Five Unpublished Blocks of Ancient Egypt from Old Cairo

Mohamed El-Mezain
Inspector of Mataria and Ain-Shams District - Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Egypt
arch.iunu@gmail.com

Mohamed Mahmoud Kacem
Assistant Professor – Faculty of Arts – Ain Shams University, Egypt
mohamed.kacem@art.asu.edu.eg

Abstract: Five inscribed stone blocks from ancient Egypt were discovered inside some buildings in Old Cairo. These blocks are inscribed with the cartouches and titles of King Sobekhotep IV, Thutmose III, Ramses IX, and Ptolemy V. Some blocks are kept in the Open Panorama near Al-Nasr Gate, such as two blocks of King Thutmose III and Ptolemy V, while other blocks are still reused in the old buildings such as the three blocks of King Sobekhotep IV and Ramses IX. The paper studies the five blocks in the context of reusing the ruins of ancient Egyptian constructions during the Medieval Era. The studied blocks have been destroyed over the centuries. To save effort, money and time, builders of the Medieval Era reused the remains of some ancient monuments to reconstruct their new buildings. There is no indication of a re-inscription of these blocks in ancient times, suggesting they were brought directly to Old Cairo from their original site. Heliopolis had extensive ruins, which could be easily transported because there were no natural obstructions between Heliopolis and Old Cairo, especially those smaller objects such as these blocks. For many years, the proposed source of these blocks was the ruins of the great temple of the deity Re-Horakhty in Heliopolis. The inscriptions provide essential information about those kings' architectural activities and their attention to Heliopolis throughout the ancient Egyptian periods.

Keywords: Stone blocks, Ayyubaid Cairo, Sobekhotep IV, Thutmose III, Ramses IX, Ptolemy V, Heliopolis.

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الملخص:
تم اكتشاف العديد من الكتل الحجرية المنقوشة من مصر القديمة داخل بعض المباني في القاهرة القديمة. هذه الكتل منقوشة بخاراطيش وألقاب الملك سويك حوتپ الرابع، وتحتمس الثالث، ورسمايس التاسع، وبطليموس الخامس. بعض هذه الكتل تم حفظها في البانوراما المفتوحة بالقرب من بواية النصر مثل كتلتين من عهد الملك تحوتمس الثالث وبطليموس الخامس، بينما كتل أخرى مازالت مستخدمة في المباني القديمة مثل ثلاثة كتل من عهد الملك سويك حوتپ الرابع ورسمايس التاسع. تناول الورقة البحثية دراسة الكتل الخمسة في سياق إعادة استخدام أنقاض المباني المصرية القديمة خلال العصور الوسطى. تم تدمير تلك الكتل المنقوشة من منشآت على مر السنين في موقع هليوبوليس. ولتوفير الجهد والمال والوقت، أعاد بناء العصور الوسطى استخدام بقايا بعض الأثر القديمة. ولا يوجد ما يشير إلى إعادة نقل هذه الكتل في العصور القديمة، مما يدل على أنها تم إحضارها مباشرة إلى القاهرة القديمة من موقعها الأصلي. هليوبوليس بها أطلال ممتدة يمكن نقلاً بسهولة، لأنه لم تكن هناك عوائق طبيعيّة بين هليوبوليس والقاهرة القديمة خاصة تلك القطع الصغيرة مثل هذه الكتل. سنوات عديدة، كان المحجر المختار لتزويد تلك المباني آنذاك هو أنقاض المعبد الكبير نابليه مع حورانيتي في هليوبوليس. من ناحية أخرى تتوفر النقوش معلومات أساسية عن الأنشطة المعمارية لهذه الملك، واهتمامهم بهليوبوليس خلال العصور المصرية القديمة.

الكلمات الدالة: كتل حجرية، القاهرة الفاطمية، سويك حوتپ الرابع، تحوتمس الثالث، رسميميس التاسع، بطليموس الخامس، هليوبوليس.
1. Introduction

In the Medieval Era, the Egyptians reused ancient Egyptian buildings like temples to reconstruct their stone blocks in new buildings to save effort and time. The Ayyubian kings built new fortification walls to defend Old Cairo against any attack by the Crusaders. Several inscribed stone blocks, which had previously belonged to the ruins of ancient Egyptian buildings, were discovered separately inside the Northern Wall of Old Cairo in 2001 during routine restoration work\(^1\). Some blocks are kept in the Open Panorama near Al-Nasr Gate\(^2\), while other blocks are still used, such as the two blocks of King Sobekhotep IV and Ramses IX. The paper publishes these blocks in the context of reusing the ruins of ancient Egyptian constructions during the Medieval Era. The five blocks’ inscriptions provide essential information about the kings’ architectural activities throughout ancient Egyptian history.

