THE SOCIAL LIFE OF FILIGREE OBJECTS

by

RAINA RODRIGUES

A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of

MA BY RESEARCH

Department of Art History, Curating and Visual Studies

School of Languages, Cultures, Art History and Music

University of Birmingham

May 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Jutta Vinzent, my research supervisor, for her patient guidance, enthusiastic encouragement, and useful critique of this research work. She sadly passed way during the course of this research. I am very grateful to Claire Jones for taking up the baton and expertly guiding me to the completion of this thesis. Richard Edgcumbe and Jane Perry at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Francesca Balzan at the University of Malta, Caroline Tonna at Palazzo Falson Historic House, Mdina in Malta, Nicholas de Piro at Casa Rocca Piccola, Malta and Sash Giles at Chatsworth House provided me invaluable insight, information and access to their filigree collections. I would like to thank Charmaine Gerada for her patient explanation of the technical aspects of filigree work. Finally, I wish to thank my mother Adriana Zarb Adami and my husband Jeremy for their unfailing continuing support in my pursuit of this research.

ABSTRACT

Filigree is an intricate metalwork method incorporating small beads and twisted threads, mainly in silver or gold, and fashioned into pieces of jewellery or decorative objects. The origins of this technique date as far back as 2500 BC, in Etruria and Greece. Though little is known of its origin, it has been used in countries through Europe, Asia and further afield. This thesis examines the role of filigree work as a mode of social positioning, as a way to place individuals and communities firmly in history and geography.

Through four case studies on drinking receptacles, a crown, a set of buttons and a pair of earrings, this research aims to examine the place, role and social significance of filigree among other forms of jewellery. The title of the dissertation alludes to Arjun Appadurai's edited book *The Social Life of Things*, and the thesis considers filigree objects as things that produce social connections and define aspects of exchange and regulated processes of circulation between producer, commissioner/owner, user/wearer and collector. For Appadurai 'things-in-motion […] illuminate their human and social context' through history and between civilisations.[1]

[1] Arjun Appadurai, '*The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspectives'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

For my daughters Safira and Raffaella, my *raisons d'être*

And for Jutta Vinzent who sadly passed away during the course of this research

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 4.1: A pair of gold filigree earrings consisting of two components - a upper fan and a lower bobbin - joined by two circular gold wires (author's photo taken directly from the private collection, with permission).

Figure 4.2: The remnant of the maker's make which is no longer discernible due to wear (Author's photo taken directly from the private collection).

Figure 4.3: One of a pair of Maltese gold filigree acorn earrings, attributed to the nineteenth century. (Author's photo taken directly from a Maltese private collection, with permission).

Figure 4.4: The portrait of a Caterina Ribotti, noble nineteenth-century Maltese noble woman, Carmelite Priory Collection, 70 x 58.4cm. Reproduced from Balzan: Vanity, Profanity and Worship, p. 80.

Figure 4.5: Gold filigree 'combini' type earrings, Private collection in Malta, very similar to the those seen in the portrait in Figure 4.5. Reproduced from Balzan: Vanity, Profanity and Worship, p. 80.

Figure 4.6: One of a pair of gold filigree and cannettille earrings donated by the Bishop of Gozo (Malta's sister island) to Nicolina de Piro after her husband donated land to build the famous Ta'Pinu Church in Gozo, demonstrating the use of filigree jewellery as between secular and non-secular relationships. (Author's photo taken at Casa Rocca Piccola, with permission).

Figure 4.7: Some examples of 2021 filigree costume jewellery from Dolce e Gabbana (accessed online).

Figure 5.1: A collection of nine silver filigree toggle buttons. Photograph provided (with thanks) to the curator at Palazzo Falson Historic House Museum, Malta.

Figure 5.2: Francesco Zimelli, Habillement ancient du Paysan Maltois, print, national Library of Malta, Valletta, Malta. Reproduced from Balzan. *Vanity, Profanity and Worship*, p 64.

INTRODUCTION

Jewellery is usually viewed solely as a mode of adornment and prestige. However, historically in many cultures, it also forms part of a complex system of demarcation and of ethnic or class affiliation. Much of jewellery scholarship has until recently been dedicated to typological scrutiny and to the analysis of style and design. While these are important approaches for the identification and provenance history of such objects, the social and cultural meanings of jewellery have only recently become the subject of investigation. For example, Michèle Mariette Hayeur Smith's PhD on the social analysis of Viking jewellery from Iceland, argues that jewellery and silversmithing as elements of adornment form part of a broader symbolic system often used to convey subtle messages of cultural identity as well as social status.[2] In light of filigree - an intricate method of metalwork incorporating small beads and twisted threads and fashioned into pieces of jewellery or decorative objects - a social approach has not been attempted yet, despite the fact that filigree offers an ideal case study for a social analysis due to its ability to be able to be applied to many sizes and its availability in both silver and gold. A personal attachment to filigree, as it is my national (Maltese) metalwork practice, prompted my interest in this research initially. This thesis examines the role of filigree work as a mode of social positioning, as a way to place individuals and communities firmly in history and geography.

---

[2] Michèle Mariette Hayeur Smith, '*A social analysis of Viking jewellery from Iceland',* PhD dissertation (2003), University of Glasgow.

The study of a culture and its design are mutually enriching enterprises.[3] Social analysis refers to the practice of systematically examining a social problem, issue or in this case a trend. Applied here, I will analyse the history of filigree jewellery work with an emphasis on its social history and iconography to bring to the fore meanings of nationhood and social status of the producer, the commissioner and the wearer. Through design and technical execution, art in its various forms enlists the spectator's (often) vicarious participation in the artist's creation. This complex interaction or relationship between the roles of the designer, the producer or craftsperson, the patron, the wearer of jewellery and the observer are key to this analysis of social class. The place, role and social significance of filigree items among other forms of jewellery are examined through history and between cultures. This research is original in deciphering the social messages conveyed through the use of this technique. Filigree work has not as yet been the subject of such scrutiny, both from an art history point of view, as well as an anthropological approach. I focus solely on filigree work with the aim of reaching a better understanding of the social dynamics at work in the countries filigree was commissioned, bought and used. As these items mainly form part of adornment, I have chosen a broad definition of jewellery and included under this heading traditional forms as well as other items that might be used as utensils or to adorn the home or the Church. Here I follow Smith's approach, that jewellery plays diverse significant roles in various realms of society. These would include gender roles and identifiers, in social status and social rank distinction, and in the religious, superstitious or cultural dimensions of society.

---

[3] Larry Gross, 'Art History as Ethnography and as Social Analysis: A Review Essay' *Studies in The Anthropology of Visual Communication* (1974), vol. 1 (1), pp. 51-56.

1.1 Research context

There is a relative paucity of academic literature with only a few papers dedicated to filigree itself. An article by Jacob Falke in 1874 focusses on the metalwork technique and the various styles according to different regions.[4] Following on from that, descriptive references are made to the technique of filigree, such as in publications on Ethiopian jewellery.[5] In terms of academic research on filigree, a BA thesis on Maltese filigree and a PhD thesis on Peruvian filigree mainly focused on archaeological significance and iconography, while a Turkish PhD thesis focused on its economic impact together with other metalwork.[6] The technique is mentioned in various books on jewellery history, but these are largely limited to descriptive annotations of its examples.[7] Its significance in societies appears to have been somewhat overlooked.

1.2 Filigree – Its Technique and History

The accepted etymology of the word filigree is derived from the Latin *filum* (wire) and *granum* (grain or bead). It is a form of decorative metalwork made from wire welded

---

[4] Jacob Falke, 'Filigree', *The Workshop*, vol. 7 no. 10 (1874), pp. 145-7.

[5] Falke, 'Filigree'.

[6] Azzopardi Marika, '19th Century Malta Filigree Jewellery', BA dissertation, University of Malta, 2009; Ximena Natanya Briceno, 'Filigree : a migrant metal practice', PhD dissertation, Australian National University, 2011; Tosun Mehtap. 'Dissolution of Crafts in the Context of Ethnicity, Gender and Class: Gold and Silver Silversmithing in Mardin and Trabzon, Turkey', PhD thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2018, https://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12622357/index.pdf

[7] These books include but are not limited to: Francesca Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta Treasures from the Island of the Knights (1530-1798)* (Malta: Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti, 2004); Francesca Balzan, *Vanity, Profanity and Worship*: *Jewellery from the Maltese Islands* (Malta: Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti, 2013); Jane Perry, *A Collector's Guide to Peasant Silver Buttons* (London: Lulu Enterprises, 2007).

onto a surface or within an outer thicker skeleton of an object made of the same metal, with or without a background. The Latin word was originally *filigrana* in Italian which became *filigrane* in 17th-century French, later *filigreen* in English before being termed filigree.[8]

Filigree continues to be produced today in many countries. These include Portugal, Genoa, Malta, Peru, China and some parts of India. While true filigree is handmade and requires intricate silversmithing techniques, as is often the case with many other skillsets, machinery-produced mass production is gaining popularity. According to Romina Grech Fenech, CEO of Sterling Jewellers, one of Malta's most prominent jewellery houses, the hand skill appears to be dying a natural death, though some filigree makers are still found practising their trade, in countries where manual labour is relatively less costly, such as Indonesia, where they have moved their filigree production.[9] Falke also alluded to this decline in Western countries in the late nineteenth century.[10]

As less metal is used, filigree items are generally lighter than other pieces of similar volume. This is because the detail and decorative value lies in the lace-like patterns alternating between the metalwork and the spaces created. Thus, the cost for the raw material tends to be cheaper than for other jewellery, though the intricacy of the work makes this skill relatively labour-intensive. Hence, the preference of this technique over others may have been significantly influenced by the relative fluctuations in the precious metal market and cost of labour. Its ability to be applied to

---

[8] *Online Etymology Dictionary* http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=filigree

[9] Interview between the author and Romina Grech Fenech, CEO of Sterling Jewellers, Malta – 12th December 2019.

[10] Falke, 'Filigree'.

many sizes and availability in both silver and gold have allowed it to be enjoyed and afforded, to some degree, by many across the different social classes. This point in itself presents a pertinent influential factor as to why filigree objects can be examined in order to elucidate and differentiate the societal standings of the people involved.

Due to the delicate nature of the thin wire work, using filigree objects may be impractical and relegated to decorative purposes only. In terms of its technique, the term filigree denotes a delicate ornamental metal-smithing technique in which rectangular cross-sectional wire is curled, twisted or braided. It traditionally comprises three distinct visual elements. These include the object as a whole, a variety of motifs within the object and the intricately and individually curled and twisted wires forming the filigree inlay. The first step involves the making of the wire of various widths (Figure 1.1). Initially, the silver is melted to the country's standard (such as 925 parts silver and 75 parts zinc, with sulphuric acid, in the UK and in Malta) and made into an ingot. This is then drawn into a rolling mill before being drawn through plates to obtain the required gauge. At this point the wire cross-section is round, before being flattened into a rectangle. The varying widths of the wire depend on the design in question. These filigree objects comprise an outside skeleton composed of plain and flattened wire usually 0.4 - 0.5 mm in diameter (Figure 1.2 A). The filling is narrower, generally 0.25 mm in diameter (Figure 1.2 B). The various components are then soldered together using various compositions of silver, gold and a flux (usually borax) (Figure 1.2 C).[11]

[11] This information and the photos below were obtained directly from Charmaine Gerada, a practising filigree silversmith in Malta. Gerada is owner and director of the company Truly Filigree and learnt the trade from her father, who in turn had learnt the trade from his father. Correspondence by email on 3rd January 2020.

Filigree is one of the oldest metalwork practices known. This ancient practice is found in various parts of the world at different historical eras. Following the Copper Age approximately 6000 years ago, the evolution of metalwork techniques fostered a new relationship between human and metal. The origins of filigree date as far back as 2500 BC having been practised in Etruria and Greece.[12] Though little is known of its origin, it has been used in countries through Europe, Asia and further afield. The Sumerians in Mesopotamia, 5000 years ago, who created the basis for preliminary civilisations first practised filigree, extended to the Middle East, Egypt and finally through to Europe and the Mediterranean. The historical understanding of filigree is largely attributable to archaeology, as burial practices often included objects of value to accompany the deceased into the afterlife.[13] Filigree objects made by Phoenicians, Etrurians and Ancient Greeks have been discovered.[14] Filigree practice *per se* was born soon after the discovery of the malleable properties of metal to turn it into sheet and then into wires[15].

One of the first documented archaeological findings points to Hissarlik north west of Anatolia (Turkey), when in 1874 Heinrich Schliemann discovered a bass-relief piece, which he named Treasure A. This was credited as one of the first examples of filigree.[16] A shielded sword found in Mesopotamia in a tomb was established to have been made in 2500BC, discovered by the British archaeologist Leonard Woolley in

---

[12]Azzopardi, *19th Century Malta Filigree Jewellery*, pp. 58-74.

[13] Azzopardi, *19th Century Malta Filigree Jewellery*, pp. 58-74.

[14] Falke, ‘Filigree’.

[15] Elisabetta Bongera, Riccardo Bottero. *La Filigrana. L'Arte di Lavorare il Filo* (Genoa: Sagep Editori, 2013) p. 15.

[16] Bongera, *La Filigrana,* p. 16.

1922.[17] The movement of filigree jewellery across the world, appears to loosely follow the migration patterns at the time, mirroring that of decline of the Roman Empire to the establishment of the first European Christian strongholds between the fifth and eighth centuries AD.[18] According to Bongera and Bottero, the migration of filigree followed commercial routes along the Mediterranean towards, which was largely dominated by the Phoenicians, traversing Cyprus, Crete, Malta, Sicily, Sardinia, Ibiza and the Strait of Gibraltar. In some countries it appears to have formed part of peasant or national costume, or forming part of expensive jewellery, such as in nineteenth-century Malta and in Genoa.[19] It was also employed to decorate various functional objects, such as dishes, utensils and receptacles. According to Balzan, the silver and gold-smiths relied on established customs and motifs pertaining to their culture and religion, which they reproduced and adapted, implementing similar basic techniques.[20]

As this metalwork practice migrated through various countries, symbols and decorative motifs were selected for use, reflecting the individual cultures and traditions, though the technique remained largely unchanged. The Etruscans included granulation, the application of very small beads of solid metal soldered to a main piece, thought to be introduced by the Phoenicians in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.[21] In the eastern Mediterranean, the Greeks and Turks used similar techniques, with floral filigree motifs and granulation encountered in ancient Greek

---

[17]Azzopardi. *19th Century Malta Filigree Jewellery,* pp. 58-74.

[18] Azzopardi. *19th Century Malta Filigree Jewellery,* pp. 58-74.

[19] Balzan *Vanity, Profanity and Worship,* pp. 67-78.

[20] Balzan *Vanity, Profanity and Worship,* pp. 39-61.

[21] Bongera, *La Filigrana,* p. 22.

gold jewellery. With expansion in to Asia and under Persian influence complexity in design increased.

The lack of scholarship exploring the social meaning of filigree could be due to the comparatively small number of collections in existence. Various museums of decorative arts house filigree objects, and some have extensive collections. These include the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum and Chatsworth House in Britain; a museum dedicated to filigree in Genoa (which I was unable to visit due to Covid-19 travel restrictions), some pieces in The German Museum in Berlin and some collections in Palazzo Falson Historic Museum and Casa Rocca Piccola in Malta. Apart from the Genoese museum, these collections are limited to one off pieces in various museums and small collections in others. The majority of filigree objects in families today are inherited as heirlooms. Due to the delicate nature of the metalwork some pieces do not survive intact, while others may be modified as they are inherited. Filigree's diverse deployment geographically and temporally, its varied employment by people of different social standings and a potential relationship to the fluctuating socioeconomic status of the relevant societies make it an ideal case study for social analysis. This thesis will contribute to the scholarship on jewellery history by placing the social elements of filigree in among the other disciplines of silversmithing, artistic practices and craftsmanship. This aspect appears to have been overlooked thus making this contribution significant.

1.3 Argument, research aims and objectives

This thesis asks the question as to what filigree objects reveal about societies in which they were produced, travelled to, used and collected. It therefore includes a

discussion of manufacturer and goldsmith, commissioner and buyer, wearer and collector. The hypothesis put forward is that filigree objects were largely in the possession of the middle and upper classes in most of the countries this metalwork transcended, but no class was excluded from some degree of ownership.

1.4 Research Methods

Through four filigree objects chosen as case studies this research uses a combination of approaches. In an attempt to understand the various social phenomena at play, methods employed involve the direct observation of pieces, their place within collections, communication with participants including curators and owners, as well as the visual analysis of pieces. The provenance of the item in question was researched through information obtained directly from the curator or current owner. Where possible, if the items had been passed through various hands and generations, its journey was mapped out. Furthermore, research was carried out elucidating information on the collector and their place and role in society. The collection the piece forms part of was examined as a whole, as well as its display. Three of the pieces chosen form part of museum collections. If the objects were in any way functional, in addition to being purely decorative, the practice of using them (at the time it was made and later on) was studied, in order for information to be gained on customs and their use.

Where feasible, searches of the inventories and catalogues of leading art collections in London, Malta, Germany and Italy were carried out, as well as searches through the catalogues of prominent jewellery auction houses. Amongst others, visits of collections included The Barber Institute of Fine Arts at The University

of Birmingham, the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), the British Museum and the Biblijoteka in Malta. As much of filigree objects are jewellery, the national costumes of the countries in question were examined over historical periods where relevant, and placed in context of the country's influences. Additionally, portraits of the monarchies colonising the countries in question and those of their peoples were also observed for the appearance of filigree jewellery. Both of these elements of research were conducted using web-based search engines, supplemented with manual searching of relevant collections where practicable.[22] It needs to be mentioned that during the course of this research the global pandemic occurred that played a significant part in preventing physical access to such collections and archives.

The information obtained was the basis for selecting the case studies (see below). These are combined into a critical narrative, to support the analysis of the social significance of filigree in different geographical and temporal contexts. Given the limited amount of literature that has been encountered on which to build a theoretical framework for the social significance of filigree, this discussion adopted an inductive approach, accounting for and acknowledging epistemic uncertainty.[23]

1.5 The scope of the case studies

In an attempt to make as broad an analysis as possible, four case studies were selected to gain a representation of filigree trade, craft, use and collectors globally through the course of history covering a wide geographical base. These case studies

[22] These included JSTOR, Google scholar, The National Potrait Gallery, the jewellery auction catalogues of Bonhams, Sotheby's and Christies among others.

[23] An inductive approach is one that from specific observations to generalised theories, this happens especially when the dataset is limited, as opposed to a deductive approach.

have been chosen to represent both secular and religious backgrounds. However, at times, it has been hard to differentiate or separate out these factors. The case studies focus on some functional items as well as purely decorative ones, as this sheds light on cultures and rituals enjoyed by different genders and classes in their respective countries. Additionally, objects of different materials (metals) were selected to provide an influential factor in the analysis.

The case studies explore a broad range of objects, origins and periods: a set of eight silver Ottoman coffee cup holders which form part of the Chatsworth House collection (UK), an Ethiopian gold filigree crown (1868) at the V&A in London (UK), a pair of Maltese nineteenth-century gold filigree earrings held in a private collection and a group of Maltese nineteenth-century silver filigree buttons housed in Palazzo Falzon in Malta. These objects each provide distinct opportunities to examine their social life and provide information on the people associated with them at the various levels of interaction with the object. Each analysis also offers potential application to other related filigree objects.

The coffee cup holders were chosen because they present many facets for examination on which to perform a social analysis. A descriptive analysis leads to an exploration of the iconography and symbolism included. Their presence in the Chatsworth House collection reflects information on their journey there and their position, bringing to the fore the establishment of then current trade routes yielding information on the financial means and class of the owner. Their function opens up associations with Ottoman cultures of coffee consumption and associated utensils, imparting valuable information on social distinction and practices between locals and the entertainment of visitors. The social analysis applied to this case study could be

extrapolated and applied to other filigree utensils such as egg cups, trays or sugar lump spoons both those of Ottoman origin and to some other continues and cultures using the same objects.

The second case study focusses on a gold crown with filigree embellishment originally belonging to eighteenth-century Christian Ethiopian royalty. It depicts religious scenes and symbols, and was looted by the British Expedition to Abyssinia at the Battle of Maqdala (1868), before entering the V&A in 1972. This object introduces the interplay between ecclesiastical and secular influences. This study allows a stratification of social classes at a different level, whereby the Church (Christianity in this case) is seen to be ubiquitously influential across many different social strata and shares some of the responsibility for both the bringing together and the division of such classes. In this case, the interaction between the Church and Royalty across different countries and continents (specifically referring to the crown's journey between Ethiopia and England) gives valuable insight of this metalwork practice and its employment in gifts, use of symbolism and the perceived value of such objects at the given time. This case study also brings to light other salient historical occurrences, such as acquisition and perceived value that have strongly influenced collectors and collections, and have been pertinent learning points throughout art history. Similar Ethiopian crowns with some degree of filigree work are in existence and most remain in Ethiopia today. My analysis of the example at the V&A therefore holds broader application for our understanding of these additional examples. It is the addition of the somewhat contentious journey taken by this particular crown that presented a different facet for analysis.

A pair of privately owned Maltese made gold filigree earrings purchased in Malta is the subject of the third case study. While not a museum piece and with a history that is not as well documented, the study of the symbols, specific methods used, similar items and jewellers' techniques provides an insight to the relationship between the maker and the wearer and also provides a framework on which to extrapolate a social analysis of filigree to today. As pointed out by Michael Baxandall this relationship provides a pivotal insight into the significant factors at play in art sociology.[24] The analyses applied here could be used for the examination of any other pieces of jewellery such as rings and brooches, regardless of their origin.

Finally, buttons were used ubiquitously and popularised throughout Europe in the mid eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[25] They are also one of the oldest forms of jewellery and adornment encountered (as old as 25,000 years) and the filigree technique is encountered very early on in Phoenician times.[26] Similar to the coffee cup holders, they also serve a functional purpose. The buttons, however, as objects applied to clothing, allow for the study of an additional element – the use of filigree in national and peasant costume as well as military uniforms. Most filigree collections house a number of buttons collected from different countries. This allows for the comparison of buttons between countries, class, gender and era.

1.6 Analysing the objects

---

[24] Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in The Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[25] Jennie Lindbergh, 'Buttoning Down Archaeology', *Australasian Historical Archaeology*, (17), pp. 50-57.

[26] Azzopardi, *19th Century Malta Filigree Jewellery*, pp. 38-38.

Jewellery pieces have played significant roles in supporting the local cultural heritage through the innovation of a traditional product or custom, and the promotion of educational activities related to the history of the product and its territory. Social class is reflective of more than the material limitations of people's lives.[27] Consequently, the local community with its historical background gives an added value to the piece of jewellery.[28] As Appadurai writes in *The Social Life of Things* the meaning that people attribute to things is derived from human interactions, transactions and motivations, especially from how those things are used and circulated. Things are sold and traded in different cultures and eras. Applying these exchanges to culturally defining aspects of the relevant society gives value to social relations.[29] Appadurai argues and demonstrates that complex social and political mechanisms regulate taste, desire and trade. As Stout pointed out in his essay titled 'Aesthetics in 'Primitive Societies' anthropologists focused on symbols that have established emotional associations, depict emotion-arousing events, persons, or supernatural entities and that enlist the spectator's vicarious participation.[30] Often jewellery pieces include such symbols with established religious, emotional and historical associations.[31] This is one of many methods in which humans elucidate symbolic

---

[27] Michael W Kraus; Paul K Piff; Dacher Keltner, 'Social Class as Culture: The Convergence of Resources and Rank in the Social Realm', *Current directions in psychological science: a journal of the American Psychological Society* (2011), Vol. 20 (4), pp. 246-250.

[28] Manuela D'Eusanio, Monica Serreli and Luigia Petti,'Social Life-Cycle Assessment of a Piece of Jewellery. Emphasis on the Local Community', *Resources* (2019), Vol. 8 (4), 158, pp. 1-14.

[29] Appadurai*, The Social Life of Things,* pp. 11-13*.*

[30] D. B. Stout, 'Aesthetics in Primitive Society' in C. F. Jopling (ed.), *Aesthetics in Primitive Societies: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1971), pp. 30-34.

[31]Stout, 'Aesthetics in Primitive Society'.

experiences. In academic contexts, jewellery and other means of personal or domestic adornment are often used interchangeably. This of course can present problems to art historians and archaeologists when attempting to strictly categorise such items. While various materials are often included in such pieces, to which very often no objective value can be attributed, such as sentimental pieces, or formerly animate objects, such as a tiger's tooth or a saint's bone, some definition is usually available in the literature to define high end jewellery.

What sociology calls 'social stratification' is a complex process that accumulates pertinence with growing populations, increasing economic yield, dependence on import and export and territorial expansion. This is usually associated with state-level societies and reflected through the different standings of individuals in said societies. No societal type can be entirely exempt from some degrees of inequalities, to varying degrees.[32] According to Harris, ''the essence of social stratification is the asymmetrical distribution of power''.[33] This is therefore a diachronic study of the relationship between social stratification and the design and use of filigree metalwork. In order to carry out a social analysis for the purposes of this thesis, some criteria of social stratification need to be established. The elements considered here include the distinction between the manufacturers (referred to as silversmiths or makers) and the different parties influencing their production (suppliers and consumers). This latter group includes influencing factors, commissioners and patrons. Societal 'elites' are generally considered to be those

---

[32] William Dressler and Michael Robbins, 'Art Styles, Social Stratification and Cognition: An Analysis of Greek Vase painting', *American Ethnology*, Vol. 2 (3) (1975), pp. 427-434.

[33] Marvin Harris, *Culture, Man and Nature: An Introduction to General Anthropology* (New York; Thomas Y Crowell, 1971), p 24.

who control resources and influence power, whether through finance, politics or popularity. More intricately, the degree to which individuals in the society could access the decision-making processes is also taken into consideration. Of course, these criteria are not discreetly defined and some blurring of lines and overlap between groups is to be expected and accepted as a limitation. This allows for the establishment of a relative (as opposed to absolute) degree of stratification, to provide a framework on which to build. An understanding of the significance of symbols and a piece's position on a social ladder requires a knowledge of the belief and value systems of the culture being studied and a knowledge of its technical and material resources as well as limitations.[34] Separately, the economies, religious customs and territorial expansions of the societies mentioned in the case studies are taken into consideration in order to apply these criteria.

To apply a social analysis to pieces of art, some insight into methodology can be gained from previous published work. Such analyses have often been applied in academic contexts to various art forms, such as Baxandall for Italian Quattrocento paintings and also work by DeNora and Hennion focussing on music.[35]In his article, ''Conditions of Trade'', Michael Baxandall examined the relationship between the artist and the client as a contract in fifteenth century Italian art and refers to these works as 'fossils of economic life.[36] In his essay 'Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy : A Primer in The Social History of pictorial Style' Baxandall emphasised

---

[34] Gross, 'Art History as Ethnography and as Social Analysis'.

[35] Tia DeNora, 'The Musical Composition of Social Reality? Music Action and Reflexivity', vol 43 (2) (1995), pp. 295-315, Antoine Hennion, *the Cultural study of Music, a critical introduction* (London: Routledge, 1983), Jeremy Tanner, 'Michael Baxandall and the Sociological Interpretation of Art', *Cultural Sociology*, vol. 4 (2) (2010), pp. 231-256.

[36] Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy.*

that the forms and styles of painting respond to social circumstances. He evaluated the integration of social, cultural and visual evaluations in the context of this relationship between the two executors of this contract and its main influencers, mainly the quality of the materials involved, the skill of the artist (and its emerging importance and position during this era) and the financial or political position of the commissioning patron. He explored visual art not only as a social construction, but also looks at the major role it plays in social orders such as interactions between individuals or between larger social groups. His writings have played a key role in defining the major paradigms in the sociology of art, through the provision of a cultural perspective.[37] Baxandall also added that the forms and styles of painting may sharpen our perception of the society. Although he referred specifically to painting, this theory can be extrapolated and applied to other art forms in terms of symbolism and iconography. He stressed the importance of the establishment of a social and economic framework to gain an understanding of the period.[38] Baxandall concluded that as visual sense represents the main organ of experience, pictures could and should be considered equally as valid as other official documents such as charters or parish rolls to provide insight to various aspects of life in a specific era. In this dissertation, his argument is extrapolated to apply to jewellery as a form of art.

Similarly, another paper by Dressler and Robbins, studying Greek vase painting, titled 'Art Styles, Social Stratification and Cognition: An Analysis of Greek Vase painting' attempts to deduce information about Greek social classes.[39] This

---

[37] Tanner, 'Michael Baxandall'.

[38] Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy.*

[39] William Dressler, Michael Robbins. 'Art Styles, Social Stratification, and Cognition: An Analysis of Greek Vase Painting', *American Ethnologist* vol 2 (1975), pp. 427–434.

paper employs and upholds Fischer's analysis (1961). Fischer examined the relationship of social structure to art style.[40] Fischer put forward a number of arguments whereby he hypothesised that graphic art is representative of an egalitarian society through the repetition of simple elements. His explanation for this was that security in these societal states was dependent on a number of people (referred to as comrades in his paper) holding a similar social status. This he argues is often represented through repeated elements. He places symmetry into this category too. Conversely, in a hierarchical society, which depends on relations between individuals of differing status position, different elements may be encountered in a representative piece of art. Interestingly, one of Fischer's theories is that artworks representative of egalitarian societies do not involve figures with enclosures.[41] This would immediately exclude filigree as ever belonging to such a society. However, it is noted that filigree work is generally not figurative, but usually includes patterns and symbols. Fischer's theory may therefore not be directly applicable to this research. Furthermore, his theory states that in hierarchical societies, representative art involves designs with little empty space.[42] Filigree jewellery, by definition is dependent on empty spaces as part of the effect of the design, but most pieces are collections of numbers of very densely bound motifs. When applied to fine metalwork practices, the value of the raw material needs to also be borne in mind, when attributing value and placing them in society. This thesis aims to test and examine this theory when applied to the different case studies, in a bid to

---

[40] J.L Fischer, 'Art styles are cultural cognitive maps', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 63 (1) (1961), pp. 79-93.

[41] Fischer, 'Art styles are cultural cognitive maps'

[42] Fischer, 'Art styles are cultural cognitive maps'.

elucidate information of the social standing of the original patrons, the commissioners and their successors.

Research focussing on social class analysis would certainly not be complete were the Marxist theories of social constructs not taken into consideration. Karl Marx famously argued that over the course of history society has transformed from a feudal system into a capitalist one. Broadly speaking this means that there is a dichotomy between the ruling class, often referred to as the bourgeoisie (who owned and dictated the means of production) and the working class, the proletariat. The fact that jewellery is often considered a luxury (as opposed to essential) item possibly demonstrates capitalism at its finest. Based on the idea of private ownership of property, this encourages the individual pursuit of profit. Marxists argue that this system creates great inequalities in societies between the two social classes.[43] When applied to the arts, it would be quite easy to place the commissioner or wearer as the former and the craftsman or artist as the latter. However, as is seen in the different case studies such a classification cannot be that simplistic as in different societies the artist (or in this case the jeweller) occupies different positions in different societies, influenced by religion and skill. Indeed, there are instances as seen in this thesis whereby the silversmith is exploited by some societies and occupies an elevated position in others. Additionally, the Marxist theory is further challenged here because filigree ownership is found to not be exclusive to a certain group of socially distinct individuals.

