



© 2018 Christie's Images Limited

*Statuette of the goddess Isis-Hededyt nursing Horus*

Egypt, geographical provenance not known

Dynasty XXV

Peridotite

12.6 x 3.8 x 6.1 cm

FGA-ARCH-EG-0662

**Provenance**

Collection of Natacha Rambova (1897-1966), second wife of Rudolph Valentino  
Collection Donald P. Hansen, New York<sup>1</sup>, on loan to the Brooklyn Museum of Art (inv.no. L67.27.1)  
from 1967-1984

Christie's, London, Antiquities, 08-06.1988, lot n° 168

Resandro Collection, Germany

Christie's, London, Antiquities, 03.07.2018, lot n° 14

**Previous publications**

FAZZINI, Richard A., *Egypt: Dynasty XXII-XXV. Iconography of Religions, Section 16, Egypt 10*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1988, p. 12 et 33 avec pl. 23 (black and white).

---

<sup>1</sup> JANSSEN, 1996, p. 13, remarks that Donald P. Hansen was the executor of her estate. Hansen was also a tenured professor at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts and simultaneously served for a record-breaking 38 years as its Director of Graduate Studies, for which see this link, Hansen in memoriam (consulted on 29 August 2018).



FONDATION  
GANDUR  
POUR L'ART

GRIMM-STADELMANN, Isabel, *Aesthetic glimpses. Masterpieces of ancient Egyptian art in the Resandro Collection*, Munich, Resandro, 2012, p. 145, n° R-415 (color).

SCHOSKE, Sylvia, WILDUNG, Dietrich, *Gott und Götter im Alten Ägypten*, Mainz, Philipp von Zabern, 1992, p. 58-59, n° 38 (color).



### **Statuette of the goddess Isis-Hededyt nursing Horus**

The statuette represents a female figure seated upon a typically designed, low-back, cubic throne, complete with a projecting plinth which serves as a foot rest. This figure wears a tightly-fitting, form-revealing sheath which had become the staple of an Egyptian woman's wardrobe from the time of the Old Kingdom. Her tripartite wig, parted in the center, exhibits lappets which fall to her chest with their ends coiffed into spiral curls. This feature of her wig suggests a date for this statuette into Dynasty XXV<sup>2</sup>. She nurses a nude, male child who sits on her lap perpendicularly to her body with his feet resting on a small, specially designed foot rest. At first glance there is nothing unusual about the pose of this nursing woman. Closer inspection, however, reveals that the traditional gesture in which a woman offers her left breast to her child, has here been reversed. To date, there are only two known sculptures of nursing women offering their right, and not their left breast to their child. This is one; the second is in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo<sup>3</sup>.

This atypical gesture is combined with the woman's unusual attribute of two scorpions resting on the crown of her head. In the past, one has been inclined to identify this female figure as Selkis because the scorpion is her traditional emblem. Such an identification, however, fails to take into account the polyvalence of ancient Egyptian symbols and how those symbols are described in ancient Egyptian texts.

As early as the Middle Kingdom, passages in the so-called Coffin Text mention a deity, Hededyt<sup>4</sup>, who, later in Nubian contexts of New Kingdom date<sup>5</sup>, is represented as a goddess with a scorpion on her head. These representations are habitually captioned, *Isis, the great, the mother of the god, the mistress of heaven*. They are also complemented by a magical stele of the same date in Cairo where two female figures, each exhibiting two scorpions as attributes on their heads, are represented. The second figure is specifically identified as Isis, and, like her companion, bears the epithets, *great of magic and mistress of the district of Ro-nefer*<sup>6</sup>.

With the passage of time, Isis-Hededyt becomes associated with the site of Edfu in Upper Egypt, the major cult center of the god Horus. There she is called *Isis, the great, the mistress of the district of Ro-nefer, the sovereign of the serek-scorpion*<sup>7</sup>. Via the theological conceit of *alexikakoi*, whereby

---

<sup>2</sup> FAZZINI, 1988, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Cairo, The Egyptian Museum CG 39368: DARESSY, 1905, p. 343-344 et II, 1905, pl. LXIII.

<sup>4</sup> MEEKS, 1977.

<sup>5</sup> GOYON, 1978, p. 439-458.

<sup>6</sup> Cairo, The Egyptian Museum 9404: GOYON, 1978, p. 445-446.

<sup>7</sup> GOYON, 1978, p. 444.



malevolent characteristics are transformed into benevolent ones, as one still sees today in the expression, *fighting fire with fire*, Isis harnesses the venomous poison of the scorpion which she unleashes against her divine foes. She thus fulfills the role of a formidable protectress not only of her son, Horus, but by extension of the living pharaoh, who in life was identified with that divine child. Her power is enhanced by her incorporation into the solar theology in which she is identified as the daughter Re<sup>8</sup>, the sun god. As his daughter, she defends her solar father against the evil power of Apophis, the serpent intent on thwarting the diurnal course of the sun.

