

The Dam's Lament and the Ark of Sapience

The Ark of Sapience is a reliquary containing the earliest positive specimen of written language as well as the bones of the earliest known yinrih to have undergone funerary rites. The text and the bones within have changed over the millennia as earlier artifacts have been found or the dating of relics thought to be prototypical called into question.

The epoch used prior to First Contact represents the earliest post-kindling artifacts that can be accurately dated, but earlier specimens have since been found that cannot be dated with enough certainty to serve as an epoch. What is known with certainty is that sophonts coexisted with presapient yinrih for a time before the latter disappeared.

The various texts housed in the ark are notable for how unremarkable they are, No profound philosophical musings, no stirring poetry, those would come later. Most are laconic declarations such as "This tree is ours", "Good hunting here", or "I feel sick". Newly sapient yinrih were wont to write to themselves in the same way a human might think out loud, so simple statements of one's current mood or activity are by far the most widespread examples of primordial writing. Paralinguistic drawings are often intermingled with written language as well.

The dam's lament is the currently accepted earliest sample of written language. It is a picture of a destroyed womb nest, the kits eaten by an oviraptor, killed at the paws of a rival shire, or even crushed under a fallen tree limb. The picture is accompanied by a single character written over and over. Primordial abounds in polysemy and grammatical categories are fluid. The repeated glyph can signify the verb "to push" but also means more abstract things like "motive", "reason" or even the interrogative "why?" This last sense is what is inferred in the case of the Dam's Lament.

The Ark of Sapience is a major bone of contention between the Bright Way and Neoshamanism. Since all such artifacts predate the Theophany they can't have belonged to Wayfarers. Neoshamanists contest that Wayfarers are appropriating Shamanist relics that should be left alone. The Bright Way asserts that it represents an unbroken development rather than a rupture from primitive animism. The vast majority of yinrih undertook the Bright Way out of the jungle and into the southern grasslands, and the shamans among them simply continued their rites as before, but worshipping the Creator rather than the creature.

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