
DIE GEISTESWELT DER
NEANDERTALER

44 Stories from the

human worlds

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From Africa to the world

Early man in the Olduvai Gorge
East Africa
1960–1970
Diorama by Fritz Laube
130 × 135 × 130 cm

Imagine a day in Africa about 2.4 million years ago when our ancestors had to cope in truly inhospitable surroundings with dazzling bright light, scorching heat, dry grassland and hardly any trees. They were able to get by thanks to a skill that set them apart from the other creatures living in the valley: they used stones and branches as tools. Our ancient ancestors of this period were the earliest toolmakers and called *homo habilis* (or handy man).
Landscape painter Fritz Laube created a very atmospheric portrait of this setting in his own unmistakable style. He depicted the small human figures with extreme attention to detail and scientific precision. At the same time, the seamless transition from a realistic landscape to a painted, semi-circular background creates an almost perfect illusion of spatial depth and reality. Laube created the diorama between 1960 and 1970; it was extensively restored for presentation in the Landesmuseum's HumanWorlds. In the background, you can see the volcanic mountains of the East African Rift System, which extends through East Africa for almost 6,000 kilometres. Today, the valley shown in the diorama is known as the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania. It has UNESCO World Heritage Site status as a famous archaeological site for human artefacts and Cradle of Mankind.

Elephant hunters on the Aller River

Wooden spear
Middle Palaeolithic,
approx. 125,000 years ago
Length: 238.5 cm
Place found: Lehringen
(Verden a. d. Aller district)
On loan from Domherrenhaus
Verden/Aller

One summer during the last warm period 125,000 years ago, hunters fashioned spears, destined for killing animals, from the small branches of yew trees. All twigs were carefully removed, and the spears' pointed tips were formed by fire hardening and then polishing them. People back then knew how to kill elephants, which were three times as big as themselves. Once hit by a spear, the elephant probably collapsed in a lake and impaled itself on the deadly weapon. The hunters made knives out of lumps of flint they brought with them, used these to cut out strips of meat and took their spoils back to the camp on the shore. The spear remained in the elephant and hyenas ate the rest of the carcass. The animal's skin and flesh quickly decomposed. If the spear had not been located under the surface of the water, it would probably have been lost.
1948: while mining lime marl, which is popular as a fertiliser, large bones came to light. Enthusiastic local researchers recovered them and when they found a wooden spear between the ribs, it was obvious that they had made the discovery of the century. Right up until today, it is the only proof worldwide that Neanderthals were able to attack and kill pachyderms and not just make use of the carrion.
1988: the skeleton of a European forest elephant was again found with flint knives but no spear embedded in it this time in a lignite mine near Gröbern. Now we know for certain that elephant hunting near North German Verden was no exception.

Corestone from red Heligoland flint
Lower Palaeolithic, approx. 13,000 to 14,500 years ago
6.6 × 2.7 × 2.5 cm
Place found: Damme (Diepholz district)

Ice Age hunters' networks

Our story probably goes something like this: the white mountain slowly became indistinct from the horizon of the coastal plain and the hunter family moved towards the midday sun carrying a tent, provisions, weapons and equipment. They were also perhaps carrying the haematite crystal from the ancestral mountain with them. Once they had met their relatives in the summer hunting grounds in the highlands after wandering for two or three days, they probably spent several days and nights celebrating and telling each other their stories. Then they would have also passed the haematite, supposedly containing the spirit of their ancestors, from hand to hand, cutting off one knife blade after the other, as was the custom. They believed that their ancestors could therefore live in any hunting grounds and protect their relatives. Some men later moved on with women from other groups.

The striking red flintstone in this scenario really does exist. It was found on camping grounds belonging to Stone Age hunters at Lake Dümmer, the second largest lake in Lower Saxony. It is the remainder of a carefully prepared corestone, from which several dozen sharp knife blades had already been struck off, recognisable by the 'conchoidal fractures' (with surfaces like the insides of clamshells). In contrast to the grey flintstone at Lake Dümmer, which was used for the other tools found there, the red one is only found on the island of Heligoland, about 200 kilometres further away. During the Ice Age, this was a white limestone cliff visible from afar, which could be reached without getting wet. Because a lot of water was bound in the glaciers during the last Ice Age, the sea level was over 100 metres lower than today. Consequently, the red corestone must have been transported over vast distances. Perhaps the hunters brought it with them but it could also have been handed on from group to group. Camping grounds that were home to several groups show that the scattered groups of hunters were in regular contact.

The mother of the moose

Moose cow made of amber
Upper Palaeolithic,
approx. 14,000 years ago
approx. 6 × 9 × 1.6 cm
Place found: Weitsche
(Lüchow-Dannenberg district)

If you thought amber was only found on the Baltic, you would be wrong. During the Ice Age about 250,000 years ago, glaciers transported it way inland.
But what kind of strange animal is this? It looks a bit like a lobster without any front legs. By adding a little more to it, you get a moose cow.
But how did it get here? Perhaps the story went something like this: several families of moose and beaver hunters arrived at the hunting and fishing grounds along the wide river in late summer. They erected tents from the previous year and collected stones that shone as brightly as the sun and could even burn. Back then, people believed that spirits lived in these stones. Figurines were cut from them and the spirit awakened. The stones were also used to decorate clothes and bags. People set off for their winter quarters armed with supplies of fish, meat and bird skins. Only the "mother of the moose" remained as custodian of the hunting grounds at the fire pit.
Over the next 1,000 years, floods repeatedly surged into the floodplains and layers of clay spread over the abandoned camping grounds, protecting them. In the 1950s, 13,000 years later, the river was canalised and flooding was a thing of the past. A farmer led the plough behind his horse and brought peat and loam to the surface by the clod. The ploughshare hit the "mother of the moose" hard and shattered it.
In 1987, an amateur archaeologist discovered the stone tools from the Stone Age camping grounds and in 1994, during systematic documentation of the site, the amber fragment of an animal figurine appeared. Years of sifting through 700 square metres of arable land were rewarded in 2004. A moose cow made of amber was reassembled from almost 50 stone splinters. These remains from the camping grounds are 14,000 years old. As a result, the age of similar but isolated finds of amber animals from Poland and Denmark can be dated for the first time.
Until recently, it was not possible to determine the age of this realistic art, made somewhere between the Ice Age and today's warm period, but the animal figurines now plug this gap. But what stories can the "mother of the moose" tell us we wonder?

A woman's body or a symbol?

These mysterious deep lines caused a sensation. Because even such a simple image is one of the absolute rarities of the early interglacial in Central Europe and we know almost nothing about the imagery of forest hunters about 11,000 years ago. Almost as soon as the flat stone slab had been excavated in 2012 from camping grounds belonging to early forest hunters, there was speculation that it was Lower Saxony's oldest woman.

There are certain similarities with female figures from this period and the typical symmetry is indisputable. But were the diamond-shaped deep grooves and the dot really supposed as a leg, hip, vulva and navel to indicate a woman's body? Not everyone looking at it, whether experts or amateurs, saw a woman in it. Ice Age art does offer mid-relief or engraved images of women from the front, just showing their hips and stomach. These are usually buxom to make them identifiable as women but more than one thousand years older than the find from Bierden.

But what about our slab? It is easy to see that the stone was used later on for grinding and other work before it finally broke due to the heat from a fire pit. More detailed studies showed that the lines were not created naturally but carved. The quartzite rock was so hard that only straight and no curved lines were possible, which could explain the lack of a typical female silhouette.

Nevertheless, at least one slightly older image of a woman is known of which the diamond-like symbol could have been based on. Which is why the interpretation that it is a symbol of a woman is the most probable one at present.

Stone slab with engraving
Early Mesolithic, quartzite,
approx. 9000 BC
7.5 × 4.6 × 1.5 cm
Place found: Bierden
(Rotenburg/Wümme district)

Harbingers of a new era

Adze
Lade Mesolithic,
approx. 6,2000 BC
Actinolite-hornblende shale
Length: 21.1 cm
Place found: Schletau
(Lüchow-Dannenberg district)

A layer of lithic flakes and flint arrow inserts, charcoal particles and charred hazelnut shells, in other words typical relics left by forest hunters who had set up camp in the dunes near the Elbe lowlands over 8,000 years ago, were unearthed on the embankment of a sand pit, barely a metre below the forest floor. A strange, long rock protruded from the crumbling sand in the middle of the rock face. When he found it, the amateur archaeologist could not believe his eyes, mapped it and then pulled it out carefully. Unbelievably, it was the ground blade of an adze, a cutting tool similar to an axe. Stone Age farmers, who migrated from the south a little while later, brought these attractive stone tools with them when they reached southern Lower Saxony 7,500 years ago. Unlike local axes made of flint, this strange-looking adze has been ground into a standardised, strictly symmetrical form. Given its rough, weathered surface, it is hard to imagine the beauty of the once polished greenish stone with its dark streaks. This special type of slate can be found in Bohemia and the Balkans, but it is unknown in the North German Lowlands.

But how did the forest hunters come into possession of the adze half a millennium before the arrival of the first farmers? Even at that time, groups of hunters to the north of the Alps and agricultural groups in south-east Europe probably bartered goods with each other. These Stone Age farmers' adzes had wooden handles and were not just used for working with wood, they were also much-feared weapons. The odd, polished stones must have been very attractive to the forest hunters and valued for their prestige. This is also indicated by the unusual circumstances in which a second adze blade, found in the north and dated to a similarly early period, was found. The blade was discovered in a grave near Merseburg and had seemingly been given to a shaman along with further magic tools to take with her to the afterlife some 8,000 years ago.

Prehistoric pigs-cum-bears?

Is this a bat? Or a pig? Neither the ears nor the mouth are formed accurately enough to suggest which type of animal it is. And what we believe to be longer front legs and shorter hindlegs are actually just pieces with which the animal's body was diagonally attached as a handle or decoration to the belly of a clay pot.

The potter probably did not intend to base the pot on a real animal at all but create an imaginary, hybrid creature instead. The human-like depictions of this early rural culture do not show real human bodies either.

The mysterious animal made of fired clay was excavated from the waste pit of an early agricultural settlement. These types of figurines are found very seldom, virtually never in one piece and often broken at the thickest point. Which is why it is assumed that they were broken on purpose, rendered unusable or even "killed", perhaps for spiritual reasons. They certainly were not toys either because, apart from the fact that they were broken intentionally, they are never found in children's graves as burial offerings.

Before firing, abstract patterns of lines were engraved on the still soft animal bodies, similar to the bands with which the potters also decorated their clay pots. What these symbols mean is not clear but they are in the unmistakable style of Linear Pottery culture. People practising this culture lived in the south of today's Lower Saxony 7,500 years ago. They bred domestic animals and cultivated grain and vegetables.

