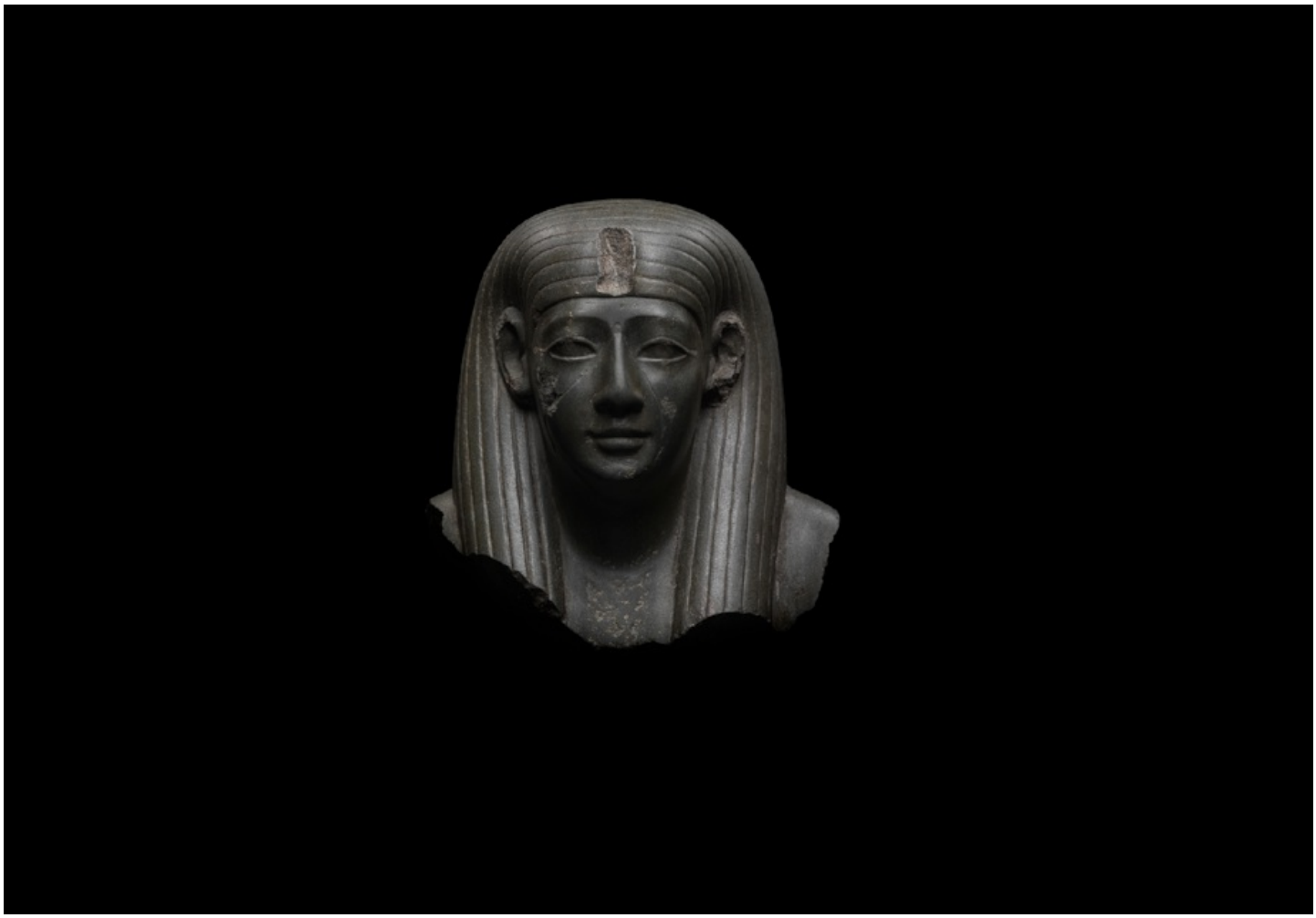
# TEFAF NEW YORK HIGHLIGHT: A GODDESS REDISCOVERED

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For forty-four years, this bust was hidden from the public eye, but has now been revealed as the work of the Greywacke Master.

