

CHRISTIAN IV's ROYAL PLATE

by *Mogens Bencard*

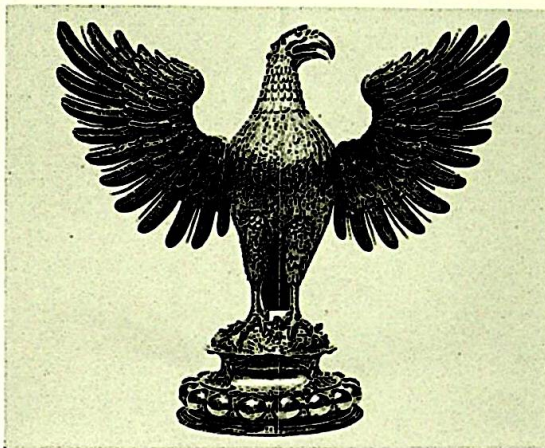
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Christian IV was born in 1577, and crowned in 1596. He ruled his Danish-Norwegian kingdom until his death in 1648. He seems to be known in Britain mainly for his heavy drinking, which is a somewhat unfocussed portrait. He was the man behind all the modern town-planning in his country and founded many new cities. He was also one of our main patrons of the arts, and was a lover and connoisseur of music. He counted among his court musicians people like John Dowland and Heinrich Schütz.

He was, however, not much of a collector, which makes it all the more strange that so much of his silver is preserved and can still be identified. With him we are in the somewhat unusual situation that written sources and material evidence unite to form a picture of what he surrounded himself with. Silver, to him, seems to be part of his image, especially of the over-sized kind, meant to show his princely magnificence, and above all his favourite ambassadorial gifts.

For his Royal Chapel at Frederiksborg Castle he commissioned from the Hamburg goldsmiths Jacob Mores I and Hans Lambrecht I the outstanding silver altar, which was installed in 1606, and also the silver pulpit, which strangely enough bears no goldsmith's marks. Normally, in Denmark at least, unmarked silver is an indication of a direct commission from the King to a silversmith, thus making it possible for the latter to avoid the guild's strict rules for marking and hall-marking. It seems impossible, however, to imagine that this outstanding piece of silver furniture was made in Copenhagen. Hamburg seems a much better candidate for its production. The solution to this puzzle may be that the goldsmith came to Frederiksborg with the silver to be fitted into the ebony pulpit. Documentary evidence shows that the king owned other pieces of silver furniture – beds, tables, fountains and mirrors. Two ebony tables with engraved silver panels are preserved, together with an ebony mirror. The rest was either sold or melted down in critical periods to furnish his wars.

Of the King's plate few pieces are preserved in Denmark. A gilt tankard, marked AE for an unknown, Danish(?) goldsmith, which presumably is a christening present to the young prince in 1577, is one of them. The other is a covered cup, made by Hermann von Bordesloe of Hamburg ca. 1590, and meant to be presented to the king on his coronation in 1596 by one of the Danish cathedral chapters. This 75 cms high cup, which strangely enough was never presented, is evidence of the Hamburg goldsmiths having such cups in stock, as one can see when comparing the two above-mentioned dates. The third item is a statuette of the young King on horseback tilting at the ring. It was made

