

REINO LIEFKES

A PATTERN BOOK OF THE VENICE AND MURANO
GLASS COMPANY LTD.

In 1963 the Department of Paintings, Prints and Drawings of the Victoria & Albert Museum acquired a unique document of late nineteenth century Venetian glass making¹. It is a glass-makers' pattern book, comprising over 1595 numbered drawings from the Venice and Murano Glass Company Ltd (Figs. 1-5).

The full-leather bound book has 161 leaves of thin tracing paper, and two leaves of blank laid paper in the front and the back, one of which is watermarked «1895». It appears to be a standard size artist's sketchbook of oblong format, measuring 19.6 X 12.5 cm. The blank laid paper leaves in the front are stamped on both sides in purple ink: «THE VENICE AND MURANO GLASS COMPANY LTD». This stamp is also used on some of the tracing paper leaves. (Fig. 2) The leaves are numbered in pencil on both sides with page numbers 1 to 322.

On the front sides of the leaves, numbered with uneven page numbers, are drawings of glass patterns, numbered in a more or less unbroken sequence from 1 to 1595. Some patterns have been given a «bis» or an «A» number, and these seem to be variations on the root-number designs. (e.g. p. 87, no. 500bis) Some patterns are shown in different sizes. These are given the same pattern number followed by a fraction, indicating their relative size (Fig. 2, pattern 595). Both front

¹ VAM E. 217-1963; I am grateful to Michael Snodin, formerly of the Department of Paintings, Prints and Drawings of the VAM, for his advice and suggestions in understanding the physical aspects of the album. An earlier version of this article was first submitted for publication to Mr. Aldo Bova in 1999, for inclusion in the exhibition catalogue *I colori di Murano nell'800*, Venice 1999' but it was not included at the time.

and side views are given of certain patterns (e.g. p. 67, no 412, 1/2 to 1/5), and in some cases a plan, or view from above is also provided (e.g. p. 185, no 1119). The drawings are in pen and black ink and seem to have been traced from another source². All the drawings from no 1 to 1548 are identical in draughtsmanship and must have been drawn by the same person as one single exercise. They are extremely skilful and confident in execution; their three-dimensionality is achieved by simple linear highlights (Figs. 1-4). The vessels are either shown in strict elevation, with tops and feet as a straight line, or in slight perspective. Underneath a drawing of a large centre-piece (no. 1238, p. 221) is written: «scala di 1/10», in Italian. The fact that this is by the same hand as the drawings and the numbering indicates that the draughtsman was either Italian or, that he was tracing an Italian text. Patterns 1548 to 1589, at the end of the manuscript, are drawn in a distinctly different style (Fig. 5). They are more precisely detailed but less skilfully drawn and have parallel hatching and dotted lines which cannot be observed in the earlier drawings. Their numbering has the crossed or «continental» 7, which was not used in Britain. This indicates that these drawings too, were probably done by an Italian, possibly working in Britain. Finally, there is a group of six drawings on the last page (p. 313), two of which, drawn in ink, are very sketchy, while the other four are in pencil only. The last end paper also has some sketches of bowls in pencil and some sort of a calculation.

Purpose and use of the pattern book

The sketchbook itself can be dated through its watermark to 1895 or later. In the margin, above model no 1366, on p. 257, the date

² On p. 27 a whole row of numbers has been left out and has been added later in pencil. This is an indication that the patterns and numbers were traced at the same time and that the numbering had already been established. If the whole pattern book had been numbered right through, an omission like this would not have occurred. On p. 119, no. 726, pattern and number have been left out and there was no blank space left blank for this. It was later drawn in pencil, partly overlapping another pattern. This could have been an accidental omission or it might indicate that a previously discontinued design was reintroduced. See also note 12.

