

A Unique Wooden Figure from Ancient Mexico

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There is no doubt but that the scraper belongs with the site, and it must be given a late seventeenth or very early eighteenth century dating. It was found 1.3 feet beneath the surface in an area very near to, if not within, the western wall of the fort.

This is not the first example of a glass artifact from a historic horizon in Florida. C. B. Moore discovered a glass cross, probably European in manufacture, and a glass pendant showing aboriginal workmanship in a mound on Pine Island in southern Florida.³ Small glass scrapers were also found at the contemporaneous Macon Trading Post in Georgia.⁴ Such finds are of interest to the archaeologist as examples of the extension of aboriginal techniques to European materials during the critical and interesting period of contact and acculturation.

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February, 1949

³ C. B. Moore, "Miscellaneous Investigations in Florida," *Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia*, Vol. 13, pp. 307-8, Philadelphia, 1905.

⁴ Information from Charles H. Fairbanks.

A UNIQUE WOODEN FIGURE FROM ANCIENT MEXICO

Among the Mexican antiquities in the Ethnographical Museum in Vienna dating from the time of the Conquest is a small wooden figure bearing the accession number 12,585. Though this object has received cursory attention in previous publications,¹ it has never been fully described. Because of its unique design and the unusual complexity of its structure, the piece merits a full technical description.

In 1881 this figure was transferred from the then "Imperial Cabinet of Coins and Antiquities" to the then Anthropological-Ethnographical Division of the Imperial Museum of Natural History, which later became the present Ethnographical Museum (Museum für Völkerkunde). According to information supplied by Professor F. Eichler, Director of the Division of Antiquities in the Museum of Art, the object cannot be traced back farther than its entry under the number XIII/47 in the fifth volume of the "New Inventory" of the Cabinet of Coins and Antiquities. It is not known from what earlier collection it entered the "Cabinet." Possibly it came from the Imperial Treasure (Schatzkammer). In the description of these collections by von Sacken and Kenner, compiled in 1866,² this figure is listed under the doubtful heading "Indian images, largely [grösstenteils] brought back by Carl Baron von Hügel, and other Asiatic objects." But it could hardly have belonged to Hügel's collection.

This figure is not mentioned in the inventory of the Imperial Treasure made at the command of the Empress Maria Theresia in about 1750;³ but it might have been one of the objects listed summarily, or regarded as unworthy

of entry. The following observation in the inventory seems to support this conjecture: "Nun folget, was sich in denen zweien grösseren kästen ober denen medaillenladen, wovon die thüren von spiegelgläser, befindet, und zwar ohne numero als erstlich . . . Nebstdeme seind in beeden angemerkten kästen 54 stuck verschiedene figurl, busten, idolen, Lares oder hausgötzen, opferlampen von verschiedenen nationen, so theils von stein, theils bronzo auch von gebrennter erde, wovon ville antique aber mehrenteils unbekannt." There is, to be sure, no specific mention here of wooden objects.

Heger⁴ suggests that a remark in the inventory made after the death of Archduke Karl of Steiermark in 1590⁵ might possibly be taken to refer to this figure, inasmuch as three shields, possibly of Mexican origin, are there mentioned in connection with an object which seems to answer vaguely the description of our piece. Thus: "Andere alte rüstungen. Ain mohrenangesicht mit etlichen türgesen und zwaien grossen perlin, darauf drei edlgestain und ain grosz perl verlorn. Drei Yndiänisch rundelln . . ."

All we may be sure about is that this figure must have been kept in various "cabinets" ever since the time when, shortly after the Conquest, such objects were brought to Europe. The relatively excellent condition of its perishable material suggests as much. Though the figure may have been in the possession of the Hapsburgs from the time of its arrival in Europe, it is not impossible that it reached the "Schatzkammer" or the "Cabinet of Coins and Antiquities" at a later date and through other channels.

The figure is carved out of a dark brown deciduous wood and covered with dark lacquer. That this coating followed the insertion of inlays is attested by the fact that the cord of the left ear-pendant of the little head on the stomach is partly covered with lacquer. In some places the lacquer is flaked or scraped off. The carving of the genitals was evidently given some finishing touches after the lacquering, as the coated surface is there marred by cuts which were not later smoothed away.

