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ABSTRACT

A Falcon God from the Garden of Princess Nimet Mokhtar at el-Marg

Aiman Ashmawy Ali – Simon Connor

This article explores a monumental statue of a deity that was moved together with other antiquities in 2001 from the garden of Princess Nimet Mokhtar at el-Marg to the Open-Air Museum of Tell Basta in Zagazig. The statue was allegedly found in the garden of the palace of el-Marg, 4 km north-east of ancient Heliopolis. This estate once belonged to the sister of King Fuad I and had been part of her private collection until the property was confiscated in 1954. The statue depicts a seated male falcon-headed deity, wearing a scarab on its wig. Its stylistic features and rounded proportions indicate that it dates to the Ptolemaic Period. This statue would be the only witness to monumental activity in the area of Heliopolis, several decades after the reign of Nectanebo I.

KEYWORDS

Heliopolis, el-Marg, Kher-Aha, Ptolemaic Period, scarab

A Falcon God from the Garden of Princess Nimet Mokhtar at el-Marg

¹ The Open-Air Museum of Tell Basta (Zagazig) displays a large number of architectural blocks and statues discovered in the surrounding region. Most were found among the ruins of ancient Bubastis, but some of the monuments on display come from other, less easily accessible sites in the eastern Delta. Among the non-Bubastian monuments on display in the Open-Air Museum are three quartzite monuments described on their labels as coming from el-Marg, located in the el-Qalyubiya province¹. This territory was once royal property, and at least one of these three monuments adorned the palace of Princess Nimet Mokhtar (1881–1966), sister of King Fuad I. Now abandoned and in a poor state of preservation, this palace still stands within its garden, easily accessible from the el-Marg Metro station, 4 km north-east of the archaeological site of Matariya (Figs. 1. 2. 3). In the first half of the 20th century, the palace still stood in the countryside, with only fields separating it from what remained of ancient Heliopolis.

The History of the Garden of Princess Nimet Mokhtar in el-Marg

»[...] Marg was only twenty minutes away from Cairo by car, but somehow as time went by it seemed to be worlds apart. [...] In Marg we were truly in the heart of one of the most beautiful of Egyptian countrysides, famous for its forests of date trees which stretched for miles, sometimes broken up by cultivated fields, but more often thickly wooded with little waterways and canals meandering through its colonnades of trees.«²

¹ Our thanks go to Christian Tietze and Marc Loth for kindly providing information, as well as to Ahmed el-Bindari for sharing his knowledge about villas and gardens of this period.

² Hassan 2000, 35. 39.

2 Princess Nimet Mokhtar³ was a daughter of the Khedive Ismail, a sister of King Fuad I and aunt of King Farouk. Her house, in the neighbourhood of el-Marg, north-east of early 20th century Cairo, was more a countryside villa than a proper palace. It was initially built at the turn of the 20th century as a khedival hunting lodge that the princess transformed into an elegant house, henceforth known for its charm and tasteful decoration, a retreat she dubbed ›Palais Sheikh Mansour⁴. Although in a poor state of preservation, the house still stands today within what remains of its garden. The architecture and decoration show a mixed Italian and English inspiration, typical of early 20th century villas in Egypt. In his *Family Album* published in 2000, Prince Hassan Hassan, a junior member of the former Egyptian royal family, provides a description of the palace, its collections and its garden. A movie directed by Helmy Rafla in 1957, «فتى أحلامي» («Fatā aḥlāmī», title translated in English as »The Man of My Dreams«), provides an opportunity to see views of the garden (see Fig. 5)⁵.

3 El-Marg Palace is mentioned in internet blogs that embellish and erroneously report on happenings and tropes usually associated with abandoned houses. The urban legends include stories, from describing a tunnel linking the palace to a nearby farm to an ›execution‹ gallows in the basement⁶. Such wild stories are encouraged by certain architectural elements, including two medieval-looking watchtowers on the exterior. The best way to understand and appreciate the original appearance of the estate and palace is to read the memories of Prince Hassan Hassan:

»When Great-Aunt Nimet decided to live at Marg, the Palace of Marg was a simple hunting lodge set in grounds that were part desert and part marshes. In front of the house, which was on slightly raised ground, was a row of six date trees growing out of the sand. From this wilderness my great-aunt was to create a home of great charm. The marshes for miles around were drained and the desert pushed back, beautiful formal gardens laid out around the house, lawns and a small forest of eucalyptus trees planted. The same tall, rustling trees bordered long alleyways, while clipped hedges enclosed groves of fruit trees. Tennis courts and a golf course sprang up unrelenting supervision and care. [...] No detail was too small to escape our great-aunt's notice, and it was this careful supervision that gave the place an air of a royal residence, for the palace itself remained a roomy, unpretentious, one-storied house which Great-Aunt Nimet would refer to as her bungalow.«⁷

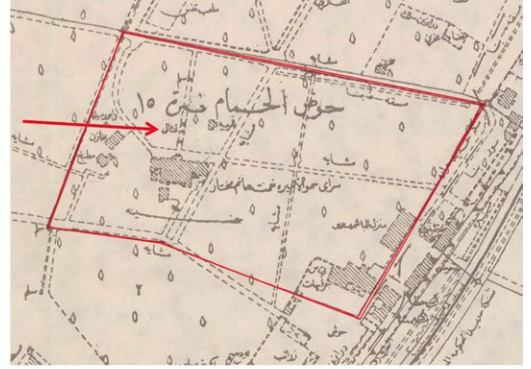
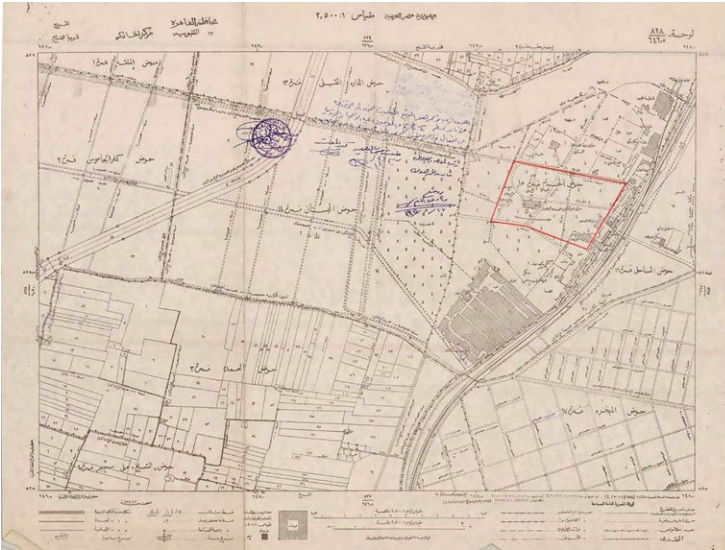
3 Not to be confused with Neamah-Allah Tawfiq, daughter of the Khedive Tawfiq. Extensive descriptions of Princess Nimet Mokhtar's appearance and personality are present in Prince Hassan Hassan's account: »I remember well arriving with my mother at Marg on a beautiful afternoon and meeting Great-Aunt Nimet for the first time. She was seated at the end of the main drawing room by a window which gave on the gardens, wearing a pale-blue gown reaching to the ground with a large cluster of diamonds on her chest in the shape of a bow. She was very composed, very regal, hair carefully set, extremely expressive dark eyes and a firm, wide mouth. [...] Princess Nimetallah, Great-Aunt Nimet, was the last surviving daughter of the Khedive Ismail and as such the last of King Fuad's sisters. This gave her a unique position in the family, and both her royal brother and other relatives often accepted her opinion on many subjects as law. Her exceptional personality enforced her privileged position. Of a naturally regal appearance without any affectations or mannerisms, a sure sense of humour which would lighten up her dark eyes, eyes that could also be most forbidding, an education combining old traditions of the East and the West which are finally remarkably similar, abreast with the latest philosophical, scientific, or literary thought in several European languages, she was a devoted wife and an impeccable public figure.« (Hassan 2000, 35 f.).

