

Fabergé Vases Galore – In Search of Historic Truth

By James Hurtt (USA)

Newsletter readers who do not read Russian have an opportunity in this essay to become acquainted with research on seven vases with English language descriptions, supporting scholarly information and outstanding Russian photographs.

- Shown for the first time as a group are seven vases in the *Fabergé, Jeweller to the Imperial Court*¹ exhibition (November 25, 2020 - March 14, 2021) at the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia. Catalog numbers from the Hermitage Museum publication are used with each illustration and in the text, unless otherwise noted.
- It has been 27 years since six of these Fabergé vases were included in a traveling (Russia, France and the United Kingdom) venue, *Fabergé: Imperial Jeweler*, 1993.²
- Ground-breaking research for six vases by Russian contributors was published by Géza von Habsburg and Marina Lopato in the exhibition catalog accompanying the 2000 Wilmington (DE), exhibit, *Fabergé: Imperial Craftsman*.³
- Archival research from a Russian publication (Guzanov, A., and R. R. Gafifulin, *Fabergé Items of Late XIX - Early XX Century in the Collection of the State Museum of Pavlovsk*, 2014, p. 210, #3801-3804) is also cited.
- The author's analysis for an unknown vase is included for readers to share additional supporting documentation.

The late, lamented Marina Lopato exhorts us to pay attention to archival material:

“Only careful use of archival material can help us sort out the vast body of objects that go under the name of Fabergé, to understand the cultural, social and philosophical aspects of the Fabergé phenomenon and to be of service to scholars, dealers and collectors.”⁴

She also highly recommends the list of invoices for Imperial purchases published in Guzanov, A., and R. R. Gafifulin, *Fabergé Items of Late XIX - Early XX Century in the Collection of the State Museum of Pavlovsk*, 2014, pp. 76-313, which updates her research in the 2000 exhibition monograph. Of particular interest are the Imperial purchases pertaining to the year 1898. Another, equally important activity to aid in understanding an object is to look at multiple images of the item. However, there is no real substitute for actually handling the object!

¹ Baboshina, T. V., and Marina N. Lopato. *Фаберже - ювелир Императорского двора* (Fabergé, Jeweller to the Imperial Court). St. Petersburg: Hermitage, 2020.

² von Habsburg, Géza, and Marina Lopato. *Fabergé: Imperial Jeweler*, 1993. Monograph to accompany exhibition sponsored by the Fabergé Arts Foundation, Washington (DC), and the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia. The exhibition of 369 objects, photographs, and drawings traveled during 1993-94 from the State Hermitage Museum to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, and to the Victoria & Albert Museum, London. Separate Russian, French, and English editions of the catalog were published.

³ von Habsburg, Géza, et al. *Fabergé: Imperial Craftsman and His World*, 2000. Monograph accompanies an exhibition in Wilmington (DE) for over 1,000 treasures of Fabergé and his workmasters, Fabergé's Russian competitors (Bolin and Tillander), and foreign contemporaries (Tiffany, Cartier, Boucheron and Laliqé). Nine major Fabergé work masters and their work are featured.

⁴ Lopato's posthumous article, [Fabergé - A Cultural Phenomenon of the Modern Age](#) (*Silver Studies: The Journal of the Silver Society*, #36, 2020, pp. 40-45)

3801	1898	II	21	б. №	Ваза стеклянная (Gallé) с болотными растениями и эфемерами: серебряная оправа с эфемерами	70	Н. II	Ф. 468. Оп. 32. Д. 1635. Л. 86
3802	1898	II	21	б. №	Ваза (Gallé) «бамбук»: серебряная оправа с листьями	200	Н. II	Ф. 468. Оп. 32. Д. 1635. Л. 86
3803	1898	II	21	б. №	Ваза (Gallé) с литьями — электрическая лампа: серебряная оправа, болотные растения	240	Н. II	Ф. 468. Оп. 32. Д. 1635. Л. 86
3804	1898	II	21	б. №	Ваза (Императорской фабрики) L<ouis>. XVI, с 3-мя сфинксами	100	Н. II	Ф. 468. Оп. 32. Д. 1635. Л. 86

Nicholas II Invoice, February 21, 1898
(Guzanov, A., and R. R. Gafifulin, 2014, p. 210.)

