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Lost in Translation

LOUIS DE CLERCQ, A PASSION FOR THE LEVANT: SELECTED OBJECTS FROM HIS COLLECTION AT THE LOUVRE MUSEUM

Daniela Galazzo*

Abstract: The Louis de Clercq Collection, housed in the Department of Egyptian Antiquities at the Louvre Museum, comprises objects made of a range of materials, including bronze, stone, marble, and faience, as well as a number of scarabs and scaraboids. These items derive from a group of antiquities assembled in the Levant during the second half of the 19th century by Louis de Clercq, a French politician and antiquities collector. This article provides a brief overview of the history of the collection and examines a selection of bronze and stone objects as iconographic and material evidence for cultural exchanges and interactions between Egypt and the Levant during the 1st millennium BCE.

Keywords: Louis de Clercq; Aegyptiaca; Bronzes; Amulets; Egypt; Levant.

1. Introduction

The Louis de Clercq Collection comprises a substantial number of antiquities which, at the time of its donation to the Louvre Museum in 1967 by the collector's grandson, Henri de Boisgelin,[1] were distributed among several departments of the museum, as well as other institutions, including the Cabinet des Médailles of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.[2]

The portion of the collection housed in the Department of Egyptian Antiquities at the Louvre Museum comprises 234 objects: 219 scarabs and scaraboids, and 15 artefacts in a range of materials (bronze, stone, marble, and faience). These include a faience aryballos in the form of a hedgehog, a tripod in the shape of a female figurine, a bronze situla, a human-headed bronze aegis, a Roman male bust, a mould for amulets, and several Egyptian bronze figurines representing deities. These objects form part of a group of antiquities assembled in the Levant during the second half of the 19th century by Louis de Clercq, a French politician, antiquities collector, and patron of the arts, primarily through the mediation of antiquities dealers and merchants.

This contribution aims to present a brief overview of the formation of the collection and to examine three artefacts within it: a bronze statuette of Osiris, a bronze situla, and a stone mould for metal amulets and jewellery. Although these objects differ in typology and chronological context, they are nonetheless representative of the cultural influences and exchanges between Egypt and the Levant. They may be classified as *Aegyptiaca* – that is, Egyptian or Egyptianising objects produced either in Egypt or in workshops beyond its borders – which were widely distributed throughout the Mediterranean during the 1st millennium BCE.

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1 Parrot 1968, pp. 299-300.

2 Le Rider – Seyrig 1967, pp. 7-53.

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2. Louis de Clercq and the Formation of His Collection of Antiquities

Louis de Clercq was born in 1836 at Oignies, in northern France (Pas-de-Calais). Raised in a wealthy family, he was introduced through personal connections to the circle of high-ranking officials within the entourage of Napoleon III.[3]

In 1854, the Comte Melchior de Vogüé,[4] accompanied by Louis de Clercq's brother-in-law, Alexandre de Boisgelin, returned from his first archaeological campaign in Syria, which helped to open the way for scholarly explorations of Syria, Palestine, and Cyprus throughout the 19th century. Although inexperienced, Louis de Clercq accepted the role of assistant in these expeditions and followed the programme outlined by Melchior de Vogüé.

The collector undertook three journeys to the Levant during his lifetime. On his first journey, in 1859, he was employed as a photographer and assistant on the government-sponsored expedition led by the orientalist Guillaume Rey to the Crusader castles of Syria and Asia Minor. After returning to Paris in 1860, he published the results of this work in six volumes entitled *Voyage en Orient. Villes, monuments, et vues pittoresques de Syrie*. During this trip, Louis de Clercq met Aimé Péretié, Chancellor of the French Consulate in Beirut from 1844 to 1880, who would become his principal point of contact during his stays in the Levant, owing to their shared interest in antiquities. From Beirut, Péretié conducted excavations on lands he owned or leased, notably at the site of ancient Byblos.[5]

Louis de Clercq returned to the region for a second time in 1862-1863, during which Aimé Péretié acted as his guide in both his travels and his acquisition of antiquities. However, de Clercq's sustained activity as a collector was abruptly interrupted by the events of 1870-1871, with the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, in which he took part.

During his second stay in the Levant, de Clercq, through Péretié, came into contact with antiquities dealers operating in the region. Some of these individuals became his agents in Syria, fulfilling his requests for the purchase of antiquities and conducting excavations on his behalf. In many cases, the precise provenance of discoveries was deliberately obscured by excavators or local inhabitants, who engaged in clandestine activities to supply the antiquities market, thereby circumventing Ottoman authorities. Louis de Clercq began his collecting activities with the acquisition of part of Péretié's collection, probably in 1871,[6] and he also financed a limited number of "archaeological" excavations in Syria.

Finally, de Clercq undertook his third and final journey in 1893, which, according to archival sources, was intended to allow him to supervise excavations whose direction from Paris had often proven difficult.

The archival material relating to Louis de Clercq, preserved at the Bibliothèque centrale des musées nationaux (BCMN) in Paris, comprises working notes and documents spanning the period from 1868 to 1921. Together, these sources offer valuable insight into 19th-century interactions between antiquities dealers in Europe and the Near East, as well as into the formation of the collection. Of particular interest is the extensive correspondence initiated in 1884 between Louis de Clercq and the photographer Quarelli, based in the Levant. These letters, preserved among the manuscripts, constitute a significant source of information regarding the provenance and acquisition of antiquities. The documentation also includes an inventory of objects formerly belonging to Aimé Péretié, whose collection was reportedly inherited by Louis de Clercq upon his death. In addition, de Clercq's notebooks, in which antiquities acquisitions were recorded over time, represent an important resource for reconstructing the geographical scope of these acquisitions.

3 The biography of Louis de Clercq has been written by Ernest Babelon in the catalogue: De Ridder 1905, p. V.

4 Bonato 2023, pp. 267-302.

5 Bonato 2023, p. 269.

6 Bonato 2023, p. 268.

From the outset of his collecting activities, Louis de Clercq aimed to assemble artefacts of Syrian and Phoenician origin, subsequently expanding his geographical focus to neighbouring regions such as Mesopotamia and Cyprus. As noted above, the de Clercq Collection, like many 19th-century antiquities collections, derived partly from archaeological excavations and partly from the antiquities market, which makes it difficult to reconstruct the precise provenance of individual objects. Moreover, in the absence of excavation records, the collection provides limited scientific information regarding the archaeological contexts of the artefacts. It is nevertheless established that the provenance of the antiquities assembled by Péretié – later inherited by de Clercq – covered the Levantine region (including Amrit, Tartus, Byblos, and Sidon), as well as the islands of Cyprus and Rhodes, and the area of Baghdad. It is also noteworthy that Péretié's notebooks record a significant number of figurines and statuettes of Egyptian deities, both seated and standing, along with scarabs and Egyptian vessels decorated in relief.

