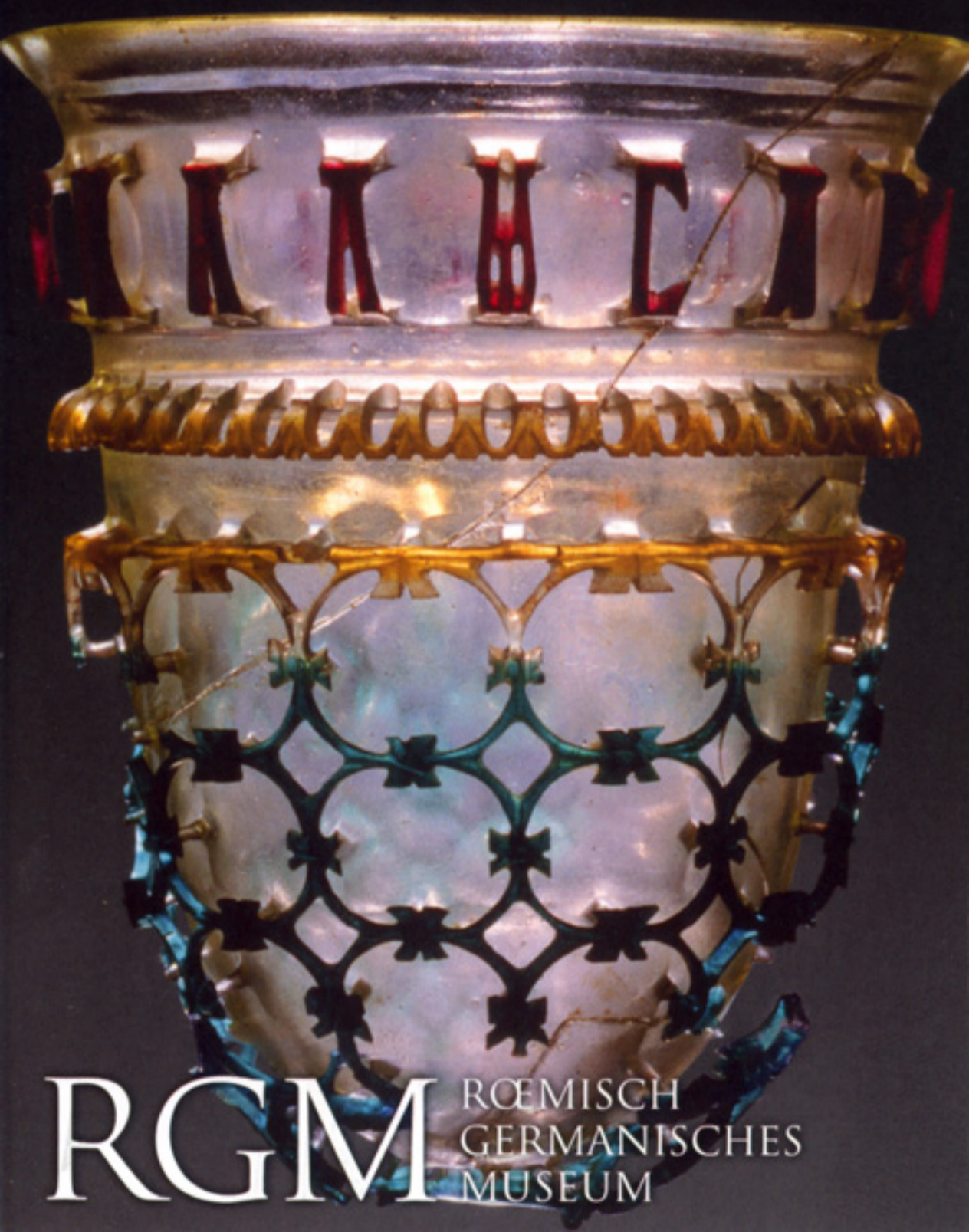


# FRAGILE LUXURY

COLOGNE –  
A GLASS-MAKING  
CENTRE  
IN ANTIQUITY

3<sup>RD</sup> JUNE TO  
13<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2016



**RGMM** RÖMISCH  
GERMANISCHES  
MUSEUM



The Roman-Germanic Museum of the City of Cologne has the world's largest collection of Roman and Frankish glass with more than four thousand com-

plete vessels. This treasure, which increases year by year thanks to excavations in the city, is the focus of this special exhibition, which takes us on a unique journey through almost a thousand years of ancient workmanship and artistic skill. It also gives an idea of the museum's impressive collections.

