

# The Meaning of the Heart Amulets in Egyptian Art

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## Abstract

*Despite the fact that the heart amulet stands amongst the most important items of magical protection in Ancient Egypt, little attention has been dedicated to the study of its symbolism. Although the heart amulets may seem quite simple in shape, its real complexity becomes evident when attention is paid to the formal diversity of this object that in fact was shaped according to different types and styles of depiction. It is also true that the heart amulet was perhaps one of the most frequently depicted amulets in Egyptian art, being a common iconographic feature in some well defined pictorial contexts where it appears as a distinctive attribute of gods or humans. Given the wide diversity of shapes and contexts in which the heart amulet is depicted, we can not expect to find only one meaning attributed to it, nor that its meaning stayed unchanged. In this study, our aim is to point out the main symbolic uses of the heart amulet through the analysis of its artistic rendering and also to highlight its variations throughout the Egyptian history.*

Our study began with a research that aimed to identify a typology of heart amulets.<sup>1</sup> Although in continuity with that study, this article now focuses on the study of the representation of heart amulets in Egyptian art. Our goal is to collect additional data concerning the symbolic use of this object, which eventually will shed light on its religious meaning. As Michel Malaise has already pointed out in the only available study of the artistic rendering of the heart amulet,<sup>2</sup> representations of the heart amulet can be found in some well-defined classes of objects or pictorial contexts. Nevertheless, distinct patterns of representation of the amulet can be detected throughout time. To identify these symbolic or ritual patterns, our research involved the study of pictorial decoration of temples, tombs, sarcophagi and papyri. Statues and funerary statuettes also provided us with important material concerning the use of the heart amulet.

The artistic rendering of the heart amulet, complemented with information available on the archaeological context, can offer us a vivid picture of its use through time. We know that the amulet was already in use as early as the 11th Dynasty among the circle of Theban royalty.<sup>3</sup> However, the first known depiction of the heart amulet is only found in the beginning of the 18th Dynasty, in the Donation Stelae, where the object is used by the young prince.<sup>4</sup> It must be noted that the heart amulet is

<sup>1</sup> The results of this work were presented in 2004, at the Ninth International Congress of Egyptologists, Grenoble. See Rogério Sousa, "The heart amulet in Ancient Egypt: A typological study," in J.-C. Goyon and C. Cardin, eds., *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Egyptologists* (Leuven-Paris-Dudley, 2007), vol. I, 713-21.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Malaise, "La signification des pendentifs cordiformes dans l'art égyptien," *CdÉ* 50 (1975), 105-35.

<sup>3</sup> This is the case of the golden object inscribed with the cartouche of Nebhetepre Mentuhotep II (Louvre Museum, N 551).

<sup>4</sup> See Ibrahim Harari, "Nature de la Stèle de Donation de Fonction du roi Ahmôsis à la reine Ahmès-Nefertari," *ASAE* 56 (1956), pl. II.



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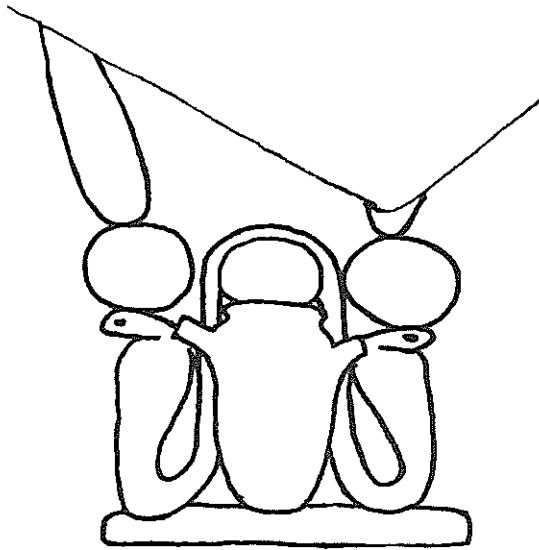


Fig. 1. Amulet of illumination. Deir el-Bahari, funerary temple of Hatshepsut, second terrace, south colonnade. Drawing by the author.

found among a group sculpture dated from the same period depicting royal children on the knees of a nurse and that the meaning of the depiction is similar to that of the Donation Stelae.<sup>5</sup>

However, the most outstanding example of the royal use of the amulet is found in Deir-el-Bahari.<sup>6</sup> A solar-headed heart amulet is clearly depicted in the Punt's expedition relief of the funerary temple of Hatshepsut (fig. 1).<sup>7</sup> The queen wears the amulet in a ritual where she gives to Amun all the goods brought from Punt.

