

The Egyptian Inscriptions at Jebel Dosha, Sudan

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Jebel Dosha, a sandstone promontory situated a few kilometres (about three miles) north of Soleb on the west bank of the Nile between the Second and Third Cataracts (Figs 1–5), is an interesting but little-known ancient site. Literature records the presence there of a rock-chapel of Thutmose III and three other rock-cut monuments, comprising a royal stela, dedicated to King Seti I, and two private stelae, one showing ‘A scribe worshipping Amen-re (?) and Satis’, the other ‘Three men, one Si-abeshek...Priest’ (PM vii, 167; cf. Hein 1991, 60, 173 and 175). The only publication of the monuments based on original work is that of Lepsius, who visited the site in 1844 and published copies of parts of the decoration inside the chapel (LD iii, 59, d-e; cf. Budge 1907, 594–7, with figs) together with a section of the Seti I stela (LD iii, 141,k). I recently (late 2003) had the opportunity to visit Jebel Dosha, finding it to be a considerably richer context than I had anticipated. Pending a more detailed survey of the site, I offer here, with the permission of NCAM,¹ a few preliminary observations, with special reference to the Egyptian inscriptions.²

Chapel of Thutmose III

This is a rock-cut chapel overlooking the Nile, situated a couple of metres or so above the path which passes in front of the jebel and separates it from the river bank (LD i, pl. 123 [lower]; Breasted 1908, 96–7, fig. 53; Wilkinson 2000, 231; Figs 5–6). Part of a substantial building programme undertaken by Thutmose III in Nubia, the Jebel Dosha chapel is similar in type and content to the contemporary chapel once located at Ellesyia just north of the Second Cataract and now preserved in the Egyptian Museum, Turin (PM vii, 90–1; Desroches-Noblecourt et al. 1968; Gundlach 1994; Laboury 1998, 98–100, C6; Curto 1999; in general: Jacquet 1967; Wildung 1977, 162–3; Schade-Busch 1997). It consists of a transverse hall and rectangular inner chamber with the remains of three seated statues cut out of the back wall (Fig. 7, after LD i, pl. 115; Laboury 1998, 90–1, C2). The small niches cut into the back and side walls of the inner chamber are later additions. The chapel has suffered some damage, much of it as the result of its re-use as a dwelling and shelter.

The left half of the façade has almost completely disappeared together with the lintel above the door and the bottom half of the right jamb. The latter (Figs 8–9) was originally decorated in sunk relief with a column of hieroglyphs, reading right to left, consisting of the king’s titulary, beginning with the title ‘good god’. It was later at least partly recut, with the hieroglyphs facing towards the door. Modification to the original decoration is also possibly to be seen in the presence of the figures of two officials, perhaps viceroys, in the area to the right of the column, one small (kneeling with arms before

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²This report was originally published, with a subset of the images reproduced here, as Davies 2004.

him) and one large (upper part of head only with remains of fan), both in sunk relief. These changes probably date to the 19th Dynasty, more precisely to the reign of Seti I, whose viceroy, Amenemipet (Habachi 1980, 633, no. 16; Hein 1991, 86), was active at this site (see below).

The wall-decoration inside the chapel, all in raised relief of good quality, is in a poor state, with most of it lost. The decorative programme consisted mainly of scenes showing Thutmose III offering to various deities. The fragmentary scenes in the Hall recorded by Lepsius, though now further eroded, are still recognizable, including one, on the east wall, where the king offers to the deified Senwosret III (LD iii, pl. 59, d; Fig. 10). Additionally, there are remains of decoration, obscured by soot, on the walls of the inner chamber, yet to be documented. The statues at the rear (Figs 11–12) are badly mutilated and their subjects difficult to identify (cf. Laboury 1998, 90–1, C2). The central figure is almost certainly that of Thutmose III, perhaps wearing the white crown; the figure to the left appears to have been shown wearing a headdress with two long plumes, in which case it is probably Amen-Ra; the figure to the right is more damaged than the others and its identity remains unclear.

