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THE GLASS COLLECTION
IN THE MUSEO DUCA DI MARTINA OF NAPLES

The Duca di Martina museum is housed in the Villa Floridiana in Naples, a building surrounded by vast grounds of more than 70,000 square metres, purchased in 1817 by King Ferdinand I of Bourbon, who entrusted its restoration to the architect Antonio Niccolini¹. The plans of 1826 held in the San Martino museum, Naples, show that Niccolini rebuilt an old lodge, turning it into a building in neo-classical style, and converted the grounds into an English garden, applying the perspective and enlightenment criteria of William Kent and using the natural slope of the ground to create woods of a scenographic effect alternating with vast lawns.

During King Ferdinand's second stay in Palermo between 1806 and 1815, when Naples was occupied by Napoleon's troops and his wife, Queen Maria Carolina, was scheming with the English to regain the throne of Naples, he devoted himself mainly to his preferred pastimes: hunting and consorting with beautiful women. And it was in exactly this period that he met Lucia Migliaccio, duchess of Floridia, widow of the prince of Partanna, Benedetto Grifeo, a noblewoman who Baron Palmieri di Miccichè recalls in his description of 1830. '*with moist black eyes like coal... in which grace, feeling and delight were read and whose look set the heart strings vibrating and went right through to the marrow*'². The king was so struck by this woman that he married her privately in Palermo in 1814, just three months after the death of the queen, Maria Carolina of Austria³. The duchess of Floridia⁴ came

¹ For notes on the Villa, see Venditti 1961: 251-262, 309-311.

² Palmieri di Miccichè 1830: 78.

³ News of the wedding was reported in the *Giornale Patriottico* 1814: 3 dic.

⁴ For information on Lucia Migliaccio, see Colletta 1834: 246; Carafa 1892: 65;

to Naples with Ferdinand in 1815, and in addition to occupying a private apartment in the Royal Palace, spent a good part of the year at the Villa Floridiana⁵, where the king often went to see her and where she organised grand receptions, also in honour of the king's Austrian relations, such as that of 22 May 1819 for the emperor, Franz I of Austria, Ferdinand's grandson⁶.

After various changes of ownership following the death of the duchess of Florida, the entire Floridiana complex was bought by the state in 1919 to turn it into a museum, after the collection of Placido de Sangro, duke of Martina, had been donated to the city of Naples in 1911. The latter was born in Naples in 1829 and belonged to an illustrious household closely linked to the Bourbon court. The duke, portrayed in a posthumous painting by Salvatore Postiglione (Naples 1861-1906), held in the museum (inv. 1792), bought most of the objects in his collection in Paris, where he had moved after Italian Unification, and where he came into contact with the main European collectors, such as the Rothschilds. He also took part in the big universal expositions in London and Paris in precisely those years, which helped nurture a strong interest in the arts applied to industry.

He actually bought entire batches of objects, some of which were sent to his Naples residence in via Nilo, of which the photographic documentation dating from the years prior to his death, in 1891, are still conserved⁷. In some of the photos published by Giusti many works that were then donated to the museum are clearly recognisable, making these precious documents for understanding the duke's tastes and the arrangement of the works in his museum-house in via Nilo. In 1881 his only son died and the entire collection was inherited by his grandson of the same name, the count dei Marsi, who gave it to the city of Naples, though the act of donation by his wife Maria Spinelli di Scalea took place only in 1919.

Giusti also published some photos of count dei Marsi's apartment

for a more expansive biography, see Di Giacomo 1914 and Martorelli 2008.

⁵ Precise descriptions of the villa are made in Francioni Vespoli 1825: 55 and Siciliano 1966: 86.

⁶ *Giornale* 1819: 27 mag.

⁷ Giusti 1994: fig. 22-23.

in Rione Sirignano, Naples, dating from 1913, a few years before the collection was moved to the Museo Duca di Martina. Indeed, a series of works was begun in 1919 to adapt the villa for use as a public museum, as was the intention of the then minister of education, Giovanni Gentile, and between 1924 and 1925 the works were moved to the new venue. Carlo Giovene, duke of Girasole, Neapolitan architect, entrepreneur and collector, who had also directed the furnishing of the Correale museum in Sorrento, was appointed to furnish it⁸.

Duke Carlo arranged the furnishings and the objects at Floridiana, recreating the same museum-house atmosphere, in keeping with the wishes of the heirs. The museum was first visited in 1927 by the king of Italy, and in 1929 by King Fuad of Egypt, but was only opened to the public in 1931, at first free, then, from 1933, at a cost of 2.00 lire per person.

