



## STATUETTE OF SAKHMET

Egypt  
Middle Kingdom, 2040-1782 BC  
Hippopotamus tooth  
Height 8.6 cm

Lion-headed goddess standing with legs together and arms by her sides. She is wearing a long close-fitting dress, broad collar, and striated tripartite wig with a lion's mane in front. The facial details are extremely fine and some of the original gilding is preserved.

Only two main goddesses were represented as lion-headed and anthropomorphic: Sekhmet and Wadjet. Determining the identity without a votive inscription naming the goddess can be challenging. In this case, however, the represented goddess is most likely Sekhmet. Wadjet, in her leonine form, was more popular during the later dynastic periods.

Sekhmet was given titles such as 'the (one who is) powerful' and 'Mistress of Dread'. She was a symbol of power and force and was a protector goddess of the pharaohs, leading them in warfare. She was considered a goddess of war and of vengeance, but also goddess of healing. This dual identity is associated with the cat goddess Bastet, the image of Sekhmet when she was calm and at rest. Bastet is the gentle goddess, the lady protector against illnesses, patron of the priests, protector of women in labour and of children. Sekhmet is also represented with the solar disk headdress like the goddess Hathor, due to her being recognised as the daughter of the sun god Ra, and his sun cult.

Sekhmet was worshipped as the "Lady of Asheru" in the temple of Mut in Karnak. She was also worshipped in Luxor, Memphis, Letopolis and the Delta region. In some temples animals were sacrificed and their blood was offered to keep cholera away. The priests performed a ritual before a different statue of the goddess every day of the year to placate her wrath. This is the reason why so many images of the goddess are still preserved. Most of the statues do not exhibit any expression or dynamism, but rather the typical hieratic attitude of Egyptian art. It is estimated that more than 700 statues of Sekhmet stood in the Temple of Amenhotep III in Luxor and in the Karnak Temple. The majority of the effigies found were sculpted during the reign of this pharaoh. Tame lions were kept in temples dedicated to Sekhmet in Leonopolis.

## PROVENANCE

Former private collection France; private collection G.B. Göttingen, Germany, acquired prior to 1980

## LITERATURE

C. Loeben: *LIBER AMICORUM, Claus Pelling zum 90. Geburtstag*, Tübingen 2022  
S. Schoske & D. Wildung: *Gott und Götter im Alten Ägypten*, Philipp von Zabern, Mainz 1992