

MAGNIFICENT SILVER-GILT FROM THE ROTHSCHILD AND ROSEBERY COLLECTION, MENTMORE TO BE SOLD AT SOTHEBY'S IN LONDON

AN EXCEPTIONAL collection of silver-gilt, objects of vertu and portrait miniatures, hidden from public view for more than 100 years is expected to sell for more than £2,500,000, at Sotheby's in London on Thursday, February 11, 1999.

The collection, formed by Baron Meyer de Rothschild (1818-1874), one of the 19th century's greatest connoisseurs, and added to by his son-in-law Archibald Philip, 5th Earl of Rosebery (1847-1929) is being sold by The Rosebery Family Trust for the benefit of the present Earl's children and grandchildren.

Baron Meyer de Rothschild, son of Baron Nathan Meyer de Rothschild (1777-1836), was born 20 years after his father's arrival in England to found the London branch of the famous banking house. He built and lavishly furnished Mentmore Towers, a Jacobean style Mansion in the vale of Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, which was eventually inherited by his only child, Hannah, who married the 5th Earl of Rosebery in 1878.

Mentmore with its magnificent collections was a Rosebery family seat until, following the death of the 6th Earl in 1977, Sotheby's were instructed to sell the principal contents at auction. The sale held at Mentmore between 18th and 27th May, 1977, broke all previous great house sale records and was dubbed The Sale of the Century.

In a statement, Lady Rosebery said: "150 years ago our great grandfather Rothschild built an enormous house, Mentmore, and he filled it with the furniture and precious objects which he spent his life collecting. As a banker, he particularly liked silver and silver-gilt, and he had all this out on display so he could really enjoy it.

"His daughter, Hannah, inherited it all. She married my husband's grandfather, the Earl of Rosebery, whose own home was in Scotland. Together, they went on collecting, and they made a catalogue of what was in Mentmore and where things came from. In it she wrote: 'One day, when as happens to all collections, this one is broken up, these notes will be of use'.

"Their son, my father-in-law, lived at Mentmore, where he enjoyed breeding racehorses, for half the year, and at our Scottish home, Dalmeny, for the other half. When he died we sold Mentmore and, using Hannah's notes, most of the contents, but we took some of the best furniture and paintings to Scotland, where we open our house to the public and host corporate entertaining.

"In Edinburgh, I work with the Scottish National Museums. I used to be a theatre designer, and my husband is an exhibition lighting expert. So we both greatly enjoy organising and running our own museum and the pleasure people get from coming to it.

"The silver-gilt and objects d'art which are too vulnerable to be put on public display were put into a Trust for the benefit of our children. The Trustees have now decided that they should be sold. For us, a benefit of the sale is that, in going back again to Hannah's notes, we have come to understand and appreciate the pleasure she had in her collections, and we hope that these pieces will give similar pleasure to their future collectors."

The 79 lots of silver-gilt making up the central part of the collection, feature objects dating from the 16th to the early 19th centuries and includes pieces from Belgium, England, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Spain and Switzerland.

A magnificent Swiss drinking cup in the form of a lion (estimate: £400,000-£600,000) is the major item. The lion in roaring rampant stance holds a gold shield enamelled with the royal arms. It represents the lion of the ancient house of Nassau and was a gift from William III to the young men of Berne, The Aussere Stand, who enthusiastically supported him in resisting the military threats of Louis XIV.

The finely modelled cup was specially commissioned from Emanuel Jenner, a goldsmith in Berne, and used on ceremonial occasions. It stayed in the Stand's possession from 1690 until 1798, when it was disbanded because of rising debts. By 1801, the lion cup was in the possession of the Archers' Society of Berne and was used as their ceremonial drinking cup. At their annual banquet, marking the conclusion of their shooting competition, the lion cup was used to drink the toast. The cup, along with other notable objects and the historic buildings of Berne, was

published by Arnold Streit in the first of a series of volumes printed between 1858 and 1862.

