

## THE BRONZE BUST FROM THE « ISIS-TOMB » RECONSIDERED

(Con le tavv. I-VII f.t.)

The bronze bust in the British Museum from the « Isis-tomb » in the Polledrara necropolis of Vulci<sup>1</sup> has suffered more vicissitudes from the moment of its discovery than any of the other grave-goods found together with it (*tavv. I a-b - II a-b*). The chamber-tomb<sup>2</sup> from which this material was « excavated »<sup>3</sup> by Napoleon's brother, Lucien Bonaparte, Prince of Canino, was at once filled in again<sup>4</sup>, and we do not know its exact location or the disposition of the objects within its three burial-chambers.

The first person to refer to the bust, even if only indirectly, was L. Urlichs who, between 4-12 April 1839, travelled to Musignano (near Vulci), where the finds had been exhibited in Lucien Bonaparte's villa in an « Egyptian cabinet ». In the list of objects from the « Isis-tomb » which Urlichs drew up after his visit<sup>5</sup>, he does not mention the bust under « lavori in bronzo ». But under « lavori in pietra » he describes the most important piece from the tomb-group, the half life-size gypsum statuette of a woman<sup>6</sup>, as follows: A female statuette, about 2½ feet high. She appears to be an Isis, but instead of the modius, she has on her head another, smaller head. Her hair is dressed in a refined style with long curls arranged like a wig. Her clothes consist of a long over-garment held by a belt and open in front. Through the gap, part of the under-garment is visible. The hands

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<sup>1</sup> BM Register No. 50.2-27.15.

MICALI, *Mon.in.*, p. 37 sg. tav. 6; DENNIS 1848, I, p. 423; DENNIS<sup>2</sup> 1878, p. 460; BM *Bronzes* No. 434; HAYNES 1965, p. 13 sgg., figg. 3-10, tavv. 9-11; HAYNES 1975, p. 20, tav. 6b; HAYNES 1985, p. 252 sg., No. 21; CRISTOFANI 1985, p. 289, No. 111.

<sup>2</sup> DENNIS 1848, I, p. 419 sg. mistakenly states that the tomb was opened in 1840; in DENNIS<sup>2</sup> 1878, I, p. 457 sg., this was corrected to 1839.

<sup>3</sup> For the methods used by the employees of the Princess of Canino in what was virtually a treasure-hunt, see DENNIS 1848, I, p. 409 sg.; GERHARD in *BullInst* 1831, p. 88, and BUNSEN in *AnnInst* 1834, p. 85, had already complained about the vandalism of the excavators at Vulci.

<sup>4</sup> GRAY 1843, p. 287 sg.

<sup>5</sup> *BullInst* 1839, pp. 71-73.

<sup>6</sup> *BullInst* 1839, p. 72.

are extended and in the left she holds a gilt sparrow-hawk with a tall fork on its head. (Translation from the Italian.)

As I have shown in 1965<sup>7</sup> and 1975<sup>8</sup>, the only possible explanation of what Urlichs saw is that Lucien Bonaparte, in his desire to possess a sensational piece of sculpture, had combined the statuette with the bust. The top of the statuette's head was damaged<sup>9</sup> and the Prince seems to have found it convenient to hide this missing part by covering it with the hollow, hemispherical lower section of the bronze bust<sup>10</sup>, the diameter of which roughly corresponds to that of the statuette's head. Further clear proof of the combination of the two sculptures at that period is the fact that the bronze bird, as Urlichs noted, was held in the left hand of the statuette, although there can be no doubt it originally belonged to the bronze bust<sup>11</sup>.

