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EARLY DUTCH PEWTER

BY ROBERT M. VETTER



Fig. I. Bulbous "Hanseatic" flagon with broad conical base, dated 1331 in the lid-seal. The piece belongs to the small stock of authentic XIVth-century European pewter. Back of the handle is relief-decorated. Excavated in the South of Holland. Height: 10 3/4 in. Collection A. J. G. Verster, The Hague.

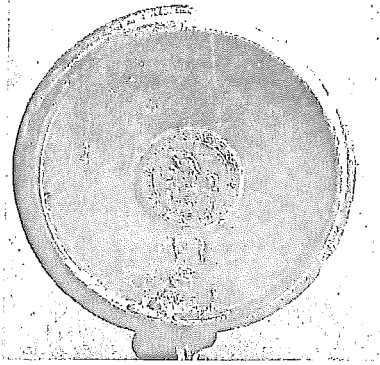


Fig. II. Lid-seal with Crucifixion scene.

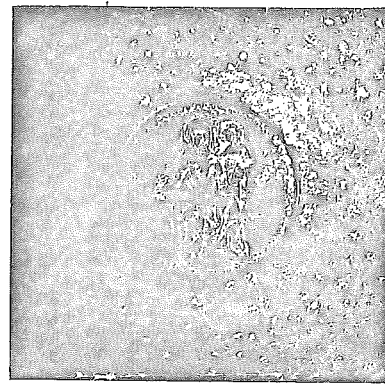


Fig. III. Bottom-seal: Madonna and child.

FOR the third time in recent years Holland showed some of its pewter treasures from public and private collections in a special exhibition at Delft. The great number of carefully selected items, their high quality and the setting, in a building of historical fame and quaint architectural charm, contributed to make this show a remarkable success, at the same time proving a steady increase of interest in pewter by the Dutch public.

Although the exhibition was not limited to Dutch pewter only, it dominated naturally by the display of remarkable and unique pieces so that it appears worth while to draw them to the attention of collectors in other countries. The stress lay on the most ancient types known, which for the last decades have had the special attention of such prominent pewter connoisseurs as A. J. G. Verster, Mr. J. W. Frederiks, both at The Hague, and Ir. F. J. Philips, of Eindhoven, who, encouraged by the late H. C. Gallois, of the Municipal Museum at The Hague, have built up remarkable collections of early pewter.

This class embraces the important "Hanseatic" types, so called on account of their cultural connection with the Hanseatic towns, their crafts, trade and shipping. It has been described more fully by Dr. Otto Lauffer, Albert Löfgren, Johs. Warncke and H. H. Cotterell in collaboration with the writer.

At Delft, one of the oldest specimens of this kind was shown and is reproduced in Figs. I, II and III. Whether it was made in the region of geographical Holland or in some other place on the shores of the North Sea cannot be ascertained. It was dug up in Holland, but belongs to the "Hanseatic" class without recognisable regional features.

Holland is perhaps the most favourable territory for the pewter collector, and Dutch pewter one of the most interesting varieties by its charming simplicity and sober substantiality. The Dutch collector is guided by the convincing testimony of numerous paintings forming an unbroken record of pewter fashions from the Middle Ages to the XVIIIth century and by the irrefutable evidence of the Nova Zembla Pewter find.² Unknown treasures are still buried in the boggy soil of the polderland, which was once sea-bottom, yielding now and then an interesting witness of bygone ages brought up by the dredger. Probably these relics in most cases formed part of the inventory of foundered vessels or had once been dropped into the sea by accident. Anyhow, the ever-present possibility of such finds makes pewter-collecting in Holland an attractive pastime.

"Hanseatic" pewter (Fig. I) which is supposed to have been made in the highly civilised sea-towns round the North and Baltic Seas from the XIVth up to the early

Apollo mai 1951



Fig. IV. Pear-shaped flagon, 10 in. high, XVth century. The hooked handle is decorated by a fleur-de-lys on both sides instead of by the more usual rosette. Twin-ball thumbpiece connected by a short wedge to a low-domed lid. A certain elegance distinguishes it from the "Hanseatic" type. Collection Ir. F. J. Philips, Eindhoven.



Fig. V. Sucking flagon ("Schapenkannetje"), Haarlem, XVIth century, marked with the arms of Haarlem and a Gothic "D." The twin-acorn thumbpiece and other details are characteristic of Dutch pewter of the period. Height 6 in. Collection A. J. G. Verster, The Hague.

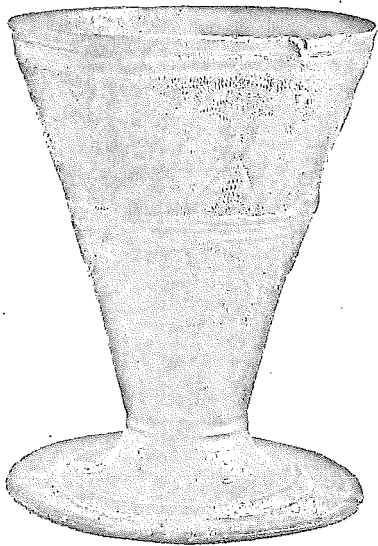


Fig. VI. Goblet, 7 in. high, decorated with bold wriggle-work engraving. The, for pewter, unusual shape seems inspired by contemporary glass. From the Lakenhal Museum, Leyden.

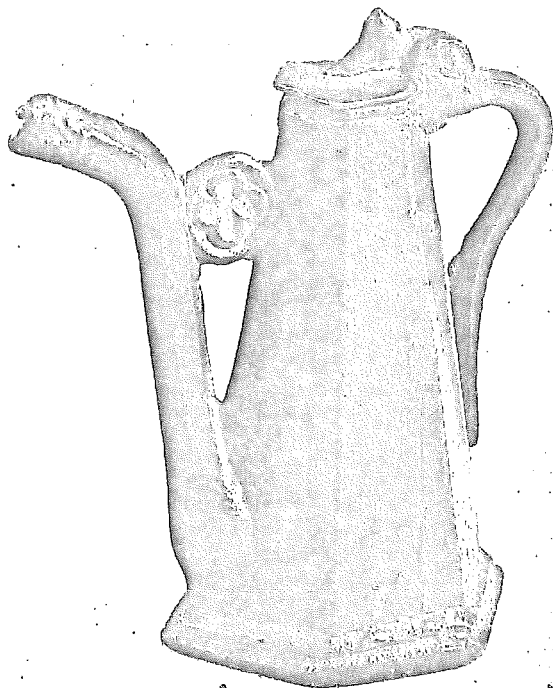


Fig. VII. Small spouted flagon, 3½ in. high, about 1400, probably French and possibly for ritual use. Formerly in the Figdor collection, now owned by Ir. F. J. Philips, Eindhoven.

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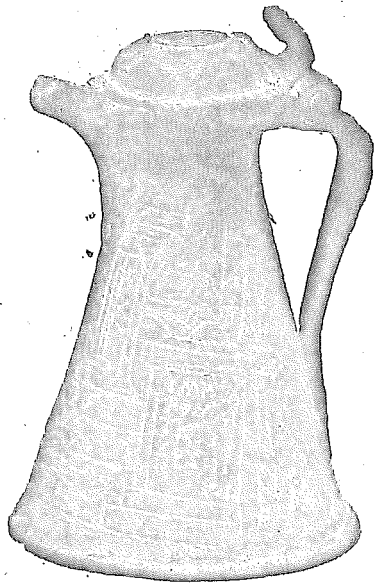


Fig. VIII. One of a pair of burettes, 4½ in. high, probably French XIVth century and of a shape unusual for this period. Deeply engraved with crude architectural motifs.
Collection G. H. Leonhardt, Laren.

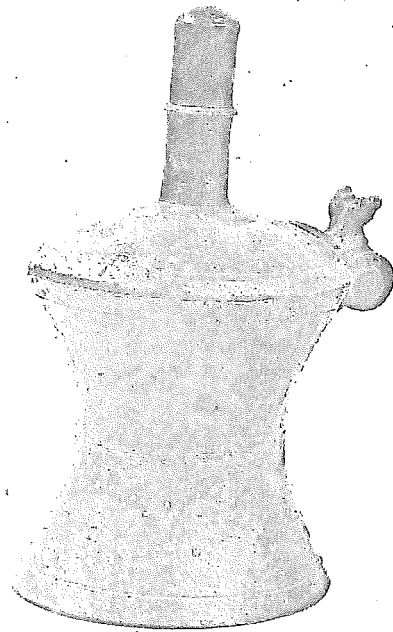


Fig. X. Salt with hinged lid, 5½ in. high, Dutch, about 1500. When opened the peg on the lid supports the latter and prevents the salt from toppling over. A thoroughly functional design of charming simplicity.
Collection Ir. F. J. Philips, Eindhoven.



Fig. IX. A pair of Dutch council- or town-flacons, 22 in. high, with escutcheons on the lid-peg, now in the Museum Fléhite, Amersfoort. XVth century. The stern contours and profiles are Gothic though the general proportions betray Renaissance influence. Several flacons of this type, but of unknown origin, exist in Holland. Their crude vigour constitutes a decided contrast with the more ornate German and Swiss varieties of the same period.



Fig. XI. Mug, 5½ in. high, marked with the arms of Rotterdam and "M.L." (Marten Louisz), about 1600. This elegant piece shows the "entwined ring" thumbpiece which, as a rule, is applied to stone-ware pot-lids only. On pewter it is absolutely exceptional.
Collection H. J. E. van Beuningen, Amsterdam.



Fig. XII. Three candlesticks, 9 in. and 11½ in. high, forming part of the ships' inventory relinquished at Nova Zembla by van Heemskerck and Willem Barendsz after hibernating on this isle in 1596-1597. A number of very interesting pewter objects was recovered there in the XIXth century by a Norwegian shipper and ultimately acquired by the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Some of the objects are of the cruder, popular type and marked with the arms of Amsterdam, whereas others, as these candlesticks, are unmarked and follow more the classical aspirations of the period. Doubts about their Dutch nationality still exist, but the writer does not share them.

XVIth centuries shows certain characteristics which may shortly be summed up as follows: A bulbous or pear-shaped body rests on a very broad base in the shape of a truncated cone, which gives the flagon an appearance of great stability, which probably was intentional with a view to the use on board ship. The inside of the dished lids and of the flat bottoms are "sealed" with medallions showing mostly religious subjects in relief in the crude but expressive manner of the early Middle Ages. The handle slopes down from the single hinge, is semi-circular in section, and ornamented at the back by foliage or similar *motifs*. Its lower end sticks flatly in a very characteristic manner to the belly of the flagon. Thumb-pieces resemble each other, inasmuch as they consist mostly of "Twin" *motifs*, i.e. pairs of lentils, balls, acorns, etc. An upstanding wedge efficiently ties hinge, thumbpiece and lid together.

The body of such flagons is built up of two halves joined by soldering, or rather welding, in a vertical plane. This vertical joint is the very characteristic of early flagons because it was abandoned during the Renaissance when the horizontal division was generally accepted. All these features point to a peculiar manufacturing technique

which during the XVIth century was superseded by more "modern" practices. It has so far not been possible to make a convincing reconstruction of the older manufacturing process. The crude solidity of this class of pewter and the purity of its metal have contributed to the often marvellous state of preservation of specimens which had been buried for centuries.

Dutch collectors very wisely leave these ancient pieces in their original state, not trying to remove the deeply coloured patina which, in accordance with the nature of the soil, is either bronze-like, deep brown or black, or a deep violet with bronze spots. Some of these pieces are only slightly corroded, while others show the ravages caused by an aggressive soil. Roughly incised house-marks and runes point to the use by analphabets.

A natural harmony between function, structure and form seems attained without conscious effort. Gaudy ornamentation is absent, and the crude relief work seems to serve devotional rather than decorative purposes. Something of the romance of the sea seems to cling to these simple objects, endearing them to the sensitive collector.

This principle of unintentional harmony remained one of the charms of Dutch pewter until it came under the

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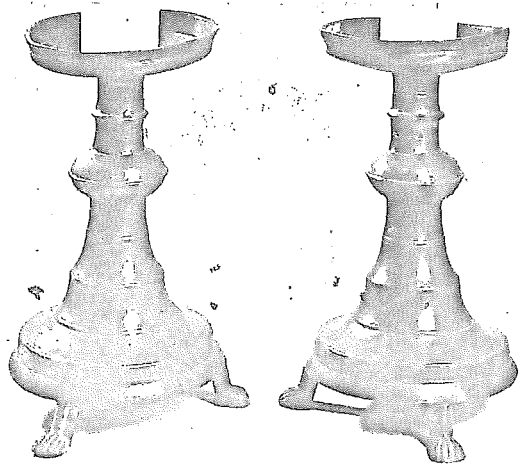


Fig. XIII. A pair of Gothic Pricket-candlesticks, Dutch XVth century, 18½ in. high, covered with deep black patina. From the *Overijsels Geschiedkundig Museum, Zwolle.*

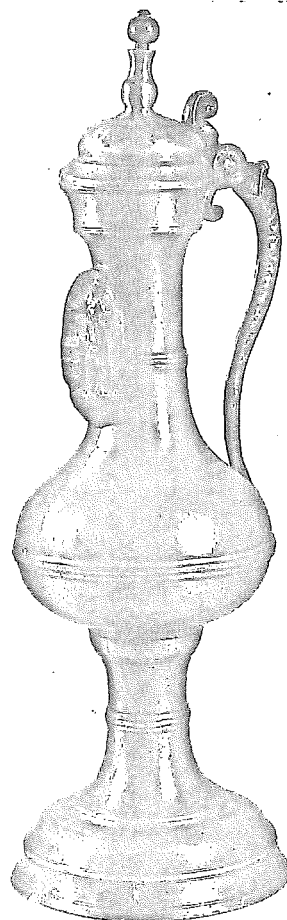


Fig. XV. One of the council-flagons of the town of Enkhuizen, 28 in. high, dating from the XVIth century. What a difference from Fig. IX! Slender and ornate. The stylish handle, thumbpiece, etc., betray the influence of a designer outside the craft who wanted to create something exceptional and succeeded. These flagons seem to have been very much admired by the burghers of Enkhuizen, because crude dummy-copies were made of them and used for adorning the terraced slopes of a Renaissance façade.



Fig. XIV. A pair of Church flagons, Leyden XVIIth century, marked with Leyden arms and "I.P." The thumbpieces are of the Dutch "erect" pattern. The comfortable stability, combined with harmonious proportions, is characteristic of XVIIth century Dutch pewter. *Collection Ir. F. J. Philips, Eindhoven.*

not so very well represented at the exhibition, but the question about its age and origin was raised, and the writer intends to devote a special study to it.

We would refer the reader to the illustrations which are described by extensive captions. It would be very gratifying to the writer if readers would favour him with photos and dates about early and especially "Hanseatic" specimens of pewter.

All the photos were courteously put at the writer's disposal by the direction of the Prinsenhof Museum, Delft. They were executed by A. Dingjan, The Hague, and the Rijksmuseum voor Volkskunde, Arnhem.

spell of the obtrusive Baroque, when other ideals became prevalent. Pewter ornamentation was never the strong side of the Dutch craft, which in that respect was surpassed by the French and German. Attempts made in Holland in that direction which were sometimes directed by recognised artists and architects, seem somehow unsatisfactory and transcending the possibilities of the material. The Delft exhibition permitted the comparison of styles to a great extent, but the decision was nearly always in favour of simplicity.

The so-called "Jan Steen" flagon, a type coveted by every collector showing a wonderful balance between body, spout and handle, is one of these classic shapes which inspired so many prominent Dutch masters who painted it in all its picturesque glory. This type was

¹Dr. Otto Lauffer: "Spätmittelalterliche Zinnfunde aus Hamburg und einige niederdeutsche Vergleichsstücke," *Mitteilungen aus dem Museum für Hamburgische Geschichte*, Nr. 4, Hamburg, 1913.

Albert Löfgren: *Den senmedeltida bukiga Tennkannan*, Stockholm, 1933.

Johs. Warncke: *Die Zinngiesser zu Lübeck*, Lübeck, 1922.

Howard H. Cotterell and Robert M. Vetter: "Some untouched aspects of old Pewter," *International Studio*, August, 1930, and April, 1931.

²See, Howard H. Cotterell and Robert M. Vetter, "The noble Pewter of Holland," *Antiques*, New York, March, 1931.