

5.4

I WAS MADE FROM EARTH

A Rhineland Archaeological Discovery, 1572

Allison Stielau

In the imagination of Northern Europeans, classical antiquity was located not only at a temporal but often also a geographical remove. Evidence for this mindset appears in an unusual mounted vessel that has resided in a German noble collection since the sixteenth century (Figure 5.4.1).¹ A simple cup or bowl of red earthenware with steeply angled sides has been raised onto a gilded silver foot that bears a lengthy inscription in German:

After I was made from earth in the reign of the peace-loving emperor Antoninus Pius, I was brought to Rheinzabern. In 1572 I was then found with his coin in the earth and bequeathed by Isack Wicker to the noble lord Philipp the Elder, Count of Hanau and Lord of Lichtenberg, undamaged through 1432 years.²

The cup's discovery in Rheinzabern, a town on the Rhine River in the region that was once occupied by Romans, indicates the possibility of encountering vestiges of antiquity on northern soil in the sixteenth century. Made by the Strasbourg smith Georg Kobenhaupt, the mount testifies to the appeal that ancient material culture held for the scholars and enthusiasts now known as antiquarians, who used artifacts to gain more direct access to the ancient past than could be grasped through surviving texts alone.³ Its inscription asserts both a recognition of this artifact's antiquity and the special status afforded it because of its age and association with Roman heritage.⁴ But the narrative constructed for the vessel by the inscription places its origins elsewhere, revealing an assumption that this modest cup could not have been produced locally.

This positioning lays bare the double bind of the Northern Renaissance, which involved both a reverence for Greco-Roman antiquity and the provincial anxiety that that celebrated antiquity, or the best parts of it, did not originate *here*.⁵ Modern archaeological investigations beginning in the nineteenth century would reveal, however, that Rheinzabern was the site of an extensive pottery manufacturing operation whose products were exported as far away as Britain. Within the conceptual framework of a "Global Renaissance," the mounted cup addresses not the expanded geographies encompassed by early modern empires and traveled by objects and people in this period, but rather the vast spread of the *Roman* empire, which captivated the attention of humanist scholars and antiquarians and,



Figure 5.4.1 Terra sigillata cup with gilt-silver mount by Georg Kobenhaupt, c. 1572, including inset Roman coin. 10.6 cm × 10.1 cm. © Hessische Hausstiftung, Kronberg im Taunus.

particularly in Northern Europe, prompted questions about the relationship between native peoples and imperial culture in the ancient past.⁶ In its material components and in the claims of its inscription, which is riddled with fascinating misprisions, the cup offers a worthy addition to the corpus of objects that open up our understanding of the Renaissance in

German-speaking lands. Analyzing each of its hybrid elements in turn, this essay considers how the cup evokes conceptions of antiquity's geography, including the tension between "here" and "away," in the sixteenth century.

Proto-Archaeology in the Renaissance

The Rheinzabern cup and its mount can be associated with a small number of surviving vessels that help to narrate the prehistory of archaeology in early modern Germany, which is in turn connected to the origins of historical research as we know it today.⁷ The inscription intervenes in a significant debate that occurred in central Europe about the origins and ontology of earthenware vessels found in the ground, questions that remained unsettled in the wider population until the eighteenth century.⁸ Long-standing tradition held that these vessels were naturally formed and appeared like a kind of seasonal harvest. But in the late fifteenth century some began to suggest instead that they were the products of older human societies, showing a new consciousness of, and interest in, the ancient past. The question of the origin of these ancient urns prompted research sponsored by local princes, which led to the formation of collections, and a new market for antiquities that could be hunted down by those who knew how to identify topographic features likely to yield ceramic deposits. The framing of such vessels within elite collections spoke to the transition between the *Wunderkammer* and working collections of objects "undergoing study."⁹ As an unexplained phenomenon seemingly generated in the earth, the uncovered urn could serve as a marvel, inspiring wonder. As physical evidence of an ancient society and its customs, it became the object of antiquarian investigation. Conjuring up the life and itinerary of a Roman vessel, naming its burial and later discovery and calculating its specific age, the inscription on Kobenhaupt's mount explicitly adopts the latter, antiquarian position. However, being carefully crafted in silver and gilded on both inside and out, the mount still renders this object a piece for the early modern art collection; it puts "research" into an inventive and appealing package.

An awareness of the commodity value of ancient pottery in the sixteenth century and its increasing circulation in a new market brings further insight to an unexamined figure in the inscription, the "Isack Wicker" who gifted the cup to Philipp IV. It seems likely that he was the Strasbourg merchant Isaac Wicker who operated as financial backer, supplier, and diplomatic agent for the Counts Palatine of the Rhine.¹⁰ Such a person would have had the means to procure an object on the growing market for antiquities and, perhaps in the hopes of fostering a business or diplomatic relationship with Count Philipp, to bestow it as a gift that flattered the nobleman's learning.¹¹ His prominent position in the inscription suggests that it was he who commissioned the mount from Georg Kobenhaupt and thus perhaps directed the choice and phrasing of the text itself. The three names associated with the vessel—the Count, the merchant-diplomat, and the goldsmith—testify to the networks fostering antiquarianism in the later sixteenth century.

Inscription

Despite its relevance to the origins of historical research in early modern Germany, the inscription has never been properly analyzed, likely because of the cup's centuries-long residence in a private collection. The lines positioned around the three-dimensional foot require careful treatment as a material text, or a text with features that cannot be easily



Figure 5.4.2 Detail of inscription on the silver mount by Georg Kobenhaupt, c. 1572. © Hessische Hausstiftung, Kronberg im Taunus. Photo: author.

transcribed and translated into another medium (Figure 5.4.2). This text both materializes the obsession of sixteenth-century scholars with antique inscriptions while also setting up the precise challenges they encountered in recording and publishing those inscriptions for further study.¹² Examining these few lines in detail requires a series of complementary approaches. Taken together they constitute a primer for interpreting texts disposed three-dimensionally.

