



The Beckford-Hamilton Sauceboats

A Highly Important Pair of Silver-Gilt Mounted Nautilus Sauceboats.

George III

London, circa 1790

Maker's mark of James Phipps

Bearing the crests of Beckford and Hamilton

Height: 15 cm, 5.9 in.

The nautilus shell sauce or possibly Scottish cream boats, (bearing in mind the fact that his daughter had married the Duke of Hamilton and that Beckford had a fixation over afternoon tea and the equipage for its service, with some 25 cream jugs in his collection when he died), are possibly described in the 1822 Beckford sale catalogue of the contents at Fonthill, put out by Christies 7th September and the 8 following days each day's sale is prefixed by the lot number.

This sale was aborted when John Farquhar bought the house and its contents. Farquhar sold some of the contents in a second differently catalogued sale in 1823 to recoup some of his expenditure, Phillips 23- 27 September and throughout October 1823. The sauce boats were bought by the Duke of Buckingham and sold in the 1848 Forster Stowe sale.

James Aldridge mounted these nautilus shell sauceboats as an item for the Beckford Wunderkammer. Their creation and design would have been closely supervised by Beckford and his general factotum Gregorio Franchi as evidenced by the sketches and notes contained in the Aldridge album of designs now in the V&A.

Aldridge mounted a large shell also purchased as with the sauceboats by the Duke of Buckingham in 1823 described as:

‘A [nautilus} large very richly mounted in silver gilt, and boldly chased and engraved, surmounted by Neptune on a dolphin, enriched by Garnets....’

This was lot number 8/55 in 1822 sale and lot 570 in the 1823 sale. The Stowe catalogue of 1848, illustrates this item on p 139.

Another Beckford nautilus this time 17th century is engraved by Cornelis Bellekin and mounted in silver gilt. This was adapted by Beckford with a finely engraved shield with his arms fitted by Aldridge. Sold as lot 8/52 in the 1822 sale and lot 1148 in the 1823 sale when purchased by the Marquess of Westminster for 69 pounds 6 shillings. It is on the designs to the lip of this 17th century mounted German shell with its cut away septa that the mounts to your sauceboats also with cut away septa are based.

There is another drawing of a mounted nautilus shell in the Aldridge album which may relate to lots 1180 and 1181 in the 1823 sale.

The 1823 Farquhar sale had the following Beckford lots incorporating Nautilus shells:

Lots 560, 570 as above, 572, 1148 as above, 1180 and 1181.

From this evidence Beckford had a considered interest in these Wunderkammer objects and this particular pair would seem to be the only pair created from scratch for a possible, practical, if exotic use, in the 19th century.

As such they are seemingly unique in the history of English silver.