



TIARAS IN THE NEWS: 2019



It's not often that tiaras make international headlines. There's something special about 2019.

FILE UNDER: TIARAS

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TIARAS HAVE BEEN IN THE news a lot lately! And I'm not talking about the never-ending royal wedding summaries I'm still getting in my Google Alerts daily emails. Let's catch up, shall we?

First, let's start with the good news.

SWEDISH FUNERAL CROWNS: FOUND!

IN A PRIOR POST, I TALKED ABOUT the theft of King Karl IX and Queen Kristina's funeral regalia ([read it here](#)). In this daring daylight theft, thieves stole funeral crowns and an orb from Strängnäs Cathedral and fled on women's bikes, pedaling to a waiting motorboat that carried them to safety. Witnesses say they saw two people in the boat. Here's an image of the cathedral, showing just how close it is to the waterfront.



STRÄNGNÄS CATHEDRAL BY SWEDISH NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD, PUBLIC DOMAIN VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

In the immediate aftermath of the theft, Swedish policeman Leif Persson said he thought someone had specifically ordered the thieves to take these items. Why? Because their value was largely in their historic importance, not their raw materials. At the time, the value of those materials was estimated at \$56,455, according to [Artnet.com](https://www.artnet.com).

But the thieves didn't exactly make a clean getaway. One man cut himself during the theft –presumably when he pulled the items from their glass case. Police found his

blood at the scene and ran a DNA test to identify him. Later, they arrested a 22-year-old man named Johan Nicklas Bäckström.

LET THE BÄCKLASH BEGIN

WHEN AUTHORITIES QUESTIONED

Bäckström, he admitted that he'd supplied the getaway vehicles (the bikes and boat), but said he had absolutely nothing to do with the theft. I know. It's a blatantly ridiculous story, considering his blood had already been found at the scene.

When authorities questioned Bäckström, he admitted that he'd supplied the getaway vehicles, but said he had nothing to do with the theft.

The police continued to search for the missing crowns (shown below), working with the cultural heritage crime unit. According to an official statement, they were focusing on a criminal group in Stockholm.



IMAGE BY **SWEDISH NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD**,
PUBLIC DOMAIN VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

As Bäckström's hearing approached, he maintained his silence, refusing to comment on others who might have been involved in the theft. Then, in the middle of the hearing, Prosecutor Isabelle Bjursten dropped a bomb: they might have found the missing crowns and orb.

ONE MAN'S TRASH...

TURNS OUT, EARLIER THAT MORNING, a security guard had found what he believed to be the

missing treasure in the Stockholm suburb of Åkersberga (shown below). Reports differ slightly on where he found them – on top of a garbage can, inside a garbage can, inside a garbage can on top of a car, or inside a garbage can marked “bomb,” depending on the source.

He found them at about 1:00 a.m., so you have to wonder about the timing. Did he get a tip? Or had someone placed the items where he’d be sure to find them? And was it a coincidence that this happened on Tuesday, February 5, 2019 – the day of Bäckström’s hearing? You make the call.



ÅKERS CANAL BY [NORDELCH ON SV.WIKIPEDIA](#),
CC BY-SA 2.5 VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

When the prosecutor dropped her bomb, the judge halted

the hearing until they knew whether they actually had the missing crowns and orb. Later, the police released a statement: yes, they had almost certainly recovered the real stolen goods.

But there was something else they *didn't* share in this statement. Not only had they recovered the goods...but they'd also recovered DNA samples from two of the items. When they compared it to the blood from the cathedral, they found a match. The man in custody was definitely one of the thieves.

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Prosecutors didn't drop that bomb on Bäckström until the last day of his trial. Did they do it on purpose, or is that just when they happened to get the DNA results? I don't know. But when confronted with this information, Bäckström finally confessed.

Yes, he had cut himself when he'd smashed the glass case that held the funeral crowns. "I am the one who committed the theft," he said. He reportedly wanted to sell the items, which is weird. Who did he think was going to buy something that niche? Something that had already been reported on worldwide? I don't know. But the prosecutor in the case asked that Bäckström get a sentence of six years in prison.

It didn't happen.

Bäckström was found guilty of theft, as well as of attempted theft for three other items left behind in the cathedral. But he was only sentenced to four and a half years.

