

# **DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION OF GOLD ORNAMENTS**

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Description of the Collection of Gold Ornaments by Bryce-Wright

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**BRYCE-WRIGHT**

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COLLECTION OF  
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FROM THE  
"HUACAS" OR GRAVES OF SOME ABORIGINAL RACES  
OF THE NORTH WESTERN PROVINCES  
OF SOUTH AMERICA.

BELONGING TO  
LADY BRASSEY.

BY  
BRYCE-WRIGHT, M.A.I., F.R.G.S.,  
F.R.HIST.S., ETC.

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APPENDIX.

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DESCRIPTION OF A COLLECTION OF GOLD  
ORNAMENTS FROM THE *HUACAS* OR GRAVES  
OF SOME ABORIGINAL RACES OF THE  
NORTH WESTERN PROVINCES  
OF SOUTH AMERICA.

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BRYCE WRIGHT, M.A.I., F.R.G.S., F.R.Hist.S., ETC.

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DESCRIPTION OF THE GOLD ORNAMENTS FROM  
THE *HUACAS* OR GRAVES OF SOME ABORI-  
GINAL RACES OF THE NORTH WESTERN  
PROVINCES OF SOUTH AMERICA,  
COLLECTED BY  
LADY BRASSEY.



THE very interesting collection of gold antiquities from the north-western provinces of South America formed by Lady Brassey is certainly one of the most representative in this country. It includes not only a large series of personal and religious ornaments, illustrating the perfection to which the goldsmith's art was carried by the Indians, but contains also specimens of the various rarer implements, such as celts and chisels (all in the precious metal), which are not usually to be met with even in collections formed in the immediate vicinity of the graves themselves.

No class of objects is more obscure in their origin or history than the ornaments and implements used by the ancient Indians of Antioquia, Cauca, and Boyacá, which are the three states (forming a portion of the new republic of the United States of Columbia) from whence the whole of the specimens of this collection were procured. They extend from one de-



gree north latitude to the eighth parallel, and are bounded on the west by the Pacific Ocean.

In our investigations of the antiquities of the old world we are assisted to a very great extent by the more or less perfect system of writing, either hieroglyphical or in more distinct characters. Hieroglyphics were used in Mexico, but in this region no such system of recording events was practised. Although in one part of Antioquia, near Titiribe, some concentric and single circles with dots in the middle have been found carved upon groups of stones, still there seems to be no analogy between them and the tribes under consideration, such sculptures being found miscellaneous spread over different parts of America. Probably all these belong to another distinct race. Those peoples did not even make use of the *Quipus* or *Quipos* of the Peruvians. These *Quipus* were threads or fringes knotted in various ways, but the meaning which they were intended to convey was generally understood only by those who made them, and not always even by them. It was like the practice resorted to nowadays of tying a knot in one's handkerchief—the knot is found, but, alas! what does it mean?

The authorities, it seems, discountenanced any attempt to record their history. We are thus thrown back upon uncertain traditions, and the information that could be gathered by the Spaniards at the time of their occupation.

There seems to have been a considerable difference between the inhabitants of the north-western States of South America and those of Mexico, the latter possessing many elaborate sculptures, whilst the former seem to have sedulously discouraged their erection. The ruthless and barbarous character of the Spanish invasion no doubt caused a great destruction of the few contemporary monuments that might have thrown farther light upon their social, religious, and

political history; while to that greed of gold, and the cruelty and recklessness which seem ever to accompany it, we probably owe much of our present ignorance and inability to interpret the ideas which are symbolized in the curious ornaments and images represented in this collection.

The population of the country in former times was simply enormous. Mr. R. B. White<sup>1</sup> states: "It may be safely reckoned that the population of Cauca and Antioquia was not less than 2,000,000, and was more likely 3,000,000." One little state, that of Pacora, mentioned several times in the following catalogue, provided at one time a contingent of ten thousand men to fight the Spaniards. The country was divided up between many tribes, all of whom were cannibals, and of a very low type of civilization; and yet these were the makers of such beautiful objects! With customs quite distinct, tribes seemingly complete in themselves, and speaking different dialects, occupied patches of ground only a few miles in extent, into which incursions were always being made by one or the other, so that their lives were spent in continual warfare.

Between the mountainous districts of the Cordilleras and the sea coast, on the Pacific side, the country presents immense varieties of soil and temperature. Near the sea, on the lowlands, the heat is very great; but on the sides of the mountains and the elevated tablelands it is temperate. Above are the forests, containing many wild animals. It may be supposed that with such variety, corresponding to so many degrees of latitude, that portion of the human family inhabiting this district would present corresponding differences: hence we see that in the temperate parts a larger amount of average intelligence seems to prevail, such as in Antioquia,

<sup>1</sup> "Journ. Anthropol. Inst.," vol. xiii., No. 3.

where it is about fifty degrees. On the Pacific coast rain seems to be incessant, as it also is in the Atrato Valley and River San Juan. The tribes of Antioquia were the only ones in the districts under consideration that buried their dead in *tumuli*, surrounding them with their arms, implements, &c., in a similar manner to the northern nations; and in the case of rank or wealth, with pottery, as well as the whole of their weapons, ornaments, and other insignia in gold. The majority of the graves were rifled by the Spaniards, who melted down, without a thought of their antiquarian value, gods, ornaments, and implements, simply for the metal. Many of these *Huacas* contained ornaments of immense value, amounting, according to some authorities, to as much as £4,000, £8,000, and £13,000 respectively; so it is no wonder they were assiduously sought after.

The Indians were rather a short people, averaging from 5 ft. 6 in. to 5 ft. 10 in., with well-knit, muscular frames, but of slender make. The women possessed beautiful dark expressive eyes and good figures.

The gold was procured from quartz lodes; and, considering that the Indians only used stone implements, instead of gunpowder, as nowadays, it is marvellous that they worked so efficiently. It was procured nearly always by sinking shafts, not by driving galleries; and they very seldom searched for it in the washings of the rivers. That they were great adepts at working the gold when procured, a glance at Lady Brassey's collection will show.

By many of the natives of Columbia it was supposed that the Indians were in possession of some great secret which permitted them to render the gold soft like putty, and then harden it. This was in consequence of finger-marks being seen on the ornaments, which must, however, have existed in the moulds of clay.