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Publication Date

2017

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Repositioning the Middle:

Movement, Sculpture, and the Body in the Central Cauca Valley

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Art History

by

Anthony Joshua Meyer

2017

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Repositioning the Middle:
Movement, Sculpture, and the Body in the Central Cauca Valley

by

Anthony Joshua Meyer

Master of Arts in Art History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Stella Elise Nair, Chair

The Middle Cauca region in the northwest Andes has traditionally been portrayed as a provincial, stagnant, and culturally passive area. Its minimally adorned ceramic sculpture has been overlooked in favor of elaborate golden figurines and relegated as unsolvable and mysterious, since the vast majority of these objects come from looted contexts. However, in this thesis, I will challenge these assumptions.

First I present evidence that this “Intermediate Area” was in fact a vibrant center of artistic production and cultural exchange. In light of this, we cannot consider the cultures and the objects that they produced as belonging to provincial societies that simply absorbed ideas from a larger center. Second, by using early sixteenth-century chronicles, archaeological reports, ethnographies, and a close visual and material analysis of surviving objects, I demonstrate that

much can be gleaned from Middle Cauca *retablo* sculptures, specifically their artistic significance and the rich history of the cultures that produced them. I show how these sculptural forms, which date from A.D. 1000 to 1400, reveal evidence of vast trade networks stretching across the northern Andes. In addition, this evidence highlights the Middle Cauca's innovative engagement with concepts of gender, the body, and the afterlife. As we shall see, Middle Cauca artists sculpted the body to situate it within a larger cosmological structure and provide the deceased with enduring stability and guidance.

The thesis of Anthony Joshua Meyer is approved.

Hui-Shu Lee

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University of California, Los Angeles

2017

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Within any academic work, one must pay respects to the people and ideas that contributed to its realization. First I would like to thank the Latin American Institute at the University of California Los Angeles for awarding me a 2016 summer grant to research museological and archival collections in Bogotá and Medellín. I would like to give gratitude to the curatorial department of the Ancient Americas at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, who provided extensive documentation of the *retablo* sculptures in their holdings and granted me access to their Andean objects. Thanks, in part, to the conservation team and María Alicia Uribe at the Museo del Oro in Bogotá, whose conversations with LACMA on Colombian objects informed my own approaches to Middle Cauca sculpture. I would also like to acknowledge my advisor Stella Nair for her comments, the number of friends and colleagues who read various iterations of this thesis, and the copious amounts of Colombian coffee imbibed that gave nourishment not only to my sleep-depraved self but also to the work before you.

But, ultimately, this thesis is dedicated to the cultural groups of the northwest Andes, lost behind a deluge of centuries long oppressive interpretations and cultural biases, who nevertheless continued to produce and persevere following the invasion of their homelands.

Europeans arrived to the Americas in 1492 carrying two equally powerful afflictions: infectious diseases and damaging cultural biases. Since Europeans' inadvertent stumbling upon the continents, the history of the Americas has been devastated by the former and entrenched in the latter, engendering a mixture of misunderstanding and intentional distortion. These problematic habits are not confined to a distant colonial past, but rather, continue to shape and define how we understand the Americas today. An example is the region that is commonly referred to as the "Intermediate Area" by scholars, which began with the famed archaeologist Gordon R. Willey who claimed the region was defined by its lack of cohesion, slower advancement, and physical position between the two illustrious centers of Mesoamerica and the Andes.¹ This geographical construct has persisted over the past several decades as a palpably derisive concept, challenged only recently by archaeologists, but still passively accepted by disciplines such as art history.² It is this paradigm, in particular its lasting impact on the study of ceramic arts, I wish to expose and dismantle.

By examining the ceramic sculpture of the Middle Cauca in the northwest Andes, we can see how this region was, in fact, a dynamic center of artistic production and cultural exchange. In this thesis, I will show how a triad of Middle Cauca statues, housed in the Muñoz-Kramer collection at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, reveal critical clues that highlight inaccuracies in early colonial sources, allude to trade networks across the northern Andes, and

¹ In a passage from a larger compendium on South American indigenous peoples, Julian Steward and Louis Faron glibly comment that groups living within the regions of Ecuador, Colombia, and Central America culturally "borrowed from Mesoamerica and the Central Andes, for they were on [a] route of diffusion," echoing Willey's observations. Julian Steward and Louis Faron, "Warring Chiefdoms of the Northern Andes and Central America," in *Native Peoples of South America* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), 202.

² See the corpus of John W. Hoopes and Richard Cooke, both of whom have worked on broadening our knowledge of the region from 2001 onward. For a particularly compelling discussion of the Intermediate Area and its diversity: John W. Hoopes, "The Emergence of Social Complexity in the Chibchan World of Southern Central America and Northern Colombia, A.D. 300-600," *Journal of Archaeological Research*, vol. 13, no. 1 (March 2005): 1-16. For an introduction to how art historians have dealt with conceptual problems in the indigenous arts, see: Carolyn Dean, "The Trouble with (the Term) Art," *Art Journal*, vol. 65, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 24-32.

position the region as a dynamic and creative center whose art expressed sophisticated concepts of gender, the body, and the afterlife.

Initially, interactions with three objects housed at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art prodded my investigation of the Middle Cauca region (Figure 1). Many of these sculptures can be found in the collections of various modern-day museums, with sizable holdings in Colombia, Spain, England, and the United States, a result of precarious paths of circulation.³ Representing a small fraction of the vast Muñoz Kramer collection of northern Andean art, these statues exemplify the diagnostic phenotypes present in Middle Cauca *retablos*: seated figures presented in two genders, black-and-red painted bodies, strikingly disproportionate body parts, strategically placed holes for ornamentation, and carved etchings on the arms and legs. Constructed from approximately A.D. 1000 to 1400, these statues are what remain of a vibrant artistic center in the Middle Cauca Valley of present-day central Colombia.

After introducing the objects central to my study, I commence with the murky history of Middle Cauca scholarship following the invasion by the Spanish, tracing the development of misidentification and typecasting that has plagued the region and its study. Afterwards, I will contrast this information with that of scholars, which challenges us to rethink how we approach these sculptures. Within this historiography, I suggest that the term “Intermediate Area” developed out of an over-reliance by scholars on early colonial sources that ignore indigenous

³ These collections hold a number of figural vessels and *retablos* from the Middle Cauca region. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) has two figural and three *retablos* listed online; the British Museum (London) holds seven figural and three *retablos*; the Ethnologisches Museum (Berlin) has two figural, one *retablo*, and photographs of the Restrepo Tirado collection; the Museo de Américas (Madrid) has nine figural and seven *retablos*; the Museo del Oro (Bogotá) exhibits three figural and seven *retablos*; the Museo de Antioquia (Medellín) has one figural and three *retablos* on display; the Museo Nacional (Bogotá) displays three *retablos*; and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Los Angeles) has one figural and seven *retablos*. The Museo Quimbaya (Ibague, Colombia) also holds a large number, but the author has not received information from the museum as to the exact count. Many of these have attributes that raise questions in terms of their authenticity. Bruhns and Kelker states that around ninety percent of these statues are faked, but I believe her estimate to be rather high. For their take on the faking of Middle Cauca sculptures, see: Karen Bruhns and Nancy Kelker, *Faking the Ancient Andes* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press 2009), 110.

narratives. Next, I discuss artistic movement, object circulation, and aesthetic preferences that may have influenced and facilitated ideologies of complementarity and the afterlife in the Middle Cauca region. While this evidence is much later temporally and may be spatially displaced (the objects' exact cultural attribution is unknown), these contemporary observations can shed new light on large-scale and perhaps long-term cultural practices that may have informed the worldview of people who sculpted Middle Cauca ceramics. To conclude, the statues are connected to contemporary artistic tradition and an exhibition, *El Barro Tiene Voz*, at the Museo de Antioquia in Medellín, revealing the enduring legacy of indigenous arts in the northwest Andes and their extending prominence.

In concert with observations described in the exhibition, I argue for the rejection of terms like the “Intermediate Area” because they connote provinciality, periphery, and passivity. By rejecting these confining categories, I suggest we consider the Middle Cauca a center of artistic production and cultural exchange, where inhabitants were active participants in a dynamic system of cultural production with long-range networks of exchange. Within that geographic nexus, the Middle Cauca innovatively sculpted the body to position it within a larger cosmos so as to provide the deceased with a sense of stability and guidance.

The Muñoz-Kramer Sculptures: a Close Visual Reading

Removed from their original context, these looted Middle Cauca statues have been stripped of most of their associated historical and functional clues (Figure 2). Due to this deprivation, we must rely heavily upon a close visual and material analysis of these objects in order to begin to speculate how they were made, who designed and used them, and in what contexts they were employed, altered, and deposited. Rendered as both males and females in

tranquil postures, Middle Cauca sculptures, termed *retablos*⁴ by Colombian scholars, have expressive facial gestures and varying unique attributes that bestow on each statue a sense of individuality. The face in particular is a locus of many singular and informative details, including an accentuated nose, dwarfed ears, pursed lips, and resting eyes that provide indications of the represented individual's distinct appearance, character, and activities. The sculptures range from 15 to 25 centimeters and, although rectangular shapes dominate, some have triangular or, more aberrantly, ovoid-shaped heads (Figure 3). A variety of forms have been painted on the surface of the face and body, which heighten the sense of each sculpture's individuality. They are almost always represented sitting, yet the range of upper body postures provides a dynamic quality to the individual sculptures.

The Middle Cauca sculptures that form one part of the Muñoz-Kramer collection at LACMA, which are the focus of my research, are typical of Middle Cauca sculpture more broadly in their materiality, general forms, individualization of features, and depictions of upper body posturing. They are made of sandy, quartz-filled clay and appear to have been made by affixing slabs of clay and etching features with simple carving tools. The unwrinkled texture of the surface suggests the use of a smoothing tool and the presence of black residue from fire clouds on the sculpture bodies indicates their heating in open-air, low-oxygen kilns. There are two slips: a red used to cover the entire ceramic body and a black to produce the geometric lines on the face and torso. Large extraneous features, such as the nose, arms, and legs, were separately molded and attached to the pre-existing slabs. Although the formation of the clay body is relatively simple, the controlled firing and intricate application of two slips would have

⁴ The term *retablo* is derived from Spanish and refers to the 'slab' construction involved in making the sculptures. Because we do not know the culture that created these sculptures, it is inadequate to assign them a name in an indigenous language. Thus, to avoid confusion for the reader who consults the wider literature and in the absence of indigenous terms, *retablo* will be used throughout this thesis. If an appropriate indigenous term arises in the future, it should take the place of *retablo*.

required training and foresight. Given this expertise, artists would have likely been trained and held a special knowledge base as a class, which may have even been valued in the larger community.

Each figure exhibits a standard approach to bodily depiction, which shows that these objects likely came from the same culture and were intended for use in a shared, yet specific, set of functions. However, they also exhibit great variability in details, which created a sense of distinct individuals in specific moments of actions. Seated with its legs extended straight out in front, the first figure of this set exhibits a regal, serene upper body posture with arms bent on both sides angled in opposing directions (Figure 4). The second and third figures, whose physical similarities suggest that they were intended to be a correlative pair, are perched in a more relaxed pose, sharing the same serenity in the face and upper body as the first figure, but differing in the resting of both arms on the knees (Figures 5 and 6). The sculptures are mostly uniform in size, apart from a tendency to depict females as slightly smaller in stature. Simple etchings have been made on the face, hands, and arms; some seem to signify diagnostic features of human anatomy, while others appear to ornament the ceramic surfaces. The sex of each figure is indicated in a minimal fashion, dwarfed in comparison to the facial features, notably the accentuated nose. Having both genders represented equally hints at a desire for complementarity, but the diminished sex may hint that gender was either not a driving factor in that ideology or that sex was not an accurate reflection of one's gender.

Each figure has a rectangular head, emphasized by elongated, slit eyes, thin, pursed lips, and geometric lines that lengthen the horizontal axis of the face. The bodies of all three figures are cloaked in a variety of resist ware painted designs. These are slightly blemished, which implies that these figures spent a considerable amount of time consigned underground. Thus,

these objects were buried, likely intentionally, and may have been made not to be seen over long durations of time, but instead, were made as part of a ceremonial ritual of entombment or were meant to have a specific role or power in interment.

Within the larger corpus of works held in other museum collections, some are carved with headdresses, which often take the form of wings or feathers, while others exhibit holes lining the top of the head, piercing the nostrils, and placed in the palms of hands. These are lingering reminders of the ornamentation these sculptures once exhibited; possibilities include elaborate feather headdresses and gold works in the form of nose jewelry, earrings, or staffs of authority that may have further individualized the statues and complemented the ceramic bodies.⁵ This evidence only allows us to realize that something was attached to the sculptures on these loci, and we must thus look for other insights into what these objects were, what purpose they might have served, and how diverse they might have been in media, size, and quality. Etchings at the joint areas, such as the ankles, wrists, and knees, mark the presence of outer garments, perhaps indicators of cloth that once covered them. This attention to detail, down to the distinctively molded fingers and toes, evokes the important role of the body and individuality in Middle Cauca ceramic arts.

The Muñoz-Kramer sculptures echo this practice of bodily adornments, exhibiting similar characteristics in the headwear and ornamentation. The solitary figure's ceramic head transforms into a sculpted headdress, flanked with dendritic appendages. Perhaps, by including the headdress in the ceramic body, artists chose to highlight the role of the figure, which may have been considered an innate quality of the individual represented. For the pair, the artist placed

⁵ The male figure of the pair bears a nose ring, most likely a modern addition by a looter or dealer. Having rusted considerably, the ring is made of a material other than gold, which does not rust. Its green coloring suggests that it is fashioned out of bronze or copper, materials that did not exist in the Americas prior to the Iberian invasion and are thus anachronistic for Middle Cauca culture.

perforations on top as opposed to the forehead, revealing the exact locations of head attachments. What the adornments of this pair once were and what they, along with the headdress of the first sculpture, meant to the makers is unclear. But, it does suggest that adornment of the body, specifically the face and head, were important to the makers of these sculptures, as was mixed materiality.

