

# AN EGYPTIAN STATUETTE IN PETRA

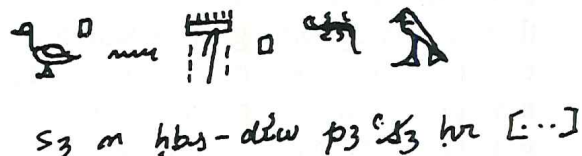
by  
Alicia I. Meza

Among the cultic objects found during the 1975 excavations of The American Expedition to Petra was a fragment of an Egyptian votive statuette (AEP 75-13) shown in Pl. I.<sup>1</sup> The fragment registered at the Jordan Archaeological Museum under the reference number 16193, lacks its head, part of the shoulders, and its base. The size of the fragment is 20.5 x 13.4 cm and its material is a fine, polished black-green schist.<sup>2</sup>

The statuette was found in the cellar area of the temple of "the winged lions" in Petra. Its presence in this particular place was attributed by the excavator to a possible diffusion of the "Osirian cult" from Egypt.<sup>3</sup> The main figure, a priest, is holding a small figure of the god Osiris, mummiform, with the agricultural implements in his hands and his arms crossed over his chest (Pl. I, 1-2).<sup>4</sup> The smoothness of the material and the velvet polished surface of the piece enhances the outline of the priest's legs under the

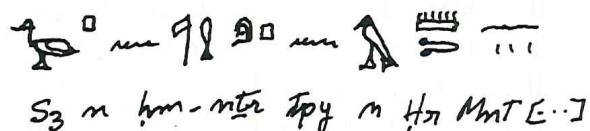
transparent dress.<sup>5</sup> Two broken lines of vertical hieroglyphic inscription are next to the left leg of the priest (Pl. I, 3-5) indicating his genealogy.<sup>6</sup> The text reads:

## Left column:



"The son of the *hbs-diw* priest, Pasha-hor", [...].

## Right column:



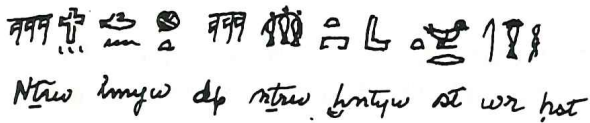
"The son of the first prophet of Horus, Montw"[...].

1. The AEP is under the direction of Dr. Phillip C. Hammond, Director of the Anthropology Department, University of Utah. I must thank him for allowing me to see his field notes.
2. My immense gratitude goes to the Director General of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, Dr. Safwan Kh. Tell, who consented to my request to write about the Egyptian statuette and who patiently agreed to send me the photographs to use for my research and writing. My thanks also to his assistant Basma Hameed, to the people at the Jordan Archaeological Museum who graciously let me photograph the fragment and helped me to realize my task. My thanks also to the Museum photographer Mr. Salem Da'jeh who attended to my demands and with a smile produced great photographs. My deepest thanks to Dr. Fawzi Zayadine and Ms. Muna Zaghoul for their valuable help.
3. Another statuette was also found by Dr. Hammond during the same season. This statuette is made of terracotta and was listed in Dr. Hammond's field report book as an Isis figurine. Ac-

ording to Dr. Zayadine, several other such statuettes were previously found in the diverse areas of Petra. Dr. Zayadine indicates that the Isis Crown and the Isis Knot are the two attributes that characterize the Isis representation. The goddess Isis is seated in mourning attitude for the death of her husband Osiris. In this way, Dr. Zayadine believes that the temple of the Winged Lions is a temple that was dedicated to the Isis cult. This is a plausible interpretation for the presence of the Osiris votive statuette in the temple (see Zayadine 1991).

4. Although the front of the statue seems to show a "left foot advanced" it is not so. When viewed from the sides (Pl. I, 2 and 3), it is clear that the mummified form has both feet bandaged together and both legs are next to each other.
5. The Osiris figure described as "kilted" has no other implements but those in its hands. The apparent kilt is a pleated and transparent priest's skirt.
6. The original transliterations and translations were done by Dr. De Meulenaere in Brussels.

