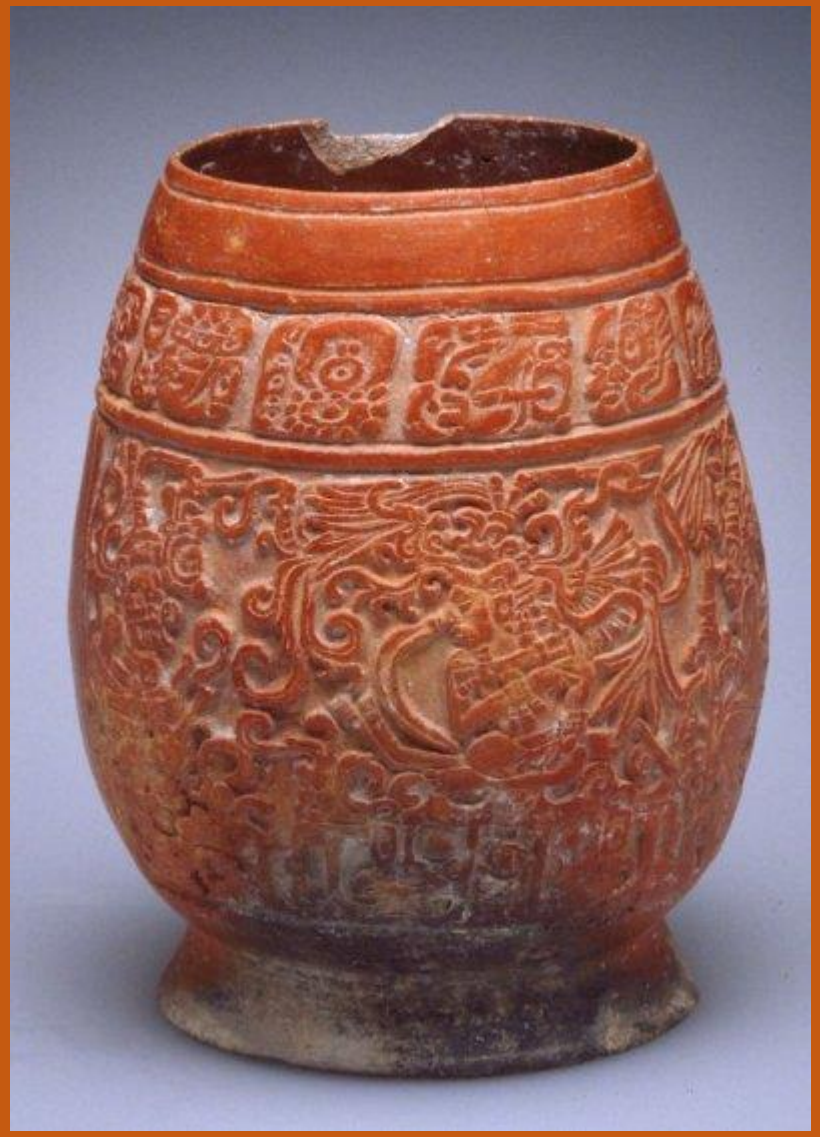
PRECOLUMBIAN ART
AT THE DE YOUNG MUSEUM

A SURVEY

DEITIES: the RAIN god



MAYAN drinking vessels: turkey vulture figure, glyphs, polychrome figure

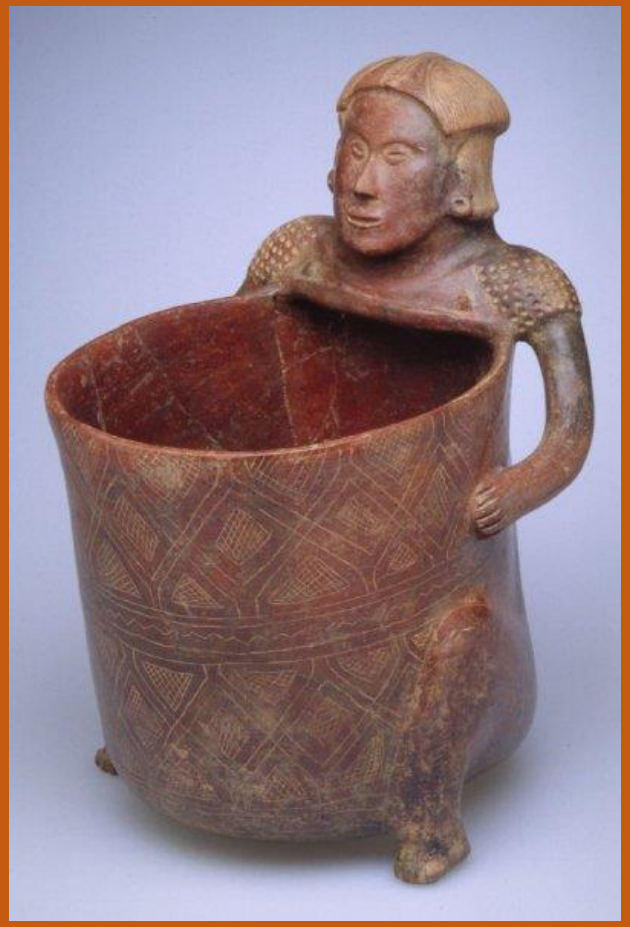
Where are these from?

