Glass
138 Two Rim Fragments of Glass Vessels

Egypt, 8th century
Glass, painted in brown luster
a. 6 cm \times 2.3 cm
b. 5.3 cm \times 4 cm

The technique of painting in luster on glass is associated primarily with Fustat, Egypt. An important luster-painted cup found there, and now in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, bears the name of Abū al-Samad bin Ali, who was governor of Egypt for one month in 773 (see The Arts of Islam, London, 1976, no. 110). Like that example, the two fragments here exhibit both epigraphic and vegetal decoration. Fragment a. is painted on the inside in brown luster and has a Kufic inscription around the top and panels of hatching below. Both the interior and exterior of fragment b. are painted in brown luster and show the end of an inscription and a part of a palmette.

130 Mosque Lamp

Iran, 8th–10th century
Colorless glass with applied handles and thread designs
Height: 18 cm

This lamp, intended originally to hang from six chains, is made of colorless glass with a pronounced shoulder and applied handles. It has a cylindrical wick-holder rising 8 cm from the base. The exterior derives its ornamental appeal from glass threads which were applied to the surface while the vessel was hot. They loop above the mouth of the lamp and trail down the spine of each handle, picking up a rhythmic wave just above the shoulder of the lamp.

The glass industry already existed in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Iran when the Muslim armies arrived in these lands. While in the early Islamic period the technology of glass-making inherited from the late classical period continued to be used, the forms and decoration underwent a gradual change in accordance with a new culture. One of the effects of the establishment of Islam was the breakdown of old political boundaries, which greatly increased cultural and commercial interchange between countries. As a result, artistic ideas spread rapidly, and it is often impossible to tell whether a glass was made in Iran, in Syria or in Egypt. Identification is further confused by the glass-makers who travelled from one center to another, and by the use of glass as a container to export such commodities as perfume, which was often shipped far afield. The excavation sites such as Susa, Nishapur, Samarra and Fustat have provided much reliable information for dating glass, but less for determining its provenance. Between the 8th century and the early 11th century, glass-makers decorated their vessels by modulating the surface of the glass. This was achieved by a variety of techniques, such as applying threads, mold-blowing, engraving and wheel-cutting.
140 Bottle

Iran, 9th century
Glass, mold-blown with applied thread design
Height: 16 cm

This bottle was mold-blown of greenish glass. The low swelling body is enhanced by a grape pattern in relief, which can be stylistically related to the stucco and wood carving of Samarra. On the neck, there is applied thread near the body and a bulging collar just below the point at which the neck flares open. The molds in which such pieces were blown were made of pottery or, rarely, wood and were designed in two pieces. After setting, these could easily be separated to extract the vessel.

141 Bottle

Iran, 9th century
Colorless glass with wheel cut and engraved designs
Height: 20 cm

This bottle has a slightly-flaring cylindrical body, a tapering neck and a wide, flattened rim. The craftsman appears to have used two techniques to enliven the surface of this vessel — wheel-cutting and engraving. The former was developed under the Sasanians in Iran and could be used to great effect for faceted geometric designs. Such motifs appear on the neck of this vessel. Engraving, seen on the body of the vessel, produced a more linear effect and could be used safely on a thinner surface.

142 Bottle

Iran, 10th–11th century
Blue glass with incised design
Height: 25 cm

This bottle, which stands on a ring foot, has a bulbous body and a tall, straight neck. Bands of geometric motifs, including concentric circles, hatching and notching, are incised into the surface. Glass color, like the strong blue hue seen here, was obtained by adding metallic oxides to clear, molten glass. The exact formula for a particular color would have been a closely-guarded secret passed from master to apprentice.

143 Drinking Cup

Iran, 9th–10th century
Turquoise glass
Height: 9 cm
Diameter: 13 cm

The body of this vessel stands on a ring foot and has a high, wide neck and a handle with a disc-shaped knob. The glass is a brilliant turquoise color enhanced by a thick layer of iridescence. The design of this cup was dictated largely by functional concerns.
144 Beaker

Iran, 9th–10th century
Colorless glass with applied thread design
Height: 10 cm

This flaring cup stands on a flat, circular foot. It is formed of very thin, colorless glass and is decorated by threads applied to the outside surface.