2/12/96, as well as a price in English currency '30/-' (30 shillings) has been added in pencil, proving that the pattern book was in use in Britain by that time. This provides conclusive evidence that it must have been created in 1895 or 1896. This also confirms the suggestion that all the drawings up to no. 1548 were drawn as one single exercise. The fact that there are only a few pages added after no. 1548, with no more than 46 designs, probably means that this must have happened not long after 1895-96.

A torn leaf has been repaired, recto, with three small sticky labels, of the type which was probably used to mark the bottom of the glasses for retail (pp. 277-278). These labels read: «COMPAGNIA VENEZIA-MURANO 125, NEW BOND STREET, W.» Apart from suggesting that the pattern book was used in the London shop, this also provides a further indication of its period of use, as the Venice and Murano Glass Company Ltd. moved its shop to 125 New Bond street during 1902-03³. These stickers prove that the pattern book was still in use by that time.

All the evidence suggests that our pattern book was used by the Venice and Murano Glass Company Ltd., in their London Showrooms, as a complete record of their regular production. The fact that new patterns were added at least twice, suggests that it was intended as a central record which had to be kept up to date. There is also evidence of extensive use. Many of the thin pages are creased or torn, and all the bottom right corners are very grubby as a result of repeated turning. Some patterns have been marked in pencil with a cross (e.g. p. 153,

³ The letterhead of the Company used on 5th December 1902, listed two Galleries, both at 30. St. James's Street and at 125, New Bond Street, while its head office was at 16, St. Helens Place. The same paper was used for a letter dated 7th May 1903, but the St. James's Street address is crossed out. (both VAM Archive, NF Venice and Murano Glass Co.); *The Post Office London Directory* 1902 (published December 1901) p. 1678 lists as address: Venice & Murano Glass Co. Lim. 30 St. James's street SW-TA "Soffiati"; *The Post Office London Directory* 1903 (published December 1902) p. 1695 lists as address: Venice & Murano Glass Co. Lim. 125 New Bond st W-TA "Soffiati". Also, an advertisement of the Company in the *Connoisseur* of August 1902 still gives the St. James's street address. This proves that the move must have taken place at the end of 1902. An advertisement in the *Connoisseur* of August 1905, gives the Bond Street address with the addition "formerly of 30 St. James's Street. With thanks to Peter Francis, Belfast for pointing out these advertisements to me.

no. 971; p. 181, no. 1105 ½) and others with written words, such as 'millefiore' (p. 5, no. 39); 6 punte (p. 101, no. 606) or 'Dragon' (p. 257, no. 1366). Quite a few designs have been traced over in pencil. Some of these also show a blue impression of the pencil lines recto, which indicates that the designs were traced onto another surface with the aid of carbon paper. (e.g. p. 47, nos. 329 & 331; p. 131, no. 804) In some cases the design has been changed in a crude way; for two beakers a stem with foot have been drawn in using pencil and pen, possibly to reflect a request by a customer. (p. 129, nos. 781 1/3; 781 1/4) Finally, on p. 3, a few designs have been added in a clumsy hand.

Not only the quality of the drawings, but also the systematic ordering of the manuscript – with all the pattern numbers more or less in following order and depicting different sizes of the same pattern to scale, and occasionally showing different views of one pattern – suggest that it was an important and accurate representation of the factory's production. The pattern book is in this respect much more complete than a regular, printed, illustrated price-list. On the other hand, the manuscript would not have been useful as a reference for individual customers, as the patterns are shown in numerical order only and are not consistently grouped in any other way, such as by object type. This indicates that it could only be used together with other reference material, probably in the London shop. To promote sales to individual customers the firm made use of printed illustrated catalogues⁴. It is highly likely that the primary purpose of the pattern book was as a reference of the factory's patterns in the London shop, and that its function was to facilitate ordering from the Venice glassworks.

Unfortunately not much is known about the provenance of the pattern book. It was given to the Museum in 1963 by a Mr U. Arbib, of 59 Weymouth Street, London, an address in very close vicinity to the New Bond Street shop. It is likely that the donor was related to Salvatore Arbib, a partner in the CVM society during the 1900s, whose brother lived in London⁵.

