Egypt Exploration Society

An Alabaster Sistrum Dedicated by King Teta

Author(s): N. de Garis Davies

Source: *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Apr., 1920), pp. 69-72

Published by: [Egypt Exploration Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3853608>

Accessed: 19-12-2015 19:40 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Egypt Exploration Society is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

AN ALABASTER SISTRUM DEDICATED BY KING TETA

BY N. DE GARIS DAVIES, M.A.

THE interesting piece of temple furniture pictured on Plate VIII has recently been added by purchase to the collection of the Earl of Carnarvon, through whose courtesy and very real interest in our science I am permitted to publish it here.

The main part of the little instrument, the height of which over all is just ten and a half inches, is cut from a single piece of alabaster. The stone is not of the best quality, for a flaw at the junction of the handle with the superstructure has caused it to snap at this point. The merit of the work corresponds, as is often the case, to the value of the material, and is not free from a certain clumsiness.

Instead of the Hathor head, which in sistra of later date than this surmounts the handle, we have here an outspreading head of papyrus set on a stem, or rather on several stems bound into a solid round rod under the head and at the end of the stalks, the whole having the appearance of a single umbel¹. A slightly drooping curve is given to the edge of the flower and not the exaggerated curl employed on the handles of some mirrors and in the decorative panels of false doors. To suit the superstructure the flower is lenticular, not circular, in shape. Since the head of Hathor is absent, her connection with the sistrum has to be shown in other wise, and this is done by placing on the flower the device

which forms a kind of rebus on the name of the goddess. Only here the house is replaced by a shrine and the falcon is set above, not in, it. He tramples on (or is protected by?) a cobra, whose head with swollen hood is erect before him, as is often the case when the bird stands on the framed Horus-name of the King. The plumage of the falcon is indicated in the usual decorative way with overlapping feathering on the shoulders, then the long plumes and finally the wing-tips crossed forkwise over the tail.

The little naos is open from side to side to admit of the two wires carrying jingling discs of metal which to barbaric tastes made the sistrum a pleasing accompaniment of song; these fittings have been lost, but the double pair of holes drilled in the walls and a slight abrasion on the outside indicates that it was once really provided with them. From the marks left, they appear to have ended outside in bent heads simply and were not formed like a as they more generally are². As the little box is barely an inch and a quarter square by half an inch deep, the sound produced can scarcely have been audible, for the discs cannot have been more than three-eighths of an inch in diameter without overlapping, or half an inch if percussion with those of the next rod was the means employed. The sistrum before us is, however, rather a dainty replica than a serious instrument, I should think.

¹ Three separate stems are shown in the wand, BLACKMAN, *Meir*, Vol. I, p. 3; Vol. II, Pl. XI; they are united at the base, where sheathing is shown. This unique wand is therefore a sistrum. The papyrus handle perhaps reappears later, see LEPS., *Denkm.*, Pt. III, Pls. 175, c, 186.

² It appears as if there was more in this serpent-shape than a happy decorative fancy, and that it carried on the tradition of the uraeus seen in front of Horus here; for where the wand is a mere emblem the uraeus, 'the close friend of Horus,' is often seen occupying the interior or flanking its walls (cf. CAULFIELD, *Temple of the Kings*, Pl. XV).

Emery Walker ph. sc.

SISTRUM OF KING TETI (SIXTH DYNASTY)

IN THE COLLECTION OF THE EARL OF CARNARVON

In its present state only one side of the box—that to the left of the falcon—is closed, but the thin sheet of alabaster which forms this wall is a separate piece; for it would have been difficult to hollow the block out accurately, even apart from flaws. The tiny slab is the full breadth of the naos, and is stuck on to the sides under the roll of the cornice, its lower edge being let into a slight groove cut in the top of the flower. The attachment with cement is apparently modern and the slab might conceivably belong to the other face. A similar groove is cut on that side also, but I am not quite satisfied that this is original. One would have expected at least one side to be open, if the jingling of the metal was to be heard¹. The genuineness of the extant slab seems certified by the inscription it carries, since it provides us for the first time with the full titulary of King Teta: “*Horus ‘He-who-brings-peace-to-the-two-lands’; the tutelary divinity of both Egypts ‘He-who-brings-peace’; Horus, conqueror of Nubt, ‘He-who-unites’ (s3m); the King of Upper and of Lower Egypt ‘The son of the Sun, Teta,’ to whom life and happiness are given eternally.*” This corresponds perfectly to the peculiarities of the age by combining prenomen and cognomen in one and by closely assimilating the *Nebti* and Horus names. The front of the handle, *i.e.* the side to which the falcon faces, also bears a vertical inscription, incised and picked out in blue, which suggests that this sistrum was presented by the King to Hathor of Denderah: “*The King of Upper and Lower Egypt, beloved of Hathor, lady of Denderah, to whom life is given eternally.*” The inscription is bordered on both sides by the sceptre. This dedication at Denderah is quite in keeping with the special prosperity of the town under the kings of the Sixth Dynasty.

