Fig. 5, The Töbing Cup

Treasures From the Celle Residence in the Schroder Collection

By :

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This article is based on a paper given at a conference at the Residenz in Celle, Germany, on 27 February 2014. "Silberpolitik" als dynatische Strategie*, celebrated the return of three magnificent silver objects purchased at the sale of the Yves St Laurent collection in Paris that until the eighteenth century had formed part of the hereditary silver holdings of the dukes of Braunschweig-Lüneburg at Celle.*

In 1838 the states of Great Britain and Hanover, brought together by the accession of elector Georg Ludwig of Hanover as George I of Great Britain in 1714, were once more separated. Under Salic law Hanover could only be ruled by a man and, with the accession of Queen Victoria, it was inherited by the eldest surviving son of George III, Ernest Augustus, Duke of Cumberland (1771-1851). The Hanoverian lands had been extended in 1705 through a dynastic marriage to include the territories of the electors of Braunschweig-Lüneburg and with this had come a substantial collection of silver, many pieces of which had been given over the generations to the dukes as *Huldigungsgeschenke*, or homage gifts, by individuals, cities or guilds. In 1838 these holdings, swelled by English silver brought to the royal residence in Hanover, became the property of King Ernest. When in turn the kingdom of Hanover was annexed by Prussia in 1866, they were taken into exile by King George V of Hanover to Gmunden in Austria. In 1924 a substantial part of these were sold to an Austrian dealer and dispersed on the collectors' market. Among the pieces sold at this time were several objects subsequently acquired by my great grandfather, Baron Bruno Schroder.

The Schroder pieces (see figs. 1-5) are all magnificent princely objects from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and their acquisition marked an important turning point in the growth of the collection. The collection was formed over two generations between about 1870 and 1930 and, until the mid 1920s, had largely been made up of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century domestic silver. Over some three or four years from 1924, however, Bruno Schroder, acquired a whole group of objects made for display that completely changed the character of the collection. Among these were several pieces formerly housed in the Residenz at Celle, and one that had come to elector Georg Ludwig as a *Huldigungsgeschenk* from the city of Lüneburg.

The collection that was taken to Gmunden was enormous. A complete inventory was compiled in 1923 and a large part sold to (or through) the Viennese dealer Glückselig. He seems to have had some sort of business partnership with Crichton's of London, perhaps because many of the pieces were of English origin. These included a service made for George II, who made frequent visits to Hanover, and plate supplied to Ernest Augustus by the royal silversmiths, Rundell, Bridge and Rundell. Probably for this reason, the London firm also had the opportunity to sell some of the Schatzkammer pieces that appear in the inventory in a section headed *Sogenannte Sideboard-Stücke* ('so-called sideboard pieces').

In the first quarter of the twentieth century Crichton's were the most important firm of silver dealers in London and Baron Schroder had been a client since at least 1917. It was logical, therefore, that they should have offered him the finest of these *Sideboard-Stücke*. Unfortunately there is no surviving correspondence about these purchases and we must assume that the transactions were conducted in person.

The pieces formerly at Celle were not all bought at the same time. First, both in age and in order of acquisition, was a mounted rock-crystal cup (fig. 1) This was acquired in 1924 for the huge sum of £6000 and was followed the next year by a mounted serpentine cup and a splendid drinking horn (figs. 2 and 3), costing together £6600.

Fig. 1

Around this time he also purchased a pair of mother of pearl cups attributed to Christoph Jamnitzer (fig. 4). The latter he did not keep for long; two years later he returned them to Crichton's in part-exchange for a very costly English rock-crystal cup of 1554. The latter came from another German princely collection, the famous *Grünes Gewölbe* ('Green Vault') in Dresden, when part of that collection was sold by the House of Wettin in 1924. The last of the former royal pieces, a cup made in Hamburg, did not come until 1929 and was supplied not by Crichton's but by the Frankfurt dealer, Z. M. Hackenbroch. It cost £7,600.

An important part of the appeal of these objects must have been their provenance. And for a successful German businessman living in England, this had a perfect 'fit'. Apart from the Hamburg cup, they had all belonged to Georg Wilhelm von Braunschweig-Lüneburg before being inherited by his nephew, Georg Ludwig, and subsequently entering the British royal collection. They then descended through four further British reigns before passing to Ernst Augustus. We do not know when the Celle pieces became part of the Braunschweig-Lüneburg inheritance – possibly at different times and from different sources – but the rock-crystal cup (fig. 1) has an engraved cipher of initials that might provide a clue to future researchers .

