

The Orlov-Davydov Nephrite Imperial Presentation portrait snuffbox by Carl Fabergé St. Petersburg. The box was presented on the 26 November 1904 to Count Anatoli Vladimirovich Orlov-Davydov (1837-1905) on his retirement and presented by the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna in the absence of the Emperor at the front.



The Orlov-Davydov Imperial Presentation snuffbox by Carl Fabergé St. Petersburg, 1904. Nephrite, gold, diamonds. Workmaster: Henrik Wigström.

Provenance:

Emperor Nicholas II & Empress Alexandra Feodorovna.
Count Anatoli Vladimirovich Orlov-Davydov.
Wartski, London.
The Duchess of Alba.

Bibliography.

Carl Fabergé - Goldsmith to the Imperial Court of Russia by A. Kenneth Snowman, page 118.
Wartski- The First One hundred and Fifty Years by Geoffrey C. Munn, page 248.

A highly important Imperial presentation snuffbox, the bun shaped nephrite lid and base mounted with a cage work of green gold laurels and red gold beadwork secured with red gold forget-me-not flowers, tied with similarly coloured gold bows and bearing trefoils set with rose diamonds. The lid is emblazoned with a miniature of Emperor Nicholas II wearing the uniform of the Preobrazhensky Guards by the court miniaturist Vasyli Zuiev, in an elaborate diamond frame surmounted with a diamond-set Romanov crown. Jewelled works of art incorporating the sovereign's portrait were the highest form of state gift in Imperial Russia. During the reign of Nicholas II Fabergé only supplied fourteen examples to the Emperor and this box is the most lavish of those that survive. Dia. 8.5cm; H. 6cm.

The box was presented on 26th September 1904 by Empress Alexandra Feodorovna to Lieutenant-General and Grand Master of the Horse, Count Anatoli Vladimirovich Orlov-Davydov. Its value had been upgraded from the original cost of 1275 roubles to 3,000 by the addition of brilliant diamonds. The portrait of the Emperor Nicholas by Zuiev was fitted at a cost of 150 roubles.

At the start of the Russo-Japan War in 1904, Count Orlov-Davydov (1837-1905) gave one million roubles to the Red Cross and another million roubles for building a war ship for the Russian fleet. The Empress Alexandra was devoted to the Russian Red Cross and this box was formal recognition of Count Orlov-Davydov's loyalty and generosity to the charity the family and the crown.

Her Grace Cayetana Fitz-James Stuart, the 18th Duchess of Alba not only inherited her father's 57 titles and his estates in Salamanca, Seville, Ibiza, and San Sebastian, but also an unrivalled art collection. Apart from masterpieces by El Greco, Rubens, Velasquez and Ingres, it also included a portrait of Mary Queen of Scots, with whom the Duchess had kinship by descent from King James II of Scotland. Of all the paintings in the Alba collection, it is those by Francisco Goya that are the most famous. Goya was a close friend of the thirteenth Duchess of Alba and his portraits of her are legendary. Many of these works of art were kept at the Palacio de Liria which, following the damage it suffered during the Spanish Civil war, was restored in the French neo-Classical taste to the earlier designs of Sir Edwin Lutyens. The Duchess added to her family's collection an astounding group of works by Carl Fabergé, the goldsmith to the Imperial Court of Russia. They were kept by the Duchess in green velvet-lined vitrines in the drawing room on the first floor of the Palacio de Liria.

The crowning glory of this collection was the Imperial presentation box given by the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna to Count Anatolii Vladimirovich Orlov-Davydov in 1904.



Anatoli Vladimirovitch Orlov-Davydov

Family Tree Preview



The Russian line of descent of the Anatoli Vladimirovitch Orlov-Davydov(1837 – 1905)

The Simbirsk Governor Count Vladimir Vladimirovich Orlov-Davydov and his twin brother Anatoli were born November 25 1837.

V.V.Orlov-Davydov and his twin A. V. Orlov-Davidov were the great-grandsons of Vladimir Grigorievich Orlov, the youngest of the brothers who enthroned Catherine II. The gratitude of the empress saw the family gain titles and numerous lands in different provinces. In 1767, during a trip along the Volga, Catherine granted the Orlov family land in the Volga region. According to legend, standing on Mount Karaulniy hill, the empress told her favorite Grigory Orlov: “Whatever you look around, everything will be yours!”. That was the beginning of the Usolsky patrimony of the Orlovs in the Samara region. The former Menshikov estate in the Simbirsk Territory - about 300 thousand acres saw the family create a large and prosperous economy, schools, churches, hospitals were built in the villages. After his death a significant part of the estate went to his grandson - Vladimir Petrovich Davydov, the son of the youngest daughter of Vladimir Grigoryevich Natalya and P.L.Davydov - cousin of Denis Davydov. In 1856, he accepted the title of his maternal grandfather and changed the family name to Orlov-Davydov.

In the years 1824-1841 in Simbirsk the Trinity Cathedral was erected - with national money, as "a monument of glory and honor in commemoration of the soldiers who laid down their lives for Faith, Tsar and Fatherland" in the Patriotic War of 1812. Among the names of donors for the construction of the cathedral are Vladimir Grigoryevich Orlov. In 1864, the cathedral suffered a terrible fire, which completely destroyed its interior. Vladimir Petrovich Orlov-Davydov, at his own expense, ordered a new interior and icons for the church.