⁴ *Connoisseur*, August 1905: an advertisement in this issue states: «should a call (visit to the showroom) be impracticable, an *Illustrated Catalogue* would be forwarded (post free) on application».

⁵ Kind information Rosa Barovier-Mentasti: Her main source on Salvatore Arbib's

Chronological sequence of the pattern numbers

One of the main questions concerning the pattern book, is the extent to which the numbering of the patterns might reflect the chronology of the firm's production.

There is no strict grouping by object type among the patterns, but in the first 75 leaves, or up to about pattern number 950, considerable effort has been made to put similar types of objects together (Figs. 1-2). The first leaf shows beakers only; the next one beakers and simple goblets, after which another seven leaves show mainly beakers and goblets. Patterns 149 to 190 are predominantly wide shallow goblets, probably for champagne, while the patterns between 283 and 369 show most of the very ornate goblets. Patterns 401 to 427 are mostly bottles and decanters, and all but one pattern in the 849 to 864 range are candlesticks. After about number 950 only small groups of similar objects can be found, and many single object types appear on the pages, as one would expect for a naturally expanding product assortment with new designs being added and allocated new pattern numbers at regular intervals.

The grouping by object type of these first 950 patterns indicates that they were already in production when the sequence of numbering was established and that the entire existing product range was re-numbered at some stage around the time when pattern 950 was first added to the assortment. Looking at some of the designs following closely after number 950 in the pattern book, it can be established that this must have happened sometime around the middle of the 1870s⁶. The famous 'Guggenheim Cup', which was first made with great difficulty in 1875, and was subsequently shown at the 1878 Paris

involvement in the CVM company is the journal of Lady Enid Layard in the Armstrong Browning University in Texas, Digital Collections: <http://www.browningguide.org/browningcircle.php>.

⁶ Some of the same patterns, featured among the first 950 or so numbers, can also be found in an earlier Salviati catalogue of about 1867 in the National Art Library at the V&A Museum in London. (Published in full in: Liefkes 1999: 20-12, 201-211; However, the numbering in this catalogue is totally different. The designs in this catalogue are grouped by object type but, as a result, the numbering is not in sequence.

International Exhibition, has number 1003⁷. Two vases which were shown at that same exhibition, with gold decoration in early Christian style, carry numbers 1053 and 1054. In fact, all Salviati or Venice and Murano Glass Company Ltd. objects which I found illustrated in contemporary sources from before 1882, and which can be matched with patterns in the pattern book, fall in the pattern-number range 1 to 1057⁸.

During its history, the company went through a number of name changes. In 1872, the company changed its name from *Salviati & C.* to *The Venice and Murano Glass and Mosaic Company Limited (Salviati & C.)*, while in 1877, a major conflict between Antonio Salviati and his principal shareholders caused him to leave and start two companies of his own, *Salviati & Compagnia* for mosaics, and *Salviati Dr. Antonio* for blown glass⁹. An incomplete and undated trade catalogue in the Rakow Library at the Corning Museum of glass is of interest in establishing a date for the renumbering of the product assortment¹⁰. The pages of this catalogue are headed *Stabilimento Salviati & Co" Venezia*, and it therefore almost certainly date from before Salviati left the CVM in 1877. The numbering of the patterns in this catalogue is almost entirely identical to the numbering in the CVM pattern book. The highest pattern number in this catalogue is 944, which is exactly the highest number we suspect to have been created when the entire existing production was re-numbered. It is likely, therefore, that this catalogue was created at the time when the new numbering was introduced, and this must have been before Antonio Salviati left the CVM in 1877¹¹.

⁷ Barovier Mentasti 1982: 213-217; Liefkes 1992: 81.