4 Bishop 2020, § 22 f.

5 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ptaC9FthSk>> (20.03.2023).

6 <<https://www.elnabaa.net/777477>> (20.03.2023).

7 Hassan 2000, 36 f.



1



2



3

Fig. 1: Map survey of Egypt in 1934 showing the area of el-Marg. The property of Princess Nimet Mokhtar is highlighted in red. The red line delimits the garden of Princess Nimet Mokhtar. Perpendicular to the palace is an alley, in which the statue of the falcon-headed deity was placed (تمثال; see red arrow on the map)

Fig. 2: Satellite view of the palace in 2022 (scale 1 : 4,000)

Fig. 3: Entrance of the garden and palace of Princess Nimet Mokhtar



4



5

Fig. 4: View of the falcon-headed statue in the garden in 1995. Photo from the report of Naser el-Said el-Sabahy on the restoration of the monuments in the palace of Princess Nimet Mokhtar

Fig. 5: Scene from Helmy Rafla's movie «فتى أحلامي» («Fatá aḥlāmī»), 75th minute of the movie

4 The palace was occupied by Princess Nimet Mokhtar's daughter and son-in-law until 1954, when it was confiscated and placed into the custody of the Ministry of Defence until the 1990s⁸. The Ministry of Agriculture then held the property until it was acquired by the Cairo Governorate in 2016 for EGP 130 million, with the aim to build a hospital⁹.

5 Princess Nimet Mokhtar was known to be a collector of art and antiquities, and as such, she had a number of ancient stone objects adorning the palace and its garden¹⁰. Numbered among this collection were at least two ancient sculptures: a quartzite seated statue depicting a falcon-headed deity and a limestone sphinx from the Ptolemaic Period¹¹. It may very well be because of the presence of these ancient artefacts that it was used as a temporary storage for antiquities found in the area after the palace was confiscated until the second half of the 20th century. This is when, according to the register books of the el-Qalyubiya Restoration Department and of the el-Sharqia Documentation Department, the lower part of another quartzite seated statue and an inscribed architectural block were stored in the garden. Still, according to the register book of the el-Sharqia Documentation Department, as well as that of the Open-Air Museum of Tell Basta, the objects of Princess Nimet Mokhtar's collection and those added later by the administration and stored in her former property were transferred for safekeeping in June 2001.

The Statue of a Falcon-Headed God

Place of preservation: Open-Air Museum of Tell Basta, 17¹²

Measurements: H. 248 cm, W. 75 cm, D. 151 cm

»The six date trees in front of the house remained, but beyond them on a lower terrace a rose garden stretched out, with – as its central ornament – a life-size red-granite statue of a seated female pharaonic figure, its face heavily mutilated, that had been found in the grounds. It was reflected in a small pool, beside which a banyan tree gave shade to a square clearing furnished with garden tables and chairs. From there a path bordered by white-trunked palm trees led to one of the main arteries of the garden, which was on still lower ground.«¹³

8 <<https://www.youm7.com/story/2014/12/12/1986766/بالمرج-قصر-نعمة-بالمرج-1986766>> (18.04.2022).

9 <https://www.masrawy.com/news/news_reports/details/2014/1/12/158025/قصر-الأميرة-نعمت-حلم-أهالي-المرج-الذي-لم-يتحقق> (18.04.2022).

10 Bakr et al. 2014, 77. 308 f. for an imperial head that might come from it; Hassan 2000, 34–46: »At Great-Aunt Nimet's at least there was a collection of fine paintings, superb rugs, and a happy mixture of furniture, arranged very personally and intelligently.« In her collections within the palace, Prince Hassan Hassan mentions a Claude Lorrain landscape, showcases with Far Eastern curiosities, a 14th-century Flemish tapestry, as well as 18th-century baroque furniture and 19th-century reproductions. This is not a unique case where a pharaonic statue was installed in a garden. In 1954, Labib Habachi mentioned, also in the vicinity of Heliopolis, a life-size seated granodiorite statue with the name of Ramesses II (current location unknown) in the garden of Anastasi Cargo, 22 Selim Street in el-Zeitoun, 2 km south-east of the obelisk of Senwosret I. This house and garden are now levelled and replaced by a new building; see Habachi 1954, 554 fn. 1; Sourouzian 2019, 556 no. 357.

11 H. ca. 60 cm, W. ca. 30 cm, D. ca. 100 cm. Cf. Loth 2003, 175 f. no. 14; Tietze – Abd el-Maksoud 2004, 45 no. 9.

12 The el-Sharqiya Documentation Department register book previously gave the statue the inv. no. 27.

13 Hassan 2000, 37.

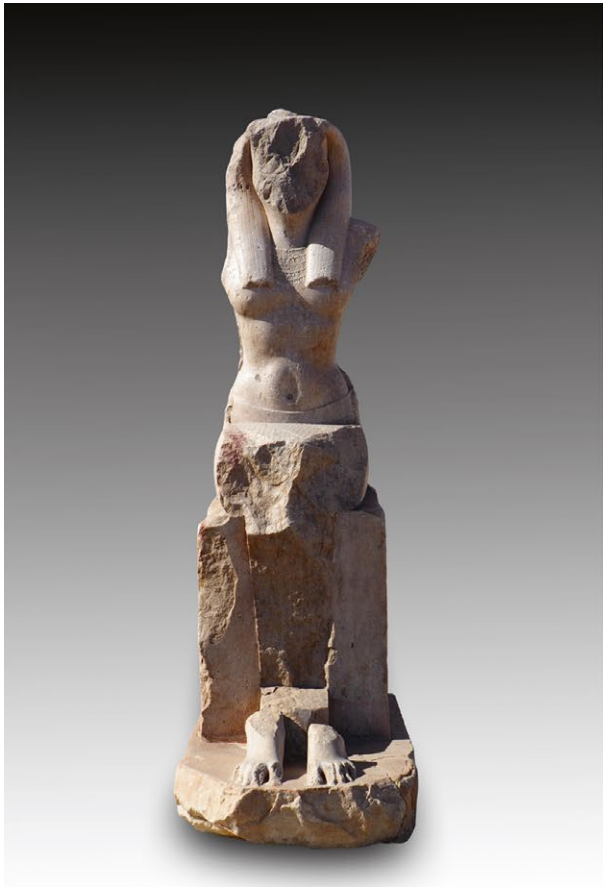


Fig. 6: Map of the Heliopolitan and Memphite regions. (scale 1 : 250,000)

