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## Title of Object

Tazza

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## Photo of Object (optional)



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## Object Information

**Artist:** Unknown

**Culture:** Italian

**Date of Object:** 1575-1599

**Country:** Italy

**Accession Number:** 75.54

**File Created:** 1/3/2018

**Material/Medium:** Silver, gilt

**Author of File:** Richard Ploetz

**Department:** Decorative Arts, Textiles, and  
Sculpture

**Reviewer of File:** Kara ZumBahlen

**Last Updated/Reviewed:** 6/14/2018

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## Tour Topics

All that glitters, Ancient Rome, Roman emperor, ancient culture, food and drink, power and status, leaders, stories/storytelling, conflict/war, wealthy, silver, Al and Mary Agnes McQuinn, feast, Renaissance, Aldobrandini, Augustus, Domitian, Caesar

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## Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

1. How do you think people knew which emperor was depicted on the tazza?
2. How would you use a tazza? How would you use 12 of them?
3. Take a moment to look at the Tazza, and focus on what elements help us identify this as having a story and figures from ancient Rome.

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## Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

1. A tazza (Italian for “cup”) is a wide but shallow saucer-like dish either mounted on a stem and foot or on a foot alone. It is a type of vessel used either for drinking, serving small items of food, or just for display. (Wikipedia)

2. Mia’s tazza was part of a set of 12 such cups, called the Aldobrandini Tazze. They are outstanding examples of Renaissance metalwork, described by experts as "the most impressive single monument of Italian and perhaps European goldsmith's work of the 16th century", and by the Victoria and Albert Museum as "one of the most spectacular groups of 16th century silver to survive."

Each tazza is a bowl or cup, approximately 16 inches (41 cm) high. The form is based on the kylix, a broad shallow wine-drinking cup from Ancient Greece, also the source of the word “chalice.” Some tazze could be used for drinking, but they would also be used as serving dishes for small food items, such as delicacies, sweets or fruit. These lavishly decorated vessels were probably intended primarily as a spectacular display of wealth and artistic taste. They were cast in sections that screw together, with seven main parts: a base, comprising a foot and stem; a disc to support the bowl, normally concealed beneath it; the circular dish-like bowl itself; a low pedestal standing above the center of bowl; and the figurine of a Roman emperor mounted on the pedestal, with separate cape.

The inside surface of each shallow bowl is chased, with guilloche decoration around the edge. Chased classical columns separate the space into four panels, each showing a scene taken from the life of the relevant Roman emperor: Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian, Titus, or Domitian. Several of the bowls are also decorated with the arms of the Italian Aldobrandini family, with a galero or ecclesiastical hat with six tassels to either side. These denote ecclesiastical rank in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, with six tassels usually indicating a bishop. In many cases, the arms are marked on the underside of the bowl, suggesting the set was not commissioned by the Aldobrandini family but acquired later.

The silver tazze were made in white metal in around 1560-70, and were gilded after 1861. The designer and maker is not known. Differences in style between the chased decoration of the bowls suggests that more than several skilled craftsmen were involved. In six cases (including the stem on our tazza), the original foot and stem with restrained classically-inspired fluting has been replaced by a contemporaneous but more decorative foot from another source, possibly from a set of 16th-century Spanish monstrances or reliquaries. (Aldobrandini Tazze, Wikipedia)

3. The figure on our tazza is the Emperor Augustus, the first emperor of Rome. However, the dish does not show scenes from the life of this emperor, but of the Emperor Domitian. At one time in their history, they were disassembled, then incorrectly put back together! The bowls and figures from the set of 12 have recently been in an exhibition, *The Silver Caesars: A Renaissance Mystery*, and are displayed with their correct bowls. (The Silver Caesars, Metropolitan Museum)

4. For Augustus’ bowl (which is in another collection), the 4 scenes chosen to illustrate his life were: 1. At the Battle of Actium (31 B.C.), Augustus wins a decisive naval victory against Mark Antony and Cleopatra, ending the civil war; 2. Cleopatra commits suicide by the bite of a poisonous snake (30 B.C.); 3. Augustus closes the door of the Temple of Janus Quirinus in Rome (29 B.C.), to show that—unusually—peace reigned throughout the Roman world; and 4. Augustus, now unchallenged ruler of the

Roman world, celebrates his military victories in a triumphal procession (29 B.C.). (Augustus, Met Museum)

