AN EGYPTIAN STATUETTE OF
A PHOENICIAN GOD

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The statuette illustrated in this article is one of special interest in the history of Egyptian religion and art. It came into the possession of the Museum in 1889, where it had previously been on exhibition for several years as a loan from Joseph W. Drexel. It therefore has the distinction of having formed part of the nucleus from which the Egyptian collection has grown. That we possessed such a statuette was first noted by Max Müller in 1906 in his Egyptological Researches, and a photograph of it was published in Cairo in 1939 in the Annales of the Department of Antiquities.

The interest which attaches to this modest sculpture lies in the fact that it represents the god whom the Egyptians called Reshef or Ershuf. His name first appears in the Egyptian pantheon in the reign of Amen-šotepe II (1450-1424 B.C.) on a clay sealing and in two stelae with historical texts, and from the second half of the Eighteenth Dynasty onwards we have no lack of stelae and texts in which he is represented or mentioned. Among the minor occurrences is a string of amulets and scarabs in our collection which came from the Palace of Amen-šotepe III and which includes an amulet with the name Reshpu, this being the most common spelling of the god’s name.

This god is very much of a late comer to the list of Egyptian divinities, but in Syria and Palestine, where he is called Reshef, we find him at a slightly earlier period. Here he shares dominion with the Canaanite Ba’al and his counterparts, figuring in the Ugaritic texts as a god of the Canaanites about fifteen hundred years before Christ. Some centuries later, in a gate inscription found at Karatepe in Turkey and recently translated by Professor Obermann, a king of the Danunites named Azitawaddu states, “And it came to pass (that) in my days, in all the borders of the Plain of Adana, from the east even to the west, even in places that had formerly been dreadful, so that a person would dread to travel the road—now, in my days, I indeed put restraint to stride on the highways of the provinces: by the grace of Ba’al and the gods. . . . I have built this citadel, and have called its name Azitawaddiya, seeing Ba’al and Reshef sprm ordered me to build. So I have built it, by the grace of Ba’al and by the grace of Reshef sprm, in abundance and in well-being, and in pleasant habitation and in ease of heart, in order that it might be a bulwark unto

1 The consonants sprm represent a word uncertain in meaning, possibly “of the birds.”
Statuette of the god Reshep. Late Dynastic Period (1085-332 B.C.). Gift of Lucy W. Drexel, 1889
the Plain of Adana and unto the House of Mupsh.” The region of Adana lies slightly to the west of the Gulf of Alexandretta where the southern coast of Asia Minor meets the coast of Syria, in that corner of the Mediterranean where many of history’s famous battles have taken place.

In the Bible we learn indirectly of the nature of the god, since the word resheph occurs in Deuteronomy, Job, the Psalms, and Habakkuk, where it means lightning, flame, fire, or heat. In I Chronicles, chapter 7, verse 25, mention is made of a man named Resheph as an ancestor of an Ephraimite family. It would seem, then, from these and other evidences that the god in his native habitat was a powerful storm god, usually considered the god of thunder and lightning.

To return to Egypt, there Resheph is frequently represented on stelae in which he accompanies a nude Syrian goddess, usually Kadesh. The stelae of this type in the collections of the British Museum, the Louvre, Turin, Copenhagen, and Vienna show Resheph on the right, Min on the left, and the goddess in the center standing upon the back of a lion and holding various emblems in her hands.

The stelae of Amen-ḥotpe II mentioned above are of interest in themselves as well as in the context in which the god is mentioned. The first, found close by the Great Sphinx of Gizeh in 1936, tells of the youthful prowess of the king in archery and horsemanship. The text, translated in When Egypt Ruled the East by Steindorff and Seele, reads in part, “Then said his majesty (Thut-mose III, father of Amen-ḥotpe II) to those who were with him: ‘Let there be given to him the very best horse from the stable of my majesty which is in Memphis, and tell him: ‘Care for it, instil fear in it, make it trot, handle it if it resists you.’’ Thereafter it was intrusted to the prince to take care of the horse(s) of the stall of the king, and he did that which had been intrusted to him: Resheph and Astarte rejoiced at him because of his doing everything which his heart desired. He trained horses without their equal. They never grew tired when he took the bridle nor did they ever sweat even on a long gallop. He used to yoke them in the harness in Memphis and stop at the sanctuary of Harmachis (the sphinx). He would spend a while there and turn back, gazing at the perfection of this sanctuary of Khūfu and Khaf-Re, the revered.” Here Resheph and Astarte appear as the special patrons of the sporting prince. The second stela tells of two Syrian military expeditions of the king, in which the following passage occurs, “His majesty crossed the Orontes upon turbulent water, like Resheph, and thereupon turned back to see his rear guard.” Here the king in his crossing is likened to Resheph, the god of lightning, crossing the waves.

