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Seljuk Mother and Child

C. 900 - 1517 A.D.

Stucco, Polychrome

H: 31cm

This very rare stucco sculpture represents a seated cross-legged woman, with her hands on her knees, holding a child in the crook of her right arm. Dressed in a robe belted around the waist, with elbow-length sleeves incised with a trim of scalloped motifs. On the upper part of the left sleeve is a tiraz band.

She wears a necklace and pendant in the form of a bird with its wings unfurled, and a diadem of rosettes over a fringe of curly hair. The artistic form of the woman is Turkic, with a rounded face, narrow extended eyes, and a long straight nose. The traces of polychrome pigments remaining on the sculpture suggest that originally it was fully painted; patches of black, red and blue are visible, with some areas of gilding on the headdress and tiraz band. The back is flat and plain, which suggests that this figure most probably intended to be secured to a wall or set within a niche; and therefore, to be visible only from the front.

It is known from excavations and textual evidence that figures with this feature were used to decorated palaces and would often represent palace guards and its inhabitants; however due to the fragile porous nature of stucco few have survived. No comparable examples of stucco mother and child figures are known, but the maternal theme is closely echoed in a group of 12th and 13th century ceramic figurines representing a women suckling a naked child. They show some variation in size and quality but were all made as hollow vessels, glazed on the interior and with a wide opening at the top. This piece is a testimony to the lasting artistic and cultural prowess of the Seljuk dynasty, the Turkic style is the perfect embodiment of the cultural influences that travelled from the East along the silk road during a vast, though relatively short-lived empire which unified Persian, Islamic, and Central Asian–Turkic elements.

Literature:

Archeologie D'Orient Arts D'Islam, Boisgirard, Paris, 29 octobre 1980, Lot 170.

Arts D'Orient, Boisgirard, Paris, 31 Mars 1993, Lot 33.

Important Antiquities from the Western Silk Road, David Aaron, 2018.

