



Tripod vessel with two handles

On display

Title/Description: Tripod vessel with two handles

Measurements: h. 76 x w. 235 x d. 146 mm

Accession Number: 746

Historic Period: Late Classic/Early Post-Classic period (AD 800-1000)

Credit Line: Purchased with support from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust, 1980

Finely carved translucent white marble vessels of the Terminal Classic period (AD 800-1000) are known from the Ulua Valley in Honduras (Stone, 1938). Although the inhabitants of this region were in contact with the Maya groups to the north and west and the non-Maya peoples of the Nicoya Peninsula in Costa Rica, they remained a distinct entity.

Just over one hundred of these vessels are known. Schaffer (1992) has suggested that production may have been limited to only a few workshops over perhaps two or three generations. They range from tall cylindrical vessels, often with ring bases, to shallow dishes, usually with tripod bases. Schaffer has argued that the tall vessels (see object 1043) are an outgrowth of Ulua polychrome painted ceramic vessels of the seventh century, whereas the shorter examples, such as this one, are most closely related to the style of the tripod vessels from Teotihuacan, which were adopted first by the Maya and then incorporated into the Ulua tradition. This example is carved from white marble with the characteristic pink veining of the Ulua region and the imagery is oriented around a simplified anthropomorphic face on each side, embedded in a pattern of scrolls.

The mouth of the face on the shorter vessel is indicated by a double-scroll, and the upper band of ornamentation is based on a mat symbol, a decorative motif associated with Maya royalty. Although the creators of the Ulua vessels did not use glyphic texts in their compositions, they did incorporate certain aspects of Maya elite symbolism in the designs. The handles also appear to be felines, with the thick tail clasped between the forepaws and curling towards the head.

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 Stendahl Galleries, Hollywood, on the advice of Robert Sainsbury in 1980 out of funds provided by the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust.
