

CENSER WITH A LYING BULL STATUETTE

Greek-Cypriot, Punic (Cypro-Phoenician), 8th-7th century B.C.

Bronze

Height: 15.4 cm , diameter: 16.3 cm

Reference: 10068



This Phoenician bronze censer, or incense burner, is composed of three parts that were molded separately. The base, first, is a cup surmounted by a wide horizontal rim under which appears a pierced ball, or pommel, taking the shape of a bud, in which the upper element, now lost, would have been inserted. This base supports a cylindrical lid decorated with two rows of triangular patterns pierced in openwork. This lid is topped by a lying bull, attached from the inside with two nails. The animal, whose rendering is very realistic, is represented with its mouth open and its tongue hanging out, as if suffering from the heat radiated by the incense burned below. The eyes, nostrils and hair on the top of the head are incised, while the skin folds on the neck and on the tail are rendered in relief.

Stylistically, this censer is a perfect example of the artistic influences and intense exchanges between the various Mediterranean cultures.

The bud-shaped pommel has an exact parallel in a Phoenician torch support discovered in Cyprus and now housed in the Louvre (Caubet 1976, no. 17), while the overall shape of the piece recalls a complete censer excavated in Santa Giusta (Sardinia), now in the Abis Collection, in Oristano (Morstadt 2008, no. OF 1a/9, pp. 138 and 389, pl. 18). The only obvious difference is that the Sardinian censer is surmounted by a bull's head and not by the entire animal. On the other hand, a bovid identical to ours and in the same lying position was discovered in Alcalá del Río (southern Spain) and is now housed in the Archeological Museum of Seville (Morstadt 2008, no. OF 1a/10, pp. 140 and 389, pl. 29).

One may note how a simple-looking artifact reveals, in each of its parts, the power of the Phoenician artistic influence across the whole Mediterranean basin. The fact that all major components of the parallels are gathered here might even allow us to consider, with the usual caution, that our example could be an original Phoenician or Cypriot production, a sort of prototype that inspired the Sardinian censer for the shape and the Spanish bull for the meticulous rendering of the bovid.

Chronologically, our censer appears to have been produced in the 7th century B.C. Despite the distances between their places of discovery, all three mentioned parallels can be dated to much the same period:

8th to 7th century B.C. for the torch support in the Louvre, 7th century B.C. for the bull in the Museum of Seville, first half of the 7th to late 6th century B.C. for the complete censer in the Abis Collection.

CONDITION

Complete and virtually intact, despite minor chips. Beautiful grainy green patina.

PROVENANCE

Ex-Swiss private collection, Lugano, Switzerland; acquired in 1998.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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