

BASTET

EGYPTIAN, LATE PERIOD, 26TH DYNASTY – 30TH DYNASTY, CIRCA 664-332 BC
BRONZE

HEIGHT: 33.5 CM.

WIDTH: 22.5 CM.

DEPTH: 13 CM.

PROVENANCE:

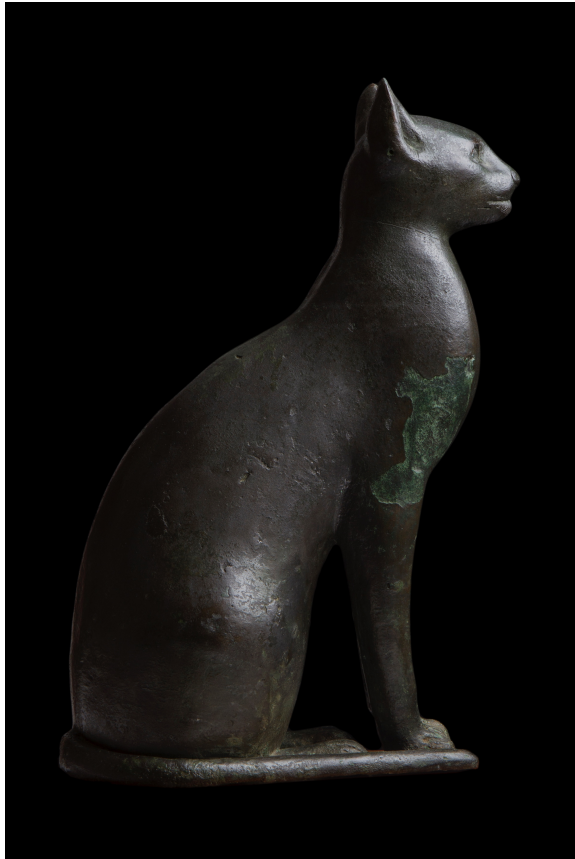
PROBABLY IN THE COLLECTION OF GEORGES DELLA FAILLE DE LEVERGHEM (1869-1944), DIPLOMATE AND SON-IN-LAW OF THE BELGIUM AMBASSADOR IN EGYPT. FORMER BELGIAN COLLECTION OF HIS SON, THE COUNT CHARLES-JULES DELLA FAILLE DE LEVERGHEM (1906-1960). PASSED DOWN AS AN HEIRLOOM IN THE COLLECTION OF THE COUNTESS DELLA FAILLE DE LEVERGHEM. SOLD BY SOTHEBY'S LONDON, "CATALOGUE OF EGYPTIAN [...] ANTIQUITIES", 1 DECEMBER 1969, LOT 30. THEN IN THE PRIVATE COLLECTION OF SYLVIA WILDENSTEIN, PARIS.



This exceptional bronze cat represents the renowned Egyptian goddess Bastet. The animal is sitting on its hind legs, forelegs straight. Its tail is delicately curled around its rump and brought in towards its right foreleg. Its chest is rounded, while its curved back reveals the animal's shoulders. Its head is upright and perfectly straight, gaze remote. The finely carved eyes probably featured irises and pupils made of another material such as glass paste, copper or gold. Its muzzle is delicately shaped, while its whiskers and whisker pads are incised, lending our cat a certain realism and showing very interesting attention to detail. This precision in the depiction of the animal is also visible in its ears. Narrow and pointed, they stand up atop its head and are exquisitely incised on the edges to represent fur. Both are pierced and once held earrings, probably made of gold. The quality of execution, the attention to detail and the great anatomical realism of our cat thus make it an exceptional, extremely rare piece. Our sculpture is also very precious due to its adornment. Around its neck, the cat is wearing a necklace with a pendant in the shape of *ib*, or a heart, discreetly incised in the bronze. *Ib*, or the spiritual heart, is a shape widely used in Egyptian amulets and pendants. Taking the form of the human heart, it was considered to be the seat of thought, the centre of intelligence, emotion and morality in opposition to *haty*, the vital organ. Our cat is



also adorned with a scarab beetle, which is perched on top of its head. Quite detailed, the insect has six legs, two mandibles, a narrow abdomen and wings that are folded over its back. Scarab beetles, which are very common in Egyptian iconography, are the symbol of the rising sun. They favour life and fertility and embody rebirth.



