

DAVID AARON



The Brummer Horus

Circa 378-341 B.C., 30th Dynasty, Egypt

Limestone

H: 50 cm, L: 44.5 cm

A large, finely carved limestone statue of the falcon of Horus. The bird stands tall on an integrated rectangular base, its long, slender talons articulated with delicate precision. The legs rise smoothly into the proudly rounded breast, with the wings folded flush on either side. The divided tail feathers cross over in the typical V-shaped at the back of the statue. The wide, alert eyes are outlined with a deep incision, highlight their oval form. The beak is similarly rounded, and incised with additional detail. Atop the falcon's head sits the remaining base of a uraeus-falcon and crown of Upper and Lower Egypt (now missing), denoting its kingly status. Traces of the original red paint can be seen, for instance on the wings. This is a smaller, though still notably large, version of the famous Horus falcon flanking the entrance to the temple of Horus at Edfu. Very few examples of limestone statues of falcons have survived from antiquity, due to the relatively soft nature of the stone. One example, also acquired from Maurice Nahman as this one was, is now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (E 11152), and another is in the North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, N.C. (GL.57.14.86).

Horus, the son of the goddess Isis and the god Osiris, was one of the most important gods in the Egyptian pantheon. He was worshipped from at least late prehistoric Egypt until the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods. His battle to regain his throne from his uncle Seth, who had killed his father Osiris, was viewed as symbolic of the pharaoh's vanquishing of Egypt's enemies, and he was seen as the uniter of the Two Kingdoms of Egypt and the maintainer of order. He therefore represented the concept of balance, which was highly valued by the Egyptians. As such, he was associated with kingship and the pharaoh came to be viewed as a representation of Horus on earth. The Pyramid Texts (c. 2400-2300 B.C.) describe the pharaoh as embodying Horus in life and Osiris in death – when one pharaoh died

their successor was Horus's new incarnation. During his battle with Seth, one of Horus's eyes was gouged out – the Eye of Horus, or wedjat-eye, was a powerful apotropaic symbol for ancient Egyptians.

Following his victory over Seth, Horus became known as 'Horus the Great' or 'Horus the Elder'. This is written in hieroglyphs as ḥr.w, or 'falcon',  , and is also translated as 'the distant one' or 'one who is above, over'. Horus was often depicted as a falcon or a man with a falcon's head. The falcon, therefore, came to symbolise divine kingship in itself, and is often depicted wearing the Double Crown of Egypt or the sun disc in statues and paintings. Horus was also god of the sky, with the sun as his right eye and the moon as his left. In his falcon form, Horus flew the sun and moon in their journey across the sky, with outspread wings protecting the earth below.

From the Late Period onwards, sacred animals became a focus for ancient Egyptian worship in the form of mummies and votive offerings. The animals were worshipped as a living incarnation of a god on earth. They would often be kept in the precinct of their associated deity's temple, where they would live a life of great luxury. Several industries supported the animal cults, with keepers, embalmers, and builders constructing the dedicated necropoleis, as well as the priests who managed the donations.

Entire complexes of buildings dedicated to falcons of Horus have been found at Saqqara, Buto, Abydos, and Kom Ombo. Pilgrims who visited these temples would purchase falcons to be mummified and presented as signs of devotion to the god, or when seeking a particular blessing. Their offerings would then be interred in the catacombs as an eternal prayer to Horus. The falcons were treated with the same reverence in death as in life: they were carefully mummified with bandages overlaid in elaborate patterns and often with painted cartonnage masks, as seen in examples now in the Michael C. Carlos Museum, Atlanta (1958.063 and 2005.040.002) and the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest (98.4-E).[1] They would also be buried in their own carefully-crafted coffins.[2]

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[1] 'Falcon Mummy', Michael C. Carlos Museum, Atlanta, 1958.063:

<https://collections.carlos.emory.edu/objects/3730/falcon-mummy> (accessed 04/04/2025); [1] 'Falcon Mummy', Michael C. Carlos Museum, Atlanta, 2005.040.002:

<https://collections.carlos.emory.edu/objects/12699/falcon-mummy> (accessed 04/04/2025); 'Mummy of a Falcon', Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, 98.4-E: <https://egypt-museum.com/falcon-mummy/> (accessed 04/04/2025).

[2] 'Coffin', The British Museum, London, 1905,0515.42:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA41552 (accessed 04/04/2025).

Literature:

The Cranbrook Collections, Sotheby, Parke-Bernet, New York, 2-5 May 1972, Lot 360, p. 151.