

ART AND RE THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Here we see Jesus shown as the Good Shepherd, symbolising his care for and guidance of his flock. It belongs to a small group of rock crystal figures of Jesus portrayed as a child.

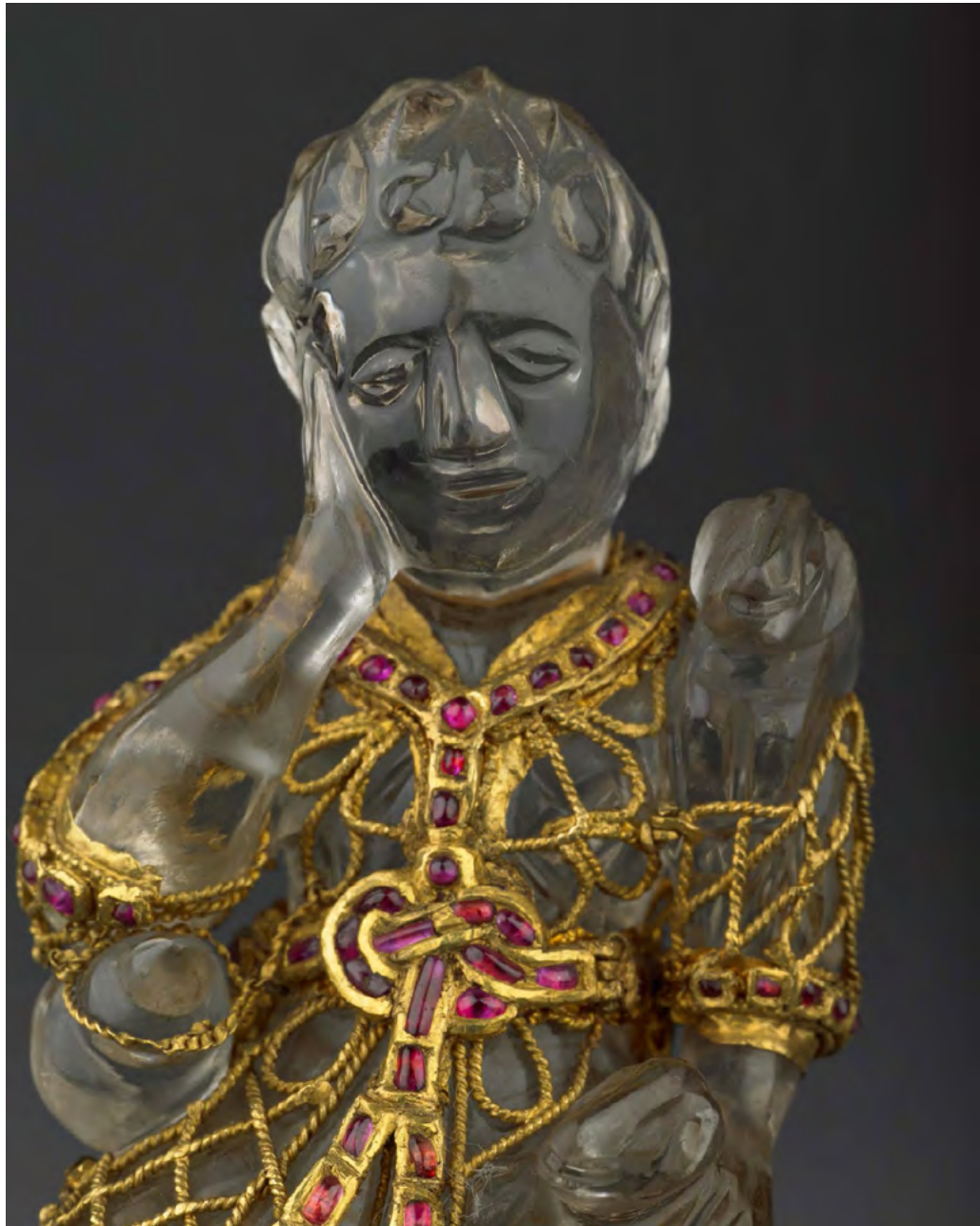
This group of sculptures were produced in Goa or Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka). Images of Jesus as a child were introduced there by Christian missionaries, who accompanied Portuguese invaders, in an effort to convert local communities. This image was assumed to appeal to local Buddhist people who were accustomed to similarly seated images of the Buddha.