The catalogue of the collection was published in seven volumes between 1885 and 1911. The first two volumes, authored by Louis de Clercq, appeared under the title *Collection De Clercq. Catalogue méthodique et raisonné*. The subsequent five volumes, authored by André De Ridder, curator in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the Louvre Museum, were published under the title *Catalogue publié par les soins de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres et sous la direction de MM. de Vogüé, E. Babelon, et E. Pottier*.

Louis de Clercq wrote in the preface to the catalogue of his collection, in 1885:[7]

> «Lors d'un voyage que j'entrepris autrefois en Orient, je fus profondément frappé de la variété des richesses archéologiques que contenait la Phénicie. Auprès un assez long séjour et quelques études préliminaires, je constatai que les divers peuples du monde ancien, en se rencontrant dans les ports de la côte d'Asie pour échanger leurs marchandises, y apportaient en même temps des coutumes, des goûts et des croyances essentiellement différents, et que, par suite de ce contact permanent, l'Art subissait des influences considérables et souvent étrangères. J'en conclus que l'histoire de l'art, dans ces riches comptoirs, présenterait un attrait tout particulier, et je me décidai à en faire le cadre de mon travail».

3. Selected Egyptian and Egyptianising Objects within the Collection

A significant number of bronze statuettes of diverse origins are represented in the collection, and an entire volume of the publication is devoted to this category of artefacts.[8]

The bronze statues and objects that entered the collection in 1882 through the legacy of Péretié lack secure provenance and were most likely acquired in Beirut and its environs, as well as in the Syrian region. Moreover, after 1882, the De Clercq Collection does not appear to have expanded through further acquisitions of bronze antiquities.[9] On this basis, the region corresponding to present-day Lebanon and Syria may be proposed as the general provenance of these artefacts.

In antiquity, the first Egyptian bronzes reached the Levantine coast during the Late Bronze Age (1550-1150 BCE), when Egyptian control extended over the Canaanite cities.[10] The production of bronze statuettes of deities increased significantly in Egypt during the period of renewed imperial control in the 26th Dynasty (664-525 BCE), as well as in connection with the establishment of Phoenician settlements in Egypt. Amulets and bronze objects were produced in considerable quantities, offering insight into the rich repertoire of Late Period craftsmanship and the votive functions associated with these artefacts.

7 De Ridder 1905, pp. VIII-IX.

8 De Ridder 1905.

9 De Ridder 1905, p. XV.

10 Page Gasser 2001, p. XI.

During the Third Intermediate Period (ca. 1075-664 BCE) and the Late Period (664-332 BCE), bronze figurines, as well as metal vessels, were produced in increasing quantities as votive objects, driven by popular demand from pilgrims.[11] These objects were likely acquired from workshops by private individuals and intended for dedication in temples or shrines. Some were inscribed with the name of the dedicant, as in the case of the bronze figurine of Osiris and the bronze situla discussed in the following pages, both of which formerly belonged to the Péretié collection.

3.1. *A Bronze Statuette of Osiris*

The bronze Louvre E 25951 represents a standing, mummiform Osiris (Figs. 1-2).[12] The god wears the Atef crown (the white crown flanked by feathers), surmounted by a uraeus. His face is rendered with well-defined features and is characterised by an interwoven false beard terminating in a curved tip. The neck is adorned with a broad, four-banded collar, complemented by an additional row decorated with a drop-bead motif. The hands emerge from the mummiform cloak: the right grasps the flail, while the left holds the crook. The right hand is positioned above the left, and the wrists are ornamented with alternating horizontal and vertical incised lines. The handles of both the flail and the crook display geometric engraved decoration. Both sceptres adhere closely to the body up to the level of the shoulders.

The figure stands upon a double-stepped base, the lower tier being broader than the upper. A loop is attached to the right side of the lower tier. The base is decorated on all sides: the lower tier bears a hieroglyphic inscription along three sides, which will be examined below (Figs. 3–5), while the upper tier presents, on its lateral faces, an alternating motif of a *djed* pillar and an Isiac knot, supported by a row of *neb* signs (Fig. 4).

Figs. 1-2. Bronze of Osiris, Louvre Museum, E 25951 © Musée du Louvre / Département des Antiquités égyptiennes (photo by D. Galazzo).

The front face of the upper register depicts a highly stylised offering scene (Fig. 3): two seated genii representing the Nile – identifiable by the characteristic headdress of Hapy – flank an offering table furnished with ritual vessels. The scene is framed by the *was* and *heka* sceptres. The rear face of the base is flat and decorated with three registers (Fig. 6): the uppermost, narrow band shows a series of small four-winged scarabs; the broader central register features a large four-winged scarab, which will be discussed further below; and the lowest register depicts, at the centre, the child Harpocrates standing on a lotus flower with his hand to his mouth, flanked on either side by the Souls of Pe and Nekhen (Buto and Hierakonpolis) in an attitude of jubilation.

The back of the bronze statuette is distinguished by a dorsal pillar decorated

11 Villing 2018, p. 74; Bianchi 1990.

12 De Ridder 1905, p. 110, n. 167; Vandier 1968, p. 314, fig. 5; Cenival 1968, p. 13.

Figs. 3-6. Details of the four sides of the base with the inscription - Louvre Museum, E 25951 © Musée du Louvre / Département des Antiquités égyptiennes (photo by R. Pietri).

with an alternating geometric motif, terminating below the *wsekh* collar of Osiris and equipped with a loop similar to that attached to the base.

The hieroglyphic inscription engraved on the base reads as follows (Figs. 3-5):

9[d] (mdw jn) Wsir nTr aA nb pt dj anx
Wnn-nfr sA 1r-WDA [...]

