

“Unmarked” Martelé

By L. J. Pristo, Ph.D.

I have been frequently asked about the likelihood of a piece of Gorham Martelé bearing a maker's mark from a different manufacturer without the Gorham marks being present. Essentially the question concerns the possibility of “unmarked” Martelé and usually arises concerning silver similar in style to Martelé but from other companies such as Reed & Barton, Black, Starr & Frost, and

Codman & Codman. As stated on page 172 of my book, *Martelé: Gorham's Nouveau Art Silver*, my opinion was that “just from common sense, Gorham would be unlikely to produce their award winning, flagship line of silver for another company so that company could place their name on the piece and take credit for the production.”

The question was recently raised again regarding a silver bowl that looked similar to Martelé but was marked only *Birks* (of Canada) and *Sterling*. Photos of the bowl were forwarded to me, and I was amazed at how closely the bowl appeared to resemble Martelé. In fact, there really did not appear to be any inconsistencies between the Birks bowl and a piece of Gorham's Martelé. I acquired the Birks bowl, and when it arrived I was even more impressed by its similarities to Martelé, to the point that I decided I needed to do some additional research.

I started by looking at numerous photos of Martelé bowls. The search found a match, or at least at first what I thought was a match, when I looked at the picture of the Gorham Martelé R/YS bowl. When first examining the picture of the Martelé bowl and the Birks piece, I saw that the foot and rim were the same, and that the decoration appeared to be a match (Fig. 1). On closer inspection, however, I noticed that the decoration is placed differently on the body of the Birks bowl in relation to the dips in the rim. So there was a match but not an exact one, and further investigation was needed.

My next step was to check the Gorham costing (production) information (Fig. 2). I found that the R/YS bowl was a Sample completed on 16 July 1909, and that there were the usual notations relating to making times, chasing times, etc., but nothing to explain the apparent similarities of the Birks bowl to the Gorham R/YS. I then proceeded to look at the “making card,” a card that Gorham used to record the actual raising of the piece, in terms of the metal used, its gauge, the amount of time needed for the making, and sometimes other data.

The making card (Fig. 3) indicates the R/YS bowl was finished in the making room on 22 December 1908. The card also indicates that Alfred Ottestad completed a second bowl on 7 June 1912 in 46 1/2 hours (as compared to 48 hours for the original). In fact, there may have been even a third example of the bowl, made by Alexander MacBeth and James Leckenby in 50 hours (this entry



Fig. 1. Comparison of the Gorham R/YS Martelé bowl (top) and the Birks-marked bowl (bottom).

PHOTOS, COSTING, AND MAKING INFORMATION IMAGES ARE COURTESY OF BROWN UNIVERSITY, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND.

	Y R O		S	
	Compute 7		Salad Bowl	
Weight	16-0		41-7	
Silver	12	80	33	08
Making 213	13	50	48	21 60
Last Birking 01				
Shaping 01	21	50	03	26 50
Pressing				
Bottoming	0	8	05	15
Leaving				
Finishing	35	18	40	20
Box	6	0	3	12 06
	48	09	81	59
	06	2	16	32
	57	71	97	91
	19	24	32	64
	76	95	130	55
	3	85	6	53
	80	80	137	08
es.		75		
M.V.	86		150	-
1/2/10	90			

Fig. 2. Electrostatic copy of the Gorham "costing" recording the parameters of the R/YS bowl (right column).

may have been an estimate since there is no date or "made" indicated on the card). Now realizing that more than one R/YS bowl had been made, the next step was to use the information in the photograph and on the costing and making cards to determine if the Birks bowl fit the recorded parameters of the R/YS bowl.

The original Gorham photo shows that the R/YS bowl is 10 1/2 inches in diameter (the company's measurements were variable and not always accurate); the new bowl is 10 5/16 inches in diameter. An examination of the costing card indicates that the original bowl weighed 41.35 ounces; the new bowl weighs 41.18 ounces, within the range that would be expected. The making card indicates that the bowl is made of three components, a .045-gauge body, a .030-gauge 5 1/2-inch bottom, and 20 inches of 15-gauge wire from a 57-inch piece. The new bowl's bottom disk measures 5 inches in diameter. The base circumference, with the wire rim, is 20 inches, and the top edge includes a wire rim that is 32 inches in circumference, for a total of 52-plus inches. The gauge of the metal

Bowl		YRS		DEC 22 1860		
PARTS	Pcs.	SIZE	Gage	DRAWING	DIE	M. W.
Body	1	14	045			Martelé
Bottom	1	5 1/2	030			time 48
Wire	20	57	15			
Adjust	1	4 1/2		4/2/10		
Wire	20	57				
Wire	20	57				

Fig. 3. The Gorham "making card" for the R/YS bowl, indicating that more than one example was made.

used in the construction of the Birks bowl fits the parameters of the R/YS bowl (the exact gauge could not be determined because of the curves and hammered surface, but the measurements that were taken were close).

Based on the consistency of the information and its overall appearance, the Birks bowl does have all of the characteristics of the R/YS bowls and of Martelé in general. This leaves little doubt in my mind that the Birks piece is the later Martelé bowl (or the third, if it was actually made). A magnified examination of the base and other areas does not reveal any indication of a removed mark, which leads to the conclusion that the bowl is a legitimate piece of Martelé that was never marked by Gorham, and which bears the mark of a different company.

The fact that the mark was that of Birks is not entirely surprising, since there is already information that indicates Gorham allowed the company to mark Gorham silver with the Birks marks. But this is the first piece of Martelé known by the author to have the Birks mark, and it remains uncertain if the piece is unique or one of several. As individual pieces of Martelé and pseudo-Martelé are documented, perhaps additional Birks items will be found.

Larry J. Pristo is the author of *Martelé: Gorham's Nouveau Art Silver*. Book updates and new information about Martelé can be found at his Web site:

