

# BUST OF A GOVERNOR

EGYPTIAN, SAIS, LATE PERIOD, 2<sup>ND</sup> HALF OF DYNASTY XXVI, CIRCA 580 BC

GREYWACKE

HEIGHT: 31 CM.

WIDTH: 21.5 CM.

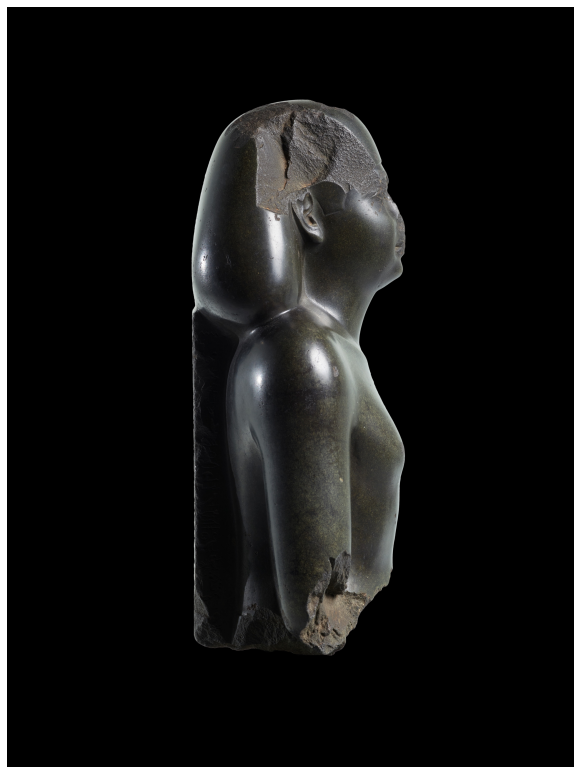
DEPTH: 13 CM.

*PROVENANCE:*

*PROBABLY ORIGINALLY FROM THE  
TEMPLE OF NEITH IN SAIS.  
IN THE COLLECTION OF COMMANDER  
SIR JOHN FRANCIS WHITAKER  
MAITLAND (1903-1977).  
SOLD AT SOTHEBY'S LONDON, 30 APRIL  
1935, DESCRIBED UNDER LOT 24.  
DOCUMENTED BY SIR ALAN GARDINER  
FOR HIS PERSONAL ARCHIVES ON THE  
OCCASION OF THAT SALE.  
COLLECTION OF DR F., SWITZERLAND,  
FROM THE 1960S.  
THEN PASSED DOWN BY DESCENT UNTIL  
2024, PARISIAN PRIVATE COLLECTION.*



This fascinating Egyptian bust represents a high-ranking governor from Sais. Although the name of the governor is now lost owing to the missing parts of the monument, this work nevertheless attests to his importance in the context of ancient Egypt.



Our elegant bust is represented bare-chested, in a hieratic position, with delicate facial features. His almond-shaped eyes, accentuated by sharply etched contours, are rather deeply carved. They are surmounted by thin, arched eyebrows, sculpted in relief. His nose, now fragmentary, was framed by high, salient cheekbones and its wings dovetailed with his round cheeks through the



delicate carving of his philtrum, almost giving the impression that our sculpture is smiling. His partly eroded mouth presents thick lips with quite deeply carved, upturned corners, again adding to the impression that a slight smile is animating his serene face. His small, round, rather subtle chin forms a delicate transition with our governor's thick neck. There is a bag wig upon his head, which leaves his ears uncovered. These are quite large and slightly protruding, presenting a naturalistic shape through subtle carving. His delicate features, round face and the polish achieved by the sculptor give our governor a youthful appearance. His bust, which conveys a straight, static posture, is characterised by square, broad shoulders. Two thin, very light lines in relief join in a delicate dimple under his neck, forming his collarbone. His pectorals, marked by round, salient nipples, are almost geometric and complete this square-shaped body with its delicate musculature. His tube-like arms are positioned along his body. The space between his arms and flanks was not carved out, a common trait in the production of Egyptian statues. Despite the diagonal break, we can guess at the original position of his arms, which must have been folded facing the front to rest upon his knees, also folded.

