PERU'S GOLDEN TREASURES

LIBRARY
OF THE
AMERICAN MUSEUM
OF NATURAL HISTORY

29.3

A55

8

1972915
G5A55
1978

PERU'S GOLDEN TREASUR

American Museum of Natural History
New York, New York
October, 1977 through January, 1978

Field Museum of Natural History
Chicago, Illinois
February through May, 1978

California Academy of Sciences
San Francisco, California
June through September, 1978

Detroit Institute of Arts
Detroit, Michigan
October through December, 1978

ES

This exhibition of pre-Columbian gold from Museo Oro del Peru is presented under the auspices of The National Institute of Culture, Peru, and was designed by the American Museum of Natural History, New York.

The participating institutions wish to acknowledge their appreciation to:

General Francisco Morales Bermudez, President of Peru . . . José de la Puente Radbill, Peruvian Minister of Foreign Relations . . . Otto Eléspuru Revoredo, Peruvian Minister of Education . . . Carlos García Bedoya, Peruvian Ambassador to the United States . . . Harry W. Shlaudeman, United States Ambassador to Peru . . . Dr. Jorge Cornejo Polar, Director of the National Institute of Culture, Peru . . . Miguel Mujica Gallo, Founder and General Director of Museo Oro del Peru . . . Lani Lattin, Executive Secretary, Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities, United States.

Authorization for the temporary export of the objects was granted in Ministerial Resolution No. 2671-ED-77 by the Government of Peru.

Indemnification of the items was awarded by the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Photographs in this booklet courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum.

PRE-COLUMBIAN CULTURES OF PERU REPRESENTED IN THE EXHIBIT

INCA: 1450-1532 A.D.

Their empire extended over much of the highland and coastal regions of western South America. Used lavish amounts of gold to adorn their temples; little survives.

CHIMU: 1000-1470 A.D.

Ruled a series of north coastal river valleys from Chan Chan, their capital. Great numbers of gold mortuary objects have been recovered from their tombs. Chancay culture, slightly to the south, was contemporary with them.

MOCHE: 200-700 A.D.

A north coast valley culture, less far-reaching than the Chimú. Their goldwork included skillfully executed figures in the round.

NAZCA: 200-500 A.D.

Inhabited a south coastal area including the desert plain famous for its lines and huge figures.

Fanciful animal forms dominate their rare cut sheet-gold pieces.

Successors to the Paracas culture, known for its unique embroidered textiles.

VICUS: 200 B.C.-300 A.D.

A northern inland culture, recently discovered and not well understood. The elegance of their style shows early mastery of working with gold.

FOREWORD

For many of us enjoying the riches of Peruvian civilization for the first time, it is important to note that the Inca with their famous empire and fabulous cities were preceded by numerous cultures covering a time span of more than two millennia before the arrival of the Spanish. During the long period when they flourished in various areas of Peru, these peoples developed large kingdoms, domesticated a whole array of food plants and produced textiles among the finest in the world. This exhibit presents examples of goldwork produced by several of these earlier cultures, particularly those which left their riches beneath the desert sands of the Peruvian coast.

Few regions were so blessed in the abundance of gold as Peru and few cultures exploited their riches with such technological and artistic ingenuity. Un-

fortunately, most of Peru's golden treasure was either collected in the vain attempt to ransom Atahualpa, the last native ruler, from his Spanish captors or was looted from thousands of tombs in the first centuries following the European invasion in 1532. Many tons of skillfully crafted golden objects were melted down for easier shipment and division among those who had little appreciation for their beauty and meaning, or for the achievement these pieces symbolized.

Only a tiny sample remains to us. But the magnificent collection assembled by the Museo Oro del Peru, in Lima, is more than enough to establish both the great creativity of ancient Peruvian civilization and the fantastic natural wealth available to it.

Pre-Columbian Peruvian culture areas
represented in the exhibit

INCA: Circa 1450-1532

In 1532, Francisco Pizarro conquered Peru, opening a whole new land of riches and a new era of growth and prosperity for Europe. At the same time, the Spanish conquest of the Inca empire brought to an end one of the world's great civilizations.

Legends of Peruvian treasure preceded Pizarro's voyage. In fact, the quest for golden riches partly inspired exploration of the New World. But despite many tantalizing finds of exquisite goldwork in Mexico and elsewhere in the Americas, really large quantities of the precious metal eluded the Europeans until Spanish conquistadors met the Inca ruler Atahualpa at the town of Cajamarca in the northern Andes. Taken captive, Atahualpa sent an order throughout his vast realm to bring gold and silver

from the temples and palaces. The metal the Europeans so prized was to have bought his freedom.

