

LINDA STEIN

EXCAVATIONS:

A CAPRICCIO

1989



VIRGINIA CENTER FOR THE CREATIVE ARTS, A STEIN SOLO EXHIBITION 1989

Each sculpture with a wall placard based on the following text

THE TRIBE OF MEN AND WOMEN WHO CREATED THESE SCEPTERS AND THE TRIUMVIRATE OF ORACLE PIECES (OF WHICH WE HAVE TWO) CAME LATE TO THE SITE.

THEY WERE ORIGINALLY A NOMADIC PEOPLE WITH GREAT SKILLS AT WEAPONRY AND TOOL-MAKING.

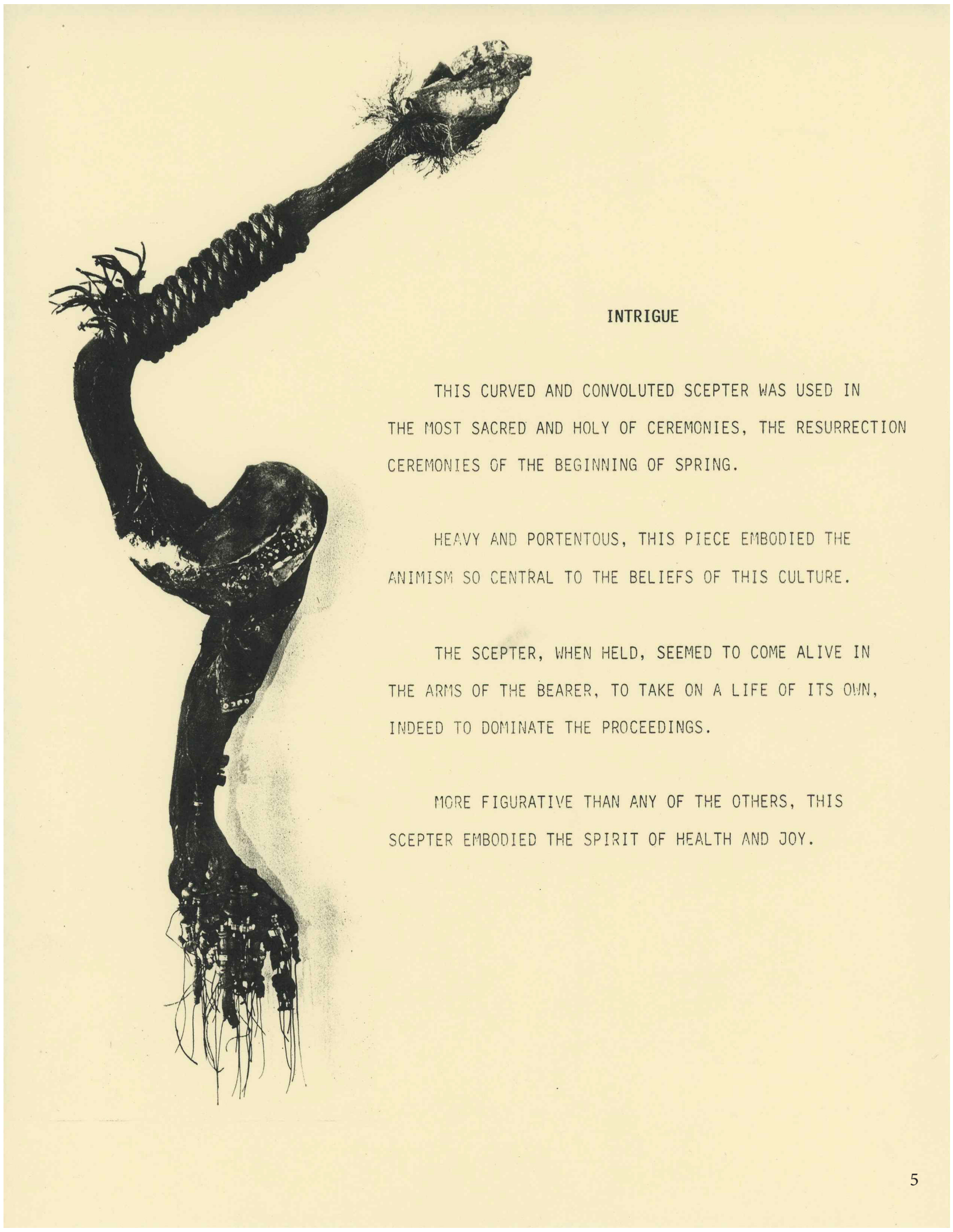
OVER THE GENERATIONS THEY TURNED FROM A WAR-LIKE EXISTENCE TO A PEACEFUL AGRARIAN WAY OF LIFE IN WHICH ALL MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY WERE VALUED AND THE NATURAL ELEMENTS WERE TREASURED AS PARTS OF A SACRED WHOLE.