This leads to the challenge of widely accepted and perceived social constructs, which is explored as part of this research. Jewellery and *objets d'art* are

---

[43] Erik Olin Wright, Luca Perrone. 'Marxist Class Categories and Income Inequality.' *American Sociological Review*, vol. 42, (1), (1977) pp. 32–55.

often seen as synonymous with varying degrees of opulence. While there are often parallels between wealth and class, the display of the form is often seen to be inversely proportional to the latter. This may hold true for certain trends in fashion and jewellery and is therefore a facet that commands exploration in research of this nature. An example of this is seen when considering the play between Italian and British influences in nineteenth-century Malta in terms of women's costume. Class and culture are often perceived as inextricably interlinked, with higher levels of culture associated with the bourgeoisie. Objective resources (such as income and material wealth) shape cultural practices and behaviours that signal social class.[44] Appreciation of the various art forms requires various factors such as knowledge and the leisure of time to acquire it. This is often a remit of wealthier individuals who can afford it financially and also have the time to invest. This would therefore usually exclude the working class. Pierre Bourdieu, a French Marxist, further developed Marx's arguments and argued that the middle class possesses cultural capital, which means the appropriate norms and values that can lead to material rewards.[45] Such signals then create cultural identities between the different classes of individuals, such that these identities become rooted in subjective perceptions of social-class rank with respect to others.[46] Culture includes art in its various forms, music, theatre and literature among others.

---

[44] Kraus, 'Social Class as Culture'.

[45] Pierre Bourdieu. 'What makes a Social Class? *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 32 (1987), pp. 1-17.

[46] Kraus, 'Social Class as Culture'.

Marxist sociology dictates that essentially, art style is a means of symbolic defence of the political and economic interest of a social class.[47] This theory has received considerable criticism, as it does not take into account other sociocultural variables independent of class interests. It appears to lack the identification of empirical ranges of style with varying historical events and circumstances, and it does not conclusively explain a demonstrable relationship between the psychological determinants of class interest and their translation into particular characteristics of style. This is further complicated by potential differences in class between the creator of the artwork and the purchaser especially in cases where the piece is not commissioned. Jewellery *per se* is most commonly and conventionally looked upon as a means of display of a combination of wealth and aesthetic value.[48] As this is a consideration of art works involving fine metals and gem stones, the value of raw material and workmanship (taken in context of the economic value at the time of manufacture and acquisition) must be considered as a significant influence. Oakley argues that gold has been considered 'material money' over the course of history.[49] This argument could be extrapolated to other fine metals and jewellery pieces, that comprise a combination of raw material value as well as artistic value.

This research also considers the psychology dictating consumer behaviour and adornment theories. It is accepted that similar to the way that humans have used territories to manage situations, set expectations, economically perform day to day

---

[47]Thomas Munro, *Evolution in the Arts and other Theories of Culture History* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Cleveland Museum of Art (distributed by Harry M. Abrams, Inc.), 1963), Ch. VII.

[48] Peter Oakley, 'Is Gold jewellery money?', *Social Analysis* (2017), Vol. 61 (4), pp. 17-30.

[49] Oakley, 'Is Gold jewellery money?'.

interactions and manage relations (including their social identity) with others, they take meaning from material objects.[50] For Goffman and other material culture anthropologists material objects are theorised as important aspects of such territories as they serve cultural, social and individual purposes at multiple levels.[51] It is widely accepted that more expensive material objects are typically associated with individuals occupying higher social classes, and this breeds a subconscious understanding of various social situations within accepted frames. Such items may include both higher costing objects, as well as rare and individual pieces.[52] In social identification theory, Tajfel suggests that individuals strive for an increasing positivity of self-concept and image and are often motivated to achieve this by associating with (the perceived to be) higher-class individuals of the society in which they belong. This translates into an emulation and imitation of trends set by these individuals.[53]

Trends associated with the consumption of such goods that at one time are considered 'desirable' needs to be taken in consideration when attributing the association of such filigree objects to specific social classes. This is because over time, goods and services cease to exist as the province of the wealthy, but tend to become accessible to those on lower incomes. The lower echelons of society seek to

---

[50] Erving Goffman, *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York: Harper Collins, 1974), pp. 31-34.

[51] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 'Why We Need Things,' in Steve Lubar and W. David Kingery (eds), *History of Things, Essays on Material Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1993), pp. 20–29.

[52] Daniel Miller, *A Theory of Shopping* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998). Thomas O'Guinn , Robin Tanner , Ahreum Maeng. Turning to Space: Social Density, Social Class, and the Value of Things in Stores. *Journal of Consumer Research*. Vol 42 (2) (2015), pp. 196-213.

[53] Henri Tajfel, H., ed. (2010), *Social identity and intergroup relations*, Vol. 7, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 43.

emulate the lifestyle choices made by the middle and upper classes through fashion (a concept that had stood the test of time and is still encountered today), art, travel and taste in food.[54] The notion of belonging to a societal group by means of association is a means of constructing boundaries and borders that differentiate between those who belong, and those who do not. The contested and shifting nature of these boundaries and borders often reflect dynamic power relations between individuals within a society.[55]

Over time, however, style trickles down the social hierarchy, becoming unanimous to all classes with mass market developments through marketing and advertising campaigns as well as the production of imitation and counterfeit products. According to Andrew Trigg, the historical struggle for identification and existence became one of 'keeping up appearances'.[56] This refers to the above mentioned copying of the consumption practices of the upper classes by the lower classes in society, where the rich lead the way in developing common practices.[57] It also demonstrates that consumer practices are a source of both social cohesion and social division.[58] The jewellery trade also highlighted the gendering of consumption and to a certain extent the oppression of women. The relationship between jewellery

---

[54] Neil McKendrick John Brewer, J H Plumb. 'The birth of a consumer society : the commercialization of eighteenth-century England' (London: Europa Publications: 1982), p. 31.

[55] Nira Yuval-Davis. (2004), *Borders, boundaries, and the politics of belonging in Ethnicity, Nationalism and Minority Rights.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 47.

[56] Andrew B. Trigg. 'Veblen, Bourdieu, and Conspicuous Consumption.' *Journal of Economic Issues*, vol. 35 (1), (2001), pp. 99–115.

[57] Trigg. 'Veblen, Bourdieu, and Conspicuous Consumption.'

[58] Trigg. 'Veblen, Bourdieu, and Conspicuous Consumption.'

and gender is touched upon in the chapters on earrings and buttons. While jewellery was and is still often seen as an extravagance, its purchase and ownership reinforced such associations of consumption with wastefulness, idleness and non-productivity.[59] A counter to this argument however, is that jewellery often formed parts of heirlooms and dowries, and was owned by women, as a means of dormant cash and investment.

In his paper titled 'Artistic presence of Urban Social Classes' (1965) Kavolis hypothesised that over time similar artistic preferences were favoured by different social strata.[60] He studied this over various eras from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to modern times. He broadly classified society into four strata, whose fantasy dispositions were the main influence of such preferences. The upper middle class and patrician class (the highest in the hierarchy) followed a rational organisation of action with immediate subjectivity, tended to favour 'sober art' with refined sensuousness and spiritualised emotionality. The new corporate middle class tended to prefer geometric expressionistic abstraction, the lower middle class opted for simplified rigidity and grotesque distortion with a degree of sentimental realism while the working class (also referred to as the upper lower class) preferred bold simplification with almost photographic realism. The latter two classes tended to express a single-minded rebelliousness with a resigned acceptance of standardised operations.[61] This theory will be explored in the case studies and applied to the filigree items where feasible.

---

[59] Juliana Mansvelt. *Geographies of consumption*, (New Zealand: Sage Publications (2005) p. 36.

[60]Vytautas Kavolis, 'Artistic preferences of Urban Social Classes', *The Pacific Sociological Review*, vol. 8 (1) (1965), pp. 43-51.

[61] Kavolis, 'Artistic preferences of Urban Social Classes'.

A major function of adornment, including jewellery and clothing, is to position individuals and communities in space and time.[62] Adornment in general refers to the body and its intentional manipulation either through dress, three dimensional artefacts such as jewellery, or body decoration and modification.[63] While, as mentioned above, adornment does not appear to fulfil a basic human need, such as that for food or shelter, humans have universally, and since prehistory invested in bodily adornment and that of societies, whether male or female, rich or poor, and regardless of the degree of complexities of societies.[64] Various academic works have looked at the deliberate manipulation of the presentation of physical presentation. In her paper 'The Side of dress and adornment as social positioning' Shukla argues that by adjusting one's bodily adornment in response to shifts in temporal factors, however culturally defined, and to the varied contextual arenas in which one operates, individuals are able to communicate maturity and accomplishment, individuality and conformity, and familiarity and distance, while positioning themselves at once artfully and meaningfully in space and time.[65] Class and culture often appear to be directly related. Different cultural aspects place society before an extensive repertoire of ideas, emotions, sensations, feelings, choices, practices and impositions.[66] A complex ideology is then formed by representations of that society

---

[62] Pravina Shukla. 'The Study of Dress and Adornment As Social Positioning'. *Material Culture Review* 61 (1). (2005).

[63] Shukla. 'The Study of Dress and Adornment As Social Positioning'.

[64] Ted Polhemus, Lynne Procter. Fashion and Anti-Fashion: Anthropology of Clothing and Adornment, (London: Thames and Hudson ,1978).

[65] Shukla. 'The Study of Dress and Adornment As Social Positioning'.

[66] Everardo Rocha, The Woman in Pieces: Advertising and the Construction of Feminine Identity, *Sage Open*, Vol 3(4), (2013).

which is then constructed, repeated, and transformed through its everyday dissemination.

In her thesis on Icelandic Viking jewellery Mayeur Smith achieved this by attempting to decipher the social messages conveyed though these items of jewellery.[67] Identifying three major roles jewellery played in this society, namely gender identity, social status and rank, as well as macro-religious roles, and the relevant technique and quality of craftsmanship, led her to conclude that this jewellery and its material culture convey social messages that can contribute to the understanding of individual societies.[68] In this research, I too explored the historical, political and religious backgrounds. In addition to the observations of cultural practices associated with the use of the filigree objects. These backgrounds provide context and helped to understand the societal structures in question.

Problems related to the study of filigree jewellery

Limitations were encountered in studying the metalwork practice itself and also with methods of social analysis, particularly when applied to art and its history. Filigree work often does not bear a maker's stamp because the fine wires and threads do not present enough of a plain surface to accommodate a hallmark Also, these pieces are so fragile and easily marked or dented that not very many have survived over time. This would not allow for a piece to be confidently attributed to a maker or an era, but rather would rely on speculation and extrapolation of other factors for their determination. Additionally, as many filigree pieces are often either soldered together

[67] Smith, 'A Social Analysis of Viking Jewellery from Iceland', pp. 18-20.

[68] Smith, 'A Social Analysis of Viking Jewellery from Iceland', pp. 18-20.

or made of many pieces and joined with links, due to inheritance issues, often, original pieces were taken apart and sometimes either rejoined later, used as separate smaller pieces, or joined to other filigree or jewellery pieces which were not necessarily by the same maker, or from the same material, country of origin or era.[69]

Many jewellery items are sold second hand, either after being inherited or when the jewellery is considered unfashionable or the patron lacks interest, and so it is often very difficult to gain knowledge as to the origins and history of the piece and the place it occupied in society in terms of its maker, the original commission (or whether an 'off the shelf' piece), its wearers, or the occasions on which it was worn or as part of costume, among others. Today, auction houses and private vendors are guarded by GDPR rules and unwritten rules of nondisclosure about the vendors. Some vendors such as the *revenditrici* (women who re-sold items) in the Knights' period in Malta, gained a reputation of somewhat behaving like usurers by obtaining precious goods form those in need at cheap prices and selling them on more expensively.[70] However, in order to preclude the sale of counterfeit good, all items then had to be accompanied by a Consul's certificate if they contained jewels or pearls in most parts of Europe.[71] Original craftsmen either sold from their studios or workshops, known as *Bottega* in Italy, Spain, Portugal and Malta, or from little stalls on the street.[72] Often, jewellery items were pawned and the raw material was used as a dormant source of cash. Another limitation that is faced in the study of all

---

[69] As informed by Francesca Balzan in conversation with the author on 11th October 2018 at Palazzo Falson Historic House Museum, Mdina, Malta.

[70] Balzan. *Jewellery in Malta,* pp. 41-43.

[71] Balzan. *Jewellery in Malta,* pp. 41-43.

[72] Balzan. *Jewellery in Malta,* pp. 41-43.

jewellery techniques, is that in times of economic hardship, jewellery and gold items were often melted down and the manufacture of new goods was discouraged. This also happened in Malta between the Knights' rule and that of the British when Napoleon looted and melted down Maltese silver items.[73] This leads to lacuna in the interpretation of jewellery history pertaining to that era and the one preceding it.

As jewellery too followed fashion trends, often patterns encountered in one trend-setting country or region was later copied by another country, so while the iconography and motifs depicted might point to a certain country, confusion may arise surrounding as to its attribution of manufacture, if it was made in a different country. Furthermore, sometimes pieces were commissioned specifically as gifts to dignitaries or to specific foreign guests. This was for example encountered in Malta during the sixteenth century when the island was under the rule of the Knights of St John. The ruling Grandmasters were almost never Maltese, but from Spain, Italy or France. Some pieces of filigree were commissioned as presents to them. Thus, to demonstrate a personal touch, motifs from their home country were included in the design of the filigree piece.[74]

In terms of the social analysis of these works, it is to a certain extent unavoidable that contextual accuracy may be sometimes subjective and generalisations made. Thus, a certain element of bias is introduced, especially in relation to quality analysis. This may be especially true in my case, as the principal researcher, having been brought up in Malta, where filigree is considered a national

---

[73] Victor Denaro, 'The Mint of Malta', *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society*, vol. 15, (45), (1955), pp. 173–187.

[74] Kirstin Kennedy K.The Fourth Congress on European Jewellery, Oporto, Nov-Dec 2018, *Jewellery History Today.* Vol 34 (1) (2019).

Maltese tradition. As per Firebaugh's first rule, it is difficult not to be blinded by preconceived ideas. These may include a failure to look for contrary evidence or a failure to recognise it when it is encountered, so ultimately contrary evidence is suppressed.[75] Furthermore, there will be some overlap between artistic preferences of adjacent social classes, and the association of one particular style with a social class does not necessarily exclude any other styles, as a range of styles may be enjoyed by a particular class. This would lead to further blurring of the lines between the different strata.[76]

The paucity of academic literature surrounding filigree has already been mentioned. Another potential contributing factor to this is the possibility of literature available in other languages, particularly those in which filigree was practised, which were not found on searches as they were carried out in English.

Much of this research and the writing up of this dissertation took place during Covid-19. This meant that a lot of the research was limited to digital communication and electronic research. Thankfully visits to some museums such as the V&A Chatsworth House and Palazzo Falson in Malta took place before the start of Covid-19.

The first case study presented below, the zarf collection will provide insight into Turkish Ottoman metalwork practices and the relationship of the object's journey through its society from the raw material to its ultimate owner. The cultural practice of coffee consumption and trade and travel routes at the time were also observed. While traditionally jewellery history has focused largely on adornment theories,

---

[75] Glenn Firebaugh, *Seven Rules for Social Research* (Princeton University Press, 2008).

[76] Kavolis, 'Artistic preferences of Urban Social Classes'.

archaeological and burial finding significance and relationship to costumes, this research contributes to the scholarship of jewellery and in particular filigree metalwork because of it coupling of its use with social interactions and hence in turn societal standing. In the examination of the role of filigree between religion and royalty and its contentious journey through the Battle of Maqdala, the study of the Ethiopian Crown examines the changing perception of value of the metalwork across continents and different ruling classes (the Church and the British and Ethiopian monarchies). The final two chapters, the Maltese gold women's earrings and Maltese men's silver buttons examine filigree in the context of its use as jewellery and personal adornment in Europe at a time when Malta was a British colony. The various influences on adornment and its use and display by different members of society provide insight into the relationship of filigree objects and the reflections its use provides on its wearers.

The above hypothesised theories and research methods employed are considered to help classify the social strata the case study pieces transcended. Similarly, geographical, historical, religious, economic and political backgrounds were studied to provide an understanding for the interpretation of the society and its symbols. As various mechanisms are employed by societies to manipulate cultural behaviour, through this research I hope to demonstrate the relevance of the filigree technique and objects to identify and differentiate social status in the relevant societies.

CHAPTER 1: A COLLECTION OF ZARFS

The first case study is a set of silver filigree coffee cup holders thought to be nineteenth-century Turkish that form part of a larger collection of silver filigree (figure 2.1). This collection is part of the Devonshire Collections at Chatsworth House. I studied their place in this collection, their manufacture, acquisition, provenance and the position they hold today. Additionally, I examined the journey from raw material to final display and trade routes likely traversed in these specific societies and cultures. I used the information gathered from these objects to provide insight into the wider scope of this research to yield information as to the social standing of the people associated with these objects throughout their journey. Goffman, a cultural anthropologist, theorised that material objects are important aspects of such territories because they serve cultural, social and individual purposes at multiple levels.[77] Also, because it is widely accepted that more expensive material objects and higher status items are typically associated with individuals occupying higher social classes a subconscious understanding of various social situations within accepted frames is prompted.[78] The provenance is established to examine the acquisition habits of the collector and to examine the collection as a whole.

The practice and culture of coffee consumption in the relevant era and geographical location also provides a useful insight into Ottoman culture and its social ramifications during the nineteenth century and beyond. The associated utensils impart valuable information as to social distinction and the treatment of

---

[77] Goffman, ‘Frame Analysis’.

[78] Erving Goffman, ‘Symbols of Class Status’, *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol 2(4), (1951), pp. 294-304.

foreign visitors including dignitaries. While coffee consumption would appear to be distinct to the art of filigree, as the technique and this practice brings these cultural elements together, the social analysis of both practices will be useful to see whether the various conclusions drawn support or contradict each other. All these facets are examined separately, to then be brought together to evaluate the relationship between the filigree metalwork and social differentiation from an art historical perspective.

Although such objects are generally produced in one country, and often in one workshop, it is often difficult to place their country of origin, as the object (as in this case) travels.[79] Elucidating the identity of the maker (or makers) and the material used can be particularly challenging due to the lack of a maker's mark or hallmark.[80] A stylistic analysis is useful because the iconography helps place such a piece's origin or provide information on the commissioner or patron, together with observations of the individual techniques, methods and materials used. Iconography, as defined by Erwin Panofsky and his followers (also referred to as iconology) refers to the method of symbolic interpretation in art and cultural history and the history that uncovers the cultural, social, and historical background of themes and subjects in the pieces of art.[81] Additionally, the study of other collections that may house similar objects helps to confirm or refute the presumed origins and provenance of such

---

[79] Francesca Balzan, Michelle Galea. *Palazzo Falson: Historic House Museum* (Malta: Midsea House Limited, 2007).

[80] As informed by Jane Perry, jewellery historian at the V&A, London 10th March 2019 during a visit to the V&A.

[81] Roelof van Straten, *An Introduction to Iconography: Symbols, Allusions and Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Abingdon and New York, 1994), p. 12, Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford University Press, 1939).

pieces. For this case study, the trade routes used across Europe and Asia shed light on the movement of such items as well as the movement of travellers and patrons or collectors. Additionally, insight into the economy of the producing region, its culture and customs provides information on the manufacture, consumers and use of such a collection of coffee cup holders. The archives of the Chatsworth House collection are publicly available online. Part of this research involved the scouring of these documents in an attempt to glean information about travels to Istanbul (then Constantinople) and the obtaining of these items.

Descriptive analysis

As described by Colomban, leading experts often base their certification of ancient artefacts on stylistic analysis and on personal sensory perceptions.[82] This analysis allows the examination of the different parts and motifs making up these objects. This collection is discussed in conjunction with examples of similar style, materials and manufacture found in different collections.

This set of coffee cup holders consists of eight zarfs (figure 2.2). These small pieces were crafted form silver wire and *niello.*[83] The level of craftsmanship is very intricate and labour-intensive. Each section of the zarf is executed in fine filigree and granulation or cannetille-like works.[84] The three-dimensional tulip form cup is made

---

[82] Philippe Colomban, Aurelie Tournie, Ludovic Bellot-Gurlet. Raman identification of glassy silicates used in ceramics, glass and jewellery: a tentative differentiation guide, Journal of Raman Spectrocopy. Vol 37 (8) (2006), pp. 841-852.

[83] *Niello* is the blackened melted compound of various metals used to join various components of filigree together.

[84] *Cannetille* is a close relative of filigree jewellery work and is often found in combination with it. Inspired by embroidery, its tightly bound wires form coils that are raised from the base tougher without wire and sheet metalwork.

up of filigree designs and encrusted with polished silver cabochons, also often referred to as *appliqué* silver granules. They hold white porcelain cups, each with a gold band, just below the edge. The main body which is gently rounded rises from a short flaring scalloped foot, the rims decorated with stylised palmettes, the bodies with rosettes, and the rims with fern-like motifs. Each zarf is made up of 6 decorated star-shaped panel sections separated by a lower rising trefoil motif at the top end. The panels feature clusters of six granulation floral motifs with a further central seventh motif, surrounded by open filigree work, forming a larger six petal flower. Each of these larger floral pieces sits under the five pointed star design mentioned above. This pattern is repeated six times in each zarf. Seven of the sections feature a traditional Islamic floral motif. There are no makers' marks or hallmarks on these pieces. They are 6cm in height with a diameter of 5cm and base that is 2.5cm wide. There are no signs of use or damage on the items such as coffee stains or scratches to the porcelain gold rim or chips. The silver filigree has retained its shape and its mild tarnish is in keeping with their storage and presumed age.

Provenance

The set has been attributed to Turkey and the late nineteenth century by the curator of The Chatsworth House Collection, Sash Giles.[85] This, I was informed by Giles, is a suggestion rather than a fact. According to Giles, this collection of zarfs and their porcelain coffee cups were most likely obtained by William, the 6th Duke of Cavendish (1790-1858). It is unclear as to whether these were a purchase or a gift. There is an archival mention of a filigree horse and carriage (figure 2.3) in the

[85] Author's conversation with curator Sash Giles while visiting the collection at Chatsworth House on 29th October 2019.

collection in 1828, although again it is uncertain as to whether this may have entered the collection earlier.[86] Mention of the 6th Duke's travels to various parts of Europe and (then) Constantinople are mentioned several times in the forms of letters and scrapbooks in the archives.[87] It is known that he travelled to Constantinople in 1839 as part of his trip to Rome to acquire a sculpture.[88] There is no documentation surrounding their actual purchase or acquisition in the Chatsworth House archives and inventory. In the Duke's guide to Chatsworth, *The Sixth Duke of Devonshire's Handbook of Chatsworth* (1839), an entry is suggestive of their acquisition during one of his travels to (then) Constantinople:

> Under glass you see Zarfs and Filingians which are the mysteries of Oriental coffee-drinking. Sir Edmund Lyons had the foresight to order them at Smyrna, to be ready on my return from Constantinople. He who has for a short time had his coffee so served thinks it must continue to be his practise, but on his coming home all things return to the mutton choppers of English habits.[89]

From this excerpt, it is unclear as to whether these were ordered and purchased on behalf of the Duke or whether they were gifted to him after his enjoyment of the coffee consumption ritual as noted by Lyons. According to a secondary source, quoting the same handbook, this was one of several such trips by the Duke. Given the background of the evolving trade and travel routes available from Britain to Asia

---

[86] Diary of the 6th Duke of Devonshire, 16 January 1839. Devonshire Manuscripts. The Devonshire Collection Archives. GB 2495 DF4, Accessed online. https://www.chatsworth.org/media/12449/df4_rev_201902.pdf

[87] Diary of the 6th Duke of Devonshire. Devonshire Manuscripts.

[88] Diary of the 6th Duke of Devonshire. Devonshire Manuscripts.

[89] John Martin Robinson (ed.), *The Sixth Duke of Devonshire's Handbook of Chatsworth* (Chatsworth House Trust distributed by Heywood Hill, London, 2020, pp. 113-117.

and Europe and the interests of the various members of the Devonshire family, this speculation gains further ground. His aristocratic status meant that he likely would have been afforded more courtesies from higher status individuals and high ranking members of society in the countries he visited. Also known as the bachelor duke, because he never married, his overriding passions were more cultural than political with deep interests in horticulture, literature, science and sculpture.[90] He was an avid collector, with a special penchant for sculpture, coins, gems and various curiosities. This filigree coffee cup set does not exactly fit in with his main Classical interests. They seem to somewhat fall short of the usual opulence he collected for display at the house. As described below, the coffee drinking ritual, especially in the latter half of Ottoman Rule, was often highlighted to Western visitors, and often formed part of meetings, whether social or pertaining to business.[91] From the above excerpt I think it would be reasonable to assume these zarfs were either purchased on the Duke's behalf or gifted to him by Sir Edmund Lyons after he had experienced and enjoyed the Turkish ritual of coffee consumption.

The Collection

The Devonshire Collection at Chatsworth House is an extensive collection of some of the finest examples of fine art and sculpture. Chatsworth House houses a small collection of silver filigree items currently displayed in one of the bedrooms in a small

---

[90] Alison Yarrington, 'Canova and Thorvaldsen at Chatsworth', in Diana Dethloff (ed.), *Burning Bright: Essays in Honour of David Bindman* (London: UCL Press, 2015), pp. 77–87.

[91] Marita Ervin, 'Coffee and the Ottoman Social Sphere', Student Research and Creative Works History Theses, University of Puget Sound, 2014, https://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=history_theses

cabinet. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain it was fashionable to collect silver miniature objects. These include diminutive decorative items such as a horse drawn carriage as well as chairs and miniature furniture items, candle holders, a spinning wheel and a standing mirror. Trinkets and jewellery boxes and small perfume vial holders also make up a significant part of this collection. Interestingly the collection of zarfs that forms the focus of this chapter is not publicly displayed but is kept away in storage. It was shown to me upon request to view the Chatsworth filigree.[92] There could be many reasons for this and at this point this is speculation. It could be because they do not satisfy the criteria of being miniatures or 'toys', but are actually full sized objects with a functional rather than a purely decorative purpose. Furthermore, on seeing the remainder of the collection, crockery and items related to food and beverage are displayed in the dining room, where a table is laid for many more guests than eight. There is no display associated with coffee consumption. The above excerpt from the 6th Duke's *Handbook* suggests that whether given as a gift or a purchase, the initial intention of their acquisition was to continue the coffee consumption practice he grew fond of in Constantinople. It is clear – at least from the current room displays - that this did not ensue, and hence they were relegated to storage, where they remain today. The zarfs of the set in question are made of silver filigree and niello, rather than gold and stone encrusted, and therefore, compared to the Duke's other often extravagant purchases, the set would probably have not been deemed very expensive at the time by him, and hence perhaps held lesser value to him.

---

[92] With thanks to the curators for allowing me access.

It is also useful to bear in mind the often haphazard way in which country house collections come together. They are repositories of many lives and things tend to pool, in disparate collections in drawers and cupboards, on mantelpieces and in nurseries and seldom-visited guest rooms; often only brought together by people with a specific interest or curatorial mind and eye. Having examined each piece in this filigree collection, there appear to be no hallmarks or maker's mark on any of the filigree items, making it difficult to place or date their origin and map their possible pathway.[93] One item, a filigree silver etui, attributed to the early 18th century, containing a silver gilt rat tailed fork, knife and spoon, has a hallmark (on the spoon only). This is an indistinct maker's mark and the London and Britannia standard marks. Additionally, several of the filigree items on display in the bedroom cabinet or kept in storage are not recorded in any database in Chatsworth House. A few are listed in inventories, thus shedding light on the date they may have entered the collection, or at least confirming that they belonged to the Chatsworth collection prior to that date, such as the horse drawn carriage.

In the Chatsworth House archives some records of silver 'toy' furniture purchased for the daughters of Richard Boyle, the 3rd Earl Burlington (1696-1753) and Lady Charlotte Boyle, the Marchioness of Harrington (1731-1754). It is interesting to note that the word 'toys' as used during that time did not necessarily denote a play item for a child, but merely a miniature, or a non-functioning replica of an article that is not used for serious or originally intended purposes but for entertainment or pleasure.[94] It is possible that early silver filigree was bought for

---

[93] Hallmarks and makers' marks are not used internationally and across all periods.

[94] Megan Brandow-Fuller, *Childhood by Design, Toys and the Material Culture of Childhood, 1700-present* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018).

these children or their contemporaries, the Devonshires. The daughter and heir of the 3rd Earl Burlington married the son of the 3rd Duke of Devonshire in 1748. As a consequence, they brought together their estates and chattels. Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire (1758-1806) was an avid collector of fine jewels. The Chatsworth House archives house plenty of bills for jewels purchased by Georgiana at a young age. She was also observed to be a very indulgent mother, so any pieces dated during her lifetime could well have been acquired by her. William, the 6th Duke of Devonshire, has been described in some further detail above. Evelyn, Duchess of Devonshire, also known as Evie (1870-1960), spent time in India as a young woman and had a large family. India was (and remains) a well-known hub for silver filigree workshops. Mary, the Duchess of Devonshire (1895 -1988), was the owner of a small collection of silver filigree jewellery, some featuring a daisy collection. This daisy collection is assumed to be Mary's as it was found in a little case belonging to her, although things may have been added to or lost over the years.

Arguably, another reason for not displaying the set is that items such as these are not considered as being of particular interest to the public during present times. This in turn may be somewhat related to the legacy of empire. In his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said argues that Western scholarship about the Eastern World is heavily linked to the imperialist societies who produced it and therefore makes much 'Orientalist' work inherently political and servile to power.[95] Said also argues that the east has been used for consumption by the west – a view which can be applied to the set. However, it is evident in this case that there has also been curiosity on the part of the collector, and a keen interest for aesthetics. 'Orientalism'

---

[95] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

as a term in European art dates to the early nineteenth century, but the movement of objects from the East to the West has a much longer history, including through diplomatic and trade exchanges between the Ottoman Empire and European powers.[96] Emerging artists often painted vivid, sometimes erotic and violent scenes. Some artists, such as Eugène Delacroix had the advantage of having travelled to North Africa while others, such as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres relied on literature and hearsay. It is some of these works of art that portrayed the East in a less than favourable light. Said's publication has had a huge impact on humanities and social science with a great influence on academic literature.[97] The concept of Orientalism evokes two intertwined concepts, that of mysterious and subtle beauty that contrasts with Occidental rationality; and the idea of backwardness and barbarism imposed by Western colonialism. This recognition of this may have had repercussions in many museums and art galleries. The increasingly contested legacy of colonialism, and its continued legacy in terms of hierarchies of objects, may explain in part why some museums especially British museums have hidden away their collections of Oriental and Oriental-inspired art pieces from nineteenth-century tours of what was then called the Orient. This may shed some light as to why this collection of zarfs is stored away from the public eye in Chatsworth House.

Telkari

---

[96] John MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 52-55.

[97] Shehla Burney. "CHAPTER ONE: Orientalism: The Making of the Other." *Counterpoints* Vol 417 (2012): pp. 23–39.

Turkish filigree is often referred to as *telkari,* meaning wire work. It is thought to have been introduced to Anatolia by the Ahi communities and further developed by the Seljuk Turks, blossoming especially in the sixteenth century in Midayat in the Mardin province, where it remains a popular craft until today.[98] Designs pertaining to the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire often displayed high quality complex filigree work. Though popularised in Turkey during Ottoman rule, it is known to have its origins (using similar terminology) in Ancient Greece and Rome. According to Falke, it was used in Anatolia in 2500BC and in Mesopotamia in 3000BC.[99] During the fifteenth century, the use of this technique became widespread in Eastern and Southern Eastern Anatolia. Though thoroughly documented evidence is scarce to come by, the Dagestani masters in the region of Trabzon are said to have influenced the development of telkari. Such Trabzon work focused heavily on producing filigree liquor and coffee cup sets, as well as other drinking addenda and utensils, such as trays and sugar tongs.[100] Copper and bronze were used by the people deemed to be of lower social standing or poorer.[101] Silver was the most common material used, with gold reserved for pieces only afforded by rich or higher status individuals and used in imperial courts[102]. Silver was quite affordable during late Ottoman Rule and wealthy families could also afford to (and did) use silverware at home for day to day use such

---

[98] William Sayers, *Art, Economics and Politics of Modern Turkey, An Example of Traditional Handicrafts in Midyat: Production of Filigree* (London and Istanbul: AGP Research, 2017).

