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Research Question: What was the process of creating a Gorham silver tea set in 1910?

The Gorham Manufacturing Company did not begin production of hollowware until 1850. The teapot, which became an integral part of Gorham's production, was one of the first hollowware products created there. By 1910, the production of all hollowware products was both mechanized and done by hand.

Gorham's success can be attributed to its highly mechanized process of silver production that made fine silverware more affordable. During the period around the turn of the century, Gorham was mainly producing pieces in their Art Nouveau and Athenic lines.<sup>1</sup> There are no records specific to Gorham that outline the process of silver production. However, the mechanized processes of silver production are fairly similar across companies and have not changed dramatically in the past century. All hollowware products, including a tea set, were made using the same methods. First, a mixture of silver ore was put into a ceramic crucible that was then heated in a gas furnace for one to two hours. Historically, copper has been used to supplement the silver as a way to strengthen and increase the durability of the product. Once the silver mixture was molten, it was then poured into cast iron "ingot" molds, 10 inches long, 6 inches wide, and 1 ½ inches thick for hollowware pieces. After cooling, the silver mixture or "ingot" was

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<sup>1</sup> Carpenter, Charles H. *Gorham Silver*. San Francisco : Alan Wofsy Fine Arts , 1997. John Hay Library. Print. Page 176.

removed from the mold, ready to be rolled out. Large silver ingots were generally rolled on two-roll mills, until the silver slab was .036 to .045 inches thick.

The next step, spinning, was a technique used specifically for the creation of the large sections of hollowware products. In spinning, a flat disk of sterling was placed in a lathe against a wooden block shaped in the exact form of the intended piece. The silversmith would apply pressure to the rotating silver using a steel spinning-tool. Once the silversmith was able to form the piece into its proper thickness, the spinner used a sectional chuck that could be removed from the finished piece. After the body parts of the piece were complete, the handle was cast using older techniques than those used for the larger sections of the products. For handles, molten silver was usually poured into sand molds. Once all the parts of the product were crafted, the pieces were transferred to the “making department” where they would be manipulated by hand until they fit perfectly together.<sup>2</sup>

There were a myriad of different decorative techniques used for the decoration of Gorham silver products. Chasing, the most challenging form of decoration, was done by tapping the silver lightly with a small punch. Repoussé, etching, and hammering were other decorative techniques used on various Gorham silver products.<sup>3</sup>

In the year 1897, martelé was introduced to Gorham. The style of martelé was based around the philosophy of the arts and crafts movement, emphasizing the close relationship of the designer, craftsmen, and the work. Unlike other lines, Gorham’s

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<sup>2</sup> Carpenter, Charles H, and Charles H Carpenter. *Tiffany Silver*. San Francisco : Alan Wofsy Fine Arts, 1997. John Hay Library. Print. Pages 202-205.

<sup>3</sup> Gunn, Lilian Miranda. *The Art of Table Setting* . Providence: Gorham Company, 1929. Rhode Island Historical Society. Print. Page 42.

martelé products were completely crafted by hand. In martelé, the silversmiths became an integral part of the design process. The design drawings given to the silversmiths were not always drawn to scale, giving each silversmith the flexibility to craft his own, unique piece. Each finished piece was hand polished and then marked with hammered punches. Most martelé products were oxidized so that their chased ornamentation would show more clearly. Though the martelé style became less popular by 1910, martelé production was still underway. Over the course of the lines existence, 86 tea sets were produced, and are recognized today as being the largest achievement of the martelé period.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Carpenter, Charles H. *Gorham Silver*. San Francisco : Alan Wofsy Fine Arts , 1997. John Hay Library. Print. Pages 183-186.

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