

SUMERIAN SEMI-PRECIOUS STONE AMULET WITH INLAID EYES

Ne-Mesopotamian, 3000-2500 B.C.

Stone and Lapis Lazuli

Height: 2.4 cm

Reference: 10940



This small head was probably used as an amulet and suspended around the neck by a string that passed through the vertically pierced hole between the chin and the top of the skull. It is almost intact: only the pupils and a part of the right eye are lost. In spite of its miniature size, this piece is remarkable for its structural and stylistic qualities. The face is structured in a rigid, symmetrical manner: the horizontal lines of the forehead, the eyebrows, the eyes and the mouth intersect the vertical axis, marked by the nose. The surface is delicately modeled. The arched and deeply incised eyebrows, the wide-open and polychromatic eyes, the high cheekbones, the large prominent nose and the curved mouth – as if in a smile – are typical Sumerian artistic conventions.

The figure may have human features, but it still represents a hybrid half-man half-bull. The head has a pair of small, blunt horns, and at the temples, two triangular and pointed ears that reproduce those of bulls. This hybrid probably refers to the bull-man (called *kusarikku* in Akkadian, *gud-alim* in Sumerian), even if a long curly beard, and thick, undulating hair, which contrast with the youthful and fresh look of this face, usually characterize the latter. The bull-man frequently appears in Mesopotamian art; it was considered a protective demon, helping people to fight evil, especially from the 2nd millennium B.C.

CONDITION

Excellent condition of preservation

PROVENANCE

Ex-Bonham's London, 30 september 1999, lot 1.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- GOODNICK WESTENHOLZ J. (ed.), *Dragons, Monster and Fabulous Beasts*, Jerusalem, 2004, p. 26-27.
WOOLLEY C.L and al., *Ur Excavations II, The Royal Cemetery*, Oxford, 1934, pl. 121, p. 301 (bull protome with beardless human head).