Roman

*Mosaic pavement: drinking contest of Herakles and Dionysos, early 3rd century A.D.*

Stone and glass

526.0 x 527.0 cm (207 1/16 x 207 1/2 in.)

figural scene: 229.2 x 295.5 cm (90 1/4 x 116 5/16 in.)

Gift of the Committee for the Excavation of Antioch to Princeton University

y1965-216
Crafted from thousands of tesserae, small pieces of stone and glass, this mosaic from Antioch-on-the-Orontes features a rare subject, a drinking contest between Herakles, the mythological hero, and Dionysos, the god of wine. The design of this early-third-century mosaic reveals that it was made for a triclinium, the dining room of a home. The Latin word *triclinium* is formed from the ancient Greek words *tri*, three, and *kline*, couch; at least three couches would have been placed directly atop the intricate geometric designs of this mosaic, arranged around the figural scene. Grandiose architecture frames the contest itself. Calyx-karters rest upon gold Corinthian columns that support an elegant, coffered, barrel-vaulted ceiling. The mask beneath the ceiling and the raised curtain dramatically revealing the competitors create a theatrical atmosphere.

Herakles, the dark muscular strongman, occupies the central position; resting on his knees, he finishes the contents of his drinking cup as his trademark lion skin cascades around his body. Another one of his familiar attributes, a wooden club, rests on the floor before him. In contrast to Herakles, Dionysos reclines leisurely, and his lithe pale body appears characteristically feminine. Victory seems to rest with the god of wine, as he extends his right arm and clasps his rhyton, or drinking horn, in triumph. As mighty as Herakles may have been in the physical sense, Dionysos prevails in the dominion of wine. A dancing maenad, a female worshiper of Dionysos, provides musical accompaniment for the contest with a tambourine. Her raised arms echo the gesture of her god, creating a symmetrical composition.

A krater and a rhyton rest on the floor, casting shadows that reveal the direction of light. In a typical triclinium, the krater would have been featured in the center of the room. The mosaic seems to invite the mortal viewer to lift the spare rhyton and join the gods in their drinking party. Perhaps, then, such a scene is intended to inspire the men to engage in their own drinking competition. The mosaic functions, however, on levels distinct from one that merely encourages excessive drinking. A moral message of the boundary of overindulgence is certainly intended; mere mortals should watch their level of consumption if not even Herakles can out-drink the god of wine. The religious undertone of the mosaic is accentuated by the gaze of the maenad; by looking away from the gods, she emphasizes that she does not belong to the same realm as they do . . . and neither do the men observing the mosaic.

The story of a drinking contest between Herakles and Dionysos is undocumented in ancient literature and known visually from only one other source, another mosaic from Antioch. Such a motif may have been invented in the wake of the rise of Christianity, when paganism adapted to the current religious climate and developed monotheistic characteristics; it may have been necessary to determine which pagan god reigned supreme in such a competitive religious environment as that which existed in the first few centuries under the Roman Empire. Situated at the crossroads between east and west, Antioch, located in ancient Syria but today in Turkey, was one of the most thriving cities in antiquity. It is not surprising that such a unique visual motif was developed there.

- *Handbook Entry, 2013*
Greek, Attic  
in the manner of the Berlin Painter, Greek, Attic, ca. 505–465 B.C.  


Ceramic  
h. 62.4 x diam. 41.1 x diam. rim 18 x diam. foot 13.9 cm (24 9/16 x 16 3/16 x 7 1/16 x 5 1/2 in.)  
Bequest of Mrs. Allan Marquand  
y1950-10  

Although this vessel has the shape, volume, and decorative scheme of one of the amphoras full of olive oil that were awarded as prizes at the Panathenaic Games in Athens, it lacks the standard Greek inscription identifying it as such. One this side, the helmeted Athena strides to the left with upraised spear, as though going into battle with the Giants. She wears two gowns, a peplos over a chiton, and carries a shield decorated with a gorgoneion, the head of Medusa. Draped over her breasts and shoulders is the aegis, a snake-fringed goat skin that was Athena's particular attribute. Flanking the goddess are a pair of cocks standing on Ionic columns.  

- *Gallery Label, 2013-05, Ancient_May2013_amphora.pdf*  

Amphoras filled with olive oil from trees sacred to Athena were awarded as prizes to victors of athletic competitions held during the Athenian festival of the Panathenaia. This vase meets most of the canonical requirements for a Panathenaic prize amphora in its shape, size, and decoration.  

On the obverse, the goddess Athena wields a spear between two Ionic columns surmounted by cocks. Typically an inscription reading "one of the prizes from Athens" runs alongside one of the columns, but because the vase lacks this validating element, it instead may have been made for the commercial market. The reverse of a Panathenaic amphora always depicts the event for which the vase was awarded; here a charioteer holds the reins to a *quadriga*, a four-horse racing chariot.  

