

Chariots: Vehicles for Allegory by Robin Hildyard

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Chariots: Vehicles for Allegory

Recent Research by Robin Hildyard

From classical times, and even further back to ancient Egypt and the Sumerians of Mesopotamia, ownership of a chariot proclaimed status, wealth, power and control. As an extension of this belief, images of chariots that formed the central focus of a triumphal procession also came to symbolise victory. However, although chariots do occasionally appear on Greek vases, much more important to the Greeks was Plato's vision of Reason as a charioteer wrestling with two very different steeds: a sleek well-behaved grey horse harnessed to a stubby black horse with rebellious and wilful character – an allegory of the soul's troublesome journey towards final enlightenment. Such refined philosophical considerations, however, did not continue under the pragmatic Romans, when chariots were depicted either racing with four horses, as shown in slip-trailed *barbotine* on a 2C vase from the Nene valley in the British Museum, or as vehicles for mythological characters, symbolising their power and mobility. Visually, in order to distinguish these charioteers from each other, they were given individual and unambiguous attributes, of which the most common are: Bacchus and Cupid in chariots drawn by a pair of goats, leopards or tigers; Cybele drawn by lions; Juno drawn by peacocks; Diana/Artemis drawn by stags; Mercury/Hermes drawn by cocks or more commonly rams; Vulcan drawn by dogs; Galatea in her shell drawn by dolphins; Neptune/Poseidon in a shell drawn by hippocamps or sea horses; Venus/Aphrodite drawn by swans or doves; Saturn drawn by winged serpents; and Mars drawn by wolves. The Sun/Phaethon and Aurora are both given, as befits their onerous daily task, a *quadriga* of four prancing horses.

As part of the huge flowering of art in Renaissance Italy, themes and allegories from the classical past were liberally exploited. Splendid examples of ceilings painted with allegorical chariots can be seen in the Villa Farnesina, consisting of a small panel of Venus in her chariot pulled by bulls, and the magnificent Triumph of Galatea in her shell pulled by dolphins painted by Raphael in 1513–14, the latter forming a striking image popularised by engravings, and later used as the basis for a well-known sprig used by Turner and many others. But by far the best chariots are to be found around the ceiling of the Sala Borgia in the Vatican, painted in the early 1520s

after designs by Raphael of 1516. Here the days of the week were allotted to different gods in their chariots: Monday as Luna drawn by robed women; Tuesday as Mars drawn by a pair of horses; Wednesday as Mercury drawn by cocks; Thursday as Jupiter drawn by eagles; Friday as Venus drawn by doves (see below); Saturday as Saturn drawn by winged serpents; and Sunday as Sol drawn by four horses. These striking images were quickly engraved, then re-engraved later by, among others, Lasinio in 1695 and Piroli in 1803.

With the important neoclassical revival during the last quarter of the 18C came a plethora of stippled oval vignettes depicting gods in their chariots by Cipriani and Bartolozzi, some of which derived from Raphael. Wedgwood used a number of jasperware sprigs based on chariots, such as *Aurora* and *Neptune Riding the Sea* (subjects also included among the Turner moulds sold at the firm's bankruptcy in 1806), both borrowed from original antique sources¹. Other chariot sprigs included *Triumph of Bacchus*², included among the Turner moulds and used later by Enoch Wood, and various small vignettes copied from gems. As neoclassical taste moved gradually from the heroic to the domestic, so the infancy of mythological figures was explored, along with sentimental images of mothers and children – a change of mood reflected in Wedgwood's pair of small jasper tablets in a very linear style, with *Cupid* and *The Infant Mercury* pulled by panthers, both adapted from the same classical source³. Another in similar vein depicts three putti (perhaps including the infant Bacchus) in a chariot blowing musical instruments.

