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EGYPTIAN

ALABASTER JAR

EARLY DYNASTIC PERIOD, 1ST-2ND DYNASTY

3400-2980 B.C.

Alabaster

Height: 5.4 cm, 6 cm diameter

Provenance:

Mrs Caroline Ransom Williams;

Gifted to the Toledo Museum of Art, 1943;

Toledo Museum of Art (accession no. 1943.50);

De-accessioned 2017

In ancient Egypt, a woman's toilette consisted of a retinue of petite jars for storing perfumes, oils, and eye makeup. For the most aristocratic women, these vessels would be fashioned from stone, such as Egyptian alabaster (as here), harder stones such as diorite, or even semi-precious stones such as jasper or amethyst. Jars of similar form can also be found in faience and pottery, sometimes painted in imitation of the stone examples. The basic form, with a broad ovoid body, short foot, and wide flat rim, remains relatively consistent with only moderate variation throughout the millennia of the Pharaonic period.

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In ancient Egyptian society, stone was regarded as the most permanent of materials in the Egyptian environment, and, as such, objects created in stone were imbued with a quality of permanence which transcended time. Anything placed within such a stone vessel was likewise believed to remain eternal and unchanged. The creamy-white colouring of alabaster also connoted purity and cleanliness, so that the vessel remained uncontaminated and anything placed within it was thought to remain eternally unsullied.

This vessel was formerly in the collection of Caroline Ransom Williams (1872-1952) America's first professionally trained female Egyptologist.