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# ALTE VITRIE

L'ARTE DEL VETRO E DINTORNI



The aim of making the pages of "Alte Vitrie" a meeting place for all those who study, admire and love the world of glass-making increasingly leads us to broaden our horizons in order to keep abreast of this most diverse of sectors.

In this issue, we present a series of excavations in Maremma which led to the discovery of a Roman manufacturing district. The site features an initial workshop with a furnace dating back to between the first and second centuries A.D., and this was followed by the construction of a larger workshop for the production of glass objects.

No less fascinating is the reflection on Liberty windows made using coloured glass mosaic tiles, a method favoured early on in Milan by Giovanni Beltrame, who pursued the use of new and innovative glass-working techniques.

Finally, a virtual "tour" of some of the most prestigious glassware collections around takes us to the Poldi Pezzoli

Museum in Milan, which houses some highly valuable pieces covering a vast swathe of history from pre-Christian antiquity right up to the 19th century.

With this third issue to be released just before the festive season, we would like to take this opportunity to send our readers our best wishes for a peaceful Christmas and New Year, on behalf of the editorial staff of "Alte Vitrie", ISVAV and MAV.

Editorial Staff



## GLASS

### WORKSHOPS IN

### ROMAN

### MAREMMA

**F**rom 2010 to 2013, the Authority for Archaeological Heritage of Tuscany and the University of Sheffield (UK) were exponents of a systematic excavation programme in the Maremma Regional Park in the Province of Grosseto. Here, in the locality of Spolverino, along the final meander of the river Ombrone, the remains of a large Roman manufacturing district were uncovered. Its foundation during the rule of Domitian was the result of the creation of a coastal path branching off from the via Aurelia vetus which had crossed these lands from as far back as the 3rd century B.C. This manufacturing complex was notable from the very beginning due to its strong vocation towards the recycling and reworking of glass. This is testified to by the remains of an early workshop dating back to between the end of the first and the end of the second century A.D., of which the foundations of a furnace and the remains of a large dolium still survive, the latter serving as a vessel for fresh water needed during the various stages of production. It was however late in the second century that the settlement underwent extensive development with the construction of a larger workshop dedicated to glass-making. It covers an area of 18 square meters inside which two circular furnaces, built with clay-bricks, are preserved in excellent condition. The furnace interiors were covered with overturned dolia in order to reduce heat dispersion in the combustion chamber. Between these two furnaces,



opposite page, above: aerial view of the Spolverino site (photo by Paolo Nannini, SBAT); the glass workshop from the Severan age (photo copyright); the large tempering furnace (photo copyright)

side, left: glass furnaces and workbench (photo copyright)

side, right: glass fragments uncovered inside the Spolverino workshop (photo by Paolo Nannini, SBAT)

below: detail of the *cloisonné glass* technique adopted for the doors of a living room created by Luigi Fontana (Milan), circa 1902. Genoa, Wolfsonian - "Palazzo Ducale" Foundation for Culture

a workbench was built using small and medium sized stones which very probably supported a marble work surface. At its feet, the excavation uncovered a large dolium in situ, again serving to hold fresh water. Immediately to the west, a large tempering furnace around 4 metres in diameter was built. It was made with recycled clay-bricks and a clay vault, and it was discovered to have collapsed within the layers of rockfall. The baking surface of the furnace was represented by a recycled sesquipedalian floor. In the north-east corner of the structure a huge number of glass pieces were found of various colours and sizes, which were destined for remelting. This glassworks remained in use at least until the second half of the 5th century A.D., when the entire settlement was abandoned and a burial ground was built above its ruins. At the time of writing, this part of the site is the subject of an analytical study thanks to the generous contribution of the Corning Museum of Glass in New York (Rakow Grant for Glass Research 2014-2015).

*Alessandro Sebastiani*  
University of Sheffield, UK

## EXPERIMENTING

### WITH LIBERTY.

#### IT'S EASY TO SAY

#### "WINDOW"

Thanks to the progress being made by studies into the Liberty style, early twentieth-century Italian windows have been reconsidered with regard to their contribution to the cultural climate of the time, but the varied array of techniques employed to produce them still remains largely undiscovered and are yet to be investigated thoroughly, although the solutions adopted were strictly in line with the stylistic decisions they were trying to create (an initial overview is presented in Lucia Mannini's, *Italian Liberty Windows. A Panorama of Materials and Techniques*, "Stained Glass Quarterly", 109, nr.2, Summer 2014, p.59-67). Indeed, one can detect a gradual move away from practices which were well established in the 1800s and which were associated with 19th century naturalism, such as painting and firing on glass, in favour of mosaic tiles which had already been coloured during



production. The latter able to express a language more in-keeping with the linearity of Liberty and the modern tastes of the era. Among the first to understand the artistic potential of such a method was Giovanni Beltrami in Milan, and he was soon followed by others, who adopted the technique either occasionally or with profound conviction, such as Cesare Picchiarini in Rome. In parallel, other procedures were introduced, sometimes

imported from abroad. The most interesting include the patents deposited by Luigi Fontana from Milan, such as the granular technique then known as *cloisonné glass*, or the process of applying ceramics to glass, known as *émail tubé* or *tubage*, introduced by Corvaya & Bazzi from Milan, and whose elegant results imitated the effects of coloured glass mosaics but at a much lower cost.