2. The studied blocks

Although many of the discovered blocks in Old Cairo were over twenty-four, only twelve were published before\(^3\). This paper will study five inscribed blocks as follows:

2.1. A block of King Sobekhotep IV

2.1.1. Description:

A limestone block is reused in the backside of the northern Ayyubid wall close to the Mettwally Gate of Old Cairo. It measures 120 cm L and 61 cm H. Six horizontal lines of hieroglyphic are inscribed in raised relief (Fig. 1).

2.1.2. Texts:

1) \{from right to left\} \(Bhd(t)\ (y)\ ntr \ 3\ sib \ swt\ \lnty [\hbt]\ \(^4\)

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4 A parallel scene shows Thutmose III running before Amun in the company of Seth and Horus. The scene is closed out by Horus whose speech reads: … \(Bhd(t)\ (y)\ ntr \ 3\ sib \ swt\ nb\ pt\ lnty\ hbt\ lnty\ nwt\ lnty\ ltr(t)\ mhwr\ “The Behdite, the Great God, Variegated of Plumage, Lord of Heaven, Foremost of Hebet, Foremost of Ainu, Foremost of the shrines of Lower Egypt.” See A.J. Shanley, *God of Confusion? An Examination of the Egyptian God Seth in New Kingdom. Expressions of Royal Ideology* (Atlanta: PhD. Emory University, 2015), 72.
2) {from left to right} \( H^e \)-nfr-R\( ^e \) di ‘nh \( dt \)
3) ... Sbk-htp di ‘nh \( dt \)
4) ... \( H^e \)-nfr-R\( ^e \) di ‘nh \( dt \)
5) ... Sbk-htp di ‘nh \( dt \)
6) ... \( H^e \)-nfr-R\( ^e \) di ‘nh \( dt \)

“1) The Behdite, the Great God, Variegated of Plumage\(^1\), Foremost [of Hebet].
2) ... Khaaneferre\(^2\), given life forever.
3) ... Sobekhotep (IV), given life forever.
4) ... Khaaneferre, given life forever.
5) ... Sobekhotep (IV), given life forever.
6) ... Khaaneferre, given life forever.”

2.2.3. Comment:

The block is attributed to the 13th Dynasty king Sobekhotep IV\(^3\). Two of his royal names clearly inscribed on the block. The repeat of the royal names in the same text could indicate that the block is related to a memorial text as a table of glorification for the king. There is a similar text is recorded on the chamber II walls beside the inner courtyard of Great temple in Philae Island\(^4\). King Sobekhotep IV was a warrior king as a Nubian expedition, to suppress rebellious Medjay in Lower Nubia, was dated to the latter part of the 13th Dynasty during his reign. Thus, he achieved a safe and welfare life for the Egyptians during his reign. We can define it through his erecting works as the block of Old Cairo belonged to its ruins.

2.2. A block of Unknown King

2.2.1. Description:

A block is situated near the previous block in the Ayyubid Wall of Old Cairo (fig. 1). It measures 59 cm L, and 45 cm H.

2.2.2. Text:

The block bears three short vertical lines of hieroglyphic inscriptions in raised relief:

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1)  2)  3)
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\(^2\) H. Gauthier, *Livre des rois d’Égypte*, II (Le Caire: l'institut français d'archéologie orientale 1912), 33 (no. IX).

\(^3\) A Nubian expedition to suppress rebellious Medjay in Lower Nubia, dated to the later part of the 13th Dynasty.

1) (di) ‘nh w3s [nb]
2) mi Rʿ dt
3) ... w3s ... [bt] nb

1) (given) [all] life and domain
2) like Re forever.
3) all [life and] domain [...] and every[thing].”

