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Classic French Paperweights: What We Knew Then, What we Know Now

I am going to speak about antique French paperweights--more specifically, about what we knew then, and what we know now. The “then” of course being 1953, the founding date of the PCA, and the “now” being the fiftieth anniversary of that founding. I did not choose the subject; it was pointedly requested of me. All objections as to speaking on any subject related to France at this politically charged time were rejected. But I will refer you to Fig.1, which is an antique French paperweight. I think it Clichy, but perhaps it is Bacca-rat.

In any case, this beautifully rendered sulphide of George Washington was made by Frenchmen who lived 150 years ago, and who greatly admired the United States because of our Revolution and the Democracy it established, since it represented their highest goals for their country. They thus greatly admired our founding fathers such as Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. They therefore made numerous paperweights with sulphides such as this one. That was some seven generations ago. Different Frenchman live today, and they will be discussed somewhat later, as they play a role in “what we knew then,” but it is sufficient for now to separate the French weight makers from the current citizens of France. I beg you to do so.

As to the subject of “what we knew then,” I immediately realized (who wouldn’t) that I was not there “then” and so have no first hand knowledge of what “we” knew. Since I started collecting in 1973, some 20 years after “then,” I have no paperweight memory which covers that time. But, I thought, that will not be too difficult; I will simply re-view the books and whatever other published literature that exists from that era and check out “what they knew.”

And so with high hopes and good spirits, I started formulating a list of the books that existed at the time. Alas, there is no 1953 compendium of “what we knew.” No book on paperweights was published in 1953. So I decided to start with Mrs. Bergstrom’s 1940 book, which was followed by the 1947 edition, not much changed, as the big war certainly slowed research in the paperweight arena. This, followed by Imbert and Amic’s book in 1947 and Jokelson’s “Antique French Paperweights” in 1955 should, I reasoned, well bracket the year of interest and give a pretty good picture of “what they knew then.” My Book List, or Bibliography, is in Fig. 2. I then thought I only needed to note all their mistakes in attribution and indicate when these were corrected, and I would have a talk all put together. However, as I worked on the project, I became aware, first, that this amount of detail would be better for a Bulletin article. Pushing along, nonetheless, I finally realized

that only a book could do ample service to such a plethora of information and only a handful of devoted cane students would be interested. An after-lunch crowd would surely fall asleep in record time. Another approach was surely required, so I decided to look only for the amusing incidents in the whole story, and recount those.

For example, Mrs. Bergstrom had two weights in her 1940 book (see Fig. 3) attributed to the “unknown maker PY.” When she found Paul Ysart was alive and well in Scotland, she felt she had been “betrayed” in some way. She then removed the “Unknown Maker PY” weights from her collection and from her 1947 book because she believed “PY” was a master worker of the Classic 1850's era. This revealed that her personality as a collector was not much different from most of us today. She removed the weights from her 1947 book, and must have sold them, for they are not at the Bergstrom-Mahler museum now. Another Ysart, being unsigned, was saved from this fate because she attributed it to “Bristol” and because of this mis-attribution, it is in the museum today. See Fig. 4.

Then, in 1947, the Frenchmen Imbert and Amic made the arrogant statement on page 65 of their book *Presse-Papiers Francais* to the effect that after the French artisans had perfected the art of the paperweight, many others, including the Bohemians and Americans, had attempted to imitate them, but “none of them attained their perfection or *could ever be mistaken for them.*” (emphasis added).

So how about this Bacchus mushroom (Fig. 5)? Or this Gillinder carpet ground with silhouette (Fig. 6), or this New England Glass Co. (NEG) double overlay upright bouquet (Fig. 7) from the collection of the New-York Historical Society? But don't take my word for it--this NEG crown is attributed in the 1984 PCA Bulletin as St. Louis (Fig. 8). It now is offered as NEG by Larry Selman. And more examples are available from our next book, Paul Jokelson's 1955 “Antique French Paperweights.” Figure 9 is an NEG flower on jasper, which Paul mistakenly attributed to St. Louis. In color as in Fig. 10, the NEG flower is nice, and the jasper probably confused Paul. The fine posy on frosted aqua ground in Fig. 11 is NEG also, but Paul thought it St. Louis. In color in Fig. 12 a similar weight shows the beauty which might have confused Paul.

