

## HEAD OF A NOBLEMAN

Egyptian, ca. 71 B.C.

Diorite

H: 22.2 cm - W: 19.7 cm

Reference: 17063



This well-preserved head may originally have been part of a stone anthropoid sarcophagus. The youthful, pleasant face exhibits many of the idealizing features so common in ancient Egyptian art. While not a portrait of the deceased, the representation expresses the ideal way in which the individual wished to be represented. The features of the face have a soft, delicate quality that to our modern eyes may suggest femininity. The head was previously identified as that of a woman; however, there is no reason to exclude the possibility that it may represent a man. Egyptian artists used certain cues to signal gender. Some of these were quite specific to a particular gender, such as clothing, coiffure, facial hair, and jewelry. Others were more symbolic, such as skin color. Generally speaking, men were depicted as reddish brown, while women were often given lighter, yellowish tones. When these indicators are not present and the piece is uninscribed, it is frequently difficult to determine which gender is represented. Without an inscription or other defining attributes, we are unable to determine much about this individual other than that he or she would likely have been a member of the elite in order to afford such a fine work.

The deceased wears a rounded wig that falls quite low on the brow and is delineated from the forehead by a deeply incised line. This simple, rounded head covering is referred to as a bag wig but may in fact represent a type of head cloth. The soft, fleshy face is broad, with rounded cheeks and a small delicate chin; in profile, it is quite flat. The horizontal eyebrows are rendered plastically and extend very far beyond the outer edge of the almond-shaped eyes, which are bordered by an unusual cosmetic line that does not continue beyond their outer corners. These last two features are typically found in sculpture from the reigns of Psammetichus II to Apries.

The figure's small nose is rounded at the tip, and the nostrils were drilled and smoothed. The mouth protrudes just a bit and is set in a slight smile; the lips exhibit a well-defined contour line around their

edges, a mark of a high-quality statue executed by a skillful sculptor. Both the handling of the eyes and the so-called Archaic smile suggest a date in Dynasty 26; the latter is an element that appeared early in Dynasty 26 and became a regular feature of Late Period and Ptolemaic art. The style of carving and the appearance of the individual bear close similarity to sculpture created during this period.

The head purportedly comes from the vicinity of Daphnae (Tell el-Dafana), a city in the Nile Delta. This provenience may help us date the piece, since excavations at the site have indicated that while there may have been late New Kingdom activity there, most of the remains date to Dynasty 26 and later. It was at Daphnae that the Saite kings of Dynasty 26 established a garrison of Greek mercenary soldiers. The city prospered until King Amasis removed Greek settlers from the area and relocated their activity to nearby Naucratis. The site of Tell el-Dafana was discovered by W. F. M. Petrie in 1886.

### CONDITION

This well-preserved head may originally have been part of a stone anthropoid sarcophagus.

### PROVENANCE

Ex- Dr. Alio Collection, Cairo, acquired in 1936; said to have been found in the vicinity of "Daphne" (Tell el-Dafana) in the Nile Delta.

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