

BLOCK STATUE INSCRIBED

EGYPTIAN, NEW KINGDOM, DYNASTY XVIII, CIRCA 1550-1292 BC
BASALT

HEIGHT: 20.5 CM.

WIDTH: 17 CM.

DEPTH: 20 CM.

PROVENANCE:

FORMER EUROPEAN COLLECTION SINCE AT LEAST THE 1940S-1950S BASED ON THE MOUNTING.

THEN IN PRIVATE COLLECTION OF GASTON SWATON (1877-1956), FRANCE. BY DESCENT TO HIS GRAND-DAUGHTER.



Our magnificent speckled grey basalt sculpture features a man sitting with his legs drawn up against his torso and his forearms crossed and placed on his knees. This type of sculpture is called a “cube statue”, named after the body’s position. Dating back to the New Kingdom, more specifically the 18th Dynasty, only the upper part has survived. The front is engraved with three lines of

hieroglyphics while the sides and back were left blank. Only the second and third lines are legible. Even if there are gaps, we can understand that we are looking at a prayer for an offering involving the name of the goddess Mut.



The sides feature old restorations probably intended to make the object more homogeneous. The head proudly overhangs the body of the statue. Only the hands are visible, creating depth. The right hand contains a folded linen cloth, the ends of which stop at the front edge. In the 18th Dynasty, linen fabric, the lotus flower – a



symbol of renewal and fertility – and lettuce were commonplace features.



With high cheekbones and full cheeks, the roundness of the face stands out. His large almond eyes are delicately hollowed out. His eyebrows follow the curve of the eyes and become thinner at their tips. Through these details, the face exudes a certain grace and elegance. The upper part of the nose ridge and the base of the nostrils suggest a nose that is both refined and broad, giving a natural and balanced profile to the subject. A deep nasolabial groove highlights the narrow mouth. The full lips also bring roundness to the sculpture, creating a delicate and harmonious balance between the round volume of the face and the cubic volume of the body. His large, well-detailed ears are extended forward and emerge from his flared wig that falls onto the upper torso, reaching the shoulders' edges. The body is wrapped in

a sheath, thereby producing a blocky appearance. This sheath was made to fit the forms of the body more closely during the late epochs, breaking with the traditional genre of cube statues such as shown by the statue of Wahibra (Ill. 1) dating from the late 26th Dynasty. Generally absent in the Middle Kingdom (Ill. 2), the rectangular back rest stands out from the back of our delicate statue dating from the New Kingdom. Similarly, the Cube Statue of Harwa (Ill. 3) on display at the Louvre, helps us to imagine what the lower part must have looked like, the feet emerging from the body and resting on the rectangular base.



These objects were very popular in the New Kingdom, establishing themselves as a model of private statuary, and spreading into the Late Period. Their solidity and block structure make them particularly well-suited to withstanding the deterioration typical of

statues exposed in open spaces. These significant advantages allowed their success and spread to the New Kingdom, as they were easy to execute and resilient. The subject was wrapped in a sheath from which only the hands, and sometimes the forearms, appeared.



The imposing appearance, the type of sheath and the visible hands: all of these characteristics confirm the dating of our magnificent cube statue to the New Kingdom, more precisely to the 18th Dynasty. Usually, they are inscribed with the name of the owner. In the Middle Kingdom, as evidenced by the titles, most cube statues were of lower and middle-ranking priests and officials. This changed during the New Kingdom, when more high-ranking officials, including viziers, embraced such statuary. It was mainly used as a form of self-promotion and to show their direct interaction with a

divinity or deified ruler. Therefore, we can conclude that our statue must have represented a high-ranking figure under the protection of the female deity Mut.

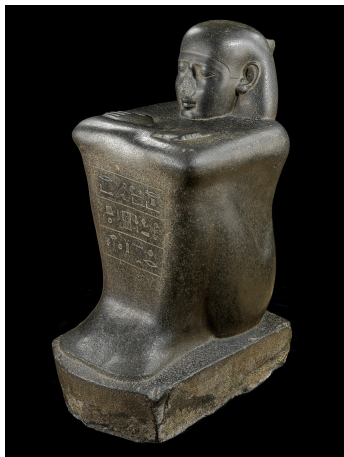
Sculpted from basalt like that of treasurer Sennefer (Ill. 4), dating from the reign of Thutmose III, is a remarkable example of this type of statuary in the 18th Dynasty. Private statuary from this period is of excellent quality due to high demand. Their simple composition allows us to focus on the serene and solemn faces of the two cube statues. Perfectly polished, the volcanic rock gives a delicate and majestic appearance, highlighting the importance of the subjects represented. Moreover, the finesse and natural quality of the lines showcase the sculptors' skills.

Basalt was appreciated for its hardness and the sheen obtained after extensive polishing. It is a volcanic rock that can be extracted from many mines. Despite the availability of such rock in multiple locations, only one old quarry is known. It is located in Widan el-Faras on Jebel el-Qatrani in northern Faiyum (Ill. 5) and was exploited during the Old Kingdom, from the Fourth to the Sixth Dynasty, and possibly as early as the Third Dynasty. It seems likely that basalt was also being mined elsewhere, especially after the Old Kingdom. Basalt was first used to make small containers at the end of the Predynastic Period. It continued to be used for this purpose until the Sixth Dynasty, and then more sporadically. It appears that basalt was used very little after the Old Kingdom, which highlights how precious our statue is, further emphasized by its small size, its detailed and elegantly carved face, as well as its hieroglyphic inscriptions. Such hard,

volcanic rock is difficult to work with. Our magnificent statue is a fine example of the artist's skill.

Our beautiful cube statue was part of Gaston Swaton's collection and was inherited by his granddaughter. Mr Swaton began his insurance career in 1918 as general agent of the Paris Insurance Union and also headed the EuroSud Swaton group, an insurance broker. Then, in 1922, he took up a mandate as exclusive agent with the French General Insurance (FGM).

Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Block statue of Wahibra, Late Period, late Dynasty XXVI, granodiorite, 102 x 45 x 66 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. A91.



Ill. 2. Block statue of Minhotep, Middle Kingdom, late Dynasty XII – early Dynasty XIII, diorite, 17.8 x 8.7 x 14.8 cm. The Metropolitan Museum, New York, inv. no. 15.3.227.



Ill. 3. Block statue of Harwa, Late Period, second half of Dynasty XXV, granodiorite, 57 x 34 x 38.5 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. A 84.
Ill. 4. Block statue of Sennefer, New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty XVIII, granodiorite, 90 x 38 x 54 cm. The British Museum, London, inv. no. EA 48



Ill. 5. Basalt quarry in Widan el-Faras on the northern edge of Jebel Qatrani in northern Faiyum.