As a literary scholar would, we might begin with an interest in the inscription's language, grammar, vocabulary, and rhythm, as well as a close reading of the narrative it constructs. The choice of German appears to rule out the circumscribed public of humanist scholars who wrote both professionally and privately in Latin. It shows that interest in local antiquity was much wider than Latinity. It may also reveal an unfamiliarity or lack of confidence with Latin on the part of the mount's commissioner—possibly Wicker—and its maker. Georg Kobenhaupt produced an elaborate vessel owned by the same noble family whose references to the Roman god Bacchus were articulated also in German.¹³ Conversely, the silver globes commissioned by Philipp's son from a later Strasbourg metalworker bore text in Latin, perhaps reflecting the new count's comparatively advanced education.¹⁴ Even for native readers of German, the inscription can be exclusionary for those unfamiliar with its abbreviations, whether now or in the sixteenth century. In this case it uses a shortened reference to the count's title "H:[ERR] Z:[U]" LICHTEN::BERG"—Lord of Lichtenberg, suggesting its intended viewers would have been familiar with this space-saving contraction.

Although the inscription defies traditional line breaks, and the text itself follows no logical metrical scheme, there are spots of potential rhymes just before inserted commas: gemacht/brocht; ert/verert/unverserdt. These reveal themselves when the text is read aloud. Perhaps it was designed to be engaged with in this way, possibly around a ritual of drinking, as some sixteenth-century vessels bore drinking ditties.¹⁵ Rhymes not only create aural pattern, they also serve to link sets of words in the reader's mind. So here "made" and "brought" are tethered together, as are the words "earth," "honored [with a gift] (bequeathed)," and "undamaged."

At a slightly later moment in Central Europe, unearthened ancient vessels "supplied not only historical facts, but also incentives for contemplation, self-reflection and piety," as Dietrich Hakelberg has shown.¹⁶ More specifically, the fragility of ceramic urns and their association with cremation burial made them a particular type of *memento mori* for Protestant audiences in seventeenth-century Silesia (modern-day Poland), who recognized in them both the nameless oblivion and exclusion from salvation their pagan ancestors were consigned to, which undergirded their own Christian worldview.¹⁷ While the clay cup held by Kobenhaupt's mount did not have the association of cremation—though it certainly may have been found unknowingly in a burial context—its inscription does frame it with themes of fragility and the passage of time. The span of years that the cup has gone "undamaged," which the engraved text carefully calculates and records, highlights the survival of material objects against human mortality. It is also meant to be wondrous, a complete survival that was probably rare when compared to the many shattered and fragmented vessels more commonly discovered. Here the condition of the earthenware cup, which has clearly been broken and glued in multiple places, threatens to undermine the inscription's assertion about wholeness. Was the statement "undamaged over 1432 years" always more wishful than accurate, perhaps overlooking reconstructions undertaken already in the sixteenth century? Or did the cup, ultimately more frangible than its metal mount, render the inscription eventually inaccurate?¹⁸

Beyond the cup's formal fragility, there is the fact of its material, which initiates the entire inscription: "After I was made from earth ... ," recalling for a reader familiar with the Old Testament, perhaps, the creation of Adam. As if mirroring the human life cycle—dust to dust—the cup returns to be found "in the earth." This verbal pairing, "von erdt"/"in der ert," might be read with the sense of mortal transience that was certainly associated with earthenware in early modernity, like the tin-glazed plate of 1661 found in a London sewer decorated only with the line, "You and i are/Earth."¹⁹ Speaking from the perspective of the plate, this legend calls attention to the shared material baseness—the earthy mortality—of its clay form as well as the viewer's human body.

Giving objects a first-person voice was a conceit that itself went back to antiquity. In that context Jesper Svenbro has argued that the inanimate object's "I" serves as a strategic narrative technique when something must speak for itself, either because of its great age or its inevitable decontextualization.²⁰ In the case of the Kobenhaupt vessel, a similar logic is at work, as only the pottery cup—centuries older than any human being—can bring us close to its story, invented though it may be. Coins are often granted first-person narratives because as currency they travel and change hands more often than many objects, and endure longer, making them protagonists of potentially exhilarating life stories.²¹ Here, however, the coin is a mere supporting character and it is clearly the cup that speaks. And yet, the inscription's first-person reference to earth appears on the mount's decidedly metallic body. This material contradiction raises questions about the cup's ontology and how

an inscription relates to its referent. Communicating in the voice of the cup, the mount suggests that rather than a set of joined components, the two have been unified into a single vessel.

Moving from the inscription's language and content, we turn now to its physical features. The appearance of the text was certainly informed by the Renaissance interest in ancient inscription; its antique majuscules spread to take over the entire surface in place of other ornament, making the lettering itself the aesthetic focus.²² The inscription's design seems to have been planned intuitively, without meticulous measurement. Its letter forms shift in size from the top of the stem down over the base of the foot to accommodate and fill this space. Ringing the inscription around a circular form meant choosing how a line of text would cover the metal surface. In this case one line drops precipitously down to the next but not always in the same position on the cup, which creates a spiraling line of caesurae descending to the left from the coin. The punctuation aiding the inscription's legibility had a classical flavor. The interpunct was a point placed at the midline to separate words in classical Latin inscriptions, while the double sets of colons linking words separated across a line break recall the hyphen or coupling stroke used for this purpose in medieval Latin manuscripts, which became a double hyphen in Johannes Gutenberg's printed Bible of 1455.²³ The cut between "Reinn" and "Zabern" perhaps highlights the name's Latin origins (*Rhenanae Tabernae*). But other divisions between lines and word particles are less felicitous, which suggests the material form of the mount was more determinative of word placement and division than a desire for readability.

