



Responsible Resources & Roots Engagement
Zürich—Helsinki—Toronto

Reviewing the fascinating Exhibition at the British Museum
London, Beyond El Dorado, March 2014

THE MIRROR OF EL DORADO: GOLD IN ANCIENT COLOMBIA

**“Over the mountains
Of the Moon,
Down the Valley of
Shadow,
Ride, boldly ride,”
The shade replied –
“If you seek for Eldo-
rado!”
Edgar Allan Poe,
Eldorado, 1849**

Inside this issue:

Guests from El Dorado	1
Ancient Fellows	1
All Myth has a legend	2
Mirror of Wealth	2
Cosmogonic Paradigm	3
Spelling Roots	3

Guests

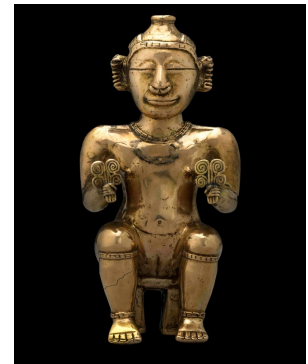
The London exhibition marked the bridge over the business years 2013/2014 in an interesting, original way. This exhibition displayed more than 300 objects from the Museo del Oro in Bogotá and the British Museum’s own pre-Colombian collection.

The special guests from London’s British Museum will be soon flying back to Colombia. Rain forest’s fantastic creatures crowded the exhibition rooms of the British Museum with golden frogs, paradise birds, tiny sacred figurines, etc. Their visit in London has brought a instructive winter story about resources to many aesthetes, handicrafts and business people as well, at the intersection of cultural tradition and personal expression. However, there is no way but to rethink the power of gold in the era of digital money. The fascinating masterworks from Colombia stand for the true

roots of El Dorado, “the Golden One”, and the ancient burgh of Gold. In front of these artisans’ wonders emerges a never fully exhausted question. *Which is the distinctive feature of gold among other metal resources and where does its strongly inspirational power for human behaviour come from?*

Gold holds its binding magic in good and bad times

Gold serves protection in all kinds of situations, beginning with monetary instability. During economic growth, gold lives in strong jewellery demand, as the former years have sufficiently shown. Furthermore, gold has demonstrated a tough independency to all kinds of scenarios. And its argument must not always be a rational one, on the contrary: there are emotions at work.



(1) Emotional binding of multiple faces controls the relationship to this resource like no other item. The individual as an explorer, producer, investor or consumer is an intrinsic part of the demand equation of the resource gold. The significant emotional constant of this equation is the fear of potential or concretely manifested instability. For ancient Colombians, fear had another dimension.

Ancient Fellows

(2)



Since ancient fellows venerated gold, it seems that this veneration still sticks in our modern genes. The lust for gold spans the earth in all historical periods, nations, genders, etc. Moreover, it may ignite the desire to possess more and more of it, and quite often by all means.

The mystical aura, the powerful attraction of this hardly extracted earthly resource prints many of our day to day

activities, wished or not. For many of us the power of gold consists in its sharp accountability, its feature lays on frames for wealth preservation, indestructibility. In a word, gold fascinates by the power to resist, exist, and survive.

Ancient Columbians were not far away from this perception but, however, with one exception.

All myth has a legend.

The Colombian legend talks about a ritual at Lake Guatavita, near modern Bogotá, at which a community leader must be overwhelmed of powdered gold.

The story goes to a ritual at Lake Guatavita, near Bogota, at which a newly elected chief, fully ornamented by powdered gold, dived into the magic lake and emerged as a chief of the Muisca.

The sacred lake used to be the ceremonial site where the locals worshipped Chie, the goddess of water. The ceremonies gave rise to the legend of El Dorado.

The community chief came to the lake with his four priests and treasures spent by his

community. After he sunk the treasures into the lake as veneration, he would immerse himself in the water. This Chief reigned over the highlands of Columbia, and the ritual meant to bring the community closer to the gods.

Communication - Identity frame - Enhancing the self-conversion

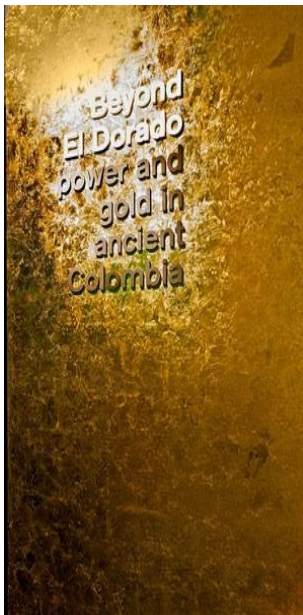
At the exhibition in the British Museum of London, three of main uses of gold artworks of Ancient Colombia were admirably emphasised.

Some art pieces were dedicated as offerings to the specific gods with the belief to intercede for community. The

residence of these gods was supposed to be located in rivers (such as Lake Guatavita), mountain caves or other magical places in the landscape. They were vessels of communication or petitioner symbols for a transcended relationship.

Other golden artworks were proudly used as adornments for clothes and body. Usually, they outlined the **identity frame** of individuals as well as – according to style and type of ornament – their belonging to a specific community in addition to hierarchical status in a group.

“ This mythical and mystical metal framed identity, enabled communication, and opened the gate to the supernatural experiences for the ancient Colombian.”



Unlike other resources, gold is not consumed and destroyed. Once bought, the gold tends to be held.

Strength and Power

The magical power of gold meant to weave in rituals into musical instruments, into fittings used particularly at handling of powerful plants, into rituals of transformation.

