



Figure

On display

Title/Description: Figure

Born: 0600 - 1000

Object Type: Figure

Materials: Turquoise

Measurements: h. 38 x w. 24 x d. 22 mm

Accession Number: 152

Historic Period: 6th century, 10th century

Production Place: Peru, South Highlands, The Americas

Cultural Group: Huari

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

During the so-called 'Middle Horizon' (c. ad 600-1000), a powerful expansionist state, whose capital was at Huari in the Ayacucho Basin, brought much of south and central Peru under its control. Pottery, textiles and small portable objects in the Huari style were widely distributed during this period, as were these miniature figurines in a squat, heavy style reminiscent of much larger stone sculpture. This example is made of turquoise or chrysocolla ('false turquoise') and wears a tunic and a heavy crown. The top of the head-dress is hollowed out, and the figurine may perhaps have served as a snuff holder. This and comparable pieces in stone and silver are illustrated in the catalogue of an exhibition held in New York in 1963-4 (Jones, 1964: nos. 26-30).

Dorothy Menzel (1968: 51-2) gives a list of related archaeological finds. One figurine came from a tomb at Ocucaje, in the lea valley, but most of them are from votive caches. Valcárcel (1933) and Cook (1992) describe two offerings of this kind, buried below the floor of a single room at Pikillajta (Pikillaqta, or Pikillacta), a large site in the Lucre Basin occupied during periods 1 and 2 of the Middle Horizon (see also McEwan, 1983). One of the Pikillajta caches (now in the Museo de San Antonio de Abad, Cuzco, Peru) consisted of forty miniature figures, two valves of *Spondylus* shell, a *Stronibus* shell and a copper or bronze bar. The contents of the second cache are in the Museo de América, Madrid. This offering, too, consisted of forty figurines, buried with *Strombus* and *Spondylus* shell. The Pikillajta figurines included both females and males wearing clothing and jewellery indicating social status or ethnic identity. Cook argues that the figurines are linked with (typically Andean) ancestor cults through which kinship, hierarchy and inheritance were determined.

It is not clear whether the figurines were made at a single centre or were manufactured all over the Huari domain, but excavations at the capital have unearthed workshop zones with waste fragments of chrysocolla and part-finished items.

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

Provenance

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from K. J. Hewett in 1958.

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