The pieces themselves are extraordinary examples of Renaissance princely goldsmiths' work and collectively represent many of the key features of this complex and diverse art form. In what ways they do this is a question I will return to a little later but first, I consider some more external aspects of the pieces.

The first, in age as well as acquisition, is the rock-crystal cup (fig. 1). This is unmarked and was described in the

Gmunden inventory as *Deutschland, aus dem Ende des 16. Jahrhundert* ('Germany, from the end of the 16th century'). More recent scholars, however, agree that it was more likely made in Antwerp around the middle of the century. The crystal is large and the mounts of superb quality and great complexity. That said, its condition is not completely original. The most conspicuous change is to the finial, where the vase element has been crushed in and a naked figure on a circular base rather crudely placed on top. We do not know when this happened, but delicate finials were always vulnerable and were often changed. Less seriously, the lower part of the bowl evidently once had pendant pearls or stones which have been lost and the hooks which would have carried them are still in place.


Fig. 2

The next piece in date, the serpentine cup (fig. 2), is struck with a spread eagle mark, perhaps for Frankfurt or Aachen. It is also an impressive and stately object and the finial figure is very splendid. But it is fair to say that in most respects its goldsmiths' work it is less impressive than the Antwerp piece. The stem and bands of cast ornament are stock models that are seen elsewhere. The stem, for example, appears on an English ostrich egg cup in the British Museum and the horizontal bands around the bowl are identical with those on a cup in the Waddesdon Bequest, also in the British Museum and attributed to Nuremberg.

The cups attributed to Christoph Jamnitzer (fig. 4) I have never seen and find it difficult to comment on. They are princely objects, to be sure, although some might consider their proportions a little inelegant. I wonder, indeed, if my great-grandfather, having lived with them for a couple of years, came to find them somewhat unsatisfactory in

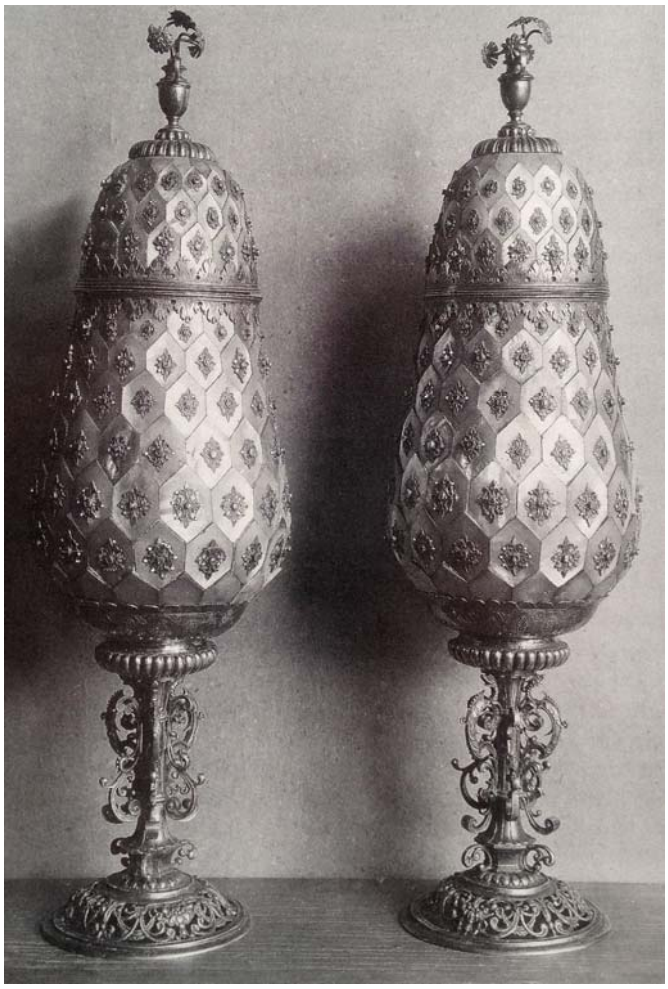

Fig. 4

this respect. As to whether they really should be attributed to Jamnitzer: the leading maker of such vessels was Friedrich Hillebrandt of Nuremberg and indeed one such cup by him in the Angwandte Kunst Sammlung in Kassel has a foot of identical design to this.

