

AP Art History

Unit 1: Mostly Global Prehistory

Unit Readings

Meret Oppenheim, Object, 1936 (Fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon)



Meret Oppenheim. Object. 1936. Fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon, cup 4-3/8 inches in diameter; saucer 9-3/8 inches in diameter; spoon 8 inches long, overall height 2-7/8" (The Museum of Modern Art)

Meret Oppenheim. *Object*, 1936. Fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon, cup 4-3/8 inches in diameter; saucer 9-3/8 inches in diameter; spoon 8 inches long, overall height 2-7/8" (The Museum of Modern Art)

A Luncheon with Fur

The story behind the creation of *Object*, an ordinary cup, spoon, and saucer wrapped evocatively in gazelle fur, has been told so many times its importance in modernist history transcends the fact it might be apocryphal (of dubious authenticity). The twenty-two year old Basel-born artist, Meret Oppenheim, had been in Paris for four years when, one day, she was at a café with Pablo Picasso and Dora Maar. Oppenheim was wearing a brass bracelet covered in fur when Picasso and Maar, who were admiring it, proclaimed, "Almost anything can be covered in fur!" As Oppenheim's tea grew cold, she jokingly asked the waiter for "more fur." Inspiration struck—Oppenheim is said to have gone straight from the café to a store where she purchased the cup, saucer, and spoon used in this piece. This amusing story belies the importance of *Object* and the critical acclaim and public fascination that has elevated it to point where it has become the definitive surrealist object...ultimately to Oppenheim's dismay.

What Is a Surrealist Object?

Oppenheim's *Object* was created at a moment when sculpted objects and assemblages had become prominent features of Surrealist art practice. In 1937, British art critic Herbert Read emphasized that all Surrealist objects were representative of an idea and Salvador Dalí described some of them as "objects with symbolic function." In other words, how might an otherwise typical, functional object be modified so it represents something deeply personal and poetic? How might it, in Freudian terms, resonate as a sublimation of internal desire and aspiration? Such physical manifestations of our internal psyches were indicative of a *surreality*, or the point in which external and internal realities united, as described by André Breton (one of Surrealism's founders and theorists) in his first *Manifesto of Surrealism*.

Visceral Responses

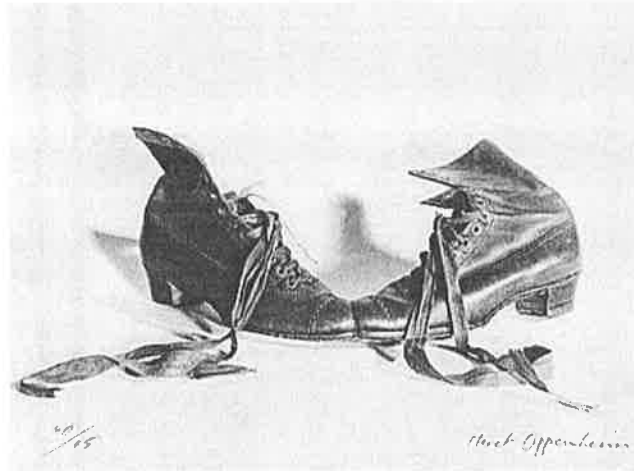
What, then, do we make of this set of be-furred tableware? Interpretations vary wildly. The art historian Whitney Chadwick has described it as linked to the Surrealist's love of alchemical transformation by turning cool, smooth ceramic and metal into something warm and bristly, while many scholars have noted the fetishistic qualities of the fur-lined set—as the fur imbues these functional, hand-held objects with sexual connotations.

In a 1936 issue of the *New Yorker Magazine*, it was reported that a woman fainted "right in front of the fur-bearing cup and saucer [while it was on exhibit at MoMA]. "She left no name with the attendants who revived her - only a vague feeling of apprehension."* Such visceral reactions to Oppenheim's sculpture come closest, perhaps, to what were likely the artist's aspirations. In an interview later in life, Oppenheim described her creations as "not an illustration of an idea, but the thing itself."

Unlike Read and Dalí, Oppenheim stresses the physicality of *Object*, reinforcing the way we can readily imagine the feeling of the fur while drinking from the cup, and using the saucer and spoon. The frisson we experience when china is unexpectedly wrapped in fur is based on our familiarity with both, and the fur requires us to extend our sensory experiences to fully appreciate the work. *Object* insists we imagine what sipping warm tea from this cup feels like, how the bristles would feel upon our lips. With Oppenheim's elegant creation, how we understand those visceral memories, how we create metaphors and symbols out of this act of tactile extension, is entirely open to interpretation by each individual, which is, in many ways, the whole point of Surrealism itself.

Presentation Problems

In spite of our individual response, the interpretation of *Object* has been complicated by the ways it was assigned meaning by others. When *Object* was finished, Oppenheim submitted it to Breton for an exhibition of Surrealist objects at the Charles Ratton Gallery in Paris in 1936. However, while Oppenheim preferred a non-descriptive title, Breton took the liberty of titling the piece *Le Déjeneur en fourrure*, or *Luncheon in Fur*. This title is a play on two nineteenth-century works: Édouard Manet's infamous modernist painting *Luncheon on the Grass (Le Déjeneur sur l'herbe)* and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's erotic novel *Venus in Furs*. With these two references, Breton forces an explicit sexualized meaning onto *Object*. Recall that the original inspiration for this work was implicitly practical: when Oppenheim asked the waiter for more fur for her cooling teacup, it was suggested as a way to keep her tea warm, and not necessarily as overtly sexual.



Meret Oppenheim, *Das Paar* (The Couple), pair of brown shoes attached at the toes, original version 1936, remade 1956

The Meaning of Others

Certainly we cannot assume that the spark of the idea for this piece and the piece itself are necessarily related, but the way meanings have been ascribed to Oppenheim's pieces by others has plagued many of her works.

Art historian Edward Powers has noted that when Oppenheim sent her Surrealist object *Das Paar* to a photographer before submitting it for exhibition, the photographer took the liberty of tying up the laces before photographing it. When Breton saw the photo with tied laces, he dubbed this object à *délacer* which in French means to untie, typically either shoes or a corset. The title and laced shoes together suggest the potential act of undressing and a fascination with exposing the female body. However, when Oppenheim later described *Das Paar* (with the laces untied), she stated it was an "odd unisexual pair: two shoes, unobserved at night, doing 'forbidden' things." She expressly assigned no gender, and suggests the "forbidden" acts already taking place between anthropomorphized shoes. She takes a more literal approach, the shoes as expressive things in themselves, rather than symbolically resonant of something else.

144. *Fountain* (second version). Marcel Duchamp.
1950 C.E. (original 1917). Readymade glazed sanitary china with
black paint.

G14, 16, 857

S5, 1038-1039, 1092, 1099

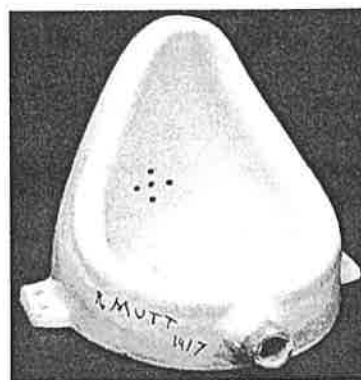
A3, 879

GW, 270

SH

Pins [Image](#) [Article](#) [Article](#) [Article](#) [Video](#) [Video](#) [Video](#)

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573/text-summary>



Marcel Duchamp *Fountain* 1917, replica 1964

Fountain is one of Duchamp's most famous works and is widely seen as an icon of twentieth-century art. The original, which is now lost, consisted of a standard urinal, laid flat on its back rather than upright in its usual position, and signed 'R. Mutt 1917'. The Tate's work is a 1964 replica and is made from glazed earthenware painted to resemble the original porcelain. The signature is reproduced in black paint. *Fountain* is an example of what Duchamp called a 'readymade', an ordinary manufactured object designated by the artist as a work of art. It epitomizes the assault on convention and good taste for which he and the Dada movement are best known.

The idea of designating such a lowly object as a work of art came from a discussion between Duchamp and his American friends the collector Walter Arensburg and the artist Joseph Stella. Following this conversation, Duchamp bought an urinal from a plumbers' merchants, and submitted it to an exhibition organized by the Society of Independent Artists. The Board of Directors, who were bound by the constitution of the Society to accept all members' submissions, took exception to the *Fountain* and refused to exhibit it. Duchamp and Arensburg, who were both on the Board, resigned immediately in protest. An article published at the time, which is thought to have been written by Duchamp, claimed, 'Mr Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bathtub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' shop windows. Whether Mr Mutt with his own hands made the fountain has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view - created a new thought for that object.' ('The Richard Mutt Case', *The Blind Man*, New York, no.2, May 1917, p.5.)

Later in life Duchamp commented on the name of the alter ego he created for this work: 'Mutt comes from Mott Works, the name of a large sanitary equipment manufacturer. But Mott was too close so I altered it to Mutt, after the daily cartoon strip 'Mutt and Jeff' which appeared at the time, and with which everyone was familiar. Thus, from the start, there was an interplay of Mutt: a fat little funny man, and Jeff: a tall thin man ... I wanted any old name, And I added Richard [French slang for moneybags]. That's not a bad name for a *pissotière*. Get it? The opposite of poverty. But not even that much, just R. MUTT.' (quoted in Schwarz, p.649.) Duchamp's use of a false signature, 'R. Mutt', anticipates his adoption of the alter ego Rose Sélavy a few years later (indeed, in a letter of the period Duchamp referred to Mutt as a woman). Some commentators have noted how the inverted urinal resembles a female body, and see this as reflecting the play with gender boundaries which was an important leitmotif of Duchamp's career.

Soon after the 1917 exhibition, Duchamp took *Fountain* to be photographed by his friend, the photographer and gallery owner Alfred Stieglitz. Since the original was lost thereafter, this

photograph (reproduced in Ades, p.129) became the basis for the later replicas. Altogether fifteen authorized replicas of *Fountain* were issued, one in 1951, 1953 and 1963 respectively and a further twelve in 1964. The Tate's version is number two in an edition of eight made by the Galleria Schwarz in Milan in October 1964. Four further examples were also made at this time, one for both Duchamp and Arturo Schwarz, and two for museum exhibition. Duchamp signed each of these replicas on the back of the left flange 'Marcel Duchamp 1964'. There is also a copperplate on the base of each work etched with Duchamp's signature, the dates of the original and the replica, the title, the edition number and the publisher's name, 'Galleria Schwarz, Milan'.

Sophie Howarth. April 2000

Further Reading:

William Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, Houston 1989, reproduced pp.90, 141

Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, revised and expanded edition, New York 1997, pp. 648-50, reproduced p.649

Dawn Ades, Neil Cox and David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, London 1999, pp.127-31

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/3671180/Duchamps-Fountain-The-practical-joke-that-launched-an-artistic-revolution.html>

Duchamp's Fountain: The practical joke that launched an artistic revolution

Martin Gayford 12:01AM GMT 16 Feb 2008

Three men met for lunch in New York early in April 1917. They were the American painter Joseph Stella, Walter Arensberg, a wealthy collector later obsessed by the notion that Bacon wrote Shakespeare, and Marcel Duchamp. After a convivial and talkative meal, they made their way to the JL Mott Ironworks, a plumbing suppliers situated at 118 Fifth Avenue.

Once there, Duchamp selected a "Bedfordshire" model porcelain urinal. On returning to his studio he turned it through 90 degrees, so that it rested on its back, signed it, "R. MUTT 1917", and entitled this new work *Fountain*.

Thus was begun the existence of one of the most influential art works of the 20th century. *Fountain* will be a crucial item in the forthcoming exhibition, Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabia, at Tate Modern. Or at least a replica of it will, because one of the most piquant aspects of the history of this celebrated object is that the original was seen by only a handful of people, never publicly exhibited, and vanished shortly after that selection, signing and christening in 1917.

All of those aspects of its story would have appealed greatly to the dry humor of the person who, with due respect to Arensberg and Stella, was solely responsible for its creation. *Fountain* was many things, apart, obviously, from a mis-described piece of sanitary equipment. It was unexpectedly a rather beautiful object in its own right and a blindingly brilliant logical move, check-mating all conventional ideas about art. But it was also a highly successful practical joke.

Duchamp has been compared to Leonardo da Vinci, as a profound philosopher-artist. But there is also a comparison to be made with Buster Keaton, another handsome deadpan clown whom Duchamp somewhat resembled. He valued humor, telling a New York newspaper that, "People took modern art very seriously when it first reached America because they believed we took ourselves very seriously. A great deal of modern art is meant to be amusing."

The context for the purchase and naming of *Fountain* was a worthy exhibition by the Society of Independent Artists, formed on the model of the Parisian Salon des Indépendants. It was to show works by anyone, subject to a fee of \$1 for membership and \$5 annual dues. Duchamp himself, as a celebrated

foreign artist, was on the board, as were various prominent American painters and art world figures. From early on, however, Duchamp seemed tempted to subvert the whole enterprise.

His first move was to suggest that the works in the New York exhibition be hung alphabetically, with the first letter to be drawn out of a hat. This idea was adopted, despite protests that it was "democracy run riot". As a result, the whole huge show - the largest ever assembled in the US - must have had a slightly absurd air, with traditionalist, amateur works sent in from the sticks hung randomly beside pieces of cutting-edge cubism.

But, not content, Duchamp further added to the mayhem with the submission of Fountain, accompanied by the non-existent R Mutt's \$6 fee and an invented address in Philadelphia. It was a missile aimed with brilliant precision at the basis of the exhibition - its democratic open admission. Here was an unmentionable object - press reports at the time referred to it as a "bathroom appliance" - it was signed and dated, but was it a work of art? If not, why not?

This deadpan style of question was very much Duchamp's technique. At the Arensbergs' salon - "an inconceivable orgy of sexuality, jazz and alcohol", according to Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, wife of the artist Picabia who frequented it, as did Man Ray - Duchamp demoralized the writer William Carlos Williams with a similar query. Williams remarked that he liked a certain painting.

"He looked at me and said, 'Do you?'," said Williams. "That was all. He had me beat all right, if that was the objective. I could have sunk through the floor, ground my teeth, turned my back on him and spat."

It must have been the way Duchamp asked this apparently innocuous question - with underlying implications of "Do you really like it?" "Why do you like it?" "Are you sure what it is?"

George Bellows, a leading painter of a gritty, realist persuasion and member of the board of the Society of Independent Artists, was similarly outraged by Fountain. According to Beatrice Wood, a young artist then in love with Duchamp, Bellows complained that it could not be exhibited as it was indecent. He suspected a joke; the name R Mutt struck him, understandably, as "fishy". Walter Arensberg countered by pointing out that the correct fee had been paid. "'You mean to say, if a man sent in horse manure glued to a canvas that we would have to accept it!,' said Bellows. 'I'm afraid we would,' said Walter."

In the event, the board narrowly voted not to show Fountain, and, according to one account, it was hidden behind a screen. Duchamp must have been pleased with his work, quite apart from the satisfactory ruckus it caused, because shortly afterwards he arranged to have it photographed by Alfred Stieglitz, taking a good deal of trouble over the result.

This image is the only remaining record of the original object. It was reproduced with an anonymous manifesto the following May in an avant-garde magazine called *The Blind Man*. The accompanying text made a claim crucial to much later modern art: "Whether Mr Mutt made the fountain with his own hands or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view - created a new thought for that object." It was this publication as much as the initial scandal which made Fountain famous.

And what happened to the original? The best guess, according to Calvin Tomkins in his biography of Duchamp, is that it was thrown out as rubbish by Stieglitz shortly afterwards (a common fate of Duchamp's early ready-mades). By a delicious irony that the artist must have enjoyed, all the versions of Fountain now extant - including the one in the Tate show - are not ready-made at all, but carefully crafted hand-made facsimiles of that "Bedfordshire" urinal.

DUCHAMP: A LIFE OF ARTISTIC BLASPHEMY

145. *Woman, I*. Willem de Kooning. 1950–1952

C.E. Oil on canvas.

G14, 905

S5, 1076-1077

GW, 555

SH

Pins [Image](#) [Audio](#) [Article](#) [MoMA site \(rich!\)](#) [Article](#)

http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=79810

Flesh and Paint

"Flesh was the reason oil paint was invented," [Willem de Kooning](#) once stated, and true to this proposition, with *Woman, I* he returned to the figure after painting abstractly for many years. Rendered with broad, expressive brushstrokes and densely layered color, de Kooning's *Woman, I* is wild-eyed and menacing. In this work, the artist's medium and subject matter converge in a disturbing vision of aggressive femininity.



Action Painting over Time

Although the painting appears direct and spontaneous, [de Kooning](#) worked on *Woman, I* for over a year and a half, during which he interspersed vigorous painting sessions with long periods of looking and thinking. Over months, he applied paint to the canvas and scraped it away. At a point, he even discarded the unfinished painting for several weeks before eventually retrieving it and returning to work.

Woman, I offers an almost encyclopedic display of the physical possibilities of paint. De Kooning's handling is alternately thick and thin, rough and slick, opaque and translucent. Arcs of fluid paint mingle with coarse bursts of color, as thick smears alternate with stains and drips faintly running down the canvas. As he worked, de Kooning prepared massive quantities of paint in kitchen bowls and constantly changed their properties by adding medium, solvent, water, or even eggs. These additions often kept the paints wet and fluid and allowed him flexibility in reworking his compositions over long periods of time. As a result, the process of painting is visible in the final work.

Surface Tensions

"I like a nice, juicy, greasy surface," [de Kooning](#) noted, and in *Woman, I* he privileges surface over illusionistic depth. Despite the figure's obvious heft, she appears flattened out, as if pressed up against the surface of the painting. Her massive arms, head, breasts, and legs have been forced into the shallow space of the composition, and through this presentation, de Kooning suggests once again an affinity between the painted surface and a woman's flesh.

Abstract Expressionist New York October 3, 2010–April 25, 2011

De Kooning famously said, "Flesh is the reason oil paint was invented," and although he often worked in an abstract style he continually returned to the figure. *Woman, I* took an unusually long time to complete. De Kooning made numerous preliminary studies then repainted the canvas repeatedly, eventually arriving at this hulking, wild-eyed figure of a woman. An amalgam of female archetypes, from a Paleolithic fertility goddess to a 1950s pinup girl, her threatening gaze and ferocious grin are heightened by de Kooning's aggressive brushwork and intensely colored palette.

2006

De Kooning took an unusually long time to create *Woman, I*, making numerous preliminary studies and repainting the work repeatedly. The hulking, wild-eyed subject draws upon an amalgam of female archetypes, from Paleolithic fertility goddesses to contemporary pin-up girls. Her threatening stare and ferocious grin are heightened by de Kooning's aggressive brushwork and frantic paint application. Combining voluptuousness and menace, *Woman, I* reflects the age-old cultural ambivalence between reverence for and fear of the power of the feminine.

The Museum of Modern Art, *MoMA Highlights*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, revised 2004, originally published 1999

Woman, I is the first in a series of de Kooning works on the theme of Woman. The group is influenced by images ranging from Paleolithic fertility fetishes to American billboards, and the attributes of this particular figure seem to range from the vengeful power of the goddess to the hollow seductiveness of the calendar pinup. Reversing traditional female representations, which he summarized as "the idol, the Venus, the nude," de Kooning paints a woman with gigantic eyes, massive breasts, and a toothy grin. Her body is outlined in thick and thin black lines, which continue in loops and streaks and drips, taking on an independent life of their own. Abrupt, angular strokes of orange, blue, yellow, and green pile up in multiple directions as layers of color are applied, scraped away, and restored.

When de Kooning painted *Woman, I*, artists and critics championing abstraction had declared the human figure obsolete in painting. Instead of abandoning the figure, however, de Kooning readdressed this age-old subject through the sweeping brushwork of Abstract Expressionism, the prevailing contemporary style. Does the woman partake of the brushwork's energy to confront us aggressively? Or is she herself under attack, nearly obliterated by the welter of violent marks? Perhaps something of both; and, in either case, she remains powerful and intimidating.

Audio Program excerpt MoMA Audio: Collection, 2008

Curator, Ann Temkin: This painting is called *Woman, I* and it has the number after it because ultimately there were six such large-scale paintings of single women that de Kooning worked on in the 1950s.

The woman of the painting is staring out at the viewer with a kind of ferocity and a kind of toothy glare that makes her anything but a typical seductress or muse that one might think of in terms of the hundreds of years of paintings of female subjects. This is a painting that he began after having worked in an abstract mode over the last few years. And having received very wonderful critical acclaim for the abstract paintings he made. He had, however, been painting the figure—and particularly the female figure—in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and at this time he decided to go back to it.

