

3.08 The youthful Horus

Copper alloy, solid cast.
Late Period (664–332 BC).
H. 6.1 cm.

The child Horus is depicted nude except for the broad collar around his neck. His head is shaven although he has the “lock of youth” on his right temple. On his forehead is the uraeus. Most bronzes show this god seated or reclining, as if on his mother Isis’s lap, but here he is striding. His hands, which are held next to each other, are holding the crook and the flail, the symbols of royalty which Horus inherited from his father Osiris. Bronzes of “Horus the child” (Harpokrates) holding crook and flail are extremely rare, especially when the child is depicted without any crowns, although there are a few cases where he is holding only the flail. The little statuette is intact and has a flat base. There is no trace of a suspension loop.

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3.09 Isis suckling Horus

Copper alloy, solid cast.
Late Period, Dynasty 26–30, 664–343 BC.
H. 17.2 cm

The goddess’s dress can only be discerned by the hemline above the ankles. Her necklace is rendered by a number of parallel incised lines with a row of drop-shaped petals at the lower edge. The bird’s wings incised on top of the wig are part of the so-called “vulture cap”, a symbol of queenship worn by goddesses and queens alike;¹ the head of the vulture, which is rather large compared to the face of the goddess, juts forward from her forehead. The heavy wig, with carefully indicated vertical strands of hair, covers not only the ears but also the shoulders.² This hairstyle became popular among upper-class women towards the end of the 18th Dynasty and is occasionally worn by goddesses like Hathor and Isis after the Amarna Period.³ On Late Period bronzes this wig, though not rare, is not as common as the tripartite striated lappet wig usually shown on goddesses. The Hathor crown with cow’s horns — the tip of the left horn is broken off — and a sun disc is supported by a modius surrounded by a circle of uraei.

With her right hand the goddess supports her left breast, but the child on her lap is not turned towards her, but faces straight ahead, with his arms held parallel to his body. He is shaven-headed with a uraeus on his forehead and the sidelock of youth on the right temple.

Representations of Isis with Horus are among the most common of all bronze statuettes from the Late Period.² Like most bronzes, they were votive offerings which were placed in a sanctuary as a supplication for prosperity and health. The high demand for some types of bronzes resulted in mass production, which led to a decline in quality, but this can certainly not be said of this particular Isis with Horus, which makes it all the more to be deplored that the base of the statuette is uninscribed.

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¹ G. Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (London 1993), 23.

² G. Roeder, *Ägyptische Bronzefiguren* (Berlin 1956), §§ 313 and 305f. Roeder also discusses the present statuette, which is depicted on his Pl. 80c.

³ J. van Dijk, *GM* 43 (1981), 11 with nn. 18–19.



3.10 Osiris standing

Copper alloy, hollow cast, with glass paste inlay.
Late Period, Dynasty 26 – 30, 664 – 343 BC.
H. 17.7 cm (19.6 cm incl. tang).

This statuette of Osiris, ruler of the dead, is hollow cast. On the back traces of the filed-off chaplets which anchored the core to the cast are visible. The X-ray photographs made of the statuette reveal these tenons as well as a crack in the casting core. The statuette is intact except for a small piece of restoration at the top of the right-hand feather. Judging by the soft shine, the bronze has been cleaned using a brushing technique. The details of the strong face are finely worked and there are traces of niello inlay around the eyes. The artificial beard is completely joined to the chest and there are no beard straps.

The god is depicted wrapped in a tight-fitting cloth, from which his rather small hands protrude. This way of showing a god is often called “mummiform”, and in the case of Osiris this would seem to be appropriate, for he was the god of the dead, the first living being to die and to be mummified, and also the first to be resurrected from the dead. It is more likely, however, that this is a way of emphasizing the primeval nature of a god.

The hands are held next to each other, an indication that this statue comes from a Memphite workshop.¹ Osiris is holding the crook and flail across his chest. These sceptres are symbols of royalty, and the pharaoh, the earthly embodiment of Osiris's son Horus, is often depicted with them as well. They characterize Osiris as ruler of the world of the dead. The crook or *heqa* sceptre may be derived from a shepherd's crook. The true origin and nature of the *nekhakha* sceptre, which for want of a better term we call a flail, is obscure.

On his head is the *atef* crown, another fixed element of the iconography of Osiris. Many variants exist of this composite crown, but the most common, simplified form shown here consists of the tall White Crown of Upper Egypt flanked by two feathers, here with diagonal striations.

On this statuette, as on the seated statuette, a disc has been added, which may represent either the sun or the moon, or both. Osiris was intimately linked with the sun god Re who passed through the underworld at night and then temporarily united with Osiris so that they became one god. The moon was a visible sign of the nocturnal unification of these two gods and Osiris can therefore also be connected with the moon.

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¹ G. Roeder, *Ägyptische Bronzewerke* (Glückstadt 1937), § 345; id., *Ägyptische Bronzefiguren* (Berlin 1956), §§ 223–225; id., “Die Arme der Osiris-Mumie”, in O. Firchow (ed.), *Ägyptologische Studien* (Berlin 1955), 248–286.

3.11 Osiris seated

Copper alloy, hollow cast.
Third Intermediate Period, Dynasty 21 – 24,
c. 1070 – 712 BC.
H. 16.0 cm (17.5 cm incl. tang).

