51

Head of a Woman

350-300 BC

Expand All

Object Details

Catalogue Number	**51**
Inventory Number	76.AD.34
Typology	Head
Location	Sicily
Dimensions	H: 28.8 cm; W: 19.1 cm; Diam (*polos*): 12.2 cm

Fabric

Orange in color (Munsell 2.5 yr 7/6–7/8), hard, fairly well purified, with reflective and calcareous inclusions; a white slip and extensive traces of polychromy: pink (face and neck), red (upper border of the *polos*, upper eyelid, and back of the neck); dark pink (central part of the *polos*), white and purple (lower border of the *polos*).

The front section of the bust was made with a mold and the details of the facial features were defined with the use of a potter's rib. The back section is not modeled and has a slightly convex wall, with a large oval vent hole in the center of the occiput.

Condition

A fragment of the back of the neck has been reattached; the polychromy is worn away, and parts of the head and neck are abraded.

Provenance

– 1976, Dr. Max Gerchik, American, 1911–2008 (Pacific Palisades, California), donated to the J. Paul Getty Museum, 1976.

Bibliography

LYONS, BENNETT, AND MARCONI 2013, p. 186, fig. 126.

Description

The female head wears a *polos* with a rounded base molding and projecting rim, decorated on the upper edge with small protruding nodes. The thick wavy hair is divided symmetrically into two masses and pulled back; on top, the hair is held by a knotted ribbon whose ends fall in the middle of the part. The hairstyle leaves the earlobes uncovered; they are perforated for the insertion of metal earrings.

The eyes are asymmetrical and slightly sunken, and the eyelids are distinctly defined. The mouth is barely half-open, with a fleshy lower lip and an upper lip almost touching the nose, which is narrow and straight; the chin is rounded and full. Traces of polychromy, still identifiable, show that the bust was originally brightly colored. The lower border of the *polos* is decorated with oblique lines that are painted purple; in the central section, though the pigment is almost entirely worn away, it is possible to make out a dark pink band, interrupted in the center by a rosette. This decorative motif can also be found in other examples, in both relief and painted versions.[1]

This type of female bust is extensively documented in the major centers of Sicily, especially in the southeastern area between the fifth and third centuries BC, in particular in Syracuse and Agrigento, where the earliest examples are documented. The most substantial group comes from the *santuario rupestre* (rock-cut sanctuary of Demeter) at Agrigento, but over time female busts also spread to Morgantina, Gela, Grammichele, Himera, Centuripe, Butera, Scornavacche, Selinunte, Adrano, Paternò, Akrai, and Lipari, with variants enriched by different ornaments and attributes.[2]

The votive bust, derived from the simpler protome, is a distinctly western Greek creation, generally associated with Demeter and Kore-Persephone, the tutelary deities of the island. It is interpreted as the abbreviated image, at once organic and abstract, of Persephone, an evocation of the *anados* of the goddess from the chthonic world.[3] Recent studies reviewing the archaeological contexts and their associations with votive offerings have given rise to new interpretations, associating the bust with the *nymphe* or young bride, who through marriage abandons the status of *kore* and reaches sexual maturity. This crucial passage is well exemplified also in the mythological episode of the abduction by Hades, god of the Underworld, of Kore-Persephone, a model for human brides.[4]

The bust type endured for a remarkably long time, and though it preserved certain constant typological characteristics—in this case harking back to Classical models—it also gave rise to many variants. Some variants followed a more traditional stylistic approach, while in other cases the models were developed with greater freedom and independence.[5] Similar typologies of busts are documented in contexts throughout Magna Graecia, such as, for example, Fratte di Salerno, where the production documents stylistic links with Syracusan terracottas but also with the production of Campania and Locri; the latter was also closely tied to Syracuse politically and culturally, as far back as the Deinomenid era.[6] The bust type later spread through the central-Italic area, with a number of different typological and iconographic variations, but also taking on a distinct function: it was less closely tied to the chthonic sphere and more often acted as an abbreviated portrayal of the offerer.[7]