[99] Falke, 'Filigree'.

[100] Tosun, *Dissolution of Crafts*, p. 111-117

[101] Tosun, *Dissolution of Crafts*, p. 184-185.

[102] Andrew J. Newman (ed.) *Society and Culture in the Early Modern Middle East: Studies on Iran in the Safavid Period* (Brill: 2003), p. 177.

as in trays and some utensils.[103] They were commonly gifted at weddings, as a means of investment for the couple.[104] From Turkey, where the technique gained momentum and popularity, it was exported under Ottoman Rule to the area formerly known as Yugoslavia and Greece. It is often also referred to as *cift isi* in some parts of Turkey, literally meaning 'tweezer work'.[105]

Traditionally, all the work involved in the creation of Turkish filigree pieces is the responsibility and handiwork of a single craftsman or workshop.[106] This generally involves its design and the production of the silver wire from which the frame and the infill motifs are made. Interestingly, most filigree items in the Ottoman Empire were flat, comprising trays, mirror frames, plates and belts. The mid and late nineteenth century saw the rise in popularity of hollow-ware, and it was during this phase that filigree coffee cup holders became fashionable, when the cups themselves were made without handles.[107] Turkish filigree designs were first drawn flat on paper in two dimensions. If the object were to be hollow, the piece of paper was then manipulated into shape to dictate the completion of the design.[108] Niello is a technique particular to Turkish and Cypriot silversmithing.[109] Granulation - the addition of small decorative metal spheres in relief (standing proud on the surface of the object) was a popular

---

[103] Rafis Abazov, *Culture and Customs of Turkey* (Greenwood Press, 2009), p. 119.

[104] Halil İnalcık, Donald Quataert, Suraiya Faroqhi*, An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 113.

[105] Mehmet Zeki Kusoglu, *Silver in Turkish Art (the Ottoman Period)*, (Turkey: Blue Dome Press, 2015), pp. 89-93.

[106] Kusoglu, Silver in Turkish Art, pp. 89-93.

[107]Kusoglu, Silver in Turkish Art, pp. 89-93.

[108]Kusoglu, Silver in Turkish Art, pp. 89-93.

[109]Kusoglu, Silver in Turkish Art, pp. 89-93.

decorative technique used on items of this time which was carried through the ages and well into modern times.[110] Ottoman jewellery often incorporated Persian and Byzantine motifs. These included natural motifs, such as flowers and stars, which reflected the prevailing tastes and belief systems.[111] As opposed to European jewellery at the time, Ottoman jewellery did not generally include birds, insects and other animals but mainly adhered to stars and floral motifs.[112] The floral, star and fern like motifs seen in this collection of zarfs is commonly encountered in Islamic jewellery such as Turkish filigree particularly, that pertaining to the period of the Ottoman Empire. Their tulip shape may have been a subject of interest to the Duke, following the Western popularity associated with tulips after their introduction to Europe from Constantinople a century earlier setting of 'tulip mania' in Europe inspiring artists and collectors alike.

Taking the above information into consideration and applying it to this collection of zarfs, it would be in keeping with the initial assumption that these zarfs are most likely of Turkish origin. This is due to the use of silver as a metal and the use of the filigree technique, as well as the incorporation of *niello*. It would make sense that the zarfs were made during later Ottoman Rule. It is unlikely that they were made later than the nineteenth century due to the presence of sumptuary laws, enforced in 1829, that forbade Muslims from practising art and craft.[113] Most forms of art were carried out by non-Muslim craftsmen, particularly Christian artisans.[114] Items

---

[110] Kusoglu, Silver in Turkish Art, pp. 89-93.

[111] Abazov, *Culture and Customs of Turkey*, p. 122.

[112] Abazov, *Culture and Customs of Turkey*, p. 121.

[113] Tosun, *Dissolution of Crafts,* p. 125.

[114] Before 1915 most Midyat residents were Orthodox Christians

such as these coffee cup holders, often hold no religious motifs as the design used was solely decorative, although they did include some Islamic motifs such as some flowers. While Anatolian filigree was mainly carried out in gold and silver, this *telkari* was usually reserved for bodily adornment such as earrings, rings and bracelets. Midyat telkari was often worked into larger decorative items and utensils. In the late nineteenth century, the silver metal was sometimes mixed with copper to decrease the raw material cost. It is unsure as to whether these zarfs may have an element of copper. In conversation with Sash Giles she mentioned that they are silver. However, this has not been independently verified by a consul. On direct observation I doubt that there is a copper component to them as over time this would show through. Additionally, niello was not usually used with copper based materials. Hence, I think these zarfs most probably originated from the Midyat province, seeing that they are larger items and the Midyat silversmiths did make zarfs. Given the repeated floral motifs encountered, including tulips and palmettes with star designs, the iconography observed is in keeping with that encountered in other forms of Ottoman visual art. In his 1974 essay, Falke in fact makes a specific mention of Turkish filigree noting some similarities in its palmette motifs and tulip shaped containers to Chinese filigree.[115] This would support the assumption that these were made in the nineteenth century.

An interesting point encountered during this research is that while the Ottoman Empire was very rich in culture and various forms of craftsmanship, it appears that there was a hierarchy even between the different decorative arts themselves. This standing was seen to divide its respective craftspeople in social classes with

[115] Falke, ‘Filigree’.

calligraphy being relegated to the highest class and the Imperial courts.[116] Jewellery making and silversmithing appeared to have been held in slightly less regard than calligraphy but silversmiths nevertheless ranked only just below the calligraphers in social standing.[117] TI interpreted this to mean that not only were the commissioners from a middle and upper middle class background, but so were the producers of such art works; they belonged to a similar social standing. As Tosun observes in his thesis, filigree work in Turkey lost some of its value both due to raw materials (silver being mixed with copper, hence cheapening it) and due to technological advances allowing it to be mass produced in other places.

Ottoman Coffee Culture

The Ottoman coffee house represented an integral part of Ottoman culture. According to Burçak Evren, coffee reached Egypt via Yemen before it was brought to Istanbul.[118] Coffee became widespread in the Ottoman Empire during the era of Suleiman the Magnificent (1520–1566), eventually establishing itself an important centre of coffee culture. Once reserved to the palace only, it became a habit for common people and a mixture of people from all walks of life including academics, business men as well as idlers.[119] This ritual served multiple purposes, bringing

---

[116] Abazov, *Culture and Customs of Turkey*, p. 119.

[117] Abazov, *Culture and Customs of Turkey*, p. 119.

[118] Birsen Yılmaz, Nilüfer Acar-Tek and Saniye Sozlü, 'Turkish cultural heritage: a cup of coffee', *Journal of Ethnic Foods*, Vol. 4, Issue 4 (December 2017), pp. 213-220; Burçak Evren, *Old Istanbul coffee houses* [Eski İstanbul Kahvehaneleri] (Doğan Book Publishing, İstanbul, 1997), p. 27.

[119] Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: the origins of a social beverage in the medieval Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988; University of Washington Press), pp. 103-104.

citizens together in the name of culture, education, music and poetry, as well as serving as meeting places for political discourse. The Ottoman presence was in many ways limited to the major urban centres and local culture was sustained among the different ethnic communities of the empire, such as the Christians of the Balkans and Armenia and the powerful Jewish and Greek merchants of Istanbul. In the provincial cities, coffeehouses and the homes of aristocratic families became the new centres of cultural exchange, replacing official institutions of learning and religion.[120] Government spies (it is said) were also regular attendees to coffee houses, to gain insight on the public's perception of the opinions pertaining to the powers that were.[121] The patronage of the coffee houses was limited to men and often to Muslims only.[122] The consumption of coffee was not limited to coffee houses, but also took place domestically, as well as being part of other traditions. This custom piqued the interest of Europeans and often the coffee drinking ritual was presented to guests and dignitaries. This opinion is further confirmed by the Duke's writing in his handbook shown above. An excerpt from the book *Intimate Outsiders*, depicts this custom as one often exaggerated to please visiting Westerners in the nineteenth century:

> The rituals that conformed to the Western stereotype of the harem were often enacted: smoking the cubuk, indulging in confectionary, and drinking coffee served in exquisite jewelled fincans, (cups) and filigree zarfs (holders). The

---

[120] Asli Tokman, 'Negotiating tradition, modernity and identity in consumer space: a study of a shopping mall and revived coffeehouse', MSc dissertation, Bilkent University, Ankara, 2001, http://repository.bilkent.edu.tr/bitstream/handle/11693/14808/0001820.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

[121] Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses*, p. 103-104.

[122] Tokman, 'Negotiating tradition', p. 63.

crowning glory of the charade was the presentation of bouquets of flowers by Sorab Ali and Yanh to the two 'duped Englishmen.[123]

The serving of coffee in nineteenth-century Turkey was a complex and ritualised process that played a significant role in society.[124] Coffee played an important role in daily life in Ottoman and coffee tradition constituted the major part in serving the guests and visitors. Nineteenth-century Ottoman coffee ceremonies conducted in the palace were of significant importance as a sign of respect.[125] Magnificently decorated utensils included cup covers, cups and zarfs.[126] In the 1800s, coffee was served on gold and silver-studded clothes (*sitil puşidesi* in Turkish), on special trays and cup covers (*sitil takımı* in Turkish), coffee cups and coffee sleeves. The essential component of this 'sitil takımı', which was made of silver, copper, or brass, was sitil bowl.[127]

To give an additional elegance to the presentation, porcelain cups with zarfs have been used since the seventeenth century to prevent the burning of the hand of the drinker.[128] Coffee was served in three-ounce cups that were often made of porcelain, without handles, known as *fincan*.[129] Sometimes, glass or wooden cups

---

[123] Mary Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders: The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature* (Duke University Press, 2008).

[124] G.F. Kaz, N. Öztürk, G. Demiray, Turan G. Tufan Ö, N.E. Noyan, A.Ö. Demirli, G. Birincioğlu, C. Aydın, E. Bilirgen, A.Z. Turan, *From the bean to the cup: a cup of coffee in the palace for all time [Tüm Zamanların Hatırına Sarayda Bir Fincan Kahve]*(Istanbul: edited by Grand National Assembly of Turkey Head of the National Palaces, 2011).

[125] Yilmaz, 'Turkish cultural heritage'.

[126] Yilmaz, 'Turkish cultural heritage'.

[127]Yilmaz, 'Turkish cultural heritage'.

[128] Yilmaz, 'Turkish cultural heritage'.

[129] Ervin, 'Coffee and the Ottoman Social Sphere'.

were used. The *fincan* was placed in the zarf, which the drinker would hold to bring the fincan to his or her mouth. The word zarf is derived from the Arabic word meaning 'holder' or 'envelope.' The fincan was generally rather plain or with minimal decoration, while the zarf held the decorative value. Metals used typically included silver, gold, copper or brass. This depended on the occasion and the patron's wealth and status.[130] In the nineteenth century, when most Ottoman Turkish zarfs were made, gold followed by silver were considered the most precious and expensive metals.[131] Other materials such as ebony, tortoiseshell, bone and horn were also sometimes used. Often, these would be accompanied by matching spoons, saucers or trays and sometimes these zarfs would also have handles. Less wealthy Turkish people also owned coffee cups (fincan) – without zarfs - during this period showing that coffee consumption was not a privilege relegated to the elite.[132] However, there was a much larger increase in the ownership of coffee cups in the wealthier groups and in 1820 almost half of the estate owners from the wealthier individuals group possessed cups and zarfs.[133]

The Ottoman Empire introduced coffee to the Western countries in the sixteenth century via Italy.[134] The fast spread of coffee precipitated a variety of prohibitions in the Muslim world over the years. Before the lifting of sumptuary law (mentioned above) it was regarded heretical to Islam because of its pleasure-giving

---

130 Yilmaz, 'Turkish cultural heritage'.

131 Yilmaz, 'Turkish cultural heritage'.

132 Pinar Ceylan, 'Essays on markets, prices, and consumption in the Ottoman Empire (late-seventeenth to mid-nineteenth centuries)', PhD dissertation, London School of Economics, 2016, http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/3507/1/Ceylan_Essays_on_prices.pdf

133 Ceylan, 'Essays on markets, prices, and consumption in the Ottoman Empire'.

134 Kaz, 'From the bean to the cup'.

nature (in keeping with the forbidding of luxury items) and therefore it was even prohibited.[135] A way around these prohibitions was found (as apparently they were not considered heretical after the beans were roasted) and they were lifted.[136] The use of zarfs spread from Egypt and further up the Nile, within the Ottoman Empire, through the Balkans and into Russia, though often in very different forms.[137] The zarfs however were not used in Europe and they remained an Ottoman–Turkish tradition.[138] As observed through dowry lists and wills, their use appeared to fall out of fashion in the early twentieth century, when eastern and 'oriental' products were gradually replaced by European goods:

> Oriental products were gradually replaced with items from Vienna and Paris. Damask, an expensive fabric from Damascus was replaced with dyed cotton; metal glass holders (Turkish: zarfs). Crafted in filigree (Turkish: feligen), which had been part of the coffee serving ritual, were discarded in favour of porcelain from Saxony.[139]

The nineteenth-century Ottoman coffee culture provides valuable insight into the social standing of the users of such zarfs. The communal drinking of coffee is associated with the exchange of cultural entertainment such as poetry and drama. I would argue that this points to a subset of society concerned with the appreciation of

---

[135] Yilmaz, 'Turkish cultural heritage'.

[136] K. Emiroğlu History of daily life [Gündelik Hayatımızın Tarihi] (Dost Bookstore Publications, Ankara, 2001), p. 341.

[137] Falke, 'Filigree'.

[138] Yilmaz, 'Turkish cultural heritage'.

[139] C.Vintilă-Ghiţulescu, *Women, Consumption, and the Circulation of Ideas in South-Eastern Europe, 17th - 19th Centuries* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2018), p. 128.

art and a result of exposure to such pieces therefore and to a form of education. I would postulate that coffee consumption in Ottoman Turkey was therefore associated with intellectuals and in a similar way to other societies such individuals may occupy higher positions of standing in their respective societies. Furthermore, I would also argue that due to the physical properties of these items, it is unlikely that such finely made filigree zarfs such as these were used in public coffee houses and taverns. Repeated use in such a setting would lead to the rapid warping and disfigurement of the shape. It would make sense that in such coffeehouses the zarfs were made of tougher less malleable and more hard-wearing material, such as copper. Rather I think these zarfs in filigree were produced for domestic use in a smaller group of people. Being made of silver and niello, I would postulate that these items were most probably used by wealthier individuals in their homes to entertain guests. It is possible that they were used by aristocracy in less formal events such as when entertaining visiting dignitaries, of which the sixth Duke of Devonshire might have been one.

Similar objects - a comparative analysis

In order to establish where in society, in terms of geography and class, these zarfs would place their owners, I examined the above described craftsmanship comparatively to zarfs in other collections. This is done in order to establish where in society, in terms of geography and class, these zarfs would place their owners. A similar collection of zarfs forms part of the Museo della Filigrana in Campo di Ligure in Italy. This collection too is attributed to Turkey and its manufacture to the

nineteenth century (Figure 2.4).[140] The difference is that this is a collection of an odd number of zarfs, nine items, though it is not known if this set represents the remnants of a once larger set. These zarfs stand on a silver filigree tray. Similar motifs and decorative features are encountered, with a flared fluted base, repeating patterns of identical petals (6 per cup in this case) to form a tulip shaped cup holder supported by a flared base. The base of each zarf in this collection stands on a round platform to which it is welded. Similarly, to those at Chatsworth, small silver cabochon balls (granulation) and niello work are seen on and between each petal motif.

The British Museum also holds one such coffee cup holder in isolation as part of its collection (figure 2.5). Its origin is attributed to Syria, possibly Damascus, and its manufacture to the late nineteenth century.[141] Syria was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1516 to 1918. Similar repeating petal motifs are seen with raised silver cabochons on a short flared base.

Other similar items were encountered on various auction sites. These were often accompanied by spoons. Some spoons were made entirely out of filigree, including its bowl. This denoted that the spoon was used to place sugar lumps (not granulated sugar) into the cup for stirring. Other spoons with a solid bowl were also encountered as forming part of a zarf collection. One such example (figure 2.6) forms part of a collection of six filigree zarfs with accompanying filigree spoons. The porcelain fincans are similar to the ones described in this case study, and the zarf design again shows a similar floral pattern on a short flanged foot with granulation.

---

[140] Bongera, *La Filigrana,* p.16.

[141] British Museum online database, museum number 2012,6017.5. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_2012-6017-5

Their origin (according to the auctioneers) is attributed to late Ottoman Turkey (early twentieth century).[142]

This set of zarfs is both elaborate and made of silver. It is therefore quite expensive, but also culturally significant for Turkey and therefore perhaps provides an explanation about the Duke's piqued interest. From the entry in his handbook he may have bought it himself or it may have been gifted to him, though it appears he failed to use it himself in England. Its wide use in Turkey also hints that sets such as these may have been used by lower classes but these probably incorporated other materials. Further to my above postulations, I would suggest that the Duke deemed this set less worthy than other items he collected and documented as they appear to not follow his usual trend of opulence and grandeur. The cultural use of such sets, which was to sit together and drink coffee, places emphasis on the communal and communicative element of the coffee drinking tradition.

It is known that filigree metalwork was very much a migrant practice traversing many countries and most continents.[143] It would be impossible to simply assign social standing to the peoples of these countries and their respective societal structures. It may, however, be the focus of further anthropological and sociological research to establish whether during the time that filigree was the popularly practised craft in each region, which societal class it leant towards more. This then brings forward a few more questions. Who were the middle and upper classes? Did class structure change between the West (Europe) and the East (the Orient)? Did the filigree item transcend different class positions throughout its journey from raw material to

---

[142] https://www.michaelbackmanltd.com/archived_objects/filigree-silver-zarfs-turkey-ottoman/

[143] Briceno, 'Filigree: a migrant metal practice'.

silversmith to patron and purchaser and to final recipient? Marxist sociology, recognised as one of the major sociological paradigms, examines (among other salient things) how a mode of production influences the social class and evaluates the relation between workers, capital, the state and culture.[144] Using this information the potential disparity between the collector (or owner) and the maker can be made. As mentioned above the class position held by the silversmith in the Ottoman Empire is well documented relative to those holding and practising other skillsets.

Conclusion

Through a combination of close object analysis, archival research and historical and contextual analysis, I conclude that these silver items are indeed most likely to be zarfs, or coffee cup holders that were most probably crafted in the 19th century in Ottoman Turkey. This form of filigree work strongly resembles that known as *telkari* that was practised in Ottoman Turkey during the latter half of Ottoman Rule. The use of the blackened technique *niello* further points to this, as do the repeating floral and star motifs, and tulip shaped receptacles. As it is known that the 6th Duke of Devonshire took advantage of the increased travel access to Europe and Asia during the nineteenth century and did visit Istanbul on a number of occasions, it is therefore most likely that this collection of coffee cup holders found its way into Chatsworth House either through a purchase by the Duke himself or as a gift given to him during one of his visits. The documentation afforded to other pieces in his collection by an otherwise meticulous art loving Duke would indicate that he felt that this collection was not worthy of particular mention or high regard. Noting that many of these zarfs

144 Ljubomir Zivkovic, 'The Structure of Marxist Sociology' *Social Research*, 34 (3), (1967), pp. 477–506.

are sold as sets, I would postulate that this strengthens the argument I made above that such items in filigree are more likely to be of domestic use. The coffeehouses would generally have more patrons and formal aristocratic entertainment, as seen by the table in the Chatsworth House dining room would seat many more people. Various hypotheses were employed in this case study in order to perform a social analysis on these items. The use of silver and this technique in Ottoman history would largely exclude their use in Imperial courts, as the latter used finer metals and often incorporated encrusted stones, especially for formal occasions. Furthermore, it was known that wealthy middle-class families often used silverware in and around the house. Jewellery and filigree as a craft was seen in the Ottoman Empire as belonging to the middle and upper middle-class skillset with calligraphy and miniature decorative art occupying the workshops of the Imperial Courts. I therefore conclude from this case study that silver filigree items such as this collection of zarfs most likely represents people who occupied the middle to upper echelons of nineteenth century Turkish society middle class, both in terms of the craftsmen and the users. Their presence in the UK and their appreciation would again relegate their owners to an upper middle class, in terms of culture and workmanship appreciation.

CHAPTER 2: AN ETHIOPIAN CROWN

The yellow gold filigree Ethiopian crown housed at the Victoria and Albert Museum is the second case study in this thesis (figure 3.1). This particular piece was chosen as it provides yet another dimension to the history, design and cultural implications of filigree workmanship and objects. African filigree and that used for royal or ecclesiastical adornment provide other vantage viewpoints. As my aim is to examine these different objects to identify or assign a class structure to their makers, wearers and owners, the answer, is seemingly simple here, as it is well-known that this crown was made for and worn by the highest ruling member of Ethiopian society, the king. I have chosen this crown for this research as it presents different facets and opportunities for a social analysis. In contrast to the other case studies, there exists sufficient literature surrounding its provenance and acquisition. Research in the field of Ethiopian jewellery, though mainly typographical, descriptive and geographical, provides a robust groundwork for a social analysis, which appears to have not been undertaken so far. Additionally, this research was largely carried out in the 1970s with a paucity of more recent scholarship. These include a 1975 article on Ethiopian crowns by René Brus and Raymond A. Silverman and Neal W. Sobania's 2004 article on Ethiopian gold and silver jewellery that includes filigree.[145]

Attempting to address questions pertaining to the society that created such pieces could be of use to the fields of archaeology, art history as well as sociology. A grasp of the social dynamics, the social representation of such objects, their use and

---

[145] René Brus, 'Ethiopian Crowns', *African Arts*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Summer, 1975), pp. 8-13+84; Raymond A. Silverman, 'Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia'.

the individuals having access to it, leads to further reaching implications than that implied purely by adornment theory.[146] Examining the symbolism and iconography of the pieces helps identify the social and cultural context of Ethiopian filigree. Introducing this sociological dimension contributes to a wider understanding of these objects beyond material adornment. It is pertinent to this research as it offers insight to the other end of the spectrum of filigree jewellery, that commissioned for and worn by royals. This chapter seeks to determine the role of filigree work in Ethiopia and to perform a social analysis on this metalwork in the country through the ages.

The crown is also implicated in British colonialism, having been looted in the battle of Maqdala in 1868, before entering the V&A in 1872.[147] Few filigree pieces are associated historically with contentious acquisition histories or relate to significant events in a nation's history permeating through to the modern day. The controversies surrounding such items also provide useful information about political and other influencing factors. Additionally, in contrast to the other three case studies in this thesis, this is a bespoke and unique item. The other case studies focus on items that either served both functional and decorative purposes (buttons and coffee cup holders), or that are purely decorative and meant for personal adornment as part of fashion, dress and costume (earrings). Such items, though individually handmade (as all filigree was in the nineteenth century), were made in large numbers with some variation between designs according to workshops, countries, fashion trends, traditions and makers. This crown, on the other hand, provides information about the use of filigree in rather different circumstances: royal, non-secular commissions and

---

[146] Smith, 'A Social Analysis of Viking Jewellery from Iceland', p. 82.

[147] David M Wilson, *The British Museum: A History* (British Museum Press, 2002), pp. 173-4

the place of jewellery and fine art items in national identity formation and battles between nation-states (which also include the different factors and practices of colonialism). This also draws attention to controversies of acquisition and retention of such pieces and asks questions about repatriation.

In a similar approach to the previous case study, the entire journey of the item from its raw material to its current location in a British collection is examined. A stylistic analysis provides the basis for the examination of the hypotheses and theories mentioned previously. Information available on its commission, the social status of various patrons, makers and owners and the standing of the Christian Church in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ethiopia, together with insights into its acquisition journey provides a background to the use of filigree and relevant metals used in some parts of Africa at the time. The late nineteenth-century battle of Maqdala and the main parties at play, namely King Tewodros II and the power of ruling Britain, highlight the importance and value attributed to such pieces during such conflicts. Speculation based on derivations from symbolic representations and the inherent bias of the history's author may lead to a degree of bias when drawing conclusions. Therefore, these factors cannot be assumed to be indisputable as such.

An analysis of filigree techniques and metals used in Ethiopian jewellery, in particular in that of crowns and jewellery yields information on the economy and relative wealth of the Ethiopian Royal Household, the Church and their respective positions in the evolving social stratification of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Ethiopia. Technical elements, such as materials and craftsmanship, have repercussions through the subsequent influence on social status within society. A formal analysis of the crafts and metalwork used alone would not suffice to draw

meaningful conclusions on the social status of the use of filigree. A more complete interpretation of the traditions associated with this craft requires the examination of the roles of skilled tradesmen and the commissioners and buyers (or users) at the time. Due to their symbolic meaning and perpetuation of form, such pieces offer a valuable means to know more about ancestral sociological history, values, believe-systems, social rankings and assumed rituals.[148]

A comparative analysis of items allows for a differentiation of this piece and also allows refusal or confirmation of the class placement it is thought to reflect. Using an object, a crown, the use of which is normally relegated to the symbolic adornment of the upper echelons of society, is of particular relevance to this research as it provides information on the use of filigree across people of different standings in a variety of different societies. This is complementary to the other case studies that focus on peasant (and other) application of filigree in buttons (this will form the final case study), its use for the ritualistic serving of coffee in the Ottoman Empire and its relevance to the middle- and upper-class Maltese that will be discussed in the next case study.

Commission, Provenance and Acquisition

This crown is currently held in the Sacred Silver Galleries (which house precious vessels in gold and silver related to religious rites and ceremonies) at the V&A in London, UK. Initially thought to be a nineteenth-century creation, recent scholarship has attributed this crown to the mid-eighteenth century, to King Iyyasu II and his

---

[148] Christoph Zellweger, 'Foreign Bodies / Jewellery as Prosthesis', *Design Research Quarterly*, vol. 3, 4 (October 2008), pp. 9-15, https://shura.shu.ac.uk/476/1/fulltext.pdf.

mother Empress Mentewwab.[149] King Iyyasu II ruled Ethiopia from 1730 to 1755.[150] Its manufacture is attributed by Brus to Gondar which is the old capital of Ethiopia, a city noted for its gold and silver work.[151] This is in keeping with the migration of filigree goldsmiths described above both in terms of geographical and time attribution. Together with another crown and coronet, this crown fell into the hands of the British Army as part of its looting during the Battle of Maqdala (for more details on this battle, see below).[152] Various items of significant value were taken from King Tewodros' treasury.[153] The inventory of this loot supports Silverman's conclusions that the finer Ethiopian jewellery and in particular filigree was at the time largely the remit of the wealthier Christian community. The items were all brought to Britain and either sold off or deposited in various museums.[154] The three crowns were presented to the V&A by the Secretary of State for India in 1869.[155] They fell into the hands of the latter through the Anglo-Indian expedition against Emperor Tewodros.[156]

---

[149] Jacopo Gnisci, 'The Looted Ethiopian Artefacts That Ended up in UK Museums', *Apollo Magazine*, May 30, 2018, https://www.apollo-magazine.com/the-looted-ethiopian-artefacts-that-ended-up-in-uk-museums/ .

[150] http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O108443/crown-unknown/

[151] Brus, 'Ethiopian Crowns'.

[152] Richard Pankhurst, 'Ethiopia, the Aksum Obelisk, and the Return of Africa's Cultural Heritage', *African Affairs*, vol. 98, no. 391 (1999), pp. 229–239.

[153] Pankhurst, 'Ethiopia, the Aksum Obelisk'.

[154] Pankhurst, 'Ethiopia, the Aksum Obelisk'.

[155] Alexandra Jones, 'Ethiopian Objects at The Victoria and Albert Museum', *African Research & Documentation* No. 135 (2019), pp. 8-24, https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/323055245.pdf

[156] Richard Pankhurst, 'Indian Reactions to The Anglo-Indian Expedition Against Emperor Téwodros of Ethiopia: The 'Magdala Campaign' of 1867-8', *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente*, Vol. 36, No. 3/4, (1981), pp. 390-418.

Focussing on an Ethiopian gold filigree crown in this dissertation introduces the interplay between the ruling ecclesiastical and secular influences at the time, differentiating social standings at a different level. The Church (Christianity in this case, at the time) is seen to ubiquitously influence the many different societal levels and shares some of the responsibility for both the bringing together and the division of such classes. In this particular case, I argue that the power play within the interaction between the Church and Royalty both within Ethiopia and later on the British Crown and its representatives is demonstrated by the journey this crown has taken. This case study also brings to light other salient historical occurrences that have strongly influenced collectors and collections, and have been pertinent learning points throughout art history. A brief overview of its commission, maker, provenance and final acquisition is pertinent to this dissertation and it follows this item through the ages providing insight on the various positions in the different societies is traversed held by the different individuals and entities.

Descriptive Analysis

This crown is constructed primarily of four units (figure 3.1). An inner raised and domed cylinder is surrounded by three pierced tiers. These tiers are supported in such a way that they stand away and are proud of the inner cylinder. It is thought that originally fabric would have covered the cylindrical portion of the inner body.[157] Today, the remains of the fabric are found crumpled behind the tiers. The fabric underlying the top tier is a lighter green, while that underlying the lower tiers is of a darker green, albeit all appear to be rather faded. The domed portion of the crown is embossed and

[157] http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O108443/crown-unknown/

chased and attached to it are 8 yellow gold filigree bead casings (figure 3.2). The filigree covers the upper two thirds of the bead which is loosely attached to the crown by a loop connection and a gold bead. Five loosely coiled repeating patterns bearing no particular symbol or shape form the filigree encasement for each bead. All 8 filigree encasings are similar. The beads are made of alternating green and red glass, only some of which remain in place. While filigree does not make up the bulk metalwork of this piece, it is prominently presented as a key decorative feature. The decoration of the tiers and remainder of the crown appears to have been stamped or chisel-cut from sheet metal. It is decorated with medallion portraits of four main human figures, thought to be the evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (figure 3.3).[158] In figure 3.3 it would follow that it is a representation of Saint Mark. Contextualising the object, however, it makes sense that these figures would represent the evangelists owing to the King's Christian beliefs and other pieces similarly made at the time. According to Brus, who was the first to describe the crown, this crown was originally surmounted by a cross.[159] This is no longer present. This absence in itself is telling that the restoration of this cross or of this piece as a crown was possibly not deemed important enough and that its value was likely considered lesser than that of other pieces in the collection. Also, the absence of the cross is not mentioned in any of the V&A descriptions.

As a crown would need to be stable while worn on the ruler's head, a degree of symmetry is requisite to ensure it serves its purpose of adornment. The even

---

[158] From an iconographic point of view, the Angel was used to represent Saint Matthew, the Lion Saint Mark, the Ox Saint Luke and the Eagle Saint John. Sometimes Saint Mark is shown with a book representing his Gospel and Saint Luke is depicted painting.

[159] Brus, 'Ethiopian Crowns'.

number of the four medallions depicting the evangelists also provides symmetry, as do the eight filigree bead encasings. Monarchies *per se* present a hierarchical structure, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when they enjoyed significant power and especially when state power was reinforced by the Church, another hierarchical structure. As the wearer and commissioner are known, the embellishment, symbolism and function as a crown suggests that its owner(s) are of the highest social standing, either of the Church or the government. In her thesis Hayeur Smith demonstrated that jewellery played a significant role gender roles and social status, rank and distinction, and the magico-religious dimension of society.[160] A crown was worn only by members of the Church or the Royal family on official occasions, otherwise being usually kept in the possession of the Church's or royal treasury, occasionally exhibited to the public as state or religious symbols. Its function was to represent the Church and the government or just the Church alone.

