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Evolution of glass recipes during the Early Middle Ages in France: analytical evidence of multiple solutions adapted to local contexts

Inès Pactat, Magalie Guérit, Laure Simon, Bernard Gratuze, Stéphanie Raux,
Céline Aunay

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Cover illustration

Goblets with white filigree decoration, produced in Swiss glasshouses, late 17th to early 18th century. From different Swiss public and private collections. For a detailed discussion see: Erwin Baumgartner, *Reflets de Venise*, Bern 2015, p. 254–272, 322–328 and the contribution of Christophe Gerber in the present volume, page 564.

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CONTENTS

- XI **PRÉFACE**
 XIII **PREFACE**
 XV **VORWORT**

Sylvia Fünfschilling

ANTIQUÉ AND ISLAMIC GLASS (KEYNOTES)

- 2 L'étude du verre antique. Etat de la question
Marie-Dominique Nenna
- 10 Entre Orient et Occident, le verre islamique (VIII^e-XIII^e siècle) :
 apports récents et réflexions sur les échanges et les influences
Danièle Foy

ARCHAIC, CLASSICAL AND HELLENISTIC GLASS

- 36 Glass fragments from Qal'eh Kali, an Achaemenid site in south-western Iran
Bernadette McCall, Amanda J. Dusting
- 43 Capacity measurement to demonstrate standardised productions of the core-formed vessels
 from the late Archaic to the late Hellenistic period. An interim report
Peter Cosyns, Bieke Verhelst, Karin Nys
- 48 The provenance of Hellenistic core-formed vessels from Satricum, Italy
Artemios Oikonomou, Marijke Gnade, Julian Henderson, Simon Chenery, Nikos Zacharias
- 54 Glass vessels from the Persian and Hellenistic administrative building at Tel Kedesh, Israel
Katherine A. Larson, Andrea M. Berlin, Sharon Herbert
- 61 Gold in glass
Despina Ignatiadou
- 68 A study of the cut gold leaf decoration techniques on ancient gold sandwich glass,
 with emphasis on the Hellenistic 'Kirikane' technique
Hidetoshi Namiki, Yasuko Fuji
- 73 Hellenistic mosaic glass and La Tène glass-working
Natalie Venclová, Šárka Jonášová, Tomáš Vaculovič

ROMAN GLASS

- 82 Gold-band glass fragments in the Römisch-Germanisches Museum of Cologne:
 considerations about the techniques
Giulia Cesarin
- 87 La vaisselle en verre de deux sépultures aristocratiques augusto-tibériennes à Ath/Ghislenghien
 (Province de Hainaut, Belgique)
Frédéric Hanut, Véronique Danese
- 92 Le verre romain de Montignac-sur-Vézère (Dordogne)
Laure Simon
- 98 The Roman necropolis of Budva (Montenegro) and its mould-blown glass assemblage
Irena Lazar
- 103 Mold-blown glass from the Roman province of Dalmatia
Berislav Štefanac
- 109 Römische Tintenfässer Isings 77
Michael Johannes Klein
- 116 A comparative investigation of the glass vessels and objects from eastern Thrace and Lydian tumuli
 in the light of the Dügüncülü and Güre finds
Ömür Dünya Çakmaklı, Emre Taştemür

- 124 Le sanctuaire d'Yvonand-Mordagne (Vaud, Suisse) : premier aperçu de la vaisselle cultuelle en verre
Chantal Martin Pruvot, Ellinor Stucki
- 132 Blown mosaic glass of the Roman period: technical observations and experiments
E. Marianne Stern
- 140 Two polychrome mosaic bowls and associated glass vessels from a rich 2nd century burial at Kelshall, Hertfordshire, England
Sally Cottam, Jennifer Price
- 145 Früh- und mittelkaiserzeitliche Glasgefäße im nördlichen Obergermanien
Martin Grünwald
- 152 L'exceptionnelle verrerie d'un bûcher funéraire du III^e siècle après J.-C. de Jaunay-Clan (Vienne, France)
Laudine Robin
- 160 Le verre archéologique du Canton du Tessin (Suisse) : une révision
Simonetta Biaggio-Simona
- 163 More glass from Aquileia (Italy)
Luciana Mandruzzato

LATE ROMAN AND EARLY MEDIEVAL

- 168 Mapping glass production in Italy. Looking through the first millenium AD
Barbara Lepri, Lucia Sagui
- 175 Chemical signature and scale of production of primary glass factories around the Mediterranean in the first millenium AD
Patrick Degryse
- 181 The cut-glass beaker from Biel-Mett/BE
Sylvia Fünfschilling
- 184 New evidence about engraved glass from Milan (Italy) (3rd–4th century AD)
Marina Uboldi
- 190 Besondere Glasfunde aus dem Gräberfeld Gönheim (Kreis Bad Dürkheim) – Germania prima – und ein neuer Ort möglicher Glasverarbeitung
Andrea Ideli
- 194 Glass vessels from Late Roman burials in Languedoc-Roussillon (France): key points, from glass production to the ritual of grave deposits
Stéphanie Raux
- 203 Late antique and early medieval glass vessels from northern-central Apulia: productions, typologies, functions and circulation
Francesca Giannetti, Roberta Giuliani, Maria Turchiano
- 209 A large glass dish from Cástulo (Linares – Jaén, Spain) with an engraved representation of Christ in Majesty
David Expósito Mangas, Marcelo Castro López, Francisco Arias de Haro, José Manuel Pedrosa Luque, Bautista Ceprián del Castillo
- 213 Late Roman glass from Mala Kopašnica (Serbia) – forms and chemical analysis
Sonja Stamenković, Susanne Greiff, Sonngard Hartmann
- 222 Glass vessels from Late Roman graves in the Hungarian part of the Roman province Pannonia
Kata Dévai
- 230 Recent glass finds from Elaiussa Sebaste in Cilicia
Çiğdem Gençler-Güray
- 235 Indices d'ateliers de verriers à Apamée de Syrie, à la fin de l'Antiquité
Danièle Foy, avec la collaboration de Bernard Gratuze
- 240 Une mosaïque de verre à thème chrétien (V^e s.), du site monastique copte des Kellia (Basse-Égypte)
Denis Weidmann
- 243 New finds of mosaic glass inlays from Antinoupolis, Egypt
Flora Silvano

- 248 Glass bead trade in northeast Africa in the Roman period.
A view according to the Museum of Archaeology University of Stavanger assemblage
Joanna Then-Obtuska, Barbara Wagner
- 257 A Late Roman glass workshop at Komarov (Middle Dniester) and
the problem of the origin of 'Barbarian' facet cut beakers
Olga Rumyantseva, Constantin Belikov
- 265 The glass collections in the 'Museum Aan de Stroom' (MAS), Antwerp (Belgium)
Eugène Warmenbol, Annemie De Vos, Peter Cosyns
- 271 Le verre de la nécropole mérovingienne de La Mézière (Bretagne, France)
Françoise Labaune-Jean

