

World Art on Swimming

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This article aims to identify swimming-related artwork from Paleolithic times up to the present day and to assess whether possible use of art could act as an aid to teaching. An art search obtained 50 paintings and sculptures. Results confirmed that artists have bestowed a wealth of related artwork on the world of aquatics. Depictions of people swimming competitively or recreationally, diving, bathing, working, and fighting were found in Egypt, Greece, Persia, Italy, Spain, the USA, Japan, and China. Depending on the particular society, the ability to swim indicated either a high or low socio-economic status. In some depictions, knowledge of swimming was accompanied by the ability to dive from high cliffs or into deep water, to hold one's breath underwater, and to show physical endurance. A variety of swimming strokes were depicted throughout history in art. Various types of swimwear, or nude swimming, were evident in different societies.

Keywords: swimming, diving, water safety, drowning.

Swimming has been the subject of extensive research in terms of core sports science disciplines except in the field of art. More specifically, recreational and competitive swimming have both been studied extensively in relation to biomechanics, physiology, and psychology, since scientists, coaches, and swimmers started being interested in increasing athletic performance and quality of life through exercise (see Vilas-Boas, 2010). Apart from very limited references (e.g., Avramidis, 2005, 2009, 2010; Avramidis & Devouros, 2008; Dawson, 2006, 2010), as far as we know, no study has yet approached swimming from the point of view of art. In other words, we are not aware the degree to which artists may have been inspired by swimming or other aquatic activities. We have not used aquatic art so far as an aid in teaching swimming and water safety.

Given the lack of scholarly work in the field of art related to swimming and aquatic activities, a number of consequences present themselves. Although scientists and swimming organizations around the world have done respected work in producing texts and manuals (e.g., Langendorfer & Bruya, 1995; Swimming Teachers' Association, 2006) and other computer or engineering-based instrumentation (e.g., Nakashima et al., 2010; Sanders, Machtsiras, & Scott, 2010) dedicated to these subjects, it seems that there is a lack of literature relating to art in aquatics. This knowledge gap means we have limited references in the form of art inspired

by religious, historical, cultural, or other events. A potentially significant part of our swimming and aquatic heritage remains neglected and undiscovered and has not yet been summarized or made available for research, education, and teaching in the fields of aquatics (i.e., swimming and water safety).

In turn, this leads us to pose the following questions: What examples exist of artwork related to swimming? Are there themes represented in aquatic artwork? Could aquatic artwork give us any insight into the way our ancestors swam or how they spent their time in or around the water? What types of aquatic events inspired the artists?

Possible answers to these questions could be meaningful for a number of reasons. First of all, we might be able to see how swimming and aquatic activities were perceived by artists in the past. Second, their artwork might give us insights into the antecedents of various swimming activities, even how strokes may have evolved over time. Third, answers could raise awareness of another dimension of swimming that so far has been unknown in most of the world of aquatics (e.g., researchers, coaches, parents, and athletes). Fourth, they could enable us to preserve this dimension of our aquatic heritage. Fifth, they could represent a unique and valuable source that could be used in education (e.g., presentation material for teaching the general public, sports scientists, and swimming coaches; introductory historical references for swimming textbooks; useful material for exhibitions, museums, and other swimming related organizations; and even for creating supporting materials for documentaries about swimming). Therefore, the purpose of this article was to identify examples of works of art related to swimming and other aquatic activities and to evaluate their content thematically.

The Literature Search Process

The terms *swimming*, *art*, *artwork*, and *depiction* were used as keywords in a search that was undertaken to identify paintings and other artwork that may have a swimming-related theme. The search used the internet search engines “Google” and “Wikimedia Commons” (2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2011e, 2011f, 2011g, 2011h), as well as swimming and water safety books with historical references. To be selected, works of art had only to meet one simple criterion: they had to have a swimming or aquatic-related theme. The search revealed 50 examples of works of art in the form of paintings or sculptures that met the selection criterion. From these, 2 were dated from Paleolithic times and the other 47 from ancient times up to the present day. From the latter, 6 originated from Egypt, 13 from Greece, 3 from Asia, 7 from the USA, and 19 from other civilizations (e.g., Persia, Italy, Spain, and others not reported).

Swimming and Aquatic-Related Artwork

In the following sections of this paper, I present a brief description of the nature of the artwork, the title, the artist, and the content. To make it easier for readers to understand, the artwork has been classified into chronological/historical and geographical sections that refer to swimming and aquatics in Paleolithic times, in ancient Egypt, Greece, and other historical civilizations (e.g., Persia, Italy, Spain, the USA, Japan, and China) from ancient times up to the present day.

Paleolithic Times

While it is uncertain how prehistoric humans swam for the first time, it is absolutely certain that they engaged in various kinds of swimming and aquatic activity. Some speculate that prehistoric people may have come into contact with water for the first time when they were being chased by an animal or an enemy and used the water for a mode of escape. Searching for prehistoric depictions revealed a wealth of information. For example, a linear image from Paleolithic times depicts people swimming using the “doggy” style of swimming. This image was found in a cave in Africa that was discovered during a mission of Anetat-Gebirges (Figure 1; Plithakis & Plithaki, 1978). Also, in the Libyan desert, in the “Cave of Swimmers,” there is another linear depiction engraved on the wall of a cave showing people swimming (Figure 2; Plithakis & Plithaki, 1978; Wikipedia, 2010). According to researchers, from this depiction it is evident that ancient humans once inhabited these lands by following rainfall patterns (Bray, 2006).

In popular and scientific literature alike (e.g., Avramidis, 2005; Bray, 2006; Jezerniczki, 2010; Plithakis & Plithaki, 1978), the “cave of swimmers,” a large shelter with prehistoric paintings at Wadi Sora, along the Western Side of the Gifl Kebir plateau in the Egyptian part of the Libyan Desert (Eastern Sahara) is considered to be the earliest representation of swimming humans. The name was given by the Hungarian explorer, Laszlo Almasy, following the discovery of the site in 1933, on account of a row of apparently floating small human figures in a swimming-like posture. The paintings of the “Wadi Sora” culture are very complex and abstract with numerous human figures in strange contorted body postures, accompanying “headless beasts” that appear to be composite creatures with attributes of several animals and a striking lack of a distinct head. The “cave of swimmers” is damaged by weathering and the figure contexts are hard to decipher, but more recently the pristine “cave of beasts” was discovered nearby. It also contains swimming figures, which allows a much better understanding of the Wadi Sora culture. The swimming figures appear to be associated with one of the “headless beasts,” arranged along a linear pattern facing the beasts. They may be performing a number of behaviors (e.g., floating, lying prostrate, praying, or giving homage), but swimming is a remote and unlikely possibility (Zboray, 2009).

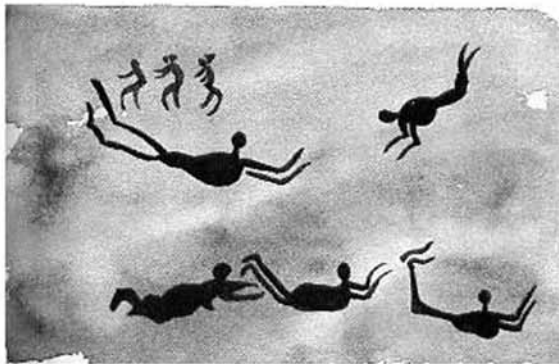


Figure 1 — People performing the “doggy” style. Wall painting in an African cave. Taken from Ellen Moody, 2004, with permission.