THE EXCAVATED SCULPTURES ON EXHIBITION ARE REWORKINGS OF TOOLS AND WEAPONS INTO CEREMONIAL FORMS THAT CELEBRATE RITES AND PASSAGES EXPERIENCED BY THE COMMUNITY. THEY WERE USED MAINLY IN RITUALISTIC DANCE DURING COMMUNAL FETES.

THE CASES USED TO HOUSE AND TRANSPORT THESE SCEPTERS WERE VENERATED AS WELL, ESPECIALLY THOSE INCORPORATING GLYPHS REVEALING IMPORTANT PLACES AND EVENTS.



Intrigue 175; wood, metal, stone, bone; 1988; 63 x 27 x 23"



INTRIGUE

THIS CURVED AND CONVOLUTED SCEPTER WAS USED IN THE MOST SACRED AND HOLY OF CEREMONIES, THE RESURRECTION CEREMONIES OF THE BEGINNING OF SPRING.

HEAVY AND PORTENTOUS, THIS PIECE EMBODIED THE ANIMISM SO CENTRAL TO THE BELIEFS OF THIS CULTURE.

THE SCEPTER, WHEN HELD, SEEMED TO COME ALIVE IN THE ARMS OF THE BEARER, TO TAKE ON A LIFE OF ITS OWN, INDEED TO DOMINATE THE PROCEEDINGS.

MORE FIGURATIVE THAN ANY OF THE OTHERS, THIS SCEPTER EMBODIED THE SPIRIT OF HEALTH AND JOY.



The Oracle 162; wood, metal, stone; 1989; 66 x 9 x 10"

THE ORACLE

THE ORACLE PIECE IS AN AGGREGATE CREATED BY THE EARLY PRIESTESSES USING AS ITS BASE THE JAGGED REMAINS OF A TREE FOUND IN THE CENTER OF THE CLEARING NEAREST THE MOUTH OF THE CAVE SACRED TO THE GODDESSES.

THE PEOPLE IN THEIR SOUTHWARD WANDERINGS CAME UPON THE HIGH PLACE WHERE AN EARLIER GROUP HAD WORSHIPPED.

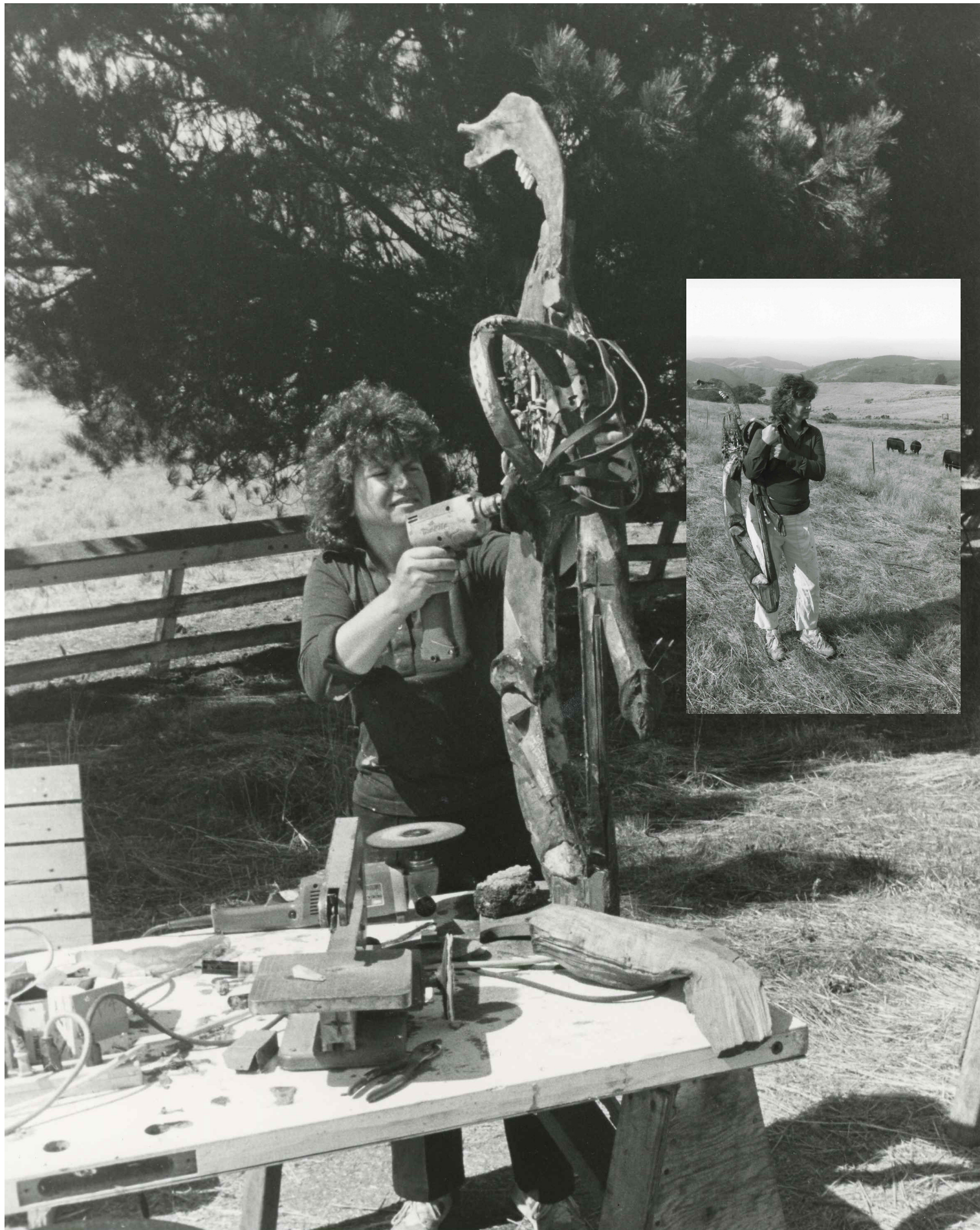
OMENS HAD LED THE PRIESTESS HERE AND, AS WAS PROPHESED, THERE LAY REVEALED, THE CAVE, THE CLEARING, THE FLAT ALTAR STONE AND THE LIGHTNING-STROCK TREE TRUNK UPON WHICH THE ARTISANS INCORPORATED SACRED OBJECTS.

