

GRANITE STATUE FRAGMENT

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HPAH5011: FUNERARY BELIEFS IN ANCIENT EGYPT



THE STATUE: CCM 118 936

This fragment (Figure 1&2), from the Major Harry Hartley Southey collection at Cyfarthfa Castle Museum in Merthyr Tydfil, once belonged to statue made of rose granite, and portrays a seated man. The fragment stands at a height of 19cm, a width of 15.25cm, a diameter of 40cm and the spine on the back of the fragment has a width of about 6.2 cm. The Rose Granite for the statue is likely to have been mined in the quarries of Aswan in Upper Egypt (Barton, 1916, pp. 382-83). Comparing this statue to other seated statues like the one in figure 4, which is of a seated statue recovered from Tell Edfu in 2018 by the Oriental Institute in Chicago (Lerner, 2019), it is likely that the individual is a man due to the style of the headdress that he is wearing, which was typically worn by male individuals (Lerner, 2019). This particular type of headdress, also seen in Figure 4, was also worn by royals and upper nobles during the Egyptian Middle Kingdom, suggesting that the individual was a part of the king's court in the Egyptian MK (British Museum, 2021). The overall condition of the statue is good, however the bottom of the statue is missing. It would seem that the statue has been separated at some time, possibly accidentally or maybe deliberately. The right hand appears to have something held in it and part of this object can be seen on the statue (both of these breakages are seen in Figure 2). On the back of the individual, a spine with a hieroglyphic inscription can be seen. This would imply that the statue is likely to have been a seated male as in the statue seen in Figure 4 (Lerner, 2019). A spine with a hieroglyphic inscription is most commonly seen on seated statues.