And so de Kooning's big challenge was how to use the power of paint to again give some meaning to creating the image of a human figure on a canvas. And if what you see on the canvas before you has the feel or the look of something like a battlefield, there's a good reason, because indeed, this is a picture that de Kooning struggled and struggled with.

He worked for months and months over a year-and-a-half, making, paintings, one on top of the other, scratching them, sanding them down, getting rid of the image that he had worked on the day before. The look of it is very much of something in progress, something that has not come to some kind of comfortable resolution or conclusion, but something which is still in a bit of a state of war.

1. Apollo 11 stones.
Namibia. c. 25,500–
25,300 B.C.E.

Charcoal on stone.

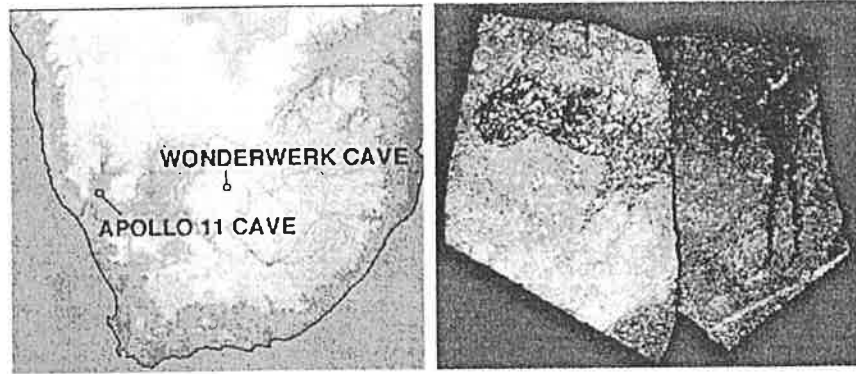
G14, 16 - 17

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Article



http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/africa/oldest_art/

The dating of the earliest rock paintings and engravings in Africa is uncertain. Direct dating techniques are not advanced enough to accurately indicate an age. Paintings on exposed rock walls are vulnerable to long-term weather and harsh climates. Moreover, many sites remain to be discovered. However, indirect dating techniques can provide a more accurate understanding of some of the rock art of Africa; painted and engraved rocks that have been buried deliberately, or that have fractured off the wall and have subsequently become submerged in soil. Radio-carbon and thermoluminescence dating provides an estimate of when these rocks were buried, although this does not tell us how old the images were before burial.

THE APOLLO 11 STONES

A painted tablet was discovered in two pieces in the Huns Mountains of southwestern Namibia in an archaeological layer dated to between 26,300 and 28,400 B.P. The discovery occurred during the flight of Apollo 11, and the shelter where it was found now bears that name. The stones were painted in charcoal, ochre, and white. The two separate pieces underwent different patinations, as the image shows.

The Apollo 11 stones were thought to be the oldest known artwork of any kind from the African continent. But in 2002, news of an important discovery in Blombos Cave on the southern Cape coast was made; Chris Henshilwood announced the uncovering of a piece of ochre decorated with a delicate geometric pattern. He dated the piece conservatively at 77,000 years old; in fact, it could be as much as 100,000 years old.

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/apol/hd_apol.htm

Apollo 11 (ca. 25,500–23,500 B.C.) and Wonderwerk (ca. 8000 B.C.) Cave Stones

Many sites remain to be discovered.

The earliest history of rock painting and engraving arts in Africa is uncertain. Increasing archaeological research in Africa demonstrates that many sites remain to be discovered. In addition, artworks on exposed rock walls are vulnerable to damaging weather and harsh climates, and although many do survive, only tentative steps have been made toward direct dating techniques.

Much more easily datable are painted and engraved rocks that have been buried deliberately, or that have fallen off the wall and become submerged in soil. Radio-carbon dating provides an estimate of when these rocks were buried, although it is still not possible to determine how old the images were before burial.

The seven slabs of rock with traces of animal figures that were found in the Apollo 11 Cave in the Huns Mountains of southwestern Namibia have been dated with unusual precision for ancient rock art. Originally brought to the site from elsewhere, the stones were painted in charcoal, ocher, and white. Until recently, the Apollo 11 stones were the oldest known artwork of any kind from the African continent. More recent discoveries of incised ocher date back almost as far as 100,000 B.C., making Africa home to the oldest images in the world.

Incised stones found at the Wonderwerk Cave in the Northern Cape province of South Africa suggest that rock engraving has also had a long history on the continent. The stones, engraved with geometric line designs and representations of animals, have been dated to circa 8200 B.C. and are among the earliest recorded African stone engravings.

Department of Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Department of Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. "Apollo 11 (ca. 25,500–23,500 B.C.) and Wonderwerk (ca. 8000 B.C.) Cave Stones". In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/apol/hd_apol.htm (October 2000)

<http://humanorigins.si.edu/evidence/behavior/apollo-11-plaque>

Apollo 11 Plaque

Date of discovery: 1969

Age: Between 60,000 and 40,000 years old

Modern humans create permanent drawings

What kind of animal do you think this charcoal figure represents? Some people believe the hind legs are human. This stone plaque is one of several carried into Apollo 11 Rock Shelter in Namibia where they were discovered in 1969 (when the first spacecraft - Apollo 11 - landed on the moon). Radiocarbon and other dating methods confirm that the cave layer that contained this plaque is between 60,000 and 40,000 years old.

R. Vogelsang et al. *Journal of African Archaeology* Vol. 8 (2), 2010

New Excavations of Middle Stone Age Deposits at Apollo 11 Rock shelter. *Journal of African Archaeology* Vol. 8 (2), 2010

https://www.academia.edu/4106767/New_Excavations_at_Apollo_11_Namibia_Ralf_Vogelsang_et_al.

The most spectacular artifacts of the latest MSA complex at Apollo 11 are the painted slabs. Radiocarbon dating of charcoal from the immediate proximity of the slabs indicated an age of about 27,500 years before present (Wendt 1974, 1976). These depictions are not only the oldest drawings known from the African continent, but are also some of the earliest pieces of evidence for artistic creation anywhere in the world. The stone slabs consist of different varieties of clay schist

Gardner's Art through the Ages, enhanced 13th ed., Fred Kleiner, p.16.

APOLLO 11 CAVE Between 1969 and 1972, scientists working in the Apollo 11 Cave in Namibia (MAP 15-1) found seven fragments of stone plaques with paint on them, including four or five recognizable images of animals. In most cases, including the example illustrated here (FIG. 1-3), the species is uncertain, but the forms are always carefully rendered. One plaque depicts a striped beast, possibly a zebra. The charcoal from the archaeological layer in which the Namibian plaques were found has been dated to around 23,000 BCE.

Like every artist in every age in every medium, the painter of the Apollo 11 plaque had to answer two questions before beginning work: *What shall be my subject? How shall I represent it?* In Paleolithic art, the almost universal answer to the first question was an animal—bison, mammoth, ibex, and horse were most common. In fact, Paleolithic painters and sculptors depicted humans infrequently and men almost never. In equally stark contrast to today's world, there was also agreement on the best answer to the second question. Artists presented virtually every animal in every Paleolithic, *Mesolithic* (Middle Stone Age), and *Neolithic* (New Stone Age) painting in the same manner—in strict profile. The profile is the only view of an animal wherein the head, body, tail, and all four legs can be seen. A frontal view would have concealed most of the body, and a three-quarter view would not have shown either the front or side fully. Only the profile view is completely informative about the animal's shape, and this is why the Stone Age painter chose it. A very long time passed before artists placed any premium on "variety" or "originality," either in subject choice or in representational manner. These are quite modern notions in the history of art. The aim of the earliest painters was to create a convincing image of the subject, a kind of pictorial definition of the animal capturing its very essence, and only the profile view met their needs.

<https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/ap-art-history/global-prehistory-ap/paleolithic-mesolithic-neolithic/a/apollo-11-stones>

Rock art and the origins of art in Africa

The oldest scientifically-dated rock art in Africa dates from around 26,000-28,000 years ago and is found in Namibia.

Between 1969 and 1972, German archaeologist, W.E. Wendt, researching in an area known locally as "Goachanas," unearthed several painted slabs in a cave he named Apollo 11, after NASA's successful moon landing mission.

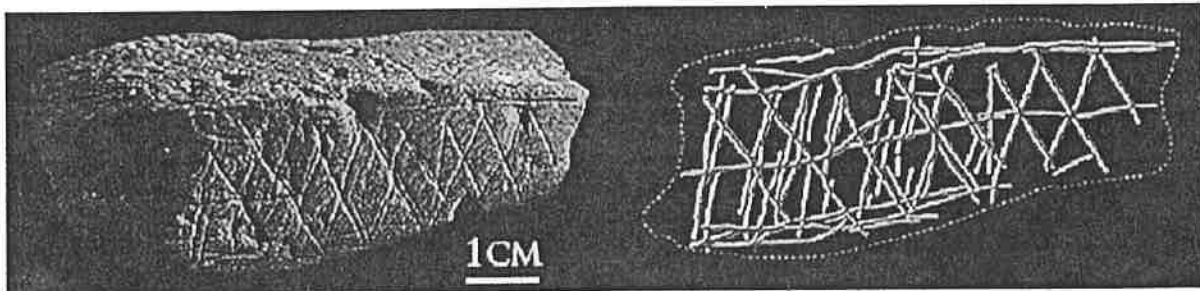
Seven painted stone slabs of brown-grey quartzite, depicting a variety of animals painted in charcoal, ochre and white, were located in a Middle Stone Age deposit (100,000–60,000 years ago). These images are not easily identifiable to species level, but have been interpreted variously as felines and/or bovids; one in particular has been observed to be either a zebra, giraffe or ostrich, demonstrating the ambiguous nature of the depictions.

Art and our modern mind

While the Apollo 11 plaques may be the oldest discovered representational art in Africa, this is not the beginning of the story of art. It is now well-established, through genetic and fossil evidence, that anatomically modern humans (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) developed in Africa more than 100,000 years ago; of these, a small group left the Continent around 60,000-80,000 years ago and spread throughout the rest of the world.

Recently discovered examples of patterned stone, ochre and ostrich eggshell, as well as evidence of personal ornamentation emerging from Middle Stone Age Africa, have demonstrated that "art" is not only a much older phenomenon than previously thought, but that it has its roots in the African continent. Africa is where we share a common humanity.

The first examples of what we might term "art" in Africa, dating from between 100,000–60,000 years ago, emerge in two very distinct forms: personal adornment in the form of perforated seashells suspended on twine, and incised and engraved stone, ochre and ostrich eggshell. Despite some sites being 8,000km and 40,000 years apart, an intriguing feature of the earliest art is that these first forays appear remarkably similar. It is worth noting here that the term "art" in this context is highly problematic, in that we cannot assume that humans living 100,000 years ago, or even 10,000 years ago, had a concept of art in the same way that we do, particularly in the modern Western sense. However, it remains a useful umbrella term for our purposes here.



Pattern and design

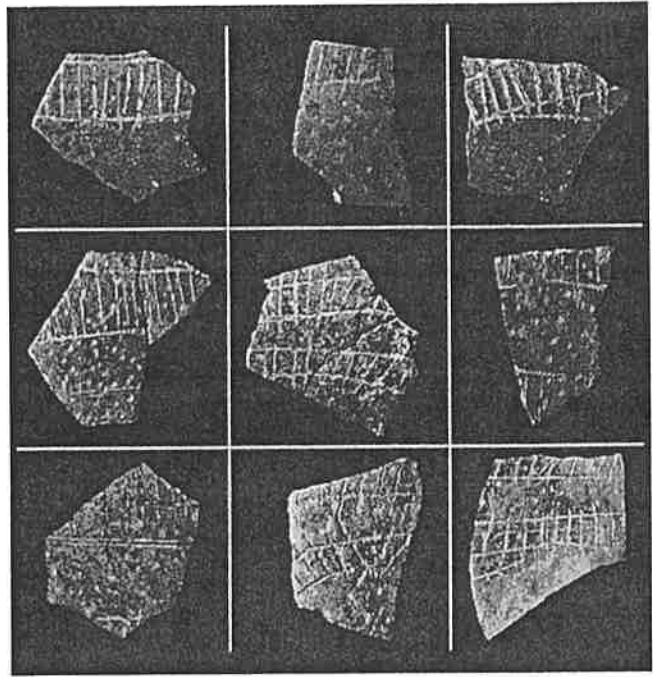
The practice of engraving or incising, which emerges around 12,000 years ago in Saharan rock art, has its antecedents much earlier, up to 100,000 years ago. Incised and engraved stone, bone, ochre and ostrich eggshell have been found at sites in southern Africa. These marked objects share features in the expression of design, exhibiting patterns that have been classified as cross-hatching.

One of the most iconic and well-publicized sites that have yielded cross-hatch incised patterning on ochre is Blombos Cave, on the southern Cape shore of South Africa. Of the more than 8,500 fragments of ochre deriving from the MSA (Middle Stone Age) levels, 15 fragments show evidence of engraving. Two of these, dated to 77,000 years ago, have received the most attention for the design of cross-hatch pattern.

For many archaeologists, the incised pieces of ochre at Blombos are the most complex and best-formed evidence for early abstract representations, and are unequivocal evidence for symbolic thought and language. The debate about when we became a symbolic species and acquired fully syntactical language – what archaeologists term 'modern human behavior' – is both complex and contested. It has been proposed that these cross-hatch patterns are clear evidence of thinking symbolically, because the motifs are not representational and as such are culturally constructed and arbitrary. Moreover, in order for the meaning of this motif to be conveyed to others, language is a prerequisite.

Fragments of engraved ostrich eggshells from the Howiesons Poort of Diepkloof Rock Shelter, Western Cape, South Africa, dated to 60,000 BP. Courtesy of Jean-Pierre Texier, Diepkloof project. © Jean-Pierre Texier

The Blombos engravings are not isolated occurrences, since the presence of such designs occur at more than half a dozen other sites in South Africa, suggesting that this pattern is indeed important in some way, and not the result of idiosyncratic behavior. It is worth noting, however, that for some scholars, the premise that the pattern is symbolic is not so certain. The patterns may indeed have a meaning, but it is how that meaning is associated, either by resemblance (iconic) or correlation (indexical), that is important for our understanding of human cognition.



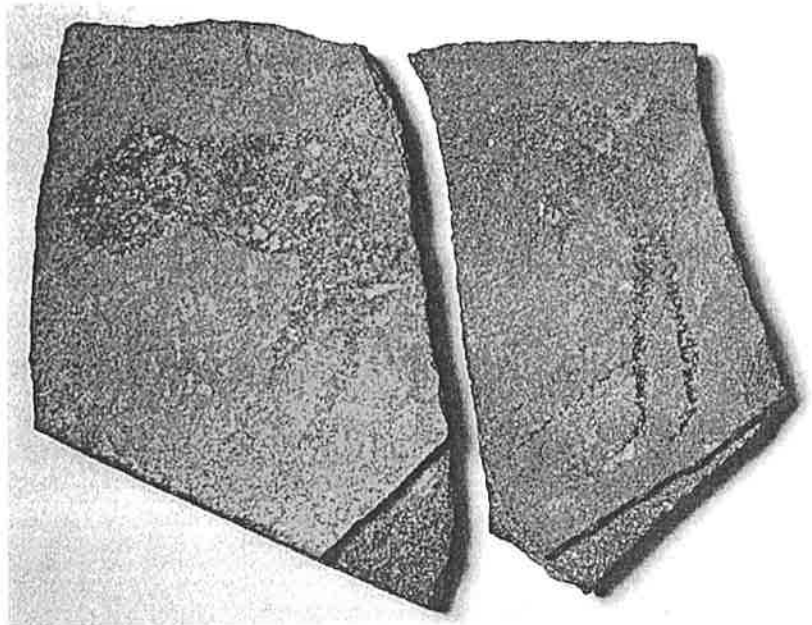
Personal ornamentation and engraved designs are the earliest evidence of art in Africa, and are inextricably tied up with the development of human cognition. For tens of thousands of years, there has been not only a capacity for, but a motivation to adorn and to inscribe, to make visual that which is important. The interesting and pertinent issue in the context of this project is that the rock art we are cataloguing, describing and researching comes from a tradition that goes far back into African prehistory. The techniques and subject matter resonate over the millennia.

Additional resources:

[British Museum African Rock Art Image Project](#)

[Apollo 11 \(ca. 25,500–23,500 B.C.\) and Wonderwerk \(ca. 8000 B.C.\) Cave Stones on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History](#)

[Trust for African Rock Art](#)



2. Great Hall of the Bulls. Lascaux, France. Paleolithic Europe. 15,000–13,000 B.C.E. Rock painting, length of largest auroch (bull) 18'.

G15,14, 15, 20, 22-23

G14,14-15, 22-23

S5, 10-1

A3, 37-39

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http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/lasc/hd_lasc.htm

Lascaux (ca. 15,000 BCE)

A virtual revolution occurred in the creation of art during the period of the Upper Paleolithic in Europe. Beginning around 40,000 B.C., the archaeological record shows that anatomically modern humans effectively replaced Neanderthals and remained the sole hominid inhabitants across continental Europe. At about the same time, and directly linked to this development, the earliest art was created. These initial creative achievements fall into one of two broad categories. Paintings and engravings found in caves along walls and ceilings are referred to as "parietal" art. The caves where paintings have been found are not likely to have served as shelter, but rather were visited for ceremonial purposes. The second category, "mobiliary" art, includes small portable sculpted objects which are typically found buried at habitation sites.

In the painted caves of western Europe, namely in France and Spain, we witness the earliest unequivocal evidence of the human capacity to interpret and give meaning to our surroundings. Through these early achievements in representation and abstraction, we see a newfound mastery of the environment and a revolutionary accomplishment in the intellectual development of humankind.

The painted walls of the interconnected series of caves in Lascaux in southwestern France are among the most impressive and well-known artistic creations of Paleolithic humans. Although there is one human image (painted representations of humans are very rare in Paleolithic art; sculpted are more common), most of the paintings depict animals found in the surrounding landscape, such as horses, bison, mammoths, ibex, aurochs, deer, lions, bears, and wolves. The depicted animals comprise both species that would have been hunted and eaten (such as deer and bison) as well as those that were feared predators (such as lions, bears, and wolves). No vegetation or illustration of the environment is portrayed around the animals, who are represented in profile and often standing in an alert and energetic stance. Their vitality is achieved by the broad, rhythmic outlines around areas of soft color. The animals are typically shown in a twisted perspective, with the heads depicted in profile but the pair of horns or antlers rendered frontally visible. (In contrast, a strictly optical profile would show only one horn or antler.) The intended result may have been to imbue the images with more visual power and magical properties. The combination of profile and frontal perspectives is an artistic idiom also observed in ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian art.

At Lascaux and Chauvet, another magnificently painted cave in France, images of animals are superimposed on top of earlier depictions, which suggests that the motivation for the paintings

may have been in the act of portraying the animals rather than in the artistic effect of the final composition. However, their purpose remains obscure. Most of the paintings are located at a distance from the cave's entrance, and many of the chambers are not easily accessible. This placement, together with the enormous size and compelling grandeur of the paintings, suggests that the remote chambers may have served as sacred or ceremonial meeting places.

In addition to the painted images, Lascaux is rich with engravings of animals as well as abstract designs. In the absence of natural light, these works could only have been created with the aid of torches and stone lamps filled with animal fat.

