Gustaf Banér and Christina Sture’s Drinking Cup from 1589

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In 2015 the Nationalmuseum acquired a large drinking cup made from spruce root, with two tall handles joined at the top and crowned with rich fretwork decoration (Fig. 1). On account of this decoration, vessels of this type are known as kronkäser, literally “crown cups”.

The kronkåsa is a characteristic display piece of Renaissance Sweden. Providing a festive highlight on the dinner table, these magnificent drinking cups were probably used on special occasions such as baptisms, weddings and funerals, when it was considered important to accentuate the history and significance of the family. They were preserved from generation to generation, as relics and evidence of a long family history. That great care was taken of these relatively fragile vessels, and that they were used time and again, is made clear by inscriptions that testify to their being renovated.

The red colour is typical of the period, predominating from the end of the 15th to the beginning of the 17th century. Wooden vessels of various sizes, such as jugs, tankards, beakers, bowls and drinking cups, were coloured entirely red, which

![Gustaf Banér and Christina Sture’s Drinking Cup from 1589](image)

**Fig. 1 Kronkåsa (festive drinking cup), Sweden, 1589.**

Carved wood, painted, H. 71 cm.

Purchase: Sara and Johan Emil Graumann Fund.

Nationalmuseum, NMK 6/2015.
could then be accented with other colours. The *kronkåsa* now acquired by the Nationalmuseum, however, is red with no supplementary colours. The body is decorated with the conjoined shields of the Banér and the Stures – two of Sweden’s oldest and most important noble families. Also inscribed on it are the letters “GB” and “CS”, and the year “1589”. The decoration appears on both sides (Fig. 2).

It was in the 16th century that the wood carver’s art experienced its real breakthrough in Sweden, and that the names of skilled carvers first appeared in written sources. The newly acquired cup has a somewhat archaic shape for one dated 1589, its distinctly Gothic character presumably reflecting a concern to maintain traditions. Writing in 1964, Sven T. Kjellberg, curator at Kulturen in Lund, identified late medieval winged altarpieces imported to Swedish churches from northern Europe as a likely source of inspiration. The openwork decoration of the altarpieces, with their arches, pinnacles and tracery, could have prompted the highly ornate crowns of these drinking cups.

Some twenty *kronkåsar* have been preserved, most of which belonged to a small circle with close ties of kinship. The majority of them date from the 16th century, when the Bielke family played a key role in the making of new cups of this kind. Two of the oldest surviving examples, dated to around 1540, belonged to this family, one of them to Nils Pedersson Bielke (1502–1550), a senior court official, and Anna Hogenskild (1513–1590), who were married in 1537.

Anna Hogenskild is an important link in the history of these festive drinking vessels. Her mother, Anna Hansdotter Tott (1478–1549), owned the family estate of Nynäs in Lemo parish, which she oversaw for 50 years. Nynäs, one of the more significant estates of the period, was in the eastern part of the Swedish realm (which at that time also included modern-day...
Finland), in an area north of Åbo (Turku) known in the 16th century as “Vakka Finland”, vakka being a reference to the wooden vessels for which the region was famous. The very first map of Scandinavia – the Catholic priest Olaus Magnus’s Carta Marina from 1539 – includes a depiction of a kronkåsa in precisely this area (Figs. 3–4). The inventory of Anna Hansdotter Tott’s estate, from 1549, records five unpainted drinking cups. Her daughter Anna Hogenskild inherited Nynäshamn from her the same year. Up to the time of her death in 1590, she in turn had several cups made, giving them to close relatives.

In his work Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus (History of the Northern Peoples), published in Rome in 1555, Olaus Magnus (1490–1557) writes that kronkåsar come from Finland, providing his text with two woodcut illustrations of them (Figs. 5–6). In one, we see a group of aristocratic gentlemen seated at a table, each drinking from a cup of this kind. The vessels described and depicted are probably ones that Olaus Magnus saw with his own eyes, but they differ in various details from the cups now preserved, all of which were made after he had left Sweden in 1524, at the start of the Reformation.
Olaus Magnus goes on:

_The cups above, with their branched handles, are products of the fine craftsmanship of the Finlanders of the North and, as noted, are called kåsor. Nature and art work together to give them beautiful and decorative forms. They are, you see, made from the finest spruce roots, which are embellished, hollowed out and decorated on the outside with a host of carved figures, and even adorned with artistically wrought golden mounts or other colourful ornaments. They therefore have a captivating beauty, and thus command a high price._

The 17th century’s interest in Swedish history also extended to these drinking vessels, which were considered evidence of a high culture long established in the country. In the same spirit, Olof Rudbeck the Elder (1630–1702) wrote his _Atlantica_ in 1677, in which he “proved” that Sweden was the sunken Atlantis, the cradle of all the world’s culture and knowledge. When a National Office of Antiquities was set up in 1630 (now the Swedish National Heritage Board), Sweden was the first country with legislation to protect its cultural heritage. It was enacted primarily to highlight the glorious history of what at that point was a new major power of Europe. Terms of reference were drawn up for the Office, setting out what “old monuments” – i.e. ancient remains recalling the great history of Sweden – needed to be recorded. They called for inventories to be made of rune stones, ruins, coins, books and archives, but the work undertaken also extended to clothes, weapons and drinking cups. Kåsor were considered antiquities of great importance to the realm, and something that set it apart from other nations.

Anna Hogenskild’s son Baron Hogenskild Bielke (1538–1605), a Councillor of the Realm, helped to keep the tradition of these wooden drinking cups alive. The Nordic Museum in Stockholm has in its collections a cup belonging to him and his wife Anna Sture. Around 1590, Bielke ordered kron-kåsor from his bailiff on the Nynäs estate, and at intervals a total of 46 red-painted cups were delivered. It was Hogenskild Bielke who, in 1589, gave the cup now acquired by the Nationalmuseum to his relatives, Gustaf Banér (1547–1600), Councillor of the Realm, and Christina Sture (1559–1619). The couple married in 1581 and had 14 children. As well as being rela-

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Fig. 5 Olaus Magnus (1490–1557). _Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus_, 1555.
eastern part of the kingdom. The German Johan Beckman, in an account of his travels, records a visit in 1765 to the collection of antiquities at the Royal Palace in Stockholm. His account mentions a magnificent drinking cup of this kind – probably one of Gustav Vasa’s that had survived into the 18th century.

During the National Romantic period towards the end of the 19th century, with its predilection for looking back in history, painted kronkäser once again began to be made, though no longer from spruce roots. From 1885 to 1898, it was possible to buy furniture, textiles and carved wooden objects from the firm of Svensk Konstslöjdställning in Stockholm, founded by the designer Selma Giöbel (1843–1925). The Swedish Society of Crafts and Design festation of nationalism, but they also offered an alternative to the costly silver cups produced on the continent. Records of kronkäser survive from several palaces and royal manors. Inventories from the storehouse at Gripsholm Castle include details of numbers: in 1546, for example, there were 8 painted cups, and in 1553, 23. A note was also made of when such a vessel was broken, as in 1551, when the nobleman Per Brahe hit a farmhand over the head with a painted cup, breaking it in the process; how the farmhand fared, we are not told. Nils Pedersson Bielke was responsible for purchasing for Gustav Vasa’s household. As noted, he was married to Anna Hogenskild, and it would therefore no doubt have been natural for him to order kronkäser for the royal household from theBielke family, drinking cups served as a token of family solidarity. Through them, the family wished both to maintain medieval drinking customs and to underscore their own long history. Knowledge about one’s origins was important, and among the Bielkes those origins were symbolised by a clearly defined design.

At court, too, magnificent kronkäser occurred throughout the 16th century, although they all seem to have been commissioned during the reign of Gustav Vasa (1523–1560). This was probably a manifestation of nationalism, but they also offered an alternative to the costly silver cups produced on the continent. Records of kronkäser survive from several palaces and royal manors. Inventories from the storehouse at Gripsholm Castle include details of numbers: in 1546, for example, there were 8 painted cups, and in 1553, 23. A note was also made of when such a vessel was broken, as in 1551, when the nobleman Per Brahe hit a farmhand over the head with a painted cup, breaking it in the process; how the farmhand fared, we are not told. Nils Pedersson Bielke was responsible for purchasing for Gustav Vasa’s household. As noted, he was married to Anna Hogenskild, and it would therefore no doubt have been natural for him to order kronkäser for the royal household from the eastern part of the kingdom. The German Johan Beckman, in an account of his travels, records a visit in 1765 to the collection of antiquities at the Royal Palace in Stockholm. His account mentions a magnificent drinking cup of this kind – probably one of Gustav Vasa’s that had survived into the 18th century.10

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Fig. 6 Olaus Magnus (1490–1557), Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus, 1555.
(Svenska Slöjdföreningen, now Svensk Form) often turned to the firm to buy prizes for its regular raffles.\textsuperscript{11} In the Nordic Museum there is a festive drinking cup made by Svensk Konstslöjdutställning in the 1880s or 1890s, with painted floral decoration, pokerwork ornament and a fretwork crown\textsuperscript{12} – tangible evidence of a strong interest in history and dreams of a glorious past.

Notes:
\textsuperscript{1} Sven T. Kjellberg, \textit{Ölets kärl}, Lund 1964, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., p. 133.
\textsuperscript{4} Kjellberg 1964, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{5} Cleve 1965, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{6} Kjellberg 1964, p. 115.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., p. 116.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., p. 138.
\textsuperscript{9} Cleve 1965, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., p. 36.
\textsuperscript{12} The Nordic Museum, Stockholm, inv. no. NM 254304.