***In Situ* Photographs from *Fabergé, Jeweller to the Imperial Court* (November 2020 - March 2021 exhibition)**



Left to Right: **#53** Gallé Glass Vase with Silver Mounts, **#55** Gallé Glass Vase with Silver Mounts, **#54** Gallé Vase Mounted in Silver, **#56** Imperial Lapidary Works Vase with Silver-gilt Mounts



Left to Right: **#48** Doulton Vase with Silver Mounts, **#49** Bowl/Vase on Three Silver Sphinxs, **#51** Glass and Silver Vase

(Courtesy Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia)

Three of the glass bodies on the vases (#53-55) are works of art by [Émile Gallé](#) (1846-1904), French artist and designer who worked in glass, and is considered to be one of the major innovators in the French *Art Nouveau* movement, one vase (#48) by a craftsman at Royal Doulton (English ceramic

manufacturer founded in 1815 and awarded the Royal Warrant in 1902), and one vase (#56) by the Imperial Lapidary Works of Russia (founded in 1725). The glass makers for vases #49 and #51 are not known. The vases here are embellished by two Fabergé workmasters - one vase (#48) by Viktor Aarne **BA BA** (active 1891-1904), and five (#49, #53-56) by Julius Rappoport **I.P. IP** (active 1883-1908), all with silver and silver-gilt mounts and/or decorations. Unfortunately, vase (#51) has no archival provenance stated since its suggested inception dates (1899-1908) until 2013.

Four vases were special commissions without stock numbers for Emperor Nicholas II, who gifted them to his wife Alexandra Feodorovna. The most expensive vase at 500 rubles was purchased by Nicholas for a 1900 Christmas gift for Alexandra has a scratched stock number 6240 normally reserved for retail store sales. The special commission pieces were made in 1897-98.⁵ I suspect Fabergé, clever business man that he was, realized the imperial interest in artistic vases, so he made some which would appeal to Alexandra's taste of the *Art Nouveau* style, or what the Russians at that time called *Style Moderne*. Decorated objects produced by the Imperial Glassworks of Russia and Fabergé's mounted vases supplied by the Imperial Lapidary Works had competitors in the Swedish Rörstrand Company and Louis Comfort Tiffany in the United States. What is noteworthy about the majority of vases highlighted here is the design and workmanship of the silver mounts matching the artistry of the vases - one would expect no less from Fabergé's artisans.

Alexandra Feodorovna, Empress of Russia (1894-1917), born a Princess of Hesse and by Rhine was very close to her only brother Grand Duke Ernest Ludwig (1868-1937), a prominent patron of *Jugendstil* (German version of *Art Nouveau*). Like her brother, Alexandra was very fond of the *Jugendstil* which did not find widespread favor in St. Petersburg, nor at the Fabergé firm as stated by Fabergé's chief designer Franz Birbaum: "The 'Modern' style, which appeared at the end of the nineteenth century, was not very widely reflected in the firm's jewellery ..."⁶ A review of the invoices from the Fabergé firm to the Imperial couple reveals approximately 23 vases were purchased by them together, or individually from 1897 to the end of 1906. The average price was 106 rubles, so the 500 rubles Nicholas paid in 1901 for #48 (Doulton vase) is quite remarkable. It was the equivalent of a teacher's annual salary in the United States.

⁵ Guzanov, A., and R. R. Gafifulin, 2014, p. 210, #3801-3804. Fabergé invoices were paid up to a year later.

⁶ von Habsburg, Géza, and Marina Lopato, 1993, p. 447.

