

GALERIE GOLCONDA

ARCHÉOLOGIE MUSÉALE
FOSSILES – BIJOUX RARES ET ANCIENS
CABINET DE CURIOSITÉS DES GRANDES CIVILISATIONS

CERTIFICATE

BETYLE-TYPE ALABASTER HEAD

SOUTH ARABIA – last century BC/1st century AD

FORMER COLLECTION OF PRINCE HOMAYOUN MIRZA MASSOUD

MATERIAL AND TECHNIQUE: masculine head in gilded white alabaster, sculpted in the round, the back left unworked. Face characteristic of the period and the region, elongated and perfectly symmetrical, the nose long and straight, the eyes and mouth marked by simple incisions. The eyebrows are inserted in a horizontal protuberance that crosses the top of the face. Alabaster is a stone that lets light penetrate with intensity. It forms in caves that vehicle water by a simple geological process, that of the stalagmites. This is a rare piece with an old patina. Presence of a very interesting line forming an amber cross in the stone.

Chips and small missing fragments due to age. Excellent state of preservation.

ORIGIN: South Arabia (present-day Yemen), considered in Antiquity as mysterious and fabulous, was called Arabia Felix for its riches and its perfumes such as myrrh and incense. The tradition of the standing stone (betyle) is very ancient in this area. It first represented the god (in the Semitic language, *beth 'el* means “*house of God*”) then became the figuration of the faithful as the materialization of a continual prayer before finally becoming the image of the deceased who continues to live. During this evolution in its symbolism, the betyle, often presented in a niche, took on the aspect of a face, first stylized then more and more developed.

DIMENSIONS: Height without the base: 19cm (7,48”) - Larg. : 10,5 (4,13”)

Height including the base: 26 cm (10,23”)

CULTURAL PASSPORT: supplied with an export licence issued by the French Ministry of Culture number 189820, allowing this piece to travel worldwide.

PROVENANCE: purchased in Mecca in the 1930s and imported to Great Britain in 1979. The prince Homayoun Mirza Massoud, born in 1886 in Ispahan, was the grandson of Naser Al Din Shah Qajar who governed Iran from 1849 to 1896. Distinguished hunter, he loved collecting the art of the region. He had seven daughters whom the British diplomats called “the seven capital sins” because of their somewhat extravagant social life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: for a similar piece see “*Collecting Masterpieces*” Part one, by Beryl Cavallini, pages 44/45.

Police book registration n°: 1777