

*Per vetri*

*in*

**Altare**



TESTO E DISEGNI

DI

AMANZIO BORMIOLI



## Amanzio Bormioli

devoted himself to borosilicate glass blowing in the sixties.

In the seventies he started the activity which brought him to start a workshop which he abandoned only to work in public when there were festivals and expositions of artistic craftworks.

In those years I had the possibility to learn this craft for fun till the point of putting into practice what was a childish play that is, carrying on the activity that Amanzio began in the workshop that it is still called by his name. Together with the traditional handicraft I develop a series of forms and figures transforming the material itself, manipulated at a hot temperature adding mineral oxides: the objects, sometimes of a bizarre design, are always the result of attempts, experiments, mistakes....in a word: Hard Work!



Raffaello Bormioli, foto di Giacomo Carlini

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# Glass in

TESTO E DISEGNI DI  
AMANZIO BORMIOLI  
VETRAIO ALTARESE

# Altare

THE LEGENDARY ORIGINS OF GLASS ACCORDING TO  
PLINIO THE OLD.



THE PHOENICIANS, NAVIGATORS AND MERCHANTS, DERIVED THEIR PROSPERITY FROM THE TRADES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA. ON THESE SHIPS, MADE ENTIRELY OF WOOD, IT WAS VERY DANGEROUS TO LIGHT A FIRE. IN ORDER TO HAVE A HOT MEAL THE SHIP LANDED NEAR A SHORE AND THE MARINERS COOKED THEIR FOOD ON A CAMP FIRE; THEN THEY RESTED A WHILE AND THE FOLLOWING DAY THEY SAILED AWAY.

ONE NIGHT, MANY CENTURIES AGO, ONE OF THESE SHIPS WITH A CARGO OF SALTPETRE PATS, LANDED AT THE MOUTH OF RIVER BELUS.



THE SANDY BEACH WITHOUT STONES COMPELLED THE MARINERS TO USE SOME SALTPETRE PATS TO BUILD A FIRE PIT. THE HEAT MELTED THE SALTPETRE WHICH MELDED WITH THE SILICON OF THE SAND AND GAVE ORIGIN TO A SO FAR UNKNOWN



BRIGHT, TRANSPARENT MATERIAL : GLASS WAS BORN.

THE OLDEST GLASS- MANUFACTURING TECHNIQUE WE KNOW OF, IS THE ONE CALLED 'FRIABLE NUCLEOUS' WHICH CONSISTS IN COATING A BLOCK MADE OF CLAY AND SAND IMMERSING IT IN A VITREOUS PASTE. IT WAS USED ONLY FOR SMALL AND ROUGH CONTAINERS.

LATER ON THE MORE REFINED TECHNIQUE OF POURING MELTED GLASS IN MOULDS WAS ADOPTED AND FINALLY, AROUND THE MID 1ST CENTURY A.C. THE BLOWING TECHNIQUE WITH AN IRON CANE WAS DISCOVERED. IT IS ACTUALLY IN USE NOWADAYS WITH FEW VARIATIONS.

FROM MIDDLE EAST GLASS SPREAD TO VENICE, IN ITALY, TO EUROPE, FRANCE, GERMANY AND THEN ENGLAND

I WILL ONLY TELL YOU ABOUT THE GLASS IN ALTARE AND ITS MASTERS



PERHAPS ROMAN FURNACES WERE SIMILAR TO THE ONE DISCOVERED AT NORA IN SARDINIA.

STARTING MY STORY WITH THE WORDS OF DAN KLEIN AND WARD LLOYD "HISTORY OF GLASS" (DE AGOSTINI 1984)

"...THE PEOPLE FROM ALTARE WERE THE ONLY INSIDIOUS AND UNDISPUTED RIVALS OF VENICE..."