Duke Carlo Giovene used the same showcases as the duke of Martina for his installation and had other identical ones made to exhibit the large collection of European and Oriental porcelain. He also arranged many objects on furniture and small wall shelves or three legged bases. In the first layout the collections had been ordered without distinction between Western and Eastern works of art. By the 1930s⁹ the museum had already achieved great acclaim, to the point of being reproduced on tourist postcards and being given important space in the 1936 Touring Club guide¹⁰.

The glass collection in both the first and second layouts after the war was exhibited in two fine rooms on the ground floor¹¹, where it remains. In 2012 those rooms with their vaults painted in tempera with floral motifs were restored and the walls lined with wisteria coloured fabrics, identical to those found under the skirting boards during the works.

The collection of about two hundred pieces is one of the most important, after the ceramic collections, and includes not only

⁸ The figure of Carlo Giovene di Girasole was recently recovered in Barrella 2015.

⁹ The first guide to the museum is from 1936, edited by Elena Romano and published by Poligrafico dello Stato.

¹⁰ *Campania* 1936: 94-95.

¹¹ See also the guide by Romano 1956.

Murano glass and examples of *façon de Venise*, but also a small nucleus of Bohemian and English crystal and some painted glass pieces and églomisés¹².

The duke's glass collection allows all the most significant stages in the development of Murano glass art and à la *façon de Venise* to be traced.

There are some examples with glazed decorations dating from the end of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, such as the beautiful vase with foliated friezes on raised feet (inv. 603), the ribbed cup enriched externally with the traditional motif of small scales and dots in light blue, white, red and dark blue enamel with gold highlights (inv. 649) and the stand decorated with a pelican at its centre (inv. 600). The latter, generally attributed to Barovier, is part of a group of works that have animal figures in the bowl, at times a coat of arms or classical figures, and are held in numerous Italian and foreign museums. An example very similar to this one is in Turin's Museo Civico¹³.

The sixteenth-century glassware is much more numerous and of different types, which document, especially from the middle of the century, the gradual surpassing of enamel decoration in favour of a growing appreciation of crystalline glass, as in the numerous series of wine glasses of which some examples are noted.

Three wine glasses with differently shaped bowls (invv. 689, 608, 484) are of particular interest, with baluster stem blown separately and then joined hot to the cup and the foot; they have sharp, essential forms of an extreme elegance and formal purity and are made with a crystalline glass developed by Angelo Barovier around 1450.

Other wine glasses reveal stranger and more bizarre forms, probably not used for drinking, like that of Catalan manufacture with a double bodied bowl, also known as a tulip (inv. 607).

Some 'reticello' and 'retorto' examples also date from the sixteenth-century, in which thin filaments of opaline glass are incorporated into the bubble, arranged in parallel canes or 'retortolo', or several threads woven to make elaborate network designs. The tub (inv. 551) and the

¹² A complete essay on the glass collection was published in Giusti 1994: 68-69.

¹³ Mallé 1971: cat. 32-33, fig. 6.

big cup with lid (inv. 563), decorated with alternate canes of opaline and woven filaments, and the bottle in the form of a bivalve shell (inv. 545) are notable among these. The latter, dating from the end of the century, shows the skill of the Murano glassmakers at making particular forms using the technique of mould blowing; the model derives from the pilgrim's flask, here made in a variant with a truncated cone base and enriched with a gilt bronze ring that encircles the base of the neck from which a chain falls with grotesque masks.

The two cruets with baluster body are of early Renaissance tradition in their form, but the relief elements of small grotesque masks, buttons and crests break the formal linearity to already reveal a Baroque style. One (inv. 460), decorated with reticello and retortoli, and another (inv. 552), decorated with white opaline feathers in a blue vitreous paste, may be attributed to the Catalan area due to the dark colour of the vitreous paste.

The production of so called 'ice' glass is also well documented in the collection, such as a tub (inv. 706) and a wine glass with lid (inv. 486), exemplifying the technique consisting of subjecting the glass bubble to sudden changes of temperature. Other similar pieces are held in many public and private collections¹⁴.

Murano glass art between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is certainly well represented in the Duca di Martina collection, both in terms of the number of pieces and the different types, which extend from crystalline 'retorto' and 'penne' pieces to coloured glass, such as a blue wine glass (inv. 657) with lid made with small enclosed gadrooning in the form of lozenges.

It is known that coloured glass was also made in other European glassworks and the Neapolitan collection holds a little known, small, blue jug (inv. 675) that could be referred to the Spanish area, possibly Catalan.

The production of glass made with the help of moulds in which the piece is blown is documented by a series of wine glasses with lids enriched by grotesque masks and baluster stems, as in one example (inv. 648), relating to Netherlands production between the end of the

¹⁴ A similar tub is held in the Murano Glass Museum, Dorigato in Venezia 1982: cat. 183 and a wine glass is published in Frankfurt am Main 1980: cat. 136.

sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries, of which another similar one is held at the Musées Royaux d'art et d'Histoire in Brussels¹⁵.

