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Mettlach Artists, Motifs and Styles

By Dr. Roy C. De Selms, SCI Master Steinologist

This article continues our series describing 19th century German history, culture and folklore, and the artists, motifs, 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.

Bob Wilson coined the term **Blue Bible** when referring to Anton Post's compilation of Villeroy & Boch Mettlach catalogs in the book *Mettlacher Steinzeug 1885-1905*, and we use that term occasionally. For convenience, when making reference to *The Mettlach Book* by Gary Kirsner, we use the acronym **TMB**.

This, the third part of our discussion of Mettlach artists/designers, addresses contributions made by Theodor Eyrich, Peter Winkel, Franz Ritter von Stuck, Matthias Hein, Alfred Stöcke, Carl Görig and Hermann Gradl.

Theodor Eyrich (b. 1838 Nürnberg - d. 1907 Nürnberg) is a lesser known VBM artist, not mentioned in TMB or the Blue Bible. Attribution of his works for VBM derives from two sources: two signed plaques in the 1044 series (Delft style #5062 and #5063), and an 1892 article in *Die Kunst für Alle* (*Malerei, Plastik, Graphik, Architektur, "Neue Trinkgeschirre"*, J. Stockbauer https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/kfa1892_1893/0126/image.info) which included pictures of four steins and one round-bodied pitcher attributed to him (Faience styles #5002, 5004, 5006-Nürnberg, 5013-Rothenburg and 5019). Figures 1-5 show these steins in that order, from left to right, and Figure 6 is "Delft" plaque #5063. (See also De Selms, Schamberger, Wilson - *Prosit* June 1999.)

At the end of 1890 VBM conceived of a new product line modeled after early Franconian and Delft articles. Since the largest collections of such wares were in the Nürnberg museums, they turned to Theodor Eyrich, a trained architect and Nürnberg native to provide designs. These new lines were to be faithful to the original shapes and colors, but adapted to new materials and production technologies. These pieces show strong archi-



The new Delft- and Faience-style items first appeared in an 1893 VBM catalog titled *Altfränkischen- u. Delfter Artikel* (Old Frankish and Delft Articles), followed by annual supplements bearing the same title (1894-1898). All five of the *Trinkgeschirre* (drink wares) attributed to Eyrich in the 1892 article mentioned above appear in the 1893 catalog, and the two plaques appeared in the 1894 supplement. Nineteen lidded steins and pitchers in the faience style appear on a single page of the 1893 catalog, including all five of the pieces directly attributed to Eyrich. The other models seen on that page are of a very similar style, and their decorations were *probably* also produced by Eyrich. We draw similar inference from the plaques #5062 and 5063: owing to their similarities, #5037, 5038 and 5064 were almost certainly by Eyrich, and probably more. These pieces show strong archi-



Figures 1-5, left to right: #5002 (4.6 L), #5004 (½ L), #5006-Nürnberg (½ L), #5013-Rothenburg (1 L) and #5019 (1 L)

tectural and Renaissance elements, as well as connections to Nürnberg, consistent with Eyrich's training as an architect, and his lived experience and interests.

The molded earthenware bodies of the Delft and Faience wares were first given a white glaze and high temperature firing. The template outline was added and the scenes were then hand-painted by artists/technicians. Delft items were painted in shades of blue; faience items were painted using historically appropriate colors (blue, yellow, sienna and brown-violet).

The two plaques mentioned earlier are the only known signed examples; none of his steins are signed. One possible reason for this lack of signatures may be the manufacturing process—Eyrich's signature would have to have been added by the decorator, and since Eyrich was not involved in painting the pieces for production his signature is not present.

Another example of Eyrich's work is the signed design for a large tile plaque with a view of Nürnberg (Figure 7).



Design for a large tile scene of the Imperial city of Nürnberg for V&B Mettlach, stamped and signed Th. Eyrich 1892. Credit Horst Barbian.

Before moving on to our next artist, we introduce a large plaque which was acquired from a recent TSACO auction and now is displayed prominently at AMOCA. Executed in the Delft style and measuring 19.4" by 37.5", this plaque offers a historic view of the town

of Mettlach. No signature has been found but it is probable that the plaque was designed by either Theodor Eyrich or Peter Winkel (who will be discussed next), and painted by in house artists, which explains the lack of signature on this exceptional piece.



