

Votive Head Of A Woman

Yemen

3rd - 1st Century B.C.

Alabaster

H: 26.5cm

With an elongated, slender neck, a finely carved straight nose above a small mouth, grooved arched eyebrows and semi-circular ears in relief. The eyes are deeply carved for inlay. In characteristic yellow veined alabaster. The top has been cut flat and left rough, possibly to fit into a niche or recess. The triangular protuberances on either side of the neck represents bunched hair. This elegant head is reputed to have come from Hayd ibn 'Aqil, the necropolis of ancient Timna', located a little to the north of the city. Timna' was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Qataban, one of the richest kingdoms of ancient South Arabia, whose wealth derived largely from its strategic position along the Incense Route, as a trading point for merchants dealing in spices and, most importantly, frankincense, myrrh and cinnamon. According to the Roman author Pliny the Elder, who died in 79 A.D., Timna' was a bustling city with some sixty-five temples. Excavations suggest a major fire forced its inhabitants to abandon the city sometime in the first century A.D. Such heads most likely decorated tombs, memorialising the individuals within, and would have belonged to an elite individual.

Literature:

L'Œil, n°422, January 1990, pg.45. Ancient Sculpture and Works of Art Part I, Sotheby's, London, 7th December 2021, Lot 1 (front cover)

David Aaron Ltd, 2023, No. 27.