

A ROEMER WITH GILT DECORATION OF THE COATS OF ARMS OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE, DATED 1662

Dwight P. Lanmon

ABSTRACT

The focus of this article is a roemer decorated with gilt coats of arms of the Holy Roman Emperor and seven Electors, once in the collection of Baron Nathaniel von Rothschild (1836–1905) and now in the collection of the Corning Museum of Glass (2023.3.11). Below the arms is an inscription stating that the roemer is a *Wilkum* (*Wilkomm* or “glass of welcome”) and the date, 1662. The technique of gilding is unusual: the gold is on the exterior surface of a pebbly red underlayer, which XRF reveals to be consistent with red bole or minium. This made the unfired gilt decoration more stable and less likely to wear with handling and gave it a perceptible thickness. Two other roemers, dated 1661 and 1662, in the collections of the Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Cologne, and the Hessisches Landesmuseum, Kassel, having gilt decoration produced using the same technique, are attributed to the same single, unidentified artisan. These roemers are, at present, the earliest known examples of the technique for gilding on glass.

A large roemer decorated with the gilt coats of arms of the Holy Roman Emperor and seven Electors, once in the collection of Baron Nathaniel von Rothschild (1836–1905) and now in the collection of the Corning Museum of Glass (2023.3.11), is the focus of this article (Fig. 1). The following discussion of the roemer’s history and decoration, explored in light of two similar contemporary *Wilkum* glasses, reveals it to be noteworthy as one of the earliest known examples of a particular technique of decoration—applying gilding to a pebbly red underlayer, which stabilizes the decoration without firing and gives the decoration thickness, creating the illusion of solid gold and the suggestion of preciousness and value.¹ The technique, refined in the early

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1 To my knowledge, these roemers are the earliest known versions. The technique was used on porcelain, particularly at Meissen, but perhaps other places, in the early eighteenth century.

FIG 1. The Rothschild roemer, with unfired gilt decoration of the coats of arms of the Holy Roman Emperor and seven Electors. Transparent light-green non-lead glass, blown, trailed, applied, impressed, painted, gilt; pewter foot. Germany, Rhineland (?), dated 1662. H. 25.5 cm. Corning Museum of Glass, 2023.3.11, gift of Dwight and Lorri Lanmon. (Photo: Corning Museum of Glass)



eighteenth century, was used extensively on both glass and porcelain for raised gilding until the practice of gilding raised enameling to give the illusion of thick layers of solid gold came into favor.

HISTORY OF THE ROEMER

There is no record of ownership of the roemer from the time of its creation in 1662 until the turn of the twentieth century. The object was enumerated as “1 Glas Pocal, 17 Jahr[undert]” in the undated inventory of *Kunstgegenstände und Einrichtungstücke* (art objects and furnishings) of the estate of Baron Nathaniel von Rothschild (1836–1905) in the Theresianumgasse Nr. 14 Palace in Vienna.² At an unknown date, the bowl of the roemer had broken in several pieces and was restored. In addition, an annular pewter foot was attached to the remains of the broken coil-wound glass foot, probably in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, indicating that the roemer was valued even though broken. The bowl was already broken when the inventory was taken, as its valuation was only 100 Kronen (about 6 US dollars in 1919). The Krone was the currency of Austria and Liechtenstein from after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1919 until the introduction of the Austrian

² “INVENTAR über die in den NATHANIEL FREIHERR von ROTHSCILDSCHEN NACHLASS gehörigen, in dem Palais in Wien, IV. BEZIRK, THERESIANUMGASSE Nr. 14 befindlichen KUNSTGEGENSTÄNDE und EINRICHTUNGSTÜCKE,” page 24, number 244, Rothschild Archive, London. The reference is courtesy of Natalie Attwood, Deputy Archivist, The Rothschild Archive (email to the author, October 24, 2022).

Schilling in 1925, which dates must bracket when the undated inventory was taken. No record of when or from whom Baron Nathaniel acquired the roemer (or its condition) has been located.

