

# BES

A close-up photograph of an ancient Egyptian wooden mask of the demon god Bes. The mask is carved from dark, heavily textured wood, showing signs of age and wear. It features a large, prominent nose, thick lips, and a wide, open mouth. The eyes are deeply recessed, and the overall expression is fierce and intimidating. The mask is set against a dark, solid background.

Demon God — Protector of Egypt

Glyptoteket

Bes

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**Demon God  
Protector of Egypt**

Tine Bagh and Lise Manniche (eds.)

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## Foreword

The Glyptotek has an exquisite collection of figurines and statuettes of Bes, the dwarfish trickster god who is almost always shown with his tongue sticking out. The objects are from Egypt and Nubia (Sudan), but unless you already knew, you would probably not connect Bes with Egypt right away. So, it is a great pleasure for the Glyptotek to present the exhibition *Bes – Demon God. Protector of Egypt*, a chance to get up close and personal with Bes, who will likely end up becoming a dear friend. In this publication, various scholars take a closer look at the multiple facets of Bes and the important role he played in ancient Egyptian society.

The exhibition is the product of an international collaboration between the Glyptotek, the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam and the Museum August Kestner in Hannover. It presents objects from the three museums' collections, alongside loans from the Roemer und Pelizaeus Museum, Hildesheim; University of Aberdeen; and the Georg Steindorff Egyptian Museum, University of Leipzig. Our sincere thanks to all our partners and lenders. The exhibition is curated by Tine Bagh of the Glyptotek, in collaboration with Christian E. Loeben (Hannover) and Olaf E. Kaper (Leiden University). For her work in the early stages of the exhibition, we also thank Amsterdam-based exhibition coordinator Kathelijne Eisses. An exhibition of this scope, including more than 250 loans, would not be possible without financial support. We are therefore deeply grateful to the Augustinus Foundation and Aage og Johanne Louis-Hansens Fond.



Wooden figure of Bes with  
a lion's mane; the feather  
crown is missing.  
(ÆIN 220)



# Bes. Demon God

## Protector of Egypt

In the ancient world, the great Egyptian gods were worshipped by pharaoh and his priests in monumental temples to maintain the order of the world, for the sun to rise every morning and the Nile overflow its banks every year to fertilise the land. As the world turned, many dangers lurked in everyday life, including venomous snakes, scorpions, crocodiles and menacing demons. The risk of death in childbirth was high, as was the child mortality rate, and wars and battles took many lives. In turn, the Egyptians sought help and protection from smaller, more available gods. The demon god Bes was especially popular. He is easy to pick out. Bandy-legged, of short stature, his tongue sticking out and with a big bushy beard, he was often depicted in the nude, with a tail and a feathered headdress.

Bes may not have belonged among the great gods in the temples, but his ferocious, demonic appearance was effective for driving out evil spirits, and in the temples he served as a support for the great gods. He was part of daily life and in the home, he was used as a decoration on beds, headrests, jars, lamps and cosmetic containers, in addition to figures and small amulets. Bes-like figures appear at the end of the Old Kingdom and in the Middle Kingdom. The more traditional form of Bes is seen from the New Kingdom to the Roman Period. At the tail end of ancient Egyptian culture, he is found all over the Mediterranean region from Ibiza in the west, down to Nubia, in today's Sudan, and as far east as Persia. Representations of Bes were made from all kinds of materials – from wood, stone, terracotta, bone and bronze to semi-precious stones and precious metals. For amulets and figurines, Egyptian faience was often used.



Wooden figure of Bes with  
a lion's mane, rear view.  
(AEIN 220)



The demon god Bes was above all a protector of Egypt. But this role was expressed in a multitude of ways over the ages, and his many aspects can be viewed from different angles. This publication examines the themes of the exhibition *Bes. Demon God – Protector of Egypt*. Jørgen Podemann Sørensen, a historian of religion (formerly of the University of Copenhagen), looks at who Bes was and where his name comes from, asking, tongue in cheek, whether Bes was a demon scarecrow or a clown. Lise Manniche (formerly of the University of Copenhagen), a scholar of ancient Egyptian sexuality and music, delves into the role of Bes in those contexts, interpreting the singular Bes chambers in Saqqara, where wall decorations show large Bes figures accompanied by a smaller female figure. Christian E. Loeben of the Museum August Kestner in Hannover was one of the principals behind the concept and creation of a Bes exhibition. Here, he discusses how Bes' broad head was used as a mask, and how Bes ascended from being a household demon to serving as the head of "all gods". Loeben also takes a closer look at the relationship between Bes and the hippopotamus goddess Taweret, who are often depicted together. Another equally important deity, the sphinx Tutu, sometimes accompanies Bes, as examined by Olaf E. Kaper of Leiden University. Kaper curated the Bes exhibition in Amsterdam and has excavated at the Dakhla Oasis, where Tutu and Bes appear together on a tomb wall. The exhibition shows Bes in "the whole world", but the focus here is on Nubia. The Glyptotek has a fine Bes pillar and a Bes head from Meroë. Pavel Onderka has carried out excavations in Wad Ben Naga, south of Meroë. In these pages, he provides a general overview of Bes in Nubia and takes a more specific look at Bes in the so-called *typhonia* (among them one in Wad Ben Naga), whose architecture included three-dimensional representations of Bes.

At the back of the book is a list of all the objects in the exhibition, organised by collection, with black-and-white thumbnail images.



Limestone head of Bes,  
found in Meroë, Sudan.  
(ÆIN 1320)



Wooden figure of Bes  
with a feather crown.  
(ÆIN 219)

Period	Dynasties	Dates
<b>Predynastic Period</b>		c. 4000-3000 BCE
<b>Early Dynastic Period</b>	1st-2nd Dynasty	c. 3100-2649 BCE
<b>Old Kingdom</b>	3rd-6th Dynasty	c. 2686-2181 BCE
<b>1st Intermediate Period</b>	7th-11th Dynasty	c. 2181-2055 BCE
<b>Middle Kingdom</b>	11th-14th Dynasty	c. 2055-1650 BCE
<b>2nd Intermediate Period</b>	15th-17th Dynasty	c. 1650-1550 BCE
<b>New Kingdom</b>	18th-20th Dynasty	c. 1550-1070 BCE
<b>3rd Intermediate Period</b>	21st-25th Dynasty	c. 1070-664 BCE
<b>Late Period</b>	26th-30th Dynasty	664-332 BCE
<b>Ptolemaic Period</b>		332-30 BCE
<b>Roman Period</b>		30 BCE-393 CE

Map of the countries/areas where the Bes figures in the exhibition were found (left) and map of Egypt and Sudan with the place names mentioned in the text (right).





# Who is Bes?



(left)  
Round, hollow terracotta figure of Bes, may have been used as a child's coffin.  
(ÆIN 319)

(right)  
Faience amulet of Bes.  
(ÆIN 1150)

Seeing one of the many different Bes figures, most of us would probably think, How could anyone possibly look like that? A squat, even dwarfish, bowlegged man, he is often shown with his tongue hanging out. His nose is broad and his beard unruly. Shown frontally, his broad face has animal ears and often a lion's mane. He has a flabby chest and a potbelly. Between his bandy legs hangs a penis and/or a lion's tail (cf. ÆIN 220). Sometimes, Bes is even represented with an erect penis.

We might ask whether his stoutness simply represents a 'real man', well fed and powerful, perhaps in the vein of the so-called fecundity figures, or 'Nile gods', which often appear as offering bearers at the base of temple walls. Or perhaps the intention is to show old age and the onset of physical decay. Indeed, ambiguity and caricature may be essential features of the small god's iconography. Bes may also be depicted with the wings and back of a bird, and he often wears a crown of upright ostrich feathers. The Late Period sees the appearance of the so-called pantheistic Bes, which has even more gods and divine attributes incorporated into the figure (see later, ÆIN 1594).

Egyptophiles are used to hybrid gods: human bodies with the head of a jackal or a long-necked ibis, even that of a frog or a snake,



artfully combined to look almost natural. Then there are the so-called hyphenated gods, such as Amun-Re, Re-Horakhty and even Ptah-Sokar-Osiris. But no god is as strange or composite and caricatured as Bes. This has led some to claim that Bes was not originally an Egyptian god but came from a country further south. Indeed, the forms of some Bes figures recall the visual vocabulary of West African sculpture (e.g., *ÆIN* 220). An Egyptian text even locates the origin of Bes in Nubia in the south (see later). Nonetheless, the fact remains that Bes became an Egyptian god. Here, we will look at his significance in an Egyptian context.

### Egyptian gods and genetically modified monsters

It used to be believed that Egyptian gods, before they became real gods, were just “powers” with no consistent personality. This made it easier to explain how seamlessly they slipped into each other or conglomerated. In fact, the gods do not have fixed personalities, and every ritual invocation of a god is essentially autonomous. At Saqqara, the burial ground of the ancient Egyptian capital of Memphis, it would make perfect sense to invoke the local funerary god Sokar as a form of the great Memphite creator god Ptah and as a form of Osiris, the mythical model of all deceased ancestors. This is not so strange if we stop imagining that all gods are like the ones in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* with defined and always recognisable personalities. Merging two or three gods enables highly compact expressions of ritual scope. Combining, say, the creative power of Ptah with Sokar’s function as a protector of tombs and Osiris’s regenerative potential is a matter of ritual. It does not imply that a genetically modified monster is taking a seat at the table with the other gods on Olympus.

Genetically modified monsters do exist in Egyptian religion, of course. From the Book of the Dead, we know “The Devourer of the Dead” (Ammut), a creature with the head of a crocodile, the forepart of a cheetah and the hindquarters of a hippopotamus. Ammut is often shown in connection with the weighing of a dead person’s heart, presumably to emphasise the critical nature of the weighing. Here, hybridity signifies monstrosity and danger, which is probably also the case with a number of other hybrid creatures illustrated in the Book of the Dead and mythological papyri. Many of these hybrid creatures are also depicted on the so-called

Bronze figures of the Egyptian gods Amun-Re (*ÆIN* 674), Sobek (*ÆIN* 675), Wadjet/Sakhmet (*ÆIN* 209) (top) and Osiris (*ÆIN* 606), Isis with Horus the Child (*ÆIN* 161), Re-Harakte (*ÆIN* 172)(bottom).

(following spread)  
So-called magic wand, made of bone, showing an early form of a Bes-like demon. (*ÄMUL* 5001)







magic or amuletic wands, which presumably protect against evil. Since monstrosity is one way to ward off evil, images of Bes are often found on magic wands as well. This has led many to conclude that Bes, with his composite and caricatured appearance, was useful for intimidating and scaring away demons. Likewise, he is often shown brandishing a short sword.

### A scarer of demons or simply a clown?

In 1930, the Egyptologist Maria Mogensen wrote about Bes in a Glyptotek catalogue: “With music, noise and grimaces he keeps away evil demons; they flee in horror at his grotesque, coarse manners or laugh at the sight of his ludicrous, ugly face.” Mogensen’s short, lively description leaves the door open to a different interpretation: Is Bes a monstrous hybrid creature like “The Devourer of the Dead”, which combines two of Egypt’s most dangerous animals with the elegant forepart of a cheetah? Apart from the so-called pantheistic Bes, he is not unequivocally a hybrid creature. The lion’s mane and animal ears could be a costume he is wearing. He may look scary, but is he unambiguously dangerous? This hirsute, bandy-legged little man with his protruding tongue, waving a sword over his feather-crowned head, would no doubt frighten a small child. A hardened demon, however, like most modern humans, would probably just crack a smile.

From such a great historical and cultural distance, trusting our first instincts can be risky. However, if we had to compare the figure of Bes to something we know, it would most likely be a clown. Clowns also have caricatured, exaggerated, disproportional features, which makes them comical. Testing the boundaries and opening up a world of absurdity, they are an emblem of riotous merriment. Here, the rule of the Greek philosopher Aristotle applies: the horrible can be hilarious if it is not dangerous. That Bes is shown dancing or in association with music (more later) could indicate that in ancient Egypt, like today, his countenance was seen as a sign of laughter and abandon.

### The name ‘Bes’

There are no mythological tales about Bes, and no temple reliefs or other images show him receiving cult. Overall,

Small limestone stela of Bes brandishing a sword over his head and a snake in his other hand. Note also the painting of a smaller Bes figure with a frame drum to the left of the relief (cf. APM 7947 p. 44). (ÆIN 222)





no Egyptian texts include any specific details about Bes. But perhaps his name itself indicates the type of ritual context in which he belongs. The word *bs* means “introduce”, “initiate”, “induct (into office)” or “crown” (if related to a king). Initiating someone into secret knowledge may be *bs*. In Chapter 8 of the *Daily Temple Ritual* the priest says, while breaking the seal of the *naos*, the small cabinet where the statue of the god stands:

I have not come to expel the god.  
It is in order to establish the god on his seat, that I have come.  
May you remain on your great seat, Amun-Re, Lord of Karnak!  
I am one who initiates (*bs*) gods.

During the initial rites, it is important that the priest convincingly declares his constructive intentions. A lot is at stake. Opening the doors to the statue of the god, the priest, in a sense, gains access to the control room. He would, in principle, be able to damage the god, who is reborn through the daily temple ritual. Performing the ritual, the priest makes sure that this happens correctly. If the god were born into the world incorrectly, the world would also be awry. In Egyptian religion, the world is an extension of the creator god. The god is born in the form of the world we know. The importance of what the high priest or his substitute performs every morning in the sanctuary of the temple cannot be overstated. It is in this context that the priest declares his good intentions – his professionalism, so to speak, as an initiator (*bs*) of gods. We might even say that he lets gods come into the world.

## Maat, world order

The daily temple ritual culminates in Chapter 42 when the god receives the universal offering, Maat, which is both a goddess and a concept of world order, or the ordered world. The world order is not a set of laws but an inherent order. Using a modern term, we might even call it the world’s DNA, the genetic code that makes the world exist, and exist in the right way. When the god receives *maat*, the god is born in the form of the world. Here again, we encounter the word *bs*:

You are the glorious god, the beloved one.  
Gracious are you, when the gods produce Maat for you.  
From Maat you come into existence (*bs*), from Maat you live,  
with Maat your body shall unite.



Bronze figure of a worshipper before the throne of a god with lions on the armrests. Two Bes figures have been incised on either side of a Hathor column on the sides of the armrests. The throne was likely intended for a seated figure of the goddess Isis with Horus the Child. (ÄIN 295)

*Maat* is also that which makes the god exist, extending and taking form in the world as we know it. To use an old term that may never be more appropriate than here, the god comes into the world. Later, in the same chapter,

Maat is with you now,  
when you have enlightened the caves of the Netherworld,  
when you have come forth (*bs*) from the hidden chamber –  
stable and strong through her.

In the morning ritual, the god is the sun that rises, coming into the world from the hidden chamber – that is, the underworld, but also the pitch-dark temple sanctuary, where the ritual has just awakened the god to new life in the statue and, in turn, in the world. Late temple inscriptions even use the

word *bs* about statues in which a god could take residence and thus come into the world.

## Name and function

The word *bs* is of major significance in rituals that let something come into being or into the world, which undoubtedly includes the meanings “to initiate” and “to crown”. But what does this all have to do with the god Bes? Egyptian priests loved punning, especially in the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods. A sentence inscribed in a Roman-Period temple in Dendera reads, “Bes has come into the world (*bs*) in Nubia” (see later). Plainly, there was an awareness of the similarity (and the possible association) between the name of a minor god and a word meaning “to appear” and “to come into the world”, as well as “to bring into the world”.

It is usually not advisable to infer a god’s whole being from their name or its possible original meaning. Many fantastical theories have come about in this way. At the very least, such reflections should not be allowed to stand alone. On the other hand, Bes as we know him is barely a person but more of a type or a function, and so it is not unthinkable that his name is a hybrid of a proper name (*proprium*) and a common noun (*appellative*), a bit like the knight in chess.

The knight is a chess piece that is characteristic and recognisable by being shaped like a horse. It moves in a unique way. Could Bes be a figure of initiation or coming-into-the-world? The idea is tenuous, but let us nonetheless examine the Bes figure’s moves on the board of Egyptian religion, that is, the ritual functions and situations in which the figure appears, and relate them to its characteristic hybrid appearance.

## Bes at home

The many individual Bes figures in museums around the world generally have no registered usage context. However, in carvings and the like, Bes is depicted on beds, headrests, chairs, lamps and other basic home furnishings. The lamps, small terracotta figures from the Roman Period, comprise a miniature version of Egyptian religion, a religion for domestic use. They represent many different gods, but the hands-down most popular figure is Harpocrates, the Horus the Child or divine child who has come into the world. Bes fits into this system of belief, while in general he was simply a guardian figure that was good to have around.

Bes lamp of terracotta  
from the Roman  
Period.  
(ÆIN 465)





Beds and headrests present a less ambiguous context: in our beds we come into the world every morning, like the god in his temple and statue. The Egyptians considered sleep to be a rejuvenating stay in the non-existent. Egyptian religion makes a very basic distinction between the non-existent (*jwtt*), an infinite, dark, undifferentiated oneness, and the existent (*ntt*), multitudinous, teeming, richly differentiated life lived in the daylight. Indeed, creation is differentiation and emergence. All things, including humans and gods, regularly need to sink back into the great undifferentiated oneness in order to emerge regenerated and refreshed. Sleep and temple cult alike were viewed from this general perspective.

The bed is also where people have sex and make babies. Making babies unequivocally falls within the significance of *bs*. The birth bed was often located in a designated birth hut on the roof. Images and models show depictions of Bes carved into one or more legs of such a bed or standing under it (see also later).

## Bes and creation

It was not only at childbirth that the presence of Bes was required. In the Osiris chapels on the roof of the great

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Model of a birth bed (fragment) with legs in the form of Bes on either side of a boat with three nude young women among fertile reeds. Bes as one of the elements indicates that this is a birth bed. (MusAK 1935.200.331)

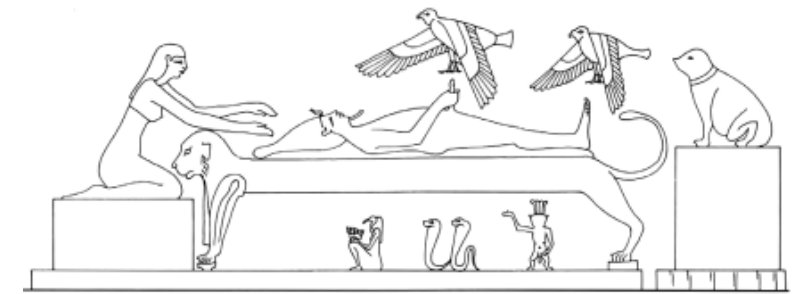


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temple at Dendera, one of many scenes of the conception of Horus clearly shows Bes standing under the bed. The (not quite) dead Osiris lies flat on the bed, while Isis, his wife, hovers over him in the form of a falcon to take his seed into her body. The idea is that the heir to the throne, Horus, is fathered by the dead Osiris, just as any Egyptian's life ultimately originates from his ancestors in their tombs. The woman on the left is the goddess Hathor, "Mistress of the West" (the "side of the dead") and goddess of love, while the toad on the right is the birth goddess Heket. The little falcon may be Horus, who often appears in images of his own conception. Under the bed, in addition to the gesticulating Bes, are two *uraeus* serpents and the god Thoth with the Horus eye, *udjat*. While the depiction is of a sexual act, Bes, like the birth goddess Heket, is presumably shown because the aim is the birth of an heir. There is more to Bes and sex, however, as we shall see later.

