

'Curiously
Enchased'
Goldsmiths &
Diplomats in
Baroque
Europe

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In 1557 Mary I, Queen of England, instructed Thomas Randolph her ambassador to Ivan the Terrible as to how to present her gifts; the highlight was a “rich standing cup containing a great number of pieces of plate artificially wrought...you shall recommend it for the Rarity of the fashion, assuring him that We do send it him rather for the newness of the devise than for the value, it being the first that was made in these parts in that manner”.

The Queen’s instructions sum up the essence of gift-exchange in early modern statecraft. Emphasized for their novelty and exceptional workmanship, objects fashioned in gold and silver lay at the heart of these exchanges, since they perfectly combined the finest craftsmanship with a recognised expression of value, as indeed they still do. A young enameller Fiona Rae, who received the Royal Warrant in 2001, makes silver boxes with the Prince of Wales’s Feathers, which Prince Charles dispenses on appropriate occasions. Intended to delight, to impress and ultimately to persuade, these values are exemplified in Berlin’s famous baroque buffet, to which this essay will return. The Berlin buffet embodies some earlier diplomatic associations: two Elizabethan bottles with chains, made in London in 1579–80 were recently rediscovered. Imbued

Figure 1. Silvergilt bottles, London 1579–80. Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg/A.Hagemann

with significance beyond their actual form, they had travelled to Brandenburg after a failed marriage negotiation with King James I, almost certainly presented to the returning German ambassador. (figure 1).¹

Presenting beautiful, costly and preferably rare objects has always been central to diplomacy, alongside lavish hospitality. Both were public acts, played out before an audience. When monarchs conducted diplomacy personally, an exchange of presents helped to cement alliances; prized for their prestige, such gifts were widely displayed and publicised through the reports which diplomats sent home. Many anthropologists and art historians have written from their contrasting perspectives about the theory and practice of gift exchange. Historians have been slower to recognise how much exceptional objects embodied subtle messages, messages which call for curatorial skills in decoding meanings and context.²

As we know from studies of the French, Danish, Swedish,



Figure 2. Dagger and scabbard, gold and silvergilt, set with hessonite garnets and emeralds. Traditionally called 'Henry VIII's dagger'. Iranian, early 17th century. Portland Collection/D. Adlam

English and Russian courts, prestigious, hard to come by and luxurious products were central to the gift exchange. Recent international exhibitions have explored specific themes from Goa to Moscow. Landmarks were the Lisbon exhibition in 1996, *The Heritage of Rauluchantim*, on the impact of Indian goldsmiths on Portuguese diplomatic gifts and in 2002 *Gifts to the Tsars 1500-1700, Treasures from the Kremlin*, at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. In 2000 *Treasures of Catherine the Great* opened the Hermitage Rooms at Somerset House and *Baroque Style in the Age of Magnificence 1620-1800*, The Victoria & Albert Museum 2009 explored the world of the court.³

Objects of exceptional quality and workmanship which have lost their history may have been devised originally as diplomatic gifts. For goldsmiths' work, the paper trail allows this to be reconstructed, even if conjecturally. Francis I, for instance, chose exotic Indian goods, notably mother of pearl, which had been imported into Europe through Lisbon, by Queen Joanna of Portugal, sister to his second wife Eleanor. A handsome Goanese mother of pearl casket, embellished in Paris by the royal goldsmith Pierre Mangot with silvergilt mounts in 1532, now in the Louvre but for many years in English ownership, could well have been a French royal gift to Anne Boleyn on her honeymoon visit to France in 1532. When King Henry VIII died in 1547, his huge inventory included seven treasured caskets of mother of pearl, one of which had mounts of precious metal & was comparable in size to this rare survivor.⁴

Rulers chose gifts carefully. Flattering phrases such as 'From the Kings own hand' might be deployed by the agent handing over the gift. Accounts by diplomats make it clear that these presentations were observed, judged and their effect on relations evaluated. Gifts were graded, so that a ruler with a son still unmarried might be sent personal weapons suitable for a boy. When the Russian Tsar sent a bundle of costly and prestigious black sabres to James I, King of England in 1617, to cement their trade treaty, he added a gold dagger set with emeralds and rubies for the King's son, Prince Charles, as a symbol of young manly values. In fact this 'Ritch dagger beset with stones' was Persian, itself a gift from

