Two 17th-century Eskimos at Rosenborg Palace

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Two seventeenth-century drinking vessels or cups, made of narwhal tusk and mounted in precious metals, have as part of their fittings miniature sculptures of Eskimos. The two figures are rendered in extremely naturalistic detail, making it possible to study their costume. This makes them 'missing links' in the evolution of Eskimo costume between the fifteenth-century mummies and modern dress. This paper presents the cups, and places them in their historical context, but leaves the evaluation of the costume-historical evidence to the ethnographers.

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Rosenborg Palace was built at the beginning of the seventeenth-century as a 'maison de plaisance' just outside the walls of Copenhagen. It was inhabited by four generations of Danish Kings for about a hundred years, after which it was considered old-fashioned and unsuitable for Royal residence. From then on it was used to store Royal treasures and family heirlooms such as portraits, unusual furniture and other precious objects.

In 1833 it was turned into a public museum, with the declared purpose of illustrating Danish National history chronologically from around 1600 till the present day. In fact, it illustrated Royal family history rather than national history, but in the days of absolute monarchy this distinction seemed irrelevant, since these histories were considered one and the same.

It may seem surprising that such a collection, standing almost unchanged since the middle of the last century, holds evidence of Eskimo costume of such importance to ethnographers that it represents a link between the mummies of the fifteenth century and the present day. As will be seen, however, this is nonetheless the case.

This evidence is not costume as such, which is probably why it has never been published in an Eskimo context. It is two small figures, one in enamelled copper, the other in silver gilt, both mounted on cups made of narwhal tusk. Both cups can be dated to the middle of the seventeenth century, the figures thus being the oldest known sculptures dipicting Eskimos. Their importance, of course, is due to the fact that this is the first time since the mummies that Eskimo costume can be seen from the back.

This paper will not try to evaluate the importance for costume history as the present author is not familiar with the topic. Instead, an attempt will be made to date the cups with their figures, and to relate them to the historical situation from which they arose. The cups

Fig. 1. Cup. Dated 1663. Narwhal tusk mounted in gold with enamel. On top a figure of an Eskimo in enamelled copper. Height 33 cm.

have been illustrated, and briefly, but not altogether correctly, described (Hart Hansen *et al.* 1985: 165).

The larger of the two cups is 33 cm high.[1] Cup and cover are made of narwhal tusk and mounted in gold. The cup, which is beaker-shaped, has a flat base made of three pieces of tusk, the body consisting of fourteen panels with grooved edges interspersed with tongues of gold. The panels are held together by three enamelled bands of gold, all decorated with varicoloured flowers. The curved cover with fourteen panels is constructed in the same way and is topped by an 8.3 cm high figure of an Eskimo, made of copper and enamelled in natural colours. The figure stands on a grass mound of enamelled copper, joined to a conical piece of narwhal tusk. The latter has a thread, so that, when screwed in tightly, it ingeniously holds the panels locked against the flower-enamelled gold rim. The figure, which obviously represents a man, stands with a narwhal tusk in its left hand and with the middle finger of the right hand pointing to the ground. He has a black bow slung over his shoulder and a quiver with arrows on his back. The coat, trousers and boots are light brown with black spots, depicting sealskin (probably the ringed seal, *Phoca hispida*). The short trousers as well as the coat with its high hood and lobed ends hanging down at the front and back represent a female costume. This discrepancy between the man and the costume will be dealt with below.

Under the cover and attached to the central piece of tusk is a circular plate of enamelled gold showing crowned initials within a wreath on a blue ground. The many-lettered initials have not been interpreted, but 'F3' refers undoubtedly to Frederik III, who was King of Denmark from 1648 to 1670. This is corroborated by the accompanying date 1663.

