



LION-HEADED GODDESS

Egypt
Middle Kingdom, 2040-1782 BC
Hippopotamus tooth
Height 8.6 cm

Lion-headed goddess standing with legs together and arms by her sides. She is wearing a long close-fitting dress, broad collar, and striated tripartite wig with a lion's mane in front. The facial details are extremely fine and some of the original gilding is preserved.

Only two main goddesses were represented as lion-headed and anthropomorphic: Sekhmet and Wadjet. Determining the identity without a votive inscription naming the goddess can be challenging. In this case, however, the represented goddess is most likely Sekhmet. Wadjet, in her leonine form, was more popular during the Later Dynastic Periods.

Sekhmet was given titles such as 'the (one who is) powerful' and 'Mistress of Dread'. She was a symbol of power and force and was a protector goddess of the pharaohs, leading them in warfare. She was considered a goddess of war and of vengeance, but also goddess of healing. This dual identity is associated with the cat goddess Bastet, the image of Sekhmet when she was calm and at rest. Bastet is the gentle goddess, the lady protector against illnesses, patron of the priests, protector of women in labour and of children. Sekhmet is also represented with the solar disk headdress like the goddess Hathor, due to her being recognised as the daughter of the sun god Ra, and his sun cult.

PROVENANCE

Former private collection France; private collection G.B. Göttingen, Germany, acquired prior to 1980

LITERATURE

C. Loeben: *LIBER AMICORUM, Claus Pelling zum 90. Geburtstag*, Tübingen 2022
S. Schoske & D. Wildung: *Gott und Götter im Alten Ägypten*, Philipp von Zabern, Mainz 1992