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# STATUES IN CONTEXT

Production, meaning and (re)uses

edited by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of contributors .....	VII
2016 Colloquium Programme .....	IX
Aurélia MASSON-BERGHOFF	
Preface.....	XI

### I. MEANING AND FUNCTION

Elizabeth FROOD	
When statues speak about themselves.....	3
Campbell PRICE	
A perfect 'likeness'? Viewing Late Period archaising sculpture in context.....	21
Marsha HILL	
Small divine statuettes: outfitting religion.....	35

### II. PRODUCTION: TECHNOLOGY AND WORKSHOPS

Aurélia MASSON-BERGHOFF and Ernst PERNICKA	
Origins of metals for countless bronzes.....	53
Florence Dunn FRIEDMAN with assistance from Michelle PISA	
Evidence suggesting another Boston dyad of Menkaura and a queen.....	73

### III. VISIBLE STATUES: TEMPLES, PALACES AND HOUSES

Neal SPENCER	
In temple and home: statuary in the town of Amara West, Upper Nubia.....	95
Kristin THOMPSON	
Evidence from Amarna reliefs concerning royal statues and their contexts: how accurate were the reliefs? .....	131
Tobias KRAPF	
Reconstructing the statuary of the courtyard of the temple of Khnum on Elephantine .....	147
Ross THOMAS	
Egyptian and Cypriot stone statuettes in context at Late Period Naukratis.....	159

**IV.  
BECOMING INVISIBLE: STATUE CACHES**

Guillaume CHARLOUX and Mona Ali Abady MAHMOUD A classification of ‘sacred’ caches in ancient Egypt.....	183
Florence GOMBERT-MEURICE Thousands of Osiris: the archaeological contexts of the bronzes found in the temple of ‘Ayn Manawîr and at the Serapeum of Memphis.....	197
Laurent COULON, Yves EGELS, Emmanuel JAMBON and Emmanuel LAROZE Looking for contexts: recent work on the Karnak Cachette Project.....	209
Julie Renee ANDERSON, Salaheldin MOHAMMED AHMED, Mahmoud SULIMAN BASHIR and Rihab KHIDIR ELRASHEED Taharqo and his descendants: a statue cache upstream of the Fifth Nile Cataract .....	229

**V.  
AFTERLIVES: REUSE AND DESTRUCTION**

Deborah SCHORSCH Ritual metal statuary in ancient Egypt: ‘A long life and a great and good old age’ .....	249
Troels Myrup KRISTENSEN Statues in late antique Egypt: from production and display to archaeological record.....	269
Simon CONNOR Killing or ‘de-activating’ Egyptian statues: who mutilated them, when, and why? .....	281

# KILLING OR ‘DE-ACTIVATING’ EGYPTIAN STATUES: WHO MUTILATED THEM, WHEN, AND WHY?

Simon CONNOR<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This contribution to The British Museum Annual Egyptological colloquium 2016 proposes to approach the final step of the ‘life’ of Egyptian statues: their ‘death’. As demonstrated by several scholars and other papers in this volume, Egyptian images can be considered as powerful, meaningful, active agents. One of the best proofs of their importance in ancient Egyptian society is the very fact that they so often show signs of intentional mutilation, in specific spots on the figures. This article aims to review the different factors which may be at the origin of the state of damage of Egyptian statues, as we can see them today in museum collections or in archaeological sites.

\* \* \*

Destroying images is a strong act. In all cultures producing statues, and in all countries where monuments are part of the landscape, mutilating them consists of a meaningful action, with the intention to shock, to put an end to a cultic activity and to symbolically erase specific records of the past. We all have in our minds the destructions of antiquities in the Middle East that have occurred during the last twenty years. The defacing of images is probably as old as the beginning of their production, and is attested in Egypt throughout its whole history. The visitor who walks through the galleries of a museum will notice that most of the Egyptian statues surrounding him or her have been — more or less deeply — damaged, in such a way that finding an intact statue is, in fact, quite exceptional. This can be due to a vast variety of factors, which this article intends to review.

Statues must be considered as both artworks and archaeological artefacts, since the traces that they bear of manufacturing, of use, of modification and of damage, as well as the architectural contexts in which they were found, tell us a lot about the treatment to which they were subjected and about the different phases of history through which they passed. Careful observation of their physical surfaces allows a great deal of information to be gathered. As is well-attested and well illustrated by the different contributions in this colloquium volume, statues were certainly considered as powerful and meaningful objects through all Egyptian history. During the pharaonic period, they were conceived as receptacles for the *ba*, were active as substitutes of the represented individuals or entities, and were the subjects of rituals. During the Christian and Islamic periods, they were thought of as relics of ancient paganism, and as such, were either damaged — as in the case of the Serapeum in Alexandria, which was burned to the ground with all its statues in AD 391/392— or later regarded as guardians of a sort, as attested by numerous 12th- to 15th-century Arab authors (see point 2.2 below). So, even if today they are mainly regarded as precious works of art with a high historical and material value, traded on the art market and constituting major attractions in museums, in ancient times they were first and foremost *active agents*.

## 1. Accidental vs. intentional

Various sources may be at the origin of a statue’s fragmentary state. Causes may, of course, be accidental. The course of time as well as natural factors such

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<sup>1</sup> I thank The British Museum’s staff for their kind invitation to participate in this colloquium. This paper presents a first overview of research carried out in parallel to my work as a curator in the Museo Egizio, Turin, and which I will continue within the framework of a Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (2017–18). The preliminary research and

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as earthquakes can cause statues to fall down from their bases, and masonry blocks falling from the ceiling or the upper part of walls can hit statues and damage them. This is perhaps what has happened, for example, to the statue of Ramesses II in Turin, for no signs of deliberate smashing are visible.<sup>2</sup> The statue was found fragmented into pieces, apparently in the ruins of the Temple of Amun-who-hears-the-prayers in Karnak by Jean-Jacques Rifaud (Rifaud 1830, 348 [9]; PM II, 214). The numerous fissures still visible recall that stage of fragmentation, but no element seems to be missing — except the extremity of the uraeus' head, one of the most fragile parts of the statue — and the surface of the statue displays no traces of deliberate smashing. Its original position in the area of the eastern temple cannot be reconstructed so far, but one may assume that it fell from its base and broke on hitting the ground.

Accidental breakages of statues must have occurred quite commonly during the pharaonic period. This is attested by the frequent restorations visible on statues, for example on the sides of the throne of the Dynasty 12 colossus reused by Ramesses II (Berlin ÄM 7264, currently in New York, MMA L.2011.42: Oppenheim et al. 2015, 300–4, cat. 221) or the western seated colossus in front of the pylon of Luxor (**Fig. 1**). A factor may be transportation, as perhaps in the case of the statue of Ramesses II, protected by the falcon god Herun, found in Tanis in a mud-brick chapel (Cairo JE 64735: Montet 1935–7, 11–4, pls 10–1; Simpson 1982, 267). The statue is carved from a block of granodiorite, while the falcon's face consists of a separate piece made of dark limestone, carefully cut in order to be inserted in the god's figure. Such a dark limestone seems to have been chosen in order to fit with the granodiorite body and to be as discreet as possible; it is most probably a repair, rather than an intentional composite sculpture. The statue may have been damaged at some point in its history, perhaps during its transportation to Tanis (from Piramesse?). Intentional damage is unlikely, since the rest of the statue is perfectly preserved.



Fig. 1: Western colossus of the pylon gate of Luxor Temple: detail of the throne repaired in antiquity. Photograph: author.

Natural catastrophes such as earthquakes may have caused the destruction of many monuments, like for example the statues of Amenhotep III's Temple of Millions of Years in Kôm el-Hettan. According to the results of the recent research led by the team of H. Sourouzian, the site suffered from at least one important earthquake between 1200 and 900 BC, which destroyed the architectural structures and perhaps caused the destruction of many colossi, whose size naturally renders them more vulnerable (Sourouzian et al. 2011, 273–327; Karakhanyan, Avagyan and Stadelman 2014, 61–90). This is most probably the case with the two standing colossi of the North Gate, which were recently re-erected close to the site, for no evident sign of intentional mutilation is visible: the noses, eyes and beards suffered from no damage other than erosion. These colossi probably cracked and collapsed owing to their own weight and to the instability of the ground. The same phenomenon may have caused the breaking of the quartzite standing colossi of the solar court of the same temple. The Colossi of Memnon themselves suffered from an earthquake, and were repaired apparently by Septimius Severus at the beginning of the 3rd century AD (Letronne 1833, 40–56; Fournet 1996, 145).