BYZANTINE AND ISLAMIC GLASS, NEAR EAST

- 280 Opaque red glass tesserae from Roman and early-Byzantine sites of north-eastern Italy:
new light on production technologies
Sarah Maltoni, Alberta Silvestri, Gianmario Molin
- 288 The Early Islamic green lead glass from the excavations at Caesarea Maritima, Israel
Rachel Pollak
- 293 Study on the Early Islamic glass excavated in Paykend in the Bukhara Oasis, Uzbekistan
Yoko Shindo
- 300 Reexamination of a Mamluk glass collection from Jerusalem
Naama Brosh
- 307 Mamluk glass from Quseir al-Qadim: chemical analysis of some glass fragments
Laure Dussubieux
- 313 An outstanding glass assemblage from the medieval and Ottoman castle at Safed (Zefat)
Natalya Katsnelson, with a contribution by Matt Phelps
- 319 Byzantine glass bracelets in Western Rus. Archaeological finds from Belarus
Kristina A. Lavysh

EUROPEAN GLASS FROM 700 TO 1500

- 326 Red and orange high-alumina glass beads in 7th and 8th century Scandinavia:
evidence for long distance trade and local fabrication
Torben Sode, Bernard Gratuze, James W. Lankton
- 334 Evolution of glass recipes during the Early Middle Ages in France:
analytical evidence of multiple solutions adapted to local contexts
Inès Pactat, Magalie Guérit, Laure Simon, Bernard Gratuze, Stéphanie Raux, Céline Aunay
- 341 'The Emerald of Charlemagne': new observations on the production techniques and
provenance of an enigmatic glass artefact
Cordula M. Kessler, Sophie Wolf, Jürg Goll
- 346 Les verres du Haut Moyen Âge issus des fouilles du *monasterium Habendum* (Saint-Amé, Vosges)
Hubert Cabart (†), Inès Pactat, Bernard Gratuze, avec la collaboration de Charles Kraemer et Thomas Chenal
- 354 Technological transition in early medieval northern Italy: preliminary data for Comacchio glass
Camilla Bertini, Julian Henderson, Sauro Gelichi, Elena Basso, Maria Pia Riccardi, Margherita Ferri
- 360 Where does the medieval glass from San Genesio (Pisa, Italy) come from?
Marja Mendera, Federico Cantini, Alessandra Marcante, Alberta Silvestri, Filomena Gallo, Gianmario Molin, Marco Pescarin Volpato
- 366 Natron and plant ash glass in the Middle Danube region during the Early Middle Ages
Danica Staššiková-Štukovská
- 374 Glass in fashion and trade in Bohemia in the 9th-11th century (archaeology and archaeometry)
Kateřina Tomková, Šárka Jonášová, Zuzana Zlámalová Cílová

- 379 13th–14th century glass in northwest Bohemia: typology, archaeometry and provenance
Eva Černá
- 385 Glass production in medieval Spain: a long-term perspective on knowledge transfer
Chloë N. Duckworth
- 391 Die Glaserzeugnisse Bolgars und ihr Verhältnis zu anderen mittelalterlichen Glasproduktionen
Svetlana Valiulina
- 399 Glass from Enez (ancient Ainos)
Üzlifat Canav-Özgülüş, Serra Kanyak
- 403 Indices de travail du verre rouge dans l'atelier médiéval d'Anlier, seconde moitié du XIV^e siècle (Luxembourg belge)
Chantal Fontaine-Hodiamont, Denis Henrotay

EUROPEAN GLASS FROM 1500 TO 2000

- 412 Looking through late medieval and early modern glass in Portugal
Teresa Medici, Inês Coutinho, Luís C. Alves, Bernard Gratuze, Márcia Vilarigues
- 421 La consommation du verre à Paris entre le XIV^e et le XIX^e siècle : des données récentes
Amélie A. Berthon, Isabelle Caillot, Kateline Ducat
- 429 Zur Frage der Provenienz von historischen Gläsern – Die Sammlung des Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museums in Braunschweig und des Rijksmuseums Amsterdam
Nicole Brüderle-Krug
- 435 Les verres émaillés vénitiens de la Renaissance : le projet Cristallo
Françoise Barbe, Fernando Filipponi
- 444 Renaissance Venetian enamelled glass. Genuine, façon de Venise and fake or copy artefacts
Marco Verità, Isabelle Biron
- 453 All-glass hybrids: Why they were made and the importance of identifying them
Suzanne Higgott
- 460 All-glass hybrids: What they are, manufacturing techniques and detection
Juanita Navarro
- 467 Venedig oder Tirol? Zur Lokalisierung einiger Hohlgläser des 16. Jahrhunderts mit Kaltbemalung im Bayerischen Nationalmuseum
Annette Schommers
- 474 Glashütte Hall in Tirol. Die archäologischen Grabungen 2008 und 2009
Anna Awad
- 482 Goblets of the late- to post-medieval period from archaeological excavations in Dubrovnik
Nikolina Topić
- 490 16th-century glass vessels from the burials of the Ascension Convent in the Moscow Kremlin
Ekaterina Stolyarova
- 495 The problem of forgeries in 19th century Murano
Aldo Bova
- 498 Deutsche Formgläser des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts? Beobachtungen und Überlegungen zu einer Neudatierung
Dieter Schaich
- 506 Die älteren Glashütten der Schweiz (ca. 1200–1800)
Walter Schaffner
- 512 „À la façon de Venise“: Zur Geschichte des Begriffs und zur Verbreitung von Gläsern in venezianischer Art in Westfalen
Sveva Gai
- 522 Haushalt, Apotheke oder Gasthaus? Zusammensetzungen frühneuzeitlicher Glasfundkomplexe im Kontext ihrer Fundsituation
Birgit Kulessa

- 532 Mirrors, spectacles and looking glasses in Antwerp and the Duchy of Brabant: aspects of production and use of optical glass based on serial documentary and archaeological evidence
Danielle Caluwé
- 537 *Façon de Venise*, une étiquette problématique. Propositions pour une méthodologie raisonnée de l'étude de la verrerie à l'italienne en Europe, XV^e-XVIII^e siècle, à partir de l'exemple du marché parisien (1550-1665)
Benoît Painchart, Christiane Guyomar
- 542 Diagnostic differences between early filigree glass and the Rosenborg Castle-type filigree glass
Kitty Laméris
- 547 The golden age of Amsterdam glass. A chemical and typological approach to recognize Amsterdam 17th century glass production
Michel Hulst, Jerzy J. Kunicki-Goldfinger
- 554 What's the purpose: oil lamp, perfume sprinkler or trick-glass?
Reino Liefkes
- 561 Court, Pâturage de l'Envers : une verrerie forestière du début du XVIII^e siècle entre tradition et modernité (Jura bernois, Suisse)
Christophe Gerber
- 567 Der Kühlprozess der Glashütte von Court, Pâturage de l'Envers (1699-1714) im Berner Jura (Schweiz)
Jonathan Frey
- 575 Quelques révélations sur l'outillage de la verrerie du Pâturage de l'Envers à Court (1699-1714)
Lara Tremblay
- 578 Eighteenth century lead glass in the Netherlands
Anna Laméris
- 585 Imported beads in Russia in the 17th and first half of the 18th centuries (Moscow, Mangazeya, Smolensk region)
Julia Likhter
- 591 „Pressglas“ aus Benedict Vivats Glasfabriken
Valentina Bevc Varl
- 597 Glass fishing floats from Greek sites
Anastassios Antonaras
- 602 Crizzling glass - corrosion products and chemical composition of Bohemian glass
Zuzana Zlámalová Cílová, Helena Brožková, Michaela Kněžů Knížová, Irena Kučerová
- 606 The development of the chemical composition of Czech mosaic glass from the Middle Ages to the present day
Michaela Kněžů Knížová, Zuzana Zlámalová Cílová, Irena Kučerová, Martin Zlámal
- 612 The glass collection of Felice Barnabei at the Museo Nazionale Romano - Palazzo Massimo in Rome
Giulia Giovanetti, Silvia Bruni
- 617 Zwei vernachlässigte Glasvarietäten des 19. Jahrhunderts: Aventurin-Hohlglas und Uran-Selenglas
Sibylle Jargstorf
- 621 The Glass Room of the National Palace of Necessidades in Lisbon
Alexandra Rodrigues, Bruno Martinho, Frederik Berger, Anísio Franco, Márcia Vilarigues
- 625 Albert Dammouse (1848-1926) et la pâte de verre (1897-1913)
Véronique Ayroles
- 631 Le verre artistique de Saint-Prex (1928-1964)
Stanislas Anthonioz, Ana Quintero Pérez
- ASIAN GLASS**
- 640 A unique glass object from a Buddhist context in Sri Lanka
Brigitte Borell
- 647 Glass exchange and people in ancient East Asia
Chizuko Kotera

