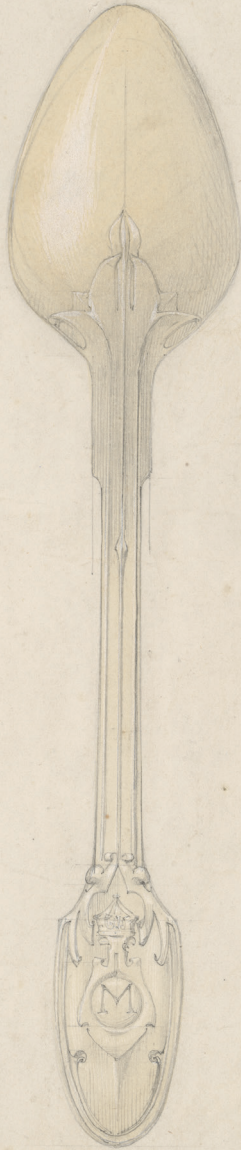
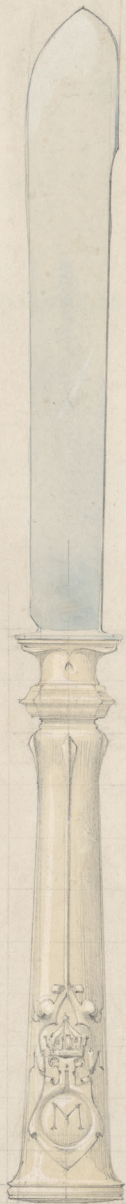


W. & A. GIBBS  
LONDON  
1860



9/ 1860

# Short notice

## Neo-Gothic Silver Cutlery with an Imperial Border

• JUDITH N.M. LEFERINK •

In 2019 the Rijksmuseum acquired a sketch for a silver cutlery design. Drawn in pencil and coloured with watercolour, it shows a very detailed knife and spoon, which in view of the yellow colour were probably meant to be executed in silver-gilt (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> The superb execution and the elegance of the design alone make it a fine addition to the museum's collection of designs; it also contains a number of indications that allow us to reconstruct a good deal of its history.

### A Rare Design by Viollet-le-Duc

The drawing is dated 1860 lower left and is monogrammed. The meaning of the monogram was unclear until recently, but there can now be no doubt that it stands for the famous French architect and designer Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879). He often used a very similar monogram, which consists of a V and an L, with a characteristic eye-shaped D (figs. 2, 3).<sup>2</sup>

In 1860, when the drawing was made, Viollet-le-Duc was still hard at work at Pierrefonds, where he had been in charge of the restoration of the castle for Emperor Napoleon III (1808-1873) since 1857. He also designed large sections of the interior in a sympathetic

< Fig. 1  
EUGÈNE-EMMANUEL  
VIOUET-LE-DUC,  
*Design for a Knife and  
Spoon for Princess  
Mathilde Bonaparte*, 1860.  
Pencil, watercolour on  
paper, 302 x 199 mm.  
Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum,  
inv. no. RP-T-2019-434;  
purchased with the  
support of the  
Decorative Art Fund/  
Rijksmuseum Fonds.

Fig. 2  
EUGÈNE-EMMANUEL  
VIOUET-LE-DUC,  
*Monogram of Viollet-  
le-Duc*, 1814-79.  
Stamp with red ink,  
15 x 15 mm.  
Paris, Fondation  
Custodia, Frits Lugt,  
Les Marques de  
Collections de Dessins  
& d'Estampes, L.2492.  
Image slightly enhanced.



Neo-Gothic style, reflecting the widespread reverence for the past at that time.<sup>3</sup> The architect published his ideas in 1854, in his *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française*. He considered the Gothic style to be the best and the finest. Working from the principles of this style, he arrived at a new interpretation with ahistorical details, which are echoed in the design for the silver cutlery.

Viollet-le-Duc designed various objects, both religious and secular, for silversmiths and goldsmiths. His designs

Fig. 3  
EUGÈNE-EMMANUEL  
VIOUET-LE-DUC,  
*Monogram of Viollet-  
le-Duc*, 1814-79,  
from J. Castagno,  
*European Artist II:  
Signatures and  
Monograms:  
A Comprehensive  
Directory from 1800*,  
Lanham 2007, pp. 276,  
367.

Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum  
Research Library,  
S Monogram,  
2007/4414.





*Fig. 4*  
Detail with the embossed stamp of Louis Charles Bachelet's firm (fig. 1).

