

INTERNATIONAL INTERESTS

Pernille Nielsen



Traces of Ancient Notaries

Between my graduating from the BC Notaries Preparatory Course in June 2002 and taking up my commission as Notary for Bowen Island, I spent six weeks in Europe with my 15-year-old daughter Anya, my sister, and her 16-year-old daughter. We enjoyed a week in Scotland, a week in Venice, and a month in Denmark visiting our relatives. My parents both immigrated from Denmark and we still have many aunts, uncles, and cousins there.

Just outside of Venice lay the islands of Burano and Murano. Burano is famous for its lace-making; Murano is the centre of a very old tradition of glass-blowing—still the main industry on the island. Venetian glass is world-famous; antique Venetian glass chandeliers hang in castles and palaces all over Europe, especially in Italy.

In the exhibits of ancient glass, I noticed an interesting sign, about a foot square, that explained some of the history and background of glass-making in the area. It referred to a document dated AD 982 and signed by a glass-maker. The signature, the sign said, had been witnessed by a Notary! That Notary had witnessed the document over 1000 years ago. That impressed me very much!

In the Fall of 2003, I again had the opportunity to travel to Europe. My friend and I flew to Rome, then took the train to the Cinque Terre, Pisa, Florence, and Venice, spending a few days in each place.

During our stay in Rome, we visited the Colosseum and Ancient Rome, Vatican City Museums, the Sistine Chapel, and St. Peter's Basilica. We were

also privileged to see the excavations of St. Peter's tomb under St. Peter's Basilica, a tour only a relatively small number of people receive permission to take.

As we walked down the steps toward the excavations, the tour guide stopped beside a model of a beautiful, ancient, pillared building; it was a model of a sumptuous Early Christian basilica erected on the spot by Constantine in honour of the Apostle Peter in the year AD 324.

The building was later torn down (approximately 1100 years later!) to make way for subsequent renovations and alterations by a variety of master craftsmen including Bramante, Michelangelo, and Bernini—the designers and builders of the present day St. Peter's Basilica.

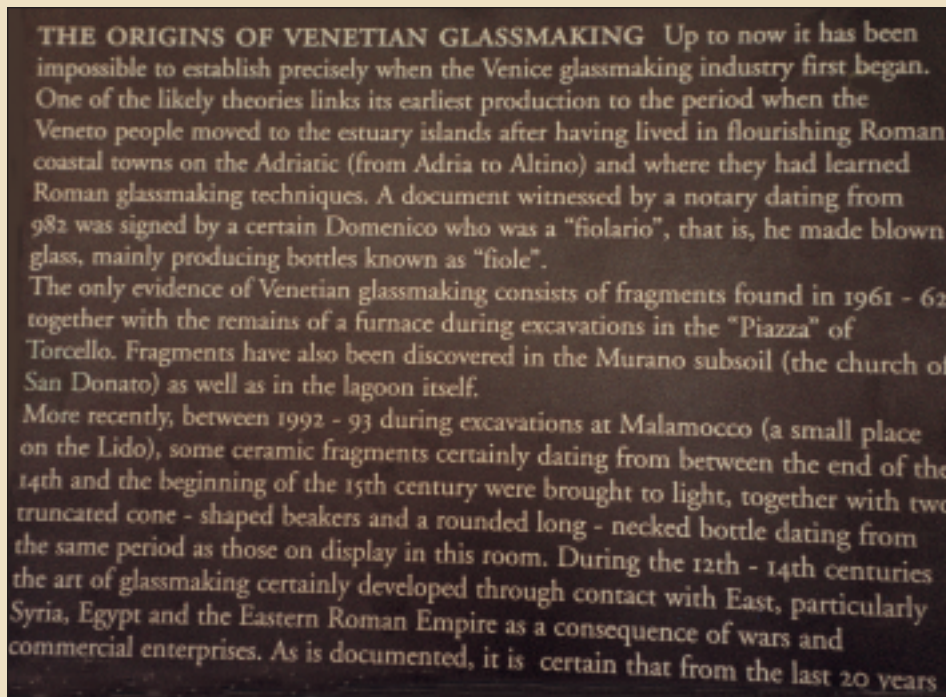
Our guide said the reason they could make such an accurate model was due to detailed notes and drawings made by one of the Pope's Notaries, a man called Grimaldi. Because few other records survived, the notes made by this Notary have been extremely valuable to historians.

During our BC Notary Preparatory Course, we learned some of the history of Notaries in BC and Canada but these two references to ancient Notaries in Italy really opened my eyes to the respected and important role Notaries have played in many countries over thousands of years.

I am looking forward to discovering more about the history of Notaries when I go to Greece in 2005. ▲

Pernille Nielsen is a Notary Public practising on Bowen Island.

pnielsen@notaries.bc.ca



Sign at the Antique Glass Museum on Murano . . .