5. The bowl that is part of our tazza shows the following scenes from the Emperor Domitian's life: 1. During the war with Vitellius over control of Rome (a.d. 69), Domitian flees to the Capitol. When the temple bursts into flames, he goes into hiding with the building's caretaker; 2. Emperor Domitian, having restored the Circus Maximus, entertains his people with an extravagant display of chariot races; 3. Domitian generously hands out money to the Roman people; 4. Domitian celebrates his military victories over the northern tribes with a triumphal procession (a.d. 89). (Domitian, Met Museum)

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### Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

1. The tazza was a popular form in Renaissance Europe. The shape (without the central statuette) was derived from ancient drinking vessels and was adapted to serve food as well. Some tazze, however, were intended solely for display, and were exhibited in dining halls or viewed in private treasuries. In the early seventeenth century, when the Silver Caesars were owned by the Aldobrandini family in Rome, the tazze were displayed, empty, during at least two feasts. Their excellent condition confirms that the Silver Caesars were rarely, if ever, used to serve food. (Met Museum)

2. Our original label had misidentified the bowl as showing scenes from the Emperor Caligula's life. Instead, it is from the Emperor Domitian's life. According to the Met Museum, "The first scene on this tazza is among the most puzzling in the set, contributing to a long-standing misidentification of the dish. Part of the difficulty stems from the fact that although the episode takes place in Rome, the setting looks nothing like the ancient city—the buildings at right are typical of Northern Europe. In fact, the tazze have a preponderance of Northern imagery, suggesting that the Silver Caesars were manufactured north of the Alps." (Met Museum)

3. The tazze have a complicated and somewhat uncertain history and provenance. At one time they were attributed to Benvenuto Cellini, but that attribution is no longer considered correct. More recent scholarship indicates they were made in the southern Netherlands, possibly for a Habsburg patron, perhaps Archduke Albert VII of Austria, towards the end of the 16th century, and then acquired by a member of the Aldobrandini family before 1603. Different bowls have slightly different styles, suggesting that a team of silversmiths was involved. The set was originally owned by the Aldobrandini family and their descendants until at least 1769, and remained together in a single collection until at least 1861. The vessels were originally plain "white" silver, but were gilded in the decade after 1861. The group was then dispersed and examples are now held by several different museums and private collectors. In the late 19th century, six of the original bases, with restrained classically-inspired fluting on the foot and stem, were replaced with more flamboyantly decorated 16th century bases, possibly of Spanish origin. Over time, the interchangeable parts of several tazze, most noticeably the bowls and figurines, have been mixed, so a bowl showing scenes from the life of one emperor may now be found in a collection with the figurine of a different emperor. (Aldobrandini Tazze, Wikipedia)

4. The early history of the tazze is not known securely. It's believed they remained a set until 1861. The 12 tazze are included in an inventory of Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini dated 1603. It is possible that they were owned by Ippolito Aldobrandini the Elder (1536-1605), who became Pope Clement VIII in 1592. If the six tassels on the family arms accurately indicate a bishop, they suggest he acquired the tazze before he became a cardinal in 1585. However, the marks may have been added later by other relatives who

were also Catholic clergymen. Perhaps more likely, they may have been given to Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini by Archduke Albert VII of Austria: the Aldobrandini family hosted the Archduke during his visit to Ferrara in 1598, when he was released from his office as cardinal by Pope Clement VIII before his marriage by procuration to Isabella Clara Eugenia, Infanta of Spain, in parallel to the marriage of her half-brother Philip III of Spain] to Archduke Albert's niece Margaret of Austria. It seems that the complete set came into the ownership of Cardinal Ippolito Aldobrandini the Younger (1592-1638), and they were included in an inventory made in 1638, after his death. (Aldobrandini Tazze, Wikipedia)

5. Eventually, the tazze were acquired by a Parisian art dealer, Frédéric Spitzer who may have sold six of them (Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Galba) to different collectors, with as many as five being acquired by various members of the Rothschild family. The six tazze that remained in Spitzer's collection (Julius Caesar, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian) until his death were sold in Paris in 1893. Some of the bowls and emperors had become mismatched, and Spitzer had replaced the simple fluted stem and base described at earlier auctions with more elaborate bases, perhaps assisted by Spitzer's frequent collaborator, the Aachen goldsmith and art faker Reinhold Vasters. According to Hayward, the replacement feet and stems (such as on our tazza at Mia) may have been removed from contemporary 16th-century Spanish monstrances or reliquaries and attached to the tazze by Spitzer to increase their market appeal and price. Five were acquired by the Frankfurt art dealer Jakob Goldschmidt, but the Julius Caesar tazza was sold separately. (Aldobrandini Tazze, Wikipedia)

