

Glass in Imitation of Other Materials

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The classification of materials is a practice with deep roots in the past, but the multifarious properties of glass lent it an intermediary or ambiguous position in many classification systems: from the Bronze Age description of glasses with reference to precious stones, and the role of glasses in alchemical theories of the Middle Ages, to the difficulties encountered by modern science in attempting to determine its physical state, glass has resisted classification.

This ambiguous position also stems from the chameleonic properties of man-made glasses, which can be worked to shape when either hot or cold, can be produced in almost limitless hues, and can be either transparent or opaque. Glass is particularly suited to mimicking the properties of stones and gemstones, though it also has strong connections with metals and pottery. Much like the plastics of the twentieth century, glass may at times in its history have been a by-word for *ersatz*. Yet imitation was often a very complex matter, for the properties of glass also lend it a unique value in many applications. Just as the Roman vessel known as the Portland Vase originally reflected cameo work in natural stones, which would have been impossible to achieve on such a large object, so it too was imitated in ceramic by Josiah Wedgwood in the late 18th century.

The aim of this study day is to explore aspects of the use of glass in imitation of other materials. What purposes were behind this practice, and how was it achieved from a technical perspective? Which materials were mimicked, and how did this affect the value of the glass itself and the material it was imitating? What was the purpose of mimesis and imitation at different times?

The study day covers a range of subjects over three millennia, from Egyptian glass and faience of the Late Bronze Age (Paul Nicholson, Susan Sherratt); to glass imitating Chinese jade (Ian Freestone), or opal and agate (Colin Brain); early English china (Mike Noble); cameo glasses (Paul Roberts); Hellenistic and Roman banded glasses (Jenny Price); glass inlays in Anglo-Saxon metalwork (Jo Ahmet); and glass skeuomorphs in the Near East (St John Simpson).

For further details, please do contact Daniela Rosenow (DRosenow@britishmuseum.org) or Chloë Duckworth (cd227@le.ac.uk).

If you would like to attend, please send your full contact details and a cheque for £15 (members of AHG), £25 (non-members) or £8 (students) payable to the Association for the History of Glass Ltd to: Denise Allen, 12 Birchy Barton Hill, Exeter EX1 3ET, UK. Lunch is not provided, but is available locally. Email: denise_allen52@hotmail.com.

Members wishing to attend the AGM of the Association only, which will be held on the same day, may do so free of charge.