



## A NOTE ON THE GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF NEW KINGDOM EGYPTIAN INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE LEVANT

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### ABSTRACT

*This note compares the geographical distribution of New Kingdom Egyptian royal inscriptions, hieratic inscriptions and inscribed architectural elements from the Levant. It highlights a clear geographical north-south cut centered around the site of Beth Shean (Northern Palestine), the southern part showing clear signs of permanent Egyptian administration, and the northern part exhibiting signs of much looser and indirect Egyptian control.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This short note examines the geographical distribution of New Kingdom Egyptian inscriptions from the Levant. The geographical region considered here covers the modern states of Israel/Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, to the exclusion of the mining regions of the Sinai and southern Negev. The epigraphic *genres* we consider are royal stelae, hieratic inscriptions and inscribed architectural elements. This choice is motivated by the following considerations: in addition to the desire of keeping this survey short and concise, we have wanted to restrict ourselves to epigraphic *genres* depicting Egyptian royal activity or administrative presence. Royal activity (often of military type) is indeed particularly well represented by royal stelae, while hieratic ostraca and inscribed architectural elements (the latter often inscribed with royal cartouches or names of Egyptian officials) are good reflections of Egyptian administrative activity. We have wished to exclude epigraphic *genres* reflecting private rather than public activity (such as private funerary stelae) as well as smaller-sized items (statues, scarabs, etc.) which could easily be transported from site to site, be received as gifts, or be kept as ancient heirlooms and therefore are less strictly tied to a fixed geographical location. This paper highlights a clear north-south cut, centered around the site of Beth

Shean, with royal stelae—mostly witnessing military activity—being centered in a region extending northwards from Beth Shean, and hieratic inscriptions and inscribed architectural elements—mostly witnessing administrative activity and long-term presence—being centered in a region extending southwards from Beth Shean.

### 2. CORPUS

This section presents our corpus, containing all known New Kingdom royal stelae, inscribed architectural elements and hieratic inscriptions from the Levant. Bibliographic references have been kept to a minimum, citing only the Porter-Moss reference when available, otherwise the *KRI* reference when available, otherwise the *editio princeps* of the inscription. While the corpora for royal stelae and hieratic inscriptions mainly reproduce recently published lists (see Secs 2.1 and 2.2 below), the corpus for inscribed architectural elements is original to this paper.

#### 2.1 ROYAL STELAE

Table 1 (page 19) presents the full corpus of New Kingdom royal stelae from the Levant, organized south to north. The corpus conforms to the most recent lists published by Wimmer and Lagarde.<sup>1</sup>

2.2. HIERATIC INSCRIPTIONS

Table 2 (page 20) presents the full corpus of New Kingdom hieratic inscriptions from the Levant. The corpus conforms to the list recently published by Wimmer,<sup>2</sup> with the addition of two recently discovered fragments from Qubur el-Walaydah.<sup>3</sup> The inscriptions are usually very fragmentary, but in most identifiable cases they are dated to the Ramesside period, usually in the late 19th and 20th dynasties.

2.3 INSCRIBED ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS

Table 3 (page 21) presents the full corpus of New Kingdom inscribed architectural elements from the Levant. The corpus includes all relevant inscriptions listed in Porter and Moss's *Topographical Bibliography*,<sup>4</sup> Kitchen's *Ramesside Inscriptions*, Albright and Rowe's list of royal inscriptions from Palestine,<sup>5</sup> Chéhab's list of Egyptian inscriptions from Lebanon,<sup>6</sup> Weinstein's list of Egyptian inscriptions from Palestine,<sup>7</sup> and Grimal's list of Aegyptiaca from the Levant,<sup>8</sup> as well as an additional fragment published by Kitchen in 1993.<sup>9</sup>

