

GÖTTINGER MISZELLEN

Beiträge zur ägyptologischen Diskussion

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Slawomir Rzepka

Some Remarks on Two Mycerinus Group Statues

In this article I would like to pay attention to some interesting features of two monuments of the Old Kingdom statuary. Both of them are group statues and were found by G.A. Reisner in the valley temple in the pyramid complex of Mycerinus.

1. The Mycerinus triad (Photo 1).

Museum, inv. no.: Boston MFA 11.3147, Brussels Mus. Roy. E 3074

Material: greywacke **Height:** 85+24,5 cm (ca 130 cm)

Inscriptions not preserved

Figures in the group: Mycerinus, Hathor, male figure.

Provenience: Giza, Valley temple of Mycerinus

Literature: PM III 28

Description.

Mycerinus in the middle of the group, standing, left foot advanced, left hand hanging closed at side, right hand held by Hathor's left; the king is dressed in *sendjyt*, with white crown and with royal beard (not preserved).

Hathor (?) on right of king, standing, left foot advanced, right hand hanging closed at side, left hand holding king's right: the goddess is dressed in close-fitting gown and tripartite wig.

Male figure on left of king, standing, with left foot advanced, right arm around back of king with hand open on king's right shoulder, left hand hanging; dressed in pleated skirt.

King is the tallest person in the group, Hathor is a bit shorter, male figure is the shortest (but all size differences are very small).

All the figures are leaned against the back slab.

State of preservation: upper part of the back slab, heads of Hathor and male figure, chest of king and male figure, left hand of male figure, lower part of the group (below the knee of figures) - destroyed.

As the king's head was identified a royal head from Brussels Museum, discovered in obscure circumstances.

Commentary.

This group is interesting in two aspects:

- its dimension,
- a relation of heights of represented figures.

The main preserved fragment is 85 cm high.¹ It means that the whole group was originally about 130 cm high. The Mycerinus triads in Cairo Museum² are 93 - 95,5 cm, the triad in Boston Museum - 84 cm high.³ So the differentiation of dimensions of all these monuments was quite small - maximum 11,5 cm. The triad of our interest was about 30 cm higher than the others (see Fig. 1). It is quite significant difference, but so far it was overlooked in the literature.⁴ There are probably two reasons of this situation:

¹ E. L. B. Terrace, *A Fragmentary Triad of King Mycerinus*, *BMFA* LIX (1961), 40-49.

² JE 40678, JE 40679, JE 46499.

³ Boston MFA 09.200. Probably the bigger difference of size is caused by the other type of composition of this triad.

⁴ The only scholar who has paid some attention to this size difference is Mathias Seidel in his recently published book: *Die königlichen Statuengruppen. Band I: Die Denkmäler von Alten Reich bis zum Ende der 18. Dynastie*, (HÄB 42, 1996).

1) Reisner in his publication of the Mycerinus temple⁵ did not give the exact dimensions of excavated statues,

2) it was not possible to compare directly the monument of our interest to the other, similar triads of Mycerinus, because they are now in Cairo Museum. Boston Museum has only one more well preserved triad, but its composition is quite different from the others (it shows Hathor seated in the middle).

Second interesting feature of our group is the way in which the male figure beside the king was shown. It is only a bit shorter than the ruler and Hathor. In triad JE 40678 the male nome personification is **much** smaller than the king, it hardly reaches the king's shoulder. Two small fragments of another Mycerinus triads⁶ also prove that the male nome personifications were regularly represented in a much smaller scale. The dyad of Sahure and the Koptos-nome personification⁷ suggests that showing the male personifications as much shorter than the king was the norm.

How the unusual features of our triad can be explained? Mathias Seidel⁸ has proposed 3 theories:

1) The male figure beside the king is not a nome personification, but one of the great gods - according to M. Seidel it could only be Re. It would explain the bigger dimensions of the group. However this hypothesis seems to be improbable:

- it makes us to assume that the meaning of this group is absolutely different from the meaning of the other triads. However all of them have important similarities: each group shows the king and Hathor,⁹ the king always wears white crown, *senjyt* and royal beard.

