

Ptah-Pataikos, Harpokrates, and Khepri

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After having completed my *Habilitationsschrift* on the god Khepri (Minas-Nerpel 2006), which John Baines examined as an external reader, I came across a small figurine related to this subject. I therefore dedicate this short essay to John in order to express my gratitude for many years of generous support and advice.

The object discussed here (Figs. 1–3) is an unpublished steatite figurine that is now housed in the Egyptian Museum Bonn (Inv. no. L 157). No further information on the find circumstances or provenance is available. The *pataikos*, which probably dates to the Late Period, is 7.5 cm high, 2.8 cm wide, and 2.3 cm deep. The naked male dwarf figure has a round, oversized head on which he wears an angular skullcap, the typical headgear of the cosmic creator god Ptah. His ears are large, the eyes protruding, the eyebrows pronounced and thick, the nose is wide and flat. The neck

of the juvenile dwarf is short and stocky, his slightly bent arms are placed beside his potbelly, and he strangles two snakes with his clenched fists. The snakes' heads are placed on the dwarf's fleshy thighs while their bodies, marked with a chequered pattern, are laid over his chest and shoulders to the middle of his back. His bandy legs are short, although their feet are now missing. Otherwise, the *pataikos* is well-preserved and equipped with three conspicuous elements: a large, three-dimensional scarab on top of his head, 2.1 cm long, and two falcons, one perching on each shoulder, with their beaks facing away from the dwarf's head and their talons firmly fixed on the snakes. The amulet could be worn around the neck with a cord fixed to the elaborate suspension ring at the middle of the figure's back between the snakes' tails, or, less likely, through the void running between the legs of the scarab. The



Figs. 1–3 Pataikos in the Egyptian Museum Bonn (Inv. no. L 157). Photograph by the author.

pataikos could also have been sewn onto a mummy, rather than hung, hence perhaps the second option.

Dwarfs and dwarf gods seem to have had a special affinity with solar deities, Ptah, and bulls, as Baines (1992) established in his article on the dwarf Djeho (see also Dasen 1993: 89, 91–97, 150–53). Djeho, buried in the 30th dynasty with his master Tjaiharpta at Saqqara, was especially qualified by his physical abnormality to perform cult dances for the burials of the Apis and Mnevis bulls that are the living manifestations of Ptah and Re-Atum.

Along with the dwarf god Bes, Ptah-Pataikos is commonly attested in Egypt by the late New Kingdom (for an overview see Dasen 1993: 84–98). The term *pataikos* was first used by Herodotus to describe images of the god Ptah (according to the *interpretatio Graeca* he is called Hephaestus) in the form of a dwarf:

He (Cambyses) abode at Memphis ... Thus too he entered the temple of Hephaestus and made much mockery of the image there. This image of Hephaestus is most like to the Phoenician Pataici, which the Phoenicians carry on the prows of their triremes. I will describe it for him who has not seen these figures: it is the likeness of a dwarf [pygmy]. Also he entered the temple of the Cabeiri, into which none may enter save the priest; the images there he even burnt, with bitter mockery. These are also like the images of Hephaestus, and are said to be his sons (Herodotus *Hist.* III. 37; translation Godley 1921: 51).

In contrast to the hybrid dwarf god Bes, no Egyptian text mentions Ptah-Pataikos, and the etymology of the word *pataikos* is unclear, but is sometimes regarded as a Greek diminutive form of the Egyptian god Ptah (Dasen 2008; Morenz 1954). A Ptah-Pataikos describes an achondroplastic dwarf, fully anthropomorphic, usually naked and often childlike, mass-produced male amuletic figurine with various attributes, of which the scarab is the most common one.