Interestingly enough, in the context of Thebes, the first documents that portray the use of the amulet by non-royalty are only found from the reign of Amenhotep II on. For example, Amenhotep, "overseer of the builders of Amun," in the reign of Amenhotep II is portrayed with this amulet on the chest of his coffin.<sup>8</sup> Sennefer, governor of Thebes during the reign of the same king, is also shown with a double heart amulet in the decoration of his tomb (TT 96). Maherpa, "bearer of the fan" and an intimate friend of Thutmose IV,

also wears a heart amulet on the chest of his precious wooden coffin found in his tomb of the Valley of the Kings (KV 36).<sup>9</sup> Yuia, father of queen Tiye, is depicted with a heart amulet on a vignette of the Book of the Dead,<sup>10</sup> on a *shawabty* statuette<sup>11</sup> and on a *ba* bird statuette.<sup>12</sup> Khaemhat, royal scribe of Amenhotep III, is shown with different kinds of heart amulets in his tomb decoration (TT 57). The famous Ramose, governor of the city of Thebes, also uses the object in a purification ceremony depicted on his Theban tomb (TT 55). However important the use of the heart amulet might have been in this period, the heart amulet seems to have vanished from the depictions of Akhenaten's reign. Curiously enough, it became increasingly popular among the pictorial and sculptural production of the Ramessid Period. On tomb decoration, in particular, the heart amulet is frequently depicted in scenes related to funerary ceremonies or to the afterlife of royal subjects, as it is the case of Rai, royal scribe and supervisor of the domains of Horemheb and Amon (TT 255), Amenemopet "overseer of the domains of Amun" (TT 41), and Userhat, "funerary priest of the royal cult of Tutmose I" (TT 51). From Deir el-Medina, the tombs of Neferabu (TT 5), Nebenmaet (TT 219), and Irinefer (TT 290) also

<sup>5</sup> Cairo Egyptian Museum, JE 98831. See Cynthia Sheikholeslami, *The Egyptian Museum at the Millennium: a Special Exhibition in honor of the VIIIth International Congress of Egyptologists* (Cairo, 2000), pl. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, archaeological data show that, early in the 18th Dynasty, the amulet was already used among the Theban royal elite. For example, the object was found in the mummies of the king Ahmose and queen Ah-hotep.

<sup>7</sup> Second Terrace, south colonnade.

<sup>8</sup> Eton College, ECM 1876. Stephen Spurr, Nicholas Reeves and Stephen Quirke, *Egyptian Art at Eton College: Selections from the Myers Museum* (New York, 1999), 24.

<sup>9</sup> Cairo Egyptian Museum, JE 31378 or CG 4219.

<sup>10</sup> See Theodore Davis, *The Funeral Papyrus of Iouiya. With an Introduction by Édouard Naville* (London, 1908), pl. I.

<sup>11</sup> Cairo Egyptian Museum, SR 95368. See James Quibell, *CG, n° 51001-51191: The Tomb of Yuia and Thuiu* (Cairo, 1908), pl. XVIII.

<sup>12</sup> Cairo Egyptian Museum, JE 95312.

show the deceased portrayed with the amulet in afterlife scenes. Occasionally, funerary sculpture also portrayed the deceased with the amulet.

