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ANCIENT EGYPTIAN PTOLEMAIC LIMESTONE FIGURE OF THE GROTESQUE DWARF GOD 'BES'

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TRACES OF ORIGINAL POLYCHROME DECORATION

EGYPT

PTOLEMAIC PERIOD 332 – 32 BC

SIZE: 36CM HIGH, 18CM WIDE, 14CM DEEP – 14¼ INS HIGH, 7 INS WIDE, 5½ INS DEEP

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LITERATURE

DESPITE THE GOD'S APPARENT FEROCITY HE WAS A BENEFICENT DEITY MUCH FAVOURED AS A PROTECTOR OF THE FAMILY AND ASSOCIATED WITH SEXUALITY AND CHILDBIRTH. HIS IMAGE IS THEREFORE FOUND ON ALL OF THE 'MAMMISI' OR BIRTH HOUSES ASSOCIATED WITH THE LATE PERIOD TEMPLES AS WELL AS BEING CARVED ON EVERYDAY OBJECTS SUCH AS COSMETIC ITEMS. HE WAS ALSO ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR DEITIES REPRESENTED IN AMULETS. THE SEXUAL ASPECT OF THE GOD SEEMS TO HAVE BECOME PARTICULARLY PROMINENT DURING THE PTOLEMAIC PERIOD WHEN 'BES CHAMBERS' WERE BUILT AT SAQQARA, AND IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED THAT PILGRIMS PROBABLY SPENT THE NIGHT THERE IN THE HOPE OF EXPERIENCING DREAMS, PERHAPS IN CONNECTION WITH THE RENEWAL OF THEIR SEXUAL POWERS.

PROVENANCE

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