The cup was recorded in 1696 in the oldest existing inventory of Rosenborg Palace in the following manner: 'A large Unicorn's Cup with three enamelled Gold Bands around its Cover (sic!), on which a Greenlander of Gold, enamelled, with his Bow on his Back.'[2] This description leaves no doubt as to the identity of the object, but it should be added that new inventories were made at Rosenborg every thirty years, and the cup can be followed through all inventories up to the present.[3] There is no information as to the whereabouts of this and the other cup with an Eskimo prior to 1696, unless one chooses to identify them with the entry: 'Two slender Beakers of Unicorn's Horn' in the 1673 inventory of the Royal 'Kunstkammer' (Cabinet of Curiosities) at Copenhagen Castle (Liisberg 1897: 166). The identification is all the more uncertain since quite a number of cups made of unicorn's horn were mentioned at the time, some of which still exist. However, the possibility that the two cups with Greenlanders were transferred from the 'Kunstkammer' in the 17th century cannot be completely ruled out. A third cup with a Greenlandic motif is to be found at Rosenborg today, just as it appeared in the 1696 inventory. It is made of walrus tusk, and stands on three silver gilt feet in the shape of walruses and with an engraved walrus on the silver cover.[4] This cup can with a high degree of certainty be identified in the 'Kunstkammer' inventory of 1673 (Liisberg 1897: 165).

Fig. 3. Tankard. Around 1660. Walrus tusk mounted in silver. Height 15.4 cm.

The second cup has a total height of 19.6 cm.[5] It has the shape of a tankard with a handle and a hinged lid. The flat base is made of pieces of narwhal tusk, and the cylindrical cuppa of seventeen panels, grooved at the edges, and joined by shafts, which in this case are also made of tusk. It is held together by a footring and a mouthring of silver gilt. The slightly curved lid is made of seventeen panels and tongues, constructed in the same manner as the cuppa, and held together by a ring and a circular central plate, both in silver gilt. The footring stands on three kneeling, silver gilt unicorns. The S-curved, silver gilt handle runs from the footring to the hinge, on which, as a thumb-piece, sits a 4.1 cm high Eskimo figure in silver gilt. In this case, too, it is a male figure with a narwhal tusk in his right hand, his left hand resting on the head of a seal which lies curled-up behind his back. He is also wearing a female costume. The central piece on the lid is engraved with two standing figures, a woman and a man. The man holds a bow and a spear in his right hand, and in his left, a harpoon with a bladder. In this case the costumes are rendered correctly (see Fig. 7).

Fig. 2a-d. The Eskimo in enamelled copper.

Fig. 4. Tankard. Around 1660. Narwhal tusk mounted in silver gilt. Height 19.6 cm.

From these descriptions some facts emerge, which will be dealt with in the following. One of the cups is dated 1663 and is directly connected with the King. The fine execution and the precious materials are common to both cups. Unicorn horns were at the time prime collector's items among princely collectors, and were thus just as costly as gold. Both cups show the thematic combination of Eskimos and unicorns.

The first problem to be dealt with is the date of the tankard. Axel Garboe, who published material on the cups in 1915, and gave a useful list of the literature on the subject (Garboe 1915: 39, 109), dated the tankard on stylistic grounds to 1620–30. Eugen v. Philippowich, who mentioned the cups in his book on ivory, dates them both to around 1660 (Philippowich 1982: 119). This is more reasonable, since prior to this time there were no Eskimos in Denmark or anywhere else from which to model figures as naturalistic as these two.[6] Furthermore, it is possible to establish a 'terminus post quem' for the creation of the tankard. It is a well-known fact that four Eskimos were brought back with the Greenland Expedition of 1654. The famous full-length portrait of these four, the man 'Jhiob', and the women 'Gabelou', 'Gunelle', and 'Sigjo', is dated 'Bergen, den 28. september Anno 1654', and is today in the National Museum, but was originally in the 'Kunstkammer'.[7] The connection between this painting, the expedition, and the two cups is obvious. The engraving on the lid of the tankard is a copy of Jhiob and Gunelle in the Bergen painting. They are standing in the same positions, only reversed, as is common with engravings, and the way in which the man is holding his weapons is revealing. Jhiob died *en route* to Copenhagen whereas the three women were sent to the Danish Court, then residing in Flensborg, and later to Gottorp to meet Adam Olearius (Meldgaard 1980: 4). In his account of this event (Olearius 1656; Scheffel 1987), Olearius published an engraving from which the engraving on the tankard is directly copied. Consequently the tankard cannot have been made prior to Olearius's book, which appeared in 1656.

It follows that both cups may be closely contemporary, and since both (and the portrait) are so obviously connected with Frederik III and his 'Kunstkammer', founded in 1652, it seems reasonable to ask whether they were made by the same artist, and, if so, by whom?

As already mentioned, unicorns were considered truely Royal beasts, and their horns were eagerly sought after by most collectors for princely and private 'Kunstkammers'. Few felt inclined to believe Ole Worm when in 1638 he published the finds of the Danish expedition of 1636 to Greenland, namely, a cranium and a tusk, which proved that the unicorn was in fact the Arctic narwhal (Schepelern 1971: 278–279). As we have already seen, unicorns were alive and kicking for many years to come. The Rosenborg collection still holds several unicorn horns and a substantial number of objects made of this material, mostly datable to around 1660: first and foremost, the Royal Anointment Throne from the late 1660s, and also a miniature ship and several cups which can be dated because they were mentioned by their maker, Jacob Jensen Nordmand, in his autobiography (Suhm 1784: 134–158; Liisberg 1893: 245–284). The reason so many objects could be produced for the King at that time is undoubtedly that a large amount of the costly horn was brought back from Greenland by David Dannel. During his return voyage in 1653 he "weighed the unicorn they had obtained, consisting of 8 complete horns, a small young one, all 9 complete to their points and weighing in all 88½ pounds. The longest was 4 Zealand ells, less than a hand's width. Furthermore 6 horns with their points broken off, weighing 65 pounds. All other small pieces and half horns weighed in all 190 pounds, and consequently all they had traded of this article 343 pounds." (Erichsen 1787: 35).

Jacob Jensen Nordmand undoubtedly made use of this hoarded treasure in his work for the King. His career was as unusual as the fact that he, a seventeenth century artisan, wrote an autobiography. He was born in Norway around 1614, joined the Navy, and later

Fig. 5a-d. The Eskimo as thumb-piece on the tankard. Silver gilt.

Fig. 6. The four Eskimos captured in 1654. From Adam Olearius, 1656.

spent three years in Holland becoming a trained gunsmith. The years 1634–39 were spent with Prince Johann Moritz of Nassau in Brazil, and although he does not mention it, he may well have acquired many of his skills at the Prince's Brazilian court. Back in his native country he also learned to stock guns, and eventually, in 1648 he came to Copenhagen to spend the rest of his life in Denmark. He died in 1695. During the 1650s and 1660s he was employed at Rosenborg, at the 'Kunstkammer', and at the Royal Armoury.

Besides being, so to speak, a professional supplier of 'Kunstkammer' objects, he also taught three generations of the Royal family the noble art of ivory turning.

Among the many objects he describes, made of many different materials, he mentions a cup, which, he says, was made in the year 1662. The text, which for reasons of interpretation must first be given in the original, runs as follows: "Den 28. Octob: giorde jeg hans Mayest: et runt beger af Enhjørning, paa 2 potter af 28 stycher med bund og laag paa, ethuert styche bleff med guld infattet oc saa siden henskichet till Guld=Smiden, huilchen skulle det indhefte." (Suhm 1784: 154). In translation: On the 28th October I made for his Majesty a round beaker of unicorn, holding 2 pots, consisting of 28 pieces with base and cover, each piece mounted in gold and then sent to the goldsmith, who was to *'indhefte'* it. As will be discussed below, the word 'indhefte' creates difficulties as to whether Nordmand made the figure or not.

The cup described, with a cover made of 28 pieces of narwhal tusk mounted in gold, does, however, makes the identification a strong possibility. No other preserved cup fits the description. The contents of two pots is acceptably close to the two litres the cup actually holds. The year 1663, with which the cup is dated, as opposed to Nordmand's date of October 1662, can be explained by his simply having forgotten the precise year.

What is more mystifying, however, is the fact that he does not mention the cup's most important feature, namely the Eskimo. And why doesn't Nordmand, who never hid his light under a bushel, boast of the exquisite enamelling of the figure or of the gold bands? No other works of his show enamelling, and he does not once refer to his having acquired this very specialized skill.

