

ROMAN FAIENCE OINOCHOE WITH A VINE BRANCH IN RELIEF

Ro-Imperial, 1st century A.D.

Faience

H : 13 cm

Reference: 14896



reference 14896

The neck is high and cylindrical, the flat lip is equipped with a spout; the narrow shoulder was modeled with a stick; the semi-spherical body is supported by a circular base; the vertical handle is ribbon-shaped. The decoration in low relief runs all around the vessel. It is composed of two identical branches of wild vine with triangular leaves and corymbs. The branches, certainly made from the same mold, appear to be suspended from the shoulder of the oinochoe at the level of their central leaf. This motif, which is obviously related to Dionysiac iconography, confirms the use of this form as a jug for serving wine.

Excluding products from Naukratis and/or Rhodes from the Orientalizing period, Greek potters never really adopted faience as a material for the manufacturing of vessels or statuettes. Even in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, artists chose basic terra-cotta simply covered with glaze to render the shiny effect of a surface imitating the appearance of metal. This process was rather complicated. It probably originated in the Near East, and became popular first in Asia Minor and then in Italy. It required two firing phases: the first to fire the vessel that had been modeled on a wheel and the second to fix (cool) the leaded glazes, recognizable by their characteristic yellow-brown coloration (the greener shades were obtained by adding copper oxide). Despite production of high-quality vessels and their wide geographic distribution, the success of glazed pottery remained rather limited, certainly because of the competition of glass, which from the first century onward supplanted ceramics as a raw material for the manufacture of all kinds of vessels. According to the classification of A. Hochuli-Gysel, this oinochoe would be the work of one of the most important workshops in the first century A.D., located in the port city of Tarsus in Cilicia (a type 2 jug, Tarsus workshop, group 3). Among the closest parallels for this piece is a jug housed in the Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria, which probably comes from the same workshop.

CONDITION

This oinochoe is complete and virtually intact, except for minor chips. The beige terracotta is covered with brown glaze inside the vessel and on the neck, green glaze on the body and under the base. Irregular dark green drips adorn the neck.

PROVENANCE

Acquired on the Swiss art market in 2001.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Typological and chronological classification of this form:

HOCHULI-GYSEL, A., *Kleinasiatische glasierte Reliefkeramik* (Bern, 1977), p. 46 (type 2), pp. 170-71, nos. T217, T225 (Tarsus workshop, group 3).

Other parallels:

Antiken aus Rheinischem Privatbesitz (Bonn, 1973), pp. 92-93, nos. 135, 136.

NENNA, M.-D., et al., *La vaisselle en faïence d'époque gréco-romaine: Catalogue du Musée gréco-romain d'Alexandrie* (Cairo, 2000), p. 402, no. 629.