The solar character of Isis-Hededyt is extended in a remarkably subtle way, indicative of just how polyvalent and intertwined ancient Egyptian religious exegesis really is. The suggested etymological root of her epithet, Hededyt, is \*HD<sup>9</sup>, denoting white/whiteness.

On one level, then, the concept of the whiteness of Isis is related to the ancient Egyptian characterizations of arachnids. The ancients observed that scorpions belong to two different groups, one characterized by its black color, the other by its paler color. Isis-Hededyt associates her with the paler of the two, *Buthus Occitanus*, *Androctonus Australis*<sup>10</sup>. The polyvalence of this epithet does not, however, stop here because the root \*HD also connotes concepts of luminosity. That epithet then links Isis with Sothis, the Dog Star, Sirius, whose heliacal rising in late summer was regarded as a harbinger of the on-coming inundation of the Nile River. All of these conceits are implicit in the use of the epithet, Hededyt, and reinforce the Graeco-Roman characterization of Isis as the goddess of myriad names.

The numerous sculptural representations, inscribed as Isis-Hededyt, which are generally dated to the Late Period attest to her popularity, but that popularity was not due to her widespread veneration. On the contrary, the cult of Isis-Hededyt was established in the temples of the Graeco-Roman Period, where she enjoyed a dedicated priesthood. Those priests annually celebrated her solemn *shaprocession* which fell on the second day of the fourth month of Shemu<sup>11</sup>.

It is no wonder, therefore, that this iconographically-rich statuette captured the attention of Natacha Rambova. Natacha Rambova (née Winifred Kimball Shaugnessy)<sup>12</sup> was born in Salt Lake City on 19 January 1897, the daughter of Col. Michael Shaugnessy, a Federal marshal and Winifred Kimball, who came from a distinguished Mormon family<sup>13</sup>. Winifred Kimball Shaugnessy was educated in London

---

<sup>8</sup> GOYON, 1978, p. 447-448.

<sup>9</sup> GOYON, 1978, p. 453-554.

<sup>10</sup> GOYON, 1978, p. 453.

<sup>11</sup> GOYON 1978, p. 449-450.

<sup>12</sup> BIERBRIER, 2012, p. 454.

<sup>13</sup> JANSSEN, 1996; and Manassa, Bennett, 2012.



and then attended ballet school in New York City, thereafter joining a ballet company for which she chose her stage name, Natacha Rambova. She accompanied that troupe to Hollywood where she became a costume and set designer. There she met the movie idol, Rudolph Valentino on the Art Deco set she designed for his movie, *Camille*, in 1921<sup>14</sup>. She illegally, because he was not yet divorced from Jean Acker, married Valentino in Mexico the following year (1922) and legally, after his divorce from Acker, the year after (1923). In 1932, six years after the death of Valentino (1926), she married Count Alvaro de Urzaiz, and became a spiritualist. He brought her to Egypt in 1936 where she both met Howard Carter<sup>15</sup> and developed an interest in Egyptology. She then studied briefly under Stephen Ranulph Kingdon Glanville (1906-1956), a noted British Egyptologist<sup>16</sup>. She obtained a grant from the Bollingen Foundation<sup>17</sup> in 1946 to study the symbolism of ancient Egyptian scarabs, but soon met and eventually married Alexandre Piankoff (1897-1966), an Egyptologist of Russian origin, who distinguished himself as a noted specialist on religion and philology, with appointments at the *Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Le Caire*, and later in Paris at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique<sup>18</sup>. She then changed her focus from scarabs to the recording of religious texts in the Valley of the Kings under the direction of Piankoff. She published her work with the assistance of [Mary] Elizabeth Thomas (1907-1986)<sup>19</sup>, an American who is now known as a pioneer in the study of the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings. Natacha Rambova died in Pasadena, California on 5 June 1996.

Her interests in spiritualism and symbolism were manifest in her collection of iconographically fascinating and significant ancient Egyptian objects, some of which were sold at Sotheby's, New York, on 05.12.2007, from which FGA-ARCH-EG-0312, a bronze statuette of a Sethian-headed anthropomorphic deity whose identification remains moot, was acquired<sup>20</sup>. This joins a second from her collection, the statuette of Isis-Hededyt, which is the subject of this notice.

The publication of the Bollingen Series<sup>21</sup> was inaugurated in 1943 as a program of the Old Dominion Foundation founded by Paul Mellon in 1941. The name chosen was that of the small village in Switzerland where Carl Gustav Jung, the founder of Analytical Psychology, had a private rural retreat. Jointly founded by Paul Mellon and his first wife, Mary Conover Mellon, the initial motive was to assure

---

<sup>14</sup> Sotheby's, Antiquities, New York, 5 December 2007, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> BIERBRIER, 2012, p. 105-106.

<sup>16</sup> BIERBRIER, 2012, p. 214.