The pigments used to paint Lascaux and other caves were derived from readily available minerals and include red, yellow, black, brown, and violet. No brushes have been found, so in all probability the broad black outlines were applied using mats of moss or hair, or even with chunks of raw color. The surfaces appear to have been covered by paint blown directly from the mouth or through a tube; color-stained, hollowed-out bones have been found in the caves.

http://www.lascaux.culture.fr/index.php?lng=en#/en/01_03.xml [flash version, cool but slow loading]

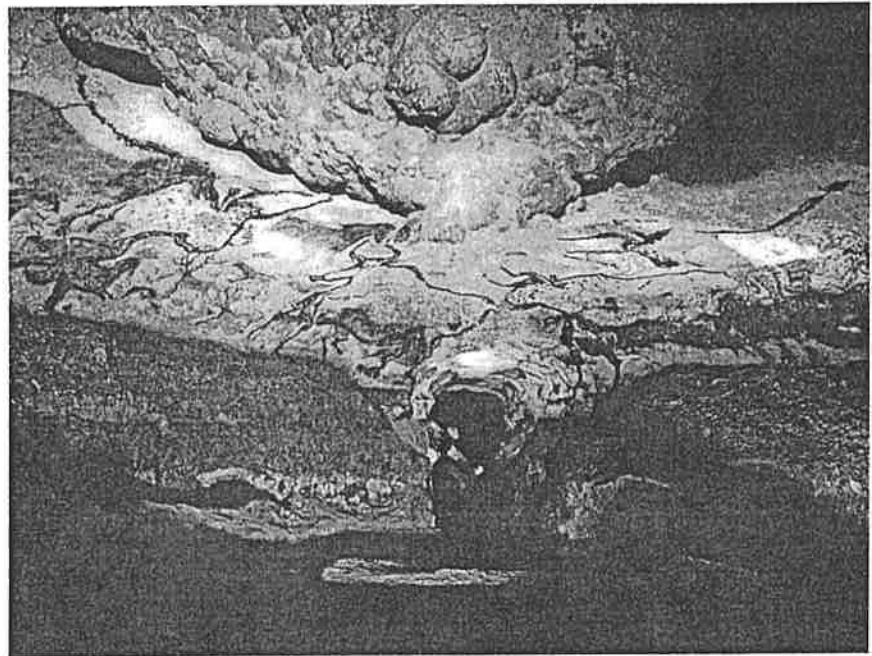
The Lascaux Cave <http://www.lascaux.culture.fr/index.php?fichier=00.xml> [html version]

The entrance to the cave, at an altitude of 185 metres, overlooks the valley floor some 110 metres below. The cavity is part of a group of cutaneous networks, i.e. of a development running parallel to the main line of the valley, which makes it very likely that there were several entrances. The total length of all of the accessible cave areas does not exceed 235 metres. The level of the cave floor drops 13 metres from the entrance to the Axial Gallery, and 19 metres to the base of the Shaft.

Lascaux has traditionally been divided into seven sectors: the Hall of the Bulls, the Axial Gallery, the Passageway, the Nave, the Chamber of the Felines, the Apse and the Shaft. The accessible areas of the cave can be divided along three major axes. The first comprises the entrance area, the Hall of the Bulls and the Axial Gallery. The second includes the Passageway, the Nave, the Mondmilch Gallery and the Chamber of the Felines. The third axis contains the Shaft and the Great Fissure; beyond this, a large quantity of scree marks the opening of the Silted-up Chamber.

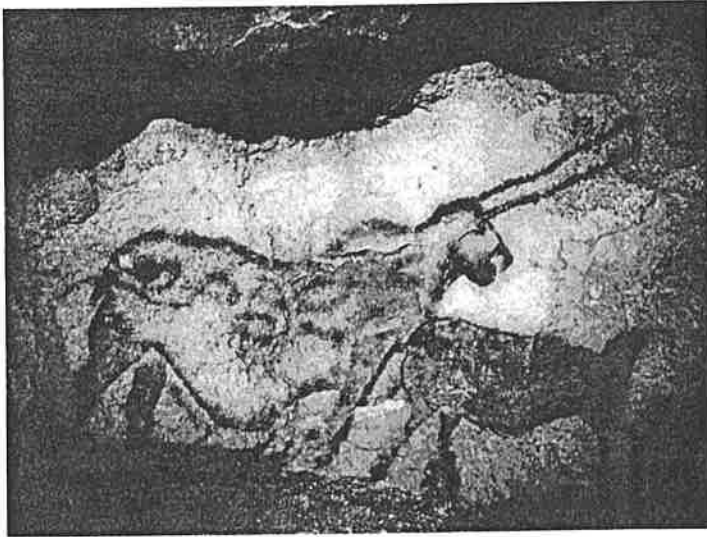
The Hall of the Bulls

The Hall of the Bulls, also called the Rotunda, is an extension of the entrance zone. It is about 20 metres long, and it varies in width between 5.5 and 7.5 metres.



Between the ceiling and the lower part, a corbelled zone contains nearly all of the iconography, which extends uninterrupted for some thirty meters on either side of the hall. The extremely white calcite walls help to show off the beautiful wall paintings by contributing to the saturation of the colors.

The images in the Hall of the Bulls are among the most striking in all of Paleolithic art: 130 figures, including 36 representations of animals and some 50 geometric signs. This extensive frieze is composed of three animal themes – horses (17 individuals), Cattle (11 cows and bulls) and deer (6 stags) – which recur consistently in the various parts of the cave. Exceptionally, a bear is also depicted.



The Unicorn

As soon as one enters the Rotunda, the gaze is drawn to an oddly-shaped animal – the Unicorn. It is the first animal in the cave, and appears to be pushing all the animals on this wall towards the back of the gallery. It has an undulating appearance, leading one to think that this might be a depiction of a feline, with its square head, protruding withers, swollen belly and strong paws. Nevertheless, two straight horns extend the length of this creature by a third, which tempts one to classify it as a mythical beast. A number

of interpretations have been put forward, none of them satisfactory.

It should be noted that carnivores in general – and felines in particular – are often depicted in a somewhat ambiguous manner; they are located in out-of-the-way zones or hidden within other creatures. By adding horns to the body of a feline, was the artist trying to disguise it?

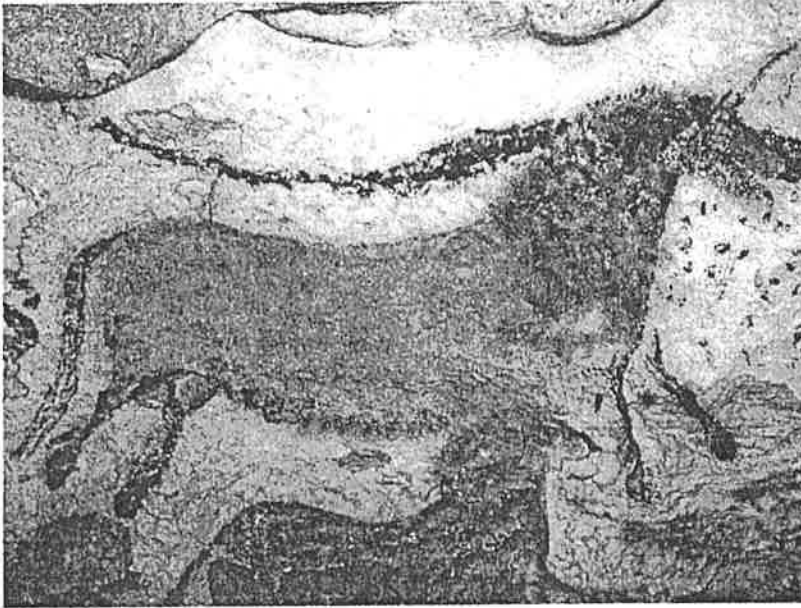
The body of the animal was created by spraying pigment, and only the two "horns" were executed with a brush.

Frieze of the Black Horses

In front of the Unicorn, a frieze of eight black horses extends for 9 metres towards the back of the hall. All of the horses, whether complete, partial or represented by a single anatomical section, appear to move along the same horizontal floor line, which is depicted through a change in background colour and the change in angle of the wall created by the bench. The entire frieze was created using stencils and the spray technique.



The first horse was originally complete. Deterioration of the underlying wall caused a large plate to become detached, taking part of the painting with it. On this plate, which now rests at the base of the panel, we can see the outline of the head and neck. The other complete horse, the fourth, stands at the centre of the frieze; it is shown extended, and only the rear legs rest on the imaginary ground-line. Its massive neck contrasts with a smaller head. The dappled appearance of its flank is caused by the varying levels of preservation of the pigments, which is more pronounced in the hollows than in raised areas. Several horses are incomplete, and representation is limited to the forequarters (second horse), the head, neck and initial section of the back (third horse), or a simple outline of the head, neck and first part of the back (fifth horse). The seventh and eighth horses are only sketches.



Great Red and Black Horse

This horse, the most complete of all the equids in this sector, occupies the central portion of the panel. It is also the only two-color animal on the left-hand wall. The spray technique was used to paint the head and body, while the limbs, tail, lines of the back, belly and nose were created using a brush. Two black spots can be seen at the level of where the lower limbs meet the body. A variety of techniques were used to structure the animal's shape. A thin red border,

painted with a brush, delineates the back and hindquarters, while a second black line is used to define the lower line of the neck that links the right forelimb with the throat. Juxtaposed black spots of roughly the same outline trace the line of the belly, while the more blurred contours of the thigh were created using a stencil. The line of the hoofs, tail and nose attest to the use of a tool identical to that employed for drawing the line of the back and neck. On the other hand, the two red summital appendices, standing in for the animal's ears, testify to a print made with a considerably larger and more flexible lock of hair, coated with a more dilute material.



First Bull The first monumental figure in the cave is that of an aurochs; it faces the far end of the gallery and towers over the Frieze of the Black Horses. It measures 3.5 meters in length from the line of the back to the muzzle, and it takes up the entire height of the 3-metre panel. It is somewhat dwarfed by the many figures of horses and cervids that surround or cover it; nevertheless, only the forequarters are depicted – the sheer density of horses to the rear meant that the full animal could not be drawn. Had it been painted in its entirety, it would have been the most imposing figure in all of Paleolithic parietal art. There is a great deal of detail

around the head and neck – the eye, the trapezoidal ear, the abundant poll, the elaborately shaped muzzle and the use of spots to depict the hide are graphic elements that we find on several bovines. This graphic similarity could suggest that they were the work of a single artist. The nearly symmetrical horns, however, are specific to this animal, in contrast to the other aurochs. The same technique also appears to have been used from one aurochs to the next: the upper portion is painted with a brush and/or swab, while the lower areas were created by spraying colored material. Chromatically, this aurochs is distinguished from the others by the use of red to outline the withers, the two horns and the poll, i.e. all of the lines located on the upper part of the figure. The red was applied at a later stage, after the black line.

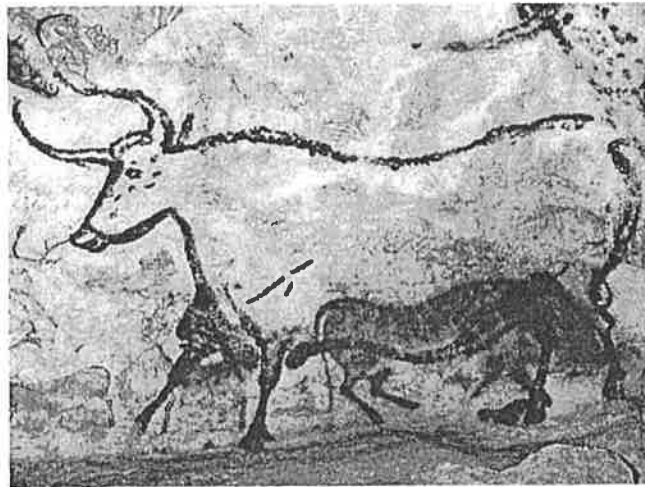
Second Bull

The second representation of a bos (or aurochs) takes up the farthest space on the wall. It faces the entrance to the cave. Here the wall is at its maximum overhang, almost 60° off the vertical. Although the aurochs is fully part of the composition, its position, backed up against the entrance to the Axial Gallery, means that it could be given a somewhat more individualized treatment, since the graphic environment is less dense than for the first aurochs opposite.

Almost every anatomical detail is depicted: the very striking horns, the parted poll, the hide, the prominent sex. Only the outline of the aurochs has been traced and, as for its counterpart, the upper part was created with a brush, while the lower contours were applied with blown pigments. It is covered over with three figures – the head of young bovine, a small, partial silhouette of a horse and a large red bovine. It is also surrounded by a number of geometrical signs, particularly between the shoulder and the breast (including dots, a hooked symbol and a red line) and over the withers (a line and three dots).

[Note: There is specific discussion of other portions of the Hall of Bulls not included here. Visit http://www.lascaux.culture.fr/index.php?fichier=02_01.xml]

<http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/lascaux/index.php>



Lascaux Cave Paintings - An Introduction

Lascaux is famous for its Palaeolithic cave paintings, found in a complex of caves in the Dordogne region of southwestern France, because of their exceptional quality, size, sophistication and antiquity. Estimated to be up to 20,000 years old, the paintings consist primarily of large animals, once native to the region. Lascaux is located in the Vézère Valley where many



3. Camelid sacrum in the shape of a canine. Tequixquiac, central Mexico. 14,000–7000 B.C.E. Bone.

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<https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/ap-art-history/global-prehistory-ap/paleolithic-mesolithic-neolithic/a/camelid-sacrum-in-the-shape-of-a-canine>

Prehistoric art around the globe: When we think about prehistoric art (art before the invention of writing), likely the first thing that comes to mind are the beautiful cave paintings in France and Spain with their naturalistic images of bulls, bison, deer and other animals. But it's important to note that prehistoric art has been found around the globe—in North and South America, Africa, Asia, and Australia—and that new sites and objects come to light regularly, and many sites are just starting to be explored. Most prehistoric works we have discovered so far date to around 40,000 B.C.E. and after.

This fascinating and unique prehistoric sculpture of a dog-like animal was discovered accidentally in 1870 in Tequixquiac, Mexico—in the Valley of Mexico (where Mexico City is located). The carving likely dates to sometime between 14,000–7000 B.C.E. An engineer found it at a depth of 12 meters (about 40 feet) when he was working on a drainage project—the Valley of Mexico once held several lakes. The geography and climate of this area was considerably different in the prehistoric era than it is today.

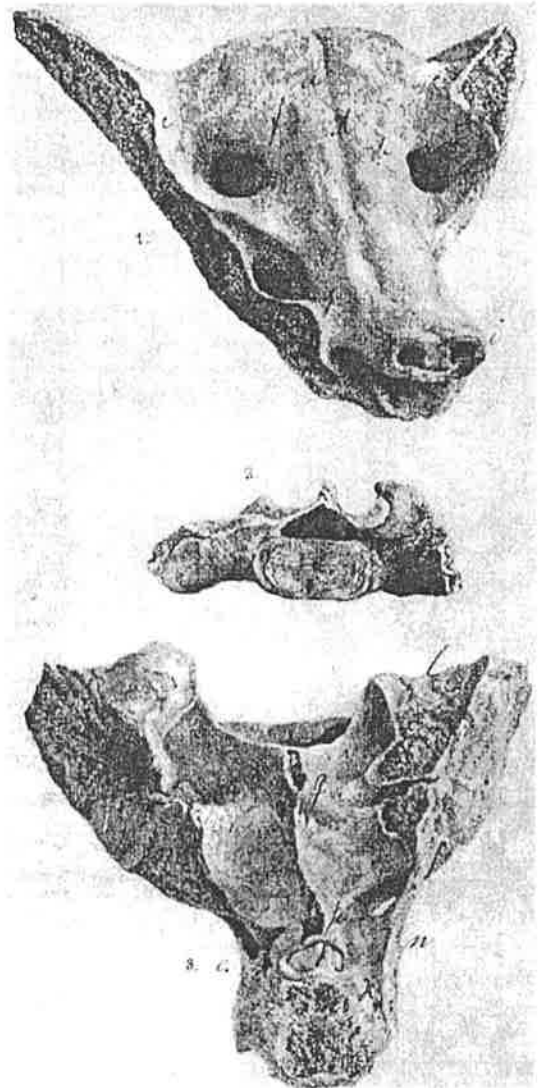
Lithograph of the sacrum as illustrated by Mariano Bárcena, published in *Anales del Museo Nacional*, vol. 2 (1882)

What is a camelid? What is a sacrum? The sculpture was made from the now fossilized remains of the sacrum of an extinct camelid. A camelid is a member of the Camelidae family—think camels, llamas, and alpacas. The sacrum is the large triangular bone at the base of the spine. Holes were cut into the end of the bone to represent nostrils, and the bone is also engraved (though this is difficult to see in photographs).

Issues: The date of the sculpture is difficult to determine because a stratigraphic analysis was not done at the find spot at the time of discovery. This would have involved a study of the different layers of soil and rock before the object was removed. Another problem is that the object was essentially lost to scholars between 1895 and 1956 (it was in private hands).

In 1882 the sculpture was in the possession of Mariano de la Bárcena, a Mexican geologist and botanist, who wrote the first scholarly article on it. He described the object in this way:

“...the fossil bone contains cuts or carvings that unquestionably were made by the hand of man...the cuts seem to have been made with a sharp instrument and some polish on the edges of the cuts may still be seen...the articular extremity of the last vertebra was utilized perfectly to represent the nose and mouth of the animal.” [1]



Bárcena was convinced of the authenticity of the object, but over the years—due to the lack of scientific evidence from the find spot—other scholars have questioned its age, and whether the object was even made by human hands. One author, in 1923, summarized the issues:

To allow us to state that the sacrum found at Tequixquaic was a definite proof of ancient man in the area the following things must be proven: (1) That the bone was actually a fossil belonging to an extinct species. We cannot doubt this since it has been affirmed by competent geologists and paleontologists. (2) That it was found in a fossiliferous deposit and that it had never been moved since it found its place there. This has not been proved in any convincing manner. (3) That the cuttings of the bone can actually be attributed to the hand of man and that it can never have occurred without human intervention. This has not been proved either. (4) That the carving was made while the species still existed and not in later times when the bone had already become fossilized. [2]

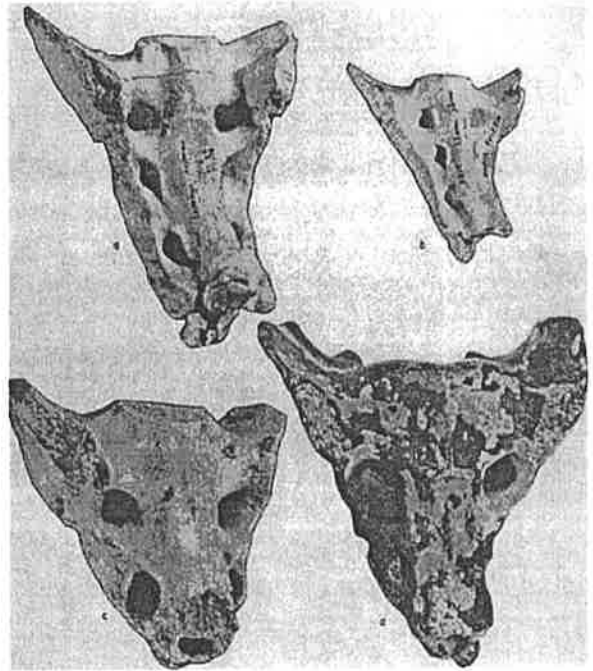
Today, scholars agree that the carving and markings were made by human hands—the two circular spaces that represent the nasal cavities were carefully carved and are perfectly symmetrical and were likely shaped by a sharp instrument. However, the lack of information from the find spot makes precise dating very difficult. It is quite common, in prehistoric art, for the shape of a natural form (like a sacrum) to suggest a subject (dog or pig head) to the carver, and so we should not be surprised that the sculpture still strongly resembles a sacrum.

Sacra from various forms of camel, illustration from: Luis Aveleyra Arroyo de Anda, "The Pleistocene Carved Bone from Tequixquaic, Mexico: A Reappraisal," *American Antiquity*, vol. 30, (January 1965), p. 269

Interpretation: Because the carving was made in a period before writing had developed, it is likely impossible to know what the sculpture meant to the carver and to his/her culture. One possible way to interpret the object is to look at it through the lens of later Mesoamerican cultures. One anthropologist has pointed out that in Mesoamerica, the sacrum is seen as sacred and that some Mesoamerican Indian languages named this bone with words referring to sacredness and the divine. In English, "sacrum" is derived from Latin: *os sacrum*, meaning "sacred bone." The sacrum is also—perhaps significantly for its meaning—located near the reproductive organs.

"Language and iconographic evidence strongly suggests that the sacrum bone was an important bone indeed in Mesoamerica, relating to sacredness, to resurrection, and to fire. The importance attached to this bone and its immediate neighbors is not limited to Mesoamerica. From ancient Egypt to ancient India and elsewhere, there is abundant evidence that the bones at the base of the spine, including especially the sacrum, were seen as sacred." [3]

As appealing as this interpretation is (and the argument the author makes is quite convincing), it is wise to be wary of connecting cultures across such vast geographic distances (though of course there are some aspects of our shared humanity that may be common across cultures). At this point in time, we have no direct evidence to support this interpretation, and so we cannot be certain of this object's original meaning for either the artist, or the people that produced it.



