

BOOK REVIEW

Molten Color: Glassmaking in Antiquity. By KAROL B. WIGHT. Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2011. Pp. 128; 92 color and 2 b/w illustrations, 36 line drawings, 1 map. Paper, \$20.00/£13.99. ISBN 978-1-60606-053-7.

The well-chosen cover photograph of a multi-colored ribbon flask, a product of early imperial Roman glass-making, illustrates both the sense of flow in the title and the visual appeal of this short survey of glassmaking in antiquity. Recently appointed Director of the Corning Museum of Glass, Wight has retained her sense of wonder at the technical brilliance of ancient glass, and communicates her passionate interest in glassmaking throughout the book. The work is addressed to a non-specialist audience.

A short introduction makes the modern reader aware of the omnipresence of glass in our daily lives; a first chapter explains what glass is and how its properties have been exploited. Good use is made here of illustrations from early books. Wight alludes briefly to the advances made in recent decades in our understanding of the chemistry of ancient glass. The map of the Roman Empire is puzzling: the sites marked on it require explanation as centers of glass-making at various times in antiquity. An historical overview begins with the earliest techniques used in Bronze Age Mesopotamia and Egypt: casting, core-forming and mosaic glass. Wight moves on to the Mediterranean of the first millennium BC, where there is a frustrating lack of surviving glass of monumental scale, but where gold-glass was first exploited and Hellenistic glass-makers developed mosaic glass to new heights of perfection. The processes of core-forming and making mosaic glass are well explained and clearly illustrated.

Much space is devoted to the glass of the Roman Empire, for the Romans exploited to spectacular effect the newly discovered technique of glass-blowing. Raw glass was exported to Europe from Judaea and Alexandria. Early imperial control of the Alpine regions allowed the exploitation of abundant local resources of metal and wood to turn glass from a small-scale, luxury product into a convenience for the masses. Secondary workshops employed glassmakers using iron blowpipes; these could hold heavier gobs of molten glass than the earliest

known pipes of glass or ceramic found in Judaea. Large containers were produced, and, most significantly for the future of the craft, glass could be recycled.

Glass thus acquired a much wider range of uses, which are explored in the last chapter of the text. The excellent photographs are not scaled but dimensions are given in the captions, along with a brief description of the glass's function and technique of manufacture and, most usefully, a museum inventory number. A glossary explains technical terms printed in bold font in the text. The layout of the chapter headings is irritating, set within the first page of text.

The focus of *Molten Glass* is technological and exclusively focused upon the Getty Museum's collection. In the preface, the author explains that the book draws upon an exhibition prepared in 2006. Temporary exhibitions of ancient glass have been a major source of scholarship in recent years: within the short bibliography Wight refers to another influential display organized by technique: *Glass of the Caesars*, held at the British Museum and other venues in the late 1980s. *Vitrum: Il vetro fra arte e scienza nel mondo romano*, held in Florence in 2004, produced a catalogue of lasting value, perhaps omitted because the publication, edited by M. Beretta and G. Di Pasquale, is in Italian. I missed any recommendation to read E. Marianne Stern's seminal article "Roman Glass-Blowing in a Cultural Context", *AJA* 103 (1999) 441–84. Scholarship on ancient glass is international, with significant publications in all the major European languages, comprehensively summarized and critically reviewed every five years by Marie-Dominique Nenna in *Revue Archéologique*.

Notwithstanding these limitations, Wight gives her readers a valuable, well-illustrated and clear account of the techniques of glass-making in antiquity as seen through the remarkable collections of the J. Paul Getty Museum. The museum would do well to commission a series of similar books on the making of other classes of object within its collections.

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