145 Goblet

Iran, 12th century
Greenish glass with applied thread design
Height: 15.2 cm

This goblet is both elegant and slightly enigmatic. The flaring cup, decorated with applied green and brown threads, stands on a tall stem which is bisected by a flat disc. The foot is a small, unstable support and, even empty, the piece’s balance is precarious. Other comparable pieces indicate that the design was deliberate rather than accidental; thus, it must have been intended to be held constantly in the hand.

146 Bottle

Iran, 9th–10th century
Colorless glass with applied thread design
Height: 13 cm

Of colorless glass, this bottle has a spherical body and a tall neck, pinched in at the base. It is decorated with thread looped around the body and applied to the neck. Tongs were used to pinch the glass surface, anchoring the threads in place. Such pinching techniques had been used for decorative purposes in pre-Islamic Iran, but were largely abandoned in favor of more sophisticated practices.

147 Jug

Syria, 12th century
Amber glass with white marvered design
Height: 13 cm

The jug has a pear-shaped body rising to a flared neck with a rolled lip. A thread is applied around the base of the neck, and a handle is applied to one side. The glass is amber in color with white marvered decoration.

The technique of marvering entailed winding opaque glass threads around a vessel while still hot. The threads were then pressed into the surface by means of a stone rod. The technique was already practised in Syria in Roman times. On this vessel, the marvered threads have been dragged with a comb-like tool to form the loops.
148 Bottle
Syria, second quarter of 14th century
Colorless glass with enameled and gilded design
Height: 32 cm
Inscriptions: Around the neck
“Glory to our lord, the Sultan, the King, the possessing, the learned, the just, the holy warrior, the defender”

Around the body
“Glory to our lord, the Sultan, the King, the possessing, the learned, the just, the holy warrior, the victorious, the protector of frontiers, the fortified by God, the triumphant, the Sultan of Islam and Muslims, the subduer of infidels and rebels ... Malik ... Ghazi”

Around the upper body is a star-like design of eight, long red points linked to each other around the base of the neck, each with a green ‘eye’ at the top and gilding. Between the points are panels of floral arabesques. Below is a cursive inscription band reserved on blue, encircling the widest part of the body. Another similar inscription band decorates the lower part of the neck. The foot and neck have been restored in silver.

Another bottle of identical form with the titles of Salah al-Din Yusuf (1237-50), the last Ayyubid ruler of Aleppo, is in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, no. 4261, Gift of Prince Yusuf Kamal, 1914 (see The Arts of Islam, London, 1976, no. 135).

The glass houses of Iran and Iraq ceased producing fine decorated glass by the 12th century. Thereafter, between the 12th and 14th centuries, the main centers for glass were located in Syria and Egypt. Here, rather than modulating the surface of the glass, the craftsmen’s preoccupation was to achieve polychrome effects in decoration. One technique was marvering, pressing colored threads into the molten surface of the vessel, which was inherited from the Roman period in Syria. The second technique, which remains the outstanding contribution of Islamic artisans to the history of glass-making, was enamelling. The use of fired pigments on glass was known in pre-Islamic times, but the Muslim craftsmen in Syria perfected the technique of fusing colored glass pastes onto the surface of the vessel by firing. Aleppo and Damascus were the two main centers for enameled glass, which was further embellished with gilding. Workshops were also set up in Cairo to fulfill the orders for lamps for numerous religious buildings constructed under the Mamluks. The capture of Damascus by Timur, who removed most of the glass-makers to his capital Samarkand, and the economic decline under the later Mamluks in Egypt spelled the end of this remarkable phase of glass-making.
Candlestick

Syria, circa 1240–50
Colorless glass with enameled and gilded designs
Height: 22.6 cm
Base diameter: 20 cm

Inscriptions: "Glory to our lord, the King, the learned, the just, the diligent, the warrior, the watcher in advance, the guardian of the borders, the assisted of God, the mighty, the victorious" (repeated)

The slightly-tapering cylindrical body is decorated with a gold geometric trellis outlined in red defining stars, octagons and hexagons painted in red, blue, green and white. The larger units contain a gold motif. Below this runs an inscription band of Thuluth script written in gold on a red background, which is enameled on the inside. A raised ring separates the inscription from the lower scroll reserved in blue. The shoulder pan, slightly depressed with a raised edge, is decorated with an interlocking arcade design in red and white against a blue ground with gilded floral motifs. The holder has an arabesque design in blue with a raised rim near the top.

