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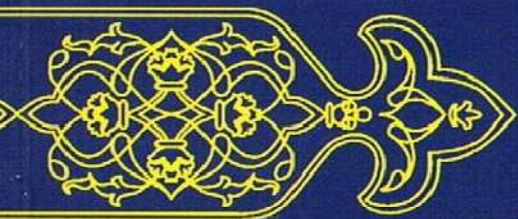
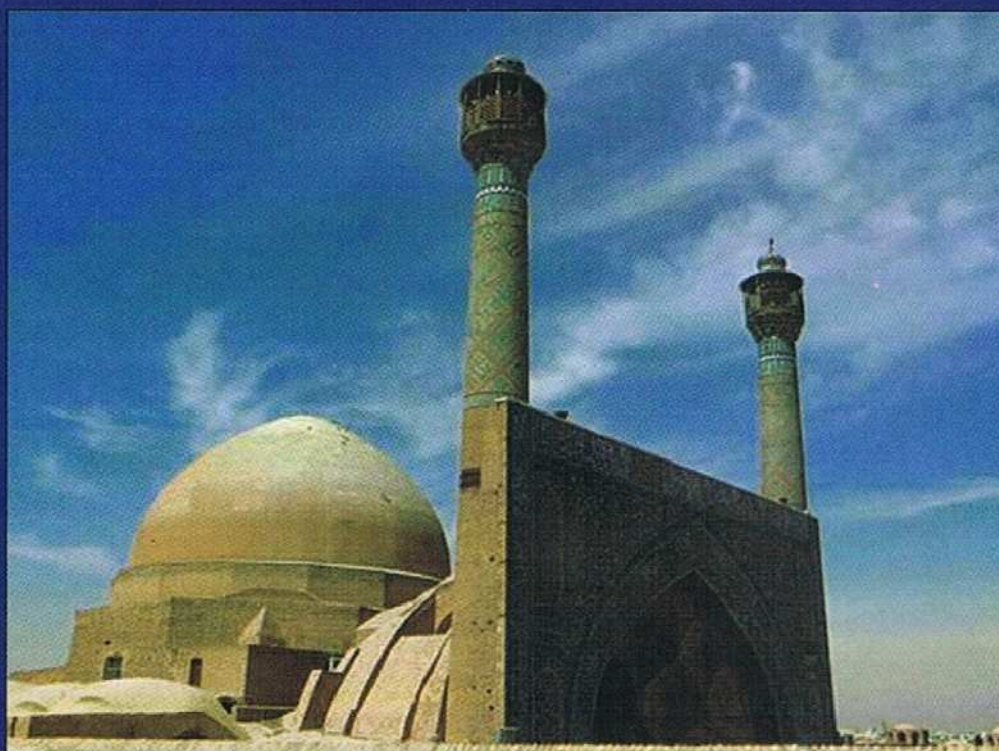


ISIAO

ISTITUTO ITALIANO  
PER L'AFRICA E L'ORIENTE

## ADAMJI PROJECT

*From the Excavation (1972-1978)  
to the Archive (2003-2010)  
in the Masjed-e Jom'e, Isfahan*



