

TREASURE SEARCH

Vase shows a special glass act

BY NANCY AND FRANK BOOS
SPECIAL WRITERS

Dear Nancy and Frank:

I'm enclosing a picture of one of two cameo vases which I inherited from my father in England. The colors are pale blue on cranberry. There is no signature. If you can give me any information on the vase, I would be most appreciative.

Patricia,

Birmingham-Beverly Hills area

Dear Patricia:

Glass is a hard, non-crystalline, supercooled liquid substance produced by fusion of several dissolved elements. It changes from molten to hard without changing in substance.

The romantic tale told by Victor Arwas in his book, "Glass," is that the discovery of glass was attributed B.C. to Phoenician sailors who had taken refuge on a Syrian coast and lit fires on the sand. Their ship was laden with natron (sodium carbonate), which adhered to the bottoms of the kettles resting in the fires. Sand, natron and fire resulted in finding pieces of glass

in the ashes.

What is absolutely true is that the Assyrians, Syrians, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans all had their own formulas for making glass and didn't keep records. Their secrets have been discovered, however, as advanced technology has allowed scientists to analyze and identify the ingredients in ancient glass.

What you have is cameo glass, which is a method of engraving a top layer of glass to expose another underlying color of glass (the cased glass). This is done with the aid of small rotating copper wheels charged with emery.

The most remarkable and notorious specimen of cameo glass extant is the "Portland Vase," which is in the British Museum. It is dark blue glass cased (overlaid) with opaque white glass. The white relief figural design was done so intricately that the underlying blue glass appeared faintly in areas, which provided a shading effect. Josiah Wedgwood used the technique in his famous jasperwares but was never able to achieve the shading effect.

As near as we can ascertain, your cameo glass vases are late 19th century

English, probably made in Birmingham or Stourbridge, where glass making received new emphasis after the repeal of the Glass Excise Tax in 1845.

If in good condition with no chips, cracks, breaks, repairs or evidence of crazing (fine lines), we think the approximate retail value of each vase is \$1,500.

Clarification: A sentence in the May 23 Treasure Search column about an American silver plate item should have read that the piece is by James Tufts of Boston.

Nancy and Frank Boos are with the Frank H. Boos Gallery, an appraisal firm and auction house at 420 Enterprise Court in Bloomfield Hills that has been in the auction business for more than 30 years.

Do you have an item you would like to know about? Send in a good photo of it, along with its description (including size, working parts, etc.) and any known provenance (history) to Treasure Search, The Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009. Include your name, community and phone number.



Cameo role: Engraving reveals an underlying color of glass.

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