Stela of Seti I

The stela of Seti I, executed in sunk relief, is situated several metres higher and a short distance to the left of the chapel (Fig. 13). It is rectangular in shape and measures about 1.5 m in height. It bears at the top a horizontal register (LD iii, 141, k; Figs 14–17) with a scene of Seti I offering to the deities of the cataract region, Khnum, Satis and Anket (Valbelle 1981, 43, no. 328, 109, para. 32, and 126–7, para 46). Below the register on the left is depicted a kneeling figure of Seti I's viceroy of Kush, Amenemipet (Figs 18–19), who was responsible for creating the monument. The rest of the stela is taken up with fifteen horizontal lines of inscription, reading from right to left, whose content remains to be fully recorded and studied (Kitchen 1975, 100–1, no. 48; 1993a, 84–5, no. 48; 1993b, 80–1, no. 48; Hein 1991, 60, 81–2, and 86; Brand 2000, 293 [3.148] and 364). Parts of it are damaged, especially a section on the right where there is a large gash and several holes, but much of it is in good condition (Fig. 21). Far from being 'badly cut' (Breasted 1908, 96; cf. Kitchen 1993b, 80, no. 48), the stela displays workmanship of high quality, with the figures in particular rendered with considerable elegance, and the hieroglyphs, where they are preserved, being perfectly legible.

Groups of Striding Figures

Several metres to the left of the stela of Seti I is a group of three male figures (Figs 20, 22), each approx. 40 cm high, shown as if striding around the jebel, their arms raised in obeisance, towards the stela, with which they are almost certainly contemporary. They are carved in deep sunk relief. This is the group of three men cited in PM vii, 167 (see above). Placed before each of them is a column of hieroglyphs, reading right to left, giving their title and name. The first figure is identified as '[Prie]st, Sa-abshek', the second as 'Scribe of Forms, Neb', the third, who is located at a slightly lower level, as 'Priest, Mai-mes' (Figs 23, 25). This Sa-abshek recurs elsewhere at Jebel Dosha (see below) and the name is known from several other sites (Roeder 1911, 181–2, pl. 119,d; PN i, 280, 16; PM vii, 8; Dewachter 1971, 108–9; Zibellius 1972, 37, V E b 80, 52, VI E b 10, and 77; Žába 1974, 231–2, A16; Colin 1998, 92–4). Neb may well be the same man as the 'Scribe of Forms, Neb of Nekhen' known from Sehel and Sabu (Gasse and Rondot 2003, 45–6, pl. 17, col. pl. xxvii).

A second, equivalent group of three officials, previously unrecorded, is located to the right and

below the Seti I stela, shown with arms down, as if walking away from the stela (Fig. 24). The name of the first figure is lost, but his title began with the element ‘Iry...’ The second is identified as ‘Priest, Sa-abshek’ (cf. first group above). The hieroglyphs accompanying the third figure, which are arranged horizontally, are a little unclear and require further study.

Stela of Amenemipet with Khnum and Satet

A short distance to the right of the second group of figures is a fine little round-topped stela, carved into the rock and decorated with figures and inscriptions in sunk relief and incised work (Fig. 26). It consists of two horizontal registers. The upper, which is the more important, bears a scene showing the ‘King’s Son of Kush, Amenemipet’ standing and offering to two seated deities, identified as Khnum and Satet (cf. Morkot 1988, 162). In the lower register, two secondary officials are depicted, standing with arms raised in obeisance. The columns of inscription accompanying them are somewhat effaced and difficult to read but progress should be possible in optimum lighting conditions.

Stela of Keny

Further again to the right is another small rock-cut stela (Fig. 27) done in similar style with a single scene, showing on the left an official identified as ‘Scribe, Great of ...?, Keny’ worshipping before two standing deities, the first identified as ‘Amen-Ra of the Pure Mountain’, the second as ‘Satet’ (Valbelle 1981, 43, no. 329). This stela is cited in PM vii, 167 (see above). It is possible that the ‘Pure Mountain’ here refers to Jebel Dosha (cf. Kitchen 1993b, 81; Valbelle 1981, 109, para. 32).

Stela of Sebakhau (?)

Beyond the stela of Keny, roughly on the north-east corner of the jebel, is a finely carved scene, in sunk relief (Fig. 28), showing in the centre a man standing facing right (height: about 23 cm) with his arms raised; behind him is a large offering-vessel on a stand and in front of him a group of hieroglyphs, reading right to left, giving his title and name ‘Bearer of Buhen Khauseba’ or ‘Sebakhau’, a name known from elsewhere in Nubia during the early Ramesside Period (Kitchen 1980, 119, no. 67; 2000, 81, no. 67; Spencer 1997, 164, 220, with n. 11, pls. 117, a–c and 151; Kitchen 1980, 130, no. 80, 1–5; 2000, 88, no. 80, 1–5). Possibly the same man is attested in a curious rock-inscription at Ibrim (Caminos 1968, 92–3, pl. 42.1).