Obviously, Bes has something to do with coming into the world or bringing into the world. This is evident in faience figures of Bes sitting atop a papyrus plant, recalling the youthful, reborn sun god on his lotus flower. Bes is holding a little baby Bes, who already has an old man's face and a feather crown. Instead of the solemn choir of baboons which usually sings the sun god up on the sky, little baboon babies are crawling all over the body of Bes. These small figures are the most merry representations yet of one of the great themes of Egyptian religion, what the Norwegian historian of religion W. Brede Kristensen called "the spontaneous rise of life" – life emerging from its own source. The lotus flower denotes both the rise of the sun and the regeneration of life, just as the papyrus plant denotes fresh, new life growing out of the primordial sea. Both plants play an important role in the illustrated literature of the dead and the column capitals

Drawing of a relief in the Dendera Temple complex showing Bes under a bed with Osiris.





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Faience cosmetic jar in the form of a seated Bes wearing a leopard skin.  
(MusAK 1993.3)

of temple architecture. Here, Bes is sitting atop the papyrus plant while a little baby Bes comes into the world.

The Egyptians pictured the creation of the world as a primordial mound rising out of the receding primordial sea, just as fertile Egypt was created anew every year after the flooding of the Nile. Creation was also seen as the sun rising every morning, the lotus flower unfolding correspondingly and the supple papyrus mounting in fertile numbers.

## Bes as part of the official cult

While Bes primarily belonged to the private, or even intimate, sphere, he also figures in representations of the official cult, as seen at the Chapel of Osiris at Dendera. As such, Bes appears in connection with the Sed Festival, the anniversary celebration of royal rejuvenation. Bes is a good fit for this celebration, where the king is reborn into the world.

Bes sitting on a papyrus column and two frogs, feeding a baby Bes. Between his legs and around him, monkeys are seen. Both made of Egyptian faience.

(ÆIN 1761 (fragment, left) and Penn Museum E14358, right)

In the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods, Bes is often depicted in so-called birth houses (*mammisi*), autonomous shrines associated with the major temples (see also later). Classic Egyptian religion was preoccupied with the conception and birth of an heir to the throne. Numerous temples had chambers with reliefs showing the queen meeting the god Amun, the royal child being shaped by the god Khnum on a potter's wheel, the queen's pregnancy and, finally, the royal heir coming into the world. During the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods, the godchild is afforded a separate shrine. In Philae, near the great Temple of Isis, the godchild, of course, is Horus. At the great Temple of Horus in Edfu, a younger form of Horus, "Horus Uniting the Two Lands," represents the son of Horus and Hathor. At the Temple of Hathor in Dendera,

there are no less than two birth houses, one finished during the Ptolemaic Period, the other during the Roman Period. The godchild there is the goddess's young son, the music god Ihy. Bes has an obvious role at these birth temples, whose main theme is the godchild coming into the world. They even have inscriptions with religious texts addressing the small god or putting words in his mouth. Warding off demons barely figures in these texts. The emphasis is on pleasure, celebration, music and dance. This aspect of Bes is also familiar from the private realm, where his image appears on mirrors and cosmetic jars, items used on occasions more festive than perilous.





What is an ambiguous, divine clown doing at these various occasions, some of them, if not outright perilous, at least critical and crucial, and others just festive? Today's ritual theory operates with the term "ritualisation" for everything that lifts an event or a time out of the ordinary and turns it into a ritual or a ritual time. Examples include Christmas ornaments, Easter eggs and fasting during the month of Ramadan. The figure of Bes is specifically intended for ritualisation. Note that a ritual always marks a transition from one state or status to another, in the process passing through a zero point of both-and or neither-nor. Without this critical ambiguity, the transition, change or renewal cannot come into the world. For a similar reason, people let it all hang out on New Year's Eve. This is where the ambiguous, clown-like Bes comes in, unceremoniously adding the necessary ritual ambiguity to a situation.

The significance of such ritualisation may vary widely, of course, and the critical ambiguity of a given situation may be taken more or less seriously. But Bes always denotes an opening: Here we go! Change is possible! Something or somebody can come into the world! Sometimes that just means party time or, conversely, the mundane, pious wish to wake up rested and refreshed in the morning. But it could also be more fundamental and critical events, such as childbirth, the regeneration of the kingdom or the godchild's coming into the world. Unlike the vast majority of Egyptian gods, the small clown is comprehensible across cultures. Indeed, after Alexander the Great, Bes became popular far beyond Egypt's borders, as seen by the amulets and figurines of Bes found across most of the Mediterranean region.

Tall Bes vase from Rome of pottery. On the neck is a cobra with cow horns and a sun disc on its head. (APM 7551)





# Bes and sexuality

While our concept of “Bes” involves complex aspects such as a variety of names and fields of operation, his physical features and posture are the most significant common denominators. When searching for the essence of “Bes”, the timeline will determine what we find. Although not generally emphasised in his physique, sexuality is arguably a key element of his character. It should be seen as supporting the sexuality of other parties, male and female, combined for a common purpose, rather than as testimony to the virility of the deity himself. The latter, most often, is surprisingly inconspicuous.

## Old and Middle Kingdom

An Old Kingdom relief from a private tomb shows a person wearing a mask resembling the later Bes figure, alongside dancing men holding what are presumably branches and women in conventional dancers’ attire. The scene has tentatively been interpreted as a rite of passage associated with puberty and, in the context of a neighbouring scene, with the fertility of the earth. In the Middle Kingdom, the presence of a Bes figure, sometimes known as Aha, on magic wands (cf. p. 20-21) links him to a ritual that is equally little known, though a birth-related theme has been suggested. Around this time, a female version of the deity with similar facial features but distinctive female characteristics appears. A collective find embracing a full-sized mask (cf. p. 62-63) and other paraphernalia such as papyri with spells for pregnancy, childbirth and infants, along with wands, clappers and figurines, reveals the existence of one or several rituals



Limestone relief of a Bes-like deity, from the funerary temple of King Sahure in Abusir. (ÄMUL 2095)

involving a Bes-like figure and its embodiment. Such activities would involve several players and a series of accepted and proven actions for the benefit of a “client”. In view of the voluminous and varied evidence from later periods, there can be no doubt that the figure of Bes had a significant association with sexuality and, in turn, the general issue of fertility.

The figure of Bes appealed to a broad range of Egyptians, from royals to labourers. Formalised rituals in temple settings would eventually trickle down to other social groups. But the process, involving such fundamental human behaviour, may also have been reversed, with certain popular beliefs taken up and emphasised in an official setting. In the case of Bes, the transmission was facilitated by Hathor, who in the 11th Dynasty was already well established at Deir el-Bahari and later spread to other centres in the Nile Valley and Sinai. Recovered votive offerings to the goddess include figurines, amulets and other ornaments with Bes figures, not to mention votive phalli and nude female figurines (the latter now termed “fertility figurines”). Hathor was the epitome of carnal love, especially in its initial stages of seduction. Sexuality was her prerogative. Without it, life, and the cosmos, would come to a standstill. By its mere presence, the image of the Bes figure played a crucial part in the proceedings.

## New Kingdom

In the New Kingdom, “Bes” continued to work his magic for both sexes. Texts and inscribed items are rare. In a late 18th-Dynasty example, the deity, designated Aha, in his own words affords protection to the male owner of a kohl tube. In this particular case, the content is specified as a medicinal ointment, but cosmetics are basic tools in the preliminaries to sexual activities and, while we tend to see them as gender specific today, this was by no means the case in ancient Egypt.

Bes figures decorated the royal bedroom in the jubilee palace at Malqata, where the king and queen recreated the symbolic interaction of Re and Hathor, perpetuating an act required for the rejuvenation of the universe. Bes was emphatically present in the houses of common people. This is especially well documented in the arts and crafts centre of Deir el-Medina, where images of Bes, adorning the walls, as well as beds, headrests and other furniture, offered protection during sleep and marital duties, plus their consequences. On a smaller scale, Bes appears on amulets worn



Aha, Bes-like figure, bone.  
(ÆIN 1380)



around the necks of nubile girls or as a more permanent mark on the female body, in the form of tattoos significantly located on both upper thighs of female figures sporting other sexual markers, such as musical instruments, heavy wigs and jewellery, unguents and, above all, nudity.

Notably, the popularity of the Bes figure continued through the Amarna Period, no doubt because he did not interfere with the doctrine of Akhenaten (1353-1335 BCE). The continued appearance of Bes on smaller objects, such as amulets and jewellery, and as figurines, indicates that he was by no means forgotten. A golden ring with his image was reportedly found in the royal tomb of Akhenaten himself. The labourers in a village at some distance from the city went a step further, decorating two walls with dancing Bes figures and female musicians. We can only speculate as to what took place in those rooms.

### Third Intermediate Period and Late Period

At the close of the New Kingdom, the priesthood gained power and moved their burials to the north. The site of Deir el-Medina became obsolete and the administrative centre of the West Bank transferred to the enclosure of the mortuary temple of Ramses III (c. 1194-1163 BCE). People and their customs came along. Imagery from the private dwellings of Deir el-Medina was reflected in a new category of objects in the possession of female members of the priestly class. In their dwellings were discovered a number of “votive model beds” (cf. MusAK 1935.200.331, p. 28) and related objects with a decorative scheme including obvious sexual references: the bed itself, a Bes figure, Hathor, musical instruments and botanical elements with erotic symbolism. Similar objects were recovered in Karnak North and elsewhere. Though small in scale, they provide a crucial context for the Bes figure. Allegedly celibate, the female clergy of Amun would not have needed such objects for their own use on earth. Instead, the objects provided a link between the common people and the powers that might influence much-desired fertility and pregnancy. Carved on the facade of a mortuary chapel within the temple precinct was a prayer for the priestess to be spoken by passersby, or else ...

The votive beds would have played a part in these proceedings. The iconography of the Bes figure decorating them is revealing for two reasons. First, the figure’s posture is the

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Faience Bes amulet with a pendant, from Amarna. (APM 4040)

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same as that on the legs of beds found at Deir el-Medina and elsewhere. The deity is standing on an inverted cone, a shape obviously meant to be a lotus flower, the ultimate symbol of rebirth. This emblem is familiar from representations of the solar child emerging from or sitting on a lotus, visualised most unequivocally in a wooden sculpture from the tomb of Tutankhamun (c. 1333-1323 BCE). Here the flower rests on a disk which, because of its shape and dark blue colour, has been interpreted as a placenta. The votive beds show not one but two Bes figures flanking a Hathor figure. A visual reference can be seen in a wall painting from Deir el-Medina of a musician with two Bes figures painted or tattooed on her upper thigh, flanking her vulva. The role of Bes as guardian of this sanctuary and the promises it holds is evident.



Two wooden legs of a birth bed with Bes. His “feather crown” here is in the form of lotus flowers and he is sitting on stylised lotus flowers, a symbol of rebirth. Bes was originally painted blue. (PM LSch 5-6)

In the Greco-Roman period, a Bes figure labelled “THEOS” (god), brandishing a sword and a serpent, and bearing an emblem of male genitals, was specifically invoked with 15 different epithets as god of the womb. Some of the verbs are borrowed from the agricultural vocabulary, aligning the deity’s responsibilities with the general concept of earthly fertility. The Bes figure is also associated with Horus. Several gems carved from haematite, as well as figurines, show Harpocrates (“Horus the Child”) carrying a Bes figure on his shoulders. Pottery figures of Bes show him with an ovoid vessel suggesting the shape of a womb. In pottery from the late New Kingdom and later, the Bes figure itself becomes the container womb. This notion is carried through in funerary customs. In three instances, two foetuses and a neonate were buried in hollowed-out wooden figures of Bes (see also above).

Fragments of a “Manual on the Pantheistic Bes” have survived in three papyrus copies (cf. also Podemann). The powers of this complex deity are represented as animal heads piled on top of the head of a Bes figure. Written on a piece of new papyrus, the spell would have served as an amulet. One figure, called “Bes with nine faces” is intended to protect a man. Another, seven-headed, figure is for a woman or a child. The heads should be understood as the deconstructed powers of the deity. The figure’s erect phallus, like the wings and other attributes, emphasises the god’s powers. The phallus itself is one weapon of domination for keeping at bay the harmful influence of “a dead man or woman, a male or female enemy, a sow and guardian of hell, of the devourer of the West, of anything evil or lethal”. Similar composite bronze figures are known, including one identified as Hormerty, “Horus of the Two Eyes”.

In the Ptolemaic “Bes chambers” at Saqqara, numerous figurines with an enlarged phallus have been found, many

(right)  
So-called “pantheistic Bes”, with heads of other gods on the sides of his head and crown. He has two pairs of arms and two pairs of falcon wings from the falcon on his back. In his hands and on his knee are cobras. Encircling his feet is a protective snake known as Mehes.  
(ÆIN 1594)

(bottom)  
Small, primitive Bes vase of pottery.  
(ÆIN 810)







playing drums but none with any other characteristics of Bes. Nearby, however, was discovered a large composite figure of a phallus carried in procession by four men, two of whom appear to be wearing Bes masks. Plainly a familiar motif at the time, the figure has been related to the fertility feast of Pamyliia, where the earth was made fertile through the agency of Osiris's phallus. The revivification of the virility of Osiris, with the participation of "Bes", was celebrated in a 26th-Dynasty temple building in Ain Muftilla at the Bahariya Oasis. An adjoining chapel was decorated with large figures of Bes in the company of women, of which regrettably only the feet remain. This focus on the Bes figure and the phallus has been seen as a Greek influence. However, in the saga of the dismemberment of Osiris, this god's missing phallus had already received special attention (see also the chapter on Bes chambers).

Large limestone relief  
of Bes with a giant  
phallus.  
(APM 7967)

# Bes as a musician



Small limestone stela of Bes brandishing a sword and snake, and a smaller figure of Bes dancing with a frame drum and a feather crown, side view. (APM 7947)

One reason why Bes is so approachable is his hallmark, a musical instrument. Instantly recognisable across time and space, this ancient means of communication suggests a cheerful frame of mind. And along with his dramatic appearance, it brings a smile to our faces. It also conjures up an element that is largely absent from ancient images: noise! Bes does not interact with his fellow characters through touch or speech; he makes his presence felt through the sound of his instrument. The ancient Egyptians would instinctively have made the switch from a visual to an aural message, while for us a conscious effort may be required.

## Frame drum

In the Middle Kingdom, the figure of Bes was tall and slim and held serpents in his hands. His musical talent only emerged once his iconography of short legs, frontal figure and abundant facial hair had become well established. In the 18th Dynasty, the length of his legs shrank considerably, and he acquired an almost emblematic appearance as he came into his own over the next nearly 2000 years. During the reign of Amenhotep III (c. 1391-1353 BCE), Bes appears holding a round frame drum, primarily an instrument played by women, while a different figure shows him brandishing knives. This is evident on a chair bearing the name of Princess Satamun, sister of Akhenaten (c. 1353-1335 BCE), discovered in the undisturbed tomb of her maternal grandparents, Yuya and Tuya, in the Valley of the Kings. A similar pairing of figures was used to decorate the two faces of the footboard of a bed in the burial equipment of Tutankhamun.



On both objects, the Bes figure is accompanied by Taweret, the hippopotamus goddess of birth (see later), which enables us to identify the underlying message of the design. The bed's decoration includes additional hieroglyphs for "life", "prosperity" and "protection". On the inside of the bed, the figures are standing on the sign for "gold", which may refer to the Golden Goddess, Hathor, who symbolised divine sexuality. The ornamentation is intended to afford magical protection during conception and/or pregnancy, the birth itself taking place elsewhere. In those days, countless dangers lurked. With the ritual noise of frame drums and the display of knives, Bes would ward off evil forces. One may ask why such furniture would be included in funerary equipment, which is used at the other extreme of human life. However, since death was seen not as the end but as the beginning of a new existence, the details of the design reflect a situation akin to that of coming into the world.

Bes with his frame drum and Taweret with the hieroglyph of protection are also paired in the decoration of a shrine made for the cult of Amenhotep I, an early 18th-Dynasty king who was deified later in the dynasty and received his own temple. The Ramessid craftsman responsible for this piece of furniture depicted it in his own tomb while overseeing his team of artisans. In addition to a cartouche of the deceased king and royal insignia, the decoration of the shrine features all the relevant symbols, including the face of the Golden Goddess, Hathor, a bed complete with steps and a headrest, and a sun disk supported by the hieroglyphs for "stability" – all celebrating the king in his daily ascent to the sky to be reborn as the solar child, as the result of sexual preliminaries discreetly suggested. In this ritual setting, the figure of Bes (here with long, elegant limbs) had a natural place, celebrating the king's rebirth with his frame drum.

Frame drums were used to announce a birth, just as in Egypt today the drum is tapped to celebrate the birthday of the Prophet as well as on many other festive occasions. Extant drums have decorations referring to the event. One, now in Oxford, shows characters resembling female Bes figures beating frame drums. Another, in Cairo, shows a goddess and a woman on one side and a goddess and a Bes figure on the other.

Figurines from the Late and Greco-Roman Periods also show Bes beating a barrel-shaped drum. This is a rather different instrument that was used in war and processions to relay a message or mood outdoors over some distance.

Bes playing a frame drum,  
bronze.  
(EIN 226)

Small figure of Bes with a  
barrel-shaped drum, faience.  
(MusAK 1951.4)





A general noisemaker and announcer of turbulence, it would go well with the blast of a trumpet.

## Shawm

Replacing the single-reed clarinet of the Old and Middle Kingdoms, the shawm (or, in a more sophisticated form, the oboe) is by all accounts very loud. A double-reed instrument related to the Greek *aulos*, it is known chiefly from banquet ensembles in 18th-Dynasty tomb decoration. Its raw, haunting sound, amplified by two pipes, was appreciated in erotic contexts. These qualities make it an obvious choice to give voice to a Bes figure. In Ramessid times, the oboe signalled a depraved lifestyle, though any moral reservations were invalidated when a sacred or ritual purpose could be claimed. Some 500 years later, Herodotus describes how the *aulos* set the mood for the annual river festival of the goddess Bastet in the Delta. As boats full of men and women sail towards the town of Bubastis, some of the women shake rattles or play *aulos*, while the others sing and clap their hands. Whenever they approach a town, they bring their boat close to the bank and, continuing their music-making, some of the women shout mockery at the women of the town. Others dance or lift up their skirts, exposing their sex. Reaching their destination, they make a feast with great sacrifices. More wine is drunk at this feast than during the whole rest of the year. While Bes is not directly associated with excessive alcohol intake, this would not have been an unfamiliar setting to him. He, too, is occasionally shown with the double pipes of a shawm in his big mouth.

