
Title of Object

Toni Malau (St. Anthony)

Photo of Object (optional)



Object Information

Artist: unknown

Country: Democratic Republic of Congo

Date of Object: late 18th-early 19th century

File Created: 1/27/2016

Accession Number: 2012.6

Author of File: Angie Seutter

Material/Medium: Ivory

Reviewer of File: Kara ZumBahlen

Department: Arts of Africa

Last Updated/Reviewed: 7/18/2017

Culture: Kongo

Tour Topics

Betrayal, Love_Honor_and_Betrayal, Group 5, Highlights 1600-1850, syncretism, cultural encounters/exchanges, spirituality/sacred, Christianity, stories/storytelling,

Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

1. Take a minute to really look at this piece. What details stand out and impress you?
2. The Kingdom of Kongo was on the Western coast of the African continent. Why do you think an amulet of good fortune would have been so heavily used during the Late 1700s/early 1800s?
3. Why do you think it's important to have a piece like this in our museum?

Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

1. Catholic since the late fifteenth century, the Kongo Kingdom fostered devotion to many saints. St. Anthony was among the foremost, and was called Toni Malau (“Anthony of Good Fortune”) for his purported powers of healing and good luck. The figure’s attributes confirm his identity: the cross held in his proper right hand, the Christ child balanced on the low curve of his left elbow, and his simple habit. (Met Museum. St. Anthony)
2. Toni Malau, or "Anthony of Good Fortune," his image appeared on religious insignia kept by his followers for protection against ill health and other problems. (Met Museum. St. Anthony)
3. Ivory, largely from elephant tusks though sometimes from hippopotamus tusks, has long been the favored art material of Africa. Kings controlled the ivory trade, supplying carving guilds with tusks and exporting the rest, mostly to Europe. At times it was white gold, fueling power struggles and decimating elephant herds. The trade wiped out North African elephants perhaps a thousand years ago and escalated in the 1700s and 1800s, when European colonialists shipped home boatloads of tusks. Trading in African ivory has been banned since 1990, but illegal trade—largely for use in Asian “medicines”—has recently reached record levels, threatening the future of African elephants. (Mia ArtStories)
4. It was possibly anointed with oils or spiritually significant substances, like red tukula, as thought to be on the example from the Met Museum (see prop photo) The powdered bark of the redwood or camwood trees, tukula could be applied to the body or textiles for cosmetic or religious purposes. A dark red-black resin has also accumulated in the crevices of the carving, and around the saint’s feet on the Met Museum pendant as well as on the Mia statuette. (Met Museum, St. Anthony)

Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

1. The faces of Toni Malau and the Christ child in his arms were repeatedly rubbed with oil, acts of devotion that left them darkly stained. Sculptures of Toni Malau were believed to have powers of healing and protection. On this figure, the Christ child’s nose and right arm were gradually scraped away by his devotees. As in many European depictions of St. Anthony, the Christ child held by Toni Malau is kneeling on a Bible. The netted cape worn over Toni Malau’s shoulders was traditionally made of raffia and reserved for Kongo nobility. (Mia ArtStories)
 2. The Kongo kingdom spanned parts of present-day Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, and the Congo Republic, adopted Christianity as its state religion in the fifteenth century. By the end of the seventeenth century, the kingdom had largely disintegrated in the face of devastating social and political upheavals. The resulting chaos bred a number of popular movements that looked to Christianity for a spiritual solution to the kingdom's problems. (British Museum)
 3. At the time this piece was made, the transatlantic slave trade had been destabilizing the area for over 300 years. Slavery was a business, highly organized and lucrative for European buyers and African sellers alike and it crushed African cultures. Slaves were the main export from the Kingdom of Kongo. (British Museum)
- “During the trans-Atlantic slave trade alone, approximately 12 million slaves were exported from Africa. Another 6 million were exported in the other three slave trades. These figures do not include those who were killed during the raids or those who died on their journey to the coast. The total effect of the slave

trades, according to calculations...was that by 1850 Africa's population was only half of what it would have been had the slave trades not taken place....The slave trade caused political instability and downfall of preexisting forms of government. "The most dramatic example may be the Kongo kingdom of West-Central Africa. As early as 1514, the kidnapping of local Kongo citizens for sale to the Portuguese had become rampant, threatening social order and the King's authority. In 1526, Affonso, king of Kongo, wrote to Portugal complaining that "there are many traders in all corners of the country. They bring ruin to the country. Every day people are enslaved and kidnapped, even nobles, even members of the king's own family." This break-down of law and order was partly responsible for the weakening and eventual fall of the once powerful state." (Nunn, The Long-Term Effects of Africa's Slave Trades)

Current Mia Label Information (optional)

"Syncretism" is the combination of different, seemingly contradictory belief systems, and this Kongo representation of Saint Anthony of Padua is a good example. Known as Toni Malau among the Kongo people, "Anthony of Prosperity" is shown here wearing a European habit, belt, and sandals. Yet over his shoulders he wears a netted cape, a raffia garment reserved for Kongo nobility, and parts of the Child's arms and Toni Malau's left hand have gradually been scraped off as believers used bits of ivory for healing or protection. Drawing its form and power from both traditions, Toni Malau embodies the rich exchange between Kongo and Christian religious thought and imagery.

Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

Mia Artstories: <https://artstories.artsmia.org/#/o/113136>

Nunn, Nathan. The Long-Term Effects of Africa's Slave Trades. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, February 2008, Copyright 2008 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology:
http://web.stanford.edu/group/scspi/_media/pdf/Reference%20Media/Nunn_2008_Development%20Economics.pdf

British Museum: The Wealth of Africa:
https://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/WOA_GeneralIntroduction.pdf

And https://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/KingdomOfKongo_TeachersNotes.pdf

Met Museum, Kongo: Power and Majesty (exhibition):

<http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2015/kongo/audio>

Met Museum, Saint Anthony (Toni Malau): <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/318322>