The next to visit Musignano to see the recent finds from the « Egyptian » tomb, was Mrs. Hamilton Gray<sup>12</sup>. She also made a list of the objects from the tomb, but this document, which would certainly have contained a description of our bust, she unfortunately lost before publishing her book in 1843; and we only have her rather vague account from memory of what she saw<sup>13</sup>. However, this suffices to establish that, by the time of her visit to the villa, the statuette and bust were no longer displayed in the spectacular combination encountered by Urlichs, but had been separated again. Mrs. Gray writes: « There were shown to us images of a large size and with a decidedly Egyptian character. One of them had in its hand the sacred hawk of Egypt crowned with the symbol of divinity ». From the plural « images » and the reference to « one of them », as well as from the mention of their large size (evidently to distinguish these sculptures from the much smaller terracotta figures of seated women<sup>14</sup> and alabastra with female busts<sup>15</sup> that also formed part of the tomb-group), it is clear that at this time both the gypsum statuette and the bronze bust were displayed at Musignano as separate pieces.

Lucien Bonaparte died in 1840. We may presume that it was after this that

<sup>7</sup> HAYNES 1965, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> HAYNES 1975, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> See HAYNES 1965, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Part of this section is missing and has been reconstructed; the diameter is approximately 11.5 cm. The diameter of the head of the gypsum statuette (PRYCE 1931, p. 156 sg., No. D1) is 11.2 cm.

<sup>11</sup> As the analysis, carried out by the Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art at Oxford, showed (see HAYNES 1965, p. 20 and fig. 3) both the bronze bust's fist and the bird were cast from the same alloy and they fit together perfectly. The doubts expressed by CRISTOFANI 1985, p. 289, No. 111, regarding the pertinence of the bird to the bust are incomprehensible in view of this evidence.

<sup>12</sup> GRAY 1843, p. 287.

<sup>13</sup> GRAY 1843, p. 268.

<sup>14</sup> *BM Terracottas* B458, B459.

<sup>15</sup> PRYCE 1931, pp. 158-161, D2-D5.

the « skilful arteficer » employed by his widow<sup>16</sup> the Princess of Canino, repaired the damage to the top of the gypsum statuette's head with plaster<sup>17</sup> and fashioned for the bust a wooden pedestal<sup>18</sup>, covered with pieces of embossed bronze sheet taken from other objects. At any rate, it is in this rather more securely based form that the bust is first illustrated, by Micali<sup>19</sup>. Dennis, who visited Vulci between 1842 and 1847, also published a drawing of the bust<sup>20</sup>. Both drawings show that a second, alien frieze had now been attached beneath the bust's damaged, hemispherical lower part, which was decorated with a frieze of walking animals. This additional frieze was made up from several pieces of a long strip of bronze sheet, chased with a procession of two-horse chariots and a walking sphinx<sup>21</sup>. It rested on a low square plinth, apparently also sheathed with pieces of bronze sheet, embossed with a file of animals whose heads had been cut off in the process of adapting it to the required shape.

We cannot say when this square plinth was removed again from beneath the bust. In a lecture delivered on 21 April, 1844, Dr. E. Braun, the secretary of the German Archaeological Institute in Rome, described the bust as rising above a « tondo basamento di bronzo fregiato di bassirelievi », a round base of bronze decorated with friezes in low relief. He makes no mention of the square plinth. Maybe he realized that it was a crude recent addition and therefore chose not to describe it. That he failed to recognize the chariot-frieze as another such addition is, however, clear from his account.

Some time between 1844, when Micali<sup>23</sup> mentioned the bust and the other objects from the « Isis-tomb » as being in the possession of the Princess of Canino, and 1848, when Dennis' book appeared, all the material from the tomb was bought from the Princess by Dr. Braun<sup>24</sup>, who himself sold it to the British Museum in 1850. By this time Braun must have had the square plinth removed, because the bust reached the Museum without it<sup>25</sup>. There the chariot-frieze was recognized as alien by C. Smith<sup>26</sup>, but remained attached to the lower part of the bust until 1962, when it was removed at my suggestion and exhibited separately. How crudely the Princess of Canino's « arteficer » had carried out his addition to, and consolidation of, the lower half of the bust, is clearly visible in the old photo-

<sup>16</sup> DENNIS 1848, I, p. 411.