2.2.3. Comment:
These remains of the text related to a protective formula that traditionally inscribed behind the king figure. Thus, it could be inscribed between two figures of the God Amun / Atum (?) and King. Although the block is placed near the previous block of King Sobekhotep IV, it is not attributed to the same king. The style and signs size of inscriptions relief of the two blocks is different.

2.3. A block of King Thutmose III

2.3.1. Description:
A granite block measures 147 cm L, 79 cm H, and 33 cm D. It was divided into three vertical registers (Fig. 2). Each register contains one of King Tuthmosis III's royal names inscribed in sunken relief.

The main register is engraved in the middle of the block and records the Throne name alongside some traditional epithets. Wadjet-Lady as Copra wraps around a papyrus stem and faces the Throne-name to present traditional symbols such as the was-sceptre and shen-ring to the royal name. The last details are repeated on the other side of the throne name.

The second register is engraved on the left side of the block. It bears the Horus- and Nebty-names. First: Horus as a falcon introduced the Horus-name and is crowned with a double crown. A copra with a decorative ankh-sign coiled around a sun disc to protect Horus. Serekh of the Horus-name is damaged. Second: Nekhbet-Lady as a vulture faces the Horus falcon to present the same traditional symbols of Wadjet-Lady to the royal name.

The third register on the right side of the block has similar content to the previous register, but it is almost damaged.

2.3.2. Texts:

The text of main register is inscribed in the middle of the block and records the Throne name of King Thutmose III. It runs vertically from right to left:
1) nsw-bit nb ir h pr Mnt-hpr-R
“1) King of Upper and Lower Egypt, lord who performs thing(s), Menkhepre”

Above the Wadjet depiction as copra, there is a short text that records its name. It runs horizontally from left to right:
2) Wdjt (nbt) Dp
“2) Wadjet-(Lady of) Buto”

Furthermore, some traditional royal epithets are inscribed around the papyrus stem in a decorative style. The text runs vertically from left to right:
3) [di.s] anx [wAs]
“3) [May she (Wadjet) give] life [and domain] (to the king)”

The second register depicts the Nekhbet figure in the vulture form that stands on the hieroglyphic sign nb: . She presents a was-sceptre of authority with a shen-ring of eternity to the Horus-name of King Thutmose III. Above her figure, there is a text that records the name and title of Nekhbet-Lady. It runs horizontally from right to left:
(4 Nxbt HDt Nxn “4) Nekhbet, the White One of Nekhen”

Another vertical text, which follows the Nekhbet figure, is damaged, but there is a similar relief of King Thutmose III from Amada temple that could help to read this damaged inscription of the block:
5) Nḥbt [di(.s) nḥ w矿山 snb]
“5) Nekhbet-Lady, [may she (Nekhbet) give life, domain and prosperous (to the king)].”

Nekhbet faces the Horus name of King Thutmose III, whose content is totally not preserved. Its suggested text runs vertically from left to right:
6) Hr KA-nḥt h$r$-m-WAṣṭ
“6) Horus, Kanekhet-khaemwaset (the strong-bull-arising-in-Thebes)”

The third register is inscribed on the opposite side of the block and symmetrically records all the details of the previous register.

2 Nekhen (Hierakonpolis) was situated in the 3rd Nome of Upper Egypt, modern el-Kab. Cf. Wb. II, 309 (7-8); H. Gauthier, Dictionnaire des noms géographiques, III, (Le Caire: l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1926), 99.
2.3.3. Comment:

The block of King Thutmose III has a style of memorial plaques or lintels that ornamented the gates or doors of sacred buildings. It records the glories and praises of the king’s name. One or two deities appeared on such plaques to crown or purify the royal body. Many examples of such memorial plaques or lintels are known, such as the previous memorial block of King Thutmose III in Amada Temple.

2.4. The block of King Ramses IX

2.4.1. Description:

A vertical granite block measures L. 229 cm, H. 17 cm, and D. 46 cm (figs. 3-4). It is reused as a crossed threshold in the gate of Khanqat of Baybars Al-Jashankair at Al-Moaz Street, No.32 (Dated 1309-1306 A.D.). The three registers contain three figures with inscriptions as follows:

The First Register:

The register scene depicts King Ramses IX wearing a tall and narrow dress, a necklace, and a khepresh-crown ornamented with a uraeus. The king is kneeling on a bolster and raising his arms in a gesture of prayer. The head and crown have an oval shape. The eyebrows and cosmetic lines unusually extended the same distance towards the ear. Moreover, a nasal-labial flap reaches below the mouth (fig. 5). All these artistic characteristics belonged to the iconographic type of Ramses IX.

