

STEIN COLLECTORS INTERNATIONAL PROSIT



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Photos From the Road
56th Installment
By Ron Fox



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in historic and scenic Brandywine Valley!



Mettlach at the AMOCA Museum - Part 4a
The Evolution of Relief, Cameo and Phanolith Wares
By Roy De Selms



Christian Symbolism Depicted
on Creussen Apostle Steins
By Mike Adkins



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Mettlach at the AMOCA Museum - Part 4a

The Evolution of Relief, Cameo and Phanolith Wares

By Dr. Roy C. De Selms

SCI Master Steinologist

This is the first part of the fourth in a series of articles describing 19th Century Germanic history, culture and folklore, and the artists, styles and techniques of the Villeroy & Boch firm at Mettlach (for convenience, abbreviated as VBM) using items from the Wilson Mettlach Collection at the American Museum of Ceramic Art (AMOCA) in Pomona, CA.

This article will examine the techniques used by VBM in production of their Relief, Cameo and Phanolith wares. Note that all three of these categories are a form of relief decoration, but considered together they reveal an evolution of techniques, effects and appearances which distinguish them.

The drinking vessels made by VBM in the 1840's and early 1850's were all relief with mostly hand-applied relief decorations, and none were numbered. Numbers sometimes associated with steins from this early period are imputed from later examples of those designs which either bore numbers or were assigned numbers in VBM catalogs.

The earliest VBM drinking vessels for which we have records and examples include a beaker showing the *Cölner Dom* (Cologne Cathedral). Indeed, the first artist invited by VBM to design drinking vessels was Ludwig Foltz II, who appears in an 1844 photograph (*Prosit* June 2004) with two of his original drinking vessels: the *Cölner Dombecher* and a *Bringkrug* (carrying stein) used to bring beer from the local brewery before bottles and cans became available.

The *Cölner Dom* is traced back to a small church which burned down in 1248. Construction of a replacement was begun immediately, but was halted some 300 years later, probably due to the Reformation. It remained uncompleted for another 300 years when it was decided in 1848 (the 600 year an-



Figure 1 - Cologne Cathedral beakers (later marked VBM #33)

niversary of its destruction by fire) to complete the construction. The name *Cöln* (or in modern German, *Köln*) appears in both English and French as "Cologne," and in Latin as "Colonia," meaning "colony." Cologne was one of the northern-most continental colonies of the "Holy Roman Empire" and this part of Germany remained mainly "Roman Catholic". The Villeroy & Boch families to the south were also Catholic and had done much in the way of restoration of Catholic churches and cathedrals that had suffered deterioration thru the years. It was natural that VBM would want to help in finishing the construction of the Cologne Cathedral.

The beakers seen in figure 1 were made by VBM as a means of providing financial aid to the final construction of the cathedral. Designed by Foltz II, they were made in bas-relief, simply called relief, and some or all of the decoration was hand applied. Profits from the sale of the beakers were donated to the Cathedral. Each beaker was marked with a unique number in chronological order. We know from observation that at least 3,370 beakers were made starting about 1842 and continuing thru and after 1852. Note that the earliest beakers had the interior glazed in the same color as the exterior which was true for all of the early drinking vessels of this period. It wasn't until about 1852 that the white glazed interiors were introduced.

It should also be noted that 1848 was the year of the social revolution in *Germania* (Germanic lands prior to unification in 1871 at Versailles) exemplified by the famous meeting at the *Paulskirche* (St. Paul Church) in Frankfurt in an attempt to form a parliament for Germania. The Prussian hierarchy had different ideas and it turned out that the finishing of the Cologne Cathedral was a symbolic and significant driving force in the unification of Germany. Figure 2 is VBM plaque 5263 featuring the completed cathedral.



Figure 2 - VBM plaque #5263
Cölner Dom (Cologne Cathedral)



Figure 3 - The Proto-Mettlach Bringkrug with brown interior and no number on the base evolved into the version seen at right which was included in the VBM catalog of 1885 as #6.

We have coined the term “Proto-Mettlach” to refer to VBM steins which pre-date the use of form numbers and white glazed interiors. Figure 3 shows a Proto-Mettlach example of the *Bringkrug* which appeared in the 1844 photo of Ludwig Foltz II. The relief decoration features Germania on the front, Noah and the Ark to one side, and David playing the harp on the other, presumably to indicate that Germany was a Christian nation. When the first known catalog was published by VBM in 1885 a later version of the *Bringkrug*

was assigned #6. The early version is marked with a rarely seen cursive italic style as shown. One easily recognized change to the later version is the eagle on the shield supported by Germania: the historical double-headed eagle of the Austrian Empire ruled by the Habsburgs was changed to the single headed eagle of the Prussian Empire dominated by the Hohenzollerns after the *Deutscher Krieg* (German War) of 1866.