4. Running horned woman. Tassili n'Ajjer, Algeria. 6000–4000 B.C.E. Pigment on rock.

G14, 522-524; S5, 411-413

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<https://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/198301/paintings.from.the.past.htm>

Paintings from the Past

Written by Martin Love

Photographs courtesy of Henri Lhote

In *The Search for the Tassili Frescoes*, (Hutchinson, London, 1959) Henri Lhote, a French expert on prehistoric cave art, says Algeria's Tassili-n-Ajjer, with its ancient "frescoes," constitutes "the greatest museum of prehistoric art in the whole world."

Actually, the "frescoes" are not frescoes at all; they're prehistoric paintings some 8,000 years old. But Tassili-n-Ajjer is without doubt the great "museum" that Lhote says it is: an assembly of 800 or more magnificent works of primitive art shelters in a virtually inaccessible region on the edge of the Sahara desert.

Today, Tassili-n-Ajjer is virtually empty of life—as is most of the Sahara. But this was not always the case; as various prehistoric campsites hundreds of miles from the Mediterranean littoral attest, the Sahara was once inhabited by man and beast and today the bones of wild creatures, humans and fish can still be found at the campsites—along with stone implements. Once, in fact, great rivers, rising in the mountain massifs of North Africa linked to the Niger River, Lake Chad and other lakes—whose shrunken remains can still be seen in parts of southern Tunisia. And in the first century B.C., Strabo, the Greek geographer and historian, noted that horses were still common in the Sahara, and, according to the Elder Pliny, a little later, carnivorous beasts still existed in what he called "Libya"—the lands lying to the west of Egypt.

The first European to see the rock paintings and engravings on the sandstone of the Tassili-n-Ajjer was a French soldier named Lieutenant Brenans, who, in 1933, ventured into a deep canyon operation and noticed, on the walls of wadi cliffs, strange figures engraved in the stone: elephants, rhinoceroses, giraffes and, side by side, human figures.

Not long after, Brenans' discovery came to the attention of Henri Lhote, a pupil of the Abbe Breuil, the great expert on prehistoric cave art in France. In Algeria at the time, Lhote went right to Djanet, a town south of the Tassili plateau, met the lieutenant and, ultimately, examined the discoveries himself. He had, he wrote later, never seen anything "so extraordinary, so original, so beautiful."

Some 15 years later and again in 1956, Lhote led a team of painters and photographers to the plateau to copy and record the art work, under the aegis of the Museum of Man in Paris and with the financial support of the National Center of Scientific Research in France. Altogether, Lhote and his associates discovered some 800 paintings, many of which they carefully copied.



Exploring the Tassili, Lhote discovered that the prehistoric inhabitants of the region left paintings almost everywhere they found a favorable spot, particularly in their "homes": the caves and rock shelters in which they lived.

At a site called Tan Zoumiatak, for example, Lhote and his team, during their 16-month stay, found a large rock adorned with great, sometimes fanciful human figures painted with yellow ochre, and depictions of various animals that once roamed the region; the same was true of shelters at Tamrit, Timonzouline, Jabbaren and Aouanrhet.

Most prehistoric art, as Lhote said, was probably inspired by religious beliefs, but the Tassili seemed different because the paintings could be found almost everywhere, often in places that did not appear to be religious sanctuaries. Most, moreover, seemed to have been done without any discernible order—suggesting a simple spontaneity.

In his book, Lhote said that the most ancient paintings—going back perhaps 8,000 years—consisted of small human figures with schematic bodies and round heads, all painted in violaceous ochre. This round-headed human type, he said, is a basic style found in many paintings of the Tassili, and later phases or periods of artistic development are derived to some extent from this phase. But he also found what he called an "evolved" period, characterized by the appearance of polychrome paintings or round-headed human figures, larger and with thickened limbs. At the end of this latter period, at an undetermined date, he said, a recognizable Egyptian influence crept into the art of the Tassili. In this period Tassili artists painted bodies in red ochre, and added stylized flowers similar to ancient Egyptian motifs. After the "evolved" period, artistic quality declined, the drawings became coarser, the forms heavier, and the details, if any, are carelessly executed. This "decadent" period marked the last attempts by the Tassili's early inhabitants to paint the round-headed figures.

Lhote postulates that the "decadent" period ended when cattle-tending herdsmen migrated to the Tassili and pushed out the indigenous population, a view he bases on the fact that Tassili rock shelters were ultimately covered with a new style of painting consisting of human and animal figures of relatively small size. He said that this new period—"Bovidian"—represents the "greatest naturalistic school" of pre historic art in the world, and pointed out that the animals probably occupied a place of great importance in the lives of the Bovidian herdsmen. Wild animals—the elephant, giraffe, ostrich, gazelle, antelope and lion—were treated no less skillfully by Bovidian artists and the abundance of animal depictions attests to the existence of a damp and rich pasture.

Lhote believed that the herdsmen of the Bovidian period came from the Nile valley, or at least had contact with the peoples of Egypt, and pointed out that some Tassili paintings show boats like the ones that could be seen cruising the Nile 5,000 to 6,000 years ago.

In recent years, Lhote's theories about the provenance has been challenged, in an amusing way, by Erich von Däniken, whose *Chariots of the Gods* proposed that astronauts from another planet had visited the earth sometime in the prehistoric past. As evidence, von Däniken included certain inexplicable facts concerning the 1513 Piri Reis map of the world (See *Aramco World*, January-February 1980) and the Tassili paintings, some of which, von Däniken believes, bear a striking resemblance to the space suits of today's astronauts (See page 14 and below).

But if the historical provenance of the Tassili paintings is uncertain, the artistic value is not. They are, quite simply, beautiful. Like many prehistoric cave paintings—Lascaux, for example, or Les Combarelles—the

Tassili paintings have a freshness of color, an economy of line and a simplicity of treatment that are the envy of modern artists—and this is an additional reason to worry about their preservation. Because of their inaccessibility the Tassili paintings were once safe from man's often destructive curiosity. But since Lhote studied them, repeated wetting by tourists—to permit photography—has begun to erode them; and with the protective film of dust gone, the elements can now get at the colors.

Worse, perhaps, Tuareg entrepreneurs began, in 1968, to break off fragments of painted rock and sell them to tourists. The results, as one writer put it, are deterioration and destruction of man's most ancient artistic heritage.

Martin Love is a former assistant editor of *Aramco World Magazine*.

This article appeared on pages 6-15 of the January/February 1983 print edition of *Saudi Aramco World*.

<http://goo.gl/tQV5BG>

The Rainbow Bridge: Rainbows in Art, Myth, and Science

By Raymond L. Lee, Alistair B. Fraser pp. 14-16

Tassili-n-Ajjer: A Rainbow in the Desert?

Fifteen hundred miles from and thousands of years before our scribe's visit to Beni Hasan, another African seems to have described rain on stone. In present-day southern Algeria, scattered collections of open-air pictographs are found on the high desert plateau called Tassili-n-Ajjer.⁶ Today Tassili is a forbidding moonscape dominated by massifs, wadis, and weathered sandstone monoliths, but in the Neolithic era of several thousand years ago, it was a savanna that enjoyed a Mediterranean climate conducive to both herding and cultivation. The evidence for this favorable ancient climate comes not only from the herdsman and animals of Tassili's rock paintings, but also from ancient pollen samples.^{6a}

Little known to Europeans until the early twentieth century,^{6b} the Tassili pictographs have become the subject of international archaeological study and since 1972 have formed the core of Algeria's Tassili National Park.^{6c} Figure 1-8 shows one of the park's most elegant pictographs: a horned running woman who may be a dancer or a goddess. Much of her body is covered with white dots that suggest scarifications, and she wears a fringed loincloth and arm bands.⁷ She is rendered in the Round Head or archaic style, which places her among Tassili's oldest pictographs.⁷ Around her are figures from a later Tassili style, and beneath her is a smaller archaic-style woman framed by the feature that interests us most—a banded arch resembling a rainbow.

Henri Lhote, one of the first archaeologists to see this pictograph, simply described these bands in 1959 as "an arch," presumably meaning a geologic feature such as a cave opening or rock shelter.⁷ A more dramatic natural arch, such as Utah's remarkable sandstone Rainbow Bridge,⁷ does not seem to exist anywhere nearby. Yet barring the unlikely existence of a constructed arch, might not Fig. 1-8's arch represent a rainbow? Several of the pictograph's features support this idea.

First, the running woman's stippling is most likely scarification. However, stippling would later be used in the Near East¹¹ and in Greece¹² to suggest divine rain. Thus the dots at the top of Fig. 1-8 may be either "a cloud of grain falling from a wheat field," as Lhote suggests,¹³ or a cloud of life-giving water drops. Second, the wavy lines hanging from the woman's arms and waist are reminiscent not only of decorative fringes but also of the rain bundles seen in Mesopotamian cylinder seals.¹⁴ We need not choose between these identifications; they may have coexisted for the ancient Tassilians. Third, the banding of Fig. 1-8's arch is one of the few distinctive features common to most ancient rainbows. For example, some aboriginal rainbow pictographs from the western United States (Fig. 1-9) share the banding and oblong shape seen in Fig. 1-8, and their resemblance to it is both striking and unexpected.¹⁵ Great differences of time and place presumably rule out any cultural connection between Figs. 1-8 and 1-9, yet those very differences arouse curiosity about what common visual or artistic experience might have led to such remarkably similar rainbow shapes in ancient Africa and pre-Columbian America.¹⁶

Unlike ancient Egypt, Neolithic Tassili does not pose any vexing questions about whether its climate permitted rainbows. Although Tassili's rainfall was not prodigious, there seems little doubt that it was routine. Can we say with certainty that Fig. 1-8's arch is a rainbow? No, but several features suggest that it may well be, and if so, it is one of our oldest rainbow images. With the civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt millennia in the future, Neolithic pastoralists invested spiritual and artistic energy in depicting the portentous bow of the heavens.

Gardner's Art through the Ages, enhanced 13th ed., Fred Kleiner, pp. 394-395.

TASSILI N'AJJER A 7,000-year-old painting (FIG. 15-2) from Tassili n'Ajjer in southeastern Algeria in the central Sahara (at that time a verdant savanna) is one of the earliest and finest surviving examples of rock art. The painter depicted a running woman with convincing animation and significant detail. The dotted marks on her shoulders, legs, and torso probably indicate that she is wearing body paint applied for a ritual. Her face, however, is featureless, a common trait in the earliest art (see Chapter 1). The white parallel patterns attached to her arms and waist appear to represent flowing raffia decorations and a raffia skirt. Horns—shown in the *twisted perspective*, or *composite* view, typical of prehistoric art (see Chapter 1)—are also part of her ceremonial attire. Notably, the artist painted this detailed image over a field of much smaller painted human beings, an indication of why it is often so difficult to date and interpret art on rock surfaces, as subsequent superimpositions are frequent. Nonetheless, scholars have been able to establish a rough chronology for African rock art, an art form that continues to this day.

Although the precise meaning of most African rock art also remains uncertain, a considerable literature exists that describes, analyzes, and interprets the varied human and animal activities shown, as well as the evidently symbolic, more abstract patterns. The human and humanlike figures may include representations of supernatural beings as well as mortals. Some scholars have, in fact, interpreted the woman from Tassili n'Ajjer as a horned deity instead of a human wearing ceremonial headgear.

5. Bushel with ibex motifs. Susa, Iran. 4200–3500 B.C.E. Painted terra cotta.

SH

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<http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/bushel-ibex-motifs>

This large painted vase, magnificently decorated, was among the funerary objects of the first inhabitants of Susa. On a secondary burial, the deceased received bushels (cylindrical earthenware pots), bowls and metal objects indicative of the prosperity of the city, then at its height. The style of the pottery is in keeping with that of the Susian plain, dominated since its foundation by the city of Susa.

A representation of the world

This large, handthrown vessel with thin walls has a stylized decoration that constitutes a kind of synthesis of the environment of the first agricultural communities of the ancient Orient. A frieze of aquatic birds runs around the top; the parallel lines of their necks suggest a whole flock on the water's surface, a sight that must have been common at the time in the low, reed-carpeted valleys. Underneath are running dogs with long, narrow bodies, perhaps the ancestors of the slender salukis, hunting dogs that were adapted to the steppe plateaus. The main part of the vase is decorated with large panels divided up with meander patterns; these may symbolize the settlement of the land by men, showing the borders of fields and villages and watercourses. In the center of the panels is the majestic figure of the goat, omnipresent in both its wild or domesticated forms. Traced with simple shapes, triangles and circles, small details such as a goatee beard or tail add a personal touch. Within the oversized circle of its horns is an abstract motif, perhaps a topographical or clan-related sign, serving to identify the vase and its owner as belonging to a particular group or a family.



Susa, a regional metropolis

This pot comes from a cemetery at the foot of the Susa acropolis, where thousands of secondary-burial places have been found, each containing painted ceramic vases and a few metal objects. This cemetery dates back to the original settlement of Susa, in the late 5th and early 4th millennium BC. At first a simple village lying in a plain where the land was worked by other agricultural communities, Susa seems very quickly to have become the leading community. Its superiority is visible in the construction of a high terrace of unbaked bricks of which only traces remain - sufficient, however, to identify it as one of the first monumental buildings of a public and probably religious nature, also found in Mesopotamia. At the foot of this high terrace, the Susians gathered the

remains of their dead after the defleshing that probably took place farther away. The reasons for these funerary practices remain uncertain, as does the exceptional nature of the offerings. Because no dwellings places contemporary to the graves have been found, we do not know if painted ceramics were in common use or if they served specifically funerary purposes. They all have similar, highly recognizable forms, styles and motifs, but each vase bears the stamp of an individual craftsman: although specialized workshops mass-produced objects over several generations, each artist gave free reign to his personal genius. The painted earthenware of the Susa graves raises questions about the first villages of the ancient Orient, their lifestyle and thinking. Susa, a prosperous city in the 5th millennium BC on the arrival of Islam, provides a rare opportunity to study the development of some of these villages, which, on the advent of writing, became political, economical and religious centers.

http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/art/timelines/ancient_near_east/html/susa.html

Prehistoric Iranian pottery was first discovered in southwestern Iran at Susa, the ancient capital of the kingdom of Elam. Several thousand examples of Neolithic painted pottery were found there at a necropolis — an elaborate ancient cemetery — buried with the dead along with copper axes and other useful items. Many of these hand-built vessels were crafted with especially thin walls, requiring extra skill and attention in their making. Their delicate nature suggests they were designed purely for ceremonial use as ritual objects. They are painted with a brown glaze in a style that exhibits a remarkable degree of inventiveness and design sophistication. Stylized animal forms combine with complex geometric shapes in symmetric ornamental patterns. Referred to as the animal style, such abstracted animal motifs would spread through various nomadic tribes from Mesopotamia to China and into Celtic Ireland. The influence of prehistoric Mesopotamia is evident in northern European art well into the medieval era.

One of the most commonly recurring animal motifs of prehistoric highland Iran is based on the ibex — a wild mountain goat. A famous example of the ibex design can be seen in the Louvre's *Goblet from Susa I*, a beaker, or vase, nearly a foot tall. The exaggerated horns of the ibex form near-perfect concentric circles that echo the cylindrical form of the vase. This design, typical of Neolithic Susa pottery, shows great sophistication in relating the shape of the painted image to the shape of the vessel itself. The significance of the ibex as a symbol is unknown to us, but the elegance with which it was rendered into a simplified geometric design speaks plainly six thousand years after its making.

6. Anthropomorphic stele, Arabian Peninsula. Fourth millennium B.C.E. Sandstone.

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<http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2010/aug/10/louvre-saudi-arabia-exhibition>

Saudi Arabia's pre-Islamic treasures come to the Louvre

Artifacts reveal the archaeology and history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from prehistoric times to the modern era

Almost nothing is known about the anthropomorphic stele of [Saudi Arabia](#) that Béatrice André-Salvini, head of the oriental antiquities department at the Louvre, refers to as the Suffering Man on account of his look of resigned pain. The only certainty is that it dates from the fourth millennium BC, was found near Ha'il in the north and has never been exhibited. That is true of two-thirds of the 320 items on show at the Louvre. With good reason. The "official" history of the country starts in the seventh century with the coming of Islam. The Suffering Man and two similar stelae, regarded as representations of the idols the Prophet destroyed, are a revelation.

http://www.roadsofarabia.com/exhibition/artifact_1.html

Anthropomorphic Stele

4th millennium BCE

This haunting anthropomorphic stele is among the earliest known works of art from the Arabian Peninsula and dates back to some six thousand years ago. Found near Ha'il in the north, it was probably associated with religious or burial practices. The figure's distinctive belted robe and double-bladed sword may have been unique to this region.

More Info

El-Maakir-Qaryat al-Kaafa, near Ha'il, Saudi Arabia

Sandstone

H x W: 92 x 21 cm

National Museum, Riyadh, 997

<http://www.arabnews.com/node/360016>

Author: Geoffrey King, life.style@arabnews.com
Wednesday 10 November 2010



The changes in Arabia that set in with the Bronze Age were incremental and far-reaching and the objects from Saudi Arabia displayed at the Louvre repeatedly demonstrated the point. These changes extended far beyond the implications of smelting metal, however useful a technical ability.

The sensitivity and the sense of mystery evoked by the anthropomorphic stone stelae from north Arabia of the 4th millennium is quite remarkable. These are outstanding works of art by any standard of judgment and the large figure from Al-Maa from Al-Maakir/Qaryat Al-Kaafa near Hail in its pose of pensive contemplation, is from the hand of a great master.

Over the following millennia, towns emerged in the oases of Arabia and Tayma in the north was one of the greatest. A large painted bowl found there of the 1st millennium BCE is one of the finest of treasures in the National Museum in Riyadh. In its setting in the Louvre with the elegance of its complex bands of decoration in brown slip-paint, it simply glowed.

In later times, Tayma was the scene for the celebrated episode between 553 and 539 BCE when Nabonidus (Nabu-na'id), the last king of Babylon, took up residence there and made it the capital of his empire. The king ensured that Babylon thereby controlled the northern distribution network of the valuable trade in frankincense and myrrh that by this time had long been carried by camel caravans from the incense producing lands in ancient South Arabia.

The Paris exhibition displayed the broken upper half of a stele and its base found at Tayma by a 2004 Saudi-German expedition. It is inscribed in cuneiform script and shows the king and symbols of the Babylonian astrological deities, with the name of Nabonidus written on the base, the first inscription in his name ever found at Tayma.

A funerary stele, inscribed in Aramaic, marks the complex culture of Tayma after the ending of Babylonian hegemony. This stele is of a well-known South Arabian type of the 3rd-2nd BCE, its human face reduced to a stylized, powerful abstraction. Such stelae are rare in northwest Arabia and it may derive from the connection of Tayma with the South Arabia kingdoms via the rich and ancient trading city of Dedan, the modern city of Al-'Ula'.

<http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/201102/roads.of.arabia.htm>

Just how original becomes evident in the first gallery as the ancient meets modernity: Three sublime anthropomorphic sandstone grave markers look as if they might have been crafted by an abstract sculptor of the 20th century—yet they are more than 5000 years old. Among them, a diminutive torso with seemingly doleful eyes and a hand poignantly held over its heart stands out for its extraordinary expressiveness, achieved with a few sparsely etched lines that adroitly captured the collarbone, hands and arms, quizzical mouth and odd, knob-like ears.

"I dubbed him 'the suffering man,'" André-Salvini recalls with a laugh, and the name stuck. The enigmatic character soon became a star of the show, singled out as the literal "poster boy" of the event to become a ubiquitous visual presence on banners inside the museum and on the front cover of the French edition of the catalogue.

Found near Ha'il in the north-central region of the country, the statue had been erected in an open-air sanctuary, according to André-Salvini. Based on similarities to other stelae excavated in Yemen with skeletal human remains carbon-dated between 3500 and 3100bce, she concludes that the "suffering man" was produced in the same era." Roads of Arabia, Written by Richard Covington, Saudi Aramco World, March/April 2011

http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/24/arts/24iht-melik24.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

Forget about Arabia as a land without figural representation. It was already there in the fourth millennium B.C. In a small village near Ha'il, three sandstone steles were dug up within the last four decades. The geometric stylization of one, a standing man with two straps across his chest and a long dagger with split blade, would have appealed to Western avant-garde sculptors of the 20th century. Another stele represents the bust of a man, arms pressed against his chest, reduced to a nearly rectangular volume. By contrast, the head is extraordinarily expressive with its lips bitterly pressed and one eyebrow slightly raised, as if in puzzlement.

