



Faience Rosette Amulet

Cyfarthfa Museums and Art Gallery, Merthyr Tydfil CCM 314.004

Object Type: Amulet

Material: Faience

Period: Middle Kingdom (2040-1782 BCE)

Provenance: Egypt

Dimensions: 3.3 by 3.6cm by 0.5cm

Object Analysis by **Nathan Moore**

Description:

The amulet is a small imperfectly round disk shape object made of faience. Faience is a man-made stone made of silica (sand) and alkaline salts with some metal included for colour with the process being described in more depth by “Riccardelli, 2017”. On the top side face is a raised five-pointed star design which portions off sections of the amulet where holes are found in separate raised sections with some decoration around them. A sixth hole is present in the middle of the object going through the raised star. Along the circumference are eighteen ridges which give rise to an imprinted design. The underside of the amulet is mostly a smooth glossy finish with slightly raised edges due to a dip in the middle. It is mostly a vibrant blue colour though specks of white and lighter blue shading is seen throughout the object. The overall design resembles a flower with the most likely being that of the Blue Lotus flower found on the Nile River.

Items of a similar design are difficult to come across, though a couple of examples appear in “Petrie, 1972, 33 and plate XXV”. These however have a total of seven holes and lack the flower design. The auction site “Invaluable, 2018” also sold a group of these rosettes which appear to have been produced with less precision and skill as not all of the holes go through the object, and there are prominent cracks throughout which could have occurred during the making process or since. Other than the description of the Uzat eye and Rosette, both “Petrie, 1972” and “Invaluable, 2018” offer little else in the way of description or classification. A highly similar drawn depiction of the five-point amulet can be found in “Schaefer, 1974, 96” of what is believed to be a plan view of the bread called a Sun-Loaf, which is circular and possesses five outer dots and one inner dot. A different, modern object that can possess a similar format of a rounded disk with multiple holes is an incense holder as they possess holes for the incense sticks to stand up and burn. While a highly unlikely use for the amulet, this has been a prominent idea put forward by those in close proximity to it, due to its similarity. Other ideas include fashion and jewellery with it being sewn into place, however a lack of visible wear around the holes currently makes it unlikely in the case of this artefact, along with no visual evidence from Stela and tombs to support this idea.

While none of these items are exactly the same as the amulet, the Hieroglyph for the Duat is particularly similar in design with an outer circle surrounding a five point star with a large dot in the middle. “Rhys, 2022” summarises the hieroglyph as the sun surrounding a star

creating a symbol of the afterlife which is closely linked with the god Ra, rebirth, and a place of neither day nor night.

If this amulet was to belong to the funerary sphere of ancient Egypt, then it being thought of as the symbol for the duat or a representation of the uzat eye could lead it to being worn, perhaps as a bracelet, by a priest to act as a guide to the afterlife, protection from evil or the deceased themselves, and an overarching symbol of rebirth. As faience became available to the lower social classes over time, it is difficult to conclude who may have possessed this amulet. Though if it is of an earlier dynasty, it would most likely have belonged to a person with influence as it was more costly to produce with only Pharaohs, nobles, and priests likely to possess them.

Given its design and lack of colour uniformity, the belief that the amulet dates back to the Middle Kingdom is due to later designs possessing a greater and more vibrant blue with little to no blemish, as well as a lack of design. "Riccardelli, 2017" gives a detailed explanation of making faience with links to other faience artefacts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. These artefacts show a gradual increase in capability of Egyptian faience craftsmanship throughout the Middle Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period. The Old Kingdom is seemingly more focused on beads before a greater design philosophy leads to an abundance of quality faience being created. However, these are not always as vibrant as those from later periods, leading to the belief that this is an earlier piece of work.

Given the unusual nature of the amulet and the lack of wider information surrounding it, it is difficult to verify whether it is an authentic artefact which is able to be dated back to Ancient Egypt, or if it is a fake from a more modern craftsman. Enough detail and damage is present to suggest it is an authentic artefact though further examination will prove useful.

Assuming it has been made for the funerary sphere of Ancient Egypt, it was most likely used during the mummification process or for the rituals performed afterwards. As such, either a priest or the mummy itself would make use of the amulet as a form of protection or guidance to the afterlife given its similarities to the Duat hieroglyph. The artefact itself, having been donated to Cyfarthfa as a single object, may have been used either singularly or within a group of the same objects. With their being limited examples of the amulet, it being

a single object appears more likely with its use being of overall lesser importance to the everyday and funerary aspect of ancient Egyptian life.

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