ANIMAL SCULPTURE

IN PRE-COLUMBIAN ART

THE
ART INSTITUTE
OF CHICAGO
ANIMAL SCULPTURE IN PRE-COLUMBIAN ART

Puma stone 1 1½” Tiahuanaco Bolivia
Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf
How often one hears an expression such as “wise as an owl,” “sly as a fox,” “stubborn as a mule,” or “gentle as a lamb.” These are only a few holdovers from the not too remote past when our ancestors lived more closely to nature. Man has always felt a kinship with animals, seeing in them human traits both good and evil. The more intimately they have shared his environment, the keener this feeling of fellowship has been. Modern living has largely deprived us of our sense of being a part of the natural order of living things.

The use of animal symbolism was universal in ancient Central and South America. The jaguar and puma, most powerful of mammals; the eagle and condor, mightiest of birds; and the serpent and crocodile, most feared of reptiles, were used repeatedly as symbols of supreme deity and of the ruling warrior-priest class. Lesser animals each had their special meaning. Often animal, human and imaginative elements were combined to conjure the supernatural. This picture book, and the exhibition from which it is drawn, presents for your enjoyment some of the more realistically rendered animals of Pre-Columbian America. They were fashioned in clay, stone and metal by skilled craftsmen who observed and understood them well. The examples reproduced are all sculptures in the round. Except where otherwise indicated, they are in the form of hollow clay vessels. Dimensions given are maximum for the complete object.

Almost without exception the art objects of ancient America were created for ceremonial purposes. Complex rituals were evolved to protect their agricultural, hunting and fishing economies against powerful natural forces that threatened their survival. Elaborate burial practices called for numerous objects to be placed in the grave to insure the well-being of the dead in after life. These funerary objects were usually made specifically for interment in observance of ritual necessity. We cannot know the exact religious meaning of each object, but when naturalistic canons governed the art style, the contents of tombs afford us our clearest picture of the life and customs of the
time. This is especially true of the Colima culture of western Mexico and the Mochica culture of northern Peru. Since both cultures are well represented in this picture book, a few remarks concerning their animal sculpture may well be appropriate. The other objects reproduced will speak for themselves.

**The Animal Sculpture of Colima**
The ceramic sculptors of Colima, along with those of neighboring Nayarit and Jalisco were among the most prolific craftsmen in ancient Mexico. Their infinitely varied terracotta figures offer us a rare glimpse of the everyday life in Pre-Columbian times. Of the three styles, Colima is notable for its smooth flowing simplified realism and the frequency of animal subjects. The animal figures are in the form of hollow ceramic vessels, usually with a spout opening from the back, top, or side. In color they vary from buff to deep Indian red, and are usually mottled with a bluish black patina. Occasionally incised lines are used to indicate markings.

By far the most frequently depicted animal is the “Techichi,” a fleshy hairless dog used for food. Elsewhere in ancient Mexico the dog was associated with death, and its presence in a Colima tomb may have been to guide the deceased in his journey to the next world. Other animals are less common and their significance as tomb sculpture can only be surmised. Some may have symbolized food, others may have been totems of good fortune. Whatever their special meaning, the skill with which the sculptor caught their character and pose delights us as it must have delighted his contemporaries.

**Mochica Animal Sculpture**
Modeled Mochican ceramics are distinctive in their beautifully simplified forms and selective detail, their simple color schemes of creamy white and earth red
COLIMA CULTURE MEXICO

Bird form reclinario ht 8 ¼” Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf

Standing Techichi dog ht 10” Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf

slips, and the frequent use of the “stirrup spout,” a hollow tube handle with a spout projecting from it. Mochica art is filled with animal symbolism designating deity, clan, rank and ceremonial function. Often animal and human forms are combined with symbolic intent. Sometimes these combinations are so convincing they do not appear to be a distortion of reality. The deer seems comfortably seated in the posture of a man, and the osprey clutches a fish with human hands. Many other sculptural representations of mammals, birds and reptiles are executed with a realism which evinces the intimate knowledge and respect of the Mochicas for their animal brothers.

Acknowledgments
This publication has been made possible through a generous gift to the Art Institute by Mr. and Mrs. James W. Alsdorf. They have also furnished photographs of their outstanding collection of Pre-Columbian animal sculpture. Mr. Nathan Cummings has furnished photographs of some of the fine Mochican animal ceramics which he has given the Art Institute along with other treasures of ancient Peruvian art. Drs. Hans and Mercedes Gaffron have lent objects from their private collections to supplement their father’s distinguished collection which was purchased by the Art Institute through the Kate S. Buckingham Fund. Thanks are due also to Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Michel and Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Weilgus for photographs of their objects. Other lenders to the exhibition whose works could not be illustrated because of the lack of space are: Mrs. Maurice Culberg, Mr. André Emmerich, Mr. John J. Klejman, Mr. John Wise, and Suzette Morton Zurcher.

For expert assistance in the identification of the animals of Mexico and Central America, the author is indebted to Mr. Philip Hershkovitz, Mr. Emmet R. Blake, and Dr. Robert F. Inger, curators respectively of mammals, birds and reptiles at the Chicago Natural History Museum. In identifying the sculptures of the Mochica culture of Peru, the author has consulted Volume I of “Los Mochicas” by Rafael Larco Hoyle, Peru’s foremost expert on the Mochicas.