⁵ G. A. Reisner, *Mycerinus. The Temple of the Third Pyramid in Giza*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1931, 109-10. Reisner has only written that this group is in „slightly larger scale” than the triad from Cairo Museum JE 46499. This scholar however has also described the triad JE 40679 as „slightly larger” than JE 40678 although they are of the same size.

⁶ See M. Seidel op. cit. 37, 40.

⁷ New York MMA 18.2.4. According to M. Seidel (op. cit. 51-53) this group was usurped by Sahure, it really represents Chephren.

⁸ Ibid. 33-34.

⁹ In spite of the lack of inscription and attributes we can assume that the female figure in our group also represents Hathor.

- the male figure beside the king is not only shorter than the king but also shorter than the Hathor. If the male figure represents the great god, we could expect it to be at least as tall as the goddess.

2) This group is one of the Lower Egypt triads.

Serious objections must be raised also against this interpretation:

- among all fragments of triads found in the Mycerinus temple there is no other example of group of similar size and figure proportions. It makes us to doubt that these group belonged to a large set of Lower Egypt triads.

- it is difficult to explain why actually the Lower Egypt triads would have been shown in a much bigger scale than these related to Upper Egypt. There also seems to be no reason for the difference of proportions between Lower and Upper Egypt nome personifications.

- M. Seidel opposes against the identification of a head in white crown from Brussels Museum¹⁰ as a part of our group. The scales of this head and the main fragment of our triad (which are identical) and the fact that beside the triads, Mycerinus is almost always shown wearing *nemes* make this identification quite probable. That is why it is generally accepted in literature.

If the head from Brussels belonged to our group, this triad of course could not represent Lower Egypt nome personification.

3) The theory which Seidel prefers says that this triad just shows the king, Hathor and the Upper Egypt nome personification. Such interpretation is no less doubtful than the former two. It make us to assume that some male nome personifications were shown in big scale and others in small one (for what reason ?). We know 3 triads showing male personifications in the small scale,¹¹ but we have no other fragment which could be interpreted as a piece of the figure of the big scale „nome god“. We do not find such differentiation of scale among female personifications - all of them are approximately as tall as the king.

¹⁰ Brussels Mus. Roy. E 3074.

¹¹ Cairo JE 40678 and two unnumbered fragments in Boston Museum of Fine Arts (see: M. Seidel op. cit. 37, 40).

This interpretation also does not explain why the whole group was much taller than the other triads.

None of above presented theories gives us a good explanation for the unusual features of the triad of our interest. So it seems quite justifiable to seek for a new interpretation.

In order to find this interpretation, we have to answer the following questions:

1) what is the purpose of the triads and what role do the nome personifications play in them ?

2) do we know any monuments or representations, which function was similar to that of the triads ?

Ad. 1)

The role of „nome gods” represented in triads is clearly defined by the inscriptions incised beside them: „Recitation: I have given to you all good things and all offerings which are in the South for you have appeared as King of Upper and Lower Egypt forever”. Nome personifications were to ensure eternal delivery of offering for the royal mortuary cult from all parts of the land.

Ad. 2)

We know quite many representations, which function was similar to that of Mycerinus triads. We find processions of personifications of different territorial units bringing offerings for the royal or the private mortuary cult. In private tombs we deal with personifications of estates, sometimes we find them also in royal monuments. The most interesting for us are, however, representations of processions of personifications of nomes, which are preserved in the mortuary temple of Sahure¹² and in the sun-temple of Neuserre.¹³ They seem to be the closest parallel for the „nome gods” representations in triads. A long row of figures bringing offerings to the king plays the same role as a long row of group-statues showing nome personifications beside the king, for whom they bring „all good things and all offerings”.

¹² R. Wartke, Zum Alabaster-Altar des Königs Sahu-Re, ZÄS 104 (1977), 145-156, Tafel VII-VIII.