Baron Albert von Rothschild (1844–1911) inherited the roemer from his brother, Baron Nathaniel; it later passed to his son Baron Alphonse (or Alfonse) von Rothschild (1878–1942) and his wife, Clarice. The roemer was seized by the Gestapo in 1938 and was probably in the possession of the Denkmalamt (Monuments Office of the Gestapo) in Vienna until 1948. It was identified in the war inventory record as number 2738.³ It was in the possession of the Museum für Kunsthandwerk (now the Museum für Angewandte Kunst, or MAK), Vienna, from 1948 to 1999, where it was cataloged as inventory numbers GL3039 and 30546, which were inscribed on the bottom of the pewter foot (Fig. 2). The collection number “15.-12.” on the underside of the pewter foot has not been identified.

In the records of the MAK archive is the following statement:

In January 1938, Alphonse Rothschild made a donation to the MAK on the occasion of the issuing of an export permit for different art objects. The export never came off, nor was the donation ever handed over to the museum. After the Anschluss, Alphonse Rothschild’s collection was confiscated by the



FIG 2. Underside of the pewter foot and base of the Rothschild roemer showing the painted collection numbers 15.-12., GL3039, and 30546, and a paper sticker from the July 7, 1999, sale at Christie’s London. (Photo: Corning Museum of Glass)

³ War Inventory, entry no. 2738 (and 244). The manuscript entry annotation by hand in red of “DA” presumably refers to the transfer of the roemer to the Denkmalamt during World War II.

Gestapo and eventually seized. Subsequently, Director Ernst [of the MAK] kept trying to get hold of the donated and other objects for the museum. In 1943, finally, a number of objects were allocated to the institution. After the end of the war and the Nazi regime, Clarice Rothschild, widow of the meanwhile deceased Alphonse Rothschild, declared that the donation would be maintained. A settlement agreement was made about which objects would remain at the museum and which would be handed over to Clarice de Rothschild. In 1948/49, Clarice Rothschild's lawyer pointed out that his client was under no obligation to offer replacement for objects lost from the donation, nor was she liable for the state of the objects. Moreover, it was agreed that no donated object was to be sold or bartered and that all objects included in the donation were to be marked as such. On 11 February 1999, the Advisory Board recommended the restitution of 91 objects, which were returned on 11 March of the same year.⁴

The restituted objects were consigned by the heirs to Christie's London, where they were sold on July 7, 1999. The Rothschild roemer (lot 139) was cataloged as dating from the seventeenth century, but the decoration was identified as "19th century." The catalog description identified the date inscribed on the roemer as 1602, not 1662. Close examination of the date on the roemer reveals that the "tail" of the second "6" has flaked off, leaving what appears to be a "0" (Fig. 3), but a faint outline proves that the inscribed date was "1662." If the date were, in fact, "1602," the inscription logically would have been questioned, because the use of raspberry prunts on roemers had not begun by then and would therefore cast doubt about when the decoration was applied.

It has not been possible to identify the buyer of the roemer at the 1999 Christie's sale, but it is likely to have been the London dealer Christopher Sheppard, who sold it to Peter Tillou (1935–2021) of Litchfield, Connecticut. It was last sold on September 29, 2022, by Brunk Auctions, Asheville, North Carolina (lot 51).

GILDING ON ROEMERS

In the Netherlands and Germany in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, roemers and other drinking glasses and tableware were occasionally decorated with gilding. On some, the gold leaf was applied to a fixative such as gum arabic, polished, and fired, and the design elements produced by scratching and rubbing (Fig. 4).⁵ Another technique was to apply gold-laden oil paint, which was gently polished but not fired (Fig. 5).⁶ The resulting decoration was, in both cases, very fragile and easily worn away.

4 "Provenienzforschung und Restitution im MAK," MAK, Vienna, <https://www.mak.at/jart/prj3/mak-resp/main.jart?reserve-mode=active&rel=en&content-id=1342703973166>. Courtesy Dr. Rainald Franz, Kustode Sammlung Glas und Keramik, Sammlungsübergreifende und EU-Projekte, Provenienzforschung und Restitution, Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna (email to the author, October 18, 2022).

5 The roemer is inscribed with the motto of Prince Maurice of Orange: "TANDEM FIT SVRCULUS ARBOR" (In time the shoot becomes a tree). For other examples, see Klesse and Saldern 1978, 100–101. Also, for an elaborately gilt Humpen, see Strasser 2002, 38–41, no. 12.

