

# Eighteenth century Hanau gold boxes

By Lorenz Seelig

## Introduction

The eighteenth century saw a dynamic increase in the production of luxury goods. Demographic, economic and social developments promoted higher demand and production that brought about a plethora of new types and forms.<sup>1</sup> Like all fancy goods, the style of gold boxes followed quickly changing fashions.<sup>2</sup> Gold boxes, artistically demanding, of precious material and produced applying complex technology, were mostly made to contain snuff. Always of small format for hand-held use and carried in one's pocket, they were fashionable accessories of a personal, intimate character.<sup>3</sup> They were also desirable collectibles.<sup>4</sup>

Since about 1725 Paris had been the undisputed center for the production of European gold boxes.<sup>5</sup> This production was the domain of relatively few specialists bound by strict controls from their guild as well as from the tax collectors. The gold fineness was confirmed by the guild's stamp of guarantee in the form of a letter which changed every year. In addition to the tax collector's charge and discharge marks, an object was stamped with the goldsmith's master mark, mostly consisting of his initials.

## **Prestige marks previously accredited to Geneva**

For a long time research on eighteenth-century gold boxes concentrated on Paris production because of its reliably documented official marks.<sup>6</sup> But it was just this solid base that prohibited critical connoisseurship. Parisian style, early neo-classical snuff boxes were seen as authentic Paris products. Only in the 1960s were questions raised that many of these boxes bore marks seemingly similar to Paris stamps but deviating in details. Abraham Kenneth Snowman coined the term "prestige marks" or *poinçons de prestige* but without pursuing the subject consequently.<sup>7</sup> In 1981 Serge Grandjean undertook an analysis of these "prestige marks";<sup>8</sup> he regarded gold boxes so-marked to be of Swiss production – possibly originating in Geneva. The assignment of a Geneva origin was not based on research of archival sources but on the seemingly logical theory that this metropolis situated near the French border would have been an ideal production place for these luxury goods. They could be – either legally imported to France or smuggled illegally – competitively priced compared to French products. Another reason for assigning Geneva as production place of these Parisian-style fancy goods was the fact that many Protestant French artisans had fled to this francophone artisan center.

The production of luxury goods in Paris and in the Calvinistic city republic were completely different.<sup>9</sup> Geneva manufacturers in the absence of official or guild supervision worked according to a self-regulated system. Unlike the Paris competition, this allowed for more modern production methods. The so-called *fabrique* consisted of the *horlogerie*, the fabrication of clocks and musical automata, traditionally of great importance in Geneva, and the *bijouterie*, which included the production of gold boxes. Geneva production was based on an intricate network of specialists in which the excellent enamel painters were held in special esteem. Locally produced gold boxes were sold by dealers, the *négociants*, throughout Europe, mostly in fairs. Parisian goldsmiths sold their snuff boxes to local luxury goods dealers, the *marchands-merciers*,<sup>10</sup> whose extravagant shops were patronized by a fashion-conscious clientele.

It is difficult to assign these snuff boxes to Geneva, since there are no town marks that could point to a Geneva origin. An analysis of forms is not possible either, since there are no definite stylistic characteristics. Still a critical examination must prove wrong the theory that gold boxes with prestige marks were made in Geneva. The initials of master and factory stamps of the prestige marks do not match any of the known Geneva *bijoutiers*. One of the few definitely assigned



eighteenth-century Geneva master marks is the one of Jean-George Rémond<sup>11</sup> (1752-1830), which shows no similarity to Parisian master marks. One of Rémond's earliest known works – a snuff box dating to the 1780s in the Khalili Collection – resembles Parisian snuff boxes made in the 1770s.<sup>12</sup>

As the various snuff boxes bearing prestige marks obviously could not have their origin in Geneva, where else could they have been made? The biography of the previously mentioned Jean-George Rémond provides a first clue. The *bijoutier* is first mentioned in Geneva only in 1783; he was born in 1752 in Hanau, Hesse, into a family of Protestant artisans who had moved to Hanau in the seventeenth century.

