

6809

Continental pewter in the service of wine

BY ROBERT M. VETTER

PEWTER DRINKING VESSELS are familiar to us all, but for centuries pewter in other forms was also important in the service of wine. Three of these somewhat less common forms are flasks or flagons, wine coolers, and monteiths, or glass coolers.

In his painting of a large and rather dissolute party in a spacious hall (Figs. 1, 1a) the Dutch artist Dirk Hals (1591-1656) shows examples of some pewter forms in use in his own day, the first half of the seventeenth century. In the foreground is a large pewter wine cooler; it contains a pewter carrying flask (*Schleppkanne*) and a glass bottle, both of which were used to fetch wine from the casks in the cellar. Beside the cooler (which bears the painter's signature) lie two pewter decanters (*Schenkkanne*) of the type known as Jan Steen flagons

(see ANTIQUES, February 1955, p. 138). The cooled wine was transferred to these quaint spouted vessels, from which it was poured in a long, elegant jet into the glasses.

Figures 2, 3, and 4 show a few of the types of pewter flasks used for transporting and decanting wine. The earliest is a sober and rather prosaic example very like that in the painting, one that the lover of simple pewter nevertheless finds very attractive. It is of the flattened-gourd type sometimes called a pilgrim's bottle, but this one is too heavy to be carried by a foot traveler; it may have served as a coachman's bottle, suspended between the wheels where it would be protected from the sun's rays. The imposing, lavishly decorated Bern flagon (Fig. 3) is a ceremonial piece; its double chain of pewter would never support the weight of the full flagon, and

Fig. 1. Convivial scene
by Dirk Hals (1591-1656);
oil on wood, 31 by 55 inches.
Akademie der Bildenden Künste,
Vienna.



Fig. 1a. Detail of Hals painting showing a pewter carrying flask (*Schleppkanne*) and a glass bottle standing in a pewter wine cooler of simple early type. Beside the wine cooler are two pewter decanting flagons (*Schenkkanne*) of the so-called Jan Steen type.

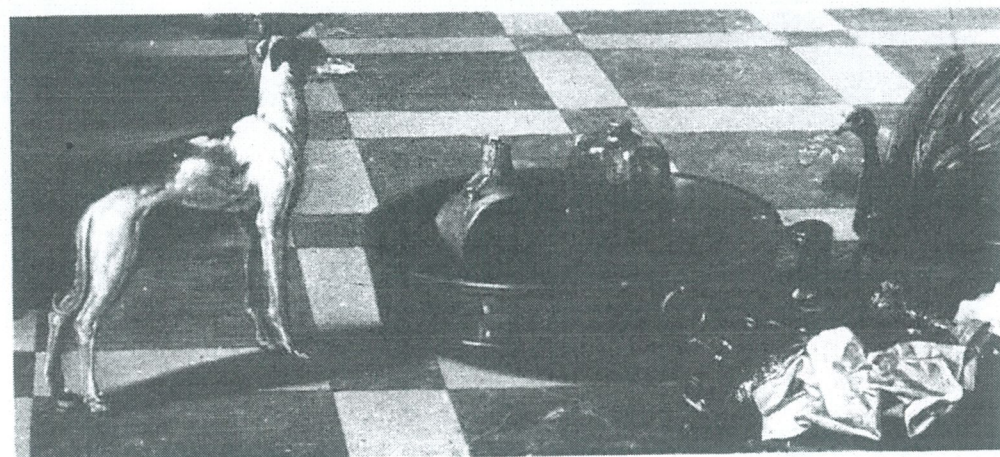


Fig. 2. Carrying flask of flattened-gourd type, very like the flask shown in Hals' painting; France or Burgundy, early sixteenth century; height, including stirrup handle, 18 inches. Handle, screw cap, and rings are of iron. Without the decorative masks to which the rings are attached, this piece might be dated much earlier. *Collection of E. W. Turner.*

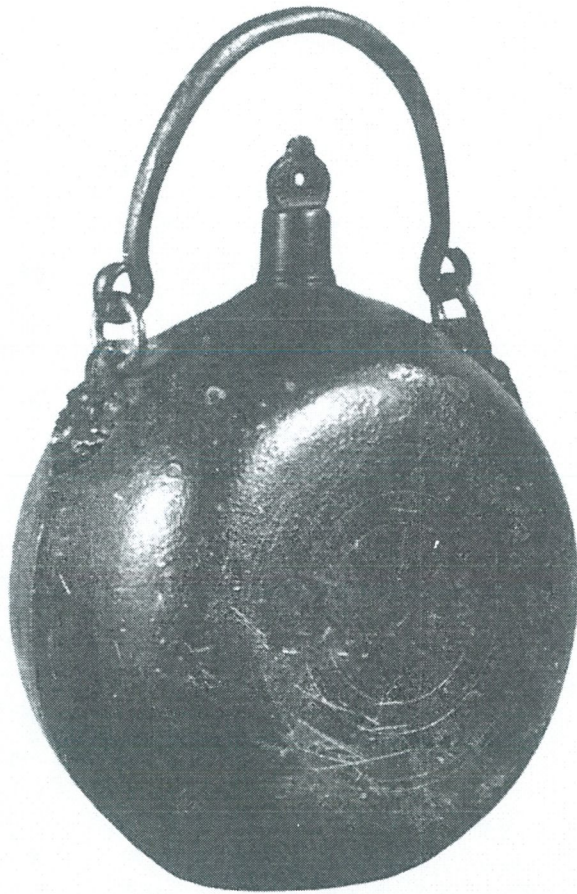


Fig. 3. Flacon made at Bern, Switzerland, by a pewterer of the Küpfer family; seventeenth century; over-all height, 20 inches. "Begging lion" finial and lion masks are of brass. Ornamental chains and the use of brass for decorative details are features of Swiss pewter in the grand style. *Collection of Karl Ruhmann.*



Fig. 4. Hexagonal decanting flacon, unmarked, dated 1737; probably Switzerland or South Germany; height 17 inches. The screw-on cap has a carrying ring. *Collection of G. Leonhardt.*

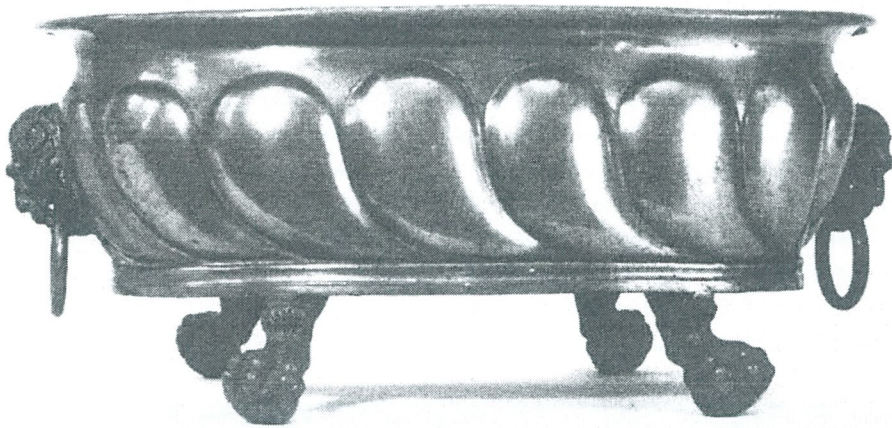


Fig. 5. Oval wine cooler bearing unidentified touch of an Italian maker; probably late sixteenth or early seventeenth century; over-all width, 26 inches. *Leonhardt collection.*

it would certainly require two men to carry it by means of the rings at the sides. The hexagonal flask in Figure 4, with its boldly projecting eagle-head spout, could be used for both carrying and pouring. Carrying flasks were not confined to any one type or material; styles vary from the crude to the elegant, in accordance with prevailing fashion and the social status of the household where they were to be used. Large capacity, however, was always desirable.

Wine coolers were developed when epicurean drinkers, who appreciated wine for its fine taste rather than as a mere intoxicant, learned to scorn the beverage in a tepid state. To cool it by setting its container in cold water, or—where that rare commodity was available—in ice, became essential. The object was, in the words of W. Somerset Maugham, to render the wine “just sufficiently chilled to run coolly over the tongue, but never so cold as to lose its bouquet and its savour.” Pewter, because of its low conductivity, is a far more suitable material for coolers than copper, brass, or silver.

Not all pewter wine coolers were by any means as simple as the flat, plain example in the Hals painting. The Italian one shown in Figure 5 is impressive and truly beautiful, at least as far as a pewter object can be. It is exceptionally heavy, with a pleasing color, fine surface texture, and bold but harmonious design. We may well imagine that it adorned the banqueting hall of some Italian *castello*. The lavishly decorated cooler in Figure 6, which belongs to a prominent collector of and writer on old pewter, is a Bavarian piece. Since the Bavarians have always been a pious people who like to adorn their domestic implements with religious symbols, the winged angels which appear in its engraving as well as in its cast ornament do not necessarily mark it as designed for ecclesiastical use.

Figures 7 and 8 show an exceptional type of cooler, which was developed in Austria. The somewhat *retardataire* decoration of Figure 7 demonstrates the conservative spirit of the pewterers: expensive molds had to be kept in use as long as possible. According to a document in the archives of the Landesmuseum Joanneum in Graz, this cooler was used at a banquet and dance given in honor of the German Emperor by the town of Graz on the occasion of his visit in 1765; as the Emperor was

Fig. 6. Tub-shape wine cooler with the mark of G.R. of Munich who became a master pewterer in 1650; over-all width, 19 inches. Winged angels, cast and engraved, appear in its elaborate decoration. *Collection of Ludwig Morz.*



accompanied by his staff, the cooler was probably refilled many times. The cooler made for the Scythe Makers' Guild (Fig. 8) shows the tendency toward over-decoration characteristic of most guild pewter of its period; the bulging lid is a concession to baroque taste, as is the little shield-bearing figure on top. The slender flagons which flank the cooler are earlier (sixteenth century) and of a type eagerly sought by collectors.

The monteith, or wineglass cooler, appeared at the end of the seventeenth century, after the introduction of sets of stemmed wineglasses. The form is said to have been named after a “fantastical Scot” who wore a cloak scalloped like the rim of the glass cooler. An article by Jessie McNab Dennis of the Metropolitan Museum of Art which appeared in *ANTIQUES* for August 1962 (p. 156) gives an admirable account of the derivation of the name and the history of the monteith and shows examples in several mediums. We may here define it simply as a basin with scalloped rim for cooling and perhaps also rinsing wineglasses.

The classical period of the monteith is the beginning of the eighteenth century, when table manners became more refined. By this time the fastidious wine drinker insisted that the glass in which the precious beverage was served must be cooled as well as the wine itself. The glasses were inserted into the notches in the monteith in such a way that their bases pointed outward while their bowls were immersed in the cooling water. The

Fig. 7. Box-shape wine cooler by Blasius Eckhenstaller, who became master pewterer at Graz, Austria, in 1638; about 24 inches in each direction. The central container is divided under its detachable lid into two compartments for two different types of wine, perhaps white and red; the outer trough contains the coolant. The taps at either side are for the wine; that in the center empties the trough. The decoration of ornamental bands and the tiny feet date back to the high Renaissance. *Laudesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, Austria.*

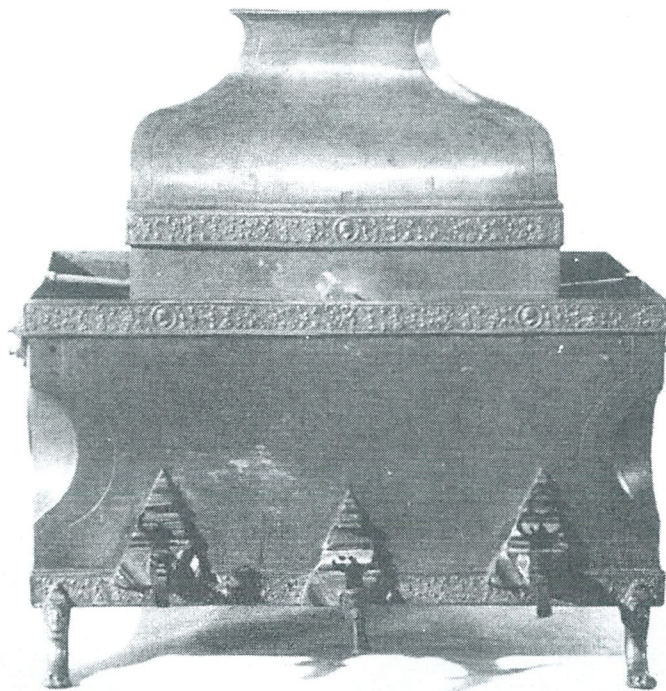


Fig. 8. Box-shape wine cooler dated 1739; made for the Seythe Makers' Guild at Waidhofen-on-the-Ybbs, Austria, and engraved with two seythe blades and the names and titles of guild functionaries. The "council flagons" (*Ratskannen*) belonged to the same guild but date from the sixteenth century. *Waidhofen Museum.*



glass was then held by the foot while it was being filled and presented to the guest, so as to prevent the bowl from being warmed again by the hand of the server.

British pewterers favored a round shape for the monteith, but those of the Netherlands preferred an oval; the example in Figure 9 shows a swelling out of the lower part of the bowl which is also characteristic of Dutch work. It is a question whether the ponderous Dutch rococo is an appropriate style for a vessel of this kind; in any event, the Rijksmuseum's rococo monteith (Fig. 10) is probably unique. The pewterers of Augsburg emulated the famous silversmiths of that town by creating models of generous baroque outlines; the lower por-

tion and scroll feet of the example of their work in Figure 11 are very stylish indeed, but the upper rim with its indentations is too plain to harmonize with these features.

A fitting conclusion to these notes is provided by the magnificent piece in Figure 12. Sebastian Lipp of Landsbut in Bavaria was a contemporary of the ambitious Augsburg pewterers, but his creative imagination was still to a large degree influenced by the ideas of the preceding (seventeenth) century. Late Renaissance details here include the sturdy claw-and-ball feet, the boldly lobed base, and the ring-bearing lion's heads; the ornamental rim decorated with cherub's heads, however, was obviously inspired by the French Louis XIV style.

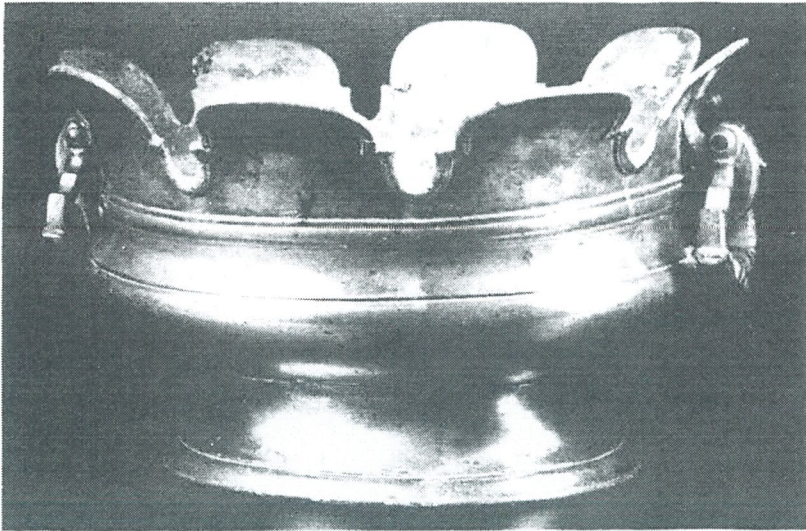


Fig. 9. Oval monteith, Dutch, seventeenth or eighteenth century. Ex coll. Verster, The Hague. Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

Fig. 10. Rococo monteith; Dutch, eighteenth century; over-all width, 18½ inches. Rijksmuseum.

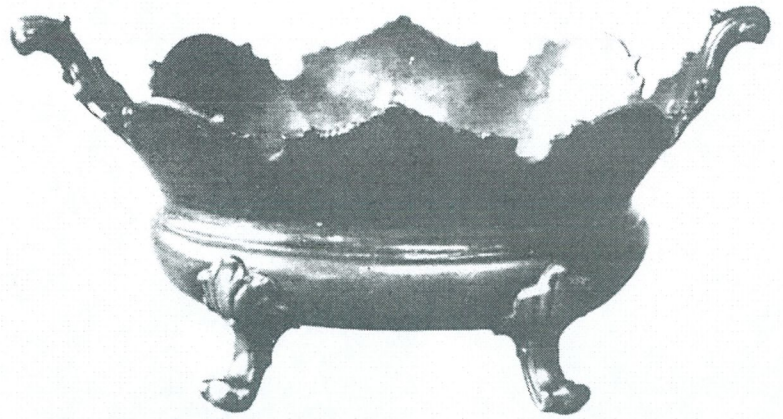


Fig. 11. Baroque monteith; Augsburg, early eighteenth century; over-all width, about 18 inches. Leonhardt collection.

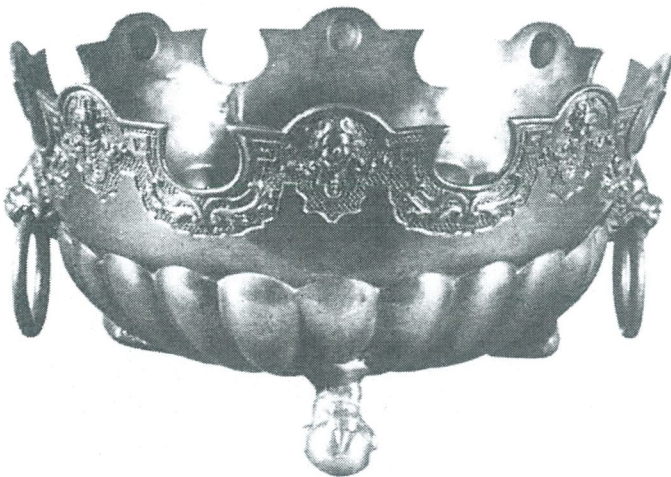
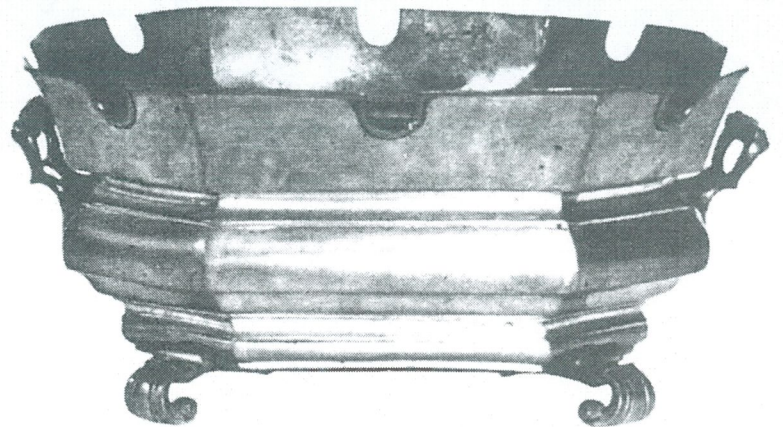


Fig. 12. Unusually elaborate monteith by Sebastian Lipp of Landslut, Bavaria; c. 1720; diameter of bowl, about 12½ inches. Ruhmann collection.