A Mysterious Monogram

by YVONNE HACKENBROCH Research Associate, Publications

The history of English domestic silver has few finer examples of engraving than an Elizabethan ewer and rose-water basin of 1567-1568, and set of twelve plates lent to the Metropolitan Museum of Art by C. Ruxton Love, Jr. Seldom have material, form, and decoration been blended to a happier effect. Seldom, too, have the graphic arts shown themselves as a more dominating influence in the formation of style. At the time when these articles were made, the decorators of textiles, carvings, metalwork, and goldsmiths' work kept in touch with the new designs of leading masters by means of woodcuts and engravings which circulated from one workshop to another. Hence it is not surprising to find woodcut illustrations from a French Bible of the time reproduced on this group of Elizabethan plate.

The parcel-gilt ewer (Figure 2) and rose-water basin (Figure 1), formerly in the collection of J. P. Morgan, are examples of the extremely rare

Figs. 1, 2. Parcel-gilt rose-water basin, and ewer, engraved by P. English, 1567-1568. Diameter 19 ¾, and height 13 ¼ inches Lent by C. Ruxton Love, Jr., 1949
Elizabethan silver decorated exclusively by engraving. The set was a part of the heirlooms of the Hyde family, who were related to royalty through the marriage of Anne Hyde to James, duke of York, later King James II. A last echo of Holbein’s art lingers in the restrained organization and clarity of line—a style that was later to be replaced by boldly embossed, profuse decoration.

The basin has panels showing episodes from the Old Testament separated by medallions with

---

**Fig. 3.** Silver-gilt plate, showing Jacob’s Dream, engraved by P. English, about 1567-1568. Diameter 7 ¾ inches Lent by C. Ruxton Love, Jr., 1949

**Fig. 4.** Jacob’s Dream, engraving by Bernard Salomon from Quadrins Historique de la Bible. 2 x 3 inches Rogers Fund, 1917
bust portraits of English kings and queens with royal insignia, from William the Conqueror to the young Queen Elizabeth. These portraits, interspaced with sea monsters, are also on the ewer. Its cavetto boss shows a scene from Exodus and bears a Latin inscription: sanvis. iésy. Christi. fily. dei. emvndat. nos. a. omni. peccato. iohannis. ca. (The blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanseth us from all sin.)

The Old Testament scenes are rendered in the style of the school of Fontainebleau, featuring swaying elongated figures. They follow woodcut illustrations by Bernard Salomon from Quadrins Historique de la Bible, published by Jean de Tournes at Lyons in 1553. Bernard Salomon, often called le petit Salomon, was among the foremost engravers of his time, even if, as some believe, he delegated the actual cutting of his blocks to others. The popularity of this Bible is proved by the quick succession of editions: the first, in

Fig. 5. Joseph Explaining Pharaoh's Dream, engraving by Salomon. 2 x 3 inches Rogers Fund, 1917

Fig. 6. Silver-gilt plate, showing Joseph Explaining Pharaoh's Dream. Diameter 7 ¾ inches Lent by C. Ruxton Love, Jr., 1949
French, English, and Spanish, was followed by editions in German and Latin in 1554, and in Flemish in 1557. (The illustrations shown are from the Latin 1554 edition.) Some of Salomon's woodcut designs were used for embroidery patterns: examples of these are a set of Swiss sixteenth century valances in the Irwin Untermyer Collection, which shows scenes from Genesis, and another set, of French sixteenth century origin, with episodes from the story of Moses, donated to the Metropolitan Museum from the same collection.

The portraits of kings and queens on the ewer and rose-water basin are, on the other hand, undoubtedly based on English rather than French sources of design. It was an English tradition to show rulers with their royal insignia: they were featured on seals, legal documents, plea rolls and chronicles. Both Stow's Chronicles of 1561 (reprinted in 1575) and Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Irelande of 1571 contain royal bust portraits from William the Conqueror to Queen Mary, each holding the orb and scepter. The woodcut illustrations in these books, however, which were printed repeatedly, have the characteristics of popular art and have little in common with the representations of kings and queens on the ewer and basin. The likeness of Queen Mary's portrait on the rose-water basin to her 1544 portrait in the National Portrait Gallery, attributed to John Corvus, indicates that the original design for both was taken from a set of engravings, or possibly miniatures, that may not have survived, of the circle of John Corvus of Flanders, "paynter and estranger," who was naturalized as John Raven in 1544. If so, the ewer and basin are of additional interest because they show one of the earliest engraved sets of portraits of English sovereigns. Moreover, the one of the young Queen Elizabeth is one of her very few dated early portraits. The style of these portraits is typical of English convention during the period when Flemish artists were invited to England by the court: after Holbein's departure in 1543, and before the ascendency of Nicholas Hilliard, who established the character of Elizabethan portraiture.