6 The roemer is inscribed: "BIBITE EX HOC OMNE CUM LAETITIA / 1608 / LAETIFICAT COR HOMINIS VINUM" (Drink from this with supreme joy / 1608 / Wine makes joyful the heart of a man).

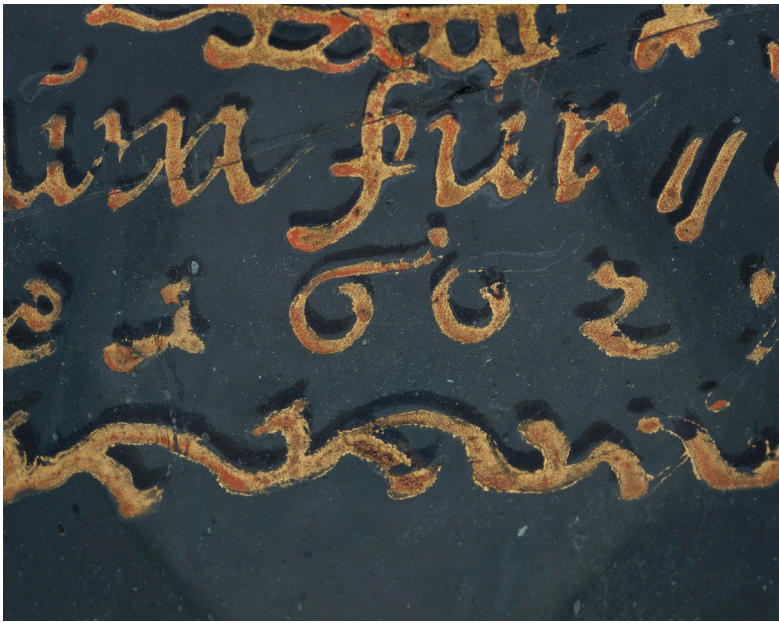


FIG 3. Detail of the inscription on the roemer shown in Figure 1, showing the fragmentary date "1662." (Photo: Corning Museum of Glass)



FIG 4. Roemer with gilt coat of arms of Prince Maurice of Orange. Germany or Netherlands, dated 1606. Transparent light-green non-lead glass, blown, applied, trailed, manipulated, gilt. H. 23.4 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, BK-NM-697. (Photo: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

FIG 5. Roemer with painted and gilt decoration. Germany, dated 1608. Transparent light-green non-lead glass, blown, applied, trailed, manipulated, cold painted, gilt. H. 23.5 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 27.185.236, Munsey Fund, 1927. (Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art)



While those types of gilt decoration are thinly applied, the gilt decoration on the Rothschild roemer is rather thick, has a pebbly texture, and is relatively unworn; and it is not gold laden throughout (**Fig. 6a**). Rather, the gold is on the surface of a dark-red underlayer (**Fig. 6b**). X-ray fluorescence (XRF) of the decoration reveals major peaks for lead and gold, a small iron peak, a very small copper peak, and peaks for potassium and calcium, which identifies the underlying layer as likely red bole, possibly with the addition of red lead to promote drying.⁷ It was probably mixed with an animal-hide glue to create a base for the application of the gold leaf. The technique is related to that used to decorate furniture and mirror frames throughout Europe from as early as the fourteenth century through the eighteenth century. (While there is a possibility that the pigment was red lead or minium in a glue binder, not red bole, we will refer to the material as “red bole” in the following discussion.)

The bole on the Rothschild roemer was applied, probably using a quill pen, as a thick, somewhat granular paint and was covered with gold leaf while the paint was tacky. The excess gold leaf was brushed away after the paint had dried, leaving it mainly on the surface of the bole. Some shiny gold is visible within small interstices

⁷ Susan Buck, a conservator and paint analyst in Williamsburg, Virginia, suggested “the red preparatory layer is like a traditional oil size which would adhere well to glass. You would expect the pigments to be red ochre, possibly with red lead to promote drying. The gold leaf would have been adhered once the sizing dried to the appropriate tack for the leaf to adhere well” (email to the author, October 18, 2022).