<sup>2</sup> Turin, Cat. 1380 (Connor 2017). In the first inventory of the Drovetti collection, written for the transport of the objects from Egypt to Livorno in 1819, the statue is described in these terms: *'Re guerriero, con un elmetto, di grandezza naturale, che esige delle ristorazioni per riunire i pezzi staccati.'* The statue was only reassembled a few years later at Champollion's instigation, as attested in a letter that he wrote in 1824: *'J'ai enfin obtenu*

*qu'on assemblât les morceaux de la statue de Sésostris [= Ramesses II], dont je parle dans ma première Lettre. Il n'y manque rien, et quand je considère la beauté et l'admirable perfection de cette figure colossale, je regrette de n'en avoir pas assez dit dans ma Lettre, en faveur de l'art égyptien'* (Hartleben 1909, 104).

Both colossi always remained on view, and, probably for that reason, also bear marks of intentional breakage: their faces and arms, as well as the faces of the queens standing at either side of their legs, bear what seems to be traces of severe, deliberate smashing (**Fig. 2**).

Distinguishing these two different situations — intentional and accidental damage — may be difficult and it will not always be possible to find out whether a defacement is ancient and intentional or not. In the case of the Sphinx of Giza, for example, is the break of the nose only due to natural erosion, the giant head of the statue suffering from wind and sand for 4,500 years, or was the nose deliberately cut to annihilate the power of this pagan image? M. Lehner has suggested an intentional mutilation, according to some tool marks visible at the level of the missing nostrils (Lehner 1991, 179–80). The persistent legend of the cannon bullet of Bonaparte is, of course, unfounded. So how can we securely identify intentional and meaningful mutilations? Protruding parts, such as the uraeus, the nose, the beard, the hands, the sceptres or other attributes are by their nature the most fragile and susceptible to breakage. However, when all of these parts, which are also the most symbolic parts of the statue, bear traces of damage, while the rest of the surface is intact, one may seriously question the possibility of accidental breaks (see also the various interpretations offered for the Dangeil royal statues, which were broken at their thinnest and weakest structural points: Anderson et al. in this volume).

Among many other examples, we may cite the granodiorite dyad of Horemheb and Mutnedjemet (Turin Cat. 1379; **Fig. 3**), which shows breaks on each arm, on the breast of the queen, on each of the eyes, the ears (and earrings), on the nose, mouth, chin and on the two uraei, while the head of the king is completely missing and his beard apparently hammered out. The indurated limestone dyad of Amun and Mut in Luxor Temple (**Fig. 4**), from the same period, shows severe damage on the legs; the arms are almost completely missing; the mouth, eyes and ears of both deities seem to have received repeated blows, as well as the uraeus of the goddess. The god’s beard is entirely missing and its break follows the outlines of the chest and neck, while the surrounding surface has remained intact, which renders an accident improbable. The same situation can be

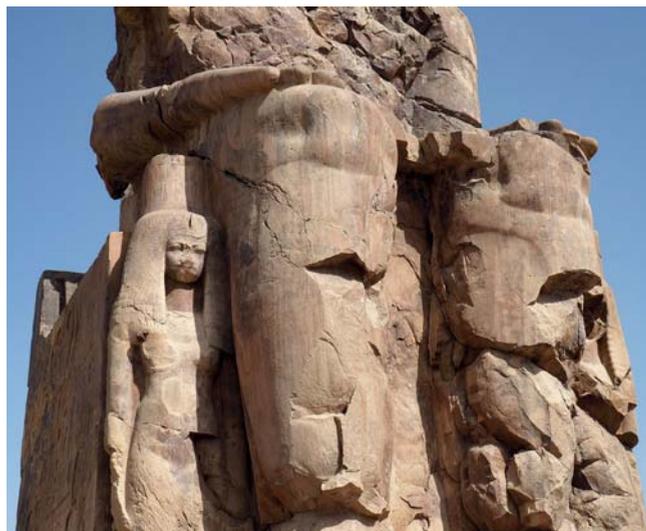


Fig. 2: Southern Colossus of Memnon, detail of the queen. Kôm el-Hettan. Quartzite. Photograph: author.

observed at the nose of Amun, while Mut’s nose, now missing, was originally a separate piece inserted in the face, probably a repair of an old break. Another post-Amarna indurated limestone statue, showing a king embraced by Horus, Osiris and Isis (Cairo JE 49536; **Fig. 5**), displays breaks in various spots that do not seem to be accidental: all faces have been literally erased; only Horus still has some parts of his head, but his beak and eyes were the targets of several hits; the same fate befell the chests of the goddess and the sovereign, and the beard and sceptres of Osiris, while the legs and front base have been hacked out, apparently with some care.

Comparison of a large number of pieces, and more particularly of statues belonging to coherent series and archaeological contexts, allows us to highlight the parts of the statue that are damaged in such a systematic manner that no coincidence is conceivable. The series of Senwosret III’s ‘praying’ statues from Deir el-Bahri illustrates this phenomenon perfectly.<sup>3</sup> All six statues were found in the depression located to the southwest of the temple of Mentuhotep II. They were probably thrown down from the terrace and may have partially broken due to the shock of the fall, but they were first cut and smashed in specific zones of the body. The

<sup>3</sup> Two of them, from which remain only the torso and kilt, are still *in situ* (Postel 2014, 118, fig. 5). One is in Cairo, Egyptian Museum, TR 18.4.22.4 (Evers 1929, pl. 83); the three others are

in London, British Museum, EA 684, 685, and 686 (Wildung 1984, 202, fig. 176; Polz 1995, 235, pl. 48a; Strudwick 2006, 90–1).

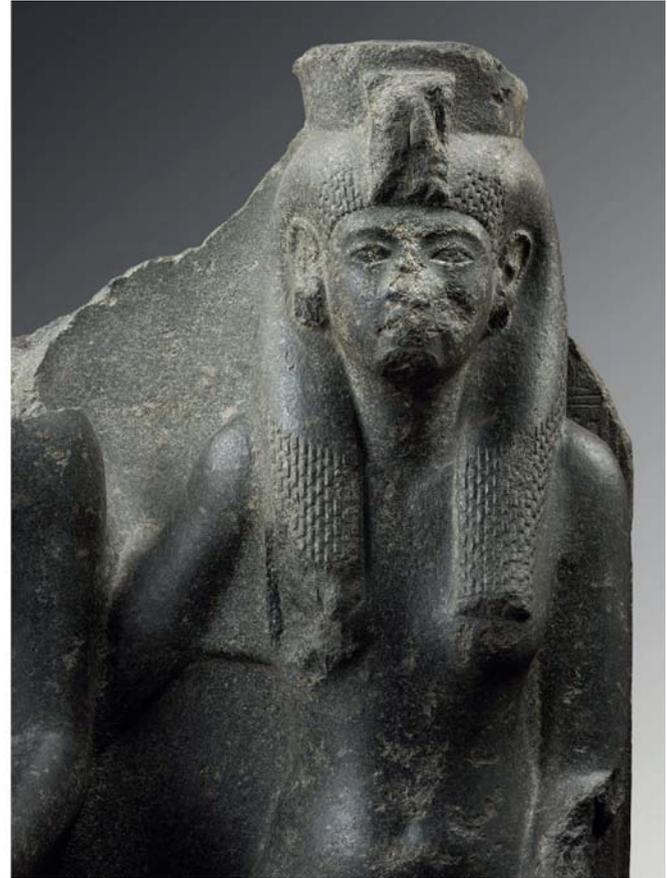


Fig. 3: Dyad of Horemheb and Mutnedjemet. From Karnak. Granodiorite. H. 139cm. Turin, Cat. 1379.  
Photographs: Pino and Nicola Dell'Aquila. © Museo Egizio.



