Pataikos

I. Introduction. Egyptian dwarf god.

The term P. is first used by Herodotus (Historiae 3.37) to describe representations of the god →Ptah in the form of a dwarf equated with Hephastios. These figures were viewed by the Persian king Cambyses (528–523) in the temple of Hephastios at Memphis. Cambyses compared them with “the Phoenicians” Pataikoi, which the Phoenicians carry on the prows of their triremes.” Herodotus also relates them to the Greek Kabeiros: “He (Cambyses) entered the temple of the Kabeiros, into which none may enter save the priest; the images here he even burnt, with bitter mockery. These also are like the images of Hephastios, and are said to be his sons.” The word P. is unknown in Egyptian and its etymology is unclear. It may be regarded as a Greek diminutive form of the Egyptian Ptah. Egyptologists usually follow Herodotus’s example and name the dwarf figures “Pataikoi” or “Ptah–Pataikoi” in order to distinguish them from the normal–statured form of Ptah.

While the hybrid dwarf god →Bes was involved in several myths, no Egyptian text mentions P. They do not seem to have been part of a specific myth or official texts and iconography. Anonymous dwarf gods invoked in magical spells may be identified with them, but none is explicitly assimilated to Ptah. The essential source of information for the nature and function of the P. is their iconography. It remains unclear whether they depict various forms of one and the same god, or a group of dwarf gods, as with Bes.

II. Typology

II.1. Phenotypes


B. HYBRID 1. ANIMAL–HEADED (44–47) 2. JANIFORM (31) 3. SCARAB–BEETLE (48) 4. POSSIBLE

A. ANTHROPOMORPHIC

1. SINGLE–HEADED

1.1. Without attributes. P. represent an achondroplastic dwarf with a long trunk and an oversized head, standing on bandy legs. The figure is usually male with small genitals. In the simplest form (1*) he is naked with a shaven or bald head, his arms hanging down along his sides with closed fists. He has a youthful appearance, which may be stressed by fetus–like features. The features of small, mass–produced amuletic figurines are very stylized (2*; HERRMANN 1994: nos. 561–564, 566–570), especially in miniature amuletic form (3–4; HERRMANN 1994: nos. 490–560, 669–661, 653–657).

1.2. With attributes

1.2.1. Sscarab–beetle, collar, knives. The most common attribute of P. is the →scarab–beetle Khepri, symbol of creation and regeneration, placed on top of his head (5–6; HERRMANN 1994: nos. 615–617, 619–623). Often the dwarf also wears a broad collar and holds before his chest two knives (7–8; HERRMANN 1994: nos. 624–631). Occasionally he is winged (9–10, 11[?]; HERRMANN 1994: nos. 639–642). He usually has a childish appearance, sometimes with a lock of youth (12), but may also appear as an adult with a wrinkled forehead and even a beard (13). This set of attributes may be combined with other attributes, which identify P. with different deities as discussed below.

1.2.2. Skullcap, crown of Ptah Tatenen. The skullcap, traditional headgear of →Ptah (14–16), associates P. with Ptah as a cosmic creator god. Some figurines wear the crown combining two plumes and a sun disc on ram’s horns, which characterizes Ptah–Tatenen (17). Inscribed figurines confirm that P. could be viewed as manifestations of Ptah. They name the dwarf “Ptah” as: “Ptah giver of life” (18–21), “Ptah–Sokar” (22), or “Ptah, the killer of serpents” (23) (for a painted miniature sarcophagus from the Ptolemaic period with the inscription “Ptah who listens, the dwarf” cf. QUAEGERBEUR/CLARYSSE/VAN MAELE 1985: 28, fig. 1 = DASEN 1993: fig. 7:1). In 23 the figure is engraved on a Horus cippus standing like Ptah on a podium with steps.

1.2.3 Sidelock of youth, with crocodiles, serpents, falcons. P. were also equated with →Horus in his form as young sun god (→Harpocrates). The similar physical proportions of children and dwarfs probably influenced this assimilation. Like Horus, amuletic P. may have a plaited sidelock of youth (12, 24). Yet P. are never shown putting a finger to their mouths, a gesture which was perhaps reserved for “real” children. They trample on →crocodiles and often bites two →serpents, which frame his mouth like a moustache (25*–28).

On miniature cippi the dwarf god substitutes for Horus. The original scheme is slightly modified. Like the divine child, the P. stands on crocodiles and is flanked by →Isis and Nephthys (29*). Unlike Horus who grasps different harmful animals, such
as serpents, →scorpions, →lions, and oryces, the P. hold knives or serpents. P. may also bite serpents, which Horus never does, possibly because that act was reserved for demonic beings. The falcons, otherwise perched on papyrus stalks, now stand on his shoulders (29*), on top of the goddesses' headaddresses, or beside him (18). The back of the latter rare Late Period variant depicts a sema taouy sign between two kneeling fecundity figures.