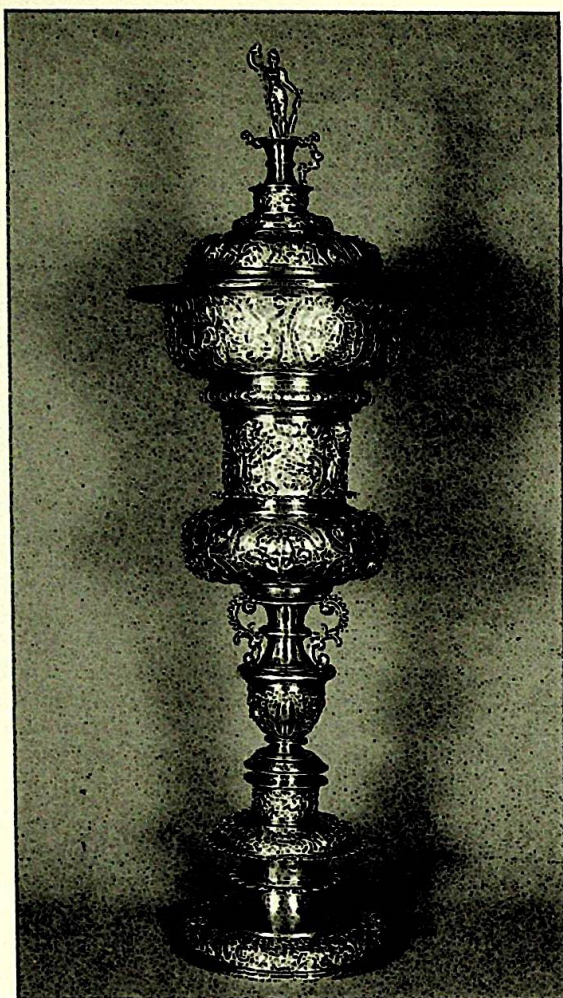


1. Eagle. Christoph Jamnitzer, Nuremberg. H. 51 cm. Coronation present 1596 from the island Oesel. Sold 1628. The Armoury Museum, Moscow.

by Heinrich Beust of Braunschweig, and according to the preserved bill, commissioned by the King in 1598. This over-sized 'Trinkspiel' – it weighs 32 kgs – was ordered to commemorate the king's sporting abilities during the coronation 'carousel'.

All other pieces of the King's plate came to Moscow during the King's lifetime, either as a result of a sale or as ambassadorial gifts. About a hundred pieces of this can be identified, and are still preserved in the Armoury Museum in the Moscow Kremlin. According to documentary evidence much more went to Russia on different occasions.

All this silver serves as an illustration to Danish history, and to the political events in North-Western Europe at the time. Some words on this seems necessary. To Christian IV Sweden was the foremost enemy. To him the Wasas were usurpaters on a throne, which he considered his. The union of the three Nordic countries under one crown had been lost to the Danes in the previous century, but a re-union remained a major political goal. That the Swedish warrior-kings became increasingly successful planted in Christian IV an often blinding jealousy with the result that all his political moves were directed against the Swedes. With Denmark and Norway fencing Sweden in on two sides, Russia seemed to the King the best of possible allies in his feud. Poland to the South was also very important in this. The Russian Czars had no reason to love the Swedes either. During the late 16th and the early 17th centuries the Swedes and the Poles had forced Russia away from the Baltic, isolating her from the trade routes to the



2. Cup. Hermann von Bordesloe, Hamburg. c. 1590. H. 59.3
 ← cm. Intended coronation present from the Cathedral
 ← Chapter of Ribe. The National Museum, Copenhagen.

West, and leaving her with only Archangelsk as a port to the rest of Europe. The Russians concentrated their forces on Poland and maintained a neutrality policy towards Sweden, but whenever they felt strong enough to do so, they approached the Danes. Usually with proposals of marriage to cement the alliance.

In 1570 the King's paternal uncle, Duke Magnus, had married Czar Ivan IV's (the Terrible) niece, Maria Vladimirovna. Magnus was proclaimed king of Livonia, but the plan was a failure, and Magnus ended his days in exile in Poland.

In 1601 a Russian delegation arrived in Denmark with an offer to the King's youngest brother, Duke Hans, of marriage to Czar Boris Godunov's daughter, Ksenija. The offer was accepted, and the Duke arrived in Moscow in September the following year, but did, unfortunately, fall ill and died in October before the marriage ceremony had taken place. Very few gifts, and little plate seems to have been exchanged on this

occasion. The accounts give a detailed description of the household silver that was sent with him, all made by Copenhagen goldsmiths. This will not concern us here, but it is known that it was returned with his estate. The Duke's followers do, however, give a description of the still-existing audience hall in the Palace of Facets in the Kremlin. Around the central pillar on shelves was arranged silver, "gilt and indescribably large and impressive". In the ante-chamber were also shelves around the walls filled with silver. All this plate, which presumably was looted by the Poles in 1616, may have served Christian IV as a guidance for future gifts to the Russian Czars.

In 1622 the new Czar, Michael Romanov, sent a delegation to Copenhagen. Officially to negotiate usual business between the two countries. If one, however, is familiar with the modest amount of gifts, a normal delegation brings along, the substantial amount of gifts presented to the king, makes one wonder about the actual purpose. From other sources it can be seen that the unofficial purpose is a proposal of marriage between the Czar himself and the King's niece in Gottorp. To the King's embarrassment and annoyance the offer was turned down, so once again his hopes for an alliance with the Russians was crushed.