The north, on the other hand, was home to people who hunted and fished. Their way of life could not have been more opposite and influenced the way animals were illustrated. The hunters, fishermen and gatherers made small realistic animal sculptures from amber and used them as amulets. In Scandinavia, they left behind realistic rock paintings of moose, bears and other animals.

The different way the animals were portrayed highlights the way people in two totally dissimilar economic systems thought.

Animal figurine
Late Neolithic,
approx. 5000 BC
Fired clay
approx. 13.1 × 2.9 cm,
Height of the front legs: 9.3 cm max.,
Hindlegs: 4.9 cm max.
Place found: a settlement in Hardegsen-Hevensen (Northeim district)
On permanent loan from the town of Hardegsen

Clay instead of metal

Cup with a handle
Middle Neolithic, approx. 3,200 BC
Fired clay
15.8 × 10.7 × 7.1 cm
Place found: Oldendorf
(Lüneburg district)

While the peasant clan placed this elegant clay cup in the graves of their dead, the rulers of a Bronze Age culture in distant Anatolia received burial offerings of similar vessels chased from precious gold, silver and bronze. Specialised metal craftsmen made the vessels, which were used for libation rituals, out of gold, silver and bronze.
These sorts of metal cups and bowls were never found in the culture of Stone Age farmers, which is hardly surprising. Because these types of prestigious objects were extremely rare and, if not melted down beforehand, were usually buried as offerings. Although finds of these offerings are difficult to prove archaeologically, they must have been known of. Because the flat bowl with handle seems to imitate this type of metal vessel. The exceptionally thin walls of the elegant cup have been made by hand and decorated with triangles that have been punched in. It is particularly noticeable that the raised handle seems to be riveted to the edge of the bowl. In fact, a rivet head with holes in it is shown on the handle insert, similarly to a metal vessel. Even the metal strips on both sides of the handle are reproduced. The sharp profile of the cup and the fingertip-like indentation of the round bottom, a so-called omphalos, reinforce the impression of a chased metal vessel.
Some 5,500 years ago, the houses of the dead, stone burial chambers under huge hills, formed quite a ritual landscape. Clay vessels were some of the usual items placed in the graves of the deceased or left behind after banquets. Our clay cup was also with several other vessels in a burial chamber like those. But our object looks like a foreign body among the other vessels. It is the only find that gives us an indirect indication that the metal vessels of the early metal-working cultures were also encountered in the north of the continent.


10:69
K. Hann. Münden

Copper axe
Late Neolithic,
approx. 2,500 BC
Copper
Length: 22.4 cm
Place found: Bühren
(Göttingen district)

Not a weapon

The surface of the mysterious material shimmered like reddish gold – what a gem!
The copper axe had probably been passed on from community to community as a valuable prestigious object, which explains how it reached Lower Saxony. Originally, it most likely stemmed from south-east Europe, where metalworking communities had developed on the Black Sea and the Balkans about 7,000 years ago. Copper had already been mined underground in these innovative hubs. The mysterious material arrived in central Europe as a rare commodity to barter. In this region, people were still living in the peasant communities of the Stone Age but were in touch with the early urban centres in the south-east of the continent. The influences that emanated from there changed the Stone Age communities.
Since only a finger-thin wooden handle fitted into the shaft hole, our axe was useless as a tool or weapon. In fact, it was used as a sign of power by a leadership elite and indirectly indicates that the peasant society did have a hierarchy. Admittedly, these types of axes were copied hundreds of times in stone and given to men as weapons or as battle axes for their graves – they expressed the social status of the person who had been laid to rest as a warrior. But copper axes were precious and reserved for an elite. For every hundred stone battle axes there is less than one copper axe. To date, they have never been found in graves but always on their own. They seem to have played a role in special religious ceremonies and were placed as sacrificial offerings in the ground.
Today, it takes some imagination to visualize the object with a corroded and green patinated surface, discovered by chance in a pile of rubble in 1970, as a symbol of power, similar to the sword in the Middle Ages.

Sunbeams from the moor

The thin gold disc has a fineness of almost 100 %! It does not just shine like the sun it also looks like it. Rings of the sun's flames and rays alternate and are chiselled artistically into the soft gold foil. The foil must have been affixed onto a flexible base because any decorations made would have easily pierced it. Perhaps it was used by a priest as jewellery, or maybe it shone as a star on a solar chariot. The gold disc from Moordorf is regarded as a particularly vivid symbol of sun worship during the Bronze Age. After use, it may have been placed in the ground as a burial offering, as the traces attached to it suggest: the weight of the layers of earth pressed it flat and grains of sand were imprinted on the gold foil.

A moor farmer called Vitus Dirks brought it to the surface when he was digging a ditch in around 1910. His son found it in the excavated soil – but it did not dawn on the poorly educated villagers that it could be made of gold. So, the gold disc was kept with other curiosities in their front parlour. In leaner times during the war years that followed, a scrap metal dealer bought it "for three Reichsmark" and sold it on to a second-hand dealer in Aurich, until it was eventually bought by the Landesmuseum in Hanover for 450 Reichsmark in 1926.

Vitus Dirks did not realise what treasure he had found until a newspaper called him. The village vicar helped him tell the tale of how he found the disc, which turned him into something of a legend in dirt-poor Moordorf.

However, the extraordinary purity of the gold is still a mystery because this is virtually unknown to occur naturally. Therefore, some people believe that this gold was not produced until around 1910. However, experiments show that such pure gold could also have been purified with Bronze Age methods. Above all, however, the traces on the disc can only be explained if it was made, used and buried in the ground during the Bronze Age.

Moordorf gold disc
Early to late Bronze Age,
approx. 1800 – 1500 BC
24 carat gold
Diameter without loops:
approx. 14.5 cm,
Thickness: < 200 micrometres,
Place found: Moordorf
(Aurich district)

Gods or a ceremony depicted?

When the stone slab with the strange figures arrived at the Landesmuseum in Hanover in 1908, it was clear that somebody had reworked it since fresh chips and white stone dust were found. But what dates from the Bronze Age and what has been added recently? For example, the legs of the figure on the left are the original ones and preserved under a brownish coating. The remains of the coating in the other areas show that it originally covered all the silhouettes. Whoever reworked the slab must have had their reasons for keeping to the Bronze Age contours of the heads and bodies.

About 3,500 years ago, a slab was split from a boulder of gneiss and carefully hewn into a curved symmetrical stele for the rock painting. The three figures on it stand out clearly from the stone which was deliberately coloured black. The one on the left is facing us with bent legs and arms raised as if in worship. The one in the middle is looking to the right and perhaps holding an axe high above his or her head. The third one, dressed in a robe, looks as if he or she is using both arms to grab something slightly further to the right. The three were interpreted as personified gods, but the worshiping pose suggests otherwise. Gods do not engage in worship. In fact, perhaps it is a burial where sacrifices are being made?

The place it was found suggests that this interpretation is correct. The slab was discovered at the end of a burial chamber weighing several tons, which had come to light when a vast burial mound was excavated. The burial offerings of weapons and jewellery, the mound and the burial chamber itself all indicate that the man entombed there was a high-ranking warrior on a par with another member of the ruling elite interred in a burial chamber with even more paintings in southern Sweden.

Today, the original Anderlingen burial chamber is erected on the lawn on the right outside the Landesmuseum. The slab with its unique silhouettes is kept in the museum and no other Scandinavian-style rock painting has been encountered this far south before.

Rock painting from the Anderlingen burial chamber
Bronze Age, approx. 1,500 BC
Gneiss
115 × 75 × 50 cm
Place found: near Anderlingen (Rotenburg/Wümme district)

From Knossos and Mycenae to Lower Saxony

Cast bronze cup
Bronze Age, approx. 1,450 BC
Bronze
Height: 5.7 cm,
Diameter: 12.4–12.6 cm
Place found: Dohnsen
(Celle district)

In 1955, ten-year-old Dieter Meister chanced upon this cup near the place he lived. On a visit to a museum with his school, he took the object out of his pocket and asked if it was anything interesting.
An archaeologist spotted its priceless cultural and historical value – but rumours also immediately started circulating that former members of the Wehrmacht had allegedly expropriated the cup or British soldiers had obtained possession of it while they were stationed in Greece. Because its shape and the way it is made and decorated is identical to metal objects from the Aegean region. The rumours proved to be unfounded, especially as the condition of the metal surface is similar to bronze finds from Lower Saxony.
But how did the cup get here? It resembles gold vessels from the Mycenaean shaft graves discovered by Heinrich Schliemann, but, in particular, a bronze cup from the island of Thera, which was under Cretan influence. The demand for drinking vessels from Cretan workshops – cups, mugs and pots made of gold, silver and bronze – was vast among the rulers of these ancient palace cultures. The valuable vessels will have been equally coveted by the ruling classes of neighbouring communities and so they probably turned up in the north now and then as diplomatic gifts.
Although there are some indirect indications of contacts between the Bronze Age societies of central Europe and the palace cultures of Crete and Mycenae 3,500 years ago, original objects from these cultures have rarely been discovered north of the Alps. The bronze cup from Lüneburg Heath with the beautiful stylised leaf branch design below the rim is the most significant of these finds. Perhaps it was once a gift to the gods here, as were so many native bronze objects from this period, which were sacrificed to the gods in moors, rivers, lakes and on land.

Golden Bronze Age

Nowadays in Germany, rescue excavations are usually the only type of archaeological digs carried out and take place before new houses or streets are built. In 2010, the Lower Saxony State Monument Office faced a special challenge with the construction of the north European natural gas pipeline, whose route practically cut through the entire state. At around 200 kilometres in length, this excavation was the largest project ever of its kind in Lower Saxony. Around 150 settlement and burial sites from 10,000 years were discovered, but a sensation awaited the archaeologists to the very west of the Diepholz region, where they found a hoard of gold. There were no other traces of the Bronze Age in the area, so it is a mystery why this treasure was buried here. Was it merely somewhere where a merchant left his inventory or had the treasure been consecrated to a deity?

At 117 objects, the find is one of the largest hoards of gold in central Europe. It was originally wrapped in linen, which was held together by bronze pins, but the fabric did not survive the ravages of time. In addition to a garment clasp and a massive bracelet, the linen bag primarily contained coil bracelets of different sizes and designs. Many of them are interlinked with each other in chains.

The treasure's material value was obviously of prime importance. The clasp does have several artistic decorations, including round sections with rays, which can be interpreted as sun symbols. But once the pin had been removed, it no longer worked. The bracelet is a semi-finished product, and of the coil bangles that make up the largest part of the find, some seem never to have been used.

About 90 % of the treasure is gold, which is remarkable and makes it particularly valuable. Perhaps the objects were primarily important because they could be bartered with, which would make them an early form of coins.

