

## A NUDE MALE STATUETTE AND HORNS OF CONSECRATION

Greek, Late Minoan IIIc, ca. 1200-1000 B.C.

Bronze

Height of statuette: 26 cm

Reference: 10819



The group is composed of two elements found at the same time, a statuette of a nude male figure and a pair of horns of consecration.

The figure is complete, except for the left forearm which is partially missing. The left leg, most likely broken during antiquity, has been repaired. The bronze surface is covered in a beautiful green patina and is in good condition, but shows defects due to the melting of the metal in places (formation of small holes caused by the presence of air bubbles). On the back, especially on the buttocks, the surface is partially damaged. The horns of consecration, which are stylized bull horns, are complete and in a good state of preservation.

Both objects were cast using the lost wax process, a technique which was widely spread in Crete and in the Hellenic world during the Middle and Late Bronze Age. The dark colored core of the statuette might not be made of bronze.

The statuette depicts a nude male figure having a youthful appearance. He stands upright in a strictly frontal position with knees slightly bent, while staring forward with his right arm raised and the left arm lifted at shoulder height and bent, but with the forearm directed toward the viewer. The clenched and pierced fist indicates that the figure was holding an object, likely a weapon. The pose recalls that of the smiting god of the Near Eastern cultures that is well-known in the Aegean islands, but the nudity of the young man excludes a thematic connection with this entity.

Two tenons preserved under the feet indicate that the piece was attached to a base.

The proportions of the figure are distinctive: the head is large compared to the body and the neck is thick, while the torso is thin and almost flat, and the legs are short and slightly muscular. The shapes are simple and closer to the Geometric artistic conceptions than to the canons of palatial Minoan art from the mid-second millennium B.C. The surfaces are rounded, with a reduced modeling and an anatomy that is

barely suggested, one in which the knees, the rib cage, and the groin are the only clearly marked details.

The head and hair are more carefully rendered, even if stylized. The face is in the form of an elongated and flat oval, with almond-shaped eyes placed far apart and with the lids in relief. The lips are prominent and the opening of the mouth is indicated with an incised horizontal line. The nose is pointed and triangular, and the ears are two small bronze discs, the outline of which recalls the figure 8.

The hair, which is a major distinctive feature of this piece, is related to hair styles attested in Creto-Mycenaean art for children's hairstyles, and is found illustrated on frescoes, vases with stone reliefs, and other bronze statuettes. Long locks furrow the skull, the outer part of which appears to be close-cropped, and terminate on the forehead and neck in three flat curls in the shape of volutes arranged in a triangle. This hairstyle was worn by adolescents during initiatory rites of passage which preceded their entry into the adult world.

No precise parallel is known for this remarkable statuette, which is unique in the context of Minoan sculpture, not only for its form, but also because of its size which makes this object one of the largest scale statuettes known to us. Both the style and proportions of this bronze enable us to date it to the late Bronze Age or the early Iron Age.

The double horns are composed of three elements. The central U-shaped body is completed in the middle by a stalk consisting of ten stacked cup-shapes which were in turn probably surmounted by an object that is now missing; at the top of the horns are two birds with spread wings.

It is widely accepted in Creto-Mycenaean religion that the horns of consecration were among the most significant objects indicating the presence of an altar or, more usually, a sacred site, like a shrine, temple, or sanctuary. The association of this object within the religious sphere is reinforced by the interpretation of the other details. In the

iconography of Minoan cult scenes, it is generally believed that birds are the manifestation of the epiphany of the deity. The meaning of the stalk remains enigmatic. Its shape recalls that of some portable altars discovered in Crete, but it might also be a tree trunk since plant elements in the middle of horns of consecration are often observed. The stalk may also be, as described, a stack of ritual cups. A definitive interpretation for this group remains elusive, but comparison with Creto-Mycenaean iconography allows us to relate the statuette and the horns within a religious context. The relative frequency of bronze figurines representing young adolescents that were dedicated as ex-votos in Minoan sanctuaries strengthens this link.

## PROVENANCE

Ex-German Collection, 1960's ; ex-European collection ; acquired in 1999.

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