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 Smith College '19
 Translating New Worlds, ARH 207, Fall 2016

Creator: Unknown
Creator Dates: Unknown
Culture: Unknown
Title: *Male Warrior*
Date: ca. 300 B.C. - A.D. 500 (Preclassic)
Place: Ameca-Etztatlán Style: Jalisco, Mexico
Type: Ceramic sculpture
Materials: Clay



Dimensions: overall: 14 1/2in x 7 1/2in x 9in; 36.83cm x 19.05cm x 22.86cm
Current Location: Northampton, MA, USA, Smith College Museum of Art
Accession Number: SC 2010:66-10
Credit Line: Gift of Gail Binney Sterne (Stearn)

Description

A ceramic sculpture in the Ameca-Etztatlán style of a dynamically posed man wielding a club or mace with both hands. The figure, likely a warrior, is wearing barrel-shaped leather armor around his torso and a conical hat topped with a crest. He is squatting, poised to strike to the proper left. He grips his club, knobbed at the proximal end and pointed at the distal end, with his clearly defined fingers. Both of his feet are less detailed, lacking toes, but are firmly and evenly planted. His filleted eyes and his slightly agape mouth produce a focused expression, and his aquiline nose is offset by prominent pierced ears. The cream slip of the figure is matte with some mottling of the surface apparent above the waist. The sculpture's thick limbs, stocky body, and archetypal pose indicate that it is almost certainly from a shaft tomb in the modern state of Jalisco, Mexico.

Research Summary

Eclipsed by the above-ground architecture and abundant material culture of Central Mexico and further by an apparent lack of ethnographic connection to the present, the sculptural artifacts of the shaft tomb culture of ancient West Mexico have been displayed with minimal historical context for almost a century.¹ These ceramic figures were brought to European awareness by anthropologist Carl Lumholtz in the 1890s who designated the style as "Tarascan," after the state

¹ Covarrubias, *Indian Art of Mexico and Central America*, 85.

which existed in West Mexico from the mid-Postclassic era until the Spanish conquest—a time frame off by almost a millennium.² Lumholtz’s inaccurate attribution would persist for “decades,” establishing a pattern of unsteady progress in the material culture terminology of ancient West Mexico.³ Archaeological progress would also be impeded by both a dearth of verifiably genuine objects and limited or no contextual information for them; indeed no Preclassic West Mexican shaft tombs have ever been excavated that were not looted first.⁴ Without evidence as to the significance of these figures, and in light of their tendency to be bought and collected unprovenanced, it is difficult to determine their meaning or purpose.

West Mexican shaft tomb figures are categorized geographically—according to the modern Mexican state in which their originating tomb is located—and stylistically—according to the specific site or region of origin, the clay type, or the overall artistic style of the figure.⁵ *Male Warrior* most closely resembles figures found in the shaft tombs of Jalisco and those which are crafted in the Ameca-Etztatlán⁶ style.^{7,8,9} Formalizing the distinctions between the ceramic type phases is often complicated due to lack of well-defined material types and a susceptibility on the part of earlier researchers to group all types under the heading “shaft tomb phase”.¹⁰ However, the date range of *Male Warrior* is determinable even without ascertaining an exact style category: in central Jalisco, where the Ameca-Etztatlán style occurs, hollow clay sculptures like it date from the Tequila II and III phases, or from approximately 350 B.C. to A.D. 400/500,¹¹ and its standard “warrior” form—a hallmark of the Late Formative period— supports this conclusion.¹² Hollow clay figures would have been found among many others in the burial chambers of a shaft tomb. The shaft of such a tomb would be up to eight meters deep, and individuals would be buried, potentially accompanied by hundreds of ceramic items, in connected chambers.¹³ These items may have been strictly mortuary offerings, or they may have been used in daily life. In particular, *Male Warrior* may have been intended to “[commemorate] military ritual”,¹⁴ represent an ancestor, or to usher the dead to the “netherworld.”¹⁵

In 1930, when artists Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo began collecting and displaying “dozens” of West Mexican shaft tomb figures, the demand for these objects grew exponentially.¹⁶ Until this point, shaft tombs were either unearthed by farmers, or were intentionally excavated by looters; the

² Sund, “Beyond the Grave: The Twentieth-Century Afterlife of West Mexican Burial Effigies.”

