

AMULET OF THE GOD THOTH IN THE FORM OF A SEATED BABOON

Egyptian, 6th - 4th century B.C.

Faience

H: 3.8 cm (1.5 in)

Reference: 16954



The statuette is virtually intact. The surface retains its original light blue color and the satin finish that is a distinctive feature of faience objects during this period. The suspension ring that allowed the figurine to be worn as an amulet is situated between the shoulders of the baboon. The creature rests on a thin base, the outline of which is curved at the back and straight in the front. The animal places its hands on its raised knees and gazes directly forward in a perfectly natural pose for this species of monkey. Despite the miniature size, the accurately observed and meticulously rendered anatomical details, especially in the baboon's head, are noteworthy: the muzzle is long and finely drawn, the eyes are deeply set, the brows form a thick edge. Except for the muzzle and the gluteal muscles, the body is entirely covered with regularly incised vertical lines that indicate fur.

The finely modeled body has slender proportions that suggest the agility of the animal. The legs of the baboon are slightly spread, revealing the genitals; the tail coils around the right thigh. Incisions indicate the fingers and the toes—even the thumbs (for both hands and feet) are differentiated.

This statuette depicts an animal well known in Egyptian statuary, the cynocephalic baboon, which was found in a comparable form as early as the Predynastic Period. Despite the absence of specific attributes, the figure can confidently be identified with the god Thoth. A lunar deity represented as a baboon or an ibis, Thoth was worshiped primarily at Hermopolis. His skills were unique, since he oversaw all intellectual activities. He was the master of writing, thought, and language, as well as the god who counted, handled numbers, calculated time, and regulated the calendar. For this reason, he coordinated the distribution of the offerings between the various gods. He was also responsible for counting the sins of the deceased when they arrived in front of Osiris in the afterlife. As a sort of divine secretary, he possessed qualities that made him a great magician and healer. As the inventor of writing, Thoth was considered the master and patron of scribes, particularly in his cynocephalic form. It was most likely the

men who were engaged as scribes who would have worn the numerous baboon-shaped amulets that appeared in tombs of the Ramesside period. Thoth amulets became even more widespread during the first millennium B.C.

PROVENANCE

Ex- H. Vollmüller collection, acquired in an auction sales at Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 1997

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