

Basic Detail Report



Anthropomorphic Turtle

Date

ca. 1350-1521

Primary Maker

Aztec

Medium

basalt

Description

This piece is a magnificent example of Aztec sculptural skill and interest in animal representations. The turtle is carved on all sides, which is typical of the Aztec stoneworking tradition. The carapace shows well-defined scutes (external plates or scales) and underneath, a human figure emerges showing only its head, hands, and feet. This figure is likely Ehecatl, the Aztec god of wind, who wears a mask, tubular nose ornament, and a pair of large earspools. Stone images of real or mythological animals with anthropomorphic body parts are common in Mesoamerican art. This hybridization is closely related to an aspect of the Mesoamerican worldview, which allowed the translation of dualities observed in nature – animal/human and earthly/divine – into highly symbolic art forms. Turtles were important in Aztec mythology and were associated with water, earth, and fertility. Several examples of turtle representations in stone and ceramic, along with the remains of actual specimens, have been found as part of offerings in archaeological sites throughout Mexico City.

Dimensions

Overall: 8 1/2 x 17 1/4 x 14 1/2 in. (21.6 x 43.8 x 36.8 cm)