The back pillar is inscribed with one hieroglyphic line (Pl. I, 4), which reads:





“The gods who are in the city of Dep, those who are the foremost of the great place of praise.”

The importance of this find is two-fold: first, there is the egyptological meaning of it which will be discussed next, and second, the anthropological significance that this fragment, deposited out of its primary context of place of origin, has as a cultural remain. This view will be discussed afterwards.

While the dress and attitude of the priest holding the osiride figure appear in Egyptian iconography during the New Kingdom (Vandier 1958: 470, 490), this type of costume and sculpture in the round continues throughout the Late Period (Bothmer 1960: 32-34, Pl. 25). Its material is also, according to Prof. Bothmer, indicative of Late Period manufacture. The style of dress, attitude and material, are similar to statues which belong to the last king of the XXV Dynasty or to Pamsik I, the first king of the XXVI Dynasty (Bothmer 1960: 32).

The first line of the inscription on the left, near the leg, which mentions the son of the *hbs-diw* priest Pashahor [...] and the second which continues... “the son of the first prophet of Horus, Montw[...]” can be interpreted in two ways: a) the person holding the osiride figure is the son of the priest Pashahor[...] first prophet of Horus Montw [...]. The other interpretation is that the person who is the son of Pashahor[...] is also the son of the first prophet of the gods Horus and Montw with his own name lost. The person who is holding Osiris is himself a priest, as his dress indicates. Could he have been Pashadw[...]the son of Montw[...]?. We can only guess since the two lines are broken.

The text on the back pillar is even more confusing and intriguing (Pl. I, 4). The word for the city of Dep which was an ancient city in the Delta, where the ancestors' souls were reunited, and which was also sacred to Osiris, is distorted into “Den.” A search for a possible alternative of the writing of Den for Dep, revealed nothing. A verbal assertion from Prof. Dr. Faiza Haikal, however, suggested that this was feasible. The spelling of the word is not all that unusual. The sign for the letter “d” is normally written as a straight hand with the five fingers united and stretched, . Here it shows only three fingers spread out vertically instead of horizontally, . Throughout the history of ancient Egyptian writing there were instances when signs were distorted or badly written.

The priestly title “*Hbs-diw*” (Pl. I, 5), is described by Pascal Vernus as a specific title of the Osirian cult in Athribis (1978: 444-447). He cites documents belonging to the XXV Dynasty in which the title is mentioned. There is also an explanation for the five strokes written in a group with the word “*hbs*”, a word that presents diverse variants in writing. According to Vernus, this word and the five strokes were related to the osirian cult in the city of Edfu and later in Athribis throughout the XXX Dynasty. Their possible meanings, “...he who covers the five gods”; “...he who covers the god with five stripes”. The exact significance is obscure, but its origin can be traced to sarcophagi of the Middle Kingdom. Later on the concept was subsequently used in the title of Athribis (446-447). Vernus, in his footnotes, cites references to the five strokes, which have been interpreted as a designation for the god Geb (Faulkner 1958: 14, line 20,5). The word *hbs* has also been interpreted as a participle that not only involves the person who executes the action but also the occasion on which the action is executed (Gardiner 1911: 42).

Although the title “*Hbs*” with the five strokes had been employed earlier, its offi-

cial use seems to have been consolidated during the XXV Dynasty and in connection with Athribis. The city of "Dep" in the Delta is also mentioned in the back pillar and the possible origin of the statuette is still speculative.

Viewing the statuette as an important cultural artifact, one that has anthropological significance and meaning, raises additional questions. The fragment was found in a temple where niches were carved in the walls, and this induced the excavator to say that the statue was positioned in the temple as a votive object for the Osiris cult. However, the context in which the fragment was found is not clear. Much debris and pottery sherds were there in addition to other objects from different periods of time. Although the direction in which the hieroglyphs are written would give us the original position of the statue in the temple, namely looking left, its secondary context is unclear. Since the statue was already broken when found and mixed with other artifacts, there is no way to know if it had been placed in the temple as a votive object or if it had just been discarded there. Perhaps the statue belonged there after all. We cannot say with any assurance, however, that because this object was found in the Nabataean temple, than the Nabataeans were worshipping Osiris. An Egyptian may have carried it from his native land. A Greek or a Roman soldier may have left it there.