## Harp

In our culture, string instruments are not generally thought of as raucous, but as rather more gentle instruments implying an idyllic, romantic setting. Not so in Egypt during Roman times when, along with frame drums and shawms, string instruments were expressly forbidden at the sanctuary of Osiris at Biga, where any kind of noisy behaviour was banned during visits of Isis of Philae to her husband. Even so, since the island of Biga lies only a short distance from Philae, a favourable north wind, presumably, would easily have carried the sound of music across the river to the dwelling of Osiris.

The combination of frame drum and harp is very much in evidence in the small Temple of Hathor, on the island of



Bes playing a shawm, faience. The black spots continue on his back, indicating that he is wearing a leopard skin. (ÆIN 225)

Philae, south of Aswan, which was decorated during the reign of Augustus (30 BCE-14 CE). Both instruments are here played by Bes figures. He does not appear as “Bes”, however, but under the name of Hiyt. The oboe and a large lyre are both held by women, while monkeys play the lute.

The harps are splendid instruments of the angular type that came into use in Egypt in the mid-18th Dynasty. Heavy, yet portable, they allow the player to perform dance steps to the music. While figurines of Bes playing a harp have generally been dislodged from their contexts, the temple of Hathor provides a storyline. It celebrates the return of “The Distant Goddess”, who, as her alter ego Tefnut, a wild lioness, rebelled against Re, her father, and fled to Nubia, causing havoc and bloodshed. Ingenious Thoth, god of writing and magic, was dispatched to bring her back. Plying the goddess with an abundance of red beer and promises of the good life in the Nile Valley, and assisted by musical baboons and Hiyt, his scheme succeeds. Safely back home, he “pacifies her with what she loves”. An accompanying hymn repeats, “the baboons are before your face and dance for Your Majesty. Hiyt beats the frame drum before you.”

The figure of Bes and his musical legacy lived on in Nubia, from where he rescued the Distant Goddess. In the Meroitic temple of the lion god Apademak at Musawwarat es-Sufra in North Sudan, he found a place on one of the columns in the central hall, playing an angular harp before a lotus flower inclining towards the sound. An adjoining scene shows a warrior figure of Bes and a griffin. A god of fertility and war, Apademak shared important traits with the figure of Bes, including the leonine references.

## Lyre

Bes figures are also shown playing a portable lyre. In origin, this is a distinctly foreign instrument and was first seen in Egypt in the hands of a Levantine merchant in the 12th Dynasty. By the early 18th Dynasty, it had gained popularity, and a number of these instruments were found during



Dancing Bes (here called Hiyt) playing an angular harp. Temple of Hathor, Island of Philae. Roman Period.

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excavations at Deir el-Medina. As depicted in 18th-Dynasty banquet ensembles, it was played with the strings in a horizontal position. During the Amarna Period, a large, vertical lyre was introduced by the Hittites, only to be replaced in turn by a large, but portable, version. This instrument remained in use for centuries, no doubt because of its affinity to the Greek *kithara*, which was also played in Egypt. One such instrument is shown in the hands of a girl who was obviously a devotee of “Bes”, his silhouette tattooed on her thighs. A person of some standing, she was the daughter of a “head of the altar in the Ramesseum” (mortuary temple of Ramses II [c. 1290-1224 BCE]). She is represented in the inner room of her father’s tomb chapel as he and his wife receive an offering of beer, a rather different setting from the unbridled feasts described above.

A “Bes” tattoo is also seen on a remarkable blue faience bowl that incorporates a whole range of erotic symbols on its small surface. Playing the lute in an arbour, a nude young woman wearing a full wig and earrings shows off her decorated thigh, while a vervet monkey adjusts her sash of cowrie shells. The lotus flower draped over her arm and the duck’s head adorning the neck of the lute are both familiar markers of sexual encounters.

Inspired by architectural columns, the handles of Roman sistra may be decorated with a Bes figure, often combined with a head of Hathor. However, Bes himself is not shown

shaking the sacred rattle. While no other musical instrument features the deity’s characteristic silhouette, it would be difficult indeed to think of a single instrument that failed to be included in the Bes figure’s repertoire. If so, it would be because the instrument had either gone out of fashion or not yet found a place in the musical life of the Egyptians during the time when Bes, under whatever name, acquired his significant position.

Faience bowl with a young woman playing a lute. On her thigh is a tattoo of a Bes figure. Amenhotep III, c. 1403-1365 BCE.

(AD 14, National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden)





# Bes chambers



Small limestone stela with  
Bes and a smaller woman.  
(APM 7762)

The figure of Bes was hugely important in the lives of ancient Egyptians, but he does not usually take centre stage. Without a cult of his own or staff to tend to his needs, Bes played more of a supporting role – in the domestic environment, as well as in the ritual setting of temples in the later part of Egyptian history. Nonetheless, his presence is occasionally seen, as his expertise appears to have been sought in communal worship in a specific architectural setting.

## Saqqara

The “Bes chambers” at Saqqara offer a tantalising glimpse into activities taking place in the shadow of the pyramids. In Ptolemaic times, the site was milling with pilgrims visiting the centres for animal worship that flourished among the ruins of the ancient kings. The chambers were arranged on a terrace on the remains of the mortuary temple of the 6th Dynasty pyramid of Teti (c. 2323-2291 BC), which was later used as a communal burial ground. Facing the mastaba of Mereruka, a well-known stop on the modern tourist itinerary, the four chambers were integrated into the Anubieion, the sanctuary of Anubis, the jackal god. Built of coarsely hewn stone and mud brick, their spectacular interior decoration featured large clay figures of Bes and female nudes, with trimmings familiar from similar figures on a much smaller scale. The rooms themselves no longer exist, but figures of Bes and his woman were rescued and set up in a glass case in an inaccessible corridor of the Museum of Cairo.



Bes and his woman, from the Bes rooms in Saqqara, now at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Ptolemaic Period.

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## Phallic figures

During excavations in 1905-1906, some 30 phallic figures were found on the floors of these chambers, their various stages of completion suggesting that they were manufactured in the vicinity. Apart from a list of erotica at the Museum of Cairo, which may include at least some of them, these figures have not yet been published and their precise whereabouts are unknown. They are probably related to another group of erotica later found a few hundred metres away in the Sacred Animal Necropolis. More or less complete, the figures have been studied and interpreted as *ex votos* carried by pilgrims. A common characteristic of the figures is the enlarged male member. The figure of Bes makes an occasional appearance. A remarkable, large composite statue shows two Bes figures and two male figures carrying an oversized phallus on their shoulders. The Greek philosopher and writer Plutarch described a similar spectacle in a procession at the fecundity festival of Pamyliia, who was associated with the god Sokar-Osiris at Memphis. The display would relate to the mundane concerns of the participants. However, the presence of these

Phallus amulets, faience.  
(ÆIN 983 and 1760)



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figurines at the site may also reflect the overall use of the complex for the cult of Sokar-Osiris, as tangible testimony to a simple way of illustrating an ancient, more sophisticated belief in sexuality as a prerequisite for rebirth.

## The significance of the Bes chambers

Curiously, apart from the wall decoration, archaeological finds in the Bes chambers show no trace of a female presence. Texts, however, provide a different picture. There are scraps of legal and other documents referring to women,

some with Greek names. Also mentioning priests, merchants and weavers, they give the impression of a once important administrative centre, a settlement like many others arising around a temple.

In this environment, near the so-called Anubieion, “Bes” would have played a major role among ordinary working people coming to pay tribute to Anubis. Assuming that each worshipper carried an *ex voto* of a mummified dog to the sanctuary, that would correspond to roughly eight million individuals passing through the area over the years (the number of the largely decomposed dog mummies found so far was calculated as  $x$  number of dogs per litre multiplied by the capacity of the galleries). If only a small percentage of these visitors made their way to the Bes chambers, the persons in charge would have had a very lucrative business. But what exactly was the nature of this enterprise?

Along the wall of one room was a mud-brick platform one metre wide. Such an

arrangement is reminiscent of the reception room in the houses of workmen at Deir el-Medina in the New Kingdom, where this “mastaba” bench has been interpreted either as a podium for the display of busts of ancestors or as a bed for a marital ritual ensuring the continuation of the species – unlike the actual bedroom with a wooden bed in a more private part of the house, where conjugal duties were fulfilled. Significantly, the wall adjoining one of these brick benches may have been decorated with a Bes figure or a dancing musician playing a double shawm (primitive oboe) and sporting two Bes tattoos on her upper thighs.



Two Bes figures and two men carrying an oversized phallus on their shoulders, a so-called phallophoria, terracotta.  
(MusAK 2019.6a)





Dancing shawm player with  
Bes tattoos on both thighs.  
Wall painting from Deir  
el-Medina.

## Bes as an oracle at Abydos

The furnishings in the Bes chambers at Saqqara are also akin to those found in an incubatory. This is a space in a temple compound where individuals would come to seek guidance or healing through the agency of a deity, who would provide a response in the manner of an oracle or appear to them in a dream. There is specific evidence that Bes assumed such a role in one of the most prominent Egyptian temples, that of Sethos I (c. 1306-1290 BCE) at Abydos. Like the Anubieion at Saqqara, this temple was originally built on the edge of the desert and had an accompanying royal cenotaph. It was dedicated to the cult of the king himself and six other deities, with a special emphasis on Osiris. Much later, in Ptolemaic times, the focus shifted to Serapis, a deity combining Osiris and the Apis bull on these same ancient premises for the benefit of the mixed Egyptian and Greek population. After the Roman conquest of Egypt, Bes enters the stage as an oracular deity used not only by clients travelling to the temple in person, but also by troubled souls abroad communicating in writing by means of an intermediary. On the exterior wall of the ancient

sanctuary devoted to Osiris, pilgrims (all male) left graffiti in Greek, testifying to their hopes for divine intervention. One visitor wrote, “Here slept and saw dreams Harpocrates of holy Pnias, a priest, dear descendant of Kopreias the priest, for Besa whose voice is all. And his gratitude is not small.” Four of the twenty-nine graffiti mentioning “Besa” are found on the inside wall, in the sanctuary of Osiris, showing that this part of the temple was also in use at the time. This practice of seeking Bes’ intervention survived until the days of Constantine II, when, after the interception of a written request inquiring about the end of the emperor’s rule, he shut it down in 359 CE.

While sexuality had been an essential part of temple ritual since time immemorial, the fact that certain activities were taking place on the premises of a sacred building does not in itself prove that they were of a ritual nature. From Ptolemaic Egypt, there is written evidence that temples were involved in sexually related negotiations with the public, though whether this specifically means “houses of pleasure” remains an open question.

At least a millenium before the flourishing business at the Bes oracle at Abydos “Bes” is known to have been a protector of sleep and was naturally associated with dreams. It is therefore not surprising that he should appeal to Egyptians seeking comfort in such affairs. The presence of brick benches and wall decorations in the chambers at Saqqara suggests a similar practice, which would have been augmented with the proffering of votive figures reflecting the nature of the request, whether for everyday needs (impotence, childlessness) or as an aspect of funerary beliefs (rebirth).

There is no direct evidence that women used the Bes chambers at Saqqara or consulted the Bes oracle at Abydos. But it is not unfeasible. A literary text, written in demotic during Roman times, but set a millennium earlier, in the Ramesside Period, tells of the inability to conceive of one Mesusekhne, wife of Setne. Eventually, they resort to divine intervention, with Mesusekhne making her way to the temple to seek advice. The voice of the god instructs her to go to the place where her husband bathes. “You will find a melon vine growing there. [Break off a branch] with its gourds and grind it. [Make it into] a remedy, put it [in water and drink it] ... [you will receive the fluid of conception] from him that [night].” The combination of instructions and a remedy to be taken proves successful, though the actual sexual union would have taken place in the couple’s bedroom rather than in the temple.



Bes as part of a column cut from the rock in the Temple of Mut at Gebel Barkal.

Archaeological remains in other temples indicate that the figure of Bes had a significant presence in official architecture. In the *mammisi* (birth chapels) of Ptolemaic and Roman temples, he clearly has a place as a symbolic ornament, though rarely as an active participant. In the 26th Dynasty temple at Ain Muftilla, at the Bahariya Oasis, at least five Bes figures in the company of women occupy the full height of two walls of a large room. Regrettably, only the feet of the figures remain. Furthermore, a 150 cm high sandstone figure of “Bes” was unearthed in 1988 in a chapel at Bawiti. As both localities show, there was a strong preference for Bes chambers in this oasis some travelling distance from the Nile Valley.

Even farther away, in the 25th Dynasty temple of Mut at Gebel Barkal, North Sudan, figures of Bes decorated eight pillars (now completely lost, but recorded by early travellers) in the first hall, with Hathor columns behind them, and two rock-cut Bes pillars in the third hall, one of which survives. Like the temple next door where the kings of the time were crowned, these chambers have been interpreted as architectural settings for an ancient rite involving the king in the guise of the potent god Amun Kamutef (“Bull of His Mother”) uniting with his mother, Mut. Counterbalancing the shape of the rock pinnacle that rises in front of the mountain – unmistakably phallic, it is rendered as the royal cobra in images – the Temple of Mut (“Mother”) was built nearby. The figure of Bes, archetypal protector of conception and birth, is prominently featured there, alongside Hathor who embodies sexuality rather than motherhood, underscoring the building’s overall sexual message. As suggested by a pun in a wall inscription, the entire interior of the temple may be seen as a giant womb where this mystery was re-enacted.

Other examples of rooms with decorations emphasising Bes figures are found in the late 18th Dynasty (the bedroom of Amenhotep III at Malqata and the workmen’s village at el-Amarna), in the Ramesside Period (houses at Deir el-Medina) and, as mentioned, in the Roman Period (a temple at Nadura and a hemispeos at Ain el-Labakha, both in the vicinity of the Kharga Oasis). Moreover, Bes appears in a 1st-century CE temple at Wad Ben Naga, Sudan (see later).



# Bes masks

## From household demon to head of all gods



Ceramic mask from HK6  
Hierakonpolis.  
(Egyptian Museum Cairo)

Apart from mummy masks, which survive in the thousands, very little is known about masks in pharaonic Egypt. There are very few images of people wearing masks, and finds of actual masks can be counted on two hands – this, even though ancient Egyptian culture is exceptionally rich when it comes to objects from everyday life.

### Ancient Egyptian masks

The earliest masks, dating to around 3650 BCE, were found at the elite cemetery HK6 in Hierakonpolis, in southern Egypt, the seat of the cult of the falcon god Horus. One mask is nearly intact, while fragments of six to ten other masks were found. These were ceramic masks that were large enough to cover a human face. The face of the mask, with its long chin, borders on caricature. The incised pattern suggests that the chin should be interpreted as a pointy beard of a type known from many other images of people in ancient Egypt and the Predynastic Period. The person wearing the mask could peep out through the acutely slanted eyeholes and speak through the small, crescent-shaped mouth. There is no opening for the nose, while the forehead is framed by high-placed ears. Behind the ears are holes for a string to keep the mask on. The ears clearly show that this is the face of a human being or a male deity. It is impossible to tell, however, whether such masks were worn by people living or dead, or whether they were made for statues of gods.

Two other masks, now at the Louvre in Paris and the Roemer and Pelizaeus Museum in Hildesheim, have the snout of the jackal god Anubis. The Paris mask shows signs



of use, most likely by priests at embalming rituals. There are thousands of depictions of this scene, which shows a jackal-headed man bending over a mummy lying flat on a bed or bier. Made of plaster-covered wood, this mask would have been relatively light to wear and was probably used while moving around.

By contrast, the Hildesheim mask is ceramic and weighs almost eight kilograms. Designed to cover the entire head, it rests on the wearer's shoulders in two semicircular cut-outs, while the eyeholes are located under the Anubis snout. It would certainly not have been easy to do anything while wearing this mask, making it unlikely to have been worn during rituals. Temple reliefs from the same period as the mask, the Greco-Roman Period, show priests wearing jackal masks and carrying shrines. Masks like the one in Hildesheim would be far better suited for this purpose. The exact circumstances of the two finds are not known.

## The earliest Bes masks

A mask, now at the Manchester Museum, is quite fragmentary, but here the findspot is known. Excavated in a house in the city of Kahun near Fayum, the mask dates from the Middle Kingdom, 12th Dynasty, c. 1900-1850 BCE. It is made from fabric and plaster and poorly preserved, though it is possible to make out the face of the god Bes. Repairs made in ancient times prove that the mask was used. It is unlikely, however, that we will ever be able to determine the context in which such a Bes mask was worn in a pyramid city like Kahun.

Since there were no temples or an actual cult of Bes in his various early forms, worship of the small god was probably limited to the domestic sphere. There, on the other hand, he is richly represented. The grotesque demon face with the protruding tongue was for warding off evil spirits.



Fabric and plaster mask from a house in Kahun.  
(Inv.no. 123, Manchester Museum, University of Manchester)

Presumably, the sole surviving Bes mask is a "fright mask", like the ones used at Halloween today. The wearer of the Bes mask probably enacted the role of the god during childbirth to keep evil spirits away from the mother and the baby, no doubt with much gesticulation and noise.

Only one of the few known masks from ancient Egypt represents a Bes-like household demon. It is also practically the only type of mask depicted as worn by a significant number of people or, more accurately, by gods in human form. A relatively large figure, 63 cm high and carved from a valuable, hard stone, shows a man in a Bes mask. It should be noted that this figure is not from Egypt. Found in Rome, it probably dates to around the beginning of the Common Era. We do not know whether the figure represents a priest or the god Bes himself, who at this point was worshipped across the Mediterranean region. Because the lower body and the hands are missing, it is impossible to tell what the figure was wearing or doing.

Reliefs with human figures wearing Bes-like masks are known as far back as the Old Kingdom (c. 2400 BCE). At the time, Bes did not yet have a fixed position as a "minor god" in the Egyptian pantheon. The oldest depiction of a person wearing a Bes-like mask appears in a royal context, at Pharaoh Sahure's pyramid temple in Abusir (5th Dynasty, c. 2428-2416 BCE) (ÄMUL 2095, p. 34). The image shows a very well-fed, nude person, perhaps a pregnant woman, with conspicuous hanging breasts and a Bes-like mask with the ears and mane of a lion. At some point in history, the face was destroyed with a chisel, perhaps in the Coptic Period, when Christians systematically destroyed images of heathen gods.