Moche jug from Peru

Funerary urn with ancestor figures perhaps; and incense burner with crocodile spirit on top

COLIMA DOGS

ACOMA PUEBLO “olla” polychrome vessels



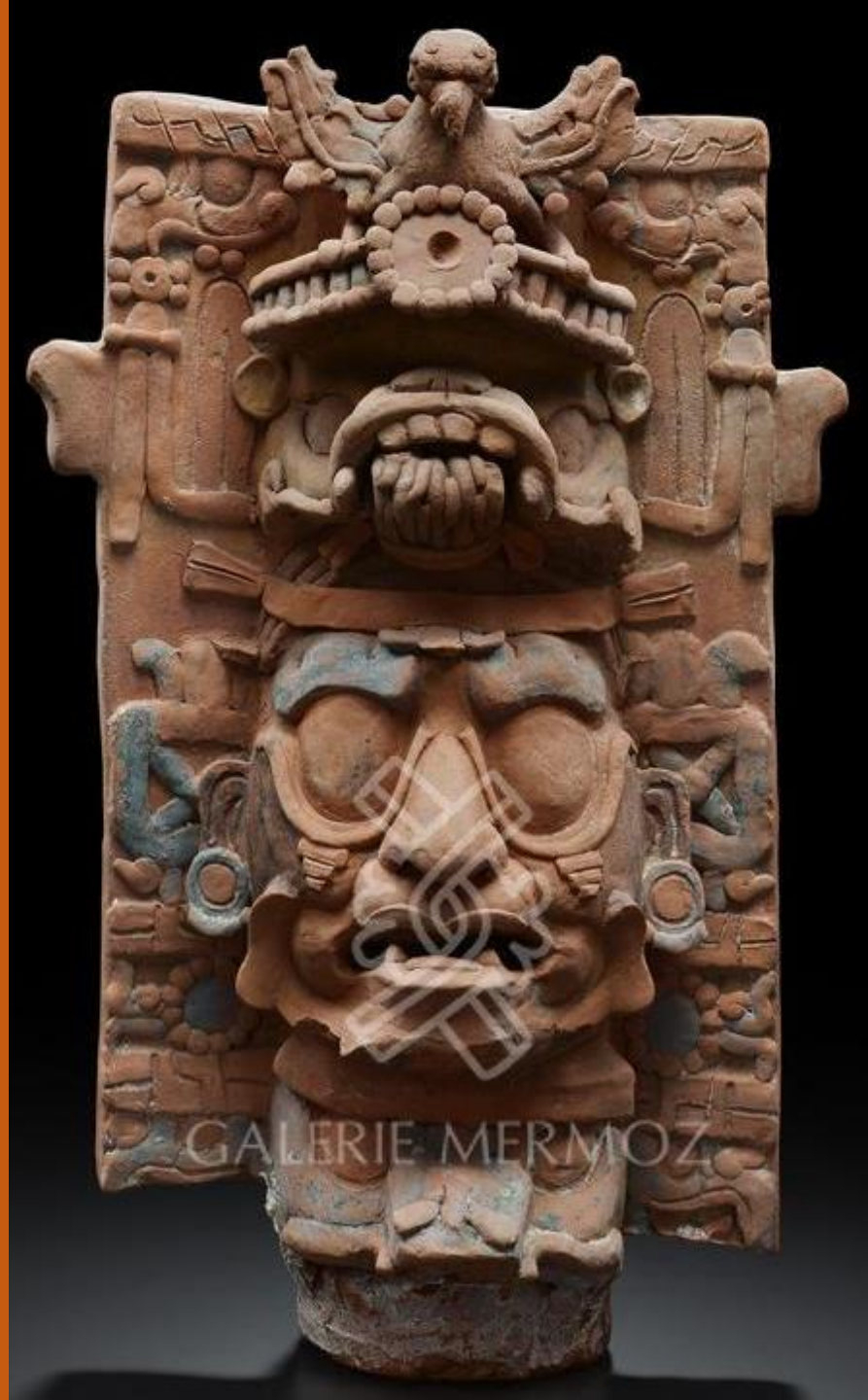
Where are these from?
What do they depict?

