig. 7b. Inscription on architectural fragment.
Fig. 8. Inscription on a pink granite block from the Mut Precinct.
Fig. 9a. Sandstone block 5MWB.16: three-quarter view showing reused side.

Fig. 9b. Sandstone block 5MWB.16: front.
Fig. 10. Early Atenist inscription on a sandstone block from the Mut Precinct.

Fig. 11. Relief on the reused side of the same block.

Fig. 12. Suggested restoration of the inscription on the sandstone block.