

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.

Our scene is pure conjecture but records do exist for later periods. Procedures became more 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,*" I not to instruct, show or teach the noble art, usage and science of making the *Gros verre en table* except to family of Hennezel, Thiéry, Thisac or Bisseval. Even as late as 1666 Jerome Hennezel swore this oath on 28th August at Darney. 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 glassworkers. Thysacs, Hennezel, 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 secret. So those with this knowledge could demand a premium price and their goods were much sought after. Those 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 looked at the market for his glass. He 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 François's region. The Italians also made mirrors of quality.

François decided it would be a good exchange to give his know-how for the know-how of Murano. So he quit the Vôge in 1492 and requested leave from the Republic of Venice to live in Murano. He asked to be allowed to exercise his art there. Jealous of the work of a young Thysac, a Lorrainer, the glassworkers of Murano made it impossible. 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.

However one of them named George Ballarino, himself a glassworker of Murano, 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. Amazed by these samples, the Doge gave okay for François de Thysac to settle there. François lived in the home of George Ballarino.

François, taught his host the mysteries of the Lorraine methods. François was indeed a descendant of the four grand families of the glassworkers of the Vôge, born at the glasshouse Thiétrys in the meadows near Hennezel, around 1472. It seems that Jehan de Thysac was his father.

François betrayed his vow. He gave away to George Ballarino the rare secrets he'd learned from his clan. In exchange however, the Italian taught 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. Ballarino 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 Ballarino grew and his activities clearly enhanced his commercial stature. He became managing agent of the guild of glassworkers of Murano, surely with 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".

Returning to the Vôge, around 1500, François found himself ostracised by his family. The situation was so bad that 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 his appetite for Italian methods.

¹ See page_100 this volume.



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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.

CREATION AU PROFIT DE FRANÇOIS DE THYSAC DU SITE DE LA FRIZON, 18 OCTOBRE 1505¹

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 himse lf 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.

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 Frizon. 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 t hings 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.

¹ AD Meurthe-et-Moselle, B 643, acte n° 14, copie collationnée à l'original.

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, the master glassworker of la Frizon could only recruit his personnel from outside his family. He was even forced to teach his new profession to yet another stranger. To get help, he recruited a man named Dardenet, who originally came from the county of Montbéliard, in Burgundy.

His initiative in bringing in another outsider was totally provocative to the corporate rules of the 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 then took the name "glasshouse Dardenet". In 1549, the team of glassworkers 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. ¹

Time solved all the problems. Everything was eventually arranged and the newcomer later established some alliances, even marriages, with the families of glassworkers of the Vôge.

¹ M. M. B 5073