#53 Gallé Glass Vase with Silver Mounts by Julius Rappoport



(Baboshina, T. V., and Marina N. Lopato, 2020, pp. 132-133.)



Alexandra's Drawing Room in the Winter Palace, ca. 1917

(Harrison, Stephen, Emmanuel Ducamp, Jeannine Falino, et al. *Artistic Luxury: Fabergé, Tiffany, Lalique*, 2008, p. 167)

3801	1898	II	21	б. №	Ваза стеклянная (Gallé) с болотными растениями и эфемерами: серебряная оправа с эфемерами	70	Н. II	Ф. 468. Оп. 32. Д. 1635. Л. 86
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Nicholas II Invoice, February 21, 1898

(Guzanov, A., and R. R. Gafifulin, 2014, p. 210, #3801)

Dimensions: 20.5 cm high (8 1/16 in.)

Marks: Fabergé, workmaster initials Julius Rappoport **I.P.** **AP**, 88 silver assay mark for St. Petersburg before 1899 on the silver foot. The glass signed and dated 'Émile Gallé 1892 Nancy fecit'. (Émile Gallé 1892 made by Nancy.)

Description and Materials: Quadruple overlay glass with opaline, pink, colorless and black hues, decorated with waterlilies and dragonflies issuing from water, everted conical silver foot chased with waves. Inscription around the lip of the vase: "Vegetations de Symboles" and "Palmes lentes de mes desirs. Nénuphars mornes des plaisirs. Mousses froides, lianes molles...". The text is verse 2* of the Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) poem, *Feuillage du cœur* [*Foliage of the Heart*]:

Végétations de symboles,	Vegetation of symbols,
Nénuphars mornes des plaisirs,	Dull water lilies of pleasures,
Palmes lentes de mes désirs,	Slow palms of my desires,
Mousses froides, lianes molles	Cold mosses, soft lianas.

*Cited above in the corrected [order](#)⁷

It is suggested Maeterlinck was one of Gallé's favorite poets, and the glass artist since 1884 used this technique, later called "vases parlants".

⁷von Habsburg, Géza, et al., 2000, p. 116, #177.

Provenance: The vase was probably acquired by Empress Alexandra Feodorovna in October 1896 while she visited her only brother Grand Duke Ernest Ludwig (1868-1937) in Darmstadt, Germany. Nicholas commissioned the special silver mount. On February 21, 1898, Nicholas II paid 70 rubles for “Glass vase by Gallé with marsh flowers and ephemerae. Silver stand with ephemerae.” RGIA, f. 468, inv. 32, item 1635, sheet 86.⁸ The 1909 Inventory of the Winter Palace Imperial apartment by N. Dementyev lists the vase in the office of the Empress. It remained in the former private apartments of the Imperial family as part of a historical life-style display from 1918 to 1926. A decision was made to dismantle these rooms and sell off the contents. *Art Nouveau* was not popular in the West given the height of the *Art Deco* style, so none of the objects found buyers and were eventually transferred to the Hermitage in 1931.

#55 Gallé Cylindrical Triple-overlay Glass Vase with Silver Mounts by Julius Rappoport



(Baboshina, T. V., and Marina N. Lopato, 2000, pp. 136-137)

3802	1898	II	21	6. №	Ваза (Галле) «бамбук»: серебряная оправа с листьями	200	Н. II	Ф. 468. Оп. 32. Д. 1635. Л. 86
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Nicholas II Invoice, February 21, 1898

(Guzanov, A., and R. R. Gafifulin, 2014, p. 210, #3802)

Dimensions: 24.89 cm high (9 13/16 in.)

Marks: Fabergé, workmaster initials Julius Rappoport **I.P.** **LP**, 88 silver assay mark for St. Petersburg before 1899. The glass signed ‘Émile Gallé and ‘Croix de Lorraine’ (special cross of Byzantine origin which became the symbol of Lorraine).

