

Higher Powers

Of People, Gods and Forces of Nature

The year 2020 was dominated by one topic: the Covid pandemic. Austria began its first lockdown on 16 March. The streets in the Inner City not far from our museums were deserted. But not completely. At the Plague Column, erected on the Graben following the 1679 epidemic, people lit candles, left flowers and drawings. They were hoping for divine mercy and succour during this crisis. These votive offerings at the Plague Column moved us and showed us that in modern societies, too, people appeal to higher powers.

But what are these higher powers? Are they deities or spirits who punish us for our behaviour and reward us for making sacrificial offerings? Are they natural forces that suddenly burst into our life, bringing destructive storms, floods, fires and illnesses? Or are our lives and the state of our planet only determined by worldly powers after all?

These are the questions we pursued while conceiving this exhibition. The artefacts selected by curators from the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, the Theaternuseum and the Weltmuseum Wien could not be more diverse. Their combination is surprising, even disconcerting and supposed to raise many new questions. Their disparity opens new conceptual spaces and new perspectives that at times and without warning are invaded by the present. Visitors will bring their own ideas to the exhibition. Prior to the opening, the public already participated: good luck charms and texts sent in by private individuals complement the objects of our collections and offer fresh views on them.

Turning to higher powers – regardless of whether they are natural forces, people, or deities – may not solve many of the problems we encounter today, but it may give us the strength to face them – which is also our wish for visitors to this exhibition.

**With every power for good to
stay and guide me, / comforted
and inspired beyond all fear, /
I'll live these days with you in
thought beside me, / and pass,
with you, into the coming year.
Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

**Yet there are others who say,
"Our Lord! Grant us the good of
this world and the Hereafter, and
protect us from the torment of
the Fire."
Sura 2:201**

**(We welcome) her, (the goddess),
who by batting her eyelids creates
and destroys the universe.
Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa, Lalitā Sahasranāma**

Room I

Forces of Nature

We begin with the four elements – Air, Water, Earth, Fire – because they are the fundamentals of life. It is no accident that they were, and in some cases continue to be, regarded and venerated as deities or spirits.

The volatile element Air opens the exhibition, symbolized by a costume designed by Ernst Fuchs. People used to believe that bad air was the cause of numerous illnesses – today we know that it can transmit diseases. For instance, the storm demon of the Ticuna people in Brazil spreads epidemics. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, however, helpful airy spirits are called upon.

Water combines tranquillity and motion. Arcimboldo's painting *Water* depicts the abundance of nature. Floods can be harbingers of renewed fertility, as in ancient Egypt. Or they can be interpreted as divine punishment: countless stories, from the Epic of Gilgamesh to ancient Greek myths to the Bible, tell of this. Storms and mighty waters are often wielded by powerful demons or deities.

Earth gives us stability and reliability. Bruegel's *The Gloomy Day (Early Spring)* depicts man as part of the annual cycle and of nature. By mining ores, we interfere with the earth's structure. Volcanic eruptions destroy settlements but also deposit fertile soils.

Fire is strong and gives us warmth and food that is more easily digested. But it also means destruction, to which the sad remains of the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro bear witness.

Hurricanes, floods, earthquakes or volcanic eruptions confront us with elemental, unfathomable powers. Experiencing the sheer strength and power of these natural forces first-hand makes us suddenly feel small and powerless.

1 **Costume for the role of Air in *Il lutto dell'universo***

Ernst Fuchs (costume design), Ernst Steiner (mask)

1977

Synthetic tulle and cloth, partially padded and draped, sprayed with paint; papier mâché, painted

Theatermuseum, Vienna

In *Il Lutto dell'universo* (The Mourning of the Universe), the four elements of Earth, Fire, Air and Water lament the crucifixion of Christ. The music for this staged oratorio was composed by Emperor Leopold I. Evoking threatening thunderclouds, the voluminous floating costume reinterprets Baroque drama for the 1970s. The role, sung by Henri Ledroit in the 1977 production, was written for counter-tenor and thus elevated into the realms of the lofty and fantastical. AS

2 **Landscape with Airy Spirits from *The Tempest* (William Shakespeare)**

Oskar Laske

1925

Watercolour, gouache and pencil on paper

Theatermuseum, Vienna

The *Tempest* is a play full of deception and disorientation, and revolves around the figure of Prospero, duke of Milan. Usurped by his brother, he is put to sea in a boat, fetching up on a remote island, where he frees Ariel, a spirit of the air. With the latter's aid he is able to command spirits and

the forces of nature, who will eventually help him to restore his honour. In this set design, Oskar Laske endows the appearance of the airy spirits with a positively dreamlike quality. As Prospero says, we too are »such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep.« RR

3 **Mary in the Storm**

Mileva Roller

1914

Coloured etching

Theatermuseum, Vienna

Amidst clouds, rain and lightning a female figure hovers above the ground, hair and veil billowing to the right over her and her two children. The work is dated 1914, and thus the storm they are exposed to can be interpreted as an allusion to the outbreak of the First World War. Although the artist is here citing the pictorial type of the Virgin of Mercy, in which Mary is seen sheltering the faithful beneath her capacious mantle, it is at the same time a self-portrait: at this point she was the mother of two sons aged three and five. DF

4 Allegory of the Elements of Water and Air

Matthias Steinl

Wrocław (Breslau) or Vienna, c.1688

Walrus tusk

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstammer

From the realm of Water – a seabed teeming with marine creatures, a merman and an equally athletic youth – a wave surges upwards in the form of a sensuously rendered young woman reaching for the air. For its part, Air is embodied by a putto in flight, who is peering into the shell proffered by the wave. Ancient lore held that pearls were created when shells floated to the surface of the water and opened in order to be fertilized by the dew from the sky. KS

5 Iansã

Brazil, 2016

Ceramic, plaster, textile, tin, animal hair (horse or cow), plastic foil, beads, synthetic adhesive

Weltmuseum Wien

In the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé religion the *orixás* (deities) are closely bound up with the natural elements. Iansã is the *orixá* of the wind, the air, the rain and lightning. As the mother of the ancestral spirits she ensures the connection between this world and the world of the spirits. She can be identified by her oxtail whip, as she transformed herself from a buffalo into a woman. Her favourite dishes

of chicken, grapes and goats are dressed with palm oil. Her colour is red. CA

6 Mural relief with sacrificial procession

Egyptian, New Kingdom, 19th Dynasty, time of Ramses II, c.1304–1237 BCE

Limestone

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Egyptian and Near Eastern Collection

Only by virtue of the River Nile and its annual floods was it possible for Ancient Egypt's advanced civilization to flourish as it did. In this procession two male Nile gods can be seen. Typical features of these figures are the pendulous breasts and stomach, attributes that also mark them out as gods of vegetation and fertility. They bear offerings of aquatic plants, birds and their nests as well as fish. On the outer right stands a female deity, also bearing sacrificial offerings. MH

7 Water

Giuseppe Arcimboldo

1566

Alder panel

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Picture Gallery

An ingenious and artful assemblage of marine creatures, including fish, crustaceans and shells, results in a bizarre head in profile that illustrates the riches of the sea. The figure wears a crown formed from the spines of a sea urchin, a reference to Emperor Maximilian II, the first owner of Arcimboldo's *Four Elements*. FDS

8 Stormy Landscape with Jupiter, Mercury, Philemon and Baucis

Peter Paul Rubens

1620–1636

Oak panel

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Picture Gallery

The forces of Nature are unleashed. In the background the clouds break, discharging vast quantities of rain upon the land. Humans and animals fight for their lives or have already lost the struggle. On the right a group of people is being led to safety by gods. Jupiter looks back: it is he who has conjured up this flood. In disguise, he and Mercury tested mortals by asking for food and shelter at every dwelling they passed, but no one was willing to give them

succour. Only the aged couple Philemon and Baucis, despite their poverty, offer them hospitality and are therefore spared a watery fate. DU