THE GOOD SHEPHERD

ART AND RE
THE GOOD SHEPHERD

IN DETAIL



DATE c. 1600
MATERIALS Rock crystal, gold, rubies,
emeralds and sapphires
SIZE 12.8 x 5cm
PLACE Sri Lanka or Goa

MAKER Unknown

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

IN DETAIL



IN DETAIL



CONSIDERING CARE AND COMPOSITION

Jesus as the Good Shepherd cares for his flock in order to save humanity. Usually, Jesus as a child is shown with his mother, the Virgin Mary. The depictions of the Virgin and Child commonly present human tenderness between a mother and child, usually through body language and sometimes in eye contact.

DISCUSS



- What might the relationship between a parent and child tell us about the nature of faith?

The image to the left of Jesus with his mother points to Christian understandings of the fulfilment of scripture: a scroll shows the predictions of the Messiah in the texts of the Jewish prophets; he wears a death shroud to forecast his death; his nakedness emphasises his humanity and is often highlighted when he is being breastfed.

- How does the knowledge that a child will die change our relationship to that child?
- What does this tell us about how a Christian might 'read' such an image?

The Good Shepherd is nearly always presented as an adult as it refers to Jesus' claim in the New Testament (John 10:1-21) that he is the shepherd who knows every sheep, and would give up his life for their safety. The sculpture of the Good Shepherd portrays Jesus as a child on his own. Does this suggest his vulnerability or perhaps his strength?

- Why might the creators of this statue have seen the advantage of presenting the Good Shepherd as a child alone?

THE MADONNA OF THE CHERRIES

ART AND RE
THE GOOD SHEPHERD



TITLE The Madonna of the Cherries
(after Titian)
DATE 1651-1656
MATERIAL Oil on canvas, on oak panel
SIZE 13.5 x 17 cm

ARTIST David Teniers the Younger
DATES 1610-1690
PLACE Southern Netherlands



This depiction of the Good Shepherd imitates images of the seated Buddha that the creators of the object would have seen. The famous seated image of the Buddha, that appears to inspire the Good Shepherd statuette, depicts the Buddha at the stage of his enlightenment. His mudras (hand gestures) symbolise:

- The Buddha's call to the earth to witness his enlightenment.
- The Buddha's promise to protect, and his instruction for followers to be fearless. This image of the Buddha reminds Buddhists that the path to enlightenment is made possible by the experience of the Buddha, offering protection and courage.

The base of the object is similar to a stupa where the Buddha's relics are believed to be kept and are testament to his existence.

TITLE Bronze gilded seated figure of Buddha Bhaiṣajyaguru
DATE 17th century
PLACE China

Object number 1966,1015.4
© The Trustees of the British Museum

IN DETAIL



In the Good Shepherd, we see that these mudras have been adapted to a resting hand on the left knee and a tender right hand to the figure's face.

We can see that the figure is seated on a cushion, so perhaps the left hand references the Buddhist tradition of meditation which would take place on a cushion.

The right hand doesn't obviously relate to a Buddhist mudra, and perhaps emphasises the innocence and youth of the child. We do not have definitive answers as to why these choices were made, but we can make suggestions based on art historical knowledge and our interpretation of the human themes presented.

DISCUSS



- Is there a relationship between the Buddhist understanding of enlightenment and the Christian concept of being saved?
- What are the similarities or differences?

CONSIDERING COLONISATION AND BIBLICAL TEXT

Here we will think critically about how religious texts can help us to understand the intended function of the rock crystal Good Shepherd at the time of its creation. We will also ask what this means today. The tradition of the Good Shepherd is mentioned in the Book of Ezekiel in the Jewish Book of Nevi'im and the Christian Old Testament. Here, Ezekiel describes how God will care for his chosen people of Israel:

“And the sheep will be safe on their land. Then they will know that I am the Lord when I break the bars of their captivity and save them from the power of those who made them slaves. They will not be led captive by the nations again. The wild animals will not eat them, but they will live safely, and no one will make them afraid. I will give them a place famous for its good crops, so they will no longer suffer from hunger in the land. They will not suffer the insults of other nations anymore. Then they will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them. The nation of Israel will know that they are my people” says the Lord God. “You, my human sheep, are the sheep I care for, and I am your God” says the Lord God.’ (Ezekiel 34: 27–31)

We know the rock crystal Good Shepherd was part of a missionary project in Goa or Sri Lanka. While the Portuguese colonised India and Sri Lanka and gained economic power through the resources they traded across the world, these objects were used in an effort to convert Buddhists (or those familiar with Buddhist imagery) to Christianity.

DISCUSS



- How might the theme of the Hebrews' captivity relate to how the colonial Christian missionaries saw their role as 'liberators'?
- 'They will not suffer the insults of other nations anymore.' (Ezekiel 34: 28) How does this relate to the colonisation of India and Sri Lanka?