<sup>17</sup> HAYNES 1965, p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> See C. SMITH in *JHS* XIV, 1894, p. 222 sg.; HAYNES 1965, p. 14, note 19a.

<sup>19</sup> *Mon.in.* tav. VI, 2.

<sup>20</sup> DENNIS 1848, I, p. 423.

<sup>21</sup> HAYNES 1965, figg. 7-10, pp. 14, 21.

<sup>22</sup> *BullInst* 1844, pp. 106-107.

<sup>23</sup> *Mon.in.* p. 37 sgg.

<sup>24</sup> DENNIS 1848, I, pp. 420, 435 sg. On p. 423 he describes the bust with the animal and the chariot-frieze but does not mention the square base, although it is illustrated with the bust.

<sup>25</sup> HAYNES 1965, p. 14, note 19a.

<sup>26</sup> *JHS* XIV, 1894, p. 222 sg.

graph (*tav.* III) taken before the alien frieze was detached<sup>27</sup>. The piece of the frieze he took for this purpose proved somewhat longer than the circumference of the bottom of the bust's lower edge, to which it was to be joined over a wooden core<sup>28</sup>, with the result that its ends overlapped considerably. This core was clearly also intended to strengthen the hemispherical section of the bust, large parts of which were missing<sup>29</sup>. Confirmation that the chariot-frieze was an addition made at Canino is provided not only by its stylistic difference from the animal frieze on the hemispherical section, but also by the fact that a further piece of it (with the provenance: from Canino) is preserved in the Badisches Landesmuseum in Karlsruhe<sup>30</sup>.

In 1965, after the removal of the chariot-frieze, I published a new study of the bust<sup>31</sup> in which I came to the conclusion that there was not enough evidence to enable one to decide whether it was complete in itself<sup>32</sup>, or whether it was originally part of a full-length figure<sup>33</sup>. Even if it was made as a bust, it cannot have ended below in the way it does now. Along the lower edge, a row of seven ancient nail-holes (in two of which the original nail-heads remain in situ)<sup>34</sup> proves that the bust was attached to a further section below it, which must have consisted of wood. But what form this missing lower section took, we have no means of knowing.

This cautious conclusion has now been questioned by F. Roncalli, who examined the « Isis-tomb » material during a brief visit to the British Museum in 1986 and convinced himself that the bust originally had been combined with other items in the tomb-group to form a statue. Apart from a rather sensational report in the press at the time<sup>35</sup>, all we know about Roncalli's theory is contained in his dogmatic caption to a colour plate of the bust which forms the frontispiece to *Rasenna* and shows the bust – but without the right hand and bird – precariously

<sup>27</sup> HAYNES 1965, fig. 7.

<sup>28</sup> See C. SMITH, *JHS* XIV, 1894, p. 222 sg.

<sup>29</sup> See HAYNES 1965, figg. 4-6. The bust has recently been consolidated by the Dpt. of Conservation of the British Museum. See *Tavv.* Ia-b, IIa-b.

<sup>30</sup> HAYNES 1965, p. 21, note 61.

<sup>31</sup> HAYNES 1965, pp. 20-24.

<sup>32</sup> So A. MINTO, *I clipei funerari etruschi*, in *StEtr* XXI, 1950/51, p. 50 sgg.; R. BIANCHI BANDINELLI in *Clusium, MonAntLinc* XXX, 1925, p. 450, includes the bust among « canopic » examples; M. CRISTOFANI 1985, p. 289, No 111, also relates it to canopic urns.

<sup>33</sup> So C. SMITH, *JHS* XIV, 1894, p. 223.

<sup>34</sup> CRISTOFANI 1985, p. 289, No. 111, describes the bust as being soldered together from pieces of hammered bronze. There are, however, no traces of solder anywhere on it; most of the hammered parts being riveted together (Dr. J. Swaddling is preparing a report on the technique of the bust). For the technique of soldering see E. FORMIGLI in CRISTOFANI 1985, p. 46 sgg., who states that soft soldering does not appear in Etruria before the second half of the 6th century B.C.