Fig. 4: Dyad of the gods Amun and Mut. Luxor Temple.  
Indurated limestone. Photograph: author.

arms, which are emphasised because of pose (and action) of the king, were systematically hammered, as well as the cobra uraeus, which was thought to magically protect the king, and the nose, which allowed the statue to breathe. In two cases, even an eye was smashed. The series of quartzite colossi from Herakleopolis Magna, usurped from late Dynasty 12 sovereigns for Ramesses II (Connor 2015), also had their faces smashed at some point in history. The nose has been completely removed, as well as the uraeus and the beard, which has been erased rather carefully on the colossus Cairo JE 45975. Even the queens on either side of the legs had their heads completely removed.

All these statues show damage on precisely the same zones of the body, which are not necessarily the most fragile and thus can hardly have suffered from accidental breaks. Therefore, these parts can be considered symbolically meaningful, since they are those which apparently needed to be erased when the statues had to be 'de-activated'. Breakages to these parts would seem thus to demonstrate a coherent practice of ritual damaging.

Since mutilation of statues is indeed an attested practice in the ancient world, let us try to understand the motives that led ancient inhabitants of the Nile Valley to deface the images present in their surroundings. Let us take into consideration different possible sources and reasons for ancient intentional breaking or mutilation of statues: iconoclasm during the Christian and Islamic periods; looting; official proscription and personal animosity; magic/ritual mutilation; or war damage.

## 2. Mutilating statues

### 2.1 Christian iconoclasm

One of the most frequently mentioned reasons to explain the state of fragmentation of statues and reliefs is the iconoclasm carried out against pagan objects and monuments during Late Antiquity (Kristensen in this volume) and the Islamic era. At least in their earlier stages, the revealed monotheistic religions prohibited the production of any likeness of a living being, and this is, in many cases, the main reason for the defacement of pre-Christian images. However, although the practice of damaging pagan monuments is well-attested, particularly during Late Antiquity, one should be careful before attributing the state of fragmentation of pharaonic monuments too quickly and systematically to anti-pagan iconoclasm.

Christian iconoclasm is well documented by a large number of texts of early Christian authors of the 4th and 5th centuries. They describe the violent conflicts which marked the rise of Christianity in Alexandria — the best documented being the destruction of the Serapeum in AD 391/392 (Kristensen 2010). The accounts of Theodoret, the bishop of Cyrhus (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.22: Schaff 1892, 148–9) and Rufinus (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 11.23: Amidon 1997, 81–2) relate how the chryselephantine colossal statue of Serapis was publicly smashed, dismembered and burned, in order to show the pagans that this 'idol' contained no power. The head was then exposed to the mockery of the people of Alexandria. Although such phenomena are attested throughout the whole Roman Empire in the 4th

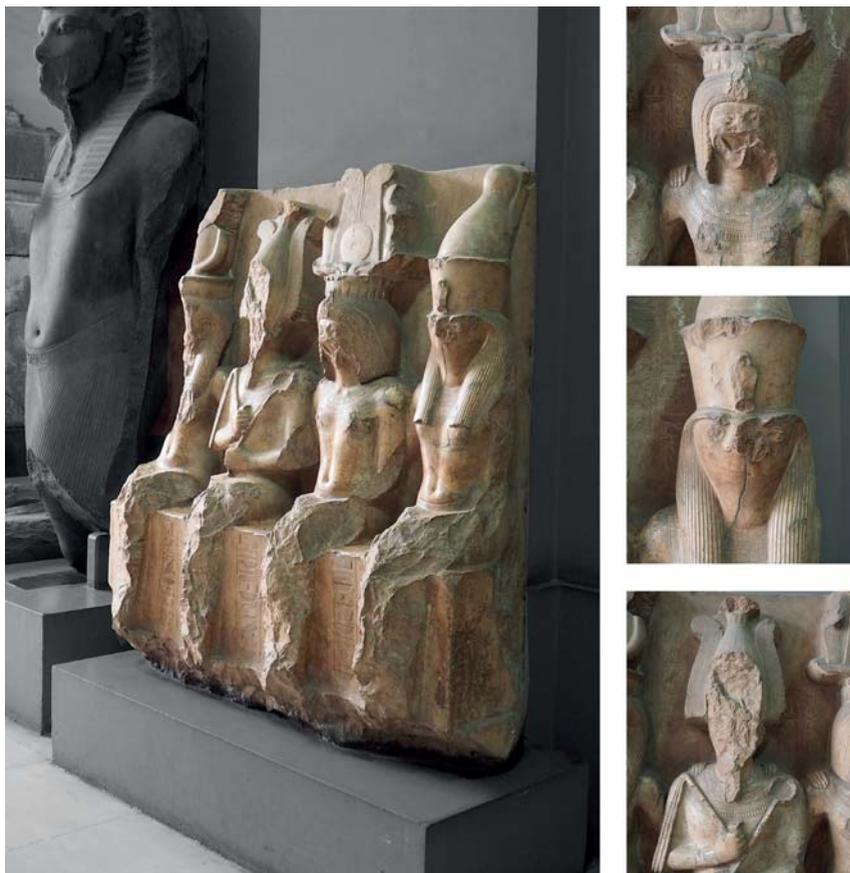


Fig. 5: Statuary group of a post-Amarna king, with Horus, Osiris and Isis. From Abydos. Indurated limestone. H. 172cm. Cairo, JE 49536. Photographs: author.

and 5th centuries, these attitudes of violence and destruction towards ancient images in the Christian period do not necessarily reflect everyday behaviour, and probably have more to do with occasional events, initiated by some radical groups. In many other situations, it seems that the people of Late Antiquity preserved testimonies of the past, or simply forgot them and let them disappear under dust and sand (Hannestad 1999; Kristensen 2010). Different responses towards pagan monuments are, therefore, attested.

A possible way of 'exorcising' or 'neutralising' pagan monuments may have been the incision of a cross or a Christian star, of which we find innumerable examples on tombs and temple walls. On statuary, however, it has remained relatively exceptional. Only a few examples can be cited, and, as far as I know, all of them are statues from the Roman period: a marble statue of Marcus Aurelius from Alexandria, which has a large cross carved on the abdomen (Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum, inv. 3250; Tkaczow 1993, 248–9, no. 169; Kristensen 2012, cat. B10; Kristensen 2013, 126–7, fig. 2.7); a head attributed to Germanicus,

without known provenance but carved in an Egyptian stone, with a cross on the forehead (London, British Museum 1872,0605.1: Kristensen 2012, cat. A10; Kristensen 2013, 93–4, fig. 1.17; Fluck, Helmecke and O’Connell 2015, 98, cat. 102); and a few other examples (Dölger 1930, 280–4; Langmann 1985; Hjort 1993; Kristensen 2012, 98, fig. 1.20). Incising this cross may have been a ‘soft’ alternative to complete destruction, although these statues bear other mutilations, which could be — but are not necessarily — contemporary with the cross incision. The absence of archaeological context prevents us from dating these actions.

A more radical reaction would be the transformation of a statue into a cross: literary sources inform us that the torso from the wooden cult statue of Kronos in Alexandria was re-carved in the shape of a cross in AD 324, when the temple was rededicated as the church of Theonas (Haas 1997, 209–10).

## 2.2 *Islamic iconoclasm*

The deactivation or ‘killing’ of pagan images is well-attested in the 4th and 5th centuries AD, but Islamic iconoclasm is more difficult to point out. In some cases, archaeological remains, ancient photographs or drawings show the level of the ground during the last centuries. In the case of Luxor Temple, for example, the *Description de l’Égypte* (vol. III) and the illustrations of David Roberts show that the heads of the two seated colossi at the entry of the temple were easily accessible from the ground, which may have facilitated their defacing. However, dating these mutilations to the Islamic era according to that argument is barely more than a hypothesis, as on the other bank of the Nile, the south colossus of Memnon shows the same mutilation, though the ground level there never reached the upper body. It remains, in fact, difficult to date such mutilations.

