

EGYPTIAN FAIENCE CIRCULAR PYXIS WITH A LID

Ne-Syrian, Middle Bronze Age (17th century B.C.)

Faience

H: 4.6 cm - D: 7.8 cm

Reference: 15664



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The circular lid is too small to have belonged to this pyxis and is therefore not pertinent: its upper surface does not retain any traces of glaze, but only a cross and dots (?) painted in black. The interior is black. Two symmetrical holes would have allowed the threading of a string to attach this lid to a vessel.

The body of the pyxis is globular but squashed. The base is circular and flat. The low vertical neck has two tenon-handles that were pierced vertically to hold the lid or another type of closing system in place. The decoration painted in black over the light blue glaze is extremely simple and limited to a series of black dots located at the level of the maximum diameter. The neck and probably the edge of the base were once painted.

During the Middle Bronze Age (especially between the 18th and the 17th century B.C.), the production of faience objects spread throughout a large portion of the Near East, including Egypt, the Levant, Mesopotamia, the Iranian plateau, Anatolia, and the Aegean world (Crete). On many Levantine sites (mostly in Ugarit, in modern-day Syria), archaeological excavations have uncovered several small vessels probably meant to store unguents or precious liquids. The technique of their manufacture and decoration were very similar to those used on this pyxis; in fact, the two closest parallels for this form come from Ugarit.

In addition, the decorative technique with a light blue background highlighted with patterns painted in black, imported from Egypt or inspired by Egyptian faience, has been used for a wide range of objects, including small vessels, statuettes that may represent a deity, pendants in the shape of fruits or animals, and bottles and flasks that copy Egyptian vessels.

CONDITION

The pyxis is complete and virtually intact. The light blue glaze, partially effaced, would have covered the entire exterior of the body, while the interior is painted in black. Some marks, visible on the base, suggest the use of a pernette (a small terracotta support) during the firing process.

PROVENANCE

Acquired by M. Sleiman Aboutaam in Beirut in the beginning of 1980's; Gallery Antiquarium, New York.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

In general on Levantine faience vessels:

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