AFTERMATH

AS OF THIS WRITING, BÄCKSTRÖM still hasn't said anything about his co-conspirators. Police arrested two more men (aged 24 and 26) on suspicion of handling stolen goods. One of them may have helped authorities find the missing items. Police say they're Bäckström's friends.

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So what happens now that the crowns have been recovered? Both need a bit of restoration. Karl's crown (you have no idea how hard it was not to type 'Karl's krown') is definitely worse for wear. Some of its stones have fallen out and most of the spines are bent backward. You can see a [picture of the recovered crowns here](#).

Here's hoping the restoration goes well and they're back on display later this year. If you check out the images at the link above, compare Karl's crown to its original state:



**LIVRUSTKAMMAREN (THE ROYAL ARMOURY),
CC BY-SA VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.**

BECAUSE NO ONE ELSE
EXPLAINED THE WHOLE BURIAL
REGALIA THING...

DURING THE MEDIA COVERAGE, THE
English-language news outlets usually described these
items as the “Swedish crown jewels.” I found that
misleading. These aren’t crown jewels in the traditional
sense, if you define crown jewels as being used in a

coronation ceremony or worn as a privilege by the ruler and his or her family.

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These are *funeral* crowns, part of a set of burial regalia.

Sets of burial regalia (*begravningskrona*, in Swedish) were created specifically to be buried with the bodies of Swedish rulers as a sign of the dead person's importance. "With the bodies" usually meant in or on top of the dead ruler's coffin. They were replicas of the real regalia, which had been used in public ceremonies while the king was alive. You didn't bury the originals because (a) that shit was expensive, and (b) it was a waste of good regalia. Instead, you made a copy and buried that version with the king.

Here's Karl X Gustav's burial regalia, for example:



**LIVRUSTKAMMAREN (THE ROYAL ARMOURY),
CC BY-SA VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.**

The problem with burial regalia? It apparently makes a really good target for thieves. Poor Karl IX wasn't the first Swedish king to have his burial regalia stolen. In a similar theft in 2013, thieves stole Johan III's regalia from Västerås Cathedral, where it had been on display. The regalia, created in the 1590s, included copies of Johan's crown and scepter. But not long after making their escape, the thieves must have gotten cold feet. An anonymous tip told police they'd find Johan III's

missing regalia in garbage bags near a highway not far from the scene of the crime.

Now, let's move on to another stolen jewel.

THE PORTLAND TIARA: STILL MISSING

IN THE SAME POST I linked to above, I also talked about the Portland tiara theft. The Duchess of Portland wore this diamond tiara to Edward VII's coronation in 1902. Her husband had commissioned it from Cartier specifically for the event.



**THE PORTLAND TIARA,
VIA THE [NOTTINGHAMSHIRE POLICE](#).**

On November 20, thieves broke into The Portland Collection, a museum on the Welbeck Abbey estate in Nottinghamshire (shown below), where the tiara and a diamond brooch were on display in an armored glass case.



**WELBECK ABBEY IMAGE BY CHRIS, CC BY-SA 2.0
VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.**

CCTV footage released on December 6, 2018 captured three thieves at work, wearing motorcycle helmets and white jumpsuits. Two of them stay just out of sight, while a third holds what looks like a pry bar and has a flashlight either mounted on the side of his helmet or held in his mouth. Unlike the Swedish thieves who used

brute force to smash the glass case that held their targets, these guys used power tools. [Click or tap here to watch the video for yourself](#). Detective Inspector Gayle Hart said the burglars probably used “specialist diamond cutter-type tools” to get through the armored glass. They’re still looking for leads on who may have rented or bought equipment like that.

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AFTERMATH

POLICE MISSED THE THIEVES BY seconds, which tells me those thieves knew *exactly* how long it would take the cops to respond. My guess is they’d already rehearsed their timing off-site. Police found a suspicious vehicle, a burned-out Audi RS5 Quattro, in nearby Blidworth about 30 minutes later. That car had been stolen on Friday, November 2, over two weeks

before the theft. Clearly, these guys planned ahead, more so than the dudes on bikes in Sweden.