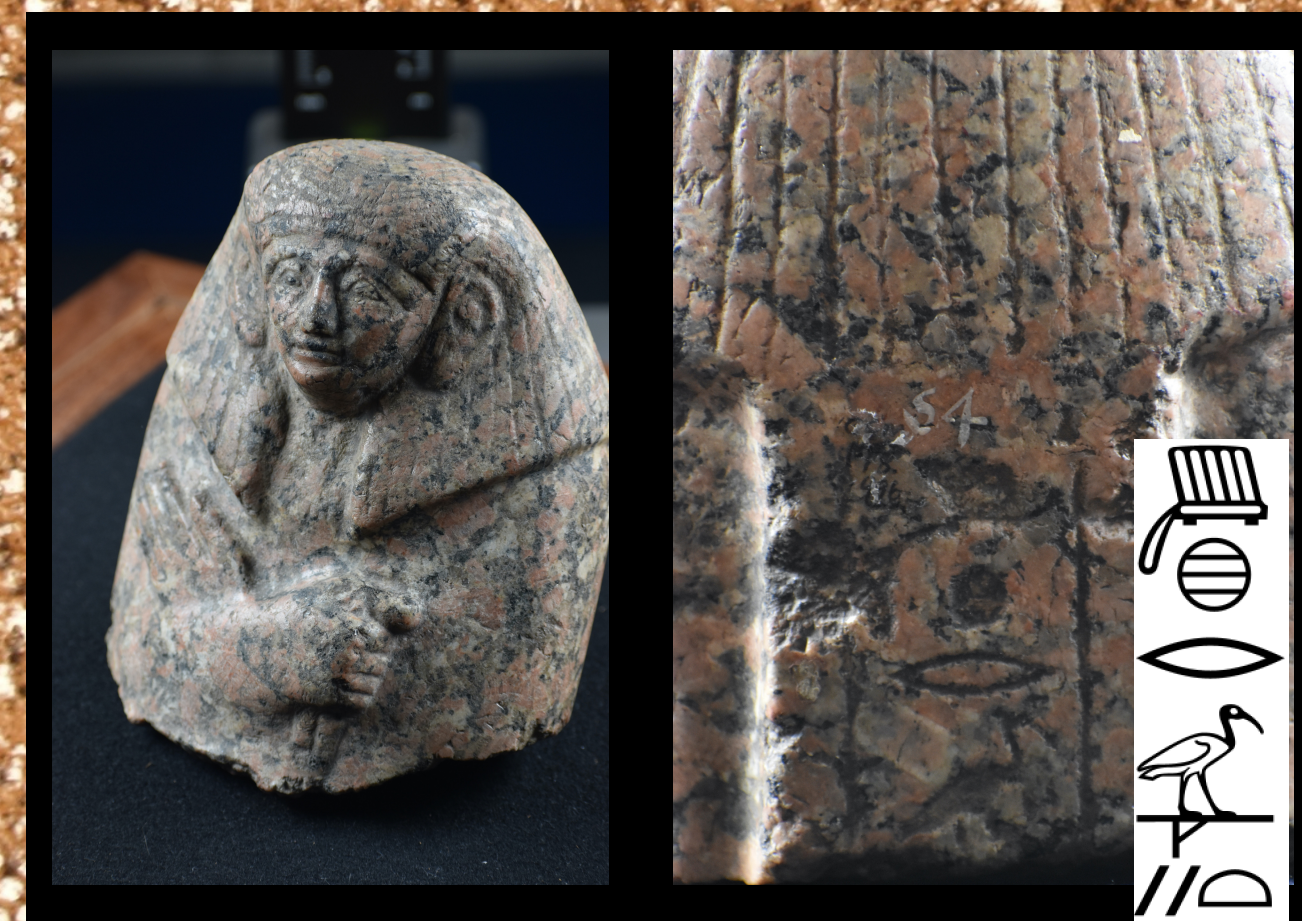


Figure 2: The front/side profile of the same statue from Figure 1, housed in the Cyfarthfa Castle Museum

Figure 3: The reverse of the statue in Figure 1&2 from Cyfarthfa Castle Museum, showing a Hieroglyphic inscription with what the glyphs may be imagined beside



Figure 1: The front profile of a rose granite statue from the Egyptian Middle Kingdom, currently housed in Cyfarthfa Castle Museum in Merthyr Tydfil

THE HIEROGLYPHIC INSCRIPTION

As the fragment is damaged, we only have part of the inscription that was on the spine of the statue (Figure 3). By looking at the style of the glyphs and that the wig worn by the statue is most common in the Egyptian MK (British Museum, 2021), we can surmise that the inscription was written in Middle Egyptian. This was the writing system most used during the Egyptian MK (Wilson, 2004, pp.25). At first glance, the most clear and non-damaged hieroglyphs are the 'h' (a circle with lines through it) and the 'r' (the glyph that looks like a mouth) (Figure 3) (Gardiner, 1957, pp. 547 & 452). The glyphs in between the 'h' and 'r' have been damaged, therefore we need to compare what remains of the text to other hieroglyphic texts which have a similar order and style. When analysing the Funerary Cone of Mermose, there is an apparent similarity with the inscription on the cone and that on the statue (Manley, 2012, pp.50), meaning that the symbol above the 'h' is most likely to be the hieroglyph 'im' (a mammals back bone and spinal cord) (Figure 3) (Gardiner, 1957, pp. 465) which when combined with the 'h' and 'r' roughly translate to 'revered one before'. Finally, the glyph at the bottom of the fragment is most likely that of an Ibis bird, even though its legs have been damaged. Within the context of the glyphs above, it is likely that the Ibis is meant to represent the God Thoth (Gardiner, 1957, pp. 470) and would have been accompanied with two other glyphs, a loaf of bread and two strokes (Figure 3) (Manley, 2012, pp.144). Therefore, the most likely translation of the glyphs is 'imsh' r dhwty: 'revered one before Thoth'. This dedication to Thoth could potentially imply that the statue's owner was possibly a scribe, as Thoth was the God of hieroglyphs and writing, and this statue may have been dedicated to the god that shared the owners occupation. (Shaw, 2014).

THE STATUE WITHIN A FUNERARY CONTEXT

Seated statues are quite an enigma when it comes to placing them within the Egyptian funerary sphere, as not many of them are found within tombs and are more likely to be found within temple complexes (Hernández, 2017, pp.4) or within private homes, such as the statue in Figure 3 (Lerner, 2019). These particular types of statues were meant to be a stylised representation of the person they depicted (Karen, 2008, pp. 1) and are likely to have been a part of certain ancestor cults which were dedicated to the recently deceased (Karen, 2008, pp.1). Sadly, due to bad record keeping, we do not know where this particular statue would have been kept during its lifetime. However, there are two possible theories based on the excavations and records of other seated statues, that can be applied here. The first scenario was that it was possibly situated in a temple complex in Hermopolis (Khmunu). Egyptian temples were home to many statues of Gods, Pharaohs and of private citizens, with these statues being dedicated to a particular god (Hernández, 2017, pp. 4). The most well-known of these sites being in Abydos, dedicated to the God Osiris (Iskander, 2011, pp.137). Hermopolis was often associated with the God Thoth (Marini, 2016, pp. 107), so it could be suggested that because this statue is most likely to be dedicated to Thoth, that it was kept where his religious cult was most prominent. The second scenario was that it was kept within the owner's villa and was used on a personal shrine. This scenario is similar to that of figure 4, as it was discovered in Tell Edfu within a large urban villa that contained a special room "dedicated to the cult of the family ancestors of the inhabitants." (Lerner, 2019). It is reasonable to suggest that this statue was kept within a room similar to the one figure 4 was found in and that this statue was placed among ancestor busts and other ancestor cult objects (Lerner, 2019).

