



Argent Haché – Acquisitions from a Unique Collection

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Daniel Seghers (1590–1661) and Erasmus Quellinus the Younger (1607–1678), *Flower Garland with the Standing Virgin and Child*, c. 1645–50. Oil on copper, 85.5 x 61.5 cm. Purchase: Wiros Fund. Nationalmuseum, NM 7505.

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Fig. 1 Caspar Liendenberg (d. probably 1768), *Tureen with lid and plate*, 1768. Silver plated brass, 21 x 30 x 17.5 cm [tureen] (h x l x w), 33 x 25 cm [plate] (l x w).
Purchase: Axel Hirsch Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMK 86/2019.



Fig. 2 Eric Nyström, *Sugar Sprinklers*, 1780–90. Silver plated brass, 19 x 7 cm (h x diam). Purchase: Axel Hirsch Fund. Nationalmuseum, NNM 87–88/2019.



Fig. 3 Unknown designer, *Plate*, 1760–1800. Silver plated brass, 2.8 x 25.3 cm (h x diam). Purchase: Axel Hirsch Fund. Nationalmuseum, NNM 83/2019.

The Nationalmuseum has acquired a number of rare, Swedish-made objects in silver-plated brass, a technique called *argent haché*, dating from the end of the 18th century. Production in Sweden was limited, and few objects have survived to the present day, so this important element of Swedish design history has been missing from the Museum's collections, although they have included a few objects of European origin.

Research into the Swedish production of *argent haché* has been lacking, but one person who made a major contribution was the antiques dealer Lars-Yngve Johansson (1941–2018), who was well-established in Sweden and renowned for his expertise. His interest in the subject and decades of collecting *argent haché* are important. He trained as a goldsmith and silversmith and

was truly able to appreciate and see the quality of different kinds of metalwork. After his death, his unique collection was sold at Bukowskis auction house, and the Nationalmuseum succeeded in acquiring some of the objects at an auction in the spring of 2019.¹

Objects in *argent haché* were produced in Sweden in the latter half of the 18th century, with early producers in Stockholm being Simon Pantaleon, from 1757, and Fredrich T Lemair, from 1762, both of whom had moved from France.² For the Nationalmuseum, Swedish production is of primary interest, though few objects remain, both stamped and unstamped. Knowledge about who made the objects and, in some cases, their hallmarks has been limited. However, thanks to one connoisseur's patient collecting and his

expertise, this ignorance can now be dispelled and his knowledge presented to a wider audience.

The acquired objects include a tureen and plate produced in Stockholm by Caspar Liendenberg in 1768 (Fig. 1).³ He started working in 1745, but according to the Assay Office's records, started stamping silver plated brass in 1766.⁴ The tureen has many stamps, thus contributing a great deal to knowledge in this area. In 1762, the Board of Trade issued an ordinance on hallmarks for *argent haché*, with the most important element being the ability to clearly distinguish between these objects and those made from silver. The ordinance used the same principles as the provisions for work in gold and silver that were issued in 1754. The stamps for silver plated brass show the chemical symbol for copper and



Fig. 4 Unknown designer, *Wine Cooler*, 1750–1800. Silver plated brass, 15.8 x 19.3 x 14.5 cm (h x l x w). Purchase: Axel Hirsch Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMK 89/2019.



Fig. 5 Erik Nordgren (1792–?), *Teapot*, 1817–47. Nickel silver, so-called paktong, blackened wood, 19 x 30 x 13 cm (h x w x d). Purchase: Axel Hirsch Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMK 84/2019.

a crescent moon. The tureen has such a stamp, as well as a year stamp, “6” for 1768. This system came into use in 1763, using numbers rather than the letters that were used as year stamps on gold and silver-work. The tureen also has a special FÖRSILV (silvering) stamp, and the master’s own stamp, LIEDENBERG. The silver has worn away in places, which is one reason why so many other objects in this material have been disposed of over the years.

A pair of elegant sugar sprinklers are from the same collection and were produced by Eric Nyström, who worked in Stockholm between 1783 and 1814 (Fig. 2).⁵ Two unstamped objects were also acquired because to their links to Sweden. A plate bearing the coat of arms of the then wealthy Grill family, that was probably produced in Sweden (Fig. 3).⁶ A wine cooler that almost certainly is of foreign provenance, but bears the initials of the wealthy industrialist Charles de Geer (Fig. 4).⁷

One interesting item in Lars-Yngve Johansson’s collection was Erik Nordgren’s teapot, which the museum was

also able to acquire (Fig. 5).⁸ He worked in Jönköping from 1817 to 1847. The teapot is made from nickel silver, also called paktong, which is a copper alloy with nickel, and often zinc. Nickel silver’s name comes from its silvery appearance, despite it containing no silver. It was first discovered in China and in western Europe items were called “baitong” (Mandarin) or “paktong” (Cantonese), which can be translated as “white copper”. The silver-coloured metal was used to imitate sterling silver. The earliest documented record of paktong in Europe is from 1597, with German imitations of paktong being produced from c. 1750. The German manufacturing process was introduced in England in 1830, and exports of paktong from China gradually ceased. We now have proof that it was also manufactured in Sweden.

In 2019, the Nationalmuseum was delighted to acquire another object in Swedish *argent haché*. This is a coffee pot with a classicised design that was typical of the time, with a straight handle in blackened wood. It is unstamped but has

a distinctively Swedish idiom (Fig. 6). The coffee pot was donated by cultural historian Åke Livstedt, who had generously donated many and diverse objects over several decades.

Notes:

1. Lars-Yngve Johansson’s expertise lives on through the book published in association with the auction: Antonia Barkman and Carl Barkman *Argent Haché. Lars-Yngve Johanssons Samling av försilvrad mässing: historik, teknik, tillverkare, stämplat*, Bukowskis, Stockholm 2019. This publication is an important contribution to the subject, particularly as it clarifies the history of Swedish production and masters, stamps, etc. This article is primarily based on that publication. There are also older articles in the field: Marshall Lagerquist, “Argent haché – En illusion av gediget silver”, in *Rig – Konsthistorisk Tidskrift*, vol. 34, Stockholm 1951:1, <https://journals.lub.lu.se/rig/article/view/8573/7713>, (accessed 25 May 2020).
2. Barkman and Barkman 2019, p. 22.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 17.



Fig. 6 Unknown Swedish designer, *Coffeepot*, 18th century. Silver plated brass, blackened wood, bone, 24 x 27.5 x 19.5 cm (h x w x d). Gift of Åke Livstedt. Nationalmuseum, NMK 78/2019.