

## ~ The Symbolism of Animals Appearing on German Beer Steins ~



compiled by Walt Vogdes

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German beer steins are rife with symbolism, and animals are a favorite device. They may appear as the primary element of the design, or as a seemingly minor embellishment of another theme; they appear in side scenes, on both inlaid and pewter lids and as thumbblifts; and they are celebrated in many character steins. But what do they mean?

The cat, monkey and herring all have special meaning about drinking (how appropriate to use on a beer stein!). Of course, each of these animals is from time to time depicted in a drunken state. The caterpillar and butterfly are sometimes seen together with a lesson about drinking - "*Wie die Raupe vom Schmetterling, stammt von Affen der Kater*" (As a caterpillar comes from the butterfly, so does the hangover come from drunkenness). The lion, eagle, bear and wren are most often used as symbols of political dominion. The fox, pig and goat have other symbolic meanings. We also find animals poking fun at others, including the gentleman rabbit dressed in hunting clothes and armed with his rifle and game bag.

In addition to the animals listed below, we can find dogs, rabbits, boars, deer, roosters and even aligators, elephants, rhinoceros and bison on steins, but these animals have no special symbolic meaning.

The order of entries in the list below is arbitrary, except that the most common symbols associated with drinking are placed first, and the political symbols are placed last.

Cat  
*Kater*

The German word for cat, *Kater*, is also used for a hangover, and the word may appear in a verse accompanying steins bearing this symbol. For example, "*Hast du Kater nimm den Rath, Trink früh was du trankst spat*" (If you have a hangover take my advice, Drink early what you drank last night).



Monkey  
*Affen*

The expression "to have a monkey on your back" has as much meaning in German as it does in English. Hence the monkey (*Affen*) symbolizes over-indulgence, and is frequently found clinging on the back of the poor fellow who is stumbling home from the *Bierstube*, or lurking in the corner in a tavern scene. ("*Besitzest du solchen Affen, so macht kein Andrer dir zu schaffen.*" - Once you reach this state of drunkenness (monkey on your back) you can't get any drunker.) This monkey is prepared to abolish his hangover with his herring.



Herring  
*Hering*

Herring are supposedly a cure for the ills of a hangover. They frequently appear in combination with other symbols of drinking, especially the cat and the monkey. In the case of this stein, the cat appears as the thumblift, and a radish adorns the top of the herring.



Ram (goat)  
*Bock*

The word *Bock* means goat or ram, hence this animal is a visual reference to spring beer, known as *Bock Bier*. ("Stösst dich der Bock, dann trotze du. Wirft er dich um, dann gute Ruh!" - When the Bock hits you, resist; if it throws you, then have a good rest!) This image is a commercial ad for Spatenbräu Bock.



Frog  
*Frosch*

Frogs are frequently depicted on beer steins, and while they don't have specific symbolic meaning, they do suggest a life immersed in fluid. ("Willst du nicht dem Frosche gleich im Sumpf versinken steige in Gambrinus Reich wo volle humpen winken." - If you don't want to sink into the swamp like a frog, climb into Gambrinus' empire where full steins beckon.)



Fox  
*Fuchs*

As in America, the fox is a symbol of slyness and cunning. In German the word *Fuchs* is also used to refer to first-year university students. The fox may of course be found in hunting themes, but on a student stein it refers to the underclassman. There are also several fox character steins in which the fox wears the hat, coat and sash of a student duelist! Here a Fuchs embraces his beer in student tradition.



Owl  
*Eule*

Symbol of wisdom, scholarliness. Owl character steins sometimes incorporate one single word - *Bibite* - which means to drink (some would say from the fount of knowledge, others would say that is far too stringent an interpretation!). The owl is often featured as the thumblift on steins which extol learning or wisdom.



Pig  
*Schwein*

Frequently seen on bowling steins, the pig is a symbol of good luck. ("Vie Schwein viel Glück!" - Plenty of pig, plenty of luck!)



Eagle  
*Adler*

The spread-winged eagle is a symbol of Prussia as well as the German Empire. It is often found as a thumblift on regimental steins, or as the primary decorative element in any patriotic stein.



Lion  
*Löwe*

In its most prevalent use the lion is a direct reference to the German state of Bavaria. It is also used as the trademark of Löwenbräu (Lion brewery) beer, and will occasionally appear as a state symbol of Switzerland. On steins where the main scene portrays the city of Munich, the Bavarian lion is frequently incorporated into the pewter lid or thumblift.



Bear  
*Bär*

A symbol of strength, the bear is also the symbol for the city of Berlin.



Wren (sparrow)  
*Spätze*

The *Spätze*, the wren or sparrow, is the symbol of the city of Ulm. It commonly appears as part of the decoration or as the thumblift on regimental steins for units which were garrisoned in that city.