By the time this vase was made, black-figure had largely been supplanted by the red-figure style. Panathenaic amphoras, however, continued to be decorated in black-figure. Even artists like the Berlin Painter, who otherwise worked only in red-figure, respected this conservative tradition.  

- *Handbook Entry, 2013*
Japanese
Kofun period, 300–710
Anonymous
Haniwa tomb figure, ca. 6th century
Earthenware with traces of pigment
h. 50.0 cm., w. 25.3 cm., d. approx. 18.7 cm. (19 11/16 x 9 15/16 x 7 3/8 in.)
Museum purchase with funds given by Duane E. Wilder, Class of 1951
y1992-2

Clay tomb sculptures known as haniwa were placed on the surfaces of keyhole-shaped kofun grave mounds during this period. These sculptures ranged from plain cylinders to complex architecture, and their intended function is still debated. One theory suggests that haniwa models served to protect and demarcate the boundary between the realms of the living and the dead.

During the Kofun period, clay tomb sculptures known as haniwa (clay cylinders) were placed on earthen burial mounds. Haniwa ranged from plain to figural, the latter surmounted with figures, animals, or even complex architecture. Plain cylinders are characteristic of early burial sites, while figural haniwa are not found until the fifth century. The intended function of such sculptures, including this hollow figure with a necklace, earring, and belt, is still debated. One theory suggests that haniwa models served to mark and protect the boundary between the realms of the living and the dead. This figure has combed patterns along the torso, arms, and portions of the head, perhaps indicating clothing and hair. The headdress, arms, and necklace were decorated with white pigment, traces of which are still visible.
- Handbook Entry, 2013

Late Classic
Maya
Ballplayer, A.D. 600–800
Ceramic with traces of Maya blue pigment
h. 34.2 cm., w. 17.8 cm., d. 11.8 cm. (13 7/16 x 7 x 4 5/8 in.)
Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund, in honor of Gillett G. Griffin on his seventieth birthday
1998-36
The massive padding around the waist of this figure identifies him as a ballplayer. Such protection was probably made out of long cloth wrappings, atop which was attached a ribbed, wooden striking element, painted blue on this example. Hieroglyphic texts on other objects note that the balls, which were struck with the torso and hips, normally ranged from nine to twelve hand-spans in circumference, explaining the need for such extensive protection. The textile motifs decorating this figure’s loincloth are unusually detailed, with the cut-out cross motif with a knot at the center suggesting a sophisticated form of textile. His bird headdress may have been particular to his team.

- Gallery Label, 2015-02, 2015 AAA Reinstallation, "Jania Case"

Late Classic
Maya

*Kneeling noble woman holding a lidded jar, A.D. 650–750*  
Ceramic with polychrome slip  
h. 28.9 cm., w. 15.4 cm., d. 22.5 cm. (11 3/8 x 6 1/16 x 8 7/8 in.)  
Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund 2005-65 a-b

In terms of ancient Maya aesthetics, the young woman represented here is a great beauty. Her fashionable, courtly hairstyle includes a high-set bun, stepped bangs, and a narrow strip at the center of her forehead. Red paint on her brow and neck frame and highlight her white-painted face. The painted designs on her cheeks may have once provided two-dimensional embellishments to a jade nose-bead that would have been suspended from the hole in her nasal septum. Elaborate earrings, probably also jade, may have originally hung from her ears, and her necklace is painted in slip.

- Gallery Label, 2015-02, 2015 AAA Reinstallation

This slip-painted figurine represents a young woman of great beauty in terms of ancient Maya aesthetics. Her elongated head naturalistically depicts the head shape of elite Maya, produced through intentional cranial alteration in infancy. Such modification gave the head a form akin to an ear of maize, the primary staple of the ancient Maya diet and the substance from which the Maya believed humans were created. Her fashionable, courtly hairstyle has a high-set bun, stepped bangs, and a narrow strip at the center of her forehead. Red paint on her brow and neck frames and highlights her white-painted face. The painted designs on her cheeks may have once provided two-dimensional embellishments to a jade nose-bead that would have been suspended from the hole in her nasal septum. Elaborate earrings, probably also jade, may have originally hung from her ears. In contrast to the removable jewelry items, her necklace is painted. The playful variety and mixing of two- and three-dimensional representational modes are typical of Early Classic (A.D. 250-550) Maya ceramic art. Scientific analysis of the clay, however, indicates this piece was probably made during the Late Classic period.

