



**Llama effigy**

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**On display****Title/Description:** Llama effigy**Born:** 1400 - 1532**Object Type:** Animal, Figure**Materials:** Silver/silver alloy**Measurements:** h. 230 x w. 40 x d. 220 mm**Accession Number:** 150**Historic Period:** AD 1400-1532, 14th century, 15th century**Production Place:** Peru, South America, The Americas**Cultural Group:** Inca**Credit Line:** Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

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The expansion of the Inca empire during the century before the Spanish conquest brought a vast area, from Ecuador to northern Chile and Argentina, under the control of a single power. Throughout their empire the Incas introduced their own, very standardised, forms of architecture, pottery, cult objects and religious practices. On state occasions, offerings and sacrifices were made at shrines, mountain tops and other sacred places, where the Incas buried clothing, food, animals, and also miniature effigies of llamas and human beings. Spanish chronicles also record that on certain occasions, at the Capac Hucha ceremonies when a new ruler came to the throne (McEwan and Silva, 1989; McEwan and van de Guchte, 1992), and at the Capac Raymi festival celebrating the December solstice, young children were sacrificed.

A child sacrifice of just this kind, perfectly preserved by the freezing temperature, was discovered on the peak of Cerro El Plomo, at 5400 m in the Chilean Andes, accompanied by a llama figurine of silver alloy and a miniature human effigy similar to no. 91 (Mostny, 1957: pls. i2b-c). Another child burial, with the same range of miniature offerings, was discovered in 1985 by Schobinger on Cerro Aconcagua, in northern Argentina. This, and other mountain-top offerings, are discussed in Beorchia Nigris (1985) and Reinhard (1992b). The identical combination of human and llama figurines in precious metal recurs also at the Inca shrines on the islands of Lake Titicaca (Bandelier, 1910: pls. lvii-lviii; see also Reinhard, 1992a), and at the Inca cemetery near the mines of Almirante Latorre, Chile (Iribarren Charlin, 1962: 67-8).

This llama is unusually large, but is otherwise typical of its kind. Made of silver or, more probably, a silver/copper alloy, it is hollow and was manufactured from several pieces of sheet metal, cut and then joined (*cf.* von Schuler-Schbmig, 1972: 27). The body is a rolled cylinder with a seam along the belly; the neck and legs are made in a similar way, and the feet attached separately. The penis is of hammered metal, and broadens out into a sheet which is wrapped over to conceal the join between

body and hind legs, and which constitutes the animal's buttocks. The head was formed separately, with additional pieces for the ears. The nature of the joins has not been analysed, but radiographs of a similar piece in the Mujica Gallo collection showed no evidence of welding, soldering or tab-joining; instead, the individual pieces were simply forced together and the joins burnished to make them inconspicuous (Tushingam *etal.*, 1979:19-20).

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

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

Despite its diminutive scale, this llama figurine is one of the Sainsbury Centre's most iconic and memorable objects, beloved by visitors, scholars and students alike. Made by the Incas (1440-1532) of South America, it was, like the Sainsburys' bequest, a gift and offering of utmost importance.

Inca offering caches often consisted of paired llamas (the other in gold or fiery red oyster shell), which were deposited with a human male-and-female duo, coca leaf, maize beer and fancy pottery vessels. The most famous occurred with child sacrifices, placed by provincial lords at their most sacred places - on mountains, islands, ruins - to show allegiance to Inca sovereignty. Raised for meat and fleece, and as beasts of burden, camelids were the most important Andean domesticated animals, serving also as pets and companions. Their offering was to signal prized provisioning and the palpable link to highland pasturelands and work - all significant to Inca identity and its ideology of controlled plenty and generosity.

At 23.2 cm tall, this example is four times the size of most llama figurines. But even larger ones existed: Spanish conquistadors glimpsed life-sized gold and silver llama effigies in temple gardens - centrepieces for their contemplation, perhaps not unlike the Sainsbury Centre's gallery setting today. Made by fine Inca metalworking on silver sheet, its features show a lean and pert, youthful body. Its form is simple, yet captures the imperial aesthetic: attentive, economical, anonymous, decorous yet approachable. The llama's attenuated profile is unmistakable. Once seen, this study in abstracted elegance can hardly be forgotten.

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George Lau, Reader, Sainsbury Research Unit

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## Provenance

Formerly in the Halifax Museum, Yorkshire, before 1912 and possibly as early as the mid nineteenth century.

Acquired as part of an exchange by the previous owner.

Gift from K. J. Hewett to Robert and Lisa Sainsbury in 1962.

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