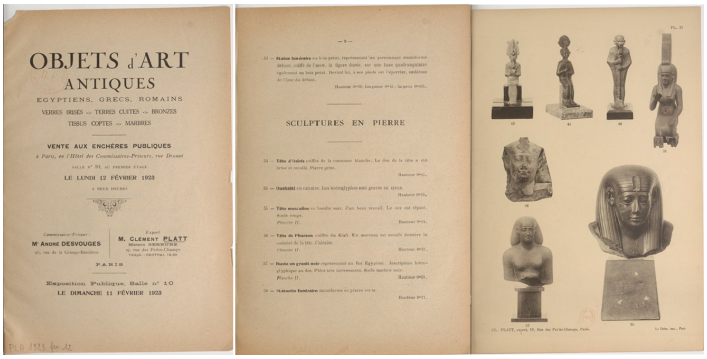
In January 2022, a bust carved from greenish-black stone and wearing an Egyptian wig was listed for sale by a small auction house in Gloucestershire. Although the piece was very finely carved, with smooth facial features and a serene expression, it was covered in a thick layer of paint or wax. This, combined with the poor quality of the available photographs, puzzled experts, who could not work out if it was a true ancient Egyptian work, or a later imitation or fake. However, through years of careful cross-disciplinary research, David Aaron discovered that not only was the piece an authentic antiquity, but that it underwent a fascinating transformation in its journey through the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.



*A Goddess by the Greywacke Master, Dynasty XXVI, Reign of Amasis II, 570-526 B.C., Egypt. Image: David Brunetti*

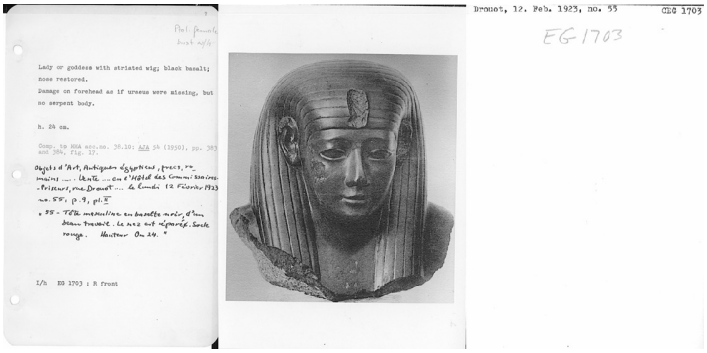
## Unearthing the provenance

Our investigation into the bust's provenance began when we found it in a 1923 publication. The head was listed and illustrated as Lot 55 in a sale at the Hôtel Drouot, Paris, which took place on 12 February 1923. The catalogue describes it as, 'Tête masculine en basalte noir, d'un beau travail. Le nez est reparé'.


OBJETS d'ART
ANTIQUES
EGYPTIENS, GRECS, ROMAINS
VENTE AUX ENCHÈRES PUBLIQUES
LE LUNDI 12 FÉVRIER 1923
Me ANDRÉ DESVOUGES
M. CLÉMENT PLATT
PARIS
Exposition Publique, Salle n° 10
LE DIMANCHE 11 FÉVRIER 1923
SCULPTURES EN PIERRE

