

Bottle with Applied Decoration

Brass Silver inlay
Mamluk
Circa 13th to 14th Century

A tall bottle of clear glass, with blue and brown enamelled and gilded elements. The bottle sits on a circular foot, from which extends the globular body. The enamelling begins at the widest point of the vessel, in repeated bands running around its circumference. A vegetal border marks the edge of the elaborately decorated ground, featuring medallions picked out in blue enamel and gold gilt plant motifs. The body attaches to a long, thin neck, adorned with applied threads of glass: four spaced evenly around the body, shaped in long waves reaching up the neck; and another running around the midpoint of the neck. The neck features enamelled striped and floral designs, and terminates with a flared lip.

Enamelling on glass was first developed in the Syrian region, probably at Raqqa; recent research has moved the earliest date of its production to the last two decades of the 12th century or the early 13th century. After the Mamluks made Cairo the official capital of their empire, glassmakers at Fustat soon became active. The mid-13th century has been referred to as the ‘golden age’ of gilding and enamelling on Islamic glass and, by the 14th century, most enamelled glass was probably produced in Egypt. Enamelling required a sophisticated control over the temperature of the wood-fuelled kilns of the medieval period, which had to remain consistent for prolonged periods in order to fix the different colours to the glass surface. Throughout the following centuries of Mamluk rule, glass production expanded into a wide range of different forms adapted from metalwork, pottery, leather, and ivory, and dimensions were increased dramatically. Small, portable enamelled and gilded glassware, such as this flask, was produced mainly towards the earlier period of the Mamluk Sultanate (1250-1517). Initially, many different colours were used together, but by the time Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāūn (r. 1293-1341 A.D.) came to power, a more controlled palette of red and blue with gold outlines was the standard. This period is also typified by a more orthodox restriction of decorative motifs to the vegetal and aniconic.

Exhibitions

International Exhibition of Persian Art, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 7 January-28 February 1931, no. 291 P.

Literature:

Catalogue of the International Exhibition of Persian Art, Royal Academy of Arts, London, exhibition catalogue, 7 January-28 February 1931, p. 167, no. 291 P.

Arthur Upham Pope, 'More about Persian Glass', Apollo, 13, January-June 1931, p. 12, fig. V.

Carl Johan Lamm, 'Glass and Hard Stone Vessels', in Arthur Upham Pope (ed.), A Survey of Persian Art from Prehistoric Times to the Present (London and New York, 1939), vol. III, pp. 2599-2600, vol. VI, pl. 1445D.

Fine Oriental Miniatures, Manuscripts and Islamic Works of Art, Sotheby Parke Bernet, 30 June 1980, Lot 331.

Antiquities and Islamic Art, Sotheby's, New York, 24-25 November 1987, Lot 4A.

Annual New Year's Day Auction, Nadeau's, Windsor, Connecticut, 1 January 2023, Lot 518.

David Aaron, IX, 2026, no. 24, pp. 93-96.