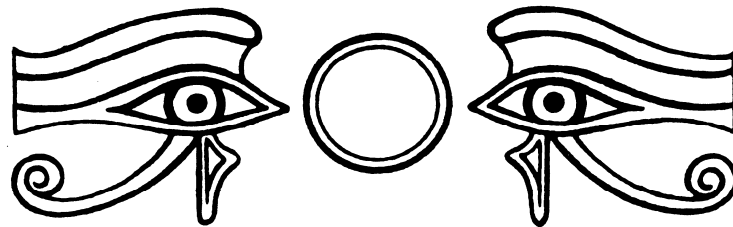


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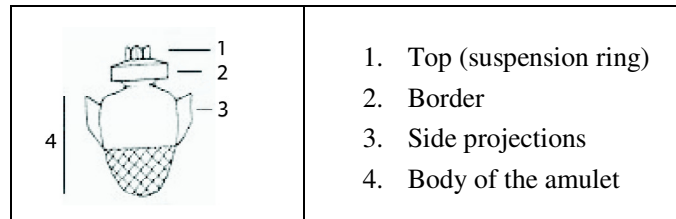
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## Animal and Human Headed Heart Amulets: Symbolism and Meaning

Rogério SOUSA (ISCS-N, CITCEM-FLUP)

Cette étude a pour but de comprendre la signification des amulettes de cœur à tête humaine ou animale. Par une approche iconographique, il est proposé une nouvelle lecture du symbolisme de cette catégorie particulière des amulettes égyptiennes de cœur. Grâce à cette interprétation, nous espérons clarifier la signification et le rôle magique des amulettes de cœur.

Heart amulets are among the most common funerary apothropaic objects in ancient Egyptian burials. Carved in a great variety of raw materials, from highly prized stones, such as cornelian, lapis lazuli or green stones, to ceramic materials, such as faience or clay, these small-sized objects rarely exceed the height of 4 or 5 centimetres. Despite that, a wide variety of formal features may be detected among them. To start with we must therefore present the morphological elements of a standard heart amulet.<sup>1</sup>



Morphology of heart amulets<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The classification of heart amulets has led us in a previous publication to present a number of categories of the heart amulets. See R. SOUSA, 'The Heart Amulet in Ancient Egypt: A Typological Study', in J.-Cl. GOYON & C. CARDIN, *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Egyptologists*, Leuven, Paris, Dudley 2007, Vol. I, pp. 713-721.

<sup>2</sup> Cairo Egyptian Museum (CG 5221): G. REISNER, *Catalogue Général des Antiquités Égyptiennes du Musée du Caire, n° 5218-6000, Amulets I*, Cairo 1907, pl. I.

The aim of this article is to discuss the iconographical features of two particular categories of heart amulets that do not have the shape of the conventional suspension ring but otherwise have their top shaped like an animal or human head.<sup>3</sup> Amulets with these features are very rare, particularly the ones with an animal head, which obviously makes it more difficult to understand its symbolism.

### The human-headed heart amulets

Human-headed heart amulets blossom in the Ramesside Period and decrease afterwards. They manage to survive, alas with a different meaning, until the Greco-Roman Period. They are usually the largest-sized type of heart amulets, reaching the height of 5 or 7 cm. Ramesside human-headed heart amulets were carved out of a great variety of raw materials: faience, jasper, glass, alabaster, quartz, steatite, basalt, serpentine, and schist are among the materials more commonly found. Unlike the standard versions of the heart amulets, the human-headed amulets do not possess any kind of side projections.<sup>4</sup> Some amulets have their heads pierced in order to suspend them but in other objects we cannot find any piercing which would clearly indicate a funerary use.

A tripartite wig, usual attribute of the deceased depicted as an Osirian divinity, usually frames the head. The wig is sometimes carefully engraved with vertical lines to suggest the hair. In some objects the wig is formed by the incrustation of a dark stone,<sup>5</sup> while in some faience or glass amulets the hair can be coloured with a black or dark blue pigment.<sup>6</sup> Of the earliest of these, some do not possess further decoration.<sup>7</sup> However it is possible to detect a progressive heaviness in the decoration of these objects. The two hands of the deceased, suggesting a mummy-like attitude,<sup>8</sup> and the *usekh* collar soon became important elements of the decoration of the human-headed heart amulets.<sup>9</sup> More rarely, the *ba* bird,<sup>10</sup> the winged scarab<sup>11</sup> and the *benu* bird<sup>12</sup> can also be found among the symbols

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<sup>3</sup> Following the advice of Professor Erik Hornung, to whom we express our gratitude by his careful reading of our study, we give in this article a special attention to a class of objects that have not yet been studied enough.

