



Dumbarton Oaks  
Research Library and Collection

# *Birds in Ancient Latin America*

**A Public Lecture by Professor Elizabeth Benson**  
Former Curator of the Pre-Columbian Collection, Dumbarton Oaks



The vivid colors of tropical birds were used by expert craftsmen to make garments and ritual objects for rulers in the early societies of the Americas, and have been used for many significant objects in more recent cultures. Birds are often thought to have special kinds of power or to represent power, as with the American eagle or the eagle on the Mexican flag. The birds themselves—macaws and quetzals, condors and harpy eagles—have traits that make them significant. For many centuries, birds have played a role in Latin American beliefs and folklore. In various places, the belief still exists that, if a shaman or healer takes a psychoactive substance and performs certain ritual steps, he can fly into another world like a bird. It is little wonder that birds are such frequent motifs in Latin American indigenous art.

**Thursday, October 29, 2009**

**5:30 P.M.**

**The Music Room**

**Reservations Required:**

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