Isfahan to the Russian ruler. A jewelled Persian dagger with a known English ownership from the 17th century preserved in the Portland Collection may well represent that princely gift. But even a fashionable and costly choice might actually be inappropriate. In the 1650s, when the Emperor ordered a suite of silver furniture in Augsburg for the Sultan from D. Schwesermuller, he found that it was quite unsuitable to send to Muslim Constantinople, as the tabletop was chased with three naked women (The Judgement of Paris).⁵

When an ambassador took his wife, she played a part in these ceremonial exchanges. Protocol might deny or discourage male visitors to the significant women of the court, but these women could contact, entertain and exchange gifts with the Queen, the King's mistress or his mother. These entertainments also involved exchanges of precious metal. In the 1660s gifts to Lady Anne Fanshawe, wife of the English ambassador to Madrid included 'a very noble present of India plate' from the Governor's wife. In the 1680s when Louis XIV wanted to make an alliance with the Ottoman Sultan, he sent magnificent official presents to Constantinople and apparently added a gold mirror enamelled with flowers and set with gems, in recognition of the particular influence of the *Sultana Valide*, the Sultan's mother.⁶

In April 1687 the Levant Company presented the gold Trumbull Beaker, marked by George Garthorne for 1685 to Katherine, Lady Trumbull, first wife of Sir William Trumbull, as they were taking a



Figure 3. Dessert table in Rome, arranged for the English ambassador Viscount James Castlemaine. Engraving Rome 1687

ship at Greenwich for Constantinople, where he had been appointed Ambassador. Lady Trumbull could consume sherbets and other cool non-alcoholic drinks from her gold beaker with ladies of the Ottoman court in the manner befitting a royal representative. According to the Levant Company's minute book, *'the Lord Amb[assador]s Lady was in expectation of a Present as her Ladyship had understood other Amb[assador]s Ladys had had, it was left to Mr Husband to provide a piece of gold plate to the value of about £60 to be presented to her Lady[ship] in the Company's name'*.⁷

The memoirs of Lady Anne Fanshawe, widow of Sir Richard Fanshawe, Charles II's ambassador to Lisbon in 1662, and subsequently to Madrid, record how gold and silver glistened in their official world. Lady Anne appreciated the lavish furnishings issued from the Stuart Wardrobe: *'a crimson velvet cloth of state, fringed and laced with gold, with a chair, a footstool, and cushions, and two other stools of the same, with a Persian carpet to lay under them, and a suit of fine tapestry hanging for that room'*. Their Chapel had two velvet altar-cloths fringed with gold, and their table and buffet were dressed with eight hundred ounces of gilt plate, and four thousand ounces of white plate, all on loan from the Crown. Displayed in a room of state, beneath a cloth and a portrait of the monarch, the sumptuous silver issued to English ambassadors glistened by candlelight at official receptions and

dinners.⁸

Diplomacy was costly, since the choice of gifts had to be carefully matched to the recipients. We can see this, indirectly, in 1604. After making the obligatory presentations to the Spanish ambassadors at their peace negotiations, James I had to replenish the English Jewel House. Fifteen thousand ounces of plate, including some early 16th century Spanish buffet plate, had been taken from his Great Cupboard of Estate, deliberately selected as fitting for the high status Spanish legates. These great pots had probably accompanied Catherine of Aragon to England a century earlier. Sadly they have not survived although the senior nobleman, the Constable of Castile, received one of the greatest, or at least oldest, treasures in the Jewel House, the 14th century Royal Gold Cup, now in the British Museum.⁹

