

## PECTORAL FOR THE LECTOR PRIEST PANAKHT

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**ABSTRACT:** An ancient Egyptian pectoral dated to the New Kingdom and belonging to the lector priest Panakht, entered the collections of the now National Museum, Prague, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The pectoral is decorated with a scene representing the rising sun on the recto and a scene of the worship of Osiris by the owner on the verso.

**KEYWORDS:** Egyptian pectorals – Osiris – Isis – Nephthys – scarab – lector priest – Panakht

*In memoriam of Břetislav Vachala (1952–2020)*

### Introduction

The collections of the National Museum – Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures contain an ancient Egyptian pectoral, which is – based on stylistic and iconographic criteria – dated to the late New Kingdom. Despite it being exhibited on several occasions, the piece was neither properly studied nor published. The pectoral currently bears Inv. No. P 1672 and forms a part of the Ancient Near East and Africa Department of the Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures, section of the National Museum (hereafter ‘Náprstek Museum’).

### Provenance

The records of the Náprstek Museum indicate that the pectoral had originally formed a part of the ‘old collection’ of the National Museum or more precisely, its historical predecessor, the Museum of the Bohemian Kingdom. Unfortunately, no further information concerning the piece’s provenance is available in the Náprstek Museum’s records.

However, the pectoral can be traced in the old inventories of the National Museum, namely in the inventory of the Classical Antiquity Collection, from the 1920s. There, the object was recorded under the Inv. No. [NM] 671 and was described as follows: ‘A wooden square plaque with a lath and a projection on the upper end, painted on both sides with inscribed hieroglyphs.’<sup>2</sup> The description of the object was later supplemented with a note by the Egyptologist Jaroslav Černý, who studied the Egyptian objects in the Classical Antiquity collection in the late 1920s or early

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2 In Czech: ‘Dřevěná destička čtvercová s lištou a výběžkem na horní části s[!] obou stran pomalovaná a opatřená hieroglyf[!].’

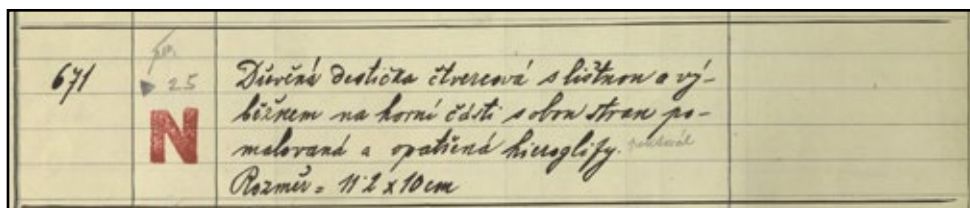


Fig. 1. Entry from the Classical Antiquity Collection inventory referring to Inv. No. [NM] 671. Jaroslav Černý's note in pencil.

1930s, identifying the object as a 'pectoral' [Fig. 1]. Unlike most objects recorded in the inventory book, the donor of the object is not given. The entry concerning the object's provenance only gives a code combining Roman and Arabic numerals, most likely an older evidence number: 'XXIII.239'.

The pectoral likely came to the Museum of the Bohemian Kingdom before the World War I, after which the institution's name changed and its collections were reorganised. It also appears that the object entered the museum's collection only after 1863 when the catalogue of the *Archaeological Collection of the Museum of the Bohemian Kingdom in Prague* was published,<sup>3</sup> as no object with a description that would correspond to the pectoral is listed. The outbreak of the World War I may hence serve as *terminus ante quem*, and the year 1863 as *terminus post quem* for the accession of the piece into the museum's collection.

## Pectorals in ancient Egypt

In Egyptian archaeology, the term pectoral is used for a type of jewellery, hung around the neck, and worn over the chest (of living people or mummies). Most frequently, the pectorals had a form of a square plaque topped with a cavetto cornice. The general shape of pectorals resembles that of a *naos* shrine. The oldest preserved pectorals date to the Middle Kingdom, although their earliest depictions are preserved on much older monuments, including those from the Early Dynastic Period. Middle Kingdom pectorals were found in the burials of members of the royal family. During the New Kingdom, pectorals entered non-royal context and started to be attributed to the belief in the afterlife and resurrection. During this period, they frequently merge with so-called heart scarabs, which were, similarly to pectorals, placed over the chest of a mummified body.<sup>4</sup> Pectorals were made of various material, including stone (predominantly basalt), Egyptian faience, and wood.

## Pectoral Inv. No P 1672 [Fig. 2, Pls. 1–2]

This pectoral (preserved width 13.2 cm, preserved height 11.7 cm, maximum thickness 1.5 cm), kept in the collections of the Náprstek Museum, is made of wood and covered in a layer of stucco and polychrome decoration on the surface. The design of the decoration follows the fashion of the yellow coffin type and other similarly fashioned, funerary pieces of the Ramesside Period (or the early Third Intermediate Period).

<sup>3</sup> *Archeologické sbírky v Museu Království Českého v Praze*, 1863.

