



Plastic Predecessors

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Plastic Fantastic Summer 2021

What was there before plastic?

Amber



Roman Amber Dice. Aquileia, Central Italy. 1st -2nd century.

Ivory



Bracelet. Owo, Nigeria. 16th century.

Tortoise Shell



Victorian hair comb. 19th century.

Amber

- Fossilized resin of trees.
- Used for jewelry and decorative objects.
- Found mainly in the Baltic Sea and Dominican Republic.
- Aesthetic qualities, ease of carving and polishing.
- For ancient people, mysterious qualities:
 - Protecting the bearer
 - Warding of evil
 - Curing diseases



Roman perfume pot, depicting cupids and a panther. 100-120 CE.

Amber: Origin



Conifer resin.



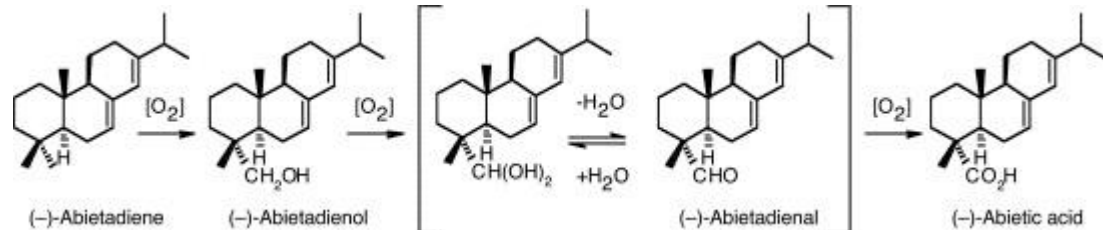
Mosquito in amber resin that gave rise to the revival of dinosaurs. Jurassic Park.

Amber formed on trees. In *Tractatus De lapidus, Ortus sanitatis* (Mainz: Jacob Meydenbach, June 23, 1491)



Amber: Some Chemistry

- Natural resins (amber) = mixture of organic compounds: alcohols, ketones, carboxylic acids and most notably terpenes.
- Mainly diterpenes.
- These components polymerize to give us the hardened resin = Amber!
- Resin that did not polymerize was softer, and as such could not last millions of years.



Diterpine resin acids in conifers

Amber: some uses

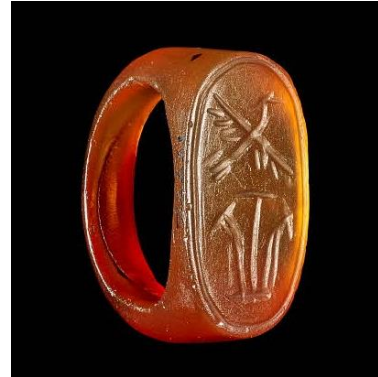
- Relatively soft
- Ideal to be cut and carved into beads and other jewelry items



Necklace from Archaic Greece.
600-480 BCE. Ancient Macedon.



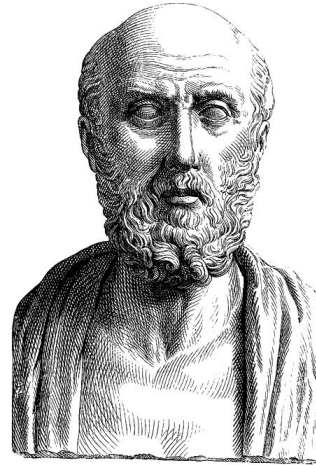
Modern Komboloi. Greece.



Amber: medicine?



Religious reformer Martin Luther carried amber for protection against kidney stones.



Hippocrates, father of medicine, used a mixture of crushed amber and honey to treat "dimming eyesight."

Amber: magic???????

Amber Associations

Chakras - [Sacral Chakra](#), [Solar Plexus Chakra](#), [Throat Chakra](#)

Zodiac - [Leo](#), [Aquarius](#)

Planet - Sun

Element - Fire

Typical colours - yellow, golden – transparent or translucent

Healing with Amber

♥ Romantic love ♥ Purification ♥ Cleansing ♥ Healing ♥ Energy ♥ Joy ♥ Enhances patience ♥ Draws negative energy from the body ♥ Balance ♥ Strength
♥ Spontaneity ♥ Wisdom ♥ Promotes good luck and success

Shop - Amber Jewellery & Gifts



Mother Of Pearl &
Amber Bracelet
£31.00



Baltic Amber Chip
Healing Bar Necklace
£20.00



Dark Baltic Amber
Nugget Healing
Pendant Necklace
£16.00

Ivory



Ancestral shrines. Palace of the Oba, Benin City, Nigeria.

Walking stick carved from narwhal tusk. Once owned by Charles Darwin.