Forcing a complex, three-dimensionally disposed text into the form of a printed paragraph inevitably mediates the reading experience created by the original. In this case, the inscription can be read only by carefully turning the mount in one's hand, or moving around it, and encountering the coin as a disruption to the text's broken lines. These are features that a printed version will not replicate. Nor will the letter forms cut by the engraver's hand conform to the metal type available in the printer's workshop. Transcription can introduce errors that impede useful contextualization, like the mistaken identification of Wicker as Wickler, for instance.²⁴ As the slightly differing transcriptions of Kobenhaupt's engraved text demonstrate, even in seeking to clarify aspects of its orthographically divergent lines, transcription inevitably erases detail from the original and introduces interpretation, which impacts reception and analysis of the text. Those interventions happen even before the significant interpretation brought to bear when the text is translated, as here into English, with punctuation to shape the lines into modern sentence structure.

The difficulties encountered in moving the text on Kobenhaupt's mount to the printed page relate to a more widespread phenomenon in antiquarian research during the Renaissance. Despite their awareness of the special evidentiary value that material texts from antiquity held, Renaissance scholars struggled to adequately capture their visual and material qualities in manuscripts and printed publications.²⁵ Methods for accurately and systematically transcribing existing antique texts were developed later, leading to the intensely rigorous publications of the full span of historical inscriptions found in Germany, a scholarly endeavor that is still in progress.²⁶

Kobenhaupt's mount may itself even bear the trace of a transcription error, in the raised quadrilateral of silver where the fragment "Reinn" is inscribed. Looking inside the mount's shaft reveals a small pin where this extra bit of silver has been added, likely to cover over an error in the original text, perhaps even a significant spelling mistake, without having to polish down and re-gild the entire metal surface. Though it is not yet clear what that error might have been—"Reinnzabern" was not a common spelling of the town's name—it may

have derived from mishearing, misreading, or miscopying in the transfer from a set of instructions about the inscription to the metal surface. Whatever the problem may have been, it was significant enough to require a laborious and, therefore, costly fix that drew even greater attention to the inscribed text and to the location of the cup's findspot.

The Mount as an Interpretive Frame

The mount that physically and conceptually elevates the simple Roman cup has hundreds of comparanda from the sixteenth century that usefully contextualize Kobenhaupt's addition. These supports were fastened to a variety of vessel forms, ranging from Chinese porcelain to those made from special materials like rhinoceros horn or serpentine and natural containers like coconuts and nautilus shells transformed into standing covered cups. Mounted medieval and ancient vessels were much rarer.²⁷ A precious metal framing signaled the significance of an object; they were added to pieces whose value might not be immediately clear, like humble earthenware. A costly mount could also be fashioned to honor a gift received from a valued patron or friend.²⁸ Mounts served the practical function of physical support and could allow the vessel, at least theoretically, to perform culturally specific practices of drinking, whether or not it ever actually was utilized that way. Kobenhaupt's Strasbourg colleague Dieboldt Krug was known for setting rock crystal vessels in gilt-silver mounts that rendered them into contemporary drinking forms like tankards and covered goblets with fashionable grotesque ornament.²⁹ The Wicker cup's mount brings it closer to contemporary silver wine cups, which often had long stems to be clutched in the hand.

Mounts often share similar physical features, particularly the border cut into a regular pattern that could be physically crimped in to clasp a fragile and irregularly shaped object. In 1562 Bartell Birtsch, another Strasbourg smith, created an apparatus using these hugging grips for the curvaceous form of an ostrich egg, which allowed it to be hung from a ring. The two bars enclosing the natural ovoid furnished, like many silver mounts, an additional, easily inscribable surface on which to offer supplementary information. Recorded there was the egg's transit from Jerusalem, where it had been acquired by an Alsatian knight, and its subsequent donation to a local convent church.³⁰ The documentation of origin and gift here aligns with the inscription on Kobenhaupt's silver foot. Nor was his inscription's use of the first person entirely unusual. A silver mount for a lost Turkish faïence vessel, thought to be associated with German military campaigns in the Ottoman Empire, bears the inscription *In Nicea I was made and now to Halle in Saxony brought, 1582*.³¹ The verbs used for the vessel's production and transit are here rhymed (*gemacht* (made) / *bracht* (brought)), in the same pairing that appears in Kobenhaupt's lines.

Calling attention to the distinction between the location of a vessel's making and its later findspot or home in these inscriptions—the acknowledgment of mobility, in other words—accords with the function of many sixteenth-century mounts that lack explicit verbalization. As Anna Grasskamp has argued, the mounts made for Chinese porcelain entering elite collections served as “intercultural in-betweens, mediating the foreign artifact and the European context through a Europeanization of the foreign vessel's silhouette and the haptic experience” of its material.³² But mounts served a similar “localizing” function for vessels produced on the European continent, like Rhenish stoneware prized for its mottled glaze that was occasionally mounted when imported into England.³³ They could also make unsettling or subversive objects “safe” for inclusion in the *Kunstammer*. Loštice stoneware from North Moravia acquired gilt-silver mounts that perhaps helped to signal that its alien,

unfinished forms and crude nodules deserved aesthetic regard and thus did not constitute a kind of classificatory mistake.³⁴ For medieval and ancient vessels, the silver mount sent a similar warning: this object is more precious than it may at first appear to be.

When it came to objects that had been recovered from the ground, mounts were a more elegant, permanent, and luxurious way of attaching information about their discovery, information that might otherwise be recorded on paper and pasted to the vessel directly to prevent its separation or loss.³⁵ In Strasbourg in 1530 the unearthing of a cremation burial in a pottery vessel was noted in ink directly on the surface of the urn.³⁶ Three decades later, when a similar find of a black earthenware funerary urn was made in Bassenheim near Koblenz on the Rhine River, it received much more elaborate documentation: an inscription engraved onto a sleekly shaped silver lid topped with acanthus leaves and a tiny putto holding two first-century Roman silver coins.³⁷ This text—also in German—noted the other ceramic objects with which the vessel was found, as well as the bones, human teeth, and fibulae contained inside it. “This ancient vessel ...” it announced “without doubt was in the earth for many hundreds of years and only found last April, in the year 1563, by an inhabitant of Bassenheim.”³⁸ As Alain Schnapp has argued, these lines demonstrate a new awareness of the historical context—indeed the stated antiquity—of unearthed artifacts, along with a desire to record what we might consider to be archaeological details of their appearance.³⁹ But the inscription still derives from a context in which some artifacts needed the aesthetic and conceptual mediation of the precious frame to make them at home in the *Kunstkammer* alongside other objects of exquisite craftsmanship and valuable materials. Likely produced in the same decade, Kobenhaupt’s mount performs a similar role, articulating the great age of the Roman vessel it grasps while simultaneously implying that this intensely valuable relic of the antique past cannot be left to stand on its own.⁴⁰

