



## Ivory and precious stones used in sculpture

Prehistoric men carved and incised animal bones and ivory, easily obtainable from mammoths, from animal horns, the teeth of the walrus and the whale. Since then ivory – now taken from elephant tusks – has been employed to make small objects, for example knife handles carved into the shape of animals, statuettes, ornaments, mirror cases and combs. Altars are often decorated with ivory, and objects used in church rituals (e.g. pastoral staff, reliquaries) are often made of ivory combined with ebony and semi-precious stones.

In the Middle Ages stonemasons and carpenters were also artists: they carved architectural mouldings, capitals and window tracery, as well as monuments and effigies. They worked the stone with metal tools (chisels, files, hammer, saw) and then finished the carved figure with gesso and colour to protect the stone from the weather.

Gemstones, hardstones, organic materials like coral, mother-of-pearl and shell, and mineral substances like jet and amber, were and are still worked with metal tools and diamond drills. Carving of precious stones is considered part of the glyptic arts, but many of these works are just small scale sculptures. The art of carving jade, for example, is very ancient and, in China, this stone was thought of as having divine properties.

C. Aira - I. Pignet  
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