Description and Materials: Decorated with dahlia blooms and leaves in yellow-green and violet-brown hues, with dark green buds and leaves in relief against a dark background. The body of the vase is shaped like a bamboo shoot with a background of dahlia stems, leaves, and flowers.

Provenance: February 21, 1898, Nicholas II paid 200 rubles for “Bamboo vase by Gallé. Silver stand with leaves”. Special commission without a scratched stock number. According to the 1909 N. Dementyev Inventory this vase stood in the Louis XVI drawing room in the Winter Palace quarters of Nicholas II and Alexandra Feodorovna (Archive GE, f.1, op. VIII g, d.7b, 1.27).⁹ Transferred to the

⁸ *Ibid.*, #177.

⁹ *Ibid.*, #179.

Hermitage in 1931.

#54 Gallé Vase Mounted in Silver by Julius Rappoport



(Baboshina, T. V., and Marina N. Lopato, 2000, pp. 134-135)

3803	1898	II	21	6. №	Ваза (Gallé) с лилиями — электрическая лампа: серебряная оправа, болотные растения	240	Н. II	Ф. 468. Оп. 32. Д. 1635. Л. 86
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Nicholas II Invoice, February 21, 1898

(Guzanov, A., and R. R. Gafifulin, *Fabergé Items of Late XIX – Early XX Century in the Collection of the State Museum of Pavlovsk*, 2014, p. 210, #3803)

Dimensions: 19.8 cm high (7 13/16 in.)

Marks: Fabergé, workmaster initials Julius Rappoport **I.P.** **LR**, 88 silver assay mark for St. Petersburg before 1899.

Description and Materials: Pear-shaped overlay glass vase by Gallé with silver mount by Fabergé, the triple overlay vase in pink and violet-black hues decorated with large Clematis blooms, leaves and swirling tendrils, the silver base applied with Clematis leaves and tendrils. Inscribed: “en ses creusets le langage des fleurs et des choses muettes/Baudelaire” (Translated: ‘in its crucibles’ the language of flowers and silent things/Baudelaire.) Wikipedia text suggests line 20 from a poem by Charles Baudelaire, [Élévation](#) (1857) includes this shortened line, “Le langage des fleurs et des choses muettes!” (The language of flowers and silent things!)

Provenance: Nicholas II paid 240 rubles on Feb 21, 1898, for “Vase (Gallé) with lilies - electric lamp: silver frame, marsh plants”. It is possible Nicholas had this particular vase transformed into an electric lamp, but before 1909 it was returned to a vase when N. Dementyev inventoried it (Archive GE, f.1, op. VIII g, d. 7b, 1.47).¹⁰ Electric lamps were often made from vases but not drilled for an electric wire opening. Instead, the wire hung down from the structure supporting the light bulb and shade. Further evidence for my conclusion is the invoice for 240 rubles, higher than the other vases in the group. The larger amount may have accounted for the electric light fixtures. In 1931, transferred to the Hermitage.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, #178.

#56 Imperial Lapidary Works Vase with Silver-gilt Mounts by Julius Rappoport



(Baboshina, T. V., and Marina N. Lopato, 2020, pp. 138-139)



(Istra Catalog: *Fabergé Style. Timeless Excellence*, 2019, p. 93)

(RGIA, f. 504, inv.1, item 2201, pages 34, 35, item 2189, page 20). It seems likely that the vase was produced by Pestu, the famous Berlin engraver, who was invited to Russia by the factory director, A.L. Gun.
The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (NE 17576).
LAZ

Vase Description
(von Habsburg, Géza, *et al.*, 2000, p. 116, #176)

Dimensions: 37 cm high (14 7/12 in.)

Marks: Fabergé, workmaster initials Julius Rappoport **I.P.** **LP**, 88 silver assay mark of St. Petersburg before 1899.

Description and Materials: The tall vase carved from a single piece of quartz with a nymph, shells, and a dolphin, the silver-gilt mount decorated with *Rococo* shells and *Art Nouveau* plant motifs.