<sup>35</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, August 18, 1986.

perched on an alabaster stand from the tomb<sup>36</sup>. Roncalli has not so far published any reasons to support his theories about the original form of the bust. A paper entitled « Un'immagine femminile di culto dalla tomba di Iside di Vulci » was read by Roncalli during the *IV Convegno Internazionale di Studi sulla Storia e l'Archeologia del territorio Orvietano*, held at Orvieto in January 1987, but the proceedings of this congress have still to appear in print. Scholars not present on that occasion are therefore reduced to making do with the caption of the frontispiece of *Rasenna* which reads (translated from the Italian): « A bust of thin hammered bronze, the legs enclosed in the abstract cylindrical volume of a small stone column once covered by a precious multi-coloured dress of closely strung glass beads, the head enlivened by eyes in glass paste; the hair fashioned like a wig and encircled in antiquity by a gold diadem: This is the newly discovered truth about the most ancient Etruscan cult statue which was found in an early 6th century tomb at Vulci and is now preserved in the British Museum. For more than a century [the statue remained] mutilated and reduced to a mere bust by the vicissitudes of the excavation and by the antiquity trade of the 19th century, but, above all, by the persistent misunderstanding resulting from a "classicistic" vision which demands "unity of material" for it, a unity no less alien to its function as a vivid cult-image than it would be to the function of a rag-doll with a porcelain head or that of a wooden Madonna in sumptuous garments and with a wax face ».

The alabaster stand on top of which Roncalli places the hemispherical lower part of the bust (*tavv. IV left*), is in fact one of a pair<sup>37</sup>, both of which are mentioned by Urlichs<sup>38</sup> and must therefore belong to the « Isis-tomb » group. That they were made as a pair is proved, despite the damaged state of the one associated by Roncalli with the bust, by their identical material and by the similarity of their slightly tapering columnar shape and their painted decoration. The better preserved example (*tav. IV right and tav. V a*) has retained its flaring, off-set foot and top, the latter surmounted by a flattened knob with a shallow hole drilled in its centre. The slightly domed surface of the knob has a broad border painted in red. Two raised bands, one encircling the foot of the knob and the other not far from the edge of the flat top of the stand, were also picked out in paint. On the damaged stand (*tav. IV left*) a frieze of dark brown painted coffers runs round it immediately above the offset of the (missing) flaring top, and another immediately below that of the (missing) flaring foot (*tav. V b*). Traces of an identical painted frieze are to be seen on the other stand immediately above the offset of the foot.

When Urlichs visited Musignano<sup>39</sup>, the stands were being used to display a

<sup>36</sup> Another view of the bust with its hand and bird, but printed reversed, appears as fig. 518 of *Rasenna*.

<sup>37</sup> BM Reg. No. 50.2-27.13 and 50.2-27.14; HAYNES 1975, p. 21, note 13, *tav. VIe*.

<sup>38</sup> *BullInst* 1839, p. 72, No. 2, under « lavori in pietra » as « due stele rotonde di marmo alti quasi un piede ».

<sup>39</sup> See note 38.

pair of small terracotta figures of seated women from the « Isis-tomb »<sup>40</sup>. It was probably to adapt the damaged stand for this purpose that Lucien Bonaparte had its broken top ground flat, a process which removed most of the flaring upper part (which presumably originally included a domed knob like that of its pendant) and thus reduced the diameter of the top to its present fortuitous measurement. The damaged surface is still visible on one side where the upper portion of the painted frieze has been destroyed (*tav.* IV left). Roncalli's main argument for combining the bust with the damaged stand was their supposed identical diameter. As we have seen, this stand originally flared out to a much wider diameter at the top than it now has and the bust could not have fitted over it. Furthermore, if the bust wore a « precious garment » in the form of a pendant skirt of glass beads of different colours, as Roncalli proposes, the elaborately moulded and painted top and sides of the stand, which were obviously meant to be seen, would have been invisible. Nor, in any case, could such a bead skirt have been suspended from the holes along the lower edge of the bust, since these holes, as we have already pointed out, were originally filled by nails.

The « Isis-tomb » group, in fact, included some 33,000 glazed faience beads<sup>41</sup>, far too many to be accounted for by Roncalli's skirt or by the many necklaces which I proposed formerly<sup>42</sup>. The excavations at Castel di Decima<sup>43</sup> have, however, now taught us that the funerary garment of an eminent lady, buried at the end of the 8th century B.C. in Tomb CI, was embroidered all over with various beads of amber, blue and white paste and silver. I would now suggest that the lady buried in the « Isis-tomb » wore a burial dress similarly adorned with a profusion of multi-coloured beads (*tav.* VI).

That the eyes of the bust were originally inlaid in a different material, probably paste, I suggested in 1965<sup>44</sup>; it is not a new discovery. But to embellish the bust's head with the gold diadem from the « Isis-tomb »<sup>45</sup> (*tav.* VII a) is a revival of a fanciful proposal first made by Dennis<sup>46</sup>. The diadem's length of 51 cm does not agree with the circumference of the bust's head of 26.9 cm, nor do the semicircles cut out in the diadem for the ears fit those of the bust. A further

<sup>40</sup> *BM Terracottas* B458, B459; HAYNES 1975, p. 20 sg., *tav.* VI d.

<sup>41</sup> Mentioned by URLICHS in *BullInst* 1839, pp. 71-73, under « lavori in smalto »: « una quantità straordinaria di piccoli anelli senza dubbio appartenenti ad una collana », *BM Reg.* No. 50.2-27.66.

<sup>42</sup> HAYNES 1975, p. 21, *tav.* VI f. For the composition of the beads and their manufacture, see the report of the British Museum Research Laboratory of July 23 1987.

<sup>43</sup> See A. BEDINI in *Lazio Primitivo* 1976, p. 287 sg., No. 92. For a reconstruction of the dress see L. QUILICI, S. QUILICI-GIGLI in *Capitolium* 51, 1976, 16.

<sup>44</sup> HAYNES 1965, p. 21, note 60. This, incidentally, disproves my supposed « classicistic » vision which « demanded a unity of material », as does the fact that I restored the bronze bird, which is covered by gold foil, to the right hand of the bust.

<sup>45</sup> *BM Jewell*, No. 1257; HAYNES 1975, p. 24, *tav.* VIII a.

<sup>46</sup> DENNIS 1848, I, p. 423.

objection to associating the diadem with the bust is their chronological discrepancy: the stamped decoration of the diadem (*tav. VII b*) connects it firmly with similarly embossed South Etruscan jewellery of the middle of the 7th century B.C.<sup>47</sup>; it was thus the oldest object in the tomb and probably an heirloom. The bust, on the other hand, is generally ascribed to the first quarter of the 6th century B.C.<sup>48</sup>.

That the bust may represent the image of a divinity, probably a goddess of death and fertility<sup>49</sup>, I have already suggested on several occasions<sup>50</sup>, and with this interpretation Roncalli seems to agree<sup>51</sup>. A striking and important piece, even in its fragmentary state, the bust appears to be the culmination of a formal tradition which includes the canopic urns and female stone busts from Chiusi and the metal funerary busts from Marsiliana and Vulci<sup>52</sup>. How it ended below, we cannot tell on the available evidence; and there we must, and should, leave the argument.

SYBILLE HAYNES

<sup>47</sup> STRØM 1971, p. 72, S47, p. 81, SIII 23, pp. 85, 189, figg. 60, 61; M. MARTELLI, in *L'Oro* 1983 p. 275, No. 77, with full bibliography.

<sup>48</sup> HAYNES 1965, pp. 20-24; HAYNES 1985, pp. 74, 252 sg., No. 21; CRISTOFANI 1985, p. 289 sg., No. 111; RONCALLI, in *Rasenna*, p. 591 sg., fig. 518.

