

GLOBAL PREHISTORY

Early Facebook

GLOBAL PREHISTORY

KEY POINTS

- Human expression existed across the globe
- Africa and Asia preceded and influenced other areas
- The art gives us clues about human culture at the dawn of civilization



Cave painting, Lascaux, France, 15,000 to 10,000 B.C.

APOLLO 11 STONES

NAMIBIA. C.25,500-25,300 BCE CHARCOAL ON
STONE

CONTENT/VISUAL

- Animals shown in **strict profile** (all four legs, head and tail are visible)
 - Most common representation of animals in Paleolithic era
 - Most informative angle of the animal to make it identifiable
 - Represents a “double” of the animal
- Stones were painted in charcoal, ocher, and white
- Some kind of supernatural creature—a **therianthrope** (shapeshifter)? Or part human and part animal?
- May suggest a complex system of shamanistic belief



Visual Characteristics

- Positive and negative space
- No details
- Fills the space

APOLLO 11 STONES

NAMIBIA. C.25,500-25,300 BCE CHARCOAL ON STONE

CONTEXT

- The oldest art in the world is in Africa
- The cave where these were found (the Apollo 11 cave) has been used for 100,000 years
- These were portable objects to accommodate the artists' nomadic lifestyle
 - **Art Mobilier**—small-scale prehistoric art that is moveable
 - These stones were from somewhere other than where they were found
- Their unearthing proved that art (and humans creating symbolic works of art) is older than we thought
- The subject of animals is universal, found in cultures across the globe
- An early example of human expression that existed before writing
- 7 slabs were found with various animals



LASCAUX CAVES

15–13,000 BCE



Fun Fact!

The Lascaux Caves were found by an 18 year old, Marcel Ravidat, in 1940.

LASCAUX CAVES

15,000-13,000 BCE. ROCK PAINTING

FUNCTION

- To guarantee a successful hunt (?)
 - A prevailing theory is that the images played a role in "hunting magic"
 - Many animals are drawn with an arrow piercing it
 - Gouges in rock indicate that spears were thrown at them
 - These animals were essential to survival
- Another theory suggests that the images communicate narratives (stories)
 - Some suggest that the person is a **shaman**—a kind of priest or healer with powers involving the ability to communicate with spirits of other worlds.



Reminder:

There is no written text at this time so communication had to happen through images

LASCAUX CAVES

- **This image marks the earliest appearance of a male figure**
- It was especially rare for a man to be depicted (women were depicted as fertility figures)
- The rhino is very realistic
- The bison:
 - is depicted a bit distorted
 - is angry (his back hair is bristled)
 - his bowels are hanging out
- The man:
 - it is unclear what he is doing
 - is depicted with less care and detail than the animals
 - has a bird head
 - May be a shaman



Why would early man choose to only create images of animals?

LASCAUX CAVES

15,000-13,000 BCE. ROCK PAINTING

VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS

- Charcoal and powdered pigments were used to add contour and volume to animals
- Animals in profile seem to float in space

CONTEXT

- There is evidence of scaffolding from holes in walls (to reach higher parts of the cave)
- Created by different painters at different times



Twisted Perspective (aka Composite View)

- Seeing more than one point of view at a time (both horns are visible which would not be possible from a strict profile view).
- This view is usually used to ensure complete understanding of the image



Strict Profile

vs.

Twisted Perspective



CAMELID SACRUM IN THE SHAPE OF A CANINE

CENTRAL MEXICO. 14,000-7,000 BCE, BONE

CONTENT

- Importance here is addressing the term "sacrum" as related to the word "sacred", thereby acknowledging its importance as a bone that deteriorates last when the body decays
 - The bone located near the reproductive organs at the base of the spine (which connects to the head of course)
 - The bone may have had special significance in the culture that produced it for these reasons.



CAMELID SACRUM IN THE SHAPE OF A CANINE

CENTRAL MEXICO. 14,000-7,000 BCE, BONE

CONTENT

- The sacrum bone:
 - was viewed as the gateway from physical world to the spiritual world
 - sacrum translates to “sacred bone”
 - in Mesoamerica, it relates to sacredness, to resurrection, and to fire
 - Last bone to decay, very dense

VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS

- The carvings:
 - holes that were cut into the end of the bone represent nostrils
 - the careful attention to detail and perfect symmetry demonstrates the artist’s hand and the importance of the work
 - done using the **subtractive technique** of removing material to create a sculpture



Fun Fact:
The sacrum bone was sacred in ancient Egypt and India too!

