

Head Of A Dignitary

New Kingdom 1550 - 1077 B.C.

Stone

H: 15.5cm

This fragmentary head sculpted in the round probably comes from a block statue of a seated or kneeling figure. On the head is a wig that consists of vertical braids, covering both the back of the skull and the forehead and forming a curved line that echoes the curve of the eyebrows. The lips reveal a faint smile, and the beginning of a false beard (postiche) adorns the chin. These beards were usually associated with the Pharoah and their inherent divinity but could be worn by men of high status at moments of importance, as is seen on the mastaba tomb of palace administrator Perneb in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (ca. 2381–2323 B.C.). His eyes are outlined in high relief, mimicking the kohl worn by high status Egyptian men and women. Almost all statues were polychromed, and traces of paint is found on the brows, eye bands and hair. All Egyptian statuary and almost all Egyptian two-dimensional art related to religious beliefs, mortuary cults and the veneration of gods and kings. It is probable that the sculpture adorned the man's tomb, where it would have received the offerings brought by his relations. The expense of such a tomb suggests an individual of some importance, although without the context of the tomb or any hieroglyphics it is impossible to say who for certain. Almost all of the quartzite (otherwise known as silicified or siliceous sandstone) used for statuary in Egypt comes from quarries in just two areas: Cairo (the Gebel Ahmar quarry) and Aswan (the Gharb Aswan and Wadi Abu Aggag quarries), therefore we can assume that most likely the stone for this sculpture was most likely originally from either of these two areas. Quartzite was a highly valued but difficult to carve hard stone. As such, it was often reserved for private and royal statues and sarcophagi, such as those of Hatshepsut and Tutankhamun (the square sarcophagus from his tomb in which the famous golden anthropoid coffins were placed), another indicator of the figure's high status.

Literature:

David Aaron Ltd, 2022, No. 22.