⁸ I checked: *The Art Journal The Illustrated catalogue of the Paris Universal Exhibition 1867*: 33: range 106-670 (only about half of the models shown here can be compared with patterns in the pattern book); Eastlake 1868: range 6-579; *The Art Journal The Illustrated catalogue of the Paris International Exhibition 1878*: 36, 126, 192: range 136-1053; Edis 1881: pl. 25-26: range 5-1057.

⁹ Liefkes 1994: 286-287; Sarpellon 1989: 15-17.

¹⁰ Rakow Library, Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, New York, available on Microfiche (Master Reel Nr 7/7, Position C). Part of this catalogue illustrated in Bova 2009: 126-129.

¹¹ Migliacciò 2012: 17-19, discusses the dating of this catalogue. A Salviati catalogue

There is one further indication that the renumbering of the first 950 or so patterns must have happened well before our pattern book was drawn up in 1895-96. For the first 937 patterns in our pattern book, there are random omissions of pattern numbers, spread out fairly evenly across the pages. This indicates that these patterns were no longer part of the regular production in 1895, probably because they were no longer in demand¹². (Figs. 3-5) Then, after pattern 937, there is a closed pattern numbering sequence without any omissions, which indicates that the entire range of these patterns was still current when the pattern book was produced¹³.

It is not clear whether the pattern numbering in our pattern book from number 950 onwards, represents a consistent chronological sequence, but stylistic analysis of the patterns suggests that the numbering does reflect some sort of chronology. Starting with pattern number 1100, for instance, there is an increased emphasis on asymmetrical fancy designs, often incorporating dragons. (Figs. 3-4) Such designs became fashionable from the mid-1880s onwards¹⁴.

As suggested above, the patterns after number 1548, drawn by a different hand, were probably added shortly after the bulk of drawings were done in 1895 or 1896. This is confirmed by the fact that a few glasses illustrated in an article by Molmento from 1903, and the model depicted in an advertisement from 1905 for instance, are not yet represented in the pattern book¹⁵.

In addition to providing the most complete production record of the Venice and Murano Glass Company Ltd. known to date, the

first attributed by Sarpellon 1989: 39-ff. to the period after 1877, has an entirely different pattern numbering, and it is likely that Salviati changed his product assortments and pattern numbering when he set up his new firm *Salviati Dr. Antonio*.

¹² Throughout first 937 patterns, just over 16 % of patterns has been omitted, spread out fairly evenly across the pages. See also note 2.

¹³ Apart from nrs. 1502-1518 incl. which was probably caused by the draftsman omitting one whole page of patterns erroneously.

¹⁴ See Bova 1997: 100-158.

¹⁵ Molmenti 1903: ill. pp. 5, 6 (left), 10 (left), 14 (left) & 15 (left), 20 (left); One of these is also shown on a photograph in an advertisement for the Venice and Murano Glass Company Ltd., first published in the *Connoisseur* of August 1905. (See page [manuscript p. 3], note 3).

book also sheds light on the close but unclear relationship between the company and another Venetian glass firm: M.Q. Testolini. The pattern numbers correspond exactly with those in an extensive, illustrated price list of the Venetian firm M.Q. Testolini¹⁶. This price list is not dated, but must have been published in or after 1889, as its cover illustrates a medal awarded at the 1889 exhibition in Paris¹⁷. It is not only the patterns and their numbers, but also the angle from which the objects are shown that are the same. The engravings in the price list are somewhat larger and show more detail, but they have enough detail in common to suggest that they were copied from the same source¹⁸. Silvano Tagliapietra writes in his *Chronache Muranesi*, that in 1910 Marco Testolini was listed as the owner of the Compagnia Venezia-Murano¹⁹. It can now be deduced that during the last decade of the nineteenth century the entire range of models and model numbers was shared between these two companies. Bova already noted that the name Testolini does not appear on the list of furnaces in Murano and Venice in any of the three editions of Zanetti's guide. Baumgartner also published in his Ariana catalogues that that Museum purchased a number of pieces from Testolini in Venice in 1885, including two glasses by Fritz Heckert in Central Europe²⁰. All of this indicates that

¹⁶ *Prix Courante des Verres Maison M.Q. Testolini Venise: Place St. Marc*, Verlag Luksch, Wien. The whereabouts of this catalogue are unknown, but parts of it are published in Bova 1997: 47-48, ill. pp. 196-198. See also Bova and Migliaccio 2014: 40. I am grateful to Prof. G. Sarpellon for allowing me to study a Xerox copy of the entire catalogue.