Although a number of small bronzes which probably represent this god have been found at many sites in Syria and Egypt, our statuette is the only known stone sculpture in the round of Resheph. As such, it presents many interesting details omitted in the bronzes. The back pilaster is curiously shaped to support the upraised right arm which holds the weapon, either a mace or an axe. The front of the base, where the name might have been inscribed, and part of the left foot are broken off. Resheph is represented as a young, vigorous warrior in a short battle dress, and his arms are modeled to give an indication of his strength. The musculature of his legs is pronounced but poorly handled. The torso is rather extreme in the emphasis of the upper part of the body, particularly the rib cage, and the waist is accordingly comparatively small. In short, the carving of the body as a whole has an archaistic general effect, which in detail proves occasionally maladroit. The face is broad, with a thick nose, the conventional strip of eye paint being indicated by incised lines. As befits a god, he wears a beard.

The headdress worn is that of the Syrian Baʾal, which is in turn derived from an Egyptian crown. Just above the forehead on the crown, a gazelle head takes the place of the uraeus, the sacred cobra which adorns the crowns of kings and divinities. The gazelle ornament is a characteristic emblem of Resheph, but it is on rare occasion worn by other gods. A stela has been found in Egypt representing a god called Keserty with the gazelle ornament, and this deity is thought to be the same as
Stela dedicated to Reshep, from Lower Egypt. Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago
Kōshar in the Canaanite poems from Ugarit, the blacksmith god later identified with Ḥephaistos by Sanchuniathon, an author quoted by Eusebius. Among secular instances of this unusual ornament are a headress in a painting from the tomb of Menena at Thebes and the fine gold circlet in our collection which was once worn by a foreign-born concubine of Thut-mosē III. Had the sculptor followed the pattern of the stelae in projecting the gazelle head from the crown, it would almost certainly have been broken, and so it has been flattened in an ingenious manner. For a like reason the spear which Reshep usually carries in his left hand is omitted, and he holds only a modest shield which does not interfere with the torso.

In Dr. John Wilson’s recent essay, The Burden of Egypt, a limestone stela of Reshep is illustrated as an example of the domestication of foreign deities in Egypt in the New Kingdom and earlier. The stela was acquired in Cairo during the nineteen twenties by the late James Henry Breasted and is now in the Oriental Institute Museum in Chicago. It has several details of interest absent from the statuette which give us additional information about the god. Since it has not been previously translated or commented upon, Dr. Pinhas Delougaz of the Oriental Institute has kindly granted me permission to publish it here.

The inscription on the right may be tentatively translated: Reshp, he who winds about, the great god; may he give to you all life and health every day. To the left we read the name of the man who dedicated the stela: for the spirit (ka) of the Priest of Horus Khenty-Ehtay, Lord of Athribis, Merer, son of Sul, justified. Horus Khenty-Ehtay was a patron god of Athribis, the tenth nome of Lower Egypt, situated just northeast of the apex of the Delta near modern Cairo. The phrase translated with some hesitation as he who winds about is rather curious and might refer to lightning or to the storm god quickly turning about to smite an enemy. Finally, the unusual element in the proper name, Sul (swl), may reflect a foreign name, although it is not written in the customary syllabic orthography. The stela is said to have come from Lower Egypt and mentions Athribis in the text, and it therefore belongs to the group of Reshep stelae in the Cairo Museum found at sites in Lower Egypt, to which the stela at University College, London, belongs and probably that in Aberdeen. Many stelae have also been found at Deir el Medineh across the river from Thebes, where the god was a patron of foreign and native artisans.

