Abstract

bA bird statuettes\(^1\), figurines, and amulets are funerary objects that is commonly found in Egyptian museums. bA -figurines started to be common among funerary objects found in ancient Egyptian tombs since the New Kingdom. Unlike bA statuettes, bA figurines were intended to be attached to a coffin or a stela in many cases. Their existence increased in the Late and Ptolemaic Periods.

This present paper is dealing with seven unpublished bA-bird figurines at the Egyptian Museum of Cairo. They were discovered by the Austrian Archaeological Institute in 1969 at El-Asassif, Thebes and since that they were not published before.

Keywords
bA- figurines, figurine, funerary object, bird.

Introduction

The current paper is dealing with identifying unpublished bA figurines (JE/94594, JE/94380, JE/94546, JE/94547, JE/94549, JE/94531, JE/94450) recovered from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, dates back to the Late period. Ancient Egyptians contemplated the soul of the deceased and referred to it by the term bA\(^2\). It is usually shown as the disguise of a bird (some alleged to be African Jabiru or Saddlebill Stork\(^3\)\(^4\)).

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\(^1\) Avian humanoids depictions (people “regardless gender or age” with the features of birds) are a common motif in ancient cultures which was extensively used in classical antiquity; The neighboring countries had shown several aspects, see J. Yarnall, « Transformations of Circe: The History of an Enchantress », Chicago, 1994, p. 28; according to her, these kinds of motifs were familiar in ancient art from the east Mediterranean civilizations (Mycenae, Crete, Egypt, etc.); H.A. Mode, Fabulous Beasts and Demons, New York, 1975, p. 101 – 102, he noted that these hybrids had been used extensively in both ancient cultures (Mesopotamia and Egypt).

\(^2\) S.G.F. Brandon and D. Miller, Beliefs, Rituals, and Symbols of Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Fertile Crescent (Man, Myth, and Magic), New York, 2014, p. 34.

\(^3\) Saddlebill stork (Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis) is a bird originated from Africa and resides today all over sub-Saharan Africa; See also, J. Hancock, J.A. Kushlan and M.P. Kahl, Storks, Ibises and Spoonbills of the World, London, 1992, p. 116.

\(^4\) L. Baqué-Manzano, « Further Arguments on the Coptos Colossi », BIFA O 102, 2002, p. 34; also, can be hieroglyphically written in the same manner as the birds.

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or as a bird (hawk, falcon, later on other types) with a human head\(^5\), deceased male or female\(^6\) according to the headdress to correlate the gender\(^7\).

Ancient Egyptians believed that the bA as the essence of a person\(^8\). Motte, had emphasized the meaning of it as the divine animating principle or psychic power in the mortal body. He added that this kind of force is entering the body at birth and leaving it at the end of one’s earthly existence\(^9\).

The main function of bA bird statuettes and figurines within the funerary artifacts (resurrection aspect) is probably to allow the deceased soul to soar upward to visit the world of the living, or ascend to the sky to travel with the sun god\(^10\) (Re). Over and above, the soul must come back during the night to the kA of the deceased (reuniting with it\(^11\) ) inside the tomb in order to rejuvenate itself from the KA energy\(^12\). As a consequence, there were small holes undertook in the burial chamber (inside the tomb) to allow the free movement of the bA.

bA depends on the physical body for its own existence, and the human body regarded as a guarantee for the resurrection of the deceased. Nevertheless, the ba had the same physical needs of food, drink and sexual activity\(^13\) as the living person\(^14\). Meskell and Joyce had a great interpretation for the bA which is a freely moving agent\(^15\), representing the person, linking between the earthly world, heaven and the afterworld\(^16\).

Moreover, the bA concept acted as the notion of strength that point to the capacity to incarnate several forms (hawk, snake, crocodile, etc.)\(^17\).

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\(^9\) E. De Motte, Egyptian Religion and Mysteries, Xlibris Corporation, 2013, p. 79.


\(^11\) Z. Hawass, The Valley Of The Golden Mummies, Cairo, 2000, p. 142.


\(^17\) B. Janowski, Arguing with God: A Theological Anthropology of the Psalms, Translated by: A. Siedlecki, Kentucky, 2013, p. 244, n. 146.
A bird figurines were usually shown as a hawk figure with a human head of the deceased, shown sometimes with human hands and arms as well.

To comprehend the dilemma, the ba could detach itself from the physical body, wag about freely and take any form it desired. While the ka referred to the interior communication of the person with him/herself, the ba served as a factor for connection between the dead person and the outer world.

The usage of the ba within the funerary domain starts from the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom, and was attributed to non-royal people without out emblematic depiction. Also, had been inscribed on texts (coffin texts specifically).

From the New Kingdom onwards, the idea of producing of funerary objects had been extensively noticed.

The ba statuettes or figurines could have been frugally left freestanding within the tomb or jointed to a stela by a wooden wedge “Fig. 2”, a hole for which is preserved in the base of the statuette or figurine.

**Description**

**Fig. 1:** It is made out of painted wood. The ba is shown as bird with human head standing over a rectangular base. It is shown wearing a tripartite hair-wig, with three lappets, leaving his two ears exposed. It is blue in color. There is a representation of turned up beard, the paint of which is missing. The eyes are outlined in black while the nose and the mouth bearing traces of reddish brown. The feathers are depicted in green, black, red and brown paint. The claws are represented in reddish brown paint. Over the chest of the bird, there is an ib-amulet. The function of this amulet is probably to identify the deceased with the new born sun which assures resurrection. It was also intended to reflect the high rank of individuals. There is another figurine that is almost identical with this one in Kunsthistorisches museum. There is a hole beneath base which proposes that this figurine probably was attached to a funerary object.

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It was discovered by the Austrian Archaeological Institute in 1969. It is coming from the transverse hall of tomb I.

Fig. 2: Wooden human headed bird bA-figurine standing over a rectangular base. It is covered with stucco and carries yellowish paint for the whole body. The tripartite hair-wig and wings are colored in blue. There are red dots over the chest while the eye brows and eyes are carries black paint. The legs are decorated with black vertical lines as an imitation of feathers. The claws are shown in reddish brown. The mouth carries red paint and represented with slight smile. The two ears are exposed. There is a hole beneath the base with a tang (partly damaged) that suggests that it was attached to another object.

Fig. 3: Wooden bA-figurine painted in yellow, red and green. The rough quality of sculpture indicates that it would belong to a provincial workshop. The hole over the head suggests the attachment of sun disc over it. The tang beneath the base alludes that it was attached to another funerary object. The facial features are executed in a rough way and they are not clear.

Fig. 4: wooden bA-figurine carries traces of white paint. There is a tripartite hair-wig over its head. Traces of beard are hardly visible. It is shown standing over a rectangular base which is deposited over a wooden like sledge base.

Fig. 5: wooden ba figurine standing over a rectangular base. Traces of white, blue, black colors are visible. There is a tripartite hair-wig shown over its head with traces of blue paint. The hole over its forehead probably suggests the existence of uraeus (?) which is missing nowadays. Accordingly, it would be assumed that this figurine belongs to a royal person. It is also shown with a beard.

Fig. 6: female bA-figurine portrayed over a rectangular base. It bears only traces of blue paint. It wears a tripartite hair-wig. The sun disc over its head probably was gilded according to the tradition of producing these figurines. The tang beneath the base assumes that it was attached to another object.

Fig. 7: female bA-figurine represented over a partly broken rectangular base. The lower part of its legs is missing. It carries traces of blue, white, green, red, and black paint. It is shown wearing a tripartite hair-wig with traces of blue paint.

Commentary and Conclusions

bA-figurines discussed in this research dates back to the Late Period, which is an era in which these funerary objects owned a high concern. They were discovered at El-Asassif, Thebes by the Austrian Archaeological Institute. They are made out of painted wood. The poor and rough body carving indicate their mass production. Their case does not reflect the skillful production of craftsmen. The colors of bA-figurines vary from one to another. As for their function, they were probably functioned as decorative elements for funerary objects of burial assemblages developed since the Third Intermediate Period onwards.

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For instance, being attached to a vaulted top of a funerary stela (fig.8), the Ptah-Sokar-Osiris statuettes, mummy cartonnages, standards or shrines. 28 Finally, Aston suggests that they were usually associated with the corner posts of qrs-w-coffins. 29

**Bibliography**


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Table 1

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<td>Painted wood</td>
<td>Height 10.3cm Length/Depth 8 cm</td>
<td>Thebes (Asassif)</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Ba figurines at the Egyptian Museum of Cairo

Figures

Fig. 1. a
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Fig. 1. b
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Fig. 2. a
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Fig. 2. a
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Fig. 3. a
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Fig. 3. b
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Fig. 6. a
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Fig. 6. b
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Sycamore wood Stela of Neswy, Ptolemaic Period (EA8468), British Museum
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