



Volume 9 of the Birmingham Egyptology Journal

2022-2023

About this issue:

This issue of Birmingham Egyptology Journal contains papers from the Sixth Annual Birmingham Egyptology Symposium held in May 2021, along with articles submitted outside that event.

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Connecting Cultures: A Graeco-Roman Stela from Abydos at the Garstang Museum of Archaeology, Liverpool

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Abstract

E.89, a Graeco-Roman Period (332 BC-395 AD) funerary stela at the Garstang Museum of Archaeology, is not only a beautiful example of funerary art from this period, but also provides an insight into how an individual's cultural hybridity could be depicted in a funerary context. Rediscovered by John Garstang in 1907, this stela is heavily damaged, but displays several figures, including a man in Greek dress with a non-Egyptian hairstyle. The portrayal of this individual, escorted to the afterlife by traditional Egyptian gods, demonstrates a striking contrast of cultural expressions. It places an individual who superficially appears Greek within a traditionally Egyptian world, and raises questions about how personal presentation could invoke cultural motifs, and the specific identity they wished to present. As a result, the stela embodies a key theme of the museum—'Connecting Cultures'—, as it provides a visually striking example of how cultures could and did come together across the ancient world.¹

Keywords

Graeco-Roman, stela, hybrid, religion, Garstang Museum, Abydos

¹ Thank you to Dr Gina Criscenzo-Laycock and the staff at the Garstang Museum of Archaeology, for allowing access to the museum collection. Additional thanks to the Merseyside Maritime Museum and University of Liverpool Special Collections and Archives for granting access to Garstang correspondence. Thank you also to Ms. Lynsey Shale and Dr Juliet Spedding for assisting with analysis of the text on the stela and orthography of signs.

Background and Rediscovery

When you step into the galleries of the Garstang Museum of Archaeology, Liverpool, one of the first display cases you are greeted with is identified by the title ‘Connecting Cultures’, a key theme of the museum. The principal artefact of this case is E.89, a funerary stela from Abydos, dated to the Graeco-Roman Period (332 BC – 395 AD) (see Fig. 1). In tours at the museum, the stela is a key feature in embodying this theme. It provides a beautiful example of artistic cultural hybridity and is used in visitor tours to explain how cultures of the ancient world were not as isolated from each other as it can sometimes appear in archaeology or displays in museums. Ultimately, E.89 provides an example of how classical and Egyptian cultures interacted at Abydos during the Graeco-Roman Period, indicating how this syncretism impacted individuals and how they may have wished to represent their own cultural hybridity.

John Garstang, founder of the University of Liverpool archaeological institute, excavated extensively in Egypt during the early twentieth century. Upon being excavated, the stela discussed here was given the number 48 A’07, indicating it was found in 1907 during Garstang’s 1906-1909 seasons at Abydos, in Tomb 48.² Unfortunately, there is no record of Tomb 48 as Garstang’s notebook for spring 1907 is missing.³ However, in one of his excavation reports, dated 8th February 1907, to Francis Chatillon Danson (patron of the expedition) Garstang writes of a Graeco-Roman cemetery discovered in January 1907:⁴

The month’s excavation was devoted almost exclusively to a Ptolemaic site found in the clean sand of the valley in which we are camped, and about 50 yards from where the workmen now live.⁵

The site was situated at Bet El Sahara, in Balliana (hereinafter referred to as El Balyana), on the west bank of the Nile, near Abydos. As Garstang notes, the cemetery was discovered fifty yards from the workmen’s lodging, a former dig-house of WM Flinders Petrie.⁶ The material discovered at the cemetery included over two-hundred funerary stelae, with up to ‘20 stelae a day’⁷ being found in early February:

Chief in importance, however, are a great number of tombstones or gravestones of the nature of Stelae, which were found deposited, standing or lying on and around the graves. Some are so numerous that I am inclined to think they must have been

² Thank you again to the Garstang Museum for granting access to the card catalogue and museum records.

³ The surviving notebooks are available to view in the University of Liverpool Special Collections and Archives, but only include the 1906 records (Tombs 1-34) and volume II of the 1907 records (Tombs 300-436) (see also Snape 1986: 27).

⁴ According to Garstang’s excavation reports to FC Danson, work at the cemetery lasted two months, from January to March 1907 (Abydos Excavation Report, February 1907, JG FC2/1, University of Liverpool Special Collections and Archives: 1).

