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VENETIAN CHANDELIERS
FROM THE 16TH CENTURY ONWARD
AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON CHANDELIER
PRODUCTION IN EUROPE AND BRANDENBURG-PRUSSIA

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about very illustrious glass objects that, although they are very well known, no systematic research has yet taken place. I am speaking about Venetian and Muranese glass chandeliers.

Even for me they were just a side panel as my field of research focuses on the chandeliers of the Brandenburg Prussian Palaces¹. This of course requires a preoccupation with all European manufacturers and royal courts.

The reasons for the lack of systematic research are surely

- the fragility of glass chandeliers;
- subsequent changes during cleaning and relocation of the chandeliers;
- often times ruthless modifications and refitting of lighting fixtures to accommodate more contemporary lighting requirements and needs;
- the dislocation and removal from their initial context and the lack of knowledge of later generations concerning the value of these objects.
- Uncertainty about the provenance since chandeliers with coloured glass elements are not always automatically of Venetian origin. Works «à la façon de Venise» were manufactured early on in various glass factories throughout Europe.

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¹ Klappenbach 2001.

During my years of research I have been able to bring to light many things, but much still awaits to be discovered.

With this speech and through examples of resources and photographs from Venice and Europe, I aim to awaken an interest in this topic. The time has come to explore the history and impact of glass chandeliers and to search for existing originals.

I would like to accomplish an awareness of the importance of these objects as valuable/worthy European artworks. I want to encourage and motivate all collections worldwide, to examine their existing Venetian chandeliers. The results can then be merged into an interdisciplinary research project where these can be evaluated.

This is why I am addressing following issues in my speech:

1. The significance of Chandeliers as royal representation- and status objects.
2. Chandelier manufacturing throughout the region of present day Italy.
3. The Venetian Glass Chandelier in Resources and Illustrations since the end of the 16th Century.
4. Examples of Glass chandeliers throughout Europe.

The significance of Chandeliers as royal representation- and status objects

Primarily, they are part of the interior furnishings, such as furniture or table and wall sconces. Precious, light reflective materials and the symbolism contained therein make them a highlight in royal chambers. Their exquisite value predestined them to serve as status symbols for their owners.

During evening festivities, they were indispensable as carriers of precious light, which was generated by very expensive beeswax candles. The emanating light was insignificant in comparison to the Chandelier itself. However, the amount of burning candles was a reflection of the owners financial resources. To 'illuminate' the importance of the court, to dazzle with the splendour of power and to set the stage for a radiant, enlightened ruler. Up until the

mid-18th Century, chandeliers adorned only representational and festive rooms. This changed during the Age of Enlightenment. Since then, in accordance with the French model, they are hung in most living rooms within a royal palace.

Even today, the ownership of chandeliers made of precious materials symbolises luxury. Luxury represents wealth and prosperity. Within the word itself, one can find the latin root 'lux', a unit used to measure the intensity of light.

Chandelier manufacturing throughout the region of present day Italy

The origin and the development of Chandeliers with hangings made of glass and rock crystal, as well as those made entirely of glass, lies within the region of present day Italy. Milan played a central role in the development of chandeliers. Since the 15th-16th Century it was a central point in manufacturing and processing of rock crystal and for steel refinement. Both materials are vital for chandelier manufacturing.

Well known for their chandeliers was the Milanese family Cattaneo (end of the 17th up until the middle of the 18th century)² as well as the workshop of Giovanni Battista Metellino (deceased before 1724)³.

Since ca. 1737 crystal cutters or 'Cristallari' from Milan delivered cut rock crystal hangings to Paris. At that time brass frames were fire gilded there for a new type of chandelier that was assigned by King Louis XV⁴.

The enchanting creations of Venetian glass artists were certainly assembled early on into chandeliers. Almost all known techniques were used to this end. These Venetian glass chandeliers as well as the bohemian crystal chandeliers were best known.

By the 18th century they had found their way into numerous palaces and private houses throughout Europe – but not in the

² Ibid.: 39, 45, 68, 114, 115; Fig. 56.

³ Ibid.: 30, 32, 39, 63, 66, 67, 71, 81, 114, 115, 372; Figs. 15, 22, 60, 62, 63, 114.

