

The West Wall of the Portico of Obelisks in Hatshepsut's Temple in 2018 and 2019: conservation and studies



Abstract: The longest, west wall of the South Lower Portico (Portico of Obelisks) of the Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari has been reassessed in terms of its current state, compared to the original documentation by Edouard Naville, as an opening step to the author's research project organized within the frame of the larger University of Warsaw Temple of Hatshepsut research program. A considerable number of blocks from the wall, including unpublished fragments, was tracked down in storage in the various temple blockyards and storerooms. About two-thirds of the wall decoration underwent conservation treatment in the spring of 2018 and 2019 seasons. The paper discusses the author's progress in this research.

Keywords: Hatshepsut temple, Portico of Obelisks, South Lower Portico, Deir el-Bahari, Naville

The west wall of the Portico of Obelisks in the Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari has come under renewed study with research initiated in 2018, aimed at providing a comprehensive analysis of the significance and history of the wall decoration, including damages and reworking. The original publication by Édouard Naville (1908) will be complemented with new pho-

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tographic and drawing documentation, as well as line drawings of the northern part of the west wall which has been published mainly as a photographic record by Janusz Karkowski (2016). The first step, covered in this summary of initial work,

was to identify unpublished blocks belonging to the west wall of the portico and to track down blocks already documented by Naville and Karkowski, but not reintroduced into the wall in their true location.

EARLIER RESEARCH

The South Lower Portico was first investigated by Naville, who started work in the temple in 1893 (James 2001: 44). Naville remarked that his predecessors at Deir el-Bahari did not have full access to this part of the temple and so did not mention the unusual scenes of transport of the obelisks present in the decoration (Naville 1908: 1). Auguste Mariette (1877: Pl. 11) documented only one register of the obelisk scenes and wrongly reconstructed the portico as having its stairway located centrally (1877: Pl. 3), so he certainly could not have been able to see the entire structure. The earlier work of Johannes Duemichen is even more fragmentary, as the author selected only a few scenes from the Portico of Obelisks, from the lower layers of decorated blocks (1868: Pls IV [bottom], VII, VIII, X, XIII [left], XXI [bottom]; for an identification of scenes, see Iwaszczuk 2016: 33).

Naville identified many blocks from the portico which Coptic monks had relocated to the Upper Terrace as building material, including most of those belonging to the transport of obelisks scene (Naville 1908: 1). The state of the Portico of Obelisks during Naville's times can be seen in his book (Naville 1908: Pl. CLI)

and in images from the Egypt Exploration Society's photo archive.¹ Karkowski published the results of his investigations within the program of the Polish–Egyptian Archaeological and Conservation Mission at the Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari (1976; 2016). Other work was also carried out, but the Portico of Obelisks was never fully investigated.

The west wall of the portico is presently preserved up to the tenth layer of blocks, although about half of its length (mainly the middle part) is preserved only until the eighth. Originally, there were probably 12 layers of blocks. The seven preserved layers from the top are decorated, separated from the three smooth, undecorated lowest layers with the usual dado line. Two blocks from the eleventh layer were documented (Naville 1908: Pl. CLIV), but were not actually replaced in the wall. One is presently lost, the other is stored in one of the temple's blockyards (see below). The uppermost layers (probably two) are lost and their decoration can be reconstructed only speculatively. The Northern Lower Portico is similarly missing its topmost blocks and thus cannot be used as a direct parallel. However, it has been postulated

1 Available at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/egyptexplorationsociety/albums/72157661494672977> (nos. DB-HAT.NEG.C.61, DB-HAT.NEG.C.62) (accessed 25.07.2019).

(based on block connections) that the Northern Lower Portico had a cryptogram frieze (Pawlicki 1997: 50), and so its southern counterpart could have been decorated similarly.²

The following sequence of scenes can be reconstructed, from south to north, based on the preserved parts of the decoration:

- A. Scene of transport of the obelisks, with a long inscription above the obelisks, a procession of deities in the upper register, and soldiers running in celebration (Naville 1908: Pls CLIII–CLV; Iwaszczuk 2016: 33–34);
- B. Scene of the king Hatshepsut offering the standing obelisks to Amun (Naville 1908: Pl. CLVI; Karkowski 1976: Fig. 5; Iwaszczuk 2016: 34);
- C. Scene of the king Thutmose III running before an ithyphallic Amun (Naville 1908: Pl. CLVII; Karkowski 1976: Fig. 4; Iwaszczuk 2016: 34);
- D. Scenes of the ritual of temple foundation, including the king before the goddess Seshat/Sefekhet-abwy and the figure of Amun belonging summarily to two scenes (Karkowski 2016: Figs 1a–3b; Iwaszczuk 2016: 34–35);

- E. Scene of the king making offerings to an ithyphallic Amun-Kamutef (Naville 1908: Pl. CLIX; Iwaszczuk 2016: 35; Karkowski 2016: Fig. 4).