The representation is that of a naked male figure crouching with the hands grasping the legs (Fig. 28). The head, finished with greater care than the rest of the figure, accounts for more than half the total height. At the two sides are flat triangular surfaces decorated with carving and with inlays, now lost. The back is hollowed out and filled with resin.

The measurements are as follows: height to the golden nail-head on the right, 90 mm.; to that on the left, 91 mm.; to the chin, 38 mm.; width of the base, 71 mm.; thickness, including the little head, 63 mm.; breadth of the back, 68 mm.; height of the triangular plane at the right, 66 mm.; of that at the left, 65 mm.; distance between the peaks of the triangles, 56 mm.; weight, 168.5 grams.

The head has a bestial aspect, with a snout, but human ears. If the two knobs on the crown are taken for the torn-off dog's ears of Xolotl, it might easily be concluded that the face is peering from a skin-mask. In that case, the hair,

¹ Heger, 1888, p. 94; Lehmann, 1922, Pl. 7; Saville, 1922, Pl. XXVII and p. 82.

² Sacken, 1866.

³ Zimmermann, 1869.

⁴ Heger, 1906.

⁵ Zimmermann, 1888.

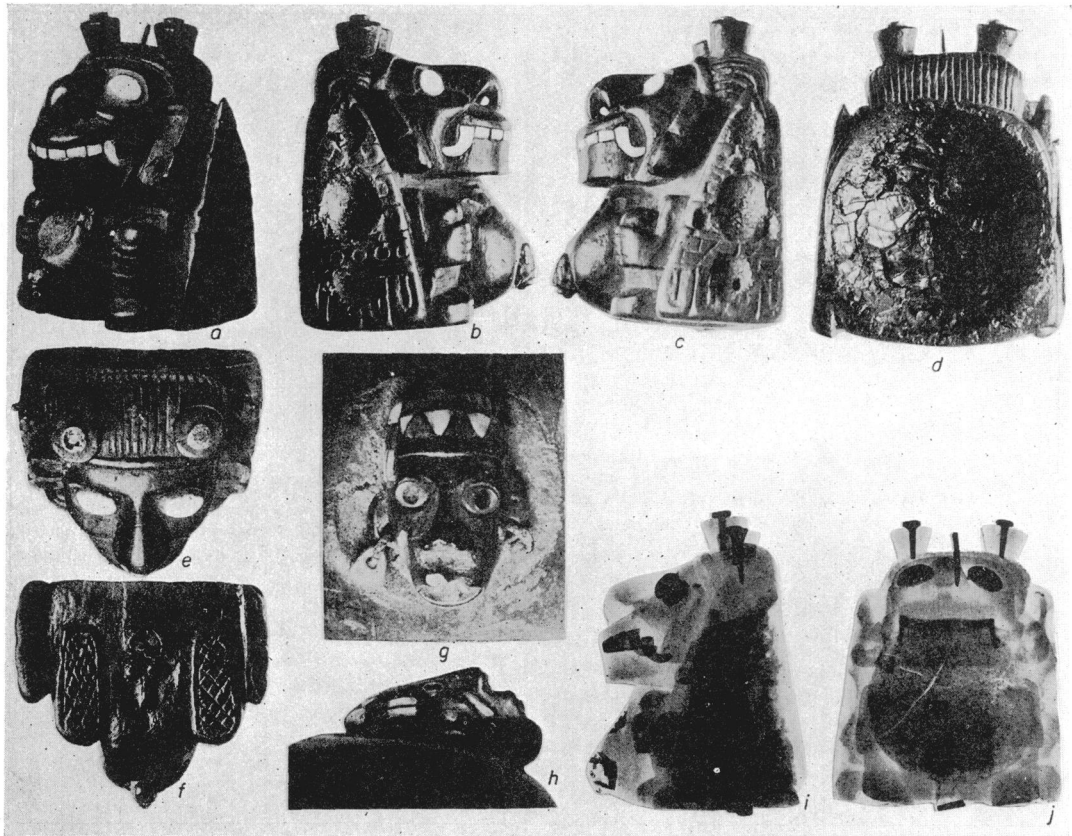


FIG. 28. Wooden figure in the Vienna Ethnographic Museum: *a*, front; *b*, right side; *c*, left side; *d*, back; *e*, top; *f*, bottom; *g*, enlarged front view of the little jet head; *h*, enlarged side view of the little jet head; *i*, X-ray, taken with the film under the right side; *j*, X-ray, taken with the film under the back. (*i* and *j*, courtesy of Dr. J. Zakovsky.)

represented by 29 furrows, together with the roll separating it from the forehead, could be regarded as the mask—though the conception is not very clearly carried out. Representations of Xolotl in the codices also show four ears—two human and two torn-off animal ears.

The eyes consist of two pieces of the white shell of a sea-mussel, 11.5 mm. wide, which are fastened, like all the inlays, in a bed of resin. If pupils were originally attached to the smoothed frontal surfaces of the shell, they have fallen off. The two 9-mm. fangs and the six 3-mm. incisors are made of the same white shell. The septum is perforated so as to end in a loop, which probably served for the suspension of an ornament, now lost. Ear-ornaments imbedded in resin have also fallen out, while perforations in the ear-lobes presumably once held pendants, or possibly inlays fastened on pegs—more likely the latter, as there are traces of resin in the holes.

The two knobs on the head, each 10 mm. high, are finished with nails, of which the golden heads are 1.5 mm. high and 6 mm. in diameter (Fig. 28). The upper surfaces of these nail-heads clearly show that they were cast by the lost-wax

