

# A NUBIAN KING IN THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE MUSEUM

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As a student at the Oriental Institute in the late 1970s I had the good fortune to volunteer in the Museum's Conservation Laboratory under the patient guidance of Barbara Hall. I am forever grateful for all I learned there and the many interesting projects I worked on. One of the most rewarding endeavours was to work with Barbara on a new metals storage room, helping to gather materials squirreled away throughout the Museum basement for rehousing. While engaged in this task, I came across an old cardboard shoe box with 'forgery' pencilled on the lid. To my amazement when I opened the box, I saw not a fake, but a bronze sculpture of a Nubian pharaoh of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty (ca. 722–ca. 655 BCE).<sup>1</sup> The figure's non-Egyptian regalia (the cap crown, double uraeus and pendant ram heads), combined with its physiognomy (its broad features as well as stocky musculature), and the somewhat 'Frankenstein-ish' pose of the piece must have appeared dubious to someone not familiar with Kushite art. However, this statuette clearly fit into the typology of small bronze statuettes of these kings.<sup>2</sup> I had also been interning in the Department of Egyptian Art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts while Ann Russmann was there, and was familiar with her catalogue raisonné of the royal sculpture of the Nubian Dynasty.<sup>3</sup>

The statuette<sup>4</sup> measures 20.0 cm tall by 3.9 cm wide and depicts a king wearing the traditional royal Nubian cap-crown<sup>5</sup> and pendant ram's head necklace.<sup>6</sup> He is standing with his arms stretched forward and slightly downturned with palms

1 Evans, Green and Teeter 2019: 119.

2 Russmann 1974: 57–69.

3 Russmann 1974.

4 OIM E 13954; <https://oi-idb.uchicago.edu/id/g2e60203-93d2-4509-a6db-0826of77e8be>. Hill 2004: 191.

5 Leahy 1992.

6 Cf. Lacovara and Markowitz 2019: 114–17.

turned inward (figs 1–3). He wears the double uraeus of the Nubian kings and the serpents' tails merge into the end of the bandeau that runs down<sup>7</sup> the back of the head (fig. 4). According to the Oriental Institute Museum's records,<sup>8</sup> the piece was purchased by James Henry Breasted in Cairo in 1929 for the sum of 250 Egyptian pounds from the famous antiquities dealing family Tano<sup>9</sup> and probably from Frank John Tano. Breasted, who was on tour with John D. Rockefeller Jr. at the time,<sup>10</sup> seems to have left the statuette at the Semiramis Hotel, which was near Tano's shop.<sup>11</sup> It was finally picked up and brought to Chicago by William Franklin Edgerton in 1931 on his way back from Chicago House in Luxor.



FIG. 1: Bronze Statuette of a Nubian King, Oriental Institute Museum E 13954. Front view. (Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.)



FIG. 2: Bronze Statuette of a Nubian King, Oriental Institute Museum E 13954. Three-quarter profile, proper right. (Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.)

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Lacovara 2015.

<sup>8</sup> I would like to thank Oriental Institute Museum archivist Anne Flannery for this information.

<sup>9</sup> Hagen and Ryholt 2016: 265–66.

<sup>10</sup> Abt 2012: 341–43.

<sup>11</sup> Bierbrier 1995: 410.

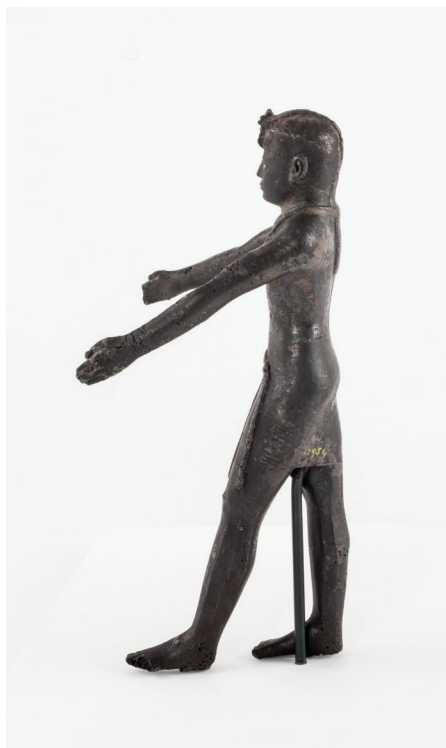


FIG. 3: Bronze Statuette of a Nubian King, Oriental Institute Museum E 13954. Side view, proper left. (Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.)