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On December 7, police with warrants raided addresses in Carlton, Cinderhill, and Bulwell. They arrested four people: three men and a woman, all between the ages of 46 and 30. After questioning, all four were released on bail until January 5. They were later re-bailed until February 2. I'm not familiar with the "rebail" component of the British legal system...feel free to explain it to me in a comment. That's the last update I can find.

Long story short, this doesn't look good. If these thieves planned ahead enough to bring specialized tools, chances are they did the smart thing and broke up this tiara immediately. *sob*

GRAND DUCHESS HILDA OF BADEN'S TIARA: STILL MISSING

THIS ONE IS EVEN LESS likely to be found than the Portland tiara because of the length of time elapsed since the theft. It disappeared in April of 2017, more than two years ago. There's absolutely nothing new to report. I keep bringing it up in the vain hope that someone, somewhere knows something about it.

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I did find a [YouTube video of a Badische Neueste Nachrichten \(BNN\) reporter](#) in the throne room of the Karlsruhe palace, showing you the empty tiara case. BTW, that's a court gown of Hilda's mother-in-law, Grand Duchess Louise, behind the case. Click or tap the image watch the video on YouTube.



CROWN PRINCESS CECILIE OF PRUSSIA'S FABERGÉ TIARA: UP FOR GRABS

IN MY POST ON FIVE types of [kokoshnik tiaras](#), the fifth tiara I talked about was Cecilie's. Just three months after I published that post, news broke that one of Cecilie's tiaras was coming up for auction.

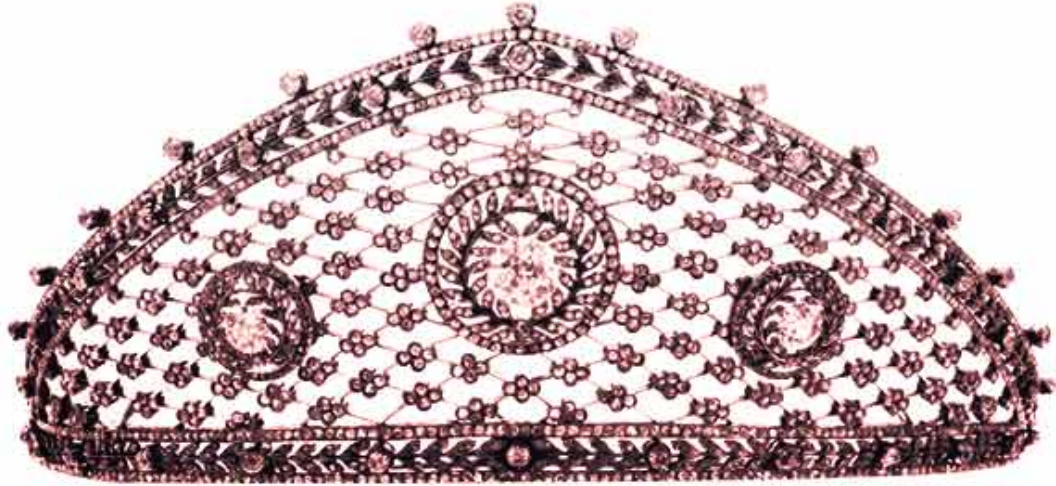


IMAGE: SOTHEBY'S.

Turns out, the auction coverage made me realize I'd gotten something terribly wrong. I'd *written* the story of her Fabergé tiara...but included a *picture* of the so-called “shamrock” tiara that may or may not be Cecilie's. Mistakes like that are embarrassing, but hey...I own up to them and I correct them. Onwards and upwards!

In any case, Cecilie's Fabergé kokoshnik tiara could be yours very soon...if you have an assload of money. (I do not.) Sotheby's will auction it off as part of their “**Magnificent Jewels and Noble Jewels**” sale on May 14, 2019 in Geneva. According to the auction lot notes, this tiara is unsigned, but all evidence points to Fabergé. The estimated sale price is \$200,000-\$300,000. I'm guessing

it goes higher than that because PROVENANCE and also because FABERGÉ. [Check out the lot listing here.](#)

