

Basic Detail Report



Toad

Date

ca. 800-300 BCE

Primary Maker

Olmec

Medium

basalt and shell

Description

Avid observers of their natural environment, ancient Mesoamerican artists attached great symbolic meaning to animals according to the main behavioral characteristics of each creature. The long life span and process of skin regeneration of the toad led to its identification with longevity and the fertility of the earth. The species most commonly represented is *Bufo marinus*, which was abundant in the tropical environment of the Gulf coast lowlands. This beautiful stone sculpture has been carved in basalt with shell inlays in the eyes and along the body. The head is upright and two arched eyebrows accentuate the circular shell eyes. The nostrils are marked by two minute orifices drilled into the stone and a long, curving line indicates the mouth. The back of the amphibian is decorated with a curvilinear motif and more shell inlays. The lower limbs include a spiral motif delicately incised into the stone. The shape and iconography of this sculpture achieve a harmonious balance between the naturalistic representation of the toad and the idealization of its symbolic power. As symbols of the regeneration of the earth, toads appear in the art of Mesoamerica from ancient times into the modern period.

Dimensions

Overall: 5 x 10 3/4 x 7 3/8 in. (12.7 x 27.3 x 18.7 cm)