The figure of Hatshepsut was chiselled out in the later regnal years of Thutmose III, but the outlines of her silhouette can be discerned wherever the background was not destroyed as well. With a few omissions, her royal names were mutilated. The figures of the gods were destroyed during the Amarna Period, and later recarved (in lesser detail and with distinctive lines) during the reign of Ramses II, with short texts added in sunken relief to commemorate these actions.

The southern half of the west wall is better preserved, and in spite of missing blocks, most of the decoration is either known or can be reconstructed. The scenes of the temple foundation rituals are the most damaged and it is clear that after the initial removal of Hatshepsut's figures most of the background was also hammered out (Karkowski 2016: 113). Apart from the deliberate destruction, the wall is also damaged by water, weathering and the load pressing on it from behind (the wall face is now somewhat convex in vertical section).

ASSESSMENT OF THE PRESENT CONDITION AND DOCUMENTATION

Treatment by conservator Maria Lulkiewicz-Podkowińska started in the spring of 2018 and was continued in the spring of 2019. Work started from the southern end of the wall and apart from

the blocks in situ included many loose blocks. Currently, only a third of the wall remains to be cleaned. The present state of conservation, which the cleaning enhanced for study, was compared

² I am indebted to Andrzej Kwaśnica for his suggestions regarding the cryptogram frieze hypothesis. Blocks potentially belonging to the uppermost layers of the wall may yet be identified in the course of future research.

with the drawings published by Naville (1908: Pls CLIII–CLV)³ in order to determine the blocks known to have been in the portico at the beginning of the 20th century and now missing. The discrepancies were numerous, although it was mostly single blocks missing rather than larger fragments of the wall. There was also a number of inaccuracies in the finer details of the drawings.⁴ The northern parts of the wall will be studied once the conservation cleaning treatment has been completed.

FINDING THE MISSING BLOCKS

To gain a comprehensive image of all the scenes and fill in gaps in the fragmentary texts for the purposes of a virtual reconstruction of the west wall of the portico, it is essential above all to identify blocks and fragments of blocks that, for a variety of reasons, have not been reintroduced into the wall. The inventory of the present state of preservation of the blocks within the wall, carried out as the first stage of the author's new project, collected data on the preserved decoration, such as inscription size, style of the Ramses II restorations, and damage patterns. Marshalling this knowledge, a considerable group of blocks and fragments of blocks (over 50) was selected in the temple's blockyards, and reassigned to the west wall of the Portico of Obelisks.

Blocks present in the reconstruction drawings from the 1908 publication were identified in the blockyard on the Lower

Terrace, in a section devoted to the Portico of Obelisks. These are (both from Scene A):

- one of two blocks from the uppermost identifiable layer (11th), with the Ramesside reconstruction of a falcon-headed deity;
- two blocks with masts of ships.

The Lower Terrace blockyard also contained blocks not included in Naville's publication:

- two blocks from the Karnak scene (Scene B): one with the pyramidion of a standing obelisk and another with an intentionally destroyed inscription fragment, both identified by Karkowski (1976: Fig. 5);
- four unpublished blocks with two male and two female deities [Fig. 1]. Their decoration was restored under Ramses II. They belong, most probably, to the procession of gods in the uppermost identifiable layer, above the obelisk transport scene (Scene A), an identification that will be confirmed once the blocks are measured more precisely;
- unpublished fragment of a block with several hieroglyphs matching in size and style the ones from the inscription above the barge carrying the obelisks (Scene A) [Fig. 2:a];
- unpublished block from Scene A, between the uppermost and middle row tugboats that were the nearest to the barge carrying the obelisks showing the oars of the former and the tops of the steering oars of the latter [Fig. 2:b];

3 The first two plates of the west wall were drawn by Mrs. M. Naville, the remaining drawings by Howard Carter (Naville 1908: v).

4 Contrary to the praise expressed by T.G.H. James regarding the drawings made by Naville's team (James 2001: 43, 47–48), in the case of the Portico of Obelisks the exactitude of the drawings is uneven.



