

DAVID AARON



Byzantine Glass Cup

Byzantine Empire

8th to 9th Century A.D.

Glass

H: 6 x Diameter: 10.5 cm

A green and blue glass cup with a rounded base and everted rim. The sides are decorated with a golden brown painted lattice, expanding out from a central sunburst motif on the base. A gold border runs just below where the lip begins to flare outwards. Three crosses are placed at even intervals around the border, divided by abstract triangular motifs.

This bowl features the lustre-painted, or 'stained', technique which was used in Egypt and Syria from the seventh to the ninth century. Pigments containing silver and/or copper were applied to the glass and then fired in a kiln at a low temperature. The pigment is then "absorbed" beneath the surface through a chemical reaction and permanently colours – or stains – the glass, becoming part of its atomic structure.

The presence of Christian imagery on a bowl decorated with an Islamic technique points to the rich cross-current of trade and ideas in the Middle East and Levant at the time, and suggests that this bowl might have been a particular commission from a Christian patron for an Islamic craftsman.

Both the shape of the bowl and the lustre-painting technique are in keeping with Islamic glass production in Syria and Egypt in the late eighth and ninth centuries; however, there are no exact parallels known for the surface decoration, supporting the idea that this was a unique commission.

It is also possible that this bowl was produced by a Byzantine Christian workshop, as a constant stream of influences flowed between both sides. It is known, for example, that the Muslim Arabs of Al-Andalus

employed Byzantine craftsmen in the tenth century to help construct the Great Mosque of Cordoba, repeating an earlier practice, and that the Fatimid Caliphs borrowed the technique of cloisonné enamel from the Byzantines. It is perfectly possible that Byzantine craftsmen may have incorporated the technique of lustre-painting into works of art with Christian imagery, such as this bowl.

Literature:

Collection D'art Africain du Vicomte Aimé Olivier de Sanderval, 30th Nov 2013, Hotel des Ventes Méditerranée, Lot 72.