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By

Christopher H. Kilgore

May 2018

A POSSIBLE EHECATL FIGURE FROM WEST MEXICO

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A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the

School of Art

Kathrine G. McGovern College of the Arts

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in Art History

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**APPROVED:**

---

Rex Koontz, Ph.D.  
Committee Chair

---

H. Rodney Nevitt Jr., Ph.D.

---

Dirk Van Tuerenhout, Ph.D.

---

Andrew Davis, Ph.D.  
Dean, Kathrine G. McGovern College of the Arts

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## **Abstract**

This thesis focuses on a particularly sophisticated example of Pre-Columbian West Mexican ceramic sculpture from the Museum of Fine Arts Houston: a dancing figure with a complex zoomorphic headdress. Late Pre-Classic Colima, the figure's culture of origin, is poorly understood due to its severely compromised archaeological record. Based on a comprehensive iconographic analysis, the MFAH figure is tentatively identified as the wind deity Ehecatl, a god from the broadly shared Mesoamerican deity system that is previously unconfirmed in Preclassic Colima. While West Mexican sculpture was once considered merely illustrative of everyday activities, this thesis concludes that the MFAH Colima Dancer and similar figures evince highly evolved communal religious practices. This interpretation also supports the existence of generally unacknowledged trade between ancient West Mexico and the rest of Mesoamerica, both in tangible assets and in ideological/religious concepts. This new perspective will hopefully catalyze further reappraisal of underappreciated West Mexican ceramic materials.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## Introduction

This thesis is focused on an earthenware sculpture of a costumed dancer from the Pre-Columbian collection of the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Accession Number 2014.6. (Figs. 1, 2, 3) Based on its stylistic and formal elements, it was produced in the West Mexican state of Colima between 300 BC and 300 AD. The figure, about 15 inches tall, bears traces of polychrome pigment and is a particularly fine example of its type, one of the most expertly fashioned and best preserved examples in the world.

I will be referring to the sculpture by a different title than the one given to it by the Museum of Fine Arts Houston. The MFAH refers to it as “Dancer with a Crocodile Helmet” but after careful analysis of this figure and several like it, I take issue with this title as I believe it to be ill-considered. In this thesis, I will be using the more generic “MFAH Masked Dancer” for, although I believe the identity of the entity portrayed by the mask is very specific indeed, I have yet to make the case.

Following a formal analysis of the figure and a brief investigation of its materiality I will attempt to persuade the reader that this magnificent work, while it does indeed portray a Colima dancer, in fact represents a costumed man in the guise the god Ehecatl. Ancient Mesoamericans believed this deity to be a wind god and avatar of Quetzlacoatl, the Feathered Serpent deity. Furthermore, an iconographic analysis of similar figures from Colima suggests that other gods from the Mesoamerican pantheon were also worshipped in the same context. The formal attributes of these figures, so clearly delineated in the precise Comala phase style, provide for a compelling case that

natives of Colima engaged in religion practices consistent with those known elsewhere in Mesoamerica. This admittedly novel interpretation brings with it several extremely intriguing implications for scholars interested in understanding ancient West Mexican culture, for none of the familiar Mesoamerican gods from either prior or subsequent periods have been definitively associated with the area.

## **General Characteristics of Colima Sculpture**

The MFAH Masked Dancer, dated to between 300 BC and AD 300, was produced during the Comala phase, the last phase of Colima culture and the one associated with Colima's most refined artworks. (Winning 1969, Townsend 1998) Many Comala phase ceramics are highly accomplished in their execution in ways that tend to appeal to modern esthetic sensibilities. They are often smooth and highly polished, show careful, precise incised markings, and utilize a variety of slip painting techniques to convey both positive and negative colors. All of these techniques are evident on the MFAH Masked Dancer.

A brief comparison of the ceramic styles of ancient west Mexico also indicates that the artists of Colima were the most inclined of the various shaft tomb traditions to render subjects naturalistically. This tendency is reflected in the MFAH Masked Dancer whose posture, gesture, and proportions read as persuasively human. This naturalistic execution is one of the main reasons that the MFAH's description is somewhat problematic, since it describes the headdress simply as representing a crocodile. The treatment of the headdress seems inconsistent with the prevailing naturalistic tendencies of ancient Colima ceramicists. That is, unless it was intended to represent the costume of a dancer impersonating a deity or other mythological being.

## **Formal Analysis of the MFAH Masked Dancer**

The earthenware figure of a male dancer, about 15 inches tall, wears an elaborate costume and headdress. (Figs. 1, 2, 3) The large headdress is comprised of a crested, helmet-like cowl and an integral mask with a long, flat, rectangular, fanged snout. The helmet has rounded lobes that hang down on either side to the shoulders and a rectangular extension that hangs to the middle of the back. The helmet's smooth surface is covered with rows of short, fine, incised vertical marks and there are small dished circular knoblike projections high on either side, suggesting stylized ears or ear flares. The crest, running fore-and-aft along the midline of the helmet, has a base of four layers from which extends a tall striated radial semicircle reminiscent of the crests on classical Greek helmets. This crest bears faint remnants of greenish pigment, suggesting that the original feature on which this was modelled had been made of Quetzal tail feathers, though these birds are not native to western Mexico. The mask has small, short tubular eyes above the long, flat, rectangular snout. The top of the upper jaw features a low central ridge and a pair of short horn-like projections curving upward and outward from its front corners. The jaws are slightly open and the pointed triangular teeth are offset to create a serpentine meander of the negative space between them.

With the headdress removed, the dancer's head is wrapped in a layer of clay bearing a fine, very regular impressed crosshatch pattern. The intention seems to be to represent layers of a thick, perhaps quilted fabric that swathes the head and jaw in the manner of a turban. Based on the configuration of the layers, donning this turban would have begun by starting at the top of the head and pulling the first wrapping snugly down

the side of the face, under the chin, and up the opposite side of the face, covering the lower lip and jaw and framing the lower face in a semicircle. Atop this chin-wrap, the upper face and head would have been wrapped horizontally with the same piece of material, the final wraps framing the upper face with two rising diagonal lines which meet at the upper center of the forehead.

The turban and chin wrap closely surrounded the face so that only the brows, cheeks, eyes, and nose are visible. The face's bony structure is subtly modelled and delicate. The rather small nose bears a prominent ornament, or tecuhtli, hanging between the nostrils, presumably suspended from a pierced septum. Compared to the fineness and naturalism of the rest of the face, the figure's eyes appear highly stylized. The eyes are represented by slightly protruding stacked elliptical appliques with small impressed horizontal lines at their centers. The effect is ambiguous, as it is unclear whether the eyes are intended to be open or closed.

The dancer's weight is distributed evenly on both feet, the knees very slightly bent, and his arms are extended to the front with the elbows flexed laterally and the hands at the level of the mid-torso. Hanging from the hands are two unusual fluted conical objects, larger at the bottom, which have been likened in appearance to brooms. (Butterwick 2004) The hands are positioned palm downward and the wrists are slightly flexed as if these conical objects have substantial weight. The means of grasping the objects is not clear, for either the figure is wearing mitts which obscure the grip or the objects themselves have attached flexible tops (possibly leather) into which the hands are inserted to be secured by bands wrapped around the wrists.

The dancer's upper body seems to be unclothed but the dancer's skin appears to have been painted black. High on the upper arms there are single plain bands and just above the elbows are armbands composed of five rows of beads. On the chest, painted stripes and a few small spheres of clay adhering to them suggest a crossed configuration of multiple beaded necklaces. In order to achieve the crossed pattern, the dancer would have placed his head and one arm through the long necklace so that it hung from one shoulder and diagonally down to the opposite hip. This was repeated on the opposite side so that the suspended necklaces crossed at the sternum. In addition there is a short choker necklace at the base of the throat and another, longer necklace hanging down to the belt. An alternative explanation may be that this arrangement of beaded elements on the upper torso indicates suspenders.

Below the chest lies a broad belt and a loose, folded loincloth that covers the midsection and lower torso and hangs to the knees. The belt sits just above the loincloth at the level of the lower chest, and shows a pattern of impressed diagonal markings forming linked square shapes that suggest plaited leather or basketry. These square shapes, each containing a series of smaller concentric square impressions, are oriented so that the corners lie on the horizontal and vertical axes, making them appear as a row of diamonds reminiscent of the markings on a rattlesnake's back. The loincloth suggests stiff leather decorated with a pattern of large studs or beads. It appears this garment would be wrapped around the waist from behind and secured at the front, with a central flap that was pulled up between the legs and connected at the same point.

The ankles and knees are encircled by similarly patterned rings that extend from the legs in a lenticular shape, tapering from above and below to create a narrow exterior

edge. These four bands may represent the top and bottom of a pair of gaiters or the tops of tall boots. The feet are covered in material that bears the same pattern of incised marks seen on the cowl of the headdress, suggesting that, on the living dancer, both these elements might have been made of leather.

## **On the Figure's Materiality**

The Masked Colima Dancer appears to have been made utilizing the slab technique and its complexity suggests it was constructed in multiple stages prior to firing. The dancer's chest is rather flat, so it is unlikely that there are any empty spaces within any part of the sculpture, although this should be checked via a fuller physical inspection of the piece. The structural role of the limbs, either in supporting the body or the extended hand-held rattles, indicates that they were made from similarly solid cylindrical elements. This assumption regarding construction technique is consistent with the classification by Lopez and Ruiz of similar figures as being solid. (Lopez, Ruiz in Beekman, Pickering 2016) The structural requirements of the extended hands most likely necessitated the massiveness of the shoulders relative to the chest and upper arms.

Reflecting on the above observations, it is my considered belief that the figure's posture, standing solidly on both feet, implies that the body was constructed in sections. The torso from the waist up would likely have been made as a single section and the legs would have been created separately, either individually or as a single unit. These upper and lower elements would have been allowed to dry until they were leather hard, then would have been assembled, held together with fresh clay in the pelvic area. Curing the legs as separate elements in this way would have given them the rigidity necessary to support the weight of the upper body prior to firing. This would in turn have allowed the sculptor to experimentally establish the correct configuration of upper and lower body that would allow the figure to stand when it was completed. The connection between the upper body and the legs was then easily concealed by the loincloth and wide belt that

were applied once the joinery between the body parts had cured sufficiently. Although my experience working in the ceramic medium is limited, I am confident that the figure's arms, head, and torso slab would have been too heavy for the lower body to support had the legs and hips not have been allowed to partially dry first.

The complex removable headdress would probably have been constructed after the rest of the figure was already fired. The many incised marks that cover the helmet and footwear are extremely fine and would have been made with a very thin, sharp object prior to firing. If the sculpture were modern, the fineness of these markings would suggest the use of something like the tip of a very thin knife like a scalpel. Since the sculpture is dated from 300 BC to AD 300, it is from the pre-metallurgical period, and such markings would probably have been made with a very fine shard of fractured obsidian or a flake of extremely fine-grained flint, presumably mounted on a haft of some sort. The many applique elements, tiny spheres on the figure's arms and torso possibly representing small rattles, might have been made of a more plastic clay than that which comprises the body. These spheres show some flattening from being pressed while soft against the already leather-hard body of the figure before it was fired.