While we can learn much about an artwork according to what is depicted, we can also extract meaning from what is missing, or where there is a lack of details. For example, in Middle Cauca sculpture, the backside of each *retablo*, in comparison to the façade, is bare, as ceramic artists focused their attention on stylizing the front. Each figure in the Muñoz-Kramer collection, similar to the larger corpus, has an absence of stylistic features on the posterior. In doing so, artists may have alluded to the importance of the front in the sculptures' functions or the role of the front in Middle Cauca ideology.

The posturing of the individuals ranges from a stoic resting of the hands to having hands and arms lifted into the air. The first figure has one open palm thrust toward the sky, as if he is caught mid-action, the dynamism of his movement a possible trace of his role as an individual or the function of the statue. Paired with the absence of detail on the back, we can assume that the sculpture was likely viewed from the front or, rather, that the meaning of each sculpture may have been best read from this angle. Perhaps the back was not intended for viewing at all, which may hint at how these sculptures were arranged and displayed once they were buried beneath the surface. So, the most pressing questions are why take the time and precision to accurately depict bodies if they are to be buried and removed from the view of the living, and who is the intended audience? At first glance, these bodies resemble the ones they accompany deep into the earth,

their reverent nature and closed eyes read as lifeless. But actually, as this visual analysis has shown, the more one views the statues, the more they seem to come alive.

The visual and material data of these looted sculptures that have been ripped from their original context are the only primary evidence we have to initiate our understanding of how these were made, who made them, how they originally appeared, and what meanings they once had. While some of the evidence gives us very clear indications, others lie among a sea of questions. Hence, we can turn to other secondary sources to uncover ways of understanding these oft overlooked sculptures, namely to the written accounts of colonial period travelers who passed through the lands where these objects were looted and studies conducted by scholars in the past century, who have investigated the cultures and landscape once homes to these objects. Finally, we can turn to ethnographic accounts by modern anthropologists who have investigated cultures whose practices may have deep roots in the region and unbox new ways of considering the context in which Middle Cauca practices may have been situated, used, and interpreted.

As we shall see in the succeeding pages, previous studies brought out critical new evidence while simultaneously introducing misconceptions. A critical analysis of this evidence is vital to our perceptions of Middle Cauca sculptors and their finished products. Since their first publication in the late nineteenth century as part of a private collection in Bogotá, scholars have endured the arduous process of piecing together the history of these enigmatic sculptures. Sixteenth-century Iberian chroniclers, namely Pedro Cieza de León, Pedro Simón, and Fray Pedro de Aguado, first recorded the art of the Middle Cauca, lumping figural work as ‘idols’ that were revered and worshipped by indigenous people. These same writers misrepresented Middle Cauca material as belonging to the Quimbaya culture, an error that continues today, but was first—and only—vehemently rejected by archaeologist Karen Bruhns during her fieldwork in the

1960s. Prior, the statues had solely appeared in brief descriptions by famed looter Luis Arango Cardona and early twentieth-century Colombian archaeologist Luis Duque Gómez. At the hands of looters like Arango Cardona and the Spaniards before them, the contexts of these statues have suffered extensive damage, which has left little to be uncovered by archaeologists in the last century.

What happened as a result is that scholars diverted their focused studies to other regions in the northwest Andes that have not been as illicitly intercepted. This has left the Middle Cauca and its associated material culture largely pushed aside, and Bruhns its only in-depth investigator. But even so, Bruhns addresses the region with an archaeological approach, focusing little on actual objects. This is where the art historian intervenes. Until now, no art historical analysis had been conducted on Middle Cauca *retablos*. As we shall see, by looking individually at these objects' details that arose in our initial visual analysis, we can connect missing parts of the puzzle, allowing us to make tenable claims regarding the objects' roles and functions. More importantly, ceramic arts reflect the decisions and exchanges that Middle Cauca artists made, repositioning the region as a prominent artistic center in a dynamic network of trade and movement in the larger northern Andes.

Chroniclers of the Cauca: Pedro Cieza de León and Pedro Simón

To grasp at the complexities of these objects, we must scout for clues in the early colonial writings from people who passed through the region in which these sculptures were made and used. Lying in the central region of Colombia, the Cauca Valley is a lush, verdant assemblage of irregularly sloping mountains carved by a sweeping river. The valley extends northward from the modern-day city of Cali in the southwestern part of the country to the source of the Sinú River,

which eventually empties into the Caribbean. In the heart of this tropical valley lie the vestiges of the collection of people who we identify as the “Middle Cauca” culture, located in the modern departments of Quindio, Risaralda, Caldas, and southern Antioquia (Figure 7). Situated between two major mountain ranges, the valley exhibits a variety of climates, from humid jungle in the north to drier, colder climates as it approaches the Andes. Rich alluvial soils enhanced by degrees of volcanic ash create an arable environment, though wide variations in temperature and rainfall fluctuate the potential of certain types of crops.⁶ Although beneficial for cultivation, the high amounts of rainfall and acidic soil do not allow for the adequate preservation of archaeological material, primarily organic objects such as cloth, wood, and bone.

When Iberians arrived in the Cauca Valley in the late 1530s, the sculptures were no longer being produced. But, traipsing this tropical environment with a colonizing and gold-plundering agenda, Iberians were met by a brimming diversity of cultural factions who spoke different languages (Figure 8). North of the Carrapa River lived the Arbi and Picara, who were the eastern neighbors of the Pozo. To the south of the Pozo lived the Paucura, inhabitants of the Pácora River Basin located south of Arma territory. The Arma lived near the Cenufana, one of the three cultural groups scholars believe are descended from the Sinú archaeological culture, contemporaneous to Middle Cauca culture. Occupying the area between the Cauca River and the eastern Cordillera were, in the words of many Spanish chroniclers, the “bellicose” and “fear-mongering” Quimbaya.⁷ Tovar Pinzón, a Colombian historian who calculated the sizes of

⁶ Juan and Judith Villamarín, “Native Colombia: Contact, Conquest, and Colonial Populations,” *Revista de Indias*, vol. 63, no. 227 (2003): 114.

⁷ Gregorio Hernández de Alba, “Sub-Andean Tribes of the Cauca Valley,” in *Handbook of South American Indians*, ed. Julian H. Steward (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1948), 308-09.

various indigenous groups living in Colombia prior to the arrival of the Spanish, estimated in the 1990s that the Quimbaya were around 25,000 in number by the early sixteenth century.⁸

At the onset, Spaniards labeled the Middle Cauca artifacts, like the *retablos*, and sites as the ancestral remains of the Quimbaya. For centuries thereafter, non-indigenous scholars and writers believed that the Quimbaya were a static group that had lived continuously in the valley, reaching far back into the ancient past. This mistaken notion led archaeologists and looters to erroneously associate the Middle Cauca as part of the Quimbaya culture. The acceptance of early colonial narratives as truth, at the expense of indigenous ones, has been a long-standing problem within the study of indigenous history, hindering our ability to understand indigenous art and culture. In fact, subsequent research demonstrated that the Quimbaya had only recently arrived to the region in the sixteenth century from their previous home in the north near the Carrapa River.⁹ According to their own accounts, or at least those related by Iberian chroniclers, the Quimbaya did not inhabit the valley until 1450 after they relocated from the south, asserting physical control of the region through warfare.¹⁰

Although mired in bias and written through a European subjective lens, colonial documents do provide certain knowledge about the interaction and customs of indigenous groups in the sixteenth century that aid in our framing of the cultural and environmental settings in

⁸ Villamarín, “Native Colombia,” 114. Villamarín also includes numerous maps detailing the locations of several indigenous groups when the Spaniards entered the Cauca Valley. Similarly, Barney-Cabrera has determined that the Cauca Valley had a population density of 50 to 100 people per square kilometer. For his analysis, see: Eugenio Barney-Cabrera, *Historia del arte Colombiano: Arte precolombino*, ed. Manuel Salvat (Bogotá: Salvat Editores Colombiana, 1975): 26-32. For a more general demographic survey of tribes in the Cauca Valley from 1542 onwards, see: Juan Friede, “Los Quimbaya: aportación documental al estudio de la demografía precolombiana” *Revista Colombiana de Antropología* vol. 2 (1962): 303-18.

⁹ Luis Duque Gómez, *Los Quimbayas: Reseña etnohistórica y arqueológica* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1970), 32.

¹⁰ The Quimbaya peoples moved in from the south. Archaeologists used the modern culture name to identify the artifacts of the Middle Cauca. Through this academic establishment, it became difficult to amend the appellation. Sam Enslow, *The Art of Prehispanic Colombia: an illustrated cultural and historical survey* (North Carolina: McFarland, 1990): footnote 46.

which the sculptures are found. For this reason, scholars have gravitated toward and heavily relied on these sources. But, as I will demonstrate, one must approach these texts in a nuanced way to tease apart fact from fiction, especially when searching for information on the *retablo* statues. Two chroniclers in particular, Pedro Cieza de León and Pedro Simón, provide detailed accounts of their campaigns through the region of present-day Colombia.

Born circa 1520 in Extremadura on the Iberian Peninsula, Cieza de León, the son of a shopkeeper, was trained at a local parish school. Apart from his rearing as a Catholic, little is known about his childhood.¹¹ In 1536, at the callow age of sixteen, with little more than a rudimentary education, Cieza landed with an expedition troupe in the bay of Cartagena and, shortly thereafter, accompanied the group along the gulf of Uraba near the present-day Panamanian border to visit the Spanish settlement of San Sebastian de Buena Vista. It was not until 1538, however, that Cieza traversed the mountains of Abibe and advanced southward through the Cauca Valley, observing the groups that lived there.

Under the direction of Pedro de Vadillo, the then interim governor of Santa Marta to the north, the first leg of Cieza's journey reached its end in Popayán to the south. Cieza primarily inspected—without taking notes—groups and resources endemic to this stretch of land. A later expedition supervised by Jorge de Robledo returned up the Cauca River, conquering various indigenous groups they encountered along the way so as to gather an economic workforce for northern-based mining operations. Robledo would later meet his demise at the hands of the natives he violently sought to control. After this combative leg, Cieza began to record the majority of his observations on the Cauca cultures in 1541 at Cartago, three years after he had traversed the terrain.

¹¹ Noble David Cook, "Introduction," in *The Discovery and Conquest of Peru: Chronicles of the New World Encounter*, edited and translated by Alexandra Parma Cook and Noble David Cook (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 5.

Colored by the vivid, vitriolic language familiar to Spanish chroniclers, Cieza mixes historical details with incessant, demonizing mentions of “savages,” “devils,” and “bloodthirsty cannibals.” Particularly noteworthy, though, are his descriptions of material culture and its usage by the inhabitants of the Cauca region. In Antioquia, after condemning them as flesh eaters, he remarks upon the beauty and splendor of their gold objects. Iberians had a great propensity for resplendent gold, arriving in the Americas with fiscal agendas, overjoyed by the metal’s abundance in the northwest Andes. These penchants often confused indigenous peoples who valued gold more symbolically than economically. Many of these objects were excavated by Iberians, who on one occasion discovered a vault in Antioquia with a western entrance that held many vases filled with fine ornaments of gold.¹² The fact that these shaft tombs are so heavily plundered is a testament to the volumes of gold works they likely contained and the reasons why *retablos* have been stripped of their ornamentation. Working within an Iberian ideology, looting, an awe of gold, and a fear of non-Christian practices are transparent in Cieza de León’s writing. For instance, he describes the appearance of trophy heads outlining the doors of political houses and how great tombs were built to house the wrapped and ornamented bodies of leaders, ferried into the afterlife alongside inebriated wives and servant lads who were conjointly buried alive. Based on the sheer number of small hills in Antioquia, presumably marking subterranean tombs,

¹² “...when the Spaniards came there, digging in a certain part, they found a vault with the entrance towards the setting sun, in which there were many vases of very fine ornaments of gold, altogether more than 21 quintals, worth upwards of 40,000 ducats...” Pedro Cieza de León, *The Travels of Pedro Cieza de León, A.D. 1532-50, contained in the First Chronicle of Peru*, trans. Clements Markham (New York: Burt Franklin, 1864), 48. “...y cauando en cierta parte, hallaron vna bóueda muy bien labrada, la boca al nascimiento del sol: en la qual estauan muchas ollas llenas de joyas de oro muy fino: porque era todo lo más d veynte y veynte y un quilate: que montó más de quarenta mil ducados.” Cieza de León, Pedro de. *Crónica del Perú: Primera Parte*. (Lima, Perú: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1984): 53, original fol. 23v.

Cieza estimated the population to have been quite large, which supports the notion of the Middle Cauca as a populous center.¹³

His observations of Popayán just to the south are similar. He notes that indigenous people carried a multitude of carved wooden figures in the form of both cats and humans, which were supplicated in return for agricultural prosperity.¹⁴ Akin to the indigenous residents of Antioquia, those living in Popayán placed their deceased political leaders in large vaults, entombing the body space with gold possessions, clothes, and weaponry. The Quimbaya mimic these cultural patterns in his documentation, although Cieza never saw any of their tombs, for he claims, “it is rumored that there are great sepulchers in this valley.”¹⁵ He addresses his section on the Quimbaya with less detail—probably because he had witnessed them three years earlier—describing them as consumers of flesh only during grand celebrations and as practitioners of great magic. However, Cieza presents two biases that become part of later archaeological ventures and scholarly studies. First he relates the Cauca region as one of continuity, in which the boundaries between cultural traditions of disparate groups are ill defined, later mirrored in the coagulation of the “Intermediate Area.” He also mistakenly connects the Quimbaya culture with the tombs of the Middle Cauca, an observation that future scholars do not begin to impugn until the latter part of the twentieth century. Thus, based on his remarks, it is with Cieza that an assumed relationship with the term “Intermediate Area” began, one that I challenge.

