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THE GLASS SNUFF BOTTLES QING PERIOD -PRESENTATION

The history of the Chinese glass snuff bottle begins at late seventeenth century.

Kangxi Emperor discovered the Bohemian cristals and appreciated their beauty.

He asked in 1696 to a German, Kilian Stumpf to open a glass workshop inside the Forbidden City. The first glass snuff bottles were monochrome and faceted like Bohemian cristals. Unfortunately, we don't know snuff bottles coming from this workshop. The first colors used are red like ruby, blue like sapphire and green like emerald. Further on, other colors were used imitating minerals like amethyst, aquamarine, pure rock cristal, agate, jade realgar aventurine or coral, amber. These snuff bottles are very well done and it's sometimes difficult even nowadays to differentiate glass or mineral. We can be helped by a bubble or the temperature of the material.

Glass could be blown and carved or blown in a mould.

Afterward, during all the Qing dynasty, the monochrome glass snuff bottle was very successful. On some of the first created, the eighteenth century ones, we can see "crizzling", that is like crazing on porcelain and that allow us to date the bottles more precisely.

Beijing School

Yellow glass, imperial color under the Qing, was very much appreciated either.

Few monochrome glass snuff bottles bear imperial marks but we can attribute some of them to imperial workshops.

We can find some monochrome glass snuff bottles engraved with poems or calligraphy. Indeed, Qianlong Emperor wrote numerous poems during his life and some of them were engraved on snuff bottles by his order ("yuti": by Imperial Order). At late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a famous school engraved on older snuff bottles former texts with a lot of skill. The most famous of these artists is Zhou Honglai.

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Another category is the overlay glass snuff bottles. They appear at the beginning of the 18th century. We put a colored layer of glass on the bottle that is carved afterward like a cameo. The glassworker had to do it at a very precise temperature in order that the layer was stuck on the bottle.

The red color is the most used one but a lot of colors were used. The glassworker could put until six colors side by side on the same bottle in order to engrave very different decorations. This was technically difficult to realize because the colors had to be precisely delimited. On the other hand, this decorated layer should be very well polished to be ergonomic.

We can sometimes find another technique where the two colored layers are superimposed on the bottle. It's called "double overlay". These snuff bottles are very rare and were made by very brilliant glassworkers.

Overlay glass snuff bottles were produced from the early 18th century until the late Qing dynasty. Different criteria, too long to enumerate here, enable to date these bottles.

Very few overlay snuff bottles bear imperial marks.

The Yangzhou school is another overlay glass school that is really recognizable. It began in the late 18th century and will continue during the 19th century. Most of these bottles are decorated with very bright colours contrasting together. The thickness of the layer that will be carved is limited. The carving will be of great fineness. Decoration will be intellectually studied (rebus, calligraphy) and made for the elite. The number of colors is the same as for the Beijing School overlay glass bottles: from two until six colors.

Enamelled glass snuff bottles:

These snuff bottles are glass snuff bottles decorated with polychrome enamels.

This technique very much appreciated by Emperors existed from the early 18th century. The bottles were decorated with birds, characters, landscapes and sometimes European characters very well painted. At late 18th century, Yangzhou school produced such bottles either.

Antique snuff bottles of this technique are rare. They can sometimes bear the Imperial mark or another mark quite recently discovered that is: "Old moon pavilion" (Guyuexuan). This was the mark corresponding to a pavilion created in the Summer Palace for Qianlong old age and where he never lived. This mark was used from late 18th century and during all the 19th century. One such bottle made for Qianlong Emperor, with a European decoration coming from the Mary and George Bloch collection was auctioned for two millions and a half Euros in Hong Kong.

In the XX^e century Ye Benqi and after Wang Xisan decorated glass snuff bottles with enamels that can be with low reliefs, in the 18th century taste and bearing sometimes the Qianlong mark. Ye Benqi snuff bottles are difficult to authenticate and their value is important like Wang Xisan ones.

Inside painted snuff bottles soon.

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