



Head

Not on display

Title/Description: Head

Object Type: Figure, Head

Materials: Red cedar, Shell

Measurements: h. 57 mm

Accession Number: 933

Historic Period: Mississippian (c. 1200-1350)

Production Place: North America, Oklahoma, Spiro, The Americas, USA

Credit Line: Purchased with support from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust, 1986

Although this small head has no provenance, it is very similar to about forty others which are known to have come from the Craig Mound at the Spiro site in Le Flore County, eastern Oklahoma (Burnett, 1945: pl. LXXVIII; Brown and Hamilton, 1965: 52). These heads are of red cedar with shell inlays in the eyes, ears and mouth. Many have green deposits on them, as here, indicating their burial association with copper objects, fine repoussé examples of which have been found at Spiro (see Brose et al., 1985: pl. 101). The back of this head has a large oval recess, with small holes drilled through above and below each ear, suggesting that it may once have been attached to a body or some other object. It has been crushed, and the right cheek repaired with pale wood.

The Spiro site was one of the main ceremonial centres during the Mississippian period. Mounds with numerous wood, shell, copper and stone burial goods have been found there (see Brown, 1975, for a discussion of Spiro art and mortuary practices). The head was almost certainly obtained there during the mid 1930s, when commercial diggers removed large quantities of material before controlled excavations were undertaken (see Clements, 1945: 48-68).

Steven Hooper, 1997

Entry taken from *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, Vol. 2: Pacific, African and Native North American Art*, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997) p. 299.

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from George Terasaki, New York, on the advice of Robert Sainsbury in 1986 out of funds provided by the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust.