2.4.2. Text:

There are some remains of two vertical lines of inscriptions that runs from left to right as follows:

1) nb h²w R³-ms-sw h³-i-(m)-W³st mrr-Imn
2) Bhdt(y) ntr r³ nb pt

“1) Lord of appearance Ramses-Khaemwaset-merrwm (who appears (in) Thebes, beloved of Amun) 2) the Behdety, the great god and Lord of heaven”.

1 There are other examples of these memorial plaques or lintels such the blocks of King Thutmose I and Amenhotep II that kept now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Cf. Spieser, Les noms du Pharaon, 239-240, 332 (nos. 171-172).


The second register:

The scene of the second register depicts Ramses IX crowned with the *khat*-headdress that is ornamented with the uraeus. The king is kneeling on a bolster and raising his arms in a gesture of prayer (fig. 6).

2.4.2.2. Text:

Remains of two vertical lines of inscriptions, which runs from left to right, are similar to the previous text as follows:

1) *nb hw R*-ms-sw *h*-i-(m)-W3st *mrr*-Imn 2) *Bhdt(y) ntr r3 nb pt

“1) lord of appearance Ramses who appears (in) Thebes, beloved of Amun 2) the Behdet, the great god and Lord of sky”.

The third register:

The scene of the register depicts King Ramses IX crowned with the *nemes*-headdress that is ornamented with the uraeus. The king is kneeling on a bolster and raising his arms in a gesture of prayer (fig. 7).

2.4.2.3. Text:

There are some remains of two horizontal cartouches of King Ramses IX that runs from left to right as follows:

1) *Nfr-kA-Ra stp-n-R* 2) *R*-ms-sw *h*-i-(m)-W3st *mrr(w)-Imn

“1) Neferkare-setepenre 2) Ramses (IX)-Khaemwaset-merrwamen, (He-who-appears-in-Thebes, beloved of Amun).”

2.5. The block of King Ptolemaic V

2.5.1. Description:

A rectangular block is made of limestone and measures L., 115 cm, H. 46 cm, and D. 42 cm. Its inscriptions are divided into two similar registers. They contain the Horus, Throne, and the Birth names of King Ptolemy V Epiphanes (fig. 8) in addition to some of his traditional royal titles.
2.5.2. Texts:

1) [Hr: Ḥwnw-ḥ’ṯ-y-m-nsw-ḥr-st-it] f dḥ nth w3s
2) [nsw-bḥt: Īw-‘n-nṯrw-y-mr(wy)-ḥt stp-(n)-Ptḥ wsr-ḥ3-R] šm-ḥḥ-[(n)-Īmn] nṯ ḫḥwȝ
3) [s3-R: Ptwlm[ s ni-Ptḥ nb nfrw 4] ... mi R] 5) mry nṯrw

“I) [Horus: Ḥwnw-khaensw-hersetetef (The-youth-who-has-appeared-as-king-on-his-father's throne).] Given life and domain. 2) [King of Upper and Lower Egypt: Iwaennetrwy-merwyet-setepentah-oserkare-sekhemanekhenamen (The heir-of-the-two-gods\(^a\)-who-love-(their)-father\(^b\), Chosen of Ptah, the strong one of the ka of Re\(^2\)], the-living-image-[of-Amun]\(^3\). God who appears\(^6\). 3) [Son of Re: Ptolemaios (V), Living forever], Beloved [of Ptah]\(^4\). Master of kindness\(^d\), 4) ... like Re 5) Beloved of the two gods\(^5\).”

2.5.3. Comment:

a) The title of “two gods” refers to King Ptolemy IV and Queen Arsinoe III.