CAMELID SACRUM IN THE SHAPE OF A CANINE

TEQUIXQUIAC, CENTRAL MEXICO. 14,000-7,000 BCE BONE

CONTEXT

Carved from the *sacrum* of a now extinct American relative of the camel (like a llama)

- First look at humans manipulating the environment/found object
- It also demonstrates humans seeking to understand forces beyond their control

FUNCTION

- The original use is unknown
 - To house spirit of the animal?
 - Ceremonial mask?
- Used later for religious ceremonies involving fertility as the sacrum part of the pelvic area is associated with reproduction



8,000 – 1,500 BCE NEOLITHIC PERIOD

- Early humans left caves and nomadic life to become herdsman and farmers
- Steady food → permanent shelter → architecture
- Crafts become decorative – jewelry and decorative surfaces



ALGERIA



RUNNING HORNED WOMAN

ALGERIA. 6-4,000 BCE PIGMENT ON ROCK



CONTENT

- The central figure:
 - Horned female figure
 - Featureless face – wearing a mask?
 - Parallel lines of dots on torso and limbs (ceremonial markings known as **scarification**)
 - Ceremonial markings on the body and face that leave scars
 - Wears arm and leg bands
 - Skirt and flowing fabric are made from **raffia**, a fiber created from palm trees, which was/is worn during ceremonies
 - Is below a rain cloud (making it possible that this work represented a request for rain)
- Smaller figures surround and are behind her, some of which are headless
- Some figures can be seen through her (layers of images)

RUNNING HORNED WOMAN

ALGERIA. 6-4,000 BCE PIGMENT ON ROCK



Actual View



Recreated View

VISUAL

- The horns are in **composite view**
- There is a strong contrast between light and dark areas
- It was created using natural pigments on rock
- No ground line
- Ambiguous depiction of space

CONTEXT

- The work may document a specific event
- The depiction of humans represents settled groups (as opposed to nomadic)

RUNNING HORNED WOMAN ALGERIA. 6-4,000 BCE PIGMENT ON ROCK

The work was found in an isolated area at the highest point, with niches carved out, which indicates that the work:

- Was not made for everyday living
- May be for ceremonial purposes



RUNNING HORNED WOMAN

ALGERIA. 6-4,000 BCE PIGMENT ON ROCK



- There are **differing interpretations** from experts as to who the woman represents:
 - Some believe she is *a goddess* of agriculture derived from the goddess Isis in Egypt
 - Others believe that she is a woman in ceremonial headgear, with the horns *representing a connection to animal spirits*
- When she was discovered, the French archeologists could not believe that this work was native to Africa so they renamed her the “White Lady of Aouanrhet” to emphasize the presumed European influence

The Persian Empire



BEAKER WITH IBEX MOTIFS

Susa, Iran. 4200-3500 BCE, painted on Terra Cotta

- This is an example of Hand-thrown pottery formed using a potter's wheel, which was very sophisticated for the time



For better understanding watch the:

[Beth and Steve Video](#)

BEAKER WITH IBEX MOTIFS

Susa, Iran. 4200-3500 BCE, painted on Terra Cotta



VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS

- The decorations are **stylized**, which means it uses simplified ways of representing objects or scenes that do not attempt a full, precise and accurate representation of their visual appearance
- The decorations from top to bottom are:
 - Aquatic birds
 - Running dogs (probably used for hunting)
 - A goat with exaggerated horns and a goatee
 - The goat is surrounded by a meander pattern, which may represent division of crops and therefore an agricultural community
 - Inside the goat's horns is a motif which could be a family or clan symbol

For better understanding watch the:

[Beth and Steve Video](#)

BEAKER WITH IBEX MOTIFS



CONTEXT

- It was found on the Susa **acropolis**, a fortified city, typically built on a hill; this acropolis was built out of bricks, creating a high terrace
- Bodies of the dead were accumulated at the base
- This beaker was found in this **secondary burial tomb** (not the original site of body burial)
- Many pots were also found in graves, which implies the need for cooking items in the afterlife
- Archeologists are not sure if these were common items or just funerary but either way their existence indicates the wealth of the Susa people
- Susa, a prosperous city in the 5th millennium BC on the advent of writing, became political, economical and religious centers
- Why do cultures bury objects with the dead and how does this allude to a belief in the afterlife?

