

## HEAD OF A CAT

Egyptian, 1070 - 712 B.C.

Bronze

Height: 7 cm (2.75 in)

Reference: 17055



In ancient Egypt, the domestic cat embodied the qualities of the goddess Bastet, who was associated with female sexuality and fertility and often depicted surrounded by a litter of kittens. Bastet, whose cult seems to have emerged as early as the Second Dynasty, was closely linked to the kingship by the Old Kingdom, acting as the royal nurse in the Pyramid Texts. Despite her generally benevolent nature, Bastet revealed her more feral and aggressive traits in her role as the daughter of the sun god, Re', in which she was charged with killing his nemesis, the serpent Apophis.

At the end of the second millennium BC, the large-scale donation of ex-votos by private individuals became increasingly popular within the cults of certain deities, peaking during the Ptolemaic Period. These votives included bronze statuettes and mummified sacred animals. A variety of creatures, including cats, were bred, mummified, and presented as offerings in temples before being interred in special catacombs. The mummies were usually buried in two types of coffins: either a narrow box that held a figure of the animal on the lid or a container in the shape of the animal itself.

The size of this superlative head suggests that it most likely came from the latter type of coffin or a votive figure, which would have depicted a cat seated upright with its front paws together and its tail curled around its body. The broad, elegantly modeled face has an incised mouth and whiskers, while engraved pupils, carefully detailed eyelids, and inner canthi distinguish the eyes. The tall ears turn slightly forward, giving an appearance of alert attention. A deep groove runs down the outer edge of each ear, with incised parallel lines along the inner edge representing fine hairs. A gold earring adorns the proper left ear.

During the Late and Ptolemaic periods, bronze was an especially popular medium for votive figures such as this cat, due to the ease with which they could be mass produced. Throughout Egyptian history,

bronze figures were assembled from separately manufactured components. These elements were usually hollow-cast using wax models. Single-piece castings became increasingly common after the Third Intermediate Period due to the preference for simpler forms and the development of more fluid alloys.

### CONDITION

Complete, in excellent condition, minor chips (lower neck, left ear especially). A gold earring adorns the left ear.

### PROVENANCE

Ex- private collection, USA, 1994.

### PUBLISHED

Sotheby's New York, 14 December 1994, lot 17;  
Art of the two Lands, Egypt from 4000 B.C. to 1000 A.D., New York, 2006, pp. 118-119, 200, no. 39.

### EXHIBITED

Spring Masters New York, (Spring 2016)

TEFAF New York, (Spring 2018)

Seattle Art Fair, (Fall 2019)

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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PAGE-GASSER M., WIESE A.B., Égypte. Moments d'éternité. Art égyptien dans les collections privées, Suisse, Mainz/Rhine, 1997, pp. 276-277.  
SCOTT N. E., The Cat of Bastet, in Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art 17, 2, 1958, p. 3.  
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