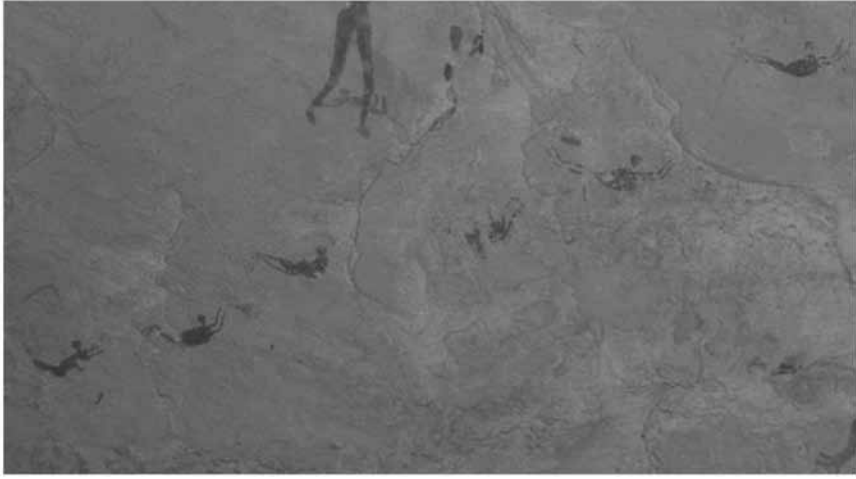


Figure 2 — Wall painting from the Paleolithic period depicting swimmers. Note. This image is depicted in the “Cave of Swimmers” in the Libyan desert whose proper name is Wadi Sora site WG 52. Taken with permission from Zboray, 2009.

Egypt

Swimming was a popular sport in ancient Egypt. Swimming contests and practices were held in the River Nile and in swimming pools. The calm waters of the Nile encouraged youths to participate in swimming competitions showing their skills. In palaces, noblemen constructed swimming pools so that princes could be taught the sport. Royal and noble children often took swimming lessons as mentioned in a biographical inscription of a Middle Kingdom nobleman (BBC UK, 2010).

The literature for art related to swimming revealed six depictions with origins in ancient Egypt. In the first, a cylindrical seal depicts the alternating strokes of legs and arms used for swimming. This depiction is dated to the 4th-5th century BC. In the areas near the River Nile, water played an important role; therefore, it is logical to assume that swimming must have been a regular activity. Cylindrical seals of many Pharaohs of the first dynasty contain depictions in the form of letters. These confirm that swimming was a known activity in previous periods (Figure 3; Plithakis & Plithaki, 1978).

An ancient Egyptian hieroglyph, dated about 3000 BC, depicts the cyclical movement of a front crawl-like stroke (Figure 4; Plithakis & Plithaki, 1978). In the third hieroglyph the elbows were slightly bent and only the upper part of the body was seen above the water surface. This possibly meant that the swimmer was trying to remain in an upright position. It has been dated about 2500 BC (Figure 5; Avramidis, 2005; Plithakis & Plithaki, 1978).

The fourth ancient Egyptian artwork depicts a swimmer performing front crawl on a votive plate dated to the end of the 8th dynasty (about 2200 BC). This performance is similar to that in the previous hieroglyphs (Figure 6; Avramidis, 2005; Plithakis & Plithaki, 1978). The fifth, an honorary depiction engraved in marble, shows the victory of Pharaoh II at the battle of Qadesh in about 1250 BC. The enemies are trying to escape by swimming front crawl or backstroke across the

River Orodis in an attempt to save themselves (Figure 7; Avramidis, 2005; Plithakis & Plithaki, 1978). Finally, a text was found on a grave (12th dynasty in about 1800 BC). It says that Pharaoh allowed someone to participate in swimming lessons that were organized for the children of the kings. This confirms that the Pharaohs could swim (Figure 8; Avramidis, 2005; Plithakis & Plithaki, 1978).

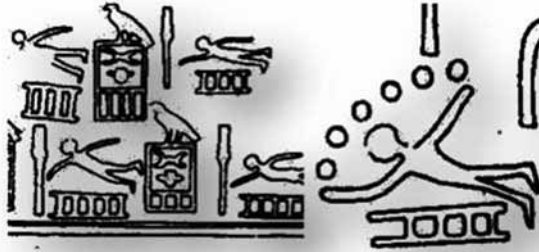


Figure 3 — Egyptian seal of the Neolithic period depicting the alternate strokes of legs and arms. Note. Linear illustrations made by Nikos Kouremenos based on depictions originally published by Mehl, 1927. Reproduced with permission.

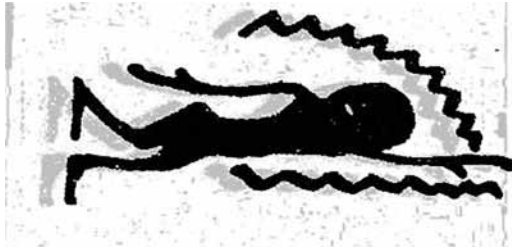


Figure 4 — Front crawl in an Egyptian hieroglyph in about 3000 BC. Note. Linear illustrations made by Nikos Kouremenos based on depictions originally published by Mehl, 1927. Reproduced with permission.



Figure 5 — Front crawl with which the swimmer tries to remain in an upright position in about 2500 BC. Note. Linear illustrations made by Nikos Kouremenos based on depictions originally published by Mehl, 1927. Reproduced with permission.

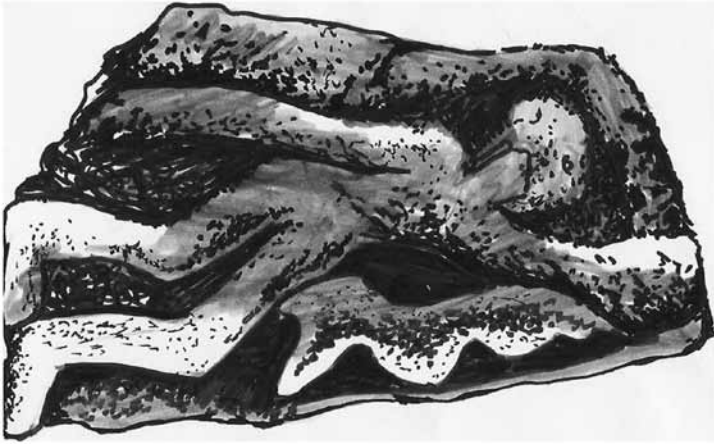


Figure 6 — Plate depicting a swimmer who is performing the front crawl (2200 BC). Note. Linear illustration made by Nikos Kouremenos based on depiction originally published by Plithakis & Plithaki, (1978) and Touny & Wenig, (1969). Reproduced with permission.

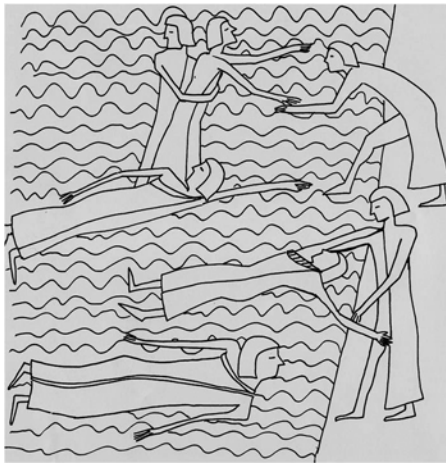


Figure 7 — Pharaoh Ramses's enemies swim front crawl or backstroke in the River Orodís to save themselves. Note. Linear illustration made by Nikos Kouremenos inspired by the Battle of Kadesh dated to 1274 BC. Reproduced with permission.