Fig. 1. Deities from the procession of gods above the scene of the transport of the obelisks (Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences | photos M. Jawornicki)



Fig. 2. Identified blocks: a – inscription above the barge with the obelisks (fragment); b – parts of tugboats nearest to the barge carrying the obelisks in the upper and middle row (block); c – oars from the upper row of tugboats (fragment); d – part of the shoulder and raised arm of Amun restored under Ramses II (fragment); e – part of the white crown of Thutmose III from Scene C (fragment) ; f – fragment of inscription behind Thutmose III and small fragment of the feathers of Amun from Scene B (Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences | photos M. Jawornicki)



Fig. 3. Identified blocks: a – part of the crown and feathers of Amun, restored under Ramses II (fragment of block); b – oarsman (fragment of block); c – beginning of the name of Amun-Kamutef (restored under Ramses II) from the northernmost scene of the portico (block); d – inscription above the last of the tugboats in the lowest row (block) (Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences | photos M. Jawornicki)

- unpublished small fragment of a block from Scene A, with oars in the water, belonging probably to the uppermost set of tugboats (middle part of the boat nearest to the barge with the obelisks) [Fig. 2:c];
- unpublished fragment of a block with part of the crown and feathers of Amun (Ramses II restoration) [Fig. 3:a];
- unpublished small fragment of a block from Scene A with the legs of an oarsman and oars [Fig. 3:b];
- unpublished block from Scene C with a part of the shoulder and raised arm of Amun (Ramses II restoration) [Fig. 2:d];
- unpublished block with the beginning of the name of Amun-Kamutef, from Scene E (Ramses II restoration) [Fig. 3:c];
- unpublished block from Scene C (mainly) with a fragment of the inscription behind Thutmose III and a small fragment of the feathers of Amun from Scene B [Fig. 2:f].

Other blocks currently in the Lower Terrace blockyard have yet to be assigned to specific locations in the Portico of Obelisks. They include several fragments of standard inscriptions, probably from Scenes D and E, which may be allocated to their proper position upon further study of the texts in the portico. There are also some blocks from the portico pillars (including fragments of the large Horus reliefs from the top, analogous to the Northern Lower Portico pillars) and some blocks that can be tentatively assigned to the north and south walls of the

portico. The section of the blockyard dedicated to the Portico of Obelisks contains also blocks from other parts of the temple.

Blockyards in the Middle and Upper Terraces and in storerooms throughout the temple, as well as cases with fragments recovered during clearing and conservation work were also inspected in search of missing fragments.

More of the blocks identified by Karkowski (1976: Figs 3–4) were found in the southern blockyard on the Middle Terrace which is in front of the Portico of Punt:

- three blocks with the cartouches of Thutmose III and two blocks with a fragment of a column of text behind Thutmose III, from Scene C;
- five blocks with the head of the goddess Seshat (one of them currently broken in two), from Scene D.

A smaller unpublished fragment with part of the king's white crown, from the same Scene C with Thutmose III [Fig. 2:e], was also found in this blockyard.

Coming from the northern blockyard on the Middle Terrace is an unpublished block with a short fragment of an inscription. The text mentions the beginning of a royal boat name that included Hatshepsut's throne name [Fig. 3:d]. It was originally located in Scene A, in the lowest set of tugboats.⁵

Eight smaller fragments belonging to the scene with obelisks standing in Karnak (Scene B) were found in the storerooms arranged in the chapels of

5 The significance of the boat's name within the portico will be discussed by the author in a separate publication.

the Northern Colonnade. These included a fragment from above one of the three boats accompanying the transport of the obelisks (Scene A, lowest register), drawn in Naville's publication, and four newly identified block fragments:

- very small part of the *serekh* of Hatshepsut's titulary from the sunk-relief inscriptions on standing obelisks [Fig. 4:a];
- lower part of the pyramidion of one of the standing obelisks [Fig. 4:b];
- two tips of standing obelisks (separate fragments) [Figs 5:c, d].

Storage chests stored on the Upper Terrace were also checked, as photo images kindly provided by J. Iwaszczuk indicated that some of the smaller block fragments found during various seasons of work might also belong to the Portico of Obelisks. It proved possible to identify fragments from Scene A:

- looped ropes used to set the steering oars (partly visible) and the end of the stern part of the tugboat nearest to the barge with the obelisks from the middle row of boats [Fig. 5:a];

