

## MOSAIC GLASS BOWL

Roman, 1st century B.C.-1st century A.D.

Glass

Height: 3.8 cm, length: 16 cm

Reference: 28145



This bowl presents an extraordinary decoration and is a very rare, completely preserved example of Roman mosaic glass. The glass-making technique in antiquity originated in Egypt and Mesopotamia in the 2nd millennium B.C. and progressed from core-molding to mold-pressing/casting and then to free-blowing and mold-blowing. Mosaic glass belongs to the category of mold-casting and required great skill of the glass-worker and several graduated steps in the execution. The first step was to produce several canes (or rods) of polychrome glass, which were then sliced into small discoïd sections: their chromatic composition determined the coloristic effect of the final result. Next, the sliced glass disks were placed side by side and fused, before the colored hot bundle was slumped in a stone (or ceramic) mold to give it its definitive shape. Finally, this was followed by tooling the ribs and flutings (they are fifteen on our bowl) on the exterior surface and by polishing the interior of the vessel, guarantying a uniformly fine surface.

While this type of mosaic ribbed glass bowl was known in Italy and in the western Roman provinces (western bowls are attributed to the Roman-Italian industry of the Augustan and Tiberian periods), their distribution extended to Egypt and to other areas of the eastern Mediterranean and even to the Black Sea. Mosaic glass pieces remained in fashion for a relatively short historic period, from the 1st century B.C. until the mid-1st century A.D.; they were highly desirable but very expensive items of tableware which only the wealthiest buyers could afford. With the spread of the glass-blowing technique, more affordable products came to replace the vessels made of mosaic glass; however, the technique itself was never forgotten and indeed survived in the production of mosaic glass beads.

The color palette of this bowl is only cobalt and white, although the combination of more subtle or intense shades of cobalt with intricate patterns in the white creates a striking decorative effect. The white volutes form spiral designs that are arranged in circles all around the surface, from the rim to the bottom of the bowl. Handling an item of mosaic glass, along with direct observation, is important to appreciate all its decorative qualities, and there is even more to discover in the present bowl: some areas become translucent when light shines

through the vessel's walls.

### CONDITION

Excellent state of preservation. Completely intact. Few areas of white color are affected by iridescence.

### PROVENANCE

Ex European private collection.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

On the technique of mosaic glass, see:

ANTONARAS A., *Fire and Sand: Ancient Glass in the Princeton University Art Museum*, New Haven-London, 2012, pp. 19-21.

EISEN G.A., *Glass*, New York, 1927, Vol. I, pp. 174-199.

OLIVER A., *Millefiori Glass in Classical Antiquity*, in *Journal of Glass Studies*, 10, 1968, pp. 48-70.

On other examples of mosaic glass bowls, see:

BERETTA M. and DI PASQUALE G., *Vitrum: Il vetro fra arte e scienza nel mondo romano*, Florence, 2004, p. 207, no. 1.22.

GOLDSTEIN S.M., *Pre-Roman and Early Roman Glass in the Corning Museum of Glass*, New York, 1979, pp. 188-191, nos. 501-512.

GROSE D.F., *Early Ancient Glass*, New York, 1989, pp. 241-250.

KUNINA N., *Ancient Glass in the Hermitage Collection*, Saint Petersburg, 1997, p. 268, no. 93.