

BUST OF A DIGNITARY

EGYPTIAN, NEW KINGDOM, RAMESSIDE PERIOD, DYNASTY XIX, 14TH-12TH CENTURY BC
REEMPLOYED DURING THE 3RD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD,
DYNASTY XXII, 10TH-8TH CENTURY BC
GREY GRANITE

HEIGHT: 56 CM.

WIDTH: 52 CM.

DEPTH: 24 CM.

PROVENANCE:
FORMER COLLECTION OF VALÈRE
MABILLE (1840-1909), ACQUIRED
AROUND 1880-1900.
BY DESCENT TO HIS GRANDSON HENRI
BOREL DE BITCHE (1892-1953), CHÂTEAU
DE RAMEZÉE, BELGIUM.
ON LOAN AT THE MUSÉE DE
MARIEMONT FROM 1944 UNTIL THE
LATE 1960S.
THEN IN A PRIVATE BELGIAN
COLLECTION.



This sublime sculpture depicts a courtly man, sumptuously dressed, in a hieratic pose.



His full face, slightly eroded but revealing round eyes, a broad nose and a mouth with thick lips, is framed by a heavy wig. The long, wavy hair covers the forehead and falls to either side of the face in a voluminous mass, concealing the ears. The neck, quite thin and tubular, is also framed by the hair, and its volumes are marked by a deep hollow on the sides.

The imposing shoulders are covered by the garment – a court tunic, usually in linen – with wide, pleated sleeves. These pleats, designed by skillful horizontal hollowing,



form rigid sections of fabric that gradually widen from the arms, ending at our dignitary's elbows. His bare forearms, of which only the right arm remains, are positioned forward as if our statue were carrying an object. The large torso suggests a well-developed musculature and prominent pectorals, which are blurred by the presence of the garment. This masculine tunic, a loose cape that covers the bust and floats behind the shoulders, giving the appearance of sleeves, is here hung at neck level by a small knot that we can see, the loop of which falls down over the chest.



On the bust, three divinities are carved: Isis, Horus and Osiris. The first, Osiris' sister and wife, embodies maternity. Assimilated to many female deities, she can be recognized here by her hathoric wig, which consists of a solar disk inserted between two cow horns.

The son of Osiris and Isis, Horus is the god of heaven and royalty, and is represented here in his usual form, with a hawk's head wearing the *pschent* crown. Finally, Osiris is the principal god of the Egyptian pantheon. He is a funerary god depicted here wrapped in a mummiform sheath, wearing the *atef* crown and holding the scepters.



On the back of our magnificent sculpture, the wavy hair ends at the top of the fragmentary dorsal pillar. The tunic, which has the same typology as the front, is also decorated with two female deities, engraved in the hollow: Sekhmet and Mut, who are presented on either side of the pillar, at different heights. The first, dangerous and warlike, is depicted as a lioness-headed woman carrying the solar disk, the *uraeus*, on her head. She also holds the *was* sceptre and the *ankh* sign of life. The second, equally fearsome, is depicted as a

woman wearing a vulture's corpse on her head, surmounted by Egypt's double crown – the *pschent* – holding a papyrus scepter and the *ankh*, symbol of life.



Two additional deities are depicted across the full height of the pleated sleeves. Ptah, on the left arm, is the demiurge of Egyptian mythology, as well as the god of craftsmen, artists and architects. He can take many forms, but here he is represented in the simpler way, as a man wrapped in a shroud, wearing the divine beard and holding a scepter combining three powerful symbols: the *was* sceptre, the sign of life, *ankh* and the *djed* pillar. On the right arm is depicted Amun, the local Theban god and one of the principal gods of the Egyptian pantheon. As his name means "hidden", he reveals himself in many ways, as he cannot be represented. He is therefore frequently depicted as a

pharaoh wearing a crown topped by two high vertical feathers, and carrying the *was* sceptre and the *ankh* sign, as on our sculpture.



The position of the bust and arms indicates that our figure was originally kneeling and presenting before him a statue of a deity or *naos* – a tabernacle housing the divine statue. This statue was certainly placed in tribute to a deity in a temple during the reign of Ramses II; his kneeling posture in an attitude of constant prayer suggests that he wished to attract the benevolence of this deity. This kneeling position, known from the hieroglyph "kneeling man holding a flagellum" (ill. 1), is very known in sculpture. The use of this hieroglyph, only used in funerary context, designates a noble person. Several examples of statuary from different periods can be seen in many museums, some

of them fragmentary, which nonetheless offer a glimpse of the position (illus. 2 -7). Other examples of statues, all dating from the Ramesside period, feature a tunic identical to our dignitary's (ill. 8-10). Finally, a bust exhibited in New York is entirely comparable to ours, both in terms of costume and position, as well as aesthetic and practical features such as the dorsal pillar (ill. 11).



