

COLNAGHI



Statue of a Priest, Possibly the Priest of Min, Yuya, Father of Queen Tiy

Egyptian, New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, Reign of Amenhotep III, 1391-1353 B.C.

Brown Quartzite

34.9 x 21 x 21.6 cm;

13 3/4 x 8 1/4 x 8 1/2 in.

Provenance:
Collection of Fernando Calicó, Spain, by 1964;
European Private Collection.

COLNAGHI

The following research was conducted by Arielle Kolzoff.

DESCRIPTION

An elegantly coiffed and dressed gentleman crouches with his knees drawn up to his chest and his arms folded over his knees. The cubic shape of such sculptures has earned them the name "block statue." Our subject wears a cheetah skin draped over his back, its paws and mask reaching over his shoulders and in front of his chest. It is secured at the right side of his torso with a tie. In his left fist he holds a stalk discussed in detail below. A long plain skirt is belted at his waist and pulled over his knees covering his lower legs to the ankle. The front of the skirt has a long triangular pleat against which rests an elaborate attribute of the man's office. This is an item Egyptologists call a "sporrán" after the Scottish item worn on the front of men's kilts. None have survived from antiquity, but judging from their representation on statuary they comprised a series of elements, likely in gold and semi-precious stone and faience, which hung from a belt at the waist to below the knees.

DATING THE STATUE TO THE REIGN OF AMENHOTEP III, "EGYPT'S DAZZLING SUN"

Every pharaoh's facial features created the standard not only for his own portraits, but also for the portraits of all of his courtiers and officials. The arched eyebrows, heavily lined upper eyelid and thick upper lip with its distinctive dip are all indicative of the portraits of Amenhotep III, who reigned from 1391 to 1353 BC. His was a reign of extreme wealth due to his takeover of the rich gold mines of northern and central Sudan. He built temples and manned fortresses throughout northern and central Sudan to maintain control of the mines and the transport of their treasure into Egypt.

The gold served several purposes. One was to fund his massive building campaign, basically a public works project, which kept the massive armies built up by previous generations busy and fed. A second use was keeping foreign powers happy by sending

COLNAGHI

them pure gold in exchange for well-bred horses and women, the latter being royal princesses, whom he added to his own harem. Thus, Sudan's gold provided Amenhotep III with a 38-year reign of peace at home and abroad.

Women played a significant role in his reign, in particular his chief queen, Tiy, the daughter of Yuya and Thuya, very likely foreign nobility who led and accompanied a shipment of royal horses from the Near East. Yuya was Amenhotep's Master of the King's Horses, and when he died early in Amenhotep's reign, was buried with his wife in a royal tomb furnished with gilded chariots. Their daughter Tiy spoke at least one foreign language and acted as Amenhotep's interpreter. Judging from the Amarna Letters, official correspondence chronicling the transactions between Amenhotep and foreign kings, Tiy was crucial to the king's success at negotiating deals with foreign dignitaries. With Tiy, Amenhotep I fathered Akhenaten, often called the first monotheist. He in turn fathered Tutankhamen with Nefertiti.

Amenhotep III was the greatest artistic patron of ancient Egypt and one of the greatest in world history. More temples were built during his reign than in all the previous fourteen centuries of Egypt's history together. Very likely more stone sculptures were created during his reign alone than during most of ancient Egypt's three millennia, and yet, Amenhotep is not as well-known as some much lesser individuals. Many if not most of his statues were usurped by later pharaohs and private individuals. The most famous of these was Ramesses II ("the Great"), who took scores of Amenhotep III statues and had their faces re-carved in his own image and his name carved over Amenhotep's.

The block-statue (cuboid posture) depicts a priest under the reign of Amenhotep III in the characteristic posture of block-statues of this period. The face and body modeling is sensitively accomplished and reflects the typical features of statues under the reign of Amenhotep III. The priest shows a slightly waved wig reaching slightly

COLNAGHI

protruding the shoulders. The face reflects the typical facial traits of the reign of Amenhotep III especially the form of the almond shaped eyes and pronounced eyebrows as well as the lip-lining of the projected mouth. The priest wears over his ankle-length kilt a star-decorated leopard skin indicating with high probability his office as a prophet; the leopard head is laying near his right hand and the skin runs over his shoulder and along the preserved left part of his back. The starry decoration alludes to the capacity of an astronomical knowledge, also indicated by a kind of apron which is an astronomer's/surveyor's instrument case hanging on the front of the statue. In his left fist he presumably held another object which is now lost.