ALAN R. SAWYER
Associate Curator of Primitive Arts
October 5, 1957
Seated Techichi dog ht 16" Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf
COLIMA CULTURE MEXICO

Techichi puppy 13" Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf

Snarling Techichi dog 15¾" Mr and Mrs D Michel

Horned toad 11" Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf
COLIMA CULTURE MEXICO

Newborn peccary l 9 7/8" Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf

Ground squirrel l 10" Anonymous
Brown coati eating ear of maize l 9" Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf
Buffalo head duck l 8" Mr. and Mrs J W Alsdorf

Animal wearing tortoise shell ht 7½" Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf
COLIMA CULTURE MEXICO

Iguana with mouth spout 1 20" Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf

Coiled rattlesnake 1 7" Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf
American crocodile 1 22½" Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf
Parrot I 7½"
Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf
Macaw ht 11½" Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf

Crow? ht 10¾" Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf

Swallow 7½" Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf

Pair of Bufflehead ducks ht 6" Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf
CULTURES OF WESTERN MEXICO

Snake l 6½" Nayarit Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf

Mother toad ht 6⅞" Nayarit Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf

Bowl with fish ht 5¼" Colima Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf
Armadillo? headed mace ht 3 3/4" Jalisco Anonymous
CULTURES OF PANAMA AND MEXICO

Jaguar gold pendant l 2¾" Veraguas Mr and Mrs R Weilgus
Newborn deer stone hacha ht $8\frac{1}{2}''$ Totonac Mr and Mrs J. W. Alsdorf

Deer whistle ht $5\frac{1}{2}''$ Totonac Mr and Mrs J. W. Alsdorf
Puma throne stone ht 17" Mr and Mrs R Wielgus
Deer with two fawns ht 11" AIC gift of Mr N Cummings
Seal beating on drum ht 17" AIC gift of Mr N Cummings
Puma head fragment ht 4½" AIC Buckingham Fund

Puma on back of condor ht 7½"
AIC gift of Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf
Puma in coil of serpents ht 9¾"
AIC gift of Mr N Cummings

Fox with man's body ht 9½" Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf
MOCHICA CULTURE PERU

Llama with saddlebags l 7¼” AIC Buckingham Fund
Head of llama ht 6⅞" AIC gift of Mr N Cummings

Monkey with coca bag ht 8½" AIC gift of Mr N Cummings
Owl with mouse in beak ht 7¾" AIC gift of Mr N Cummings

Two frogs ht 7¾" AIC Buckingham Fund
Frog bottle wood with shell inlay 1 1/8" AIC Buckingham Fund

Frog ht 6 1/4" AIC gift of Mr N Cummings

Black frog ht 7 3/8" AIC gift of Mr N Cummings
MOCHICA CULTURE PERU

Osprey holding fish ht 9½" AIC gift of Mr N Cummings

Toucan ht 8½" AIC gift of Mr N Cummings

Parrot ht 8½" AIC gift of Mr N Cummings
MOCHICA CULTURE PERU

Bird finial bronze with shell inlays ht 4 1/4" Mr and Mrs R Wielgus

Merganser with fledgling ht 9 7/8" AIC gift of Mr N Cummings
Alpaca head fragment ht 6¾" South Coast Tiahuanaco AIC Buckingham Fund

Guinea pig whistle l 2½" Chancay Drs H and M Graffon
Llama head ht 8¼" Chimú-Inca Mr and Mrs J W Alsdorf
Puma head detail spout ht 8\(\frac{3}{4}\)" North Coast Tiahuanaco AIC Buckingham Fund

Ocelot ht 8\(\frac{3}{4}\)" Nazca AIC Buckingham Fund
CULTURES OF SOUTH PERUVIAN COAST

Goose ht 5½” Nazca AIC Buckingham Fund

Dog l 6½” South Coast Tiahuanaco AIC Buckingham Fund →
Detail monkeys, pumas and Spaniard on horse gold arm band l 10" AIC Buckingham Fund
Hummingbirds gold ear ornament ht 1¼" AIC Buckingham Fund
Alpaca stone vessel ht 2⅞” AIC Buckingham Fund

Llama stone vessel ht 2⅜” Mr and Mrs R Wielgus
Monkey whistle and rattle ht 8 1/4"

Late Maya Mr and Mrs. J W Alsdorf
CULTURES OF
PRE-COLUMBIAN AMERICA

COLIMA 500-900 AD
NAYARIT 500-900 AD
JALISCO 500-900 AD
TOTONAC 500-900
AZTEC 1300-1500 AD
VERAGUAS 1300-1500 AD
MONABI 600-800 AD
MOCHICA 300 BC-500 AD
NAZCA 100-500 AD
HIGHLAND TIAHUANACO 100-500 AD
COASTAL TIAHUANACO 500-900 AD
CHIMU 900-1400 AD
CHANCAY 900-1400 AD
ICA 900-1400 AD
INCA 1400-1550 AD

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