

Silesian Influences. Wheaton Arts lecture 16.05.2021. - Q&As

Q: The sword guards are so interesting Marek. Were they just decorative?

A: As I see the (serious) signs of wear on the millefiori glass layer – this guard was certainly in use. Until real guard was recorded, I supposed that guard depicted in Minutoli-Klaproth treatise was made from millefiori glass only. In this case it would be just decorative item. But the original one I depicted in my presentation was made of metal (steel??) and coated on both sides with layer of millefiori glass. So it's decorative and ready to fight in fact.

Q: Did these factories use Coal?

A: No, they didn't. In the 18th and 19th centuries they used mainly beech wood as a fuel. The ash remaining from the burning of beech wood provided potash at the same time as an ingredient for glass melting.

At the end of the 19th century more modern glassworks could switch to coal as a fuel. Josephine's Glassworks was fired with coal in the 20th century.

Q: Did the formula for Ruby Glass travel to other countries outside the region?

A: Yes, but under certain conditions. In the 19th century there were known (better or worse) different formulas for gold ruby glass production. Those most effective and modern were patented after they were published, so they were available, but not free of charge. Therefore it's hard to say which glassworks used it and how many of them worked on their own formulas to avoid high cost of patented.

Another question is the composition of the ruby glass formula described in the publications, and another is the detailed instructions on how to proceed to achieve the right result. Especially in the production of gold ruby glass, the right sequence of steps at the right time was of great importance. And this information was crucial in the entire gold ruby glass formula.

Q: How many paperweights are in the Hermitage?

A: It's a good question. In expert's (also Russian expert's) opinion, Russian museums may have everything we can imagine, but most of these exhibits are stored in museum warehouses and are yet to be cataloged. If and when it will be done – it's another question. Especially that several works of art were stolen by the Soviets from the territories of the Soviet occupation zone after the World War II. And we should be aware, that their occupation zone was not only the East-Germany territory, but also the territories of Poland, Czechoslovakia and most others countries under Soviet rule – post-Soviet Union countries like Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. In the mid-1990., when Soviet army was leaving territory of Poland, hundreds of trains with the “belongings” of Soviet soldiers were transported to Russia out of any control of Polish authorities. It was the last transport of “war booty”.

Q: How we can be sure, that type II Silesian paperweights origin from Hoffnungsthal, not Bohemian Harrach glassworks?

A: This is indicated by a simple logical structure:

1. We have documented 19th century reports, confirming, that Hoffnungsthal and Josephine's glassworks were a leading producers of millefiori glass items, making also paperweights in the 19th century.
2. We must expect the large, coherent group of Hoffnungsthal's glass items to be distinguished.
3. In this group should, or at least may be present some indications of Silesian – Prussian origin – for instance Prussian coat of arms – Prussian eagle in millefiori canes.
4. Presence of other techniques for which Hoffnungsthal was famous, such as excellent quality colored overlays and gold ruby glass is also expected.
5. Documented by Franz Pohl millefiori production in Harrach's glassworks and Harrach's coat of arms millefiori cane and paperweight clearly indicates on properly attributed Harrach group of millefiori paperweights. This group cannot be attributed to Carlsthal glassworks, also because there are not present Carlsthal millefiori canes.
6. Considering the above, so-called group II of millefiori paperweights cannot be attributed to Harrach, Carlsthal nor Josephine's glassworks, so may be only Hoffnungsthal's origin, as it's certainly Silesian group of paperweights.

Thank you for your interest. Answers to the next questions, if received, will be added to this document.

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