³ Ibid.

⁴ Lynton and Lynton, *Out of the Depths: Tomb Figures from West-Mexico: Catalogue of an Exhibition*, Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, Museum of Ethnography, 21.

⁵ Kan, Meghan, and Nicholson, *Sculpture of Ancient West Mexico: Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima*, 19.

⁶ Also known as Ameca Gray, Ameca-Zacoalco, and Estolanos style. Beekman and Pickering, *Shaft Tombs and Figures in West Mexican Society: A Reassessment*, 20.

⁷ Townsend, “Before Gods, Before Kings,” 112.

⁸ Kan, Meghan, and Nicholson, *Sculpture of Ancient West Mexico: Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima*, 24.

⁹ Butterwick, *Heritage of Power*, 48.

¹⁰ Beekman, “The Chronological Context of the Central Jalisco Shaft Tombs.”

¹¹ Beekman and Pickering, *Shaft Tombs and Figures in West Mexican Society: A Reassessment*, 13.

¹² Weigand and Beekman, “The Teuchitlan Tradition: Rise of a Statelike Society,” 43.

¹³ Ibid, 38.

¹⁴ Townsend, “Before Gods, Before Kings,” 112.

¹⁵ Butterwick, *Heritage of Power*, 49.

¹⁶ Sund, “Beyond the Grave: The Twentieth-Century Afterlife of West Mexican Burial Effigies.”

increased attention to the sculptures brought about by Rivera and Kahlo exacerbated the latter process.¹⁷ By the mid-1940s, archaeologists of the region convened at a roundtable to construct a baseline for knowledge gleaned from these looted objects.¹⁸ Increased tourism to West Mexico coupled with an ever-growing market value for its looted materials resulted in “entire sites [being] systematically plundered;” it was not until 1972 that “cultural patrimony agreements” between Mexico and the United States were signed.¹⁹ This phase in West Mexican archaeological history had not only seen rampant looting, it saw forgery incentivized by the high prices that private collectors and museums alike were willing to pay for shaft tomb figures. The scale of forgery is unknown but would have reached its peak in sophistication in the 1960s and 1970s, and it is highly probable that “all collections from this period are tainted with fakes”.²⁰ Fake or highly restored sculptures dilute what knowledge can be gained from comparing existing collections to what are now scientific, sanctioned excavations, and they have the potential to muddle already hazy ceramic type definitions.

Comparanda

The first three works were chosen to demonstrate the standardized form of the Ameca-Eztatlán warrior. The last work was chosen because it illustrates how Diego Rivera’s collection of West Mexican burial effigies influenced his work, which heightened the demand for these illegally obtained objects but also elevated them to high art and confirmed their importance to Mexican history.

Jalisco Warrior, Ameca-Eztatlán style
100 B.C.–A.D. 250
(Jalisco)
Clay
Ceramic sculpture: 17 1/2 in
Auction Item from Sotheby’s Lot 140



¹⁷ Evans, “Navigating the Afterlife: Two Shaft Tomb Figures from Ancient West Mexico,” 30.

¹⁸ Covarrubias, *Indian Art of Mexico and Central America*, 85.

¹⁹ Townsend, “Renewing the Inquiry in Ancient West Mexico,” 21.

²⁰ Pickering, “Maggots, Graves, and Scholars,” 46.

Two Warriors with Spears

100 B.C.–A.D. 300

Ameca-Etztatlán style, Jalisco

Left: 16 5/8 in. (42.2 cm) x 10 1/8 in. (25.7 cm)

Right: 17 5/8 in. (44.8 cm) x 9 1/8 in. (23.2 cm)

The Andrall E. Pearson Family Collection

The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Standing Warrior with Club

100 B.C.–A.D. 250

Jalisco

Terra-cotta

Sculpture: 39.3 cm x 20.6 cm x 22.8 cm

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Buhl Ford II

Detroit Institute of Arts Collection: DIA.72.1



Diego Rivera (Mexican, 1886-1957)

Detail from *Palacio Nacional Murals: De la civilización el Pre-Hispanico a la conquista* (Tarascan Civilization)

1945-1951

Pigment on plaster

Fresco painting

Archivision Addition Module Three:

6A1-RD-PN-D2



Annotated Bibliography

Beekman, Christopher S., and Robert B. Pickering, eds. *Shaft Tombs and Figures in West Mexican Society: A Reassessment*. Tulsa, OK: Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, 2016.

