

Aegis of Isis
The British Museum

From Kawa, Sudan
Kushite, late 3rd century BC

Ornamental head of a goddess, possibly Isis



The term *aegis* is used in Egyptology to describe a broad collar surmounted by the head of a deity, in this case a goddess, possibly Isis. Representations in temples show that these objects decorated the sacred boats in which deities were carried in procession during festivals. An *aegis* was mounted at the prow and another at the stern. The head of the deity identified the occupant of the boat and it is likely that this example came from a sacred boat of Isis.

The eyes and eyebrows of the goddess were originally inlaid. The large eyes, further emphasized by the inlay, are typical of later Kushite art. The rectangular hole in her forehead once held the *uraeus*, which identified her as a goddess. The surviving part of her head-dress consists of a vulture - the wing feathers can be seen below her ears. The vulture head-dress was originally worn by the goddess Mut, consort of Amun of Thebes, but became common for all goddesses. The rest of the head-dress for this *aegis* was cast separately and is now lost, but would have consisted of a sun disc and cow's horns. The piece bears a cartouche of the Kushite ruler Arnekhamani (reigned about 235-218 BC), the builder of the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es-Sufra. S. Wenig, *Africa in antiquity: the arts*, Vol II, exh. cat. (Brooklyn, N.Y., Brooklyn Museum, 1978)

M.F. Laming Macadam, *The temples of Kawa* (Oxford, 1949 (vol. I) 1955 (vol. II))

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