⁵ Abydos Excavation Report, February 1907, JG FC2/1, University of Liverpool Special Collections and Archives: 1.

⁶ Garstang notes the proximity to Petrie’s house in an earlier letter to FC Danson on February 2nd 1907. (Correspondence from John Garstang to Francis Chatillon Danson, 1907, D/D V 4/3, Danson Family Archive, Merseyside Maritime Museum Archive, Liverpool).

⁷ Correspondence from John Garstang to Francis Chatillon Danson, 1907, D/D V 4/3, Danson Family Archive, Merseyside Maritime Museum Archive, Liverpool.

*deposited by the friends of the dead as tributes in much the same way as wreaths now are in our country.*⁸

As much as Garstang's reports were concerned with the more everyday workings of the excavation, such as the building of a well or the outbreak of an illness in camp, his letters to Danson provide little information regarding specific tombs or stelae found.



Fig. 1 – E.89 Graeco-Roman Funerary Stela, Garstang Museum of Archaeology (Image courtesy of Garstang Museum of Archaeology, Liverpool).

⁸ Abydos Excavation Report, January 1907, JG FC2/1, University of Liverpool Special Collections and Archives: 1

However, as the museum record states, E.89 was excavated in 1907 at Abydos, indicating the high probability that it originated from the El Balyana cemetery. While no glass-plate negative exists in the Garstang collection for E.89, the photographic records provide evidence for other stelae from the site, including many in a similar style (see Figs. 2 & 3).⁹



Fig. 2 – Glass-plate negative A-94, from Garstang’s 1907 excavation of El Balyana at Abydos. Graeco-Roman Period stelae are piled around the tombs. (Image courtesy of the Garstang Photographic Archive, Garstang Museum of Archaeology, Liverpool).

Description

E.89 is a round-topped limestone stela (see Fig. 1), measuring 34 cm high, 32 cm wide, and 4.5 cm in thickness. It is carved in high quality sunken relief, which is divided into three registers. The stela is damaged, with much of the top register, part of the left side, and half of the lower register broken away. No visible colour remains. The lunette contains one visible wing, suggesting that a sun disc may have been present before the stela was damaged. There is no evidence remaining that indicates a second wing. One pendent *uraei* is also included, with part of a second snake visible on the left hand side which has been damaged. There are also four figures remaining in the central relief, accompanied by five lines of text, and a further line of text at the bottom of the stela. It is likely that a seventh line once existed, based on the separating line of relief which has been broken away.

⁹ A film negative of the stelae, Z139, is available, however this was taken after the stelae arrived at the museum.



Fig. 3 – Glass-plate negative A-625, showing four stelae excavated from El Balyana cemetery by Garstang in 1907. The upper and bottom right stelae show Isis standing behind Osiris. (Image courtesy of the Garstang Photographic Archive, Garstang Museum of Archaeology, Liverpool).

Figures

The four figures from left to right include: Osiris (partially visible), Anubis, the deceased male, and Nephthys. Each figure is identified by text containing epithets. The positioning of the deities within the scene suggests that it is taking place in the Judgment Hall of Osiris (seen most commonly in the thirty-third scene from the Book of Gates), with the gods providing Osiris with reports and bringing the deceased into his presence.¹⁰

Osiris appears in his traditional mummiform depiction, on the left of the scene. He wears the white crown, with both arms folded across his chest. On his left shoulder can be seen a hand, most likely belonging to the goddess Isis. Stelae from this period often incorporate Isis into scenes such as this, standing behind her husband with a hand on his shoulder. This is seen in several of Garstang's stelae from the cemetery at Abydos (see Fig. 3), as well as stelae exhibited at the Cairo Museum, and Fitzwilliam Museum.¹¹ The second figure visible in E.89, Anubis, leads the deceased by the hand towards Osiris, his arm raised in greeting. The god appears with the head of a jackal, wearing a short kilt, and performs his traditional role as the guide of deceased souls. Between Osiris and Anubis, an offering table is set with bread and beer, another traditional Egyptian motif.

Nephthys assists Anubis in guiding the deceased to Osiris, her arm also raised in greeting. She wears a sheath dress and headdress, which in this case, appears to be a conflation of the headdresses of both Isis and Nephthys – the throne hieroglyph (Gardiner Q1) associated with Isis¹² and the basket (Gardiner V30) associated with Nephthys.¹³ The basket would usually be situated atop the sign for a temple enclosure¹⁴ to read the name of Nephthys, *nbt hwt* (Mistress of the House/Shrine). However, in this instance, the sculptor has used the throne instead of the temple enclosure. This indicates a conflation of decorative or ideological elements, which may have been copied from elsewhere.