Although the intricacies of classical mythology were probably best understood by the wealthy returning from the Grand Tour and by the aspiring 'middling' customers of Josiah Wedgwood, it is apparent that by about 1800 the basic language of allegorical chariots was known at practically all social levels, as shown by the variety of very cheap prints in stamped brass frames produced by P & P Gally at this period. These naive hand-coloured chariot engravings included Flora and Pomona, but are mainly patriotic, showing a reclining female figure drawn by tigers, leopards or lions, symbolising Peace (1) and Plenty. A pair of slightly more sophisticated Gally engravings entitled *Britannia supporting the Protectors of Peace & Liberty* and *Plenty & Peace all over the World* are dated 1814, prematurely celebrating the end of the Napoleonic Wars before the battle of Waterloo the following year, while other chariot prints were used in support of the people's heroine, Queen Caroline, in 1820.

For ceramic manufacturers in the early years of the 19C, there was hunger for new decoration, reflecting the change in mood which favoured lighthearted themes linked with domestic life. When the lustre technique was perfected in 1805, 'copper' derived from gold deposited on a red clay body proved ideal for a rich ground colour to contrast with applied white sprigs, while at the same time both popular pearlwares and the superior feldspathic stonewares of Chetham & Woolley needed new decorative themes to keep up with fashion. Thus it is not surprising that soon a novel range of sprigs emerged, comprising sportive cherubs playing with lions and goats, ventures into the childhood of the gods and, for printed wares, a proliferation of the stippled bat-printed vignettes of domestic and nursery life, to which the artist Adam Buck (1759–1833) has given his name.

Recent study by the art historian Peter Darvall⁴ of this prolific artist has concluded that almost all the popular 'Adam Buck' prints used on pottery and porcelain are actually clever pastiches made by imitators, including Edward Francis Burney (1760–1848), whose pen and watercolour work was always engraved by others and usually published by Rudolph Ackermann. In addition, after the New Hall factory switched their production in 1812 over to bone china and



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exploited the whiter ground by using 'Adam Buck' bat-prints, the larger pieces such as slop basins and teapots required prints larger than those available in the Buck style. One of these in particular, the highly mannered *Mercury* teetering on the edge of his chariot pulled by rams (2) was used on Pattern 1109, which is closely datable to 1814⁵, and also used as a sprig by Enoch Wood (3). Crucially, the print source for this was published by Ackermann and, allowing for possible discrepancies between an artist's original watercolour and the engraved version, is attributed by Darvall to the artist EF Burney. *Mercury* is paired here with *Venus* in her chariot improbably pulled by doves, evidently by the same hand and, apart from the image being reversed, derives closely from engraved versions⁶ of Raphael's allegory of *Friday* in the Sala Borgia at the Vatican. As no original print after Burney was to be found, a trade card for *Sicilian Bloom* soap, with the same engraving and dated in ink 1809⁷, is illustrated here (4).

It is interesting to note that the same pair of engravings adapted into sprigs appears not only on blue ground pearlware jugs and porter mugs but also on bone china jugs with sprigs either 'lilac' blue (5) or enamelled in bright colours, all compatible with an attribution to Enoch Wood. Thus it would appear that Rudolph Ackermann's smart establishment in the Strand was not only acting as arbiter of good taste but was also responsible for supplying identical designs to different manufacturers, ranging from expensive bat-printed porcelain teawares to cheap sprigged pearlware beer jugs for the mass market. So here at last might be a rare opportunity to gain entrée into the dimly understood chain through which high London fashion quickly percolated down to the painting, printing and sprig-making workshops of the North Staffordshire potteries.