The sistrum was almost exclusively carried by women (except when kings make presentation to Hathor), often in pairs. In form it was a reminder of the name and nature of the goddess and so gained its cult efficacy. Touched by the devout or received into their hands, the temple instrument brought heightened life. Its use as a musical instrument followed the natural association of the goddess of joy with the dance and merry-making, and the sistrum is a clever adaptation of the wand to this employment, not an adornment of a musical instrument with reminiscences of the goddess. Here we find that this stage was already reached before the Sixth Dynasty. The ancient device of the head of the ox-god or cow-goddess which is incorporated in the Middle-Kingdom sistrum, is seen in the Cairo palette of Narmer; GRIFFITH, *Beni Hasan*, Vol. III, No. 81; LACAU, *Sarcophages*, Pl. XXXIV, Nos. 84, 85; LEGRAIN, *Statues*, Vol. II, p. 31; DAVIES, *Deir el Gebrâwi*, Vol. I, Pl. III. It looks as if the stout horns had been combined with the cord by which the symbol was hung round the neck of devotees to form the slender antennae between which the later naos is set, and which may also have given the impulse to the looped form of the sistrum. The neck-tie of the symbol may be taken from the ribbon which was often put round the neck of cattle specially selected for exhibition or sacrifice.

Dr Gardiner (*Notes on Senuhe*, pp. 101—3) has given strong reasons for assigning the name *sekhem* to the looped sistrum, the term *seshesht* (also *šš*, and even *ššš*, a plainly onomatopoeic word) to the naos-sistrum. Yet this, though strongly evidenced for Ramesside and later dates, and having textual support in earlier times, is directly contradicted by the

¹ In Blackman's *Meir*, Vol. I, Pl. II, the arm of the man is seen through the naos, *i.e.* it is openwork. No rattle is there shown. It is strange that *irt ššš* “*playing the sistrum*” is used of sistra without any apparent metal fittings (WILKINSON, *Manners and Customs* (ed. BIRCH), Vol. III, p. 422; LEPS., *Denkm.*, Pt. III, Pl. 189).

tomb-scenes at Thebes in the Eighteenth Dynasty. The texts indeed seem to point to three objects sacred to Hathor and thence transferred to the cult of Amūn, the *menat*, the *sekhem* (?) wand and the *seshesht* or *seshesh*, but the pictures connected with these legends rarely show more than one object besides the *menat*, and that is always the looped sistrum, never the other form¹. The looped and the naos sistrum cannot indeed well occur together, as the former seems to be the *substitute* for the latter².

So far as we can see, the earlier form is that with the naos. We still have this in the Eleventh Dynasty (word-sign for *šhm* in PETRIE, *Coptos*, Pl. VIII, l. 8) and in the Twelfth (GRIFFITH, *Beni Hasan*, Vol. IV, Pl. XXV, and LACAU, *Sarcophages*, Pl. XXXIV, No. 89) where it is still fitted with tinkling discs. The first appearance of the looped sistrum known to me is, strangely enough, as held by one of a crowd of worshippers on a well-known Cretan vase, assigned, roughly, to the Seventeenth Dynasty³. Throughout the succeeding Dynasty this new form replaces the naos-sistrum as a wand and musical instrument. With the full advent of the Ramesside Dynasties the naos-sistrum reappears, but does not replace the looped form. The employment of the two is probably differentiated, and this may be true of the period of disappearance, some change of customary use or representation being involved. The green glaze naos-sistrum in PETRIE, *Palace of Apries*, Pl. XIV, is pierced for wires, but the Ramesside and later pictures do not at all support this use⁴. The later naos-wand seems to be merely a device representative of the goddess and confined to use in temple services.

The reason for the resuscitation of the naos-symbol was perhaps that the use of the looped tinkling sistrum had not only spread to other cults beside that of Hathor, but, with the wholesale entrance of women into nominal service in the temple of Amūn, had become very general indeed. Like many another ancient custom it was readily tolerated in the worship of the Aton, and the tendency to secularize it and make it an accompaniment of festive occasions was probably strengthened during that period.

