

REVIEWS

ANCIENT AMERICAS

Golden Kingdoms: Luxury Arts in the Ancient Americas. Edited by Joanne Pillsbury, Timothy Potts, and Kim N. Richter. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum and Getty Research Institute, 2017. Pp. 311. 428 color illustrations. 4 maps. \$59.95 cloth.

Golden Kingdoms is the catalogue of a joint exhibition of the J. Paul Getty Museum (September 2017 to January 2018) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (February to May, 2018). The book discusses the role and legacy of luxury items in the ancient Americas from a wide range of perspectives, addressing regions from Mexico to Peru and a chronology from 2000 BC to the Spanish colonial period. Despite this ambitious design, the authors have brilliantly managed to write a volume that is exciting reading for both experts and non-specialists alike. The catalogue is perfectly suitable for teaching activities at universities. Timelines and maps guide non-specialists through the cultural diversity of the Americas, and well-researched introductory chapters and detailed catalogue entries address the questions that experts will have in mind.

Above all, the catalogue presents almost 300 fascinating exhibits from 57 museums in 13 countries. Rare objects are presented with arresting images and exciting research outlines developed during four years of research and assembled by scholars from across the Americas in a project founded by Getty-Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, a collaborative organization of arts institutions under the aegis of the Getty Museum. Such efforts, dedicated to establishing and maintaining a dialogue across national boundaries, deserve a special reference in these times of intensified debates about borders: the joint academic exploration of a manifold yet shared cultural and material heritage generates remarkably stimulating results.

The volume makes a thought-provoking contribution to academic debates that surround the production and uses of premodern material culture in general and luxury items in the ancient Americas in particular. Focusing on gold, shell, jade, and feathers, the volume discusses the world of artisans and artists as well as the world of patronage and ritual in the ancient Americas in order to address the social and emotional universe of material culture. The materials in these exhibits were considered to be animated substances, often believed to contain divine power; therefore, the book discusses “how individuals,

collectively or independently, made certain aesthetic and material choices about how to express their deepest beliefs” (1).

The recent debates of archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians on religious materiality could have been pursued further, yet the volume innovatively explores the significance of material cross-references. All these materials were valued as transformative matter and thereby gained cultural meanings as “efficacious, active agents essential for the maintenance of the social order and the bestowal of divine blessings” (6). Artisans, therefore, are addressed as experts in material transformation and aesthetic achievements. Their knowledge of materials’ mutability and sensory qualities was crucial to transform matter into meaningful things, as much as were their investments in time, labor, and resources.

The volume follows the stories of matter and making that granted such sophisticated objects the capability to evoke affective resonances. These material transformations are the basis for these luxury artifacts’ significance for social and political hierarchies. We learn that artifacts were produced for specific individuals, and are taken through an exploration of the objects’ meanings as extensions of bodies. The roles of long-distance trade, artifacts’ mobility, and the material connections and artistic exchange across the Americas will certainly stimulate further innovative research.

Without a doubt, a detailed discussion of how new material worlds impacted European craft cultures would have significantly added to the volume. Its main achievement is to present a wide range of rare artifacts, dispersed across the international landscape of museums and framed with thought-provoking research that bridges the disciplines of archaeology, art history, ethnohistory, history, and linguistics. Above all, this book makes the reader wish to have seen the exhibition in person, and this is one of the best possible readings that an exhibition catalogue could engender.

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CONQUESTS

Contesting Conquest: Indigenous Perspectives on the Spanish Occupation of Nueva Galicia, 1524–1545. By Ida Altman. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017. Pp. 152. \$24.95 paper.
 doi:10.1017/tam.2018.51

Ida Altman’s slim and eminently accessible book is a splendid addition to the growing Latin American Originals (LAO) series. Altman’s succinct analysis of the early phase of Spanish incursions into western Mexico provides a captivating picture of the complex