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Figure of Khnum

Circa 600-300 B.C., Late Period, Egypt

Bronze

H: 19.6 cm, W: 5.4 cm, D: 6.9 cm

A striding figure of the Egyptian god Khnum, in bronze. The god is depicted as a man with a ram's head, with two large horns curving inwards and forwards towards the face, in the style of later representations of Khnum (earlier images depict the god with corkscrew horns extending horizontally from his head, to distinguish him from the curved-horned god Amun). Between the horns, he wears a cylindrical modius headdress, which may have attached a crown or other headdress. He stands with the true left foot in front of the right, with his left arm extended forwards and the right by his side. Originally the left hand must have been holding a sceptre or other emblem of power.

Khnum was one of the most ancient gods of Egypt, who was worshipped from as early as the Predynastic Period and into the early centuries C.E. Originally a water god, Khnum was the patron god of the First Cataract (area of rapids) of the Nile, and protector of its source. The Egyptians believed that the waters of the Nile proceeded from the god Nun from a hole in the earth at Elephantine, where one of Khnum's most important temples was based. The inundation waters bearing fertile mud were also thought to come from this source; Khnum often features in creation myths using a potter's wheel and primordial mud to create man and his 'ba' (spirit), creating children within their mother's womb, and assisting in birth alongside the frog goddess Heqet. In some myths, Khnum is said to have created the 'First Egg' from which the sun was born. He also had an important cult in Esna, south of Thebes. Khnum

was depicted variously as a ram, or a man with a ram's head or horns, and very occasionally with a hawk's head, in reference to his role as the 'ba' of the sun-god Re (who is depicted with a ram's head during his nocturnal journey through the underworld).