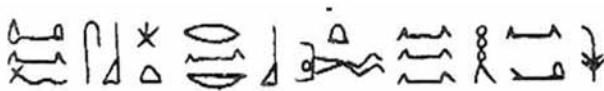


Figure 8 — Text from an Egyptian grave that says that Pharaoh allowed someone to participate in swimming lessons that were organized for the children of the kings. Note. Drawn by Nikos Kouremenos based on the original that was published by Touny & Wenig (1969) and Decker, (1975). Reproduced with permission.

Greece

The ancient Greeks developed a considerable relationship with the sea that surrounded their country. For example, in Greek mythology, the sea was worshipped as a god. Ancient Greek city-states were the established dominant naval powers in the Mediterranean Sea. Furthermore, swimming was an important physical activity for ancient Greeks (Kassaris & Albanidis, 2010).

Fourteen depictions of people swimming originated from ancient Greece. The first was found on a silver receptacle in a Mycenaean grave and shows swimmers performing the breast stroke. This is an indication that this swimming style was known in the Homeric period. Three swimmers are shown; two of them on the right are swimming breaststroke (Figure 9; Avramidis, 2005; Plithakis & Plithaki, 1978). The second depiction was originally on an alabaster thanksgiving container. It was found in the vehicle of a female swimmer from the 18th dynasty during 1380 BC (Figure 10; Avramidis, 2005; Plithakis & Plithaki, 1978). In the third depiction, on the top left hand side, the head of an animal is seen scaring swimmers who “fly” (Figure 11; Avramidis, 2005; Plithakis & Plithaki, 1978).



Figure 9 — Silver receptacle from a Mycenaean grave depicting swimmers performing the breast stroke. Note. Linear illustration made by Nikos Kouremenos based on depiction originally published by Plithakis & Plithaki, 1978. Reproduced with permission.

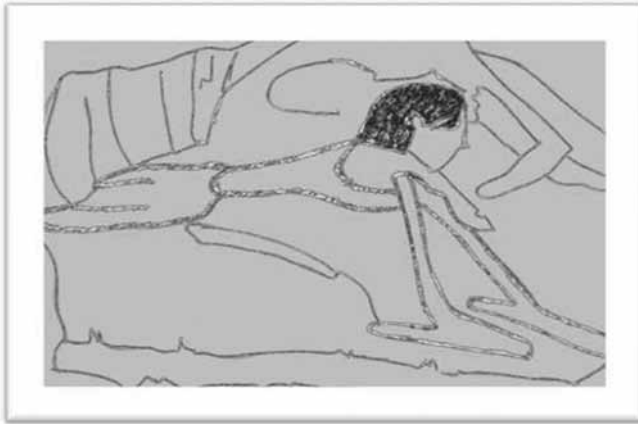


Figure 10 — Female swimmer of the 18th dynasty on an alabaster thanksgiving container. Note. Linear illustration made by Nikos Kouremenos based on depiction originally published by Plithakis & Plithaki, 1978. Reproduced with permission.

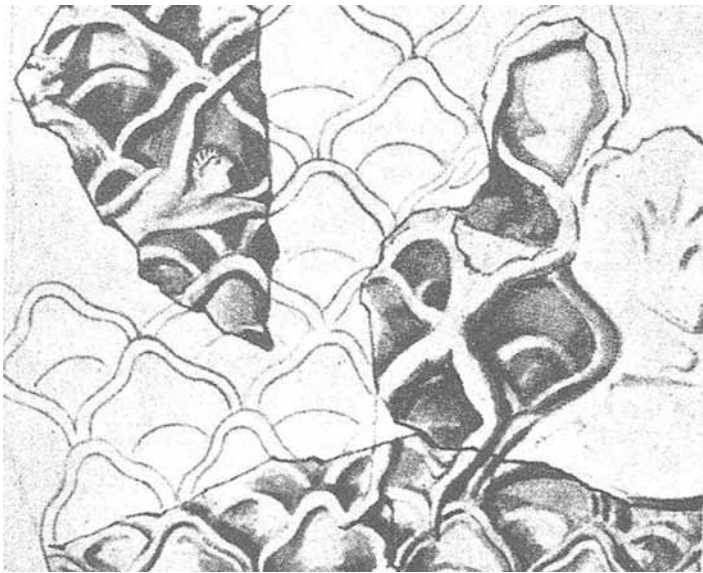


Figure 11 — In the Mycenaean “rhyton siege” male figures are depicted to swim at sea. Note. Courtesy by National Archaeological Museum of Athens. Index number 481. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism /Archaeological Receipts Fund. Reproduced with permission.

In the fourth Greek angiography, a sunrise is depicted. Near the bottom of the picture a swimmer is shown performing the front crawl (Figure 12; Avramidis, 2005; Plithakis & Plithaki, 1978). The fifth depiction represents a snapshot of the story of Theseus and the Minotaur. Theseus was saved from the Minotaur in Crete

Island and returned to Athens with young boys and girls. They had been sent as “death toll” from Athens to King Minos. One of them is looking forward, about to step onto the Athenian land, while another jumps into the water from the ship and starts swimming. The scene is depicted on an archaic crater of Attica painted by Ergotimos and Klitias (570-500 BC; Figure 13; Avramidis, 2005; Plithakis & Plithaki, 1978).

The sixth depiction shows the moving story of Leander and Hero. Aphrodite’s priestess, Hero, lived far away from Leander, the son of Avidos. In fact, they lived in different areas of the Hellespont. During the night, Hero would hold a torch to guide Leander who swam toward her. During one stormy night, the wind blew out the torch and Leander, losing his orientation, drowned. When his beloved Hero realized it, she jumped into the water, committing suicide by drowning, so that she could be with him again (Figure 14; Areopagus, 2000; Avramidis, 2010; Wikipedia, 2011c).

In the seventh depiction, a swimmer or diver is seen ready to dive. He is depicted on a bronze statuette from the 5th century BC (Figure 15; Avramidis, 2005; Avramidis & Devouros, 2008; Plithakis & Plithaki, 1978). The eighth depiction, describes the efforts of Dedalus and Icarus trying to escape from King Minos in Crete Island. While most scholars know about their initiative to escape by flying, only a few know that they might have escaped by swimming. These two possible ways of escaping are depicted on a Cretan coin (Figure 16; Avramidis, 2005).



Figure 12 — Depiction of the front crawl on Greek angiography. Note. Apollo as Helios often was seen driving a chariot lead by winged horses and with an image of the sun and its rays framing Apollo’s head. Drawn by Nikos Kouremenos based on the original that is depicted in *Metapedia* (2011). Reproduced with permission.



Figure 13 — A young man swims impatiently while his ship approaches Athens, on a krater of Attica of 570-500 BC. Note. The famous François vase was discovered by Signor Alessandro François in 1845. It depicts the Return of Theseus from the Slaughter of the Minotaur. When the ship approaches the land, one of the companions of Theseus casts himself into the sea to swim to the land. Taken from Sailko who has granted permission to copy and distribute the image (see Wikimedia Commons, 2011f).



Figure 14 — Leander swimming towards the coast where his lover Hero waits for him. Each night Leander would swim to meet his lover Hero. One night, during a storm, Leander drowned. The grief-stricken Hero threw herself from a tower. Note. Drawn by Bernard Picart (1673-1733). This media file is in the public domain in the United States. This applies to U.S. works where the copyright has expired, often because its first publication occurred prior to January 1, 1923. Taken from Wikipedia, (2011c).



Figure 15 — Statuette of a swimmer or diver (5th century BC). Note. Drawn by Nikos Kouremenos based on the original.



Figure 16 — Dedalos and Icarus try to escape from Crete either by flying or swimming. Note. Linear illustration made by Nikos Kouremenos based on depiction originally displayed in the British Museum with index number 2283. Reproduced with permission.