I would argue that Smith's argument only holds true in this case if the finished object is taken as *de facto* at face value. The pertinence of this point is to examine why filigree was chosen to be symbolic and not any other methods of jewellery practised. I could put forward many arguments. The ornate detail of filigree work is in keeping with royal costume and opulence. The fact that Ethiopian crowns were expected to be worn only by the current ruler and only on state occasions means that robustness was not necessarily a pre-requisite. While most other forms of jewellery or adornment are to some extent used by most members of society regardless of social standing, the use of a crown is almost never used outside royalty. This research consciously takes an approach that begins with the object. The following

---

[160] Smith, 'A Social Analysis of Viking Jewellery from Iceland', p. 3.

study on the macro-environment will provide an insight into the historical, political and geographical setting of nineteenth-century Ethiopia and therefore contextualise the object.[161]

The historical, political and geographical setting of nineteenth-century Ethiopia

An understanding of the wider factors influencing the Ethiopian economy and social class distinction provides information on the manufacture, consumers and use of filigree and similarly made items. Owing to its geographical location at the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia has been a region of intense cultural exchange for over 2000 years.[162] It has been a melting pot of Christian societies of the central and northern highlands with northeast Africa and the eastern Mediterranean with the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa with their Muslim societies. Over time, geographical boundaries have shifted and moved due to battles and disputes concerning land ownership, making it difficult to define a country's definite borders. In 2004, Silverman examined the tradition of the use of objects made from silver and gold in Ethiopia over the ages by all its people to draw conclusions as to the movements of relevant peoples and their exchanges of ideas and cultural traditions.[163] Silverman's paper provides a very useful insight for this thesis. He demonstrated that gold and silversmithing in Ethiopia represent a cross roads of Muslim and Christian societies with exchange of peoples, objects and ideas. He mentions that filigree was mainly associated with Christian practice and included filigree while Muslims generally used

---

[161] This crown was made for an eighteenth-century king but was looted during the nineteenth century Battle of Maqdala.

[162] Silverman, 'Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia'.

[163] Silverman, 'Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia'.

silver and did not use filigree.[164] I have applied a stylistic analysis to this historical framework to obtain knowledge on the society in which this object was made and used.

As in many other parts of the world, religious differences were a source of conflict towards the end of the first millennium AD. Conflict has often been responsible for the exchange and introduction of differing cultural activities. Abyssinia, as it is historically known, in the central and northern highlands was a strong Christian stronghold since its introduction to the religion via Aksum in the fourth century. From the seventh century a religious distinction of its people was made palpable from its non-Christian neighbours. While the integration of different religions was known, some of these interactions may not have always been peaceful and may have revolved around the acquisition of power, status and hierarchy through various mechanisms. Religious and cultural symbols, such as the Christian cross and depictions of saints and evangelists, have been purposely selected and adapted by the wearers to convey ideas of the social status they wished to be associated with or to emulate and the ideas and religions they wanted to introduce and govern with. The selection process and exploitation of such symbols are used to help affirm social and political ideals.[165] Indeed, in the seventh century, during a period of conflict with Islam, it became a legally enforced requirement in Ethiopia to wear jewellery that was demonstrably symbolic of Christianity.[166] Crosses were worn by most.[167] This notion reinforces Goffmann's theory that material objects function as cultural, social and

---

[164] Silverman, 'Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia'.

[165] Smith, 'A Social Analysis of Viking Jewellery from Iceland', p. 53.

[166] Roger McKay, 'Ethiopian Jewelry', *African Arts*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1974, pp. 36–39.

[167] McKay, 'Ethiopian Jewelry'.

individual purposes.[168] These occur at multiple levels, such as the definition of a linearity of families, and in the case of this crown, of rulers.

In the nineteenth century Christian jewellery was not worn for political reasons but most likely for private or public commemoration and celebration of (often religious) events. However, crowns were altogether different, as they were symbols of governmental representation and therefore of power. From the 1880s there was a British colonial presence in Ethiopia. While filigree had reached Britain in the nineteenth century, it is pertinent to note that filigree was actually not introduced by Britain but was present earlier (this is explained in more detail below). It is widely accepted that more expensive material objects and higher status items are typically with individuals of higher social classes, and this bred a subconscious understanding of various social situations.[169] Here items may include both higher costing objects, as well as rare and individual pieces.[170] I would also assume that it is often the case that the cost of such items prohibited their regular use, hence contributing to their scarcity.

Ethiopian jewellery

While some conclusions about social status associated with this crown may be drawn from the stylistic and iconographic analysis alone, it becomes evident in this case study that sufficient information alone does not enable a meaningful social analysis of the Ethiopian people through their filigree jewellery. Ethiopian jewellery is very diverse with filigree being one of its techniques. Filigree was thought to have been

---

[168] Erving Goffman, ‘Relations in Public*’.*

[169] Daniel Miller, *A Theory of Shopping* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[170] O’Guinn, 'Turning to Space’.

introduced to Ethiopia through refugee movement from Greece and Armenia in the eighteenth century.[171] According to Silverman and Sobania, whose research examined archaeological records, European travellers' accounts together with their own historical and ethnoarchaeological research, Ethiopian jewellery in silver and gold was popular with both the elite and the ‘common folk’. While this article provides insight into Ethiopian jewellery practices, this crown is not mentioned. Information and suggestions taken from this paper are conceptualised and applied to this crown in order to contribute to the social analysis for this dissertation.

The adornment of Christian jewellery was enforced by the state early in Ethiopia’s history, although it is intriguing to note that there were a number of religious conflicts within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and between them and the Muslims, which is significant in view of the religious iconography on jewellery, as it indicates a struggle for Christian dominance over Islam. Silverman and Sobania. divided these into Christian influenced jewellery and that of Islamic origin. Documentary evidence exists that connections were made between the Christian highlands of Ethiopia and other parts of the Eastern Orthodox world, namely Greece and Armenia.[172] Being Christian, they fled persecution by the Ottomans in their countries. A movement of metalworkers from these countries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries played a significant role in introducing new jewellery styles and techniques.[173] A number of Greek refugees arrived in Gondar during the reign of King Iyasu II. Among them were twelve goldsmiths known for their proficiency in filigree and it is thought that they introduced filigree to Ethiopia. Gondar subsequently

[171] Silverman, ‘Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia’.

[172] Silverman, ‘Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia’.

[173] Silverman, ‘Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia’.

became known for its jewellery production. Their work gained momentum as they were very quickly commissioned by King Iyasu II to decorate his palace and make other regalia pertaining to the royal courts.

The Greeks and Armenians continued their trade in Gondar and it was noted that a later King, King Tewodros (who played a major role in the Battle of Maqdala described below), ordered these goldsmiths to make various objects (including filigree) as gifts for Queen Victoria of Great Britain.[174] It is said that later on the Greeks tended to concentrate their skills on trade while the Armenians restricted their skills to royal and Church commissions and one off pieces. They mainly made crowns, table services, crosses, battle shields and arm bracelets and cuffs. It is interesting that many of these pieces were ensured to remain one-off pieces due to a practice known as *cire perdue* (lost wax), where a mould or case of the jewellery (excluding filigree which was not a technique subject to casting) was destroyed after the piece was finalised.[175] In this way, no two items, especially crosses, were alike.[176] Sometimes, in later years, filigree (usually silver) was added to these cast crosses.[177] In terms of design, technique and some aspects of iconography the influence of Ottoman filigree is evident in these pieces. Filigree utensils such as cups and coffee cup holders were also used by Royal Households. Ethiopian filigree items were more robust than filigree items encountered elsewhere due to the filigree being soldered onto a solid surface, and hence could be applied to weaponry and utensils as they were less delicate than open work.

---

[174] Silverman, ‘Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia’.

[175] McKay, ‘Ethiopian Jewelry’.

[176] McKay, ‘Ethiopian Jewelry’.

[177] McKay, ‘Ethiopian Jewelry’.

During the 3000 years of Imperial Rule in Africa's oldest independent state, Ethiopia, the creation of jewelled crowns for the Emperor, his Queen and his noblemen represented an ancient artistic tradition.[178] It was the custom for each Ethiopian ruler to have a crown made for his coronation.[179] The predecessor's crown was reserved in the treasury of the Cathedral of St Mary of Zion at Axum where the coronation ceremony was held.[180] There remain 25 of these crowns in this treasury only dating back to 1665. Most of these crowns are gold and silver and formed in tiers or in the form of a tiara. According to Brus, this is reflective of the long-standing culture contact the Ethiopians maintained with Byzantium.[181] A few other Ethiopian crowns have square bases and are surmounted by a replica of the Ark of the Covenant, considered by the Ethiopian Church as the guardian of the fate of the land.[182]

The other jewellery form, though less pertinent to this thesis, is the Islamic jewellery, produced in the Muslim societies of the Horn of Africa.[183] This is usually encountered in silver (not gold) and closely resembles Bedouin jewellery.[184] This jewellery was worn mainly by the peasant and lower class women in forms of necklaces, amulets, multiple thick ankle and wrist bracelets and large earrings.[185]

---

[178] Brus, 'Ethiopian Crowns'.

[179] Brus, 'Ethiopian Crowns'.

[180] Brus, 'Ethiopian Crowns'.

[181] Brus, 'Ethiopian Crowns'.

[182] Brus, 'Ethiopian Crowns'.

[183] Brus, 'Ethiopian Crowns'.

[184] Silverman, 'Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia'.

[185] Brus, 'Ethiopian Crowns'.

This is interesting as while gold was locally mined (within and near Aksum's borders), silver was imported mainly in the form of coins and melted down and diluted (the final constitution was less than one third silver). So, while the production of silver may have incurred more labour, more items were made per gram of silver. In fact, many Christian churches have been found to have chalices made of silver as well as gold. Up until the twentieth century, gold in Ethiopia was the metal of choice for the trappings and symbols of Church and state, and silver (though worn by some priests) was relegated to the non-elite.[186] Pewter jewellery was also mentioned in Silverman's publication, mainly worn by some Christian women in the nineteenth century.[187] It is interesting that Islamic Ottoman influence had such strong influence on Christian filigree production (via the Greek and Armenian refugee migrant goldsmiths) while Islamic jewellery production failed to adopt filigree as a main technique. This may be because as these Muslim peoples derived their cultural influences from their Somali, Swahili, Red Sea and Arabian neighbours their crafts followed this pattern. This Bedouin silver jewellery has been further subdivided as Harari jewellery styles and Arabian styles. The details of this are beyond the remit of this thesis.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the elements considered in this case study must include the distinction between the manufacturers (referred to as silver or gold-smiths or makers) and those influencing their style of work and purchase (patrons, commissioners, buyers and wearers. Societal 'elites' are considered those who control resources and influence power through finance or politics. In this case it is known that the Church and Royalty were the main influencers. The role and status of

---

186 Silverman, 'Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia'.

187 Silverman, 'Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia'.

the Ethiopian silversmiths and goldsmiths introduce a concept particular to this case study. This contrasts sharply to that encountered in the chapters on Maltese and Ottoman filigree, namely cultures in which skilled tradesmen were held in particularly high social esteem. Indeed, Maltese silversmiths formed memberships of recognised guilds and Turkish gold and silversmiths were accepted into Imperial Courts, occupying a status only inferior to that of calligraphers and miniaturists. In contrast, Ethiopian jewellers were classed with blacksmiths, a social class perceived to be lower than that of farmers and often ostracised by society. It remains unclear as to why this was the case. Silverman attributes this distinction of artisans and craftsmen to a distinct division in the Christian highlands that stratifies clergymen, farmers, artisans and slaves in a descending order. Any form of manual work other than farming was considered degrading, and in some parts the craftsmen were even designated an (inferior) ethnic group.[188] In fact they usually lived together in a village near Aksum.[189] This could date back to the fifteenth century when blacksmiths were seen as some form of sorcerers, due to perceived association with an evil eye. As a result, the then Emperor Zara Yaecob put all the goldsmiths to death.[190] They gradually became more accepted in society, but nevertheless occupied inferior status roles.

Further documented information surrounding the recognition and adoption of the filigree technique by the Church and Royal household in Ethiopia could not be found during this research. This may be reflective of a perpetuating low status of filigree craftsmen. It could be postulated that as a good number of the twelve refugee

[188] Silverman, ‘Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia’.

[189] Silverman, ‘Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia’.

[190] Silverman, ‘Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia’.

metalworkers were Christian they may have either brought some of their works of art with them and presented them to the King and / or the Church or they may have presented samples of their work to the Church thus putting them in favour on the basis of their admirable work. While purely speculative, it is unlikely that refugees would have had any direct access to Royal subjects, while the Church, that by definition would have been welcoming to people belonging to all social statuses, would have been a more likely entry point for these craftsmen.[191] However, it is impossible to know for certain and it is difficult to prove or argue conclusively how the contact itself may have been established. The irony here is not lost that a metalwork practice (filigree) imported from an Islamic background (the Ottoman Empire) via Christian refugees reached the uppermost echelons of Christian Ethiopian society.

Filigree therefore becomes the representation of an entangled history and of a technique that subverts religious identification. This contrasts with Islamic jewellery in Ethiopia which, as mentioned above, was largely composed of silver and attributed to classes of lower social standing. It does, however, remain confusing as to why Muslim metalworkers appear not to have been assigned such a demeaning low social status. However, it is known that in Harari societies they occupied a special lower societal class but without the severe ostracization suffered by the Christian goldsmiths.[192] The observation here is that as the gold metal after being mined locally acquires increasing societal status and value as it makes it journey from the mines through the craftsmen and finally to its commissioners and ultimate owners. It is quite a steep rise from the almost lowest societal rung (just above that of slaves) to

---

[191] Niall Finneran, 'Ethiopian evil eye belief and the magical symbolism of iron working', *Folklore* (2003), Vol. 114 (3), pp. 427-432.

[192] Silverman, 'Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia'.

the highest. I would argue that this is likely due to the fact that it is locally mined and sourced. Therefore, the sourcing of the raw material was likely tasked to the lowest rungs of society due to the inherent risky nature of the work and degree of manual labour involved. In contrast, the silver used by the Muslim silversmiths was imported as coins, melted down and alloyed with other metals to make it go much further.[193]

Richard Pankhurst's research on trade in Ethiopia during this time offers some valuable information as to how gold and silver jewellery made its way up the ranks through society. Shops, as such, were not a known entity and trade mainly took place at markets where items were exchanged for gold or coins or other artefacts.[194] Gondar was the leading city of gold. This was usually traded with other associated merchandise such as mules, ivory, horses and coffee. Merchants were considered influential people with higher social standing, as the latter was dependent on trade. There was distinction of rank between merchants with the richer ones riding by mule and porter while the lower ranked ones travelled on foot. They travelled from cities in which they would collect their items to be sold and transporting it via mule and caravan to cities where they could gauge demand and secure price. The highest form of what would be referred to today as a shop was the indoor dwellings of a merchant's house, where high-level transactions would take place.[195]. In a vein similar to that of Christian versus Muslim goldsmith, Christian traders and merchants encountered far more obstacles to trading. Trade was therefore largely monopolised by Muslims as the principal import and export routes were through Islamic areas,

---

193 Silverman, 'Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia'.

194 Richard Pankhurst, 'The Trade of Northern Ethiopia in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1964), pp. 49–159.

195 Pankhurst, 'The Trade of Northern Ethiopia'.

such as the Red Sea with often obvious discrimination encountered in terms of taxes and custom duty.[196]

When applying the above information to Ethiopian filigree and to this crown, I have reached the conclusion that gold filigree in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ethiopia could be examined to show distinct societal rankings of its citizens. The owners and commissioners occupied the highest echelons while the craftsmen were relegated to the lowest ranks. These were in turn reflective of their relative wealth and position in society, where the highest echelons belonged to the highest ranks of the Church and/or state (royalty). This I would argue occurred despite the lowly status of the goldsmiths and the relatively low status of its traders. Taking into account the information discussed about the relevant societal positions held by goldsmiths and their commissioners, I would now assume that unlike filigree in other societies, Ethiopian filigree does not transcend people of all social standings, but rather omits the lower ranking citizens in society.

This differs from the conclusions I reached for Ottoman silver zarfs, which illustrate the upper middle class positions in society their owners occupied and where metalworkers and traders enjoyed far more respect in their respective societies. There, filigree appears to have reached most members of society, allowing for a degree of differentiation according to the value of the metal itself and the complexity of the metalwork.

The battle of Maqdala, 1868

[196] Pankhurst, ‘The Trade of Northern Ethiopia’.

The historical context surrounding the origins and provenance of this crown provides context. Few filigree pieces are associated historically with contentious tales of acquisition or relate to significant events in a nation's history. The battle of Maqdala was the concluding event of the British Expedition to Abyssinia led by Sir Robert Napier and fought in April 1868.[197] In the mid-nineteenth century, Emperor Tewodros II tried to modernise his empire, Abyssinia, by opening up relations with Britain.[198] Following requests for British military assistance (munitions and military expertise), that were ignored, relations between deteriorated. Tewodros detained the British consulate, other foreigners and missionaries in protest. Britain retaliated by dispatching an envoy of 12,000 British and Indian troops to the Emperor's fortress in Maqdala. Tewodros II sent two hostages on parole to negotiate terms.[199] However, Napier insisted on the release of all the hostages and an unconditional surrender. Tewodros refused to cede to the latter, though he released the European hostages. The British then continued the advance and assaulted the fortress.[200] Having chosen death over the life of a prisoner, Tewodros II was found dead inside the second gate, having shot himself with a pistol that had been a gift from Queen Victoria.[201] His death brought the battle to an end and his body was allowed to be cremated and buried inside the church by the priests.[202] The British forces then looted 'an infinite variety of gold, and silver and brass crosses' along with filigree works and rare

[197] Silverman, 'Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia'.

[198] Pankhurst, Richard. 'Maqdala and its loot', Afromet, http://www.afromet.info/history/I.

[199] Pankhurst, 'Maqdala and its loot'.

[200] Pankhurst, 'Maqdala and its loot'.

[201] Pankhurst, 'Maqdala and its loot'.

[202] Pankhurst, 'Maqdala and its loot'.

tabots.[203] The emperor's orphaned seven-year-old son was taken to Britain and educated at Rugby School.[204] He later died of pleurisy aged 17 and his buried remains remain at Windsor castle.[205] The UK treasury deposited this gold crown and a chalice at the V&A in 1872. The rest of the V&A's collection relating to Maqdala came later via private donations and purchases.

Repatriation requests

Items such as this crown belong to the highest part of society. Unlike the items described in the other chapters, their main function is political representation. Indeed, 'belonging' in this case becomes a contested verb, for its status is to be representative of a government, to belong to a 'nation'. However, whose government and nation? With conflicts and changes to nations, questions of repatriation come into play. The V&A has received numerous requests for its return to Ethiopia but this crown remains in its possession. Haile Selassie, the last ruler of Ethiopia requested its return, together with the remains of Tewodros' son, on one of his visits to England in the mid-twentieth century. Several looted artefacts have been gradually restituted to Ethiopia. However, the lion's share still remains in Britain. In 2008, Ethiopia again lodged a formal request at various British institutions for the return of the valuable treasures looted from Maqdala. The director of the V&A Tristram Hunt reiterated that

[203] Pankhurst, 'Maqdala and its loot'.

[204] Emperor Tewodros' wife died a month after her husband and their son was taken to Britain to be looked after by the British government.

[205] Pankhurst, 'Maqdala and its loot'.

the museum would retain ownership of these items, including this crown, but would return the items back to their original ‘home’ in Maqdala on a long term loan.[206]

This was not the only incident of foreign looting from the ancient African state. During the Italian fascist occupation between 1936 and 1941, crowns, state papers and a fourth-century obelisk from Aksum were seized.[207] In this latter case, during an Italian peace treaty with the United Nations in 1947 the return of the items was agreed. This has not yet been undertaken, and the obelisk remains in Rome.[208] The retention of such items and the degree of resistance to repatriation are relevant to this research as they provide clues to the perceived value of the items today. The opposing parties put forward different arguments. Their position in a British museum is considered by some as beneficial to the cultural good of the many and provides insight into the history of Ethiopia to a wider audience outside Ethiopia; this is countered by the fact that these items were taken under force and effectively stolen. This latter viewpoint would lead to a conclusion that from a moral standpoint they should be returned to their rightful owners.

As the future and survival of museums with collections expanding today’s national borders, such as the British Museum and the V&A, would be in serious jeopardy should the latter argument win, it is unlikely that such possessions will ever be readily relinquished. Additionally, the return of such pieces would establish a precedent of relevance to the African continent as a whole and to other states

---

[206] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-43642265

[207] Pankhurst, ‘Ethiopia, the Aksum Obelisk’.

[208] Novati, Giampaolo Calchi. Re-Establishing Italo-Ethiopian Relations after the War: Old Prejudices and New Policies.” *Northeast African Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1996, pp. 27–49.

affected by colonialism.[209] In the case of this crown, a middle ground has been reached and a loan of the items to Ethiopia has been agreed.[210] This has not yet come into effect. It is not within the remit of this dissertation to make an argument for or against the morality of such acquisitions but rather to use this history as a tool in the analysis of power and influence to understand the social standing the filigree in this crown represents. I would argue that if these items were today considered of low value (both in terms of monetary and political significance) they would probably be returned without dispute or would not be asked to get returned, querying the real reasons behind repatriation requests and arguments to retain the objects in Britain. Thus, it is the quest for return and the motivations behind the refusal that should be examined in more detail. This however is beyond the remit of this chapter.

Other pieces and their significance

The metals and craftsmanship involved in the making of this crown is here examined comparatively to other similar pieces of filigree and Ethiopian jewellery. This is done in order to help confirm or refute conclusions drawn for the social analyses carried out above in relation to stylistic analysis, the goldsmiths, the owners and piece's journey and provenance. Ethiopian crowns have piqued the interest of a few historians. In his publication on Ethiopian crowns, Brus mentions that twenty-five such crowns remain in the possession of the treasury of the Christian Church of St Mary of Zion, dating back as far as 1665.[211] He mentions that most likely more such crowns were made beforehand but they were destroyed as part of pagan Queen

[209] Pankhurst, 'Ethiopia, the Aksum Obelisk'.

[210] https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/04/arts/design/v-and-a-ethiopian-treasure.html

[211] Brus, 'Ethiopian Crowns'.

Judith's attempt to erase Christianity from Ethiopia (AD 943-977).[212] Most of the crowns in collections similar to the V&A are alike in form and style and, according to Brus, this is indicative of the close ties and influence with early Byzantium, from which Ethiopia derived its Christianity and much of its art.[213] Gold filigree was often used in these crowns, such as the one donated by Empress Taitu, consort of Menelik II (not her coronation crown), to the treasury. This now sits in the National Museum in Addis Ababa. This museum also houses a splendid collection of Ethiopian crowns, donated by Haile Selassie in 1944. Most churches in Ethiopia possess crowns in their collections. This is due to a persisting tradition that Ethiopian Coptic Christian brides and grooms wear them on their wedding days and borrow them from the Church. An interesting point made by Brus, is that more recent crowns were influenced by the British coronation ceremony which took place within the Church of England. In fact, some of the more recent crowns were indeed made in London, such as that of Haile Selassie. Today, modern crowns used for religious ceremonies resemble more closely European and British coronets, than the one in this case study.

While this crown *per se* did not yield much information regarding gender roles within Ethiopia, the history of the display of crowns in Ethiopia does provide some insight. While in many societies women have to fight to gain a similar social standing to men, in Ethiopia women were allowed to use or borrow the crown (such as for weddings) and also to enjoy similar privileges to men. However, this was changed following Queen Judith's attempt at denouncing Christianity and converting Ethiopia

---

212 Brus, 'Ethiopian Crowns'.

213 Brus, 'Ethiopian Crowns'.

into a pagan state. To protect Christian treasures, they were then housed in a monastery on an island that only men were allowed to frequent, with ‘no female creature, human or animal’ allowed.[214] Additionally many churches, especially those in Gondar, also have crowns for their priests and deacons to be used on feast days such as Easter and Christmas.[215] This is representative of the relative wealth and status of the Church in Ethiopia, and is not dissimilar to wealth statuses of other Christian denominations, such as the Vatican. These crowns very seldom left the Church and when they did it was only for feast days.[216] Even more rarely did they leave the country. When they did, it was either as a gift or as part of lootings as seen with Tewodros’ crown.[217]

The British Museum and V&A house a few pieces of Ethiopian filigree. Most of these are jewellery pieces in silver or gold, of silver gilt including anklets, amulets, beaded bracelets, bangles and necklaces. Most pieces are attributed to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Information provided by the British Museum further confirmed that filigree jewellery such as anklets were exclusive work by high ranking Christian women and made from locally sourced gold, while silver was imported in the form of Maria Theresa Thaler coins and melted.[218] Having researched the online collection of Ethiopian filigree work at the British Museum, the V&A and the Museo della Filigrana in Campo Ligure, Italy, I noticed that the filigree encountered in Ottoman work, such as the zarfs, and that in Maltese filigree largely did not have a

---

[214] Brus, ‘Ethiopian Crowns’.

[215] Brus, ‘Ethiopian Crowns’.

[216] Brus, ‘Ethiopian Crowns’.

[217] Brus, ‘Ethiopian Crowns’.

[218] https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Af1868-1001-3-a-b

background, while all Ethiopian filigree encountered had a background of sheet metal. This made it more robust and less fragile and thus was more amenable to use. It was not just relegated to a purely decorative piece. Filigree was also used to adorn weaponry such as shields. When researching the British Museum filigree collection, often in crowns and larger items, it is combined with other metalwork techniques, involves a variety of metals as well as other materials such as fabrics (including velvet, silk ,leather and animal hair) .[219]

Artefacts housed at the V&A also include utensils such as cups, which involved intricate repeating designs of filigree in silver and silver gilt. The origin of many of these items has been attributed to the Battle of Maqdala. This includes a silver gilt coffee cup holder, a zarf. A fincan is not present in this example. This may be because it is either lost, or because the filigree encountered is on a solid watertight background which may make the use of a fincan obsolete. This could be interpreted as another reflection of the influence of Ottoman crafts and traditions (such as coffee drinking) in Ethiopia.

While Maltese and Ottoman filigree encountered consisted largely of repeated motifs with clear iconography and patterns such as flowers and stars, Ethiopian filigree work lacked such symbolism as it mainly repeated undulating patterns and coils that circumferentially and uniformly adorned its pieces. While research into this crown alone would point to gold filigree being in the realms of the highest ranking members of society alone, namely the Church and royalty, comparing this item with other pieces of Ethiopian filigree and jewellery has shown that gold filigree was also worn by high ranking members of Christian society, especially women. Apart from

---

[219] Accessed online from the British Museum database. Object Af1868-1001-1. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Af1868-1001-1

pieces such an armlets and shields it appears that outside the clergy, army and royalty, men did not wear filigree.

Conclusion

Various aspects of Ethiopian history, culture, economy, filigree techniques have been evaluated in order to perform a social analysis on the place filigree metalwork held in Ethiopia, particularly in the nineteenth century. The stylistic analysis of this crown and its comparison to other Ethiopian pieces of filigree and to other forms of Ethiopian jewellery has allowed for the formation of a sort of hierarchy reflective of the collectors, owners and wearers. Gold filigree, especially in the form of crowns was worn exclusively by the highest ranks of Ethiopian society, namely royalty and the Christian clergy. This confirmed the influential position held by the Christian Orthodox Church in this African country. As mentioned in Silverman's article, there was a divide in Ethiopian jewellery which was reflective of a class divide between Muslim women who wore silver beaded jewellery and Christians who wore gold. Furthermore, filigree as a metalwork was only worn by Christian Ethiopians, most commonly in large ornate objects of Christian representation. I would argue that in nineteenth-century Ethiopia, the presence of filigree itself and the metal used points to an association with individuals of higher social standing. The relative scarcity of these items associated with the cost of raw material is also suggestive that wealth was a requisite for the ownership of such filigree pieces. When worn as jewellery purely for adornment purposes, even in silver or silver gilt it was mainly exclusive to the highest-ranking Christian women or for the clergy or royalty.

This, however, only refers to the final consumer within Ethiopia. It has been documented (by Silverman) that such objects undergo increasing complexity from raw material to finished object. Though Silverman makes no reference to Ethiopian crowns, his argument can be applied in this case study. This filigree piece starts at the point of lowest Ethiopian social standing, moving through the social hierarchy to reach the highest echelons while being transformed. This however is within its mother country only. I would argue that the global journey taken by this crown and the issues surrounding its provenance strengthen the argument that this crown was perceived to be of significant value both locally in Ethiopia and on an international level. The argument here is that it was not have been involved as part of the loot if it was not recognised by an outsider as valuable. The pertinent question here being what made it recognised as valuable to the British. To outsiders the focus might be on the material and exquisite craft skills, as well as its association with a deposed royalty and the representatives of the Ethiopian Church or Government/ Royalty. In this case I doubt that it is the filigree component that made this so valuable. The V&A houses various filigree items, only a few of which are on permanent display. Additionally, the queen's most prized items, shown in the book *Royal Treasures: A Golden Jubilee Celebration* shows no filigree objects. This could be indicative that the current monarch does not place filigree in a high enough regard and this has influenced museum displays and focus away from filigree.[220]

---

[220] Jane Roberts, *Royal Treasures: A Golden Jubilee Celebration*. (London: Royal Collection Enterprises Limited, 2002).

CHAPTER 3: A PAIR OF GOLD FILIGREE EARRINGS

A pair of gold filigree earrings purchased on the island of Malta is the third case study. These earrings form part of a private collection. They were specifically chosen for the purpose of this research to attempt to use a different example of filigree in order to establish the role of the metalwork practice in the evaluation of the different standings in society. Their provenance history is not well documented. However, the study of the symbols, the specific methods used, similar items and jewellers' techniques offers insights into the relationship between the 'artist' and the wearer and the tradesmen in between. Baxandall argues that these relationships provide a pivotal insight into the significant factors at play in the sociology of art. While he applied this to fifteenth-century Italian paintings, I will extrapolate his argument to other forms of art, in this case jewellery and filigree.

Some examples of filigree metalwork were encountered in Malta through archaeological findings dating as far back as the time of the Phoenicians where such jewellery items were found in burial sites.[221] However, it is not until the nineteenth century, under British rule (1814-1964), that its popularity gained momentum. The pair of 18 carat gold earrings have been attributed to a nineteenth-century Maltese goldsmith, Amabile Portanier. This attribution was made by the vendor to the buyer (the current owner's mother). While this has not been independently verified by a Maltese jewellery historian or expert, examples of Portanier's work reveal identical motifs especially in the lower 'combini' aspect of the earrings, making this statement likely to be true. Using them as a case study allows for an insight into social classes

---

[221] Azzopardi, *19th Century Malta Filigree Jewellery,* p.74.

in nineteenth-century Malta by examining the collectors, wearers and even the jewellers and tradespeople related to these earrings. The position of the skilled tradesman and the use of iconography sheds light on factors influencing wealth, status and spending power. Other crafts practised on the island and Maltese national costume pertaining to women are examined in order to distinguish social classes through the filigree worn by women (male national costume is discussed in the final case study, focussing on filigree buttons). In terms of scholarship on this particular subject, there are published texts and unpublished dissertations on the topic.[222] These have provided some guidance from which to formulate arguments and reach conclusions. Together with their comparison to other creations using similar metals, techniques and motifs and ownership history are also used to strengthen or weaken formulated arguments.

The literature has considered jewellery in light of its production and in view of its use as part of adornment. Furthermore, portraiture is used to explore the ways in which the jewellery was worn, therefore indicating function and also the social roles of filigree. While some extensive collections of filigree exist, it appears from the academic literature available that little research has been undertaken so far. This is true both about the collections publicly available and private collections. In Malta, these include the Casa Rocca Piccola and the Palazzo Falson collection and another anonymised private jewellery collection. In the UK, these include the V&A and the British Museum in London as well as the Chatsworth House collection. Of notable pertinence is the collection of Maltese jewellery items at the V&A acquired at the

---

[222] The literature includes Victor F. Denaro, *Goldsmiths of Malta and Their Marks* (Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki:1972); Francesca Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta;* Francesca Balzan, *Vanity, Profanity and Worship;* Azzopardi,'19th Century Malta Filigree Jewellery', Tonna, 'Leandro Preziosi'.

