



Cosmetic vessel on a stand

Not on display

Title/Description: Cosmetic vessel on a stand

Object Type: Vessel

Materials: Steatite

Measurements: h. 62 x w. 40 x d. 38 mm

Accession Number: RLS 36

Historic Period: Dynasty XVIII (c. 1570-1293 BC)

Production Place: Africa, Egypt

Credit Line: Bequeathed by Lady Sainsbury, 2014

The vase was probably once provided with a flat disk top, and doubtless originally was used as a container for *kohl*, a cosmetic used for painting the eyelids and eyebrows. It was much favoured by women, not only for decoration but also as a protection for the eyes against the harsh glare of the sun. *Kohl* was also attributed with healing properties.

This vase is somewhat more elaborate than most surviving containers for *kohl*, though some close parallels can be cited (see for example Burlington, 1895: pl.20; Wallis, 1898: 14. pl. 8.8; Kayser, 1969: 58.9; Vandier d'Abbadie, 1972: nos. OT243-4', Boston, 1982: nos. 267-8). There is a band of petal-like decoration below the rim. Below this, the encircling openwork panel consists of a winged Bes figure represented frontally, with serpents flanking his head and bunches of what are possibly flowers or feathers in his hands. He in turn is flanked by two other Bes figures with *sa*-amulets (signifying 'protection') between. One of these Bes figures holds knives, the other proffers a vase. On the opposite side of the panel another winged Bes in profile with serpents holds aloft tiny plaques mounted on *neb* (or basket) signs, each plaque engraved with the hieroglyphs *ankh* ('life') and *was* ('dominion'). Bes is flanked by figures of the goddess Taueris, who has the head of a crocodile and the body of a hippopotamus. She is closely connected with childbirth in the role of a protector. Here she is shown holding knives, and before her is a *sa*-amulet.

Bes, usually depicted as a fearsome dwarf with a feathered head-dress, is a genial god, pre-eminently associated with the protection of mankind from malevolent powers of all kinds. His other major role was to protect women against the hazards of childbirth.

The stand was apparently made separately and then cemented to the vase, but they have come apart. The former is in the guise of a table or altar with short legs, and is provided with a cornice.

Provenance

Purchased by Lisa Sainsbury from Peter Sharrer on 13 June 1979.

Bequeathed to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 2014 by Lisa Sainbury.
