
Koopman Rare Art

Director's Choice – Timo Koopman
A 17th Century Norwegian Peg Tankard

My choice this week is this little jewel of a tankard. It is perfect in its colour, proportions, and use of ornamentation and cast elements. Finding a Norwegian silver tankard as early as 1650 is incredibly rare. This beautiful example has unusual features, such as its double-eagle thumb piece and three handsome lion sejant feet.



A Norwegian 17th Century Octagonal Peg Tankard

Bergen, circa 1650

By Herman Wichman

Scratch weight: 45 lod

Height: 14.5cm

The octagonal Tankard sits on three lion sejant feet; the scroll handle with double-headed eagle thumbpiece, the sides with engraved flower-headed panels, the cover with the owner's name Rasmus Jensen 1679 and a coat-of-arms with two vacant cartouches.



Peg Tankards

Peg or pegged tankards, are drinking vessels with small knobs or 'pegs' set vertically on the inside of the vessel. The pegs were used to keep a measure of how much alcohol the drinker had consumed. These were social vessels, allowing one person to drink a specified measure of alcohol and then pass the tankard to the next drinker, who in turn would drink to the next peg, and then pass the tankard once more.

Pegged tankards find their origins in Scandinavia, with the earliest examples coming from Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. The Danish word for a pint is 'paegl', from which it is believed the term 'peg' stems. The nobility and royalty would of course have their tankards in silver as opposed to birchwood which was popular. Silver being both aseptic and antiseptic in property made the perfect choice for an item that would be shared.



18th Century Norwegian Birchwood Peg Tankard

Bergen in The Renaissance Period

This period in Norway saw the introduction of journeymen entering the guilds and outsiders from Germany and other part of Northern Europe such as the Netherlands. They had a distinct influence on the style. The elongated form with embossed auricular ornaments of the renaissance were replaced with shorter versions, engraved with floral baroque decoration influenced by the silk embroideries and engravings from abroad.



Engraved flowers by Johan Theodor de Bry 1612

During the Renaissance period, Bergen held significant importance. It was the trading capital of Northern Europe, largely because of its strategic location on the sea routes. This made it a central hub for commerce and also a vital part of the Hanseatic League, a

powerful economic and defensive alliance of merchant guilds and market towns in Northwestern and Central Europe. Bergen's inclusion in the League facilitated its trade with other parts of Europe, particularly in fish from the north of Norway.

For a time, Bergen served as the capital of Norway, which added to its political significance. The presence of the royal family and the court enhanced its status and influence. The city saw the construction of many important buildings, such as the Bergenhus Fortress, and became known for its vibrant cultural scene, further establishing its prominence. Bergen was a bustling and influential city with a rich cultural and economic life that resonated throughout Europe.

The silver guild in Bergen played a crucial role in the city's development as a centre for silversmithing. Bergen was a significant hub for art including objects made of gold and silver, which adhered to international standards. The guild lasted from 1568 to around 1840, during which the city produced about half of all Norwegian silver.

The guild ensured the quality of workmanship was maintained at a high standard, and acted as governing bodies for the trade, setting rules and regulations that had to be followed by its members. It also provided a network of support for craftsmen and facilitated the exchange of ideas and techniques.



Herman Wichman 1643 – ca. 1662

Wichman is well known from the archive records, but the actual number of known works is decidedly out of proportion to his long tenure. Wichmann was born in Halberstadt in

Braunschweig and presumably received his vocational education in his home country. He came to Bergen as a journeyman and in 1643 he presented his required masterpiece to the guild. His career as a goldsmith seems to have started quite normally. He married shortly after he had taken citizenship, and in 1645 he and "his quinde" lived quite well in Flønderborgsmuget in a two-storey house valued at 250 Rd. In 1657 we find him registered as a farmer, with his farm and land in the 14th district valued at 250 Rd., but no other wealth.

Alas, what had started so well was not to continue. Everything we later hear about master Herman is far from good, and his later years seem to have been characterized by poor financial conditions. The fact that in 1658 he received a fine for a barrel of Rostockerøl from the guild for breaching regulations does not mean much. There were probably many good Norwegian goldsmiths who in the course of time had to do their part for the common good. But it was undeniably worse that in 1678 he was accused of having supplied illegal work for "Signeur Capitain Storm". However, in that same year he can be seen to have received 3 Rd. as support from the guild coffers. It was probably this need that drove him to perform this kind of grisly work. From 1658 until his death, sometime after 1688, little in the way of documentation survives, although in 1668 he received a contribution from the guild treasury for his wife's funeral. Herman Wichman is credited as the first of the Bergen goldsmiths to use the cartilaginous baroque ornament. He used this on his masterpiece, which is housed in Skreddersvennenen velkomst, one of the most monumental Norwegian goldsmiths' works to have survived from the 17th century.



The Journeymen Tailors' Welcome Cup 1643 Herman Wichman

Wichman, a German journeyman is known to have learned his style there. His treatment of decoration, probably taken from engravings by the Dutch artist Van Vianen is superior and reveals a complete immersion and familiarity with the basic form.



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