Other examples of weights “*mistaken for them*” can be found in Paul's 1965 book: “One Hundred of the World's Most Important Paperweights.” An NEG cross flower weight (Fig. 13) is ascribed to Baccarat with the note that it is “very skilled work.” These NEG cross flowers were usually very well made, and the quality that impressed Paul can be seen in color in Fig. 14. But by 1965 Paul should have been extremely skeptical of any weight with double swirled latticino being attributed to Baccarat. The NEG bouquet swag of Fig. 15 was so well made that Paul attributed it to St. Louis. Again, these swag bouquets are usually NEG at its best.

What was going on here? It is difficult for us to realize the extent to which quality was attributed to France, as if this were the only necessary clue. Weights of lesser quality were routinely ascribed to America or Bohemia. This can be seen by reading between the lines of Paul's books, and seems to have affected attributions by everyone, I suspect, up until 1969.

The seminal event occurring that year was the publishing of Paul Hollister's book, the *Encyclopedia of Glass Paperweights*. Hollister was a professional artist with an eye for detail, the memory to record it, and the ability to describe it clearly. Instead of quality, he focused on the details of design and implementation that are useful for identification. He showed canes and cane shapes (Fig. 16 for example), useful because they are created by tools (floor molds) that can be peculiar to each factory. The vein patterns of leaves in flower weights, also created by tools, are repetitive and attributable to a particular factory. He discusses densities, as these relate to the glass formulations, which tend to be consistent to a factory. Since Hollister, then, the experts try to attribute weights to various sources based upon the details which he defined. This is probably the most significant thing that we know now, that they did not know, or at least did not sufficiently emphasize, "then." George Kuller's books on identifying millefiore and lampwork paperweights follow this lead, and continue the trend to making attribution more of a science, rather than an art. These three books are essential for the library of the antique weight collector.

Hollister's error figures are quiet impressive (Fig. 17), to some extent because we agree with him. But something is missing: St. Mande! Careful weight study by George Kuller finds St. Mande (not St. Maude, which is only one letter different as reported in the 1991 Bulletin). The signature cane (Fig. 18) was the undeniable clue, but much work by an actual Frenchman nailed down the factory and shop location and found the records proving they made millefiore. In the 1999 Bulletin, George provided the cane shapes that allow positive attribution (Fig. 19).

What of the future? As Yogi Berra said, it is risky to make predictions, especially about the future. But please study for a moment my Fig. 20. These weights are both called Pantin because it is convenient to do so. But they are irreconcilably different in density, leaf patterns, stem design, and profile. Dwight Lanmon, then with the Corning Museum, studied the density of the roses and fruit weights normally attributed to Pantin and found them to be in the middle of the range for Bohemian weights. In an article in the 1989 Bulletin, he concluded, and I agree, there is no reason to continue to call them French. Which, by the way, we were only doing because they were of high quality. Hopefully, more study will discover the skilled workmen who made the roses and fruits that we know in our hearts are not Pantin, but we continue to call them that out of convenience.



Figure 1. Antique French Paperweight of George Washington

Bibliography

Bergstrom, Evangeline
Old Glass Paperweights.....1940

Bergstrom, Evangeline
Old Glass Paperweights..... 1947

R. Imbert and Y. Amic
Les Presse-Papiers Francais.....1948

Paul Jokelson
Antique French Paperweights.....1955

Paul Jokelson
One Hundred of the Most Important
Paperweights.....1965

Evelyn Campbell Cloak
Glass Paperweights of the Bergstrom
Art Center.....1966

Paul Hollister
Encyclopedia of Glass Paperweights.....1969

Paul Hollister and Dwight Lanmon
Paperweights:Flowers which clothe the
meadows.....1978

