

HORUS-FALCON

EGYPTIAN, GRAECO-ROMAN PERIOD, 1ST CENTURY BC – 1ST CENTURY AD
LIMESTONE

HEIGHT: 30 CM.

WIDTH: 9,5 CM.

DEPTH: 21 CM.

PROVENANCE:
FORMER ENGLISH PRIVATE
COLLECTION.
SOLD BY SOTHEBY'S LONDON, 14
DECEMBER 1981, LOT 134.
THEN IN THE COLLECTION OF
PETER AND JOCELYN MITCHELL,
MAWALLOK ESTATE, WESTERN
DISTRICTS, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA.



This elegant limestone sculpture represents the god Horus as a falcon. The bird is represented upright on its legs, wings folded back, supported by a rectangular base, everything carved from a single block. The

feet are exquisitely sculpted, each claw individually carved, making the sculpture particularly lifelike. Its thighs, covered in thick feathers, are extremely long, and its chest broad and puffed out. Its neck is also massive, lending the sculpture an undeniable majesty. Its head is flat on top and dovetails into two wings, only the contours of which are traced. The flight feathers, or the feathers on top of the wings, are crossed over its tail.



Despite the absence of marks delineating the individual feathers, the artist was able to depict the different layers with a simple but skilful use of depth, giving the sculpture a



very graphic appearance. The finesse of the work is also encapsulated in the motif decorating the eyes. Slightly almond shaped, they are surrounded by a rounded ornamental motif, the outer edges of which are indented. This decoration is reminiscent of the bird's feathers and was generally enhanced with a painted colour. A magnificent example that still has traces of polychromy is conserved at the Royal Museum of Mariemont in Belgium (Ill. 1). Two other very lovely sculptures that have the same characteristics as our work are conserved at the British Museum and in a private collection (Ill. 2 3). Our falcon was thus most likely a votive object placed in a temple as a dedication.



Our sculpture represents one of the most important deities of the Egyptian pantheon: Horus. Son of Isis and Osiris, the falcon god whose name means “the distant one” is the

quintessential royal god. An allusion to the sky traversed by the sun, he is the celestial god whose eyes represent the sun and the moon. According to the Osirian myth, when his father, Osiris, was killed by Seth, Horus avenged him. The god was then crowned Pharaoh of Egypt while his deceased father became King of the afterlife. On the basis of this legend, Horus became the protector of the pharaohs, his reincarnations on Earth. They often had themselves represented in miniature between Horus' feet. This very iconography can be seen in the magnificent example conserved at the Louvre (Ill. 4).



The cult of Horus would have a strong presence over the centuries. Worshipped both in Upper and Lower Egypt, he was widely represented in art, either in the form of a falcon or in that of a falcon headed human. One of the most important temples



dedicated to the cult of Horus is the Temple of Edfu on the west bank of the Nile, where there are still two monumental sculptures of the falcon god, one of which is topped with the double crown (Ill. 5 - 6).

Our sculpture of Horus was in an English private collection before being sold by Sotheby's in 1981 (Ill. 7). It was then acquired by a couple of Australian collectors, Peter and Jocelyn Mitchell. After settling into Mawallok estate in Australia in 1980, over the years, the Mitchells would collect many Greek, Roman and Egyptian archaeological pieces that they would lend out for temporary exhibitions.

Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Falcon, Egyptian, Dynasty XVIII, limestone with traces of polychromy, H.: 82 cm. Royal Museum of Mariemont, Belgium, inv. no. B.126.



Ill. 2. Horus falcon, Egyptian, Roman period, limestone, H.: 91.5 cm. British Museum, England, inv. no. EA1420.



Ill. 3. Horus falcon, Egyptian Ptolemaic period, limestone, H.: 30 cm. Private collection.

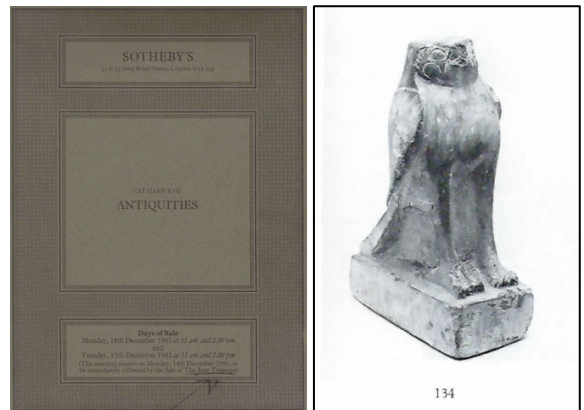


Ill. 4. Falcon, Egyptian, 359-341 BC, limestone, H.: 50 cm. Musée du Louvre, France, inv. no. E11152.



Ill. 5-6. Pair of Horus falcons, Egyptian, 237-57 BC, stone. Temple of Edfu, Egypt.

Publication:



Ill. 7. Sotheby's Antiquities, London, 14 December 1981, lot 134.

