

A SPOOL PYXIS

CycladicMarble

D (base): 13.8 cm – D (lid): 13 cm

Reference: 18729



This object, larger than the average size, reproduces the “classical” shape of the Cycladic pyxis: the profile is elegant and the dimensions are well-balanced. A groove allows to perfectly adapt the lid to the body.

The outlines of the lid and of the base are flanged compared to the straight shape of the body, which makes the vessel look like a spool. The wall of the vessel and the short vertical portion of the lid are furrowed with accurate, incised horizontal lines. Their presence is a distinctive feature of this type of containers, but their meaning remains enigmatic: perhaps were they a simple decoration or, as P. Getz-Gentle suggested, a symbolic pattern related to the horizontal lines that adorn the abdomen of some supposedly pregnant Cycladic figurines. Unlike the usual typology, the base of the piece here is slightly curved, while the lid – the diameter of which is a bit smaller than that of the base – is flat: both elements are pierced symmetrically, near the rim, by two small holes which served to close and/or hang the pyxis from a cord (there were usually four rather than two holes).

Along with the famous figurines, stone vessels are among the objects that most commonly symbolize the activity of the inhabitants of the Cyclades in the late Neolithic period and during the Bronze Age: marble was the material par excellence for Cycladic sculptors, but other rocks such as steatite or schist were used to carve vessels. From a technical point of view, the precise circular shapes and the regular traces on the surface of the stone suggest the use of a potter’s wheel, yet rudimentary, during the manufacturing process. On the other hand, the finishing touches were made by polishing, using sand or emery.

The exact purpose of these “boxes” is unknown: some examples still retain traces of pigments in the inside, even in the lid. Their current name results from the presence of the lid and from their similarity, probably accidental, with the pyxides shaped by the Greek potters of the Classical period. Our pyxis is a beautiful example of this type of

object, both for its excellent condition and for its perfect outline.

CONDITION

Complete and in excellent condition, aside from a few chips on the rim. Two small labels are glued, one in the lid (91.130b) and the other inside the body (91.130a).

PROVENANCE

Ex-American private collection, 1980s-1990s.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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