¹³ E. Edel, S. Wenig, *Die Jahreszeitenreliefs aus dem Sonnenheiligtum des Königs Ne-user-re*, Berlin 1974, Tafel 5, 24.

The relief representation have one interesting feature, which can help to find an explanation for our untypical triad: the procession of personifications of nomes from the southern part of the land is headed by a personification of Upper Egypt. Respectively - the Delta „nome gods” are led by a personification of Lower Egypt. We can presume that among all Mycerinus triads, two were showing the king with figures which personifies both parts of the land. These triads were surely somehow differentiated from all the others. A triad showing the Upper Egypt personification was a kind of summary of all the triads representing southern „nome gods”. We could expect that this fact was accented by a bigger dimensions of this triad. The figure personifying Upper Egypt is of course of higher rank than the nome personifications. This difference of rank could be expressed by a height of the personification figure - it could be similar in size to the representation of the king.

Does the triad Boston MFA 11.3147 show the king together with a figure personifying Upper Egypt? Considering all above quoted facts, it seems quite probable. There can be only one serious objection: the male figure standing beside the king in our triad is not similar to the Upper Egypt personifications known from reliefs showing nome processions. In the latter case we always deal with the so called „fecundity figures”¹⁴ (called also sometimes „fertility-” or „Nile-gods”). They are shown with drooping breasts and bellies, wearing characteristic skirts. Male figure in our triad is not „fecundity figure” for sure. It does not mean however that it could not personify or symbolise Upper Egypt. Ancient Egyptians had many ways of expressing one notion. Upper Egypt was often symbolised by the goddess Nekhbet, but could also be described as a „places of Seth”. This expression was often used in Pyramid Texts¹⁵ and proves that during the Old Kingdom Seth was treated as a titulary god of Upper Egypt. From a later period we know monuments clearly showing that Seth could play exactly the same role as the Upper Egypt „fecundity figure”. On the thrones of the statues of Sesostris I¹⁶ the union of Two Lands (*sematawy*) was shown. In five cases this

¹⁴ See: J. Baines, *Fecundity Figures. Egyptian Personifications and the Iconology of a Genre*, Warminster 1985.

¹⁵ E. Otto, *Die Lehre von den beiden Ländern Ägyptens in der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, in: *Studia Aegyptiaca* 1, 1938, 16.

¹⁶ Cairo Museum CG 411-420.

union is performed by „fecundity figures” symbolising Upper and Lower Egypt. On five another statues this role is played - respectively - by Seth and Horus.

Conclusion.

The triad Boston MFA 11.3147 + Brussels Mus. Roy. E 3074 represents the king and Hathor together with the figure which personifies Upper Egypt (it could be Seth).

2. *The Mycerinus dyad* (Photo 2, Fig. 2).

Museum, inv. no.: Boston MFA 11.1738

Material: greywacke **Height:** 139,5 cm

Inscriptions not preserved

Figures in the group: Mycerinus, female figure.

Provenience: Giza, Valley temple of Mycerinus.

Literature: PM III 29.

Description.

Mycerinus on right of female figure, both standing with left foot advanced; king with closed hands hanging at his sides; dressed in *senjyt*, with *nemes* on his head and the royal beard.

The female figure has her right arm around king's waist with her left hand resting on his arm; she is dressed in close-fitting gown and tripartite wig.

The female figure is slightly shorter than the king.

The figures are standing on a rectangular base, leaned against a back slab, which reaches their shoulders.

This group has never been finished - it has not been polished (lower part is only roughly smoothed) and no inscriptions have been made.

State of preservation - very good.

Commentary.

This group shows - according to its discoverer - „undoubtedly Mycerinus and Khamerenebty II.“¹⁷ This opinion is often repeated in popular and scientific publications in spite of the fact that it is absolutely baseless. Nothing allows us to identify the female figure as a representation of Khamerenebty II. W. Seipel,¹⁸ has noticed that this queen had no special position among the royal wives. On the contrary - her tomb is a normal mastaba, while for his two other wives Mycerinus has built pyramids. They are placed south of the royal pyramid and one of them was even covered with red granite. But Khamerenebty II is the only wife of Mycerinus known by name - this was probably the only reason for G. A. Reisner to assume that she was represented in this group.

