ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROBLEMS OF MODERN EGYPTOLOGY

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We present in this study a brief description of the main morphological and symbolic features of the solar heart amulet. Under this designation we consider the heart amulets that present a sun disk over the top of the object. Starting with a morphological description of these artefacts, we will also consider in this article the study of the artistic rendering of this particular type of heart amulets as a way to clarify its symbolism.

**Morphological Features of Solar Heart Amulets**

Solar amulets are not a common artefact. Most of the objects known to us date from the Late Period, although, given the few available data in museum records, dating can be a very difficult task to undergo indeed, if not an impossible one. Faience stands as the most frequently used raw material to mould these objects. The use of crystal rock, which was not commonly used to carve standard heart amulets, is surprisingly high among solar amulets. Amulets like these, carved in crystal rock, have a strong visual impact thanks to the light effects produced by the material. Gold and, more rarely, cornelian were also used to manufacture these objects.

Side projections, intended to be the depiction of the cardiac veins or auricles, are a common feature among these amulets. As to the body of the amulet, it is usually decorated very simply, the most typical anatomical features being the shape of a crescent and mound. Notwithstanding this possibility, most solar heart amulets known to us do not have any decoration at all on their body.

The top of these artefacts usually have a square shape, suggesting the motif of a naos cornice. The sun disk or sometimes the body of the amulet can be pierced to allow the suspension of the object. As to the sun, it is usually clearly shaped in order to show the entire circle of the disk. However, some objects may actually show nearly half of the disk, thus suggesting the shape of the sun at sunrise.

**Depictions of Solar Heart Amulets**

The solar heart amulet is a common attribute of the avian form of the god Horus. In fact, especially among the bronze statuettes of the Late Period, the solar heart amulet was frequently

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1 SR 9214 (Cairo Egyptian Museum), AEO 10164 (Louvre Museum) and also no. 142877 (Warsaw National Museum).
3 SR 9261, SR 9263 and SR 9269 (Cairo Egyptian Museum).
4 SR 9261 and SR 9269 (Cairo Egyptian Museum).
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depicted on the chest of Horus, who also sometimes wears a royal crown, such as the pa-sechemty, and a usekh collar.6

Interestingly enough, the earliest depiction of the solar heart amulet known to us dates from the reign of Hatshepsut and can actually be seen on the funerary temple of this queen in Deir-el-Bahari, in the context of the offering of the goods brought from Punt.7 The amulet stands in the centre of a superbly decorated pectoral that seems to be made of gold.8 Two solar headed cobras flank the amulet and encircle it with their bodies. The entire composition stands on a ta sign. Notwithstanding the remarkable visual effect of that composition, this pectoral strangely remains the only depiction known to us of such a solar heart amulet before the Third Intermediate Period. In fact, it is only after the beginning of the Dynasty 21 that we can find new depictions of the solar heart amulet, where it is used as an iconographical feature of the Theban yellow anthropoid coffins. Although with nearly a lapse of four centuries, the depiction of the pectoral found on the external coffin of the lady Unet is remarkably similar to Hatshepsut’s pectoral: the solar heart is also encircled by the bodies of two solar headed cobras.9 A similar composition can also be found on the coffin of lady Akhi, as well as on her mummy cover: a black coloured heart is flanked by two cobras headed by a solar disk.10 Although it is slightly different due to its iconographical sophistication, the pectoral depicted on the mummy cover of Padiamon also has a strong affinity with the previously described depictions.11 The centre of the composition consists of a solar heart flanked by two cobras (these ones do not have a sun disk over their heads). The difference is that this entire composition is headed by the depiction of a large and superb winged scarab with ram’s head.

Although all the pectorals described before may seem remarkably similar, we cannot ignore their contextual distinction: while the pectoral of Hatshepsut is used in the context of the divine cult, a royal prerogative, the pectorals used by the clergy of Amun have a strong funerary meaning. Therefore, we need to clarify the meaning of the object in each context.

