

# THE STANDING PHARAOH



During the first millennium BC, bronze royal effigies multiplied and apart from their modest size, they often represent true masterpieces. Like this little statue (H. 20.5 cm) of a standing pharaoh found by the IEASM in Thonis-Heracleion. It is practically intact and comes from the level of destruction of the temenos of Amun-Gereb.



## Subtle modelling with fine details

Bare chested, the pharaoh is dressed in the pleated shendjyt loin cloth and bears a high kheprech crown with pointed circles, in a classical striding pose, his clenched fists having formerly held the insignia of power now lost (ceremonial cane and ankh symbol...).

Under the uraeus undulating in a symmetric loop, with big eyes close to the bridge of his nose, his firm oval face becomes fleshier with a plump mouth and a full chin.





With harmonious proportions, his long straight body seems to “melt” his muscles due to the subtle modelling, but it preserves fine details, and realistic traits like the prominent collarbones, the knees, or the shinbones.

## **Puzzling name on the statue's belt buckle**

Conforming to common practice, his pharaoh's name is incised on his belt buckle, but the incised signs are difficult to decipher.



Inside the oval of a cartouche (?), one can distinguish three “hieroglyphs”, which due to their tripartite structure can be adapted to the protocols of several **kings of the Saite dynasty**.

The most apparent reading would be in favour of Neferibre the throne name of Psamtik II, third pharaoh of the XXVIth dynasty (595-589 BC) who recalls to memory the recently identified “portrait” in the Jacquemart-André Museum (MJAP-S 8733), still without excluding those of Wahibre pointing back at Psamtik II and Apries, Uhemibre at Nekao or Khenemibre at Amasis, well attested on the site of Thonis-Heracleion.

## **Sign of post-Persian iconography?**

Yet, already difficult on the sole basis of the stylistic criteria, an attribution to one of the sovereigns of the base first half of the 6th century BC would be contradicted by the presence of a rare iconographic particularity which is often considered to be post-Persian:

in the back of the figure, the presence of an **axial ribbon descending from the end of the crown to the belt of the loincloth**. A typology attested by other royal bronzes of high quality but in a kneeling posture: the statuette of the Nelson-Akins Museum in Kansas City, item 53-13 (“pseudo-hieroglyphic” inscription), often attributed to Khenemma’âtre, Achoris (XXIXth “mendesian” dynasty, 393-380 BC), of BM EA 64369 and of Tanis OAE 3412 not epigraphic, both datable into the fifth - fourth century BC.



# Example of the flowering of the art of metal working

Made in a costly material the Thonis-Heracleion pharaoh has his place in the flowering of the art of metal working, inaugurated by the Third Intermediate Period and continued in the creative “Ethiopian Renaissance”.

The very Incarnation of royal power, his elegant and dynamic appearance illustrate the role of the sovereign in the accomplishment of the rituals of the temple for a constant dialogue with divinity.

**Object:** Bronze with a brown patina. H. 20.5 cm. XXVIth or XXIXth dynasty. Maritime Museum, Alexandria (SCA 1305)

**Source:** Original description by Jocelyne Berlandini-Keller in exhibition catalogue „Osiris - Egypt’s Sunken Mysteries“, Paris, 2015, re-ed 2018, exh. Egypt’s Sunken Cities, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis 4 November 2018 - 14 April 2019

**Photos:** Christoph Gerigk © Franck Goddio/Hilti Foundation