Geraldine Casper
Glass Paperweights of the Bergstrom-
Mahler Museum.....1989

The Bulletins of the Paperweight Collectors
Association.....1984,1991,1997,1999

Figure 2. Bibliography

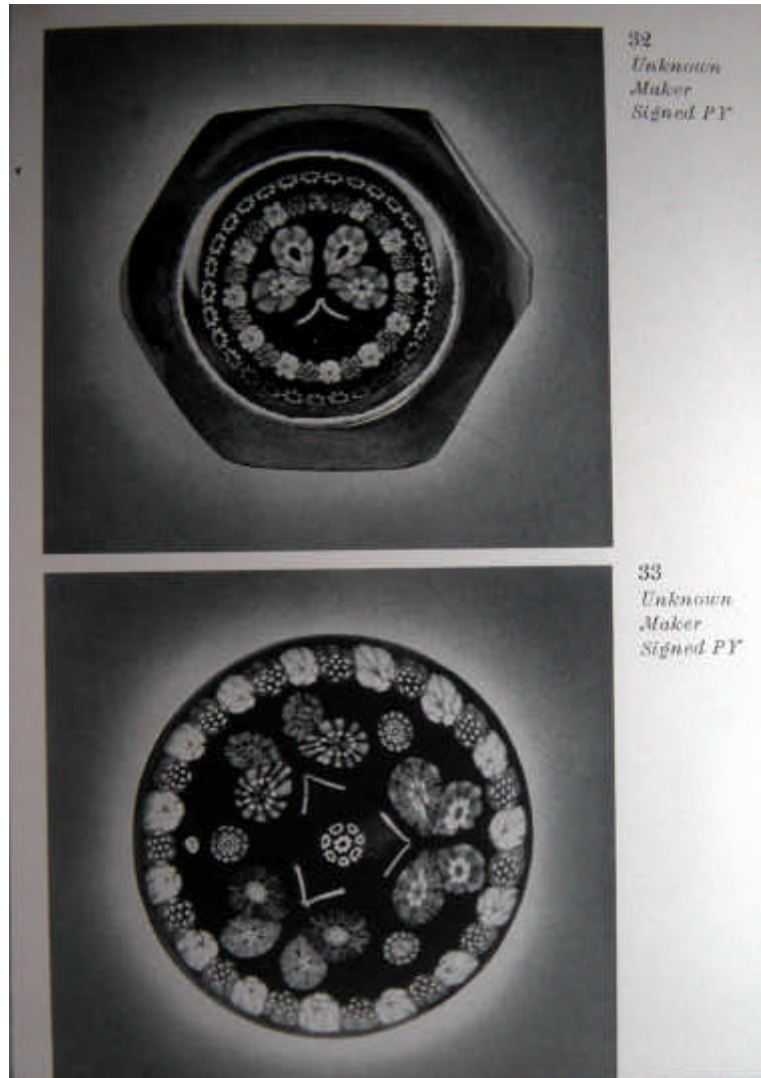


Figure 3. Bergstrom's Unknown Maker PY



Figure 4. Ysart Identified as 'Bristol'

