



## **Objects from Doncaster Museum and Art Gallery's World Cultures collection**

### **World Cultures**

The World Cultures collection contains cultural artefacts from around the globe. Areas in which the collection is strong are Africa, India and Pakistan and Oceania (Australia and the South Seas Islands).

The first major donation came in 1933 with 90 weapons from the collection of Major Peake of Bawtry Hall. Major Peake possibly collected the weapons while travelling with his regiment. Another large donation was made by the Church Missionary Society. Their collection relates to many of the countries in which the society was active, such as Africa, North America, China, India, Australia and the Middle East.

The collection contains several crowd-pleasing objects. One such item is the Samurai armour, donated by Mr Roy Hatfield who brought it back from Japan. Many visitors old enough to remember the old museum at Beechfield, recall this armour on open display by the staircase. Unfortunately its many years on display have left it needing conservation before it can be safely displayed again.

A recent report on the World Cultures collection has given us an idea of the strengths and scope of the collection. It highlighted several groups of objects such as costume, jewellery, weaponry and musical instruments that have very interesting cultural stories to tell.

This collection has the ability to draw different cultures together to celebrate the diversity of human art, craft and social expression. It is a window on the heritage of a wider world.

## San-xian

### Yantzi Valley, southern China

*San-xian* literally translated means three-strings, which aptly describes this three-stringed musical instrument. It has a dry percussive tone and loud volume, similar to a banjo or lute. The body and neck is made from red sandalwood, and the resonance box is covered with python skin.

There are two types of *san-xian*. A northern version is often about 122cm in length, and a southern one is shorter, at about 95cm. The larger instrument has a range of three octaves, whilst the smaller one achieves two and a half. Being around 78cm in length, this is the smaller, southern, *san-xian*.

In China, the *san-xian* is sometimes called a *quixian*, meaning storytelling string, because of its accompaniment to kunqu opera and tanci narrative song. Traditionally, the strings are plucked with a hard plectrum made of animal horn, but often the fingernails are grown long for the purpose. In traditional Chinese song music, the *san-xian* was the most popular musical accompaniment. But in modern China, pupils of the instrument are declining and it is rarely played.

DONMG ZW1301



**Shark tooth sword**  
**Kirabati people, Gilbert Islands, Micronesia**

These shark tooth weapons are unique to the Gilbert Islands. Called *tebutje*, they are made by the Kirabati, the main inhabitants of the islands. The body of the knife is carved from Coconut Palm, and the sharks' teeth are from two species found at the reefs around the islands. The teeth are bound to the body with cord made from coconut fibre, known as coir.

Warfare on these islands was commonplace, and often occurred as a result of disputes over land possession or titles. These knives, and other weapons made using sharks' teeth, were incredibly effective and inflicted gruesome laceration wounds. To combat this, the islanders developed a unique style of armour made from the only abundant material on the island, coconut fibre. They formed this into thick matted plates, which they stitched together to make segmented body armour and even helmets.

When missionaries arrived, warfare was brought to an end, and this type of weaponry became obsolete.

The Gilbert Islands are made up of a chain of 33 small atolls in the Pacific Ocean. They were first visited by missionaries as early as 1857, and were made a British Protectorate in 1892.

DONMG 1933.54.1  
Major Peake Collection



## Silk embroidered kameez

### India/Pakistan

Traditionally worn with trousers known as *salwar*, this *kameez* formed part of an outfit known as a *salwar-kameez*. This originated in twelfth century Iran, and gradually migrated to Pakistan and India where the style of garb is still worn. Originally it was an outfit designed for and worn by men, but in modern times is more commonly worn by women. It is often accompanied by a scarf, called a *dipatta*, placed over the head.

This *kameez* is quite small and therefore probably part of a child's clothing. It is made from finely woven silk and is intricately embroidered. The *salwar-kameez* is ordinarily made from cotton for everyday wear. Silk is reserved for special occasions like weddings, and for important religious or social festivals.

