

BACTRIAN COMPOSITE STONE STATUETTE SEATED ON A THRONE

Bactrian, late 3rd millennium B.C.
steatite or serpentine
H: 12.2 cm
Reference: 19407



Like on other Mesopotamian figurines, the décolleté, which is wider than the neck, was probably decorated with necklaces and garlands (see, for example, the two women depicted on a silver vase found in Marv Dasht in the Fars province in Iran).

Morphologically, this piece (known and published since the mid-1970s) is characterized by massive and solid forms, which contrast with the delicate, fancy rendering of the drapery. It certainly represents a woman, seated on a low circular stool decorated with deep vertical incisions, visible only in the back. The bust is upright, its depth well modeled. The legs are bent and entirely wrapped in the garment : they constitute the horizontal plane of the figurine, forming a semicircle just in front of the bust. Not a single sign of the feet is indicated.

Stylistically the fabric is shaped like a kaunakes, the quintessential Mesopotamian garment made of sheepskin. The different elements are rendered as small tongues in low relief with undulating vertical incisions that form a chevron pattern.

These composite statuettes, which rarely exceed 15-18 centimeters in height (this piece is one of the largest known), form a category of very distinct and unique objects from the civilization of Bactria. Although no typological study has ever been undertaken, the existence of several separate groups can be mentioned :

- a) standing statuettes ;
- b) statuettes seated on a visible stool (our figure belongs to this group) ;
- c) seated statuettes, without any indication of the stool, hidden by the kaunakes :

this is the largest group, which includes the more stylized figurines ;

d) statuettes seated on the ground, with bent knees ;

e) statuettes with schematic, flat and triangular bodies, without indication of the bust.

Only a few specific archaeological contexts are known for this type of sculpture, and its exact significance remains obscure, although it is certain that these objects come almost exclusively from necropoleis. If the prototypes of the women in kaunakes (reliefs, statuettes, etc.) are to be found in Mesopotamia and Iran, the meaning of the Bactrian pieces is certainly different and would touch on the funeral sphere, even if it is impossible to determine whether it is a deity being represented, the deceased or his/her image, a worshipper, etc. Furthermore, the existence of several types of statuettes, each very different from one another, could indicate that more than one type figure is represented or that they represent different aspects of the same figure.

Iconographic affinities with Mesopotamian and Iranian objects and their distribution help us in defining their chronological framework : archaeologists agree on a date of the late 3rd millennium or the very early 2nd millennium B.C. They are therefore contemporary with other outstanding artistic productions of this region from Prehistoric times (goldwork, metal tableware, seals, etc.).

CONDITION

Aside from a few chips, the body of the statuette is practically intact, and the surface is in extraordinary condition. It was completed by a head and arms (traces of which are still visible), carved from white limestone : it was therefore bi-colored, with the most significant body

parts (the head and hands were the seat of the senses and of all activity) showing up in light color against the dark background of the body.

PROVENANCE

Ex-american private collection, New York.

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