

Basic Detail Report



Perfume-Holder

Date

43-409

Medium

Bone

Description

Narthecium. Ivory-coloured, turned bone tube with a milled edge. Broken at narrower end. Found at Lombard Street, London in 1866. Narthecia were containers that the Ancient Romans used to hold salves or ointments which were used as medicine or perfume. Perfume-holders, called unguentaria, were usually made out of alabaster, onyx, or glass. Narthecia were a specific kind of unguentaria that were used in the bath; they were usually round boxes made of ivory. The Romans washed themselves almost every day at public baths. At the baths, they covered themselves in perfumed oils and salves. Since perfume was so popular in Roman society, there was a large number of perfumers, most of whom could be found in an area called the Velabrum. The three main types of perfumes were solid (hedysmata), liquid (stymmata) and powdered (diapasmata). The different varieties were either named after their place of origin, their main ingredient, or how they were prepared. The most popular scents in Ancient Rome included rhodium (rose), melinum (quince blossom), and metopium (bitter almond). Perfumes were rubbed on the hair as well as the rest of the body; some Romans even used different scents on different body parts, a practice that was shared by the Greek Epicureans. Romans of all ages and genders covered themselves in perfume after getting out of bed, bathing, and eating. Unguents were occasionally used on domesticated dogs and horses or even put in drinks.

Dimensions

Object/Work: 93 mm