

TWO CHRISTIAN FUNERARY STELAE FROM THE LUXOR MUSEUM OF ART¹

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Abstract. — This article presents an edition of two Christian funerary stelae in Greek on display in the Luxor Museum of Art.

Keywords: Christian funerary stelae, Greek, Armant, Esna

The Luxor Museum of Art exhibits two Christian funerary stelae that have been in its possession since the museum opened in 1975 and are counted among its “Coptic” artifacts.² Both stelae contain elaborate artistic decoration and a Greek text commemorating the deceased. The museum published a general guidebook with the two stelae in 1978.³ A year later, in 1979, when the museum’s catalog was published, these pieces were similarly featured.⁴ While the catalog’s presentations of the pieces are more detailed than the cursory descriptions provided in the guidebook, they do not come anywhere close to editions. For example, no transcription of either text is provided. Furthermore, beyond mentioning a few descriptive features of each piece’s artistic presentation, there is no proper evaluation of their visual characteristics. For these reasons, we will provide a first edition of these pieces here.

Epitaph for the Monk Hop

This sandstone stela is cut in raised relief where the top displays a cross with forked ends (cross “fourchée”) flanked by α and ω (Fig. 1). The lower

¹ We thank the Luxor Museum of Art curators for permitting us to take images of the stelae, measure them, and generally autopsy them when we visited the museum in May 2024.

² Like other pieces in the Luxor Museum of Art, these two epitaphs were in the storage magazine at Luxor before they were brought to the museum and put on display.

³ M. al-Qadīm, *The Luxor Museum of Ancient Egyptian Art: Guidebook* (Cairo 1978) 117 (nos. 305 and 308).

⁴ J.F. Romano, *The Luxor Museum of Ancient Egyptian Art: Catalogue* (Cairo 1979) 196–197, 198–199 (nos. 305 and 308).

part depicts a wreathed cross “fourchée” with a flourish, six scrolls and two palm fronds. The stela’s architectural form consists of a pediment upon a rectangular base, which is broken off at the bottom. Two stelae from Armant (Hermonthis), dated to around the sixth to eighth centuries, provide close parallels in terms of medium, iconography and formulary.⁵ From top to bottom, even if there are some minor variations, they equally contain a decorated pediment, a textual band and a wreathed cross “fourchée” with scrolls. The present stela can thus be assigned the same provenance and date.⁶

The text of the two-line epitaph is generally bilinear with certain letters preserving faint vestiges of red paint. Letters are executed with precision and are clearly and regularly inscribed. The text contains three well-attested phonetic interchanges: ι > ει, ο > ω (twice) and α > ο (Gignac, *Gram.* 1.189–190, 275–278, 286–287). In βοηθῶν the crossbar of the θ is omitted, a copying error by the stonemason.

Cat. no. 305

H × W = 75 × 35 cm

ca. VI–VIII
Hermonthis

Ἰς Θεὸς ὁ βοηθῶν
Ὡπ μονοχός ἀμήν.

1. read Εἰς Θεὸς ὁ βοηθῶν 2. read μοναχός

“One God, who helps. Hop, the monk. Amen.”

1 Ἰς Θεὸς ὁ βοηθῶν: Ἰς for Εἰς before Θεὸς is also found in e.g. *SB* 1.1573 (an armband from Memphis) and *SEG* 31.1570 (a sixth-century tombstone of unknown provenance). For Θεὸς instead of Θεός see *CIEN* 7.27 (Esna?, ca. IV–VIII), with the parallels cited there, for ὁ instead of ὁ *CIEN* 8.22 (Edfu?, VII–X), and for both combined *CIEN* 10.27 (Esna, ca. VI–VII). The rendering of θ as ο in βοηθῶν also occurs in *CIEN* 1.6 (Esna region?, VII–VIII).

⁵ J. van der Vliet, “Christian Epitaphs from Egypt and Nubia at the Museo Egizio, Turin: A Dossier,” *Rivista del Museo Egizio* 5 (2021), available online at <https://rivista.museoegizio.it/article/christian-epitaphs-from-egypt-andnubia-at-the-museo-egizio-turin-a-dossier/>, 18–20, nos. 13–14, Figs. 13–14.

⁶ For the Hermonthis stelae, see B. Tudor, *Christian Funerary Stelae of the Byzantine and Arab Periods from Egypt* (Marburg 2011) 165–166, 420–422.

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