9 Statuette of Jupiter Dolichenus

Roman imperial era, 1st half of 3rd cent. BCE

From the deposit found at Mauer an der Url (Lower Austria)

Bronze

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities

The thunderbolt is one of Jupiter's most essential implements: as the god of the sky he sends signs to earth in the form of lightning. In this figure Jupiter is merged with a city and weather deity from Doliche (modern-day Dülük) in Eastern Anatolia: clad in a Phrygian cap and armour, he stands on a bull and holds a thunderbolt and the double axe (now lost). His cult became widespread, as it was popular among Roman soldiery. The inscription on the base tells us the statuette was dedicated by the veteran Marrius Ursinus. KZO

10 Mask costume of the storm demon O'ma

Brazil, Ticuna, c.1830

Tapa cloth, bark, bark bast, plant fibres, tar, pigment, feathers

Weltmuseum Wien

Ticuna settlements are surrounded by dense rainforest, in which dwell spirit-beings that can have a positive or negative influence on human life. They are particularly dangerous for children, as they steal their souls, thereby causing them to sicken and die.

Among the most dangerous of these spirit-beings is the storm spirit O'ma. He roams the forest, tearing down trees and harming crops. He is also said to be responsible for causing epidemics. CA

11 Ornamental ewer with seychelles nut

Anton Schweinberger and Nikolaus Pfaff (carving, attr.)

Prague, 1602

Coco de mer; silver, parcel-gilt; niello

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstammer

Until well into the eighteenth century the seychelles nut, the seed of the sea coconut palm, was held to be a fruit originating from the depths of the ocean, watched over by huge birds and dragons. It was said to possess wondrous medical virtues and even regarded by some as the panacea, the legendary remedy for all diseases. With Neptune on its lid and sea-dwellers on the sides and foot, the ewer alludes to water

both as the exotic rarity's purported origin and as a fertile and live-giving element. PR

12 Indra

Nepal, 14th cent.

Bronze

Weltmuseum Wien

In the Old Indic Veda religion Indra features as the highest god of Heaven, the war-like god of rain and storms. He is also regarded as a god of fertility and creation, and as the king of Heaven. In general he embodies nature's productive forces. Indra is the most famous god of the Vedic age and the deity most frequently invoked and extolled. According to the Vedas, he is the one who crushes all resistance. CS

13 The Flood

Lodovico Ottavio Burnacini

End of 17th cent.

Pencil and ink on paper

Theatermuseum, Vienna

»And the waters prevailed ... And all flesh died that moved upon the earth ... and every man.« Thus runs the description of the Flood in the first book of the Bible. Burnacini shows the dramatic events of a devastating natural catastrophe. All attempts at rescue are futile, for anyone who is not safely aboard Noah's ark is delivered up to the raging waters. The drawing displays similarities with a relief on the Plague Column on the Graben in Vienna, which was also designed by Burnacini. RR

14 Representation of an Earthquake

Published by Martin Engelbrecht, Augsburg

c.1755–1760

Coloured etchings mounted on card and cut out

Theatermuseum, Vienna

On 1 November 1755 a massive earthquake destroyed large parts of Lisbon, killing tens of thousands. The event was widely reported in contemporary accounts, setting off a discourse in which scientific explanations and supernatural interpretations were ranged against each other: were natural catastrophes purely physical phenomena or punishments

inflicted by God? This representation of the event in the form of perspective scenery for a zograscope (an early form of peep-show) is a particularly fine aesthetic example of the way the event was exploited in the media of the time. DF

15 The Gloomy Day (Early Spring)

Pieter Bruegel the Elder

1565

Oak panel

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Picture Gallery

The devastating impact of the natural catastrophes of late winter determines the fates of humankind. Villagers are mending the damage caused to their houses. Stormy seas flood the land, capsizing ships. But all this evidently fails to perturb the little carnival king and the man eating waffles on the right in the foreground.

The majestic mountains in the background are a reminder that Bruegel, a native of the Low Countries, left a record in his works of his impressions of the Alps, which he had crossed on his return journey from Italy. SP

Two further paintings by Bruegel from the series of the Seasons are displayed in Gallery X.

16 Hand stone with model of a mine

Matthias Scrawuth, Franz Xaver Glantz

Kremnica (Slovakia, formerly Kingdom of Hungary), c.1764

Minerals; silver, parcel-gilt

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstammer

Hand stones are specimens of ore or mineral samples that stand out by reason of their natural size, form or beauty. In the sixteenth century these unusual »gifts« of the earth were often fitted with bases and displayed in European princely collections, as was this model of a mine in which we encounter the three elements of earth, fire and water. The »fire machine« pumps out water from the deep galleries of the mine in order to permit access to the »fruits« of the earth. PR

17 Rockhole Site of Ngalurrilyinga – Tingari Cycle

Charlie Tjapangati

1997

Acrylic on canvas

Weltmuseum Wien

For the Aboriginal people the landscape is marked with paths and places that are associated with the workings of beings from the mythical past, the so-called Dreaming. The painting represents an actual place from the Dreaming.

The artist has been a member of the Papunya Tula Artists since the 1970s. This group translates the traditional body and sand painting into new media. In order not to reveal

secret knowledge, parts of the pictures are overpainted with dots; mythological traditions such as the Tingari Cycle are only handed down to initiates. RB

18 Oxalá/Oxalufã

Antonio Alexandre de Sousa Teixeira

Brazil, 2016

Chrome-plated sheet iron

Weltmuseum Wien

In the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé religion the *orixás* (deities) are closely associated with the natural elements. Oxalá is the *orixá* of the earth and regarded as the god of creation. Each *orixá* is venerated in a special way and on a particular day of the week. Oxalá's day is Friday and his sacrificial food is white, unsweetened maize. Any animal sacrificed to him must be female. Oxalá manifests himself in various forms. In a slightly bowed pose, leaning on a staff, he is Oxalufã, a wise old man. CA

19 Lot and his Daughters

Jan Massys

1563

Oak panel

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Picture Gallery

The righteous Lot and his two daughters are saved from the biblical city of Sodom, which is destroyed in a hail of fire and brimstone. Fearing that they will remain childless, Lot's daughters get him drunk so that they can conceive a child with him. On the left the view opens up to reveal the burning city. Lot's wife, who despite being warned by God turned round to look again on her home, has been turned into a pillar of salt. SP

20 Fire

Giuseppe Arcimboldo

1566

Limewood panel

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Picture Gallery

To compose his representation of fire Arcimboldo chose various firearms and implements needed to generate fire, combining them ingeniously to create an astonishing figure with a flaming mane. The gold chain suspended from his neck composed of interlinked flints and fire-steels alludes to the Order of the Golden Fleece. Displayed on his breast is the double-headed eagle. Both chain and eagle symbolize

the imperial dignity and the emperor's dominion over fire and arms. FDTS

21 Rome Burning in the Opera Nero (Anton Rubinstein)

Carlo Brioschi

1885

Pencil and gouache on paper

Theatermuseum, Vienna

Sometimes it is insanity rather than carelessness that sparks a catastrophe. Emperor Nero, for example, was accused of having set fire to Rome – a misdeed that supplied the subject matter for many dramatic works centuries later. Carlo Brioschi, stage painter at the Imperial-Royal Court Theatre, created this design for Act Three of the opera *Nero* by Anton Rubinstein. Before the advent of electric lighting it was a huge challenge to create the impression of blazing flames without setting fire to the theatre itself. RR

**22 God of the fire mountain Brômô in
*Kosumô's Sacrificial Death***

Richard Teschner

1912

Limewood, varnished and painted, partially gilded; glass; brass; printed linen ('April' pattern by A. Poschpischill for the Wiener Werkstätte); cotton; mechanism: Tonkin bamboo cane, leather Theatermuseum, Vienna

Richard Teschner was one of the foremost masters of puppetry. Inspired by the Wayang Golek Indonesian rod puppets he created his own unique form of theatre – the *Figurenspiegel* («Magic Mirror»).