The ninth depiction shows Skyllias cutting the anchor lines of the Persian fleet. Herodotus reports that Skyllias (also spelled Skilis) was a prisoner of war in one of Xerxes's ships during the second naval expedition. When he was informed that Xerxes intended to attack a small Greek fleet, he grabbed a knife and jumped into the sea. The Persians failed to locate him and assumed that he had drowned. He managed, though, to escape by swimming underwater. Furthermore, he cut the ropes that anchored the ships to the dock. He used a cane reed as a snorkel so that he could swim under the water surface unnoticed. He swam 15 km and joined the Greeks in the cave Artemisio (Figure 17; Anonymous, 2004; Lawrence, 1997; Wikipedia, 2004).

The tenth ancient Greek depiction shows a boy riding a dolphin. A friendship developed between a dolphin and a young boy named Lasos. Each day they swam together when the boy returned from school. The dolphin allowed his friend to climb onto his back and ride around on him. One day the dolphin accidentally hit the boy with his dorsal fin, causing internal bleeding from which he died. When the dolphin realized that his friend was dead, he took him to the shore and then washed up on the beach himself committing suicide. The locals were touched and buried them together (Figure 18; Avramidis, 2005; Catton, 1990).

The eleventh depiction shows swimmers trying to avoid a sea monster, possibly a shark, after their ship sank. The scene is depicted on a silver vase that was found in Mycenae (Figure 19; Boardman, Griffin, & Murray, 1993). The twelfth Greek depiction shows a swimmer performing the front crawl on a jar painted by the artist Anthokides (Athens, 560-530 BC; Figure 20; Avramidis & Devouros, 2008; Plithakis & Plitathaki, 1978).



Figure 17 — Skyllias cuts the anchor lines of the Persian fleet. Note. Photographic reproduction of the original. Taken from the International Swimming Hall of Fame with permission.



Figure 18 — Lasos swam every day after school with his dolphin friend. Note. Copyright by Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons. Photograph taken and released in the public domain by Marie-Lan Nguyen Taken from Wikipedia, (2011d).

The final ancient Greek depiction tells the tale of Alexander the Great as described in Aristotle's *Problemata*. At the siege of Tyre, in 332 BC, he ordered divers to destroy any submarine defences the city might undertake to build. While in none of these records does it actually say he had any kind of submersible vehicle, legend has it that he descended in a device that kept its occupants dry and admitted light. He was lowered in a diving bell, which relates the tale that Alexander had built "a very fine barrel made entirely of white glass," which was towed out to sea and lowered into the water. In an Alexandrian script, two companions accompanied Alexander and all were stunned by what they saw by the bright lights emanating from the diving machine. Alexander is quoted as observing from what he had seen underwater, that "... the world is damned and lost. The large and powerful fish devour the small fry."

Another story regarding Alexander's underwater adventures was published in 1886 in France. At the age of 11, Alexander supposedly entered a glass case, reinforced by metal bands and had himself lowered into the sea by a chain over 600 feet long (Figure 21; Avramidis, 2005; Lahanas, 2004). In the literature there are many drawings depicting this event, although there is no actual historical reference. Authors were possibly affected by the fact that Aristotle wrote first about the bell as a medium for underwater diving, giving details of the way that it should be submerged (C. Lagos, personal communication, 4 April 2005).

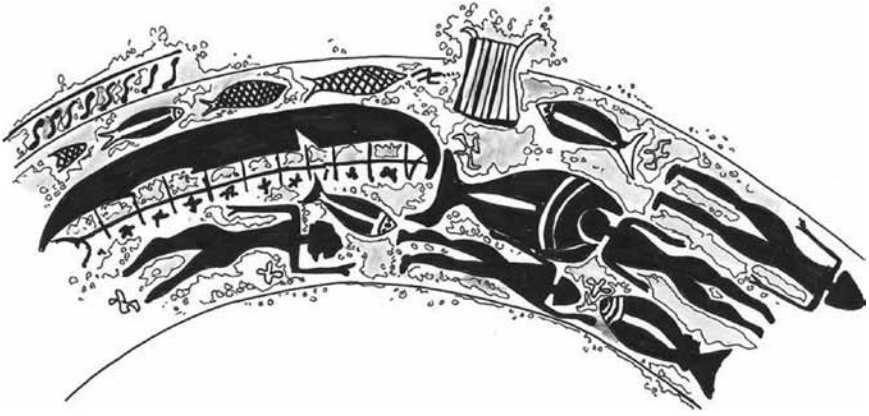


Figure 19 — Survivors are trying to avoid a sea monster by swimming. Note. Drawn by Nikos Kouremenos based on the original ancient Greek depiction that was published by Boardman, Griffin, & Murray, 1993.



Figure 20 — In “women bathing” a freestyle swimmer is depicted on an amphora of 560-530 BC. Note. Drawn by Andokides. Photograph taken from Marie-Lan Nguyen (a.k.a. Jastraw). The original is displayed in Louvre Museum. The owner of the photo has released it in the public domain. Taken from Wikimedia Commons (2011b).



Figure 21 — Depiction of a legend; Alexander the Great dives using an underwater bell in the siege of Tyre or earlier in his life. Note. This is a faithful photographic reproduction of an original two-dimensional work of art. The work of art itself is in the public domain because its copyright has expired. Taken from Wikipedia, (2011e).

Asia

The development of swimming in Asia dates back to ancient times when there were many myths concerning swimming. For example, the word *swimming* can be found in a verse in the “Book of Songs,” the earliest collection of poems from China. Ancient swimming was also described in books of the pre-Qin periods (prior to 221 BC; Show China, 2010). Similarly, in Japan, according to mythology from the time of the gods through ancient times, swimming was as natural to the Japanese as walking because Japan, like Greece, is surrounded by sea, and has many other

aquatic environments. Swimming was respected and studied and became a kind of military art (International Young Women and Children's Society, 1935).

The current search revealed three depictions of swimming activity in Asia. The first depiction shows men and women gathered, socializing and washing. The Japanese built public bathhouses around thermal springs. These bathing community meeting places were traditionally accepted in Japanese culture until the 19th century, when, influenced by western morality, gender-segregated bathing became the norm (Figure 22; Wigo, 2009).

The second Japanese depiction shows women pearl divers called Ama. The Ama have a 2,000-year tradition of diving on the south-eastern coast of Honshu. The profession was passed down from mother to daughter, generation after generation. Initially, their primary job was the collection of shells, but after the 1900s, their goal was the collection of mother-of-pearl from oyster shells. The Ama were originally thought to have been the wives of fisherman forced to contribute to family survival. This is why this profession is an exception to the rule in a male dominated society such as Japan. In olden days, women started work in the shallows at the age of 11 years. By the age of 17 years, they were able to remain submerged for up to three minutes at a time and dive as deep as ten metres. Eventually they would go as deep as 35 metres with a weight attached to their bodies (Figure 23; Wigo, 2009).

The third Asian depiction is a scene of a swimming race or exhibition in honor of the fifth Dalai Lama. It is taken from a mural on a wall in Potala Place, an ancient architectural complex considered to be a model of Tibetan architecture located on Red Hill in Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region, China (Figure 24; Wigo, 2009).