Mettlach plaque, 19.4" x 37.5" with modern frame, hand-painted, c.1890, Delft coloring, historically important view depicting the town of Mettlach, *Villeroy & Boch Mosaik, Steinzeug u. Sanitärabrik, Schloss Ziegelberg, Saareck, Church of St. Lutwin, alter Turm*, bridge crossing Saar river in 1886, most likely made for a presentation or an Exhibition, only example known to exist.

Peter Winkel (b. 1866 Wallerfangen - d. 1932 Keuchingen) is another lesser known VBM artist/designer, but for different reasons (see Horst Barbian: *Mettlacher Turm*, July 2014). At the age of 14, already showing his talent, he came to VBM from nearby Wallerfangen to study under the guidance of Johann Ludwig (Jean) Beck, working in the design department. When Beck retired, Winkel was able to take over his position as “Head Painter and Drawing Teacher.” Winkel was not a modeler, but only supplied the decorative templates for transfer printing or for hand painted items such as crockery, wall plates, jugs, bowls or tile pictures. He favored natural animal scenes, but also supplied scenes of playing children, dwarfs, gnomes and anthropomorphic animals. Sometime during this period Winkel is said to have studied at the Munich Art Schools and developed the technique of the “old Munich school.” A large faience tile wall plaque (figure 10), signed “P. Winkel,” shows his ability to work on a large scale, and he was certainly capable of rendering the scene of Mettlach shown earlier. Similar in scope and scale, this plaque, held in the *Heimatismuseum Schloss Fellenberg* in Merzig, shows a panorama of Beckingen. In this case Winkel apparently made the design and finished the entire plaque since he was able to sign it. Rules are made to be broken so they say. Oh well.

As an employee of VBM, Winkel's works were the property of the company, and unlike outside artists such as Schlitt, Quidenus, Stuck, etc., he had no inherent right to have his signature on his works. His high position did allow him to put his signature on some pieces, but only if it was subtly hidden. This is why Winkel is not mentioned in the introduction to the VBM catalogs 1885 - 1905. It wasn't until Bob Wilson, trained as a Civil Engineer, noted an unexplained mark in the form of an angle appearing within some VBM transfer designs and realized that the German word *Winkel* means “angle” in English that Winkel's cryptic signature was identified. Three examples are shown here: plaque 3225 (French Republic) and steins 1338(1909) and 1339 (1909). These marks are accompanied by the year of the design, and the only interpretation for this mark is that it is Winkel's cipher. The signature is sometimes missing from these items if it was cut off the transfer sheet due to the size of the object receiving it. (Pitchers #1338 and 1339 bear the same designs and signatures as the corresponding steins. Because of the subject matter, these items have sometimes been mistakenly attributed to Heinrich Schlitt, including by this author in the March 2021 issue of *Prosit*.)



Figure 9 - The decorating shop at Mettlach.



Figure 10 - A large tile panorama of Beckingen, signed “P. Winkel”

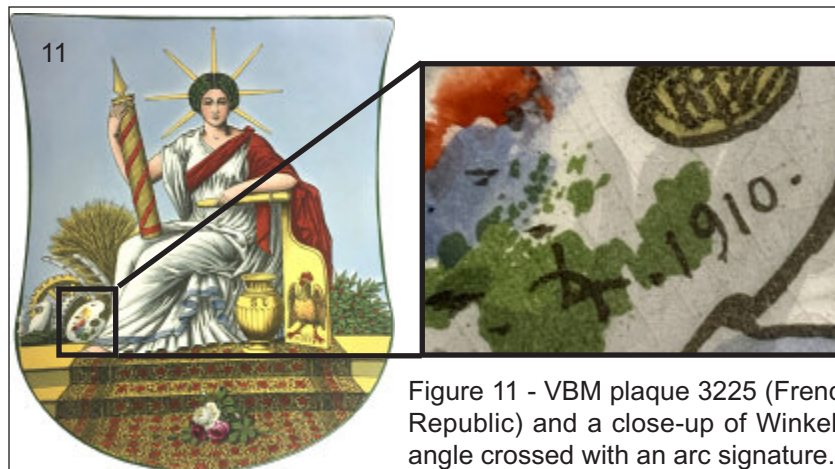


Figure 11 - VBM plaque 3225 (French Republic) and a close-up of Winkel's angle crossed with an arc signature.