6

6 The statue mentioned by Prince Hassan Hassan in his depiction of Princess Nimet Mokhtar's garden is the falcon-headed deity¹⁴ now on display in the Open-Air Museum of Tell Basta. It is not known when the statue was found, but it was already on display in the garden by 1934, when the map of the Survey of Egypt was drawn (Figs. 1. 2. 3. 4). Prince Hassan Hassan, born in 1924, describes it in the above-mentioned abstract when he mentions his visits to el-Marg as a child. The same statue appears in a scene in Helmy Rafla's movie (Fig. 5). According to Prince Hassan Hassan, the statue had apparently not been bought, but had been found in the »ground«, likely

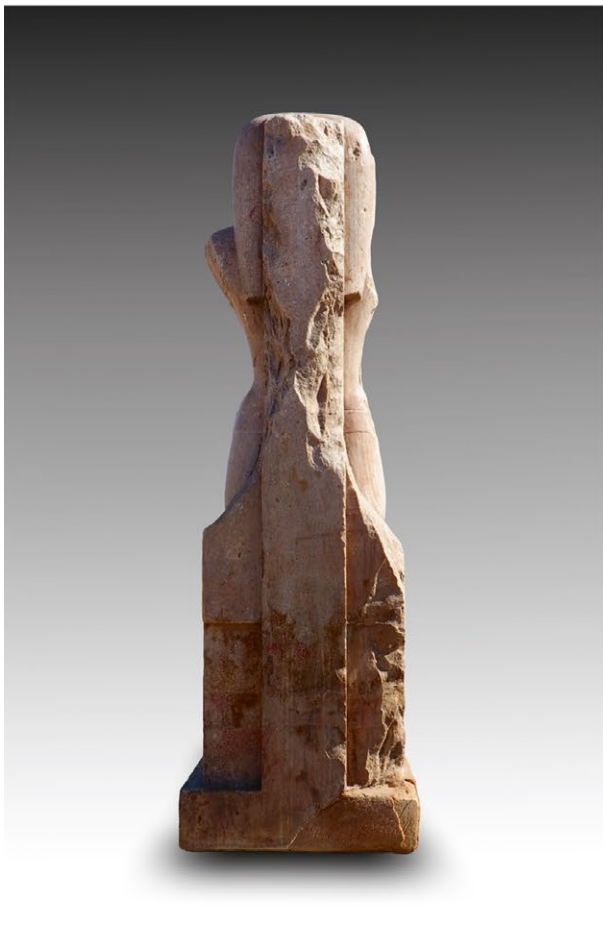
14 For background on damage to the sculpture, see Connor 2022, 59–109.



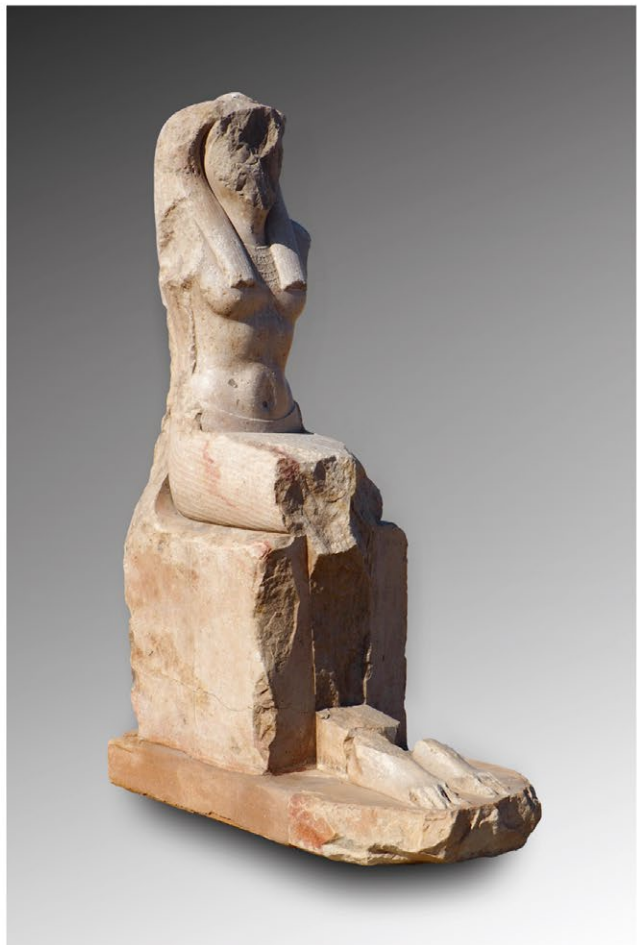
a



b



c



d

Fig. 7: Front (a), profile (b, d), and back views (c) of the falcon-headed deity. Contrasting with the good state of preservation of the torso, wig, neck, feet, and sides of the throne, some parts of the statue display severe and apparently intentional damage



8



9

in the neighbourhood. The closest archaeological sites, Heliopolis (4 km to the south-west) and Tell el-Yahudiya (18 km to the north) would provide the two closest possible provenances, unless another, still unidentified sanctuary was located in the area of el-Marg (Fig. 6).

7 The statue shows several traces of targeted damage: the face, arms, and legs, the corners of the back pillar, the front and right rear edge of the throne, the edges of the back pillar, as well as the front and right rear corners of the base have been repeatedly smashed to such an extent that the face and limbs are entirely missing¹⁵. In contrast, the surface of the preserved parts remains in excellent condition, which certainly suggests intentional and targeted depredations. The absence of chisel marks suggests the use of blunt tools, perhaps hard stone pounders. Despite the severe blows to the face, there is no doubt that the figure had a falcon's head. This is evident because of the high, forward-projecting forehead, the angle of the curved neck, the depressions in the temporal areas on either side of the head, and the absence of ears.

