

## 2.45 Fragment of a block statue

Granodiorite.

Dynasty 22, reign of Osorkon II, c. 924–909 BC.

H. 28 cm, W. 24 cm.

Block statues, also known as cubic statues, played an important role within the repertoire of sculpture for private individuals for nearly two millennia.<sup>1</sup> The type was never used by kings, and almost only by men, hardly ever by women. The basic form is that of a squatting man with his legs drawn up against his body and his arms crossed on his knees. It is a shape that is only known from the Ancient Egyptian culture. Originally the arms and legs were clearly recognizable, but as time progressed the form became increasingly abstract. The body then seems to be covered in cloth, with only the head, the lower arms and sometimes the feet carved separately.

The first examples date from the early Middle Kingdom, but during this period they are still quite rare. Unlike in later periods, Middle Kingdom block statues regularly come from tombs rather than temples. During the New Kingdom the number of block statues increased dramatically, and virtually all of them now come from temple sites, notably from Karnak, the great temple of Amun of Thebes. During the Ramesside Period the form became more variable again, with many block statues showing a squatting figure with more or less completely articulated limbs, but after the New Kingdom the abstract form returned and block statues were more popular than ever before. In the Late Period, the block statue, together with the naophorous statue, became the most frequently used form for having oneself represented in the great temples of the gods. The latest block statues date from the Ptolemaic Period. The symbolism of the block statue is still not very clear. The unarticulated form emphasizes the divine nature of the person depicted and texts on the earliest block statues appear to indicate that they depict the deceased at the moment of resurrection and creation on the primeval hill,<sup>2</sup> but this theme is not taken up by later texts. The symbols of regeneration which the owners of block statues often hold in their hands, however, are also linked with the wish to be reborn and live on after death. As a temple statue, the block statue expresses the owner's desire to participate in the daily temple cult and partake of the regular food offerings given to the gods of the temple. It also became an object of prestige, with inscriptions and depictions of cult scenes in relief expressing the high status of the owner.

The statue from which the present fragment stems must once have been magnificent, and it is unfortunate that nothing more than the proper right front corner appears to have survived. On the top, the carefully modelled left hand of the owner is still visible, but otherwise nothing of the human figure remains. Fragments of ritual scenes are carved in shallow sunk relief on the sides of the statue. One of the reasons why block statues became so popular in the time after the New Kingdom may have been that they offered plenty of space for inscriptions and representations in relief. In the Third Intermediate Period in particular, all sorts of statues were decorated with depictions of gods, often on the body of the owner, for example on his chest or on his dress. The relatively large surface of a block statue was ideal for such decoration. A completely preserved companion piece to the present statue, owned by the same man, is inscribed on the front and two sides with a long biographical inscription in thirteen lines and with shorter texts on the shoulders, the feet and the back pillar.<sup>3</sup> The present statue obviously concentrated on pictures rather than texts. A single line of text runs along the top edge of the statue, but otherwise the inscriptions on the surviving fragment are captions belonging to the illustrations.

The owner of this statue was a member of an important family of Theban priests which can be followed over the course of many generations starting in the 20th Dynasty.<sup>4</sup> The main source for this family is a statue in Cairo belonging to the son of the owner of our fragment, the Fourth Prophet of Amun Djeddjehutyefankh who was also known as Nakhtefmut, and the family is therefore often referred to as the “Nakhtefmut Family”. Our man belonged to the twelfth generation. His name is Djedkhonsefankh, son of Nesperennub, and he was married to a granddaughter of Shoshenk I, the first ruler of the 22nd Dynasty. Later generations also frequently married into the royal family and thus were able to retain fairly high-ranking positions within the hierarchy of the Theban priesthood, notably the office of Fourth Prophet of Amun in Karnak, which was held by six members of the family for most of the duration of the 22nd Dynasty.

The inscriptions preserved on our fragment enumerate some of the offices held by Djedkhonsefankh: he was not only “Fourth Prophet of Amun in Karnak”, but also “Second Prophet of Mut, the Matron, the Lady of Isheru”, “Sem-priest who makes libations”, and “Scribe in charge of the transport of festival goods to the Benenet”, i.e. the temple of Khonsu.<sup>5</sup> He was thus linked to the cults of all three members of the Theban triad, Amun, Mut and Khonsu. At the head of the hier-







archy of Amun in Karnak, the most important temple of Egypt, stood the High Priest of Amun, also known as the “First Prophet of Amun” – an unfortunate translation of the Egyptian title which we owe to the Greeks – followed by the Second, Third and Fourth “Prophet”. These four senior priests not only performed religious duties in the temple, but were also administrators who managed the hundreds of lower-ranking priests and other employees of the temple as well as its vast income. Although Djedkhonsefankh’s rank in the temple of Amun was lower than that in the temple of Mut, the former was obviously considered to be more prestigious than the latter since it is always mentioned first.