International Exhibitions in London in 1851 and 1872 by the South Kensington Museum (now V&A), these represent nineteenth-century examples of Maltese filigree created for an international clientele.

Descriptive analysis

Each earring consists of two components, or motifs, linked together with two circular pieces of gold wire (figure 4.1). The upper component is fan-shaped, known as '*mrewha'* in Maltese., composed entirely of openwork (with no sheet backing) filigree with nine whorls of oval-shaped loosely coiled wire soldered onto another nine twisted wire loops whose ends converge into a single point to form the base of the fan. The lower motif, mainly filigree with some granulation and *cannettille* (tightly coiled circular wire, almost looking like a spring) is in the shape of a lace-making bobbin, known locally as '*combini*'. It is quite commonly encountered (in a variety of crafts and) in Maltese filigree. In the main body this lower motif constitutes four overlapping fern designs at right angles to each other, to make a rounded three-dimensional structure that tapers at both ends. Each fern is composed of seven 'leaves' of loosely coiled twisted gold wire within an outer thicker wire joined at the bases, the longer leaves being above the shorter ones. At the top of these overlapping four fern motifs a further eight longitudinal coils are soldered together to taper to a point of *cannettille* and a gold bead. It is at this point that the lower earring motif attaches to the upper fan motif. At the lower end of the main body of the bobbin motif, this *cannettille* and granulation pattern is repeated in reverse allowing the earring to taper off.

The base of the upper motif is fixed to a thicker gold wire that loops through the wearer's earlobe piercing. It is on the underside of this thicker wire that the goldsmith's stamp and consul's stamp were once visible.[223] These are now somewhat faded and indiscernible, though it is clear on both earrings that these are remnants of such stamps (figure 4.2). This sign of wear is indicative that these earrings were worn quite often. This observation in itself is telling; suggesting that they were not reserved only for occasional use. Rather, they were used frequently. This would point to an object that was either versatile and appropriate to many occasions. As they are quite ornate and large this could also point to the social class of the wearer. The fact that they retained their shape and that the thicker earring loop is the original shows that they were well cared for and preserved. It could also mean that they were enjoyed by different wearers and many generations.

Provenance

These earrings were a Christmas gift by the current owner's mother. The owner is an avid collector of fine jewellery and a white collar professional in full time employment They were purchased from a small Maltese antique jewellery shop (selling both local and foreign jewellery). While the vendor could not (for data protection purposes) give me any information on the actual sellers he did mention that he acquired them through auction after the division of inheritance assets, and that the jewellery was not appreciated by the heirs. He did make a comment that they had belonged to a 'reasonably upper class Maltese family'. In this case, it was the seller who identified

[223] The consul's stamp was a stamp granted to members of the guild (registered goldsmiths and silversmiths) as seal of authenticity of both material and workmanship. This was usually placed alongside the maker's stamp.

the social class. He mentioned it was a well-known Maltese family who auctioned off antique furniture and paintings together with some pieces of fine jewellery. This auctioneer in Malta is usually associated with fine art and antiques, rather than jewellery sales. The seller informed me that at the time it was well known who the family was, though it was never formally recorded due to confidentiality issues.

Maltese iconography

Iconography pertaining to the Maltese Islands is reflective of the various influences on the island's culture. Malta, though very small, is a melting pot of various traditions and customs owing to its rich history and many rulers. The Southern European element is a major source of Maltese culture because of the cultural impact on Malta over the past eight centuries. Malta shares the religious beliefs, traditions and ceremonies of its Sicilian and Southern European neighbours, the single biggest influence remains the presence of the Catholic Church.

Maltese filigree is often denoted by the presence of the Maltese eight-pointed cross used as a motif. This is the badge of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, rulers of the island of Malta from 1530. Following confirmation of British sovereignty of Malta by the treaty of Paris in 1814, this motif was adopted by a few jewellers in London, thus rendering it no longer the exclusive deign of Maltese jewellers. After the Maltese cross, a crucifix is also very often found, whether as a pendant or attached to a rosary. This was often used in both Sicilian and Italian filigree. While evidence of filigree jewellery in Malta was found in Phoenician burial sites, it is thought that the

Maltese adopted the filigree practices and influences from their Sicilian neighbours.[224]

Other commonly found motifs in Maltese jewellery include the fan ('mrewha') and lace bobbin ('combini') encountered in these earrings. The fan is used in the Spanish and Sicilian summer months, but also form part of Malta's traditional costume, used to keep women cool. The lace bobbins are a symbol of the actual bobbins used in lace making in Malta. The symbols and motifs used in filigree are very often found in lace made in Malta at the time.[225] These include wheat ears, oats and acorns. The latter is thought to be a symbol of mourning (Figure 4.3) although to the British is also thought to symbolise prosperity and fertility.[226]

As seen in the earring above, Maltese filigree techniques were often combined in the same piece with other techniques referred to as the French *cannetille* and Spanish *gran spinat*.[227] Similarly confounding is that during the Knights' rule, Maltese jewellery and filigree was often commissioned for the various Grandmasters and hallmarks bore the Grandmasters' stamp. They were never Maltese and plenty of jewellery pieces previously attributed to other countries, generally the countries from which the Grandmasters hailed from) were later found to be crafted by Maltese jewellers. An example of this is the *Gran spinat* technique, initially attributed to

---

[224] Azzopardi, *19th Century Malta Filigree Jewellery*, pp. 31-34.

[225] Nicholas de Piro, *The Quality of Malta: Fashion and Taste in Private Collections* (Malta: AVC, 2003), pp. 172-175.

[226] Kathia Pinckernelle, *The iconography of ancient Greek and Roman jewellery,* MPhil(R) dissertation, University of Glasgow, 2007.

[227] *Gran spinat* is a fancy fine gold link chain with each chain composed of a hollow square or rectangular shape mounted with soldered gold granules to form a small flower or star shape on two sides of the rectangle. Each link alternated with the granules on the opposite sides of the rectangle.

Majorca.[228] It was found later that when such pieces were commissioned, motifs pertaining to the intended recipient's country of origin and some techniques were imitated and produced.

The filigree technique gained momentum to become one of the most characteristic crafts of the Maltese Islands through to the nineteenth century together with bobbin lace (which, as seen above, interestingly followed very similar patterns and incorporated similar motifs).[229] Lace making and the associated use of bobbins was not carried out by aristocratic British women, or by British women in nineteenth-century Malta. Rather, it was typically the remit of the Maltese (and more specifically Gozitan) wife of the working class man with the skillset passed down from mother to daughter.[230] I would argue that the use of this motif in these earrings could therefore point to them being made (or commissioned) to honour a proficient lace maker. Therefore, by association of the above-mentioned points, this would place the wearer (at the time) among the working class. However, the history surrounding lace making during British rule has an interesting story. During a particularly bad recession in the early eighteen hundreds lacemaking in Malta was almost lost.[231] Lady Hamilton Chichester brought over some lace makers from Genoa to reinvigorate the Maltese craft.[232] Further to this, Maltese lacemaking was introduced to Britain in the 1851

---

[228] Kirstin Kennedy K., 'The Fourth Congress on European Jewellery, Oporto, Nov-Dec 2018', *Jewellery History Today.* Vol 34 (1) (2019).

[229] de Piro, *The Quality of Malta.*

[230] 'Maltese Crafts'. VassaloMalta. https://vassallohistory.wordpress.com/maltese-crafts/Retrieved 21 November 2014.

[231] 'Maltese Crafts'.

[232] 'Maltese Crafts'.

Victoria and Albert Museum Exhibition of Commonwealth crafts. It immediately gained popularity among the British and was the influence for Bedfordshire lace.[233]

This might negate the earlier assumption I made that lace bobbin would naturally be associated with citizens of lower social standing. However, the use of the fan transcended all social classes with differences in embellishments of the actual object. Hence, I will extrapolate no assumption on social ranking based on this motif. As informed in person by Francesca Balzan, the possibility that this pair of earrings were not always composed of a fan and a lace bobbin motif needs to be taken into consideration. It apparently was often the case with inheritance and division of jewellery that these could have been composed of more motifs or adjoined to different ones originally. I would argue that in this case this is unlikely as the earring loop still bears remnants of the goldsmith's original mark, and this is the most easily replaceable part. However, in her book *Vanity, Profanity and Worship, Jewellery of the Maltese Islands* there appears to be a very similar pair of earrings using the lace bobbin motifs albeit on a different upper motif, by the goldsmith Amabile Portanier. Hence the attribution to Portanier for this pair of earrings. It would be useful to compare both consuls' and the makers' marks on both sets; however, it is not possible due to wear.

Jewellery on the Maltese Islands

Maltese jewellery techniques and styles between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries were noted for their international character.[234] This was attributed to the

---

[233] 'Maltese Crafts'.

[234] Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta,* pp. 41-43.

presence of the Knights of St John in Malta as a reflection of the multi-national origins of the Order. Both gold and silver wire were used during the sixteenth century to make ornate embellishments for costume. This included both national costume and that of the Knights. This however, was periodically suppressed by sumptuary laws.[235] Gem stones were not usually included in Maltese filigree. Seed pearls and to a lesser extent amethyst are the gems usually associated with Maltese filigree jewellery when they are included.[236] Seed pearls were introduced at the time of the Knights and reached the height of their popularity in the late eighteenth century. They became characteristic of Maltese jewellery during this era when they were mounted on gold filigree in earrings, brooches and necklaces. Often, in these cases, the filigree acted as a support onto which the seed pearls were encrusted.[237]

The biggest movement in Malta's jewellery history was seen with the arrival of the Knights. Filigree items in Malta can be broadly classified into two groups: secular and ecclesiastical jewellery and objets d'art. Most secular jewellery was used to adorn female patrons and was quite varied.[238] These included jointed belts, bracelets earrings and rings and were mainly gold (figure 4.4, figure 4.5).[239] They were often made in collections such as pairs of bracelets and demi-parures, consisting of earrings and necklaces. The latter sometimes included pearls.[240] Maltese male secular jewellery has always been somewhat more restricted, and was mainly limited

---

[235] Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta,* pp. 41-43.

[236] Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta,* pp. 41-43.

[237] Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta,* pp. 41-43.

[238] Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta,* pp. 41-43.

[239] Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta,* pp. 41-43.

[240] Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta,* pp. 41-43.

to filigree buttons with filigree sometimes also appearing in rings, watch chains and buckles. It is interesting to note, that jewellery worn by Maltese men at the end of the time of the Knights and at the beginning of British Rule became increasingly popular and more extravagant by those pertaining to those of a lower social standing, whereby they tended to make more of an ostentatious exhibition of it. These included both gold and silver buttons and multiple rings.[241] Furthermore, according to Balzan, those occupying the highest echelons in Maltese society during the time of the Knights and beyond would have owned and worn jewellery that represented the best of foreign goldsmiths' and enamellers' art. As filigree was locally produced, this would have automatically relegated anyone wearing it with an association of lower classes.[242] In his 1971 chapter titled 'Aesthetics in 'Primitive Societies'', Stout highlighted that anthropologists focused on symbols that have established emotional associations, depict emotion-arousing events, persons, or supernatural entities and that enlist the spectator's vicarious participation.[243] Very often, as mentioned above, jewellery pieces include symbols with established religious, emotional and historical associations.[244] Ecclesiastical pieces form a significant part of the Maltese collection of filigree, where these were reliquaries and pieces used to adorn churches or jewellery worn by both knights and clergy, as well as by lay people in society to exhibit their religious piety. Crucifixes, worn as pendants, or as part of rosary beads,

---

[241] Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta,* p. 65.

[242] Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta,* p. 43.

[243] Stout, 'Aesthetics in Primitive Society'.

[244] Stout, 'Aesthetics in Primitive Society'.

rosary bead posts and devotional pendants of enamelled medals featuring saints framed in silver or gold filigree all formed part of this collection.[245]

Furthermore, filigree jewellery was also used to adorn statues and paintings (these were affixed to the painting) found in church collections.[246] These pendants were thought to have once been affixed to larger rosaries, as was often encountered in Sicilian practices.[247] Examples of filigree pendants or necklaces affixed to paintings such as the Christ child, the Madonna and child and various statues survive in different Maltese churches. While not perhaps directly relevant to the earrings in question, such jewellery pieces were often made and donated to the church either as part of a painting or as a gift or promise in the form of prayer.[248] One such example of filigree used as an item of significance between the church and its people in Malta is another pair of gold filigree and cannetille earrings (figure 4.6). These now are exhibited in the Casa Rocca Piccola collection. They were a present from the Bishop of Gozo (Malta's sister island) to Nicolina de Piro after her husband donated land to build the Ta'Pinu Church in Gozo.[249]

As seen in the other case studies, the filigree craftsmen (I have found no mention of women's names, hence the use of the term men) enjoyed different societal standings in different cultures. According to Denaro, the presence of British

---

[245] A rosary bead post refers to one decade of the rosary consisting of 10 beads each representing one 'Hail Mary' prayer, to help the wearer keep track of how many have been said and how many remain.

[246] As observed by the author in person in Palazzo Falson and Mdina Museum collections in Malta on 29th October 2019.

[247] Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta,* p. 170.

[248] As informed by Nicholas de Piro, the owner and curator of Casa Rocca Piccola on a visit and guided tour of the museum on 30th October 2019.

[249] de Piro, *The Quality of Malta*, p. 48.

occupation in Malta brought prosperity to its gold and silversmiths through the introduction of a new stamp to safeguard against the addition of impurities and those fraudulently posing as such craftsmen.[250] This he believed restored pubic faith and hence value to the craftsmen and their filigree, and somewhat elevated their social standing. I interpreted his publication 'The Canongate, Edinburgh and Maltese Silver' as to imply that prior to the introduction of this stamp in 1810, Maltese gold and silversmiths were seen as craftsmen who while skilled were well known to tamper with metals and duplicitously sell good low value goods at higher prices. However, in the same essay he states that in 1801 Maltese silver and goldsmiths were recognised among their British and French counterparts and added to the prestigious 'Rohan code' of craftsmen with their own hallmark. It is however unambiguous that he is of the opinion that these craftsmen had their reputation repaired by the British in Malta in the early nineteenth century and that this event led to their improved regard within social circles.

A social analysis applied to these earrings

Extrapolating a social analysis from this pair of earrings in isolation would make for an extremely challenging task. It is a tenet for social historians that a society's attitude to art is predetermined by the context in which the artist works and is expressed in the relationship between the producer and the 'recipient'.[251] I would argue that in all forms of art and certainly in jewellery, this relationship, though often

---

[250] Victor F. Denaro, 'The Canongate, Edinburgh and Maltese Silver', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* (1969-1970), pp. 237-40.

[251] B. Aulinger, 'Social History of Art', Grove Art Online, https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T079457.

of a more personal kind is not only a private but of course also an economic matter. The professional act of the production of the piece is always based on the existing economic framework of exchange of goods or currency and not simply on the hoped future reception. D'Eusanio *et a*l have argued that the local community with its historical background gives an added value to a piece of jewellery.[252] In his concept of 'the Period eye' Baxandall argued that the processing of visual information uses a combination of skills that are both innate and based on experience, the latter often culturally determined. He thought cultural factors influence characteristics that are considered attractive at any particular time.[253] In his anthropological analysis of a society's visual culture, he examined how artists and their works functioned in their original social, commercial and religious context.[254]

In order to apply these principles to these earrings in order to examine how filigree could shed light on the social standing of its commissioners and wearers, it is therefore important to consider the various influences on culture and fashion in nineteenth-century Malta. As a brief summary, the island has a rich history of different foreign rulers before British colonialism. It can be surmised that during British Rule a hierarchical system was rigidly in place. Taken at face value, the British were the ruling class, and the majority of the Maltese formed the working class, in Marxist terms, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Carvalho argues that it was a struggle for Maltese elites in the nineteenth century (especially in the latter half) to achieve

---

[252] D'Eusanio et al, 'Social Life-Cycle Assessment of a Piece of Jewellery'.

[253] Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy.*

[254] Adrian W.B. Randolph, 'Gendering the Period Eye: Deschi Da Parto and Renaissance Visual Culture', *Art History* (September 2004), vol. 27 (4), pp. 538-562.

harmonisation with the British ruling administration.[255] An interesting dichotomy arose between two sets of middle class Maltese, one in favour of Italian tradition and culture and the other leaning towards the adoption of British influences.[256] It was mainly the members of the professional classes who led the opposition to the British, and particularly to the diffusion of the English language. Many newspapers and almanacs from this era were still published in Italian.[257] It could also be argued that during the latter part of Malta's British Rule, during the strive and quest for independence, Maltese jewellery and hence filigree, could have been popularised as Maltese women sought to exhibit their defiance. However, this happened later on in the second half of the twentieth century.

For those occupying lower rungs on the Maltese social class ladder, their relationship with foreigners and in particular their British rulers was largely conditioned by religious and economic factors.[258] Farmers and skilled workers depended on the ruling class for the financial opportunities afforded to them by the British presence. While religious sympathies lay with Roman Catholic Sicilians, the Protestant British did not resonate with the Maltese from a religious viewpoint, one deeply ingrained into Maltese culture. I would postulate that this would provide some insight as to why the British in Malta were not seen to be using filigree jewellery, especially if most of it was associated with Catholic symbolism or that filigree was seen as a Catholic rather than a Protestant metalwork practice on the island.

---

[255] Carvalho, Joachim. *Religion and Power in Europe: Conflict and Convergence* (Italy: Edizioni Plus, 2007).

[256] Carvalho, *Religion and Power in Europe.*

[257] Balzan *Vanity, Profanity and Worship,* pp. 39-42.

[258] Carvalho, *Religion and Power in Europe.*

Additionally, the Sicilians were viewed by the British as something of the 'greater unwashed' engaging in various criminal activities and other untoward practices such as prostitution. Hence, in keeping with the above mentioned information that Maltese filigree tended to follow the Sicilian and Italian trends, it may well have been regarded as vulgar or ostentatious by the British, through an association with the Sicilian influence.

While normally somewhat divisive, religion was the one sector that often brought the local and ruling populations together due to the interwoven practices of charity and the Church. The ruling aristocracy would often be in attendance at charity dinners and gala events in all their finery at occasions where the upper echelons of Maltese society would have the opportunity to rub shoulders with the British elite. Church attendance was open to one and all, then in turn brought together the different classes of Maltese society especially on Sundays for Mass and during village feasts. Balzan documented in some detail the jewellery worn by the British elite to such social gatherings.[259] Her primary sources were newspaper cuttings and almanacs pertaining to the period. The jewellery worn by duchesses, members of the aristocracy and wives of British governors was documented. Filigree is not mentioned in any of these excerpts. Rather, descriptions of pearls, rubies and diamonds seem to dominate.[260] This may be explained in part by the distinction made by Queen Victoria between jewellery and ornaments, where the former referred to real gold and real stones or pearls while 'ornaments' included imitation gold and paste, cut steel, carved

---

[259] Balzan *Vanity, Profanity and Worship,* pp. 39-42.

[260] Balzan *Vanity, Profanity and Worship,* pp. 39-42.

ivory, coral, silver filigree, and pebbles among others.[261] Filigree jewellery is mentioned and advertised in local newspapers written in Italian.[262] Fashion was often influenced by stage jewellery worn by actors and actresses. Jewellery was no exception to this. In the age of Queen Victoria, in the late nineteenth century (1867) it was reported in *Godey's Lady's Book* that 'Filigree is all the rage' with strings of large beads of gold and silver filigree worn around the head and neck.[263] Maltese filigree earns praise in its comparison to Genoese filigree by some British in London. So though the workmanship was admired and pieces were sometimes worn, it appears to have failed to earn itself a significant place in nineteenth-century British fashion stakes.[264] It could be argued that during the latter part of Malta's British Rule, during the strive and quest for independence, Maltese jewellery and hence filigree, could have been popularised as Maltese women sought to exhibit their defiance. However, this happened later on in the second half of the twentieth century.

Azzopardi also mentions that the visiting British often purchased filigree jewellery items to take back home as souvenirs. Jane Perry, a jewellery historian at the V&A writes in a description of Maltese silver filigree buttons that the British preferred buying silver filigree jewellery pieces while the Maltese tended to prefer to adorn themselves in gold filigree jewellery.[265] As mentioned above, much of Maltese jewellery and filigree included Catholic religious motifs. The eight-pointed cross

---

[261] Charlotte Gere, Judy Rudoe, 'Jewellery in the Age of Queen Victoria, A Mirror to the World', (London: The British Museum Press, 1986), p. 196.

[262] Balzan *Vanity, Profanity and Worship,* pp. 39-44.

[263] Gere, Rudoe, 'Jewellery in the Age of Queen Victoria'. p. 214.

[264] Gere, Rudoe, 'Jewellery in the Age of Queen Victoria'. p. 218.

[265] Perry, *A Collector's Guide to Peasant Silver Buttons*, pp. 21-23.

belonging to the Knights of Malta was essentially a crucifix denoting the Catholic order while many other pieces were used to adorn portraits of saints, Jesus and the Madonna (with or without child) or involved crucifixes or rosary beads. Balzan writes that while much of these religious pieces were commissioned or made for ecclesiastical use to adorn churches, their painting and statues offered up as votives or sacrifices, many secular local women (and sometimes men) wore these pieces as expressions of their devotion.[266] It is worth noting that local women were often bought these jewellery pieces as part of dowry or heirloom to give her financial assets as a means of security during a period of time when women's rights and independence were scarce to say the least. Should she ever find herself in strife, these jewellery items could be sold off.

In her dissertation titled 'Leandro Preziosi: Portrait Photography and the Art of Dress in the second half of Nineteenth-Century Malta', Tonna argues that jewellery, hairdressing and clothes are interdependent on each other in the art of dress. According to Tonna, evidence from early portrait photographs helps improve the understanding of how the Maltese elite women followed the European fashion and added their own taste and touch to it. Their art of dress embodied the constraints of correctness and modesty as well as the desire for luxury and finery. Just taking into account the above mentioned factors in nineteenth-century Malta, namely religion and ruling versus working classes, it would appear that gold filigree jewellery such as these earrings were mainly worn by upper middle class Maltese women and those leaning towards Italian fashions. According to Balzan a search through the archives for pictures of influential British women in nineteenth-century Malta showed that

---

[266] Balzan *Vanity, Profanity and Worship,* pp. 67-72.

these ladies in formal attire with a few in less formal day to day wear.[267] In none of these pictures could I see any filigree jewellery worn. As another point, when later on, Queen Elizabeth II lived in Malta between 1949 and 1951 I have seen no photos of her wearing filigree jewellery.

The above arguments and assumptions can all be made and attributed to the time at which the piece was made and intended to be worn. However, as Jack Ogden, an eminent jewellery historian, poignantly argued, a real issue to the jewellery historian is that applying modern thought to old jewellery is inextricably linked with an obvious paradox.[268] He argues that it is impossible to appreciate something from the past when applying modern aesthetic criteria, without developing an inherent misunderstanding.[269] He also argued that to judge art and jewellery from the past within its own cultural context, independent of modern experience and taste is extremely difficult. I acknowledge this point, and it certainly applies to fashion and the art of dress in the broadest sense. Things that were deemed beautiful and in vogue in a past era are not necessarily appreciated as such later on. However, I would argue that an individual's interest in fashion is not necessarily related to what that individual's personal aesthetic tastes, but more as a form of conforming to society's norms, as often expressed through a desire to be associated with the upper echelons of the society that individual inhabits.

While Ogden attributed this to jewellery as an art form, I would counter this argument by stating that jewellery as a form of adornment is one of the least conforming means of personal expression as it often is used to denote a uniqueness.

---

[267] Balzan *Vanity, Profanity and Worship,* pp. 67-72.

[268] Jack Ogden. Jewellery, (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1989). iii.

[269] Ogden, 'Jewellery'.

I do not apply this necessarily to symbolic jewellery (such as wedding rings) but rather to statement pieces such as cocktail rings or earrings. In this case it is the combination of the rarity, the value and the aesthetics of the piece and the confidence of the individual to wear or to display it. While it may be a challenge to appreciate some older jewellery pieces in the light of their origin without bias from modern day influences, this does not make its appreciation a moot point and therefore as inherently flawed as Ogden appears to think. Rather it is reflective of the individual's capability of independent and higher order thought process that actually trends do not necessarily apply to him or her when choosing a particular piece of jewellery. I do accept however that the appreciation of inspiration, may be lost as different defining events of an era (such as wars and pandemics) do not necessarily apply, and unless experienced, attached emotions are difficult to convey.

Furthermore, the appreciation of technique may also be lost as technology advances and mass machine production takes the place of skilled craftsmen. This is particularly applicable to filigree. In the light of modern mass produced filigree bypassing manual techniques, cost is reduced as is its perceived value. As such skillsets are costly today and the demand for filigree has somewhat dwindled recently, it is today considered too expensive for jewellers to keep up the trade, especially in the face of cheaper counterparts. Incidentally, China also enjoys a very rich filigree history with many intricately beautiful pieces some of which are displayed at Chatsworth House and in Genoa.[270] A family owned Maltese jewellery shop managing director has informed me that such traditional filigree work is still practised in Indonesia and that they now outsource all the filigree pieces there as it is more

[270] Falke, 'Filigree'.

cost effective, in terms of raw material and labour. She added that in the last decade, like lace in Malta, little regard is given to the handmade nature of filigree and the main interest and market lies in the tourist sector (Malta's largest industry) with very little local interest.[271]

The prohibitive cost of fine jewellery and the fashionable (though sometimes very costly too) costume jewellery have proved too formidable a competitor in today's jewellery scene. Additionally, as Malta is very small and therefore somewhat limited in terms of fashion its people have always looked outward for inspiration, rather than inwards to extoll local talent. From my observations, the wearing of foreign clothes and accessories today is symbolic of the relative wealth associated with ease of travel and acquisition of recognisable goods. Interestingly, in 2021, Dolce e Gabbana, a fashion powerhouse, brought out a filigree costume jewellery line in association with their Sicilian inspired collection (figure 4.7). This may be the harbinger of filigree making a comeback in modern day Europe. Additionally, the popular use of gold plated silver makes these pieces more affordable.

The gold filigree earrings in this case study were certified as 18 carat gold by the seller. This material would have been expensive and ill afforded by working class families in nineteenth century Malta, especially for a piece of jewellery of considerable size and weight. This in itself would point to a commissioner or wearer of considerable financial means. It may be the case that the original intended recipient was a member of the Maltese upper echelons of society or they were intended as a gift to a visiting dignitary. At some point they did enter a Maltese family as informed by the seller who acquired them from this said family at auction. There is

---

[271] Interview between the author and Romina Grech Fenech, CEO of Sterling Jewellers, Malta – 12th December 2019.

a paucity of information available on the goldsmith himself, save for his mention in Denaro's book listing Malta's goldsmiths and their hallmarks and in Balzan's book showing very similar earrings.

Conclusion

The social analysis described above in context of the various influencing factors in the nineteenth century and today leads us to conclude that such an example of filigree could be used as an aid to establish class ranking in Malta in the last two centuries. Given that filigree was mainly associated with Italian influence and this was seen as somewhat inferior in terms of social ranking in British-ruled nineteenth-century Malta and the iconography is equivocal in terms of the information it shares about social standing it would appear that filigree as a trade was relegated more towards lower rankings in society. However, the use of 18 carat gold, its weight relative to other jewellery pieces and the intricacy of the workmanship would point to a relatively wealthy intended recipient. This analysis would allow a conclusion that such a piece could be used to classify the Maltese in the nineteenth century in different rungs of social standing. Extrapolating the social analysis to modern times, it appears that such filigree items are not commonly encountered so in terms of their rarity and value (18 carat gold is still a very expensive metal), it could be concluded that such filigree work would belong to someone occupying an upper middle class background reflective of an appreciation of the art and metalwork and of relatively comfortable financial standing.

CHAPTER 4: A CASE STUDY OF FILIGREE BUTTONS

The final case study focusses on buttons made from silver filigree. These are a group of nine silver buttons that form part of the Palazzo Falson filigree collection in Mdina, Malta (figure 5.1). Buttons, ubiquitously used, represent artefacts worn by those associated with both high and low social status. Jewellery in its many forms has been used for a number of reasons, such as currency, wealth display and storage, function (such as clasps, pins and buckles), symbolism (to show membership or status), protection (such as amulets and crucifixes), or for artistic display. Many items of jewellery, such as buttons, brooches and buckles originated as purely functional items, but evolved into decorative items as their functional requirement either diminished or their use as adornment raised the value of the garment and elevated the status of its wearer.

Most cultures have at some point had a practice of storing vast amounts of wealth in the form of jewellery items. Buttons were purposely chosen as a case study, as they represent one of the oldest forms of garment adornment combining function as well as a decorative purpose. Buttons often form an integral part of national costume and are used by both genders. Their use has transcended centuries and geographic borders. It is most likely that ritual occasions and symbolic acts prompted the initial use and wear of jewellery.[272] The way they are used and displayed (or hidden) reveals information on their wearer and his or her status in society. In previous chapters I have made multiple references to the delicate nature

---

[272] Marel Eichhorn-Johanssen, Adelheid Rasche. *25,000 years of Jewelry: From the Collections of the Staatliche Museen Zu Berlin* (Berlin: Getty Publications, 2013) p. 13.

of filigree metalwork precluding its everyday use. This notion is somewhat contradictory in this chapter, given that buttons are repeatedly used. Another reason I have chosen to evaluate filigree buttons for this research is because filigree buttons intended for display as well as fastening purposes were mainly used by men (and only occasionally by women) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[273] National costume pertains to both gender roles, thus allowing a social analysis of men as well as women in society, as the use of clothing, accessories and jewellery have always been closely intertwined.[274] Whereas in the case study about the gold filigree earrings the position of women in society was the focus, this focus of this chapter is to analyse a man's position in society through the observation of filigree.

Furthermore, it will also become evident, once again, that over the years, filigree has not only been a means of expression of artistic, stylistic and above all, aesthetic character, but has been constantly challenged by society's and the consumers' social and cultural scrutiny. Such adornment such as buttons generally corresponds moreover to the prevailing costume silhouette and tactile ornamentation, in terms of its artistic design.[275] An advantage to studying these filigree buttons is that there are various comparators in terms of other buttons and in particular filigree styles that will be used to extrapolate information on social standing as seen through the filigree metalwork. The study of buttons leads to questions about social stratification in a traditional craft that crossed many geographical borders over time, with the introduction and use of different metals, styles and purpose. It will, indeed, bring to the fore as to what kind of buttons were reflective of what kind of masculinity.

---

[273] Perry, *A Collector's Guide to Peasant Silver Buttons*, p. 123.

[274] Eichhorn-Johanssen, Rasche. *25,000 years of Jewelry,* pp. 188-203.

[275] Eichhorn-Johanssen, Rasche. *25,000 years of Jewelry,* pp. 188-203.

In other words, while it is known that men wore them, we currently know less about how they define the male producer and wearer. The opulence and value of the materials used themselves are as seen in previous chapters.

A brief history of the development and use of buttons is included in this chapter to provide a better basis for the understanding of the specific role of filigree buttons. This sheds light on their journey from purely functional objects as fasteners to serving either a dual decorative purpose or a combination of both. Without entering the vast field of button jewellery in general, it is important to appreciate the many different styles in the various costumes in which buttons have been used. Different types of filigree were used in different eras and in different countries by the different members of their respective societies. As the last three case studies demonstrated, in most cultures, the giving and wearing of jewellery and filigree objects constitute an important part of social life in all societies, involving, for example, economic transactions as well as religious beliefs. Some scholarship does exist on filigree buttons. It is quite limited, however, in that the main sources are by two authors, Perry and Balzan.[276] The scope of this chapter is to expand on this scholarship and to use existing literature as a base upon which to build a social analysis with a particular focus on filigree buttons for male clients.

