

A HANDSOME GIFT FOR THE APIS

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ABSTRACT

Bronze Apis bull No. 1879.332 in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, was dedicated by Harmakhoros, the brother of Pabasa, the chief steward of the God's Wife of Amun, Nitocris I, sometime during the reign of Psammetichus I.

The production of bronze statuettes increased in Egypt during the Third Intermediate Period, and even more in the Late and Ptolemaic Periods. The reasons must have lain in greater demand for such objects, stimulated by changes in technology (capacity to manufacture such statuettes in large numbers), religion (expansion of popular cults with their festivals and pilgrimages) and art. However, the dating of these objects usually poses serious problems.

Almost all were votive items dedicated by pious worshippers and pilgrims to temples or related structures, especially those associated with burials of sacred animals. The statuettes represent the deities to whom they were dedicated, or the people who presented them, or both categories.

We know next to nothing about how these items were displayed. Although quite a few are inscribed, the texts hardly ever contain more than the names of the deity and the donor, and one or more simple standard wishes. Inscriptions which contain royal names are infrequently found and pieces which can be ascribed to people whose dates we know are exceptional. However, a bronze statuette of the Apis bull (No. 1879.332) in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford is one such case.¹ Although its provenance is not recorded, there is little doubt that it comes from the Serapeum at Saqqara.

The cult of Apis² was among the most ancient in the Memphite area. Apis was one of a number of local deities of the cattle-breeding Delta which manifested themselves in the form of the bull. There was only one Apis bull at a time, chosen for the triangular blaze on its forehead and special markings on its hide. The Apis was kept in the precinct of Ptah at Memphis and after its death buried, at least from the reign of Amenophis III onwards, at northern Saqqara. The underground galleries which served as the burial place of the Apis bulls are known as the Serapeum, from "Osiris-Apis", the "deceased Apis". The galleries were excavated by Auguste Mariette between 1850 and

¹ I am grateful to Dr Helen Whitehouse, Assistant Keeper of Antiquities in the Ashmolean Museum, for help, information, an opportunity to study the object, and permission to publish it. I also wish to thank her and the photographic studio of the Ashmolean Museum for a new set of photographs used in this article. The line-drawings of the text and the incised decoration on the statuette were made by Mrs M. E. Cox and I am very grateful to her. I am pleased to be able to contribute this small essay to the volume dedicated to Professor Garrido.

² E. Otto, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Stierkulte in Aegypten* (Leipzig, 1938); H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* 46-51; J. Vercoutter in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* i, 338-50; G. J. F. Kater-Sibbes and M. J. Vermaseren, *Apis, I-III* (Leiden, 1975-7); E. Winter, *Der Apiskult im Alten Ägypten* (Mainz, 1978).

1854, although the sphinxes flanking the approach to the Serapeum had been the objects of attention of dealers in antiquities (e.g. Fernandez) even earlier. The connection between these sphinxes and the Serapeum, and so its identification, had been made by A.C. Harris well before Mariette's arrival in Egypt, in 1847-8.

The Ashmolean statuette³ (figs. 1-6) is well preserved: the only damage which it has suffered has been to the head of the uraeus on the sun disc and to the tip of the animal's left horn. According to Roeder, such statuettes were made up of parts cast separately. I cannot see any 'joins' on the Ashmolean statuette except for the roughly broken off tangs visible on the bottom of the hollow base. These correspond to the front left and back right legs and show where these were attached to the base. The statuette measures 9.7 cm (length) by 2.8 cm (width) by 11.4 cm (height) and weighs 612 g. The base is 1.2 cm high.

The bull is shown in a standard way⁴, with its left front and rear legs forward; its tail is attached to the right rear leg. A convex sun disc with an uraeus fits neatly between the horns. Details of the bull's anatomy are modelled, with additional features incised (eyes, ears with fine hairs inside them, the diagonally striated tail, and the hooves). The hairs of the animal's hide may have been shown by fine incised lines, but only traces of them are now left on the bull's left haunch. In addition to the triangular blaze on the forehead, the Apis's other markings are shown in a symbolic fashion (fig. 7): a winged scarab on the shoulder blades, an ornamental rectangular cover on the back, and a vulture with outspread wings bearing small round cartouches on the bull's hind quarters. All of these features are incised. There is a collar, also incised, round the bull's neck. The incised decoration may have suffered from over-enthusiastic cleaning some time in the past.

