Tripod Vase with Bird Handles
Pre-Columbian, Ulúa

Ulúa, Terminal Classic, 700–1000 AD
Travertine, 5 3/4 x 13 x 9 3/4 in. (14.6 x 33 x 24.8 cm)

Museum purchase funded by the Alice Pratt Brown Museum Fund

This is one of the largest and most elaborate tripod cylinder vases made by the Ulúa people of northwestern Honduras. They carved local marble into beautiful translucent vessels.

The handles of this vase represent birds with large curved beaks, possibly parrots or macaws. Frontal feline deity heads with sharp fangs and round ears framed by profile serpent heads decorate the sides. These motifs are embedded in rows and columns of scrolls that probably signify the watery Underworld. Vases like this were important luxury items traded over long distances of Mesoamerica.

Online Resources:
Hirsch Library Online Catalog
The Metropolitan Museum of Art Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Articles: (full-text access available on-site; off-site access available through your school library or Houston Public Library)

Print Resources:
Historical Dictionary of Mesoamerica
Houses in a Landscape
Rediscovered Masterpieces of Mesoamerica
Atlas of Ancient America
The Art and Architecture of Ancient America
Bibliography

Object Specific Information


General Surveys of Art


Similar Objects


Stone, Doris. Masters in Marble. Middle American Research Series 1. New Orleans: Tulane University, 1938. F 1421 .T95 1938

Imagery or Symbolism


General Mesoamerican History and Archaeology


This reference guide is just the tip of the iceberg on helpful resources in the library’s holdings. Many of the suggested resources above have their own bibliographies. Each of these may lead you to other resources that would also be helpful in your research here in the museum or in another library. To find additional resources, use keywords such as “Mesoamerica” and “stone vases” in the on-line catalog and periodical indexes. Once you find a few relevant titles, pay attention to the subject headings to identify similar materials. Examples of useful subject headings are:

Indians of Central America--Antiquities
Central America--Antiquities
Indian art--Central America
Archaeology --Central America

For guidelines about writing, it may be helpful to look at Sylvan Barnet’s A Short Guide to Writing about Art, which includes tips for looking, reading, and writing about art. Ask for it at the reference desk. At every stage of your work, please allow the library staff to help you. We can be reached at 713-639-7325 or hirsch@mfah.org