



Large vase

On display**Title/Description:** Large vase**Object Type:** Vase**Materials:** Porphyry**Measurements:** w. 289 mm**Accession Number:** 1044**Historic Period:** Nagada II-Dynasty I (c. 3600-3000 BC)**Production Place:** Africa, Egypt**Credit Line:** Purchased with support of the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust, 1991

Vases cut in a variety of stones, both soft and hard, are among the commonest of Egyptian artefacts, particularly in the Predynastic period and the first six historical dynasties, when they were favoured as luxury items in royal and private tombs. It is probable that most would have contained foodstuffs, drink or precious ointments for use in the next world. However, if they were placed in the tombs empty they are still likely to have symbolised their intended contents, which could be called into being by magical means. When not provided with separate lids, these vessels were sealed with a piece of strong linen or other material, and securely tied.

A variety of types are shown here, notable among them the massive compressed spherical example (no. 224). Four of them are furnished with two lugs, pierced horizontally from each end, by which they may have been suspended. No. 225 has greenish (copper?) deposits adjacent to both lugs. Comparable examples are illustrated by Khouli (1978: pls. 55-7); for a technical discussion of lapidary work, see Aston (1994).

Cyril Aldred & Geoffrey T. Martin, 1997

Entry taken from *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection* 3 volume catalogue, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997)

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

Some objects seem to step out of time and place and enter into another space. I often think this when I stand in the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection among the Ancient Egyptian works fashioned in wax, ceramic, wood, metal, and stone. This fabulous vase, for example, is the largest of a small group of predynastic stone vessels which were already ancient when Christ was born.

Its purpose and function, the most obvious things about it for those who knew it when it was new, are pretty much lost to us. We can't even be certain what was put into it, assuming it was a vase. But in so many ways this matters less than what it means now. The vase sends an echo down the centuries that tells us artistic sensibility, and the skills that accompany it, are fundamental to the

human condition; it shows us that pristine simplicity, the natural pattern-work of stone, and the poetry of weight, can resonate for us just as they did for those who saw it fifty centuries ago. It sits well with Cubism, Secessionism, Art Deco, and most forms of Abstraction. In so doing, it reminds us that through the centuries and across nations, the space I refer to in my first sentence has always existed, even if it wasn't described. It was called both the *aesthetic dimension* and *significant form* by modern thinkers. And by placing it in their collection, Robert and Lisa Sainsbury showed an innate understanding of what this space was about.

Paul Greenhalgh, Executive Director, Sainsbury Centre

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAPLarge vases like these were laboriously shaped from single blocks of stone. Their production was highly skilled and time-consuming; the hieroglyph of a hand-drill, used for hollowing out the vessel cores, also became the symbol for 'craftsman' generally. Stone for these vases was sourced from quarries in the eastern desert. The material, time and resources required for their production highlight centralised power and royal wealth, even at this time.

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1991 on the advice of Robert Sainsbury out of funds provided by the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust.
