This firmly planted standing male figure represents a ritual performer, made sacred by the bituminous black paint covering his face and body; this substance is called chapopote in Hispanicized Náhuatl, the language of the Aztecs. The ethnicity of the Classic inhabitants of central Veracruz is unclear; they are often identified as Totonac Indians, who inhabited the area north of the port of Veracruz at the time of contact with Cortés. Just to the south lived Náhuatl-related people speaking its dialect, Náhual, who probably moved down from the highlands around the start of the Common Era. The closest parallel stylistically to this figure, with button-shaped pupils stuck into spindle-shaped eyes, was excavated in Protoclassic contexts by Alfonso Medellín Zenil at Nopiloa, well in the historic area of the Nahual-speakers, and discussed in his Cerámicas de Totonacapan. Important to note too is the head with similar features and headdress found by Medellín at Remojadas, in the Totonac zone, and reported in his 1960 article “Nopiloa” in La Palabra y el Hombre. The broad proportions of both the Nopiloa head and the Harn figure’s face relate to the style of Teotihuacán, the great city contemporary with the latter.

In both hands this figure clutches what Myra L. Englehardt identified as a rattle stick in the right hand of a similar figure in the Appleton Museum of Art in Ocala, Florida. Englehardt later suggested that the stick has cult implications, possibly to summon the gods when struck upon the earth. She therefore posits that the stick identified people associated with the Aztec god Xipe Totec, the deity of spring vegetation. Although overall in Mesoamerica black paint is associated with war, the complex makeup of chapopote confers a protective quality to the asphalt, rubber, and soot mixture and suggests this figure may be a priest, perhaps associated with the Aztec sorcerer god Tezcatlipoca, one of whose aspects is Xipe Totec. The lumps on the arms may represent cicatrization, encouraged by rubbing soot into self-inflicted wounds on the skin. The ring on which this figure stands, not found in other male figures of this style, may indicate its placement over an orifice, suggesting its location in a shrine.