



Unpublished Composite Amulet of Goddess Mut-Sekhmet (Egyptian Museum JE 53287)

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ABSTRACT

The research concentrates on studying and publishing a composite amulet representing the goddess “Mut-Sekhmet”, which is currently displayed in room (no. 19) at the Egyptian Museum under the accession number (JE 53287-SR3/8114). Although the original colors have disappeared except for the lower part between the legs of the goddess Mut. The amulet remains in a good condition, allowing for detailed study and analysis.

The study presents the development of amulet forms and uses, with a primary focus on composite amulets, their symbolism, and significance during the Third Intermediate Period. The study also aims to determine the period to which the composite amulet of the goddess Mut-Sekhmet belongs and to identify its possible discovery location through an analysis of its artistic features. The study unveils the representation of Mut-Sekhmet together in a composite form, focusing on the material and color with previously documented amulets of the same type from the Third Intermediate Period in addition to light on their social, religious and political significance.

KEYWORDS: Composite amulet; Mut; Sekhmet; Third Intermediate Period.

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تميمة مركبة للآلهتين "موت وسخمت" غير منشورة (JE 53287)

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الملخص

يركز هذا البحث على دراسة ونشر تميمة مركبة تمثل الإلهة "موت- سخمت"، وهي معروضة حاليًا في الغرفة (رقم: 19) بالمتحف المصري والمسجلة في السجلات تحت رقم (JE 53287/SR. 8114) وعلى الرغم من إختفاء النقوش والألوان الأصلية بإستثناء الجزء الأسفل بين ساقَي الإلهة موت، إلا أن التميمة لا تزال في حالة جيدة، مما يسمح بدراستها وتحليلها بشكل مفصل. تُصوّر التميمة محل الدراسة الإلهة موت واقفة ترضع طفلًا، بينما تقف الإلهة سخمت خلفهما تحتضن كلاهما والتي عكست مفهوم الحماية والأمومة في مصر القديمة. تتضمن الدراسة فكرة استخدام التماثيل والغرض منها في مصر القديمة، مع التركيز بشكل رئيسي على التماثيل المركبة ورمزياتها وظهورها البارز خلال فترة عصر الإنتقال الثالث. تهدف الدراسة إلى إستنتاج الفترة التاريخية لهذه التميمة المركبة وتحديد مكان إكتشافها من خلال تحليل سماتها الفنية. تكشف الدراسة عن تمثيل موت وسخمت معًا في تميمة مركبة واحدة مع التركيز على المادة واللون، والإشارة إلى تماثيل أخرى مماثلة من نفس الفترة وذلك لفهم دلالاتها الدينية والاجتماعية والسياسية، بالإضافة إلى النتائج التي ستتضح من الدراسة.

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Introduction

Ancient Egyptian amulets were a main religious and magical element in ancient Egyptian civilization (Klasens, 1975: 232-236a). The ancient Egyptians used amulets for protection and as magical tools to bring good luck; most were carried during their owners' lifetimes (Petrie, 1914: 4). These small artistic objects bore religious symbols with spiritual meanings, reflecting the Egyptians' belief in the power of magic and spirituality to influence their reality (Petrie, 1914: 5). Amulets were used from the earliest times throughout ancient Egyptian history until the Greco-Roman period (Petrie, 1914: 1; Klasens, 1975: 222).

The ancient Egyptians believed that the world was filled with invisible forces, both good and evil. They used amulets to protect their bearers from specific dangers (Roeder, 1961: 124; Budge, 1925: 306). Amulets were also used during the mummification process, placed between the mummy's bandages to protect the deceased in the afterlife (Albert, 2012: 81; Barbotin, 2008: 44).

Amulets often took the form of hieroglyphic symbols or deities, whether fully human, with an animal head, or as sacred animals (Pinch, 1993: 188). From the earliest times, amulets were made from animal by-products, most notably bone, shell, and ivory (Ikram & Dodson, 1998: 137).