PROMINENT AT THE TOP IS A PIECE OF ALTAR STONE FROM THE SAME STONE FOUND IN MANY OF THE SCEPTERS.

EMBEDDED IN THE BODY ARE PLATES OF BRASS, COPPER AND ZINC, ENGRAVED WITH HOLY TEXT, WHICH WERE ONCE WORKED INTO LEATHER, TO BE ROLLED AND CARRIED FROM CAMPSITE TO CAMPSITE.

WHEN THE PEOPLE CEASED TO BE NOMADIC THEY WORKED THEIR SACRED TEXTS INTO METAL AND CREATED THE ORACLE AS THE CENTER OF THEIR RITES AND CULTURE.





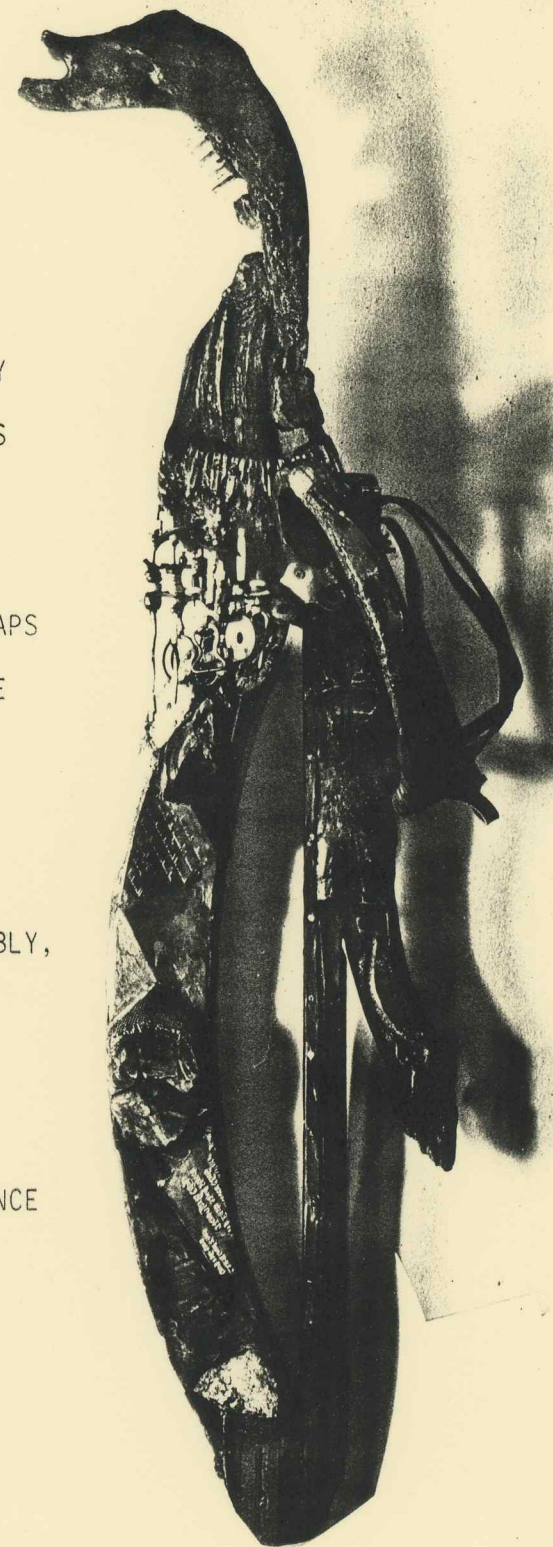
MOON CRADLE

THIS SCEPTER IS ONE OF SEVERAL USED IN CEREMONY BY THE PRIESTESSES OF ARTEMIS, OFTEN IN HER INCARNATION AS SELENE.