¹³ Ibid., 51.

¹⁴ “...amongst these canes they place certain boards on which they carve the figure of a devil, very fierce, and in human form, with other idols and figures of cats which they worship. When they require water or sunshine for their crops, they seek aid from these idols...” Ibid., 59. “Entre estas cañas teinen puestas algunas tablas, donde esculpen la figura del demonio muy fiera de manera humana, y otros ydolos y figuras de Gatos en quien adoran. Quando tienen necesidad de agua o de sol para cultiuar sus tierras, piden (según dizen los mismos Indios nautrales) ayuda a estos sus dioses.” Cieza de León, Pedro de. *Crónica del Perú: Primera Parte*. (Lima, Perú: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1984): 62, original fol. 28r.

¹⁵ Ibid., 85.

Although he did not witness the sculptural objects I am investigating, Cieza does provide us with useful evidence in reconstructing the history of the Middle Cauca *retablos*. We know that he is witness to several anthropomorphic “idols” throughout the Cauca Valley, which would have likely encompassed *retablo* sculpture, and notes their bearing of gold jewelry. He describes indigenous peoples in many communities as wearing beautiful necklaces, earrings of fine gold, and crowns made entirely of plumes.¹⁶ Artists could have translated this imagery onto ceramic *retablos* to further convey individuality and group affiliation. Interestingly, the only sculptural medium he explicitly mentions is wood. It is probable that *retablos* were made of wood in addition to clay, though with humidity and acidic soil conditions, they would have dematerialized underground. The vast presence of these “idols” in the burials and living spaces he mentions attests to their importance to indigenous peoples and help us to better speculate their—and the Middle Cauca objects’—possible functions.

Pedro Simón, another Iberian writer, provides more utile information on the Cauca region, the context for the sculptures I assay. He was educated in the convent of San Francisco in Cartagena and arrived in the Americas to teach Franciscan theology. In 1608, as a provincial minister, he accompanied Juan de Borja on the conquest of the Pijaos, documenting his observations of indigenous peoples that would later provide the backbone for his *Noticias Historiales* in 1623. Specifically, he discusses encountering numerous wooden statues of diverse sizes plated in gold. These statues were divided into a roughly equal number of male and female representations and found alongside other anthropomorphic figural renderings in graves.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid., 64, 70.

¹⁷ “...veinticuatro ídolos o bustos de madera, como unos grandes gigantes, todos planchados de oro fino desde la cabeza a los pies: estábanse mirando unos a otros, la mitad de ellos con aspecto figura de hombres y la de frente de mujeres: cada cual tenía una como mitra o tiara de finísimo oro, bien tallada, en la cabeza, y de un hombre a otro de los que se estaban mirando, sustentaban una vara gruesa, y de ella colgaba una hmaca en que echaban el oro que ofrecían los indios en aquel gran santuario, que era el común de todo el pueblo...” Pedro Simón, *Noticias*

Graves were marked with trees built on top of the funerary sites and included a categorically broad litany of items from ceramic vessels to food.

Anthropomorphic vessels, like the *retablos*, have been uncovered in similar gendered arrangements by both Bruhns and Arango Cardona.¹⁸ These archaeological data bolster Simón's observations, making them useful in our discussion of Middle Cauca *retablos*. However, vital to bear in mind is that Simón consulted older documents and largely copied his observations from previous chroniclers, like Juan de Castellanos and Fray Pedro de Aguado,¹⁹ evincing the role earlier works had in shaping the ideas of subsequent writers. Ironically, Simón points out that the Pijaos' souls were saturated with "idolatrous" beliefs that had been passed down over generations.²⁰ One could consider the transcription of generalizations and negative characteristics from chronicler to chronicler as evoking a similar idea.

Although lacking indigenous input, mentions of sculpture and gold in the works of Simón and Cieza de León allow us to note the presence of objects like the *retablos*, their possible ornamentation, the spaces in which they were located, and how they were arranged. By acknowledging the backgrounds of these writers, the time that passed between seeing and recording, and their co-dependence on one another's texts, we can peel back the intricate layers of bias to expose valuable information and early viewings of Middle Cauca material culture.

Historiales de las Conquistas de Tierra Firme en las Indias Occidentales, vol. 4, pt. 3 (Bogotá: Casa Editorial de Medardo Rivas, 1892), 31.

¹⁸ Bruhns uncovered a total of twelve anthropomorphic vases in one tomb in the Middle Cauca with an equal number of the vessels flanking the deceased on each side. Karen Bruhns, "Ancient Pottery of the Middle Cauca Valley, Colombia" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1976). Luis Arango Cardona also notes a grave in La Tebaida having twelve clay figures divided by the figure of a man and woman in coitus. Another in Armenia contained "...diez y seíz estatuas de barro, la mita de machos, que estaban ordenados así..." Luis Arango Cardona, *Recuerdos de la Guaquería en el Quindío* (Bogotá: Luis Tamayo Cia., 1924), book I, 146.

¹⁹ Juan de Castellanos, *Aventuras de Varios Ilustres Varones* (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1972). Pedro de Aguado, *Primera Parte de la Recopilación Historial Resolutoria de Sancta Marta y Nuevo Reino de Granada de las Indias del Mar Océano*. Bilbao: Espasa Calpe, 1930.

²⁰ "...por tener la idolatría tan embebida en el alma y heredada de tantas generaciones atrás..." Ibid., 45

Approaches of Middle Cauca Scholarship in the Twentieth Century

Middle Cauca sculptural objects are not comprised of fine metals and were not forged in a way to attract the attention of art collectors for most of the colonial and nation-building periods. Hence, there is no mention of these objects until the twentieth century, when archaeology in the region launches in earnest. Much of this work took for granted the assumptions made in the colonial writings. For instance, chroniclers had set a precedent that assumed monotony among northwest Andean cultures and their statues as mere “idols,” reflections of ancient, inferior, and pagan ways. In the early twentieth century, when archaeologists entered the scene, there was an attempt to categorize the material culture of the nation into neatly packaged regions and time periods. At this point, Colombia was in its infancy as a nation and, like many Latin American countries in this era, was trying to define its national identity and historical past.

For example, in 1938, the Colombian archaeologist and ethnologist Gregorio Hernández de Alba outlined the general characteristics and decorative styles of each region, first labeling the Middle Cauca material as both Quimbaya and Quindío.²¹ Hernández de Alba was nationally renowned as an interlocutor with indigenous groups, evidenced by his close involvement with the indigenous arts and literary group Movimiento Bachué, making his complacency with Quimbaya all the more puzzling. Three years later, American anthropologist Wendell C. Bennett researched the valley, borrowing Hernández de Alba’s categories without questioning their validity. Bennett selected only the most important characteristics and produced a generalized ceramic seriation, lumping together Quimbaya ceramics and Nariño, a cultural group to the

²¹ Hernández de Alba’s publication is titled *Colombia: Compendio Arqueológico*. Luis Duque Gómez, *Colombia monumentos históricos y arqueológicos* (Mexico: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1955), 72.

south, as part of a ‘middle period’ due to their concurrent use of resist-ware techniques. He, like most archaeologists of the period, primarily looked at holdings in national collections without the involvement and perceptions of indigenous peoples themselves.

In an attempt to reclassify the art of the northwest Andes, which included Middle Cauca sculpture, early efforts were undertaken by Luis Arango Cardona, a famous Colombian *guaquero*,²² or looter, turned preservationist who recorded his observations in the field. He is known for founding the village of La Tebaida in the department of Quindío, a point that showcases his intimacy with the region’s archaeological remains. Arango Cardona excavated—clandestinely—in Quindio with his brothers, but also traveled around Manziales and Magdalena to the north.²³ He defined three distinct artistic regions according to large swatches of similarities: the northern region was the area of black monochrome ceramics; the Quindio region, essentially the territories of those groups highlighted by Cieza de León, were corralled into a category predicated on the use of negative resist painting; finally, the western region was characterized by a heavy sand temper in the clay body.²⁴ The *retablo* statues problematize his categories, as their negative resist painting and coarse temper place them both in the Quindio and western regions, revealing the shortcomings of these early, supposedly definitive, classifications.

Despite having a questionable background as a looter, scholars viewed Arango Cardona’s reflections as informative and useful. Many adopted his categories as the foundation for their own investigations. Initial surveys conducted by Luis Duque Gómez in the early 1940s expanded Arango Cardona’s divisions to four: Northern, Northwest, Western, and Quindio. Early

²² The term *guaquero* is derived from the word *huaca*, a Quechua term for an ancient site or spot. In short, *guaquero* are those that clandestinely excavate these sites. For a behind-the-scenes look at these *guaqueros*, see: Karen Bruhns, “The Methods of Guaquería: Illicit Tomb Looting in Colombia,” *Archaeology*, vol. 25, no. 2 (1972): 140-43.

²³ Arango Cardona, *Recuerdos* (1924).

²⁴ Duque Gómez, *Colombia monumentos*, 76.

archaeologists had difficulties in distinguishing between the cultural groups within each region, re-emphasizing Cieza de León's and Simón's implications of the area's cultural continuity and situating the material culture of these groups into mystifying, indiscernible boxes.

This tradition lingered until the works of Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, Duque Gómez, Karen Bruhns, and Armand Labbé from the middle of the twentieth century onward. In 1965, Reichel-Dolmatoff, a German-Colombian archaeologist, substantiated the claim that Quimbaya was a name used indiscriminately to refer to a girth of artifacts stretching from the central Cordillera through the Cauca Valley, loosely defined by the existence of negative resist painting. In reality, the Quimbaya had little to no personal connection with these archaeological materials, occupying the Cauca Valley for only a brief stint prior to the appearance of Europeans. Within that same publication, Reichel-Dolmatoff issued that "Quimbaya should not be applied to the thousands of ceramic vessels," including the *retablos*, attributed to the Cauca Valley.²⁵ But, ironically, he made no attempt to redefine the cultural regions, simply inserting quotation marks around Quimbaya when discussing the material culture throughout the remainder of his text. He did, however, divide the Cauca cultures into smaller groups, incorporating the style names "Calima" and "Malagana," but in the company of the ever-persistent "Quimbaya." At the onset of the 1970s, Duque Gómez continued his efforts to differentiate between various sub-cultures, re-addressing the fallacy behind the name "Quimbaya," but inevitably followed Reichel-Dolmatoff's handling and left the term intact. Moreover, he presented an argument that occupations in the Caldas territory are extremely old, most likely culturally isolated throughout their development.²⁶

²⁵ Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Colombia. Ancient Peoples and Places Series* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1965), 102.

²⁶ Duque Gómez, *Los Quimbayas*, 116-20.

Karen Bruhns, who excavated the Middle Cauca region in the 1960s for her dissertation, was the first to systematically define the occupations. Surveying over sixty sites, she divided the Quimbaya material into two complexes: Caldas and Middle Cauca.²⁷ Ceramics of the Middle Cauca include black-on-red and black-on-white resist ware, found primarily in the northern part of the valley. The later Caldas complex, on the other hand, contains red-and-black resist ware ceramics harnessed from sites that were neither as numerous nor as large as those of the Middle Cauca. These sites demonstrated a cultural shift from inhumation to cremation and were located in Quindio, Risaralda, and Caldas. It is within the later Caldas complex that the *retablos* have been placed, as many of those that have been uncovered in graves hail from these smaller sites. Through this research and her subsequent work, Bruhns moved the study of the Middle Cauca in a positive direction, winnowing cultural groups of the Cauca Valley from one another temporally and spatially, while blatantly maintaining a distance from the term “Quimbaya.” Her work mainstreamed the gradual adoption of these subdivisions in future work and museum display within Colombia and Los Angeles.

A decade later, former curator of the Bowers Museum Armand Labbé, in a large volume on the various archaeological culture areas in Colombia, grasped the plurality and complexity of Middle Cauca history. In his section on the region, he inventoried the vast array of cultural factions inhabiting the valley today, as well as notated their connections and lack thereof to the material culture long attributed to them. Although he, too, amassed the remains under a Quimbaya heading, he did offer insight about the dynamic movement of Middle Cauca peoples. He suggested numerous waves of contact with cultures of Central America based on certain

²⁷ Bruhns, “Ancient Pottery of the Middle Cauca Valley,” 1976. For an earlier account, see: Karen Bruhns, “Stylistic Affinities Between the Quimbaya Gold Style and a Little-Known Ceramic Style of the Middle Cauca Valley, Colombia,” *Ñawpa Pacha: Journal of Andean Archaeology*, no. 7/8 (1969): 65-83. For a later built-upon version, see: Karen Bruhns, *Archaeological Investigations in Central Colombia*, no. 606 (BAR International Series: Tempus Reparatum, 1995).

stylistic attributes that will be addressed in the next section of this thesis.²⁸ His progress and innovative push would be short lived, however, as political quandaries in Colombia during the 1990s stymied archaeological investigation until the most recent excavations in Ciudad Perdida of the north and Calima-Malagana to the southwest.²⁹ These studies encourage a deeper interaction with the cultural material of the indigenous past, integrating ethnohistory to avoid the previous stereotypes that beleaguered twentieth-century scholars.

Yet, the “Quimbaya” designation remains resilient, stamping the majority of didactic texts in museums and catalogs. Though most scholars are aware of the problematic association, it prevails as a habit, creating false knowledge through its advertisement to wider publics. In perpetuating this untrue association, the same allied notions of indigenous intransience used by Iberian chroniclers and twentieth-century writers flourish and persist. It continues an original, untenable claim that the indigenous peoples of the Cauca had remained in situ since their arrival to the area centuries ago, incapable of movement, interaction, and trade.