GLASS BLOWER OF ROMAN TIMES



VERY LITTLE IS KNOWN OF THE GLASS CRAFT IN ALTARE IN THE MIDDLE AGES \_ I WILL MENTION THE ONLY DOCUMENTS WHICH ARE KNOWN AND DATED: - 1130- THE THE LANDS OF ALTARE WERE DONATED TO THE BENEDECTINES LIVING ON THE ISLAND OF BERGEGGI FROM BISHOP RAMBALDO . - 1141 - THE DONATION IS APPROVED BY POPE INNOCENZO II - 1283 - A DOCUMENT TALKING ABOUT A GLASSMAKER GABRIELE LIVING IN ALTARE:  
 IT IS QUITE EVIDENT THAT THE BENEDECTINES IN BERGEGGI CERTAINLY KNEW THAT THE BROTHERS IN THE PROVENCAL ISLE OF LERINS WERE FAMILIAR WITH GLASS MAKING.  
 THE LANDS AROUND ALTARE WERE FULL OF BEECH TREES, WHOSE WOOD IS THE IDEAL FUEL FOR FURNACES, AND OF THICK FERN BUSHES : FROM THEIR ASHES IT WAS POSSIBLE TO GET A VERY GOOD FLUX FOR GLASS. THESE REASONS FAVOURED THE SETTLEMENT OF A HARD-WORKING COMMUNITY OF FRENCH GLASS-MAKERS IN OUR VALLEY.....

THIS IS HISTORY BUT I WANT TO TELL YOU THE LEGEND AS WELL.

ACTUALLY IF THE GREATNESS OF ROME IS NOT DIMINISHED BY THE AWARENESS THAT THE ORIGIN OF ITS FOUNDATION DERIVES FROM A LEGEND ....SO KNOWING THAT FLEMISH CRUSADERS MAY HAVE NEVER COME TO ALTARE AND THAT THE STORY OF THEIR ORIGIN IS ONLY A NICE AND ROMANTIC LEGEND WILL NOT SPOIL THE GLASS MAKERS FROM ALTARE. COMING BACK FROM THE FIRST CRUSADE A FLEMISH FLEET THREW THE ANCHOR NEAR THE LITTLE ISLE OF BERGEGGI.....



WELCOME GENTLEMEN TO THE MONASTERY OF BERGEGGI.

WE ARE FLEMISH CRUSADERS COMING BACK FROM THE HOLY LAND.

AND WHILE SOME OF THEM WENT UP TO THE MONASTERY OF THE BENEDECTINES OTHERS LOOKED CLOSELY AT THE MOUNTAINS OF THE LIGURIAN COAST. THEY WERE ALL GLASS MAKERS WHO HAD LEFT THEIR GLASS CRAFT TO GO TO THE HOLY LAND.

UP THERE, AMID THOSE MOUNTAINS IT LOOKS LIKE THE IDEAL PLACE TO BUILD A FURNACE.

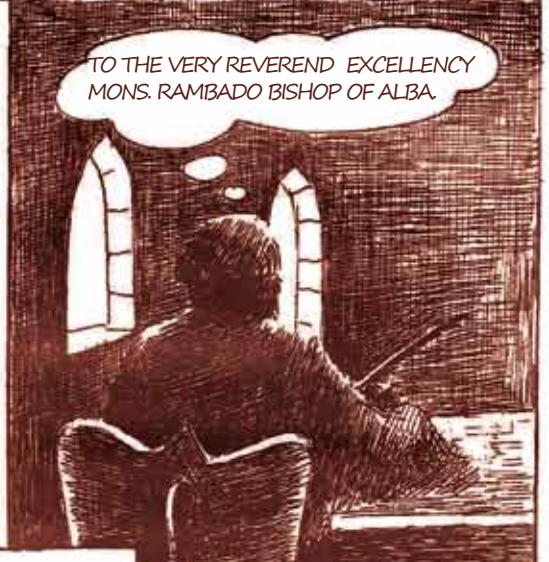


REVEREND FATHER, WE WOULD REALLY BEGRATEFUL IF YOU COULD ASK PERMISSION ON OUR BEHALF TO ESTABLISH A FURNACE AMID THOSE MOUNTAINS

I WILL WRITE TO MONSIGNOR RAMBALDI WHO IS THE OWNER OF LANDS IN ALTARE.



TO THE VERY REVEREND EXCELLENCY MONS. RAMBALDO BISHOP OF ALBA.



AT NIGHT ONE OF THESE TALKED TO THE PRIOR.