MAYAN effigy censer with Jaguar God of the Underworld-Height : 63.5 cm

Width : 39.2 cm
Thickness : 23 cm
Brown-red terracotta with remains of polychromy.
The burning of incense and of other offerings played an important role in the ritual life of the ancient Maya. This object is not the actual burner itself but the support for a conical-shape censer plate and of its lid. Copal balls and other offerings were placed in the censer to be burned, the aromatic smoke of the offering becoming the food of the gods and ancestors.
The support is made of a vertical clay cylinder with two symmetrically attached flanges surrounding the face of a deity or of an ancestor.
On our censer support, the face of the Jaguar God of the Underworld rests on a jawless earth monster,

possibly depicting a mountain. The deity's

headdress consists of a jawless jaguar head topped by a jeweled crown with a flower-like diadem on the front. Very often, the diminutive face or body of an anthropomorphic creature (now missing) emerges from the center of this flower ornament. A primordial bird referred to as the Primary Bird Deity rests on the crown itself. Both, the crown and the bird constitute the avian aspect of an entity called the Jester God, an important headdress-like ornament associated with royal rulership. The entire composition on the frontal face of the incense burner can therefore be viewed as a cosmogram with the earth below and the celestial realm presided by the Primary Bird Deity above.



MAYAN

https://www.pinterest.com/rishardg/mayan-ceramics/?lp=true

- Polychrome decoration (colored slips of iron reds, yellows, white, black)
- Codex style drinking vessel cup were exchanged as gifts between high profile dignitaries . Used to drink ceremonial cocoa drink.
- Wide mouthed vessels for ritual vomiting
- Imagery depictions of Mayan mythology, religion, ball game players, calendar, hieroglyphic writing
- Wide mouth jars for ritual vomiting and enemas from tobacco used as hallucinogenic
- Figures were often of nobility. Women wore the huipil woven/embroidered draped top. Deities in ceremonial garb

This elaborate incense burner unites a Teotihuacan ritual object with a Maya mythological narrative. It features a supernatural being, perhaps a deified ancestor, emerging from a large shell that symbolizes the entrance into the watery underworld. The figure grasps the edge of the shell with his left hand to aid his emergence into the human realm

JALISCO west mexico 100BCE-200CE

- Created figures to be placed in tombs to accompany the deceased for all eternity. Figures could also represent ancestors, marriage, fertility with a couple of figures attached side by side.
- Warriors with barrel garb
- Different periods styles

VERACRUZ central gulf coast mexico 100-1000BCE

Flute, Mexico, Southern Veracruz, Nopiloa, 300-500 A.D., Slip-painted ceramic.