In front of the dilapidated palace in Usolye are two huge oaks, they were planted in honor of the birth on November 13, 1837 of the sons of V.P. Orlov-Davydov, the twins Anatoli and Vladimir. Both brothers went into the army. V.V.Orlov-Davydov, in 1855 entered the service as a non-commissioned officer of the Cavalier Guards regiment and fought in the Crimean War of 1853-56 On January 25, 1859, together with his brother Anatoli, he was appointed "for special assignments" to the Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasian Army, Prince A.I. Baryatinsky, his mother's uncle. Life in the Caucasus was "fun", but serving as an adjutant to Field Marshal was by no means a sinecure. The brothers were participants in the famous military operation - the assault on the village of Gunib and the capture of Imam Shamil. On September 27, 1860, during the storming of the aul Benoy, V.V. Orlov-Davydov received a heavy bullet wound in the thigh and spent 3 months in the hospital. In 5 years he has gone from the rank of cornet to colonel. In 1866, at the age of 29, Vladimir Vladimirovich was already Major General of His Majesty's Suite, the adjutant of Emperor Alexander II.

On December 6, 1866, V.V.Orlov-Davydov was appointed Simbirsk Governor, and took over the administration of the province on January 11, 1867. His twin brother Anatoli to whom the box was given also became a General and Master of the Horse in the suite of the Emperor Nicholas II and one of the Imperial Family's closest advisors.



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The summer house of Count Orlov in Neskuchny garden in Moscow.

♂ Anatoli Vladimirovitch Orlov-Davydov

comte Orlov-Davydov (2nd)

- Born 13 November 1837 (Monday)
- Deceased 19 December 1905 (Tuesday), aged 68 years old

📁 1 file available

Parents

- Vladimir Petrovitch Orlov-Davydov, comte Orlov-Davydov (1st), born 23 April 1809 (Sunday), deceased 24 April 1882 (Monday) - Saint-Pétersbourg, Russie aged 73 years old
Married 3 June 1832 (Sunday) to
- Olga Ivanovna Bariatinskaja, born 8 April 1814 (Friday), deceased 9 September 1875 (Thursday) aged 61 years old

Spouses, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren

- Married in 1864 to Maria Egorovna Tolstoï, born in 1843, deceased 19 May 1895 (Sunday) aged 52 years old (Parents : ♂ Egor Petrovitch Tolstoï 1802-1874 & ♀ Varvara Petrovna Troubetzkaya †1900) with
 - ♂ Alexei Anatolievitch Orlov-Davydov 1871- *Married in 1900, London, to Thekla Staal von Greiffenklau with*
 - ♂ Sergei Alexeievitch Orlov-Davydov 1901-1945 *Married 24 July 1935 (Wednesday) to Elizabeth Gwendolen Scott-Ellis 1914-1976*
 - ♀ Olga Alexeievna Orlova-Davydova 1904-1991 *Married 7 June 1931 (Sunday), Vevey, Suisse, to Mikhail Alexandrovich Gortchakov 1905-1996 with :*
 - ♂ Aleksandr Mikhailovich Gortchakov 1933-2017

This shows the line of descent of the family in the United Kingdom after they had anglicised their name to Orloff-Davidoff.



Count Anatoli Vladimirovitch Orlov-Davydov (1837-1905) as a young man, circa 1875.

Found in the collection of Russian State Film and Photo Archive, Krasnogorsk.



General the Count Anatoli Vladimirovich Orlov-Davydov (1837-1905), circa 1903 in fancy dress for a ball in St Petersburg while Master of the Retinue (Horse) just prior to his retirement.



A wing of the Orlov-Davidov Usolye Palace circa 1955 in use as a school.

Background

The most expensive Romanov egg ever made and certainly the best was the Winter Egg of 1913 costing just under 25,000 roubles.

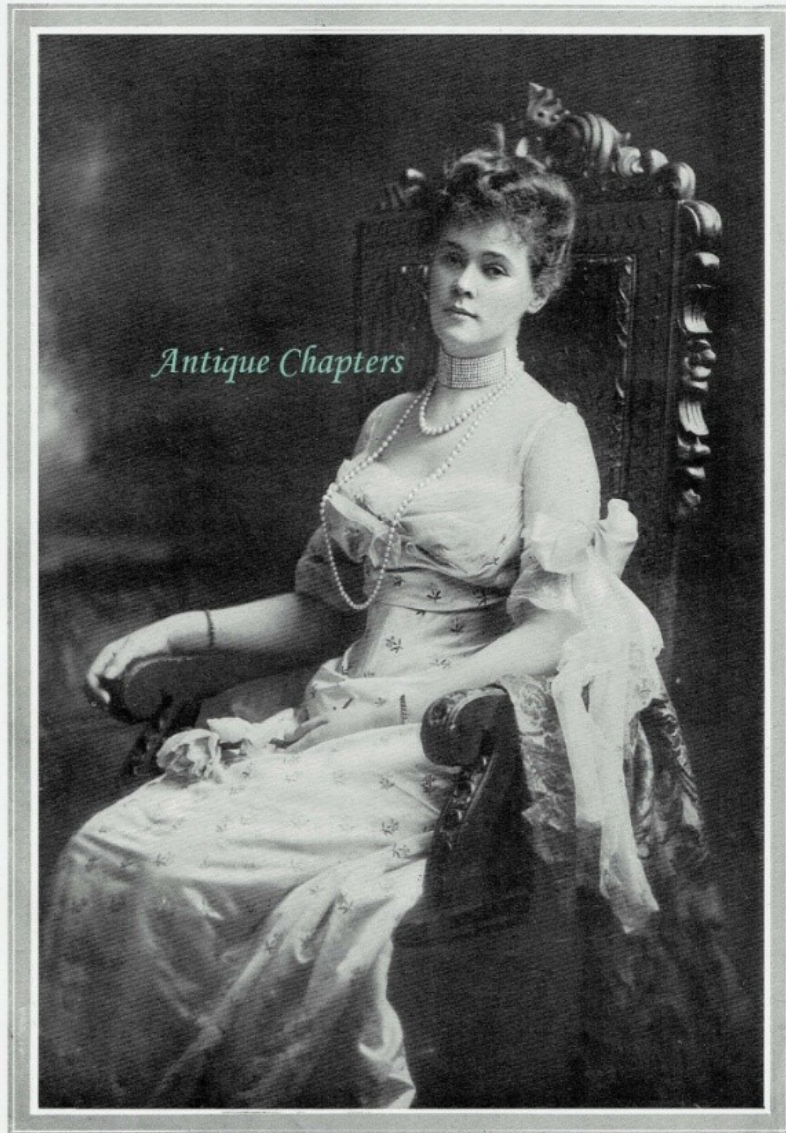
The Romanov nephrite portrait box cost 3000 roubles and was given to Count Orlov-Davidov - Master of the Horse in 1904 in recognition of his loyal support of the Imperial family on his retirement. The name became anglicized on his death when his son Alexei moved to England. Count Alexei Orloff -Davidoff, of St. Petersburg, married the daughter of the Russian Ambassador in London; Thekla de Staal von Greiffenklau, in the Russian Chapel, at the Greek Orthodox Church, Welbeck-street in 1900, the society wedding of the year attended by the Prince of Wales. He would have inherited the box from his father in 1905 before the Revolution and it may well have been kept in London.

