

Fabergé, German Ties and British Betrayals

By Michel Kamidian

The year 2014 is a special year for the House of Fabergé as it marks the 200th birthday of its founder Gustav Fabergé (1814 – 1894). At the same time, it is also exactly 120 years ago since he passed away in Dresden, Germany.

Over the past 70 years a staggering number of books and articles have been published about the Fabergé firm and its most famous member, Carl Fabergé. Sadly, most authors have contributed to a long list of western publications that carelessly repeated the same stories over and over; stories that included gross factual errors. The source document of most books and articles was the controversial first biography of Carl Fabergé written by H.C. Bainbridge in 1949. Instead of increasing the knowledge on Fabergé, these publications offered not much more than colored illustrations depicting the most lush and famous creations. In the worst cases authors even attributed clear forgeries to Fabergé, and vice versa, considered genuine masterpieces to be made by other jewelers. They thereby harmed the historical and cultural heritage left by the *Grand Maître*. So, despite the enormous amount of books published on Fabergé, our main heroes, founder Gustav Fabergé and his son Carl Fabergé, remained poorly studied in western literature.

Tatiana Fabergé and Valentin Skurlov

Fortunately, with the Soviet years coming to an end, a new era of Fabergé knowledge and information began after two exhibitions dedicated to Fabergé were held in Russia. After being a taboo for more than seventy years, the treasures made by the former Imperial supplier were finally presented to the Russian public again. The first exhibition, ‘The Great Fabergé’, took place in 1989 in the Elagin Palace in Leningrad. It was the first ever exhibition dedicated to Fabergé in what was then still the USSR. The second exhibition, the ‘Fabulous Epoch of Fabergé’, was held in the Catharine Palace in Tsarskoye Selo in 1992 and was dedicated to the 150th anniversary of the Fabergé House. The exhibitions brought together Russian researchers and art scholars which led to valuable affiliations. The partnership between Tatiana Fabergé¹ (great granddaughter of Carl Fabergé) and researcher Valentin V. Skurlov marked a turning point in the field of Fabergé scholarship. Together they explored both the Fabergé family archives as well as the Soviet archives, making tremendous discoveries. Based on their research they were able to compile (among other things) the first *catalogue raisonné* of the Imperial Easter Eggs, published through auction house Christie’s in 1997. Another landmark

¹ Tatiana Fabergé has inherited the family love for jewellery art and followed the footsteps of her father Theodore Fabergé, who worked with his uncles Eugene and Alexander Fabergé in the new *Fabergé & Cie* firm in Paris (opened in 1922). Blessed with the gift of drawing Tatiana improved her skills in Paris, where she attended the prestigious *Ecole National Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs*. She used her training to help her father by drawing technical designs for both jewellery projects and *objets d'arts*. She also contributed to the development of several pieces. In 1949, Tatiana was hired by Leon Grinberg who ran the *A la Vieille Russie* antiquary in Paris. The shop specialized in Russian art and the art of Carl Fabergé. After two months she left the company when she found out that the shop was also selling brand new items as pre-revolution Fabergé. She dedicated the rest of her life protecting and preserving the family heritage and is still today the head of the Igor Carl Fabergé Foundation.

development was Valentin Skurlov's discovery of the memoirs of Franz Birbaum, the chief designer of the firm, in 1992. Unfortunately, not even these new discoveries (which would become the foundation of all books and articles published in the last two decades) could escape controversies caused by the self-proclaimed western "experts" that had already inflicted so much damage to the reputation of Fabergé. Without permission, Mr. Geza von Habsburg and Mrs. Marina Lopato published the Birbaum Memoirs in their 1993 publication 'Fabergé: Imperial Jeweler'. In later publications they even had the nerve to refer to their own 1993 publication when quoting from the memoirs.

Despite the continuous meddling of western "experts", the newly found archival documents were an immense contribution to the field of Fabergé art and brought forth an enormous amount of information and knowledge about the firm's history and production processes. One of the chapters of the firm's story that stayed underexposed is that of Fabergé's German and English connections. Let's start in Germany.