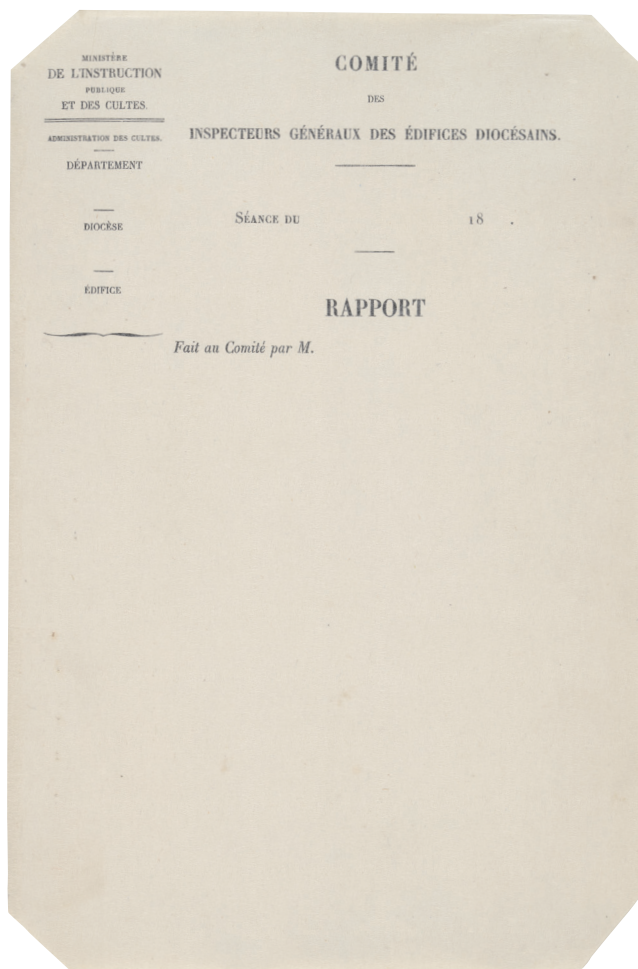
*Fig. 5*  
EUGÈNE-EMMANUEL VIOLLET-LE-DUC (design) and LOUIS CHARLES BACHELET (execution),  
*Reliquary*, 1850-51.  
Gilded bronze over wood,  
88 x 74.2 x 43.2 cm.  
Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, inv. no. 2016.118; restricted gift of Mary Kathryn Hartigan and the Thomas W. Dower Foundation.



were usually executed by the major Parisian goldsmiths headed by Placide Poussielgue-Rusand (1824-1889), Jean-Alexandre Chertier (1825-1890) and Louis Charles Bachelet (1817-1880).<sup>4</sup> The architect's involvement in designing cutlery in 1860 is exceptional; we know of no other cutlery designs by him. This may explain why the drawing was not attributed to Viollet-le-Duc until now.

An embossed stamp in the paper links the drawing to Bachelet's firm (fig. 4): it contains the address of his shop at 58 Quai des Orfèvres, which he had owned since 1851. It was a prestigious address: he bought the building from Jean-Charles Cahier (1772-1849), a former jeweller to the French court.<sup>5</sup> As well as this shop, Bachelet owned the premises (*magasins*) at 16 Rue de Verneuil.<sup>6</sup> The two addresses tell us that Bachelet must have had a considerable business with several employees.<sup>7</sup> The goldsmith had previously executed designs by Viollet-le-Duc; around 1851 he made a little reliquary for Napoleon III (fig. 5).<sup>8</sup>

The awards Bachelet received tell us that his firm was highly reputable. In 1855 he won a second-class medal at the Exposition Universelle in Paris for a religious work to a design by Viollet-le-Duc.<sup>9</sup> At the 1862 International Exhibition in London he was awarded a medal in the first-class category.<sup>10</sup> Since the embossed stamp on the drawing of the cutlery mentions a first-class medal, it has to date from after that year. It is likely that Bachelet received the design drawing in order to produce the cutlery; at some point after 1862 he filed the sheet in his business records and put his firm's stamp on it. It is unlikely that Viollet-le-Duc was commissioned to make the design by Bachelet: if he had been he would probably not have drawn it on the back of a form for one of his other activities, as *inspecteur général des édifices diocésains* (fig. 6).<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately we do not know whether the cutlery was made before the drawing found its way into the archives.