Amulets in the ancient Egyptian language are referred to as *wd3* (*Wb* I: 401), *mkt*, meaning protection (*Wb* II: 159), and *s3* (*Wb* III: 413). Each word may refer to different types of amulets used for protection, health, or magical purposes (Klasens, 1975: 233). Common amulets often represented specific deities or religious symbols, with each amulet associated with a particular deity or cosmic principle (Shorter, 1931: 312).



For instance, the  *wd3t* amulet represents the Eye of Horus (fig. 1). It was believed to be the embodiment of healing and power and also symbolizes rebirth, protection, health, and restoration (Cooney & Tyrrell, 2005: 3). Meanwhile,  the *hpr* scarab represented the regeneration and rebirth of the soul (fig. 2) (Chappaz & Chamay, 2001: 97).



Fig. 1: Wedjat amulet, faience, Third Intermediate Period, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA 31.3.113a). ©

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/552491>

[Accessed May 4, 2025]



Fig. 2: Scarab amulet, faience, Third Intermediate Period, The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. (72.3019a-c). © <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/134325> [Accessed May 4, 2025]

Amulets continued to be used and developed throughout ancient Egyptian history (Capart, 1909: 14-21). During the Third Intermediate Period, amulets witnessed a remarkable evolution in both form and function (Ward, 1970: 56-66).

This period was characterized by political decentralization and the increasing authority of priesthood, particularly in Thebes. It was reflected in the widespread use of protective amulets began to feature complex motifs, combining multiple divine symbols in a single piece to raise their protective power. They were crafted in various colors (Capart, 1908: 15); for example, green symbolized vegetation and flourishing. These amulets also showcased fine craftsmanship and intricate iconographic details (Harris, 1961: 15).

The Composite Amulet: Iconography and Function

Composite amulets in ancient Egypt refer to a distinctive type of amulet that combines various symbols or deities to create a more powerful and protective object imbued with complex symbolism (Clark, 2000: 315). These amulets first appeared at the end of the Middle Kingdom. Although this type of amulet was rare in both form and symbolism, the combination of two or more symbols into a single form had begun to emerge (Andrews, 1994: 19).

Initially, amulets took simple forms such as scarabs inscribed with sacred symbols or names but sometimes, they featured more potent or complex inscriptions, like the combination of the Eye of Horus and the symbol of life *ʾnh* in a single amulet (Thomas & Pavitt, 1922: 61).

Composite amulets began to feature combinations of various divine symbols, such as Ra-Horakhty (Tait, 1963: 93), Bes, Ptah, and Taweret (Ceruti, 2020: 61). Depictions of deities became increasingly common in amulet form, evolving over time into more detailed and artistically refined representations (Andrews, 1994: 7).

These amulets were widely distributed through all levels of ancient Egyptian society, no longer limited to the upper classes or priesthood, reflecting their broad popular

appeal and widespread use (Shorter, 1931: 312; Albert, 2012: 71). Moreover, they reveal the efforts of Egyptians during this period to preserve spiritual and social stability during political conditions (Bennett, 2019: 160).

Unpublished Composite Amulet of Goddess Mut-Sekhmet



Fig. 3: Composite Amulet of Goddess Mut-Sekhmet, Third Intermediate Period.
© Egyptian Museum (JE 53287-SR3/8114), Cairo.

- **Definition:** A Composite amulet of Goddess Mut-Sekhmet.
- **Date:** Third Intermediate Period, Twenty-First Dynasty (ca. 1069–945 BC).
- **Provenance:** Sold by the Lily Place Estate in 1929¹ (Jones, 2018: 134).
- **Material:** Green glazed faience.
- **Dimensions:** Length: 9.5cm; Width: 2.5cm; Depth: 3 cm.
- **Current Location:** Egyptian Museum, room (no. 19) (JE 53287-SR3/8114).
- **Description:**