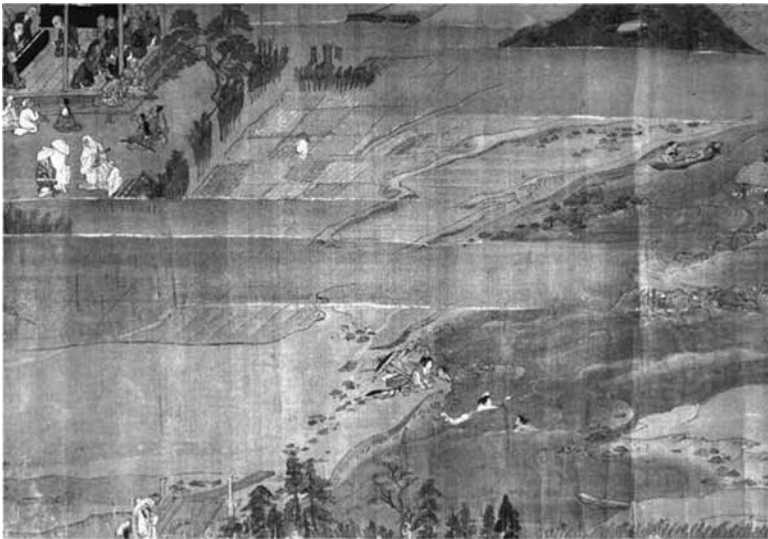


Figure 22 — This painting is one of 12 scrolls of the life of the priest, Ippen. It is the oldest representation in Japanese art of men and women swimming together (1299 AD). Note. The original is one of the treasures of the National Museum of Tokyo. Photographic reproduction of the original. Taken from the International Swimming Hall of Fame with permission.

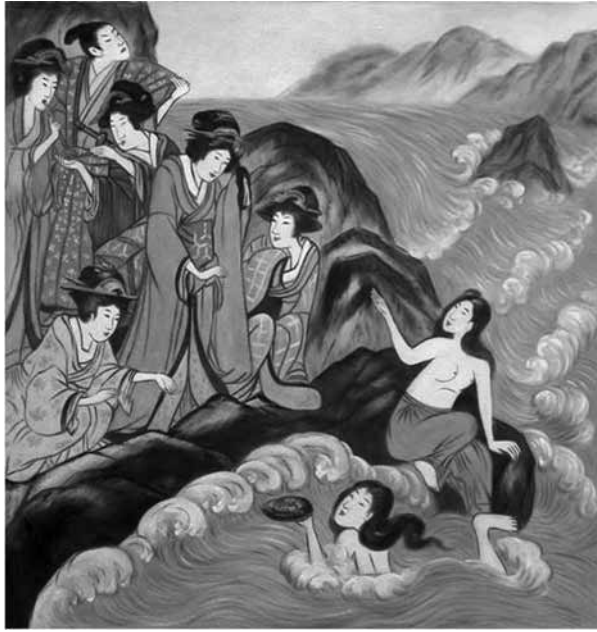


Figure 23 — Before the 1900s the Ama were “pearl” divers. Note. Painting from a 15th century woodcut. Photographic reproduction of the original. Taken from the International Swimming Hall of Fame with permission.



Figure 24 — Swimming race or exhibition in honour of the fifth Dalai Lama. Note. Photographic reproduction of the original. Taken from the International Swimming Hall of Fame with permission.

Colonial to Modern America

The search for artwork related to swimming revealed seven paintings originating in the United States of America. The first painting shows a Caribbean native woman taking her children for their daily bath. It shows that Indian mothers were responsible for teaching their children to swim. It was incumbent on mothers that children knew how to swim as soon as they could walk because much of their lives were spent around, on, or in the water. According to early explorers to America, the aboriginal people were great swimmers. This image is from the Drake Manuscript, and is believed to be from the Island of Trinidad (Figure 25).

The second artwork depicts Native Americans using front crawl while swimming. The act of swimming was known to many Native Americans. Many tribes spent their lives on the shores of inland waterways, paddling from their childhood in fragile bark canoes often being thrown into the water and needing to swim to save their lives. Native Americans reportedly swam with the crawl stroke. Interestingly, they seemed to be able to swim the front crawl stroke when Europeans were more typically using breast stroke and side stroke (Figure 26; Bruce Wigo, personal communication, 10 March 2010).

The third piece of American artwork shows enslaved African swimmers harvesting the pearl fishery of Venezuela. After the aboriginal natives died from disease

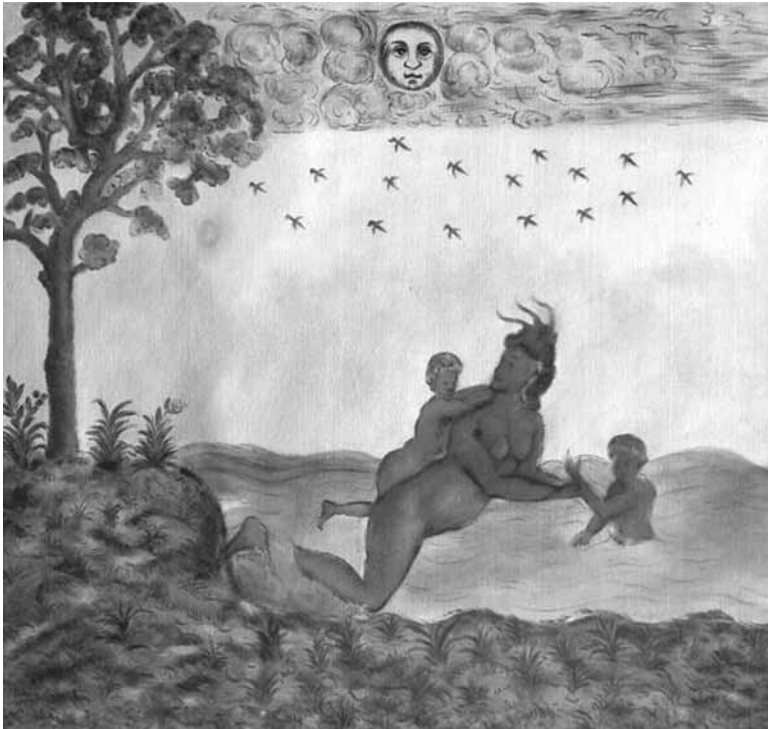


Figure 25 — “The Indian women swim like fish in the sea.” Note. Originally published in the *Histoire Naturelle des Indes* (The Drake Manuscript ca. 1586). Oil on Canvas, reproduction at the International Swimming Hall of Fame. Taken with permission.

or genocide, African swimmers were brought in to dive for pearls. The principal immediate effect of Columbus's discovery and of the commercial trading with the New World was the great wealth of pearls that enriched Spanish traders. The natives were found to be in possession of rich fisheries on the coast of Venezuela and somewhat later on the Pacific coast of Panama and Mexico, from whence adventurers returned to Spain with large collections (Figure 27; Wigo, 2009).



Figure 26 — The Native Americans used the crawl stroke, when Europeans were using breast stroke and side stroke. Note. Hatatsa Village, painted by George Catlin, 1833. Photographic reproduction of the original. Taken from the International Swimming Hall of Fame with permission.

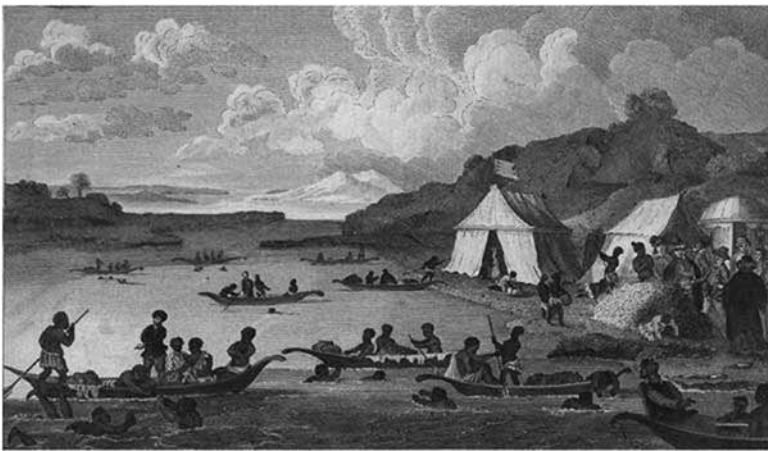


Figure 27 — Enslaved African swimmers harvesting the pearl fishery of Venezuela. Note. Image owned by Kevin Dawson, Department of History, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Taken from Dawson, (2006) with permission.