The deceased himself appears between Anubis and Nephthys, holding an *ankh* in his left hand. He has short curly hair and wears a long mantle. It is in these elements, his clothing and hairstyle, that we see a difference from styles from the Pharaonic period. This indicates the 'Connecting Cultures' alluded to in its present museum display, cultural hybridity seen throughout Graeco-Roman Egypt. Riggs¹⁵ notes that a juxtaposition such as this, with the deceased depicted with classical or 'non-Egyptian' clothing compared to the rest of the figures, can be used to draw attention to the deceased. The observed contrast of styles is noticeable, and is seen elsewhere in Ptolemaic and Roman Period stelae (see Figs. 4 & 5) with individuals presented in a Graeco-Roman style, rather than a purely Egyptian one.¹⁶ It is this combination of elements, placing Egyptian tradition alongside Graeco-Roman clothing and hairstyle, which makes E.89 a perfect example of the theme of 'Connecting Cultures'.

¹⁰ Manassa 2006: 109, 116.

¹¹ Cairo Museum JC 39074, seen in Abdalla 1992: pl. 24b. Also Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, E.63.1901, where Isis stands behind a seated Osiris with her hand on his shoulder, and British Museum EA838, where Isis stands behind Osiris with her hand raised.

¹² Gardiner 1957: 500, Erman and Grapow 1926 Vol. I: 20.

¹³ Gardiner 1957: 525, Erman and Grapow 1926: Vol. II: 227.

¹⁴ Gardiner 1957: 525 (O9), Erman and Grapow 1926: Vol. II: 233.

¹⁵ Riggs 2008: 349.

¹⁶ See also the Tomb of Petosiris (also called Padiosir) at Qâret el-Muzzawaka (Osing et al. 1982). The tomb owner appears in Greek dress, painted in a different artistic style to the more traditional Egyptian motifs in the rest of the tomb.

Text

The stela text is carved in sunken relief with modelling of details, which Abdalla describes as ‘much higher quality than other stelae from Abydos.’¹⁷ However, the damage occurred to the stela renders many of the signs unclear. Abdalla provides us with a translation and transliteration.¹⁸

Five surviving columns of inscriptions provide the names and epithets of the deities present:¹⁹

Above Osiris:



dd mdw hpi-wsir nb r3-st3w

Words spoken (by) Osiris, lord of r3-st3w

Above Anubis and the deceased:



dd mdw inpw

Words spoken (by) Anubis

h^ci-m-...

[Translated by Abdalla as a partial name].

¹⁷ Abdalla 1992: 56.

¹⁸ Abdalla 1992: 56.

¹⁹ Photographs of the text taken by the author, with permission from the Garstang Museum of Archaeology.

Above Nephthys:



dd mdw Nbt-ḥ(y)t

Words spoken (by) Nephthys

There is also a partial line of Graeco-Roman hieroglyphs in the register below the figures. While the rest of the piece is broken away, there was likely another row below this, as indicated by the decorative line beneath the signs.


Below figures:

dd mdw in r^c dhwtj ḥr-m-p my im3ḥw



Words spoken by Re, Thoth and Horus-in-Pe: 'Come (or give) the revered one...

Discussion

While Abdalla's translation provides a good overview of the text, there are parts which are inaccurate. The description of Osiris is particularly difficult to decipher; Abdalla translates the sign above the head of Osiris (above  after the opening of *dd mdw*) as *ḥpi* in a version of the name *wsir-ḥpi* or Osiris-Apis.²⁰ However, this form does not appear in Wilson's Ptolemaic Lexicon nor in Kurth's Ptolemaic Sign List.²¹ Abdalla's interpretation may have come from mistaking the sign for the new-born bubalis (Gardiner E9)²² and therefore translating it as the

²⁰ Abdalla 1992: 56, cf. Erman and Grapow 1926 Vol. I: 360.

²¹ Wilson 1997. Kurth 2010.

²² Gardiner 1957: 459.

