



An Etruscan Amber Head Pendant. Etruria, Circa 5th Century B.c.



3 700 EUR

Period : Before 16th century

Condition : Etat d'usage

Description

An Etruscan Amber Head Pendant. Etruria, circa 5th century B.C. Measurements 5.1 x 3.6 x 2.4 cm. 9cm high on its bronze display stand. Provenance Anonymous sale; Sotheby's London, Antiquities, 14-15 December 1981, lot 206. The property of an American private collector, acquired at the above sale. Carved from translucent red-brown amber with a warm, granular patina and areas of stable age-related degradation, this pendant takes the form of a profile head with stylised Archaic features. The sculptor emphasised the large almond eye beneath a defined brow ridge, a softly smiling mouth, and carefully delineated hair arranged in striated bands sweeping back from the face. A drilled perforation at the crown indicates its original function as a suspended ornament, while

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the smoothing around the opening suggests active wear in antiquity. Amber was a prestigious imported material in Etruria, highly prized for its rarity, colour, and perceived apotropaic power.

From the late 6th century B.C. onwards, figured amber pendants appear in elite tombs, particularly those of women, reflecting both personal identity and a protective role within funerary belief systems. The prominent, wide-open eye here may have served as a talismanic motif, thought to ward off malign forces and ensure the wearer's vigilance and wellbeing in life and beyond the grave. This piece reflects the distinctive aesthetic of Etruscan amber carving, in which

Mediterranean influences are reinterpreted with a locally expressive sculptural style.

Condition Age-related nibbles and craquelure are present throughout the material, consistent with the natural oxidative degradation of ancient amber. There is a chip to the centre of the foremost side of the head, visible in the first image. Some stabilised crumbling surrounds the suspension perforation on the reverse. The overall structure remains stable and well-preserved.

Comparisons For related profile head pendants in amber, see the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, inv. nos. 83.AO.202.1 and 77.AO.81.30, both published in F. Causey (ed.), *Ancient Carved Ambers* in the J. Paul Getty Museum (2012/2019). See also Christie's, London, Antiquities, 14 April 2011, lot 129, for a stylistically comparable example.