

# EL VIDRIO EN LA ALHAMBRA

## Desde el periodo nazarí hasta el siglo XVII

### Glass from the Alhambra

FROM THE NAZARI PERIOD UNTIL THE 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY



Museo de la Alhambra, del 18 de mayo de 2016 al 31 de marzo de 2017

Museum of the Alhambra, from 18 May 2016 to 31 March 2017

#### MUSEO DE LA ALHAMBRA

Horario de verano: del 15 de mayo al 31 de octubre  
De 10:00 a 19:00 h. (del 15 de mayo al 31 de octubre)  
De 10:00 a 18:00 h. (del 1 de noviembre al 31 de octubre)

Horario de invierno: del 15 de octubre al 31 de marzo  
De 10:00 a 19:00 h. (del 15 de octubre al 31 de marzo)  
De 10:00 a 18:00 h. (del 1 de abril al 31 de marzo)

Organización: Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife  
Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife  
Consejería de Cultura

#### MUSEUM OF THE ALHAMBRA

Summer opening hours: from 15 May to 31 October  
10:00-19:00 hours (from 15 May to 31 October)  
10:00-18:00 hours (from 1 November to 31 October)

Winter opening hours: from 15 October to 31 March  
10:00-19:00 hours (from 15 October to 31 March)  
10:00-18:00 hours (from 1 April to 31 March)

Organization: Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife  
Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife  
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# GLASS FROM THE ALHAMBRA

## From the Nazari period until the 17th Century

18 May 2016 – 31 March 2017

*Contempla estas lámparas (suruŷ) que, por la noche, brillan a través del cristal de los vidrios, y las verás arder con vivacidad.*

*Se diría que son lenguas de serpientes que aparecieran en el momento de calor meridiano y que no cesaran de agitarse.*

Abū Tammām Gālib ibn Rabāṭ al-Ḥaŷŷām

The inherent fragility of glass means that very few pieces survive in the palaces of the Alhambra. Nonetheless, the pieces that have been conserved offer an interesting insight into the high technical skills of the craftsmen that worked this material, the variety of shapes and the uses to which it was put.

In the Alhambra glass was used for making tableware to complement the typical blue and white or golden ceramic dishes, making the Sultan's ceremonies even more refined. Glass was also used in personal items and as a complement for jewellery and other decorative pieces.

The experts who analysed these glass pieces made a curious finding, namely that some of the pieces used during the Nasrid era were in fact of Oriental origin, so demonstrating the cultural relations with Egypt and other areas at that time.

Glass was also used in architecture to seal the gaps in the lattice windows, so creating a transparent effect and reflections of colour, as seen in Gothic cathedrals.

After the fall of Granada, the Christians also used the Alhambra as a Royal House and we have various glass pieces that date from this period too. They combined technical maintenance with tradition and complemented their collection with pieces of Venetian inspiration. As with the previous period, we have a number of well-crafted and richly decorated glass tableware items that testify to the finery of the Royal House in the 16th and 17th centuries.

In the maintenance and restoration of the palaces, they also used glass in the windows, albeit with a system and with decorative solutions that were in vogue at that time which were quite different from those favoured by the Nasrids.

The exhibition also presents a selection of pieces acquired in Egypt. Some of them were made during the Roman Empire, which was also the origin of the glass made in the Iberian Peninsula. Later examples

were made under the Mamelukes, who were contemporaries of the Nasrids. These pieces offer a fascinating repertoire of shapes and uses, so complementing the collection and enabling us to compare the work of different glass workshops in the Mediterranean region at that time.

## GLASS IN THE ALHAMBRA. Nasrid period.

### TABLEWARE

#### BOTTLES



The Museum of the Alhambra has a widely varying range of small and medium-sized bottles, which were probably used as tableware or for storing cosmetics.

One common type was a small bottle with a long neck as can be seen in the *ataifor* dish on display in the exhibition. These bottles can also be seen in the green and manganese *safa* dish on show in this room, in which two figures are seen raising glasses in a toast, while in their other hands one holds a bottle and the other a canteen.

There is another type of bottle of Oriental origin made of green glass and carved with geometric motifs.



#### BOWLS

These small, very delicate pieces were possibly used in tableware as spice containers.



#### GLASSES

Of the different items made with this material, glasses are amongst the most common survivors. All these glasses were manufactured by blowing into a mould. Pieces made with this technique with clearly marked decorative patterns were normally made of thick glass, which distinguished them from other pieces made with free blowing.