Numismatic Inclusions

In addition to securing a narrative to the earthenware cup, the mount also served to physically incorporate the silver coin—a Roman *denarius*—into the vessel form. The authenticity of the coin as a physical witness to the trajectory of the cup is heightened through the visible and material access given to both sides. Rather than offering the mere *impression* of the original coin’s obverse, or soldering the coin directly to the foot with one side visible, Kobenhaupt in fact inserted the denarius into a round hole so that when one inspects the interior of the foot, the reverse’s symbols and legend are visible along with the ruddy base of the clay cup itself.

This method of incorporating coins into precious metal substrates, and especially into vessels, had its roots in classical antiquity. A revival of this practice beginning in the sixteenth century involved placing antique coins into the walls of contemporary forms, like standing cups and tankards.⁴¹ It was a means of ordering and securing small collections of ancient numismatic material while signaling their important status in a method analogous to the mounting of other exotic objects for the *Kunstkammer*. This was a less mutable form of later purpose-built coin cabinets, in which specimens were left open to manipulation. Eventually so-called coin-vessels (*Münzgefäße*) began to include contemporary European coins as well as examples from the recent historical past. The choice and arrangement of coins often made claims about the relationship between contemporary political powers and the historical past, or about a particular dynasty, by bringing together coins issued by successive rulers. Occasionally antique and modern coins appeared together to underscore

the connection between the ancient Roman Empire and its modern descendant.⁴² On the silver mount, the denarius is used as historical evidence to date the Roman cup, rendering this otherwise simple, unplaceable vessel ancient, and thus supporting the epic narrative of travel, survival, and staggering age that the inscription on the mount presents.

Like the collection, recording, and analysis of inscriptions, the study of coins (numismatics) was a major field of antiquarian study in the sixteenth century and it was particularly significant in Northern Europe, where coins were more accessible archaeological remainders of the antique past, filling the deficit in larger-scale survivals like sculpture and architectural ruins.⁴³ Being eminently portable, coins were also more easily collected than many antique relics, and German scholars, nobles, and even wealthy patricians competed and sometimes collaborated to acquire comprehensive series of Roman coins.⁴⁴ Conrad Peutinger of Augsburg planned but never completed a history of the Roman emperors with woodcut illustrations drawn from his own extensive coin collection.⁴⁵ Coins were valued as material evidence of the past and in particular for the apparent access they gave to authentic portraits of historical personages, which then guided German artists representing those figures.⁴⁶ Peutinger's imperial coins, for example, informed the portrayal of Roman emperors on the tomb of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I in Innsbruck.⁴⁷

The silver coin attached to Kobenhaupt's mount prompted speculation about the earthenware cup that was then recorded in the inscription. It was presumably associated with Emperor Antoninus Pius (r. 138–161) because of the legend on its obverse and perhaps utilizing existing publications of Roman imperial coinage, or the knowledge of local antiquarians. The brief literature on the vessel has simply accepted the inscription's assertion that the coin named Antoninus Pius, who was called "peace-loving" (*fridlibenden*) because he lacked any military experience and his reign was considered to be remarkably peaceful. But both obverse and reverse are distant from existing denarii of Antoninus Pius and instead match one denarius of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, who reigned as a teenager between 218 and 222 and was known more commonly as Elagabalus (Figure 5.4.3).⁴⁸ With



Figure 5.4.3 Silver denarius of Elagabalus, Antioch, AD 218–222. 18.7 mm, 3.42 grams. New York: American Numismatic Society.

this identification, the youthful bust on the obverse begins to make more sense, and the inscription's misinterpretation comes into view. In marked contrast to Antoninus Pius's reputation as a peaceful, prudent, and fiscally responsible emperor, Elagabalus was considered decadent by his contemporaries, as well as eccentric for violating Roman sexual and religious mores. Once the high priest of the sun god Elagabal at Emesa (modern-day Homs, in Western Syria), he elevated the deity to replace Jupiter in the Roman pantheon. His assassination at the age of eighteen came in the wake of this and other provocations that had lost him popular support.⁴⁹

Elagabalus's denarius connotes a martialism in utter contrast to the peaceful associations of the second-century Antoninus Pius. It was minted in Antioch (Antakya, modern-day Turkey) where forces loyal to the young priest had defeated the brief-reigning emperor Macrinus in 218 and where Elagabalus stayed for several months after he had assumed the imperial titles to put down revolts and execute those loyal to his immediate predecessor. The bust of the beardless young Caesar appears draped to the right and wearing a laurel wreath on the obverse; the reverse references Roman military symbols—two standards flanked by battle flags topped by the legionary eagle—encircled by the legend *CONCORDIA MILIT[VM]*—harmony with the soldiers. The Roman army's movement around the empire also provides the likely explanation for the denarius's appearance in Rheinzabern, more than 1500 miles from its point of origin. Military outposts in Roman Germania were responsible for bringing a variety of coinage to existing local currencies. Later in the third century, mints were set up in Cologne and Trier, but until that point, currency often traveled from more central locations in the empire to provide soldiers' pay and the means for other strategic financial transactions.⁵⁰ After traveling, likely along military routes, to Germania, it is possible that the denarius then entered the local economy, where it may have circulated or been kept for years before accidental loss or deliberate burial.

