

Bohemian Millefiori Paperweights

The Riedels' Dynasty and Count's Harrach Glassworks

Marek Kordasiewicz © 2006

In the 19th century Austrian Empire two glassmaking regions were technologically most advanced and important – Venice and Bohemia.

Venice was under Austrian rule from 1797 (peace in Campo Formio) till 1866, when proclaimed in 1861 the Kingdom of Italy conquered in the war with Austria.

Bohemia was much more integrated with Austria and remained under Austrian rule from 1526. After anti-Habsburg's insurrection (1618 - 1620) Bohemia lost it's statehood and regained independence after the World War I in 1918.

This is important to clearly point, that Bohemia was neighboring with the best Silesian glassmaking region in the Giant Mountains (Riesengebirge). Some of the best Bohemian glassworks were placed very close to the Bohemian-Silesian border. This was the reason, that very often glassware made in Silesian glassworks were misattributed to the Bohemian ones. As both Bohemia and Silesia in the 19th century were parts of two different and competing states, we should differ Bohemian and Silesian attributions of the glassware produced there.

For several years scholars and glass collectors were not sure, which paperweights and millefiori glass objects could be attributed to the Bohemian or to the Silesian glassworks. Common practice was to call "Bohemian" all Riesengebirge paperweights.

According to presence of the Prussian coat of arms (the Prussian eagle) in two types of previously called "Bohemian" paperweights, we should attribute them to the Silesian glassworks.¹

¹ Kordasiewicz, Marek: Silesian Millefiori Paperweights. Paperweight Collectors Association Inc. Bulletin 2005.

First confirmed attribution of the Bohemian millefiori paperweight was published in 2002,² when the Riedel's signature cane and related paperweights were attributed to the Polaun glassworks owned in the 19th century by Josef Riedel – the Glass King of the Iser Mountains (Isergebirge). The Riedels arrived to the Isergebirge in the mid-18th century, where they founded and owned many glassworks, among them glassworks in Wilhelmshöhe, Antoniwald, Christiansthal, Josefsthal and Polaun.^{3,4}

During the next years of my research on millefiori glass and paperweights I found another signed example of the Riedel's paperweight [Figures 1., 2., 3.].⁵

We find there excellent selection of the Riedel's millefiori canes, but what is most interesting – this is rarely seen example of Riedel's paperweight, where millefiori canes are set on the black glass ground.

This type of Bohemian paperweights usually has millefiori canes set on the green transparent glass with mica flaks encased. The base in this paperweight is as usual polished flat.

² Kordasiewicz, Marek. Glass Paperweights. The Heritage of the 19th Century Riesengebirge and Isergebirge Glassworks. AMKOR, Zabrze 2002.

³ Pazaurek, Gustav E. Gläser der Empire- und Biedermeierzeit. Klinkhardt & Biermann, Leipzig 1923., p. 73

⁴ Kordasiewicz, Marek. Glass Paperweights. The Heritage of the 19th Century Riesengebirge and Isergebirge Glassworks. AMKOR, Zabrze 2002. p.p. 39-42.

⁵ This paperweight was for the first time published and described in the Newsletter No. 84 of the Paperweight Collectors Circle, April 2004: Kordasiewicz, Marek. 19th Century Paperweights – Silesian and Bohemian Glassworks.



Figure 1. J. Riedel's millefiori paperweight, Polaun in Bohemia, ca 1890 -1900. d: 70mm.



Figure 2. J. Riedel's millefiori paperweight, Polaun in Bohemia, ca 1890 -1900. d: 70mm.

As a quality of millefiori used in the Riedel's post-classic paperweights is rather high, I always suspected, that some of the Riedel's glassworks could make millefiori and paperweights in the classic period (1840. - 1850.). Unfortunately no documented records exist to confirm this supposition.



Figure 3. J. Riedel's signature cane, Polaun in Bohemia, ca 1890 -1900.

Among millefiori paperweights of Bohemian – Silesian origin one may find some other groups with different kinds of millefiori, which don't match those already attributed to the Silesian glassworks. It seemed to be highly possible to find another group of millefiori paperweights, which could be attributed to the Riedel's family glassworks.

As a result of my research and analysis of paperweights published in other paperweight publications⁶ we could distinguish another group of millefiori paperweights represented by interesting example of signed millefiori weight with transparent ruby glass background on white lace cushion [Figure 4.].

Curious collector would ask, where the signature cane is – and the answer is simple – there is no signature cane but the group of canes arranged in shape of capital "R" letter. It is better visible, when we rotate the paperweight to the correct position [Figure 6.].

⁶ Brackel, Peter von: Paperweights. Historicism, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, 1842 to Present. Atglen, Schieffer Publishing Ltd., 1999., p. 23, fig.4 top.



Figure 4. Riedel's millefiori paperweight, Bohemia, ca 1850. d: 80mm.



Figure 6. Riedel's millefiori paperweight, Bohemia, ca 1850. d: 80mm.



Figure 5. Riedel's millefiori paperweight – bottom view.

Comparing this “R” composed of millefiori canes with later Riedel's signature cane [Figure 3.], we may suppose, that this is classic period example of the Riedel's glassworks paperweight. There are also known other Bohemian paperweights with similar millefiori canes, some of them exactly matching canes from the paperweight above.

The canes in this group of paperweights are different than Silesian type I and II millefiori canes, as well as excavated in Carlsthal millefiori canes.⁷ What is interesting, the quality of this attributed to Riedel's millefiori is also a bit worse than classic Silesian millefiori. It seems to be justified, as Bohemian glassworks started to produce millefiori and filigree glass much later than Silesian glassworks (Hoffnungsthal, Carlsthal and Josephinenhütte) and most probably never achieved highest technological level in this kind of glass.

To compare other Bohemian millefiori quality we should focus on the canes from the paperweight with sulphide of Goethe, attributed to the count's Harrach glassworks in Neuwelt [Figures 7., 8.].

The results achieved here were far from the quality of the Silesian, Venetian and French glassworks in the classic period.

Millefiori canes used in this paperweight are rather simple, the filigrees construction shows also, that maker had less control on their shape.

⁷ Kordasiewicz, Marek. Glass Paperweights. The Heritage of the 19th Century Riesengebirge and Isergebirge Glassworks. AMKOR, Zabrze 2002., p.p. 29-32.



Figure 7. Count Harrach glassworks millefiori paperweight. Neuwelt, Bohemia, ca 1850. d: 73mm.



Figure 8. Count Harrach glassworks millefiori cane. Neuwelt, Bohemia, ca 1850.

Anyway, we should consider Bohemian paperweights and millefiori glass to be very interesting and relatively rare. There are known other rare Bohemian paperweights from some not described yet groups – probably different glassworks, which still are

waiting to be properly attributed and researched.

The above information should be useful for scholars and paperweight collectors in their further research on the Bohemian millefiori and paperweights. However, the Readers must be aware, that presented here attributions of classic period millefiori paperweights are not 100% confirmed, but highly probable. Further research is needed to confirm these theories or prove other attribution if any would appear.

Hope, that this article will encourage other scholars to make more researches on the classic period Bohemian paperweights, being aware that they differ from the classic period Silesian ones.

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Fig. 4., 5., 6. – courtesy of Peter von Brackel
Fig. 7., 8. – courtesy of Annemarie and Gerd Mattes