German Collaborations

The ancestors of Gustav Fabergé, French Huguenots from Picardy, left their country with the start of religious persecutions initiated by the Edict of Nantes of 1685 ordered by King Louis XIV. Protestants started immigrating to Germany as the King of Prussia welcomed all Protestants and offered good living conditions for hardworking families. After living in Germany for many years, the family name had changed to Favri, which later became Favry. The name Fabergé dates back to arrival of the family in Pernau (what is now Estonia) at the end of the 18th century (1796), where Gustav Fabergé was born in 1814. After marrying Charlotte Jungstedt in 1842, Gustav moved to Russia's North Capital pursuing his dream of becoming a goldsmith.² Thanks to archival research we now know that Gustav improved his skills through traineeships at German jewelers such as Spiegel and Keibel in Saint Petersburg. It did not take long before Gustav opened a modest jewelry store with a small workshop in the cellar located at 11 Bolshaya Morskaya Street. His workshop was producing quality products, which, nevertheless, did not differ much from items made by other jewelers of that time.

In 1846 the Fabergé's had their first boy, Peter Carl Fabergé (Peter Carl had two sisters, Alexandrina (1844) and Wilhelmina (1848)). Carl started his studies at the German *Annenschule* in Saint Petersburg. In 1860 the family decided to move to Dresden in Germany, but Gustav kept his store and workshop running by assigning Valerii Zaionchkovskiï and Hiskias Pendin to manage all affairs in Saint Petersburg. Young Carl continued his education at the *Handelslehranstalt* School in Dresden.

Encouraged by his father and other jewelers, Carl Fabergé went on a *tour d'Europe* in 1862, together with his friend Julius (the son of a renowned Saint Petersburg jeweler who ran the 'Butz' firm, which supplied the Imperial Court). They underwent traineeships at the leading

² T. Fabergé, E. Kohler, V. Skurlov (2012), *Fabergé; A comprehensive Reference Book*, Edition Slatkine, Geneva. P. 19

jewelry houses in Germany, France, and Italy. Carl got to know several museum collections such as the one of the Grünes Gewölbe in Dresden and of the Opificio Delle Pietre Dure in Florence. In Italy he met Fortunato Castellani, Carlo Giuliano, and Giacinto Mellilo. They had been inspired by Etruscan artworks found not so long before, and they were producing golden filigree, which was in great demand throughout Europe. The application of that technique would play a big part in the worldwide recognition that the Fabergé firm received later on.

In Paris and London, Carl Fabergé visited many local manufacturers and jewelers as well as museum exhibitions. In other words, he received an extensive and all-round training in the art of jewelry design. By the time Carl (now 18 years old) returned to Saint Petersburg in 1864, he was also fluent in four languages: Russian, German, French and English.³ He was also able to express himself in Italian too, as his grandmother on his mother's side, Carolina Lotto, was Italian.

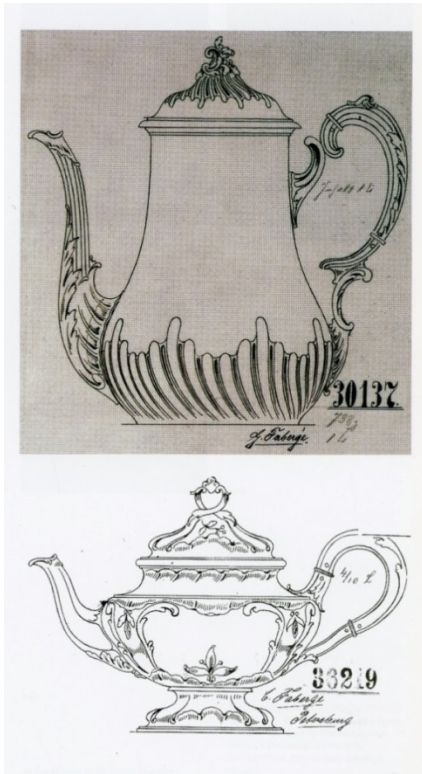
Even though Carl had become familiar with many collections of famous museums throughout Europe, it was the 'Decorative and Applied Jewelry Art' department of the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg that inspired him the most. One of Carl's first real tests was working in the Hermitage where he helped restoring museum exhibits, free of charge. This way he was able to handle some of the greatest treasures of the art world that were kept in the museum. It was not long before he was asked by the purchase commission of the museum to start working as an appraiser.