THE SHOULDER PIECE BEARS THE ORIGINAL LEATHER STRAPS WHICH SERVED TO STEADY THE SCEPTER IN THE FRENZY OF THE DANCE.

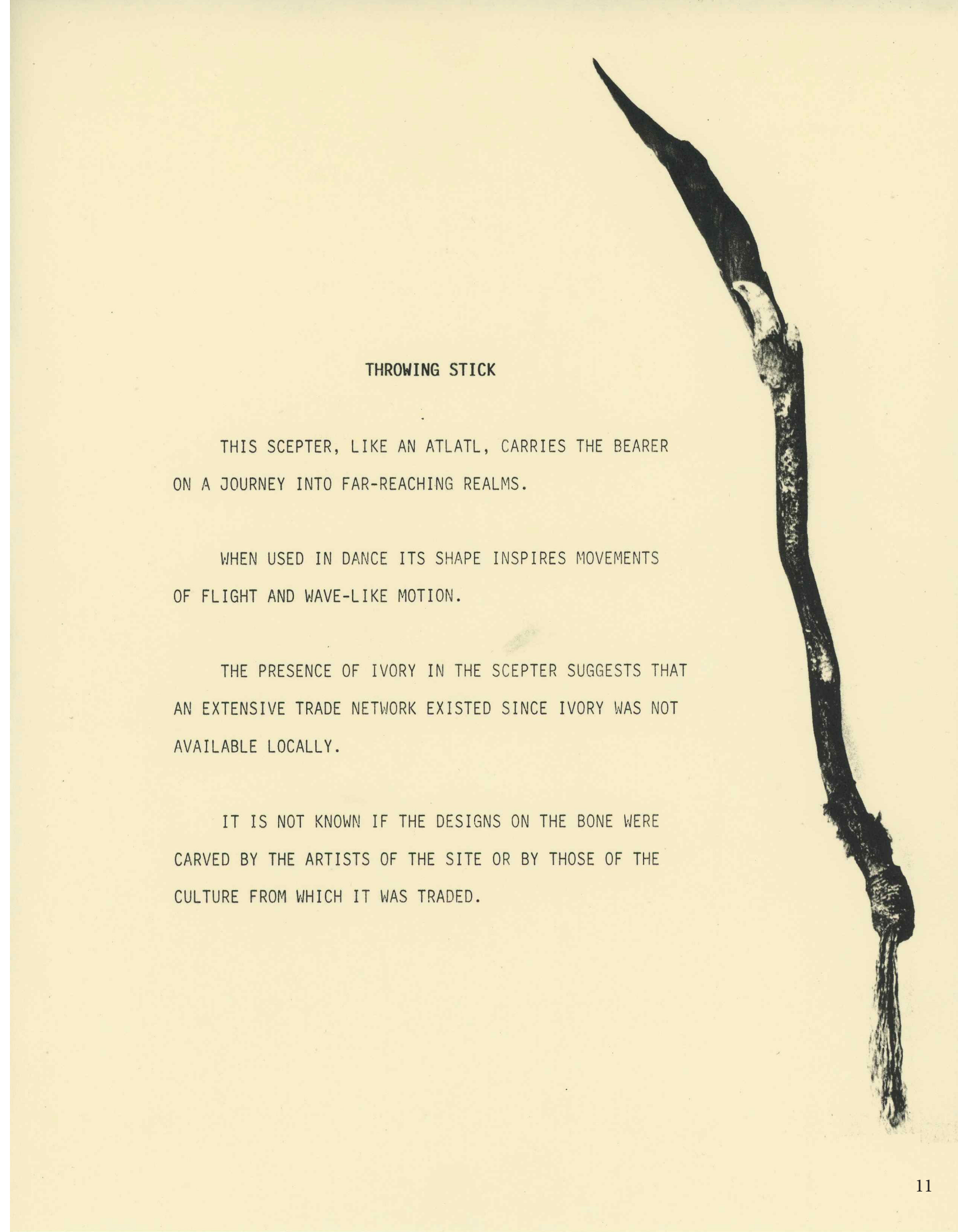
THE STONE AND THE BEADWORK WERE USED TO CREATE A SOUND TO BREAK THE STILLNESS OF THE NIGHT AND, PRESUMABLY, TO PROVIDE A RHYTHMIC ACCOMPANIMENT TO THE PRIESTESS' MOVEMENT.

THIS SCEPTER ACHIEVED ITS POWER ONLY IN THE PRESENCE OF THE MOON; WHEN ARTEMIS FAILED TO SHOW HERSELF, THE SCEPTER WAS LAID TO REST ON THE ALTAR OF THE GODDESS.





