Chalice

Metalwork Collection

Accession Nr.:	13679
Artist/Maker:	Egger, Dávid (1832 - 1897) Egger, Henrik (1836 - 1914)
Place of production:	Budapest
Inscription:	jelzetlen
Materials:	gold; silver-gilt
Techniques:	cast; chased; chiselled; repoussé/punched
Dimensions:	height: 27,5 cm base diameter: 15 cm weight: 985 g

The highly articulated trefoil base of this chalice rises in a conical manner. Its surface, with the exception of the plain gold cup, is covered in abundant asymmetrical floral and figural sculptural decorations of gilt silver as well as colorful enamel in latticework and scale patterns. Recurring motifs are rocailles, volutes, cartouches, and shells, and even the node on the baluster-shaped stem is made up of asymmetric shells. There are enamel ornaments of varying sizes portraying shells, leaves, ears of wheat, flowers, butterflies, and doves that have been individually mounted on the chalice. The green and yellow shades of the translucent enamels are set off by white and blue opaque enamel decorations in several places, such as the upper edge fringe of the calix.

This chalice required rather complex metalworking techniques and was masterfully produced, so was already considered an extraordinary relic from the middle of the 18th century when it was purchased. During the preparations for the exhibition on stylistic history presenting the Baroque and Rococo periods, the restoration experts removed the thin gold plate covering the foot (this was not a usual practice, but was a practical consideration to hide the numerous elements for attaching the decorations). It was then discovered that based on the technical characteristics, the work had been produced more than one hundred years later than had been believed. The gold sheet hid a thick silver plate, which when removed revealed the screws affixing the applied elements. This method of assembly was not at all a customary practice in the 18th century. The gilding of the interior of the chalice stem proved to be electroplating, and this technical solution eliminated the possibility that it had been made earlier than the middle of the 19th century.

The museum purchased and registered the chalice as a French Rococo work in 1915. The seller was Henrik Egger (1836-1914), who had retired from dealing antiques and had earlier worked together with his brother David (1832-1897), a goldsmith, at their workshop in Budapest (for more on the Eggers, see: KEMENCZEI Ágota: Az Egger-műkereskedés és kapcsolata a Nemzeti Múzeummal a dualizmus korában [The Egger Art Dealers and Their Connection to the National Museum during the Dual Monarchy]. *Folia Historica* 27. 2010-2011. 99-116.).

Arnold Ipolyi had already spoken about the “goldsmith-antique dealer” brothers as outstanding practitioners of enamel art in his 1874 lecture on Hungarian and Transylvanian enamels. They were generally recognized experts in enamel art. In addition to the Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest, the works of the “Gebrüder Egger” can also be found in the Imperial Treasury, the Schatzkammer, in Vienna.

This chalice in particular was mentioned when it was purchased from amongst the items in the former Egger collection. It also had a prominent place in the 1917 exhibition of new acquisitions. They wrote that this *“specially displayed enameled Rococo gold chalice with its delicately embossed details evinces the hand of a French craftsperson.”* The report on the Egger Hall that opened at the museum in 1924 also specifically pointed out this chalice richly decorated with enamel amongst its masterworks. It was also a part of the show displaying the great works of European applied arts held on the 100th anniversary of the institution. The catalogue mentioned it as an extraordinary work.

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A piece in the museum collection that is closely analogous to the chalice is a holy water font attributed to Dávid Egger that was also assembled with screws. The fittings for this were similarly hidden by a back plate that could be removed, just as with the chalice.

During the Historicist period, combining elements of earlier objects in the spirit of the past to make a new work was not condemned, but was general practice. However, in the case of this chalice, we instead have a unified creation, a brilliant work by an outstanding goldsmith who had a great sense of style.

by Ildikó Pandur

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