Stela of Amenemipet (?) with Lunar God and Satet

Several metres to the left of the chapel of Thutmose III, on a rock shelf about a metre or so above the river-bank path, are the remains of a stela, done in sunk relief of very good quality (Fig. 29). It shows on the left the kneeling figure of an official facing right, offering to two standing deities facing left (height about 35 cm), the scene surmounted by a winged sun-disk. The identity of the first deity, evidently a lunar god, remains to be determined as the hieroglyphs here are unclear; the second deity is the goddess Satet. The official’s title is lost and his name almost completely gone, but the quality and style of the piece suggest that this is probably another representation of the Viceroy Amenemipet.

Miscellaneous

A number of other stelae once decorated the face of the jebel for many metres to the right of the Thutmose III chapel, but unfortunately their inscriptions are no longer preserved. Also noticeable is a series of deep rectangular holes which extend in a line rightwards from a point just above the present height of the entrance to the chapel (Figs 5, 8 and 30). These were probably designed to hold wooden beams but their exact function and date are uncertain. Similar holes were associated with the chapel at Elessyia (Desroches-Noblecourt et al. 1968, 3, pls. 3–6; Jacquet 1967, 73, n. 4; Curto 1999, 39 [plate], 42 and 57).

Conclusion

Jebel Dosha has many more Egyptian inscriptions than previously recorded, and there is every possibility that others remain to be discovered. On present evidence, the site appears to have been first exploited by the Egyptians during the reign of Thutmose III, a presence that was renewed and much enhanced under the direction of Seti I's Viceroy of Kush, Amenemipet. All the non-royal inscriptions observed hitherto on the jebel appear to date to the reign of Seti I or at least to the early Ramesside period. Full documentation of the site's monuments, which overall are in reasonable condition, may be expected to yield a considerable amount of new prosopographical, historical and iconographic data, leading to a more detailed understanding of the site's function and meaning and of its role in Egypt's appropriation of Nubia. Ideally, in view of the ever-mounting pressures of modern development, such a project should not be too long delayed.

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Abbreviations

- LD = C. R. Lepsius, *Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien*. 12 vols. Berlin 1849–59.
- PM vii = B. Porter and R. L. B. Moss (eds), *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs and Paintings, vii. Nubia, the Deserts, and Outside Egypt*. Oxford, 1951.
- PNI = H. Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen*, i. Gluckstadt, 1935.

All photographs are by W.V. Davies except for figs 4, 20 and 29 which are by D.A. Welsby.

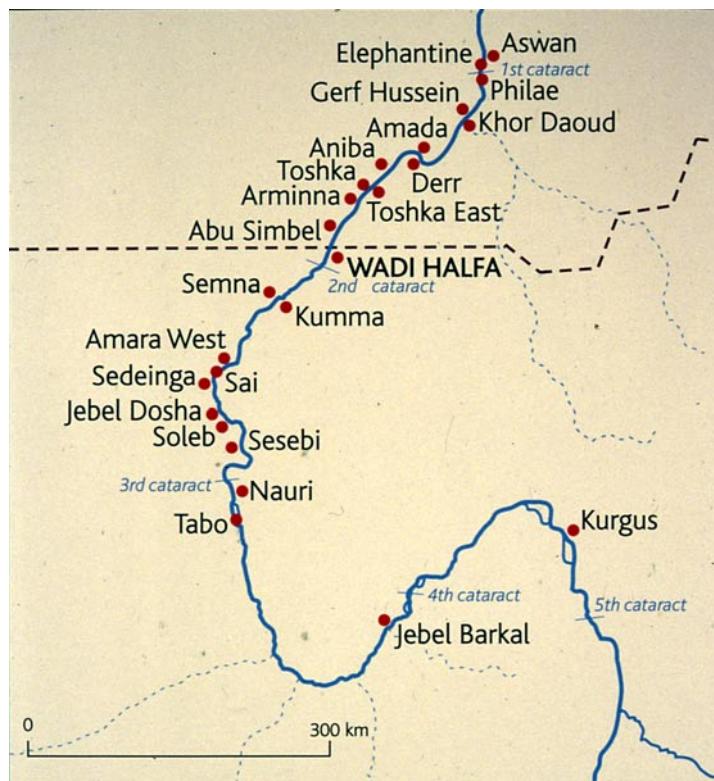


Fig. 1 Map showing location of Jebel Dosha.



Fig. 2 View of Jebel Dosha (promontory extending from sand dune on left) approaching from the south-west.



Fig. 3 View of Jebel Dosha from the south.