In 1872, 26-year-old Carl made his professional entrance in the firm. At the time the workshop employed four German goldsmiths: Reimer, Rautel, Gunst and Eckhart. Later on the renowned enameller Rückert and his sons also closely collaborated with the firm.⁴ It was only after Hiskias Pendin died in 1882 that Carl Fabergé took over the management of the firm. That same year his younger brother Agathon, a gifted designer, also joined the firm. From that point on the firm started to produce original pieces, often designed by Agathon.

At the all-Russia exhibition in Moscow 1882, Fabergé presented for the first time its reproductions of Count Stroganoff's archeological findings, excavated in Kerch, and won its first golden medal. Fabergé's chief workmaster at the time, Erik Kollin, had studied the long-forgotten filigree and gilding techniques which allowed the firm to successfully yield the required tints needed to fulfill the task. In 1885, the firm participated in the International Nuremberg Exhibition where it displayed its reproductions of recently found Scythian treasures. In that same year, 1885, the firm successfully delivered its first Imperial Easter order from Alexander III, named the Easter *Hen Egg*. Fabergé thus earned the right to be named "Supplier of His Majesty's Court". This also allowed the firm to take more imperial orders in

³ For a much more detailed description of the early life of Carl Fabergé see: T. Fabergé, E. Kohler, V. Skurlov (2012), *Fabergé: A comprehensive Reference Book*, Edition Slatkine, Geneva.

⁴ The Rückert family was of German origin. Rückert Senior specialized in classical painted enamel (art-nouveau). His sons graduated from the famous Stroganoff School where they were taught and inspired by Mikhail Vrubel. They specialized in producing geometrical pattern painted and shaded enamel (art-deco). Many of their items portrayed famous historical scenes, folklore and fairy tales, and works by famous Russian painters.



Two Fabergé drawings for designs of a teapot and coffee pot from the silver workshop of Koch & Bergfeld in Bremen, Germany. Ink on paper laid down in an album of working drawings by German and other Russian artists – inscribed G. Fabergé, 30137 and C. Fabergé Petersburg, 33219, c. 1884, the leather-bound album 29½ x 20 x 2 1/8 in. (75 x 51 x 5.5 cm).

Source: von Habsburg, G. (2000), *Fabergé: Imperial craftsman and His World*, p. 199

the future. The *Hen Egg* won over the hearts of the Imperial Family members and gave Fabergé the opportunity to keep supplying the Imperial family with his Easter surprises year after year.

Meanwhile Gustav Fabergé continued to represent the firm in Germany, a country with a tradition of excellent hardstone carvers and silversmiths. Gustav was always scouting for young jewelers to join the Fabergé firm. At the same time, he established important commercial ties with local manufacturers such as the ‘Koch & Bergfeld’ foundry and the ‘Wilkins & Söhne’ firm (both located in Bremen) for the production of big size silver artworks.

One of the main reasons why Fabergé did this was the lack of high-quality silver ingots in Russia. Another reason was the lack of machinery that was fit for producing bigger objects.

Carl Fabergé also struck up partnerships with the stone cutting workshops ‘Stern’, ‘Wild’ and ‘Dreher’ in Idar Oberstein that all produced small stone figures and floristic compositions for the Fabergé from 1898 to 1908.⁵ Fabergé was not the only famous Russian jewelry firm to produce items in Germany. Many others, such as ‘Sazikov’, ‘Marshak’, and the ‘Grachev Brothers’ also distributed their orders to German factories.

However, the Russian artworks made by German producers vary greatly in quality. Artistic and technical quality should thus always be the keystone for assessing them. The technical quality is inter alia determined by what is known as the ‘correct weight’ of an item, i.e. the ‘right’ weight in proportion to the size of the artwork. This is one of the qualities that distinguished the products of Fabergé from those of other jewelry houses.

The catalogue of the 2000 ‘Fabergé and His World’ exhibition in Wilmington (USA) features two design drawings of silver kettles produced by the Koch & Bergfeld foundry.

⁵ 1908 was the year in which Fabergé opened its own lapidary workshop in Saint Petersburg and started to produce, among other things, hardstone figures and flowers. Later on in 1912 Fabergé took over the Carl Woerffel lapidary workshop, also in Saint Petersburg.