Throwing Stick 179; wood, metal; 1988; 62 x 33 x 11"



THROWING STICK

THIS SCEPTER, LIKE AN ATLATL, CARRIES THE BEARER ON A JOURNEY INTO FAR-REACHING REALMS.

WHEN USED IN DANCE ITS SHAPE INSPIRES MOVEMENTS OF FLIGHT AND WAVE-LIKE MOTION.

THE PRESENCE OF IVORY IN THE SCEPTER SUGGESTS THAT AN EXTENSIVE TRADE NETWORK EXISTED SINCE IVORY WAS NOT AVAILABLE LOCALLY.

IT IS NOT KNOWN IF THE DESIGNS ON THE BONE WERE CARVED BY THE ARTISTS OF THE SITE OR BY THOSE OF THE CULTURE FROM WHICH IT WAS TRADED.



REDEMPTION

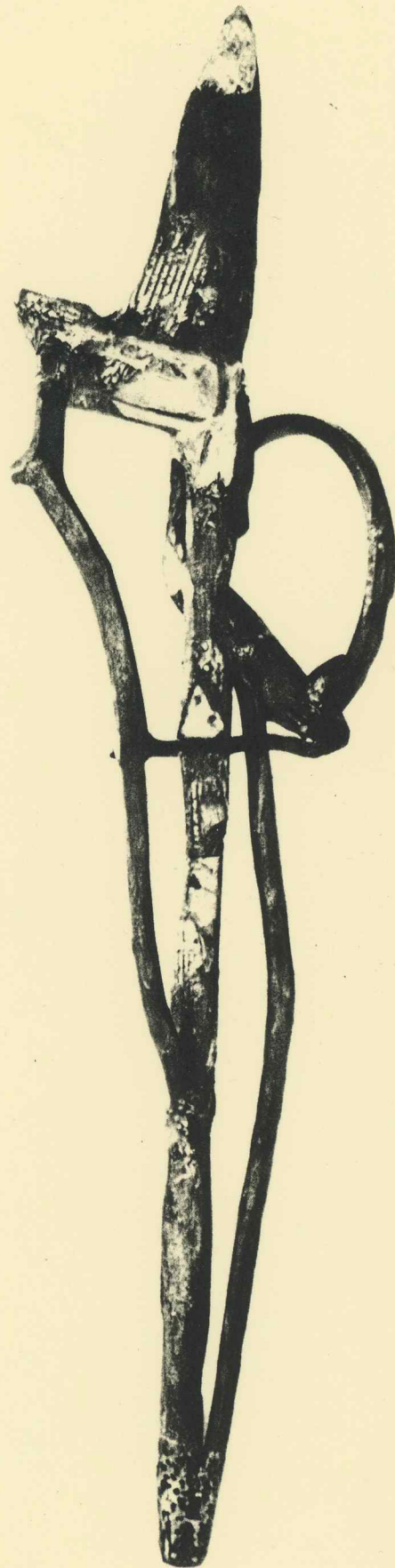
THIS SCEPTER, CALLED REDEMPTION, WAS USED BY A TRIBUNAL OF ELDERS TO DECIDE MATTERS OF LAW AND JUSTICE.

THE PIECE, CAREFULLY BALANCED AND INTRICATELY WORKED, BEARS FRAGMENTS OF THE CODES OF LAW ENGRAVED IN COPPER, TIN AND ZINC, DEMONSTRATING THE SOPHISTICATED METALWORKING SKILLS OF THE CULTURE.

SIMILAR PIECES, PREVIOUSLY DOCUMENTED, SUGGEST THAT THE SCEPTER RESTED UPON A FLAT STONE AND THAT IT WAS HELD GENTLY BY THE PRIESTESS.

THE SCEPTER THEN TURNED EASILY, OFTEN MOVED BY THE POWER OF THE WIND.

IT IS CLEAR THAT THE USE OF THE SCEPTER WAS CEREMONIAL, BUT IT WOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH THE CULTURES OF THE PERIOD THAT THE PIECE WAS ALSO USED IN AN ORACULAR VEIN - TO DECIDE THE FATE OF A SUPPLICANT OR ASCERTAIN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF A CLAIM





Double Circle 181; wood, metal, stone, bone; 1989; 27 x 10 x 13"