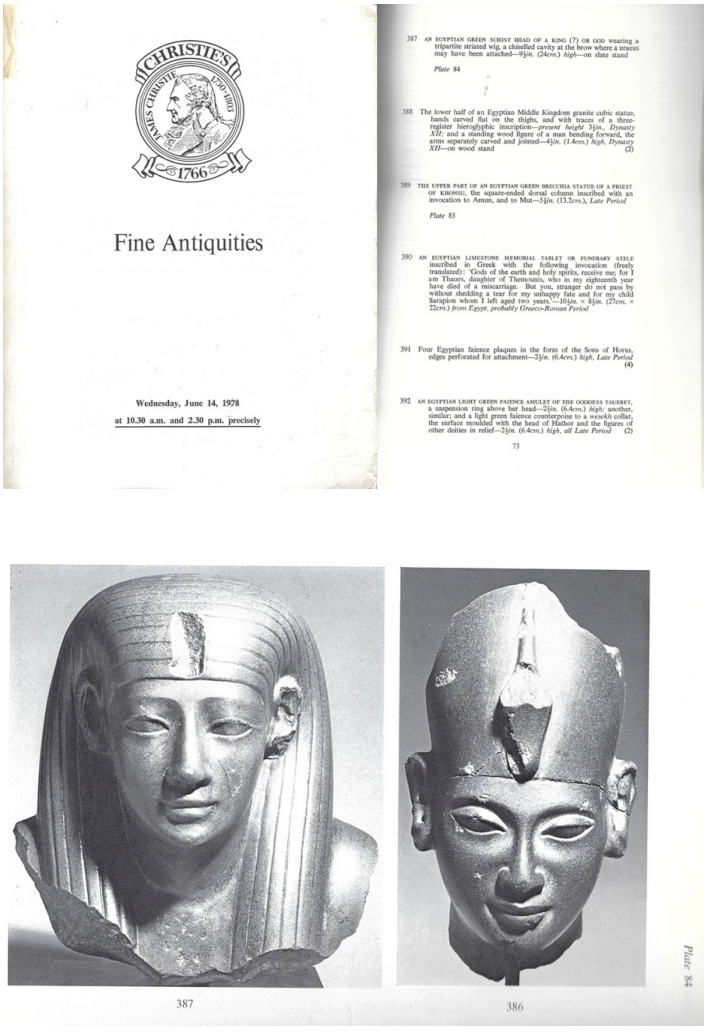
*Objets d'Art, Antiques Egyptiens, Grecs, Romains, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 12 February 1923, Lot 55.*

Interestingly, Curator and Chairman of the Department of Egyptian, Classical and Ancient Middle Eastern Art at Brooklyn Museum, Bernard V. Bothmer also recorded this statue in his notes (EG 1703). Bothmer described the piece as 'Lady or goddess with striated wig; black basalt; nose restored'.




*Statue recorded in the files of Bernard V Bothmer (1912-1993) as EG 1703*

The head resurfaced on the art market in 1978, this time at Christie's in London. In the 14 June 1978 Fine Antiquities sale, the piece was listed as lot 387, and described as, 'An Egyptian green schist head of a king (?) or god', consigned from the London art market. A private collector in the U.K. bought the piece from this sale, and it was then passed down through their family, disappearing from public knowledge until 2022.

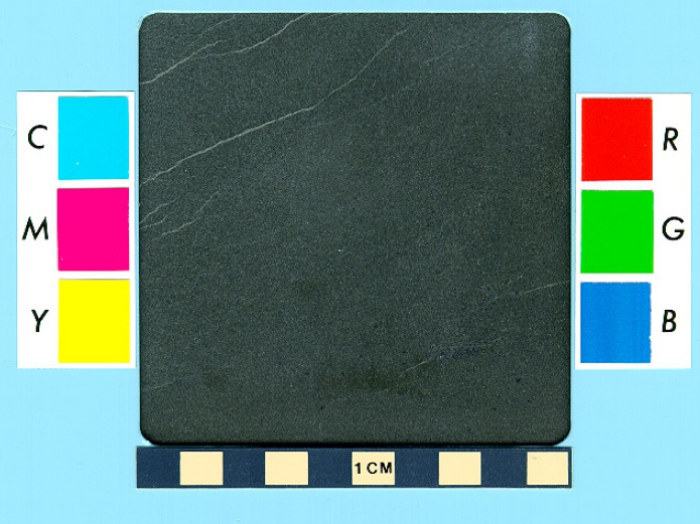



*Christie's Fine Antiquities sale, 14 June 1978, Lot 387.*

The art-historical research builds a picture of the head's whereabouts in the twentieth century, but also raises some new questions. Who was the head – a man, a king, a god, or a goddess? What was it made from? And what happened to its nose?

