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Exhibition Artifacts

Machu Picchu: Unveiling the Mystery of the Incas

More than 400 artifacts are a part of the traveling exhibition "Machu Picchu: Unveiling the Mystery of the Incas," on display at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County from June 22 through September 7, 2003, making it the largest exhibition of Inca artifacts ever mounted in the United States. Examples of these artifacts include:

A Royal Tocado Tunic

The Inca emperor had the prerogative of wearing a tunic completely covered with rows of complex geometric motifs, known as tocapu. The only surviving example of an Inca all tocapu tunic is displayed in this exhibit. While the meaning of the geometric symbols on the garment remains elusive, the all tocapu tunic provided an effective visual marker for the unique status of the Inca ruler and his great power.

Burial Cave Objects

The individuals interred at Machu Picchu were accompanied by their personal possessions, including the pottery they used for cooking and serving food.

The 1912 excavations recovered a wide range of items used in daily life including:

- Cuzco Inca style ceramic jar (aryballos) (1450-1532 AD)
- Provincial Inca style ceramic jar (aryballos) (1450-1532 AD)
- Ceramic plates decorated with bands of alpacas

Inca Metal Objects from Machu Picchu

The 1912 excavations yielded a wide variety of metal tools and jewelry. While some of these were produced at Machu Picchu by craftsmen working for Pachacuti's royal lineage (the Inca King), other items were brought to the country palace from distant parts of the empire.

Objects from this section are from the collection of the Yale Peabody Museum and include:

- Bronze axe
- Silver bracelet
- Bronze chisel
- Silver shawl pin
- Bronze knife and awl
- Copper T-shaped knife with crescent shaped blade

Ceremonial Knives

Animals, including llamas and guinea pigs, were favored gifts to the gods and special ritual knives were produced for the sacrifice. In many cases, these ritual tools were perforated so that they could be worn around the neck as pendants.

Artifacts on display include:

- Bronzed straight bladed knife with fisherman
- Bronze knife with pinwheel decoration on the handle
- Bronze knife with a finial depicting a bird holding a snake in its beak

Tools for Communication with the Sacred

In Inca times, objects called conopas or illas were used in rituals dedicated to the gods in order to ensure the fertility of animals, particularly the llama and alpaca herds. With many of these objects, ceremonial offerings, sometimes consisting of fat, coca leaves, maize and other items, were placed in the cylindrical hole in the back of the object, which was then buried along with prayers and offerings of corn beer.

Objects on display include:

- Stone carving of an anthropomorphic face with a spiral headdress, Cuzco, Inca (1450-1532 AD)
- Stone effigy of a bird, Cuzco, Inca (1450-1532 AD)
- Triangular stone effigy of camelids on a hillside, Cuzco, Inca (1450-1532 AD)
- Stone effigy of an alpaca with cylindrical depression for offerings, Cuzco, Inca (1450-1532 AD)

Inca Ritual Equipment from Machu Picchu and Beyond

During the excavations at Machu Picchu, the 1912 Expedition recovered a wide range of unusual items that probably were used in Inca religious rituals. Some were related to astronomical observations, some served as charms, and still others were used to make offerings of animals and corn beer to supernatural forces.

Objects on display include:

- Zoomorphic schist miniatures possibly representing a porcupine, a bird and a dog
- Bronze parabolic mirrors
- Jar from woman healer's cave burial
- Bone textile tools
- Bone shawl pin decorated with two "kissing" birds
- Bronze shawl pin (tupu) with jar-shaped head

Wooden Beakers

For the Incas, the drinking of corn beer (chichi) was central to all state and religious rituals, and this was usually done with decorated wooden beakers (qeros).

Gold and Silver Objects

Precious metals had symbolic significance for the Inca-gold was associated with the sun and silver was associated with the moon. Inca royalty, high-ranking officials and other favored individuals wore precious metal jewelry and used gold and silver vessels in their feasts. Special objects for religious rituals also were made of these sacred materials.

Artifacts on display include:

- Silver and gold male and female figurines
- Silver llama figurines
- Silver ear ornament
- Gold feather plume holder
- Seven gold birds
- Gold and silver beakers
- Silver bowl and spoons

Expedition Memorabilia

The three Yale-Peruvian scientific expedition to Machu Picchu were carefully planned and provisioned by Hiram Bingham III.

Objects included in the exhibition include:

- Bingham's Kodak 3A camera and Kodak panoramic camera
- Bingham's 1911 notebook recording the scientific discovery of Machu Picchu
- Entomology specimens collected at Machu Picchu in 1911 and 1912

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