To ensure the highest standard of quality, the firm commanded strict quality criteria and always sent its design drawings and the wax models of the items to the silversmiths at the Koch & Bergfeld factory. Nowadays the plaster molds of Fabergé sculptures are displayed at some of the workshops in Germany, as they are still very proud of their former ties with Carl Fabergé.

A good example of a famous Fabergé silverwork that was cast by the Koch & Bergfeld firm is the 1900 'Swan', commissioned by the 'Tver Thread Manufactory Company' and presented to Arseny Morozov and his spouse as a wedding and housewarming gift. The Morozov family was one of the best clients of Carl Fabergé's firm.

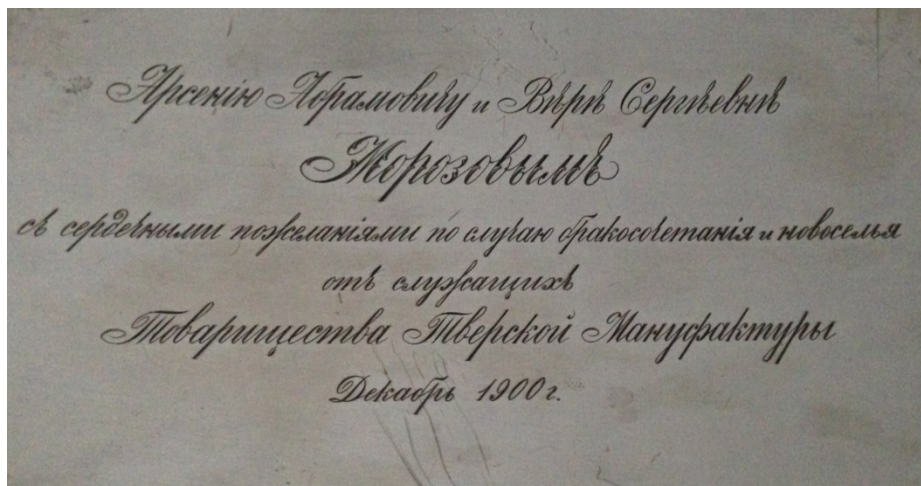


*Swan, by Carl Fabergé, c. 1900. Silver, cabochon cut rubies.
Measurements: 37x47x31 Weight: 4.2 kg Foundry: Koch&Bergfeld.
Inventory number: 119660 Import hallmarks of St. Petersburg Customs;
84 zolotniks. Private Collection Source: Private archive.*

The sculpture is an example of the highest artistic and technical casting, produced according to the *Cire Perdue* (lost wax) method. By using this technique in combination with an elaborately detailed wax model and high-quality silver, little work was required after the casting. It gave the sculpture a true 'silk' look. The Swan was modeled on a scale of $\frac{1}{2}$ its life size. Silver sculptures of this size are very rare; over the past fifty years no zoomorphic silver sculptures of this size have appeared on the western art

market or on auction sales. The sculpture is adorned with *cabochon cut* ruby eyes. The eyes of Fabergé wildlife sculptures are almost always made of precious stones. The artwork carries Import hallmarks of St. Petersburg Customs and the metals assay mark of 84 zolotniks. Besides the inventory number, one can find an engraved message on the bottom plate that reads: "*To Arseni Abramovitch and Vera Sergueevna Morozov - With warm wishes on the occasion of the wedding and housewarming, from the partners of the Tver Thread Manufactory Company - December 1900*".

The products that were cast in Germany were exported to Russia where they were hallmarked and improved if necessary. Contrary to Russia and many other European countries, firms in Germany were exempt from governmental hallmarking but were still responsible for the metal assay. Practice showed that Russian jewelry firms, and especially Fabergé, often refrained from hallmarking imported items. It was somewhat risky to put hallmarks on the bottom plate of the artwork 'post production' because hallmarking techniques could cause the metal to deform. Of



The inscription (in Russian) on the bottom plate of the silver Swan. It translate to: To Arseni Abramovitch and Vera Sergueevna Morozov - With warm wishes on the occasion of the wedding and housewarming, from the partners of the Tver Thread Manufactory Company - December 1900". Source: Private archive.

course, it was possible to hallmark the body of the artwork, and this also happened from time to time, but it could ruin the artistic image of the item. We now know that Franz Birbaum expressed his concerns about this issue several times. It is one of the main reasons why the Fabergé hallmarks are missing on some

of the firm's most fine artworks.