At the back, his perfectly rounded bag wig rests upon a wide dorsal pillar covered in inscriptions. On its main face, three columns of hieroglyphs inform us of the identity and role of our figure. For instance, we can read that "he who deviates from his path is bound for condemnation", as well as a reference to the city of Sais; he thereby declares his faithfulness to the patroness of the city, Neith. We can also decrypt the titles of priest and high-ranking governor, which indicate

that he was definitely an important figure in Sais. On each side, there is an additional column of inscriptions. What remains of the inscriptions on the dorsal support are fragments of an appeal to the living, a typical feature calling upon passersby for prayers or offerings. Engraved in a particularly legible, elegant style, these hieroglyphs are rather unique and of very high quality.



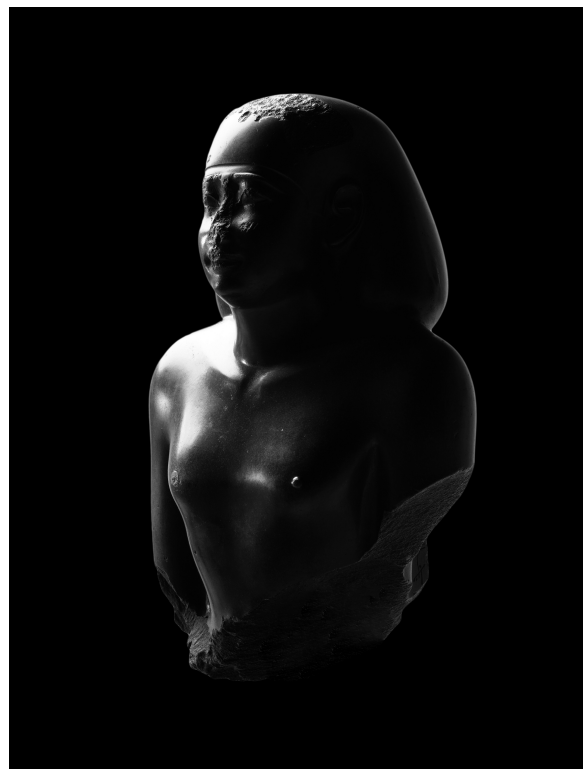
The dorsal pillar, which forms a vertical support, made its appearance during the New Kingdom. This element became prevalent from Dynasty XXVI, also known as the Saite Dynasty. Psamtik I, the first pharaoh of the dynasty, established his capital in Sais, in the western Delta, following the Assyrian invasion of Egypt. The reunified country regained its independence and there followed a period of artistic revival, sometimes referred to as the "Saite Renaissance". In that period, Neith, the patron goddess of Sais, supplanted

Amun as the first god of the monarchy. She was the mother of the sun god Ra and the patroness of weavers. She was generally represented with the seven arrows she had used to create the world. The city of Sais would later become the royal necropolis for the whole dynasty.



During the Saite Renaissance, private statues were mainly based on ancient prototypes, but were characterised above all by a mix of elements taken from different periods. Stone works shared carefully polished surfaces that promoted the nature of the material, as is the case for our bust of a governor. The number of statuary types was still relatively limited and, through all of Dynasty XXVI, the type of the “kneeling priest” was prevalent. The priest could have his hands flat on his thighs or be holding before him a naos containing the statue of a deity in relief. By comparing our statue to similar works, we suppose that our figure

must have been clothed in a simple pleated loincloth fastened around his hips, leaving his torso bare. He must have been kneeling, in the hieratic posture favoured by the Egyptians, forearms and hands resting along his thighs and palms facing down. The statue of the dignitary Naktherheb (Ill. 1) displays that very posture, as does the Louvre’s Saite statue (Ill. 2). The unique style of our sculpture, the sculpting of his face, his bag wig and the references to the city of Sais enable us to estimate that the work was sculpted in the second half of Dynasty XXVI (around 595–525 BC). Several similar examples, now preserved in various museums across the globe, support this estimate (Ill. 1 to 7).