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3 Leprohon, The Great Name, 181, 190. There is another version of his Throne name “Heir of the gods who love their father, chosen of Ptah, the power of the ka of Re, the living image of Amun.” See M. Chauveau, Egypt in the Age of Cleopatra: History and Society under the Ptolemies, translated by D. Lorton (London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 46.
4 H. Gauthier, Le livre des rois d’Égypte, III (Le Caire: l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1913), 275–288; von Beckerath, Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen, 236–239; Sales, “Le Roi Ptolémafoue”; 201; Leprohon, The Great Name, 181. The complete version of this title is “Ptolemy, living eternally, beloved of Ptah, the god who appears (= Epiphanes), master of kindness (= Eukharistos)”. Cf. Chauveau, Egypt in the Age of Cleopatra, 46.
b) This title is written in Egyptian as a translation of the Greek title “the two Philopators (= Ptolemy IV and Arsinoe III)”. It also appeared on some contemporary monuments.

c) The surname nTr-pr i in Egyptian was just a translation of the Greek title Ἐπιφανής Epiphanes “God Manifest”, or “the Glorious/Illustrious”. Sometimes it appears in a dual form as nTrwy-pr i, and it refers to the dead parents, King Ptolemy IV and Queen Arisnoi III.

d) The epithet nb nfrw could be also translated as “lord of the crowns / perfection / kindness.”

Most of these titles or epithets regularly followed the royal names of King Ptolemy V. His Greek titles remained unchanged; They were translated into the Egyptian language. The Greek version accurately renders all these epithets, replacing Amun with Zeus, Ptah with Hephaistos, and Re with Helios. The surname nTr-pri and the epithet nb nfrw provide a specific date of around 199 BC. or 189 BC.

Although Ptolemy V had ruled Egypt for a long time and left the kingdom in a state of vulnerability, he achieved relative peace for over 15 years before the armed rebellion resumed its activities among natives and foreigners. The religious policy of the Ptolemies towards the Egyptian clergy was visible in the plentiful offerings in...
addition to building activities of the Egyptian temples. Actually, Ptolemy V erected many Egyptian temples to proclaim himself a Pharaoh before the Greeks and Egyptians. On the other hand, he defined many revenues for these temples; thus, he won the Greek nickname Eucharist "Gracious." In return, this political propaganda showed him as Egyptian to win the sympathy of the native Egyptians. Ptolemy V connected his violence against the natives' revolt with the native deities of Egypt. He presented the Egyptian deities as his protectors against the protesters. After his victory, Ptolemy V was honoured as a hero, conqueror, and god according to the decree of Memphis (Rosetta Stone lines 6, 2, and 14 during his coronation on March 27, 197 BC).

After centuries, these Ptolemy V temples were abandoned and destroyed; People brought some blocks from the ruins of Heliopolis and reused them in their buildings in Old Cairo during the Medieval Period. Some shards of evidence could support this suggestion:

A bronze seal of unknown provenance was kept in a private collection. It has an inscription of the titulary of Ptolemy V followed by the epithets related to Hathor. It may be a foundation seal beneath King Ptolemy V's temple and was discovered after reusing the ruins of this temple.

1) A limestone block discovered in the foundations of the pre-Islamic church of Abu Sarga (Sergius) in Babylon (East Cairo, near Heliopolis) with two Ptolemaic cartouches was initially brought from a Ptolemaic temple for reuse in the construction of that church.

2) King Ptolemy V and Queen Cleopatra I permitted the Judean Syrian Onias to remove the destroyed temple of Leontopolis in the Nome of Heliopolis to rebuild a new temple at Yahwa. A view suggests that this temple was probably located much closer to ancient Heliopolis, probably at Tell-el-Yahoudieh, the main settlement of the Jews in Egypt at that time.

3) The block of Old Cairo, which was dated to the reign of King Ptolemy V Epiphanes (204-181/182 BC.), was discovered near other blocks that originated from Heliopolis.

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2 Johnson, Ptolemaic Royal Titulature in Royal and Civil Documents, 225.
3 Schoville, “The Rosetta Stone in Historical Perspective”: 17.
4 Johnson, Ptolemaic Royal Titulature in Royal and Civil Documents, 235.
6 He took over the power in 204 BC. when he was only five years old. See M.O. Aneni, “Politics of the Ptolemaic Dynasty”, New Journal of African Studies 12 (2016): 155.
3. General discussion

The first point discusses the provenance of the five studied blocks. Although the intended destruction of the buildings was almost for economic reasons, some buildings fell due to natural aspects. The generations over the years reused the ruins of such buildings to supply other new buildings. According to Al-Maqrizi, the Ayyubid Rulers prefer to take these blocks from ancient sites instead of cutting stones from Moqattam to save effort and time¹.

