

DAVID AARON



Head of a Woman

3rd-1st Century BC, South Arabia

Alabaster

Height: 23 cm

A stylised head carved from creamy alabaster with a few darker red veins running through it. The head sits atop an elongated neck, the face framed by textured hair that flows from the high, flat forehead to the level of the squared chin. The large, recessed eyes, which would probably have originally been inlaid, sit below slender incised eyebrows. A long straight nose leads down to the mouth, formed of an incised line enclosed within slightly raised lips. The ears project on either side of the head, with the hair tucked behind them, to fall in triangular wedges to the chin.

This head is stylistically aligned with those found at Timna, the capital of the ancient Yemeni kingdom of Qataban, which existed from the 1st millennium BC until the late 1st or 2nd centuries AD. Timna served as an important hub of the Incense Route, the camel caravan that transported incense from Arabia and India to ports on the Mediterranean Sea. Roman author and philosopher Pliny the Elder (23/24-79 AD) described Timna as a busy city with around 65 temples. Excavations in 1950 and 1951 by Wendell Phillips and his team unearthed several sites in the city, including the South Gate, private residences, a structure identified as a temple complex, and the necropolis. The alabaster heads were found in the vicinity of the necropolis, known as Ḥayd ibn 'Aqīl. A further head was discovered in 1962 by a British officer stationed in Aden. The heads are all roughly carved on the reverse and often squared off at the top and back, suggesting that they were designed to be placed within niches in a shrine; several of the sculptures were found together within the antechamber of a crypt.

Literature:

Antiquities and a collection of Panamanian Gold Pendants, Christie's, London, 6 June 1967, Lot 160, p. 28.

Antiquities and Ethnographica, Christie's, London, 12 December 1967, Lot 168, p. 34.