

SENBEF

EGYPTIAN, LATE PERIOD, BEGINNING OF THE 26TH DYNASTY, CA. 664-660 BC

LIMESTONE

HEIGHT: 38 CM.

WIDTH: 27 CM.

DEPTH: 22 CM.

PROVENANCE:

*WITH THE DEALER MAGUID SAMEDA
(55 IBRAHIM PASHA) IN CAIRO IN THE
1950S, DESCRIBED BY THE
EGYPTOLOGIST JEAN YOYOTTE IN 1957
(PER BOTHMER'S ARCHIVES,
N°BVB 914).*

*IN THE COLLECTION OF RENÉ
WITHOFS (1919-1997), BRUSSELS,
FROM 1974 OR BEFORE. SOLD TO
ANTIQUITIES, SOTHEBY'S, NEW YORK,
ON 10 DECEMBER 1999, LOT 229.
THEN IN A PRIVATE COLLECTION IN
NEW YORK.*



This magnificent block statue depicts a high-ranking official called Senbef, squatting with his knees around his chest and his arms laid at. Delicately-engraved hieroglyphs can be made out on the front of his tunic and on the back-rest pillar. The inscription was not quite completed since the lines of separation between the columns of hieroglyphs are only traced at the beginning of the text.



The front features a call to passers-by:

«Oh prophets and pure priests who have access to the temple of Osiris, Lord of Ro-setaou, you will be guests in this temple if you commemorate my name every day: Senbef, son of the divine father, priest imy-âh and prophet of Osiris, Lord of Ro-setaou, Di-Ptah-iaou, conceived by Seneb-Hor-ites, daughter of the governor of Khem Pef-tjau-[...]»

The following is inscribed on the back rest:

«[The local god] of Senbef, son of the divine father, the priest imy-âh and responsible for the confidential affairs of Ro-setaou, Di-Ptah-iaou, conceived by the daughter of the governor of Khem, Sene[b-Hor-ites].»



This is followed by a traditional version of the end of the Saite formula. This tells us,

therefore, that this statue was placed in the temple of Osiris, Lord of Ro-stau, in the region of Giza. Block statues appeared at the beginning of the 12th dynasty during the Middle Kingdom and continued through the New Kingdom into the Late Period (ill.1). It was the preferred way of depicting characters who were neither royal nor divine, in temples or tombs. In temples, as was the case with Senbef, it enabled the person offering the sculpture to take part in the worship of the deity and to benefit from their protection in the afterlife. Senbef calls the priests into the temple and encourages them to pronounce his name to benefit from his protection.

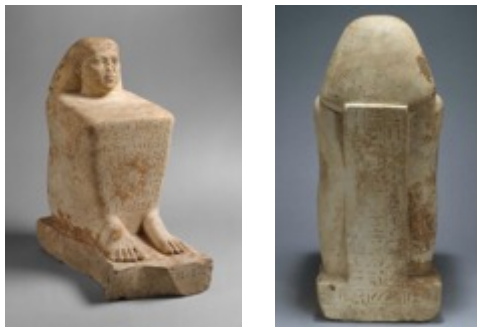
The raw material used – a very compact form of limestone – was characteristic of sculptures of the early 26th dynasty. The attention given to the details of the body of Senbef by the sculptor confirms this dating. The body is covered in a combination of a tunic and a very tight corset, which highlights the shape of the back, the arms and the legs, in opposition to the traditional highly geometric aspect of the block statue (ill.2). The tunic descends to a level which leaves the feet visible. The arms on the top of the statue – which would traditionally be flat – are different from one other and separated by an indent that has been carved (ill.3). The realism of the artist goes as far as the nails on the hands, and the detail of the sculpture, which enhances the shape of the body, enables us to date our sculpture exactly to the reign of Psammetichus I (664 – 610 BC).



Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Block statue of Hr, Late Period, 25th – 26th dynasties, limestone, H.: 28.2 cm. Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Egypt, inv. no. 37344.

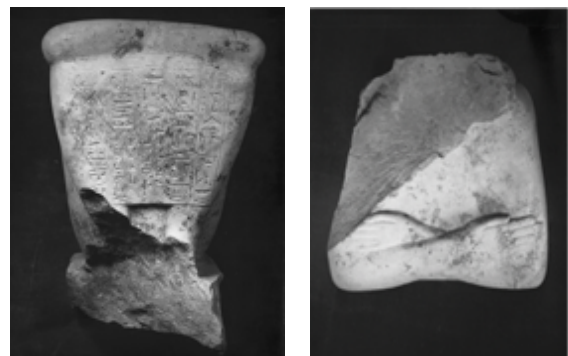


Ill. 2. Block statue of Ankhwenefter, Late Period, 25th – 26th dynasties, limestone, H.: 46 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 1993.161.



Ill. 3. Block statue of Djedbastetiufankh, Late Period, 25th – 26th dynasties, limestone, H.: 26.1 cm. Cleveland Museum of Art, United States, inv. no. 1914.661.