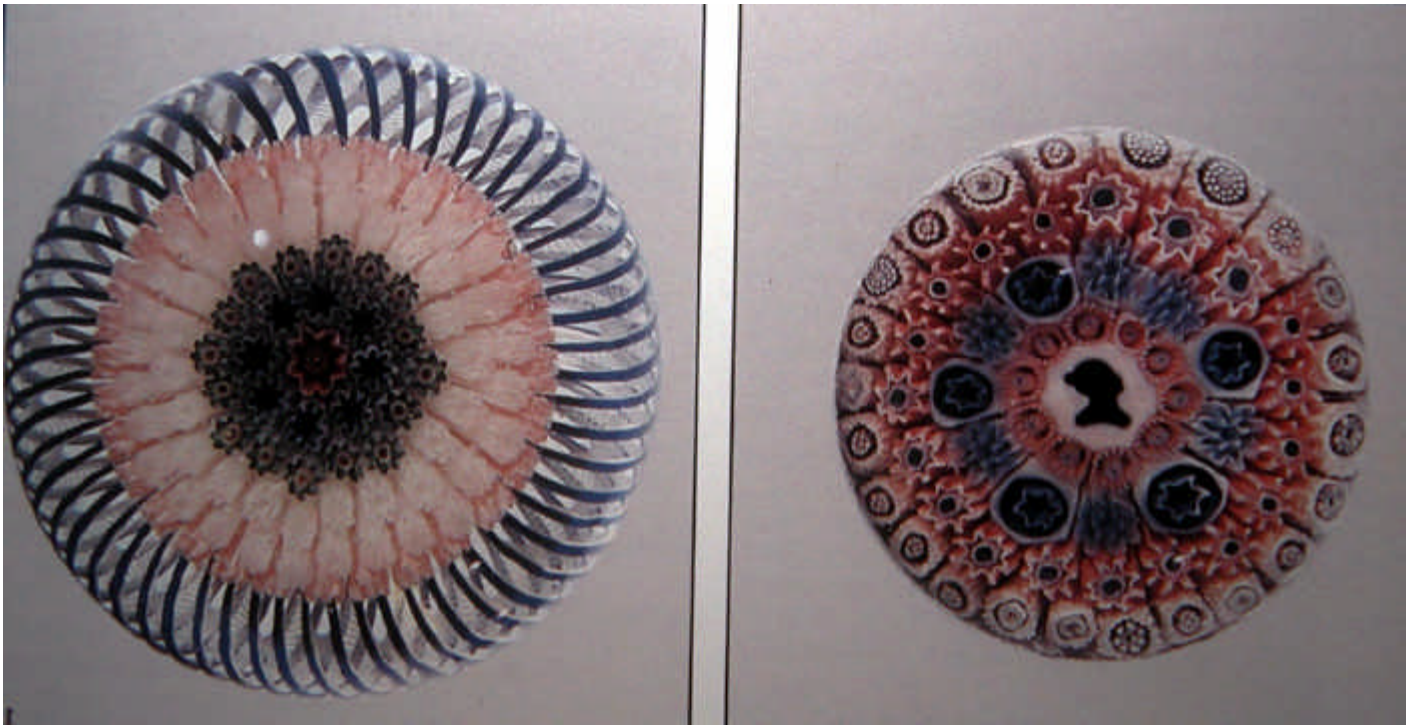


Figure 5. Bacchus Mushroom



Figure 6. Gillinder Carpet Ground with Silhouette



Figure 7. NEGC Double Overlay



Figure 8. NEGC Crown

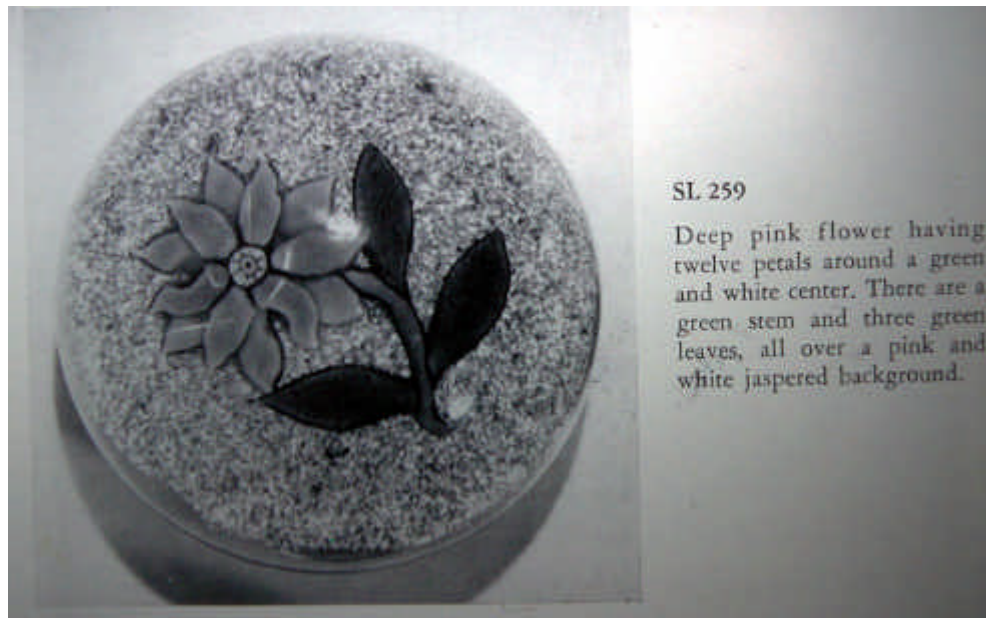


Figure 9. NEGC Flower on Jasper



Figure 10. Color Version of NEGC Flower on Jasper

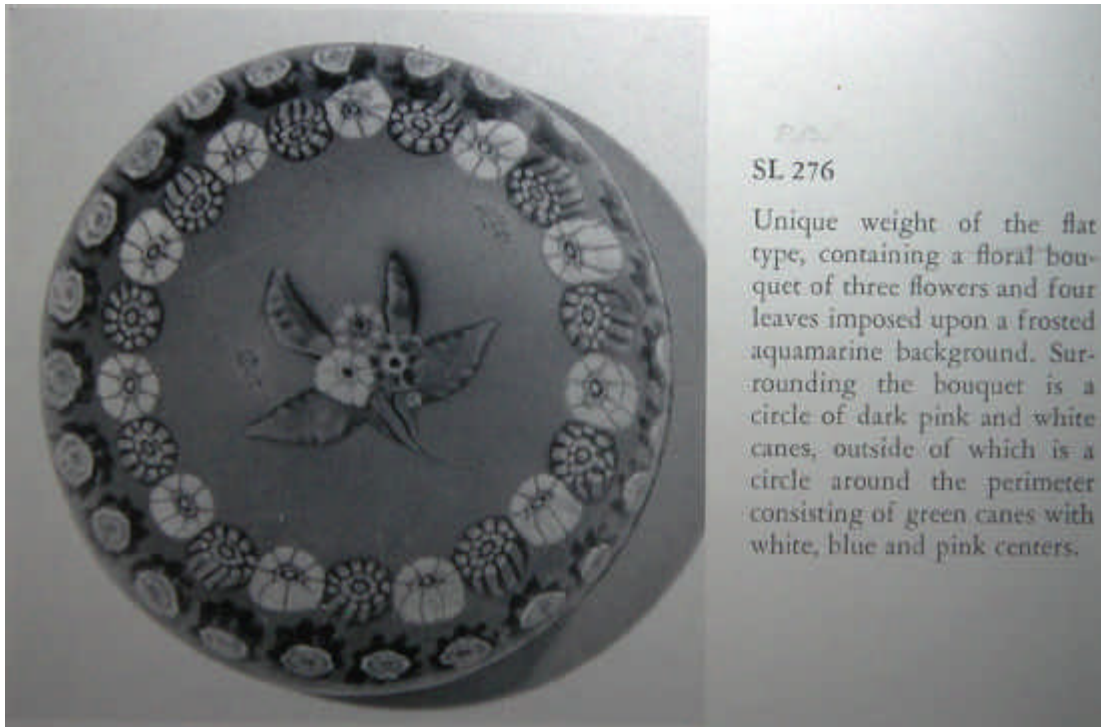


Figure 11. Misidentified NEGC Posy Weight



Figure 12. Similar NEGC Posy In Color