How, then, is the last sentence in his description to be interpreted? Why does he send the cup to the goldsmith to be *'indheftet'*, and what is the meaning of the word? What immediately comes to mind is merely the assembling of the prefabricated elements. But if this is the case, it is hard to understand why he did not do it himself, or why he found it necessary to mention it at all. The Dictionary of the Danish Language explains the word as either 'to fasten' or 'to sew'. The Dictionary of Older Danish interprets it as to fasten, ironically quoting only Jacob Jensen Nordmand for this interpretation. Dictionaries of Norwegian, modern or older, have the same denotation. Modern philologists have no alternative explanation, and modern goldsmiths have no recollection of any other version within their craft.[8)]

This leaves the case open to speculation. It seems fairly certain that Jacob Jensen actually made the cup and its fittings. Strictly speaking, the text "each piece mounted in gold" does not necessarily include more

than the gold tongues. If this is the case, then the unknown goldsmith made the bands and the figure with their enamelling; the word *'indhefte'* then standing for far more than it suggests. This would make the reference to the goldsmith more understandable, and at the same time account for the difference in dates.

The next question is whether it was a Copenhagen or a Hamburg goldsmith that did the finishing work on the cup. An entry in the autobiography, undated, but after 1657, when Nordmand was given command of the armoury, informs us that he went to Hamburg for the King to have "cups of unicorn, of rhinoceros, and of other rare materials mounted (*'indfattet'*) in gold by the goldsmiths." (Suhm 1784: 156). This, of course, makes Hamburg a possibility, but not a very convincing one. The figure is so naturalistic and so accurate in the rendering of detail that the artist must have had direct access to the costume and the weapons. And this was only possible in Copenhagen.

As mentioned above, the man Jhiob died before reaching Denmark, but the three women lived on in Copenhagen at least until around 1660 (Meldgaard 1980: 4). Although the three women, according to Adam Olearius (Olearius 1656), were given European dress upon their arrival in Flensburg, there is every reason to believe that on occasions they were made to wear their native costume. This may be the reason why the artist, who made the figure of the Eskimo for the cup, made the mistake of dressing a male Greenlander in female costume. The same mistake occurs in the case of the Eskimo on the tankard. This is all the more strange since the artist would have been better informed if he had only read the very page from which he took his model for the engraving on the lid of the tankard. Olearius writes that "the hood of the men sits flat on top of the head while that of the women extends almost half an ell above the head because of their hair arrangement. The female coat has a long point hanging from it in front and at the back, extending all the way to the knees, something the men do not have. The trousers reach to the knees, some even further below; those of the women end above the knees, barely covering the buttocks. They are entirely naked between the rim of the trousers and the upper edge of the boots, a distance of about the width of one hand." (Scheffel 1987: 708). This mistake seems to link the two cups closely together. No evidence, however, can be obtained as to who made the tankard. Jacob Jensen does not mention anything identifiably similar, but it is possible that he created both cups for the King. The similarity in conception, in construction, in execution, and in date makes this attribution defensible.

It seems hard to understand today what unites such heterogeneous themes as Eskimo, Unicorn, Drinking Vessel, Cabinet of Curiosities, and King. The first two themes are related through the rediscovery of Greenland in the late 16th and the early 17th centuries. Before this, unicorns were legendary and mythical creatures, believed to be horse-like animals with a one-horned forehead, living in remote parts of the earth. They were fierce and wild, and according to medieval legend, could only be tamed by pure virgins, in whose laps they would quietly lie down, horn and all. Tales of how they looked and where they lived were varied and numerous, going back to classical authors, and they were even mentioned, it was believed, in the Bible. Tangible evidence - apart from the beast's horn - had never been found. In the 16th century, rumours that marine unicorns lived in the Arctic oceans began to penetrate Europe's learned circles. As one among several, Olaus Magnus mentioned this fact as early as 1555 (Magnus 1555:743-44). On his second voyage in 1577 Martin Frobisher found the carcass of a 'fish', which he had described and depicted, and whose tusk he brought back as a present to his Queen. "This horne", he wrote, "is to be seene and reserved as a Jewel, by the Queens maiesties commaundement, in hir Wardrop of Robes." (Stefansson 1938). This is the first official entry of the Marine Unicorn into Royal circles.

