

# Silver cup of the Hertenberg knights from Jeterbenk Hill near Medvode (Slovenia)

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## Summary

A medieval silver cup was found by chance in 1986, during woodcutting on the northern slope of Jeterbenk Hill (municipality of Medvode, Central Slovenia) not far from the ruins of the castle on the top of the hill. Since September 2023, it forms part of the collections of the Muzej in galerije mesta Ljubljane (MGML – Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana). In its shape, the ribbed cup with an embossed chevron pattern on the rim and cable pattern at the base, weighing close to 100 g, resembles the glass beakers of the Byzantine, perhaps Venetian tradition. Similar beakers with vertical ribs were common in the towns and castles of Central Europe in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and were probably made under the influence of models from the Eastern Mediterranean or the Near East. Non-invasive, pXRF and PIXE

measurements revealed a remarkably high silver surface content (99.8%), which presumably does not accurately represent the original composition, as also indicated by the results of preliminary density measurements of the object. The precious object is most likely connected with the nearby castle at the top of Jeterbenk Hill which was built in the late 12<sup>th</sup> or early 13<sup>th</sup> century as part of a three-castle complex (the old and new Hertenberg castles and the Nebojse tower/*alt Hertenberch*, *new Hertenberch* and *Nebojz*) of the Hertenberg family, who were Spanheim *ministeriales*. Archaeological research and literary sources indicate that the castle on the summit of Jeterbenk Hill, the presumed Nebojse tower, was destroyed during an attack in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Late Middle Ages, goldsmithing, silver beaker, glass beaker, castle, Carniola

## 1. Introduction

Tableware for eating and drinking in use in the urban settlements and castles of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries was predominantly made of wood, pottery and glass, though castle inventories, inheritance deeds, lists of wedding gifts and depictions in illuminated manuscripts show that vessels of precious metals were not uncommon. Even families of lesser means would own at least one silver bowl, while wealthier households boasted an extensive assortment of silverware such as cups and goblets, bowls and jugs, which were often at least partially gilded.<sup>1</sup>

Like jewellery, tableware made of precious metals was valued primarily for its material worth. Both categories of movable goods were considered significant investments and hence subject to pawning, selling and melting. Rapid changes in fashion also caused old pieces to be modified to suit contemporary taste. Their owners took great care of such items and testamentary records from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the

14<sup>th</sup> century extensively document the bequeathing of silverware and reusing of precious metals as durable materials. This results in silverware from the High and Late Middle Ages very rarely occurring as archaeological finds, usually as parts of hoards in very different contexts and with unclear motives for their reversible or irreversible deposition.<sup>2</sup> According to some estimates, less than one percent of the originally tens of thousands of valuable medieval metal pieces have survived to this day. The majority, i. e., roughly 90% of the objects surviving in Central and Western Europe are sacred items from church treasuries, while jewellery and secular tableware survive only exceptionally, mainly in hoards, as already mentioned. In his 1982 book, for example, Johann Michael FRITZ documented only 45 secular silver vessels among Central European finds from the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> Recent hoard finds, especially those from Erfurt in

<sup>1</sup> FRITZ 1982, 64–65; KRABATH 2007, 126; SCHULZ 2011, 469–519; STÜRZEBECKER 2015, 62; for medieval castle furnishing in Carniola see e. g. MAKAROVIČ 1991, 50–53.

<sup>2</sup> For the high and late medieval hoards of coins, jewellery and/or vessels from precious metals, see KRABATH 2007; SCHOLZ 2023.

<sup>3</sup> FRITZ 1982.

## Figure Credits

Fig. 1: Andrej GASPARI

Fig. 2: Blaž GUTMAN

Fig. 3: Blaž KUMER, Ida MURGELJ

Fig. 4a: from DAVIDSON 1940, fig. 12:4

Fig. 4b: from BAUMGARTNER 2005, cat. no. 9

Fig. 4c: from BAUMGARTNER/KRUEGER 1988, cat. no. 205

Fig. 5a: from BAUMGARTNER/KRUEGER 1988, cat. no. 100

Fig. 5b: Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Tab. 1: Microanalytical Centre, Jožef Stefan Institute, Ljubljana

## Ein Silberbecher der Familie Hertenberg vom Jeterbenk-Hügel nahe Medvode (Slowenien)

Im Jahr 1986 wurde ein mittelalterlicher Silberbecher zufällig bei Holzfällarbeiten am Nordhang des Jeterbenk (Gemeinde Medvode, Zentralslowenien) in der Nähe der Ruinen der Turmburg auf dem Gipfel des Berges entdeckt. Seit September 2023 gehört der Fund zur Sammlung des Muzej in galerije mesta Ljubljane (MGML – Museum und Galerien von Ljubljana). In seiner Form ähnelt der gerippte Becher mit einem geprägten Zickzack-Muster am Rand und einem Wellenband am Fuß, der etwa 100 g wiegt, den Glasbechern der byzantinischen oder vielleicht der venezianischen Tradition. Diese waren in den Städten und Burgen Mitteleuropas in der zweiten Hälfte des 13. und ersten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts verbreitet und wurden unter direktem Einfluss von Vorbildern aus dem östlichen Mittelmeerraum oder dem Nahen Osten hergestellt. Nichtinvasive pXRF- und PIXE-Messungen ergaben einen bemerkenswert hohen Silberanteil (99,8%) an der Oberfläche, der wahrscheinlich nicht genau die

ursprüngliche Zusammensetzung des Blechs repräsentiert, wie auch die Ergebnisse vorläufiger Dichtemessungen des Objekts anzeigten. Das wertvolle Objekt steht höchstwahrscheinlich mit der nahegelegenen Turmburg auf dem Jeterbenk-Hügel in Zusammenhang. Die Turmburg wurde im späten 12. oder frühen 13. Jahrhundert als Teil eines dreifachen Burgkomplexes (die Burgen *Alt Hertenberg/alt Hertenberg*, *Neu Hertenberg/new Hertenberg* und der *Nebojse-Turm/Nebojz*) der Hertenberg-Familie, die Ministeriale der Spanheimer waren, erbaut. Archäologische Forschung und Schriftquellen deuten darauf hin, dass die Burg auf dem Gipfel des Jeterbenk, der vermutliche *Nebojse-Turm*, in der ersten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts während eines Angriffs zerstört wurde.

**Schlagworte:** Spätmittelalter, Goldschmiedekunst, Silberbecher, Glasbecher, Jeterbenk-Turm, Hertenberg-Ritter, Burg, Krain

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