The publications stirred great interest in the world of collectors and Baron Meyer de Rothschild and his agent, Victor von Tschann-Zeerlander, were quick to identify the importance of the lion cup as a significant and historically interesting work of art. They negotiated its purchase from the Archers Society in 1860 for SF6,500 and the lion cup became another highly prized Rothschild possession.

A pair of Elizabeth I silver-gilt livery pots, 1602 (estimate £500,000-£700,000) is a rare survival. This type of pot was used in the great Elizabethan houses to distribute a daily allocation (livery is derived from the old French *livrée* meaning allocation) of ale to all the members of the household. Although examples survive in museums and institutions, this is the only silver-gilt pair known to be in private possession. A similar pot was last seen at Sotheby's in 1991 during the exhibition of English Silver Treasures from The Kremlin. They were purchased from George L Durlacher a London dealer by Baron Meyer de Rothschild in 1871 for £530.

A robust silver-gilt ewer, London, 1676 (estimate: £50,000-£70,000) came from the Royal plate cupboard of Charles II. The armorials on the ewer were altered for William III and Mary and it formed part of their coronation plate. It left the Royal collection in the early 19th century when the Prince sold items to finance large orders of new plate for use at Carlton House. Although engraved with Royal armorials that look familiar, they are of a particularly rare form. After the accession of William and Mary, Scotland took two months to swear allegiance to the crown and between February and March, 1689, the arms of Scotland were not used in the quarterings but those of Ireland were used twice. The 5th Earl of Rosebery bought the ewer from a London dealer who had purchased it from an auction at which it was sold by Lord Clifden.

Other items include fine early German cups, an 18th century part toilet service and a suite of Queen Anne silver made for the Gorges family.

Also included in the sale is a remarkable group of landscape miniatures. The earliest, by Hans Bol, signed and dated 1588, depicts an expansive northern landscape with St Jerome with his lion discreetly placed in the lower right corner (estimate: £18,000-22,000).

The flowering of the tradition in the 18th century is well represented by a diverse selection by the greatest of that era's practitioners, the Van Blarenberghe family. Included are works by Louis Nicholas 'Le Grand' Van Blarenberghe, Landscape with commedia dell'arte travellers (estimate: £8,000-12,000) and a Coastal Landscape with watchtower, by his son Henri Joseph Van Blarenberghe (estimate: £10,000-12,000).

Among the portrait miniatures are an evocative group of late 18th century works by artists such as Pierre Adolphe Hall, Luc Marie Sicardi and Augustin Dubourg whose images capture the ephemeral twilight the Ancien Régime.

Pre-eminent among the small group of objects of vertu is the extremely rare and historically important American gold Freedom Box (estimate: £300,000-400,000) given in 1773 (three years before the Declaration of Independence) by the Corporation of the City of New York to Thomas Gage, Lieutenant General and Commander in Chief of all his Majesty's forces in North America.

The Freedom Box, made by Otto Paul de Parisien of New York, is one of only two American gold Freedom Boxes made before the War of Independence to have survived. The box was purchased by the Earl of Rosebery from the London dealer J Parkes in 1897.

Lord Rosebery's affection for the former English colonies in North America is demonstrated by two great relics of the American Civil War that he acquired for his collection. Both will be included in Sotheby's New York auction of Fine Manuscript and Printed Americana, on Tuesday, December 15, 1998.

The dignified valedictory that the defeated General Robert E. Lee issued to his troops after surrendering at Appamattox Courthouse has been regarded with reverence in the South since it was first issued on April 10, 1865.

Known simply as "General Orders No. 9", Lee's brief text reassured his beloved Army of Northern Virginia that "after four years of arduous service", he "has been compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers & resources." The original order, dictated by Lee to a military aide, has long been lost, but Lord Rosebery acquired a pristine, near contemporary copy, written by a clerk and proudly signed by Lee with his rank of General (estimate: \$40,000-

60,000).

Complementing the document is a handsome post-war albumen-print portrait of Lee, signed by him, and with a lengthy presentation inscription on the verso by his former Confederate comrade-in arms, General Gilbert M. Sorrel (estimate \$5,000-7,000).

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