The information provided by textual sources of the Islamic period illustrates diverse reactions towards pagan monuments, especially in the 13th and 14th centuries (Reid 2002, 30). Some describe, for example, an intentional damaging of the Sphinx in the 14th century,<sup>4</sup> while other texts from the same period tell that

the Sphinx was considered a monumental talisman, protecting the cultivated area from the sands.<sup>5</sup> The pyramids were partially dismantled to build the walls of medieval Cairo, but they were also part of the Islamic cultural landscape (Smith 2007). In fact, a large number of medieval Islamic authors praise the fact that their rulers never destroyed these monuments. In contrast to the Christian period, the Egyptian population of the Islamic period was no longer in direct contact with pagan cult, and the pharaonic monuments, which were often already dismantled and buried under the sand or alluviums, could no longer be seen as dangerous records of idolatrous practices, but more as testimonies of the accounts written in the books of revelation.<sup>6</sup> There would thus have been no need for ostentatious mutilation or systematic destruction of pagan monuments. In this period, therefore, mutilation or damage carried out on pharaonic images may be in many cases simply due to their reuse as ‘spolia’ in medieval monuments, instead of meaningful and ritual deactivations of statues. The greywacke sphinx of Senwosret II (Cairo JE 37796 – TR 16.2.21.6: Sourouzian 1996) is one among many examples. This statue, which comes from Heliopolis according to its inscriptions, was found in the early 20th century in the masonry of Mottaher mosque in Old Cairo. Lacking the head and the front paws, the body of the lion formed a quite convenient parallelepiped block to be reused in an architectural structure. Other examples of statues recut to be reused in Islamic constructions are the quartzite sphinxes inscribed for Amenemhat V (Sekhemkare) and Ramesses II, also from Heliopolis as indicated by their inscriptions, which were found reused in a postern of the medieval walls of Cairo; today they are on display in a modern reconstruction of the postern on a square, just north of Bab el-Nasr (**Fig. 6**). The practice of ‘spolia’ is attested at all periods and examples are very numerous. Such reuses were already frequent in pharaonic times. The excavations of the pavement and foundations of the Ptolemaic temple of Medamud, for example, brought to light statues and architectural fragments of Senwosret III, several Dynasty 13 rulers and Sobekemsaf I. Much earlier, the architects of

<sup>4</sup> The author Ahmed al-Maqrizi (1364–1442), in his work *al-Mawa’iz*, reports the action of an activist Sufi called Mohamed Sa’id al-Su’ada, who went in 1378 to the pyramids plateau in order to disfigure the Sphinx (Haarman 1980; McGregor 2013, 184).

<sup>5</sup> See Ahmed al-Maqrizi (cf. *supra*) and Abdelrahman al-Suyuti (1445–1550), in his work *Husn al-mubadara* (McGregor 2013, 178).

<sup>6</sup> See the author Abd el-Latif al-Baghdadi (1162–1231), *The Eastern Key* (McGregor 2013, 179).



Fig. 6: Reconstructed postern of the northern wall of medieval Cairo, near Bab el-Nasr, with reused sphinxes of Amenemhat V and Ramesses II. Quartzite. L. of each sphinx: 157cm. Photographs: author.

Merenptah’s Temple of Millions of Years employed fragmented gigantic sphinxes and jackal statues.

Just as in the case of the Christian period, as Kristensen has pointed out, different reactions may have occurred contemporaneously. The existence of some cases of iconoclasm does not mean that this reaction towards pharaonic antiquities was common among the population. The large number of statues or reliefs which have always remained visible, yet have not been defaced, speaks in favour of a certain tolerance of these ancient images — or an ignorance of their significance.

### 2.3 Looting

One reason for the destruction of some statues seems to have been the plundering of burial chambers. Perhaps in order to avoid the curse of the tomb owner, statues from the funerary chapel or the serdab were often found intentionally smashed, possibly by the robbers. The statues of Iteti, from Giza (Fig. 7, Turin S. 1876: Connor 2016, 40, 86), and of King Djoser, from



Fig. 7: Head of the statue of Iteti. From Giza. Limestone. H. 117cm (whole statue). Turin, Suppl. 1876. Photograph: Pino Dell’Aquila. © Museo Egizio.

his pyramid complex in Saqqara (Cairo JE 49158: Sourouzian 1995, 149–52) are probably both victims of such vandalism. In the case of Iteti, the head has been cut off; the torso and feet were not found during the excavations of Schiaparelli. The faces of both statues show evident traces of intentional breakage, produced by a series of blows, made with a hammer and chisel: the nose has been mutilated, as well as the area of the eyes, and, in the case of Djoser, the beard has been partially cut off.

It is difficult to know whether a *symbolic* or a *material* reason caused such destruction (the two are not incompatible). A practical motive may be the process of extraction of the precious materials used for the inlaid eyes (metal and rock crystal) or for features ornamenting the statue. That might have been the case of the statue of the commander-in-chief Hor, son of Tithoes (Berlin ÄM 2271, 1st century BC–1st century AD), which was once ornamented with insignia and necklaces, later removed and erased (Lembke and Vittmann 1999).<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the damage inflicted on the noses and the beard, and the beheading of Iteti's statue, speak in favour of a proper intention to render them unable to act.

Concerning the beheading, it must be kept in mind that when dealing with the head of a statue or a headless sculpture, it is often difficult to identify the reason for its decapitation. As we will see later, as the head is considered the most important part of the body, decapitation is a commonly attested practice in ancient societies as well as in art, as a radical and symbolic way of killing and depriving the individual of his identity. However, statues may have also been damaged, mainly beheaded, in modern times (i.e. in the last centuries), by antiquities robbers. Indeed, a head is much easier to transport, to hide and to sell than a complete statue, and remains a very valuable piece. This might partly explain why sculpture collections include so many heads — and, consequently, so many headless bodies.

As we will see, the nose and the beard are the most frequently damaged zones on royal and divine statues. Concerning the eyes and nose, we may propose that the reason was to make the owner of the tomb blind and unable to breathe, while the robbers were plundering

the tomb. Such looting is hard to date, but it might have occurred early in the pharaonic period, before the site was covered with sand.

In the case of a looting situation, the damage suffered by a statue would therefore be intentional, but not necessarily meaningful — or at least not only — and a purely material motivation might be at the origin of a defacement: the removal of precious parts.

#### 2.4 Official proscription and personal animosity

A well-attested reason for damaging statues is the *damnatio memoriae*, or proscription. As pointed out by T. M. Kristensen, in some cases, this type of damage is obvious, ‘reminding viewers that they should “remember to forget” the disgraced’ figure or ‘at least maintain a very particular kind of memory of the individuals subjected to this punishment’ (Kristensen 2015, 670). For political, religious or personal reasons, some individuals had their names erased from the monuments, and sometimes their representations destroyed, in order to cancel their memory, and, in the case of Egyptian imagery, to magically incapacitate the representations of these persons and to render them inactive.

Proscription or *damnatio memoriae* have been studied by several authors, especially in the cases of royal proscription. A well-known case is that of Hatshepsut (Fig. 8), who suffered a systematic proscription at the



Fig. 8: Granite kneeling statue of Hatshepsut (front) and limestone heads of jubilee pillars (back).

From Deir el-Bahri. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 29.3.1. H. 261.5cm. Photograph: author.

<sup>7</sup> I thank Nicola Barbagli for bringing this statue to my attention. The man's face, otherwise well preserved, has also been heavily disfigured by what seems to be a double knock on the nose.

end of the reign of Thutmose III (Dorman 2005; Roth 2005, 280–1; Bryan 2012, 365–9). At Deir el-Bahri, the statues of the queen were removed from the temple, systematically altered and thrown into two large holes in front of the temple. The damage was clearly intentional and concentrated in specific areas, with stone hammers used to inflict it: the statues were usually beheaded; the hands and feet were often hacked, and, for the standing statues, the base separated from the body; the face was usually less damaged, apart from the uraeus, an emblem of royalty and divine protection that was systematically erased (Arnold 2005). However, the inscriptions and names are still present on these statues. A different treatment was given to the reliefs, the figures remaining intact and her name being substituted by those of Thutmose I or II. Her statues were ritually mutilated and buried in front of her former monument, in order, as said by B. Bryan, to 'incapacitate her spirit and thereby prevent any potentially hostile activity' (Bryan 2012, 369).

