

The Goddess Neith

664-525 B.C., 26th Dynasty

Bronze, Electrum

H: 33cm

Bronze statue of the goddess Neith, striding, her left foot extended forward. Her left hand is extended forward and formally held a papyrus sceptre, a fragmentary ankh is visible in her right hand. She wears a close-fitting sheath dress, incised with a broad usekh collar, and carefully engraved bracelets and armlets. On her head is the Red Crown of Lower Egypt, decorated with vertical striations and restored spiral and spire. Her face is finely molded, with a broad upturned nose and electrum-overlaid eyes and eyebrows.

Neith was one of the earliest recorded gods in the Egyptian pantheon, worshipped from early in the Predynastic era through to the arrival of Roman rule. A war goddess and goddess of weaving, she was the patron goddess of the Red Crown of Lower Egypt and the city of Zau (Sais, in the 5th Nome of Lower Egypt) in the Delta. A powerful and popular goddess, she was, according to the Iunyt (Esna) cosmology, the creator of the world and the mother of the sun, Ra. This made her the mother of all of the gods, who often came to her to settle their disputes.

Her symbols are the bow and arrows and a sword and shield as a war goddess, a weaving shuttle as a funerary goddess, and the Red Crown of Lower Egypt as goddess of creation and mother goddess. She is usually depicted, as here, as a woman wearing the Red Crown of Lower Egypt, however, she is occasionally depicted as a cow in connection with her role as the mother of Ra.

The use of electrum, a naturally occurring alloy of gold and silver sometimes called ‘green-gold’, for the eyes speaks to the high status of the object. Electrum had been used by the Egyptians since at least the 3rd millennium B.C., but, give its rarity, was reserved for the most expensive and important objects. Most electrum used in Egypt was imported from Nubia, though some was found there.

Literature:

Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, February 25th, 1971, no. 70, illus.

Sotheby’s, New York, June 5th, 1999, no. 31, illus.

David Aaron Ltd, 2023, No. 28.