Cologne can look back on a two-thousand-year tradition of glass working. Soon after the town was founded in the years just before the birth of Christ, shrewd traders came to the Rhineland to offer their fragile, luxurious wares to demanding Roman customers.

These traders were followed by specialized craftsmen. Initially, after the middle of the first century AD, immigrant glass-makers from the Mediterranean produced vessels from imported raw glass ingots in Cologne. Due to the danger of fire, the glass works were located outside the town walls. Soon it was realised that the local sand, for example at nearby Frechen, was eminently suitable for the production of glass.

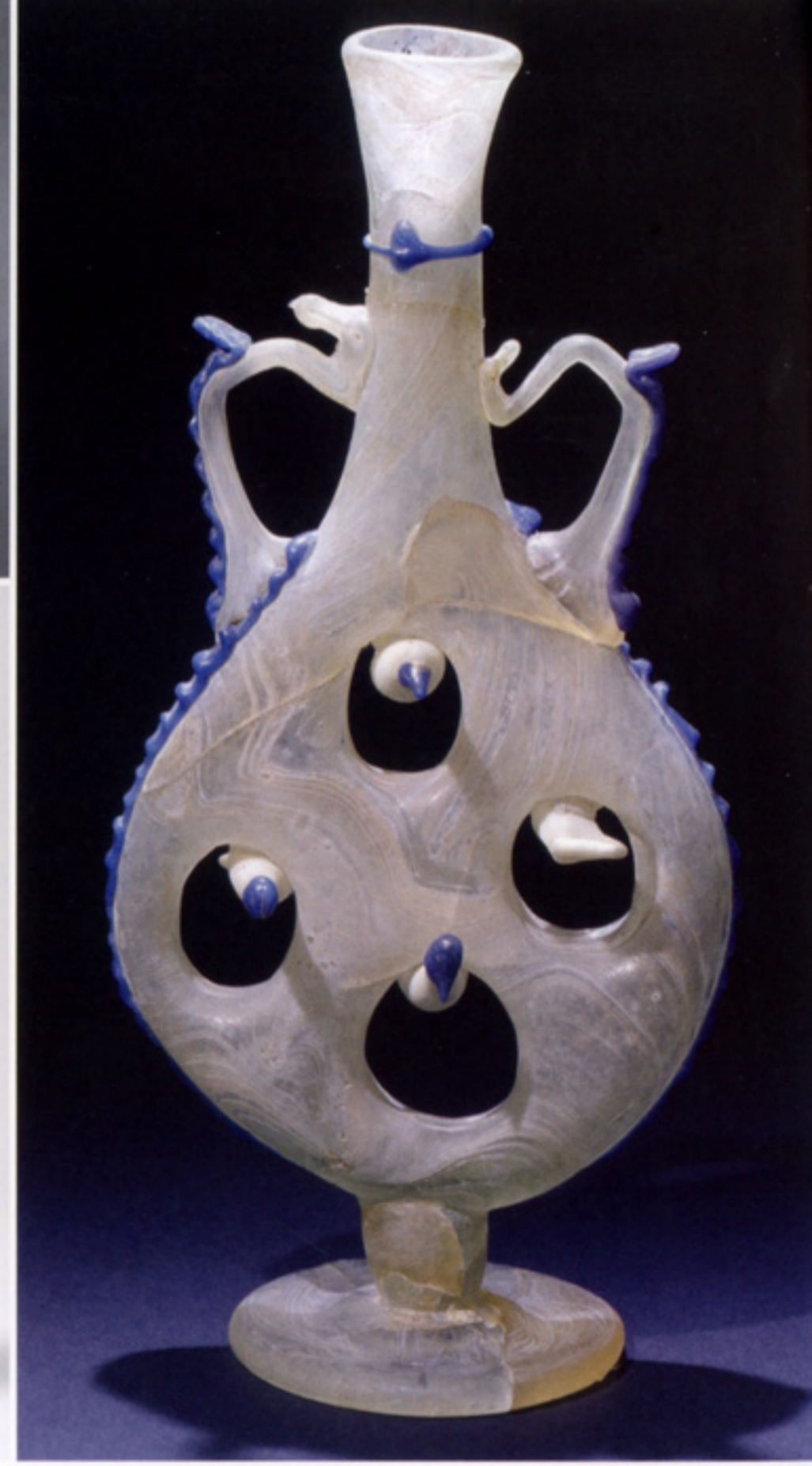
At first, the workshops in Cologne produced simple blue-green glass vessels. However, the product range was soon enlarged to include composite forms and a variety of mould-blown glass vessels: wine jugs resembling barrels, small ointment bottles shaped like seashells or grapes or even in the form of a monkey playing a panpipe. The vessels decorated with threads of coloured glass were characteristic "Made in Cologne" products, as were the vessels decorated with blobs of coloured glass. Great skill, care and patience were required for enamel painting on glass - the glass goblet depicting scenes from the Achilles legend provides evidence of perfect craftsmanship. The same applies to the dishes with a finely incised decoration dating from the turn of the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Hunting scenes, mythological and Christian motifs are high quality products of a glass workshop, which probably manufactured such luxury goods on commission for its wealthy customers.