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### Current Mia Label Information (optional)

**(NOTE: the current online label and audio clip have an error! The bowl that is on display with the Augustus figurine is actually the bowl from the Emperor Domitian.)** This tazza is from a set of twelve made for display on a sideboard. The ornamental imagery was inspired by the Lives of the Caesars, a second century a.d. book in every Renaissance library that describes the lives of the first twelve Roman emperors. Each tazza featured a different emperor rising from the center, with events of his reign depicted around the inside of the bowl. The set was dismantled in the late 19th century, then incorrectly reassembled by a Parisian antiques dealer. As a result, the Institute's tazza combines Augustus's portrait with scenes from the life of Caligula. This example is sometimes called the Aldobrandini tazza after one of its early owners, Cardinal Ippolito Aldobrandini, who became Pope Clement VIII in 1592.

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### Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

Tazza (cup): [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tazza\\_\(cup\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tazza_(cup))

Aldobrandini Tazze: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aldobrandini\\_Tazze](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aldobrandini_Tazze)

The Silver Caesars, Metropolitan Museum: (Augustus)

[https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/771529?exhibitionId=%7b9b36ecfe-445d-4d4d-9d50-7903753ee9b7%7d&oid=771529&pkgids=468&pg=1&rpp=4&pos=2&ft=\\*](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/771529?exhibitionId=%7b9b36ecfe-445d-4d4d-9d50-7903753ee9b7%7d&oid=771529&pkgids=468&pg=1&rpp=4&pos=2&ft=*)

The Silver Caesars, Metropolitan Museum: (Domitian):

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/771541?exhibitionId=%7b9b36ecfe-445d-4d4d-9d50->

[7903753ee9b7%7d&oid=771541&pkgids=468&pg=0&rpp=20&pos=12&ft=\\*&offset=20](https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/objects?exhibitionId=%7B9b36ecfe-445d-4d4d-9d50-7903753ee9b7%7D#!?page=0&offset=20)

The Silver Caesars: A Renaissance Mystery, Metropolitan Museum of Art (exhibition ran from December 12, 2017 to March 11, 2018):

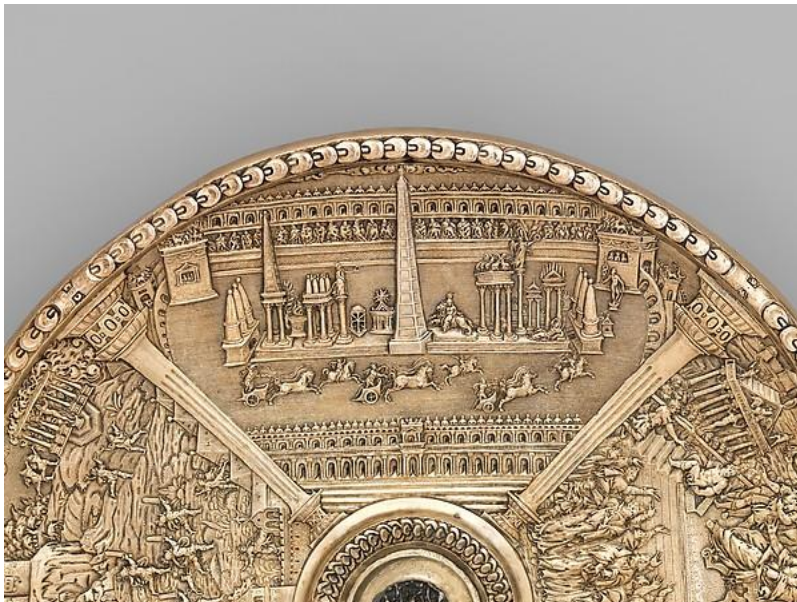
<https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/objects?exhibitionId=%7B9b36ecfe-445d-4d4d-9d50-7903753ee9b7%7D#!?page=0&offset=20>

Here are the four scenes from inside our tazza (from the Met Museum):

Scene 1:



Scene 2:





Scene 3:



Scene 4:

