



Figure 1: Upper part of Statue (bust) CCM 276.004 – side profile (Author photograph, 2025).



Figure 2: Upper part of Statue (bust) CCM 276.004 – reverse profile (Author photograph, 2025).



Figure 3: Upper part of Statue (bust) CCM 276.004 – front profile (Personal photograph, 2025).

Upper part of a statue (bust)

Cyfarthfa Castle, Merthyr Tydfil CCM: 276.004

Object type: Head (broken from rest of statue).

Material: Granodiorite.

Period: Third Intermediate / Late Period, likely late 25th – early 26th Dynasty (c. 744-525BCE).

Provenance: Unknown (Egypt); collected by Major Harry Hartley Southey; later donated to Cyfarthfa Castle Museum.

Dimensions: 19.1cm x 17.0cm x 14.5cm (Maximum height x width x depth).

Object analysis by **Misch Watson** – 2504292, UWTSD HPAH5085/6085.

The Upper part of a statue (bust) CCM 276.004, also referred to as the Cyfarthfa Bust, is an artistically carved object from dense granodiorite, which is black speckled with light grey plagioclase inclusions¹. The head is of life-size scale and frontally oriented, with a smooth, symmetrical and idealised face emerging from a wide striated wig, that tucks behind the ears and flows carefully onto the remnants of the shoulders. Incised eyebrows perfectly frame the polished almond-shaped eyes; their gleam conveying a lifelike gaze. Gently rounded cheeks taper to a sharp jawline, which compliments a serene looking, slightly open and suggestive smile. The base of the neck and wig are broken away together at a roughly horizontal angle just above the shoulders and upper torso (see Figures 1, 2 and 3), which would likely have merged down into a full figure carving. Despite the fragmentary state of the object, the Bust still conveys a striking sense of presence: when handled, the smooth precision of the features almost feels alive, as if frozen in time.

Granodiorite is a remarkably hard igneous rock comprised of quartz and feldspar, which Ancient Egyptians highly valued, due to hardness which allowed for crisp carving, alongside the dark colour which had symbolic meaning and emphasized the high polish that could be achieved.² The prestige value of granodiorite meant it was likely only used in sculptures and monuments attributed to those of high social status, which leads to the suggestion that the Cyfarthfa Bust might have represented such a figure. The idealised features, striated wig, youthful face and direct frontality are all features of the Cyfarthfa Bust, which as Bothmer (1960) notes, were characteristics produced from Saite craftsmanship of the 26th dynasty 664-525 BCE.³ The *Bust from a Statue of a King* as shown in Figure 4, has remarkably similar features to the Cyfarthfa Bust – striated wigs, almond-shaped eyes and idealised features, which point towards the Late Period revival of earlier artistic and stylistic forms in sculpting, known as Saite Archaism – an ideological comeback rooted in cultural legitimization.⁴



Figure 4: Bust From a Statue of a King, Late Period (Saite), c. 664–610 BCE (*The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, accession X.358).

¹ Aston et al 2009: 5-6

² Borghi et al 2015: 3-14

³ Bothmer 1960: 72-75

⁴ Assman 2005: 255

The break at the neck area of the Cyfarthfa Bust indicates that it once surmounted a larger sculpture. One plausible reconstruction is that of a block statue – similar to the object shown in Figure 5. This design of a compact squatting figure enveloped by a cloak was popular with non-royal elites, since they offered a durable and sturdy presence in temple



Figure 5: Block Statue of the Porter Amenemhat, Ptolemaic Period, 4th c. BCE (*The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession 25.184.15*)

courtyards, wherein they might act as an intermediary between the worshippers and gods in a funerary context.⁵ Alternatively, some domestic shrines saw the use of uninscribed busts to facilitate communication with deceased relatives.⁶ Such sculptures often depicted non-royal figures with striated wigs, which in conjunction with the modest scale and absence of royal regalia on CCM 276.004, supports this suggestion. However, the style of the break above the shoulder on the Cyfarthfa Bust indicates that it was not originally designed as a bust, and additionally, the prestige and technique of the granodiorite carving reaffirms the argument it may have held a more important position as a larger carved object, in a more significant funerary ritual context.

The polished eyes and open mouth invite some association with the *Opening of the Mouth Ceremony*. During funerary rituals, priests would touch the eyes and mouth of the statue, so that it could breathe, see and speak in the afterlife.⁷ Egyptian belief systems were highly complex and as Edward Wente (1982) explains, every living person possessed the vital force of life - the *Ka*, which could be manifested in a statue to join the deceased, if the correct funeral rites were carried out.⁸ Harrington (2013, pp. 3-15) notes that block and naophorous statues of the Late Period increasingly satisfied the presence-bearing role as recipients of

⁵ Robins 1997: 239-240

⁶ Harrington 2013: 55-62

⁷ Taylor 2001: 90-91

⁸ Wente 1982: 149-166

ongoing offerings as remembrance – which is a role once associated with earlier *ka-statues* from earlier periods.⁹

It is possible that the Cyfarthfa Bust functioned in the same way: as a *ka-stature* designed to receive offerings and nourish the deceased as denoted by the open mouth.¹⁰ These features underline the potential role the Bust might have had as a conduit between worlds within the ancient Egyptian funerary sphere. In certain lighting the carefully designed eyes of the Cyfarthfa Bust glint, and the slightly parted lips evoke breath and speech, which aligns with the concept that this Bust served as a material vessel for the *ka*, the life-force that received offerings, and also for the *akh*, the transfigured spirit whose

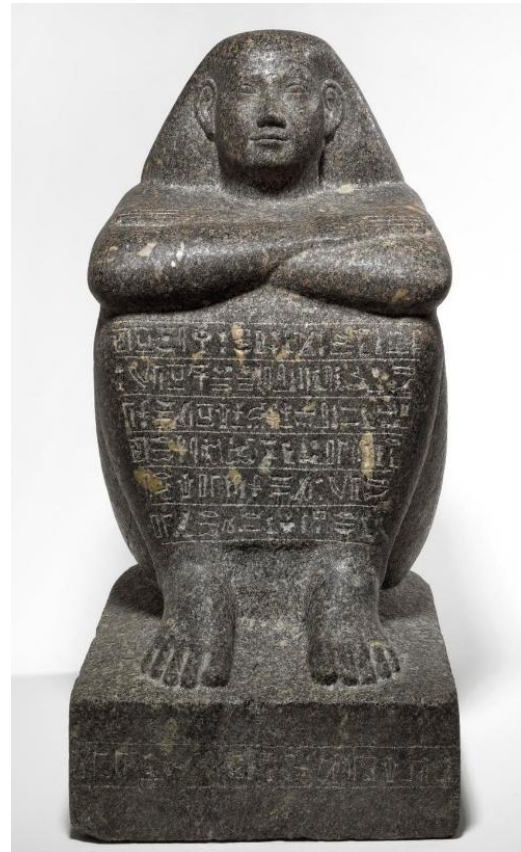


Figure 6: Block Statue of Padimahes, late 25th–early 26th Dynasty (c. 700–650 BCE) (Brooklyn Museum, accession 64.146)

effectiveness depended on continued engagement and remembrance.¹¹ The divine creative force known as *Heka* would also have had a place in this funerary sphere. Purposefully carving the head of the Bust from a hard, dark material and polishing it to a sheen, would allow the *Heka* to reanimate the senses and connect worlds together in Ancient Egyptian belief.¹² It is possible that the Cyfarthfa Bust would have represented its owner within a funerary and ritual context in a similar way to that of the *Block statue of Padimahes*, as shown in Figure 6. Today, the Bust continues to mediate a connection between the past and present; with our scholarly interaction becoming a form of modern ritual; a small reactivation of the *Heka*, reminding us that the dead can remain present as long as they are acknowledged.

⁹ Harrington 2013: 55-60

¹⁰ Ikram 2004: 1003–1006

¹¹ Assman 2015: 50-57, 250-255

¹² Zinn 2013: 4227-4231

The Late Period Saite Dynasty deliberately revived earlier artistic and religious traditions, with statues being commissioned by officials to participate in temple rituals and encourage worshippers, notwithstanding the opportunity to display wealth and status.¹³ The anonymous, but expensive features seen on CCM 176.004 indicate an elite, non-royal status. Economic and religious changes during the Saite period resulted in funerary monuments being dismantled and repurposed, which may explain why only the head survives.¹⁴ It is difficult to discern whether the Cyfarthfa Bust was repurposed in this way at this time, or whether it was intentionally broken – perhaps for ease of transport - when Major Harry Southey collected it from Egypt in the early 20th century. Understanding the original provenance of this item may never be known, due to the nature of its modern acquisition, however through geological surveys and research into material

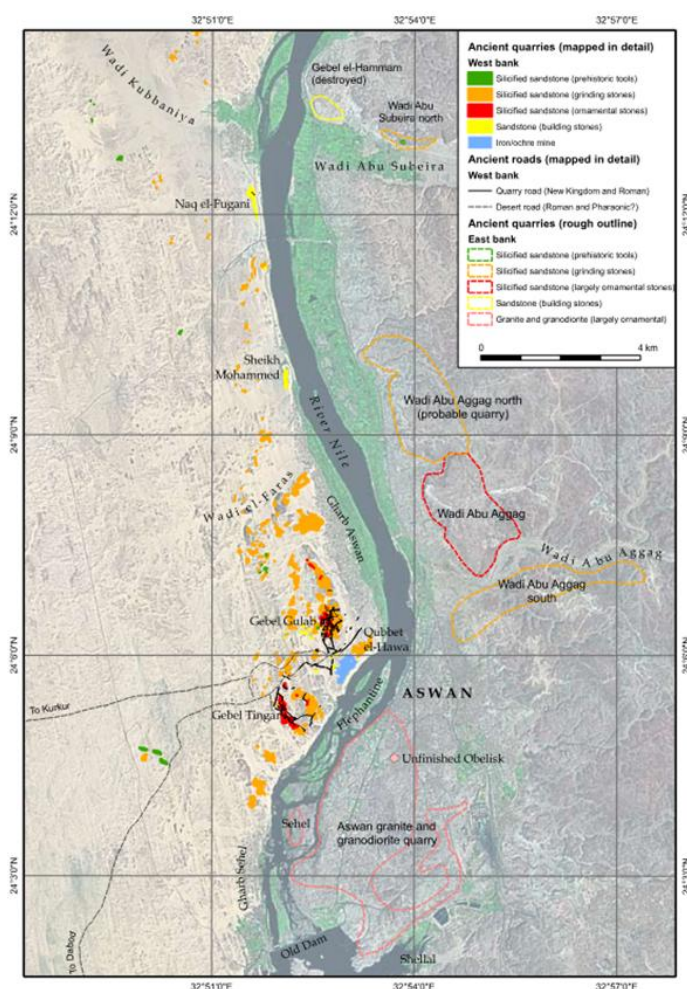


Figure 7: Map of quarry and stone extraction zone at Aswan (Harrell & Storemyr, 2009, fig. 7)

origins in Egypt, we can get one step closer. Granodiorite used for statuary purpose in the Late Period was primarily extracted from the quarries next to Aswan's first cataract – specifically the quarries outlined in peach in Figure 7, which were active throughout the Dynastic Period into the Late period, which makes this area a likely source for the Cyfarthfa Bust.

¹³ Kahl 2010: 1-6

¹⁴ Baines and Lacavara 2002: 5-12, 12-15

Engaging with the Cyfarthfa Bust emphasised its materiality: the surface felt cold and enduring, with its strength and weight conveying a sense of durability and permanence. Looking into the dark, polished eyes instigated a fleeting sense of connection, and as Streb and Kolnberger (2019) argue, an objects' material presence can mediate between the past and present.¹⁵ Interacting with an object like this in a scholarly setting evokes an emotional response, awakens a connection and prompts reflection towards its story and meaning for people millennia apart.

¹⁵Streb and Kolnberger 2019: 117-121

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Figures

Figure 1: *Upper part of Statue (bust) CCM 276.004* – side profile. Cyfarthfa Castle Museum Collection. Photograph by author (M. Watson), 2025.

Figure 2: *Upper part of Statue (bust) CCM 276.004* – reverse profile. Cyfarthfa Castle Museum Collection. Photograph by author (M. Watson), 2025.

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Figure 4: *Bust from Statue of a King*, Late Period (Saite), c. 664–610 BCE. Granodiorite. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Accession Number: X.358. Image source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art Online Collection (accessed 2025).

Figure 5: *Block Statue of the Porter Amenemhat*, Ptolemaic Period, 4th century BCE. Basalt; from Thebes, Karnak, Temple of Amun Cachette. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Accession Number: 25.184.15. Image source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art Online Collection (accessed 2025).

Figure 6: *Block Statue of Padimahes*, late 25th–early 26th Dynasty (c. 700–650 BCE). Granite. Brooklyn Museum, New York. Accession Number: 64.146. Image source: Brooklyn Museum Collection Online (accessed 2025).

Figure 7: *Map of quarry and stone extraction landscapes in the Aswan region*. After Harrell, J. A. & Storemyr, P. (2009) 'Ancient Egyptian quarries—an illustrated overview'. In Abu-Jaber, N., Bloxam, E. G., Degryse, P. and Haldal, T. (eds.) *QuarryScapes: Ancient stone quarry landscapes in the Eastern Mediterranean*. Geological Survey of Norway Special Publication 12, pp. 7–50, Figure 7. Screenshot taken by author (M. Watson), 2025, for academic use.