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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ADDS OLDEST DATED SCULPTURE IN AMERICAS
TO THE GALLERY OF PREHISTORIC MEXICAN GODS

The oldest dated sculpture ever found in the Western Hemisphere, an extraordinary piece of dark green jade carved 2,000 years ago, has been added to the gallery of prehistoric gods and other early sculpture on display in the Exhibition of Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street. Carved in the likeness of an ancient Mexican deity, it measures barely 6 inches high and 4 inches at its greatest width. It is known as the Tuxtla Statuette and has been lent to the Museum by the United States National Museum of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.

The unique importance of the Tuxtla Statuette lies in the date carved on it. The figure is that of an old man with hieroglyphics cut into the sides and back of the cassock with which the figure is covered from the shoulders down. The head is somewhat pointed; the lower part of the sculptured face is masked by a duck-like beak extending like a beard down over the chest. Instead of arms there are folded wings beneath which appear outlined the legs and feet of a bird.

The statuette came to light when a field was ploughed in 1902 in the district of San Andres on the gulf coast of Mexico about one hundred miles southeast of Vera Cruz. Dr. George C. Vaillant of the American Museum of Natural History, New York, writes of the Tuxtla Statuette as follows:

"The inscriptions are well drawn. The Maya system of writing dates was by a system of counting in units of 20. Therefore the date on the statuette - 8.6.2.4.17 - stands for 17 days, 4 months of 20 days, 2 years, 6x20 years and 8x20x20 years. The numerical part of the dating can be read. The rest of the inscription cannot, but it probably relates to festivals and ritualistic subjects.

"The correlation of the Maya with the Christian calendar is subject to considerable controversy. The two main systems differ by 260 years. The Goodman-Thompson

system makes this date 162 A.D.; the correlation by Dr. H. J. Spindon 260 years earlier, or 98 B.C.

"While the system of writing is the same as that used by Maya, the carving of the sculpture is less finished and more nearly like that of the Olmec. The bearded figure carved on the back of the statuette also suggests the Olmec style. The piece, therefore, is of extreme importance since not only is the date very early but also the piece combines elements from two civilizations, the Maya and the Olmec. Thus the piece is historically as well as artistically significant."

The Exhibition of Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art through September 30. In addition to its weekday hours of 10 A.M. to 6 P.M. and its Sunday hours of 12 Noon to 6, the Museum is open every Wednesday night until 10 P.M.

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