The Ha'il sculptures form part of a larger group of steles strewn around the Arabian Peninsula from the southernmost part of present-day Jordan to Yemen, with significant stylistic variations. This funerary art was cultivated over a period of some 3,000 years. A rectangular headstone of a tomb, one of many from the Tayma' or Teima oasis in the eastern region, is believed to date from the fifth or fourth century B.C. It displays the same inclination toward the reduction of human appearance to near abstraction paradoxically associated with the same sense of expressiveness. An inscription is carefully engraved in Aramaic, the ancient Semitic language that was widespread across the Near East by the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. The monumental lettering, evidently from a professional scribe's hand, reads "In memory of Taym son of Zayd." In formulation as in sound, the funerary memento barely differs from the inscriptions engraved in Arabic more than a thousand years later as Islam began spreading in Arabia and far beyond.

9. The Ambum Stone. Ambum Valley, Enga Province, Papua New Guinea. c. 1500 B.C.E. Greywacke.

G14, 1045

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http://cs.nga.gov.au/Detail-LRG.cfm?IMG=40724_B&IRN=40724&vID=3

The Ambum stone, Ambum Valley, Western Highlands, Papua New Guinea

[Pre-historic zoomorphic figure, the Ambum Stone; possibly representing the embryo of a long-beaked echidna] 3500 years ago possibly representing the embryo of a long-beaked echidna figurines, ethnographic objects, greywacke stone Technique: greywacke stone

20.0 h x 7.5 w x 14.0 d cm Purchased 1977 Accession No: NGA 77.637



This exquisite and exceedingly rare sculpture, discovered in a cave in the early 1960s, was made more than 3500 years ago and is one of the earliest known Pacific works of art. Ancient stone mortars and pestles from Papua New Guinea are often fashioned into the forms of birds, humans and animals. However, the *Ambum stone* is on a higher sculptural level than other prehistoric pestles and has a greater level of figurative detail. When the process involved in producing the *Ambum stone* is taken into consideration it is all the more magnificent – working with the tough greywacke stone would have involved many weeks of laborious chipping and hammering at the surface with stone tools.

Despite the various animalistic features, such as the nose tip that resembles that of a fruit bat, it may depict a juvenile long-beaked echidna (spiny anteater), an animal that is thought to have been revered prior to the introduction of pigs for its useful fat deposits. The significance and function of the *Ambum stone* remains obscure, as little is known about the people who produced this beautiful work. Objects such as this are often considered sacred and credited with supernatural powers by present-day people in the region, where they are used as spirit stones in sorcery and other rituals.

Text © National Gallery of Australia, Canberra 2010

From: Ron Radford (ed), *Collection highlights: National Gallery of Australia*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2008

http://www.ga.gov.au/image_cache/GA17318.pdf (p16)

When the Australian National Gallery lent one of its treasures, the Ambum Stone, to an art exhibition in France last year, it fell while being placed on display and broke into three main pieces.

The pieces of this prehistoric stone sculpture from Papua New Guinea were roughly glued together and after exhibition returned to National Gallery conservators in Canberra for proper repair.

'This was a tough break for art, but a good break for science', says Dr John Bain, one of the AGSO – Geoscience Australia geologists asked to analyze the broken Ambum Stone before repair.

The interior of the sculpture, which differed from the coated and weathered exterior, was exposed by the breakage. Gallery conservators pieced together not only stone, but also data from geologists, anthropologists and other scientists about a very rare artifact of a people long gone.

Little known

The 25-centimetre-high Ambum Stone fits comfortably in an adult human hand. Anthropologists believe the Ambum Stone depicts a fetal echidna, and that the sculpture was used in fertility rituals.

It was found in 1962 in a cave in Yambu-clan territory in the Ambum Valley in the western highlands of PNG. Shortly after discovery, it was bought by a private European collector.

No-one knew its age, and little is known about its original owners because there is no cultural continuity between the sculpture's maker and present-day inhabitants of the area where it was found. Similar stone sculptures that might put the Ambum Stone in a cultural or historical context are very rare.

Science informs art

With the Ambum Stone interior exposed, Gallery conservators wanted to know its geological composition in the hope of linking the sculpture to the area where it was found. Geoscience Australia was approached for answers. Dr Bain spent time from 1966–71 mapping areas of PNG, and knows the geology of the region where the Ambum Stone was found. He examined the broken pieces under stereoscopic microscope and organized an infra red spectral analysis. He found that the Ambum Stone is a fine-grained crystalline rock, probably an altered andesitic lava or crystal tuff, and that its outer layer seems to be several coatings of white clay material. As well, tiny rootlets were found in a small fracture. This discovery led to further research at the Australian National University, and eventually answered the biggest question of all: the age of the Ambum Stone.

Age determined

Ms Beata Tworek-Matuszkiewicz, Senior Conservator of Objects at the National Gallery, says that plant roots penetrated a small crack some time after the sculpture was lost or discarded by its owners. 'The sculpture broke partially along an old crack, exposing the plant roots and giving us an opportunity to carbon date the organic matter', she says.

Ms Tworek-Matuszkiewicz says it was a 'shot in the dark' because the plant roots may have been only 50 years old. But the organic matter proved to be 3.5 thousand years old. 'That means the Ambum Stone has to be at least that age and possibly much older, which fits nicely with what anthropologists know about the makers of this stone sculpture', she says.

[http://www.jps.auckland.ac.nz/document//Volume 74 1965/Volume 74, No. 1/A remarkable stone figure from the New Guinea Highlands, p 78 - 79/p1](http://www.jps.auckland.ac.nz/document//Volume%2074%201965/Volume%2074,%20No.%201/A%20remarkable%20stone%20figure%20from%20the%20New%20Guinea%20Highlands,%20p%2078%20-%2079/p1)

A REMARKABLE STONE FIGURE FROM THE NEW GUINEA HIGHLANDS

The frontispiece of this issue is a photograph of a most unusual stone figure in the possession of Mr. Philip Goldman who has kindly permitted the *JPS* to publish the photograph and information which he has provided.

The figure was collected in 1962 from a cave in Yambu clan-territory in the Ambum (or Ambumu) Valley of the Western Highlands District of the Territory of New Guinea. The Ambum Valley is occupied by clans of the Mae Enga people, and the altitude of Yambu lies between approximately 6,000 and 8,000 ft. The collector was a non-anthropologist who did not obtain any information from local people as to the stone's use or as to their beliefs concerning its origin.

The height of the figure is 20 cm., greatest width 7.5 cm., and thickness 14 cm. It weighs 4lb. 6oz. Mr. Goldman believes that the material is probably medium grain greywacke.

Mr. Goldman suggests that the figure may possibly represent the embryonic stage of a Long-beaked Echidna (*Zaglossus* sp.), sometimes known as the 'New Guinea Anteater'. The elongated snout and the representation of the lower limbs lend plausibility to this suggestion. Unfortunately we have so far been unable to locate any photograph or drawing of recently hatched *Zaglossus*. However, we are unable to suggest any other New Guinea creature which looks in any way like the carving.

Long-beaked Echidnas have been reported from a number of localities in New Guinea mountain ranges, in some cases at very high altitudes, well above the limit of human settlement. They are absent or very rare in those areas where there is any substantial human population. However there is no reason to suppose that they were not formerly well distributed in the Highlands, when human populations were smaller and their impact on the natural environment was less intense.

Prehistoric stone figures recovered from New Guinea include over twenty representations of birds and several anthropomorphic pieces ¹, but only, so far as we know, one other which has been interpreted as

a mammal. This is a figure from the Giriwo River headwaters, Eastern Papua, described by Etheridge (1908) and interpreted by him as a cuscus or other marsupial. The Yambu stone is thus unique as a representation and is also clearly of quite remarkable aesthetic quality. However it does appear to share certain stylistic features (ridge-division running down whole length of face; protuberant belly; representation of limbs and genitalia) with some other figures from the Highlands ².

Dr. M. J. Meggitt, in a forthcoming publication on Mae Enga religion, refers to the use of natural stones and prehistoric stone artifacts in fertility cults which propitiate the ancestral dead.

Mr. Goldman, whose address is Apt. 6, 36 West Heath Road, London N.W.3, would welcome information from any reader who can throw further light on the figure.

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¹ Bulmer 1962:204-7, 1964:67-72; Pretty 1964.

² Bulmer 1962:205-7, pl. 2-3.

<http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/international/2008-10-27/pacific-art-gods-ghosts-and-men/230246>

Pacific art - Gods, ghosts and men

Updated 5 January 2012, 10:20 AEDT Michael Cavanagh

A new exhibition at Australia's National Gallery of Art aims to make Australia more aware of the rich culture of some of its nearest Pacific neighbors.

It has been collecting dust for years - hidden away in Australia's National Art Gallery in Canberra.



But now, as Radio Australia's Michael Cavanagh reports examples of just over 2000 pieces of Pacific art are to go on display at the gallery in the 'Gods, ghosts and men' exhibition.

The Australian art gallery has made a name for itself by staging major exhibitions of art from around the world, as well as maintaining permanent displays of local and overseas works.

However up until now the varied collection of Pacific art has rarely seen the light of day.

This is despite what the gallery's Director Ron Radford says has been a long awareness of the region's rich offerings.

"And in January 1969 Sir William Dargie the gallery's future chairman embarked on the first of three expeditions to Papua New Guinea. He had been stationed there during the war. Results of these arduous expeditions concluded because there were three expeditions beginning between 1969 and 1970 laid the foundations for the gallery's very considerable Pacific arts collection," he said.

Crispin Howarth is responsible for deciding on the 75 pieces to be displayed, which vary from a Vanuatu stone mortar believed to be between three and eight thousand years old to contemporary pieces.

"This exhibition is a way for the younger generation of Australians to start appreciating and recognizing, and even becoming influence by the arts from the Pacific region, which for so long in Australia have hidden from sight" he said.

"Times and focus have changed - in the 1960s there was a push to show Pacific art, but at the time it was known as primitive art, because it was the work of tribal communities, indigenous communities. It was seen at a different angle, as a touchstone for Western artists.

"The works shown in this collection vary from the Ambum stone, which is one of the oldest known works from the whole Pacific, right through to a work by Matthew Salle, a new Islander from Papua New Guinea, whose work he made in 2004."

Mr Howarth says it's impossible to try and represent every community and every art style right across the Pacific.

"So, it's a matter of selecting things for their visual impact - we are a fine art gallery - we're not a museum, we don't show anthropology. And so much in the past, art from the Pacific has fallen into the trap of being looked at as anthropological specimens."

Mr Howarth also says the collection was compiled and displayed with an awareness of the cultural sensitivities involved.

"We organized actually for our Maori collection of art from New Zealand, every work was blessed prior to display. The tapu, the rituals were undertaken to lift the tapu on the works so then they were enabled to be shown publicly. We're in close contact with many communities - for instance the Vanuatu works, the Rambaram figure, we contacted the originating community and sought permission prior to display.

"So it's shown with pride of the community - the community is quite proud that their works are being shown so far away from their country. It's a great status thing.

"But as for sensitivities as well, some objects of a secret and sacred nature, of course we would never show. Objects which involve human remains, if we were not given permission to show, we would never show. And there are other objects that are of an arcane nature, but the knowledge and information behind them has been slowly lost over the 20th century.

"The definition of culture changes - now that's more into a museum realm than an art gallery - but all cultures change."

http://www.metmuseum.org/TOAH/hd/ngss/hd_ngss.htm

The earliest known works of Oceanic sculpture are a series of ancient stone figures unearthed in various locations on the island of New Guinea, primarily in the mountainous highlands of the interior. To date, no examples have been excavated from a secure archaeological context. Although organic material trapped within a crack in one example has recently been dated to 1500 B.C., firm dating and chronology for the figures are otherwise lacking.

The stone sculptures fall into three basic categories: mortars, pestles, and freestanding figures. The tops of many pestles are adorned with images of human heads, birds, or bird's heads. The mortars display similar anthropomorphic and avian imagery as well as geometric motifs. Freestanding figures include depictions of humans, birds, and phalluses, as well as long-nosed animals that some scholars identify as echidnas (spiny mammals resembling hedgehogs). While the original significance and function of these stone images remain unknown, they possibly represent totemic species or ancestors and were likely used in ritual contexts. When found by contemporary New Guinea peoples, these early stone sculptures are often thought to be of supernatural origin and are reused in a variety of religious contexts, from fertility rituals to hunting magic and sorcery.

Eric Kjellgren, Department of Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Jennifer Wagelie, Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York



10. Tlatilco female figurine. Central Mexico, site of Tlatilco. 1200–900 B.C.E. Ceramic.

SH

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<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1983.424>

Female Figure, 12th–9th century B.C.

Mexico; Las Bocas (?)

Ceramic; H. 6 3/4 in. (17 cm)

Rogers Fund, 1983 (1983.424)

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Ceramic figures from central Mexico made during the late second millennium B.C. usually depict women. Commonly described as fertility figurines, their attenuated limbs and occasionally disturbing facial features have been interpreted as abnormalities indicative of special access to the supernatural realm. As there is a wide range of representation and type



among these figures, such interpretations are not necessarily exclusive. Certain figurines have details that may indicate social status, such as the earspools and hairstyle seen here, while others clearly relate to Olmec imagery. Most of the details reflect regional traditions in which facial and body treatments can be recognizably precise. The crisp narrow eyes and mouth of this figurine, for instance, recall the so-called pretty lady figures from Tlatilco, an early site in the Basin of Mexico, but the bodily proportions are less distorted than those of Tlatilco figures. A possible source may be further to the south, as the figure is said to be from the site of Las Bocas in the present-day state of Puebla.

<http://archaeology.about.com/od/tterms/a/tlatilco.htm>

Tlatilco is an important Early Formative [Mesoamerican](#) site in [Central Mexico](#). Located in the Valley of Mexico, on the shores of Lake Texcoco. The site is now partially covered by the modern town of the same name, and in the 1950s was heavily quarried to obtain clay to make bricks. This activity led to the occasional digging up of burials, unfortunately promoting the looting of figurines, and pottery.

[Excavations](#) [Ancient Art History](#) [History](#) [Iron Age](#) [Toltec](#)

Excavations at Tlatilco

In 1945-1950, Mexican archaeologists carried out the first excavations at Tlatilco, discovering many burials with grave goods, mainly ceramic vessels, figurines, masks, and musical instruments dating between 1200 and 400 BC. Later archaeological excavations led to the identification of house floors and trash pits suggesting that the site was not only a burial place but an actual community. Radiocarbon, obtained during the 1962-1969 excavations, place some of the burials between 1200 and 900 BC.

Although evidence of structures with domestic or public activities are almost absent at Tlatilco, due to the extent of looting activities and modern construction, information about the life style and [social organization](#) of this Formative site can be gathered by the materials recovered in its almost 500 burials.

Especially important are the hundreds of female figurines, with detailed depictions of hair styles, clothing and body ornaments which carry valuable information about its ancient inhabitants' real or idealized life style. It has been proposed that these figures could depict real individuals or deities.

Social Organization at Tlatilco

The analysis of the burial materials also provide information about Tlatilco's social ranking, specialized activities and inter-regional connections. Evidence of long-distance trade, such as seashells, jade ornaments, iron-ore mirrors, marine turtle shells and pearl oyster pendants have been found in some burials, suggesting not only the presence of pan-Mesoamerican connections, but also the existence at Tlatilco of social groups with preferential access to these exotic goods.

Finally, the finding of such luxury items in child burials would suggest the existence at Tlatilco of some sort of hereditary system, where people, presumably leaders, were allowed to take out of circulation precious and exotic goods and bury them with infants--who could not have possibly acquired them by themselves--therefore marking an example of early inherited social inequality.

Sources

This glossary entry is a part of the About.com guide to the Ancient Mesoamerica and the Dictionary of Archaeology.

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Female Figurine, Tlatilco, Central Mexico, 900-500 B.C.E.
Ceramic, modeled, W. 1.25" x H. 3.00" 2001.25

Numerous female figurines similar to this one have been found in excavated ancient sites, including burials and dwellings, throughout Central Mexico. Although little is known about the function of these objects in Pre-Columbian society, it has been suggested that they are related to women's roles in regards to nature, especially fertility and maternity. The figures are small scale and small breasted with cinched waists, stump-like arms and ample thighs. Representing both young and old women, some are naked while others wear short skirts and applied ornaments. Less common examples from Tlatilco include figurines holding babies, and dual faced images sharing a central eye. Sometimes associated with the later Michoacan figures dubbed pretty ladies in the literature, these brownware figurines may have served in widespread fertility cult practices in ancient Mesoamerica.

https://sniteartmuseum.nd.edu/assets/134708/snite_selected_works.pdf

STANDING FEMALE FIGURINE WITH BLACK- AND-WHITE DUALITY BODY PAINT, TYPE D4

Early Preclassic period, 1300-1000 B.C.

Tlatilco culture was a regional religious expression of the Valley of Mexico and the central Mexican highlands named after a site in the northwest corner of Mexico City.



The area was an Olmec port of trade on a route that extended across the Valley of Mexico. Its inhabitants made Olmec-influenced figurines and ceramic vessels that included imagery of the Great Goddess. They buried these objects with their dead under the floors of their homes and compounds. This finely modeled figurine's duality body paint is unusually well preserved. Fingerprints indicate that all the paint was applied at one sitting, without time to dry. The limbs and body are quartered just above the navel (right leg, left chest, and left arm are cream; left leg, right chest, and right arm are black). The artist covered the entire face with red, then painted black and white on the right and left sides. Double-wedged eyes with central punch marks distinguish Type D4, an archaeological classification, from the rest of the D group figurines. In 1966 Arthur N. Seiff lent a large exhibition of Mesoamerican art, including this piece, to Father Anthony Lauck's O'Shaughnessy Art Gallery at Notre Dame. This figurine returned to campus as a purchase in 2000. DEBS

<https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/ap-art-history/global-prehistory-ap/paleolithic-mesolithic-neolithic/a/tlatilco-figurines>

Tlatilco Figurines

Intimate and lively

Tlatilco figurines are wonderful small ceramic figures, often of women, found in Central Mexico. This is the region of the later and much better-known Aztec empire, but the people of Tlatilco flourished 2,000-3,000 years before the Aztec came to power in this Valley. Although Tlatilco was already settled by the Early Preclassic period (c. 1800-1200 B.C.E.), most scholars believe that the many figurines date from the Middle Preclassic period, or about 1200-400 B.C.E. Their intimate, lively poses and elaborate hairstyles are indicative of the already sophisticated artistic tradition. This is remarkable given the early dates. Ceramic figures of any sort were widespread for only a few centuries before the appearance of Tlatilco figurines.



Appearance

The Tlatilco figurine at the Princeton University Art Museum has several traits that directly relate to many other Tlatilco female figures: the emphasis on the wide hips, the spherical upper thighs, and the pinched waist. Many Tlatilco figurines also show no interest in the hands or feet, as we see here. Artists treated hairstyles with great care and detail, however, suggesting that it was hair and its styling was important for the people of Tlatilco, as it was for many peoples of this region. This figurine not only shows an elaborate hairstyle, but shows it for two connected heads (on the single body). We have other two-headed female figures from Tlatilco, but they are rare when compared with the figures that show a single head. It is very difficult to know exactly why the artist depicted a bicephalic (two-headed) figure (as opposed to the normal single head), as we have no documents or other aids that would help us define the meaning. It may be that the people of Tlatilco were interested in expressing an idea of duality, as many scholars have argued.

The makers of Tlatilco figurines lived in a large farming villages near the great inland lake in the center of the basin of Mexico. Modern Mexico City sits on top of the remains of the village, making archaeological work difficult. We don't know what the village would have looked beyond the basic shape of the common house—a mud and reed hut that was the favored house design of many early peoples of Mexico. We do know that most of the inhabitants made their living by growing maize (corn) and taking advantage of the rich lake resources nearby. Some of the motifs found on other Tlatilco ceramics, such as ducks and fish, would have come directly from their lakeside surroundings.

Male figures are rare

Tlatilco artists rarely depicted males, but when they did the males were often wearing costumes and even masks. Masks were very rare on female figures; most female figures stress hairstyle and/or body paint. Thus the male figures seem to be valued more for their ritual roles as priests or other religious specialists, while the religious role of the females is less clear but was very likely present.