Official gifts could include exceptionally costly regional specialties, such as Tokay from Hungary, Champagne from France, furs from Russia, hardstones from Saxony, exotic birds from North Africa and even a polar bear, sent from the Tsarina to Dresden. Jerome Horsey, an English merchant who travelled to Russia on behalf of the Muscovy Company in 1586 took to Boris Gudonov an eclectic mix of rarities; *'2 lions, dappled bulls, 2 mastiffs,*

bulldogs (presumably for the sport of bull-baiting), *gilt halberds, pistols, guns, armour, wine, store of drugs of all kinds (spices), organs, virginals, musicians, scarlets (dyed cloth), pearl chains, plate of curious making ...*. In 1663 Charles II's embassy to Moscow took pigs of Cornish tin, as well as examples of London-made fire-arms. The latest technology, notably guns and clocks, became an English speciality.¹⁰

Porcelain opened a new phase in diplomatic gifts. In 1713 only two years after the secret of the magical 'white gold' had been discovered, August II the Elector sent the first gift of this dazzling novelty to his cousin, King Frederick IV of Denmark. We are now familiar with its prestigious role, from its first discovery, exemplified by the *Fragile Diplomacy Meissen Porcelain for Foreign Courts 1710–1763* exhibition at the Bard in

New York, through the Imperial exploitation of the products of the Du Paquier factory, to its full flowering under the kings of Prussia and of France. But goldsmiths' work maintained its special status.

Diplomats had great prestige and attracted many gifts of plate from their merchant communities. In Madrid, Lady Anne recorded '...the English Consul with all the merchants brought us a present of two silver basins and ewers, with a hundred weight of chocolate, with crimson taffeta clothes, laced with silver laces, and voiders, which were made in the Indies, as were also the basins and ewers... the English merchants of Seville, with their Consul, presented us with a quantity of chocolate and as much sugar, with twelve fine sarcenet napkins laced thereunto belonging, with a very large silver pot to make it in, and twelve very fine cups to drink it out of, filigree, with covers of the same, with two very large salvers to set them upon, of silver.'

Until the 1820s English ambassadors, the embodiment of the monarch, were equipped with silver from the Jewel House for public entertainments, to support their role as royal representatives. This generous English system, which explains the former royal origin of plate in many aristocratic collections such as Althorp, Anglesey Abbey, Woburn Abbey, Welbeck Abbey, Belton and Burghley House, required ambassadors and other officers of state to select plate from the Crown's reserves, or to have new services made at the Crown's expense but to their own taste. Lent for the period of duty, these services were often then converted into family possessions later, by the simple step of obtaining a writ of discharge under the Privy Seal. This process cost little more than a hundred pounds, whereas a single tureen might cost as much or more.¹¹

For ambassadors in northern Europe cisterns for cooling wine



Figure 4. The Berlin Buffet. Painting of the Rittersaal by T. Kjellberg, 1847
Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg

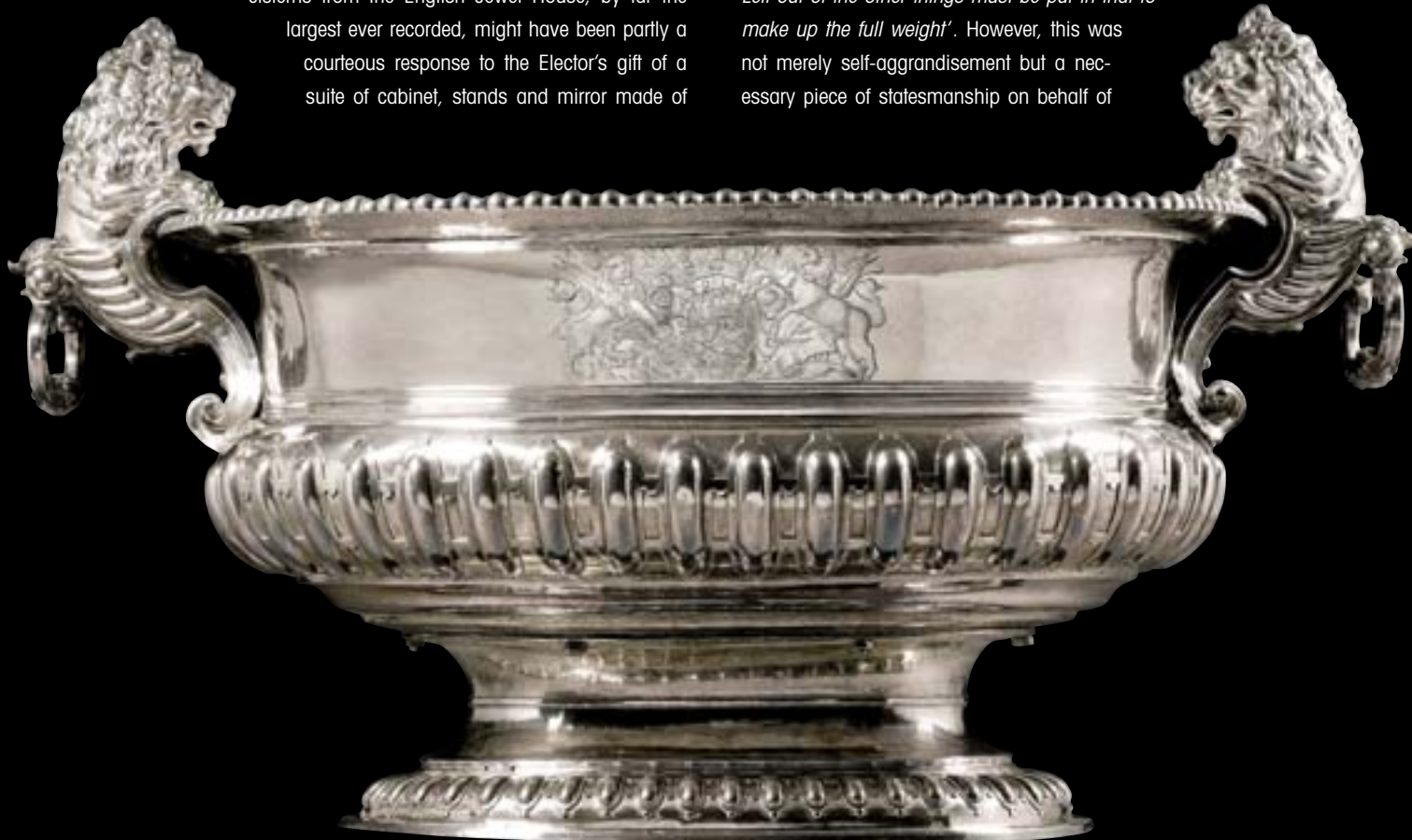
set out at dinners and receptions, were a prestigious necessity, particularly before the concept of a matching dinner service emerged. They became larger and larger. In 1663 a cistern and sconces appear in the issue to the Earl of Carlisle for his embassy to Russia and the Earl of Peterborough was issued with a cistern weighing 1185 ounces for his embassy to the Emperor in 1672. Famously, the Earl, later Duke of Marlborough, as Ambassador to the States General selected in September 1701 a trend setting issue of silver dining furniture, much of it still at Althorp: one large cistern of 1944 ounces, with a smaller cistern and fountain for rinsing glasses and two ice pails. To this was added in December 'a paire of large Bottles curiously enchaised' weighing 653 ounces, display plate for the buffet. Having been lent 7,390 ounces for his embassy he received another 7,351 ounces on being appointed Captain General of His Majesty's forces in Holland.¹²

A case study linking England and Brandenburg-Prussia illuminates the role of goldsmiths' work in diplomatic exchanges. Its origins lie in the War of the Grand Alliance 1688-1697, which ended with the Treaty of Ryswick. Silver featured in a set of showy reciprocal gifts. Only the common enemy Louis XIV was excluded, and in effect mocked in the Dutch press, for having sacrificed his palace silver to the melting pot in 1689.