1.2.4. Moon disc. P. may be crowned with the moon disc in the crescent shape of the new moon (30–31). These seem to merge with youthful →Khonsu, who is normally clothed in a tightly fitting garment.

1.2.5. Crown of Amun-Re, solar symbols. P. may wear a crown made of two high plumes with a sun disc that characterizes →Amun-Re (32), sometimes placed on a modius (33). Specific solar symbols occur on a few figurines, such as the cobra (→Serpent) running along the back of an amulet in Cairo (34), or the →lions surrounding a statuette in the Louvre (35). Solar associations are stressed by inscriptions on the base or the back pillar of the figurines. Most of them refer to aspects of the sun god or evoke sun travel. Some depict the sun god in his three forms: as the →scarab Khepri of the morning, the shining disc of midday, and the bent old man of the evening (KÖNIG 1992; DASEN 1993: fig. 7:3).

1.2.6. Atef crown. P. with the atef crown (36*–39) were probably assimilated to →Osiris, equated with the nightly rejuvenated →Re. A →scarab–beetle may stand in place of the sun disc (36*). Since Ramses-side times a similar crown is occasionally worn by →Ptah (SANDMAN–HOLMBERG 1946: 16, fig. 18; BERLANDINI 1995: 39).

1.2.7. Phallus, flagellum, low crown with plumes. A few drawings depict dwarfs with the low crown with plumes, the flagellum, and erect phallus of →Min as in spell 164 of the Book of the Dead (DASEN 1993: fig. 7:4), which describes their protective function. They are invoked with the goddesses →Sekhmet–Bastet and Mut to protect the deceased, whose body may perish. This funerary aspect of P. may explain his protective presence on a miniature wooden sarcophagus (16).

1.2.8. Lotus flower. A female bone figurine crowned with a lotus flower may be a female doublet of P. This pairing is found with many Egyptian gods, especially in the Late Period (40).

2. MULTIPLE-HEADED. Some figurines, with or without attributes, are two–(41*), three– (42), or four–headed (43), probably to increase the apotropaic power of the god.

3. POSSIBLE

3.1. P. rarely occur in non-amuletic forms. Only a group of New Kingdom miniature faience plaques may have been used as inlay ornaments for jewelry or furniture. They depict naked dwarfs seen in profile, their arms hanging down alongside their body, the feet set apart. Their lack of attributes makes identification with P. uncertain (HERRMANN 1985: nos. 131–134).

3.2. The dwarf god may be identified in a few papyri and monuments. In a 21st dyn. mythological papyrus, a dwarf figure stands in the solar disc (DASEN 1993: 49f., fig. 5:1). He substitutes for the →scarab–beetle Khepri as a morning form of →Re, recalling the function of P. as manifestations of youthful solar gods (→Solar deities).

3.3. On a 22nd dyn. stela from Sais, a dwarf stands behind the goddess →Neith who faces the king (DASEN 1993: pl. 3:1). He has no attributes (scarab or serpents), but like anonymous dwarf gods in general, P. are associated with Neith in magical spells.

3.4. Female forms of P. may be identified with Middle Kingdom statuettes of dwarfs (cf. § IV) as in the later unusual bone figurine, crowned with a lotus flower (40).

3.5. The identity of very stylized amuletic dwarfs is debatable (HERRMANN 1994: nos. 681–708). They may not allow a clear distinction between →Bes and P., if one assumes that the characteristic attributes of Bes may be missing (feather headdress, mane, protruding tongue, animal tail).

B. HYBRID

1. ANIMAL-HEADED. A hybrid type depicts a P. standing with clenched fists and conventional attributes (→scarab–beetle, atef or →Amun’s crown), but with an animal head (→falcon, →ram, baboon [→monkey]) and a falcon’s or →crocodile’s back (44–46). Ram heads are usually turned backward (45*). This figure could represent the day and night aspects of the sun god (→Solar deities): the dwarf’s body may refer to its morning form, the ram’s head to its evening form (PIANKOFF 1935). Baboon–headed dwarfs probably represent →Thoth (46–47). Falcon–headed P. (44) may have fused with Sokar (→Osiris), a funerary god sometimes identified with the rising sun, traditionally depicted in human form with a falcon’s head.