This leads us to the problem of dating. For although the mount's inscription makes a bold and specific claim about the length of time the clay vessel remained "undamaged," this new identification of the coin with which it was found reveals that chronology to be off by sixty years or more. Kobenhaupt's inscription has previously been identified as among the earliest examples of coin-dating, an archaeological method in which securely dated coins are used to estimate the age of finds, which are often ceramic fragments.⁵¹ Because of the wide date range for red slipware vessels of this type in Rheinzabern, there is little about the cup itself to suggest a more precise date. The inscription's misidentification of the coin and its true age throws into stark relief the potential errors created by coin-dating, especially in an era before the existence of easily searchable numismatic databases. But it also demonstrates exactly the kind of hasty assumption that was a feature of early antiquarian research. In the shift to material over textual evidence, Renaissance scholars often dealt credulously with their sources. In Kobenhaupt's inscription it is as if the precision dating the coin appeared to offer—1432 years, exactly—sanctioned the ingenious reconstruction of the cup's itinerary. As Christopher Wood has written, credulity could be "the matrix of creativity."⁵²

Terra Sigillata

The earthenware cup Wicker gave Count Philipp is of a type now known as *terra sigillata*. It is immediately recognizable from its bright, almost coral-colored, shiny surface, which is the result not of a glaze but rather a slip of fine clay that in firing turns glossy.⁵³ To produce this

sintered surface required specific firing conditions in the kiln, which suggests the red color was a feature worthy of extra investment in manufacturing. Terra sigillata vessels were everyday tableware—dishes, bowls, and cups—whose slipped surface made them impermeable to liquid.⁵⁴ Their foot-rings, which were attached after the vessel form itself was hand-thrown on the wheel, differentiated them from cooking vessels that would have nestled in flames and distinguished them from local production in some provincial parts of the empire.⁵⁵

For forms that were simple, standardized, and fairly consistent over time, variation came by way of decoration, which was produced using ceramic molds patterned with dies that transferred reliefs to the surface of the wet vessel as it dried. Actual coins were sometimes used to create this ornament. A fragment of border decoration found in Rheinzabern includes two coins believed to represent Antoninus Pius and his wife Faustina that are the indexical trace of numismatic artifacts pressed directly into the mold, creating a juncture of coin and vessel that Kobenhaupt's sixteenth-century mount unwittingly revived.⁵⁶ It is from this impressed ornament, and the stamped phrases and names of individual potteries commonly appearing on vessels, that the name "terra sigillata," a Latinate term for "sealed clay" postdating Roman antiquity, comes.

Although extremely prevalent in Roman archaeological sites, terra sigillata was produced in a limited number of locations and then exported across the empire. Arezzo was the major Italian site, beginning around 40 BC, later followed by clusters of potteries in South and Central Gaul (modern-day France) in the first century and later still in Eastern Gaul (southwestern Germany) in the second and third centuries. Rheinzabern, which served as a stopping place for travelers on Roman roads, was one of these locations. Its name derived from the Latin *Rhenanae Tabernae*—taverns or way stations on the Rhine.

Roman pottery was known in Italy in the Middle Ages through unearthed fragments and the occasional discovery of furnaces and other working features of ancient manufacturing, but its origins were not well understood and it was not systematically collected.⁵⁷ As knowledge of Roman antiquity increased and ceramic finds began to be saved and recorded, artists developed an interest in earthenware vessels, likely including terra sigillata for its impressed ornament. In the 1520s Giulio Romano, who painted the pagan gods feasting in the presence of classical vessels, owned multiple ancient earthenware bowls that may have been red slipware.⁵⁸ The painter and chronicler of Renaissance artists' lives, Giorgio Vasari, meanwhile, wrote about the kilns filled with clay urns his grandfather had found near Arezzo, whose remains he used to create imitations that still survived in Vasari's lifetime. In 1492 another large cache of terra sigillata was found near Arezzo and its items were carefully recorded, down to the stamped name of the pottery's owner.⁵⁹

The cup given to Philipp IV is the earliest documented find of Rheinzabern terra sigillata, but textual evidence demonstrates that there was local knowledge of this class of Roman ceramics in the region decades earlier. In 1531 the Alsatian humanist Beatus Rhenanus cited the discovery in Rheinzabern of "small red ceramic vessels" (*uascula figlini operis rubella*) in addition to pagan images and inscriptions, cremation burials in earthenware vases, sarcophagi, and seal gems.⁶⁰ Rhenanus likely based this assertion on the antiquarian manuscript of the Basel cathedral chaplain Hieronymus Brilinger, who reported being told by locals on a visit in 1509 that farmers there were constantly ploughing up old vessels and Roman imperial coins.⁶¹

An understanding that Rheinzabern was actually a significant site of production of terra sigillata locally and for the northwestern provinces came only later, with systematic archaeological research. In 1895 Hans Dragendorff published a foundational text on red

slipware, which relied on specimens that were rigorously dated, sometimes by means of the coins with which they were discovered.⁶² Dragendorff's typology of terra sigillata vessels is still used to identify the standard forms. Count Philipp's cup, for example, is of the type known as Dragendorff 33, a small, deep vessel with sharply angled sides and a single groove cut into the exterior surface.⁶³ It was extremely common and in production from the first through the third century.⁶⁴ Excavations by Wilhelm Ludowici in the early twentieth century vastly expanded knowledge of the Rheinzabern terra sigillata industry, and it continues to be a significant site of investigation.⁶⁵

According to Astrid van Oyen, "sigillata delimits the disciplinary imagination of Roman archaeology," which "can be defined as studying the period during which sigillata pots circulated, and the geographical area in which sigillata pots are found."⁶⁶ Kobenhaupt's mount for the cup from Rheinzabern captures a much earlier archaeological imaginary, before the refinement of field methods, terminologies, and typologies of the kind now used to study Roman pottery, but already motivated by the urge to date unearthed artifacts and use them to tell far-reaching stories about the distant past. For the next generation of German antiquarians, however, the terra sigillata vessel would no longer require the mediating support of the silver mount. A series by the Flemish-German painter Hendrik van der Borcht that depicts antiquarian collections visualizes this shift in the framing of Roman material culture.⁶⁷ A red slipware cup very close in form to that which Georg Kobenhaupt mounted in 1572 appears more than once in these oil paintings on copper; its recurrence suggests it may have been part of Van der Borcht's own collection (Figure 5.4.4). Set among a glass jug, small-scale nude sculptures, carved gems, and medieval, Roman, and Greek coins, the cup has both the special sheen of terra sigillata's sintered surface and a patina signaling its age and probable tenure in the earth. If not yet able to stand entirely on its own, the cup has been made recognizably ancient thanks to its placement alongside more obviously antique forms, likely reflecting the display strategies of contemporary collections.