The bride arrived at the chapel at half-past two o'clock with her father, Madame de Staal having previously arrived. The Rev. E. Smirnoff, chaplain to the Russian Embassy, performed the nuptial rite, assisted by other clergy belonging to the chapel. After the prayers preceding the betrothal the ceremony of coronation took place. Standing within the bema, the bride and bridegroom approached the Holy Doors and their two rings were laid on the Holy Table. The priest then gave them lighted tapers and led them into the naos, and after the usual prayers and responses the priest took the rings and gave them to the bridegroom. During the impressive ceremony the crowns were held over the heads of the bride and bridegroom by Count A. Deym (son of the Austrian Ambassador), Count Albert Mensdorff, Baton Mirbach, and Count Dupsky. The bride wore a gown of the richest white satin, most simply made, the only trimming being a trail and cluster of orange blossoms on the bodice. A tulle veil was arranged over a coronet of orange blossoms, and the bride carried a bouquet of white blossoms. After the ceremony the bride's parents entertained a large number of friends at the Russian Embassy, Chesham- place. Madame de Staal received her guests at the head of the staircase, and soon after the bride and bridegroom arrived Madame de Staal, according to Russian custom, presented them with two sacred ikons, which they reverently kissed kneeling. The Prince of Wales, with Major-General Sir Stanley Clarke in attendance, was present ; and other guests included the Turkish Ambassador and Madame Anthopoulos Pasha, the Italian Ambassador, the French Ambassador, the United States Ambassador, the French Minister, the Portuguese Minister, the

Chinese Minister, the Danish Minister, Captain Coerper (German Naval Attache), Count A. Deym, Countess Isabella Deym, Baron and Baroness Urewenitz, Baron and Baroness Deichmann, Prince Oberlinsky, Vicomtesse de Legasca, Princess Alexis Dolgorouky, the Duchess of Devonshire, the Duchess of Cleveland, the Marquise d'Hautpoul, the Earl and Countess of Hopetoun, the Earl of Rosebery, the Earl and Countess of Clanwilliam and the Ladies Meade, the Earl of Kimberley and Lady Constance Wodehouse, Count and Comtesse de Mauvy Talvande, the Earl of Arran and Lady Esther Smith, the Countess of Galloway, the Countess of Jersey, Baroness Meyendorff, M. R. de Staal, Viscountess Galway and the Hon. Violet Monckton, Lord Acton and Miss Acton, Lady George Hamilton, Lady Wantage, the Right Hon. H. H. and Mrs. Asquith, Colonel the Hon. Sir William and Lady Colville, the Hon. Dorothy Hood, the Hon. Mrs. Percy Mitford, the Hon. Philip Stanhope and Countess Tolstoy, M. and Madame Gosch, Sir Halliday and Lady Macartney, Miss Blanche Forbes, Mr. W. H. Grenfell, Mr. William Gillett, Mrs. Borthwick, Mrs. Bischoffsheirn, Mrs. Ronalds, the personnel of the Russian Embassy, and others. In the course of the afternoon Count Orloff-Davidoff and his bride left on their way to Mentone, the Countess wearing a pale grey dress prettily stitched and tucked, with bodice of tucked grey glaze, Cluny lace, and gold buttons, a cape to match, and a three-cornered black hat, slightly trimmed with pale blue. The numerous wedding presents were displayed in the dining-room. The Prince and Princess of Wales presented the bride with a beautiful diamond aigrette tipped with turquoises. The Duchess of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha sent a brooch of diamonds, sapphire, and ruby. Princess Victoria of Wales's gift was her photograph in an embroidered and embossed leather frame. The Crown Princess of Roumania gave a moonstone brooch set in diamonds. M. de Staal's gift to his daughter was a magnificent gold tea service, including kettle and large tray, of beautiful design. [Possibly at Wartski in other descriptions just described as a gold tea service the fact that it was supplied with a tray is the possible key?]

Among Madame de Staal's presents were a collar of nine rows of large pearls with diamond slides ; a large brooch and gold necklace with five graduated pendants to correspond of diamond Catherine wheels with large centre stones and fringed with diamonds ; two solitaire diamond hairpins, antenna- for the hair with two large diamonds, and a gold bracelet set with diamonds and sapphires. Count Orloff-Davidoff, father of the bridegroom has given the bride a pearl necklace, a ruby and diamond necklace, and a gold curb bracelet with large uncut emerald and diamond clasp; while the bridegroom's presents to his bride included a diamond tiara and a long diamond chain. Count Alexander Orloff-Davidoff gave a dark-green enamel parasol handle, richly studded with gold, diamonds, and rubies ; Princess de Wittgenstein, a large carbuncle heart brooch, set in diamonds, with pendant watch to match; Prince Galitzen Prosorovsky, gold chain bracelet studded with turquoises ; M. Rudolph de Staal, a superb dressing-case, with massive gold mounts to all the fittings, including the brushes, mirror, &c. ; the Marquis of Salisbury, ormolu and tortoiseshell lyre clock ; the Earl of Rosebery, a tortoise brooch, the body formed of a single pearl set in diamonds ; Mr. A. J. Balfour, white enamel and turquoise wreath brooch ; the Duchess of Devonshire, gold clock in crystal case. An incident, fortunately unattended with any untoward result, occurred during that part of the service where the bride and bridegroom held lighted tapers, when the bride's veil came in contact with the candle. The bridegroom immediately extinguished the flames, and little harm except a slight singeing of the hair resulted.