Figure 12 - These steins (1338-1909 and 1339-1909) and their corresponding masters, are signed by Winkel.

Franz Ritter von Stuck (b. 1863 Tettenweis/Pas-sau - d. 1928 Munich) was the son of a village miller and was rewarded with knighthood by Prinzregent Luitpold of Bavaria in 1905, presumably for his achievements as an artist/designer and architect. The three steins in figure 13 reflect the classic story entitled “The Trumpeter of Säckingen” written by Joseph Victor von Scheffel in 1853. Each stein has a verse from Scheffel’s poem which tells the story of unrequited love between young Werner, a Heidelberg student and trumpeter, and a Baron’s daughter, Margaretha (*Der Trumpeter von Säckingen*, a translation by Dagmar Rives, *Prosit* March 1998). A story of love squelched by class differences, it is also a political statement describing the 1848 socialist uprising in Germany which was snuffed out by the Prussian aristocracy.

First in the set, VBM 2007 depicts Hiddigei, the Baron’s cat and student of human behavior, is a major character in the story. The second in this set, VBM 2008, shows Werner plaintively sounding his trumpet as he departs the scene after being rebuffed in his pursuit of Margaretha by the Baron. Werner’s good deeds in exile ultimately earn him a knight-hood, and with this new status he is able to reunite with Margaretha. The third stein, VBM 2009, is titled “The First Kiss.”

The only other piece known to be designed by Stuck for VBM is the rather rare 3 L. Pokal showing monkeys doing their own thing, whatever that might be (fig. 14). Unfortunately this Pokal is not in the Wilson collection because Colette did not like monkeys..



Matthias Hein modeled many steins for VBM and had a penchant for the grandiose as seen in this magnificent 5.0 L. stein in figure 15 (VBM #1632). This is one of the rare steins which is signed by two artists, Hein and Warth, apparently working together. The side with the drinker celebrating with his stein held high is signed Warth and the scene is similar to some of his smaller steins. The other side signed Hein with a scene near the end of the party is similar to some others of his.

The next two steins (figure 16) were each made in ½ L, 1.0 L. and 3.8 L. sizes and are very sought after by many Mettlach collectors. On the left in figure 16 is VBM 2828 which depicts the Wartburg castle on both the inlay and the body. This castle, built in the Middle Ages, is the site where Martin Luther went into hiding and translated the New Testament from Koine (ancient Greek) into German in eleven weeks. The castle is situated on a precipice of 410 meters (1,350 ft) to the southwest of and overlooking the town of Eisenach, in the state of Thuringia, Germany.



The text on the body (#2828) reads:

Wart Berg du sollst mir eine Burg werden.

Wait mountain you shall become a fortress for me.

*Wer nicht liebt Wein - Weib - Gesang,
der bleibt ein Narr sein Leben lang.*

Whoever doesn't love wine, women, song
remains a fool his whole life long.

*Heil unsern Burgherrn allerwegen,
Gott spende ihm den reichsten Seden*
Health always to our Lord of the Castle,
may God grant him the richest blessings.



The stein on the right in fig. 16 (#2829) is entitled *Rodenstein* and tells the story of the renowned drinker from Heidelberg adapted from a poem by Viktor von Scheffel in the 19th C. entitled *Die Drei Dörfer* (the three villages). As the story goes, Herr von Rodenstein got so drunk on one of his binges that he had to pay for the large quantity of drinks by selling two of the three villages he owned in the Odenwald, Gersprenz and Reichelsheim which are named on the stein. He formally donated the third village, Pfaffenbeerfurth. to Heidelberg University and his "thirst to the students" so he could watch them drink as he once did. The appropriate text reads:

*Pfaffenbeerfurth soll der Hochschul' sein,
mein Durst den Herrn Studenten.*

Pfaffenbeerfurth shall belong to the university,
my thirst to the students.