Anthropomorphic Stele

- **Anthropomorphic:**
 - Resembling a human form
- **Stele:**
 - Upright stone slab
- 3" tall
- Over 60 found across 1400 miles





ANTHROPOMORPHIC STELE

Arabian Peninsula. 4000-3000bce, Sandstone

FUNCTION

- Probably associated with religious or burial practices

VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS

- Carved on both sides
- Belted robe and double-bladed sword

CONTEXT

- One of many found in Saudi Arabia
 - Part of sanctuaries with tombs
 - Steles were placed in a circle around the sanctuary
- Steles in other locations have differing functions (such as geographical markers) but all are male forms
- *These steles mark the beginning of human representation in this area*



ANTHROPOMORPHIC STELE

Arabian Peninsula. 4000-3000bce, Sandstone

- Saudi Arabia used to be lush and fertile, allowing for settlements and domestication of animals
- Trails to other settlements allowed for an exchange of ideas, materials, and objects, creating commercial and cultural crossroads connecting the Ancient World
- *Originates in the same area as Islam*, an **aniconic** (does not allow for figural representation) religion, which demonstrates the existence of the dominance of the human figure prior to the religion's development

China



Jade Cong - CONTEXT

Jade in China:

- Many jade objects were found in this area from this time period but mostly *bi*, *yue*, and *cong* (featured in next work)
- Stone workers used jade to make prestigious, beautifully polished versions of utilitarian stone tools, and also to make implements with possible ceremonial or protective functions
- The high status of jade continues throughout Chinese history

Bi—round piece with hole in the middle



Yue—battle axe



JADE CONG

Liangzhu, China. 3300-2200 bce, carved jade

CONTENT

- **Jade** is linked to durability, subtlety, beauty

VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS

- This cong is geometric in shape with **symmetrical patterns** engraved on it
 - This has a face pattern, which may refer to spirits or deities and which is a combination of a man-like figure and a mysterious beast, possibly a dragon or a mask

[Beth and Steve Video](#)
(5 min)



Cong definition—

- Long, hollow pieces with triangular sides
- Circular center with a square outer section

JADE CONG

Liangzhu, China. 3300-2200 bce, carved jade

FUNCTION

- The shape and iconography suggest it was used for ritual
- The **cong** was used by the social elite
- Items used for divine power and witchcraft to control the subjects
- Also **Funerary art** as:
 - All were found in tombs in large numbers
 - Some were broken or intentionally burned

CONTENT

- **The inclusion of squares and circles symbolizes Earth and Heaven and a link between the natural and supernatural worlds**
- The masklike imagery represents shamanistic or mythological figures
 - Same imagery is used later in China in masks



- At the time the Jade Cong was created, there were not tools strong enough to carve it
- Artist's had to use abrasive sand rubbed on to it to create the designs

