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Head of a King

Bust of Amenhotep III, re-employed by Ramses II

Egypt

1540-1190 B.C., 18th/19th Dynasty

Limestone

H: 36.7 cm, W: 48.3 cm

Monumental head of an Egyptian king, originally most likely Amenhotep III, 1390-1353 B.C., later re-cut and re-employed by Ramesses II, 1279-1213 B.C. Wearing a broad beaded collar and striped nemes-headcloth with fragmentary queue behind. The uraeus and postiche missing, with the incised beard-strap lines still visible. A circular recess is cut into the top of the head, probably to hold the Crown of Upper and Lower Egypt.

The hard cream-coloured stone from which this head is carved was particularly favoured by Amenhotep III, however, the head bears evidence of modification. The carved vertical recess on the front of the head would have served to secure the addition of a nose, and the alteration and addition of an uraeus designated by Ramesside stylistic preference. The apparent addition of other royal accoutrements, perhaps streamers or additional cobras, is suggested by several narrow drilled recesses on the sides and back of the head. Another modification is the indication of recesses to indicate pierced ears, which did not appear in royal statuary until the time of Amenhotep III's son, Akhenaten, and his successors. The drilled recesses at the corners of the lips visually assisted the transformation of what was originally a wider mouth to the smaller mouth preferred by King Ramesses II.

Amenhotep III, father of Akhenaten and grandfather of Tutankhamun, presided over a rich and prosperous reign of almost thirty-nine years which saw a flowering of grand art and architecture, best exemplified by the two enormous statues of the king outside his mortuary temple Thebes, known since classical Greek times as the Colossi of Memnon.

Literature:

Günther Roeder, *Hermopolis 1929-1939; Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Hermopolis-Expedition in Hermopolis, Ober-Ägypten, in Verbindung mit zahlreichen Mitarbeitern*, 1959, pp. 11 and 257, pl. 43 f.