

HITTITE BRONZE, SILVER AND ELECTRUM STATUETTE OF A MOUNTAIN GOD

Ne-Hittite, mid 2nd millennium B.C.

Electrum

H: 24.5 cm

Reference: 18133



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The technique used for the creation of this statuette is that of solid casting using the lost wax technique; the arms were cast separately and attached with the aid of a tenon and a rivet at the level of the shoulder blades. The eyes were inlaid. After the casting and the initial finishing by cold work, the surface of the bronze was covered with many sheets of silver (for the entire body and the skirt) and electrum (for the face, the beard and perhaps the crown) which were simply placed on the metal and hammered into rectilinear channels – which were already present from the casting – engraved in different places: under the arms, on the neck, on the head, etc. The silver plaques (torso, left leg, skirt) and the electrum ones are for the most part well preserved. Afterwards, perfect polishing allowed the artisan to almost completely hide the joins between the plaques. Cast with the feet, two cubic tenons pierced with a hole were used to fix the figure to its base. Close examination reveals that the bronze was worked with all the small details, for example the finger and toenails, etc. as if the silver-electrum covering was not foreseen. Although the statuette was perfectly modeled and balanced, it is designed especially for the frontal view, as seen in the straight position of the head and the torso as well as a certain rigidity in the legs. The god is represented standing with the left leg advancing; the right arm is raised while the left, which descends along the torso, is bent: in the two hands, whose fists are clenched, he holds thin cylindrical objects like a lance, an axe or a scepter (in the left hand there remain traces of a small cylinder). The torso is bare but his legs are wrapped in a particular type of skirt, open at the front: it has large, rounded scales in relief that recall stylized boulders from images of Hittite mountain gods. The skirt is held up by a thick belt clasped over the stomach by a large metal buckle.

His face, with precise and austere features, is framed at the brow by his hat while the cheeks and chin are covered by the rounded contour of

the beard, which falls to his chest; vertical lines break up the rounded surface of the beard and indicate the curls. The god wears a tall head covering that seems to imitate the white crown of Upper Egypt of the Pharaohs; the hole at the top of the hat may have been used to attach a vegetal decoration. The presence of the hat, which in Egypt had a precise political significance, is difficult to explain in a setting as far away as central Anatolia and worn by a divine figure at that.

The identity of this personage is hypothetical, especially because of the absence of any attributes, but the position and the general iconography suggest images of Teshub, the god of storms, who was one of the most important gods in Hittite pantheon (he corresponds to the Syrian Baal and the Mesopotamian Hadad): the particular structure of the skirt may be an allusion to the god of the mountain, who, in Hittite iconography, carries Teshub on his back. In the Hittite artistic repertory of the mid 2nd millennium B.C., there exist some comparable images to this figure (cf. for example the statuettes of Doghantepe and Lattakia), even if the relationship between the white crown and the scaled skirt is a unique case. Some other figures of the same god were created in the Syro-Palestinian world, a historical context very close to that of the Hittites, but where Egyptian influence was more strongly felt: one can mention two well known examples such as the statuette of Minet el-Beyda, which preserves the gilding on the crown and face of the god but who wears an Egyptian skirt (Baal-Hadad; from Ugarit, Musée du Louvre AO 11598) or like another statuette from Ugarit that wears a low crown in steatite with vegetal motifs at the top (Musée du Louvre, AO 18511)

PROVENANCE

Ex-German private collection, beginning of the 1980's.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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