3. DISCUSSION

Fig. 1 compares the geographical distribution of our three sets of inscriptions. Let us first compare Figs. 1a (royal inscriptions) and 1b (hieratic inscriptions). The two maps reveal a perfect symmetry around the site of Beth Shean: there are no hieratic inscriptions north of this site, and no royal inscriptions south of it. This very neat distribution could hardly be due to

chance and certainly hints at a real phenomenon that requires an explanation (see hereunder). Let us now look at Fig. 1c (architectural elements). This map shows a distribution mostly centered in Beth Shean and south of it. In fact, the two only exceptions to this pattern are the sites of Byblos and Tell Delhamiyah. Note however that Byblos is a special and unique case regarding Levantine-Egyptian relations, as a city well known for its intimate ties with Egypt since the Old Kingdom. Its relationship with Egypt thus certainly lies outside of the particular phenomenon of the New Kingdom Egyptian empire in Asia. As for the inscribed Ramesses IV block from Tell Delhamiyah, it is a surface find from a site not far from Beth Shean and hence possibly originates from the latter site.<sup>10</sup> The distribution of inscribed architectural elements, outside of these two explainable outliers, thus does seem to confirm the same north-south cut as observed previously: most of them come from Beth Shean (or the Beth Shean region, if we want to account for Tell Delhamiyah separately) and south of it, thus representing a phenomenon comparable to that of hieratic inscriptions.

We propose that the explanation of the observed geographical cut is quite simple: the nature of the Egyptian presence in the Levant during the New Kingdom was quite different south and north of Beth Shean, with Beth Shean acting as a border site between these two distinct phenomena. The southern region exhibited strong and permanent Egyptian presence, as witnessed by hieratic

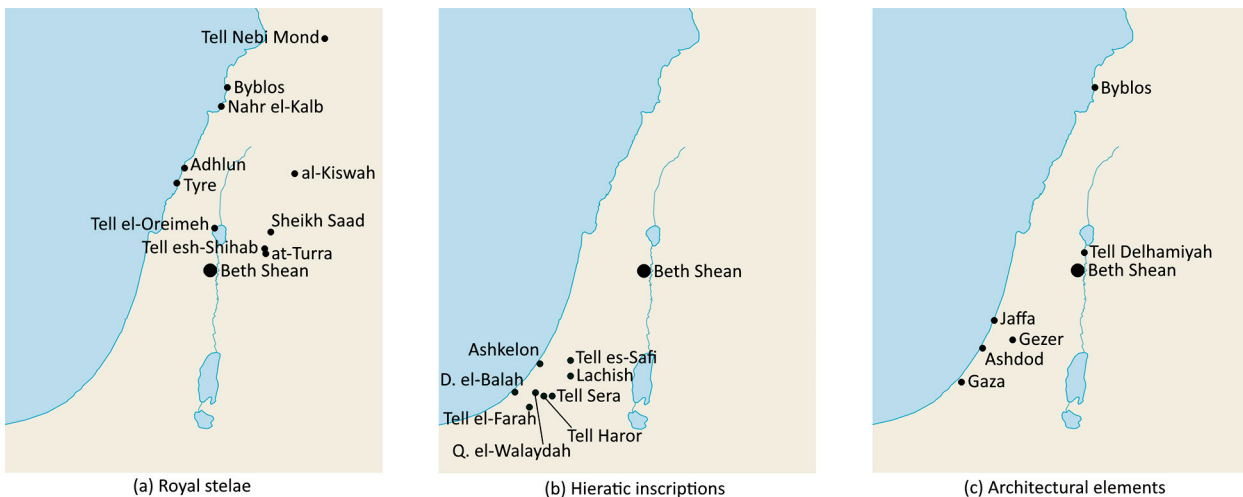


FIGURE 1: Geographic distribution of royal stelae, hieratic inscriptions and architectural elements.