¹⁷ The highest number in the Testolini price list is 1451, while in our pattern book the pattern numbers of the drawings in the original hand go up to 1548. This means that if we assume that Testolini was selling the whole range of CVM glassware, that almost 100 designs had been added to the production in between publication of the Testolini price list and the production of the CVM pattern book in 1895-96. This confirms our idea that the Testolini price list must therefore be dated shortly after 1889 and certainly not later than 1895-96.

¹⁸ Pattern no. 106 shows a swan in the Testolini catalogue, while in our drawing the same detail resembles a snake. Pattern no. 100 has two swans in the Testolini catalogue, while they look more like dragons in the drawing. Perhaps the word 'Dragon' added in pencil to pattern 1365 on p. 257 of our pattern book, clarifies the nature of the two indistinct creatures on this vase.

¹⁹ Tagliapietra 1979: 56.

²⁰ Bova 1997: 48.

Testolini was probably exclusively a retailer rather than a producer, and that for the last decade of the 19th-century onwards it probably sold glass made by the Venice and Murano Glass Company.

Conclusion

Detailed study of the CVM pattern book kept in the V&A Museum in London shows that it was created in 1895-96 and it strongly suggests that it was updated for a short while only, certainly not later than the early years of the 20th century. Doubtless, it will need more research into the exact dating of the patterns depicted to prove and refine the relationship between pattern numbers and dates as suggested here. More work also needs to be done to clarify the often highly complex relationships between the CVM and other Muranese firms, such as M.Q. Testolini.

Little is known about the later chronology of the company in London. The Post office Directories of 1909 list nothing, and then from 1910-13 they register the CVM but refer to the «Venice Glass Company» in 301 Oxford Street and after 1914, at the outbreak of WWI, the company no longer appears in the directories. It seems that the horrific reality of the Great War killed off the taste for fanciful Murano glass in Britain.

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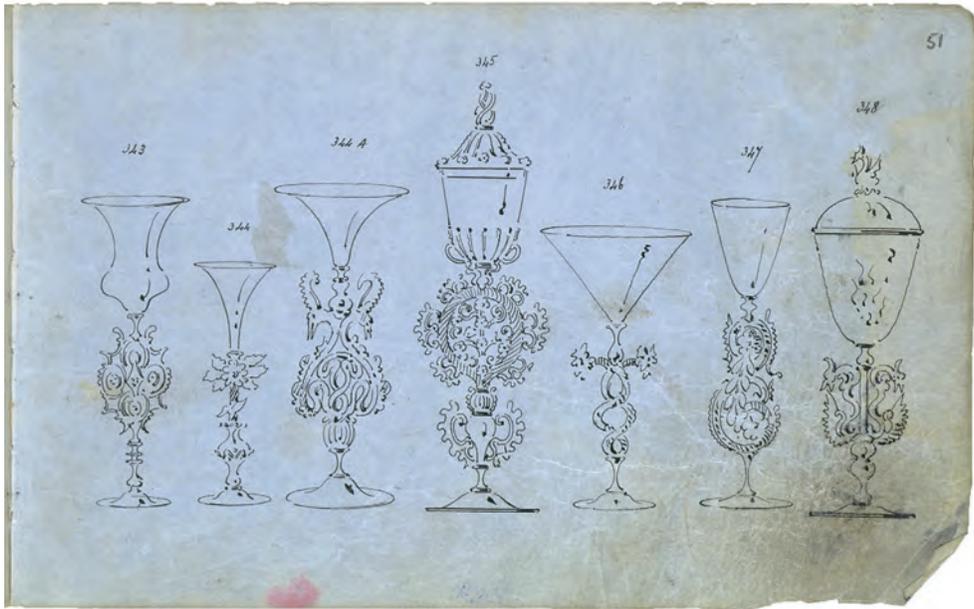