method. Each golden head was driven into the wood by means of a four-cornered silver pin, 2×2 mm. in section, which, to judge from the top of the pin visible through a break in the golden head on the left, was inserted in the head at the time of casting. The gold content of the broken head is greater on the surface than inside. The two wooden knobs with their golden nail-heads may represent the torn-off ears of Xolotl; or they may represent other ornaments. On the head of Xolotl as represented in the Codex Borgia a pair of precious stones is actually shown next to the dog's ears.

From the middle of the crown a silver pin of 1 sq. mm. section projects to a height of 6.5 mm. It probably once carried an ornament of some sort, perhaps a golden nail-head like those just described. The sharp edges of the square pin suggest that it was forged rather than cast. The fact that it is bent back slightly suggests that the ornament which it originally carried may have been forcibly removed. The furrows representing the hair of the figure also show dents which may be derived from this act of vandalism. The length of the three silver pins is shown in the X-rays.⁶ The

fact that the central pin is half again as long as the pins with golden nail-heads suggests that the ornament or head it carried must have been of considerable size.

Carved in flat relief on the chest is what appears to be a butterfly, 20 mm. wide, with two antennae and four wings, its center once occupied by an inlay, the loss of which leaves a hollow filled with the same calcareous resin as that holding the little head on the navel. The dark spots in the X-rays show the relative sizes of these inlaid masses of resin. Around the lost inlay in the center of the butterfly, as well as around the little head on the navel, to be described presently, the wood is carved flat. At the sides of the butterfly are two little asymmetrical hollows, without traces of resin, whose purpose is not clear.

The arms and legs of the figure are treated schematically, the four fingers of the hands grasping the shanks below the kneecaps.

The triangular side-pieces are perhaps to be regarded as knots or loops attached in some way to the head (Fig. 29). If so, they might belong to the band confining the hair behind the forehead. The low-relief decoration of these triangles is divided into two parts, of which the upper consists of

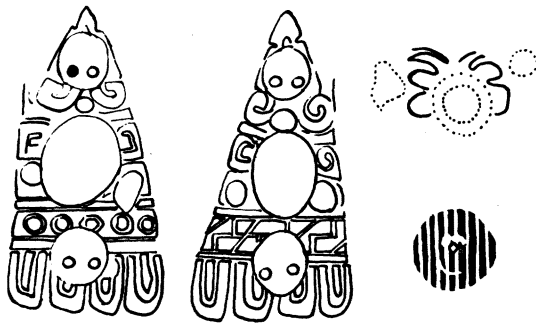


FIG. 29. Relief decoration of the two side triangles, carved "butterfly" on the chest, and pattern of depressions on the furrowed hair of the crown suggesting the original presence of an ornament attached to the silver nail in the center.

volutes, while the lower is different in the two triangles, that on the right showing a band with circles, that on the left a plaited band. Each triangle ends at the bottom in a row of four leaves, which might stand for a textile pattern. A similar ornament occurs frequently on the feet of vessels as early as the Teotihuacan culture.