Buried treasure in Gessel
Middle Bronze Age,
1,350 – 1,300 BC
Total weight: 1.7 kg
Place found: Syke
(Gessel district)

A classy woman

Cast bronze bowls
Late Bronze Age,
approx. 750 BC
Bronze
Height: 18.7 cm,
Diameter: 31.6 cm
Place found: Winzlar
(Hanover region)

At first the finds looked modest with mere fragments of clay vessels and some metal items encountered during construction work. It was only during archaeological research that an extremely rare embellished pin made of pure gold and the most valuable burial offering were discovered: a wafer-thin cast bronze bowl filled with the ashes of people who had been cremated. It was a sensation. Because among the thousands of similar cremations that occurred throughout Europe in this period, bronze needles and clay urns are common in burial sites, but these sorts of valuable objects are a rarity.

The semi-circular bronze vessel with its cylindrical neck and wide cylindrical sieve edge are particularly exciting. These sorts of vessels were made in the forges near the dwellings of the ruling classes. The bowl was first formed from wax and covered with clay, then, after melting out the wax, cast in liquid bronze and the meandering and undulating ornaments were then punched into the surface. A unique feature of this object is the blue vitreous enamel which was melted in between all the many holes on the pierced edge. The local bronze smiths were clearly versed in the technique of making vitreous enamel.

The bronze bowl is an example of excellent craftsmanship and an outstanding piece of art. Just like chalices and patens during Holy Communion, it was probably used in religious rituals. But which person in Winzlar was so important that such a valuable metallic object was placed in his or her grave? The original assumption was that the ashes came from a man, but this was corrected at a later date. In fact, they are probably the remains of a roughly 60-year-old woman. And because such exquisite burial offerings were only given to people in the upper echelons of society, it must have been a very powerful woman, possibly a priestess.

In the Bronze Age, grave monuments and burial offerings indicated the standing of people for the first time. The warrior from the stone chamber of Anderlingen or the huge burial mound of "King Hinz" of Seddin in Mecklenburg are well known. Winzlar's powerful woman could have been their equal.

Cloak
Roman Empire,
1st – 4th cent.
Modern wool replica
252 × 160/176 cm
Place found: Hunteburg

A warm investment

Textile fabrics from the Roman Empire are much treasured in terms of cultural history. Very few have survived over the centuries. Some of them include coats, overalls and trousers made of wool, which were found in north German moors. They were some of the clothes uncovered on moor mummies. The moor did an excellent job of preserving the wool.
The coats are large rectangular cloths made of heavy wool fabrics, which were folded into a kind of cape. They came with elaborate coloured patterns and sometimes fringes or cords. Roman pictures give clues as to how the garments were worn. The cloths for the coats were folded once so that the top section was about half a metre above the hem of the lower part. The now double cloth was placed around the shoulders, possibly with a second, narrower fold forming a collar. The warm cape was fixed with a sturdy garment pin called a fibula, which pierced all layers of the cloth, below the right shoulder. A particularly striking specimen was the so-called "coat B" from Hunteburg. It had covered the body of a man deposited in the moor. The rich colours of the textiles made of green and blue dyed wool faded in the moor, but a replica indicates its former beauty. The cloak has a lot of darned patches, which corroborate the theory about how it was folded and worn. The fabric has a tablet-woven border on all sides, which is interwoven with the actual cloth. The techniques for making these sorts of garments were highly advanced, but it was a long way from obtaining the wool to finishing the garment. Back then, being in a position to wear good quality garments meant a lot of work, and items of clothes were people's most valuable possessions.

Comb
Roman Empire,
1st cent.
Ivory
Width: approx. 4 cm
Place found: Grethem
(Heidekreis district)

Old and valuable

The scene we see on the comb shows us a young lady with an elaborate hairstyle, leaning gracefully on her chair, the carefully draped robe revealing more of her beautiful body than concealing it. Is it a woman performing her morning ablutions? Could this be Venus, the goddess of love, to whom Cupid, who is approaching from the left, will present what he is holding in his hand?

The scene is depicted on the handle of a comb, only fragments of which have survived. However, this clearly shows that the craftsmanship and artistic design of the relief carving are top quality. The ivory object was probably made during the reign of Emperor Augustus in a renowned Italian workshop. The people commissioning and purchasing this sort of object were members of the most distinguished circles of Roman society, including the imperial family. Back then, ivory was already an extremely valuable material and at the time of the Roman Republic it was even part of the state reserves.

In 2006, two vessels used as urns were recovered at Grethem, one of which contained not only the ashes of an adult woman but also some larger remains of objects – including the comb fragment. The urns are also imports from the Roman Empire but much younger than the comb. The metal vessels, known as "Hemmoor buckets", come from workshops of the 2nd and 3rd centuries and originally served as tableware. These sorts of Roman metal vessels had already been found on the same site in the past. In the 1850s, two were added to the collection and belong to the museum's oldest.

The addition of the comb shows that superb objects made by Roman craftsmen found their way to the north, where they were sought after as antiques.

A woman's place is in the home?

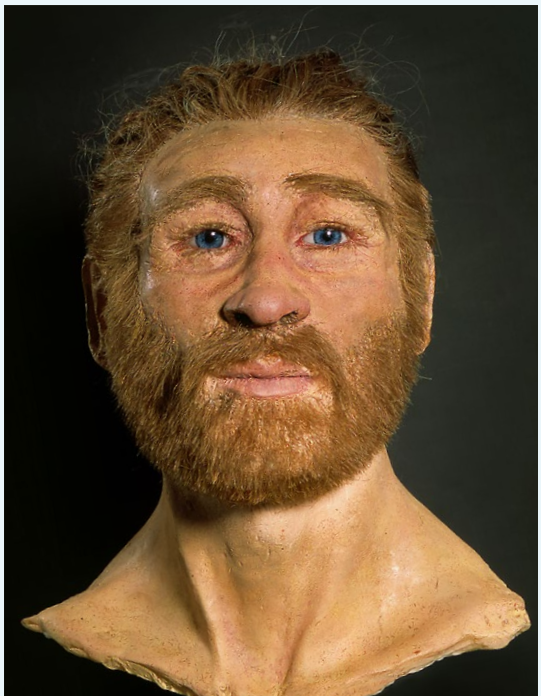
Brooch depicting saints
9th/10th cent.
Modern replica
Non-ferrous metal with enamel,
Diameter: 2.5 cm
Place found: Lüneburg

What sort of woman might have worn this brooch? These types of colourful, enamelled brooches with pictures of saints were used to hold coats or robes together and placed in Christian women's graves alongside small decorative crosses. Research has shown that these brooches depicting saints were made from the middle of the 9th to the early 10th century. They were probably made in the central areas of Francia on the Rhine, the Moselle or the Main.

In north Germany, most of the brooches are found in areas where people were converted to Christianity by Franconian missionaries. At the end of the 8th century, the spirituality of the people living in this area underwent fundamental change. During his infamous Saxon Wars, Franconian king Charlemagne forced the people not only to recognise his rule, but also to become Christians. As a result, they had to abandon their own centuries-old religious traditions and practices, which are said to have included the making of human sacrifices, all sorts of clairvoyance, magic and sorcery. It is not clear whether people really did indulge in these practices, but a decree issued by Charlemagne claimed as much and banned them from continuing under pain of death. The decree also forbade traditional customs and rituals associated with looking after the dead, especially the cremation of the deceased.

The purpose of these draconian measures was primarily to destroy the social fabric of the people whom Charlemagne had brought to heel. But even if the Christian faith had been foisted upon them, it opened up completely new perspectives for women, beyond the duty of marriage and motherhood. At least members of the upper class were allowed space for contemplation and could gain access to education and power by living as nuns, which was an act of emancipation.

Testimonies of popular piety, such as the brooches depicting saints, are handed down primarily from women coming from this world.



Moor mummy
3rd/4th cent.
Modern reconstructions
Body height: 180 cm
Place found: near Neu Versen
(Emsland district)

“Roter Franz”

The moor mummy called “Roter Franz” was 25 to 30 years old when he died. Perhaps he was a warrior and fought on horseback. His hip and thigh bones indicate he was a keen rider throughout his life; a healed fracture of the right collarbone may have been caused by a fall from the horse or an injury sustained in battle. At 180 cm, he was tall; it was only in the moor that his body shrank to its present size. As the mummy bears no traces of disease, he did not die of natural causes, in fact, forensic analysis revealed that the man had had his throat cut!
The mummified corpse was discovered on Bourtang Moor near the village of Neu Versen in 1900. Today, it is a unique historical source for anthropologists and archaeologists and many details were brought to light while it was being studied. For instance, carbon dating showed that the man must have died between 252 AD and 296 AD or 316 AD and 388 AD. And a facial reconstruction even gives us an idea of what he might have looked like.
However, some questions have remained unanswered. The mummy was discovered without any clothing, but did it really reach the moor in this condition? It is possible that the man had worn linen clothing and the fibres had chemically completely disintegrated in the moor. Why was the body not cremated as was customary in Lower Saxony in the 3rd and 4th centuries? Was he murdered or killed for ritualistic or religious reasons and therefore submersed in the moor? One thing is for sure, Franz’s hair was red because the mummy had been lying in the moor.

Buried treasure in Lengerich
4th cent.
Gold and silver
Place found: Lengerich

Easy come, easy go

The treasure was hidden in three parts under a large stone slab. In addition to coins and gold jewellery, it also included rank insignia belonging to an officer in the Roman army – a crossbow brooch made of pure gold and two solid gold bangles, which were awarded in recognition of special services rendered. Who buried these symbolic objects near what is Lengerich today?
In the first four centuries AD, young men from the Germanic world flocked to the Roman army to seek their fortunes as mercenaries. Regardless of their origin or ethnicity, practically anyone could reach the highest ranks of this army and, with the fame and wealth that beckoned, this was a tempting prospect. In addition to exotic wares, veterans often brought home Roman lifestyles.
This sort of mercenary could have hidden the treasure after returning to Emsland from a successful and profitable military career in the Roman army in the 4th century.
This precious metal treasure was discovered in 1847 and is the largest known cache from the Roman Empire to be found in north-west Germany to date. Unfortunately, most of it, including a priceless necklace, was melted down in the 19th century. All that is left of it today are a coin, three rings, a coil bracelet and four decorative buttons, the purpose of which we are not sure of. Close by were more than 1,200 silver Roman coins and two silver and bronze bowls. Only 18 coins have been preserved and the two bowls have vanished.
The name of the treasure's owner and his deeds will remain unknown forever – but one thing is for certain: he did not manage to recover his fortune during his lifetime.