The Hamburg cup is marked by the goldsmith, Dirich Utermarke. Hamburg, in a sense, was home to my family, so this must have had a special resonance for my great-grandfather. In general shape it is of a very familiar type and the profile of the bowl is a standard Renaissance vase form that was established quite early in the sixteenth century. Its ornament, too, is quite standard for its time. But the cup is very large and stands nearly 76 cm high. Few vessels of this size survive (though a similar one by Utermarke is in the Kremlin, and a third, 113 cm high, is among the group of plate now returned to Celle). Not only that, but its unbroken history is of no less interest than its size. Commissioned by Leonhardt Töbing in 1602 for presentation to the city council of Lüneburg, it was subsequently given in 1706 to Georg Ludwig of Hanover as a *Huldingungsgeschenk*. At that time the coat of arms of the original donor was removed from the foot of the cup and today is to be found to the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin.

The last of the Braunschweig-Lüneburg pieces in the collection, the extraordinary so-called Garssenbüttel drinking horn (fig. 3), also has a 'history'. In this case, however, one might suppose that it is partly an invention. The silver-gilt mounts were made in Braunschweig (Brunswick). But drinking horns are a form one associates more with the medieval period than the late Renaissance and in a sense the horn is a throw-back to an earlier time. Indeed, the engraved inscription around

Fig. 3

the lip relates the story that the horn – in fact not a horn at all, the inscription tells us, but the claw of a griffin – was won in a battle in 1307 and passed down through the family until the new mounts were made for Hartwig

van Garssenbüttel in 1610. It would be interesting to carry out a scientific analysis of the horn, which I suspect would turn out to be no more from the fourteenth century than from a griffin: ancient family relics were as likely to be fabricated as the bones of ancient saints. But it is a wonderful object even so.

I said earlier that these objects have a wider cultural interest and it to this theme that I turn next. For in their different ways they illustrate many of the features that make princely goldsmiths' work a unique window into the sixteenth-century mind. These qualities come under several headings but I want to look at just three: the preciousness and beauty of their materials, their role as symbols of dynastic longevity and their complex programs of ornament.

I will say nothing of silver itself. It was universally recognized that this was a valuable material which, when fashioned into large and impressive objects, was a token of wealth and status. But princely collections included many objects that incorporated other materials too. Some of these were mounted because they were precious or beautiful, some because they were exotic and because they were considered to be 'curious' or even of scientific interest. And finally, some of these mounted materials had a longer life than their mounts, casting off their original mounts and replacing them, like a new set of clothes, as times changed.

Amongst the precious materials, rock crystal (fig. 1) had a special place. It also had what might be termed 'alchemical baggage' which enhanced its mystique and value. The sixteenth-century alchemist, Paracelus (following Pliny), described rock crystal as 'congealed water' that had solidified through some sort of unexplained magical process. Naturally, because it was so valuable, it was often recycled when its original mounts fell out of fashion. But the relatively large number of objects with crystals like this that survive from the middle and later sixteenth century tell a special story. For these crystals were very often recycled components of medieval reliquaries that had been destroyed in Protestant regions during the Reformation. As such they are a special reminder of the religious turmoil of that time.

The serpentine cup (fig. 2) clearly had an earlier life too. Serpentine was particularly associated with Saxony and was, in a sense, a symbol of national pride. It also had a reputation as an antidote to poison and the inscription around the lip repeats the old myth: *Serpentin heis ich. Alle Gift vertreib* ('Serpentine is my name. I drive away all poison'). But while the ornament of the cup is in the fashionable style of around 1580, the shape of the stone is not. In fact it reminds one of early fifteenth-century vessels such as one from Dresden and it must have been remounted. This is confirmed by a small area on the bowl where the surface is quite rough. For this there can be no other reasonable explanation than that the fixing for a silver handle like that on the Dresden cup was ground down when the new mounts were made.

Sometimes materials were mounted into silver vessels for quite different reasons and two examples of this are the rock-crystal cup (again) and the drinking horn. The crystal cup incorporates another mounted element: a small piece of agate in the stem. This is impos-

sible to extract, but it transmits light and is clearly hollow. It is, in other words, a small vessel like a beaker. When the late Rudolf Distelberger examined it in 2005 he identified the agate from its striations as belonging to a group of vessels known to date back to antiquity. The conclusion we must draw from this is clear: that the patron knew the agate to be ancient and that by enshrining it within this splendid cup he was treating it in a similar way to a medieval relic. But, in keeping with Renaissance intellectual values, this was a relic of the classical world rather than the religious world.