The female figure in our group is not an effigy of Khamerenebty II. This figure probably does **not** represent any of Mycerinus' wives at all. A proportion of figures testifies against the generally accepted interpretation of the female figure as a queen's effigy. The woman is almost as tall as the king. It means that the represented persons are of a similar rank.¹⁹ Sources preserved from this period prove however that the position of a queen was in no way comparable to the position of a king. He was a god - Horus, while she could be only a priestess of gods.²⁰ Even if her tomb was a pyramid, its size was never comparable to the size of a royal tomb. Pyramid Texts appear in queen's tombs for the first time at the very end of VIth Dynasty - much later than in royal pyramids. We have no reason to presume that queens played a significant role in celebrations of the Sed festival²¹ or in a royal mortuary cult.

¹⁷ Reisner, *op. cit.*, 110 [17].

¹⁸ W. Seipel, *Untersuchungen zu den ägyptischen Königinnen der Frühzeit und des Alten Reiches. Quellen und historische Einordnung.*, Dissertation Hamburg 1980, 163-8.

¹⁹ According to V. Dobrev this group statue proves that Mycerinus was obliged to share the royal power with his queen at the end of his reign because he was ill (*id.*, *Observations sur deux statues de Menkaouré du musée de Boston*, DE 27 (1993), 9-18). Such theory seems to be to speculative.

²⁰ *ibid.*, Tabele 1.

²¹ Queen is not shown in the representations of the Sed festival from the solar temple of Neuserre (see: F. W. Bissing, *Das Re-Heiligtum des Königs Ne-woser-re*, II, III, Berlin - Leipzig, 1905-28). A fragment of relief from Heliopolis (Torino, Museo Egizio, inv Suppl. 2761/21), which shows Djoser in the Sed cloak proves that even if the queen was present during the ceremonies, she did not play an active role.

We know only 7 examples of group statues showing a king with his wife (dating from the Old Kingdom). Six of them show Radjedef with his queen,²² the seventh example probably presents Chephren with his wife.²³ In each case female figure is considerably smaller than the king.

We should mention also a relief fragment found in Heliopolis.²⁴ It shows probably a group statue of Djoser accompanied by 3 women: his wife, his daughter and (probably) his mother. All female figures are much smaller than the king's figure.

Two facts testify against the interpretation of the female figure as a queen's effigy:

- the rank of royal wife was not comparable to the rank of her husband,
- a queen's figure is always considerably smaller in group statues, which undoubtedly show a king with his wife.

Only one fact (but surely an important one) testifies in favour of interpreting of our group as an effigy of a royal pair. The female figure has no divine attributes on her head. She seems not to be a goddess, but a „normal“ human - probably the king's wife. I will try to show however that this figure represent a goddess, who for some reason was shown without her attributes.

If we assume that a goddess was shown, Hathor is the most probable one. She was represented in four triads of Mycerinus (most probably also in two other poorly preserved²⁵). In each case she was dressed in a close-fitting gown and a tripartite wig - just like the female in our group. In the triads showing all figures standing, the proportion of the king and Hathor is such as in our dyad. In triads however Hathor always wears the sun disc and the cow horns on her head.

The female figure in our dyad has no such attributes, but this fact is easy to explain. We have to notice that a sculptor who wanted to present the king (with *nemes* on his head) together with Hathor, in the same proportion as in

²² Louvre E. 12627, Louvre E. 11552a-h, München ÄS 5243 and 3 other fragments (present location unknown; published by Chassinat in: *Mon. Piot.* XXV, 1921-22, 64.)

²³ Leipzig Inv. Nr. 8244 (see: R. Krauspe, *Katalog ägyptischer Sammlungen in Leipzig. Band 1. Statuen und Statuetten*, Mainz 1997, 37 [79], Tf. 26,4).