The basis of the famous Augsburg buffet, a prestigious suite of display silver set up in Berlin in 1701, had originated in London. (figure 4) This was a massive pair of cisterns and fountains with the Garter Badge, ordered by William III in January 1693 and

completed in 1694 for his German cousin and ally. Described in the Jewel House books as ‘*One large silver cesterne curiously chased and embossed with the Duke of Brandenburg’s arms 5129 ounces. One other the like 5073 ounces*’, the English royal gift came complete with ‘*(cuir bouilli)* leather cases’. When melted in 1745, these weighed 10,203 Troy ounces or 317.3 kilos. For comparison the Raby cistern sold in July 2010 weighs 2,514 ounces or 80 kilos. William III’s exceptional order for cisterns from the English Jewel House, by far the largest ever recorded, might have been partly a courteous response to the Elector’s gift of a suite of cabinet, stands and mirror made of

was to be another cousin of William’s, the Elector of Hanover. Raby needed to reinforce the message of friendship between monarchs and give exceptional honour to the new King of Prussia, a valuable future ally in the north. In 1706, the unusually large Raby cistern made up the greater part of the plate issued to Thomas Wentworth, 3rd Baron Raby. He was clearly determined to have it made as heavy as possible, as his instructions spell out; ‘*The cistern cant be to(o) big so all the plate that is Left out of the other things must be put in that to make up the full weight*’. However, this was not merely self-aggrandisement but a necessary piece of statesmanship on behalf of



white Baltic amber to Queen Mary, which John Evelyn saw at Whitehall Palace in July 1693.¹³

Prince Elector Friedrich III of Brandenburg (1657–1713) thought he might become King William’s heir to the Orange title in the Netherlands, so the massive Augsburg buffet he commissioned in the late 1690s for the Rittersall (Knights Hall) or throne room of the Berlin Palace is ornamented with the red eagle of Brandenburg and the lions of Holland.

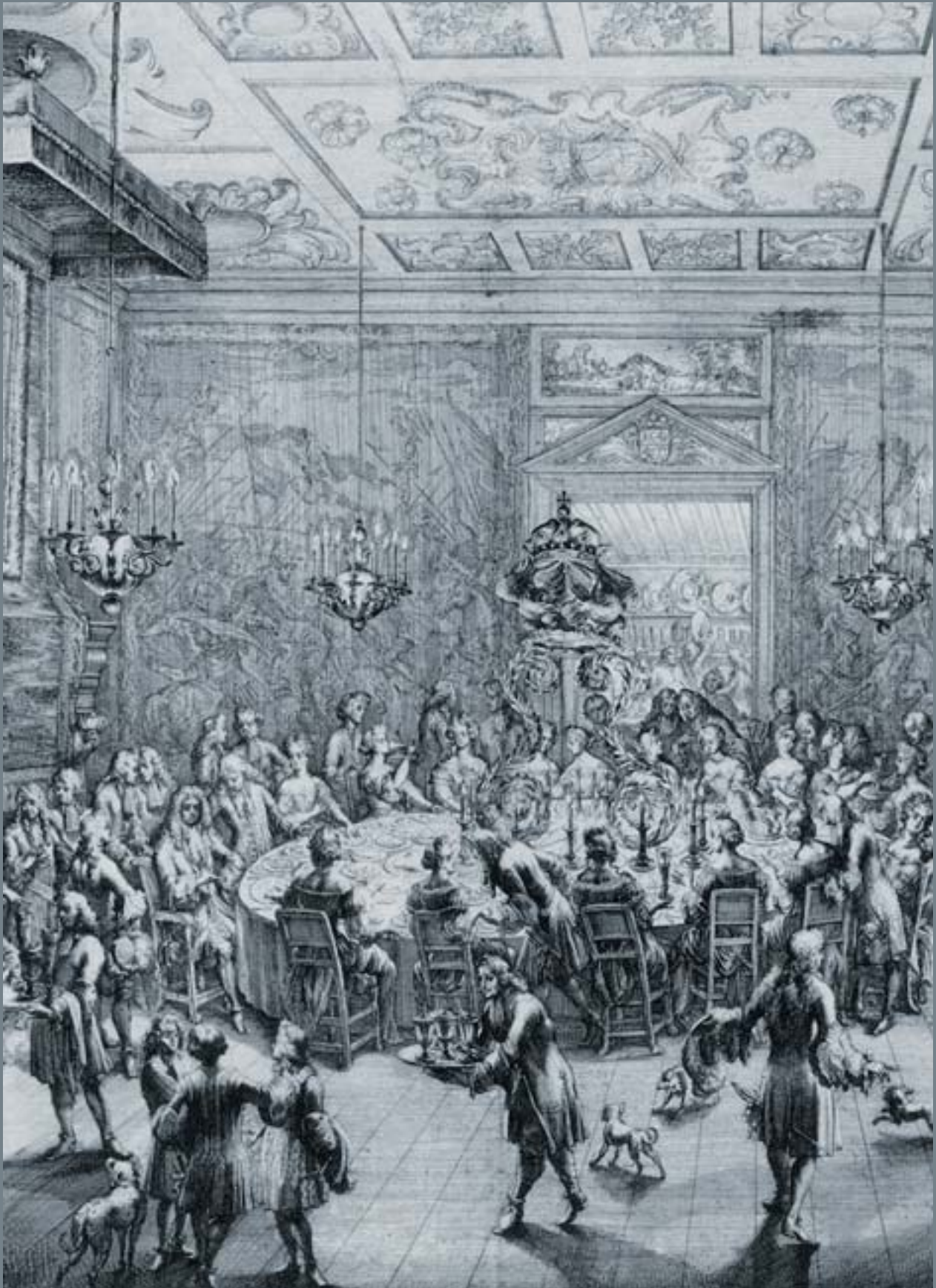
This episode of princely extravagance had an aftermath. In 1701 Thomas Wentworth, Lord Raby, was a witness in Berlin when the Elector declared himself King of Prussia. The largest elements in his new buffet, literally its dual foundations, were the two massive cisterns ordered by William III as presents for the Elector in 1694. By the time Raby was appointed Ambassador in 1706, the English throne was occupied by Queen Anne, and her successor