⁴ References: <http://www.fotothek.spsg.de>, Photograph no. F0027992.

Prussian Palaces. Everyone was trying to imitate Venetian glassware and chandeliers.

The bohemian Glassmakers excelled herein – their «à la Façon de Venise» chandeliers from the 19th c. are very difficult to distinguish from the real thing. Presumably this strong Bohemian competition led to a prolonged interruption in the production of glass chandeliers in the early 19th c. Venice. During the second half of the 19th c. the production picked up again. To date, here in Venice, these delicate works of art are made using historic models as an inspiration for new designs. The popularity of these works remains undiminished.⁵

The Venetian Glass Chandelier in Resources and Illustrations since the end of the 16th Century

Due to their highly exposed position and their fragility, glass chandeliers were extremely vulnerable. They broke relatively easily, so that few have survived. Often times, those that survived are no longer in their original state and have been strongly altered. Most likely, the earliest existing examples stem from the early 18th c. The earliest known written reference, that I am aware of, stems from the estate of Henri I de Bourbon, Prince de Condé (1552-1588). In the inventory of the estate furnishings there is mention of a coloured glass chandelier: «Ung chandelier de salle á quatre branches suspendu en la salle [...] fasson de croustalle, faict au tour et figuré de plusiers couleurs»⁶.

Due to the high rank of its former owner, the chandelier was certainly state of the art and highly modern for that time. However it is unclear whether the chandelier came from Venice or not. Targeted research could certainly provide further evidence of such objects.

Written evidence of such a chandelier can be found in the Inventory of the Garde Meuble in Paris dating from 1673: there is

⁵ Refer: Theuerkauff-Liederwald 1993.

⁶ D'Allemagne 1891: vol. 1, 250.

mention of a «chandelier de cristal de Venise»⁷. Unfortunately this work has no longer exists and its appearance is unknown.

In 1692 the Elector of Brandenburg, Frederick III purchased three «Christallene Cronen» – crystal crowns – from the Glass factory in Pretzsch. The factory, located in the Electorate of Saxony by Wittenberg, was founded in 1692⁸ and was operated by a Muranese Glassmaker Ludovico Savonetti. There is no mention of metal frames on the invoice, so it can be assumed that the chandeliers were made entirely of glass⁹. In the same year Savonetti delivered nine «glass chandeliers» to the court in Dresden¹⁰. It has not yet been proven, that the existing chandelier in Schloss Moritzburg near Dresden is one of the above mentioned.

We know that Ludovico Savonetti produced a «very clear, pure crystal glass, large magnificent, expensive Chandeliers, delicate reticella, some coloured flowers of unbelievable height and size»¹¹.

If these descriptions are of «à la Façon de Venise» Chandeliers which were decorated with flowers and others decorative blown glass elements is not known.

The earliest records of glass Chandeliers that were produced in Venice are those found in the Amalienburg in Munich. They were specifically made in 1739 for these rooms and are made of colorless crystallglass. In 2012 the Venetian chandelier located in the mirror cabinet of the resident palace in Würzburg was restored. It is verified that it was made in Venice in 1756 (Fig. 1: Venetian Glass Chandelier, before 1756, Photograph and restorer 2012 by Ingrid Thom Bayerische Verwaltung der Staatlichen Schlösser, Gärten und Seen). Its composition and style is closely related to the large chandelier in Ca' Rezzonico¹². This Chandelier, accredited to

⁷ Guiffrey 1886: 93.

⁸ Baumgärtner 1977: 25.

⁹ Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz Berlin (GStA PK). I. HA, Rep. 9, EEE, Paket 2, Bl. 690, 691.

¹⁰ Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden. Hausmarschallamt, R XVI no. 5, p. 297.

¹¹ Schmidt 1992: 131, 132 («sehr weisses reines Christallglas, grosse prächtige Cronen, [...] von hohem preiss, [...] fillagrame Fadenglas mit mancherley farbigen Bluhmen und von ungemeiner grösse und höhe»), and 115, 120.

¹² Theuerkauff-Liederwald 1993: Fig. 1.

Giuseppe Briati, also stems from the 18th century. Also the blown glass parts are mounted on metal arms.