The support for speculations are in the date. There is agreement about the date of manufacture. The XXV Dynasty ended at approximately 665 BC. After the Assyrian invasion of Egypt, which swept through the area of Palestine as well, a new dynasty emerged in Egypt in 664 BC, the XXVI Dynasty (Stevenson Smith 1988: 395-416). During these turbulent times, the Edomites were living in the Petra area and the Naba-

taeans were yet to come. According to J. Starcky (1964), the Nabataeans moved into the land of Edom in about 600 BC and into the Petra area about 400 BC.

Can we say with assurance that the Nabataeans worshipped Osiris? There is not enough proof of it. Egyptian artifacts have been found throughout the Palestine area (Schulman 1990: 235). Scarabs from the XVII Dynasty were found in the Petra area (Ward 1973: 45-46). At al-Balu', a Moabite site, a basalt stele was found on which three figures are depicted (the stele is today at The Jordan Archaeological Museum). The figure of an Egyptian king wearing the crown of Upper Egypt is one of them, the other two are not very clear, but in the center a goddess has the moon and the sun above her shoulders. According to Harding, this central figure was a king and the other two figures were two gods with Egyptian features (Harding 1984: 38).<sup>7</sup> But it is unclear if these figures were kings, or gods or both. Whatever the interpretation, they do not represent Osiris, nor are they of Nabataean origin.

While Palestine was under Egyptian control throughout the New Kingdom, the Egyptian influence there is undeniably obvious. It is equally obvious that there was an Asiatic influence upon the Egyptian culture. And although there were many cross-cultural contacts, we cannot say with assertiveness that a cult of Osiris had been established in Petra. One of these cultural contacts, which could be possible, is the Isis cult described in an article by Dr. Zayadine (1991). The votive statuette may have been deposited in this way in the Isis temple as a token of votive piety toward the goddess' deceased husband.

Nevertheless, the presence of the Egyptian statuette in Petra has great significance for two reasons. First, it is proof of the exchange of material culture between Egypt

7. The Balu'a stele was first published in an article by Ward and Martin (1964). The Osiris votive statuette was first published in *ADAJ* 22 (1977-

78): 81-101. Pl. LVII, 2 with a legend "Site II Fragment of Egyptian funerary statuette used as offering, cella area."

and Jordan, although the specific reasons for its transport and deposit in the Nabataean temple are unknown. Second, it gives us an important basis for further research. Since the statuette is much earlier than the temple, this find could have been part of an earlier temple's foundation which was uncovered by the Nabataeans who re-used it as a votive object. Only future archaeological work and research may provide us with answers to the questions and speculations formulated above.

