

HELLENISTIC GLASS SHELL

Greek-Hellenistic, 2nd - 1st century B.C.

Glass

L: 14.50 cm

Reference: 30962



This beautiful and highly attractive object is made of the translucent yellow-green glass. It is shaped as a large shell of the Family Arcidae (ark shells) and presents its typical feature: the body is longer than high. On the exterior, fourteen thick, V-shaped ribs are radiating from the umbone and become broader toward the long edge creating the pattern looking like a hand fan. They correspond to the deep grooves on the interior side where the hinge is slightly arched.

The craftsman who faithfully followed the form of the natural shell left nevertheless a thicker wall. One feels it with the weight of the object and realizes that the thickness differs in the parts, it is especially noticeable toward the edge. This area was probably fortified with the intention when the craftsman took into the consideration the practical use of the dish making of a fragile material. When the piece is brought to the light it reveals the different effects of translucency and semi-translucency. Once again, this depends on the thickness of the glass wall and also reminds of the unique manufacturing process: the glass was cast by sagging in a one piece mold and subsequently hand tooled.

Since the Hellenistic period it became a tradition for the Greeks and Romans to present the bowls in the form of a shell as their table service dishes. The silver and gilded silver items as well the pieces made of semiprecious stones would be considered as the most luxurious while the bronze ones were in a more common use. It has been suggested that the specific shape suited well the shellfish dishes; and it is also believed that the bronze bowls were used as the baking pans. One cannot exclude the opportunity of employing such vessels in the libation ceremonies. The deep grooves of this glass shell would create the flow of multiple drops over the altar.

CONDITION

Complete; assembled from seven large fragments; few chips and

fractures.

PROVENANCE

Ex- B.R.Wagner private collection, Geneva, collected in the late 1960's - 1970.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

GOLDSTEIN S. M., Pre-Roman and Early Roman Glass in the Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, New York, 1979, pp. 139-140, no. 288.

STERN E. M., Roman Mold-blown Glass: The First through Sixth Centuries: The Toledo Museum of Art, Rome, 1995, pp. 199-200, no. 137.

STRONG D. E., Greek and Roman Silver Plate, London, New York, 1979, p. 153, pl. 42a.

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