Calculations based on the list of gold objects assembled and their approximate weights and qualities suggest that as raw gold the ransom would have been worth about \$28,175,000 at the market price of August 17, 1977. There was much silver in addition. The Spanish invaders executed Atahualpa shortly after his fabulous ransom had been collected and divided it among themselves.

As the Spanish were more interested in the commercial value of the gold than in the beauty and use of the objects, they melted down all of the vast Inca treasure. Within a few years of the conquest, the systematic looting of cemeteries began, and most of the gold unearthed in this manner was also converted to ingots. Even most of the gold more recently excavated has come to us from treasure hunters who did not care about collecting information to document its history and meaning.

Yet, from fragments we can piece together a fascinating picture. What the Spanish wrote about what they saw, drawings on pottery that show gold in use, and occasional records of other objects included with gold in tombs give us at least a glimpse of a daily and ceremonial life as rich as the gold itself.

In order to understand the use and meaning of gold in ancient Peru, it is best to begin at the end, as does this exhibit. Although little Inca gold survived the melting pots, eyewitness accounts tell us something of its role in the rapidly collapsing empire.

Like peoples everywhere, the ancient Peruvians appreciated the beauty of gold and thus used it lavishly as personal adornment, both in life and in death. The large Inca shawl pins or *topus* (items 10 and 11, case 3) are elegantly simple examples. Their unencumbered, almost modern purity of form typifies Inca goldworking and other aspects of Inca arts.

The Inca himself, members of his family and others of noble rank had the right to use dishes and other objects of daily life fashioned from gold, such as the two small beakers (items 18 and 19, case 6). Such beakers, often quite large, were probably used

for drinking the maize beer called *chicha*. Many accounts describe public ceremonies during which participants consumed large amounts of *chicha*. The hospitality of the Inca and other leaders was an expected part of daily life, and the ability to provide such feasts was important to maintaining political power and influence. Using golden drinking vessels enhanced both the ceremony and the power and status of its providers.

Religious objects made of gold for the adornment of temples also characterize many cultures. The Incas dedicated their most famous temple to their chief deity, the sun, in Cuzco. Known as Coricancha, the golden enclosure, it was a great compound of buildings surrounded by a beautiful cut-stone wall built without mortar. The temple contained the most fabulous treasures of the empire. None of it remains.

A young Spanish soldier, Pedro de Cieza de Leon, described it in his chronicle of 1553 as follows:

It had many gates, and the gateways finely carved; halfway up the wall ran a stripe of gold two handspans wide and four fingers thick. The gateway and doors were covered with sheets of this metal. Inside there were four buildings, not very large, fashioned in the same way, and the walls inside and out were covered with gold, and the beams too. . . .

In one of these houses, which was the richest, there was an image of the sun, of great size, made of gold, beautifully wrought and set with many precious stones. . . .

There was a garden in which the earth was lumps of fine gold, and it was cunningly planted with stalks of corn that were of gold—stalks, leaves and ears. . . . Aside from this, there were more than 20 llamas of gold with their young, and the shepherds who guarded them, with their slings and staffs, all of this metal. . . . In a word, it was one of the richest temples in the whole world.

The use of gold in religion did not always reach the public scale of elaborate temples. Small figurines such as those included here (items 3 through 6, case 2), usually a much more personal expression of religion, were frequently left as a kind of offering in caves or other natural shrines. Only because of this practice did they survive the Spanish furnaces.

The long ear of the figurine wearing the hat indicates the importance of earspools in pre-Columbian Peru. Persons of high status had their ears pierced and stretched to accommodate these enormous ornaments. Noting this unfamiliar custom, the Span-
ish referred to such people as *orejones*, long ears. As a prime status symbol, earspools were made of various precious materials and intricately decorated. For example, the centers of the pair shown here (items 41 and 42, case 10) are set with a mosaic of mother-

of-pearl, turquoise, lapis lazuli, red spondylus shell and possibly jade. This pair and others are displayed in the Chimú section of the exhibit.

The lifelike Inca figurines represented people or animals for whom prayers were offered. After people, the llama and its close relative the alpaca were probably the characters most frequently portrayed in these small figures. Domesticated in the high Andean plain long before Inca times, these two camellike animals had different economic roles. The alpaca was raised for its fine wool; the llama served as a beast of burden and was also commonly sacrificed.

