

THE GLASS ROOM OF THE NATIONAL PALACE OF NECESSIDADES IN LISBON

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INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses the study of the Glass Room at the National Palace of Necessidades in Lisbon, and the glass collection of king Ferdinand II of Portugal that had been here on view. This study is part of a Ph.D. project, concerning the study and preservation of this collection, as well as of a project entitled *The Stained Glass collection of King Ferdinand II of Portugal – Assembling the puzzle*, that aims a better understanding of the respective origins and technological characteristics of the king's collection.

Ferdinand II of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha (1816–1885), king-consort of Portugal, assembled a collection of glass and stained glass of a wide variety of objects both in terms of provenance and dating. It includes objects produced in Venice, or *à la façon de Venise*, in Central Europe, in the Iberian Peninsula, and probably also in England, possibly from the 15th or 16th to the 19th century.¹ This outstanding collection ranks on a similar level as some of the most renowned international collections and museums. But since the times when it had been privately exhibited in the Glass Room in Necessidades, most of this collection has remained unknown to the general public. It was dispersed after the King's death and during the Republic, and later the greater part of it has been reassembled in storage (as one believes its main part is still nowadays) at the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, the Portuguese Museum of Ancient Art. Small sets of objects were also dispersed and stored in Pena National Palace, Ajuda National Palace, Queluz Palace and the Museu Nacional de Arqueologia.

THE COLLECTING CONTEXT

The assembly of this collection took place within the context of European collection in the mid-19th century. The collector, Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha was born in Vienna, married Queen Maria II and fathered their first male heir in 1837.² Ferdinand resided most of the time in two places in Portugal. Initially, the king inhabited in his official residence in the city of Lisbon (the National Palace of Necessidades), where the first gathered glassworks were originally displayed in the so-called Glass Room. The separation of glass from other artistic works seems to have been a common practise in the 19th century by the glass-lovers. The Royal Family occupied the part of the Old Convent, in the National Palace of Necessidades. After the Queen's death, King Ferdinand moved to his second residence, the National Palace of Pena

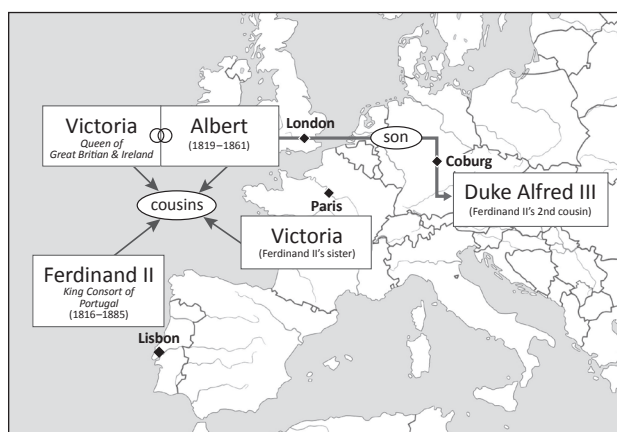


Fig. 1: Ferdinand II most relevant family relations in Europe associated with the collecting context.

in Sintra, and took a small part of the collection to be displayed inside a showcase in the hallway.³

The greatest part of the collection continued to be kept at the National Palace of Necessidades. After the king's death, it is believed that the collection underwent several moves, to finally being handed into the Public Treasury and transferred to the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga.

However, small sets of objects went separate ways, at least to four other locations: the National Palace of Pena, the National Palace of Ajuda, the National Palace of Sintra, and the Museu Nacional de Arqueologia (the National Museum of Archaeology). Since the peregrination of the collection leaves many open questions, the objective of this paper is to establish some clarity in this matter. To that end, it is important to learn more about the formation of the collection.

THE CREATION OF THE GLASS COLLECTION

While Ferdinand II was settling down in Lisbon and starting to collect art objects he was not alone: his cousins, Albert in London (1819–1861, Prince Consort of Queen Victoria of England, 1819–1901), and Alfred in Coburg (1844–1900, Duke Alfred III of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha) were collectors. In Paris, his sister Victoria, who lived in the Court of Napoleon III, was also surrounded by art dealers and collectors

¹ MARTINHO and VILARIGUES 2011, 8–13; MARTINHO and VILARIGUES 2012, 527; RODRIGUES et al. 2013, 259; RODRIGUES and MARTINHO 2015, 84.

² MARTINHO and VILARIGUES 2012, 526; RODRIGUES and MARTINHO 2015, 77.