²⁴ Torino, Museo Egizio, inv Suppl. 2761/21; see note 17.

²⁵ Boston MFA 11.3147 (widely described in the first part of this article) and a small fragment of a triad showing a seated figure in the middle (present location unknown).

triads, could not show the goddess with her attributes. In triads the royal head-dress is always a white crown, which is approximately as tall as the Hathor's horns. In our dyad the king wears *nemes*. A sculptor would have to use one of the following solutions to show the goddess with her horns:

1) the goddess is shown as much shorter than the king, so that: the height of Hathor + the height of horns = the height of the king (Fig. 3);

2) the figures are of equal height and are leaned against a very high back slab on which the attributes of Hathor are sculpted - above the king the back slab is empty (Fig. 4).

None of these solutions seems to be good enough. In the first case the rule of showing the king and Hathor in similar size (like in the triads) would be broken. In the second case, the artistic effect would not be satisfactory - a high back slab, empty above the king's head would spoil the harmony and the symmetry of the group.

The best possible variant was chosen : Hathor was shown without her attributes and she were to be identified by an inscription. Because the group was never finished, this inscription is absent.

Conclusion

The interpretation of this dyad as an effigy of the king and the goddess - although controversial - seems to be more probable than the assumption that during the reign of Mycerinus, the position of the queen was so high that she could be represented as almost equal to the king.

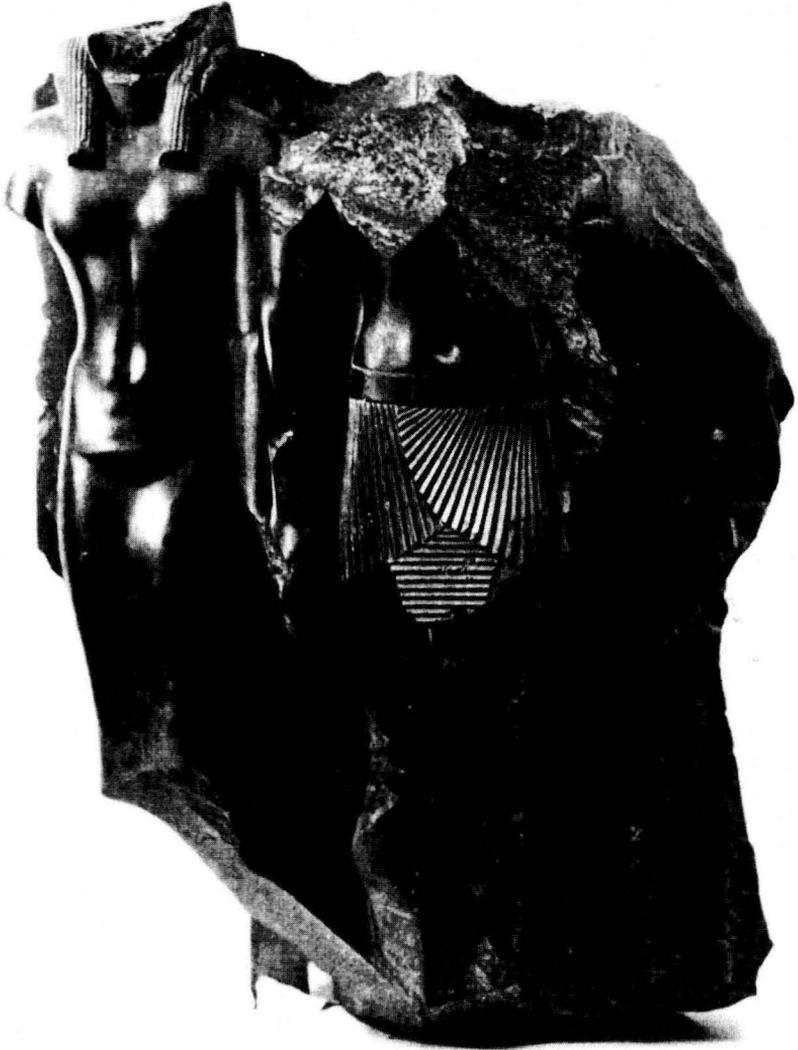


Photo 1. Boston MFA 11.3147 (W. Wood, A Reconstruction of the Triads of King Mycerinus, *JEA* 60 (1974), 82-93, Plate XXV, 1.)