Another nude, though not overweight, female figure wearing a Bes mask is now in Manchester. This wooden figure was found in the so-called Magician's Tomb from the Middle Kingdom, 13th Dynasty (c. 1700 BCE). During the reign of Ramses II (New Kingdom, 19th Dynasty, c. 1250 BCE), the tomb was covered by his mortuary temple, the Ramesseum. The figure, which has moveable arms with hands holding snakes, was likely used in rituals in private homes.

What appear to be female mask-wearers are also represented on the so-called magic wands, which were made of

Figure of a woman wearing a Bes-like mask with snakes in her hands. From tomb under Ramesseum.

(Inv.no. 1790, Manchester Museum, University of Manchester)





Horus stela (also known as a magic stela or cippus), made of serpentine, showing a Bes mask above Horus the Child standing on two crocodiles. (MusAk 1935.200.691)

hippopotamus or elephant ivory from the late 12th to the mid-18th dynasty (c. 1800-1400 BCE) (ÄMUL 5001, p. 20-21). Perhaps they were placed around the birth bed to protect the mother and baby. The wands show frontal, nude figures with Bes-like masks and always with animal tails, perhaps of a lion. Because they have female breasts, they must be female deities, but the boundary is fluid and they are sometimes also depicted with defined chest muscles, even if the penis is not visible. In rare cases, the figure is accompanied by the hieroglyphic inscription Aha, "The Fighter", clearly denoting a male deity. Since the heads of the male and female versions are identical, they almost certainly portray people wearing masks.

### Bes masks on Horus stelae

Later in Egyptian history, the image of the Bes mask becomes less ambiguous, as the masks exclusively represent the protective and apotropaic (warding-off-evil) deity which, from the 26th Dynasty (c. 600 BCE), can definitively be identified as Bes. Later still, other deities are sometimes shown wearing such masks to expand their authority or increase their popularity. Horus the Child was always a very popular guardian god. The son of Isis and the dead Osiris, the godchild's powers were so great that he defeated his wicked uncle, Seth, who killed his father. In the duel, Seth lost his testicles and, in turn, his manhood and power, while Horus lost his left eye. Seth personifies everything evil and bad. When he is defeated, all of humanity is protected against evil. Every pharaoh is identified with Horus, and Horus the Child/pharaoh had the overall power to protect the Egyptians against all misfortunes. A group of objects from the late New Kingdom (c. 1000 BCE), known as "Horus stelae", remained popular far into the Roman Period (1st cent. BCE).

Almost every single one of the 400 or so surviving stelae shows the god Horus in the nude, as children in ancient Egypt were typically depicted. His sidelock unequivocally signifies that he is a child or youth. Horus the Child holds dangerous animals, such as snakes and scorpions, in his hands, while triumphantly standing on crocodiles. These stelae often have hieroglyphic inscriptions on all sides, sometimes also including the base. Egyptologists presume that the apotropaic images and magic inscriptions were activated when water was poured over the stela. Drinking the water would protect against or cure diseases in general. In modern Egypt, we know of bowls with Arabic inscriptions on the



inside, in which liquids would be poured and later drunk. The content of the texts is believed to have an effect on the person who drinks from the bowl.

A number of Horus stelae show a Bes head over Horus the Child. Experts disagree, but this is most likely a Bes mask worn by Horus the Child. Examples showing the head of Horus the Child partially overlapping the Bes head support this hypothesis. The reason for not simply portraying Horus the Child with a Bes mask on his face goes back to conventional two-dimensional Egyptian representation, in which every important element is shown. Had the Bes mask covered the head of Horus the Child, we would no longer be able to see his most important trait, the sidelock of youth. Apparently, this was such an important sign of a child god that it always had to be visible.

For the Egyptians, it was more important to show what was really there than what was visible to the eye. An image could easily show both the “packaging” and the “contents” at the same time. Offering bearers would be shown carrying chests or boxes into the tomb, while the contents, such as sticks, staves, clothing and the like, were depicted above the boxes, even though they were, of course, inside. Horus the Child wore a Bes mask not just to demonstrate his apotropaic power, but also to be able to wield it. This is not to say that he merged with the popular and ubiquitous demon with the horrifying face, whose chief task was protecting Egyptians against misfortunes. The universal god Horus already had that role to a far greater extent than Bes.

## Why Bes masks?

What was the real reason for the mighty Horus to wear a Bes mask? As we have seen with the mask from Kahun, such masks could be worn not only by gods but also by ordinary people. Through rituals, the mask would protect the mother and child, as well as the person wearing it. In late Egyptian history, amulets in the form of Bes heads or masks were very



Back of a Horus stela  
with magical images and  
inscriptions.  
(APM Dortmund 146)



Horus stela with a large  
Bes mask, serpentine.  
(APM Dortmund 146)





Bes head/mask amulets  
and moulds.

(left)

MusAK 2019.21, 2019.16 (top left)

ÄMUL 5088 (bottom left)

ÆIN 774, 1230 (right)

(right)

MusAK 1950.52 (left)

ÆIN 775 (top right)

APM 11439 (bottom right)



popular for protecting their owners against evil. Why was Bes so frequently depicted on amulets, when other gods were also available to use? Bes's main area of responsibility is the domestic sphere, where he was very useful and revered. He did not belong among the "great gods", who had their own cult places with temples. Only pharaoh had access to those. Only through him could the mighty gods, who were in charge of maintaining what the Egyptians called *maat* (world order), be approached. To appeal to Bes, Egyptians did not first have to go through pharaoh or his priests. They could appeal directly to Bes. Wearing a Bes mask, the god Horus, or all pharaohs, went from being an unapproachable god to a folk god.



Stela with a deity with a Bes mask and "all gods", serpentine.  
(MusAK 1935.200.688)

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## Bes with 'all gods'

When a figure is wearing a mask, it is impossible to tell what "noble" god in the Egyptian pantheon is hiding behind it. In late Egyptian history, a deity containing all Egyptian gods in one is shown wearing a Bes mask. Some Egyptologists incorrectly call this god "Bes-Pantheos". In fact, this is not Bes but an "all lord" incorporating every Egyptian god. The god wears a Bes mask only to become a folk god that everyone can reach. A papyrus depicting this god calls him "human with nine heads on one neck, Bes face, ram's head, falcon's head, crocodile's head, hippopotamus head, lion's head, bull's head, monkey's head and cat's head". The number nine is not a coincidence. In hieroglyphs, the number three, written as three strokes under a sign, signifies plurality, and three times three signifies an absolute plurality.

Accordingly, we can conclude, this is not the Bes himself making a career leap from good-natured household demon to cosmic all-god but simply his typical and familiar apotropaic visage. In the form of a mask, his face turns any Egyptian god into an available and present folk god.

# Taweret and Bes

## A demonic goddess and a divine demon?

Two gods in the Egyptian pantheon share the same area of responsibility – the domestic sphere, in particular pregnant women, infants and nursing mothers. Both gods have deep roots in Egyptian religion, but they are classified very differently today. Taweret is called a goddess, while Bes is often called a demon. The ancient Egyptians did not make that distinction. Indeed, the two figures appear so closely connected that we have to question whether the difference in perception also applies to the degree of their divinity. More about that later. First, let us meet the two deities.

### Taweret

The name Taweret comes from the ancient Egyptian *ta weret*, which was not originally a name but simply means “The Great One”. This should probably be read as “The Great Goddess”, matching her designation as a goddess. The name is first found in the New Kingdom (c. 1500 BCE). The hippo is the biggest animal in pharaonic Egypt, and the name appears to be a collective term for a number of past hippopotamus goddesses, including Ipet (probably “The Wet Nurse”), Reret (“The Sow”), Hedjet (“The White One”), Shepset (“The Noble One”) and Duat (“The Adored One”). When these goddesses were depicted without an inscription, it was, and still is, simply impossible to determine which one it is. They are rarely shown standing on all fours, like an ordinary hippo. The Egyptians created a peculiar image of a hippo standing upright on its hind legs, making it look almost human and emphasising its big belly. Considering also the animal’s aggressive behaviour in protecting her young,

Statuette of a hippopotamus,  
Egyptian alabaster.  
(ÆIN 1722)





the female hippo's singular profile made it an appropriate symbol for women in pregnancy and childbirth, as well as for nursing mothers. The image of the erect female hippo was augmented with large female breasts and the typical, divine tripartite wig. These human features were not the only things that made her an odd, composite creature. The powerful tail of another Nile animal, the crocodile, was grafted onto the goddess's back, adding to her iconography. Her feet were taken from another mighty animal, the lion, and because she needed to hold things, she was given human hands or even lion's paws.

Figures of Taweret often show her with her hands (or, more often, lion's paws) resting on the hieroglyph *sa* ("protection"), highlighting her role as protector of mother and child. The goddess had served this function from early Egyptian history, where her image was used to decorate beds, head-rests, chairs and boxes. Taweret was also popular as amulets worn around the neck. Scores of these are found in museums worldwide. Amulets and figurines of the goddess were most often made of Egyptian faience, though a remarkable number carved from rock crystal also exist. Many examples in glass have been discovered in houses in Amarna, the capital of Pharaoh Akhenaten (18th Dynasty, c. 1350-1330 BCE). Although Akhenaten rejected the many Egyptian gods in favour of just one, the sun god Aten, a surprising number of figures of Bes, Taweret and other protective deities were discovered in houses in Amarna.

One group of objects is particularly associated with hippopotamus goddesses: the so-called magic wands. Most often made of hippopotamus or elephant ivory (see earlier), they show early forms of hippopotamus goddesses brandishing knives or snakes. Chapter 137B of the Book of the Dead mentions "the mistress of magical, protective power". In turn, Taweret is linked with Isis, "The Great Magician", whose chief role was to protect and raise her son Horus, of whom every Egyptian pharaoh was an incarnation. This association may also explain why some representations show the hippopotamus goddess with a human head. A rare example, now in the Museo Egizio in Turin, has the features of Queen Tiye (mother of Akhenaten).

Seth, the god of chaos, could also take the form of a hippo. Hence, the hippopotamus goddess possessed a duality of both protection and chaos. This may explain why Taweret never became one of the great gods in the Egyptian pantheon. She remained within the domestic sphere as one of the most



Egyptian alabaster jug in the form of a hippopotamus goddess with a human face. (ÆIN 1646)

popular deities. Like Bes, she had no temples of her own, apart from smaller shrines during the Roman Period, as mentioned in written sources from Fayum.

## The Hippopotamus goddess Ipet/Opet

The oldest hippopotamus goddess was Ipet, who is known from pyramid texts (PT 381) as early as the Old Kingdom (c. 2300 BCE). She is also called Apet or Opet, and a temple in her honour was erected inside the walls of the Great Temple of Karnak in late pharaonic Egypt, 30th Dynasty (c. 350 BCE). The Temple of Opet, as it is known, is prominently situated in the southwest corner of the complex. The surviving building is from the Ptolemaic Period (c. 150 BCE), but excavations have uncovered an earlier building from the 25th Dynasty (c. 700 BCE). Written sources show that the temple dates all the way back to the Pharaoh Thutmose III (18th Dynasty, c. 1479-1425 BCE). Ipet's popularity in Thebes (Luxor) may have something to do with the fact that her name was written as the Egyptian word for Thebes, "Ipet". It was no coincidence that the hippopotamus goddess Ipet was venerated in Thebes as "she who gave birth to the Ennead, mistress of heaven, mistress of Upper and Lower Egypt". There, she was juxtaposed with the sky god Nut. In the same way that the sun god Atum would be reborn in the body of Nut and become the scarab god Khepri, Osiris, the dead sun god, would be transformed into the moon god Khonsu in the womb of the heavenly goddess. It is likewise no coincidence that the Temple of Khonsu lies right next to the Temple of Opet.

This important cosmic and, above all, regenerative role also connects the hippopotamus goddess with the goddess Hathor. The hippopotamus goddess is sometimes depicted with features of Hathor, cow's horns and a sun disk, transforming her from a private household goddess into a cosmic universal deity. It does not seem so strange, then, that the hippopotamus goddess, with all her different names and aspects, was called Taweret, "The Great One".



Painted wooden figure of Taweret with the facial features of Queen Tiye, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1350 BCE.  
(Museo Egizio Turin)

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Hippopotamus goddess in the Temple of Opet, Karnak.





## Bes and Taweret

The story behind the name of Bes the protector, whom the Greeks called Besas, is a bit more complicated than that of Taweret. While Taweret, at least as far back as the New Kingdom around 1500 BCE, was a (universal) name for the hippopotamus goddess, the name Bes is not found until around 500 years later, in the 21st Dynasty, and the name only came into widespread use later, in Egypt's Greco-Roman Period (332 BCE-393 CE). The earliest images of a Bes-like creature, as we have seen, seem to show people wearing lion masks (see the chapter on Bes masks). On the aforementioned magic wands, which also feature images of Taweret or another hippopotamus goddess, Bes is shown with a tail. No longer a human figure in a mask, he has been elevated into a mythological creature alongside other magical figures. In rare instances, he is called Aha, "The Fighter", probably referring to his fight against the forces of evil. Sometimes, he is depicted holding knives – later, even a sword – as well as snakes and scorpions that he has defeated.

In two-dimensional images, Bes, with his characteristic squat body and leonine facial features, is usually shown frontally. This frontality is remarkable in Egyptian art, where faces are usually shown in profile. Frontal faces were mainly reserved for foreigners, foreign gods and, above all, demons. That Bes continued to be depicted in this manner may be derived from early representations of figures wearing masks. This is particularly apparent from the so-called Horus stela (see earlier). His close association with Horus the Child is also evident in the composite names of Hor-Bes and Bes-Harpocrates, dating to the tail end of ancient Egyptian history.

Bes is also associated with dance, music and, in turn, sex. It was probably because of these aspects that he was regarded as a protector of the home, pregnant women and infants. This links him closely with Taweret, as seen in their joint appearance on magic wands. The connection between the two deities seems so intimate that some Egyptologists have even called Bes the male counterpart of Taweret. This is highly unlikely, however, since the magic wands already feature female versions of Bes-like figures. She was later known by the name Beset, which, grammatically, is the feminine form of Bes. Beset is considered his wife or, in some instances, his mother. She looks like him. It is only her obviously female breasts that set her apart. In the Greco-Roman Period, she is sometimes also shown wearing women's clothing.

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Detail of a chair belonging to Princess Sitamun, showing Taweret and Bes, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1350 BCE (JE 5342 / CG 51113 Egyptian Museum, Cairo)



Terracotta figure of Bes and Beset. Roman Period.  
(ÆIN 1688)



In any case, Bes is closely linked with Taweret. He appears in all the same contexts and, like Taweret, he was mainly worshipped as a protector. It is not at all strange, then, that he and Taweret are still found in the Amarna Period. In later periods of Egyptian history, Bes' popularity even exceeds that of Taweret. Apparently, a male creature with leonine features had greater powers than a hippopotamus goddess. An even greater number of figures and amulets exist of Bes in his various roles. Representations of Bes with "all the gods" (see above) indicate that he could have been regarded as a "true" god, even as the frontal depiction keeps all his demonic features. Bes can be interpreted as a beloved, divine demon, while the less widespread Taweret ranks as a demonic goddess who never became as broadly popular as Bes.



Faience amulets of  
Taweret.  
(APM 15701 and 13266)



# Bes and Tutu

## A comparison



Bes and Beset in a small temple, terracotta. Roman Period.  
(ÆIN 1689)

Because few myths have survived, the ancient Egyptian deities are difficult to grasp for modern observers. Usually, we have to base our understanding on their names and titles, and their depictions in art. Here, the grouping of gods in pictorial representation may provide a clue. Revealing the associations that a given constellation of deities had for Egyptians, it also conveys information about the individual members. Interconnections may have arisen from a shared mythology, as well as from a joint cult in a specific locality, a shared field of operation or other aspects. The god Bes may be depicted in the company of a variety of other gods, with some combinations being more common than others. This helps us gain a better understanding of his character.

### Bes and goddesses: Taweret and Beset

As early as the Middle Kingdom, Bes was frequently shown alongside the hippopotamus goddess Taweret. Their association may be explained by their shared function. They were both invoked for protection in similar circumstances. Like Bes, Taweret was popular in everyday situations, and numerous amulets testify to her role as an apotropaic goddess. The second most frequent association of Bes is with Beset, the female version of him. The two deities were very similar, and their joint appearance in pictorial representation may be ascribed to their parallel roles. They are found together in terracotta statuettes, on oil lamps, on stelae and, as far back as the Middle Kingdom, on magic wands.

These magic wands depict “Bes” in the company of other divine beings, including Taweret and figures that may be interpreted as demons with knives in their paws, often depicted as fantastic beasts or as beings made up of animal and human parts. The name applied to the god at this time is Aha (“The Fighter”), while the early name for his female counterpart remains unknown.

## The hierarchy of gods

When gods are depicted together on a stela, it sometimes shows a difference in status, revealing their respective ranks in the hierarchy of gods. In Egypt, there was no established pantheon in which individual gods were assigned a permanent place. Rather, the pantheon was always evolving, with new gods appearing and old ones fading away over time. Nevertheless, there was a general sense of hierarchy. This is clearly worded in a stela of King Ramses IV at Abydos, in which the king emphasises that he had not favoured the great gods over the small ones. Likewise, a text known as the Great Demotic Wisdom Instruction warns the reader: “Do not slight a small god, lest his retaliation teach you”. It is quite explicit which gods were to be counted among the great ones. Namely, they were the gods of the provincial capitals, such as Thoth, Re, Hathor and Amun. The identity of the “small gods” is less transparent, since there was a wide range of deities in the lower echelons of the divine world who could be classified according to various criteria. At the bottom of the hierarchy were the demons with their limited functions and lack of cult, even though an individual demon might occasionally receive veneration. In their appearance, the demons were particularly monstrous, showing combinations of animal forms not found in the great gods. Perhaps of a higher order were such small gods as Bes and Taweret, who shared their composite animal appearance with the demons. Like them, Bes and Taweret were not worshipped in temples, but they were ubiquitous, especially in a domestic context and with women and children. While these two deities were certainly related to demons, their popularity makes them stand out as positive forces able to assist people in dealing with the misfortunes of daily life.

A private devotional stela from Horbeit in the Nile Delta is particularly instructive in demonstrating the position of Bes among the gods. The stela, now in the Hildesheim collection, was originally set up in Piramesse, the capital of Ramses II in



Limestone stela from  
Horbeit in the Nile  
Delta. (PM 426)





the eastern Delta. The principal deity on the stela is Amun-Re, who appears in the upper register, extending the sign of life to the king, who is facing him. In the register below, Bes is shown opposite an individual who must be the donor of the stela. Bes is handing him the hieroglyph of life, along with the sign for dominion, the two traditional attributes of the gods. Because of his position in the lower part of the stela, Bes can be seen as playing the part of a mediator before the great god Amun-Re. Egyptian stelae often show a distinction between the registers, with the main beneficiary being depicted in the upper register. This may be a god or, in the case of a funerary stela, a private person. The lower register, or multiple registers, may be taken up by other persons or divine beings who are subordinate to the god or person represented above. In the Hildesheim stela, there is a connection between Bes and Amun-Re, with Bes playing a supporting role to the sun god. Additional sources support the notion that Bes might act as a mediator for people looking to communicate with the great god Amun-Re.

