

THE ITALIAN GLASSWARE INDUSTRY DURING THE FASCIST REGIME

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ABSTRACT

I began my research on twentieth-century Murano Glassware in 2022 at the Centro Studi del Vetro of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice. In 2023, thanks to the Rakow Grant, I was able to broaden my scope beyond Murano to glassware producers throughout Italy, which, in the shadow of the fame of Venetian glass, have rarely been studied. This brief report is the result of my research conducted on “The Italian Glassware Industry during the Fascist Regime.” It offers, from both a technical and aesthetic perspective, a glimpse of sources and discourse regarding the production of everyday use glass in Italy during the studied period, as well as a selective list of the major factories. The material I collected is enormously greater than shown here.

During the Fascist Regime era, many critical changes took place in the Italian glassware industry, primarily through the activities of the Federazione Nazionale Fascista degli Industriali del Vetro e della Ceramica (FNFIVC). For the Federation, “vetro comune”—Italian jargon from that time for the category of table glassware—was of major concern, since the national market in this sector was monopolized by imported merchandise. In accordance with the Government’s autarchic and economic modernization policies, the FNFIVC aimed to develop this branch of industry and provide high-quality glass tableware designed and produced in Italy that was readily available to the Italian populace.¹

In the abundant historiography on Fascist economy and industry, I have not found a specific study on the glass industry. Likewise, there is little historiography on contemporary Italian mass-produced glass compared to the number of studies of artisanal Murano glass,² but I have discovered a wealth of previously unstudied primary sources in different regions in Italy relating to this subject matter. Most sources relevant to the topic are publications produced by the FNFIVC itself. Underlying political ideologies apart, they offer useful evidence for my study. In particular, *L’industria del vetro in*

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1 Rovini 1940.

2 A rare study is Felice 1937.

Italia (1940) is the first and most detailed inventory of Italian glass factories.³ For each company, the document indicates address, capital, founding date, names of founder(s) and director(s), and details about items produced. Another fundamental source is the monthly official review by the FNFIVC called *L'industria del vetro e della ceramica*,⁴ which published articles reporting on scientific, commercial, artistic, and political matters concerning the glass industry in Italy. Furthermore, the FNFIVC took an active part in the trading of Italian glassware through the Consorzio Italiano Vetrario (CIV) (Fig. 1). Founded in 1935 in Rome,⁵ this corporation was in charge of regulating the trade of *vetro comune* on behalf of its members, which were the major factories in the sector at that time.⁶ The literature created by the FNFIVC as well as the CIV and all the archives from these two organizations allowed me to trace two axes of evolution that led the glassware industry during the Fascist era: technical and aesthetic.⁷

To increase glass production so that every Italian could use drinking glasses made entirely in Italy, it was crucial to modernize the machinery, which was rather outdated in Italy at that time. Throughout the 1930s, a series of articles promoted the adaptation of mechanical production, presenting factories, such as Ricciardi Vetreria Meccanica & C. in Naples, as remarkable examples in automatizing many steps of the subdivided work chains.

In January 1935, the CIV decided to control the fabrication of *vetro comune* and regularize it in terms of type, shape, and decoration.⁸ The aim of standardization was to render work simpler and more economical for mass production. It was also meant to streamline the management of warehouses and supply systems for commerce. Likewise, the administrative unification under the CIV reduced production costs and thus lowered purchase prices.⁹

There was also a shift at this time toward sourcing raw materials from within Italian territories. Sand with high silica, in particular, previously all imported from France or Belgium, was found in Roveria, Istria, even though the effective exploitation remains to be verified by the author.¹⁰

In terms of aesthetics, between 1928 and 1935, Italian glassware adopted a geometrical Art Deco style, which was universally popular at that time (frequent use of black glass, conic or spherical cups, ribbed design, etc.). Art Deco progressively converged with the Modernist style, characterized by simple and imposing shapes in colorless glass, likely in keeping with the aesthetic promoted by the Fascist regime. Indeed,

3 FNFIVC 1940.

4 *L'industria del vetro e della ceramica: Rassegna ufficiale delle Federazioni Nazionali Fasciste delle Industrie del Vetro e della Ceramica*, published from 1932 to 1943; the FNFIVC changed the name to *Il Vetro* in 1938.

5 L'atto costitutivo della Società Anonima per Azioni CIV, Register 13241, August 24, 1935, fascicoli del Tribunale, ASCC, Rome.

6 1935 list of 25 members of the CIV, Register 80454, 1935, fascicolo "Consorzio Italiano Vetrario," ASCC, Rome.

