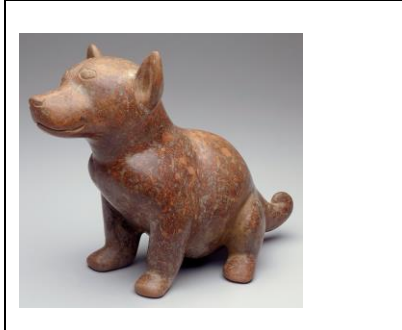

Title of Object

Dog

Photo of Object (optional)



Object Information

Artist: Unknown

Country: Mexico

Date of Object: c. 100-300 CE

File Created: 5/4/2016

Accession Number: 99.57.3

Author of File: Mary Ann Wark and Brenda Haines

Material/Medium: Clay

Reviewer of File: Kara ZumBahlen

Department: Art of the Americas

Last Updated/Reviewed: 7/5/2016

Culture: Colima

Tour Topics

Group 1 tour, Animals, Ancient culture, ceramics, daily life, food/drink, funerary/afterlife, mythology, ritual/ceremony, spirituality/sacred, symbolism

Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

1. When you look at this dog, what is your emotional reaction to it? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. Having seen a video of present-day Xoloitzcuintle (Mexican hairless) dog and puppies, what are the realistic features of this ceramic dog?
3. Which of the ways the dog functioned in Colima life do you think was being emphasized by this representation?
4. Dogs were found in 75-90% of the shaft type graves. Why do you think effigies/ or sculptural representations of the dogs were placed in the tombs?
5. Now that you know the various ways this Mexican Hairless dog (Xoloitzcuintle—(show-low-eats-queen-tee) was part of the Colima culture, was this dog friend or foe?

Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

1. Hand built. Modeling more important than decorative painting. Chubby. Head lifted, ears perked up, revealing happy, playful nature.
2. Details incised: oval eyes, mouth, nose
3. Surface highly burnished slip, light orange/red with a black speckled patina. No painting.
4. Size could have been similar to the real dogs.

Despite the absence of the potter's wheel, enclosed kilns, or true glazing, Mesoamerican ceramicists achieved remarkable results through the skillful use of simple techniques. Although it was long believed that all Pre-Columbian firing was done in open fires or pits, archaeological research has proved that simply constructed open kilns were also used. Since only a closed kiln can attain the higher temperatures required to produce stoneware, all Mesoamerican ceramics were porous, low-fired earthenware. Clay was obtained from local sources and tempered for plasticity and strength by adding sand, crushed shards and shells, volcanic ash or organic fibers. Forms were made by three basic methods used singly or in combination: hand-modelling, coiling, and molding. Clay slabs draped on convex or concave molds were used to produce rounded shapes. Hollow figures and composite forms were individually constructed from a combination of hand built and mold-made sections. Before firing, vessels were often burnished by polishing the surface with a hard object such as a pebble. Burnishing rendered the porous surface more impervious to liquids and produced a smooth, lustrous exterior. Most ceramics appear to have been produced by trained specialists.

An engaging menagerie of realistically modelled animal effigy vessels were produced in Colima, particularly plump Mexican hairless dogs depicted asleep, scratching, or playing. Craftspeople from Colima also hand-modelled flat, solid male and female figurines, as well as energetic acrobats, dancers, musicians, masked figures, dwarves, humpbacks, and single-horned male figures now believed to represent Shamans. The Colima ceramic tradition is overwhelmingly representational, lively, and accessible.

Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

"West Mexico" encompasses three cultures named for the modern states in which their archeological remains are located: Colima, Jalisco, and Nayarit – which in turn incorporate distinctive subcultures, artistic styles, and traditions. The area was prosperous and rich in resources and navigable rivers facilitated travel and trade. Power was held in kinship groups or "lineages" who lived together in thatch roofed houses built in stone and mud, braced with branches. These small communities had flat, stone lined courts where ceremonial ball games took place and plazas where family celebrations and seasonal feasts took place. Ownership of land was hereditary, and the right to land was marked and established by the burial of important ancestors on site.