Descriptive analysis

This is a group of nine identical silver buttons. Each button consists of two functional components linked together. Each button is conical in shape and measures 60 x 42

---

[276] Perry, *A Collector's Guide to Peasant Silver Buttons*; Perry, *Traditional Jewellery in Nineteenth Century Europe;* Balzan, *Palazzo Falson;* Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta;* Balzan, *Vanity, Profanity and Worship.*

mm, the usual size of a coat button today. They are composed from pieces of sheet silver with a long conical back and a domed face, joined together with a ring of twisted decorative wire. On each domed face six applied filigree rosettes are arranged symmetrically in a circle, surrounding a central rosette at the top of the dome of the button. A circle of twisted wire surrounds the loop shank at the apex of the cone where it attaches to the T-shaped toggle through a series of oval silver loops. A stamp RO is found on the T bar, thought to be the maker's mark. According to Denaro, RO was a mark of a nineteenth-century Maltese gold / silversmith.[277] The use of T-bars and toggles is indicative that these buttons fastened clothes together loosely. I would argue that being made of silver, being quite a malleable metal, it is likely that they would have been kept for special occasion wear, rather than everyday use. Additionally, I have noted that these buttons do not exhibit signs of wear and tear. There is no evidence of smoothing or wearing of the filigree edges or denting or scratches. It is unclear as to whether they may have undergone restorative work so it will be assumed that they have not (apart from regular polishing) as there is no note of this according to the current curator of the house.

Colomban's theory that a stylistic analysis and a personal sensory perception may provide insight for purposes of classification remains central to this case study. These perceptions that would no doubt have influenced both the original intended nineteenth century recipient and also Captain Gollcher to make his acquisition. Gollcher was Maltese by his birth in Malta in 1889 to wealthy Swedish parents who owned a shipping company.[278] He joined the British army, serving in both world wars.

---

[277] Denaro. *Goldsmiths of Malta,* p. 248.

[278] Balzan, Galea, *Palazzo Falson*, pp. 9, 15.

He was ranked as captain and later as Knight of the Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem, before being awarded an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) title.[279] In a similar fashion to the Chatsworth House collection, Gollcher was a cultural enthusiast and keen collector of antiquities, archaeological findings, silver, art, paintings, books and manuscripts and jewellery.[280] He was married but childless. He left the house and its contents to the Captain O. F. Gollcher OBE Art and Archaeological Foundation making it clear in his will that the house and its collection be open to the public after his death (1962).[281] Collecting such a precious item as these buttons for pure cultural reasons could be considered a confirmation of Gollcher's social status. Through birth, wealth and ranking in the British army, Gollcher was considered to be among the higher ranking echelons of social standing in Malta. The motifs included in these buttons are floral rosettes that do not appear to represent a specific kind of flower. This arrangement, as seen below, is quite common on conical buttons attributed to Malta. Such a commonly used design therefore makes it difficult to attribute iconography or symbolic representation. The decorative aspect using this filigree technique would indicate that they were likely to be worn to be seen, so they would be on a prominent part of the body and on the outside, i.e. not covered by other garments. This would be in keeping with Perry's observation that such buttons were often warn to fasten a waistcoat, as discussed below.

Provenance

---

279 Balzan, Galea, *Palazzo Falson,* pp. 9, 15.

280 Balzan, Galea, *Palazzo Falson*, p. 12.

281 Balzan, Galea, *Palazzo Falson,* p. 12.

These buttons have been attributed to the Oakes period (1810-1820) by Francesca Balzan, the former curator of the Palazzo Falson Historic House Museum.[282] They belonged to Olof Frederick Gollcher (1889-1962), who bought and inhabited the house in the twentieth century.

The aim of this case study is to understand what kind of buttons were produced and what kind of masculinity this reflected. While it is known that men wore them, we know less about how they define the male producer and wearer. Twentieth-century Malta class was largely associated with links to the colonial occupation of the island irrespective to a certain extent of wealth. His association and rank in the British Army may well have led to him being socially 'promoted' up the rungs, his wealth being a catalyst. Why he chose to add these buttons to his collection can be speculated upon. Galea and Balzan noted that he was a keen collector of silver and jewellery. These buttons would have served both these fascinations. In comparison to other similar buttons, they appear very similar to Swedish nineteenth-century silver buttons that also used filigree.[283] I would argue that these buttons piqued a particular interest to this collector as they would have provided him with a connection to both his Swedish and Maltese heritage. According to Perry, Swedish filigree buttons were usually round with T-shaped bars and used sheet metal with overlying filigree.[284]

There is no known documentation to the acquisition of these buttons, and it is not known how they came to be in Gollcher's possession, or whether he did indeed use them himself. While Balzan stated that are mentioned in inventories, whether these were bought or given as a gift is subject to further speculation. It is a possibility

---

[282] Balzan, *Vanity, Profanity and Worship*, pp. 72-73.

[283] Falke, 'Filigree'.

[284] Perry, *A Collector's Guide to Peasant Silver Buttons*, p. 158.

that they are given to him as a gift by somebody who knew him well enough. I would argue that it is unlikely that he would have worn them, as in the twentieth century, these buttons were no longer used in Malta, as they were replaced by round buttons without T-bars that fit into buttonholes. Additionally, as he was a military man, these forms of buttons were never seen as part of the British army uniform.[285] The fact that they show little or no wear would also point to them being owned for reasons of collecting rather than use.

Though this is elucidation, I will assume that these joined part of his collection as a keen collector of silver and jewellery, given they were of no practical use in the twentieth century and would have most likely been considered 'out of fashion'. I think it is most likely that he would have bought these specifically to add to his collections. Furthermore, as during this time, the Maltese were considering their position for independence from the British, this may have prompted an interest in Maltese made pieces. Though today this group of buttons is displayed with jewellery and filigree items, it is unknown into which collection he would have placed them as it would have been eligible for the silver collection and antiquaries collection too. It is also not known whether he displayed them or merely had them in collection while he? was alive. The filigree craftsmen (I have found no mention of women's names, hence the use of the term men) enjoyed different societal standings in different cultures. This he believed restored public faith and hence somewhat elevated the craftsman's presence in terms of social standing.

As an association with British trends was considered to lend itself to association with Malta's upper classes, it may be the case that these buttons were

---

[285] As informed by Caroline Tonna, curator of Palazzo Falson Historic House Museum, Malta on 29th October 2019 in conversation.

acquired for the wearer or owner to have himself associated with the perceived upper classes in the eyes of others. Negating this argument, however, is Balzan's opinion that jewellery worn by Maltese men at the end of the time of the Knights and at the beginning of British Rule became increasingly popular and more extravagant by those of a lower social standing, whereby they tended to make more of an ostentatious exhibition of it (figure 5.2).[286] These included both gold and silver buttons and multiple rings.[287] She quotes the observation of a nineteenth-century Englishman who appeared to be describing the local men in what I observe to be a somewhat derisory manner.[288] 'Some of them (the villagers) wear several gold rings and have the buttons of their waistcoats made of the same metal or of silver….. On feast days, a potter or publican of the like will appear with ten gold rings on his fingers, as many on his watch-chain, and numerous gold or silver buttons waist-coat'.[289] The Maltese feast has been a significant date in the Maltese social calendar for centuries, with best dresses and jewellery brought out for display. It is also interesting to note that following examination of examples of portraits of English men residing in Malta, none are found of English men either wearing traditional Maltese peasant costume or these types of buttons. This observation also applies to women. It is unfortunate that there exists no information about either the vendor or the person who initially used these buttons as that would be useful in helping establish the direction of the arguments and hypotheses made and also to perform a more

---

[286] Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta,* p. 65.

[287] Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta,* p. 65.

[288] Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta,* p. 65.

[289] Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta,* p. 207.

accurate social analysis in order to use the items to rank the different societal levels among men in nineteenth-century Malta.

The Collection

The house (Palazzo Falson) was acquired by Olof Frederick Gollcher who made some restorations and alterations to parts of the building. Today it is owned by his foundation. This is a seventeen-room house museum with historic domestic objects and antique collections. The permanent displays are collections that originally belonged to Gollcher. Occasionally temporary exhibits from private collections are held there.

The extensive jewellery collection houses various pieces of filigree. This includes another two sets of buttons (also thought to be men's buttons). One of these sets is a group of six gold *Gran spinat* round buttons and the other another group of six smaller round silver filigree buttons (attributed to the nineteenth century, with a Maltese maker's mark M) (Figure).[290] This latter group of buttons is in silver openwork, rather than filigree. The jewellery collection features some elaborate pieces of jewellery and intricate filigree work such as hair pins, brooches and hair ornaments. It is likely that these belonged to Gollcher's wife and were worn by her.

The other filigree items within this jewellery trove includes both pieces for men and for women. The former includes a long silver filigree chain intended for wear around the neck with multiple pendants featuring the eight pointed Maltese cross. This has been attributed (by Balzan, the former curator of Palazzo Falson) to a previous ownership by the Knights of Malta (in the sixteenth and seventeenth

---

[290] *Gran spinat* is a form of granulation beaded metalwork, commonly in gold used in Malta, thought to be infused by the Spanish.

centuries) as part of their ceremonial regalia. A large wide chain filigree necklace with a large crucifix also belongs to this collection. A near identical item is found in the filigree collection at Chatsworth House. Both have been attributed to Italian silversmiths and were likely to have been worn by members of the clergy for religious ceremonies. How these two necklaces came to form part of both these collections would make another interesting case study, focussing on the filigree used in religious dominations of the different societies. The relevance to this case study however, is that parallels and similarities can be drawn between the Duke of Devonshire (referred to in the first case study on the Turkish zarfs) and Capt Olof Gollcher. It appears that both held a fascination with filigree as a technique and its aesthetic effect. They were both collectors of fine art (though objectively the Duke was far wealthier than the Captain).

I would postulate that these silver filigree buttons made their way into Gollcher's ownership specifically to form part of the wider filigree collection rather than for personal use. It appears from the remainder of the collection that he collected objects that piqued his fascination for their decorative aspect, as he never formed part of the Order of the Knights of Malta nor was he a clergyman or known to hold any fervent religious beliefs. In the twentieth century these filigree buttons were no longer in use having given way to the new trends of men's jacket which were tighter fitting with round buttons and buttonholes. The fact the Gollcher acquired the buttons and included them as part of his collection and are still on display today is evidence that he valued the filigree metalwork (despite its falling out of vogue) and its decorative and fine workmanship.

To strengthen this argument, it is known that silver held its value and moreover that its value (per weight) increased between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Malta.[291] Were it only for the value of the silver itself that these objects were retained in collection, it would have made more sense that they were melted down and refashioned into more fashionable items or used to make coins (as happened in various other parts of the world). An explanation as to why they were only worn on occasion in the nineteenth century to become collectors' items later could be the fragile nature of the workmanship that defines filigree. I would conclude that their inclusion in the collection shows that filigree metalwork, in particular silver buttons, transcended the rungs of the social ladder upwards from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Whereas in the nineteenth century we see these buttons forming part of peasant costume and ostentatious display, later on they seem to have made their way into the collections of the wealthy as collector's items.

The significance of the buttons in costume

Buttons associated with traditional costume tend to differ remarkably from other buttons.[292] There is great variation between buttons of different countries reflective of the wider traditional costume, its resources and its metalwork practice.[293] The use of buttons with traditional dress is largely a European practice and filigree is found on a number of European peasant costume buttons. The nineteenth century saw a radical change in the role of European garment jewellery with its decline starting around

---

[291] Denaro, 'The Mint of Malta'.

[292] Perry, *A Collector's Guide to Peasant Silver Buttons* p. 4.

[293] Perry, *A Collector's Guide to Peasant Silver Buttons*, p. 9.

1800.[294] The abolishment of Maltese sumptuary laws in 1832 (enacted in 1640) benefitted the inhabitants of rural areas allowing them a freer right over their dress codes.[295] The women's festive costumes generally consisted of a skirt and apron with a multi piece top and bodice, while a silver filigree clasp was used to fasten a scarf or headdress.[296] Buttons were usually made of silver (and sometimes of brass). They were considered a status symbol in rural men's clothing with their use only partially reserved for functional status.[297] This latter is explained by Rasche in his chapter 'Remarks on Modern Era Garment Jewellery' in his book *25,000 years of Jewellery*, and is in keeping with Balzan's observations that rural men displayed silver filigree buttons on their waistcoats as a display of ostentatiousness and relative new wealth. It is thought that the fashion followed by both genders in rural Europe in the nineteenth century was reflective of older patterns of urban culture and garment jewellery. Rasche also states that prior to this period jewellery manufacture was reserved almost exclusively for gold in Europe. However, the nineteenth century saw the introduction of other metals and larger volumes of production thus enabling this jewellery to reach members of all social classes.[298]

These buttons vary enormously between countries, with some very fine filigree work to some very thick metal wire used.[299] Similar to buttons, brooches initially were objects intended as fastenings, serving to attach two panels of fabric to each other in

---

[294] Eichhorn-Johanssen, Rasche. *25,000 years of Jewelry,* pp. 188-203.

[295] Balzan, *Jewellery in Malta,* p. 64.

[296] Eichhorn-Johanssen, Rasche. *25,000 years of Jewelry,* pp. 188-203.

[297] Eichhorn-Johanssen, Rasche. *25,000 years of Jewelry,* pp. 188-203.

[298] Eichhorn-Johanssen, Rasche. *25,000 years of Jewelry,* pp. 188-203.

[299] Perry, *A Collector's Guide to Peasant Silver Buttons*, p. 4.

a parallel fashion.[300] Later on, their use became relegated to decorative purposes only. According to Perry, silver buttons in Malta were the most distinctive item of traditional jewellery to survive.[301] She attributes conical buttons to nineteenth-century Malta while relegating round buttons to the eighteenth century, particularly in Malta and in Italy.[302] According to Perry, it is unclear as to whether conical shaped filigree buttons were worn in Italy and she states that these buttons were used solely in Malta. Some conical buttons with Italian marks exist, and are usually smaller and rounder than those made in Malta. Perry argues that these were likely made for export to Malta as there are no published examples of Italian costumes with conical shaped buttons.[303]

I would counter this hypothesis by arguing that it would be unlikely that an export market particularly for Malta actually did exist. This is because the relatively small economy of scale for Malta to merit its own market and the fact that Maltese trends in costume and jewellery at the time were largely influenced by either the ruling British or by the neighbouring Italians, and not vice versa. Additionally, Malta had its own silver and goldsmiths who would have been capable of meeting the demand in a more cost-effective manner. It may, however, be the case that wealthy Maltese patrons commissioned bespoke Italian jewellery. However, it was considered then (as it is now) to be considered wealthier and of a higher social standing if items worn were demonstrably 'foreign', because of the association with rarity and expense.

---

[300] Eichhorn-Johanssen, Rasche. *25,000 years of Jewelry,* pp. 188-203.

[301] Perry, *Traditional Jewellery in Nineteenth Century Europe* p. 95.

[302] Perry, *Traditional Jewellery in Nineteenth Century Europe* p. 95.

[303] Perry, *A Collector's Guide to Peasant Silver Buttons*, p. 158.

To counter my own argument, as the discussion focusses on buttons, it may be that such wealthy patrons needed their buttons to be conical in shape so as to fit the necessary item of clothing in question. Furthermore, originally such buttons could have been made in Italy to be presented as gifts to the Maltese or to other people on the island. It is likely that these were men's buttons rather than those used on women's clothes, because in the nineteenth century women's clothes were more tight fitting. Buttons with T bars and toggles are more likely to have been used on looser fitting clothes, such as men's waistcoats. According to Perry, Maltese men wore these buttons on their waistcoats (Figure 5.2) to fasten them down the front in the middle 6 or 12 at a time. This collection comprises 8 buttons. Whether it is a complete set or missing some pieces is unknown.[304]

History of Buttons

The history of buttons is relevant to this research because their use reflects a unique human feature: the combination of tools with decorative purposes. Buttons were initially overlooked in terms of archaeological findings. They were underestimated and this therefore made them difficult to trace. This could be indicative that initially buttons were used to draw the attention to the social role of the person. The function of fastening or closing something appears to have been a secondary role. Hence, to craftsmanship and the applied arts, the button was considered one very early example of folk art. I would argue that the more aesthetically pleasing a button was conceived of at the time, the more likely it is to catch the observer or a passer-by's attention. Being small in size and easily detachable could also mean that (as seen in

304 Perry, *Traditional Jewellery in Nineteenth Century Europe,* p. 95.

this example, Figure 5.1) value could be added to the clothing through metalwork and gemstones if necessary, detached when not being used and reattached to a different garment if needs be. Their use was not limited to garments only. They are also used for wallets and some forms of boxes and bags. Functional buttons with corresponding buttonholes were first encountered in Germany during the thirteenth century.[305] The popularity of filigree buttons gathered momentum across Europe becoming more widespread with the use of tight-fitting garments especially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[306] The precursor to the button fastener was the fibula, a brooch or pin used to hold two pieces of clothing on the shoulder or chest. The button began to replace the fibula by the early Middle Ages. Buttons functioned as primary fastenings for men's dress earlier than for women's.[307] This may be because from the late Middle Ages into the twentieth century, women's clothes were tight and smoothly fitted. Lacings and hooks would be better suited. The ball-shaped toggle button is probably the type of button that replaced the fibula as a fastening for cloaks, capes, and other outer garments. A sixteenth-century example exists in Nuremberg hallmarked silver, attached to a thin bar by a flexible chain link.[308]There are records of buttons in documents relating to nobility during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance where Venetian glass buttons decorated with pearls, and black

---

[305] Lynn White: 'The Act of Invention: Causes, Contexts, Continuities and Consequences', *Technology and Culture*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Autumn, 1962), pp. 486–500 (497f. & 500)

[306] Stephen Hinks, 'A Structural and Functional Analysis of Eighteenth Century Buttons', MA dissertation, College of William & Mary, 1988, https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-p512-7653, pp. 92-94.

[307] Perry, *A Collector's Guide to Peasant Silver Buttons*, pp. 21-23.

[308] Eichhorn-Johanssen, Rasche. *25,000 years of Jewelry*, p. 218.

enamel buttons mounted on gold were documented.[309] These were considered in terms of quality, namely as contemporary jewellery. Buttons of any material were generally round in shape and made of decorated metal or covered with needlework in silk or metal threads on a wooden core.

The eighteenth century is considered the Golden Age of buttons by collectors, because their variety of styles and size increased dramatically. Buttons were commonly used on several pieces of men's clothing, a trend which continued into the nineteenth century.[310] Large buttons, normally made of metal or thread, were used on the coat, while smaller buttons, often otherwise matching, were worn on the waistcoat.[311] Men's coats required buttons at the front opening, sleeves, pockets, and back vents. Waistcoats and breeches were also fastened with buttons. The size of the button grows and the shape generally flattens during the course of the century, ending in the flat disk as large as 1.38 inch (3.5 cm) in diameter.

In the late eighteenth century, European button making fell into two categories: craft traditions allied with other high-quality decorative arts, such as filigree, and mass-production techniques. It is likely that the latter were fuelled by military uniforms which had rows of many (twenty to thirty) buttons for tight fitting jackets. The development of cut-steel buttons and accessories by the Birmingham steel manufacturers Boulton in the eighteenth century marked a pivotal point in English button making.[312] This led to the production of specialised buttons that today still

---

[309] Hinks, ‘A Structural and Functional Analysis of Eighteenth Century Buttons, pp. 92-94.

[310] Hinks, ‘A Structural and Functional Analysis of Eighteenth Century Buttons’, p. 73.

[311] Hinks, ‘A Structural and Functional Analysis of Eighteenth Century Buttons’, p. 73.

[312] Jenny Uglow*, The Lunar Men: Five Friends Whose Curiosity Changed the World* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002).

makes up a major portion of the button industry.[313] The value of decorations on a man's ensemble during the nineteenth century in many parts of Europe could account for much of the cost of the costume. Thus, luxurious buttons became an increasingly essential part of the expression of status in upper-class men's dress. In keeping with Balzan's observation that men of lower social standing in Malta put their buttons on display, this could be another example whereby these buttons would have been a means of the lower classes attempting to associate themselves with the upper classes at the time. The degree of decorative value would serve to catch the observer's eye in order for such an association to be made. It is known that gold was available to filigree workers in nineteenth-century Malta. That silver was used would either point to buttons used more frequently less formally, or used on special occasions by those of lower means perhaps. Each country, region, and specialisation within the various armed services each had their own individual designs. From the beginning of the early nineteenth century men's dress became much plainer and less ostentatious.

According to Perry, filigree buttons represent one of the commonest forms of buttons, and were usually found in silver.[314] A limitation to the study of buttons however is that those made of precious metals such as silver and gold were often melted down or sold on when money was tight instead of passed on as heirlooms.[315] Furthermore delicate buttons such as those made of filigree might sustain damage and wear over time. As seen in the V&A Collection after explanation by Perry,

---

313 Uglow, *The Lunar Men.*

314 Perry, *A Collector's Guide to Peasant Silver Buttons*, p. 117.

315 As informed by Francesca Balzan in conversation on 11th October 2018 when she was then curator of Palazzo Falson Historic House Museum, Mdina, Malta.

sometimes these buttons would be altered over time and changed into earrings or some other form of jewellery.[316]

This observation of costume types provides a framework around which the probable functions or decorative value of specific buttons can be determined. However, just because a given type of button was normally used on specific types of clothing, there is no guarantee that specific buttons were always used on such types. In other words, it is conceivable that waistcoat buttons were occasionally used on shirts, for decoration on women's dresses, or as substitutes for missing game pieces. This study discusses how buttons were normally used without differentiating between specific buttons.

Similar objects - a comparative analysis

The above described craftsmanship involved in the production of these buttons is examined comparatively to other similar buttons. This is done in order to establish where in society, in terms of geography and class these buttons would place their owners and wearers. Unlike in other chapters, with buttons there is a wealth of comparative collections. This has been succinctly described in the published literature by Jane Perry in her book *A Collector's Guide to Peasant Silver Buttons*, which involves descriptive analyses of the silver buttons in the V&A's collection. Perry makes the distinction that in her book, the term 'peasant' does not refer to low socio-economic status nor is it a derogatory term.[317] Rather it refers to national costume.[318] Furthermore many museums house button collections, and a few even have filigree

[316] Perry, *A Collector's Guide to Peasant Silver Buttons*, p. 119.

[317] Perry, *A Collector's Guide to Peasant Silver Buttons.*

[318] Perry, *A Collector's Guide to Peasant Silver Buttons.*

buttons on display. Notably these are Casa Rocca Piccola in Malta, the British Museum in London and the Staatliche Museen in Berlin. The silver filigree button collections at the British Museum have been attributed to the early nineteenth century. It should be noted however, that these attributions were made by Balzan while Perry was responsible for the Victorian and Albert Museum attributions. The implication of this being that these attributions may be biased and all belong to a single opinion rather confirmed by multiple sources thus lending objectivity. Noting that many of these buttons are found as identical sets, I would postulate that this strengthens the argument I made above that such items in filigree are more likely to be of decorative use. This is because such fine metalwork would be ruined with multiple use and therefore it is likely that for everyday use either cheaper or mismatching sets would have been needed. Additionally, it is more likely that identical buttons would have been part of formal wear and mismatched buttons if need be relegated to informal dress.

Social analysis

The factors examined above exert various influences on the social analysis of these filigree silver buttons. This is extended to include the distinction between the manufacturers and the owners or wearers.[319] This set of buttons is made of silver and is actually quite simple in terms of design when compared to other filigree items. This may be in part because of the relatively small size of the buttons and the need for the use of thicker wire in order to fulfil their primary purpose as clothes fasteners. They also culturally significant for Malta and may therefore explain why Gollcher may

[319] Judith Huggins Balfe. *Paying the Piper: Causes and Consequences of Art Patronage* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

have acquired them but likely never used them himself. Their wide use in previous times in Malta (during the nineteenth century when they were made) would also suggest that button groups such as these may have been worn by lower classes who collected and used silver as family heirlooms and for use on special occasions.

It is known that filigree metalwork was a trade in Malta that gathered momentum and popularity during the nineteenth century, hence their value is likely to have increased from the time they were made to when they were acquired by the captain. It would appear that as their use dwindled, their perceived value may have increased in recognition of the appreciation of the metalwork as well as the workmanship involved. This increasing value may have led to him deeming them a worthy investment. Pierre Bourdieu who built on Marx's theory argued that the middle class possesses cultural capital.[320] The outwardly display of such capital then creates cultural identities between the different classes of individuals, such that these identities become rooted in subjective perceptions of social-class rank with respect to others.[321] Culture includes art in its various forms, music, theatre and literature among others. Jewellery would be considered as one of these art categories. The term culture has many definitions. In this context of this thesis, I would define it as the appreciation of art and history through its societal context. According to Bourdieu, its appreciation is relegated to the classes who afford both the means and the time to enjoy it. Through these filigree buttons and their acquisition and prominent placement in the collection and display I would argue that this reflects the 'ascent' of the

---

[320] Bourdieu. 'What makes a Social Class?'

[321] Kraus, 'Social Class as Culture'.

metalwork along Malta's social ladder. The fact that this set was and remains on display further confirms the retainment of such value.

Further anthropological and sociological research work with respect to jewellery history would be useful to help establish whether during the time that filigree was the popularly practised craft in each country and which rung on the societal ladder it leant towards more. Marxist sociology examines (among other salient things) how a mode of production influences the social class and evaluates the relation between workers, capital, the state and culture.[322] Before the late twentieth century filigree buttons could not be mass produced, each piece was individually handcrafted. I would argue therefore that filigree was always deemed a collectible and due to its fragility and the laborious skill required and was likely only used for display or special occasion, thus elevating it in the eyes of whichever society it belonged to. Using this information, the potential disparity between the collector (or owner) and the maker (the social standing of the Maltese nineteenth century silversmith already discussed in the previous chapter) can be made.

Conclusion

From the filigree work in this collection of buttons, I have reached the conclusion that these were probably purchased by Olof Gollcher either as an investment or for their subjective aesthetic value or the appreciation of the craftsmanship. It is unlikely that he wore them himself due to a different trend in twentieth-century men's clothing in Malta. The documented use of conical shaped silver filigree buttons are part of traditional Maltese 'peasant' costume, which in nineteenth- and twentieth-century

[322] Kraus, 'Social Class as Culture'.

Malta would have been associated with men occupying the lower rankings of society. The intricacy of the filigree work and the metal being silver likely points to objects that were used on special occasions by members of the lower echelons of society. Due to the improved prosperity brought on by the silversmith's guild it is likely that during the nineteenth century the value of such objects increased and therefore were later associated with a high rung on the societal ladder. The inclusion of these buttons in the collection and later in the museum display points to a perception of increased value of these buttons that was recognised initially by high ranking members of twentieth-century Maltese society such as Gollcher and also their place as part of a collection that remains to today demonstrates the value associated with the metalwork itself. It becomes evident that such appreciation of workmanship is latterly a reflection of a more refined and cultured background, if one takes on board Marxist theory, particularly Bourdieu's contribution.

From the social analysis performed I would conclude that filigree metalwork in these buttons can be used to distinguish between the different societal classes as perceived at the time and on reflection today. The buttons being filigree minimises the discussion of buttons being used by anybody. Because of the material and work involved, filigree buttons are only used by a certain class as described above, but not by economically poor people. In terms of aristocracy in nineteenth-century Malta I would argue that silver filigree buttons were reflective of working and lower middle-class societal members as being under British rule meant that the upper middle classes and aristocracy aligned themselves with a British code of dress. This is opposite to my conclusion for the gold filigree earrings worn by women. In the following concluding chapter of this dissertation I will bring together the various

analyses of the different case studies chosen to further demonstrate how the study of filigree metalwork can be used to differentiate social classes in different societies.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to examine different filigree objects to gain an understanding of their social life and their reflections in different societies. Various arguments were made as the objects were evaluated through a multifaceted approach. The degree to which individuals in any given society influence or govern key decision-making processes is also given due consideration. A degree of blurring of lines and overlaps between groups is to be expected and accepted as a limitation. This is in keeping with class differentiation or social stratification as it is commonly referred to, which is by no means an exact science. Societal 'elites' are that minority in a society who through wealth and / or power occupy privileged positions and therefore hold the capacity to control resources and exert influence.[323] This in turn is because the degree of subjectivity and the multiple forces at play do not allow this to be dichotomously separated into groups. Furthermore, as indicated by Marx, societies are extremely dynamic and constantly evolve due to the nature of economic forces. Other forces exert influence too, as the definitions of societies and the ranks of their members are not solely limited to Marxist theories and economics.

The four case studies each presented various opportunities to allow for a multi-faceted approach to the examination of filigree art work for purposes of elucidation of social standing in the different societies they transgressed. As a brief summary, the silver filigree zarfs demonstrated the journey from raw material through silversmithing and ultimately to consumer and collector, showing that the metal as it gained complexity and aesthetic value rose in rank as it made the jump from

---

[323] Pierre Naville. "Technical Elites and Social Elites." *Sociology of Education*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1963, pp. 27–29.

workshop to the upper middle class. The intricacy of its workmanship is ultimately what determined its final position in society, its raw material limiting its further rise. The filigree in the Ethiopian crown showed that while the raw material contributed to its value, its mining and manufacture kept the labourers in lower societal echelons, while it rose in rank with complexity and ultimately with its end consumer wearer. The final workmanship and its makers made entries into the higher societal ranks later as the degree of workmanship detail became more coveted. The Maltese earrings and silver buttons (due to the importation of raw material and their associated cost) saw entry into higher societal rankings at the same time as the makers, buyers and collectors being able to both appreciate and value, workmanship and cost. The raw material cost in both silver and gold would make it accessible to those referred to as peasants, and also those who were richer. Their use on special occasions as in peasant costume demonstrates an appreciation for the value of the workmanship.

Hence, filigree in this thesis has been studied in different societies and through different gender roles. This allows for the establishment of a relative (as opposed to absolute) degree of class differentiation, in the hope of establishing a framework on which to build. After completing this research, I would now argue that filigree is the ideal artistic metalwork technique to observe and differentiate social standings. I make this distinction from other jewellery forms because very often the value of jewellery lies mainly in its raw materials, gem stones and metal and in its sentimental associations. While the raw material in filigree does point to wealth status (like with other jewellery), the relative aesthetic success of ‘real’ (i.e. handmade) filigree is dependent on both the design and its manifestation through exquisite labour-intensive manual skill. This brings me to my own stratification of social

standings. Alongside wealth, education and to some extent culture, the time to learn and appreciate the financial value, craftsmanship and artistic inspiration in such objects is what I now think is the key determining factor in assigning or differentiating social standing. Financial freedom is an enabling factor to observe and indulge this interest or to become an end consumer. However, this holds less true today than it did before the ease of availability of digital information, allowing people to pursue interests more freely. I postulate that a society's members can be classified according to their interest and appreciation in the talent, effort, skill and beauty encountered in different forms of art or entertainment, be it paintings, sculpture, jewellery or literature, among others.