**Bruno Genito and Fariba Saiedi Anaraki (eds.)**

Tehran 2011





پژوهشگاه سازمان میراث فرهنگی،  
صنایع دستی و گردشگری ایران  
۸۸۰۶



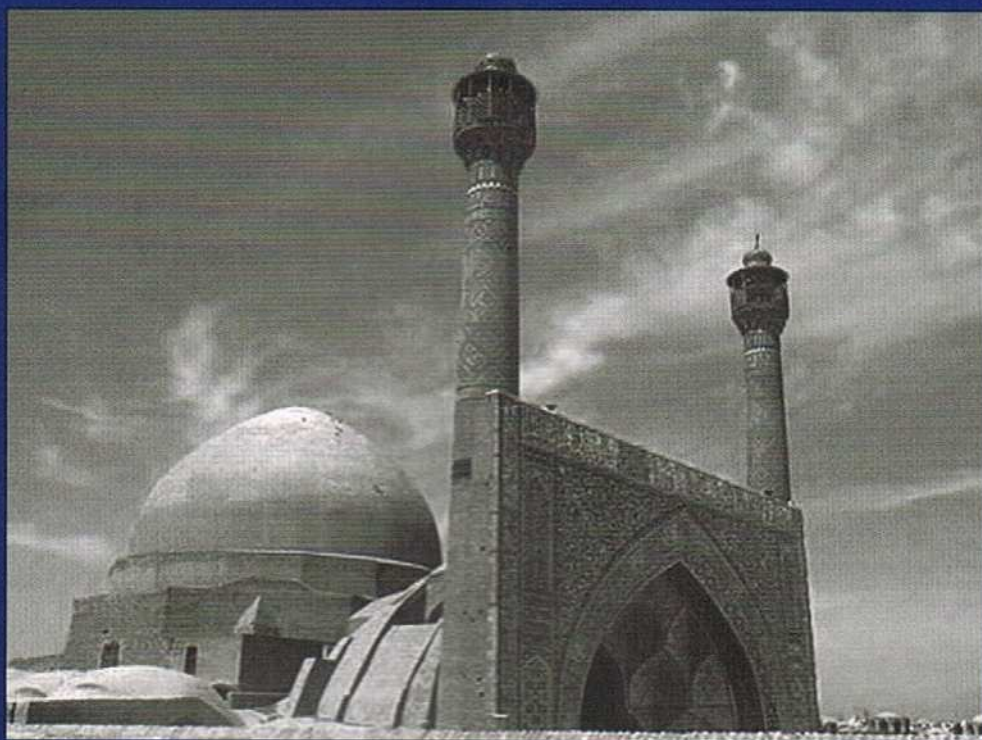
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از کاوش (۱۹۷۲-۱۹۷۸) تا بایگانی (۲۰۱۰-۲۰۰۳)



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برونو جنیتو و فریبا سعیدی انارکی

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GLASS OBJECTS  
FROM THE EXCAVATIONS IN THE MASJED-E JOM'E, ISFAHAN:  
THE ADAMJI PROCESSING ACTIVITIES

*Giulio Maresca*

In the frame of the joint Italian/Iranian ADAMJI Project great relevance was given to processing the glass fragments. The *corpus* of glass materials collected from the excavations carried out by the IsMEO in the *masjed-e Jom'e*, Isfahan between 1972 and 1978 is in fact made up by over 7000 fragments. By virtue of such a consistency, it thus represents an extremely precious source of information about a region of the Iranian Plateau for which a strictly systematic archaeological information is still rather scanty, especially as far as that field of production is concerned, too often analysed considering non-contextualised objects.

At the end of the 70s IsMEO a quite relevant part of the glass fragments brought to light was singled out and stored separately within boxes placed in the Mosque main storeroom. About 450 fragments of this assemblage were already inventoried and 58 of them were also drawn.

At the very beginning of the project, the first task was to detect these boxes and check their content. Unfortunately, materials had suffered a very long period of storage: inventoried fragments were partially merged with un-inventoried ones and, in some cases, even with other materials (especially pottery). Moreover, many of the boxes containing glass fragments were fully covered by dust and many of the plastic bags in which fragments were enveloped were almost totally destroyed, so that certain fragments were scattered in the boxes with their related labels irretrievably damaged or even lost.

In order to prevent further decay and loss of data, every single box, plastic bag and fragment was accurately cleaned from dust and the greatest part of them was replaced with new ones.

Anyway, it was possible to detect the greatest part of the previously inventoried *corpus*. The fragments were re-examined one by one: their descriptions and drawings were accurately checked and



in some cases, when necessary, modified, their dimensions measured again (including thickness, in many cases previously neglected) and colour photographs of each of them were taken to replace the old black-and-white.