Hein is one of the few, perhaps the only designer, who designed VBM steins specifically for the American market. Figure 17 shows a stein (VBM #1997) ordered by George Ehret to give to his many friends and patrons on two 25 year anniversaries 1866 – 1891, and 20 years later 1886 – 1911. The steins are associated with Ehret's "Hell Gate Brewery" established in 1866 in Manhattan, NYC (*Prosit* 9/21). George was born and raised in Germany and followed his father, Anselm Ehret,



who had immigrated to NYC right after the 1848 social revolution in Germany that brought many Germans to the U.S. The ubiquitous saying on the stein reads: *Hopfen u. Malz, Gott erhalt's* (Hops and malt, may God preserve them.) Note that the hexagram on the lid is often mistaken for the Jewish Star of David, but is actually the "Brewer's Star," also called a *Zeugels Stern* (advertising star), when used at the entrance to beer cellars to advertise the availability of beer. Context matters!

Two more American-related steins attributed to Hein are seen in figure 18. The one on the left was produced in 1896 to honor the 80th anniversary of the founding of the 7th Regiment of the NY National Guard. The motto in Latin reads "Pro Patria et Gloria; Excelsior" (for country and glory; higher). On the right is another NY National Guard stein for the 23rd Regiment with motto "Vigilantia; Excelsior" (vigilance; higher).



Figure 19 is 3.3-liter relief master stein #1739. The design takes the general form of a coat of arms, in this case for the brewing industry. The central shield features a goat on its hind legs about to take a sip of beer from a beaker. A *Landsknecht* and a troubador appear as supporters, and the remainder of the design is filled with sheaves of barley and a hops vine which includes a "tag" with Hein's signature. The verse reads

*Viel besser krähet jeder Hahn,
So er die Kehle fuchter an.
Every rooster crows much better
when he moistens the throat.*



Figure 20 shows an etched set signed by Hein with a decoration which has been termed "Wild Rose." Here again we see Hein using stylized elements with soothing colors to create an overall peaceful, romantic effect.

Fig. 20:
VBM Etched
2L #2020 (master)
and 1/2L #1987
"Wild Rose"



Hein also designed many so-called Mosaic steins and sets. The 2.0 L. master stein in figure 21 (#1571) has a typical stylized motif and an interesting shape, both of which foreshadow the Art Nouveau movement of the early 20th century.