Liebenau

Dedicated to the spear

The amulet was found on the weapon belt of a man who was buried near Liebenau (Weser) in the 5th century. Handling weapons was part of his everyday life and mastering them in combat or while hunting required strength, skill and rigorous training. One of the oldest written records in Lower Saxony stems from this world of warriors: a round silver pendant with the runic inscription RAUZWI, a loose translation of which would be "dedicated to the spaer". At that time, societies in northern Europe had no formal system of writing. For thousands of years, they had preserved and passed on their memories, traditions, myths and legal standards orally. However, at the turn of the 3rd century, the use of characters similar to letters had begun. They were etched on and therefore merely consist of lines. These runes were used for purposes that were profane but also religious and associated with magic. They provide information about the owners or manufacturers of objects, but also had a magical function: runes cast spells, laid curses or were used for dedications. The question of the origin of the letters in a cultural environment that did not have an alphabet and the reasons for their use have been the subject of research for a long time, and the origin of the runic alphabet has not yet been satisfactorily clarified. There is much to suggest that it was developed in the western Baltic region on the basis of the Latin alphabet at the beginning of a new era and perhaps even invented by one or more intellectuals as a means of communication.

Silver disc
5th cent.
Silver
Diameter: 2.5 cm
Place found:
Liebenau/Weser

Burial offerings
5th cent.
Gold, silver, amber, glass, iron, non-ferrous metal, ceramic
Place found: Issendorf (Stade district)

Buried in the ground

In Lower Saxony, it had been customary to cremate the dead since the Bronze Age. In the 5th and 6th centuries, some family groups on the lower reaches of the Elbe River began to bury their dead without cremating them beforehand. It is not clear whether this type of burial was due to religious reasons or whether families were merely following the example of other regions. For archaeologists, this change in tradition is a stroke of luck that provides lots of insights into people's lives. The graves of the dead buried in this way often contain parts of their clothing and burial offerings that would have been burned and destroyed forever if they had been cremated. For example, a grave containing a body from the beginning of the 5th century from a cemetery near Issendorf, shows how richly adorned a woman's traditional costume might have been at that time. Three magnificent brooches made of gold-plated silver were found on the clothing of the woman buried. Two round robe clasps kept a sleeveless dress together, the large two-armed brooch did up a coat or cape. The valuable pieces of jewellery bear testimony to the exceptional craftsmanship of the goldsmiths back then.
In addition to a fine silver choker and a necklace with glass beads and bugle beads made of silver, the woman also wore a splendid necklace, weighing about 300 grams, and made of 80 large amber beads. She also had three keys on a belt, a large, functional iron key and two small decorative keys, which could be interpreted as pagan or Christian amulets and were kept in a small leather bag. A knife and four ceramic vessels were also included in the grave. It is not clear what role the woman played in her farming community, but she must have belonged to a prosperous and influential family.

Striking gold

Rope chains made of gold threads are some of the most complicated items made by early goldsmiths. Fashioning them is enormously complex and requires a lot of skill. The oldest ones made in this way are found among the remains of the Scythians from the middle of the first pre-Christian millennium. In Europe, they first appear in the last centuries BC and seem to have been forgotten about after the 5th century. They were revived again in Scandinavia in the 10th century but then tended to be made of silver.

Today, it is still difficult to date and determine the origin of the Isenbüttel gold rope chain with any precision. There is much to suggest that it was made in the 7th century and is therefore from the very period in which such items of jewellery are very rare in Europe. In terms of style, this distinctive object is very like the Scandinavian rope chains from the Viking era, but the embellishments also hint at south-eastern European pieces from the Migration Period.

The exceptionally high-quality rope chain is 42 cm long and crafted from gold threads just 0.5 mm thick. The ends of the chain are enclosed in gold sheaths in the shape of animal heads, which are elaborately decorated with pearl cords and red semi-precious stones set using a cloisonné technique.

The Isenbüttel gold rope chain was found during the clearing of woodland in 1922. It is unclear how it came to be buried originally. Its finder initially gave it to his children to play with, and later offered it to the landowner in exchange for "a juicy fat pig". It then passed through the hands of antique dealers and collectors until it was purchased by Hanover's Landesmuseum in 1962.

The value of the materials used and the superior quality of this goldsmith's work are without parallel in northern Germany. The former owners of this valuable item of jewellery probably came from the upper class during the Merovingian period.

Gold rope chain from Isenbüttel
7th cent.
Gold, semi-precious stones
Length: 42 cm
Place found: Isenbüttel
(Gifhorn district)

Bracteates
5th/6th cent.
Gold
Diameter: 30 mm max.
Place found: Nebenstedt
(Lüchow-Dannenberg district)

Gold of the gods

Embossed discs made of sheet metal are called bracteates and the Medieval sort are usually coins. However, the embossed jewellery discs from the 5th to the 6th century made of sheet gold were worn as amulets, as their loops or holes indicate.
We cannot interpret the scenes depicted on them with any certainty today. But to people who wore them in times gone by, they must have had some sort of easily decipherable meaning and probably also conveyed social and religious identity. These images suggest animals and gods, or scenes and figures from Germanic mythology anyway. Runes are also encountered on many bracteates.
These were made by skilled master craftsmen on behalf of the Germanic elite and came a long way from their southern Scandinavian origins, reaching Norway, the Danube region, England and even Russia. The inhabitants of the Germanic world were clearly in constant contact with one another and were not only divided into numerous tribes and groupings, but also organised into larger national structures.
In southern Scandinavia, bracteates also served as offerings to the gods and were buried for this purpose in small and large mounds in the ground. Some researchers suspect that they were also temple treasures. In other areas of central and northern Europe, nearly always only individual items can be found as burial offerings. However, in Lower Saxony both phenomena can be observed. A single bracteate was discovered as a burial offering in a cemetery near Issendorf; but small collections of bracteates from around 500 AD were unearthed near Nebenstedt, Sievern and Landegge – an indication that similar religious practices to those in southern Scandinavia might have existed here at that time.


INGELRII


INGELRII

Sword
11th cent.
Iron
Length: 84 cm
Place found:
Teufelsmoor near Worpswede

In the name of the sword

The inscription INGELRII on the blade is easy to read. This is not the name of the warrior who once took this splendid sword into battle, although iron swords did play a key role in the early Germanic societies of central and northern Europe – both as a feared weapon and as a status symbol of the free man.

Mythology is full of stories about the legendary qualities of swords and some even have their own past history and bear names such as the Gram sword, which Siegfried used to slay the dragon. But the inscription on our sword has nothing to do with a name like that either. INGELRII is the name of a workshop. Around 800, exceptionally high-quality weapons were produced by the Franconians in the Meuse region and on the Lower Rhine. The weapons were also very popular with the enemies of those producing them – and so many a man fought against Charlemagne with an imported Franconian sword in the Saxon Wars. During this time, some armourers added an inscription to the blades they produced. The brands of the Carolingian era signified quality and had been copied over many generations up to the 11th century. Only few of these swords dating already to High Medieval Ages still exist as they were seldom placed in their owners' graves in the largely Christianised areas of central and northern Europe. Consequently, it was virtually impossible for them to emerge as archaeological finds centuries later.

Hanover's Landesmuseum acquired one of these extremely rare specimens in 1933. It was somehow found in the Teufelsmoor between Worpswede and Adolfsdorf in around 1900 and looks just like a typical sword from the 11th century. One side of the blade bears the INGELRII workshop inscription and the other side has another, which is impossible to read and was probably merely of a symbolic nature.

A change of perspective

The open robe reveals the beautiful embroidery on the slit sleeves. The hems of the breeches are decorated with lace. We encounter Don Luys, the governor of the province of Paucartambo, dressed like a Spanish official of noble origin. Only those high up in the colonial hierarchy wore a garment like this. The medal of "Mary the Immaculate Conception" on his chest also suggests he was educated by the Catholic Jesuits.

However, the man is barefoot! That is not consistent with a prestigious baroque painting at all. And only the highest Inca princes wore this sort of headdress with feathers, pearls and red wool fringes. According to the cartouche on the bottom right of the picture, Don Luys stems from the third Inca Lloque Yupanqui and therefore from the highest ruling caste of the pre-Hispanic period. He was therefore both an Inca prince and a high-ranking member of colonial society, part of the indigenous elite and the Conquista.

The painting was probably part of the collection of Dona Martina Chiguan Topa, a descendant of Don Luys. In the late 18th century, it escaped an edict by the church to destroy pictures that suggested any link to the Incas. As one of the few remaining examples of its kind, it was added to the collection belonging to Hanover textile merchant Wilhelm Gretzer at the end of the 19th century and came to the then Provinzialmuseum in Hanover in 1927.

Cuzco Painting School
Portrait of (Don) Luys
Guamantitu Yupanqui Chiguan Topa
Peru, 18th cent.
Oil on canvas
195 × 130 cm
Gretzer collection

Picture puzzle

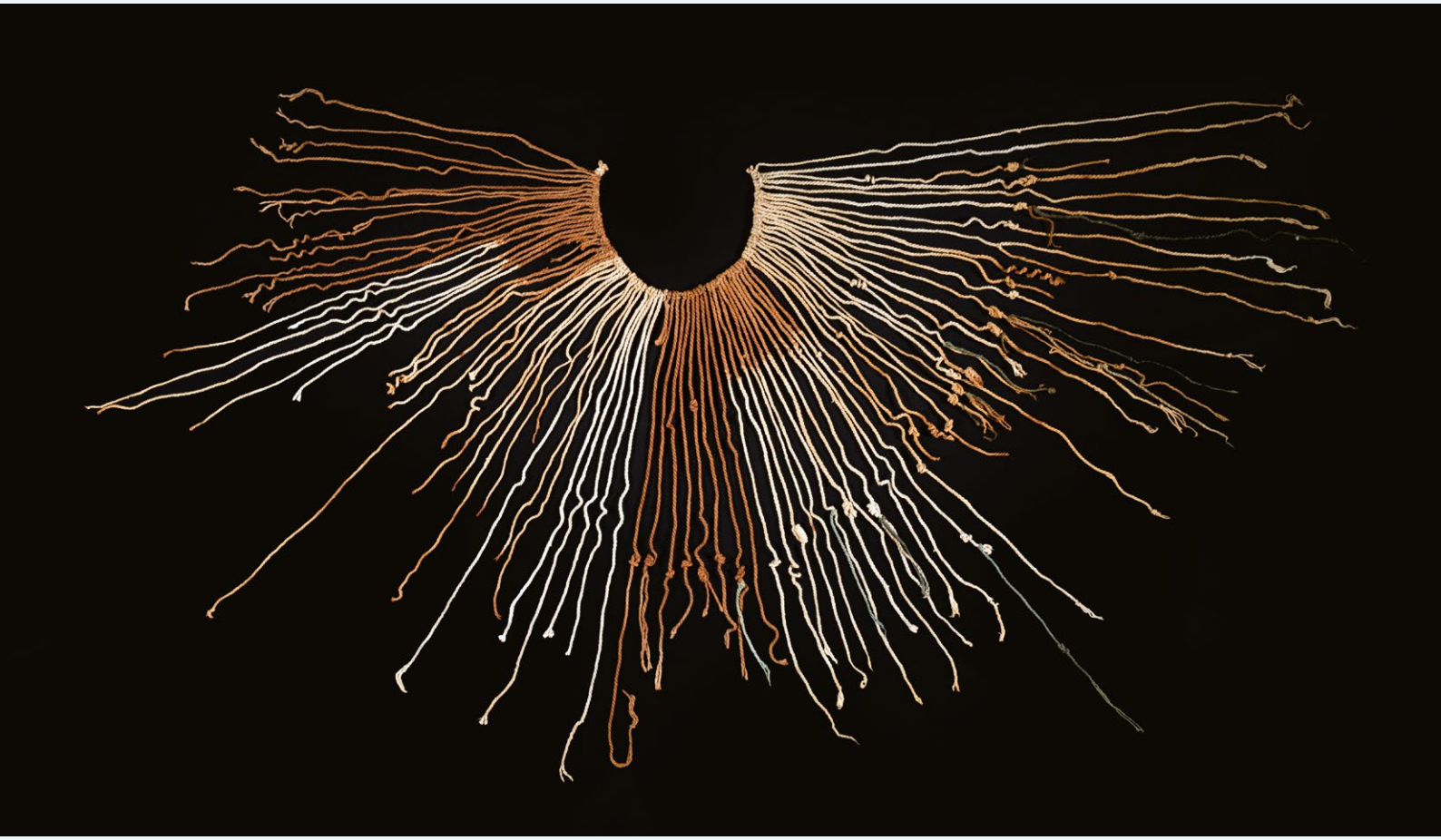
Fragment of painted fabric
Peru, Pachacamac
Chimu style
1100–1300
152 × 49 cm
Gretzer collection