NOTE: exact function and meaning are unknown

England



STONEHENGE

Wiltshire, UK. Neolithic Europe. C 2500-1600bce. Sandstone

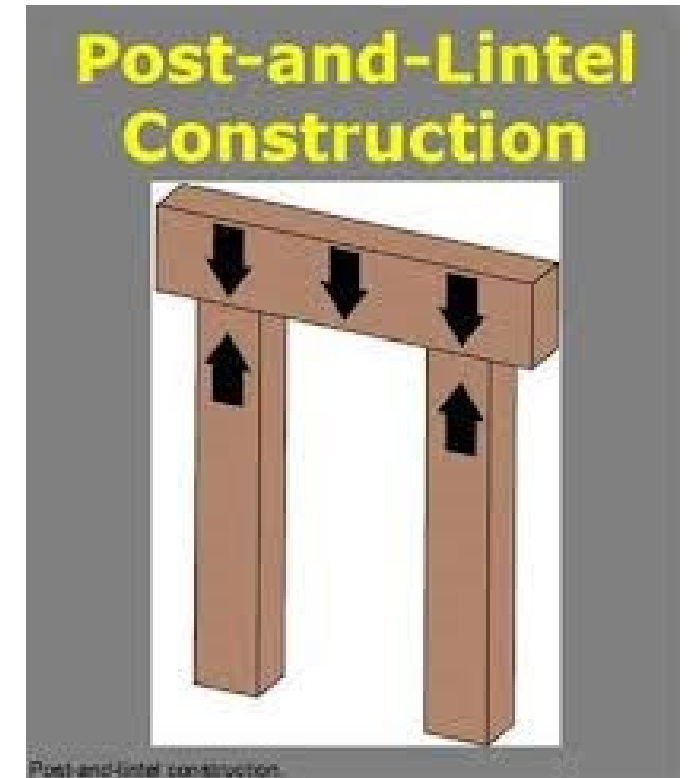
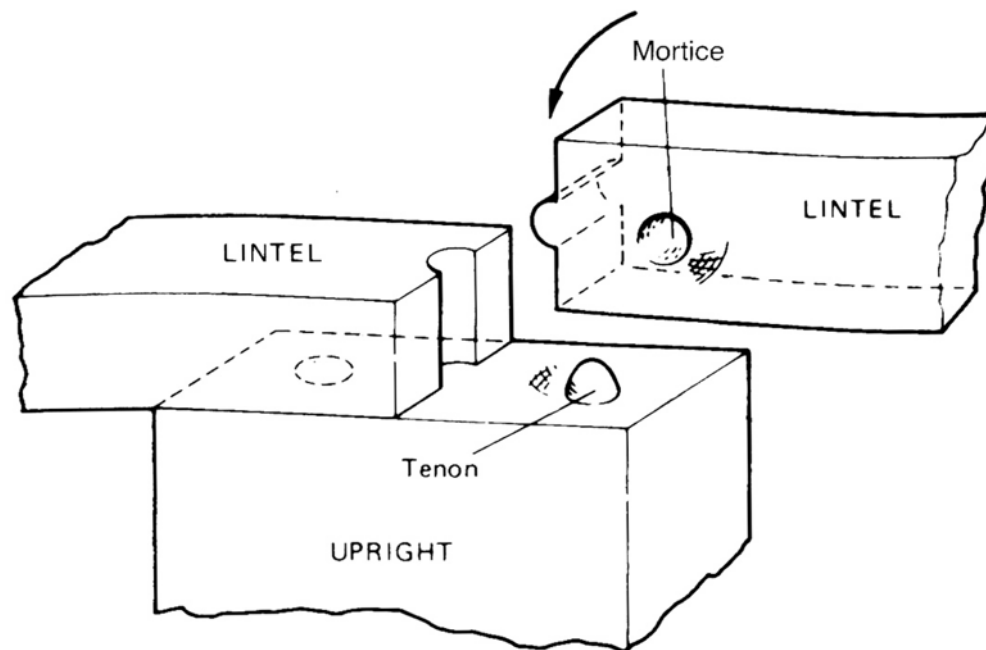
Megaliths – large stone blocks

[Video](#)



POST AND LINTEL & MORTISE AND TENON CONSTRUCTION

- Horizontal beam (**Lintel**) that is supported by two columns (**Posts**)
 - Lintels of Stonehenge are curved slightly to echo the circular form
- **Mortise and Tenon**
 - An advanced connection system
 - Creates an interlocking system



STONEHENGE

Wiltshire, UK. Neolithic Europe. C 2500-1600bce. Sandstone

- Built in 3 phases
- **PHASE 1**
 - **Henge:** a circular ditch and bank
 - A ditch six feet deep was dug with a bank of dirt within it about 360 feet in diameter, with a large entrance to the northeast and a smaller one to the south
 - Inside the henge, 56 pits were dug and either wooden posts or stone were placed in them
 - The interior facing sides of stone are smoothly finished



Located near a river for ceremonial purposes

STONEHENGE

Wiltshire, UK. Neolithic Europe. C 2500-1600bce. Sandstone

- **PHASE 2**
 - 100-200 years later
 - Wooden posts, possibly of a roofed structure, in the center of the henge, as well as more upright posts near the northeast and southern entrances
 - **Used for burial at this time**
 - Over 50 men were buried here
 - All were 24-40 years old, in good health, with little sign of hard labor or disease
 - Suggests that they are the political elite of Great Britain