## **West Mexico and Mesoamerican Religious Practice**

It has long been accepted that Mesoamerican spiritual practice was deeply rooted in time, eclectic, tolerant, and amenable to the incorporation of compatible ritual practices. (Nicholson 1976, Townsend 1979) These characteristics resulted in a pantheon of gods and a spectrum of ceremonial activities that were broadly consistent across various ethnic and linguistic groups. (Nicholson 1971) However, ancient West Mexico has often been treated as if it were constitutionally inhospitable to the existence of the spiritual phenomena that proliferated everywhere else in Mesoamerica. I contend that this perspective essentially amounts to the logical fallacy of a special pleading, since West Mexico's supposedly exceptional status is never justified. Nonetheless, West Mexico was seen as constituting a special case in Mesoamerican studies, and not just in terms of religious practice. The state of uniqueness was believed to be pervasive across almost all cultural phenomena.

Admittedly, a variety of unusual circumstances prevailed to make ancient West Mexican culture singular in multiple ways, but regional distinctiveness is a nearly universal phenomenon. Some early scholars, preoccupied with the idiosyncratic nature of West Mexican art and funerary practice, assumed that there were simply no ethnographic analogies between the region and the rest of Mesoamerica prior to the Classic period (Meighan, Nicholson in Kan 1970, Winning 1974) and many non-specialists still accepted this conclusion after its falsity should have been obvious. This tendency was probably exacerbated by the lingering echoes of the cultural chauvinism evidenced in the early negative assessment of West Mexico by the Spanish.

## **Anticipating Challenges**

Although West Mexico's supposed cultural isolation has been widely questioned in recent decades, to date no one has made a compelling argument that the widely shared Mesoamerican religion was known or practiced there. To make the case will require the construction of a fairly complex rhetorical edifice. In hypothesizing that natives of Colima revered the same pantheon known elsewhere in Mexico, I anticipate objections to my thesis from those who still consider ancient West Mexico a cultural isolate. However, I also expect opposition from more informed scholars, those who readily accept the existence of contact between West Mexico and contemporaneous cultures but who find iconographic evidence of shared religious practices to be unpersuasive.

Of the two classes of objection listed above, refuting the outright denial of ethnographic analogies is a straightforward matter. It entails simply reciting obvious but overlooked analogies and making the case that they imply ongoing contact with other Mesoamerican cultures. The second class of objection is rather more challenging to confront, partly because even if I were to succeed in persuading those in the first group, I might thereby simply be adding members to the second group. Even beyond this, persuading the latter group is doubly challenging because proposing a previously unattested iconographic connection necessitates addressing the most formidable theoretical challenge to any iconographic comparison over time: the concept of iconographic disjunction. Therefore, before I offer the rationale for my conclusions, I will explain the concept of disjunction and its relevance by synthesizing an important scholarly debate between H. B. Nicholson and George Kubler on the topic. (Nicholson

1976) After summarizing their exchange, I will offer my own appraisal of the implications of disjunction vis-à-vis the iconography of Mesoamerican religious practice.

Having anticipated and addressed the most likely objections to the structure of my argument, I will then proceed with an iconographic analysis and comparison intended to establish the rightful position of West Mexico within the larger Mesoamerican unitary civilization. This analysis and comparison will utilize a corpus of Colima dancer figures assembled specifically for this thesis in addition to the MFAH Masked Dancer.

Following my analysis of the various dancers, I will propose specific iconographic analogies between Colima dancers and materials from other cultures both prior and subsequent. Based on these cross-cultural analogies I will propose tentative identifications of a number of Colima dancers as deities. Once these provisional identities have been proposed, the arguments against West Mexican membership in the Mesoamerican cotradition will be summarized and addressed. I will then return to the subject of the MFAH Masked Dancer for a detailed analysis and exploration of its iconographic implications.

## **The MFAH Masked Dancer: Historical and Cultural Context**

The MFAH Masked Dancer is an artifact from one of the Shaft and Chamber tomb cultures of ancient West Mexico. These cultures were primarily located in the modern states of Nayarit, Jalisco, and Colima. (Fig. 4) While there are stylistic distinctions between the ancient artworks that were created across these three states, scholars tend to treat the native cultures as a generally unified tradition with discrete populations manifesting broadly similar societies and cultural practices. The epitome of these shared cultural practices would have to be their distinctive funerary tradition, practiced between approximately 1400 BC and 500 AD. These funerary practices, characterized by shaft and chamber tombs, are unlike anything practiced elsewhere in Mesoamerica, and the funerary art, consisting of large numbers of ceramic sculptures in an unmistakable constellation of artistic styles is also unique in Mesoamerican art history.

It is not the goal of this thesis to recite in any thorough way the distinctions between these cultures, their burial practices, or their artistic styles. To the contrary, we will proceed on the assumption that the commonalities between West Mexican shaft tomb cultures should be treated as more relevant than any differences. This thesis seeks to analyze the MFAH Masked Dancer and similar figures to gain new insights into Colima cultural practice. Thereafter, this new perspective on Colima culture will serve as a lens through which to understand ancient West Mexico as a whole.

The analysis will focus on one particular category of the Colima style, the solid Comala phase figural sculpture, of which the MFAH Masked Dancer is a particularly fine example. Within this category, we will engage in a description, formal analysis, and

iconographic comparison of a corpus of similar contemporaneous figures. The goal of this exercise is to establish the iconographic “identities” of members of the dancer corpus, including the MFAH Masked Dancer. Once the figures have been identified, we may use the information to formulate new hypotheses regarding the social, political, and religious environment of ancient Colima. Based on the assumption that Colima shared its foundational attributes with the other shaft tomb traditions, insights into Colima’s society would be expected to apply to the cultures of ancient Nayarit and Jalisco as well.

## **West Mexico: A Study in Scholarly Neglect**

As a field of inquiry, the cultures of ancient West Mexico have suffered a regrettable systemic neglect dating to the earliest contact with European explorers and continuing into the 21st century. Centuries before the Spanish arrived in the new world, West Mexican cultures had undergone a period of decline and a population collapse from which they never completely recovered prior to the Conquest. Understandably impressed with the splendid accomplishments of the Aztec and Maya, Spanish explorers came to consider the cultures of West Mexico inherently backward. This condescending disregard was perpetuated by later scholars with the consequence that systematic archaeological study got a very late start in West Mexico. Shockingly, the first officially sanctioned national archaeological expedition to west Mexico did not take place until 1931. Widespread looting of archaeological sites had preceded this expedition and continued during the 1950s, 60s, and into the 70s on a scale described by Richard Townsend as “unprecedented”. (Townsend 1998) Obviously, most such looted artifacts ended up sequestered in private collections and those available for scholarly study lacked any archaeological context, so the ethnography, economy, and religion of ancient West Mexico have been difficult to reconstruct. Based on a supposed lack of easily observed parallels, there has been a tendency to regard West Mexico as uniquely isolated or at best peripheral to the larger Mesoamerican cultural cotradition. Other contributing factors include the fact that the West Mexican shaft tomb tradition is seen nowhere else in Mesoamerica, that the various cultures there lacked monumental architecture, that they had no literary or calendrical tradition, and that a comprehensive understanding of the

artistic tradition was impossible given that the evidence was sparse, scattered, and lacked context.

This compromised archaeological record was a substantial impediment for earlier scholars attempting to understand ancient West Mexico. For example, Clement Meighan and Henry Nicholson took the position that “West Mexico appears to have occupied a somewhat peripheral and less developed position vis-a-vis the Mesoamerican “heartland” to the east, particularly in the aesthetic, intellectual, and religious-ritual spheres.”

(Meighan, Nicholson in Kan 1970) Another specialist, Hasso Von Winning, was the first to attempt a comprehensive stylistic and formal typology of the region's sculpture. He concluded, based on the absence of feather headdresses among the ceramic figures available to him, that “specific deities occur in West Mexico not before A.D. 900,” some 600 years after the MFAH Masked Dancer was produced. (Winning 1974) If these authoritative and principled scholars had been able to access the abundance of West Mexican material that has been accumulated and disseminated in the intervening decades, they would doubtless have arrived at different conclusions. Nonetheless, their influence is still felt and the notion of West Mexico's uniqueness has tended to linger. This thesis seeks to critically examine this presumed uniqueness through a systematic review of literary, iconographic, and archaeological materials.

## On West Mexico's Ostensible Isolation

It was once almost universally accepted that there was no reciprocal influence between West Mexico and other Mesoamerican cultures. This assumption probably began reflexively due to the uniqueness of West Mexican artistic styles and subject matter and it was probably amplified by the regrettable lack of scientific data and by disinterest, born of ignorance, in the historical cultures of West Mexico. A latent sense of West Mexican cultural inferiority also probably contributed to the notion and while this proposition will likely be comprehensively dismissed in the long run, it still generates unwarranted skepticism of new perspectives.

This sense of west Mexico's prior isolation may have been exacerbated by certain aspects of the culture that are explicitly foreign in origin. For example, there is a suite of attributes which together constitute compelling evidence of formative era intrusion of South American culture into west Mexico prior to 800 BC. Patricia Anawalt provides a useful compendium of these markers which include stirrup vessels, metallurgy, textile and body painting patterns, exploitation of *Spondylus* shell resources, and, most notably, shaft and chamber tombs. (Anawalt in Townsend 1998) She even goes so far as to suggest that both hairless dogs and the Painted Jay, a distinctive, insular population of West Mexican birds, may have been introduced by immigrant populations from South America.

While these phenomena constitute compelling evidence of the introduction and influence of a remote culture, they do not amount to proof that this introduced culture remained pristine and indeed it would be naïve to think that this were the case.

Nonetheless, it seems that there has sometimes been an implicit presumption that this non-native origin somehow precluded the culture from evolving into a fully-fledged member of the larger Mesoamerican cotradition. Such a latent intellectual tendency should be recognized and dismissed as unsupportable. If one accepts a South American origin for the shaft tomb tradition, one must also acknowledge that at least 500 years passed between the advent of South American cultural markers and the beginning of the Arenal phase that encompassed the mature cultural traditions of west Mexico. It would be obtuse to expect that West Mexican culture would not accrete and assimilate elements of contemporaneous cultures during that time. Ecuador is 2,400 miles away, so it is safe to assume that these very early West Mexican immigrant cultures had no practical limitations and no antipathy to long distance travel. Why then would they not have been in contact with contemporaneous cultures, whatever their location on the isthmus of Mexico?

If one chose to presume that west Mexico remained completely isolated from other cultures during the intervening 5 centuries, one should then propose a rationale for this position. It would be very difficult to imagine that there was simply no contact between west Mexico and other local cultures, so as a rational proposition, a period of comprehensive west Mexican isolation would have to be explained in terms of human agency. One is then challenged to imagine circumstances wherein ancient West Mexico would have no contact with other cultures. This would require a protracted state of affairs in which either there was a comprehensive self-imposed isolation, a virtual hermitage, or where foreign contact was effectively embargoed or blockaded by outsiders. Neither of these propositions is even remotely plausible, ergo the conscientious researcher should be

inclined to challenge the assumption, however popular, that other Mesoamerican polities had no discernible influence on West Mexican cultures.

## Evidence of Interregional Trade

While a dearth of information constituted an obstacle to early research into ancient West Mexico, a great deal of useful scholarship has been produced in recent decades. Upon surveying the accumulated evidence, a dedicated researcher or even a serious layperson is soon disabused of the idea of ancient west Mexican cultural isolation. There is ample evidence of substantial contact between West Mexico and other Mesoamerican cultures and this evidence of may be divided into two categories, excavated materials from West Mexico that are definitively sourced elsewhere and ceramic material representing shared cultural practices originating elsewhere in Mesoamerica, including religious/ideological beliefs.

