

BOOK REVIEW

Fire and Sand: Ancient Glass in the Princeton University Art Museum. By ANASTASSIOS ANTONARAS. Princeton University Art Museum Series. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012. Pp. 408 + 556 color + 40 b/w illustrations. Hardcover, \$65.00/£45.00. ISBN 978-0-300-17981-1.

Antonaras is an archaeologist and curator at the Museum of Byzantine Studies, Thessaloniki. His work to date has been extensive, though with a focus on ancient glass and particularly Byzantine material from northern Greece. In this attractive book he presents the illustrated collection of 509 ancient glass objects from the Mediterranean world housed in the Princeton University Art Museum, with which he has worked extensively. The objects range in date from the mid-second millennium BC to the 7th century AD (though the majority are Roman and Byzantine), and in type from simple flasks and jugs to core-formed vessels, fragments of millefiori glass, and miscellaneous items such as stirring rods and inlay. Most were purchased by the museum in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. In addition to the catalogue, an introductory essay and glossary of glass working techniques are provided.

Antonaras ensures that his 19-page introductory essay adds to, rather than replicates, the existing body of glass catalogues and introductions to ancient glass by pursuing a specific focus: the people involved in glass making, working, and trading. He does this well, marrying archaeological, historical, and literary evidence in a brief but interesting and well referenced introductory section in which the social status, gender, and provenance of glass artisans, and the value of glass itself are all commented upon. These considerations are interspersed with the usual introduction to the raw ingredients and furnaces used in glass making. Throughout, the focus is on the Roman-Byzantine periods, for which there is more abundant historical evidence.

The introductory essay is followed by an illustrated glossary of glass working techniques, a useful reference tool for those not familiar with glass production who wish to fully understand the catalogue descriptions that follow. The description of cold-working (“carving”) glass may be somewhat misleading, as it states that this technique is now thought to have been used only very rarely if at all, but

does not make clear that this opinion is not yet shared by all scholars. The other entries are well summarized and clearly written, however, and the accompanying illustrations or photographs facilitate understanding of these.

The catalogue consists of 5 sections, divided according to the technique by which the glasses were worked: Core-Formed Vessels; Rotary-Pressed, Slumped, Cast, and Sagged Vessels; Blown Vessels; Rod-Formed Vessels; Miscellanea. These sections are further sub-divided as appropriate. Each entry in the catalogue is accompanied by a full color photograph, and includes details of date, dimensions, provenance, modeling technique, and condition, as well as a thorough technical description and list of comparanda. The collection mainly consists of a wide range of complete vessels and tableware, though smaller fragments are also included for earlier periods (Egyptian New Kingdom) and unusual production techniques (such as millefiori or cameo). Of particular interest are three glass baby feeders of the 1st–4th centuries AD, two 1st-century AD inkwells, and two fragments of rare cameo glasses of the early 1st-century AD.

The volume also features profile drawings of the entire collection, presented together following the main catalogue. This is a most useful addition for those interested in glass typology and in using this book for comparative purposes. It might have been helpful to include scales along with these illustrations, but given that dimensions can be found with the main catalogue entry for each item, this is a minor criticism.

The presentation of material from this collection, which has never before been published in full, is justifiable in itself. The value of this book is increased, however, by the comprehensive nature of the catalogue entries, the inclusion of profile drawings as well as color photographs for each item, and the interesting introductory essay. It is also an attractive, well produced book that could easily fit into the “coffee table” as well as the academic genre.

CHLOË N. DUCKWORTH

University of Nottingham, Chloe.Duckworth@nottingham.ac.uk