Not unlike the mirror holder in the form of a kneeling male (see facing page), this figure may once have served as a piece of court furniture. Such mirroring of aristocratic service on a small scale is a conceit common in ancient Maya courtly art. Subsequently, when interred with a Maya lord at burial, this eternally youthful kneeling courtesan would have been constantly at the ready to serve him a drink from her lidded jar.
Late Classic
Maya (‘Codex’ style)
The Princeton Vase, A.D. 670–750
Ceramic with red, cream, and black slip, with remnants of painted stucco
h. 21.5 cm. , diam. 16.6 cm. (8 7/16 x 6 9/16 in.)
Museum purchase, gift of the Hans A. Widenmann, Class of 1918, and Dorothy Widenmann Foundation
y1975-17

On this side of the famous Maya chocolate-drinking cup known as the Princeton Vase, an old, toothless underworld god sits on a throne within a palace, represented by the pier behind him and a cornice above. Curtains, which were used as doors among the ancient Maya, have been pulled up to reveal the interior scene. This deity, known among scholars as God L, wears his characteristic shawl and a broadbrimmed hat bedecked with owl feathers and an owl. In addition to ruling the Maya underworld, God L was the patron deity of tobacco and merchants. Five elegant female figures—possibly concubines—surround him. A rabbit scribe, who might be spying on God L, sits below, writing in a book.

A standing woman with her head bent in concentration suggests that the viewer rotate the vase to the left. She holds a vessel similar in size and shape to the Princeton Vase, and a stream of liquid pours down from it, presumably into a vessel whose rendering has eroded. This method of preparation likely frothed the bitter chocolate beverage that this vessel was made to serve. The vertical pier or rear wall of a palace structure marks the boundaries of the overall composition on this vase, placing the selfreferential vignette of vessel use at the end of the scene, as a sort of addendum.

The most important moment in the narrative of the Princeton Vase appears on this side of the vessel. Two men wearing elaborate masks and wielding axes decapitate a bound and stripped figure, seen at the lower left; the victim’s serpent-umbilicus curls out to bite one of the executioners. The scene closely parallels a portion of the Popol Vuh, a sixteenth-century K’iche’ Maya mythological narrative in which the Hero Twins trick the lords of the underworld into requesting their own decapitations. As is common in mythological narratives throughout the Americas, these heroes win the day not through feats of brute strength but through cunning, and often humorous, trickery.

With graceful, sure lines painted on a cream slip, the Princeton Vase presents a story that stretches around the entire object. Because passing or turning the drinking cup is necessary for full comprehension of the narrative, subtle visual devices between the primary scenes encourage the viewer to rotate the vessel, creating a temporal unfolding of the visual experience. Here, for example, a young noblewoman taps the foot of the woman in front of her while turning her head in the opposite direction: she is between two scenes and encourages her companion (and thus the viewer) to shift her attention around the vase.

- Gallery Label, 2015-02, 2015 AAA Reinstallation - Princeton Vase
The bold vertical form of the pier or rear wall of a palace structure serves to mark the boundaries of the composition. A standing woman with her head bent in concentration provides a suggestion to the viewer to shift to the left. She holds a vessel similar in size and shape to the Princeton Vase itself, and a stream of liquid trickles down from it, presumably into a vessel whose rendering has eroded. This preparation likely frothed the bitter delicacy. On this side of the Princeton Vase, an old, toothless underworld god sits on a throne within a palace, represented by the pier behind him and a cornice above. Curtains, which were used as doors among the ancient Maya, have been drawn up to reveal the old lord seated within. This deity, known among scholars as God L, wears his characteristic brocaded shawl and a broad-brimmed hat bedecked with owl feathers and a taxidermy owl. In addition to ruling the Maya underworld, God L was the patron deity of tobacco and merchants. Five elegant female figures—daughters or concubines—surround him. Each wears a loose, flowing sarong and jewelry at her ears, neck, and wrists. A rabbit scribe, who might be spying on God L, sits below, writing in a book. God L delicately ties a bracelet on the woman before him, but the tapping on her heel by another woman suggests that her attention is about to shift elsewhere. With graceful, sure lines painted on a cream slip, the Princeton Vase presents a story that stretches around the entire object. Because passing or turning the drinking cup is necessary for full comprehension of the story, subtle visual devices between the primary scenes encourage the viewer to rotate the vessel, creating a temporal unfolding of the visual experience. Here, for example, a young noblewoman taps the foot of the woman in front of her while turning her head toward the opposite direction: she is between two scenes and encourages her companion (and us) to shift her attention around the vase. Both the most complex and the most important moments in the overall narrative of the Princeton Vase appear on this side of the vessel. Two men wearing elaborate masks and wielding axes decapitate a bound and stripped figure, seen at the lower left. The victim’s serpent-umbilicus curls out to bite one of the executioners. The scene closely parallels a portion of the Popol Vuh, a sixteenth-century K’iche’ Maya mythological narrative in which the Hero Twins trick the lords of the underworld into requesting their own decapitations. As is common in mythological narratives throughout the Americas, these heroes win the day not through Herculean feats of brute strength but through cunning, and often humorous, trickery.

