

# Stone

Stone vessels, usually manufactured of malleable limestone, were commonly found in the Jerusalem area in the late Second Temple period. There are abundant examples in Qumran, in a variety of shapes and sizes, which demonstrate expert workmanship.

The reason for the use of some of these vessels can be found in Jewish ritual law (halakhah). Stone, in contrast to pottery, does not become ritually unclean (tamei). Jewish law maintains that pottery vessels which have become ritually unclean must be broken, never to be used again, whereas in similar circumstances stone vessels retain their ritual purity and need not be discarded (Mishnah. Kelim 10:11; Parah 3:2).

Widespread use of these stone vessels is particularly evident because of their discovery in the excavations of the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem. Some of these vessels served the same functions as ceramic vessels, and some had particular shapes and functions. Although the raw material is common in Jerusalem, the cost of production was, no doubt, far greater than that of pottery. The flourishing manufacture of stone vessels came to an end in the wake of the destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.).

- [Measuring Cups](#)



Limestone. First century C.E.

KhQ 1036, KhQ 1604

Cup (A): height 7.5 cm (3 in.)  
diameter 8 cm (3 1/8 in.)

Cup (B): height 12.8 cm (5 in.)  
diameter 19.4 cm (7 1/2 in.)

Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority (38,39)

Cylindrical cups of this type are frequently found in sites of the Second Temple Period. It is believed that their capacities correspond to the dry and liquid measures mentioned in the Mishnah, a collection of rabbinic laws governing all aspects of Jewish life.

The surfaces of these vessels were pared with a knife or adze, and their surface was left un-smoothed. The vertical handles rule out the possibility that they might have been produced on a rotating lathe.

- [Large Goblet](#)



Limestone. First century C.E.

Height 72 cm (28 1/4 in.)

Diameter 38.5 cm (15 1/8 in.)

Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority (37)

This large goblet-shaped vessel was produced on a lathe, probably in Jerusalem, and is extremely well crafted. It is surprising that an ancient lathe was capable of supporting and working such a large and heavy stone block. The vessel may shed light on the shape of the "kallal," mentioned in the Talmudic sources as a vessel for holding the purification ashes of the red heifer (Mishnah Parah 3:3).

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- [More artifacts from the Qumran Community](#)