Among Danish scientists the unicorn was a much debated topic. In 1628 Caspar Bartholin published his book 'De Unicornu'. It is illustrative of the state of the debate that he found it necessary to defend the existence of the old unicorn. "He who denies this", he wrote, "shows ignorance of classical authors and of the Holy Book. As long as there are unknown regions of the world, there is hope of finding a complete unicorn." As a matter of interests, this conviction can be found as late as 1862 in a paper by an English traveller (W. B. Baikie 1862).

Ole Worm was the first to carry out serious scientific research on material evidence. In 1636 the Greenland expedition had brought back not only tusks, but also a cranium of the narwhal. In a reminiscing letter to Isaac de la Peyrère, dated 12th April 1645, Worm recalls the situation (Schepelern 1968: 99). During a visit to the Chancellor Niels Friis, Worm had reproached the travellers to Greenland for only bringing back the horns, never any other part of the animal, so that the old question could finally be solved. Friis told Worm to be patient and then showed him not only a horn, but also a cranium with a piece of the same horn still in its place. Worm was overjoyed. He saw at once that the skull was that of a whale, and that the 'horn' was indeed a tusk growing from the left side of the upper jaw. He was given permission to borrow it in order to study it more closely. He called friends and students to his house, had the skull measured and drawn, and in 1638 he published his results (Worm 1638). In the debate which followed, he always maintained one fact, which shows his good common sense. In his experience, he said, horns always grow from the exterior of the skull, never, as in this case from a hollow in the cranium. He did not deny the existence of the old unicorn, but could only say that what he had seen, or heard of from travelling students and learned colleagues, were tusks – of the narwhal.

This is the background for the two themes: Greenlanders and Unicorns. The two cups can be seen as minor monuments to newly-acquired knowledge in an age when the world was being discovered by courageous travellers and clear-minded scholars.

The Drinking Vessel theme springs from a different notion, which is meaningless today, but which at that time was an established fact. Unicorn's horn was believed to have a purifying effect on poisoned liquids. Ground horn, or just a small piece of horn attached to the inside of a cup, was considered effective, if one was unable to afford a cup made entirely from the precious material.

In 1636, when Worm had first seen the narwhal, he took part in an experiment in which pigeons and kittens were given poisoned food, with and without powder from the tusk. The result, wrote Worm, was not entirely unsatisfactory. Faint praise, admittedly, but enough for him to remain positive towards the powers of the tusk. Later, in Schleswig, Olearius experimented with two dogs, which were given corrosive sublimate, one of them with an addition of ground tusk dissolved in milk. One dog died at once, the other to his delight survived until later in the night. What Olearius did not – and could not – know was that milk is an effective antidote to corrosive sublimate.

Jacob Jensen Nordmand made quite a number of drinking vessels, still at Rosenborg, for Frederik III. He also made a still-existing miniature model of a boat. In the stern, he informs us, was a piece of iron, so that with the help of a magnet the King could sail it in his wine-cups. This sounds like a perfect toy for people of a playful disposition; but, although Nordmand does not mention it, it was a far more serious business: a protection against being poisoned.

In consequence it can be said that the connection between unicorn/narwhal and drink was quite natural at the time. Rhinoceros horn was known to hold similar powers, and was thus also made into drinking vessels. This even goes for serpentine stone. The Swedish general Wrangel, for example, had a complete set of dining utensils in serpentine, intended for use on his military campaigns. Few of these objects, however, show traces of having been put to practical everyday use. It seems much more probable that they were normally kept in cupboards to be taken out only on special occasions, during visits by foreign potentates perhaps, to give prestige to the owner. Rather they were considered precious and rare man-made 'artificialia', filled with the wonders of nature. As such they were true 'Kunstkammer' objects, fit for a King.

Cabinets of Curiosities must not be seen as the mere haphazard accumulations of objects that modern rationalists would have us believe. According to their time-bound rules, they had rational as well as educational value. Each item was meant to make the visitor – prince or scholar – ponder the marvels of a surrounding world. Each 'Kunstkammer' was a universe in miniature, meant to illustrate Man's skill and Nature's boundless wonder. A mirror, in short, reflecting God the Almighty. Thus, the larger and more varied a 'Kunstkammer' collection was, the more it glorified the King who owned it.

