



Ointment or Perfume Bottle (Unguentarium)

Date

4th to 5th century

Primary Maker

Artist Unknown

Medium

glass

Description

Medicines and their ingredients were stored and transported in small, hand blown glass medicinal bottles. This “apothecary” glass has been in use for nearly 2,000 years. The earliest examples were the Roman unguentaria, or teardrop bottles, made by the thousand from the end of the first century until about 500. For a skilled glass worker, they were simple to make. A tiny gather of glass was blown into a bulb and the neck pulled with tools to elongate it. The vial would then be sheared from the blow pipe, leaving a simple, flared top. In later centuries, the shapes of these medicinal bottles became more complex. Glass was also used to hold perfume. Every morning, a well-to-do Roman lady would have herself bathed and made-up by her maids before visiting or being visited by her friends. The favorite scents were

toilet waters prepared with French lavender, saffron, and crushed rose petals. In the evening, heavier perfumes based on cinnamon and myrrh might be worn.

Dimensions

Overall: 6 x 2 5/8 x 7/8 in. (15.2 x 6.7 x 2.2 cm)