- 652 Glass from Mughal India. A study of four eighteenth century cobalt blue bottles
Tara Desjardins

WINDOW GLASS AND STAINED GLASS

- 660 The early medieval stained glass windows from St. John, Müstair: materials, provenance and production technology
Sophie Wolf, Cordula M. Kessler, Jürg Goll, Stefan Trümpler, Patrick Degryse
- 668 Painted window glasses from Akko/Acre from the Crusader period (1099–1291 CE).
Manufacturing processes and conservation
Adrienne Ganor
- 672 Medieval window glass in Scotland
Helen Spencer, Craig Kennedy
- 680 Untersuchungen zur Provenienz von Gläsern aus dem Kloster Maulbronn
Manfred Torge
- 684 Swiss *Kabinettscheiben* from a 19th century Portuguese collection. Study and chemical characterisation
Andreia Machado, Alexandra Rodrigues, Mathilda Coutinho, Luís C. Alves, Victoria Corregidor, Rui C. da Silva, Vincent Serneels, Ildiko Katona Serneels, Sophie Wolf, Stefan Trümpler, Márcia Vilarigues
- 689 Le vitrail dans les hôtels suisses de la Belle-Epoque : une importance sous-estimée ?
Dave Lüthi
- 697 „Magisches Licht“ – Glasfenster in der neo-islamischen Architektur
Sarah Keller
- 699 The window glass and stained glass windows of Belém: a cultural history of the Brazilian Amazon region
Amanda Corrêa Pinto, Márcia Vilarigues, Thais Sanjad
- 703 Autour d'un artiste-verrier de la première moitié du XX^e siècle.
Marcel Poncet (1894-1953) : à la jonction de la peinture et du vitrail
Camille Noverraz
- 706 L'activité créatrice de Paule Ingrand au sein d'« Art et Verre » (1946 à 1962)
Isabelle Lecocq, avec la collaboration de Catherine Thomas
- 713 Makellos transparent oder mit romantischen Schlieren? Überlegungen zu Sortenvielfalt und Ästhetik des
Fensterglases im frühen 20. Jahrhundert mit Fokus auf dem Spiegel- oder Kristallglas
Anne Krauter, Ueli Fritz

REVERSE PAINTING ON GLASS

- 722 Une œuvre du Vitromusée Romont passée à la loupe. Un cabinet de facture napolitaine décoré de plaquettes
de verre peintes
Elisa Ambrosio
- 725 La peinture sous verre « savante » en France au XVIII^e siècle : oubliée puis redécouverte
Jeannine Geysant
- 732 La peinture sous verre chinoise au XVIII^e siècle. Une rencontre artistique Chine – Occident
Thierry Audric
- 735 La peinture sous verre monumentale de l'église paroissiale de Mézières (Fribourg, Suisse) :
« La délivrance de Saint Pierre », 1940, par Emilio Maria Beretta
Monika Neuner, Yves Jolidon, Pascal Moret

GENERAL THEMES

- 740 Le verre à l'école, un projet pour les jeunes
Maria Grazia Diani, Luciana Mandruzzato

EVOLUTION OF GLASS RECIPES DURING THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES IN FRANCE: ANALYTICAL EVIDENCE OF MULTIPLE SOLUTIONS ADAPTED TO LOCAL CONTEXTS

Inès Pactat, Magalie Guérit, Laure Simon, Bernard Gratuze, Stéphanie Raux, Céline Aunay

INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with the transition from Roman to medieval glass manufacturing processes by examining three Carolingian glass workshops in France. During the Merovingian period, the Roman production system is still in effect, but an increase of recycling soda-lime glass made from mineral soda (also called natron glass) has been observed from the 7th century onwards.¹ This phenomenon is the direct result of a progressive decline of Near Eastern raw glass imports. Similar solutions of glassmaking, based on a plant ash as fusing agent, were adopted both in the East and the West. During the 9th century, soda-lime glass made from halophytic plant ash replaced natron glass in Eastern Mediterranean and in Mesopotamia.² By the 12th century, it is the dominant glass type throughout the Mediterranean. In Western and Continental Europe, potash-lime glass made from wood ash develops from the end of the 8th century,³ resulting in glass compositions characterized by high contents of magnesia, and oxides of phosphorus and manganese.⁴ This type of glass, also known as wood ash glass, becomes the prevailing one in continental Europe at the end of the 10th century. However, cobalt blue natron glass is still used until the end of the 12th century for specific productions.⁵ We must also point out the existence of another kind of glass, where the calco-alkaline flux is partly or totally replaced by lead oxide.⁶

As we have discussed, important changes in glass manufacturing processes occurred in Western Europe during the Carolingian period. In recent years, the increasing number of analyses carried out on Western European glass dating from this transition period has highlighted the presence of a great variety of compositions. This diversity seems to reflect the use of local raw materials, which enabled glassmakers to face the lack of both raw and recycled natron glass. Three case studies of glass workshops in France illustrate the different solutions developed during the 9th–10th centuries to maintain the glass manufacturing: Méru (Oise), La Milesse (Sarthe) and Melle (Deux-Sèvres) (figure 1). The first two are glass workshops dating from the 9th and the 10th centuries; they are located in the north and the northwest of France respectively. The third workshop is known for its glass produced from recycled metallurgical vitreous slags.

A CAROLINGIAN GLASS WORKSHOP IN MÉRU

In 2008, an archaeological evaluation conducted at Méru (Oise) has revealed a medieval glass workshop and a con-



Fig. 1: Location of the three studied glass workshop and the sites where the beakers from Melle have been discovered. © authors.

temporary settlement.⁷ The site was probably abandoned after a fire and has not been reoccupied afterwards. Despite its relative isolation from urban and religious centres, the workshop is located on land belonging to the abbey of Saint-Denis, and is situated on a major road, close to necessary resources (wood, clay and water). Although the site has not been fully excavated, different elements prove undoubtedly the presence of a glass workshop: vitreous slag and vitrified furnace walls, crucibles (including three complete ones), glass working waste and glass artefacts. Based on ceramics and glass vessels, the site can be dated to the first and second third of the 9th century.

