

# Steinologists' guide to old German print and script

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Beer stein enthusiasts are mostly attracted to this hobby by the sheer aesthetic beauty of the old steins. However, there is considerable historical and even practical information lurking in the German words inscribed on many steins. If only one could properly transcribe them, then a dictionary might yield the final interpretation or at least the accurate transcription might be sent to someone else for translation or used in an article or advertisement.

It is even conceivable that some SCI member will eventually act as a collector and organizer of all information found on

original regimental steins. This tremendous task would require absolutely accurate transcription (but not interpretation) of all the German words including the roster names. The latter sometimes appear in old hand written script.

Old German print and script are not familiar to most Americans and even to many Germans. Teaching of the old print and script was being discontinued in German schools in the late 1930's and completely discontinued after World War II. Modern German text will appear the same as ours with a few exceptions

Fig. 1 **OLD GERMAN PRINT & SCRIPT**  
**WITH ROMAN EQUIVALENTS**

ꝺ a	A a	<i>Aa</i>	ꝶ o	O o	<i>Oo</i>
ꝸ ä	Ä ä	<i>Ää</i>	Ꝿ ö	Ö ö	<i>Öö</i>
Ꝣ b	B b	<i>Bb</i>	ꝰ p	P p	<i>Pp</i>
Ꝭ c	C c	<i>Cc</i>	ꝺ q	Q q	<i>Qq</i>
Ꝥ d	D d	<i>Dd</i>	Ꝟ r	R r	<i>Rr</i>
Ꝣ e	E e	<i>Ee</i>	Ꝣ s	S s	<i>Ss</i>
Ꝣ f	F f	<i>Ff</i>	Ꝣ t	T t	<i>Tt</i>
Ꝣ g	G g	<i>Gg</i>	ꝺ u	U u	<i>Uu</i>
Ꝣ h	H h	<i>Hh</i>	ꝺ ü	Ü ü	<i>Üü</i>
Ꝣ i	I i	<i>Ii</i>	Ꝣ v	V v	<i>Vv</i>
Ꝣ j	J j	<i>Jj</i>	Ꝣ w	W w	<i>Ww</i>
Ꝣ k	K k	<i>Kk</i>	Ꝣ x	X x	<i>Xx</i>
Ꝣ l	L l	<i>Ll</i>	Ꝣ y	Y y	<i>Yy</i>
Ꝣ m	M m	<i>Mm</i>	Ꝣ z	Z z	<i>Zz</i>
Ꝣ n	N n	<i>Nn</i>	Ꝣ	ss	<i>ss</i>

mentioned later.

It is hoped that the lists and comments provided here will be helpful to steinologists in finding the full meanings of their stein decorations or at least communicating the words accurately to others. Of course many transcriptions will be plagued by the absence of letters or parts of letters owing to wear or artist error, etc. There will also be variations from the alphabets given here, but these will usually fall between the old German and Roman and be recognizable as in the pictured stein text. Sometimes a German dictionary would help in deciphering one or two letters in a word, otherwise a guess in parentheses, or just a parentheses with nothing in it might be appropriate.

In order to make a transcription, it should only be necessary to compare the letters on your stein with the old German print or script listed alphabetically in the accompanying and then write down the Roman equivalent. However, a few further comments might be in order.

In German all nouns are capitalized. This often results in almost every other word in a sentence beginning with a capital. A quick perusal of the chart will show some sets of letters, that look very much alike. For instance, B, P, and V; t and k; and f, l, and middle s in print; and e and n in script will require considerable study in order to be distinguished. The capital I and J were the same letter and usually occupied only one place in the Old German alphabet. They are listed separately here for convenience. There should be no difficulty transcribing this letter because I only appears before a consonant and J only before a vowel. The only exception will be found in words that are not of German origin.

The two dots appearing over the vowel a, o,

and u are called an *umlaut* (pronounced oom-lout). The umlaut simply gives one alternative sound to each of the vowels when spoken. Unlike English, only a single sound is given to each letter in German and none is silent.

Vowels having an *umlaut* are often transcribed by omitting the *umlaut* and following the vowel with an e. Thus, a = ae; o = oe; and u = ue. This transcription is also found in some modern German text, but is not universal.

Note that there are two small s's in old German. For lack of a better name, the tall one that looks like an l will be called middle (or beginning) s. The one that appears like the Roman s in print is called a *schluss s* (pronounced shloose ess; meaning closing s). The middle s is used only at the beginning or interior of word, but never to end it. The *schluss s* is used only to end a word. However, since many German words are compound words (i.e., made up of two or more shorter words), the *schluss s* will be found in the interior of a compound word when it ends one of the component words.

The double s is treated similarly. Two middle s's will be used to make up a small double s for the beginning or interior of a word. However, a word or a component word of a compound word will only end in a special s. This double s is found in the chart immediately following z since it has no place in the Roman alphabet. It is also called a *schluss s* or preferably sz (pronounced esszet; meaning sz). The sz and the *umlaut* are the only elements of old German to remain in the modern text.

Let us now proceed with one example. Figure two is the picture of the verse appearing on Villeroy & Boch stein #1370.



Fig. 2

It should be transcribed as follows:

*Bei Singen und Sagen  
Nuch Muhen (or Muelien) und  
Plagen.  
Thut jeder sich laben  
An Gottes herrlichen Gaben!*

As an example only, quotation marks have been added in the German style, i.e., subscript at the beginning and superscript at the end of the quotation. Observe the similarity of u and n. They are sometimes impossible to differentiate unless you know the language. However, note that u will most likely be next to a consonant and n next to a vowel. Occasionally the printed u will be overlined (u) as is the script u. On the other hand, an overlined consonant means that it should be doubled as in the example: herlichen = herrlichen. Also note that most of the capital letters are easily recognized since they have already undergone the transition to the Roman. This transition was not instantaneous but took place over many, years.

Old German. script will be encountered only rarely on steins. It will be found occasionally on rosters of old regimentals. These rosters will usually be in alphabetical order, but quite often the

names at the beginning or end will not be. Script will take considerable study so proceed with patience.

Numbers in print appear just as our own. However, the written one, "I" can be confused with our seven, but should not be since the German written seven is always crossed at the middle "7". In numbering, a comma is used instead of a decimal point. Thus, your stein will read 0,5L, but should transcribe to 0.5L.