

## ROMAN MARBLE HEAD OF A GODDESS

Roman, 2nd century A.D.

H: 30.4 cm (12 in)

Reference: 34839



At the first glance, this beautiful female head with a diadem appears to be the head of a goddess represented in the Archaistic style, i.e. imitating the Greek Archaic (ancient) style; such an attribution would be based on the shape of the corkscrew curls. The most typical arrangement of the hairstyle of an Archaistic goddess, however, is different and almost always has long hair parted in the middle of the head and set in several long stiff spiral locks which are put symmetrically on the sides at the shoulders; in addition, the flaps of curving locks hang down in front of each ear.

Although two similar thick corkscrew locks are prominently seen at the temples of this head, their shape looking like the flaps, and the row of shorter corkscrew curls form the lower part of the hairstyle, the rest of the hairstyle is unlike. It consists of the tresses of hair rolled around the top of the head in a kind of a turban which is typical for the hairstyle of the Roman ladies of the Trajan-Hadrian period (the beginning – first third of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.). One finds a similar pattern of triangular segments of the tresses in the hairstyle of the time, and also in the portraits of the empress Sabina, wife of Hadrian.

This particular feature helps to date the marble head quite precisely, but leaving the question of the represented person open (in the case of a complete figure, a special garment or additional attribute could help with the identification). The diadem indicates either goddess or queen, as well as the possibility remains for an idealized individual presented in the guise of a goddess or queen.

The stiff spiral locks are equally typical for the hairstyle of the Egyptian goddesses such as Isis or Hathor in the representations of the Hellenistic period. Their iconography was adopted for the images of the Ptolemaic queens. The combination of the vertical rows above the forehead (the stylized short spiral locks), the larger side corkscrews and the diadem in this head resemble the look of the Ptolemaic princess Cleopatra, daughter of Ptolemy VI and Cleopatra II, known in

history as Cleopatra Thea (the Goddess). Her images are testified in the numismatic material. She became the Seleucid queen, was wife of three Seleucid kings and the mother of three other. A remarkable woman, she even ruled on her own, an unprecedented case in the history of the Seleucid empire. She was great aunt of Cleopatra VII who later announced herself as the second Cleopatra Thea. The portraits of the Hellenistic rulers remained popular in the Roman period, they adorned the portrait galleries and libraries of the educated elite, reminding of the grandeur of their life.

### CONDITION

Complete; surface weathered and cleaned; a few pits and chips in places; rusty stains; the tip of the nose is broken off.

### PROVENANCE

Ex- Karl Wittgenstein (1847-1913) private collection, Vienna, Austria; thence by descent to his daughter, Margaret Wittgenstein-Stonborough (1882-1958); thence by descent. A photograph show the head on display at the Wittgenstein home in 1931.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

WALKER S., HIGGS P., eds, *Cleopatra of Egypt: From History to Myth*, London, 2001, p. 87, nos. 92-94.

BURSTEIN S.M., *The Reign of Cleopatra*, Norman, 2007, pp. 78-79.