How they were found

In the first half of the 20th century, a great number of graves were found by brick-makers mining clay in the area. These brick-makers would often sell the objects—many of them figurines—that came out of these graves to interested collectors. Later archaeologists were able to dig a number of complete burials, and they too found a wealth of objects buried with the dead. The objects that were found in largest quantities—and that enchanted many collectors and scholars of ancient Mexico—were the ceramic figurines.

Craftsmanship

Unlike some later Mexican figurines, those of Tlatilco were made exclusively by hand, without relying on molds. It is important to think, then, about the consistent mastery shown by the artists of many of these figurines. The main forms were created through pinching the clay and then shaping it by hand, while some of the details were created by a sharp instrument cutting linear motifs onto the wet clay. The forms of the body were depicted in a specific proportion that, while non-naturalistic, was striking and effective. The artist was given a very small space (most figures are less than 15 cm high) in which to create elaborate hairstyles. Even for today's viewer, the details in this area are endlessly fascinating. The pieces have a nice finish, and the paint that must indicate body decoration was firmly applied (when it is preserved, as in the two-headed figure above). Many scholars doubt that there were already full-time artists in such farming villages, but it is certain that the skills necessary to function as an artist in the tradition were passed down and mastered over generations.

Essay by Dr. Rex Koontz



Shaman, Middle Preclassic (1200-600 B.C.E.), Tlatilco, 9.5 cm high ([National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City](#))

11. Terra cotta fragment. Lapita. Solomon Islands, Reef Islands. 1000 B.C.E. Terra cotta (incised).

S5, 862

GW, 462

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<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/pacific-migrations/page-3>

Story: Pacific migrations

Page 3 – Into Remote Oceania: Lapita people

Around 1500 BC a culture known as Lapita (ancestors of the Polynesians, including Māori) appeared in the Bismarck Archipelago in Near Oceania. Recent DNA analysis suggests that they originally came from Island South-East Asia, and that there was some interbreeding with people already living in the Bismarcks. Archaeological sites in the Moluccas in Indonesia are the closest forerunners to Lapita sites.

The pottery of the Lapita people was similar in form to that of their forebears, but their decorative style was an innovation that emerged in the Bismarcks. The design included stylized faces, which were most elaborate during the early years of the migration and clearly carried cultural significance. This unique style was one of several traits referred to as the 'Lapita cultural complex'.

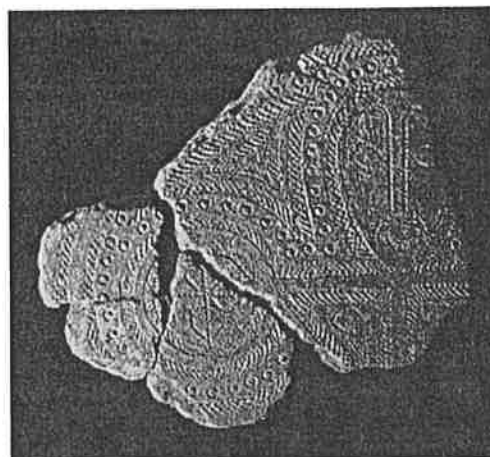
Lapita in Remote Oceania

The Lapita were the first people to penetrate Remote Oceania. Between 1200 and 1000 BC they spread rapidly from Melanesia to Fiji and West Polynesia, including Tonga and Samoa. Explorers and settlers travelled across an expanse of the western Pacific in only 5–10 generations. The picture we have is of a fairly small population travelling at speed.

When Lapita people migrated from Near Oceania they left behind the disease of malaria. As a result the population increased, providing extra migrants for the voyaging frontier. They established a few permanent villages in each major island group. Some settled, while others journeyed on, but contact continued between communities on different islands. This migration was not driven by overcrowding, as there was land to spare. Rather, it is likely that social factors such as prestige or curiosity were an incentive to find new islands.

Lapita people lived in villages on small islands near large ones, or on the coast of larger islands. Some had houses that were built on poles over the water. They did not colonise island groups smaller than about 1,000 sq km – probably for environmental and cultural reasons.

As they travelled from island to island they transported plants for cultivation, including taro, yam, breadfruit, banana and coconut. They also took domesticated pigs, dogs and fowls. The Pacific rat (*Rattus exulans*) was either brought or came as a stowaway on the canoes. As bones of domesticated animals have proved hard to find in the Lapita sites of Fiji and West Polynesia, some researchers think that the earliest Lapita people to reach these eastern islands were foragers rather than gardeners, and that the food plants arrived later.

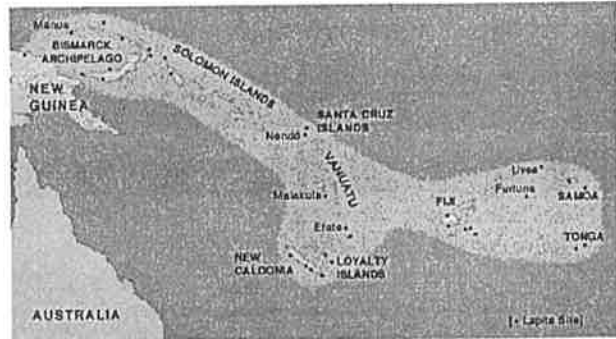


The migrants caught diverse seafoods with nets, spears and hooks. The large numbers of native birds and animals on the new islands provided a reliable food supply in the early years, as the people established their economies. But many species, including large flightless birds, a land crocodile and giant iguana lizards, were defenseless against this new human predator, and soon became extinct.

The Lapita moved into West Polynesia. It was a long time before people migrated to the smaller islands further east.

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/lapi/hd_lapi.htm

The term *Lapita* refers to an ancient Pacific culture that archaeologists believe to be the common ancestor of the contemporary cultures of Polynesia, Micronesia, and some areas of Melanesia. The culture takes its name from the site of Lapita in New Caledonia, one of the first places in which its distinctive pottery was discovered. While archaeologists debate the precise region where Lapita culture itself developed, the ancestors of the Lapita people came originally from Southeast Asia. Beginning around 1500 B.C., Lapita peoples began to spread eastward through the islands of Melanesia and into the remote archipelagos of the central and eastern Pacific, reaching Tonga and Samoa by roughly 1000 B.C. The Lapita were a seafaring people who settled primarily on the coast rather than inland and their skilled navigators traversed the ocean with ease.



Lapita art is best known for its ceramics, which feature intricate repeating geometric patterns that occasionally include anthropomorphic faces and figures. The patterns were incised into the pots before firing with a comb like tool used to stamp designs into the wet clay. Each stamp consisted of a single design element that was combined with others to form elaborate patterns. Many Lapita ceramics are large vessels thought to have been used for cooking, serving, or storing food. Some of the designs found on Lapita pottery may be related to patterns seen in modern Polynesian tattoos and barkcloth. In addition to vessels, a number of freestanding pottery figures depicting anthropomorphic and zoomorphic subjects have been unearthed at Lapita sites, as well as a single bone image representing a stylized human figure.

Jennifer Wagelle, Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York

Citation

Wagelle, Jennifer. "Lapita Pottery (ca. 1500–500 B.C.)." In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/lapi/hd_lapi.htm (October 2002)

Further Reading

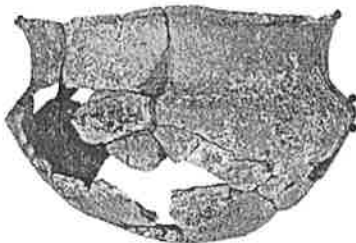
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Suggested Online Resources

- [Australian Broadcasting Corporation Online: News in Science](#)
- [Simon Fraser University: Report of the 1997 Lapita Project](#)

<http://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2011/12/02/3381368.htm>

Lapita find opens new chapter of Pacific history Friday, 2 December 2011 Genelle Weule ABC



This 2600-year-old Lapita pot has been reconstructed from fragments found in Papua New Guinea (Source: Professor Ian McNiven)

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A huge treasure trove of artifacts including thousands of fragments of pottery provides the first evidence that the sea-faring Lapita people settled in mainland Papua New Guinea.

The discovery, by a group of archaeologists from Australia and Papua New Guinea led by Dr Bruno David and Professor Ian McNiven from Monash University, may also give clues about the origin of Torres Strait Islanders.

The groups' findings are to be presented this weekend at the Australian Archaeological Association Conference in Toowoomba.

The Lapita culture developed on islands off the east coast of Papua New Guinea around 3500 years ago. Approximately three hundred years later the Lapita people started heading east to become the first humans to settle the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji, moving later to Samoa and Tonga.

Evidence of their settlement is found in the remains of intricately patterned pottery used for rituals.

But while fragments of the pottery had been found on mainland Papua New Guinea, archaeologists believed the Lapita people never settled in this area.

"We thought that these were an island people only, there was no evidence of these people going onto the PNG mainland at all until we had our findings near Port Moresby," says McNiven.

Caution Bay find

Between 2009 and 2010 McNiven's teams of archaeologists and local community members excavated several sites at Caution Bay, north-west of Port Moresby.

"When we dug deeper down between 1 and 2 meters below the surface we found evidence of Lapita people and lots of it," says McNiven.

This suggests the Lapita community was very well established, not just passing traders, he says.

Covered under 110 tonnes of sediment lay food remains — shells, fish bones and turtle bones — that indicated the marine-loving people lived in several villages that extend one square kilometer inland.

The excavations also revealed a wealth of implements — stone tools, cutting tools and stone axes made out of volcanic rock — as well as Lapita pottery fragments. The largest site, known as Bogi 1, contained thousands of fragments of pottery.

Also included in the find were scraping tools made of rare obsidian found on West Fergusson Island, 500 kilometers to the east.

"So suddenly everything changed. These weren't just people moving out into the Pacific moving further and further east. We now know they came underneath the bottom part of Papua New Guinea and settled on the mainland," says McNiven.

"This is a whole new chapter of Pacific history that nobody knew about."

McNiven says extensive radiocarbon dating on the site indicates the material is between 2500 and 2900 years old.

And while some archaeologists still hold doubts about the find, McNiven says the designs are identical to those found elsewhere in the Pacific.

Professor Glenn Summerhayes from the University of Otago is an expert in Lapita archaeology.

Summerhayes, who was not involved in the project, says some of the pottery is definitely Lapita.

"The pottery we're looking at is a later form of Lapita. [Early Lapita] is quite intricate ... over time the pottery becomes a bit more simplified," explains Summerhayes.

"Not all of [the pottery found] looks like new Lapita, but some of it does, which suggests to me that we are witnessing another expansion along the south coast that we had not imagined."

"This is either trade ware coming in, or probably more likely part of the Austronesian push."

Torres Strait Island connection

McNiven says the discovery could be linked to an earlier find of 2500 year-old pottery in the Torres Strait Islands.

Ancient Torres Strait Islanders, like Australian Aboriginals did not make pots.

"At that time [2003] the earliest pottery on the southern coast of PNG was only 2000 years so everyone said 'No, no you must be wrong. You can't have 2500 year old pottery in the Torres Strait Islands'."

"But now we've found this Lapita pottery on the south coast which is more than 2000 years old. So bingo!

McNiven believes the Lapita people come are coming around the southern part of PNG, they're setting up near Port Moresby and ... eventually their descendents may have moved into the Torres Strait.

"I think this may be ... telling us who Torres Strait Islanders are."

Summerhayes says more data is needed to confirm this link.

"I'm not going to say one way or another because to be quite honest I haven't got a clue anymore. The fact that they've found Lapita pottery west of Port Moresby after years of top rate archaeologists have been working in that region ... just tells me how much we don't know about the past."

<http://www.archaeology.org/issues/109-131/features/1354-lapita-tahiti-tatau-oceania-captain-cook>

Culture: Lapita

Location: Oceania

Date: ca. 1000 B.C. (fragment); 1843 (engraving)

Private Collection, Prismatic Pictures, The Bridgeman Art Library; Courtesy University of Auckland Anthropology Photographic Archive)

Captain Cook was the first to use the verb "tattoo" in English in 1769, when he described the Tahitian art of *tatau* in his diary. Now people all around the world bear Polynesian-inspired tattoos, but the first to wear those famous designs were likely the Lapita, who lived from around 1500 to 500 B.C. and are the ancestors of many of today's Pacific peoples. No direct evidence of Lapita tattooing exists, but University of California, Berkeley, archaeologist Patrick Kirch says that the intricate



designs they incised on their pottery resemble tattoo motifs that are still used today and were made by the same tooth like implements that can still be used to create tattoos. "These vessels were being decorated the same way as the body and might represent ancestors," says Kirch, who thinks these "tattooed pots," which were thick and crudely made, were probably intended for display during ceremonial occasions. The Lapita used slender, undecorated pottery for utilitarian purposes, such as storing water. Kirch notes that in ethnographic accounts of Oceanic societies, women were responsible for making pottery and men were responsible for tattoos. "It's possible the Lapita women were creating the skillfully made pottery that actually had to be used, and men were making terrible pottery and decorating it with tattoos."

The following excerpts were compiled by Douglas Darracott, Plano West Senior High School, Plano, TX

Terracotta fragment. Lapita Solomon Islands, Reef Islands 1000 BCE Terracotta

1. "If Lapita people had sailing canoes, they must also have had textiles. Most ethnographically documented sails in the Pacific are made of plaited pandanus fiber, and it is very likely the Lapita people also made such sails, and almost certainly other kinds of plaited textiles, such as floor mats and garments. Tattooing equipment has been found in Lapita sites. Given the decoration of Lapita pottery, and the existence of tattooing, it seems probable that any textiles might also have been decorated" (Brunt 39). "Until 2003, very few human remains had been found of Lapita people themselves. In that year quarrying operations on Efate island, at a place called Teouma, exposed a piece of Lapita dentate-stamped pottery. As Stuart Bedford *et al.* report, by 2006 excavations at Teouma had revealed a largely intact Lapita cemetery with almost fifty burials. There is considerable variation in the burial positions of these individuals, but decorated Lapita pots were intimately connected to burial practice at the site. One consistent characteristic of these burials is that some time after burial the grave was opened and the skull removed. One burial contained an individual with three skulls laid across his chest, while in another a carinated (ridge) pot contained a complete skull sitting on top of a broken shell ring; a flat-bottomed dish was turned upside down and placed over this burial, as a lid. This dish is decorated with a double-face motif. A repeating pattern of 'long nose' or 'elongated face' motifs (known from many other Lapita pots) is alternated with a triangular face, also known from other pots, which, uniquely in this instance, has been flipped or inverted so that it sits against the 'long nose' faces" (39). "Another distinctive pot found at Teouma is a carinated pot with a dentate-stamped face motif on the rim. Inside the rim are perched modeled clay birds. Although the pot is not complete, it would appear that there were four birds on the rim with their heads oriented towards the center of the vessel. The lower part of the pot, which was still more or less together in the archaeological deposit, contained a collection of assorted human bone. The upper part of the pot had been broken and scattered in antiquity as a result of later burials in the same area of the site. One bird's head from the pot has dentate stamping on it suggesting the features of the bird- appearing, for example, to define a wing. This kind of modeled figure occurs only very rarely in Lapita deposits, although one other bird figure with dentate stamping on it was found in the Reef-Santa Cruz group. Human figures and human faces have also been found occasionally" (40).

2. "Initially, Lapita people seem to have sailed into the Pacific as energetic traders without extensive territorial ambitions, perched on the margins of islands (like the birds on the rim of the Teouma pot) and

sailed further and further in search of new resources and new materials. Over time they settled the islands, moving back from the beaches, and developed more independent identities, marked by their increasingly divergent and distinctive material remains. The term 'Lapita' is not used for sites or assemblages that continue beyond about 2,000 years ago, but this is not a matter of an abrupt change so much as a gradual transformation. Their descendants continued to be traders, but the networks of their trade changed, rarely reaching as far afield as their forebears did. Ceramic production ceased altogether in many parts of the region from about 2,000 years ago" (43). "The ceramics exhibit a high degree of aesthetic sophistication, and are covered with intricate geometric patterns applied with toothed stamps. These designs may relate to Lapita barkcloth patterns and tattoos that have not been preserved archaeologically, for, in historic times, these art forms have often drawn on a common body of motifs. The geometric designs appear on pottery throughout the vast areas settled by the Lapita, suggesting that they maintained a high degree of cultural uniformity despite the extent of their settlements. Lapita designs share several motifs with the art of the contemporary Dong Son peoples of Southeast Asia, which in turn is evidence of the complexity of cultural and trading relationships in this region of the world. Although figurative art is relatively rare in the Lapita tradition, some of the excavated ceramics and potsherds include human faces and figures. One of the most famous examples, excavated in the Solomon Islands and dating to about 1000-900 BCE, presents a stylized human figure. An oval face is set on an inverted triangle flanked at each side by a circle containing a quatrefoil floral motif. These geometric elements may represent an abstract human body; the facial features themselves are simple and stylized, but certainly not abstract. Each part of the composition is articulated by bands of stamped motifs. Scholars often interpret such Lapita designs, both geometric and figural, both geometric and figural, as the source of much later Melanesian and Polynesian imagery" (D'Alleva 13-14).

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177. Lukasa (memory board). Mbudyé Society, Luba peoples (Democratic Republic of the Congo). c. 19th to 20th century C.E. Wood, beads, and metal.

KA

Pins [One in set](#) [Another](#) [Another](#) [Another](#) [Context1](#) [Context 2](#) [Context 3](#) [Context 4](#) [Context 5](#) [Video](#) [Video 2](#) [Article](#) [PDF, pp9-10](#) [Lukasa in Minn](#) [Article](#) [Diagram w/ translation](#)

<http://www.artsconnected.org/resource/44908/lukasa-memory-board>

This bead-studded memory board, known as a *lukasa*, is an important tool of the powerful Mbudyé association. Members are responsible for the preservation and teaching of history to younger generations, an essential and valued role in Luba society. Beads and engravings on the board encode genealogies, migrations, information about

important individuals and chiefs, as well as royal secrets and maps. A single colored bead, for example, represents a specific individual, while a large bead, surrounded by smaller beads refers to a chief and his dignitaries. Lines of beads signify journeys or paths. The head at the top of the board represents Lolo Inang'ombe, the ancestral founder of Mbudyé. She is symbolically linked with the tortoise, an emblem of royalty among the Luba.



<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1977.467.3>

Lukasa, or memory boards, are hand-held wooden objects that present a conceptual map of fundamental aspects of Luba culture. They are at once illustrations of the Luba political system, historical chronicles of the Luba state, and territorial diagrams of local chiefdoms. Each board's design is unique and represents the divine revelations of a spirit medium expressed in sculptural form. While many lukasa utilize a system of denotation based on masses of shells and beads affixed to their wooden surfaces, this example communicates its content through incised designs and images carved in relief.



Lukasa belong to regional chapters of the Luba mbudyé association. Mbudyé is a council of men and women charged with sustaining and interpreting the political and historical principles of the Luba state. As authorities on the tenets of Luba society, mbudyé provide a counterbalance to the power of kings and chiefs, checking or reinforcing it as necessary. Members of mbudyé proceed through a series of stages within the society as they master successive levels of arcane knowledge. Only those at the apex of the association can decipher and interpret the lukasa's intricate designs and motifs.

Mbudyé members call the twin projections sprouting along the board's outer edge the "head" and "tail" of the lukasa, zoomorphic elements that are meant to evoke the crocodile. An animal equally at home on land and in water, the crocodile's dual nature is suggestive of Luba political organization, whose existence relies on the interdependence of the kikungulu (the head of the mbudyé) and the kaloba (the "owner of the land," or chief).

More detailed information is conveyed on the front and back of the board. On the lukasa's "inside" surface (the front), human faces represent chiefs, historical figures, and mbudye members. The rectangular, circular, and ovoid elements denote organizing features within the chief's compound and the association's meeting house and grounds. Its "outside" surface displays incised chevrons and diamonds representing the markings on a turtle's carapace. These are a reference to Lolo Ina Nombe, the founding ancestress who exists in the form of a turtle, and constitute a symbol of the vaunted lineage of the Luba peoples. The motifs are said to evoke kitema, spirit capitals that house the tombs of divine kings, so that the same surface also provides a map of the physical and religious geography of the region.

<http://www.lacma.org/sites/default/files/2.%20Introductory%20Essay.pdf>

A LUKASA MEMORY BOARD IS A LIBRARY OF LUBA historical knowledge with encoded memories of the past to retell in the present. Luba people invented lukasa memory boards to protect, transmit, and sanctify the esoteric royal knowledge undergirding this great Central African kingdom. Luba describe memory as a string of beads documenting events, people, and places that can be restrung and reorganized in a myriad of ways. A lukasa fixes the beads in dynamic juxtapositions, and memories are then associated with their forms, colors, sizes, and configurations.

