"Drink and Eat, Don't Forget God" – Decorated Stoneware in a Period of Religious and Political Conflict in Norway and Neighbouring Parts of Scandinavia

Volker Demuth

Abstract:

In northern Europe, the 16th century was a period characterised by the breakthrough of the Reformation and the establishment of national states. Following the technological principles of printing and adapting the motifs of Renaissance woodcuts, potteries predominantly in the Rhine and Meuse regions started to produce relief-decorated stoneware with elaborate decorations. The appearance of these stoneware-vessels closely reflects both trading networks and a certain "habitus" of the consumers. The motifs of the decorations give insight into aspects of the religious struggles and political conflicts of the period. Based on finds from Norway, relief-decorated stoneware can highlight aspects of long-range contact, exchange, and conflict.

Keywords:

Norway; Scandinavia; Relief-decorated stoneware – Renaissance – Scandinavia – Reformation – economy – lifestyle – object-biographies

1. Renaissance stoneware with moulded relief applications in the North – a brief history of research

Due to its rich decorations and attractive appearance, relief-decorated stoneware vessels were valued collectors' items since the 19th century. Following this, they were mostly published and discussed in the perspective of art history (GAIMSTER 1997, 15–30). However, many of these objects lack any context and therefore it is impossible to reconstruct their original use or other aspects of their "biography". However, the rich figurative decorations mediate an insight into the contemporary mentality and allow the value of this special type of pottery to shine through. The Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, now part of the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design in Oslo, Norway, has, for example, a large collection of high-quality stoneware vessels that was donated to the museum in the early 20th century by a

private collector (STEEN 1991). In addition to collectors, the first archaeologists also paid attention to the decorated stoneware vessels found in Norwegian towns during earthworks and delivered to museums (GRIEG 1933, 178–189).

Since the 1970s, several scientific presentations of material from stoneware production regions were published, enabling profound insight into the material from different production centres like the Rhine/Meuse area (HÄHNEL1987; 1992; MENNICKEN 2013; ROEHMER 2014; UNGER 2007) and Lower Saxony (STEPHAN 1992). These publications focused on the establishment of a thorough technological, and chronological framework for stoneware, though theoretical and cultural-historical aspects are also discussed. A milestone in the research of stoneware was the book "German Stoneware" by David Gaimster in 1997. Alongside a solid presentation, this work emphasised the socio-cultural aspects of stoneware. It showed the significance of stoneware as a source for economical networks in the North Sea and Baltic Sea area and analysed the iconography of the mould-decorated stoneware as a historical source and social medium. Partly inspired by Gaimster, stoneware and other ceramics were used as a source for cultural-historical analyses in Scandinavia in recent decades (LINAA 2006, DEMUTH 2015).

2. Renaissance stoneware – technology, typology, chronology

The Renaissance stoneware presented in this paper is restricted to vessels with applied moulded relief-decoration. Undecorated vessels, which were produced and consumed in a much larger scale, were not considered. Stoneware is a ceramic that is fired to such a high temperature that the fabric is fused and thus watertight. As not every type of clay is suitable to be processed this way, stoneware workshops developed in areas with easy access to natural mineral deposits of suitable tertiary clays from the 13th and 14th century onwards. Stoneware was mainly produced in three regions: the Rhine/Meuse area, Duingen in Lower Saxony and Waldenburg in Saxony (**Fig. 1**). The region at Rhine and Meuse with Cologne, Frechen, Raeren and Siegburg was by far the most important of these regions.

In the early 16th century, workshops in Cologne started to decorate stoneware with relief applications that where mass produced in moulds (GAIMSTER 1997, 191). This was a ceramic adaption of printing technology, which flourished in the Renaissance. Other pottery centres in the Rhine-Meuse area quickly adopted the technology of moulded relief applications and soon

it also spread to potters in the Duingen (LÖBERT, 1977, 25, 26) and Waldenburg areas (SCHEIDEMANTEL 2005, 164, 165). Technological details such as the colour of the fabric and surface treatment make it possible to distinguish the products of the various regions and production centres.

