

DAVID AARON



Statuette of the God Bes

Egypt

1st Millennium B.C.

Bone

H:5cm

A carved bone figure of the god Bes in his canonical form as a stocky dwarf. His face is highly expressive, with frowning eyebrows in high relief and a grimacing mouth with teeth bared and tongue extended. A thick lion's mane frames the face, and large ears protrude on either side of the head. His hands are placed on his hips, on the incised belt or animal skin worn by the god. His legs are broad and bowed, as is typical for images of Bes. The statuette is hollowed, and may have originally been part of a fan or mirror.

Bes was worshipped as a protector of households, especially mothers and children. With his wild beard, lion's mask, and loud instruments, Bes was believed to ward off evil spirits. He was thus seen as a protector of women during labour, alongside the goddess Taweret. Later he became the defender of all that is good, and the god of music and merriment. Unlike other Egyptian deities, images of Bes were kept within the home as apotropaic devices. He was depicted in full face portrait, rather than in profile, even when in relief. Worship of Bes spread as far north of Syria and as far west as the Balearic Islands in Spain, and continued into the Roman and Achaemenid Empires.

Literature:

Catalogue of Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Mexican Antiquities etc., Sotheby's, London, 22 October 1934, Lot 155, Pl. IV.

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Intérieurs, Christie's, Paris, 7-8 July 2011, Lot 349.