

STATUETTE OF A YOUNG WOMAN (APHRODITE?)

Greek, Middle of the 5th century B.C. (450-440 B.C.)

Bronze

Height: 11.9 cm

Reference: 27228



Solid cast statuette of a young woman standing; thin square base, cast in a single piece with the statuette. The weight of her body is supported by her left leg, while her right leg is slightly bent and stepping forward.

The young woman wears a full-length peplos; only the tips of her feet are visible, the toes indicated by incised lines. The top ends of the garment are pinned together on the shoulders by means of fibulae that are no longer clearly seen. The garment falls partially over the upper arms, forming cascades of folds that gather under the armpits and hang down to the hips. In front and behind, the torso is covered by a loose folded fabric (apoptygma, the blousing of the peplos formed by turning back the cloth at the top). The young woman's left arm descends along her body, the tips of her fingers lightly pulling on the edge of the apoptygma. Her right arm is bent and directed to the right, rather than towards the viewer.

The young woman – the proportions, the supple figure, the shape of the face and the youthful features suggest that she is indeed very young – turns her head to the right and lowers her gaze to her hand, in which she holds an object with a worn outline that could be a bird; the creature appears to stand upright, its feet placed on the open palm.

Long vertical folds mark the peplos, especially covering the legs. The prevalence of verticality is balanced at the hips by the lower horizontal border of the apoptygma and by its more rounded and wavy folds behind. The edge of the fabric forms a V-shaped neckline in low relief.

The arrangement of the hair (the area of the figure that is preserved best) recalls the use of a sakkos or cecryphalos (types of hairnet), except that the material is not visible; the hair is long and styled in a thick wavy mass over the forehead, while it is coiled in a bun at the back and held only by small bands that cross on top of the head.

Only a few facial features are now visible; there are enough indications, however, to underline the excellent artistic quality of this piece. The face is oval and regular in shape, the head is slightly inclined and the expression is gentle; but also, great attention has been paid to the cold-worked details such as the eyelids, the eyebrows and the full mouth.

Although this young woman cannot be confidently identified, the presence of the bird in her hand recalls the iconography of two of the most famous Classical Greek deities, namely Athena and Aphrodite. The Athena hypothesis can probably be rejected, since the goddess of war, whose sacred bird was the owl, usually has a helmet and a spear and her peplos is open on the right side, as was the case for a young woman before marriage. Therefore, Aphrodite, the goddess of love, whose sacred bird was the dove, is undoubtedly favored here, given her hairstyle and her entirely closed garment. Furthermore, there are many famous contemporary images of the goddess with a similar typology, in particular the caryatid-shaped handles of mirrors. These figures are most often identified with Aphrodite, especially in the presence of attributes such as a dove, a fruit or a flower. Then again, one should not exclude the possibility that this image might simply represent a kore (maiden), which the presence of the bird would nevertheless link to the goddess of love and fertility (the image of a maiden holding a pigeon is common in contemporary Greek art, especially in sculpture).

The current condition of the surface does not enable us to attribute this work to a precise regional workshop; typologically (peplos, smooth apoptygma, arrangement of vertical folds on the legs, etc.), the comparison with the caryatid mirrors attributed to the north-eastern Peloponnesian schools seems to be the most convincing (Argo-Corinthian types, as classified by L.O. Keene Congdon). The natural attitude (inclined head, position of the arms, flexible right knee), less rigid than the representations of the Severe style, the thick body and the voluminous folds on the chest are all elements that allow us to date

this example to the middle of the 5th century B.C.

CONDITION

Complete statuette, though surface very worn and damaged, with corrosion and thick granulations. Right hand reglued; incomplete attribute (head missing?), probably a bird. Patina ranging from pale to dark green, reddish marks in places.

PROVENANCE

Ex Mr. A. Menno Collection, Switzerland, 1970's; ex Mr. A. Apollone Collection, Comano (Ticino, Switzerland).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

On some handles of contemporary mirrors, see:

KEENE CONGDON L.O., *Caryatid Mirrors of Ancient Greece*, Mainz/Rhine, 1981, pl. 59, 60, 72, 79, 83, 88, 91.

On peplophoroi of the Severe style, see:

TÖLLE-KASTENBEIN R., *Frühklassische Peplosfiguren: Originale*, Mainz/Rhine, 1980, pl. 21d.

On the iconography of Aphrodite, see:

Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC), Vol. II, Zurich-Munich, 1984, s.v. Aphrodite (see especially pp. 19 ff., nos. 111-123).