## Scientific analysis

Geologist Dr. James Harrell proposed a new theory about the stone's identity: metagreywacke, a greenish-grey stone used by the Egyptians for important statues from at least the Middle Kingdom onwards. In pursuit of answers, art conservation scientist John Twilley analysed small samples of the statue through optical petrography, scanning electron miscopy, and X-ray spectrometry. The results confirmed that Harrell's theory was correct, but, intriguingly, they also revealed that the stone samples taken from the restored nose matched those from the rest of the bust. The samples were so close in colour, porosity, and grainsize, that it seems they were crafted from the same piece of stone, despite the nose's later date.




*Hammamat metagraywacke*

Further close study revealed traces of sharp chisel blows along the rear of the wig, and parts of the base of the bust – someone had intentionally cut away large chunks of the sculpture. Could it be that the stone was taken from the back and base of the statue to make its new nose?

More clues about this unusual nose job were unearthed when conservationist Kate Bowles carefully removed and documented the restorations. A layer of paint and dark wax were removed from the base of the head, revealing a large section of green resin, which seemed to match the resin on the surface of the nose and chin. With the resin removed, the fragments of stone forming the restored areas could be extracted and examined individually. These fragments were of varying size and shape, and some of them were clearly carved with designs that matched the rest of the bust. We found pieces that lined up with the bottom right end of the wig, the rear of the wig, and the division between the arm and shoulder. The fragments were marked with traces from a reciprocating saw, which were also found on the underside rear of the statue.

The story of the bust was captured in its physical material. A section of stone was cut from the underside rear, then trimmed into a block, from which the new nose was carved. A chisel was then used along the sawn edges, and leftover fragments

were mixed with magnesite cement and applied to surface to cover up the traces of the sawing. The cement was carefully colour-matched to the stone, and a final layer of talc mixed with organic resin and pigments was then applied as a cosmetic coating to further conceal this clever restoration. As well as the nose, the restorer reworked the cosmetic lines at the outer corners of both eyes.

A restoration of this kind would be virtually unthinkable today, when great emphasis is placed on minimally invasive and reversible conservation techniques that try to stay as true to the original object as possible. The restoration was clearly done by someone incredibly skilled in stone carving, and who had great confidence in their ability to recreate ancient Egyptian work – once the stone removed from the back of the bust had been carved, there would be no material for a second attempt without doing further damage to the statue. No matter the skill of the carver, however, any restoration speaks to the character and tastes of its own time period. To modern eyes, the restored nose simply raised questions about the sculpture's antiquity. With these restorations removed, it became clear that the piece was truly an ancient Egyptian masterpiece.

## Dating the restoration

The new nose was definitely added before 1923, as it can be seen clearly in the photograph in the Drouot catalogue. In this photo, however, the edges of the inset piece of stone are still visible, as is the damage to the right cheek. The surface layer of talc-based material must, therefore, have been added later to smooth over the surface, before it was next photographed for the 1978 Christie's sale.

Close comparison of the bust with a statue in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, supplies the next piece of the puzzle. A greywacke bust of a man dated to the end of the fourth century B.C. (Ägyptische Sammlung, INV 20) exhibits clear signs of reworking. Like our bust, the Vienna statue has an unusually shiny and polished surface, and evidence of re-carving around the eyes and eyelids. The reworking looks distinctly modern, though clearly trying to follow the style of the Late Period. Most notably, the nose of the Vienna bust is probably not original – the nostrils are too wide for the base of the nose on the face – and yet is carved from the same stone as the rest of the statue. Vivian Davies, previously Keeper at the British Museum, noted that the new nose must have been crafted from fragments of the lower part of the statue.



*Bust of a man, presumably end of the 4th century BC, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Ägyptisch - Orientalische Sammlung*

The bust was sold to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in 1799 by Prince Poniatowski, who probably acquired the piece in Rome shortly before then. It is one of several Egyptian sculptures of the Late Period which were probably brought to Rome in antiquity, and were then “completed” and reworked according to Roman tastes.

