

Chapter Three

The Oath

Privileged positions were worth defending. Somehow glassmakers had to protect their status. Their ancestors had discovered how to do it, the hard way. If any Tom Dick or Harry found the recipes, the art would be dispersed and privileges would become forfeited by lower standards, imitation and spreading of the techniques. Glassmaking families hit on ways of keeping their benefits within their select group. To counter the dispersing effect of the laws of inheritance, and to keep the gains to their kin, they usually married within the craft. This retained the calling to a small group of family names. The original Charter mentions principally four. These were Hennezel, Thiéry, Thisac, and Bisseval.

Intermarriage was not the only ruse they resorted to. Young men of these families all went through a crucial ceremony to uphold the coterie. On reaching maturity they submitted to an initiation rite.

We can imagine the scene in the early years. As fire was their métier, a goodly blaze must be the centre point. Around this glowing focus, in the depth of the forest, related male members of the four families gathered. The fathers in one group who knew the form and the sons nervously standing in line all wondering what came next. In the group of sons were those related young men who were reaching maturity. They stood subdued and uneasy.

On the stroke of midnight the elder, the chosen father of the master glassmakers, intoned. Who shall be first?"

Our first initiate steps forward, places his hands in the hands of the elder.

"Do you, Thysac minor, swear by this your life and the peace of your everlasting soul to keep for all time the secrets you shall hear tonight, never passing them to any man save a son of those tonight at this place herein? Do you swear never to reveal any of the art or mysteries you shall learn at the ovens of your family so long as you shall live?"

"I do so swear."

Then would follow the second initiate and so on. After all had so sworn the remaining procedures of the ceremony would be performed. Procedure would be designed to be spectacular and memorable. Only after this ceremony, solemnly performed, would the initiate be admitted to the close circle of artisans to be taught the mysteries needed for the art of window glass making. Only after this ceremony would he be told how to make the special colours achieved, and how to prepare the various materials and nostrums used.

This scene is pure conjecture and not based on any specific written evidence but records do exist for later periods. Procedures became formalised and more civilised. The apprentice had "*to vow with his hands under the hands of a notary, on the part and portion which he claimed in Paradise, and under peril of damnation of his soul,*"¹ not to instruct, show or teach the noble art, usage and science of making the Gros

¹ Engle A. (1975) Readings in Glass History. Phoenix Publications, Jerusalem

verre en table except to family of Hennezel, Thiétry, Thisac or Bisseval. Even as late as 1666 Jerome Hennezel swore this oath on 28th August at Darney. Then he stood in front of the curé, his father, his uncle Isaac and another related glassmaker.

François lets the cat out of the bag

With manufacturing processes of today well documented and made public when patented, it may be hard for us to understand the secret world of the glassmakers. Thysacs, Hennezels, Thiétrys and Bisvals all shared this secret. They put great importance on their oath. To mix suitable materials, to blow a muff or cylinder of glass, to slit it and open it and flatten it into a windowpane, was a difficult process. Moreover to make your glass any colour, even red, was a cherished secret. So those with this knowledge could demand a premium price and their goods were much sought after. Master craftsmen with this knowledge had been granted nobility by its possession. Small wonder then that these families shunned outsiders.

When a young man of the family reached manhood, and swore the oath, he joined the glassmaking fraternity. He became honour bound not to divulge the secret turn-of-hand or tinctures.

Now about 1492 François de Thysac and his brother Robert looked at the market for their glass. They realised that the French nobles, the high ranking ecclesiastics and the rich bourgeoisie, chose to buy glass articles made in Murano in Venice. These articles were made of a fine material called *cristallo*. It could be fashioned thinly and had a brilliance and clarity that was superior to the glass vessels made in the Lorrainers' region.

François and Robert decided it would be a good swap to exchange their know-how for the know-how of Murano. So they quit the Vôge in 1492 and requested leave from the Republic of Venice to live in Murano. They asked to be allowed to exercise their art there. All of this is recorded in the annals of the guilds of Murano.

