



Composite or pantheistic Bes figurine

On display

Title/Description: Composite or pantheistic Bes figurine

Measurements: h. 87 x w. 85 x d. 27 mm

Accession Number: 682

Historic Period: Dynasties XXVI-XXX (c. 650-342 BC)

Production Place: Africa, Egypt

Credit Line: Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1977

This elaborate figurine of the dwarf god Bes falls into a class of amuletic objects which can be categorized as apotropaic; they were intended to ward off malefic powers or influences from the fortunate owner. It is possible that such figures were also offered as votive gifts in temples and shrines.

Figures of Bes showing pantheistic attributes are not rare, but the present piece is an especially fine example with much iconographical detail meriting full description. The god has his usual feathered head-dress, and sun-disk with horns, set above a circular coronet *modius*. He is provided with two sets of arms, the upper pair outstretched above two pairs of wings and grasping objects which can be interpreted as knives. The right hand of the lower set of arms holds a *was* sceptre, symbol of 'dominion', and the left an *ankh*, the sign of 'life'. On the left side of the head are placed the forepart of a crocodile (Sobek) with the head of a jackal (Anubis) below it. On the right side are seen feline (?) and hippopotamus heads. In place of the customary phallus, the figure is provided with the head of a jackal, now slightly damaged. The left leg of Bes is shown advanced, his feet being in the form of jackals' heads.

The back of the figure, which has the folded wings of a falcon (Horus), is equally informative. Behind the head are represented four smaller heads; a baboon (Thoth, top right), a bull's head with sun-disk and horns (probably Apis, top left), a cat (Bastet, lower left) and a ram (Amun or Khnum, lower right). The suspension loop above is broken.

Entry taken from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection 3 volume catalogue, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997).

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from Peter Sharrer in 1977 out of funds provided by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury.