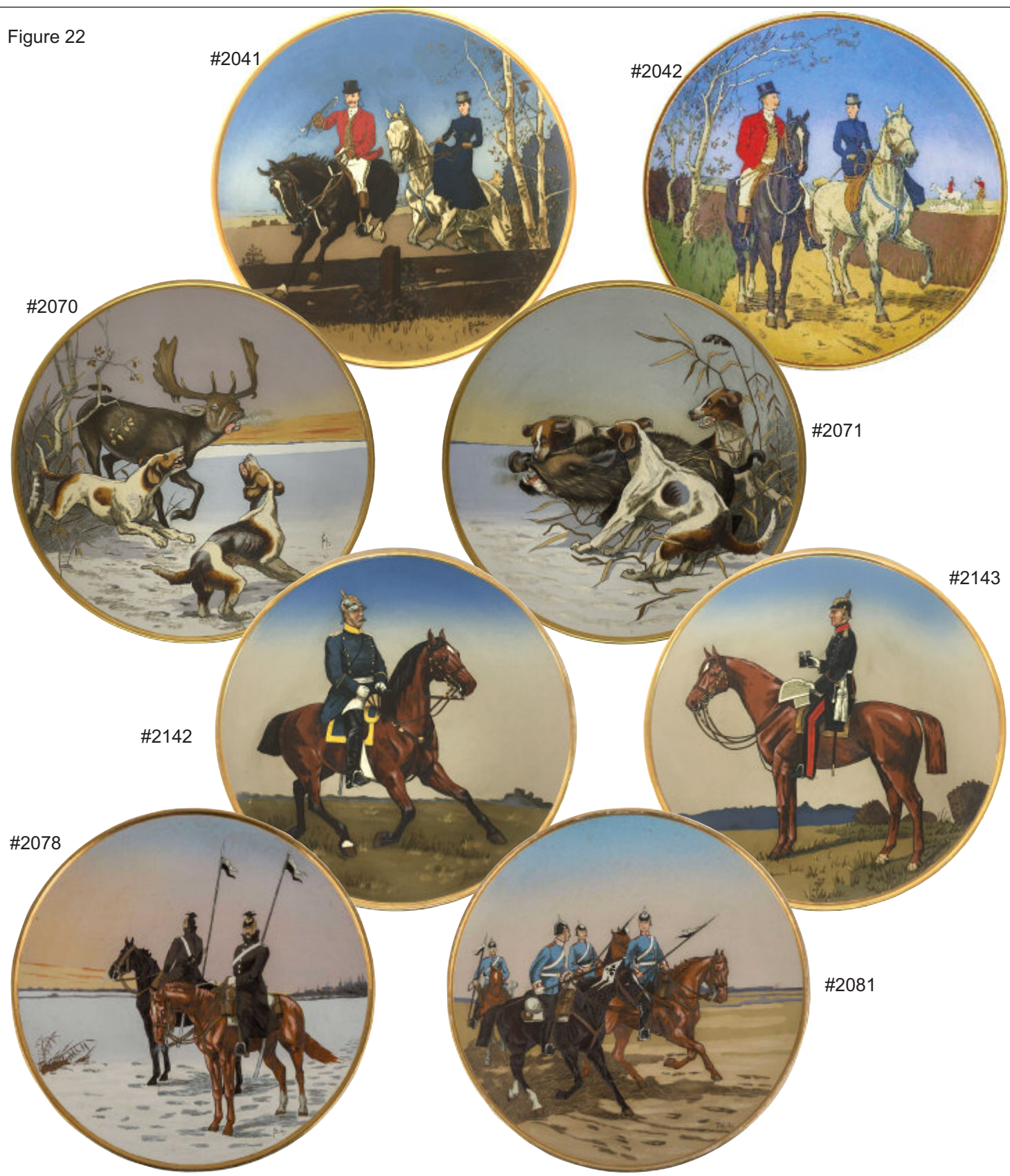
Fig. 21: VBM Mosaic
2L #1571 (master)
and 1/2L #1570



Alfred Stöcke (b. 1860 - d. 1948) was a Berlin artist of note, but nothing of his personal life appears to have been written. He is not credited with having designed any VBM steins, but here we see eight magnificent plaques he designed (Figure 22). VBM plaques 2041 and 2042 depict a man and a woman on horseback in a fox hunt. Continuing the hunting theme,

plaques 2070 and 2071 show dogs harassing a stag and dogs cornering a boar. While plaques 2142 (Bismarck) and 2143 (von Moltke) form an impressive pair, they also fit within a set of eight military themed plaques. Plaque #2078 shows two Ulans on horseback, #2081 shows four mounted Hussars. All of these plaques are 15" in diameter.

Figure 22



Carl Görig - While we know that Carl Görig designed a handful of steins for VBM, biographical information is very slim, and somewhat entangled with other members of his family, so we will not venture into that area at this point. The examples shown here testify to both his artistry and his versatility. Etched #1520 employs symbols and text to evoke a sense of patriotism. Etched #1566 is a contemporary theme, as is the tapestry style #1650. Perhaps his crowning achievement for Mettlach is 6.2 liter #1818, which imparts a festive sense of *Gemütlichkeit*.

23



#1520

24



#1566

25



#1650

26



6.2L
#1818

Hermann Gradl (b. 1869 Dillingen - d. 1934 Landsberg am Lech) - Gradl is best known as the artist responsible for an extravagant Art Nouveau fish service produced by Nymphenburg Porzellan which was awarded the Grand Prix as one of the most successful examples of Art Nouveau at the Paris World Exhibition of 1900. Mettlach fans are thankful for his etched Four Seasons plaques.

The fourth and final part of this review of artists/designers who provided designs to Villeroy & Boch Mettlach moves further into the modern era, dealing with Art Nouveau, Art Deco and Poster Art styles.

I extend thanks to Anna Sanchez, of AMOCA for photographs, to Horst Barbian for his writings in *Mettlacher Turm* and subsequent correspondence, to Steve Steigerwald who came through in a pinch, and to Walt Vogdes for his careful and thoughtful editing.



27



#2898

#2899



#2997



#2998

