



Eccentric flint

On display

Title/Description: Eccentric flint

Object Type: sceptre

Materials: Flint (?), Paint, Stucco

Measurements: h. 305 x w. 175 x d. 15 mm

Accession Number: 708

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

Production Place: Guatemala, Mesoamerica, The Americas

Cultural Group: Maya style

Credit Line: Purchased with support from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Trust, 1979

The Mayan civilisation produced remarkable knapped flints colloquially known as 'eccentric' due to the complexity of their irregular shape. This one is thought to have come from present day Guatemala, but the territory of the Maya extended over Honduras and Belize, as well as central Mexico. The flint has been expertly knapped, revealing not only an arresting three-dimensional shape but eight separate faces in profile. This is a virtuoso piece in a material as brittle as glass, allowing the artist to demonstrate extraordinary skill in flint or, sometimes, obsidian. The precise interpretation and meaning is conjecture and it has often been stated that the object was a votive offering. However, a more likely interpretation is that the flint formed the head of a sceptre and the existence of a tang (shaft) section on this and similar Mayan flint artefacts would support this theory.

Calvin Winner, Head of Collections, Sainsbury Centre

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from John Stokes, New York in 1979 out of funds provided by the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Trust.
