

ASSYRIAN FAIENCE JAR WITHOUT HANDLES

Assyrian, 8th-7th century B.C.

black)

H:7.1 cm

Reference: 25510



25510

Despite its current condition, this piece is remarkable for its careful workmanship and especially for its dimensions; faience is indeed a material that does not always suit such large vessels. The simple shape contrasts with the decoration, characterized by a rich polychromy and by the figural scene painted on the central part of the jar. The oval body has an elegant regular profile that terminates at the foot in a small disk in low relief (but the jar cannot stand by itself). The upper shoulder turns gracefully into a high neck, slightly flared, surmounted by a thick rounded lip. There are two small circular holes, probably ancient, pierced in the upper body; their meaning remains enigmatic.

The surface (including the inside of the vessel) is entirely covered with a pale blue glaze, except for the two friezes that decorate the shoulder and the maximum circumference of the jar. On the yellow shoulder, the potter has painted twenty-three pointed languettes in alternating yellow, white and pale blue.

Viewed from above, they form a large flower whose center corresponds to the mouth of the jar. The main frieze represents an animal scene twice, similar though not identical, recalling the standard repertory of Near Eastern art: a) separated by a yellow/white-colored stylized palmette supported by a pedestal, two ibexes are depicted face-to-face and in the act of getting up (their hindquarters are already raised, but one foreleg of each animal is still bent on the ground); b) the scene is almost the same, but smaller, and a tree (or shrub) with a thin and sinuous trunk, adorned with small triangular leaves, replaces the palmette between the quadrupeds. The contours and anatomical details of the animals, as well as the outlines of the leaves and friezes, are highlighted by thin black lines. Large vessels comparable in size, manufacturing technique, shape and decoration have been excavated at Assur, Nimrud and Khirbet Qasrij, in northern Mesopotamia, near the banks of the Tigris; the specimens said to come from Ziwiye and Hasanlu, in northern Iran, appear to be Mesopotamian imports. The

most common forms of the repertory are jars and large cylindrical buckets. Animals such as wild goats and antelopes, facing off and separated by a tree or placed in a stylized natural environment (rocks, plants, etc.), constitute practically the only decorative theme of these vessels; human figures are rare.

Although large faience vessels of similar decoration and size (such as our jar, but also large cylindrical buckets) have been found in many private houses at Assur (sometimes dated to the post-Assyrian period and used as funerary urns), archeologists think that these objects were made mainly for religious purposes in the temples or that they belonged to the inventory of the royal palaces. The habitual presence of glaze inside these jars indicates that they were probably intended to store and/or to transport liquids. They can be dated approximately to the 8th-7th century B.C.

CONDITION

Vessel reassembled from large fragments, incomplete in places and partially repaired; surface slightly chipped and cracked, original luster now lost, but polychromy well preserved (including inner jar and neck), colors slightly faded.

PROVENANCE

Ex-Sigmund Waltz Collection, Germany, 1970s.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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nos. 128-129.

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blue background).

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1966, p. 42-43, nos. 49-50.