A love of Egyptian art, the eye of the connoisseur, and scholarly acumen all come together in the work of Jack Josephson, who has greatly advanced our knowledge and appreciation of Late Period sculpture. His long-standing interest in Egyptian art is by no means limited to the last phases of Egyptian civilization, however, and I therefore feel confident that he will take pleasure in reading the following notes on some statues from a much earlier period, presented here as a small token of esteem for his scholarship.

I. A Cat Statue from the Precinct of Mut at Karnak (Mut 4M.141)

The first of the three statues I propose to discuss is undoubtedly the least well known. It was briefly mentioned and illustrated with a single photograph in a (privately distributed) preliminary report on the Brooklyn Museum Expedition’s first four seasons of work in the Temple of Mut at Karnak (1976–1979),1 where it is described as “a rare representation of the goddess [i.e., Mut] in the guise of a cat.” A few years later it was used as the starting point for Herman te Velde’s article on the cat as the sacred animal of Mut;2 in it he gave a succinct description and a partial translation of the inscription on the base of the statue, but no illustration. During the 2007 season at Mut, when the contents of the site magazines were moved to new SCA storage facilities outside the precinct, it was possible to re-examine the statue and take a new series of photographs (figs. 1-3). This resulted not only in improved readings of the inscriptions, but also made it possible to establish the date of the statue, hitherto said to be “uncertain.”

The statue was found on 12 April 1979 in the remains of the approach to the temple, in the area in front of the First Pylon of the Mut Temple, c. 40 cm west of the sixth of the seven columns on the right-hand (west) side of the East Porch, at about pavement level. This was probably not its original location within the Mut Precinct, for the constructions in this area date from the 25th Dynasty and the Ptolemaic Period, while the statue, as we shall see, is much earlier in date. The stonework in which it was found was so damaged, however, that it would be hard to draw firm conclusions from its position within these remains; one might speculate that it may at some point have been reused in the foundations of the pavement between the East and West Porches.4 The measurements are as follows: the total preserved height, including the base, is 47 cm; the base is 58 cm long, 25 cm wide, and 11 cm high. The maximum width of the animal, measured across its hind legs and tail, is 22 cm, and the width across the front paws is 17 cm. The statue is made of sandstone. The head is missing and so is most of the proper right-hand side, including almost all of the inscription on that side of the base. All four corners are also damaged, again with loss of part of the inscription.

That the animal represented is a cat and not a lioness is made clear by the inscription, but the statue itself, despite the missing head, also looks more like a cat than a lion; it is rather more gracile than the usually much sturdier figure of a lion, although the feet are relatively heavy. The absence of a mane, which would undoubtedly have been

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1 R. Fazzini et al., The Brooklyn Museum—American Research Center in Egypt Expedition to the Precinct of the Goddess Mut at Southern Karnak. Preliminary Report (Brooklyn, 1979), 5 and fig. 32.
3 I would like to thank Richard Fazzini for permission to publish the statue here and Mary McKercher for providing photographs and additional information on the statue’s provenance.
4 According to the entry in the SCA register, it was found “in (the) remains of (the) floor,” and in the preliminary report (n. 1 above), it is said to have been found “at the level of the foundations of the porch.”
visible on the preserved part of the statue, further confirms this identification. The animal is depicted in what has been called its standard “hieroglyphic” form, sitting upright with its tail curled upwards between its right flank and thigh. Cat lovers will know that cats never actually hold their tails in this fashion, and the famous bronze cats from the Late Period almost without exception have their tails on the ground along their right side, sometimes with the tip curled around the right forepaw. The upward-curling tail may in fact have been borrowed from the images of lions and sphinxes (including the Great Sphinx of Giza), which are almost always shown with their tails held in this way.

The statue is inscribed with a single line of text around all four sides of the base (fig. 4a) and a further short line on the top surface of the base, in front of the cat’s forepaws (fig. 4b). Of the latter text, only the first half is preserved, reading “The beautiful cat of Mut (?) …,” confirming that the animal represented is indeed a cat. The identification with the goddess Mut is also obvious from the offering formulae inscribed on the base. This inscription starts at the center of the front with the usual htp-di-nsw and then runs in opposite directions (fig. 5). The formula running from left to right along the front and left sides of the base reads:

“An offering which the King gives (to) Mut […/…], mistress of the Two Lands, that she may give a happy lifetime in Thebes,” and that (my) name may endure in her temple […]. Made (i.e., dedicated) by the ‘Standard-Bearer’ […].”

The matching formula running from right to left is very incomplete, but although the right side is almost entirely missing, it continues on the back of the base:

“An offering which the King gives (to) Mut […/…, that she may give …] ’joyfulness ’ while following [the king (?)’ … …, to the ka of (?) the Standard-Bearer of] / the Great Regiment of Neb-ma’at-Re, Pa’i ser’, [justified (?)].”

The religious aspects of the cat as an image of the goddess Mut having been dealt with admirably by Te Velde, all that remains here is to establish the date of the statue. That it stems from the New Kingdom is clear: leaving aside an ephemeral Second Intermediate Period king of that name, the Neb-ma’at-Re mentioned in the owner’s title can only refer to either Amenhotep III or Rameses VI. The title tjuw-sryt “Standard-Bearer” is not attested after the New Kingdom and neither is the name Paser, although the reading of the latter name is not entirely certain. The offering formulae are also common during the second half of the 18th Dynasty (after the reign of Thutmose III) and the Ramesside Period. Close scrutiny of the inscription reveals the presence of minute traces of blue pigment in some of the signs and, much more clearly, of red in the framing lines. There are no traces of colors other than blue in the hieroglyphs, and since the framing lines show that at least red would almost certainly still be present had it been used, we may safely conclude that the hieroglyphs were originally all painted blue and the framing lines red. This was a popular color scheme for inscriptions at the end of the 18th Dynasty that appears to have gone out of fashion during the Ramesside Period. For this reason alone it is not very likely that the statue belongs to the reign of Rameses VI.

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8 nḥm-ib ẖr smn nsw, cf. the inscription of Kenamun.


10 Wh. IV, 192, 13–18.

