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Cult Statuette of Pepy I and the Horus Falcon

James Romano: This statue shows King Pepy I of the 6th Dynasty. He's seated on a throne and holds in front of him a shepherd's crook and a flail. These were two very ancient symbols in Egypt, referring back to the agricultural god Osiris. The crook was used in herding sheep because Osiris, and by extension the king, was the shepherd of his people. The other object is a flail or a whip. Its exact significance is a point of debate, but clearly it had none of the pastoral and passive qualities of the crook.

Now I ask you to walk around the back of the statue and look at the falcon that perches on the back of the king's throne. This bird, this falcon, was vital to the composition because it represented Pepy's alter ego. You see, in ancient Egypt, the king was divine. He was the living sky god Horus, who, when he was up in the air, was shown as a falcon. The falcon had to be with Pepy, because the falcon was Pepy.