Provenance: In May 1898, the Imperial Cabinet paid 1,880 rubles for the carved smoky “topaz” or quartz vase from the Imperial Lapidary Works. Nicholas paid 275 rubles just for the silver-gilt base and box on May 25, 1898 (RGIA, f. 504, inv.1, item 2201, pages 34, 35, item 2189, page 20).¹¹ In the Winter Palace apartment of Nicholas II and Alexandra Feodorovna, and between 1917-1922 transferred to the Hermitage Museum.

¹¹ Lopato, Marina. “Notes on the Lapidary Work of the Fabergé Firm” in von Habsburg, Géza, 2000, pp. 298-299.

#48 Doulton Vase with Silver Mounts with Silver Pea Pod Decorations by Viktor Arne



Pea Pod Decoration Enlargement
(Guzanov, A., and R. R. Gaffulin, 2014, pp.39-41;
Baboshina, T. V., and Marina N. Lopato,
2000, pp. 122-123)

[Palisander/Rosewood Drawing Room](#) in the
Alexander Palace, 1917
(Courtesy Paul Gilbert)

Dimensions: 52 cm tall (20.47 in.) cut line

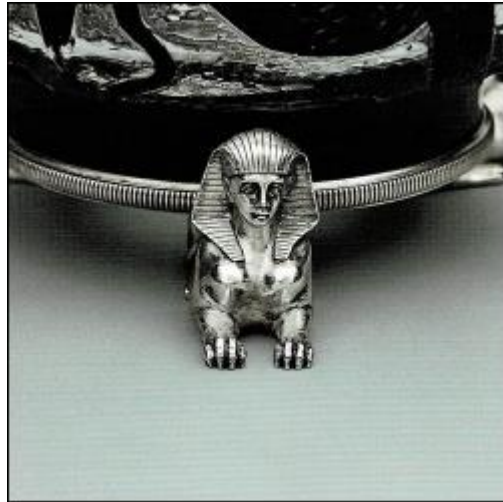
Marks: Fabergé, workmaster initials Viktor Arne **BA BA**, 88 silver assay mark for St. Petersburg 1899-1908. Scratched stock number 6240.

Materials: Red glazed pottery vase stamped on the base 'England 1654'. *Art Nouveau* style with silver mounts and pea pods suspended from the silver rim.

Provenance: Purchased by Nicholas II January 22, 1901, for 500 rubles. Christmas 1900 gift to his wife Alexandra Feodorovna, who displayed it in the Palisander/Rosewood Room of the Alexander Palace. Most of the remaining contents of the Alexander Palace were transferred to the Pavlovsk Palace Collection after World War II, where this vase is still treasured today. The vase has a stock number 6240 indicating it may have been part of the regular retail inventory of the St. Petersburg shop. Did Carl Fabergé show this vase to Nicholas II expecting him to purchase it based on the special commissions for silver-mounted art glass vases Nicholas ordered in 1897-1898 from the firm?

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#49 Glass Bowl/Vase on Three Silver Sphinxs by Julius Rappoport




(Baboshina, T. V., and Marina N. Lopato, 2000, pp. 124-125)

3804	1898	II	21	6. №	Ваза (Императорской фабрики) L<ouis>. XVI, с 3-мя сфинксами	100	Н. II	Ф. 468. Оп. 32. Д. 1635. Л. 86
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Nicholas II Invoice, February 21, 1898

(Guzanov, A., and R. R. Gafifulin, 2014, p. 210, #3804)

Dimensions: Diameter 14.3 cm (5.63 in.) 9.8 cm high (3.85 in.)

Marks: Fabergé and the Imperial Warrant, workmaster initials Julius Rappoport **I.P.** , 88 silver assay mark for St. Petersburg prior to 1899.

