

CIRCULAR CENSER

Ne-Mesopotamian, Mid to late 3rd millennium BC

Gold

Height: 9 cm, diameter: 17.4 cm

Reference: 16428



This censer is composed of three assembled elements. The body and the foot were hammered from the same gold leaf, but the bottom of the vessel is a small disk that was made separately and soldered to the upper foot. The lid is pierced by many small holes, made with a very thin punch, arranged in straight lines.

The piece is as simple as it is elegant in shape. The body, mounted on a small trumpet-shaped foot, has a triangular profile, with a high vertical rim supporting the slightly convex circular lid.

Exactly how the object was utilized is uncertain. The presence of a cap on the bottom, which was no doubt difficult to seal completely, indicates that the vessel was not intended to contain liquids. It would therefore have been a censer for solid substances that gradually freed their scent through the lid or for incense sticks inserted into the small holes pierced in the lid.

Although no archeological or historical evidence enables us to confirm the precise use of this artifact, its shape clearly indicates its origin and date, since it is attested for gold drinking cups and also for small cosmetic containers discovered in the royal tombs of Ur and dated to around 2600 B.C. (Woolley 1934, pl. 160a, 161 and 239).

Exhibited: Artempo: Where Time Become Art , Palazzo Fortuny, Venice, June-October 2007.

Published in the catalogue of the exhibition mentioned above

CONDITION

Virtually intact; polished surface, minor deformations and irregularities due to ancient use. Partially cracked rim

PROVENANCE

Ex-Sam Dubiner Collection, Israel, collected in the 1950s-1960s

BIBLIOGRAPHY

On Mesopotamian metal vessels, see:

MÜLLER-KARPE M., Metallgefäße in Iraq I, II/14, Stuttgart, 1993, nos. 1129-1133, pl. 77-78.

On gold vessels from Ur, see:

WOOLLEY C.L., Ur Excavations: Vol. II, The Royal Cemetery, London, 1934.