The Funerary Meaning of the Solar Heart Amulet

In order to get a clear picture of the funerary symbolism of the solar heart amulet we cannot ignore the iconographic motifs where the object is depicted, not as an amulet but as a symbol. In fact, the solar heart is often used among the decorations of the Dynasty 21 anthropoid coffins. We will now briefly comment on some of these compositions.12

On the coffin 24793 (British Museum), the solar heart is repeatedly depicted on the central vertical axis of the coffin. On the lower registers, the solar heart stands between two en-

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5 UC 22526 (Petrie Museum).
6 See avian statue of Horus: Cairo Egyptian Museum, JE 30335.
8 All the composition is collared in yellow, which suggests a golden artefact.
9 See coffin AF 9593 (Louvre Museum). The inner coffin is decorated with a similar pectoral. See also R. Sousa, ‘The Meaning of the heart amulets in Egyptian Art’ in JARCE 43 (2007), 62.
12 In all the quoted depictions the heart is always coloured in black with anatomical features coloured in red.
throned gods. Over the head of each god a shendjít shrine, an image that is frequently used as a symbol of the underworld, was depicted. Interestingly enough, the coffin of the lady Direpu, in the Cairo Egyptian Museum, has a similar composition: although the enthroned gods may be absent, the solar heart still is flanked by two shendjít shrines.

Another kind of composition may also be frequently seen. The solar heart stands over the nub sign of ‘gold’. Here again, it is the situation of the coffin 24793 (British Museum), where two solar hearts stand over nub and heb signs. This is clearly a composition that alludes to the iconographical depiction of the ‘Horus of gold’, where the god Horus stands over the sign nub to symbolize the triumph of Horus over Set. This triumph is, in fact, the reason for the justification of Osiris and the cause of his resurrection. Therefore, given the funerary context of the composition, the black heart can be seen as a symbol of the resurrection of Osiris. This interpretation can in fact be corroborated by other iconographic details. In contemporary coffins, we can find depictions of the heart amulet, always coloured in black, with inscriptions of the Osirian name of the deceased. The association between the depictions of the shendjít (a symbol of the Osirian realm) and the solar heart also stresses the Osirian significance of this symbol.

Besides, the symbolism of the object can be enriched with an obvious solar significance given the depiction of the solar disk. In fact, the solar heart may be seen as an iconographic rendering of the mythic union of Re and Osiris, the two principles of cosmic order. Being one of the most praised theological issues of the period, the cosmic union of Re and Osiris was the subject of many iconographic compositions. Therefore, especially in this funerary context, the solar heart may be regarded as another symbol of the solar-osirian union that was supposed to happen in the Duat.

In fact, among contemporary funerary papyri, we can also find the same symbolic articulation between the heart amulet and the solar disk. In the funerary papyrus of Nesipautitaui, we can see the depiction of a large heart amulet and a solar disk. However, instead of being depicted together, these symbols stand on the opposite faces of the scroll. The heart amulet is depicted in the beginning of the document and it is inscribed with the chapter 30B, standing as a symbol of the justification of the deceased. On the other hand, the solar disk is depicted at the end of the scroll and stands as the symbol of the rebirth of the deceased. It is between these symbols, with more or less the same rounded shape, that the path of transformation in the beyond is depicted. Besides that ‘geometrical’ symmetry between the heart amulet and the sun disk, we can also understand these symbols as different manifestations of the deceased. The large heart amulet explicitly refers to the Osirian identity of the deceased: the Osirian name is written on the surface of this amulet. On the other hand, the rising sun illustrates the solar manifesta-

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13 JE 29669/CG 6028, Cairo Egyptian Museum.
14 Around the central composition we see the signs ankh, djed and the tjet.
15 See J. Assmann, Mort et au-delà dans l’Égypte ancienne (Monaco, 2003), 114. The resurrection of Osiris is expressed in this composition by the hieroglyphic signs of ankh, djed and the tjet.
17 A. Piankoff and N. Rambova, Mythological Papyri (New York, 1957), pl. 77. See also R. Sousa, Heart of Wisdom: Studies on the Heart Amulet in Ancient Egypt (BARIS 2211, Oxford, 2011), 76.
18 For the study of these religious papyri of the 21st Dynasty, see A. Niwinski, Studies on Illustrated Theban Funerary Papyri of the 11th and 10th centuries BC (OBO 86, Freiburg, 1989), 38–42.
tion of the deceased as a result of the regeneration performed in the Duat. Interestingly enough, some heart amulets also seem to explicitly intend to display an iconographic relation between the heart and the solar disk. The heart amulet of Khaemuase, in the Collection Hoffmann, depicts a scarab holding on its legs the heart and the rising sun, thus expressing the solar rebirth from the Duat where the heart stands.19

