



Axe-god pendant

On display

Title/Description: Axe-god pendant

Born: 0300 - 0400

Object Type: Pendant

Materials: Jade, Pigment

Measurements: h. 85 x w. 34 x d. 11 mm

Accession Number: 148

Historic Period: Formative (late) period (300 BC-AD 400), 3rd century, 4th century

Production Place: Costa Rica, Mesoamerica, Nicoya Penninsula

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

Axe-shaped pendants in the form of birds or human figures are found as tomb offerings in northwest (Pacific) Costa Rica and in the Atlantic Watershed region (Snarskis, 1981:181-4, nos. 19-35, and Easby, 1981:139-42). It is not clear whether they were made from re-used celts, split longitudinally, or whether the axe shape is purely symbolic. Like many pendants, the reverse of this one is unfinished and shows scars where the original blank was sawn from one side and then the other, until the stone between the cuts could be snapped, leaving a ridge. Jade is one of the hardest and most resistant of stones, but it was worked without the aid of metal tools which were not introduced into Costa Rica until about ad 500. Cutting, polishing, and the drilling of suspension holes at the neck were carried out with tools of wood, cane, and even string, in conjunction with abrasives of sand or crushed mineral material (Easby, 1968:16-26).

Although axe-gods are a typically Costa Rican product, the workshop sites have not yet been discovered, nor have sources of jade been found in Costa Rica. Some of the raw material was imported from the Motagua Valley of Guatemala, but the search for local sources continues (Lange et al., 1981).

Entry taken from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection 3 volume catalogue, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997).

Provenance

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from K. J. Hewett in 1962.

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.

