

Toys & „Kruselerpuppen“ in the Middle Ages

Only few facts are known about the life and the games of the children in the Middle Ages until now. Many toys haven't survived the time, some clay and wooden figures still have, however, been received up to today's time. Already around 1300 the Saint Elisabeth made presents for foundlings in a hospital founded by her:

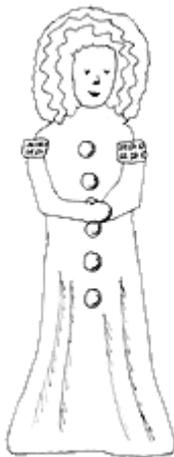
"Aller hande kinderspil,
kruseln, fingerline vil,
di gemachet werden
von glase unde ouch zu erden
unde ander cleinode gnuoc".

"kruseln" are "Kruselerpuppen" - dolls with a special kind of veil, the Kruseler; "fingerline" are small glass rings. (Q:6)

Kruselerpuppen

Clay dolls had mainly two functions: Toys for the girls (as a counterpart to the toy-knights for the boys) as well as representations of Saints. Dolls consisted of wood or clay. For sure there also were dolls of fabric or leather, stuffed with wool or moss, these, however, are for certain already rotten and no longer provable today.

The "Kruselerpüppchen" as a special form of dolls appear increasingly from the second half of the 14th century on. They were also called "Pfeifentöppchen", pipe clay dolls. Their zenith is the 14th and 15th century (1300-1500).

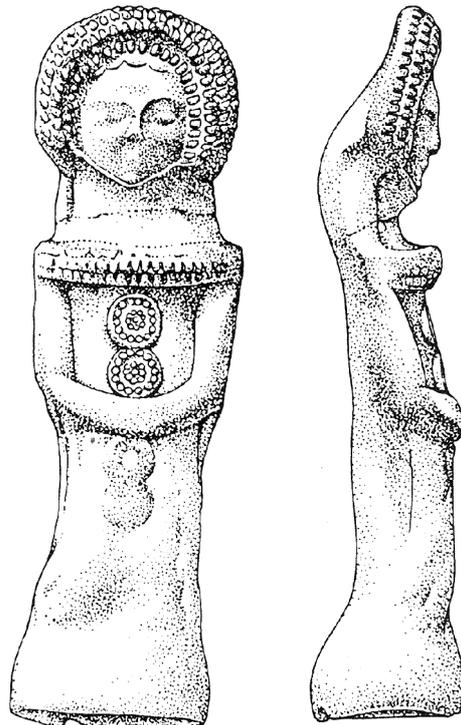


The dolls were dressed after the newest fashion of noble ladies in long, buttoned dresses, their hands folded before their body and on their head a "Kruseler", a head gear consisting of several veils over each other, whose starched, fine crimped seams appeared as quillings. This kind of headgear was modern in Germany from the middle of the 14th to the beginning of the 15th century (1350-1400).

The "Kruselerpuppe" displayed the life of an adult woman at that time. Girls could play "noble lady" with it. (Q:6)

Troves, for example from Burg Wildenstein, Augsburg and Nuremberg, make possible a reconstruction of the original appearance.

(fig.: schemes of Kruselerpuppen)





(fig. left: copy of a doll from Steinfeld / Stadelhofen, height ca. 5.7 cm, from the 16th century)



(fig. right: replica of a late medieval clay doll (original arguably from the first half of the 15th century). Woman standing in a rich pleated cloak, which she is holding together before her body with both hands, as well as with a broadly based cap (actually no Kruseler), which is gebunden with a kerchief around the chin.

Production

Mostly the clay figures were produced by the "Bilderbäcker" (figure bakers), who were making figures of saints and votive items otherwise. While you were making the toys and saints reproductions by hand in the 12th and 13th century, in the 14th century it was started a mass-production of those figures with the help of models. This commodity was found mainly during excavations in the southern german regions, but also sporadic in northern germany and even in finland and hungaria. Workshops of the "Bilderbäcker" could be archeologically evidenced so far in Utrecht, Cologne and Worms.

