THE EMPEROR TAZZAS
By YVONNE HACKENBROCH

One of the pleasures of visiting a museum is a constant sense of discovery brought by wandering from object to object and from period to period. In the Bache collection there is a silver-gilt table decoration of the sixteenth century which has historical associations of particular interest. The dish stands upon a high foot with vase-shaped stem, and the surface of the bowl, divided into four sections of low relief separated by columns, depicts four events of Roman history. In the center stands a statuette of the emperor Otho, clad in armor and cloak—there can be no mistake, for his name is engraved in capitals upon the base. The decorative motives are classical: festoons of fruit and flowers, cherubs' heads, rams' heads, and masks in high relief. The tazza is cast in five sections, fastened together with screws, and rises to a height of sixteen and a half inches. Pricked upon the underside of the bowl are the crest and cardinal's hat of Ippolito Aldobrandini, later Pope Clement VIII, indicating that the tazza came into his possession between the years 1585 and 1592, while he wore the cardinal's purple, before his election to the seat of Saint Peter. It can hardly be thought that Aldobrandini commissioned the tazza himself; his arms appear as an inconspicuous addition rather than an indication of original ownership, executed, as they are, in a technique too delicate to compete with the bold surface decoration.

The dish was one of a set of twelve, which must have formed an impressive sight when displayed upon the cardinal's banquet tables. An Italian manuscript which bore the arms of Cardinal Aldobrandini and was formerly in the collection of Frederic Spitzer in Paris but has been lost since the sale in 1893 described the historical events shown in the reliefs. Six of the original tazzas were also in the Spitzer collection. They clearly all followed one basic design, varied according to the story of the particular emperor.

The theme of the Twelve Caesars is derived from Suetonius, the Roman historian, whose literary work belongs to the time of Trajan and Hadrian (A.D. 98-138). His Lives of the Caesars begin with Julius and end with Domitian. The revival of interest in them during the Renaissance, partly due to the first edition of 1470, then later to reprints and to translations from the pens of outstanding humanists, including Erasmus of Rotterdam, created a demand for such representations of the subject as are found on the Aldobrandini tazzas.

One of the first renaissance artists to make use of the theme of the Twelve Caesars was Giovanni Cavino of Padua (1499-1570), who struck a sequence of medals which follow closely the style of Roman coins and cameos. These "Paduans" had a wide appeal and established the rendering of idealized Roman profile portraits elsewhere. Theodore de Bry (1528-1598) and Nicolas de Bruyn (1570-1652) issued series of engravings of Roman emperors, while Léonard Limosin, first of the name, of Limoges (1505-1575) painted their portraits in grisaille enamel, which later artists...
repeated with many variations. Representations of the Twelve Emperors in full figure and armor are known from engravings by Eneo Vico of Parma, published in Venice in 1553, and from those of the Nuremberg artist Virgil Solis (1514-1562), whose style is closely similar to that of the statuettes of the Aldobrandini tazzas. The goldsmith derived his motives frequently from other artists, particularly after the beginning of the Renaissance. Following the rapid development of printing the circulation of ornamental engravings increased, and it became usual workshop practice for the goldsmith to combine designs drawn from different
Tazza with statuette of the Roman emperor Domitian, from the same set. The tazzas were probably made in Augsburg about 1580. In the Lee collection, University of Toronto

sources in the making of individual cups or table decorations.

Other Nuremberg engravers who published patterns for the goldsmith include Bernhard Zan, Jonas Silber, Paul Flindt, and Georg Wechter, to whose work the Aldobrandini tazzas are most closely related. The general proportions between foot, vase-shaped stem, and spreading bowl are similar, and so are such lesser motives as the chain and scale pattern on the rims.

The perfect understanding of the character of metalwork displayed in these ornamental designs suggests that the makers had tried their
hands at goldsmith’s work as well as engravings. During the Renaissance the various disciplines of art were closely linked. Georg Wechter, whose pattern book is one of the highlights of ornamental engraving, calls himself on the title-page Georg Wechter… painter of Nuremberg, 1579. Many painters, including Dürer of Nuremberg, took their early training from the goldsmith, an advantage when essentially metalwork design came to be used for printed engravings.

In the absence of hallmarks there is, however, some evidence suggesting that the Aldobrandini tazzas were made in Augsburg, a conclusion supported by affinities of style and taste. On the bowl depicting Domitian’s German conquests, now owned by Dr. W. L. Hildburgh, London, the Germans float a banner with a pinecone, the emblem of the town of Augsburg. It was at Nuremberg and Augsburg during the later period of the Renaissance that merchant princes and a prosperous bourgeoisie created a demand for art objects of an exuberant character, with the emphasis upon abundance of fine detail. The vigorously treated combat scenes on the emperor tazzas present an ex-
ample of this style, and they show considerable originality in spite of the fact that they are probably derived from engraved designs. While it is not possible to identify the goldsmith responsible for these unusual table decorations it may be assumed that he worked in Augsburg under the influence of South German engravers, among whom Georg Wechter was one of the most important.