- Gallery Label, 2013-09, PreColombian_Sept2013
The masterful calligraphic painting on the Princeton Vase is the finest known example of Maya "codex style" ceramic art. Graceful, sure lines painted on a cream slip present a theatrically composed mythological scene, while subtle visual devices encourage the viewer to turn the drinking vessel, adding a temporal unfolding to the visual experience. On one side, an old, toothless Underworld god sits on a throne that is placed within a conventionalized depiction of a palace structure, represented by the pier behind him and what is likely a lintel above. Jaguars, with dripping volutes replacing their lower jaws, adorn the roof of the structure. Curtains, which were used to provide privacy for Maya structures lacking proper doors, have been pulled up and tied to reveal an old lord seated within. This deity, known among scholars as God L, wears his characteristic open-weave shawl and broad-brimmed hat, upon which an owl perches. In addition to ruling Xibalba, the Maya Underworld, God L was the patron deity of tobacco and merchants. He is surrounded by five elegant female figures, who may be his daughters or his concubines. Each wears a loose, flowing sarong, decorated with what appear to be batik-like dyed patterns, and jewelry at the ears, neck, and wrists. One of the women behind God L pours chocolate from a vessel of the same form as the Princeton Vase, frothing the bitter delicacy. A rabbit scribe, a regular companion to God L, sits below, recording the actions of the scene in a book with jaguar-pelt covers. The deity delicately ties a bracelet on the woman before him, while another woman taps her foot to draw attention—her companion’s and the viewer’s—to the gruesome scene at her left, in which two men wearing elaborate masks and wielding axes decapitate a bound and stripped figure. The victim’s serpent-umbilicus curls out to bite one of the executioners. The scene closely parallels a portion of the sixteenth-century Quiché Maya mythological narrative, the Popol Vuh, wherein the Hero Twins, Hunahpu and Xbalamque, trick the lords of the Underworld into requesting their own decapitations. As is common in mythological narratives from throughout the Americas, these heroes win the day not through Herculean feats of brute strength, but through cunning, and often humorous, trickery. The formulaic text at the upper edge of the Princeton Vase serves to consecrate the vessel and also specifies that it was intended for drinking "tree-fresh" chocolate. The vase would have been used in courtly banquets similar to the scene depicted.

- Gallery Label, 2010-01
The masterful calligraphic painting on the Princeton Vase is the finest known example of Maya "codex style" ceramic art. Graceful, sure lines painted on a cream slip present a theatrically composed mythological scene, while subtle visual devices encourage the viewer to turn the drinking vessel, adding a temporal unfolding to the visual experience. On one side (seen here), an old, toothless underworld god sits on a throne that is placed within a conventionalized depiction of a palace structure, represented by the pier behind him and what is likely a cornice above. The cornice is adorned with two jawless jaguars framing a frontal shark face. Curtains, which were used as doors among the ancient Maya, have been furled and tied to reveal the old lord seated within. This deity, known among scholars as God L, wears his characteristic open-weave brocaded shawl and broad-brimmed hat bedecked with owl feathers and a stuffed owl with wings outstretched. In addition to ruling Xibalba, the Maya underworld, God L was the patron deity of tobacco and merchants. Five elegant female figures — daughters or concubines — surround him. Each wears a loose, flowing sarong, decorated with batik-like dyed patterns rendered in soft brown wash, and jewelry at the ears, neck, and wrists. One of the women behind God L pours chocolate, frothing the bitter delicacy from a vessel of the same form as the Princeton Vase. A rabbit scribe, who may be spying on God L, sits below, recording the actions of the scene in a book with jaguar-pelt covers. God L delicately ties a bracelet on the woman before him, while another woman taps her foot to draw her attention—and the viewer’s—to the gruesome scene at left, in which two men wearing elaborate masks and wielding axes decapitate a bound and stripped figure. The victim’s serpent-umbilicus curls out to bite one of the executioners. The scene closely parallels a portion of the Popol Vuh, a sixteenth-century K’iche’ Maya mythological narrative wherein the Hero Twins trick the lords of the underworld into requesting their own decapitations. As is common in mythological narratives throughout the Americas, these heroes win the day not through Herculean feats of brute strength, but through cunning, and often humorous, trickery. The formulaic texts at the upper edge of the Princeton Vase serve to consecrate the vessel, to specify that it was intended for drinking "maize tree" chocolate, and to designate its owner, a lord named Muwaan K’uk’. The vase would have been used in courtly feasts similar to the scene depicted.