The busts have for some time been datable to the final decades of the fifth century BC, in part due to stylistic affinities with the coinage of contemporary Syracusan master die-engravers; they have been dated as late as the second half of the fourth century BC, in the period of Classical revival that corresponds to a general rebirth of the Greek centers in Sicily, led by the tyrant Timoleon. This age, following the crisis of the first half of the fourth century BC, has generally been characterized as a return to classically inspired formal and iconographic motifs. More recent studies, however, including those devoted to the coroplastic material of Scornavacche (near Ragusa), have noted the continuous utilization of the female bust of Classical origin, from the period of Dionysius up to that of Timoleon. This phenomenon is attributable primarily to the workshops of Syracuse, which, just at the beginning of the fourth century BC, held to the Classical style, in part as a matter of cultural identity.[8]

The persistence over time of standardized typologies, due to conservatism in artistic conceptions and the reutilization of older molds, resulted in the production of numerous generations of closely similar examples, which has made a detailed and accurate chronology problematic. Furthermore, the Getty bust echoes certain distinctive features of the Agrigentine busts of the second half of the fourth century BC, especially in the rendering of Classical-style facial features, such as the full chin, the small mouth with a prominent upper lip, and the triangular forehead, as well as in the solid articulation of the facial planes and in the general sobriety of the expression. These characteristics are also found in a group of busts from Morgantina, together with the molding at the upper edge and ears pierced for metal earrings.[9] The freehand hairstyle, with lively, puffy locks of hair, closely corresponds to the emerging artistic tendencies of the Early Hellenistic period; the latter is also found in a number of Syracusan busts.[10]

Notes

1. For the painted busts, see, for instance, examples in Morgantina that can have the *polos* with a pink flower and the unmolded bust decorated with painted panels depicting ritual or mythological scenes: BELL 1981, pp. 29–33, 140–43, nos. 106, 107, 113 (second half of the fourth century, beginning of the third century BC); PAUTASSO 2007. For metal earrings in terracotta busts, see BELL 1981, no. 107.

2. On the theme of busts in Sicily, the bibliography is vast. See PORTALE 2000, and E. C. Portale, "Busti fittili e Ninfe: sulla valenza e polisemia delle rappresentazioni abbreviate in forma di busto nella coroplastica votiva siceliota," in ALBERTOCCHI AND PAUTASSO 2012, pp. 227–52; PAUTASSO 2012; M. Albertocchi, "La coroplastica siceliota nella prima metà del V secolo a.C," in ALBERTOCCHI AND PAUTASSO 2012, pp. 142–61; GRECO 2013; and FERRUZZA 2013. A number of examples of uncertain findspot are also currently in the British Museum: see HIGGINS 1954, nos. 1188–89, pl. 162; see also the busts in PELAGATTI AND GUZZO 1997, pp. 12–14, figs. 2–3; and, among the examples that have appeared in auction catalogues: *Antiquities*, Bonhams Knightsbridge, sale cat., April 22, 1999, lot 562; *Antiquities and Islamic Art*, Sotheby's New York, sale cat., December 2, 1988, lot 102A; *Antiquities and Islamic Art*, Sotheby's New York, sale cat., December 17, 1997, lot 109.

3. Most of the female busts in Sicily and in Magna Graecia come from votive contexts, generally those linked to the pair of Demeter and Persephone; see KILMER 1977, pp. 133–34; for busts found in funerary contexts, see BELL 1981, p. 105, no. 43; and E. C. Portale, "Busti fittili e Ninfe: Sulla valenza e polisemia delle rappresentazioni abbreviate in forma di busto nella coroplastica votiva siceliota," in ALBERTOCCHI AND PAUTASSO 2012, pp. 227–52, esp. p. 234. On the religious issues of the female bust, see GRECO 2013, SIRACUSANO 1986–87; G. Sfameni Gasparro, "Demetra in Sicilia: Tra identità panellenica e connotazioni locali," in DI STEFANO 2008, pp. 25–40; and PORTALE 2008, pp. 24–25.

