



Sculpture and Social Dynamics in Preclassic Mesoamerica

Julia Guernsey

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This book examines the functions of sculpture during the Preclassic period in Mesoamerica and its significance in statements of social identity. Julia Guernsey situates the origins and evolution of monumental stone sculpture within a broader social and political context and demonstrates the role that such sculpture played in creating and institutionalizing social hierarchies. This book focuses specifically on an enigmatic type of public, monumental sculpture known as the "potbelly" that traces its antecedents to earlier, small domestic ritual objects and ceramic figurines. The cessation of domestic rituals involving ceramic figurines along the Pacific slope coincided not only with the creation of the first monumental potbelly sculptures, but with the rise of the first state-level societies in Mesoamerica by the advent of the Late Preclassic period. The potbellies became central to the physical representation of new forms of social identity and expressions of political authority during this time of dramatic change.

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