

Fatimid Pen Box

10th - 11th Century, Fatimid, Egypt or Syria

Glass

L: 11.8cm

This fatimid glass pen box is created in colourless glass, a wheel-cut decoration is visible, although the decay of the glass over time has blurred its clarity. The two parts are of equal size, oblong in shape with rounded edges.

An exceedingly rare and unusual object, this glass box belongs to a very small group of similar containers of which, according to the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, initially only three were known, though others have since emerged. One of the other boxes is in the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, catalogued as from West Asia or Iran, 10th-11th century; another is in Berlin, in the Museum für Islamische Kunst, which was found in Egypt and is catalogued as 11th century Fatimid Egyptian. Both boxes have metal hinges, with which the box was opened, and it is possible that the current box also had such hinges, now lost. The box in Toronto displays similar wheel-cut decoration as the current box, which is claimed to point to an eastern origin, suggesting both may therefore have been worked in glasshouses in Iraq or Iran in the 10th and 11th centuries, when wheel-cut glass was produced in larger numbers. The third box is kept in the Cathedral Treasury in Capua, Italy and was used to house the relics of Saint Blaise. The metal hinges and clasp on the third box are not of Islamic origin and were probably added later.

Literature:

Hommage à René Huyghe, Tessier & Sarrou et Associés, Paris, 5th June 2019, Lot 168.

Art De L'Islam et De L'Inde & Archéologie, Ader, Paris, 25th November 2021, Lot 170.

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