«Words spoken by Osiris, the great god, lord of the sky: May life be granted to Wnennefer[13] son of Horwedja».[14]

The bronze is preserved in a very good state of conservation. The precision of the workmanship and the quality of the inscription support an attribution to the Saite Period (664-525 BCE). Indeed, the execution of comparable bronze objects becomes markedly less refined during the 30th Dynasty (380-343 BCE) and the Ptolemaic Period (305-30 BCE).

13 *Wnn-nfr* was originally one of the epithets of Osiris and later entered private onomastics, becoming widely used during the Late Period. It is, in fact, frequently attested on bronze statuettes depicting Osiris, where it appears both as an epithet of the deity and as a personal name. See Ranke 1935, p. 79, n. 19.

14 The name Horwedja became very common in the Late Period but is less frequently attested during the Graeco-Roman Period. See Ranke 1935, p. 246, n. 23.

The statuette of Osiris, with the hands positioned at different levels, would, according to Roeder's classification, suggest a Lower Egyptian origin.[15] The beard, rendered in continuity with the modelling of the face, together with the lower limbs enveloped in the cloak and rendered almost indistinguishable, likewise supports this attribution.[16] By contrast, the majority of Osiris bronze statuettes discovered in the Levant display the hands held at the same level.[17]

It is noteworthy that bronze votive statuettes depicting Osiris enjoyed a wide distribution beyond the borders of Egypt. Several examples are known from the Heraion of Samos,[18] whose dedicants were likely Greek merchants and mercenaries engaged in contacts with the Near East, or Egyptian pilgrims who reached the island. Bronze statuettes of Osiris dating to the Ptolemaic and Roman periods have also been recovered in Cyprus.[19]

In the Levantine region, notable examples include a statuette from Ashkelon, dated to the late 7th century BCE, as well as a group of seven Osiris figures from the same site assigned to the Persian Period.[20] Two additional statuettes have been recovered from the Persian-period sanctuary at Mispe Yammim, alongside two specimens from Dan and one from el-Jib.[21]

As Page Gasser has observed,[22] the Osiris bronzes from Ashkelon and el-Jib were recovered in contexts associated with the production and consumption of wine. This evidence may be related to Herodotus's identification of Osiris with Dionysus.

Numerous bronze figurines of Osiris are attested in the western Mediterranean. Among the better-documented examples, two poorly executed bronze statuettes, likely datable to the Roman period,[23] have been recovered at Tharros; one of these features a loop at the base, a characteristic also observed in a specimen from Turris Libisonis.[24]

Further examples originate from the Iberian Peninsula, including the Osiris statuette from Punta de la Vaca, likely deriving from the local Phoenician necropolis, and another from Villaricos,[25] now preserved in the Museo Arqueológico Provincial de Almería.[26]

The widespread attestation of this Egyptian deity across the Mediterranean underscores his religious significance. The scenes engraved on the base of E 25951 may be divided into two categories: the first, represented by the frieze alternating the *djed* pillar and the Isiac knot – symbols respectively associated with Osiris and his consort Isis – as well as the offering table, belongs to the Osirian sphere; the second, depicted on the rear face of the base, pertains to solar iconography.

Indeed, Harpocrates and Osiris may be understood as two complementary manifestations of the same divine principle, metaphorically expressing the cyclical regeneration of nature. Harpocrates embodies the youthful phase, associated with rebirth and emergence from the lotus flower, whereas Osiris represents the mature and dying god, enveloped in his mummiform cloak.[27]

15 Roeder 1956, § 177.

16 Aubert – Aubert 2001, 214.

17 Kamlah 1999, p. 173.

18 Jantzen 1972; Śliwa 1983.

19 Michaelidou – Nicolaou 1978, p. 799.

20 Bell 2011, pp. 415-416; Page Gasser 2001, p. XII.

21 Bell 2011.

22 Page Gasser 2001, p. XII.

23 Acquaro – Moscati – Uberti 1975, pl. XLIX, F1 and F2.

24 Pais 1881, pp. 344-345, pl. VI n. 9.

25 Oggiano – Pedrazzi 2013, pp. 67-68.

26 Gamer-Wallert 1978, pl. 33 a-d; Bondì 1985.

27 Hölbl 1989, pp. 318-325.

The offering scene featuring the figures of Hapy is positioned directly above the beginning of the dedicatory inscription. The two Nile-related genii evoke the association between Osiris and aquatic and regenerative elements, a connection well attested in the architectural context of the Osireion at Abydos. Moreover, the scene of the offering table corresponds to the iconographic formula *ḥtp-dỉ-nsw*. While the inscription on the statuette invokes Osiris to grant life to the dedicant, the offering of food and drink constitutes its material realisation. In addition, the invocation of the rising sun, expressed through the solar motifs on the base, is likewise linked to themes of rebirth and regeneration.

As regards the solar motifs, the four-winged scarab on the base is particularly noteworthy (Fig. 6). This iconography is of Egyptian origin, although it was widely adopted and reinterpreted in the Syro-Palestinian region, within Phoenician and Aramaic contexts as well as in Israelite milieus. [28]

The winged scarab is attested in Egypt from the New Kingdom onwards, particularly in the form of amulets and scarabs. However, from the 9th century BCE – and possibly already in the 10th century BCE – it becomes widespread in the central and southern Levant, appearing on Egyptian-inspired amulets as well as on scarabs, bronze objects, and ivory artefacts. In these same regions, representations of the four-winged scarab are also documented, sometimes depicted with a solar disk between the forelegs, an iconographic variant that is not attested in Egypt.[29]

The elaboration of the original iconographic motif thus appears to have taken place in the Levantine sphere, where both the winged and the four-winged scarab are attested, whereas only the former is documented in Egypt, predominantly during the New Kingdom. Significantly, the four-winged scarab is also attested on metal bowls, such as the fragmentary vessel from the Idean Cave, which features a scarab surrounded by friezes of falcons and papyrus blossoms. This object is generally interpreted as an import from Phoenicia, dating to the mid- to late 8th century BCE.[30]

The city-states of northern Syria likewise constituted significant cultural and artistic centres, having entered into contact with Crete at an early date. In this context, another example of the same iconographic tradition is attested on a metal bowl from Nimrud, now preserved in the British Museum, which depicts a scarab grasping a solar disk between its forelegs.[31]

Ward[32] notes a limited number of examples of four-winged beetles on faience amulets in Egypt dating from the 8th century BCE, as well as two further attestations from the Saite Period, one on a scarab and another on a sarcophagus.[33] He interprets these rare occurrences as the result of a re-elaboration of an originally Egyptian motif that was transmitted to Canaan and subsequently reintroduced into Egypt in a transformed iconographic form.