A closer examination of the Otho tazza shows that the scenes on the bowl do not correspond but represent events in the reign of Vitellius, for instance, the appearance of the eagle, which

Suetonius describes thus: "Hearing of the murder of Galba, Vitellius made two divisions of his forces, one to send on against Otho, and the other to lead in person. The former was greeted with a lucky omen at the start, for an eagle suddenly flew towards them from the right and after hovering about the standards, slowly preceded their line of march." The next scene illustrates another passage: "Later, as he was sitting in judgment on the tribunal at Vienna (the modern Vienne, near Lyons, France) a cock perched on his shoulder and then on his head." Then follows how "he entered the city
Nero and Julius Caesar, engravings by Virgil Solis. Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Portrait of Otho, engraving from "xii Caesarum Romanorum Imagines" by Franc. Sweert, Antwerp, 1603. Engraved design for metalwork, by Paul Flindt. In the Metropolitan Museum
An archer on horseback and a Roman camp. Woodcuts from “Discours de la Religion des Anciens Romains,” printed by Guillaume Roville, Lyons, 1555. In the Metropolitan Museum (Betriacum) to the sound of the trumpet, wearing a general's mantle and a sword at his side, amid standards and banners, with his staff in military cloaks and his troops with drawn swords.” In the fourth scene “he assumed the office of high priest and made himself Consul for life. He made funeral offerings to Nero in the middle of the Campus Martius, attended by a great throng of the official priests.”

The bowl that originally belonged to the Otho tazza in the Bache collection and relates episodes of Otho's short reign, is now erroneously combined with the Domitian statuette in the Lee collection in Toronto. Suetonius's text establishes the sequence of events, beginning with a banquet that took place shortly after Otho's hopes of being adopted by the emperor Galba had been shattered by the adoption in his stead of Piso: “He (Otho) had been inclined to seize the camp immediately after the adoption (of Piso), and set upon Galba as he was dining in the palace, but had been prevented by consideration for the cohort which was on guard at the time. To all of them ten thousand sesterces were paid at once.” It may be observed that a servant attending the emperor carries a dish which looks like a diminutive replica of the tazza itself. The next scene introduces Otho as emperor: “Hurriedly entering a closed sedan, such as women use, he hurried to the camp... He arrived at headquarters and was at once hailed as Emperor.” Then follows the battle against Vitellius on the banks of the river Po: “In the final and decisive struggle at Betriacum he was defeated, but through treachery.” The fourth scene shows Otho in the act of committing suicide, following the example set by the messenger seen in the foreground. Suetonius shared the public opinion that “none ever died like Otho.” This is his account: “A common soldier on bringing news of the defeat of the army was believed by no one, but was charged by the soldiers now with falsehood and now with cowardice, and accused of running away.
Whereupon he fell on his sword at the Emperor's feet. My father used to say that at this sight Otho cried out that he would no longer endanger the lives of such brave men, who had deserved so well. When he was resolved upon death, he said 'Let us add one more night to our life' (these were his very words). Leaving the door of his bedroom open until a late hour he gave privilege of speaking with him to all who wished to come. When he woke up about daylight, he stabbed himself with a single stroke under the left breast." The faithful rendering of the scene leaves no doubt about Otho's identity. Furthermore Otho's name appears twice scratched across the back of the bowl, intended, no doubt, to prove helpful when the tazza had to be taken apart for cleaning or packing, but failing to serve this purpose in the end.

Yet another transposition took place: the bowl intended for the Domitian tazza in Toronto has been combined with the statuette of Vitellius. This combination, owned by Dr. W. L. Hildburgh, is on exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. It is to be hoped that an exchange of the pertinent portions will, before long, restore the original appearance of three tazzas in New York, Toronto, and London.

There can be little doubt that the confusion of parts took place while six of the original set of twelve tazzas were together in the Spitzer collection in Paris: Julius Caesar, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian. The Julius Caesar tazza, now part of the Lazaro collection, was exhibited in Lisbon in 1945 (colleção Lazaro, no. 110). The Vespasian tazza, formerly at the Pierpont Morgan estate in England, was exhibited at Burlington House in 1901 (cat. plate lxxiv) but has since disappeared. Of the Titus tazza only the bowl, formerly in the pos-
session of the fourth Earl of Ashburnham, survives. Described as a rosewater dish by Cellini, it was sold at Christie's, London, in 1914 (cat. no. 202), and after changing hands several times is now in a private collection. The tazza surmounted by Nero and combined with the bowl of Augustus found its way to the Wernher Museum and Art Gallery at Luton, England, shortly to be opened to the public. Of the other tazzas that once completed the set of twelve no traces remain.

The historical associations of the tazzas may serve as an indication of the taste and humanistic interests of their former owner, Cardinal Ippolito Aldobrandini. But they are also of interest in themselves, for the artist not only studied his historical sources closely, but produced works of art which appeal strongly to the eye as well as to the intellect. Since their decoration is conceived as an illustrated anthology of Suetonius's text, the confusion produced by a transposition of parts, involving the tazzas in New York, Toronto, and London, is unfortunate. Otho stands witnessing the triumph of his rival and counter-emperor Vitellius; Domitian looks down upon Otho's struggles, defeat, and violent death; while Vitellius faces towards the future of the Roman Empire, posing among scenes from Domitian's Germanic conquests. An exchange of parts among the Bache, Lee, and Hildburgh collections would restore the three tazzas to their original state and be a pleasant expression of international common sense.

Woodcut from the "Discours de la Religion des Anciens Romains"