

## MARBLE ROMAN HEAD OF SERAPIS-AMMON

Roman, 2nd century A.D.

Marble

H: 29.2 cm

Reference: 21759



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Male head carved from a fine-grained marble, whose near translucence is visible in the polished areas of the face, especially the forehead and the cheeks. The hair is composed of very thick curls, made by using a drill. Substantial traces of paint prove the pictorial dimension of the original sculpture. Indeed, both the hair and the headgear have a pinkish hue. This head is characterized by thick hair and by a bushy beard framing the face. The abundant locks form compact shells and are each marked by one or more deep holes. The mustache and the beard are likewise composed of extremely dense and compact curly hair, marked by deeply engraved furrows.

A high cylindrical headdress, known as a modius, covers the crown. Flat-topped, it has a prominent upper brim. A plant with fruit (no doubt an olive branch, a symbol of the fertility of the land) is represented vertically and occupies the front of the modius. The wide almond-shaped eyes are surmounted by heavy eyelids; each eye shows an iris delineated by a circular incision. The eyebrows are strongly marked and run towards the finely modeled nose, whose tip is damaged. The nose is perfectly shaped and the parallel nostrils are clearly visible. It is also worth noting the presence of two fragmentary elements that would form horns, placed on each side of the head, in the hair. The various characteristics of this carved head enable us to confidently identify it as a representation of the Greco-Egyptian god Serapis-Ammon. While the head presents the original iconography of the god, the general treatment of the facial features (hair, beard, cheeks) allows us to date it to the Antonine period of the 2nd century A.D.

A syncretic god, Serapis is a synthesis of several figures of the Egyptian pantheon (Osiris-Apis, the god of fertility embodied in the shape of a bull) and of the Greek pantheon (Zeus, the supreme god, or Hades, the god of the underworld). Serapis was introduced in the late 4th century B.C. by Ptolemy I, the first pharaoh of the Lagid dynasty, in

order certainly to be accepted by the Egyptian world and, at the same time, to bring together the Greeks, newly arrived in Egypt, and the natives. Serapis was therefore a god of fertility and abundance, closely related to the chthonic world, but he also healed the disabled and predicted the future, which enabled him to please many believers and to be appreciated by everyone.

Iconographically, he is depicted much like the Greek god Hades, with a bushy beard and thick hair, seated on a throne or standing upright, wearing a chiton and a himation. Personifying the fertility of the land, Serapis sometimes holds a cornucopia in his left hand. As in our example, his most common attribute is the modius, a headdress in the shape of a kalathos, or basket, which was a standardized measure for wheat grain and therefore a symbol of the underworld. In turn, the horns would refer to the images of the god in his syncretic form, coupled with the Egyptian god Amun. Among the major deities of the Egyptian pantheon, Amun was sometimes represented in the shape of a ram with large curved horns. As from the Hellenistic Greek period, Serapis was very popular, replacing Osiris. His chief center of worship was at Alexandria, but he was also honored at Memphis. His cult was a sweeping success in the ancient world and he became a god revered all around the Mediterranean Sea.

### CONDITION

Head in excellent condition; clean oblique break at the neck; tip of the nose broken, horns incomplete, upper edge of the modius chipped; minor concretions.

### PROVENANCE

Ex-Georges and Ludmilla Anghelopoulo Collection, Beirut, Paris, and Kitzbühel; acquired from Elie Boustros in Beirut before 1948.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

HORNBOSTEL W., *Sarapis: Studien zur Überlieferungsgeschichte, den Erscheinungsformen und Wandlungen der Gestalt eines Gottes*, Leiden, 1973,

*Sarapis-Ammon*, pp. 181 ff.

*Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC)*, Vol. I, Zurich-Munich, 1981, s.v. Ammon: pp. 666-689, more specifically F. Rappports avec

d'autres divinités, c. Ammon et Sarapis, nos. 141-152.

*Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC)*, Vol. VII, Zurich-Munich, 1994, s.v. Sarapis, pp. 666-692, more specifically II. Sarapis-Ammon,

no. 211.

For similar examples:

HORNBOSTEL W., *Sarapis. Studien zur Überlieferungsgeschichte, den Erscheinungsformen und Wandlungen der Gestalt eines Gottes*, Leiden, 1973,

fig. 117, 123, 125, 198 (for example).