AND HERE THE LEGEND FLOWS INTO HISTORY WITH THE DONATION OF THE LANDS IN ALTARE TO THE BENEDECTINES. 2

HAVING OBTAINED PERMISSION TO SETTLE IN THE LANDS OF ALTARE, THE GLASS MAKERS WITH THEIR FAMILIES STARTED TO CLIMB TOWARDS THE PASS WE INHABITANTS OF ALTARE CALL "BOCCHETTA" BUT CALLED "CADIBONA HILL" ON THE MAPS. AFTER REACHING THE PASS A VALLEY WITH THICK WOODS SURROUNDED BY RAGGED MOUNTAINS APPEARED TO THEIR EYES.

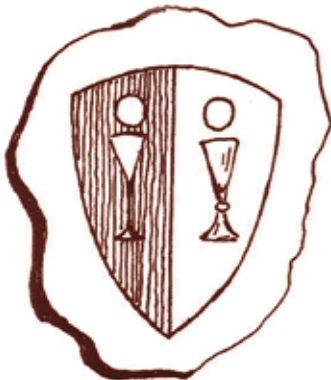
IT WAS THE VALLEY OF ALTARE IN THE MARQUISATE OF MONFERRATO.

THE GLASS MAKERS SETTLED THERE AND STARTED THEIR WORK.



IN FEW DECADES THE WORKING ACTIVITY OF THE GLASS MAKER FROM ALTARE WAS WELL-KNOWN AND APPRECIATED BOTH IN MONFERRATO AND IN THE REPUBLIC OF GENOA. THE OWNERS OF THE NEARBY ESTATES, AND INCREASINGLY THE FARTHER ONES, DID NOT HESITATE TO GIVE PRIVILEGES OF ANY KIND TO THE GLASS MAKERS FROM ALTARE IN ORDER TO HAVE THEM IN THEIR FEUDS. IT WAS IN THAT PERIOD THAT PRINCE GUGLIELMO, MARQUIS OF MONFERRATO, ISSUED THE CHARTER OF THE LAND OF ALTARE CONCERNING THE GLASS CRAFT. IT DATES BACK TO FEBRUARY, 15TH, 1495. IN THIS WAY IT CONTRIBUTED AND LEGALIZED THE BIRTH OF THE FIRST UNIT OF THE CORPORATION THAT WILL LATER BE KNOWN BY THE NAME OF 'UNIVERSITY OF GLASS CRAFT'. THIS UNIVERSITY WILL LATER HAVE ITS OWN REGULATIONS, ITS SEAL AND ITS FLAG. ITS CONSULS, ELECTED EVERY YEAR, WILL HAVE THE HONOUR AND THE DUTY TO MAKE EVERY GLASS MAKER STRICTLY OBSERVE THE LAWS AND THE TRADITIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY.

SEAL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASS CRAFT



SEAL OF THE COMMUNITY IN ALTARE



THE FLAG OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASS CRAFT

THE ORIGINAL ONE IS IN THE GLASS MUSEUM IN ALTARE.



... NOBODY BELONGING TO THE GLASS CRAFT CAN HAVE A FIRE OR WORK OUTSIDE THE PERIOD BETWEEN SAINT MARTIN'S FESTIVAL AND SAINT JOHN'S ONE... AS AS IT WAS CUSTOMARY IN THE PAST ON PAIN OF THE WRITTEN PUNISHMENT.

NOBODY CAN WORK OR MAKE SOMEBODY WORK EITHER FURTHER ON FROM MILAN, PAVIA, PIACENZA OR FROM THE MOUNTAINS... MOREOVER IT HAS BEEN DECIDED, ORDERED AND ESTABLISHED THAT NOBODY OF THE ABOVE MENTIONED...



THESE RULES OBLIGED THE GLASS MAKERS TO EMIGRATE FARTHER AND FARTHER: TO BELGIUM , THE LOW COUNTRIES AND FRANCE, WHERE ROYAL TITLES AND TAX-EXEMPTIONS WERE ALLOWED TO THE GLASS MAKERS FROM ALTARE.

