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***A stela of the Early Middle Kingdom in the
South African Cultural History Museum,
Cape Town, South Africa***

The South African Cultural History Museum [SACHM] in Cape Town possesses a small but fine Egyptian collection, including the Middle Kingdom stela published here for the first time.

The first Egyptian objects arrived in South Africa in the late 19th century and went to the South African Museum [SAM] in Cape Town, which had been established in the 1820's. Eventually the SAM became a natural history museum that included a department of ethnology, later anthropology. In 1966 the SACHM was established, and the relevant collections of the SAM, including the Egyptian collection, were transferred to the new museum. In 1999, the above-mentioned two museums, together with several others in Cape Town, were amalgamated under the auspices of Iziko: Museums of Cape Town.

The SACHM now possesses an Egyptian collection of approximately 500 objects. The core collection comprises material from Kafr-Tarkhan excavated by Sir Flinders Petrie on behalf of the British School of Archaeology in Egypt (BSAE) before World War I. Most of the artefacts date from the Early Dynastic period of the Egyptian civilisation, although there are also some later pieces. Graves from the Predynastic to the Roman Periods were found at Kafr-Tarkhan. The bulk of the collection consists of pottery, but also included are the following: linen, cosmetics palettes, beads, alabaster vases, basketry, sections of a wooden bed and a reed coffin (Dynasty 3rd/4th), a bone spoon, pebbles, iron ore, sea shells, and flint and bone bangles. Artefacts from Tell el-Amarna [also Petrie] form part of the collection as well as a few objects excavated by Guy Brunton, mostly without provenance.

There is also a "Cape Connection". Flinders Petrie's paternal grandparents, Margaret Mitten and William Petrie, resided at the Cape of Good Hope for about ten years from 1829 onwards. In 1851



their son, William Petrie Jun. married Anne Flinders, daughter of Ann Chappell and Captain Matthew Flinders, the explorer and cartographer of Australia. Their only child, William Matthew Flinders Petrie, was born on 3 June 1853.

The stela has the museum number SACHM 1649. The measurements are: width (widest section) - 90 mm; length (middle of stela) 110 mm. The stela shows in the upper register three lines of hieroglyphs, giving the usual offering formula, and in the lower register the owner of the stela Senusret is sitting with a woman in front of an offering table. The inscriptions and scenes are rather crudely cut, so that there are problems in reading the whole inscription:

A boon which the king gives to Osiris, lord of Busiris, the great god, lord of Abydos; may he give an voice offering, comprising a thousand of all good and pure things for the honoured Senusret, born of Henyt (?) and begotten of ... Neit (?).

The findspot of the stela is not known. Abydos seems to be very likely, although another site, such as a provincial cemetery cannot be totally ruled out. The stela is executed in the silhouette style: all figures are cut in sunk-relief without further inner details. This style was very popular in the Middle Kingdom, especially in the 13th Dynasty, though already known since the beginning of the 12th Dynasty¹. The stela is therefore hard to date more precisely. The name of the owner Senusret points to the 12th Dynasty rather than to the 13th Dynasty. The simple offering formula without *n k3 n* indicates even the early 12th Dynasty.² To about the same time belong most parallels for the depiction of the owner with a woman sitting on one chair with the woman embracing the men. This kind of couple is quite common during the Middle Kingdom, but seems to have been especially popular in the early Middle Kingdom (CG 20525, CG

¹ W. K. Simpson, *The Terrace of the Great God at Abydos: The Offering Chapels of Dynasties 12 and 13*. New Haven: Peabody Museum of Natural History of Yale University, 1974. Publications of the Pennsylvania-Yale Expedition to Egypt; no. 5. ANOC 31.2 (Stela Berlin 1192)

² C.J.C. Bennett. Growth of the Htp-di-nsw Formula in the Middle Kingdom. *JEA* 27 (1941), 79

20542, Louvre C1, Louvre C 167, BM 572, BM 586³; dateable later: Florence 2506⁴ – Amenemhat III; Geneva D50 – Senusret III/Amenemhat III; Vatican MG 170). Together these few criteria support a dating of the stela to the early 12th Dynasty maybe Senusret I or Amenemhat II rather than later.



The text on SACHM 1649

³ Examples are published with photographs: Simpson, *op. cit. passim*. Other examples: R. E. Freed. *Stela Workshops of Early Dynasty 12*, *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson*, (Edited by P. der Manuelian) Boston 1996, 301, 308, 319, 322, 325

⁴ S. Bosticco. *Museo Archeologico di Firenze. Le Stele Egiziane dall'Antico al Nuovo Regno*. Rome 1959, no. 36