Fig. 4 Jebel Dosha seen from across the Nile. The chapel of Thutmose III is masked by the vegetation on the island in the foreground.



Fig. 5 View of Jebel Dosha from the north, with chapel of Thutmose III on left.

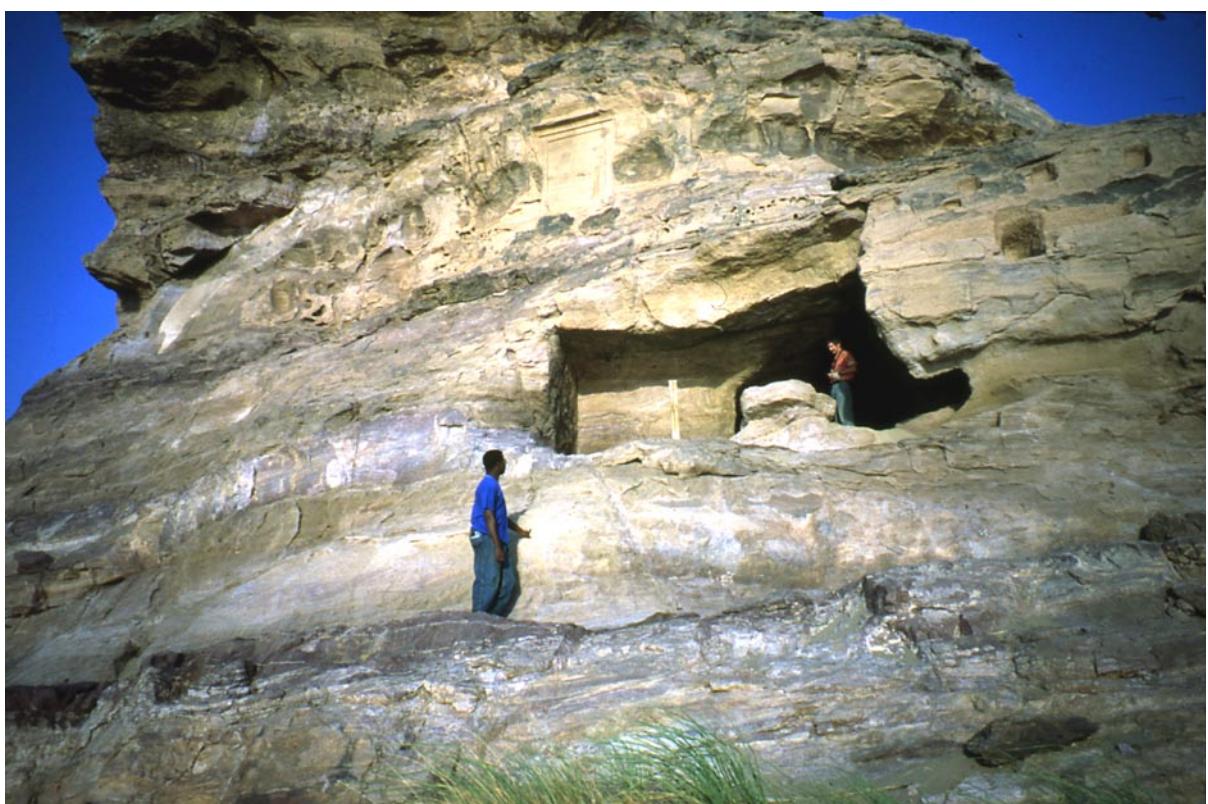


Fig. 6 Chapel of Thutmose III and, above to the left, stela of Seti I.

