

## SUMERIAN GYPSUM MASK

Ne-Mesopotamian, Middle of the 3rd Millennium B.C.

Gypsum

Length: 4.9 cm

Reference: 9229



This mask is almost intact. It certainly belonged to a composite statue, of which only the anterior part of the head is preserved sculpted in the round. The eyes are hollow and were made of another material. One can see the cheekbones, the triangular and prominent nose, the small horizontal mouth and the undulating line of the eyebrows; the groove around the mouth probably served to affix a beard, proving that the figure represented is a man. The back is smooth and slightly concave. This face is remarkable for its structural and stylistic qualities. The rigid construction of the head – punctuated by the horizontal axes (eyebrows, bridge of the nose) – is perfectly balanced by the delicate surface and the round, undulating lines of the contours of the eyes and eyebrows.

This mask have belonged to a praying figure, a well-known iconographic type in Mesopotamian art. These statues (men or women, sometimes even kings and dignitaries, generally standing with their joined hands clasped on their chests) were placed in the temples on benches around the base of the walls. These composite statues (i.e. made of various materials) are one of the most significant examples of the artistic heritage of the Sumerian sculptors. Already existing in the 4th Millennium (Uruk, Dkemedet Nasr), this type of sculpture was very successful throughout Antiquity, not only in Mesopotamia, but also in Elam, in Palestine and in the lands of Urartu. It is difficult to have a clear idea of the final appearance of a composite work, since no complete example has survived. The body of the statuette was probably of wood or bronze. Certain elements could have been covered with silver or gold foil.

### CONDITION

Almost intact

### PROVENANCE

E. Boustros, acquired in the 1970's

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Exhibition of the Great Civilisation of Syria, Tokyo, 1988m, n. 78 (small Mari mask, the same in PARROT a., Mari, Paris, 1953, n. 38-39).

AMIET P., Art of the Ancient Near East, New York, 1977, pp. 359-365 (praying figures).

Some composite near eastern statues: AMIET P., Art of the Ancient Near East, New York, 1977, p. 115, n. 36 (aragonite, wood, gold, lapis lazuli).

R.L. ZETTLER (éd.), Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur, Philadelphia, 1998, p. 61, n. 8.