Photo 1. Boston MFA 11.1738 (G. A. Reisner, *Mycerinus*, Cambridge (Mass) 1931, Pl. 55).

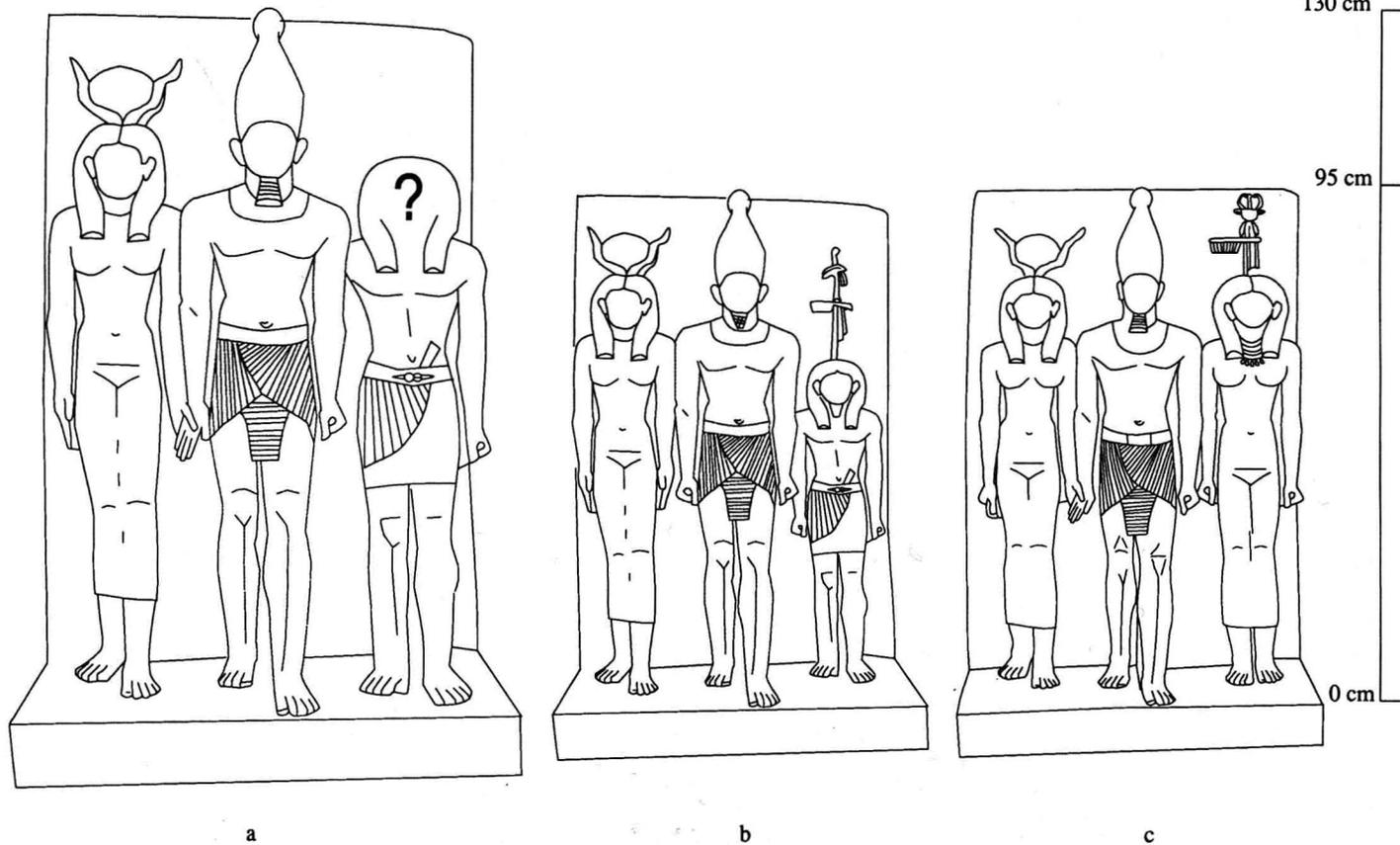


Fig. 1. Reconstructed triad Boston MFA 11.3147 + Brussels Mus. Roy E 3074 (a) and two triads from Cairo