The most valuable glass vessel in the Roman-Germanic Museum was also found in Cologne. The only cage-cup in three colours worldwide is the *vas diatretum* from Cologne. It reminds us of the transience of life and, in dark red letters, exhorts us to "drink, live well, now and forever".

Researchers had long assumed that the town had become derelict in the early Middle Ages and that affluence was no longer imaginable. Far from it! Studies over the past two decades prove the unbroken urban continuity of Cologne during the transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages. Excavations show that glass was still in demand as a luxury in the early Middle Ages. Although now located in the artisans' and traders' quarter in what is today the Old Town, production methods remained almost unchanged and the composition of the glass was the same as that of traditional Roman glass. However, the range of vessels was adapted to the taste of the new era and the new inhabitants of the town, in which the Franks set the tone from the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD onwards. Instead of the diversity of Roman forms there were just simple dishes and beakers. Nevertheless, the ornate claw beakers of these times show that, even after the Roman period, the glass artisans had lost none of their skills.

The exhibition not only reveals the diversity of forms and the great skill of Roman and early medieval glassworkers. It also shows the role played by glass in the context of Roman and Frankish burial customs and religious beliefs. Indeed, it is mainly due to the tradition of placing glass vessels in the graves of the deceased that the extremely fragile glass of ancient times has survived undamaged over the centuries.

Furthermore, the exhibition also considers the raw materials and techniques of ancient glass-making, before closing with a brief glimpse of later developments.



# RGM ROEMISCH GERMANISCHES MUSEUM

RGM - Roman-Germanic Museum

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www.roemisch-germanisches-museum.de

Opening hours:

Tuesday to Sunday 10 am - 5 pm

"Cologne Day" (1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of the month)

10 am - 10 pm

Public guided tours:

Each Tuesday at 15.30

Parking:

Cathedral parking: access via Trankgasse and  
Bechergasse

Car park Groß Sankt Martin: access via  
Große Neugasse

Guide book accompanying the exhibition:

"Fragile Luxury

Cologne - a glass-making centre in Antiquity",

192 pages with approx. 190 illustrations in colour,

22,95 €

Ein Museum der



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