

# EGYPTIAN BRONZE STATUETTE OF OSIRIS

Egyptian, circa 600 B.C. (Saite Period)

Gilded Bronze

Height: 47.8 cm

Reference: 18768



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This statuette is distinguished especially by its size, which is clearly larger than the average bronze figurines of Osiris. The body is elongated and well proportioned, the crown that covers his head is very tall. The lower part of the legs is lost; the head, which is completely preserved, is broken at the neck, but the two breaks match up perfectly. Many elements were applied and/or made in other materials: the eyes, the brows, the plumes of the headdress, the false beard and the head of the uraeus.

This image follows the canonical iconography of Osiris: the god is wrapped in a shroud that is perfectly modeled to the contours of his body; in his hands he holds the flagellum (the nekhekh scepter, visible in the left hand) and the hekat scepter, the shepherd's crook. The position of the arms (the fists crossed on the chest) is an indicator of the provenance of this statuette, which would have been made in one of the centers of Upper Egypt. On his head, he wears his typical head covering, the atef crown, composed of the white crown of Upper Egypt flanked by two ostrich plumes, which are attached by two tenons inserted into the vertical slots of the crown; a serpent descends down the front of the headdress, where, just above the forehead, the head of the uraeus would have been attached. Under Osiris's chin, a square hole was used to insert the false beard. The entire surface of the bronze is covered in a bright blue-green patina with traces of darker brown and red.

Originally, the figure of Osiris was related to the fecundity of the Egyptian soil, the renewal of vegetation as well as the world of shepherds as proven by the hekat scepter (which reproduces the shepherd's staff). He personified the fertility of the earth and the cultivated fields and became therefore the guardian of the balance and cycles of nature. But the most famous myth of Osiris that concerning

his death, which was known through many versions: the son of Geb (the earth) and Nout (the sky) and husband of Isis, the god was the first pharaoh of Egypt. With Isis, they were a pair of royal benefactors who taught the humans how to practice agriculture and fish (Osiris), weaving and medicine (Isis). Jealous of his rule, his brother, Seth, assassinated him, cut up his body and disposed of the pieces in the Nile. However, Isis, his wife and faithful widow, found and reassembled the body of her husband and, with the help of her sister, Nephtys, and Anubis, she embalmed the corpse. After breathing life into him for a short instant, Isis was impregnated by Osiris: their union resulted in the birth of Horus, who, following in the footsteps of his father, became Pharaoh. And so, after having survived the ordeal of death, Osiris triumphed thanks to the magic of his wife and became the ruler of the underworld, who held the seeds of life and, at the same time, was the protector of the deceased, to whom he would promise life after death. These two closely related characteristics linking the god of fecundity and the funerary divinity were certainly the basis for the success that Osiris enjoyed in the Egyptian world: at the end of the New Kingdom and especially during the entire 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C., statuettes of Osiris were considered the most important of funerary offerings.

## CONDITION

This hollow cast statuette (under the crown, remains of the blackened core, made of an unknown material, are still visible) is larger than average. It is complete and in good condition: the surface of the metal is dark brown with patches of green patina in places. The gilding, which covered the whole figure, still appears on the front of the body, on the neck, and on the crown. The feathers of the crown and the god's attributes are inlaid; the eyes were made of another material.

## PROVENANCE

Ex-American private collection, 1980's-1990's.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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OnOsiris, see:

WILKINSON H.R., *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, London, 2003, pp. 118-123.