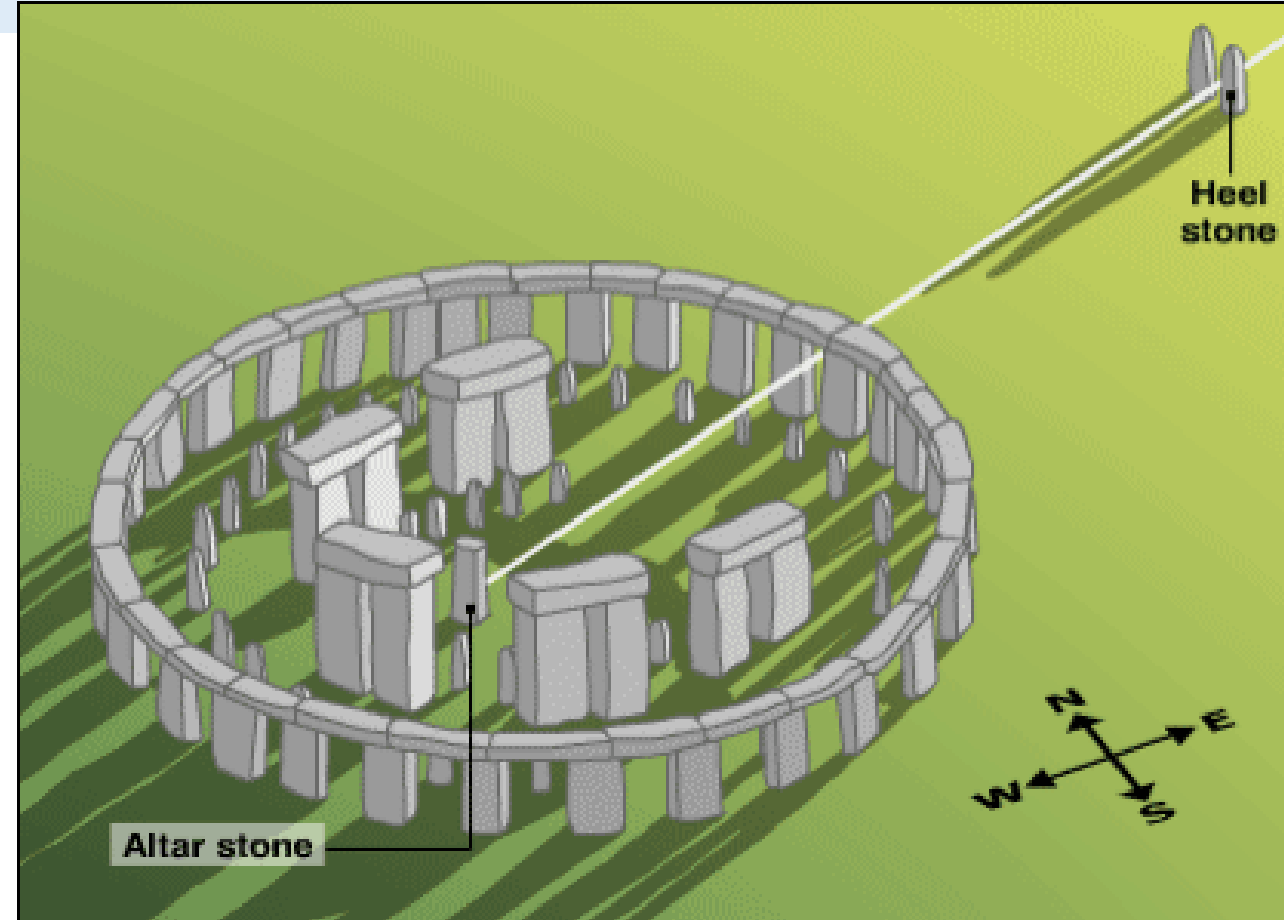


STONEHENGE

Wiltshire, UK. Neolithic Europe. C 2500-1600bce. Sandstone

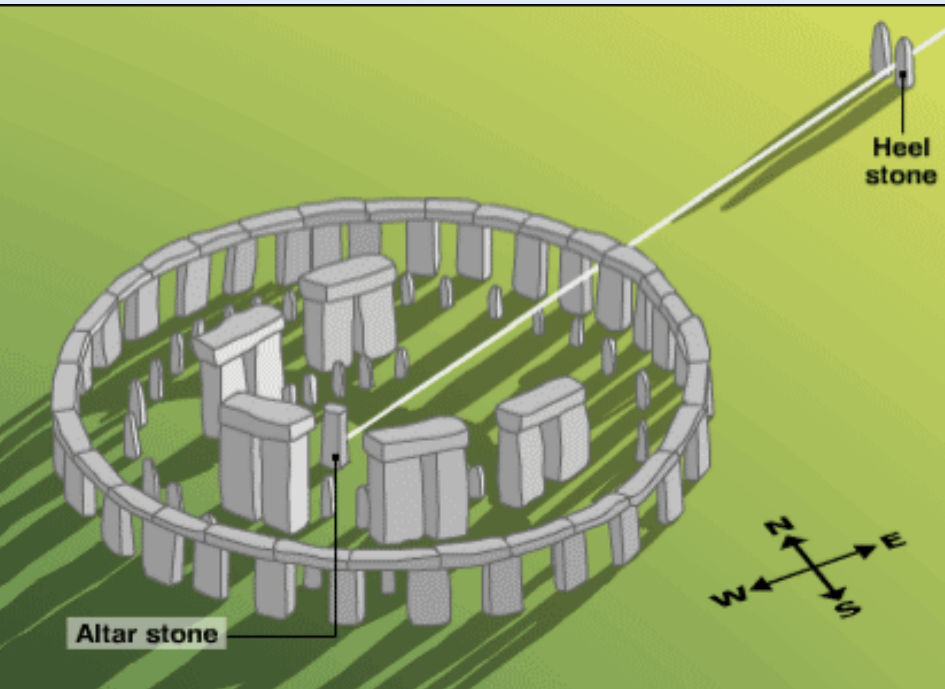
- **PHASE 3**

- 400-500 years later
- A circle 108 feet in diameter of 30 huge and very hard sarsen stones were erected within the henge
 - Stones were capped with 30 lintel stones
 - Each stone was 13' tall, 7' wide, 25 tons
- Encircled 5 trilithons
 - **Trilithon**: upright stone with a stone lintel
 - 20-24' tall, each weighs 50 tons
- A pathway is created that leads to a river



Sunrise of the midsummer solstice is exactly framed by the end of the horseshoe of trilithons at the interior of the monument, and exactly opposite that point, at the center of the bend of the horseshoe, at the midwinter sunset, the sun is also aligned

STONEHENGE – THE LAYOUT



- Heel stone marks the point of the sunrise on the summer solstice
- Destination site associated with death and burial

STONEHENGE

Wiltshire, UK. Neolithic Europe. C 2500-1600bce. Sandstone

Function(s)

- Celestial calendar with the alignment to the solstices
- Burial site for elites as a sign of power
- Pilgrimage site for sick or wounded to be healed





AMBUM STONE

New Guinea, 1500 bce, Greywacke



CONTENT

- Unique in the detail and sophistication of carving
- **Composite figure is anthropomorphized**
 - *Part human, part animal*
- May be a deity
 - Anthropomorphizing of animals was a way of harnessing their otherworldly powers
 - Common practice among early cultures
- Stone is extremely hard and difficult to carve; this would have taken a long time to achieve this level of detail, demonstrating importance of the object

AMBUM STONE

New Guinea, 1500 bce, Greywacke



FORMAL

- **Stylized**
 - Simplification of form, but still recognizable
- Sitting upright
- Front legs, like arms, rest on it's round belly
 - May symbolize abundance or fertility
- Has male genitalia

AMBUM STONE

New Guinea, 1500 bce, Greywacke



CONTEXT

- The original purpose/meaning is unknown
- Later people of the area attributed shamanic attributes and **supernatural powers** to it, using in rituals for fertility and hunting
- Many would be brought together for ceremony
 - Fertility of the earth
 - Prosperity to community
 - Ward off danger
- Buried in ancestral graves

