

Upper Gallery Case 3 South American Archaeology

The objects on display here were found at various archaeological sites in South America in the late 19th - early 20th Century, pre-date the Spanish Conquest of South America, and were donated by James Cooper Clark, F.R.G.S., F.R.A.I.

Born in Lhanbryde in 1879, James Cooper Clark attended Elgin Academy and Aberdeen Grammar School before becoming an archaeologist. His work took him to South America, and in 1927 he took part in the British Museum expedition to British Honduras (now Belize). He was a recognised authority on early Mexican civilisation, and edited and translated the *Codex Mendoza*, a 16th Century Mexican manuscript containing a history of Aztec rulers and their conquests as well as a description of the daily life of pre-conquest Aztec society (the *Codex Mendoza* is now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford). His book about Eight Deer, a “Zapotec hero”, is taken from the *Codex Columbino*.

In December 1912, Clark delivered a lecture to the Elgin and Morayshire Literary and Scientific Association (now The Moray Society) about the Mazatec Indians of Mexico, later gifting his collection of South American artefacts to the Museum. The collection is described in the original museum accession book as *“A unique and valuable collection...acquired by Mr Clark during his travels in Mexico and are arranged and labelled in proper order by him”*.

From the lecture, a description of the landscape:

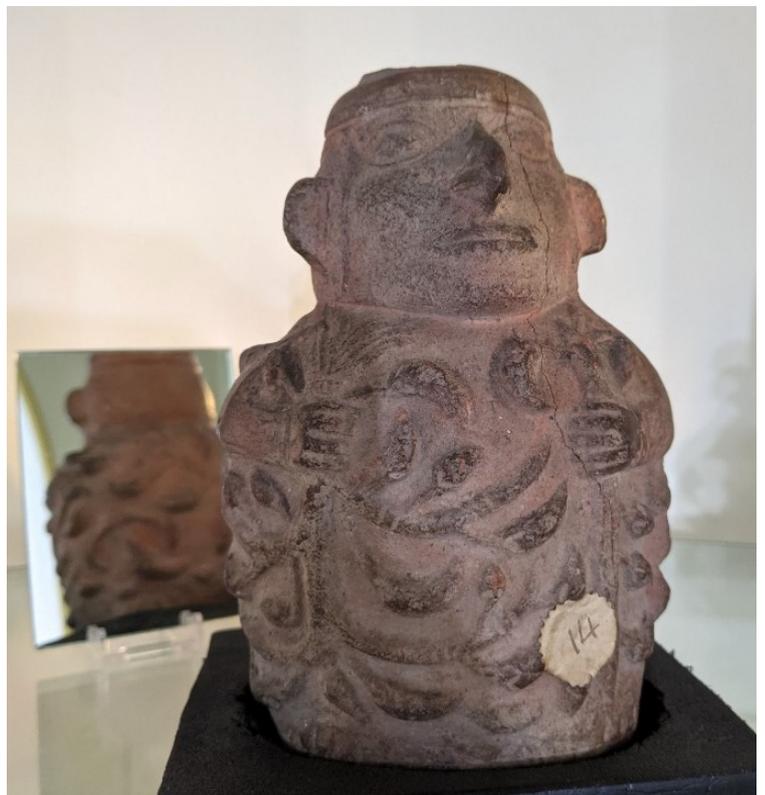
“The trees lose their foliage, flowers disappear, the pines tall and gaunt, are covered with trailing white moss, which gives them a weird and ghostly appearance. All is white except for a scarlet orchid, which grows on certain trees. This phenomenon is accounted for by the excessive moisture of the atmosphere.”

Clark lived for some time at South College in Elgin, before moving to London and then Aberdeen where he died in March 1944. He is buried in Elgin Cemetery.

