



Carved bone

Not on display**Title/Description:** Carved bone**Object Type:** Ornament**Materials:** Bone**Measurements:** h. 313 x w. 52 x d. 80 mm**Accession Number:** 710**Historic Period:** Classic period (c. AD 300-900)**Production Place:** Mesoamerica, Southern Mesoamerica, The Americas**Cultural Group:** Maya**Credit Line:** Purchased with support from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Trust, 1979

The carved bones of humans, deer and jaguar have been found in burials and offerings in the Maya region. Before interment, they may have been used as hair ornaments, handles for feathers or as perforators (Scheie and Miller, 1986:152, pls. 49-50, 61). This carved bone, probably a human tibia, shows an individual with an elaborate head-dress wielding a hooked axe. The body is frontal, with the right arm raised holding the axe and the left arm lifted across the chest. The left leg is straight, with a sandalled foot shown in profile. The right leg is raised so that the thigh is horizontal and the right foot is at the upper left corner of the cut-out section. The right toe touches the back of the left leg. The cut-out section appears not to be the result of damage, but to have been intentionally made. Although a number of the carved bones represent named rulers, the individual on this bone appears to be supernatural. The enormous mouth is open, showing a tooth, and the lower lip protrudes nearly past his shoulder. The large round eye has a single horizontal slit. The prominent nose and bulbous forehead are in distinct contrast to the elegant sloping forehead so common in Maya royal portraiture.

The figure has a beaded collar of square plaques, perhaps representing jade or shell, with two larger circular ornaments against this background. A long thin object, possibly a paper, feather or textile ear ornament, extends through his ear to his left hand. He wears a hip-cloth with an ornate loincloth. The central part of the head-dress is a profile creature that in several respects resembles the wearer: large nose, oval eye and snaggle-tooth. As with most zoomorphic head-dresses, the lower jaw is missing. Feathers extend to the left and above the creature. Scrolls, which may represent smoke, emerge from a crescent, perhaps a shell, in the forehead area. The posture of this figure is comparable to that of Underworld figures painted on a vessel in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and to other figures which are described as being engaged in a sacrificial dance (Scheie and Miller, 1986: 271, 274, 287, pl. 117; Scheie, 1988).

(Yale University Press, 1997).

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from Stendahl Galleries, Hollywood on the advice of Robert Sainsbury in 1979 out of funds provided by the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Trust.