After these preliminary operations, processing operations on the extant glass fragments took place, based on the analysis at a macroscopic level of the various features. The fragments processed during this phase were the ones already singled out in the 70s and properly kept separated with the addition of other several hundreds recovered by chance during the ADAMJI processing operations related to other classes of materials.

Fragments were all sorted both by horizontal and vertical provenance and those belonging to the same level of one of the sectors of the Mosque were all recorded on a properly arranged archive form, based on production<sup>1</sup> (colour<sup>2</sup>, technique of production, thickness), morphological (form and type of the original vessel, part of the object involved, measurements) and stylistic criteria (type and description of the decoration when attested).

Following this methodological approach, fragments were archived as "Diagnostic" or "Undiagnostic" and put in separated boxes. Subsequently, among the fragments considered as "Diagnostic", those with more interesting morphological and production-related features were also inventoried (the significant c. 300 item): photographs of each of them were taken and drawings in many cases were made.

In this way, a number of 199 new inventoried glass fragments (from inventory number 7001 to inventory number 7199) was added

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<sup>1</sup> During the processing operations some pieces of glass slag were also found. These fragments anyway, apparently scattered without any stratigraphic or spatial order in different sectors of the Mosque, cannot be considered as an evidence of an *in loco* centre of production.

<sup>2</sup> The chromatic *spectrum* of the fragments attested, ranging from colourless to dark or to indefinable (when fragments present too many encrustations or are in an extremely severe state of decay, or altered mostly with iridescence and milkiness) includes several variations, each of them attested in slightly different hues anyway taken into consideration in the main colour definition (*i.e.* "very light yellowish green", "light yellowish green", "yellowish green" etc.).



to the previous 450 and a total of over 350 drawn glass fragments was reached. In the last two seasons of work (2009 and 2010) other 6000 fragments of glasses were processed and 50 c. selected in order to be inventoried, drawn and photographed. To sum up the total were c. 1500 diagnostic, and c. 5400 un-diagnostic!

During the processing operations also some restoration activities were accomplished by a specialised restorer by ICHHTO (Mr. Beshad Babae). Restorations were carried out on some fragmentary vessels (particularly intensively on the inv. 739: a footed sub-cylindrical beaker) (Fig. 1). After preliminary operations (collecting fragments, provisionally bonding and cleaning by means of ethanol and water), fragments were permanently bonded with epoxy adhesive; then lost portions of the object were replaced by means of a mixture of epoxy adhesive, Biloxit and pigment, and the restored object was coated by Paraloid. New photographs were taken at the end of restoration and also new drawings were made.

Together with the accomplishment of the processing operations during the archival phase it was also possible to put forward some very preliminary production-related and morphological observations about the materials.

According both to the stratigraphic and technical-stylistic elements, the main bulk of the glass assemblage may with a certain confidence be attributed to the Islamic period, especially from the 9<sup>th</sup> up to the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD. In this period a new style, developed in Iraq under the Abbasid Caliphate, gradually radiated outwards to other areas of the Islamic world (Kröger 1995, 35; Carboni and Whitehouse 2001, 18-19). As shown by the archaeological literature, in these centuries glass was very extensively utilised in the everyday life of the Islamic society, and was mass-produced to meet the diversified needs of the urban middle-class.

Such a massive production was possible thanks to the free-blown technique so well attested in our assemblage, while mould-blown, the other main technique utilised during this period, is instead attested in a very limited number of cases, especially on some open



vessels (such as bowls and dishes) and only with a decorative intent<sup>3</sup>. No significant traces of other production techniques seem to be attested in the assemblage<sup>4</sup>.

One of the commonest categories of glass objects brought to light by the excavations in the *masjed-e Jom'e* is represented by various types of little or medium-size flasks and bottles. These objects had almost always strictly utilitarian purpose, mainly concerning cosmetics or pharmaceuticals<sup>5</sup>, but could anyhow show some of the most elaborate decorations attested. That is the case of the composite flask decorated with applied threads (Inv. 145) (Fig. 2), in some way reminiscent of the more elaborate "cage flasks" common in Syria between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Carboni 2001, cat. nos 4a, 4b; Carboni and Whitehouse 2001, cat. nos 29-32).