³ Ibid, 85.

with similar taste for glass. Lisbon, Paris, London and Coburg were thus related through the king's family, and all of these relatives, or their immediate circle, was about to establish similar collections (see figure 1).⁴

In London, similar collections were formed by well known collector, and these were later incorporated in Museums being created in this period; in Coburg, the collection of Duke Alfred himself; and in Paris, the collection of Alfred-Émilien O'Hara, known as Count of Nieuwerkerke, later sold to Sir Richard Wallace in London, also including objects identical to the ones in Ferdinand's collection.⁵

It is unknown when the King started to collect glass objects, being the earliest receipt from 1852. In 1854–55, his sons Dom Pedro and Dom Luís travelled around Europe bringing some souvenirs (at least from Venice). Between 1862 and 1864, one knows the King acquired a series of objects in Lisbon, Paris, Munich, Florence, and Dresden, and he kept contacts in London and Coburg, as mentioned. On the other hand, recent research has given new insight into the network of art dealers supplying Fernando II from the abovementioned locations, as A. S. Drey, M. Meyer, A. Rusca, T. Gagliardi or L. A. A. Beurdeley, who figured as important suppliers of various noble families, and were therefore related with other collectors and collections.⁶

THE GLASS ROOM

This paper took interest in the glass set dating back to Ferdinand's time, and on the display of the objects in the Glass Room as it would have been during this period.

Concerning the glass that existed in the Palace of Necessidades during the King's life, one knows very little of it. The earliest records are the two albumen prints by Charles Thompson, that were travelling from London in 1866.⁷ These two photographed glass objects have no correspondence to any description found until today on the glass in Necessidades, neither to any object nowadays in the assets of any Portuguese Museum or Palace.

In fact, the earliest record and information on the Glass Room is a written document from 1886, and then some pictures, but none of the room itself. The location inside the palace is only hypothetical, and suggested by the studies of Art Historian José Teixeira (1986).⁸

From the written description, information on the furniture was gathered, and this allowed us a two-dimensional reconstruction that gives an idea of the set of glass pieces on display on the seven *étagères*. There was also a central *buffet* that decorated the room, besides some other carved wood wall decorations.⁹

From the written document, one could finally have an idea of the way the glass objects were on display, which was not possible before. By comparing the looks of the objects in the collection today with the description of 1886, and although one cannot separate the objects by *étagère* (which would mean in seven groups), one can now have for the first time a visual idea of what was on display in the Glass Room and how the objects were displayed.¹⁰

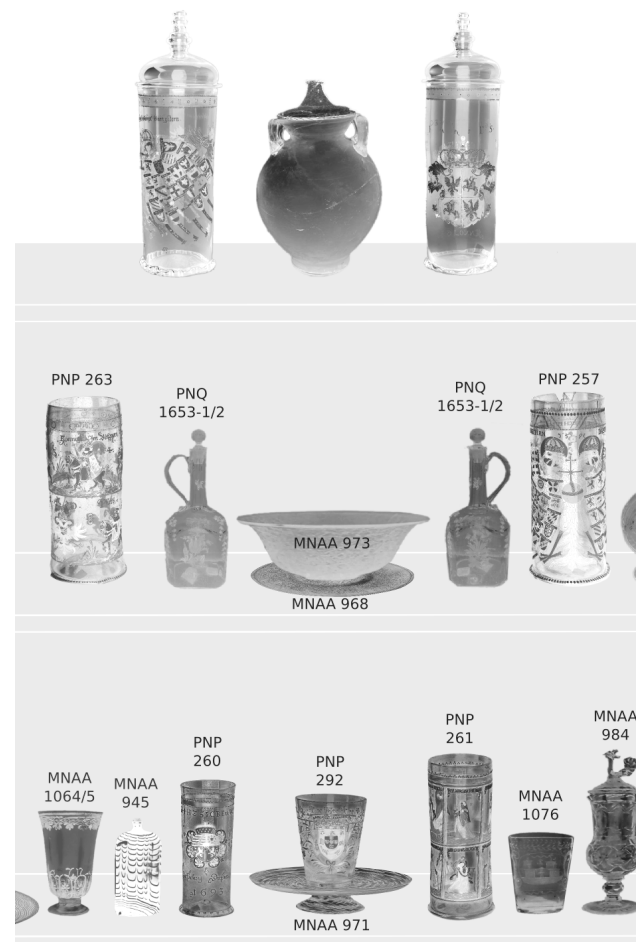


Fig. 2: Schematic representation of the central part of the *étagères*, and of the central pieces on display in the Glass Room in the Palace of Necessidades in Lisbon, according to the description of 1886.

