

EGYPTIAN BRONZE STATUETTE OF A CAT

Egyptian, 21st-26th Dynasty, ca. 1070-525 B.C.

Bronze

H: 21.0 cm (8.2 in)

Reference: 30082



The slim and elegant body of the seated cat seen in profile has an extremely beautiful and expressive outline. The anatomical shape is smoothed; other details are clearly indicated. The figure of a cat is represented seated with the tail curling in front of the forepaws. The animal is wearing a cowrie shell neck-cord modeled in low relief with an amulet on the chest and lion-head amulet with pendants between the shoulder blades. The finely modeled face has engraved whiskers and ear-markings; the eyes are recessed for inlay. The engraved rings are also seen on the tail. The surface of the bronze figure which is a hollow cast has a rich dark-red patina.

The cat was the sacred animal and personification of the goddess Bastet. Since the 3rd millennium B.C. ancient Egyptian art depicted the goddess Bastet as a fierce lioness or a woman with the head of a lioness. She was considered as having the protective powers and the defender of a pharaoh. Later her role in the Egyptian pantheon was diminished with the rise of Sekhmet, similar lioness goddess.

From the Middle Kingdom times (ca. 2030-1640 B.C.) the nature of the goddess began to be viewed as milder than that of other lioness deities. Bastet began to be represented as a woman with the head of a cat and ultimately emerged as the Egyptian cat-goddess. In the Middle Kingdom, the domestic cat appeared as Bastet's sacred animal. Cat cemeteries are found throughout Egypt in which the mummified remains of these animals are accompanied by a big number of their bronze statuettes. The large bronze figures once served as a container for a cat mummy.

The cats, famous for their mouse-hunting abilities, were domesticated by the Egyptians in the Middle Kingdom. Egyptian house cats were larger than modern domesticated cats. The tomb scenes of the New Kingdom represent cats seated beneath the chairs of their owners as household companions or flushing out birds for their masters in the

Nile marshes. In this statuette, the animal is shown seated in alert pose, with stern forward gaze.

Condition:

Complete; some restoration to the tip of one ear, neck and one hind leg; brown-reddish patina; a few touches of green oxides on the top of head and right foreleg.

PROVENANCE

Ex- W.D. Collection, New York, acquired in the mid-to-late 1940s; thence by descent.

EXHIBITED

TEFAF, New York, Spring 2017

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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