Following an unusual Inca custom, each ruler accumulated his own treasure rather than simply inheriting it from his predecessors. A 16th-century account states:

Inca figurines

Chimú earspools

Each dead lord has here his house and all that was paid to him as tribute during his life, for no lord who succeeds another can, after the death of the last one, take possession of his inheritance. Each one has his service of gold and of silver, and his things enclosed for himself, and he who follows takes nothing from him.

Pedro Sancho, 1543

As a result of this custom, the dead rulers did not have tombs in the ordinary sense of the word, but their houses continued to function, with staffs of retainers as well as the physical objects surrounding them in life. The mummies and associated cult objects regularly took part in the appropriate ceremonies of state.

Inca llama

CHIMU: Circa 1200-1470

Many of the customs documented for the Inca probably date back at least to the Chimú. Their kingdom, known as Chimor, was conquered by the Inca about 1470. In Chan Chan, the Chimú capital, each ruler built an enormous walled compound of adobe. The compounds included hundreds of storage chambers for food and very large burial platforms. The treasure accumulated by Chimú leaders was interred in tombs at Chan Chan and elsewhere in the kingdom.

Because so much of it comes from tombs, Chimú gold gives us insight into mortuary art and ritual. Many of the Chimú artifacts are simply the ornaments and symbols of status probably collected during life. But others relate specifically to death and its attendant ceremony. The golden burial gloves and the large masks, attached as a sort of face to mummy bundles, provide examples of gold specifically associated with death.

The golden gloves (items 20 and 21, case 8) are so extraordinary and rare that it is difficult to interpret their place in Chimú culture. Their rigidity strongly suggests, of course, that they were never worn except possibly in death. Each finger with its silver fingernail, the hand and the arm were formed separately and the parts then assembled with golden tabs. Figures with plumed headdresses, depicted in profile on the back of the hands, carry clubs and probably represent warriors. A comparison of decorative details on the two gloves, such as the headdress plumes, shows that they are not identical, a departure from the perfect matching usual for paired articles.

The eyes of the warrior figures have the upturned outer corners also characteristic of the mummy masks. This manner of portraying the eyes, known as the Lambayeque style, typifies goldwork from sites such as Pampa Grande in the Lambayeque Valley, north of Chan Chan. Much of the surviving Chimú gold comes from this area; discovery of the tombs there after the artistic and cultural value of

ancient Peruvian objects had become obvious saved the contents from conversion to bullion.

The several masks included in this exhibit, such

Chimú burial gloves

as item 62, case 15 (illustrated on cover) are excellent examples of Chimú mummy masks. They also point to interesting aspects of how the ancient Peruvians worked gold and certain of their attitudes toward it.

Detailed studies made at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology of masks similar to these show that they are not of pure gold but merely have a gilt surface. Far from reducing the value and interest of the masks, such studies underline the complex technology of ancient Andean metallurgy. Basically, Andean gilding worked by chemically removing the other metals (usually silver and copper) from the surface of a gold alloy, leaving an exterior layer of almost pure gold.

Gilding, of course, achieves a glittering golden expanse with a minimum of the precious metal. Economical use of gold no doubt played a role in the choice of gilding to make mummy masks and other large golden pieces. But still greater economies could have resulted from affixing gold foil to the surface of more common metal instead of beginning with, or in some cases producing, a gold alloy and enriching its surface by chemical means. On rare occasions that was actually done. One authority has suggested that ancient Peruvians may have felt the need for gold objects to contain some gold throughout. Their total "essence" had to be golden even if they consisted mostly of other metals.

And despite all the effort expended to achieve the golden surface of a mask, that surface was almost entirely covered with other materials. Inlays of silver and other metals covered the flanges which formed the ears; the eyes had insets of turquoise and other stones; feathers adorned parts of the mask, and virtually the entire face was often painted with materials such as cinnabar. Less than 10% of the gold surface could be seen. Why was the gold so hidden? We come once again to the important presence of gold throughout the object: once the gold surface had been established, the fact that it could not be seen appeared not to matter.

The color of many of the pieces in this exhibit can be traced to these gilding techniques and surface coverings. Frequently the enriched-gold surfaces have worn away, leaving silver and/or copper exposed. Oxidation of these metals can produce a gray or green coloration. The masks themselves retain traces of the original paint.