The fire god Brômô embodies a volcano on Java with which the following legend is associated: a childless royal couple prays in desperation to the goddess of fertility on the fire mountain. Their wish is granted, but only at the price of a fatal promise to sacrifice their children once they reach adulthood. When the fateful time approaches, their youngest son Kosumô sacrifices himself, thus propitiating the fire-spewing deity. AS

23 Remains from the Museu Nacional

Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, 2018

Ceramic, glass, ash, wood

Weltmuseum Wien

In the night of 2 September 2018 the Museu Nacional, former residence of the Portuguese and Brazilian imperial families, was engulfed in flames. This was the palace where the Austrian archduchess and first empress of Brazil, Leopoldine, lived from 1817 until her death in 1826. The museum burned to the ground, destroying the great majority of the collections and archival and printed holdings of the Brazilian National Museum, which had been housed here since 1892. CA

24 T-Shirt (Eyjafjallajökull cancelled my flight)

2011

Cotton

Private collection

In March 2010 the Eyjafjallajökull volcano erupted on Iceland. Towering clouds of ash darkened the skies. As these were deemed to pose a hazard for aircraft, air traffic in Europe came to a virtual standstill. Although these fears later turned out to be groundless, the volcano became world-famous, reminding people in Europe once again of how natural forces can affect their lives. CA

Room II

Worldly Powers

Living together in societies requires structures determined by man. In these, social functions and ranks play an important role. In many civilizations such hierarchies are confirmed and displayed with the help of clothes, insignia or symbols – in the past perhaps even more so than today. Both secular and religious rulers wore head-dresses and accessories made of choice materials like precious metals and stones. It often took craftsmen months or even years to produce these sumptuous and exceptional artefacts.

Civil servants such as judges are generally identified by some form of insignia because they represent the rulers, the state and its order. Worldly powers reveal their authority mainly on a symbolic level. This is why costly textiles, shields and swords were popular gifts for other rulers, and were worn and displayed at lavish public events like coronations. The people had to see these artefacts to recognize the power they represented.

But everyday objects can sometimes symbolize power too: originally a tropical helmet protected its wearer from

wind and weather. Over time, however, it became a symbol of European colonialism because it was worn by the armed »protection forces«, who suppressed the local population.

Worldly powers also act as a higher authority in questions of jurisprudence, they make judgements on life and death and decisions about war and peace. They can provoke conflicts or defuse them. In an ideal world, their decisions should serve the common good.

25 Headdress of a queen

Egyptian, New Kingdom, 19th–20th Dynasty, c.1315–1081 BCE
Dark grey granodiorite
Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Egyptian and Near Eastern Collection

Originally part of a larger than life statue, this headdress consists of a Uraeus (cobra) diadem, attesting to a connection with the sun god Re. The cow horns with sun disc are an attribute of the goddess Hathor, who was frequently venerated in the form of a cow. The pair of falcon feathers had been worn by queens from around 2000 BCE. All these elements in the headdress, which are also found on statues of female deities, emphasize the divine character of the queen's role in life. MH

26 Crown of Stephen Bocskai

Turkish, c.1605
Gold, gemstones, pearls, silk
Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstkammer

A crown – deriving from the Latin *corona*, meaning a wreath – is a head covering that renders visible the power and rank of its wearer. This example was used by Sultan Ahmed I, who was at war with Emperor Rudolf II, to crown Stephen Bocskai, the leader of the Lutheran mining towns of Upper Hungary, as king of Hungary. By this act he disacknowledged Emperor Rudolf's royal Hungarian title. After the Habsburgs

had been restored as kings of Hungary, the Hungarian Estates demonstrated their acknowledgement of this by surrendering the Turkish-made crown to King Matthias. PR

27 Tafa gašša (ornamented shield)

Gift of Lij Iyasu, heir to the throne
Ethiopia, c.1900
Dyed leather; velvet; silver-gilt mounts
Weltmuseum Wien

With the introduction of firearms, precious buckler shields lost their practical function in armed conflict, thereafter serving as signs of rank for aristocrats and distinguished military leaders. The high status as an honour bestowed by the Ethiopian emperor is present in this example in two-fold form: the shield was part of a diplomatic exchange of gifts between the heir to the Ethiopian throne Lij Iyasu and Emperor Franz Joseph I in 1914. NH

Further objects from the set of gifts made by the heir to the Ethiopian throne to the Austro-Hungarian monarchy together with an exploration of its diplomatic history can be seen in the permanent exhibition Benin & Ethiopia. Art, Power, Resilience at the Weltmuseum Wien.

28 War dress of a Korean prince

Korea, c.1890–1894

Imperial Carriage Museum Vienna, Monturdepot

The two-part ensemble comprises a dress and helmet with matching decoration. King Gojong (1852–1919) was the first Korean ruler to open his country to the West. This strategy included the taking up of diplomatic relations and the negotiation of a trade and friendship treaty with Austria-Hungary in 1892. The war dress on display here was a gift from King Gojong to Emperor Franz Joseph, who gave it to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in 1894. MKR

29 Helmet and cuirass

Kiribati, 2nd half of 19th cent.

Porcupinefish skin, coconut fibre, wood, hair

Weltmuseum Wien

On Kiribati, an island state in the Pacific, some conflicts, for example, those involving land rights, were resolved through ritualized duels right up to the late nineteenth century.

This heavy armour served as protection against blows from swords edged with shark's teeth. The cuirass was worn over a pair of trousers and a top made of tightly woven coconut fibre. Both the duels and the production of these suits of armour were embedded in a ritual context. The aim was to subjugate one's opponent; killing was punished. RB

30 Armour of Albert, Duke of Prussia

Lower German (Brunswick), c.1526

Steel, partially etched, with black infill; leather

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Imperial Armoury

Albert, Duke of Prussia (1490–1568) commissioned this unusual armour for himself, probably on the occasion of his marriage to Dorothy of Denmark in 1526.

In the Renaissance, armour served to protect the body in battle and tournament, and by extension was also regarded as a symbol of political and military might. Also worn on ceremonial occasions, it was inspired by contemporary fashions. The tonlet imitates the pleated cloth skirt that formed part of male costume around 1520. SK

31 Figural staff of a chief

Unrecorded Chokwe artist(s)

Angola, Moxico province, before 1875

Wood, human hair

Weltmuseum Wien

Found in many different forms, sceptres and staffs are symbols of power. This spectacular example is in the shape of a seated figure wearing a ceremonial *cipenya mutwe* headdress that was reserved for chiefs.