### Acknowledgements

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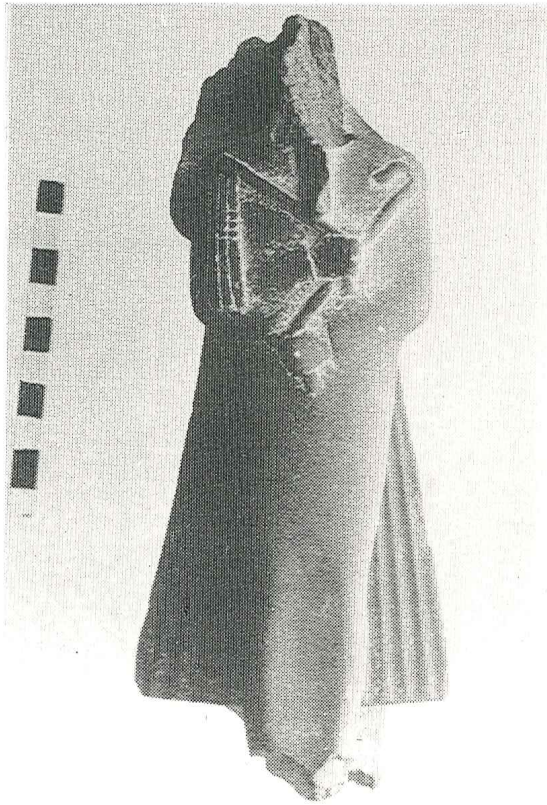
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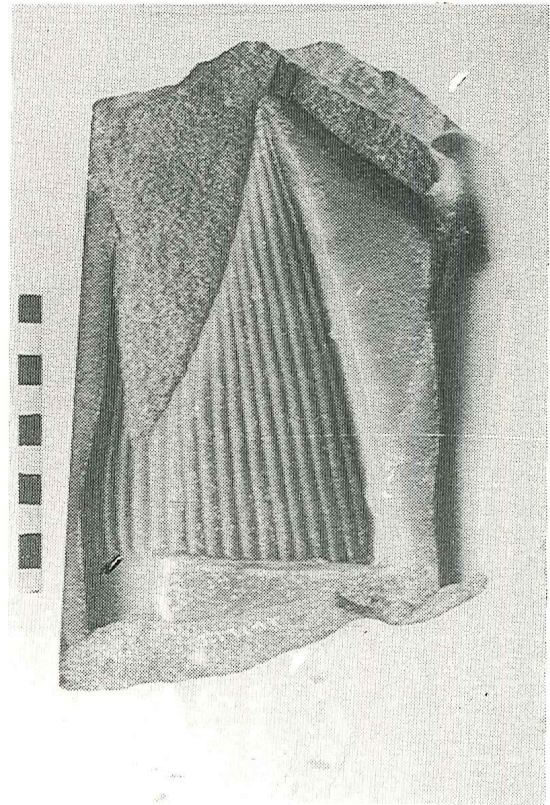
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Without any of them I could not have succeeded. I also must make clear that I claim responsibility for any mistakes I have made.

A. I. Meza  
104-60 Queens Blvd Apt. 21N  
Forest Hills N.Y. 11375  
U.S.A.



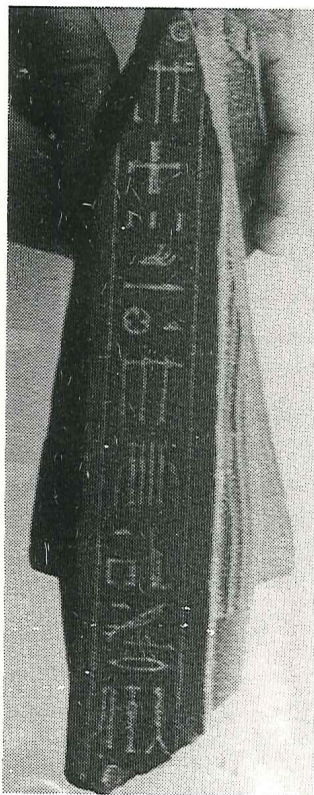
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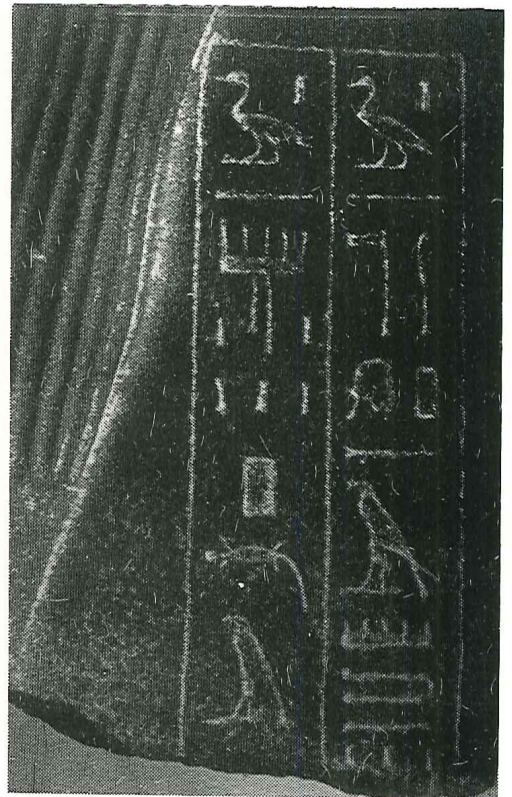
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Fragments of an Egyptian votive statuette.