2. JANIFORM. Janiform P. may combine the dwarf’s head with that of an ani-
mal, usually a falcon or a ram, joined back to back (31).

3. Scarab–beetle. The iconography of the scarab–beetle Khepri may fuse with that of P. A faience figurine from Sardinia depicts a P. with a potbellied trunk evoking the carapace of a scarab (48). The blending is more frequent in depictions of anonymous dwarf gods, possibly P. (cf. below § 4.1).

4. Possible


4.2. Bronze pantheistic statuettes offer combinations of human and animal elements (→ dog, → falcon, → ram). Apart from a dwarfish body, they do not have the head or the distinctive set of attributes of P. or of → Bes, and the identity of the dwarf is unclear (ROEDER 1956: 100–104, figs. 128–136).

II.2. Associations


1. Associated with deities/demons 1.1. Maat. → Maat often appears on the back pillar of P. She is winged, crowned with an ostrich feather, and holds two tall feathers (8).

1.2. Isis (Hathor)/Nephthys. A winged goddess with a → sun disc and cow’s horns, probably → Isis (or → Hathor), is also found on the back pillar, sometimes holding two similar feathers (21, 11).

A large series of amulets reproduce a scene derived from “Horus on the crocodiles” cippi. Isis and Nephthys stand around (29*) or on the sides of the god (cf. ANDREWS 1994: figs. 34–35). An inscription under the base of a P. in the Louvre stresses the protective function of the amulet. It evokes the “words, which Isis must pronounce,” most likely a magical spell to guard children from danger (KÖNIG 1992: 128).

1.3. Sekhmet. The back of P. may be carved with the lioness–headed → Sekhmet (36*). → Ptah’s companion, winged like → Maat or → Isis but crowned with the sun disc. An inscription on the base of a figurine from Lachisch evokes the divine pair: “Ptah (and) Sekhmet, the Lady of Heaven” (9).

1.4. Nefertem. The child god → Nefertem with a lotus flower on top of his head is sometimes carved on the back of a P. (6).

1.5. Bes. A few amulets place back–to–back depictions of a P. with the atef crown, and of → Bes, with his typical tall–feather crown (39).

2. Association with animals

2.1. Scarab. As the most common attribute, the → scarab is placed on his head (5; HERRMANN 1994: nos. 615–617, 619–623). It may also replace the sun disc of the atef crown (36*).

2.2. Crocodile. Amuletic P. is sometimes depicted as trampling on → crocodiles (25–26). On miniature cippi (29*) he stands on the crocodiles like → Horus.


2.4. Falcon. In some cases a → falcon may stand on the shoulders of P. (29*) or beside them (18).

2.5. Lion. Occasionally two → lions stand beside P. on miniature cippi (35).

III. Sources

III.1. Chronological range. P. appears by the late New Kingdom in Egypt. Earlier forms of the god may be identified in predynastic figurines of dwarfs (DASEN 1993: pl. 27:1–2). A precise dating of amuletic P. is still difficult. Most objects in museum collections have no provenance, and very few excavation reports provide accurately dated contexts. Types of faience and glaze (blue or green, dark or light) varied in the course of time, but their attribution to specific periods is not yet clearly established. However, some major stages in the development of the god’s iconography can be discerned. The production of P. flourished in the Third Intermediate Period (1075–656). The figurines are usually made of dark blue faience and depict dwarfs standing with no attributes or with broad collars, crowned with → scarabs, biting → serpents, and holding knives (26, 36*).

The headresses are varied. Like → Bes, P. may have wings (9–10). Representations borrowed from → Horus stelae of “Horus on crocodiles” (25*) seem to appear in the Third Intermediate Period. Hybrid dwarfs with animal elements (44–47) are characteristic of the Late Period. Cruder stylized depictions date to the Late Period (4; HERRMANN 1994: nos. 649–651, 653–657) and Graeco–Roman Period, but more complex forms of P. were still produced (CLERC et al. 1976: Kit. 772, pl. 10; 600–450).