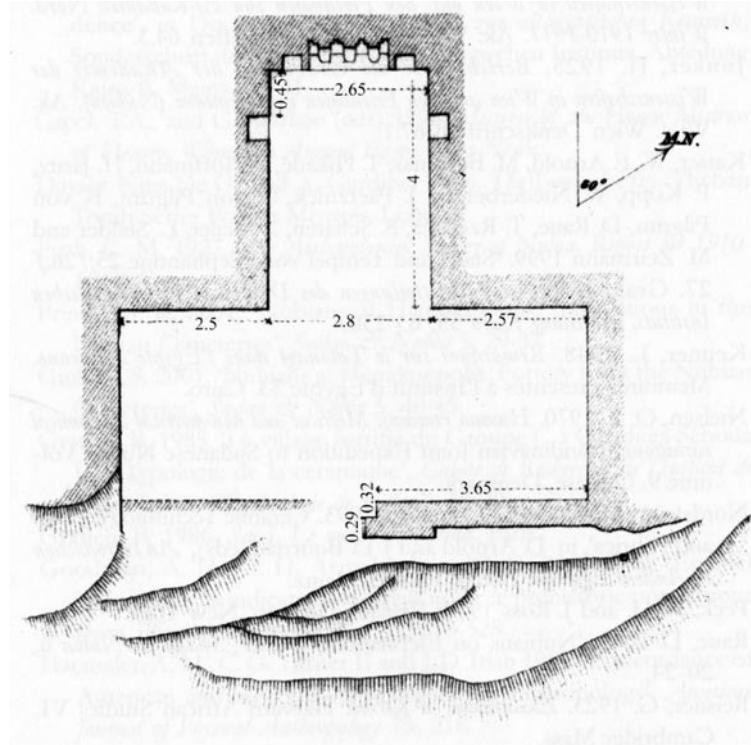


Fig. 7 Chapel of Thutmose III, plan (after LD i, 115).



Fig. 8 Chapel of Thutmose III. Remains of entrance and right façade.



Fig. 9 Chapel of Thutmose III. Remains of decoration to right of entrance.



Fig. 10 Chapel of Thutmose III, hall, east wall. Remains of decoration including cartouches of the deified king, Senwosret III.



Fig. 11 Chapel of Thutmose III, interior, inner chamber.



Fig. 12 Interior of Thutmose III chapel, with remains of three rock-cut figures in rear wall.



Fig. 14 Royal stela, detail. Figure of King Seti I.



Fig. 13 Stela of King Seti I.



Fig. 15 Royal stela, detail. Figure of King Seti I before offering table.



Fig. 16 Royal stela, detail of offering table and figure of Khnum.



Fig. 17 Royal stela, detail. Figures of three deities, Khnum, Satet and Anket.



Fig. 18 Royal stela, detail. Figure of viceroy Amenemipet and accompanying inscriptions.



Fig. 20 Examining the figures and inscriptions to the left of the royal stela.



Fig. 19 Royal stela, detail. Figure of viceroy Amenemipet.