In order to understand which types of glass were worked and produced at Méru, 50 samples have been ana-

1 FREESTONE 2015; MIRTÍ et al. 2001.

2 WHITEHOUSE 2002.

3 VAN WERSCH et al. 2015; VELDE 2009; WEDEPOHL, WINKELMANN and HARTMANN 1997.

4 WEDEPOHL and SIMON 2010.

5 BRILL 1999, 244; FOY 2001, 291–302; SIMON-HIERNARD and GRATUZE 2011; STREPNIČH and LIBOUREL 1997.

6 BRILL 1999; DUCKWORTH et al. 2014; MECKING 2013; WEDEPOHL and BAUMANN 1997.

7 PACTAT, GRATUZE and DERBOIS 2015.

		Na ₂ O	MgO	Al ₂ O ₃	SiO ₂	P ₂ O ₅	K ₂ O	CaO	MnO	Fe ₂ O ₃	TiO ₂	ZnO	SrO	CoO	Rb ₂ O	CuO	SnO ₂	Sb ₂ O ₃	BaO	PbO	
Samples	Colour	%																			
<i>Crucibles</i>																					
111-72	blue-green	17.6	0.63	2.41	67.6	0.06	0.71	8.36	0.34	0.62	0.08	0.003	0.05	<0.001	0.002	0.005	0.002	0.46	0.02	0.01	
82-C1	colourless	9.48	2.62	3.10	64.4	1.04	4.01	11.2	0.78	1.29	0.19	0.05	0.05	0.002	0.007	0.74	0.07	0.10	0.08	0.34	
<i>Raw glass</i>																					
12-61	blue-green	13.7	0.62	2.62	69.7	0.11	0.37	10.0	0.26	1.04	0.25	0.01	0.03	0.002	0.001	0.03	0.01	0.004	0.02	0.08	
111-143	light yellow	11.8	0.60	2.65	69.9	0.10	0.39	10.6	1.50	1.02	0.31	0.01	0.02	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	<0.001	0.04	0.002	
111-139	light green	13.7	1.12	3.01	68.8	0.29	1.71	8.27	0.86	1.01	0.20	0.02	0.04	0.001	0.003	0.13	0.01	0.08	0.05	0.06	
111-102	purple	10.9	1.32	3.47	70.3	0.27	1.15	8.24	0.74	2.09	0.37	0.02	0.05	0.003	0.002	0.14	0.04	0.14	0.04	0.16	
<i>Wastes</i>																					
94-33	deep green	6.85	4.06	2.39	62.5	1.71	7.60	11.8	0.64	1.01	0.18	0.03	0.05	0.001	0.01	0.21	0.04	0.15	0.09	0.18	
111-156	deep green	10.7	2.04	3.29	61.9	2.48	4.05	10.2	0.66	2.16	0.27	0.05	0.05	0.004	0.007	0.47	0.14	0.12	0.08	0.64	
101-47	yellow-green	4.47	4.96	2.40	57.3	2.56	11.7	12.4	0.71	1.41	0.20	0.03	0.05	0.002	0.02	0.89	0.05	0.03	0.11	0.22	
111-97	green	9.11	2.94	2.69	64.0	1.28	6.06	10.6	0.60	1.11	0.21	0.05	0.04	0.002	0.01	0.37	0.05	0.06	0.08	0.17	
94-29	light green	5.46	4.77	2.39	60.1	2.35	10.0	11.5	0.69	1.18	0.20	0.04	0.04	0.001	0.02	0.48	0.04	0.04	0.10	0.18	
111-75	light green	10.9	2.65	2.95	63.6	1.07	4.33	10.7	0.59	1.32	0.22	0.11	0.04	0.002	0.008	0.61	0.06	0.06	0.07	0.20	
111-127	light green	6.42	4.11	2.86	61.8	1.95	7.62	11.8	0.67	1.21	0.22	0.04	0.05	0.002	0.01	0.22	0.06	0.05	0.11	0.27	
111-153	blue-green	16.7	0.54	2.41	68.5	0.07	0.51	6.84	0.12	0.62	0.10	0.16	0.05	0.001	0.001	1.05	0.01	0.77	0.02	0.42	
111-101	cobalt blue	16.7	0.55	3.09	69.0	0.12	0.55	6.34	0.35	0.66	0.13	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.001	0.48	0.03	0.67	0.02	0.08	
94-27	red	13.4	0.79	2.29	63.5	0.29	3.57	7.37	0.36	5.08	0.09	0.02	0.05	0.004	0.007	0.97	0.02	0.53	0.04	0.60	
94-27	black	15.2	0.60	2.57	66.6	0.13	0.95	6.51	0.32	3.75	0.10	0.03	0.04	0.004	0.001	0.29	0.04	0.62	0.02	1.32	
<i>Tesserae</i>																					
58-63	blue-green	13.6	0.48	2.50	63.4	0.11	0.50	6.77	0.47	0.49	0.07	0.003	0.05	0.001	0.001	1.47	0.09	0.69	0.02	8.38	
111-100	blue-green	15.9	0.57	2.59	66.5	0.20	0.72	6.80	0.48	0.93	0.09	0.005	0.05	0.001	0.001	1.68	0.06	0.39	0.02	1.59	
94-28	yellow	14.6	0.39	1.76	61.7	0.05	0.43	4.45	0.22	0.97	0.10	0.003	0.03	0.000	0.001	0.01	0.04	1.80	0.01	12.5	
<i>Vessels</i>																					
55-50	deep green	8.36	3.10	2.67	62.3	1.43	6.17	11.1	0.72	1.12	0.18	0.02	0.05	0.002	0.01	1.86	0.07	0.09	0.09	0.21	
48-54	light green	15.5	1.00	2.77	67.1	0.24	1.16	8.17	0.85	1.20	0.15	0.03	0.06	0.003	0.002	0.25	0.05	0.20	0.04	0.23	
56-68	light green	3.62	4.85	2.44	60.2	2.37	11.0	12.1	0.75	1.33	0.24	0.03	0.04	0.001	0.02	0.14	0.04	0.02	0.14	0.20	
82-11	light green	5.36	4.64	2.48	60.4	2.18	9.18	12.3	0.75	1.29	0.22	0.03	0.05	0.001	0.02	0.32	0.07	0.04	0.11	0.14	
94-23	light green	14.7	0.94	2.81	68.2	0.23	0.98	8.27	0.88	1.03	0.18	0.05	0.05	0.002	0.002	0.43	0.03	0.13	0.04	0.16	
111-124	light green	13.9	0.70	3.13	71.7	0.08	0.54	8.35	0.02	0.44	0.08	0.001	0.05	<0.001	0.001	0.003	0.001	<0.001	0.02	0.002	
111-128	light green	7.75	3.97	2.61	62.3	1.71	6.75	11.3	0.76	1.26	0.21	0.06	0.04	0.002	0.01	0.46	0.04	0.04	0.10	0.13	
111-144	light green	8.36	3.39	2.77	61.2	1.19	5.74	11.1	0.73	1.35	0.17	0.04	0.05	0.002	0.01	0.61	0.24	0.09	0.13	2.30	
111-147	light green	12.7	1.24	2.33	66.5	0.32	5.04	8.54	0.84	1.01	0.14	0.02	0.05	0.002	0.004	0.12	0.04	0.15	0.04	0.16	
14-59	blue-green	4.02	4.41	2.60	59.7	2.13	10.1	12.4	0.78	1.35	0.23	0.03	0.04	0.002	0.02	0.46	0.19	0.03	0.13	0.88	
111-115	blue-green	3.25	5.06	2.93	59.4	2.38	9.55	13.8	0.79	1.49	0.28	0.03	0.04	0.001	0.020	0.13	0.04	0.02	0.16	0.23	
94-22	light blue	12.5	0.93	2.89	70.1	0.12	0.70	10.5	0.09	1.04	0.28	0.004	0.02	0.001	0.001	0.01	0.003	0.003	0.02	0.01	
94-24	light blue	16.0	0.37	2.06	71.9	0.13	0.50	6.96	0.42	0.30	0.05	0.001	0.04	0.001	0.001	0.003	0.001	0.004	0.02	0.001	
111-79	light blue	6.80	4.39	2.68	61.5	2.00	8.04	11.2	0.65	1.23	0.20	0.04	0.05	0.002	0.018	0.21	0.07	0.05	0.10	0.31	
111-107	light blue	15.9	0.59	2.89	69.3	0.12	0.94	8.84	0.02	0.37	0.07	0.00	0.05	<0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	<0.001	0.02	0.003	
82-3	light blue	6.57	4.18	2.42	60.9	1.88	8.92	11.6	0.66	1.16	0.20	0.06	0.05	0.002	0.016	0.50	0.06	0.05	0.10	0.21	
82-3	cobalt blue	13.3	0.95	2.46	67.7	0.27	2.99	8.36	0.51	1.13	0.16	0.06	0.04	0.04	0.004	0.26	0.02	0.85	0.03	0.14	
82-3	colourless	14.0	1.03	2.53	68.6	0.25	2.05	8.47	0.83	0.82	0.15	0.01	0.05	0.001	0.003	0.06	0.01	0.20	0.04	0.03	
111-99	light yellow	13.6	0.56	2.56	68.3	0.09	0.37	10.3	1.59	1.06	0.30	0.01	0.02	0.001	0.001	0.002	0.001	<0.001	0.03	0.002	
55-51	opaque white	8.56	2.00	2.79	54.8	0.98	3.67	9.19	0.58	1.33	0.17	0.04	0.04	0.003	0.006	0.56	10.2	0.10	0.08	4.42	
55-51	black	7.15	3.00	3.52	63.4	1.28	4.66	11.8	0.68	1.65	0.24	0.03	0.05	0.002	0.010	0.37	0.75	0.06	0.11	0.85	
111-149	black	5.84	3.27	3.60	61.8	1.70	5.93	12.3	0.68	2.42	0.27	0.04	0.05	0.002	0.011	0.60	0.11	0.06	0.10	0.82	
<i>Stained glass</i>																					
82-9	deep green	6.35	3.74	2.67	61.1	1.55	6.75	11.8	0.71	1.52	0.23	0.04	0.05	0.002	0.013	2.09	0.35	0.05	0.10	0.39	
82-10	light green	5.67	3.88	2.49	60.5	1.49	7.56	12.3	0.71	1.50	0.20	0.03	0.04	0.002	0.015	0.55	0.38	0.05	0.11	2.00	
94-30	light green	14.8	0.85	2.64	67.3	0.62	0.98	9.11	0.92	1.09	0.15	0.01	0.06	0.002	0.002	0.13	0.04	0.20	0.04	0.12	
94-37	light green	14.7	0.87	2.58	68.1	0.22	0.87	9.57	0.38	1.02	0.21	0.02	0.03	0.002	0.001	0.16	0.03	0.05	0.02	0.27	
110-62	light green	6.82	4.25	2.33	61.0	1.94	8.12	12.0	0.70	1.10	0.17	0.08	0.04	0.002	0.013	0.54	0.05	0.04	0.09	0.17	
111-112	light green	3.70	4.87	2.67	58.5	2.38	10.8	13.3	0.79	1.50	0.25	0.02	0.04	0.001	0.022	0.14	0.04	0.02	0.15	0.27	
94-18	cobalt blue	15.2	0.69	2.63	67.8	0.15	0.77	7.64	0.38	1.17	0.10	0.02	0.05	0.05	0.001	0.56	0.04	1.58	0.02	0.36	
82-8	cobalt blue	13.1	1.04	2.78	68.5	0.24	0.93	9.60	0.36	1.60	0.23	0.12	0.03	0.08	0.001	0.30	0.01	0.18	0.03	0.08	
94-17	red	11.8	1.38	3.19	66.5	0.60	2.30	9.67	0.69	1.62	0.20	0.03	0.05	0.004	0.004	0.41	0.13	0.18	0.05	0.61	
94-20	red	12.9	1.40	2.63	66.9	0.38	1.69	9.97	0.87	1.09	0.17	0.07	0.05	0.003	0.002	0.58	0.10	0.08	0.04	0.34	
82-2	purple	13.2	1.06	2.29	68.9	0.18	1.00	9.48	1.30	1.19	0.21	0.01	0.03	0.001	0.001	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.08	
82-5	purple	15.1	1.05	2.81	68.0	0.16	0.85	7.94	1.16	1.42	0.22	0.01	0.06	0.002	0.001	0.11	0.02	0.09	0.04	0.13	

