

2.35 Pectoral with heart scarab

Dark serpentinite.

New Kingdom, Dynasties 19–20, c. 1307–1070 BC.

H. 5.7 cm, W. 5.0 cm, D. 1.9 cm.

In order to be granted eternal life in the realm of Osiris after death the Egyptians had to appear before a divine tribunal. The deceased was led into the Hall of Ma'at where Osiris presided over a court of forty-two divine assessors. The heart of the deceased was then weighed on scales against a symbol of Ma'at, or cosmic and social order, while he recited a catalogue of forty-two declarations of innocence, each of which denied the commitment of a specific offence against Ma'at. By doing so he not only declared himself innocent of any wrongdoing on earth, but also demonstrated that he was able to live in accordance with Ma'at in the hereafter. When he had successfully passed this judgment of the dead, the deceased was declared "true of voice" (often simply rendered as "justified"), and appended to the name of the deceased, this phrase became the standard formula for referring to the blessed dead.¹

For the Egyptians the heart was not only associated with feelings and emotions, it was also the seat of intelligence, knowledge and memory. When the heart of the deceased was weighed in the balance against Ma'at it was therefore in theory able to expose its owner as a liar if the latter's declaration of innocence did not conform

with his conduct on earth. Spell 30 of the Book of the Dead, one of a group of spells concerned with the heart, was intended to prevent this: it urges the deceased's heart not to testify against him before the divine tribunal and upset the equilibrium of the balance. Other spells from this group are intended to prevent the heart from being robbed by hostile demons in the underworld; these spells stress that the heart belongs to its rightful owner and must not be taken away from him. Spell 30 of the Book of the Dead was frequently inscribed on a heart scarab which was suspended from a cord and placed on the chest of the mummy. From the New Kingdom onwards such heart scarabs were often embedded in a pectoral, a rectangular plaque usually shaped as a typical Egyptian shrine with a cavetto cornice along the top. Many examples are decorated with a variety of funerary symbols and deities such as Re, Osiris, Isis and Nephthys or Anubis.² The scarab itself can either be carved from the same material as the pectoral or it can be made of a different material and inserted into an oval-shaped hole in the pectoral. The Book of the Dead specifies that the scarab should be made of nephrite, a green stone, and mounted in gold and silver, but needless to say this was not within everybody's financial capability.

The owner of the present example must have been a man of relatively modest means. His pectoral and scarab have been carved from a single piece of stone and its design is rather simple, although it contains all the crucial elements. On the front is the scarab beetle, set



within a rectangular frame. The scarab is a manifestation of the sun god and a symbol of creation and rebirth; it represents the various manifestations and stages of regeneration (*kheperu*) which the deceased will be able to assume in his new existence.

On the reverse a short inscription gives the name of the owner and the beginning of a text from the Book of the Dead which combines elements from Spells 26 and 30 B: "Recitation by the Osiris Praemnekhu, justified. He says: My heart belongs to me, the heart which I had from my mother, the heart of my manifestations (*kheperu*)". The rest of the text has been omitted, but its continuation is automatically implied: "Do not stand up against me as a witness, do not oppose me in the

tribunal, do not be hostile to me in the presence of the keeper of the balance..."

Unfortunately Praemnekhu does not mention his title and nothing more is known of him. The form of the name and the shape of the hieroglyphic signs make it probable that he lived during the Ramesside period.

JvD

¹ For more details and bibliography see S.G.J. Quirke, "Judgment of the Dead", in D.B. Redford (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* II (Oxford 2001), 211 – 214.

² E. Feucht, *Pektorale nichtköniglicher Personen* (Wiesbaden 1971).