Several examples of the earliest Proto-

Mettlach steins in the Wilson Mettlach Collection at the AMOCA share very similar designs: a high relief hand applied front scene, light relief lattice work on the sides and back, a rosette atop the handle, a double-pronged lower handle attachment and a brown glazed interior. Figure 4, showing St. George slaying the Dragon, was promising enough that a revised version was later produced, but this form never made it into a VBM catalog. (One consequence is that we have no form number to assign to this stein!)



Figure 4 - An early - and rare - Proto-Mettlach stein depicting St. George and the Dragon. A later variation is shown at right. Neither version ever made it into a VBM catalog.



Figure 5 - The only part of the design of this Proto-Mettlach version to be carried forward and assigned a model number in the VBM catalog of 1885 is the primary relief decoration of a man and a woman dancing. Perhaps this early example, fitted with awkward pewter mounts, convinced the company that the rosette atop the handle had to go.

Another example of the evolution of this group appears in figure 5. While the central motif of this stein did make it into the VBM catalog of 1885, the body style, decorative vines, handle shape, figural inlay and coloration all disappeared. The successor, VBM #762, a 1.4 L. stein, is rather underwhelming in its appearance.

The last example of this group of similar early Mettlach steins is seen in Figure 6. Despite the many changes (handle, side decoration, coloration, base, rim decoration, etc.) the central design of a group of men singing remained intact in form #202 which did appear in the 1885 VBM catalog.



Figure 6 - The central design of Proto-Mettlach was retained for VBM #202, despite a number of other changes.



It's interesting to trace the evolution of this next Proto-Mettlach stein (figure 7a) from the early 1840s to its appearance in the 1885 Mettlach catalog as VBM #24. This stein has four applied relief panels of a hunter progressing through his four seasons of life. Relative to the characteristics of Proto-Mettlach items which we have discussed, it does not include the rosette on the upper handle or the two-pronged lower handle attachment, but does display the coloring and interior brown color.

As with other popular VBM steins, modified versions appeared in rapid succession. The second version of the stein (figure 7b) appeared shortly after the Proto-Mettlach version. The stein shown in figure 7c is a copy made by the Dorfner Co. of Hirschau as marked. The same copy was also made by the nearby E. Kick Co. of Amberg which exchanged molds with Dorfner. This example can be dated to before 1854 because the lid has a scene entitled *Schrannenplatz München* which in 1854 was renamed as the now-renowned *Marienplatz*.

We note here that the easiest way to produce a copy of a stein is to use that stein as a model from which a mold is made. Due to shrinkage of the clay when fired, the copy will always be smaller than the mold, and therefore smaller than the original from which the mold was made.

The version of this stein which appeared in the 1885 catalog as #24 (figure 7d) retained the hand applied relief scenes, although the overall design was substantially changed by the addition of several verses, modified framing of the scenes, a more modern base, a larger rim area, bolder colors and an inlaid lid. It's possible that these changes were done after Foltz's passing in 1867 and might be called an "after Foltz" design.

Steins appearing in the 1885 VBM catalog were listed with odd capacities. For instance this #24 stein was listed in 1.10 L. and 0.58 L. sizes. The apparent reason for this is that prior to 1875 stein capacities were not uniform and had their own nomenclature. The