During the 21st Dynasty the object stood as an important item of magical protection among the priesthood of Amun where it was frequently depicted on the chest of the anthropoid coffins. Among the coffins found on the royal cache of Deir el-Bahari, some of the most impressive of them were decorated with depictions of the heart amulet, sometimes associated to the images of the solar scarab.<sup>13</sup> Items such as those suggest that complex depictions of the heart amulet were an attribute of a high rank. Also in the collective tomb of Bab el-Gussus, several anthropoid coffins were found showing large depictions of that amulet on their chests.<sup>14</sup> Although the object is seldom found on some women's coffins,<sup>15</sup> it seems that the depiction of the heart amulet is more closely related to the male priests. Besides the depiction of the amulet on coffins, it was also frequently drawn over the so-called "mythological papyri" typical of the period. Later on, in the Late Period editions of the Book of the Dead, the heart amulet will stand as a mandatory attribute of the deceased, especially in the context of the "cardiac" vignettes.<sup>16</sup>

After the 21st Dynasty the amulet is rarely depicted in human contexts, starting to be an iconographical attribute of specific divinities, as the divine children (Horpakhered, Nefertum, or Ihy) or the falcon gods such as Horus<sup>17</sup> or the Akhet bird.<sup>18</sup>

At this point we can detect an important development in the use of the heart amulet. Archaeological and iconographic data suggest that, until the beginning of 18th Dynasty, the object seemed to have a strong connection to Theban royalty and possibly could be used with a meaning of "divine" status. From the reign of Amenhotep II on, maybe reflecting the desire of strengthening the loyalty of his high officers, it is possible that the amulet started to be used as a very exclusive decoration. This is suggested by the fact that it can only be found among the individuals more closely connected to the king. Since it could still be viewed as an important sign of the Theban elite, the heart amulet was also seen as an unacceptable symbol to the spirit of Amarna's reform, which may explain the notorious absence of the amulet among depictions dated from this period.

<sup>13</sup> Both of the coffins of Pinedjem II (Cairo Egyptian Museum, JE 26197) and the outer coffin of Nesikhonsu (Cairo Egyptian Museum, JE 26199), his wife, have an elaborated iconographic programme where the heart is a central element. See Georges Daressy, *CG*, n° 61001-61044: *Cercueils des cachettes royales* (Cairo, 1909), pl. XLII and pl. XLV.

<sup>14</sup> It is usually on the finest coffins that the amulet is represented. See the coffin and mummy cover of Padiamon (Cairo Egyptian Museum, CG 6233/CG 6235) and the mummy cover of Pakharu (Cairo Egyptian Museum, CG 6122, now in Alexandria National Museum). About this coffin see Erik Hornung and Betsy Bryan, *The Quest of Immortality: Treasures of Ancient Egypt*, (Washington, 2002), 158. Depictions of the amulet are also found on CG 6153 and CG 6191. For these coffins see Andrzej Niwinski, *CG*, n° 6069-82: *The Second Find of Deir el-Bahri (Coffins)* (Cairo, 1999), fig. 113. Similar depictions can be found in the coffin CG 6028 (Cairo Egyptian Museum) and in many other monuments. For the coffin AE 10, in Berna Historical Museum, see Regine Schulz and Matthias Seidel, *Egipto: O Mundo dos Faraós*, (Lisboa, 1997), 476. For the coffin N 2503533, in the Vatican Gregorian Museum, see Annie Gasse, *Les sarcophages de la Troisième Période Intermédiaire du Museo Gregoriano Egizio* (Vatican, 1996), 81, pl. XIII, 2. Also on coffin AF 9593, in the Louvre Museum (unpublished).

<sup>15</sup> Unet (Louvre Museum, AF 9593), Direpu (Cairo Egyptian Museum, CG 6028) and Ikhi (N 2503532) are songstresses of Amun. They wear the amulet on the chest of their coffins. Nesitanebetacheru and Unet also show the amulet on the scene of the weighing of the heart displayed on their coffins. However, the coffin of Unet was not made for a lady, but for a male priest: the lid of the coffin depicts a male priest, but the side decoration of the coffin depicts the female songstress. Anyway, we may take as a rule that, when a couple is depicted, it is always the man that wears the amulet. See Book of the Dead of the architect Kha and his wife Merit, from Deir el-Medina (TT 8) and the funerary papyrus of Yuya (from KV 46).

<sup>16</sup> For the study of the "cardiac" vignettes of the late versions of the Book of the Dead see Rogério Sousa, "The cardiac vignettes of the Book of the Dead (Late Period)," *BAEDE* 17 (2007), 39-53.

