

Basic Detail Report



Incised panel bowl

Date

750-950 CE

Medium

Ceramic with traces of pigment

Description

Large Maya bowl decorated with incised relief panels depicting human figures; Red slip with traces of pigments.

_____ Burnishing is the process of producing ceramics with a shiny surface without using a glaze. To produce

burnished surfaces, potters must wait until the ceramics are nearly dry, and then must rub the surface to align the surface clay particles with a smooth object, usually a round, flat-sided stone. Sometimes only certain areas of a pot or a figure are burnished, since the contrast between glossy burnished surfaces and matte, unburnished areas can produce a variety of decorative effects. Food and Beverage Serving Vessels The bowls, plates, cups, and other food and beverage serving vessels found in the museum's collection are generally decorated rather than plain wares, but for everyday use, most serving ware would have been made of plain ceramics, dried gourds (for cups and bowls), carved wood, or basketry. Since most of the fancier pieces have been found in graves, we have to use clues from each item to determine its original function. An object's condition can give important clues as to whether or not it was used before being buried; scrape marks or chips (called use-wear) in the finish of the vessel interior are good indicators of use. If it is likely that a vessel was used to serve foods and/or drinks, sophisticated chemical analyses of microscopic residues left on the vessel interiors may possibly yield information about what the vessel contained. Because such analyses are expensive, destructive, and not likely to produce good results with pottery which has been carefully washed after excavation, we lack such detailed information for most of the prehistoric pottery objects in the museum's collection. Although we don't always know specific recipes, we do know what foods were consumed. Maize (corn) was the staple crop in the Maya world, but a wide variety of fruits and vegetables were eaten, including beans, squash, peppers, and tomatoes. While we may be able to make educated guesses about what was served, except for contact-period ceramics and for some grave goods, it is very difficult to determine who used any given piece of pottery, and under what circumstances. Were some vessels reserved for special guests, or for use by high-status elders? Were they used during special religious ceremonies or rituals? Was their use avoided by certain classes of people, such as children and/or menstruating women? As we venture farther back into the past, answering questions such as these becomes increasingly difficult. Although it is tempting to draw on information from modern traditional societies and from contact-period chronicles, inferences drawn from such sources must be used with care, especially when used to interpret objects distant in both space and time. Maya (AD 250-850) The Maya civilization was one of the premier civilizations in the New World, achieving great

masterpieces of art and architecture, a sophisticated calendrical system, and a formal system of writing which has only been deciphered in the past several decades. The decipherment of Maya writing enables us to have a much more detailed view of the political machinations of this series of city-states located in the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, Belize, and adjacent areas of Guatemala and Honduras than had hitherto been possible. Although the exact details of the Maya collapse in the 800's are still controversial, it appears that excessive warfare and violence, coupled with environmental degradation and the stress of a large population, led to demise of this once-vibrant culture. Populations crashed, with survivors of the urban centers dispersing to more rural areas. Suggestions for further reading about the Maya: Henderson, John S. (1997): *The World of the Ancient Maya*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca. Schele, Linda and David A. Freidel (1990): *A Forest of Kings: the Untold Story of the Ancient Maya*. William Morrow: New York Sharer, Robert J. with Loa P. Traxler (2006): *The Ancient Maya*, sixth edition. Stanford University: Stanford.

Dimensions

Height: 4 1/2 inches (11.4 cm)