Apis bull. However, given that the stela comes from Abydos, which is not associated with the Apis, it is unlikely that such an appellation would be appropriate here. Instead, the sign above E9 may be read as a conflation of two signs. F7/F8,²³ the ram's head or forepart of ram, combined with X1,²⁴ the bread loaf, may together be read *šfy* 'majesty' or 'dignity'.²⁵ This would leave the sign group reading *šfy* *wsir* 'the majesty of Osiris', which could be considered an appropriate translation given E.89's context. Furthermore, the transliteration of the phrase 'Lord of the Necropolis' provided by Abdalla includes *r3-st3w* in reference to the 'necropolis'. However, both Gardiner²⁶ and Erman and Grapow²⁷ suggest *r-st3w* as the correct transliteration for the word, indicating an inaccuracy on the part of Abdalla.

Such idiosyncrasies in the text may stem from it having been copied from another source, as seen with the signs in Nephthys' headdress. The content of the text suggests that it may have been copied from elsewhere – as Walker and Bierbrier note,²⁸ the columns provide the names of deities but not the words spoken by them. While it may have been the case that the scribe did not have the time or space on E.89 to include the speech of the deities, it seems more likely that the stela could have been abandoned. Given the damage occurred, it may be that E.89 was broken before completion, resulting in the unfinished inscription, possibly copied from another text or funerary monument.

The column of text above Anubis and the deceased is translated by Abdalla as including the name of the deceased. However, Abdalla's rendering²⁹ of *h^ci-m-h3t* is a naming form that is not attested beyond the Twentieth Dynasty.³⁰ While it is possible this name may have been copied from an earlier piece, it is more likely that the text contains an epithet of Anubis, such as *hnty sh-ntr* (Foremost of the Divine Booth).³¹ Abdalla³² also provides the transliteration *nbt h(y)t* for the name of Nephthys, however the signs actually read *nb(t) st*. Given the clear female identity of the figure, one would expect to see the inclusion of the female 't' yet this is missing. Therefore, the signs may read 'Mistress of the Throne' rather than 'Mistress of Heaven' as suggested by Abdalla.³³ As 'Mistress of the Throne' often alludes to Isis, the figure may be a combination of the two goddesses, just as the headdress refers to both Isis and Nephthys.

The final line of text refers to *im3hw* 'the revered one'.³⁴ This phrase may be in reference to the deceased man, indicating the transformation undergone as he travels to the afterlife. This indicates that while there would undoubtedly be a strong Greek influence for how individuals in Graeco-Roman Egypt would choose to have their dress and hairstyle depicted on such a monument there was still, at least in this case, a desire for the individual represented to partake in the Egyptian funerary cult that would transform them into an *akh* in death.

The decision to use hieroglyphic script in the texts inscribed on E.89 also provides us with an insight into the choices made by the deceased (or their family). As Garstang notes in

²³ Gardiner 1957: 462.

²⁴ Gardiner 1957: 531.

²⁵ Erman and Grapow 1926 Vol. IV: 459.

²⁶ Gardiner 1957: 522.

²⁷ Erman and Grapow 1926 Vol. IV: 353-355.

²⁸ Walker and Bierbrier 1997: 153.

²⁹ Abdalla 1992: 56.

³⁰ Ranke 1952: 237-243.

³¹ Erman and Grapow 1926 Vol. III: 385, Vol. IV: 217-219.

³² Abdalla 1992: 56.

³³ Erman and Grapow 1926 Vol. III: 406; Abdalla 1992: 56.

³⁴ Erman and Grapow 1926: Vol. I: 81.

his archaeological reports, most of the stelae found at the Abydos site were inscribed with Greek, Demotic, or Hieratic, rather than hieroglyphs:

*A good proportion of these stelae are inscribed, in Greek, Demotic, Hieratic, and rarely in the older hieroglyphic character.*³⁵

Abdalla's work on the Abydos stelae reveals a similar trend. He notes that only a few of the stelae are inscribed with hieroglyphs, which are usually used to identify deities, as seen in E.89.³⁶ This is indicative of the decline in use of hieroglyphs for private stelae during this period,³⁷ and suggests that the usage of hieroglyphic script was a specific preference over the more common possibilities as noted by Garstang.

