Moskito people, Colombia, Lower Magdalena River

**Burial Urn with Seated Female Effigy Lid**

Late period, 1000–1500

Coarse ceramic with traces of white paint

Urn: 16 ⅝ × 8 ⅞ × 8 ⅞ in. (42.2 × 22.5 × 22.5 cm)

Lid: 16 ⅝ × 8 ⅜ × 8 ⅜ in. (42.2 × 21.3 × 21.3 cm)

Gift of Rod McGalliard

1995.28.167

Various styles of burial urns line the lower course of the mighty Magdalena River in northern Colombia; most of these regional styles have not been scientifically excavated but have been disturbed clandestinely. The Moskito style, to which this urn belongs, is among these. In a related region known as Tamalameque, large numbers of urns were placed in side chambers off shaft graves. Into these were placed bones gathered up after the flesh was gone. In the case of the Desana of the Amazonian drainage in southeastern Colombia, whom Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff observed ethnographically and described in his Amazonian Cosmos, the members wait for five years before exhuming the bones of a wise man; they then grind the small bones into a powder that they drink mixed with corn beer, and they bury the large bones in a pottery urn.

The absence of male genitalia on this seated figure identifies it as female. Males also have distinctive constricted calves deformed by ligatures probably made by beads, an historic feature of the Carib-language peoples of the Amazon and Orinoco, leading to the hypothesis that these Caribs moved into the lower Magdalena in the Late Pre-Columbian period. The urns of male lids are also decorated with bird-effigy handles, another feature lacking in urns with females seated on their lids. Throughout the Intermediate Region between the two high civilizations of Mesoamerica and the Andes, stools are identifiers of tribal leaders, specifically shamans, some of whom were female.