

VAL SAINT LAMBERT

by Alan Thornton

The Belgian company Val Saint Lambert are probably most famous for their cut crystal ware, but they have made a wide variety of paperweights throughout the last 150 years. The main factory is based in Seraing, near Liège, on the River Meuse, but for much of their history they owned additional glass factories. One was nearby at Jemeppe (from 1883 to 1952) and two were near Namur: d'Herbatte (from 1879 to 1935) and Jambes (from 1880 to 1931). The main factory produced heavy lead crystal items, Herbatte used 'semi-crystal', Jambes made lamp glasses, and Jemeppe a range of products. Paperweights were made at Seraing, and almost certainly at Jemeppe and Herbatte on occasions.

The 19th century paperweights are probably the largest, and include various designs with millefiori canes, lampwork, and sulphides - sometimes combined. One common feature is a multi-coloured torsade, often set so low in the dome it is hidden from above (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Typical multi-coloured VSL torsade

Another characteristic is the flat ground base which shows clear signs of the thick encasement glass, much as if one polished down the base of a Whitefriars paperweight (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Typical VSL base

Below are six examples of Val Saint Lambert paperweights from the 19th Century, showing typical designs that can include millefiori canes, sulphides, plaques, and twisted ribbons, set on a range of solid coloured or mica grounds.



Figure 3. Heart plaque



Figure 4. Spaced millefiori



Figure 5. Religious sulphide



Figure 6. Three pigeons sulphide



Figure 7. Butterfly design. Courtesy of Peter Pommerencke (farfalla-Paperweights)



Figure 8. Double pansy design. Courtesy of Paul Dunlop (The Dunlop Collection)

Pansies are a popular design, usually single, but pairs are known, as shown in Figure 8 above. Grounds vary, as does the glass: it can be the heavy lead crystal of the Seraing factory, but some are made of lighter glass, probably from Jemeppe.

Most of the 19th century weights are around 4 inches in diameter, but there

are some that are nearer 3 1/4 inch diameter. Whether these were made at the same time is not clear. Figure 9 shows 13 Val Saint Lambert designs.

There are some large Val Saint Lambert style paperweights that have various colours of glass swirled into a white ground (eg Figure 10): these have been attributed to the Herbatte factory.



Figure 9. Thirteen Val Saint Lambert paperweights. Image courtesy of Peter Pommerencke (farfalla-Paperweights)

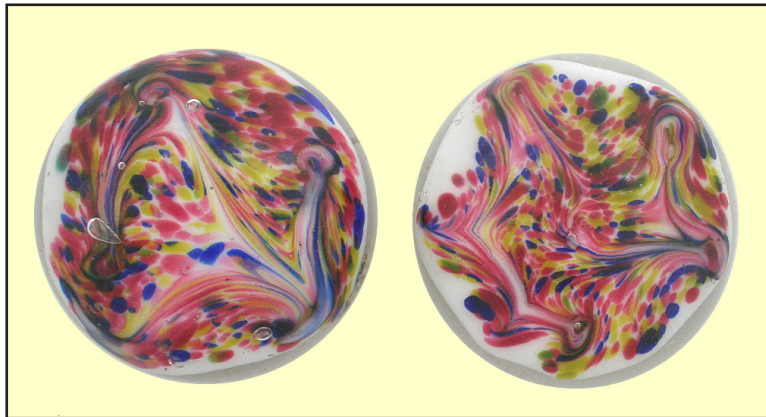


Figure 10. A matched pair of VSL swirl designs in lead crystal, possibly from the Herbatte factory. Purchased in Liège. Diameter 4 inches, concave polished bases.



Figures 11, 12. Typical VSL designs from the early 20th Century

By the 1900s, the style of the weights had changed, the catalogues showing heavily cut and faceted overlay designs (Figures 11 and 12). These sometimes have monograms engraved on a flat top facet (eg Figure 13 on page 14).

Val Saint Lambert continued to produce paperweights after the Second World War, and millefiori paperweights appeared from time to time. One of their more innovative workers was Louis Leloup, who worked at Val Saint Lambert from 1947 to 1970. He produced various abstract designs and deep cameo work paperweights, before leaving to start his

own studio in 1971.