Fig. 2: Chemical analyses of 50 glass samples from Méru, by LA-ICP-MS. © MSHE, I. Pactat.

lysed using laser ablation inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (LA-ICP-MS) (figure 2). They represent the whole variety of the finds: raw glass, cullet, glass working waste, glass droplets, crucibles, glass vessels and stained glass.

The analyses have revealed two main compositional groups, which correspond to two different glass recipes (figure 3). They are mainly distinguished by their levels of soda (Na₂O), potash (K₂O), lime (CaO) and phosphorus oxide (P₂O₅). The first recipe follows the Roman glass making

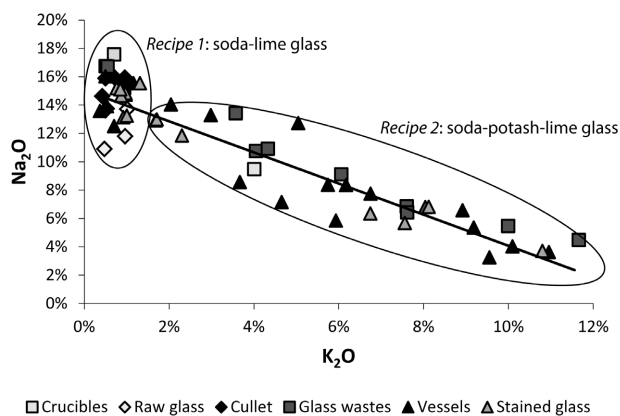


Fig. 3: Sodium and potassium oxides contents of the glass from Méru, labelled according artefact category. © MSHE, I. Pactat.

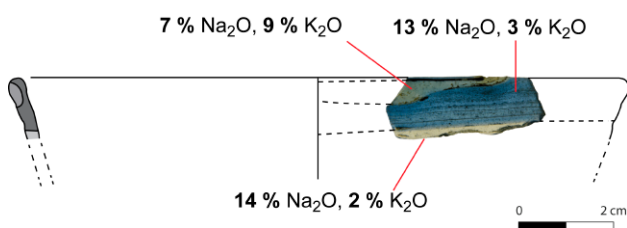


Fig. 4: Sodium and potassium contents of a composite funnel beaker from Méru. © MSHE, I. Pactat.