It represents one of its owner's highly esteemed ancestors, whose role is to protect his descendants. The use of human materials such as hair reinforces the significance of such

objects. This personal object was brought to Europe by a military officer. NH

32 Robes of the Order of the Golden Fleece

Vienna, 1712

Imperial Carriage Museum Vienna, Monturdepot

One of the noblest western European chivalric orders, the Order of the Golden Fleece was founded in Burgundy in 1430, later passing to the House of Habsburg. Among its primary aims was the defence of the Church. However, by investing high-ranking nobles as knights of the Golden Fleece, the sovereigns of the order also sought to bind them to the ruling dynasty by ties of loyalty. In wearing their robes at the order's ceremonies the knights demonstrated to all present their membership of an exclusive circle. The last person to wear this set of robes was the later emperor Franz Joseph in the years before he came to the throne. MD

33 Blessed sword bestowed on Archduke Ferdinand II

Rome, 1581

Steel, iron, silver, gold, wood

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Imperial Armoury

At Christmas the pope traditionally gave an elaborately worked blessed sword to a ruler or famous military leader

in recognition of their defence of Christendom against the Ottoman Empire. The present sword was sent by Pope Gregory XIII (1502–1585) on New Year's Day 1582 to Archduke Ferdinand II of Tyrol (1529–1595). The hilt and pommel are of cast silver which has been chased, engraved and fire-gilded. The pommel shows Pope Gregory's coat of arms featuring the dragon of the Boncompagni family. SK

34 The Crusade to Palestine

Published by Matthias Trentsensky

Vienna, c.1845

Coloured lithographs

Theatermuseum, Vienna

The medieval crusades that took place between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries were political undertakings carried out by force of arms. In the nineteenth century, however, they were romanticized: a crusade was regarded – particularly in a metaphorical sense – as a selfless fight for elevated ideals. Trentsensky's colourful sheets of cut-out standing figures were intended as educational playthings for children. The figures represent Christian crusaders leading away captive Muslims. DF

35 Mitre from the 'Papal gift vestments'

Rome (?)

c.1740–1758

Base fabric: silver lamé (silk, silver wire); decoration: gold embroidery, pearls, gold braid

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Ecclesiastical Treasury

In the Roman Catholic Church, the word 'mitre' designates a head covering that may only be worn by high-ranking dignitaries such as popes, bishops, cardinals and abbots. Significantly, the lavish gold embroidery of the mitre exhibited here includes at its centre a representation of the papal crown or »tiara«. It distinguishes the pope as the supreme theological authority and also symbolizes the subordination of secular to ecclesiastical power (see also no. 88). In 1963 Paul VI became the last pope to be crowned with the tiara.
KSL

36 Headdress

Unrecorded Luba (?) artist(s)

DR Congo, 19th cent.

Parrot feathers, plant fibres, animal skin, grass

Weltmuseum Wien

This rare parrot-feather headdress was worn at the royal court. The use of feathers such as these was at times reserved exclusively to the royal court; however, they have always had high status as prestigious ritual insignia. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century similar headdresses were distributed or sold to individuals seeking to reinforce their position with sacred legitimation. High-status goods of this kind deriving from the royal court were also strategically redistributed in order to secure ideological and religious control over newly conquered territories. NH

37 Pith helmet owned by Oscar Baumann

London, 19th cent.

Cotton, felt, leather, paper, metal

Weltmuseum Wien

This type of head covering is emblematic of the presence of Europeans outside their own continent, and as such is associated with various positions of power: traders, military and police, missionaries, explorers – all sported similar helmets.

This example was worn by Oscar Baumann (1864–1899) between 1891 and 1893 while travelling in Tanzania,

Rwanda and Burundi (all then under German colonial rule). For a short time thereafter he was Austria-Hungary's honorary consul in Zanzibar. NH

38 Hairpin in the shape of a gun

Unrecorded Zaramo artist(s)

Tanzania, 19th cent.

Wood

Weltmuseum Wien

This hairpin in the shape of a gun with finely carved decoration is part of a collection of over 1,700 objects amassed by Alfred L. Sigl, a colonial officer. Regrettably, it is not known whether it was worn locally or produced for sale. In eastern and central Africa, hairpins – used sometimes to secure headdresses or for personal hygiene – are status symbols for their wearers, particularly when made of finer materials such as ivory. NH

39 Feather headdress

Leopardo Yawa Bane

Brazil, Huni Kuin, before 2015

Feathers (macaw and Amazon-type), cotton, plant fibres

Weltmuseum Wien

Leopardo Yawa Bane, a political leader of the Huni Kuin, an indigenous group in western Brazil, wore this headdress for public appearances. It underscores his indigenous identity, which among other things consists of an intimate connection with the environment – that is, the Amazon rainforest and its inhabitants. Feathers also lend their wearer beauty, charisma and vitality, attracting fertility spirits and therefore making him more attractive to his lover. CA

40 Autumn Landscape (September)

Lucas van Valckenborch the Elder

1585

Canvas

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Picture Gallery

To all appearances, the earthly powers-that-be – its representatives assembled in a group at the centre of the painting – have a beneficial effect on the people living under their rule: following the plentiful and richly varied harvest seen on the left, the viewer's eye wanders across a cultivated landscape with paths and open spaces and various groups of people who have the time and means to enjoy carefree amusements.

All this is taking place under the eyes of the inhabitants of castle and town, who also profit from the labour of growing and harvesting. Exploitation or symbiosis? CB

41 Interrogation in the Dungeon (formerly: Court Scene)

Alessandro Magnasco

c.1710–1720

Canvas

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Picture Gallery

In the torture chamber interrogations are being carried out under various forms of brutal physical duress. »Hoisting« was performed by tying the victim's hands behind his back and hauling him aloft by the arms with a rope fixed to a gibbet. Immediately to the right a man is straddled on a chevalet or »Spanish donkey«. This contraption consisted of two planks mitred to form a sharp angle; heavy weights were attached to the victim's feet to increase the discomfort. Torture was not a punishment in itself but was part of official penal procedure and intended to provide the basis for a verdict. DU

42 Genre picture: 'Scene with Judge'

China, Canton (Guangzhou), Qing dynasty (1644–1911), c.1893

Tetrapanax papyrifer, (*tong cao* 通草), watercolour

Weltmuseum Wien

Depicted here is a scene in a court with the accused kneeling. The judge, who is seated, is reading out the bill of indictment. Behind him is a standing screen showing the qilin, a mythological one-horned beast. The qilin embodies benevolence and righteousness and serves a just judge. This genre painting is an example of »China trade art« from the Canton region in South China. Common themes in this type of painting were occupations, religious ceremonies and so forth. BZ

43 *buzi* (badge of rank for an official)

China, end of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911)

Silk, gold thread

Weltmuseum Wien

Textile badges of rank for civil and military officials in the later Chinese dynasties were displayed on the back and front of clothing to identify an individual's rank and function. An animal was assigned to each of the nine ranks in the civil and military administrations. The badges of civil officials all displayed birds. The silver pheasant denoted a civil official of the fifth rank. Military officials were identified by mythical beings and various animals including big cats. BZ

44 The Story of Alexander: The Battle of Gaugamela (Arbela)

After Charles Le Brun, cartoon by Louis Licherie

c.1680–1687

Wool, silk, metal threads

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstkammer

Alexander the Great, who united the Greeks and conquered Persia, was one of the most important figures of Antiquity. From the Renaissance, monarchs often likened themselves to the victorious military commander. King Louis XIV (1638–1715) was no exception, regarding himself as a new Alexander. At his behest a series of monumental tapestries depicting the story of Alexander were woven after paintings by the court artist Charles Le Brun. They celebrate Alexander – and thus also Louis himself – as a virtuous hero and successful and valiant military leader. KSL

45 The Court Processing from the Hofburg to St Stephen's Cathedral (Ceremony of Hereditary Homage for Maria Theresa)

Gustav Adolf Müller after Andreas Altomonte

1740

Engraving

Theatermuseum, Vienna

At the centre of the picture stands the Holy Trinity Column on the Graben, which Emperor Leopold I had erected to render thanks for the deliverance of city and country from the great plague epidemic of 1679. Here Maria Theresa is seen passing the column in November 1740. Her accession to power was marked by the public ceremony of Hereditary Homage, at which the Estates of the realm acknowledged the archduchess's divine claim to power and swore an oath of fealty to their new monarch. DF

46 Ideal portrait of Emperor Charlemagne (747–814)

Copy after an original by Albrecht Dürer

End of 16th or early 17th cent.