This could actually have been a kind of visual language. We can identify patterns and people, boats and canopies, fish and birds and probably mythical creatures, too. Everything is strictly arranged according to a precise plan. But what do the images mean? Are they scenes from people's everyday lives – perhaps fishermen at work? Are they mythological themes? A religious interpretation is also conceivable, such as the journey of the deceased into another world. It is all guesswork – there is a whole host of different interpretations.

What we do know is that textiles were of particular importance in ancient Peru. For example, they were placed in the graves of people of high rank who had died. Fabric production was widespread in various ancient Peruvian cultures and many different techniques were developed. It was not just textiles in the form of burial cloths or clothing on mummies that were found in graves but also tools for textile production such as spindles, weaving swords or parts of looms.

But why has our fabric been cut in such an irregular pattern? Unfortunately, at the end of the 19th century, large textiles from Peru were often cut up in order to provide samples for various museums and private collections. The same happened to this fabric, which was found in the ruins of the Peruvian city of Pachacamac and is part of Wilhelm Gretzer's collection. Gretzer cut it up and sent the once larger piece to Berlin. He kept the smaller one, which is how it later found its way to Hanover. Unfortunately, most of the pieces of fabric sent to Berlin were destroyed during the Second World War. Consequently, the fact that the fabric had been cut up proved to be a stroke of luck, because the now larger section in Hanover survived the war undamaged.

Interconnected digital databases of the collections of ancient Peruvian objects scattered throughout the world will help to reunite these sorts of fabric fragments in the future.



Stringing meaning together

Was this the transcript of an astronomical event or a court case? Are we dealing with statistics on building materials or with a report on the course of a battle won? We cannot be sure and no one can break the code today.
Knotted Quipu string bundles helped the Incas to compile statistics and were portable ways of storing knowledge: they were used just for counting purposes or to save information about important events. It was not merely the number and position of the knots that were important, but also the colour in each case and probably also the rotational direction of each thread used.
Since historical images do exist of messengers delivering rolled up Quipu strings, the tied messages had to be decipherable both by the sender and the recipient. Therefore, it must have been a system just like writing. And it clearly helped the complex administrative apparatus to be so successful in the Inca empire although a written language was lacking.
Today, it is no longer possible to make out what the remaining pieces of string mean. And this is despite the fact that there were still similar components in European writing 500 years ago: at the beginning of colonisation, the Quipu system existed alongside Spanish records for several years. But fanatical Spanish missionaries in the 16th century regarded the formerly very extensive Quipu archives to be the work of the devil and destroyed them. Consequently, academics are still trying to crack the Quipu code.

Quipu string
Peru, Inca period
15th – 16th cent.
Length of the pieces of string:
46 cm max.
Gretzer collection

Souvenirs from Cook's voyages

Hook with a rat guard (*taunga*)
Tonga, Polynesia
Before 1780
Height: 61 cm,
Diameter: 26 cm
Cook collection

Today, captain James Cook (1728–1779), is the epitome of the seafarer and explorer. But he was much more than an adventurer. As a cartographer, he filled many of the white patches on the map and shaped the image of the Pacific and its inhabitants in Europe. On his three famous voyages to the South Seas, scientists and artists were taken along, collections assembled and impressions of countries and people were captured in pictures and finally disseminated through printed travel journals. The objects collected by Cook and his fellow travellers are often regarded as the earliest examples of material culture from their region of origin, as Cook was either one of the first or even the very first European to arrive and collect objects there.

But as important as Cook was as a pioneer in exploring the Pacific, our image of him is not only a positive one. His voyages were the start of European and American influence in these regions, which resulted in the enslavement of people and the spread of previously unknown diseases.

This rat guard, which prevents rats from reaching the food attached to the hook under the plate, comes from the collections compiled of Cook's voyages. It belonged to the collection at the Academic Museum in Göttingen. In 1853, by royal edict, the Göttingen people relinquished items from their enormous Cook collection and gave them to the newly founded Provinzialmuseum in Hanover. In most cases, they tried to send the less impressive second copy from the collection. But a mishap occurred with this item: the replica made to be put on show was inadvertently retained and the original sent to Hanover, where it now takes centre stage in the selection of items from Cook's voyages.

Globalising by rafting

Model of a raft
Taiwan
Before 1868
47 × 14.5 × 31 cm
Ebele collection

The first major wave of globalisation perhaps took place with the help of rafts. The Austronesian-speaking peoples, who first emigrated from South China to Taiwan about 7,000 to 8,000 years ago, used rafts similar to this model. As likely as not, people set out on these sorts of long rafts made of bamboo or tree trunks! They soon developed a variety of boat shapes including large outrigger canoes and double hull boats, which were seaworthy, although they were not held together by any nails or rivets. As well as having excellent navigational skills and an obvious desire to explore, the Austronesian-speaking sailors used the boat technology to reach the most distant islands of the Pacific off the coast of South America as well as the island of Madagascar, which is located off the African continent.
The use of bast fibre to produce fabrics demonstrates that people had things in common in this vastly populated area. They also held similar religious beliefs. However, it is primarily the language that proves they had the same roots: from Madagascar to Easter Island and from New Zealand to Hawaii, people still speak languages belonging to the Austronesian language group.

That will be 25 shells, please!

A small piece of shell money is enough to buy a bread roll or a banana at the market and a few strands of it will get you a pig.
There are many different kinds of money, and our version consisting of notes and coins is just one of endless possibilities for storing value in a portable and accepted form.
In the past, some means of payment were only used in a small area, whereas others were accepted across large regions. Even today, not all of them have been superseded by the notes, coins and "plastic money" we are familiar with.
On the island of New Britain in the Bismarck Archipelago, for instance, you can still pay for your shopping with shell money to this very day. Specialists make the strands so precisely that the exact same number of shells is always threaded onto a certain length of strand. Smaller sections can therefore still be used as a means of payment locally.
Big rings of shell money are objects of prestige. On special occasions, their owners cut them up and share the strings of money among the guests so as to cement or enhance their social status. As a result, bundling large sums ultimately only serves to sustain general solvency and ensures that every member of the social network comes into money on a regular basis.

Large hoop of shell money (*loiloi*)
Melanesia, Bismarck Archipelago,
Duke of York Islands, 20th cent.
Height: 8.5 cm
Diameter: 100 cm
Schneider Collection


PRO
PELLE
CUTEM


HB
E M
1
2
N B

½ Made Beaver Token
No year [1854]
Canada, Hudson's Bay Company
Copper alloy (brass)
5.14 g
Diameter: 27 mm

Money is as money does

In North America, people were familiar with coins from Spain, France and Great Britain. But away from civilisation, they were still bartering and using commodity money. Beaver pelts served as a standard of value and unit of account, with the result that certain trade goods were priced in terms of beaver skins. In 1733, for example, a pair of trousers cost three beaver skins; in 1748, a scalping knife (!) could be yours for one beaver skin; and in 1863 the asking price for an axe was three beaver skins. So beaver pelts represented relatively high values with a lot of buying power – and that made it difficult when it came to trading for things of lower value and everyday necessities. Cutting up the valuable furs did not make any sense and was totally out of the question.

1854 saw the introduction of practical metal tokens for the pelts the trappers delivered. They were far more convenient and durable than the actual pelts and were also issued in values of ¼ and ⅛ of a beaver skin.

These tokens were a private currency rather than legal tender. Because there was a huge shortage of small-denomination coins in the vast British Empire during the 18th and 19th centuries, the authorities tolerated the issue of trade tokens like this by private institutions and companies. And even if this "money" seems strange to us: money is as money does. It testifies to how money has evolved through history, from bartering and commodity money all the way to metal money. A vestige of this first currency has survived to this very day: there is still a picture of a beaver on the back of some Canadian coins.

Made of world-spanning cloth

Barkcloth dance masks
(*a quruquruk*)
New Britain, Qaqet-Baining
1st half of the 20th cent.
356 × 42 cm and 380 × 33 cm

At the end of the celebration, the elaborately adorned dancers appear in their huge masks. The figures dancing on the square outside the village almost look like superhuman beings. Before their performances, the dancers are subject to strict taboos and have fasted for many days. They pull their stomachs in demonstratively as they dance to show how steadfast they were.

Among the Baining people, masked dances were part of various rites of passage. This particular type of mask, known as an *a quruquruk* is part of an initiation ritual that celebrates passage into adulthood.

The Baining are famous for these magnificent masks, which come in all sorts of different shapes. They can be several metres high and consist of a complex rattan frame covered with painted barkcloth. The cloth is made by pounding together several layers of inner bark from certain trees like the paper mulberry. It is thick and durable, but also very lightweight.

This method of producing cloth out of wood fibres is a widespread technique. Beating the bark on a surface decorated with carved patterns results in an imprinted "watermark". In many regions, barkcloth is considered precious and is printed or painted with elaborate designs.

In our part of the world, the cloth is usually referred to as *tapa*, but only because Captain Cook first came across this textile technique on Tahiti and brought it to Europe under the local name the islanders used for it. In Hawaii these fabrics are known as *kapa*, whereas the Samoans call them *siapo*. They are one of the few material similarities common to the large area of the Pacific and Indian Ocean inhabited by Austronesians. But only among the Baining people on the island of New Britain are they used to make such huge and impressive masks.


Bitte nicht betreten!