<sup>17</sup> See Cairo Egyptian Museum, JE 30335, in Jean-Pierre Corteggiani, *L'Égypte des pharaons au Musée du Caire* (Paris, 1986), 160.

<sup>18</sup> See Cairo Egyptian Museum, SR 6850 (unpublished).

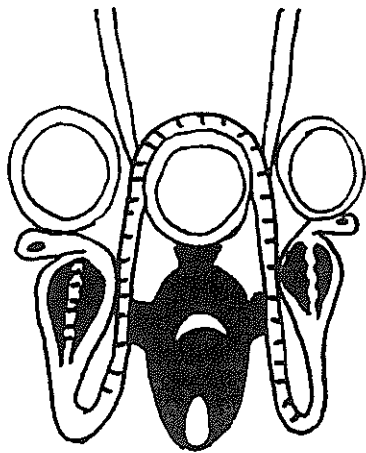


Fig. 2. Amulet of illumination. Anthropoid coffin of Unet, 21st Dynasty. Louvre Museum (AF 9593), Paris. Drawing by the author.

On the other hand, in the Ramessid Period, depictions of the amulet became more frequent among tomb decoration of Theban necropolis. However, they seem to have changed their meaning, since they are not used in a political context but in a religious one, in strong association with the afterlife. The amulet is also an important object among depictions of Theban clergy of the 21st Dynasty. From then on, the amulet started to be an iconographic attribute of child divinities. Even when a person (especially the king) wore the amulet, it seems that the intention was to identify himself with a child god. This is the case of the Pharaoh, very frequently depicted with the amulet in the context where the identification with the child god (such as Ihy or Horpakhered) is intended.

#### Symbolic Contexts in the Use of Heart Amulets

Our hypothesis is that variations detected in the use of heart amulets may be due to variations in its meaning. The great diversity of artistic depictions of the heart amulet may in fact be grouped in four major symbolic contexts in which the amulet is invested with different symbolic meanings and perhaps with distinct ritual functions.<sup>19</sup>

#### Heart of illumination

In this particular and highly exclusive context, the heart amulet is used as a symbol of an illuminated conscience, which in early New Kingdom could only be attributed to the king. With this meaning, the amulet was depicted with a solar disk on top of it and, in that way, it seemed to be used as an attribute of the god Horus, especially in his falcon manifestation.<sup>20</sup>

Very rarely, the solar-headed amulet is also shown in certain royal rituals. This is the case of the dedication of offerings performed by Hatshepsut to the god Amun, at Deir el-Bahari. Here, the sovereign wears a pectoral composed by a solar-headed heart flanked by two sacred serpents. This splendid piece of jewelery is used by the queen in a ritual context that was devised to prove her ability to guarantee the divine cult. In this way, the solar headed heart amulet could help to demonstrate that the queen successfully performed the royal task of connecting the divine realm and the earthly world, through her "illuminated" mind. In this context, the heart amulet seems to be a tangible sign of the divine status of the Pharaoh. Topped by the solar disk, the amulet might have been a symbol of identification of the king's heart with the sun, and signaled the illumination of his conscience (that is to say, his ability to perform *maet* in the very same way that the sun did at the cosmic level).

It is also interesting to see that the solar-headed amulet was frequently depicted on the chest of the 21st Dynasty coffins of the Theban priests of Amun (fig. 2).<sup>21</sup> This use seems an appropriation of an

<sup>19</sup> Although these categories may in fact be largely representative of the depictions of the heart amulet in Egyptian Art, we can add to these major themes a few exceptional motifs which will be the focus of our analysis in another article.

<sup>20</sup> See the avian statue of Horus: Cairo Egyptian Museum, JE 30335.