Various and very significant are also the open vessels: cups, bowls, plates, even though their precise function and utilisation is still not very clear. However, their presence may in some way be connected with some specific socio-economical dynamics, according to which, probably, these vessels were mainly considered as precious "display items".

Much more widespread and diagnostic are, instead, the so-called "Mosque Lamps". Of probable Byzantine derivation, these lamps were suspended to the ceiling by means of chains or ropes passing through the handles. Of this type of lamps several examples are attested, some of which with a very graceful profile (Inv. 256)

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<sup>3</sup> Apart from a few cases with different mould-blown decorative motifs or with applied, figurative decorations, the main decorative pattern attested in the assemblage is simply represented by one or more whirling or spiralled glass threads applied around the body and/or the neck of some of the vessels. Incised or scratched patterns are very sporadic, while is noteworthy the absence of pinched-impressed examples.

<sup>4</sup> The prominent utilise of the free-blown technique is the reason for which the average thickness of the fragments in the assemblage can be measured between 0,1 and 0,2 cm, with extremely rare cases approaching to 1 cm or even over, but almost always in the case of specific parts of the vessels (usually bases or handles).

<sup>5</sup> It is also probably (even if there is not any specific indication related) that some of the largest examples were utilised to store some quantity of oil or other combustible material for the glass lamps found fragmentary in huge number within the assemblage.



(Fig. 3). Anyway, this type of lamp, very common in many Islamic context, instead of the convex base attested in many of the Isfahan examples usually shows a ring-shaped base (Carboni and Whitehouse 2001, cat. no. 235; Kordmahini 1988, 115).

Noticeable in the assemblage is also the presence of examples of another type of lamp, with cone-truncated goblet on a stem having a terminal pearl-shaped element (as Inv. 884) (Fig. 4). This type is well attested in the Byzantine and also in the Islamic world, especially at Fustat, in Egypt, where in the 9<sup>th</sup> century it replaced the conical lamp which had been common in the entire Egyptian region since the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Pinder-Wilson and Scanlon 1973, Figs. 18 and 19).

Probably relating to a third type of lamps are the ring-profiled sub-cylindrical stems (as Inv. 889 and 1764) (Fig. 5, 6). Deriving from the Byzantine tradition and attested in many Islamic sites, they however find the closest analogies with objects coming from Susa (Kervran 1984: figs. 10,1 and 3) and dated to the 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

It is however important to recall that many other types of glass vessels, especially beakers, cups or bowls with sub-cylindrical or cone-truncated profile, even without a wick-holder, could have been used as lamps if a separate wick-holder, perhaps of a different material, was placed in the vessel (Kröger 1995, 180).