<sup>4</sup> We have found only one object with a suspension ring: Cairo Egyptian Museum (SR 9221).

<sup>5</sup> See Louvre Museum (AF 12141) or Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.8/115512 tf).

<sup>6</sup> See Cairo Egyptian Museum (SR 922, SR 9196).

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.8/115512 tf), Louvre Museum (N 4622) or Petrie Museum (UC 69861).

<sup>8</sup> See British Museum (EA 15598) or Cairo Egyptian Museum (SR 9215).

<sup>9</sup> See Cairo Egyptian Museum (SR 9204, SR 10824), British Museum (EA 29440).

<sup>10</sup> See British Museum (EA 26807).

<sup>11</sup> See Cairo Egyptian Museum (SR 10824), Petrie Museum (UC 52612).

depicted on these objects. It is also possible to find the depiction of a *naos*, sometimes flanked by the gods Re and Osiris.<sup>13</sup> As well as the Osirian name of the deceased<sup>14</sup> it is also possible to find a short version of chapter 30 B of the Book of the Dead on the flattened surface of some objects.<sup>15</sup> Besides their use among the wrappings of the mummy, these amulets can also be found inserted on large funerary pectorals. In the superb composition of the pectoral of Kiemneferui, for instance, a human-headed heart amulet is found at the centre. The entire pectoral is shaped like a *naos* inside of which is found a heart amulet positioned above a solar barque together with the gods Re and Osiris.<sup>16</sup> While in some pectorals, the human-headed heart amulet seems to be identified with the sun disk,<sup>17</sup> in other objects it seems to be strongly connected to Osiris.<sup>18</sup>

During the Ramesside Period, the human-headed heart amulet seemed to have been an important funerary artefact, but this type of object became less prevalent after that period. Interestingly enough, a similar class of objects reappears in the Greco-Roman Period but with a very different meaning. In fact, although they might seem similar to the Ramesside objects, these later amulets had a votive purpose revealed by the inclusion of a base in the bottom end of the amulet. According to Julia Falkovitch the presence of a base in an amulet indicates that the object could be used as a divine statue.<sup>19</sup>

### Animal-headed heart amulets

Animal-headed amulets are extremely rare and are an example of the fine work done by Egyptian craftsmen. Unfortunately we only possess three objects that fall into this category.

The one from the Cairo Egyptian Museum was found among the wrappings of Amenemope, in the tomb of Psusennes I.<sup>20</sup> The amulet measures only 3,5 cm in

<sup>12</sup> See Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (Inv. B326). The *benu* bird is depicted in this amulet over a lotus flower and topped by a solar disk. See also British Museum (EA 29440).

<sup>13</sup> See Petrie Museum (UC 52605/UC 13212).

<sup>14</sup> See Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (Inv. B326).

<sup>15</sup> See G. STEINDORFF, *Aniba (Service des Antiquités d'Égypte, Mission Archéologique de Nubie [1929-1934])*, Vol. II, Glückstadt, Hamburg, New York 1937, tf. 50.

<sup>16</sup> See Cairo Egyptian Museum (JE 92638). This object was found in the Ramesside coffin of Kiemneferui, found at the precinct of Sekhememkhet, in Sakara.

<sup>17</sup> See J. TAYLOR, *Death and the afterlife in Ancient Egypt*, British Museum Press, London 2001, p. 204. Here, the amulet rises from the solar bark, and it is greeted by Isis and Nephthys.

<sup>18</sup> See B. VOGEL, *Meisterwerke Altägyptischer Keramik: 5000 Jahre Kunst und Kunsthandwerk aus Ton und Fayence*, Höhr-Grenzhausen, Rastal-Haus, 1978, n° 318.

<sup>19</sup> J. FALKOVITCH, 'L'usage des amulettes égyptiennes', *BSÉG* 16 (1992), pp. 20-26.

<sup>20</sup> See Cairo Egyptian Museum (JE 86045).

height and is carved out of chalcedony. The head of the amulet depicts that of a baboon topped by a suspension ring. Unlike the human-headed heart amulets, this object has two side projections, a typical feature of the heart amulets. Besides the tripartite wig and the collar, the amulet is decorated with a short version of the titulature of the pharaoh Amenemope.

The object from the Louvre Museum seems to be dated from the Ramesside Period and it is carved out of schist, measuring 4 cm in height.<sup>21</sup> The bottom of the object is shaped like the lid of a vase topped by a canine head. Like the one from the Cairo Museum, it also has side projections.