### **The bijouterie production in Hanau**

Now we have to recall some of Hanau's history.<sup>13</sup> In 1597, the medieval town of Hanau am Main was enlarged by the addition of a new town called Neu-Hanau built specifically to attract Protestant refugees from France and the Netherlands. This new town, with its grid planning, was Germany's first major 'Huguenot town', its greatest asset being its proximity to Frankfurt am Main, where Germany's leading trade fair took place. The initial flourish of arts and crafts in Hanau in the early seventeenth century, however, was followed by a period of steady decline. When Hanau was passed to the Landgraviate of Hesse-Cassel in 1736, the county's new ruler Prince Regent William (1682-1760) – who later became Landgrave William VIII – immediately threw himself into the challenge of developing Hanau's economic status.<sup>14</sup> Before the year was over he had issued letters of patent for the promotion of trade and industry, promising a number of privileges and substantial financial incentives to anyone willing to set up in business in Hanau. These were widely advertised, both in German and French. The benefits included exemption from taxation charges, as well as freedom of trade and of religion. As well as textile workers, who specialized in fashion and fancy goods, the new privileges in Hanau attracted *bijoutiers*, French-speaking jewellers, mostly Huguenots, who were motivated by the prospect of financial gain. Within a few years, Hanau's *bijouterie* business was booming; between 1737 and 1764 some thirty-two *bijoutiers* – some of whom operated large manufactories – claimed the privileges set out by the sovereign. For a town with only eleven and a half to twelve thousand inhabitants, *bijouterie* was a very large industry indeed.

Hanau's industry of luxury goods enjoyed its first golden age in the 1760s. In 1764, the main producers of the area clubbed together to form the *Gesellschaft der Neu-Hanauer Bijoutiers*, or the Neu Hanau Society of *bijoutiers*, introducing its own regulations to establish the independence of the official craft guilds (which in those days still held considerable sway in Germany), and thus preventing intervention by the authorities. The society's statutes included several regulations pertinent to this article: for example, the restriction of the number of journeymen and apprentices that could be hired was lifted, allowing master craftsmen to recruit as many extra hands as they required for business, and clearing the way for factory-style production.

The regulations over the standard of gold became especially important: the use of inferior gold was outlawed to prevent any damage being done to Hanau's reputation. Hanau's goldsmiths had to work with gold of 18 carats or more; the 18-carat items were to be marked with a shell, and the 19-carat items with a bird's head. These marks were deliberately chosen to resemble the Parisian discharge marks of 1756-1762 and 1750-1756, and served to identify the standard of gold for internal purposes as well as to maintain some affinity with Parisian hallmarks. In fact, sanctioning the production of items using 18- and 19-carat gold gave Hanau's manufacturers a distinct economic advantage over their competitors in Paris, who had to abide by a standard of 20.25 carats. Any gold work produced in Hanau had to be struck not just with a standard mark, but also with a *bijoutier's* mark that would facilitate the identification of the maker. The decision to dispense with a town mark, however, can be traced back to an agreement made in 1752 between the government and the *bijoutiers*. Although the government had initially insisted that all precious metal objects leaving the town should be complete with the town mark of Hanau, the *bijoutiers* successfully argued that their work could not be sold as Parisian by merchants in other cities if it displayed a mark from Hanau.



In Hanau authentic Parisian marks were imitated with the intention to deceive – without achieving a total identity with the French patterns – possibly to avoid court actions. In modern terminology this would be a case of “trademark piracy”.<sup>15</sup> From antiquity seals, signs or stamps marking goods had the function to guarantee their quality and possibly also workmanship, but just as old was the practice of counterfeiting by imitating seals, signs or marks. Some of the better known examples are the marks of weapons’ blades, the quality of which had essentially existential importance. To name just one significant example: the Passau Wolf, a mark used on Passau blades, was also used for blades made at other locations. As regards the eighteenth century, the imitation of the sword mark of the Meißener Porzellan-Manufactur should be mentioned. In porcelain research these imitated marks are described as “foreign types with a likelihood of confusion”.<sup>16</sup> This was practiced by manufacturers “who did not dare to produce outright fakes but wanted to benefit by using a famous mark more or less assuming the ignorance of the consumer.”<sup>17</sup> The same can be said for the imitation of marks on Hanau gold boxes. While other trademark imitators worked in a grey area shying away from any written documentation, the reasons for imitation of French marks were openly discussed in Hanau.