A Type of Russian Beauty



Photo

THE COUNTESS ORLOFF DAVIDOFF

Lafayette

Daughter of M. de Staal, sometime Russian Ambassador to the Court of St. James's. The Countess is a regular visitor to London during the Season.



Countess Orloff-Davidoff diamond necklace. Sotheby's. Magnificent Jewels. 19 Nov 08. Geneva.

Countess Orloff-Davidoff is the only daughter of Baron de Staal, late Russian ambassador to England. Her wedding, which took place four or five years ago from the Russian Embassy in Chesham Place, was a very brilliant function, and was attended by the king- then Prince of Wales. In appearance the Countess is more than usually tall with a singularly graceful figure and carriage. As is perhaps natural from the circumstances of her girlhood as an ambassador's daughter, she is an accomplished linguist, and went about a great deal in English society accompanied by her popular parents. Her husband, Count Alexis Orloff-Davidoff, will succeed to great riches upon the death of his father, who is a well-known Russian magnate.' Extract from *The Bystander*, October 26, 1904.

By family tradition this necklace was previously part of a tiara made by Fabergé in the 1860s and later redesigned as a necklace by Buccellati in the early 1990s



The Count and Countess Serge Orloff-Davidoff



COUNTESS SERGE [REDACTED] AND HER FAMILY

Harold Adams, Dover Street

A very agreeable study of Lord and Lady Howard de Walden's second daughter with her cheerful little girl, Tatiana, aged three, and Marina, who won't be two till the end of December. The marriage of the Hon. Elizabeth Scott-Ellis to Count Serge [REDACTED] only son of Count Alexis and Countess Thecla [REDACTED] at the Russian Church of St. Philip in Buckingham Palace Road, was the last big event of the London season of 1935. This young couple soon found a house to suit them in Hill Road, St. John's Wood, which is still their address. Like all the members of her family, Countess Serge [REDACTED] is extremely musical, the 'cello, which she plays to admiration, being her particular instrument

The Countess Serge Orloff- Davidoff was by birth a Howard de Walden still one of the richest families in Britain but a second daughter hence would have had to sell the box after the war perhaps in the Wartski records may have a note regarding the purchase. Kieran: dug further in our archives and it first entered Wartski in 1971. The vendor's name is unclear in our ledger, it is garbled and appears to read 'P. J Boat'. The name does not appear to occur anywhere else in our ledgers as a source and we do not know who they were. There is nothing here to preclude the family being the source.

He was the only son of Count Alexis Orloff-Davidoff, who married Thecla, daughter of Baron de Staal, the Russian Ambassador to London. He came straight from his home into College as a War Scholar in Short Half 1919. He had never been to school before, but settled down at once to life at Winchester. He reached Senior Part 2, and played in College XV.

In October 1924 he went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, and took Honours in Engineering in 1927. After four years with the Westinghouse Company in the USA, and three years in business in London, he was naturalized as a British subject in 1935.

On July 24th 1935 he married the Hon. Elizabeth Gwendolen Scott-Ellis, second daughter of the 8th Baron Howard de Walden. They lived in Lodsworth, Sussex, and had two daughters: Tatiana (born April 9th 1936) and Marina (born December 30th 1937).

In the war he was commissioned as a Sub-Lieutenant in the RNVR. A friend of twenty-five years' standing wrote: "I met Serge in London early in the war, full of enthusiasm, about to embark as an Engineer Officer on a battleship."

Orloff-Davidoff was then attached to the Special Branch of the RN in 1941, being promoted to Lieutenant. His friend wrote: "I next met him early in 1945 at SHAEF and heard of his exploits. After a short period afloat he did special work in the Middle East which took him as far as the Caspian Sea. His task was to organize the flotillas which took our men and their friends to and from enemy territory in the Balkans... For the success with which he carried out his important and hazardous task in the Balkans he owed much to his knowledge of European languages and his capacity for getting the best out of all sorts of people".

By 1942 he had become a Lieutenant-Commander, and, as his friend hinted above, won fame for the skill with which he landed our men and their friends behind the enemy lines in the Balkans, and, when necessary, took them off again.

In 1944 he was appointed Liaison Officer with the Allied Naval Chief at SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force). "I saw him for the last time only a few days before his death. His work at SHAEF was over, and he was looking forward to his new appointment on the Allied Control Commission in Austria. It was on his way to his new post that he was killed in a motor accident on August 12th 1945; a sad end to a varied and fruitful war-time career, in which his cheerfulness and enthusiasm never flagged".

He was thirty-nine when he died in the motor accident near Hamburg, and rests in grave 3A.H.1 of Hamburg Cemetery. A memorial service for him was held at the Russian Orthodox Church, Buckingham Palace Road, London on 23rd August 1945.

A portrait photograph of him exists in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records him as belonging to HMS President, the London drill-hall of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.

Count Serge Orloff-Davidoff was educated at Winchester and died towards the end of the Second World war in a car accident.

A short history of Nephrite mounted Romanov presentation boxes

Imperial presentation boxes come in two forms portrait and monogram and in two materials enamel and nephrite.

Nephrite Portrait boxes by Faberge

Nineteen portrait Nicholas II boxes were executed by Fabergé, making these boxes even rarer than the fifty known Imperial Easter eggs.