The object from the British Museum is moulded from clay and portrays an avian head<sup>22</sup> clearly resembling the head of a falcon framed by a tripartite wig with two side projections.

### **Symbolism of human-headed heart amulets**

Both formal and iconographic features of the Ramesside human-headed amulets strongly suggest a funerary purpose. Their size, weight and suspension method do not suggest their use by the living. Their iconographic attributes seem to depict the deceased as an Osirian entity and remind some of the features that can be found on contemporary anthropomorphic coffins with the hands over the chest and sometimes the *ba* bird and the winged scarab as well. These elements and the writing of the Osirian name of the deceased confer to these objects a strong Osirian significance.

In order to clarify the meaning of these artefacts we must bear in mind the general meaning of the heart amulets. It is often suggested that the heart amulet is an apotropaic piece aiming to provide a physical substitute for the heart organ. This is not our interpretation of the available data concerning its use in iconographical contexts. In fact, during the Ramesside Period, the main symbolism of the heart amulet concerns the weighing of the heart. The funerary vignettes that illustrate that event frequently show the deceased receiving the heart amulet as a recompense for the positive outcome of the judgement.<sup>23</sup> During the Ramesside Period and even in the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty, the object seems to have been used as a symbol of the deceased's virtue and wisdom or, in other words, as a symbol of his pure and *maetic* heart (in a spiritual and not a physical sense). Given this general meaning of the object it becomes clear that the

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<sup>21</sup> See Louvre Museum (E 11682).

<sup>22</sup> See British Museum (35412).

<sup>23</sup> See R. SOUSA, 'The Cardiac Vignettes of the Book of the Dead (Late Period)', *BAEDE* 17 (2008), pp. 39-53 ; *Id.*, *Heart of Wisdom: Studies on the Heart Amulet in Ancient Egypt*, Oxford 2011, fig. 53.

human-headed heart amulets intend to depict the deceased's justified heart, that is to say, the divine heart fully identified with Osiris.

The increasing complex solar-Osirian theology of the Ramesside Period is also detected in the decoration of these amulets. Some of them present a *naos*, sometimes flanked by the gods Re and Osiris,<sup>24</sup> which shows that the pure heart of the deceased was in contact with the primordial world of the Duat (where the mythic union of Re and Osiris took place) and that it could experience a solar rebirth, illustrated by the *benu* bird<sup>25</sup> and the solar scarab.<sup>26</sup> This idea is also suggested in some of the pectorals where the amulet was inserted: the amulet is found in the centre of a *naos*, where the union of Re and Osiris leads to a solar rebirth of the deceased.<sup>27</sup>

A very different meaning seems to be associated to the human-headed heart amulets crafted in later times, especially during the Greco-Roman Period. The formal features of these objects, crafted with a plane base, show that they were conceived as a miniature of a divine statue. It seems that these amulets were no longer an image of the deceased but that they were seen as the heart of Osiris, the sacred vase of Athribis. In fact, the decoration of the body of the amulet follows the iconography of Osiris Canopus. The central element of the decoration is a *naos* sometimes associated with a winged scarab and two child divinities. The head is also adorned with a tall crown, a common attribute seen in the iconography of Osiris Canopus.<sup>28</sup> These objects should be seen in the light of a personal relation to a god and not as a funerary symbol.

### Symbolism of animal-headed heart amulets

The few examples known to us of animal-headed heart amulets do not permit us to make definite assumptions about their symbolism. Based on the available information, certain hypothetic considerations can be formulated which future studies may or will confirm.

All these objects were carved in such a way that it is not possible to consider their cardiac configuration as accidental. In fact, the side projections that all of them possess clearly identify these artefacts as heart amulets. Their animal

<sup>24</sup> See Petrie Museum (UC 52605/UC 13212).

<sup>25</sup> See Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (Inv. B326). The *benu* bird is depicted in this amulet over a lotus flower and topped by a solar disk. See also British Museum (EA 29440).

<sup>26</sup> See Cairo Egyptian Museum (SR 10824), Petrie Museum (UC 52612).

<sup>27</sup> See Cairo Egyptian Museum (JE 92638). See also J. TAYLOR, *Death and the afterlife in Ancient Egypt*, London 2001, p. 204. Here, the amulet rises from the solar bark, and it is greeted by Isis and Nephthys.

