Material Culture Workshop

# Meet the Artifact:

Object title in catalog: drinking-cup

Material (check all that apply):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Bone  Leather  Fabric  Metal (explain type | Pottery  Glass  Wood  Stone | Other (describe) |
| Silver | | |

# Observe its parts.

Describe it as if you were explaining it to someone who can’t see it. A tall double-walled cup with a small stem. It has a pronounced rim and has a scene embossed on the side. The scene depicts a younger man sitting on an older man’s lap while they relax on a sofa. There is a lyre visible to the right, and a man entering though a door on the left. The reverse side is not visible.

*Think about: shape, color, texture, size, weight, age, condition, movable parts, or anything written or painted on it.*

# Try to make sense of it.

*Answer as best you can.*

Where is it from? It was found in Palestine

When is it from? It was found with coins from Claudius, so it is estimated to be from slightly after Claudius’s term of power, likely close to the turn of the millennium.

Who used it? List the reasons you think so. This is made of solid silver meaning it was likely commissioned by a wealthy household. The commissioner was also likely gay, based on the imagery on the embossing, which would be significantly less culturally widespread than in Greece.

What does this tell you about the people who made and used it? This provides some valuable insight into the sexuality of romans. Homosexuality was more taboo in Rome than in Greece, so the fact that a wealthy man could openly commission a cup like this provides some insight.

What does it tell you about technology at the time it was made? The cup was made really well and can be held up against silverwork today. The artisan was clearly skilled in his craft

What is a similar item from today? Think about not just function but social meaning. I speculate that the primary purpose of the cup was as a social signal rather than a cup. This would make it fit into a similar space as much of the modern LGBTQ merchandise that can be found in all shapes and sizes.