For Nicholas II there seem to be only two portrait boxes in Nephrite recorded the Orlov-Davidov and the rectangular one below

For Nicholas II the monogrammed number of boxes is recorded 27 of which 8 were in nephrite the balance wood or enamel.

The only other recorded Nicholas II nephrite portrait box is: Important Works of Art by Carl Faberge Christies New York 19 April 2002



LOT 128

A HIGHLY IMPORTANT JEWELLED TWO-COLOR GOLD AND NEPHRITE IMPERIAL PRESENTATION SNUFF-BOX

MARKED FABERGÉ AND WITH THE WORKMASTER'S MARK OF HENRIK WIGSTRÖM, ST. PETERSBURG, 1908-1917, WITH SCRATCHED INVENTORY NUMBER 4909 OR 4902

Price realised USD 834,500

A HIGHLY IMPORTANT JEWELLED TWO-COLOR GOLD AND NEPHRITE IMPERIAL PRESENTATION SNUFF-BOX marked Fabergé and with the work master's mark of Henrik Wigström, St. Petersburg, 1908-1917, with scratched inventory number 4909 or 4902

Of rectangular form, the hinged cover set with a rose-cut diamond openwork interlaced geometric trellis within a rose-cut diamond rim, enclosing a portrait miniature of Tsar Nicholas II in the uniform of the 4th Imperial Family Rifle Guards regiment wearing the Order of St. George signed and dated by Zuiev 1916, surmounted by a diamond and rose-cut diamond Imperial crown, within a laurel-leaf rose-cut diamond wreath, with two-color gold laurel-leaf rim, *fully marked*, in an original

wooden fitted case stamped 'Fabergé, Petrograd, Moscow, London' with Imperial warrant 2½ x 3 11/16in.(6.4 x 9.5cm.)

Provenance

Presented to Frédéric Masson in May 1917 on behalf of Tsar Nicholas II J.M. Jacques, England Landsell K. Christie, Long Island A La Vieille Russie, New York

Portrait box private collection *The Last Flowering of Court Art* sold by Wartski

Matt yellow and polished red gold, rectangular with indented round corners, the hinged lid centred by an oval portrait miniature of Tsar Nicholas II in the uniform of the His Majesty's Life Chevalier Guards, beneath domed glass held in a brilliant cut diamond set bezel surmounted by a diamond set Imperial crown, flanked by a finely chased berried laurel and oak wreath entwined with diamond ribbons, further mounted with six diamonds and decorated with chased gold floral motifs, edged and bound by leaf and berry scrolls against a sable ground.

Chief Workmaster: Henrik Wigström, St. Petersburg, 1908-1917, inventory number: 1976.

Provenance:
Acquired from Fabergé by the Imperial Cabinet on 16th May 1909 for 1800 roubles. Presented

by Tsar Nicholas II to Secretary of State Nickolai Mansurov. Later owned by Frank Sinatra. Sinatra was a Fabergé collector and frequent visitor to Wartski.

Gold snuff boxes were first used as Imperial presentation gifts in Russia during the reign of Peter the Great. Nicholas II awarded only twenty presentation boxes holding a portrait to his subjects. This box was given to Nickolai Pavlovich Mansurov in 1909. Mansurov was a longstanding and trusted advisor of the Tsar. He was both Secretary of State and a privy councillor. The gift was an acknowledgement by Nicholas II of his loyalty to the Imperial Court during his sixtieth year of service.



This portrait box cost 1800 roubles in 1909 or approximately half as much as the nephrite box obviously it is not in the same league

ROYAL COLLECTION LONDON

MIKHAIL PERKHIN (1860-1903)

Box 1894

Nephrite box with gold, guilloché enamel and diamond mounts | 3.4 x 14.0 x 8.0 cm (whole object) | RCIN 40810



©

- Description

Major-General Sir Arthur Ellis (1837-1907) served Edward VII when both Prince of Wales and King, first as an Equerry and later as Comptroller. He accompanied the Prince and Princess of Wales on their visit to Moscow and St Petersburg in November 1894 to attend the funeral of Tsar Alexander III and the wedding of Tsar Nicholas II to Princess Alix of Hesse. He also accompanied the Princess of Wales to St Petersburg for the marriage of Grand Duchess Xenia to Grand Duke Alexander in July 1894, when this box was presented to him by Marie Feodorovna. Mark of Michael Perchin; gold mark of 56 zolotniks (before 1896); Fabergé in Cyrillic characters; engraved ARTHUR ELLIS in Roman letters, PETERHOF in Cyrillic characters AUGUST 1894 in Roman letters Text adapted from Fabergé in the Royal Collection

Provenance

Given by Tsarina Marie Feodorovna to Sir Arthur Ellis, 1894; by whom bequeathed to Queen Alexandra, 1907

Monogrammed nephrite box The Walters Art Gallery



<https://art.thewalters.org/detail/1327/oval-box-with-monogram-of-nicholas-ii/>

This nephrite box is decorated with the monogram of Nicholas II in diamonds. The 300-year-long reign of the Romanov dynasty ended in 1917 in the revolution that cost Nicholas II his life. Later, in the 1920s, Henry Walters, founder of the Walters Art Museum, was able to buy a select group of objects with connections to the Russian royal family, including this piece. Jewelled boxes were often given as diplomatic gifts, and hardstone carving, in nephrite, malachite, or jasper, for example, was a Russian specialty.