Besides regulating their standards of gold, the *bijoutiers* of Hanau also went to great lengths to raise the artistic quality of their goods. The Hanau Drawing Academy, or *Zeichenakademie*, was established by the Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel at the request of the *bijoutiers* in 1772.<sup>18</sup> This gave young craftsmen the chance to become accomplished draughtsmen in their hometown, and so spared them the considerable costs of studying abroad. Drawing, designing, painting, modeling and engraving were considered crucial for the students’ artistic development and the refinement of their taste.

In the 1770s, Hanau’s leading *bijoutiers* took a decisive step towards maintaining the high standard already achieved by the town’s gold box makers, which depended on the quality of the boxes’ engine-turned decoration, or *guillochage*. Etienne Flamant, a *guillocheur* from Geneva, had worked for several *bijoutiers* in Hanau since 1762. Flamant was in possession of a *guilloche*, or lathe-turning machine, of his own invention, the likes of which had never before been seen in Hanau. The gold workers of Geneva regarded Flamant as so indispensable to their own production that they tried to woo him back, offering exceptionally favourable terms for his work. He was promised an annual supply of circa 624 gold boxes, which he was to decorate with his *guilloché*. Flamant presented this offer from Geneva to Hanau on 28 September 1773, which led to five of Hanau’s large *bijouterie* manufacturers attempting to negotiate their own terms with Flamant. Flamant decided to stay in Hanau, albeit for a high price: one of his conditions was that the manufacturers would absorb his considerable debts. Astonishingly, the contract signed on 15 November 1773 (Fig.1/2), a six-year term ending in 1779, and perhaps later extended, was less favourable than the offer from Geneva. Hanau’s *bijoutiers* were to supply Flamant with around 395<sup>19</sup> to 430 gold boxes every year. Specifically, he was to receive 200 to 210 rectangular, oval or octagonal boxes, 120 to 130 boxes *en baignoir ou chasses*, fifty to sixty boxes *pour dames* (slightly smaller boxes), and twenty-five to thirty *journées*, even smaller boxes for daily use. The *guillochage* alone had cost between five and fourteen guilders per box depending on the size of the box. These terms applied only to existing models, but Flamant also undertook to deliver at least two new patterns per year, costing one guilder more. Another important clause in the contract required the *bijoutiers* to provide the *guillocheur* with a steady stream of boxes, so that he would never run out of work. It was apparently Flamant’s responsibility to select the engine-turned decoration for each box, resulting in an inevitable homogeneity.

The contract was signed by Hanau’s leading *bijoutiers*: Les Frères Toussaint promised 160 gold boxes per year, Les Frères Souchay 120 boxes, Daniel Marchand seventy and Esaias Obicker thirty. Jean-Louis Hauchard promised just fifteen boxes, although their overall annual production was likely to have been very substantial indeed, even in comparison with the *orfèvres-joailliers* of Paris (the yearly production of one of the most famous specialist makers of gold boxes, Joseph-Etienne Blerzy [master 1768, died shortly after 1806] is estimated to be about 100 pieces).<sup>20</sup> Unsurprisingly, it soon transpired that Les Frères Toussaint were unable to supply Flamant with the boxes they had promised; we know from a letter of Flamant’s dated 25 November 1774, for example, that by then the Toussaint brothers were al-



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Nous soussignés Freres & Soeurs: Les Freres Toussaint: Daniel Marchand  
Esaié Obieker, et Louis Mauchard Répétiteurs d'une part et moi Etienne Flamant  
Gentilhomme d'autre part, confectionnés qui nous avons passé ensemble ce jourd'hui le contrat  
suivant lequel contracté nous voulons qu'il soit enregistré dans tous les archives y concernées  
pour un chacun de nous pour autant qu'il lui en appartient exactement de bon droit et sans aucun  
Savoir

Art. 1.  
Nous les Freres Souchay, les Freres Toussaint, et moi Daniel Marchand nous nous  
engageons à faire paier au Sieur Flamant au moins sous huit jours la somme de  
100 Louis neufs, ou Carolins qu'il a touchés en fiore jusque au delà de Genève  
sans attendre qu'il nous les remboursera: et nous en paierons jusqu'à ce qu'il les aura  
acquittés les intérêts à raison de six pour cent