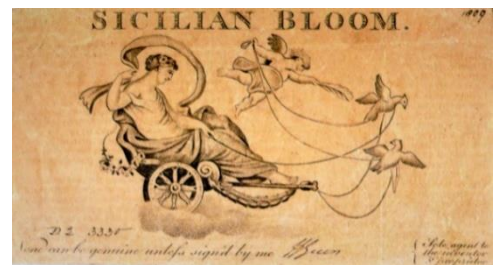
Rudolph Ackermann (1764–1834) was born in Saxony, moved to London in 1784, set up a coachbuilding works at Little Russell Street in 1792 and then in 1795 switched from designing coaches to selling prints in a shop with a fashionable address, 96 Strand. The following year he took over the drawing school which had been operating at 101 Strand, renaming it in 1797 The Repository of Arts, an elegant salon lavishly advertised with a coloured print by Augustus Charles Pugin and Thomas Rowlandson (6), where artists and art lovers could congregate, buy art supplies and be the first to experience what was new in the fashionable London art world. Ackermann was naturalised in 1809, coinciding with the launch of his monthly magazine, priced at a hefty four guineas per annum, aimed at both fashionable society and manufacturers:



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THE REPOSITORY of Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufacture, Fashion, and Politics. MANUFACTURERS, Factors and Wholesale Dealers in Fancy Goods that come within the scope of this Plan, are requested to send Patterns of such new Articles as they come out, and if the requisites of Novelty, Fashion, and Elegance are united, the quantity necessary for the Magazine will be ordered. R.Ackermann, 101 Strand, London. (Vol2 December 1809)

These monthly magazines included swatches of dress material, and one surviving early issue of August 1809⁸ still retains an attachment entitled 'R. Ackermann's Pattern Card for Embossed Ornaments, in Gold, White or other Colours', consisting of eight pages of engraved designs, each numbered and priced. These include four chariot designs of varying complexity, with an elaborate Cybele pulled by a pair of lions very much in the EF Burney style, complete with tambourine trailing behind. It is clear therefore that such designs were offered directly for sale to manufacturers, and as for Burney's relationship with Ackermann – perhaps only at second hand, through Ackermann's highest paid engraver J Samuel Agar⁹ – it is relevant to note an undated Ackermann trade card¹⁰ that offered 'upwards of 150 Sheets of different Medallions, in Colours, plain or in Bronze, mostly engraved after Burney and Westall. From Heathen Mythology; Greek, Roman, and Modern History; allegorical and emblematical Figures'. Evidently Burney supplied the allegorical figures while Westall produced the architecture and landscapes.

Ackermann's business flourished to the extent that, with permission, he was able to dedicate his *Repository* successively to HRH the Prince of Wales, HRH the Prince Regent and finally His Majesty the King as George IV. Royal patronage for the firm continued later with Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. The *Repository* was lit by gaslight as early as 1810. Ackermann was instrumental in introducing lithography by translating Alois Senefelder's instruction book into English in 1819, and he continued to publish *The Repository* until 1828, after which his art supplies business moved to 96 Strand to be continued by his sons.

As for the artist EF Burney, subsequent investigations into the huge number of engravings after his work have proved quite productive. For example, the pair of chariot designs with rather obscure iconography entitled *Commerce* (7) and *Agriculture* (9), both inscribed 'Burney delinct. Cardon sculp. London, published 1799 at R. Ackermann's Repository of the Arts, 101 Strand'¹¹, are to be found as sprigs on a brown ground pearlware jug marked 'Wood & Caldwell' and also on bone china jugs of tapered baluster shape (8,10), reasonably attributable to Enoch Wood. Burney was responsible for several sets such as *Faith, Hope & Charity, Elements* and the *Seasons*,



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but the most exciting discoveries came from his set of the Months with signs of the Zodiac and allegorical chariots, published by Ackermann between 1807 and 1809, of which fortunately the British Museum has a complete set¹². Three of these, *May*, *July* and *September* represent the direct source of sprigged chariots widely used from shortly before 1815, while *December* contains many of the same elements found in another popular chariot sprig and is clearly related.

To consider these in order, *May*, *Maia the mother of Mercury drawn by Gemini*, was engraved by Edward Scriven after EF Burney and published by Ackermann in 1807 (11), which translates into a somewhat confused sprig (note the raised tambourine) found on marked Wood & Caldwell pearlware jugs, and on Ridgway porcelains c1815¹³ (12).

