Baket-Mut, 'Chantress' of Amun

19th Dynasty, 1285 - 1270 B.C.

74 x 44 x 49 cm (29 $^{1}/_{8}$ x 17 $^{3}/_{8}$ x 19 $^{1}/_{4}$ inches)

Limestone with traces of polychrome

This enigmatic pair statue portrays a husband and wife, seated on a shared plinth and seat. There is a line of inscription running down the skirt of the female figure, allowing us to distinguish her as 'Baket-Mut' a 'chantress' (songstress) devoted to the temple of Amun. It can be presumed that a line of hieroglyphic inscription once ran down the legs of the male figure, unfortunately this has been lost in antiquity so we are unable to identify him.

Group statues were popular in both the tomb and temple, often depicting husband and wife dyads, or family groups. The earliest documented examples date to the reign of King Djoser in the Third Dynasty (circa 2675–2625 B.C.E.). Most pair statues are created with the female seated on the left of the husband, however in this case she is placed on his right. There is no definite reason why this should be, however it is a possibility that this statue was one of an identical but mirror image pair, to be placed at the entrance of a mastaba or tomb.[1] Baket-Mut's left arm is placed behind her husband portraying affection, it is also likely that the husband's right hand once rested over the right hand of Baket-Mut. The same pose is found on the limestone statue of Horemheb (1300BC-1250BC), now kept in the British Museum. The intimacy of this pose helps us to understand the sanctity and importance of marriage and kinship to the Egyptians.

Masterfully carved from limestone, traces of original pigment can be found over areas of the surface, meaning that at the time of production the statue would have been vibrantly painted. It was created during the 19th Dynasty, a period when Egypt was thriving, having enjoyed great prosperity and power for three hundred years. As the Egyptian borders expanded, influences came from newly occupied territories and vassal states such as the Canaanites and the Anatolian Hittites. It is widely acknowledged that the New Kingdom produced the most awe-inspiring and stylistic art. The wealth of the country was reflected in the enormity of individual artworks as well as their quality.

The clothing worn by the couple can go some way in helping us date the sculpture, as they are depicted wearing the fashions set by the royal family of late Dynasty XVIII and early Dynasty XIX. This also shows that the seated couple were wealthy and operated in high society. Baket-Mut's dress is simple and

close fitting, with almost the suggestion of nudity with the visibility of her navel. Although the husband's legs and upper torso have been lost, there are enough clues remaining to allow us to speculate on his appearance. His clothing, like his wife's, follow the styles set by the royals. A two-part outfit consisting of a wrapped skirt with sash sits high on his hips, and a tunic would have covered his upper torso, the remnants of pleated sleeves are visible on his upper arms. Baket-Mut is also depicted wearing an elaborate wig of plaited locs terminating in intricate beading, secured along the forehead with a wide headband. Wigs of this style were first introduced in Dynasty XVIII and examples have been found in the tombs of New Kingdom royalty and elite.

The name 'Baket-Mut' can be translated to mean 'Handmaiden of the Goddess Mut'; 'Mut' being the 'Mother Goddess', a primal deity associated with parthenogenesis (reproduction without fertilization) and water. 'Mut' was also the consort to the God 'Amun', along with their son, 'Khonsu', they make up the Theban triad. As a 'Chantress' in the temple of Amun, she can be firmly linked to these principal Theban deities.

Hailing from an era renowned for its unparalleled artistic accomplishment, this striking dyad preserves not only the skill of the sculptor; but embodies the spirit of New Kingdom art. Sculpture of this pedigree, scale and importance is seldom available to the private market and would be an exceptional acquisition for any private or museum collection.

Exhibitions

L'Ibis Gallery, New York, 1987-1988.

The Winter Antiques Show, New York, 2003.

The Michael C. Carlos Museum, Atlanta, Georgia, 2012-2016.

Literature:

L'Ibis Gallery Exhibition Poster, taken in 1987 by John Kasparian.

"Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Statues, Reliefs and Paintings VIII", Part 2, Private Statues (Dynasty XVIII to the Roman Period), Statues of Deities, Jaromir Malek, Oxford, 1999, p.511. 801-614-640.

Cover of Spring/Summer Calendar 2013, Michael C. Carlos Museum, Emory University, Atlanta.

"Baket-Mut Chantress of Amun", 2017.

David Aaron, 2018-19, No. 13.