

Ox-shaped Vessel

Carefully moulded in Lopburi, Thailand, using clay, 2,000 years ago.



Vessel in the shape of a water buffalo | Lopburi, Thailand, 300 BC to AD 200, Ceramic (ox-shaped)

Background information

The ox was symbolic of a farmer's wealth, as this was traditionally measured by the number of cattle owned. The ox is considered by many of the peoples of Southeast Asia to have a soul – a clear representation of an animal worthy of worship. Valued for its usefulness and docility, it is also a powerful symbol across the region, representing wealth, status, and sincerity. The ox also had an important role in wet rice cultivation.

This ox-shaped vessel was made of clay and fired at low temperature in a kiln. The resulting material is called earthenware. The form was hand-built, perhaps using coils of clay to construct the walls of the vessel, and still bears the fingerprints of its maker. The opening on its back was probably used to hold water. The vessel features of the ox have been clearly incised.

The ox is the main agricultural beast of burden in flooded rice paddies. Domesticated 4,500 years ago, its natural habitat is the river wetlands of Southeast Asia. Valued for its usefulness and docility, it is also a powerful symbol across the region.

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Proposed Activities

STUDENTS WILL LEARN ABOUT

- Burial pottery
- Symbolism of prehistoric Southeast Asia

GLOSSARY

Earthenware is a type of pottery made from clay and fired at a low temperature.



LOOKING ACTIVITIES

1. Describe the animal depicted in this object. Does it have horns? How strong do you think it is? What kind of items do you think it can carry?
2. Look at the material used to make this object. Is the texture smooth or rough? Do you think it took a long time or a short time to create this sculpture? How old do you think this vessel is?
3. Compare the ox's pose to an animal you've seen. What animal does it remind you of?



MAKING ACTIVITIES

1. Draw a scene to show how an ox might be used for work in a rice field.
2. Write a short paragraph on an animal you would like to be a symbol of strength and protection. Why did you choose it?
3. Using clay, create a sculpture of an ox to show its strength and power. How would you pose it?



CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

English

Create a story based on the ox vessel. Imagine yourself as the sculptor, why do you want to sculpt the vessel in the shape of an ox? What is its story?

Art

1. Why do you think clay was used to create this sculpture?
2. What material would you have used? Why? Would it last as long as the clay?
3. Carve an image on clay. Learn to design, carve, and create a sculpture in 3-dimensions.

Geography

Locate the different countries where an ox would have been used for agriculture. Which countries are known for exporting rice?