Industrialization and economic development of European countries in late 19th century increased the demand for silver utensils and other applied artworks. Competition between manufacturers inevitably affected the production quality. German and other European producers applied metal saving methods, thus making the artworks cheaper. An example of such a technique is to produce hollow silver artworks that are later filled with gypsum. However, they never got anywhere near the quality of silverworks made by Russian Firms.

So in 1887, Fabergé opened its first Moscow subsidiary; a small store on number 4 Kuznetsky Most Street. The shop was run by Allen Bowe. Not much later, in 1890, Fabergé also opened its own Moscow workshop that specialized in silverworks. The machinery, tools and equipment were all imported from Germany. With the opening of the Moscow store and workshop Fabergé also established its English network. Where the collaborations with German parties mainly concerned production, the English connection was mostly one of commerce.



Photo of the treasures that were found by the Soviet Government in the Yusupov Palace in 1925. Standing in the middle, leaning on an identical Fabergé swan, is Fedor Afanasiev, former head of the Fabergé jewellery department. Source: T. Fabergé, E. Kohler, V. Skurlov (2012), Fabergé; A comprehensive Reference Book, Edition Slatkine, Geneva. p. 549

English Affairs

It is said that one of the reasons for the grand success of the firm was the ability of Carl Fabergé to recruit the best and loyal employees. However, in hindsight we can conclude that his selection of British business partners was far from a successful one. Carl Fabergé chose Allen Bowe to run the Moscow store and workshop. It did not take long before Allen Bowe brought his brother Arthur Bowe into the company.

During the first years the collaboration with the Bowe brothers was a fruitful one. It was no surprise that the Moscow branch was also successful as Carl Fabergé personally took his firm to the top of the field. Carl had turned Fabergé into a household name that stood for the highest quality of jewelry and applied artworks.

While preparing for the 1900 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, and once again demonstrating his extraordinary talents of entrepreneurship, Carl Fabergé received permission from the Tsar and His Majesty's Cabinet to exhibit the Easter Eggs that the firm had manufactured for the Empresses Maria Feodorovna and Alexandra Feodorovna. This meant that the Fabergé Imperial Easter Eggs could be presented to the public for the very first time. The exposition started on April 14, on the eve of the Catholic Easter and just one week before the Orthodox Easter. One could reason that the opening of the *Exposition Universelle* was scheduled in order to enhance the world premiere of the Imperial Easter Eggs, and to please Tsar Nicholas II. Approximately 50 million people visited the exhibition and



View of the Seine and the Alexander III bridge during the 1900 exposition Universelle in Paris. Source: Private archive

which reputation and fame had now spread worldwide (in comparison, the entire population of France was about 38 million at the time). Carl Fabergé was compared to the Renaissance genius Benvenuto Cellini.

In 1903 Carl Fabergé decided to open another store abroad. Arthur Bowe was appointed as manager for the new shop in London while Allen stayed in Moscow. The firm had also

opened shops in Odessa (1900 – 1918) and Kiev (1906 – 1911) but according to the Birbaum memoirs, “the best pieces were sent to London”. Sadly, it would not take long before his British partners would betray him. In 1906, during the Russian – Japanese war, Arthur Bowe started to have concerns about the survival of the firm, even though Carl had repeatedly told him to stay calm and that everything would be alright. However, without informing Carl or anyone else in

Saint Petersburg, he sold the entire stock of the shop plus all the designs (circa 500, including designs made in Russia) to the French jewelry firm ‘Lacluche Frères’, a direct competitor of Fabergé. Needless to say, Carl Fabergé broke all ties with the Bowe brothers and brought forth a lawsuit demanding the sale to be canceled. In a letter sent to Allen Bowe that was found in the Fabergé archives, Carl expressed his anger:

*...now my products, ideas and designs have become the property of a third party, because of your unbridled egoism, or perhaps for reasons unknown to me, have committed an act which in my opinion cannot be justified in anyway. This kind of action is so outrageous that I, for my part, feel obliged to disregard you and declare once and for all that I sever all relations with you.*⁶

Fortunately, Carl Fabergé won the lawsuit, and the damage could be controlled. There are now reasons to believe that Allen Bowe was in fact also working as an informer for the British Intelligence Agency.