<sup>21</sup> See Unet's coffin (Louvre Museum, AF 9593) especially the outer coffins of Pinedem II and Nesikhonsu (Cairo Egyptian Museum, JE 26197 and 26199) and the mummy cover of Padiamon (Cairo Egyptian Museum, CG 6235).

earthly life. Therefore, the fact that the amulet was given by the king during the lifetime of the officer does not exclude a funerary use: the golden amulet symbolized after all the immortal heart of the officer, a conquest of his intelligence and honor. An example of such use can be seen in representations of lustration ceremonies performed in the ritual context of the erection of the mummy over a sand hill that, from the reign of Amenhotep II on, became an important feature of tomb decoration among the elite funerals of the period.<sup>25</sup> Yellow or red colored, the object depicted in those situations was certainly a golden heart amulet. Although without a solar disk, this amulet might have had a meaning closer to the one exposed before. In fact, rather than a magical substitute of the heart, the amulet might have been depicted to assure that the deceased had the virtue and the wisdom required to allow his identification with the rising sun, which indeed was crucial to go forth by day.

Reminiscent of this use of the amulet is probably the depiction of it on the chest of the anthropoid coffins produced until the end of 18th Dynasty. On some of those monuments the amulet, painted in yellow or covered by a gold leaf, is depicted between the hands of the deceased (sometimes holding the signs *djed* and *tjet*) and held by a heavy necklace.<sup>26</sup> Void of any other funerary symbols, the depiction of the amulet in this context intends to show that the deceased had already been decorated by the king as a keeper of *maat* and, in this manner, he had accomplished his task of being a righteous one. The depiction of the amulet on the chest of some funerary statuettes of this period, including *shawabtis*<sup>27</sup> and statuettes of *ba* birds probably had the same meaning.<sup>28</sup> Examples like these allow us to think that despite being received on earthly life as a decoration (as a symbol of royal acknowledgment), it was also used in the afterlife. The heart amulet could be a powerful help in the court of Osiris, where the royal decree was going to be observed.

#### *The amulet of justification*

From the Ramessid Period on it is very usual to depict the heart amulet in a funerary context. This can mainly be seen among the vignettes of the weighing of the heart (often painted on tomb walls),<sup>29</sup> where the deceased receives it as a sign of the positive result obtained. The fact that the deceased

<sup>25</sup> Representations of this kind can be seen in some of the most elaborate tombs from Theban necropolis. Tombs of Duauanech (TT 125), Sennefer (TT 96) provide some of the finest examples of the use of the heart amulet in this context. The tombs of Ramose (TT 55) and Userhat (TT 51) also provide similar depictions of the heart in the context of lustral purification. For the lustral depiction in Userhat tomb see Norman de Garis Davies, *Two Ramesside Tombs at Thebes* (New York, 1927), pl. XI. For the description of the ritual see Jan Assmann, *Mort et l'au-delà dans l'Égypte ancienne* (Monaco, 2003), 468–74. These depictions must be distinguished from the funerary libation which had a distinct meaning. See Alan Gardiner, "The Baptism of Pharaoh," *JEA* 36 (1950), 3–12. Also Aylward Blackman, "Sacramental ideas and usages in Ancient Egypt," *RT* 39 (1920), 45–48 and Cathie Spieser, "L'eau et la regeneration des morts d'après les representations des tombes thébaines du Nouvel Empire," *CdÉ* 72 (1997), 221–28.

<sup>26</sup> The oldest known type of these representations goes back to the reign of Thutmose III and was elaborated to Amenhotep, the "Overseer of the builders of Amen." Maherpa, intimate friend of king Thutmose IV, was another great personality to be rewarded with one of these amulets depicted on the chest of an anthropoid coffin. The sarcophagus of Khai (n° 2686), an high official buried in Nubia, currently conserved in the Elephantine Museum, also presents a great heart amulet on its chest.

<sup>27</sup> See Luís Araújo, *Estatuetas Funerárias Egípcias da XXI dinastia* (Lisboa, 2003), 108. Also Gae Callender, in Ian Shaw, ed., *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 2000), 182. Although, unfortunately, most of these statuettes do not display the titles of the deceased represented, one of them belonged to Yuya, one of the most eminent individualities of the reign of Amenhotep III. The quality of these objects must alert us to the equally high status of its proprietors.

<sup>28</sup> An interesting *ba* statuette from the tomb of Yuya also presents a heart amulet on its chest.

<sup>29</sup> The scene of the weighing of the heart is a common theme depicted among the tombs of Theban necropolis. This is the case of the tombs of Amenemuia (TT 178), Neferskerhu and Pabasa (TT 296), Neferenepet (TT 178), Userhat (TT 51), Rai (TT 255), Nakhtamon (TT 341), Amenemopet (TT 41), Khonsu (TT 31) and Simut (TT 409), to mention only a few of them.



