



BULLETIN

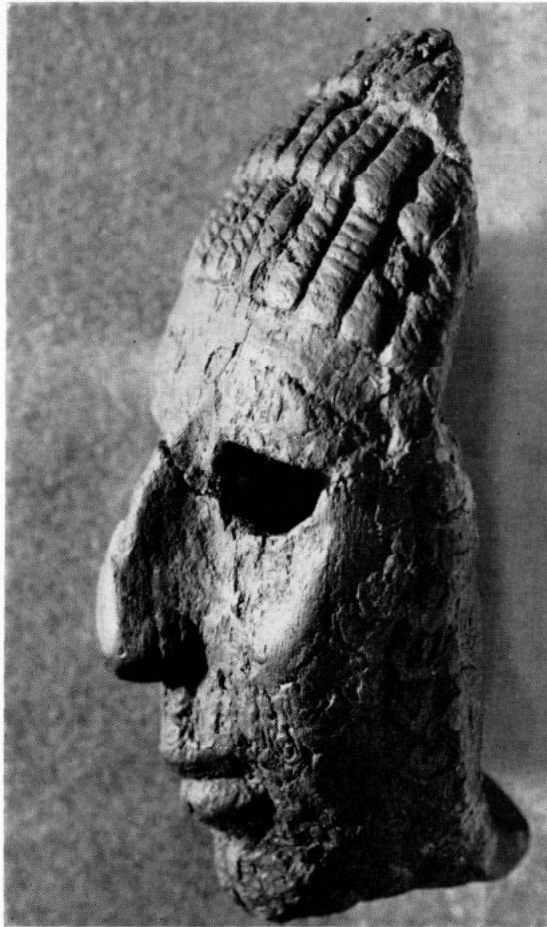
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

VOLUME LVIII

1960

NOS. 313 & 314





Early Dynastic Egyptian Mask, Wood, ca. 3000 B.C. H. 6½ in.
Gift of J. J. Klejman 60.1181

IN THIS nearly life-size wooden mask we have the earliest example from Egypt of a human face treated at a large enough scale and sufficiently well preserved to enable us to comprehend fully the sculptor's intention. The strongly curved nose – so often missing or damaged in early work – lends to it a distinctive character. Nor does the absence of the eyes, which were inlaid in another material, detract from the forceful impression. Characteristic of this formative period in Egyptian art are the curls of the beard and details of the hair. These are applied minutely and decoratively to a simple but immediately effective plastic rendering of a facial type.

It has for some time been known on the basis of very fragmentary evidence from the First Dynasty tombs both at Abydos and Saqqara that fairly large statues were being made in wood at that time. Our acquaintance with the beginnings of Egyptian sculpture in the round has been based, however, largely on small ivory statuettes and poorly preserved stone figures which were placed as votive offerings in the ancient and much revered temple at Hierakonpolis near the old southern border of Egypt. It is upon this material that we can draw chiefly for parallels to the style of the wooden mask which probably belonged to a composite figure made up of different pieces of wood. This is also suggested by a flat piece of wood with strands of hair carved on it which came from a First Dynasty Royal Tomb at Abydos and is now in the

Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. Perhaps our face, which is hollowed out inside, formed part of a kneeling bearded figure like two badly damaged pieces of stone sculpture found at Hierakonpolis. The head of one of those in Oxford bears a close resemblance to our wooden face, although the nose is broken away.

This remarkable example of the achievement of the early Egyptian sculptor was once in the collection of Émile Amélineau in Paris and is said on good authority to have come from the excavations which he conducted in the royal tombs of the First and Second Dynasties at Abydos in 1895, shortly before Sir Flinders Petrie undertook a more thorough and better known examination of this important site. Since the wooden face is most closely related to the Hierakonpolis material which belongs to the last years of the Predynastic Period and the beginning of Dynastic times, it would appear most likely that Amélineau discovered the mask in one of the royal tombs at Abydos.

W. S. S.

Bronze stag from Talish in Northwest Persia, ca. 1000–800 B.C. H. $3\frac{7}{8}$ in.
Frederick Brown Fund 60.245

AROUND the beginning of the first millennium B.C. Northwest Persia was invaded by nomadic peoples who seem to have been the ancestors of the Medes and Achaemenian Persians. They entered Persia through the area west of the Caspian Sea, and apparently first settled in the Elburz mountains which lie just back from the Caspian. Their remains, consisting primarily of bronzes like the stag illustrated here, have been found at Talish, Amlash, and Daylaman. Although the bronzes usually represent stags and humped cattle (the zebu), our collection includes a dog and a man on a horse. Since a cylinder seal showing a mounted warrior found at a site in Persia can be dated to about 850–800 B.C., it is now almost certain that these bronzes should be dated at about the same time or somewhat earlier. Their simple, rather geometrical, yet powerful style has an especial appeal to modern eyes.

E. L. B. T.