One century later, during the phase of the 'Amarna iconoclasm', another large-scale proscription was carried out by royal order against the traditional gods, in particular Amun. Most probably mainly for political reasons, Akhenaten ordered the name of Amun to be erased (even within the cartouches containing the name of his father Amenhotep III) and his statues destroyed throughout the whole country. This iconoclastic campaign, and the restorations which followed at the end of Dynasty 18 and during Dynasty 19, are visible on statuary. Particularly representative cases are Cairo CG 42052 (Lindblad 1984, 51, cat. 4), CG 42066 (Laboury 1998, 224–6, cat. C 66), CG 42065 (Sourouzian 1991, 69–70, fig. 23) and Turin Cat. 767 (Connor 2017, 50–2), showing respectively Thutmose I, Thutmose III, Amenhotep II and perhaps Amenhotep III with the god Amun, and, in the case of the Turin statue, with Amun and Mut. On each of these groups, the figure of Amun was hammered, while the king remained intact. When restored in the post-Amarna or Ramesside periods, the Amun figure was either cut, in a reduced size, in what remained of the damaged piece, or completed with additional sculpted fragments to fill the gaps and replace the too-damaged parts of the body.

After his reign, Akhenaten himself suffered from a *damnatio memoriae*: his name was erased everywhere, his monuments were dismantled, their blocks were reused as construction material and the statues of the royal family smashed (Fig. 9) (e.g. Thompson 2011; Bryan 2012). Still associated with the Amarna

sovereign, Tutankhamun and Ay, too, were subject to a quite systematic usurpation during the reign of Horemheb. The statue in the Louvre, inv. E 11609 (Fig. 10) (Barbotin 2007, I, 130–2, cat. 73; II, 200–5), which represents the god Amun protecting the child king, shows, among other mutilations, an erasure of some signs of his cartouches, leaving only the god's names, in order to render Tutankhamun unidentifiable: *[twf-'nh]-Imn [nb-hpr.w]-R'*. It is, however, difficult to date the other damage done to the piece: both figures were beheaded (the head of the god has been re-fixed), and the hands and feet were smashed, as well perhaps as the god's beard. Are these mutilations contemporary with the hammering of the cartouches? This might justify why the statue was 'de-named' instead of being usurped, but remains difficult to explain, when reusing the statue would have been quite easy.

Proscription also applies to non-royal individuals. Reliefs, wall paintings, as well as statues in Memphite mastabas (see numerous examples cited in Kanawati 2003) and Theban tombs contain an innumerable corpus of mutilations. In many cases, defacement affects most of the human figures, and could be due to various factors; but in others, only some figures, clearly identified by their inscriptions or their iconography, are defaced. A well-known case is that of the paintings of Rekhmire (TT 100); the figures of the deceased and of his son, even in the scenes of the rituals for the mummy, are the object of a meticulous and systematic hammering, leading to the supposition that some kind of disgrace fell on the family, or that some personal hatred was expressed against its members, perhaps from political opponents, sufficiently powerful to lead to the disfigurement of their representations on the tomb's walls. Such a destructive action must have taken place, at the latest, shortly after the disappearance of this family, when the remembrance was still sufficiently vivid to lead to the destruction of their images. In the current state of knowledge, it is difficult to ascertain if the destructive action came from a royal order or from a private initiative.

As regards non-royal sculpture in the round, a probable example of proscription is that of a quartzite triad of early Dynasty 13 (Louvre A 47; cf. Fig. 11), which once represented three generations of high priests of Ptah, grandfather, father and son (Delange 1987, 81–3). The figure of the son, on the proper left of the block, has been carefully cut out. The rest of the statue is intact, except for the noses of the figures. In this case,

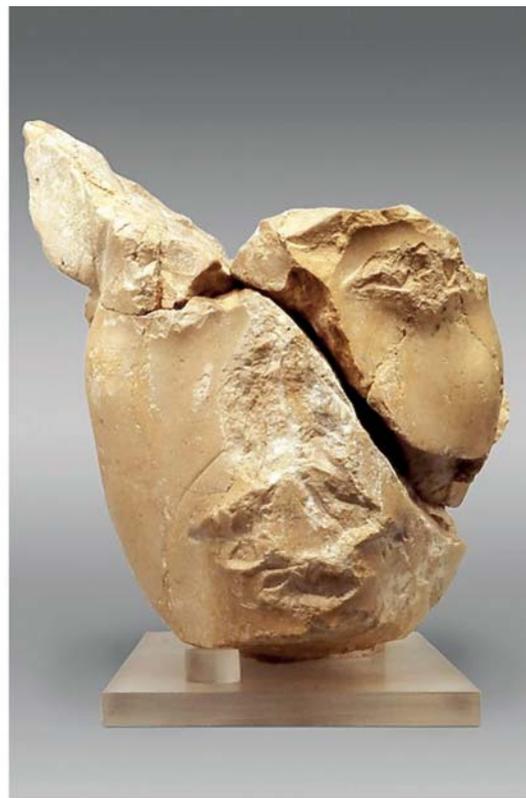


Fig. 9: Heads of statues of the Amarna royal family. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005.363 (partly restored), 57.180.79, 21.9.2, 21.9.487. Indurated limestone and quartzite. From el-Amarna. Photographs © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

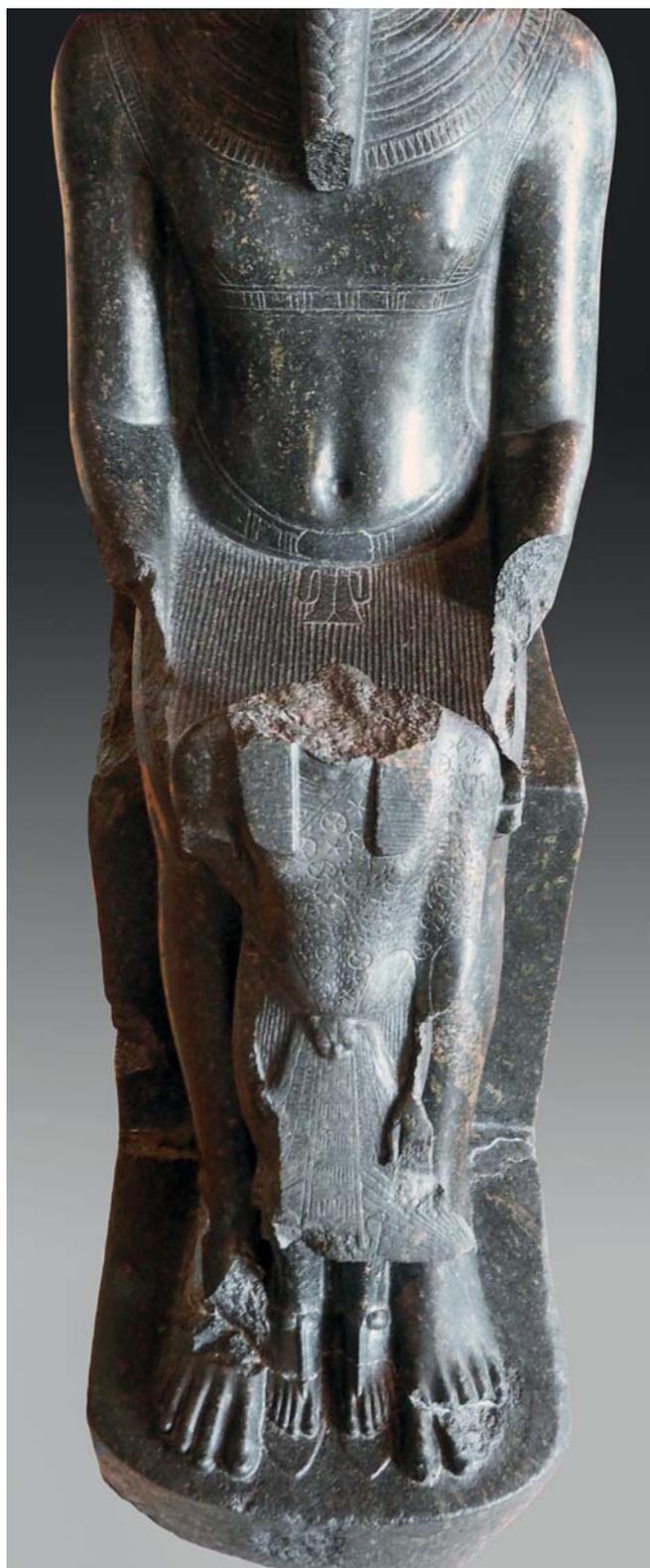


Fig. 10: Detail of the statue of the god Amun protecting Tutankhamun in worshipping position. From Karnak or Luxor? Granodiorite. H. 220cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, E 11609. Photograph: author.

it is not necessarily due to an intentional mutilation, since they were the most protruding parts of this sculpture. According to the inscription, the statue was ordered by the central figure, Nebpu, for himself, his father and his son. The name of the son is actually still visible, but his figure was carefully cut out, and the angle even re-carved, in order to transform the triad into a dyad. The characters are not known from any other source.

