In considering a topic to present in honor of my dear friend and colleague, Richard A. Fazzini, it seemed only natural to turn to a subject that reflects his long-standing interest in, and association with, the temple complex of the ancient Egyptian goddess Mut at Karnak. And, surely, there is little else that is quite so evocative of that place than the hard-stone sculptures of the lion-headed goddess Sekhmet, so many of which once graced its architectural setting. Indeed, the distinguished chairman of the Brooklyn Museum’s Department of Egyptian, Classical, and Ancient Near Eastern Art has himself published several such sculptures.1 It is my hope, then, that the presentation of a Sekhmet statue that recently entered the permanent collection of the San Antonio Museum of Art, together with two related works in that museum’s permanent collection, will be an appropriate compliment to a scholar who has devoted so much of himself to excavating, documenting, studying, and preserving the Temple of Mut at Karnak.

The typical, and well-known, image of the goddess Sekhmet is a composite one that shows the body of a woman surmounted with the head of a lioness. This visual image is, of course, quite appropriate for a divinity that was believed to embody the potentially devastating power of the blazing sun, with which she could destroy the enemies of both the sun god and the king, his child and representative on earth. In addition, Sekhmet was linked to disease and pestilence, apparently not only in the sense of causation, but also of cure.2 The goddess’s name reinforces her image, as well as her nature, since the meaning is essentially that of “the powerful one.” Traditionally the wife of Ptah, the creator god of ancient Memphis, Sekhmet became closely associated with the goddess Mut, consort of the god Amun, whose major cult center was at Karnak. This may have been a reflection of the traditional parallelism of Lower and Upper Egypt, the creator god Ptah and his consort Sekhmet being paramount at the Lower Egyptian cult center of ancient Memphis, the creator god Amun and his consort Mut being paramount at the Upper Egyptian cult center of ancient Thebes, and the two divine couples being naturally linked in ancient Egyptian mythic/cultic/representational thought.

During the 18th Dynasty, King Amenhotep III commissioned a seemingly extraordinary number of works, including hundreds of life-size, hardstone statues of the goddess Sekhmet.3 These appear to have been mainly intended for his mortuary temple on the West Bank at Thebes, a site now marked by the so-called Colossi of Memnon, where statues of the goddess continue to be discovered by the site’s present excavator, Dr. Hourig Sourouzian.4 Both seated and standing images of Sekhmet were created, and at some later point, perhaps beginning during the reign of Ramesses II, many were transferred across the river to the East Bank and the complex of the


2 For a summation, see Fazzini in Capel and Markoe, Mistress of the House, 134–135, 208, notes 8–9.

3 For the sculpture of Amenhotep III, see Arielle P. Kozloff and Betsy M. Bryan with Lawrence M. Berman, Egypt’s Dazzling Sun: Amenhotep III and his World (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1992).

4 A recent Sekhmet sculpture discovered by Dr. Sourouzian is illustrated in an article by Zahi Hawass, “A Lost Tomb,” Horus, The Inflight Magazine of Egypt Air, vol. 24, issue 2 (March/April, 2006), 20.
The New Kingdom granodiorite seated Sekhmet sculpture in San Antonio (figs. 1–2) entered the museum’s permanent collection in 2004 as part of a bequest from the prominent local philanthropist and art collector, Gilbert M. Denman, Jr. The surface of the statue is worn and pitted overall from weathering, but despite this, many details are still visible. A deep depression, or slot, is cut into the top of the skull (fig. 3) and suggests that the sculpture was once crowned with a headdress, perhaps of another material, which is now lacking. Most probably, such an attached headress would consist of a sun disk and uraeus serpent, as is found in many of the complete examples. The striations of the lappet wig display careful carving, as does the leonine ruff and whiskers, the latter carved with regularity. The eyes and muzzle are clearly visible, but are more worn than the wig and ruff. Although a decorative band appears as a part of the bodice of the goddess’s garment just below the breasts, it is no longer possible to determine if there were once rosettes over the nipples, as are often present in these sculptures. Both forearms show considerable wear, especially the right. The left hand grasps the remains of an ankhr, which rests on the goddess’s left knee. Her close-fitting sheath dress descends to a point just above her ankles, and she wears anklets that appear just below the hem of the garment and consist of vertical bars contained within horizontal bands at top and bottom, all carved in relief. Her feet and toes, like her hands, are worn. She sits upon a throne, from which the back pillar rises to just above her head. The back pillar is uninscribed. Each side of the front of the throne, however, bears a single vertical column of hieroglyphic text. That on the goddess’s proper right side reads right to left; that on the goddess’s proper left side reads left to right. The statue base is quite substantial and tall.

The inscription on the proper right, front surface of the throne flanks the goddess’s right leg, and is carved in a single, vertical column of hieroglyphs (Inscription A, figs. 4 and 6). It reads: nyt nfr nb tswy Nb-ma‘t-r-k nswt Śmḥt nbt ‘ṣgm d Śḥt dt, or, “The good god, the lord of the thrones of the Two Lands, Neb-maat-re, beloved of Sekhmet, lady of Aaget, given life forever.” The inscription on the proper left, front surface of the throne flanks the goddess’s left leg, and is also carved in a single, vertical column of hieroglyphs (Inscription B, figs. 5 and 7). It reads: st R‘ mrt.f ‘Imn-htp ḫḥ₂ wst nswt Śmḥt nbt ‘ṣgm d Śḥt dt, or, “The son of Re, his beloved, Amenhotep, ruler of Thebes, beloved of Sekhmet, lady of Aaget, given life forever.” As Fazzini has noted, “The inscriptions on the completed Sekhmet statues from Amenhotep III’s reign make statements about Sekhmet’s nature and relate her to other deities and to various geographical locales. Each also indicates that Amenhotep III is beloved by the manifestations of Sekhmet named.” The San Antonio Sekhmet, then, reflects the latter case, and links the statue and the goddess to a geographical locale.

A note regarding these texts, made by an anonymous scholar, but passed on to the San Antonio Museum of Art by the Metropolitan Museum of Art states:

... 109 different inscriptions were known to Yoyotte, most of them from the temple of Mut. The estimated total of statues is about 600—many uninscribed. Yoyotte and Germond considered these inscriptions to be versions in stone of the litany of Sakhmet as a goddess recorded midway between the Old Kingdom roots of such and the written litanies of the late temples.

The district or city named on this Sakhmet—Aagat—is otherwise unattested, though Gau- thier connects it with the Old Kingdom estate designation Iagat, which, however, seems—

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1 The point is also discussed by Fazzini in Capel and Markoe, Mistress of the House, 135, and by Kozloff in Kozloff and Bryan, Egypt’s Dazzling Sun, 225.
2 It bears the museum accession number 2005.1.28, and measures a total preserved height of 180.5 cm (71”). The width at the top of the throne is 53.5 cm, and the depth of the base at the goddess’s feet is 100 cm. The length of the break at the crown of the head measures 20.3 cm, and the width of each text column is 5.5 cm.
3 In addition to his bequest, Mr. Denman made many gifts of antiquities and other works of art to the San Antonio Museum of Art during his lifetime, including two major donations, a large collection of Classical art in 1986 and a somewhat smaller collection of Egyptian art in 1991.
4 A complete example is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession number 19.8.2. Like the San Antonio sculpture, it was once in the collection of Lord Amherst. The Metropolitan’s statue was recently discussed by Arielle Kozloff in Kozloff and Bryan, Egypt’s Dazzling Sun, 225–226, no. 34.
5 Capel and Markoe, Mistress of the House, 134.