The very rare and well-preserved backrest of the Chimú litter (item 69, case 17) suggests the great splendor that surrounded royal travel. An eyewitness description of the arrival of Atahualpa in his litter to meet Pizarro in Cajamarca might also apply to the use of this litter by the Chimú.

The advance guard of Atahualpa's army began to enter the square. First came a squadron of people dressed in a red-and-

white check livery, who picked up the straws from the ground and swept the road; then more bands in different liveries, all singing and dancing, and after them a number of men with breastplates . . . medallions and gold and silver crowns, in the midst of whom came Atahualpa in a litter lined with multicolored parrot feathers and decorated with gold and silver plates. The ruler was borne on the shoulders of many men and behind him came two more litters and two hammocks containing persons of importance, who were followed by many more who wore gold and silver crowns. . . .

Francisco de Jerez, 1534

Chimú backrest of litter

Miniature funeral procession

Shirt covered with gold plaques

Similar pomp attended the litter of a deceased ruler on the way to burial, illustrated in the exhibit by the miniature funeral procession (item 70, case 18) with its carriers, household goods and plants. The litter was carried empty, however, and the mummy bundle borne separately, lashed to a pole.

In use, the decorated side of the backrest faced the rear, where it could be viewed; the plain side was originally covered or padded with cloth. The six richly painted "portals" of this piece may represent administrative buildings, and the gold staffs held by the figures may be symbols of office. Gold plates attached to the wooden frame (perhaps a type of acacia wood) form most of the costume of the figures. The original decoration probably included feathers, leather and cloth as well.

The small textile fragment (item 95, case 23) covered with gold squares still sewn with their original threads shows how fabrics were sometimes decorated with gold, a custom demonstrated on a large scale by the magnificent shirt (item 71, case 19) to which about 13,000 gold plaques have been resewn. A gar-

ment weighted down with so much gold could hardly have been comfortable. It may have been for a mummy; if worn by a living person, its use would have been limited to rare ceremonial occasions. The design on the exposed part of the fabric appears to be Inca, and the textile may have been made after the Inca conquest of the north coast.

The great number of beakers found in tombs (such as item 102, case 24) more likely symbolize wealth and pleasure in life than reflect a mortuary practice. As with the Inca, beakers almost certainly served chiefly as containers for the abundant maize beer that accompanied religious and political functions. In fact, the written evidence suggests that maize beer traditionally played a particularly important role in the social and political life of the north coast, and the quality and quantity of vessels a household possessed for serving it was likely to be an excellent index of status.

Beakers might be quite plain or adorned, like this one, with turquoise plaques and designs. Near the lip is a typical Chimú wave pattern. This beaker also

has the double base characterized by a false bottom in the container proper; a rattle occupied the chamber formed between the two bases. The exact function of the double base is unknown. Might the rattle have been a convenient signal for its user to indicate to his host that the golden goblet was empty?

MOCHE: Circa 200-700 A.D.

Moche goldwork has a more three-dimensional feeling than that of the Chimú. The Moche emphasized shaping and combining multiple sheets of gold and they added bangles, which gave their creations a very special shimmering appearance.

The spectacular feline figure, probably representing a puma (item 138, case 32) exemplifies these qualities. It combines a flat sheet-gold body and tail with a three-dimensional head probably hammered over a wood form or "mold." Double-headed serpents decorate the flat surface. The two sheets of gold that compose the body form a bag similar in shape and size to the cloth bags used for carrying coca leaves. Chewing coca leaves mixed with a small

amount of lime to liberate the cocaine was common, particularly among the nobility, and involved an elaborate ritual paraphernalia. Elsewhere in the exhibit are two small gold picks, each decorated with a bird (items 187 and 188, case 46), that may have been used to dip the lime from a gourd.

Few prehistoric cultures have left such a vivid visual record as the Moche of their customs and activities. Their highly realistic art, especially the painted and modeled ceramics, reveals a society with a complex religious life as well as an emphasis on warfare. The many aspects of daily life depicted include the plants and animals used by the Moche.

These ceramics also enable us to see how the Moche used gold, particularly items of personal adornment such as earspools. Men are also shown plucking out their facial hair with tweezers, a practical alternative to shaving because native Americans do not have heavy beards. These tweezers, generally crescent shaped, in some cases may have served as pendants attached to necklaces. They were usually of copper, occasionally of gold. The elegant crescent form of item 171, case 39 extends to represent a

Chimú beaker

Moche puma

Moche tweezer ornament

double-headed serpent. Depilatory tweezers were often used in conjunction with polished stone mirrors to complete the ancient Peruvian "shaving" kit.