<sup>49</sup> A comparable divinity seems to have been worshipped in the sanctuary of the Cannicella necropolis at Orvieto; see G. COLONNA, *I culti del Santuario della Venere*, in *Annali della Fondazione per il Museo «Claudio Faina»* III, 1987, p. 24 sgg.

<sup>50</sup> HAYNES 1965, p. 24; HAYNES 1975, p. 20; HAYNES 1985, p. 252 sg., No. 21.

<sup>51</sup> In *Rasenna*, caption to frontispiece and p. 591 sg.

<sup>52</sup> HAYNES 1965, p. 22 sg.; HAYNES 1985, No. 21; CRISTOFANI 1985, No. 111; RONCALLI, in *Rasenna*, p. 592.

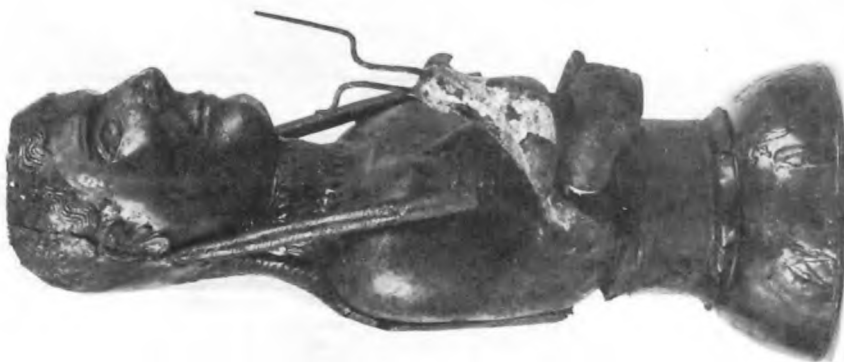
The following abbreviations have been used in addition to the *Elenco delle Abbreviazioni* in *Studi Etruschi*.

- CRISTOFANI 1985 = M. CRISTOFANI, *I Bronzi degli Etruschi*, Novara.  
 GRAY 1843 = MRS. HAMILTON GRAY, *Tour of the sepulchres of Etruria in 1839*, London.  
 HAYNES 1965 = S. HAYNES, «Zwei archaisch-etruskische Bildwerke aus dem 'Isis-grab' von Vulci» in *Antike Plastik* 4, p. 13 sgg.  
 HAYNES 1975 = S. HAYNES, «The Isis-tomb; do its contents form a consistent group?» in *Atti Grosseto*, pp. 17-29.  
 HAYNES 1985 = S. HAYNES, *Etruscan Bronzes*, London.  
*Lazio Primitivo* = *Civiltà del Lazio Primitivo. Catalogo della Mostra*, Roma 1976.  
*L'oro* 1983 = *L'oro degli Etruschi*. A cura di M. CRISTOFANI e M. MARTELLI, Novara.  
 PRYCE 1931 = F. N. PRYCE, *Catalogue of Sculpture in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities in the British Museum, Vol. I, Part II. Cypriote and Etruscan*, London.  
*Rasenna* = *Rasenna. Storia e Civiltà degli Etruschi*, Milano 1986.  
 SCHUMACHER 1890 = K. SCHUMACHER, *Beschreibung der Sammlung antiker Bronzen zu Karlsruhe*, Karlsruhe.

