



Two-part effigy vessel/censer

Not on display**Title/Description:** Two-part effigy vessel/censer**Object Type:** Sculpture, Vessel**Materials:** Ceramic, Paint, Terracotta**Measurements:** h. 240 x w. 110 x d. 145 mm**Accession Number:** 624**Historic Period:** Classic period (AD 400-500)**Production Place:** El Peten, Guatemala, Mesoamerica, The Americas**Cultural Group:** Maya**Credit Line:** Purchased with support Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1975

This unusual effigy vessel is in the shape of a seated, cross-legged figure, with his hands clasped to his chest and his head facing left. He wears what appear to be feathered ear ornaments, a lip plug (which has been subject to minor restorations), and a jaguar head-dress. The jaguar imagery is continued on his garment, which is painted yellow with black jaguar spots. The jaguar tail acts as a support for the figure.

Maya ceramics have long been appreciated for the delicacy of the painted imagery and rich use of colour. In the Classic period the vessels were characteristically painted with red and black figures and script on an orange-red background. Pigments were both mineral- and vegetable-based. Completed works were fired at relatively low temperatures in the open air, as is still done today in some places. In this figure, the painting sometimes follows the sculpted forms, but in certain areas, such as the ear ornaments, armbands and fingers, the paint is added irrespective of the contours of the clay (see Scheie and Miller, 1986:148, pl. 39).

The vessel was constructed in two parts, with the head and shoulders forming the lid. A lump of copal incense was found in the hollow interior, indicating that this figure could have served as a censer. Holes in the mouth would have allowed smoke to escape. Incense was an integral part of Mesoamerican and therefore of Maya ritual, and was recorded in the sixteenth-century accounts of Bishop Landa (Tozzer, 1941:144 ff). In the archaeological record, censers have been found in a variety of contexts, including burials and caches (Chase, 1988).

Entry taken from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection 3 volume catalogue, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997).

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from Edward H. Merrin Gallery, New York in 1975 out of funds provided by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury.