% oxide	Glass from La Milesse			Glassy slags and wastes from La Milesse		
	Average (14)	min	max	Average (4)	min	max
Na ₂ O	0.54	0.37	0.67	0.53	0.46	0.58
MgO	3.81	2.99	4.49	2.22	0.85	3.77
Al ₂ O ₃	2.92	2.21	3.88	3.87	3.51	4.16
SiO ₂	55.5	52.2	60.7	67.7	60.9	72.7
P ₂ O ₅	2.94	2.05	3.55	1.17	0.17	3.40
K ₂ O	12.9	8.6	17.3	12.6	10.9	13.4
CaO	16.3	13.2	23.7	6.35	2.5	9.6
MnO	0.89	0.68	1.12	0.44	0.19	0.81
Fe ₂ O ₃	3.03	2.14	5.76	4.08	2.69	4.67
TiO ₂	0.45	0.36	0.57	0.57	0.52	0.64
ZnO	0.031	0.019	0.038	0.011	0.0019	0.032
SrO	0.052	0.044	0.076	0.027	0.012	0.047
Sb ₂ O ₃	-	-	0.0001	-	-	-
BaO	0.0015	0.0009	0.0026	0.0019	0.0002	0.0059
PbO	0.22	0.19	0.29	0.13	0.056	0.23
SnO ₂	0.0014	0.0011	0.0018	0.0017	0.0013	0.0022

Fig. 6: Composition of the glass from La Milesse, by LA-ICP-MS. © CNRS, B. Gratuze.

tradition by re-melting natron glass (figure 3, recipe 1). Some glass vessels and stained glass fragments found at Méru were produced using recycled glass like tesserae, antique beads and glassware. Small blocks of soda-lime glass were also discovered in the workshop. The second recipe is partly based on the reuse of natron glass, but the contents of potash, magnesia, and phosphorus oxide are higher. This particular feature could be interpreted either by the mixing of two different types of glass (natron and wood ash) or by the addition of an increasing amount of wood ash into a mixture of glass cullet (figure 3, recipe 2). We observe an inverse relationship between soda on the one hand, and pot-

ash, magnesia and phosphorus oxide on the other: soda decreases from 14 to 3.2 wt.% while potash increases from 1.7 to 11.7 wt.%. This corresponds to a gradual transition between natron glass and wood ash glass. Crucibles, glass working waste, glass vessels and stained glass are once again represented in the soda-potash-lime group.

Among the different glass vessels from Méru, a funnel beaker made with three different parts of glass (colourless, cobalt-blue and light-blue) is particularly interesting (figure 4). The analyses reveal that the different parts of the beaker have different soda, potash, lime and magnesia contents, which means that the two main glass recipes identified could have been partly contemporary (figure 2, sample 82-3).

In conclusion, the presence of both crucibles and glass wastes into the two main compositional groups shows undoubtedly that the transition from natron glass to potash-lime glass occurred in Méru. During this transition period, glassworkers had to adapt their methods in response to the decrease in the availability of natron glass by developing new recipes using local raw materials in order to meet the demand for glass. Evidence that stained glass and vessel glass were manufactured in the same place is provided by glass waste, such as a twisted shard of a cylinder-blown window glass, and a common chemical composition (figure 5-A).

THE 10TH CENTURY GLASS WORKSHOP OF LA MILESSÉ

The archaeological site of Bois Beslan at La Milesse (Sarthe) was discovered in 2012–2013. Most finds discovered at the site relate to the extraction and reduction of iron ore between the Late Iron Age and Antiquity. A glass workshop has been identified in the north-eastern part of the site.⁸ Typical elements of glass-working activity have been collected in abandoned mining dumps (figure 5-B). Seven crucibles with glass or vitrified matter on their internal or external walls have been identified and more than 20 kg of waste materials have been recovered. Half of this material is related to glass working (wires and rods of drawn glass with round or flat sections, glass drops, small raw glass fragments and shapeless nodules), the other half is scoriaceous vitreous material.

The workshop can be dated to the 10th century according to glassware and ceramic typology; the dates have been confirmed by radiocarbon analyses. The most frequently found form is that of a goblet with a straight or hemmed edge, a concave bottom and an ovoid body. The goblets are decorated with horizontal or spiral trails. They are similar to specimens dating to the 9th–10th centuries.⁹ The second most frequent form is that of a high goblet with a simple rounded rim and a truncated wall. Funnel beakers and hemispheric cups are each represented by one object. All the glass samples are coloured deep green.

⁸ RAUX et al. 2015.

⁹ FOY and SENNEQUIER 1989, n° 61, 145–146; MOUNY 2008, n° 1, fig. 2.