A 1493 document records a dispensation for the Muranese glassworker Giorgio Ballarin to employ in his furnace a young Lorrainer, "franzoso", who was recognized as particularly experienced to make up window glasses of every colour but above all in red *"that still was not yet invented in Murano"*.² Giorgio Ballarin was manager of a furnace in 1492 but when the elections were held for the guild of Murano glassworkers, he was elected to take supreme responsibility for maintaining the art; he became the gastaldo. A podium meeting records the part he had in an appeal introduced to the Venetian government for a foreign glassworker, on April 10th 1492. The text of the appeal was as follows, (my translation): *"To the illustrious Prince and High Lordship, the man to make plentiful honourable works, in this your enclosed city and best new things uncommon in these lands and at your location, which are not (presently) at Murano, Master Roberto "franzoso" (i.e. French) begs Your Highness if you deign to grant him, is able to save by living with this family in this city. While there, with the oven, would make and exercise his art, himself to truly do specialities with beauty above all, also items of great tables of truly transparent red colour, and other items one by one making figurines and arms, that are samples of the sort not done here, nor ever was, neither is there any person who knows what to do, not in this land nor in Italy. And will not damage or be prejudicial to the glassmakers of Murano,*

² Ricette Vetrarie del Rinascimento, C. Moretti, T. Toninato, Marsilio editori Venezia 2001 (translation from page 40-41)

because, (although) unemployment is often foretold, (it is) not true that those out of work knew how to do it; and so keep out praiseworthy skill without need, and deprive the illustrious Prince and High Lordship and above all, this city. And if recommended, I ask the scribe to give thanks, to the Serene Highness, at the feet of whom I will always be."

By asking to come to Venice to make "true specialities" and plates "of true transparent red colour", Roberto "franzoso" confirmed that there was no such activity there, not only in Italy, but even in the territories of the Serene One, "outside Murano". The transparent red, described as rosechiero, was a colour produced by copper oxide. Benvenuto Cellini (Trattato dell'Oreficeria) wrote that its recipe had been found by chance by an alchemist jeweller. According to Luigi Zecchin³ on page 228 of his vol. III: at the end of the XIVth century Mastro Antonio da Pisa made extraordinary red glass that he admitted not knowing "*how it was produced*". At the end of the 1300s then, to all intents and purposes, it was only made in Italy by chance - thus it was not the glassworkers of Murano who invented it. It was named in Venetian documents for the first time in 1493⁴ It is possible therefore that "maistro Roberto franzoso" was correct when he affirmed that the Muranese were ignorant of the particular red colour that he knew how to make, in stained glasses, suitable "*to make figures and coats of arms*"

Roberto had something to offer but jealous of the work of this young Thysacs, a Lorrainer, the glassworkers of Murano made

³ "Vetro e Vetrai di Murano" Arsenale Editrice Venezia 1989

⁴ But a recipe for red glass from copper is also present in the Ms Bolognese (recipe no. 268) with the title: "Affare vetrio rosso" (to produce red glass)

it difficult. Venetian glassworkers were under the jurisdiction of the Venetian Council of Ten. So jealous was the Council that the Murano glassmakers were virtual prisoners on their island. They were not allowed to leave without special permission. If they attempted to set up a works elsewhere, reprisals were made against their families. Muranese master craftsmen were convinced they knew how to make glass as well as anybody, and better. Furthermore, they didn't accept gladly the arrival of a foreign glassworker who, if initially carrying out a type of work they had neglected, would be able after to sneak into "crystalline glass". When His Serene Highness sought their opinion they were frosty. *"The advice in response to Your Serenity's letter, from we true patrons of the art who have read the supplication, is that we would regret strongly such a thing. If allowed, the Mariegola dei marceri, with its regulations, would be departed from and we do not favour it at all. If granted to supplicant aforesaid, it will be total ruin to this your land of Murano and said patrons."*

An opinion of this kind invited a rejection of his appeal; but "franzoso" was not about to be defeated, and a few months later he reorganized his application, and turned toward the same glassworkers of Murano for support. He turned particularly to Giorgio Ballarin, whose election to the highest position of the art was made on the 9 December 1492. Giorgio Ballarin, dreamt of being initiated into the art of Lorraine. He interceded with the Doge of Venice. He took some samples to the Doge, made by glassworkers of Lorraine. The Doge recognised the beauty of the coloured glasses, especially the reds and pinks, which he had been unable to find in Murano. So it was that in February of 1493 a letter left the ducal building from the ruling body of Murano, with the order to conform to the Mariegola, which was now interpreted as being made for protecting the art and not to hinder its development. Granted that *"the young man called Lorrainer the Franzoso son of Joannnis de **Tisano**,"* could come simply to work at Murano for

some time, if this could give also a way of learning anything from him on the manufacture of the coloured plates. He would come to teach and reveal an important achievement not made here, if aforesaid Lorrainer teaches as he works.