Figure 5. The Raby Cistern, London 1706. Sold at Sothebys 10 July 2010

Queen Anne’s reputation as a generous and wealthy monarch and worthy successor to William III.¹⁴

Diplomatic dinners were a kind of competitive warfare, carried out without shots being fired in anger. In the 18th century as the buffet declined, so the table became the main vehicle for displaying silver. The French court was again the innovator. From the 1670s, Louis XIV’s designers and artists generated new ideas, from ways of eating to the form of gifts, ideas which rapidly spread across Europe. Lacking easy access to silver and exploiting the newly arrived technique of gem-cutting, Louis XIV started presenting foreign diplomats with gold boxes set with diamonds, accompanied by some delicious Paris-made novelty, such as a jewelled mirror, a watch or a fan, for the ladies.

Figure 6. Dinner for William of Orange and Mary Stuart at the Hague, c.1680; detail of engraving by Romeyn de Hooghe. Ann Eatwell/VandA





Goldsmiths' work 'in the new fashion' was perceived as a symbol of national or at least royal policy. Embracing this strategy, the French court pursued Colbert's policy of emphasizing the luxury trades and *L'Art du Vivre* as national characteristics. For many years silver historians have cited references in the *Mercure de France* in the 1690s to Louis XIV's newly invented tableware, from the *surtout* to the sauceboat 'avec deux anses et deux becs' devised by the royal goldsmiths for his private dining room at Marly. However, the true meaning of these newspaper stories has been missed; they are propaganda, inserted to demonstrate the King's continuing wealth and his inventive menus. The policy worked. French innovations in tableware were emulated by other courts, as the news spread, so that by 1700 English ambassadors were also rapidly demanding tureens, this new kind of centrepiece or *surtout* (as depicted by Francois Massialot in the 1712 edition of his famous *Cuisiniers royal et bourgeois*) and the more convenient deeper sauceboats for their services. Although the French King had lost a huge amount of face and damaged his international standing by the colossal sacrifices of plate and silver furniture to the melting pots in 1689 and indeed again in 1708/9, he had found a way to create a more positive image through these new commissions.¹⁵

In an age when royal marriages cemented alliances, these were a high point of diplomacy, requiring many gifts for the attendants, themselves aristocrats, who would bear witness later as to the successful achievement of the occasion. In 1740 George II

