

STEIN COLLECTORS INTERNATIONAL

# PROSIT



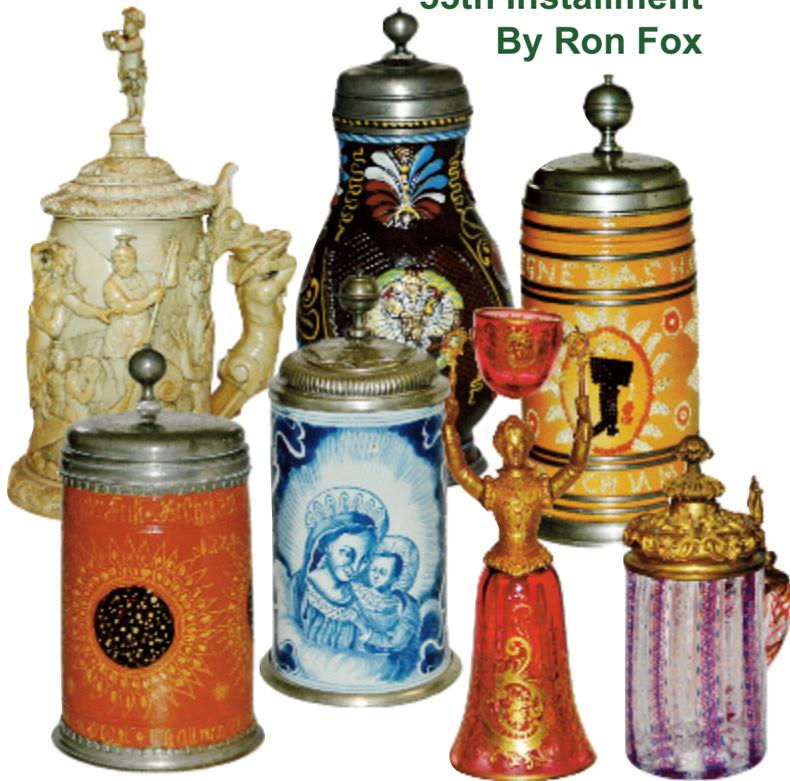
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The Beer Stein Magazine

December 2020

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By Ron Fox



Buckauer Porzellanmanufaktur and  
The Symbols of Commerce  
By George Schamberger



Mountain Figurals  
By Mike Adkins



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## Mettlach at the AMOCA Museum - Part 3a - European Myths and Legends

By Dr. Roy C. De Selms  
SCI Master Steinologist

This is part one of the third in a series of articles that will describe 19th Century German history, culture and folklore and the artists, styles and techniques of the Villeroy & Boch firm at Mettlach (VBM), using items from the Wilson Mettlach Collection at the American Museum of Ceramic Art (AMOCA) in Pomona, CA.

### GREEK MYTHS

When I was a little boy, my grandmother gave me books for all special occasions (still a good policy), but it was the book entitled "Myths and Enchantment Tales" that interested me the most. The thoughts of those myths (Greek *Mythos*) have stayed with me all of my life and taught me lessons as they were intended to do. The Greek myths have been enjoyed by and informed all civilizations for over 2,000 years.

The Fayence style stein in figure 1 shows our current vision of the Cupid myth (*der Amor, die Amorette*, German; *Cupidus*, Latin; *Eros*, Greek) that has evolved from its first appearance in the Western World over two millennia ago. The symbolism we now associate with Valentine's Day cards is that of affectionate love, but the original symbolism went further to include "lust" and "erotica".

*Amor, der beste Schütz' ich bin,  
so manches Herz sank durch mich hin.  
Ich habe auf Erden viel Gewalt,  
über arm und reich u. jung und alt.*

Cupid, I am the best shot,  
so many a heart was hit by me.  
I have a lot of power on earth,  
over poor and rich, young and old.

According to Roman myth Cupid was the son of Venus (goddess of love) and Mercury, but in earlier Greek mythology he was the son of Aphrodite (goddess of love) and Zeus among others, but that was only speculation because DNA testing wasn't available yet. In either case the scene of Cupid and



Figure 1: VBM stein 5013/5028  
*Mit reitendem Amor*  
(With riding Cupid)

Venus on this Phanolith plaque (fig. 2) conveys an image of unconditional love between mother and child.

The next stein (fig. 3) shows Mercury, the messenger of the gods, catching a ride from the powerful winged horse, Pegasus. The head of Mercury is also seen on VBM stein 2001 K associated with banking and commerce. Related to this is the chemical element, Mercury, which is the only metal that is liquid at normal temperatures. Its chemical symbol is Hg standing for the Greek word Hydrargyros (liquid silver) and gives it the common name quicksilver. Most of our scientific terms come from Greek, sometimes adjusted thru Latin like the myths. It's curious that American student fraternities have Greek names, but German student societies have Latin names.

The designers of the stein are noted on the stein: J.W. Baur delineavit (delineated it), Melchior Küsell fecit (fashioned it).



Figure 2: VBM plaque 7074  
Cupid and Venus



Figure 3: VBM stein 5024/5394  
Merkur (Mercury)

The text on the stein reads:

*Und hier wird Pegasus mit Macht von  
dem Gehalten, der in dem Fabel  
Reich das Post Amt zu verwalten.  
Als aller Götter=Bot: vor dem man  
Paulum hat, dort auch gesehen auch  
an/in der Enstrenser Stadt.*

And here is Pegasus held firmly by the one who, in this fabled kingdom, has to administer the post office. As the messenger of all gods: not feared by anyone, there he was seen near/in the town of Enstrenser.

Similar to the earlier Greek goddess Artemis, Diana was the Roman goddess of chastity, hunting and the moon, shown here as the "huntress" (fig. 4). The hunting theme will be revisited later with the Germanic legend of St. Hubertus.



Figure 4: VBM stein 5019/5393  
Diana

Centaur (fig. 5) appear in many cultures dating back three to four thousand years ago. The Centaur is the astrological sign of Sagittarius for those born between November 22 and December 21 and based on star formations in the night sky. The Sagittarius is known as the independent, determined and loving humor and travel sign of the Zodiac. Sagittarians are bold and always truthful. They will say what is on their mind, even if it crushes your very soul.



Figure 5a: VBM plaque 2740  
*Mater Felix* (Happy Mother)  
Zentaur (Centaur)



Figure 5b: VBM plaque 2741  
*Venator* (Hunter)  
Zentaur (Centaur)

It has been suggested that the idea of centaurs came from the first reaction of a non-riding culture, as in the Minoan Aegean world, to nomads who were mounted on horses. The theory suggests that such riders would appear as half-man, half-animal. It is reported that the Aztecs also had this misapprehension about Spanish cavalrymen. The Lapith tribe of Thessaly, who were the kinsmen of the Centaurs in myth, were described as the inventors of horseback riding by Greek writers. The Thesalian tribes also claimed their horse breeds were descended from the centaurs.

The Roman Bacchus myth descended from the earlier Greek myth of Dionysus. Both represented gods of wine and agriculture and the associated overindulgence in wine: debauchery, eroticism and wild Bacchanalian parties such as shown on the stein in figure 6. These early parties in the 2nd century BC became so gross that even the Roman Senate put a halt to them for a while. Note the Satyr (half man and half goat) to the left of the handle of the stein and associated with Dionysian parties and lechery.



Figure 6: VBM stein 2035  
*Bacchuszug* (Bacchus Procession)

## GREEK LEGENDS



Figure 7: VBM cameo plaque 2442  
*Scene aus dem trojanischen Krieg*  
(scene from the Trojan War)

In Homer's mythical Iliad, Agamemnon was the commander of the Greek forces in the Trojan War. Agamemnon was the king of Mycenae and his brother Menelaus was the king of Sparta. Agamemnon and his brother were married to the daughters of King Tyndareus of Sparta, Clytemnestra and Helen respectively. While the Trojan War remains a Legend, the cities of Mycenae and Troy have been found



Figure 8: VBM stein 3089  
Diogenes

and excavated by the German Archeologist, Heinrich Schliemann. The cameo style plaque in figure 7 shows a scene from the Trojan War where Agamemnon led a fleet of Greek warriors to take Troy and reclaim Menelaus' wife, Helen, who had been abducted by or eloped with the Trojan Prince Paris.

Diogenes (412 - 323 BC) was a Greek philosopher and cynic who believed that only by depriving oneself of everything in life that is superfluous could one hope to be free of desire and therefore unhappiness. Figure 8 shows Diogenes, homeless and living in a barrel and drinking only water from the fountain. The lantern by his side is

what he carried at all times looking for an "honest man" which he was preordained never to find.

The lid inlay shows his predecessor, Socrates (470 to 399), whose optimistic philosophy was at odds with that of Diogenes. While their times overlapped somewhat, they probably never met. Socrates saw the glass half full of wine and Diogenes saw it half empty, but it was still the same glass containing wine. While the inlaid lid proclaims *Vinum amai* (I love wine), on the body of the steins Diogenes laments *Abstineo* (I abstain).

The verse on the body reads:



Figure 9: VBM stein 2383  
*Alexander vor Diogenese, humoristisch dargestellt, etruskische Art*  
Alexander in front of Diogenes, humorous presentation, Etruscan style

*Diogenes der alte Narr verdrossen  
hockt er da und starr  
wo selbst der alten Götter ew'ge Ju-  
gendkraft  
verschmäht die Liebe nicht noch  
weniger den Rebensaft.*

Diogenes the old fool sits there  
weary and motionless  
where even the old gods' eternal  
power of youth  
does not spurn love nor even less  
the juice of the grape.

Alexander of Macedon (356 - 323 BC)  
(AKA Alexander the Great) visited

Corinth after conquering Greece and on his way to conquer the world. While in Corinth many statesmen and philosophers came to him with their congratulations, and he expected that Diogenes of Sinope, who was living in Corinth, would do likewise. But since that philosopher took not the slightest notice of Alexander and continued to enjoy his leisure in the suburb Craneion, Alexander went in person to see him and found him lying in the sun (fig. 9). Diogenes raised himself up a little when he saw so many people coming towards him, and fixed his eyes upon Alexander. And when that

monarch addressed him with greetings, and asked if he wanted anything, "Yes," said Diogenes, "stand a little out of my sun." It is said that Alexander was so struck by this, and admired so much the haughtiness and grandeur of the old man who had nothing but scorn for him, that he said to his followers, who were laughing and jesting about the philosopher as they went away, "But truly, if I were not Alexander, I wish I were Diogenes." and Diogenes replied "If I weren't Diogenes, I would be wishing to be Diogenes too."



Figure 10: VBM plaque 1770  
*Tell vor Landfогt Gessler*  
(Tell in front of the bailiff Gessler)



Figure 11: VBM plaque 1769  
*Winkelried in der Schlacht bei Sempach*  
(Winkelried in the battle at Sempach)

## GERMANIC LEGENDS

Figure 10 introduces the story of William Tell. According to Swiss legend, an Austrian bailiff named Gessler demanded that homage be paid to his hat, which he'd placed atop a pole. When Tell refused, he was seized and condemned to death. He was granted his life on the condition that he demonstrate his skill as an archer by shooting an apple from his son's head. He did that successfully and was later able to escape and kill Gessler, sparking a rebellion against Austrian (Hapsburg)

rule and resulting in the formation of the (Old) Swiss Confederation in 1291.

The Habsburgs again tried take over Swiss confederacy. The Battle of Sempach was fought on 9 July 1386, between Leopold III, Duke of Austria and the Old Swiss Confederacy (fig. 11). The battle was a decisive Swiss victory in which Duke Leopold and numerous Austrian nobles died. The victory helped turn the loosely allied Swiss Confederation into a more unified nation and is seen as a turning point in the growth of

Switzerland. According to legend, the Swiss initially could not break the close ranks of the Habsburg pikemen. Winkelried cried: "I will open a passage into the line; protect, dear countrymen and confederates, my wife and children..." He then threw himself upon the Austrian pikes, taking some of them down with his body. This broke up the Austrian front, and made an opening through which the Swiss could attack. Note the central figure, Winkelried, with pikes sticking thru his torso and fighting the Habsburg knights wearing armor.



Figure 12: VBM 2.6L. stein 2812  
*Jagdembleme* (hunting emblems)

A hunting theme, that of St. Hubertus, is depicted on this art nouveau master stein (fig. 12) with a crucifix over a stag's skull. The legend goes that Hubertus had withdrawn from life at the court when a family tragedy occurred and was just sustaining himself by hunting. One Good Friday morning while others were at church, Hubert went hunting in the Ardennes forest. While pursuing a magnificent stag or hart, the animal suddenly turned and Hubert was amazed to see a crucifix standing between its antlers and he heard a voice saying: "Hubert, unless thou turnest to the Lord and leadest an holy life, thou shall quickly go down into hell." Hubert dismounted, prostrated himself and prayed. As a result of this experience and following instructions for humane hunting practices, he became *Sankt Hubertus* and is honored among sport-hunters as the originator of ethical hunting behavior.

Tannhäuser, based on his Bußlied (penitence ballad), became the subject of a legendary account. It makes Tannhäuser a legendary, medieval knight and poet who



Figure 13: VBM stein 2401  
*Tannhäuser im Venusberg*

found the Venusberg, the subterranean home of Venus, and spent a year there worshipping the goddess (fig. 13).

After leaving the Venusberg, Tannhäuser is filled with remorse, and travels to Rome to ask Pope Urban IV (reigned 1261–1264) if it is possible to be absolved of his sins. Urban replies that forgiveness is impossible, as much as it would be for his papal staff to blossom. Three days after Tannhäuser's departure, Urban's staff bloomed with flowers; messengers are sent to retrieve the knight, but he has already returned to Venusberg, never to be seen again. This is the story put forth by Wagner in his mid 19th century opera, *Tannhäuser*.

Lohengrin, the knight of the swan, hero of German versions of a legend widely known in variant forms from the European Middle Ages onward. It seems to bear some relation to the northern European folktale of "The Seven Swans," but its actual origin is uncertain. The basic story tells of a mysterious knight who arrives—in a boat drawn by a swan—to help Elsa,



Figure 14: VBM stein 2391 (1L)  
*Schwanenritters Hochzeitzug*  
*The Swan Knight's Wedding Procession*



Figure 15: VBM stein 2394  
*Drei Szenen aus Siegfrieds Jugendleben*  
 Three scenes from Siegfried's youth)

a noble lady in distress. He marries her but forbids her to ask his origin because it would destroy his magical powers. She later forgets this promise, and he leaves her, never to return. The scene on the stein in figure 14 shows the wedding of Lohengrin and Elsa and was in Wagner's opera, *Lohengrin*. Wagner's "Wedding March" music is better known in western culture as the classic "Here comes the bride" still played at most weddings.

The scenes on the stein in fig. 15 show events in the life of the young Siegfried, subject of legend and the main character in the opera of the same name by Richard Wagner. While Wagner portrayed a slightly different sequence of events, the stein is true to the legend. The first scene appears at the left, as Siegfried visits the blacksmith Mimer to forge the magical sword (*Nothung*). Mimer is afraid of Siegfried, and sends him into the forest under the ruse of collecting firewood, hoping that the dragon Fafnir will kill him. In the scene on the right side, Siegfried encounters the dragon, and slays him with a

cudgel. Returning to the blacksmith in the center scene, Siegfried forges the magical sword himself. Text above each scene read as follows: Left side, *Jung Siegfried kommt zum Schmiede* (Young Siegfried comes to the smith); Right side, *Jung Siegfried erschlägt den Lindwurm* (Young Siegfried slays the dragon); Center scene, *Jung Siegfried schmiedet sein Schwert* (Young Siegfried forges his own sword). (See also Mettlach's "Siegfried" Stein by Jack Lowenstein, *Prosit*, June 1986.)

The *Bringkrug* (carrying stein) in figure 16 depicts the legend of St. George and the Dragon which tells of Saint George (280 - 303 AD) of Cappadocia (modern day Turkey) taming and slaying a dragon that demanded human sacrifices, thereby rescuing a princess chosen as the next offering. By the 5th century, the veneration of Saint George had reached the Christian Western Roman Empire, as well, and in 494 George was canonized as a saint by Pope Gelasius I as among those "whose names are justly revered



Figure 16: VBM 5.6L stein 2015  
*St. Georg mit dem Drachen und Spruch*  
 St. George and the dragon, with verse

among men, but whose acts are known only to God," which explains the words around the neck of the stein— *Mit Gott und St. Georg* (with God and St. George). It is probable that the dragon shown here was actually a crocodile. Crocodiles were not uncommon in Turkey, the Middle East and along the Nile in nearby Egypt.

The text on the lid inlay of this next stein (figure 17) is a phrase first uttered by the Roman orator Cicero in 70 B.C. deploring the condition of the Roman republic (*O tempora, o mores!*— Oh the times, oh the morals!).

However, the text and imagery on this curious stein were intended as a criticism of French and British colonial intrusions in Egypt during the beginning of the 19th century, and are taken from a German student song entitled *Ein Lustiger Musikante* (A Lusty Musician). Written in 1840 by Emanuel Geibel, the song tells the tale of a pyramid-destroying encounter on the Nile between a musician and a crocodile representing the French vs. the British and both vs. the Ottomans and all the ensuing battles.



Figure 17: VBM stein 1132  
*Musikant am Nil* (Musician on the Nile)

The lesson to be learned here is that in spite of all of the teachings and good intentions of the wise philosophers, we have not progressed in our moral behavior in over two millennia. The Biblical saying, “For the love of money is the root of all evil,” is as relevant today as it was then.

**O TEMPORA, O MORES!  
OH THE TIMES, OH THE MORALS!”**

(Dixie Trainer explored the history surrounding this stein in an extensive article titled “The Fiddler Stein” for the December 1994 issue of *Prosit*.)

The Reading area of [the SCI website](#) contains links to three useful sources for translating expressions and verses which appear on steins:

- [Translations Illustrated](#)
- Les Hopper’s [1,001 German Translations](#)
- [The Beer Stein Library](#), now hosted by AMOCA

Anna Sanchez, Collections Manager at AMOCA, deserves special thanks for photographs of items from the Bob Wilson Mettlach Collection.



***Ein Lustiger Musikante***  
(Emmanuel Geibel)

*Ein lust'ger Musikante marschierte  
einst am Nil  
o tempora, o mores!  
Da kroch wohl aus dem Wasser ein  
großer Krokodil  
o tempora, o mores!  
Der wollt' ihn gar verschlucken  
wer weiß, wie das geschah?  
Jucheirassa! O tempora!  
Gelobet seist du jederzeit, Frau  
Musika!*

**A Lusty Musician**  
by Emmanuel Geibel

A lustful musician once marched on  
the Nile  
Oh the times, Oh the morals!  
A big crocodile crawled easily out of  
the water  
Oh the times, Oh the morals!  
He even wanted to swallow him  
who knows how that happened?  
Hurrah! Oh the times!  
You are praised at all times, Lady  
Music!