Limestone stela of Tutu and Bes.  
(APM 7757)

## The god Tutu

Another god in whose company Bes sometimes appeared is Tutu. A less familiar Egyptian deity nowadays, Tutu only appeared fairly late in the 26th Dynasty as a local god of the city of Sais. In the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods his popularity was widespread, however, and images of him are found in all parts of Egypt. Tutu, the son of the goddess Neith, was depicted as a striding sphinx. In this form, Tutu joins Bes on a stela in the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam. Bes is holding a writhing serpent in his left hand, while his right hand brandishes a sword above his head. In the Hellenistic and Roman Periods, these symbols of the god's protective powers are commonly shown as his attributes.

In the Greco-Roman Period, Tutu and Bes were often depicted separately on stelae. Tutu is currently known from 78 stelae. Stelae depicting Bes are found in many collections, but because they have never been studied as a group, their

Limestone sculpture of Tutu with a double Bes head below his stomach.  
(ABDUA 21516)





Wall painting in the tomb of Petubastis in el-Muzawwaqa, Dakhla Oasis.

number can only be estimated as being equivalent to those of Tutu. The only other comparable series of stelae was made for the protective god Agathos Daimon, the “good spirit” of the city of Alexandria, who was represented as a bearded serpent and often paired with the goddess Isis-Thermuthis in serpent form. The combination of Bes and Tutu on some stelae suggests that their individual stelae served a similar purpose and were probably cultic. Such stelae were intended as images of the god, or gods, serving as a focal point for prayers and offerings. It is interesting that there was such a large market for stelae depicting “small gods”. It suggests that they were specifically intended for use in a private setting, where these gods were invoked as mediators before the great gods, for example at home or in the forecourt of the temples to which the public had access.

The association of Bes with Tutu is also confirmed by a few other monuments in which Bes literally plays a supporting role. Three stone statues of Tutu are known in which the head of Bes acts as a support for the belly of the sphinx. Likewise, in a temple relief from Athribis in the Nile Delta, a small head of Bes is added on top of the head of Tutu as a support for his crown. This supporting role is explained by the occasional depiction of Bes supporting the sky. Alongside the image of Tutu, it not only serves as another indication of the relationship between the two gods, it also confirms the higher status of Tutu, who, as the son of Neith, was ranked among the gods of heaven. Tutu was considered to be a representation and manifestation of the supreme solar god Amun-Re. Bes, too, was associated with Amun-Re, but his place was on earth. The relationship between Tutu and Bes was one of equals, though they were not the same. Tutu ranked above Bes. He had a cult in temples throughout the country, whereas Bes never received official veneration. Tutu also had a festival, known from the temple calendar of Esna. By contrast, Bes’ domain was specifically that of the house. He does appear in a supporting role at the temples, in the so-called *mammisi* (birth houses), but never as recipient of his own cult.

Tutu was venerated in many places, including Koptos and Esna, but the only temple dedicated primarily to Tutu stood in the village of Kellis (Ismant el-Kharab) in the Dakhla Oasis. It contained a large *mammisi* where the rejuvenation of the god was celebrated. While Bes was not included in the official decoration, there was a painted graffito of him in one of the subsidiary shrines of the temple, along with a few



images on votive gifts in the forecourt. Nevertheless, Bes' popularity among the people of Kellis was equal to that of Tutu, judging from the personal name Besas, which occurs as frequently as Tithoes, the Greek form of Tutu.

The two gods occupied parallel positions in the Egyptian pantheon: both were apotropaic deities who enjoyed widespread popular appeal. In el-Muzawwaqa (Dakhla Oasis), the two appear together as divine protectors at the entrance to the tomb of one Petubastis.

## Pantheistic images

Like Tutu, Bes was associated with the sun god. Both could be the base of pantheistic (polymorphic) forms in which smaller animal heads are added to the head of the god, along with other elements of power, such as wings and weapons (see earlier). The resulting images, although monstrous to our eyes, were meant to give a more accurate rendering of the complex nature of the all-powerful solar deity than the conventional images of him in human form. The Bes Pantheos image developed in the Late Period, whereas images featuring Tutu emerged only in the late Ptolemaic or early Roman Period. The two pantheistic images never occur together. They seem to have functioned in different contexts, corresponding to the different functions of Bes and Tutu.

In the case of Bes, the image was always related to the practice of magic. With the pantheistic figure at hand, the magician was able to access the powers of the supreme deity of creation and use those powers to his own ends. The earliest occurrence of the image is in bronze figurines and drawings in magical handbooks (cf. *ÆIN* 1594, p. 41). The image continued to be used as a magical tool far into the Roman Period, when it was still repeatedly depicted on magical gemstones.

Unlike images of Bes Pantheos, which appear exclusively in magical applications, pantheistic images of Tutu are found in cultic reliefs set up in temples. One example is labelled in Greek as Tithoes (Tutu), "the god of Amun". The title confirms that the pantheos images were associated with the great sun god. The images of Bes and Tutu correspond to the principal differences between the gods at the core of the imagery. Bes was the god providing protection in daily life and in the house, whereas Tutu was venerated in the temple. This is also the reason why countless amulets in the shape of Bes, but only a handful of Tutu amulets, have survived. In daily

life, Bes was more easily approachable, while Tutu was closer to the great gods in heaven. Tutu was not only more powerful, he was also more awe-inspiring than Bes.

When Tutu and Bes appear side by side, as in the stela above, the juxtaposition emphasises the common characteristics of the two gods. While there were differences between Bes and Tutu, the stela underscores that both were protective deities directly associated with Amun-Re.

Bronze figure of Tutu.  
(MusAK L2.2016)



# Bes in the kingdom of Kush/Nubia



Part of a sandstone Bes pillar  
from Meroë, Sudan.  
(ÆIN 1333)

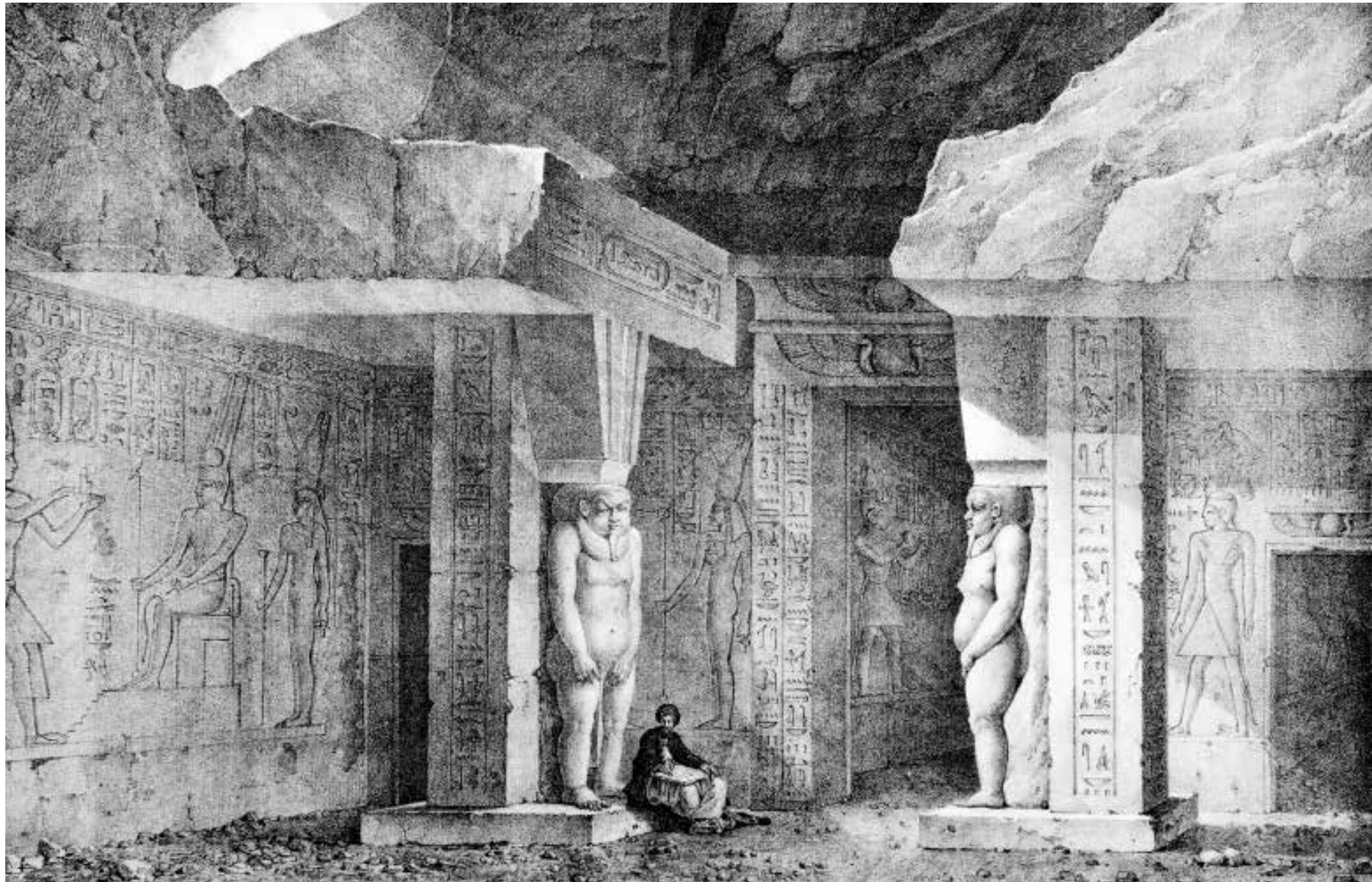
Surprisingly, the largest depictions of the god Bes are not found in Egypt but in the Nubian kingdom of Kush, more precisely in the Middle Nile region. Bes entered this region south of the Second Cataract at the latest during the New Kingdom occupation of Kush and was worshipped there for close to two millennia. In the Napatan (c. 747-300 BCE) and Meroitic Periods (c. 300 BC-350 CE), Bes played a prominent role in both the official and popular religions of Kush. Like other gods taken over from the Egyptian pantheon, Bes underwent certain changes in his roles. In the Myth of the Distant Goddess he was an appeaser and a companion, while in popular religion and personal piety he performed the same tasks as in Egypt.

## Bes in temples

In the Gebel Barkal temple built by King Taharqa in the 7th century BCE, we find the largest known representation of Bes (see p. 58 and later). This temple served as a pattern for other Kushite temples built in the centuries to come, prime among them the Mut temple at Wad Ben Naga (see also later). The use of Bes figures in temple architecture was not limited to pillars; smaller images of him were incorporated into the facades of other temples. As a rule, representations of Bes were associated with sanctuaries of female deities.

In Temple T at Kawa, also built by Taharqa, an incense burner decorated with figures of Bes was found. Outside a Napatan shrine at Kawa (Building A1), terracotta statues of Bes and his female companion, Beset, were recovered (the identification of the female companion as Beset may not be





Interior of the Temple  
of Mut in Gebel Barkal,  
with Bes columns.

strictly accurate). Roughly one metre high, these figures were originally inserted into the walls of the shrine.

Bes' role in the Myth of the Distant Goddess is most elaborately illustrated in reliefs on columns in the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es-Sufra, dating to the late 3rd century BC. The scenes also show the closely related Onuris legend, telling the myth from the perspective of the appeaser of the Distant Goddess. These reliefs provide evidence of the Kushite iconography of Bes. As a rule, Bes is shown wearing a lion skin and his typical feather crown, though in one instance he wears the Double Crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. In another case, he is shown with no headdress at all. Bes is armed with a sword, a spear (a typical Meroitic feature), a bow and a shield for protection. Three main subjects in the Musawwarat reliefs can be distinguished: Bes killing or capturing enemies (humans, as well as antelopes personifying evil and chaos and relating to the Onuris legend); Bes triumphant; and Bes playing a harp in front of the appeased lioness representing the Distant Goddess. The majority of scenes are augmented with images of plants, evoking a garden-like atmosphere.

Column showing Bes fighting enemies, Musawwarat es-Sufra.



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At the nearby site of Naga, several larger Bes statuettes and faience figurines were discovered within the extensive building program carried out by the royal couple, King Natakamani and Queen Amanitore (early 1st century AD).

## Bes in popular religion

There is multiple evidence of Bes in popular religion and as an object of personal piety. Figures of Bes were drawn on globular vessels discovered at the late Meroitic cemetery in Karanog. The vessels were for the storage of wine, beer and other alcoholic beverages. The iconography of these figures was greatly influenced by Hellenistic depictions of Silenus, a companion of the wine god Dionysus. Bes was a protagonist of the Dionysian cult in Meroë. In a tavern discovered in Sayala, an altar was decorated with images of Bes, while a possible tattoo of the silhouette of a Bes figure was identified on a female corpse in the Meroitic cemetery at Aksha.

The most abundant documentation comes in the form of Bes amulets and Bes masks discovered in the tombs of individuals of different social strata, from lower ranks to royal families. The amulets either formed part of necklaces or were placed on the body of the deceased. They appear frequently in the Napatan Period, while their number decreased in the Meroitic Period.

There may also be rare epigraphic evidence of Bes. In a Meroitic funerary text from Qasr Ibrim, Karl-Heinz Priese (1935–2017) identified the word “kheskheseli” (most likely, “the dancer”) as a possible Meroitic designation for Bes.

The presence of Bes in Kush seems to have continued into the Post-Meroitic Period (c. 350–550 CE). At Wad Ben Naga, several children's cemeteries were identified around the ruins of the so-called Typhonium (see later), which was dominated by pillars depicting Bes. Apart from children, a pregnant woman was laid to rest there. Such evidence confirms the role of Bes as a protector of pregnant women and small children, even in distant Nubia.



# Bes and typhonia in Kush / Nubia

*Typhonium* (*typhonia* in the plural) is a term introduced by early European visitors to the Nile Valley to describe temples incorporating monumental carved images of the god Bes into their architecture. The term is derived from a Greek mythological creature, Typhon (Τυφών), whose name, before the decipherment of hieroglyphs, was among those borrowed to designate Bes.

In the 19th century, two temples located upstream from the First Cataract of the Nile were described as “typhonia”, while additional temples with statues of Bes were discovered in the following century. Bes figures employed in the architecture of Meroitic buildings are found in the Royal City of Meroë (kiosk M 279 and temple KC 104), Musawwarat es-Sufra (temple MS 300), Gebel Adda and elsewhere.

## The typhonia at Gebel Barkal and Wad Ben Naga

The first of these two temples (the two earliest shrines?) is the hemispeos B 300 carved into the foot of the Pure Mountain of Gebel Barkal, in close proximity to the Great Temple of Amun. It was commissioned by King Taharqa, who ruled over the temporarily united double kingdom of Egypt and Kush in the first half of the 7th century BCE. The other temple is located 700 km further up the Nile, close to the modern village of Wad Ben Naga. This temple was built seven centuries later by Taharqa's distant successors King Natakamani and Queen Amanitore in the middle of the 1st century CE. Initially, the large figures of Bes represented the only connection between the two temples. However,





Bes pillars in the Temple of Mut at Wad Ben Naga.

excavations in Wad Ben Naga over the past decade have shown that there was more to it than that.

The typhonia at Gebel Barkal and Wad Ben Naga were first recorded in 1821. The French explorer Frédéric Cailliaud (1787–1869) described the temples in his travelogue and captured them in drawings, which were eventually published in his multi-volume work *Voyage à Méroé*. While the rock-cut temple at Gebel Barkal was well preserved, the temple at Wad Ben Naga was already in ruins by the time of Cailliaud's visit. It is dominated by sandstone pillars decorated with figures of Bes. Over the next two centuries, the typhonium at Gebel Barkal was frequented by visitors, while the one at Wad Ben Naga fell into oblivion and disappeared from the archaeological record. It was only rediscovered and archaeologically explored in the 2010s.

## The typhonium at Gebel Barkal

The typhonium at Gebel Barkal consisted of two ante-chambers (B 301–302) built of brick and five interior rooms (B 303–307) cut into the solid rock of the mountain. In front of the temple was a porch supported by two pairs of columns. The gate was set between the two towers of the pylon and led to the temple's forecourt (B 301). The forecourt contained eight monumental Bes pillars arranged in two rows. Behind these pillars were eight columns with Hathoric capitals. The next room was a hypostyle (B 302) equipped with another eight Hathoric columns. The hall of offerings behind it (B 303) was the first room to be cut into the rock. Its ceiling was supported by another pair of Bes pillars.



Temple of Amun at Gebel Barkal.

From the hall of offerings, there was access to the main sanctuary (B 305) and two side chapels (B 304 and 307). At the rear of the main sanctuary, a small passageway led to what was presumably a storage room for cult equipment (B 306). In its ground plan, the temple resembled temples built in Nubia by the New Kingdom pharaohs. The Gebel Barkal temple itself was built on the site of a New Kingdom antecedent.

The rooms of the temple were richly decorated. The scenes on the walls narrated the Nubian version, from the Napatan Period, of the Myth of the Solar Eye (or the Myth of the Distant Goddess). The decoration was divided into two symmetrical parts, referring to the two lands in which the story was set and over which Taharqa ruled. The northern half of the temple contained images of gods associated with Egypt, the southern half images of gods associated with Nubia. The northern wall of the hall of offerings showed King Taharqa followed by his mother, Queen Abar, approaching Amun-Re of Karnak accompanied by his consort, Mut (of Karnak, Mistress of Asheru). On the opposite southern wall, Taharqa with his wife, Takahatamani, is approaching Amun-Re, Lord



of the Thrones of the Two Lands who dwells in the Pure Mountain, accompanied by Mut, Mistress of Ta-seti (Nubia). The decorative scheme clearly shows that the temple was dedicated to Mut (who is also entitled “Lady of Heaven” and “Lady of Napata” in the accompanying inscription), since she was the most frequently depicted deity in the temple.

### The typhonium at Wad Ben Naga

The front part of the typhonium at Wad Ben Naga has been badly damaged. The temple was apparently entered through a transversal room (WBN 204), possibly a porch-like structure, adjoining the pylons and facade of the temple proper. The roof of the transversal room was supported by four pillars. Unfortunately, we cannot say much about the pillars, as only their bases have been preserved. One may speculate whether they were decorated with large images of Bes, like the pillars documented in the interior of the temple.