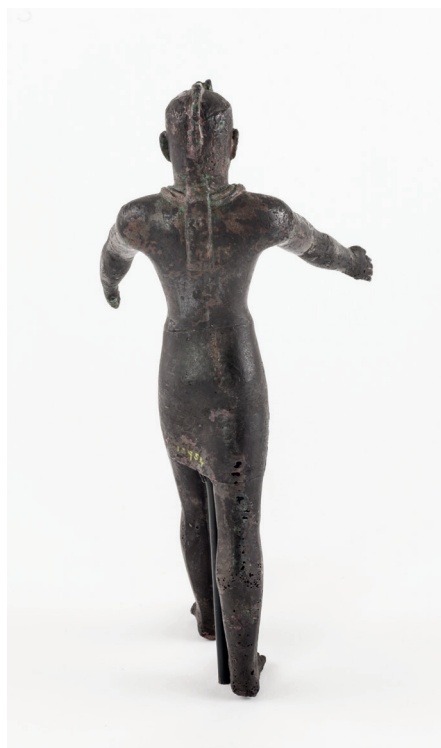


FIG. 4: Bronze Statuette of a Nubian King, Oriental Institute Museum E 13954. Back view. (Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.)

The statuette was catalogued as ‘Dynasty 26’ when it entered the Oriental Museum, but evidently dismissed as a fake sometime after, thereby escaping notice and mention in Russmann’s compendium. During her tenure at the Oriental Institute Museum, Emily Teeter suggested the monarch represented is probably Taharka,<sup>12</sup> the fourth and most well-known king of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty. This is most likely the case because the bronzes of the earlier Twenty-fifth Dynasty rulers, Shabaka and Shebitku tend to be finer and less common.<sup>13</sup> Although the Oriental Institute king was more finely crafted than many of the later Twenty-fifth Dynasty examples, the rather bland face points to the images attributed to Taharka. The outstretched arms indicate that it was holding something, most likely a naos. A number of other bronzes depict kings kneeling with arms out and palms flat and facing inwards, also likely to hold a shrine or some other presentation piece;<sup>14</sup> however, this is the only standing example. Like a number of standing stone naophorous statues, additional support was provided when the shrine did not reach all the way to

<sup>12</sup> Teeter 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Russmann 1974: 19–20.

<sup>14</sup> Russmann 1974: 57–69.

the ground.<sup>15</sup> On this bronze a circular indentation in the chest may have been for a strut to help support what was being held.<sup>16</sup> The raised edges of the sporran indicate that it was probably originally inlaid, as were the statuette's eyes. This elaborate detail, as can still be seen in the Gulbenkian Museum torso of King Pedubaste,<sup>17</sup> would probably have not been intended to be hidden behind a full-length naos.

Many of these bronzes believed to come from Egypt, as opposed to those found in Sudan,<sup>18</sup> were vandalized in the succeeding Twenty-sixth Dynasty.<sup>19</sup> On this example, the naos, or whatever was held between the hands, was removed. It appears that the arms were slightly pulled apart to facilitate the erasure of the gilded rams' head pendants, and the sculpture was also removed from its base.

Now rescued from obscurity, this important statue has pride of place in the Oriental Institute's new Egyptian and Nubian galleries masterfully curated by Emily Teeter. 🙏

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Selim 1990.

<sup>16</sup> These complex bronzes often relied on struts and other armatures to support component parts. Cf. Roeder 1956: 487–515.

<sup>17</sup> Hill and Schorsch 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Macadam 1955: pls LXXVII–LXXIX; LXXXII.

<sup>19</sup> Hill 2007: 197.

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