All the photographs are by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.



b



a

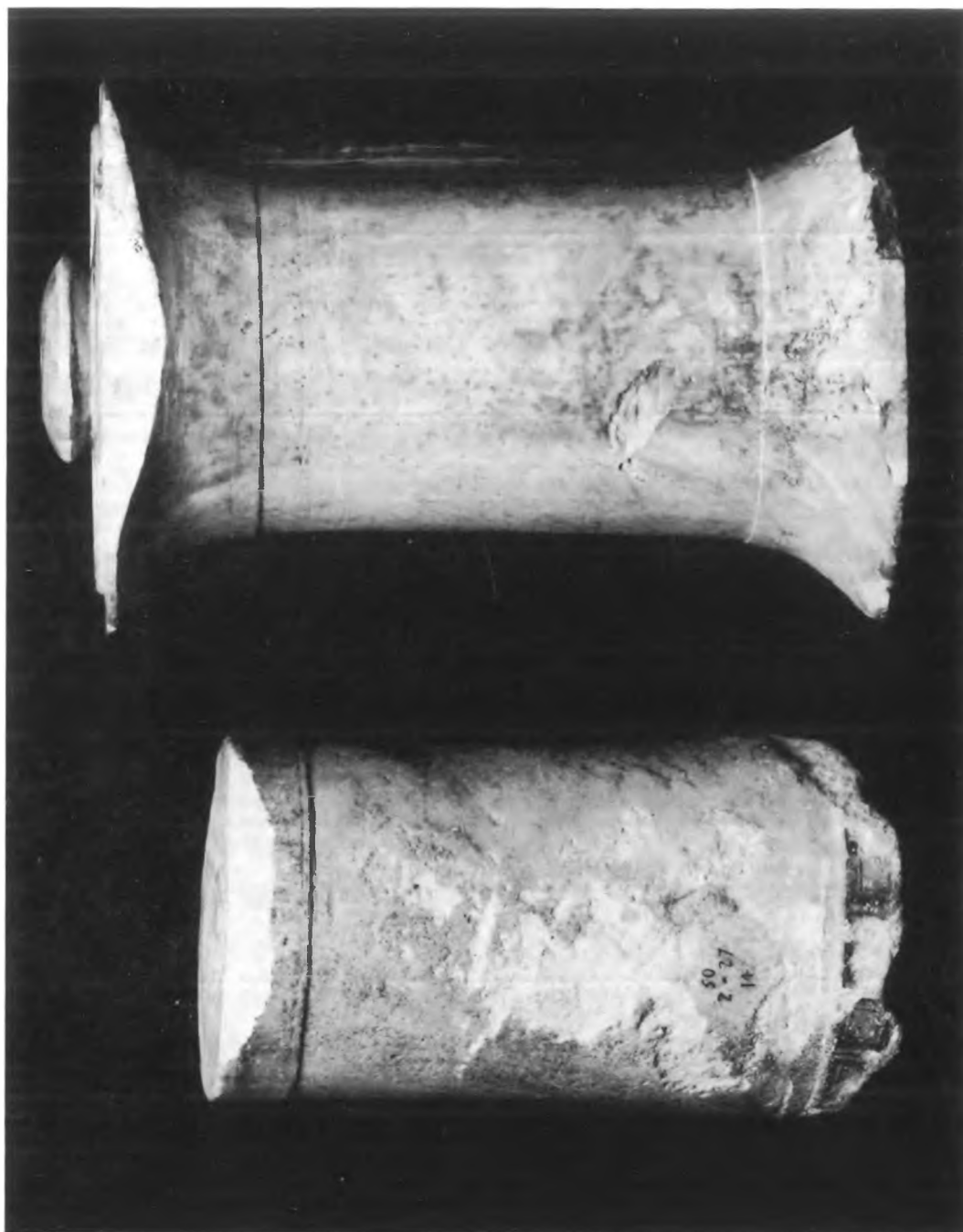
a-b) Bronze bust from the « Isis-Tomb » (British Museum).



a-b) Bronze bust from the « Isis-Tomb » (British Museum).



Bronze bust from the « Isis-Tomb » before the restoration of 1962 (British Museum).