DOUBLE CIRCLE

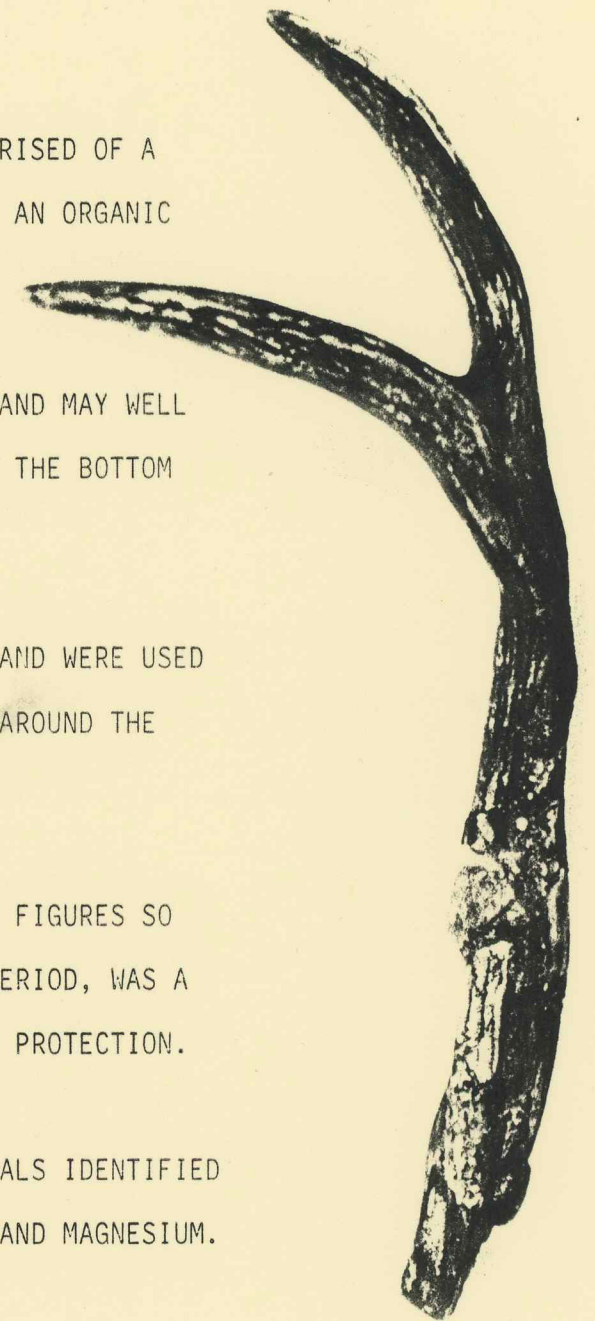
THIS DECEPTIVELY SIMPLE PIECE IS COMPRISED OF A COMPLEX SERIES OF ELEMENTS WHICH FUSE INTO AN ORGANIC WHOLE.

THE PIECE IS SMALLER THAN THE OTHERS AND MAY WELL HAVE BEEN LONGER OR HAD SOME ATTACHMENT TO THE BOTTOM BUT NONE HAS, THUS FAR, BEEN FOUND.

THE TWO PRONGS OF THE HORN ARE LARGE AND WERE USED TO CIRCUMSCRIBE A DOUBLE ARC IN THE EARTH AROUND THE OBJECT OR PERSON IN NEED OF PROTECTION.

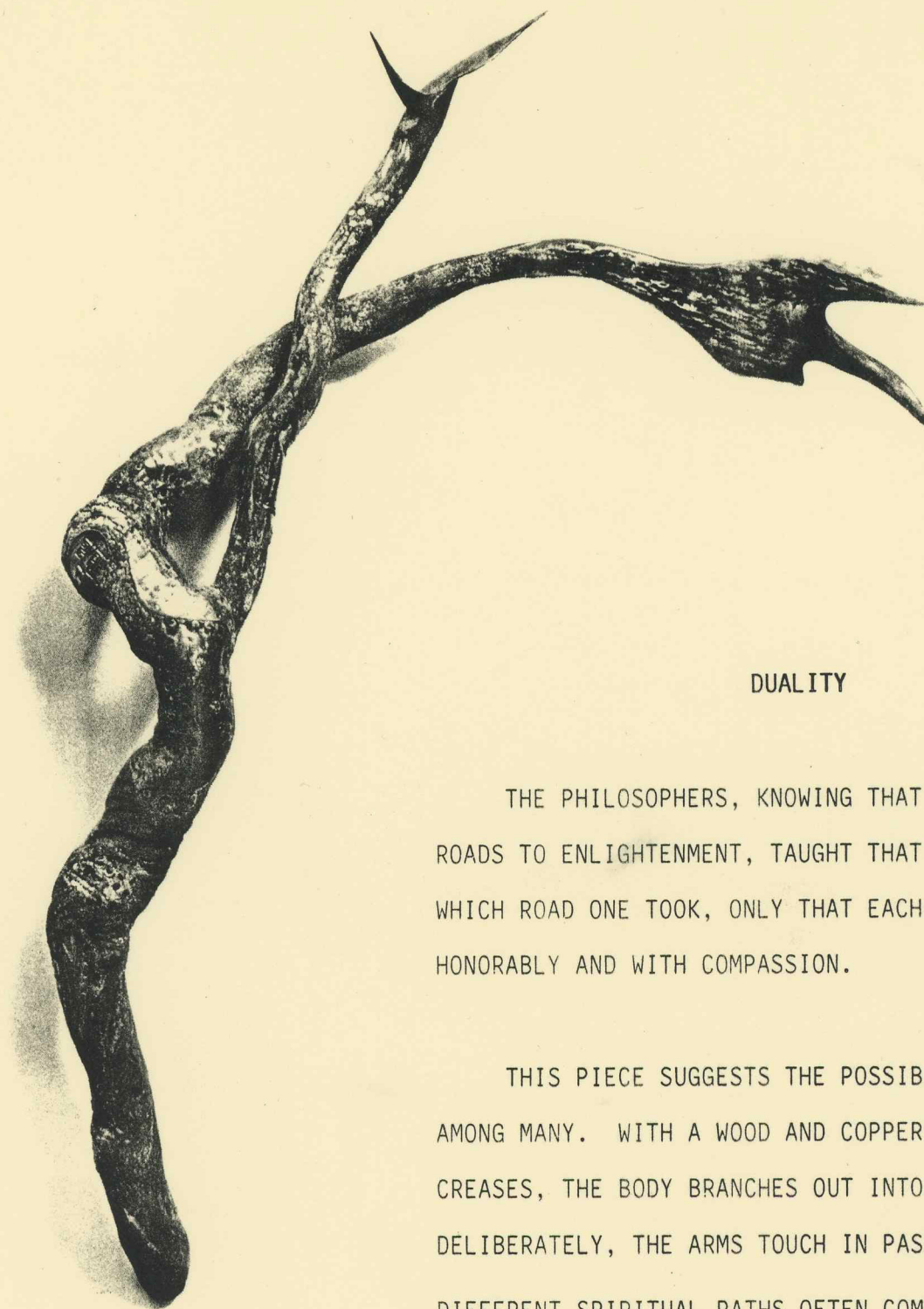
WE KNOW THAT THE DOUBLE CIRCLE, WHICH FIGURES SO PROMINANTLY IN THE POTTERY OF THE LATTER PERIOD, WAS A POTENT AND MYSTICAL SYMBOL OF STRENGTH AND PROTECTION.