This bust, which is distinguished by its fineness and elegance, features classic characteristics of Egyptian sculpture, wherein figures were represented in both an idealised and a symbolic way. The governor

is represented bare-chested, which expresses both virility and dignity, in accordance with the standards for representing the Egyptian elites. The smooth wig adorning his head underlines his high status. The hieroglyphs on the dorsal pillar, linked directly to power and divinity, reinforce the sacred, majestic aura that emanates from this work.



Our statue is sculpted from a stone that is quite typical of ancient Egyptian productions: greywacke. It is a very fine-grained, smooth, chemically homogeneous stone, allowing for a perfect polish and highly valued for its hardness and durability. Its dark colour, with different, particularly dark tones of green, is what makes it unique. The greywacke used in Egypt was often extracted from local quarries situated in Upper Egypt, particularly in the regions around Luxor and Thebes, the deposits of which were exploited from the Old Kingdom until the Roman Empire. Its rareness, combined with

the beauty and durability of the stone, meant that it was a material reserved for exceptional works, often associated with royalty and great figures. This stone was highly popular due to its colour, which likens it to bronze. Our bust, of a very deep, dark green, appears lustrous and smooth, which makes the surface very luminous and accentuates the majesty of the figure represented. The fact greywacke lent itself to such a magnificent polish, combined with its unique texture, imbued sculptures carved from the stone with a distinct gravitas and solemnity. In the case of our bust of a governor, that smooth, careful finish is a sign of the work's value and importance. Such a masterful polish also enabled the artist who created our work to showcase their qualities as a sculptor, while enhancing the particularly delicate shaping of the face.

In all likelihood, our superb bust is from the temple of the great goddess Neith in Sais, one of the main centres of religious and cultural life under Dynasty XXVI. It was then in the private collection of Sir John Francis Whitaker Maitland (1903–1977), a British statesman and Member of Parliament and of the House of Commons. His collection was sold at Sotheby's London on 30 April 1935 (Ill. 9). As a great lover of Egyptian art and a seasoned collector, Maitland was in possession of several Egyptian sculptures from Sais, which were also sold during that sale. Some are currently preserved in international museums, including an imposing naophorous statue preserved at the Penn Museum in Philadelphia (Ill. 8). Our bust corresponds to lot 24 of the Sotheby's sales catalogue. Its description is accompanied by a photo, reproduced in plate III, which is actually that



of lot 22 (Ill. 10). However, the description for lot 24 definitely corresponds to our sculpture. On the occasion of the sale, some of the inscriptions were copied by the famous English Egyptologist Sir Alan Gardiner (1879–1963 – Ill. 11 and 12) for his personal archives. Thanks to his tracing of the right column, which has the same characters as the beginning of the cartouche and the same break, we can say with absolute certainty that this is our sculpture and that it was thus sold in London in 1935. Our bust of a governor was probably sold at this sale and then added to the collection of Dr F., in Switzerland, from the 1960s. The work was then passed down by descent within a Parisian private collection from 2015 until 2024, before joining our collections.

### Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Statue of Nakhtherheb, Late Period, Dynasty XXVI, ca 590 BC, quartzite, H.: 113 cm. British Museum, London, inv. no. 1914.0613.1.



Ill. 2. Statue of a dignitary, Late Period, Dynasty XXVI, 570–526 BC, probably from Sais, greywacke, H.: 43.5 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. E 25390.



Ill. 3. Bust of the dignitary Ankhefensekhmet, Late Period, Dynasty XXVI, 664–526 BC, greywacke, H.: 43.5 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. E 25459.



