

# EGYPTIAN BRONZE AND SILVER STATUETTE OF THE GOD NEFERTEM

Egyptian, 26th-30th Dynasty (ca. 7th-4th century B.C.)

Bronze and Silver

H: 23 cm

Reference: 20345



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The figure shows remarkable artistic skills despite minor superficial wear. It represents a young man standing in the strictly frontal position that is typical of Egyptian statues. The left leg is a bit forward, the left arm hangs along the body, while the right arm is bent and holds a harpe, the end of which rests on the shoulder. Its handle and blade are richly adorned with fading incised decorations, which have unfortunately faded in parts. The young man, whose divine status is emphasized by the false beard and the frontal uraeus, wears a tripartite wig and is dressed in a finely pleated kilt. The shapes of his body are elegant and well proportioned with the long limbs and the thin torso; the face is ovoid in shape with idealized and precisely rendered features.

The open crown of a large lotus flower is placed on his head, completed by a long ostrich feather (vertical, in the center of the flower) and flanked by two counterweights of menat necklaces.

This vegetal decoration is the key element enabling us to identify the statuette as Nefertem, the Memphite deity, son of the creator god Ptah and of the lioness goddess Sekhmet, with whom he formed a divine triad, mostly from the New Kingdom onward. A god closely associated with the lotus flower which was widely used in Egyptian perfume industry, Nefertem was revered as the Lord of perfumes. He is also connected with the sun god Ra, since the lotus rises in the morning as does the sun. The relationship of Nefertem with the great goddess Hathor, in turn, is evidenced by the constant presence of the counterweights of the menat necklaces in his iconography.

Although mentioned from the Old Kingdom in written sources, Nefertem appears only much later in Egyptian iconography, from the

Third Intermediate Period. That is to say towards the early 1st millennium B.C., when he is mostly used as a subject on amulets. Votive statuettes representing him are well documented, especially during the Late Period, but their number is largely smaller than that of the images depicting other deities such as Osiris, Isis, Harpocrates, etc.

## CONDITION

This solid bronze statuette is complete; the surface is partially covered with a bluish green patina (loincloth, back, arms) and shows traces of corrosion that are more visible on the lower legs. The eyes are inlaid with silver, while a copper fillet highlights the drawing of the eyebrows and of the beard. The petals of the lotus, which appear hollow on the outside, were probably completed with polychromatic inlays (enamel, semi-precious stone, etc.). A suspension ring is soldered to the back of the head, atop the skull. Due to its size, this statuette may be considered as an offering to a shrine which was suspended from a pillar or from another type of support, rather than worn as an amulet or as a necklace element.

## PROVENANCE

Ex-Captain E.G. Spencer-Churchill (1876-1964) Collection, Northwick Park, Massachusetts, USA; acquired in Cairo in 1910; Christie's, London, 21th November 1965, lot 426; private Collection; Bonham's, London, 26th April 2001, lot 175.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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