The reliance on colonial sources for information about prehistoric cultures, though useful in certain aspects as shown with respect to the *retablos*, encouraged researchers to give credence to their impartial statements on cultural continuity and passivity, placing the Middle Cauca on the periphery of larger civilizations and not as an active center in its own right. In doing so, the *retablo* sculptures were associated with the periphery and pushed aside in favor of objects from larger centers, their full potential unrealized. Elaborate ornamentation, detailed individuality, and symbolic arrangement are alluded to in colonial sources and later scholarly texts, but hidden behind erroneous non-indigenous terms like the “Intermediate Area.” Headings like this shroud

²⁸ Armand J. Labbé, “The Quimbaya Region: Artists, Graves, and Cannibals of the Middle Cauca,” in *Colombia Before Columbus: The People, Culture, and Ceramic Art of Prehispanic Colombia* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 83.

²⁹ For recent publications, see: Giraldo, Santiago. “A Tale of Cities Lost and Found: Rediscovering Ciudad Perdida and the Lost World of the Tairona.” *Popular Archaeology*, vol. 15 (June 2014); Cardale de Schrimppff, Marianne. *Calima and Malagana: art and archaeology in southwestern Colombia*. Bogotá: Pro Calima Foundation, 2005.

the Middle Cauca as an insignificant region of inquiry, its material culture's dynamic meanings and uses largely unexamined and unexplored.

This dependence on non-indigenous texts and histories, common across the study of indigenous art across the Americas, has until recently discouraged and ignored the voices of indigenous peoples themselves. Perhaps if scholars had listened to local ethnologists,³⁰ as well as indigenous peoples, in the 1950s, they would have also realized that cultures of the Cauca Valley had unique characteristics to the rest of the Americas, revealing the particularities of place, local creativity and invention, as well as serving as examples of the diversity and complexity of these indigenous arts across the Americas.

Cauca Sculpture and the Movements of Artistic Technology in the Northwest Andes

Misidentifications and scholarly mishandlings aside, the Middle Cauca was a cradle of budding artistic development, producing a variety of handcrafted ceramics like the *retablo* sculptures at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Figure 1). It is from closely analyzing these objects, their forms, materials, decorations, facture, and function that we can apprehend a greater understanding of artistic development in the Cauca region, as well as insights into artistic exchange, the body, perceptions of gender, and spatial practices. In particular, by considering these sculptures in light of a material culture and ethnographic approach, our understanding of indigenous art in the “Middle Americas” is transformed.

Known as being a pivotal center for gold production in the early centuries A.D., some of the earliest cast figures from the northwest Andes are sourced to the central Cauca Valley. It is not until after A.D. 800, however, that intensive ceramic production emerges in the

³⁰ Victor A. Bedoya, *Pijaos y Quimbayas: Los Grandes Ríos Amazonas, Orinoco y Magdalena; Romance de Ibaguè* (Bogotá: Biblioteca Nacional, 1950), 174.

archaeological record. In conjunction with an exponential growth in the population density of the Cauca Valley, vessels and sculptures took on a variety of forms and functions, ranging from simple spindle whorls for spooling fibers to complex anthropomorphic jars for storage.

Particularly notable are an assortment of seated figures referred to in the literature as slab figures, or *retablos*, connected with the Caldas complex from A.D. 1000 to 1400, eponymously named as such due to the prevalence of these objects at sites in the national department of Caldas.

As the innovation of these sculptures reveal, artists must have had a great deal of technical knowledge, which suggests the Middle Cauca was an area well versed in artistic production. Slab figures are typically rendered as both males and females in reverent postures, bedecked with polychrome geometric designs. Classified as either *coco* (hollow) or *macizo* (solid) based on their construction, the *retablos'* intricate handmade characters have captivated looters and archaeologists alike. The slab figures are coarsely tempered with high levels of quartz, evident in the iridescent inclusions that appear beneath raking rays of light. Firing was most likely achieved in an open pit or hearth due to the extreme variability in the color of the paste. Many of these figures wear a high percentage of fire clouds, a further indication of a large presence of carbon and reduced oxygen control common to hearth-like kilns. *Retablos cocos* were manufactured in a two-part construction process: a coiling technique to create the hollow body and a slab technique for the limbs and head. In the *retablos macizos*, the coiling technique is omitted and the entirety of the vessel is executed in slabs. Geometric patterns are applied with a resist ware technique in which the decoration is outlined in a local plant resin onto a black-slipped ceramic body. Portions to remain red are blocked out with clay slip that does not affix to the resin. The vessel is then hovered above an open flame until the resin chars, creating a black design that permeates the surface. Once cooled, the sculpture is then brushed to remove the

masking resin and reveal a lustrous black-on-red design. Although most exhibit this highly technical black-on-red treatment, some do contain vestiges of yellow paint. These materials were all locally procured, but, as will be revealed later, the slab technology is similar to production techniques in the central Andes, like those of the Chancay, and was possibly borrowed.

To understand how ideas may have come in and out of the Cauca area and resulted in these sculptural ceramics, we need to remember the central element in their environment: the river. This allowed the Cauca Valley to be a hotbed of trade and movement, not just of objects but also of indigenous people and ideas (Figure 9). The Cauca River itself provides a reliable form of transportation, as it connects the mountainous regions of the western Amazon and the northern highlands, linking inhabitants of the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. Overland travel through areas lying outside the river valley is fraught with adversity due to the densely vegetated rain forest. By contrast, the interconnected riverine systems made movement easy, facilitating trade and communication that would have been otherwise hindered by a virtually intractable tropical and vernal environment.

Although the traditional paradigm of the Americas is that native peoples were largely bound to a small region and rarely migrated beyond, evidence suggests this was not the case. For instance, sixteenth-century documents refer to Aztec, presumably Nahua, trading colonies located along the Caribbean coast of modern Costa Rica stretching down into Panama, settlements that had existed far prior to an Iberian occupation.³¹ It is widely known that migrant peoples from the Valley of Mexico relocated to present-day El Salvador and Costa Rica just over a thousand years ago. These cases reveal that the area north of what is now Colombia, in what is

³¹ Markets in the Gran Nicoya region were called *tianguetz* by local Nicarao, which is derived from the Nahua word *tianquiztli*. These traders were likely placed to obtain gold and cacao. Richard Cooke, "Prehistory of Native Americans on the Central American Land Bridge: Colonization, Dispersal, and Divergence," *Journal of Archaeological Research*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2005): 135-36; 155-56.

often referred to as “Central America,” was indeed a bustling, vibrant center that attracted migrants and goods from far more northern regions.

The northern Andean region was an equally dynamic area that attracted people and goods, this time often from the south. Cieza de León describes communities in the Amazon as having close sociopolitical ties to peoples in the northern Andes. The presence of macaw feathers and types of hardwood from the Amazonian rain forest in Andean factures and constructions corroborate this connection.³² American archaeologist Donald Lathrap has contentiously argued that the upper Pachitea basin in the Andes was occupied by groups of Arawak-speakers who had trekked southwestward from the Amazon into Ucayali and upstream the Pachitea between 1500 B.C. and A.D. 650.³³ Deep into the past, a plurality of indigenous peoples were traveling and migrating in many areas surrounding the Cauca valley, creating a dynamic, diverse center. Essentially, people and materials entered the Northern Andes and valued goods went out.

This energetic movement can be seen in artworks made of gold. The movement of gold artifacts from the central Andes to Mesoamerica has been substantially traced in the works of various scholars. In 2008, anthropologist Ana María Falchetti completed an examination of more than 200 Darién gold pendants housed in collections at the Museo del Oro in Bogotá and the Metropolitan in New York.³⁴ The earliest form of metallurgy originated in the central Andes almost four thousand years ago and slowly traveled to the Middle Cauca region by the early centuries A.D. Once the technology arrived in the Cauca Valley, techniques flourished, producing the magnificent specimens showcased in exhibitions museum visitors behold today.

³² Stefano Varese, “Relations between the Andes and the Upper Amazon,” *Latin American History: Oxford Research Encyclopedias* (2016): 7, accessed July 3, 2016, doi: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.103.62.

³³ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁴ Ana María Falchetti, “The Darién Gold Pendants of Ancient Colombia and the Isthmus,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, vol. 43 (2008): 39.

Radiocarbon testing on cores sampled from Quimbaya and Muisca gold objects show these styles as fully developed by this time.³⁵ Early forms were strongly linked to metallurgy practiced in the central Andes, executed primarily in shaped metal as opposed to cast. Subsequent innovative experimentation in the northwest Andes developed *tumbaga*, a gold-copper alloy, and an elaborate wax-model casting practice to fabricate these intricate works. Local goldworking styles in the Cauca Valley thus developed rapidly, beginning foremost in the Calima area and advancing into the Middle Cauca. Goldwork in the Cauca Valley exhibited a high variability of methods, from depletion gilding to casting, employed to fashion earplugs, multi-strand necklaces, ligatures, pendants, and full-bodied seated figures (Figure 10). These gold sculptures represent highly realized figures with detailed facial features and ornamentation, the astounding result of a single cast, and bear resemblance to ceramic *retablos*.³⁶ By virtue of these innovative gold creations, the Middle Cauca existed as an artistic center at the close of the first century, attested in the fact that many of these objects were circulated as far north as the Valley of Mexico.

Apart from traveling far distances, Cauca objects were also disseminated widely. Based on stylistic traits that are particular to the pendants of the Cauca Valley, Falchetti showed that many were distributed from what is now Panama to the Yucatán, with a special concentration in the Atlantic watershed of modern Costa Rica. Though she ascribes this phenomenon as primarily caused by a movement of technology, as the makeup of materials indicates they were probably procured locally, it nevertheless supports that trade and communication occurred between indigenous peoples and that Middle Cauca goods were in high demand, especially beyond the

³⁵ Karen Bruhns, *Ancient South America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 180.

³⁶ Falchetti, "The Darién Gold Pendants," 51.

valley.³⁷ Indeed, most of the metal ornaments found in present-day Panama were first produced in the Cauca Valley and then redistributed. Elites obtained these objects either from traders, itinerant artisans, or acquired them on diplomatic journeys to Cauca manufacture centers.³⁸

Interestingly, gold production began to decline around 900 A.D., eventually becoming non-existent in the Middle Cauca, replaced by ceramic production. Instead, the focal point of gold output was repositioned in the north until the arrival of the Spaniards.³⁹ Simón comments that the area between the Darién and Magdalena, which contained the northern center, had the finest gold veins, while the Cauca Valley produced meager amounts of gold in the 1570s. Yet, canoe travel effectively distributed these goods throughout Magdalena and beyond.⁴⁰ Once established, the Spaniards would later greatly exploit these same mines, extracting the mineral resources and shipping them across the Atlantic to the Iberian Peninsula and then onto other parts of Europe.⁴¹ It is possible that gold and metal sources had been depleted in the Middle Cauca and artists were forced to supplant sculptural needs with a different medium.

If gold technology followed a certain path after its introduction, traveling north along the Andes, why not ceramics or ceramic technology? Because of the impressive aesthetic quality of gold objects and their extreme value for Europeans and European diasporic communities, ceramics, particularly those more modestly worked such as the Middle Cauca sculptures, have received little attention by scholars. This means that there has been very little scholarly attention

³⁷ Two pendants were found in the Cenote of Sacrifice at Chichén Itzá, a Postclassic Maya site in the Yucatán, Mexico. *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁸ Cooke, "Prehistory of Native Americans," 152.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴⁰ "...se navega con gran frecuencia de anoas, con canaletes y bargos grandes a la sirga, hasta entrar en el río de Nechi y llegar a la misma ciudad de Zaragoza..." Simón, *Noticias Historiales*, vol. 4, pt. 3, 132.

⁴¹ Luis Duque Gómez, "El oro de los indios en la historia de Colombia," *Boletín del Museo del Oro*, vol. 28 (1990): 9-11.

to the creation, use, meaning, and circulation of ceramics such as the *retablos*, particularly by art historians. Thankfully, archaeological excavation like Karen Bruhns's work in the 1960s and 70s revealed that ceramics from these regions were moving. Several vessels from what is now Panama were found at various sites in the central Cauca, as well as works that define other culture areas in and around the valley. Even the *retablo* statues themselves reveal traces of distant cultures that either traversed through the valley directly or whose objects passed through the hands of local indigenous groups. Thus, when considering the sculptures of the Middle Cauca, we must realize that not only was the region historically a major center of artistic production, materials, and a locus for immigrants, but it was also a center through which people, materials, and objects came and passed on their travels to far-reaching places.

For example, Armand Labbé suggests that Caribs entered the northwest Andes and replaced tribes in the Middle Cauca around 1000 A.D., at the onset of the Caldas complex.⁴² His conjecture is grounded on the concurrent appearance of urns, which hint at cremation as a new form of post-mortem deposition, a predominant Carib custom. Moreover, the inclusion of incised patterns on the appendages of each statue, non-existent until the Caldas complex, recalls Carib cultural motifs. Ligatures are used to restrict blood flow to certain parts of the body, making the individual appear swollen, and thus stronger (Figure 11). Among the Pijaos in the southwestern sector of Caldas, ligatures remain a popular custom among women.⁴³ Recent mtDNA studies have shown that two groups of Chibcha speakers migrated into the northwest Andes, detailing

⁴² Armand J. Labbé, "The Quimbaya Region," 83.