For the sake of appearances it was, however, important that gifts were returned equivalent to those presented by the Russian ambassadors. The archives give a detailed description of the King's actions. First he took out from his collections a number of silver items, which he sent to the goldsmith "to change the escutcheons on". Undoubtedly older presents bearing donors' names or coats-of-arms, which were exchanged for the King's initials. This was not enough to make an even balance, so further objects were bought from goldsmiths and private owners. As we shall see later, the King was well supplied with silver, which makes it obvious that he was not prepared to part with good plate for this – politically seen – useless reason.

As the balance was still uneven, he sent to his silk-works in Copenhagen for a number of textiles. The bill for this, bearing the King's acceptance, is still preserved. Two of the items, two magnificent damask-woven table cloths, are still preserved in the Kremlin.

Although the silver probably was not of the best quality and not quite up-to-date, it was, according to the archival information, impressive enough. Its total weight was 5639 "lod" (1 lod equals c. 14.7 gr.), and 100 items are mentioned. They are not described in detail. The biggest group consisted of covered cups, the second of flagons and ewers. Bowls, plates, dishes, platters, stoups, candlesticks, a beaker, a basin are also mentioned. Of the more individual objects were two unicorns, a horse, a "Maiden with a Kettle", two ostrich egg cups, and a "Mother of Pearl bowl" (probably a nautilus cup). The lot gives a good impression of what was given away on such occasions.

One item can be identified through a contemporary Russian engraved inscription, saying that it was brought

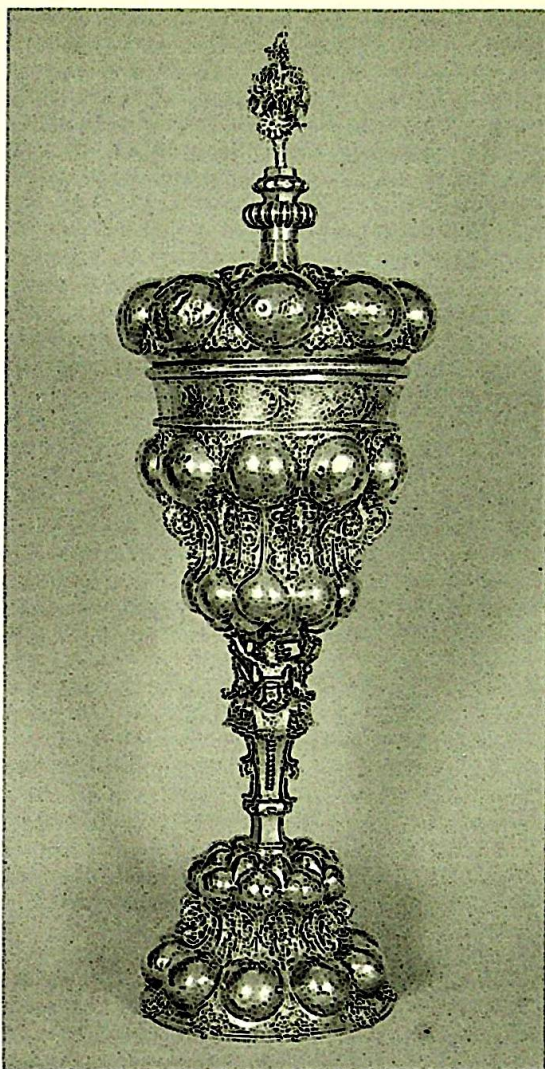
to the Czar in 1622 by Deakon Zdan Sipov, who was one of the ambassadors to Denmark. It is a double cup from around 1560 by Christoph I. Epfenhausser in Augsburg. It bears on each half Christian IV's somewhat primitively chased monogram, and may therefore be one of the cups sent to the goldsmith to change the "escutcheon". Two more items in the Kremlin have identical monograms, which makes them attributable to this gift. One is a ewer made in 1594-95 by John Morley in London, and the other a basin with the same date and marked "VV". Another ewer is dated to the same year, but bears no maker's mark. This is not monogrammed, and there is no further information about it, but it is tempting to group it with the others. It is not known, how these pieces came into the King's possession. The date may suggest that the Scottish delegation brought them to the coronation in 1596, but that would acquire acceptance of the idea that James VI ordered silverware from London. They could alternatively, although this has been doubted by English scholars, have been presented to King Christian in 1614, during his visit to his brother-in-law, who by then had become James I of England.