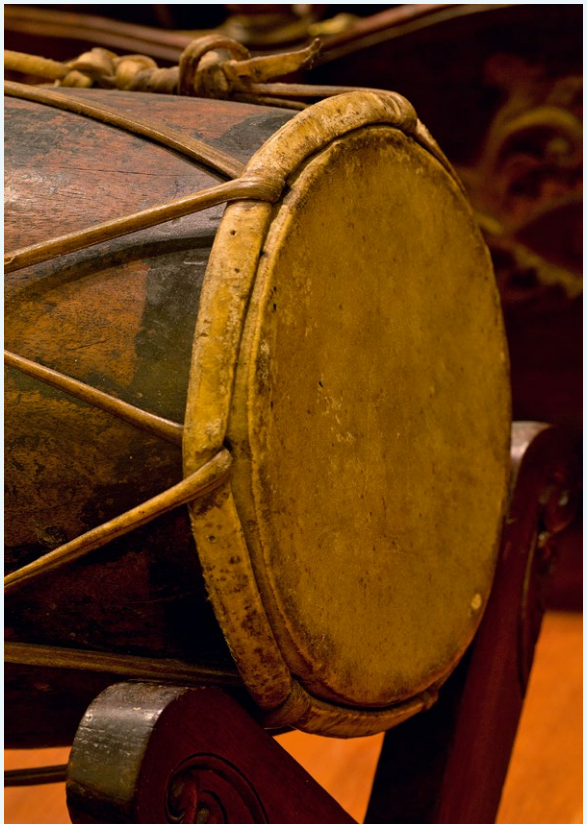
Gamelan orchestra
Yogyakarta, Java,
Indonesia
Around 1800
Purchased 1995

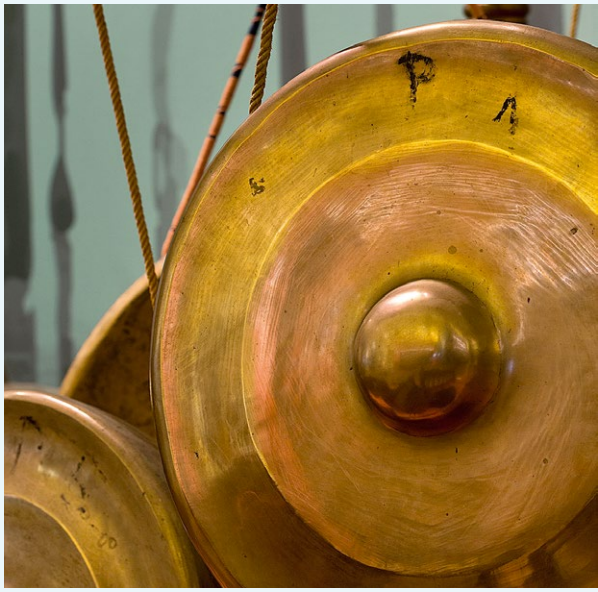
Living sound

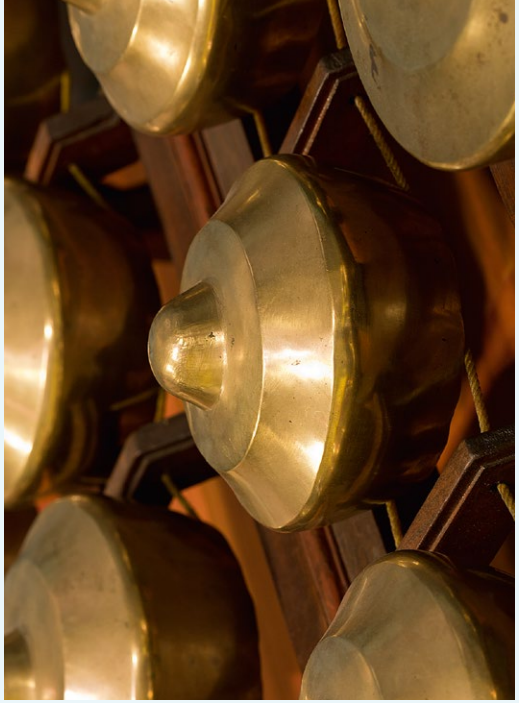
The beating of gongs and metal slabs strikes up an unfamiliar rhythm. The notes intermesh and overlap. It is the sound of gamelan. That is the name of both the music itself and the groups of instruments it is played on. They are mainly found on the Indonesian islands of Java and Bali, and the orchestras consist of gongs and xylophones in different combinations and sizes. The music is played for entertainment and to accompany dances and shadow puppet plays. Sometimes the orchestras are supplemented with drums, string and wind instruments as well.

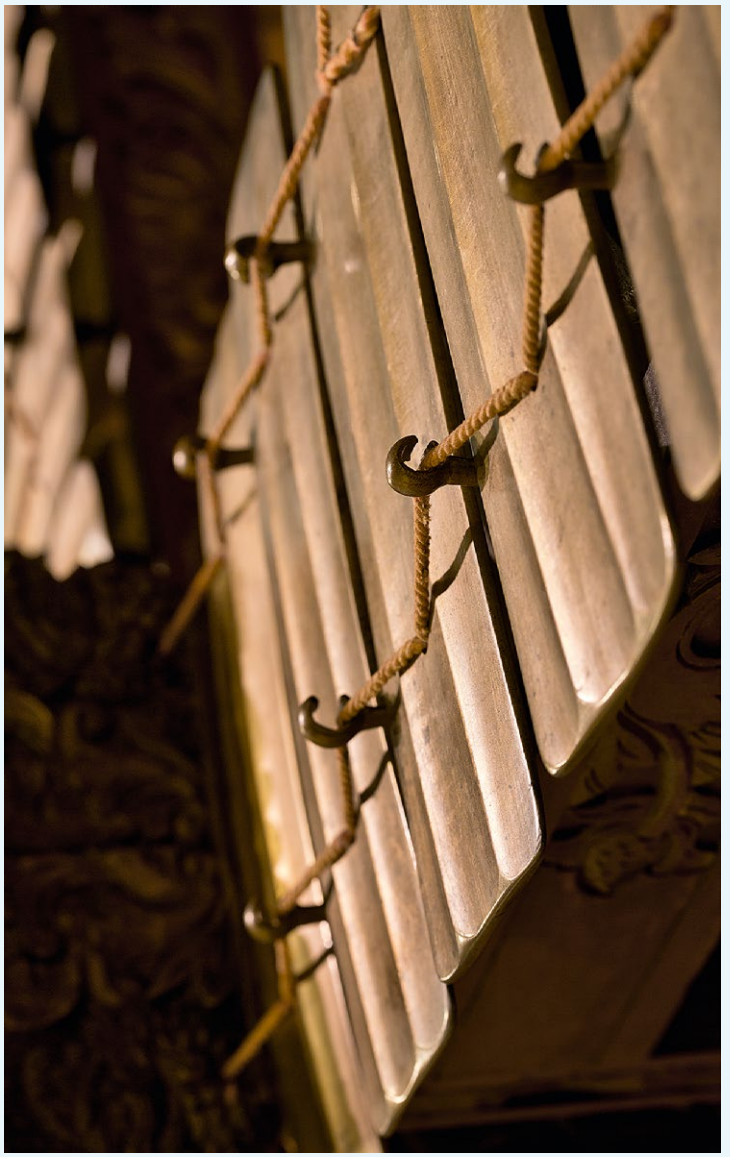
The instruments on show at the Landesmuseum Hanover date from around 1800 and were made by outstanding master craftsmen; they were commissioned by the fourth Sultan of Yogyakarta and used in his palace. All in all, the orchestra consists of 34 groups of instruments, most of which are on display. Every single gong was hammered out of a piece of metal by hand and meticulously tuned. The heaviest of the suspended gongs weighs almost 150 kilograms. The complete ensemble has survived intact, is in excellent condition and one of the oldest of its kind in Europe. And it is played on a regular basis!

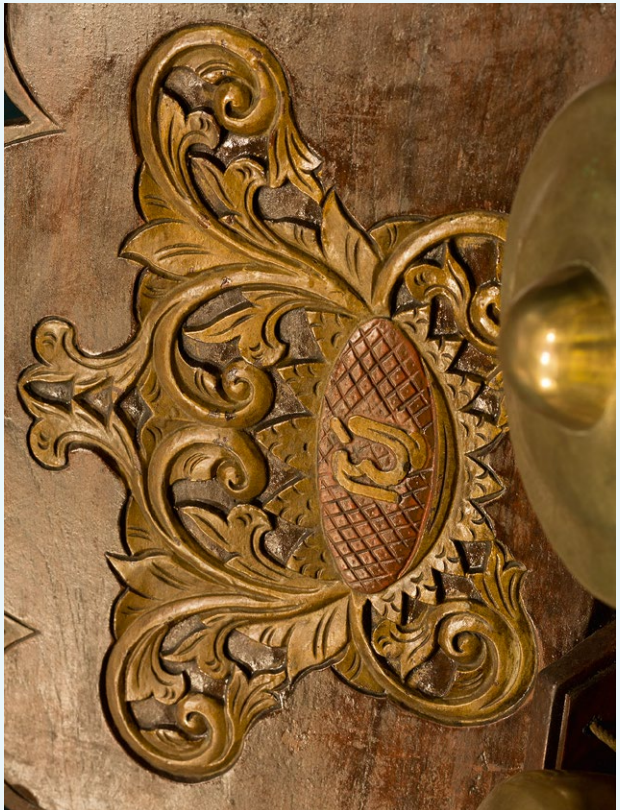
The first time Europeans got an impression of what gamelan music sounds like was in 1889, when a troupe from Java played at the Paris World's Fair. Back then, the music met with mixed reactions. Nowadays, however, when gamelan is played in Hanover and the museum air vibrates with its metallic sound, many visitors are spellbound.











What a performance!

Shadow puppet
Kresna
Java, Indonesia
20th cent.
Height: 70 cm
Purchased 1986

Week after week, people gather in eager anticipation of the next performance. Will Prince Bima be the victor today, or will it be the giant Rajamala who gets the upper hand? Can the cunning Prince Arjuna bring about a decision? Just as if they were watching a TV soap opera, the audience discusses how the story might progress and identifies with the heroes. But this particular thriller is not being produced in the studios of Babelsberg or Bollywood. It is being performed live with articulated, two-dimensional leather puppets behind an illuminated screen.

The art of shadow play has a long tradition on the Indonesian island of Java and reached its peak in cities like Yogyakarta and Surakarta. Because it originates from India, the repertoire is based on Indian stories like the Mahabharata Epic, which tells of the struggle between the five Pandava brothers and their cousins, the 99 Kauravas. The narrative also features another character who played a shifting role, particularly in Indonesia: Kresna, who acts as an intermediary between the conflicting parties. His black face indicates positive characteristics like wisdom and self-control, and he was extremely popular in precolonial times. In the 18th century, his unbiased attitude led him to be associated with the Dutch, who initially acted as mediators between the competing dynasties on Java when they first arrived. But as the colonists' presence had an increasingly negative impact, Kresna's standing diminished – to the point where stories featuring Kresna were not performed at all at times. Only in postcolonial times was he rehabilitated, and is now once again one of the most popular shadow play characters of all.