July, entitled *Julius Caesar drawn by Leo*, was engraved by Samuel Agar after EF Burney and published by Ackermann in 1807 (13), displaying Burney's flamboyant style, used on Ridgway porcelains and crisply sprigged Wilson stoneware jugs, paired with *September*, c1815 (14).

September, entitled *Ariadne and Faun carrying Libra*, was engraved by Thomas Williamson after EF Burney and published by Ackermann in 1808 (15). Another version was engraved by Samuel Agar in 1807; note again the tambourine. It was used on bone chinias by Ridgway (13) as an alternative to the continuous classical frieze with griffins¹⁴, and on Wilson stonewares (16).

December drawn by Capricornus, engraved by Samuel Agar after EF Burney, published by Ackermann in 1809 (17) shows a wrapped figure in a throne-like chariot, huddled over a low brazier and drawn by a goat with fishtail surmounted by a putto clutching an arrow. The popular sprig used by New Hall and Enoch Wood (18) shared many similar elements – a huddled figure in



(11)



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(13)



(14)



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a sled pulled by a goat, tall triangular brazier with smoke, putto with arrows hovering overhead, and oddly a dead game bird hanging behind the sled – and would thus appear to have been either simplified for use on ceramics or more likely taken from another Burney version of *December* or *Winter*.



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Contemporary with and stylistically related to these Burney designs but with no known print source are three chariot sprigs with playful putti: one with the infant Mercury pulled by a ram with putto hovering overhead, much used by Enoch Wood (19), perhaps inspired by Wedgwood's *Eros and the Infant Mercury*; another with the infant Bacchus on a chariot clutching a wine jar, crisply depicted here by Chetham & Woolley (cover image, 20), the chariot drawn by a tiger surmounted by a putto with raised tambourine, on a field strewn with grapes; and another with the infant Cybele favoured by Enoch Wood (21), shown leaning back in a chariot drawn by a lion ridden by a winged putto, with another holding a mirror. A block mould for Cybele was



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found at Enoch Wood's Fountain Place Works¹⁵, and the fact that these neat designs form a set of three, rather than the usual pair, could indicate that they were directly commissioned for use on jugs, to avoid the need for an odd sprig on the front below the spout. All three sprigs are to be found on Enoch Wood pearlwares and lustrewares, Chetham & Woolley feldspathic stonewares and New Hall bone chinias.

To complete this survey of sprigged chariots, an odd pair must be mentioned: putti or cupids firing arrows at a target with a dead dove at its foot, with a putto descending from the clouds bearing a wreath of laurel leaves; and its oddly matched pair depicting a long flat chariot reminiscent of the Raphael frescoes at the Sala Borgia (above) with a figure of the infant Vulcan holding a firebrand aloft, drawn by a pair of greyhounds ridden by a putto. These are contemporary with the Burney sprigs, being noted on an unattributed bone china jug dated 1819, on pre-1817 Wilson jugs (22,23) and on Chetham & Woolley stonewares. The cupids' archery sprig is among the moulds used at Denby, while the putto hovering with laurel wreath was adopted by the salt-glazed stoneware potters of



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Brampton for use on their inscribed christening moneyboxes until at least the mid-19C. But no source has yet been found, and the rather formal poses could perhaps suggest a French origin.

It would seem that the craze for sprigged chariots, a lively alternative to the well-established hunting jug genre, began shortly before 1815 and lasted until around 1830, enjoying much the same period of popularity as printed decoration in the Adam Buck style, both ultimately becoming victims of constantly changing fashion. Much earlier, in the 1750s–60s, Robert Sayer had published *The Ladies Amusement or Whole Art of Japanning Made Easy* solely for the benefit of amateurs¹⁶, only to find that these designs were plundered by early

printers on ceramics such as Sadler & Green. By contrast it is clear that, a generation later, Rudolph Ackermann purposefully aimed his large output of printed images and designs at manufacturers: a pioneering attempt to combine art with industry which, energetically endorsed by Prince Albert, was to become such a defining feature of the 19C.