Museum - JE 40678 (b) and JE 46499 (c).

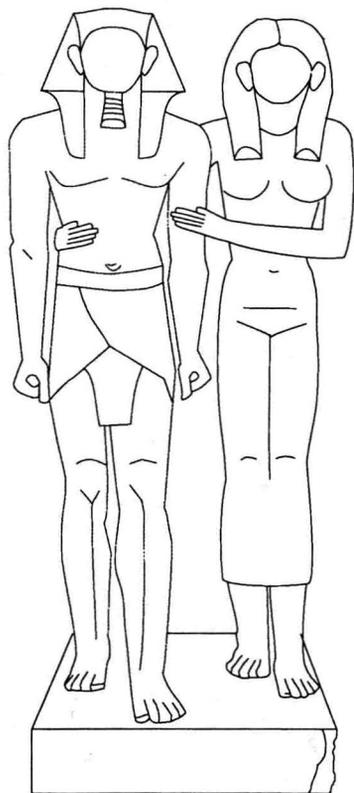


Fig. 2. Dyad of Mycerinus
(Boston MFA 11.1738).

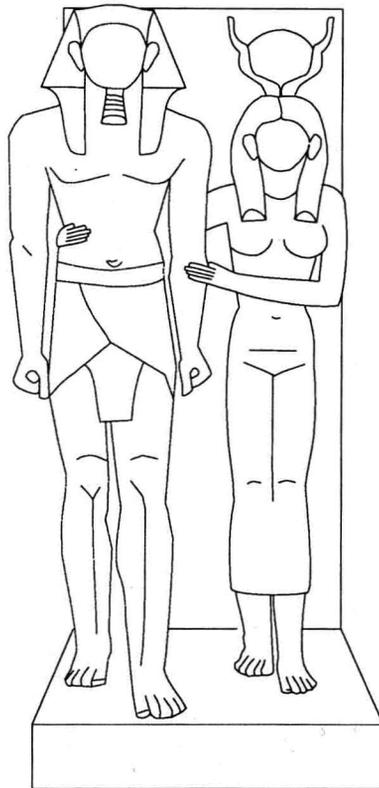


Fig. 3.

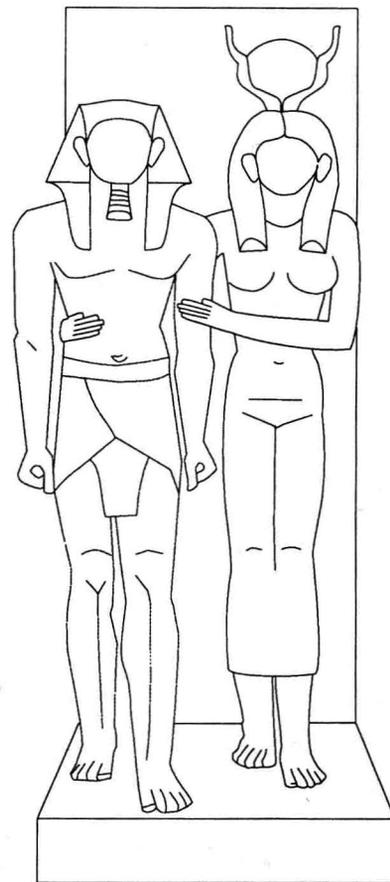


Fig. 4.