Then, or shortly after, the Muranese learned how to make the glass "colour rosechiero". This is a term that remains in the vocabulary of Italian glassmaking to designate transparent red⁵ from copper.

But not only did Robert teach the making of red glass but he was also involved in transfer of true crystalline mirrors. His original wordy submission also contained his claim to show the manufacture of glass mirrors by the method of making glass "in big plates".

When they suspended the common external tariff on April 11th 1321, the Senate of the Republic of Murano also listed "true mirrors" among export items, liable for duty. This probably followed from the failed attempt to launch mirrors there by the German d'Alemagna, who knew how to "far lastra". But after that year, there is no document referring to a Venetian production of mirrors of glass until 1507.

⁵ "In a reducing environment the copper is reduced to Cu⁺ (Cu₂O) or even to metal that precipitates in the glass in a microcrystalline or colloidal form, which develops the red colour. The transparent reds are denominated as copper-ruby or "Rosechiero", those opaque "Hematinone", "Blood of ox", "Sealing wax" or, in Venetian slang, "Rosso coppo". With a more powerful reduction and a thermal treatment of slow cooling, can be obtained the precipitation in the glass mass of metallic copper crystals as happens in the case of the glass "avventurina"" (Extract from "Ricette Vetrarie del Rinascimento", C.Moretti- T.Toninato - Marsilio editori Venezia 2001) (translation from page 40-41)

Around then, they learned how to copy the glass made in the form of big cylinders and to draw plates bigger than the usual ones, thus providing the technical basis for the attainment of the famous "Venetian mirrors."

Recently I have come across the record of another Lorrainer who went to Murano, this time Jacques de Hennezel⁶ of the Sybille glassworks. Arriving in Murano, Jacques showed mirrors to the brothers del Gallo, as the report says, which left them aghast. The brothers asked the Grand Council of Venice for the privilege of the manufacture of the mirrors. "*We now know the secret to make good and perfect mirrors in glass crystalline, a thing unknown in the entire world.*" Jacques returned around 1503 and is recorded at the Court of François the First, distributing his coveted mirrors to the "beautiful Ladies"! According to Luigi Zecchin the first record of crystalline mirrors in Murano was in 1507.

There is a mystery about some of this. In Murano history only Robert Tyzack is referred to but in Lorraine there is well-documented evidence that François Tyzack returned from Murano with the skill to make crystalline glasses, Venetian fashion, in colours. On his return he told the Duke that he was a native of the Big Glassworks close to Darney, but went to Venice just to learn the art of making crystalline. He now felt the need to return to his roots. The duke was so impressed by François' samples that he granted him land at la Frizon in Lorraine to build his glassworks in 1505. Was it one and the same person - or more likely a small family group? Two authors⁷ refer to Robert obtaining permission to leave Lorraine and claim that the original permission document is in the Departmental Archive at Nancy, but so far I have been unable

⁶ "Nobles et Verriers" by René d'Hennezel

⁷ Germain Rose-Villequey and Michael Philippes

to find it. Reading this permission might clarify whether it was a Tyzack family party who went to Murano or just Robert, who, because in Italy he was always referred to as "franzoso" (The Frenchman), just used François as his nickname on his return. Certainly in the Murano documents the essence of what Robert disclosed was the red coloured glass, rather than the mirrors. He did however pass his Lorraine technique for making the large panes by the muff method, clearly part of the process.

François was indeed a descendant of the four grand families of the glassworkers of the Vôle, born at the glasshouse Thiéry in the meadows near Hennezel, around 1472. It seems that Jehan de Thysac was the father. Robert's birth has not been found but the Muranese have recorded his presence and the name of his father.