This statuette shows Osiris with his arms crossed at the wrists, a hallmark of Upper Egyptian (Theban) workshops.¹ The shape of the uraeus, with a clearly coiled body, is also typical for Upper-Egyptian manufacturers.²

X-ray photographs of this statuette have revealed interesting details. For example, it has two casting channels, one under the heels and the other under the seat. The chaplets were probably of a different metallic composition than the bronze of the statuette itself because they have corroded away completely on the surface. There are tiny rectangular holes in the bronze skin on the back and in the middle of the back of the crown. There is also an interesting casting fault near the knees. Perhaps the lower legs had to be recast. There is a hole under the seat through which it is possible to see the grey core material.

Unlike the standing Osiris figure, this statuette has not been subjected to repairs since it was found. The large almond-shaped eyes are very detailed and were originally inlaid, as were the cosmetic lines. The beard is attached to the chest at one point only. The uraeus on the *atef* crown, which is much larger than the one on the standing Osiris, is wearing a fragment of what will once have been the White Crown. The feathers of the *atef* crown have striations which run parallel to the lower edge of the feathers. What is particularly striking is the lively expression on the face of this statuette.

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¹ See the literature quoted at No. 3.10.

² Roeder, *Bronzefiguren*, 179 (§ 221 d, 4C).





The Osiris Myth

Although the best known myth from Ancient Egypt is the one concerning the god Osiris, the Egyptians themselves have not left us a coherent narrative version of it. For an actual story relating this myth we have to rely on Greek authors such as Plutarch. Egyptian texts only make allusions and references to the Osiris myth which, however, tend to confirm Plutarch's story.

Osiris once ruled Egypt as a beneficent king who brought civilization and the rule of law to his people, and taught them how to farm the land and how to worship the gods. His brother Seth conspired against him, however, and tricked him into lying down inside a beautiful coffin which he then shut and threw into the Nile, whence it drifted downstream to the Mediterranean. Isis, the wife of Osiris, then went on a long search for the body of her husband and finally found it at Byblos in Phoenicia. After she had brought it back to Egypt, however, Seth managed to lay his hands on the body of Osiris again and cut it up into fourteen parts which he scattered all over the country. Isis then went out again to recover the parts, burying each where she found it. In a different version of the story Isis, being the great magician of the gods, was able to reassemble the body of Osiris and even to conceive his posthumous child Horus. Osiris then became ruler of the dead in the underworld, and his son Horus inherited his kingdom. Isis hid her child in the papyrus marshes of the Delta until he was old enough to claim his inheritance. Horus then had to engage in a prolonged physical and legal battle with his uncle Seth, who disputed Horus's inheritance. Eventually Horus prevailed and became the new ruler of Egypt. Osiris and Seth were members of the so-called Ennead of Heliopolis, a group of nine gods who were in fact all forms or "developments" of the primeval creator god Atum from whom they had originated. Atum, who at an early stage became identified with the sun god Re, was an androgynous god who impregnated himself and gave birth to the first male-female couple, Shu (breath of life) and Tefnut (order), who in their turn produced Geb (earth) and Nut (sky). These two gods gave birth to the fourth generation, which consisted of the couples Osiris and Isis, and Seth and Nephthys. Horus is the "tenth god" of this Ennead, he is embodied in the

living pharaoh, the legitimate heir to the throne of Osiris and ultimately of the creator god Atum. The King of Egypt is therefore called Horus, and when he dies he becomes Osiris and his successor the new Horus.

With the murder of Osiris death came into the world, but he was not only the first living being to die, but also the first to be resurrected. Osiris is therefore not only called "Foremost of the West" and "Ruler of the Underworld", but also "Ruler of the Living". The resurrection of Osiris became the model for every Egyptian who had lived according to *ma'at*, world order; he became an Osiris himself after entering the hereafter. The dead also identified themselves with the sun god Re, however, who went through a never-ending daily cycle of death at sunset and resurrection at sunrise. The Egyptians believed that after the sun god had died and entered the underworld beyond the horizon in the west, he temporarily merged with Osiris. Thus Re-Osiris was imbued with new life and was able to be reborn in the morning as Horus, the son of Osiris. This reborn sun god is therefore called Re-Horakhty, "Re-Horus-of-the-horizon".

The name Osiris is the Greek version of Egyptian *Wsir*, the meaning of which is unknown. The name Isis, Egyptian *Iset*, is probably related to the word for "seat" or "throne" – the hieroglyphic sign with which both the name Isis and the word for "seat" are written often appears as an identifying label on top of the goddess's head. She is often equated with the goddess Hathor, the daughter of Re, who could be depicted in the form of a cow. As such both Hathor and Isis are very often shown wearing a crown consisting of cow's horns with the sun disc in between.

The name of Horus, finally, *Heru* in Egyptian, means "the one on high" or "far away". This characterizes him as a sky god and as such he is often depicted as a falcon or a man with the head of a falcon. Re-Horakhty, too, is shown as a man with a falcon's head and a sun disc on top. Horus is also very often shown as a child, however, either on his own or on the lap of his mother Isis.

Osiris, Isis and Horus were among the most popular gods of Ancient Egypt. They were worshipped in virtually every temple in Egypt, but Osiris in particular was



also associated with two major cult centres, one in Abydos, in northern Upper Egypt, and one in Busiris, in the Delta. The best known temple of Isis was on the island of Philae, at the southern border of Ancient Egypt, an important pilgrimage centre during the Graeco-Roman period. Her temple there was the last to function as such before the advent of Christianity heralded the end of

Ancient Egyptian religion. In the preceding centuries the cult of Isis had spread all over the Roman Empire and images of Isis have been found even beyond the borders of the empire. Depictions of Isis with her child Horus on her lap bear a striking resemblance to representations of the Virgin Mary with her child.

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