ALONG WITH WOOD AND BONE, VARIOUS METALS IDENTIFIED IN THE WORK ARE BRASS, ZINC, COPPER, TIN, AND MAGNESIUM.





Duality 183; wood, metal, stone, bone; 1989; 42 x 23 x 16"



DUALITY

THE PHILOSOPHERS, KNOWING THAT THERE WERE MANY ROADS TO ENLIGHTENMENT, TAUGHT THAT IT DID NOT MATTER WHICH ROAD ONE TOOK, ONLY THAT EACH PERSON BEHAVE HONORABLY AND WITH COMPASSION.

THIS PIECE SUGGESTS THE POSSIBILITY OF TWO PATHS AMONG MANY. WITH A WOOD AND COPPER BASE OF FOLDS AND CREASES, THE BODY BRANCHES OUT INTO TWO DISTINCT ARMS. DELIBERATELY, THE ARMS TOUCH IN PASSING, MUCH AS DIFFERENT SPIRITUAL PATHS OFTEN COME TOGETHER AT CERTAIN POINTS.



Sea Ladder 182; wood, metal, stone, bone; 1989; 65 x 15 x 11"

SEA LADDER

THIS CELEBRATORY PIECE WAS USED TO COMMEMORATE THE HARVEST FROM THE SEA.

THE INTRICATE WORKINGS OF WOOD APPEAR TO BE SKELETAL AND ECHO THE SHAPE OF FISH TAKEN FROM THE WATERS CLOSEST TO THE SITE.

THE TOP ELONGATES INTO A STAFF OF BONE AND THERE IS A BACKBRACE OF WOOD WHICH BENDS TO CURVE AND CLING SINUOUSLY TO THE BODY.

THIS SENSUOUS BLEND OF ELEMENT AND SHAPE IS TYPICAL OF THE PEOPLE OF THE CULTURE FOR WHOM THE SENSUAL AND THE NATURAL WERE INTERTWINED AND COEXISTANT.





