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MURANO GLASS INDUSTRY
IN THE PORTUGUESE ROYAL HOUSE COLLECTION:
REBIRTH AND SPLENDOR

Shortly after the unification of Italy in 1861, Princess Maria Pia of Savoy (1847-1911), daughter of King Victor Emmanuel II of Italy, married King Louis I of Portugal (1838-1889), and moved to her new royal residence in 1862 – the Palácio Nacional da Ajuda, property of the Royal Family until 1910, when the Republic was proclaimed and the family went into exile.

Queen Maria Pia proceeded to refurbish the interiors by following the fashion of the day. Balls and several ceremonies were held in the palace rooms which then became the centre of the Portuguese Court in the 19th century. The palace was closed after the proclamation of the Republic in 1910 and reopened to the public in 1968 as a museum, gathering important collections from the 15th to the 20th century, mainly decorative arts.

Perhaps given her cultural background, Queen Maria Pia bore a passion for glass. Throughout her life in Portugal (1862-1910), she acquired a considerable amount of decorative and utilitarian objects, such as lamps, mirrors, tableware and many other sets. The Palácio da Ajuda glass collection includes about 13,000 objects from prominent European regions and the acquisitions were made in the course of significant artistic movements, from the Historicist revival to the Art Nouveau period.

Murano glass collection incorporates about 600 utilitarian and decorative pieces, mostly acquired during the time period that King

Luis and Queen Maria Pia of Savoy inhabited Ajuda¹ dated between the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century. Decorative glass objects include several bowls and jugs; and among the utilitarian group, a table service, a mirror and a chandelier. Other glassworks from the same manufacturing period are nowadays in other former royal residences such as Palácio Nacional de Queluz and Palacio Nacional de Sintra; at Sintra, there are four decorative objects, two remarkable chandeliers and a mirror of the 19th century (which may also have been purchased by the Queen); and at Queluz, another chandelier can be found.

While living in Portugal, Queen Maria Pia kept in touch with the Savoy family. She travelled thirteen times to different European destinations, visited the Courts and she kept visiting her mother country, Italy. She went to Venice in 1867, 1888, 1900 and 1901, and visited the blown glass objects of *Salviati* and *Compagnia Venezia Murano*'s factories, where she bought part of the glasses and commissioned several orders². The collection of Muranese glassworks of the Portuguese Royal House also includes objects from the factories of *Fratelli Toso*, *Testolini* and *Pauly Gregoretti & Co.*, but without any doubt the Queen distinguishably preferred the productions of *Salviati* and *Compagnia Venezia Murano*.

In Paris, the Queen bought a few glassworks in *G. & L. Salviati* store, on *Avenue de l'Opéra*, and in *A. La Paix*, a resale shop in the same avenue.

In the Murano glass of the Portuguese royal household we can observe the relevant techniques and styles of Muranese glass production of the second half of the 19th century, and beginning of the 20th century. Therefore, one can see blown and mold-blown glassworks, where the mould techniques vary, and glass vessels decorated by jacks work according to the prevailing styles in Venice between 1862 and 1910. Under the Historicist Muranese Revival of the dominant eclectic taste, fantasy and exuberance appeared as main character features: the polychromy, by combining warm and cold colours, the gradations of

¹ The glass objects can be seen in the database: <http://www.matriznet.dgpc.pt/matriznet/home.aspx>.

² Barovier and Tonini 2015: 35.

colour, the natural tones such as the colour of amethyst, ruby and *fumé*, decorative techniques such as the gilding (cold or fire-gilding: in the first case, a gold leaf is applied to the surface, in the second, gold powder is sprinkled into the batch), the enamelling, the filigree in its many variations, the *aventurina* (Fig. 1), the *mezza-stampaura* and the *incalmo*. It is also possible to find finely decorated exemplars in this collection, like glassworks ornamented with dragons (Fig. 2), dolphins, flowers and leaves, pearls, winged horses, raspberry prunts *appliqués*, masks and lions (the symbol of the city), or a summary of the whole *repertoire* beloved by 19th century Venetian glass masters.

Identification Methodology

The *Arrolamento Judicial* (Judicial Inventory) of Palácio Nacional da Ajuda, carried out following the departure of the Royal Family into exile in 1910, allows us to identify a large proportion of glassworks and their original location. This document is a very important source for the study of all the collections. Fortunately, some of the Murano glass objects still keep their manufacturer label, and therefore their authorship could more easily be attributed to. Others were identified with the help from documents such as trade invoices or receipts, or purchasing orders found in the National Archives of Torre do Tombo and at Palácio da Ajuda³. This research is still undergoing on the latter Archives.

Other archival sources such as inventories of tableware and other sets, lists of “broken” glass, schedule books, notebooks and personal notes of the Queen and her chambermaids, and finally, sales brochures (indicating that the Portuguese Royal House also commissioned pieces from abroad), complement the researches.

