

Head of a Woman

3rd to 1st Century B.C,

Yemen

Alabaster

H: 24 cm

With a long tapering neck, high distinct cheekbones and almond-shaped eyes which are missing the original inlay. The mouth and grooved eyebrows are carved, and the coiffure is visible either side of the neck.

This elegant head of a woman is reputedly from Marib, the ancient capital of the kingdom of Saba', in Southern Arabia, modern-day northern Yemen. A land of great wealth, the Sabaeans were a seafaring people who traded spices such as frankincense and myrrh. Some scholars believe it to be the site of the biblical land of Sheba, from where the famously wealthy Queen of Sheba originated.

Most likely created to adorn a niche in a tomb, this head would have belonged to a high-status private individual.