They all follow a similar pattern: they are cylindrical in shape and decorated in relief with a pattern that starts at the base and moves up through the whole body of the glass. Geometric and plant motifs predominate.



### REDOMAS OR JUGS

This kind of jug has been known in the Hispano-Muslim world since the Caliphate period and was also used in the Nasrid Era. It is quite thick and has a greenish tone with blue decoration applied on the neck, the rim and the top of the handle.

The Museum also has a set of necks with three spouts and handles made in opaque red glass. This type of wax-red glass is sometimes decorated with opaque white threads applied on the piece in relief. This product was widely used in the Middle East and the Mesopotamian and Iranian regions from the early Islamic period and also appears in pieces from the Alhambra.



### LIDS

Lids were used to cover dishes (*safa* and *ataifor*) and pots (*qudur*) to protect the food and keep it warm. Along with similar pieces in ceramic, a significant number of these items survive today. They share a number of common characteristics, in that they are all made of thick glass and they are all moulded in such a way as to create two types of decoration: curved ribs and stylized plant motifs. Some are colourless, while others have been coloured (green, violet, blue, honey-coloured).



### AMPOULES

Perfume was a constant feature in the gardens. It was normally stored in small ampoules, perfumes and ointments in concentrated form for personal use. It was highly valued and widely used in everyday life.



### PERFUME JARS

Vessels used to hold water scented with the aroma of roses, orange blossom etc, which was sprinkled on hair, body and clothes or used to give rooms a pleasant smell.

When used as containers, they normally had a wax stopper to prevent the perfume from evaporating. Their bulbous shape, highly stylized conical neck and minute opening made sprinkling their contents easier.

### LAMPS

These lamps were used for lighting the mosque. They were hung from the ceiling and were normally made out of bronze. They were decorated with fretwork and had gaps in which to insert small glass cups full of oil, which served as fuel for the wick that provided the light.



From the Almohad and Nasrid periods onwards, these lamps with small glass cups became increasingly elaborate with a number of projecting arms at different heights. The cups with the oil were inserted into these arms so improving the lighting in each part of the mosque. This solution can be seen today in the bronze lamp from the Great Mosque of the Alhambra which is on display in Room Six of the Museum, although of the original arms all that survive are the fittings.

In order to show how these lamp cups from the Alhambra worked, we have installed them in a Coptic plate lamp, which is very similar to surviving examples from the Caliphate period. When the wicks were lit, the decoration on the metal lamp was projected onto the walls, creating attractive shapes that were transformed with light and shade.

The fragments of glass lamps discovered in the Alhambra also include enamel pieces or pieces with incised decoration typical of Mameluke Egypt, which like other Oriental goods were widely admired and exchanged as gifts.



### BRACELETS

The manufacture and use of glass bracelets has been a popular tradition since Ancient Roman times. The collection at the Museum of the Alhambra includes a wide range of pieces from the Nasrid era and is enhanced with others in Oriental style that date from the Ayyubid, Mameluke and Ottoman periods.

## THE CHRISTIAN ROYAL HOUSE

The Alhambra's collection of glass pieces also gives us an interesting insight into life in the palace city during the time when it was a Christian Royal House (16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries) under the governorship of the Tendilla family.

The pieces that have survived from this period show that there was some continuity in glass manufacture from the mediaeval period. We can also see that certain types disappeared while others continued to evolve from the Middle Ages right up to modern times, as happened in the case of glasses of which quite a number survive.

The modern glass pieces in the Alhambra either come from Venice itself or were made *a la façon de Venise* i.e. according to Venetian fashion.

### GLASSES



The glasses have a cylindrical silhouette and the decoration of the mould-blown pieces owes a lot to their predecessors from the Nasrid era. However the newer glasses were larger and were made out of thinner glass, making them lighter. There were different types ranging from free-blown glasses to others that were moulded and then blown. In some cases they had engraved, carved or even enamelled decoration.

The most common forms of glass were probably used for drinking water or wine, and there were others with more specific features that may have been used for drinking liqueurs. Most of these use highly refined pastes.

Engraved glasses were quite important in glass-making centres such as La Granja de San Ildefonso, examples of which are also on display at the Alhambra.

### WINE GLASSES



The wine glasses follow the Nasrid tradition depicted on the ceramic dishes. They are typically divided into three parts: foot, stem and bowl. The collection at the Museum of the Alhambra has various fragments of wine glasses, above all feet and stems. Only one complete wineglass survives, which may be of Venetian origin or influence.