This work is astonishing in several aspects, one of them being its multiple dating. Many elements are characteristic of the Ramesside period: the ostentatious costume with its intricate, delicately worked pleats and voluminous wig, in particular, reflect the wealth and luxury resulting from contacts developed with Egypt's neighboring peoples in the New Kingdom. This tunic was worn during the reign of Ramses II, while the

wavy wig appeared during the reign of Seti I, father of Ramses II. The statue was therefore probably made during the 19th dynasty, during the reign of Ramses II (1279-1213 BC). However, later modifications and additions indicate that the work was re-used, probably by another dignitary of Dynasty XXII (945 - c. 715 B.C.): deities have been incised over the entire surface of the work, certainly for prophylactic purposes. The dorsal pillar has been hammered in the same time, in order to erase the name and dedication formulas to the gods associated with the former owner.

Our splendid dignitary bust is carved from grey granite, a hard, very dense volcanic stone. However, the volumes are rendered in an extremely delicate and realistic manner, and a light polish dresses the work and accentuates the play of light and shadow created by these more or less deep hollows and reliefs. A sculpture of this quality bears witness to the remarkable craftsmanship of the artist who created it. The Egyptian granite comes from quarries located in Aswan, a few kilometers from the banks of the Nile.

The Belgian industrialist and collector Valère Mabille (1840-1909) built up an important collection in the 1880s-1900s, notably when he was in Egypt (ill. 12). It was at this time that our superb bust joined his collection. An export permit was obtained for each of the Egyptian works he acquired, and these documents are preserved in the archives of the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria. The statue was subsequently passed down to his grandson, Henri Borel de Bitché (1892-1953), a Belgian diplomat. The latter presented the work at his estate, Château de Ramezée, built in the 18th

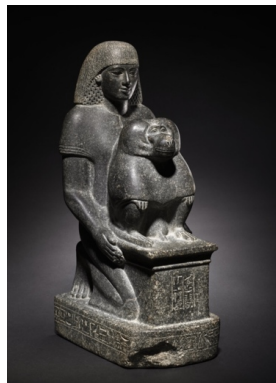
century and refurbished several times up to the 19th century (ill. 13).

The dignitary's bust was then placed on deposit at the Musée Royal de Mariemont from 1944, where it remained until the late 1960s, when it was purchased and transferred to a private Belgian collection.

Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Drawing of the hieroglyph « homme kneeling man holding a flagellum » (A52).



Ill. 2. Statue of the court official Minemheb, Egypt, New Kingdom, Dynasty XVIII, reign of Amenhotep III, ca. 1391-1353 BC, granodiorite, H. : 45 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, inv. no. 1996.28.



Ill. 3. Naophorous statue, Egypt, New Kingdom, Dynasty XIX, reign of Ramses II, ca. 1279-1203 BC, granodiorite, H. : 90,7 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. A73.



Ill. 4. Kneeling statue of Yuny, Egypt, New Kingdom, Dynasty XIX, reign of Seti I, ca. 1294-1279 BC, painted limestone, H. : 129 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 33.2.1.



Ill. 5. Naophorous statue, Egypt, New Kingdom, Dynasty XIX, ca. 1295-1186 BC, Egyptian quartzite, H. : 42,7 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. E 25457.



Ill. 6. Naophorous statue, Egypt, New Kingdom, late Dynasty XVIII, ca. 1300-1295 BC, Egyptian quartzite, H. : 61 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. N 61.



Ill. 7. Naophorous statue, Egypt, New Kingdom, Dynasty XIX, reign of Ramses II, limestone, H. : 64 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. N 71.



Ill. 8. Seated statue of a dignitary and his wife, Egypt, New Kingdom, Dynasty XVIII or XIX, ca. 1300-1250 BC, limestone, H. : 130 cm. The British Museum, London, inv. no. 1839,0921.726.



Ill. 9. Statue of Haremhab, Egypt, New Kingdom, Dynasty XVIII, reign of Tutankhamun or Aya, ca. 1336-1323 BC, granodiorite, H. : 113 cm. The MET, New York, inv. no. 23.10.1.

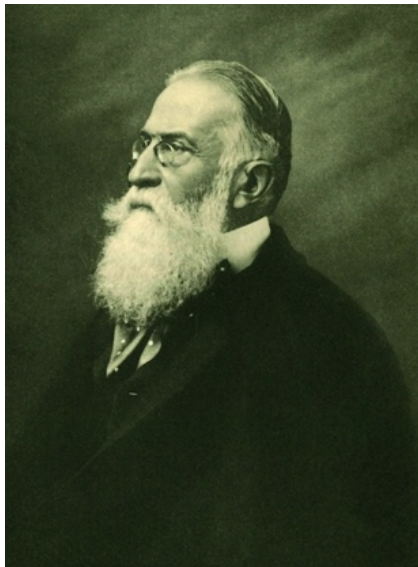


Ill. 10. Statuette of the dignitary Kasa, Egypt, New Kingdom, Dynasty XVIII, 1550-1295 BC, limestone, H. : 16,9 cm. The British Museum, London, inv. no. 1856,0814.2.



Ill. 11. Bust of a naophorous statue, Egypt, New Kingdom, Dynasty XIX, *ca.* 1301-1200 BC, granite, H. : 43 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. O.C.3525.

Provenance:



Ill. 12. Valère Mabilie (1840-1909).



Ill. 13. Ramezée castle, Belgium.