Another monogrammed nephrite box: Sothebys Lot 419

PROPERTY FROM A PRIVATE GERMAN COLLECTION

An Imperial Presentation Fabergé jewelled gold, enamel and hardstone box, workmaster Michael Perchin, St Petersburg, 1899-1903

LOT SOLD. 299,000 GBP

An Imperial Presentation Fabergé jewelled gold, enamel and hardstone box, work master Michael Perchin, St Petersburg, 1899-1903



An Imperial Presentation Fabergé jeweled gold, enamel and hardstone box, workmaster Michael Perchin, St Petersburg, 1899-1903 circular, carved of nephrite, the hinged lid centred with the rose-cut diamond-set crowned cypher of Emperor Nicholas II on a ground of translucent white enamel over sunburst engine-turning within a diamond-set bezel, the lid border of two-colour gold laurel festoons hung from diamonds, chased leaf rim mount, *struck with workmaster's initials and Fabergé in Cyrillic*, 56 standard diameter 8.6cm, 3 3/8 in.

PROVENANCE

Presented by Emperor Nicholas II

CATALOGUE NOTE

Nephrite was the preferred hardstone in the production of Imperial Presentation boxes. Symbolizing Russian hope, nephrite, like malachite, proclaimed the mineral wealth of the country, of which Russians and their Emperor were justly proud. Fabergé was famously the only jeweller entitled to use the prized stone, and his work masters took full advantage of the privilege.

This Imperial Presentation snuff box is one of 27 with the cypher of Emperor Nicholas II supplied by Fabergé to the Imperial Cabinet between 1899 and 1903, the year of Perchin's death. They ranged in cost from 800 to 2,000 rubles (see U. Tillander-Godenhjelm, *The Russian Imperial Award System, 1894-1917*, Helsinki, 2005, p. 181); at least eight of these were made of nephrite, according to the Cabinet ledgers. In addition to the present lot, these included the rectangular portrait box, also by Perchin, which sold, Christie's New York, 21 October 2003, lot 154; and the circular cypher box by Perchin in the Lillian Thomas Pratt Collection at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond (no. 47.20.271). A later box by Wigström, like the present lot incorporating white enamel in contrast with the nephrite, is in the Walters Art Museum (no. 57.1047). A circular nephrite portrait box, the lid border similar to that of the present box, was exhibited by A La Vieille Russie, New York, 25 October - 7 November 1961, cat. no. 88, illustrated p. 47. Sotheby's is grateful to Svetlana Chestnykh for her assistance in researching this lot.

Fabergé Imperial Presentation Boxes A short history

Fabergé Research Newsletter.

*Two events in 2010 – an exhibition in Paris and an auction at Christie's London – have brought jeweled Fabergé snuff boxes with portraits and ciphers into the limelight. Dr. Ulla Tillander-Godenhjelm in her 2005 publication, *The Russian Imperial Award System, 1894-1917*, pp. 400-401, lists the ranks of Russian state servants who received boxes of this type. She emphasizes these objects were not gifts in the general sense of the word and were not a personal expression of the sovereign's generosity. They were instead:*

- *a remuneration for service rendered by state servants in Russia, and*
- *in the case of foreign recipients, jewelled boxes were a demonstration of good relations between two nations.*

In other words, the boxes (as one of the many award categories) were official symbols of meritorious service, or of good foreign relations.

The snuff boxes discussed in this text were state visit gifts during the reign of Alexander III (1881-1894), and Nicholas II (1894-1917), respectively. The RIAS text cited above lists the portrait boxes given during the reign of Nicholas II to Russian recipients (p. 168), and to foreign recipients as diplomatic gifts (pp. 171 and 174). Imperial Presentation boxes were never inscribed with a dedication as recipients of these boxes had the option to return their boxes to the Imperial Cabinet in exchange for cash. Because of that policy, many of these boxes were "recycled" and then presented again.

The monetary value of the Imperial award boxes varied greatly. A general rule was that the value in roubles of an imperial gift to a Russian state servant should not exceed the annual income of the recipient. The value of snuff boxes presented to foreigners was entirely dependent on the importance of the recipient or of the occasion for the presentation. The boxes shown below are examples of gifts which have been highly upgraded in value. Large brilliant cut diamonds from the stock of the Imperial Cabinet have been added to the boxes in order to make the gift worthy of its recipient and of the important occasion for which it was presented.



*1889 Bismarck Box – Alexander III
Imperial Presentation Box
(Hodges Family Collection)*



*1894 Alexander III
Imperial Presentation Box
(Courtesy Musée National de la Marine)*



*1896 Alexandra Feodorovna
Imperial Presentation Box
(Courtesy Musée National de la Marine)*

The Bismarck Box, known for 25 years through exhibitions and in the literature of Fabergé, is the earliest extant Imperial presentation box awarded to a foreign recipient by Alexander III, Russia's ruler from 1881-1894. Discovery of the Imperial Cabinet invoice dated September 20, 1889, pinpoints the date of presentation to the year 1889 coinciding with Alexander III's first German state visit with Kaiser Wilhelm II who became Germany's ruler in 1888.

During the visit the Tsar had lengthy talks with Germany's Reichs-Chancellor Prince Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898), who only five months later on 18 March 1890 at age 75, was dismissed by the German Emperor. Historians suggest the fame of the Iron Chancellor (as Bismarck was known) was too much for the new German sovereign. The date of the state gift was verified in the New York Times, October 15, 1889. The Alexander III miniature on the Bismarck box appears to match the portrait of the 1894 box (illustrated above in the middle) by Alexander Matveevich Wegner (Вегнер 1826-1894). An inscription added later to the box with the date of 1884, perhaps at the direction of a family member, pre-dates the actual date of presentation by five years.

Two snuff boxes on view at the Musée National de la Marine in Paris (*Cadeaux des Tsars*, May 28 – October 3, 2010) were both presented to the French Admiral Alfred Gervais (1837-1921). The box bearing the miniature portrait of Alexander III (middle) was a gift presented to him at the funeral of the Emperor. The admiral was present at both the funeral of Emperor Alexander III (November 19, 1894) and the wedding (November 26, 1894) of the young Imperial couple. The box on the right with the miniature portrait of Alexandra Feodorovna (unfortunately badly damaged) was presented to Admiral Gervais during Nicholas and Alexandra's state visit to France in 1896. The admiral was attached to the Empress's person during this visit. An important purpose of the visit was to reinforce the Franco-Russian alliance initiated by Alexander III. During the visit the young Tsar laid the cornerstone of the Alexander III Bridge in Paris, which to this day has remained a perceptible symbol of the alliance.