8 The god is seated on a throne, his forearms once resting on the thighs (Figs. 7. 8. 9). He wears a ›divine‹ type of loincloth, with one rounded flap covering the other and relatively wide, regular, slightly concave folds (Fig. 10). The smooth belt narrows below the slightly rounded belly. The throne is decorated with a feather-motif on the sides, bordered by a frieze (Fig. 11). Given the high polish and the degree to which this statue's details are complete, it is difficult to consider it unfinished. The absence of an

Fig. 8: Three-quarter view of the falcon-headed deity's face

Fig. 9: The feet had been cut off from the main block. The legs themselves are entirely missing. The toes might have also been intentionally damaged

15 Loth 2003, 168–170 figs. 53–59 no. 11; Tietze – Abd el-Maksoud 2004, 46 f. no. 18.



10

Fig. 10: Detail of the kilt



11

Fig. 11: Right side of the throne, decorated with a pattern of feathers

inscription seems surprising, but may be intentional, indicating that it was inserted into a base, providing the deity's identity and perhaps the name of the ruling king.

Who Was the Depicted Deity?

⁹ The falcon head is generally associated with sky and solar deities. The statue is said to have been found at el-Marg, and the proximity to Heliopolis suggests the identification with a form of the sun god. Remains of a scarab are still visible on top of the headdress (Fig. 12), a clear reference to the God Khepri¹⁶. To our knowledge, a falcon head and a scarab are not commonly associated in a single figure. This statue would, therefore, adopt a rather unique iconography in that the falcon head would, at first glimpse, indicate the God Ra-Horakhty. Khepri is well-attested for sculpture-in-the-round in the shape of monumental scarabs¹⁷ but is much less frequently depicted in a human-bodied appearance. A limestone life-size head and torso from the Middle Kingdom in the Egyptian Museum Cairo, JE 30168/CG 38103, is the first of this kind that we know of¹⁸. The deity in this case holds the shape of a seated male with a human

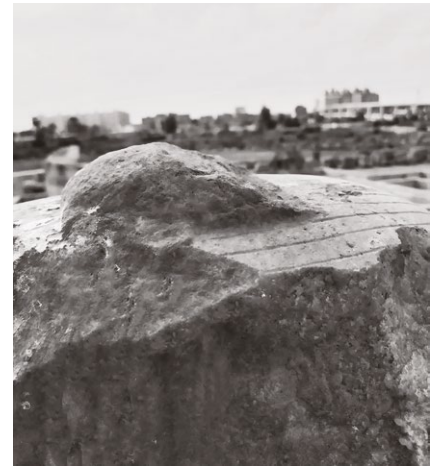
¹⁶ The three-dimensional depiction of a scarab on top of the head appears occasionally also on royal statues from the Ramesside Period onwards. Several Ramesside statues show the king adorned with this element on top of the head (see Minas-Nerpel 2006, 397–405; Burger Robin 2019, 45–49. 63–65; Sourouzian 2019, 624 f.). A few statues depicting Hellenistic rulers also show the beetle carved in relief on top of the *nemes* (see Stanwick 2002, 57. 108. 172 fig. 58; Minas-Nerpel 2006, 405–408 figs. 170. 173. 411 fig. 174). It is perhaps going too far to interpret the presence of this element as an assimilation between the king and the God Khepri. Rather than statues depicting the king in the form of the God X, as has been previously suggested, we should rather see this ornament simply as a sign of eternal regeneration by including the individual in the early phase of the sun. Statues of private individuals during the Libyan Period can also display a scarab on top of the wig (see Brandl 2008, 328–330).

¹⁷ Minas-Nerpel 2006, 350–360 figs. 132–141.

¹⁸ Minas-Nerpel 2006, 412 f. fig. 175. Until now it has been dated to the 18th Dynasty (Daressy 1905/1906, 35; Vandier 1958, 623; pl. 122; PM VIII, 1045 no. 802-024-030), but its style seems to us closer to those of the late 12th Dynasty, Connor 2020, 44; pl. 24, 2.5.2 i. Characteristic of the reign of Amenemhat III onwards are the elongated proportions of the torso, the slender waist, broad shoulders, and the dry musculature. The pectoral muscles are emphasised and underlined by a clear sinuous depression, similar to the monumental statues of King Amenemhat III. The large spread ears, wide face, almond-shaped eyes, and wide mouth with deeply

face, a long beard, and a tripartite wig topped by a massive scarab. The same iconography of an anthropomorphic figure with its head surmounted by a beetle is also found on reliefs, although a solar disc is at least as frequent¹⁹. Khepri may also be depicted in the form of a falcon-headed deity without a scarab. This is indicated in vignette 17 in the tomb of Sennedjem (TT 1) at Deir el-Medina, where the sun god travels on the solar boat under this very shape. The inscription refers to all his names: Ra-Horakhty-Atum, Lord of the two lands and Heliopolis, Khepri-Who-is-in-His-Barque²⁰. Although (or since) the text on the painted wall does not specify which aspect of the sun the figure depicts, it may apply to all at the same time.

¹⁰ In the case of the el-Marg statue, it seems that we are dealing with a unique iconographic association of a beetle and a hawk. These two solar animal forms and the vicinity of the site of Heliopolis lead us to suggest that this statue combines, in a single figure, different aspects of the same deity, therefore evoking two of the three phases of the sun god rather than only one specifically.



12

Fig. 12: Scarab sculpted on top of the head of el-Marg's falcon deity

Dating the Statue

¹¹ The deity wears a long tripartite wig whose strands are indicated by simple parallel incisions. Between the sides of the wig is a finely sculpted collar in relief, consisting of five rows. The first from the top row consists of tubular beads, the second of lotus flowers alternately open and closed, the third of eight-petalled rosettes, the fourth of lily flowers alternately open and closed, and the fifth consists of a row of droplet-shaped pendants (Fig. 13).

¹² To our knowledge, this collar does not find any close parallel in stone statuary, but several in the decoration of stone sarcophagi, wooden coffins, and cartonnage funerary masks from the Late Period to the Roman era²¹. Other close parallels in relief are visible on the walls of Ptolemaic temples, such as Dendera. Among the earliest examples, we may mention sarcophagi from the 26th Dynasty²². They continued to be used during the Ptolemaic Period²³ and still appear on gilded cartonnage masks during the

carved and slightly raised corners are also elements that bring us close to the anthropomorphic divine statues of the end of the Middle Kingdom. See also the statues in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden, F 1934/2.89, the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, AIN 1415, the EMC, JE 36359, and in the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva, Eg. 04. The limestone material, style, and life-size divine statue typology bring us particularly close to the repertoire discovered at Hawara.

¹⁹ Minas-Nerpel 2006, 367. 375–377. 384. 413 figs. 142–145. 148.

²⁰ Minas-Nerpel 2006, 118 fig. 9.

