



Human effigy pot

Not on display**Title/Description:** Human effigy pot**Object Type:** Figure, Pot**Materials:** Earthenware**Measurements:** h. 572 x w. 260 x d. 260 mm**Accession Number:** 778**Historic Period:** AD 800-1500**Production Place:** Ecuador, South America, The Americas**Cultural Group:** Manteño-Huancavilca**Credit Line:** Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1980

The Manteno, and their southern neighbours the Huancavilca, inhabited the central coast of Ecuador at the time of European contact. Saville (1907: 8-15) summarises several eyewitness accounts of their way of life, and their archaeological remains are described by Saville and by Bushnell (1951: 95-122), Estrada (1957:29-44; 1962) and Meggers (1966:122-31). The Manteno were famous merchants, whose fleets of balsa-log sailing rafts traded along the Pacific coast as far as southern Peru. One of these rafts was captured by Pizarro's pilot, Bartoleme Ruiz, who lists its contents as gold and silver items, fine textiles, beads and 'many black jars'. This jar and nos. 82-3 fit this description and, like the best of Manteno pottery, are made of a burnished, dark-surfaced warefired in a reducing atmosphere.

Large sculptural pots have been found at several localities in the province of Manabi (Lapiner, 1976: pls. 784-7; Felleman and Scott, 1982: nos. 163-4). They may simply have been human effigy figures, or vessel lids, but are generally believed to be incense burners. The bell-shaped base is open at the bottom and could have fitted over a brazier. This example shows no sign of burning, but two apertures would have allowed smoke to pass from the bell into the legs of the main figure and out at the top.

The figure sits on a stool and is naked except for wristbands and ear spools modelled in relief. The facial decoration is common to these effigies, and matches the fashion observed by Pedro de Cieza de Leon (1864:175-6) in the sixteenth century: the 'men are marked in the face, and the mark begins at the root of the ear and descends to the chin, the breadth being according to each man's fancy. Some mark the greater part of the face, and others less'. On many incense burners, and on smaller figurines as well, the incised decoration extends also onto the body. This suggests that the design at the neck of this figure may represent body paint or tattooing, rather than a necklace. In support of this view, the animal head motif (emphasised by white fill) is matched on Manteno terracotta stamps used for imprinting patterns on textiles or on the human body.

Warwick Bray, 1997

(Entry taken from *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection catalogue, Vol. 3: Precolumbian, Asian, Egyptian and European Antiquities*, edited by Steven Hooper, Yale University Press, 1997).

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from John Stokes, New York, on the advice of Robert Sainsbury in 1980 out of income from the Sainsbury Purchasing Fund.