My classification is divided broadly into four categories: those who have the interest to appreciate the aesthetic and workmanship as well as the means, followed by those who have the appreciation, but not the means, those who have neither means nor appreciation and in the lowest ring those who have the means but not the appreciation. In so doing I build my classification on the following assumptions. In most Western societies today, a state-provided education (with prescribed uniform subject syllabi) and the ready availability of information puts individuals on a more or less even starting point with regards to opportunity to explore or to develop such interests. Of course, exposure, opportunity and the 'nurture versus nature' argument still hold. Made in gold or silver, and sometimes cheaper materials, filigree and indeed many other art forms, can be financially available to almost all who exhibit an interest. In the upper echelon, and therefore the most 'elite', in Naville's parlance, I place those individuals who can appreciate the human cost associated with the object's journey from raw material to finished product and appreciate the aesthetics

of the design and the craftsmanship associated with the execution of the beautiful finished item. This group I then further sub-classify by those who have the means to also be the consumers of such art (upper most) and those who do not (second upper). Those who have the financial means and the benefit of time on their hands but do not exhibit such interest fall into the category below, while those what have neither the means nor the interest fall into the lowest category. Of course, there are many limitations and exceptions to what seemingly appears a simplistic categorisation at *prima facie,* and this only applies to societies where such information is readily available should it be sought. This classification really is an elaboration of Bourdieu's and Baxandall's stances in the studies of art and sociology.

In the course of the research I made an interesting observation of the trend overriding the relationship between and financial means and class status. Acceptance, occupation or recognition into a higher ranking societal class often lagged behind the acquisition of said wealth. This was mainly observed through the exchange of the finished object. Hence, I noticed that upward societal progression often lagged behind financial progression, usually by a few years if not a generation. This I surmised is because often the display of newly acquired wealth was (and remains) regarded as ostentatious and therefore acts as a barrier to entry protecting the exclusivity afforded to those occupying society's upper echelons. However, this is usually a subconscious element in the minds of those who strive to associate with those perceived to be 'superior' by making such displays. From my observations (especially in Maltese dress and adornment), the intended end-point is generally not necessarily to achieve acceptance by those in upper echelons but rather to impress or to try and set themselves aside from those in their peer circles or societal ranks.

This is I think intrinsic to sociology at many levels in different art disciplines. This would explain why I placed those with the financial means but lack of interest in the second lowest rung. This is because they usually exhibit signs of wealth, easy recognition (such as a big diamond, or a lot of gold, or a recognised brand name) and conformity rather than an appreciation for individual beauty. This could also be explained in part through the effort associated with the work involved in acquiring such wealth. By this I mean that to improve one's financial means often involves the sacrifice of time to earn the money which would possibly come at the expense of time to pursue such interests. Then once the newly acquired wealth is established and stable, such interests could be nurtured. Hence this time lag between wealth acquisition and social positioning. This would explain why one off and ornate pieces (such as the Ethiopian crown) were and remain more likely to be found belonging to or commissioned by upper classes. Another limitation to this classification is the recognition and appreciation of the increasing trend of mass production versus handmade filigree, because this classification also takes into account the object from its inception and not just the end point. This will be another significant factor in the use of filigree to enable such a classification. Of course, it would be amiss to fail to acknowledge my own inherent bias during the undertaking of this research and the writing of this thesis. I am a manually skilled and educated professional (a plastic surgeon) who has found the means and time to explore this subject that I find so fascinating. Today the ownership of filigree that is handmade or that which is mass produced or made of 'costume jewellery' is a differentiating factor in establishing the wealth status, consumer behaviour of 'fast fashion' or the avid collector.

These four case studies provide an insight into some of the societies filigree formed a part of, but is of course in no way comprehensive and this research cannot be used to extrapolate the arguments made and conclusions reached to filigree practices and objects globally. Asian filigree, of which Portugal, China, Indonesia and India had vast collections have not been included. Additional such studies and that of South American filigree would allow for a more comprehensive and far reaching overview of what filigree can reveal at societal levels.

I would conclude that filigree, due to its raw material and the workmanship involved is a useful tool to observe social standing, and even to classify or stratify members within the society they occupy. To make such observations in past times, namely in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (as observed in this thesis), the metalwork technique would require observation and recognition of the symbols and patterns used to place an item in the country where it originated and then to follow it through to its final position of ownership and / or display. The metal used provides information about the relative wealth of the individual who acquired it. Its provenance and mode of acquisition yields information as to the perceived value of the filigree object by its previous owners. Its wearing or display (or lack of this) is another differentiating factor. Making these observations allows for the determination of an individual's social standing within society in one of four broad rungs on the social ladder: those who appreciate the aesthetics, craftsmanship and have the means to be consumers, those who have the appreciation but not the means, those who have the means but lack the appreciation and those who lack both.

ILLUSTRATIONS

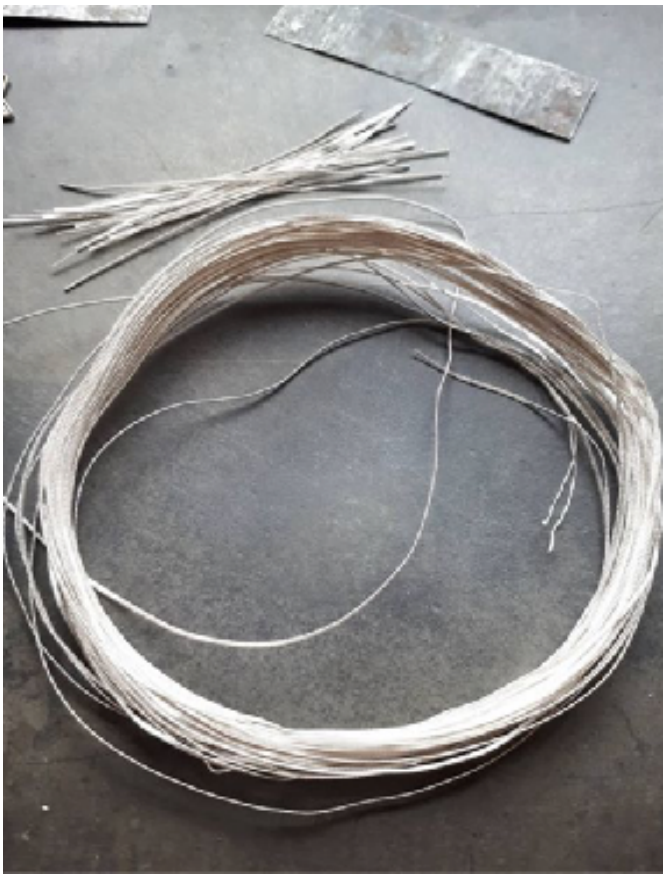

Figure 1.1: Silver wire before it is twisted to make filigree (kindly provided by Charmaine Gerada, a Maltese filigree worker)

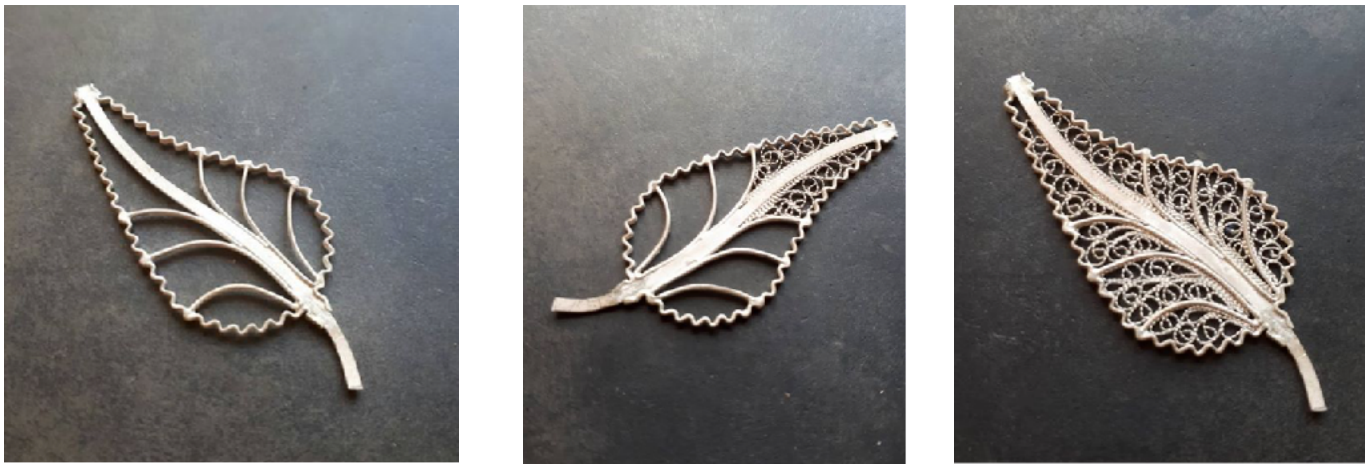

Figure 1.2. An example of the creation of a filigree motif (a leaf). A: The outer framework of the leaf is made from thicker wire. B: A thinner skeleton is used on the inside. C: This is then filled with coils or finely twisted wire (kindly provided by Charmaine Gerada)

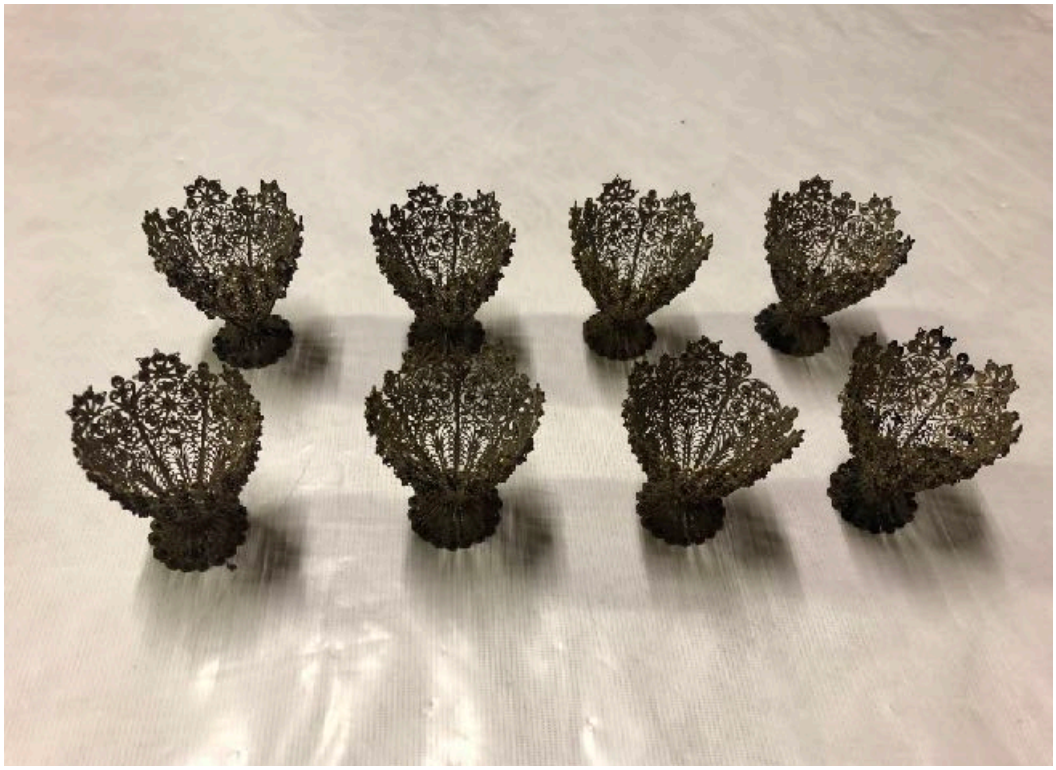

Figure *2.1: A collection of eight silver zarfs at Chatsworth House, UK. (Author's photos, photographed in the Chatsworth House collection)*

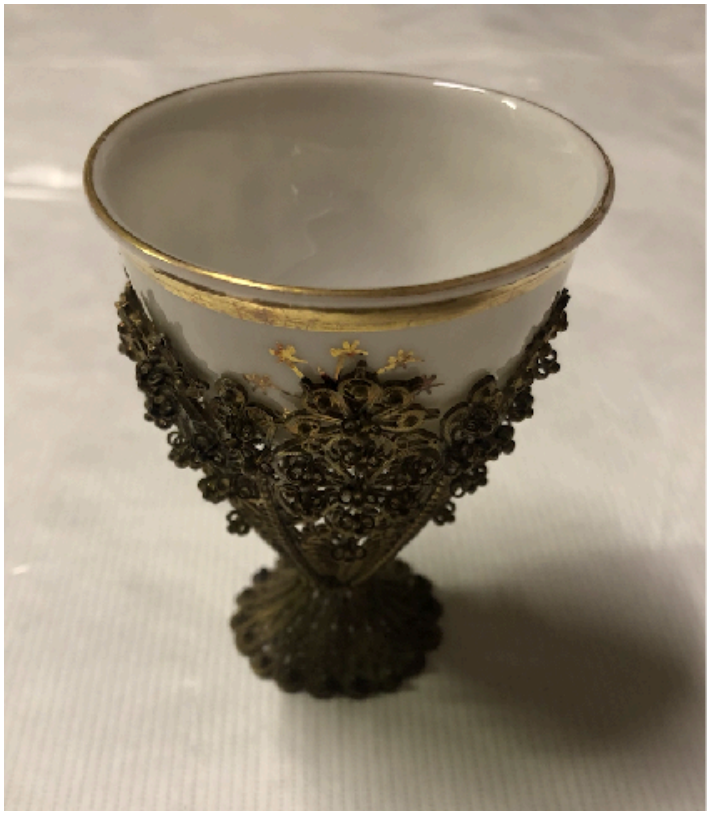

Figure 2.2: A silver filigree zarf with its porcelain fincan. (Author's photos, photographed in the Chatsworth House collection)

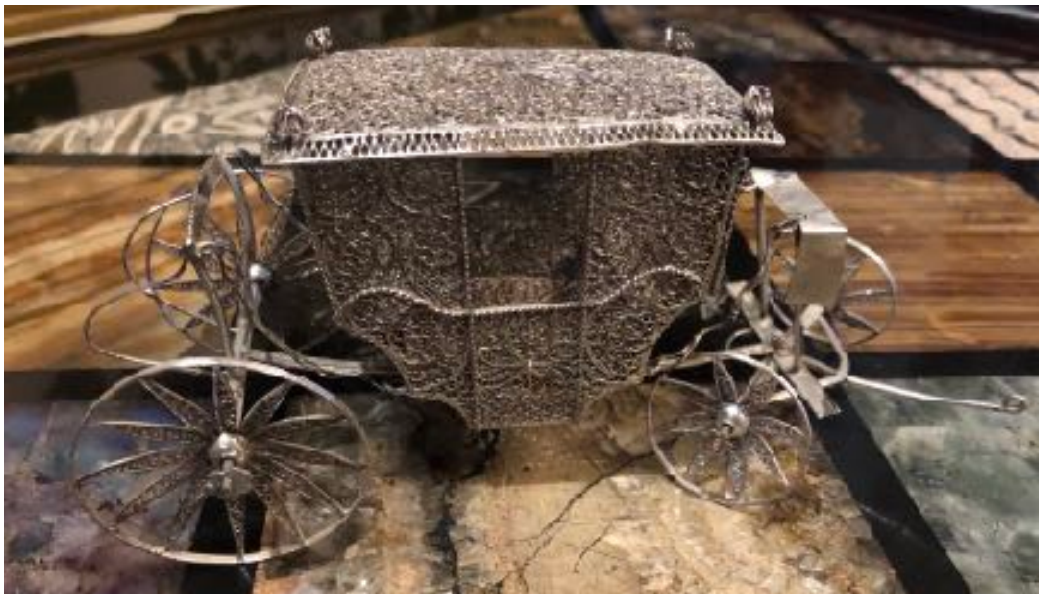

Figure 2.3: A silver filigree carriage found in the filigree collection in the permanent exhibition at Chatsworth House (Author's photos, photographed in the Chatsworth House collection)

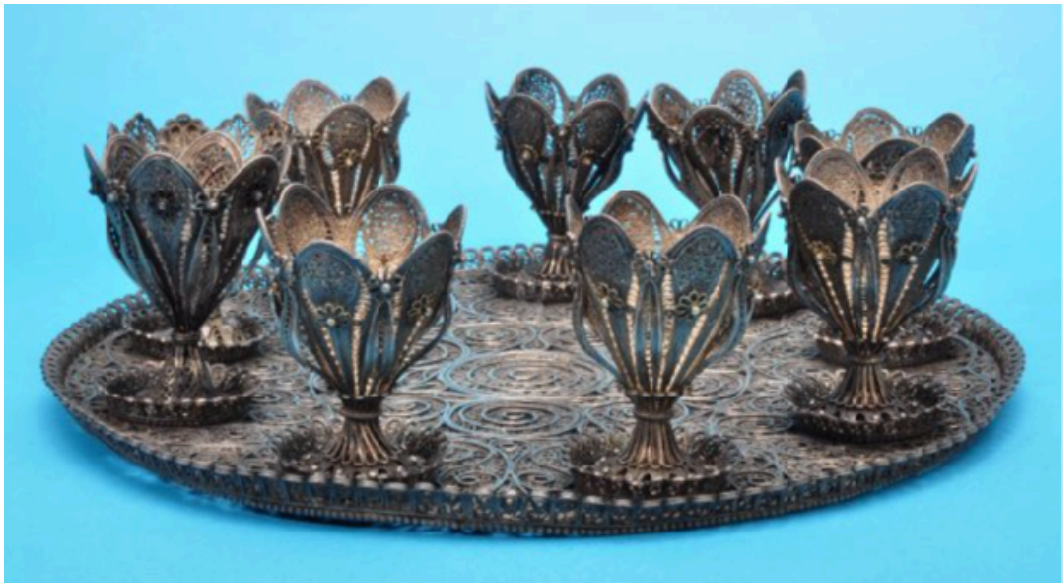

Figure 2.4: A collection of silver filigree zarfs, attributed to nineteenth with its accompanying tray. Museo della filigrana, Campo Ligure, Italy. Museo deal filigrana, online archives: http://www.museofiligrana.org/it/album/asia

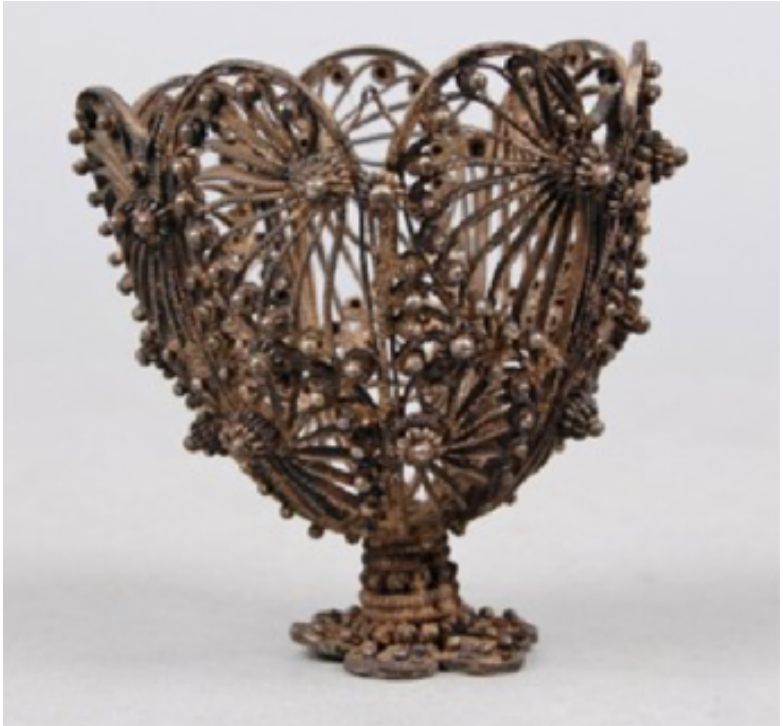

Figure 2.5: A single silver filigree zarf, attributed to nineteenth century Syria, The British Museum online database, accessed online: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_2012-6017-5

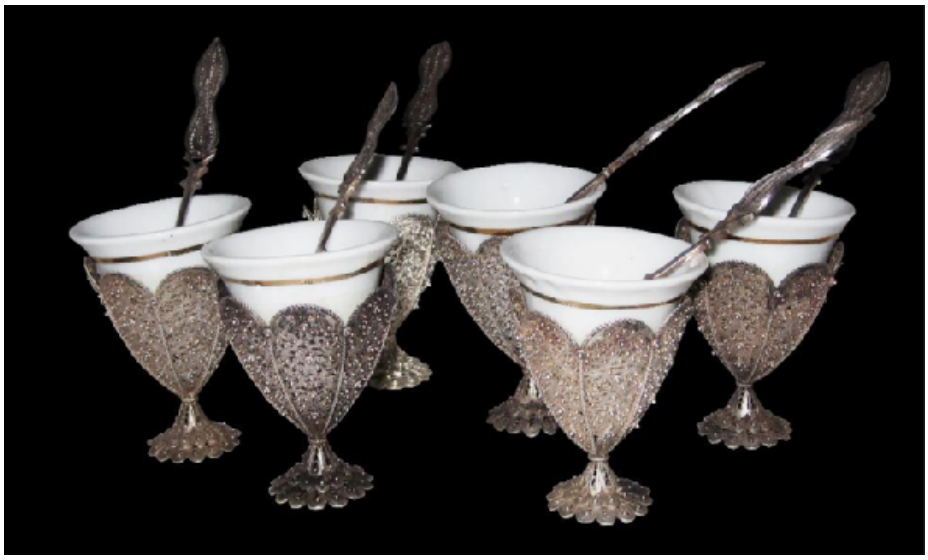

Figure 2.6: A set of six silver filigree zarfs with matching spoons encountered on an online auction site. Accessed online: https://www.michaelbackmanltd.com/archived_objects/filigree-silver-zarfs-turkey-ottoman/

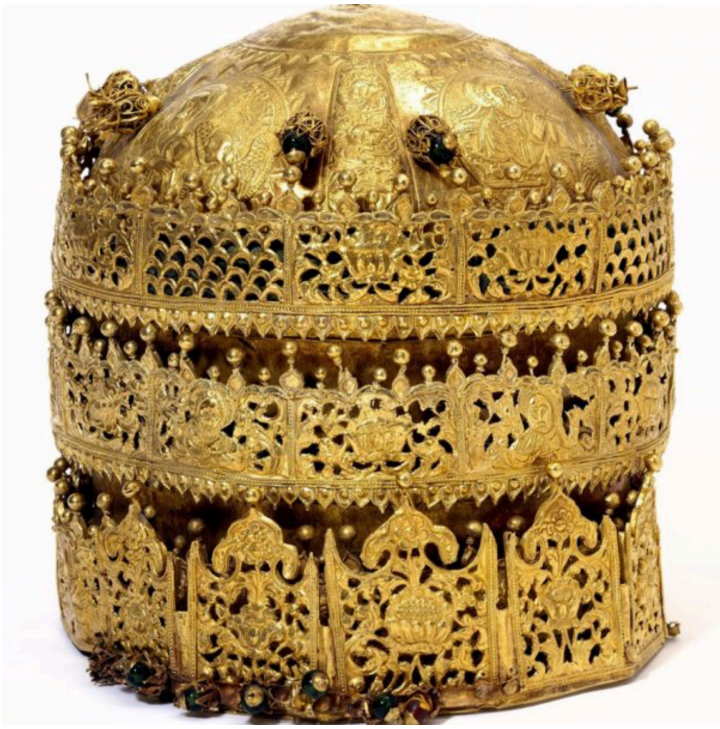

Figure 3.1: The Ethiopian Ethiopian Crown of Maqdala, housed at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK. Accessed online : https://collections.-vam.ac.uk/item/O108443/crown-unknown/

Figure 3.2: The gold filigree detail of the one of the eight glass bead encasings on the Ethiopian crown of Maqdala. Detail from Figure 3.1

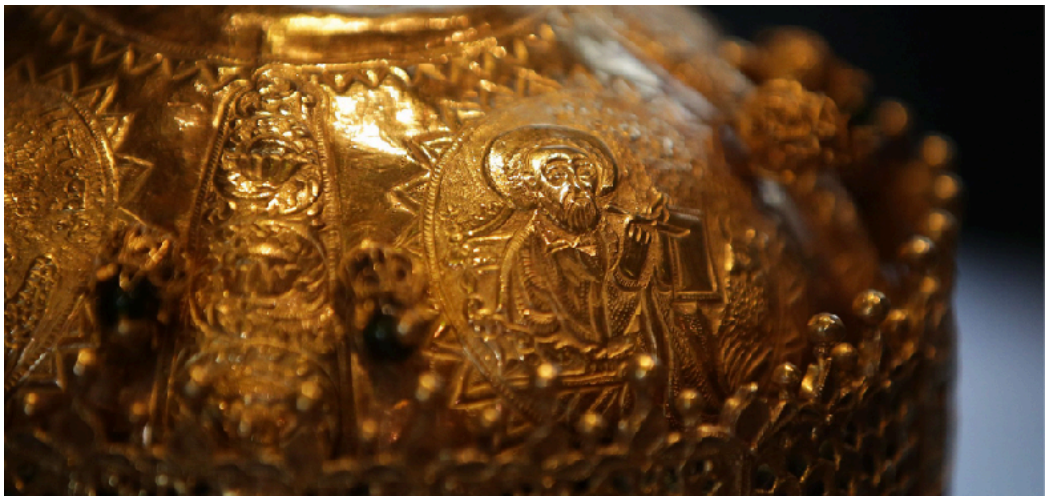

Figure 3.3: One of the four evangelists, most likely to be Saint Mark on the domed aspect on the Ethiopian Crown Crown of Maqdala. Accessed online, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/07/why-britain-wont-return-ethiopias-sacred-treasures/593281/

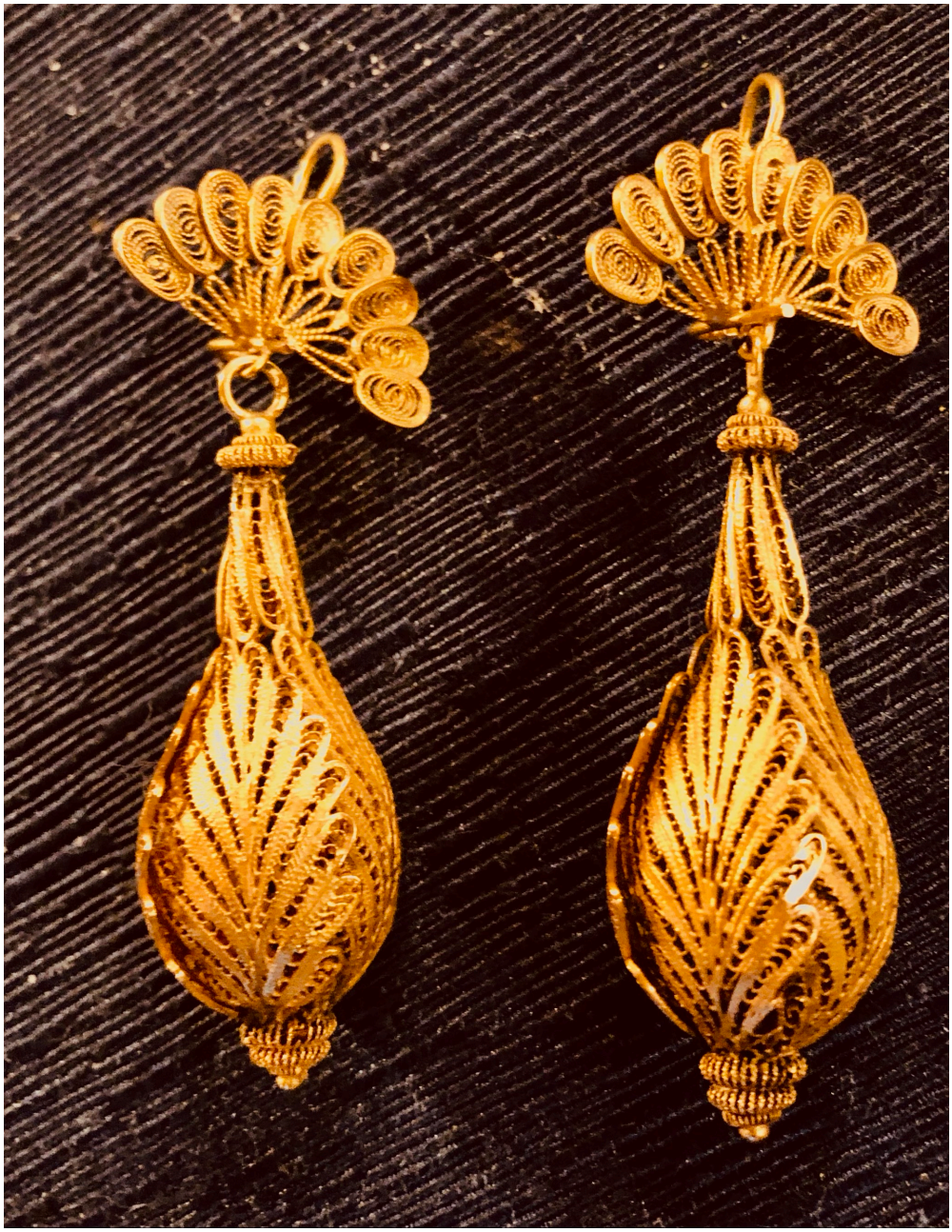

Figure 4.1: A pair of gold filigree earrings consisting of two components - a upper fan and a lower bobbin - joined by two circular gold wires (Author's photo taken directly from the private collection, with permission)

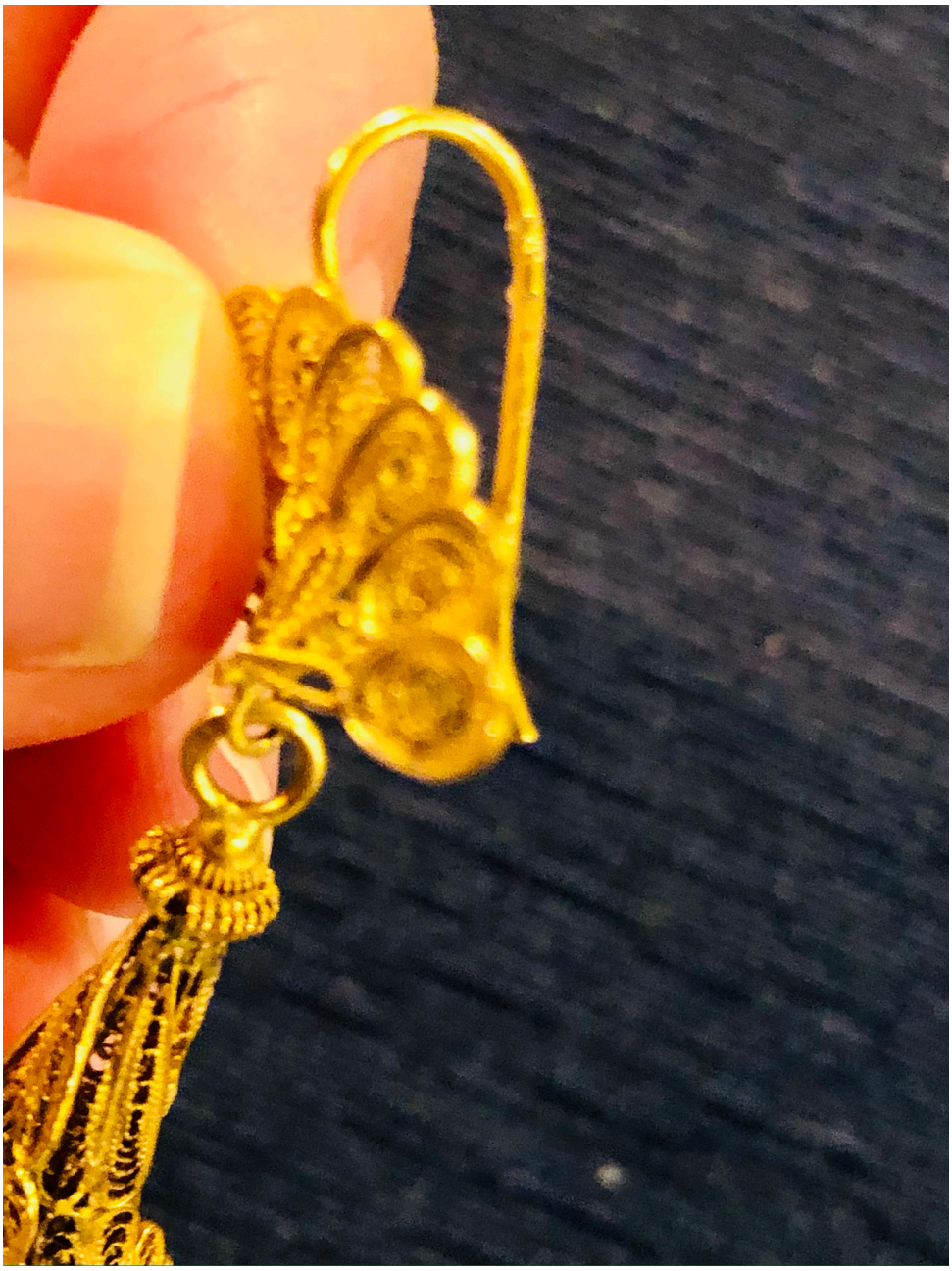

Figure 4.2: The remnant of the maker's make which is no longer discernible due to wear (Author's photo taken directly from the private collection)

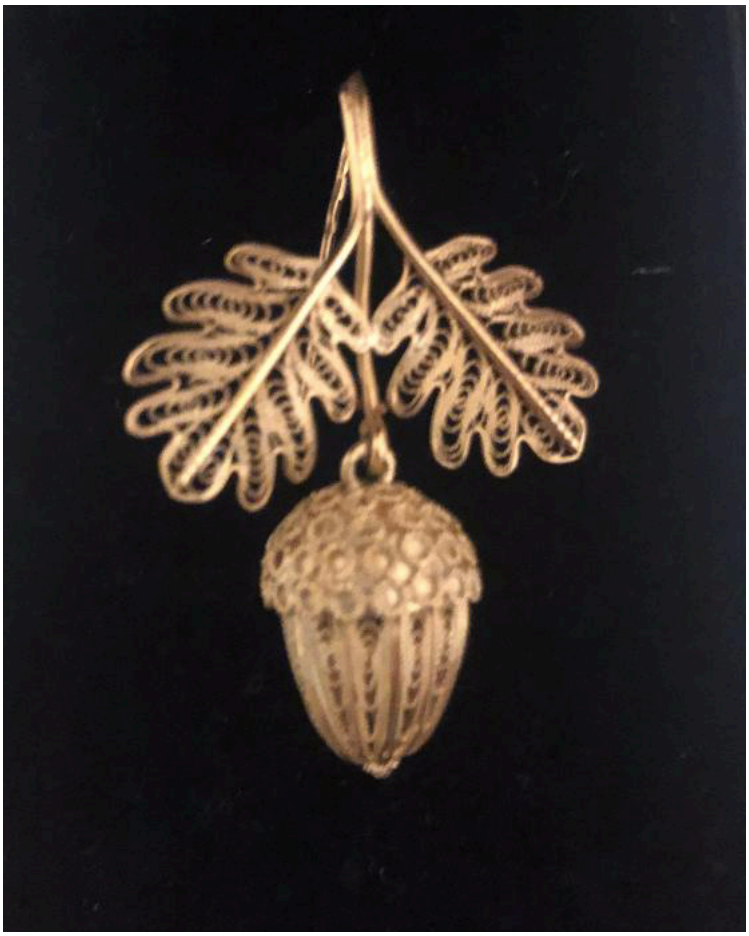

Figure 4.3: One of a pair of Maltese gold filigree acorn earrings, attributed to the nineteenth century. (Author's photo taken directly from a Maltese private collection, with permission)

Figure 4.4: The portrait of a Caterina Ribotti, noble nineteenth-century Maltese noble woman, Carmelite Priory Collection, 70 x 58.4cm. Reproduced from Balzan: Vanity, Profanity and Worship, p 80.