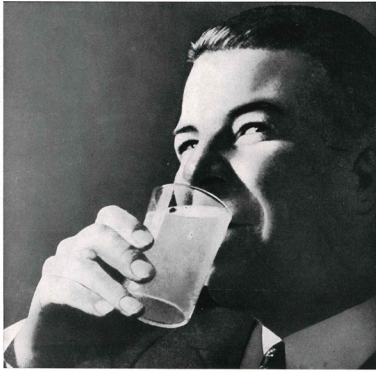
7 The archives of the CIV are conserved mainly at the ASCC, Rome, and at the Archivio Confindustria. Those concerning the FNFIVC are mainly preserved at the ACSR, fondo Confederazione Fascista dei Lavoratori dell'Industria, 1929–1943.

8 For example, in the "pressed tumblers" category, the CIV authorized production of cylindrical and conical tumblers with undecorated bottom; cylindrical tumblers with the options of reinforced clean bottom or engraved bottom, etc.

9 See Mauri 1935a; also CIV, "Tipizzazione e limitazione della produzione di articoli di vetro e ceramica," 1940, Serie 17, scaffale 42, busta 202 (55) 156, Archivio Confindustria.

10 Refer to Mauri 1935b.

CONSORZIO ITALIANO VETRARIO



TUTTI GLI ARTICOLI IN VETRO BIANCO
DA TAVOLA E DA USO COMUNE

SEDE LEGALE

ROMA

Via Regina Elena, 86

DIREZIONE

COMMERCIALE E

AMMINISTRATIVA

FIRENZE

Via Strozzi, 4

FILIALI

NAPOLI · MILANO · FIRENZE

XII

DEFINIZIONE SUL VETRO. — « Pietra, vetro, luce, diversi in peso, devono avere una medesima tonalità davanti a Dio ».
(Wburgmester, « Il Duomo di Westfalia »).

FIG 1. Advertisement of the CIV in *Il Vetro*, November 1938, 12. (Photo: © Centro Studi del Vetro-Istituto di Storia dell'Arte della Fondazione Giorgio Cini)

from 1935 to 1943, a series of articles in *Rassegna ufficiale delle Federazioni Nazionali Fasciste delle Industrie del Vetro e della Ceramica* praised glass for its luminosity, purity, functionality, and hygienic nature—characteristics that reflect Fascist social values. It is also worth noting the propensity to make all table items out of glass, including plates, bowls, and even cooking tools (Fig. 2).

NAPLES (CAMPANIA)

Between the two World Wars, the South of Italy was an important producer of glassware, in particular, Naples and its surroundings (Nola and Frattamaggiore). Despite the glorious past of glassware production in this area, today it is completely overlooked and almost no trace has been preserved either physically or in the historical records, beyond what I have discussed here. I was, however, able to find some dormant archives, which had never been consulted or removed from storage, from one of the largest *cristallerie*¹¹ in the city, Cristalleria Nazionale.¹² The company was known

11 The Italian word *cristalleria* should not be taken to mean working with crystal (lead glass); in glass-related documents during the studied period; it refers to a factory producing everyday use glassware, whether in glass or crystal.

12 Companies' commercial deeds are preserved at the ACC, Naples, from its constitution date, August 29, 1919, until its fusion with the Society Richard Ginori in 1956 (register 8899). The factory in Naples (Corso Malta, 150) was transferred to Milan in 1947.

FIG 2. Plate in PYREX glass by the factory MIVA in Acqui, reproduced in the article “Stoviglia trasparente” (Transparent crockery), *Il Vetro*, January 1941, 3. (Photo: © Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale «Vittorio Emanuele II» di Roma)



for its trendy items in the 1930s, and especially for a futuristic-design set with a triangular black handle, exhibited at the Venice Biennale d'Arte in 1934 and bought for the Ministry of the Interior (Fig. 3). In 1938 the factory was one of the first in Italy to launch an unbreakable drinking glass.¹³

EMPOLI AND COLLE DI VAL D'ELSA (TUSCANY)

An equally important glassware production region during the interwar period was Tuscany, more specifically, Empoli and Colle di Val d'Elsa, both active until the 1970s.¹⁴ On a local scale, the bibliography on Tuscan glass for this period is relatively rich.¹⁵ However, the regional museums struggle to maintain the memory of a defunct local industry. The Empoli Glass Museum has not preserved any archives but exhibits examples of the typical heavy green glassware from the main local factories, three of which are listed in the inventory by the FNFIVC.¹⁶ Particularly

¹³ “Vetro temperato,” *Il Vetro*, October 1939, 361.