The fourth artwork is entitled “Another Way of Turning or Rolling Round.” It depicts a naked man swimming underwater. In the seventeenth century, Melchisédec Thévenot attempted to transform swimming into an art by developing theories on how to swim gracefully. This artwork, along with others, was depicted in his book “The Art of Swimming, 1669” (Figure 28; see Dawson, 2006; Thévenot, 1972).

The fifth artwork depicts seventeenth-century enslaved Africans diving for gold nuggets that accumulated on riverbeds at the foot of waterfalls. One of them is swimming while another one is diving head first (Figure 29; see Dawson, 2006).

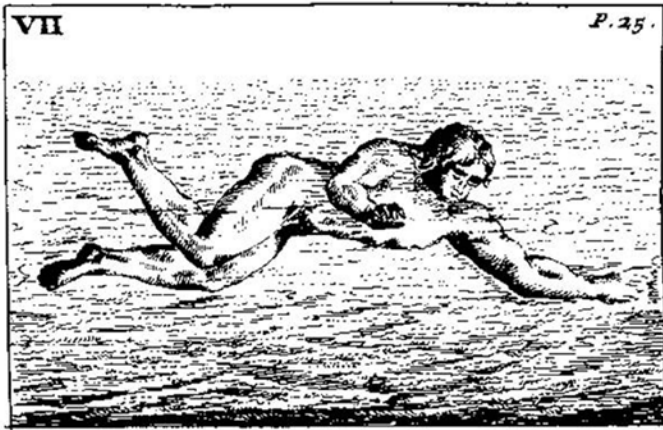


Figure 28 —“Another way of turning or rolling round.” Note. Figure shown in Thévenot, 1972. Reproduced by permission from the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.



Figure 29 —“Seventeenth-century Africans diving for gold nuggets.” Note. Picture taken from D.O. Dapper, *Description de l'Afrique*, Amsterdam 1686. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

The sixth artwork is entitled “Somali Boys Diving for Money” and depicts young boys diving in the seam abandoning their canoes (Figure 30; Dawson, 2006).

The seventh swimming-related artwork depicts the U.S. President, Barack Obama, swimming. A photograph, showing him swimming and playing in the waves (Anonymous, 2009), went around the world, attracting mass publicity, possibly because it shows a fit president who takes pride, apart from leadership and administrative duties, in his sporting activities. Pantelis Avramidis was inspired by the theme of that activity and the photograph and drew this picture (Figure 31; Anonymous, 2009).



Figure 30 — “Somali Boys Diving for Money.” Note. Figure taken from Kevin Dawson, Department of History, University of Nevada, Las Vegas with permission.



Figure 31 — U.S. President, Barack Obama, captured by reporters, swimming in moments of leisure. Note. Drawn by Pantelis Avramidis. Taken from Avramidis, 2010.

Other Civilizations

Nineteen depictions related to swimming were found in a number of other civilizations. In the first, a swimmer performs the front crawl depicting symbolically the River Orodus. This bronze statuette was found in Antioch (Figure 32; Avramidis & Devouros, 2008; Plithakis & Plitathaki, 1978). The second picture was on a Venetian manuscript and shows an alternating stroke in swimming. A swimmer approaches an enemy vessel underwater and tries to sink it by making a hole with a sharp object (Figure 33; Avramidis & Devouros, 2008; Plithakis & Plitathaki, 1978).

In the third artwork, a girl swims in a mire and tries to catch a fishing bird. This depiction was found in Zagazik and originated in the 26th dynasty (about 700 BC; Figure 34; Avramidis & Devouros, 2008; Plithakis & Plitathaki, 1978). The fourth



Figure 32 — Swimmer, personification of the Orontes River. Bronze, 2nd century CE. Note. Photo taken from Marie-Lan Nguyen from the original that is displayed in the Louvre Museum. Photographer has released the photo in the public domain (see Wikimedia Commons, 2011a).



Figure 33 — A swimmer, approaching with freestyle swimming, is trying to pierce an enemy ship with a sharp object. Note. Drawn by John Julius Norwich. Taken from Vatopaidi Word Press (2009) with permission.

depiction shows a diver performing a technically beautiful dive. It was found in a wall painting on a grave in Poseidonia of Southern Italy (5th century BC; Figure 35; Avramidis & Devouros, 2008; Plithakis & Plitathaki, 1978).

The fifth piece of artwork shows men swimming from one side of the river to the other to avoid arrows from the enemies' archers. Two of them are using inflated animal bladders or stomachs (probably sheep or goat) for their swimming. This



Figure 34 — Salve-holders in shape of wild duck with girls swimming. Note. Wood. Dynasty XVIII, about 1400 B.C. Taken from Yare Egyptology, (2011) with permission.

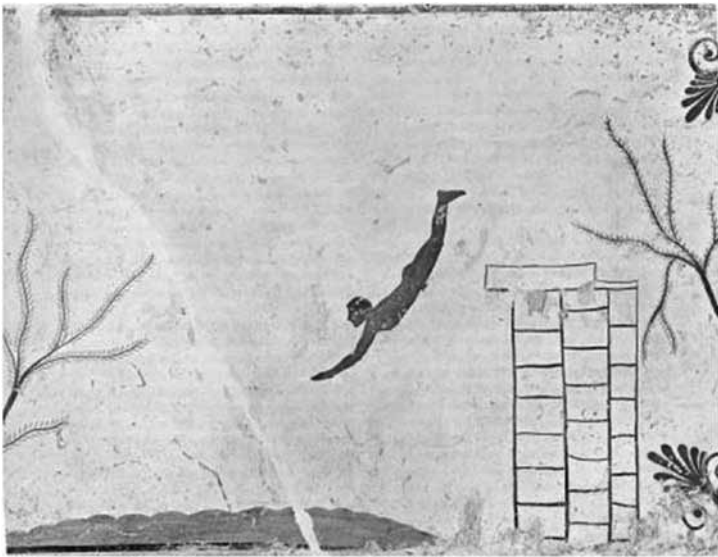


Figure 35 — Wall painting of a diver, on a grave in Southern Italy during the 5th century BC. Note. Photo taken by Michael Johanning in 2001 and released in the public domain (see Wikimedia Commons, 2011g).

looks like an improvised inflatable device such as using jeans, a technique used today in courses on personal survival at sea (Assyrian anaglyph from Nineveh Palace, 880 BC; Figure 36; Avramidis & Devouros, 2008; Plithakis & Plitathaki, 1978).