Fig. 1 - Page 51 from the Venice and Murano Glass Company Ltd. pattern book. Pen and ink on thin tracing paper, 1895-96. 19.6 X 12.5 cm. London, Victoria & Albert Museum, VAM E. 217-1963 (©Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

Fig. 2 - Page 99 from the Venice and Murano Glass Company Ltd. pattern book. Pen and ink on thin tracing paper, 1895-96. 19.6 X 12.5 cm. London, Victoria & Albert Museum, VAM E. 217-1963 (©Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

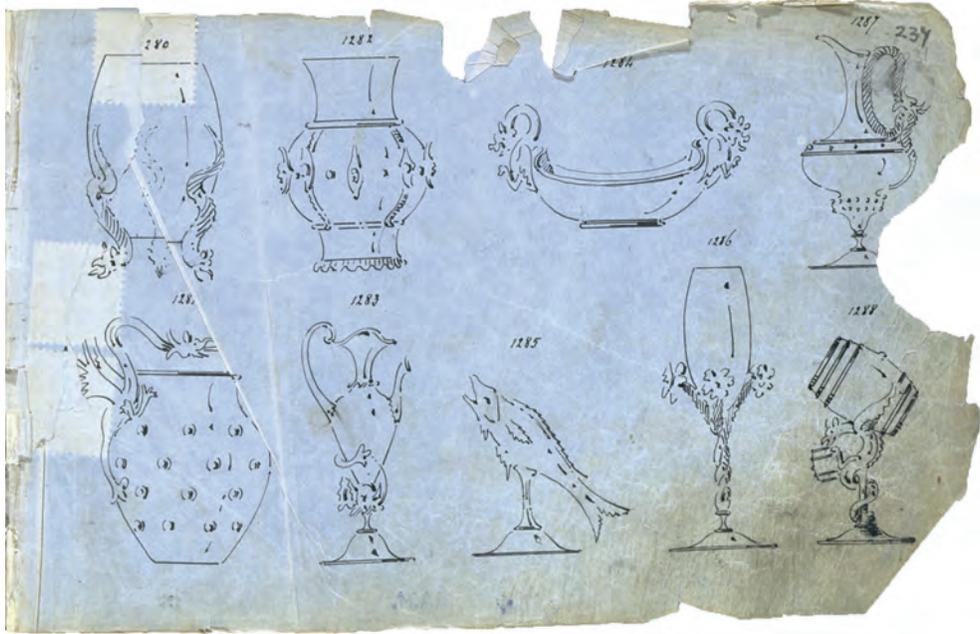
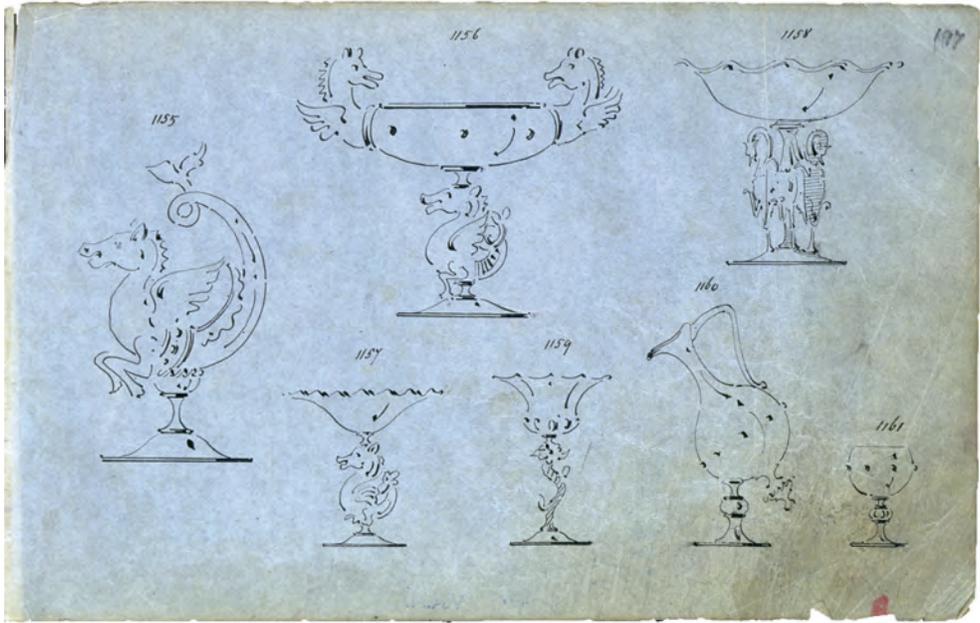