Both the ewer and the basin display the mark of an unidentified London goldsmith who used a T in a shaped field and the date-letter for 1567/68. That date is repeated in numerals next to the engraver's initials: \(15_6^{67}\).\(p\), the engraver's monogram, is also present on the set of twelve silver-gilt plates with engraved decoration, which I am convinced are of English origin and close in date to the ewer and basin. These plates, lent to the Museum by Mr. Love, were formerly in the collection of Baron Alphonse de Rothschild. They are numbered in sequence...
according to the story of Genesis, which is featured in the center of each plate. The border design includes portrait medallions, birds, animals, flowers, and Latin inscriptions related to the Biblical representations.

The English origin of these plates seems clear from features they share with the ewer and basin and with another set of twelve plates also signed by $M$, now owned by Francis B. Fowler, Jr. of Los Angeles, and formerly in the collections of the antiquarian Sir Robert Bruce Cotton and of J. P. Morgan.

The choice of Salomon’s Bible illustrations links the Love plates to the ewer and rose-water basin. The designs on the plates, however, are freer adaptations of the woodcuts, and there are certain changes and omissions. The modification of rectangular illustrations for use on circular plates resulted in a loss of concentration, mitigated by a rather monotonous succession of architectural accessories such as steps in the foreground, high arches above, or fantastic rock formations and towering trees. Such liberties with the original design are to be expected as the accent shifts from woodcut illustration to decoration on silver. These losses, however, are compensated for by a gain in harmony between the figural scenes and the border. The inclusion of Latin Biblical inscriptions brings to mind similarly devised Elizabethan trenchers, also intended to heighten the pleasures of convivial gatherings. The ewer and basin, as we have seen, bear a London goldsmith’s mark as well as the engraver’s monogram $P$, whereas Mr. Love’s plates bear no maker’s mark along with the engraved $P$. Nevertheless it seems unlikely that one person served as engraver and goldsmith, for engraving on silver was a highly skilled technique usually executed by a specialist in that art alone.

The Fowler plates feature the Labors of Hercules after engravings by Aldegrever. Three of them have the engraver’s monogram $P$, but — unlike the plates now on loan to the Museum — they bear in addition the hooded falcon mark of the London goldsmith Thomas Bampton and the date 1567.

Who was this monogrammist $P$? His monogram, found exclusively on Elizabethan silver, has been repeatedly associated with the Flemish engraver Pieter Maes, or Maas. Although it is true that many foreign artists seeking refuge from religious persecution were active in England at that time, this identification is most improbable. Maes began his apprenticeship with Adam Brix at Antwerp not earlier than 1572, when he was twelve years old. For this reason he cannot be identified with $M$ who, in 1567, revealed himself as an accomplished engraver and who followed the style of the school of Fontainebleau, whereas the younger Pieter Maes adopted that of Hendrick Goltzius. Thus, though I am convinced that $P$ worked in England, his identity is unknown.

**Fig. 9. The Sacrifice of Isaac, engraving by Salomon.**
2 x 3 inches Rogers Fund, 1917

**Fig. 10. Silver-gilt plate, showing the Sacrifice of Isaac. Diameter 7 ¾ inches**
Lent by C. Ruxton Love, Jr., 1949
As far as can be established only two sets of Elizabethan engraved plates exist, other than the two already mentioned. These two sets are not signed by the engraver but both are marked by the same London goldsmith, F. R. A set of twelve, with scenes from the life of the Prodigal Son in the style of Virgil Solis, is in the collection of the Duke of Buccleugh, and at one time formed part of the Hyde heirlooms, and later part of the Strawberry Hill Collection. One plate is dated 1568/69, the other eleven 1569/70. The other instance where the maker’s mark F. R. occurs is on a set of six parcel-gilt plates at the Victoria and Albert Museum, made 1573/74, with engravings from the story of Abraham and Isaac, surrounded by sea monsters in the style of Ducerceau.

The engravings by the monogrammist $^p_M$ are in contrast to the general overelaboration of Elizabethan decoration. At times of exuberant growth and expansion of national wealth such as the Elizabethan era, the extraordinary vitality of man tends to result in overstatement. All the more remarkable, therefore, is the balanced harmony of form and decoration that distinguishes this group of table silver as works of art.

Fig. 11. Silver-gilt plate, showing Joseph Recognized by his Brethren. Diameter 7 3/4 inches
Lent by C. Ruxton Love, Jr., 1949