USURPATION

This beautiful brown quartzite statue suffered exactly that fate. While the facial features were not changed, the original inscription carved on the back of the statue was re-carved to suit a new owner, perhaps many centuries later. The roughness of the inscription gives it away. When hard stones are fresh from the quarry, they still retain enough moisture so that very sharp and clear details can be cut, for instance the jeweled elements of the sporran. After a long period of exposure to Egypt's dry air and heat, the outer layer or skin of the stone dries out, and new carvings have rough edges. The fragmentary inscriptions are on the statue's back pillar. It comprises two columns, both of which are traditional royal offering formulae. The right column reads, "[An offering [which the king gives] Amen-Re, Lord of....., invocation offerings...". The left column reads, "An offering which the King ". It is likely that the statue was originally placed at a Theban temple, most likely Karnak, the cult center of Egypt's national god, Amen-Re, where it was eventually usurped and re-inscribed for Amen-Re by the new owner.

BROWN QUARTZITE

"Wondrous" (biat) was the word the ancient Egyptians gave to the stone we call brown quartzite. Its hard granular structure makes it extremely difficult to carve, yet the skilled

COLNAGHI

hands of Amenhotep III's sculptors produced exquisite statuary with surfaces ranging from delicately textured to glasslike smoothness. All hard stone quarries belonged to the king, and all of its workers worked for the throne. The endowment of a portrait in highly prized brown quartzite, therefore, was a very special gift to this gentleman.

Clearly the individual represented by this sculpture was quite important during Amenhotep III's reign. While we cannot identify him by name, we can come a bit closer to identifying him by understanding the importance of brown quartzite in Amenhotep III's reign and of the attributes he wears and carries.

The brown quartzite quarries were slightly south of Cairo at Gebel Ahmar, meaning Red Mountain, which glowed red in the setting sun. An exquisite and extremely rare red quartzite statue was discovered accidentally in the courtyard of Luxor temple in 1989. Even more famous and remarkable are Amenhotep III's nearly six-story (56.5 feet) brown quartzite statues known today as the Colossi of Memnon which guarded the entrance to his memorial temple at Kom el-Heitan on the west bank of Luxor (ancient Thebes). In recent years, excavations at Kom el-Heitan have revealed two more pairs of colossi guarding two previously unknown gates within the temple site.

These monoliths, quarried and carved at Gebel Ahmar, were shipped hundreds of miles upriver and against the Nile's northward flow to Thebes on specially made rafts. This was an incredible and extraordinary effort engineered and managed by a man named Amenhotep son of Hapu, who went by the modest title of "scribe of recruits," but was the most important and effective of Amenhotep III's officials.

CLOSEST PARALLEL

Private portraits in brown quartzite are rare. The best-known example (pictured below) is a block statue of the High Priest of Ptah, Ptahmose, crouching on a pillow, his face peering out over his drawn-up knees and folded arms. He oversaw Ptah's vast temple at Memphis, ancient Egypt's traditional capital across the river and slightly upstream

COLNAGHI

from modern-day Cairo. One of Egypt's oldest gods, Ptah was the patron of craftsmen, particularly relevant in the case of statuary in a stone as challenging as brown quartzite. Ptah's name remains alive today hidden at the end of "Egypt," which comes from "Hut-ka-ptah," the ancient name of Memphis. Ptahmose wears the short, curled wig with braided side-lock of a young royal prince and traditional for a high priest of Ptah. He also wears a sporran, much more complicated than our subject's and an elaborate jackal necklace, which had for a thousand years been associated with the position of High Priest of Ptah.

IDENTIFYING ATTRIBUTES

While Ptahmose's statue may be the closest parallel in terms of composition, material, and general subject, others from this same reign help to shed light on our subject. First, the jeweled sporran was a badge of office of every major priest. Amenhotep III's brother-in-law, the astronomer Anen, Second Prophet of Amun, wore one, as did Taitai, High Priest of the Temple of Horus, Lord of Hebenu, a small site halfway between Thebes and Memphis. Neither of their sporrans is exactly like the one worn by our subject, nor that of Ptahmose. Possibly each temple had its own design. Exactly what significance or use they had is not known.

