

# LOOKING FOR—AND FINDING?—WORKSHOP MAKERS' MARKS ON LATE ROMAN DIATRETA

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## ABSTRACT

This note presents an exciting new identification concerning late Roman carved workshop makers' marks on glass diatreta—a discovery that was hidden in plain sight. This is a preliminary result of a forthcoming comprehensive study of the abstracted, openwork symbols that sometimes accompany an inscription. On glass objects, if mentioned at all in past scholarship, they have been misleadingly referred to only as “stop-marks” designed to ornamentally frame an adjacent inscription. By instead approaching these symbols as imagistic script, a visualized form of the presentation of writing, their communicative purposes can be better recognized along with their producers. Through this approach, two remarkably similar glass openwork vessels—each with an identical symbol—and a possible third vessel with a nearly identical symbol and a related design have been identified. Together they represent compelling evidence of makers' marks and workshop production.

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Despite the fact that for more than 250 years Roman diatreta (known today as glass cage cups or openwork vessels) have intrigued historians, the symbols found on the inscribed vessels have been neglected. This is in part due to the application of the limiting term “stop-mark” to these symbols, commonly used to categorize them as a mere decorative feature framing the accompanying inscription.<sup>1</sup> However, the marks can be considered “imagistic script”—by which I mean a visualized form of the presentation of writing, where letters become imagery—as well as writing-like aestheticized elements, such as monograms, pseudo-script, and other stylized writing as a visualized form.<sup>2</sup> Examples of imagistic script on diatreta include a leaf/*rho* shape<sup>3</sup>

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1 For a discussion of stop-marks on diatreta as more than simply “decorative” in their purpose, see Meredith 2015, 58–60.

2 On late Roman stop-marks and imagistic script, see Meredith, forthcoming.

3 Meredith 2015, cat. figs. 36, 54, and cover image. See also Meredith 2023, 119–139, fig. 2. For seven glass openworked vessels, each with an abstract symbol (in order of the country of discovery): from Autun (France), see Broschat et al. 2022, 22–23; from Cologne-Benesisstraße (Germany), see Meredith 2015, cat. fig. 25; from Cologne-Braunsfeld (Germany), see Meredith 2015, cat. fig. 21; from Szekszárd (Hungary), see Meredith 2015, cat. fig. 36; from Taraneš

## QUICK CITATION

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