Figure 5.4.4 Hendrik van der Borcht, *Still Life of Antiquities, including Terra Sigillata Vessels*. Before 1651. Oil on copper. 34.5 cm in diameter. St. Petersburg: State Hermitage Museum. © Fine Art Images/Bridgeman Images.

Conclusion: Local Earth

In reference to Roman earthenware, the term “terra sigillata” may be modern, but it had a different connotation in early modernity, where it described healing earth from specific locations that was “sealed” with a stamp and sold as a form of medicine.⁶⁸ Already in the sixteenth century vessels were made from this special clay that were meant to infuse liquids with the healing properties of their material. Around 1600, earthenware vessels with a similar tone to Roman red slipware were produced in Silesia, which had become not only a site of archaeological interest because of the burial urns discovered there but also a new, northern source for healing earth.⁶⁹ Silesian terra sigillata vessels take seventeenth-century forms like tankards and incorporate metal mounts that serve as feet and lids.⁷⁰ In this combination of gilt setting and glossy coral surface, they could be descendants of Philipp IV’s mounted ancient cup, which was discovered and framed just a few decades before in the Rhineland.

The plain surfaces of these Silesian vessels bear only the stamp that operated as the authenticating sign of the clay’s medical efficacy, which depended on its specific geographical and geological provenience. Though distant in function from these containers made from the mined *materia medica* of Silesia, the Rheinzabern cup and its mount together allude to a not dissimilar conflation of earthen vessel and specific terrestrial findspot—*von erdt/ in der ert*. Unknown to the inscription’s author, however, the earth of which the cup was made and in which the cup was eventually found were one and the same. The journey Kobenhaupt’s mount imagined for the cup it supported was lengthy and adventurous, from the heart of the Roman empire to its furthest reaches. But the real history of this object was, as we have seen, much more local. Bringing together the cup from Rheinzabern and the coin from distant Antioch, the sixteenth-century mount allowed “here” and “away” to intone the antique past in a single voice.

Acknowledgment

My thanks to Stephen Campbell and Stephanie Porras for the invitation to contribute to this volume and to Adam Eaker, Aaron Hyman, and Hannah Murphy for suggestions on an earlier draft of this text.

Notes

- 1 Descended from the counts of Hanau-Lichtenberg, it now forms part of the collection of the Hessische Hausstiftung. I thank Dr. Markus Miller for making this cup available for my examination at Schloss Fasanerie in Eichenzell in April 2022. For the most recent publication on this understudied object, see the catalogue entry by Andreas Dobler in Andreas Dobler, Markus Miller and Hildegard Wievelhove, *Die Darmstädter Silberkammer: Werke alter Edelschmiedekunst* (Petersberg: Michael Imhoff, 2007), 14–15. Earlier literature includes Adolph Schürmann and Ferdinand Luthmer, *Großherzoglich Hessische Silberkammer. Mustergültige Werke alter Edelschmiedekunst aus dem sechzehnten bis achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt: Arnold Bergsträsser, 1884); Max Sauerlandt, *Edelmetallfassungen in der Keramik* (Berlin: Keramische Rundschau, 1929), 18–19; Ulrike Jaenchen, “Der Goldschmied Georg Kobenhaupt” (PhD diss., Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich, 1977), 49–55.
- 2 NACH • DEM • ICH • WARD • VON: ERDT • GEMACHT, VNDER: DEM • FRIDLIBENDEN • KEISER : ANTONINVS • PIUS • GEN • REINN: ZABERN • BROCHT, BIN • VOLGENT • 1572 • MIT: :SEINER • MVNCZ • FVNDEN • IN • DER • ERT, DEM • WOLGE: :BORNEN • HERN • HERN • PHILIPS • GRAVEN • ZV • HANAW H: Z: LICHTEN: :BERG • DEM • ELDERN • VON • ISACK • WICKER • VERERT, IN • 1432 • IORN • UNVERSERDT,