In addition to these priestly offices, Djedkhonsefankh also calls himself “the eyes of the King in Karnak”, which may mean that he reported directly to the King about the affairs of the temple. From the long autobiographical inscription on Djedkhonsefankh’s other block statue, which was dedicated to him by his eldest son Nakhtefmut, we learn that he was favoured by Osorkon II and “his heirs”, so he must be the king Djedkhonsefankh served.

On the front of the statue there must originally have been two symmetrically arranged scenes showing Djedkhonsefankh in the centre offering to two groups of deities.<sup>6</sup> Only part of the left-hand scene, which shows him before the Theban triad, survives. Of the figure of Amun little more than his right arm survives, with a hand holding an *ankh* sign. Behind him stands the goddess Mut, whose left hand touches Amun’s shoulder. Mut was the goddess of kingship and she is therefore shown with the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. Over her lappet wig she wears the so-called vulture cap, with the wings of the vulture down the sides of her head, its tail on the back and its head and beak, here lost, on the forehead. She too holds the symbol of life in her right hand. The third god is Khonsu, the child of Amun and Mut, who is also a god of the moon. On his head are the full moon and the crescent. A single braided lock of hair adorns his temple, the so-called “lock of youth” which characterizes him as a child god. He also wears a uraeus and the curved divine beard. His body is depicted with the primeval shape resembling a mummy which was often chosen for gods of creation and regeneration. Around his neck is the so-called *menyt*, a heavy necklace with a counterpoise on the back. His hands hold a composite staff consisting of the symbols of life, stability and dominion, as well as the two sceptres commonly associated with the god Osiris, the crook and flail. Short inscriptions above the figures identify them as Mut, Lady “of the Isheru (the name of her main

Theban temple), lady of heaven, mistress of the gods”, and “Khonsu in Thebes, Neferhotep, Horus, lord of joy”.

On the side of the fragment we see Djedkhonsefankh offering to the god Osiris. Over his long linen costume he wears the leopard skin characterizing him as an officiating priest and his head is shaven as a token of ritual purity. In his left hand he holds an incense burner and with his right hand he pours a libation over an offering table, of which only a lotus flower draped over the offerings survives. The god himself has also largely disappeared, but his characteristic crook and flail with the *was*-sceptre can still be seen, as can his curved beard. The eight columns of text above the scene consist mostly of the name and titles of Djedkhonsefankh and the indication that he was the “son of the priest of Amun, who was allowed free access to the palace, Nesperennub, justified”. The three last columns on the left, written in retrograde, identify the god as “Osiris, foremost of the West, the great god, Lord of Abydos”. The text continues with a funerary prayer for Djedkhonsefankh: “May he (Osiris) grant that his<sup>7</sup> *ba* may leave (the tomb) in order to see the sun and that he may join the praised ones”. These “praised ones” are the blessed dead who partake of the daily offerings to the gods in the temple. The block statue of Djedkhonsefankh, which was once set up in the court of one of the Theban temples, served as his intermediary in this offering cult.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Schulz, *Die Entwicklung und Bedeutung des kuboiden Statuentypus*, 2 vols. (Hildesheim 1992).

<sup>2</sup> A. Eggebrecht, “Zur Bedeutung des Würfelhockers”, in S. Lauffer (ed.), *Festgabe für Dr. Walter Will* (Cologne etc. 1966), 143–163.

<sup>3</sup> Cairo CG 559, from Luxor Temple; see K. Jansen-Winkel, *Ägyptische Biographien der 22. und 23. Dynastie* (Wiesbaden 1985), 9–24; 433–440, Pls. 1–3 (No. A 1). Djedkhonsefankh also dedicated a Horuscippus in the temple of Mut in Karnak.

<sup>4</sup> K.A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1110–650 BC)* (Warminster 1973), §§ 183–189; M.L. Bierbrier, *The Late New Kingdom in Egypt (c. 1300–664 BC)* (Warminster 1975), 79–85.

<sup>5</sup> On these titles see Jansen-Winkel, *Biographien*, 39–40.

<sup>6</sup> The arrangement of texts and depictions must have been similar to that on another block statue in Cairo, CG 42231, which also has a single line of text around the top edge and offering scenes to various deities on the front and sides; see Jansen-Winkel, *Biographien*, Pls. 49–53 (No. A 17).

<sup>7</sup> Lit., “your *ba*”.