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Beyond El Dorado: power and gold in ancient colombia

Elisenda Vila Llonch

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Among the cultures of the northern Andes, gold has been revered above all other materials. Gold was believed to be a product of the Sun, the supreme procreator, and as such had special associations with fertility and power. For the people of Colombia, the value of gold lay in the symbolic and transformative properties associated with its color, aura and malleability and it was used to fashion some of the most visually dramatic and technically sophisticated works of art found anywhere in the Americas before European contact.

Drawing on the spectacular collections of the Museo del Oro in Bogota and the British Museum, this beautiful book features over 150 masterpieces fashioned exquisitely in gold, including tiny votive figures, decorative nose rings, vessels, pectorals and masks. Through these diverse objects, the author explores the myth and ritual of El Dorado (the golden man) and the legend of the lost city of gold that fascinated European explorers for over two centuries; the use of gold objects by spiritual leaders for healing, divination and guidance in the dangerous mystical ‘soul journey’; the importance of gold in marking the threshold between the living and the dead; and the legacy of pre-Hispanic traditions in the northern Andes today.

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