FIG 6. Detail of the coat of arms of the Holy Roman Emperor on the Rothschild roemer in Figure 1, shown from (a) outside and (b) inside the bowl. (Photos: Corning Museum of Glass)

and around the edges of the designs, likely on the glue that bled out from the bole. The shiny gold not covering the bole is mainly visible when viewed from inside the glass, especially in the loops below the emperor's coat of arms (Fig. 6b).

Why was this approach taken? The most likely answer is that it was an attempt to make the unfired gilt designs more stable and less likely to wear with handling, and to give them perceptible thickness. In addition, the red background, which is slightly visible through the thin gold-leaf layer, gives a richness to the appearance of the gold. (Boles are available in many colors, from white to yellow to dark red. Gilding on red bole appears warmer than on yellow bole, which appears paler.) The decoration is attractive when viewed from both inside and outside the glass.

While the Rothschild roemer is the only example we have identified where gilded red bole was used, there are many examples of gilding on an unfired red material on other glass forms and porcelain dating from the early eighteenth century. For example, there is a group of drinking glasses and other tableware forms with unfired painted and gilt decoration that are attributed to Dresden—the gilding applied over a thick red material (Fig. 7a, b).⁸ XRF analysis of this material suggests that it is not red bole. The underlying material appears to be a different gilding composition, although to the eye it does look like the gilding was applied on red bole. The XRF peaks showed that the gilding and the underlayer contained mercury, lead, iron, copper, and possibly gold. This different composition might explain the difference in color—the gilding looks yellower and brighter and less pasty than that on the Rothschild roemer.

THE COATS OF ARMS

The eight coats of arms decorating the bowl of the Rothschild roemer are inscribed with the emperor's title (*Kaiser*) and each elector's title (*Churfürst*). Below the arms is an inscription (see below) stating that the roemer is a *Wilkum* (*Willkomm* in more contemporary German; English “glass of welcome”) and the date, 1662. The coats of arms are as follows, starting with that of the emperor and proceeding to its right, around the bowl: Mainz, Cologne, Bavaria, Trier, Saxony, Palatinate (Pfaltz), and Brandenburg (Fig. 8). Translations of the titles into more current German and English

⁸ See Klesse and Mayr 1987, no. 54, and pages 42–45, where there are references to many other examples from this group. See also Harden 1968, 149, no. 202.

FIG 7. (a) Wineglass with unfired painted and gilt Chinoiserie decoration, with (b) detail. Probably Saxony, Dresden, about 1730. Colorless non-lead glass, blown, molded, cold painted, gilt. H. 13 cm. Corning Museum of Glass, 79.3.419, gift of Jerome Strauss. (Photos: Corning Museum of Glass)



FIG 8. The eight coats of arms on the Rothschild roemer (left to right, top to bottom): Archduke of Austria and Holy Roman Emperor; Electors of Mainz, Cologne, Bavaria, Trier, Saxony, Palatinate (Pfaltz), and Brandenburg. (Photos: Corning Museum of Glass)

appear in parentheses in the list below. The title *Chūr*, for which current German uses *Kurfürstentum*, is abbreviated below as *Kur-* (e.g., *Kurmainz* / Electorate of Mainz).

HOLY ROMAN EMPEROR. Leopold I Habsburg (1640–1705), King of Hungary, Croatia, and Bohemia, Duke of Burgundy, Margrave of Moravia, and Count of Tyrol, second son of Emperor Ferdinand III, was elected emperor in 1658 and served until

his death in 1705. As emperor he assumed the arms of the Archduke of Austria, which are emblazoned in the primary location on the roemer. The arms are identified above as “Ihro Käys: Maie:” (*Ihre kaiserliche Majestät* / Your Imperial Majesty).

ELECTOR OF MAINZ. Adjacent to the coat of arms of the emperor is that of the Archbishop-Elector of Mainz, which is inscribed “Chür Maintz” (*Kurmainz* / Electorate of Mainz). He ranked first among all ecclesiastical and secular princes of the Empire, and was second only to the emperor. Johann Philipp von Schönborn (1605–1673) served as Archbishop-Elector of Mainz from 1647 to 1673, Bishop of Würzburg from 1642 to 1673, and Bishop of Worms from 1663 to 1673. The coat of arms combines those of Würzburg, the city of Würzburg, and the Schönborn and Siebmacher families.