François and Robert betrayed their vows. They gave away to Giorgio Ballarin the rare secrets they'd learned from their clan. In exchange however, the Italian taught certainly François the turn of hand of the craftsmen and the ingredients of the Venice glassworks. Both exchanges were forbidden by the rules of their respective fraternities and both were jealously guarded secrets. Ballarin became a master of the Lorraine art.

These two glassworkers won such renown that the loathing from the other artists of Murano calmed down. The reputation of Ballarin grew and his activities clearly enhanced his commercial stature as can be seen from his election as managing agent of the guild of glassworkers of Murano, their gastaldo, surely from the respect of his peers. Thysac benefited by his stay in Murano. He learned the skills of the Venetians and especially the art of making the "cristallo".

François decided he would return to the Vôle, around 1500, and take what they had learned with him. His exchange of

technology was against the codes of secrecy at both places and back home, François found himself ostracised by his family and it was impossible for him to introduce his new techniques into a family glasshouse. He must build a new glassworks to exploit the new methods. He won a hearing with duke René II and whetted the duke's appetite for Italian methods.



This map shows the difficulties of a journey from Lorraine to Murano. Somewhere the Alps have to be passed. Although only just over 300 miles as the crow flies, anyone who has ever travelled in the Alps will know that the snaking routes often double the length of the journey.

Here is a translation of the grant, signed by Duke René in 1505:-

**CREATION AU PROFIT DE FRANÇOIS DE THYSAC DU
SITE DE LA FRIZON, 18 OCTOBRE 1505⁸**

René by grace of god King of Herusalem and of Sicily Duke of Lorraine and of Bar, Marquis of Pont County of Provence of Vaudemont of Aubmalle and of Guise, is all those truthfully that these letters present.

Humble supplication from our dear friend Francoys de Tizal glassmaker native of our Big Glassworks, close to our City of Darney, heard things that some time ago encouraged him to leave here and withdraw himself to Venice where he learned the art and mastery of making the crystalline made in that place. He now makes that which their masters enjoy. He has returned to meet masters and workers here because of the special affection and natural love that he has for his place of birth and nourishment.

So he wished to get back and make his continual residence and living in the aforesaid Big Glassworks. This is a new glasswork, a house and dwelling for his family people and servants of him to stay in, so our pleasure is to favour his wish. Giving and assigning an appropriate place to make there in the big glassworks, work of vitality and work in his art and mastery of glassmaking, for him, his heirs, assignees. For this purpose he has such privileges prerogatives exemptions and liberties that the other glassmakers have from ancient time near by our City of Darney.

⁸ Archives Departementales de Meurthe et Moselle, B 643, acte n° 14, copie collationnée à l'original.

Knowing how we regard glasswork we have not found any piece as the work shown here, comfortable, beautiful and new for our pleasure, he will make this of grand appearance and make it very well if he settles with appropriate material for the improvement of our domain.

In order to retain him under us and so he could live here and earn his livelihood for his own reasons, by our grace especially after the advice of our officers of Darney, the people of our council have given this permit by these present Grants to sign over and give to master Francoys de Tizal and his issues what he can and may himself construct, build and maintain.

All this is one new glassworks with the ovens, houses and dwellings there belonging to them and as necessary for himself to lodge and work at his art and settle in this place named the High Frison. Know also there are the remains located and situated there from three former glassworks known as La Grosse Glasswork Brise Verre. So also François de Tizal and his heirs will take in our forests near the glassworks in appropriate places and with minimum destruction, wood and ferns, all other materials and fit and appropriate herbs for his art and mastery of glassmaking.

Also is to him agreed, and bestowed on him and his issues that he can enjoy and carry such privileges, prerogatives, exemptions and liberties that obtain and are the custom for the other glassmakers of seniority, staying in our prefecture of Darney.

All in the same form and manner as is bestowed on Claude, Didier and Jehan Hennezel, as many glassmakers, with their access when they were given the so-called Le Fay, close to Belrupt. And at the centre of the things on this declaration, François de Tizal and his issues will return and pay, to our

general receiver of Lorraine, for tenure, henceforth for each year, promptly, the sum of three small florins, ten gros pièce money of our Duchy of Lorraine. By two equal terms one half at Christmas and the other half on the Saint Baptist Jehan following.

