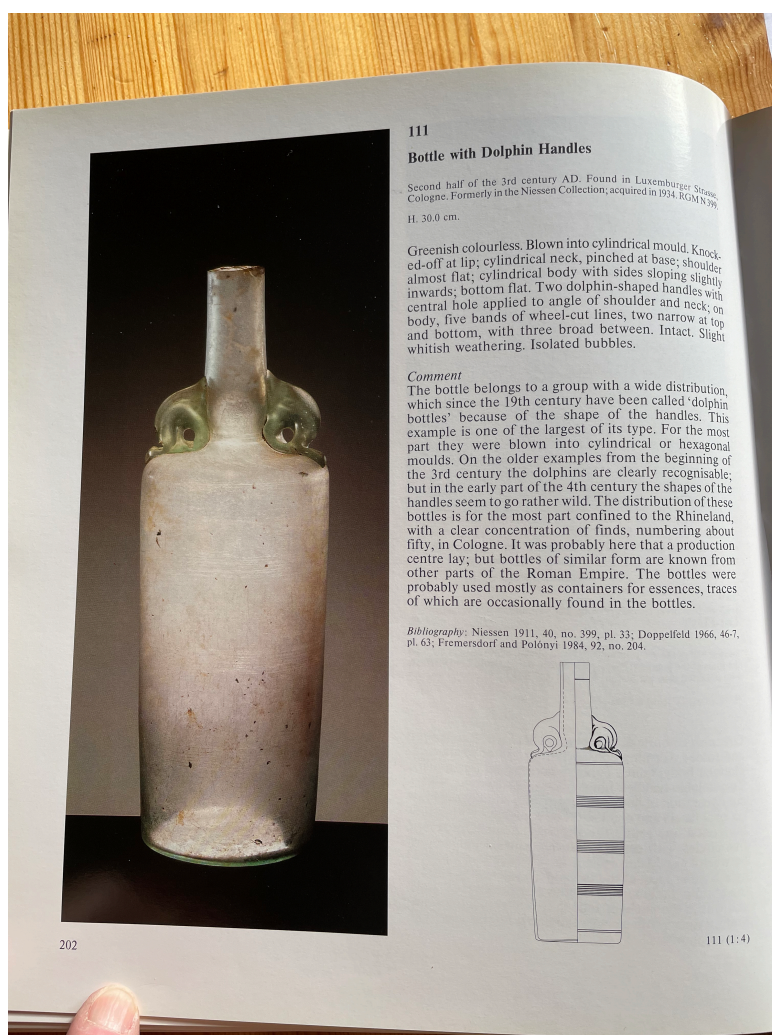


News from the Finds Tray

Late Roman dolphin handled bottles 3rd/4th C

SF23571

One of a pair of handles in the form of a stylised dolphin from a light green glass bottle.



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Bottle with Dolphin Handles

Second half of the 3rd century AD. Found in Luxemburger Strasse, Cologne. Formerly in the Niessen Collection; acquired in 1934; RGM N 399.

H. 30.0 cm.

Greenish colourless. Blown into cylindrical mould. Knocked-off at lip; cylindrical neck, pinched at base; shoulder almost flat; cylindrical body with sides sloping slightly inwards; bottom flat. Two dolphin-shaped handles with central hole applied to angle of shoulder and neck; on body, five bands of wheel-cut lines, two narrow at top and bottom, with three broad between. Intact. Slight whitish weathering. Isolated bubbles.

Comment

The bottle belongs to a group with a wide distribution, which since the 19th century have been called 'dolphin bottles' because of the shape of the handles. This example is one of the largest of its type. For the most part they were blown into cylindrical or hexagonal moulds. On the older examples from the beginning of the 3rd century the dolphins are clearly recognisable; but in the early part of the 4th century the shapes of the handles seem to go rather wild. The distribution of these bottles is for the most part confined to the Rhineland, with a clear concentration of finds, numbering about fifty, in Cologne. It was probably here that a production centre lay; but bottles of similar form are known from other parts of the Roman Empire. The bottles were probably used mostly as containers for essences, traces of which are occasionally found in the bottles.

Bibliography: Niessen 1911, 40, no. 399, pl. 33; Doppelfeld 1966, 46-7, pl. 63; Fremersdorf and Polónyi 1984, 92, no. 204.



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Parallels

The two examples cited below namely the Speyer bottle and the example from Lullingstone villa were both found in association with burials.

Most likely produced in Cologne or Rhineland. The dolphin-shaped handles are of a strongly shaped abstract form indicating a date in the second half of the 3rd. century A.D. Several examples in the same size from Cologne (RGM), Germany, Nijmegen (Museum Het Valkhof) and Leiden (MvOL), the Netherlands. Source <https://ancientglass.wordpress.com>



The Speyer wine bottle



Remark: The world's oldest unopened bottle of wine, was discovered during the excavation (1867) of a Roman nobleman's tomb, near Speyer, Germany. Of the six glass bottles in the woman's sarcophagus and the ten vessels in the man's sarcophagus, only one still contained a liquid. From [Ticia Verveer @ticiaverveer](#) in a tweet with a picture. The "[Speyer bottle](#)", sits comfortably in the Wine Museum section of the [Historical Museum of the Palatinate](#) in Speyer, Germany.

A Roman glass mold-blown vessel like this is called a "dolphin handles bottle" with the cracked-off rim. Late 3rd-4th C. Below are two empty examples of this type of bottle both with the same dulling, creamy white weathering, and iridescence. Most of these vessel are of clear light green glass . The first from [The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) and the second from [The Augustinus Collection of Ancient Glass](#).



The Metropolitan Museum of Art



The Augustinus Collection of Ancient Glass

Lullingstone villa.

Glass bottle with dolphin handles, AD300

This bottle is decorated with horizontal bands and was one of four found in the mausoleum, two for each person. It is likely it contained some sort of liquid to see the deceased into the next life. There were four discovered in the grave.



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