Figure 7. The White Drawing Room at Waddesdon Manor, laid for a royal dinner. George III Service by R-J Auguste, Paris and F P Bundsen, Hanover, 1775–1824. ©The National Trust. Waddesdon Manor/ the Rothschild Collection, Rothschild Family Trust/M.Fear

arranged the marriage of his daughter Princess Mary to Prince Frederick of Hesse, later Landgrave of Hesse. Her English retinue was led to Kassel by the Duchess of Dorset. Immediately after their arrival Frances Countess of Herford wrote back to the Countess of Pomfret describing their reception, the dinner and public ball and emphasizing the nature of the gifts, carefully selected as fitting for a noblewoman 'The whole was conducted with surprising magnificence and order; and the English who were present were treated with all imaginable distinction and politeness. The Duchess of Dorset was presented with a fine diamond ring; a set of Dresden china; and a tea table with a gold tea-canister, kettle and lamp.' This personal witness would be passed on, shared within court circles and redound to the honour of both parties.¹⁶

Although the dry entries in court ledgers may seem opaque, silver has the unique advantage that its weight was usually recorded. Jet Pijzel Dommissé's recent research on Hague silver identified the origin of two magnificent silver *Buies* or waterfountains in the Portland Collection in England. Unmarked and with no contemporary documentation in family papers, these great buffet pieces, clearly French in design, have a parallel in a Paris fountain

Figure 8. Pair of fountains or Buies, the Hague, Adam Loofs 1680–1. Portland Collection/D. Adlam





Figure 9. William of Orange (William III). Drawing in crayon by Kneller. Portland Collection/D. Adlam

of the early 1660s (now at the Getty), but are not French in their execution and workmanship. We now know that the States General ordered them in 1681 as a present for William of Orange. The Dutch goldsmith Adam Loofs had indeed spent many years in Paris working for Louis XIV, but returned to the Hague in time to be given this prestigious commission, which he executed with high baroque bravura. He had not yet been re-admitted to the Hague guild, hence the absence of marks. These spectacular objects left the Hague after William became King of England; they are now crowned with the stag crest of the Cavendish family.¹⁷

Gifts of gold and silver had to be showy, eye-catching, and if not actually *'in the latest fashion'*, at least curious, or incorporating flattering messages or historical associations. Why in 1706 did the city of Luneburg in the north German duchy of Celle choose a cup already a hundred years old as a presentation to the Elector George Ludwig (later King George I of England)?

Understanding the context explains the choice. This spectacular cup, Hamburg work of about 1600, stands almost 30 inches tall and is crowned with a figure of Justice. More important, it is chased with portraits of northern European rulers who were Protestant or sympathetic to reform. As elucidated recently for the Schroder exhibition at the Wallace Collection, the portraits probably depict the kings of Sweden, Poland and France, and the rulers of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, Brandenburg and Hesse-Kassel. The link appears to be the various roles they played in the German Reformation. Originally one of a pair presented to Luneburg by Leonhardt Tobing in 1602, this massive cup also bears three cold-enamelled figures of Fortitude, Temperance and Prudence. In 1706 the city of Luneburg needed to mark its homage to the Elector; a new relationship had emerged, since the Duchy of Celle was now united with the Electorate of Hanover under his rule. The Protestant theme was entirely appropriate to the Elector, who had been fighting the French for most of his adult life.¹⁸

Publicity was also a feature of the gift-exchange. Moscow's policy of publicising tributes from foreign monarchs is particularly well-documented. Carried in ceremonious processions through the streets and accompanied by music, gifts such as a spectacular set of tall cups from Sweden or a rock crystal chandelier and fifty nine pieces of plate from the States General were an essential element in the formal reception of an arriving ambassador. However, from Constantinople to London the public were given the opportunity to enjoy these spectacles. Until the late 17th century the Banqueting House in Whitehall was the setting for ambassadorial receptions; the Russian embassy of 1662 was a particularly impressive occasion. As the diarist John Evelyn noted, 165 of the retinue carried the presents of sables, fox and ermine, Persian carpets, *'hawks, such as they said never came the like; horses said to be Persian'* into the Banqueting House. When the Moroccan ambassador brought 2 lions and 30 ostriches, Charles II joked that all he could send in return was a flock of geese.¹⁹

Plate contributed to a realm's self-presentation. Court officials arranged exhibitions of exceptionally large objects intended for foreign recipients, as occurred several times in London's West End in the 1720s and 1730s, when the King himself was shown the cistern (or bath) ordered from Paul Crespin by the King of Portugal.



