Donation of 18th-Century Swedish Silver Items

Micael Ernstell
Curator, Applied Art and Design

Art Bulletin of Nationalmuseum Stockholm
Volume 28:1
In 2021, the Nationalmuseum was delighted to receive another important donation of silver items from Märta Christina and Magnus Vahlquist, given through the Friends of the Nationalmuseum. The value of such generous and insightful donations cannot be overstated, and they are of huge significance for the Museum’s work on advancing the collection through new acquisitions. Their generous gift in 2020 comprised two magnificent beakers with filigree ornamentation; they date from 1698, are by Rudolf Wittkopf, and were presented in the Art Bulletin.¹

These were followed in 2021 by another gift that included three unique silver items from the 18th century. Two of these are from Sweden’s Great Power Era, the third from the 1760s.

One of the oldest is a pot produced in the Stockholm workshop run by Petter Henning’s widow, in 1715 (fig. 1). Petter Henning (1658–1713) was the son of one of the 17th century’s leading silversmiths outside of Stockholm – Henning Petri (d. 1702), who worked in Nyköping from 1657. Petter Henning was made a master goldsmith in Stockholm in 1688. His workshop’s production was extensive and he was appointed court goldsmith by the kings Karl XI and Karl XII, as well as the dower queen Hedvig Eleonora. Following his death, his widow, Anna Maria Richter (1675–1755), continued to run the workshop until 1735, when their son, also called Henning Petri, was made a master and took over.²

Petter Henning’s (1658–1713) workshop, Chocolate Pot, 1715. Silver, 22.5 × 17 × 7 cm (h × l × w), 720 g. Gift 2021 of Märta Christina and Magnus Vahlquist through the Friends of the Nationalmuseum 2021. Nationalmuseum, NMK 53/2021.
One example of an early Swedish chocolate pot in silver was produced by Olof Fernlöf in Gothenburg, in 1728, which was sold a few years ago at auction in Stockholm. It is pear-shaped, with a round base, a sliding lid filial for the molinet and a wooden handle. Height 27.5 cm. There are later examples of chocolate pots made in Sweden using silver and ceramics.

Chocolate spread from Mexico to Spain in the early 16th century. The drink was popular in southern Europe for many years, but did not spread rapidly to other areas of Europe. In France, the arrival of chocolate is associated with the 1615 wedding of Anne of Austria and Louis XIII, and it did not arrive in England until the 1650s. Field marshal and count, Carl Gustav Wrangel (1613–1676) is the first known importer of chocolate to Sweden. In the autumn of 1670, he bought chocolate from Hamburg through a banker, Manoel Teixeira. In a letter, the banker apologises for his inability to obtain perfumed chocolate, but states that adding ambergris or musk when preparing it is equally effective.4 The type of serving container he used is unknown.

When the pot was produced, drinking chocolate was not as we would recognise it today; it was a viscous concoction that could include chocolate, eggs, milk, sugar, vanilla and other spices. Not only this, but lumps of fat formed in the chocolate, as no one knew how to separate the cocoa butter from the solids. This was not done successfully until the 19th century and, naturally, this influenced the design of the chocolate pots.

In Stockholm in 1755, Cajsa Warg (1703–1769) published a recipe for “Chocolade-Miölk” in her cookery book, Hjelpreda I Hushålningen för Unga Fruentimber (A Household Aid for Young Women): “Bring sweet milk to the boil and add enough grated chocolate to it that it becomes dark. Leave it to boil with a cinnamon stick and sugar to taste. Then thicken with 4 or 5 eggs.
Carl von Linné (1707–1778) provided instructions for the preparation of what he called “the food of the gods” – Théobroma Cacao: “Dissolve 1 oz. chocolate in 6 oz. water or warm milk and heat, until the solution is slowly simmering, stir over hot embers for fifteen minutes, whip until frothy and then pour the froth into a cup. The frothing should be uninterrupted; what is left in the vessel can be whisked again so that it froths.”

The viscous mixture thus required considerable stirring before it was served, while also being kept hot. Chocolate pots were therefore designed with a small hole in the lid, so a stirrer or molinet could be used to stir the drink without it cooling too much, while also achieving the desired froth. This pot has a removable top finial with a bayonet mount that covers the smaller hole. To keep the heat in, the spout also has a hinged lid. The little sieve that sits on the inside of the spout is somewhat special, preventing unwanted ingredients ending up in the cup. This thick drink was imbibed with a spoon or straight from the cup; chocolate cups were also preferably lidded.

The other item also comes from Petter Henning’s workshop. It is a toiletry box, also from the Swedish Great Power Era, stamped 1715 (fig. 8). It was probably part of a larger toiletry set with more items. Toiletry sets were important to the upper classes in society, as they were kept in areas to which guests had access, so were preferably made from expensive materials. The design of Henning’s box is monumental, despite its insignificant height, just 6.5 cm. The architectural forms of the late Baroque, with angled corners and cornices, as well as ornamentation with gadroon borders and chiselled patterns is typical of the time. The design influences come from France. Petter Henning was one of the first goldsmiths in Sweden to adopt the ideals of French style, as early as the 1680s. Casting, punching and engraving were introduced; chased ornamentation did not belong to this style. Nicodemus Tessin the Younger was very familiar with the arts and cultural life of France, and brought the new French...
ACQUISITIONS/DONATION OF 18TH-CENTURY SWEDISH SILVER ITEMS

influences to Stockholm. He was the royal architect and court intendant, and used the latest fashions to create a stately setting for King Karl XI. Original drawings, craftsmen and a French goldsmith named Jean Francois Cousinet renewed Swedish design, resulting in a dinner service, for example, for King Karl XII, which was produced in 1703–11 as a cooperation between Cousinet and Petter Henning. It was probably designed by Tessin.8

The third silver item in the donation is a confectionary bowl from 1769, which embodies the design ideals of European Rococo. A shell-shaped bowl is borne on three claw-and-ball feet (fig. 9). Silversmith Lars Petter Hackzell (1739–1771) was a master silversmith in Örebro for a brief period, 1768–71. He came from a family with many silversmiths in small Swedish towns, such as Mariestad and Strängnäs. His confectionary bowl is another example of something that is often highlighted in the history of Swedish silver, namely that smiths outside Stockholm had the same quality and same influences as their colleagues, who were closer to the royal court and the capital city’s leading circles. Hackzell’s life story also reflects the need for access to a functioning workshop. In 1768, he married Ulrica Blom, a widow who had inherited a workshop from her husband, silversmith Olof Norling. After Hackzell’s death, Ulrica Blom married silversmith Stephan Halling in 1772, who became a master silversmith the same year.9

Fig. 8 Petter Henning’s (1658–1713) workshop, Toiletry Box, 1715. Silver, 6.5 × 10.5 × 7.9 cm (h × l × b), 310 g. Gift 2021 of Märta Christina and Magnus Vahlquist through the Friends of the Nationalmuseum. Nationalmuseum, NMK 54/2021.

Fig. 9 Lars Petter Hackzell (1739–1771), Confectionary Bowl, 1769. Silver, 9.8 × 16.6 × 18 cm (h × l × b), 260 g. Gift 2021 of Märta Christina and Magnus Vahlquist through the Friends of the Nationalmuseum. Nationalmuseum, NMK 57 /2021.

Notes:
3. Later owners’ mark of the baronial family of Oxenstierna af Eka och Lindö
7. Later owners’ mark of the baronial family of Lorichs