Model of a soul boat
Sembiring Batak,
Sumatra, Indonesia
Pre-1896
94 × 77 × 26 cm
Stalmann Collection

Slow boat to paradise

During the big festival of the dead known as *Pekualuh*, the Sembiring set the ashes of the departed adrift on the river in soul boats, which were decorated with carved likenesses of the dead and measured about two metres long. As soon as the boats were far enough away from the riverbank, the people standing on the shore tried to capsize them by throwing stones at them, thereby committing the ashes to the river and preventing anybody from taking possession of the human remains further downstream. The souls of the dead were believed to flow with the ashes to a far-off land of souls, where a paradise-like afterworld awaited them. This belief in islands of the dead and the use of soul boats can be found in many places throughout the Austronesian religion – including among the Sembiring, who are thought to be the descendants of migrants from southern India and belong to a subgroup of the Batak people. The various groups of the Batak live in the north of the Indonesian island of Sumatra and very little was known about them for a long time. In the past, their religious ideas varied from one group to another.

The use of soul boats was specific to the Sembiring, who evidently considered them so representative of their culture that they made miniature replicas of the boats so that European collectors could take them home more easily. However, the Sembiring stopped practising this custom at the end of the 19th century, when they largely converted to Christianity.

Minimalist design from the South Seas

Forward or reverse gear? The whitewashed boat is designed in such a way that it can be paddled in both directions. It comes from Wuvulu, one of the Western Islands of the Bismarck Archipelago. The craftsmen on these islands were master woodworkers, and the evidence of their incredible skill includes boats that combine exceptional simplicity and elegance with outstanding workmanship. The islanders also mastered the art of building wooden houses so perfectly that they were mosquito-proof.

All that came to an end in the early 20th century, when German trading companies took over the islands and felled most of the trees. As part of the German New Guinea protectorate, the island was leased to the trading company of H. R. Wahlen in 1907. Even before that, German traders had introduced various diseases to the island, and collectors had acquired most of the objects made of local materials by swapping them for cheap replacements from Europe and Asia.

This specimen, which features particularly beautiful curved lines, was gifted to the museum by Bruno Mencke in 1900. It is not known how it came into his possession – but as the heir to a fortune running into millions, he probably acquired it via the trade in ethnographic artefacts. Mencke was an adventurer and instigated the First German South Seas Expedition in 1900/01, during which he died after conflicts with the indigenous islanders.

Outrigger canoe
Wuvulu, Western Islands
Pre-1900
74 × 552 × 95 cm
Mencke Collection

Maika'i Tubbs
A Life of Its Own
O'ahu, Hawaii
(completed in Hanover, 2015)
Vine sculpture, plastic
approx. 150 × 150 cm

The world is drowning in plastic

Beautiful and bizarre, the white-flowering vine creeps its way across the wall. It is based on the Hawaiian baby woodrose (*Argyreia nervosa*), a plant that was introduced by Europeans, has meanwhile overrun the native flora and now threatens to choke it. Set against a white background, the white plastic vine is just as inconspicuous as the green of its natural counterpart in its green surroundings. Shaped out of items from a mountain of waste that is growing higher by the day – plastic plates and plastic cutlery – it too is both beautiful and destructive. The increasing amount of plastic waste is a consequence of our modern age. In the major oceans, huge swirling patches of it are forming into islands, some of them twice the size of Germany. Every single day plastic trash is generated on the Hawaiian Islands, too, where some hotels serve food on plastic plates with plastic cutlery, all of which is simply thrown away. That cuts labour costs. Dishwashers are no longer required, and the American dream is consequently turning into a nightmare. The work of artist Maika'i Tubbs focuses on rubbish-related issues on his native island of O'ahu.

劉正昌藏
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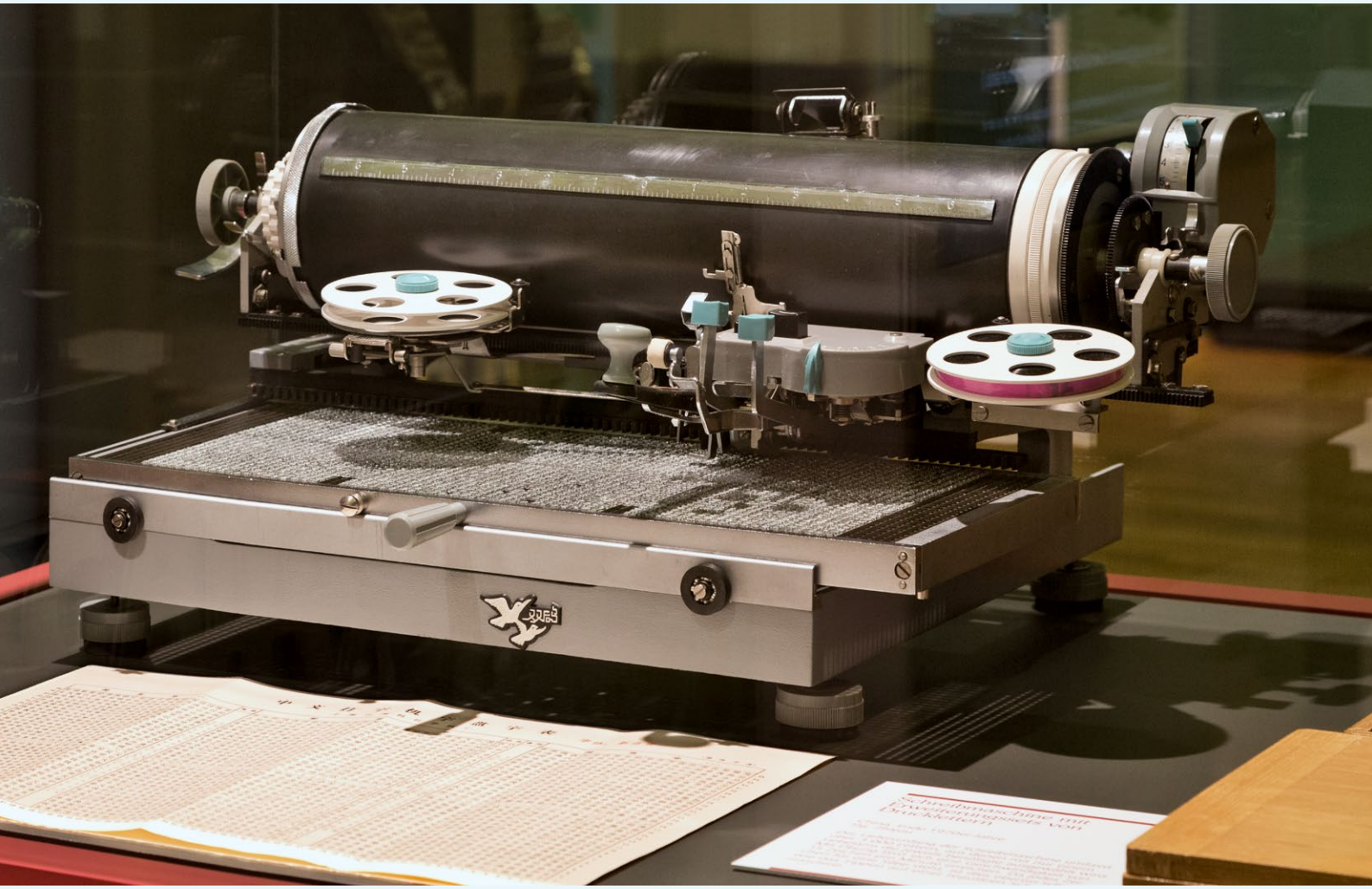
Treasures for creating treasures

Calligraphy tools, table, chair and side table with censer
Japan for the Chinese market
1st half of the 20th cent. and 21st cent.
Wilke Collection, purchased 2015, and Bahlsen Collection

Inkstone with base
China
Pre-1853
approx. 12.1 × 9.2 × 1.5 cm
King Ernst August Collection
Pictured with: inkstick
China
Pre-1914
4.2 × 1.8 × 0.9 cm
Oppermann Collection

Five inksticks
China
Pre-1914
Length of longest stick: 11.1 cm, diameter: 1.5 cm
Oppermann Collection

Ink, inkstone, brush and paper: these "four treasures" play an important role in the Chinese writing room or study. They are the tools needed to produce handwritten works of art – i. e. calligraphy. Each of these treasures is rooted in a long tradition of craftsmanship. Entire manufacturing dynasties resulted, and in some cases the names of good producers have been guaranteeing the finest quality for centuries.
In China, writing is not merely a form of communication – the "art of beautiful writing" has been considered important and held in high esteem for centuries. It was often created in a special study, a place of calm where one could devote oneself to literature or painting. The appearance and furnishings of the room correspond to the ideal of aesthetic pursuit.
But what is it that makes Chinese writing so special? Well, it evolved from abstracted drawings – or pictograms as they are commonly called. As a result, there is still a representational quality to them, and calligraphy and painting are considered equals.
In the case of calligraphy, however, it is even more essential for the artist to plan ahead carefully and then execute the plan powerfully and single-mindedly within a set framework. That is why a person's writing is believed to reveal a lot about their leadership qualities.



The “one-armed bandit” from the Far East

Typewriter
China
Late 1970s
68 × 45 × 36 cm
Zhiyou Collection

Eighty-five thousand! That is roughly how many characters there are in the Chinese script, which is one of the oldest in the world. This huge number results from the fact that it is a logographic script and not an alphabetic one. However, knowing approximately 3,000 to 4,000 characters is enough to cover daily needs like reading a newspaper. Even so, it goes without saying that developing a typewriter for such an enormous character set was a major technical challenge.

This typewriter is equipped with over 3,000 characters, from which the required type is selected by means of a single lever arm. With practice, it is possible to achieve a speed of 15 characters per minute. Since each of them stands for a meaningful syllable or even an entire word, that is actually almost as fast as typing a text in a European language on a conventional European typewriter.

You hardly ever find Chinese typewriters in museum collections – it would seem that for a long time, nobody thought they were worth collecting. But now that we have arrived in the digital age, these machines have vanished from print shops and newspaper offices and are now rare. Computers and smartphones are used differently: the equivalent sound of the required Chinese character is entered in Pinyin (a phonetic script in European letters) and converted into the corresponding Chinese character.