Figure 13. Misidentified NEGC Weight from 100 Most Important



Figure 14. NEGC Cross Weight



Figure 15. Another Misidentified NEGC Paperweight

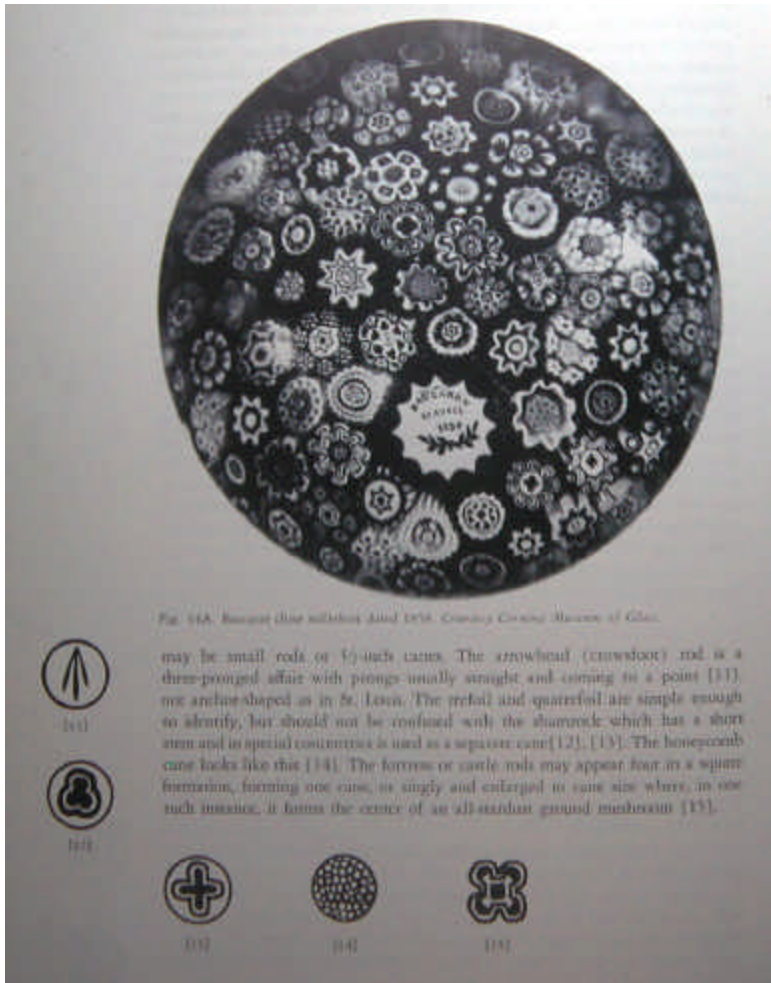


Figure 16. Example of Hollister's Ap-

**The Encyclopedia of Glass
Paperweights**

by Paul Hollister 1969

Illustrated:

Baccarat	
Black and White.....	53 +2 objects
Color.....	20
Total.....	75
Errors (3 lizards prob. Pantin)	
Saint Louis	
