

KHONSU'S HEM-HEM CROWN



In the temple sector of Thonis-Heracleion an interesting example of bronze Pharaonic statuary was found. This is a complete headdress, made up of the nemes and the hemhem crown. The nemes is hollow in order to adapt itself to the head of the hypothetical individual. Its sides are short and trapezoidal, ending in two tongue-shaped pieces with rounded outer

rims, and both are pierced by a small fixation hole. On the upper right side of the headdress, a small rectangular tenon was also designed to fix on a piece which has now disappeared. On the front of the nemes, a large uraeus reared up which is extremely corroded.

The hem-hem crown is made up of two horizontal ram's horns, on which are placed three bunches of papyrus, each surmounted by the solar disc, flanked by two feathers and two erect uraei.

This crown is in the form for the warrior god Horus of Edfu. It is also sometimes encountered on the heads of kings. This is the case, for example, on a relief carving in the temple of Hibis at Kharga, depicting Darius as Pharaoh, wearing this crown, or later on a bronze figurine of Alexander the Great (Württembergisches Landesmuseum, Stuttgart).

Attribute of a young Horus

Nevertheless, the hem-hem crown is above all the attribute of a young Horus, Somtus, patron of Herakleopolis. In the Greco-Roman Period, the young Horus, Harpokrates, is often represented with this headdress. This is how we see him on a terracotta figurine in the Greco-Roman Museum at Alexandria, dressed in a Greek tunic and holding a club.

The same choice of attribute for the young god is found on a bronze figurine in the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam.

It is tempting, taking account of the place of its discovery (a site dedicated to Horus in the form which the Greeks identified with Herakles), to attribute the bronze headdress to an effigy of the young Horus (Harpokrates).

Attachment method suggests wooden sculpture

From the dimensions of the crown, the size of the complete effigy can be estimated at fifty to seventy-five centimetres. The long point at the rear of the nemes and the round holes in the sides of the headdress reveal the attachment method, which seems more suitable for a wooden sculpture than one in metal (certainly not in stone).

We see the same attachment method on a bronze nemes of the same calibre and character preserved in the Louvre Museum.

It is likewise with a luxurious silver headdress inlaid with gold, belonging to the treasure of Tikh el-Karamus, at the Cairo Museum, which also takes the form of a combination of the nemes and the hem-hem crown. It dates from the start of the Ptolemaic Period and is ascribed to a god or a deified king.



Object: Bronze. H. 15 cm. End of Late Period – Early Ptolemaic Period (end of fifth to beginning of fourth century BC). Maritime Museum, Alexandria (SCA 401)

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