

DAVID AARON



Coptic Head of Zeus

Egypt

Circa 4th Century A.D., Coptic,

Limestone

H: 25 cm

A carved limestone head of a bearded man, with hair falling around his face in thick locks. His strong features are carved deeply: a slightly downturned mouth, broad nose, and deep-set eyes below a prominent brow. The hair is detailed roughly on the reverse of the head, flowing down to the wide neck at the base of the piece. The piece is pierced vertically from the base of the neck through to the raised projection in the centre of the crown of the head, perhaps for attachment to a larger piece.

The Coptic period refers to the time in Late Roman and Byzantine Egypt (3rd-7th centuries B.C.) when Egyptian religious culture shifted from ancient Egyptian polytheism to Coptic Christianity. Coptic art drew from both Egyptian and Hellenistic sources, sometimes adapting the subjects and symbols from Greek and Egyptian mythology to align with their Christian beliefs. The melded styles reflect the multicultural society of Egypt at this time, and a similar fusion appears in Coptic music that incorporated older Egyptian melodies into Christian songs. This head features many aspects of previous Greco-Roman sculptures of Zeus, the god of thunder, with his thick beard and frowning brow.

Exhibitions

Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, Maryland, in 1973 and 1977 (Loan nos. 14.73 and 25.77), with old label on stand.

Literature:

Art of Antiquity, Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, 14 October 1964, Lot 56