ELECTOR OF COLOGNE. The coat of arms of the Archbishop-Elector of Cologne is identified as “Chür Cöllen” (*Kurköln* / Electorate of Cologne) on the roemer. The Archbishop of Cologne was one of three ecclesiastical prince-electors (along with Trier and Mainz). From 1583 to 1761, the archbishopric was linked to the Bavarian branch of the House of Wittelsbach. Maximilian Henry of Bavaria (1621–1688) became Elector of Cologne in 1650 and served until 1688; he was a first cousin of Ferdinand Maria (1636–1679, Elector of Bavaria 1651–1679). The coat of arms of the Elector of Cologne, the arms of the city quartered by the arms of Bavaria, did not change between 1612 and 1806.

ELECTOR OF BAVARIA. The Bavarian coat of arms on the roemer is identified as “Chür Beiren” (*Kurbayern* / Electorate of Bavaria). It shows the historical arms of Bavaria (fields of blue-and-white diamonds) combined with those of the Palatinate (lions on a black background) and an inescutcheon with a golden orb on a red field signifying his position as Imperial Arch-Steward (*Erztruchsess*) of the Holy Roman Empire. The Arch-Steward shield with the imperial orb was an integral part of the Bavarian Elector’s coat of arms until the end of the Empire in 1806. Ferdinand Maria (1636–1679) served as Elector of Bavaria from 1651 to 1679 and was a first cousin of Emperor Leopold I.

ELECTOR OF TRIER. The Electorate of Trier was an ecclesiastical principality of the Holy Roman Empire that existed from the end of the ninth to the early nineteenth century. The coat of arms of the city of Trier is a red cross against a silver ground (*argent a cross gules*). The arms on the roemer consist of that basic design, with the addition of the Lamb of God carrying a vexillum in an inescutcheon, derived from the Elector’s coat of arms. The vexillum is an ancient Roman flag-like object familiar from the Christian iconography—prevalent from late antiquity until today—of the flag carried by a lamb, representing Christ victorious over death. The coat of arms is identified as “Chür Trier” (*Kurtrier* / Electorate of Trier). Karl Kaspar von der Leyen (1618–1676) was Elector of Trier from 1652 to 1676.

ELECTOR OF SAXONY. The coat of arms on the roemer identified as “Chür Sachs:” (*Kursachsen* / Electorate of Saxony) is that of Johann Georg II (1613–1680), Elector of Saxony from 1656 to 1680. There is one significant difference, however, from the usual Saxon arms: the depiction of an eagle in the fourth quadrant, instead of a lion. This may be an error, but it is not impossible that the eagle in this Saxon coat of arms was intentional, as it forms part of the Ernestine arms and could represent either the Palatinate of Saxony or the Palatinate of Thuringia.⁹

ELECTOR PALATINE. The coat of arms on the roemer is inscribed Chür Pfaltz (*Kurpfalz* / Palatine Electorate). The Electoral Palatinate was a state that was part of the

9 Suggested to Dedo von Kerksenbrock-Krosigk by Mr. Reiner Ebling and Mr. Gerd Dethlefsen, October 24, 2022 (email, Dedo von Kerksenbrock-Krosigk to the author, October 25, 2022).

Holy Roman Empire, and its counts were confirmed as electors by the *Goldene Bulle* (Golden Bull) of 1356, which named the Electors who were to choose the emperor, defined their roles at court, and secured privileges for them. The arms of Pfalz are a combination of the historical lion of Pfalz and the diamonds of the Wittelsbach family, Dukes of Bavaria and Princes of the Pfalz. The tri-lobed design at the bottom of the arms is not found on any coins of Karl I Ludwig (1617–1680), who served as Elector Palatine from 1649 to 1680, but a scrolled design was used on coins of the period.

