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MFA **H** *The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*  
Hirsch Library Research Guide



### Kneeling Woman Nursing a Baby

Jalisco

Pre-Columbian, Jalisco, 300 BC–AD 300  
Ceramic, Overall: 13 in. (33 cm)

Museum purchase funded by Mrs. Harry C. Hanszen

The cultures of West Mexico, dating from 300 B.C. to A.D. 300, were once considered simple farming communities. Recent excavations in the area paint a remarkably different picture. They indicate complex and stratified societies led by chiefs and religious centers that emphasized the veneration of family ancestors. It is probable that the artworks displayed in this gallery were made in workshops by skilled artisans.

The ancient peoples of West Mexico buried their dead in deep shaft tombs under land that belonged to families of high status. They placed ceramics in burials to accompany the dead in the afterlife. Artists from cultures in Colima, Nayarit, Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán fashioned the ceramics in appealing animal and human figures. Local clay and minerals gave them vivid orange hues. After applying slip and paint, the earthen pots were polished with stones to create glossy finishes.

Female figures embodied the concepts of fertility, lineage, and community continuance. This kneeling woman wears a turban and elaborately decorated skirt. She proudly displays her baby. As a mother nursing her child, she is a symbol of the mythical womb of the earth, the source of all life.

#### Online Resources:

[Hirsch Library Online Catalog](#)

[The Metropolitan Museum of Art Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History](#)

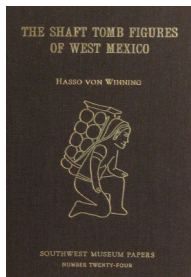
**Articles:** (full-text access available on-site; off-site access available through your school library or Houston Public Library)

[Bell, Betty. "Archeological Excavations in Jalisco, Mexico." \*Science\* 175, no. 4027 \(1972\): 1238-9.](#)

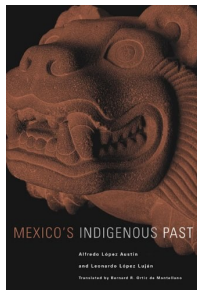
[Beekman, Christopher S. "Recent Research in Western Mexican Archaeology." \*Journal of Archaeological Research\* 18, no. 1 \(2010\), 41-109.](#)

[Meighan, Clement W. "Prehistory of West Mexico." \*Science\* 184, no. 4143 \(1974\), 1254-1261.](#)

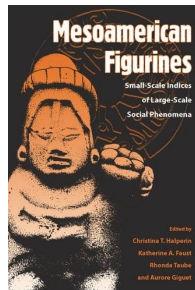
#### Print Resources:



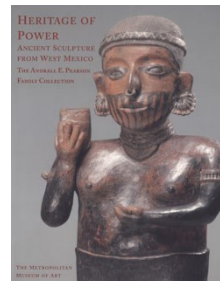
[The Shaft Tomb  
Figures of  
West Mexico](#)



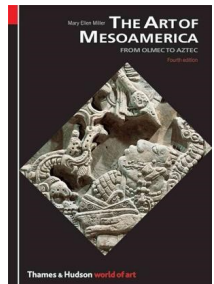
[Mexico's Indigenous Past](#)



[Mesoamerican  
Figurines](#)



[Heritage of Power:  
Ancient Sculpture from  
West Mexico](#)



[The Art of Mesoamerica  
from Olmec to Aztec](#)

## Bibliography

### Object Specific Information

[Landay, Janet, and Thomas T. DuBrock. \*The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Visitor Guide\*. London: Scala, 2000.](#)  
N 576 .H7 A85 2000 Ref.

### General Surveys of Mesoamerican Art

[Gardner, Helen, Fred S. Kleiner, and Christin J. Mamiya. \*Gardner's Art through the Ages\*. 12th ed. Belmont: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2005.](#)  
N 5300 .G25 2005 Ref.

[Honour, Hugh, and John Fleming. \*The Visual Arts: A History\*. 5th ed. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1999.](#)  
N 5300 .H68 1999

[Stokstad, Marilyn, and David A. Brinkley. \*Art History\*. 3rd ed. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008.](#)  
N 5300 .S923 2008 Ref.

### Jalisco Art and Archeology

[Bell, Betty. \*The Archaeology of West Mexico\*. Ajijic: West Mexican Society for Advancement Study, 1974.](#) F 1219 .A734 1974

[Bradley, Douglas. \*The Lords of Life: The Iconography of Power and Fertility in Preclassic Mesoamerica\*. Notre Dame: Snite Museum of Art, 1993.](#)  
F 1219.3 .P8 B78 1993

[Kan, Michael, Clement W. Meighan, and H. B. Nicholson. \*Sculpture of Ancient West Mexico: Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima\*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum, 1989.](#) F 1219.3 .A7 L6 1989

[Townsend, Richard F., and Patricia Rieff Anawalt. \*Ancient West Mexico: Art and Archaeology of the Unknown Past\*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998.](#) F 1219 .A597 1998 Reserve

[Von Winning, Hasso. \*Pre-Columbian Art of Mexico and Central America\*. New York: Abrams, 1968.](#) F 1219.3 .A7 V6

### Pre-Columbian Art

[Emmerich, André, and Lee Boltin. \*Art before Columbus: The Art of Ancient Mexico, from the Archaic Villages of the Second Millennium B.C. to the Splendor of the Aztecs\*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963.](#) F 1219.3 .A7 E48

[Highwater, Jamake. \*Arts of the Indian Americas: Leaves from the Sacred Tree\*. New York: Harper & Row, 1983.](#) E 59 .A73 H53 1983

[Paz, Octavio. \*Ritual Arts of the New World: Pre-Columbian America\*. Milano: Skira, 2000.](#) F 1219.3 .A7 M85713 2000

### Mesoamerican History

[Carrasco, David. \*The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures: The Civilizations of Mexico and Central America\*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.](#) F 1218.6 .O95 2001 Ref.

[Coe, Michael D., Elizabeth P. Benson, and Dean R. Snow. \*Atlas of Ancient America\*. New York: Facts on File, 1986.](#) E 61 .C66 1986 Reserve

[Markman, Peter T., and Roberta H. Markman. \*Masks of the Spirit: Image and Metaphor in Mesoamerica\*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.](#) F 1219 3. M4 M36 1989

This reference guide is just the tip of the iceberg on helpful resources in the library's holdings. Many of the suggested resources above have their own bibliographies. Each of these may lead you to another resource that would also be helpful in your research here in the museum or in another library. To find additional resources, use keywords such as "Jalisco", "Mesoamerica", and "ceramics" in the online catalog and in periodical indexes. Once you find a few relevant titles, pay attention to the subject headings to identify similar materials. Examples of useful subject headings are:

*Indians of Mexico*  
*Indian sculpture--Mexico*  
*Mexico--Antiquities--Exhibitions*  
*Pottery*  
*Art, Primitive*

For guidelines about writing it may be helpful to look at Sylvan Barnet's *A Short Guide to Writing about Art*, which includes tips for looking, reading, and writing about art. Ask for it at the reference desk. At every stage of your work, please allow the library staff to help you. Contact us at 713-639-7325 or hirsch@mfa.org