HYPOTHETICAL JOURNEY

From piecing together, the evidence that is on the statue and additional research carried out, we can put together a possible object biography. The statue's hypothetical journey can be seen in Figure 5. It is likely that sometime during the Egyptian Middle kingdom, 2055- 1650 BC, (Shaw, 2003, pp.137) an official working within the Pharaoh's court, possibly a scribe due to the appearance of the Thoth Hieroglyph (Shaw, 2014) was given a slab of red granite as a reward for his service to the Pharaoh (Connor, Tavler & Putter, 20, pp. 298). The granite would have most likely been mined in Aswan, taken up the Nile to the royal court and then the slab gifted to the individual. The individual would have taken the slab back to the province where he resided and the local craftsmen there then carved the statue. The statue would then have been dedicated to the God Thoth and possibly to the Pharaoh who had gifted the granite slab. Upon the owners death, the statue may have remained within the household becoming a part of the ancestor cult, or it may have been buried at the temple complex in which it was kept. During the early 1900s, Major Harry Hartley Southey visited the excavations of the Villa or temple and purchased this fragment of the statue for his private collection back home in Wales. Upon Southey's death in 1917 (CWGC, 2021) his collections became a part of his local town's museum in Wales, where it resides to this day.

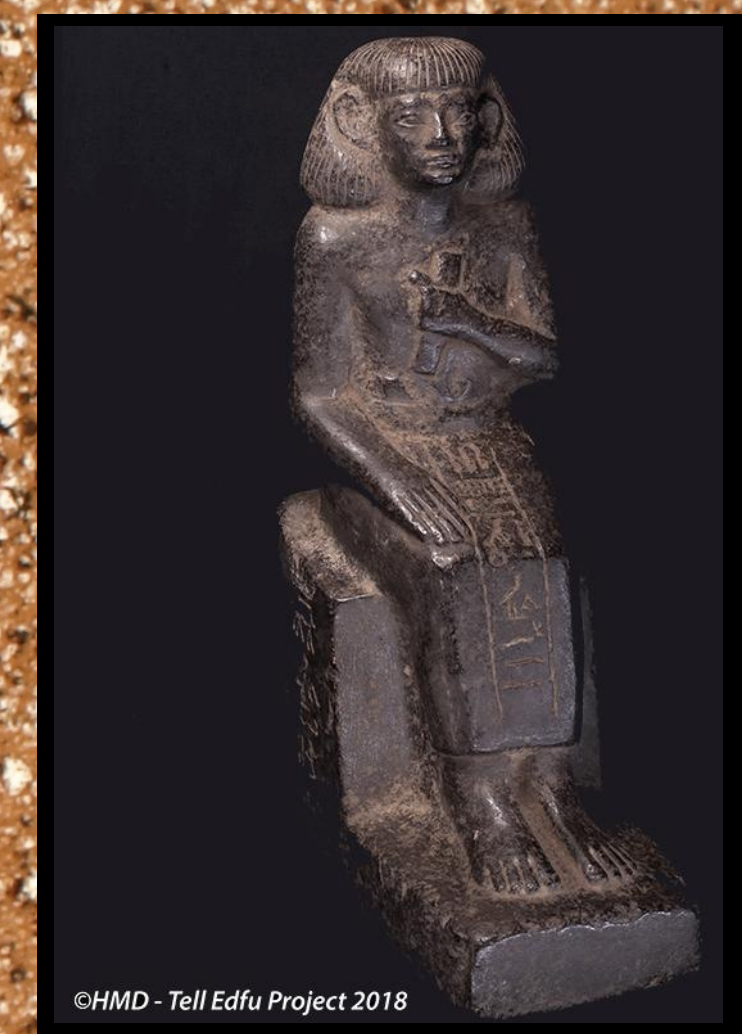
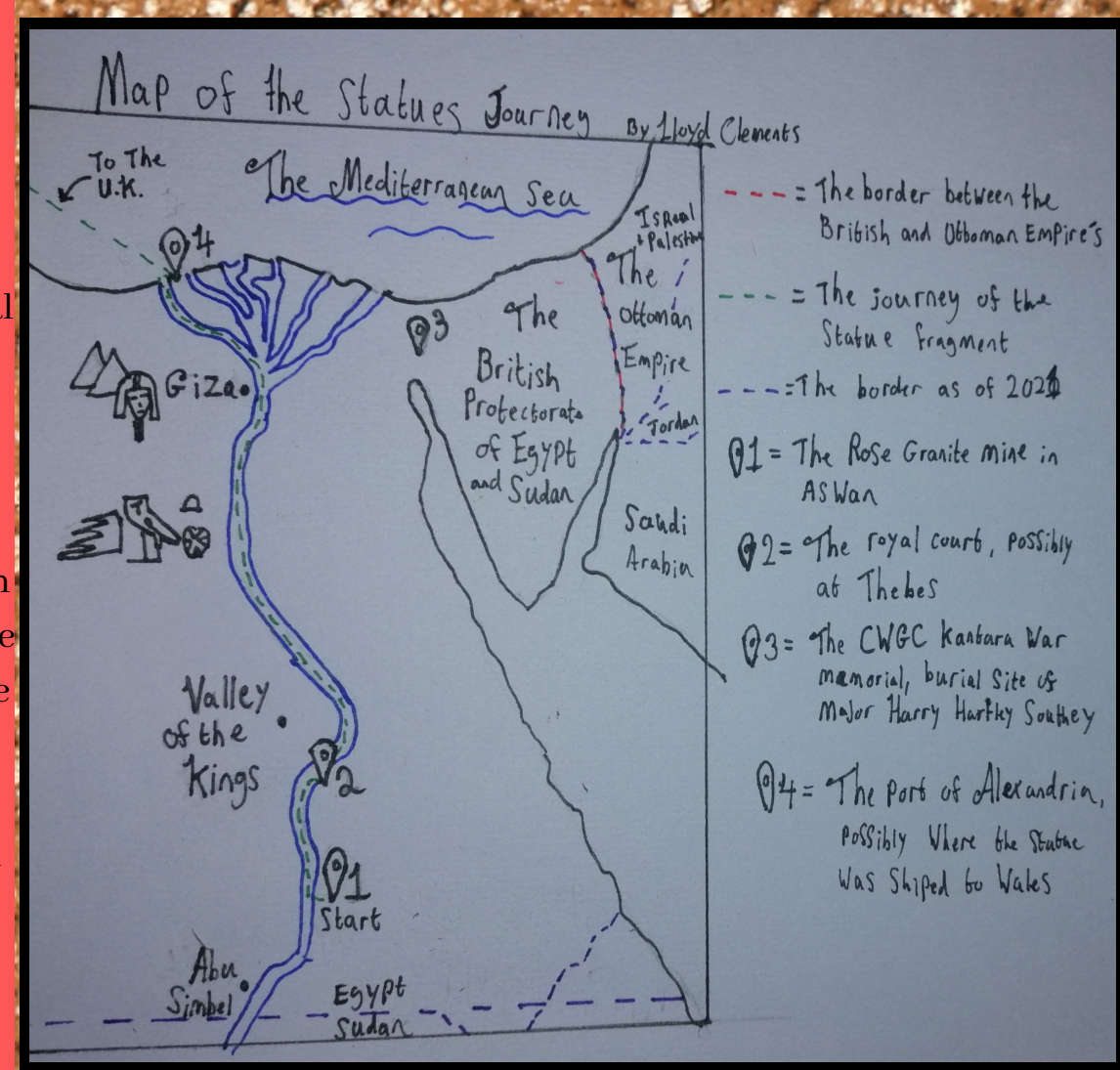


Figure 4: A statue discovered by the University of Chicago on an excavation in 2019 at Tell Edfu, UChicago News, 4th January. Available at: https://news.uchicago.edu/story/ancient-urban-villa-shrine-ancestor-worship-discovered-egypt

Figure 5: A Map of the statues journey from Aswan to Wales, by Lloyd Clements



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