Silk originally came from China, a product of the silkworm, which excretes silk thread as a product of eating mulberry leaves. Silk production is thought to have reached India around two thousand years ago, brought by traders along the famous silk route that wound its way through India, the Near East and into Europe. Today India uses more silk than any other country, and is its second largest producer.

DONMG ZW1604



## **Silk embroidered shoes**

### **China**

These tiny shoes are not those of a baby but of a fully-grown adult woman. For thousands of years, Chinese women practiced foot-binding. In Chinese culture, small feet were considered a symbol of beauty, elegance, wealth and status. Far from being considered a form of mutilation, they were considered a form of adornment and embellishment. This was linked to the ideals of propriety, chastity, civility and culture, which were a prerequisite to the brokering of a successful marriage.

Girls' feet were bound from between the ages of three and eleven years old, in an attempt to achieve a perfect foot size of just three inches.

Binding was undertaken from such a young age with the justification that the cartilage in adolescent feet had not yet solidified into bone. It was therefore easier and less painful to manipulate. Binding was often initiated in late winter when, due to the cold, feet were numbed and so the process was less painful. It began by breaking the toes and folding them under the foot, and then binding the foot tightly. This pulled the arch of the foot towards the heel. The process was continued by the foot being successively bent more severely and bound more tightly. In order to stop infection, the feet were regularly cleaned, toenails cut, and dressings changed.

DONMG ZW1935



## Samurai armour

### Japan/China

One of Doncaster Museum's most fondly remembered objects is the samurai suit of armour. For many years, it was on display by the staircase in Beechfield House. Unfortunately, due to being on open display for so long, the suit of armour is in desperate need of treatment by specialist conservators.

The suit of armour was donated to the museum (accession number 1923.58) by a Mrs Hatfield, widow of Mr Roy Berriman Hatfield. Mr Hatfield purportedly received the suit as a gift whilst working as an aide to the governor of Hong Kong a century ago. The suit was published as part of a story in the *Doncaster Gazette* of 15 February 1924.

Displayed here are a samurai helmet (*kabuto*), sword (*katana*) and dagger (*wakizashi*), to represent the popular armour display once on show at Beechfield.

The samurai were highly skilled warriors drafted from the Japanese middle class. Their origin can be traced to the twelfth century, and they flourished until the early nineteenth century. They were the protectors of the emperor.

Samurai body armour consists of several major elements. These are the *do* or breast-plate to protect the torso, a pair of *sodie*, or shoulder-protectors, one or two *kote*, which were arm-protectors, a *kusazuri*, an apron that protected the hips, a pair of *haidate* to protect the thighs, and *suneate*, which were greaves to protect the shins.

Interestingly the *kabuto* (helmet) and *mempo* (face mask) were the inspiration behind the helmet of a famous sci-fi character...Darth Vader from *Star Wars*.

**DONMG 1916.29, ZW203, ZW2552**



## Ivory gaming pieces (ducks and seals)

### Yupik Nation, St Lawrence Island, Canada

These beautiful and endearing little caricatures of ducks and seals are part of a game played all across northern Alaska, Canada and Greenland. Depending on where in Canada it is found, the game is called either *meteghlluwaaghet* or *tingmiujaq*. Played by both adults and children, it has many subtle variations in the rules. The basic game has similarities with ancient games from Europe like knuckle-bones, known more commonly now as jacks.

The game is for two or more players and is played in two parts. To begin with, the ducks are divided evenly amongst the players. Each player then takes it in turn to cup the ducks in his hands and drop them to the floor. They are only permitted to pick up those birds that are sitting upright (in one rule variation they even have to be facing, beak pointed in their direction). The opponent wins any ducks that are not upright. Once each player has had his turn, round two begins, referred to as duelling. Each player takes one of his opponent's ducks and one of his own. Holding them by their beaks (heads together) between finger and thumb, they rub them together and flip them to the floor. Whichever duck is standing wins, and the winner takes the loser's bird. This is repeated until one player has all the pieces and the game is won.