Figure 10. The Hanover Cup. Schroder Collection



Newspapers in London, Paris and the Hague published stories about exceptional silver commissions, no doubt fed by the contemporary equivalent of press agents. When George III wanted to promote British support against Napoleon's invasion of his electorate of Hanover, he held a magnificent party for princes, dukes and diplomats at Windsor Castle on 25 February 1805 with a German theme. For the press, the highlight of the event was the 'choice and valuable furniture saved from the plundering hands of the common enemy, when he unjustly invaded the King's electoral dominions'; that is the dazzling silver tables, mirrors, chandeliers and tableware from Hanover, accumulated over the previous hundred and fifty years and seen for the first time in Britain. The sheer splendour of his Hanover silver, some of which is now on show at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, with a French dinner service split between The Louvre and Waddesdon Manor, was intended to impress and persuade the British audience that the Electorate was worth defending.

Not necessarily accurate, newspaper stories in fact might be a deliberate snub to a recently defeated enemy. This motive lies

Figure 11. Silver furniture and chandeliers acquired by George II for Hanover, evacuated from Hanover in 1803 and displayed in the Ballroom, Windsor Castle from 1805 to 1816. Aquatint from W.H. Pyne, *Royal Residences* 1819. ©The National Trust. Waddesdon Manor, the Rothschild Collection/M. Fear

behind a Dutch newspaper story in 1698, reporting a story from London about a new and impressive suite of silver furniture being made for William III. This, the newspaper claimed, was intended as a gift for Louis XIV, who had been forced at the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697 to make peace with the Dutch Republic and England. His costly military campaigns had famously forced him to sacrifice twenty tons of precious metal in 1689 including one hundred and twenty pieces of silver furniture from Versailles, plus even his showy tableware. So the story was a calculated public insult. In fact, William III ordered this suite as his celebration of the Treaty of Ryswick; intended for prominent display at his evening *Appartements* in the State Rooms of Kensington Palace, the silver table, *gueridons* & mirror are still in the Royal Collection.²¹

In London there was always acute and competitive awareness of Paris design and craftsmanship in goldsmiths' work. French



Figure 12. Detail of the George III Service by R-J Auguste, Paris and FP Bundsen in the White Drawing Room at Waddesdon Manor. Waddesdon Manor ©The National Trust/ the Rothschild Collection. Rothschild Family Trust/M.Fear

plate cost more, just as French chefs demanded higher wages and more expensive ingredients. Because of the sheer cost of warfare, Louis XV found it necessary to call plate into the melt in 1759, to finance his war against England and her allies. At once, a caricature was published in London showing Louis XV and his favourite, the notoriously extravagant Mme de Pompadour wielding shears to cut up the royal tableware, including a rococo tureen, a candelabrum and a fancy casket bearing the signature of the famous Meissonier. However, these ancient enmities and the exorbitant cost of Paris-made plate were no bar to foreign courts commissioning from French royal goldsmiths. When George III, as Elector of Hanover, required a new service in the fashionable neoclassical style for his Electoral palace, his German officials commissioned designs from Joseph and Ignaz Wurth in Vienna and Luigi Valadier in Rome. But it was in Paris, and to the royal goldsmith Robert Joseph August, that the commission was made, as Dr Lorenz Seelig has demonstrated.²²

Connoisseurship has its limitations; we now benefit from a subtler historical understanding of the mysterious world of diplomatic gifts. The messages embedded within exceptional objects can be unlocked only by archival probing. In the last twenty five years we have benefitted from a flowering of reconstructive history; the Society for Court Studies published valuable conference papers in 2009. Equally, sales of major objects attract stimulate research, as with the Raby cistern.

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NOTES

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- 6 Mirrors had a special significance at the Ottoman court. The Paris-marked gold mirror, which had passed by marriage to an Indian princely family, was recently on the London market
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