

Basic Detail Report



Vessel

Date

300-600 CE

Primary Maker

Zapotec

Medium

Ceramic

Description

This Zapotec object is an urn with a seated deity figure decorating the front. At the back side of the sitting figure is an attached cylindrical vase that originally would have extended to the height of the figure's head (this particular object has lost more than half of this cylinder). It was

made to be interred in a tomb, grave, or possibly in or at the base of a monument. Although named and referred to as an urn it is important to note that these types of highly decorated vessels have never been found to hold human remains. Instead bits of jade, snail shells, obsidian, and occasionally the small bones of birds have sometimes been found inside or near the vessels. Almost all figures on urns are human in form and represent Zapotec gods or humans dressed in elaborate costume and headdress to mimic the appearance of the gods. Usually the figure is in sitting position with hands on knees but other variations of postures, hand positions, overall size and proportions exist. Because the Zapotecs used molds to create the urns it is not uncommon to find exact duplicates at excavation sites. The figure pictured here is highly ornamented in a headdress (part of which is missing), round bead necklace, ear spools, and a mask over the nose and face. Draped around the shoulders is a decorative band (perhaps a textile), and a triangular loin cloth falls over the crossed legs. In its hands it holds the rope handle of a bag of incense. The existence of a writing system, an elaborate calendar, and a complex religion, plus the development of the major city of Monte Albán and the controlled empire that occupied much of the present day state of Oaxaca all attest to the achievements and advancements of the Zapotec culture. The abundance of technically and aesthetically fine art objects produced by the Zapotecs confirms their sophistication and inspires appreciation.

Dimensions

14 1/2 × 10 in. (36.8 × 25.4 cm)