

ARCHAIC BRONZE OF A STANDING MALE STATUE

Greek-Archaic, late 8th-early 7th century B.C.

Bronze

H: 13.9 cm

Reference: 17627



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Despite its highly stylized and simplified shapes, a feature which can be observed in the artistic field of many regions of the ancient world, this piece can reasonably be attributed to the Greek artistic sphere: human figures displaying similar characteristics are documented during a time between the late Geometric and early Archaic period.

This figurine represents a standing nude man; his position is frozen and strictly frontal. Seen in profile, the body is somewhat thick, but the overall outline is still very geometric and a bit naive. The head, supported by a low, squat neck is round, with a circular face; the shoulders and the arms form a trapezoid; the cylindrical bust widens at hip level, the buttocks are rounded, the legs are spread apart, with the knees marked by a bulge. Two stumps representing the feet of the figure, were cast in a single piece with a small rectangular base and lack details that would indicate toes.

The contours are modeled and rounded. Aside from the penis and the scrotum, and from the vertical line of the dorsal spine, no anatomical details are explicitly indicated on the body. The head and face, however, are more carefully rendered. The human senses organs are well depicted (the globular eyes, the prominent nose, the ears in relief, the horizontal mouth) and deep incisions furrowing the skull, from the forehead to the neck, indicate the hair locks. The hair is cropped at neck-length. Although the forearms are missing, the elbows clearly appear to form a right angle. The man was therefore directing his forearms forward.

It is difficult to determine what the figure was actually doing. The frontal, rigid pose and the arms directed towards the viewer would correspond to the position of the charioteers, who were standing

upright to drive their chariot, with the reins in their hands to lead the horses. These figures are well attested in the Greek iconography of the early 1st millennium (statuettes, ceramic paintings). Nevertheless, this hypothesis faces two arguments: first, this man does not wear a helmet – contrary to the ancient images of charioteers – and second, the small base has no device that could have served to attach him to a chariot.

On the chest are bronze traces in relief of two dots arranged vertically, and a horizontal but irregular line, the meaning of which is unclear. Perhaps it was a system allowing the attachment of a sword belt, of a shield handle that warriors suspended over their shoulder, or of an instrument (a lyre?).

Whether a charioteer, a warrior, a musician or another possible figure, this statuette was probably a votive offering to a deity, given to a shrine by a devotee, like many other small bronzes of this period.

Stylistically, in the Greek world, the closest parallels for our statuette are figurines dated to the first half of the 7th century B.C. Indeed, the design of the statuette shows a certain evolution compared to the highly structured artistic forms of the 8th century (more rounded outlines, more natural transition between the different parts of the body, better respected proportions). This statuette was probably produced during a transitional phase between the late Geometric art and the early Archaic period.

The number of works that can be related to this one are rather limited and their poses are not very diversified, even if they are attested in several regions of Greece (Olympia, Crete, northern Greece, Cyclades, etc.). They are typical warriors with a shield or raising their spear, charioteers, musicians playing their lyre or a wind instrument, standing men or, more rarely, seated men or working artisans.

CONDITION

The statuette is in an excellent state of preservation; it was cast in solid bronze though the forearms are lost. The cleaned surface is entirely covered with a dark brown patina: the original color of the golden yellow bronze is only partially visible. Superficial bronze deposits (visible between the legs and on the neck of the figure), as well as holes and irregularities reflect problems that would have occurred during the casting of the metal. The eyes may have been inlaid and made of a semi-precious material.

PROVENANCE

Ex-German Private Collection; Gorny&Mosch, Munich, 1998, cat. n. 93, lot 3003.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

On Greek sculpture of this period:

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Other related statuettes:

Hommes et dieux de la Grèce antique, Bruxelles, 1982, no. 126, 128, p. 206-208.

In pursuit of the Absolute, The G. Ortiz Collection, London, 1996, no. 85.

NEUGEBAUER K.A., *Kat. der Statuarische Bronzen im Antiquarium* (Staatliche Mus. zu Berlin), Berlin, 1931, no. 26-27, p. 18-19.

VERLINDEN C., *Les statuettes anthropomorphes crétoises en bronze et en plomb, du IIIe mill. av. J.-C., Louvain*, p. 172-174, pl. 94, no. 240-242.