

DAVID AARON



Stele of Thutmose IV

C. 1417-1407 B.C., Reign of Thutmose IV, 18th Dynasty, New Kingdom, Egypt

Limestone

H: 46 cm, L: 69 cm

A round-topped limestone stele for Pharaoh Thutmose IV. The stele depicts the pharaoh on the left-hand side, wearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, or pschent. In his right hand he holds an ankh and in the other the was sceptre. An offering bearer stands before the king on the right, with both arms extended bearing offerings of plants. Above the figures is a row of incised hieroglyphs, including two cartouches recording the name and prenomen of the pharaoh. A winged sun disc sits at the top of the composition, with wings outstretched over the scene.

Thutmose IV (r. c. 1401-1391 or 1397-1388 B.C.) was the eight pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty. His prenomen (royal name) was Menkkheperure, meaning 'Established in forms is Re'. He is best known for his restoration of the Great Sphinx of Giza and subsequent commission of the Dream Stele. Thutmose IV was the son of previous pharaoh Amenhotep II and Tiaa, but he was not Amenhotep's chosen successor. It has been theorised that Thutmose usurped his older brother in order to claim the throne, and that the magnificent Dream Stele was designed to consolidate his rule. The large, round-topped granite stele (also known as the Sphinx Stele) was positioned between the front paws of the Great Sphinx of Egypt during the first year of Thutmose's reign. The stele is 3.6 metres tall and originally formed the back wall of a small open-air chapel. It depicts Thutmose making offerings and libations to the Sphinx. The inscription tells that Thutmose was granted kingship by the Sphinx itself, as a reward for clearing the sands that had risen around its base. He also added an inscription on the body of the Sphinx, recording that the pharaoh found a stone in the shape of the divine falcon of Horus as a child.

During his reign, Thutmose IV established peace between Egypt and their former rival Mitanni, and married a Mitannian princess to secure the alliance – the princess would go on to become his principal consort, queen Mutemwiya. He was also responsible for many grand architectural projects across Egypt, including the completion of the eastern obelisk at the Temple of Karnak. At 32 metres tall, this was the largest obelisk ever erected in Egypt, and it would later be transported to the Circus Maximus in Rome by Emperor Constantius II in 357 A.D., and then to the Piazza San Giovanni by Pope Sixtus V in 1588. Thutmose also constructed a unique chapel and peristyle building on the eastern walls of the main Karnak temple building. This was a place where the common people, who were not allowed into the temple itself, could address their prayer to the god Amun. Thutmose IV is also depicted in numerous portraits, although many were later coopted by Ramesses II. After a roughly ten-year reign, Thutmose died and was succeeded by his son, Amenhotep III.