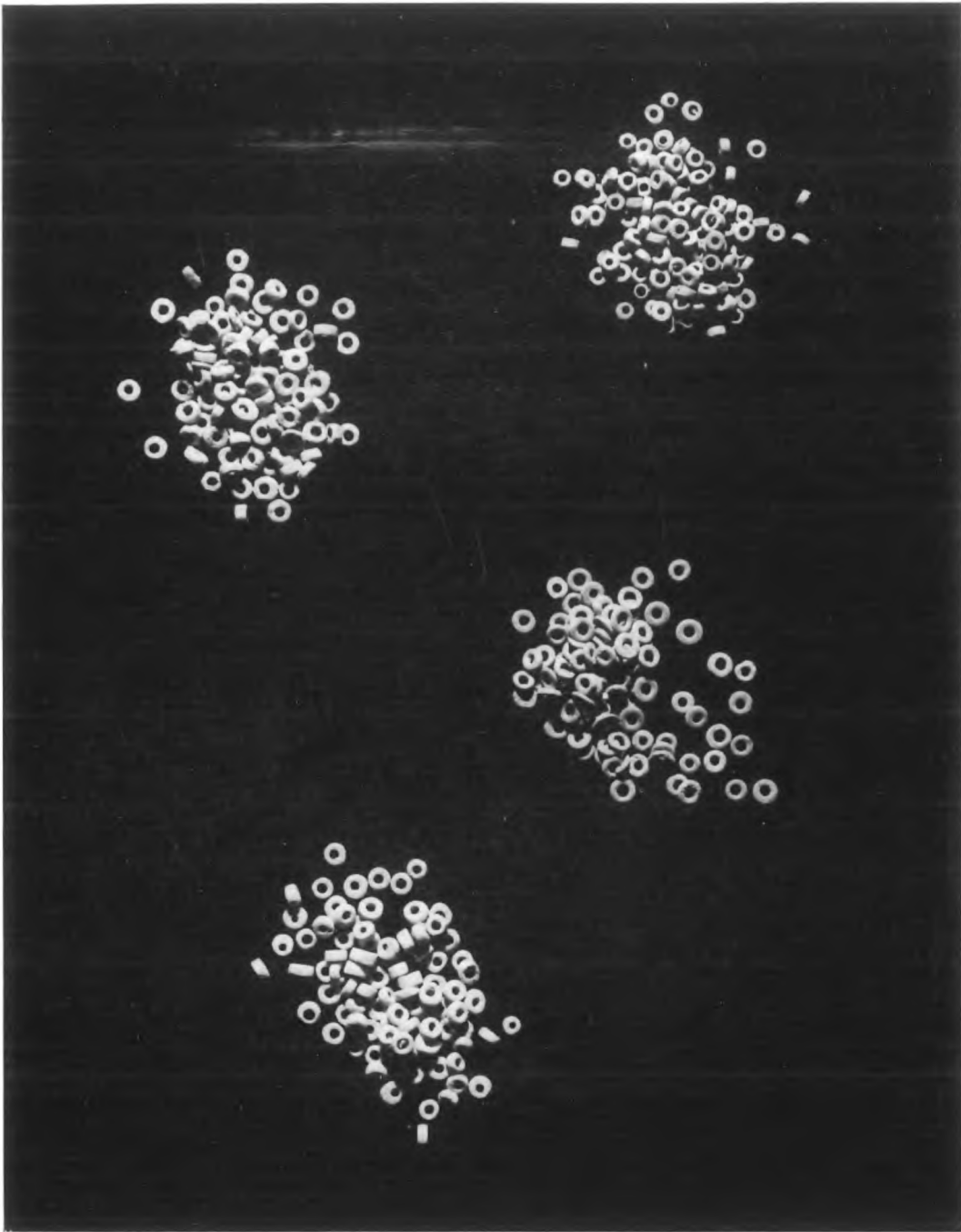
Pair of alabaster stands from the « Isis-Tomb » (British Museum).



Top of alabaster stand, Tav. IV right.



Detail of flared base of alabaster stand, Tav. IV left.



Selection of glazed faience beads from the « Isis-Tomb » (British Museum).



*a-b*) Gold diadem from the « Isis-Tomb » (British Museum).