



Object type: Male Figure
Indigenous name: Moai Kavakava
Culture/Location: Easter Island
Date: early to mid-18th century
Materials: Wood, obsidian, bone
Dimensions: H. 15 in.
Institution and accession number:
Indiana University Art Museum: 80.5.1



Object type: Lizard Figure
Indigenous name: Moko Miro
Culture/location: Easter Island
Date: early to mid-18th century
Materials: Wood, bone, obsidian
Dimensions: H. 15in
Institution accession number:
Indiana University Art Museum.
2010.24

The first object is the “Male Figure, *Moai Kavakava*”, a wooden figurative sculpture of a tall slender man in a standing position with his hands at his side and knees slightly bent. The most notable features on the sculpture are the rib cage, collarbone, and spinal cord. The large head, bones inserted within the eyes, and the low-relief mouth are all indications that this object is from Easter Island. Considering that this object was carved from wood emphasizes its connection to the island’s natural resources. The object was likely carved by a high-ranking priest who also served as the artist, from toromiro wood. Like many sculptures from Polynesia, this sculpture is carved from one material. During the process of carving, the priest prayed to imbue the object with an ample amount of mana, which is the manifestation of power one inherits from the gods (D’Alleva 1998, 20). When the artist/priest felt that the carving was finished, then the decorative material such as the inlaid eyes would have been added.

The second object, the Lizard Figure (*Moko Miro*), is a wooden sculpture carved from the toromiro tree that depicts a lizard like creature with human features. The features include folds along the mid-section, which represent the rib cage, a spinal cord along the top, and long thin arms extending across the chest. The bones inserted within the eyes and the low relief of the mouth indicates that the object came from Easter Island. Individuals within certain festival settings wore this object on the neck or around the belt area (Indiana University Art Museum). This object may have also been hung or placed on each side of the doorways of a house to

either ward off intruders or bring good fortune (Skinner 1922, 298). This object itself is believed to be associated with death and illness (Brooklyn Museum). I believe that the speculation for this comes from its similarity to the Male Figure – *Moai Kavakava*.

I believe that there is a connection between the two objects because of how similar they are in appearance. Additionally, there are other reasons that necessitate further research. Both of these objects indicate a close relationship between ancestors and descendants. They were likely passed down from generation to generation thus referencing genealogy, lineage and spirituality. This can be seen with the inlaid spinal cord on the back of both figures where each bump represents ancestral ties (Kaeppler 2003, 14), as well as the rib cages of both of these figures (Kaeppler 2003, 15). I believe that there is not a coincidence in the similarities between carvings of these objects and the emphasis in the physique we see. Taking into consideration that the *moko miro* was worn within dancing rituals, this could have been a plea to the gods by the person who wore it, to fix the famine issue which occurred on the island. I am saying this because of the importance that genealogy and fertility had within the moai culture and the importance of nature within this culture. Both objects illustrate two starving beings.

The creation of the religious group the *Makemake* cult, a group of followers who believed in the chief god, the “bird-man” held responsible as the creator of humanity and as the god of fertility, adds another connecting point to my hypothesis. Adrienne Kaeppler explains that there is a resemblance to bird features within the moai kavakava such as the long arms extending downward onto the knees indicating the long wings of a bird and the large nose being the beak (Kaeppler 2003, 20). Kaeppler also goes on to state that “When carved from wood, the transformation of man to bird and bird to man, so important in the birdman rituals, materialized in its bird form as moai tangata and its human form as the moai kavakava” (Kaeppler 2003, 21). If this is correct then what is the connection of the man to lizard? The *moko miro* contains human-like qualities to it but also a head in the shape of a beak. Could this object be another form in within the transformation state? Further research is necessary in illuminating more on these objects.

Bibliography

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Lizard Figure, Moko Miro

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