Ancestor worship was widespread throughout Western Mexico. The honoring of ancestors guided principles of land inheritance, power, and social status. The custom of burying the dead with their wealth, to commemorate their accomplishments and provide them with rewards in the afterlife, also served to ensure the status of their heirs by securing the deceased's lands for their descendants.

While the peoples of West Mexico produced no writings, pyramids, or monumental stone sculptures, they built and stocked hundreds of shaft tombs with a variety of grave goods including unusual trade items, offerings of ceramic art, food, drink, jade carvings, shell ornaments, earrings, and beads.

These “shaft tombs” are a unique feature of West Mexico. Constructed using stone and wood tools, the tombs consist of a vertical or slanted shaft, about one meter in diameter and one to fifteen meters long, leading to one or more horizontal, vaulted burial chambers: cave like rooms three to four meters in diameter and one meter high. The bodies of the deceased were bound in mats, tied to a board, and lowered by rope into the chambers. A capstone closed off the chamber(s) from the shaft and the shaft was back filled with dirt and volcanic ash. The location of the tomb might be indicated by a circle of stones. Some shaft tombs were located beneath the floors of houses, others were found in nearby cemeteries. In Colima, the average shaft was two and half meters long and jumbled human remains and broken ceramics from different periods are evidence that the tombs were frequently reused. In addition to exceptional ceramic sculptures, the tombs in Colima might contain trade goods made of shell, green stone, obsidian, and other rare items. A large proportion of the Colima tombs contained either the skeletal remains of a dog or a ceramic dog effigy to guide the dead in the underworld.

Dogs were important part of everyday life for the Colima people. They were an important source of food. They were watch dogs, aided in the hunt, were used in healing (by body heat for such ailments as rheumatism, asthma, toothache and insomnia), and served as family pets.

Some say dogs as food source: fattened. This task was a proud one: aiding the wellbeing of the people and was honored in sculpture for its sacrifice. Some Colima dog effigies are shown with ears of corn: scientific analysis has shown that maize was a significant part of the domesticated dog’s diet.

Others say: The dogs were the only source of meat since there was very little cattle available throughout Mesoamerica. The dogs were fattened and killed, most likely for feasts or as ritual offerings rather than as everyday fare. Eating is a religious ceremony connecting Colima people to the earth. The reciprocal system between earth --and by extension gods—and humans was a defining part of Mesoamerican culture. The dog figure represents this importance as a reminder of the significance of food in relation to man.

Archaeologists and anthropologists think the Colima believed that dogs were guardians of the dead; that they were companions and guides in the underworld. They represented the god of death.

They also might have had a creation myth:

- In his study of the contemporary Cora, Von Winning discovered a myth that was still prevalent among the people concerning the role of dogs in the afterlife. [The] dog was considered to be an independently acting demon in the myths of the creation of the earth and mankind, particularly in the myths of the flood among the ancient inhabitants of Colima. . . . According to this the people followed the trail of a dog, leading to a high mountain, in order to escape from drowning in a rising flood. Meanwhile the dog beat a drum, the sound of which caused the water to swell up in waves, whereupon the people climbed to the summit. Most of them died of starvation while waiting for the water to recede. Those few who survived are believed to be the ancestors of mankind. The dog disappeared into a large lake where the wandering souls visit it on their way to their final resting place." Von Winning, *The Shaft Tomb Figures*, 43 (1974)

Mexican hairless dog (Xoloitzcuintle (show-low-eats-queen-tee) is the oldest domesticated breed in the Americas, being over 3000 years old and was already domesticated by the time of the Colima culture. The Xolo dog was named after the Aztec god who would lead the deceased into the afterlife. Aztec Xolotl (show-low-till) (“Lord of the Underworld”) was the deity who aided the dead on their journey to the afterlife. Xolotl was also the god of deformities and fire. “Itzcuintli” is Aztec for “dog”. It was an AKC breed 1887-1959, was not for a while, and as of 2008 has been an AKC breed again. The litters are large (over 3-5 puppies). Being hairless, they radiate a lot of heat. Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo were fans of these dogs and made them part of their art and might have made them popular again. Hairless feature is a recessive gene.