The sixth depiction shows a diver diving head first into the water from a height while being watched by others in a dinghy. This depiction is taken from an Etruscan fresco of the 6th century BC (Figure 37; Avramidis & Devouros, 2008; Plithakis

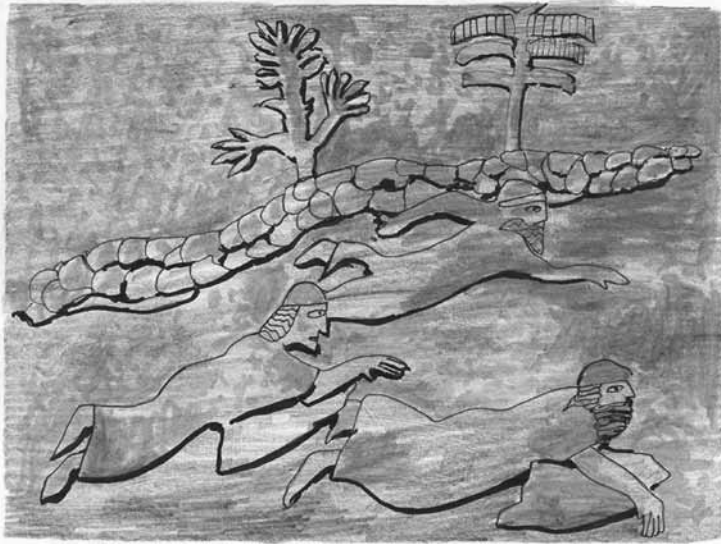


Figure 36 — Survival swimming to escape from enemy darts in an Assyrian depiction of 880 BC. Note. Carved slab from King Ashurnasirpal II's throne room at Nimrud, Iraq, Assyrian, c865 BC. Warriors are crossing the river on inflated skins with breathing tubes, while the defenders are watching from a fortress. Linear illustration made by Nikos Kouremenos based on depiction originally displayed in the British Museum, London. Reproduced with permission.



Figure 37 — A diver dives from a height in an Etruscan fresco of the 6th century BC. Note. Photographic reproduction of the original. Taken from the International Swimming Hall of Fame with permission.

& Plitathaki, 1978). The seventh artwork is entitled “Manta Ray.” Taken from the Drake manuscript, the inscription of this painting explains that “this fish is very large and no less vicious; when the negroes dive into the sea for pearls it jumps on them to drown them and then eats them” (Figure 38; Thenonist, 2004).

The eighth painting shows a sailor been rescued from drowning by Native Americans. In 1524, Giovanni da Verrazanno left Madeira, Spain for the new world. After 49 days, he sighted land, probably the coast of North Carolina, but rough seas and no harbors made landing impossible. As the crew needed fresh water, he sent a small boat ashore, but the surf was too rough to land. As natives stood at the water’s edge, a brave sailor attempted to swim ashore with presents in his hand. Probably caught in a rip tide, he nearly drowned but was rescued by the natives (Figure 39; Edward, 1900).

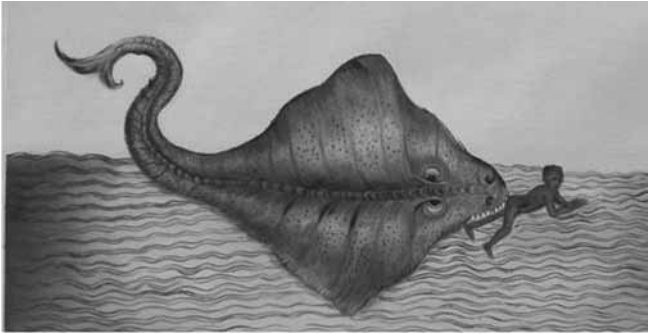


Figure 38 — The fish drowns the Negroes and eats them. Note. Painting woodcut. Photographic reproduction of the original. Taken from the International Swimming Hall of Fame with permission.



Figure 39 — A sailor is rescued by Indians. Note. Painting woodcut. Photographic reproduction of the original. Taken from the International Swimming Hall of Fame with permission.

The ninth painting is entitled “The Daughters of Ran.” Hans Dahl depicts women swimming without covering their “shameful parts” (Figure 40). On the other hand, the tenth painting shows exactly the opposite: John Leech’s “Swimming for Ladies,” which depicts women swimming fully clothed in a swimming pool. It is a good example of how women swam in the era before the famous “one-piece bathing suit” of Annette Kelerman (Figure 41). The eleventh painting depicts ships and men swimming and diving head or feet first. In his painting, Giulio Romano depicts people riding ducks or dolphins (Figure 42). The twelfth artwork is entitled “The Swimmers.” In this, the anonymous artist depicts men swimming front crawl, diving and boating (Figure 43). The thirteenth painting is entitled “A Good Place for Swimming.” Made by Carl Larsson, it shows men swimming, boating or ready to dive (Figure 44). In the fourteenth painting, Gustave Caillebotte’s “Swimmers Preparing to Dive” shows men swimming or diving from a jetty (Figure 45). The fifteenth piece of art is drawn by Henri Privat-Livemont and is entitled “Casino de Cabourg 1897.” It depicts men and a woman swimming in a coastal area (Figure 46). The sixteenth painting was drawn by Max Liebermann. It is entitled “At the Swimming Hole, 1877” and depicts young men getting undressed and preparing to swim in a stream (Figure 47). The seventeenth painting was drawn by Joseph Eduard Sauer. Like the previous painting, it is entitled “At the Swimming Hole, 1890” and depicts naked young boys sitting or getting out of the water at a swimming hole (Figure 48). In the eighteenth depiction, Thomas Cowperthwaite Eakins’s painting entitled “The Swimming Hole, 1885,” depicts naked men diving head first, sunbathing, and swimming (Figure 49). The final image shows some of the approximately 1500 Dongola employed by the British during the 1884 Nile Expedition swimming across rapids. In this art work we note the use of the freestyle (Figure 50).



Figure 40 — “The daughters of Ran.” Note. Drawn by Hans Dahl (1849–1937). This is a faithful photographic reproduction of an original two-dimensional work of art. The work of art itself is in the public domain because its copyright has expired. Taken from Wikimedia Commons (2011f).



Figure 41 — “Swimming for ladies.” Note. Drawn by John Leech (1817-1864). This image is in the public domain because its copyright has expired. This applies to the United States, Canada, the European Union and those countries with a copyright term of life of the author plus 70 years. Taken from Wikigallery, (2011a).



Figure 42 — Scene showing that those born under the sign of Aries in conjunction with the constellation of the Ship and Dolphin are imparted with aptitudes for navigation and swimming, symbolized by the ship and swimmers, from the Camera dei Venti, 1528. Note. Drawn by Giulio Romano (1499-1546). This image is in the public domain because its copyright has expired. Taken from Wikigallery, (2011b).

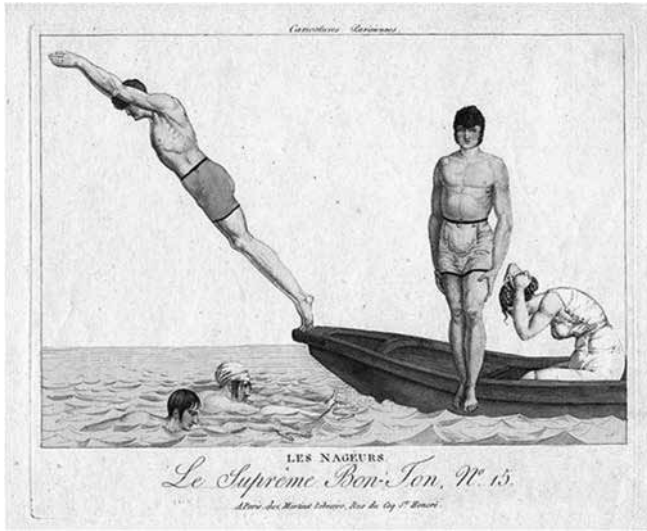


Figure 43 — “The swimmers.” Note. Drawn by an anonymous artist. This is a faithful photographic reproduction of an original two-dimensional work of art. The work of art itself is in the public domain because its copyright has expired. Taken from Wikimedia Commons (2011c).