The monumental gate, framed by sandstone jambs and an architrave, led to an open courtyard (WBN 203). Two pairs of trees were planted in deep pits hollowed into the bedrock under the courtyard. Other plants were probably planted around the trees. The most recent excavations have also identified tree pits located in front of the temple’s entrance.

Behind the “temple garden” was a portico (WBN 202), whose roof was supported by two monumental Bes pillars crowned with Hathoric capitals. A main gate, set into the portico’s rear wall, led to the hall of offerings (WBN 201), while two side doors opened onto two similar complexes of rooms flanking the open courtyard. These complexes comprised a sequence of three rooms – an open court, a portico and a roofed chamber. This arrangement effectively copied the sequence of rooms located on the temple’s axis (rooms WBN 201–203). Two stairwells leading to the temple’s roof were set into the thick wall between the side complexes and the open courtyard.

On either side of the gate leading to the hall of offerings was a niche, originally containing pair statues of Amun and Mut. To the left (north) were Amun and Mut of Thebes (Egypt), and to the right (south) were Amun and Mut of Napata (Kush/Nubia). The hall of offerings was the temple’s most sacred and spectacular room. The walls were decorated with colourful paintings depicting the royal couple, King Natakamani and Queen Amanitore, offering to the divine couple, Amun and Mut. Fragments of paintings preserved



Excavation at  
Wad Ben Naga.

from the north wall clearly show that the scene included a figure of a ram-headed (i.e., Nubian) Amun. Like the statues in the niches of the portico, this clearly implies the north-south (or Egyptian-Nubian) division of the temple. Presumably, the northern sidewall contained a similar scene of the royal couple approaching Amun and Mut of Karnak.

The hall of offerings resembled interiors of contemporary Roman villas in Alexandria. The wall paintings employed a total of 18 different colours and shades (the richest repertoire of colours known from a Meroitic temple), while the (perhaps) vaulted roof was decorated with plaster appliques. In the middle of the room stood a second pair of Bes pillars crowned with Hathoric capitals.

A tall niche with an altar was set into the rear wall of the hall of offerings. This niche was decorated with wall paintings of a female goddess, most likely Mut, and was surmounted by an arched sandstone architrave (adorned with two winged sun disks) and a cavetto cornice on top.



Sandstone foot of Bes,  
fragment of a Bes column  
from Wad Ben Naga.

The niche is rather to be seen as an independent room of the temple, since it represented a miniature version of the main sanctuary.

Apart from the main gate, the hall of offerings had two side doors providing access to an ambulatory (WBN 205), an architectural feature borrowed from contemporary Egyptian architecture of the Roman Period, encircling the hall of offerings on three sides. In the rear wall of the ambulatory were three niches which resembled those in the portico. Presumably, they once contained now lost divine statues much like those discovered in the niches of the portico.

## Comparison

Taking a closer look at the architecture of the two typhonia, we note a number of similarities. The most visible one is the employment of Hathoric capitals and monumental Bes figures in the decoration of the temple. In the Barkal temple these appear independently, while at Wad Ben Naga they are merged into a single feature, most likely necessitated by the lack of sandstone for making pillars.

Despite the fragmentary preservation of the wall paintings at Wad Ben Naga, the southern wall of the hall of offerings can be reconstructed with a high degree of certainty. The reconstruction clearly points to inspiration from the decoration of the hall of offerings in the Gebel Barkal temple. We may assume that the inner decoration of the temple showed an adapted version, this one Meroitic, of the myth of the Solar Eye.

The similarity between the architectural layouts of the two temples is less apparent. It is most pronounced in the halls of offerings. Both halls share the same characteristics: a pair of Bes pillars, similar themes of decoration and their connecting position within the temple. The triple sanctuary and the storage room in the Gebel Barkal temple (B 304–307) appear to have been replaced by niches in the rear walls of the hall of offerings and the ambulatory. The court (B 301) and the hypostyle (B 302) at Gebel Barkal seem to correspond to the open courtyard (WBN 203) and the portico (WBN 202) at Wad Ben Naga, respectively.

## Conclusion

The choice of the royal city at Wad Ben Naga as home for the only known temple of Mut (as the Distant Goddess) from



the Meroitic Period was by no means accidental. Ptolemaic and Meroitic texts in the Egyptian language and hieroglyphics refers to the region south of Meroë as (the nome of) “Farthest Kenset” or “End of Kenset”. As such it appeared in the nome lists of Ptolemy II and Ptolemy IV, as well as in the early Meroitic hymn to the Nubian god Apedemak, carved on the walls of the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es-Sufra built by King Arnekhamani. But above all, during this period, Kenset was known as the place where the Solar Eye dwelt, where she was to be appeased and from where she had to be lured back to Egypt.

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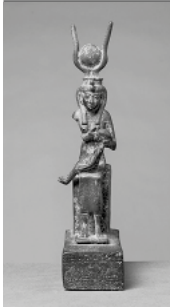
# List of exhibited objects

## Abbreviations

H	Height
W	Width
D	Depth
L	Length
	(all measurements in cm)
dyn.	dynasty



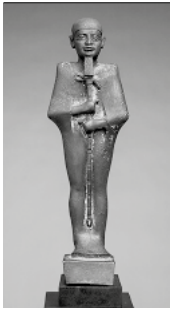
Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek,  
Copenhagen



ÆIN 161  
**Isis nursing her son Horus**  
Third Intermediate Period,  
c. 1070-664 BCE  
Bronze  
H 22.6 cm, W 5.5 cm,  
D 11 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.2, 176.



ÆIN 172  
**Re-Horakhte**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Bronze  
H 24 cm, W 5.5 cm,  
D 8.8 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.2, 86.



ÆIN 191  
**Ptah**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Bronze and gold  
H 20 cm, W 6.5 cm,  
D 6 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.2, 64.



ÆIN 209  
**Wadjet/Sakhmet**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Bronze  
H 24 cm, W 4.5 cm,  
D 7.7 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.2, 148.



ÆIN 219  
**Bes figure**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Wood  
H 26 cm, W 8.5 cm,  
D 2.4 cm  
Mogensen 1930, 35,  
xxxiv.



ÆIN 220  
**Bes figure**  
Amenhotep III,  
c. 1403-1365 BCE  
Wood  
H 11 cm, W 5.5 cm,  
D 2.5 cm  
Jørgensen 1998, 336.



ÆIN 221  
**Stela with Bes with sword and snake**  
Graeco-Roman Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Limestone  
H 22 cm, W 13.3 cm,  
D 5 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.1, 226.



ÆIN 222  
**Stela with Bes with sword and snake**  
Graeco-Roman Period  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Limestone  
H 20.5 cm, W 16 cm,  
D 4 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.1, 226.



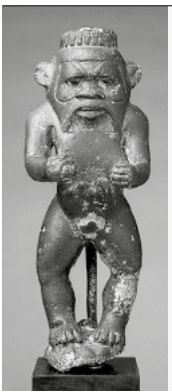
ÆIN 223  
**Bes with sword and cobra**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Bronze  
H 11.6 cm, W 4.8 cm,  
D 3.3 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.2, 78.



ÆIN 224  
**Double Bes amulet**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 5 cm  
Mogensen 1930, 35,  
xxxiv.



ÆIN 225  
**Bes playing shawm**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 8 cm  
Mogensen 1930, 35,  
xxxiv.



ÆIN 226  
**Bes with framedrum**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Bronze  
H 13.2 cm, W 4.8 cm,  
D 6.1 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.2, 78.



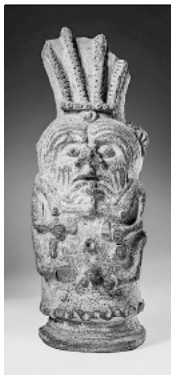
ÆIN 295  
**God's throne with Bes on the sides and worshipper**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Bronze  
H 14.4 cm, W 8.8 cm,  
D 16.6 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.2,  
284.

108

109



ÆIN 314  
**Stela dedicat-  
ed to lion god  
with Bes and  
Beset**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Limestone  
H 22.5 cm,  
W 26.5 cm, D 5 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.1, 280.



ÆIN 319  
**Round,  
hollow Bes  
statuette**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 64 cm  
Fjeldhagen 1995, 84.



ÆIN 464  
**Bes as a  
Roman  
soldier**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 19.8 cm  
Fjeldhagen 1995, 78.



ÆIN 465  
**Bes lamp**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 16.8 cm  
Fjeldhagen 1995, 80.



ÆIN 466  
**Dancing Bes**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
100-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 11.8 cm  
Fjeldhagen 1995, 78.



ÆIN 467  
**Small flask  
with double  
Bes head**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 4.8 cm  
Fjeldhagen 1995, 80.



ÆIN 517  
**Woman  
“in labour” /  
Baubo**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 7.1 cm  
Fjeldhagen 1995, 129.



ÆIN 520  
**Phallic figure**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Limestone  
H 7 cm, W 10 cm,  
D 2.6 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.1, 228.



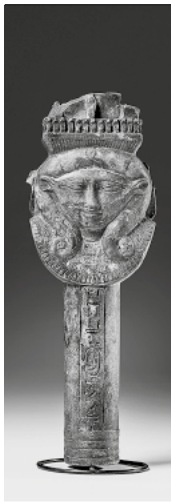
ÆIN 606  
**Osiris**  
26th dyn.,  
c. 664-525 BCE  
Bronze  
H 40 cm, W 11.5 cm,  
D 8 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.2, 28.



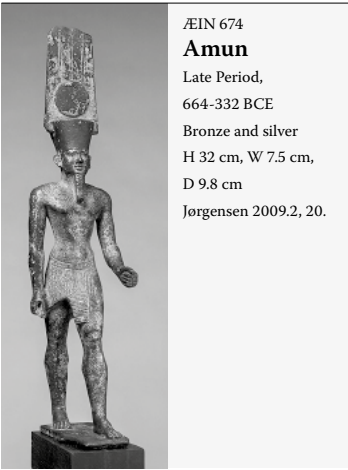
ÆIN 624  
**Sistrum with  
Pataikos**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Bronze  
H 14.5 cm, W 3.8 cm,  
D 2.4 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.2,  
294.



ÆIN 625  
**Sistrum  
handle with  
Hathor head**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Bronze  
H 26 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.2,  
294.



ÆIN 626  
**Sistrum  
handle with  
Hathor head**  
Late Period-Ptolemaic  
Period, 664-30 BCE  
Faience  
H 23 cm  
Mogensen 1930, 72,  
lxxii.



ÆIN 674  
**Amun**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Bronze and silver  
H 32 cm, W 7.5 cm,  
D 9.8 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.2, 20.



ÆIN 675  
**Sobek**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Bronze  
H 26.8 cm, W 7.8 cm,  
D 11 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.2,  
106.



ÆIN 726  
**Sela with  
Seth, the bull  
from Ombos**  
19th dyn.,  
c. 1300-1200 BCE  
Limestone  
H 22 cm  
Jørgensen 1998, 270.



ÆIN 754  
**Bes with snake  
and knife**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Limestone  
H 11 cm, W 8.5 cm,  
D 3.5 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.4, 226.



ÆIN 774  
**Bes amulet,  
'coin'**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Faience  
D 1.3 cm



ÆIN 775  
**Bes head  
amulet**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 2.3 cm



ÆIN 783  
**Scarab with  
Bes**  
New Kingdom,  
c. 1550-1070 BCE  
Faience  
L 2.5 cm



ÆIN 810  
**Primitive Bes  
vase**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Pottery  
H 14 cm, D 9.5 cm



ÆIN 983  
**Phallic amulet**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Faience  
H 2.2 cm



ÆIN 1150  
**Bes amulet**  
Memphis  
Roman Period (?),  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Faience  
H 4.5 cm  
Bagh 2011, 63.



ÆIN 1230  
**Bes amulet,  
'coin'**  
Memphis  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Faience  
D 1.5 cm  
Bagh 2011, 55.



ÆIN 1294-95  
**Necklaces  
with amulets**  
Meroë  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Faience  
L 25 cm  
Bagh 2015, 58



ÆIN 1320  
**Bes head**  
Meroë  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Sandstone  
H 13.5 cm  
Bagh 2015, 69.



ÆIN 1333  
**Part of Bes  
pillar**  
Meroë  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Sandstone  
H 64 cm, W 15.5 cm,  
D 4 cm  
Bagh 2015, 36.



ÆIN 1380  
**Aha figure**  
13th Dyn.,  
c. 1795-1650 BCE  
Bone  
H 4.2 cm  
Mogensen 1930, 35,  
xxxiv.  
ÆIN 1380



ÆIN 1493  
**Anubis in  
military  
uniform**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-300 CE  
Bronze  
H 18 cm, W 10.5 cm,  
D 5 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.5,  
104.



ÆIN 1499  
**Osiris, Isis  
and Horus**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Bronze  
H 12.6 cm, W 7.4 cm,  
D 4.4 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.2, 166.



ÆIN 1520  
**Horus falcon**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Bronze  
H 25.7 cm, W 7.4 cm,  
D 17.2 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.2, 230



ÆIN 1594  
**Pantheistic  
Bes**  
26th dyn.,  
c. 664-525 BCE  
Bronze  
H 14 cm, W 12.5 cm,  
D 8.5 cm  
Jørgensen 2009.2, 76.



ÆIN 1646  
**Taweret jar**  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1550-1300 BCE  
Calcite  
H 19.5 cm  
Jørgensen 1998, 324.



ÆIN 1688  
**Bes and Beset  
as soldiers**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 11.5 cm  
Fjeldhagen 1995, 82.



ÆIN 1689  
**Bes and Beset  
in a small  
temple**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 9 cm  
Fjeldhagen 1995, 83.



ÆIN 1715  
**Bes on top of  
two sitting  
women**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Faience  
H 7.6 cm, W 4.4 cm,  
D 2.5 cm



ÆIN 1722  
**Hippo-  
potamus**  
1st dyn., c. 3000 BCE  
Calcite  
H 16.5 cm, L 32 cm  
Jørgensen 1995, 28.



ÆIN 1742  
**Zithar player**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 18 cm  
Fjeldhagen 1995, 135.



ÆIN 1757  
**Lamp shaped  
as phallic  
figure**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 4.7 cm, W 10 cm



ÆIN 1760  
**Phallic amulet**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Faience  
L 4.7 cm



ÆIN 1761  
**Bes with Bes  
baby, lower  
part**  
3rd Intermediate  
Period,  
c. 1070-664 BCE  
Faience  
H 9.7 cm



ÆIN 1771  
**Phallic figure**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 6.5 cm  
Fjeldhagen 1995, 138.





ÆIN 1772

**Woman “in labour” / Baubo**

Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE

Terracotta  
H 9 cm

Fjeldhagen 1995, 130.




ÆIN 1782

**Hedgehog, scaraboid**

Late Period,  
664-332 BCE

Faience  
L 1.4 cm, H 1 cm

Ägyptisches Museum  
– Georg Steindroff –  
der Universität Leipzig




ÄMUL 1678

**Oval Bes plaque**

3rd Intermediate  
Period,  
c. 1070-664 BCE

Faience  
H 0.4 cm, W 0.3 cm



ÄMUL 1941

**Bes figure**

Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE

Terracotta  
H 25 cm, W 8 cm,  
D 4.5 cm




ÄMUL 2095

**Relief of god with Bes/ Beset mask**

Abusir, temple of  
Sahure

Old Kingdom,  
c. 2686-2181 BCE

Limestone  
H 26 cm, W 19 cm,  
D 5.5 cm



ÄMUL 2581

**Bes head with short body**

Late Period,  
664-332 BCE

Faience  
H 13.5 cm, W 7.5 cm,  
D 4 cm




ÄMUL 2854

**Beset “in labour”**

Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE

Terracotta  
H 22 cm, W 11 cm,  
D 5.5 cm




ÄMUL 2855

**Jug shaped as Bes on a lion**

Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE

Terracotta  
H 11 cm, W 5.5 cm,  
D 3.3 cm

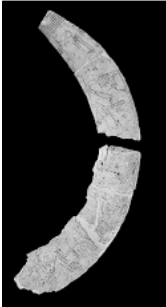


ÄMUL 3662

**Scarab with two dancing Bes**

Second Intermediate  
Period (?),  
c. 1650-1550 BCE

Faience  
H 2.5 cm, W 1.3 cm,  
D 3.5 cm



ÄMUL 5001

**Magic wand**

Middle Kingdom,  
c. 2055-1650 BCE

Bone  
H 10 cm, W 29 cm,  
D 1 cm




ÄMUL 5088

**Bes head**

New Kingdom,  
c. 1550-1070 BCE

Faience  
H 4 cm, W 5.5 cm,  
D 4 cm




ÄMUL 6084

**Plaque with Bes demon**

Aniba, Nubien  
New Kingdom,  
c. 1550-1070 BCE

Limestone  
H 1.3 cm, D 7 cm

University of Aberdeen,  
Scotland



ABDUA 13801


**Mould for Bes amulet**

Amarna  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1350-1330 BCE

Terracotta  
H 3.6 cm, W 2.9 cm,  
D 1 cm

112

113




ABDUA 13817

**Mould for Bes amulet**

Amarna  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1350-1330 BCE

Terracotta  
H 3.2 cm, W 2.7 cm,  
D 1 cm




ABDUA 13845

**Mould for Bes amulet**

Amarna  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1350-1330 BCE

Terracotta  
H 2 cm, W 2.3 cm,  
D 1.3 cm




ABDUA 13857

**Mould for Bes amulet**

Amarna  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1350-1330 BCE

Terracotta  
H 2.5 cm, W 3 cm,  
D 1.7 cm



ABDUA 13863

**Mould for Bes amulet**

Amarna  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1350-1330 BCE

Terracotta  
H 2.7 cm, W 3 cm,  
D 1.5 cm



ABDUA 21190

**Magical block with Bes sphinx**

Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE

Limestone  
L 15.5 cm, W 9.2 cm,  
D 5 cm



ABDUA 21516

**Tutu with double-headed Bes below**

Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE

Limestone,  
H 5.35 cm, D 7.5 cm




ABDUA 21847

**Amulet with Bes and other deities**

Late Period,  
664-332 BCE

Steatite  
H 6.5 cm, W 2.5 cm,  
D 1.9 cm



ABDUA 22386

**Head of Bes figure**

Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE

Green hard stone  
L 13.5 cm, W 13.1 cm,  
D 5.3 cm




ABDUA 22388

**Dancing Bes, handle of a mirror or part of furniture (?)**

New Kingdom,  
c. 1550-1070 BCE

Wood  
H 120 cm, W 27 cm,  
D 12 cm




ABDUA 22390

**Bes amulet with framedrum**

New Kingdom,  
1550-1070 BCE

Faience  
L 5 cm, W 1.8 cm,  
D 0.5 cm




ABDUA 22396

**Bes amulet**

New Kingdom-  
Late Period,  
c. 1550-332 BCE

Faience  
H 5.7 cm, W 3.2 cm,  
D 1.8 cm




ABDUA 81638

**Hedgehog with Bes, scaraboid**

18th dyn.,  
c. 1550-1300 BCE

Steatite  
H 1.6 cm, W 1 cm,  
D 0.9 cm




ABDUA TE4389

**Bes head with framedrum**

3rd Intermediate  
Period-Late Period, c.  
1070-332 BCE

Faience  
L 6.5 cm, W 3.5 cm,  
D 1.5 cm

Allard Pierson, University of  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