It may therefore be proposed that the motif on E 25951 was either engraved in Egypt on the bronze statuette itself, or, alternatively, added – together with the engraved decoration of the base – at a later stage, prior to the object's probable dedication as a votive offering in a Levantine sanctuary by an Egyptian community settled in the region or by pilgrims.

The presence of a double loop on E 25951 suggests that such statuettes may have fulfilled a dual function, serving both as votive offerings dedicated to a deity and as amuletic objects intended to confer the protection of the represented god upon the bearer. These loops would have allowed relatively heavy and sizeable figurines (c. 10 cm or more in height) to be attached to the garments of priests or pilgrims, or

28 Peyronel 2018, pp. 467-480; Schroer 2018, p. 470.

29 Ward 1968, pp. 135-143.

30 Matthäus 2011, p. 119, fig. 22; Matthäus 2001.

31 Almagro – Gorbea 2015, p. 73, fig. 11.

32 Ward 1968, pp. 135-143.

33 Ward 1968, pp. 135-143.

alternatively to be suspended from divine statues. It has also been proposed that they may have been hung on the walls of temples.[34]

With the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE, and particularly after the early 7th century BCE, the expansion and diversification of offering practices represent a significant phenomenon. From this period onwards, during the Late Period, a wide range of individuals dedicated various types of offerings, including metal figurines, in temple contexts. The most frequently attested statuettes are those depicting deities whose cults were widely disseminated or particularly associated with universal religious concerns, such as Osiris, Isis, Nefertem, and Harpocrates.

Osiris, as ruler of the underworld and guarantor of rebirth in the afterlife, appears to have held particular appeal even for individuals whose religious background lay outside the Egyptian cultural sphere. It may therefore be suggested that such votive offerings carried personal significance for the dedicant.[35]

3.2. A Bronze Situla

Some of the iconographic motifs discussed above are shared with those found on another object in the collection, the situla Louvre E 25956,[36] which has been mentioned only sporadically in the literature and has not previously been fully published (Figs. 7-10).[37] The vessel has a cylindrical, narrow, and elongated form and is equipped with two thick rings welded to the rim, intended to accommodate the handle of the situla, which is still preserved. The decorative scheme is organised into three registers, in accordance with comparable examples, while the base is breast-shaped and decorated with the characteristic motif of a blossoming lotus flower. Above the upper register, an inscription is engraved, probably of a dedicatory nature; however, it is currently illegible (Fig. 11). The situla is in good condition, although the surface exhibits traces of oxidation.

The decoration is executed in bas-relief. The upper register depicts the solar journey: the sun is represented on a boat steered by two boatmen, positioned at the bow and stern respectively, each operating a long oar. The vessel is drawn by four jackals with slender bodies and elongated limbs, while four baboons stand before them in an attitude of adoration towards the rising sun. The scene thus represents the nocturnal solar barque prior to dawn, when, drawn by jackals, it emerges from the darkness and is greeted by the baboons as the sun rises.

The middle register is the widest, as it accommodates the principal scene: the offering to the gods. The dedicant of the situla is depicted wearing an ankle-length garment. His torso is slightly inclined forward, in accordance with the gesture performed with his raised right arm, which presents an offering of Maat. The object suspended from his left arm may plausibly be interpreted as a long piece of cloth.

Between the donor and the first processional deity before him, the ithyphallic Amun-Min, an altar is depicted, bearing an offering of lotus flowers. The god is represented according to his conventional iconography in mummiform guise, with raised arms clutching a flail; he wears a headdress composed of two tall feathers surmounted by a solar disk. Behind Amun-Min, a lower altar in the form of a *naos* is represented, upon which a lettuce is placed, an element regarded as a potent aphrodisiac and a recurrent offering in cultic contexts dedicated to the fertility god.

The divine procession continues with Isis-Hathor, again preceded by a small altar in the form of a classic *ḥtp*-sign bearing an offering. The female deity, surmounted by a solar disk and cow horns, wears a long, close-fitting dress and holds a *was* sceptre. Behind her, the goddess Nephthys is crowned with the hieroglyph corresponding to her name; she likewise wears a long garment and holds a *was* sceptre in front of a small offering altar.

34 Taylor 2007, p. 87.

35 Weitz 2005, pp. 133-137.

36 De Ridder 1905, p.124, n. 204; Vandier 1968, p. 317, fig. 8.

37 Galazzo 2007.

Figs. 7-10. Situla Louvre Museum E 25956 © Musée du Louvre / Département des Antiquités égyptiennes.

Ptah appears next to Nephthys in mummiform guise, holding a *was* sceptre and with his head surmounted by a solar disk. The following deity is Mut, depicted with her right hand raised in adoration; she wears the Double Crown of Upper and Lower Egypt and holds the *ankh* sign in her other hand. The final deity in the procession is Re-Horakhty, whose head is crowned with a solar disk and uraeus. He faces the same direction as the dedicant and holds the *was* sceptre in his right hand. All the deities, with the exception of Mut, are accompanied at the upper edge by a small rectangular space intended for the inscription of their names, although these remain unfilled.

Fig. 11. Situla Louvre Museum E 25956 – Detail of the inscription © Musée du Louvre / Département des Antiquités égyptiennes.

Finally, the third register, at the bottom of the situla, again features the solar barque with a lotus-shaped bow and stern and two boatmen; this time, however, the divine *naos* replaces the solar disc. The barque is flanked by two falcon-headed figures, the Souls of Nekhen (Hierakonpolis), and two jackal-headed figures, the Souls of Pe (Buto), kneeling in an attitude of jubilation. The setting then shifts to the Chemmis swamp, with the birth of Harpocrates from the lotus flower, holding a flail in his hand and flanked by Isis and Nephthys, represented as cows.

