Hi this is the start of lecture about the Sican culture – more specifically Sican metal working.

+Sican metalworking is a PreHispanic, Peruvian culture.
+It produced high quality craftsmanship as far as metal working, particularly with gold alloys and arsenic copper.

< Insert “arsenic copper” here>

++What makes this culture so important is...

1. that before this time scientists believed that the earliest gold metalworking took place among the Incas. But the Incas are a later culture, later race.

2. Actually, the workmanship that is seen in the gold working from this culture took place in an earlier time. It took place from 900 to 1100 AD. Took place prior to the Inca rise. Prior to Hispanic discovery of the New World.

3. Fortunately for modern day archeologists this Middle Sican culture (900 to 1100 AD) and remains a mystery

+For the most part because treasure hunters looted the artifacts from the culture so little is known about the culture
+until about the 1970s and 1980s we knew little about this culture because of all the looting that occurred.
+What we did know about the artifacts came from private and public collections.
The problem is that when you look at things from private collections, a lot of the pieces of the artifacts are missing, like feathers, pigments, and other markings – these were missing because of careless cleaning.

As a result, only limited amount of information can be drawn from the artifacts that are in private and public collections.

In addition to our knowledge about these artifacts, we really didn’t know how they were produced back in this time because there were no large excavations by scientists.

The looting took place and really began in about the 1930s, lasted until the late 1970s.

It wasn’t until 1978 that the first scientific excavation took place and scientists began to piece together the Sican culture.

++This is important to know...At one of the excavation sites, one grave, they found 3 interesting things

1. scientists found 1.2 tons of grave goods.

2. Most of the objects from that site were 14 to 18 karat gold jewelry and many of the objects were tumbaga

3. Tumbaga is gold copper or gold silver alloy mixture. Alloy is a mixture of two metals.

At another grave site, Gold Cache #1 scientists found 60 metal objects - most were gold sheet and the silver or tumbaga.
This cache contained three types of gold items:

1. Crowns, headbands that were worn during religious ceremonies

   2. Sets of gold feathers – these feathers were formed by pounding gold until it was foil thin

   3. Also, found were Bundles of naipes – naipes are coins used as Sican currency or money.

   < Insert “naipes” here>

Gold Making Skills of Sican Culture – Sic-on

There were not alot of sophisticated tools in those days. Their tools were primitive tools but they were able to do exquisite gold making.

++You need to remember that...

1. Goldsmiths used hammers made of stone hammers and stone anvils. Stone hammer – a rock with round edges. They would use these hammers to pound out gold sheets.

2. Handheld stone hammers commonly made from hematite or basalt. These two minerals help hammer out materials.

They would use one hammer to pound out the metal and then a softer one to pound to pound out the dimples.

The goldsmith had lots of expertise.

He knew how to properly flatten out a piece of gold –

he knew how to make certain alloys.
He knew how to flatten out gold metals so they would flex and not break.

He would flatten these metals out so they would flex for some of the headdresses for Sican people would wear.

He knew how to make gold feathers – like feather – very fine gold making.

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He also knew how to make ear spoons – these are like earrings today.

< Insert “ear spoons” here>

Ear spoons in Sican era were usually used for headdresses.

Ear spoons had detailed work.

Each earspoon was about 3 inches in diameter and finely decorated and served as metalworking that was ahead of its time.

Another trait of the goldsmiths was to join two metals together to form alloys like gold and silver.

++It is important to know that: they would join the two metals using an organic glue, would heat it, and wherever the two metals would touch they form an alloy only at that spot.

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++One last trick that should be remembered is that:

goldsmiths were able to use a technique, depletion gilding, to dissolve the base metals away and the gold sheets would appear like 24 carat gold.

< Insert “depletion gilding” here>

++This would turn it into tumbaga sheet – lesser quality of gold and only worth 10 to 14 carats. But

Because of the technique gold appeared as a much higher quality.

Not all of the pieces were of high quality – for example they found at one grave site a beaker with a portion of the rim of the silver base was melted,
and the base shows an "orange peel" texture, the result of overheating. Not all of the pieces were perfect.

They did some experimenting with metals.

Some metalworkers made no attempt to correct errors when finishing objects.

This kind of error generally indicates an apprentice worker.

In another case, they found a ceremonial mask and the front portion was perfect and the back had defects.

Scientists believe that the goldsmith completed the front and then turned it over to his apprentice.

For objects found in the tombs, we now know different aspects of their culture.

For instance, we know that because they invested so much time and effort into metal working that metal objects had strong meaning for its people.

Gold had the highest value –

usually used for art or symbol of artistic expression –

they would use it for draw figures as an act of artistic expression.

++It is important to remember two aspects about the Si-con Culture:

1. Gold was reserved for the highest class of people – different classes of people

Whoever was in the highest class had the highest quality of gold – pure gold or 24 carat gold.

2. The next class of people used tumbaga – used tumbaga to emulate the highest class

They would decorate themselves with tumbaga – a lower carat of gold – as a substitute for pure gold.

Many of the precious objects found in the tombs were by people in public settings.
At times they used to impress onlookers or in religious ceremonies.

++The last important aspect that you should remember is that:

1. of the excavation is that the highest leaders would be buried with large scrap piles – scrap piles of tumbaga and scrap piles of precious metals.

These were buried with them in their burial chamber and the more scrap the higher stature in the Sican culture.

2. The presence of scrap in the tomb represented the political power of the person.

Reference: