

The art of communal drinking. Late medieval ceramic drinking vessels from southeastern Central Europe and their role in identity formation

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Summary

Communal eating and drinking are universal human behaviours. They are culturally coded social practices involved in the formation of social identities through strategies of inclusion and exclusion – who is invited to a meal and who is not, who may or may not prepare and consume certain foods and drinks, what behaviours are expected of whom, and what material paraphernalia may be used by whom and in what context. Drinking vessels and their physical properties are often used strategically to either unify or diversify individuals and groups. The material culture of communal drinking is enmeshed in the formation, performance and negotiation of identities through the processes of social competition and cultural distinction.

1. Introduction

Things are all around us. We make them, acquire them, use them, cherish some and disregard others, we curate them, break them and discard them. We inhabit the world with and through things, we shape our world with things, but in turn things act upon us, they shape us, they make us what we are. Objects are the material medium, the actant and the outcome of social practices. Whether intentionally and consciously or unintentionally and subconsciously, we interact with things – material culture in the broadest sense of the term – in everything we do.¹

Things carry meanings and convey messages. We often use material culture strategically to represent ourselves as we wish to be seen and understood by others, to strengthen the bonds with our kin and our peers and to emphasize the differences that separate us from strangers. But such communication is not always intentional and straightforward; the meanings of objects and materials are

This paper examines the material aspects of late medieval drinking culture, focusing on the decorated ceramic drinking vessels that were used in the southern regions of Central Europe. Several distinct groups of medieval ceramic drinkware are presented, such as earthenware beakers and goblets with relief decoration and the Loštice semi-stone-ware goblets. Their regional distribution, the social contexts in which they were used, and their relationship to drinking vessels made of other materials are discussed in terms of the role they played in the formation of late medieval social and cultural identities.

Keywords: communal drinking, ceramic drinking vessels, Loštice goblets, identity formation, Late Middle Ages

also read into them, quite often subconsciously, depending on the social and cultural context.

Things position us in the world, spatially, culturally, socially, psychologically and emotionally. In some material environments we feel at home, we feel like we belong; in others, we feel alienated. Furthermore, things have their own temporalities, which are crucial to the way we structure, shape and perform our identities through the continuum of our biographical timelines. Materials are resilient and durable. Artefacts accumulate skills, values and meanings through the relationships they form with the people who make, use and discard them. Objects are time materialized, which is why they can act as anchors of memory and identity. Indeed, material objects are central to identity formation, performance and negotiation.²

In this paper, I will consider a specific group of medieval artefacts – the late medieval decorated ceramic drinking vessels – and discuss the role they played in the formation of social identities. My geographical focus will be on the southern regions of Central Europe. The basic form of these vessels was adapted to their practical function

¹ There is a vast literature on material culture and its relevance to the social world. For some of the key concepts and perspectives, which are also central to this paper, see BOURDIEU 1977; APPADURAI 1986; MILLER 1994; WOODWARD 2007.

² A. JONES 2007; WOODWARD 2007.

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Fig. 2. Vectorization and digital editing by Nina BRATUŠEK. 1: after GUŠTIN 2001, fig. 4/2. – 2: after GUŠTIN 2001, fig. 2. – 3: after CECH 1985, fig. 36/B4. – 4: after CECH 1985, fig. 37/B21. – 5: after TKALČEC 2001, tab. 2/1. – 6: after GUŠTIN 2001, fig. 5/3. – 7: after GUŠTIN 2001, fig. 5/1. – 8: after GUŠTIN 2001, fig. 9/5

Fig. 3. Base map: <https://d-maps.com/m/europa/slovenie/slovenie25.pdf>; additional digital graphics by the author. Based on GUŠTIN 2001, fig. 8, supplemented by the author

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Die Kunst des gemeinschaftlichen Trinkens. Spätmittelalterliche Trinkgefäße aus Keramik aus dem Südosten Mitteleuropas und ihre identitätsstiftende Rolle

Gemeinsames Essen und Trinken sind universelle menschliche Verhaltensweisen. Es handelt sich dabei um kulturell kodierte soziale Praktiken, die durch Strategien der Ein- und Ausgrenzung zur Bildung sozialer Identitäten beitragen – wer zu einer Mahlzeit eingeladen wird und wer nicht, wer bestimmte Speisen und Getränke zubereiten und konsumieren darf und wer nicht, welche Verhaltensweisen von wem erwartet werden und welche materiellen Utensilien von wem und in welchem Zusammenhang verwendet werden dürfen. Trinkgefäße und ihre physischen Eigenschaften werden oft strategisch eingesetzt, um Individuen und Gruppen entweder zu vereinen oder zu diversifizieren. Die materielle Kultur des gemeinschaftlichen Trinkens ist in die Bildung, Aufführung und Verhandlung von Identitäten durch Prozesse des sozialen Wettbewerbs und der kulturellen Abgrenzung eingebunden. Dieser

Beitrag untersucht die materiellen Aspekte der spätmittelalterlichen Trinkkultur und konzentriert sich dabei auf die verzierten keramischen Trinkgefäße, die in den südlichen Regionen Mitteleuropas verwendet wurden. Es werden verschiedene Gruppen von mittelalterlichem keramischem Trinkgeschirr vorgestellt, wie z. B. tönernen Becher mit Reliefdekor und Loschitzer Becher aus Halbleinzeug. Ihre regionale Verbreitung, die sozialen Kontexte, in denen sie verwendet wurden, und ihr Verhältnis zu Trinkgefäßen aus anderen Materialien werden im Hinblick auf ihre Rolle bei der Herausbildung spätmittelalterlicher sozialer und kultureller Identitäten diskutiert.

Schlagworte: gemeinschaftliches Trinken, keramisches Trinkgeschirr, Loschitzer Becher, Identitätsstiftung, Spätmittelalter

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