Stelae

The stelae of ancient Egypt served many purposes, from funerary to territorial to publishing decrees.

*Figure 1: Ancient Egyptian funerary stelae*

Funerary stelae were usually inscribed with the name and title of the deceased, along with images or hieroglyphs.

- The earliest Egyptian stelae date back to the mid- to late-third millennium BC.
- Stelae are stone slabs that inscribed, carved, or painted with imagery or text. While most were taller than they were wide, slab stela took a horizontal dimension.
- Funerary stelae were generally built in honor of the deceased, and decorated with their names and titles.
- The Boundary Stelae at Amarna are an example of how stelae were used as territorial markers.
- Stelae also were used to publish laws and decrees, to record a ruler’s exploits and honors, mark sacred territories or mortgaged properties, or to commemorate military victories.

*Note:*

**Funerary** means of or relating to a funeral.

**Stelae** are stone or wooden slabs, generally taller than they are wide, often erected for funerals commemorative purposes and decorated with images or text.
Egyptians were well known for their stelae, the earliest of which date back to the mid-to late-third millennium BC. Stelae were stone slabs that served many purposes, from funerary to marking territory to publishing decrees. Images and text were intimately interwoven and inscribed, carved in relief, or painted on the stelae. While most stelae were taller than they were wide, the slab stela took a horizontal dimension and was used by a small list of ancient Egyptian dignitaries or their wives. The huge number of stelae surviving from ancient Egypt constitute one of the largest and most significant sources of information on those civilizations.

Funerary stelae were generally built in honor of the deceased and decorated with their names and titles. Some funerary stelae were in the form of slab stelae, as opposed to being the more common vertical stelae. An example of the funerary stelae are the Coregency Stelae, a set of seven limestone stela-fragments which were found in a tomb at Amarna. The stela dates from the late eighteenth dynasty of Egypt and shows the figures of Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and Meritaten (Figure 0).

Many stelae were used as territorial markers to delineate land ownership. The most famous example of this is the Boundary Stelae at Amarna, constructed under the reign of Akhenaten during the Eighteenth Dynasty. The entire city of Armana was encircled with a total of 14 boundary stelae, cut into the cliffs on both sides of the Nile and each now labeled with a letter. The stelae detail the founding of the new capital city of Egypt and are a primary source of information about the city. Among the accounts are the establishment of the city, the projected layout of the city, commands for Akhenaten's future burial, celebratory events, and the Pharaoh's worship of the god Aten.

Stelae also were used to publish laws and decrees, to record a ruler's exploits and honors, mark sacred territories or mortgaged properties, or to commemorate military victories. Much of what we know of the kingdoms and administrations of Egyptian kings are from the public and private stelae that recorded bureaucratic titles and other administrative information.