¹ Lily S. Place, an American woman who lived in Cairo during the 1920s, was known for her interest in ancient Egyptian art and antiquities. During her travels between Egypt and her native Minneapolis, she collected a large number of artifacts, including amulets and small statues, for the purpose of collecting and for cultural and scientific interest, rather than for commercial purposes. Later, she donated these pieces to several American museums (Minneapolis Institute of Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Arizona State Museum). This collection, known as the “Lily Place Estate,” was officially registered as the source of the collection which she owned after 1929, which was later identified in museum catalogs upon the transfer of ownership. The Collections were classified as a private donation from Lily S. Place, highlighting her role in supporting archaeological studies and Egyptology during the first half of the Twentieth century. © <https://statemuseum.arizona.edu/sites>

An unusual amulet, made of green-glazed Egyptian faience² (Petri, 1914: 12), features a grassy green color. Although the original colors have faded over time, some pigment is still visible on the lower portion between the legs of the goddess Mut (fig. 3a). The amulet depicts the goddess Mut-Sekhmet with a human female body (Al-Aboudi, 2024: 13).

Mut was a mother goddess, known as the Lady of Isheru³ (Gauthier, 1920: 192), who was worshipped at Karnak. She appeared as a cosmic mother goddess who created everything. Mut depicted as a human female, wearing a tight-fitting dress and a long wig adorned with cobras (Andrews, 1994: 22).

Mut goddess stands with a slight smile on her face, probably embracing a naked king (fig. 3a). The child is shown naked with a left sidelock symbolizing childhood, Mut wings⁴ (Te Velde, 1979: 3-9) extend to embrace both the goddess and the child, symbolizing protection (EL-Aboudy, 2024: fig.14).

The hole in the upper back of the amulet was used to attach a string, allowing it to be hung around the neck or wrapped around the body (Petrie, 1914: 13). Mut is depicted wearing the double crown and suckling a child from her right breast, while her left hand supports his head (fig. 3b).

The goddess Sekhmet is shown standing at the back of Mut, she is depicted wearing a tripartite wig, a tightly fitted sheath dress and crowned with the sun disk (fig. 3c). This unusual iconography of suckling goddess effectively expresses the protective and nurturing role of the goddess (Andrews, 1994:23).

The Symbolism of the Composite Mut and Sekhmet

Composite amulets during the early Third Intermediate Period represented manifestation of the development of religious and social beliefs in ancient Egypt (LaSin, 1998: 6).

The representation of combining several divine symbols into a single amulet emerged to enhance divine powers. For example, the combination of the goddess of war, Sekhmet, with Mut, the goddess of motherhood, was intended to provide multi-purpose protection (Montet 1933: 113; Hart, 2005: 210; Morenz, 1973: 76).

The symbolism of the goddess Mut reflects one of the oldest deities in ancient Egyptian religion. Its worship continued throughout the ages until the Late Period (Fazzini, 1996: no. 61; Wilkinson, 2003: 150). Mut was the wife of Amun, the mother

²Green glaze faience was one of the most commonly used colors in amulet and pottery making in ancient Egypt, particularly from the Middle Kingdom to the Late Period. This color was primarily used to glaze faience amulets, giving them a lustrous and durable finish. This glaze is composed of a delicate mixture of natural materials and minerals, with copper oxide as the primary source of the green color. Small amounts of iron oxide or cobalt were sometimes added to adjust the hue and support the glaze layer.

³The Isheru, also known as Isheret, was a crescent-shaped sacred lake that surrounded the temple of the goddess Mut at Karnak, in Thebes. It played a main role in religious rituals. It was an integral part of the worship of the goddess Mut, who was a prominent deity in the Theban Triad.

⁴ Mut was frequently portrayed as a woman with the head of a vulture, or wearing a vulture headdress and the double crown. She was also sometimes depicted with wings outstretched to reflect motherhood and divine protection.

of Khonsu in the Theban triad and a divine mother like Isis for Horus. (Andrews, 1994: 19; Te Velde, 1988: 242).