A "man of memory" touches the surface of the wooden tablet and recalls information as he presents a narrative to a rapt audience. No two recitations are alike, for these court historians always perform memory in the present to meet the needs of a given audience in a particular moment. A lukasa's beads are like a code that can be read only by a few who know its secrets.



<http://africa.uima.uiowa.edu/chapters/governance/archaeology-of-rule/?start=2>

In a number of African precolonial states, history was a specific and highly valued form of intellectual activity, and art often served as a vehicle for the making of history. In the Luba kingdom, an entire institution was dedicated to the maintenance and transmission of historical knowledge. Called Mbudye, its members were "men of memory," court historians who used visual memory devices to assist with oral recitations of history. Principal among Luba memory devices is the *lukasa*, a flat, hand-held wooden board studded with beads and pins or covered with incised or carved ideograms. During Mbudye rituals to induct rulers into office, a *lukasa* is used to teach sacred lore about culture heroes, clan migrations, and the introduction of sacred rule and to recite genealogies, king lists, and the episodes in the founding charter. Each *lukasa* elicits some or all of this information, but the narration varies with the knowledge and oratory skill of the reader.

<http://www.learner.org/courses/globalart/work/214/index.html>

The Luba kingdom emerged as a powerful political entity in Central Africa as early as the seventeenth century.

Key to the successful expansion of the Luba was a form of government that combined divine kingship and rule by council. As is often the case with empires built on dynastic rule, politics were closely associated with history for the Luba.

The *mbudye* association was created in the 1700s as a council charged with preserving and interpreting both the political systems of the Luba state and its history. *Lukasa*, or memory boards, are mnemonic devices that enable the elite members of this community to recall information concerning genealogy, court ceremony, cultural

heroes, clan migrations and the location of things within the royal compound or tribal territory. A *lukasa* might also map out “spirit capitals,” palaces of deceased rulers abandoned by new kings to become receptacles of the former kings’ memory. Because they are keepers of knowledge critical to sustaining the rituals and authority kingship, members of the *mbudye* association play an important role in the balance of power. The close association of the *lukasa* with rulership is attested to by the back of the board, which is carved to resemble a tortoise, a Luba symbol of royalty.

Made of wood planks, some *lukasa* are simply carved in relief, while others, like this one, are first carved and then studded with beads and shells. All the elements of the board carry symbolic meaning, as do their placement in relationship to one another. “Reading” the *lukasa* involves holding the board in the left hand and tracing the designs and symbols with the right forefinger. To “read” a *lukasa* demands much more than verbalizing static meaning conveyed through visual signs. Rather, it calls for the interpretation of those symbols as they relate not only to the past, but also to the present. The ability to decipher and interpret the markings on *lukasa*, therefore, requires extensive training and is the exclusive domain of those individuals who have passed to the highest levels of the *mbudye* association.

<http://www.learner.org/courses/globalart/work/214/expert/1/index.html>

Cultures around the world had so many different ways to record and remember their histories. Whether they had writing systems or not, they almost always developed complex mnemonic systems, or memory devices, to assist with the protection and the transmission of knowledge.

There’s one culture in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Luba of southeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, that developed one of the most remarkable mnemonic devices known in Africa, and it’s called a *lukasa* memory board. All of them have geometric abstract patterns on what the Luba call the outside of the board, but the inside of the board has beads and/or iconographic motifs. A court historian would hold the board in his hand and run his fingers over the surface of the beads. And through this kind of tactile contact with the board, it would stimulate remembrance of events, people, and places in the past—what we might call the loci of memory. Luba often associate memory with a string of beads, where you can take each of these events and people in the past and string them together in different ways depending on who you are and to what audience you’re speaking. This is the power of rhetoric and this is one of the ways this board is used.



So, the *lukasa* memory board might be used to validate a king’s power, or to remind the public of how the king came to power, or to talk about his ancestry. It can be used in many, many different kinds of ways, but it’s just an incredibly complex sort of library of knowledge and information about the Luba past, and I think really challenges misperceptions about history in Africa. So anybody who would say that oh well, this culture did not have writing so they must not have recorded their history is wrong. An object like the *lukasa*, it’s a merging of the visual with the verbal, because by looking at the object and touching the object, it stimulates oral traditions that are then recited in these very prolonged narratives that might remind you of classical orature.



172. Power Figure (Nkisi Nkondi) Kongo Peoples, Democratic Republic of Congo

Late 19th c. wood and metal

G14, 1066-1067

(similar S5, 894)

(similar GW 365-366)

SH

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http://www.dmaconnect.org/CONNECT/dma_406348?ssSourceSiteId=null

At over three feet tall, this *nkisi* (in-KEE-see) *nkondi* (in-CON-dee) sculpture, with its aggressive stance and huge, staring eyes, is a power figure who oversees matters of civil law. All *minkisi* (plural of *nkisi*) are designed to inspire awe and to mediate between the living and the spirit worlds.

Each *nkisi* is associated with a specific name, pose, and function. A ritual activates it. Frequently, special medicines, or *bilongo* (bee-LAWN-go), made of vegetal, animal and mineral elements such as dirt from graveyards were inserted by a ritual specialist (*nganga*) into the figure's resin-covered abdominal cavity and in its beard to give the figure power. Each nail protruding from this *nkisi's* chest was driven into the figure by a ritual specialist to seal an agreement or vow among members of the Yombe (YOM-bay) community. This action activates the spirit and medicines in the *nkisi*, empowering the figure and ensuring that those who swore an oath, honored it.

The Power of Nkisi

All *minkisi* are containers for magical substances, or "medicines," which empower them to protect the community or an individual against negative forces. *Minkisi* (singular: *nkisi*) may also cause misfortune and illness. They come in a variety of forms, including cloth bundles, snail shells, clay pots, or sculpted wood "power figures" in animal or human form. Each power figure has a special name, specific pose, a particular function, and a ritual to activate it. The Dallas Museum of Art *nkisi* belongs to a class of *minkisi* called *nkondi* (in-CON-dee). The term *nkondi* can be translated as "hunter" of wrongdoers in matters of civil law; the hunter is simultaneously chief, doctor, priest, and judge.

The empowering medicines, made of vegetal, animal, and mineral elements (including dirt from ancestral graves), may be placed atop the *nkisi's* head, in its belly, on its back, or in any natural orifice and sealed in place with resin. *Minkisi* can also be given the power to cause misfortune, illness, and death by ritual specialists.

This *nkisi* is meant to intimidate. With its arms akimbo (hands on hips), it assumes an aggressive posture called *vonganana* or "to come on strong."

Function

When oaths were sworn and bonds were sealed before the *nkisi nkondi* in a *mambu*, or law court, a ritual specialist hammered a nail, screw, or blade into its body to activate the spirit and medicines contained within, and to ensure that those who swore the oath would honor it on pain of illness or misfortune. The sculpted wood form of the figure is studded with nails or blades which indicate how often the *nkisi* has been used.

Sculpture Workshop

This power figure is one of several large-scale sculptures brought to Europe between 1880 and 1910 that originated in a single workshop on the Chiloango River, which flows along the border of present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo and Cabinda.[1] The sculptures from this workshop were each carved from a single piece of wood and are characterized by the realistic modeling of the body with its massive shoulders, akimbo pose, chief's hat, a knotted or plain fiber skirt, staring eyes, a heavy resinous beard that signifies seniority and wisdom, a large cowrie shell covering the abdominal cavity containing medicine, knotted armbands, and feet placed on rectangular blocks.

Materials and Symbolism

The materials used to create this *nkisi* are meant to suggest great power and express the figure's roles within the earthly and spiritual realms.

The iron nails and blades piercing the wooden torso of the *nkisi* are evidence of the contract ritual associated with the figure. They were said to activate the figure's power ensuring that an oath made before it, was kept. Resin, a sticky substance produced by trees, was used to make the beard (a sign of seniority and wisdom) and belly pouch of the *nkisi*. Additional medicinal materials were added to the resin to empower the figure. The decoratively incised mpu (im-POO), or chief's hat, on the *nkisi*'s head shows the authority of the figure while the skirt, made of raffia fibers, communicates the figure's connection to the Yombe peoples.



<http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/151358>

This striking figure, with its serenely rendered face and violently pierced body, was made to contain and direct a spirit in order to assist people in need. Among the Vili and other Kongo language speakers, Nkondi means "hunter" in the Kongo language and refers to the spirit's power to track down the source of trouble. The figure's cap and assertive pose, with hands on hips and chin thrusting forward, suggest those of a chief, and like a chief, the figure and its associated spirit were called on to enforce laws and exact punishment. The spirit was drawn into the sculpture through the application of medicinal ingredients packed in resin on its head and in the projecting box, sealed by a mirror, on its abdomen. These ingredients were selected for their associations with the ancestral world (such as earth from graves) and for their metaphorical associations with the spirit's powers. Medicines may also have been related directly to the figure's function; for instance, the chain may refer to the spirit's ability to immobilize its victims. A nail or a blade was driven into the sculpture each time its force was invoked through ritual, thereby provoking the spirit into action.

http://creativity.denverartmuseum.org/1964_292/

This sculpture comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo in Central Africa. We do not know the name of the sculptor who carved this particular object. An *nkisi* [en-KEE-see] is the result of a collaboration between a sculptor and an *nganga* [en-GONG-ga]. An *nganga* is a ritual specialist, a healer, and a mediator. Upon request, a sculptor would carve an *nkisi* in the form of a man, woman, or animal. Whatever the form, it is crucial that the figure suggests aggressiveness. Protruding tongue, hands on hips, wide eyes, and an open mouth are common aggressive details used by sculptors. Once the sculpture was completed, the *nganga* performed rituals and attached objects to enhance the *nkisi*'s power.

This nkisi is a device, record keeper, or tool for dealing with social issues. Minkisi (plural) have both public and private functions. Historically, they were used by individuals, families, or whole communities to destroy or weaken harmful forces, prevent or cure illnesses, ward off bad deeds, solidify contracts or oaths, and resolve arguments. Nkisi are intended to create a frightening effect; it is the sculptor's job to create an image that implies force.

[http://africa.si.edu/collections/view/objects/asitem/search\\$0040/54/title-asc?t:state:flow=89372987-da13-4e03-a51c-96bdb5453438](http://africa.si.edu/collections/view/objects/asitem/search$0040/54/title-asc?t:state:flow=89372987-da13-4e03-a51c-96bdb5453438)

Ritual experts, or nganga, mediated between conflicting parties and aided individuals seeking help. In the case of a dispute, a representative from each side of the conflict would hammer a piece of metal into the nkisi figure. In disputes over land, for example, sealing an oath by hammering a nail into the nkisi would be sufficient to secure the land for generations. Contracts and personal vows could also be confirmed in this manner. A person's word was sealed by attaching a personal item, usually drawn from their body—a piece of cloth, hair, or even saliva—to the nail or blade before it was hammered into the figure. Each party is then bound to honor the terms of the agreement. Nganga would memorize the circumstances attached to each nail and blade. In cases where an nganga was asked to cancel a vow, it was crucial not to remove the wrong nail, since each nail concealed an oath or agreement. The term nkisi (pl. minkisi) has no English equivalent. In the past "fetish" and "power figure" have been used as brief identifiers, but they do not convey the word's meaning. A nkisi is the physical container for a spirit from the other world, the land of the dead. When activated by a specialist, or nganga, it has the power to heal, to protect or to punish. Minkisi can be dramatic wooden sculptures with mirror-covered resin boxes added to hold the empowering substances, or they can be ordinary containers such as pots, net bags and baskets. An active nkisi requires the rituals of its nganga, and it always contains medicines, materials with potential spiritual powers. The mirror-covered stomach pack and other amulets and containers identify this figure as a nkisi, and its aggressive pose (the upraised arm originally held a blade) suggests it is a nkondi (hunter) type. By occult means, this type of nkisi hunted down unidentified witches, thieves, adulterers and other wrongdoers. It once had a personal name and invocations that are now lost to us.



The public performance aspect of the rituals would have made the purpose of the nkisi clear, but much about the composition of its medicines would have been known only to the nganga, possessor of the ability to see into the spirit world. There is a certain blurring of identity between the nkisi and the nganga. This nkisi carries musical instruments like the ones used by the nganga--antelope horn whistles, a crescent-shaped wooden slit gong and a miniature iron gong. The container hanging from the right arm is in the shape of a gunpowder flask, a distinctive form with suspension cords running through interior channels on its sides. The nganga commonly aroused the attention of the nkisi nkondi by exploding gunpowder in front of it. The ball that closes the flask is a spherical seedpod containing medicines. Not visible is another medicine pack on the bottom of the flask, one of about a dozen empowering additions, an unusually large number. Because these medicines are on the front and back, atop the head and between the legs, on the shoulders, feet and elbow, they literally cover all directions and, like the reflective glass eyes, enable the nkisi nkondi to see witches, those who would do harm. The eyes are further emphasized by red and white lines, the "tears" that come with death. Literally every item, color and form on this figure has a meaning, so that what began as a relatively compact, solidly modeled sculpture becomes an exposition of Kongo beliefs to those with the eyes of knowledge.

173. Portrait mask (*Mblo*). Baule peoples (Côte d'Ivoire).

Late 19th to early 20th century C.E. Wood and pigment.

(similar S5, 891)

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<http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.32.html/2014/myron-kunin-collection-african-art-n09225>

Baule Portrait Mask of Moya Yanso (ca. 1890-1973), by Owie Kimou (d. 1948)

Portrait masks, called *Mblo*, are the most emblematic form of Baule sculptural tradition. The Kunin Mask, featured on the front and back cover of Susan Vogel's landmark *Baule: African Art, Western Eyes* (1997), is arguably the most iconic of all *Mblo* masks.

Vogel (1997: 141-144) notes: "*Mblo* masks [...] are one of the oldest of Baule art forms. This refined human face mask, the prototypical Baule object in art collections, is usually a portrait of a particular known individual. [...] More than any other kind of mask, *Mblo* embody the core Baule sculpture style manifested in figures and decorated objects – spoons, combs, pulleys and the like. Lustrous curving surfaces, suggesting clean, healthy, well-fed skin, are set off by delicately textured zones representing coiffures, scarifications, and other ornaments. The idealized faces are introspective, with the high foreheads of intellectual enlightenment and the large downcast eyes of respectful presence in the world. Ornaments above the face [...] are chosen for their beauty, and have no iconographic significance; braided beards, and fine scarifications and coiffures, denote personal beauty, refinement, and a desire to give pleasure to others [...] The] *Mblo* portrait mask was the summit of Baule sculpture, the most beautiful art form [...]."

According to Philipp Ravenhill (*in* Phillips 1995: 142, text to cat. 71), Baule portrait masks were "worn to enact a series of characters who dance to music with a participatory audience. The performance climaxes with the arrival of [*Mblo*] in human form, especially portrait masks inspired by actual people. The subject portrayed in, and honored by, a mask [occasionally danced] with it and address[ed] it affectionately as 'namesake' (*ndoma*). As in Baule figurative sculpture that depicts otherworldly mates or bush spirits, the face of the mask is critical to Baule ideas of personhood and verisimilitude. It is in looking at the mask's gaze that one perceives it as a person with a living presence."

And Vogel (1997: 26 and 28) continues: Baule sculptures "are appreciated for their subtle rhythms and a beauty that stops short of sweetness. To the Western eye, an essence of Baule style is a balanced asymmetry that enlivens while suggesting stability and calm. [...] To an art historian, the most consistent feature of Baule art, and one expressed across the wide variety of Baule object types, is a kind of peaceful containment. Faces tend to have downcast eyes [...] so that Westerners might feel that the mood of much classical Baule art is introspective."



As the names of most traditional African artists did not survive, it is exceptionally rare to know the name of an artist, and rarer still to know both his and the name of the subject represented. The Kunin Mask is such an exceptionally rare case. Based on field research conducted by Susan Vogel between 1971 and



1996, the Kunin Mask was created by Owie Kimou of Kami (d. 1948) as portrait of Moya Yanso (ca. 1890 – 1973), a woman renowned throughout Kami for her ideal beauty. Vogel (*loc. cit.*: 137) notes: "This mask was carved around 1913 by Owie Kimou, Kami's most celebrated artist (d. 1948) on a commission from Moya Yanso's new husband, a famous dancer who originally wore it. The mask was later danced by Yanso's son, Soule and later still by Ndri (ca. 1939-1995), and by his older brother, her husband's two sons by another wife. Yanso continued to accompany the mask for many years, until she was no longer physically able. Later, her granddaughter accompanied it, in increasingly rare performances, until it was sold in the mid-1990s."

http://www.newpaltz.edu/museum/exhibitions/african_art/1-5a.htm

MBLO PORTRAIT MASK Before 1935 Baule Peoples, Ivory Coast Wood, pigment, 16 x 5 3/4 in.

One of the oldest of Baule (pronounced BOUGH-lay) dances is the *mblo*, a dance of celebration and entertainment that honors an ancestor. Masks are worn at the *mblo* that represent specific individuals, but they are idealized according to the Baule standards of beauty. Even so, no two masks are exactly alike. Only the best dancers in a village would be allowed to participate in the *mblo*, since the dance is focused on placating the spirit of an ancestor.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/09/28/arts/art-view-beyond-beauty-art-that-takes-action.html?pagewanted=2>



Among these is a likeness of a woman named Moya Yanso, whose face, carved by the artist Owie Kimou around 1913, is topped with a jaunty row of antennae-like prongs and decorated with three light-catching copper plates.

<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/317834>

Designed as part of a Baule theatrical tradition, known as "Mblo," that combines dramatic skits and solo dances, this mask is an idealized representation of the prominent member of the community for which it was sculpted. Its lustrous carved surfaces suggest healthy skin set off by a delicately textured coiffure and facial scarifications. Within Baule culture, Mblo portrait masks are appreciated as the most refined and long-standing form of artistic expression. While they may depict either men or women, such works were generally commissioned by a man to honor a female relative or created by a carver in homage to a particular woman's dance skills and beauty. Because of their importance, only the best dancers are eligible to wear portrait masks in performance. On such occasions it is required that the portrait's subject, or "double," be present to accompany it.

<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/319512>

Portrait masks embody the core Baule sculptural style that is echoed in figural sculpture and decorative arts. They also have provided Baule sculptors with their prime opportunity for artistic invention, and the corpus demonstrates enormous formal diversity. This diversity is often apparent in imaginative decorative passages extending above the face: the quiet tranquil visage of this example is crowned with a fantastical series of wild-animal horns.

The mask is exceptional for its nuanced individuality, highly refined details, powerful presence, and considerable age. It is especially appealing for its unusual depth that affords strong three-quarter views. The broad forehead and downcast eyes are classic features associated with intellect and respect in Baule aesthetics. The departure from a rigidly symmetrical representation suggests an individual physiognomy. The expression is one of intense introspection. Its serenity is subtly animated by two opposing formal elements: the flourishes of the coiffure and beard at the summit and base.

Such masks appeared as the final sequence of an operatic public entertainment known as Mblo. Mblo performances consist of a succession of dances that escalate in complexity and importance, culminating ultimately in tributes to the community's most distinguished member. Individuals honored in this way are depicted by a mask that is conceived of as their artistic double or namesake.

<http://stieglitzcollection.crystalbridges.org/object/>

Unknown Baule. Ivory Coast, Africa. Portrait Face Mask (Mblo) with Crest
19th century. Wood and pigment. 14 x 6 1/4 x 4 1/8 in. (35.6 x 15.9 x 10.5 cm)

The Portrait Face Masks of the Baule people of Ivory Coast were created as stylized representations of revered ancestors or community members. They were originally created for ceremonial purposes, but later were worn in dances called Mblo, for entertainment. With their organized geometry, smooth surfaces, and elongated structure, they exude an air of solemnity and dignity. Their downcast eyes and pursed mouth represent Baule ideas of propriety.