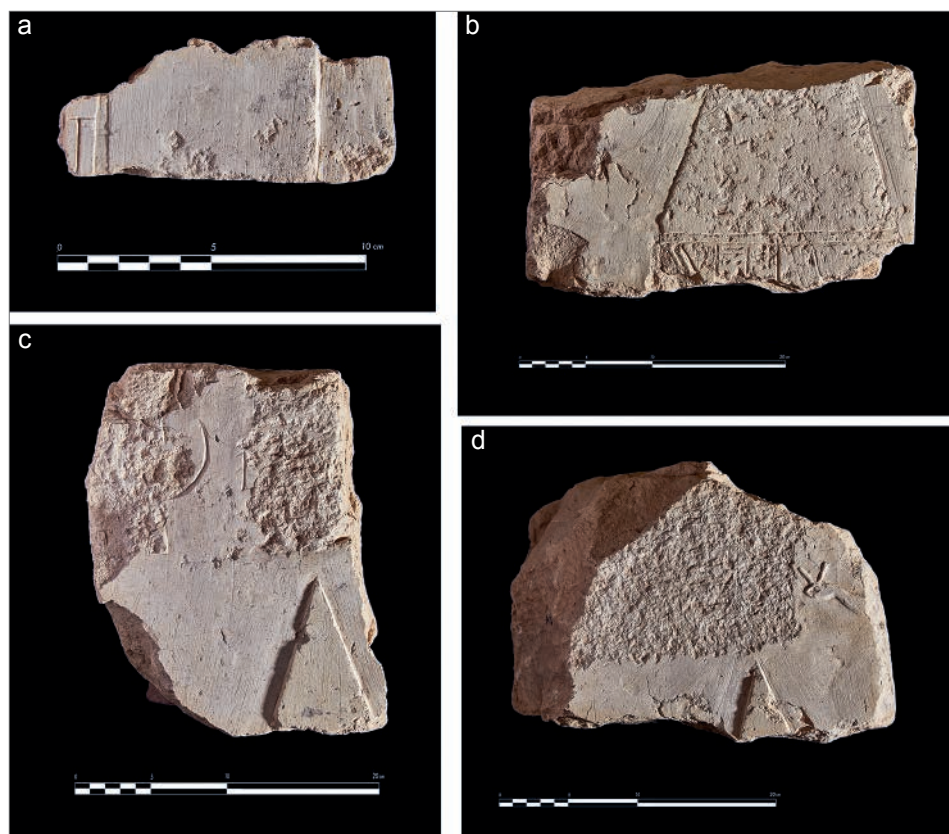


Fig. 4. Identified blocks: a – part of a *serekh* from one of the inscriptions on the standing obelisks in Scene B (fragment); b – part of the pyramidion of a standing obelisk (fragment); c – tip of a standing obelisk from Scene B (fragment); d – tip of a standing obelisk from Scene B (fragment) (Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences | photos M. Jawornicki)

- stern part of the tugboat nearest to the barge with the obelisks from the uppermost row of boats, with part of the steering oar and rope [Fig. 5:b];
- lower part of a boat and long rope [Fig. 5:c];
- two small fragments with oars in the water [Figs 5:d, e];
- several very small fragments with ropes and steering oars (presently not located within the scene, but having proportions and angles making the assignment to the portico probable).

All the fragments with submerged oars have the water represented without waves, which is characteristic of the Portico of Obelisks, so their general allocation is certain.

Altogether, over 50 loose blocks and fragments thereof, belonging to the west wall of the Portico of Obelisks, were tracked down or freshly identified. Approximately half were unpublished. The smallest elements were secured together in one of the North Colonnade storehouses, whereas the larger ones were left grouped in the blockyards on the Lower and Middle Terraces. They will be used in a virtual reconstruction of the west wall of the portico and will be ready for reintroduction in the wall.

Queries in museum collections also identified blocks missing from the west portico wall, e.g., a block missing from the middle set of tugboats (Scene A) identified by Karkowski as ÄM 14142 from the Neues Museum (formerly Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin) (Karkowski 1997: 114; see also Naville 1908: Pl. CLIII; Iwaszczuk 2016: 34). Another fragment, also representing part of a tugboat from Scene A (with an overseer of oarsmen) is housed

in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge (Iwaszczuk 2016: 34). One more block that may belong to the obelisk transport scene and will require further consideration is in Bournemouth (Bournemouth Natural Science Society No. 1922-03-004; Roberts 2009; for the scene identification, see Iwaszczuk 2016: 34). Clearly, extended queries may yet locate other missing blocks outside Egypt.