### Neo-Gothic Silver Cutlery Design

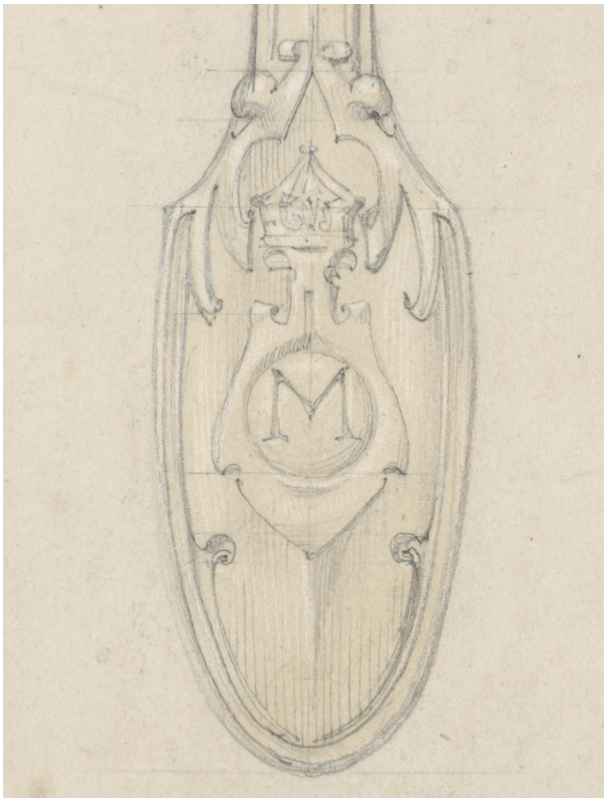
The design for the cutlery, consisting of a knife, a spoon and a second spoon finial, bears a strong resemblance to Viollet-le-Duc's architectural designs. The Gothic inspiration is obvious; the tight verticality, motifs such as pointed arches and trefoils, and Viollet-le-Duc's characteristic ahistorical embellishment define the design. The knife handle, which was designed as a kind of column, is 11 centimetres long and 2.2 centimetres wide. The long lines of the decoration accentuate the verticality. The decoration incorporates a reference to the client or the intended user. Knife and spoon display a cartouche with an M below a closed or imperial crown (fig. 7).

Fig. 6  
Back of the design  
(fig. 1).



< *Figs. 7a-b*  
Details showing a  
cartouche with the M  
under a closed crown  
(fig. 1).

> *Fig. 8*  
'The stamp of the  
princess [Mathilde];  
red cypher sur-  
mounted by the  
imperial crown',  
in Isabelle Julia,  
*Le peintre et la  
princesse: corres-  
pondance entre  
la princesse  
Mathilde Bonaparte  
et le peintre  
Ernest Hébert,*  
1863-1904, Paris  
2004, pp. 30-31.  
Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum  
Research Library,  
664 E 9.



Even though the crown is a product of the designer's imagination, the closed form nonetheless points to a member of a royal or imperial family.

### **Princess Mathilde and the Parisian Art World**

The crowned M in the cutlery design almost certainly refers to Princess Mathilde Laetitia Wilhelmina Bonaparte (1820-1904); she used a similar M for the initial letter on her stationery (fig. 8).<sup>12</sup> For a variety of reasons it is likely that she was aware of the cutlery design, but her precise role in the making of the drawing remains unknown.

Mathilde was the daughter of Jerome, King of Westphalia (1784-1860) – the youngest brother of Napoleon I (1769-1821) – and Princess Catharina van Württemberg (1783-1835). She spent her youth in Florence and Rome, where her interest in the arts was probably sparked.<sup>13</sup> Through her noble origins she was contracted to an arranged marriage to her cousin Napoleon III, but after his failed



Fig. 9  
SÉBASTIEN  
CHARLES GIRAUD,  
*The Large Salon of  
Princess Mathilde,*  
*Rue de Courcelles,*  
1859.

Oil on canvas,  
63 x 100 cm.  
Compiègne,  
Musées nationaux  
du Château,  
inv. no. c. 51.030.  
Photo: © RMN-  
Grand Palais  
(domaine de  
Compiègne)/  
Gérard Blot/  
Christian Jean

coup d'état on 30 October 1836 in Strasbourg, where he tried to depose King Louis-Philippe I of France (1773-1850), her parents broke off the engagement. The strong friendship that Mathilde and Napoleon III had built up from their youth, however, endured for the whole of their lives.<sup>14</sup> A new marriage candidate was found in the wealthy Russian Anatoli Nikolajevitsj Demidov (1813-1870), who had purchased the Tuscan title of First Prince of San Donato. They married in 1840. Her motivation for the marriage may have had to do with his wealth and his interest in the arts, and he probably married her for her status and position in the art world.<sup>15</sup> With the approval of Tsar Nicholas I (1796-1855), the couple separated in 1847 and Mathilde moved to Paris. In 1852 her cousin, with whom she had always kept in touch, awarded her the title of *Princesse Française* and she became the highest placed woman at the French court. She hosted social functions and organized banquets for

Napoleon III for the next year, until he married the Spanish countess Eugénie de Montijo (1826-1920).<sup>16</sup>

It is likely that during this period Mathilde also encountered artists who were working at her cousin's court. In 1853 Mathilde moved into 24 Rue de Courcelles, a house in which she established one of the most prominent salons of the nineteenth century (fig. 9). It was there that her international and diplomatic contacts helped her to become an important figure in the Parisian art world.<sup>17</sup> We know that several artists were close friends; Viollet-le-Duc was one of them. The intimate relationship between Viollet-le-Duc and Mathilde is evident from various exchanges of letters, now in the collection of the Médiathèque de l'architecture et du patrimoine (MAP). From the wide range of the topics they discussed and the freedom of the conversation that they kept up it is clear that Viollet-le-Duc was her confidant and her adviser, both in the arts and on a personal level.<sup>18</sup>

They spent a lot of time together and he wrote about this to members of his family.

