

A FRAGMENT OF A BLOCK OF SHEPENUPET II

Mansour El-Noubi^{*}

This fragment is a rectangular sandstone block measuring 67.5 cm in height and 42 cm in width with incised border-line. Its provenance is unfortunately unknown. The block is presently kept in Luxor magazine and was in the private collection of Albert Tadros and comes probably from Medinet Habu¹ or Karnak.

The inscribed surface is relatively well preserved, except for the left-hand corner of the lower part, but any colour that might have been there is lost. The technique is sunk relief with incised hieroglyphs. The upper part of the block (about one third of its height) is broken and has been, seemingly recently, repaired.

The right part of a scene shows a walking figure of the Nile god² presenting two hes-vases, accompanied by two lotus flowers, on an offering table which is in the form of the htp-sign (?). He also holds a w3s-sceptre, situated in the centre. Two nh-signs and a papyrus blossom hang down³.

^{*}Lecturer at the Faculty of Arts, Sohag, Dept. Of Egyptology, South Valley University. The author is very grateful to Dr Mohammed El-Soghaier, General Director of Upper Egypt Antiquities, Luxor, for permission to publish this fragment.

¹G. Daressy, Notice explicative des ruines de Médinet Habou. Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte. Le Caire 1897, 38-42; PM 175-177.

² For a similar although not identical scene, see J. Leclant, Recherches sur les monuments thébains de la XXV^e dynastie dite Éthiopienne. IFAO, Bibliothèque d'étude, T.XXXVI. Le Caire 1965, Pl. LXXIV/B.

³ In the Old Kingdom, more secular offering bearers carry a wide variety of material gifts, while in royal mortuary temples personifications of royal estates and fecundity

In one column on the left, in front of the fecundity figure an inscription is preserved:

Dd mdw: ínt⁴... df3w⁵ nb ímy.
Šp-n-wp(t).⁶

"Speech: Bringing of all the respective nourishments."
Shepenupet.

And finally, the lower register of the block consists of a frieze with alternating w3s and ^enh-signs standing on nb-signs, monogram "All dominion and life".

God's Wife of Amun, the Kushite princess Shepenupet II, daughter of Piye (prenomen, Mistress of Beauty, is Mut the Eye of Re^c), functioned during the reigns of Shebitku, Taharqa and Tantamani⁷. We know of her from a number of remains of monuments

figures bring symbolic ones. In the New Kingdom and later the relationship between the types and the formulae is more complex; see the summary in: J. Baines, *Fecundity Figures. Egyptian Personification and the Iconology of a Genre*. Aris & Phillips Publishers, Warminster, Wilshire 1985, 131-134.

⁴ B. Gunn, 26, Pl. LXIV/1, in: R. Engelbach, *Harageh*. London 1923.

⁵ According to J. Leclant and J. Yoytte, *Nouveaux documents relatifs à l'an VI de Taharka*, *Kémi* 10, 1949, 28-42, df3 means the function of fecundity figure; R. Hannig, *Die Sprache der Pharaonen. Großes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch (2 800-950 v. Ch.)* Mainz 1995, 1006.

⁶ See: J. von Beckerath, *Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen*, *Münchener Ägyptologische Studien*. Heft 20. Deutscher Kunstverlag München-Berlin 1984, 109, 163, 272; C.E. Sander-Hansen, *Das Gottesweib des Amun*. København, Ejnar Munksgaard 1940, 10; K.A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100-650 BC)*. Second edition with supplement. Aris & Phillips LTD. Warminster 1986, 386-390, 480; LÄ II, 792-812.

⁷ Full genealogy of the 25th dynasty in: K.A. Kitchen, *op. cit.*, 478; N. Grimal, *Histoire de l'Égypte ancienne*. Fayard, 1988, 404, Fig. 158; A. Erman, *Zu den Legrain'schen*

mostly from Medinet Habu in Western Thebes⁸. Across the Nile at Karnak she together with her brother Taharqa, added to the long and rich series of the Osiris-chapels⁹.

Now, we can make, from the point of view of its iconographic form, only very a brief analysis of the scene on the block of Shepenupet II which represents a Nile god as an "offering bearer"¹⁰.

J. Baines, in his most recent study¹¹ of the subject of Egyptian religious personifications, uses the term "fecundity figures" for Nile gods. They are very well attested from the 5th dynasty until late antiquity and are found mostly on temple reliefs, tombs, and stelae. Curiously, more attention was in general given to the symbolic gifts which the fecundity figures carry, than to their form. They have usually a human face with a long false beard and wear a divine wig which appears in different forms at different periods. J. Baines divided them according to the wigs in to 6 main types¹². Our figure is similar, but not strictly identical with type 1, where the wig

Inscripfen. ZÄS 35, 1897, 29; A. Leahy, *The Adoption of Ankhnesneferibre at Karnak*, JEA 82, 1996, 162-163, n.64.

⁸ U. Hölscher, *The Architectural Survey 1929/30. Medinet Habu Reports*. Chicago 1931; J. Leclant, op. cit., Pl. LXXIII, I,XXXIV; D. Eigner, *Die monumentalen Grabbauten der Spätzeit in der thebanischen Nekropole*. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Wien 1984, 100.

⁹ J. Leclant, op. cit., Pl.LX/A-C, Pl. LXII, Pl. LXII/28, A,4, Pl. LXXIII/C, Pl. LXXIV.

¹⁰ A number of bearers have general personification form. The sub-category of fecundity figures has a distinctive form, and in respect to the function many, of the generalizations made about these figures could probably be extended to offering bearers in temples as a whole; the *sm3-t3wj* function falls outside the strict category of offering bearers; for further details see J. Baines, op. cit., 7-18, passim.

¹¹ J. Baines, op. cit., 115-116.

¹² J. Baines, *ibid.*, Fig. 50, with excellent discussion on pages 85-93.

falls down the back of the figure (the wig of our fecundity figure is not so impressive) and instead of two arms only one is shown. This type is very rare in the iconography of later periods, and has connotations of archaism.¹³ The figure wears only a simple necklace¹⁴, his heavy stomach spills over his belt in three folds. The usually pendulous breasts are hardly visible.

In general, the material available for the study of fecundity figures is very fragmentary. Despite the wide variety of contexts in which they occur, our knowledge of their functions, for example, are very limited. The most frequent seems to be the bringing of offerings, which is also our case¹⁵.

In spite of the brevity of the accompanying formula and relative simplicity of the fecundity figure with the offering table, we can date the block to the 25th dynasty and place it probably to Medinet Habu¹⁶, where it presumably formed part of the original temple decoration for one of the chapels of the divine adoratrices.

¹³ L. Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Sa3hu-Re*^c. *Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft in Abusir 1902-1908*, Leipzig 1913, southern entrance, south side, Pl. 29, north side Pl. 30.

¹⁴ J. Baines, *op. cit.*, 95; the necklaces or any particular form of it, has no specific meaning for fecundity figures.

¹⁵ Other functions: *sm3-t3wj*, libation, presentation of offerings, and protection; for further information see J. Baines, *op. cit.*, 209-329.

¹⁶ U. Hölscher, *The Excavation of Medinet Habu*-Volume V, 17-33. The University of Chicago. Oriental Institute Publications. Chicago, Illinois 1934; W. el-Sadeek, *Twenty-Sixth Dynasty Necropolis at Gizeh. Beiträge zur Ägyptologie*, Band 5. Wien 1984, 180-182.