Fig. 3. Amulet of justification. Papyrus of Nesipakhchuti, Louvre Museum (E 17401), Drawing by the author.

raise *maet*-like feathers in his hands (fig. 3) in a gesture of joy and contentment<sup>30</sup> makes very clear the fact that, used in that context, the heart amulet is a reward given by the court of the dead to legitimate the deceased as an Osiris.<sup>31</sup>

The vignettes that depict the amulet in scenes of adoration of Osiris must also be interpreted with this meaning. As in the former example, the amulet is used as a decoration of justice that allows the deceased to be in the presence of the god.

It is always with this meaning that the amulet is depicted on the chests of the anthropoid coffins produced on the 21st Dynasty. The differences between these representations and those from the former period lie on the fact that they are heavily surrounded by many other funerary symbols: the *benu* bird, a dog-like figure of Anubis, the solar winged scarab, many winged goddesses, sacred objects like the *ḥ-wr* totem and hieroglyphs such as *udjat*, *nefer* and *neb*.<sup>32</sup> Instead of the yellow pigments or the golden leaf used to color the amulet in former periods, now this object is painted in blue or black

and it is usually inscribed with the name of Osiris followed by the name of the deceased. Clearly, in this context, the amulet is used as a symbol of the osirification of the deceased and can be seen as an important element of the iconographical constellation of Osiris.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> This gesture is especially depicted on mythological papyri produced during the 21st Dynasty. See mythological papyri of Khonsumes (Kunsthistorisches Museum, AOS 3859). About this papyrus see Alexandre Piankoff and Natacha Rambova, *Mythological Papyri* (New York, 1957), pl. 147. Cf. the papyrus of Nesipakhchuti (Louvre Museum, E 17401). For this papyrus see idem, pl. 104. Papyrus Nesitanebetaui (Cairo Egyptian Museum, SR 40017). The same gesture is also depicted on the 21st Dynasty coffins, where this theme is very common. See the coffins of Pakharu (Cairo Egyptian Museum, CG 6122/6121, now in National Museum of Alexandria), Padiamon (Cairo Egyptian Museum, CG 6233/6235), Ankhefenmut (Cairo Egyptian Museum, CG 6109), Chebet (Cairo Egyptian Museum, CG 6028), Paser (Louvre Museum, N 2570) and Amenempermut (Cairo Egyptian Museum, CG 6153).

<sup>31</sup> In the vignettes of the weighing of the heart, the presentation of the deceased to the god Osiris is the natural consequence of a positive outcome of that procedure. Usually the amulet is given to the deceased before the adoration of Osiris. Although couples can be depicted, men are always the ones that wear the amulet. This is the case of the tomb of Rai and his wife, Nebetaui, (TT 255) where the amulet seems to be connected with the weighing of the heart.

<sup>32</sup> See lid of the exterior coffin of Pinedjem II (Cairo Egyptian Museum, JE 26197), but also the coffin of Padiamon (Cairo Egyptian Museum, CG 6233), the coffin and mummy cover of Pakharu (Cairo Egyptian Museum, CG 6122/6121, now in National Museum of Alexandria), the coffin of Tjenetethatmetjeru (Cairo Egyptian Museum, CG 6191) and other unidentified coffins (Cairo Egyptian Museum, CG 6153).

<sup>33</sup> These coffins, dated from the reign of Pinedjem II, usually have a great *usekh* necklace, in the center of which is depicted the heart amulet. See typology of these coffins in Andrzej Niwinski, *21st Dynasty Coffins from Thebes* (Mainz am Rhein, 1988), 67–96.



Fig. 4. Amulet of justification. Coffin, 21st Dynasty. Drawing after Andrzej Niwinski, *The Second Find of Deir el-Bahari* (Cairo, 1999), 56.