Canvas

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Picture Gallery

This idealized fictitious portrait – no likeness of its subject has survived – exploits all the possibilities of the pictorial composition in order to foreground the insignia, which are as it were the proof of the fullness of his power: the

confined frame of view, detailed rendering of objects and clothing, and the use of the free surface above the figure for depictions of the imperial coat of arms with eagle and of the French fleurs-de-lis. The original by Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) once served as one of the doors of a cabinet in which the imperial insignia – housed until 1794 at Nuremberg – were kept. CB

**We are such stuff as dreams are
made on, and our little life is
rounded with a sleep.**

William Shakespeare

**Now, my Lord, I will bring down
the tornado on you.**

Maya, Yucatan, Mexiko

**Om, may Mitra and Varuna
be propitious with us,
may the Honourable Aryama
be propitious with us,
may Indra and Brihaspati
be propitious with us,
may Vishnu with long strides
be propitious with us...**

Rgveda und Taittirīya Upanisad

Room III

Establishing Contact

Natural forces and divine and worldly powers strongly influence our lives. But are we at their mercy? Since time immemorial, we have reached out to them through prayers and rituals, have asked for their help and support. There are myriad ways this can be done: in a group or alone, in public or private. This reaching out can be influenced by one's individuality or completely rejected.

Small things often play a seminal role in personal rituals. Amulets have always been worn as protection against negative forces. Good luck charms and talismans often accompany us through life. They attract positive energies and amplify what is good. The countless examples provided by our visitors bear witness to this: many were happy to accept the invitation extended in the run-up to this exhibition to send us their personal good luck charms, a selection of which are on show in this gallery.

A house altar locates the divine inside our home. A place where we offer sacrifices to the deity. They are also places of prayer. Prayer beads can help us attain a trance-like state through constant repetition.

Communal rituals play an important role in our lives. They represent connections and structure time: having to isolate during lockdown, with rituals such as religious services, weddings and funerals restricted or even prohibited, has proved a painful experience for many of us.

Religious specialists (like priests, prophets, shamans), whose vestments transmit status and special abilities, lead communities through rituals. They can be contemplative and adhere to strict rules. But they can also lead to the ego's dissolution through ecstatic feasts, allowing participants to become one with the divine.

47 Für den Todesfall ('In the Event of my Death')

Alfred Roller

Ink on paper

Theatermuseum, Vienna

As a founding member of the Vienna Secession and chief stage designer at the Vienna Opera, Alfred Roller was one of the central figures in the Austrian art and theatre world at the beginning of the twentieth century. Already gravely ill with cancer, during the last year of his life he made a precise record of his symptoms and the treatment he was undergoing. His instructions, entitled »In the Event of my Death« reflect an attitude that was deeply rooted in this life: brief instructions for his relatives, without a trace of pathos. He died on 21 June 1935. His family carried out his wishes to the letter. CMH

Transcription of the document:

In the event of my death.

My body is to be buried as it looked at the advent of death. That is, no ceremonies, no washing, changing of clothes, etc. A simple pair of pyjamas, or naked, wrapped in an old sheet.

Opera and School to be informed by telephone.

Close relatives and friends to be informed in writing: Brünn, Innsbruck, Breitner, Mell, Anderle, etc. To be added in each case: the corpse can no longer be viewed. Day of funeral yet to be arranged. Corpse to be removed from the house as swiftly as possible! Plaster cast? Do not think that anything useful can be achieved, given the gross alteration in the lower halves of the face. If anything, the hands.

I am for cremation. If Dietz is against it on principle, or others perhaps on emotional grounds, I agree to interment. It is all the same to me what happens to my body.

What is most important to me: a funeral without any kind of ceremony, unattended, that is, early in the day or late at night. No speeches! No music, no flowers. But above all, no religious ceremonies, of whatever rite. No bells, no candles, etc.

This request also makes it impossible to accept a grave of honour, in the event that one is offered.

Best if my family members do not attend the cremation and interment. One man will suffice to establish identity, e.g., Dietz.

Death notice to be issued only after the funeral. See above.

Decorations to be returned:

only the Order of Franz Josef; office at the Hofburg

48 Prayer beads

Rosary, decade

German (?), 1st quarter of 16th cent.

Agate, ivory; silver-gilt

Kunsthistorisches Museum
Vienna, Imperial Treasury

Rosary

Japan, before 1889

Wood; metal; dyed cord

Weltmuseum Wien

Rosary

Japan, before 1889

Wood; metal; dyed cord

Weltmuseum Wien

Prayer beads

Egypt, before 1977

Synthetic material; metal

Weltmuseum Wien

Prayer beads

Egypt, before 1977

Synthetic material; metal

Weltmuseum Wien

Buddhist prayer beads

Singapore, before 1994

Wood; plastic; rayon

Weltmuseum Wien

Subḥa

Tunisia, before 1914

Glass beads; cotton cord;
silk tassel

Weltmuseum Wien

Prayer beads serve as an aid for the recitation of prayers. These examples from Germany, Tunisia, Egypt, Singapore and Japan attest to their wide use in various religions. Among other respects they differ in the number of beads. In Buddhism the 108 beads stand for the 108 volumes of the collected words of the Buddha. Islam uses strings of 99 beads in order to glorify the 99 names of Allah.

The Catholic rosary, which has either 59 or 10 beads, is used for prayer with a focus on Mary and Jesus. Rosaries made of particularly precious materials are used as votive offerings. In contrast, Buddhist prayer beads are made of perishable materials, symbolizing the transience of existence.

One by one, the prayer beads slip through the fingers of the faithful. Constant repetition helps them to leave the self behind. In a trance-like state they lose themselves completely in the contemplation of the divine. CA

49 Bowl with bezoar

India, Goa (?), 17th cent.

Bezoar, gold

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstammer

Suspended on the chain of this gold bowl is a bezoar. A bezoar is a stone formed in the stomach of mainly South American and Asian ruminants. This rare natural product was said to possess magical and medicinal properties, including the power to neutralize poison. It could be taken in powder form or – as here – dipped into liquids. In the sixteenth century bezoars were regarded as an efficacious remedy against the plague, which explains their huge price: they were two and a half times more valuable than gold. PR

50 The god Bes

Egyptian, Late Period, 5th–4th cent. BCE

Faïence, glazed in green

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Egyptian and Near Eastern Collection

As a divine being, Bes is responsible for the domestic sphere, where he protects humans and especially mothers from negative influences. As a small god or demon he has no temple, being worshipped directly in private. In his form as a tutelary deity he is represented with a mask with a lion's face (ears and mane), lion's tail, and a feather crown. With the aid of dance and music at celebrations Bes can ward off dangerous animals. Like Thoeris, his image decorates furniture used for women in childbirth. MH

51 The goddess Thoeris (Tawaret or Ipet)

Egyptian, Late Period, 7th–6th cent. BCE

Red jasper

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Egyptian and Near Eastern Collection

Thoeris (or Ipet) belongs to a group of goddesses represented in hippopotamus form. In her role as mother and wet-nurse she is also a tutelary deity of infants and women in childbed. Thoeris is depicted on household furniture in order to invoke the special protection needed by mother and child during confinement. In the case of the

present amulet Thoeris holds the symbol (or hieroglyph) for »protection«. MH

52 Pomander

Northern German, 15th–16th cent.