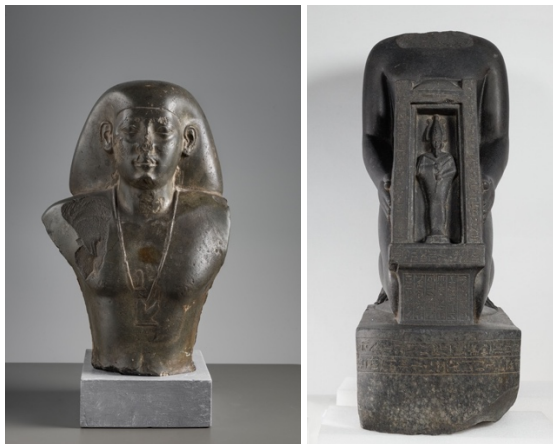
Ill. 4. Naophorous statue, Late Period, Dynasty XXVI, 610–595 BC, greywacke, H.: 26.5 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. E 10709.



Ill. 5. Naophorous statue, Late Period, end of Dynasty XXVI, 610–595 BC, stone, H.: 29.5 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. E 14705.



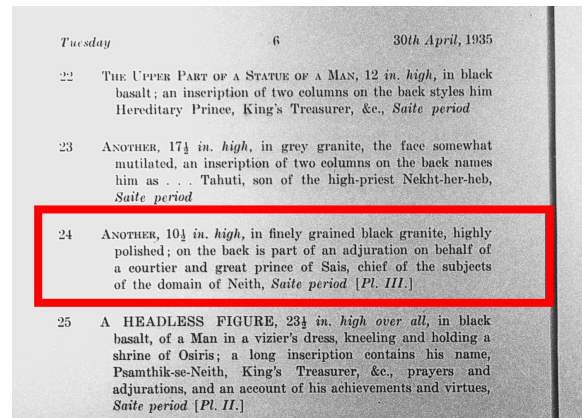
Ill. 6. Statue of the military commander Amasis, Late Period, Dynasty XXVI, 600–570 BC, meta-greywacke, H.: 18 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 66.99.68.



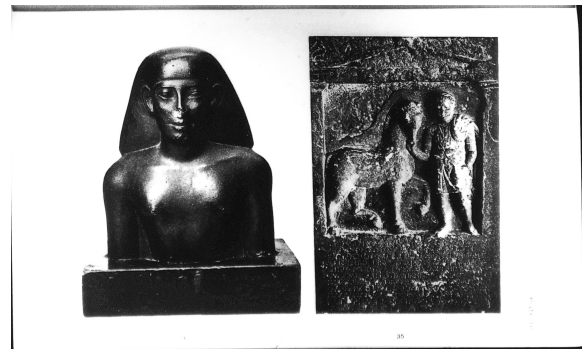
Ill. 7. Bust of a judge, Late Period, Dynasty XXVI, 664–525 BC, greywacke, H.: 23 cm. Museo Egizio, Turin, inv. no. cat. 3075.

Ill. 8. Naophorous statue from Sais, Late Period, Dynasty XXVI, 664–525 BC, basalt, H.: 57 cm. Penn Museum, Philadelphia, inv. no. 42-9-1.

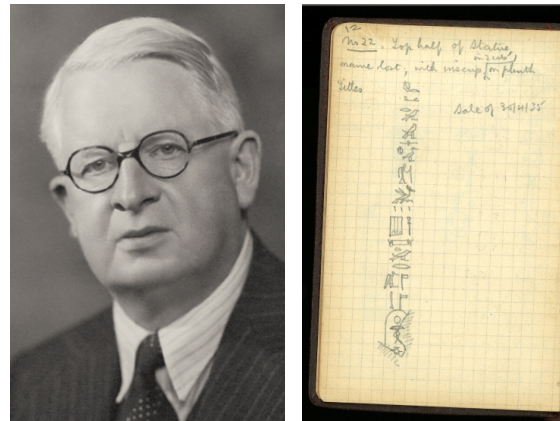
## Provenance:



Ill. 9. Sales catalogue of 30 April 1935, Sotheby's.



Ill. 10. Plate III.



Ill. 11. Sir Alan Gardiner.

Ill. 12. The inscription on the dorsal pillar of our sculpture, as reproduced by Alan Gardiner.