¹⁴ At the present time, no establishment remains in Empoli, and only two factories still work in Colle di Val d'Elsa: CALP (Cristalleria Artistica La Piana) and ColleVilca.

¹⁵ Malandra 1983; Ciappi 1996; Secchi 2008; Ciappi and Viti 2015.

¹⁶ E. Taddei & C. (founded in 1913); Cristalleria Empolese Cella Lorenzo & C. C.E.S.A. (founded in 1925); Cristalleria Genovali (founded in 1939). Documents and deeds of the society (from 1914 to 1964) in Cacelleria del Tribunale di Firenze, fasc. 222, ASF.



FIG 3. Glass cups bought for the Ministry of the Interior, featured on an advertisement of the Cristalleria Nazionale in *L'industria del vetro e della ceramica*, January 1936. (Photo: © Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale «Vittorio Emanuele II» di Roma)

known for its effort to modernize rustic table items is Vetraria E. Taddei & C. (Fig. 4).¹⁷ Another glass town in Tuscany is Colle di Val d'Elsa, which also has a small museum preserving around 750 works of local glass from the fifteenth to the end of the twentieth century.¹⁸ One of the largest tableware producers in Italy was located in this town: the Vetrerie Operaie Riunite Modesto Boschi, founded by Modesto Boschi in 1921.¹⁹

MURANO (VENETO)

Trained workers from Colle di Val d'Elsa were important resources in the development of producing *vetro comune* at an industrial scale in Murano, as some of them joined

¹⁷ The Archivio storico comunale di Empoli preserves a Taddei & C commercial catalog (1934), whereas *Domus*, *L'industria del vetro e della ceramica*, and the Triennale catalogues from 1935 to 1950 regularly feature Taddei & C's new items. The company is also the only Italian common glassware factory to have participated at the Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne, Paris, in 1937 alongside Murano's furnaces. Ciappi 1996; Ciappi and Viti 2015.

¹⁸ The internal inventory of the museum's collection is still in progress. Secchi 2008.

¹⁹ The company's commercial deeds from its founding date in 1921 to the liquidation in 1953 are preserved in fascicoli 3320, ASF. See also a particular trajectory of the founder: "La morte del Gr. Uff. Modesto Boschi," *L'industria del vetro e della ceramica* 1936, August: 165.

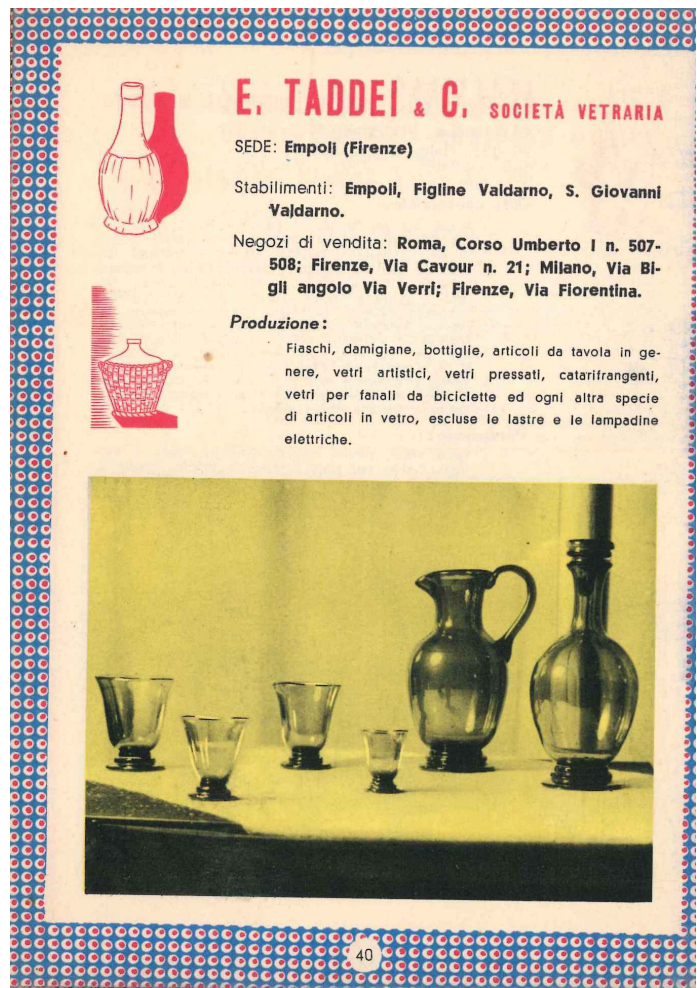


FIG 4. Presentation of E. Taddei & C's glass cups with ribbed-design foot, in the FNFIVC's *Catalog ufficiale delle aziende partecipanti nel padiglione del vetro e della ceramica alla X fiera del Levante*, 1939, 40. (Photo: © Centro Studi Del Vetro-Istituto di Storia dell'Arte della Fondazione Giorgio Cini)