Figure 44 — “A good place for swimming.” Note. Drawn by Carl Larsson (1853-1919). Reproduction of the original. Taken from Wahoo Art (2011) with permission.



Figure 45 — “Swimmer preparing to dive.” Note. Drawn by Gustave Caillebotte (1848–1894). This is a faithful photographic reproduction of an original two-dimensional work of art. The work of art itself is in the public domain because its copyright has expired. Taken from Wikimedia Commons (2011e).



Figure 46 — “Casino de Cabourg 1897.” Note. Drawn by Henri Privat-Livemont (1861-1936). This is a faithful photographic reproduction of an original two-dimensional work of art. The work of art itself is in the public domain because its copyright has expired. Taken from Wikimedia Commons (2011d).



Figure 47 — “At the swimming hole.” Note. Drawn by Max Liebermann (1847-1935). This image is displayed in Dallas Museum of Art and it is freely available in the public domain because its copyright has expired. Taken from Wikipedia, 2011a.



Figure 48 — “At a swimming hole.” Note. Drawn by Joseph Eduard Sauer (1868-1909). Taken from Art Renewal Centre (2011) with permission.



Figure 49 — “The swimming hole, 1885.” Note. Drawn by Thomas Cowperthwait Eakins (1844-1916). This work is in the public domain in the United States because it was published before January 1, 1923. The author died in 1916, so this work is also in the public domain in countries and areas where the copyright term is the author’s life plus 80 years or less. Taken from Wikimedia Commons, 2011h.



Figure 50 — Men employed by the British during the 1884 Nile Expedition swimming freestyle. Note. Image owned by Kevin Dawson, Department of History, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Taken from Dawson, (2006) with permission.

Discussion

This educational essay aimed to locate a number of works of art depicting swimming activities and to describe their content. Because art represents an echo of the past to the present, very often researchers use it as a means of understanding the life of our ancestors. Therefore, a visual observation of these swimming depictions raised a number of interesting ideas that I could discuss.

Depending on the society and the civilization, the ability to swim could be an indicator of a person's socio-economic status. In some societies, only a few people knew how to swim and usually they had a higher socio-economic status. For example, in ancient Egypt, swimming was an activity taught and learned by the Pharaohs and their families for recreational purposes in swimming pools. In contrast, the general public were self-taught in the River Nile for survival purposes (BBC UK, 2010). Therefore, it seems that the aquatic location where swimming lessons were undertaken might be an indicator of the status of the swimmer. Also in ancient Greece as early as 5 BC as well as in pre-Columbian America, the ability to swim was perceived to be as normal as the ability to walk because everybody had to know how to swim to survive in the water environments that surrounded them. Greek society was famous for its prosperity and advances in civilization, including sports, while Native American cultures were often considered relatively primitive by comparison. In other societies, the ability to swim was proof of a lower socio-economic status. People had to know how to swim as this was a vital skill for their survival as well as for livelihood activity (see Wigo, 2009). For example, the Ama had to swim to be able to collect pearls from the bottom of the sea, while aboriginal Americans needed to swim in case their canoes tipped over. Due to limited finances, fishermen allowed their wives to work so that they would contribute financially to the family. Similarly, enslaved African Americans had to swim in order to harvest pearls. Thus we may conclude that the knowledge of swimming was not necessarily something that depended only on how close to the water someone lived but also on how their societies felt or needed to be engaged recreationally or professionally with water.

Apart from the recreational and professional engagement of people with water, swimming was also a vital skill necessary to those involved in military exhibitions. Troopers who knew how to swim had higher chances of being saved when thrown unintentionally into the water or when water was their only route of escape from the enemy. Such examples were noted here in several depictions (e.g., the prisoner of war, Skyllias, escaped from the Persian fleet by swimming underwater; Pharaoh Ramses's enemies swam front crawl or backstroke in the River Orodís to save themselves; in Byzantium, a swimmer approaching with freestyle swimming tried to pierce an enemy ship with a sharp object).

For those engaged in aquatics, swimming was not the only skill known to guarantee safety and immunity from drowning; three other necessary skills were also identified in the depictions. First, it was shown that the skill of diving was known by those seen in or around the water (e.g., several depictions from Italy and Greece presented showed people diving and swimming). Second, the ability of swimmers to hold their breath and swim underwater was essential for fishermen and troopers (e.g., Skyllias swam underwater to escape from his enemies; the Ama used to dive as deep as 35 metres with a weight attached to their bodies or remain submerged

for up to three minutes at a time to collect shells or pearls; enslaved Americans used to dive underwater harvesting the pearl fishery of Venezuela). Finally, physical endurance to be able to swim carrying weapons and wearing armor or other heavy clothing was essential for military personnel (e.g., Pharaoh Ramses's enemies swam front crawl or backstroke in the River Orodus to save themselves while wearing their armor; in the siege of Tyre, the troopers of Alexander the Great swam underwater carrying weapons; in a naval battle, a swimmer tried to pierce an enemy ship with a sharp object; warriors performed survival swimming for escaping enemy arrows in an Assyrian depiction wearing their military uniform).

One area of practical interest that we can draw from the artistic depictions are the different styles of swimming strokes portrayed. It is interesting that, although the front crawl stroke has been considered to be a relatively recent innovation of the early 20th Century, depictions of front crawl-like strokes are evident in art dating to ancient times. In fact, in this collection of swimming art, it is striking how many depictions of crawl stroke swimming appear. Apparently this stroke is depicted even more frequently than the more rudimentary breaststroke and the 19th Century innovation, the sidestroke. While art depicts some individuals using forms of backstroke, front strokes were much more common among the current artefacts presented in this paper.

The use and the type of swimwear worn while swimming varied among different civilizations as well. In some societies, people were depicted swimming in the nude. Such evidence was present in the artwork of several artists of western civilizations (e.g., Wikimedia Commons, 2011f; and the artwork of Giulio Romano, Carl Larsson, Max Liebermann, Joseph Eduard Sauer, and Thomas Cowperthwaite Eakins). This might mean that nudity was not offensive to the morality of those societies but was perceived as normal. On the other hand, in some artwork people were depicted wearing small or full body swimming costumes or even heavy clothing (e.g., the artwork of Leech, Gustave Caillebotte, and Henri Privat-Livemont). In the culture of those societies, nudity in the water might be taboo. From this contradiction we assume that the way in which swimming was performed might be a mirror reflecting the culture and stereotypes of each society about the lack or presence of shame in exposing the human body while engaged in aquatics.

Summary

To summarize, the present essay has illustrated that swimming has been reported as a mode of human movement since Palaeolithic times as represented in human art. Depictions of people swimming competitively or recreationally, diving, bathing, working, and fighting were found in the art of ancient Egypt, Greece, Persia, Italy, Spain, USA, Japan, China, and many other countries. Depending on the society, art illustrated that the ability to swim indicated high or low socio-economic status. In some art depictions, knowledge of swimming was accompanied by the abilities to dive from high cliffs or into deep water, to hold one's breath underwater, and to show great physical endurance. Importantly, all forms of modern swimming strokes, except the butterfly, were observed in the examples of art in this paper. The art also portrayed various types of swimwear, or nude swimming, in different societies. Finally, it is clear that many artists from all around the world

were inspired by aquatic, and more specifically, swimming, themes of daily life, portraying ordinary people or legendary and historical figures engaged in aquatics. Swimming coaches, teachers and sports scientists, lifesavers and swimmers should be aware of the unparalleled heritage of art that portrays aquatic activities. This art that depicts our ancestors can serve as a reminder of where we came from as well as be an invaluable addition to teaching aids for public and academic aquatic, water safety and swimming education.

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