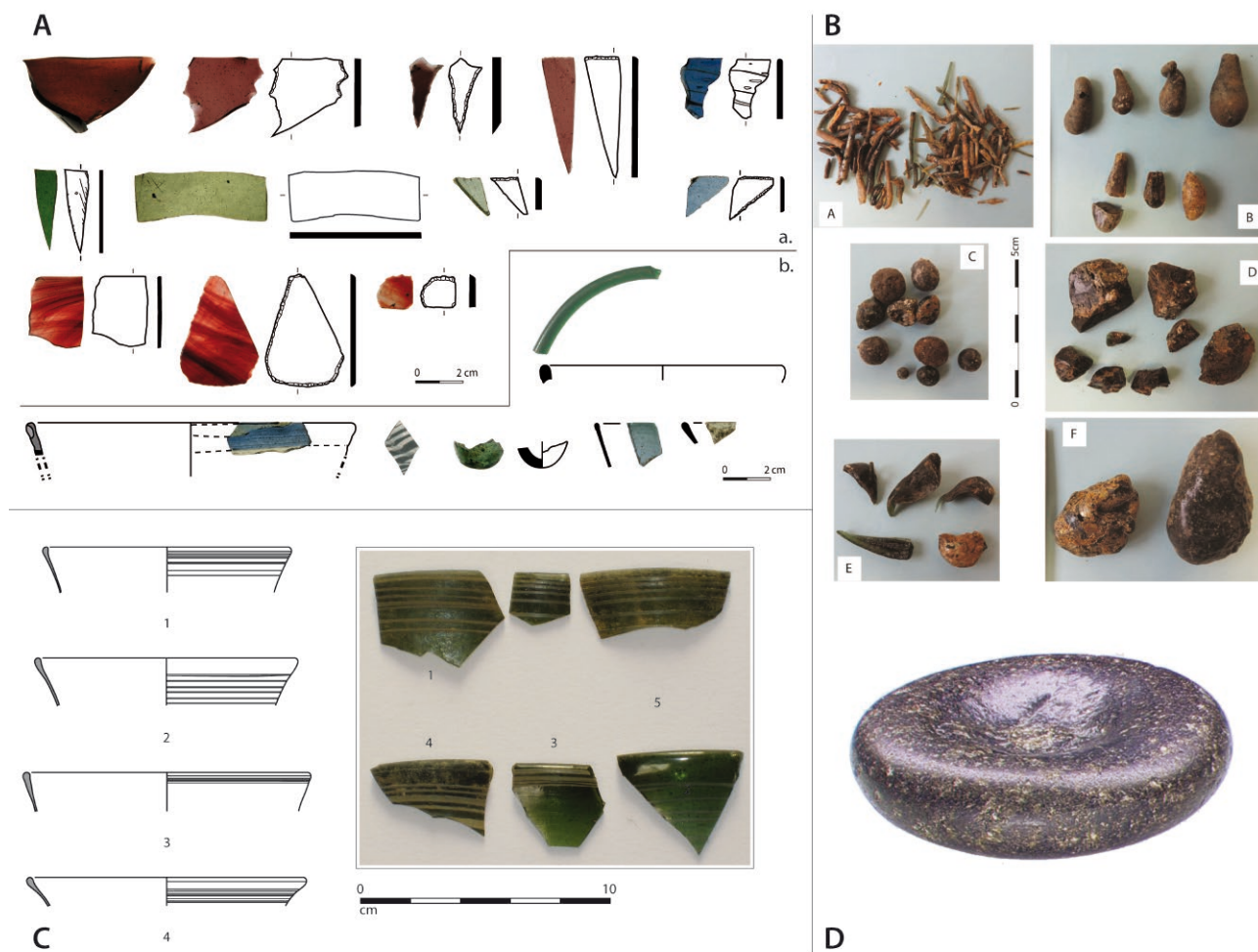


Fig. 5:

A: Méru workshop production: stained glass (a) and glass vessels (b).
© Inrap, M. Derbois, St. Lancelot; MSHE, I. Pactat.
B: Glass wastes from La Milesse: wires and rods (a), glass drops (b-c), raw glass fragments (d), shameless nodules (e-f).
© Inrap, St. Raux.

C: Deep green beakers with white trails from Faye-sur-Ardin.
© Inrap, L. Simon.
D: Lead-rich linen smoother from Beaugency (Loiret, $\phi = 70$ mm).
© CNRS, B. Gratuze.

14 samples of crucibles, raw glass, glass wastes and vessels have been analysed using LA-ICP-MS (figure 6). They form a homogeneous chemical group of potash-lime glass. Compared to contemporaneous wood ash glass,¹⁰ La Milesse glass contains less soda and more alumina and oxides of iron, titanium and zirconium (figure 7). Recycled natron glass was not added to the melt as evidenced by the low soda contents (0.54 +/- 0.10 wt.% Na₂O). The high iron oxide level shows furthermore that local ferrous sand was used. So, the chemical homogeneity of this group reveals primary glass production at La Milesse.

The reoccupation of an abandoned mine site represented several advantages for the glassworkers. They could benefit from local raw materials like sandstone and clay deposits to build the furnaces. In addition to the local sand (with elevated iron oxide), the fuel and plant ash required for glass production were supplied by nearby vegetation. Due to the absence of structures, it is difficult to interpret the archaeological remains, but we can suppose that the La Milesse glass workshop was very close to medieval models with a primary furnace to prepare the melting batch and a secondary one for glass blowing. The particular composi-

tion of the glass and the presence of semi-finished products and glassy slags suggest that the primary production was located near the excavated area.

THE RECYCLING OF LEAD SLAG IN THE AREA OF MELLE DURING THE CAROLINGIAN PERIOD

In 1992, Julia Scapova published an uncommon composition of a 10th century linen glass smoother discovered in Novgorod (Russia).¹¹ This silica-lime-alumina-lead glass contained high iron, barium and antimony. During the following decades, several linen glass smoothers with a similar composition were described in Germany, France, England¹², Ireland, Norway and, more recently, Denmark and Belgium. All these objects are dated between the end of the 8th century and the end of the 10th century. At the end of the 1990s, both chemical and lead isotopes analyses were carried out on various materials (lead ore, slag, metallic lead, silver coins...) from the Carolingian lead-silver mines

¹⁰ Unpublished data.
¹¹ SCAPOVA 1992.
¹² BAYLEY 2009, 258.

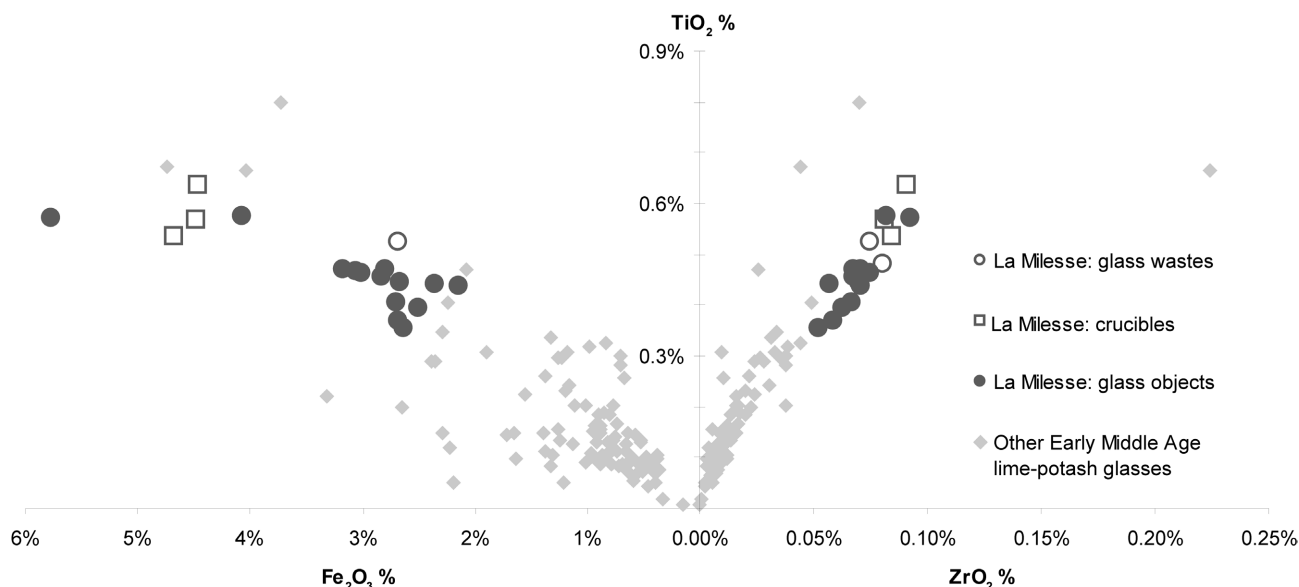


Fig. 7: Iron, titanium and zirconium oxides contents of glass from La Milesse. © CNRS, B. Gratuze.

