



Decorative hair pin in the shape of a sewing needle

Date
1st century

Primary Maker
Unknown artist, Roman (Ancient)

Medium
Drawn and tooled glass

Description

Two of the objects in the Isaac Hollister Hall Collection were long, thin needle-like objects that were each about sixteen centimeters in length. Far too fragile and long for needlework, I took a closer look at the objects to determine their actual function. The needles, one green and one blue, are comprised of solid rods that taper at one end to form a point, while the other end resembles the eye of a needle. Archaeologists have discovered many of these needles in the Mediterranean and Near East regions and date them to the early years of Imperial Rome, specifically between the 1st and 3rd centuries A.D. Many scholars believe that these needles were originally used as hair pins or cosmetic applicators rather than for sewing. The Wellin’s needles are quite ornate and feature applied white trailing around the eyes of the needles, which further suggests their function as hair adornments. The needles are among many other glass pieces in the Wellin’s collection, all distinctly from the Roman Imperial era and all discovered on Cyprus. Looking to take advantage of Cyprus’ location, the Roman Empire seized control of Cyprus in 58 A.D. and established it as a Roman province, until it transitioned to a province of the Byzantine Empire in 330 A.D. This relationship explains why the Roman glass pieces in the Wellin’s collection were discovered on Cyprus, and it reflects another rich part of the island’s long and diverse history (SOURCE: Ianna Recco '16, "Unpacking the Past: Object Highlight: Roman Glass Needles," Wellinformed blog (Spring 2016), <https://www.hamilton.edu/wellin/wellinformed/unpacking-the-past-object-highlight>).

Dimensions

Overall: 6 7/16 x 5/16 x 3/16 in. (16.4 x 0.8 x 0.4 cm) Other (Opening): 5/16 in. (0.8 cm)