Amber; mounts: silver-gilt; enamel

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstkammer

Originally from Schloss Ambras in Innsbruck, this object was a refillable perfume dispenser. It was commonly filled with musk, a very strong-smelling animal-derived substance. The pomander was then hung from a rosary, belt or a chain which one wore on the body. CB

53 Gold bracteate with loop and rim

Scandinavia, end of 6th cent.

Gold

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Coin Collection

Scandinavian gold bracteates (coin-like, pendants decorated on one side only) from the fifth and sixth century provide pictorial evidence of Nordic culture and mythology. This example shows a stylized horse with twisted legs surmounted by an oversized head. The scene is interpreted as the healing of a wounded horse by the god Odin, accompanied by a raven on the left. Worn on a chain, the bracteate seems to emanate a protective apotropaic power, enhanced by the runes at the rim. JH

54 Rosary pendant, so-called Betnuss

Netherlandish, beginning of 16th cent.

Boxwood, exterior partially coloured

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstkammer

These objects were either hung as a sumptuous pendant on a rosary or used as miniature travelling altars. While the primary purpose of the »Betnuss« (»prayer nut«) was for private devotion, their virtuoso craftsmanship also made them objects of artistic wonder, as in this case: when open, the two inner surfaces reveal intricate micro-carvings representing St Christopher (above) and Jesus with Mary and her parents Anne and Joachim. The Latin circumscrip-

tions also refer to the figures depicted, invoking the saints' intercession. Images of St Christopher were believed to protect travellers from sudden death. DU

55 Alchemical table bell

Hans Bulla

Prague, c.1600

Metal alloy, iron

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstkammer

In many cultures bells play an important role in cultic, magical or religious contexts. Through their sound they can enchant, ward off, summon or lure, or create a connection with the supernatural, as with this bell, made for Emperor Rudolf II from an alloy of seven different metals.

Bells such as these were regarded as having special powers, being thought to connect natural material properties with the supernatural forces of the planets. According to Paracelsus they could be used to summon spirits. PR

GOOD LUCK CHARM

56 Hare paw

St Johann im Pongau, 1946

Private collection

This rabbit's foot is my oldest possession, since 1946. The year before, everything that didn't fit into my small backpack was lost. A peasant girl gave it to me »to brush off the specks left by an eraser'. For which it was – and remains – the perfect tool. Whenever I'm embarrassed after receiving an impressive gift that I don't need, I console myself with my small rabbit's foot. Because it's also perfect for a tender caress. Traude Veran

57 Philip Prospero, Prince of Asturias (1657–1661)

Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez

1659

Canvas

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Picture Gallery

At his birth, Philip Prospero was the long-awaited heir to the Spanish throne. The child suffered from scrofula (a form of tuberculosis) and epilepsy. The amulets and talismans suspended from his belt and from a cord across breast and shoulder were believed to possess magical powers. The little bell, pomander, bezoar and a marten's paw were intended to protect the child from the evil eye and keep diseases at bay. But the gloomy background hints at a sombre fate: Although

destined for greatness, the delicate, sensitive child died aged just four. DU

58 So-called horoscope amulet of Wallenstein

Southern German, c.1600–10

Rock crystal, gold, silver-gilt

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstkammer

Since being associated in the mid-nineteenth century with Wallenstein, the commander in chief of the imperial army during the Thirty Years War, this object has given rise to much speculation. It was suggested that it was the general's birth horoscope, and that he wore it on his breast as a talisman. The truth of this legend cannot be verified. However, what is certain is that the celestial symbols represented on it together with the Hebrew name of God and the magical sequence of letters AGLA (אלגא; Attah gibor le'olam adonai; »Thou, O Lord, art mighty forever«) were intended to transfer their protective influence to the amulet's wearer. PR

59 House altar

Mongolia, 19th/20th cent.

Wood, clay, paper

Weltmuseum Wien

House altars like this stand in the sacred space within the yurt. Their compact dimensions are adapted to nomadic life. Various gods made of clay are inlaid in niches in a wooden frame. In others small images are glued in. Produced cheaply in great numbers, these small images serve the poorer sectors of the population as a direct substitute for expensive bronzes; in terms of function and desired efficacy, however, there is no significant difference between the former and the latter. CS

60 Retablo

Joaquín López Atay

Peru, 1970s

Wood, ceramic, metal, dyestuffs

Weltmuseum Wien

Peruvian house altars are distinguished by their combination of Christian scenes – going back to the Spanish colonization – with local customs. In the two upper sections of this *retablo* are two scenes, one with Jesus being worshipped by the faithful and one of the Nativity. The scene in the bottom section relates to an unspecified local custom and shows a feast with people celebrating and making music. CF

61 House altar

Bequeathed by Hermann Bahr and Anna Bahr-Mildenburg

Mid-19th cent.

Wood; porcelain, painted; metal

Theatermuseum, Vienna

During the last phase of his life, the Austrian writer and dramatist Hermann Bahr (1863–1934) turned to the Catholic faith. His conversion, which his friends regarded as a conservative relapse by this erstwhile defender of modernism, was probably why he acquired this small house altar. Designed in Gothic revival style, it has a central section made of wood. Concealed behind the two wings is a porcelain painting of the Virgin and Child. KN

62 San Phra Phum (shrine of the spirits of the land)

Thailand, 2nd half of 20th cent.

Wood

Loaned by John D. Marshall

In Thailand the land is generally not thought of as uninhabited but as peopled with spirits and ghosts who own a place and protect it. When someone wants to build a house, this means that these beings will have to be moved. Miniature houses are built for them, for example in the garden, thus ensuring they have a new home and that they will also protect the occupants of the new house. Failure to do this will provoke their anger, and put one at risk of being constantly troubled by them. CA

GOOD LUCK CHARM

63 Hugin Munin

Vienna, 2019

Private collection

This trusted talisman is a good-luck charm, a souvenir or just a loyal companion. Like their big brothers Hugin and Munin, these small black leather ravens can carefully hold on to ideas and thoughts that crop up during the day. Like a knot in your handkerchief, they preserve valuable thoughts and are a friendly yet firm reminder to realise them. Petra Stelzmüller

GOOD LUCK CHARM

64 Glass pendant with fish

Venice (Murano), 1995

Private collection

This small glass pendant is one of my dearest childhood treasures. It was produced in a glass manufactory in Murano and was a given to me by a dear childhood friend during my first visit to Venice at the age of seven. The pendant has accompanied me for twenty-five years, and it still brings a smile to my face. It never fails to remind me that it is often the smallest things in life that are the most precious. Katrin Riedl

GOOD LUCK CHARM

65 The Silver Bunny

Germany, 1940s

Private collection

I don't know if it has brought me luck. But the rabbit, a relic from my early childhood, is still my companion. It has bite-marks, either from my teeth or those of Bredo, my beloved St. Bernhard. The silver rabbit was originally attached to a rattle, but since 2008 it's been suspended from my favourite pair of chopsticks from southern China. Akelei Sell

GOOD LUCK CHARM

66 Leather treasure chest with three stone elephants

USA

Private collection

My German aunt Annie emigrated to New York during World War II. On one of her rare visits, she gave me this chest with elephants and an iridescent image of New York. They have accompanied my entire life as good luck charms. Although I don't know much about my aunt, her life's story inspired me. Years later, I moved to New York myself and lived there in 1999 and from 2001 until 2004. I felt at home there right away, protected by higher powers (even though my second day at work was 9/11). Markus Wiesenhofer

67 Ekeko

Bolivia, 1972

Wood, textile, ceramic, feathers, paper

Weltmuseum Wien

In the Andes Ekeko figures are popular good luck charms. They are displayed in homes in a prominent place and promise material prosperity, being hung with miniature representations of their owner's wishes, with a tiny house standing for a new dwelling, an aeroplane for a journey, and so on. In order for these wishes to come true, Ekeko must be attended to: a lit cigarette is placed in its mouth, and if this burns down to a stub these wishes will be fulfilled. CA

68 House altar (*lararium*)

consisting of: pottery lamp, cup-bearing lar with rhyton, porter (peasant or slave) with yoke, Jupiter, Mercury, pantheistic *signum*

Roman imperial period, 1st–2nd cent.