⁴³ Duque Gómez, *Los Quimbayas*, 143.

one pre-1492 migration from lower Mesoamerica into the northern and central regions, possibly reflecting a Carib immigration.⁴⁴

Artistic affinity can be very useful in showing cultural contact, in particular with the Middle Cauca sculptures. A striking correlation also exists between these Middle Cauca statues and Chancay ceramics from the central Andes. Similarly lacking in its archaeological documentation, the Chancay culture reached an apex during the Late Intermediate period, roughly A.D. 1000 to 1450, the same timeframe given to the Caldas *retablos*. These standing figures were wrapped within funerary bundles and placed around the deceased, and scholars believe they embodied a surrogate audience for burial rites and commemorative ceremonies (Figure 12).⁴⁵ Although not precisely identical, the number of similar attributes is uncanny: perforations to insert ornamentation line the top of the forehead, the geometric painting of the face and upper body in black design, dwarfed sex characteristics, the quick, cursory quality in the formation of the objects, and their similar deposition patterns. No other statues mimic these semblances so concretely in the Americas. Given their close resemblance and similar techniques, it is highly likely that the two cultures—either in person or via their objects—were in close communication, possibly along the same trade networks that slowly maneuvered the knowledge of gold production (Figure 13). By A.D. 1000, the paths of circulation would have been well established, allowing for these stylistic attributes to travel quickly and be emulated. This

⁴⁴ María Claudia Noguera-Santamaría et al., “Mitochondrial DNA analysis suggests a Chibchan migration into Colombia,” *Universitas Scientarium*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2015): 261-78.

⁴⁵ George Lau, “Ancestor Images in the Andes,” in *Handbook of South American Archaeology*, ed. Helaine Silverman and William H. Isbell (New York: Springer, 2008), 1039. For more information on Chancay ceramics generally, see: Rose Lilien, “A Study of Central Andean Ceramic Figurines (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1956); A.L. Kroeber, “The Uhle Pottery Collections from Chancay,” in *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology*, vol. 21, ed. A.L. Kroeber and Robert H. Lowie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1926), 265-304; Cecilia Bákula, “The Art of the Late Intermediate Period,” In *The Inca World: The Development of Pre-Columbian Peru, A.D. 1000-1534*, ed. Laura Laurencich Minelli (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 113-14.

transference with the Andes is further advocated by the presence of Quechua loan words in the indigenous languages of present-day Colombia, particularly those of the Cauca and Arawak groups of the Amazon.⁴⁶ Perhaps these linguistic vestiges reflect a historical migration route from the coast across the Cordillera into the upper Amazon or by dint of a trans-Andean trading corridor.

A few researchers have attempted to connect cultures in and around the Cauca Valley with those found in the Andes, pointing to Middle Cauca modeled pots as resembling those of the Mochica, or the double-spouted jars as relationally Nazca.⁴⁷ Apart from objects, some have also drawn similarities between agricultural and historical practices. Bruhns compared the field system of Quindio to the ridged fields termed *huachos* in the central and south Andes that continue to be vital to modern communities.⁴⁸ Interestingly, she claims that this agricultural innovation reached the Middle Cauca sometime during the Middle Cauca complex, approximately 800 to 1200 A.D., possibly alluding to an Andean connection prior to the forging of *retablos* during the Caldas complex. Others have argued that similar redistributive norms appearing in Andean political systems emerged near provincial areas like Bogotá and Quito.⁴⁹ In short, intensive maize cultivation on colonized mountain slopes permitted the easy storage of agricultural surplus, which would then have to be redistributed by community leaders, who

⁴⁶ This may have occurred prior to the Spanish invasion, but it is also widely known that Spaniards spread Quechua in the Andes, so the phenomenon may have later origins. Varese, "Relations between the Andes and the Upper Amazon," 5.

⁴⁷ Steward and Faron, "Warring Chiefdoms," 207.

⁴⁸ Karen Bruhns, "Prehispanic Ridged Fields of Central Colombia," *Journal of Field Archaeology*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1981): 4.

⁴⁹ Joanne Rappaport, *The Politics of Memory: Native Historical Interpretation in the Colombian Andes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 35.

eventually controlled a greater proportion of the means of production. No doubt this would have impacted ceramic production as well.

Other scholars have noted shared cultural traits that connect the Middle Cauca with groups much farther south in the Andes. In her extensive study of the Gran Cumbal community in the Nariño area of Colombia, Joanne Rappaport found parallels between their experience of history and the ideologies of other groups in the Andes.⁵⁰ History is experienced through everyday activity, the past considered to be located in front of the observer, while the future is behind, invisible to the faculty of sight. Clearly, many of the groups in and surrounding the valley harbor ideological and technological influences from cultural centers in the Andes. Therefore, to understand Middle Cauca ceramics, we must acknowledge that the community who created them had a long and complex history of interaction with a diversity of cultures and regions across the Americas, both north and south.

These scholarly studies provide yet another advantageous lens through which we can begin to apprehend the larger cultural and historical milieu of Middle Cauca ceramic sculptures. The region served as a dynamic center in the early centuries A.D., producing gold works that were circulated and marketed up North America, as far as the Valley of Mexico. Eventually, these technologically advanced pieces were replaced by complex ceramic technology, perhaps due to a change in resource availability or medium preference. As artists worked within this new medium, they borrowed motifs and techniques from cultures much farther down in South America, such as Chancay, to satiate desires for ideological representation, possibly in the same manner as with gold centuries earlier. Although indigenous groups of the Cauca and elsewhere in the northwest Andes were adopting or imitating certain aspects of Andean cultures, they still

⁵⁰ Joanne Rappaport, "History and Everyday Life in the Colombian Andes," *Man*, vol. 23, no. 4 (Dec. 1988): 721. See also: Joanne Rappaport, "Geography and Historical Understanding in Indigenous Colombia," in *Who Needs the Past? Indigenous Values and Archaeology*, ed. Robert Layton (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 88.

retained unique identities and disseminations, byproducts of deliberate selections and refinements in techniques. This is especially true of the Middle Cauca, whose object distribution was fettered to the western part of Caldas, suggesting that *retablos* of this style were an innovative, local tradition.⁵¹

Ceramic Sculpture and the Stabilization of Death

Many have purported this possible exchange as an interaction between the passive cultures of the northwest Andes and the active cultures of the central Andes, situating the Cauca Valley merely as a provincial blank canvas that absorbed the spilled ink of other indigenous groups and material culture flowing through the region. In reality, I suggest that artisans in the Cauca strategically selected and borrowed attributes to adapt to their cultural and spiritual needs.

Complementarity appears to have been a concern of people living in the Middle Cauca and was visually expressed in their ceramic sculptures. In fact, cultural groups throughout the northwest Andes and proximal Uribe region are highly attuned to the idea of complementarity and it is a driving force in their spiritual ideology. We can see this in the pairing of male and female elements in the artistic production of indigenous culture within the northern Andes and the Amazon, both in the past and the present. For instance, looters have noted the placement of male and female figurines and anthropomorphic vases near the heads of the deceased, separated by a horizontal axis, as early as 800 A.D. (Middle Cauca complex) and possibly until 1400 A.D. (Caldas period).⁵² The importance of complementarity can also be seen in museum collections, such that mirrored pairs of figures can be found in numerous collections, hinting at the

⁵¹ Karen Bruhns, "Precolumbian Cultures of the Middle Cauca Valley/ Las Culturas Prehispánicas del Cauca Medio," in *Quimbayas* (Bogotá: Banco Popular, Fondo de Promoción de la Cultura, 1990), 27.

⁵² *Ibid.*

importance of having both genders artistically rendered. This gendered pairing is so prevalent that Labbé suggested in his later analyses that most seated females from the regions of the Middle Cauca and Highland Nariño, which borders modern Ecuador to the south, were companion pieces to male sculptures.⁵³ In a grave located in La Tebaida, twelve clay figures were separated, possibly according to gender, by a figure of a man and woman in coitus, the sexual union of male and female.⁵⁴

One critical source of information has largely been ignored by art historians and archaeologists of the Middle Cauca: ethnography.⁵⁵ These sources provide crucial insights into the distinct ethnic groups that operate in and around the Middle Cauca's cultural sphere, and thus provide possible clues into the worldview of the sculptures' makers. For example, several indigenous groups in Colombia narrate origin myths with a strong gendered component. The Kogi of northern Colombia in the Sierra Nevada believe that four pairs of men and women founded the first four lineages that populated the world.⁵⁶ These lineages wandered in the cardinal directions, bestowing each cosmological realm with a dual-gendered structure as a way to harmonize each space. The villages of the Kogi are further divided into two sections by means of an invisible line. Ceremonial houses mimic that division, diametrically parted between two entrances to separate male and female members during congregation. Two carved posts depicting

⁵³ Armand J. Labbé, "Symbol, Theme, Context, and Meaning in the Art of Prehispanic Colombia," in *Shamans, Gods, and Mythic Beasts: Colombian gold and ceramics in antiquity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 26.

⁵⁴ Arango Cardona, *Recuerdos de la Guaquería*, book I, 108-10.

⁵⁵ For those readers with doubts on the validity of ethnography in interpreting the Andean past, a compelling discussion on its use has been recently published: Bill Sillar and Gabriel Ramón Joffré, "Using the present to interpret the past: the role of ethnographic studies in Andean archaeology," *World Archaeology* (2016): 1-18.

⁵⁶ Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Los Kogi: una tribu de las Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia* (Bogotá: Procultura, S. A., 1985), 158.

each sex, one on either side, mark that distinction.⁵⁷ Witoto groups of the western Amazon carve statues in couples, the images of which are made from a deceased member of the family and must always be accompanied by a secondary statue of the opposite gender. When placed in the household, the female is positioned at the end whereas the male *janare* statue occupies the entrance.⁵⁸ A similar artistic practice of making wooden figurines exists among the contemporary Kuna of eastern Panama, whose villages spill into the Urabá region of Colombia. These statues, or *nuchukana*, are always constructed with a complementary partner and are always placed in close proximity to one another so as never to be alone. According to Kuna belief, loneliness is amplified through the statues' ability to feel. Evidently, indigenous groups between lower Central America and the northern Andes decisively organize domestic and mortuary spaces according to a balanced sense of gender and companionship, a practice that could explain the gendered arrangement of Middle Cauca sculpture.

The concept of complementarity, more broadly, can be noted in the surviving material culture of the Cauca Valley. This expression is executed in subtle ways that show complementarity between a diversity of things or issues. For instance, disparate materials were used to connote complementary relationships between the earth and the sky. Half of the *retablo* figures are typically hollow, adjoined by their solid counterparts. Gold objects from the region chiefly consist of an alloy—the mixture of copper and gold, referred to as *tumbaga*. Gold, as argued by Falchetti, represents the male sphere, along with the color yellow and the fertilizing energy of the sun. Copper, an earthly color, is associated with the waxing moon and the female realm, characterized by its fecundity and terrestrial nature. The latter is subject to heavy

⁵⁷ Gerardo Reichel Dolmatoff, "Funerary Customs and Religious Symbolism Among the Kogi," in *Native South Americans: Ethnology of the Least Known Continent*, ed. Patricia J. Lyon (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1974), 295.

⁵⁸ Paolo Fortis, "Images of Person in an Amerindian Society: An Ethnographic Account of Kuna Woodcarving," *Journal de la Société des américanistes*, vol. 98, no. 1 (2012): 27.

corrosion, related to the development and decline of human biological life. In the formation of *tumbaga*, the female is united with the male, and an ideal, plenary concoction is produced. Even the scent of copper sparks an association with soil, the Tukano describing its loamy quality as comparable to a toad.⁵⁹

On another level, it is the union of human and divine, of mortality and immortality.⁶⁰ Conclusively, gold was viewed as a supernatural medium, a miniature representation of the ordered cosmos. The perforations on Middle Cauca sculptures—not limited to any single part of the body—were likely used to insert gold, feathers, and textiles to create multimedia presentations, though these materials have not survived the test of time. In a collection owned by D. Vicente Restrepo, Ernesto Restrepo Tirado observed that many of the sculptures present contained the original inserted gold works (Figure 14).⁶¹ Ultimately, he determined that gold decoration on the statues contains a variety of forms, including simple hollow rings, triangular prolongations and plates that resemble mustaches, crowns, and animal-shaped pendants. A few of the figures even had seven rings in each ear, accompanied by necklaces made of golden frogs, animals, insects, or geometric patterns. Several also wore bracelets and gold girdles, which most likely would have overlaid the incised patterns on the limbs of each statue. If we consider Falchetti's analysis, the integration of a supernatural work of gold or feathers, associated with birds and the sky, would have supplemented the earthiness and materiality of the ceramic body, a substitute for copper. In turn, this combination would have reinforced the Middle Cauca ideology of gender complementarity through a symbolic pairing of material counterparts.

⁵⁹ Ana María Falchetti, "The Seed of Life: The Symbolic Power of Gold-Copper Alloys and Metallurgical Transformations," in *Gold and Power in Ancient Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia*, ed. Jeffrey Quilter and John W. Hoopes (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2003), 350.

⁶⁰ Falchetti, "The Darién Gold Pendants," 65.

⁶¹ Ernesto Restrepo Tirado, *Ensayo Etnográfico y Arqueológico de la Provincia de los Quimbayas en el Nuevo Reino de Granada* (Bogotá: Imprenta de la Luz, 1892), 34-36.

Pigments used in ceramic sculptures also convey critical ideas of complementarity, such as the ostensible pairing of red and black coloring. In Tukano belief, a group inhabiting the eastern part of Colombia in the Amazon, red symbolizes positive energy while black is negative.⁶² Among the Karayá who live in the forests of eastern Brazil, mourners are ritually painted with the colors black and red, extracted from the *genipao* and *urucú* fruits respectively. There is even a gendered component to this practice, in which men are painted red and the women and children black, though there is no clear parallel to the designs on *retablos*. The idea is that women and children are ‘weaker’ in nature and must be painted with a stronger color to resist the implacable temptations of evil spirits.⁶³ Color acts as a protectant for the living community members against the spirits that ensue to capture the individual postmortem. The Kogi classify colors hierarchically with red and white exemplifying good fortune, whereas obscure colors such as green, blue, and black are harbingers of illness and death.⁶⁴

The combination of red and black, as well as ceramic and feathers or gold, potentially created a balance and provided stability, an integral quality of a religious specialist or leader in the northwest Andes. A religious specialist is viewed as a mediator and guardian of the supernatural and natural worlds, constantly caught in the middle of opposing forces, and thus requires anchoring through a harmonious representation. This stability is further strengthened in the spatial organization of and reference to dualistic concepts. Sometimes, as is the case with one Muñoz Kramer statue in this study, artists chose to depict the right hand, and possibly the offering it once held, raised in the air. The Kogi believe that the right hand is associated with good forces and the raising of the right arm is part of a spiritual ceremony to remove negative

⁶² Gerardo Reichel Dolmatoff, *Desana: Simbolismo de los Indios Tukano del Vaupés* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, Departamento de Antropología, 1968), 92-94.