ELECTOR OF BRANDENBURG. The coat of arms decorating the roemer and inscribed “Chür Brand:” (*Kurbrandenburg* / Electorate of Brandenburg) displays the red eagle of the arms of the Margraviate of Brandenburg as Arch-Chamberlain (*Erzkämmerer*) of the Holy Roman Empire and Duke of Prussia, emblazoned with the scepter of power. The Elector of Brandenburg from 1640 to 1688 was Friedrich Wilhelm “The Great” (1620–1688), who developed Brandenburg-Prussia into a major military power. The coat of arms was used on coinage and elsewhere until the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806.

THE INSCRIPTION BELOW THE COATS OF ARMS

Below the coats of arms is a lengthy inscription encircling the bowl ([Fig. 9](#)), indicating that the roemer is a *Wilkum* (in modernized German, *Willkomm*), a “glass of welcome.” A *Willkomm* is a glass that a host hands to a guest upon arrival, to bid them welcome. The roemer would probably have been filled with wine or beer and some were quite large, holding more than a liter.¹⁰ The inscription reads, “Wan ein gũth freunde fert ein bey mir; Setz ich im diesen Wilkum für Damit kan er verspüren thon, mein gũtte treu Affection A° 1662”; in somewhat modernized German: “Wenn ein guter Freund bei mir einfährt [mich besucht], setze ich ihm diesen Willkomm vor damit kann er verspüren tun, meine gute treue Affection A[nno] 1662”; and in English: “When a good friend visits, I put this welcome (*Willkomm*) in front of him; thereby he can feel my good and loyal affection Anno 1662.”¹¹

A CLOSELY RELATED ROEMER

A related roemer decorated with the gilt coats of arms of the Holy Roman Emperor and seven Electors is in the collection of the Hessisches Landesmuseum, Kassel ([Fig. 10](#)). It is also dated 1662 (see below, [Fig. 12](#)) and is decorated with the same coats of arms. There are some variations, particularly in the depiction of the coat of arms of the Holy Roman Emperor, which is emblazoned on the breast of the double-headed imperial eagle ([Fig. 11a](#)), unlike that on the Rothschild roemer ([Fig. 11b](#)). The other coats of arms are essentially identical on both roemers, including the eagle replacing a lion in the fourth quadrant of the Elector of Saxony’s coat of arms. They also have similar curvilinear outlines, are separated from each other by vertical bands of stars, and are identifiable as being written by the same hand ([Fig. 12](#)).

The technique of decoration is also structurally the same as on the Rothschild roemer, the primary difference being that the undercoat for the gilding on the Kassel roemer is not red. It is not evident what the material is, but the decoration on both glasses has the same raised, slightly pebbly texture, indicating that a similar material was used.

¹⁰ Email, Dedo von Kerssenbrock-Krosigk to the author, April 13, 2024. See Saldern 1965, 28–30.

¹¹ Email, Dedo von Kerssenbrock-Krosigk to the author, October 4, 2022



FIG 9. View of the inside of the bowl of the Rothschild roemer. The image has been reversed so that the inscription below the coats of arms is readable. (Photo: Corning Museum of Glass)



FIG 10. Roemer with unfired gilt decoration of the coats of arms of the Holy Roman Emperor and seven Electors. Transparent light-green non-lead glass, blown, trailed, applied, impressed, painted, gilt. Germany, Rhineland (?), dated 1662. H. 26.4 cm. Landesmuseum Kassel, Hesse-Kassel, KP B IX/I.137. (Photo: Landesmuseum Kassel, © Hessen Kassel Heritage)



FIG 11. Details of the coat of arms of the Holy Roman Emperor on the (a) Kassel and (b) Rothschild roemers. (Photos: [a] Landesmuseum Kassel, © Hessen Kassel Heritage; [b] Corning Museum of Glass)



FIG 12. Detail showing the border above the coats of arms, the inscriptions above and below them, and the gilt trailed and milled thread below the bowl of the Kassel roemer in Figure 10. (Photo: Landesmuseum Kassel, © Hessen Kassel Heritage)

The lengthy inscription below the arms is also essentially the same on both glasses, both in text and calligraphy: “Wan ein guth freündt kert ein bey mir / setz ich Im disen wilkum für / Damit kan er verspüren thon / mein gute trew, und Affection. / Anno Dom. 1662.” There are above the coats on arms on both roemers similar wide, gilt linear bands topped by a border of repetitive curvilinear motifs, augmented with repeated diamonds. The forms of both glasses are also essentially the same, with the same style of molded prunts, and the trailed and milled thread below the bowl is gilt on both examples—an unusual feature.