Jesus' self-identification as the Good Shepherd is found in John's Gospel in the New Testament, where Jesus describes himself in the symbolic 'I am' sayings. These sayings have informed Christian art since the time of early Christian Roman images and the Good Shepherd was initially more popular than later representations of Jesus as a king.

- How can the figure of Jesus be understood as both a shepherd and a king?

CONSIDERING COLONISATION AND BIBLICAL TEXT (CONTINUED)

John's author explicitly refers to the passage where God describes himself as a shepherd in Ezekiel. This can be interpreted as the Christian understanding that Jesus fulfils the promises of the Jewish scriptures. In the preceding chapter in John, Jesus heals a blind man and goes on to tell the Jewish authorities that they are the ones who are blind, by which he means spiritually blind. He next describes himself as the Good Shepherd.

'I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. The worker who is paid to keep the sheep is different from the shepherd who owns them. When the worker sees a wolf coming, he runs away and leaves the sheep alone. Then the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. The man runs away because he is only a paid worker and does not really care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep, and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I give my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not in this flock, and I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd. The Father loves me because I give my life so that I can take it back again. No one takes it away from me; I give my own life freely. I have the right to give my life, and I have the right to take it back. This is what my Father commanded me to do.'

John 10: 9-18

DISCUSS



- Look up the passage in Ezekiel 34 to compare it with John 10: 9-18.
- What are the similarities and differences? What do they tell us about John's account of Jesus' self-understanding?



- How would these metaphors relate to how a) the colonisers and b) the missionaries saw themselves?
- How might the missionaries have used these texts and the rock crystal Good Shepherd to persuade the local people of the Christian belief in Jesus as a saviour?
- What questions do you have about the relationship between invaders and religion here?
- Can you apply these questions to any other places or times?

CONSIDERING REPRESENTATIONS OF JESUS

This object is made of a selection of rare and luxurious materials. Rock crystal has been carved to create the figure, embellished with twisted gold to suggest embroidery and the tassels of the cushion, then inlaid with rubies and other precious gemstones. Rock crystal is one of the hardest materials on earth and is extremely difficult to carve. Not only is gold rare and expensive, it is also an inert mineral and maintains its colour and shine, unlike silver which becomes carbonised and tarnished.

Accompanying the invaders and colonisers from European countries, Christian missionaries often brought images of a pale-skinned Jesus with blonde or brown hair with them. On the next page is an image that is typical of this imagined image of Jesus. As a Palestinian living in the first century CE, Jesus would almost certainly have had darker skin and hair.

DISCUSS



- Why might artists have made sacred objects out of precious metals and stones?
- What connections can we make between gold and the meaning of Jesus for Christians?
- Figures such as this were often made in ivory, but this is made of rock crystal. How and why might the transparency of the object relate to its function and audience?



- Look up images of Jesus in different cultural contexts. Why is Jesus portrayed in different ways and in different landscapes?
- Why do you think Christian missionaries used images of Jesus portrayed as a pale-skinned European?
- Why might the missionaries in India and Sri Lanka have decided to use rock crystal and draw on familiar representations of the Buddha?
- What questions does the rock crystal Good Shepherd raise about the relationships between art, representation, religion and power?
- How can you take these questions further?

THE CONVERSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE



TITLE The Conversion of Saint Mary Magdalene
DATE c. 1834-1835
MATERIAL Oil on millboard
SIZE 20 x 42.5 cm

ARTIST Hippolyte (Paul) Delaroche
DATES 1797-1856
PLACE France


CLASSIFICATION

Why is the Good Shepherd sculpture a sacred object?

The figure would have either been used as object of devotion or to inspire devotion. Sometimes this line can be blurred, depending on the individual, as the object is sacred because of what it represents.

The object is no bigger than an adult hand (12.8cm x 5cm), so we can assume that it is likely to have been used privately or for a very small group of people.

DISCUSS

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- What are the similarities and differences between public and private devotion?
 - What are the advantages and disadvantages of religious objects being small or large?

Conduct an experiment in class to explore this question.
What questions would you ask?

REFLECTING ON THE OBJECTS AND WAYS OF LOOKING

Consider the Good Shepherd and the Mosque Lamp (see separate resource). Take time to think about what you've learned about the role of art in faith and society.

These might be some things to consider:

- Personification of holy figures
- God described through metaphor
- Patronage
- Continuity and change
- Human and religious themes
- Does art enrich religion, cause problems, or both?