



Pendant plaque

On display

Title/Description: Pendant plaque

Object Type: Relief

Materials: Jade

Measurements: h. 72 x w. 64 x d. 8 mm

Accession Number: 649

Historic Period: Late Classic period (AD 600-900)

Production Place: Mesoamerica, Mexico, The Americas

Cultural Group: Maya

Credit Line: Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1976

Jade was a favoured material for ornaments worn by the Maya élite. The symbolic associations of jade with maize, water and fertility, as well as its scarcity, underscored its pre-eminence as an element of courtly regalia relating to the wearer's status. This pectoral shows a head carved in low relief. The face is framed by a head-dress, a necklace with five trapezoidal elements and ear ornaments. The imagery of the head-dress is avian, with the beak rendered as a double arc across the forehead and feathers indicated by vertical striations.

This ornament could have been worn either as a pectoral or perhaps attached to a garment. There are two perforations on the upper right and upper left sides that would allow for suspension. Five smaller perforations at the base, corresponding to the five panels of the necklace, may either have been used to suspend additional elements from the plaque, or to secure the piece to a garment. Jade ornaments have been recovered from caches, burials, tombs and offerings in the Maya region. In certain contexts, such as termination ritual deposits (Garber, 1993), the jades were intentionally smashed as part of sacrificial activities. Numerous jades were dredged from the Cenote or sacred well at Chicken Itza and many of these were also in damaged condition (Coggins and Shane, 1984; Proskouriakoff, 1974). One carved plaque from the Cenote (Peabody Museum 10-71-2-/06665; Coggins and Shane, 1984:no.30; Proskouriakoff, 1974:158, and pl.64) has stylistic attributes similar to this plaque, including the crisp carving technique and the bird imagery reminiscent of Central Mexican conventions.

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 John A. Stokes Jnr., New York in 1976 out of funds provided by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury.
