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SHARD OF COLOURLESS GLASS DECORATED WITH COLOURED
ENAMEL AND GILDING

SYRIA; 1ST HALF OF THE 13TH CENTURY

H: 4.5; W: 5.7 CM

This shard of glass has a curved shape indicating that it once formed part of a flask or some other rounded vessel. The convex side bears a painted figurative decoration executed in gold as well as blue, red, yellow, turquoise, brown and white enamel.

To the left is the torso and head of a bearded man pouring small 'beads' out of a wicker basket, and to the right is a similar basket held by a single hand. Between the containers are the legs of a third figure who appears to be wearing a loose-fitting, blue garment on their upper body. The image is presumably a depiction of wine production, the red and yellow 'beads' representing grapes crushed under the central figure's feet.

Related scenes with various types of agricultural production are seen on a fully preserved, Syrian bottle from around 1250.¹ Furthermore, depictions of workers crushing grapes with their feet are included in several manuscripts of al-Hariri's *Maqamat*, including one made in Syria between 1225 and 1235.²

As regards the portrayals of the figures, the halo surrounding the bearded man's head and the remnants of the central figure's blue, loose-fitting clothes clearly show a kinship with contemporary book illustration. For example, similar halos and richly folded costumes appear in a depiction of the Crucifixion in a Syriac Orthodox manuscript from the early thirteenth century (19/2019) as well as in a representation of a medical consultation from a work on medicinal plants dated 1224 (4/1997).

Although the halos were presumably inspired by Christian painting, the Islamic art of the period did not use them as a sign of holiness but instead as a means of highlighting the faces of the figures, whether religious or secular.

¹ *Stefano Carboni and David Whitehouse: Glass of the Sultans, New York 2001, cat. 121.*

² *See e.g. David James: A Masterpiece of Arab Painting: The 'Schefer' Mâqâmat Manuscript in Context, London 2013, p. 178, fig. 2.9.*

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