Interrupting the design of each of these triangles, and irrelevant to it, was a group of three large inlays, now lost, leaving only the holes in which they were imbedded by means of resin and, in the case of the upper and lower inlays, by means also of a pair of wooden pegs. In the triangle on the right the peg at the rear of the upper inlay is still in place. This peg, cut in a roughly hexagonal shape and measuring $14 \times 2.5 \times 2$ mm., projects 1.5 mm. from the surrounding surface. The bores for insertion of the missing pegs are

from 9 to 13 mm. deep and 2 to 3 mm. in diameter at the orifices, each bore converging to an inner point.

Projecting from vertical bores between the head of the figure and the points of the triangular side-pieces are tufts of black silky vegetable fiber twisted into cords. A considerable remnant of these cords survives, in a half-decayed state, in the bore on the left. Extending from the two bores to the hollow on the back, where they are joined under the resin filling, these cords presumably served as a means of suspending the figure, perhaps as the central pendant of a necklace. On the other hand, the cords may have served to attach to the figure a little cape (*delantal*), such as was commonly provided for images of the gods.

The bottom of the figure shows plaited sandals on the feet, that on the right 31 mm., that on the left 34 mm. long. The genitals were originally modeled flat; an inlay of the glans is lost. To judge from two remaining fragments, the anus was originally represented by an eccentrically perforated disk of malachite, 2 mm. thick and 9 mm. in diameter, with sides inclined conically inward. The disk was fastened in place not only by resin, but by means of a wooden peg bound with fiber cords. The round hollow, 6 mm. deep, into which the malachite disk was set, cannot be distinguished in the X-rays. It may communicate with the hollow on the back.

The hollow on the back of the figure, thickly coated with resin, has a measurable depth of 15 mm. and a diameter of 60 mm., not including a resinous rim of 3.5 mm. all around. As the X-ray shows, this hollow, with its resinous filling, extends deep into the figure. The little spots which appear in this area of the X-ray indicate earthy particles in the resin. The filling, which considerably increases the weight of the object, may have been inserted in order to protect the wood against splitting. A dog's head from the old collection at Ambras Castle near Innsbruck, now in the Ethnographical Museum in Vienna, shows a similar resin-filled cavity.

Though the insertion of the resin in the hollow back of the figure may have represented a purely preservative measure, there is an alternative possibility. A greenstone figure in the Stuttgart Museum, which was acquired from the monastery of Weingarten at the time of its secularization in 1803,⁷ shows Quetzalcouatl or Xolotl as a skeleton with a sun-disk on his back, over a symbolical representation of the jaws of the earth. Again, the representations of Xolotl in the Codex Borgia and related codices⁸ show him with the name of the sun, "4 olin" (Codices Borgia, Vaticanus B), or accompanied by a figure leading the sun into the jaws of the earth (Codices Telleriano-Remensis, Vaticanus A, Borbonicus, and Tonalamatl Aubin). In the Codex Borbonicus this figure is again Xolotl. The greenstone figure in Stuttgart once also had inlays over the heart and the navel, like the Vienna figure. One might thus conclude that the cavity on the back of the Vienna figure formerly held a large inlay, possibly a sun-disk like that of the Stuttgart figure. However, the probable use of the object as a pendant on a necklace would seem to militate against this explanation.

Projecting from the navel of the figure's prominent belly

⁶ For the X-rays, the writer is indebted to the kindness of Dr. J. Zakovsky, Director of the X-Ray Experimental Laboratory in Vienna.