The choice of the collector is very clear: it was to organize the glassworks according to symmetry and the sizes of the objects, rather than concerning himself with production or artistic style (see figure 2).¹¹

Besides this recent advance for the knowledge of the set of glass on display in the Glass Room 1886, one also knows that another room in the Palace had two stands with glass objects, in this very same year. This room was called the First Library Room (*Sala da Primeira Biblioteca*). There is a theory – but no record, though – that they were somewhere else (namely in the Glass Room) before this time.¹² What one could nevertheless discover was that, from the pictures available, some of the objects on these stands are now in

4 MARTINHO and VILARIGUES 2012, 529–530; RODRIGUES and MARTINHO. 2015, 84.

5 Ibid, 87.

6 MARTINHO and VILARIGUES 2012, 530–531; RODRIGUES and MARTINHO. 2015, 85.

7 VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM 2016a; VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM 2016b.

8 TEIXEIRA 1986, 188.

9 ARQUIVO HISTÓRICO DA CASA DE BRAGANÇA 1886.

10 Ibid.

11 RODRIGUES and MARTINHO. 2015, 85.

12 TEIXEIRA 1986, 208.

Portuguese Museums's assets. Unfortunately, the resolution of the pictures and the possible lost of track of some of these objects did not allow the identification of all glassworks in the two stands, for some one could not even recognise.

THE GLASS COLLECTION TODAY

King Ferdinand died in 1885. Between 1886 and 1892, Ferdinand II's grandson (Dom Carlos I) acquires in auction a great part of the objects in the Glass Room, and has its own room in the new part of Necessidades Palace. In 1892, some glass objects were sold (most could not be identified by their description).

Until 1910, one suspects that several transfers occurred, and possibly additions to the collection. In 1910, the collection was delivered to the public treasury, suffered relocation to the vault (Casa Forte das Necessidades) and a new inventory was made. Many glass objects described then were different from the ones in the Palace in 1886. Between 1939 and 1957 the objects were transferred from Casa Forte das Necessidades to Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (the main part), and the other small sets to the other mentioned locations (the National Palace of Pena, the National Palace of Ajuda, the National Palace of Sintra, and the Museu Nacional de Arqueologia).¹³

Consequently, the collection in the storage rooms of the Portuguese Museum is slightly different from what one knows from the 19th century. Several objects, in the same typology as the ones being collected in the middle of the century are present in the storage rooms, but one finds no correspondence with the ones one could identify in Ferdinand's collection back in the 1886 records. These yet unidentified glassworks can either have been added by his successors, or one simply does not have enough information yet. On the latter case, one cannot know if the objects were somewhere else in the royal residence by Ferdinand's time.

There are some leads that support the latter hypothesis. For instance, one knows for sure, from a receipt,¹⁴ that one goblet (MNA1066vid, similar to two other ones in London contemporary Museums collections, acquired or bequeathed about the same time – Victoria and Albert Museum Inv. Nr. 1864-1855, British Museum Inv. Nr. 1855, 1201.157),¹⁵ was certainly acquired by the King to the dealer Beurdelay in 1863. Nevertheless, this is one of the cases of a glasswork that one cannot find in any description or record and therefore cannot locate in the collection in 1886 or before.

FINAL REMARKS

The interpretation of the description from 1886 provided a new perspective on the collection and on the Glass Room from Necessidades. For the first time, one has a visual idea of its contents, and the characteristics shared with other collection practises:

- on the one hand, by including a set of *Humpen*, and by the way the objects were displayed, one can see the collection as being in part an affirmation of the King's Germanic

past (for example drawing of 1845, Rittersaal, Stolzenfels Schloss)

- on the other hand, by comprising Roman, Iberian, Venetian and on the Venetian style, Bohemian or in the Bohemian style, and objects from other relevant production centres (that were also being collected at the same time by coeval collectors); by the isolation of glass from other artistic works; as well as for the fact that the collection reflects his own taste and personality, one can look at this collection as a fashion of the collecting practises of Ferdinand's time.

Nevertheless, it is still necessary to track down the path of several works of art in the Museum's collection nowadays, as well as continuing the work on understanding this set in order to answer the new questions arising from this investigation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank to Parques de Sintra – Monte da Lua for making available some of the archival documents studied. This work was supported by The Portuguese Science Foundation (projects UID/EAT/00729/2013, PTDC/EPH-PAT/3579/2012 and SFRH/BD/84675/2012).

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¹³ ARQUIVO NACIONAL DA TORRE DO TOMBO 1910.

¹⁴ RODRIGUES and MARTINHO. 2015, 87.

¹⁵ THE BRITISH MUSEUM 2013; *List of the Objects in the Art Division, South Kensington Museum* n.d.

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