The latter category should be considered more persuasive evidence of contact and mutual influence than are physical objects of foreign origin for the following reason: Valuable materials of foreign origin could theoretically be passed hand-to-hand by a succession of individuals, none of whom may have travelled more than a short distance. Such a chain of transmission would not be sufficient to establish West Mexican membership in the Mesoamerican cotradition, as it would not necessitate ongoing protracted contact with any particular external polity. On the other hand, evidence indicating the adoption of complex cultural practices reflecting ideological or religious beliefs *would* tend to imply that the society itself had changed in response to contact with other cultures.

Cumulative cultural changes due to external influences may then be attributed to either or both of two mechanisms. Contact could have been initiated either by individuals

from other Mesoamerican cultures traveling to west Mexico or by West Mexicans traveling to other parts of the isthmus. Having accepted as a logical proposition the possibility of contact between west Mexico and the rest of Mesoamerica, one is therefore justified in searching for evidence of such contact. As it happens, evidence of mutual contact is abundant.

### **On the Implications of Interregional Trade**

Michael Smith states that no single Mesoamerican polity was self-sufficient and there were no obstacles to long-distance trade (Smith #2 in Smith, Berdan 2003). Smith's scholarship references a Postclassic context, but this should not be interpreted to negate the possibility of trade in an earlier era. Implicitly, interactions on the level shown above tend to presuppose that West Mexican cultures exhibited a panoply of sophisticated characteristics.

The existence of trade suggests a complex of precursor phenomena, all of which would tend to increase the probability of further expanded contact over time. The precursor phenomena would include knowledge of trade routes, comprehension of non-native languages or the use of a *lingua franca*, a familiarity with and desire for non-indigenous resources, and an awareness of foreign market demand for exclusive indigenous assets.

### **Conchs, Jade, Greenstone**

Given the extensive looting that took place in West Mexico during its long period of neglect, much of the archaeological material recovered is of uncertain provenance, so

conclusions based on it would not be reliable. However, to exclude such materials is not particularly burdensome to the task of establishing long distance trade. While only a small number of undisturbed sites have been systematically excavated, these have produced a variety of objects that demonstrate ongoing contact with distant locales throughout greater Mesoamerica. For example, the tomb at Huitzilapa in Jalisco contained both West Indian Chank (*Tubinella angulata*) and Queen Conch (*Strombus gigas*) shells, both of which are native to the Caribbean sea. (Lopez, Ramos in Townsend 1998) Kristi Butterwick states that West Mexican trade in Caribbean and Gulf shells goes back to at least 1400 BC. (Butterwick 2004) The Huitzilapa tomb also contained carved jade and greenstone objects which necessarily came from non-local sources. (Lopez, Ramos in Townsend 1998) Karl Taube cites other greenstone artifacts that suggest early commerce between West Mexico and other parts of Mesoamerica. The objects referenced are a pair of stone carvings of the Old Fire God Huehueteotl tentatively sourced to Colima. Both carvings show the god with hands placed on raised knees, an idiosyncratic posture that is reminiscent of Olmec predecessors and so distinctive that it is associated strictly with representations of Huehueteotl emanating from Colima. Taube suggests a Protoclassic date of 100 BC – 300 AD based on a stylistic comparison to other greenstone figures excavated in Colima but he adds that “it is quite possible that the two West Mexican braziers are of considerable antiquity” based on their similarity to Olmec exemplars. (Taube 2004) A small greenstone figure in an equivalent pose is illustrated and cited by Lopez and Ramos as evidence both of long distance trade and of the use of exotic materials by a ruling elite. (Lopez, Ramos in Townsend 1998) To the contrary, Winning stated that the earliest external contact with West Mexico is evidenced by

images of Huehueteotl from Teotihuacan which appeared only after the shaft tomb tradition ended. (Winning 1974) If Taube is correct, Winning's position is erroneous both in terms of the chronology and the iconographic source of the Colima Fire God figures. In terms of establishing contact with other cultures, the Colima Huehueteotl carvings are especially significant in that they indicate the acquisition of greenstone through foreign commerce, they prove West Mexicans assimilated foreign ideological and religious concepts, and they suggest that this trade in material and conceptual assets necessarily began very early on, before the Late Formative period.

### **Spondylus Exploitation**

Anawalt believes that the Ecuadorian originators of the shaft tomb tradition established colonies in west Mexico due to the presence of spiny oysters of the genus *Spondylus*. Having depleted their own sources of *Spondylus* shells, they then travelled north along the Pacific coast until they encountered the bivalves off Mexico. (Anawalt in Townsend 1998) The Pacific species *Spondylus princeps* has been recovered in Maya contexts at Pacbitun, Tikal, Caracol, and Copan, (Wagner 2009) demonstrating that long distance trade was well established though its chronology is ambiguous. Postclassic *Spondylus* trade between West Mexico and the Aztec world is confirmed by illustrations in the Aztec *Codex Mendoza* c. 1525 in which *Spondylus* shells are shown as a component of the tribute sent to Tenochtitlán by the province of Cihuatlán in coastal Jalisco.

## **Ceramic Evidence of Ethnographic Analogies**

The second category, elaborated or crafted Materials indicating the transmission of cultural practices originating outside of West Mexico, need not be subjected to the same scrutiny as objects in the first category. Most materials that are attributed to ancient West Mexican origin are ceramic and subject to stylistic and formal analysis. Regardless of whether such materials were looted, they may still be reliably attributed to the region based on their formal characteristics. But the true significance of these objects is not the fact of their physical origin in West Mexico but in the remote origin of the cultural practices that inspired them.

The following classes of objects all indicate the influence of sources that are distant chronologically, geographically, or both. While no single instance should be considered dispositive, collectively these examples constitute a cluster of ethnographic markers that indicate long term contact with other cultures. Nicholson argues that, in attempting to establish connections between disparate cultures, clusters of examples should be given more credence than individual cases. (Nicholson 1976) Assuming clusters are indeed more persuasive, then the following examples should represent a compelling case for West Mexico's membership in the unitary Mesoamerican culture.

### **The Ball Game**

The ballgame is a quintessential manifestation of Mesoamerican culture, a highly complex activity rife with socio-religious significance. There is an abundance of proof that ancient West Mexicans played the game, which should serve as proof that the culture

was never comprehensively isolated. The undisturbed tomb at Huitzilapa contained a ceramic ballplayer figure and four ballcourts were discovered around the site. (Lopez, Ramos in Townsend 1998) Jane Day describes numerous individual ballplayer figures from all three West Mexican states as well as four ceramic ballcourt dioramas with integral players from Nayarit. (Fig. 5) (Day in Townsend 1998)

### **Ceiba Trees**

The Kapok tree, (*Ceiba pentandra*), also known as *Pochotl*, was considered sacred in multiple Mesoamerican cultures, an *axis mundi* that linked the underworld, the living earth, and the heavens. In young Ceiba trees, the trunk is covered with a profusion of thick sharp spines, an evolutionary adaptation to discourage climbing animals. As the tree grows, the trunk's expansion and elongation cause these closely packed spines to spread apart, becoming worn and blunt over time. (Fig. 6) Reverence for *Ceiba* trees in West Mexico is indicated in multiple circular ceramic tableaus of the Pole-climbing ritual from Nayarit, (Fig. 7) in Colima phytomorphic vessels (Fig. 8) (Witmore in Townsend 1998) and in the regalia of a dancer figure from our corpus. (Fig. 9) In each case, the characteristic protrusions on the tree's trunk identify the species. Regarding the dancer figure, the trunk rising from his back evokes the insignia often worn on the backs of high ranking Mesoamerican warriors to distinguish them in the confusion of combat. Seen in various Aztec codices, these typically ornate and distinctive insignia extended above the heads of most of the massed combatants, identifying those in command to their subordinates. (Fig. 10) Pragmatically, such standards were made of wicker, cloth, and feathers and were light enough not to limit the wearer's mobility. In this case however,

the analogy to a warrior's insignia is only partially apt, for a genuine tree trunk of the size depicted would severely compromise a warrior's strength and agility. To be able to fight while so burdened, the wearer would necessarily require superhuman (godlike) strength, and this is likely part of the implicit message. Wielding an atlatl also places this dancer among the subset of figures that may represent deities, which could serve to reinforce the sacred status of Ceiba trees in Colima. (I will more fully explain the potential iconographic significance of the atlatl later in this thesis.)

The Maya and the Mixteca also considered the Ceiba tree to be an *axis mundi*. (Townsend 1997) Transcribing a Nahuatl source, Sahagún documents continued reverence for Ceiba (described as "Silk-Cotton") trees during the Postclassic era: "THOU ART A CYPRESS, THOU ART A SILK COTTON TREE. BENEATH THEE, THE COMMON FOLK WILL SEEK THE SHADE; THEY WILL SEEK THE SHADOW. This saying is said of the rulers who are esteemed like cypresses, like silk cotton trees. Beneath them there is seeking of shade, beneath them there is seeking of shadows." (Sahagún 1969-75) Given these examples, it should be clear that the spiritual significance of Ceiba trees was a broadly shared cultural trait clear across Mesoamerica over a protracted period.

## **Cacao**

Although it was not native to the area, cacao was being cultivated in Colima and on the Pacific coast at the Nayarit-Jalisco border by 1502. (Fig. 11) At least a half-millennium earlier, around 1000 AD, cacao was already being distributed as far north as Chaco Canyon in northwest New Mexico. (Crown and Hurst 2009) Given the existence

of Postclassic trade routes along the northern Pacific coast of Mexico, the plantings mentioned above may have been the source of cacao consumed in the American Southwest, since they were the plantations closest to Chaco Canyon. (Crown and Hurst 2009, Washburn 2011) "Turquoise, cacao, cotton, feathers and other goods (Smith 2003) were moved through many intermediary processing and exchange centers, both along the coast (Mountjoy 2000) and in the interior (Beekman 2010). The late Postclassic Aztec professional merchant class known as the *pochteca* surely must be rooted in this trade. We conclude that our discovery of theobromine in different and unexpected contexts in the American Southwest virtually mandates a reassessment of current theories regarding Southwest/Mesoamerican relationships." (Washburn 2011)

The likelihood of Formative era cacao production in Colima is reinforced by the existence of ceramic vessels in the shape of cacao pods. (Fig. 12) Although lacking provenance, these two effigy vessels show the emphatic naturalism often seen in Comala phase ceramics, along with the curved walls and bottom that Otto Schöndube considers diagnostic of West Mexican ceramic vessels. (Schöndube in Townsend 1998) These cacao effigy vessels are obviously based on the fruit of the Pataxte tree, *Theobroma bicolor*, (Fig. 13) a relatively rare cacao species that is less amenable to modern commercial exploitation than the more familiar *Theobroma cacao* that supplies almost all modern cocoa production. Washburn et al explicitly stipulate that *T. bicolor* may have been the source of cacao consumed in Pueblo and Hohokam communities. (Washburn 2011) That acknowledgement, along with the high probability that the effigy vessels originated in Comala phase Colima, strongly implies that cacao was grown, consumed, and valued as a trade good in ancient West Mexico during the Classic era and perhaps

before. Michael E. Smith defines cacao as a "key" luxury commodity (Smith #1 in Smith, Berdan 2003) and cacao trade to and from Colima would suggest the adoption of (or at least exposure to) a whole suite of attendant cultural practices. These include the existence of social elite structures that accompanied its production and consumption as well as the ritualized behaviors associated with cacao's use. In addition, cacao is addictive, which would incentivize the consumers to pursue further trade to acquire it. This exchange went far beyond West Mexico's mere acquisition of a rare and coveted consumable good and eventually resulted in the establishment of West Mexican cacao plantations. In other words, continued reciprocal trade led over time to the establishment and propagation of a local source of a previously foreign luxury good and to the entrepreneurial exploitation of that local source. This sequence constitutes an extremely complex phenomenon indicating highly evolved social institutions. In sum it evinces a very sophisticated culture at odds with the earlier scholarly underestimation of ancient West Mexico.

