



Kohl Faience pot

Cyfarthfa Museum, Merthyr Tydfil CCM 313.004.

Object type; Kohl pot.

Material; Faience

Period; pre 17/18 dynasty.

Provenance; Unknown.

Condition; Intact with cracks. Evidence of repair to waist and base (in green).

Dimensions; H3.5 cm, W3cm.

Object analysis by Tara Houseman

Description; A small, simply styled pot. Short and rounded with flat everted rim. Rotund at the waist and pinched in below the upper rim and above the base. The rim, waist and base are all roughly the same width. Colour is primarily mid -blue with hints of green. Irregularities in the surface are a combination of age- related cracks and fissures and air bubbles from the manufacturing process. The overall surface effect is almost map like. The pot is slightly irregular in shape meaning it is not symmetrically balanced. Repair to the base means it can stand.

Context; Kohl had many uses in every day Egyptian life and pots such as these were in use throughout the Pharaonic period. Kohl was used by men, women and children of all social classes as insect repellent, as protection from the glare of the sun and as make up (Lawrence,2023). Kohl was considered to have magical and religious properties and thus was an integral part of grave assemblage. (Mccole,2023). Provisions for the afterlife were thorough, detailed and personal. A pot such as this may have been a favourite item of the deceased's or may have been made specifically for the tomb. (Baines, Lacovara 2002) So, we see that the use of Kohl was intrinsic in daily life and in the funerary sphere and representative of the materiality of death in ancient Egypt. The faience was revered as a magical substance, the bluey –green colour depicting the colour of the Nile and the sea

represented fertility, life and the sun. (Ricardelli,2017). The uninterrupted use of Kohl during this period reflect consistency in ideological and cultural domains by revealing the significance of beauty, health, ritual, religion and magic in ancient Egypt.

Chronology; Looking at comparative pieces, we see a consistency in style throughout pharaonic Egypt. Materials varied widely; the image below (Fig.1), shows a kohl pot dated Middle Kingdom, made from Travertine (Egyptian alabaster).



Fig.1 Kohl pot, Middle Kingdom.



Fig.2 Kohl pot, Middle Kingdom.

The pot in Fig.2 is made in pottery known as Gulleh ware.



Fig.3 Kohl pot, New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1550-1295 BCE Faience.

Personal possessions in life and in death reflected wealth and status. Kohl pots inlaid with gold and semi-precious stones were commonplace in opulent tombs, (archaeologicalmuseum.jhu.edu) This artefact so kindly donated to Cyfarthfa museum by the family of Major Harry Hartly Southey's family poses a dilemma. It is made of faience, imbued with spiritual and magical qualities and yet seems quite roughly made which seems something of a paradox.

Bibliography.

- Lawrence, L. (2023) 'Kohl, more than meets the eye.' Aramco World.pp.34-37. Volume 74. Number 1. Aramcoworld.com
- archaeologicalmuseum.jhu.edu
- Szpakowsky, K. (2008). Daily life in Ancient Egypt. Blackwell Publishing,U.K.
- Baines, J. Lacovara, P. (2002) SAGE Publications (London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi) Vol 2(1): 5–36 [1469-6053(200202)2:1;5–36;020595]
- <https://www.metmuseum.org>
- (https://www3.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/egfc/hd_egfc.htm#:~:text=Carolyn%20Riccardelli,December%C2%A02017)
- Zinn,K. (February 2023) Personal Communication.
- Hayley Mccole. <https://kallosgallery.com/blog/55-the-role-of-kohl-in-ancient-egypt/#:~:text=COPYRIGHT%20%C2%A9-,2023%20KALLOS%20GALLERY,-SITE%20BY%20ARTLOGIC>.
-

Plates;

- Fig.1.www.metmuseum.org

- Fig.2 www.metmuseum.org
- Fig.3 https://archaeologicalmuseum.jhu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ECM431_potwithlid_horiz.jpg