

# Mysteries of the Ancient World

## Tour Description

Unlock the mysteries of the ancient world through discussions of diverse artworks from around the globe.

**Tour Objective** To look closely at art objects made by numerous ancient cultures to discover common aesthetic and practical concerns, and to examine how such factors as environment and technology influenced art production.

**Means** Select objects from diverse ancient cultures, such as those from ancient Nigeria, Egypt, China, Japan, Mexico, and France, as well as from the ancient Near East and Mediterranean. For most themes, you will also want to choose items in a variety of media.

It is essential that you ground any discussion of culture in close observation of the artworks first. Develop questions that encourage students and adults to figure out as much as possible about the culture from the artworks themselves.

## Themes

**Art Reflects the Culture** The art of ancient cultures is so integrally tied to all other aspects of culture that nearly every tour of this topic will have, to some degree, an “Art Reflects the Culture” theme. This theme is also very popular among teachers to complement history and humanities lessons. There are many variations that would appeal to groups of all or different ages.

Possible thematic focuses include:

**The Art of Daily Life**  
**Survival in this World and the Next**  
**How was it Made?**  
**Spiritual Beliefs and Practices**  
**Safari**  
**People and Their Environment**  
**Gender Roles in Ancient Cultures**  
**Encounter and Exchange.**

By looking closely at ancient art from different cultures you can demonstrate the many concerns shared by ancient peoples and the varied ways they addressed those concerns in their art. For each object ask your groups to consider what they can deduce from it visually and then give additional pieces of information that will encourage further exploration. For example, after exploring the shapes and designs of the Chinese bronzes, explain where they were found to encourage group members to consider their meaning on yet another level.

**Disclaimer:** Not all objects in the following section are currently on view.

## **Suggested Objects**

Here are some examples of ancient objects you could compare and contrast to illustrate a wide variety of concerns and solutions shared by ancient peoples around the world. The objects are organized into categories to guide you whether your tour focus is broad or narrow. Within many of these lists, there are more specific comparisons to be made—daily use versus ceremonial; use in this life versus use in the next life; animal designs used to animate objects; scenes of daily life illustrated on objects; male figures versus female figures, etc. Remember, these are only a few of the objects available to choose from for this tour.

### **Taking Care of the Dead**

China, Sarcophagus of Prince Cheng Ching, 524 CE, 46.23.1a-d

Tomb objects from China

Egypt, Mummy and Coffin of Lady Tashat, 1085-710 BCE, 16.414

Tomb objects from Egypt

Greece, Grave Stele, 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, 31.4

Rome, Cinerary Box, 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, 62.20a,b

### **Storage and Consumption of Liquids**

China, Stem Cup, 2500-2000 BCE, 2000.156.1

Central Andes Region (Peru), Nazca, Vessels, 100 BCE-600 CE, 43.2.13, 42.61.9, 44.3.59, 43.2.3

Korea, Stem Bowl with Pierced Foot, 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century CE, 73.46.10

Greece, Kylix, 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, 62.41

China, Kuei, 12<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century BCE, e.g. 50.46.121, 50.46.119, 50.46.59

China, Owl Tsun, late 14<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century BCE, 50.46.120

Mexico, Colima, Dog Vessel, 200 BCE-400 CE, 47.2.21

### **The Power of Animals (Real and Fantasy)**

Greece, Lion, 330-317 BCE, 25.25

Isthmus Region (Costa Rica), Vessel in the Form of a Jaguar, about 1200, 46.3.6

Mexico, Olmec, Figure (baby with jaguar features), 71.72a,b

Mississippi Valley Region (United States), Caddo, Bowl (with bear head), 1250-1500, 90.2.4

China, Bronzes (with tao-tie masks), 13<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century BCE, 99.66.3, 50.46.115, 50.46.87, 50.46.121, 50.46.6a,b

China, Winged Dragon pendants, 16<sup>th</sup> -1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, 50.46.350, 50.46.241, 50.46.296, 50.46.282, 50.46.285, 50.46.297

### **Gods and/or Leaders**

Gandhara (Afghanistan), Standing Buddha, 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, 2001.153

Head of Buddha: Cambodia or Thailand, 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, 50.46.219;

Khmer (Cambodia) 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century, 50.46.222; China 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, 37.64; Burma 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century, 92.42

TOUR DESCRIPTIONS:  
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Greece, Hydria, 530-500 BCE, 61.59  
Rome, Standing Deity, 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, 79.21  
Mexico, Olmec, Seated Child with Helmet, 1150-550 BCE, 71.72a,b  
Egypt, Osiris, 644-30 BCE, 16.40

**The Power and Beauty of Women**

France, Female Figure (“Venus”), cc. 20,000 BCE, 72.10  
Mexico, Colima, Female Figure, 200 BCE-400 CE, 88.80.4  
Cycladic Islands, Female Figure, 2500-2400 BCE, 62.52  
Nigeria, Ife, Shrine Head, 12<sup>th</sup> century CE, 95.84  
Rome, Matron, 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, 32.16

**The Art of Entertainment**

Mexico, Nayarit, Drummer, 200 BCE-400 CE, 74.35.1  
China, Pair of Dancing Figures, 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, 50.46.186.1  
China, Figure of a Squatting Drummer, 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, 2003.101  
Mexico, Veracruz, Figure of a Ballplayer Wearing a Yoke (Rattle), 600-750 CE, 47.2.9  
Greece, Kylix, 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, 62.41

**The Art of Looking Good**

Indonesia, Arm Bracelet, 7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, 89.36.3  
Egypt, Horus Collar, 2160-1786 BCE, 27.42.4  
Etruria, Mirror, 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, 62.13  
China, Ornamental Jades, late 11<sup>th</sup>-early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, e.g. Belt Ornament 69.97.5; Dragon Pendant, 50.46.230; Dragon Ornament, 50.46.320; Garnet Ornament, 50.46.338  
Greece, Tiber Muse, late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, 56.12