

Venetian Heritage

Domenico Bussolin - Millefiori and Paperweights

By: Marek Kordasiewicz © 2006

In the 2005 *Annual Bulletin of the Paperweight Collectors Association, Inc.*, Kathy Moyer presented a very important paperweight containing Bussolin's millefiori canes that was attributed to the Riesengebirge area.¹ The reference books describe very few other examples of such a "Bohemian/Silesian" paperweight containing Bussolin's canes, and we should thus consider them to be extremely rare. My latest discovery [Figures 1, 2] encouraged me to research this kind of paperweight and as a result, we can now distinguish a very important group of Venetian paperweights that was almost certainly made by Domenico Bussolin.

Ancient glass spheres with internal mosaics and filigrees fascinated Heinrich von Minutoli during his expedition in Egypt. This kind of glass was also made in Venice in the fifteenth through sixteenth and mid eighteenth centuries, but was then forgotten for several years. Minutoli tried to reinvent this art in 1821-22 with help of some Venetian glassmakers, but their results were not satisfactory at that time.² After that, he contacted Silesian Riesengebirge masters in the Hoffnungsthal glassworks, where Dr. W. E. Fuss managed to produce millefiori glass in the early 1830s and in 1833 showed his achievements in Berlin.³

In 1838 Domenico Bussolin opened his glass factory in Murano, employing elder master glassmakers to reinvent millefiori glass. In 1842 he was awarded a silver medal for the results in works on this glass in the Veneto Institute of Sciences, Literature and Arts. Such a success would naturally be assumed to be preceded by years of experiments and it is known that



Figure 1: Bussolin concentric millefiori with red, black, and gold aventurine torsade. 2 15/16" dia.



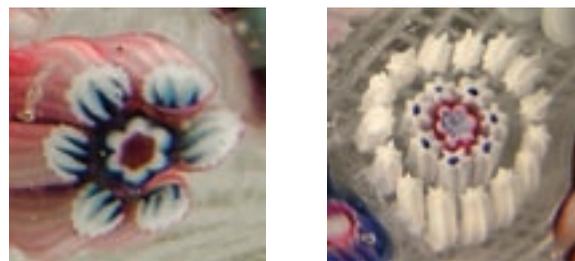
Figure 2: Side view of Figure 1 paperweight.

Bussolin started to work on the filigree and millefiori glass about 1836. He was a pioneer of the filigree and millefiori glass in nineteenth century Venice, sending samples of his products to the courts in Vienna, Petersburg, Paris, and other wealthy connoisseurs. Unfortunately, his business didn't succeed, and Bussolin was forced to close his firm in 1842. During 1838-1842 he produced a large selection of the finest filigree and millefiori glass, including complex millefiori canes and aventurine glass. Bussolin used his canes for his products, among them the famous intarsia plaques. No records exist on paperweight production, but scholars speculate that this was highly possible. His works inspired other famous Venetian and foreign glassmakers to produce millefiori and filigree glass objects. He was over eighty when he died in extreme poverty on March 6, 1886 in Padua.⁴

In G. Sarpellon's book and in the Venetian Museo Vetrario on Murano, we find documented examples of filigree glass and millefiori canes [Figures 3a-3b, 4a-4d] made by Domenico Bussolin.⁵ These canes are found in this group of Venetian paperweights.

As Bussolin described in his report submitted in 1842, the elements used for millefiori and filigree glass must have the same melting point and the same coefficient of expansion as a function of temperature.⁶ This guarantees glass compatibility and indicates that it is almost impossible to achieve positive results using glass and canes from different sources as such an incompatibility would cause cracking of the product during annealing.

Up until now, paperweights [Figures 5-7] containing such Bussolin canes were attributed to Bohemian/Silesian or unknown makers. However, they do not contain any known Silesian or Bohemian canes, and this makes sense because of the glass compatibility problem. For this reason, it is also reasonable to



Figures 3a (left) & 3b (right): Bussolin arrow and star canes recorded by G. Sarpellon and found in this group of Venetian paperweights.

conclude that the clear encasing glass as well as the other previously unrecorded millefiori canes [Figures 8a-8e] in these paperweights are also Bussolin's.