- 3 Peter N. Miller, *History & Its Objects: Antiquarianism and Material Culture Since 1500* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2017), 56.
- 4 On early modern antiquarianism in Strasbourg and the surrounding region, see Bernadette Schnitzler, *La Passion de l'antiquité, six siècles de recherches archéologiques en Alsace* (Strasbourg: Société savant d'Alsace, 1998), 14–26.
- 5 On German humanists' orientations to Rome, see Christine R. Johnson "Creating a Usable Past: Vernacular Roman Histories in Renaissance Germany," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 40, no. 4, (2009), 1069–90.
- 6 Christopher B. Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book: Tacitus's Germania from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011).
- 7 Hans Gummel, *Forschungsgeschichte in Deutschland*, Volume 1 of *Die Urgeschichtsforschung und ihre historische Entwicklung in den Kulturstaaten der Erde*, ed. Karl Hermann Jacob-Friesen (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1938), 15.
- 8 This summary follows Alain Schnapp, *The Discovery of the Past: The Origins of Archaeology* (London: British Museum Press, 1996), 142–55. See also Dietrich Hakelberg, "For the Sake of Memory: Practicing Archaeology in Early Modern Silesia," in *Histories of Archaeological Practices: Reflections on Methods, Strategies and Social Organization in Past Fieldwork*, ed. Ola Wolfhechel Jensen, 53–80 (Stockholm: National Historical Museum, 2012); Karel Sklenář, *Archaeology in Central Europe: the First 500 Years* (Leicester and New York: Leicester University Press and St. Martin's Press, 1983); Alexander Heising, "Reception and History of Research in the Roman Provinces of Germany," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Roman Germany*, ed. Simon James and Stefan Krmnicek, 520–50 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
- 9 Schnapp, *Discovery of the Past*, 168.
- 10 At no point in the literature on this object has his identity been posited, or even raised as a pertinent line of inquiry. On Wicker's business and diplomatic connections, see Rudolf Reuss, *Zwei Lieder über den Diebskrieg oder Durchzug des Navarrischen Kriegsvolkes im Elsass, 1587* (Strasbourg, J. Noiriel, 1874), 18; "Trois Lettres de Strasbourg," *Société de L'histoire du Protestantisme Français Bulletin Historique et Littéraire* 33 (1884), 540–43, here at 542–43.
- 11 On Philipp IV's position and engagement with contemporary scholarship, see Gerhard Bott, "Two Magnificent Strasbourg Globes for Count Philipp V of Hanau-Lichtenberg," *Globe Studies* 53/54 (2007), 78–94, here at 85.
- 12 On this topic, see William Stenhouse, *Reading Inscriptions & Writing Ancient History: Historical Scholarship in the Late Renaissance* (London: Institute of Classical Studies, University of London School of Advanced Study, 2005).
- 13 *Die Darmstädter Silberkammer*, 10–11.
- 14 Bott, "Two Magnificent Strasbourg Globes," 81.
- 15 A silver beaker made in Strasbourg around 1560 bears the inscription "Im Jenner Drink Ich / Guetten Wein / Brauch Kostlich Speiss / zur Wollust mein" (In January I drink good wine and need fine food for my pleasure). Victoria & Albert Museum, inv. No. 6558–1859. Available online at <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O91614/beaker-greuter-courakt/>. Accessed 13 October 2023.
- 16 Hakelberg, "For the Sake of Memory," 70.
- 17 Hakelberg, "For the Sake of Memory," 70–71.
- 18 Timothy Schroder, *The Gilbert Collection of Gold and Silver* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988), 40–43, no. 4.
- 19 Museum of London, identification number A14639. Available online at <https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/113833.html>. Accessed 13 October 2023.
- 20 Jesper Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 26–43.
- 21 The longevity of this trope is made clear by the span between, for example, Jean Froissart's *Dit du Florin* (1389) and Helenus Scott's *The Adventures of a Rupee* (1790).
- 22 Jaenchen, *Der Goldschmied Georg Kobenhaupt*, 51.
- 23 Keith Houston, *Shady Characters: Ampersands, Interrobangs, and Other Typographical Curiosities* (London: Particular Books, 2013), 124–25; Paul Saenger, *Space between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 26; Paul Shaw, "Tiger Rag: Attitudes to Hyphenation and Rag Settings," *Print Magazine*, April 24, 2018, <https://www.printmag.com/article/hyphenation-justification-and-rags/>. Accessed 1 April 2023.

- 24 Sauerlandt, *Edelmetallfassungen*, 19. This error was repeated in Jaenchen, *Der Goldschmied Georg Kobenhaupt*, 49.
- 25 Christopher S. Wood, "Notation of visual information in the earliest archeological scholarship," *Word & Image* 17, no. 1–2 (2001), 94–118.
- 26 For a recent example, see Eberhard J. Nikitsch, *Die Inschriften des Landkreises Mayen-Koblenz I* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert, 2021).
- 27 For a still undeciphered medieval example, see Katharina Siefert, "Rätsel in silbernen Lettern: Ein kleiner Becher und viele Fragen," *Badische Heimat* 1 (2018), 58–61.
- 28 Adam Eaker, "The Art of the Tudor Gift," in Adam Eaker and Elizabeth Cleland, *The Tudors: Art and Majesty in Renaissance England*, 110–13 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2022), 110.
- 29 Schroder, *The Gilbert Collection*, 492–93, no. 133.
- 30 Württembergisches Landesmuseum, *Die Kunstkammer der Herzöge von Württemberg: Bestand, Geschichte, Kontext*, 3 vols (Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net, 2019), 2: 448–49.
- 31 ZU NICEA BIN ICH GEMACHT VND NVN GEN HALLE IN SACHSEN BRACHT ANO 1582. Sauerlandt, *Edelmetallfassungen*, 46.
- 32 Anna Grasskamp, "Frames of Appropriation: Foreign Artifacts on Display in Early Modern Europe and China," in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Encounters between China and the West*, ed. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Ning Ding, 29–42 (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015), 32.
- 33 Philippa Glanville, *Silver in Tudor and Early Stuart England: A Social History and Catalogue of the National Collection 1480–1660* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990), 328–51.
- 34 See the mid-sixteenth-century Loštice beaker with gilt silver rim in the Kunstgewerbemuseum Köln.
- 35 *Die Kunstkammer der Herzöge von Württemberg*, 1:305–6.
- 36 Sauerlandt, *Edelmetallfassungen*, 14.
- 37 Dietrich Hakelberg, "Une Monture d'argent comme preuve," in *L'Age du faux: l'authenticité en archéologie*, ed. Marc-Antoine Kaeser, 179–180 (Hauterive: Laténium, 2011). I thank Dr. Hakelberg for providing me with this text.
- 38 Nikitsch, *Die Inschriften des Landkreises Mayen-Koblenz*, 293–95.
- 39 Alain Schnapp, "The 'Antiquitates' of the Greco-Roman World and Their Effect on Antiquarian Thought in Europe from the Renaissance to the Early Nineteenth Century," in *Multiple Antiquities, Multiple Modernities: Ancient Histories in Nineteenth-Century European Cultures*, ed. Gábor Klaniczay, 279–304 (Frankfurt: Campus, 2011), 282–83.
- 40 Though it should be noted that some sixteenth-century collections did incorporate antique earthenware vessels without the mediating structure of the mount. See *Die Kunstkammer der Herzöge von Württemberg*, 1:290–1. For another roughly contemporary imaginative textual framing of an unearthed ancient vessel, see Edward Wouk, "Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle, the Quatre Vents press, and the patronage of prints in Early Modern Europe," *Simiolus* 38:1/2 (2015–2016), 31–61, here at 56–58.
- 41 For an overview of this phenomenon, see Klaus Pechstein, "Münzgefäße," in *Münzen in Brauch und Aberglauben*, ed. Hermann Maué and Ludwig Veit (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1982).
- 42 The second mounted terra sigillata vessel in the Hessische Hausstiftung, unfortunately outside the scope of this short essay, employs precisely this strategy. In addition to a foot, the cup carries a silver lid that links a large silver coin commemorating the death of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I in 1519 to a series of small Roman imperial coins set concentrically around it. See Dobler, *Die Darmstädter Silberkammer*, 14–15.
- 43 John Cunnally, *Images of the Illustrious: The Numismatic Presence in the Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).
- 44 Miriam Hall Kirch, "'Many Kinds of Old, Heathen, Imperial Pennies and the like Antiquities,'" *Journal of the History of Collections* 25, no. 1 (2011): 29–43; Martha McCrory, "Coins at the Courts of Innsbruck and Florence: The Numismatic Cabinets of Archduke Ferdinand II of Tyrol and Grand Duke Francesco I de' Medici," *Journal of the History of Collections* 6, no. 2 (1994): 153–72.
- 45 Christopher S. Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 229.
- 46 McCrory, "Coins at the Courts."

