

DAVID AARON



Bronze Siren

5th to 4th Century B.C.

Greek or Etruscan

Bronze

H:5.5 cm

Sirens were dangerous bird-like females who tempted sailors with their hauntingly beautiful song. In Homer's *Odyssey* (XII, 39) Odysseus and his sailors were warned about the lethal consequences of succumbing to the music of the sirens. Odysseus had to be lashed to the mast of his ship, and his sailors filled their ears with beeswax in order to avoid the sirens' allure.

After centuries of verbal story-telling in the region, the Homeric epics were written down around the end of the 8th century or the beginning of the 7th century B.C. And although no visual description was given by Homer, by the 7th century B.C., sirens were regularly depicted in art as human-headed birds, possibly influenced by the Ba -bird of Egyptian religion. In early Greek art, the sirens were generally represented as large birds with women's heads, bird feathers and scaly feet.

This beautifully modelled figure was possibly an attachment or terminal to a bronze vessel or mirror. Although the shaping and lack of attachment loops or flat surface plates suggest that this could also have been a stand-alone votive figure. With a placid face, upright body, slightly flaring incised wings and claw-like talons, this female siren has close comparables found in the metropolitan museum, New York

(<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/256250>) and the British Museum (1865,0720.46), although both are lacking the definition and beauty of the present example.