In 1625 the King involved himself in the 30 Years' War, with lost battles and an occupied Jutland as a result. To finance the liberation Christian IV was forced to sell, melt down, or pawn most of his silver. This brought a lot of the silver, the King did not want to part with in 1622, into the Czar's hands. It was sold by "German merchants" in Archangelsk, and acquired by the Czar in 1629. In the literature it is an often repeated "fact" that the sale was the result of the King's unredeemed pledge. This can hardly be true, since it would not have been possible to sell off pawned wares, and especially not Royal ones, at such short notice. It seems more probable that the King had actually planned the sale to take place in Archangelsk, as the Czar, being the only prince in Northern Europe not tied up in the 30 Years' War, might be considered the most likely customer.

The Czar's purchase is carefully listed in all detail in 1629. It includes 105 numbers, and although the King's name is not mentioned, so many items can be identified as his, that there can be no doubt that they all came from his vaults.

The list comprises, in the order they are mentioned: 2 thuribles in the shape of mountains with castles on the top; 6 sets of basins with ewers; 1 chandelier; 4 oversized buckets (wine coolers); 14 deep dishes; a set of 12 dishes, one set of 6 and one of 3 dishes; 25 cups with lids; 6 small bowls ("bratiny"); 2 horses on socles (to hold spices?); a set of 6 candlesticks, and one of 3 candlesticks; 2 covered mugs; 6 covered cups; and 1 eagle. To the sale must be added, although they are not mentioned in the list: 1 covered bowl; 1 sweetmeat bowl with a foot in the shape of a lion; and 1 thurible like the two above.

Of these the following have so far been identified: the 3 thuribles, of which the two were made by Dirich Utermarke in Hamburg, and the third is unmarked.



3. Bossed cup. Christoph Jamnitzer, Nuremberg. H. 55.5 cm.
 ← Coronation present 1596 from Arild Huitfeldt. Sold 1628.
 ← Museum of Decorative Arts, Copenhagen.

The castle on top of the latter is a rendering of Kronborg Castle at Elsinore as it stood before a fire in 1629, and must have been commissioned by the King directly from (a Hamburg?) goldsmith. Of the 4 wine coolers one was made by Dirich Utermarke, and the three by Flor Robyn II in Hamburg. Of the 14 dishes five are preserved. They bear the King's coat-of-arms (household dishes?), and are made by Hinrich Lambrecht I in Hamburg. Some of these have later been furnished with Russian inscriptions on the rims. 6 of the identified cups can be seen to have been presents to the King at his coronation or just after. Two of these, each weighing over 10 kg, were presented by the town Wilster in Holstein, and made by Jacob Mores the Elder in Hamburg, who also made a cup presented by another Holstein town, Krempe. Like a cup, mentioned earlier, Hermann von Bordesloe also made the cup presented by another cathedral chapter, and as this is also marked

before 1590, we have once again an example of goldsmiths having showpieces like this in stock. One cup, presented by the town Malmø, was made by Mattheus Fischer in Rostock, and one was made by Christoph Jamnitzer in Nuremberg. This latter has earlier been thought to have been bought by the King from his chancellor, Arild Huitfeld, whose name is inscribed on it. As donors, rather than owners seem to put their names on this kind of silver, it must be considered a gift from the chancellor, most likely for the coronation. If this is correct, it becomes a very early example of the bossed cups, later to become so popular. One cup, also made by Hermann von Bordesloe was included in the sale, but cannot be identified as a present. As mentioned, two cups weighed over 10 kg, and it is clear, that no cup weighed under 1 kg. Like the Czar in his Palace of Facets, the King had certainly also been able to impress visiting princes and ambassadors with shelves filled with his Royal Plate. Easily identified is also the eagle, which was presented in 1596 by the island Oesel, then a Danish province. It was made by Christoph Jamnitzer. The covered bowl was made by Dirich Utermarke, and the sweetmeat bowl by Hinrich Lambrecht I.

