



Pendant: head of an Apis bull

On display

Title/Description: Pendant: head of an Apis bull

Object Type: Ornament

Materials: Faience

Measurements: h. 16 x w. 18 x d. 15 mm

Accession Number: 586

Historic Period: Late Period (c. 650 BC)

Production Place: Africa, Egypt

Credit Line: Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1974

The muzzle of the animal and the area above the eyes are wrinkled. A triangular recess (one of the marks of Apis) on the forehead suggests that an inlay of different material is missing. The eye-sockets are also empty. The ears project from the sides of the head; the nostrils are pierced through. A hole to take a suspensory filament runs laterally behind the ears. The fine green glaze is discoloured to brown in some places: otherwise apart from loss of inlays the object is undamaged. The rudimentary horns suggest that the animal is a young calf. The Apis was a sacred bull, the burial of which in the Serapeum at Saqqara was a national event. Originally conceived as a procreative animal, symbol of fertility, it later took on other features, being associated with Ptah, the creator god of Memphis, and with kingship itself. Eventually Apis was fused with Osiris, god of the Underworld, to become a funerary deity, the Serapis of the Hellenistic world. After the death of a reigning Apis a successor was chosen by the priesthood, who looked for special markings on the pelt of a bull or calf grazing in the herds in the Nile Valley.

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

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from Peter Sharrer in 1974 out of funds provided by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury.