Art. 2.  
Le plus nous chargerons la dette que le Sieur Flamant a contracté nous vis le Sieur  
Esaié Fernau et nous serons retirés de chez lui: les biens appartenant au Sieur Flamant  
pour que celui qui se le transporterait dans sa demeure ou Ville, et non pas ailleurs, et les  
lettres de change que Fernau a de Flamant soient renvoyés à ceux qui les ont fournis

Art. 3.  
Nous fournir au Sieur Flamant quatre cent cinquante Tabatières par Annees et grandes  
deux petites selon les qualités et les prix suivants, cependant sans nous engager à un nom bre  
faux de chaque qualité, pourvu qu'il est possible qu'on en fasse plus de grandes que  
de petites et une autre plus de petites que de grandes, nous avons donc mis à peu près  
à quinquante la quantité aller comme suit: en ais sans pourtant nous y  
liés absolument

Savoir

200 à 250 grandes Tabatières quarrées, ou les un à 9 pans à	14
150 à 180 dites à six pans ou à 8 pans à	10
50 à 60 pour dames à	8
25 à 30 petites à	5

Le total de l'engagement sera donc de 800 à 815 pièces selon les prix de dessus  
pour les modèles de usage, et qu'il y aura de ces pièces des nouveaux modèles  
qui seront aux bijoutiers et dont Flamant s'engage de fournir au moins  
à proportion sera augmentés chaque pièce d'un florin, mais tout ce qui aura  
été fait depuis ces nouveaux modèles pendant le cours d'une année entière  
ne paiera que le prix ordinaire

après une plainte entiere & prompte accusation dans toutes ses classes & qualité  
contre les raffacteurs d'encre nous Nous supplions l'illustre Conseil de la  
Regence de la munice de son approbation, et de sa garantie de le faire exécuter  
sans forme de procès sur simple information par un chancelier d'entre nous pour  
autant qu'il lui en appartient dans toute sa forme et teneur  
fait à Hanau le 15 jhr 1770

Les Freres Souchay &  
Les Freres Toussaint  
Daniel Marchand  
Esaié Obieker  
Jean Louis Mauchard  
Etienne Flamant

Les Freres Souchay &  
Les Freres Toussaint  
Daniel Marchand  
Esaié Obieker  
Jean Louis Mauchard  
Etienne Flamant

Les Freres Souchay &  
Les Freres Toussaint  
Daniel Marchand  
Esaié Obieker  
Jean Louis Mauchard  
Etienne Flamant

Paris le 15 Novembre 1773

L.P.

cette copie est son force en tant à l'original qui est  
entre les mains de mes Freres Souchay

Fig. 1/ 2: Excerpt of the contract between Etienne Flamant and five Hanau bijoutiers, 1773, Marburg, Hessisches Staatsarchiv, 81 B 1 78, no.45, fol.68r and 69v, © Marburg, Hessisches Staatsarchiv

ready seventy-nine boxes in arrears. The allegedly poor quality of some of the gold boxes delivered to Flamant, moreover, led to his taking legal action against the *bijoutier* Esaias Fernau (c. 1734-1795), who between 1762 and 1780 shared a *compagnie* with Daniel Marchand.

**Charles and Pierre-Etienne Toussaint**

Gold boxes can today be attributed to all five of these Hanau-based *bijoutiers*, and similarities between them are striking. The brothers Charles (1720-1790) and Pierre-Etienne Toussaint (1726-1805)<sup>21</sup> held a dominant position in Hanau. Of Huguenot descent, the Toussaint brothers arrived in Hanau from Berlin in 1752 – the year in which the *bijoutiers* and the government of Hanau settled the matter of the marks – and formally requested their industry privileges. By 1762 they had several German and foreign craftsmen working for them, including Jean-Jacques Bury (1728-1785) of Strasbourg,<sup>22</sup> the outstanding chaser who had set up business in Hanau in 1758. Two of their most loyal journeymen, Johann Friedrich Bold and Jean D’Ours, had learned their trade in Berlin, and the engraver Paul Scallet, who had worked in Paris for ten years, also came from Berlin. This illustrates the importance of Berlin’s Huguenot-dominated luxury goods industry to Hanau and its rise as a centre for the production of gold boxes.