Mut appears in amulet form as a fully human figure, either seated or standing, attuned in a tight-fitting dress, and sometimes wearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt (Leitz, 2002: 251; Te Velde, 1988: 398). However, she was also depicted in the form of Isis, nursing a male child. In other representations, Mut embodied the features of a fierce lioness (Gauthier, 1920: 192; Germond, 1986: 1-4).



Fig. 4: An amulet of Goddess Mut, Third Intermediate Period.

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A standard model of a Mut amulet can be seen in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, where the goddess Mut is depicted seated on a low-backed⁵ throne (fig. 4a). Both sides of the throne are adorned with a pair of God Nhb-Kaw⁵ figures (fig. 4b) (Hansen, 2001: 296-299; Shorter, 1935: 44). The goddess Mut is shown wearing the double crown and suckling the divine child, who is seated on her knee. The child appears either as a fully formed royal figure or as a naked infant, presumably representing the god Khonsu in the Theban Triad (Andrews, 1994: 19; Luiselli, 2015: 111-131).

⁵The god Nhb-Kaw whose name means “the one who appoints the positions in the afterlife. He is known from the late Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts as the “One Numerous of Coils,” who feeds the deceased king. In the Book of the Dead, he appears as one of the judges of the deceased at the weighing of the heart. In the funerary text known as the Amduat, he is depicted as a double-headed snake, whose tail also ends in a snake’s head. Amulets of Nhb-Kaw were produced during the Third Intermediate Period.

The Art Institute of Chicago (1892.52), Third Intermediate Period, Twenty-First Dynasty (about 1069–945 BC), $6.1 \times 1.7 \times 3.4$ cm, blue glazed faience, Temple of Mut in Luxor (fig. 4a–b).

The symbolism of the goddess Sekhmet was represented in ancient Egyptian beliefs, particularly through the royal rituals especially in the coronation and Sed Festival ceremonies (LaSin, 1998: 6; Smith, 1946, fig. 125).

During the Third Intermediate Period, the power of the goddess Sekhmet was represented as being associated with the king's coronation ceremony (Aldred, 1969: 77; Derchain, 1991: 87), and with her ability to protect Egypt during periods of instability preceding the coronation (El-Aboudy, 2024: 4; Posener, 1976: 26-27).

Goddess Sekhmet was wearing the White Crown, giving her a symbolic role as a representative of the rule of Upper Egypt (Barta, 1980: 531; De Buck, 1956: 386). The appearance of Goddess Sekhmet repeatedly in the scenes of the coronation gives her the source of divine legitimacy to the king (Frood, 2013: 171; Junker, 1911:32).

The king's defensive symbolism was expressed through amulets that were worn for personal protection or offered as ritual gifts to the gods within temple contexts (Lichtheim, 1976: 199; Spalinger, 2000: 275-282). Some of these amulets had a short text that described their purpose such as *s3w n p3 shꜥp n shꜥmt* “amulets of pacification of Sekhmet” (Ritner, 1993: 51; El-Aboudy, 2024: 6-7).



Fig. 5: A Composite amulet of Goddess Sekhmet -Mut, Third Intermediate Period.
© https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA11314[Accessed May 4, 2025].

Another composite amulet could be the example in the British Museum, which depicts the composite amulet of the goddess Sekhmet-Mut in the form of a female body with the head of a lioness (Andrews, 1994: 23, no.19c).

An amulet shows Sekhmet depicted with her characteristic features standing. She is wearing the double crown and a wide collar, suckling the child king or her son

Nefertem (Erman & Grapow, 1971: 250), supporting her breast with her left hand while the right hand is around his head (El-Aboudy, 2024: 18, fig. 15).

The child king is shown standing attitude, wearing a royal kilt (Wilkinson, 2003: 150-152) and holding in the left hand *hk3* Scepter, at the back side the rest of their bodies broken from their legs. (fig. 5b).

The British Museum (EA11314), Third Intermediate Period, Twenty-First Dynasty (ca. 1069–945 BC), L.7.08 cm, Th.1.27cm, W.2.88cm, green glazed faience. (fig. 5).