Colima means “god of fire who rules”. The most active and dangerous volcano is in that region of Mexico. Little is known about Colima civilization that existed between 300 BCE and 300 CE. Most of our information is derived from the subterranean tombs where the Colima were buried. Carved deep into the rock, these multi-chambered tombs were reached by long vertical shafts—some plunging 45 feet. Families deposited their dead within each tomb over several generations, equipping their relatives with terra-cotta vessels and sculptures for the afterlife.

Sculptures of dogs such as this one were found in high status contexts, representing wealth and abundance.

The dog’s special relationship with humans is highlighted by a number of Colima dog effigies wearing human masks. This curious effigy type has been interpreted as a shamanic transformation image, or as a reference to the modern Huichol myth of the origin of the first wife who was transformed from a dog into a human. However, recent scholarship suggests a new explanation of these sculptures as the depiction of the animal’s inner essence, which is made manifest by being give human form via the mask. The use of the human face to make reference to an object’s or animal’s inner spirit is found in the artworks of many ancient cultures in the Americas from the Inuit of Alaska and Northern Canada to peoples in Argentina and Chile.

Current Mia Label Information (optional)

Colima artists are known for their lively representations of animals, particularly dogs. Mexican hairless breeds such as the Xoloitzcuintle (show-low-eats-queen-tee) were domesticated and raised as a source of food. They also had supernatural importance and were thought of as guides and companions for humans in the afterlife. Colima burials frequently contained dog effigies, along with other provisions for a comfortable afterlife.

Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

Photo or video of xolo dog today (Mexican Hairless): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEmG8F1ITYU>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_4Sf2KIF6k

Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera used Mexican hairless in their paintings: “The Love Embrace of the Universe, the Earth (Mexico), and Mr. Xolotl” by Frida Kahlo; “Frida Kahlo and her Itzcuintli Dogs” photo by Lola Alvarez Bravo, 1944.:



“Itzcuintli Dog with Me” by Frida Kahlo, 1938 (<http://www.wikiart.org/en/frida-kahlo/itzcuintli-dog-with-me-1938>)

Wikipedia articles: Mexican hairless dog; Western Mexico shaft tomb tradition, Dogs in Mesoamerican folklore and myth, Colima

Sacred Symbols-Four Thousand Years of Ancient American Art (English translation) and catalogue, artsmia: <http://archive.artsmia.org/sacred-symbols/> and <http://archive.artsmia.org/sacred-symbols/preview-dog.html>

Ceramic dogs, audio interview, Bowers Museum: <http://www.bowers.org/index.php/visit/tours/audio-tours/B/4-bowers-audio/2-highlights-of-the-bowers-collection-english/4-ceramic-dogs-colima-culture-west-mexico>

Colima dog in the Dayton Art Institute: <http://www.daytonartinstitute.org/art/collection-highlights/pre-columbian/colima-dog>

Butterwick, Kristi. *Heritage of Power: Ancient Sculpture From West Mexico: The Andraill E. Pearson Family Collection*, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Yale U. Press, New Haven and London.

Kan, Michael, Clement W. Meighan, and H.B. Nicholson. *Sculpture of Ancient West Mexico. Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima: The Proctor Staffor Collection*. Los Angeles. 1970 Print.

Townsend, Richard F. And Patricia R. Ana Walt. *Ancient West Mexico: Art and Archaeology of the Unknown Past*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998. Print.

Prop idea:

Show image of Dog with Human Mask from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art M.86.296.154:

