

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 deduce what they can from it visually and then give additional information to 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

Japan, Haniwa of a Female Shrine Attendant, 6th century, 97.38
China, Sarcophagus of Prince Cheng Ching, 524 CE, 46.23.1a-d
Egypt, Coffin of Lady Tashat, 1085-710 BCE, 16.414
Egypt, False door, about 2400 BCE, 52.22
Greece, Grave Stele, 5th century BCE, 31.4
Rome, Cinerary Box, 1st century CE, 62.20a,b
Rome, Tondo: Portrait of a Young Noblewoman, 2nd century, 68.9.4
Rome (Palmyra), Funerary Relief, late 2nd century-first half of the 3rd century, 2008.28.2
Mexico (Colima), Dog, c.100-300 CE, 99.57.3

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, 5th-6th century CE, 73.46.10
Greece, Kylix, 5th century BCE, 62.41
China, Kuei, 12th-10th century BCE, e.g. 50.46.121, 50.46.119, 50.46.59
China, Owl Tsun, late 14th-13th century BCE, 50.46.120
Maya, Chocolate pot, 750, 97.92.6 or Vase, 450-700, 2000.195
Iran, Aquamanile (Ram-shaped Ewer), 13th century, 50.46.449

The Power of Animals (Real and Fantasy)

Greece, Lion, 330-317 BCE, 25.25
Guanacaste, Vessel (Form of a Jaguar), c. 1100 - 1200 CE, 46.3.6
Turkey, Elephant Attacking a Feline, late 4th-mid 5th century, 69.49.2
Egypt, Coptic Ram, 5th century CE, 62.53
Eastern North America, Birdstone, 1500-500 BCE, 2001.163
China, Bronzes (with tao-tie masks), 13th-10th century BCE, 99.66.3, 50.46.115, 50.46.87, 50.46.121, 50.46.6a,b
China, Winged Dragon pendants, 16th -1st century BCE, 50.46.350, 50.46.241, 50.46.296, 50.46.282, 50.46.285, 50.46.297
Veracruz, Hacha, c. 600-900 CE, 64.26

TOUR DESCRIPTIONS:
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Gods and/or Leaders

Gandhara (Afghanistan), Standing Buddha, 3rd century CE, 2001.153
Head of Buddha: Cambodia or Thailand, 8th century CE, 50.46.219;
Khmer (Cambodia) 12th-13th century, 50.46.222; China 5th century CE,
37.64; Burma 11th-12th century, 92.42
Greece, Black-Figure Neck Amphora, c. 540 BCE, 57.1
Rome, Standing Deity Holding Horn and Bucket, 1st century, 79.21
Maya, Plate, c. 500-800 CE, 71.61.7
Djenne (Malian), Equestrian figure, about 1450, 83.168
Assyria, Winged Genius, c. 883-859 BCE, 41.9
Egypt, Striding figure, 300-30 BCE, 58.14
India, Uma-Maheshvara, 10th-11th century, 97.36

The Power and Beauty of Women

France, Female Figure, c. 20,000 BCE, 72.10
Japan, Jōmon period, Figurine of a Female, 1000-800 BCE, 2016.46
Mexico, Nayarit, Figure, c. 100-200, 47.2.30
Cycladic Islands, Female Figure, 2500-2400 BCE, 62.52
Nigeria, Ife, Shrine Head, 12th century CE, 95.84
Rome, Matron, 1st century CE, 32.16
Greek, Head of Aphrodite, 3rd century BCE, 32.15
Greek, Red-Figure Hydria, c. 320 BCE, 2000.71
Aztec, Chalchiuhtlicue, c. 1200-1521, 2009.33

The Art of Entertainment

Mexico, Nayarit, Drummer, 200 BCE-400 CE, 74.35.1
China, Pair of Dancing Figures, 1st-2nd century CE, 50.46.186.1
China, Figure of a Squatting Drummer, 1st-2nd century CE, 2003.101
Veracruz, Figure of a Ballplayer Wearing a Yoke (Rattle), 600-750 CE,
47.2.9 or Ballgame yoke, 600-900 CE
Greece, Red-figure Kylix, 5th century BCE, 62.41
China, Zither (Qin), 5th century BCE, 2002.8
Egypt, Pair of clappers, about 1550-1292 BCE, 2012.64a,b

The Art of Looking Good

Egypt, Horus Collar, 2160-1786 BCE, 27.42.4
Egypt, Headrest, c. 2635-2155 BCE, 2000.70.2
Spiro (United States), Pair of gorgets, 1200-1350 CE, 91.37.1,2
Etruria, Mirror, 3rd-2nd century BCE, 62.13
China, Ornamental Jades, late 11th-early 3rd century BCE, e.g. Belt
Ornament 69.97.5; Dragon Pendant, 50.46.230; Dragon Ornament,
50.46.320; Garnet Ornament, 50.46.338
China, Cosmetic Container, c. 100 BCE -c. 200 CE, 2001.69.2.2a,b
Greece, Tiber Muse, late 2nd century BCE, 56.12
Greece (Roman copy), *The Doryphoros*, 120-50 BCE, 86.6
Roman, Double Cosmetic Tube with Handle, 5th century, 2003.118.2