Presentation of the Deceased

E.89 may have been commissioned by the deceased prior to his death, or by his surviving family or community after his death. Therefore, it is unclear how involved the individual would be in the creation of the stela. Furthermore, an element of decorum or societal expectation may have contributed to the stela, particularly if it were to be displayed in a public area. Only one other stela from the El Balyana cemetery was found incised with hieroglyphic script, indicating that the usage of such script was not the norm in this area. It is likely that the inclusion of the script was a specific decision made by the deceased or his family, possibly as the hieroglyphic script was closely associated with the gods,³⁸ or for more aesthetic or decorative reasons.

'Connecting Cultures', as noted above the display case containing E.89, is at the heart of the stela's decoration. The deceased individual is presented as aspective, a symbolic rendition of the body that evaluates it from many angles at once, as opposed to a particular perspective or point of view.³⁹ In comparison, several of the other stelae found at El Balyana depict individuals front-facing, in a more classical style.⁴⁰ In this case, the aspective presentation may represent a continuation of pharaonic artistic conventions. Despite this

³⁵ Abydos Excavation Report, February 1907, JG FC2/1, University of Liverpool Special Collections and Archives: 2.

³⁶ Abdalla 1997: 119. Only one other stela from Garstang's excavations includes an offering formula in hieroglyphs, Garstang 228a A07, which was given to the Merseyside County Museum and included six lines of *htp-di-nsw* offering formula.

³⁷ There is evidence of hieroglyphic formulae on private stelae in Upper Egypt in the late Ptolemaic period, for example at Hassaia, however in this cemetery at Abydos, the usage of hieroglyphs is rare. (See Abdalla 1997: 121). See for example Horniman Museum no. 71.

³⁸ The hieroglyphic script is referred to as the 'script of the words of god' in the Memphis Decree, while demotic is referred to as the 'script of documents'. (Quirke and Andrews 1988: 23).

³⁹ Brunner-Traut, 2002: 424.

⁴⁰ See Garstang Museum E.2, E.17, and E.22 for example.



Fig. 4 – Detail of E.89 stela, showing garment worn by deceased. Photo taken with permission from the Garstang Museum of Archaeology.



Fig. 5 – Detail of Scene 36, Tomb of Petosiris at Tuna el-Gebel. Overseer wearing 'Greek' styled garment including mantle over tunic. Courtesy of www.meretsegerbooks.com.

continuity, the deceased is presented wearing clothes that are not traditionally Egyptian in style. The quality of the modelling of the figure allows us to see that the garment includes a tunic and mantle, draped over the left shoulder with attention paid to the detail in the garment (see Fig. 4). The garment resembles the Greek *himation*, a mantle worn over a *chiton* tunic or alone, draped over one shoulder and wrapped around the body.⁴¹ Similar garments are seen depicted in the Tomb of Petosiris at Tuna el-Gebel, with overseers wearing mantles draped over their shoulders and waists, with a *chiton* underneath (see Fig. 5).⁴² Such garments are also seen in terracotta sculpture from the Graeco-Roman Period.⁴³ The *himation* seems to have been a form of dress in the Greek homelands as early as the Archaic Period (650 BC)⁴⁴ and appears on

⁴¹ Lee 2015: 115.

⁴² The exact dating of the Tomb of Petosiris at Tuna el-Gebel is disputed, but it likely was built during the early Macedonian Period (Briant 2002: 861, O'Brien 2020: 49), as it mentions the conquest of the Persians. Therefore, it would date to c.332 BC-305 BC.

⁴³ See for example, University of Missouri Museum of Art and Archaeology, 66.352 – a terracotta of an old woman and child from Ptolemaic Egypt. The woman wears a *himation* wrapped around her left arm and waist.

⁴⁴ Van Wees 1998: 347.

Archaic and Classical Greek pottery worn by both men and women.⁴⁵ Traditionally, men wore the *himation* wrapped around their left shoulder and arm, leaving their right arm free, while women would drape it over the right shoulder.⁴⁶ In early Archaic vases, men are depicted wearing the *himation* with the *chiton*, while later on, throughout the sixth century, younger men begin to be depicted wearing only the *himation*.⁴⁷ Van Wees argues that the wearing of the *himation* signified a movement away from Greek warfare, with excessive drapery of the garment representing a more civilian mindset in everyday Greek dress.⁴⁸ It represents a man of leisure and thinking, rather than of strength, and its representation on E.89 ties the individual depicted to Greek culture.



Fig. 6 – Glass-plate negative A-623, showing six stelae excavated by Garstang at the El Balyana cemetery, showing deceased individuals depicted wearing ‘Greek’ dress. (Image courtesy of the Garstang Photographic Archive, Garstang Museum of Archaeology, Liverpool).

