

2.33 Mould for a faience bead of Ay

Fired alluvial clay.

Dynasty 18, reign of Ay, c. 1323–1319 BC.

L. 7.2 cm, W. 3.8 mm, D. 1.9 cm.

This pottery mould has a depression containing a raised inscription reading “The Son of Re, God’s Father Ay, divine ruler of Thebes”.¹ King Ay ruled Egypt for a short period of time after the premature death of Tutankhamun. Ay came from an influential family with marriage links with the royal family of the late 18th Dynasty, but was not of royal blood himself. Once he had – unexpectedly, it seems – become king he included his chief title “God’s Father”, which he had held as a palace official at Amarna, in his cartouche, a most unusual step for a king to take.

Moulds of this type were used to make small faience objects such as amulets, inlays, scarabs, beads and ring bezels.² Experiments with replicas have clarified the various stages of production. After the still damp silica paste was removed from the mould, it would show a deep imprint which could then be filled with faience paste of a different colour. The unfired beads were perhaps provided with a thin rope or stick through their length which could later be removed or which would burn away in the kiln. Similar open-face moulds were also used for the mass production of floral elements such as faience bunches of grapes and for manufacturing faience rings. They are frequently found in excavations in Egypt, especially in town sites, for example at Tell el Amarna, where thousands of pottery moulds have been discovered over the years,³ and at Qantir

(Piramesse), where a hoard of at least 141 moulds was found.⁴

An actual example of an elongated bead of Ay of the type fitting this mould is in the Louvre Museum.⁵ It is made of blue-green faience with dark blue hieroglyphs and is pierced twice longitudinally, with a wide thread hole on the right and a smaller one on the left. Inscribed faience beads of this type are not very common⁶ and it is not known in which composite item of jewellery they were incorporated. In shape they resemble the *sweret* amulets⁷ hung around the neck of the mummy and designed to preserve the name of the deceased, but these are usually made of carnelian, although exceptions do occur.⁸

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¹ See Appendix E. It is interesting to note that the first hieroglyph in the second group (the so-called “seated man” sign) has the wrong shape (Gardiner’s Sign List A1 instead of A2), a mistake found on other small objects with the name of Ay, but never in his monumental inscriptions.

² Compare 2.14 and 2.52 in this collection.

³ F.D. Friedman, *Gifts of the Nile: Ancient Egyptian Faience* (London 1998), 257 no. 185, Pl. on p. 167.

⁴ R. Khawam, “Un ensemble de moules en terre-cuite de la 19e dynastie”, *BIFAO* 70 (1971), 133–160; E. Brunner-Traut and H. Brunner, *Die Ägyptische Sammlung der Universität Tübingen* (Mainz am Rhein 1981), 156–157, Pls. 98–101.

⁵ Unpublished, but briefly mentioned in O. Schaden, *The God’s Father Ay* (diss. University of Minnesota, 1977), 272.

⁶ Cf. W.M.F. Petrie, *Scarabs and Cylinders with Names* (London 1917), Pl. 38, 18.14 no. 9 (Horemheb); Pl. 39, 19.2 no. 30 (Seti I); Pl. 49, 21.6 (Psusennes II); Pl. 52, 25.3 nos. 15–18 (Shabaka).

⁷ C.A.R. Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt* (London 1994), 99.

⁸ E.g. two examples of the treasury scribe Huy in Boston and Brooklyn, resp., both made of blue-glazed steatite.