During the course of the industrialization in the 19th century, the manufacturers and merchants adopted new sales methods to promote and advertise their products and export them. A glance into the beautiful catalogues of that time – from the *Compagnia di Venezia and*

³ *Ricordo di Venezia* 2015: 152-155.

*Murano*⁴ and *Salviati* house as well as from other manufacturers, such as *Fratelli Toso* and *Testolini* – display a varied and colourful array of decorative and utilitarian objects, that allowed us some identifications. Pictures of chandeliers and lamp projects and chandeliers drawings from *Compagnia di Venezia and Murano* were also sent to Queen Maria Pia, having probably been designed in this glasshouse. (Fig. 3)

The implementation of “*Service à la russe*”⁵ as a purpose for bourgeois day to day meals or, in general, the upper crust, led to the creation of new designs and typologies of tableware. These new rules of table service and etiquette associated with the development of industrial technology and glass chemistry, were crucial to the growth of glass production in the second half of the 19th century, a period in which manufacturers had seductive and engaging designs luxuriously decorated with new colours, made accessible also through catalogues. This period called for a large-scale production, so as to fulfil the needs and requirements of the emerging bourgeoisie⁶ (fig. 4).

We gave special attention to the Museo del Vetro collection, in particular to the 19th century glassworks, some with dates and authorship attributions, but also to other important collections that include items considered for the sake of comparison with the Ajuda collection: the Corning Museum of Glass, Stanford University, the Victoria & Albert Museum collections, and private collections such as the Boos-Smith and the Rossela Junk.

In a watercolour painting from the album of Enrique Casanova, one can observe the “cup with dragon” of the house *Fratelli Toso* (PNA, inv. 3730) in the painting studio of Her Majesty, where it’s still in exhibition. Queen Maria Pia, commissioned the album to the Royal House painter as a gift to her husband on his 51st birthday, on 31st October 1889, and it depicts nineteen rooms of the Palaces of Ajuda, Cascais and Sintra. It was painted between 1889 and 1891/92 hence we conclude that the same cup was already in Ajuda during that

⁴ Sheet of drawing The Metropolitan Museum of Art. New York. Elisa Wittesley Collection Fund (Accession number: 67.788.21).

⁵ Service in the Russian style. A manner of dining that involves courses being brought to the table sequentially, beginning with soup and ending with desert, introduced in Paris by the Russian Ambassador Alexander Kurakin, at the early of the 19th century.

⁶ Liefkes 1997: 108.

period⁷. Moreover, and according to other documentation examined that supports the idea that the monarch deeply treasured her Venetian objects, we can attest that the Queen had at close quarters, in their private chambers and in her daily life, many Muranese decorative glassworks, in the same way as having numerous portraits of her father, King of Italy.

Finally we can only say that sometimes it becomes difficult to identify some glass pieces, not only for lacking a signature, but also because, being so fashionable, the same designs were often copied by different manufacturers.

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⁷ Burnay 2015: 71.

Accession number: 67.788.21 Drawings of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Ricordo di Venezia. 2015. *Ricordo di Venezia. Murano Glass of the Portuguese Royal House*, Exh. Cat. Lisbon: from July 2015 to January 2016: Palácio Nacional da Ajuda. Direção Geral do Património Cultural.



Fig. 1 - *Cameo*, aventurine glass (brown glass. copper or gold?), 1867. Murano, Venice. PNA, Inv. 52136. Pietro Bigaglia offered this cameo in aventurine glass, with the portrait of King Vittorio Emanuele II in his glass beads firm, to Queen Maria Pia of Portugal during her visit to Murano in July 1867. On the occasion, the Queen also visited the Glass Museum and Salviati's factory (Mentasti and Tonini 2015: 35).



Fig. 2 - Salviati? Fratelli Toso?, *Tazza with dragons*, colourless and light blue-clear glass, yellow and black opaque glass, 1866-1891. Murano, Venice. PNA, inv. 3719. The glasswork is inspired by Catalan designs of late 16th century, early 17th century. The *Museo del Vetro* has a piece from Catalonia (176) and also a 19th century model by Salviati (175). In 1891, this Tazza was on view in the painting studio of Palácio da Ajuda (© José Paulo Ruas / Direção Geral do Património Cultural / Arquivo de Documentação Fotográfica. DGPC/ADF).



Fig. 3 - Compagnia di Venezia Murano, *Chandelier model*, 1866-1903. Albumen photographic print. PNA, inv. 63083 (© Luisa Oliveira / Direção Geral do Património Cultural / Arquivo de Documentação Fotográfica. DGPC/ADF).



Fig. 4 - The Dining room in chestnut wood (Neo-Renaissance style) decorated by Leandro Braga in 1879. It's exhibited the table service *Regina Margherita pattern* from Compagnia Venezia Murano, acquired by the queen Maria Pia in Venice in 1901 (Burnay 2015: 124; © José Paulo Ruas / Direção Geral do Património Cultural / Arquivo de Documentação Fotográfica. DGPC/ADF).