<sup>4</sup> Feucht 1971, pp. 1–11.

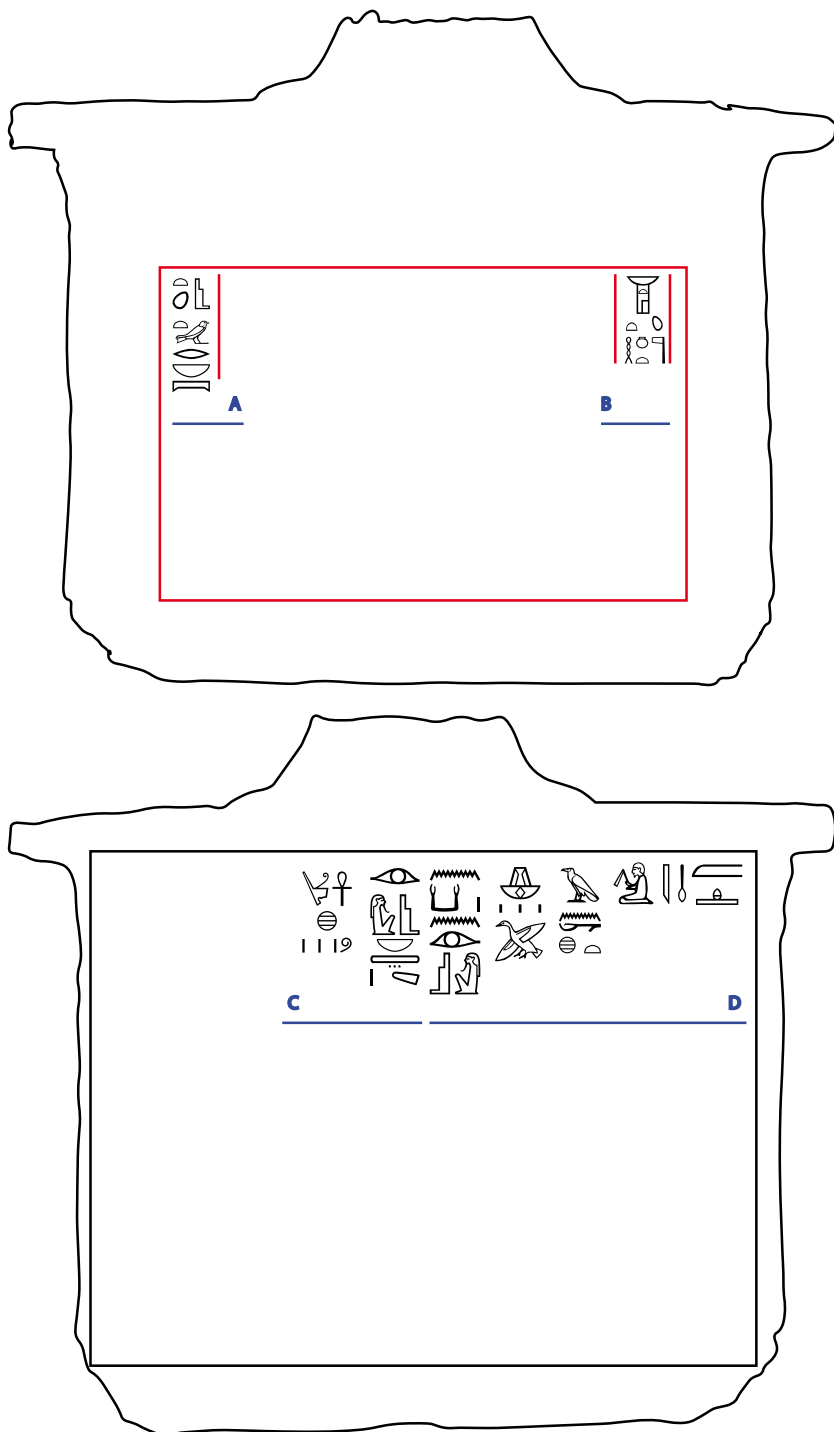


Fig. 2. Position of cursive hieroglyphic text on the recto (top) and verso (bottom) of the pectoral, Inv. No. P 1672 (Illustration: Pavel Onderka).

## Recto of the pectoral

The recto [Pl. 1] of the pectoral is decorated with the depiction of the solar barque carrying a scarab, symbolising the rising sun, i.e. the god Khepri. The barque sails on a dark-coloured band representing waters. The scarab is shown from above and is rendered plastically. Details of the scarab's body, which is painted in a natural, dark colour, are outlined with light-coloured lines. The surface of the scarab is largely abraded. A small figure representing the sun god sitting on its heels is placed on top of the scarab. This constellation can be understood as a parallel to a scarab pushing the solar disc, which frequently appears as a decoration element on pectorals during the New Kingdom. The sun god bears a sun disk on his head and holds an *ankh*, the symbol of life, in his hands. The scarab is between two goddesses – Isis stands on the left, while Nephthys stands on the right.

