



STATUE OF A FALCON-HEADED GOD, POSSIBLY SOPET

Egypt

Late Dynastic Period/Ptolemaic Period, I Millennium BC

Limestone with surface concretions

Height 35 cm Base 23 cm x 11 cm

The plumage of the falcon is finely executed, with folded wings crossing on the back and ending in a fan-like form. The body of the deity, with its big belly and crooked legs, represents either Bes or Pataikos. On the back of the head, semi-circular traces suggest that the statue originally wore a removable crown, which has now disappeared. During the daily morning rituals, the priest would have placed such a crown on the deity's head. The statue was originally painted, and traces of paint are still visible in the sunken relief of the hands. A break in the lower part of the legs has been repaired.

The body type and dwarfish features of the god are well-known and frequently depicted in the Late Dynastic Period. The role of Bes as protector of pregnant women, childbirth and young children is also too well known to require further explanation. However, the nature of this god cannot be reduced simply to that of a clownish guardian of the gynaeceum. One of his key characteristics is his role in the composition of complex, polymorphous divinities, manifesting primarily in the realm of magic - the pantheistic deities. These figures all have the body of Bes but are endowed with various, often multiple, heads (generally between two and seven), wings, and sometimes a crocodile's tail. When the god has only one head, it is usually that of a ram. A rare example is the "pantheist Bes stele" exhibited in Karlsruhe, where the god is depicted with the head of a baboon.

PROVENANCE

Former private collection P.M. Maastricht, The Netherlands, acquired in 1973 in Paris, France

PUBLICATION

A. Gasse & J.-C. Grenier: *Nains et Faucons*, Bibliothèque des écoles des Hautes Etudes Sciences Religieuses, Vol. 156, Grenoble 2012

Surface analyses: M.S.M.A.P. Laboratory, Bordeaux

LITERATURE

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S. Albersmeier: *Ägyptische Kunst*, Bestandskatalog Badisches Landesmuseum Karlsruhe, Minerva 2007

É. Naville: *The Shrine of Saft el Henneh and the Land of Goshen*, The Egypt Exploration Fund, 4th Memoir, Trübner&Co London 1888