FUNCTION

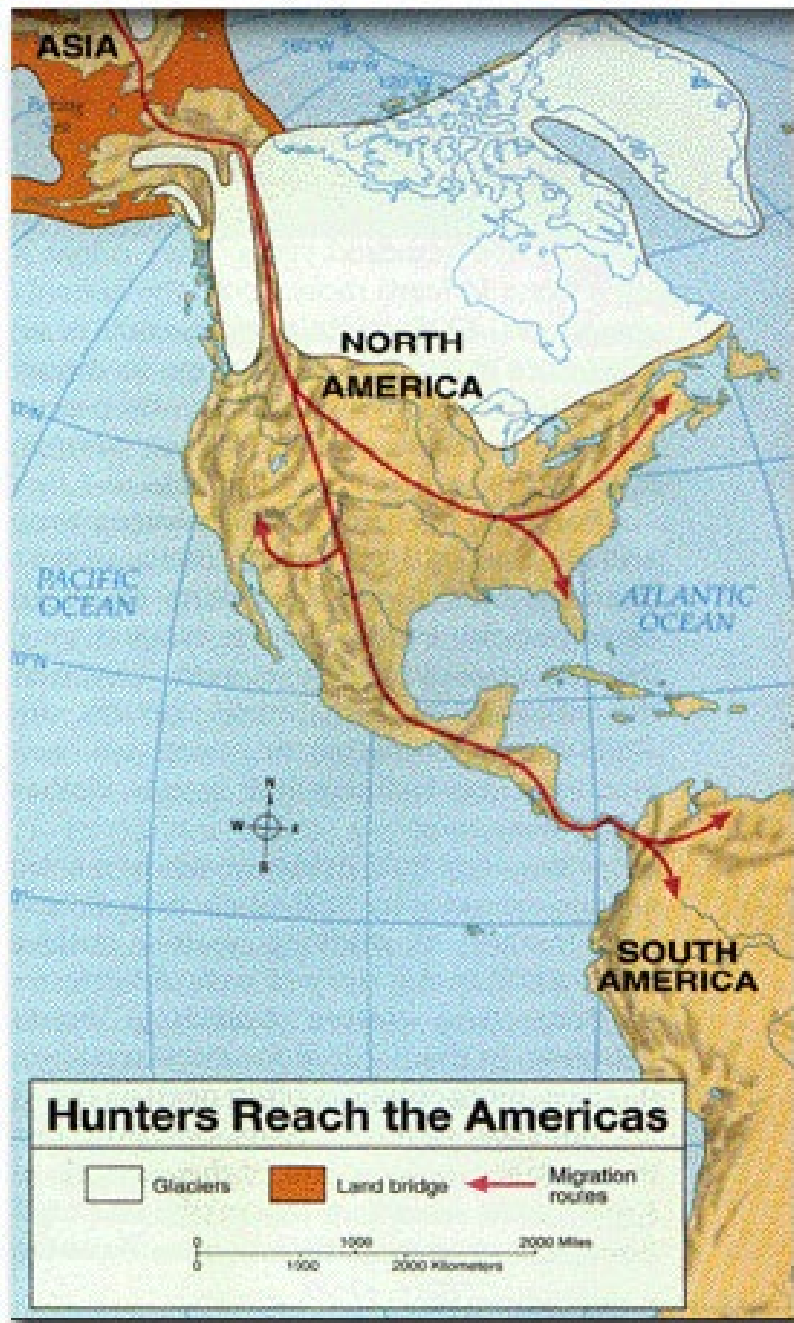
- Possibly a pestle for grinding body paint used in ritual

AMBUM STONE

Greywacke, New Guinea, 1500 BCE



- Other works from this time period
- Stone is extremely hard and difficult to carve – *material is significant*
 - Would have taken a long time to achieve this level



TLATILCO FEMALE FIGURINE

CENTRAL MEXICO, SITE OF TLATILCO, 1200-900 BCE CERAMIC



CONTENT

- Displays the idea of **duality**, an important concept to early American cultures, representing:
 - Life and death together
 - Cycle of life
 - Rebirth
- Suggests **shamanism** and an influence from early Asia
 - This may represent a woman wearing a mask for shamanism or transformation
- Details were created using **incised** clay (the artist cut into the clay) It was Painted red, yellow, black

VISUAL

- Intimate, lively poses and elaborate hairstyles are indicative of the already sophisticated artistic tradition and also suggests hairstyles were important to the culture
- Symmetrical
- no interest in the hands or feet

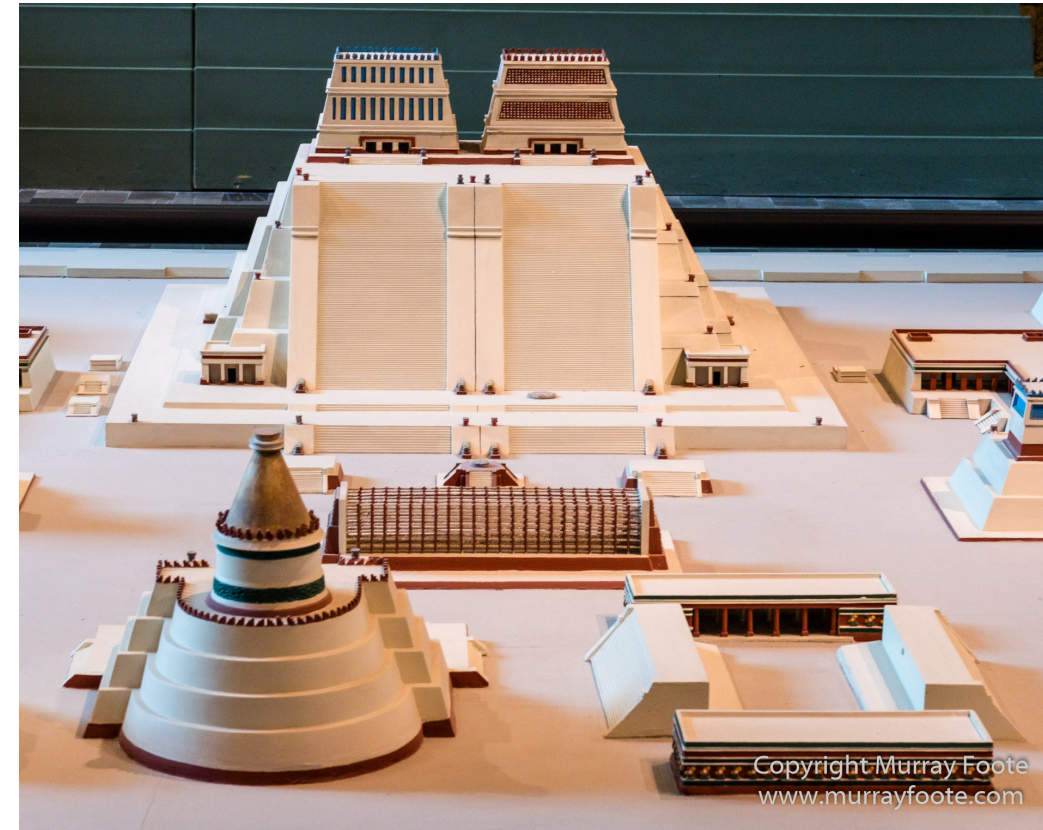
[SmartHistory 5 min](#)