⁷ Fischer, 1904; Seler, 1908, Vol. 3, p. 392.

⁸ Seler, 1904-09.

is a tiny head of jet, 14 mm. high, 6 mm. from front to back, and 7 mm. wide without the ears, which add another 3 mm. to the width. The elaborate inlays of this little head include eyes of mother of pearl, 3 mm. wide, with inset pupils of obsidian (of which that on the left is missing). The upper teeth in the open mouth are represented by two gashes in the lower edge of a trapezoid of mother of pearl, 2 mm. wide; and the tongue is formed of a tiny rectangular plate of red shell, 1 mm. wide. The X-ray shows that the plate forming the tongue is rather long and deeply imbedded in the mouth. The tip of the nose and the left half of the upper lip are broken away, perhaps through a fall, which would also account for the loss of an ornament once imbedded in a resin-incrusted hollow under the nose. Through perforations in the ears pass twisted fiber cords for the suspension of pendants, of which that surviving on the right consists of a minute perforated deltoid of yellowish green stone, 3.5 mm. long and 0.25 mm. thick. The soft stone of this pendant, which under magnification shows dark honeycombing in a pale mass, and which effervesces in hydrochloric acid, is probably Mexican onyx. Across the brow of the little head lies a headband 2 mm. wide, inlaid with three and a half triangles of turquoise (points downward), alternating with three triangles of malachite (points upward). The hair is represented by seven furrows above the headband and ten furrows below it. At the right end of the headband a knot is represented by means of a bit of red shell with a longitudinal groove, the loops being formed of a half-disc of turquoise above the knot and a rectangle of turquoise with a longitudinal groove below it. The continuation of the headband beyond the knot is suggested by a little rectangular plaque of turquoise. The right cheek is decorated with a diagonal band composed of two narrow plaques of turquoise, while the left cheek carries two plaques of malachite, of which the lower one is very short.

In its technical aspect the Vienna figure is without parallel among surviving Mexican antiquities. The nails of gold and silver, the fastening of inlays with wooden pegs, and the diminutive head carved in jet, with its tiny inlays, are features which do not occur on any other known specimen. Because of lack of comparative material it remains, for the present, impossible to determine the exact place of origin of the piece. The technique, in any case, implies a tradition of craftsmanship reaching back some hundreds of years.

Fully as interesting as its technique is the iconography of the piece. The little head peering from the navel scarcely has a parallel, unless the lost inlays of the greenstone figure in Stuttgart were similar. We may be reasonably certain that the figure is a representation of Xolotl.

Unfortunately, the sixteenth-century sources do not inform us very fully about Xolotl. Because of the name "4 olin" attached to Xolotl in the Codex Borgia, Seler identified him with Nanauatzin, a "foundling in the grass" in the sense of the Arapaho myths,⁹ who bursts into full effulgence only on the fourth day. This fourth day is precisely the day "4 olin," the fifth day of the year 13-acatl, the birth-year of the sun. However, Xolotl is hardly a hero like Nanauatzin

or the sun itself. He appears (in the Codex Borbonicus) as carrier of the sun, or (in Mendieta) sets the sun in motion.

In this connection, a pair of figures appearing on pages 49, 47, and 18 in the Mixtec Codex Vindobonensis¹⁰ is of considerable interest, as showing a certain resemblance to the Vienna carving. These figures have torn-off dogs' ears, animal half-masks (perhaps jaguar masks?), long braids or knots, which in one figure are decorated with blue and green stones, in the other with golden bells (Fig. 30). These representations may perhaps shed light on the relation of Quetzalcouatl to Xolotl. In close proximity to these representations we find on page 48 in the same Codex Vindobonensis a number of forms of Quetzalcouatl arranged in pairs, one of



FIG. 30. Mythical pair of brothers from the *Codex Vindobonensis*, page 49. The figure on the right wears the hat of Quetzalcouatl. Very similar figures without animal masks occur on page 48 among the paired manifestations of Quetzalcouatl.

these pairs being decorated with ornaments very similar to those of the pairs on pages 49, 47, and 18. A commentary to a Mixtec picture-codex in the convent of Cuilapa,¹¹ which must have had a number of similarities to the Codex Vindobonensis, told of a pair of culture-heroes, or twins, who were apparently the same as the single Quetzalcouatl of the Mexican area. Because of lack of material, the whole question must be approached with the utmost caution. On the other hand, the very lack of sources increases the importance of the Vienna figure.