The strong belief of the ancient Colombians was that they may transform themselves into the powerful, fearful creatures that surrounded them. Strength and power was a promise of gold. This transformation was for them an essential life experience,

by stepping beyond their humanly limits.

Therefore, this mythical and mystical metal framed identity, enabled communication, and opened the gate to the supernatural experiences for the ancient Colombian.



(4)

Mirror of Wealth

And what have we seen with our analytical eyes today? The ancient artefacts are mirroring the ideas of richness, wealth and high polished craftsmanship in a fascinating world of sundown many ages ago. They are now museum deposits and exponents of a further immense treasure that could not escape from the material melting pot of modern civilisation. Then one specific property of gold was missed in the ancient Columbia: **the attribute as tool of exchange**. Ancient Columbian were not interested in the material

worth of gold.

But, not all that shone was gold in the exhibition. Artworks that seemed at first glance made of gold were in fact worked out of metal alloys. Many of them were artfully combined, in different shapes.

Gold, silver and copper is a combination known as *tumbaga*, and stood for the rainbow of ancient Columbians' imagination and wishes, being associated with the sun and the moon. It is not just the glance of resource gold that

The exhibition has been planned in partnership between Museo del Oro and the British Museum. Owned by the Banco de la República, the Museo del Oro, Bogotá, houses the largest collection of Latin American gold work in the world.



(5)

shone, but the ingenious Columbian artists' in mastering laborious techniques with a rich esthetical sense.

Sources Photos 1,2,4,5,6:
Exhibition Beyond El Dorado, power and gold in ancient Colombia
Britisch Museum with Museo del Oro, London,
17 October 2013—23 March 2014

Cosmogonic Paradigm

What brought them to shine was human beings' power of imagination and diversified work. The exhibition let us discover the refinement of human spirit in poured precious metal.

Like the universally liturgical scenery of nature, the exhibition's rooms opened an atmosphere of a tropical cathedral.

Spot-like shapes of gold sparked from deep dark green backstage, and reminded us of the hard endeavour of miners to dig for the first nugget.

The rainforest moved light on gold at the chattering sound of unseen birds. The sensation conducted the rational to an emotional ladder. Indeed, in

those past times it was not the desire of gold as a support of material wealth that made it precious to the ancient Colombians. Heavily essential was the symbolic magic power of gold.

The transformative properties and its association to the sun was for them the true vibration of the cosmogonic paradigm they believed to live.

Cosmogony = Symbolic narrative of the creation and organisation of the world as understood in a particular tradition.

Cosmogonic = a theory or story of the origin and development of the universe, the solar system, or the earth-moon system.

(6)



Spelling of Roots

The exhibition was a spelling of roots through their resources. It depicted a long way back to the quotations of life of this shining metal. Some short period of time, gold fascination has been interrupted by The Golden Tulip Age or The White Gold, the porcelain. And every time it survived.

The truth of El Dorado will remain forever with ancient Columbians, but our take is a

useful one. What sacralises gold are much more the ways of its extraction from the bottom of the earth or the rivers' flows, than its assignment to wealth.

Exploration and extraction, finally refinery processes and artefacts manufacturing meant conferring to this metal a universal indestructible virtue. Not to mention that every ounce of gold that that has ever been mined still exists.

For Investors in 21th Century, Gold has unique properties as an asset class.

The diversity of gold-backed and gold-related products means that gold can be used to enhance a wide variety of individual investment strategies and risk tolerances.

Indestructibility of Gold

Unlike other resources, gold is not consumed and destroyed. In fact, gold's indestructibility is one of the attributes that make it so attractive, particularly for money.

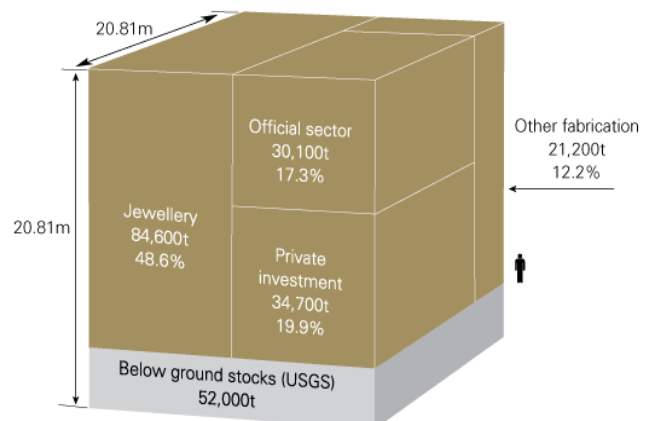
The amount of new gold mined each year is overwhelmed by the total amount of gold in the world.

Throughout history about 3'822 billion ounces of gold had been produced. Over 90 percent of the amount was extracted since 1900. About 1.3 billion ounces have been used for jewellery.

The central banks hold in 2013 approximately one-fifth of all the gold ever mined. These holdings are highly concentrated in the advanced economies of Western Europe and North America, a legacy of the gold standard. By other words, the central banks have immense pricing power in the gold markets. The rest of the total amount is held by private investors. Once bought, the gold tends to be held.

1 ounce = 28, 3495231 gram

Total above ground stocks = 174,100t (US\$7.9tn)



Source: Thomson Reuters GFMS



Responsible Resources & Roots Engagement (3R) Zurich—Helsinki—Toronto

Obere Kirchgasse 10
CH -8400 Winterthur
SWITZERLAND
Phone: +41 79 286 07 38
E-mail: eleni.regli@resources-roots.com

3267 Havenwood Dr.
Mississauga/Toronto, ON L4X2M
CANADA
Phone: +1 9056029430
E-Mail: info@resources-roots.com

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