



Hacha (axe-shaped head)

On display

Title/Description: Hacha (axe-shaped head)

Object Type: hacha

Materials: Greenstone

Measurements: h. 263 x w. 30 x d. 225 mm

Accession Number: 698

Historic Period: Classic period (AD 600-900)

Production Place: Mesoamerica, Mexico, The Americas, Veracruz

Credit Line: Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1978

Hachas are axe-shaped stone objects which may have been attached to *yugos*, as seen in relief sculpture and on ballplayer figurines, and as indicated by burial placements (Leyenaar and Parsons, 1988:31,41; Scott, 1991: 209; Wilkerson, 1990: no. 73). Alternatively, it has been suggested that they served as ballcourt markers (Castro Leal in Ryan, 1992:180, no. 72; Proskouriakoff, 1971: 563-5). Leyenaar and Parsons (1988: 47-8) have proposed that *hachas*, along with the *yugos* and *palmas*, were ceremonial versions of actual wooden objects worn during the game. Stone versions have been found in burials and caches, and in some cases they were intentionally broken and sprinkled with cinnabar (Medellin Zenil, 1960:108, 112-3, pls. 65-6; Scott, 1991; Wilkerson, 1990: nos. 73, 75).

Stone ballgame objects have occasionally been found in association with disarticulated skulls. Decapitation was closely connected to the ballgame, as such a blood sacrifice was thought to be part of controlling the cosmic order and ensuring a good harvest (Leyenaar and Parsons, 1988: 98-100). The iconography of the *hachas* most likely reflects this aspect of the ballgame, with many appearing to represent severed trophy heads with the eyes closed in death.

This example depicts a head with a slightly open mouth, earflares and a head-dress. The crest above the crescentic perforation is rendered in plated sections which resemble a rattlesnake tail or perhaps an armadillo back (*cf.* Easby and Scott, 1970: nos. 148-9). The stone is light green with darker inclusions and is softly polished, with the exception of the interior of the earspools, the eyes, and parts of the head-dress which are left rough, perhaps suggesting that at one time these were inlaid. The imagery is the same on both sides, indicating that it was meant to be seen from both sides. Small losses are evident on one side of the crest.

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 Stokes, New York in 1978 out of funds provided by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury.
