



DOG EFFIGY WITH HUMAN MASK

Mexican, Colima, ca. 300 B.C.–A.D. 500

Terra cotta; 9 × (length) 15 in. (22.9 × 38.1 cm.)

Purchase, Academy Volunteers Fund, 1973 (4173.1)

The shaft-tombs of Colima, Jalisco, and Nayarit on the Pacific coast of Mexico have yielded an impressive variety of hand-modeled clay mortuary figures. The large, polished red-ware figures from the small state of Colima are especially well known for their realistic portrayals of wild and domesticated animals. Deer, turtles, sharks, ducks, parrots, and especially dogs are part of a large menagerie charmingly described by Colima artists.

One of the first-published (1888) shaft-tomb figures from West Mexico was a Colima dog with a human mask almost identical to the Academy's piece. Similar extant sculptures have smaller masks covering only the nose of the dog. The Academy's dog has a corpulent body supported by stocky legs and a large head cleverly balanced by a spoutlike tail. Detail is created by modeling, for example in the subtly indicated spine and the erect ears, and by some incision on the eyes and ears of the mask. The coloring of the piece is mottled, the result of the buff clay being

covered with red slip, which in turn is flecked with black because of reduction firing. The piece was also burnished. Many Colima dog effigies have pierced ears (in the Academy's example only the ears of the mask are pierced), suggesting that they may have worn earrings or other ornaments of perishable materials. Today the Huichol Indians of West Mexico occasionally thread a cotton string or a small weaving as a talisman through holes they pierce in their dogs' ears.

The dog represented in Colima sculpture is apparently a *tepesquintli* or *techichi*, a special breed of hairless canine that was raised for food by the Maya, Aztecs, and other Mesoamerican groups. The ancient inhabitants of Colima may also have consumed the meat of this animal, perhaps at feasts or sacrificial rituals. The ubiquity of the dog effigies in tombs may indicate that they were not only important companions for their dead masters but also a source of nourishment in the next life. They also may have represented guides to the underworld or totemic animals (a concept found also in North and Middle American mythology). A totemic relationship between the dog and a man or clan might be indicated, since the mask transforms the wearer into the being whose likeness he wears.

RAD

Colima Dog with Human Mask

Purchase Academy Volunteers Fund, 1973
#4173.1 15 x 9 inches (22.9 x 38.1 cm)

Colima, West Mexico
ca 300 BC-500 AD

Gallery Description: Colima art forms are generally sophisticated and polished. Little pot bellied dogs of Colima belong to the hairless breed that were fattened for consumption. They are shown in many poses-sleeping, playing, growling. The later Mexicans believed that an owners dog would guide his soul to the Underworld. The mask may indicate a totemic relationship between dog and man.

Subject: The HAA ceramic dog has a human mask. It seems to represent one of the varieties of the breed known as the Mexican hairless dog. (xoloizcuintli or tepescuintli or techichi). Colima dogs with masks are less commonly seen in collections than the dogs without the masks.

Materials and Techniques: Polished red terra cotta and hollow in structure.

Background for the Colima Dog: The famous red pottery dogs of the State of Colima date about 200 to 900 AD and consist of what may be called caricatures of short and fat dogs. Present day west Mexico farmers who find them buried on their farm land call them "tlalcoyotes" which in the Aztec language Nahuatl means "Coyote that lives inside de earth". Farmers who find them, being well aware of their value, take great care of the statues when they come upon one on their land. In other parts of Mexico, statues of dogs can be found which are older, but the art work of these statues are not as sophisticated as the "Dogs of Colima". The Aztecs believed that hairless dogs represented the god Xolotl, who had the task of guiding the dead on their journey to the Spirit World "Mictlan". In order for the souls of the dead to reach "Mictlan" they had to cross the river as well as face other obstacles. The dark and hairless Xoloitzcuintlis, that represent the god Xolotl, had the task of guiding their human masters across the mystical river and help them overcome all of the obstacles on the journey.

In central Mexican, generally, a person's dog (if well treated in life) awaited the soul of its keeper at a river that divides this world from the next and to help the soul reach the other side. The Huichol also speak of the dog who was not well treated in life. They say that this dog will threaten to bite the soul but is quickly pacified with a meal of tortillas that the soul has brought along for that purpose. (Peter Furst IN Townsend, *Ancient West Mexico*)

Another theory is that the dog is an ancestor and is explained in an origin myth. Transformation could be another explanation-where it is the dog who is given the face of a human being. OR like the Inuit art, the human mask may represent the animals inner essence, soul or life force.

Resources:

Minnesota Institute of Art website: www.artsmia.org/ceramics/nayarit_figure/where.html

HAA Catalogue of Selected Works from the Permanent Collection.

Townsend, Richard R. *Ancient West Mexico, Art and Archaeology of the Unknown Past.* The Art Institute of Chicago. 1998.

Instructional Aids: Do you have a dog for a pet? Would you like to have this dog as your pet? Why? Do you think he played an important role for his master since he was buried with the person after his death?