

Statuette of the Baboon God Thoth

Egypt

Late Period 664 - 332 B.C.

Limestone

H: 22.5cm

A small-scale statuette of a baboon, squatted on an integral base with its paws resting on its knees, crowned with a lunar disc. Its mane has been modified to resemble a typical Egyptian wig and the thick fur around its shoulders has been similarly anthropomorphised into a smooth cape. Its tail curls neatly round to its right. The baboon was sacred to the ancient Egyptians, representing the manifestation of the god Thoth, and baboon imagery is common to Egyptian art, being found in wall paintings, reliefs, statues and amulets. The mantle of fur suggests the baboon is a male Hamadryas baboon, which is characterised by its thick cape of fur around its neck and most often represented in Egyptian art, leading to its second name, the 'sacred baboon'. Thoth was a moon deity, the god of reckoning, of learning, and of writing. He is most often depicted as a human man with the head of an ibis, but also as a baboon, an animal sacred to him. Thoth's role as a moon deity means Thoth baboons were often depicted, as here, with a lunar disc. His main sanctuary was at Khmunu (Hermopolis; modern Al-Ashmunayn) in Upper Egypt, where many thousands of mummified baboons and ibis have been found.

Literature:

Art d'Asie- Antiques- Haute Epoque- Antiquités précolumbiennes, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, March 15 and 16, 1961, lot 214

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