It may well have been that the naos device was given the general term *sekhem* 'wand' when used as such and *seshesht* when the tinkling discs were added to it. There must have been a time when the new and the old forms existed side by side, and we may have a trace of this in the story of Sinuhe where the terms are held apart, "their *menats*, their wands and their sistra" (or, since the hieratic sign is the same, or almost the same, for , and , "their *menats*, their naos-wands and their looped wands"). In the Theban tombs of the early New Kingdom, as has been said, there is several times an apparent mention of the three objects, though only the *menat* and looped sistrum are pictured (the picture and the legend have rarely both been preserved intact). Unless we have to do with a slavish repetition of a formula from the transition period or a childish desire to enumerate all the best-known cult-objects or the names used for such, we must be dealing with two words in

¹ Shown only in LEPS., *Denkm.*, Pt. III, Pl. 110, *b*, but I am sure that the form could no longer be recognised on that monument, and in Pt. III, Pl. 72 (Amenophis III). The latter I cannot control.

² Seen together in Ramesside times in LEPS., *Denkm.*, Vol. III, Pl. 175, *h*, and WILKINSON, *Popular Account*, fig. 282.

³ HALL, *Aegean Archaeology*, Pl. XVII.

⁴ Of course if the bars were enclosed in a box, as with the subject of this article, their presence might not be indicated.

apposition "the wands—the rattles (or whatever the *seshesht* may mean¹).” Hence a passage in the tomb of Kēnamūn could be translated "*I offer to thee the menat ornament, and the jingling (?) sistra*" (the picture is lost). It may be that the extra-temple use of the sistrum may have only been adopted by the Amūn priesthood, and was limited to the Eighteenth Dynasty at Thebes. The decisive feature is that at this place and period the naos-sistrum never appears in the tombs and that the name of the looped sistrum, wherever we can control it, is *seshesht*². If the records in BRUGSCH, *Thesaurus*, p. 1191, can be trusted, the inscriptions assert that the princesses carry naos-sistra, while the sketch shows that, conformably with custom in the period of Akhenaten, they are looped. The anomaly, if it exists, must be due to misinterpretation of the one hieratic sign. In Tomb 90, where the hieratic memoranda for the legends are still visible, the text gives as pictograph the naos-sistrum, though the scene showed the looped instrument.

The change in nomenclature from the Eighteenth Dynasty, or perhaps more properly Theban, usage to the practice of Ramesside and later times, for which Dr Gardiner has given proofs, must be connected with the new preponderance of the priesthood and a regained importance for the cult of Hathor³. The use of the sistrum came under more strictly religious prescriptions, and the names adopted in priestly circles perhaps gained weight, or at least prevail in the religious texts which are henceforth our main source of information. The more distinctive name *seshesht* which in popular speech was applied to the familiar looped sistrum very likely still had wide currency; for the Greeks, who took over that instrument, perhaps echoed the root-meaning of the word in their own sibilant word with similar sense, *σειστρον*; the populace seem to have had right on their side and there is no reason why we should not adhere to the usage.

I have not referred to the cloth flags which in tombs 39, 109 and 82 at Thebes are carried with the other emblems, as the name *sekhem* is scarcely applicable to them (though *primā facie* it seems so in DAVIES-GARDINER, *Tomb of Amenemhēt*, Pls. XIX, XX), and their appellation appears to be *kk* in MARIETTE, *Abydos*, Vol. II, Pl. 55. The statement in the latter text that the *menat* necklace is carried on the neck, the *seshesht* emblem in the hand, the *sekhem* (?) sistrum *behind*, is explicable by the fact that in pictures the *menat* is extended in one hand, while the sistrum is held by the loop in the near hand, and therefore is drawn behind the figure though really hanging at the side. The interesting point is that the writer has described the familiar scene as we should, being deceived by his own convention.

Regarding the substance of which the Carnarvon wand is made, this may well have been often employed for ceremonial emblems. The wand shown at Beni Hasan is of ebony with copper (?) fittings. Later the material is green or blue glaze. One would have expected the looped sistrum to have been of metal, but I think this is only guaranteed for quite late examples. But the pictures hint at silver and gold instruments. The majority that have come down to us would be burial models probably.

In conclusion it seems not impossible that the looped sistrum may be the lineal ancestor of our baby's rattle of the same shape; cf. DAVIES, *El Amarna*, Vol. I, Pl. XXVII.

¹ The root *sš* seems to mean 'to tremble,' 'quiver,' or the like (SETHE, *Pyramidentexte*, § 1080, d), suggesting that the sistrum was already a shaken rattle at the opening of written history.

² DAVIES, *Tomb of Puyemré* (forthcoming), Pls. 38, 53; SETHE, *Urkunden*, IV, 917. The former tomb contains interesting scenes of the presentation of the various cult-objects of Hathor.

³ Compare the revival of the emblems of Hathor worn by officials (LEGRAIN, *Statues*, Vol. II, Pls. XXVIII, XXXI and Vol. III, Pls. XVIII, XIX, XX, XXIII, XL, XLVIII; PETRIE, *Palace of Apries*, Pl. XIV; MARIETTE, *Mastabas*, pp. 465—7).