



Gold-glass images were made by engraving a picture, often with text, onto a sheet of gold leaf. This was then placed between two pieces of glass which were fused together by heating. This gold-glass disc is the base of a bowl. These kinds of objects were given as presents by the early Christian Romans, on special occasions such as weddings or religious festivals.

Several gold-glass bases have survived because they were inserted within underground tomb-complexes (catacombs). When the owner of a gold-glass bowl died, the vessel was smashed to show that the deceased could not use it anymore. The decorated base was stuck onto the wall of the dead person's tomb as a sign of his/her faith and to celebrate the friendships he/she used to have.

This piece shows a woman on the left and a man on the right. They are both raising their hands in the ancient gesture of prayer (the Romans did not pray with their hands together, or kneeling down, but standing up with their arms raised). Above them is the chi-rho symbol (the first two letters of the Greek word *Christos* - Christ), a symbol used to show that the figures were Christian.

The inscription reads:

The inscription is backwards from this side of the glass.

DIGNTIAS AMIC. (this is an ancient spelling mistake – it should read DIGNITAS AMIC.) – ‘*The worthiness of friends*’

Compare:

The famous mosaic from Hinton St Mary in Dorset, with a central image of Christ, with a chi-rho symbol behind his head:

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/pe_prb/t/the_hinton_st_

mary_mosaic.aspx

Details:

3rd-4th century AD. Diameter 11.4cm. Ashmolean Museum 2007.26.