



# THE HISTORY OF THE DRINKING CUP *AND THE COFFEE CUP AS WELL*

*A long and a large story*

*By Bernd Rohrmann - - April 2024*



*? Why are drinking-cups essential ?*

*Because they are needed to hold and to consume beverages, since endless times, and thus rated as essential for human existence.*

*? When was it invented ?*

*Very long time ago - ten-thousands of years. Cups have been found in archaeological sites of prehistoric cultures all over the world.*

*At first cups made from wood, then shells, then stones, then ceramics, then glass, and finally metals. Wooden cups did not survive. Here are two examples from truly early times, estimated as from 9000 BC and 4000 BC.*



*According to archaeology concepts, the “upper paleolithic period”*

lasted from about 40,000 years ago to about 8,000 years (or 5,000 years) ago - and the oldest cups - stones, then ceramics, as the two above - found are usually allocated to this time.

Procedures changed immensely in the "bronze age" (3300-1200 BC) when glass creation and metal products eventually became feasible.

Archaeologists have debated for centuries where the drinking cup was invented - and the two crucial candidates always were and still are, the culture in Egypt, and the Mesopotamian cultures.

### ? Why was this essay more demanding than expected ?

Firstly, there are much more general drinking cups than just coffee cups, my original agenda.



And secondly, there are far far more cups than I had expected, culture-wise and purpose-wise and country-wise and any-wise.

That's why I say "a long and a large story" in my title line.

### ? Drinking-cups in historic Egypt times ?

Here is the perhaps "#1" and otherwise "#2" candidate for the invention of impressive cups - and what one can see in countless grave paintings or carvings is indeed overwhelming.





*The cups seem to be ceramics., and they are elegant. Some contain graphic pattern.*

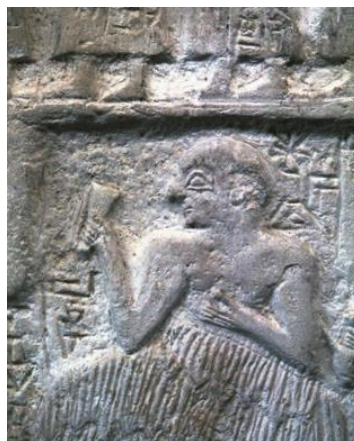


*Amusingly, many of modern cups or mugs in Egypt use colourful scenes from historic graves as their topic.*



### ? Mesopotamia cups ?

*The historic pieces of the other “#1” or “#2” cup seem to show more design and more decoration than the Egypt ones.*





*There are also mugs covered with inscriptions, like this one, dated 1850 BC.*



*The added pictures show animals and even humans. And some bowls, like this piece dated 2500 BC, have an elaborated set of handles.*



*It appears to me that Mesopotamia, especially the realms of Assyria and Babylonia, are the “#1” re complex cups and mugs.*

### *? Drinking-cups during the Roman empire ?*

*About 2000 years later, but it were the Romans who made drinking cups a standard equipment of daily life.*







Some features of the shown cups: Containing a sketch of a famous person, or funny animals, like an octopus.

## ? Drinking-cups - purposes and styles ?

Over time, cups and mugs and carafes and pots became standard tools of every household.



Regarding coffee pots or teapots, most have one handle, but handle-less mugs are also very common (and easier to produce).



Design-wise, they may be plain, usually white - but to give them a graphic feature is a tradition of several thousand years and still very vivid today.







*Beside colourful paintings, especially plants, is a strong tradition to present people! Here you see: Queen Cleopatra and musician Buddy Guy.*



*Also a mighty tradtion: To create very funny and very weird coffee cups!*



Regarding technical facets: Just one example is that plop-on handles are available in any colour and any shape.



By the way - - coffee pots are not only coffee pots, nor are teapots only teapots - - all of them can be both, and have been used as both since a long time.



### ? Drinking-cups in Germany as art pieces ?

It's easy to find lottttts of examples. But I will restrict this issue to the 'metropolis' of high-class cups: "Meissen. Porzellan". It was founded 1710, first European porcelane factory, in Meissen, near Dresden. Is still alive, now owned by the state of Saxony.

Coffee or tea cups are only one of their wide-ranging porcelain art - but they are unmatched. Here are a few:







*This is what only Meissen did at highest level, to give many of their products a golden cover.*

*No wonder that Meissen Porzellan was always expensive, very much so.*



*The last example is very cute, and it is a rare cup with two handles.*

### **? Cups made from glass ?**

*Archaeologists think that kind-of glass was invented in Mesopotamia, as these two pictures show, Assyria-800BC and Babylonia-500BC*



*Egypt followed, and cups from glass became common in the Roman empire.*





*As already stated, in current times any kind of cups and mugs and pots from glass are fully common.*



### *? Cups made from metal ?*

*It seems that creating drinking cups with metal is as long a technology as using glass. The following pic shows a sketch from about 800 BC.*



*These three examples of early cups made with tin are from Old Egypt, Roman Empire and Old China*



*It was only in the 20th century that cups were made from metal, iron or aluminium.*



*A significant development was the 'enamel' technique - now all metal cups can be coloured, and that is nowadays widely used.*



*Any colour is indeed utilized (even pink, but that I hide).*





*Beside colours , text can also be attached, carrying information or a personal note.*



### *? Drinking cups in Japan ?*

*Europeans, including me, are tempted to overlook what Asian countries contribute to the 'art' of cups. Here is one impressive example - Japan.*





Unusually, the image on this drinking cup reflects the climate, winter in this case.