DONMG ZW2564-65



## Circumcision mask

### Ubangi tribe (?), Zaïre, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo

This mask, known in the region it comes from as a *dagara*, is associated with the 'Ngbaka' or 'Gaza' initiation. This is a coming of age initiation for boys and girls. At around the age of 13, a group of up to 30 boys and girls are isolated from their villages for three months. They are sent to live in a secret camp in the forest or on the savannah. Here they receive intensive training and education in the spiritual beliefs and practices of their ethnic group, and are taught about the responsibilities of adulthood. The initiation finishes with a ritual circumcision, entering them into adulthood and allowing them to marry. The mask is worn during the circumcision rites. On returning to their village, the youngsters are greeted with celebrations consisting of music and dance, and a feast is held in their honour.

The masks of the Ubangi are apparently recognisable by the serrated ribbing down the centre of the forehead. This is sometimes also repeated on the nose, cheeks and behind the ears.

DONMG 1985.129



## Wooden puppet

### Ibibio Nation, Akwa-Ibom state, Cross River area, SE Nigeria

This curious wooden figurine is typical of the skilfully carved wooden puppets of the Ibibio people of SE Nigeria. These people are well known for their puppet theatres, used to entertain, narrate history and culture, instruct and educate, control and pass social commentary. The puppets often have moving limbs and jaws. This particular puppet only has moving arms. Puppet theatre can only be performed by men initiated into the 'Ekon'. Performances are often humorous, but carry serious content. Puppeteers are guaranteed anonymity and protection, allowing them to parody village life and satirise important tribal members, without fear of reprisal.

The figure is rather curiously depicted as wearing a trilby and knee-high socks. It has the general appearance of a white European, but the characteristics of an African. It is possible that the puppet is meant to satirise white European missionaries or colonial officials. It is therefore an incredibly interesting puppet, a symbol of contact between the native Africans and interloper Europeans from the nineteenth century onwards.

There are other examples of Ibibio puppets in museums across the world, and many share certain characteristics with this example. The main one is that they are often painted white, as this colour symbolises good, beauty and wealth.

**DONMG ZW791**



## Brass anklets (matching pair)

### Igbo tribe, Awka-Orlu Plateau, NE Nigeria

These anklets are characteristic of the Igbo tribe of NE Nigeria. Made by specialist itinerant metalsmiths (known as the Awka), from a small village, Igbo-Ukwa, the anklets are called *ogba*. They were beaten from a solid brass bar, and decorated with punch-dot and incised-line decoration. This consisted of a combination of geometric patterns and zoomorphic (animal) imagery, the meaning of which has not been established.

The anklets formed part of a newly married woman's dowry, and were a symbol of their high social status. The status derived from the fact that brass was a very rare commodity and therefore considered a precious metal. Because the anklets restricted movement and prevented women from carrying out normal domestic duties, this also conveyed their status as privileged.

The anklets are so cumbersome and heavy that they caused the wearer to walk with a rolling gait. A movement which women of lower social standing imitated, to suggest they were accustomed to wearing them, and were therefore of a higher class within their society.

DONMG 1985.217



## Aboriginal shield

### Northern Queensland, Australia

Known in the Queensland tribal areas as a *balan bigin*, this shield is typical of the type made and used by the First Nation cultures of this region of Australia. The shield is made from a single piece of the magurra or mibir fig, cut often from the thick sprawling buttress-like roots of the tree. Only initiated men who had become warriors were allowed to make these shields.

The shields were painted with many different designs, representing the different tribal groups of the Queensland area. Permission for the design to be used had to be sought, and approved by tribal elders. The designs consist largely of geometric patterns, and natural pigments are used giving the following range of colours: white, yellow, red and black.

The smaller shields like this one were apparently for use in hand-to-hand combat, when wooden clubs were common assault weapons.

First Nations people from the Tully River tribal area are known to have used red stripes as decoration on their shields. That may indicate this shield's original owners. You can make out red ochre pigment, now faint, painted in thick bands at the top and bottom of the shield.

DONMG 1919.7