Given these elements, we can presume that the iconographic juxtaposition of the sun disk and the heart amulet was regarded not only as a highly praised funerary symbol of the solar-chthonian union of Re and Osiris in the Dynasty 21, but also as a symbol of the two possible ways given to the deceased to achieve immortality in the afterlife: he could be justified and therefore could live as an Osiris in the djet dimension of time, as an Uennefer, but he could also be reborn again, identifying himself with the solar god and thus integrating in the renewing cycles of time, neheh.20

Seen in this light, the solar heart amulets depicted on the chest of the anthropoid coffin of Theban clergy may therefore express this complex set of beliefs and could have played a decisive role in the afterlife since they could help the deceased to be united both with the chthonian realm of Osiris and with the solar rebirth of Re.

The ‘Royal’ Meaning of the Solar Heart Amulet

As we have seen, outside the funerary context, the solar heart amulet seems to be a divine attribute of the god Horus and, as such, can be considered as a royal attribute. To understand its symbolism, we must therefore return to the few surviving depictions of these objects known to us. The use of the amulet in the context of the dedication of offerings performed by the sovereign to the god Amun, at Deir el-Bahari, clearly gives this object a royal meaning. This splendid piece of jewellery is used by the sovereign in a ritual context that aimed to show the ability of the king to guarantee the divine cult. Depicted in this context, the solar heart amulet could help demonstrate that the sovereign successfully performed the royal task of connecting the divine realm and the earthly world, literally through the heart. Headed by the solar disk, the amulet might have been a symbol of identification of the king’s heart with the sun, and could therefore signify the illumination of his heart/mind (that is to say, his ability to perform maat in the very same way that the sun did in the cosmic level). Therefore, the solar heart amulet seems to be a tangible sign of the divine status of the Pharaoh and of his identification with Horus. It is also probably with this meaning that the solar heart amulet is depicted among the avian depictions of Horus. As the divine model of the Pharaoh, the iconography of Horus showcased par excellence his maetic control over the entire creation through his solar heart.

Conclusions

The solar heart amulet raises interesting questions about the Egyptian belief system and its iconographic rendering. As many other amulets, this particular category of objects must be seen as highly cryptical and thus must be read according to the hieroglyphic value of its symbols:

19 See G. Legrain, Collection Hoffmann Catalogue des antiquités égyptiennes (Paris, 1894), 13. See also R. Sousa, ‘Symbolism and Meaning of Pendulum Heart Amulet’ in GM 221 (2009), 75 (fig. 2).
20 For the importance of the notions related to the union of Re and Osiris on the funerary beliefs system of the afterlife, see Assmann, Mort et au-delà dans l’Égypte ancienne, 282–292.
ib and Re. ‘Solar heart’ is therefore a possibly correct interpretation of this composition that could be seen as a royal attribute and as a symbol of the illuminated heart of the Pharaoh which enabled him to perform maet as the earthly manifestation of the god Horus. At least in the Dynasty 18, particularly during the reign of Hatshepsut, the object was used in earthly life by the king in order to demonstrate the divine status that enabled him to guarantee the divine cult.

On the other hand, the use of the solar amulet on the 21st Dynasty coffins of the Theban priests of Amun can be seen as an appropriation of an object that, in the past, had been given a strong regal status. However, although it had initially been given that political reading, among the burials of the 21st Dynasty priests of Amun, the object was used mostly as a funerary symbol of resurrection. Furthermore, these later representations depict an important mystery of the beyond: they illustrate the solar-osirian union between the heart (taken as a symbol of Osiris) and the solar disk, which guaranteed the perpetual renewal of the world. Also, the two symbols could express the two ways presented to the deceased to achieve immortality: the perpetual existence on time djet through his osirification and the rebirth through his integration on the solar cycle, neheh. Given the late and funerary origin of most of the solar heart amulets known to us, it is possibly with this later reading that these objects must be understood.
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Figure 1. Solar Heart Amulet.
Cairo Egyptian Museum (SR 9279, CG 5223)

Figure 2. Solar Heart Amulet.
Petrie Museum (UC 22526 A)

Figure 3. Fragment of Decoration of Mummy Cover of Padiamon, Cairo Egyptian Museum (CG 6235).
Drawing by the author

Figure 4. Fragment of Decoration of Coffin of Di-repu (detail), Cairo Egyptian Museum, Dynasty 21.
Drawing by the author