4. GRECO 2013 and Portale, "Busti fittili" (cited in n. 2 above). As is general with votive products, the busts present a polysemic character and take on a particular meaning only within the "system" of the votive offerings made in a specific context; but a primary meaning related to marriage as a woman's sexual and existential completion seems to be prevalent.

5. FERRUZZA 2013, pp. 189–91; PORTALE 2000, pp. 273–75.

6. For the busts in Magna Graecia, see in general KILMER 1977, pp. 121–27; PORTALE 2000, nn. 44 and 50. At Fratte di Salerno, there is documentation of a bust with a tall *polos* that, given its general formal structure, can be linked to types of Sicilian production from the fourth to the third centuries BC; see GRECO AND PONTRANDOLFO 1990, fig. 150. For Locri, see also the bust in HIGGINS 1954, no. 1230, pl. 69 (beginning of the fourth century BC).

7. For the issues relating to the busts in the central Italic area, see PENSABENE 2001, pp. 67–69; P. Pensabene, "Cippi busti e ritratti: Nota in margine a M. F. Kilmer, *The Shoulder Bust in Sicily and South and Central Italy: A Catalogue and Materials for Dating* (Göteburg, 1977)," *ArchCl* 29 (1977), pp. 425–35.

8. On this problem, see PORTALE 2000; SPAGNOLO 2000; PISANI 2008, pp. 155–56; and J. P. Uhlenbrock, "La coroplastica nella Sicilia orientale e meridionale nell'età dei due Dionisi," in *LA SICILIA DEI DUE DIONISI* 2002, pp. 321–37; RIZZA AND DE MIRO 1985, pp. 238–40; N. Bonacasa and E. Joly, "L'ellenismo e la tradizione ellenistica," pp. 277–347 in *SIKANIE* 1985, esp. pp. 313–14. For the influence of Syracusan coinage on Sicilian coroplastic art, see BELL 1972, pp. 7–8, 11; BELL 1981, p. 28, esp. bust no. 112, in which Bell detected affinities with the coins of Euainetos; CROISSANT 2007, esp. pp. 313–16. For the hairstyle, see A. Bignasca, "Nuove terrecotte dell'offerente di porcellino e la prima metà del 4. secolo a Morgantina," *AntK* 35, no. 1 (1992), pp. 18–53, pl. 6.

9. See, for example, *SIKANIE* 1985, nos. 279–80, and the plastic vases in the form of a female head found in Agrigento in the area to the south of the Temple of Zeus, datable from the second half of the fourth century BC. These reproduce a type of female head with hair parted over the forehead in two wavy masses: see E. De Miro, "Agrigento: Scavi nell'area a Sud del tempio di Giove," *MonAnt* 46 (1963), pp. 81–198, esp. p. 115, fig. 31. See also the group of busts (nos. 97–102) from Morgantina with solemn features comparable to a tetradrachm issued by Agathocles about 310 BC: BELL 1981, pp. 27–33.

10. For Syracuse: G. V. Gentili, "I busti fittili di Demetra o Kore di Siracusa," *Archivio storico siracusano* 5–6 (1959–60), pp. 5–20; KILMER 1977, nos. 33–36, figs. 74–75, 82–84, pp. 116–18; G. Voza and P. Pelagatti, *Archeologia nella Sicilia sud-orientale*, exh. cat. (Naples, Centre J. Bérard, 1973), pp. 102–3; and PORTALE 2000, n. 57. For the type of thick hairstyle with loose, wavy locks of hair, see, for instance, the female heads in WESCOAT 1989, no. 3, fig. 19, and the two-headed bust from the *santuario rupestre* in Agrigento: *SIKANIE* 1985, no. 281.