- Handbook Entry, 2013

Chinese
Tang dynasty, 618–907
Pair of painted tomb guardians, ca. mid–8th century
Earthenware with silver, gold, and painted decoration
figure (.1 a): h. 60.7 cm, w. 30.5 cm, d. 17.2 cm. (23 7/8 x 12 x 6 3/4 in.)
base (.1 b): h. 7.4 cm, w. 29.2 cm, d. 22.8 cm. (2 15/16 x 11 1/2 x 9 in.)
figure (.2 a): h. 60.0 cm, w. approx. 31.0 cm, d. approx. 21.0 cm. (23 5/8 x 12 3/16 x 8 1/4 in.)
base (.2 b): h. 7.7 cm, w. 29.2 cm, d. approx. 18.5 cm. (3 1/16 x 11 1/2 x 7 5/16 in.)
Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund 2001-215.1-.2
These spirit tomb guardians (zhenmushou) clutch snakes in their hands while subduing animal demons atop rock plinths. The human-faced beast has one taloned foot on the back of a screaming deer-demon; the lion-faced guardian is seen pouncing on a squealing, green-spotted, winged boar-demon. Painted down the front of both guardians is a central band of stylized peony flowers, with floral bands on a silver ground along their sides.

The forearms and ankles of both guardians, as well as the mane surrounding the lion’s face, are boldly painted to suggest fur, while the hair on the human face is executed in fine lines. Slits along the tops of both figures’ arms may originally have held flame-shaped spikes made of perishable material. The backs of both guardians are painted with red circles to resemble fur pelts.
This pair of beast guardians represents the final stage of the long sculptural evolution of tomb guardians, when their function as demon-quellers became visually represented. Similar examples date to around the mid-eighth century and have been recovered primarily from the area near the Tang-dynasty capital of Chang’an (present-day Xi’an).

These spirit tomb guardians are subduing animal-demons on top of rock plinths. The human-faced guardian, clutching a snake in each hand, stands with one clawed foot on the back of a cowering deer-demon. The lion-faced beast guardian, his taloned right hand raised and a snake in his left, is in the act of pouncing on a winged, green, spotted boar-demon. Painted down the front of each guardian is a central band of stylized peony flowers flanked by floral bands on a partly silver ground. The forearms and ankles of both figures are painted to simulate fur. Deep, thin slits along the tops of the arms on both figures may have held flame-shaped spikes made of perishable material. Flames made of ceramic are found on similar figures of the Tang dynasty. Because of their usual position near tomb gates and their ferocious demeanor, such beast figures are thought to have served as sentinels who protected the earthbound soul of the deceased by quelling demon spirits.

This pair of guardians represents the final stage in a long sculptural evolution. Tomb guardians may have precedents in antlered creatures carved in wood from the Warring States period (ca. 470–221 b.c.). Excavated from tombs in southern China, many of these figures are shown with long dangling tongues, holding or biting snakes. Such burial sculptures became rare in the Han dynasty (206 b.c.–a.d. 220), but vivid descriptions of fantastic creatures in Han literature, pictorial carvings, and Buddhist iconography may have provided models for the subsequent development of tomb guardian figures. In this later period, the guardians have human or animal faces and feline-like bodies with pawed feet, and are shown walking on all fours or sitting on their haunches. During the early Northern Dynasties (386–581), single guardians were sometimes placed in tombs. By the sixth century, pairings of guardians, one with a human face and the other with a lion face, were frequently buried, and often grouped with accompanying pairs of standing warrior figures.

The standard groupings of pairs of beast and warrior tomb guardians in the Tang dynasty corresponds to mention in burial regulations of the Four Spirits (Sishen). During the Tang, the use of the Four Spirits remained a privilege of the ruling class. In the early Tang, beast guardians may have become associated with pairs of deer-like spirits — auspicious tianlu with one horn and apotropaic bixie with two — which may have resulted in a reassessment of their iconography. Clawed feet replaced paws, and horns were added. The final stage in the development of tomb guardian figures occurred from the mid-seventh to mid-eighth centuries, when their function as demon vanquishers began to be visually represented. Figures with more human bodies were shown sitting erect while subduing anguished demons underfoot. Surviving examples, all dating to about the mid-eighth century, have been recovered primarily from around the Tang capital of Chang’an (present-day Xi’an).