These masks often feature elaborately carved hairstyles and beards, as well as carefully rendered scarification along the forehead and cheeks, demonstrating regional differentiation.

http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/citi/resources/Rsrc_001285.pdf



The idealized human face is a subject of special attention for Baule (BOUGH-lay) sculptors. Among the most highly regarded Baule art forms are **stylized** portrait masks, called *ndoma* (nDOE-mah), a word meaning "double" or "namesake." Such masks are considered by many Baule to be their culture's greatest sculptural achievement. Throughout the 20th century, *ndoma* masks have been made in abundance, but their origins are believed to be much older. The masks appear in entertaining performances that are reinvented every couple of generations. The performances, which feature masks of domestic and wild animals as well as human beings, celebrate and satirize aspects of daily life.

Ndoma masks depict prominent members of a community. Subjects can be male or female, but masks usually depict women and are often **commissioned** by an admiring spouse or relative. Despite a high

degree of stylization, the masks are considered to be true doubles of the person whom they depict and never appear in public unless accompanied by that person or her close relative. Likewise, a portrait mask cannot be made without the permission of the person being depicted. The masks are not portraits in the sense of a **realistic** depiction of a person's physical features. Rather, they combine recognizable details of a specific individual, such as her hairstyle or **scarification** marks, with idealized facial features to create an evocative representation of her. Characteristic gestures of the person may also be reproduced in performance, and the mask's human double may lend articles of clothing, scarves, and jewelry to complete the likeness.



175. Bundu mask. Sande Society, Mende peoples (West African forests of Sierra Leone and Liberia). 19th to 20th century C.E. Wood, cloth, and fiber.

G14, 1075

S5, 888

SH

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http://www.philamuseum.org/micro_sites/exhibitions/africanart/flash/sierra.swf

Beauty Stripped of Human Flaws: Soweï Masks My earliest memory of Soweï was when I was about four years old. It would come out during the harvest season, when people had harvested rice and cocoa. It was a time of plentiful and it was a time to celebrate. They would then have an initiation for girls into womanhood. The Soweï masked devil would come out and people would dance and celebrate. A lot of women have the belief that this wonderful, beautiful Soweï mask completely represents womanhood. Women who were infertile would run over and try to touch the raffia, the masked devil itself, so they can get pregnant. Women who were pregnant and wanted their children to have rings around their neck [a sign of beauty in Soweï culture] would actually try to get a raffia off of the mask and tie it around their waist so their children were born with rings around their neck. The Soweï initiation brought life to the compound. There's a lot of love for the Soweï because it's like a symbol of womanhood and sisterhood. Hannah Foday

<http://www.brynmawr.edu/collections/Exhibitions/exh-mende.shtml>

The Sande Society mask, or sowo-wui, is worn by Mende women of Sierra Leone, and has the distinction of being one of the few ritual masks worn by African women.

The Sande, or Bundu, Society is a fellowship of women who are responsible for preparing young Mende girls for adulthood, and for their roles as wives, mothers and female community members. At the girls' initiation, which is still practiced into the twentieth century, a society member appears in full costume as Sowo, the water spirit of the Sande Society, and walks with the grace and elegance expected of Mende women. The costumed woman wears a black gown of raffia fibers that conceals her body, and the mask rests over her head on her shoulders. This dark mask "exalts the far-famed beauty of Mende women," (1) and represents the sculpted head of Sowo.

The mask itself is a conical helmet that rests on top of the raffia costume, and is described by observers as "truly a glamorous being...the mask joins the community together in the experience of its beauty and allure." (2) The artist, carefully chosen by the Society, carves the face with the attention a woman would give her own appearance. The mask's appearance exemplifies Mende women's physical and moral beauty and cannot fall short of the Mende ideal. The artist coats the mask with palm oil, which gives it the black, lustrous shine - the color of the spirit of the waters. A sleek, luminous surface is achieved and the mask takes on a glow, which seems to come from the inner light of life.



The ideal Mende mask has clearly defined features created by delicate, dainty carving. The neck with its rings of flesh, the face, and the coiffure make up the three divisions of the mask. These must be in perfect symmetry, with the coiffure as the largest and most elaborate part of the mask. The features of the face are held to a standard, while distinctions occur among the coiffures.

Coiffures: The hair styles of the Mende masks are quite varied, and some are ornately decorated. A thick head of hair is admired, and these are designed into coiffures that indicate elegance, wealth, and femininity. The beautiful styles are very complicated and very neat to convey conscientious grooming and good behavior, while adornments to the coiffures exhibit individuality. The perfect style of Sowo's hair indicates her supernatural status, and contrasts with the wildness of the raffia costume. A perfect coiffure connects the mask to the divine world.

Neck Rings: The neck rings at the base of the mask are an exaggeration of actual neck creases. Mende people consider a beautiful neck to be one with rings: they are a sign of beauty because they suggest wealth, high status, and are sexually attractive. The rings indicate prosperity and wholesome living, and are given by God to show his affection for a fortunate few. As well, the rings indicate a relationship with the divine: the Sowo itself is a deity from the waters, and the neck rings represent the concentric waves which are formed on still water by Sowo's head breaking through the surface. The spirit comes from the water, and what the human eye sees on the necks of women "is human in form, but divine in essence," as portrayed in the mask. (3)

Facial Features: The neck rings cradle a small face whose features are situated at its bottom half. The face itself is carved in a compact space which is dominated by the eyes. Each feature is specially carved to convey Mende ideals of beauty and female behavior.

The Brow: The most outstanding feature of the masks face is the brow. This exaggerated brow symbolizes poise and success. The brow shines and is never covered by hair, which indicates happiness and self-confidence.

The Mouth: The small pursed mouth of the Sande Society mask indicates composure, and forbids flirtation or smiling. The Sowo's mouth is sealed so no female secrets are revealed. The Mende society discourages spiteful talk which can cause suffering, thus silence becomes an indication of composure and sound judgment. The mask shows the ideal mouth: an image of perfect silence.

The Nose: Sowo's nose is delicate and sharp, and small like the mouth. The Mende people loathe bad smells, and women are considered to have a stronger sense of smell than men. Despite this quality, the nose of the sowo-wui is discreet, never large or suggestive of her strong sense of smell.

The Eyes: The eye is the supreme element of the body, and the most interesting component of the head because it is considered a human's most beautiful physical trait. The Mende believe that eyes are goodness, and reveal a person's genuine feelings. The eyes on the mask are heavily lidded, downcast, and barely open. The slit eyes have many meanings: they conceal the identity of the masked Society member, and make it impossible for the woman to communicate with others using her eyes. As Sowo is too exalted to look in the eye, her lowered lids prevent anyone from looking into her eyes. The eyes also give an air of calmness and gentleness, characteristics which are attractive to Mende people. The dreamy look given the mask is very sexual to Mende men, but such a look also reassures a husband that his wife is not trying to make eye contact with other men.



Scarification: The small marks found beneath the eyes on a Sande Society mask may be identity marks formally used by the Mende. These are rarely, if ever, found on modern Mende people.

CREDITS: All the Sande Society helmet masks on display are part of the generous gift of African and Pacific Art from Mace Neufeld and Helen Katz Neufeld '53.

Endnotes:

- 1) African Art, Michel Leiris, Jacqueline Delange, Golden Press NY 1968
 - 2) Radiance from the Waters, Sylvia Ardyn Boone, Yale University Press, 1986.
 - 3) Radiance from the Waters, Sylvia Ardyn Boone, Yale University Press, 1986.
- This exhibit and its accompanying text was prepared by Catherine Foster '99. All photographs of helmet masks from the College's Collections are the work of Molly Greenfield'01.

<http://www.learner.org/courses/globalart/work/71/index.html>

Among the Mende people in Sierra Leone, the Sande (or Bondo) society has traditionally overseen the transition of girls from childhood into adulthood.

Girls would be taken into the forest and taught the secret knowledge of women. When they had completed this initiation, they were returned to the community and presented in a ritual masquerade as mature women ready for marriage.

This helmet-like mask, along with a full-body costume made from the raffia palm, would be worn during both secret initiation rituals and the final presentation ceremony by the *sowei*, or Sande leader, usually a talented performer and high-ranking official in the society. In most African cultures, all masks, including those representing female characters, are danced by men. The *sowei* mask is unique because it is danced by a woman. The mask and its wearer offered a model of ideal behavior for new members to emulate and a demonstration of female virtues and wisdom to the larger community.

In dancing the mask, the *sowei* channeled the spirits of female ancestors, becoming an embodiment of mystical power, called *angafa*. The mask reflects this transformation as well as other values of the society, including wisdom and beauty. The concentric rings around the neck of the mask, for instance, represent ripples of water, alluding to the rise of the female spirit out of the watery realm that is its dwelling place. At the same time, these can be interpreted as rings of fat, signs of fertility and maturity. Likewise, the lustrous black surface of the mask simultaneously refers to the rich mud at the bottom of the river and the ideal complexion of healthy and beautiful skin. Other aspects of the mask refer to the secrecy associated with the Sande rite of passage and with woman in general. These include the downcast eyes suggestive of inner spiritual concentration and, in the case of this particular mask, a tortoise placed above the elaborate coiffure.



Expert Perspective: Mary Nooter Roberts, Professor of Culture and Performance, University of California, Los Angeles

Among Mende peoples of Sierra Leone in West Africa, there's an entire association dedicated to women's initiation rites, specifically the initiation rites of very young women—girls undergoing puberty, who are secluded from society for a period of time, during which they are instructed by elder women who are members of an association called Sande whose role is specifically to guard and transmit the knowledge pertaining to women's worlds. At various points during this initiation rite, masquerades were staged that would announce the completion of certain stages of learning. And what is so remarkable about Mende masks is that they are one of the very rare examples where masks are commissioned and danced, performed, by women. This is a very rare occurrence in Africa, where masks are usually performed by men.

We in the West call them masks, but when you see the mask enter the arena and perform this very remarkable dance that can have both very calm and measured movements and also very frenetic and lively acrobatic movements as well, this is a recognition that the spirit has come to visit and that the spirit is present. But the mask is all about announcing the sort of acquisition of knowledge, and the mask itself can embody that knowledge through its iconography.

In the Mende masks, there's a lot of emphasis on a beautiful broad forehead and then a very compressed face with downcast eyes—eyes that reflect composure and that reflect the kinds of learning and instruction that the woman has acquired through the course of initiation rites. And you'll notice often that there are rings around the neck. A woman with lines around her neck is considered to be extremely beautiful. That is very true among Mende, but there's also the suggestion that because the spirits reside within the deep dark pools and lakes, that when a spirit emerges and pokes her head through the water, it creates concentric circles on the surface of the water. And these rings are a reflection of the emergence of the spirit.

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-africa/new-topic-2014-08-07T19:20:54.093Z/a/sowe-mask-sierra-leone>

Sowe mask, Sierra Leone, Sande society

Sowe masks—unique to the region around Sierra Leone—are worn by senior members of the all-female Sande Society during rite-of-passage ceremonies that signify a girl's transition to adulthood. They are carved expressions of local ideals of feminine beauty, health and serenity that vary widely in their detail.



Masquerade performances play an important symbolic role in the Sande Society. The mask is worn by the *ndoli jowei* ("the sowe who dances") along with a black raffia and textile costume which completely conceals her identity. Traditionally, the *ndoli jowei* appears at specific stages of the period of transition at events that are accompanied by music, dancing and singing. She is regarded as both a physical manifestation of the spirit of the Sande Society and an embodiment of its powerful medicines.

Colonized and colonizer

The mask featured in this display was collected in 1886 by Thomas Joshua Alldridge for the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London, where it represented the exotic "otherness" of African culture and belief systems. Although this mask bears much of the customary iconography seen on other sowe masks: blackened surface, small facial features, prominent forehead and elaborate hairstyle it has an extraordinary feature in the form of a Western-style top hat. At the time this mask was collected at the end of the nineteenth century imported items of Western clothing were used by members of the Sierra Leonean elite as symbols of status and power. At the same time Europeans eagerly collected African masks and displayed them in museums as examples of exotic "otherness." This two-way interpretation of a single object questions the impact of the cultural contact between colonized and colonizer.

The following excerpts were compiled by Douglas Darracott, Plano West Senior High School, Plano, TX

Female mask of the Mende (Sierra Leone), wood

176. Ikenga (shrine figure). Igbo peoples (Nigeria). c. 19th to 20th century C.E. Wood.

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<http://africa.uima.uiowa.edu/media/photos/show/1941?back=home%2FSearchForm%3FSearch%3Dikenga%26Go%3D>

Aggressiveness and a need for high achievement are characteristic of the Igbo. Success and self-reliance of Igbo men is believed to lie in the strength of their right arms. Every Igbo male may own a personal shrine called *ikenga* ("place of strength"), which is dedicated to a man's ability to make his way with the strength of his right arm. Traditionally a man sacrifices a chicken or some kola nuts to his *ikenga* for success in trade, war, hunting, farming, or in gaining a government job or scholarship (Starkweather 1968: no. 78). All *ikenga* have carved ram's horns which suggest power and vigor. Many depict a seated male holding a sword in his right hand and the severed head of an enemy in his left--symbols of achievement in traditional society. Some *ikenga*, like this one, carry a pipe in their mouth--a symbol of male power. The *ichi* (scarification) on the figure's forehead is associated with membership in a titled society. Based on its similarity to a figure published by Fagg (1968: no. 156) this *ikenga* may be attributed to the Onitsha-Awka region.



<http://africa.uima.uiowa.edu/chapters/key-moments-in-life/adulthood/?start=5#essay>

Among the Igbo people, each adult male owned a shrine dedicated to his own personal ambition, ability, and strength. These were called *ikenga*, and the owner regularly offered prayers and sacrifices of gin, egg, and kola nut to the spirit of the *ikenga*. This small, simple example includes on its face the *ichi* (scars) that represent membership in a prestigious and expensive titled society. The horns that project upwards are ancient symbols of aggressiveness and ambition.

<http://bowersmuseum.blogspot.com/2006/12/object-of-week-igbo-ikenga.html>

"The practical purpose of art is to channel a spiritual force into an aesthetically satisfying physical form that captures the presumed attributes of that force." – Chinua Achebe

For the Igbo people achieving success in work, family and personal status was vital to individual and community well-being. With spiritual and material worlds interacting and affecting one another the Igbo relied on *ikenga* to mediate between the two realms. An *ikenga* acted as a guardian and assisted one in achieving success in their endeavors. These wood carvings were vessels that held a combination of spiritual forces including those of the ancestors and one's own personal spirit or *chi*. By the time a man entered into matrimony he would have obtained an *ikenga* from an expert carver; the *ikenga* would be kept with him throughout his life. Sacrifices in the form of wine, food and blood would be made to the *ikenga* and would be placed or poured directly on to its surface. (Evidence of residue from past sacrificial material is most visible on this figure's head). At



death ikenga would be destroyed or sometimes buried with the deceased as its purpose became defunct, no longer needing to function as a mediator between worlds or able to hold one's departed chi.

The ikenga shown here in the shape of a man possesses characteristics associated with power and success. Large round horns dramatically loop above the figure's head, a knife is held in the right hand while the left holds a severed human head. He wears a scalloped skirt open in the front exposing his genitals. A third "leg" extends from the back, and together with the figure's front legs forms a stool. These features are directly linked to concepts of power and action seen as necessary for accomplishing a moral and successful life. As described in the catalog *Igbo Arts: Community and Cosmos*, "the horns are symbolic of masculine power and the knife is an object of action; placed in the figure's right hand adds significance because the right side is reserved for all things of importance and virtuous conduct. The severed head resembles the idea of achievement; it can be seen as a reward for displaying the courage needed to confront challenges" (Cole, 30).

<http://csuimages.sjsu.edu/gallery/exhibits/african/africaexhibit/imageswitharrows/ikenga.html>

The Igbo of Nigeria, because of their egalitarian and highly competitive social system, are preoccupied with personal achievement. This preoccupation is reflected in their art in the abundance of ikenga carvings which symbolize personal success and individual attainment. There are basically two forms to the ikenga figures. One is a more abstracted or stylized type, the other more humanistic. Both are in the image of a horned male figure made of wood. In its simplest form, it consists of only a cylindrical block and projecting "horns." The horn symbolizes the aggressive, assertive, and powerful nature of the male animal. The more elaborate type of ikenga, a standing or seated male figure with full head and limbs such as the one seen here, usually holds a severed head in one hand and a machete in the other. These objects can refer to achievement or title taking. If present the stool represents authority and prestige amongst the title-taking individuals of the society. Some of the more elaborate figures can reach up to 6' high and may have an ornate headdress on top of the regular head and may also have a variety of faces resembling masks. Many ikenga also have marks and symbols added to the surfaces, these in the past have represented the "Ichi" scarification patterns that were also a sign of title.



<http://museum.msu.edu/?q=node/205>

The ikenga is an Igbo variation of a tradition found among a number of peoples in southeastern Nigeria that is grounded in the belief that a man's ability to accomplish things successfully is embodied in his right hand or arm. This male-oriented institution concentrates on a man's skills with tools and weapons, his economic effectiveness, and his ability to win physical contests. Ikenga figures vary greatly in size and formal characteristics. They may be as high as six feet or as small as a few inches. Though always representing a male, the figure may be relatively naturalistic or highly abstract. The usual attributes associated with these wood figures are emblems of prestige and power. The male figure is often depicted holding a sword in his right hand and a trophy head in the left. Sometimes the sword is replaced with a staff of authority. Often the male figure



is depicted sitting on a stool, a symbol of prestige associated with the title-taking societies of Igboland. The single most prevalent attribute, found on virtually all ikenga, is a pair of horns projecting from the top of the man's head, an allusion to the aggressive nature of male animals. This ikenga is a relatively abstract example. The body is rendered as a simple textured cylinder set on a bifurcated base. Two horns project from the top of the head. Stylistically, it is quite similar to published examples of ikenga figures coming from Umumbo in the northwest part of Igboland. This figure was purchased by Ottenberg from the Seattle-based African art collector and dealer, Michael Heide, in 1991.

<http://goo.gl/iBQ8hV> (<http://www.digitalgallery.emory.edu/>)

Shrine Figure, Ikenga and Sculpture and Ikenga are shrines to the right hand, but they are also symbols of ancestors and personal power. Success, strength, achievement, and assertiveness are associated with the right hand as a symbol of power. Ikenga is treated as a spirit and stays with the person who possesses it until death. If the guardian is devout, he will "feed" the ikenga daily with kola and wine. Although this ikenga is more abstract than the other example displayed here, it has characteristic ikenga features, such as a stool for the seat of authority and horns for vitality.

The following excerpts were compiled by Douglas Darracott, Plano West Senior High School, Plano, TX

1. "Sculptures called ikenga are used in male cults that address the powers, successes, and failures of an individual. Among the several southern Nigerian peoples who have this or a related cult and art, the latter is most highly developed among the Igbo" (Cole and Chike 24). "Igbo success in material, social, even spiritual and political terms ultimately rests in moral determination and physical strength. The prevailing ideal has been an excellent yam farmer who accumulates wealth and prestige, titles, a large family, and finally, an honored place among prosperous and respected ancestors. This will to succeed is institutionalized in personal shrines, ikenga, maintained by men in most regions and only occasionally by women.... These images are found in the shrines of individual diviners and corporate tutelary cults and as representatives of age-grades and communities. Drums owned by villages (or village-groups) repeat basic ikenga imagery. Many Igbo villages are called ikenga, and while the reason for this is not clear, their existence proves the importance and antiquity of the concept" (24). "The basic Igbo ikenga image is a human with horns, sometimes rendered very simply as an abstract head-and-horns-on-base. Larger, more elaborate examples include fully realized males seated on stools, holding and wearing various symbols, and with more or less complex headdresses determined in part by horns and often including several other motifs" (24). "Ikenga, as shrine, symbol, and idea, incorporates a person's chi, his ancestors, his right arm or hand, aka ikenga, his power, ike, as well as spiritual activation through prayer and sacrifice. Young men acquire ikenga at varying ages in different regions but commonly have one by the time they are married and have established a family. The images are frequently carved, usually from 'male' hardwoods such as iroko, oji. Normally an ikenga is consecrated in the presence of one's lineage and/or age-mates. Onwuejeogwu recounts a rite that took place before the former, with the lineage head officiating. Offerings of yam, a cock, wine, and kola were provided by Okafor, the recipient. The headman prayed over the kola... The headman then killed the cock, dripped blood on the ikenga, pulled feathers from the fowl, and stuck them and four lumps of cooked yam on the image" (24).

2. "Food was shared among the guests, and the headman later poured a libation of palm wine on the image, praying: 'Health, good fortune are what we are seeking for. We are searching for an upright ikenga'" (26). "The primary diagnostic of all ikenga is a pair of horns, and the primary meaning of horns