- 47 Wolfgang Kuhoff, “Augsburger Handelshäuser und die Antike,” in *Augsburger Handelshäuser im Wandel des historischen Urteils*, ed. Johannes Burkhardt (Berlin: Akademie, 1996), 260n11.
- 48 I thank David Wigg-Wolf of the German Archaeological Institute for his swift identification of this mount’s inserted coin in correspondence on 19 November 2022. See the entry RIC IV Elagabalus 187d, *Online Coins of the Roman Empire*, numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.4.el.187d, accessed 19 November 2022.
- 49 Anthony R. Birley, “Aurelius Antoninus (2), Marcus,” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 50 On the military context for coin circulation in Roman Germania, see David Wigg-Wolf, “Coinage and Money in the Roman Rhineland,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Roman Germany*, ed. Simon James and Stefan Krmnicek, 219–54 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
- 51 *Die Darmstädter Silberkammer*, 14.
- 52 Christopher S. Wood, “The Credulity Problem,” in *The Age of the Antiquaries in Europe and China, 1400–1800*, ed. Peter Miller and François Louis, 149–79 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 151.
- 53 This overview is indebted to Astrid van Oyen, *How Things Make History: The Roman Empire and Its Terra Sigillata Pottery* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 11–15.
- 54 On the pitfalls of utilizing this functional vocabulary, see Geoffrey B. Dannell, “Samian cups and their uses,” in *Romanitas: Essays on Roman Archaeology in Honour of Sheppard Frere on the Occasion of his Ninetieth Birthday*, ed. R. J. A. Wilson, 147–76 (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2006).
- 55 Dannell, “Samian Cups,” 148.
- 56 Heinrich Ricken and Manuel Thomas, eds., *Die Dekorationsserien der Rheinzaberner Reliefsigillata* (Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt, 2005), plate 62, no. 15.
- 57 Michael Greenhalgh, *The Survival of Roman Antiquities* (London: Duckworth, 1989), 236–38.
- 58 Toby Yuen, “Giulio Romano, Giovanni da Udine and Raphael: Some Influences from the Minor Arts of Antiquity,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 42 (1979): 263–72, here at 269n26.
- 59 Yuen, “Giulio Romano,” 268n25–269n25; Greenhalgh, *Survival of Roman Antiquities*, 237.
- 60 Beatus Rhenanus, *Rerum Germanicarum libri tres (1531): Ausgabe, Übersetzung, Studien*, ed. and trans. Felix Mundt (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2008), 380–81.
- 61 Rhenanus, *Rerum Germanicarum*, 604–5; August Bernoulli, ed., *Die Aufzeichnungen Heinrich und Konrad Iselins und eines Unbekannten, 1364–1452* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1915), 193–236, here at 194.
- 62 Van Oyen, *How Things Make History*, 24; Hans Dragendorff, “Terra Sigillata: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der griechischen und römischen Keramik,” *Bonner Jahrbücher* 96/97 (1895), 18–155.
- 63 Dragendorff, “Terra Sigillata,” plate 2.
- 64 For an overview of this form, see Felix Oswald and Thomas Davies Pryce, *An Introduction to the Study of Terra Sigillata Treated from a Chronological Standpoint* (London and New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), 189–91.
- 65 Wilhelm Ludowici, *Katalog V: Stempel-Namen und Bilder römischer Töpfer ... aus meinen Ausgrabungen in Rheinzabern 1901–1914* ([Germany], [1927]); Allard W. Mees, *Organisationsformen Römischer Töpfer-Manufakturen am Beispiel von Arezzo und Rheinzabern* (Mainz: Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseum, 2002).
- 66 Van Oyen, *How Things Make History*, 5–6.
- 67 Elizabeth Honig, “Making Sense of Things: On the Motives of Dutch Still Life,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 34 (Autumn, 1998), 166–83, here at 177.
- 68 Alisha Rankin, “Empirics, Physicians, and Wonder Drugs in Early Modern Germany: The Case of the ‘Panacea Amwaldina,’” *Early Science and Medicine* 14, no. 6 (2009): 680–710.
- 69 Karl H. Dannenfeldt, “The Introduction of a New Sixteenth-Century Drug: *Terra Silesiaca*,” *Medical History* 28 (1984): 174–88; Vítězslav Štajnochr, Vladimír Scheufler and Alfons Hubala, “Novověka Terra Sigillata,” *Český lid* 81, no. 2 (1994): 133–59.
- 70 For example, see the covered tankard from Silesia now in the Landesmuseum Württemberg, Stuttgart, inv. No. KK grün 45. Available online at <https://bawue.museum-digital.de/pdf/object/10503.pdf?lang=en>. Accessed 13 October 2023.

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