Fig. 3 - Page 197 from the Venice and Murano Glass Company Ltd. pattern book. Pen and ink on thin tracing paper, 1895-96. 19.6 X 12.5 cm. London, Victoria & Albert Museum, VAM E. 217-1963 (©Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

Fig. 4 - Page 237 from the Venice and Murano Glass Company Ltd. pattern book. Pen and ink on thin tracing paper, 1895-96. 19.6 X 12.5 cm. London, Victoria & Albert Museum, VAM E. 217-1963 (©Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

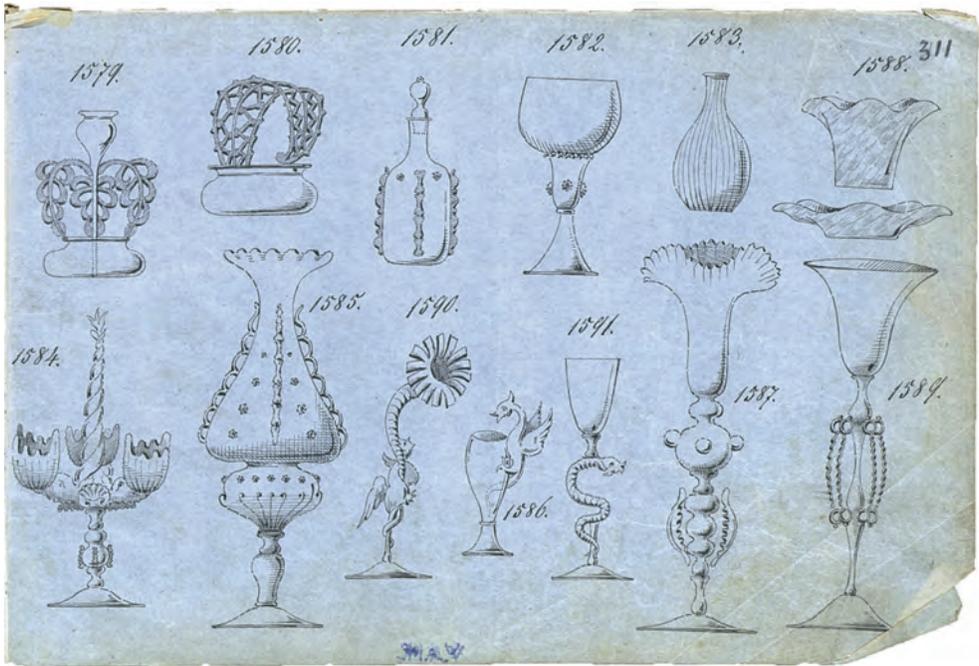


Fig. 5 - Page 311 from the Venice and Murano Glass Company Ltd. pattern book. Pen and ink on thin tracing paper, 1896-1903. 19.6 X 12.5 cm. London, Victoria & Albert Museum, VAM E. 217-1963, (©Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

