



Female figure

On display**Title/Description:** Female figure**Born:** 1400 - 1532**Object Type:** Figure**Materials:** Gold alloy**Measurements:** h. 58 x w. 17 x d. 19 mm**Accession Number:** 151**Historic Period:** AD 1400-1532, 14th century, 15th century**Production Place:** Peru, South America, The Americas**Cultural Group:** Inca**Credit Line:** Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

Miniature human effigies, male and female, made of gold, silver, stone or Spondylus shell are one of the most widespread Inca artifacts, and this figurine is a typical example. It is hollow, and constructed from several joined pieces of sheet metal (cf. von Schuler-Schomig, 1972: 28-9). The face was made with the aid of a mould or die, and the hair is a separate unit. Seams making the joins between the edges of the sheets can be seen down the back of the figure and inside each leg. The soles of the feet were added after the legs had been formed. The metal is not pure gold, but an alloy containing silver and/or copper. After manufacture, the surface of the piece was enriched by a pickling process that removed the baser metals but did not affect the gold (Lechtman, 1973).

These figures have occasionally been found in graves (Dorsey, 1901: 255-6, pls. xl and xli), but more often as votive offerings at shrines and other sacred sites (for discussion see no. 90 and McEwan and Silva, 1989). Some of these effigies were originally dressed in miniature clothing, and there is a fine example from the frozen burial of Cerro El Plomo, Chile, complete with its feather head-dress, tunic, mantle, sash, necklace and silver dress pin (Mostny, 1957: pl. 13 and Jones, 1964: no.35). Other clothed examples are illustrated in Morris and Thompson (1985: colour plate vn) and in Levenson (1991: 591-2), and four more were discovered in 1985, with a sacrificed child, on Cerro Aconcagua in Argentina. These mountain-top sacrifices are reviewed by Beorchia Njigris (1985), Reinhard (1992b) and McEwan and van de Guchte (1992).

Entry taken from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection 3 volume catalogue, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997).

Provenance

Formerly in the Halifax Museum, Yorkshire, and acquired as part of an exchange by the previous owner.

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from K. J. Hewett in 1949.

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
