

ACM WONDERS

Suitable for ages 13 and up

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ZOOMORPHIC KETTLE

Cast in brass, in Brunei, in
the 19th century

Background Information

This brass kettle is decorated with motifs borrowed from popular Chinese culture: dragon, frog, fish – and the shape is like a turtle. Animals like these are often featured on the exterior of kettles made in Brunei and they have special meanings. The turtle symbolises a long life and the frog symbolises fertility. Kettles were, and are still, used today as water containers at many Malay gatherings and parties that featured communal feasting. Diners would wash their hands before and after meals with water from these kettles.

Brunei is known for its metalwork, especially in brass and silver. Artisans who worked on metal objects were highly valued for their craftsmanship. They produced kettles, gongs, cannons, and other objects with decoration similar to what you see here.

Brass production peaked in the 16th and 17th centuries, then began to decline in the 19th century due to competition from European imported goods. Brunei culture was influenced by trading connections with the rest of Southeast Asia, Middle East, and China. The production of this Brunei brassware reflects similarities in techniques, forms, and decorations among these cultural traditions.



Zoomorphic kettle
Brunei, 19th century
Brass, height 19 x 27.2 cm
Asian Civilisations Museum
XXXX-02920

LET'S DISCOVER

Learn about the cross-cultural motifs on this kettle.

FUN FACT

There are many examples of old brassware in Brunei and other places on Borneo that exhibit Chinese influences, such as dragon decoration.

GLOSSARY

A **zoomorphic** object is in the shape of an animal.

Brass is an alloy (mix of metals) made from copper and zinc. It is malleable and easy to cast into different shapes.

LET'S LOOK CLOSELY

Use these guidelines to discover details about this object.

1. **LOOK** closely at the kettle. Can you spot the different creatures on the object?
2. **EXAMINE** the material of the kettle. Do you think its texture is smooth or rough? How long do you think it took to make this kettle?
3. **THINK** about the importance of symbols in various cultures. **RESEARCH** online about the symbolism of the various creatures found on this kettle.

CREATE AT HOME

Continue the experience at home by doing these activities. Send us your work @ACM_SG for a chance to get featured.

4. **START** collecting recyclable objects in your home. **DESIGN** an object or container with an animal face and tail, and then **CONSTRUCT** it.
5. Brunei is on the island of Borneo. The country has a rich biodiversity in its tropical rainforests and bodies of water. Turtles are a protected species in Brunei.

RESEARCH and **CREATE** a poster or **WRITE** a story advocating for the protection of endangered animals.

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1 Empress Place Singapore 179555
www.acm.org.sg
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