There is no record of the acquisition of the Kassel roemer, but it was mentioned in an inventory of glass objects that was “active” during the eighteenth century. It is possible the roemer was part of the princely collection—perhaps the Glaskabinett of Landgraf Wilhelm VIII (1682–1760)—and was later moved to the Museum

Fridericianum in 1779, where it was enumerated in the inventory in the “Armaturzimmer,” located in “Schrank V., 1 Gefach” (Cabinet 5, Shelf 1).¹²

ANOTHER CLOSELY RELATED ROEMER

Another roemer that was also likely decorated by the same artisan is in the collection of the Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Cologne (Fig. 13); it was formerly in the collection of Ferdinand Franz Wallraf (1748–1824).¹³ It has worn raised gilt decoration on a red underlayer, which indicates it was produced using the same technique as on the Rothschild and Kassel roemers. It bears the gilt coat of arms of the Elector of Mainz on the bowl, and there is a lengthy inscription flanked by a decorative border of repeated curvilinear elements. The bowl has been broken and repaired, and fragments of the



FIG 13. Roemer with unfired gilt coat of arms of the Elector of Mainz. Germany, Rhineland, dated 1[6]61. Transparent light-green non-lead glass, blown, trailed, applied, impressed, painted, gilt. H. 23.5 cm. Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Cologne, F 191. (Photo: © Rheinisches Bildarchiv [RBA F 191])

12 Email, Dr. Antje Scherner to the author, June 7, 2023. The object is listed in the “Inventarium über Krystall, Fluß und Glas u.s.w. 1. Armaturzimmer, 2. Andere unten in den Zimmern gebliebene Stücke, Vasen usw.” (Laufzeit des Inventars 1719–1795), page 9, number 139; it is also enumerated in the “Inventar der Glas- und Porzellan-Sammlung” (Laufzeit 1880er bis 1930er Jahre), page 15, number 137; see <https://datenbank.museum-kassel.de/109712/0/0/0/s1/1/100/objekt.html>.

13 Portions of the Wallraf collection were transferred from the Wallraf-Richartz Museum to the Kunstgewerbe Museum in Cologne in 1888. For references to the roemer, see Falke 1900, 70; Grimm 1984, cat. nos. 41, 141, 364, 366; Klesse 1963, 108, no. 173; Klesse and Reineking von Bock 1973, 108, no. 173; Theuerkauff-Liederwald 1968, 144–145.

FIG 14. Details of the Mainz coat of arms on the (a) Cologne and (b) Rothschild roemers. (Photos: [a] © Rheinisches Bildarchiv [RBA F191]; [b] Corning Museum of Glass)



inscription are missing, but it has been transcribed as “Gebt Gott willich was Ihme gehörrh allezeith vnd trinkt hiemith / Auff Ihr Churfürstlichen genaden gesundtheith ANNO DOMINI 1[6]61”;¹⁴ in more contemporary German: “Gebt Gott willig zu aller Zeit was Ihm gehört und trinkt hiermit auf Ihre Kurfürstlichen Gnaden Gesundheit Anno Domini 1[6]61”;¹⁴ and in English: “Give God willingly what belongs to him, and drink herewith His Electoral Grace’s health Anno Domini 1[6]61.”¹⁵

There are minor differences in the rendering of the coat of arms from those on the other roemers, but the decorative border of the shield is nearly identical (Fig. 14a, b). Notice, as well, that the formation of the numeral “6” in the dates on all three roemers is identical. Furthermore, the milled trailed band below the bowl is gilt, a feature that is unusual and suggests the same “hand” decorated all three (see Figure 13).

