

# ANCIENT EGYPT

Masterpieces from Collectors and Collections



## FACE OF QUEEN NEFERTITI



In all previous releases, this head fragment in miniature form has been identified as a representation of Pharaoh Akhenaten. However, the red quartzite material alone suggests otherwise. The creator would have had to go to great lengths to acquire it for it was the definite preferred material for creating portraits in the round among female members of the Amarna Royal Family. Images of Akhenaten made from this material are almost exclusively found in funerary figurines. The small size of this item alludes to

this type of figurine; however, the Swede Bengt Petersen, who initially took charge of it, rightly pointed out that because of the missing beard its origin as an Akhenaten figurine can be ruled out. Furthermore the excellent quality with which this small head fragment was made is on a completely different level to the rather generic faces of funerary figurines, known to have been mass produced in a relatively short period. It was therefore necessary to disassociate this item from Akhenaten and identify another source for it, remarkably something that none of the Egyptologists involved with it post-Peterson managed to do.

Now, for the first time, it's being suggested that in all likelihood the item's face is that of Queen Nefertiti. The stone used is very much associated with her, as well as with other female members of the Royal Family, particularly the daughters of the royal couple. This means a very essential feature of the arts dating to Akhenaten's reign, the so-called "Amarna Art", is evident with this piece. Red quartzite would usually have been the preferred material for depicting the skin of men and accordingly was used in royal sculptures in both the eras before and after Akhenaten. It's only down to the fact that during the "Amarna Art" period women were also normally depicted with a natural, light pink-tinged skin colour that red quartzite could also be used for female figures. The best example of this is the famous Bust of Queen Nefertiti (Berlin 21300). The above explains why only the eyes and mouths that were painted on quartzite faces, as the skin was of course left to be represented by the stone. This is very clearly shown in this example by the leftover paint deposits. The near-exclusive use of this hard rock for feminine sculptures during Akhenaten's era is one of the many radical changes to art-making that took place in the Amarna period.

The detail on this fine piece of work – still easily discernible despite its size – also supports the argument that it is the face of Queen Nefertiti: the very strikingly, but not exaggeratedly carved out chin, the thick - not too large - slightly downward-pointing lips, the nose that appears wide compared to the lips and finally the eyes in painted in *sfumato* style (meaning they are only faintly represented in a smoke-like fashion). All the features described here are similar to the circular sculptures that represent the Amarna family's princesses (a large number of which are made from red quartzite and are currently in our possession). However the other sculptures don't feature the royal headdress appendage found on the forehead. This headdress leads us to the identification of Nefertiti, along with the Uraeus which once sat in the centre of Queen's hat's brim. Despite its wanton destruction, traces of the Uraeus are still observable on this head today. After the Amarna period ceased, this important power symbol of the Egyptian monarchy was chiselled off sculptures of kings and queens. In the case of this statuette it's evident that the entire forehead area was broken off whilst removing the Uraeus. It was re-attached when the statuette's fragments were discovered.

Some of the item's handlers have claimed that remnants of the headdress are apparent on one ear (something not mentioned by Peterson), again suggesting the identification of Nefertiti is correct. If this is true and the traces are indeed of the headdress, then this could only be the royal *khat* headscarf. This was worn by kings and queens in the Amarna period. The best known example of a queen adorning the royal *khat* headscarf was that shown on the wooden head of Queen Tiye (Berlin 21834), whose headpiece featured it before being reworked. Before and after the Amarna period the only females to bear these garments were Goddesses.

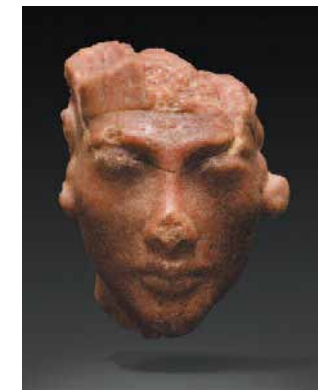
The clearest indication that the facial fragment exhibited here originated from a statuette featuring Queen Nefertiti comes from close examination of the left ear. The entirely preserved lower part of the ear (if indeed this is meant to be the earlobe) is disproportionately large. This is likely to be the circular disk of a mushroom-shaped ear-plug often displayed on such statuettes, as shown on both of Nefertiti's ears on a famous limestone exhibit (Berlin 21263). Hints of such an ear-plug disk can even be seen in the right ear of this head, but it is more damaged than the left.

Although this is only a miniature statuette of Queen Nefertiti, the remaining parts of her face exemplify exquisite mastery in the working of the hard quartzite. Resultantly, the fragment makes for a spectacular new addition to the corpus of Nefertiti round sculptures. CEL.