The text was inscribed after the casting. It starts on the front of the base, continues along its true right side and ends on the back. The left side was left blank. This suggests that the statuette was intended to be displayed with its left side not visible, perhaps against a wall (the animal, therefore, faced to the right, in the position which was more common in Egyptian art). The text (figs. 8-11) is written within framing lines and runs as follows⁵:

*Wsir-Ḥp: ḥs šḥp ḥ3w(wt)-ntr m 'ndty Inpw Ḥry-ib Ntr(yt) Ḥrw-m-m3 'ḥrw s3 mi-nn
P3-di-b3stt mwt.f T3-snt-ḥrw*

"Osiris-Apis. The singer who satisfies the altars of the gods in the nome of Busiris, and of Anubis in Netjeryt, Harmakhoros, son of the man with the same titles, Petobastis. His mother is Tasent(net)hor."

The writing of *mi-nn*, "likewise", i.e. with the same titles, is less common.

All the names can be found in H. Ranke's *Die ägyptischen Personenamen*, i: Harmakhoros (*Ḥrw-m-m3 'ḥrw*, "Horus is true of voice", 247.22), Petobastis (*P3-di-b3stt*, "One whom Bubastis gave", 123.5), and *T3-snt-(nt)-ḥrw*, "The sister of Horus",

³ The statuette is 802-090-790 in PM 8. It is listed in G. J. Chester, *Catalogue of the Egyptian Antiquities in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford* (1881), 97 [H. 68], and in G. Roeder, *Ägyptische Bronzefiguren* 330 [414, a] fig. 437 (sketch). Roeder states that the statuette had no incised decoration but he must have seen it in a very corroded state.

⁴ The fundamental study of bronze Apis bulls still remains G. Roeder's *Ägyptische Bronzefiguren* 324-30 [410-15].

⁵ I have been able to consult J. Černý's quick copy and translation in the records of the Ashmolean. My interpretation is partly different.

367.17.

The toponyms mentioned in the titles are *'ndty*, 'The Nome of Andjety', i.e. the 9th (Busirite) Lower Egyptian nome⁶, and *Ntr(yt)*, perhaps Bahbit el-Higara or a place nearby, in the 12th (Sebennyitic) Lower Egyptian nome⁷. Despite the impression created by the conventional numbering of the nomes, the two sites were not far apart.

Anubis was one of the deities worshipped at Bahbit, next to its chief goddess Isis⁸.

The names of Harmakhoros's parents Petobastis and Tasent(net)hor are the same as those of the parents of Pabasa (Pabesios, *P3-n-bs*), the chief steward of the Theban God's Wife of Amun, Nitocris I, during the last third of the reign of Psammetichus I, and the owner of tomb TT 279 at Asasif in the Theban necropolis⁹. Pabasa may have originated in the Delta¹⁰ and the owner of the Ashmolean statuette may be his brother, who continued to reside in Lower Egypt. Such a situation reflected the re-structuring of state and religious institutions under the first king of the Saite dynasty and the introduction of his own men to Thebes. The Apis bull in the Ashmolean Museum then probably dates to the reign of Psammetichus I.

The regard in which Psammetichus I held the cult of Apis is well documented. He built a court at Memphis where the animal was kept and made its oracular appearances¹¹. At least two Apis bulls were buried in the Serapeum at Saqqara during his reign, Apis Bull XXXVII in the year 20/21, and Apis bull XXXVIII in the year 52. In view of the average life span of some 18 years for each animal, it would not be illogical to expect another Apis bull to have died around the year 36.

