

Sculpture and Social Dynamics in Preclassic Mesoamerica

This book examines the functions of sculpture during the Preclassic period in Mesoamerica and its significance in statements of social identity. Julia Guernsey situates the origins and evolution of monumental stone sculpture within a broader social and political context and demonstrates the role that such sculpture played in creating and institutionalizing social hierarchies. This book focuses specifically on an enigmatic type of public monumental sculpture known as the “potbelly” that traces its antecedents to earlier small domestic ritual objects and ceramic figurines. The cessation of domestic rituals involving ceramic figurines along the Pacific slope coincided not only with the creation of the first monumental potbelly sculptures, but with the rise of the first state-level societies in Mesoamerica by the advent of the Late Preclassic period. The potbellies became central to the physical representation of new forms of social identity and expressions of political authority during this time of dramatic change.

Julia Guernsey is an Associate Professor in the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research has appeared in a variety of journals, including *Antiquity*, *Ancient America*, and *Journal of Latin American Lore*. Her most recent book, coedited with John E. Clark and Bárbara Arroyo, is titled *The Place of Stone Monuments: Context, Use, and Meaning in Mesoamerica’s Preclassic Transition*.

*For Tony Guernsey and Rita Ford Guernsey,
my heroes;*

*For Abby and Jack,
the centers of my world;*

*and for Michael,
who made it all possible.*

Sculpture and Social Dynamics in Preclassic Mesoamerica

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