²¹ For descriptions of these collars consisting of beads of different shapes in imitation of leaves, buds, lilies, and lotus flowers, see Buhl 1959, 154–160. Perhaps, as Marie-Louise Buhl suggests, this motif imitated or was a reminder of actual flower garlands that were placed on mummies and divine figures. One of the closest comparisons is a collar fragment made of silver and stone inlays, perhaps originally from a coffin acquired by the Musée du Louvre, Paris in 1953 (E 25379). The absence of archaeological context or inscriptions deprives us of a precise dating. See Aldred et al. 1980, 193 fig. 179; Seipel 2001, 128 f. no. 154. See also the metal necklaces in the Louvre, E 25379 (<<https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010009421>> [20.03.2023]) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 49.121.1 (<<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/547900>> [20.03.2023]).

²² For example, the greywacke sarcophagi of Ahmose (Leiden, 149; cf. Buhl 1959, 23 f. no. A, 5 fig. 3; comparison for the necklace: a vase with the name of Amasis, EMC, CG 3767, from Mit Rahina; von Bissing 1902, 51), Wahibreemakhet (Leiden, 1383; cf. Buhl 1959, 31–33 no. C a, 4 fig. 7; <<https://www.rmo.nl/collectie/collectiezoeker/collectiestuk/?object=828>> [13.09.2023]), and General Kheperra from Giza from the reign of Amasis (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MFA 30.834b; cf. Buhl 1959, 24 no. B a, 1 fig. 4; <<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/147319>> [13.09.2023]).

²³ For example, the limestone sarcophagi of Shepmin from Akhmim (Copenhagen, AIN 923; cf. Buhl 1959, 52 f. no. E a, 16 fig. 20; Jørgensen 2001, 270 f. no. 14), of Wesir-pa-wer (British Museum, London, EA 1343; cf. Buhl 1959, 82–84 no. E b, 20 fig. 45; <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA1343> [20.03.2023]), and of Nesheru (EMC, CG 6291; Buhl 1959, 111 f. no. F b, 1 fig. 65).

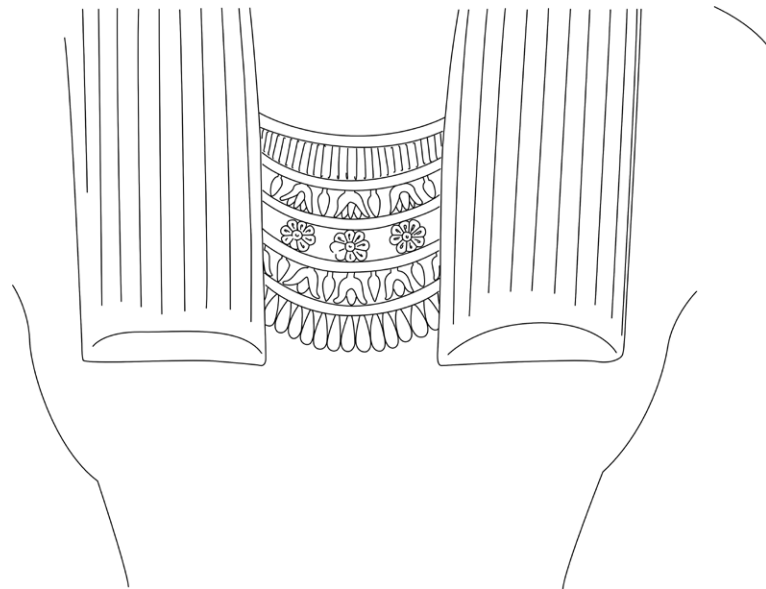


Fig. 13: Collar of the falcon-deity from el-Marg

13

Roman Period. Fortunately, the stylistic treatment and body proportions of the statue allow us to further refine the dating. In his account, Prince Hassan Hassan mentions this statue as depicting a »seated female pharaonic figure«. This impression was naturally encouraged by the emphasis on the roundness of the chest area. However, this is clearly a male deity, as indicated by the type of kilt, as well as the naked torso with rounded pectoral muscles. The accentuated emphasis of the chest is very much in keeping with the preferences and style of the period. The body proportions are indeed characteristic of the end of the Late and Ptolemaic Periods, with a fleshy, soft, and almost plump modelling of the chest and belly, contrasting with the trim silhouette provided by the narrow waist (Fig. 14)²⁴. The pinkish beige variety of quartzite from which the statue was carved is itself particularly frequent among the material found in Heliopolis, dating from the Late Period²⁵.

13 In spite of a large and by now well-documented corpus of often fragmentary sculptures from the Late and Ptolemaic Periods, a general lack of inscriptions and corresponding heads makes it hard to assign dates to objects. The works of Karol Myśliwiec, Bernard V. Bothmer, Jack A. Josephson, Olivier Perdu, Marsha Hill, and Paul E. Stanwick²⁶ have allowed great progress in our knowledge of the statuary of the second half of the 1st millennium B.C., but accurately and precisely dating a body or a face within that timeframe often remains problematic.

14 Large seated statues in quartzite are unfortunately lacking in the known repertoire of the 1st millennium B.C., depriving us of close comparisons for the el-Marg falcon deity. Keeping such problematic issues in mind, the following considerations remain subject to revision in the light of future studies on the art of the second half

24 One of the best descriptions of a similar deity's body treatment is provided by Marsha Hill and Deborah Schorsch in a recent article on another hawk-headed statue, this one in solid silver, now in the Miho Museum in Japan, which they date to the 4th century B.C., a dating that we also propose for the el-Marg quartzite statue; see Hill – Schorsch 2021, 172 f.

25 See notably the heads now in the Museo Egizio, Turin, S. 2699, 2696+2701, 2702, 1/2, or the colossus of Psametik I found in 2017 (Ashmawy Ali et al. 2019, 34–39). See also the sphinx of Psametik II now in Alexandria (Kom el-Dikka, 101), dedicated to Atum, Lord of Heliopolis, and the pair of sphinxes of Apries (Alexandria, Kom el-Shuqafa, 90 and 91), dedicated to the Souls of Heliopolis, Connor 2021, 81 f. fig. 6, 4. 5. The architectural fragments found on the archaeological site of Heliopolis during the recent campaigns of excavations also confirm the use of such a variety of beige quartzite from the 26th Dynasty onwards.

26 See notably Bothmer et al. 1960; Myśliwiec 1988; Josephson 1997; Hill 2004; Perdu 2012; and, for sculpture of the Ptolemaic Period, Stanwick 2002.

of the 1st millennium B.C. The proportions of the el-Marg falcon-headed deity's body exclude it from being dated to the 26th Dynasty. This is because statues of that time show a more slender and elongated body, a particularly unnatural rendering of the lower torso and abdomen, and a narrow waist contrasting with particularly broad shoulders. The pectoral muscles are usually placed high and are firm, but discreet. By contrast, the el-Marg statue is much fleshier, curvier, with a particular emphasis on the roundness of the pectoral muscles.

