

Prehispanic Metallurgy and Votive Offerings in the Eastern Cordillera Colombia

Roberto Lleras-Pérez

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ABSTRACT

A sample of 3,001 pre-Columbian metal objects belonging to the Museo del Oro and to other museums and private collections, is described and analysed. The archaeological items are part of the metallurgical tradition which evolved in the central area of the Eastern Cordillera, Colombia around A.D. 600 to 1,500. The study is divided in two major parts: Part I deals with the classification, description and analysis of adornments with respect to their function, iconography, geographic distribution and archaeological context. The description of the metallurgical technology, employed for the manufacture of adornments and votive figures, is also included in this part. The methodology used is based on that developed by the Museo del Oro for the classification of its own collection; part of the work included the construction of a new scale for the accurate determination of the surface colour of gold, copper and silver alloys. Archaeological and ethnohistorical data related to the societies inhabiting the area, at the time of the production of metal objects, is used to interpret the information collected and to propose a new scheme, which considers the existence of three Sub-areas and three Styles within the region. Part II deals exclusively with votive items. A selective literature survey, compiles the main theories related to the function and significance of votive offerings among different societies, throughout the world. The classification system, based on the main iconographic attributes of the figures, underpins a descriptive section which explores the distribution of figures in the area, and the associations between the different types. Assemblages composed of two or more figures are also studied. The final chapter proposes a new interpretation of votive offerings among the Chibcha speaking communities of the Eastern Cordillera, based on the dualistic cosmovision which ruled the main iconographic patterns and the distribution and composition of assemblages.

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