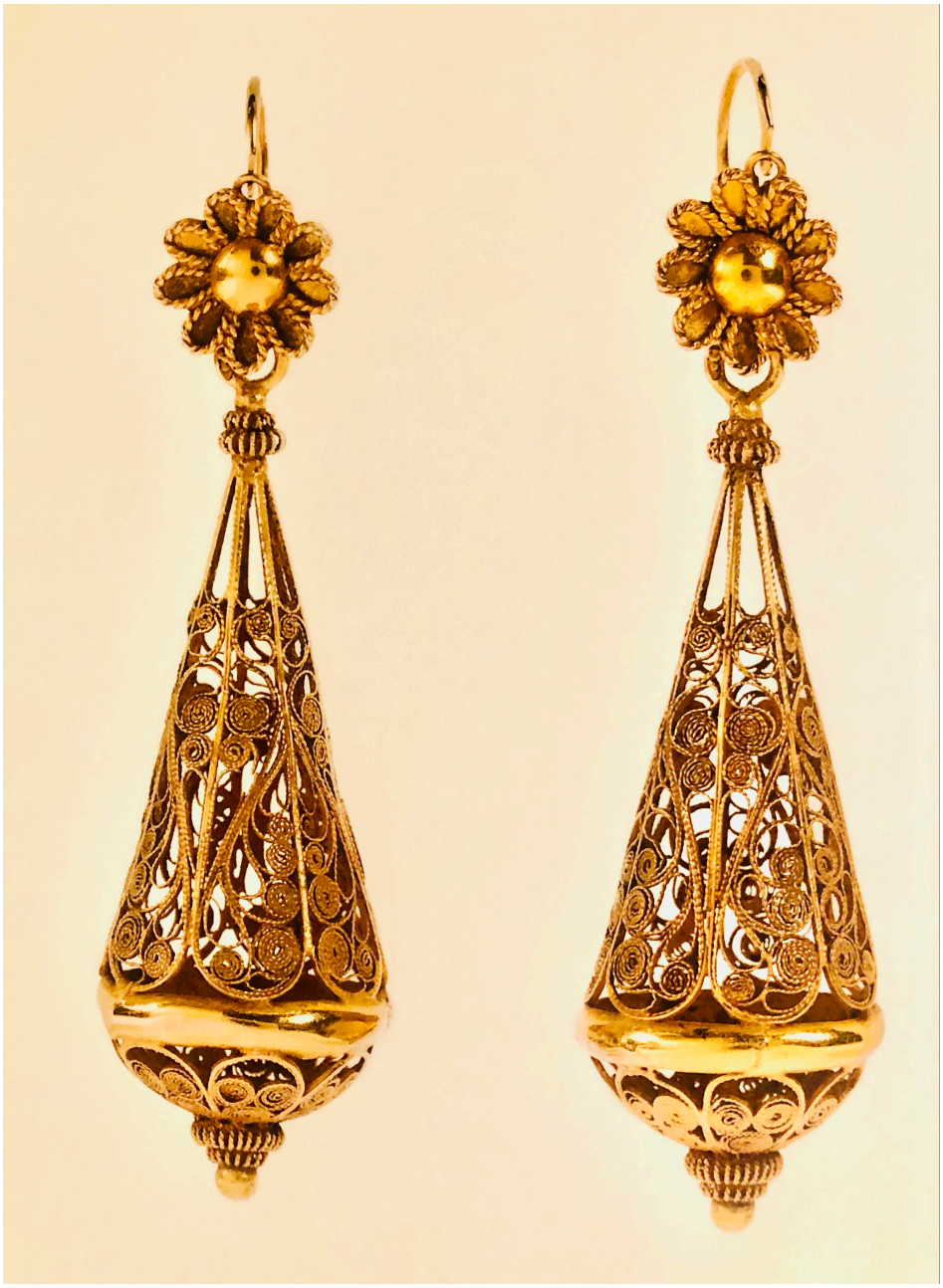

Figure 4.5: Gold filigree 'combini' type earrings, Private collection in Malta, very similar to the those seen in the portrait in Figure 4.5. Reproduced from Balzan: Vanity, Profanity and Worship, p80.

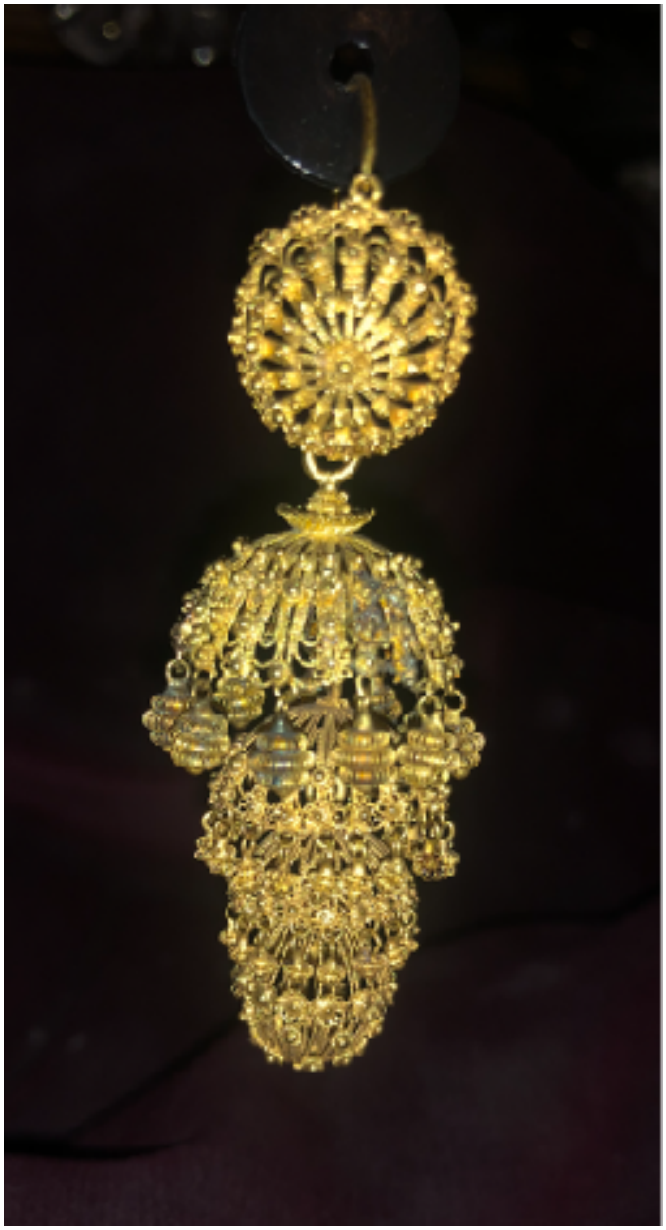

Figure 4.6: One of a pair of gold filigree and cannettille earrings donated by the Bishop of Gozo (Malta's sister island) to Nicolina de Piro after her husband donated land to build the famous Ta'Pinu Church in Gozo, demonstrating the use of filigree jewellery as between secular and non-secular relationships. (Author's photo taken at Casa Rocca Piccola, with permission)

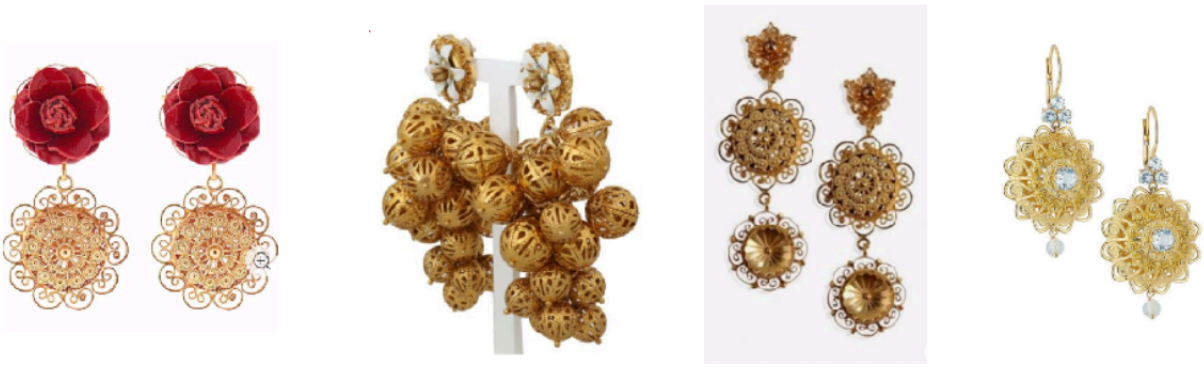

Figure 4.7: Some examples of 2021 filigree costume jewellery from Dolce e Gabbana (accessed online).

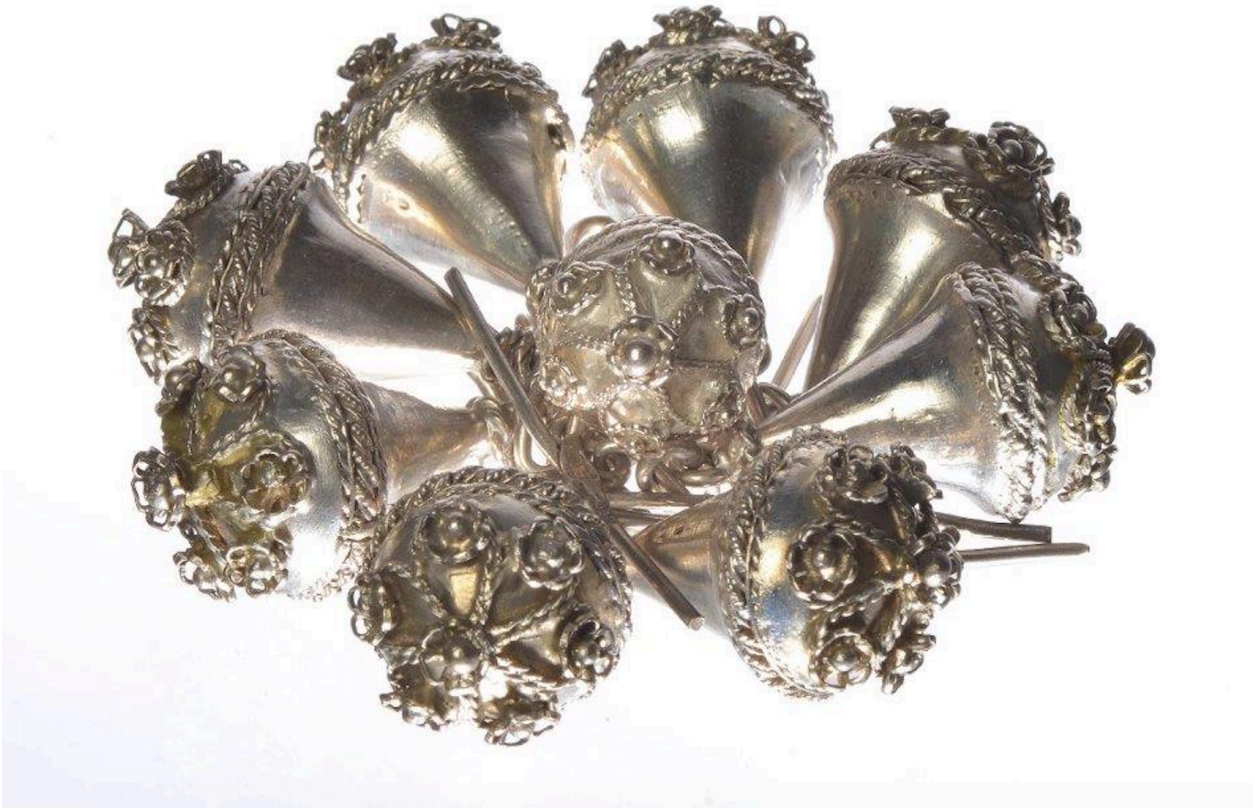

Figure 5.1: A collection of nine silver filigree toggle buttons. Photograph provided (with thanks) to the curator at Palazzo Falson Historic House Museum, Malta.

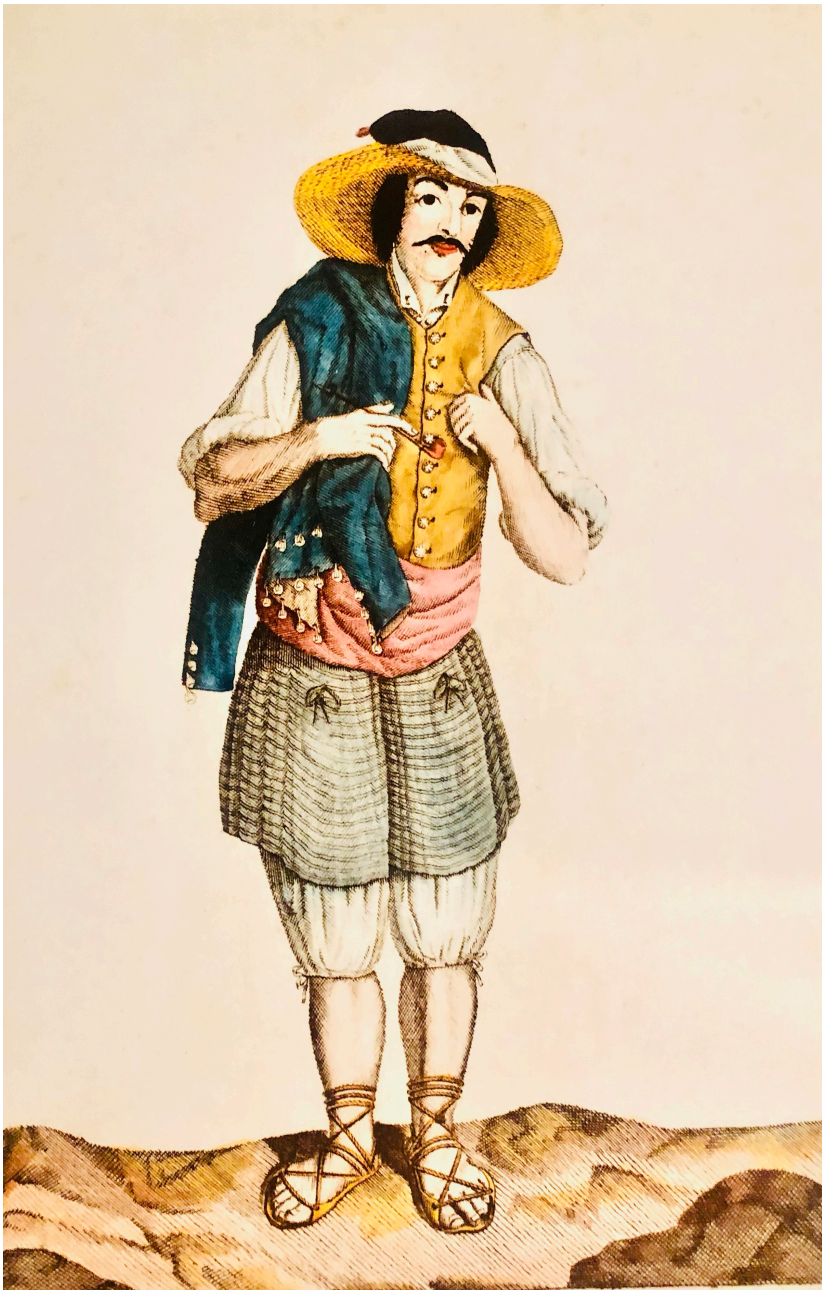

Figure 5.2: Francesca Zimelli, Habillement ancient du Paysan Maltois, print, national Library of Malta, Valletta, Malta. Reproduced from Balzan. Vanity, Profanity and Worship, p 64.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Unpublished

Archives

British Museum, online database:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_2012-6017-5

Diary of the 6th Duke of Devonshire, 16 January 1839. Devonshire Manuscripts. The Devonshire Collection Archives. GB 2495 DF4.

https://www.chatsworth.org/media/12449/df4_rev_201902.pdf

Museo della Filigrana; online archives: http://www.museofiligrana.org/it/album/asia

Victoria and Albert Museum, online database:

https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O108443/crown-unknown/

Dissertations

Azzopardi, Marika. '19th Century Malta Filigree Jewellery', BA dissertation, University of Malta, 2009, https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/80639

Briceno, Ximena Natanya. 'Filigree: a migrant metal practice, PhD dissertation, Australian National University, 2011, https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/150321?mode=full

Ceylan, Pinar, 'Essays on markets, prices, and consumption in the Ottoman Empire (late-seventeenth to mid-nineteenth centuries)', PhD dissertation, London School of Economics, 2016, http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/3507/1/Ceylan_Essays_on_prices.pdf

Ervin, Marita. ‘Coffee and the Ottoman Social Sphere’, Student Research and Creative Works History Thesis, University of Puget Sound, 2014, https://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=history_theses

Hinks, Stephen. ‘A Structural and Functional Analysis of Eighteenth Century Buttons’, MA dissertation, College of William & Mary, 1988, https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-p512-7653

Pinckernelle, Kathia. *The iconography of ancient Greek and Roman jewellery,* MPhil(R) dissertation, University of Glasgow, 2007.

Tokman, Asli. ‘Negotiating tradition, modernity and identity in consumer space: a study of a shopping mall and revived coffeehouse’, MSc dissertation, Bilkent University, Ankara, 2001, http://repository.bilkent.edu.tr/bitstream/handle/11693/14808/0001820.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Tonna, Caroline. ‘Leandro Preziosi : portrait photographer and the art of dress in the second half of nineteenth century Malta’, MA dissertation, University of Malta, 2017.

Tosun, Mehtap. ‘Dissolution of Crafts in the Context of Ethnicity, Gender and Class: Gold and Silver Silversmithing in Mardin and Trabzon, Turkey’, PhD thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2018, https://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12622357/index.pdf

Published

Abazov, Rafis. *Culture and Customs of Turkey* (Greenwood Press, 2009).

Appadurai*, Arjun. The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*,* 1986).

Balfe, Judith Huggins. *Paying the Piper: Causes and Consequences of Art Patronage* (Urbana, Ill. : University of Illinois Press, 1993).

Balzan, Francesca. *Jewellery in Malta Treasures from the Island of the Knights (1530-1798)* (Malta: Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti, 2004).

Balzan, Francesca. *Vanity, Profanity and Worship*: *Jewellery from the Maltese Islands* (Malta: Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti, 2013).

Balzan, Francesca; Galea, Michelle. *Palazzo Falson - Historic House Museum*. (Midsea Books: 2007).

Baxandall, Michael. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy : A Primer in The Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Bennett, David and Daniela Mascetti. *Understanding Jewellery* (Suffolk; Antique Collectors' Club, 1989; 3rd edition, 2007).

Bongera Elisabetta, Bottero Riccardo. *La Filigrana. L'Arte di Lavorare il Filo* (Genoa: Sagep Editori, 2013).

Bourdieu, Pierre. 'What makes a Social Class?' *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 32 (1987), pp. 1-17.

Brandow-Fuller, Megan. *Childhood by Design, Toys and the Material Culture of Childhood, 1700-present* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018).

Brus, René. 'Ethiopian Crowns', *African Arts*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Summer, 1975), pp. 8-13+84.

Burney, Shehla. 'CHAPTER ONE: Orientalism: The Making of the Other.' *Counter-points* Vol 417 (2012): pp. 23–39.

Carvalho, Joachim. *Religion and Power in Europe: Conflict and Convergence* (Italy: Edizioni Plus, 2007).

Colomban Philippe, Tournie Aurelie, Bellot-Gurlet Ludovic. 'Raman identification of glassy silicates used in ceramics, glass and jewellery: a tentative differentiation guide', *Journal of Raman Spectrocopy*. Vol 37 (8) (2006), pp. 841-852.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. 'Why We Need Things,' in Steve Lubar and W. David Kingery (eds), *History of Things, Essays on Material Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1993), pp. 20–29.

D'Eusanio, Manuela; Serreli, Monica ; Petti, Luigia, 'Social Life-Cycle Assessment of a Piece of Jewellery. Emphasis on the Local Community', *Resources* (2019), Vol. 8 (4), 158, pp. 1-14.

de Piro, Nicholas. *The Quality of Malta: Fashion and Taste in Private Collections* (Malta: AVC, 2003).

Denaro, Victor. 'The Mint of Malta', *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society*, vol. 15, (45), (1955), pp. 173–87.

Denaro, Victor F., 'The Canongate, Edinburgh and Maltese Silver', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* (1969-1970), pp. 237-40.

Denaro, Victor. *Goldsmiths of Malta and their Marks* (Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki,: 1972).

Dressler, William; and Michael Robbins. 'Art Styles, Social Stratification and Cognition: An Analysis of Greek Vase painting', *American Ethnology*, Vol. 2 (3) (1975), pp. 427-434.

Eichhorn-Johanssen, Marel; Rasche, Adelheid. *25,000 years of Jewelry: From the Collections of the Staatliche Museen Zu Berlin* (Berlin: Getty Publications, 2013).

Evren, Burçak. *Old Istanbul coffee houses* [Eski İstanbul Kahvehaneleri] (Doğan Book Publishing, İstanbul, 1997).

Falke, Jacob. 'Filigree', *The Workshop*, vol. 7 no. 10 (1874), pp. 145-7.

Finneran, Niall. 'Ethiopian evil eye belief and the magical symbolism of iron working', *Folklore* (2003), Vol. 114 (3), pp. 427-432.

Fischer, J.L. 'Art styles are cultural cognitive maps', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 63 (1) (1961), pp. 79-93.

Gnisci, Jacopo. 'The Looted Ethiopian Artefacts That Ended up in UK Museums', *Apollo Magazine*, 30 May 2018, https://www.apollo-magazine.com/the-looted-ethiopian-artefacts-that-ended-up-in-uk-museums/

Goffman, Erving. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York: Harper Collins, 1974).

Goffman, Erving. *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972);

Gross, Larry. 'Art History as Ethnography and as Social Analysis: A Review Essay', *Studies in The Anthropology of Visual Communication* (1974), vol. 1, pp. 51-56 (1974), vol. 1 (1), 51-56, https://repository.upenn.edu/svc/vol1/iss1/8

Harris, Marvin. *Culture, Man and Nature: An Introduction to General Anthropology* (New York; Thomas Y Crowell, 1971).

Inalcik, Halil, Quataert, Donald, Faroqhi Suraiya*, An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Jones, Alexandra. 'Ethiopian Objects at The Victoria and Albert Museum', *African Research & Documentation* No. 135 (2019), pp. 8-24, https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/323055245.pdf

Kavolis Vytautas, 'Artistic preferences of Urban Social Classes', *The Pacific Sociolgical Review*, vol. 8 (1) (1965), pp. 43-51.

Kaz, G.F., N. Öztürk, G. Demiray, Turan G. Tufan Ö, N.E. Noyan, A.Ö. Demirli, G. Birincioğlu, C. Aydın, E. Bilirgen, A.Z. Turan, *From the bean to the cup: a cup of coffee in the palace for all time [Tüm Zamanların Hatırına Sarayda Bir Fincan Kahve]* (Istanbul: edited by Grand National Assembly of Turkey Head of the National Palaces, 2011).

Kraus, Michael W ; Piff, Paul K ; Keltner, Dacher, 'Social Class as Culture: The Convergence of Resources and Rank in the Social Realm', *Current directions in psychological science : a journal of the American Psychological Society* (2011), Vol. 20 (4), pp. 246-250.

Kusoglu, Mehmet Zeki, *Silver in Turkish Art (the Ottoman Period)*, (Turkey: Blue Dome Press, 2015).

MacKenzie, John. *Orientalism: History, theory and the Arts*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

Miller, Daniel. *A Theory of Shopping* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

Munro, Thomas. *Evolution in the Arts and other Theories of Culture History* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Cleveland Museum of Art (distributed by Harry M. Abrams, Inc.), 1963).

Naville, Pierre. 'Technical Elites and Social Elites.' *Sociology of Education*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1963, pp. 27–29.

Newman, Andrew J (ed.) *Society and Culture in the Early Modern Middle East: Studies on Iran in the Safavid Period* (Brill: 2003).

Novati, Giampaolo Calchi. Re-Establishing Italo-Ethiopian Relations after the War: Old Prejudices and New Policies." *Northeast African Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1996, pp. 27–49.

Oakley, Peter. 'Is Gold jewellery money?', *Social Analysis* (2017), Vol. 61 (4), pp. 17-30.

Ogden, Jack. *Jewellery*, (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1989).

Pankhurst, Richard. 'Ethiopia, the Aksum Obelisk, and the Return of Africa's Cultural Heritage', *African Affairs*, vol. 98, no. 391 (1999), pp. 229–239.

Pankhurst, Richard. 'Indian Reactions to The Anglo-Indian Expedition Against Emperor Téwodros of Ethiopia: The 'Magdala Campaign' of 1867-8', *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente*, Vol. 36, No. 3/4, (1981), pp. 390-418.

Pankhurst, Richard. 'Maqdala and its loot', Afromet, http://www.afromet.info/history/l

Pankhurst, Richard. 'The Trade of Northern Ethiopia in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1964), pp. 49–159.

Perry, Jane. *A Collector's Guide to Peasant Silver Buttons* (London: Lulu Enterprises, 2007).

Perry, Jane. *Traditional Jewellery in Nineteenth Century Europe* (London: V&A Publishing, 2013).

Randolph, Adrian W.B. 'Gendering the Period Eye: Deschi Da Parto and Renaissance Visual Culture', *Art History* (September 2004), vol. 27 (4), pp. 538-562.

Roberts, Jane. *Royal Treasures: A Golden Jubilee Celebration*. (London: Royal Collection Enterprises Limited, 2002).

Roberts, Mary. *Intimate Outsiders: The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and-Travel Literature* (Duke University Press, 2008).

Robinson, John Martin (ed.), *The Sixth Duke of Devonshire's Handbook of Chatsworth* (Chatsworth House Trust distributed by Heywood Hill, London, 2020).

Sayers, William. *Art, Economics and Politics of Modern Turkey, An Example of Traditional Handicrafts in Midyat: Production of Filigree*, (London and Istanbul: AGP Research, 2017).

Shukla, Pravina. 'The Study of Dress and Adornment as Social Positioning', *Material Culture Review* 61 (1). (2005).

Silverman, Raymond A. and Neal W. Sobania, 'Gold and Silver at the Crossroads in Highland Ethiopia', *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2004), pp. 82–109.

Stout, D. B., 'Aesthetics in Primitive Society' in C. F. Jopling (ed.), *Aesthetics in Primitive Societies: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1971), pp. 30-4.

Tajfel, Henri., ed. (2010), *Social identity and intergroup relations*, Vol. 7, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Tanner, Jeremy. 'Michael Baxandall and the Sociological Interpretation of Art', *Cultural Sociology*, vol. 4 (2) (2010), pp. 231-256.

Uglow, Jenny. *The Lunar Men: Five Friends Whose Curiosity Changed the World* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002).

Vintilă-Ghiţulescu, Constanţa (ed.). *Women, Consumption, and the Circulation of Ideas in South-Eastern Europe, 17th - 19th Centuries* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2018).

White, Lynn. 'The Act of Invention: Causes, Contexts, Continuities and Consequences', *Technology and Culture*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Autumn 1962), pp. 486–500 (497f. & 500).

Wilson, David M. *The British Museum: A History* (London: British Museum Press, 2002).

Yarrington, Alison. 'Canova and Thorvaldsen at Chatsworth', in Diana Dethloff (ed.), *Burning Bright: Essays in Honour of David Bindman* (London: UCL Press, 2015), pp. 77–87.

Yılmaz, Birsen; Nilüfer Acar-Tek and Saniye Sozlü. 'Turkish cultural heritage: a cup of coffee', *Journal of Ethnic Foods*, Vol. 4, Issue 4 (December 2017), pp. 213-220.

Yuval-Davis, Nira. (2004), *Borders, boundaries, and the politics of belonging' inEthnicity, Nationalism and Minority Rights.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Zellweger, Christoph. 'Foreign Bodies / Jewellery as Prosthesis', *Design Research Quarterly*, vol. 3, 4 (October 2008), pp. 9-15, https://shura.shu.ac.uk/476/1/fulltext.pdf.

Ljubomir Zivkovic, 'The Structure of Marxist Sociology', *Social Research*, Vol. 34, Issue 3 (1967), pp. 477–506.