Red quartzite with traces of black painting.  
H: 5,5cm, W: 4,3cm, D: 3,8cm  
18<sup>th</sup> dynasty, Reign of Pharaoh Akhenaten: 1353-1336 BC  
Provenance: Former collection of the artist R. Holtermann, Stockholm (Inv.-No. H 172)

### Notes

Petersen B.J., "Two Royal Heads from Amarna: Studies in the Art of the Amarna Age", in *Medelhavsmuseet Bulletin* 4, 1964, p. 13-29 (26-29; Figs. 10-13); Müller M., *Die Kunst Amenophis III. und Echnatons*, Basel, 1988, IV, p.147; *Christie's London*, (sales cat. July 11, 1990), Lot 464; Schoske S., Wildung D., *Gott und Götter im Alten Ägypten*, (exhibition cat. Berlin, 1992), p. 90-91, Nr. 61; Arnold D., *The Royal Women of Amarna – Images of Beauty from Ancient Egypt*, MMA Series, New York, 1996. Eaton-Krauss M., "The Khat-Headdress to the End of the Amarna Period", in *SAK* 5, 1977, p. 21-39.





## MAGIC KNIFE WITH FIGURES OF DEITIES AND ANIMALS



This crescent-shaped object is a so-called magic knife, also known as an *apotropaic* wand, decorated with figures of deities and animals in fine relief. The two ends of this example show the head of a leopard on the left and probably the head of a fox (now broken off) on the right. In between, the various gods and symbols of protection and fertility are lined up next to one another. The leopard's head is followed by the goddess Taweret with a *sa* or protective loop, a crouching lion with upright tail, the god Aha in portrait with snakes in his hands, a so-called snake-necked panther with a cobra above it, an upright lion god leaning on an *ankh* symbol, another crouching lion with upright tail, a felid striding on two legs, a goddess with a lion's head seated on the ground with *ankh* symbols above her knees and an *udjat* eye.

All the gods, animal and symbols depicted are intended to protect the mother and the young child at birth and during the following period, ensure that they prosper and ward off harmful powers. So states the inscription on the back of a magic knife in Copenhagen: "Cut off the enemies heads of who enter the room of the children born to NN". Exactly how magic knives were used at birth and in the period just after birth is not known. It is assumed, however, that they were placed on the body of the pregnant woman to protect the unborn child or that the newborn infant was laid down to sleep under the protective arch.

**Hippopotamus tooth.**  
L. 34 cm; W. 4,5 cm.  
12<sup>th</sup> dynasty, c.1938–1759 BC.  
Private collection.

**Notes**  
Altenmüller H., *Die Apotropaia und die Götter Mittelägyptens. Eine typologische und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung der sogenannten "Zaubermesser" des Mittleren Reiches*, 2 Bde., Rottweil, 1965, p.45 (Bd.II), p.69 (Bd. I).

Hornung E., Staehelin E. (ed.), *Skarabäen und andere Siegelamulette aus Basler Sammlungen*, with the cooperation of Artur Brack [et al.], Basel, 1976, p.122–129.

Wiese A., "Die Anfänge der ägyptischen Stempelsiegel-Amulette: eine typologische und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu den "Knopfsiegeln" und verwandten Objekten der 6. bis frühen 12. Dynastie", (*OBO, Series archaeologica* 12), Freiburg (Switzerland)/Göttingen, 1996, p.111–117, p.127–129.

Child mortality was particularly high at the end of the Old Kingdom and in the First Intermediate Period, when internal political turmoil and power struggles made it difficult to provide adequate care. For this reason, a series of magical objects was developed, intended specifically to protect young children and their mothers. These include the button seal, many of which bear an express "*wish for many children*", as well as the magic knife.

The magic knife was carved from a hippopotamus's tusk. This explains its crescent shape. Various gods, symbolic animals and protective symbols were carved on the upper side. "Aha" (Bes), "Taweret", "Baba" and "Mafdet" often appear. Depictions of Bes and Taweret can often be seen on beds and other objects found in the "child bed" or "maternity bower", the enclosed space in which mother and child lived during the period immediately after the birth. Their protective character may be further enhanced by signs of protection, well-being and defence. The images could also include mythical creatures such as Set, griffins or snake-necked panthers. Animals whose symbolism is closely linked to protection and regeneration include the lion, the crocodile, the turtle, the scorpion and the snake. Not forgetting the salutary eye of Horus and the loop providing magical protection. AW.