1913 Nicholas II Imperial Presentation Snuff Box
(Courtesy Christie's)

An Imperial presentation snuff box during Tsar Nicholas' reign with his portrait presented to Turkhan Pasha, a career diplomat and Turkish ambassador from 1908-1913 in St. Petersburg, set a world auction record (\$1,463,985) for an Imperial snuff box with a miniature portrait of the sovereign by Fabergé. The hammer price was doubled from its low estimate and is now in the McFerrin Collection. In the auction catalogue description (Christie's London, November 30 – December 1, 2010, Lot 219) Dr. Tillander-Godenhielm discusses the provenance of Imperial gifts, details about the recipient, the cost of important Imperial presentation snuff boxes, the revival of the Louis XVI style and Henrik Wigström's designs, and the miniaturist Vasilii Zuiev.



Nicholas II Imperial Presentation Snuff Box
(Courtesy Christie's)

An Imperial presentation snuff box is one of 68 boxes with ciphers made during the reign of Nicholas II by the firm of Fabergé. This category of boxes was awarded for special service rendered or to commemorate an anniversary in the recipient's career and is similar to those with

a miniature portrait. The box sold to Russian billionaire Alexander Ivanov on November 29, 2010, for £97,250 (\$151,905).

Dr. Tillander-Godenhilms advises that Imperial presentation boxes were made with blank cartouches. The clerks in the Cabinet having received an order to furnish a box at (for example) 3,500 roubles selected a box from their shelf. The price of it may have been 1,500 roubles, so they took brilliants from their stock costing 2,000 roubles and sent the box to jeweller Carl Hahn who set the stones into the box. The oval with either miniature portrait or cipher was also mounted into the box at this same time. After 1911, the jeweller Carl Blank received most of these commissions.

A total of 228 new snuff boxes were acquired during the reign of Alexander III. Only three portrait boxes awarded by Alexander III seem to have survived, the two pictured above and a further box now in the Gokhran deposit, the State Precious Metals and Gems Repository in Moscow. The last mentioned box is of an earlier date, it has possibly been recycled a number of times or has remained on hand until the 1880's when a miniature portrait of Alexander III by the miniaturist Alexander Matveevich Wegner was placed in the cartouche.

After the death of an Emperor, the Imperial Cabinet had boxes in stock from the previous reigns; Alexander II fell victim to an assassination plot and Alexander III died at the young age of 49, therefore, the Imperial Cabinet in 1894 had quite a few snuff boxes in stock when Nicholas II ascended the throne. Many of the boxes presented between 1894-1917 were thus older ones.

Research on portrait boxes in the reigns prior to Tsar Nicholas II continues by Dr. Ulla Tillander-Godenhilms. Our thanks to her and Dr. Daniel L. Hodges for sharing their information in this Fabergé Research Newsletter.

[Christie's](#) upcoming Russian Works of Art sale on 29 November 2010 will be led by an important jewelled vari-coloured gold and guilloché enamelled Imperial presentation snuff-box, marked Fabergé, with the work master's mark of Henrik Wigström. It was presented to the Turkish diplomat, Turkhan Pasha (1846-1927), in December 1913 on behalf of Emperor Nicholas II probably to commemorate the end of his five -year ambassadorship in St. Petersburg. In 1919 the snuffbox changed hands for the last time, when it was acquired by the family of the present owner. The firm of Fabergé was awarded the title of Court Jeweller in 1884 and became one of the main suppliers to the Cabinet of His Imperial Majesty. **Only fifty-four presentation snuffboxes set with a miniature of Nicholas II were ever presented by the Emperor. Of these, only nineteen were executed by Fabergé, making these boxes even rarer than the fifty known Imperial Easter eggs.**

The present Imperial presentation snuffbox was purchased from Fabergé on 16 May 1909 at a cost of 2,500 roubles and was entered in the ledgers of the Cabinet of His Imperial Majesty. In 1911, a portrait miniature painted by Vasilii Zuev was set on the cover. The snuffbox was later presented on behalf of Emperor Nicholas II to Turkhan Pasha, Turkish ambassador in St Petersburg, on 12 December 1913. Vasilii Zuev, born in Stavropol in 1870, graduated from St Petersburg's Baron Stieglitz Central School of Applied Arts in 1895 and studied for one year at the Imperial Academy of Arts. He was a drawing master at the Imperial Alexandrovskii Lyceum and from 1904 worked for the Office of His Imperial Majesty painting miniatures on ivory. Zuev was recruited to work for the firm of Fabergé and painted miniatures for a number of Imperial presentation snuff-boxes and Imperial Easter eggs. The depictions of Nicholas II painted by court miniaturist Zuev were based on photographs or paintings and depicted the Emperor at various ages, in different regimental uniforms, in this particular case the Emperor is depicted in the uniform of the Preobrazhenskii Regiment. The rectangular form of the box itself - with cut corners, use of three-colour gold, sophisticated rich royal blue guilloché enamelling - exemplify Fabergé's revival of the Louis XVI style, and reflect the overwhelming influence of the eighteenth century French court on the Russian Imperial tradition of presenting gold snuff-boxes. The recipient of this jewelled portrait snuffbox was Turkhan Pasha, a career diplomat and politician, **Father of Mrs Mango who purchased your bulldog Custer** who held posts throughout Europe and served

as Prime Minister of Albania in 1914 and from 1918 to 1920. He became Chargé d'Affaires at the Turkish Embassy in St Petersburg in 1873 and returned to St Petersburg as Ambassador between 1908 and 1913.

