

British Museum acquires the exquisite Palmerston Gold Chocolate Cups

The British Museum is delighted to announce the acquisition of a pair of delicate chocolate cups once owned by the first Viscount Palmerston. The cups are part of an unique collection of historic English silver and gold formed by Sir Ernest Cassel (1852-1921). Offered for sale in 2004, no UK museum was in a position to purchase the collection in its entirety so it has been saved for the nation via an ambitious collaboration on the part of a nationwide consortium of museums to bring this collection into the public domain. Spearheaded by the Ashmolean Museum and the V&A, the consortium arranged to purchase pieces according to the special relevance they would have to the various institutions. The purchase has been made possible by the very generous support of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the National Art Collections Fund, the MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund, the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, museum Friends' organizations, and other benefactors.

An exhibition of all the consortium purchases, opening at the Ashmolean Museum in August 2005, will subsequently be shown in Birmingham, Cardiff, Temple Newsam, and the Museum of London.

The Palmerston gold cups

London, c1700

Maker's mark of John Chartier

Made of the gold from melted down mourning rings inherited by Anne Houblon, Lady Palmerston.

H: 6.4 cm.

The custom of giving memorial rings, inscribed with the deceased's name and date of death, had developed by the mid 17th century. These were usually passed down through family members. Exceptionally, in this case, the rings were melted down and turned into memorial chocolate cups. These cups are the only known examples of mourning rings being adapted in this way. They are also unique examples in gold and in this they provide a poignant addition to the British Museum's existing group of documentary gold plate and its outstanding collection of mourning rings. Of special interest is the link to Sir Hans Sloane, whose collections became the foundation of the Museum in 1753: it was Sloane, who, around 1690 invented the mixing of chocolate with milk to make it more palatable. Sloane's recipe eventually passed to Cadbury's.

Inscriptions on the insides of the handles and the base read: *DULCIA NON MERUIT QUI NON GUSTAVIT AMARA* (he has not deserved sweet unless he has tasted bitter) and *MANIBUS SACRUM* (to the shades of the departed); on the other *Think on yr Friends &*

Death as the chief and *MORTVIS LIBAMVR* (let us drink to the dead). Lady Palmerston bequeathed them to her husband, 1st Viscount Palmerston, in 1735 as 'the 2 lesser Chocolate Cups you would sometimes look on as a Remembrance of Death, and also of the fondest and Faithfullest Friend you ever had' and they have descended through the Palmerston family.

Acquired by the British Museum for £54,161, with the aid of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the National Art Collections Fund, and private donations.

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