⁶³ Rafael Karsten, *The Civilization of the South American Indians* (London: Kegan Paul, 1926; reprinted 1968), 7.

⁶⁴ Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Los Kogi*, 233.

forces and acquire positive ones.⁶⁵ Religious mediators of the Ancerma culture, a faction inhabiting western Colombia, cure by means of passing their right hand over the patient, extracting the source of the illness with the mouth and exhaling it while gesturing upward.⁶⁶ These forces are simultaneously ordered spatially, as goodness defines the east and wickedness characterizes the west.

The avian headdress of the figure reinforces the religious mediator identification, positioning him at the center of the cosmos in a soul flight to rid the world of excess evil. According to Tukano beliefs, birds occupy a prominent space within ideology and are considered synonymous with religious leaders, able to cross the boundaries of cosmological levels. A religious guide, or *payé*, shares an extraordinary capacity for sight, much akin to an eagle. Bearing similarities to Kogi thought, the Tukano *payé* is a mediator with the ability to seize souls and cure people of their illnesses. However, in turn, they also have the potential to cast nefarious forces and cause the death of individuals. In this aspect, *payés* represent owls, animals feared for their auguries of death, living in rotted trunks and stalking cemeteries in the night.⁶⁷ The shrilling voice of the owl pierces the soul as it echoes in the night, mirroring the intense luminosity of the moon. Much like the owl, the moon keeps watch over the dead and is said to descend through the darkness, opening graves and devouring the bodies of the dead.⁶⁸ The *payé*, both eagle and owl, sun and moon, is imbued with good and malevolent forces. As a guardian, the statue's hands are

⁶⁵ “El lado derecho y la mano derecha se consideran como buenos y femeninos mientras que el lado y la mano izquierda se consideran como malos y masculinos. Durante las ofrendas se describe con la mano izquierda un movimiento circular con el objeto de ‘sacar lo malo’ y luego con la derecha para ‘traer lo bueno’...” Ibid., 234. For a detailed study of Tukano religious ritual, see: Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, *The Shaman and the Jaguar: A Study of Narcotic Drugs Among the Indians of Colombia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975).

⁶⁶ Hernández de Alba, “Sub-Andean Tribes,” 320.

⁶⁷ Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos: The Sexual and Religious Symbolism of the Tukano Indians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 52-53.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 72.

raised upward to the heavens, but at the same time, his feet and posture remain firmly planted downward toward the earth. The aesthetic selections work in concert to reflect the mediator's salient, stable role between the living and the dead, the above and the below. By choosing to represent the spiritual figure, a recurrent type among these statues, artists in the Middle Cauca highlighted the importance of portraying a steady body, as the religious mediator must be stable in order to deal with the evils and uncertainties he faces, which appears to be a ubiquitous belief among cultures in and around the Cauca Valley.

By the same token, a stable religious mediator harkens back to the significance of complementarity and balance. The *retablo* that shares many qualities with these leaders is a figure that embodies both good and bad forces, heightened by other statues exhibiting an equal presence of two genders, the colors red and black, and a balance between left and right organization. Within the mortuary context, an ideology of complementarity mapped onto the ceramic body and through a dual-gendered presentation shows that Middle Cauca artists may have understood the roles of these sculptures as one of stability. In trying to create a counterbalanced space within the shaft chamber tomb, artists were possibly hinting at the displacing ambiguity of death and the need to situate the deceased in familiarity and certainty, monitored by the sculptures of spiritual mediators.

Ceramic *Retablos* as Embodied Protectors and Guides

As indicated previously, the ceramic sculptures in the Middle Cauca represent female and male bodies. Their emplacement, along with archaeological and ethnographic evidence, suggests that these statues may have been a deliberate presentation of real bodies. Thus, we need to consider the ceramic sculptures not just as a representation of gender dualities, but also as objects

that directly engage with human bodies. Many are formed to represent human bodies, while some are so individualized, they may have been made to present a specific person.

While we have limited information for the north Andean region near to where the Middle Cauca figures were made, we do have evidence from many other parts of the Andes, demonstrating that the use of figures as placeholders for living bodies has a deep, rich tradition in the Andes. The archaeologist George Lau has extensively studied ancestor effigies in the Andes, arguing that they are essentially persons, reflecting social relationships and acting as physical mediators between the living and the deceased.⁶⁹ Using Gell's contention that artworks carry the agency of its creators, Lau articulates the social functions these effigies fuel, which allow individuals to posthumously extract the power and guidance of their ancestors. Namely, descendants would seek advice when disconcerting problems arose. Over long periods of time, they were actively handled, curated, and nourished, their aesthetic qualities reflecting those decisions. In the Andes specifically, descendants cared for these sculptures, placing offerings at their feet and occasionally dressing them with new wrappings.

Based on certain sensorial characteristics of the Middle Cauca *retablos*, they serve analogous functions to the Andean statues analyzed by Lau. As interred objects, the statues may have played a role in the mortuary rites of the deceased. Twentieth-century ethnographers recount several instances of burial ceremonies in Colombia, among which was a strong belief in the transmigration of souls into the supernatural afterlife. Hernández de Alba details the Quimbaya as having a particularly elaborate mourning service for highly regarded individuals.⁷⁰ The first night was immersed in sounds of weeping and singing coupled with the drinking of chicha, while individuals close to the deceased would wait near the entrance to the grave for

⁶⁹ Lau, "Ancestor Images in the Andes," 1043.

⁷⁰ Hernández de Alba, "Sub-Andean Tribes," 313.

several nights (Figure 15). Community members are recorded as visiting the grave and using the objects contained within the tomb.⁷¹ Following the vigil, the community leader was either burned and placed in a receptacle or interred at a great depth. The leader was then buried with slaves and wives who had been given a stupefying intoxicant, providing him a retinue that would keep watch over his body.

Other groups in close proximity to the Cauca Valley also provided leaders and nobles with living accouterments to ensure provision in the afterlife. For the Muisca, the Chibcha group associated with the tales of El Dorado in Bogotá, immortality is the continuation of life, far beyond the enclosure of the tomb, one matching their telluric existence.⁷² For the Middle Cauca cultures, the placement of effigy statues near the deceased perhaps acted as the inclusion of living escorts, supplying departed souls with their future desiderata. This attention to the dead is echoed in the belief system of the Tukano, which calls for a fully lit fire atop the grave site to be maintained for eight days to prevent the deceased from freezing.⁷³ The Kogi conceive the souls of the dead as itinerant, hopelessly wandering for nine days and nights in need of guidance to the world beyond.⁷⁴ The fire serves as a beacon of familiarity and direction. One could consider the stable bodies of the *retablos* as a similar guidepost. With regard to the Caldas statues, we know that, in one instance, they were buried with anthropomorphic jars flanking the deceased on both sides, which could also suggest an observant and protective role.

The ceramic statues of the Middle Cauca, while striking in their simple yet evocative forms, also have unexpected allusions to sound. In the Restrepo Tirado collection, one figure

⁷¹ Labbé, “The Quimbaya Region,” 83.

⁷² Steward and Faron, “Warring Chiefdoms,” 214.

⁷³ Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos*, 148.

⁷⁴ Reichel Dolmatoff, “Funerary Customs,” 299.

presumably carried a gourd rattle, though it is unlikely, as these do not survive archaeologically, a result of tropical humidity within the shaft chamber tombs. Yet, another Middle Cauca statue in the Saint Louis Museum of Art—with strong collection history and authenticity—wields a ceramic rattle-like item in its right hand (Figure 16). Gourd rattles are used in Tukano culture to ward off evil by virtue of the reverberating echo it produces on the walls of the mortuary chamber.⁷⁵ Rattles are also constructed with cosmology in mind, their handles typically painted red to symbolize the terrestrial and the addition of feathers at the base of the chamber to invoke the celestial; alternatively, it is another combination of male and female. *Payé*, or religious specialists, upon their conferral into the role, also ritually deposit invisible splinters into their left forearm that reverberate when moved so as to frighten nearby spirits. The tinkling sound of gold décor within the closed chamber recapitulates this notion of sonority as safeguard. Thus, the emphasis on noise and sound tells us about the importance of the faculties in Middle Cauca culture and their involvement in protection, as well as dictate how Middle Cauca inhabitants made sense of the world through their body.

Materiality was important in the Andes and ceramic sculptures employ materiality to accord further meaning to the bodies represented. Ornamenting the body with feathers, for example, may reflect the views of indigenous groups in the area. Among the Bororó in the Amazon forests of western Brazil, feathers are particularly useful in shielding bodily remains from evil forces, preventing further decomposition and encouraging spiritual survival.⁷⁶ Plumage is placed on the more delicate parts of the body, notably the head, a possibility with the *retablos* as well. The goal is to frighten away evil spirits so as not to disturb the peaceful slumber of the

⁷⁵ Looters refer to *retablos* with rattles as *caciques sonajeros*. Jesús Arango Cano, “Primera Parte: Cerámica de las Culturas Central Andinas,” in *Cerámica Precolombina* (Bogotá: Plaza & Janes, 1979), 38.

⁷⁶ Karsten, *The Civilization of the South American Indians*, 100.

deceased. The Tukano, just north of the Middle Cauca, have a grand tradition of feather crown making, weaving together thin reeds and fibers with small feathers vertically aligned to produce a radial effect. Small feathers at the base of the crown are yellow, recalling the potency of the sun and simultaneously galvanizing calm and hospitable attitudes, important qualities in the face of danger. Similar featherwork constructions were being exponentially produced in the northern coast of modern Peru from the tenth through fifteenth centuries.⁷⁷ Perhaps similarly colorful and metaphoric headdresses once crowned contemporaneous Middle Cauca sculptures.

In addition to feathers, the ceramic sculptures show evidence of other types of adornment, which may have included gemstones, semi-precious stones, or large minerals. Evidence suggests that they may have been used for protection. The looter Luis Arango Cardona documented that one grave with *retablo* figures in the department of Armenia contained rock crystals the size of cacao grains, which he suggests would have been strung to form a necklace.⁷⁸ Archaeologist Duque Gómez claims that collars of numerous rock crystals appear frequently in Calima area graves, the region adjacent to the Middle Cauca.⁷⁹ Interestingly, the ceramic bodies of the actual figures themselves contain high quantities of quartz, which is a durable and ubiquitous material, possibly providing the ceramic sculpture with protective abilities.

Quartzite is a stone derived from quartz that can serve as an effective polisher and hammering tool. Studies of the Tukano reveal that their group leaders wear a short cylinder of

⁷⁷ Heidi King, "Feather Arts in Ancient Peru," in *Peruvian Featherworks: Art of the Precolumbian Era*, ed. Heidi King (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 30-31.

⁷⁸ Arango Cardona, *Recuerdos de la Guaquería*, 124-25.

⁷⁹ Duque Gómez, *Los Quimbayas*, 129.

the element suspended from their neck as a defense against evil influence.⁸⁰ Within Tukano culture, religious specialists are even referred to as “rock-crystal people.” On account of their opalescent color spectrum and piezoelectricity, rock crystals are considered to be powerful implements, a reflection of the transformation processes that a spiritual mediator undergoes.⁸¹ The presence of quartzite, possibly suspended around the necks of these statues or in their material makeup, imbues the *retablos* with the protective power of a religious leader. In another light, it alludes to the transformation underlying death, from corporeality to a disembodied spirit, or clay to fired ceramic.

We can acquire a sense of the possible significance of other decorative elements in the Middle Cauca ceramic sculptures. Ligatures may be etched onto the arms and legs of these figures superimpose another layer of protection against evil spirits, the squeezing sensation considered to rid evil if it had already taken bodily possession. As a practice, ligatures are worn at an early age, especially with certain ceremonies, and are seldom removed. The use of ligatures is widely known among the Caribs, who wear two-inch broad belts of cotton knitted around each ankle, just below the knees, and the upper part of each arm. The band is worn throughout the individual’s life, only detached if needing to be immediately replaced. Some groups ceremonially smear ligatures with *urucú* red dye and adorn the bindings with tassels. Furthermore, ligatures are usually associated as markers of the transformative process of puberty. They make calves swell like the pregnant bellies of an adult female, and there exists a tale among

⁸⁰ Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos*, 118.

⁸¹ Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, “Basketry as Metaphor: Arts and Crafts of the Desana Indians of the Northwest Amazon,” *Occasional Papers of the Museum of Cultural History*, no. 5 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 27.

certain groups that the mythic birth of women occurred from the distended calves of men.⁸² The ligature, as an object, carries with it notions of rebirth, change, and protection during transitions in one's life, hence justifying their appearance on *retablos* that may have been found in graves conceptually located at the nexus of life and death.

Though, it is also interesting to entertain an antithetical scenario of the functions these protective references in the material objects might have served. Perhaps, instead of keeping watch over the deceased, the statues protect the living from departed souls. Among the Matsigenka of the eastern slope of the Peruvian Andes, a group considered part of the Arawakan cultural family, there is a long tradition of fear associated with spirits. The corpse is seen as intact, its spirit held within, until a month later once the process of decay has left little more than bones. It is at that point the spirit is released, wanders the earth, and revisits familiar locations.⁸³ Spirits are viewed as carriers of death and are believed to snatch the souls of the living. The role of the religious specialist is to protect the living by scaring away the spirits during the crossover between the secular world and the supernatural. The Matsigenka even place red designs on their faces to trick spirits into thinking they are jaguars, causing them to leave out of fright.⁸⁴ It is clear that the *retablos* in the Middle Cauca serve a vigilant purpose, but given this ethnographic example, it might be a more intricate role than simply guardians protecting the dead.