Few Egyptians were likely to witness the funeral and burial of an Apis bull more than twice or three times in their lifetime. It is likely that it was an occasion for which people gathered from places far away. Harmakhoros, a minor temple employee living in the central Delta, probably came to Memphis to attend the obsequies of one of the bulls which died during the reign of Psammetichus I. Unfortunately, unlike their mother cows, who were all known as Isis mother of Apis, individual Apis bulls did not have special names which would have distinguished them, so we do not know with certainty which particular bull it was. It may have been on the grand occasion of the inauguration of a new gallery, the so-called Greater Vaults, running in a westerly direction and at right angles to the earlier Lesser Vaults, for the bull who was buried in Psammetichus's year 52.

Harmakhoros used the opportunity to dedicate a handsome bronze statuette of an Apis bull, one which must have made a substantial inroad into his finances, in the animals' funerary chapels at Saqqara. It would be interesting to know whether his better known and probably better-off brother Pabasa made the same journey.

⁶ P. Montet, *Géographie de l'Égypte ancienne* i, 97-102.

⁷ P. Montet, *Géographie de l'Égypte ancienne* i, 108, rather than another town of the same name in the eastern Delta, i, 177.

⁸ L. Habachi in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* i, 682-3.

⁹ Conveniently, E. Graefe in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* iv, 640, with further bibliography.

¹⁰ E. Graefe in *SAK* 1 (1974), 204-5; id. *Untersuchungen zur Verwaltung und Geschichte der Institution der Gottesgemahlin des Amun vom Beginn des Neuen Reiches bis zur Spätzeit* ii, 110.

¹¹ Herodotus II, 153.

Illustrations

(Figs. 1-6 and 8-10 © Ashmolean Museum, Oxford):
Apis bull, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 1879.332.