The Czar's acquisition was certainly a substantial help to refurbish his collections of plate, lost prior to his accession to the throne.

Negotiations between the Russians and the Danes became scarce for a while. One Danish embassy to the Czar must be mentioned, because it shows, what was presented at normal ambassadorial errands. The czar was given a piece of jewellery set with diamonds to which was added 6 cups in all. Certainly a long way off from the enormous amount of gifts exchanged, when important matters were to be discussed.

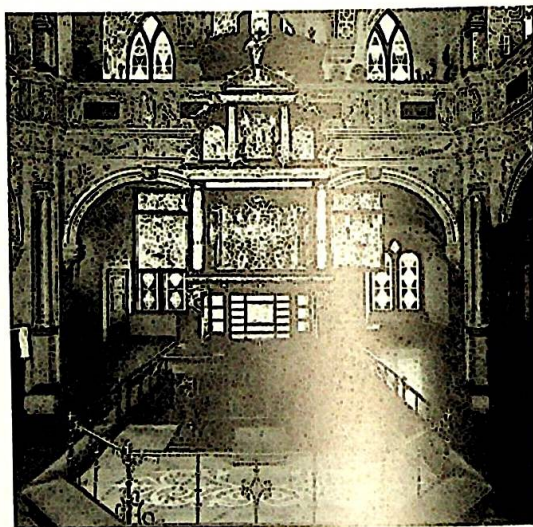
Later once again the Czar approached Christian IV with a proposal of marriage. This time between his daughter Irina, and the king's son, Valdemar Christian. One may, perhaps, wonder why the czars were so keen on marrying into the Danish Royal family. Apart from the political aspects already mentioned, and certainly important, one must not forget that the czars of the early 17th century, whether Godunovs or Romanovs came from Bojar families. To them such a marriage would be advantageous, placing, if not themselves, then their sons and daughters one step above the other Bojar families on the social ladder.

Being this as it may, an ambassador was sent to Copenhagen in 1640 to "inspect" the young man, and to ask, if the King would consent to such a plan. The King's reaction was positive, and in 1641 it was arranged that Count Valdemar Christian should travel as an ambassador to Moscow.

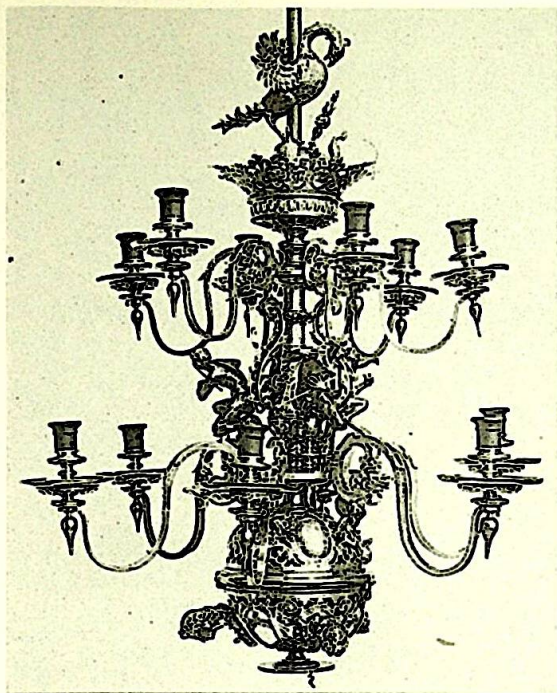
The embassy was furnished with gifts related to the importance of the errand. A stallion and some mares were sent with horsecloths lined with velvet, and the covering for the stallion is specified as being of "coloured" velvet with gold lace trimmings. This cloth,



