

Marco Spallanzani. *Vetri islamici a Firenze nel primo Rinascimento*. Florence: Studio Per Edizioni Scelte, 2012. xii + 106 pp. ISBN: 978-88-7242-339-4.

This book is another welcome addition to the publications focusing on the importation of luxury objects to Florence from the Near and Far East by the economic historian Marco Spallanzani. Like his volumes on Oriental carpets and Islamic metalwork in Renaissance Florence, this book is the fruit of decades of research in archives and local libraries. The format utilizes the same useful interdisciplinary approach that draws on source documents, visual representations of objects in Renaissance works of art, and photographs of surviving examples.

When reading volumes like this one, I immediately turn to the appendixes to see what documentary evidence has been included. This volume does not disappoint as it presents thirty-two extracts from a variety of documents that mention Islamic glass. In addition to the expected admiration of the fine art of glass noted by Italian tourists to Damascus, both Niccolò da Poggibonsi (in 1348) and Simone Sigoli (in 1384) marveled at the nocturnal illumination of the grand city provided by thousands of glass lamps.

Aside from the references to Islamic glass found in travel diaries, shipping lists, and inventories, one reads of the difficulty of acquiring glass lamps from Damascus in Italy at the end of the fourteenth century. Ports in Pisa, Genoa, Venice, Ollioules (Southern France), Marseilles, and Barcelona saw the arrival of luxury merchandise including glass from Alexandria and Beirut. At the same time, the growing market for Venetian glass in the Near East is reported in an extraordinary document from 1395. The author provides a substantial context for the reader by supplementing each piece of documentary evidence with a useful elucidation.

Islamic glass enjoyed only a brief period of popularity in Florence during the last third of the fourteenth century and in the early fifteenth century. With origins going back to around 1200, enameled and gilded Islamic glass may have originated during the Fatimid period. The type of Islamic glass that briefly circulated in the Florentine market during the years before and after 1400 was Mamluk glass produced in Egypt and Syria. While the specific cities for the manufacture of Mamluk glass continue to be debated, Spallanzani argues that between 1379 and 1395 the majority of Islamic glass arriving in Italy would have derived from Syria as it was shipped out of Beirut. Glass also shipped from Alexandria, but less frequently and in lesser quantities, and this glass would presumably have originated in Egypt.

The fifteenth century saw the decline of Islamic glass being made in the Near East owing to economic, political, and artistic factors, which resulted in more and

more glass workshops shutting down. The ascendancy of Venetian glass during the fifteenth century can be seen with the increasing number of shipments of Venetian glass to the Levant, the declining quality of Mamluk mosque lamps, and the cessation of the collecting of Mamluk glass and rise of the collecting of Venetian glass by Italian families such as the Medici and the Strozzi.

Following a brief introduction to the subject, the author provides a synthetic and coherent exploration of the Islamic glass in Florence by dedicating chapters to specific issues including the sources for the research, details about the importation of glass, the collectors of Mamluk glass, the uses and prices of glass pieces, and a look at specific vessel forms circulating in Florence. Spallanzani confronts head on the problems involved in using source documents to understand the collecting of Islamic glass, including the paucity of documentary evidence, the lack of detailed descriptions of Islamic glass, and the fact that documents consistently refer to Islamic objects as *di* or *da* Damascus, or *domaschino*, even though they could have been made elsewhere in the Islamic world.

While not the most expensive of the luxury goods coming from the Levant, Mamluk glass was relatively rare in Europe. With the exception of the Medici — Piero de' Medici possessed eleven pieces in 1463 — most Italian collectors only possessed one or two pieces of Islamic glass. Because Islamic glass enjoyed only a brief period of popularity in Florence, and as little evidence about it has survived, this volume is relatively short. As Islamic glass was collected in other important cities even though the archives have not revealed analogous evidence, the author feels Florence can be interpreted as a type of valid model for the collecting of Islamic glass in Italy and beyond. The solid scholarship, inclusion of source materials, and beautiful illustrations make this tome an invaluable and handsome addition to the growing number of resources on the collecting of Islamic luxury goods in Florence.

MARY L. PIXLEY

University of Missouri