

# ACM WONDERS

Suitable for ages 13 and up

# ACM

## VESSEL IN THE SHAPE OF A WATER BUFFALO

Handmade in Dong Marum,  
Lopburi, Thailand, about  
2,000 years ago

### Background Information

The more oxen a farmer owned, the more the farm could produce. Valued for its usefulness and docility, it is also a powerful symbol across the region, representing wealth, status, and sincerity.

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 it. If you look closely, you can see the fingerprints of its maker on the surface. The hollow back was probably used to hold water. It could have been used during important ceremonies, or placed in a tomb.

The ox also has had an important role in wet rice cultivation. It is the main agricultural beast of burden used in flooded rice paddies. Domesticated 4,500 years ago, its natural habitat is the river wetlands of Southeast Asia.



Vessel in the shape of a water buffalo  
Earthenware  
21.6 x 33.5 x 10.8 cm  
Asian Civilisations Museum  
1996-00120

# LET'S DISCOVER

Learn about symbolism in prehistoric Southeast Asia, and the significance of burial pottery.

## FUN FACT

Many of the peoples of Southeast Asia think the ox has a soul, and thus is an animal worthy of worship.

## GLOSSARY

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

**Burial pottery**, or grave goods, were often made in ancient times. They were thought to provide the dead with items that they would need in the afterlife. The amount and types of these goods found in graves show the economic status of the person buried there.

**Ploughing** fields helps to prepare the soil for planting crops. As the earth is broken up, nutrients from beneath come up to the surface, and the soil is better able to absorb moisture as air pockets are created.

Produced by the Asian Civilisations Museum  
1 Empress Place Singapore 179555  
[www.acm.org.sg](http://www.acm.org.sg)  
© 2021 Asian Civilisations Museum

## LET'S LOOK CLOSELY

Use these guidelines to discover details about this object.

1. **LOOK** closely at this object and note its shape, size, and texture. What do you think it was used for?
2. **IMAGINE** yourself as the sculptor of this vessel. Why did you want to sculpt the vessel in the shape of an ox? What is its story?
3. **WRITE** a short paragraph on an animal you would like to use as a symbol of strength and protection. Why did you choose it?

## CREATE AT HOME

Continue the experience at home by doing these activities. Tag us @ACM\_SG for a chance to get your design featured.

4. **DRAW** a scene to show how an ox might be used to help with ploughing, then **COMPARE** your drawing to an actual photograph you find online.

**LOCATE** the different countries where an ox would have been used for agriculture. What crops are these countries known for producing? Are oxen still used in some countries?