### **Feline Skin Headdresses**

Ceramic figures from across West Mexico are shown either with feline effigy figures atop their headdresses or with a close-fitting cap made of patterned feline skin. Christopher Beekman has noted that feline-skin headdresses are also seen on Olmec colossal heads, although the Olmec jaguar motif was probably replicated in West Mexico by the much smaller Margay. (Fig. 14) (Beekman 2011, 2018) Beekman also draws parallels to feline themed head adornments in Maya, Teotihuacano, and Aztec contexts. For Beekman, the association of human and animal is not gratuitous, but is understood in

terms of a co-essence, translated as *nahualli* in Nahuatl and *wayob* in Maya. The concept of a co-essence is another cultural artifact with wide currency in ancient Mesoamerica. As co-essences, the human and animal identities were understood to exist not as an impersonation or a hybrid but as a human and an animal simultaneously. Intriguingly, the literal translation of *nahualli* is “covering” or “mask” (Beekman 2018) which possibly implicates the headdresses and masks worn by Colima dancers.

### **Tecuhtli**

Numerous West Mexican figures, including a plurality of the corpus of Colima dancers, wear conspicuous nose plugs. In his essay “Creation Stories, Hero Cults, and Alliance Building”, John Pohl describes how during the Postclassic era, more than 12 different ethnic groups subscribed to a cult of Quetzalcoatl, the initiates of which were members of an elite alliance of entrepreneurial merchants. To receive admission, aspirants traveled to the cult center of Cholula, met the priests, performed obligatory rituals, and underwent ceremonial piercings of ears, lip, and septum. Afterward, they received a nose ornament and were given a royal estate and the title “*tecuhli*”, “lord” or lineage head. (Pohl #1 in Smith, Berdan 2003) The nose ornaments themselves were also called *tecuhli* and were markers of the wearers’ elite status as members of the entrepreneurial merchant class known as the “*Pochteca*”. According to Pohl, these Postclassic merchants specialized in long-distance trade (Pohl #1 in Smith, Berdan 2003) and since long-distance trade in foodstuffs and luxury goods began during the Formative era, (Clark in Evans, Webster 2001) groups analogous to the Pochteca may have had a similar role during that time. As is the case with other writings focused on later eras, we

should not consider Pohl's description of the Pochteca system to apply to the Formative era without reservation, but neither should we assume that precursor phenomena or similar institutions were impossible during earlier times.

Where they existed, these entrepreneurial trading institutions were instrumental in generating wealth. Many of the Colima dancer costumes in our corpus are festooned with abundant jewelry and splendid feather ornaments, both of which have been classified as luxury goods. (Smith #1 in Smith, Berdan 2003) The expense of acquiring such costumes suggests dancers likely enjoyed high economic standing. The acquisition of finery from remote locales would also presumably be facilitated for merchants affiliated with a dispersed network of fellow traders. The elevated status of Colima dancer figures within their own communities may also be inferred from contexts that do not involve performance. As noted earlier, ceramic figures shown wearing *tecuhitli* nose ornaments and dancers' signature chin-wrap turbans were sometimes portrayed seated on canopied throne-like chairs (Fig. 15) or carried on palanquins by lesser figures without nose ornaments. (Fig. 16) (Winning 1972)

It is also worth noting that an avatar of Quetzalcoatl known as "*Yacatecuhtli*", "Vanguard Lord" was the patron god of the Pochteca merchant class. (Pohl #2 in Smith, Berdan 2003) This bears emphasis: Ehecatl, the previously mentioned manifestation of Quetzalcoatl, is the tentative identification of the most common type in the corpus of Colima dancer figures. Another manifestation of Quetzalcoatl, *Yacatecuhtli*, was the patron deity of long distance trading groups. Ergo, it is conceivable that dancers in ancient Colima costumed as Ehecatl may have belonged to merchant lineages analogous to those described by Smith. Mark Miller Graham has proposed a West Mexican

iconography of rulership in which high status was indicated by the wearing of *Strombus* shell diadems. (Graham in Townsend 1998) Perhaps it would now be appropriate to expand Graham's iconography to include another exalted class of individuals based on the presence of *tecuhтли* nose ornaments. This proposition makes no claim that the wearing of *tecuhтли* should indicate a hierarchical social or political status relative to wearers of *Strombus* diadems, merely that Graham's iconography may be usefully augmented by the reasoned addition of other status markers and perhaps that the *tecuhтли* could qualify as such a marker.

Another intriguing intersection of ideological and spiritual significance lies in the fact that the words "Pochteca" (Merchant class) and "Pochotl" (Ceiba tree) are cognates. "Pochteca" derives from the name of a trading district in Tlatelolco known as "Pochtlan" or "place of the ceiba tree". To quote Townsend, "In a figurative sense pochteca means mother, father, protector, or governor of a community (Sahagún 1951-70, Bk. 10: 60). This information is presented only to call attention to the fact that symbols describing the structure of the universe, like cult effigies, may also be charged with sociopolitical significance." (Townsend, 1979) In any event, evidence of ongoing cultural transmission between polities continues to accumulate.

## **Disjunction as an Obstacle to Iconographic Analysis**

Although he did not directly address ancient West Mexico, H. B. Nicholson was an early advocate for the existence of a continuous unitary Mesoamerican culture from the Olmec era to the Conquest. Nicholson's essay, entitled "Preclassic Mesoamerican Iconography from the Perspective of the Postclassic: Problems in Interpretational Analysis" is persuasive and extremely pertinent to this thesis. (Nicholson 1976) In fact, it is so germane that I will summarize his argument in detail in the following section and follow his argument with additional observations of my own. Where necessary, I will insert parenthetical observations into the body of the debate for clarity.

In making his argument for Mesoamerican cultural continuity, Nicholson described an ongoing effort to discover specific meanings in pre-Postclassic representational art. This effort attempts to connect these early artworks to literary sources, utilizing the process of iconography as defined by Erwin Panofsky. (Panofsky 1955)

In Panofsky's definition, iconography is an analytical process concerned with determining the subject matter of works of art as opposed to describing their form. The endeavor requires interpretation which, where possible, may utilize contemporaneous textual materials. However, in the case of ancient Mesoamerica, the only surviving texts capable of using art to provide insight into ethnographic, religious, or ideological phenomena date from around 1500 AD (more than a millennium after the peak of West Mexican culture). Nicholson acknowledged this situation as problematic but nonetheless attempted to reconcile the iconographic material (art) with the literary materials. What,

then, are the arguments in favor of this unitary culture, what are the counterarguments, and how may the proposition be tested?

Nicholson's favored approach is the “direct historical approach”, described by Julian Steward, which entails working backward chronologically “from the known to the unknown.” (Steward 1942) Utilizing ethnographic data accumulated by Europeans during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Nicholson seeks to draw inferences regarding the earlier pre-literate culture, hoping to arrive at a defensible ethnographic analogy.

Another way that Nicholson considers bridging this chronological discontinuity is via “intrinsic configurational iconographic analysis” which entails a comparison of entire symbolic systems, but he refrains from using this approach. His position is that since the direct historical approach has been successful in affirming a connection between these texts and archaeological materials from their own era (the late Postclassic), then it should be possible to use the same Postclassic literary sources to interpret much earlier archaeological materials and/or iconography. This prompts the question: was there continuity over time and therefore, cultural unity with earlier Mesoamerican cultures?

In support of the affirmative position, Nicholson lists scholars who favored the theory of unitary culture: Ignacio Bernal, Gordon Willey, Michael Coe, and David Joralemon. (Nicholson 1976) As of this writing, the supporters now also include Richard Townsend, Alfredo Lopez Austin, Lorenza Lopez Mestas Camberos, and Jorge Ramos de la Vega. (Lopez, Ramos in Townsend 1998)

Nicholson also cites Hermann Beyer and George Kubler as scholars who deny the validity of the direct historical approach for the iconographic analysis of materials before the Late Postclassic. Nicholson excuses Beyer from the debate due to the early date

(1922) of his contribution. However, in addressing Kubler's opposition to the direct historical approach, Nicholson responds with a comprehensive rejoinder.

Kubler bases his opposition to the historical approach on Erwin Panofsky's concept of disjunction, a type of disruption within an artistic tradition. (Panofsky 1972) Disjunction is a phenomenon wherein there is continuity in a formal visual tradition over time but a dramatic change in the significance attached to the elements of that tradition. Disjunction may be readily exemplified by the appropriation and repurposing of various Classical forms of art and architecture by the Christian church. (Kubler 1967) Kubler is emphatic in his employment of disjunction to deny the validity of the direct historical approach vis a vis Postclassic Mesoamerican materials, saying "disjunction... makes every ethnological analogy questionable by insisting on discontinuity rather than its opposite whenever long durations are under discussion". (Kubler 1970) (Please note that to make "every ethnological analogy questionable" is not to summarily falsify said analogies.) He continues: "...analogizing also leads to misleading fragmentations, by pinning or imposing whole clusters of late ethnohistorical detail upon isolated fragments of very ancient symbolic behavior, as when the mythological and ritual meanings of the cult of Quetzalcoatl are identified as present in Olmec culture because a feathered form appears there." Kubler further contends that "the supporting evidence for such a unitary view is ...so thin that both the thesis and the antithesis are still beyond proof." (Kubler 1973)

Nicholson acknowledges the inevitability of some disjunctions between Mesoamerican visual motifs and their interpretations over time, but also accepts the likelihood of numerous continuities. He endorses and encourages the continued

application of a measured approach to a broad spectrum of materials. Nicholson assumes an agnostic position on the issue of a unitary Mesoamerican civilization, advocating a detached, precise analytical approach. This position obviously but cleverly requires openness to the possibility that a unitary civilization exists.

Nicholson then addresses the weaknesses in Kubler's position as he sees them. First, he points out that Panofsky's single example, the difference between the Greco-Roman and Christian interpretations of Classical forms, was the consequence of a dramatic, comprehensive transition between dominant religious ideologies. Such events, on a world historical scale, are highly anomalous, and Nicholson argues that there is no evidence of such a rapid transition in religious ideologies in Mesoamerica. He acknowledges the certainty of periodic violent political upheaval but sees no evidence of "sweeping supersedures of whole religious ideological systems." Rather, he posits that the organic polytheistic systems of Mesoamerica were accretive, hence tolerant of new and different deities but "tenaciously conservative in the retention of fundamental concepts."