Both the form and decoration were inspired by metalwork from the period. At this early date glass workers were still experimenting with many different ideas, and produced a great variety of vessels in enameled glass. Later, in the Mamluk period, the repertoire of forms and decorations became much more restricted and standardized. Only one other comparable piece has been recorded, which was previously in the Eumorfopoulos Collection (see "Modern Objects in the Eumorfopoulos Collection" by Mrs. R. L. Devonshire in Apollo, January, 1927). It was one of the pieces of Mamluk glass along with a bowl and goblet, which Mr. Eumorfopoulos acquired in China about eighty years ago. Mr. Eumorfopoulos’s glass candlestick was slightly smaller in size with a design of arabesques around the body, with the holder missing.

A style of decoration similar to that on the candlestick illustrated here is used on a glass basin in the Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, (no.44.235), and on a glass tray in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, (no.01.1.533).

Published: Gustav Schmoranz, Old Oriental Gilt, and Enamelled Glass Vessels, London 1899, fig. 34, p.36.
Burlington Magazine, September, 1910.
Sevmour de Ruxi, Les Arts, 1914.
C.J. Lam, Mittelalterliche Gläser und Steinschnittarbeiten aus dem Nahen Osten, Berlin, 1930, pl.126, no.17.
Mosque Lamp

Syria, 14th century  
Colorless glass with enameled and gilded design  
Height: 33 cm

The blue calligraphy around the body is outlined in gold and red. The red outlined calligraphy on the neck was originally filled in with gilding, of which only traces now remain. Both zones of epigraphy consist of a repeated phrase, "the wise." Besides the calligraphy, only the red outlines of the designs and the small flowers in white, pink and red are enameled on the outside. The rest of the enameled decorations, the blue and green medallions, the frames of the handles, and the bands of red, are applied from the inside of the lamp. Gold floral scrolls on the outside decorate the colored areas. The foot of the lamp is restored.

Lamps such as this one were often ordered by Sultans and dignitaries to adorn mosques and madrasas, in which they were suspended by chains from the ceiling. This style of elongated calligraphy is rarely found on mosque lamps, which usually feature a much bolder form of Mamluk Thuluth writing. A covered stem-bowl in the Toledo Museum of Glass, Ohio, has a similar type of inscription (illustrated in Christie's Fine Islamic Works of Art, June 23, 1970, lot 119).
151 Egg from the Chain of a Mosque Lamp
Syria or Egypt, 14th century
Colorless glass with enamelled design
Height: 14 cm
Diameter: 11.5 cm
Inscriptions: Sura LXXVI, v.4–6.
Glass eggs were suspended above mosque lamps, providing the link between the six or eight chains holding the lamp and single chain from the ceiling. It is said that one of the functions of such eggs was to prevent small animals from climbing down the chain to get at the oil in the lamps.

This egg is enhanced with a Qur'anic inscription, left in reserve against blue enamel in four cartouches. The cartouches are interspersed with oval panels containing floral sprays. A scalloped disc with radial lines is enamelled in red around each end where suspension rings are secured by metal wire threads running through the body of the egg.

152 Beaker
Syria or Egypt, 13th century
Colorless glass with enamelled design
Height: 14.7 cm
This vessel with boldly-flaring sides exhibits minimal but elegant enamelled decoration. It consists of a single band twisting into three interlaced star knots and enlivened by raised dots of translucent blue. Beakers of this exact shape can be seen in a depiction of a physician’s home in a Syrian manuscript, Risalat Da’wati al-Atibba of al-Mukhtar bin al-Hasan bin Butlan,” dated 1273 (see R. Ettinghausen, Arab Painting, New York, 1977, p.144). Similar glasses are held by seated courtiers among the figures inlaid on a bowl in the Louvre signed by Ibn al-Zayn (MAO 331; see E. Ayl, Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks, Washington, D.C., 1981, no.20).

Published: C. J. Lamm, Mittelalterliche Gläser und Steinschnittarbeiten aus dem Nahen Osten, Berlin, 1929, vol.II, pl.96, no.9.

153 Beaker
Syria or Egypt, 14th century
Colorless glass with enamelled design
Height: 18.4 cm
This cylindrical beaker, flaring at the top, is made of rather thick glass. Its seemingly hasty decoration—a vine pattern, birds and knots—is enamelled in fine red lines. Traces of gilding remain as well. While the shape of this vessel is not uncommon, the decorative themes with which such beakers are enhanced range from the monochromatic economy of this example to extensive figurative compositions executed in a wide range of colors.
154. Kaftan Sleeve

Iran, 10th century
Woven silk
Size: 34 cm x 25.3 cm

Inscriptions:
The wide band
"With good-fortune and prosperity and wealth and joy and happiness
and honor"

The narrow bands above and below the wide band
"I seek refuge with the Merciful . . . from the evil of this world and the
other world and from . . . and from the evil of all beasts. You grasp it by its
forelock, surely my Lord is the right path, and I seek refuge in thee from
all the evils of this world and the torments of the other world"

The V band
"O the owner of splendor and honor, reward . . . from youth and . . .
blissful"

This fragment is one of a remarkable group of textiles discovered over 50 years ago in a
necropolis in Rayy, south of Tehran. A complete kaftan with identical sleeves is known (see
Dorothy Shepherd, "Medieval Persian Silks in Fact and Fancy," Bulletin de Liaison du
Centre International d’Étude des Textiles Anciens, Lyon, 1974, fig. 20) so it is possible to
reconstruct its original purpose. The exquisite calligraphy and the extensive vocabulary of
decorative motifs attest to the weaver’s considerable technical expertise.

155. Textile Fragment

Egypt, 15th century
Woven silk
Length: 51 cm
Width: 30.5 cm

The pattern of this fabric is based on a repeat of dark blue bands with two designs separated
by turquoise stripes. One of the bands is composed of a row of lotus blossoms, rendered in
ivory with turquoise outlines. The second band has a row of squares with an ivory
inscription, an abbreviation of the word “al-Sultan,” enclosed by a turquoise lozenge.

This is probably part of a sleeve of a robe. Another piece of similar shape is in the Madina
Collection in New York (see E. A. W. Alt, Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks, Washington,
D.C., 1981, no. 119). A smaller fragment of the same textile is owned by the Metropolitan
Museum, New York.

Textile Fragment

Iran, 16th century
Woven silk, metal thread
Height: 42 cm
Width: 61 cm

Kashan was one of the main centers of weaving in Iran, and certainly one of the few places capable of producing complex textile designs of this nature. The background was originally entirely of silver thread which is now to a large extent disintegrated to show the saffron colored warps underneath. The subject matter is obscure but it probably represents a seated sage either attended by a disciple or set in contrast with a youth more interested in the beauties of nature than learning. The exact allusion would undoubtedly have been obvious to contemporaries of the textile. Great attention has been paid to variations in detail in order to variegate the effect of a repeated design. This can be seen in the sequence of colors at the roots of the tree stumps and the trees, the book covers, the loin cloths and the flowers in the hand of the youth, which are subtly varied on each row.

This belongs to a little-known group of figural textiles. Another example in the Cleveland Museum of Art is signed by Abdul al-Qasim Kashani who describes himself as “servant of the court,” and is dated 920 (1523). One of the other known examples is dated 941 (1534-35). Therefore, despite the rather curious style which relates more to early 17th-century miniature painting, it seems that this textile dates from the 16th century.

Textile Fragment

Made by Shams

Central Asia (?), first half of 17th century
Woven silk
Size with border: 114 cm × 141 cm
Size of figural panel: 76 cm × 67 cm

The panel has an apricot-colored background, woven with a repeated motif of a standing female figure accompanied by a partridge in a rocky landscape and a small tree. The figure is dressed in a long coat of chevron-pattern stripes in silver, blue and apricot thread that covers a greenish robe tied with a sash and a pink skirt with silver clover-leaf buttons. She wears jewelry and a shawl around her shoulders; her hair is adorned with pearls and a scarf; and her silver shoes are curled at the toes. The signature “amal Shams” is written on the skirt of the robe. The partridge is blue with silver wings. The tree is woven in silver thread with silver, blue and apricot leaves.