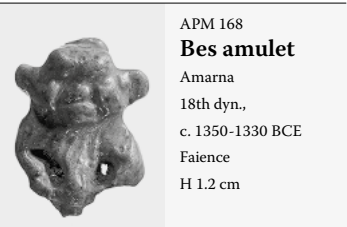


APM 140

**Mould for Bes amulet**

Amarna  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1350-1330 BCE

Terracotta  
H 4.3 cm



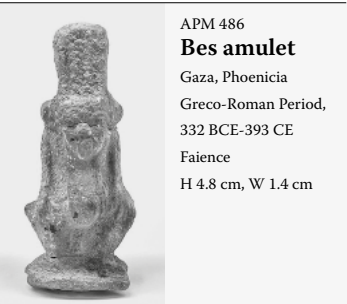
APM 168  
**Bes amulet**  
Amarna  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1350-1330 BCE  
Faience  
H 1.2 cm



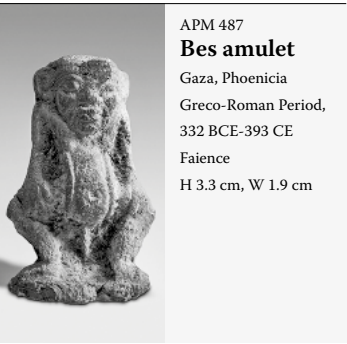
APM 172  
**Upper part of  
Bes amulet**  
Deir el-Bahri  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Faience  
H 3.5 cm



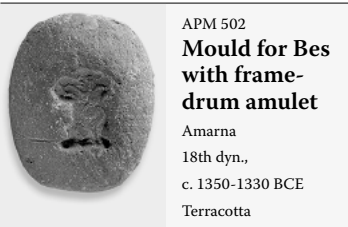
APM 201  
**Nude Bes with  
shield and  
sword**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 20.5 cm



APM 486  
**Bes amulet**  
Gaza, Phoenicia  
Greco-Roman Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Faience  
H 4.8 cm, W 1.4 cm



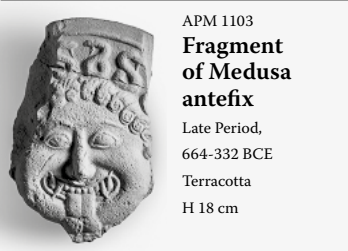
APM 487  
**Bes amulet**  
Gaza, Phoenicia  
Greco-Roman Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Faience  
H 3.3 cm, W 1.9 cm



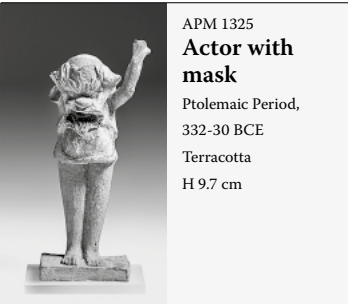
APM 502  
**Mould for Bes  
with frame-  
drum amulet**  
Amarna  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1350-1330 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 2.7 cm



APM 707  
**Lion head**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 12.7 cm



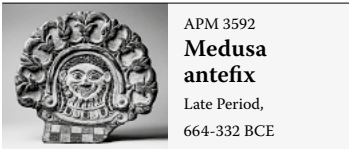
APM 1103  
**Fragment  
of Medusa  
antefix**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 18 cm



APM 1325  
**Actor with  
mask**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 9.7 cm



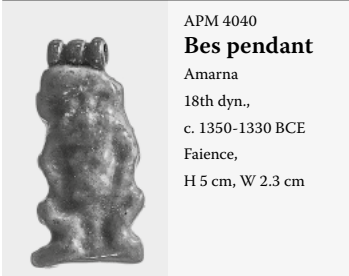
APM 3579  
**Young man  
dancing**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 15.2 cm



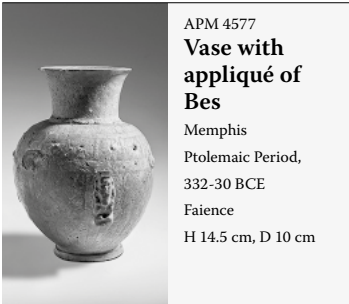
APM 3592  
**Medusa  
antefix**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 39 cm



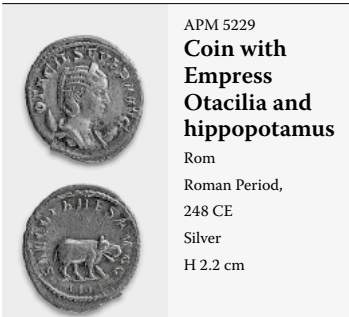
APM 3796  
**Relief frag-  
ment with  
Bes face**  
Amarna  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1350-1330 BCE  
Limestone  
H 8.5 cm, W 7 cm



APM 4040  
**Bes pendant**  
Amarna  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1350-1330 BCE  
Faience,  
H 5 cm, W 2.3 cm



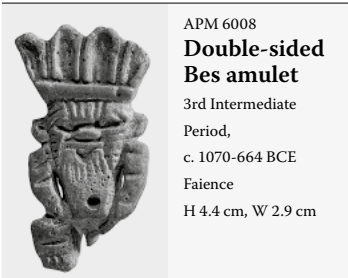
APM 4577  
**Vase with  
appliqué of  
Bes**  
Memphis  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Faience  
H 14.5 cm, D 10 cm



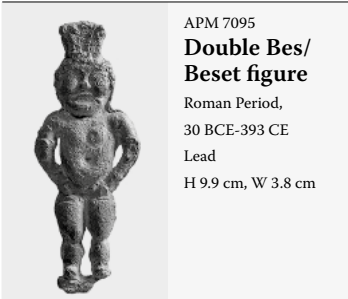
APM 5229  
**Coin with  
Empress  
Otacilia and  
hippopotamus**  
Rom  
Roman Period,  
248 CE  
Silver  
H 2.2 cm

114

115



APM 6008  
**Double-sided  
Bes amulet**  
3rd Intermediate  
Period,  
c. 1070-664 BCE  
Faience  
H 4.4 cm, W 2.9 cm



APM 7095  
**Double Bes/  
Beset figure**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Lead  
H 9.9 cm, W 3.8 cm



APM 7149  
**Bottle shaped  
as Beset**  
Memphis  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 11.8 cm



APM 7150  
**Bottle shaped  
as Bes with  
Roman kilt**  
Memphis  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 23.5 cm



APM 7151  
**Bes with  
feather crown  
and Roman kilt**  
Memphis  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 11.8 cm



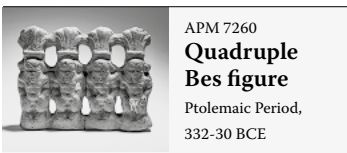
APM 7152  
**Harpocrates  
with  
cornucopia**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 4.6 cm



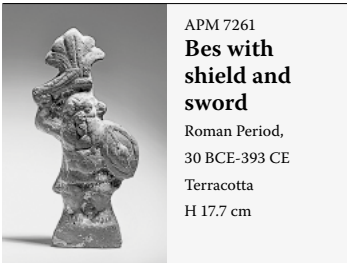
APM 7250  
**Nude Horus  
priest with  
phallus over  
shoulder**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 5.6 cm, W 2.8 cm



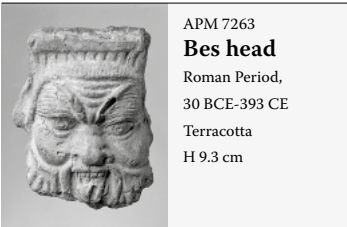
APM 7259  
**Standing Bes  
figure**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 23.3 cm



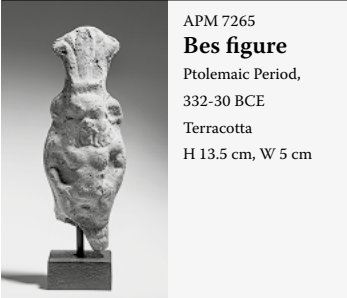
APM 7260  
**Quadruple  
Bes figure**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 10.8 cm, W 14 cm



APM 7261  
**Bes with  
shield and  
sword**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 17.7 cm



APM 7263  
**Bes head**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 9.3 cm



APM 7265  
**Bes figure**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 13.5 cm, W 5 cm



APM 7267  
**Bottle shaped  
as nude Beset  
with shield  
and sword**  
Memphis  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 28 cm

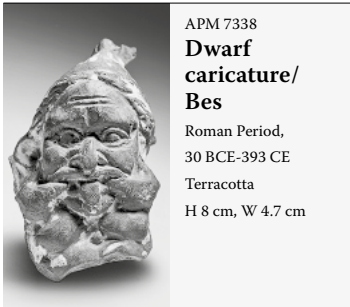


APM 7274  
**Bes with  
sword and  
snake**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 40.7 cm, W 20.8 cm



APM 7299  
**Harpocrates,  
naked with  
two lotus  
buds on head**  
Graeco-Roman  
Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 11.2 cm, W 6.8 cm





APM 7338  
**Dwarf caricature/  
Bes**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 8 cm, W 4.7 cm



APM 7395  
**Shawm player  
with phallus**  
Graeco-Roman  
Period,  
332 BCE.-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 7.8 cm, W 4.5 cm



APM 7399  
**Torch-holder  
with woman  
and Bes head**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 20.1 cm, D 6.3 cm



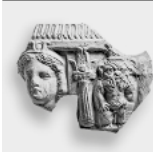
APM 7418  
**Bottle shaped  
as African  
head**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 13.1 cm, W 7.1 cm,  
D 8.3 cm



APM 7469  
**Woman  
“in labour” /  
Baubo**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 C  
Terracotta  
H 9.1 cm, W 7.2 cm



APM 7551  
**Large Bes  
vase**  
Late-Roman Period,  
200-393 CE  
Pottery  
H 70 cm



APM 7558  
**Potsherd with  
relief of Isis  
and Bes**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 4.2 cm



APM 7559  
**Cup with  
appliqué of  
dwarf playing  
pan flute**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 5.6 cm, W 4 cm



APM 7568  
**Bes mask**  
Roman Period,  
30-393 CE  
Faience  
H 11 cm, W 8 cm



APM 7596  
**Potsherd with  
Bes appliqué**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Faience  
H 6.7 cm, W 5 cm



APM 7631  
**Bes amulet  
with shield  
and sword**  
Naucratis  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Faience  
H 5.6 cm



APM 7681  
**Miniature  
flask shaped  
as Bes**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Faience  
H 4.7 cm, W 1.1 cm



APM 7683  
**Bes with  
amphora**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Faience  
H 4.3 cm



APM 7757  
**Stela with  
Tutu and Bes**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Limestone  
H 28 cm, W 35.5 cm



APM 7762  
**Stela with  
Bes holding  
a knife and  
snake, small  
woman**  
Saqqara  
Graeco-Roman  
Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Limestone  
H 45.5 cm, W 33 cm

116

117



APM 7792  
**Relief of lion**  
Graeco-Roman  
Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Limestone  
H 15.5 cm, W 25 cm



APM 7893  
**Scarab  
with Bes  
decoration**  
Phoenicia  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Jasper  
H 1.2 cm, W 1.7 cm



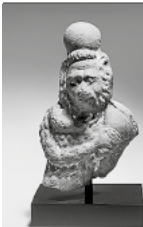
APM 7896  
**Scarab  
with Bes  
decoration**  
Cyprus  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Precious stone  
H 1.9 cm, W 1.5 cm



APM 7947  
**Stela with Bes  
and a smaller  
dancing  
Bes-figure**  
Graeco-Roman  
Period,  
332 BC-393 CE  
Limestone  
H 32 cm, W 23.5 cm



APM 7967  
**Dancing Bes  
with promi-  
nent phallus**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Limestone  
H 65 cm, W 35 cm



APM 8965  
**Upper part of  
monkey figure**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 9.9 cm, W 6.2 cm,  
D 3.9 cm



APM 10089  
**Mould for  
standing Bes  
figure**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 5.6 cm



APM 10117  
**Bes amulet**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Faience  
H 3.9 cm, W 1.3 cm



APM 11439  
**Mould for Bes  
head**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 4.5 cm, W 5.2 cm



APM 11440  
**Bes amulet**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 2.3 cm, W 1.1 cm



APM 12774  
**Bes amulet**  
3rd Intermediate  
Period,  
c. 1070-664 BCE  
Faience  
H 3.3 cm



APM 12781  
**Bes amulet**  
3rd Intermediate  
Period,  
c. 1070-664 BCE  
Faience  
H 3.6 cm

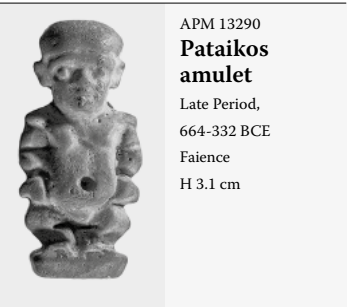


APM 13135  
**Two Bes  
figures car-  
rying phallus  
(fragmentary)**  
Graeco-Roman  
Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 9.4 cm



APM 13266  
**Taweret  
amulet**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 5.1 cm, W 2.3 cm





APM 13290  
**Pataikos amulet**

Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 3.1 cm



APM 13330  
**Torch-holder with Bes head**

Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 8.7 cm, W 4.1 cm,  
D 2.1 cm



APM 14156  
**Bes with feather crown and Roman kilt**

Mit-Rahinah,  
Memphis  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 12.2 cm



APM 14404  
**Upper part of Bes playing framedrum**

Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 4.4 cm, W 2.5 cm



APM 14415  
**Mug shaped as Bes head**

Graeco-Roman  
Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 11.5 cm, D 9.3 cm



APM 15701  
**Taweret amulet**

Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 6.3 cm, W 1.7 cm



APM Dortmund 146  
**Cippus stela with large Bes mask**

Late Period(?),  
664-332 BCE  
Serpentine  
H 13.4 cm,  
W 10.2 cm, D 2.2 cm

**Museum August Kestner,  
Hannover**



MusAK 1396  
**Fragment of frieze with Bes**

Graeco-Roman  
Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 16.5 cm, W 13.5 cm



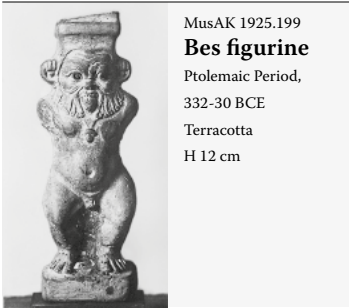
MusAK 1925.181  
**Lamp shaped as Beset**

Graeco-Roman  
Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 6.9 cm



MusAK 1925.183  
**Flask with Bes decoration**

Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Pottery  
H 6.9 cm, D 4.7 cm



MusAK 1925.199  
**Bes figurine**

Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 12 cm



MusAK 1925.209  
**Bes-Silenus carrying a jar**

Roman Period  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 10.5 cm



MusAK 1925.212  
**Nude Beset with Bes baby and jar**

Roman Period  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 9.1 cm, W 7.5 cm



MusAK 1925.218  
**Pilgrim flask with double Bes head**

Roman Period  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 5.4 cm, W 6.4 cm



MusAK 1925.230  
**Mould for double-headed Beset flask**

Graeco-Roman  
Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 10 cm, W 11 cm



MusAK 1926.285  
**Horus in military uniform**

Roman Period,  
30 BCE-332 CE  
Limestone  
H 25 cm, W 13.5 cm,  
D 8 cm



MusAK 1929.336  
**Mould for Bes amulet**

Terracotta  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1550-1300 BCE  
H 2.6 cm, W 2.3 cm



MusAK 1929.616  
**Lamp with Bes and Beset**

Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 7.3 cm, W 5.3 cm,  
D 5.1 cm



MusAK 1935.157a  
**Mould for Bes amulet**

Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 4.5 cm, W 2.7 cm,  
D 1.2 cm



MusAK 1935.157b  
**Bes amulet**

18th dyn.,  
c. 1550-1300 BCE  
Red faience  
H 3 cm



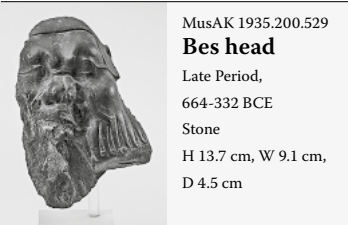
MusAK 1935.200.331  
**Model bed with relief**

New Kingdom,  
c. 1550-1070 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 17.2 cm, W 26.9 cm



MusAK 1935.200.379  
**Upper part of Bes figure**

New Kingdom,  
332-30 BCE  
Faience  
H 6.3 cm, W 4.9 cm,  
D 3.5 cm



MusAK 1935.200.529  
**Bes head**

Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Stone  
H 13.7 cm, W 9.1 cm,  
D 4.5 cm



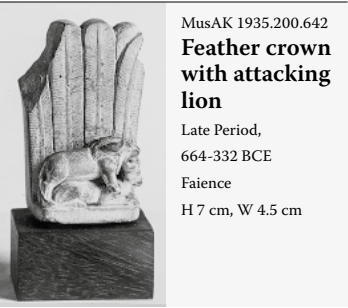
MusAK 1935.200.530  
**Head rest with Bes and Hathor**

Late Period,  
664-320 BCE  
Limestone  
H 16.3 cm, W 9.1 cm,  
D 8.4 cm



MusAK 1935.200.532  
**Nude woman on bed**

New Kingdom,  
c. 1550-1070 BCE  
Painted limestone  
H 7.7 cm, W 19 cm,  
D 5.7 cm



MusAK 1935.200.642  
**Feather crown with attacking lion**

Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 7 cm, W 4.5 cm



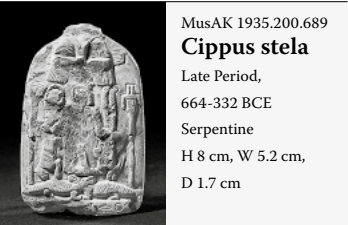
MusAK 1935.200.645  
**Rim of vessel**

Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 5 cm, W 6.2 cm,  
D 2 cm



MusAK 1935.200.688  
**Stela with Pantheistic Bes**

Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Serpentine  
H 15 cm, W 10.5 cm,  
D 3.7 cm



MusAK 1935.200.689  
**Cippus stela**

Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Serpentine  
H 8 cm, W 5.2 cm,  
D 1.7 cm



MusAK 1935.200.690  
**Cippus stela**

Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Limestone  
H 17 cm, W 8.3 cm,  
D 7.5 cm