In many parts of the New World, metal figurines and other three-dimensional objects were made by casting in molds formed around a wax model of the figure. The nest of the stingless American honey bee provided the wax.

Where wax was not readily available, as on the Peruvian coast, the production of figures in the round required a very different approach. Goldsmiths hammered sheets of gold into three-dimensional forms, often shaping them around models or molds made of wood or stone. The preformed sheets of gold were joined mechanically, as with staples or folded-over tabs, or metallurgically, joining the two pieces by a form of welding or by soldering through introduction of molten metal between them.

Moche jaguar

The exquisite small Moche jaguar (item 165, case 54, in the technology section) exemplifies this approach to the production of hollow figures. The figure is one of a group of at least seven essentially identical jaguars created in the same workshop, perhaps by the same goldsmith, and buried inside a mummy bundle washed out of a pyramid in the Lambayeque Valley in 1925. Several of these matched

jaguars have now been studied in detail, demonstrating the intricacy of their structure. Each consists of twelve separate pieces. Upper and lower parts of the body were separately hammered over molds and the two parts then joined by soldering. The same molds served to shape all of the animals. The front legs, tails and ears were each formed in halves and welded together. The completed appendages were then inserted into openings prepared for them in the body and secured by solder. Our knowledge of exactly how this jaguar was produced makes it one of the most fascinating articles ever found in Peru.

NAZCA: Circa 200-500 A.D.

The Nazca culture on the south coast did not produce gold objects in the great quantity of the north. Stylistically, their art is also quite distinct from that of the Moche. Although both styles are rich in animal motifs, the realism so characteristic of Moche remains largely absent in Nazca. Theirs was a style of delicate cut-metal sheets, and the figures they designed were more fanciful than realistic. Both the delicacy of the work and the use of extensions around the borders of masks and other pieces bring to mind the fine Nazca pottery and even the famous outlines of gigantic figures engraved in the desert earth of the Nazca plain.

The mask chosen for the introduction of the exhibit (item 1, case 1) illustrates this delicacy of form. It represents a human face surrounded by serpents as hair. The four perforations suggest that it was originally affixed to a mummy bundle.

The same vibrant lightness typical of the mask can be seen in the unusual sheet-gold birds or bats (items 184 and 185, case 42). The antennalike features projecting from the head may represent the bristles of a bird related to the whippoorwill. But it is not impossible that the head of a butterfly was combined with a bird's body; the use of curious animal imagery appears commonly in Nazca art. Most of the huge figures on the plain reflect these fanciful motifs, which also occur frequently in the ceramics

Nazca mask

Nazca bird

and textiles. They are successors to themes encountered in the fabulous embroideries of the Paracas civilization which flourished in the region earlier.

VICUS: Circa 220 B.C.-300 A.D.

The oldest objects in this exhibit come from the Vicus area, near the border of Ecuador. The Vicus culture was discovered quite recently, and both its date and cultural relationships remain uncertain. Already advanced in metallurgy, the Vicus provided a bridge between the beginning phases of Peruvian goldworking and the more developed stages demonstrated by the Moche.

Vicus gold is elegant in its simplicity. Metalworkers cut sheets of gold into basic forms and decorated them with simple impressed and embossed designs. Much of the decoration is abstract and geometric, but animal forms often appear.

Many items which would later become so important in the catalogue of Peruvian gold were already present in Vicus—most notably earspools and nose ornaments. These latter were attached to the nasal septum between the nostrils. They were large, usually completely covering the mouth. Though very different stylistically, in concept they resembled the Nazca mouth masks. Distant geographically, the two cultures probably overlapped in time.

The surface of some of the finest Vicus nose ornaments show silver on one half and gold on the other. The use of the two colors is symmetrical, as in the V-shaped piece adorned with a human face and two squirrels (item 200, case 49). Note that the symmetry and opposition of the design also carries through to the contrasting bands near the top.

The story of ancient Peruvian gold is far from complete. Its origins still must be traced, its complex technology better understood and the meanings of its mysterious uses deciphered. But even the small sample that survives makes evident that goldworking in pre-Columbian Peru represents a very special moment in the history of this most durable and valuable of metals.

Craig Morris

AMNH LIBRARY

100092560

American
Museum of
Natural
History

Central Park West at 79th Street, New York, New York