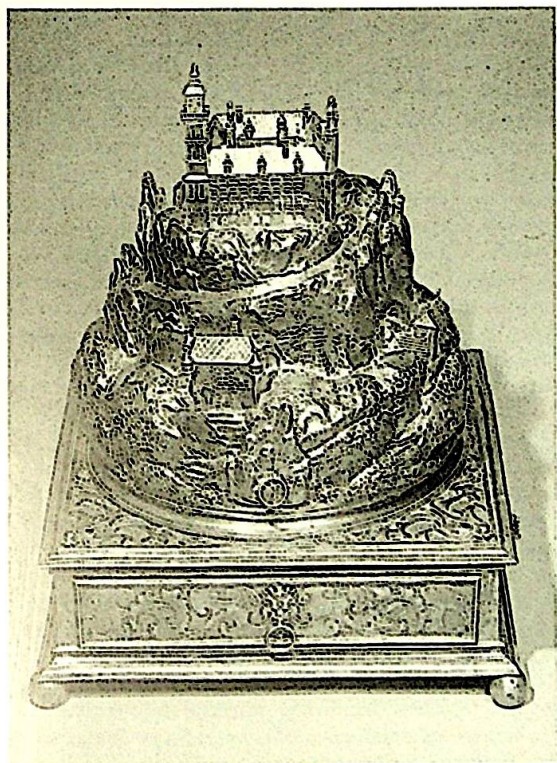
4. Christian IV tilting at the ring. Heinrich Beust, Brunswick.
 ← H. 71.5 cm. Commissioned by the king 1598. The Royal Collections, Rosenborg.



5. Altar. Jacob Mores I and Hinrich Lambrecht I, Hamburg.
 ← H. 4.5 m. Acquired 1606. Frederiksborg Castle Chapel.



6. Chandelier with clock. Hinrich Lambrecht I, Hamburg.
 ← Acquired by the king c. 1606. C. 1.5 m. Helligaandskirken, Copenhagen.



7. Thurible. Hamburg? (H. 53 cm) The castle on top represents
 ← Kronborg at Elsinore before a fire 1629. Recorded in Moscow 1632. The Armoury Museum, Moscow.

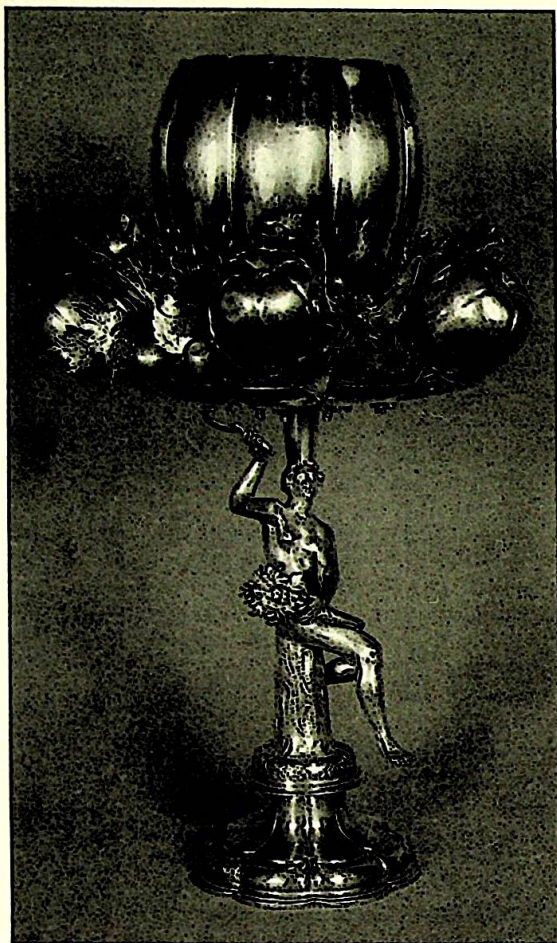
bearing Christian IV's crowned monogram is still preserved in the Kremlin. The most striking in our context is the King's purchase of silver from the Hamburg trader, Albert Baltzer Berns. His bill, which is still preserved, comprises 51 gilt silver cups, and one chased basin. As usual there is no description of the items, but the total weight was c. 70 kg. and the cost 4055 rix dollars. One cup can be identified through its Russian inscription. It was made by Johan Jans in Hamburg. It is hallmarked for the period 1614-28, which shows that Berns also dealt in stocks.

The Count was a success with the Czar, and after many intricate negotiations between the two rulers the marriage was decided, and in September 1643 Valdemar Christian left Copenhagen for Moscow. Richly endowed with gifts and with a train of 300 people.

