

EGYPTIAN FAIENCE STATUETTE OF THE GODDESS TAWERET

Egyptian, New Kingdom-Third Intermediate Period (ca. 1000 B.C.)

Faience

H: 7.8 cm

Reference: 20075



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The figure represents Taweret (the great), a female deity of composite form. Standing on her hind legs, she probably stepped forward on her left leg. Her frightening body is composed of the head and pregnant abdomen of a hippopotamus, the legs of a lion, and the back and tail of a crocodile. Only the tripartite hairstyle and the full, pendulous breasts resemble human features. The arms curve inward alongside the body to the belly, where the goddess probably held her usual attribute, the sa, a symbol of protection. A finely crafted necklace with three rows of small beads adorns her chest. On her head, she wears a small cylindrical modius whose edge is lightly chipped. The chip may indicate that the headgear of this Taweret would have been completed by a horned solar disk, a sign of her divine origin. The cult of Taweret, which was already widespread during the Old Kingdom, became very popular in the Third Intermediate Period, when statuettes, amulets, and pendants were produced in large numbers. But the remarkable artistic quality of this example distinguishes it from those mass-produced objects. Despite some wear on the surface, the details and the freshness of the forms, perfectly modeled and rounded, as well as the precise, expertly incised details, are clearly visible.

The head with its strong bone structure, mouth ajar to reveal the tusks, the pointed ears and deep eye sockets (the eyes were probably inlaid), the central part of the back with bones and scales that reproduce a crocodile's skin, the striped wig ending in ribbons all these elements contribute to the excellent quality of the work and relate it to the finest figurines of Taweret, for example, the specimen in the Louvre. Ancient Egyptians believed that Taweret assimilated and synthesized the threatening properties of three common and very dangerous animals of ancient Egypt hippo, lion, and crocodile turning them into positive symbols of protection. The numerous statuettes and amulets of Taweret, like those of Bes, the guardian spirit with the appearance of a

dwarf, thus had an apotropaic function. The prominent breasts and pregnant condition reflect the other role of Taweret, that of a fertility deity. In this capacity, she primarily assisted women in labor and those who had just given birth, dispelling evil. With the baby under her protection, especially to ensure that there would be sufficient mother's milk, she functioned as a nurse who cared for the newborn.

CONDITION

This statuette, molded in slightly friable, homogeneous light blue frit, is in overall good condition, but the hands (or the claws) and the lower legs are missing, as is the attribute that once was soldered to the creature's belly. A grayish patina partially covers the surface.

PROVENANCE

Ex-Guy Weil Goudchaux private collection; acquired in Paris, at the Louvre des Antiquaires, in 1980.

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WILKINSON, R. H., *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (London, 2003), pp. 185-86.