15 If we consider the three centuries covered by the following dynasties, no statue, to our knowledge, shows such particularly prominent modelling of the pectoral muscles as seen on the el-Marg deity. None of the statues of Nectanebo I display such accentuated shapes, even though the statues of the 29th and 30th Dynasties do show more flesh suppleness around the navel and on the pectoral muscles than during the 26th Dynasty²⁷. The general stylistic development seems to go towards a growing interest in a fleshy depiction of the human body.

16 The undulating musculature and fleshy appearance of the el-Marg statue, as well as the meticulous care for details and polishing, are mostly reminiscent of features and forms of Ptolemaic Period statues and bas-reliefs, particularly of the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C. The sculptures that can be dated to the first two Ptolemies still closely follow the style of Nectanebo I's reign²⁸, to such an extent that it is difficult to precisely date a statue, either royal or private, between the 30th Dynasty and Ptolemy II. As observed by Stanwick, it is only by the 2nd century B.C. and the ›boy-kings‹ Ptolemy V and VI that style clearly evolves towards new shapes, fleshier and more rounded than previously seen. One of the closest examples of sculpture-in-the-round is the torso now in The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1948.141 (Fig. 16), depicting Amenpayom, a great army general from the district of Mendes²⁹. In royal statuary, a few standing statues attributed to Ptolemy VIII, or more largely 2nd century B.C., also show this careful depiction of body musculature and fleshiness³⁰.

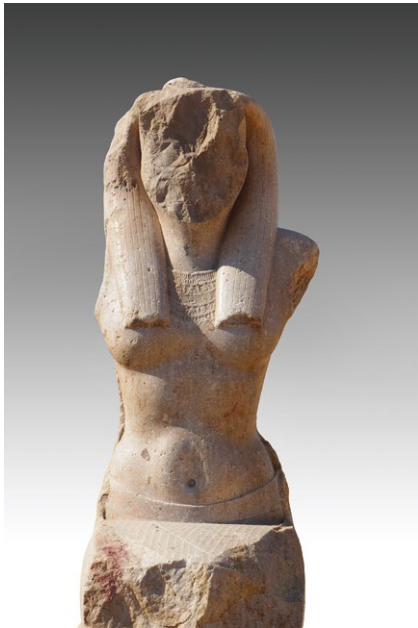
17 If the dating that we propose for the statue belonging to the second half of the Ptolemaic Period is correct, the el-Marg statue of a falcon-headed deity would be the latest of its type found in the vicinity of Heliopolis. Whatever its precise date, it would also be a remarkable example of a stone sculpture representing a god with such quality and at such an unusually large size. Self-standing monumental hard stone depictions

27 See, for example, the body of the statue of King Nepherites found in Buto, now in the Tanta Museum (Fig. 15 a), and the ones of Nectanebo I in the Louvre, E 25492 (<<https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010004098>> [24.03.2023]), in the Musée Rodin, Paris, Co. 1420 (cf. Meffre 2017/2018, 237–239), in the Musei Vaticani, Rome, 22671, and in the Sharm el-Sheikh Museum, formerly EMC, JE 87298 (cf. Stanwick 2002, 216 fig. 201 a). Compare also the torso of a high official from Saft el-Henna who served Nectanebo I in the MMA, 2002.248 (Fig. 15 b), and Bothmer et al. 1960, 94; pl. 72, 75. We can also mention the ›Dattari Torso‹ in the Brooklyn Museum, New York, 52.89: despite being unprovenanced and without a royal name in its inscriptions, Bothmer proposed to date it to the reign of Nectanebo I according to epigraphic and stylistic criteria (Bothmer et al. 1960, 100; pl. 76, 80). In his note on this piece, no one better expresses the mixture of roundness and muscularity that characterises the art of the 4th century B.C.: »More than any other statue of its size, this sculpture has tension and strength, expressed in superbly modelled muscle and flesh. [...] the vigour of the male body is captured in forms of almost sensuous appeal.«

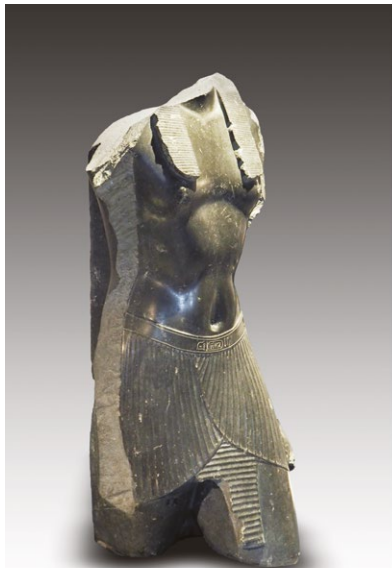
28 See comment of Stanwick 2002, 66–69. Despite differences in the rendering of faces, for example, among the sphinxes of Saqqara's Serapeum, it is clear that royal depictions of the early Ptolemies continuously imitate those of the last Egyptian rulers. The Vatican statue of Ptolemy II (22682), cf. Stanwick 2002, 46. 55 f. 66 f. 98. 157 figs. 2. 3, A3, is a clear example of 29th–30th Dynasty imitation models.

29 See comment in Bothmer et al. 1960, 122–125 no. 97; pl. 91. See also comments and bibliography on the museum website page: <<https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1948.141>> (22.01.2023). See also the comment of Zivie-Coche 2004, 183–186, on the statue of (Pa)merih in the EMC, CG 687, probably also from the second half of the Ptolemaic Period, both for stylistic reasons and because the titles of the dignitary are typical of that period.

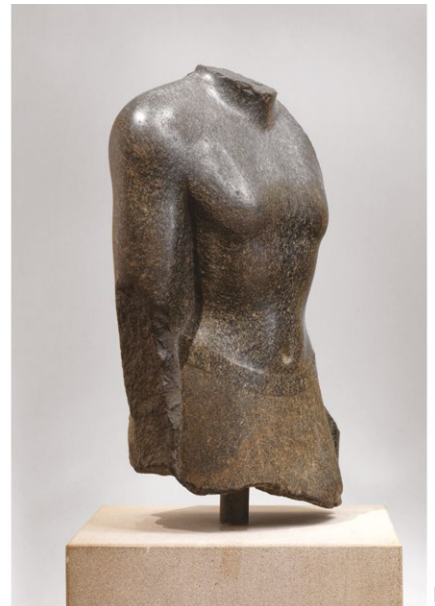
30 Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam, 7780 (Stanwick 2002, 114. 184 no. C12 figs. 98. 99); Alexandria, Kom el-Dikka, 1001+1999, 3200, found in the harbour near the Pharos lighthouse, today in front of Bibliotheca Alexandrina (Stanwick 2002, 17. 73 f. 115 f. 189 no. C22 figs. 111. 112); BM, EA 27390 (Stanwick 2002, 70. 110 f. 175 no. B23 fig. 70).



