

Swiss Coconut Tankard?

Before its entrance into the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva the coconut tankard described in the abstract belonged to the collection of Jean-Jacques Rigaud (1785 – 1854), whose granddaughter Anna Sarasin gave it to the museum in 1903 as has also already been mentioned. Jean-Jacques Rigaud was an important political figure of 19th century Geneva and on top of that a passionate collector. In his residence of Tour-de-Peilz he collected furniture, weaponry and art objects from the Middle Ages and later periods of time. Today a big part of his collection can be found in the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, where in 1910 one of the exhibition rooms was named after the collector. In 1896 Rigaud published *Renseignements sur les beaux-arts à Genève* describing the rise of fine arts in Geneva during the 18th century and emphasising the quality of Swiss painting, especially of painting that focused on the depiction of the Alps. As a patron he also supported the local contemporary art scene and was an active member of several clubs and societies involved in the arts. It seemed clear to him that the artistic ideal could not be separated from the patriotic ideal. Rigaud set the focus of his heterogeneous collecting on national and regional objects. It is however to be mentioned, as Paul Rousset points out, that Jean-Jacques Rigaud was neither an art historian nor did he have very profound knowledge about art. He could be described as an amateur favouring the curiosity and Helvetic sentiments he attributed to his collected objects over their historical value as antiques. Moreover, the conditions to acquire new objects must have been very convenient for Rigaud, as Rousset says, since there was a great selection of art objects for comparatively low prices on the market in the first half of the 19th century and also the contacts Rigaud made through the above mentioned clubs and societies ought have been helpful. Besides these newly acquired objects, part of Jean-Jacques Rigaud's collection consisted of inherited objects as well.¹

In the documentation of the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire the coconut tankard discussed here, is mentioned as to once have been in the possession of the Sirs of Littow in the canton of Lucerne. Afterwards it belonged to an anonymous collector who presumably sold it to Rigaud. The coat of arms on the front of the tankard can be connected to the Swiss family names of Stocker, Stockert or Stöckli, as already suggested in the abstract. Two coats of

¹ Paul Rousset, "Le syndic Rigaud amateur d'art et collectionneur," *Genava: Revue d'histoire de l'art et d'archéologie* 18, (1970), 145-160, <http://doi.org/10.5169/seals-727640>.

arms that are similar to the one on the tankard are indeed registered in the Online State Archive of the canton of Lucerne under the name of Stöckli (Fig. 1, 2). By taking into account the tradition of giving cups and tankards to senior civil servants, revees and people of similar status in Switzerland from the 16th century on, that Dora Fanny Rittmeyer describes, I suggest that the coconut tankard was commissioned by the family of Stöckli and given to the Sirs of Littow as a present to show their gratitude and favour.²

Contrasting the Swissness of the tankard, characterised by its history of possession wandering from one Swiss family to another and most likely being mounted by a Swiss silversmith as well, with the strangeness of the coconut, as the fruit of a plant not growing in Switzerland, implies an ambiguous tension surrounding the object. Interestingly it is a foreign material that is used by one Swiss family to show respect to another Swiss family. Nevertheless, traditional European or even Swiss silversmith's art is used to incorporate the foreign material into Swiss culture augmenting its value through precious materials and presenting it clearly not as naturalia but as artificialia. The material's foreignness is therefore limited and presented as part of Swiss material culture. The gifting family thereby inscribes itself in Swiss tradition as well as in international trading networks transporting foreign goods and knowledge to Switzerland. Even though humbly presenting a gift the Stöckli family demonstrates Swiss dominance. At the same time the power of the descendants of the Sirs of Littow is affirmed through the reception of such an exclusive and precious gift expressing the dominance of Swiss material tradition over a foreign material. Dynamics of power and superiority as well as habits belonging to society are played on the back of a foreign object, namely the coconut.

Using a material foreign to Switzerland to demonstrate something Swiss is also the case with Rigaud and his collection. His collection aimed at showing the quality, value and development of Swiss art and craftsmanship includes with the coconut tankard an object not originally Swiss or Alpine in its materiality. The active act of Rigaud buying the object shows that he saw something in it that contributed to his collection as means to construct an image of remarkable Swiss art production.

² Dora Fanny Rittmeyer, *Geschichte der Luzerner Silber- und Goldschmiedekunst von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Luzern: Keller, 1941), 215f.

Finally, another close look at the coconut tankard reveals some details about its approximate age. Telling from the formal characteristics of the coat of arms the tankard can be dated to the 17th or 18th century. Moreover, there is a little ornament sitting at the back of the tankard exactly above the junction of the handle where the lid is affixed with a hinge. With its mussel shaped form and structure it could be identified as a *rocaille*, linked to the stylistic epoch of Rococo and therefore dated to the 18th century. In their combination the stylistic elements point to the making of the tankard during the 18th century.

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Fig. 1: Unidentified artist(s), Family coat of arms, undat., State archives Lucerne, vgl. <https://query-staatsarchiv.lu.ch/detail.aspx?ID=1625849> (14.01.2019).



Fig. 2: Unidentified artist(s), Family coat of arms, 1928?, State archives Lucerne, vgl. <https://query-staatsarchiv.lu.ch/detail.aspx?ID=1625846> (14.01.2019).