

A Lettuce for Min

by

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During his excavations in the temple of Min and Isis at Coptos (Qift) in 1894,¹ Petrie discovered objects and inscriptions dating from the early Old Kingdom to the Coptic period. The objects included those from the foundation deposits of Tuthmosis III² and the Ptolemaic period,³ which represented the two main phases of later building activity in the temple. Beneath these later temple foundations there were blocks from the dynasty XII temples of Ammenemes I and Sesostris I and others from a temple of king Inyotef Nubkheperre of dynasty XVII laid as a pavement. Under the pavement he discovered unusual fragments of stone and pottery sculpture and large pottery vessels.⁴ This pottery is now in the Petrie Museum, University College London, and as so many of the pieces are unpublished and new reconstructions have been made, they will form the subject of a separate monograph.⁵ Above the Inyotef blocks Petrie also found other fragments of sculpture and inscriptions and various votive objects dating from the New Kingdom to the late Roman period.⁶

Among the smaller votive objects from the temple there was an unusual faience model fragment which will be the subject of this paper. Until its identification was confirmed in 1924, there was some uncertainty about the identity of the sacred plant which was depicted in association with Min. It was identified as a tree,⁷ possibly a cyprus,⁸ a sycamore,⁹ a persea,¹⁰ a fig,¹¹ or an acacia,¹² it was also suggested that it might be an artichoke or a pine cone.¹³

Other scholars did accept the fact that it was a lettuce,¹⁴ but at the time Petrie excavated Coptos he thought it was a palm spathe.¹⁵ In his daily journal he recorded the discovery as follows: "Two bits of the altar behind a statue of Khem were found just off the cornice  ; and half of one of the plants upon the altar  in green glaze, in the round 6 ins. long. These probably belonged to a fine statue in the temple!"¹⁶

As stated elsewhere,¹⁷ the Petrie collection is still undergoing sorting, identification and registration and the work is undertaken site by site,¹⁸ so for each group of material there is still the probability that published objects will be re-identified and that previously unpublished objects will be discovered and identified, often with the aid of the Petrie manuscripts. Such is the case with this model lettuce which until recently was 'lost' among unidentified faience objects.

The model has now been given the museum number, UC.34696, and it is 15.6 cm. long, 7.0 cm. wide and 3.0 cm. thick. It has been reconstructed from four fragments (see fig. 1) and is broken at the top and base which exposes a white core. At the base there is a horizontal groove around the circumference which delineates a lower area where overlapping pointed leaves were filled in with solid blue colour. Beneath this section the model is broken but there may have been a stalk, especially if this represents an offering which might be held in the hand.¹⁹ The surface glaze is apple green and the upward pointing, overlapping leaves are marked by grooves which were filled by a deeper blue glaze.

In 1924, Keimer published his solution to the mystery of the identification of the Min plant²⁰ and incorporated his identification with further illustrations in his study of ancient Egyptian plants.²¹ He showed that it was the *Lactuca sativa* L., which is probably the domesticated form of the wild *Lactuca scariola* found in many parts of Europe and Asia. *Lactuca sativa* can grow up to a height of 1-1½m. and has a characteristic tapered shape with pointed, overlapping leaves; the stem below the leaves has cicatrices. In modern Egypt it is cultivated in kitchen gardens and also as a subsidiary field crop for the oil from its seeds. It was probably cultivated this way in antiquity as there are depictions of irrigated lettuce fields being harvested.²² Keimer suggested that the fact that it is a milk-sap plant explains its association with the fertility god Min and it may have a connection with the sperm of the god. There is a popular belief in Egypt that eating lettuces will guarantee many children and there is some evidence from the past that the lettuce was considered to be an aphrodisiac.²³ Indeed, the act of offering the god (bw plants enabled him to perform (snhp) the sexual act.²⁴

Apart from the representations of the cultivation and harvesting of the *Lactuca* mentioned above, there are many others from dynasty VI onwards of the lettuce in its religious context. These depictions fall into two categories: those where a variable number of lettuces are depicted on the god's stand or a box behind the figure of the god and those where the king or priest offers one or two of the plants to the ithyphallic god. The lettuces which are depicted behind Min in the Old and Middle Kingdoms are usually as large, or larger, than the god.²⁵ The support then evolved into a shrine

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shaped box with a variable number of lettuces on the top (usually 3 or 5 in the New Kingdom), which was also supported on poles and carried by priests in procession behind the god.²⁶ A dynasty XIX calendar of the festival days records that on the " 26th day of the second month (Mechir) of prt (winter), a festival day, 'three times good', Min of Coptos leaves on procession this day with his lettuces and his beauty (erect phallus); Isis sees the beauty which is upon him!"²⁷ Both the stands and the boxes retained chequered designs of the fields divided by the irrigation ditches and form a link with the domestic use of the plant.

The lettuces depicted on shrines behind the god in the late periods²⁸ are also smaller than the figure, like the New Kingdom examples, but the size and style of this model would seem to indicate that it should be grouped with the second category, a plant which was offered in the hand. As this is, to my knowledge, the only known model in the round, comparisons can only be made with the depictions of the lettuce in reliefs.²⁹ The closest parallels are those of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods,³⁰ particularly that of Caesar Augustus with a lettuce in each hand offering to Min at Kalabshah.³¹ This would define the model as a votive object and accord with the Ptolemaic and Roman building activity in the temple of Coptos³² and also Petrie's inadequate description of the stratigraphical provenance³³ where he lists the 'palm spathe' with other objects of a late date and it can be inferred that they came from upper levels in the temple.

