



Dancing figure

Not on display

Title/Description: Dancing figure

Object Type: Figure

Materials: Earthenware

Measurements: h. 425 x w. 210 x d. 230 mm

Accession Number: 865

Historic Period: Formative (late) period (600-200 BC)

Production Place: Colima, Mesoamerica, Mexico, The Americas

Credit Line: Purchased with support from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust, 1983

These figures (the present example and UEA 864) stand with their legs slightly bent in a position suggesting the movements of ritual dancers. One (UEA 864) is wearing what is probably a feathered tunic, perhaps similar to the Central Mexican *ehuatl* (but open in the back and without the short skirt), a feathered garment associated with specific groups of warriors (Anawalt, 1981: 50-2). His ornaments include a double-strand bead necklace, bracelets on both wrists, and two large discs on each leg. He wears a helmet with broad chin-strap, and an elaborate removable head-dress. It is not known if this semi-circular head-dress was meant to be worn with the radiating elements (most likely representing feathers and reeds) in a frontal or profile fashion: both positions are seen in other Colima-style ceramics with non-removable head-dresses. In parts of modern Mexico, the feather and reed head-dresses of dancers are also orientated both ways (Leyenaar, 1981: pls. 2, 4).

The second figure (UEA 865) is similar in appearance, although it has double discs at the knee and further discs on the upper arms. The dancer wears a netted costume on the body and legs, which may represent a form of cotton armour similar to garments known from Central Mexico in the Aztec period (Anawalt, 1981: 46-51). This garment is not open at the back; there is a spatulate bow-tie projection at the small of the back. Lynton and Lynton (1986: no. 27) illustrate a figure with a similar costume and a removable head-dress.

The head-dress has both feathers and netting in its decoration, and because the figures were acquired together it is not certain to which the head-dress belongs. It fits both. It is likely that a second head-dress once existed. Losses have been restored and cracks filled on figures, bases and head-dress.

Entry from Steven Hooper (ed.), Catalogue to the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. University of East Anglia, 1997.

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from John Stokes, New York, on the advice of Robert Sainsbury in 1983 out of funds provided by the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust.