Although other Venetian glassmakers (G.B. Franchini, P. Bigaglia) knew Bussolin and were inspired by his works, they used their own techniques and materials. Franchini made only millefiori canes and lampworked objects, while Bigaglia was a businessman, producer of filigree glass and paperweights



Figures 4a - 4d (clockwise from upper left): Bussolin star, cog, tube, and pastry mold canes recorded by G. Sarpellon and found in this group of Venetian paperweights.



Figure 5: Bussolin crown paperweight. 2" dia.

containing Franchini's millefiori canes.⁷ There are no recorded paperweights which contain both Bussolin and Bigaglia/Franchini filigrees and millefiori.

Domenico Bussolin had his own factory with furnaces and gaffers, so he was able to produce advanced glassware. With such a background, he had no reason not to make millefiori objects



Figure 7: Bussolin concentric on lace. 2 3/4" dia.



Figure 6: Bussolin concentric on lace. 2 3/4" dia.

and paperweights himself. The only reason for the extremely low volume of Bussolin's millefiori glassware production was economy and fashion. His wares were not so desired at that time to earn enough money to allow his business to survive.

It also doesn't make sense to me that Bussolin would sell canes and raw materials for clear glass with his production recipes to other glassmakers. There was no economic reason to do so. Thus, the theory of traveling canes again seems to be false.

Considering the above facts, it's almost sure now that Domenico Bussolin was the first paperweight maker in the nineteenth century. His paperweights are a coherent group with a mean specific gravity of 2.81 and yellow-lime UV fluorescence. The mean diameter of the nine known examples is 6.9 cm (2.72"), ranging from 6.6 cm to 7.4 cm (2.60" – 2.91"). Their bases usually have a relatively deep polished concavity with a wide basal ring. Sometimes advanced design techniques are applied such as a crown pattern and filigree torsades. The filigrees used in these weights, like all Busso-



Figures 8a - 8e (left to right): Bussolin dog, eagle, goat, four arm arrow floret, and trefoil. These canes are not recorded by G. Sarpellon and are found in this group of Venetian paperweights.

lin's filigrees, always rotate down to right. The millefiori arrangement is usually quasi-concentric, scattered on clear or muslin ground. Some of the millefiori canes contain uranium oxide. There are a limited number of silhouette canes among over a hundred patterns of Bussolin's millefiori [Figures 8a-8c].

A few years after Bussolin's achievements, paperweights were produced by other Venetians such as Pietro Bigaglia and then by the famous French glassworks. It still is not known if Silesian masters, as pioneers of the nineteenth century millefiori, started to produce paperweights before or after Bussolin. Because of the long Venetian tradition in millefiori spheres making,^{8,9,10} I suppose paperweights were first introduced in the nineteenth century by Venice, but the exact dates will probably remain secret forever.

End Notes:

¹ Kathy Moyer, "The Top Twelve Antique Paperweights," *Annual Bulletin of the Paperweight Collectors Association, Inc.*, 2005, p. 77.

² Giovanni Sarpellon, *Miniature Masterpieces. Mosaic Glass 1838-1924* (Munich & New York: Prestel, 1995), p.63.

³ Sibylle Jargstorf, *Paperweights* (West Chester: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1991), p.35.

⁴ Sarpellon, pp. 23-31

⁵ Sarpellon, pp.24-30.

⁶ Sarpellon, p.26

⁷ Sarpellon, p.56

⁸ Marek Kordasiewicz, "Silesian Heritage, New Clues in the Paperweight World," *Annual Bulletin of the Paperweight Collectors Association, Inc.*, 2004, p.33.

⁹ Sarpellon, p.63.

¹⁰ Anna-Elisabeth Theuerkauff-Liederwald, "Venezianisches Glas der Veste Coburg," *Luca Verlag*, 1994, pp. 58-73.

To Learn More:

Miniature Masterpieces, Mosaic Glass 1838-1924 provides an excellent history of the millefiori and filigree work of Domenico Bussolin.

About the Author:

Marek Kordasiewicz, the author of *Glass Paperweights, The Heritage of the 19th Century Riesengebirge and Isergebirge Glassworks*, has been collecting and researching antique paperweights and related glass for over eleven years. He specializes in the work from Bohemian-Silesian factories.

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Figure 5 courtesy of Sotheby's New York.

Figures 6, 8b, and 8c courtesy of Peter von Brackel.

Figures 3b, 4a, 4d, 7, 8a, 8d, and 8e courtesy of Annemarie and Gerd Mattes