

73. Examples of Writing in Stained Glass

Shown below is a selection of panels showing details of the writing, placed in date order. Looking at examples in our collection, it seems that early inscriptions on glass are commonly white writing on a black background. The area would have been completely painted with black enamel, then the writing would have been scraped out using something like a sharp stick.

By the early 1300s, the writing is black on a white background. The skill of working with black enamels has improved greatly, and shading and stippling techniques make the images far more painterly. The writing continues to become more refined and ornamental.



Beatrix van Valkenburg—English, late 13th century



Sacrifice of Isaac—German, 1278, from the church of St.Thomas, Strasburgh



The Visitation—German, late 14th century



Annunciation of the Virgin—English, Hampton Court, 1400-1430



Judgement of Solomon—German, Cologne, early 15th century



Solomon and the Queen of Sheba—German, Cologne, early 15th century



St Barbara—German, Rhineland, early 15th Century



Arms within Garter of Sir Henry Fitzhugh—English, early 15th century





Crucifixion—English, 1450-1500



St John the Evangelist and a kneeling Soldier
Probably from the church of St Peter Mancroft, Norwich, England, 15th century



St Mary Magdalene—English, 15th century



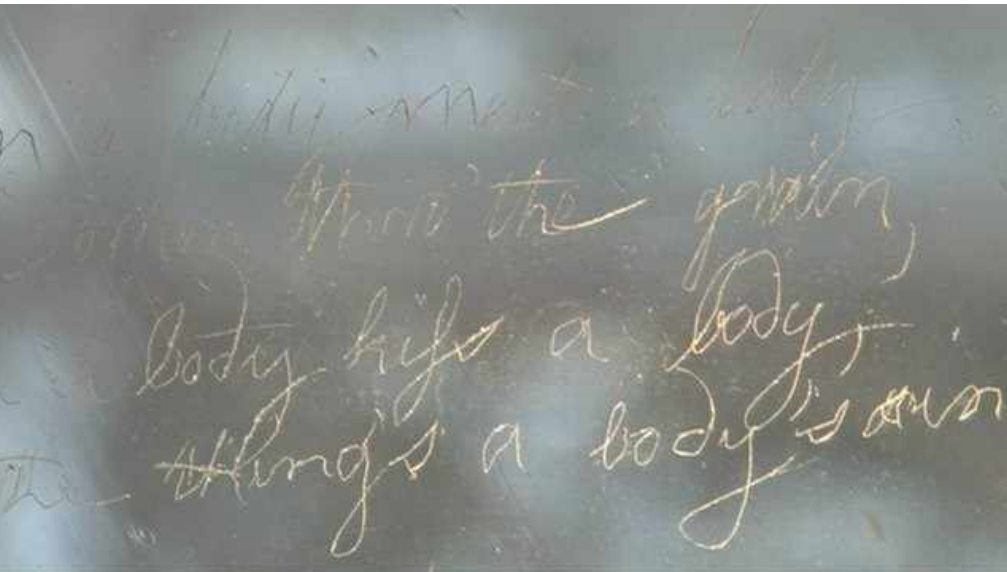
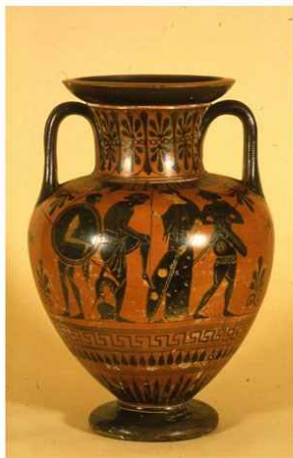
St Nicholas Preventing an Execution—South Netherlandish, 1509-1513



St Francis—Swiss, 1671



The decoration on Greek vases from Athens between the 6th and 4th centuries BC show a parallel to the white on black then black on white writing in stained glass, but in reverse. The decoration begins with black figure decoration, where the leather hard pot has the images painted on with a slip (runny clay mix) which, when fired in a reducing kiln, causes the slipped areas to turn black – black figures on a red background. Around 530BC, the technique changes with the whole pot being coated with slip, then the images are picked out by scrapping away the slip resulting in red figures on a black background. More subtle details could then be added with lines or dilute washes of glaze applied with a brush.



Other famous writing on glass includes Robert Burns's verse written on a pane in the globe Tavern, Dumfries:

**Gin a body meet a body
Coming through the grain.
Gin a body kiss a body
The thing's a body's ain.**

[Image from: http://news.bbcimg.co.uk/media/images/56181000/jpg/_56181517_burns_window_etching.jpg]