1. **Terracotta figure (unpainted) from Chapala, Mexico (state of Jalisco).** Male figure, seated, with arms folded resting on knees (height 12 cm). Originally labelled “Tarascan Culture”. ELGNM: 1913.40



2. **Terracotta figure and jar (unpainted) from Jalisco, Mexico** (or Trujillo, Peru – some confusion from old cataloguing). Cylindrical, hollow jar in the form of a male figure, possibility a god of fertility. The figure is robed (in feathers or plants), holds two branches and wears a hat (height 15 cm). ELGNM: 1913.36



3. Terracotta figure and jar, black (wash) and grey, from Peru. In the form of a male priest. The figure is seated and cross-legged, hunch-backed, and wears a tall hat and earrings. (height 14 cm). Possibly circa 900 AD in date. Originally labelled “priest of Maya civilisation).
ELGNM: 1913.37



4. A selection of pottery/clay and stone heads
(top row, left to right)



Terracotta figure / plaque, fragment, from Mexico. Upper half of an infant, mouth open, with arms hanging over the just visible arm of a mother figure (height 4.5 cm). ELGNM: 1913.20

Terracotta head, fragment, from Mexico. Part of headdress is missing, nose is damaged. Coiled earrings visible, headdress folded and ribbed (height 4cm). ELGNM: 1913.53

Terracotta head, fragment, from Mexico (probably from Teotihuacan). Head of a male figure, Huehueteco the god of fire.

Wrinkled face, part of headdress missing (height 3.5 cm). Dating from the late Aztec period. ELGNM: 1913.60

Terracotta head, fragment, from Mexico. Male head, with headdress and coiled earrings. The headdress is looped at the front with two almost rectangular pieces on the top (height 5.2 cm). ELGNM: 1913.44

4. (bottom row, left to right)



Pottery head, with traces of red pigment, from Mexico (probably Teotihuacan). Elongated human face, flattened on rear. ELGNM: 1913.88

Grey stone figure pendant, from Oaxaca Valley, Mexico. Squatting figure, with hands clasping front of knees, wearing hat or flat-topped headdress. Flat backed with a hole on the rear to thread as a pendant. Described as being of Mixtec culture, typical of the Oaxaca Valley (height 3.8 cm). ELGNM: 1913.117

Green stone figure pendant, from Oaxaca Valley, Mexico. Squatting figure, with hands clasping front of knees, wearing hat or flat-topped headdress. Flat backed with a hole on the rear to thread as a pendant. Described as being of Mixtec culture, typical of the Oaxaca Valley (height 5.3 cm). ELGNM: 1913.116

Dark grey stone figure pendant, from Oaxaca Valley, Mexico. Squatting human form, with hands clasping front of knees. Flat backed with a hole on the rear to thread as a pendant (height 3 cm). ELGNM: 1913.86

Pottery head, from Mexico (probably Teotihuacan). Simple human face, with mouth slightly open showing teeth. Flattened on rear (height 3.8 cm).

ELGNM: 1913.41

5. Pottery votive vessels

(rear, L-R; front)



Miniature pottery vessel, from Mexico (Lake Chapala). Rounded pottery vessel with 3 projecting “handles”. Grey and blackened. Thought to have been a votive offering (height 3.5cm).

ELGNM: 1913.30

Miniature pottery vessel, from Mexico (Lake Chapala). Rounded grey pottery vessel with flared rim. Thought to have been a votive offering (height 5.5cm).

ELGNM: 1913.129

Miniature pottery vessel, from Mexico (Lake Chapala). Rounded, lipped, grey pottery vessel. Thought to have been a votive offering (height 3.5cm).

ELGNM: 1913.134

Miniature pottery bowl, from Mexico (Lake Chapala). Shallow grey pottery bowl. Thought to have been a votive offering (height 1.2cm).

ELGNM: 1913.102

6. Grey soapstone necklace, from Oaxaca Valley, Mexico. Necklace comprising discoidal and tubular beads with wedge-shaped central pendant. Formed from 84 pieces (length 52 cm). Originally labelled “Zapotec Culture”.
ELGMN: 1913.99



7. Pottery spindle whorls and copper axe head

Spindle whorls from Oaxaca Valley, Mexico. Hemispherical spindle whorls with central holes. Decorated with incised lines and geometric patterns. Smallest is 3.5 cm in diameter, others are 4.5 – 5 cm in diameter.