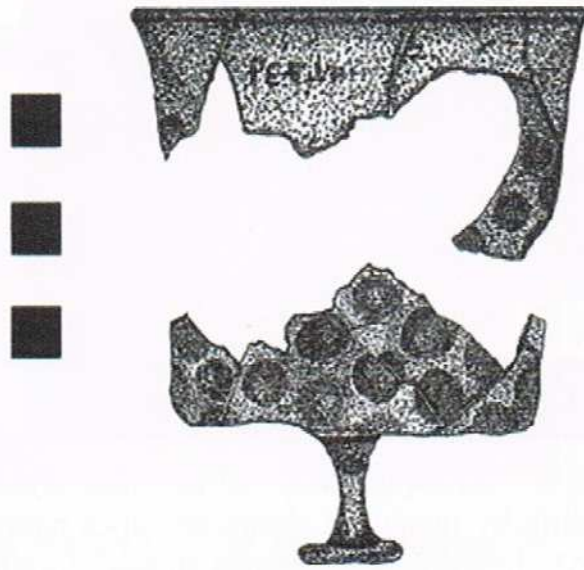
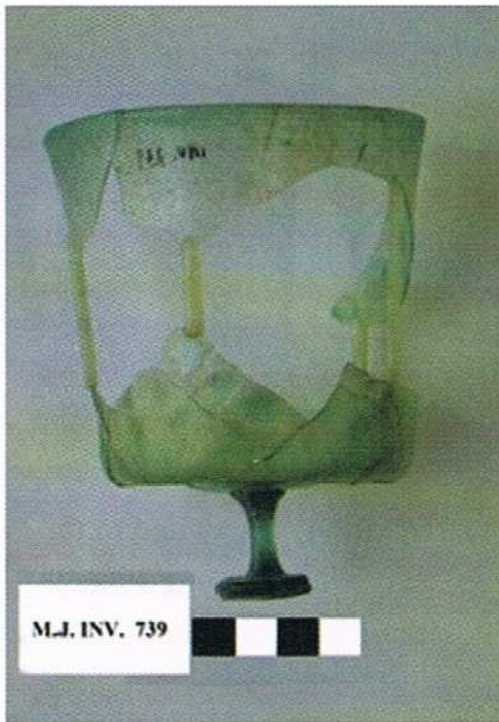
Of noticeable importance are also three examples of applied decorations consisting of stamped medallions with figurative motifs showing evident analogies with objects belonging to the Late Sasanian - Proto-Islamic period. A lion head similar to the example in the assemblage (Inv. 528) (Fig. 7) is attributed by Balog (1974, no. 11) to the Syrian region and is dated to the Omayyad period by virtue of its typical style, reminiscent of the stucco sculptures (representing both men and animals) in the palace of Khirbet al-Mafjar, near Jericho.

Two stamped medallions each representing a male head (Inv. 933 and 959) (Figs. 8, 9) found instead their closest parallels in some examples of applied decorations, all dated to the Late Sasanian - Early Islamic Period, brought to light at Aqaba, along the Palestinian shore, and in the region of Fars, at Qasr-i Abu Nasr and Istakhr (Whitcomb 1995).

From this brief discussion is therefore clear how a great deal the glass finds from the *masjed-e Jom'e* of Isfahan can contribute

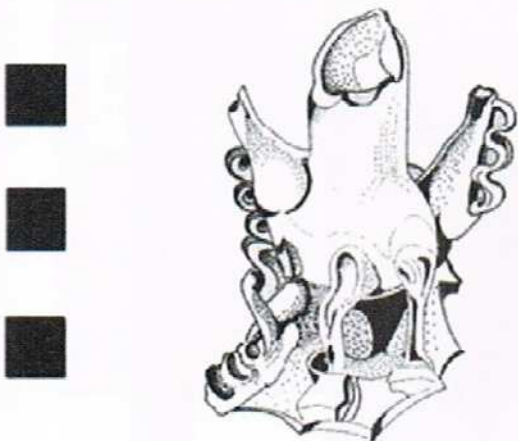
about the knowledge regarding the utilisation of glass and the exploitation of its technical and artistic possibilities by the early Islamic society in an stratified archaeological context of primary importance not only in Iran but in the entire Islamic world as well.





M.J. inv. 739

Fig. 1 - a footed sub-cylindrical beaker after the restoration, photo by MAI, drawing by Beshad Babae



M.J. inv. 145



Fig. 2 - composite flask decorated with applied threads, reminiscent of the "cage flasks" common in Syria between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Drawing by Emanuela Bossa-Morichi, photo by MAI