The situla belongs to Type III in the classification proposed by Miriam Lichtheim,[38] characterised by a narrow profile and relief decoration organised into multiple registers. Type III vessels lack the extended libation formula typically found on objects with a larger available surface. Situlae of this type are generally decorated with scenes drawn from the Egyptian mythological repertoire, closely associated with themes of rebirth and regeneration. In particular, the depiction of the solar barque's daily and nocturnal journey constitutes a recurrent motif, frequently occupying the upper and lower registers of these vessels.

The tripartite division of the decoration (an upper celestial register, a central earthly or ritual register, and a lower underworld or afterlife register) recalls the painted wall compositions of the tombs in the Val-

38 Lichteim 1947, p. 175, pl. IV.

ley of the Kings. The depiction of the barque with the *naos* in the lower register evokes the nocturnal solar journey, while the aquatic element is to be identified with Nun, the primeval waters from which all forms of life originate. The ithyphallic Amun-Min, frequently represented on vessels employed in cultic and funerary contexts, is closely associated with notions of fecundity, which he embodies. The presence of the lettuce, understood in Egyptian symbolic vocabulary as an aphrodisiac, further reinforces this interpretation.

The offering of Maat is relatively uncommon within the iconographic repertoire of situlae. In Egypt, the presentation of Maat in non-royal contexts is attested in two principal situations: either the king acts as intermediary on behalf of the deceased, or the deceased himself assumes the role of officiant. In the first case, the earliest attestations date to the reign of Ramesses II. In the second, private individuals depicted offering Maat appear in a limited number of tombs from the Ramesside Period through the Third Intermediate Period, notably at Deir el-Medina, Gourna, and Khokha. Furthermore, several bronze statues of the Late Period depict a priest offering Maat upon a *neb*-sign base. Such scenes were likely intended to represent ceremonial and votive offerings performed before the gods, in which the donor himself assumes the role of ritual officiant.

Finally, the third register recalls the iconography previously discussed in relation to the bronze statuette of Osiris: the Souls of Pe and Nekhen constitute a recurrent motif on situlae, typically depicted facing the rising sun, personified by Harpocrates emerging from a lotus flower. In alternative iconographic variants, this solar manifestation may also take the form of a winged scarab.

In his study of Egyptian *mammisi* (birth houses within temple complexes), F. Daumas[39] identified the "Souls of Pe and Nekhen" in statuary and relief representations as royal ancestors who played a significant role in the divine birth of the royal child. A close conceptual and iconographic connection may thus be established between the wall reliefs of Egyptian temples and votive and liturgical objects such as situlae.

The child's attributes include the crouching posture, the sidelock of youth, and the finger placed at the mouth. This variant depicted on a lotus flower emerging from the primordial ocean, became particularly widespread during the Libyan dynasties of the Delta, where it functioned as a symbol of regeneration.[40]

The motif of the divine solar child in Egypt is well attested, particularly through its association with royal iconography at the end of the 18th Dynasty. In the Levant, it is documented on a gold amulet from Megiddo dating to the Ramesside Period. More generally, comparable amulets have been recovered across a wide geographical area, including Arslan Tash, Deve Hüyük, Nimrud, Cyprus, and the western Mediterranean, persisting into the Hellenistic period and appearing on diverse media such as ivory objects, seals, and bronze figurines.[41] The figure of the divine child, originally of Egyptian origin, was thus assimilated into the Levantine *koiné*, where it became integrated into local iconographic and mythological systems.[42] This process reflects the intense commercial and cultural exchanges that characterised relations among these regions.

The solar barque journey is likewise an Egyptian iconographic motif attested on other metal vessels within Phoenician and Punic craftsmanship. A notable example is a Phoenician silver bowl from Praeneste, recovered from the so-called Bernardini Tomb and executed in an Egyptianising style.[43] The vessel depicts the solar barque in its various phases of the diurnal and nocturnal cycle, alternating with scenes of Horus being suckled by Isis among papyrus stems.

The iconographic motifs found on Egyptian or Egyptian-style situlae, as discussed above, recur – albeit with variations and additional details – in a substantial number of comparable vessels both in Egypt

39 Daumas 1958, pp. 448, 458.

40 Staubli 2024.

41 Staubli 2024, p. 113.

42 Staubli 2024, p. 123.

43 Almagro – Gorbea 2015, p. 59, fig. 2.

and across the Mediterranean basin. Indeed, such motifs were widely disseminated in the Levant, Cyprus, and the Aegean from the early 1st millennium BCE, reaching a particular peak during the Saite Period in Egypt.[44]

Further examples derive from the Levantine region. A situla of Egyptian manufacture was discovered in a Phoenician temple in the hinterland of Tyre, at Mispe Yammim,[45] and is generally dated to the 6th or 5th century BCE on palaeographic grounds. The vessel bears a Phoenician inscription below the rim, dedicating the object to Astarte, while hieroglyphic signs are employed to identify the depicted deities. It may therefore be interpreted as a private votive offering to the local deity, intended as an act of personal devotion.

The situla from Mispe Yammim is not the only example preserving a Phoenician dedicatory inscription. Another case is the situla held in the Princeton University Art Museum, of unknown provenance and decorated in an Egyptianising style.[46] The inscription consists of an invocation to Isis requesting the granting of "favour and life" to the dedicant, in accordance with traditional Egyptian offering formulae. The object may be dated to the 6th-5th century BCE and reflects craftsmanship executed within an Egyptian artistic idiom.

Moreover, seven situlae were uncovered at Ashkelon[47] in the remains of an Iron Age wine storage facility, together with a bronze offering table; these objects can be dated broadly from the Saite Period to the Ptolemaic Period. More recently, five situlae of Egyptian workmanship have been discovered at Amrit, dated to the Persian period (5th-4th century BCE) and probably to be interpreted as votive dedications, found in association with small offering tables.[48] Also noteworthy is the situla uncovered during the excavations of P. Montet at Byblos,[49] recovered without clear archaeological context but in proximity to the temple of Baalat Gebal. Finally, another undecorated situla was found at Ugarit in a funerary context.[50]

Other situlae have been discovered at Carchemish, Zincirli, and Samal, with dates generally placed at the end of the 7th century BCE, as well as in Cyprus.[51] From non-Egyptian contexts, a further relevant example is the situla recovered from a tomb at Lefkandi, which is likely to date to approximately 950-900 BCE.