14



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b



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Fig. 14: El-Marg falcon-headed deity

Fig. 15: a) Nephertites, Greywacke, H. 100 cm (Tanta Museum); b) torso of an official from Saft el-Henna who served Nectanebo I (MMA, 2002.248)

Fig. 16: General Amenpayom, H. 96.4 cm (Cleveland, 1948.141)

of anthropomorphic deities are not so commonly attested in the repertoire of Egyptian statuary, apart from the extraordinary production of Amenhotep III. However, they do appear in the corpus of the Ptolemaic Period. In addition to the large granodiorite falcons at Edfu, the most impressive case comes from the submarine excavations of Heraklion, which brought to light a colossal statue of Hapy (or a deity with similar iconography)³¹. We can also include several life-size or slightly smaller examples: a standing god with tripartite wig in Turin, Cat. 1384³², the head of a quite similar god wearing a sun disc above the tripartite wig in the Louvre, E 3463³³, and an under-life size seated statue of Atum, Lord of Heliopolis and Kher-Aha, that was found in Herculaneum in 1959, but likely came from the Heliopolitan region (probably Kher-Aha)³⁴.

Post-Nectanebo I Royal Activity in the Heliopolitan Region

18 The dating of the large statue of a solar deity from el-Marg contrasts with the image that we have of the end of ›life‹ of ancient Heliopolis itself.

31 Granite, H. 540 cm; cf. Goddio 2006, 94–96 no. 108.

32 Granodiorite, preserved H. 103 cm. See museum website page: <https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/it-IT/material/Cat_1384/?description=statua&inventoryNumber=&title=&cgt=&yearFrom=&yearTo=&materials=9cd e1ae08db2419ab0bfd37cc6e89392&provenance=&acquisition=&epoch=&dynasty=&pharaoh=>> (23.01.2023). This statue depicts a deity rather than a king, as indicated by several elements (the tripartite wig, the beard with curved extremity, the *ankh* held in the right hand, and the ›divine loincloth‹ with two finely pleated panels folded over a smooth underskirt at the front). The break is precisely on the upper part of the wig, on a spot that should not be particularly fragile if the head had not been topped with a protruding element. The similarity of this statue with the Louvre head E 3463 may suggest a sun disc.

33 Granodiorite, preserved H. (bust) 48 cm. See museum website page: <<https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010015391>> (23.01.2023).

34 Soprintendenza Speciale per i beni archeologici di Napoli e Pompei, 77449; H. 90 cm; see Botti 1963, 1–4; Capriotti Vittozzi 2008, 95–114; Poole 2016, 133 no. 103. We follow the dating proposed by Giuseppina Capriotti Vittozzi for the end of the 4th or 3rd century B.C. The fineness and precision of the features allow a comparison with statuary of the highest quality. As she observes, elements characteristic of this period include the almond-shaped eyes prolonged by a fine line of make-up, the nose whose root is placed between the eyebrows (only superficially sculpted), the very small mouth with raised corners marked by two dimples, and a well-defined philtrum.

An apparent climate of decline can be discerned from the material that has been yielded to us either in collections or directly from the recent excavation campaigns. Although the pottery found on the archaeological site of Matariya attests to human activity throughout the Ptolemaic Period, Heliopolis seems to have known a quite severe economic decline after this reign, and no witnesses to royal activity after Nectanebo I³⁵. The only exceptions might be the pair of statues of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II, found in Rome in the 18th century, now in the Vatican, 22681 and 22682, for which a Heliopolitan origin has been proposed³⁶. This pair of statues could be the last monuments erected by a Ptolemy in a slowly-dying temple-city, but the inscriptions on the statues invoking Ra-Horakhty and Atum do not necessarily designate Heliopolis as a provenance, since the temple is not mentioned. They could also have been sculpted for another place where Atum and Ra-Horakhty were also worshipped³⁷. The mention of the sacred bull Mnevis suggests that they were erected in the Heliopolitan region, perhaps in the still-functioning sanctuary of the sacred bull at Arab el-Tawila.

19 The decline of Heliopolis, which led in three centuries to the desolate landscape described by Strabo³⁸, is intriguing considering that Heliopolis remained constantly mentioned as a main reference for Egyptian religion, both inside and outside of Egypt. It is, therefore, appropriate to question the designation of Heliopolis at that time. Had the name of the ancient temple-city become a *topos* rather than an active cultic place?

20 It is also possible that the lack of funding or royal interest in the main temple in Matariya did not concern all related sanctuaries in the surrounding region³⁹. As suggested by Jean Yoyotte in 1954, the opulence of Heliopolis (and its inhabitants) declined to the benefit of minor, though perhaps wealthier and more accessible sanctuaries such as Kher-Aha and Per-Hapy⁴⁰. Located on the east bank area south of Heliopolis, they seem to have been closely linked to Heliopolis as early as the Old Kingdom but are better attested from the New Kingdom onward. From the Late Period, we have a great deal of documentation informing us about important religious festivals that linked Kher-Aha and Per-Hapy to Heliopolis⁴¹. A naophorous statue of Merenptah and a sphinx of Amasis excavated at Athar el-Nabi, as well as several architectural blocks, speak in favour of placing the location of Kher-Aha near Old Cairo, Babylon, and Fustat, i. e., 18 km south of Matariya⁴². Several sources (unfortunately not found in

35 Despite the large number of finds during the last campaigns of the Egyptian-German mission on the archaeological site of Matariya, no monumental inscriptions, no reliefs, and no statues were found. For an overview of the goals and results of the recent excavations of the Egyptian-German mission in Heliopolis, see Raue 2020 (with bibliography); Ashmawy Ali et al. in preparation; Ashmawy Ali – Raue 2024. See also discussion in Yoyotte 1954, 113–115; el-Banna 2014, 14–23; as well as the comments in Ashmawy Ali et al. in preparation.

36 Botti – Romanelli 1951, 22–25. 137 nos. 31. 32; pls. 22. 23; Stanwick 2002, 46. 56. 98 f. nos. A3. A4 figs. 2–5.

37 Arnold 1999, 160. 342 fn. 72.

38 Str. 17, 1.27. See translation by Hans C. Hamilton and William Falconer: The Perseus Digital Library, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0239%3Abook%3D17%3Achapter%3D1%3Asection%3D27>> (13.09.2023).

39 Among the satellite sanctuaries associated with Heliopolis, we can mention that of »Hathor of the red mountain«, which is probably located in the area of Mansheyat el-Sadr/Medinet Nasr, around 7 km south of Matariya and at the foot of Gebel Ahmar, where a stela of Ramesses II and a statue of Tawosret were found (Raue 1999, 30). The Mnevis sanctuary in Arab el-Tawila is also attested as fully operating until the time of Caracalla (Raue 2020, 339).