The most common types of stoneware vessels with moulded applications were jugs in various shapes. Ovoid or round bodied jugs with applied bearded face masks, known as Bellarmine or Bartmann jugs, were produced in vast numbers in Cologne and Frechen (**Fig. 2**), but also at other places such as Siegburg and Duingen. The Bartmann jugs of the 16th century were elaborate drinking vessels with detailed relief applications, often including friezes with toasts or blessings. In the 17th century, particularly in the latter half, Bartmann jugs were rather coarsely produced storage or pouring vessels with fewer and cruder relief applications. These widespread objects were frequently the subject of various studies, with a later work emphasising the importance of the find context for the cultural-historical interpretation of these jugs as archaeological finds (ORSER 2019, 90).

Cylindrical baluster jugs with large friezes were frequently manufactured at the Raeren workshops and in smaller quantities in Siegburg and the Westerwald. "Schnellen" are high and conical formed tankards typical for Siegburg (Fig. 3). They were mainly produced in the second half of the 16th century. Another characteristic Siegburg type is small funnel-necked jugs with relief-medallions (ROEHMER 2014, 189). During the first half of the 17th century, cylindrical tankards appear as a new form of drinking vessel (Fig. 4) produced in all major pottery centres. Whereas the large baluster jugs may have been primarily used as pouring or serving vessels, the smaller types were drinking vessels. Summing up, moulded relief decorations appear in the early 16th century and are produced throughout the first half of the 17th century. During the 17th century the production of elaborate relief-decorated stoneware seems to decrease at most production centres, whereas other decorations like incised ornaments and colourful glaze become more frequent. Jugs or bottles with crude and simple relief applications as a basic commodity and container were still produced in vast amounts throughout the 17th century, predominantly by potters in Frechen (GAIMSTER 1997, 210, 211).

3. Relief-decorated stoneware of the Renaissance in Norway and neighbouring parts of Scandinavia: empirical basics

Based on my research of museum collections in southwestern Norway and literature (DEMUTH 2022, 112 f.; 296, 297), the occurrence of highly decorated Renaissance stoneware in the Nordic countries is rather limited, both in absolute numbers and in relation to the total volume of pottery. Approximately 200 fragments of this decorated stoneware could be identified amongst archaeological finds from the city of Bergen, which was the largest town in Scandinavia until the 17th century. This is just a tiny percentage of the vast amounts of pottery from this period excavated on various occasions in Bergen. Unfortunately, postmedieval finds are in many cases poorly documented, making it rather difficult to determine the exact proportions of different pottery types for the Early Modern period. However, an excavation of a warehouse from the 16th and 17th century at "Strandgaten 55–57" in Bergen generated a large sequence of pottery in a well-documented context (DEMUTH 2001, 87–92). This site was obviously a warehouse where pottery was stored and sold. Amongst the excavated pottery, stoneware stands for approximately 1–2% of all ceramic finds, with about half of the stoneware showing relief decoration (DEMUTH 2022, 194).

However, relief decorated stoneware appears in small amounts in many parts of the country, most frequently in towns or places connected to local elites, like rectories and churches. Stoneware with elaborate decorations is occasionally found even at places occupied by socially less privileged people, as finds from a peasant farm in Porsgrunn in southeastern Norway indicate (DEMUTH 2019, 128; SETHRE 2017, 261).

Only a few examples of decorated Renaissance stoneware from Denmark are published. Amongst these are pieces of Raeren stoneware dating to the second half of the 16th century, found at castles that belonged to the highest nobility (LINAA 2006,114–117). A few fragments of relief decorated stoneware from the town of Aalborg in northern Denmark are published, indicating that these vessels were present, though in a limited scale (KLINGENBERG 2010, 1001–104). The situation is obviously similar in Sweden, where stoneware makes up about 3% of all pottery in the Early Modern town of Nya Lödöse in southern Sweden, with just very few relief decorated vessels, mainly from Raeren (CARLSON ET. AL. 2018, 394; fig. 28). In the Swedish capital of Stockholm, decorated Renaissance stoneware appears frequently, though only in small amounts (GAIMSTER 2002, 198). The same pattern is documented from the old diocese and university city of Lund in Scania, which became Swedish after 1658 (GAIMSTER 1998, 173–176). Single finds of relief decorated stoneware are documented even at settlements at the periphery of the Swedish dominion, for example in the town Tornio,

founded in the early 17th century in present-day northern Finland, (NURMI 2011, 115, 116). These somehow random examples taken from the available literature show that vessels in relief decorated stoneware were known in most regions of coastal Scandinavia in the Renaissance, but they were rather rare and no mass material. While places mentioned in this text are marked on the map (**fig. 5**), there are numerous other places, especially in the eastern Baltics, where considerable amounts of decorated stoneware were discovered, like in the old Hanseatic city of Riga (REINFELDE 2015).

4. Renaissance stoneware as a source to cultural history

Beyond their chronological and aesthetic values, the highly decorated stoneware provide insight into complex social and cultural issues, both through decoration-motifs and based on the circumstances of their use. Art-historical research provides models to understand the intricate pictures on stoneware and an object-biographical approach towards individual pieces illustrates the multifaceted nature of the vessels.

4.1 Woodcuts, prints and paintings as patterns for relief decorated stoneware

The technology of relief decoration on stoneware was strongly influenced by woodblock printing and metal plate engraving, not only in terms of adapting the technological principles of mass reproduction, but also by transforming the motifs of contemporary prints to pottery (GAIMSTER 1997, 142, 143). In this way, contemporary topoi from artworks became broadly distributed wherever such stoneware was present. A typical example is the numerous illustrations of "peasant dance" scenes, as rendered, among others, by Pieter Bruegel and engraved or cut in wood by Hans Sebald Beham, who was a student of Albrecht Dürer. The "peasant dance" images by Beham were used as direct templates for panels on stoneware jugs by potters, especially in Raeren (MENNICKEN 2013, 162–164). This archetypical figure enables a variety of interpretations. It may express the social distinction of upcoming burgher classes towards a countryside population that was perceived as less civilized (MENNICKEN 2013, 160–162). But also, an idealised perception of the farmer as opposed to a decadent Catholic clergy is possible (MOXEY 1989, 38, 39, 54–58). Raeren jugs with "peasant dance" images (Fig. 6) are widely spread in Scandinavia, which indicates that the ideas behind the images were also present amongst the people using these vessels.

A small group of images can be described as "Protestant propaganda", reflecting the spread of Lutheran ideas in the 16th century (GAIMSTER 1997, 148–151; ROEHMER 2014, 166–171, 198–203). Typically, these vessels depict the pope or other Catholic institutions as the devil, even though these are quite rare, even in production areas (GAIMSTER 1997, 149; ROEHMER 2014, 166). It is noteworthy that some fragments of Siegburg stoneware clearly showing Protestant, anti-Catholic motifs were found in Bergen. A body fragment of a funnel-necked jug with a round medallion depicting the Temptation of Christ, with the devil dressed as a monk, was found within the Hanseatic kontor (Fig. 7). A "Schnelle" tankard with a similar motif was amongst the finds from the above-mentioned pottery warehouse at Strandgaten in Bergen. The Lutheran faith of stoneware users in Bergen is also expressed by a "Schnelle" found at the Hanseatic kontor showing Jesus and some prophets in an elaborate relief panel Fig. 8). The composition of this image can be interpreted as an expression of fundamental elements of Protestant theology (KRUEGER 1994). A direct parallel to this vessel is found in a museum collection in the Rhineland, where it is thought to be a contract work for a secret society (ROEHMER 2014, 173). The vessel from Bergen possibly indicates the presence of similar groups at the Hanseatic kontor. These finds are not just products of intricate craft and extensive exchange, but also a medium of religious belief and thus actors within the fundamental ideological struggles of the 16th century in northern and central Europe.

4.2 Relief decorated stoneware as medium for text

A specific kind of relief decoration on Renaissance stoneware, especially on "Bartmann" jugs from Cologne and Frechen, but also other production centres, are drinking verses and blessings on vessels (Fig. 2). The inscriptions are typically applied on a broad band around the waist of the jugs. Most often these decorations on stoneware can be dated to the 16th century. The verses are in Low German and consist mostly of moralistic or pious blessings, which appear in numerous variations (GAIMSTER 1997, 152; UNGER 2007, 66, 67). Many of the verses are connected to eating and drinking, as the vessels were probably often used during festivities in company. Literary speaking, one can interpret the verses as "the sayings of the bearded mask" (UNGER 2007, 60), which puts a moral aspect to the act of collective drinking. Drinking verses of this kind were typically for 16th-century Protestant morality, which emphasises the "... necessity of good moral behaviour, to restrain greed, drunkenness and excess" (MORRALL 2002, 270). Along with contemporary mores, the inscriptions also mediated the Low German language, which had a strong influence on the Nordic languages

during the late medieval and Early Modern period (Særheim 2019). This linguistic influence resulted occasionally in severe internal conflicts in the Nordic societies, as an episode from 1489 illustrates. During a drinking party in the inland region of Telemark, a quarrel started as one of the guests used a Low German toast, to the disapproval of the host (Særheim 2019, 153). The farmer who hosted the party was annoyed that the guest, who also was from the region, but eventually learned Low German during service as mercenary, used foreign phrases instead of the local Norse dialect. The following quarrel ended with the use of axes and knifes and in the end the host was killed by his guest (Særheim 2019, 153). This incident demonstrates both the spreading of Low German in Norway, not at least by drinking verses, but also the strong and conflicting feelings triggered by this influence.

4.3 Relief-decorated stoneware as heritage items

Some pieces of highly decorated stoneware are passed on as complete vessels to museum collections and allow to a certain degree the reconstruction of their biography. These objects communicate the meaning and appreciation for their owners in a special and illuminating way.

In an old cabinet in the manor Bogstad in the proximity of Oslo, a complete Siegburg "Schnelle" with silver mounting (Fig. 3) has lasted to the present day and is kept as part of the collection of the manor, which is a museum today. The moulded decoration on the tankard shows the royal coat of arms of Spain and England and in the middle the coat of arms of the dukes of Jülich-Kleve-Berg, as overlords of the town Siegburg. One of the reliefs bears the date "1574", which usually marks the year of the production of the mould. However, the silver lock shows the coat of arms of the Leuch family, which owned Bogstad manor from 1665 to 1778. The oldest known member of this family, Peder Nielsen Leuch (1636–1693), was originally a tailor who married the daughter of the former owner of the manor. He was a social climber who managed to become wealthy in the first part of the 17th century. It is unclear how he came to possess the Siegburg tankard, but obviously it was important enough for him to equip the vessel with a costly silver mounting approximately 100 years after its production. In that way the family coat of arms was combined with the royal coats of arms on the vessel, possibly ennobling the Leuch family by this company. There are historical examples of Siegburg tankards used as prestigious gifts amongst members of Early Modern

elites (LÜPKES, 2022). Perhaps the Leuch family wished to document close ties to the high nobility through the coat of arms on the Siegburg "Schnelle".

The Lillehammer Museum in central Norway holds another stoneware vessel with secondary silver mounting. A cylindrical, blue-painted Raeren tankard with an impressive "Vanitas" illustration and inscription and the date "1637" bears a silver mounting with the coat of arms of the Monrad family and the date "1689" (Fig. 4). The initials "FM" on the mounting connect the tankard to Fredrik Monrad, who was the parish priest at Øyer, north of Lillehammer in the late 17th century. He probably inherited the vessel from his father, Erik Monrad, who became the parish priest in Middelfart Denmark in 1637 and who was later the bishop of Ribe. Most likely the Raeren tankard was a present to Erik Monrad, who not only got his first appointment, but also married in 1637, matching the date on the mould. This made the vessel very suitable as a gift, just like the monogram "EM" from the decoration, which identifies the producing potter as Emund Mennicken from Raeren (MENNICKEN 2013, 223). While one could even speculate if the tankard was a custom order, fragments of an identical tankard have also been found in Haapsalu in Estonia (RUSSOW 2006, 162). A complete vessel of this kind was also found at Grenzau in the Westerwald, emphasising the close connections between potters from Raeren and the Westerwald (REINEKING VON BOCK 1986, 316). The "Vanitas" motif was quite suitable for persons from the Protestant clergy, who were part of the administrative elite in the absolutistic 17th century. The fact that the vessel was kept in the family for many decades underlines the significance of the object.

Another example of a stoneware vessel in an ecclesiastical context in Scandinavia is a Siegburg "Schnelle" used as a chalice in the church of Medfjord, a small fishing village on Senja Island far north in Norway (NICOLAISSEN 1916, 24). The almost complete tankard lacks the handle and is decorated with moulded images of Alexander the Great, Hector of Troy and Emperor Karl, and the date "1588". It shows the use of moulded stoneware by Renaissance clerics in the North and that these vessels could be kept in use for a considerable period.

However, one should bear in mind that relief decorated stoneware occasionally was also used by lesser privileged people, as already mentioned above. An example is the site of a peripheric peasant farm near Porsgrunn in southern Norway, where fragments of a Raeren baluster jug from the late 16th and of a Frechen Bartmann jug from the second half of the 17th century were discovered along with other household debris (SETHRE 2017). Possibly these items were available from the Dutch traders, who sailed to the region in large numbers

during the 17th century. The find once more confirms the crucial importance of find contexts for the interpretation of individual objects.

Conclusion

Relief decorated stoneware is a specific find category that is found in small numbers but has great potential for far-reaching interpretations. In Scandinavia, these vessels are often connected with privileged social groups, but they were probably also available to less wealthy people. Similar vessels may indicate quite different events, actors and activities, all depending on their use, which can be traced through the circumstances under which the objects are deposited and found. As these objects show complex imagery in the relief applications, they function as a medium for meanings expressed by the pictures on the vessels. The relief decorated stoneware can thus be interpreted as an indicator of familiarity with certain intellectual or ideological concepts or a social habitus. This deeper significance of some stoneware may be an explanation for the use of individual vessels for decades or even centuries.

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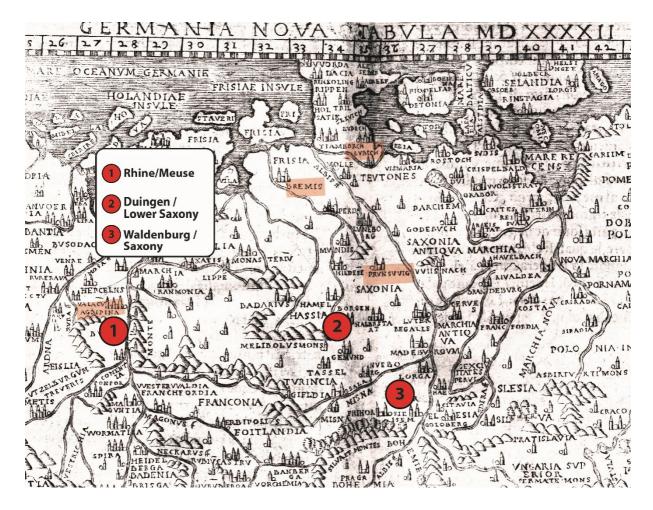


Fig. 1: The three main regions for late medieval and Early Modern stoneware production, marked on an inset of "Germania Nova tabula" by Claudius Ptolemy, Venice, 1548. Artwork: Volker Demuth



Fig. 2: Almost complete "Bartmann" jug produced in Cologne or Frechen, mid-16th century, found at the Royal Fortress in Bergen, Norway. Inv. No. BRM 39/39. Photograph: Volker Demuth



Fig. 3: Complete "Schnelle" tankard produced in Siegburg, with secondary silver mounting. Dated 1574. Part of interior at the manor Bogstad, near to Oslo, Norway. Inv. No. NFBO.00679. Photograph: Jon-Erik Faksvaag / Museum Bogstad Gård



Fig. 4: Complete cylindrical tankard produced in Raeren, with secondary silver mounting.

Dated 1637. Probably property of local parish priest Fredrik Monrad at Øyer, north of

Lillehammer, now in the collection of the "Maihaugen" museum, Lillehammer. Inv. No. SS
14495. Photograph: Museum Maihaugen / Lillehammer

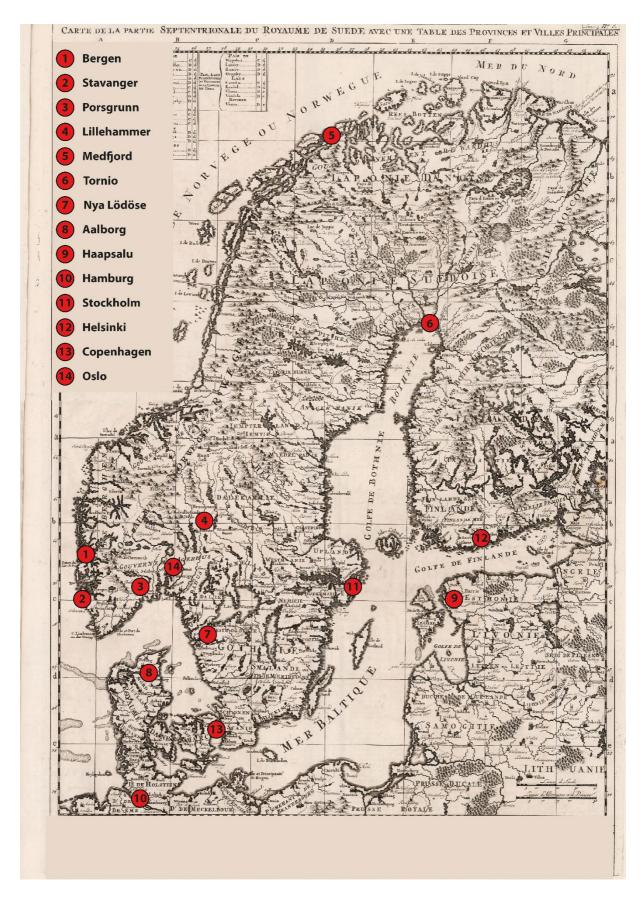


Fig. 5: Map from 1714 by Nicolas Gueudeville with places named in the text and modern capitals marked. Artwork: Volker Demuth



Fig. 6: Almost complete panel jug with "peasant dance" frieze produced in Raeren, found at Murehjørnet, Bergen. Inv. No. B 8975. Photograph: Volker Demuth



Fig. 7: Body fragment of a funnel necked jug produced in Siegburg, found at Bryggen in Bergen. Relief medallion showing the Temptation of Christ, with the devil dressed as a monk. Inv. No. B6583. Photograph: Volker Demuth



Fig. 8: Lower part of a "Schnelle" tankard produced in Siegburg, found at Bryggen in Bergen. Relief application showing a scene with Christ and prophets, symbolising Protestant theology. Inv. No. B 6879. Photograph: Angela Weigand / University of Bergen