In Egypt, the most remarkable assemblage is represented by the approximately 400 situlae recovered from the necropolis of sacred animals at Saqqara,[52] dated between the 7th century BCE and the Graeco-Roman period. It is noteworthy that similar vessels are frequently attested in contexts associated with animal necropoleis or catacombs,[53] such as the animal necropolis of Tuna el-Gebel, that of Dendera, and the Bucheum of Armant, where Apis bulls were interred in subterranean galleries. The archaeological provenance of these objects supports their interpretation as votive offerings, typically dedicated by pilgrims.

To conclude, situlae functioned as ritual vessels employed both in temple contexts and in the funerary cult within private tombs. They often fulfilled a dual role, being used for the libation of milk or water along the routes of funerary processions and for offerings to the deceased, thereby invoking the protection of the divinity, conceived as capable of "granting life" to the dedicant.

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44 Gubel 2015, p. 249.

45 Frankel – Ventura 1998, pp. 39-55.

46 Mc Carter 1993, pp. 115-120.

47 Bell 2011, pp. 397-415.

48 Al-Maqdissi 2007, pp. 60-61.

49 Montet 1928, p. 254, n. 965.

50 Bell 2011, p. 407.

51 Bell 2011, pp. 406-412.

52 Insley Green 1987.

53 Bell 2011, pp. 412-415.

It is also worth mentioning another situla from the Michaelidis Collection,[54] which depicts a scene of adoration of Psamtik I before Anat, shown seated on a throne and armed with a spear and shield in one hand and an axe in the other. The representation of this goddess on a situla is likely explained by her association with Isis and Hathor.

Furthermore, an inscription on the statue of Neferperet, royal butler of Thutmose III, who accompanied him during his campaigns in Retjenu, records that he brought four cows from those regions to be offered in the funerary temple of his king, together with a bronze milk vessel, probably identifiable as a situla.[55]

The main difficulty in the study of Egyptian situlae lies in the limited number of properly excavated examples, since most specimens entered museum and private collections without secure archaeological provenance. This circumstance significantly hinders the establishment of a reliable chronology or a detailed developmental sequence, particularly in relation to their diverse contexts of use and function.

As for Louvre E 25956, it may tentatively be dated to the Saite Period on the basis of its typology and the quality of its decoration. The object was probably manufactured in an Egyptian workshop and subsequently exported to the Levant as a votive offering intended to be personalised through the addition of inscriptions, as suggested by the presence of spaces intentionally left blank on its metal surface.

3.3. *A Mould for Amulets and Jewelry*

Louvre E 25961[56] is a single-piece mould carved in serpentine, utilised on both faces and intended to receive molten metal for the production of amulets and jewellery (Figs. 12-13). Such moulds were widely used during the Late Bronze Age[57] and are attested across an extensive geographical range encompassing the Near East, from the southern and northern Levant to Anatolia and the Aegean islands.[58]

Serpentine, widely available in the eastern Mediterranean, was an ideal material for the production of moulds for amulets and jewellery, owing to its ease of cutting and polishing.[59]

The figurines and jewellery elements carved in negative on Louvre E 25961 feature suspension devices, either in the form of a small loop at the upper edge or a perforation aligned with the main axis of the object, which would have allowed the finished amulets to be suspended (as in the case of scarabs and *wedjat* eyes). In addition, each mould cavity is provided with a channel designed to allow excess molten metal to drain off during casting.

On side A of the stone (Fig. 12), a symmetrical arrangement of amulets can be observed, with five elements on each side of the mould and a central motif designed to maximise the use of the available space. The five anthropomorphic figurines, arranged in a parallel sequence, are individually enclosed within a rectangular frame surmounted by a curved upper outline.

The first figurine on the left represents Horus standing on two crocodiles, with his arms grasping a snake. The second deity is Ptah, depicted in mummiform guise with a shaved skull and a long beard, holding a *was* sceptre with both hands. Adjacent to him is another male deity, shown striding in a long garment and holding a *heka* sceptre; his headdress is not clearly defined, but it appears to correspond to the lotus emblem of Nefertem. Next is the figure of Amun, recognisable by the two tall feathers of his crown. The final figure is a lion-headed deity, probably Sekhmet, wearing a long tunic and surmounted by a solar disk with uraeus; she holds a papyrus sceptre in one hand.

54 Grdseloff 1942, pp. 28-35.

55 Haring 1997, pp. 145-146.

56 Cenival 1968, p. 14; Vandier 1968, p. 318, fig.13; Ziegler 2001, p. 88, fig. 42.

57 Golani – Tucci 2023; Golani 2019.

58 Golani 2019, p. 57.

59 Golani 2019, p. 45

Figs. 12-13. Face A and B of the mold, Louvre E 25961 © Musée du Louvre / Département des Antiquités égyptiennes.

Among the amulets on the same face of the mould, a figure of Bes is depicted, with the tail hanging between the legs. Next appears a kneeling baboon, followed by another amuletic composition consisting of a boat carrying a scarab, flanked on both sides by two baboons in an attitude of adoration. The final two elements comprise a lunar emblem in the form of a crescent moon and a pomegranate.

Particularly noteworthy is the central motif on this side of the mould: possibly a ring intended to be bent into a circular form, featuring an uraeus at its centre and forming an S-shaped design enclosed between two papyrus stems.

On side B of the mould (Fig. 13), a symmetrical arrangement of amulets is again observable, with two elements on each side, while three additional negative forms are carved on the shorter side of the stone. Among the four principal amulets, another figure of Bes is represented, together with two earrings provided with small pendants, and an anthropomorphic figure of crouching Harpocrates, shown with the finger raised to the mouth. The shorter side of the mould features a sequence comprising a *wedjat* eye, followed by a scarab and a bead; all three elements are provided with perforations. At the centre, there is likely a ring incorporating a bead.