A production can also be assumed in Nuremberg, because in the area around the city disproportional many "Kruselerpüppchen" were found. (Q:2)

After you pressed the light pipe clay mass in the onesided form (the so called "model") made of wood or clay, the body of the doll was widened from the bottom up with a conic wooden or metal stick. At the head of the doll this stick was occasionally still up to 5 mm thick. Then the bottom of the body was finger-formed to a foot. On the bottom of one of the found figures corresponding dabs are still to identify.

While the back of the dolls was flat most of the times, on many figures the back part was covered with another clay roll, which was oppressed then. With the use of stamping with a comb like tool it was tried to carry on the gathered seam of the Riseler from the front to the back side. The head has been pressed forward at all of the figures. Partly the figur was formed also in a two-parted "model" and burned then.

(fig.: Klapperdocke/Kruselerfigur, Nuremberg, around 1351/1500)



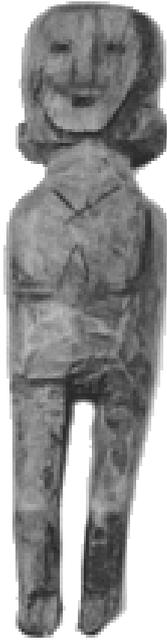
(fig.: "Kruseler Püppchen" from the 14th/15th century,
Burg Endsee, near Ansbach (in the picture on the right))



Depictions of Saints

Certain "Kruselerpüppchen" with less details and additional attributes like crowns are more to see in a religious context. They could represent St. Mary as well as other Saints, like St. Elisabeth for example. Dr. Stefan Gerlach from the BlfD Wuerzburg says, "that many figures unequivocally represent a Madonna or a Saint (of course in contemporary garb); as can be proved they were also mass-produced in places of pilgrimage, like hermitages, as devotionals, exported or brought back of pilgrims. You can suppose a function of those figures in home altars and at religious ceremonies very well. For example for the 16th century are also known children games after religious motifs." For example on the left figur of the above picture, which is less detailed as the toy figures, you can see an oval, shield-like area, into which presumably a silver- or gold coin was glued with wax back then. This was a possibility to gift a newborn or a bridal couple with money in a fitting manner. No written records are known about this, though. It could also be possible, that in the oval area pictures of Saints were glued, reliefs made of papermaché, relics or pilgrim badges; that they were religious devotionals or pilgrim souvenirs. (Q:2)

wooden figures and "Klapperdocken" (rattling dolls)



More rare finds are dolls made of wood, so called Docken, which were made by the "Dockenmacher". The word Dokken or Tocken means "wooden block". In the middle ages all kinds of dolls were called "Docke/n". Still today in Nuremberg you can find the "Dock'n Gäßla", a small street in which back then supposedly toys were sold. Since the beginning of the 15th century in Nuremberg is the profession of the "wooden doll maker" on record. (fig. above left: wooden doll from Luebeck, around 1300) (fig. above right: doll from Thüringen, around 1530, lime-wood, carved and framed, height 21 cm, Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nuremberg)



Wooden dolls are found in the excavations from the 14th century on. They were dress-up dolls, therefore mostly only the head was fully sculpted. In Schwerin (Mecklenburg) it was even found the carved and with two holes for the fingers endowed head of a hand doll from the 14th century. Wooden toy-horses are yet known from the early-medieval North-Europe, for example from St. Petersburg (8th/9th cent.) or Trondheim/Norwegen (around 1100). In Nowgorod there were found horses with wooden wheels. At the end of the 14th century dolls with wax heads came from Italy to Europe. (Q:6)

(fig. below left: wooden doll around 1580, Hessisches Puppenmuseum)



Another typical baby toy were rattles made of clay. There were such in form of animals (birds or horses), of dolls, but also simple round ones with a handle. Besides their function as toy rattles had another meaning, too, they were said to convey protective magic. (Q:6)

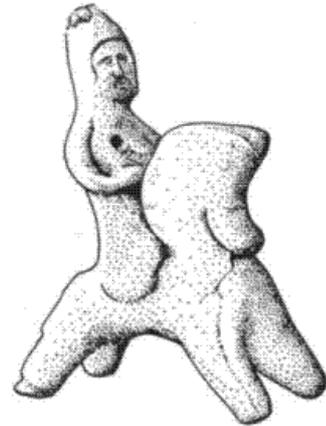
(fig. right: Klapperdocke from France, around 1101/1200, red-brown clay, conical and hollow, filled with grains (or sth. similar) to clatter. Female figur with veil-like headgear, lifted arms and hands folded before the belly.)