The Murano glassmakers demonstrated their skills over the seventeenth century by creating an endless series of wine glasses in the most varied shapes, with round, bell, oval, truncated cone and flat disc cup, but primarily with stems enriched with wings, rings, lion heads, cords and chains and additions of crests worked with pincers known as 'morise'. A large wine glass with snake stem (inv. 597) is rather from the northern area, possibly the Netherlands, a type documented in Venice in a 1689 inventory of the Darduin Glassworks of Murano, and indicated with the term '*gatti con bisse*', or wine glasses with snake stem.

Among the Duca di Martina wine glasses, that with the strangest and most bizarre shapes is a very tall example (inv.463) with lid that narrows towards the base forming a series of seven diminishing bulbs. It is missing its domed lid, but this is present in a similar example held in the British Museum, London¹⁶. It is in any case documented that wine glasses of this kind were also made in the Murano glassworks for export to northern European countries.

Another very characteristic shape of Veneto production is the table lamp, produced from the sixteenth century. A model in the form of an imaginary animal is held in the Naples collection (inv.691); it was made with the mould blowing technique and could be of seventeenth-century Spanish manufacture.

The firkin bottle (inv. 488) in blue glass is also from the northern European area; it is a table recipient with a small opening on the back, in which brandy or other syrupy wines were kept to preserve their bouquet and aroma¹⁷.

The collection is rich in glassware of less usual shapes, like the bellows bottle (inv. 578), inspired by ancient Roman examples, decorated with opaline canes and applications of colourless glass worked with pincers; and again, the Cantir, of which a pair is held (invv. 627, 629), a typical Spanish jug used for wine with two upper

¹⁵ Liège 1958: 142, cat.306.

¹⁶ Tait in Venezia 1982: cat.165.

¹⁷ Lanzilli in Ambrosio *et al.* 2011: 41, cat.35.

openings, one short and wide for filling and the other long and narrow for drinking¹⁸; and the Kuttrolf, (inv.696), a typical German container, but also produced in Venice, where it was known as a *zuccarino*. The neck is formed of two or more small, twisted tubes to make the liquids descend more slowly, probably rosolio or aromatised wines.

The eighteenth century was also a period of new blossoming and great expressive imagination in Venetian glass. The production of opaline glass is well documented in Naples, which with its milky white colour imitated porcelain. A jug (inv.698) decorated with polychrome enamels is notable, as is a series of so-called chalcedony glass pieces, in brownish and iridescent colours that imitated the dappling of zoned agate, a variety of natural chalcedony. These were often enriched with 'aventurine', or copper crystals, which were incorporated into the vitreous paste and, remaining there in suspension, took on the appearance of small, luminous gilt specks.

A jug with lid (inv. 663) dating to before the end of the seventeenth century¹⁹ and a trembleuse cup (inv. 662), a model that was often found in many glass collections, are noteworthy.

The so-called dappled glass is also typical of eighteenth century production, made by spraying red and blue onto the outside of the mix, giving the effect of malachite, as can be seen on a two-handled cup (inv.460) and a small vase with lid (inv. 659).

Finally, the opaline glass pieces, also known as 'girasol', are noteworthy, such as a small stand (inv. 654), a pair of trembleuse cups²⁰, (invv. 468,479), and some little rosolio glasses (invv. 465, 573), with light ribbing, models mainly taken up from the Renaissance tradition, a technique that was then to have much success over the course of the entire nineteenth century.

¹⁸ Lanzilli in Ambrosio *et al.* 2011: 51-52, cat.55.56.

¹⁹ Giusti 1994: 73.

²⁰ Giusti 1994: 74.

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Fig. 1 - *The Museum rooms of the glass collection.* Napoli, Museo Duca di Martina.



Fig. 2 - *Goblet*, Murano, 16th century. Napoli, Museo Duca di Martina, n. 473.



Fig. 3 - *Bottle*, Murano, last quarter 16th century. Napoli, Museo Duca di Martina, n. 545.



Fig. 4 - *Bottle*, Murano, late 16th century - early 17th century. Napoli, Museo Duca di Martina, n. 607.



Fig. 5 - *Goblet*, Murano, last quarter 16th century. Napoli, Museo Duca di Martina, n. 637.



Fig. 6 - *Goblet*, Murano, 16th century. Napoli, Museo Duca di Martina, n. 571.



Fig. 7 - *Goblet*, Murano, first quarter 16th century. Napoli, Museo Duca di Martina, n. 688.