Black and White.....	64 +6 objects
Color.....	28
Total.....	98
Errors.....	0
Clichy	
Black and White.....	28 + 1 object
Color.....	20
Total.....	49
Errors.....	0
Error Rate.....	3/222.....1.35%

Figure 17. Hollister's Error Figures

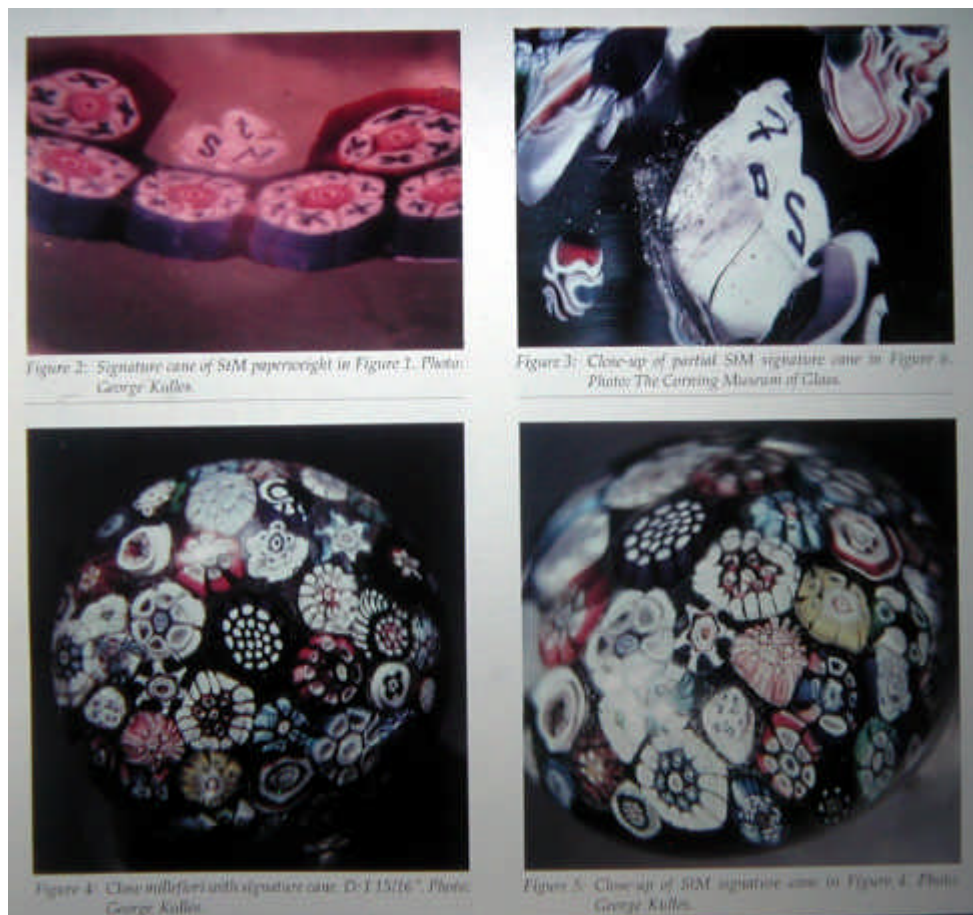


Figure 18. Signature Cane for St. Mandé



Figure 19. From the 1999 PCA Bulletin: George Kuller's St. Mande Cane Types



Figure 20. Paperweights Identified as 'Pantin'