

Basic Detail Report



Mask

Date

ca. 1500-400 BCE

Primary Maker

Olmec

Medium

greenstone

Description

Olmec stone masks are abundant in the archaeological record and are often found in burials and offerings. The specific function of these masks is unclear, but it is unlikely they were made to be worn, as most have no eye or nostril holes and are usually smaller than an average human face. This mask departs from a naturalistic depiction of human characteristics in a number of ways. The forehead shows a variation of the typical Olmec cleft, while below two recessed areas indicate the eye sockets. The nose is short and wide with open nostrils, and toothless gums and a tongue can be seen in the large, gaping mouth. The exaggerated emphasis on the mouth suggests a strong symbolic significance, perhaps a representation of a cave as entrance to the underworld. The iconography on this mask suggests the Olmec avian-jaguar motif, a combination of animal attributes that pertain to diverse natural realms.

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Dimensions

Overall: 3 7/8 x 4 x 2 5/8 in. (9.8 x 10.2 x 6.7 cm)