The scarab emphasizes the *pataikos*' aspects as a creator and solar deity (Györy 2004: 66–67; Dasen 1993: 48–50; 2000: 91). Inscriptions on several *pataikoi* confirm the solar aspect of these figurines, often crowned with a scarab (Koenig 1992; Dasen 1993: 94–95). The connection of Khepri and Ptah in Memphis can be further established by an uninscribed royal bust of Merenptah or Ramesses II, now in the Egyptian Museum Cairo (CG 38104: 84.4 cm high; Minas-Nerpel 2006: 401–2, figs. 162–63). It is crowned by a three-dimensional scarab on top of the royal *nemes*, very much like a *pataikos* but on a larger scale. The king, it seems, is depicted as the living Khepri on earth, and this bust had not only been found in Memphis, but in the temple of Ptah of all places. Without providing further details, Jacques de Morgan (1894: 51, no. 156) even described the relationship between the scarab

and the god with the following words: 'le scarabée était consacré à Ptah.' Gaston Maspero (1900: 17, pl. 20) suggested that a head of Ramses VI, allegedly from Coptos and now in the Egyptian Museum Cairo (JdE 27535: 19 cm high; Minas-Nerpel 2006: 402–3, figs. 164–65; 419), and which is also crowned by a three-dimensional scarab albeit this time with a sun-disc on top of it, should be identified with Ptah-Khepri.

De Morgan and Maspero may have had in mind the relationship between Ptah-Pataikos and the scarab, but the connection of Ptah and Khepri also seems to be emphasized in a sun hymn to Amun dating to the reign of Amenhotep III, which is attested on the stela of the twin brothers Suty and Hor, now in the British Museum (EA 826; *Urk.* IV, 1943–49, no. 732; Fecht 1967: 25–50; Assmann 1999: no. 98; Minas-Nerpel 2006: 294, 419, n. 1150): after Ra and Khepri are invoked in the first *epiclesis*, the sun god is identified with Ptah (Schlögl 1980: 77; Assmann 1999: no. 89, V. 4–10). It is not surprising to find this connection in a monument which according to Baines (1998: 282) attests to the fact that 'the contrast between traditional and new modes of ... understanding the sun god was not very sharp and that different tendencies ... were not seen as mutually exclusive. This perception ... could relate to ... a more explicit pluralism, that is to the acceptance of different, closely focused approaches.'

The pair of falcons perching on the *pataikos*' shoulders has been discussed by Hedvig Györy (2003). According to her, the birds are not found in the New Kingdom complex *pataikos* compositions, but were introduced during the Third Intermediate Period (Györy 2003: 21). She connects the two hawks with the Horus *cippi*, thus drawing the *pataikoi* into the circle of the child-god *par excellence* (Györy 2003: 22, 26). She also considers several other interpretations, for example the Heliopolitan idea of the 'double Horus' (Györy 2003: 26) or, in an explanation better associated with Memphis (Györy 2003: 23), a connection with Nefertem and Sakhmet. The association with the Horus *cippi* leads to further links between Ptah-Pataikoi and Harpokrates, which are not obvious in the case of the dwarf figure in Bonn, since his feet – and every possible element once below them – are missing.

In all likelihood, the feet of the *pataikos* in Bonn can be reconstructed as standing on two crocodiles, similar to a worn *pataikos* in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest (Inv. no. 51.2332; 7.26 cm high, 3.27 cm wide, 2.18 cm deep; Györy 2003: 12–15) that dates to the Late Period (Fig. 4). The dwarf figure also holds two snakes in his hands, and there are also two falcons perching on his shoulders. The scarab on top of his head is not three-dimensional, but directly carved into it. In contrast to the *pataikos* in Bonn, the Budapest example has a kind of

pataikos' sides, thus linking him even further with the infant Horus. As a result, Sylvia Schoske and Dietrich Wildung (1992: 182–83) go so far as to call these figures not dwarfs or *pataikoi*, but infants, and identify them with the juvenile Horus. The face of the *pataikos* in Bonn looks indeed very childlike, but from his proportions he is also like a dwarf, and he is linked at the same time with Ptah. Therefore, the traditional term Ptah-Pataikos does not seem inappropriate, although one should be aware of the numerous influences contained in such small, but complex, figures.

Whether the Ptah-Pataikos amulets were directly or indirectly linked with Harpokrates they demonstrate, as do the Horus *cippi*, that the original precedent of Isis (and Nephthys) protecting Horus is thus transferred from the divine to the human world. Amulets in the form of Harpokrates and Ptah-Pataikos were intended to shield and heal human beings. As well as being linked to Harpokrates, the Ptah-Pataikos figures also relate to Ptah in his role as a creator god by the solar and regenerative symbol of a scarab, representing Khepri's qualities. The scarab could also stand for the heavenly sphere and the crocodiles for the terrestrial one, which are both connected by the figure of the creator god Ptah.

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