A STATUETTE OF PSAMTIK I WITH A SPEAR

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One of the unique statues from the Late Period is a royal statuette of the 26th Dynasty showing the king holding a spear.¹ The legs of the standing statuette are missing. It is made of graywacke, h. 22 cm., h. of the back pillar 19.5 cm., l. of the spear 14.3 cm.

The king stands with his left leg, which is now missing, forward (fig. 1, a-b). He grasps a spear firmly with both hands. His body is powerfully built and particularly well defined, with broad shoulders. The king’s torso is finely modeled and slightly muscular. The distinct median line below his pectorals is unclear behind the spear. His abdomen swells slightly below the waist, and he has a circular navel. He wears a khat-headdress and a short bipartite pleated kilt. The uraeus upon the forehead has a single symmetrical loop; the cobra’s tail emerges on top of the head. The king’s face is nearly intact, with only a small part of the nose missing. It is idealized, expressionless, and displays little modeling. His mouth is small, straight, fleshy lipped and flanked with drill holes on each side. The intact nose is undistinguished. The eyes alone are noteworthy. They are almond shaped, with their plastically rounded upper rims continuing past the outer canthi to form downwardly sloped cosmetic lines. The eyebrows also are in raised relief. Between the eyes is a slightly raised triangular space. The back pillar is uninscribed.

The features of the statuette are those of Saite portraits.² By comparing the statuette’s features with the features of the well-known royal portraits of the Saite Period, we find that the face of this statue is very close to the sphinx of Psamtik I (figs. 2–3) in the Cairo Museum (JE 36915),³ which might have been made only a few years after the end of the Kushite Period. These sculptures clearly show influences of the art of the 25th Dynasty, such as the signs of fleshiness along the sides of the nose near its midpoint, and the folds seen on slightly earlier Kushite sculpture. These flesh folds specifically point to an origin early in the reign of Psamtik I, when the influence of the Nubian kings’ workshops was still strong.⁴ Therefore this statuette can be identified as Psamtik I, one of the few sculptural representations of this king who reigned for 54 years.⁵

The attitude of the statuette represents the king spearing his enemy, a pose previously unknown in stone sculpture. The spear is hurled into the flesh of a missing enemy. It is an exceptional occurrence in the history of royal statuary. The hunt in the marshes is a theme known from reliefs or paintings in private tombs and royal temples. The theme of spearing an enemy is related to the triumph over evil, which is usually personified by one of the different representations of Seth, for example, as a crocodile or hippopotamus. The victorious king defeats the forces of chaos, and preserves the universal order that it is his duty to insure. The development of this

¹ Formerly in the private collection of Jack Josephson, New York, until 2003 (bought from Daedalus Gallery October 1, 1993); now in the private collection of Sheikh Saud el Thani in Doha.


⁴ Josephson, “A Portrait Head of Psamtik I?”, 435.

theme in the Late Period leads Horus to grapple with his enemy Seth in a series of episodes. In the end, Seth is finally vanquished. One of these episodes is the spearing of Seth by Horus, which is often represented in reliefs, especially on the walls of Egyptian temples. These representations reveal several attitudes, a striding pose with left leg forward or a standing pose with left leg forward. The arms are separated from the body and grasp the spear strongly with both hands, or grip the long spear in one hand while holding a rope with which to capture the defeated animal in the other hand. This emphasizes the dynamism of the triumph of Horus or of his representative upon the earth, the pharaoh. The mighty god could be represented standing on board his boat, or upon the representation of his enemy, or in front of his enemy.

However, this attitude is very rare in three-dimensional figures. We have only the twin statues, in gilded wood, of Tutankhamun standing upright on a papyrus raft and engaged in the mythical hunt for the hippopotamus that symbolizes evil. The pharaoh is represented as the incarnation of the god Horus, who, according to the legend, fought in the swamps against the evil god Seth, who was transformed into a hippopotamus and was finally defeated. Figures with arms holding the spear show one arm raised and the second extended downwards, or the two arms raised separately in front of the body. It is easy to represent these figures in reliefs, but difficult in three-dimensional stone figures because of the nature of the stone, which is liable to break. Perhaps for this reason we do not find stone statues in this attitude, with the exception of this statuette of Psamtik I. The artist tried, in this piece, to deal with the problem of the arms and the spear being raised separately in front of the body, and thus being liable to break, by joining the arms and the spear to the body of the statuette.

It is likely that the statuette is the representation of the incarnation of triumphant Horus, originally standing on or before a representation of Seth, similar to a relief of Horus standing on a crocodile on the wall of the Sokar-Osiris chapel in the temple of Dendera (figs. 4–5). The presentation of the king in this attitude is intended to guarantee the power and victory of the king over his enemies. This ideology of the triumphal divine king was needed by the new king, Psamtik I, the founder of the 26th Dynasty, who eliminated local rulers in Lower Egypt (25th Dynasty) and ended the authority of the Napatan kings at Thebes (25th Dynasty), thereby reuniting Egypt. At the start of his reign, he was a vassal of the Assyrians, but later, as their power collapsed in Asia, he became the independent ruler of Egypt and played an important role in the reunification of Egypt. This is the most logical explanation for the king’s pose in this statuette, through which he might be shown to have established his rule as one who has become powerful and victorious over all his enemies.

As the incarnation of triumphant Horus, the king wears the divine bipartite kilt of Horus, which is sometimes pleated like the kilts of the figures of Horus in the temple of Hibis in Kharga Oasis. The latter is very similar to the kilt of Psamtik I in our statuette (figs. 6–8). Additionally, the ka of the king has special characteristics, particularly appearing as one of the manifestations of the god Horus. The Hibis temple representation shows the ka of the king wearing the same short kilt of Horus. I believe that our figure represents either the divine ka of Psamtik I, or the king as the incarnation of the triumphant Horus.

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8 *Édfou* 9 (Cairo: IFOA, 1929), pl. 076; 05.

9 *Édfou* 13, pls. 495, 497–506.

10 ***ibid., pl. 512; Émile Chassinat, *Le temple de Dendara*** 2 (Cairo: IFOA, 1934), pl. 127, see also pl. 129.

11 *Édfou* 9, pl. 49a.


13 *Édfou* 13, pls. 494, 508, 510, 513.

14 *Dendara* 2, pl. 127, see also pl. 129.

15 *ibid., Mamdouh Eldamaty, Sokar-Osiris-Kapelle im Tempel von Dendera* (Hamburg: Dr. Kovac, 1995), 86.


18 Cf. ibid., pl. 40.