Carl’s next big mistake would follow almost immediately; he jumped out of the frying pan but



*Allen Bowe (second from right) came back to Russia in 1917 with a delegation of English and French members of parliament. There are reasons to believe that he was doing so for the British Intelligence Service. Source: T. Fabergé, E. Kohler, V. Skurlov (2012), *Fabergé; A comprehensive Reference Book*, Edition Slatkine. Geneva. p. 565*

into the fire when he opened his new shop in London in 1907 on 48 Dover Street and appointed H.C. Bainbridge as the director of the shop. Bainbridge, who had gotten involved in the Moscow branch of the Fabergé Firm after meeting Arthur Bowe in a train from Moscow to Paris, had to run the shop with the help of Carl’s youngest son Nicholas.

Before Bainbridge started in London, Carl Fabergé personally took him on a six weeks tour around Saint Petersburg, visiting museums and other sights, to provide Bainbridge with some basic knowledge about Russia. When Bainbridge asked him about a contract, Carl told him that his word is his contract. Just before Bainbridge boarded his train to London Carl whispered two words in his ear, ‘be noble’.⁷ Unfortunately Bainbridge was not worth the trust that Carl had put in him. Despite the high demand for Fabergé artworks in the UK and Europe, the London shop managed to make substantial losses. Bainbridge was

⁶ T. Fabergé, E. Kohler, V. Skurlov (2012), *Fabergé; A comprehensive Reference Book*, Edition Slatkine, Geneva. p.

⁷ Bainbridge H.C. (1966), *Peter Carl Fabergé Goldsmith and Jeweller to the Russian Imperial Court; His Life and Work*, p. 529.

often absent from the shop and as it turned out ‘borrowed’ a lot of money from the store (circa 5000) without permission from Saint Petersburg.

In 1908, Fabergé suffered another setback when the Guild of London Goldsmiths demanded a ban on the sale of enameled artworks that bore no English hallmarks, and thus created a difficult situation for the firm. In 1911 Fabergé went to court to fight the new policy rules, but lost the case and had to compromise. It now had to import half-finished products from Russia to London, having them stamped with English assay hallmarks, and then sending them back to Saint Petersburg for enameling before finally sending them to London again to be sold.

Bainbridge was dismissed as director of the shop in 1915 because of his frequent absence and for neglecting the clientele. Bainbridge, who could not stand being fired, responded by sending an official letter to the Imperial Highness the Grand Duchess Vladimir of Petrograd. In his letter Bainbridge accused Carl and his son Agathon of being German spies, in the middle of a war between Russia and Germany! Carl was informed about the letter and responded by writing a letter directly to secretary of Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna. He had no difficulties to convince her of his loyalty to Russia.

The regretful involvement of the Bowe brothers and Bainbridge would not stay without consequences. Unfortunately, it was only the beginning of a western cartel of dealers and ‘experts’ that have, together with the Bolsheviks, irrevocably damaged the cultural heritage of the Fabergé firm and Russia.

Due to the 1917 revolution the Fabergé firm (together with many other companies and especially those with ties to the Imperial court) ceased to exist. The Fabergé family had to flee the country and start over again. Carl Fabergé only lived in exile for a few years before he died in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1920. His sons Eugene and Alexander founded the *Fabergé & Cie* firm in Paris in 1922. They also hired A. Marchetti and G. Guerrieri, two former Fabergé jewelers. Later, Theodore Fabergé would join his uncles and became a jeweler in the *Fabergé & Cie* workshop. He was educated in Switzerland and attended the Geneva Academy of Fine Arts. His uncles named him the successor of the house of Fabergé of Russia. All the items produced by the workshop were marked with French marks and personal hallmarks (Theta-Phi for Theodore Fabergé) and a “K. Fabergé” hallmark, clearly distinguishing them from pre-revolution Fabergé works. However, some dealers and “experts” would take off the French marks and sell the items as pre-revolution Fabergé art, this of course causing anger and frustration to the Fabergé brothers in Paris. It is known that antique store Wartski’s in London ordered two nephrite snuff boxes with miniatures portraits at *Fabergé & Cie*.