Moulds were used for the production of goldsmiths' components and amulets and could be either single-part or composed of two halves in the case of more complex forms. A. Golani and G. Tucci have proposed that, since stone moulds frequently fractured when exposed to the high temperatures of molten metal, artefacts such as the present example may instead have been intended for the production of wax models within the *lost-wax* casting technique, thus enabling repeated use.[60]

In this process, the stone mould required only moderate heating before the introduction of molten wax. The resulting wax model was then coated with successive layers of clay; once the coating had hardened and dried, it was perforated to reach the wax core, allowing it to drain out when melted. Molten metal was subsequently poured into the resulting cavity. After solidification, the clay mould was broken and the casting extracted. A. Golani and L. Tucci further suggest that stone moulds may also have been used for the production of embossed metal objects through cold-working techniques, resulting in hollow jewellery elements.[61]

Moulds for amulets and jewellery are attested not only in Egypt but also in the Levant, where they are documented in a variety of materials. Several examples have been recovered at Byblos,[62] including a frag-

60 Golani – Tucci 2023.

61 Golani – Tucci 2023.

62 Gubel 1994.

mentary schist mould for rings,[63] a bivalve steatite mould depicting a standing female deity supporting her breast, moulds for small rings, fishhooks and hooks,[64] and a fragmentary steatite mould for beads, among other examples.[65] Additional specimens have been found at Ugarit, including a bivalve mould featuring a wide range of jewellery forms, as well as scarab-shaped and pomegranate-shaped pendants.[66]

Moulds bearing scarabs, *wedjat* eyes, or amulets of Egyptian deities such as Bes have been discovered in a pottery workshop at Carthage, confirming their local production. Similar ceramic moulds have also been recovered from funerary contexts, suggesting a magical and apotropaic function.[67] Indeed, Bes is frequently associated with the protection of children and young mothers in domestic and funerary spheres, while Sekhmet also fulfils an apotropaic role, often linked to the safeguarding of children.[68]

The most widely distributed amulets in the Mediterranean basin, in addition to scarabs, include the *wedjat* eye, representations of Bes, lioness and feline goddesses (chiefly Sekhmet), Ptah-Pataikos, and Isis. From the end of the New Kingdom onwards, the number of amulets placed in tombs increases markedly, while the repertoire progressively expands; during the Third Intermediate Period, an even broader range of deities becomes represented within funerary assemblages.[69]

Among the published moulds, only a limited number derive from securely datable archaeological contexts. A substantial proportion was recovered from surface finds or from early, poorly documented excavations, which makes it difficult to establish their original archaeological setting. Nevertheless, according to A. Golani, most of these artefacts can be attributed to the Late Bronze Age (15th-13th century BCE), while a smaller group is datable to Iron Age I (12th-11th century BCE).[70]

Stone moulds should be distinguished from other types of moulds used for casting vitreous materials such as faience, paste, or glass, which were generally made of clay.[1] In Egypt, clay moulds for the production of faience amulets are attested in large quantities from the New Kingdom, particularly at sites such as Amarna, Malqata, Memphis, Qantir, and Gurob. However, stone moulds are also documented, including a limestone example from Amarna used for the production of jewellery and amulets, as well as a Graeco-Roman mould for jewellery production featuring two small scaraboid forms.[71]

In general, faience was the most widely used material for the production of amulets. This can be explained by its relatively simple and inexpensive manufacturing process, combined with its strong symbolic value, derived from its green hue and lustrous surface, both associated with ideas of regeneration and rebirth.[72] By contrast, high-value materials such as gold, silver, and precious stones occur predominantly in elite contexts, where their use reflects status, wealth, and restricted access to luxury goods.

The association between amulets and jewellery elements is a noteworthy feature. In Egypt, as well as across the Mediterranean basin, the distinction between ornamental and apotropaic functions is often difficult to establish, since adornments frequently fulfilled both roles simultaneously.[73] Moreover, certain jewels were specifically produced for the deceased's journey into the afterlife, while even the gods were depicted as

63 Dunand 1937, n. 8940, p. 230, fig. 249.

64 Dunand 1937, n. 7387, p. 94; Dunand 1950, pl. CLXXXIII.

65 Dunand 1937, n. 7388, p. 94 fig. 82.

66 Galliano – Calvet 2004, p. 192, n. 182.

67 Cintas 1946, p. 27; Vercoutter 1945.

68 Barcat 2019, p. 228.

69 Barcat 2019, p. 227.

70 Golani 2019, p. 56.

71 Bresciani – Betrò 2004, p. 242.

72 Caubet – Pierrat-Bonnefois 2005.

73 Meiri 2016.

adorned with ornaments and received jewellery offerings within the context of temple cult practices.[74] In the Levant, jewellery was produced both locally and through imports from Egypt, often in a commercial context, as evidenced by finds from Beth Shean, Deir el-Balah, Lachish, and Tell el-Ajjul.[75] Local assemblages include jewellery depicting Egyptian deities such as Hathor, Bes, and Taweret.[76] Other recurrent motifs comprise animals associated with Egyptian deities, such as the cat, the falcon, and the cobra, as well as Egyptian symbolic elements like the lotus flower, which is linked to creation myths and the sun god.

Among the negative forms represented on Louvre E 25961, the pomegranate is a widely attested motif outside Egypt, with a broad distribution across the Mediterranean basin. In the Levant, it has been documented at sites such as Lachish and Beth Shean, with attestations spanning from the Late Bronze Age through the Iron Age.[77]

The crescent moon motif is documented from the Amarna period onwards and is particularly characteristic of the New Kingdom (1550–1070 BCE), where it is associated with concepts of regeneration and cyclical renewal, as reflected in the lunar cycle.[78] In the Levant, this iconography is attested at sites such as Megiddo,[79] Beth Shean,[80] and Tell Abu Hawam, with a chronological range extending from the Late Bronze Age through the Roman period.

However, the *wedjat* eye is perhaps the most widely attested amuletic form, spanning a chronological range from the Old Kingdom to the Roman period, and occurring not only in Egypt but also in Phoenician and Punic contexts.[81] This diffusion is closely linked to its strong apotropaic value, rooted in mythological traditions associated with Horus and the sun god.[82] The bead depicting an uraeus flanked by two lotus flowers on the present artefact finds parallels in small ceramic moulds dated to the New Kingdom.[83] The element associated with the other ring, by contrast, may be related to so-called "barrel-shaped" beads, a common typological category in ancient jewellery production.[84]

We have already discussed Bes and his diffusion in Phoenician–Punic contexts. Among the anthropomorphic deities represented on Louvre E 25961, the Memphite triad composed of Ptah, Sekhmet, and Nefertem is attested both in Egypt and in regions under Phoenician influence. These deities are documented in the eastern Mediterranean during the 8th and 7th centuries BCE, reflecting sustained cultural transmission and direct contacts with the Nile Delta.

