

EGYPTIAN BRONZE STATUETTE OF GOD PTAH

Egyptian, Late Period (ca. 6th-4th century B.C.)

Bronze

H: 13.5 cm

Reference: 22895



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The statuette is mounted on a square hollow plinth provided with a large vertical tenon under the base. It was cast in a single piece with the figure. The mummiform god Ptah is represented in his canonical iconography; static yet majestic, he is wrapped in a shroud, hitched up behind his back, which follows the outline of his body (elbows, buttocks, knees, feet). Only his hands and wrists emerge from two vertical slits in the shroud, holding the was scepter and the djed pillar. The scepter, a symbol of sovereignty, is positioned in a curious manner, since the god does not place it flat against his chest, as is normally the case, but holds it head-on (seen in profile, the scepter partially appears behind his beard).

A skullcap covers the head of Ptah, above the somewhat protruding ears; his facial features are finely modeled and balanced; his chin is adorned with a false beard that partially conceals the scepter. Around his neck, he wears a large semi-circular necklace composed of several rows of delicately carved cylindrical beads; its counterweight, decorated with incised lines, is suspended from the nape of his neck and descends onto the shroud, despite its edge in relief. The front side of the plinth is in the shape of a five-stepped staircase. Ptah is an ancient creator god of the Egyptian pantheon; he presided over the conception of the universe, which was created by the force of his thoughts and speech. For this reason, he was most often regarded as the patron of craftsmen (construction, metallurgy, sculpture, pottery, etc.) and was greatly worshipped, especially in Deir el-Medina, near Thebes. His home town and principal shrine was Memphis, where his cult was associated with those of his spouse Sekhmet and their son Nefertem. As a creator god, he was also closely related to Maat, the female deity who maintained the order of the universe and the principle of cosmic harmony.

In Egypt, the production of small votive bronzes representing divinities, like our example, and/or animals is typical of the Late Period. These figurines were most often manufactured in workshops located near sanctuaries and sold directly to the faithful, who dedicated them to the deity either to ask a favor or to give thanks for a favor already granted. The significant differences in artistic and technical quality characterizing this group of objects no doubt reflected the socio-economic status of the worshipers; this figure of Ptah, with its careful and precise workmanship, was probably offered to the god by a high-class member of society.

CONDITION

Complete statuette in excellent condition. Full cast; grainy surface, covered with a dark patina partially turning to light green.

PROVENANCE

Ex-R. Liechti Collection (1934-2010), Geneva, collected in the 1950s-1990s; acquired from M. Wettstein, antiquities dealer in Zurich, July 22, 1956.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

On close parallels, see:

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SCHOSKE S. and WILDUNG D., Entdeckungen: Aegyptische Kunst in
Süddeutschland, Mainz/Rhine, 1985, p. 141, no. 123.

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Mainz/Rhine, 1992, p. 128, no. 88.

STEINDORFF G., Catalogue of the Egyptian Sculpture in the Walters Art
Gallery, Baltimore, 1946, no. 493, pl. 80.