<sup>17</sup> Bollingen Series (consulted on 29.08.2018)

<sup>18</sup> BIERBRIER, 2012, p. 431-432.

<sup>19</sup> BIERBRIER, 2012, p. 539.

<sup>20</sup> Antiquities, Auction catalogue, Sotheby's, New York, 5 December 2007, lot n° 10.

<sup>21</sup> Bollingen Series (consulted on 29.08.2018); and McGuire, 2012.



a wider audience in the English-speaking world for Jung's scientific work. Natacha Rambova's interest in spirituality and competence in arcane ancient Egyptian religious texts found in the tombs of the Valley of the Kings was a perfect match by which she received a grant from that Foundation in 1946. She edited a number of volumes in that series published under the name of Piankoff<sup>22</sup>.

Natacha Rambova probably acquired the statuette of Isis-Hededyt because its unusual nursing gesture and paired scorpion attributes doubtless appealed to her interests in spirituality and symbolism. Its acquisition adds to the number of iconographically significant objects already in the collections of the Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, some of which will be featured in their own right as objects of the month.

Dr Robert Steven Bianchi  
Curator in chief  
Curator of the Archaeology Collection  
Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, February 2019

### ***Bibliography***

*Antiquities*, Auction catalogue, Sotheby's, New York, 5 December 2007.

BIERBRIER, Morris Leonard (éd.), *Who was who in Egyptology* [4th revised edition], London, The Egypt Exploration Society, 2012.

mellon.org (consulted on 29.08.2018)

Hansen in memoriam (consulted on 29.10.2018)

Bollingen Series (consulted on 29.08.2018)

DARESSY, Georges, *Catalogue général des antiquités du Musée du Caire / Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte. Statues de divinités 38001/39384*, I, Le Caire, 1905 ; et II, Le Caire, 1905.

FAZZINI, Richard A., *Egypt: Dynasty XXII-XXV. Iconography of Religions, Section 16, Egypt 10*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1988.

GOYON, Jean-Claude, "*Hededyt: Isis-Scorpion et Isis au scorpion. En marge du papyrus de Brooklyn 47.218.50 - III*", *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 78 (2) (1978), p. 439-458.

---

<sup>22</sup> PIANKOFF, 1954; PIANKOFF, 1955; PIANKOFF, 1957; PIANKOFF, 1962; and PIANKOFF, 1968.



GRIMM-STADELMANN, Isabel, *Aesthetic glimpses. Masterpieces of ancient Egyptian art in the Resandro Collection*, Munich, Resandro, 2012.

JANSSEN, Rosalind M., "From Hollywood to Thebes: in quest of Natacha Rambova"(1897-1966)", *Göttinger Miszellen* 153, 1996, p. 5-15.

JANSSEN, Rosalind M., "Rambova and Piankoff: tying up the loose ends", *Göttinger Miszellen* 156, 1997, p. 67-71.

MANASSA, Colleen, DOBBIN-BENNETT, Tasha, "The Natacha Rambova archive, Yale University", *Göttinger Miszellen* 234, 2012, p. 85-100.

MCGUIRE, William, *Bollingen: an adventure in collecting the past*, Bollingen Series, Princeton, N. J., Princeton University Press, 1982.

MEEKS, Dimitri, "Heddedet", in *Lexikon der Aegyptologie* II, 7, Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1977, c. 1076-1078.

PIANKOFF, Alexandre, *The pyramid of Unas*, in RAMBOVA, Natacha (ed.), photographs by L. F. HUSSON, *Egyptian Religious Texts and Representations* 5, Bollingen Series 40 (5), Princeton, N. J., Princeton University Press for the Bollingen Foundation, 1968.

PIANKOFF, Alexandre, *The shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, in RAMBOVA, Nina (ed.), Harper Torchbooks / The Bollingen Library, New York, and Evanston, IL, Harper & Row, 1962.

PIANKOFF, Alexandre, *Mythological papyri*, 2 vols., in RAMBOVA, Natacha (ed.), *Egyptian Religious Texts and Representations* 3, Bollingen Series 40 (3), New York, Pantheon Books for the Bollingen Foundation, 1957.

PIANKOFF, Alexandre, *The shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, in RAMBOVA, Natacha (ed.), *Egyptian Religious Texts and Representations* 2, Bollingen Series 40 (2), New York, Pantheon Books for the Bollingen Foundation, 1955.

PIANKOFF, Alexandre, *The tomb of Ramesses VI*, 2 vols, in RAMBOVA, Natacha (ed.), photographs by L. F. Husson, *Egyptian Religious Texts and Representations* 1, Bollingen Series 40 (1), New York, Pantheon Books for the Bollingen Foundation, 1954.

SCHOSKE, Sylvia, WILDUNG, Dietrich, *Gott und Götter im Alten Ägypten*, Mainz, Philipp von Zabern, 1992.