<sup>28</sup> See Petrie Museum (UC 52618/UC 52616). See also W. M. F. PETRIE, *Amulets*, London 1914, p. 36.

features are employed in these objects as divine attributes. As such, two alternative readings of these objects may be admitted. In the first place we may consider the heads of the baboon, the dog and the falcon as part of the typical iconography of Thoth, Anubis and Horus. However, the gods most commonly associated with such attributes are the four sons of Horus. Instead, it seems more plausible that the features of the baboon, the jackal and the falcon may in fact be understood as depictions of Hapi, Duamutef and Khebehsenuf, respectively. That reading of the animal-headed amulets reveals the possibility that some of the human-headed amulets previously discussed may in fact represent a depiction of Imsety. This is possibly the situation of the simplest unadorned human-headed heart amulets. Like their animal counterparts, the human-headed amulets that could depict Imsety would not have any decoration besides the name of the deceased.<sup>29</sup>

By admitting the possibility that some heart amulets were associated with the imagery of the four sons of Horus we must therefore pay some attention to the significance of such symbolism. Being the protectors of the viscera, the four sons of Horus were magically attached to the heart *ib* of the deceased which, according to the interpretation of Thierry Bardinnet, was not understood as the cardiac muscle but as the inner part of the body cavity.<sup>30</sup> This is one possible explanation for the depiction of the four sons of Horus, not merely as miniatures of the canopic vessels, but specifically as heart amulets. However reasonable this explanation may be, one other reason may be the association between the four sons of Horus and the heart amulet. Among the iconographical compositions of the Ramesside Period we can see a clear association between these four gods and the heart amulet. In the funerary papyrus of Amenemuia (Berlin Egyptian Museum, n° P 3127) for example, these deities are depicted in close association with the heart amulet, which forms the central element of the composition.<sup>31</sup> The reason why the four gods appear to be so closely connected to the heart amulet seems to be found on the amulet itself, which is inscribed with chapter 30 B of the Book of the Dead. The four sons of Horus are a regular iconographic element of the vignettes of the cardiac chapters. When we examine the papyrus of Amenemuia, these gods seem to play the role of guardian deities that protect the justified deceased on his way through the Duat to be regenerated.

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<sup>29</sup> This could be the situation of the amulet 38.8/115512 tf of the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the object N 4622 from the Louvre.

<sup>30</sup> T. BARDINET, *Les Papyrus médicaux de l'Égypte pharaonique*, Paris 1995.

<sup>31</sup> See Fig. 10.

**Final Remarks**

Although much rarer than the standardized heart amulets, the animal and human-headed heart amulets also stress the connection between the heart amulet and the imagery of the weighing of the heart and the judgement of the dead. This typically corresponds to the religious trend of the Ramesside Period when a complex iconographical set of symbols related to the afterlife was elaborated. This iconographical exploration of the judgement of the dead seems to be a funerary development of the personal piety. In the same way as the heart was regarded during the life of the individual as the central element to establish the personal relationship with god, once in the Duat, the heart should become the seat of the deceased's divine essence (*ba*). This seems to be the intention behind the depiction of the human-headed heart amulets. As for the animal-headed heart amulets, while also connected to the judgement of the dead, their significance seems to be related to the divine protection given to the deceased on his secret journey through the Duat: a protection that could only be possible thanks to the purity of his heart. The fact that so few of these items have come down to us must also stress that such objects were probably known only to a very exclusive elite (such as the royal origin of the baboon-headed amulet suggests) and therefore the symbolism that underlies these amulets may be seen as the true reason behind the rarity of these artefacts: perhaps their religious meaning was too selective to be known to a wider range of people.

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## FIGURES



From left to right:

Fig. 1: Human-headed heart amulet (Metropolitan Museum of Art, DP136533). Gift of Miss A. M. Hegemann, 1938 (38.8). © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 2: Human-headed heart amulet (Petrie Museum, UC 52605). © Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, University College London

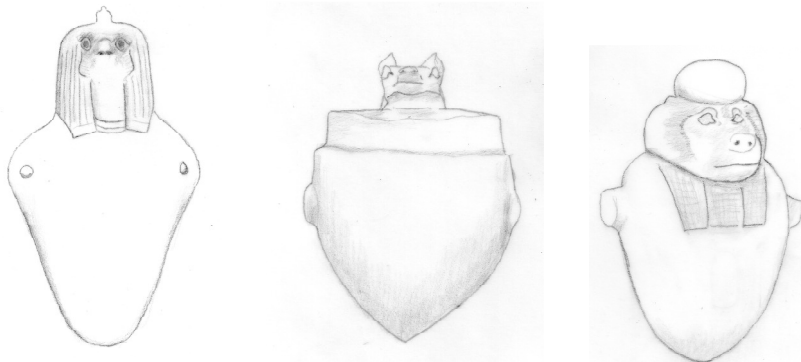
Fig. 3: Human-headed heart amulet (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, B326). Drawing by the author



