

HEAD OF AN OFFICIAL

EGYPT, NEW KINGDOM, EARLY TO MID-DYNASTY XVIII, CIRCA 1550-1390 BC
BLACK GRANIT

HEIGHT: 13 CM.

WIDTH: 16 CM.

DEPTH: 12 CM.

*PROVENANCE:
FORMER ENGLISH PRIVATE
COLLECTION SINCE THE LATE 19TH -
EARLY 20TH CENTURY BASED ON CUSTOM-
MADE AND INSCRIBED ALABASTER BASE.
DINA (1928-2021) AND RAPHAEL (1924-
1999) RECANATI, NEW YORK, ACQUIRED
CIRCA 1974; THENCE BY BEQUEST UNTIL
PRESENT DAY.*



This splendid head is a portrait of an official, probably a high dignitary of Ancient Egypt. The man is shown faceward, with a very smooth facial expression. His thick, arched eyebrows are modeled in light relief, raised and descend to the temples following the curve of the eyes. Both are outlined with a

very thin and shallow contour line. His broad, large eyes are almond shaped with hemmed eyelids, which are deeply carved.



Two high cheekbones are visible on either side of a fragmentary wide nose, which enables us to imagine large nostrils, and on which two incisions in the form of windings embody the nose wings. On both sides, a crease of flesh is visible on the cheeks and a deeply carved philtrum separates the nose from the mouth. This latter is quite large, with thick lips of similar size, and gives an impression of a slight smile by means of two drilled holes at the ends. The chin is small,



almost indistinguishable, which accentuates the round shape of the face. The head is maintained to an extremely wide and muscular neck. The figure wears a short wig down to the shoulders and tucked behind large ears protruding from it. The undulating locks of hair ending in corkscrew curls at the forehead and behind the shoulders are delicately incised. The man's natural hair is visible under the wig, above the ears, materialized by the sculptor with two incisions joining towards the temples. The ears are deeply carved and every part of it is rendered in a very naturalistic way.



This head may well derive from a seated or block statue, as the position of the head and the wig may indicate. His face bears the hallmarks of portraiture of early Dynasty XVIII, resembling in particular early portraits of Senenmut, the influential high official responsible for construction projects

during the reign of queen Hatshepsut. Some twenty-five portraits of Senenmut are known, many in highly polished black granite, with similar features. This mastery in the outlining of the eyebrows, the thick lips, the drawing of the ears, the large wide-open eyes and the youthful physiognomy are indeed very similar to the features of the portraits we know, like the one in Berlin (ill. 1) and those in London (ill. 2-3).



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Large ears are also typical of official portraiture of the period of Hatshepsut's reign, adopting Middle Kingdom models (see ill. 4-5), as well as the gracious style that is proper to Dynasty XVIII with the smooth and simplified faces, the pleasant expression, the anatomy of the ears and the style of the wig (ill. 6-8).



Furthermore, the block statue appeared under Dynasty XII, *i.e.* during Middle Kingdom, when its compact aspect was appreciated for the large surfaces allowed to texts. This type of sculpture was exclusively masculine and for civilians. It remained

fashionable until New Kingdom, when innovations can be noticed. Found in funerary monuments, these sculptures used to be deposited in sanctuaries.

This magnificent head is sculpted in a dark granite, quite specific to Egyptian production since quarries in the region of Aswan and Fayoum ensured its availability. This very hard stone allows the artists to apply fine details on their creation, but also allows a beautiful luster. The very refined incisions and details as well as the glow polish can be witnessed on our superb official head, highlighted by the mastery of the artist. Indeed, his steward position certainly gave our unidentified man access to the best artists of his time.

Our head is mounted on an old alabaster base with a painted label. Similar bases were fashioned for Egyptian works for various British collections, public and private, including that of Lady Meux, whose collection was published in 1896. We can thus infer that the object was in an English private collection, circa late 19th - early 20th century. It was then acquired in New York circa 1974 by Raphael (1924-1999) and Dina (1928-2021) Recanati (ill. 9). He was an Israeli-American businessman and banker and she was an interdisciplinary artist herself. As art enthusiasts, the couple gathered an important collection, mainly of modern art and in particular American abstractionism but also Egyptian art, as Dina was born in Egypt and started to wonder about her childhood memories and the Egyptian civilization (ill. 10). This Egyptian head of an official was then bequeathed, before joining our collections.

Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Block-statue of Senenmut carrying the daughter of the queen Hatshepsut Neferura, Egyptian, New Kingdom, Dynasty XVIII, reign of Hatshepsut (1479-1457 BC), black granite, H.: 100 cm. Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin, no. inv. ÄM 2296.

Ill. 2. Block-statue of Senenmut, Egyptian, New Kingdom, Dynasty XVIII, reign of Hatshepsut (1479-1457 BC), quartzite, H.: 54 cm. British Museum, London, no. inv. EA1513.



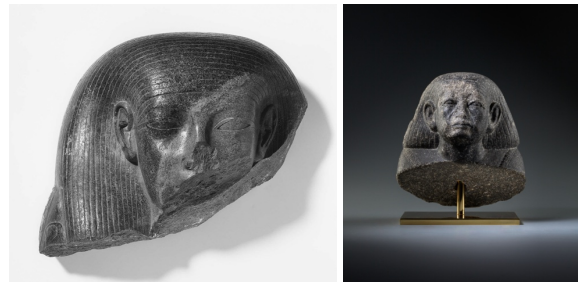
Ill. 3. Seated statue of Senenmut holding Neferura, Egyptian, New Kingdom, Dynasty XVIII, reign of Hatshepsut (1479-1457 BC), *ca.* 1479 BC, granodiorite, H.: 72.5 cm. British Museum, London, no. inv. EA174.

Ill. 4. Bust of a dignitary, Egyptian, Middle Kingdom, Dynasty XII (1963-1786 BC), granite, H.: 24 cm. Private collection, sold at HVMC, "Archéologie", 19 January 2022, lot 17.



Ill. 5. Statue of a dignitary, Egyptian, Middle Kingdom, late Dynasty XII (1862-1786 BC), gabbro, H.: 10.5 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. E 22771.

Ill. 6. Fragment of a statue, Egyptian, Middle Kingdom – early New Kingdom, Dynasties XII to XVIII (2061-1390 BC), basalt, H.: 10.5 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. no. 17.1118.



Ill. 7. Head of Viceroy Merymose from his middle sarcophagus, Egyptian, New Kingdom, Dynasty XVIII, reign of Amenhotep III (1390-1352 BC), granodiorite, H.: 41.5 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. no. 09.286.

Ill. 8. Fragment of a male statue, Egyptian, Middle Kingdom – early New Kingdom, Dynasties XII to XVIII (*ca.* 1981-1550 BC), granodiorite, H.: 15.2 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, no. inv. 66.99.65.

Provenance:



Ill. 9. Raphael and Dina Recanati.



Ill. 10. The Recanati's home in New York.