



### 2.36 Human-headed heart amulet

Hard dark stone, glass inlay and traces of gold foil.  
New Kingdom, Dynasty 19, c. 1307–1196 BC.  
H. 5.7 cm, W. 3.8 cm, D. 2.1 cm.

Heart amulets<sup>1</sup> are among the most important funerary amulets of the ancient Egyptians, for whom the heart was the seat of intelligence, knowledge and memory. During the judgment of the dead which the deceased had to go through before he could enter the realm of Osiris, his heart was weighed in the balance against the symbol of world order (Ma'at). Spell 30 B from the Book of the Dead urged the heart not to stand up as a witness against its owner during this trial, and this spell was often written on a heart scarab or on a heart-shaped amulet and placed on the chest of the mummy.

The present heart amulet belongs to a type which is characterized by having a human head. The exclusive bond between the heart and its owner is emphasized by giving the heart the latter's face. Human-headed heart scarabs are attested as early as the late Middle Kingdom, but heart-shaped amulets with a human head do not appear before the end of the 18th Dynasty, and most examples appear to be Ramesside. Many of these have a heron depicted on the front. This is the Egyptian *benu* bird, a creature associated with the sun god Re and his alter ego the creator god Atum, which in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian times became known as the phoenix. The word *benu* is related to the verb *weben*, "to rise", "shine", frequently used in connection with the sun god. In Egyptian mythology the *benu* bird represents continual rebirth and regeneration and is therefore an appropriate funerary symbol. Spells 83 and 84 of the Book of the Dead express the desire of the deceased to assume the form of a heron or a *benu* bird and thus to become identified with the sun god, and in the heart amulet spell 29 B he says: "I am the *benu*, the *ba* of Re". The human head on this amulet has a rather broad face with rounded cheeks. The eyes are indicated only by the eyeball and the upper eyelid. The eyebrows are incised and may originally have been inlaid. The head is covered with a typical Ramesside double-layered lappet wig concealing the ears. The strands of hair are indicated by curly lines on the top and back and by vertical rectangles on the lappets. The hair is secured by a horizontal band. Another band joins it in the centre at the back,

running over the top of the head and ending at the forehead in a triangle which is perhaps meant to represent a lotus flower. Between the lappets of the wig, part of the broad collar around the neck is visible. Traces of gold adhere to both the wig and the collar, suggesting that these parts, and perhaps the whole head, were once covered with gold leaf. Two holes about 8 mm deep are drilled into the back of the head. Presumably these were intended to secure a suspension loop, but the holes do not meet.

On the front of the oval heart itself is a representation of the *benu* bird. It was doubtless originally inlaid with variously coloured materials, but only the blue-green glass inlay of the bird's body remains. The reverse is inscribed with a single column of rather badly executed hieroglyphs giving the name of the owner: "The Osiris, the high priest Yupa, justified". The combination of this name and title is not known from other sources, but the name Yupa is rare and the owner of our heart amulet may well be identical with the famous High Steward of the Ramesseum Yupa, whose career spanned at least the period between Years 5 and 54 of Ramesses II<sup>2</sup> and who was buried in the necropolis of Memphis. High officials often received honorary priesthoods in some local cult at the end of their career as a kind of state pension.<sup>3</sup>

A heart amulet in the collection of the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden<sup>4</sup> bears a striking similarity to the present example, although the *benu* of the Leiden amulet is slightly more elaborate. It is made of the same material and has exactly the same wig, hair bands and suspension holes; its head too was once covered with gold leaf. There can be little doubt that both amulets came from the same workshop, presumably at Memphis.

JvD

<sup>1</sup> Cf. C.A.R. Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt* (London 1994), 72–73, Pl. 66.

<sup>2</sup> J. Ruffle and K.A. Kitchen, "The Family of Urhiya and Yupa, High Stewards of the Ramesseum", in *Glimpses of Ancient Egypt. Studies in Honour of H.W. Fairman* (Warminster 1979), 55–74.

<sup>3</sup> W. Helck, *Zur Verwaltung des Mittleren und Neuen Reiches* (Leiden 1958), 222–223.

<sup>4</sup> Inv. B. 326, see H.D. Schneider, *Life and Death under the Pharaohs* (Perth 1996), 144 No. 228. The date assigned to it there, c. 1000 BC, would seem to be too late.