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A Seventeenth-Century Spanish Glass

THE GENERAL CONTOURS of the glass shown in Figure 1 suggest a goblet or a chalice, but the vessel is considerably larger than the usual wineglass.¹ Since the rim was splayed to form a lip, this vessel may have been used for drinking a beverage other than wine, or possibly it was a loving cup, to be passed from hand to hand.

The transparent green glass is glossy on the surface, and its clarity is unmarred except for one small bubble (2 mm.) and a few others no larger than pin pricks. The hollow foot was blown from one gather of glass, and the bowl from another. The paraison (partially shaped mass of molten glass) for the foot was opened and shaped into a cone; the edges were spread and turned under for reinforcement. The paraison blown for the bowl was attached to the hollow foot as the latter was being held on the pontil, an iron rod used for holding hot glass. After the bowl was detached from the blowpipe—the entire vessel being held on the pontil—the rim was opened up to form a bell-shaped cup. The rim was encircled with trailed threads of dark brown glass, which show a peculiar unevenness due to lack of complete fusion. The rough mark of the pontil, left unpolished, shows within the cavity of the foot (Fig. 2). A simple decoration was formed around the bowl by trailing two cords of dark brown glass and pinching them together to create a chain of oval links.

Except for its shape, which is not characteristic of any specific place of manufacture, this

footed bowl is typical of glass blown in southern Spain during the seventeenth century. The green coloration contrasting with brown, the quality of the thinly blown glass with its minute bubbles, the trailed threading and chain decoration, the turned-under rim of the base, all indicate the probability that it was produced at a glass furnace of Castril de la Peña, a town in Granada province.

Glasses from this center, now in the Museo Arqueológico at Granada,² bear a close relationship in quality and technique to the Missouri glass. Numerous examples may be seen also in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and of the Museo Arqueológico Nacional and the Museo de Artes Decorativas in Madrid. A vase of Castril glass (Fig. 3) in the museum of The Hispanic Society of America, New York, is more easily identifiable as the work of a glass blower in southern Spain because of its traditional Moresque shape. In this object are found the same quality of transparent green glass as that used for the Missouri bowl, although the threads are sapphire blue, and the same kind of cord decoration, in this instance trailed vertically and pinched into a net pattern.

Not much was known until the nineteenth century about the glasses made in Granada and other southern provinces. Even the Spaniards regarded these objects as ordinary household goods of little interest, but now the glasses blown in small workshops from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century are recognized by museums as worthy of attention. Forerunner among museums to collect the glasses of southern Spain was the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, which, in 1873, bought more than three hundred pieces from a Spanish bibliographer who traveled extensively in Spain. This man, Bonifacio Riaño y Montero, and his brother Juan listed the purchases made over a period of years, attributing each piece to a definite locale near the town or city where he had

[Dr. Donald B. Harden, formerly director of the London Museum, stated (on a visit here in 1971) that this vessel seemed to him probably Spanish of the seventeenth or eighteenth century, or possibly from the Low Countries, or even Italy. He advised me to consult Mr. Robert F. Charleston of the Victoria and Albert Museum. The latter thought it might be Spanish, but suggested that I consult Mrs. Frothingham; therefore I wish to express my gratitude to these scholars. - Ed.]



1. Glass drinking vessel, probably from Castril de la Peña (Granada), seventeenth century. Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia.

2. View of the base of the Missouri vessel, showing the pontil mark.

found them.³ Six years later, Juan published a book⁴ which included a chapter on Spanish glass. His statements were based largely on his brother's notes about the glasses belonging to the Victoria and Albert Museum, and on the research done by a friend in Spanish municipal archives.⁵

A meticulous study of glasses found in the entire region of Granada, Jaén and Almería brings recognition and the realization that these vessels usually display certain distinctive characteristics of color, ornamentation and shapes. Colorless glass, known as crystal in Barcelona during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was not produced at this period in the southern factories. Their metals, tinted either accidentally by impurities in the silica or intentionally by the addition of iron oxides, ranged in shades of green, from pale leaf-green to dark olive, from aquamarine to a rich emerald. Other





3. Glass vase, probably from Castril de la Peña (Granada), seventeenth century. Photo courtesy of the Hispanic Society of America, New York.

compounds added to the pot gave brown that is almost black, purple, cobalt blue and amber yellow. All the glasses, whatever their color, are filled with minute air bubbles. Often in the glasses of Castril and other Granadine furnaces two colors are combined, the basic greens or pale amber being trimmed with contrasting hues. At Castril, the glassmen attempted to correct the green coloration in the metal by adding a manganese compound to the pot, but a greenish or yellowish tonality persisted. In an effort to achieve a colorless glass they also blew it very thin. The plastic decoration of trailed threads, chains and pinched crestings is traditional in southern Spain, carried on probably since the time of Roman domination in Hispania. Hispano-Moresque influence is noticeable in many shapes, especially vases, but this trait is modified to some extent by the influence of Venetian-style shapes produced contemporaneously in Barcelona. Drinking glasses from southern Spain range from wineglasses and tumblers to mugs, and while they do not reach the high artistic standards of Catalonian glasses, a few originating at Castril de la Peña compare favorably with those of Venetian style from other regions.

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¹ Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia, Acc. No. 64.87. Provenience unknown. H. 12.3 cm., diam. rim 15.2 cm., diam. base 10.1 cm. Gift of Mr. H. K. Negbaur.

² Joaquina Egurias Ibáñez, "Museo Arqueológico de Granada; Colección de vidrios andaluces," *Memorias de los museos arqueológicos provinciales, 1948-49* (extractos) IX-X (Madrid, Cuerpo Facultativo de Archiveros, Bibliotecarios y Arqueólogos 1950) 289-296.

³ Bonifacio Riaño y Montero, [List of glasses, 1873]. MS (B916) in the library of The Hispanic Society of America, New York: Alice W. Frothingham, *Hispanic Glass* (New York 1941) 74; *idem.*, *Spanish Glass* (London 1963) 53-54.

⁴ Juan Facundo Riaño y Montero, *The Industrial Arts of Spain* (London 1879) 1st ed., [228]-249.

⁵ Manuel Romero y Ortiz, Letter dated September 30, 1873. MS (B969) in the library of The Hispanic Society of America, New York.