

“The Poetical Stela of Thutmose III”

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[page 351] THE POETICAL STELA OF THUTMOSE III

[Introduction by Vincent A. Tobin] Thutmose III of the Eighteenth Dynasty was the greatest empire builder of Egypt’s history, having conquered from the Sudan as far as Mesopotamia. The black granite stela (Cairo Museum 34010) which bears the present text was erected in the great temple of Amun-Re at Karnak to celebrate the numerous conquests of Thutmose. Although erected after the king’s victories, the text is composed in the form of a prophecy spoken by the god Amun-Re promising Thutmose his support in the winning of universal dominion for Egypt. The text is divided into three sections: a prologue composed in a poetic prose style, the actual poem of victory, and a short epilogue also in poetic prose.

[page 352] PROLOGUE

1. Thus speaks Amun-Re, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands:
Come to me and rejoice at the sight of my beauty,
My son, my defender, Men-Kheper-Re,¹ who lives to eternity.
I shall shine through love for you,
2. My heart / gladdened at your joyful entry into my temple. My hands shall endow your person with protection and life, For your comeliness is exceedingly pleasant to my breast.
3. I shall establish / you in my sanctuary and delight in you,
I shall give you dominion and victory over all foreign lands.
I shall establish your power and the awe of you in all the nations,
4. And the fear of you shall extend to / the four pillars of heaven.
I shall increase admiration for you in all flesh
And extend your majestic battle cry throughout the Nine Bows.²
The nobles of every foreign land will be united in your fist,
5. For I myself shall extend my arms to bind them for you.
I shall shackle the Nubian archers by ten thousands of thousands
And the men of the north by hundreds of thousands of captives.
6. I shall cause your foes to fall beneath your feet,
And you will trample upon the rebellious and traitors,
For I have assigned to you the earth in its length and its breadth,

1. Men-Kheper-Re was the “throne name” of Thutmose III. This name was given to the king at the time of his succession to the throne and designated him as ruler of Upper and Lower Egypt.

2. The name given to the traditional enemies of Egypt.

- And men of west and east are under your control.
7. You will trample down all foreign lands, your heart rejoicing,
For there will be none who can stand in your Majesty's presence.
Under my guidance you shall overwhelm them,
 8. Having crossed the water of the great river which surrounds/ Naharin³
In the victory and power which I have destined for you.
They shall hear your war cry and hide in their holes,
For I have deprived their nostrils of the breath of life,
 9. Implanting the fear of your Majesty deep within their hearts.
My uraeus⁴ upon your brow will destroy them,
- [page 353] 10. Making the savages easy prey/ and consuming the islanders with its fire.
It will behead the Asiatics, for they will have no protection,
And your enemies will succumb to its strength.
11. I shall cause your victory to encompass all lands,
My glittering uraeus will be your protector,
And there will be none who can oppose you to the farthest reaches of heaven.
(All men) will come weighed down beneath their tribute
 12. And bowing to your Majesty as I have ordained.
I shall cripple the opponents who come against you,
For their courage will have burned away as their bodies quake with fear.

POEM OF VICTORY

13. I have come to empower you to crush the rulers of Djahi:⁵
I shall lay them low beneath your feet throughout their lands,
I shall cause them to know your Majesty as the lord of sunlight,
And you will shine before them as my image.
14. I have come to empower you to crush the men of Asia:
You will smash the heads of the nomads of Retjenu,⁶
And I shall cause them to know your Majesty adorned in your royal insignia,
When you raise up weapons of war in (your) chariot.
15. I have come to empower you to crush the eastern lands:
You will tread down those who dwell in the regions of God's Land,⁷
And I shall cause them to know your Majesty as a thunderbolt
Which hurls its flame as fire as it makes its attack.

3. Mesopotamia.

4. The depiction of a cobra with its head lifted and reared back to strike, the *uraeus* was the traditional symbol of royal power worn on the forehead of the pharaoh as part of their royal regalia.

5. The area extending through Palestine, Syria, and northern Mesopotamia.

6. Syria-Palestine.

7. The general name given to territories outside the boundaries of Egypt.

- [page 354] 16. I have come to empower you to crush the western lands:
Keftiu⁸ and Isy⁹ stand in awe of you;
I shall cause them to know your Majesty as a young bull,
Firm of heart, sharp of horn, whom none can hinder.
17. I have come to empower you to crush the heathen:
The lands of Mitanni¹⁰ tremble through dread of you;
I shall cause them to know your Majesty as a crocodile,
The dread one of the river, whom none dare approach.
18. I have come to empower you to crush those who dwell on the islands:
Those who dwell in the midst of the sea shall succumb to your war cry;
I shall cause them to know your Majesty as the avenger
Who stands upon the back of his wild bull.¹¹
19. I have come to empower you to crush the Libyans:
The islands of Utjentiu¹² belong to the strength of your might;
I shall cause them to know your Majesty as a hostile lion,
And you will render them carrion throughout their valleys.
20. I have come to empower you to crush the very ends of the earth:
All that the ocean encircles is enclosed within your grasp;
I shall cause them to know your Majesty as lord of the wings of Horus,
One who seizes with (only) his glance whatever he desires.
21. I have come to empower you to crush the leaders of the earth:
You will fetter the Bedouins as prisoners;
I shall cause them to know your Majesty as the Jackal of Upper Egypt,
The swift runner who traverses the Two Lands.
22. I have come to empower you to crush the bowmen:
Nubia as far as Shat¹³ is in your possession;
[page 355] I shall cause them to know your Majesty as your Two Brothers,¹⁴
Whose two hands I have joined for you in victory.

8. The island of Crete.

9. Possibly the island of Cyprus, although it is north, not west, of Egypt.

10. The kingdom of Mitanni, located in Mesopotamia, whose empire in the fifteenth century extended across Syria as far as Palestine.

11. The imagery of these two lines is based on that of Horus, the god of kingship and the avenger of the god Osiris, who defeats Seth (the “wild bull”). Thutmose is thus portrayed as the rightful conqueror of the foreigners who are the enemies of Egypt.

12. An unknown location.

13. A region of Nubia, the location of which is otherwise unknown.

14. The Two Brothers are the gods Horus and Seth, symbols of the dual kingship of Upper and Lower Egypt.

EPILOGUE

23. (Behold) your Two Sisters:¹⁵ I have placed them as a protection around you,
And the arms of my Majesty are uplifted to disperse (all) evil.
I shall make firm your defense, my son, my chosen one, Horus,
Victorious Bull in Thebes, whom I have begotten from my very body,
24. Thutmose who lives to eternity, who performs for me everything which my *ka* desires.
You have erected my temple as a structure enduring to eternity,
Wider and longer than it had previously been,
25. And its great portal (is named) “Men-Kheper-Re / celebrates the beauty of Amun-Re.”
Greater are your monuments than those of any ruler who has ever existed;
I ordered you to construct them, and I am content with them.
I shall establish you upon the Horus throne of millions of years,
And you will rule the living forever.

15. Two Sisters are the goddesses Isis and Nephthys, used here as symbols of the divinely given royal power.