The martial arts personified

The 8th century saw the emergence of a military nobility in Japan whose power was consolidated by the rise of clan leaders and territorial rulers, or *shoguns*. Known as the samurai (or *bushi* in Japanese), this warrior elite had its own value system, the *bushido*, which encompassed both ethical standards and the principles of the martial arts. The samurai era ended in the 19th century, when the Imperial Japanese Army modernised both its weapons and its strategy. Our armour dates from that period.

A samurai only wore armour in battle; its sometimes magnificent features revealed the warrior's rank and the artistry of the goldsmiths and brass-smiths in his entourage. It was made of various materials: the helmet, breastplate and face mask – often depicting a terrifying grimace complete with artificial beard – were generally crafted from metal. The hip and thigh guards, arm protectors, shoulder plates and upper and lower leg guards were made of bamboo or multiple layers of leather, which an enemy sword would get stuck in, whereas it would glance off the helmet, mask and breastplate.

The samurai sword is a weapon, a power symbol and a work of art all rolled into one – and the epitome of Japanese weaponry. Besides the masterfully crafted blade, which was made by special swordsmiths, other elements such as the handle of the utility knife, the blade collar and the pommel, or end cap, also testify to the skill of its makers.

The sword guards are a very special group of objects. They point to material and technical innovations such as the evolution away from iron and towards various bronze and copper alloys, culminating in the inclusion of gold and enamel. In times of peace, the master smiths could give free rein to their artistic imagination. The designs range from abstract patterns all the way to opulent imagery depicting scenes from myths, sagas and everyday situations.

Samurai armour with sword
Japan, 19th cent.
160 × 70 × 40 cm
Wrede Collection (property of the City of Hanover)
provenance unknown

Grave posts (*aloalos*)
Mahafaly, Madagascar
2nd half of the 20th cent.
196 × 20 × 16 cm and
186 × 17 × 16 cm
Schomerus-Gernböck
Collection

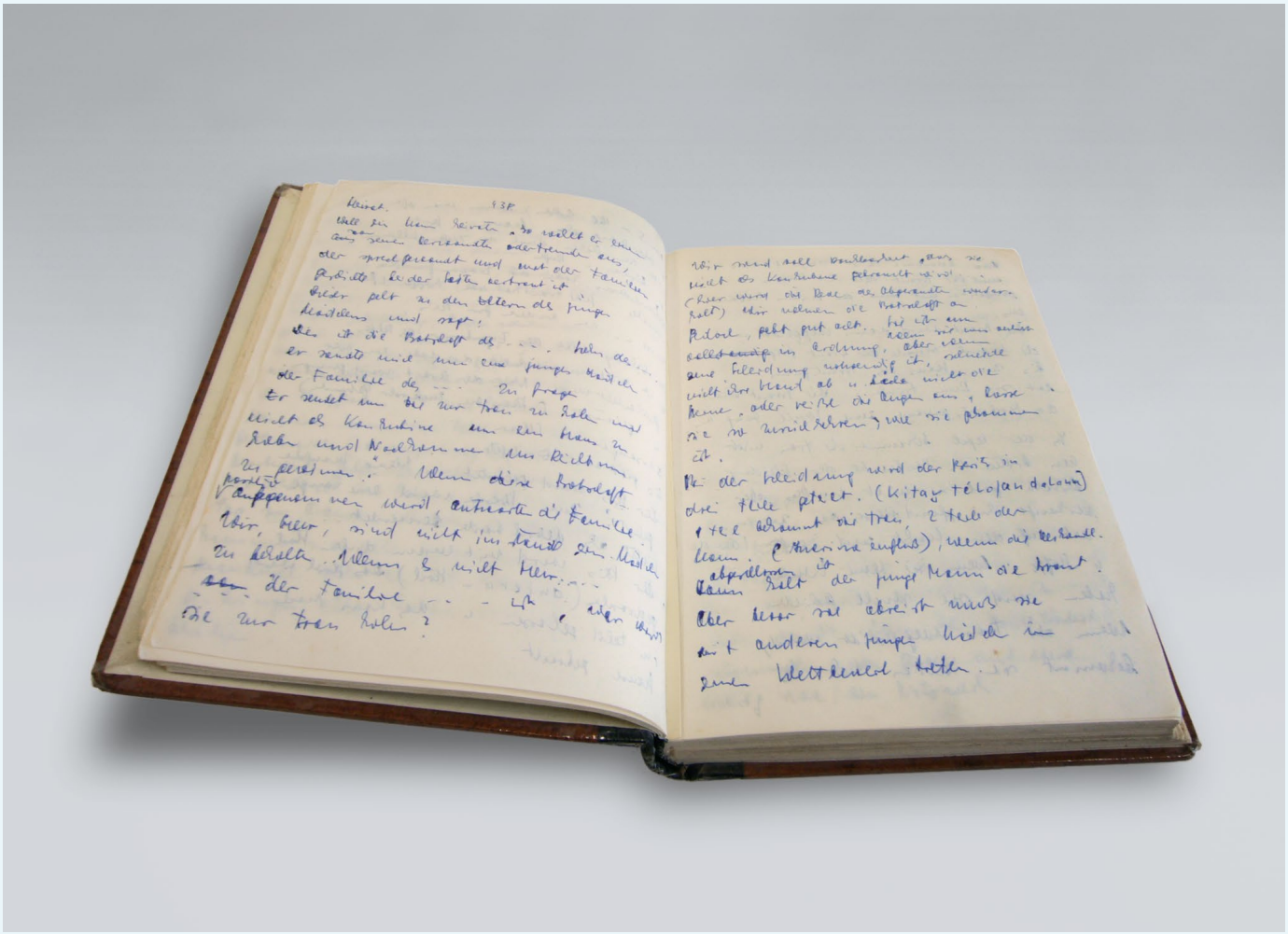
Wooden images for the living dead

The geometric patterns are topped with sitting birds and a standing cow. Although the carved wooden posts were erected on tombs, the woman depicted on one of them is not a portrait of the person who has died. Instead, the animals and people that are shown on these Mahafaly grave posts, sometimes along with everyday scenes, establish an allegorical link with the lives of the deceased. The ornaments can be interpreted as the sun, moon and stars, and the cow might be an indication that the dead person was a good cattle breeder.

The family tomb is a person's permanent residence – their life elsewhere on earth is only temporary. After death, they are reunited with the spirits of their forebears, who continue to reside near their tombs on their ancestral land, the spiritual centre of every family.

For many Malagasy, death means a transition into another form of life. The souls of the recently deceased play an important role as intermediaries between humans and the creator god, as well as helping the living members of a family communicate with their dead loved ones.

The size and shape of the tombs vary depending on the region and the family's wealth. Among the Mahafaly in the southwest of the island, they consist of rectangular arrangements of stacked stones. The skulls or horns of sacrificed zebu cattle are placed on top of them, and in addition the graves of important personalities are marked with large carved wooden posts such as these, which are known as *aloalos*.



An essential companion

Field journal
of Lotte Schomerus-Gernböck's
second research expedition
Used in Madagascar
1963 – 1964
15.8 × 21 × 2.2 cm

In the 20th century, a firmer scientific basis was established for the study of other peoples and cultures. To this day, long-term field research and the "participant observation" it involves remain an important method. While living with a group of people and sharing its members' everyday routines, the researcher studies their way of life and finds out a great deal more than by simply questioning them. To put it another way, the researcher gets to experience a different worldview first-hand.

It was this type of field research that resulted in the collection of ethnologist Lotte Schomerus-Gernböck. In the course of her many stays on Madagascar, the scientist had intense contact with various ethnic groups on the island, which lies off the coast of East Africa. Starting in 1961, she worked with its people for more than three decades and built up a close relationship with them – especially with the Mahafaly in the southwest of the island, where she is still remembered as *neneney* – "our mother". Schomerus-Gernböck even received the Republic of Madagascar's Order of Merit for her work.

The museum in Hanover received a large selection of items from her extensive and very systematic ethnographic collections. The objects depict many different aspects of Malagasy life. They are supplemented by audio recordings, photos, slides and films in which some of the pieces can be seen in their original context, and last but not least by field notes, journals and publications. That enables us to reconstruct the stories behind the objects, identify artists and get a sense of life in the places the ethnologist visited. And that makes her collection particularly valuable to the museum.

Colon figure
Cameroon? (Kuyu, Rep. Congo?)
Africa
Pre-1911?
Height: 70 cm, diameter: 15 cm
von Puttkamer Collection?
Purchased from Konietzko, 1930

Looking back

The painted wooden figure comes from Central Africa, but does it depict a native inhabitant? The white face could indicate that it is meant to be a European, while the clothing suggests it could also be an indigenous soldier from the colonial auxiliary force. Soon after their first contacts with people from far-off lands, Africans began creating figures of the strangers – not just of Europeans and Asians, but also of Africans dressed in the clothes or uniforms of the colonists. They quickly became part of local life, presided over certain ceremonies as guardians or were used in rituals performed by local healers. These figures therefore helped to incorporate the unfamiliar and the overarching colonial hierarchy into a local context.
The African view of the newcomers provides a different perspective on colonial history. It is a symbol of willingness to approach the unknown and engage with it.
According to the museum's accession register, the figure was purchased on the art market in 1930. However, letters from the dealer state that it was requisitioned from the royal court of Bamenda in Cameroon by the German "protection force" under Governor von Puttkamer during a punitive expedition in 1911. That cannot be right though, because Governor von Puttkamer had left Cameroon by 1907. Judging by the style, it probably originates from the area that is now the Republic of the Congo. So the figure still raises a lot of questions, and a lot of research into its object biography remains to be done.


UTAWALA-
WA
KIJERUMANI
AFRICA
MASHARIKI
BY. CHARINDA

Is this the right way?

A white man on a sedan chair is being carried by four native inhabitants. He is pointing the way with one hand, and using the pistol in the other to make sure his message is clear. The picture probably shows Carl Peters, who in the late 19th century used dubious treaties to seize large areas of land for German East Africa and subsequently ruled over them. His cruelty earned him the nickname "Hangman Peters" in the German Reichstag, and in Africa he was known as *mkono wa damu* – "the man with blood on his hands".

The painting was created using a special technique and style known as Tingatinga. Named after Edward Saidi Tingatinga, the Tanzanian art form was originally defined by its characteristic use of materials: initially, the paintings were always done on square hardboards in vibrant colours – mostly bicycle paints.

Charinda, who was born in southern Tanzania in 1947, adopted this form of painting in 1975, going on to become one of the first Tingatinga artists to use canvas as a substrate in 1989. His subjects are mostly taken from his immediate lifeworld; his work frequently features animals, often grouped together in a special way and radiating a serene, almost supernatural quality. But he also deals with contemporary and historical themes – as in this painting, which refers to the German colonial era and makes pointed reference to this inglorious chapter of German-African history.

Mohamed Wasia Charinda
Utawala wa Kijerumani
Afrika Mashariki
(German East Africa Administration)
Tanzania, Africa
Pre-2009
62 × 62 cm
Purchased 2009