

DAVID AARON



Enamelled Mamluk Glass Beaker

14th Century A.D.

Glass

H: 11.5cm

Hand blown to take a conical form, this beautiful Mamluk beaker has a clear glass body with enamel and gilt decoration applied to the surface in classic arabesque designs. The top band of decoration consists of an inscription reading- "al-'izz al-maqim al-da'im wa al-'umr al-salim wa al-jadd (sic) al-?a'id wa [a]l-ta[mm]a" "Forever lasting glory and safe life and rising fortune and abundance" The main body has 4 panels created from gold bands outlined in a red enamel. Most interestingly is the use of raised dot work, which is not a common decorative technique often employed by Mamluk artists. The base is thickened as often seen in Mamluk vessels, where a double layer of glass creates a doughnut appearance, the central pontil mark shows that the body was hand blown. The production of such glass was the specialty of the regions controlled by the Ayyubids and the Mamluks (present-day Egypt and Syria) in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. There are similarities in the fine work of the Venetians, but Islamic artists focussed on the use of Arabic inscriptions and vegetal designs as decoration. This decorative technique involved gold and/or coloured enamels created from powdered opaque glass, being applied to the surface, and the fixed by heating the whole piece in a kiln. The large number of existing fragments with decorative surfaces suggests that these items were made for popular commercial use, not just the wealthy. Enamelled and gilded glass developed in the twelfth century in the Syrian area and flourished during the final decades of Ayyubid power and the first of Mamluk domination in the thirteenth century. As Cairo became the capital of the empire in the fourteenth century, most enamelled and gilded glass from that time may be attributed to Egyptian, rather than Syrian, workshops. The late fourteenth century saw a decline in production; by the early fifteenth century, dwindling patronage eventually caused workshops to close. By the late fifteenth century, the production of most enamelled glass had shifted to Europe.