The term *façon de Venise* refers to glass made in the Venetian way, which was very popular throughout 16th century Europe. In Spain this style was used above all in the area around the court in Madrid. Another important centre for this kind of production was Catalonia. However, Andalusia is not normally known for this type of glass and was instead renowned for producing pieces with its own very particular characteristics.



### HANDLES

A lot of handles were also manufactured according to the *façon de Venise*, using very different decorative techniques such as filigree, pegging etc. These must once have been used in jugs, glasses, fruit bowls etc, to make them easier to carry around and to embellish the outside.



### PLATE/FRUIT-BOWL

One of the most complete surviving pieces is this fruit bowl, which is very delicate and finely made and demonstrates the quality of the ware that must once have adorned palace tables.



### LIDS

These were probably used to cover jars, jugs, pitchers, vinegar bottles, jam jars, wine glasses, etc. They were all made out of colourless glass and have some form of decoration. These include filigree, moulded glass and applied decorations.

These pieces are *a la façon de Venise* and are completely unrelated to the lids made in al-Andalus.

### APPLIED DECORATION

Venetian glass also typically used animal or plant applications with lion's heads, blackberry motifs etc. These types of decoration were moulded and then used to decorate a piece that had already been blown or moulded. They were normally gilded although in many cases the gilt has now disappeared.

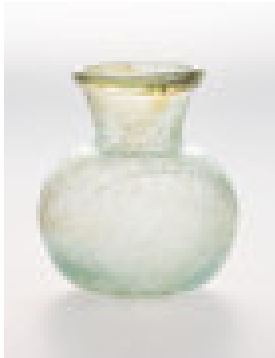
One fragment from the Alhambra collection has a handle decorated with filigree and finished with a lion's head; another has the form of a berry or blackberry while a third fragment is decorated with the head of a satyr, as shown here.



This kind of applied decoration can also be found in glass pieces from Castile and Catalonia.



## ORIENTAL GLASS



This section contains a group of pieces acquired in Cairo and manufactured in the old city of Fustat. They are divided into two groups: the first group from Roman times (1<sup>st</sup>- 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.) (ointment bottles, ampoules, beads, small bottles) and the second from the Muslim period under the Mameluke dynasty (13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Centuries) (glasses, mosque lamps, bottles).

In the exhibition there is an *ijsidi* perfume bottle (10<sup>th</sup> Century) carved in rock crystal which can be compared with the blown glass pieces.





## NASRID ARCHITECTURAL GLASS



The window openings in the houses and palaces of the Alhambra were normally decorated with latticework screens made of wood or plaster. These screens had gaps which were filled with coloured glass. The only surviving examples from this period that remain in situ are those in the ceiling of the Balcony of Lindaraja in the Palace of the Lions.

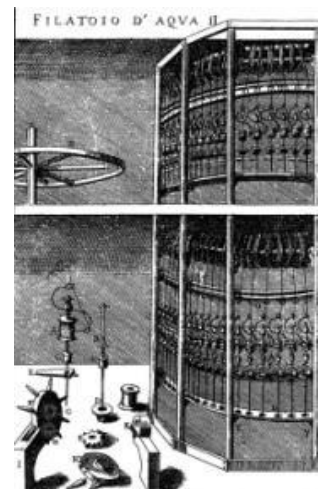
The glass pieces were cut into geometric shapes with different colours which produced reflections on the walls that moved during the day, creating a very different atmosphere inside the rooms to what we see today.

These pieces of glass were manufactured using the crown glass technique. Coloured glass discs with a diameter ranging from approximately 5 to 40 cm have been used since late antiquity right down to the present. Crown glass was first produced in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. It was used as window glass to seal off the inside of the rooms, while allowing light to pass through.

**The following colours** were used: violet, honey-coloured, green, blue and colourless.

**Shapes:** the pieces were cut above all into geometric shapes (polygons, crosses, ribbons, eight-pointed stars etc) and some plant motifs (palm leaves).

In Christian times a completely different technique was used in which the decorated glass pieces were inserted onto a lead frame.



### PIECES FOR A SPINNING MACHINE

These pieces are examples of the industrial use of glass, in this case in a spinning machine. A large number of these pieces are conserved at the Alhambra today, an indication that it was once an important silk-manufacturing centre.

“The reflection of the wine as the light passes through it tinges the fingers of the cupbearer red, just as the juniper stains the snout of the antelope”.

Abū-l-Ḥasan Ali ben Hisn



## *MUSEO de la Alhambra*



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