Cast bronze; pottery

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities

Lares are country deities who protected house and land in Roman times. Each household had its own lar, the lar *familiaris*. As »spirit of the house« also a cup-bearer and dispenser of blessings, the *lar* was frequently venerated in pairs with other gods in small chapels that were often simply painted on a wall.

The *lararium* included figures of tutelary deities, vessels and lamps used for the cult as well as votive offerings. It also included statuettes of other specially venerated deities together with ancestral images of the family and the image of the emperor. On special occasions and certain days of the month prayers were said to these deities and offerings made to them on the altar.

Some of the statuettes shown here were found in a *lararium* at Montorio, near Verona, in 1830, including the figures of the porter, Jupiter and Mercury, and a pantheistic *signum* with attributes of deities. ML

69 Shaman altar with suitcase

Eduardo Calderon

Peru, before 1999

Suitcase; various materials

Weltmuseum Wien

Eduardo Calderon (1930–1996) was a shaman who practised internationally, also in Austria. His altar, which he simply called a *mesa* (table), contains numerous objects that are typically held to possess special powers, such as images of saints, shells, crystals, archaeological artefacts, rods, swords, rattles and bottles of herbs, all of which he used in his efforts to diagnose and cure diseases. However, his *mesa* also features personal elements: for example, a figure of the elephant-headed Indian god Ganesha. CA

70 Demiurge

Richard Teschner

1914

Heliogravure, aquatint etching

Theatermuseum, Vienna

A demiurge is the creator and god of his own visible world. This etching was made shortly after Teschner had staged his first plays at the »Golden Shrine« puppet theatre. In both art forms, the graphic and the theatrical, he achieved a quietly dynamic and moving rendering of all the strange characteristics of a demiurge. In the puppet theatre, effects

are achieved similar to those of the shaman intervening creatively in the course of the world. Teschner's renown in Vienna as the »Magician of Gersthof« is symptomatic of the artist's self-dramatization. AS

71 Shaman's robes

Korea, 1980s

Synthetic fibre

Weltmuseum Wien

The robes displayed are part of a set of clothing belonging to the female shaman Woo Okju (1920–1993). During a ceremony the shaman slips into various roles in order to assume the power of the individual in question in coping with a particular task. Normally robes are destroyed following the death of a shaman. In this case, however, they passed into the ownership of her disciple – and researcher into Korean shamanism – Yang Jongsung. BZ

72 Figure

Unrecorded Yombe artist(s)

DR Congo/Angola, Loango Coast, mid-19th cent.

Wood; dyed textile; shell; plant fibre; pigment

Weltmuseum Wien

Figures such as this one vary in their making and use, not least because they come from widely differing periods and locations in several African states and kingdoms. This delicately carved female figure is richly decorated and furnished with important attributes: in her right hand she holds a stick, in the left a basket. She also wears a head covering, the form of which indicates a position of prestige. NH

73 Nkisi figure

Unrecorded Kakongo artist(s)

DR Congo

Wood, mirror, metal, textiles, pigment

Weltmuseum Wien

Figures like these were used for medical purposes, but their social function at times extends far beyond European understanding of the concept of medicine. Their use requires a process to ensure the functionality of the figure, as shown by the mixture of plants, minerals and other organic materials hidden behind mirrors or a textile drape. *Minkisi* (the plural of *nkisi*) communicate with *banganga* (specialists) to relay human concerns between the worlds. NH

74 Horus stela (Cippus)

Egyptian, Ptolemaic Period, c.210–180 BCE

Serpentine

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Egyptian and Near Eastern Collection

From around 1000 BCE the infant Horus was invoked on so-called Horus stelae as a helper in the case of scorpion stings or snake bites. According to legend, Horus himself was stung by a scorpion.

He stands on two crocodiles, holding scorpions and snakes. The Horus stelae were either laid on the chest of the affected individual as a remedy, or worn by children as a preventive measure. Water was poured onto the stela. The dissolved power of the image and text was held to endow the water with a curative effect. MH

75 Seven magical gems

Late Roman; 2nd–3rd cent. CE

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities

Harpocrates on a lotus blossom between magical inscriptions

Medium-brown sard

Hecate on a lion

Dark grey haematite

The infant sun god Horus within Bes, the ageing sun (so-called Bes Pantheos)

Heliotrope

Cockerel-headed figure

Dark green jasper

Horus as the sun (Heliorus)

Black jasper

The sun god Chnoubis

Green jasper

Lizard

Heliotrope

Believed to be charged with magical powers, these precious and decorative stones probably came from Alexandria (Egypt) and served as amulets and talismans. Wearing them directly on the body – as medallions, ring stones or sewn into little pouches – was thought to provide protection, healing or the assistance of higher powers. Inscriptions and incised images were intended to intensify these effects: such gems frequently bore images of chimerical creatures, animals, and magical inscriptions or symbols.

The settings of the stones are modern. KZO

GOOD LUCK CHARM

76 Elephant: The Doctor

Germany, 2004

Private collection

This elephant was a gift from my nephew, Jani. He gave it to me to bring me luck when I defended my dissertation. Unbeknownst to the examiners, it sat next to me on a chair and did a brilliant job. Now it spends every day with me in my office, the reminder of an important rite of passage that allowed me to realise my dream: to become a curator at an ethnographical museum. Claudia Augustat

GOOD LUCK CHARM

77 Temari

Japan, made in Austria, 2021

Private collection

My private good luck charm is a Japanese *temari*. In Japan, mothers give such good-luck spheres to their daughters for New Year. These balls are filled with rice husk, a rattle and felicitations.

I make my own ball every year and am happy to pass on this centuries-old craft. The Weltmuseum Wien is planning to host a workshop in February. Martine Roovers

78 Dancing demons

Burma, 19th cent.

Wood

Weltmuseum Wien

Dances performed by demons should be understood more as mystery plays than as what our word »dance« conventionally suggests. In Hinduism, dance – to stick with this term nonetheless – is a sacred activity expressing the highest form of spirituality, which the spoken or written word is unable to convey. In the dance the mortal merges with the divine, and the material with the spiritual.

The art of dance is said to have been revealed by the gods themselves through their mouthpiece Bharata. The origins of Hindu dance lie in the *Bharata Natya Sastra* (3rd cent. BCE – 5th cent. CE), a canonical work (*sastra*) in which the theory and practice of the art of theatre and dance (*natya*) are described by the sage Bharata.

Imbued with a sense of great emotion and surrender, all the Hindu classical dance styles give artistic expression to subject matter from religious philosophy and mythology, in particular from the great epics of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The body language of these wooden figures gives an idea of what such dancers are capable of expressing. CS

79 Table base with satyr and maenad

Roman imperial period, Athens (?), middle of 2nd cent. CE

Marble

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities

Above a socle rises a pillar, in front of which is a pair of mythological figures: a naked satyr – identifiable from his pointed ears and panther skin – pressing himself lasciviously against a dancing maenad who is beating a tympanon and whose frenzied movements have caused her dress to gape. Followers of the god Dionysus, the two figures exemplify religiously motivated rapturous excess with music, dance and wine – in pursuit of *ekstasis*, a »stepping outside oneself« to come closer to the god. ML

80 Shiva Nataraja

India, 20th cent.