MusAK 1935.200.691  
**Cippus stela**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Serpentine  
H 13.8 cm, W 10 cm,  
D 4.7 cm



MusAK 1935.200.705  
**Nude woman  
between Bes  
columns**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Limestone  
H 17 cm, W 11.3 cm,  
D 4.4 cm



MusAK 1935.200.722  
**Cosmetic jar  
with Bes relief**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Steatite  
H 6.5 cm, W 4.1 cm



MusAK 1935.200.726  
**Bes playing  
framedrum**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Bronze  
H 8.6 cm, W 2.6 cm



MusAK 1935.200.755  
**Fragment of  
Bes with Bes  
baby**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 13.7, W 9.7



MusAK 1935.200.848  
**Lantern with  
Bes face**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 6.8 cm



MusAK 1935.200.851  
**Lantern with  
Beset**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 7.3 cm



MusAK 1949.278d  
**Bes amulet**  
New Kingdom,  
c. 1550-1070 BCE  
Carnelian  
H 2.3 cm, W 1.4 cm



MusAK 1949.315  
**Winged  
sphinx with  
Bes head**  
Graeco-Roman  
Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Faience  
H 1.7 cm



MusAK 1949.340  
**Bes amulet,  
'coin'**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Faience  
D 2 cm



MusAK 1950.20  
**Bes shaped  
vessel**  
New Kingdom,  
c. 1550-1070 BCE  
Chrystal  
H 3 cm



MusAK 1950.50  
**Mould for Bes  
head**  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1550-1300 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 7 cm, W 7.1 cm,  
D 3.1 cm



MusAK 1950.52  
**Mould for Bes  
head**  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1550-1300 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 6.5 cm, W 4.7 cm,  
D 2.7 cm



MusAK 1950.59  
**Mould for  
lion with Bes-  
like head**  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1550-1300 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 3.9 cm, W 3.4 cm,  
D 1.3 cm



MusAK 1950.60  
**Mould for Bes  
amulet**  
19th dyn.,  
c. 1300-1200 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 3.45 cm, W 2.9 cm,  
D 1.7 cm



MusAK 1950.159  
**Sistrum  
handle with  
Bes standing  
on lions**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Bronze  
H 6.6 cm, W 3.2



MusAK 1951.3  
**Flask with  
African  
couple**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 5.1 cm, W 5.2 cm,  
D 3.2 cm



MusAK 1951.24  
**Bes with  
drum**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Faience  
H 4.4 cm



MusAK 1951.35  
**Cippus stela**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Serpentine  
H 4.8 cm, W 3 cm



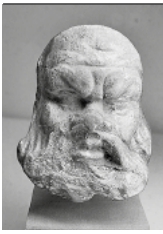
MusAK 1951.179  
**Amulet with  
Bes relief**  
Graeco-Roman  
Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Glass  
H 2.8 cm, W 1.7 cm,  
D 1.7 cm



MusAK 1952.143  
**Bes flanked by  
cobras**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Faience  
H 4.2 cm, W 3.9 cm,  
D 0.4 cm



MusAK 1952.145  
**Bes plaque**  
3rd Intermediate  
Period,  
c. 1070-664 BCE  
Faience  
H 4.3 cm, W 4.6 cm



MusAK 1966.74  
**Bes head**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 6.3 cm, W 3.1 cm,  
D 2.9 cm



MusAK 1970.27  
**Tomb relief  
with Bes in a  
gate**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Limestone  
H 33.5 cm, W 19 cm



MusAK 1983.21  
**Scarab  
with Bes  
decoration**  
3rd Intermediate  
Period,  
c. 1070-664 BCE  
Steatite  
H 3.8 cm, W 2.6 cm,  
D 1.6 cm



MusAK 1983.24  
**Fragment of  
Bes pendant**  
New Kingdom,  
c. 1550-1070 BCE  
Faience  
H 2.3 cm



MusAK 1987.53  
**Relief with  
priest wearing  
leopard skin**  
Old Kingdom,  
c. 2686-2181 BCE  
Painted limestone  
H 24.7 cm,  
W 15.3 cm, D 5.5 cm



MusAK 1993.3  
**Cosmetic jar  
shaped as Bes**  
26th dyn.,  
c. 664-525 BCE  
Faience  
H 15.3 cm



MusAK 2004.415  
**Sitting Bes  
with tenon on  
his head**  
3rd Intermediate  
Period,  
c. 1070-700 BCE  
Wood  
H 13.4 cm, W 8.8 cm,  
D 3.9 cm



MusAK 2007.292  
**Mould for Bes  
head**  
Greco-Roman Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 8 cm



MusAK 2008.320  
**Pendant  
shaped as  
dancing Bes**  
New Kingdom,  
c.1550-1070 BCE  
Gold  
H 3.8 cm, W 1.2 cm,  
D 0.4 cm





MusAK 2010.371  
**Phallic figure**  
New Kingdom,  
c. 1550-1070 BCE  
Indurated limestone  
H 6.6 cm, W 2.8 cm,  
D 7.2 cm



MusAK 2013.10  
**Vessel with  
Bes face**  
Persian Period,  
c. 500-400 BCE  
Alabaster  
H 8.4 cm, W 7.6 cm



MusAK 2019.1  
**Ring bezel  
with Bes as  
lute player**  
Amarna  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1350-1330 BCE  
Faience  
H 2.2 cm, W 1.3 cm,  
D 0.4 cm



MusAK 2019.2  
**Ring bezel  
with female  
lute player**  
Amarna  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1350-1330 BCE  
Faience  
H 1.3 cm, W 1.1 cm,  
D 0.2 cm



MusAK 2019.6a  
**Harpokrates  
on a phallus  
carried by two  
Bes figures**  
Greco-Roman Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 12 cm, W 14 cm,  
D 8 cm



MusAK 2019.6b  
**Harpokrates  
on a phallus  
carried by two  
Bes figures**  
Greco-Roman Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 25 cm, W 16 cm,  
D 8 cm



MusAK 2019.11  
**Part of a  
bridle**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Bronze  
H 9.8 cm, W 6.5 cm,  
D 0.9 cm



MusAK 2019.12  
**Bes jar amulet**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 1.8 cm, W 1.3 cm,  
D 0.9 cm



MusAK 2019.13  
**Bes amulet**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Blue glass  
H 2.3 cm, W 1 cm,  
D 0.9 cm



MusAK 2019.14  
**Bes amulet**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Egyptian blue  
H 2.9 cm, W, 1.2 cm,  
D 0.5 cm



MusAK 2019.15  
**Bes amulet,  
double sided**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 3.8 cm, W 2.8 cm,  
D 1.4 cm



MusAK 2019.16  
**Bes head**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 3.1 cm, W 3.5 cm,  
D 1.3 cm



MusAK 2019.17  
**Amulet with  
Bes and  
Anubis**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 2.8 cm, W 3 cm,  
D 1.2 cm



MusAK 2019.18  
**Miniature  
cippus**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 2.8 cm, W 1.4 cm,  
D 0.8 cm



MusAK 2019.19  
**Bes amulet**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 1.5 cm, W 1.2 cm,  
D 0.9 cm

122

123



MusAK 2019.21  
**Bes head**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 1.5 cm, W 1.5 cm,  
D 0.4 cm



MusAK 2066  
**Scarab with  
Bes motif**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Steatite  
H 1.5 cm, W 1.1 cm,  
D 0.7 cm



MusAK 2553  
**Bes statuette**  
Graeco-Roman  
Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Bronze  
H 4.8 cm, W 2.2 cm,  
D 1.5 cm



MusAK 2623  
**Bes pendant**  
New Kingdom,  
c. 1550-1075 BCE  
Faience  
H 3 cm



MusAK 2624  
**Bes amulet**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 2.1 cm



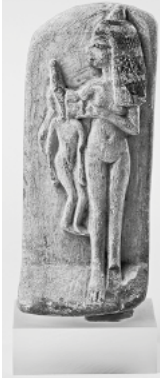
MusAK 2625  
**Bes amulet**  
Graeco-Roman  
Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Faience  
H 2.1 cm



MusAK 2694  
**Bes head**  
Graeco-Roman  
Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Glass  
H 1.2 cm, W 0.7 cm,  
D 0.7 cm



MusAK 2838  
**Bes amulet**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Glass  
H 1.2 cm, W 0.7 cm,  
D 0.7 cm



MusAK 2859  
**Plaque with  
nude woman  
and suckling  
child**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Limestone  
H 15.3 cm, 6 cm,  
D 4.2 cm



MusAK 2889  
**Head rest  
with Bes faces**  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1550-1300 BCE  
Wood  
H 17.6 cm, W 9 cm,  
D 18.9 cm



MusAK 2890  
**Head rest  
with Bes faces**  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1550-1300 BCE  
Wood  
H 16.6 cm,  
W 28.5 cm, D 8.1 cm



MusAK 3440  
**Cartouche-  
shaped pen-  
dant with Bes**  
25th dyn.,  
c. 747-664 BCE  
Glass  
H 1.7 cm, W 1 cm



MusAK 4538  
**Sitting woman  
supported  
by Bes and  
scarab at back**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Limestone  
H 18.4 cm, W 6.7 cm,  
D 1.7 cm

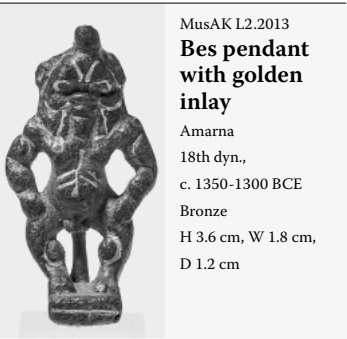


MusAK 4573  
**Fragment of  
Bes amulet  
with three Bes  
figures**  
Ptolemaic Period,  
332-30 BCE  
Faience  
H 3 cm, W 3.2 cm,  
D 0.7 cm



MusAK K2135  
**Scarab with  
Bes fighting a  
standing lion**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Jasper  
H 1.6 cm, W 1.25 cm





MusAK L2.2013  
**Bes pendant with golden inlay**  
Amarna  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1350-1300 BCE  
Bronze  
H 3.6 cm, W 1.8 cm,  
D 1.2 cm



MusAK L2.2016  
**Tutu figure**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Bronze  
H 3.1 cm, W 3.8 cm,  
D 7.6 cm



MusAK L3.2016  
**Bes statuette with sword and snake**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Bronze  
H 7.6 cm



MusAK L4.2019  
**Harpokrates with sky supported by Bes figures**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 9.4 cm, W 9.5 cm,  
D 5.4 cm



MusAK L5.2019  
**Plaque with theater mask**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Glass  
H 3 cm, W 3.2 cm,  
D 0.5 cm



MusAK L6.2016  
**Phallic amulet**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 4.1 cm, W 2.5 cm,  
D 2.5 cm



MusAK L7.2016  
**Dancing Bes and Beset, handle of sistrum**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Bronze  
H 2.7 cm, W 4.2 cm,  
D 2.7 cm



MusAK L7.2019  
**Small Bes relief**  
New Kingdom,  
c. 1550-1070 BCE  
Ivory  
H 5.9 cm, W 3.6 cm,  
D 0.5 cm



MusAK L8.2016  
**Mould for backside of Bes**  
Ptolemaic Period (?),  
332-30 BCE  
Terracotta  
H 4.8 cm, W 2.9 cm,  
D 1.8 cm



MusAK L8.2019  
**Bes-amulet**  
New Kingdom,  
c. 1550-1070 BCE  
Bone  
H 4.9 cm, W 2 cm,  
D 2 cm



MusAK L10.2011.3  
**Bes amulet**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 6.1 cm, W 2.45 cm,  
D 1.2 cm



MusAK L11.2014  
**Bell with Bes**  
Graeco-Roman  
Period,  
332 BCE-393 CE  
Bronze  
H 6.2 cm, W 5 cm,  
D 5 cm



MusAK L12.2019  
**Bes holding vessel**  
Amarna  
18th dyn.,  
c. 1350-1300 BCE  
Glass  
H 4.8 cm, W 3.5 cm,  
D 3 cm



MusAK L13.2016  
**Phallic amulet**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 3.1 cm, W 1.5 cm,  
D 3 cm



MusAK L13.2019  
**Bes as lyre player**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Bronze  
H 6 cm, W 2.5 cm,  
D 2.7 cm



MusAK L14.2019  
**Painted Bes face**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 20.3 cm, W 13 cm,  
D 6 cm



MusAK L17.2019  
**Scarab with Bes face**  
Ptolemaic Period (?),  
332-30 BCE  
Faience  
H 1.1 cm, W 1.7 cm,  
D 2.5 cm



MusAK L18.2019  
**Bes figure**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 36.7 cm



MusAK L19.2019  
**Bes amulet**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Bronze  
H 5.4 cm, W 3.7 cm,  
D 3.7 cm



MusAK L20.2019  
**Bes shaped vessel**  
26th dyn.,  
c. 664-525 BCE  
Faience  
H 6.4 cm



MusAK L22.2019  
**Bes amulet**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Silver  
H 3.6 cm, W 1.9 cm,  
D 1.1 cm



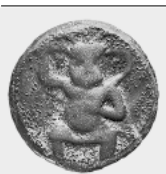
MusAK L23.2019  
**Bes amulet, double sided**  
Late Period,  
664-332 BCE  
Faience  
H 5.1 cm, W 2.7 cm,  
D 1.1 cm



MusAK L24.2019  
**1/8 Chalkos coin**  
Ibiza  
3rd century BCE  
Bronze  
D 1.1 cm



MusAK L25.2019  
**1/4 Chalkos coin**  
Ibiza  
3rd century BCE  
Bronze  
D 1.7 cm



MusAK L26.2019  
**Bes coin**  
Ibiza  
3rd century BCE  
Bronze  
D 1.6 cm



MusAK L27.2019  
**Semis coin**  
Ibiza  
1st century BCE  
Bronze  
D 2.3 cm



MusAK NN  
**Sistrum with dancing Bes and Beset**  
Roman Period  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Bronze  
H 20.4 cm

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PM 153  
**Amulet plaque with Bes**  
3rd Intermediate  
Period,  
c. 1070-664 BCE  
Faience  
H 4.5 cm



PM 221  
**Bes amulet**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Faience  
H 3.8 cm











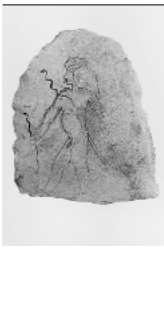
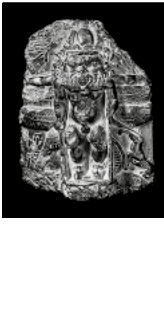


PM 248  
**Bes with baby Bes**  
3rd Intermediate  
Period,  
c. 1070-664 BCE  
Faience  
H 7.3 cm, W 3.6 cm



PM 426  
**Horbeit stela**  
Ny Rige,  
c. 1550-1070 BCE  
Kalksten  
H 10.4 cm, W 6.3 cm,  
D 2.7 cm



PM 664  
**Beset figure**  
Roman Period,  
30 BCE-393 CE  
Terracotta  
H 20 cm

	<p>PM 938</p> <p><b>Winged Bes</b></p> <p>Roman Period Period, 30 BCE-393 CE</p> <p>Terracotta</p> <p>H 8 cm</p>
	<p>PM 942</p> <p><b>Pilgrim flask with double Bes head</b></p> <p>Roman Period, 30 BCE-393 CE</p> <p>Terracotta</p> <p>H 8 cm</p>
	<p>PM 943</p> <p><b>Pilgrim flask with double Bes head</b></p> <p>Roman Period, 30 BCE-393 CE</p> <p>Terracotta</p> <p>H 4.9 cm</p>
	<p>PM 1026</p> <p><b>Bes statue</b></p> <p>Ptolemaic Period, 332-30 BCE</p> <p>Limestone</p> <p>H 46.5 cm, W 22.5 cm, D 1.7 cm</p>
	<p>PM 1180</p> <p><b>Mould for Bes figure</b></p> <p>Ptolemaic Period, 332-32 BCE</p> <p>Plaster</p> <p>H 7.7 cm</p>
	<p>PM 6162</p> <p><b>Bes pendant with sword</b></p> <p>Roman Period, 30 BCE-393 CE</p> <p>Bronze</p> <p>H 2.8 cm, W 1.4 cm, D 0.4 cm</p>
	<p>PM 2872</p> <p><b>Bes as lyre player</b></p> <p>Roman Period Period, 30 BCE-393 CE</p> <p>Bronze</p> <p>H 2.1 cm</p>
	<p>PM 4887</p> <p><b>Bes vase</b></p> <p>18. dyn., ca. 1550-1300 BCE</p> <p>Pottery</p> <p>H 24.8 cm, D 14.9 cm</p>
	<p>PM 5268</p> <p><b>Ostracon with Bes with snakes</b></p> <p>New Kingdom, c. 1550-1070 BCE</p> <p>Limestone</p> <p>H 11.2 cm, W 9.3 cm, D 2.5 cm</p>
	<p>PM 5887</p> <p><b>Stela with pantheistic Bes</b></p> <p>Ptolemaic Period, 332-30 BCE</p> <p>Black stone</p> <p>H 13.8 cm, W 10.6 cm, D 3.9 cm</p>
	<p>PML/Sch 3</p> <p><b>Bes figure</b></p> <p>Late Period, 664-332 BCE</p> <p>Egyptian blue</p> <p>H 12 cm, W 6.1 cm, D 3.8 cm</p>
	<p>PML/Sch 5-6</p> <p><b>Two bed legs with Bes</b></p> <p>New Kingdom, c. 1550-1070 BCE</p> <p>Wood</p> <p>H 62/62.6 cm, W 13.5/13 cm, D 5.1/4.1 cm</p>

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<p><b>2015</b></p> <p>Finds from the Excavations of J. Garstang in Meroe and F.L.L. Griffith in Kawa in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, <i>Meddelelser fra Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek</i>, Ny Serie nr. 17. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.</p>	<p><b>Jørgensen, M. 1998</b></p> <p><i>Egypt II (1550-1080 BC.)</i>. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.</p>	<p><b>Mogensen, M. 1930</b></p> <p><i>La Collection Égyptienne de la Glyptothèque Ny Carlsberg</i>. Levin &amp; Munksgaard, Copenhagen.</p>
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Exhibition architects: Alexander Haslund Damsbo and Henrik  
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Exhibition graphic design: All the Way to Paris

Original exhibition concept and selection of the exhibited objects:  
Cooperation between Christian E. Loeben (Hannover), Olaf E.  
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Pierson Museum, Amsterdam as head coordinator by Director Wim  
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The demon god Bes was above all a protector of Egypt, as manifested in a variety of ways over the ages. This publication takes a closer look at the themes of the exhibition *Bes. Demon God: Protector of Egypt*. Who was Bes? What role did he play in sexuality, as a musician or alongside other gods? And why was he so popular in Nubia, Egypt's southern neighbour?

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