All be aware that Francoys de Tizal has overcome adversity but is for the present very needy and provided with possessions of this world tied up; he can construct and build his glassworks, ovens, houses and necessary dwellings but we now make something pleasing and new for his art and mastery. He has of our ample grace; we especially forgo and quit the supposed three small florins until our good pleasure that one can see how he is working.

So given in Mandement by these same presentations and our treasurers and faithful counselors presidents and people of our accounts of Lorraine at Nancy, Bailiff of Vosge district attorney and receivers, captain mayors and receiver of Darney and all other of our officers their lieutenants and each of the clerks, who have our present licence permission, and consent of stay, together with the pre-eminences prerogatives, exemptions and liberties there described, made, suffered and allowed to the aforesaid Francoys de Tizal and other heirs, enjoy and use fully and peacefully. Do not disturb them or put on to them claims, deals or contrary obstacles or sufferings or orders giving their right to others.

Our receiver of Darney must promptly make known by letter that he suffers Francoys de Tizal to enjoy our present grace, and receipt of supposed three small florins by him forgone, each year, by reason of our good pleasure.

And by a report the receiver, shall recall each year, in a certified authentic text copy of this original understanding. He will be excused yearly by this amount for as long as Francoys enjoys our grace.

*In testimony we have signed our hand and appended our seals. Given the eighteenth day October in our City of Luneville the year one thousand five hundred and five. **So René sign.***

Now François held the secret of Venetian glass. Held in isolation by his kin, this master glassworker of la Frizon could only recruit his workers from outside his family. He was even forced to teach his professional secrets to yet another stranger. To get this help, he recruited a man named Dardenet, who originally came from the county of Montbéliard, in Burgundy.

His plan which brought in another outsider was totally provocative to the corporate rules of the Lorraine glassworkers. They served François de Thysac with a swingeing lawsuit. However his chief apprentice, Jacques Ardenay (later Dardenet), succeeded in driving an agreement with the glassworkers of Darney, giving him right of training. A confirmation of this agreement was given in 1516. Four days later, the Duke Anthony confirmed the letters of grant originally sealed by the duke René.

Dardenet benefited so much from the teachings of his master that he was a great success. The whole enterprise and rise of François de Thysac was ultimately crowned with triumph.

The glasshouse of la Frizon later took the name "glasshouse Dardenet". In 1549, the team of glassworkers there included, the son of Dardenet, "master of la Frizon" and three workmen Philibert, Jehan Mathys and Guyon. In 1552, the glasshouse "*granted to make crystalline*" was still working. The royalty tax rose to seven francs and one half, according to a record of Count Nicolas Vosgien, receiver and tax gatherer of Darney. ⁹

⁹ Archives Departementales de Meurthe et Moselle. B 5073

Time solved all the problems. Everything was eventually arranged and the newcomer later established some alliances, even his marriage in the Vôge.

In 1552, the glasswork "rented by periodic payment in order to make crystalline " still worked on ¹⁰, but Nicolas de Dardenet, by then husband of Nicole de Thysac, did not hesitate to quit la Frizon in order to be owner of the glassworks of Lichécourt ¹¹. and of Boyvin. ¹²

¹⁰ The tax rose to 7 francs and half. Accounts of Nicolas Vosgien, receiver and: tax gatherer of Darney. (Archives Departementales de Meurthe et Moselle. B 5073)

¹¹ A listing of the fiefs of Lichécourt and Boyvin was given December 16 1574 by Nicolas de Dardenet, Lord of Lichécourt. (Archives Departementales de Meurthe et Moselle. B 754 n° 14).

¹² Nicolas de Dardenet worked at Boyvin in company of Nicolas II de Hennezel, Lord of Vioménil.; he quit the art of glassmaking afterwards in order to perform a military career. The numbering of the lordship of Lichécourt that he gives May 1 1579, qualifies him as Lord of Quercy and Lichécourt partly, and captain lieutenant in the government of Clermont in Argonne. (Archives Departementales de Meurthe et Moselle. B 754 n° 23).