The scene showing the scarab between the two goddesses, represents sunrise, a topic frequently depicted on New Kingdom pectorals.<sup>5</sup> In the given context, the scarab is identified with the rising sun, that is with the sun god Khepri. Through the presence of Isis and Nephthys, the sister-wife and sister of Osiris, the rising sun is also identified with Osiris, the god of resurrection.

Both goddesses face the scarab with arms raised in adoration. They are clad in close-fitting long dresses of a dark colour. Their heads are adorned with white headcloths and their attributes, or more precisely hieroglyphic signs representing their names: *st* (Q1 of Gardiner's sign list) for Isis, and *nb.t-ḥw.t* (O9 of Gardiner's sign list) for Nephthys. Their wrists are bejewelled with bracelets.

The whole scene is framed by a decorative frieze consisting of alternation of one long and three short rectangles. Both goddesses are accompanied by a caption consisting of one column of cursive hieroglyphic text placed behind the upper part of her body. Each caption includes the name and an epithet of the respective goddess:

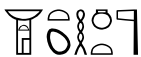
A)



*ʒs.t wr.t nb(.t) p.t*

Isis, the Great, Lady of the Sky.<sup>6</sup>

B)



*nb.t-ḥw.t ḥnw.t ntr(.w)*

Nephthys, Mistress of the Gods.<sup>7</sup>

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5 Feucht 1971, p. 4.

6 LÄGG IV, pp. 49–50.

7 LÄGG V, pp. 188–189.

## Verso of the pectoral

The verso [Pl. 2] of the pectoral shows its owner worshipping Osiris.<sup>8</sup> Between the god and the human, there is an oval depression representing the base of the scarab hollowed exactly in the same position as the scarab's back on the recto. The colouring of the base of the scarab is badly preserved. However, remains of its decoration indicate that the base was originally inscribed with four lines of cursive hieroglyphic text most likely containing the initial part of Chapter 30B of the *Book of the Dead*.

Under the base of the scarab, a basket or a lowered circular offering table loaded with offerings (most likely loaves of bread surrounded by green vegetables). A tripartite garland rises from in front of Osiris' toes. Osiris is shown in his typical mummy form. His face and hands, i.e. parts of the body protruding from the shroud, are painted green. The green colour accentuated Osiris' connection with rebirth and regeneration. He wears an *atef*-crown, consisting of the White Crown of Upper Egypt and two ostrich feathers on its side. Osiris has a typical chin-beard ending in a rounded curl. The upper part of the god's shroud is coloured red and decorated with black dots. The lower part, from chest down, is coloured white. In his right hand, Osiris holds a sceptre (*hk3*), and a flagellum (*nhh*) in his right.

In front of Osiris' head are two columns representing the captions to the gods figure, identifying him as:

C)



*wsjr nb t3 'nh.w*

Osiris, Lord of the Land of the Living.<sup>9</sup>

The owner of the pectoral is depicted opposite Osiris with an adoration gesture. His head is shaven. He wears a blue (or green) wide collar around his neck. He is dressed in a long kilt fastened under his navel. Behind his back, two twisted ropes used for tying the collar's two ends, hang down. The figure of the lector priest is accompanied by a caption located in front of and above his head. It consists of three short columns and one short line of cursive hieroglyphic text:

D)



*n k3 n wsjr hrj-hb.w p3-nht m3'-hrw m htp*

For the *ka* of the Osiris, [i.e. the deceased], the lector priest Panakht, justified in peace.

The caption identifies the owner of the pectoral as a lector priest, called Panakht. Lector priests were a category of ancient Egyptian clerics attested from all periods

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Feucht 1971, pp. 21–23.

<sup>9</sup> LÄGG III, p. 769.

of Pharaonic history, whose principal qualifications were literacy, ritual practice, and knowledge of magic spells. They were involved in temple ceremonies, funerary rituals, and healing amongst others.<sup>10</sup> The priest's name Panakht is frequently attested from the New Kingdom.<sup>11</sup>

The whole scene is set on a band representing a stylised mat. The basket or the lowered offering table is placed in the very centre of the mat. The arrangement resembles that of the hieroglyphic *htp* sign (R4 of Gardiner's sign list) representing an offering. From the top, left, and right, the scene is bordered with a simple black line frame.

The pectoral is topped with a cavetto cornice. In the centre was a projection which served for the pectoral's suspension. The upper part of the projection is not preserved. In terms of its decoration, the present pectoral ranks amongst Feucht's type 107.<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusion

The pectoral for Panakht is decorated with two typical scenes associated with the rebirth, namely the scene representing the sunrise on the recto, and a scene of the worship of Osiris. The owner of the pectoral is identified as the lector priest Panakht.

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10 See Forshaw 2014; for summary see Forshaw 2014, p. 139.

11 Ranke 1935, no. 113.17.

12 Feucht 1971, pp. 92–94, Pl. XVI.



Pl. 1. Recto of the pectoral, Inv. No. P 1672 (Photo: Jiří Vaněk).



Pl. 2. Verso of the pectoral, Inv. No. P 1672 (Photo: Jiří Vaněk).