Having addressed the primary shortcoming in Kubler's argument, Nicholson seeks to determine the best way to test the concept of unitary culture. Starting from the principle of identifying similarities between individual motifs over time, he makes the case that a more dispositive achievement would be the identification of clusters of such motifs. The larger and more complex these clusters, the more compelling the evidence for continuity would be. Based on John Rowe's "Stratigraphy and Seriation" (Rowe 1961) Nicholson argues for the development of a highly populated series of exemplars with an increasing degree of similarity over time. (By invoking Rowe's references to physical

excavation, Nicholson establishes a clever metaphorical parallel to an iconographic chronology showing changes over time. Although he does not use the expressions, he appears to advocate the development of a kind of iconographic “fossil record” of visual motifs with a minimum of “missing links”.)

Nicholson sees the aggregation of related iconographic correspondences into clusters as especially useful. In an effort to expand the scope wherein these clusters may be recognized, he suggests including iconographic contexts and associations. By way of example, he makes the point that Tlaloc, with connotations of rain and plant growth, is implicitly a fertility god and that iconographically, representations of footprints in Mesoamerican art over millennia implied travel. (One gets the impression that he sees these iconographic clusters as being synergistic, the combination of elements to some degree more persuasive than the sum of their parts.)

Ultimately, Nicholson takes the position that any argument for disjunction must be assertive and evidence based rather than presumptive and reductionist. He points out that there is no evidence of a radical religious/ideological upheaval in Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica that is remotely comparable to the cultural break between Classical paganism and Christianity. Therefore, he advocates a presumption of continuity of conceptual significance in terms of similar iconographic images. In conclusion, Nicholson states his belief that the “most basic religious-ritual patterns were probably widely shared throughout Mesoamerica from Late Preclassic or at the latest Early Classic times on.” (Nicholson 1976) His position appears to be well-reasoned, cogently argued, and prescient.

### **Further Thoughts Contra Kubler**

Kubler's opposition to the direct historical approach is vaguely puzzling in that it appears to be a preemptive campaign against any search for evidence of cultural continuity. Put differently, it seems to avoid engaging with materials that might challenge a prevailing scholarly perspective. Kubler's interpretation of disjunction is reductive, over-specified, and effectively turns Panofsky's prudent acknowledgement of a discrete, intermittent art historical phenomenon into a universally applicable, decisive negating principle. In his view, disjunction becomes a virtually nihilistic template that denies even the possibility of iconographic continuity. Surely one should be able to argue that a particular iconographic interpretation is incorrect without assuming that cultural continuity is impossible. Reduced to its ultimate implications, Kubler's argument need not even consider any evidence since the conclusion is foreordained.

## **Creating a Corpus of Colima Dancers**

In order to evaluate the formal qualities of the MFAH dancer in context, I have compiled a corpus of Colima dancer figures. Sources include images published in archaeological and art historical literature, in museum and exhibition catalogs, and in searches of numerous digital image databases. Repeated searches within each digital database typically employed terms such as “ceramic”, “dancer”, “figure”, individually and in various combinations, but searches always included the term “Colima”.

At this point, several caveats are in order, given the ambiguities inherent in the study of materials from ancient west Mexico. First, I have proceeded on the assumption that all the Colima dancer figures encountered in the search were authentic. Colima dancer figures, like much of the artwork from ancient west Mexico, have largely been ignored by scholars and collectors, so that, to date, there has not been a great incentive for modern hoaxers to create fake dancers. In contrast, the best-known Colima ceramics, the charming potbellied dogs, are extremely popular with collectors and have been reproduced in great abundance by modern ceramicists. So many fakes exist that even formerly undisputed museum pieces are now suspect. (Pickering in Beekman, Pickering 2016) Compared to the Colima dogs, dancer figures have not enjoyed the same degree of attention from collectors and there is very little scholarship dedicated exclusively to them. However, as more attention is paid to Colima dancers figures in the future, it is possible that hoaxers will be more inclined to fake them and questions of authenticity should therefore be given more credence at such a time.

Second, I am assuming that the ceramic dancer figures within the corpus represent actual members of Colima society engaged in an established cultural practice. As such, I believe the figures embody and encode historical ethnographic data. Furthermore, I assume that the details of dress and accoutrements represented in the sculptures are accurate, insofar as that is possible given the limitations of the ceramic medium. For example, a bundle of short cigar-shaped objects held in one hand will be interpreted as a bunch of darts if the other hand holds an atlatl, even though atlatl darts rendered in true scale would be much longer, thinner, and have fletching and lithic points. Beyond such inherent material limitations, I will rely on the naturalistic tendencies of ancient Colima's artists and assume that people and objects are rendered faithfully. Examples of this naturalism may be seen in the ceramic cacao pod effigy vessels mentioned earlier and in a ceramic conch shell effigy trumpet. (Fig. 12 & Fig. 17)

Third, establishing a categorical framework within which to formally analyze such a corpus was initially a daunting prospect. Any figure within the corpus could be placed within a variety of subsets depending on which formal criterion was chosen as a marker. For example, a marker could be based on an aspect of the headdress, the figure's posture, the clothing, the amount and arrangement of jewelry, the handheld objects, or adornments of the limbs, among other factors. Initially, I considered a spreadsheet analysis but quickly realized that the mathematical implications made such an approach unproductive at this stage. Mathematically, if members of the corpus have (X) attributes, the total number of possible combinations of those attributes is computed as the factorial of the number of attributes, written (X!). In layman's terms, the factorial of a number is that number multiplied by every smaller number. For example, if an object has 4

attributes, the total number of possible combinations of those 4 attributes is the factorial (4!), computed as  $(4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1) = 24$ , meaning there are 24 possible combinations of those 4 attributes. With 5 attributes, there are 120 possible combinations, with 6 attributes there are 720, and with 8 attributes, the number rises to over 40,000. This level of complexity made an approach based on specific attributes unworkable for a project of this scope.

Fourth, my conclusions regarding the corpus, while I believe them to be accurate, are not intended to be definitive and should be assumed to be incomplete. My goal is to provide a novel yet valid framework for the analysis of material from west Mexico, rather than to proscribe or limit further analysis in any way. The identifications I make below are based on iconographic and ethnographic correspondences. I will be highly gratified if other researchers reviewing the corpus are able to provide insights based on correspondences that I have failed to discern.

Finally, I offer my analyses with an acknowledgement of their conjectural nature but with a clear methodological agenda. I wish to show why iconographic analogies may have considerable utility in the scholarship of West Mexico, while acknowledging the critiques of such analogies in earlier writing.

### **Evaluating the Figures in the Corpus**

The *sine qua non* of Colima dancers is the presence of lenticular rings around the legs of the dancer, typically present at knee and ankle, rarely at a single point on the legs. (Beekman 2011) All of the full-body Colima figures with such rings that I have found are included in the corpus. At the time of this writing, over 45 figures have been accumulated.

One might imagine that a corpus composed of (X) number of dancers could also contain (X) different costumes, but that proved not to be the case with Colima dancers. As the corpus grew over time, it became clear that there were suites of formal characteristics shared by certain figures. While theoretically a vast number of permutations was possible given the number of attributes, the evidence of the corpus showed numerous similar configurations among the dancers. In short, the similarities between dancers simplified categorization, making it obvious that there were considerably fewer types of costumes than the total number of dancers. Furthermore, these combinations of characteristics suggested that many dancers were being represented in a prescribed, formulaic manner. This implies that the dancers in a given set that was portrayed in a specific way were all intended to represent a particular entity. While many figures within the corpus were unique, a surprisingly large number of figures showed sufficient similarities to fall into six distinct types.

The MFAH Masked Dancer epitomizes the most common type within the corpus. Shared characteristics include (but are not limited to) the high longitudinal crest, a flat rectangular fanged snout, and fluted conical objects suspended from the hands. There are at least 12 figures that share these characteristics, at least 25 percent of the total number of dancers in the corpus. Other types represented by more than one example include dancers with a high circular transverse crest featuring a central stylized human face (four examples), dancers whose accoutrements include a jaguar effigy or jaguar paws (four examples), dancers with a headdress in the shape of a shark (three examples), dancers with an upright conical feather crown and a toothless pointed muzzle (two examples), and dancers carrying a child effigy (two examples). These six types comprise 26 different

figures, over half the corpus. Each type likely represents a particular entity that was familiar within the home culture.

### **Deciphering the Typology**

If individual dancers may be put in groups and categorized by type (i.e. A, B, C, D, E, F) how may we further characterize the various types within the collective group? Theoretically, if we were to imagine that the letters A through F represented individual types, then how might the larger *alphabet* be defined? In other words, given a variety of types within a larger class, what characteristics would these disparate *types* share as a class? Put yet another way, if we were to ask the human beings portrayed in our corpus to explain the significance of their dances, what would they tell us?

The figures in our corpus are obviously not involved in a mundane human action. Rather, they appear to be involved in a highly circumscribed activity, presumably a ritual, that imposes prescribed modes of dress, action, physical location, etc. One may assume that the dancers' behaviors are highly encoded but nevertheless comprehensible within an ethnographic context. The challenge is to find an ethnographic perspective that allows us to decode the iconographic data discernable among the aggregated members of the corpus.

Let us begin by analyzing the costumes in generic terms. Most of the costumes feature feathers and many have other explicitly zoomorphic aspects. Within the larger Mesoamerican context, the conflation of human and animal characteristics is often associated with supernatural beings, to wit, deities. (Covarrubias 1957) Proceeding on the

assumption that these ceramic figures were intended to represent dancers performing as deities, which deities might they be portraying?

### **Implicit and Explicit Status Markers**

Proceeding under the assumption that the MFAH Masked Dancer's rendering represents the actual costume once worn by a living dancer in ancient Colima, we may arrive at some tentative conclusions about the activities related to the dance. It is likely that the dancer wore the tightly wrapped, padded turban not only to protect his head, but to provide a secure friction fit to the headdress, which was likely rather weighty. Once the dancer's turbaned head was wedged inside, the headdress would have remained securely in place during the dance. The use of the turban to provide a friction fit would also account for the presence of the wrapping under the figure's chin. This integral chinstrap would keep the turban in place, preventing it from being pulled off if the weight of the headdress shifted during abrupt movements. The chinstrap would also keep the turban in place when the headdress was removed after the dance. The turban would also absorb sweat generated by the exertion of dancing in a heavy costume, sweat which might otherwise run into the dancer's eyes.

The presence of the chinstrap turban may therefore be considered a diagnostic identifier of Colima dancers, even in cases where a removable headdress has been lost or never existed. Turbaned figures also frequently appear in many of the ceramic tableaux of west Mexican village life, identifying the subjects as dancers within diverse groups of people.

Since it often appears in conjunction with the "tecuitli" nose ornament, the dancers' chinstrap turban also has a conferred connotation of elevated status. It is well

established that in other Mesoamerican contexts, the presence of a tecuhtli indicates an exalted social position to the degree that the word tecuhtli itself is synonymous with a cultural elite. Several important Colima ceramic figures explicitly indicate the high status of figures wearing chinstrap turbans. Such figures are sometimes seated on canopied thrones or are carried on litters by multiple lesser figures.

In light of this iconographic data, it is likely that the living Colima dancers who inspired these ceramic figures enjoyed high status and considerable deference within their communities. Since their costumes are typically richly adorned with jewelry and precious feathers, it is also safe to assume that the dancers' high status was accompanied by substantial material wealth. Possibly, their high status may have been a function of roles as priests, rulers, or entrepreneurial merchants.