Ivory

Weltmuseum Wien

In his manifestation as Nataraja, Shiva performs the cosmic dance *ananda tandava* as a symbol of the eternal cycle of growth and decay. Shiva here unites the roles of creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe in one person, thereby perpetuating the eternal cycle of the creation and destruction of the world. Shiva dances to the rhythm of the heart of the cosmos, which exists only by virtue of the

benevolent act of his dance. With one leg he stamps down on ignorance and illusion – represented in the form of a dwarf – from which his devotees are to be freed. CS

81 Model of a devil-dancer

Bolivia, before 1972

Ceramic, textile, dyestuffs

Weltmuseum Wien

The origins of the dances of the devil are connected with the chthonic deity Wari. He possesses the riches of the earth and lured men into digging for them. When Christian missionaries tried to equate him with the devil, Wari successfully averted this reinterpretation, from then on being venerated as the patron saint of miners. Through the »devil« dances that nonetheless developed in association with the deity, humans seek to ensure his favour. This promises high yields and a safe return from the mine. CA

GOOD LUCK CHARM

82 Magical dragon stone

China, Song Dynasty (960–1279) or earlier

De Mika Collection

Chinese dragons are long, serpent-like creatures imbued with magical powers. Without light, this good-luck charm

looks like a plain black stone, but once it's lit one can make out a long dragon. On the reverse are its eye, tooth and claw. Chinese scholars believe that a real dragon lives in this stone. As its present owner I can confirm: it has mysterious hidden powers to ward off evil – especially during the last year when I was living abroad! Anonymous

83 Princess, Dragon, Buddha in *Der Drachentöter (The Dragon-Slayer)*

Richard Teschner

1928

Limewood, carved and painted; textiles; gilt leather; gilt paper; leather, painted;

Mechanism: Tonkin bamboo cane, brass tubing, steel springs, gut strings/nylon thread

Theatermuseum, Vienna

In the play *Der Drachentöter (The Dragon-Slayer)* by Richard Teschner, the dragon, symbol of primordial matter, takes hostage a princess, who represents the human soul. Lovestruck, he keeps watch over the princess, and neither wise words from a learned man nor violence from a warrior can free her. Only the Buddha – embodying enlightenment through introspection – succeeds in vanquishing the dragon and plunging it into the boundless abyss.

Inspired by Indonesian Wayang theatre, Teschner repeatedly drew on spiritual movements, stylizing himself as a high priest of his mystery cult embodied in the *Figurenspiegel* (»Magic Mirror«).

Through the medium of the highly flexible figures, detached from speech, the puppet master creates an expressive, pantomimic puppet theatre for an adult audience. AS

84 Insignia of Iemanjá

Brazil, 2015

Chrome-plated sheet iron, glass beads

Weltmuseum Wien

In the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé religion the *orixás* (deities) are closely bound up with the natural elements. Iemanjá is the *orixá* of the ocean. When rituals are performed, believers are possessed by her in a state of trance. For these ceremonies they wear the goddess's insignia: a veil of white glass beads, a pectoral pendant with representations of fish, a mirror and a small sword. During the time of slavery this ritual gave believers the feeling of not being wholly powerless. Today it provides a source of strength in times of crisis. CA

85 Shaman's robe

Brazil, Yudjá, before 1992

Feathers, cotton, palm leaf, wood, dyestuffs

Weltmuseum Wien

The Yudjá live on the Xingu River in southern Amazonia. Their shamans were both religious specialists and healers.

Birds were regarded as their allies, since they mediated between the earthly and the divine world. The feathers of the shaman's robes symbolize his exclusive relationship with the celestial powers and spirits. The cotton is a gift of the heavenly beings and likewise represents the divine world. No shamans have been trained since the 1980s. CA

GOOD LUCK CHARM

86 Red wool thread

Tibet, 1995

Private collection

At the end of my trip to Tibet, a visit of Tsurphu Monastery was scheduled for 1 May 1995. Upon our arrival, we learned that the head of the Karma Kagyu school would grant us an audience. After being blessed by the ten-year-old Karmapa, a monk gave me a piece of red string. »So you don't lose the through-line of your life.« Whoever sees the Karmapa is given seven fortuitous rebirths. Eva Abbrederis

GOOD LUCK CHARM

87 Chain pendant 'rosette'

Private collection

This is my good luck charm, a pendant given to me by my grandmother. I often wear this piece of jewellery and I treasure it – in memory of my grandmother and because it has often brought me luck. Anne-Rose Fuchs

88 Chasuble from the 'Papal gift vestments'

Rome (?), c.1740–1758

Base fabric: silver lamé (silk, silver wire); decoration: gold embroidery, silk shading, gold braid

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Ecclesiastical Treasury

During his visit to Vienna in 1782, Pope Pius VI attempted to persuade Emperor Joseph II (1741–1790) to revoke the church reforms he had enacted shortly beforehand. It is recorded that Pius presented the emperor with a set of liturgical vestments for divine service at court. These precious objects that derive from historical papal ownership – the chasuble displayed here bears the arms of Pope Benedict XIV (1675–1758) – attest to the sense of authority possessed by the supreme dignitary of the Church (see also no. 35).

KSL

89 The Feast of Venus

Peter Paul Rubens

c.1636/37

Canvas

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Picture Gallery

The statue of Venus, goddess of love, sets everything in motion. Courtesans bathe and decorate the figure. A matron offers incense while young women approach to bring the goddess votive gifts of dolls, seeking to secure fruitfulness for their unions. A roundelay of amoretto and cupids opens the goddess's sphere to allow the young brides to enter; the other women are already initiates. Also accompanying the rites with dance are the three Graces on the left, companions of the goddess, and the frenzied maenads on the right in the background. DU

Room IV

Space for Thoughts and Comments

At the end of last year, we invited museum visitors to participate in this exhibition project. Many decided to do so, sending us their good luck charms and composing texts.

On show here are objects that have inspired, brought luck or have given strength to our visitors, with many becoming permanent companions. A selection of submitted objects is on show in Gallery III.

The texts produced in the course of our online writing workshop are also displayed in this gallery. Illustrations of fifteen selected exhibits – without explanations – served as inspiration for the participants. The texts document the associations, thoughts and stories that grew out of viewing the exhibits in the context of this show; they offer insights into visitors' conceptual spaces but they are not conventional museum labels. We see these diverse submissions as an offer to be inspired and a broadening of perspectives.

Do you also want to share your thoughts, feelings and views on higher powers? Then note down your text on a sheet of paper and leave it on one of the walls of this gallery.

The German texts of the online writing workshop can also be accessed via our website: <https://hoeheremaechte.khm.at/en/>



We would like to thank all our authors, lenders and participants.

Instagram

Become an exhibit yourself and discover your higher power – with our Instagram filters created especially for the exhibition.

Need a power boost? Then take on the role of a fearless knight. Do you want to ward off evil and protect someone? Then transform into the patron saint Bes. Or do you want to finally win over your secret love? Nobody can resist the goddess of love Venus.

Try our filters right now, share your higher power with the hashtag #BeTheHigherPower and don't forget to tag our Instagram channel @kunsthistorischesmuseumvienna



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Credits

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U4

IT'S WELL WORTH COMING BACK!

By paying just a little extra on top of the admission ticket you bought today, you could turn it into the Annual Ticket.

CATALOUGE

A richly illustrated book accompanies this exhibition, including contributions by our visitors as well as conversations about the topics participation, anthropocene and state power. The book is published in German and can be found in our shops and online: <https://shop.khm.at/>

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Follow us on Facebook and Instagram. Discover a special playlist accompanying the exhibition on our Spotify channel – music about god, earthquakes and hope.