The stylistic details are also of interest. First, the pose is the same as that of the statuette, left foot forward, right hand holding a weapon aloft, left hand holding a shield, to which is now added a spear. It would seem that the statuette was copied from such a stela. The weapon this time is a scalloped axe of a type which originated in Syria. Reshep wears the thick, pointed beard which characterized foreigners, Libyans and Asiatics alike, from the Early Dynastic period onward. He is represented with the same beard on one of the London stelae and one recently acquired by the Cairo Museum, although the traditional braided beard of a god is more usual. He wears the gazelle headdress, this time with the gazelle head in profile, and in addition two streamers hanging down from near the top of the crown. Frequently the streamers are replaced in the Reshep stelae by a cord with a tassel on the end. Such tassels are also shown on the hem of the kilt, as they are here. They bring to mind the tassels worn by the Syrians and Palestinians in the temple relief at Medinet Habū and the Syrians in the tomb of Rekh-mi-Re. The kilt with tassels, the crossed bands that support it, and the collar are details also to be found in the representation of Seth on the Stela of Year Four Hundred, the monument found at Tanis wherein Seth is celebrated as a king upon the four-hundredth anniversary of the refounding of his temple there. Seth in this period had many affinities with Asiatic gods. The miscellaneous objects over the right arm of Reshep on the stela seem to include two tassels and an animal tail, perhaps the “royal” tail associated with kingship.

Reshep continued to survive as a god well into Late Dynastic times and the Ptolemaic period. He is mentioned on an altar of Nectanebo II (Nakht-Hor-Hebyet) of Dynasty
XXX, in whose reign the Metternich Stela was dedicated, and is represented on a wall of the temple of Montu at Karnak in the reign of Ptolemy III, Euergetes I. In the Graeco-Roman period Antaios is represented with several attributes of Reshep, and there are indications that it was Reshep whom he replaced at Antaiopolis. In Carthage, Palestine, and Cyprus he was identified with Apollo, and a region called the land of Reshef (eres Reshef) in a Phoenician inscription has been located in Palestine where it now bears the Arabic name Mughāret Ablūn, the Grotto of Apollo. Some miles north of Jaffa there exists the ruin known today as Arsūf, which preserves in its name the consonants of Reshef and gives an indication of the name's original pronunciation. On the Plain of Arsūf, which the ancient geographers knew as Apollonia near Caesarea, a great battle was fought on September 7, 1191 between the Saracens under Saladin and the Crusaders under Richard Coeur de Lion, and this place name is now the only living reminder of the once powerful Canaanite god whose influence extended from the Plain of Adana in Asia Minor to es Sebūt in Nubia below the Tropic of Cancer. The statuette has traces of gold on the face and crown, as well as specks of green which may indicate the original presence of copper. The height is 11 1/2 inches. For a typical Syrian bronze statuette covered with gold sheath see acc. no. 32.161.45 in the Ancient Near Eastern galleries. There have been many excellent studies of Reshep, particularly Les débuts du culte de Rechef en Égypte by Grdseloff and a series of articles in the Annales by Leibovitch. Articles of major interest are those by Wijngaarden, Boreux, Vincent, Przeworski, and Golénischeff. For another stela, recently published by Janssen, see Chronique d'Égypte, no. 50 (1950). The Phoenician quotation is from J. Obermann, “New Discoveries at Karatepe” in the Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, vol. 38. The vocalization of the name of the god as Rashāp by Albright (AOF, VII, p. 167, n. 20) is not followed in view of the Carthaginian and Arabic writing with initial aleph and the Egyptian “spelling” rshp discussed by Grdseloff. Hence the name is here read on the pattern of Anūf, Eshmūn, not Haddā. The familiar form Reshep is used in the article instead of the more correct Ershūp.

Amulets from the palace of Amen-ḥotpe III. The fish amulet at the upper right is inscribed on the underside with the name Reshpu. From the Museum’s excavations at Thebes