## On the Iconography of Divinity in Mesoamerica

The symbolic role of the dart-thrower in Mesoamerican iconography has been acknowledged since the late 19th century when Zelia Nuttall wrote “The Spear-Thrower of the Ancient Mexicans”. In it, Nuttall states “Pausing now to review the principal Aztec gods in their representations, one cannot but be struck by the fact established by the foregoing testimony that *each god carries, as symbol, some form of atlatl*”, (italics in original). (Nuttall 1891)

If one is willing to entertain the possibility that Colima was part of the larger unitary Mesoamerican culture, Nuttall’s observation allows for a new appraisal of those figures within the Colima corpus that are shown equipped with a spear-thrower. Since the atlatl was seen as symbolic of power across Mesoamerica as early as the middle formative period, (Slater 2011) contemporaneous with Comala phase Colima, might one assume that representations of atlatls in the latter culture carried the same association with divinity?

To date, six different Colima figures have been found holding atlatls, all bearing the diagnostic leg rings that confirm their dancer status. Of the six, five hold the atlatl vertically, as if proffering it to observers. This seems significant in that they do not hold the atlatl in a threatening position but rather in one suggesting symbolic significance. While there are many Colima warrior figures in menacing poses brandishing clubs, spears, or slings, none of these figures hold an atlatl and none wear a dancer’s leg rings.

Per Nuttall, we will proceed on the assumption that each of our dart throwers *might* represent a god from the greater Mesoamerican pantheon. Since little is known of

the native religious practice of ancient Colima, which gods might they represent and how might these gods be identified?

One intriguing possible answer is suggested by a figure from the corpus which holds an atlatl and wears a headdress described as representing a duck. (Winning 1974) If we assume that the atlatl indicates deity status, the presence of the duck headdress is especially pertinent in that ducks were symbolically associated with wind deities by the Olmec, the Maya, and the Aztec. If this same iconographic correspondence applies to Colima, this dart thrower is therefore likely a wind deity. If that were the case, the figure could be both a cognate of earlier Olmec wind deities and a precursor to the wind god Ehecatl, whose anthropomorphic manifestation conflated the duck wind deity and the feathered serpent deity Quetzalcoatl. (Fig. 18) Utilizing a similar iconographic approach, we may now consider the identities of other dancers in the corpus.

## **Iconographic Correspondences Between Colima and Other Cultures**

Having established a theoretical framework allowing the identification of some Colima dancers as deity impersonators, we may hypothesize about the identity of other members of the corpus based on iconographic elements. In so doing we will employ Steward's direct historical approach, working from known examples and drawing inferences about a lesser-known culture. Unlike Nicholson, however, who was obliged to work from the historic era backward, our application of the technique will proceed both backward and forward chronologically. Working from the "known to the unknown" allows us to analyze relatively obscure Colima culture in terms of better known cultures both prior and subsequent. Given the variety of types contained in our dancer corpus, we will have the opportunity to apply the approach to numerous disparate examples. This may permit us to establish multiple distinct associations among the individual dancers, establishing the iconographic clusters that Nicholson considered so important. In addition, the elaborateness and variety seen in their costumes means that any particular dancer might be the source of multiple iconographic correspondences. In such a case, any individual dancer figure could constitute an iconographic cluster in its own right. Were this analytical framework systematically and comprehensively applied, it could reveal the dancer corpus as an extraordinarily rich repository of iconographic material, potentially capable of elucidating many hidden aspects of Colima culture. Conceivably, West Mexico might even be elevated to the status of a possible iconographic "missing link" between the earlier pre-Formative period and the later Classic and Postclassic periods.

## **Juxtapositions**

We will begin this series of comparisons with examples connecting figures from the corpus with iconographic evidence from both earlier and contemporaneous cultures. The correspondences will not be explored in any detail, though such an effort would be warranted given sufficient time and space. This thesis is simply not the appropriate venue for that discourse and the examples are offered only to serve as proof of concept.

### **Shark Dancer**

The Colima Shark dancer recalls an Olmec precursor in the Shark monster or God VIII, shown here in a relief from San Lorenzo. It is also reminiscent of a Formative era relief from the Epi-Olmec culture recovered from a river at La Mojarra. In the relief, a figure wears a headdress incorporating one large shark with four smaller sharks attached to the larger shark's back. (Fig. 18)

### **Jaguar Dancer**

Another pre-formative correspondence can be seen between two standing Olmec greenstone Were-Jaguars and a Colima jaguar dancer. (Fig. 19) Kristi Butterwick explicitly accepts a feline interpretation of the dancer's costume, describing the animal on the headdress as having round ears and a long thick tail. The tunic bears markings described as representing animal hair and the dancer's raised "paws" have dewclaws. (Butterwick 2004)

### **Dancer Presenting a Baby**

This connection is particularly striking. The figures at left and right are Olmec and the central figure is from Colima. In all three examples, the figure holds an inert, supine infant. (Fig. 20)

### **Sun Deity Dancers**

We may now proceed with comparisons of Colima iconography with Classic and Postclassic exemplars. This illustration (Fig. 21) shows three of the four Colima dancer headdresses with semicircular transverse crests that feature stylized human faces. The adjacent Aztec codex paintings show human sacrifice to the sun deity Huitzilopochtli. Each painting shows the sun with a human face, actively observing the event.

### **Water Deity Dancers**

Next, at center we see a Colima heron dancer, holding an atlatl and conjectured to be a water deity, juxtaposed with a Mixtec earthenware figure and an Aztec codex painting of the water deity Tlaloc. All three wear conical feather crowns and the painting shows the god's cloud net garment to good advantage. Note the close correspondence between the costume in the painting and that of the Colima dancer. (Fig. 22)

### **The MFAH Dancer**

Having established that the natives of ancient West Mexico likely honored gods that were known throughout Mesoamerica, we may now return to the subject of the MFAH Masked Dancer. As stated earlier, it is the position of this thesis that the MFAH

Masked Dancer represents Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, here juxtaposed with images from later Mixtec, Aztec, and Spanish sources. (Fig. 23) The formal elements and materiality of the figure have already been addressed, so its iconographic implications may now be explored.

While the MFAH confidently describes the figure as wearing a crocodile mask, the headdress shows numerous details inconsistent with this interpretation. Crocodiles, like all air-breathing quadrupeds adapted to spend protracted periods in water (e.g. hippopotami) have nostrils and eyes that are elevated above the general contours of the skull, allowing these organs to be above the water's surface when the animal's body is submerged. The MFAH Masked Dancer's headdress lacks nostrils but does have what appear to be external ears, both features that are inconsistent with any crocodilian species. In addition, the muzzle is flat and rectilinear, has horns on its tip, and a central longitudinal ridge on its top surface. The mask also seems to have four eyes and most prominently, a huge crest. I believe it would be more appropriate to suggest that the headdress represents a composite creature, presumably one of mythological origin.

## On Conflated Identities

In ancient Mesoamerica, the conflation of two identities did not involve impersonation, transformation, or hybridization. Both conflated identities continued to exist as co-essences within a single entity and neither identity was diluted nor was a “genuine” or “original” identity temporarily exchanged for another. This simultaneous existence of multiple identities exemplifies the concept of *Nahualli* or *wayob*, “co-essence,” mentioned above, a concept which was broadly shared across Mesoamerican cultures. (Beekman 2018) The sustained melding of essences, such as the conflation of an individual human being and a particular type of animal, was a familiar part of the daily conceptual lives of both the elite and the common people

In attempting to iconographically decode the MFAH Masked Dancer it is important to remember this cognitive context. A concept of the self that entails the existence of multiple disparate spiritual entities within a single being can be challenging for the modern sensibility to assimilate, but it was a prevailing condition in Mesoamerican thought. In the case of a dancer portraying a deity, the state of co-essence existed both between the conflated identities that made up that deity and between the dancer and the deity he portrayed.

### **The MFAH Masked Dancer: Ehecatl?**

Given this precondition, the MFAH figure's headdress appears less like a crocodile and more like a mythological being with conflated identities. Surveying the larger Mesoamerican pantheon, one deity seems to fit the iconographic parameters of the MFAH piece: Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, which combines two earlier deities, Quetzalcoatl and an as-yet-unnamed wind deity.

Quetzalcoatl is the familiar and ancient feathered serpent deity whose worship was pervasive in Mesoamerica. The earliest image of Quetzalcoatl dates to Olmec culture no later than 900 BC, although the deity's theological role in that culture is not well understood. The unnamed wind deity combines the attributes of a human being and a duck.

The conflation of ducks with wind deities is also a very ancient phenomenon in Mesoamerican culture. The earliest examples of figures combining duck and human characteristics are also Olmec, preceding the shaft tomb cultures of West Mexico by hundreds of years. (Fig. 24) (Taube 2004)

Maya culture also provides numerous iconographic exemplars, images of both zoomorphic deities and costumed humans wearing buccal masks which cover only the lower face. (Fig. 25) Helpfully, some figures (*e* and *f* in the illustration) actually incorporated the Maya glyph *ik* for "wind" within the figures' eye. (Taube, 2004)

Related to their identification with wind, ducks were also associated with rain, as the windy Mexican spring season was seen as ushering in the inevitable rains of summer. Karl Taube relates: "One particular species of duck, the atapalcatl (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

was believed to be a harbinger of rain: *'It is named atapalcatl because if it is to rain on the next day, in the evening it begins, and all night [continues], to beat the water [with its wings]. Thus the water folk know that it will rain much when dawn breaks'.*" (Sahagún, quoted in Taube 2004) "Oxyura jamaicensis" is the Linnaean designation of the Ruddy duck, and Sahagún's account is a good description of a Ruddy duck drake's courtship display. In their attempts to attract a hen, the male ducks make a series of short, frantic dashes across the surface of a body of water, beating their wings rapidly without attempting to rise into the air, resulting in a brief, splashing buzz. Since Ruddy duck breeding season occurs in the spring prior to the advent of the rainy season in early summer, it is natural that this distinctive animal behavior would come to be associated with an impending meteorological phenomenon. Ruddy ducks also have distinctive facial markings, with a bright blue bill and white cheeks on a round black head. This striking feature may have been the inspiration for the odd buccal mask associated with Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl. (Fig. 26)

At some point during the middle or late formative period, the feathered serpent deity and the human-duck wind deity were conflated to create Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl. The process of combining the two deities, each of which was composed of two conflated identities, was not as straightforward as it might at first appear. The feathered serpent god Quetzalcoatl conflates reptilian and avian identities while the unnamed wind deity conflates avian and human identities. The combination of all of these elements has subtle iconographic implications.

## **On the Iconographic Evolution of Ehecatl**

Iconographically, Quetzalcoatl is essentially serpentine with feathers for scales and a feather crest or collar. The particular type of serpent is a rattlesnake, but the avian element, manifest in the feathers, does not refer to any particular bird species. The Olmec early wind deity has a human cranium and upper face including the nose, with a duck's bill in place of the mouth. This general configuration of the wind god is consistent with Maya representations, which also have normal human bodies.

The original motivation behind this conflation of feathered serpent and wind god may have been the desire to create an instantiation of Quetzalcoatl that could be portrayed by human deity impersonators performing public rituals. The rationale for this conclusion may be stated as follows: If the god is simply to be rendered pictorially, it may remain a serpent. However, when Quetzalcoatl must be portrayed in ritual it becomes expedient, even necessary, to anthropomorphize the deity, for in such cases, the god must be portrayed by an obviously bipedal human being.