The weaving is of extraordinarily fine quality, and the large figure motif is in the tradition of Safavid and Mughal design of the early 17th century. Nevertheless, the facial features, the hair style and the posture of the figure all have a more Far Eastern flavor, as does the color scheme. The artist Shams was, therefore, probably working in Central Asia, perhaps even as far east as Chinese Turkestan, producing fine silks for export to India and Iran. Turkestan had a long tradition of silk weaving and a large Muslim population.

The silk panel is framed in four bands of patterned Ming Dynasty silk, which suggests that it stayed close to where it was woven until more recent times.
The Morosini Carpet

Iran, second half 16th century
Wool, dyed
Length: 5 m 76 cm
Width: 2 m 57 cm

Before the 16th century, carpet designs were based on the traditional Turkic format which had no doubt been brought westwards from Central Asia by the migrating Turks in the 10th to 12th centuries (see A. Briggs, “Timurid Carpets,” Ars Islamica, Vol. VII, 1946, pp. 20-54; and vols. XI-XII, 1946, pp. 46-58). Around 1500, however, carpet weaving in Iran was revolutionized when court painters were commissioned to reproduce new carpet designs. The use of their detailed cartoons permitted weavers to render accurately much more complex patterns than had previously been possible.

The central medallion pattern, with a quarter-medallion in each corner, was the earliest and most widely-used of the new repertoire of designs in the 16th century. It is interesting to notice in this carpet the contrast between the central medallion and its surrounding field. The red ground is like a realm of wild animals, where tigers, leopards and lions stalk ibexes and deer among the dense foliage. The green medallion is a garden of peace in its midst, where ducks float on a pond shaded by trees. The branches are laden with pomegranates and blossoms, and perched among them are pheasants, parrots and songbirds.

The history of this carpet lends it special significance. It was sent as a gift by the Safavid Shah Sulaiman (1667-74) to Francesco Morosini when he was elected Doge of Venice in 1681. This gesture of goodwill had serious political implications, for the Safavid court had long hoped to cement a relationship with Venice. The Morosini family played a major role in the history of the Venetian Republic from the 12th century onwards. Francesco was probably its best-known member, having gained renown as one of the greatest sea captains of the 17th century before being elected Doge. Many fine Safavid carpets now in European museums were discovered in Italy, which is no doubt due to the diplomatic relationship between Iran and Venice.

Provenance: The Morosini Family Collection.
159 Textile Fragment

Turkey, second half of the 16th century
Gold brocade on green satin
Length: 66 cm
Width: 21.5 cm

The fragment has an ogival trellis design of white scale-pattern on an emerald green ground. A large gold flowerhead is enclosed in each compartment with a pink tulip in the middle and a spray of small blue flowers.

Another piece of the same textile is in the Keir Collection, London (see Freiderich Spuhler, Islamic Carpets and Textiles in the Keir Collection, London, 1978, no.127). It was probably made for an imperial kaftan. Its striking range of colors and crisp definition of design show why the Ottoman weavers have been held in such esteem.

160 Cushion Cover

Turkey, 16th century
Silk velvet with silver brocaded details
Length: 122 cm
Width: 65.5 cm

The very rich quality of this cushion cover is achieved by the combination of silver and gold set off against the glowing red background. The effect of gold is achieved by allowing the saffron-colored warps to show through the metallic threads. Floral stems, border lines and other details are picked out in moss green.

Published: Tulips, Arabesques and Turbans, Decorative Arts from the Ottoman Empire, ed. V. Petsopoulos, London 1982, no.17.


161 Textile Panel

Turkey, second half of 16th century
Silk velvet with silver brocaded details
Height: 169 cm
Width: 125 cm

The panel is woven in two parts and joined down the middle. The red ground has a design of pomegranates, originally a metal thread background, enclosing a spray of tulips and carnations. The use of an inner frame cutting through the pattern is used with a variety of repeat pattern designs and is a highly-effective decorative device. A pair to this panel is in the Benaki Museum, Athens (see Les Arts Décoratifs Musulmans, Paris, 1925, pl.32).