Ivory: Sources



Narwhal



Sperm whale



elephant



extinct elephant
(mammoth)



hippo



walrus



whales



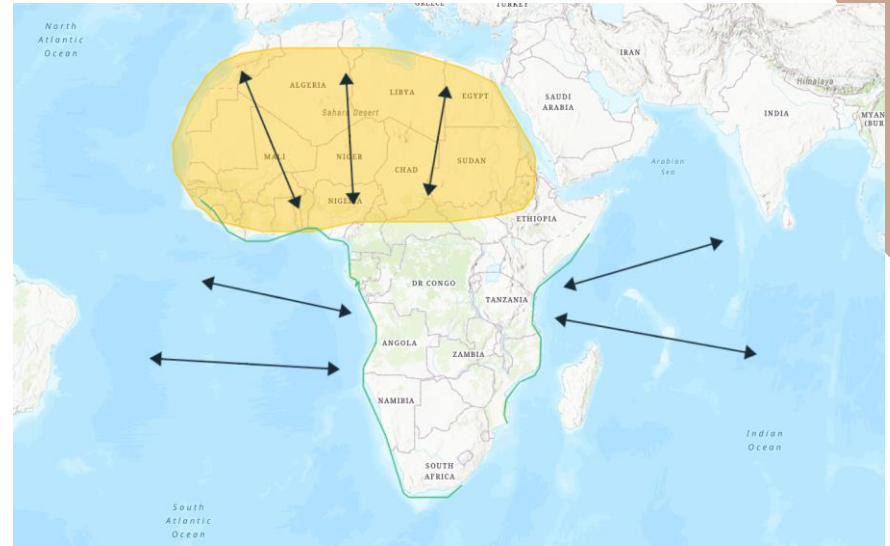
warthog

The elephant never tires carrying its tusks.

—Duala proverb from Cameroon refers to responsibility.

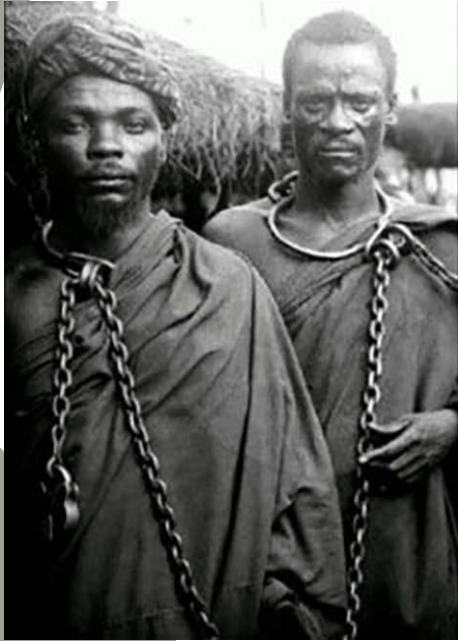
Ivory: pre-colonial trade

- Mostly within Africa
- Early Asian demand relied on internal trade from Eastern countries to Tanzania.



Ivory armband. KwaGandaganda (excavation site in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa). 9th century CE.

Ivory: Colonialism...



Maji Maji prisoners. Tanganyika.

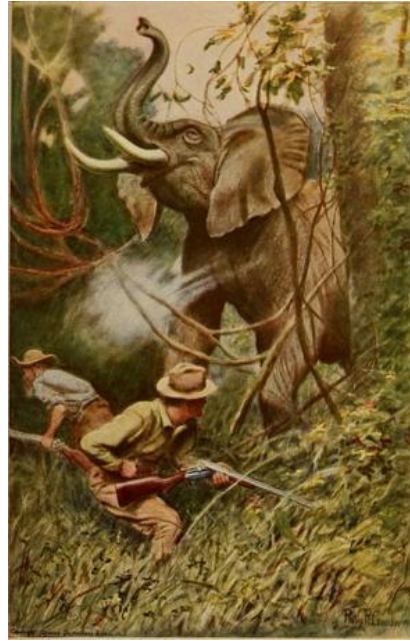


Image from African Game Trails by Theodore Roosevelt, 1910.



Ivory traders. East Africa.
1880s/1890s.

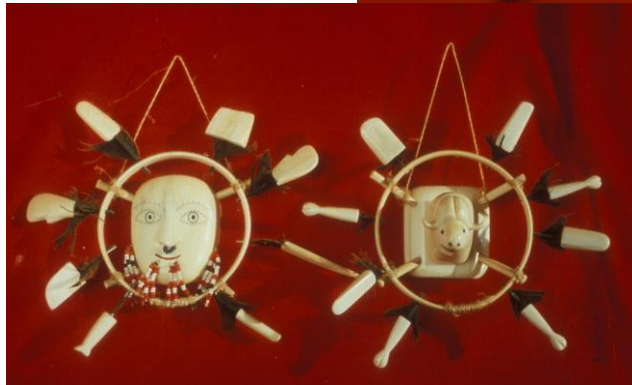
Ivory: Uses



Bull Leaper. Figurine from the Palace of Knossos, Crete. 1500 BCE.



Modern Cretan Dagger.



Ceremonial walrus ivory mask. From the Yupik in Alaska.

Tortoise Shell



Dolls' house of Petronella Oortman, 1686 – 1710, Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.



Tortoise shell ornament from Micronesia.

References

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