As an Osirian symbol of justification, the amulet is also used by the deceased in many different situations of the life in the beyond. Playing the *senet* game<sup>34</sup> and to be refreshed by the powers of life given by the tree goddess are only some of the many pleasant situations that can be at hand in the afterlife to the rightful ones. Going forth by day, travel on the solar bark<sup>35</sup> to the paradisiacal fields of Iaru<sup>36</sup> and give praise to the divinities of the beyond<sup>37</sup> are among the many situations where the deceased is often depicted with the heart amulet (fig. 4). Through the representation of the amulet, all these situations of the hereafter were connected to the osirification of the deceased, the true cause to the happiness experienced in the beyond.

Nevertheless, the ultimate privilege offered by the amulet was to participate in the great mysteries of the Duat, like the regeneration of the solar disk or the triumph of the solar bark over Apopis. These are some examples that show that the osirification of the deceased allowed him to participate in the mysteries where the sun would triumph over the powers of darkness and death, from which the entire regeneration of the cosmos would depend on.<sup>38</sup>

Generally speaking, this kind of iconographical use of the heart amulet intends to identify the deceased as an Osiris, someone that had overcome successfully the trial of the beyond and from then on could be accepted among the presence of the gods and go forth by day. In this way, the amulet was viewed as an Osirian symbol, a sign of purity and virtue that allowed the deceased to participate in the mysteries of the beyond.

#### *The amulet of divine birth*

Since the beginning of the 18th Dynasty, the heart amulet was used to distinguish royal princes. The oldest record of such use can be found on the Donation Stela, where it is worn by the young prince while his father leads him to the presence of Amun-Ra (fig. 5).<sup>39</sup> The amulet is also found among a group statue of royal princes found in Zagazig that represents a nurse with four princes

<sup>34</sup> In the tomb of Nebenmaet (TT 219), from 19th Dynasty, the deceased is depicted playing the *senet* game with his wife, Meretseguer. See Charles Maystre, *Tombe de Deir el-Médineh: La tombe de Nebenmât (n° 219)* (Cairo, 1936), pl. V.

<sup>35</sup> In the tomb of Irinefer (TT 290) the deceased wears the amulet in front of the *benu* bird while travelling in the solar bark.

<sup>36</sup> In the tomb of Amenemopet (TT 41) the deceased is depicted with the heart amulet in several situations of the afterlife: while he visits the Fields of Iaru, among the navigation of the solar bark and in the combat with Apopis. See Jan Assmann, *Das Grab des Amenemope (TT41)* (Mainz am Rhein, 1991), pl. 40.

<sup>37</sup> In the tomb of Khakhbenet (TT 2), the deceased, adorned with the amulet, prays before Thot.

<sup>38</sup> On the 21st Dynasty, pictorial compositions became highly elaborate, turning into the way to express complex theological notions, like the complementarity between solar and Osirian elements. See Niwinski, "The solar-Osirian unity," 91.

<sup>39</sup> See Harari, "Nature de la Stèle de Donation," pl. II.



Fig. 5. The amulet of divine birth. Donation stela. Karnak, temple of Amon-Ré. 18th Dynasty, reign of Ahmés. Drawing after Ibrahim Harari, "Nature de la stèle de donation de fonction du roi Ahmôsis a la reine Ahmès-Nefertari," *ASAE* 56 (1956), pl. II.

adorned with the amulet.<sup>40</sup> The significance of the use of the amulet in this context is not clear. At that time, the amulet did not seem to have the strong funerary significance that it acquired in later times. It seems likely that, in the beginning of the 18th Dynasty, the amulet was used by the royal family as a symbol of purity. That would explain the later use of the amulet as a royal decoration: it symbolized the rise of the status of the officer to the inner and intimate circle of the "family" of the Pharaoh.

From a certain perspective, all of the contexts of use of the amulet previously discussed can also be connected to the idea of purity. While it was used as a royal decoration, it was also a symbol of the purification required to be in the presence of the Pharaoh. The same idea of purity is also underlined in the amulet of justification, since it was the symbol of the purity measured by the weighing of the heart.

<sup>40</sup> Cairo Egyptian Museum, JE 98831. See Cynthia Shoikhosleslami, *The Egyptian Museum at the Millennium: a Special Exhibition in honor of the VIIIth International Congress of Egyptologists* (Cairo, 2000), pl. 22.