### ? Drinking cups in China ?

Indeed, China has a long-lasting very rich history regarding this as well. Here are five examples.





? Preparing cups or mugs for drinks ?



*These three historic images show that preparing cups or mugs has always been a demanding task.*





Cups and mugs had been around for thousands of years - but to provide hot drinks like tea was only possible once metal pots could be made, mainly for water, to put over fire.



Immense changes occurred when coffee became the main drink, at least in Europe and America.

Not that long ago, in 1908, Amalie Melitta-Bentz invented the paper filter for preparing coffee. This is still in use. There is also version for just one cup.



Later followed the clever “French filtered coffee tool”. Given the immense coffee consumption in central Europe, in Germany then coffee-makers were developed, based on coffee storage and water storage.



The very crucial invention happened in Italy, in 1888, named “Espresso Machine”, based on high-pressure technology.



*Since then about every café or bistro or restaurant has an Italian espresso device. It utilizes a technology not feasible with any other coffee maker. Actually one can also buy a small espresso machine for use at home.*

*For most peoples (certainly me) this is the best coffee you can get, wherever you are.*

**? Have ladies with cups or mugs been shown in art ?**

*Yes, since thousands of years, beginning in classical Egypt. Plus, there are lots of paintings of this as well. Here are six: examples.*







*In world war II it became common to create them with the country's flag, or to put a military message on them.*



*In wars, a carriable water tool was established for a long time, plus a cup. The first army where every soldier had a waterbottle and a drinking-cup was at the Roman Empire.*



*Much much later, since WW 1, high-quality tools which combine bottle and cup are standard in most armies.*

*A special and highly appreciated piece was the "Feldflasche" of the German army in which bottle and cup are linked. The bottle is protected by a soft cover. This type is dominant since about 1930.*



## ? The impact of espresso machines ?

The nature of espresso machines means that the cups used with it must differ - - they are smaller.



There is no lack of “art” cups though!

## ? Some cute contemporary coffee cups ?

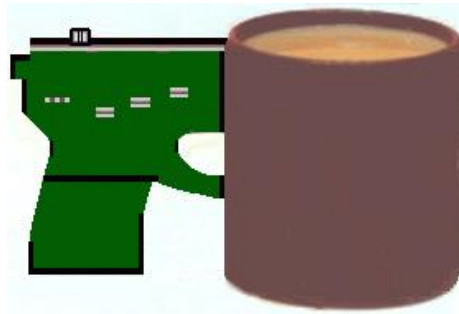
Here are just 6 examples, either cups or mugs, to amuse you!





## ? Drinking cups - how to make them special ?

Easy! Just four examples of rather weird one:s: Extra-large handle, fun face, unusual design, special texts.



## ? Drinking cups in current times ?

To handle this issue is stress! Here is what I see day after day in cafes: Quite a few different cups yet in one facet they are all the same, namely: Made from paper or plastic.





Impossible to avoid them - they do show 'how things are'.

### ? The end of 'classical' drinking cups ?

I assume, actually I fear, that the "classical" drinking cup, in use for about ten-thousand years, and made from stones or ceramics or glass or metal, will die.

In reality, lots of cafes nowadays abandon them. Instead, paper or plastic cups will be everywhere everywhere everywhere. This is sad, given the enormous and multifold craft and art underlying the classical drinking cup.

As core reason are environmental arguments dominating, plus financial ones. Yes, for companies it's cheaper to buy paper cups than real cups.

Furthermore, there is a new culture about having a coffee - not to sit down and enjoying the day, rather, to run around with it. And that's easier, as paper or plastic cups usually have a lid.

This is a core reason for the nearby-dead of the classical cup. The other core factor: 'Contemporary' people have mostly never seen anything else than paper cups.

But - things may change again, the millions, or even billions, of paper cups abandoned after use are ubiquitous. Thus some governments now forbid paper cups!

So - - is the "classical" cup back?

**YES!**



**NO!**



Wow, I think.

Yes indeed, naively I hope, seriously, that the 'real' cups are not yet a cemetery matter, that they will stay alive, above all: to maintain an essential feature of human culture, truly worth it.

### Postscriptum:

I know of a devoted coffee fan who has been this for a very long time - at least six decades!



Yet when the coffee is not ok he actually feels screwed up.

Whatsoever, he is presented at this essay's end - a dedication!