The identities of the two gods to be conflated overlapped in that the feathered serpent Quetzalcoatl and the Olmec wind deity each had an avian aspect. The combination of the two deities' binary identities meant that the shared avian elements would inevitably be expressed as a single characteristic. Ergo, Quetzalcoatl's undifferentiated avian aspect came to be specifically anatine upon conflation with the Olmec wind deity. In this manner the four elements comprising the two deities' identities were unified in a single tripartite identity: Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl.

However, this synthesis of the feathered serpent with the anatine-human wind deity presented an iconographic challenge in that once the conflation of identities took

place, the serpentine connotation was lost, simply because both humans and ducks have legs. After all, when a serpent is given legs it is no longer a serpent at all. This attenuation of Quetzalcoatl's primal identity was compounded by the fact that the deity's feathers ceased to be a diagnostic feature. Since ducks are also feathered, the association between the serpent deity and its feathers was lost when the two gods were combined. Once conflated with the wind deity, Quetzalcoatl's identity as a snake became so iconographically tenuous that sustaining it required reiteration via the addition of other reptilian characteristics.

For example, if a dancer portraying Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl were to wear the original Olmec style duck mask and feathers, the deity he portrayed remained the original wind deity; that is, nothing about his costume made iconographic reference to a snake. The conflation of Quetzalcoatl with the Wind Deity therefore necessitated an additional, explicitly reptilian iconographic element. This accounts for the addition of pointed reptilian teeth to the bill, as seen in both the Colima mask and in later Aztec and Mixtec manifestations. The addition of the fangs to the duck bill also created the risk that the buccal mask could be mistaken for a different toothy creature with a long muzzle, be it fish, reptile, or mammal. This probably accounts for the exaggerated flatness of the MFAH Masked Dancer's buccal mask and for other details that make it unlike living creatures, e.g. the rectangular shape, horns, central ridge, and absent nostrils.

### **Diamonds and Scales**

The desire to impart specifically reptilian formal elements may also be the reason for the linked diamond pattern on the MFAH Masked Dancer's wide belt. These mimic

the rattlesnake's characteristic markings, as do the crossed, beaded necklaces/suspenders the dancer wears. (Fig. 27) A review of the corpus indicates that the crossed necklace motif is only present on Colima dancer figures that conform to the Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl type and may therefore be considered diagnostic. A more subtle reptilian element might be seen in the incised woven pattern on the dancer's chinstrap turban, which suggests scales. Since the turban would have been concealed when the headdress was worn, this pattern may have merely been a result of the weaving process and its similarity to scales may be gratuitous. (Fig. 28)

### **Rattles, Brooms, or Both?**

The significance of the MFAH Masked Dancer's fluted, conical hand-held objects may also be tentatively explained by way of a conflated functional and symbolic identity. (Fig. 29) Other Colima dancer figures sometimes hold conventional rattles with globular heads and sticks for handles, identical to maracas. Since the serpent associated with Quetzalcoatl is the rattlesnake, one would expect that a dancer representing the god should be capable of making the snake's eponymous sound. This thesis has already addressed the iconographic challenge of preserving Quetzalcoatl's serpentine identity when the deity is portrayed by a human being, and the dancer's hands contribute to this problem as surely as the legs. Since rattlesnakes are armless as well as legless, maracas held in a human hand further attenuate the serpentine identity, rendering the sound of the rattle artificial rather than organic. By hiding the dancer's fingers in black mitts and securing the pendant rattles with wound straps, the dancer's costume makes them an organic extension of the arms, turning each appendage into a rattlesnake's tail.

As noted above, the peculiar fluted striations on the objects make them resemble brooms (Fig. 28) and their position in the dancer's hands implies they would be employed with a swinging motion reminiscent of sweeping. This simple domestic activity could be richly meaningful in Mesoamerican thought. Along with fasting and bloodletting, sweeping was a widely practiced means of ritual purification, and sweeping is also associated with another metaphorical role of Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, that of a sweeper involved in seasonal ritual cleansing. Once again, Karl Taube quotes Sahagún: "...it was Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl who brought the fertile clouds of rain: *"Quetzalcoatl— he was the wind; he was the guide, the roadsweeper of the rain gods"*. (Sahagún, quoted in Taube 2004) As the wind deity, Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl was believed to have generated the winds that swept the paths and fields in advance of the rainy season, purifying them prior to the planting of crops. By swinging his brushlike rattles in pendulum fashion, the dancer representing Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl may have simultaneously evoked the serpent's warning, the wind, and the brooms of ritual purification. Like the Ruddy Duck mentioned above, Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl's actions preceding the rainy season associated him not only with the wind but also with water. Given the Mesoamerican fondness for conflation, these manifold identities would have been readily accepted by an audience familiar with the god's mythology. (Fig. 30)

## **Concluding Thoughts and a Respectful Admonition**

The interpretations offered in this thesis are obviously unorthodox, but the dearth of knowledge about ancient West Mexican religious practices makes it unwise to reject out of hand the possibility that its residents may have revered the same gods commonly worshipped by other Mesoamerican cultures. Given the many examples offered above, protracted, mutually beneficial contacts between greater Mesoamerica and West Mexico may be confidently asserted. The examples imply ongoing trade in numerous instances, including the provision of locally sourced luxury goods by both parties. Given that reciprocal trade in tangible assets took place at this level, then the exchange of religious and ideological beliefs and practices was eminently possible. Nonetheless, the idea that Colima dancer figures indicate the reverence for gods from the larger Mesoamerican pantheon is admittedly provocative.

As has been noted repeatedly, the cultures of Western Mexico have been treated with indifference and intellectual disregard by both historical foreign occupiers and modern scholarly specialists. It would be unfortunate if this neglect were to continue in light of new interpretations of objects that are already within the corpus of scholarship. It is the proposition of this thesis that Colima religious practice almost certainly utilized a pantheon that incorporated gods that were essentially cognates of those revered earlier by the Olmec, simultaneously by the Veracruzanos, Teotihuacanos, and Maya, and later by the Mixtec and Aztec. While scholarly skepticism of this idea is to be expected, to reject it out of hand would be to perpetuate the same neglect and unwarranted cultural condescension that has sometimes characterized the scholarship regarding western

Mesoamerican cultures. One hopes that, in the absence of contradictory evidence, even unorthodox ideas regarding the spiritual practices of ancient west Mexico will be given appropriate consideration. Underappreciated ethnographic analogies, in conjunction with abundant iconographic similarities, justify a reappraisal and possibly, a rejection of west Mexico's presumed cultural isolation. It is to be hoped that this thesis will help contribute to that reappraisal and assist in the acceptance of ancient West Mexico as an integral part of the unitary Mesoamerican civilization.