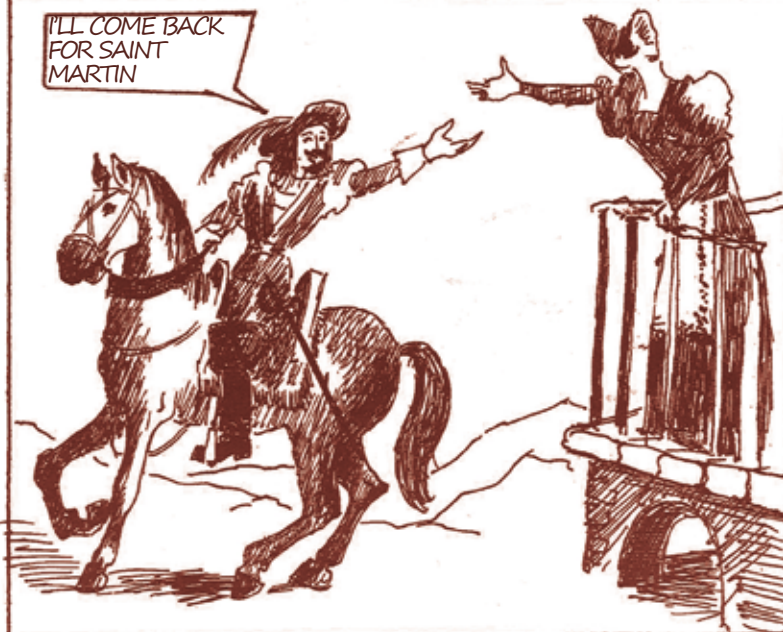
( LES MEDAILLES EN VERRE DE ALTARE- H.SHUERMANN. LIEGI 1884)

( LES VERRERIES ET LES GENTILSHOMMES VERRIERS DE NEVERS- A. BOUTELLIERS 1885)

IT WAS JUST IN NEVERS THAT THE GLASSHOUSE OF BROTHERS ETTORE E LORENZO BORMIOLI FLOURISHED AND WORKED FROM THE HALF OF THE XVTH CENTURY TO THE FRENCH REVOLUTION...

ASKED TO PARIS BY MINISTER COLBERT THE GLASS MAKER FROM ALTARE BERNARDO PEROTTO HANDCRAFTED, FIRST AMONG THE OTHERS, GLASS SLABS THROUGH FILTERING.

I'LL COME BACK FOR SAINT MARTIN



ENAMELLED STEM GLASS PROBABLY MADE BY GLASS MAKERS FROM ALTARE FOR DUKE GONZAGA OF NEVERS

AFTER 1565. WALLACE COLLECTION - LONDON IN FRANCE AND IN THE LOW COUNTRIES THE 'FALCON DE ALTARE' WAS PREFERRED TO THE 'FALCON DE VENICE'

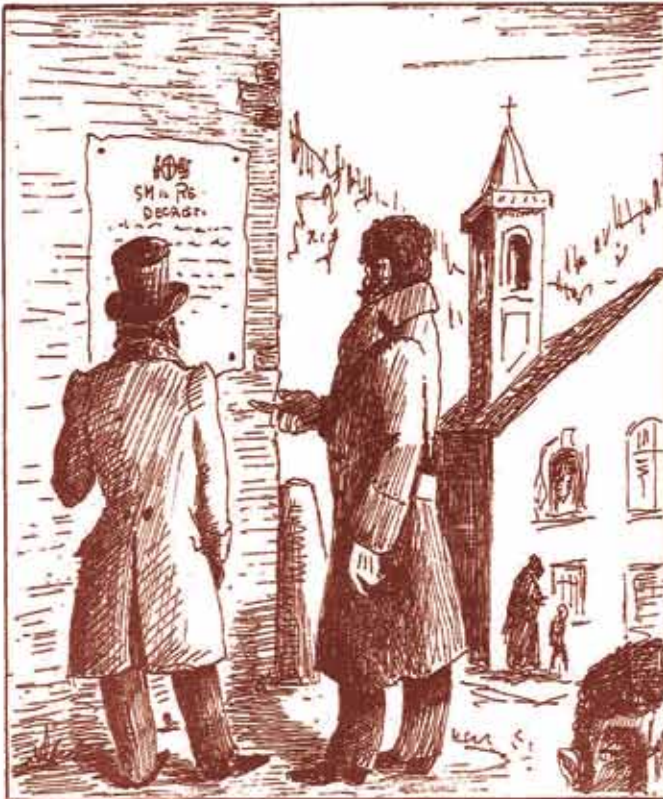
THE CONTRACTS STIPULATED WITH THE GLASS MAKERS CLEARLY STATED THE RESTRICTIONS UNDER WHICH THEY WERE BOUND TO WORK.