Image credits

3. Paul Bohanna Antiques

4,11,13,15,17. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

14,16,22,23. © Victoria & Albert Museum, London

7,9. Staatliche Museen Berlin, Kunstbibliothek

5,8,10,12,18,19,20,21. Private collection

Notes

1. Montfaucon, Bernard de *Antiquité Expliquée* 1719, 5 vols, supplement 5 vols, Paris. *Aurora*, vol3 pt1 pl34, *Neptune Riding the Sea*, vol1 pt2 pl16 fig25. Wedgwood's versions illustrated by Elizabeth Bryding Adams, *The Dwight and Lucille Beeson Wedgwood Collection at the Birmingham Museum of Art* 1992 Birmingham, Alabama, cat nos 883, 836
2. Modelled by Hackwood 1776. Illustrated Adams *opcit* cat no 250
3. Macht, Carol *Classical Wedgwood Designs* 1957 p62 New York. The infant Bacchus and Hermes/Mercury taken from a sarcophagus in the Stanza del Fauno in the Capitoline Museum. Wedgwood jasper tablets derived from this source, entitled *Cupid and The Infant Mercury* in collections of Manchester Art Gallery; combined oval plaque illustrated by Adams *opcit* cat no275
4. *A Regency Buck. Adam Buck (1759–1833)*, An Appreciation by Peter Darvall, exhibition and catalogue, Ashmolean Museum, 2015. *Mercury*, stipple engraving published by R Ackermann p107 fig 193. New Hall slop basin, pattern no 1109, fig 192
5. New Hall partners Hollins, Warburton & Co supplied the London chinaman John Wyllie with '24 setts handled china @ 6/-' of pattern no 1109 in 1814, and in 1815 they supplied '48 setts teas Black landscapes & Black Infants'. See Eatwell, Ann and Werner, Alex 'A London Staffordshire Warehouse 1794–1825' *Journal of the NCS* vol8, 1991
6. Copied from either the 1695 engraving by Lasinio or possibly a contemporary publication by Francesco and Pietro Piranesi, *Peintures de la Sala Borgia au Vatican*, with etchings by Tommaso Piroli, 1803 Paris. A copy in V&A Museum collection, Mus No E.5079-1908
7. British Museum, D,2.3330
8. Ackermann's *Repository* 1809 with attachments, copy in New York Public Library (Hathitrust Digital Library). Another single Ackermann pattern card, British Museum, Banks Collection D,2.3467
9. The Ackermann Ledgers for years 1818–19, listing payments to employees, are held by Coutts Bank
10. British Museum, Banks Coll D,2.3389, headed by stipple engraving by Samuel Agar after Burney showing five putti representing the Arts around a chariot
11. Staatliche Museen Berlin, Kunstbibliothek, cat no 05 4603
12. British Museum: January/Janus 1924,0428.14; February/Februa 1924,0428.15; March 1924,0428.16; April 1924,1428.17; May/Maia 1924,0428.18; June/Juno 1924,0428.19; July/Julius Caesar 1924,0428.20; August/Augustus 1865,0114.729; September/Libra 1924,0428.34; October/Pomona 1924,0428.21; November/Chiron 1924,0428.31; December 1924,0428.22
13. The Ridgway pad mark pattern book, now considered to be Cauldon Place rather than the Bell Works, shows the sprig of *September* on a vase design no 13, on a jar-shaped vase design no 23 and on a plant pot design no 29. They were usually paired with 'May'
14. 'Baccanian frieze. A fragment from the Forum of Trajan, now on the principal front of the Palace Aldobrandini at Rome', illustrated as plate 8 by CH Tatham, *Ancient Ornamental Architecture*, London 1803. See Hildyard, Robin 'Country Classical', *Antique Collecting*, September 1997
15. Falkner, Frank *The Wood Family of Burslem*, 1912, Plate XLIII
16. See Williams-Wood, Cyril *English Transfer-Printed Pottery & Porcelain*, 1981, pp40–47