A000-Afr-Niger-Bura-Ritual funerary cylinder-Terra cotta-3rd -11th Century CE



Figs. 1-3. Afr-Niger-Bura-Ritual funerary cylinder-Terra cotta-3rd -11th Century CE

Case No.: 6

**Accession No.**

**Formal Label:** Afr-Niger-Bura-Ritual funerary cylinder-Terra cotta-3rd -11th Century CE

**Display Description:**

The Bura Iron Age culture (3 rd to 11 th century CE ) is named for its first discovered site in the [Tillabéry Region](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tillabéry_Region), of the [Tera Department](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tera_Department), in southwest [Niger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niger). Two other sites of expecial note are Asinda and Sikka in Burkina Faso and Niger respectively. The Bura culture encompasses a set of [archeological](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archeological) sites first discovered in 1975 in the lower [Niger River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niger_River) valley bordering SW [Niger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niger) and SE [Burkina Faso](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burkina_Faso). Excavated objects include terracotta heads, vessels and funerary urns, stone heads and iron arrow points. The terracottas have distinctive raised clay curvilinear motifs of unknown meaning.

The Bura culture belongs to a set of archaeological sites in the middle Niger valley in an area 250km long and about 150 km wide.   
The Bura site consists of many individual [necropoleis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Necropoleis) with coffins crested by unusually-distinctive [terra cotta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terra_cotta) [statuettes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statuette). The main [necropolis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Necropolis) itself has a diameter of about one kilometer. Burial mounds, religious altars, and ancient dwellings occur here over a large area. In 1983 a site 25 meters by 20 meters was excavated.

This present specimen of a funerary urn has a wide array of curvilinear motifs. Due to its placement in the soil the urn was cracked but is in remarkably good condition. It has natural age cracks that have been repaired and yet it remains intact. Stylistically this terracotta is attributed to the greater Bura site complex. This Bura funeral terracotta  is among the largest in height (22 in.) and is in the shape of an elongated cone with curvilinear figural or abstract motifs. These funeral objects were created as though one would shape a pot, tapering it to the head and adding the various surfaces embellishments. This is a classic example of the early art coming from this recently discovered culture that is spread over parts of Burkina Faso and Niger. Works such as this illuminate the ancient art of the West African potter and the rituals they served that are no longer practiced yet are commemorated in mute testimony with these surviving relics. It may be possible to reconstruct the meaning of some of these artifacts by comparing them with similar terracottas of Inner Niger Delta in Mali at Djenné-Djeno.

Bura includes 3 types of sites that are not always easy to distinguish from each other:  
 1) Sites with necropolis proper characterized by a particular kind of coffin jars or anthropomorphic funerary urns made up of pottery surmounted by heads of statuettes, placed upside down on the ground and containing human skeletons in Asinda-sikka. These sites include 2 distinct archaeological levels. This is the type of site from which the present head has come.   
 2) Sites of religious altars and ritual ceremonies characterized by piles of large blocks of stone form a sort of flattened tumulus or esplanades such as Asinda-Sikka, Karey-Tondi, Jajé-Tondi or Mebera-Tondi There are fragments of feet of tripod vases and fragments of pottery in the form of small painted cylinders.  
 3) Housing sites difficult to identify. But the discovery of fragments of tripod vases and sometimes of small piles and alignments of large blocks of stone testify to a human presence. Also on the site are quarrying wastes of quartzites or flint representing the site of arched framework and thin ceramic of Kosendo-gorizo ​​located to the west of necropolis, behind a hill.  
  
 The general articulation of the system of occupation of space sites in Bura seems to revolve around two poles, the necropolis and the religious altar. The necropolis is almost always located in protected places. In the necropolis, anthropomorphic terracotta coffins or anthropomorphic funerary urns were laid upside down on the original floor and were then covered by a remobilization of the wind after the 13th century.  
 Funerary urns are generally surmounted by heads of anthropoid statuettes presenting a generally anthropomorphic form. Three types of funerary urns can be distinguished:  
    1. Longiform or tabular vases 70 to 80 cm high and 10 to 30 cm in diameter, surmounted either by complete statuettes of a person or mounted rider. These vases serve as supports for statuettes and sometimes form their bodies.  
    2. Hemispheric vases 20 to 40 cm high and 10 to 30 cm in diameter generally topped by statuette heads. This is probably the origin of the current terra cotta head.   
    3. Semi-ovoid jars, approximately 50 to 70 cm in diameter and 40 to 60 cm in diameter, supporting either complete statuettes or statuette heads.

**LC Classification:**

**Date or Time Horizon:**

**Geographical Area:**

**Map:**

**GPS coordinates:**

**Cultural Affiliation:**

**Media:**

**Dimensions: H** 22 in

**Weight:**

**Condition:** Significant cracks at the tip and base of cylinder, a few cracks with repairs to top.

**Provenance:**

**Discussion:**

**References:**





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| **Ralph J Coffman Jr**  149 Atlantic Ave  Swampscott MA 01907-2427  United States |

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