

Metals Response Paper

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Metallurgy is a complex production technique which has changed the way societies function. It came about at varying times in different cultures, and this technology gap has been influential in the Americas, where a rich tradition of native metal clashed against the smelting of Europe. In this context, the relationships among metals and people become pronounced and can be interpreted from a number of angles.

Martinón-Torres et al. provide a splendid example of how ethnohistory might be combined with a traditional scientific work. In this paper, they examine a number of artifacts from a cemetery in Cuba and attempt to use their properties and potential provenance as a lens through which trade and relative value of metals can be determined. They begin by discussing the artifacts they found in the context of actual site properties. A gold bead and its origin as native gold provides important clues as to the material trade present in the region and potentially leads to a better understanding of the community connections at that time. Additionally, they discovered a number of brass tubes and a cupreous disc conjectured to form a medallion. The authors did not assume that the manufacture was homogeneous and later provide substantial evidence that the brass artifacts were aglets brought over by Europeans. This demonstrates the complexity of material relationships, especially when two rich technological histories collide. To strengthen the paper, they could have examined changes in burial patterns, since a depositional period of over 500 years spanning the European conquest is valuable indeed. They also could have added more on the grouping of artifacts, as most of the analysis was either on an individual or collective scale. That being said, they did accomplish admirably what they set out to do.

This attention to metallurgy's social and historical context contrasts with Scott's 1983 work which details production processes in early Colombia. He

uses high-technology analyses, but the evidence generated supports lackluster conclusions about the importance of production techniques to the lives of early Colombians. Scott explains in detail how a bicolor effect was produced. Even so, there is no explanation of why a two-color effect would be preferable to a single color. It might have some cultural or ritual significance and is easier than producing a non-homogeneous base material, but there is no discussion of this social aspect of production. He mentions that an etching process was probably used on a particular plaque given high magnification examination, but offers no possible reason why such a process would be used. The production processes themselves are covered in great detail, but the reasons why those particular processes were used are lacking. Furthermore, his textual examples are Roman, and it is difficult to see the connection between ancient Europe and pre-Colombian societies. The actual evidence collected by Scott is extraordinary, and he uses microstructure to provide convincing details about the production process, but there is a missing link in his description of the potential impact of this production on the culture of early Colombia.