Seen from this point of view, the two Eskimo cups were ingenious 'Kunstkammer' objects. Not just ethnographical pieces to be placed in the 'Indian Cabinet', not just pieces of raw material to be placed in the 'Cabinet of Naturalia', nor even just precious man-made objects to be placed in the 'Cabinet of Artificialia', but all of these at once – a miniature world in their own right. And in addition to this, they pay homage to a King who was Sovereign of a people in such distant regions as Greenland.

Finally, one feature requires comment. This is the three unicorns which form the feet of the tankard.

When Greenland is so much emphasized in the cup, and when Ole Worm's scholarly results were well-known facts by the 1660s, why place the mythical beast there rather than the marine unicorn?

Mere conservatism is, of course, a possible explanation. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the Danish King had very definite economic and political interests in keeping the old unicorn alive. All three expeditions to Greenland during the reign of Christian IV and Frederik III brought back unicorn horns. If trade with Greenland became permanent, the King

Fig. 7. Central piece on the lid of the tankard. Silver gilt. Originally copied from Olearius.

would find himself in the position of being sole supplier of a costly raw material to the courts of Europe, equivalent, for instance, to Saxony's serpentine stone and Pommerania's amber. And politically, horns could serve as ambassadorial gifts of such splendour that they might pave the road to success. Thus Worm's insisting that the horn was a narwhal's tusk cannot have met with approval at court. No wonder that Christian IV's son-in-law Corfitz Ulfeldt severely criticized Worm.[9] In 1647 Ulfeldt went on a diplomatic mission to France and succesfully negotiated a treaty. He brought with him as his main gift a unicorn's horn, which, he insisted, was the major reason for the favourable reception the French gave him. As we have seen, Frederik III did his best to maintain the unicorn in its former position, but he was fighting a losing battle. Seen in this light, the presence of two Eskimos on the cups are a concession to the progress of science, and the unicorns a perpetuation of the myth.

Thus the two Eskimos were not placed on the cups as mere artistic flights of fancy. They were an important part of both cups' calculated iconography. [10]

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Notes

1. Rosenborg, Mus. No. 5–320.
2. The 1696 inventory, p. 56, No. 16. This inventory only exists in an incomplete version, published in Copenhagen in 1775.
3. These inventories, as yet unpublished, are kept at Rosenborg.
4. Rosenborg, Mus. No. 7–55.
5. Rosenborg, Mus. No. 7–57. The 1696 inventory (p. 57, No. 20) describes the tankard as follows: 'A Unicorn's Jug mounted in Silver, gilt, on the Lid a Plate with two Greenlanders, it stands on two (sic!) Unicorns, and on the Handle stands (sic!) a Greenlander with the same Fish.'
6. Stylistically, the tankard cannot be dated to 1605, when Goske Lindenov brought back Eskimos from his expedition (Gad 1967: 266).
7. It should be mentioned that at least two further paintings existed in the 17th century. They are listed among Carl Gustav Wrangel's paintings as '3 Grönländische Persohn' (No. 281) and '4 Grönländer' (No. 317). It seems reasonable to suggest that Wrangel brought them back to his manor Skokloster in 1659 after his looting of Danish castles in the Swedish-Danish war. They are no longer at Skokloster, and – if they still exist – there is no knowledge of their present whereabouts. I am indebted to mag. art. Charlotte Christensen for this information, deriving from Povl Eller's notes on the Skokloster paintings (Det Nationalhistoriske Museum, Frederiksborg Castle).
8. I am indebted to Professor S. Hjorth, Copenhagen University and the firm Kgl. Hofjuveler A. Michelsen for help in this matter.
9. The discussion between Ulfeldt and Worm is mentioned in the correspondence between Worm and de la Peyrére from 1645 (Schepelern 1968).
10. The enamelled Eskimo's downward-pointing finger is an iconographical feature which I can only mention in passing because I have found no interpretation of it. It appeared after restoration in the Bergen painting, and it can be seen in some of the copies, including that of Olearius. It is also to be found in other contemporary paintings. A possibility is that it was meant to represent the heathen pointing towards hell as the future home for his unbaptized soul.

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