Cases of political proscription and personal hatred seem therefore to differ: in the first case, the memory of the targeted individual needs to be eradicated (the names of Hatshepsut, Akhenaten, Tutankhamun, are erased everywhere, and their statues severely mutilated or, more rarely, reused); when personal hate (or disfavoured?) occurs, the individual's name is not erased, but only his figures are hacked out, so as to remind readers of the inscriptions of the discredit fallen on him.

### 2.5 *Magic, ritual mutilation*

In some cases, the defacing of statues seems to have been a ritual performed without the intention of destroying them, but as an act which properly allowed them to serve their particular functions.

This would seem to be the case with the very peculiar group of the so-called 'reserve heads'. These limestone heads do not consist of fragments of statues, but proper statues originally conceived as heads. Around thirty of them are known. All have been found in shafts or burial chambers of Dynasties 4 and 5 in the Memphite necropolis. They were apparently (although none was found in its original position) conceived as being part of the underground part of the tomb, therefore close to the body of the deceased. Almost all of these heads show evident traces of hacking on the ears. The necks and skulls, also, often have several incisions, which have been interpreted by R. Tefnin as perhaps the symbol of decapitation or trepanning (Tefnin 1991a; 1991b). Several theories have been formulated concerning the presence of these heads in some Old Kingdom burials. N. Picardo recently proposed that they could be seen as a kind of negation of the decapitation (Picardo 2007). In the same way as dangerous hieroglyphs can be represented cut or injured, in order to prevent any negative action, these decapitated heads would have been magically rendered inoffensive. It would constitute a kind of negation of the risk of being beheaded. The process of damaging these disembodied heads would thus be a kind of 'execration



Fig. 11: Fragmentary triad of high priests of Ptah of late Dynasty 12 or early Dynasty 13. Unknown provenance. Quartzite. H. 92cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, A 47. Photographs: author.

magic', or what Picardo calls a 'semantic homicide', preventing the deceased from becoming headless, which is one of the fates most greatly feared during the post-mortem transition, according to numerous representations in later funerary texts. The reserve heads would have interceded magically and conceptually against the loss of the deceased's head. It would thus probably be the result of a kind of ritual, which perhaps occurred during the funeral.

Another, much later, case is that of the statue of the deified prince Ahmes-Sapair (Louvre E 15682: **Fig. 12**), which shows several traces of apparent ritual damage, completed by ancient Egyptians themselves (Vandersleyen 2005; Barbotin 2007, I, 32–4; II, 8–15). According to its style, the statue belongs to late Dynasty 17, and is therefore approximately contemporary to the prince himself, and may have been sculpted for his grave — although its size, 103.5cm high, is unusually tall for this period. Its inscriptions describe the sadness of the royal family confronted with the prince's death. The cult of this prince continued in the Theban region during the whole New Kingdom, as attested by a large

series of stelae (Vandersleyen 2005, 23–6, 38–45). For some reason, at some point in its use, numerous blows were inflicted upon the statue to break the arms and legs of the prince, although neither his face nor his nose were broken. Furthermore, a few holes were cut in the throne and painted red. It has been proposed that the intention of this damage was to magically bind him to his seat, without cancelling his capacity to act as a deified figure (Vandersleyen 2005, 15–6). Another hole appears more difficult to explain: a hole cut into the back of the head, within the curls of the wig. Does it have to be considered as a kind of trepanation? Do we deal again with a way to render the statue and the represented prince harmless, but without killing him, since he was still supposed to act as a deity? Or, more simply, was it intended to help in fixing a metallic ornament onto the wig, as suggested by C. Barbotin (2005)?

In these cases, which still depend greatly on our interpretation, we might not be dealing with a 'killing' or a 'deactivation' of these sculptures in the round, but properly with their 'activation' in a specific role that they were supposed to fulfil.



Fig. 12: Statue of prince Ahmes-Sapair. Unknown provenance. Limestone. H. 103cm.  
Paris, Musée du Louvre, E 15682. Photographs: author.

### 2.6 War

Another possible reason for the mutilation of statues might be war damage. It has been suggested in the past that the innumerable statues found in the Cachette of Karnak were buried owing to breakages caused by Assyrian or Persian incursions; nevertheless, recent research has shown that the Cachette dates from a

much later time, at the end of the Ptolemaic period, i.e. several centuries after any foreign invasion in Thebes. Therefore this thesis is considered less and less probable today (see Jambon 2016, 154 with bibliography; Coulon et al. in this volume). However, the royal statues found in the Cachette of Dokki Gel may have been buried, according to C. Bonnet, as a consequence of the military expedition of Psamtek II in Nubia. If so, it

must be noted that their dismemberment was quite carefully made, by an experienced sculptor, seemingly with an intention to cause minimum damage to the sculptures (Bonnet 2011), which would suggest that this (ritual?) mutilation occurred not during a violent raid, but during a planned and codified procedure, perhaps even a ceremony. J. Anderson compares the Dokki Gel discovery with similar finds from Gebel Barkal and Dangeil, and she proposes a temple refurbishment as an alternative explanation to the burial of the Kushite kings' statues (Anderson et al. in this volume).

The case of the sanctuary of Heqaib in Elephantine is perhaps clearer. This small temple shows signs of violent destruction before being buried and covered with successive levels of occupation, which sealed its ruins and its mutilated statues (Habachi 1985, 159). Its destruction can be dated to the Second Intermediate Period, around 1700–1600 BC, i.e. at a time when the enemy in the south, the kingdom of Kerma, was particularly powerful and aggressive. Contemporarily, in Sudan, the kings of Kerma were buried under large tumuli, together with sacrificed human bodies, *bucrania* and fragments of Egyptian statues, most of them now part of the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Several theories have been proposed to explain the presence of these fragments of Egyptian statues in these Sudanese royal tombs. Only one of them was found integrally preserved, the statue of Sennuy (Boston 14.720: Reisner 1923, 34–5, cat. 32). The other ones are not only damaged, but in most cases they consist solely of fragments, which are impossible to join together. It is noteworthy that on the face fragments found in Sudan, the nose is often present, and there are no traces of smashing on the arms, nor on the chin. We seem to be dealing with a different process of damaging, therefore, than in the cases found in Egyptian contexts. To explain the presence of these hundreds of

isolated statue fragments, it may be suggested that these pieces came to Kerma already in that state. Indeed, military incursions of Kerma armies into Egypt are well-attested by texts during the Second Intermediate Period (see for example the texts in the tomb of the governor Sobeknakht II in Elkab: Davies 2003). Might the Kerma soldiers have attacked the sanctuary and its sculptures during a raid, bringing back fragments of statues as a kind of trophy to Sudan, where they would accompany the king to his grave, as symbols of victory over Egypt?<sup>8</sup> This remains in the realm of conjecture, and would need further evidence, such as a join between material found in Kerma and that still in place in Egypt.<sup>9</sup>

In front of their destroyed temple and its broken statues, the inhabitants of Elephantine might then have chosen, instead of repairing the site, to bury it and, before that, ritually render inactive what remained of its sculptural material, which would explain why the statues found inside by Habachi, even those of which the rest of the body is still well preserved, almost systematically lack their noses. Only the statue of Imeny-Iatu (Habachi 1985, 64, pl. 103–10, cat. 37) is intact, as well as (except for a knock to the chin beard), the statue of Khema (Habachi 1985, 43–4, pls 39–45, cat. 15).