Our sculpture was probably discovered in the Coptic cemetery of Nazlet el-Batran, located to the south of the city of Giza (per Bothmer's notes, no. 914). According to Jean Yoyotte, French Egyptologist, it then appeared on the ancient art market in 1956. It was added to the collections of Mr René Withofs, the owner of an art gallery in Brussels who collected many artworks, especially primitive. The sculpture was then bought at auction by a private collector from New York.



Photographies of our sculpture, Bothmer archives, No. BVB 914.

BVB 914
Block statue from the Coptic cemetery southeast of Giza

Le cimetière copte où la statue a été trouvée est contigu vers le Sud au cimetière musulman de Nazlet el-Batran qui est exactement porté sur SURVEY of EGYPT, Maps 1:100,000, Sheet Helwan (C 34) dans le carré B 1. Il se trouve donc sur le bord du désert, droit à l'est de Nazlet Batran, à 400 m. au sud du Grand Sphinx. Sa position précise est portée sur le plan donné dans 34-111 Hassan, *Excavations at Giza 1920-1921*, 2e planche en frontispice (Coptic cemetery).

Le texte gravé sur la robe recoupe admirablement l'indication de provenance que l'on vous a fournie: il contient un appel aux visiteurs "qui monteront au temple d'Osiris, seigneur de Rosetaou." Or, on peut aisément établir qu'il existait sur le bord du désert et immédiatement au sud du Grand Sphinx, une localité nommée *Rosetaou* ou *Ir Neir nb Ht-st-yr*. "La Maison d'Osiris, seigneur de Rosetaou". D'une part, la stèle de la Pille de Khéops (H 30, 1-10, cf. Roscher, *JNES* 4, 241) situe le Sphinx (Horusou-Sama-khis) "au Nord d'Osiris-seigneur-de-Rosetaou" et la pyramide de la princesse -celle ou "visner a fouillé- "au Nord-Ouest de la Maison d'Osiris-seigneur-de-Rosetaou". D'autre part, une stèle inédite (Caire J. N. 66612 (Ramesse III) relate une inspection des terres faite "au Sud du village de Rosetaou": il se trouve que cette stèle a pour provenance: "Nazlet Batran - Found in digging a canal from Saqqara to Giza" en 1924 ("Il s'agit du canal qui longe le désert). Nous disposons de bien d'autres documents relatifs à cette Rosetaou, à son culte de Sokaris-Osiris, à sa signification mythologique, à son clergé. Nous connaissons même son nom grec: *BOUSIRIS* DU NOMME LETOPOLITE.

J'ai vu chez un antiquaire, un fragment de relief provenant d'une tombe, et pour lequel la même provenance "cimetière au sud des pyramides" m'a été indiquée. Le morceau représente le grand prêtre de Ptah Hori fils du grand prêtre de Ptah Pahemeter en adoration devant "Anubis seigneur de Rosetaou". Or, d'après la thèse inédite de Kaystre (*Inscriptions des grands prêtres nubites*, n° 89), le même morceau avait été vu chez un marchand dès 1944 et copié alors par Grisehoff. Il y a donc fort longtemps que le site est exploité et nous devons rechercher systématiquement tous les monuments actuellement dans le commerce qui peuvent en provenir.

Description of our sculpture by J. Yoyotte.





Jean Yoyotte (1927-2009)

Publications:

- M. Lehner and Z. Hawass, *Giza and the Pyramids: The Definitive History*, Chicago, 2017, p. 495.

A Saite Period cube statue of a man named Senbef, unpublished but photographed by Jean Yoyotte in the Cairo antiquities market in 1996, appeals to the prophets and purification priests who ascended towards the temple of 'Osiris, Lord of Rosetta'. The antiquities dealer told Yoyotte that the piece had been found in the Coptic Cemetery at Giza, south of the great gate in the Wall of the Crow. So the Osiris temple could perhaps be somewhere between the Sphinx and the great stone gate, which may have remained open as a portal of the sacred way 2,000 years after the 4th dynasty Egyptians built it.

South of the Wall of the Crow, Late Period burials on the site of the Workers' Town might also point us towards the missing Osiris temple. Two thousand years after the 4th dynasty occupation of the ancient settlement, people of the Late Period, through to the Persian and Roman Periods, down to the 2nd century AD, dug burial pits through a sand layer and often down into the 'mud mass' of the settlement ruins. In the Late Period a common practice was to place the dead in mud coffins with moulded face masks [20.3]. The plastered and painted coffins carried inscriptions invoking the compound deity Ptah-Sokar-Osiris, and Osiris, Lord of Rosetta.

- C. M. Zivie-Coche, *Giza au premier millénaire, autour du temple d'Isis, dame des pyramides*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1991, pp. 215-216.

E. STATUE-CUBE DE SENBEF, FILS DE PTAHDILAOU

Cette belle statue-cube en calcaire a été vue dans le commerce des antiquités du Caire dans les années 50, date à laquelle elle a été photographiée⁶³². Elle est inédite et son

630. H. Ranke, *PN I*, 127, 25.

631. H. Ranke, *PN I*, 125, 15.

632. Que Jean Yoyotte trouve ici mes remerciements pour me l'avoir signalée et m'en avoir procuré un jeu de photographies.