The presence of the Greek garment on this stela, and on earlier monuments such as the Tomb of Petosiris, indicates how Greek culture was assimilated into Egyptian society. It is likely that such integration took place much earlier than the period E.89 dates to, and much earlier than even the Tomb of Petosiris. For example, Saite Period white-ground pottery from

⁴⁵ Lee 2015: 115. See for example a red-figure *kylix* by the Calliope Painter, c.430 BC, Boston Museum of Fine Arts 21.4. The *himation* is also seen worn in Attic iconography attributed to the Polyphemus Painter, dating to 650 BC, formerly Berlin A42 (Van Wees 1998: 349).

⁴⁶ Lee 2015: 116.

⁴⁷ Van Wees, 1998: 352.

⁴⁸ Van Wees 1998: 352.

Naukratis depicts a female figure wearing a *himation* over her left arm.⁴⁹ This indicates that the clothing was present in Egypt long before the E.89 stela was carved, and that it was recognisable as a Greek garment. It therefore suggests that the inclusion of the *himation* may have been a conscious decision on the part of the deceased or his family, in an attempt to include Greek elements in his funerary commemoration. Many of the stelae excavated by Garstang at Abydos also include individuals wearing Greek garments such as the *himation* (see Fig. 6). This indicates that in the context of this necropolis, such Greek dress was in keeping with the decorum of the period, and therefore would not be considered unusual. This implies a level of hybridity that was ingrained in society at this place and time, where garments that can be labelled as Greek were worn by people who wished to partake in cult that was intrinsically Egyptian in nature.

Similarly, the hairstyle of the individual in the E.89 can initially be identified as Greek. The deceased wears his hair cut short, so that his ears are visible. This is described as the Greek ‘athlete’ hairstyle by Haas, Toppe, and Henz,⁵⁰ as Greek sportsmen would usually keep their hair short when competing. However, Walker and Bierbrier⁵¹ describe the deceased’s appearance as ‘Romanised’, dating the stela to the late first or early second century AD based on his resemblance to individuals depicted in panel portraits of a similar date.⁵² The style may be a representation of local customs which are an amalgamation of several cultural styles. Similar hybridity can be seen in earlier periods of Egypt, for example the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, where Egyptian style and language mixes with Kushite clothing, facial appearance, and hairstyle. The stela of Pekartror⁵³ dates to the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty at Abydos and depicts a Kushite prince in a traditional Egyptian pose with arms raised in adoration of his deceased mother. He wears a fringed transparent cloak, wrapped under his left arm and knotted at his right shoulder, which is described by Hallmann⁵⁴ as a ‘Kushite cloak’.⁵⁵ Such hybridity is also true of the Third Intermediate Period, where Libyans are often seen depicted in Egyptian dress, while keeping Libyan decorative features such as feathers in the hair, accompanied by Libyan names.⁵⁶ As a result, this indicates that hybrid decoration within funerary commemoration may not have been as unusual as it first appears.

The hybrid decoration within E.89 indicates that the designer or creator made a conscious decision to use non-Egyptian hairstyle and dress in the funerary display of the deceased. While we do not know the ethnic background of the deceased, his presentation suggests a connection to the Graeco-Roman culture portrayed. This may have been a form of social participation, keeping with trends of style and dress seen on other stelae from the site.⁵⁷ It may also suggest the opposite, with the surprising inclusion of hieroglyphic script indicating

⁴⁹ Smith 1886: 53.

⁵⁰ Haas, Toppe, and Henz 2005: 298.

⁵¹ Walker and Bierbrier 1997: 153.

⁵² See for example, British Museum EA 74711 (formerly National Gallery 1268) and EA 65346, both pictured in Walker and Bierbrier 1997: 49, 95-96, and depicting men with short curly hair similar to that of the individual in E.89. Both portraits are dated to c.70-160 AD.

⁵³ OIM 6408, University of Chicago.

⁵⁴ Hallmann 2007: 19.

⁵⁵ Similar garments appear in relief on Kushite monuments, such as the temple of Taharqa at Kawa (684 BC), indicating they were Kushite in origin (MacAdam 1955: 78, Hallmann 2007: 26).

⁵⁶ See Louvre IM 3736, stela of High Priest and Libyan Prince Padiese before Apis, in which the prince wears an ostrich feather while adoring the god. See also Baines 1996: 379, and Leahy 1985; 1992.

