

Axel von Saldern, *Antikes Glas*. Handbuch der Archäologie. C. H. Beck, München 2004. xxv and 708 pages with 73 figures, 64 plates with 406 figures.

Over the last sixty years the study of ancient glass has progressed from strength to strength, and the articles in numerous specialist and non-specialist publications testify to the rapidity of progress and change within the discipline. But what had so far been lacking was an up to date handbook for the specialist that summarized the state of research and guided the reader to the necessary additional literature to aid in his or her own research. It had, however, become something of a truism, that the field had now progressed well beyond what one expert could encompass alone. Axel von Saldern, former curator at the Corning Museum of Glass and the Brooklyn Museum, associate director of the Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf and director of the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg, is probably one of the few doyens of the field who could attempt an overview of two thousand years of glass production with any hope of success. That the editor Beck was able to recruit him to write this volume is thus an immense achievement that will be of lasting benefit to the field.

Yet even at over seven hundred pages this work has had to make economies, and it is probably best to state from the beginning what this book is not for: of necessity, certain areas of study will find themselves underrepresented. Glass technology and studies of glass working sites do receive short summaries, but substantial help is offered in references to relevant descriptions and other important articles elsewhere. Other areas are less fortunate, however. Saldern interprets his topic 'Antikes Glas' to stand for material from the origins of glass making to the end of the classic age, that is the fourth and fifth centuries in the west and the sixth in the East. Roman period glass objects, Merovingian and Sassanid glass and non-Roman glass production north of the Alps (especially glass objects) get very little mention, with the exception of Celtic pre-Roman glass jewellery (pp. 90–93). Instead of approaching the subject as a jack of all trades, Saldern thus displays himself for what he is: the master of Mediterranean vessel glass and by focusing on these Mediterranean vessel glass traditions he produces a book that will be an asset for years to come to workers in these fields.

The introducing chapters present an overview of the current state of research on pre-Roman glass production, covering its beginnings in the Near East and Egypt, through the glass inlays of the first millennium BC, to the core-formed vessels and the numerous glass working centres of the sixth to first centuries BC. The largest part of the book is then dedicated to Roman vessel glass, with detailed studies taking in all of the major luxury vessel groups, which display Saldern's expertise to the full. This typological section concludes with a brief overview of the undecorated, non-luxury types and a number of unusual vessels. On pages 528–623 he reviews the various regional schools of glass production

in the Roman Empire, discussing the extent of their likely local production and the characteristics of an area's glass typologies. This section also includes listings of important sites in each area which are well worth consulting and pointers to some of the extant problems.

In the appendices, a number of much shorter chapters deal with other overarching aspects of glass research, including the brief introductions to glass technology as well as production and working sites, already mentioned, questions of transport, the likely contents of vessels, the chances of survival over considerable time periods, as well as repairs and then concludes with a short section on fakes and reproductions. The book concludes with a thematic bibliography naming the most important works for each field, as well as listings of the literature cited and provides a separate, but very welcome, list of the unpublished MA and Ph. D. theses that are crucial to the study of glass at present.

The reviewer is well aware that it is not usually the role of a handbook to be read cover to cover, but having done so, she was consistently held captive by the excellent style and clarity of Saldern's text and the substantial amount of editorial work that must have gone into the production of the book. If there is one fly in the ointment, it is that Beck despite its beautiful production, was unable to produce at least a selection of the more than four hundred photographs of glass vessels and objects in colour, as in the case of the Shrines (plates 85 and 86), or at a slightly larger scale, as in the case of the Kantharos Dish (plate 363), to bring out what makes these objects so noteworthy. Nevertheless, the photos are of high quality and usually make their points well.

As for the likely target readership, like its predecessor, Kisa's *Das Glas im Altertum*, it is directed at connoisseurs of the material. But more realistically, given its high, if well justified price, it is likely to become a much consulted work on the shelves – or more often the desks – of specialists in Mediterranean glass, especially those working with complete vessels in museums and other collections. Having used it during the production of several settlement site glass reports over the last few months, it has become a kind of firm friend to the reviewer when dealing with luxury glass, albeit it has proved less useful when dealing with more common every day wares, such as plain bowls, drinking vessels and the ubiquitous containers. Saldern is well aware of this and points readers to publications of large assemblages of such material. For example, to name but a few (p.474–479), he cites the Colchester report by Hilary E.M. Cool and Jennifer Price for Britain and Beat Ruetti's report on Augst and Kaiseraugst, for Germany. Moreover researchers would also be well advised to consult Saldern's regional chapters, which cover these undecorated vessels in greater detail than the typological overview. Having tested it as a textbook, the reviewer would, however, have to report that the handbook is of only limited use to an absolute beginner in the field. Students that I pointed towards the book – even those to whom the German language was not an issue –

found that it assumes already a substantial amount of prior knowledge of the basics of glass studies. It thus does not help the newcomer to identify and separate different material and in this it differs markedly from, for example, J. Price / S. Cottam, *Romano-British Glass Vessels. A Handbook* (York 1998), which addresses a market with less expertise. But then such a Handbuch is traditionally meant as a rapid reference work for the initiate, and not a beginners' introduction.

Writing a handbook in a field that receives as much attention as glass studies do at present, inevitably raises the question of how the work will hold up over time. Predictions are hard to make in this area, but the overviews of the literature on the relevant vessel type which precedes every entry provide a good idea of whether the type in question has been understood and recognized for some time, or whether the material is currently undergoing re-assessment.

The section that is likely to become obsolete quickest is the overview of regional schools. Some, such as Britain and the Rhineland, are well studied and their characters can be deemed to be well understood, but others are of such a large scale, for example the Danube provinces, by comparison to other such landscapes, such as Southern and Central Italy, that it seems unlikely that further research will not have established smaller but better defined landscapes, like Greece, within them in ten or twenty years time. Yet, even here, Saldern has offered us a basis to work from in the considerable work to come, and we owe him a huge debt of gratitude.

Saldern dedicates the handbook to Donald Harden, as a person who moved glass studies forward like few others. In summarising Harden's work and that of many others working in the field (including himself), Axel von Saldern has set up an imposing monument to twentieth century glass studies. It is to be hoped that it will be well used and that it will soon be translated into English to make it available to a more international market.

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