

EGYPTIAN BRONZE HEADDRESS OF OSIRIS

Egyptian, 664-332 B.C.

faience paste

H: 38 cm

Reference: 17479



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Figures of royalty, deities, and officials were created in bronze as early as the Middle Kingdom, intended primarily for use as votives or in ritual performances.

Such objects were often embellished with separately attached attributes and inlays crafted from other materials. The production of divine statuettes, particularly for donation by private individuals, exploded during the Late and Ptolemaic periods, with Osiris being the most popular subject.

Osiris typically appeared as a seated or standing mummiform figure, most often wearing the White or atef crowns. The central, conical component of the atef resembled the White Crown and was distinguished by some combination of horns, ostrich plumes, solar disks, and uraei on either side. This pair of finely fashioned elements would have adorned the crown of a large figure of Osiris. The disks, feathers, and uraei all contain traces of inlay, while incised detail enhances the graceful curve of the horns. Bronze attributes such as these might ornament wooden or metal statues.¹ In either case, the scale of these feathers suggests that the figure they adorned, if standing, might have been approximately four feet in height too large for a votive statuette. An example of this size was most likely intended for a cultic context, perhaps within a temple shrine. Solid bronze elements such as these feathers would have been produced by pouring molten bronze into stone or pottery molds. The figure to which they were attached, however, was probably manufactured using the lost-wax process. In this technique, a model of the figure would have been coated with wax and covered with another material, such as clay. When fired, the wax melted, leaving space for the introduction of the liquid bronze. Osiris, with his streamlined appearance, would have been particularly easy to replicate using this method.

PROVENANCE

ex George Gorse Collection, France

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Smaller examples exist in both materials. A standing bronze figure with attached feathers is in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden (AB161); see Hans Schneider, ed., *Life and Death under the Pharaohs: Egyptian Art from the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden, Netherlands* (Perth: Western Australian Museum, 1997), p. 118, cat. no. 184. In an Atlanta private collection is a wooden head with a bronze beard and tangs for the attachment of feathers, now missing; this work is unpublished. A similar feather (53.76.2) and a flail (53.76.1), of smaller scale and in inlaid bronze, are in the Brooklyn Museum; see Brooklyn Museum, *Five Years of Collecting Egyptian Art, 1951-1956* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1956), pp. 46-77, cat. no. 54, pl. 78.