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## Figures

### Figure 1

MFAH Dancer, 3/4 Frontal View



**Figure 2**

MFAH Dancer, Left Profile View



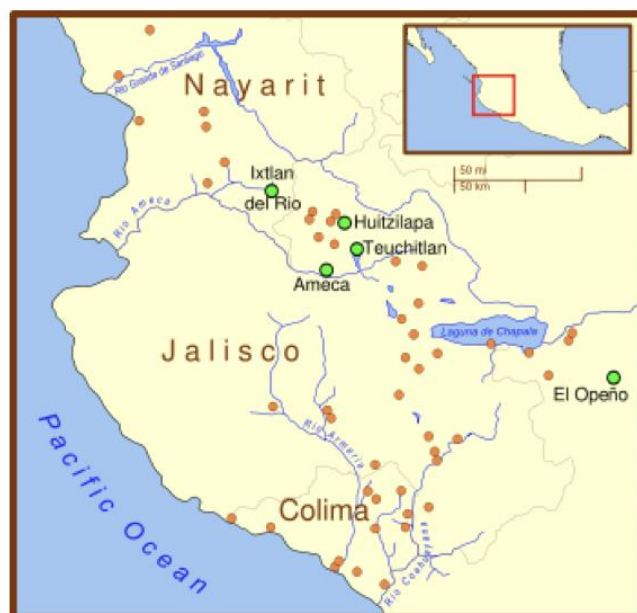
**Figure 3**

MFAH Dancer, Frontal View Without Headdress



**Figure 4**

Map of West Mexico



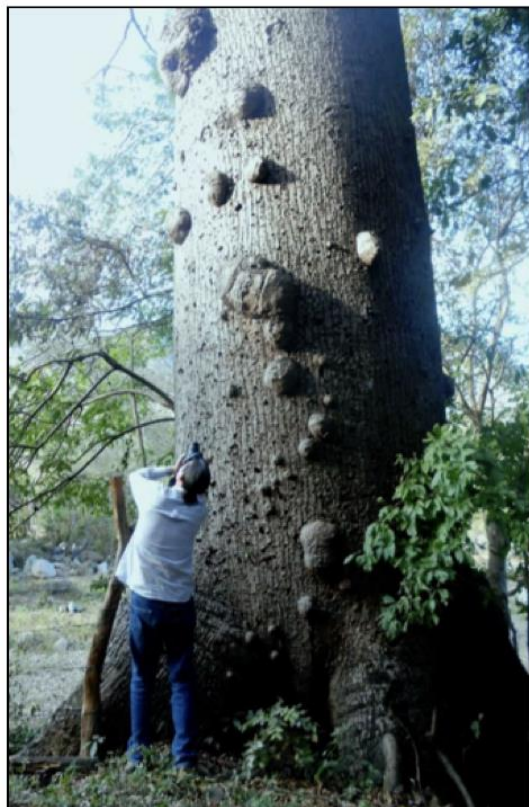
**Figure 5**

Ceramic Ballcourts from the Huitzilapa tomb



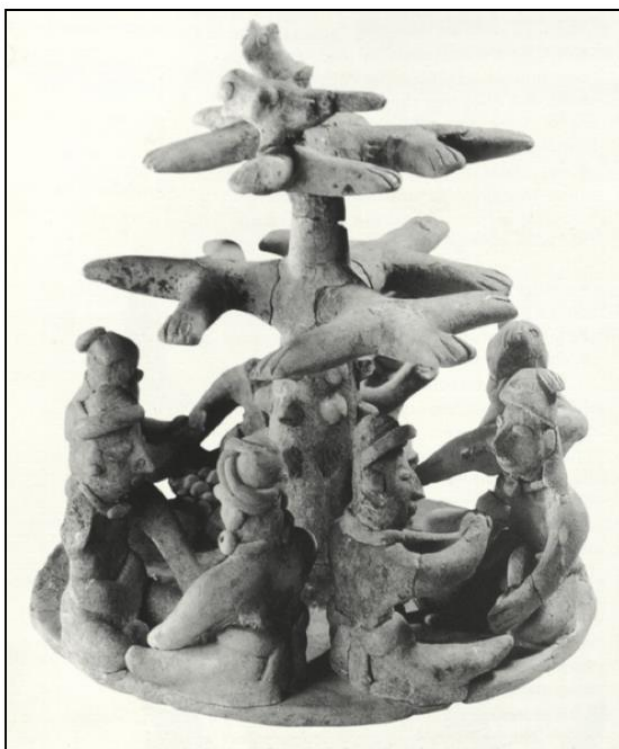
**Figure 6**

Ceiba Tree, Colima



**Figure 7**

Ceramic Tableau with Ceiba Tree as Axis Mundi, Nayarit



**Figure 8**

Ceramic Ceiba Trunk Effigy Vessel, Colima



**Figure 9**

Ceramic Colima Warrior Dancer with Ceiba Tree Regalia



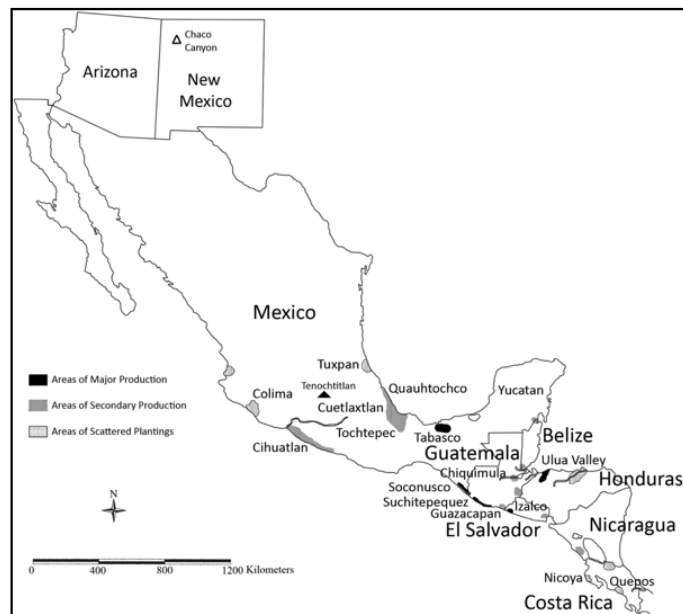
**Figure 10**

Aztec Warrior Regalia Painting, Codex Mendoza



**Figure 11**

Map: Cacao Cultivation in Mesoamerica ca. 1502



**Figure 12**

Ceramic Cacao Pod Effigy Vessels, Colima



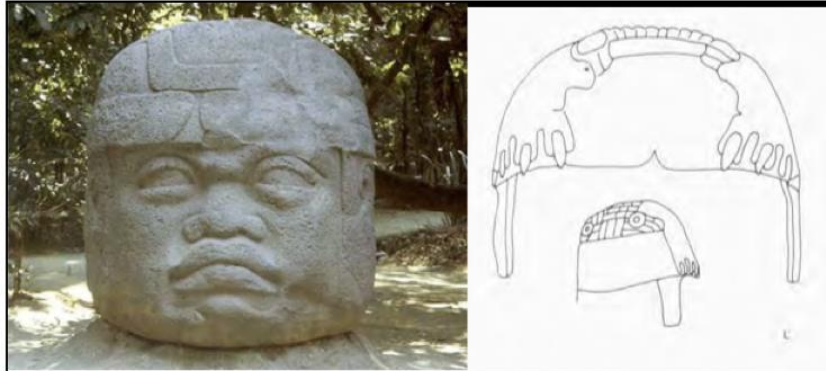
**Figure 13**

Cacao Pod (*Theobroma bicolor*)



**Figure 14**

Feline Skin Caps: Olmec Colossal Head, Nayarit Ceramic Figure



**Olmec Colossal Head with Feline Skin Cap (Drawing After Beekman 2011)**



**Nayarit Figure with Feline Skin Cap (Drawing After Beekman 2018)**

**Figure 15**

Ceramic Enthroned Figures with Tecuhtli, Chinstrap Turbans, Colima



**Figure 16**

Ceramic Figure with Tecuhtli, Chinstrap Turban borne on Palanquin, Colima



**Figure 17**

Ceramic Conch Shell Effigy Trumpet, Colima



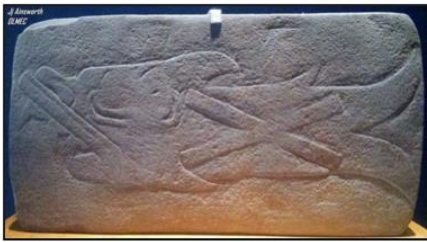
**Figure 18**

Ceramic Colima Dancer with Duck Headdress, Atlatl



**Figure 19**

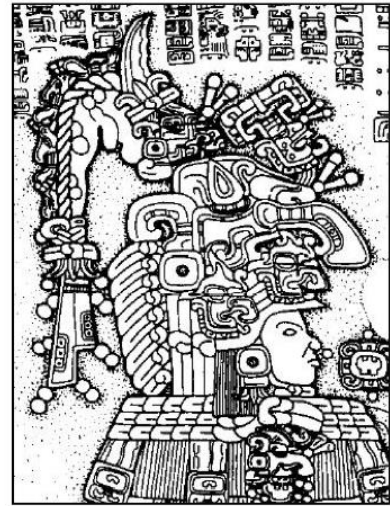
Ceramic Colima Shark Dancer with Olmec Shark Monster, Epi-Olmec Ruler



**Olmec Shark Monster**  
**(God VIII)**  
**San Lorenzo**  
**Monument 58**



**Colima**  
**Shark Dancer**



**Epi-Olmec**  
**Ruler with Shark Headaddress**  
**La Mojarra**  
**Stela I**

**Figure 20**

Ceramic Colima Jaguar Dancer with Olmec Were-Jaguar Figures



Olmec  
Were-Jaguar  
Figure 1



Colima  
Jaguar Dancer



Olmec  
Were-Jaguar  
Figure 2

**Figure 21**

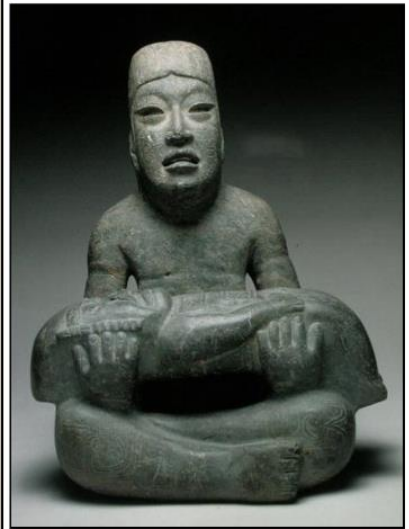
Ceramic Colima Dancer Holding Infant, Olmec Figures Holding Infants



**Olmec Figure**  
**Holding**  
**Were-Jaguar**  
**Baby**  
**1**



**Colima Dancer**  
**Holding Infant**

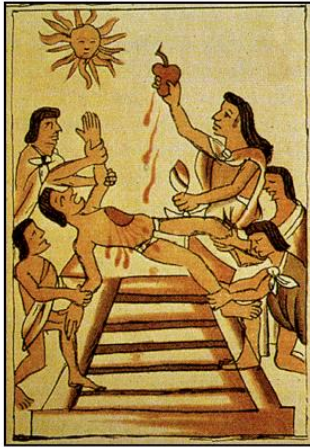


**Olmec Figure**  
**Holding**  
**Were-Jaguar**  
**Baby**  
**2**

**Figure 22**

Ceramic Colima Sun Deity Dancer, Aztec Codex Paintings

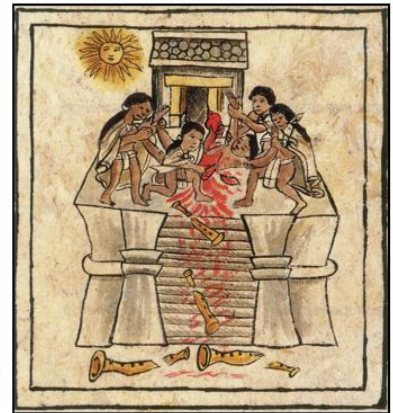
**Aztec Painting:  
Sun with Human Face**



**Colima  
Sun Deity  
Dancer**



**Aztec Painting:  
Sun with Human Face**



**Colima Sun Deity Headdresses with Human Faces**

**Figure 23**

Ceramic Colima Heron Dancer, Mixtec Tlaloc Figure, Aztec Tlaloc Painting



**Mixtec Tlaloc Figure**  
**with**  
**Feather Crown**



**Colima Heron**  
**Dancer**  
**w/Feather Crown,**  
**Net Costume**



**Aztec Tlaloc Painting**  
**w/Feather Crown,**  
**Cloud Net Costume**  
**Codex Ixtlilxochitl**

**Figure 24**

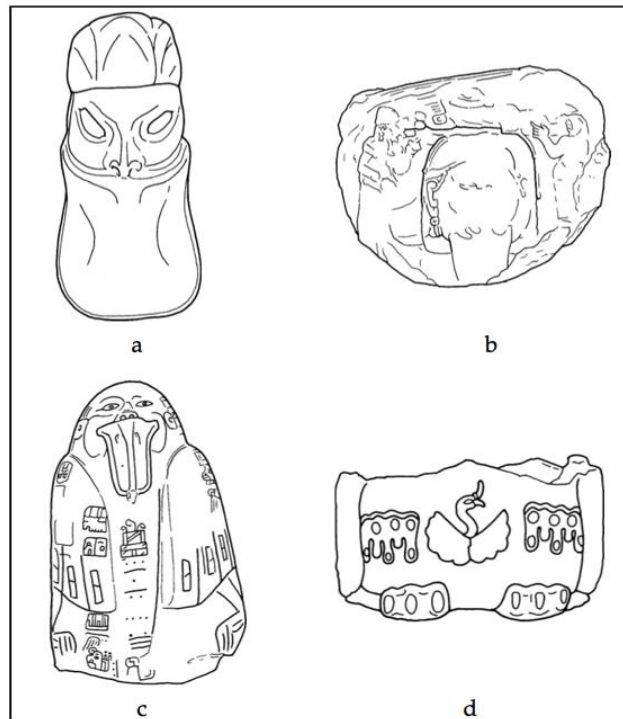
MFAH Dancer Surrounded by Codex Paintings of Ehecatl

**Ehecatl - Quetzalcoatl**



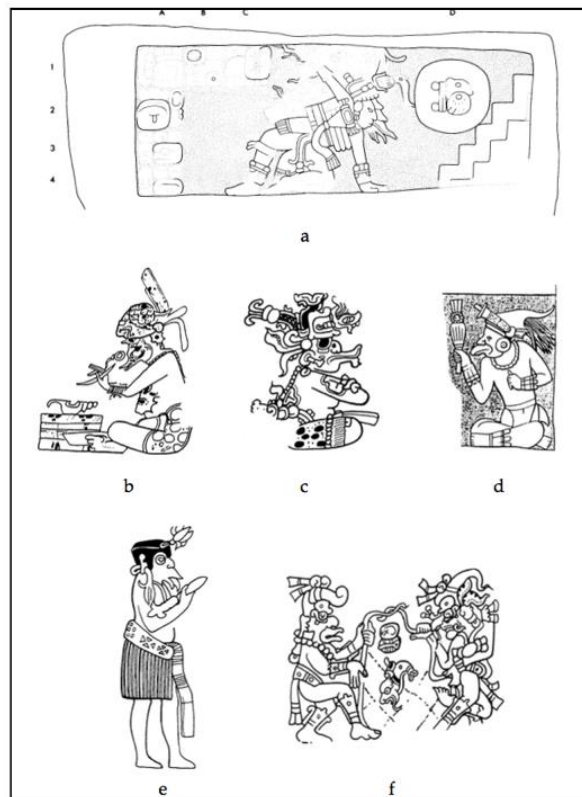
**Figure 25**

**Olmec Duck Deity Sculptures**



**Figure 26**

Maya Duckbilled Wind Deities



**Figure 27**

Ruddy Duck Drake



**Figure 28**

MFAH Dancer, Belt and Necklaces, Closeup



**Figure 29**

MFAH Dancer, Head with Turban, Closeup



**Figure 30**

MFAH Dancer, Handheld Objects, Closeup



**Figure 31**

MFAH Dancer, 3/4 Frontal View, Left Profile View

