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COSMETIC JAR

EGYPTIAN

NEW KINGDOM, EARLY EIGHTEENTH DYNASTY

CIRCA 1550-1450 BC

Stone

Dimensions: 13.4 cm High

Provenance:

Maurice Bouvier (1901-1981) Collection, Alexandria, acquired between 1930 and 1959.
Bouvier Collection, Switzerland, 1959-2019.

Comparative Literature:

W. C. Hayes, 'The Tomb of Nefer-khēwet and His Family', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Vol. 30, No. 11, Part 2: The Egyptian Expedition 1934-1935 (Nov., 1935), pp. 17-36, esp. p. 30, fig. 13, and figs 15 and 16.

R.E. Freed, *Egypt's Golden Age: The Art of Living in the New Kingdom, 1558-1085 BC* (Boston, 1981).

C. Lilyquist, *Egyptian Stone Vessels: Khian through Tutmosis IV* (New York, 1995), p. 31, cat. 43 (fig.55), p.123, fig.163.

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The ancient Egyptians' consummate skill in creating exquisite vessels from a wide variety of beautiful stones can be traced back to as early as Predynastic times, long before they turned their attention to the sculpting of stone statues, for which they are now so famed. Using sophisticated technologies including drills, saws and lathes, these talented craftsmen were able to produce myriad styles and designs, each with particular functions. The significance of stone vases to the Egyptian cultural record, and the beauty ascribed to them even in antiquity, is charmingly conveyed by the hieroglyphic representation of a counterweight drill in the writing of the noun for 'art'. Regarded as the most durable material in the Egyptian landscape, the choice of stone imbued these vases with characteristics of permanence, their contents thereby thought to remain unsullied for eternity.

The present cosmetic jar demonstrates the Egyptian artisan's expertise in producing profoundly harmonious, balanced, and elegant vessels even on a petite scale. Of an unusual, rich tabacco-hued stone, it comprises a voluptuous, rounded body, with wide, gently flaring neck, and stands on a low ring foot. The design conforms to similar examples dating to the early New Kingdom, during the reigns of Tuthmosis I to Tuthmosis III. Considered one of the great ages of Egyptian cultural history, the advent of the New Kingdom ushered in a period of great power and concomitant wealth, which gave rise to a growing taste for luxury goods. Cosmetic jars were always an important part of Egyptian daily life, but, during this time, there was an increased desire among wealthy and high-status Egyptians to surround themselves with fine vessels, both for use in life and to ensure continued prosperity in the Afterlife. The present jar, with its elegant proportions and attractive medium, is a perfect reflection of the refined society of the New Kingdom.



Fig. 1: Serpentine unguent jar of Amenemhat, Tomb of Neferkhevet, Asasif, 1504-1447 BC, 9.7 cm H, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 35.3.25



Fig. 55. Cat. 43. Tuthmosis I (Hatshepsut); Assasif, MMA 729; inscription 1:1, profile 1:2

Fig. 2: Alabaster vase inscribed for Hatshepsut, Tomb of Neferkhevet, circa 1504-1447 BC, 17.8 cm H, Cairo Museum.



Fig. 3: Alabaster cosmetic jar of Rennefer, Tomb of Neferkhevet, Asasif, circa 1504-1447 BC, approx. 14.5 cm H

The jar was originally most probably closed with a flat lid, or with a piece of linen cloth secured with a mud seal, to prevent the precious contents from spilling out. It can be compared, in particular, to several similar examples that belonged to the scribe Neferkhevet and his family in the early part of the eighteenth dynasty (*see, figs 1-3*), which are thought to have held expensive unguents and perfumes.