

Basic Detail Report



Statuette

Date

664-525 BC

Primary Maker

Giovanni D'Athanasia

Medium

Paint, wood, plaster

Description

This object is from Ancient Egypt, and has been estimated to date from the period known in Egyptology known as Late Period. This is equivalent to between 664 and 332 BC, so this piece is around 2500 years old. The label, written by one of the original collectors Richard Cuming or his son Henry Syer Cuming (probably Henry), says: "HAWK, emblem of Osiris (in wood painted), from the cover of a case for [illegible] the viscera, Thebes, Egypt" This means it is the hawk symbol from the top of a chest which would have held Canopic jars containing body parts. Ancient Egyptian gods and goddesses were often represented as having animal as well as human features, usually heads of symbolic animals important to that god or goddess. In fact, the Hawk is associated with Horus, the son of Osiris and the goddess Isis and is not the direct emblem of Osiris but could be said to be indirectly associated with it. Canopic jars and chests hold body parts from the deceased person. It was believed that in order to get into the afterlife, people had to take with them everything they needed, which would be put in their graves alongside them. Ancient Egyptians practised embalming, a way of preserving the body and its parts after death. Organs would be removed and stored in jars, so that they could accompany the body and soul to the afterlife. Collecting note: how did this piece come to be here in Walworth? The Cuming family, who lived on Walworth Road in the 18th and 19th centuries, were collectors with a desire to create a miniature British Museum in Walworth. Their house was filled to the brim with objects, which they later left to the local authority to create the Cuming Museum in 1906. From the early 19th century onwards, Egypt was a target for collectors and traders, desperate to excavate, and profit from the trade in, ancient artefacts, despite it being illegal. This piece, and several others in the Cuming collections, are associated with Giovanni D'Athanasia (1798-1854). He, and many others like him, went into Egypt and hunted for artefacts to sell on the open market. D'Athanasia sold a lot of his "finds" to the British Museum and also to smaller collectors like the Cumings, either directly or indirectly through dealers. This hawk survived the fire which damaged the Cuming museum galleries in 2013 but unfortunately it lost some of its painted surface and is no longer quite as fresh looking as the image.

Dimensions

Object/Work: 138 x 150 x 50 mm