

A STATUE OF THE GODDESS HATHOR

THE Museum has recently acquired the torso¹ of an Egyptian life-size female statue of greyish-black granite². The woman is shown standing against a narrow back pillar (worked out of one block with the statue itself), on the back and on the left side of which hieroglyphic inscriptions have been incised. She is clothed in a tight fitting lower garment and wears above it a non-Egyptian kind of shawl, such as we know from a number of statues of the Hellenistic time, which were found in Egypt. The borders of this shawl are decorated with elaborate fringes³. In her left hand the woman holds three stylized flowers, difficult to identify. Her right arm hangs down at the side of her body, its hand is empty but closed.

The work of the sculptor is very well done. The moulding of the arms and breasts and of the right shoulder, the carving of the flowers, the way the general form of the body is indicated underneath the garment—all that betrays the chisel of a master artist. With the exception of the shawl itself—not of its artistic rendering—there is nothing un-Egyptian about the statue. It shows the Egyptian style of the latest period; only in the rendering of the folds of the lower garment, above the breasts and below the knees, a faint reminiscence of Greek forms which the Egyptian artist had seen, not a real influence of Greek art, may be discernible.

It is understood that a piece of such quality must have been made for an important person. Had we no other means of identification, we might be tempted to see in it the representation of a leading priestess or of another lady of the highest rank.

Fortunately the inscription comes to our assistance. The style of its hieroglyphic signs dates it toward the end of the time of Ptolemaic rule in Egypt, i. e. about 50 B. C., but its contents tell us much more. From it we learn not only who was represented but also the original provenance of the statue.

The main part of the inscription is taken up by a real host of titles—not of a lady but of a man. This man must have held a leading position in the Upper Egyptian town of Denderah, well known to tourists through its beautifully preserved temple of the goddess Hathor. And more than that. Our official—whose name unfortunately is broken away—bears besides several court titles and military titles a great number of priestly titles, some of which bring him into direct contact with this goddess. He calls himself 'priest' of five different forms of Hathor (in one of them she



PLATE III. A Statue of the Goddess Hathor.

is called 'the owner of sweet breeze') and, after enumerating all his titles, he addresses the priests of Dendereh and asks them to pronounce (and thereby keep alive) his name daily, while they are officiating in the temple of Hathor⁴. Similar requests to the priests are often found on statues which were erected in a temple, in order to let the represented person remain close to his god throughout eternity.

But this request on our statue is followed by something quite unusual and still more revealing. It is a speech which 'the great princes and the priests of Dendereh' direct to the official "Firmis", so they say, "what thou hast offered, thou pious one". And then, after a brief gap, we read: "It is the lady of Dendereh, the mistress of all the gods, the eye of (the sun god) Rê!" These words, so it seems to me, become understandable only if we refer them to the statue, if we assume, that it represented the goddess Hathor herself and that it was this high official who had it carved by an outstanding artist of his time, and who dedicated it to the temple of Dendereh. It may have served as the revered cult statue of the great goddess for a good many years, and we are not surprised, if we read at the end of the inscription that the representatives of Dendereh, grateful for this costly present to their temple, climax their address to the beneficent donor by wishing him a life of '110 years', and 'that thy son remain upon thy seat after thee and the son of thy son likewise'!

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¹ Unfortunately, the head and feet are missing.

² The exact measurements of the torso are: Greatest height 127 cm., greatest breadth 44 cm., greatest depth 30 cm.

³ An almost identical one is worn by the late statue of a priest, from Coptos (E 975), which has been in our collection since 1894, and to which the new statue will be exhibited as a parallel.

⁴ For a similar text, found on a statue of about the same time, also from Dendereh and now in the Cairo Museum, cf. G. Daressy in *Annales du Service des Antiquités au Caire*, Vol. 16, pp. 268 ff.