### 2.7 *The case of the Cachettes or favissae: deactivation of statues?*

Finally, mutilations might perhaps be linked, at least in certain cases, to some still unknown ritual in the case of temples' 'Cachettes' or *favissae*, pits containing statues, which were found in numerous temples throughout Egypt, under the pavement of a courtyard. Sculptures were sometimes found reduced to small fragments, as in the case of the two statues of Amenhotep III found

<sup>8</sup> O'Connor 1974, 30–1; Wenig 1978; Bonnet 1997; Davies 2003; Valbelle 2004; Davies 2004, 101, no. 75; Davies 2005, 50, 55, nn. 18–9; Minor 2012. Another case in Nubian territory of probable symbolic victory over Egypt or even the Roman Empire is the head of Augustus found in Meroe (London, BM 1911.0901.1), which was found in 1910 by Garstang's team buried in the ground at the entry of a temple or shrine. That structure, decorated with scenes of Meroitic military triumph, might be interpreted as a victory shrine (Oppen 2014, 20–9). When entering it, people necessarily had to walk on the ground containing that head, which it is very tempting to see as a symbolic treading down.

<sup>9</sup> Such as a joint between a headless statue found in the sanctuary of Heqaib in Elephantine (Habachi 1985, 44, cat. 16, pls 46–8), and a head discovered at Kerma, now in Boston MFA 20.1207 (Reisner 1923, 40, cat. 66). Thanks are due to the staff of the Egyptian Department of Boston Museum, who kindly provided me with a cast of the break of the head. I am currently in the process of asking for access to the lower part of the statue, in the storage of Elephantine Island, in order to check that joint. Should it be confirmed, this connection would bring a decisive light on the *membra dispersa* found in Nubian contexts, and a new interpretation of the documents taken away as fragments from Egypt to Kush, by Kerma military expeditions, during the Second Intermediate Period.

in two circular pits under the pavement of Montu’s temple in Karnak (Barguet and Leclant 1954, 46–7, figs 78–9; Valbelle 2016, 21–3).

In most cases, statues have been found in a fragmentary state, and the recurrence of damaged parts of the body, as well as the way the fragments are displayed inside the pit, speak in favour of intentional mutilations (Jambon 2016, 148–50).<sup>10</sup> It remains difficult to date this damage precisely and to ascertain that it specifically occurred before the burial of the statues. Were they buried because they were damaged, or ritually mutilated because they had to be ‘deactivated’ before being buried in the sacred pit? That question remains difficult to answer with certainty, notably because, although most of the statues found in cachettes were found in a fragmentary state, many were also intact (see, for example, the statues from the Cachette of the Luxor Temple: el-Saghir 1991); it remains clear, however, that the pieces were not thrown inside the pit, but were carefully buried and associated in coherent groups, to ‘sleep’ inside the sacred area (Goyon and Cardin 2004, 19–20; Jambon 2016; see also Charloux and Mahmoud in this volume about a recently discovered and carefully excavated cache in Karnak). Further research is needed concerning these *favissae*, taking into consideration their differences of time and context, which suggest that there may have been many different reasons for their digging and for the breaking/cutting/mutilation of some of the statues found inside.

If statues were mutilated precisely *just before* being buried in a sacred pit — which still needs confirmation, since it would in any case have been far from systematic — the idea would, surely, not have been to ritually ‘kill’ the represented person or the memory of him or her, since the inscriptions generally remained intact, but maybe more to ‘deactivate’ the object, to prevent



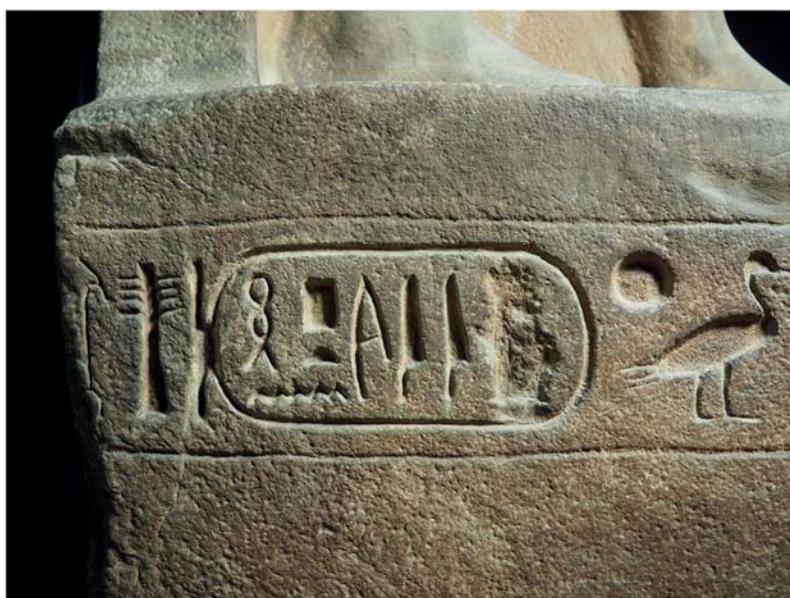
Fig. 13: ‘Ozymandias colossus’. Ramesseum. Granite.  
Photographs: author.

the statue from acting, by depriving it of its feet (capacity to walk), arms (capacity to act) or head (capacity to hear, to breathe, to see, to speak).

### 2.8 Multiple cases

Often, a single monument may attest different phases of damage or reuse. In the Ramesseum, the enormous colossus that inspired Shelley’s ‘Ozymandias’ poem and that once sat in the first court, may have initially cracked and collapsed accidentally owing to an earthquake, but it also bears traces of intentional cuts, as one can see on the large scar on the face, witness of an unfinished sawing action, probably in order to produce blocks for masonry or for millstones (Fig. 13). Before

<sup>10</sup> Some statues cited by E. Jambon (2016: Cairo CG 42027, 42059, 42148, 42149) show traces of cutting, which cannot be accidental.

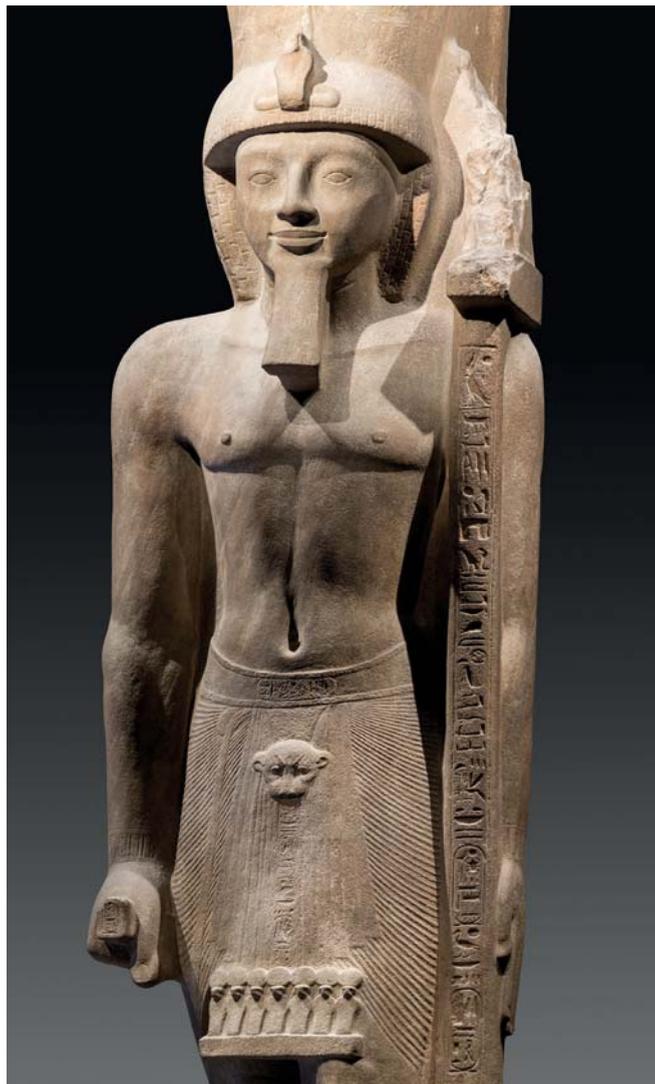


Figs 14–15: Standard-bearer statue of Sety II. Turin, Cat. 1383. Sandstone. H. 516cm.  
Photographs: Pino Dell'Aquila © Museo Egizio.

this cutting action for the purpose of reuse, the statue apparently suffered a ritual mutilation: the uraeus was not just damaged, but also carefully cut off, and the whole tail was completely erased; this cannot be by accident. The snake-goddess who was thought to magically protect the king is indeed one of the parts that needed to be systematically hammered when a statue was supposed to be deactivated. The jubilee statue-pillars in the courtyard also bear traces of systematic

mutilation: the colossal faces show clear tool marks on the eyes, nose, mouth and chin.