⁵⁷ See for example Garstang Museum E.1, E.16, E.17.

a shift from the ‘norm’. He wears a Greek *himation*, yet carries an Egyptian *ankh*, while surrounding himself with Egyptian gods. He thus partakes in a traditional Egyptian funerary cult, being escorted to Osiris by Anubis and Nephthys and yet his self-presentation is not traditionally Egyptian. Walker suggests that such presentations reflect local pride through funerary commemoration – individuals create a sense of local identity by combining cultural attributes.⁵⁸ While the markers of style are of national or ethnic cultural identity, their usage in personal funerary cult, specific in this case to the Abydos cemetery, indicates a version of hybridity which may be confined to that area. However, if the stela text was copied from elsewhere, it is likely that the stela was commissioned by an individual who wished to use hieroglyphs in the deceased’s funerary cult, whether they understood them or not.⁵⁹ This indicates the importance of perception. The text may have been copied from elsewhere, yet the inclusion of hieroglyphic script creates the perception that the designer or creator understood the significance of using the ‘script of the gods’.

Concluding Remarks – ‘Connecting Cultures’

Ultimately this depiction, combining Egyptian and non-Egyptian cultural elements in a funerary setting, indicates how connected different cultures were in Egypt, and in the wider ancient world. The context of the El Balyana cemetery provides evidence of this cultural hybrid identity continuing into death. The depiction of Greek garments and hairstyle creates an impression of an individual who visually does not appear to adhere to what would have been considered a more Egyptian appearance. Yet the scene depicted on the stela places him into a very traditional, and everlasting, Egyptian context. This form of depiction indicates that identity is not necessarily limited to one culture or the other—the deceased may have considered himself as belonging to several cultures at once and the stela permits this to be presented. E.89 is unusual in its usage of hieroglyphs yet is part of a group of stelae which combine and connect cultures, providing evidence of hybrid identity and society. It suggests that at Abydos, during this period, these cultures existed together—and as a result, there was an element of selection or preference involved to how an individual would have themselves depicted. This resulted in a funerary culture and art which, while it is neither fully Egyptian nor non-Egyptian, becomes something more through a combination of both.

As a result of this possibly more personal choice in an individual’s funerary depiction, E.89 remains a crucial part of display at the Garstang Museum of Archaeology. It serves as an important reminder that while ancient cultures may seem disparate to a modern audience, this was not the case. E.89 was created in a period where native Egyptian society was under and influenced by Greek and Roman rule. This resulted in the combining of people and therefore of cultural motifs and elements which to our modern eyes show (and act as an important reminder of) how ancient culture was fluid and nuanced. It could be and was affected by social decorum, political context, and the personal wishes of the creator or designer, but it is only through more ‘permanent’ works such as E.89 where individuals could have ‘creative freedoms’ that modern audiences can glimpse how connected these cultures truly were.

⁵⁸ Walker 1997: 16. This is seen elsewhere in the Fayum mummy portraits, where cultures combine as the result of a desire to emphasise ‘Greekness’ as part of a syncretised community.

⁵⁹ Similar elite participation is seen in the funerary mask of one Titos Flavius Demetrios, who was commemorated by a gilded cartonnage funerary mask, inscribed in Greek with a Roman tria nomina. (Ipswich Museum, unnumbered. In Walker and Bierbrier 1997: 84).

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Fig. 1 – E.89 Graeco-Roman Funerary Stela, Garstang Museum of Archaeology. ©Garstang Museum of Archaeology 2018.

Fig. 2 – Glass-plate negative A-94, Garstang Museum of Archaeology. ©Garstang Museum of Archaeology Photographic Archive 2018.

Fig. 3 – Glass-plate negative A-625, Garstang Museum of Archaeology. ©Garstang Museum of Archaeology Photographic Archive 2018.

Fig. 4 – Detail of E.89 stela. Photo taken with permission from the Garstang Museum of Archaeology. ©Louise O'Brien 2021.

Fig. 5 – Detail of Scene 36, Tomb of Petosiris at Tuna el-Gebel. Used with permission, courtesy of www.meretsegerbooks.com. ©MeretsegerBooks 2021.

Fig. 6 – Glass-plate negative A-623, Garstang Museum of Archaeology. ©Garstang Museum of Archaeology Photographic Archive 2018.

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