*Lucia Mannini*



# THE POLDI PEZZOLI MUSEUM

## Milan

The Poldi Pezzoli Museum, born from the private collection of Milanese nobleman Gian Giacomo Poldi Pezzoli (1822-1879), is housed in the seventeenth-century building at n°12 Via Manzoni. The shrewdness of the noble collector meant that the rich and varied collection gathered over a number of years was opened to the public, as specified in his will, thus constituting a piece of collective heritage of extraordinary importance and magnitude. The corpus of work held by the museum is composed of paintings, weapons, furniture and objects of decorative art, all of which bears testimony to the variety of typologies desired by the founder himself. Over time, the collection was added to thanks to new purchases and generous donations. The museum also houses an important collection of Murano glassware. Today it is difficult to know with any certainty

who the individual pieces were acquired from and when, but it is known that in 1879 the collection already included the finest pieces featured in the current exhibition. In particular, twenty-four archaeological glass pieces were present, documented in the catalogue of 1881, the year the Casa Museo was opened and two years after the Milanese collector's death. An interest in glass would also be shared by the subsequent directors of the museum, particularly Giuseppe Bertini and Camillo Boito, who purchased a number of different pieces and set up a new display. The glassware collection boasts 262 pieces, a part of which is located in the "Sala dei Vetri Antichi" in Murano, and another in the "Studiolo Dantesco". The historical period covered by these pieces is vast: an aryballos dates back as far as the 5th century B.C., while the most recent pieces are from the 19th century. The majority of the items on display, originating from Murano, belong to the 15th and 16th centuries and testify not only to the aesthetic preferences of Poldi Pezzoli

himself, but to those of an entire historical period, such as the crystalline windows and the refined gold decorations. Gian Giacomo Poldi Pezzoli's main aim was not to collect systematically, but to gather pieces that satisfied qualitative and aesthetic criteria which are still evident today in the rarity and beauty of the glassware present in the museum. Indeed, we can observe a wealth of glassware featuring unusual and bizarre forms such as oil lamps which look like birds, and above all a wide variety of production and colouring techniques such as chalcedony glass, transparent glass engraved with diamond cutters, glaze decorations, watermarks, "reticello", "glass" ice, the use of moulds and refined crests made with tongs.

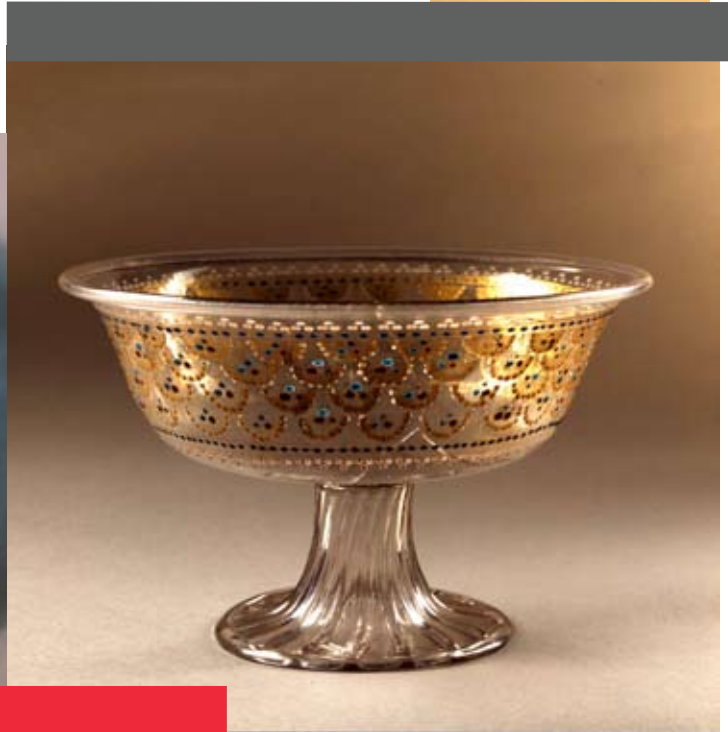
*Lavinia Galli*

For further information  
[www.museopoldipezzoli.it](http://www.museopoldipezzoli.it)

*below, right:*  
bowl with stem, Murano, late 15th century – early 16th century, transparent glass decorated with glazes

*below, left:*  
small dish, Murano, late 15th century – early 16th century, blue glass decorated with glaze

*sotto:*  
jug, Murano, 17th century, amethyst glass



**Editorial staff:**  
Mariateresa Chirico  
Matteo Fochessati  
Giulia Musso

**Istituto per lo Studio del Vetro e dell'Arte Vetraria**  
Piazza del Consolato, 4  
17041 Altare (SV) - Italy  
Tel +39019584734  
[info@museodelvetro.org](mailto:info@museodelvetro.org)  
[www.museodelvetro.org](http://www.museodelvetro.org)



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**Cover:**  
*Pavoni*, Artistic Window by Giovanni Beltrami (Milan), designed by Giovanni Beltrami. Milan, Alessandro Grassi collection, 1902