Many of the vessels in the Renaissance *Schatzkammer* or *Wunderkammer* were valued because they were exotic: coconuts and seashells fell into this category. The Celle drinking horn, if it really were a griffin's claw, would fall into this category, but here the situation is more complex. It is hard to think of anything rarer or more exotic than a griffin's claw. The foot and terminal of the mounts remind one that it is indeed the claw of this fabled beast, and yet we can wonder whether anyone in the early seventeenth century really believed that that was the case. A more interesting question is whether the horn was in fact the one that had been won three hundred years earlier, in 1307. I doubt it, but neither does it really matter. From the point of view of Hartwig von Garssenbüttel, who commissioned the mounts in 1610, there was a 300 year-old family tradition and this horn – whether real or not – was the symbol of that tradition and of the longevity of the Garssenbüttel dynasty. Being symbols of family longevity was an important aspect of princely objects like this and sometimes helps to account for their survival through later centuries. One thinks, for example, of the objects listed in 1565 by the Wittelsbach duke Albrecht V as 'inalienable heirlooms' which were meant never to be destroyed, recycled or sold.

How the horn came into the possession of the electors of Braunschweig-Lüneburg is not known, but Hartwig von Garssenbüttel was the founder of a school at Essenrode, close to Braunschweig, so perhaps it was later presented to the elector as a homage offering, in the same way as the Töbing cup was given to elector Georg Ludwig.

The third theme I would like to explore in this short article is the complex programmes of ornament that are so often a feature of medieval and Renaissance goldsmiths' work. Sometimes this is just an ornamental density that reflects Mannerist *orror vaccui* and the serpentine cup is a good example of that. But two of the other Schroder pieces from Celle, the crystal cup and the Töbing cup, illustrate a more didactic content that is intended to be studied and to be understood. The meaning of these programmes is not always obvious and can require careful attention to be understood.

We have already considered the rock-crystal cup as a sort of secular reliquary, but the embossed decoration on the cover adds a further dimension: it shows the four alchemical elements, each with its title, *Terre, Ethera, Ignis* and *Aqua* (Earth, Air, Fire and Water) (fig. 6). But this theme is given a theological context by being shown through biblical stories – the creation of Eve for Earth, the Last Judgement for Air, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorra for Fire and Noah's flood for Water. It is unfortunate that the finial of the cup now has this rather meaningless form, for it is possible that the original finial

Fig. 6, Detail of cup and cover, probably Antwerp, circa 1550

Fig. 8, Detail: The Töbing Cup

bore some direct thematic relation to the iconography of the cover, without which it is diminished.

Much more interesting is the rich program of ornament on the Töbing cup. This can be interpreted as having a strong message, even though one that is carefully coded. The ornament is in two groups: on the cover are the four Cardinal Virtues, Prudence, Fortitude and Temperance, with Justice forming the finial (fig. 7). Around the bowl are six portraits of rulers, each inscribed with their name (fig. 8). All of these details are painted with 'cold enamel' (in fact a kind of paint), which is partly lost and has dulled over time. The subjects on the bowl appear to be three kings: Eric von Sveden, Sigismund I von Polen und Henri II von Frankreich, and three German rulers: Herzog Heinrich von Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, Graf Albrecht von Brandenburg und Landgraf Philipp I von Hessen-Kassel. The portraits seem to be in an earlier, quasi Cranach, style and all of their subjects were dead by 1568, 30 years before the cup was made. But they were linked by Protestantism, either because they were Protestants themselves or because they were tolerant to Protestant believers within their territories. The inclusion of the figures on the cover is, of course, a commentary on the rightness of the Protestant faith and a reflection on the virtue of the rulers.

There is much more to be said about these pieces and much research remains to be done. But the conference in Celle presented a very good opportunity to 'bring them home' and to consider them as a special group. Taken together, they form a sort of microcosm of Renaissance goldsmiths' work, with a fascinatingly multi-layered intellectual agenda seen through their materials, their ornament and their role as ancient and validating family heir-

looms. But it has also been interesting to look at them in the context of the collection to which they now belong and to realise what an important and formative component of that collection they are.

For further information about these objects and an overview of the Schroder Collection, see Timothy Schroder, Renaissance Silver from the Schroder Collection, *Wallace Collection / Paul Holberton publishing, 2007*

Fig. 7, Finial of the Töbing Cup, Hamburg 1602

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