40 Yoyotte 1954, 114 f. The author even proposes that the elites of Heliopolis, having undergone the economic measures taken during the Persian Period, may have seen their wealth and prestige profoundly suffer and their importance diminish, while that of the priestly aristocracy of the neighbouring Kher-Aha grew. See also a comment of Quirke 2001, 113 f.

41 See notably the long inscription on the statue of the vizier Psametk-seneb, who probably lived during the 30th Dynasty (EMC, JE 29877/CG 682), see el-Sayed 1982, 187–204; Perdu 2006, 41–52.

42 Hamza 1937, 233–242; pls. 3. 4. See also the discussion in Sheehan 2015, 30 f.

their original context) and textual evidence (Books of the Dead, stelae and inscriptions on statues), evoke a cult of Atum, of the Ennead, and of Osiris in Kher-Aha from the New Kingdom to the Ptolemaic Period⁴³. One of the latest monuments that most likely originated from this satellite sanctuary is the finely carved limestone statue of Atum that was found in Herculaneum. It is stylistically datable to the first half of the Ptolemaic Period, i. e., a period for which no statues, stelae, blocks, or monuments of any kind are known in Heliopolis itself.

21 Could a case be made for the rise of a similar satellite sanctuary to the north of the ancient and declining mother institution of Heliopolis on the way to Tell el-Yahudiya? The statue of the falcon god allegedly found in el-Marg and dated to the mid-Ptolemaic Period, therefore dating precisely to the period of decadence of Heliopolis, would support it. This has to remain a hypothesis as long as surveys are not carried out in this sector of Cairo (notably in the garden surrounding the palace of Princess Nimet Mokhtar, still free of buildings). In this regard, it should also be mentioned that the area of el-Marg has occasionally yielded other monuments. Unfortunately, they were not accompanied by documentation concerning the conditions and the precise place of their discovery, but the local inspectorate placed them in deposit in the princess's garden during the decades that followed its confiscation. Among these was a quartzite block⁴⁴, probably a fragment of an architrave, inscribed on one side for Amenhotep III⁴⁵ and on the adjacent one for Ramesses II or one of his successors (Fig. 17)⁴⁶.

22 The other piece also allegedly found in el-Marg, according to the register book of the el-Qalyubiya Restoration Department, is the lower part of a life-size seated female statue, broken at waist and ankles (Fig. 18)⁴⁷. The figure wears a long undecorated sheath dress. In her left hand, she holds an *ankh*-sign, indicating that it is very likely a depiction of a deity. Made of quartzite, the statue is of high quality, with elegant proportions, and her knees well-modelled and visible through the dress. The sides and back of the throne display a finely incised motif of feathers bordered by block border, similar to the ornamentation of the throne of the falcon deity, but with the addition of a *smꜣ-tꜣ.wy*. The surface of the sculpture is characterised by a high-quality finish and a fine polishing (although not as fine as the falcon figure, which looks almost glassy in some areas). The absence of the torso and of the lower part of the statue deprives us of a potential inscription and of stylistic elements that would aid with dating the piece. The low backrest of the throne is covered with a fabric or a schematic cushion that partially descends at the rear part of the seat, and the back pillar protrudes in high relief. These features are regular for seated divine or kingly statues from the New Kingdom onward⁴⁸ and do not provide any dating criterion for the following periods. The feathered motif of the throne is also attested from the New Kingdom onward and becomes particularly widely used during the Late and Ptolemaic Periods. It is not associated with any particular deity and is not a conclusive dating criterion.

43 Yoyotte 1954, 84 f. 91, 93 f. 99, and particularly 110–115; Cesaretti 1987, 31–45, so far is the most comprehensive overview of sources on Kher-Aha and its pantheon; el-Banna 1989, 125 f.; Capriotti Vittozzi 2008, 97–101.

44 Also moved from the garden of el-Marg to the Open-Air Museum of Tell Basta in 2001, inv. no. 15 (H. 57.5 cm, W. 99 cm, D. 55 cm).

45 *Sꜣ Rꜥ n h.t-ꜣ (ꜥmn-[htp...]) [...]*. The palaeography clearly points to the reign of Amenhotep III, and the surface within the cartouche is slightly concave, as a result of the reinscription of Amun's name after the reign of Akhenaten.

46 *Nb tꜣ.wy (W[sr-Mꜣꜥ.t]-Rꜥ) [...]*.

47 Moved from the garden of el-Marg to the Open-Air Museum of Tell Basta in 2001, inv. no. 10 (H. 75 cm, W. 40 cm, D. 80 cm). Cf. Loth 2003, 171 f. no. 12; Tietze – Abd el-Maksoud 2004, 45 no. 12.

48 Evers 1929, 51 § 357.



17

Fig. 17: Block (fragment of a lintel?) with two inscribed adjacent sides

23 In 1999, Dietrich Raue suggested that the finds at el-Marg could be *spolia* from Heliopolis⁴⁹. This is possible for the architectural blocks, which can be reused in new constructions, but a reuse is more difficult to conceive for the large (and heavy) quartzite statue of the falcon-headed deity, which has clearly been disfigured, but shows no trace of recutting into blocks or millstone. Let us hope that the coming few years will allow archaeologists to explore the still unbuilt areas of the el-Marg district, where the ground may still contain traces of the religious landscape that surrounded ancient Heliopolis, and provide further answers to the question of the location and possible function of this large deity statue.

49 Concerning findings in el-Marg, see also Raue 1999, 30 fn. 8; 31. 37. 319.



Fig. 18: Lower part of a statue of a female deity

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A Falcon God from the Garden of Princess Nimet Mokhtar at el-Marg

Aiman Ashmawy Ali – Simon Connor

يتناول هذا المقال تمثالاً ضخماً لمعبود تم نقله مع قطع أثرية أخرى في عام 2001 من حديقة الأميرة نعمت مختار بالمرج إلى متحف تل بسطة المفتوح في مدينة الزقازيق. يُرجح أن هذا التمثال قد عُثر عليه في حديقة قصر المرج، الذي يقع على بعد 4 كم شمال شرق مدينة هليوبوليس القديمة. كانت هذه الملكية تابعة لشقيقة الملك فؤاد الأول، وكان هذا التمثال جزءاً من مجموعتها الخاصة حتى تمت مصادرة ممتلكاتها في عام 1954. يجسد التمثال معبوداً ذكراً جالساً برأس صقر، مرتدياً جعراً على شعره المستعار. تُشير سمات التمثال الفنية وأبعاده الدائرية إلى أنه يعود إلى العصر البطلمي. قد يكون هذا التمثال هو الشاهد الوحيد على الأنشطة الأثرية في منطقة هليوبوليس القديمة بعد عدة عقود من حكم الملك نختنبو الأول.

الكلمات المفتاحية

هليوبوليس، المرج، خر-عحا، العصر البطلمي، جعران

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