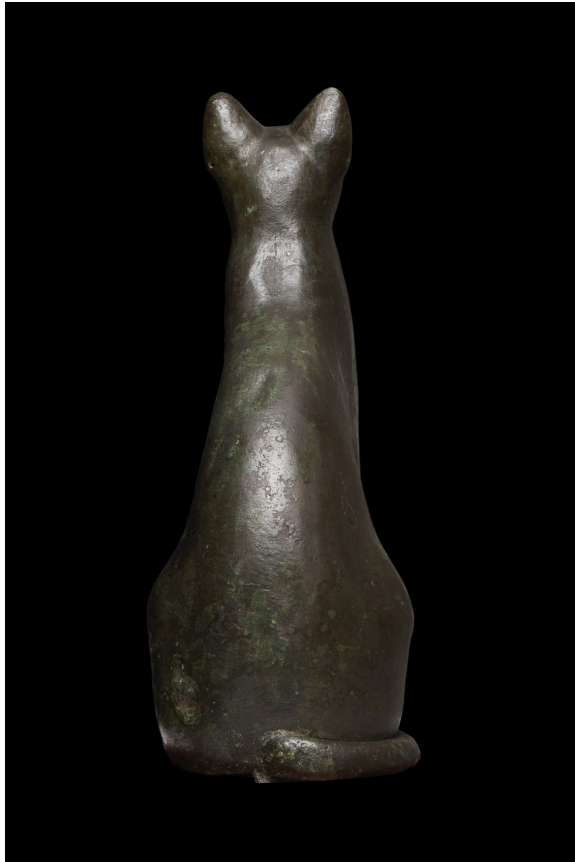
The cat is sculpted in bronze and is hollow inside. It has an original patina with green and brown hues, which gives our work a certain aura, symbolising the mark of time on the material. Bronze, an alloy of copper and tin, was one of the most prized materials in the Egyptian world, mainly due to its solidity. The technique used here is that of lost wax casting. It consists in making a wax model, which is then fired at very high temperatures. Once the wax has melted, it is evacuated and replaced by molten bronze.

The hollow cast left our piece with a bronze surface of very interesting finesse. This technique was widely used by the Egyptians, particularly to craft such objects, and then by the Greeks and Romans, to produce larger sculptures. Incidentally, it is unbelievable to think that this technique is still used nowadays to create bronze sculptures. Our cat displays two pins in its forelegs and rump, which would have made it possible to place the sculpture on an antique base.



The goddess Bastet is one of the most important goddesses in the Egyptian pantheon. Known since at least the beginning of the Old Kingdom, she is primarily linked to the sun. In the Late Period, her cult became more and more popular. She then acquired more benevolent characteristics and became the protective goddess of the home and feminine fertility,

capable of offering great prosperity. She was thus opposed to the ferocious character of the lion goddess Sekhmet.



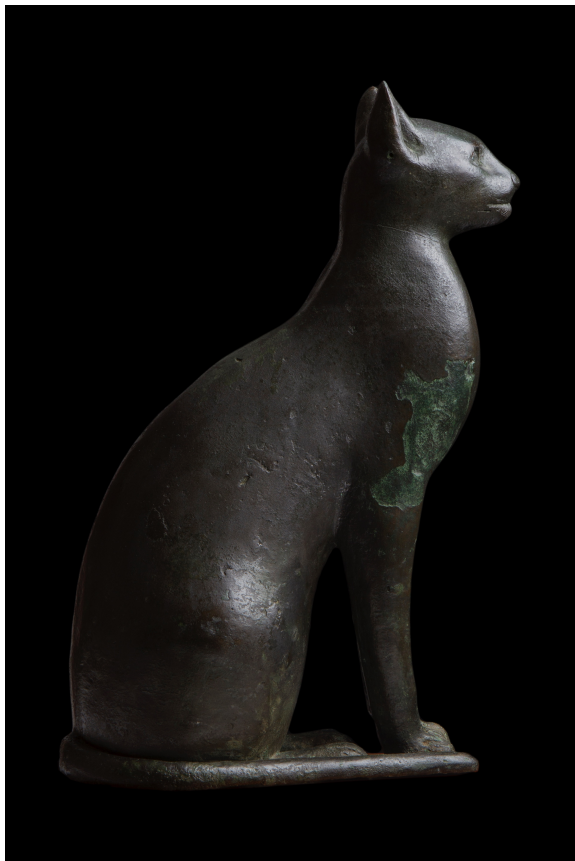
Her main place of worship was the city of Bubastis in the Nile Delta. When the city became the capital in the 22nd Dynasty, it developed considerably, causing the cult of Bastet to expand. The site is known for having harboured one of the largest cat cemeteries, where mummified cats were offered as votive objects. The mummies themselves were generally placed in bronze or wooden receptacles shaped like sitting cats. Other smaller bronze figures or amulets were also offered by priests and other donors hoping to communicate with the gods and elicit their favour. These bronze sculptures echo a very particular iconography that was taken up from dynasty to dynasty. Most thus faithfully represented the animal in an

anatomical sense, but also in its very essence, with its elegant, almost haughty posture: sitting, head upright, tail curled around one paw, as in the hieroglyphics. The ears are generally pierced, and it is not uncommon for the animal to be adorned by a scarab beetle and wearing a necklace over its chest, indicating its protective function and link to the sun. Magnificent examples are thus conserved in various museums worldwide (ill. 1-5).