% oxide	Melle's glass smoothers			Melle's slag		
	Average (70)	min	max	Average (35)	min	max
Na ₂ O	1.32	0.68	2.36	0.26	0.13	0.42
MgO	2.26	1.55	3.40	3.07	0.87	4.92
Al ₂ O ₃	7.27	5.58	10.13	4.64	3.18	6.13
SiO ₂	44.2	37.0	52.3	41.6	30.8	52.3
P ₂ O ₅	1.87	1.02	3.00	2.28	1.11	3.81
K ₂ O	4.02	3.03	5.45	2.51	0.89	4.57
CaO	15.5	12.3	19.8	16.5	6.40	28.4
MnO	0.29	0.11	0.55	0.47	0.23	0.77
Fe ₂ O ₃	3.43	1.69	4.66	10.40	5.73	20.20
TiO ₂	0.25	0.18	0.42	0.28	0.21	0.37
ZnO	0.21	0.04	0.55	0.24	0.04	0.74
SrO	0.09	0.06	0.16	0.12	0.05	0.20
Sb ₂ O ₃	0.51	0.30	0.80	0.31	0.11	0.51
BaO	1.35	0.41	3.11	4.46	0.32	12.70
PbO	17.8	8.10	26.1	12.7	3.50	37.0
SnO ₂	0.0058	-	0.028	0.004	0.0004	0.018
% oxide	Faye-sur-Ardin / Bressuire / Poitiers / Pussigny					
	Deep green glass from beakers			Opaque white glass from trails		
	Average (19)	min	max	Average (9)	min	max
Na ₂ O	2.59	1.15	4.50	2.31	1.33	3.94
MgO	1.86	1.56	2.32	1.61	1.52	1.71
Al ₂ O ₃	8.20	7.13	10.20	7.18	6.66	7.94
SiO ₂	58.7	52.9	64.2	50.2	46.9	56.8
P ₂ O ₅	1.34	0.94	1.94	1.39	0.89	2.28
K ₂ O	4.09	3.61	4.57	3.58	3.30	3.92
CaO	12.4	10.0	15.7	11.3	10.1	12.0
MnO	0.42	0.26	0.51	0.38	0.33	0.44
Fe ₂ O ₃	3.50	2.67	5.51	3.41	2.63	4.35
TiO ₂	0.25	0.21	0.30	0.24	0.21	0.29
ZnO	0.09	0.02	0.33	0.08	0.02	0.12
SrO	0.06	0.05	0.07	0.06	0.05	0.07
Sb ₂ O ₃	0.14	0.07	0.27	0.17	0.07	0.23
BaO	0.68	0.26	1.16	0.66	0.24	0.91
PbO	5.15	1.66	10.10	10.50	5.47	14.2
SnO ₂	0.31	0.02	0.69	6.66	4.24	10.2

Fig. 8: Composition of glass smoothers and slag from Melle, and composition of beakers from Bressuire, Faye-sur-Ardin, Pussigny and Poitiers. © CNRS, B. Gratuze.

of Melle (Deux-Sèvres). A connection was established between the glassy slag produced at this smelting site and the silica-lime-alumina-lead glass of the linen glass smoothers (figure 8).¹³ Since 2012, several glass vessels sharing the same specific composition as the Melle's linen smoothers have been identified thanks to a systematic analysis of glass objects discovered on different Carolingian archaeological sites to the north and to the west of Melle: Bressuire, Faye-sur-Ardin, Pussigny, Poitiers and probably Perigny.¹⁴ Most of these objects are deep green coloured beakers with a flared and rounded rim and several opaque white trails under the rim (figure 5-C). But some unidentified fragments from Faye-sur-Ardin could expand and diversify this first typology.

LA-ICP-MS analysis results shows that - like the linen smoothers - all these objects were made from recycling glassy slag, which was produced during the smelting of galena (figure 9). Comparing the chemical composition of the glassy slag, the linen smoothers and the beakers (figure 8), it appears that soda-lime glass cullet is systematically added to the melting batch: to a lesser extent in the production of the linen smoothers (1.3 +/- 0.3 wt.% Na₂O) and to a greater extent in the production of the glass vessels (2.4 +/- 1.3 wt.% Na₂O). The results also reveal that opaque white glass is locally produced by adding tin and probably lead oxides to the same base used for the glass body (figure 8).

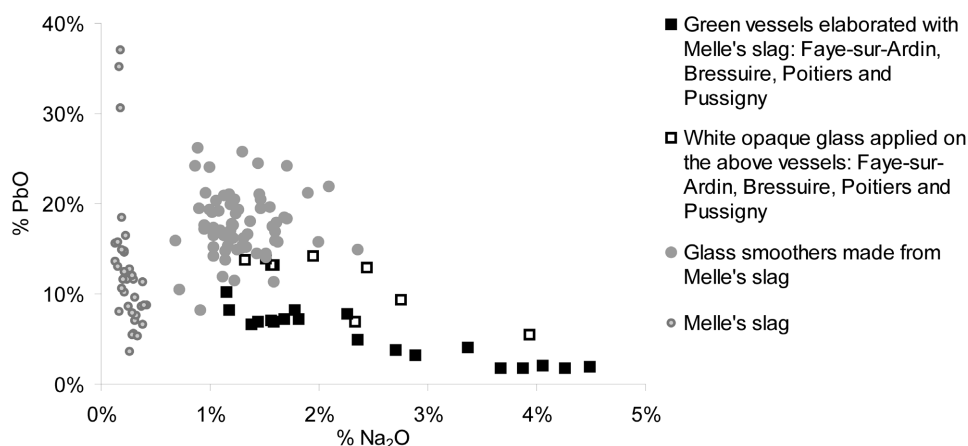
The use of this metallurgical by-product has two main advantages. Firstly, glassy slag is a cheap raw material that was used to compensate for the shortage of natron glass. Secondly, this recipe saves significant amounts of energy. The production of wood ash glass, developed at the same time in Western Europe, requires large amounts of wood which was used as fuel and - in the form of ash - as potash-lime flux. Therefore, the use of slag significantly reduces wood

¹³ TÉREYGEOL et al. 2004.

¹⁴ GRATUZE et al. 2014.

Fig. 9: Comparison of lead and sodium oxides contents of the beakers from Bressuire, Faye-sur-Ardin, Pussigny and Poitiers, and the lead-rich linen smoothers and slag from Melle.

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needs and can be considered as an adaptation of Melle's glassworkers to the lack of natron glass across Europe. This real technological innovation does not have, as far as we know, any equivalent in the Carolingian period.

As no craft structure has yet been discovered at Melle, the workshop is consequently only known through its products (linen glass smoothers and vessels). We can, however, hypothesise that – for practical reasons – it was located close to the smelting site. The glassware production can be dated between the 9th and the 10th centuries, according to the archaeological context within which the beakers were found.

CONCLUSION

While archaeological and archaeometric data date the emergence of wood ash glass to the end of the 8th century, these three glass workshops dating from the 9th–10th centuries have shown that the transition from soda-lime to potash-lime glass was a gradual process. Indeed, the use of wood ash as flux did not happen suddenly since natron glass cullet was still used in the 9th century. The site of Méru illustrates this phenomenon on a workshop scale. But ongoing studies on Carolingian glass¹⁵ demonstrate that Méru is not an isolated case. For example, two contemporary glass objects discovered at Vernou-sur-Brenne (Central France) fall into the transition between natron soda-lime glass and wood ash glass.¹⁶ While the first one is a soda-lime glass containing a little wood ash (3 wt.% K₂O and 1.4 wt.% MgO), the second one is a potash-lime glass containing high soda (5 wt.% Na₂O). These two pieces were produced by an unknown glass workshop. At the same time, an original recipe recycling metallurgical waste was developed by Melle's glassworkers.

These different case studies provide the first evidence of medieval primary glass production in France. They outline local solutions to the lack of natron raw glass and they illustrate the Carolingian glassworkers's ability to adapt methods and recipes in order to maintain production volumes of vessel glass and stained glass. The transition period seems to end between the mid-10th century and the beginning of the 11th century.

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¹⁵ GRATUZE, PACTAT and HILBERG, forthcoming.

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