

1. Image: Crocodile-Head Figure Pendant (A.D. 800-1519)



<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/309115>

2. Material Data:

Geography: Costa Rica

Culture: Diquís

Medium: Gold

Dimensions: H. 2 1/4 × W. 2 1/2 × D. 3/4 in. (5.7 × 6.4 × 1.9 cm)

Classification: Metal-Ornaments

Display: Metropolitan Museum of Art; a gift and bequest of Alice K. Bache, 1966, 1977

(metmuseum.org, 2021)

3. Formal Analysis:

Line: The line of this piece is clearly horizontal, created by the top and bottom panels, between which the figure is placed. The horizontal theme is also repeated in the swirled crocodiles coming from the head and feet, the double-headed serpent being held across the body, and the severed leg found in the figure's teeth.

Shape and Form: There are geometric circular shapes found in the swirls of the crocodile heads and in the heads of the snakes; there are rectangles in the top and bottom panels, and in the mouths of the crocodiles. The figure is biomorphic, depicting a human body with an animal's head.

Space: This sculpture is three-dimensional, with the figure emerging from the flat top and bottom panels.

Texture: Since this piece is made of gold, it should be somewhat smooth, and most likely cool to the touch, as metals are.

Value and Light: There is much light coming off this sculpture, due to the bright metal that was used.

Color: This piece has a wonderful warm yellow hue, reflecting the richness of the gold.

Movement: The figure in this piece seems to be moving its arms outward, stretching the snake across its body. It also appears to be chewing on the leg in its mouth.

Repetition: There is repetition in the flat top and bottom panels, the four swirly crocodiles, the ornamentation on the head of the figure, and the snake heads.

Balance: There is absolute balance in this piece, as it seems to be almost perfectly symmetrical, with the exception of the leg in the figure's mouth.

Emphasis: The emphasis of this piece appears to be on the figure itself, having been placed in the center, with ornamentation adorning the head, and swirls at the wrists like bracelets, and the heavy-looking footwear.

Economy, and/or Proportion: Most of the figure's proportions seem life-like, with the exception of the arms being elongated.

4. Context: The Diquís people and culture thrived in pre-Columbian Costa Rica from 700 to 1530 CE. In the Boruca language, the word "*diquís*" means "*great waters*" or "*great river*". The lands they inhabited were rich with gold deposits, and they created their sculptures through hammering the gold nuggets or melting them down into wax molds, which is known as casting (museo.precolumbiano.cl, 2021). Artists would often use acid to remove copper from the surface, allowing for a shinier piece; this process is known as depletion gilding (haaedu.org, 2016). Their extraordinary metallurgy produced earrings, diadems, necklaces, masks and ornaments to be applied on clothing (Dallas Museum, 2017). Over the years, there have been many sculptures discovered in the northern part of Costa Rica, and most of them depict animals, or some kind of human/animal hybrid.

5. Iconography: According to our text, "in Diquis mythology, serpents and crocodiles inhabited a lower world, humans and birds a higher one" (Stokstad, 2017). In this sculpture, the crocodile is a strong thematic element,

possibly signifying that the figure is a demon or someone to be feared, especially with the leg shown in its teeth, and the snake across its body. Depictions of animals are common in Diquis culture, and many are anthropomorphized, like this one. It is believed that the ability of such creatures to cause harm also engendered their capacity of inspiring religious awe and respect (metmuseum.org, 2021). This sculpture would most likely have caused its viewer to be somewhat reverent, and perhaps, even a bit afraid of what it symbolized.

6. Personal Reflections: I chose this work because I was drawn in by its shine, the swirls of the crocodiles, and by the strong symmetry of the piece. I found the swirls to be fanciful, and I was amused by the leg in the figure's mouth, which I assumed was meant to be scary. I was also amused by the two-headed snake, and the fact that the figure seemed to be holding it across its body as a symbol that it was not afraid of it. I really enjoyed learning more about the Diquis culture and how prevalent their gold works were – I had never heard of these peoples before. I viewed many pieces from this time period, but this sculpture stood out as one of the best examples of their metallurgy.

7. APA citations:

Dma.org. 2017. *Cultures & Traditions - Diquís - Dallas Museum of Art Collection Online*. Available at: <https://collections.dma.org/essay/v2e0ryjz>.

Haaedu.org. 2016. *Veraguas/Chiriquí culture, Honolulu Museum of Art - haaedu.org*. Available at: <http://www.haaedu.org/veraguaschiriqu-culture-panama-pendant>.

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Stokstad, M., & Cothren, M. W. (2017). *Art History, Volume 1 (6th Edition)*. Pearson Education (US). <https://bookshelf.vitalsource.com/books/9780134485096>