The King again turned to Hamburg for the gifts. Two bills are preserved to give us information on the silver to be included. One is signed by Hans Georg Dessler, who is not a member of the Hamburg guild, but known from other sources as a jeweller. Again the individual items are not described, but listed as follows: 31 cups weighing c. 38½ kg; 13 flasks c. 12 kg; 10 bowls c. 5 kg; 9 flagons c. 10 kg; 3 basins with ewers c. 9½ kg; 3 beakers on knobs c. 1 kg; 1 mother-of-pearl swan c. 1½ kg; and 1 nef on 4 wheels c. 1 kg. In total c. 78½ kg, for which was paid 4028 rix dollars. In addition, the bill includes the purchase of 1 nautilus cup with a Hercules, one with a Diana, 1 ostrich egg with a coral spray, a mountain with a coral spray and a bowl, and a Bacchus, which brings the bill up to 4488 rix dollars.

The other bill is signed by Hans Lambrecht III, member of the guild and of one of Hamburg's greatest goldsmith dynasties. Many works from his hand is known, although none in the Armoury in Moscow, which may suggest that he in this case acted as a dealer. His bill comprises 53 cups totalling c. 62 kg; 3 nautilus cups c. 3.7 kg; 3 flagons c. 3½ kg; 3 flasks c. 2 kg; 3 basins with ewers c. 10 kg; 2 sweetmeat trees c. 13 kg, a white lion c. 4 kg; 18 chased sweetmeat bowls c. 8½ kg; 10 plain ones c. 9 kg; and 6 further cups c. 1½ kg; All in all c. 118 kg to a price of 6081 rix dollars. So the King's total purchase of silver for his son's nuptial quest was 10,500 rix dollars.

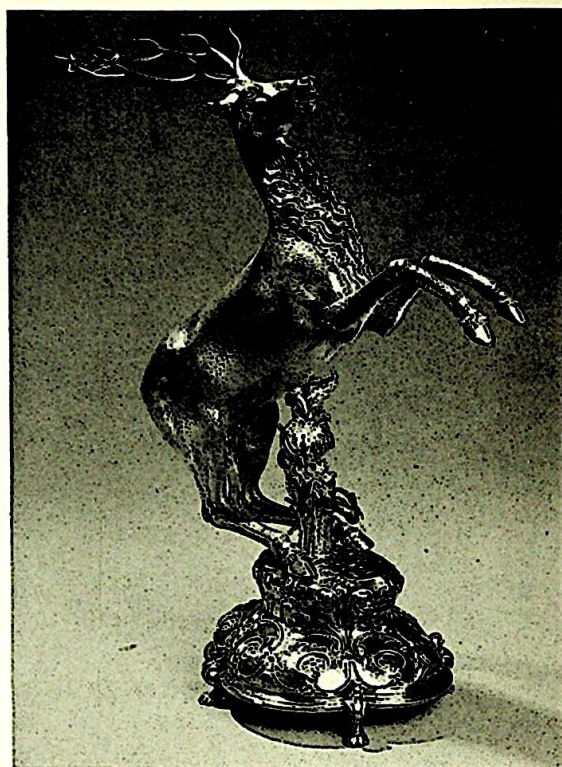
An identification between these two bills and silver in the Armoury is in this case made even more difficult by the fact that the count lost one of his ships underways, and obviously some of the gifts. It is also clear from the travel accounts that Valdemar Christian started buying pieces of silver, as soon as he had heard about the shipwreck. Some pieces of all this wealth can, however, be identified through various sources. Russian inscriptions on the items: a double cup by Hans Petzolt of Nuremberg, c. 1600; a pineapple cup by Hans Georg Kolbe, Hamburg, 1614-28; a cup by Dirich Utermarke, Hamburg 1614-28; a pineapple cup by Carsten Mundt I, Hamburg 1628-43; a pineapple cup by Hans Lambrecht II, Hamburg 1631-33; a melon cup by the



8. Melon cup. Hans Lambrecht II, Hamburg, 1631-33. H. 38 cm. present to the Czar 1644. The Armoury Museum, Moscow.

same; a bossed cup by the same; a columbine cup by Claus Sülssens, Hamburg, 1635-43; 2 columbine cups by "PI", Kiel; another columbine cup by "HT", in Worms; and finally one bossed cup, made in Hamburg.