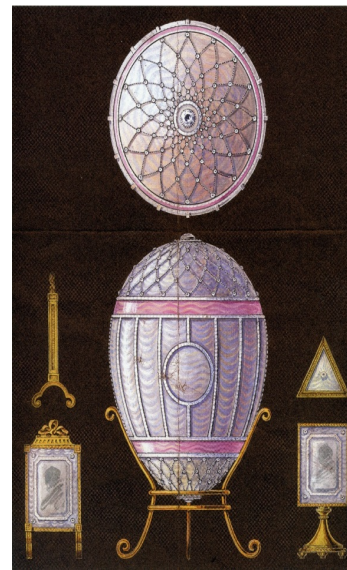
Hallmarks used by Theodore Fabergé in Geneva. Source: T. Fabergé, E. Kohler, V. Skurlov (2012), Fabergé; A comprehensive Reference Book, Edition Slatkine, Geneva. p. 167

In 1949, after decades of Soviet ruling and long after Carl Fabergé passed away, Bainbridge, out of all people, published the first biography on Carl Fabergé. Despite of being aware of his reputation, Carl's eldest son Eugene decided to provide Bainbridge with the information needed to compile the biography.⁸ In a 1938 article about Fabergé figurines and hardstone animals, published in 'The Connoisseur Magazine', Bainbridge admits that for a long time he was unaware of the fact that Fabergé was producing Imperial Easter Eggs because Carl Fabergé has

never mentioned it to him...⁹ It tells us a lot about the involvement of Bainbridge and the relationship between the two. To celebrate the publication of the 1949 biography, the owner of antique shop 'Wartski's' in London, Mr. Emanuel Snowman, organized an exhibition dedicated to Fabergé.

In 1953, his son Kenneth Snowman published the book 'The Art of Carl Fabergé' in which he described one of the trips his father made to the USSR in order to purchase antiques and to deal with 'Antikvariat' office. The Soviets had created a special organization, the *Gokhran* (of which the *Antikvariat* was a department, from 1927 to 1937) that was responsible for the confiscated treasures and their evaluation.¹⁰ Kenneth Snowman wrote:

"In Moscow he (Emanuel Snowman) he had bought a large gilded and painted Imperial Factory standing vase for £80 from the government department which dealt with the disposal of the confiscated national treasure. Two days later in Leningrad, the equivalent department there offered him a second vase for what amounted to £200. It was clear that this second example, identical in design to the first, completed what must originally have been a pair. 'Why so much?' he protested, explaining that he had acquired its twin only two



Easter Egg project by Eugene Fabergé for the firm Fabergé & Cie Paris, 1936. From the archives of Tatiana Fabergé. Source: T. Fabergé, E. Kohler, V. Skurlov (2012), Fabergé; A comprehensive Reference Book, Edition Slatkine, Geneva. p. 158

⁸ Besides Eugene (1874-1960), Agathon (1876-1951) and Nicholas (1884 – 1939), Carl Fabergé had two other sons, Alexander (1877-1952) and Nikolai (1881-1883).

⁹ Bainbridge H.Ch. Fabergé Figurines in Russian Coloured Stones // Connoisseur. Vol. 101, no. 440. April 1938: 200 – 201, 203 – 204 pp.

¹⁰ Carl's second son Agathon was imprisoned in 1919 but later released to serve as an appraiser for the *Gokhran*. Other famous jewelers that served the *Gokhran* were Carl Bock and Georgi Utkin.

days before in Moscow for £80. Upon receipt of this intelligence, the three Government Inspectors on duty conferred anxiously between themselves and withdrew into another room for the rest of the morning before eventually emerging in triumph. 'You are right Mr Snowman, we have checked and you owe us £120 on the first vase.'"¹¹

At that time £120 amounted to about 1,200 rubles. Snowman gives the impression that employees of the Soviet *Antikvariat* office were very cunning and were fighting for every ruble that they could put their hands on when it came to selling the valuable confiscated Fabergé art. However, documents found in the Soviet archives paint a very different picture. The prices of the Fabergé Easter Eggs that were sold by the Soviets between 1930 and 1933 were estimated by the curators Armory Museum as high as five times the price of the original invoice, but they were sold for only a mere fraction of the estimate price, mainly to Snowman and the American businessman Armand Hammer. A few examples of Easter Eggs which were valued between 15,000 and 20,000 rubles:

- The *Danish Palaces Egg* (1890); price on original invoice: 4,260 rubles. Sold for 1,500 rubles.
- The *Renaissance Egg* (1894); price on original invoice: 4,750 rubles. Sold for 1,500 rubles.
- The *Basket of Wild Flowers Egg* (1901); price on original invoice: 6,260 rubles. Sold for 2,000 rubles.
- The *Peter the Great Egg* (1903); price on original invoice: 9,760 rubles. Sold for 4,000 rubles.
- The *Mosaic Egg* (1914); price on original invoice: unknown. Sold for 4,000 rubles.
- The *Red Cross Portraits Egg* (1915); price on original invoice: unknown. Sold for 500 rubles.
- The *Red Cross Triptych Egg* (1915); price on original invoice: unknown. Sold for 500 rubles.

In total a number of fourteen Easter Eggs were sold between 1930 and 1933 for a total of only 57,000 rubles! Confiscating Russian treasures and selling them to controversial western dealers like Snowman and Hammer is of course a disgrace on its own, but it is hard to imagine why the *Antikvariat* office would on the one hand fight over £80 pounds, like Snowman makes us believe, but on the other hand sold prime artworks for only 10 or 20% of the estimated value. There were people who understood the horrors of the events that took place under the Soviet regime and who tried to oppose it, but there were others, like Bainbridge, Snowman and Hammer, who could not care less and were eager to deprive Russia from its cultural heritage only to sell it again with enormous profits.

One of the eggs that were sold to Snowman was the 1901 Imperial *Basket of Wild Flowers Egg*. Snowman probably wanted to make a name for himself as a connoisseur and decided that the Egg was not by Fabergé but by the French jeweler Boucheron. In his 1953 book 'The Art of Carl Fabergé' he stated:

¹¹ Snowman, A.K. (1983), *Carl Fabergé; Goldsmith to the Imperial Court of Russia*, p. 116.

“Even Henry Bainbridge, the most conscientious of men, failed to identify the true creator of the sumptuous egg-shaped basket of flowers and grasses dated 1910 which is in the Sandringham collection.”¹²

Many immediately contested this ridiculous attribution, but the hard evidence that the *Basket of Wild Flowers* was indeed a Fabergé Imperial Easter Egg made in 1901 was provided by Valentin Skurlov when, in 1993, he found the original invoice and a photo of the Egg in a 1902 Fabergé exhibition. The Egg is now one of the highlights of the Royal British Collection.

The false attribution did have its consequences. It made western “connoisseurs” such as Geza von Habsburg and Alexander Solodkoff believe that floral compositions of such quality (even when they were bearing hallmarks) could in fact be produced by German, Austrian or French jewelers. They started to call into question authentic Fabergé flowers and calling them “in the style of Fabergé” or claimed that they had “hallmarks in the style of Fabergé”. This only contributed to the already vague atmosphere of mistrust and misunderstanding around Fabergé flowers. It was true that because of the high demand for floral compositions in the 1930’s, several European dealers ordered floral works from German stone cutters. These new German items could remind one of the elegant Russian artworks produced before the revolution, but only a fool would mistake them for being Fabergé.

Black Pages

The Fabergé firm was a shining example of a company with an international vision which it applied throughout its entire structure. Under the wings of Carl Fabergé, who was himself trained in many countries and cultures, the firm became one of the most famous jewelry firms in the world. Throughout the decades, different nationals have played different roles within the firm and influenced the course of its history. We have seen that Germans individuals and firms have strengthened the firm; fine Workmasters and silver foundries contributing to the success of Fabergé.

The involvement of the British on the other hand has only led to troubles and sorrows. The affairs mentioned above can only be described as black pages in the history of Fabergé. The events have furthermore led to a closed circle of western “experts”, “connoisseurs” and other stakeholders including auction houses and renowned art dealers, which up till now is operating in a system that aims to manipulate and control the narrow and specific Russian art market. Their activities have discredited and depreciated the cultural and historical heritage of Russia.

For a much more detailed article on western “experts” and “connoisseurs” please visit: <https://www.igorcarlfaberge.com/russian-art-in-danger-international-plot-against-the-heritage-of-the-great-faberge/>

¹² Snowman, A.K. (1983), *Carl Fabergé; Goldsmith to the Imperial Court of Russia*, p. 146.