⁸² Mark M. Graham, "Creation in the Goldwork of Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia," in *Gold and Power in Ancient Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia*, ed. Jeffrey Quilter and John W. Hoopes (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2003), 289.

⁸³ Glenn H. Shepard, "Three Days for Weeping: Dreams, Emotions, and Death in the Peruvian Amazon," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 2 (June 2002): 209.

⁸⁴ Shepard translates the following from a member of the community: "The ghost comes out of the forest. It smells bad, it is very frightening. It comes looking for its family and its friends. It wants to snatch our soul to take with it to the Land of the Dead. So we paint our faces with annatto. The ghost sees the red designs, like jaguar spots, and thinks we are a jaguar. It smells the aromatic smell of annatto. The ghost runs away and leaves us alone." *Ibid.*, 212.

The positions of the depicted persons can also provide tantalizing clues regarding the statues' original meanings and uses. A diagnostic trait among the statues is the seated posture of the figures. Specifically, all but two of the thirty sculptures I have examined are rendered in a seated position, the idea of sitting related to stability and being grounded. In each case of those seated, the figures are placed on a bench. The bench has been closely associated with religious and political leaders, alluding to sacred and political performances and rituals (Figure 17).⁸⁵ As a convention in the art of the indigenous Americas, benches represent power and sagacity, both of which are endemic to the personality of a leader within the community. Carved from a single block of wood, it allows for one to rest the physical body while simultaneously aiding in mental concentration. Among the Tukano, it is said that a person who lacks good judgment does not know how to be seated. If a pernicious individual sits on a bench, it will harm him, making him fall ill. A bench is thus the defining characteristic of mental and physical stability.

Interestingly, several *retablos* have benches forming part of the vessel body. The main body is extended past the juncture of the legs until it reaches equal plane with the bottom of the feet, creating a seamless transition between the individual and its seat. The amount of extension varies sculpture to sculpture, but the interconnectivity nevertheless suggests that the figure and his or her symbol of authority, or duty, are indistinguishable. Many of the faces contain rectangular squares filled in with parallel lines, a resounding symbol of wooden stools and stability within Tukano drawing. In an insightful essay, Armand Labbé traced the development of the seated figure theme to its origins in the goldwork of the Middle Cauca region.⁸⁶ Afterward, the motif traveled northward and westward through the Cauca River valley, becoming preeminently transcribed into other ceramic traditions. For the larger northwest Andes, the

⁸⁵ Labbé, "Symbol, Theme, Context, and Meaning," 27.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

Middle Cauca was evidently a center for artistic representation with regard to these ideologies of stability, protection, and guidance, which are visually represented by the inclusion of a seated posture on a bench.

But if these figures had been made to observe and attend to the departed, why are the eyes depicted as shut? Vision, or the act of seeing, is of critical importance to many, if not most, Andean societies. Ethnographic studies have shed some light on this occurrence. The Tukano, like other indigenous cultures in South America, make a distinction between conceiving and perceiving. To conceive is *pemahsíri*, dissected into *peri* (to hear) and *mahsíri* (to know). When one conceives, it is through senses other than vision. The emphasis is placed on the mind, which interprets various stimuli, mainly those of sound, for it is the mind that ‘hears’ and reflects.⁸⁷ Sight falls into the realm of perceiving, but it is not a faculty that allows one to truly understand. Knowledge is reserved for the other senses and their associated organs, which, in the case of the Caldas *retablos*, are accentuated and elaborated. In having the eyes shut, perhaps the statues are better able to conceive the world around them, ameliorating their competence in pinpointing evil hindrances. Religious leaders must have acute hearing to clearly distinguish supernatural voices during a trance, the ears elaborately ornamented as a visual target. In addition, the nose is enlarged on the face, highlighting the function of smell. A large number of graves would have contained burning incense, perhaps even toted by the *retablos* in their raised hands. The Tukano point to smoke, emitted by burning tobacco, as a principle of communication with supernatural forces. Wind is the agent of that communication, carrying the message of the smoke beyond the earthly realm.⁸⁸ Yet, smoke also signifies a purifying quality, dispelling evil and sickness from its vicinity. Magnified noses on the *retablos* could be related to Tukano ideology, in that they are

⁸⁷ Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Los Kogi*, 94.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

needed to discern the messages emitted from furling vapors or to uptake healing powers in order to stay resilient in a dark, ill-ridden subterranean space and chauffeur the itinerant soul of the deceased into the afterlife.

One possibility is that these sculptures may have been constructed to keep watch over the deceased and, reciprocally, may have been maintained by the living. Anthropologist Paolo Fortis has researched the artistic production of the contemporary Kuna for almost a decade. In his observations, he notes that *nuchukana* “protect [the] family by keeping away dead people’s souls and demons” within the household.⁸⁹ The name itself, as translated by Fortis, alludes to their value, *nuchu* meaning “little and pretty one,” which is pluralized by the suffix, *kana*. These statues are thought to detect imperceptible presences, perceive invisible places, and camouflage in order to attack (Figure 18). Broadly speaking, they are able to sense what occurs in the supernatural. Fortis describes one statue that was carved with four faces each pointed at a different cardinal direction, accenting their omniscience. When they are manufactured, they are essentially brought to life (Figure 19). The wooden statues embody substitutes or doubles of real people, and carvers imbue their own life force, *purpa*, to create the sculptures. Through this act of carving, they are individualized and ritually substantiated as a person, referred to as “substitutes,” “doubles,” and “images” of real people.⁹⁰ Even though the revamped artistic production is relatively modern, initiated over a century ago, the Kuna tradition may extend deeper into the past and a parallel may exist within the larger cultural framework of the Middle Cauca.

In the Kuna context, young “seers” are given companion *nuchukana* to be nurtured during their lifetimes and, reciprocally, to guide the seers at the time of apprenticeship and later

⁸⁹ Paolo Fortis, *Kuna Art and Shamanism: an Ethnographic Approach* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 67.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 174.

in their lives. They aid the seer in diagnosing illnesses and contacting the souls of diseased persons. Considered part of the household, family members care for the *nuchukana*. They are nourished, perfumed, and, long after their wooden structure decays, immortalized through memory. Young girls are tasked with washing them in water infused with sweet basil and the carved figures share meals with the household by inhaling the aromas of comestibles. Principally, they protect and aid in return, acting as part of the group, but devoid of any kinship as they are to be respected for fear of revenge in the event of negligence.⁹¹ Perhaps the contemporary curatorial nature of these statues in eastern Panama bolsters our understanding of Middle Cauca *retablo* caretaking. In a tomb, documented once again by the infamous looter Arango Cardona, one shaft chamber contained a cross of iridescent gold with the image of Christ.⁹² The presence of a clearly Christian object in an ancient tomb suggests two scenarios: either the local Christianized Quimbaya continued to bury their dead in parallel patterns with similar accouterments in the early colonial period as the previous Middle Cauca inhabitants, or indigenous people returned to the sites of their ancestors and paid homage to the dead and, quite possibly, the living statues that were still protecting, guarding, and eternally waiting.

To recapitulate, the Middle Cauca *retablos* possibly serve their communities as real bodies, similar to the Andean statues researched by George Lau. It is probable that this representation of bodies began in the Middle Cauca and subsequently spread with new gold technology, as figural representation is highly prevalent in the goldwork of the region. Within the context of shaft chamber tombs, *retablos* may have facilitated the role of protector, keeping watch over the deceased, safeguarding them from the traumas and ambiguities associated with death. Middle Cauca inhabitants may have had a reciprocal relationship with these statues,

⁹¹ Fortis, "Images of Person," 191.

⁹² Arango Cardona, *Recuerdos de la Guaquería*, book II, 139.

similar to ones within Kuna communities, revisiting graves to provide for these vigilant protectors. As in the instance with the golden cross and the fact that many contemporary indigenous cultures continue to create ancestral effigies and imbue statues with life essences, it is important to realize the endurance of these practices and sculptural traditions. Through these potential relationships, we can imagine the Middle Cauca as a center of innovative ideologies toward the body, gender, the senses, and the afterlife.

Reflection: The Enduring Voices of Middle Cauca Ceramics

So how can we begin to consider this seminal modest sculpture tradition without its exact cultural provenance? How was it made, what roles did it play, and what can it tell us about the people who produced them? Even further, what has become of the ceramic production and technology of the Middle Cauca region, specifically with regard to the *retablos*? Simple, yet surprising to most, the answer to the latter is it continues today. In a current exhibition at Museo de Antioquia in Medellín, titled *El Barro Tiene Voz*, curators present a range of indigenous ceramics, which includes Middle Cauca sculpture, geographically circumscribed to the northwest Andes from the early centuries A.D. through modern-day.

The goal of the exhibition is to increase public awareness of indigenous artistic production and abolish the colonial mentality that perpetuates notions of indigenous groups as living remnants of the past. At the end of the exhibition, reverently positioned on the final wall are two *retablos*, their rustic colors starkly contrasted on the bare surface (Figure 20). Perplexingly, the labels for the two statues state their provenience as “Nariño,” the department that borders Ecuador to the south. Originally, one might pass the statues off as clear fakes, irrelevant to a scholar’s research, but important in building a visual index for inauthentic objects.

However, upon further exploration of the space, amidst the visitors' escalating sentiments agog, it is revealed that contemporary artists made these statues, replicating them to mimic objects that belong to the Cauca Valley's cultural heritage. Ultimately, these works are intended to prompt consumers and scholars of the continuity in indigenous cultural production as well as the livelihoods of indigenous peoples themselves.

Not only that, but the display also ushers in discussion about the ways in which clay, as a medium, *tiene voz*, or has a voice. The room holding the two *retablos* is part of a section that encourages intercultural dialogues across historical eras. This flexibility and experimentation conveys how ceramics of the past enlighten those of the present, showing the similarities, but also the dynamic departures modern ceramicists have promoted. Ceramics relay narratives about the people that conceive, construct, and circulate them by virtue of the marks they bear, as I have shown in this analysis. Here, the exhibition galvanizes visitors to view clay works as keepers of those narratives, each stylistic element a different articulation of the story, diachronically traceable. In this manner, the *retablos* not only protect the deceased, they also harbor the beliefs and histories of the culture in which they were realized. Chronicles of artistic movement, object circulation, and aesthetic choices predicated on ideologies related to complementarity, the body, and the afterlife are uniquely reflected in these singular statues. As evidenced in an array of ethnographies in the absence of archaeological data, we can see how the stylistic attributes of Middle Cauca sculptures, like ceramics more generally, convey a polyphonic, complex history of the people that produced them.

Objects that have been looted and dismissed can actually reveal a number of shrewd perceptions if we apply visual scrutiny, rethink colonial sources, mine archaeological data, and incorporate ethnographers. Even if these answers are not definitive, they do provide us with

compelling clues about the past. For example, the Middle Cauca existed historically as a distinct center of material production, paving the way in artistic and technological advancements in the working of gold and ceramics. Access to an extensive trade network encouraged that development, but also reinforced it, as Middle Cauca objects moved along the same paths that first brought materials sparking the region's own aesthetic strategies. Inhabitants of the Cauca Valley selected appropriate techniques and motifs that were adaptable to an existing ideological framework that uniquely served their communities. As a result, ceramic *retablos* provided balance, support, and reassurance in the face of death's uncertainties. Comparable to the indigenous communities of the Cauca Valley today, the culture that produced the *retablos* were connected, mobile, inventive, and principal actors within the larger dynamics of the northern and northwest Andes.

However, if we continue to rely on defining our scholarship in similar terms to the colonial sources we consult, we risk portraying indigenous peoples in the Middle Cauca as immobile, static, and provincial. This practice reinforces colonialist views and hierarchies, devaluing indigenous people not only in the Middle Cauca but also across the globe. At this pivotal moment, we must reject terms that have clouded our judgment. Instead, we should emphasize the role of indigenous people at the center of their cultural histories and view these groups as dynamic entities, interconnected yet unique, and not as large categories fitted to generalizations. This approach should be fundamental in the study of Native American arts, allowing scholars to break the confines of their cultural biases. Much akin to the contemporary *retablo* sculptures in *El Barro Tiene Voz* and their museologically coveted antecedents, the indigenous peoples of the deceptively coined "Intermediate Area" were, are, and continue to be a reflection of artistic innovation and exchange, protecting their indigenous ancestors and heritage

beyond the Middle. The Middle Cauca should be studied and referred to as the Middle Cauca, not lost under a washing, oppressive heading. It is up to us, as scholars, to purport that transience and persistence, repositioning the Middle Cauca as a verifiable center of indigenous artistic production.



Figure 1. Three *retablos* from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Muñoz Kramer Collection. These three statues represent a range of phenotypic and stylistic characteristics evident in Middle Cauca Caldas complex sculpture. See Figures 6-8 for individual photographs.