From Russian provenance records of 1663: 13 sweetmeat bowls made jointly by Hans Lambrecht II and Ambrosius Sommer, Hamburg. These must be the rest of the set of 18, mentioned in Hans Lambrecht III's bill. Furthermore one of the sweetmeat trees, also in this bill, a nautilus cup by Diterich Thor Moye, Hamburg 1633-35, and a table decoration consisting of a blue and white china bowl, resting on a branch of coral rising from a silver gilt mountain, made by Hieronimus Bang, Nuremberg and dated 1630. This is to be found in Dessler's bill. Most of this silver is dated prior to the actual purchase, once again showing that it had been kept in stock, ready for such occasions. The relatively large amount of items made by Hans Lambrecht II demands attention, especially as he is only known to have been active for the two years mentioned. Is it to be seen as an indication of a mix-up between the marks of the two goldsmiths, and that Hans



9. Table decoration. Johan Jans, Hamburg, 1635-44. H. 40 cm. Acquired (in Vilna?) by Count Valdemar Christian en route to Moscow. Presented to the Czar 1644. The Armoury Museum, Moscow.

Lambrecht III actually sold more of his own silver to King Christian in 1643?

To this must be added one last piece, a rearing hart, made by Johan Jans, Hamburg 1635-44, which can be identified as one of the Count's gifts through various sources. This is not to be found in any of the two bills, and must have been bought by the count underways, presumably in Vilna, then residence town of the Polish king. It is of interest to know that an object as good as this could, so to speak, be bought on the roads of Europe.

What, then, happened to the Count, surrounded by all his splendour, to the marriage, and to the alliance between the two countries? This time the Swedes did not sit back to trust their luck and wait for the Count to die. They decided on a surprise attack on Denmark. Few months after Valdemar Christian's departure they fell into Denmark without a previous declaration of war, something, which according to an outraged King Christian, no Christian Nation had ever done before. Instead of joining forces with Denmark, as the King had hoped, the Czar decided to postpone the marriage till he had seen the outcome of the war. So, when it ended in 1645 with a bad defeat for the Danes, the Count, who had been kept prisoner in the Kremlin, was sent back to his home country. All the King's investments in his political schemes once again were done in vain.

And the silver remained in Moscow, because it was presented as ambassadorial gifts on Valdemar Christian's first audience in the Palace of Facets.

To summarize: The over-sized plate, which in shapes often imitate household silver, but is not meant for practical use, plays an important role as a demonstration of princely magnificence. Displayed on shelves – as in the Palace of Facets – it impresses visiting ambassadors, who faithfully report to their sovereigns, what they have seen. At state banquets it can also be found on shelves behind the princes, or, as for instance in the case of the three magnificent mountains, where smoke from incense came out of the castles' chimneys, placed on the table.

It was also considered important in the exchange of gifts between princes, and, as such it may reveal, how important the individual embassy is. In the case of the Russian embassy to Copenhagen in 1622, it was obvious that the rich gifts exchanged had no relation to the official negotiations, and they only became understandable, when it was revealed that the real business was the Czar's proposal of marriage. This must, of course, have been well-known facts to the surrounding circle of spies and diplomats, who must have been able to see from the gifts, if from nothing else, whether something of importance was going on. Seen in this respect, plate is not merely a matter of collecting, but has also a political and historical significance.

The amount of silver, not only in kilos, but in numbers as well, is considerable. A set of gifts can, as has been clearly demonstrated, go up to a hundred items. This made it necessary for the goldsmiths to keep plate of this type in stock. Otherwise they could not meet the often sudden demands of delivery, made upon them.

Plate may be furnished with the donor's name or coat-of-arms, never, as it seems, with the owner's. It may be commissioned from the goldsmith for a special occasion, as most probably is the case with Christoph Jamnitzer's huge eagle, which Oesel presented to Christian IV for his coronation. Ready-made items may be furnished with the donor's name, as is demonstrated with Hermann von Bordesloe's cup, which the cathedral chapter of Lund presented to the King.

Plate, known to have been commissioned, like the King tilting at the ring, may be fully marked. On the other hand unmarked silver, like the thurible with Kronborg Castle on top, or the Frederiksborg pulpit, is somewhat puzzling. Normally guilds and towns upheld strict rules about marking to ensure the correctness of the silver's quality. The by-passing of these rules can only be the result of direct negotiations between customer and goldsmith.

Christian IV's plate, of which so much and detailed knowledge can be presented, is therefore a useful source of information to the silver historian.

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