A still extensive list of fragments and blocks drawn in Naville's publication, but presently missing from both the wall and the temple blockyards, could also fall in this category. These are fragments from the obelisk transport Scene A:

- fragment of a block from the uppermost identified layer, with an inscription accompanying the procession of gods (Naville 1908: Pl. CLIV left upper corner);
- two large fragments of blocks from the tugboat nearest to the barge carrying the obelisks, in the uppermost register, showing the aft pavilion and steering oars (Naville 1908: Pl. CLIV right upper corner);
- two smaller fragments from the inscription above the transported obelisks;
- larger part of a block containing the end fragments of an inscription above the last of three boats accompanying the transport (lowest register); only a part of it has been found so far;
- three smaller filling blocks from the lowest set of tugboats;
- one small filling block with hieroglyphs from the inscription above the running soldiers;
- one block representing part of a boat with oarsmen from the uppermost set of tugboats.



Fig. 5. Identified blocks: a – loops of rope and part of a steering oar from the last of the middle set of tugboats in Scene A (fragment); b – stern of the last tugboat from the uppermost row in Scene A, with part of a steering oar and rope (fragment); c – part of a boat and long rope from Scene A (fragment); d – oars in water (fragment); e – oars in water (fragment) (Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences | photos M. Jawornicki)

NAVILLE'S PUBLICATION AND THE PRESERVED DECORATION: INITIAL COMPARISON

Apart from the missing blocks and their fragments, the condition of the decoration on the wall is in several places worse than when Naville documented it. This is particularly evident on the falcon head at the aft of the southernmost of the accompanying boats, which was drawn complete by Mrs. Naville, but is now destroyed. The line drawings prepared by the author as part of this project will show the differences to the 1908 drawings in detail, but some are already clear without further measurement. Some of these discrepancies are probably due to the scale of the old drawings, which did not allow for all details to be represented.

a) Wigs

The wigs in the drawings differ from the actual reliefs in two ways. Firstly, their shape is slightly different in the case of most of the figures represented on the boats, which results in their generally different look. Secondly, the wigs of the running soldiers in the lowest register were drawn in less detail; there are seven to eight rows of small locks in the drawings, whereas their number in reality is about 15–16.

b) Colors

Colors were obviously not recorded in the black and white drawings, and some became visible clearly only after conservation:

- 1) The transported obelisks were painted a pinkish red, which presently comes out as light pink where the residue of the paint is mingled with the prime. The pyramidia of these obelisks were not painted red; there is no color on the tip that is preserved in Scene A. The tips of the standing obelisks (Scene B) have no traces of color left [see *Figs 4:b–d*].
- 2) The bodies of water were painted a vivid blue including the oars which were later repainted brown.
- 3) Similarly, some parts of boats painted yellow were covered with paint together with whatever was in front of these parts, including human figures that were subsequently painted over with the usual dark red for skin, white for clothes and eye whites, and black for the hair.
- 3) The deckhouses on the ships were painted without the underlying relief lines. The decoration, visible only on some of the blocks, includes rectangular segments in red paint and small double spirals in red over white.
- 4) Where visible, the paint on the bows and sterns is yellow, while the bodies of the ships are painted white. One of the accompanying boats has a red line on the side.
- 5) In many places, the paint did not follow the lines of the relief, especially when it concerned human bodies. This resulted in alterations of clothes and hairlines. The colors occasionally exceeded the lines near the dado.

c) Hieroglyphic signs

In general, the hieroglyphic signs copied in Naville's publication were slightly idealised, standardised, and sometimes also simplified, so their individual forms were not retained.

d) *n*-signs (Gardiner N 35)

The *n*-signs were consistently drawn with less waves (4–7) than in reality (mostly 9–10).

e) Oarsmen's heads

In the lowest set of tugboats in Scene A, there is a confusion with the number of the heads of the oarsmen that are partly hidden by the boat structures. On one of the boats, a rower's head is missing from Naville's publication, whereas in another there are two heads where there should be only one.

PROSPECTIVE WORK AND SUMMARY

The process of searching the temple blockyards and storehouses, as well as looking through the archival documentation of archaeological missions working in the temple over the years has yet to be completed. Of particular interest is the decoration of the northern third of the west portico wall owing to the poor preservation of the scenes of temple foundation (see Karkowski 2016: Figs 1a, 2, 3a, 4). The few remaining lines of reliefs, usually just a few centimetres long, have already been documented for future use in the reconstruction. Patterns of destruction will also be used in an effort to identify more blocks belonging to this scene.

The identification of blocks is the first step to a virtual recreation of the decoration of the west wall of the South Lower Portico, which will serve as a framework for research on its historical, ideological and ritual meaning. The blocks and fragments of blocks will also be ready for the actual reconstruction work.

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