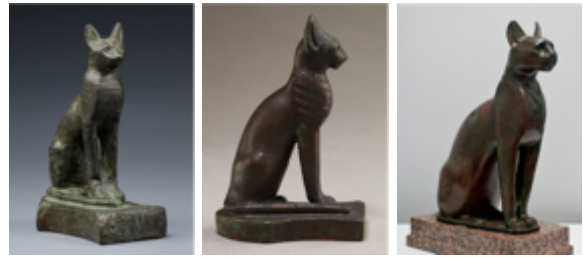


Our Bastet is thus exceptional by its size and the finesse of its execution, but also by its provenance. It belonged to the collection of Countess Della Faille de Leverghem. The Della Faille is an important family in Belgian aristocracy, which included many Belgian politicians. Charles-Jules' father, Georges Della Faille de Leverghem (1869-1944), himself a diplomat had married Jeanne Alice

«Simonne» Maskins, the daughter of the Belgian diplomat to Egypt, Léon Maskens (born in 1944). Léon Maskens had played a significant role in the acquisition of Egyptian antiquities for a Belgian museum in the early 20th century, so therefore, it is possible that our Bastet was originally welcomed into the Della Faille family via Léon Maskens. As art collectors, part of the collection of The Della Faille was bequeathed to the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium. Our cat was then sold by Sotheby's London on 1 December 1969 as lot 30 (ill. 6). It finally joined the collection of the famous collectors Daniel and Sylvia Wildenstein. Daniel Wildenstein was a French art trader and historian, who was born in 1917 and died in 2001 (ill. 7). Nicknamed “the man with 10,000 paintings”, he married Sylvia Roth, in whom he kindled his passion for horse racing and artworks. Sylvia died in 2010.



Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Bastet, Egyptian, Late Period, 664-30 BC, bronze, H.: 8.8 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 10.130.1320.

Ill. 2. Bastet, Egyptian, Late Period – Ptolemaic Period, 664-30 BC, bronze, H.: 8.7 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 44.4.9.

Ill. 3. Cat, Egyptian, 22nd-26th Dynasty, bronze, H.: 35.56 cm. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington DC, inv. no. HC.S.1921.01.(B).



Ill. 4. Bastet, Egyptian, 664-610 BC, bronze, H.: 27.6 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. E2533.

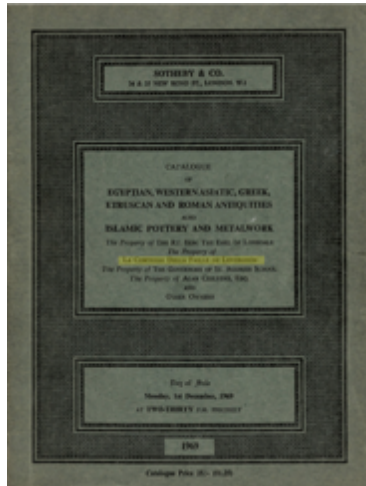
Ill. 5. The Gayer-Anderson Cat, Egyptian, Late Period, bronze, H.: 42 cm. British Museum, London, inv. no. EA64391.



Ill. 6. Daniel Wildenstein in his New York apartment the day of the sale at Sotheby's on 1 December 1969.

Publications:

- Sotheby's London, Catalogue of Egyptian
[...] antiquities, 1 December 1969, lot 30.



A LARGE EGYPTIAN BRONZE CAT

*The Property of La Comtesse Della Faille De Keverghem
(from the Collection of the late Comte della Faille de Leverghem)*

56 AN IMPORTANT LARGE EGYPTIAN BRONZE FIGURE OF A CAT, seated with its tail curling round towards its forepaws, the features of the face and ears finely cast and incised, the ears pierced for the receipt of earrings, wearing finely incised pectoral ornament in the form of the *Ab* or heart amulet, and with a scarab on top of the head, 13½ in. (33.7 cm.), Saite Period, (two small holes on left side)