the oldest cristalleria on the island, Cristalleria e Vetreria Veneziana già Franchetti.²⁰ Another important—and still functioning—cristalleria in Murano was founded in 1925 by the manager of the Cristalleria Franchetti, Ugo Nason, and it contributed significantly to widespread public access to modern Murano glassware.²¹ Now forgotten, the Società Veneziana Conterie e Cristalleria²² was fairly well placed in the glassware market, as its advertisements appeared in almost every issue of *Rassegna ufficiale delle Federazioni Nazionali Fasciste delle Industrie del Vetro e della Ceramica* between 1938 and 1944, and *Domus* featured the latest products of this company in its series of articles entitled “Cristalleria Italiana” in 1938.

²⁰ The story of this manufacture started in 1882 as Vetreria Veneziana in Murano; it became Cristalleria e Vetreria Veneziana già Franchetti in 1913; then, in 1919, the Società Anonima Cristalleria Murano with another factory in Treviglio. The head office moved to Milan in 1929. See Zecchin and Zaniol 2011.

²¹ About this *cristalleria*, refer to Beltrami 2023.

²² Founded in 1898, in Murano and in Venice, it produced at first only *conterie* (glass pearls), then it enlarged its production to *cristallerie fine* and to laboratory glass. No archives have been found about the company. See Morazzoni and Pasquato 1953.

ALTARE (LIGURIE)

This small town near Savona was a very important center of glass production and the Museo dell'Arte Vetraria Altarese's rich collection of the region's glass has been published in a catalog.²³ In addition, some local publications preserved in the museum allowed me to learn the story of Altarese glass.²⁴ Exceptionally, in the 1930s the local glass factories, especially Società Cooperativa Artistico Vetraria (SAV), tried to integrate up-to-date styles for their everyday-glass production.²⁵ The use of black glass for the foot of drinking glasses in a simple, rigorous, and geometrical shape is the most widely diffused (Fig. 5).

MILAN (LOMBARDIA)

Milan is the industrial capital in Italy, but many of its factories remain to be studied. I would mention only the Vetrerie Peruzzi, Bozzi & Figli, producer of glassware for restaurants and bars,²⁶ and the MIVA, specialized in glass insulators, which became popular in 1943 for its tableware and cooking tools in heat-resistant borosilicate glass, often referred by the brand name PYREX.²⁷ Additionally, an important source I found in Milan was the commercial catalogs from the department store Rinascente,²⁸ which allowed me to study the glassware for sale on the Italian market and to discern its evolution during the 1920s and 1930s.



FIG 5. Glass cups of blown white glass resting on a cylindrical black glass foot. SAV, Altare, about 1935. Each: H. 8.5 cm; Diam. 7 cm. Museo dell'Arte Vetraria Altarese, inv. 259. (Photo: © Museo dell'Arte Vetraria Altarese)

²³ Chirico 2009.

²⁴ Malandra 1983.

²⁵ Sardoni 1982.

²⁶ At Via dell'Assunta, 7, Milan. Commercial deeds from this company are preserved at the ACC, Milan.

²⁷ The factory MIVA was located at Via Carducci, 12, Milan.

²⁸ Preserved for the period of 1920s and 1930s at the Raccolta delle Stampe Bertarelli.

FIDENZA-PARMA (EMILIA-ROMAGNA)

Bormioli Rocco & Figlio Vetreria still exists as an industry giant and is especially known for one of the first jars with a spiral locking mechanism entirely in glass. The company has preserved its archives, which allowed me to study their history.

CONCLUSION

Studying the Italian glassware industry during the Fascist regime is challenging because it requires varied approaches combining artistic, social, political, and economic points of view. I will deepen my analysis and publish the rich, mostly hitherto-unseen material that I was able to collect, in hopes of offering researchers a tool to broaden the study of Italian glass and to fill the current void, to whatever extent possible, in Italian glass historiography.

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ACSR = Archivio Centrale Stato di Roma, Rome

Archivio Confindustria = Archivio storico della Confederazione generale dell'industria italiana, Rome

Archivio Rinsacente = Archivio del Rinascente, Raccolta delle Stampe Bertarelli, Milan

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