He was a regular visitor to Saint-Gratien – Mathilde’s country estate, where she liked to spend time – or Rue de Courcelles and was one of a small group of artists, who were also close friends of Mathilde’s, which travelled to Belgirate in Italy in 1861. Inspired by the surroundings, Viollet-le-Duc made landscape drawings and sketches

during this stay; he gave several of them to Mathilde. There was also an exchange of drawings the other way round.<sup>19</sup> As the cutlery design intended for her was carefully finished and ended up in Bachelet’s files, unlike the sketchy little drawings, this probably did not apply to this sheet. The princess may have asked him to make a design for her, with the intention of commissioning Bachelet to execute it, but unfortunately we do not know if this ever happened.

## NOTES

- 1 Provenance: art dealer Chantal Kiener, Paris, year unknown; Kate Edelman Johnson, year unknown; her sale, Los Angeles (Andrew Jones Auctions), 18-19 May 2019, no. 210; purchased by the Rijksmuseum with funds from the Decorative Art Fund/Rijksmuseum Fonds, 2019.
- 2 Jean-Michel Leniaud, ‘Les Visions du Grand Duc’, in Laurence de Finance and Jean-Michel Leniaud, *Viollet-le-Duc, les visions d’un architecte*, exh. cat. Paris (Cité de l’architecture et du patrimoine) 2014, pp. 18-20; John Castagno, *European Artists II: Signatures and Monograms: A Comprehensive Directory from 1800*, Lanham 2007, pp. 276, 367.
- 3 Arnaud Timbert, *Viollet-le-Duc et Pierrefonds, histoire d’un chantier*, Villeneuve d’Ascq 2017, pp. 101-12.
- 4 Gaël Favier, ‘Viollet-le-Duc et les orfèvres religieux Notre-Dame de Paris’, in Finance and Leniaud 2014 (note 2), p. 118.
- 5 Peter Hervé, *The New Picture of Paris, from the Latest Observations*, London 1829, p. 522.
- 6 Didot-Bottin, *Annuaire-Almanach du Commerce et de l’industrie ou almanach des 500,000 adresses*, Paris 1859, p. 782.
- 7 Catharine Arminjon, *Dictionnaire des poinçons de fabricants d’ouvrages d’or et d’argent de Paris et de la Seine II: Paris 1838-1875*, Paris 1994, p. 259.
- 8 With thanks to Carole Pater from the Paris archives for the information about Louis Charles Bachelet.
- 9 *Exposition de Paris (Exposition universelle 1855): rapport du jury*, Paris 1856, pp. 912, 1151, 1432.
- 10 *Section française. Catalogue officiel: International exhibition 1862*, Paris 1862, p. 171.
- 11 For Viollet-le-Duc’s appointment as one of the ‘inspecteurs généraux des édifices diocésains’, see Martin Bressani, *Architecture and the Historical Imagination: Eugène-Emmanuel Violet-le-Duc, 1814-1879*, London/New York 2016, p. 273.
- 12 Isabelle Julia, *Le Peintre et la Princesse correspondance entre la princesse Mathilde Bonaparte et le peintre Ernest Hébert 1863-1904*, Paris 2004, pp. 30-31.
- 13 Éric Anceau, ‘Mathilde et Napoléon III: une relation privilégiée’, in Carole Blumenfeld, Philippe Costamagna, Adrien Goetz and Paul Perrin, *Un soir chez la princesse Mathilde: une Bonaparte et les arts*, exh. cat. Ajaccio (Palais Fesch-Musée des Beaux-Arts) 2019, p. 51.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Oleg Y. Neverov, *Great Private Collections of Imperial Russia*, London 2004, pp. 132-33.
- 16 The engraved seal bears similarities to Eugénie’s stamp. However, it is inconceivable that this cutlery was designed for her. Since her marriage in 1853 she had used the name Bonaparte and it would have been inappropriate to adapt the representation of the state crown for artistic purposes.
- 17 Anceau 2019 (note 13), pp. 52-53.
- 18 Jean-Charles Forgeret, ‘La princesse Mathilde et Viollet-le-Duc’, in Blumenfeld, Costamagna, Goetz and Perrin 2019 (note 13), p. 160. On 3 January 1904, after the death of the princess, Viollet-le-Duc’s son Eugène-Louis wrote: ‘Elle (Mathilde) avait pour mon père une véritable affection.’ (She had a true affection for my father.) Ibid., pp. 159-60.
- 19 Ibid., p. 159.

