Zapotec people, Mexico, Valley of Oaxaca

**Seated Companion Urn**

Early Classic period, 300–500

White-slipped gray ceramic with traces of cinnabar

18 × 11¾ × 10¾ in. (45.7 × 29.8 × 27.3 cm)

Gift of Mrs. A. H. Spivack in memory of Dr. A. H. Spivack

C-80-12

Cylindrical urns, closed at the bottom, were placed in elite tombs of the Zapotec Indian civilization in the state of Oaxaca, especially around the ceremonial center of Monte Albán in the fertile central valley for which the culture was named. Traces of food and drink suggest that these urns contained a funerary banquet for the deceased, who was laid supine on the floor of the tomb behind them. Urns representing masked deity impersonators were flanked by companion urns, whose naturalistic faces are unmasked and whose bent arms and crossed legs are clearly visible, even if geometricized. These urns often were made in sets; an identical urn to this one appeared on the art market two decades ago. Both were larger than a single urn of this type that was excavated in Tomb 153 at Monte Albán in the 1940s and described by Alfonso Caso and Ignacio Bernal in *Urnas de Oaxaca*.

Identifiable as male by his bare legs and a thick loincloth flap hanging down in the front, this figure wears a plaque on his chest that has a stylized four-lobed flower with a jade disk in its center. His plumed headdress has on its front a monster mouth plaque based on the water glyph, a symbol explored by Howard Leigh in John Paddock’s compilation *Ancient Oaxaca*. These plaques make clear that the figure in front of this urn was formed from slabs of the gray clay common in the Valley of Oaxaca, even if the urn itself was formed by coiling, the standard technique of pottery making in Mesoamerica.