TLATILCO FEMALE FIGURINE

CENTRAL MEXICO, SITE OF TLATILCO, 1200-900 BCE CERAMIC

CONTENT

- Displays the idea of **duality**, an important concept to early American cultures, representing:
 - Life and death together
 - Cycle of life
 - Rebirth
- Templo Mayor of the Aztecs reflects duality as well
 - One side for fire and one for water



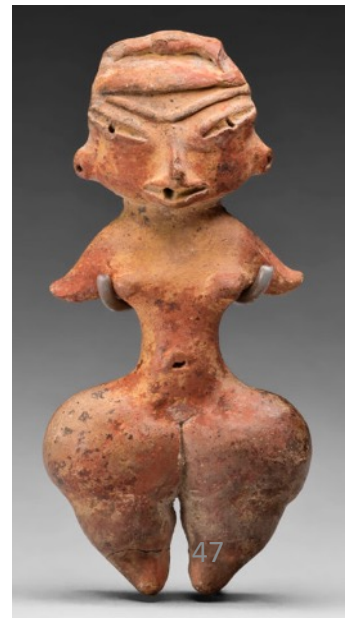
[SmartHistory 5 min](#)

TLATILCO FEMALE FIGURINE

CENTRAL MEXICO, SITE OF TLATILCO, 1200-900 BCE CERAMIC

CONTEXT

- These were burial figures (**funerary art**)
- Many of this kind have been found, this one is unique in its double face
- Most have narrow waists and wide hips



TLATILCO FEMALE FIGURINE

CENTRAL MEXICO, SITE OF TLATILCO, 1200-900 BCE CERAMIC



Male versions existed but are rare and typically would be depicted wearing masks and costumes, demonstrating their value as priests or religious specialists





TERRA COTTA FRAGMENT

OCEANIA: LAPITA. SOLOMON ISLANDS, REEF ISLANDS. 1000 BCE TERRA COTTA



CONTEXT

- People came from Southeast Asia
- The Lapita people are known for their ceramics
- This is the earliest known image of a human face for this area

- **Anthropomorphic**

FUNCTION

- Most were decorated, large vessels for cooking and food storage

- **VISUAL CHARACTERISTIC**

- **Patterns** are **incised** into the clay before firing
 - A comb-like stamp is used
 - Each stamp had its own design to create intricate design

TERRA COTTA FRAGMENT

OCEANIA: LAPITA. SOLOMON ISLANDS, REEF ISLANDS. 1000
BCE TERRA COTTA



- Visual Characteristics

- The artist applied a red **slip (watered down clay to thin it)** with added pigment to decorate the pot

By tracking where different pieces of Lapita pottery were found, researchers able to see how far they traveled in the Pacific Island area



TERRA COTTA FRAGMENT

OCEANIA:LAPITA. SOLOMON ISLANDS, REEF ISLANDS. 1000 BCE TERRA COTTA



Flash forward:

Similar designs can be found in modern Polynesian tattoos and bark cloth
- *all allow surface decoration that then articulates a three-dimensional form*
(the two works on the right are also in the 250 image set!)