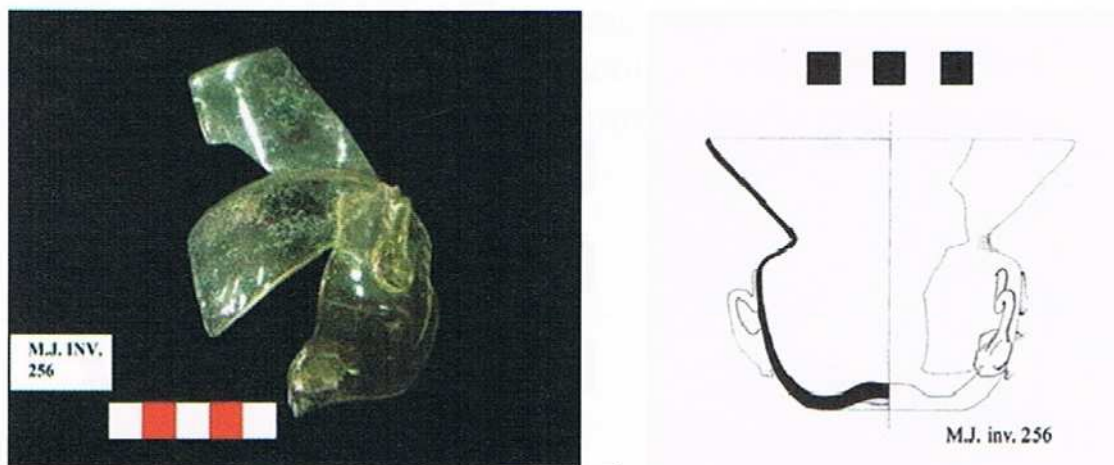
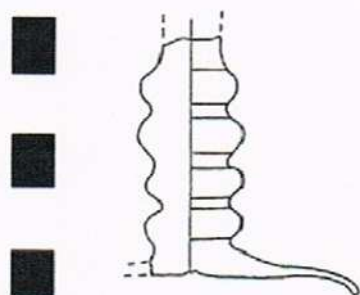


Fig. 3 - "Mosque Lamp" of probable Byzantine derivation, suspended to the ceiling by means of chains or ropes passing through the handles. Photo by MAI, drawing by Emanuela Bossa-Morichi



Fig. 4 - lamp with cone-truncated goblet on a stem having a terminal pearl-shaped element. Photo by MAI

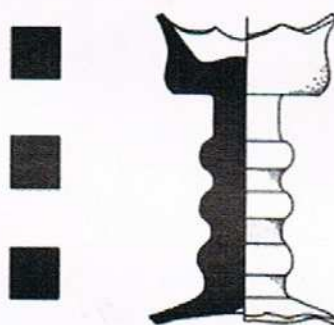




M.J. inv. 889

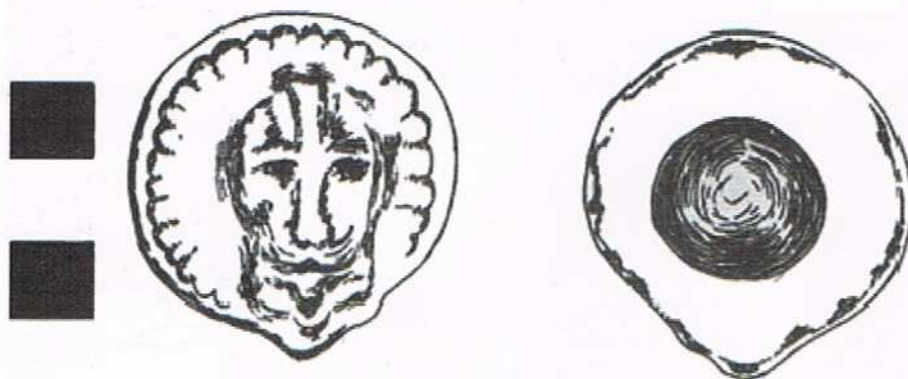


Fig. 5 - lamp with ring-profiled sub-cylindrical stem. Drawing by Emanuela Bossa-Morichi, photo by MAI



M.J. inv. 1764

Fig. 6 - lamp with ring-profiled sub-cylindrical stem. Photo by MAI, drawing by Emanuela Bossa-Morichi



M.J. inv. 528

Fig. 7 - stamped medallion with figurative motif of a lion head. Photo by MAI, drawing by Shabnam Juzdani





Fig. 8 - stamped medallion representing a male head. Photo by MAI, drawing by Shabnam Juzdani



Fig. 9 - stamped medallion representing a male head. Photo by MAI

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