



Treasures of the Royal Courts: Tudors, Stuarts and the Russian Tsars

Supported by the Friends of the V&A

With further support from Summa Group

9 March – 14 July 2013

A new V&A exhibition will examine the development of cultural diplomacy and trade between Britain and Russia from its origins in 1555 when the Muscovy Company was founded. *Treasures of the Royal Courts: Tudors, Stuarts and the Russian Tsars* will reveal the majesty and pageantry of the royal courts of Henry VIII to Charles II and Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible) to the early Romanovs as they sought to strengthen their power against a backdrop of religious and social upheaval.

The exhibition will begin with Henry VIII's consolidation of the Tudor dynasty following his accession to the throne in 1509 and the establishment of the English court style. Charting the exchange between consecutive British sovereigns and ambassadors and their corresponding rulers and diplomats in Russia, it will conclude at the end of Charles II's reign in 1685, after the re-establishment of the British monarchy had resumed contact with Russia.

Comprising more than 150 objects, the exhibition will chronicle the ritual and chivalry of the royal courts with heraldry, processional armour and sumptuous textiles including furnishings and fine clothing. The leading figures of the time including monarchs, diplomats, wealthy merchants and courtiers will be introduced through portraiture, including paintings and miniatures by court artists. Magnificent examples of jewellery and luxury goods will illustrate the valuable gifts presented by ambassadors. Other highlights will include a rarely shown portrait of Elizabeth I; the celebrated Barbor jewel, a pendant of enamelled gold set with an onyx cameo of Elizabeth I; a hand-coloured map of Muscovy from 1570; and contemporary literature including Shakespeare's First Folio.

At the heart of the exhibition will be a showcase of spectacular British and French silver; 20 extraordinary survivals given to successive Russian Tsars as well as examples from Charles I's collection sold by British merchants of the Muscovy Company to Tsar Alexis. Held in the Kremlin Armouries since this time, they would have been melted down to finance either the English Civil War or the reign of Louis XIV had they remained in Britain or France. The vulnerable status of silver, easily melted and recycled as coinage, will be underlined by the remarkable Dolphin Basin, made in 1635 by Christiaan van Vianen, a favoured silversmith of both Charles I and Charles II, which lacks its accompanying ewer. This has inspired a new commission for a related vase by contemporary silversmith Miriam Hanid, which will be displayed at the end of the exhibition.

Martin Roth, V&A Director said: *“This exhibition tells us about Britain’s longstanding relationship with Russia as well as highlighting similarities of diplomacy and exchange between both countries - then and today. Our partnership with the Kremlin Museums continues this association and we are delighted to bring together such extraordinary treasures from both museums.”*

The outstanding craftsmanship of the workshops attached to the courts will be explored including the Royal Almain Armoury in Greenwich, founded by Henry VIII in 1515, which tailor-made his imposing suit of armour, on loan from the Royal Collection. The Almain Album, a unique record containing 29 bespoke Greenwich armour designs by Jacob Halder for high-ranking royal courtiers of the Elizabethan court will be shown as an interactive display.

The important role of heraldry in the 16th and 17th centuries as a display of status and strength was conveyed using coats of arms and the depiction of beasts as a metaphorical world of fantastical creatures. The Dacre Beasts, a group of red bull, black griffin, white ram and crowned white dolphin that bear the medieval arms and armorial crest of the powerful Dacre family will be on display with the ‘Kynge’s Beestes’ stone lions – the only beasts known to have survived from Henry VIII’s royal palaces. The heraldic emblem of the pelican will also be represented; a pair of live pelicans were given to Britain in 1662 by the Russian ambassador and nested in St James’s Park where their successors remain today.

Although no illustrations of Russian ambassadors presenting at British courts are known, other depictions of European ambassadors presenting to British monarchs will be included. Paintings showing Charles II receiving the Spanish ambassador, the Prince de Ligne from the Chateau Beloeil in Belgium, will be projected to convey the fanfare and public excitement surrounding an ambassadorial reception. A remarkable example of gift-giving at court is the lavish chariot presented in 1604 by British ambassador Thomas Smith to the Russian ruler Tsar Boris Godunov. It reflected Britain’s technological advances and introduced the notion of wheeled transport for the first time to Russia. Too delicate to travel from the Kremlin Armouries Museum, it will be represented by a specially-commissioned film and scale model.

The works will be drawn from the V&A’s collections, with important loans from Russia, including the Kremlin Armouries Museum and the State Historical Museum in Moscow, alongside objects from British collections including the National Portrait Gallery, National Maritime Museum, the Royal Collection and Royal Armouries.

The exhibition marks the 400 year anniversary of the Romanov dynasty and is part of an ongoing programme of exchange between the V&A and the Kremlin Armouries Museum in Moscow. An exhibition, *The Golden Age of the English Court: from Henry VIII to Charles I*, including many loans from the V&A, runs from 24 October 2012 – 27 January 2013 in Moscow.

-ENDS-

NOTES TO EDITORS

- The exhibition curator is Tessa Murdoch, Deputy Keeper of Sculpture, Metalwork, Ceramics and Glass at the V&A
- An audioguide, narrated by historian David Starkey in English and Moscow Bureau Chief of The Economist Arkady Ostrovsky in Russian, will accompany the exhibition
- The V&A is open daily from 10.00 – 17.45 and until 22.00 every Friday

Ticket Information

Tickets: £8 (concessions available)

For advance bookings visit www.vam.ac.uk (booking fee applies) or call 020 7907 707

Exhibition Sponsors:

About the Friends of the V&A

The Friends of the V&A was founded in 1976 and supports the V&A with grants towards acquisitions, scholarships, exhibitions and other important work. Members enjoy a range of benefits including free entry to V&A exhibitions, previews of exhibitions and new galleries, and the annual Members' Week. For more information visit www.vam.ac.uk/membership.

About Summa Group

Summa Group is a diversified private holding with significant investments in port logistics, engineering, construction, telecommunications and the oil and gas sectors. Companies of the Group employ more than 10,000 people in almost 40 regions of Russia and abroad. Mr. Ziyavudin Magomedov is the founder and shareholder of the Group.

Corporate support for the V&A is more vital than ever. Please help us by acknowledging the exhibition supporters Friends of the V&A and Summa Group.

About Vnesheconombank

Vnesheconombank, which has supported the transport of loan objects, is a Russian state corporation performing functions of the Bank for Development. It operates to diversify the Russian economy, boost its competitive edge and encourage the inflow of investments.

Exhibition Publication

V&A Publishing has produced a hardback book to accompany the exhibition, jointly edited by Professor Olga Dmitrieva, Moscow State University and Dr. Tessa Murdoch, V&A and published in Russian and English editions. For PRESS information about the book, contact Julie Chan on 020 7942 2701 or email j.chan@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

Exhibition Merchandise

There will be a V&A Shop range to coincide with the exhibition. For PRESS information on merchandise contact Lee Kendall on 020 7942 2681 or email l.kendall@vam.ac.uk.

For further PRESS information about the exhibition, contact Zoë Franklin or Amelia MacGregor on 020 7942 2497 / 2502 or z.franklin@vam.ac.uk / a.macgregor@vam.ac.uk.

A selection of high resolution images are available to download at pressimages.vam.ac.uk