

ARCHAEOLOGIA MEDII AEVI FINLANDIAE XXXI

SHATTERED AND SCATTERED PASTS

Festschrift for Professor Georg Haggrén

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Natascha Mehler

BARTMANN JUGS FROM THE GULF OF FINLAND AND THEIR ROLE IN DATING SHIPWRECKS

ABSTRACT

Bartmann jugs and other vessels made of Rhenish stoneware play a special role in the study of trade networks in the late Middle Ages and early modern period. With this in mind, this article presents Bartmann jugs from two shipwrecks in the Gulf of Finland, the Esselholm and Metskär wrecks. There are two jugs from the Esselholm wreck that date from around 1550 to around 1600. Another jug from the Metskär wreck dates from c. 1550 to c. 1610. It is also being discussed what role the dating of the jugs plays in the dating of the sinking of the ships.

Keywords: Bartmann, stoneware, ceramics, shipwreck, trade, German

Bartmann jugs, stoneware containers with distinctive male-bearded-face masks and applied medallions, were produced in the early modern period in huge quantities, predominantly at Frechen near Cologne, Germany, but also at a few other sites in the vicinity. Most were specifically made for export, mainly to England or the Netherlands,¹ from where most of the jugs were then transported on ships to colonies of those countries. A find distribution map shows that Bartmann vessels can indeed be categorised as global objects.² The map also clearly shows that the characteristic jugs predominantly appear in maritime find contexts: under water and on land in trading ports, harbour towns or colonial fortifications. Shipwrecks in which such vessels have been found are of particular importance for the dating and interpretation of the global consumption of Bartmann jugs.³ In archaeology, shipwrecks are generally regarded as time capsules because they represent a specific moment in time – the sinking of a ship – with all its consequences, including the preservation of finds. If the date of the ship's sinking is known from written sources, this date provides a *terminus ante quem* for the production of the objects that have been preserved in it.

The oldest Rhenish stoneware jugs with applied Bartmann decoration date to the second quarter of the 16th century and were produced in Cologne.⁴ From that point on through the 18th century, the number of vessels produced increased rapidly. It is particularly shipwrecks of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindisch Compagnie, VOC) from which we know numerous, very well-preserved Bartmann jugs. One example is the wreck of the *Batavia* (sunk off Australia in 1629).⁵



FIGURE 1. The two Rhenish Bartmann jugs and one undecorated stoneware jug from the Esselholm wreck. The face mask of jug no. H78050-18 (left) shows a beard with a straight end and the face mask of jug no. H78050-17 (right) shows a beard with a rounded end that merges into the tip of the acanthus leaves on the body of the vessel. Photo: Riikka Tevali.

There are also shipwrecks in the Baltic that have Bartmann vessels on board. In the wreck of the *Kronan*, sunk off Öland in 1676, around 70 jugs were found.⁶

This article deals with Bartmann jugs from two shipwrecks in the Gulf of Finland, the Esselholm wreck and the Metskär wreck. The jugs with the bearded face masks are re-evaluated and contextualized with Siegburg stoneware vessels with which they were found together. Finally, I will discuss what these Rhenish stoneware vessels can contribute to the question of when each ship sank.

THE BARTMANN JUGS FROM THE ESSELHOLM WRECK

The Esselholm wreck lies near the island of Hässelholmen in the archipelago of Snappertuna, county Raseborg, Finland. It sank approx. 10 km south of a medieval royal castle and a 16th-century manor. The date of the ship's sinking is not known. The circumstances of the discovery, the ship's construction and the interpretation of the wreck were recently re-evaluated by Riikka Tevali (2024). I will concentrate here on two nearly identical Bartmann jugs (find nos. H78050-18 and H78050-17) (Fig. 1) that were found in the wreck and interpreted as part of the cargo due to their location in the bow area of the ship.⁷

As noted above, the jugs are very similar in terms of shape and decoration. Their bodies are very bulbous and lack a foot ring. The round bodies bear three small portrait medallions, each of which is surrounded by four acanthus leaves arranged in a star shape. The backsides of the jugs are undecorated. All the medallions show the right-facing shoulder portrait of a beardless person with a helmet-like headdress and a blouse with a folded collar. While the body decoration of both vessels is very similar, the face masks show slight differences. The nose and eyes are similarly designed on both masks, but on the face mask of jug no. H78050-18 (Fig. 1, left), however, the beard is straight at

the bottom and the beard mask is applied over a shoulder ring, which it covers. In jug no. H78050-17 (Fig. 1, right) the beard has a round shape and runs into the acanthus leaf of the central decoration. The tip of this leaf overlaps the lower end of the beard and was therefore applied after the beard mask was put on the neck of the jug. Both jugs are so similar in shape, glaze and decoration that they very probably come from the same workshop. The handles and rims of the jugs show no signs that they once had pewter lids.

Both Bartmann jugs were produced in Frechen near Cologne, from where very similar vessels and decorative fragments have been found in the excavated workshop waste from Rossmarstraße 22–24.⁸ Typochronologically, the two Bartmann jugs from the Esselholm wreck date to the period from c. 1550 to c. 1600. Comparative finds of vessels with very similar decorative structure and execution of the overlays are available, for example from Cologne, Frechen or Amsterdam.⁹

The Bartmann jugs are accompanied by a third slightly smaller Rhenish stoneware jug, which is identical in shape and ware but has no applied decoration (find no. H78050-19). Also found in the wreck was a decorated funnel-necked beaker with a wavy foot made of Siegburg stoneware (find no. SMM2097:1).¹⁰

THE BARTMANN JUG FROM THE METSKÄR WRECK

The Metskär wreck is located in the Hiittinen archipelago off the south coast of Finland.¹¹ As with the Esselholm wreck, there is no written record of when the Metskär ship sank. The finds recovered from the wreck include tripod cooking vessels made of ceramic and metal, wooden vessels and a Rhenish stoneware tankard from Siegburg, which has been attributed to the workshop of master Christian Knütgen. The tankard shows the coat of arms of the county of Jülich-Kleve-Berg and that of Denmark and bears the date 1574.¹² As there is no other basis for dating the wreck, this tankard or its date was previously regarded as the *terminus post quem* for the sinking of the ship. The Siegburg tankard was found in the stern of the ship, as was the Bartmann jug (find no. H71105-1) (Fig. 2). All other artefacts were found in the bow of the ship.

In this case, too, the Bartmann jug is very bulbous and lacks a foot ring. A central band with the inscription 'ARM VNT FRVM IST MIN RICHTVI' (Germ. *arm und fromm ist mein Reichtum*, Engl. *to be poor and pious is my wealth*) runs around the belly. Small round medallions and acanthus leaves are arranged alternately above and below the banner. The reverse of the jug is not decorated.



FIGURE 2. Rhenish Bartmann jug from the Metskär wreck. Photo: Taru Laakkonen, Finnish Maritime Museum.

The medallions are all the same and show a person facing to the right with short, curly hair and a high collar. Here, too, the bearded face mask is applied over a shoulder ring. Single small acanthus leaves are attached to the left and right of the bearded face mask below the shoulder ring. The facial features are roughly executed, with the beard ending straight at the bottom. The handle and rim show no signs that a pewter lid was once present here.

This arrangement of the décor (central banner with alternating small medallions and acanthus leaves) is frequently found on Bartmann vessels from the period c. 1550 to 1575 from Cologne and Frechen. The same motto is also frequently documented.¹³ A vessel dated to 1609 attests to the use of the decoration until the early 17th century.¹⁴

EARLY BARTMANN JUGS IN THE BALTIC

Riikka Tevali recently revised the previous interpretation that the two ships were Dutch trade ships and instead convincingly argues that they once belonged to the Swedish nobility.¹⁵ The question thus is: How do the Bartmann jugs from the two wrecks fit in with this interpretation? How widespread and available were Rhenish stonewares and Bartmann jugs and Dutch lead-glazed earthenware in Sweden? When both ships sank, the Finnish archipelago in the Gulf of Finland was part of the Swedish Empire. Thanks to increasing excavations and research, it can be stated that Rhenish stoneware and Dutch lead-glazed earthenware were widespread in the 16th century and part of everyday material culture. Rhenish stoneware was shipped in enormous quantities across the Rhine River to the Netherlands and traded from there to many countries and regions,¹⁶ including the Baltic.

Indeed, in southern Finland Bartmann jugs from the late 16th century have been found not only in towns but also in rural settlements such as Lillas in Mårtensby.¹⁷ In the late 16th century, present-day Sweden and Finland were connected not only geopolitically but also through the network of the Hanseatic League. The role of Hanseatic merchants and ships in the international trade in Rhenish stoneware has often been emphasised.¹⁸ In recent years, there have been more and more finds of Rhenish (but also Lower Saxon and Saxon) stoneware vessels from late medieval and early modern shipwrecks in the Finnish archipelagos and also in settlement contexts in Finland.¹⁹ It is becoming increasingly clear that there were transshipment centres for German stonewares in the eastern Baltic,²⁰ notably Lübeck, but also Rostock, Stockholm and Gdansk further east.²¹ There are numerous Bartmann jugs from Stockholm, including some that are very similar to the three jugs from the two mentioned wrecks.²² Transshipment places such as Stockholm could well have provided the ships with Rhenish stonewares.

Tallinn, situated at the southern end of the Gulf of Finland, was an important Hanseatic trading post. Rhenish stoneware has also been found in Haapsalu.²³ From Pärnu, on the Gulf of Riga, there is a Cologne Bartmann jug with banner decoration, which is very similar to the jug from the Metskär wreck.²⁴ Fragments of a Bartmann jug from Vilnius have the same banner as the Bartmann jug from that wreck. Here, however, the small medallion shows a person wearing a helmet.²⁵ The distribution of Bartmann jugs on both sides of the Gulf of Finland clearly shows that decorated Rhenish stoneware adorned tables here as well in the late 16th century. Georg Haggrén has described such a display of extraordinary vessels with the concept of conspicuous consumption.²⁶

As already mentioned, there are no written sources on the sinkings of the ships and there is little dating material available. The Rhenish stonewares play an important role with regard to the question of sinking, because in contrast to the many lead-glazed earthenwares, which can only be roughly dated, the Bartmann vessels and the two pieces from Siegburg can be dated more precisely. The lead-

FIGURE 3. Rhenish Bartmann jug from the Scheurrak SO1 wreck, a Dutch merchant vessel that sunk off the Dutch island of Texel in December 1593. Image kindly provided by the Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, inv. no. SO1-11003.



glazed earthenwares were presented in detail in 1978 and the Netherlands was suggested as the region of manufacture.²⁷ Based on the find location within the wreck and quantity, these are probably cargo rather than vessels used for food production on board. This is also supported by the fact that they show no traces of use such as soot.²⁸

Typochronologically, the Bartmann jugs from both wrecks date to the period c. 1550 to 1600. Longer periods up to c. 1609 are documented for the use of the decoration, as mentioned above. In addition to the two Bartmann jugs from the Esselholm wreck, there is a very nice comparative find from the wreck Scheurrak SO1, which sank in 1593 in the Wadden Sea off the Dutch island of Texel (Fig. 3). This is a Dutch merchant ship that contained a cargo of Baltic wheat and apparently sank on its return voyage from the Baltic.²⁹

The two vessels from Siegburg are also important for the question of the dating of the sinkings of the ships. The Metskär wreck contained the Siegburg tankard dated 1574. The Esselholm wreck contained a funnel-necked beaker with applied medallions showing a floral motif that were very common in the 16th century. The medallion decoration on the beaker from the Metskär wreck belongs to the type of stylised floral motifs.³⁰ Interestingly, funnel-necked beakers with very similar floral designs to those of the beaker from the Esselholm wreck are known from the workshop of master potter Anno Knütgen, who operated in Siegburg and in Westerwald.³¹ The Siegburg tankard from the Metskär wreck was produced in the workshop of the Siegburg master potter Christian Knütgen (signed CK 1574), a close relative of Anno. For the funnel-neck beaker discovered in the Metskär wreck a date of around 1580 to 1590 has been suggested.³² Based on comparative vessels from Siegburg and surrounding places I would like to revise the dating of the funnel beaker and suggest the period c. 1570 to 1600 instead.³³

Finally, it should be noted that caution is required when dating the deposition of the Rhenish stoneware vessels. Richly decorated stoneware in particular, which was more expensive than lead-glazed earthenware cookware, often had a long lifespan. The decorated vessels adorned the table and were well looked after. Stoneware is also more stable and durable than earthenware.³⁴ A number of shipwrecks have been investigated that have decorated Rhenish stoneware vessels as part of the ship's inventory and that sometimes typochronologically can be dated much earlier than that. The *Sea Venture* for example, which sank off Bermuda in 1609, contained two Bartmann jugs that typologically date to the last decades of the 16th century. The already mentioned VOC ship *Batavia*, which sank off Australia in 1629, contained several much older Bartmann jugs.³⁵ I readily agree with Riikka Tevali's interpretation that the two wrecks sank at the end of the 16th century.³⁶ However, it is

also possible that the Bartmann vessels and the Siegburg funnel beaker date to around 1600, or that the vessels are old pieces that were valued and that the two ships hence sank in the early 17th century.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With this article I would like to congratulate my bearded Baltic colleague and friend Georg Haggrén, who has dedicated his career to researching material culture. I would like to thank Riikkka Tevali for providing me with the Bartmann jugs, images and information. On a lighter note, it should not go unmentioned that the idea for this short paper was born in a ladies' toilet in Bonn. This contribution is part of the international research project on the global distribution and use of Bartmann vessels (project title 'Bartmann goes global', funded by the German Research Foundation / DFG and the Arts and Humanities Research Council / AHCR, 2024–2027). I would like to thank my project colleagues Christoph Keller, Christian Röser, Sören Pfeiffer and Nigel Jeffries for their insights. I would also like to thank Gerald Volker Grimm, with whom I also discussed the stoneware.

Natascha Mehler is Professor of Historical Archaeology at the University of Tübingen, Germany. She has been researching the archaeology of the Hanseatic League in the North Atlantic and material culture for many years. This is precisely what she enjoys discussing with Georg Haggrén, whom she has known for decades and from many joint events, e.g. the regular meetings of the Baltic and North Atlantic Pottery Research Group (BNPG), or the Medieval Europe Research Community (MERC) of the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA).

NOTES

- 1 Göbels 1971.
- 2 Keller 2023.
- 3 Gaimster 1997a: 359.
- 4 Gaimster 1997a: 199, 204; Unger 2007.
- 5 Green 1989.
- 6 Einarsson 1997.
- 7 Edgren 1978: 75; Tevali 2024: table 2 and fig. 9.
- 8 The find complex at Frechen, Rossmarstraße 22–24 is currently being investigated by Christoph Keller, Amt für Bodendenkmalpflege im Rheinland.
- 9 Ostkamp & Snip 2023: 596 catalogue no. C237; Unger 2007: catalogue no. 53.
- 10 Tevali 2024: table 2, fig. 10.
- 11 See Tevali 2024.
- 12 Edgren 1978; Tevali 2024: table 1 and fig. 5a.
- 13 Ostkamp & Snip 2023: 464–7, 590; Unger 2007: 141–52.
- 14 Ostkamp & Snip 2023: 501.
- 15 Tevali 2024.
- 16 E.g. Göbels 1971: 284–317.
- 17 Heinonen 2021: 132.
- 18 E.g. Gaimster 1997a; 2014; Mehler 2009.
- 19 Haggrén 2008; Tevali 2019.
- 20 Gaimster 1999; 2014: 66.
- 21 Tevali 2019: 77.
- 22 E.g. Johansson 2006: 80–1.
- 23 Russow 2006: 162–3.
- 24 Russow 2006: 177.
- 25 Urbonaitė-Ubė 2018: 196 and fig. 4.
- 26 Haggrén 2008: 88; Tevali 2019.
- 27 Edgren 1978: 83.
- 28 Edgren 1978: 90.
- 29 Manders 1998.
- 30 A vessel with an identical floral decoration is published in Pfeiffer 2023: cat. no. 338; Pfeiffer 2023: 42 no. 4, 187.
- 31 Ruppel 1991.
- 32 Tevali 2024, based on a recommendation by Georg Haggrén.
- 33 Grimm 2019; I would like to thank Gerald Volker Grimm, who also shares this assessment.
- 34 Gaimster 1997b: 121.
- 35 Gaimster 1997b; Green 1989.
- 36 Tevali 2024.

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