- Handbook Entry, 2013

Chinese
Southern Song dynasty, 1127–1279
Guanyin seated in Royal-ease pose, ca. 1250
Wood with traces of blue-green, red, and gold pigments on white clay underlayer with relief designs
h. 110.0 cm., approx w. 79.0 cm., approx d. 50.0 cm. (43 5/16 x 31 1/8 x 19 11/16 in.)
Museum purchase, Carl Otto von Kienbusch Jr., Memorial Collection
y1950-66
The Chinese Buddhist deity Guanyin is the Bodhisattva of Infinite Compassion. A bodhisattva is a figure who has achieved the highest aim in Buddhism, enlightenment, and may pass into nirvana, the state of freedom from suffering and the endless cycle of rebirth. However, bodhisattvas elect instead to remain in this world, easing the suffering of all beings and helping others attain enlightenment. The earliest known mention of Guanyin in China comes from a Chinese translation of the Indian sacred text the Lotus Sutra in 286, which records the deity’s vow to save those in danger of murder, shipwreck, and other forms of suffering. Guanyin, who could take on more than thirty different manifestations in quests to aid victims, became beloved throughout China and well known in the West in its female form. A cult devoted to the deity emerged between the third and sixth centuries, and in the seventh century, with the rise of the Pure Land School of Buddhism, the deity became an important figure in the Buddhist pantheon. This figure is identified as Guanyin by the image in the crown of Amitabha Buddha, the central deity in the Pure Land. This sculpture can be read as male or female, which indicates Guanyin’s universal and inclusive nature. The flexible pose of rajasila, or royal ease, with a raised leg and casually draped arm, became associated with the deity in the late ninth century. Such temple sculptures were periodically redecorated, and the relief designs on the surface of the skirt and scarves were probably added during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).

- Gallery Label, 2013-01, Asian relabeling July 2014, also Jan 2013
The bodhisattva Guanyin (Sanskrit Avalokiteshvara) is an important figure in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. Bodhisattvas are enlightened beings who reject Buddhahood to remain in the six realms of transmigration, where they can allay suffering and help others to attain enlightenment. In his Chinese translation of the Indian sacred text the Lotus Sutra, the Indo-Iranian missionary Kumarajiva (ca. a.d. 350–410) refers to the deity as the Bodhisattva of Infinite Compassion. In chapter 25 of the text, the deity vows to save those in danger of murder, shipwreck, and other forms of suffering. Guanyin could appear in more than thirty different manifestations in the quest to aid others along the path to enlightenment, each of which is described in the Lotus Sutra. These different manifestations reflect the bodhisattva’s use of "skillful means" (Sanskrit upaya) to appeal to a variety of people who possess different capacities to understand the teachings of Buddhism. The bodhisattva’s full Chinese name Guanshiyin, as translated from the Sanskrit by the monk Xuanzang (a.d. 602?–644), means "Observer of the Cries of the World." Over time, the deity became one of the most beloved deities in China. A cult devoted to the deity emerged between the third and the sixth century, and with the rise of the Pure Land School of Buddhism in the seventh century, Guanyin became a prominent figure in the Chinese Buddhist pantheon. Bodhisattvas have technically transcended the physicality of gender, which in Mahayana Buddhism is considered but a delusion of the unenlightened. In sculptural form, however, bodhisattvas are generally presented as androgynous handsome males. In contrast, this sculpture of Guanyin can be read as being either male or female. The feature speaks to the gradual feminization of the deity in the Chinese context, where an eleventh-century apocryphal sutra presented a white-robed form of the bodhisattva along with a "child-giving" form having the power to bestow sons upon female devotees. Around the beginning of the twelfth century, the bodhisattva became associated with a tale of the ancient princess Miaoshan, who was said to have been banished from the palace upon her refusal to marry. After she donated her own eyes and arms as medicine to cure her father’s illness, she was revealed to be a thousand-armed, thousand-eyed goddess. This thousand-armed and -eyed figure corresponds to a manifestation of Guanyin, who uses her eyes to see all the world’s troubles and her arms to assist those in need. The popular reference to Guanyin as the "Goddess of Mercy" stems from early Jesuit interpretations of the deity’s function.

This figure is identified as Guanyin by the miniature image of Amitabha Buddha in the crown. The circular urna in the forehead, one of the marks of an enlightened being, is empty, but presumably originally contained a piece of glass or rock crystal. The figure’s relaxed pose of rajalilasana, or royal ease, with a raised leg and casually draped arm, did not become associated with the deity until late in the ninth century. Despite the languid posture, the torso retains a sense of unmoving solidness, disturbed neither by much movement nor by dramatic distortion. The paridhana skirt, draping the lower portion with beautiful ease, is confidently natural and conforms to the shape of the body underneath. Temple sculptures were periodically redecorated, and the addition of relief designs on the surface of the skirt and scarves probably occurred sometime in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).

- Handbook Entry, 2013
Egyptian
New Kingdom, early 18th Dynasty

*Fragmentary lid from the coffin of Wadj-shemsi-su*, ca. 1500–1425 B.C.
Wood, painted plaster, limestone, obsidian, and bronze
61.0 x 39.5 x 20.5 cm (24 x 15 9/16 x 8 1/16 in.)
Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund 1998-37

Anthropoid coffins, fashioned in the rough semblance of a wrapped and mummified corpse and crowned with a life-like carved and painted mask, first appeared in the Middle Kingdom and became the most common type of coffin in the New Kingdom. This imposing mask was part of the lid of an anthropoid coffin constructed from wooden boards joined by dowels. Dowel holes in the rim were for securing the lid to the missing case. The stylistic features point clearly to a date in the early part of the 18th Dynasty, the period covered by the reigns of the pharaohs Tuthmosis I to Tuthmosis III (ca. 1500-1425 B.C.).

The inner and outer surfaces are coated with white gesso, both to complete the modeling of the carved wooden mask and to serve as a ground for its painted decoration. Although we cannot know how faithfully it represents the features of the man whose mummy was once enclosed in the coffin, the portrait on the lid is modeled with considerable sensitivity. He has a slanted forehead, a large nose, full lips, and a small, rounded chin. The eyebrows and cosmetic lines are modeled in low relief and painted green. The bronze sockets of the eyes are inlaid with polished white limestone and black obsidian. The ears were modeled entirely in gesso and are pushed forward by the wig, which is painted with green and yellow stripes. The wig falls behind the ears in thick, symmetrical lappets, framing the face. The green stripes on the cheeks are the straps of a false beard, now lost, which symbolized the dead man’s association with Osiris, god of the Underworld. Around his neck, the man wears a broad collar with rows of green tubular and pendant beads separated by yellow bands.

On the back of the mask is an inscription, written in black paint in cursive hieroglyphs, identifying the occupant of the coffin as "Wadj-shemsi-su, engendered by Betyu-ka (his father), born of [...] (his mother)." This is followed by part of Spell 17 from the Book of the Dead, which identifies the deceased with the creator deity and provides information on the nature of the sun god, the gods of his entourage, and the geography of the Underworld. The text hovered above the face of the deceased, who would read it during his journey into the Underworld. By teaching passwords, giving clues, and revealing routes that would allow him to answer questions and navigate around hazards, the Book of the Dead enabled Wadj-shemsi-su to overcome obstacles and not lose his way during the perilous journey undertaken by his soul. In addition, it granted the help and protection of the gods while proclaiming his identity with them. These measures alone, however, were not enough, since the Egyptians also considered it necessary for the body itself to be preserved as a physical counterpart to the transient soul. The body of the deceased had to be carefully mummmified in order to preserve it within its coffin.

- *Handbook Entry, 2013*
Asante artist

**Man’s wrapper (kente), 20th century**

Cotton, rayon, and dye

h. 332.1 cm x 229.4 cm (130 3/4 x 90 5/16 in.)

Bequest of John B. Elliott, Class of 1951

1998-697

Asante Kente cloths are made by stitching together strips of woven fabric that alternate warp- and weft-faced weave, resulting in a checkered effect. Once a royal textile whose use was carefully restricted, kente is now the national cloth of Ghana and an international symbol of pan-Africanism. Kente is draped around the body without fasteners, requiring constant readjustment or “dancing” of the cloth, allowing its patterns to be seen in constant movement. Both whole cloths and smaller patterns are named for proverbs, objects, and people. Exhibiting the skill of the weaver, named weft-faced patterns are concentrated at the cloth’s ends. This large, 27-strip men’s wrapper includes *nnwọtoa* (“snail’s bottom”) and two variations of *nkyɛmfre* (“broken pots”).

- **Gallery Label, 2014-04-30, “Akan Art” Collection Theme for website**

Rings were a prominent aspect of the royal regalia—rulers often wore two or more on each hand. They were worn only by chiefs, along with velvet hats trimmed with gold-leaf attachments and neck and elbow amulets. Solid or gold-leaf bracelets were worn by chiefs and the queen mother. Other items symbolized rank and prestige for members of the royal retinue. The pectoral disc, or “soul washers” badge, often identified the official who purified or “washed” the chief’s soul. At other times, these were worn by messengers, sub-chiefs, and other officials. The “linguist’s” staffs derived from silver-topped European canes introduced in the seventeenth century. Once held by the chief, they are now the insignia of office for the chiefs’ counselors and spokesmen. The complexly carved finials functioned as visual conveyers of meaning.

- **Gallery Label, 2012-09, Fall 2012 African Rotation**

Igbo artist

**Shrine figure (ikenga), first half of the 20th century**

Wood and paint

116.0 cm x 30.0 cm x 30.0 cm (45 11/16 x 11 13/16 x 11 13/16 in.)

Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund

2010-129
Ikenga are figural shrines made by the Igbo, who are known for their focus on personal achievement and a system of titles based on earned status. Offerings made to ikenga are meant to ensure accomplishment in spiritual, economic, political, and military ventures. The large size and complex iconography of this example suggest that it was a communal ikenga belonging to a lineage, community, or age grade of elevated status. The figure's staff of authority, elephant tusk, anklets, and scarification marks reveal the high rank of the group that owned it. Horns, physical representations of power and aggression, are present on all ikenga figures. On this ikenga, however, the sculptor has expanded what are often simple curved horns into a complex openwork headdress of sacred pythons, the embodiment of the goddess Idemili.