The sites of Memphis and Heliopolis give an ideal example of the reuse phenomenon. Memphis is located far (about 35 km) from Old Cairo, where the blocks were already discovered, and the Nile River separates the two sites. Memphis, therefore, was not the original suggested site for these blocks of Old Cairo. Alternatively, there are many notes refer to Heliopolis as the original site, as follows:

1) Heliopolis is nearer to the modern site of these blocks, only about 12 km away.
2) Ramses IX left several monuments at Heliopolis².
3) An inscription records a royal offering that was presented by King Pami of the 22nd Dynasty³, as follows: "The son of Re [Pamy] is endowed with life forever. He did this as an endowment for the Baou of Heliopolis, the lords of the Great Temple which dominates Heliopolis, the establishment of their daily offering and [for]every feast of the Great Temple forever [...] with them like Re [eternally]"⁴. This text is inscribed on a reused block that was discovered within the same walls of Old Cairo. It is related to the Great Temple of Heliopolis.
4) The perfect evidence for the proposed origin of these blocks is the discovery of a sphinx of King Ramses II. It was reused as a threshold for the side-gate of the Ayyubian walls of Old Cairo. Heliopolis was the original site of this sphinx⁵.

According to the previous observations, there were ruins of a building at Heliopolis from which the people of Old Cairo transported these blocks to reuse them in their buildings.

The second point of discussion is about the type of building from which these inscribed blocks were brought, so we must concentrate on the following points of observation:

1) The big size of these blocks indicates to their use in a sizable building as temple.
2) The decoration of these blocks is traditional on the temples’ walls.
3) There are other discovered blocks related to the god Re-Horakhty and King Ramses II, and they are also reused in other buildings of Old Cairo⁶. They all belonged to the same source.

Accordingly, these blocks of Old Cairo were brought from the ruins of the great temple of the sun god Re-Horakhty at Heliopolis to reuse them in other buildings like the northern wall of the Ayyubid dynasty. This phenomenon has been practised since

early times. For example, a block from the mortuary temple of King Amenhotep III was reused in the mortuary temple of Merenptah.

The last point is why the hieroglyphic inscriptions on these blocks were not erased, despite they were used in an Islamic cult place? Along the periods, the Egyptians respect their ancient monuments especially those of the religious building as temples in the so-called ‘Heritage Zones.’ They consider these ruins as ‘Architectural Heritage.’ Thus, they protect these ruins through reusing without re-inscription.

4. Conclusion

In sum, the inscribed blocks of Old Cairo have been destroyed over the centuries at the site of Heliopolis, which seems to be reasonably rapid pace. For economic reasons through saving money and effort, builders of the Mediaeval Era reused the remains of some ancient monuments to reconstruct their new buildings. There is no indication of a re-inscription of these blocks in ancient times, suggesting they were brought directly to Old Cairo from their provenance site. Heliopolis had extensive ruins that could be easily transported by the ships through the River Nile branches. There were no natural obstructions between Heliopolis and Old Cairo. For many years, Heliopolis was the chosen source for the building’s supplies. The proposed source of these blocks was the ruins of the great temple of the god Re-Horakhty in Heliopolis. According to the texts, the blocks of Old Cairo added a new achievement to the well-known monuments of King Sobekhotep IV, Thutmose III, Ramses IX, and Ptolemy V.


Bibliography:


• https://www.memphis.edu/hypostyle/pdfs/glossary.pdf
(Fig. 1)
The upper block of King Sobekhotep IV and the lower blocks of Unknown King
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(Fig. 2)
A block of King Thutmose III. Photograph © Authors
The block of King Ramses IX was used as a threshold at the entering door of the Khanqat of Baybars Al-Jashankair. Photograph © Authors
(Fig. 5)
Details of King Ramses VI’ figure with the khepresh-crown. Photograph © Authors

(Fig. 6)
Details of King Ramses VI with the khat-headdress. Photograph © Authors

(Fig. 7)
Ramses IX was crowned with the nemes-headdress. Photograph © Authors
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(Fig. 8)
The middle inscriptions of the block of King Ramses IX. Photograph © Authors

(Fig. 9)
The lower inscriptions of the block of King Ramses IX. Photograph © Authors

(Fig. 10)
A block of King Ptolemaic V. Photograph © Authors