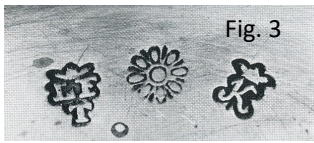


Fig. 3

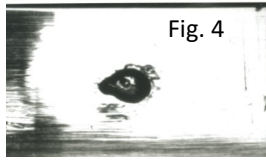


Fig. 4

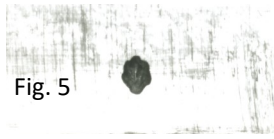


Fig. 5

Fig. 3 Les Frères Toussaint, gold box, marks, Paris, Musée du Louvre (Grandjean 1981, no. 568) © Grandjean 1981

Fig. 4 and 5 Esaias Fernau (?) and Les Frères Toussaint, gold boxes, marks, Regensburg, Fürstliche Schatzkammer Thurn und Taxis (Seelig 1987, nos. 38 and 39) ©Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Karl-Michael Vetters

The numerous gold boxes bearing the maker's mark LFT<sup>23</sup> were made by Les Frères Toussaint, as the company was officially named. (Fig. 3) The boxes marked LFT also usually bear the standard mark of a bird's head or a shell on their outside bezel, (Fig. 4/5) where Parisian discharge marks tended to be struck. The rosette-shaped mark invariably found next to the LFT mark was modelled on the Parisian charge mark of 1768-1774. This is also true of the crowned letter K, found in conjunction with the LFT mark, which was undoubtedly modelled on the Parisian warden's mark for the years 1773-1774. It seems likely that the Toussaint brothers chose their marks (which they would continue to use until the end of the century or later) after signing the agreement with Flamant on 15 November 1773.

Up to now it has not been known if the Toussaint brothers had previously used different marks.<sup>24</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has two stylistically identical, brilliantly chased gold boxes<sup>25</sup> both of which have the same set of marks. (Fig.6—10) The data base of the museum states them to bear the master mark LFT, even though the F is not easily discernible. (Fig.8/10) The three letters are in the same order as the LFT mark used from 1773 on and also feature a crown, yet the form used is decidedly different from that of the later LFT mark. Marks identical to the ones on the New York snuff boxes are also found on various gold boxes made in the 1760s or early 1770s, (Fig.11/12) which the



Fig. 6



Fig. 8



Fig. 7



Fig. 9

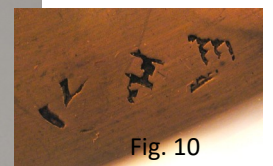


Fig. 10

Fig. 6/7/8 Les Frères Toussaint (?), 1750s to 1760s, snuff box, full view and bottom including marks, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (acc.no. 48.187.422) © New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 9/10 Les Frères Toussaint (?), 1750s to 1760s, snuff box and marks, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, (acc.no. 48.187.471) © New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art



Fig. 11

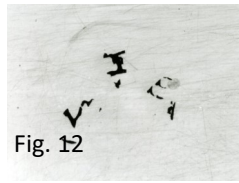


Fig. 12

Fig. 11/12 Les Frères Toussaint (?), third quarter of 18th century, snuff box and marks, Regensburg, Fürstliche Schatzkammer Thurn und Taxis (Seelig 2007, no. 35) © Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Walter Haberland (Fig.11) and Karl-Michael Vettters (Fig. 12)



Fig.13

Fig. 13 Les Frères Toussaint, circa 1780, snuff box, Sotheby's, London, Nov. 9, 2000, lot 66, © Sotheby's.



Fig. 14



Fig.15

Fig. 14/15 Les Frères Toussaint, circa 1780-1785, bonbonnière, lid and bottom, Christie's, Geneva, May 10, 1983, lot 49 © Christie's

author, given the stylistic characteristics, had assigned to Berlin.<sup>26</sup> Since some also bear the bird's head mark, a Hanau origin of these boxes would be feasible. In fact these could be early works by the Toussaints brothers, originally from Berlin, having been made with the help of their Berlin-trained workers to resemble 1750s Parisian gold box patterns after their move to Hanau.<sup>27</sup>

In accordance with this early production date the third of the three marks (Fig.8/10) – in the form of a harrow – imitates the Parisian charge mark of 1756-1762; the first mark, in the form of a bull's head (?), is like the Parisian charge mark of 1750-1756. Therefore it can be assumed that from the middle of the eighteenth century Hanau produced a considerable amount of gold boxes, some even with early neo-classical features. A more modern style took hold as a consequence of the contract with the Geneva *guillocheur* Etienne Flamant. It would be only logical to assume that the Toussaints brothers chose a new set of marks around 1773.

