

Breakout Session Record

Amanuensis/Student name: Sabiha Ahmad

Date: 7/14/05

Institution: Victoria and Albert Museum

Title of Breakout Session: "Natural motifs and the manufactory of silver"

Names of Breakout session leaders: Dr. Helen Clifford (Senior Research Fellow, Dept. of History, University of Warwick) and Sophie Lee (Curator, Metalwork, V & A)

General themes discussed at the Breakout session:

3 main themes of potential interest presented by Dr. Clifford and Ms. Lee:

- 1) sources of design: how were natural motifs circulated? E.g. as paper designs; few working designs of silver- although there were printed sources of presentation pieces
- 2) copying objects- how? Taken back? Copying plants?
- 3) How is drawing disseminated among different trades?
- 4) Difference in techniques of making require different amounts of silver

Actual themes discussed:

How value of a piece is determined? Value of metal vs. value of workmanship?

Identification of motifs in decoration and relation to trends/fashion in consumers' tastes

Descriptions of different processes of working and pros/cons of each

Explanation of specialized features on vessels such as lids, pegs, locks, etc. & relation to social status of owner

Actual conditions of working on a piece- to what extent a collaborative endeavor- how can we delineate the space of working?

Explanation of marks & scrapings on the bottom of vessels

Relation between owner's identity and type of vessel/work commissioned

Any other information about the session:

Objects in session date from 1630 - 19th century

Object Information

Object Title: Design for a soup tureen-

Object Date: London, England 1730-40

Museum accession number of object: E. 2606-1817

Description of Object (please attach any information received from breakout session leaders to this sheet):

Pen & wash

“Picture of a design for a soup tureen with the crest of Thomas Coke, Earl of Leicester”
worked c. 1750 by Nicholas Sprimont

Function of the object?

To show design of piece to a potential client

Where was the object used/viewed/consumed?

Who used it?

Original context of the object?

Illustrates a common practice of casting a standard pattern and then customizing it with finials and other decorative features—in other words, it was rare to have a customized piece from start to finish.

The significance of the object?

What questions did the audience ask about this object?

Significance of ostriches? Answer: heraldic symbols of arms maybe?

What does the artichoke handle refer to? Answer: perhaps the contents of the tureen?

Object Information

Object Title: Footed salver

Object Date: London 1664-5

Museum accession number of object: 549-1874

Description of Object (please attach any information received from breakout session leaders to this sheet):

Silver-gilt

Mark DR, unidentified

Heraldic arms of Sir Thomas Rokeby (1631/2-99) engraved on plat.

Relief carved foliage & animals around border

Lightweight although heavy-looking

Function of the object?

display

Where was the object used/viewed/consumed?

Who used it?

Original context of the object?

The significance of the object?

What questions did the audience ask about this object?

Did collectors carry examples over into silver trade? Answer: rare materials in 18th c.

Relationship of heraldic silver to corporate Identity?

Monetary value of artifacts? Answer: silver artifacts should be approached as movable investments. In the 16th-17th c. royal family asking for loans, so silver artifacts were melted down- as a result, not many specimens from that period.

What did artistry consist in?

What type of bear is carved on the salver border? Answer: usually unicorns or lions carved, so maybe the bear shows this is a commissioned piece? Other motifs identified on this piece: camel, sunflower, dianthus

Object Information

Object Title: Peg tankard

Object Date: Stromso (Drammen), Norway, about 1680

Museum accession number of object: M.488-1910

Description of Object (please attach any information received from breakout session leaders to this sheet):

Silver, parcel-gilt
Mark off Hans Nieman the Elder
Standard shape following trade patterns
Application to fashionable

Function of the object?

“welcome” cups

Where was the object used/viewed/consumed?

Who used it?

the name “Jensen” engraved on side of mug

Original context of the object?

Christening present of Jensen?

The significance of the object?

Made from a single disk of silver, but surface decoration engraved from patterns; gilt on the inside because gold antiseptic; pegs- to measure out drink?

What questions did the audience ask about this object?

Significance of engraved figure of man? Answer: groom

Why does it have a lid? Answer: protection against poisoning, and therefore a sign of powerful status; lids ripped off from tankard bodies and recycled

Object Information

Object Title: tea caddy

Object Date: London, 1766-67

Museum accession number of object: M.1770-1944

Description of Object (please attach any information received from breakout session leaders to this sheet):

silver

Mark perhaps of Emick Romer

Made in 4 sections- cast

Function of the object?