- Gallery Label, 2019-08, Women in the Arts of Africa

The Igbo people are known for their dedication to individual accomplishment and for adhering to a system of titles based on earned status. Ikenga reflect this focus on achievement. Offerings made to this type of ikenga were intended to support a community's spiritual, economic, political, and military success and were ceremonially paraded at the annual ikenga festival. The large size, complexity, and iconography of the Princeton work confirm its position as a communal rather than personal ikenga. Offerings made to this type of ikenga were intended to support the success of the group's endeavors and were ceremonially paraded at the annual ikenga festival in a show of community solidarity. The work's iconography reveals the elevated status of its owners group. Ichi scarification marks of senior titleholders cover the forehead. Other indications of high rank include a staff of authority, elephant tusk, and ivory anklets. Horns—physical representations of power and aggression—are present on all ikenga. This artist has elaborated what are often simple curved horns into a complex, openwork headdress of sacred pythons, the embodiment of an Igbo goddess.

- Gallery Label, 2015-03, African Rotation March 2015, also African Rotation September 2013

The Igbo people are known for their dedication to individual accomplishment and for adhering to a system of titles based on earned status: ikenga are the sculptural reflections of this focus on achievement. As altars to success, offerings made to ikenga are meant to ensure accomplishment in many ventures: spiritual, economic, political, and military.

The large size, complexity, and iconography of the Princeton work confirm its position as a communal rather than personal ikenga. Offerings made to this type of ikenga were intended to support the success of the group's endeavors and were ceremonially paraded at the annual ikenga festival in a show of community solidarity.

The work's iconography reveals the elevated status of its owners group. Ichi scarification marks of senior titleholders cover the forehead. Other indications of high rank include a staff of authority, elephant tusk, and ivory anklets. Horns—physical representations of power and aggression—are present on all ikenga. This artist has elaborated what are often simple curved horns into a complex, openwork headdress of sacred pythons, the embodiment of an Igbo goddess.

- Gallery Label, 2011
The Igbo peoples are known for their dedication to individual accomplishment and a system of titles based on earned status: ikenga are the sculptural concentration of this focus on achievement made into a figural shrine. Offerings to ikenga, altars to success, are meant to ensure accomplishment in many ventures: spiritual, economic, political, and military. The large size, complexity, and iconography of the Princeton work, created by a sculptor working in the Nteje area of eastern Nigeria, confirm its position as a communal ikenga as opposed to a personal one. As such, it belonged to a family, village, or age grade, and offerings made to it supported the group's endeavors rather than the personal deeds of its members. Communal ikenga were ceremonially paraded at the annual ikenga festival in a show of community solidarity when all males born the previous year were brought before them.

The work's iconography reveals the elevated status of its ownership group. Striations representing ichi scarification marks cover the forehead. Ichii marks were the prerogative of an ozo titleholder, the Igbo system of hierarchical titles based on personal integrity, wealth, and achievement. Other indications of high rank include a staff of authority, elephant tusk, and ivory anklets. Horns, physical representations of power and aggression, are the one constant on all ikenga figures regardless of size, sculptural style, or, most importantly, the rank of the owner. In a demonstration of his sculptural virtuosity and creativity, the Igbo artist has elaborated what are frequently simple curved horns into a complex openwork headdress of sacred pythons, the embodiments of the Igbo goddess Idemili. Overall the superstructure is reminiscent of many masks of the Mgbdeike type. Mgbdeike masqueraders sometimes wear costumes made of cloth or metal plates that resemble the figure's layered shirt. The references to this masquerade suggest a powerful male presence.

- *Handbook Entry, 2013*

Ndebele artist

*Married woman's ceremonial apron (jocolo), mid-20th century*

Glass beads, goat skin, brass rings, and thread

66 × 56 cm (26 × 22 1/16 in.)

Museum purchase, Mary Trumbull Adams Art Fund, and anonymous gift 2019-12

Different types of Ndebele aprons are made and worn by women to denote their stage of life. Upon marriage and then on special occasions, the woman wears the jocolo, an apron with five fingerlike panels suggesting the children she will bear. Created by her mother-in-law, the apron was traditionally made of animal skin decorated with a background of small white beads and a colored central design. The Ndebele are known for decorating their homes with geometric wall paintings, and the abstract homestead motif seen here became popular on jocolo around the mid-twentieth century, allowing us to date the apron. Although retained here, the brass beads at the waist were valuable and often removed before the jocolo was sold.

- *Gallery Label, 2019-08, Women and the Arts of Africa*