Horses



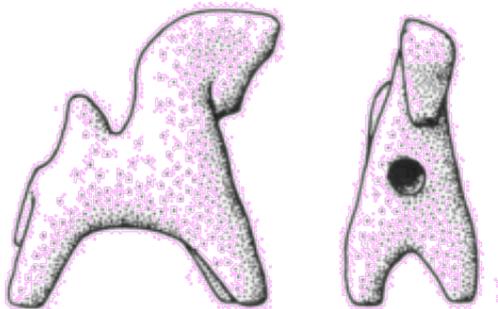
Small figures made of clay were very popular with small children. They appear at excavations in towns or potteries since the 13th century. The "Bilderbäcker" produced not only dolls, but also and mainly animals, mythical beasts, knights or even helmets. But especially popular were small horses.



Some with a rider, often with shield and helmet, which distinguishes them as tournament horses. (Q:6)

(fig. left: toy horse from Minden, original height 5 cm)

(fig. right: clay horse with rider from Sonnenburg, Tirol)



Sometimes appear draft horses with a horizontal hole. The horses were shaped freely by hand and all do have a hole in their breast. It is assumed, that the hole was there for the attachment of a wooden stick as a grip.

(fig. left: horse from Linz, Oberösterreich, 2 views)



At the back end of the horse back of the hand made toy horse from the Turmberg is a hint of a saddle area. A small hole on the bottom proves, that the figur was presumably moved during the play (in a tournament or battle) with the help of a stick. Surely also a rider belonged to the horse. (fig. right: glazed clay horse from the Turmberg near Kasendorf, ca. 1220, height: 4,65 cm, length: 3,3 cm)



(fig. left: horse with wheels, wood, around 500, Hessisches Puppenmuseum)

puppet theatre

Surely not only girls played with clay figures. The puppet shows, in Swedish today still called "docktheater", was an amusement for everyone, young and old. The children presumably imitated tournament and minnesingers with the late medieval rider- and animal figures.

Moving figures were supposedly used since ever for religious and ceremonial celebrations. But the form of theatre with a dramatic plot is a later development. As origin for the hand puppet theatre Persia is supposed, marionettes were yet common in the antique Greece.

Already after the crusades you can find first pictures of toy figures in the western European culture, which must not mean though, that this form of theatre didn't appear occasionally before. So far the earliest depiction of a puppet theatre is from the time around 1160 and can be seen in the "Hortus deliciarum" of the abbess Herrad von Landsberg. The next picture after that is to be seen only in a vignette in the Alexanderlied around 1344; you can see a so called Possenburg, a puppet show with spectators. Both manuscripts don't refer to the theatre form in their text, because presumably it was commonly known in the mean time, but still insignificant. (Q:5)

(fig.: coloured illustration from the 'Hortus Deliciarum' (adults are playing before the throne of Salomo with knight marionettes))



Sources & further reading:

(Q:1) <http://www.landschaftsmuseum.de/seiten/lexikon/Spiele-Puppen-2.htm>

(Q:2) <http://www.landschaftsmuseum.de/seiten/lexikon/Spiele-Puppen.htm>

(Q:3) <http://www.hohengundelfingen.de/images/kruselerpuppen.jpg> -> Maße!

(Q:4) <http://www.landschaftsmuseum.de/Seiten/Lexikon/Spiele-2.htm>

(Q:5) <http://www.maren-winter.de/puppen.htm>

(Q:6) <http://www.ausgraeberei.de/spielzeug/index.htm>

(Q:7) <http://www.spielzeugmuseum-nuernberg.de/> (Virtuelles Depot)

(Q:8) <http://www.bildindex.de> (GNM Nürnberg)

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item: clay dolls, Germany 14th century and France 12th century

see pages 3 and 4 for images and further information