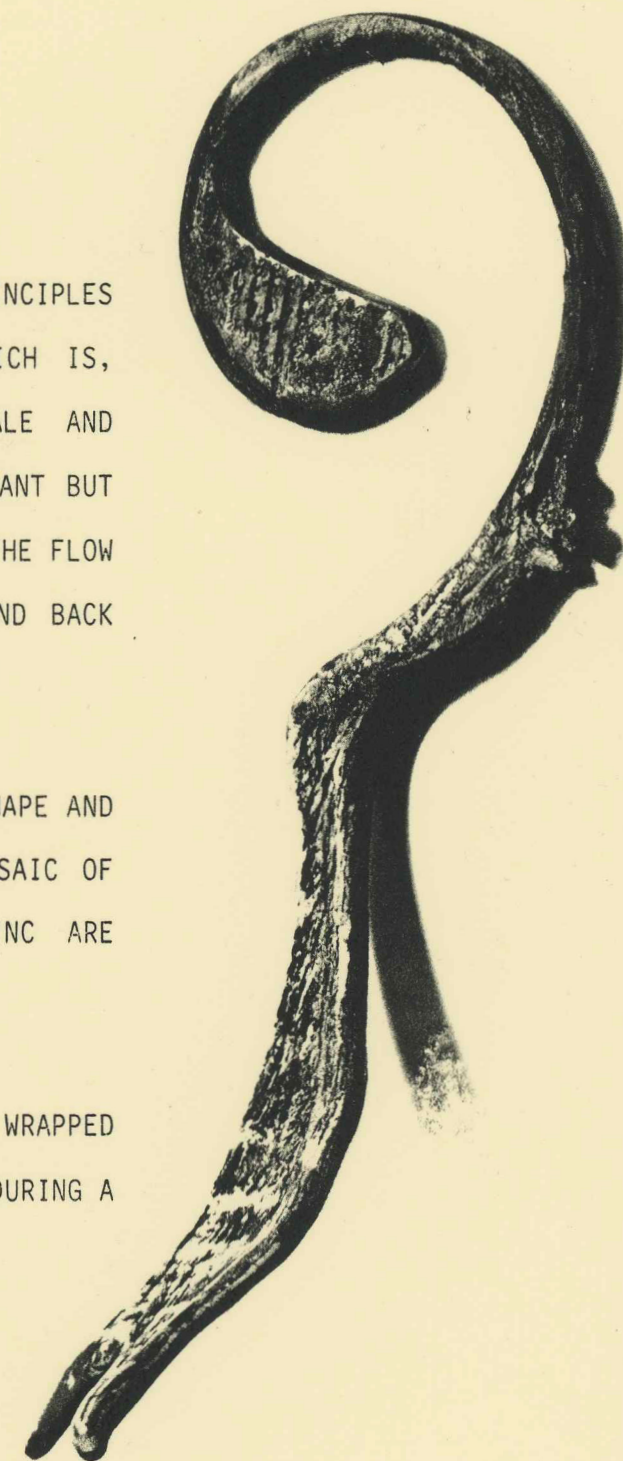
Body Staff 180; wood, metal, bone; 1989; 38 x 13 x 18"

BODY STAFF

IN THIS PIECE BOTH THE FEMALE AND MALE PRINCIPLES ARE REPRESENTED AS AN INTEGRATED WHOLE WHICH IS, INDEED, HOW THE CULTURE PERCEIVED BOTH MALE AND FEMALE. NEITHER ONE NOR THE OTHER WAS DOMINANT BUT BOTH ACTED TOGETHER. ANDROGENOUS IN NATURE, THE FLOW OF THIS SCULPTURE IS FROM FEMALE TO MALE AND BACK AGAIN.

THOUGH THE PIECE IS SIMPLE, RELYING ON SHAPE AND BALANCE TO ACHIEVE ITS SPIRITUAL ROLE, A MOSAIC OF COPPER, BRASS, TURQUOIS, MAGNESIUM, AND ZINC ARE WORKED INTO THE CURVE AT ONE END.

IT IS BELIEVED THAT THIS SCEPTER WAS WRAPPED AROUND THE SHOULDER OR PRESSED TO THE ABDOMEN DURING A CEREMONY.





Night Wind 173; wood, metal, stone, bone; 1988; 48 x 18 x 11"

NIGHTWIND

THE NIGHTWIND SCEPTER WAS USED AT FUNERAL CEREMONIES HELD AT DUSK.

THE ARC-LIKE SCYTHE REPRESENTS THE FLOW OF THE LIFE FORCE FROM ONE FORM TO ANOTHER AND THE PASSAGE OF THE SOUL FROM ITS HUMAN AVATAR TO A PURE SPIRIT FORM.

THE BONE AT THE SCEPTER'S TOP REPRESENTS THE STRENGTH OF SPIRIT PERMEATING ALL LIFE.

THE NATURE OF THIS PIECE, EVEN THE PRIEST'S HANDLE WHICH EMERGES FROM THE BODY, IS ORGANIC, WOOD FLOWING TO STONE FLOWING TO METAL.

THIS SCEPTER WAS USED IN THE MOST MYSTERIOUS OF CEREMONIES, THAT CELEBRATING THE PASSAGE OF THE SPIRIT FROM ONE FORM TO ANOTHER AND OF THE BODY FROM LIFE TO DEATH.





Afterlife 164; wood, metal; 1989; 71 x 12 x 11"

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AFTERLIFE

THIS SHRINE, A CHANNEL TO THE AFTERLIFE,
WAS SITUATED IN THE CENTER OF AN EXPANSE OF LAND
ON THE FAR WESTERN EDGE OF THE SITE.

IT WAS THROUGH THE AURA CREATED BY THIS
SHRINE THAT THE INDIVIDUAL, ALONE AND MEDITATIVE,
ADDRESSED THE DEAD.

