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BOTTLE OF COLOURLESS GLASS DECORATED WITH COLOURED ENAMEL AND GILDING

SYRIA; MID-13TH CENTURY

H: 24; MAXIMUM DIAM: 15.5 CM

The decorations on this bottle consist of two Arabic inscriptions praising an unnamed sultan, curved arabesques in blue, white, red and gold as well as four golden fish. Despite their bold colours, the decorations are characterised by a lightness that also let the transparent glass stand out, and one must imagine that the play of light in the glass and the liquid within has complemented the ornamentation.

The gold and the colourful enamel were painted onto the surface of the fully formed and cooled bottle. Following this, the entire vessel was gently reheated until the components of the coating melted and adhered to the glass. The process involved a significant risk of the flask cracking or melting, and thus would have required strict temperature control and accurate knowledge of the respective melting points of the glass and the colours.<sup>1</sup>

The Islamic tradition of enamelled and gilt glass is associated with Syria and Egypt in the period from approximately 1200 to 1500. Due to its shape and the airiness of the decorations, this vessel can be attributed to mid-thirteenth century Syria, although the calligraphy, which combines features from the *Naskh* and *Thuluth* scripts, might suggest a slightly later dating.<sup>2</sup>

On later glass objects from the fourteenth century, the decorations gradually extend to more of the glass surface. At the same time, the arabesques are replaced by East Asian floral motifs, and the inscriptions are written in monumental, pure *Thuluth* calligraphy. This style is exemplified by a glass basin with lotus motifs (Isl 223) and a mosque lamp with Koranic verses (D 32/1986).

<sup>1</sup> *Melanie Gibson: 'Admirably ornamented glass' in Sydney M. Goldstein (ed.): Glass: From Sasanian Antecedents to European Imitations, London 2005, pp. 263–277.*

<sup>2</sup> *For two related flasks from the same period, see cat. 121 in Stefano Carboni and David Whitehouse: Glass of the Sultans, New York 2001 and cat. 308 in Sydney M. Goldstein (ed.): Glass: From Sasanian Antecedents to European Imitations, London 2005.*

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