CONCLUSIONS

The three roemers discussed here were decorated by the same unknown artisan, likely working in the Rhineland. They were decorated at the time of the dates inscribed on them—that is, in 1661 and 1662. The decoration was not applied in the late nineteenth-century to seventeenth-century roemers, as was alleged when the Rothschild roemer was sold at auction in 1999 and 2022. Proof of this conclusion is the documentation of two closely related roemers with gilt decoration, one of which is documented in the eighteenth century, while the second was in a collection whose owner died in 1824.

The bowls of large roemers were often elaborately decorated with mythological scenes, coats of arms, city views, personal or tributary inscriptions, and even insects in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries in Germany and the Netherlands, their voluminous bowl surfaces facilitating a wide range of decorative approaches. They were likely highly valued when they were new, so many have survived. Roemers

¹⁴ The inscription on the roemer is derived from “Gebt Gott, was Gott gehört” in Matthew 22:21 (reference courtesy of Dedo von Kerssenbrock-Krosigk).

¹⁵ Email, Dedo von Kerssenbrock-Krosigk to the author, October 25, 2023.

were diamond engraved or sometimes enameled in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and wheel-engraved in the eighteenth century, and a few were decorated with unfired paint and gilding. The decoration on the latter, however, was fragile and easily worn, which may be the reason fewer have survived than engraved examples.

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European glass drinking vessels often have inscriptions wishing health and prosperity to the drinker (such as the roemer shown in [Figure 5](#), which is inscribed in Dutch, “Drink from this with supreme joy / 1608 / Wine makes joyful the heart of a man”). I know of no other roemers decorated with the coats of arms of the Holy Roman Emperor and the Electors or inscribed as a “glass of welcome.” Rather common, however, are German glass vessels decorated with figural and armorial polychrome enamel decoration depicting the emperor and Electors and their coats of arms; most are large, cylindrical vessels called “Humpen” and date from the mid-sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century. They were often used to welcome important guests or sometimes in games to test the prowess of a drinker.¹⁶

The existence of two roemers bearing the arms of the emperor and all the Electors of the Holy Roman Empire, and a roemer bearing the coat of arms of a single Elector, suggests that they were originally parts of larger sets, with some roemers bearing the individual arms of the Electors, while roemers bearing all seven Electors’ arms and that of the Holy Roman Emperor were the “masters” of each set. Large sets of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century roemers are, not surprisingly, extremely rare. Indeed, I only know of one such group, a matching set of seven covered roemers with enameled hunting scenes: six (one dated 1665) are in the Universitätsmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte in Marburg; another from the same set is in the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.¹⁷

The roemers discussed here are the result of an effort to create unfired gilt decoration that is relatively stable. It also resulted in decoration that suggested the use of significant quantities of gold, adding to the apparent richness and value of objects meant to celebrate the Holy Roman Empire. They are, at present, the earliest known examples of the use of bole or glue as a ground layer for gilding on glass. The technique was refined in the early eighteenth century—most likely in the Saxon court, given the same or similar unfired technique and material on glasses attributed to Dresden and on Meissen porcelain—and was used extensively on both glass and porcelain to create decoration of raised gilding. The technique, supplanted in the first half of the eighteenth century by gilded raised enameling to create the appearance of thick layers of solid gold, has been underappreciated and under-researched.

16 A “Willkomm” is a glass that a host hands to a guest, to bid him welcome. According to Robert Schmidt, the term “Humpen” only comes up in the seventeenth century, and these vessels were called “Willkomm” before that. That said, any glass could be a “Willkomm,” e.g., those that bear the diamond point-scratched signatures of special guests. In guilds, it was apparently common that a glass was passed around (like in a Protestant communion) and accordingly had to be big enough. I am not entirely sure if that custom would also have been found at the courts or more affluent households. In any case, the “Humpen” were also used for the competition of “Zutrinken,” whereby I would offer you the glass filled with beer, you’d have to empty it in one go, and I then would have to “Bescheid geben,” i.e., follow suit. If either one of us fails in this task, a refill is handed out, and so on. I should think that greeting a guest with a roemer that alludes to the Holy Roman Empire has a strong meaning of its own. The roemer would probably have been filled with wine, but not necessarily so. Email, Dedo von Kerssenbrock-Krosigk to the author, April 13, 2024.

17 See Saldern 1965, 116, fig. 178.

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