inscriptions (mostly denoting administrative activity) and inscribed architectural elements (denoting long-term presence of Egyptian officials). On the other hand, the region north of Beth Shean, with its numerous victory stela, was an area under much looser Egyptian control, mostly void of material witnesses of long-term Egyptian presence such as precisely hieratic inscriptions and inscribed architectural elements. We argue that these victory stela—as opposed to what might seem obvious at first sight—do not depict long-term occupation, but rather short-term military incursions, crowned by the rapid erection of these stela as markers of passage, followed by a rapid disengagement of the Egyptian troops, who soon returned towards garrisons situated more southward. Between these two distinct realities, Beth Shean acted as a border site, being the only site in the Levant to exhibit at the same time royal inscriptions, hieratic inscriptions and inscribed architectural elements. This would nicely account for the often observed fact that Beth Shean produced more inscribed Aegyptiaca than any other site in Canaan, despite its small size (2 hectares at most).<sup>11</sup> This comparison is even more telling when compared to some other sites considered as Egyptian provincial capitals in the Levant, such as Kumidi (Kamid el-Loz), where no Egyptian royal inscriptions, hieratic inscriptions or inscribed architectural elements have ever been found, despite decades of excavations.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, on the diachronic side, it should be noted that the overwhelming majority of the material gathered in Tables 1, 2, and 3 dates to Ramesside times. In fact, only two fragments from Byblos have been securely attributed to the 18th Dynasty, with two more possible candidates from Beth Shean and Tell el-Oreimeh (see Tables 1 and 3). Our geographical conclusions are therefore only relevant for the 19th and 20th Dynasties. For the earlier part of the New Kingdom, one can turn to other types of evidence, the most abundant of which is provided by Egyptian scarabs found in Levantine contexts. Recent quantitative studies have shown that the number of such scarabs reach two peaks in the Southern Levant, namely during the reigns of Thutmose III and Ramesses II, both peaks being certainly linked to the well-attested military activity of these two sovereigns in the region.<sup>13</sup> As for a more geographically nuanced interpretation of the Egyptian presence in the Levant during the 18th Dynasty, further research would need to combine

quantitative and geographical approaches for scarabs and other types of material, both in the southern and northern Levant.

#### 4. Conclusion

Thirty-five years ago, in his seminal paper on the Egyptian empire in the Levant, James Weinstein advocated for a nuanced view of the empire, noting that the nature of the Egyptian presence in the Levant went through very different phases throughout the New Kingdom, ranging from “political and economic domination” in the second part of the 18th Dynasty to straight “military occupation” in the 19th and early 20th Dynasties.<sup>14</sup> He noted that most reference works of his day were still describing the empire as quite a homogeneous phenomenon during the whole New Kingdom, and that such statements needed to come under strong chronological nuances. While our three tables show an overwhelming majority of Ramesside material (as opposed to the dearth of inscribed 18th Dynasty material) and thus clearly vindicate Weinstein’s views, the conclusion of this paper is that Weinstein’s nuanced approach should also apply to the geographic variable, and that egyptological descriptions of Egypt’s Asiatic empire as stretching from southern Palestine to northwestern Syria need to be brought into subtler perspective, since the nature of the material record in these different regions is extremely diverse, as shown in this short survey.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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<sup>1</sup> This author’s exhaustive review of the relevant inscriptions in Porter and Moss’s *Topographical Bibliography*, Kitchen’s *Ramesside Inscriptions*, Albright and Rowe’s list of royal inscriptions from Palestine (William F. Albright and Alan Rowe, “A Royal Stele of the New Empire from Galilee,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 14 [1928]: 281–287), Chéhab’s list of Egyptian inscriptions from Lebanon (Maurice Chéhab, “Noms de personnalités égyptiennes découvertes au Liban,” *Bulletin du Musée de*