**Cecilie's Fabergé kokoshnik tiara
could be yours very soon...if you have
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Sotheby's also put together a [very interesting video](#) featuring [Daniela Mascetti](#), their chairman for Jewellery Europe. In the video, she talks about visiting Burg Hohenzollern and seeing a painting of Cecilie wearing this tiara. Later, she got an email with a photo of the tiara and she thought...*now where have I seen that before?* She recognized it from the painting, and couldn't believe she'd seen that same tiara in a portrait in the Hohenzollern castle. Both Cecilie and her husband, Wilhelm, are buried there. And speaking of places to be buried, Burg Hohenzollern isn't a bad choice. It's absolutely stunning:



BURG HOHENZOLLERN BY LUKAS RIEBLING,
CC BY-SA 3.0 VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The lot listing doesn't say *who* put the tiara up for auction, just that the tiara has remained in the family "by descent." What does that mean? It means the tiara has been passed down through family of the original owner up to this point.

Does that help us narrow things down at all? Not really.

Crown Princess Cecilie had two daughters, Cecilie Viktoria and Alexandrine. Alexandrine never married and had no children (she was born with Down

Syndrome). Her sister, Cecilie Viktoria, wore this tiara when she married an American, Clyde Harris of the Monuments Men. They settled in Amarillo, Texas and had one child, a daughter. Did Cecilie Viktoria's daughter inherit this tiara? Maybe. But it might also have gone to the family of one of Crown Princess Cecilie's sons, seeing as Cecilie Viktoria probably didn't have much use for a tiara in Amarillo, Texas.

I'll update this post once the auction is over and we know how much the tiara sold for.

UPDATE: The tiara sold for \$437,500 to a buyer who was not me.

Incredibly, this isn't the only Fabergé tiara up for grabs in May. The other one belonged to Grand Duchess Alexandra of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Cecilie's sister-in-law.

GRAND DUCHESS ALEXANDRA OF MECKLENBURG-SCHWERIN'S FABERGÉ TIARA: UP FOR GRABS

IF CECILIE'S TIARA ISN'T YOUR cup of tea (or

you're balling so hard you need multiple Fabergé tiaras), you might bid on this beauty instead:



IMAGE: CHRISTIE'S.

This tiara was a wedding present from Grand Duke Friedrich Francis IV of Mecklenburg-Schwerin to Princess Alexandra of Hanover. They married in 1904, one year before Friedrich's sister Cecilie married the heir to the Prussian throne.

Christie's will auction off this tiara as part of their "**Magnificent Jewels**" sale on May 15 in Geneva, just one day after Cecilie's tiara gets a new owner. The estimated sale price is \$230,000-\$340,000. Also like

Cecilie's tiara, I'm guessing it goes higher than that because PROVENANCE and also because FABERGÉ. [Click or tap here to see the lot listing](#). Christie's also did one of their "5 minutes with...." features on this tiara - [click or tap here to check it out](#).

Like Cecilie's tiara, I'm guessing this one goes higher than the pre-sale estimate because PROVENANCE and also because FABERGÉ.

Like Cecilie's tiara, Alexandra's sparkler also has an unbroken provenance "by descent." So what does that mean? The tiara could have gone to any of Alexandra's four surviving children, and then to the children's children (or cousins), and so on. A kind soul on the Royal Jewels of the World Message Board shared [a photo of Alexandra's daughter, Anastasia, wearing the tiara](#).

Does this mean Anastasia inherited the tiara? Maybe. Maybe not. In royal and noble families, it's common to lend jewels to family members. Anastasia died in 1979,

so if she *were* the owner, the tiara probably passed to one of her four daughters: Elisabeth, Irene, Margaretha, or Sibylla. It looks like all four of them are still alive as of this writing.

I'll update this post with the sale price after the tiara has been auctioned off. Also, if I learn anything else about any of these stories, I'll add to this post over time.

UPDATE: On May 15, 2019, Alexandra's tiara sold for an amazing \$1,035,000 to a buyer who (clearly) was not me.

The End

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SOURCES

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Crown Princess Cecilie of Prussia's Fabergé Tiara

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Grand Duchess Alexandra of Mecklenburg-Schwerin's Fabergé Tiara

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YOU MIGHT ALSO ENJOY

- [5 Types of Kokoshnik Tiaras](#)
- [Who Stole Grand Duchess Hilda of Baden's Tiara?](#)

POST TAGS

theft, Germany, Great Britain

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