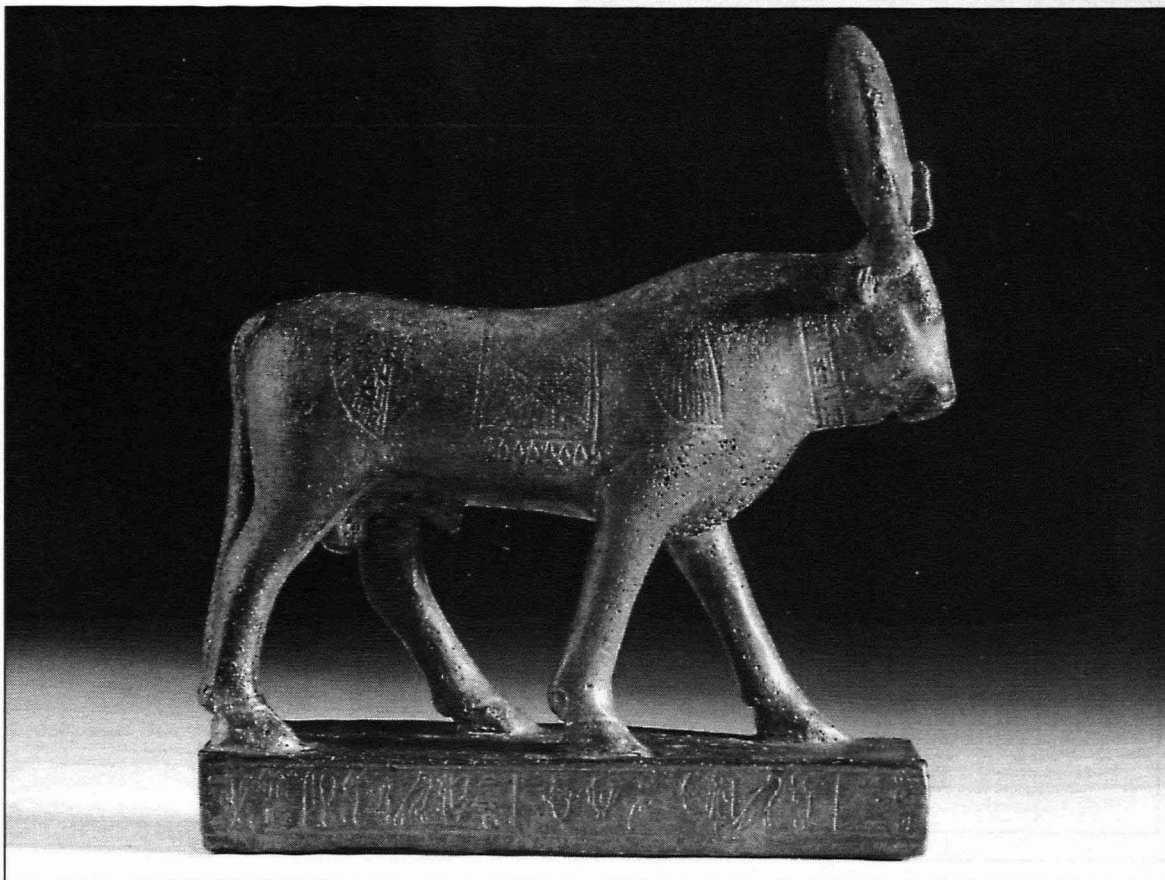


Fig. 1: Right side.



Fig. 2: Left side.



Fig. 3: Front.

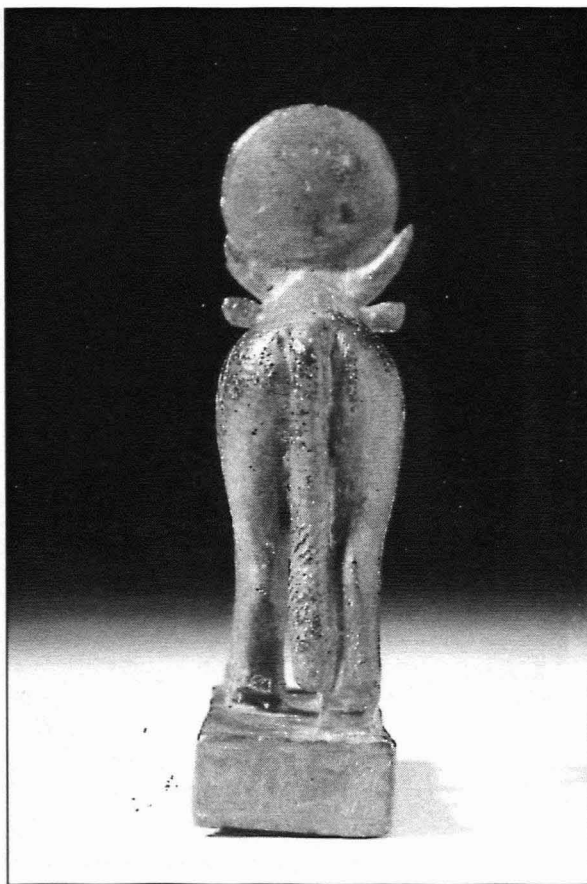


Fig. 4: Back.

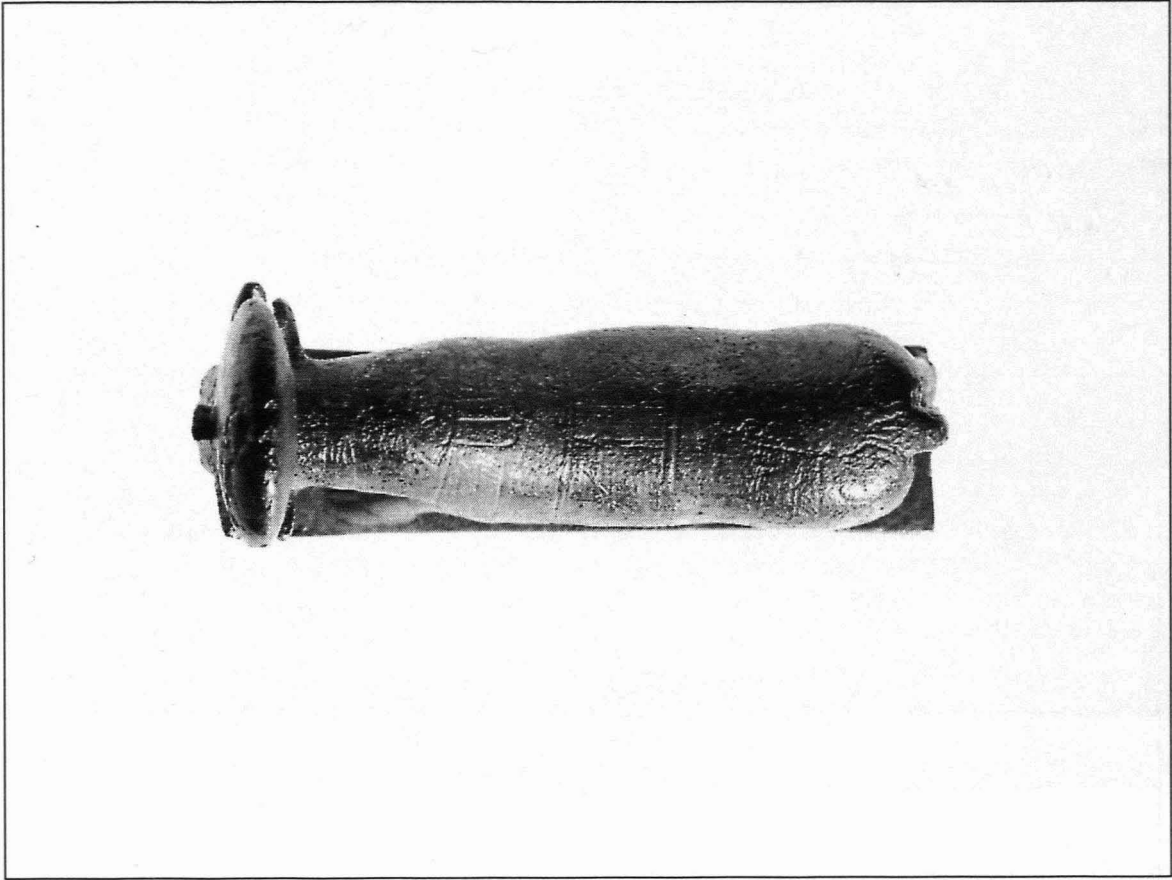


Fig. 5: View from above.

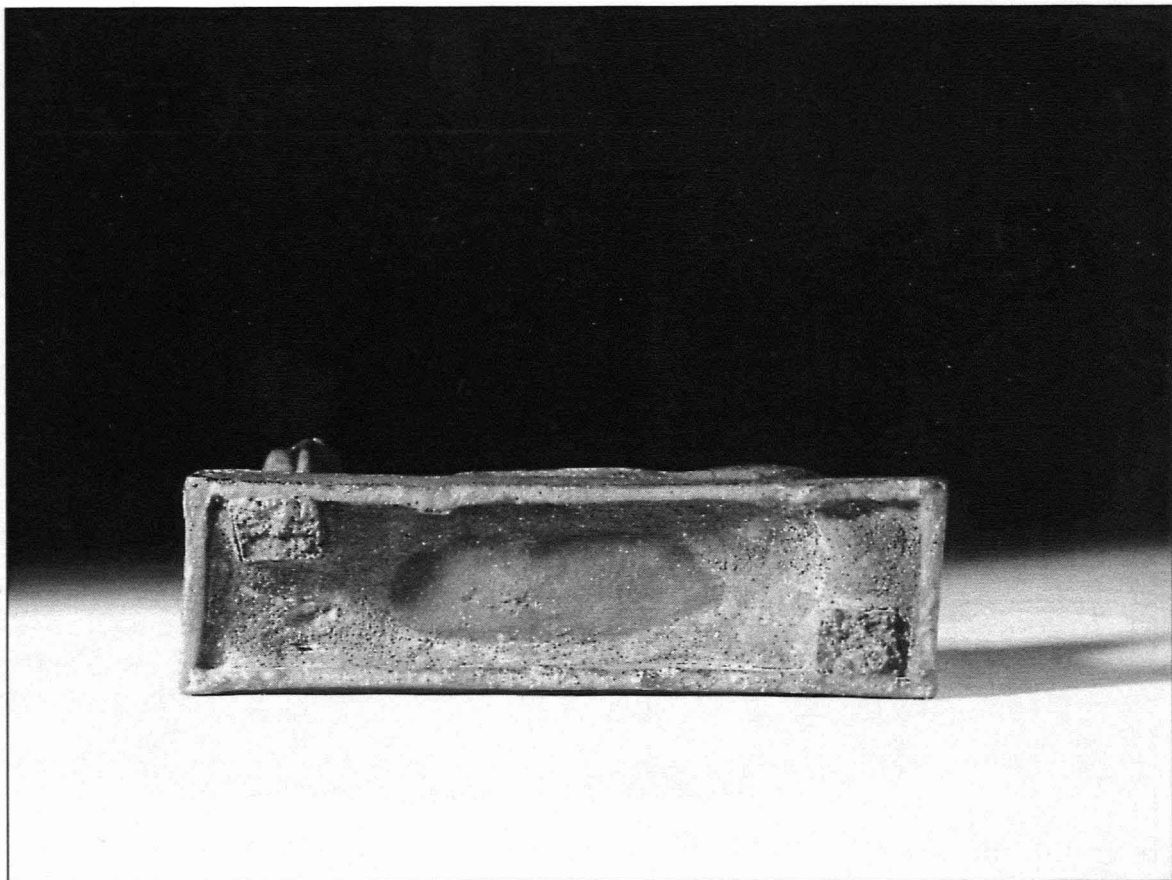


Fig. 6: View of the base from below.

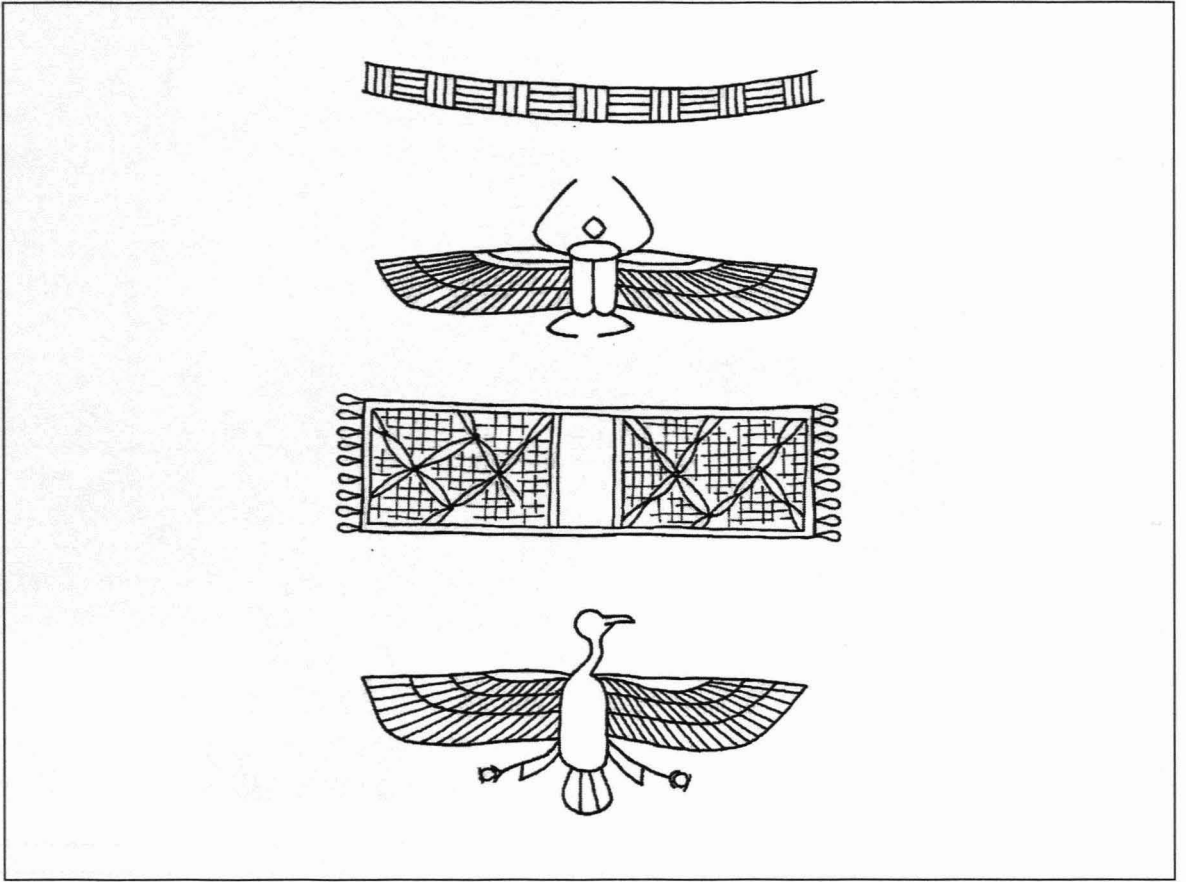


Fig. 7: The collar and markings on the back.