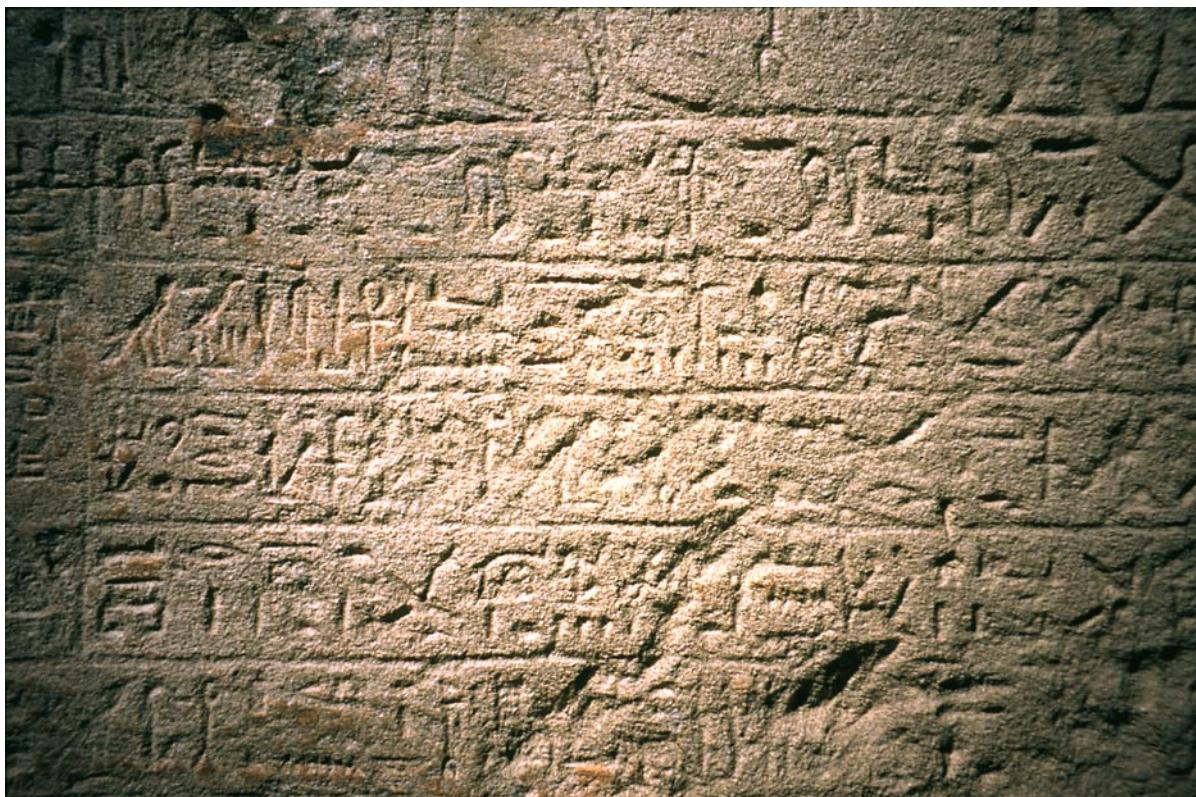


Fig. 21 Royal stela, detail of main inscription.



Fig. 22 Group of three male figures, located to left of royal stela.



Fig. 23 Two male figures, located to left of royal stela.

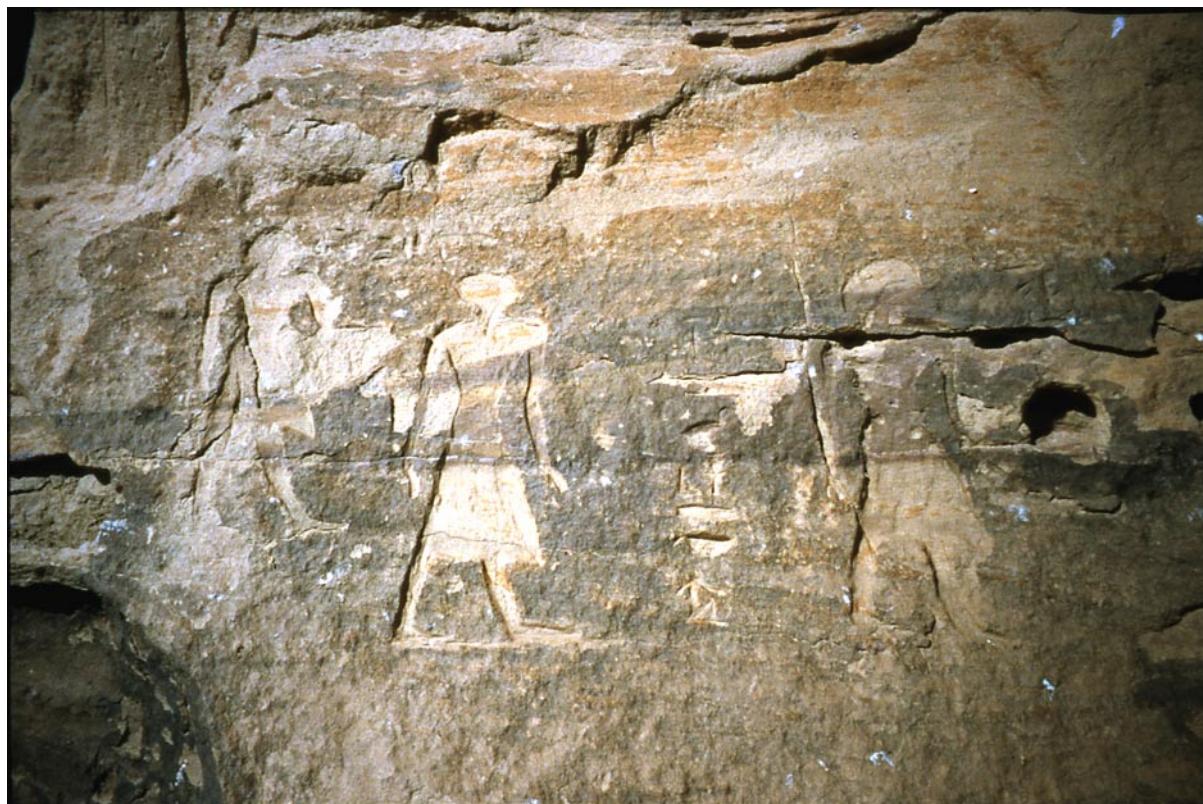


Fig. 24 Group of three male figures, located to right of royal stela.



Fig. 26 Stela showing the viceroy Amenemipet before two deities.



Fig. 25 Figure of the priest, Maimes.



Fig. 27 Stela showing the scribe, Keny, before two deities.



Fig. 28 Scene showing an official named Sebakhau(?).



Fig. 29 Stela showing an official kneeling before two deities.



Fig. 30 Rock face to right of Thutmose III chapel, with remains of stelae and series of rectangular holes.