A comprehensive collection of essays related to shaft tomb culture, covering history and current collections-based research and archaeological case studies. Likely the most up-to-date print source on nearly all areas of West Mexican archaeology. Particularly useful for understanding the current work in West Mexico and the changing perspectives of researchers, but also for the authors' considerations for the future of research in the field.

Good for further reading about determining authenticity of sculptures.

Butterwick, Kristi. *Heritage of Power: Ancient Sculpture from West Mexico, The Andrall E. Pearson Family Collections*. New York, New Haven & London: The Metropolitan Museum of Art & Yale University Press, 2004.

A thoroughly researched catalogue of the Pearson Family collections. Includes many full color plates which are organized geographically. The focus is on the collected objects, but there is some helpful background research on shaft tomb culture and speculation as to the meaning and use of the objects. Contains three meticulous descriptions of Jalisco warrior figures in the Ameca-Etztatlán style, which were essential for identifying the correct origin and style of *Male Warrior*.

Ryan, Judith. "The 'Haunting Subhuman Monstrosities' of Ancient Nayarit: A Critical Reassessment." *National Gallery of Victoria* 24 (1983).

An online article responding to earlier scholarship's proclivity for harsh value judgments in describing ceramic sculptural styles. Focuses more on Nayarit figures in the San Sebastian style. Illustrates the shift in perspective of archaeologists; stands in strong opposition to schools of thought which hold that art can be "primitive." Discusses the "power" of West Mexican sculpture.

Sund, Judy. "Beyond the Grave: The Twentieth-Century Afterlife of West Mexican Burial Effigies." *The Art Bulletin* 82, no. 4 (2000): 734.

An online journal article centered around the significance of West Mexican ceramic figures in the 20th century. Goes into great detail about the impact Diego Rivera's collection had on the illegal excavation of West Mexican sites. Interestingly connects the advertising campaign of Kahlua importer and West Mexican ceramic sculpture collector Jules Berman to the widespread looting of effigies. A good source for research on the impact of ancient West Mexico.

Attribution Changes

I suggest three changes to the tombstone information provided by the SCMA for this ceramic sculpture. First, the title of this work should be changed to more accurately represent the object; I propose "*Male Warrior*", which is more consistent with the titles of comparable works found in all consulted sources. Next, the date should be specified as "ca. 300 B.C. - A.D. 500." This is a conservative approximation of the date for this object based on my research and is the most specific it could be without using absolute methods. Finally, the place made should be given as "Ameca-Etztatlán Style: Jalisco, Mexico." All consulted sources indicate that works of this kind were made in Central Jalisco, and denotation of the ceramic style is consistent with the tombstone information format of other museums. This would constitute a correction to the accession files for this object in which it is erroneously associated with Nayarit.

Public Posting

The Preclassic ceramic burial effigy *Male Warrior* is representative of the Ameca-Etztatlán style of what is now known as Jalisco, Mexico. It was most likely looted from a shaft tomb, where it would have accompanied the individuals buried there along with many other ceramic sculptures. Because of the high value of Mexican antiquities in the early to mid-twentieth century, shaft tombs were pillaged on an enormous scale; until 2014 no Preclassic shaft tomb had ever been found undisturbed. In addition, fake ceramic sculptures became much more sophisticated in response to this unrelenting demand for attractive West Mexican art pieces. The infiltration of fake works into the corpus of genuine works obfuscated the already complicated system of classification for these objects. In the absence of a comprehensive approach to verifying the authenticity of West Mexican ceramic sculptures, the status of pieces like *Male Warrior* in museum collections remains in question.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank professor Elizabeth Klarich for her assistance with initial research, professor Dana Leibsohn for her editing suggestions, and my peer Natalia Perkins for proofreading well past proofreading hours.

Works Cited

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