The gold boxes enameled with brown tree agate motifs set on a wave-patterned *guilloché* ground, mostly of golden-yellow translucent enamel, are within the works made since 1773 relatively early creations by the Toussaint brothers. This decoration, used around 1775 by the Parisian *bijoutier* Charles Le Bastier,<sup>28</sup> was immediately adopted by the Toussaints in Hanau. (Fig. 13) Rather more widespread are the LFT boxes enamelled *en plein*, showing marine landscapes *en rose camaïeu* (in crimson). (Fig. 14/15) These boxes may well have been inspired by Parisian gold boxes of the late 1770s, and in most cases depicted a narrow shoreline with a view of ruins or a ship at sea. As discussed later the painting can be attributed to specialist enamel painter Ignatius Peter (or Johann Ignaz) Krafft (1745-1810).



Fig.16



Fig.17

Fig. 16 Les Frères Toussaint, 1780s, snuff box, Christie's, London, June 30, 1982, Highly Important Gold Boxes. The Property of Lord Rothschild, lot 15, © Christie's

Fig. 17 Les Frères Toussaint, 1780s, snuff box, Christie's, Geneva, November 15/16, 1994, lot 1, © Christie's

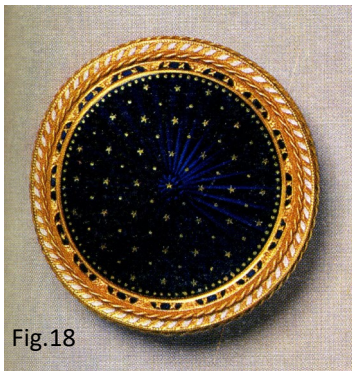


Fig.18



Fig.19

Fig. 18 Les Frères Toussaint, circa 1785-1790, bonbonnière, Christie's, London, July 5, 1977, lot 200, © Christie's

Fig. 19 Les Frères Toussaint, circa 1785-1790, snuff box, Christie's, Geneva, November 15, 1988, lot 218, © Christie's. This lot was sold together with an etui of a Russian dealer from Reval dating to 1790 which also might point to the dating of the box.

Other boxes attributed to the Toussaint brothers feature a form of decoration not used by them until the early 1780s: an engine-turned ground enriched by engraved pellets.<sup>29</sup> (Fig. 16) This design, which became popular in Paris around 1780, was taken a stage further by the Toussaint brothers, who began arranging the pellets into the shape of a four-petalled flower or added stripes to the pattern. The pellets were rendered in a different colour, such as a dark red which contrasted with the green waves of the engine-turned ground. (Fig. 17) Similarly unusual, and rather obtrusive in its impact, is the *vermiculé* decoration of two LFT gold boxes, modelled on those by the Parisian *orfèvres-joailliers* Joseph-Etienne Blerzy and Jean-Joseph Barrière (master 1763, working until 1793) dating from 1781-1782.<sup>30</sup> During this period, the Toussaints also often used large, narrowly spaced white enamel beads – again modelled primarily on boxes by Blerzy – to give their products an opulent, if rather ostentatious, appearance ( up to now these type of gold boxes were seen to be in typical “Swiss taste”). In their later works, the Toussaints also worked with *paillons*, small pieces of gold foil fired between two layers of translucent enamel, another Parisian technique. The brothers also adopted the star-shaped pattern<sup>31</sup> (Fig. 18) and a peacock feather design,<sup>32</sup> both developed in Paris during the 1780s. An oval box auctioned in Geneva in 1988 shows an unusual variation of the peacock motif. (Fig. 19)

In the 1790s the Toussaint brothers produced two exceptional boxes, both struck with the LFT mark, which prove that they also made boxes on commission. The patron of these boxes, Prince Carl Anselm of Thurn und Taxis (1733-1805), accumulated a very fine collection of gold boxes at his seat in Regensburg, documented in an inventory in 1796. The collection is now housed in the Princely Treasury or *Fürstliche Schatzkammer* Thurn und Taxis in Regensburg, a branch of the Bavarian National Museum in Munich since 1998. Most of Carl Anselm's acquisitions were purchased on his be-