Fig. 8: The text.



Fig. 9: The text.



Fig. 10: The text.

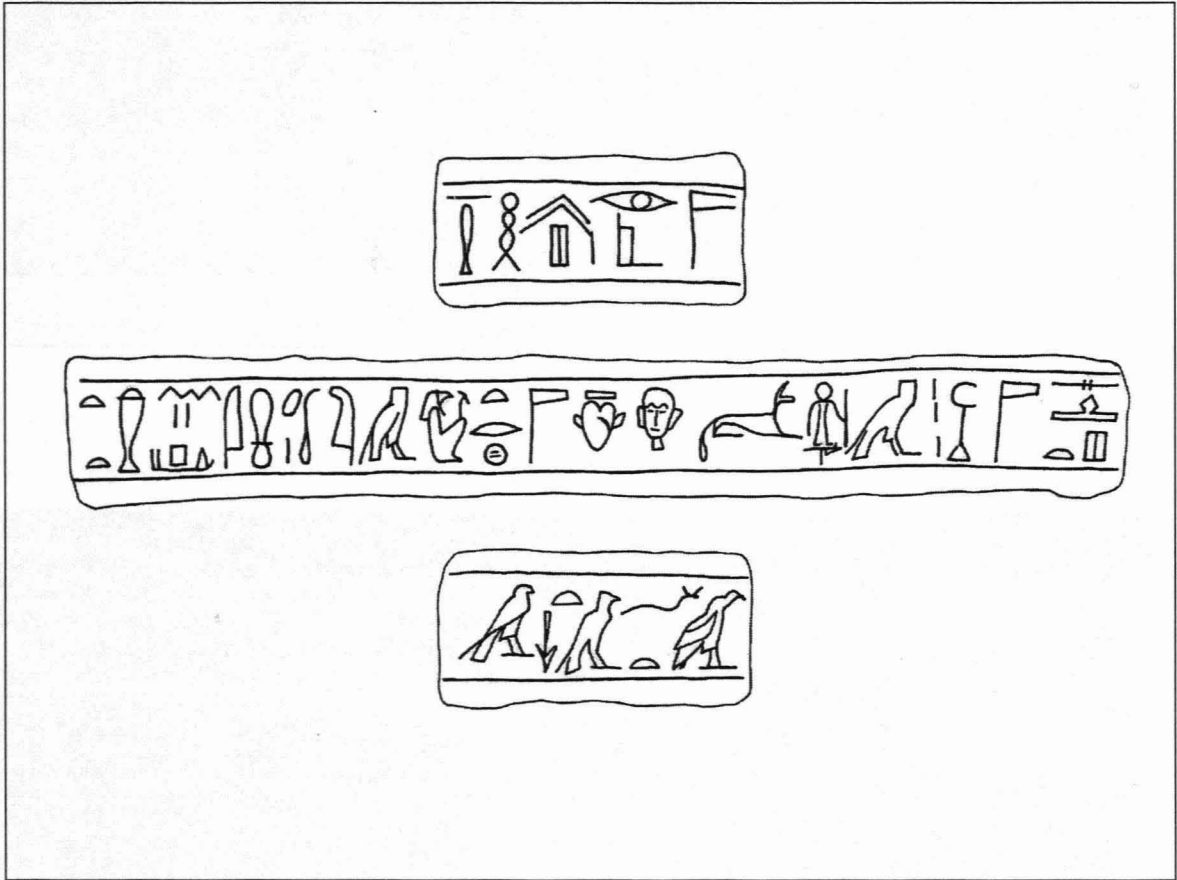


Fig. 11: The text.