- Beyrouth 22 [1969]: 1–47), Weinstein’s list of Egyptian inscriptions from Palestine (James M. Weinstein, “The Egyptian Empire in Palestine: A Reassessment,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 241 [1981]: 1–28), and Grimal’s list of Aegyptiaca from the Levant (Nicolas Grimal, “Quelques réflexions sur la géopolitique du Levant au deuxième millénaire av. J.-C.,” in Anne-Marie Maïla-Afeiche [ed.], *Interconnections in the Eastern Mediterranean. Lebanon in the Bronze and Iron Ages. Proceedings of the International Symposium Beirut 2008* [Beyrouth: Baal Hors-Série VI, 2009], 339–360) has not revealed any royal stelae absent from the combined lists of Wimmer and Lagarce (Stefan J. Wimmer, “A New Stela of Ramesses II in Jordan in the Context of Egyptian Royal Stelae in the Levant,” in J.C. Margueron, P. de Miroschedji, and J.P. Thalmann [eds.], *Proceedings of the 3rd International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East [3ICAANE], Paris 2002* [forthcoming]; Bérénice Lagarce, “Une stèle ramesside à Meydaa [région de Damas] et la présence égyptienne en Upé,” *Syria* 87 [2010]: 53–68).
- <sup>2</sup> This author’s exhaustive review of the relevant inscriptions in Porter and Moss’s *Topographical Bibliography*, Kitchen’s *Ramesside Inscriptions* and Grimal’s list of Aegyptiaca from the Levant (Grimal 2009) has not revealed any hieratic inscription absent from Wimmer’s list (Stefan J. Wimmer, “A New Hieratic Ostrakon from Ashkelon,” *Tel Aviv* 35 [2008]: 65–72). Note that Grimal mistakenly attributes to the New Kingdom a few Late Iron Age hieratic ostraca from Qadesh-Barnea and Arad (Grimal 2009, 354, 359; for the Late Iron Age attribution of these ostraca, see for example S. Yeivin, “A Hieratic Ostrakon from Tel Arad,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 16 [1966]: 153–159 and F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005], 247–262).
- <sup>3</sup> Stefan J. Wimmer and Gunnar Lehmann, “Two Hieratic Inscriptions from Qubur el-Walaydah,” *Egypt and the Levant* 24 (2014): 343–348.
- <sup>4</sup> We have omitted a small fragment from Hazor bearing the inscription “[Member of the elite, high] official, sem-priest, director of every kilt, chief [director of craft]” (James P. Allen, “A Hieroglyphic Fragment from Hazor,” *Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar* 15 [2001]: 13–15). This inscription is indeed dated to the New Kingdom but its unclear nature does not permit its classification *a priori* as an architectural element (see discussion in Allen 2001, 14). We have also omitted two small inscribed fragments found in secondary use in Qubeibeh and Khirbet ed-Duheisheh, both near Tel Shalaf (15 km northwest of Ashdod) and possibly originating from that site (Joseph Leibovitch, “A Hieroglyphic Inscription from Qubeibeh,” *Yediot* 21 [1957]: 208–210, pl. 20:1 [Hebrew]; Alan Rowe, *A Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs, Scaraboids, Seals and Amulets in the Palestine Archaeological Museum* [Cairo: Imprimerie de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1936], addendum C, pl. XXXVLI). As for the Hazor fragment, their precise nature is not clear, with authors hesitating between a lintel and a stela (see discussion in Orly Goldwasser, “On the Date of Seth from Qubeibeh,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 42 [1992]: 47–48, note 1).
- <sup>5</sup> Albright and Rowe 1928.
- <sup>6</sup> Chéhab 1969.
- <sup>7</sup> Weinstein 1981.
- <sup>8</sup> Grimal 2009.
- <sup>9</sup> Kenneth A. Kitchen, “A Fanbearer on the King’s Right Hand from Ashdod,” in M. Dothan and Y. Porath (eds.), *Ashdod V—Excavation of Area G* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 1993), 109–110.
- <sup>10</sup> Ellen Morris, *The Architecture of Imperialism* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 708.
- <sup>11</sup> Amihai Mazar, “The Egyptian Garrison Town at Beth-Shean,” in S. Bar, D. Kahn and J. J. Shirley (eds.), *Egypt, Canaan and Israel: History, Imperialism, Ideology and Literature, Proceedings of a Conference at the University of Haifa, 3–7 May 2009* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 171.
- <sup>12</sup> Marlies Heinz, *Kamid el-Loz, Intermediary Between Cultures, More than 10 years of Archaeological Research in Kamid el-Loz (1997 to 2007)* (Beyrouth: Baal Hors-Série VII, 2010).
- <sup>13</sup> See Daphna Ben-Tor, “Egyptian-Canaanite Relations in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages as