Smiling figures
Altered skulls

THEMES:
human sacrifice,
Sacrificed and ate dogs,
great ball courts for ceremonial ball games

AZTEC

eagle

Sun god

MOCHE north coast peru 600-800 CE

- Stirrup vessel
- Painted with cream color and terra cotta slip
- Spiral fine line motifs. Painting brushes made from long lock of hair
- Vessels used for holding sacred fermented liquids consumed during ceremonies or placed in graves as offerings

COLIMA west mexico 300 BCE-300 CE

- Colima dogs: fattened to be ritually sacrificed or eaten; or serves as a watchdog and healer of the ill.
- The plump hairless canine, the “Chichi” or “Escuintla” is related to the Chihuahua or Mexican Hairless, “Xoloitzcuintle”
- Xolo dog named for the diety Xolotl, the god of the underworld who guided deceased on their journey to the afterlife.
- These were buried in shaft tombs to protect the deceased and provide sustenance for eternity

TEOTIHUACAN valley of Mexico 400-600 BCE

- Great Pyramids of the City of the Gods. 8 square miles of a ceremonial city. 150,000 people lived there.
- Temple of the moon
- Temple of the sun

ANIMAL SYMBOLISM

- JALISCO: frog—rain, fertility
- MAYA: birds—rulership (turkey vulture);
- MAYA: jaguar—strength and leadership, high speed, massive strength, largest animal, spirit companion and protector. It was the king of beasts in the Pre-Columbian world. Warriors, rulers, hunters, shamans associated themselves with jaguar.
- Serpent—represents renewal. It sheds its skin and transforms from old to new.
- AZTEC: eagle--The meaning of this Aztec symbol was power, strength and courage. These attributes were attached to eagles due to their amazing flying skills, large size and strong nature

OLMEC southern mexico to guatemala 900-500BCE

- Famous for human depictions with infants as a recurring theme
- Shapes of heads attributed to deliberate skull shaping (like the Egyptians)
- First civilization (major one) in MesoAmerica
- Used volcanic stone to sculpt massive head monuments
- JAGUAR Deity depicted in many hybrid forms with human forms
- RAIN Deity

CIVILIZATIONS mesoamerica

An advanced way of life of a particular area and its social organization made possible by reliable sources of food and resources

- **FOODS PLANTS** maize (corn), beans, squash, chili peppers, cotton
- **ACTIVITIES** rituals, games, historical events
- **CLASS STRUCTURE** rulers, order of society
- **RELIGION-DEITIES (Gods): death, life, earth, rain, fire, sun, plants**
- QUETZALCOATL the feathered serpent (tail feather of quetzal bird and snake-coatl deity of earth and water, vegetation, war and human sacrifice, death and resurrection
- XOLOTL the companion to Quetzalcoatl, a dog headed god
- TLALOC the rain god. Called CHAC in Mayan. His name translates to“He makes things sprout”. He has protruding fangs, large round eyes, big snout/nose

PUEBLO northern native american

- Tradition of pottery from oldest pueblos of Acoma, San Ildefonso, and Hopi.
- An evolving native american art form, still alive today with family and community integral to its making. A rich cultural heritage
- Ancestral patterns and methods are handed down through generations, identifying artists and styles.
- Polychrome slip decoration
- Several families have made significant contributions to this genre, and names like Tafoya, Martinez, Lewis, Chino, Gutierrez, and Nampeyo are synonymous with outstanding craftsmanship and ingenuity.

COMMON TERMS

- ICONOGRAPHY studies the identification, description, and the interpretation of the content of images: the subjects depicted, the particular compositions and details used to do so, and other elements that are distinct from artistic style.
- glyphs (hieroglyphics)
- Duality- a great theme in artwork : life and death, spirits/humans, evil and good, spring/winter, light and dark, male and female
- CODEX a manuscript book especially of Scripture, classics, or ancient annal
- EFFIGY a sculpture or model of a person