IT IS KNOWN OF A GIOVANNI ONGARO FROM MURANO WHO WAS BOUND TO WORK AT THE 'FALCON DE ALTARE' : HE DID NOT WANT OR COULD NOT WORK THERE SO HE WAS COMPELLED TO REPATRIATE.



SO CENTURY AFTER CENTURY WE GET TO THE NAPOLEONIC EMPIRE.

FROM A REPORT OF PREFECT CHABROL IT IS POSSIBLE TO UNDERSTAND HOW MANY THE FURNACES IN ALTARE WERE AND WHO THEY BELONGED TO: 1-PAOLO AND ANGELO SAROLDI-2- GIUSEPPE E FRANCESCO BORMIOLI 3- FRANCESCO E FILIPPO LODI 4- VEDOVA MASSARI 5- FRATELLI BORMIOLI 6- ANGELO SAROLDI



WITH THE RESTORATION KING CARLO FELICE ABOLISHED ALL THE PRIVILEGES THAT THE GLASS MAKERS FROM ALTARE HAD ENJOYED SO FAR. THE SUBSEQUENT ECONOMIC CRISES THAT CRASHED THE AREA COMPELLED MOST GLASS MAKERS TO EMIGRATE TO ALL THE OTHER ITALIAN STATES ITALY WAS STILL SCATTERED IN. THE ONES WHO REMAINED WERE COMPELLED TO WORK AT STARVATION SALARIES, VERY OFTEN PAID WITH LITTLE BREAD AND LITTLE POLENTA - AS A CONSEQUENCE WORKSHOPS WERE SET UP BY CRAFTSMEN FROM ALTARE IN SESTO CALENDE, BORGO SAN DONNINO, CENTO, RIMINI, BOLOGNA, ROMA, OTHERS AS FAR AS SOUTH AMERICA, IN LIMA AND MONTEVIDEO. IT WAS JUST IN THE MIDDLE OF 1800 WHEN A DOCTOR FROM CALICE LIGURE CAME TO ALTARE: GIUSEPPE CESIO, A FOLLOWER OF MAZZINI AND PHILANTROPIST, DID NOT HESITATE TO WALK LONG HOURS ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS TO GO TO ALTARE AND CURE THE PEOPLE WITH CHOLERA. LIVING IN CONTACT WITH THE GLASS MAKERS GOT INFORMED ABOUT THEIR PAST AND SAW HOW MISERABLE THE PRESENT WAS...

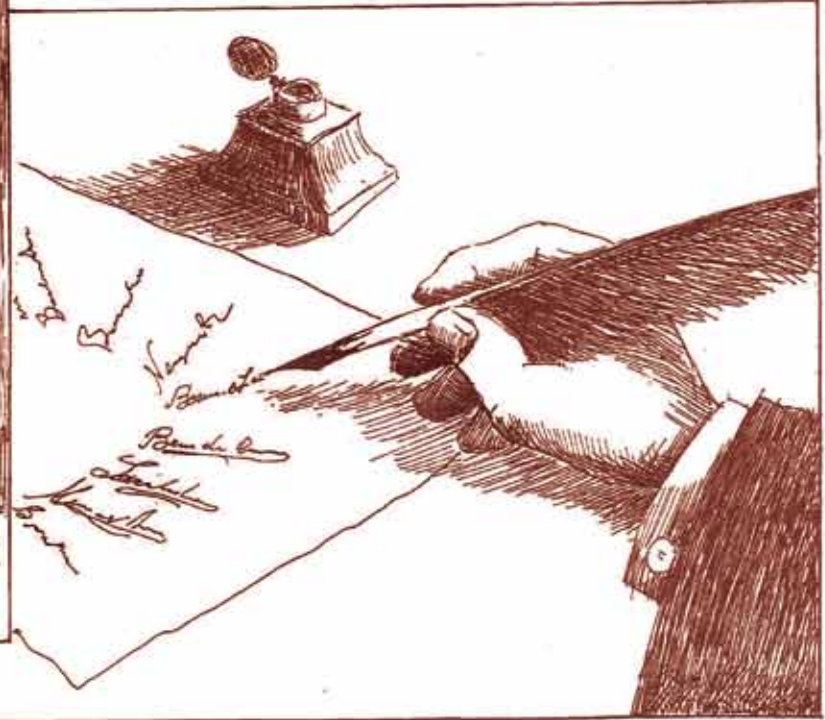
...AND SO DOCTOR CESIO EXPLAINED AND SUBMITTED A REALLY FUTURISTIC IDEA TO THE GLASS MAKERS: THE FOUNDATION OF A COOPERATIVE.