In Russia, the practice of awarding jewelled snuff-boxes came into its own during the reigns of the Empresses Elizabeth and Catherine the Great, when snuff taking developed into an elaborate social ritual - l'art de priser - and gave rise to the new art form of luxurious snuff-boxes, for which there was a tremendous demand. This custom endured in Russia long after the fashion for snuff taking had passed. A jewelled presentation snuffbox frequently awarded portrait gift during the reign of Nicholas II and was an Imperial award bestowed upon both deserving Russian nationals as well as foreign dignitaries. Nicholas II presented a total of fifty-four snuffboxes with his miniature portrait, twenty of these to prominent Russians and thirty-four to foreign dignitaries.

Tillander-Godenhielm, *The Russian Imperial Award System, 1894-1917*, Helsinki, 2005.

Arja-Leena Paavola offers the following review of this book in the Spring 2006 issue of *Universitas Helsingiensis* the quarterly of the University of Helsinki:

The practice of rewarding citizens for good work and loyalty proved an efficient way of strengthening the bonds between subject and monarch. In many respects the system was defined by the service hierarchy created by Peter the Great known as the Table of Ranks. Ulla Tillander-Godenhielm, Ph.D., who defended her doctoral dissertation in the field of art history in October, examined the Russian imperial award system during the reign of Russia's last tsar, Nicholas II.

"A decree of 1898 defined twelve award categories, over half of which were decorations, titles, expression of the emperor's favour, grants of money, and gifts made of precious materials. For over one hundred years, the system was also in use in the Grand Duchy of Finland, whose subjects were entitled to the same honours as any other individual in the service of the empire," says Tillander-Godenhielm.

Subsequent generations have often created an image of a system of unsurpassed luxury and opulence that catered exclusively to the elite of the country. In reality, the value of an award could not exceed an individual's yearly salary. In addition, there were many awards designed specifically for the lower echelons, including factory workers. Each of the twelve categories had an internal hierarchy. A young man who started his career at the lowest rung of the hierarchical ladder, through diligent service, could earn for himself the highest honours the empire had to offer.

Tillander-Godenhielm points out that the gift items bestowed were not merely symbolic tokens but were in fact a subtle means of remuneration. These gifts were luxurious and often quite elaborate. While they did speak of one's importance and position within Russia's service hierarchy – which consisted of fourteen classes, or ranks – they also were a means of augmenting an individual's wages, which were frequently low. A general, for example, could not always support the lifestyle his position demanded on his official salary. If this was the case, he had the option of returning his gift to the Cabinet of His Imperial Majesty for its full value in cash. In fact, over sixty percent of gifts presented to ranks five and lower were sold back in this way. The widows or children of the original recipients could also return them; thus, they served as a kind of pension or life insurance.

"A fine silver or gold pocket watch was a typical gift. When travelling by sea to Finland, the Russian emperors would present watches to the pilot boat captains, and when travelling by train, every station manager along the way would receive one, as would the policemen responsible for the safety of the imperial family."

Tillander-Godenhielm is herself a fourth-generation member of a goldsmith family with Russian connections. Several Finnish goldsmiths were employed as suppliers by the Cabinet of

His Imperial Majesty, and Tillander-Godenhielm's grandfather was one of them. While working in the family business, she became interested in Russian gold and silver objects, many of which have remained in Finland, some still in the possession of the original recipient's family.

Sometimes orders for multiples of the same gift item were placed. "Archival research has revealed account books showing requests for ten silver cigarette cases decorated with a double-headed eagle of a specific design, or twelve rings set with specific gemstones. This type of gift was destined for lower-ranking servitors. The more valuable gifts intended for higher ranking officials were all unique in design."

Coveted investments

The Cabinet of His Imperial Majesty had inspectors to ensure that the gold and silver objects it received were of the highest quality. Many of these items were bestowed upon foreign dignitaries and thus served as a means of showcasing the skill of Russian craftsmen. During state visits, these valuable gifts were written about in papers and put on public display.

These award items – especially those with a known provenance – have increased steadily in value since the Revolution and nowadays can fetch astronomical sums. For example, a table portrait of Nicholas II presented to the French prime minister René Viviani in 1914 sold at Sotheby's last year for £350,000. As a result, however, they have become the object of numerous forgeries.

A substantial number of the surviving objects made for the Russian imperial award system are today in museums or in the private collections of various European monarchs and American millionaires. In the 1930s, Stalin had many of these items sold in the West in order to obtain much needed foreign currency.

Ulla Tillander-Godenhielm has had the privilege of personally handling many of the items she discusses in her dissertation. "You cannot really study objects such as these without examining them up close.

A known provenance of course greatly increases the interest of an object. Those pieces really make my heart skip a beat. Fortunately, Russian archives have now been opened up to researchers and it has become possible to trace the origins of many of these items."

The real story uncovered

In the 1930s, all kinds of stories were concocted in order to increase the value of these objects and boost sales. "The empress gave her obstetrician, Professor Ott, a monogrammed snuffbox for every child he helped deliver. Many of these have been sold in the United States as gifts from the emperor to the empress. "But who would seriously believe that a man would give a snuffbox to his wife for giving birth to their baby?" Tillander-Godenhielm chuckles. "I think true stories about the real officials and servitors of the time are much more interesting."

It is not, after all, that long ago. While in St Petersburg, Tillander-Godenhielm discovered that a hospital built by Dr. Ott was still in operation. "When visiting the hospital, I was asked if I would like to meet the great-granddaughter of the good doctor, who as chance would have it works as an obstetrician there. I met this young woman who told me a great deal about her great-grandfather. The family no longer possessed any of the awards he had been given, so she was delighted when I showed her pictures of two of the thirteen snuffboxes Dr. Ott had received for his services."

Tillander-Godenhielm's study has raised interest all over the world, and for once, a dissertation has proved to be a "best seller", but only 1,200 copies of her book were published.

Research prior to the sale by J B Hawkins 15 November 2019