Several phases of modification and disfiguring may be the reflection of different meanings and practices through Egyptian history. The Turin statue of Sety II (cat. 1383, Figs 14–15) shows several traces of damaging, which attest several successive responses towards ancient monuments. Before being transported to Livorno and then to the Piedmont's capital in 1824, this



colossal sculpture was rising, together with its twin (Louvre inv. A 24: Barbotin 2007, I, 100–2; II, 142–5, cat. 48) at either side of the axial entrance of the barque chapel that Seti II erected around 1200 BC in front of the Amun temple. The bases that once supported them are still *in situ* and allow reconstructing the original position of both colossi. Several marks allow following a series of episodes through the long ‘life’ of these statues:

- The edges of the base are severely blunted and even form small cavities, which are clearly due to a repetitive action of scratching. These concavities, called ‘cupules’, are usually interpreted as the result of a ritual activity that consisted in scratching the stone, in order to take off some powder that those who could access the sacred area were probably conserving as kind of magic souvenir or amulet. Such activity is attested at least as early as the New Kingdom, as attested by the columns of the Temple of Amun-who-hears-the-prayers, carved during the reign of Thutmose III, which show several of these cupules. They were later covered with a layer of plaster during the reign of Ramesses II, on the occasion of the enlargement of the oratory temple (Gallet 2013, 5–6, figs 5–6). On the statues of Sety II, no elements allow us to date these cupules, since the practice of removing ‘temple powder’ seems to have continued long after the pharaonic period, as is suggested by the position of such cupules, very high on the walls of certain temples, when the level of the ground in the courtyards or the forecourts had already risen several metres owing to the accumulation of layers.
- On the lateral sides of the base and on the back pillar of the Turin statue, the ‘Seth’ hieroglyph was erased inside every cartouche of the king (*sth.y mr(y).n pth*). The hammering concerns only the god’s sign, while the rest of the cartouche was left intact, as was the complete other cartouche, with the king’s throne name. The target was thus obviously not the individual Sety, but simply the hieroglyph representing the god Seth, inside his name. This cancellation probably occurred at some point in the 1st millennium BC, when the god Seth became particularly unwelcome in a sacred space.<sup>11</sup> It is noteworthy that even in the earlier case of Sety I, at the beginning of Dynasty 19, the hieroglyphic figure of Osiris sometimes replaced that of Seth in the cartouche of the king, for example on the wall decoration of his tomb. Strangely, this

<sup>11</sup> Until then, although a dangerous god of disorder, Seth was also considered a necessary deity, notably in the fight against Apep during the nocturnal journey of the sun, and as such received a cult, which seems to have developed especially in the Ramesside period. Personal names including the name of Seth disappear after Dynasty 20, as well as any restoration or building of a temple dedicated to this god. The growth of the personal cult of Osiris during the 1st millennium, as well as the

assimilation of Seth with the hated invaders, led to a persecution of Seth, who became the incarnation of the enemy *par excellence* (Soukiassian 1981; te Velde 1984, 910–1). Hammering the name of the god from the inscriptions in temples may have been a way to fight against the mythological enemies who were threatening the cosmos, and at the same time, to fight against the earthly enemies of Egypt.

cancellation of the Seth sign appears only on the Turin statue, while the Louvre one conserved it. I cannot see any other explanation beside the fact that perhaps the Louvre statue — or at least its inscriptions — were less visible at the time of this anti-Seth iconoclasm.

- A figure of Amun was once carved at the top of the standard that the king holds against his left arm. On both statues, this figure was heavily mutilated — but not the god's name on the inscriptions. No persecution against the god Amun is known after the Amarna period; the breaking of the god figure has thus probably to be related to anti-pagan iconoclasm, in Late Antiquity.
- On the Louvre statue only, the nose and the beard of the king were carefully cut away, as well as the head of the uraeus. As we will see, these three spots were precisely the main targets of the hammerers who wanted to 'deactivate' a statue. Such actions are attested throughout the whole pharaonic period and probably still in Late Antiquity, when minds and patterns of thought, although modified by the adoption of the new religion, were still impregnated with ancient Egyptian beliefs. Strangely, the nose and beard of the Turin colossus are still intact, for a reason that I cannot explain so far.
- Finally, a rectangular hole was cut in the front side of the base of the Turin statue. It damaged part of one of the cartouches, but it does not seem to have been an action against some hieroglyphic signs — the hole is too wide, too high and too deep. Most probably, this cavity was hollowed in this solid block of stone in order to fix a beam, perhaps for the installation of houses or structures in the courtyard of the temple, at some point in Late Antiquity or the medieval period.

### **Conclusion and further avenues for research: when and why mutilate a statue?**

The previous pages reviewed some possible causes for damage to statues. As art historians and archaeologists, we are accustomed to reconstructing the original

appearance of a piece in order to appreciate its aesthetic value, to study its stylistic features, to put it back in its architectural context, to re-enact the rituals which may have surrounded it. This is, of course, necessary; however, focusing on the actual damage to these artworks can also be extremely revealing and tell us a lot about the role that a statue may have played.

The first step is to try, by looking at the archaeological context and the relationship with other pieces, to differentiate accidental breaks from intentional mutilations; then, to distinguish intentional but not necessarily meaningful breaks (as sometimes in the case of the reuse of blocks or the looting of precious material) from intentional and meaningful mutilations, which, as we have seen, seem to focus on the parts of the body which would allow the statue to be in full possession of senses (the nose, the eyes, the mouth, the ears), those permitting it to act (the arms, especially in the case of praying statues, or often the wrists in the case of seated statues, and legs), and those which would confer some symbolic or magical power (the uraeus, the sceptres, but also the beard, often carefully erased so as to deprive the figure of its male capacity).

As noted by B. Bryan, statues were often treated in the same way as human bodies sometimes were in the Predynastic period,<sup>12</sup> or in the late Middle Kingdom, in Nubia:<sup>13</sup> broken, disjointed, decapitated. The removal of their hands, feet and heads left them functionless. Mutilating an image, like mutilating a body, would impede its potential for action (Bryan 2012, 364, 366, 368).

Once the intentional nature of a mutilation has been acknowledged, detecting the date and reason of this defacing may be possible from different clues. Sometimes, the identification of the target, such as Hatshepsut or Akhenaten, allows us to suggest a date for the prescription, due to the political context (in those cases, the late reign of Thutmose III or the post-Amarna period). In other cases, the archaeological context can help us. The reserve heads, for example, seem to have been ritually damaged perhaps even during their production, or in the process of their installation in the tomb. In the case of sites that are covered with sand or debris, the upper levels provide a *terminus ante quem*

<sup>12</sup> As attested at the sites of Hierakonpolis and Gerza, where traces attest intentional dismembering of bodies either before or shortly after burial: head, hands and feet were removed, seemingly to hinder the movements of the dead (Petrie, Mackay and Wainwright 1912, 8–15; Dougherty and Friedman 2008).

<sup>13</sup> The head and the headless body of a sacrificed individual were found associated with a ritual deposit (Vila 1963, 145–7; Vila 1973, 628–9; Jambon 2010, 4–5).

for the smashing of the sculptures. This is how we can date, for example, the destruction of the statues of the sanctuary of Heqaib to the Second Intermediate Period, i.e. at the time of the royal tumuli of Kerma. The smashing of the genitals or the breast of a statue may be due to Christian prudishness in Late Antiquity, as pointed out by N. Hannestad (Hannestad 2001). In some cases, as we saw, a single statue can bear traces of successive episodes of damage, repairs and again mutilations, as in the case of the group statues of a king and the god Amun, restored by the successors of Akhenaten, and defaced again at some point in Egyptian history.

Several elements can, therefore, be taken into consideration and help us to interpret damage to statues: anti-pagan iconoclasm, war damage, ritual deactivation in order to render the image harmless because of proscription, or because they did not serve anymore and had to be buried, or, in still other cases, because they were to be reused as masonry.

When looking at a broken piece, its fragmentary state is an integral part of its history. Its mutilations can tell us a lot about the originally represented character, about the periods during which the piece existed, about the factors that may lead to iconoclasm, and about the material value and power that people always conferred upon images.

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