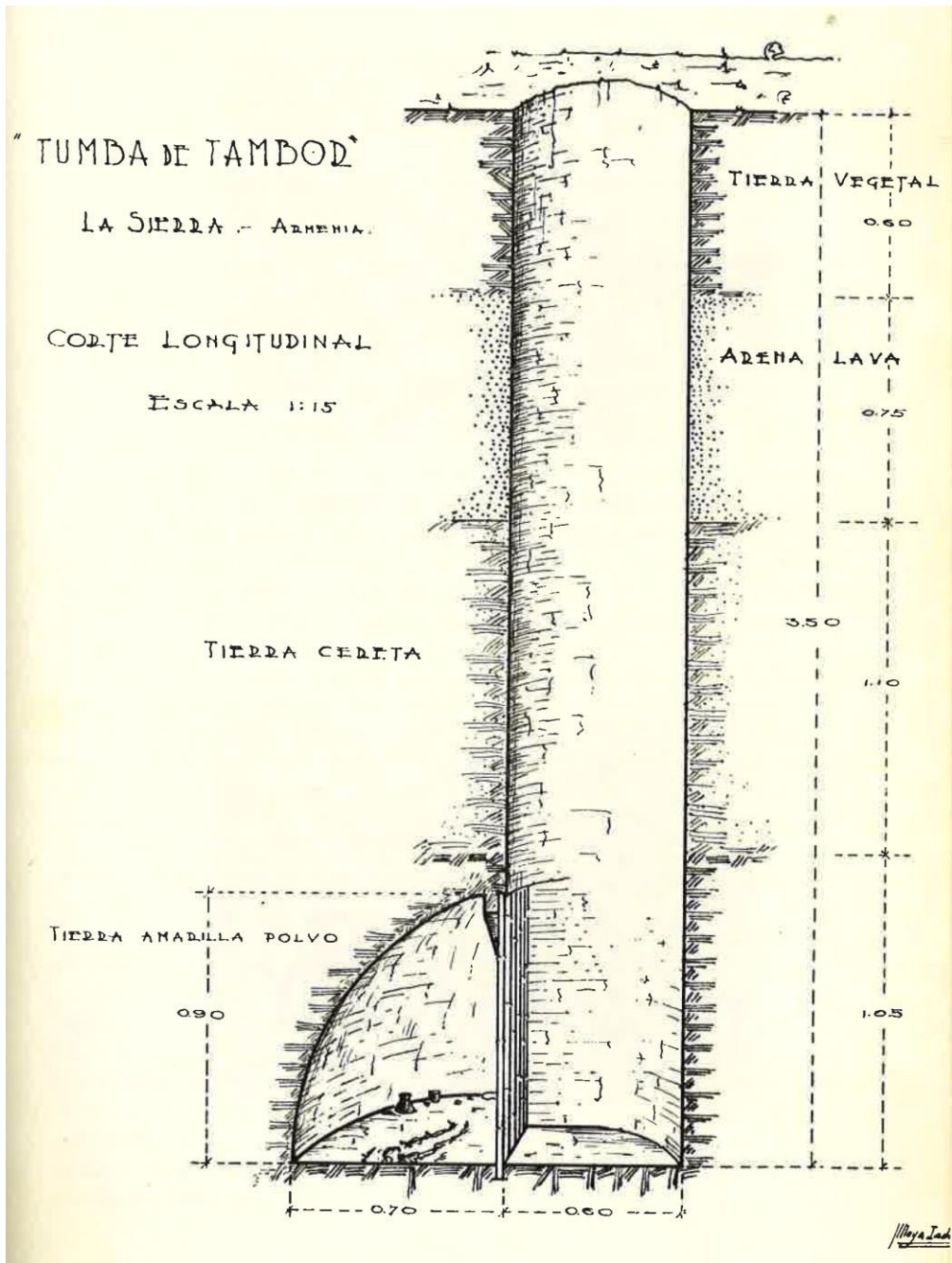


Figure 2. Sketch of shaft chamber tomb excavated by Duque Gómez in 1942 at La Sierra, La Tebaida, Cauca, Colombia. From Duque Gómez 1970: Plate XXIX.



Figure 3. Various *retablos* at Museo del Oro, Bogotá to illustrate the variation of head shapes. Photos by author.



Figure 4. Male *retablo coco*, Middle Cauca, Caldas complex, A.D. 1000-1400. 27.3 x 24.8 x 12.9 cm. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.2007.146.5. Photo © LACMA.



Figure 5. Male *retablo coco*, Middle Cauca, Caldas complex, A.D. 1000-1400. 21 x 16.5 cm. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.2007.146.271. Photo by author.



Figure 6. Female *retablo coco*, Middle Cauca, Caldas complex, A.D. 1000-1400. 17.2 x 15.2 cm. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.2007.146.272. Photo by author.



Figure 7. Map of present-day Colombia with Cauca River Valley (departments of Quindío, Risaralda, Caldas, and southern Antioquia) outlined in blue.

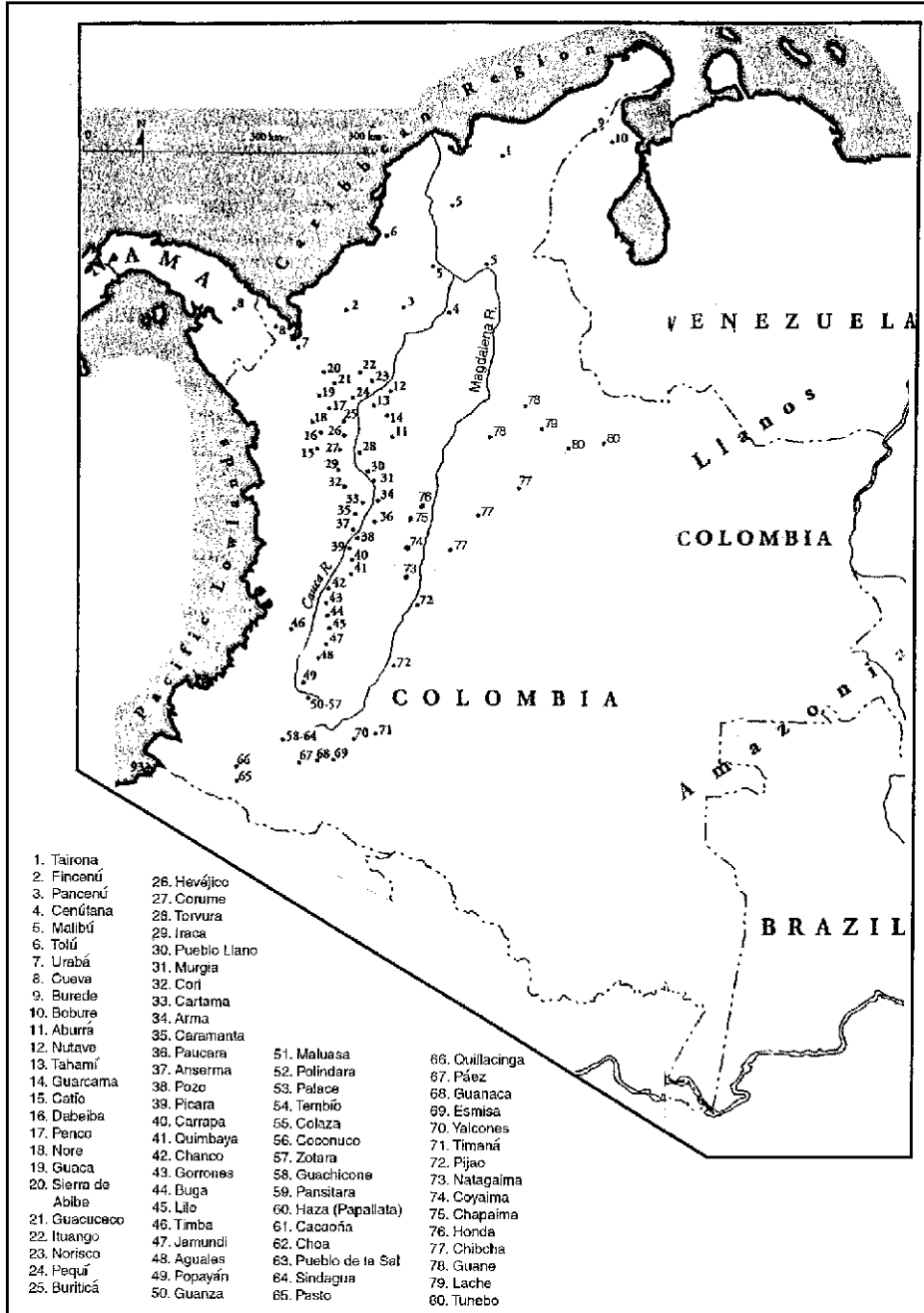


Figure 8. Map of native ethnic groups during Spanish arrival, circa 1500. From Villamarín 2003: 122, Map II.



Figure 9. Photograph of Cauca River, Colombia.



Figure 10. Squatting Female Figure cast in *tumbaga*, Middle Cauca, 500 B.C. – A.D. 700. 14.5 x 7.5 x 5.5 cm. British Museum, Am1940, 11.2. Photo © British Museum.



Figure 11. Ligatures as a Carib custom. Agostino Brunias, *A Family of Caribs in St. Vincent*, late 18th century. Oil on canvas.



Figure 12. Two female *chuchimilcos*, Peru, Central Coast, Chancay, A.D. 1000-1430. The left figure is from the Michael C. Carlos Museum at Emory University (1998.012.012) and the right is from the Fowler Museum of Art at the University of California, Los Angeles (X71.424).



Figure 13. Photograph of *retablo* from Restrepo Tirado's collection, 1899. Now housed in the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin.



Figure 14. Map showing the emergence of gold production at various sites from present-day Chile to Costa Rica. Possible trade route highlighted in blue by author. Original map by Museo del Oro.



Figure 15. Print depicting an indigenous burial ceremony. Theodor de Br-, *The Burial of a King*, 16th-century engraving, Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Germany.



Figure 16. Male *retablo coco* with possible ceramic rattle or offering, Middle Cauca, Caldas complex, A.D. 1000-1400. 36.9 x 29.6 x 15.5 cm. St. Louis Museum of Art, 253:1978. Photo © St. Louis Museum of Art.



Figure 17. Tukanoan *caapi* bench, Rio Uapués, Brazil, 20th century. 55 x 24 x 20 cm. National Museum of the American Indian, Washington D.C. Photo © NMAI.



Figure 18. Mikita Smith posing with recently washed *nuchukana* statues. From Fortis 2012: Fig. 8.1.

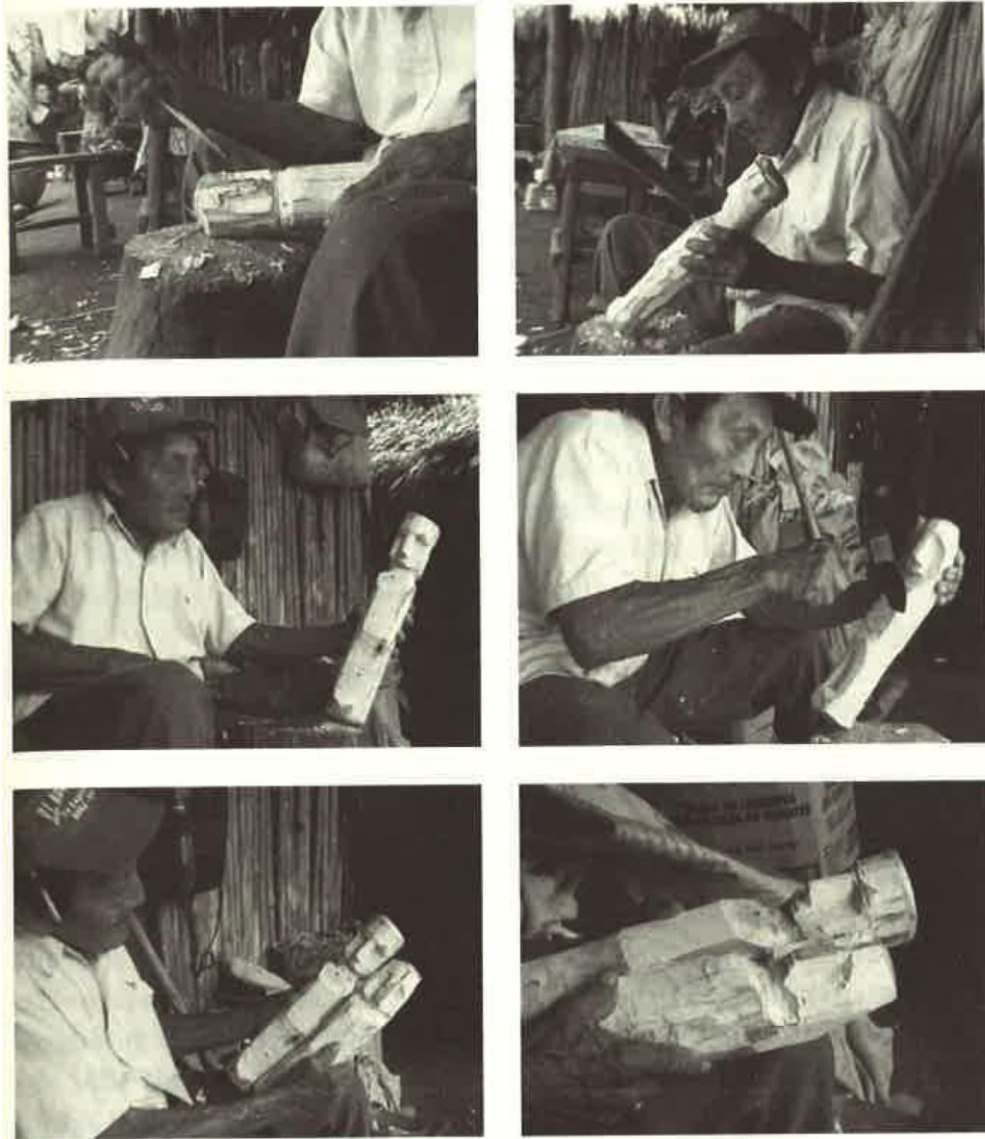


Figure 19. Stills from a video of Leopoldo Smith carving a *nuchkana* couple. From Fortis 2012: Fig. 3.4-3.9.



Figure 20. Two modern *retablos* from Nariño, *El barro tiene voz: las cerámicas prehispánicas al arte actual* exhibition, Museo de Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia. Photo by author.

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