Fortunately, this suggested date for the lettuce model has been corroborated by an analysis undertaken by Dr. Alexander Kaczmarczyk

of the Department of Chemistry of Tufts University, Mass., in the laboratory at Oxford during the summer of 1979. Dr. Kaczmarczyk has spent several years analysing Egyptian faience objects of all dates in order to determine the combination of constituents that were used in the manufacture of faience in different periods.³⁴ His report on the lettuce model, UC.34696, is as follows:

"The green consists of copper (3- 4 %), with traces of lead 0.2 - 0.4 %), tin and antimony (less than 0.1 %). There is also, as usual, a substantial amount of iron and calcium. The alkali used for fusion must have been natron or sodium-rich ashes since the potassium level is quite low.

The blue lines consist of cobalt-rich glaze applied over the copper green. The cobalt is as high as 1% in places. This type of outlining is very characteristic of the end of the Late Period and the Ptolemaic and Roman periods.

The overall composition and combinations of chemicals is quite typical of Ptolemaic faience, or late Late Period. The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, has several objects which are decorated similarly."

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Petrie Museum of Egyptian
Archaeology, U.C.L.

Notes

1. Petrie, Koptos, 1896.
2. Adams, J.E.A., 61, 1975, pp.102-111, figs.1-4.
3. Petrie, ibid, p.19, pl.XXIII.
4. Petrie, ibid, pp. 5-6, pl.V, 1-3.
5. Adams, forthcoming.

6. Petrie, ibid, pl.XXI.
7. Tiele, Histoire comparée des anciennes religions de l'Égypte, 1882 p.82; Muller, Egyptological Researches, vol. I, 1906, p.35 and Egyptian Mythology, 1913, pp.138-9; Jéquier, Bull de l'Inst.franc. d'Archéol.Orient.,VI, 1908, p.36; Reinach, Ann.Serv.,VI,1908,p.36.
8. Meyer, Geschichte des Altertums, I, 1887, p.69, 58.
9. Rochmonteix, Rec. de Trav., VIII, 1886, p.193.
10. Gayet, Le Temple du Louxor, 1894, pp. 42, 50, 73, 85.
11. Claire, Creation Records discovered in Egypt, 1898, p. 412.
12. Daressy, Sphinx, XVI, 1912, pp. 181-2.
13. Jéquier, B.I.F.A.O., XIX,1922, pp.27-29, abou.
14. for instance, Loret, Flore pharonique, 1892, pp. 68-9, no. 113; Daressy, Ann.Serv., I, 1900, p.26; Bissing and Muschler, Die Mastaba des Gem-ni-kai, II, 1904-5, p.41.
15. Petrie, ibid, p.24; Catalogue of a Collection of Antiquities from the Temple of Koptos Exhibited in the Edwards Library, University College London, 1894, p.12.
16. Petrie MSS Journal, 26th Jan.-9th Feb., 1894, original in the Griffith Institute, Oxford, copy in the Petrie Museum.
17. Adams, ibid, pp.102-3.
18. Landi and Hall, Studies in Conservation, 24, 1979,p.141.
19. Gauthier, Le Temple de Kalabschah, 1914, vol.I, p.162, vol.II, pl.LV, Augustus offering lettuces to Min.
20. Keimer, AZ, 1924, pp.140-3.
21. Keimer, Die Gartenpflanzen in Alten Agypten, I, 1924, pp.1-6, 77-80,121-6,167.
22. Newberry, Beni Hasan, I, 1893, pl.XI.
23. Gauthier, Les Fêtes du Dieu Min, 1931, p.166.
24. Chassinat, Le Temple d'Edfou, I, 1892, p.82, II,1918, p.44.
25. eg. Couyat et Montet, Les Inscriptions du Wadi Hammamat, 1912, no.63,pl.XVI, Dyn.VI, 3 lettuces as tall as Min, all on a stand with 30 compartments; Weill, Les Décrets Royaux, 1912,p.40,pl.VII, Dyn.VI, Pepi II offering a probable lettuce to Min who has larger lettuces behind him; Chevrier, Ann.Serv., XX,1920, pl.II,Dyn.XII Sesostri I with ithyphallic Amun-Re; Naville, The Temple of Deir el Bahri, I, 1895, pl.XX, and V, 1906, pl.LXLVII, Dyn.XVIII, last date of naturalistic representations.

26. lettuces on a box retaining nine compartments in the reign of Amenophis III, Dyn.XVIII, see Gayet, ibid, pl.XVI.
27. Pap.Sallier IV, B.M.10184, Birch, Select Papyri in Hieratic from the Collections of the British Museum, 1844, pl. CXLIV-CLXVIII; de Rouge, Rev.Arch, 1853, IX, pp.687-691; Chabas, Bibliothèque Egyptologie, XVI; Budge, Facsimiles of Egyptian Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum, 1923, pls.LXXXVIII-CXI, pp.74-8.
28. Couyat et Montet, ibid, no.240,pl.XL (Dyn.XX), no.75, pl.XVII (Dyn.XXV), nos. 51 & 52, pl. x (Dyn.XXVI), no.144, pl.XXXIV (Persian).
29. Keimer, ibid, p.167, Die Formtafel zu Lactuca sativa L.
30. Rosellini, I Monumenti dell 'Egitto e della Nubia, III, 1844, pl.LVI, relief of Phillips Arrhidaeus in his shrine at the temple of Karnak offering a lettuce in each hand to Min-Amun; Kamal, Cat.Caire: Steles Ptolemaïques et Romaines, 22007, 22017,22051, 22074,22136,22151,22152, Roman stelae from Akhmim with lettuces on stands behind the god.
31. see note 19).
32. Top.Bib, V, 1937, pp.123-8.
33. Petrie, ibid, p.24, para.40.
34. Dr. Kaczmarczyk will shortly publish his full analysis of the lettuce together with his other results in a monograph.



A Faience Lettuce Model in the Petrie Museum,
UC. 34696.