IDD website: http://www.religionswissenschaft.unizh.ch/idd
III.2. Geographical distribution. Outside Egypt P. are the most frequently found Egyptian gods. In the Bronze Age, amuletic P. were widely exported in the Phoenician world, later throughout the entire Mediterranean basin. In Palestine/Israel, P. are testifies since the Late Bronze Age II B and are the second-most commonly found Egyptian amulet after the Udจา—at-eye (Herrmann 1994: 405, nos. 489–506, 561–564, 571–572; ARAV/BERNET 1997: 212; DABROWSKI 2000: 217f). In mainland Greece and islands (Rhodos, Lindos: Blinkenberg 1931; Camiros: JACOP 1932–1933) they are often found associated with Memphite deities (Sekhmet, Nefertem) in tombs and sanctuaries, as in Cyprus (CLERC et al. 1976: 117f, pl. 10), Sardinia (HÖLB 1986: 109–114), Malta, Gozo (HÖLB 1989: 50–53), Italy, and more specifically Etruria (HÖLB 1979: 101–103, 112–118). At the end of the 7th cent. East Greek workshops created a Hellenized form of P. depicting a plump dwarf holding his hands over a paunchy belly, often with a child seated on his shoulder (CAUBET 1969; SNN 1983; DASEN 1993: 200–204, pls. 77–80; KARAGEORGHIS 1996: 14; DASEN 2000).

III.3. Object types. Although P. may be freestanding on a rectangular base (30), in general they are found as amuletic figurines (1–10 cm in height) with a loop on the neck or back (41*, 45*), or with a back pillar pierced at neck level (8, 10). A few bronze examples seem to have been fitted onto a stand or staff with a tenon (ROEDER 1956). Most figurines are made of faience, some of steatite, ivory, or semiprecious stones, especially carnelian. Only a few are made of wood or bronze (PETRIE 1914: 38 no. 176).

On miniature variants of magical stelae, so-called Horus cippi, P. substitute for the Horus—the—child —Harpocrates (29*). Like this deity they stand on crocodiles, stran- gling serpents, and are flanked by Isis and Nephys.

For rare nonamuletic representations of P. on papyri cf. § II.1.A.3.1–2.

IV. Conclusion. Three views commonly explain the emergence of amuletic P. The first relates P. to the notion of dwarfs as protectors against serpents and harmful animals, documented as far back as the Middle Kingdom (SANDMAN–HOLMBERG 1946). The second view assumes that dwarfs had an early privileged relationship with Ptah, the patron of craftsmen (MON- TET 1952; MONTET 1952a). A third hypothesis regards P. as a Late Period creation influenced by the introduction of Phoenician gods (MORENZ 1954). These hypotheses omit significant aspects of the symbolism of dwarfs such as their solar affinities, which are expressed repeatedly in magical iconography and iconography throughout the dynastic period.

Several iconographic elements also indicate links of P. with the liminal world of demons. The disquieting genii guarding the doors of the underworld may combine a dwarfish body with an animal head, bite serpents, and hold small or large knives. They may represent other forerunners of P. or parallel forms (DASEN 1993: 90f, fig. 7.2, pl. 8.1). This demonic connection may explain the multiplicity of P. who do not seem to have been regarded as independent deities but as manifestations of greater gods, Ptah and Am as creator gods, Horus and Khonsu as youthful gods, Min as a fertility god, and Sokar and Osiris as forms of the nocturnal sun god.

Middle Kingdom female (and male) dwarf figurines strikingly resemble New Kingdom P. (squat proportions, flat—topped heads). Mainly found in tombs of children and women, the statuettes seem to be connected with fertility, possibly as magical charms (DASEN 1993: pls. 32–33). Stands from the Middle Kingdom in the shape of dwarfs have similar associations with protective powers. The combination of attributes—dwarfish proportions, pregnant appearance, and charming of serpents—suggests that the figure served as an apotropaic figure for the protection of family life (RAVEN 1987; DASEN 1993: pl. 34:1).

Because of their ambiguous physical appearance, infantile and mature P. were connected with solar and rejuvenating symbolism. They were regarded as a solar harmoni- stasis, embodying the morning form of the sun god, newly born and old at the same time. Their association with the continuing process of creation may have motivated their identification with Ptah in his capacity as a creator god, and similarly with Horus, Khonsu, Osiris, and other youthful and regenerative gods.

The protection offered by P. seems to have concerned both the living and the dead. Found in houses (DABROWSKI 2000: 215–220), they guarded the family against unpredictable negative forces, especially pregnant women and small children. In- scriptions and magical signs, such as the udจา—at-eye of Horus, were carved under their plinths to ensure health and fertility (Koenig 1992). P. could be worn around the neck as helpers during childbirth, like the faience dwarfs prescribed in magical spells. Miniature models of Horus cippi
were perhaps set up in houses or in gardens to chase away dangerous animals and malevolent influences. Often discovered in burials, P. also had a strong symbolism of regeneration in the afterlife. Figurines kept in temples may have been votive offerings (CONTENAU 1926: fig. 56). The back pillar of an amulet in Cairo has a standard New Year’s wish (DARESSY 1905–1910: 202, no. 38810).

V. Catalogue


VI. Selected bibliography


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