To store tea

Where was the object used/viewed/consumed?

Who used it?

Original context of the object?

No apprentices can have masterpieces in 17th century because of foreign goldsmiths- French Huguenots

The significance of the object?

What questions did the audience ask about this object?

Are the different subcontractors (chasers, embossers, hammerers from behind) working on one piece working in the same space? Or is the object being carried to different places?

What do numbers on bottom refer to? Answer: 9 oz. 15 ?

Significance of pictures on side of tea caddy? Answer: inspired by oriental motifs (late 17th-18th c); frivolous/superficial- theory that more middle class ppl. Appreciated this style because it's harder to make—theory here is that middle class gave importance to both design and value of metal

Object Information

Object Title: tea caddy

Object Date: 1788-89

Museum accession number of object: M.89-1935

Description of Object (please attach any information received from breakout session leaders to this sheet):

Mark of Hester Bateman

made of standardized gauge silver- so cost of object lower

cut & soldered, not raised—method of creation implies division of labor that involves moving the object from place to place

slightly asymmetrical body- because silver warps in the heat—soldering needs to be planned because joints can melt—different solders had different melting points

Function of the object?

Presumably to store tea

Where was the object used/viewed/consumed?

Who used it?

A lock on the caddy suggests the owner's high status

Original context of the object?

The significance of the object?

an example of batch production because of beading on edges—beading was a standardized stamping process that was fashionable at the time--

What questions did the audience ask about this object?

Why wasn't a pattern needed for this piece?

What do the marks on the bottom of the piece mean? Answer: tool testing, assay scrapings, scratch weight etched on bottom—weight a way of identifying piece in a household inventory

Object Information

Object Title: base of a salt cellar

Object Date: Utrecht, the Netherlands, about 1630

Museum accession number of object: M.163-1939

Description of Object (please attach any information received from breakout session leaders to this sheet):

Made from a single sheet of silver—hammered/ raised into shape

Lightweight

Mark of Thomas Bogaert

Function of the object?

Salt cellar basin

Where was the object used/viewed/consumed?

Who used it?

nobles

Original context of the object?

how to work a raised piece: raise sheet up like a bowl—no seams—then small crook hammer taps object from inside out—

An example of the auricular style (for the “ear-like” quality of the sinuous shapes this style produces—an attempt to replicate natural designs)—one of the few instances of silverworking in which skill valued above monetary value of metal.

The Van Viannans—a noble family that commissioned auricular prints

The significance of the object?

The difficulty of the process is important—this object presents an instance not of the application of design to form but that design and form are one and the same

What questions did the audience ask about this object?

Why were objects raised/hammered into being given the difficulty of the skill and the relative lack of attention given to skill at this time? Does value derive from the difficulty of the skill? Answer: in the case of auricular style, design more important because of difficulty of technique.

Object Information

Object Title: sea urchin salt

Object Date: London, 1825-6

Museum accession number of object: M.24-1964

Description of Object (please attach any information received from breakout session leaders to this sheet):

Silver

Mark of John Bridge for Rundell, Bridge and Rundell

cast from a sea urchin and spun to make inner surfaces smooth
an example of literal naturalism (like in 18th c) but more refined

Function of the object?

Salt cellar

Where was the object used/viewed/consumed?

Who used it?

High status piece

Original context of the object?

Made in a time when there was a passion for specialized vessels & naturalized styles
Made in multiple numbers

The significance of the object?

What questions did the audience ask about this object?

Describe the process of spinning/turning/lathing silver? Answer: a method of shaping in which silver was scraped off of an anchored piece of silver—this is a different technology from raising/hammering, where silver is not removed- fun fact: apprentices used to wash the silver scrapings out of their hair and keep them

Where is the weight in casting vs. embossing? Weight related to ?

Is there a period when English becomes sought after in Europe? Answer: not really

Relation between gold and silversmithing? Answer: interchangeable until the 18th? c when term “silversmith” comes into use

Relationship between goldsmiths & banking? Proposed theory: the shift towards deriving the value of a piece from workmanship rather than metallic value depends on a shift toward more sophisticated banking practices

Comment: The sea urchin raises question of what relation the artisan wants to create between art and nature

Comment: a continuity in methods since Roman times except for the rolling mill and electrotyping