The paintings by Pietro Longhi and Francesco Guardi quite accurately represented chandeliers that are certainly of Venetian origin.

The evidence for this has yet to be adduced. Or has it already been found? I would like to close my speech with an enumeration of Venetian chandeliers made entirely from glass that can be found throughout Europe.

Examples of Glasschandeliers throughout Europe

I venture the proposition that all European Chandeliers, in the broadest sense, are based on Venetian chandeliers in design and technology.

Bohemia: With the discovery of crystal glass, the production of glass arm chandeliers took place here¹³. The systematic study of locally produced chandeliers is also lacking in Bohemia.

A manufacturing of glass arm chandeliers existed very early on in England. These differed primarily through their perfect execution and brilliant finishing¹⁴.

The Chandeliers from the Real Fábrica de Cristales de la Granja located in San Ildefonso de La Granja in Spain, the Venetian influence is unmistakable¹⁵.

Also in Norway it is obvious that the Glassworks Nøstetangen knew of the Italian designs and techniques¹⁶.

It is indicated in written sources, that the Potsdam Glass factory, which was famous for its excellent cut glass, also manufactured glass chandeliers. Unfortunately I am unable to allocate existing chandeliers to this factory. These are only assumptions. (Fig. 2: Glass arm Chandelier in Sanssouci castle, Glassfactory Potsdam or Zechlin, SPSSG, Photo Nr. F0019594, Photograph Hagen Immel). It is certain, that the Royal Glass factory in Zechlin produced

¹³ Klappenbach 2001: Figs. 78, 83.

¹⁴ Mortimer 2000: Plate 15-31 and Klappenbach 2001: Figs. 34, 35.

¹⁵ Ruiz Alcón 1971: 29-36.

¹⁶ Klappenbach 2001: Fig. 20.

Glass chandeliers in large numbers. Single components of these chandeliers are still preserved today.

After the separation from Bohemia, through the Prussian King Frederick II (1712-1786), Silesia continued to manufacture Chandeliers made of glass. Although these chandeliers resemble those made in the factory in Zechlin, there are distinctive features that differentiate the two¹⁷.

An outstanding example can be found in Saxony. I had mentioned that the factory of the Venetian Savonetti, Chandeliers were purchased not only by Prussia but especially by the Elector of Saxony. They are pictured in large numbers on description of the festivity surroundings of the marriage of the Prince Elector 1719 and a few examples are preserved there.

Another reliable source, which documents the appearance of historic chandeliers, is an incomplete chandelier made of an entirely different material namely Meißen Porcelain.

These sources attest that the Dresden Glass factory supplied parts of a Glass arm chandelier as a model for the porcelain version. The similarity is obvious. The Chandelier is now located in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (Inv. Nr. BK-17463)¹⁸.

Through this observation my not yet proven theory arose; the second type of Chandelier that was produced by Meissen 1762 for Frederick II must also have used a Glass arm chandelier as a model. Only, in this case, the model was Venetian with a very intricate design (Fig. 3: Porcelain Chandelier in the New Palace in Potsdam-Sansouci. Meißen, Johann Joachim Kändler 1762, Photo: SPSG, Nr. F0027989, Photograph Wolfgang Pfaunder).

Many details show quite clearly, how techniques that were used by glassblowers were transferred into porcelain. This phenomenon is unique to the Meissen Porcelain Manufactory.

I am still looking for a written proof.

I would be very pleased if I have been able to awaken your interest in the systematic research of Venetian chandeliers.

(Translation by Bettina K. Schneider)

¹⁷ Klappenbach 2001: Fig. 148.

¹⁸ Den Blaauwen 2000: 72-74.

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Fig. 1 - Venetian Glass Chandelier, before 1756. Bayerische Verwaltung der Staatlichen Schlösser, Gärten und Seen (Photograph and restorer 2012 by Ingrid Thom).



Fig. 2 - Glass arm Chandelier in Sanssouci castle, Glassfactory Potsdam or Zechlin (Photo SPSG, no. F0019594, Photograph Hagen Immel).



Fig. 3 - Porcelain Chandelier in the New Palace in Potsdam-Sansouci, Meißen, Johann Joachim Kändler 1762 (Photo: SPSG, no. F0027989, Photograph Wolfgang Pfaueder).