Reflected by Scarabs,” in S. Bar, D. Kahn and J. J. Shirley (eds.), *Egypt, Canaan and Israel: History, Imperialism, Ideology and Literature, Proceedings of a Conference at the University of Haifa, 3–7 May 2009* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 23-43; and Daphna Ben-Tor, “Political Implications of New Kingdom Scarabs in Palestine During the Reigns of Tuthmosis III and Ramesses II,” in D. Aston,

B. Bader, C. Gallorini, P. Nicholson, and S. Buckingham (eds.), *Under the Potter’s Tree. Studies on Ancient Egypt Presented to Janine Bourriau on the Occasion of her 70th Birthday*, OLA 204 (Leuven—Paris—Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2011), 201–214).  
<sup>14</sup> Weinstein 1981, 12, 17.



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**TABLE 1:** Royal stelae (south to north).

SITE	DESCRIPTION	REFERENCE
Beth Shean	Sethi I year 1 stele	PM VII, 380.
	Other Sethi I stele	PM VII, 380.
	Ramesses II stele	PM VII, 379.
	Anonymous stele fragment (possibly 18th Dyn.) <sup>a</sup>	PM VII, 379.
at-Turra	Ramesses II stele fragment	Stefan J. Wimmer, "A New Stela of Ramesses II in Jordan in the Context of Egyptian Royal Stelae in the Levant," in J.C. Margueron, P. de Miroschedji, and J.P. Thalmann (eds.), <i>Proceedings of the 3rd International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East (3ICAANE), Paris 2002</i> (forthcoming).
Tell esh-Shihab	Sethi I stele fragment	PM VII, 383.
Sheikh Saad	Ramesses II stele (a.k.a. "Job stone")	PM VII, 383.
Tell el-Oreimeh	Anonymous stele fragment (possibly 18th Dyn.) <sup>b</sup>	PM VII, 382.
Tyre	Sethi I stele fragment	KRI I, 117.
	Small Ramesses II stele fragment	KRI II, 401.
	Other Ramesses II stele fragment	Henri Loffet, "La stèle de Ramsès II en provenance de Tyr," <i>National Museum News (Beirut)</i> 9 (1999): 2–5.
al-Kiswah	Ramesses II stele fragment	Jean Yoyotte, "La stèle de Ramsès II à Keswé et sa signification historique," <i>Bulletin de la Société française d'Égyptologie</i> 144 (1999): 44–58.
Adhlun	Ramesses II rock stele	PM VII, 383.
Nahr el-Kalb	Three Ramesses II rock stelae	PM VII, 385.
Byblos <sup>c</sup>	Thut[mosis] stele fragments	Maurice Dunand, <i>Fouilles de Byblos</i> , Vol. II (Paris: Geuthner, 1958), no. 13439.
	Ramesses II stele	PM VII, 389.
Tell Nebi Mond	Sethi I stele	PM VII, 392.

<sup>a</sup> This small stele fragment is attributed by Rowe to Thutmose III or Amenhotep II (Alan Rowe, *The Four Canaanite Temples of Beth-shan*, Part I, *The Temples* [Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1940], 33). Rowe mentions another tiny fragment from Beth Shean as probably belonging to the same stele (Alan Rowe, *The Topography and History of Beth-shan*, *Beth-shan I* [Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1930], 36, pl. 49:2).

<sup>b</sup> Albright and Rowe attribute the stele to Thutmose III or Amenhotep II, notably on the basis of language, paleography and the stele's mention of Mitanni (Albright and Rowe 1928, 282–285).

<sup>c</sup> We have omitted a small unclear fragment from Byblos, attributed by Montet to a "stèle ou une statue" (Pierre Montet, *Byblos et l'Égypte* [Paris: Geuthner, 1928], 57 [no. 33], fig. 19).

TABLE 2: Hieratic inscriptions (south to north).

