

Glass in the Celje and Kozjansko Regions from the Seventeenth Century until Today

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Glass is one of the most appealing materials made by man. The development of glassmaking and its technology were an important contribution to the development of design culture up to the present day. Glass as a material is also unique. In its liquid state it is fluid and glowing, in the solid state it is hard, translucent and fragile. It can be colourless or tinted. Glass can be blown, rolled, cast in wooden or metal moulds, pressed and so on. It can be cut, polished, engraved and coloured. A number of technological design and decoration possibilities make room for a great deal of satisfaction and aesthetic pleasure.

In this region there is no clear evidence of glass production in the Middle Ages, although it most probably existed. Many monasteries were built on Slovene lands, and they were particularly famous as centres of glassmaking activity. Documents from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries record that the Carthusian monastery in Žiče produced glass for its own use. These records are, of course, incomplete, and only archeologists will be able to reveal the extent to which the production of glass was spread throughout Slovenia. In general, the status of glassmaking in Slovenia is very unclear. However, one thing is sure – glass in Slovenia was influenced from two directions. In western and central Slovenia the influence of Venice and its glassmakers was strongly felt. In Ljubljana and its surroundings, one can map out the activity of a number of bourgeois glassworks, the so-called *Venezianer Hütten*, that were influenced by Venetian glass. On the other hand, the eastern part of Slovenia is the home of the more typical central European forest glassworks

In Slovene Styria, glassmaking was concentrated in two regions – in Pohorje and in the Celje and Kozjansko regions. The Pohorje glassworks were researched and published in detail for the first time by Franc Minarik (1964) in a book called *Pohorske steklarne* (The Pohorje Glassworks). This work is the first of its kind in this field, as well as being the first outline of the history of glassmaking in any of the regions of Slovenia. Recently, new research on the Pohorje glassworks was published by Valentina Varl (2006) in *Pohorsko steklo steklo z dušo* (Glass from Pohorje, Glass with Soul). This is complex work which outlines the history, design and tradition of the Pohorje glassworks from the seventeenth to the beginning of the twentieth century.

In contrast to this, the Celje and Kozjansko regions have been somewhat neglected by scholars. The first person to conduct a systematic research of glassmaking in this region was Hanns Guss, in his article titled 'The furnaces in former lower Styria up until the downfall of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in 1918' (Guss 1978). Forest glassworks, which typically used wood as

fuel, were also operative in other regions. But as early as 1794 the glassworks in Liboje started using coal, which made the production of glass a cheaper process. In the eighteenth century glassmaking in Slovenia underwent a period of change. In Slovene Styria there were between fourteen and seventeen smelting works, of which seven or eight were in the Celje and Kozjanko regions. Most glassworks were in the area surrounding Rogaška Slatina, where the first factory existed already in 1665 and where many are still operating today.

In the glassworks in the Celje and Kozjanko regions the majority of products were made from green and colourless glass. Fragments of glass found in the dumping grounds of former glassworks and preserved glass containers provide evidence that opaque and multi-coloured glass was also being produced. Apart from simple glass objects, more complex glass products were made. Therefore, Slovene glass production did not fall behind the achievements of other European countries at that time.

The names of fallow fields and place names also suggest that glassworks existed in certain areas. The conditions for the operation of a small glassworks were an adequate supply of wood, which would be able to cater for at least forty years of production; potash, which in most cases was obtained locally, as in Lemberg, Hrastje and Olimje, although most of this material was obtained from other sites; and, most importantly, silica, which can be found in abundance in Pohorje. Pohorje was also the main source of silica for the glassworks in the Celje and Kozjanko regions.

The basic products of most glassworks were mineral water bottles for the water from the wells in Rogaška Slatina and its surroundings, which was already famous by that time. The first glassworks was situated in Macelj, nearby the Croatian border, and was owned by Eggenberg family. In the year 1702 the first famous glassworker, Pankratz Piebl, came from the Archduke's forest glassworks In der Eich in Upper Austria. Later many forest glassworks operated in this region, manned by renowned glass workers from Bavaria and Bohemia. A special place amongst the famous glassworkers is occupied by the engraver Hieronymus Hackel, who came to Celje in about 1805 and stayed there until his death in October 1844. He was born in northern Bohemian and was baptised in Wolfersdorf on April 27th, 1785. (Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1. Engraved glass beaker by Hieronymus Hackel (Celje Regional Museum, KZS 795, Photograph by Tomaž Laukoa).



Figure 2. Detail of the beaker in Figure 1 showing Hackel's engraved signature.

The nineteenth century saw a change in glassmaking. During this period, coal was widely used for fuel, which was favourable for cheaper production. This was fatal for a considerable number of glassworks that still used wood as fuel. An even greater milestone in the history of glassmaking was the railway from Vienna to Trieste, constructed in the years 1841 to 1859, which offered new opportunities for the glass trade. It also encouraged fiercer competition with the Bohemian glass industry, with which the Slovene glassmaking industry could not compete until the 1880s. During the period of the trade and industry exhibitions in Inner Austria between 1838 and 1844, which were important for the Slovene glassworks, a remarkable standard of quality and design developed.

Like most other factories, the glassworks in the Celje and Kozjansko regions manufactured not only mineral water bottles, but also tableware and kitchenware, beer containers, glass for pharmaceutical purposes, chandeliers (which remain in a number of churches today) and other glass products. More valuable products were decorated by cutting, engraving and enamelling. It can be seen that the motifs of the glass decorations were influenced by local popular art, and sometimes included, besides these artistic elements, some applied artistic and ethnological decorative features. On the other hand, products for everyday use were mostly smooth, strictly functional and aesthetically simple, yet their forms are much admired even today.

This heterogeneous glass tradition continued into the twentieth century. A special characteristic of the glassworks at Hrastnik, which replaced the former glassworks in Jurklošter in 1860, was the heterogeneity of its production. In 1895 it encompassed three production programmes, and even before that had a network of sales spread throughout Europe and in countries overseas. In 1927 another important glassworks was established in Rogaška Slatina, today known as Steklarna Rogaška (Rogaška Glassworks). Part of the Rogaška glassworks was Dekor Kozje, which was established in 1974, but closed in 2005, where uniquely shaped cut crystal and engravings formed part of its rich production programmes. The ongoing need for skilled glass workers resulted in the establishment of the glassmaking school in Rogaška Slatina in 1947. This prompted an even greater interest in the manufacture of glass, and the school has

so far produced a number of renowned glass workers. The school remains the most important educational centre for future glassworkers in the region.

A rich tradition and the unexplored representation of this particular branch of industry prompted a growing need for collecting, conserving, evaluating and exhibiting this heritage in museums throughout Slovenia. The glass collection of the Celje Regional Museum illustrates the tradition and development of design in our region. Many pieces are also found in other museums in Slovenia, in museums other countries, as well as in private collections. Together they represent the tradition and cultural heritage of this important glassmaking region.

References

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