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¹⁰ Anonymous, 1929.

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NOTES ON THE ADENA ASPECT*

A new material trait of the Adena Aspect has recently been discovered in two mound sites in Ross County, Ohio, viz., tubular pottery pipes with a constricted mouthpiece. Similar specimens in stone are diagnostic of the aspect¹ but pipes made of pottery are unreported in either comprehensive analyses of Adena or the site reports in their bibliographies²

The Renick group of mounds are situated 0.4 mile south-east of Chillicothe on the second terrace overlooking the Scioto River, and are on the property of the Aluminum Company of America. Mound I was 9 feet 1 inch high, had a diameter of 74 feet, and contained 32 burials, 2 subfloor

tombs, and a house site. The skeletal remains were generally in an extreme state of decay, in some cases being discernible only as a discoloration in the soil. Mound II, 80 feet to the northeast, was 15 inches high and 30 feet in diameter. It covered a single partially disturbed extended burial in a subfloor tomb and was unaccompanied by material remains. Mound III lay about 250 yards east of I, was 40 inches high and 50 feet in diameter. This site was over two-thirds razed by construction workers before any examination could be effected. The sole feature of its partial exploration was a distinct floor line which showed slight evidence of fire upon its surface.

The second site was a small isolated earth mound, 3.5 feet high and 30 feet in diameter, located on the land of Samuel Dresbach in the southwest quarter of Section 19, T10N, Ross County, Ohio. It contained a single central inhumation accompanied by three tubular pipes of pottery. As in the Renick mounds the skeletal material was in an exceedingly poor state of preservation. However, a contributing factor was undoubtedly a previous partial exploration by unknown parties.

The tubular pipes from the Renick and Dresbach mounds are quite similar in their construction and physical appearance (Fig. 31). The tobacco chambers in all cases are slightly elliptical, conforming to their outside diameters, the result

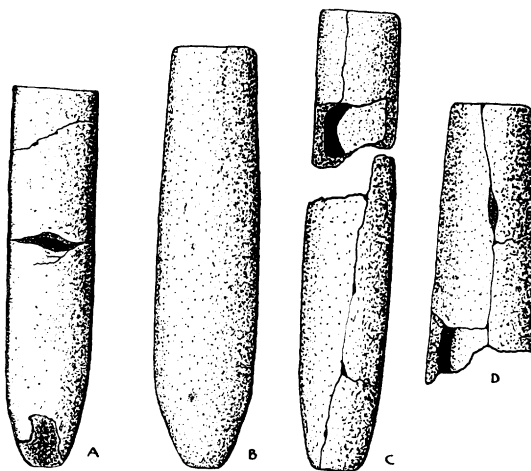


FIG. 31. Tubular pottery pipes from Ohio: A, Renick group; B, C, D, Dresbach mound.

of completed forming preparatory to firing. All of these pipes were crudely made and lack the finish and symmetry that usually characterizes their stone counterparts within the aspect.

The specimens with their proximal end intact all have a wedge-shaped or flattened mouth piece and exhibit a pronounced shoulder between the stem and the tobacco chamber. The two complete tubular pipes are 9.5 and 10.5 cm. in length. Outside diameters vary from 2 to 2.9 cm. and tobacco chambers have an average wall thickness of 0.35 cm. The color on their exteriors ranges from light tan to dark gray, the paste shading from reddish tan to gray. Temper-

* The writer is indebted to the Ross County Historical Society, which sponsored the explorations, and to Mr. Donald McBeth, who was in direct charge of the work, for generously making the material remains, field notes, and photographs available for study.

¹ Webb and Snow, 1945, pp. 85-6; Greenman, 1932, pp. 454-5.

² Webb and Snow, 1945; Greenman, 1932.