SITE	DESCRIPTION	REFERENCE
Tell el-Far'ah (South)	Two sherds mentioning agricultural taxes	KRI IV, 242.
Tel Haror	One ostrakon fragment	Orly Goldwasser, "Hieratic Sherd From Tel Haror," <i>Qadmoniot</i> 24 (1991): 19.
Tel Sera <sup>c</sup>	Four bowls mentioning agricultural taxes, and seven additional small inscribed sherds	KRI VII, 259–260.
Qubur el-Walaydah	One ostrakon fragment and one fragment of an inscribed bowl	Stefan J. Wimmer and Gunnar Lehmann, "Two Hieratic Inscriptions from Qubur el-Walaydah," <i>Egypt and the Levant</i> 24 (2014): 343–348.
Deir el-Balah	One sherd mentioning agricultural taxes	Stefan J. Wimmer, "A Hieratic Inscription," in Trude Dothan and Baruch Brandl (eds.), <i>Deir el-Balah: Excavations in 1977–1982 in the Cemetery and Settlement, Volume 2: The Finds</i> (Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem, 2010).
Lachish	One bowl mentioning agricultural taxes, and nine additional small inscribed sherds	PM VII, 371–372.
Ashkelon	One ostrakon fragment	Stefan J. Wimmer, "A New Hieratic Ostrakon from Ashkelon," <i>Tel Aviv</i> 35 (2008): 65–72.
Tell es-Safi	Two small inscribed sherds	Aren M. Maeir, Mario Martin, and Stefan J. Wimmer, "An Incised Hieratic Inscription from Tell es-Safi, Israel," <i>Egypt and the Levant</i> 14 (2004): 125–134; Stefan J. Wimmer and Aren M. Maeir, "The Prince of Safit?: A Late Bronze Age Hieratic Inscription from Tell es-Safi/Gath," <i>Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i> 123 (2007): 37–48.
Beth Shean	One jar label and two sherds of a ritual/religious nature	PM VII, 380; Stefan J. Wimmer, "Der Bogen der Anat' in Bet-Schean," <i>Biblische Notizen</i> 73 (1994): 36–41; Stefan J. Wimmer, "A Hieratic Sign," in A. Mazar (ed.), <i>Excavations at Tel Beth Shean 1989–1996, Vol. 2</i> (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2007), 688–689.

TABLE 3: Inscribed architectural elements (south to north).

SITE	DESCRIPTION	REFERENCE
Gaza	Two block fragments (one bearing Ramesses II's cartouche)	KRI VII, 45.
Ashdod	Doorpost mentioning an Egyptian official <sup>a</sup>	Kenneth A. Kitchen, "A Fanbearer on the King's Right Hand from Ashdod," in M. Dothan and Y. Porath (eds.), <i>Ashdod V— Excavation of Area G</i> (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 1993), 109–110.
Gezer	Monumental block bearing the nbw hieroglyph	PM VII, 374.
Jaffa	Doorposts bearing Ramesses II's cartouche	KRI II, 401.
Beth Shean <sup>b</sup>	Rameses-Wesr-Khepesh's doorpost and lintels, bearing Ramesses III's cartouche	PM VII, 378–380.
	Misc. doorposts	PM VII, 378-380
	Lintel fragment bearing a private funerary inscription	PM VII, 378.
Tell Delhamiyah	Stone fragment bearing Ramesses IV's cartouche	Jean Leclant, "Fouilles et travaux en Egypte et au Soudan," <i>Orientalia</i> 51 (1980-1981): 485, fig. 83.
Byblos <sup>c</sup>	Fragment bearing Thutmosis III's cartouche	PM VII, 389.
	Fragment with an unidentified king kneeling	PM VII, 389.
	Gate fragments of Ramesses II	PM VII, 389.
	Inscribed block containing a fragmentary Ramesses II cartouche	PM VII, 390.
	Doorpost fragments of Ramesses II	PM VII, 390.
<sup>a</sup> Kitchen mentions that the title inscribed on the fragment is attested from the 18th dynasty onward (Kitchen 1993, 109), but does not provide a more precise dating estimate for the fragment itself. <sup>b</sup> Some fragments of doorposts and lintels from Beth Shean (KRI V, 252–255), too fragmentary as to enable a decipherment, have been omitted. <sup>c</sup> We have omitted two inscribed fragments of green stone, whose identification as fragments of a statue or of some architectural element remains unclear (Dunand 1939, pl. XXXV, cf p. 424 [no. 6555]).		