Another group of five Egyptian statues, found at the ancient Roman estate of Horti Sallustiani and now in the Gregorian Egyptian Museum, were restored by Francesco Maratti Padovano (c. 1669-1719) for Pope Clement XI at the start of the eighteenth century. Maratti crafted new pieces to replace missing sections of the statues, including a new nose and chin for a statue of Queen Tuya (Musei Vaticani, cat. 22678).




*Bibliotheque nationale de France*

As it so closely matches the style of other, securely dated restorations, it seems highly likely that this bust was also given its new nose in eighteenth-century Italy. It may well have followed the same historical trajectory as these parallels too, being brought to Rome by the ancient Romans to decorate their sanctuaries dedicated to Egyptian cults.

## Attributing a masterpiece

Through close stylistic analysis, Egyptologist Biri Fay has proposed that the bust of a goddess belongs to a series of works attributed by Bernard Bothmer to a single artist or workshop dubbed the Greywacke Master. The single hand of the artist can be clearly seen in three works found in the Tomb of Psamtik at Saqqara in 1863 and now in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo (CG 38358, CG 38884, and JE 38927), as well as in a head of the Goddess Selket, formerly in the collection of Christos G. Bastis. Fay adds to this group a sphinx of Amasis II (Museo Capitolino, Rome, inv. 35) and the greywacke goddess. All of these pieces exhibit the same fine quality of carving, overall proportions, and smooth surface, that mark out the works of this master sculptor. This attribution also helps to firmly date the bust of the goddess to the reign of King Amasis II (r. 570-526 B.C.) in the 26th Dynasty.



*Artifacts from Tomb of Psamtik in Boulaq Museum, 1870s. Photograph: MM. Delié and Béchard, 1872*

## Understanding the history

The combination of scientific examination and art-historical and Egyptological research thus reveals a great deal about the history of the bust. After Amasis II's death and the defeat of his son and successor by Cambyses II, the invading Persians destroyed much of the Saite Dynasty's architectural and cultural projects. The face and lower of half of this bust were probably intentionally damaged during this period, along with many other statues.

But not all of the damage to the bust seems to have been enacted with the intention to destroy. A small incised rectangle on the front of the wig shows where the uraeus was removed very carefully, as was some kind of ornament around the neck, now attested by small pick marks left where it was removed. The ears and parts of the wig were also reshaped at some point. These changes suggest that the bust was altered in order to represent a new subject, before it was damaged more dramatically. Reusing statues in this way was a common practice in ancient Egypt, as fine materials were costly and scarce. Moreover, as this bust was carved by a skilled master sculptor, repurposing it would associate its fineness with the new subject.



*A Goddess by the Greywacke Master, Dynasty XXVI, Reign of Amasis II, 570-526 B.C., Egypt. Image: David Brunetti*

This explains why the bust has been described in so many ways. Without the uraeus or other identifying emblems it is hard to pinpoint exactly who it was designed to embody, both at first, and after the uraeus was removed. The initial presence of a uraeus and tripartite wig means it must have represented either a royal or divine subject originally. The tripartite wig was much more commonly seen on women of the Late Period, and can be seen on images of elite unmarried women, queens, and goddesses. As it was so finely crafted, and the other works by the Greywacke Master were all dedicated at the Temple of Sais, it follows that this bust would have also been displayed there. This suggests that the bust probably represented one of the goddesses of the ancient Egyptian pantheon when it was first made, as stated by Bothmer.

Although there are many questions still left to be explored, the answers revealed through our multidisciplinary research demonstrate the value of such a collaborative approach. Through scientific and art-historical study, this bust has been restored from an unknown, misunderstood, and uncelebrated piece of lost history to its rightful place as the work of a master craftsman, made to adorn the main sanctuary of the Saite pharaohs. Based on our research, we have chosen to non-invasively reattach the earlier restorations, as they represent a key part of the bust's story. Despite its long journey through tumultuous times and changing attitudes towards sculpture, the Greywacke Goddess has returned as one of the masterpieces of its age.



*A Goddess by the Greywacke Master, Dynasty XXVI, Reign of Amasis II, 570-526 B.C., Egypt. Image: David Brunetti*