From left to right:

Fig. 4: Pectoral of the lady Kiemneferwy (Cairo Egyptian Museum, JE 92638), from the funerary complex of Sekhemkhet (Sakara), Ramesside Period. Drawing by the author

Fig. 5: Miniature statuette of Osiris Canopus, Greco-Roman Period. Drawing by the author after W. M. F. PETRIE, *Amulets*, p. 36



From left to right:

Fig. 6: Animal-headed heart amulet (Cairo Egyptian Museum, JE 86045), from the burial of Psusennes I (Tanis), 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty. Drawing by the author

Fig. 7: Animal-headed heart amulet (Louvre Museum, E 11682). Drawing by the author

Fig. 8: Animal-headed heart amulet (British Museum, EA 35412). Drawing by the author

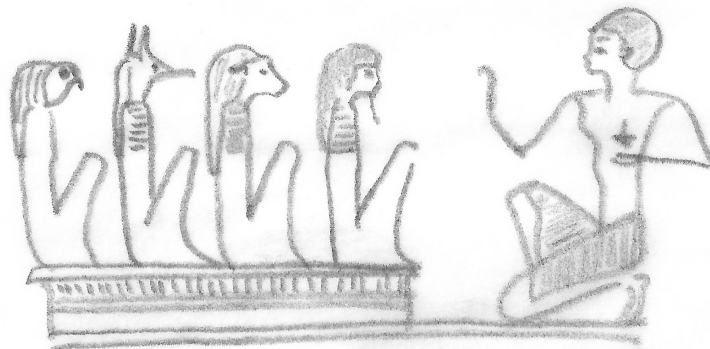


Fig. 9: Vignette of chapter 27 from the Book of the Dead of Ahmose (Louvre Museum, N 3086), Ptolemaic Period (?). Drawing by the author

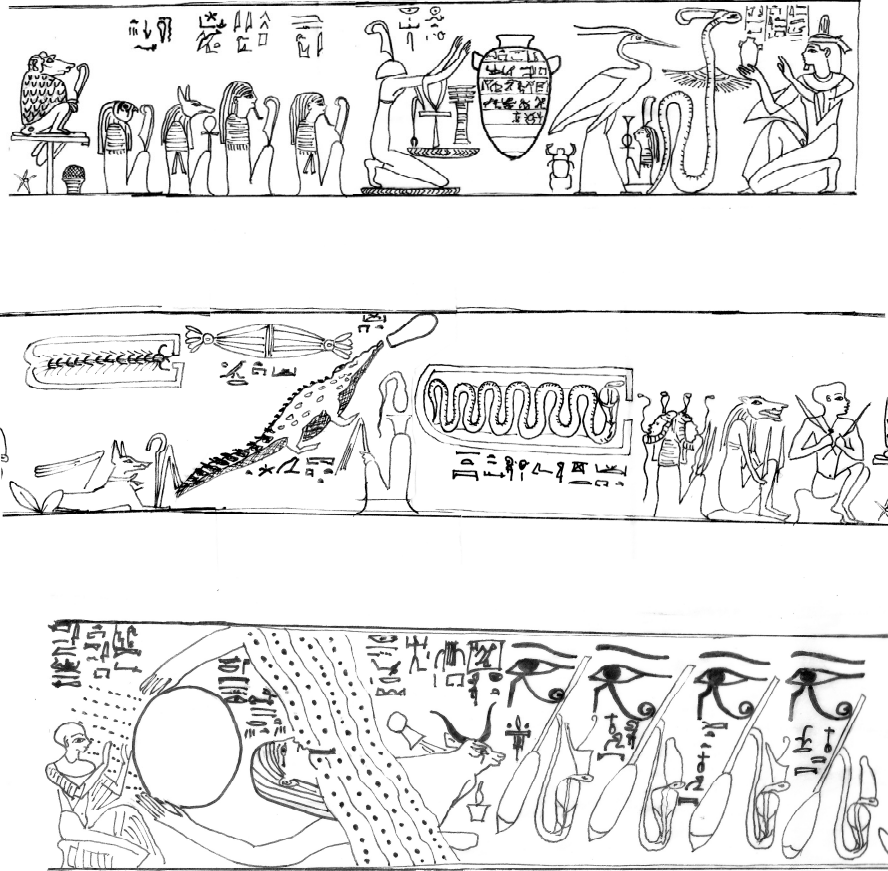


Fig. 10: Funerary papyrus of Amenemuia (Berlin Egyptian Museum, P 3127), Ramesside Period. Drawing by the author