Description and Materials: Circular Egyptian-style glass bowl (later called a vase) with blackened silver-overlay reserves depicting vultures standing on three silver sphinx feet.

Provenance: Purchased by Nicholas II for 100 rubles February 21, 1898, as a special commission without a stock number. Alexander Palace prior to 1940, now in the Pavlovsk Collection.

#51 Glass and Silver Vase

Photographic images of the vase and its monogram, when illustrated in published resources, are assembled below:

Image not available, auction no longer on the Internet.

Does a reader have a copy of the photograph to share?

Dorotheum Vienna, May 14, 2013, Lot 1210 sold for €32,020



Bonhams London, November 26, 2014 [Lot 148](#)



Hermitage Venue 2020/21
In Situ Photograph



Istra Exhibition Catalog, 2019, p. 154 with Minimum of Information; Baboshina, T. V., and Marina N. Lopato, 2000, pp. 128-129)

No information available



Monogram for the Blue and Purple Vases
Bonhams London, November 26, 2014
[Lot 148](#)

Monogram?
Dorotheum Vienna, May 14, 2013, Lot 1210 sold for €32,020



No Monogram for the Black Vase
Since the Vase Is Shown from the Back
(Istra 2019 and Hermitage 2020 Catalogs)

Dimensions: 42 cm high (16 9/16 in.)

Marks: Fabergé and 84 silver assay mark for Moscow, 1899-1908.

Description and Materials: The ovoid dichroic lithyalin-type Continental vase simulating grey carved stone enriched with speckled gold, mounted in a silver scrolling foliate supports an openwork *Rococo* style base with an applied Latin monogram **NGB** [Bonhams Auction Catalog, 2014] or **NBY** [Hermitage Catalog, 2020, p. 128] resting on four-leaf feet.

Provenance: Dorotheum Vienna May 14, 2013, Lot 1210 sold for €32,020 (No longer on the Internet)

Bonhams London, November 26, 2014 [Lot 148](#) sold for 25,000GBP (US\$ 34,494)

Fabergé Museum Baden-Baden, 2014

Research conundrums to solve:

- No standard marks (workmaster initials, silver assay marks, stock number, etc.) from the object published in any of the printed sources.
- The Moscow glass and silver vase (#51) from its suggested inception (1899-1908) until 2013 has a large gap in its provenance, i.e., 114 years of archival documentation are missing.
- The monogram, when shown, has been interpreted in several ways:
 - **NGB** in Latin (Bonhams Auction Catalog, 2014)
 - **NBY** (Headlined in the object's description, 2020Hermitage catalog, p. 128)
 - **No monogram** is visible in the 2019 Istra catalog (p. 154) and in the 2020 Hermitage 2020 catalog illustrations, because the vase is shown in both instances from the back where there is no monogram.
 - **NBG** is the consensus among Fabergé researchers, since the surname is traditionally placed in the second position.
- The monogram is applied by hand, rather than engraved which tends to cost more.
- The descriptive text on the marks suggest vase (#51) has a silver mount made in the Fabergé Moscow workshop between 1899 and 1908, while the other six vases were made in the St. Petersburg workshops of Viktor Aarne and Julius Rappoport. The Moscow workshop used cut-glass as did the jewelers Bolin and Petr Fariseev, who also mounted pottery and porcelain vases made by the Kuznetsov factory (1810-1917) with silver.
- Per Wikipedia, the lithyalin-type material is “a type of glass, developed in Bohemia by Friedrich Egermann (1777-1864). It is opaque and has a marbled surface resembling semi-precious stone.” The type of glass - lithyalin - used in vase (#51) has not been seen in any of the vases mounted by the Moscow workshop until this example. Is it a special commission? The applied silver monogram might support this theory. An extensive study of the monogram has not yielded the identity of the owner. Did someone supply the vase to be mounted?

Are there other known Fabergé objects made from “lithyalin-type” glass? A search of leading auction databases has not identified the use of this material. Readers are invited to share further details.