Some millefiori weights were made in the 1960s and 1970s (eg Figures 14 and 15 - see next page), often scratch signed on the base with 'VSL' or 'Val St Lambert'. Some millefiori paperweights very much in the Murano style were on sale when I visited the factory in 2007, though the majority were cut overlay designs (Figure 16). The most recent items designated as paperweights are made of clear crystal.

Whilst Val Saint Lambert might be the best known of the Belgian factories,



they were not the only one to produce paperweights. There are many different



such as Chênée in the 1992 book 'Presse-papiers de prestige, Presse-papiers populaire' by Jacques Parisse; several of his relatives had worked in the Liège glass factories.

Left. Figure 13. Early 20th C VSL with monogram
 Right. Figure 14. VSL paperweight from the 1960s - 1970s.
 Below. Figure 15. VSL paperweight from the 1960s - 1970s
 Bottom right. Figure 16. Facetted overlay paperweights on sale in 2007



designs from other factories, including ice pick flowers, harlequin bubble designs, encapsulated sulphides and cap badges, green glass dumps, frit designs, and some high quality millefiori pieces from Chênée. These deserve an article of their own.

Alan Thornton

There is a lot of information about Val St Lambert and other Liège glassworks



The history of Vonèche and the Val St Lambert factory

Many glass lovers and paperweight collectors have heard of the Belgian maker Val St Lambert. Fewer know about the relevance of the great Vonèche factory, and the role that the creation of Belgium played in the history of antique paperweights.

The story begins in 1802, when a French industrialist Henri D'Artigues was encouraged by Napoleon to leave Saint-Louis and buy a run-down glassworks at Vonèche. The site had been in the Southern Netherlands, but this area had been annexed by France in 1795. D'Artigues began making lead crystal glass, and was so successful that within 10 years the Vonèche factory was the most important crystal producer in the

French empire. Two key workers were François Kemlin (a chemist) and Auguste Lelièvre (an engineer).

Things started to go wrong in 1815, following the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. The Southern Netherlands was re-united with the Dutch Republic, so Vonèche was no longer in France. There were now import duties on its goods, and it lost much of its French market.

In 1816, D'Artigues negotiated with the French king to start a new crystal factory in France. He bought the Verrerie de St Anne, in the small town of Baccarat, and renamed it the 'Verrerie de Vonèche à Baccarat' - a name it kept until 1843.

failed, not because of technical or managerial issues, but because of political change. However, its demise led directly to the creation of lead crystal factories at Baccarat and at Val St Lambert.

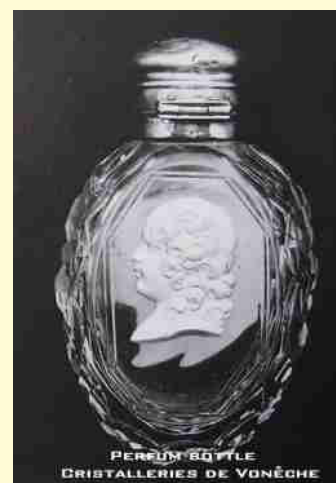
An interesting question is whether Vonèche ever made any paperweights. We do not know the answer, but they were probably operating a little too early for any millefiori work. That said, sulphide paperweights were being made in France in the 1790s, well before Apsley Pellat got involved, and Vonèche are credited with making high quality sulphide items such as the perfume bottle shown below. But as with much early attribution, confident verification is difficult if not impossible.



Henri D'Artigues

In 1825 Kemlin and Lelièvre decide to start a new factory near Liège, buying the old abbey building at Val St Lambert. Some workers transferred from Vonèche, and began producing lead crystal items in 1826. Not long afterwards Vonèche was pushed into terminal decline: the creation of Belgium by the revolution of 1831 saw the French speaking south and Flemish speaking north territories established as an independent country. Vonèche now lost its market share in the Low Countries too, and closed shortly afterwards.

What had been the biggest and most successful crystal producer in Europe



Vonèche sulphide flask