(a)



(b)



(c)

Fig. 6: A composition amuletic figure of Sekhmet-Mut as a lioness-headed.
© [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection EA51811](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/EA51811) [Accessed May 4, 2025].

A rare composite amulet made of green glaze with dark accents depicts the goddess Mut-Sekhmet⁶ standing with the body of a human and the head of a lioness (El-Aboudy, 2024: 7, fig. 13).

Sekhmet is shown as a woman standing with the head of a lioness and a broken headdress. She was regarded as a powerful magician who protected children from disease and danger (Al-Nadi, 2006: 171-172).

Sekhmet is depicted offering her breast⁷ (Waitkus, 1997: 87) to a child king who cannot reach it (Bonnet, 1952: 648). He is shown naked with a right sidelock, symbolizing childhood (Andrews, 1994: 23, no. 19a).

A winged Mut standing behind Sekhmet, looking to the right protects them, she is probably wearing the double crown. The suspension hole on the upper back of the amulet is broken. The British Museum (EA51811), Third Intermediate Period, 21st Dynasty (about 1069-945 BC), H. 8.08 cm, W. 2.55 cm, D. 2.52 cm, green glazed faience (fig. 6).


Conclusion

As a result of a comprehensive study focused on the composite amulet of the goddess Mut-Sekhmet, displayed and registered in the Egyptian Museum (**JE 53287/SR.8114**), it has been conclusively identified as a representation of the composite deity Mut-Sekhmet. Through comparison with similar amulets dating to the Third Intermediate Period, it has been confirmed that the amulet is made of green glazed faience and dates back to the **Twenty-First Dynasty** (ca. 1069–945 BC). It is most likely that this amulet was originally discovered in the **Temple of Mut at Luxor**.

During the Third Intermediate Period, there was widespread interest in reconstruction temples, especially at Thebes, which reinforced the status of the goddess Mut within official religious beliefs. More complex representational forms emerged, with Mut-the goddess of motherhood, protection, and regeneration who was sometimes combined with Sekhmet, the goddess of power and destruction. Their composite form represented an amulet that combined mercy with power, becoming a distinctive religious and artistic symbol during this period.

The goddess Mut is frequently depicted with vulture wings, a potent iconographic symbol embodying multiple connotations of divine protection and authority. In ancient Egyptian religious iconography, wings functioned as a powerful symbol; both Mut and Nekhbet are often portrayed extending their wings around the king or the deceased, signifying divine shelter and protection. The symbolic relation of the vulture with maternal care and fertility further reinforces Mut's identity as a protective mother goddess. Her presence in funerary iconography underscores her primary role in protecting the deceased in the afterlife. The representation of winged Mut is not

⁶The standard model of a Sekhmet composite amulet could be the example of the Egyptian Museum, where Sekhmet seated, wearing a double crown and nursing a standing king, he has a lion face to compare himself with Sekhmet son. Egyptian Museum Cairo (TR11.2.29.9-SR3/7037), 0.5cm, faience.

⁷ Sekhmet is sometimes followed by a  Nesert flame sign as a symbol of protective power against the king's predators. (Gardiner sign N33).

decorative scene, but rather a religious symbol that was part of the ancient Egyptian beliefs.

Most amulets dating back to the Third Intermediate Period are distinguished by their craftsmanship and proficiency, being crafted from blue and green glazed faience. This reflects the flourishing of local workshops and the religious and artistic interest in producing composite amulets during this period. The combination of form, color and material reflects the symbolic thought in ancient Egyptian religion and its ability to use elements of nature to reflect religious and ideological concepts

The unusual composite amulets of the goddess Mut as a wet nurse are similar in representation to the goddess Isis nursing Hours, suggesting a symbolic merging of the two goddesses as a protector and mother goddesses.

Composite amulets of goddesses Mut-Sekhmet had symbolic social, and political significance during the Third Intermediate Period, being presented as gifts during the New Year's Festival to grant the wearer the protection and renewal enjoyed by the king at the beginning of the new year.

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