Coiffures are sometimes helpful in identifying subjects. Ptahmose's coiffure, as noted above, was particular to his unique position. Many priests had clean shaven heads, like *laita*. In banqueting scenes, rare individuals with shaven heads, as opposed to richly bewigged courtiers, are usually assumed to be priests. On the other hand, Anen wore a full and rich version of the latest fashion in men's wigs, not at all indicative of his position as Second High Priest of Amun. Our subject wears a rather old-fashioned wig but one that does appear on statuary of Amenhotep son of Hapu, who was at least one generation older than his king.

COLNAGHI

The most intriguing, yet incomplete, attribute belonging to our statue is the stalk he holds in his left hand. This stalk is identical to one held by Taitai in his left hand on his grey stone statuette in Berlin's Egyptian Museum. The stalk projects backward from Taitai's fist. The front part of this object is broken away but the remaining cross section shows it to have been nearly spherical. This can only have been a lettuce, the attribute of the fertility god, Min, whose cult center was at Akhmim, not far from where Taitai served as high priest of Horus, Lord of Hebenu. Min was assimilated into the Horus myth during the Middle Kingdom, hence a possible reason for Taitai holding this attribute.

Lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*) was a favorite offering and symbol of Min. The slightly pointed spherical shape of the entire vegetable with its thick, ringed stalk is well-known from representations on offering tables especially in the New Kingdom. Its milky sap resembles human semen, and possibly was an aphrodisiac. Rituals involving Min occurred both during coronations and during royal jubilee festivals, when the physical power and prowess and fertility of the king were magically rejuvenated giving new life and energy to all elements of the land and its inhabitants.

CONCLUSION

The truth is that no definite identification can be reached. On the other hand, we have enough evidence to suggest an intriguing possibility, that it represents Queen Tiy's father Yuya. The statue is beautifully carved in brown quartzite, Amenhotep III's favorite stone, which was hardly ever given to private individuals for their own statuary. One of the rare examples is the portrait of the High Priest of the Ptah Temple at Memphis, an office once held by Amenhotep III's own son (who died young), and arguably the most powerful post in northern Egypt. Another was Amenhotep III's own private steward or butler, Nefronpet, "great one of the chamber of the lord of the two lands (Upper and Lower Egypt)," someone clearly of great personal trust and affection for Amenhotep.

COLNAGHI

Therefore, the owner of our statue must have been someone of particular importance in Amenhotep III's mind.

The cheetah skin and the jeweled sporran clearly identify this man as a priest. He holds in his hand a lettuce, sacred to the god Min, whose cult center was at Akhmim, Queen Tiy's hometown. Akhmim was a center for two important enterprises: linen production and the raising and training of horses. Weaving and horse mastery were specialties of some Near Eastern kingdoms, and Akhmim became a center for immigrants from Western Asia. Min's associations with eastern gods made him a likely comfort to new arrivals like Tiy's parents Yuya, the royal horse master, and Thuya, apparently the head of a linen weaving shop.

It would be hard to imagine that a simple priest in a provincial town would be granted a statue in brown quartzite unless this individual held some other office or significance in Amenhotep III's reign. Only one person comes to mind: Queen Tiy's father, Yuya, who carried the title Priest of Min in addition to being Master of the King's Horses. Yuya and his wife Thuya were so important to and beloved of Amenhotep III that he endowed them with a tomb in the Valley of the Kings at Thebes. Here is someone important enough to earn a statue carved in "wondrous" stone: Yuya, priest of Min, Master of the King's Horses, and father of Amenhotep III's great queen Tiy. The old-fashioned wig is appropriate for his generation.

The inscription suggests that the statue was originally set up at Karnak temple in honor of its original owner, who was a priest of Min. Egyptian deities were remarkably tolerant of each other. No conflict of interest would have arisen. Karnak continued to be a center of national worship and offerings for centuries to come. At times there were so many statues clogging the aisles and pathways, that the priests cleaned house and buried them, or they either gave permission to or ignored individuals who adopted and re-inscribed long-standing statuary.

COLNAGHI

This is a rare and beautifully carved statue from what many historians feel was the greatest period of artistic production in ancient Egypt's 3000-year history, the reign of Amenhotep III, and it may be an important bit of evidence enriching our knowledge of this great king's reign.

COLNAGHI

Comparanda



High Priest of Ptah, Ptahmose, Egyptian, New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, Reign of Amenhotep III, 1391-1353 B.C., brown quartzite, 94 x 31 x 61 cm, Museo Egizio, Florence, no. 1790



Nefronpet as a Scribe, Egyptian, New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, Reign of Amenhotep III, 1391-1353 B.C., brown quartzite, 49.5 x 22 x 39.4 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, no. E 14241