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Karnak: excavation yields 38 artifacts

The *Centre franco-égyptien d'étude des temples de Karnak* (CNRS / Egyptian Ministry of State for Antiquities) has just completed the excavation of a *favissa*, a pit discovered in early December 2014 near the temple of the god Ptah. The dig has unearthed 38 statues, statuettes and precious objects, making this an exceptional find, both for the quantity and quality of the religious artifacts brought to light. Furthermore, a completely new recording method was used during the dig that makes it possible to virtually reconstruct each step of the discovery with millimeter accuracy.

The *Centre franco-égyptien d'étude des temples de Karnak* (French-Egyptian Center for the Study of the Temples of Karnak - Cfeetk) was founded by the CNRS and the Egyptian Ministry for Antiquities to study and restore the Amun-Re precinct at Karnak (Luxor). Since October 2008, an interdisciplinary program has been dedicated to the temple of Ptah, located at the northern end of the temple of Amun-Re. Built during the reign of Thutmose III (c.1479 – c.1424 BC), the temple of Ptah was restored, enlarged and adapted throughout the period before the reign of Emperor Tiberius (14-37 AD). It is dedicated to the god Ptah, a divinity associated with the Egyptian town of Memphis.

The program has entered its second phase¹, which focuses on archaeology, and the excavations recently uncovered a *favissa* (repository pit for cultic objects) two meters behind the temple. Here, Cfeetk archaeologists found 38 statues, statuettes and precious objects made of limestone, greywacke², copper alloy and Egyptian frit³, sometimes covered in gold. These religious objects had been placed around the lower part of a seated statue of the god Ptah. The find notably included:

- 14 statues, statuettes and figurines of Osiris,
- 3 statuettes of baboons,
- 2 statuettes representing the goddess Mut, including one covered in hieroglyphics,
- 1 head and fragments of a cat statuette (Bastet),
- 2 unidentified statuette bases,
- 1 small plaque and the upper part of a small stele marked with the name of the god Ptah,
- Several inlays (iris, cornea, beards, headdresses, etc.)

¹ Supported by Labex Archimède as part of the IA-ANR-11-LABX-0032-01 program. (<http://archimede.cnrs.fr/>)

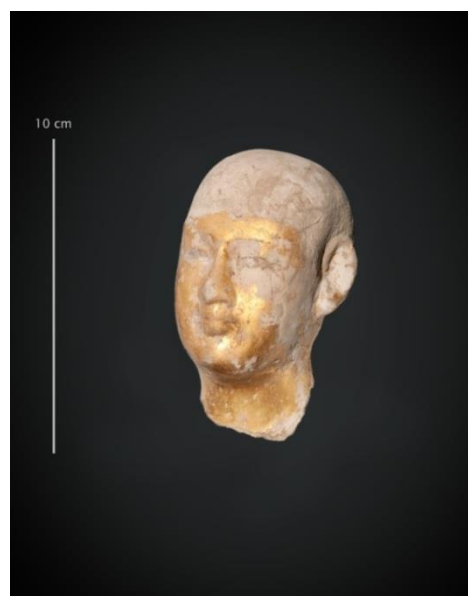
² Very hard sedimentary rock of a green-grey color, found in the eastern Egyptian desert and often used for statues in Ancient Egypt.

³ Enameling and modeling technique similar to pottery, used to make amulets and small statuettes, generally blue or blue-green in color.

A sphinx statue and a small statue head probably representing the god Imhotep were also discovered in the upper part of the pit and fragments of a stele were found at the edge. According to the ceramic material found in the pit and the epigraphic⁴ data, this collection of statues dates back to the 8th-7th century BC, which marked the beginning of the 25th Egyptian dynasty.

This discovery is exceptional in Egypt in terms of both size and quality. Another aspect that makes it special is the recording method used during the dig. The excavation of the objects was recorded by a topographer specialized in archaeology who made a series of photogrammetric reconstructions by high-density image correlation, from the discovery of the first object until the complete removal of the statues from the pit. This technique consists in compiling hundreds of photographs taken during the fieldwork to make a virtual 3-D reconstruction of each step of the excavation. By linking these photogrammetric reconstructions with very precise topographical reference points – to within a few millimeters – this method makes it possible to locate all the objects after they have been removed and study their layout in detail. It also enabled the scientists to assemble a video of the whole removal operation, which needed to be completed rapidly due to the objects' value, while preserving the data collected on the site as it was discovered.

All the artifacts brought to light are being restored in the Cfeetk laboratory. The excavation is ongoing and could shed light on the organization of the surroundings of the Temple of Ptah - as well as explain the digging of this outstanding *favissa*.



Left: statuette and figurine of Osiris; Right: small statue head, probably of the god Imhotep
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⁴ Epigraphy: study of inscriptions on stone, clay and metal



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3-D video reconstruction of the discovery of a bronze statue of Osiris in the *favissa*:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OhmodqNwdg

3-D video of a statue of Osiris in greywacke:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0MA1WnFkpg

3-D video reconstruction of the discovery of the sphinx:

<http://www.cfeetk.cnrs.fr/index.php?page=sphinx-decouvert-au-temple-de-ptah>

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