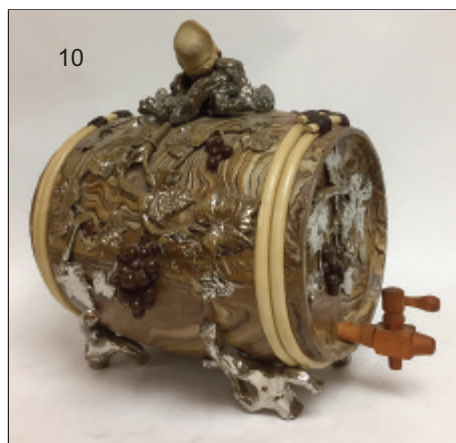
classic size was called a *Maaß* (meaning measure) which was typically slightly over 1.0 L., and a *Halbmaaß* (half measure) or *Seidel* was a little over 0.5 L. In 1875 Chancellor Otto von Bismarck decided to have the newly formed German Empire begin using the Metric System devised in France in the very late 1700's (*Prosit Dec.* 2010). So VBM took what they had and just listed the steins with whatever capacities they measured and didn't put size capacity marks on those steins. The first VBM catalog where standard 1.0 L. and 0.5 L. capacity marks are listed for #24 and others was in 1905. We know that VBM stein #675 was retrofitted with a false inner bottom to conform to the listed and marked capacity of 0.5L. (*Prosit Dec.* 2012 pg. 32). It is probable that the majority of the 1.0 L. and 0.5 L. steins were retrofitted to conform to the Metric capacities. However, it was apparently deemed not worthwhile to do this for steins larger than 1.0 L. Those larger steins did not receive capacity marks, and remained listed in the catalogs with odd capacities.



Figure 8 - A sketch of VBM wares on display at the 1851 Crystal Palace Exposition



Proto-Mettlach punch bowl, later VBM #52



Proto-Mettlach barrel, later VBM #301

Documentation from the Crystal Palace Exposition in London in 1851 includes two drawings of early Mettlach products. Figure 8 includes a Proto-Mettlach version of VBM #32, plus a tureen or punch bowl and a barrel-shaped wine dispenser. These later appeared in the 1885 VBM catalog as #52 and #301, respectively (figures 9 and 10).

Figure 11, the second drawing from the Crystal Palace Exposition, shows a stein of the style seen in figures 4-6.

Figure 12 shows a Proto-Mettlach serving stein which evolved into model #171. The decoration was adapted to several models of different sizes, all of which were assigned the same number. At the center top of this figure is a shard from a broken #171 stein from which we can see that the relief was separate from the body itself, confirming that these relief decorations were still being hand applied as late as 1905.



Fig. 11 - A sketch of a VBM stein on display at the 1851 Crystal Palace Exposition



Figure 12 - A Proto-Mettlach pouring stein, and its derivative, #171.

The relief wares we have examined thus far have been entirely opaque. In order to understand the artistic direction taken next, it is useful to discuss the Portland Vase and Josiah Wedgwood of England.

The following quoted material is taken almost directly from Wikipedia:

"The Portland Vase is a Roman cameo glass vase, which is dated to between AD 1 and AD 25, though low BC dates have some scholarly support. It is the best known piece of Roman cameo glass and has served as an inspiration to many glass and porcelain makers from about the beginning of the 18th

century onwards. It is first recorded in Rome in 1600–1601, and since 1810 has been in the British Museum in London. ... It is made of violet-blue glass, and surrounded with a single continuous white glass cameo making two distinct scenes, depicting seven human figures, plus a large snake, and two bearded and horned heads below the handles, marking the break between the scenes."

In the late 18th century, Josiah Wedgwood "devoted four years of painstaking trials at duplicating the vase – not in glass but in black and white jasperware [a type of pottery usually described as

stoneware]. He had problems with his copies ranging from cracking and blistering (clearly visible on the example at the Victoria and Albert Museum) to the sprigged reliefs 'lifting' during the firing, and in 1786 he feared that he could never apply the Jasper relief thinly enough to match the glass original's subtlety and delicacy. He finally managed to perfect it in 1790, with the issue of the 'first-edition' of copies (with some of this edition, including the V&A one, copying the cameo's delicacy by a combination of undercutting and shading the reliefs in grey), and it marks his last major achievement."



Figure 13 - At left and center, the original Portland Vase (glass). Right, an early version of the Josiah Wedgwood copy in black and white Jasperware, ca. 1790. Both vases are in the British Museum. Source: WIKIPEDIA, The Free Encyclopedia.

Figure 13 shows two views of the original Portland Vase side by side with a ca. 1790 Jasperware copy produced by Josiah Wedgwood. Wedgwood had enjoyed success with its line of "Jasperware" (figure 14) which was very popular with the English upper class throughout the 19th C. Interestingly, Wedgwood obtained several tons of so-called Cherokee Clay from the North Carolina mountains in the mid 1700's. This clay was known by the American Indians to make fine porcelain. The original shipment of clay was



Figure 14 - An example of Josiah Wedgwood's "Jasperware"

depleted by the time Wedgwood made his imitation of the Portland Vase and he turned to other sources. Whether or not Wedgwood achieved a product that was actually translucent is still a matter of conjecture.

Together, the Portland Vase and Josiah Wedgwood's success at making a copy became the inspiration for the Cameo and Phanolith wares developed by Jean-Baptiste Stahl at Villeroy & Boch in Mettlach in the late 19th C. Unlike the opaque Relief wares we have ex-

amined thus far, the Cameo and Phanolith wares reflect Mettlach's attempts to achieve translucency in the relief decoration.

While stein collectors generally accept Cameo and Phanolith wares as distinct types, in reality the development of translucency in these wares was evolutionary, proceeding in incremental steps which involved trial and error. As a result, there are a number of examples of VBM Cameo wares which provide evidence of distinctly different techniques, and several of those are discussed in the following paragraphs. There are likely some Phanolith wares which also differ in their manufacturing techniques, but in general Mettlach did not use that term until they had achieved their ultimate goal of true translucency.

Cameo was the first step in the evolution toward translucency undertaken by Jean-Baptiste Stahl. The stein in figure 15 has the appearance of translucency and may have achieved it to a degree, but only in the most shallow areas of relief. The greatest challenge faced by Stahl—and by others attempting the same thing—was to find a material which possessed the property of translucency and had a shrinkage coefficient close to that of stoneware. It's very difficult to put translucent *porcelain* figures on a *stoneware* or *pottery* base and not have cracking or pieces splitting off during firing as the result of different rates of shrinkage. The degree of loss during firing made this commercially unviable.

Figure 16a shows Cameo plaque #2443, and figure 16b is a shard from a damaged example of that plaque. The shard reveals an early attempt by Stahl to create the *appearance* of translucency, although the entire plaque was cast of a single clay material in one mold. The green or blue background coloring was painted in and given a final firing. The shard clearly shows that the relief and the body were formed together, and errors in applying the background color can also be detected.



Figure 15 - VBM Cameo #2757



Figures 16a and 16b - VBM Cameo plaque #2443. The shard from a damaged example of this plaque reveals that the relief and the body were cast together, and the background was then painted in.

Cameo plaque #2970 (figure 17) represents another step in Stahl's quest for translucency. Note that the areas of apparent translucency are blue, even in that part of the plaque which has a yellow background color! We don't have shards for this plaque which would help us determine if the relief is truly translucent or if the blue translucent effect in the upper portion of the plaque has been painted in. However, close inspection shows that the entire background is blue and the yellow section has been painted in. This is especially obvious at the upper edge where the blue background color was not entirely covered by the yellow over-painting.



Fig. 17 - VBM Cameo plaque #2970

Somewhat later the next phase is shown by Cameo plaque #3113 (figures 18a-b) where the shard shows the white figure hand-applied over the colored base. This phase shows some translucency in the very shallow areas, but most of the relief decoration was too thick to allow the background to show through, and some examples are known to have the background color faintly painted on the shallower portions of the figures to simulate being translucent.

The true Phanolith (Greek: light stone) translucent wares were achieved late in the game as indicated by the high mold numbers: They were all numbered in the 7,000's and no steins were made.



Fig. 18 - VBM Cameo plaque #3113. The shard at right reveals that the relief decoration has been applied over the dark background.

lain is what causes it to be relatively soft and able to be scratched. Also note that the applied figures are very shallow in depth.

That concludes Part 4a of this series of Mettlach at the AMOCA Museum. I extend thanks to Anna Sanchez, Collections Manager at AMOCA for photographs of items from the Robert Wilson Mettlach Collection, and to Walt Vogdes for his careful and thoughtful editing. The next chapter will discuss Etched, Chromolith, Printed Under Glaze and other variations.



Figure 19 - The VBM Portland-like vase, Cameo #2447 (left), and Phanolith #7011 (center and right)

Stahl created two versions of a Portland-like vase, first in Cameo (#2447), later in Phanolith (#7011), using the same molds for each. These vases show a scene from the Trojan Wars (figure 19).

Figure 20 shows plaques 7079, 7080 and 7081. By personal inspection of one of the plaques I was able to confirm the translucence and the identity of the material. A flashlight in a dark room showed light coming thru the plaque, proving the translucent property. A scratch test on a shard showed that the material was "soft-paste porcelain". Porcelain is broadly divided into "hard-paste" which is brittle and can't be scratched with a steel stylus, and "soft-paste," which can be scratched. The addition of glass to make soft-paste porce-



Figure 20 - VBM Phanolith plaques 7079, 7080 and 7081