THE IDEA WAS ENTHUSIASTICALLY ACCEPTED AND ON CHRISTMAS NIGHT, 1856 THE GLASS MAKERS MET...



... TO SIGN THE DEED OF INCORPORATION OF THAT COOPERATIVE THAT WOULD LATER BECOME THE ARTISTIC GLASS SOCIETY.

THE FOUNDERS' SIGNATURES, AS A TRIBUTE TO MAZZINI, WERE WRITTEN AS IN A CIRCLE TO AVOID BOTH A FIRST ONE AND A LAST ONE. SO THE FIRST COOPERATIVE IN ITALY AND PERHAPS IN EUROPE WAS BORN.





THE S.A.V. LIVED AND WORKED , WITH UPS AND DOWNS, TILL APRIL,28TH,1978. THE AUTOMATION AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR MARKED THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

STREAMS OF INK AND SEAS OF WORDS WERE WRITTEN IN FAVOUR AND AGAINST IT IN THE LONG RUN OF ITS LIFE... BUT 122 YEARS OF UNINTERRUPTED WORKING ACTIVITY AND BREAD FOR FOUR GENERATIONS OF INHABITANTS OF ALTARE, HONOUR AND PRESTIGE IN THE WORLD FOR THE LITTLE TOWN IN LIGURIA SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES.

AND IT WAS AMID THE WALLS OF THIS FACTORY THAT WE LAST GLASS MAKERS IN ALTARE, LEARNT THE GLASS ART FROM OUR FOREFATHERS. OTHER GLASSMAKERS WERE BORN IN ARGENTINA, EAST AFRICA, MIDDLE AND FAR EAST THANKS TO PEOPLE FROM ALTARE. NOWADAYS IN ALTARE TWO GLASS FACTORIES, COMPLETELY AUTOMATIZED, WORK: CO-VETRO AND SAVAM, VETRITALIA IN DEGO AND VALBORMIDA IN CARCARE; THEY PRODUCE BOTTLES FOR WINE AND LIQUEUR WITH THE MOST SOPHISTICATED MODERN TECHNIQUES.



THE MOST RECENT CHAPTER OF THE HISTORY OF THE GLASS IN ALTARE HAS COME TO AN END.

SURELY OTHERS WILL FOLLOW BUT I MIGHT NOT WRITE THEM.

I DEDICATE THIS WORK OF MINE TO ALL THE GLASS MAKERS IN ALTARE. HERE I WANT TO REMEMBER THREE WHO WERE VERY DEAR TO ME:

**DIEGO MIRENGHI-ALDO BRUZZONE- POLIUTO SAROLDI**

ALTARE 21 MARZO 1986

*Imanolo Zornicelli*

VETRAIO ALTARESE



“E’ stato facile ricostruire la genealogia della famiglia, in quanto tutti vetrai, nati e vissuti ad Altare.”



Amanzio Bormioli al lavoro con il padre Alfio nei primi anni '80

*Si ringrazia la Professoressa Bruna Giacosa per la traduzione del testo.*



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**Vetrai in Altare dal 1570...**

**Jesus Christus Superior Aster**  
- Illuminotecnica e immagine di Danilo Assandri-