(top) ELGMN: 1913.57 (middle L-R)
ELGMN: 1913.56 ELGMN: 1913.104
(bottom) ELGMN: 1913.69



Wedge-shaped axehead from Ayautla, Oaxaca, Mexico. Length 11.3 cm. Originally labelled “Mazatec culture. Copper was cast pure, but never intentionally alloyed with tin to form bronze”.

ELGMN: 1913.110



8. Painted pottery bowl, from Teotitlan del Camino, Oaxaca, Mexico. Simple rounded bowl with rounded base, scored on inside, Red rim, some blackening on outside (height 5cm, diameter 12 cm). Original label states "Zapotec culture, bowl used in connection with the spindle"
ELGNM: 1913.94

9. Painted pottery dish, from Island of Sacrificios, State of Veracruz, Mexico. Plate-like dish standing on 3 short legs. Decorated with painted dots, lines and half circles in black, red and orange (height 6.5 cm, diameter 22.5 cm). Original label states: "Totonac art, tripod dish"
ELGNM: 1913.95



10. Pottery vessel, from Chapala, Jalisco, Mexico.

Vase-shaped pottery vessel with flared rim. Wheel made.

Terracotta, slightly polished/burnished, some blackening around the base.

Thought to be a cooking vessel (height 16.5 cm). Original label states: "Tarascan culture cooking pot".

ELGNM: 1913.91



11. Pottery vessel, from Teotitlan del Camino, Oaxaca, Mexico. Rounded pottery vessel, with rounded base and flaring rim. Blackened terracotta, thought to be a cooking pot. Original label states: "Zapotec culture cooking pot" (height 14.2 cm).

ELGNM: 1913.92



This exhibition was prepared July 2021.

Glossary

Codex Mendoza: an Aztec codex, believed to have been created around the year 1541, containing a history of the Aztec rulers and their conquests as well as a description of the daily life of pre-conquest Aztec society. The codex is written in the Nahuatl language utilizing traditional Aztec pictograms with a translation and explanation of the text provided in Spanish. It is named after Don Antonio de Mendoza, the viceroy of New Spain, and a leading patron of native artists. Translated and edited by James Cooper Clark in the 1930s. For more information, visit the Bodleian Library's website:

<https://treasures.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/treasures/codex-mendoza/>

Chapala: a town and municipality in the central Mexican state of Jalisco, located on the north shore of Lake Chapala, Mexico's largest freshwater lake.

Isla de Sacrificios: an island in the Gulf of Mexico, situated off the Gulf coastline near the port of Veracruz, in Mexico. During the era of the Spanish Conquest it was reported that two temples stood on the island.

Mazatec: an indigenous people of Mexico who inhabit the Sierra Mazateca in the state of Oaxaca and some communities in the adjacent states of Puebla and Veracruz.

Mixtec: member of an indigenous people of southern Mexico, noted for their skill in pottery and metallurgy.

Oaxaca Valley: a geographic region located within the modern-day state of Oaxaca in southern Mexico. Occupied by the Aztecs from the 15th Century AD, it was subsequently conquered by the Spanish.

Tarascan: a member of an indigenous people of a mountainous area in Michoacán, Mexico.

Teotihuacan: the largest city in pre-Columbian America, 25 miles northeast of Mexico City. Built circa 300 BC, it reached its zenith circa 300 – 600 AD, when it was the centre of an influential culture that spread throughout Meso-America. It was sacked by the invading Toltecs around 900 AD.

Teotitlán: a district located in the north of the Cañada Region of the State of Oaxaca, Mexico, thought to have been founded around 1465 AD by the Zapotecs. In the Nahuatl language, Teotitlan means “land of the gods”. There is a tradition of weaving in the area, with tribute to the Aztec being paid in weavings.

Zapotec: a member of an indigenous people living in and around Oaxaca in southern Mexico. Dating from 200 AD, going into decline in 1520 AD, but a small Zapotec population still live in southern Oaxaca. Known as the “Cloud People”.