Harpocrates, the child form of Horus, was a recurrent iconographic motif in the Levantine world, particularly within glyptic art. He is typically represented as a naked boy with a shaved head, a sidelock of youth, and a finger placed to the mouth. In this form, he was regarded as a protective figure against venomous animals and harmful forces. Although the popularity of this iconography reached its peak during the Late Period, small ceramic moulds attesting to its production are already documented from the Amarna Period onward. The last two negative forms are considerably less common. The first is the solar barque, which appears in several variants, either with a solar disk or with Ra depicted crouching between the baboons in

74 Maxwell – Hyslop 1971.

75 Meiri 2016.

76 Herrmann 1994.

77 Hermann 2016, p. 11, pl. VIII; Golani 2013, pp. 156-157.

78 Andrews 1994, p. 90.

79 Hermann 2016, p. 12, pl. IX.

80 McGovern 1985, p. 70, fig. 67.

81 Müller – Winkler 1987, pp. 169, 118.

82 Meiri 2016.

83 Khawam 1971, pl. XXXIV/27; Herrmann 1985, nn. 350-370; Herrmann 1990, nn. 88-92.

84 Schlick-Nolte – von Droste zu Hülshoff 1990, n. 478, p. 429.

place of the scarab. This motif is attested from the Late New Kingdom onwards and is closely associated with themes of rebirth and regeneration.[85]

The second motif is the figure of Horus standing on crocodiles, widely attested in its *cippus* form and predominantly associated with the Late Period. Amulets of this type, often equipped with a suspension ring, have been discovered at sites such as Nippur, Byblos, Hama, Meroe, Axum, and Rome. The iconography of Horus on crocodiles, although varying in specific details between examples, typically depicts Horus as a naked child with a sidelock of youth, trampling crocodiles and subduing other dangerous animals such as lions, gazelles, snakes, and scorpions, often under the protection of Bes. In addition, Horus *cippi* are frequently – but not invariably – inscribed with religious and magical texts. They were produced in a wide range of sizes, from small portable amulets to large stelae intended for installation in temple courtyards.[86]

For an ancient Egyptian traveller, such an amulet would have functioned as an apotropaic device ensuring protection, with the additional potential to provide magical healing in the event of injury or venomous bites inflicted by dangerous animals.

A closely comparable depiction of Horus standing on crocodiles appears on another mould preserved in the *Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève*.[87] Executed in steatite, of unknown provenance, and dated to the 26th Dynasty, this object also includes other forms shared with the present artefact, namely a *wedjat* eye, a scarab, and an amulet of Bes.

According to A. Golani, two-part stone jewellery moulds represent a technological innovation of Near Eastern origin, as suggested by their wide geographical distribution.[88] Moreover, the highest concentration of such moulds has been documented in the coastal regions of the northern Levant, particularly at Ugarit and Byblos. This pattern is likely connected to the intensive trade networks operating in the region during the Late Bronze Age and even earlier, which presumably involved a significant number of specialised metalworkers, as also indicated by the diffusion of bronze figurines.[89] Furthermore, as noted by A. Golani and G. Tucci, all known examples of such moulds derive from urban centres. By contrast, most precious metal jewellery is attested in funerary contexts and in association with palatial and temple environments during the Late Bronze Age.

During this period, Egyptian hegemony over the Levant, together with the intensification of trade contacts, facilitated an increased circulation of precious metals – such as gold from Egypt – throughout the eastern Mediterranean.

In conclusion, a dating of Louvre E 25961 to the Late Period may be proposed, since the amulet of Horus on crocodiles is predominantly attested in this phase. The mould likely originated in Egypt, although many of the negative forms of Egyptian amulets it contains are, as discussed above, well represented in Near Eastern contexts. This may help to explain the wide diffusion of such moulds outside Egypt.

4. Concluding Remarks

The Louis de Clercq collection represents a remarkable journey both geographically and chronologically, encompassing the various stages in the formation of antiquities collections during the 19th century, as well as the patterns of trade and cultural exchange that shaped the countries of the Mediterranean basin across centuries and millennia.

85 Andrews 1994, p. 90.

86 Draycott 2011, pp. 123-133.

87 https://www.mahmah.ch/collection/oeuvres/moule-amulettes/018159 (accessed 20.01.2026).

88 Golani 2019, p. 58.

89 Golani 2019, p. 59.

As has been demonstrated, many objects in the collection, including those discussed in the present contribution, belong to the category of *Aegyptiaca*.

The remarkable diffusion of bronze statuettes depicting deities of the Egyptian pantheon as an expression of popular piety can be observed from the Late Period through the Graeco-Roman era, both within Egypt and beyond its borders. From the 25th and 26th Dynasties onwards, bronze figurines acquired increasing popularity, facilitated by the dissemination of the *lost-wax* casting technique, which enabled the relatively standardised production of small bronze statuettes and votive vessels. This development also accounts for the persistence of well-defined iconographic conventions in the representation of deities, thereby complicating precise chronological attribution.

During this period, new political centres emerged, alongside renewed networks of contact and shifting power relations between Egypt and the Mediterranean world.

Aegyptiaca represent the material expression of these renewed contacts and commercial exchanges: Egyptian or Egyptianising objects of Levantine, Phoenician, and North Syrian origin reappear across the Mediterranean basin from the 9th century BCE onwards, including small amulets, scarabs, bronze statuettes, and vessels. This phenomenon was further facilitated by the extensive trade networks operated by Phoenician merchants throughout the Mediterranean.

These artefacts were not merely exotic imports but were also valued for their apotropaic qualities and associations with regeneration, being frequently deposited in tombs or sanctuaries, particularly in contexts linked to women and children, where notions of fertility and rebirth were especially significant.

Their diffusion outside Egypt suggests that local communities were at least partially aware of the original meanings embedded in Egyptian religious thought. Their iconography is closely connected to specific protective symbolism and only rarely appears to have been directly integrated into formal cultic practice.

Across the Mediterranean, evidence attests to the widespread reception of these objects, and several indicators suggest that *Aegyptiaca* played a role far beyond that of simple "souvenirs" acquired by traders or pilgrims. Their frequency reflects a sustained fascination with Egyptian magic, religion, and iconographic traditions, and points to their incorporation into local belief systems and ritual practices.

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