

Inka Pilgrimage: Hidden Treasures of Pachamama  
Chapter 1 - Museum of Gold

*Eldorado*  
by Edgar Allan Poe  
(published 1849)  
GAILY bedight,  
A gallant knight,  
In sunshine and in shadow,  
Had journeyed long,  
Singing a song,  
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old --  
This knight so bold --  
And o'er his heart a shadow  
Fell as he found  
No spot of ground  
That looked like Eldorado.

And, as his strength  
Failed him at length,  
He met a pilgrim shadow --  
"Shadow," said he,  
"Where can it be --  
This land of Eldorado?"

"Over the Mountains  
Of the Moon,  
Down the Valley of the Shadow,  
Ride, boldly ride,"  
The shade replied, --  
"If you seek for Eldorado!"

<http://poestories.com/read/eldorado>

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My main concern after landing safely at the El Dorado International Airport in Bogota, Colombia – and after watching lightning bolts light up the eastern sky like a row of candles – was whether Susie would meet me as promised. She had been on an adventure of her own, traveling through Ecuador, where she did some volunteer work,

and visiting friends in Colombia. She was devoting her graduate (post-baccalaureate) years to becoming familiar with Latin America and the multifarious cultures of the Spanish world. Her degree in Spanish served her well. She was now speaking Spanish better than her Paraguayan-born mother. I was amazed at her Spanish-speaking skills, and I told her I would pay her way if she would be my guide and interpreter once again, just like we had done the previous year on our Maya Pilgrimage (Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras). My daughter couldn't turn down an all-expense paid trip through the South American countries, especially after her monetary funds had been depleted.

“Paul Wigowsky!” yelled my daughter above the tumultuous sounds in the waiting area. I guess yelling “Dad” would have attracted the attention of all the fathers who were emerging from the confines of the airport, so Susie yelled my name instead. I looked past the sign with my name in bold letters – that she was holding above her head – to see the smiling face of my lovely dirty-blond-haired daughter.

“Susie!” I yelled back as I rushed with my suitcase in tow to give her a warm hug.

“Am I glad to see you,” I said after the warm hugs had been exchanged. “I thought you might not make it.”

“You knew I would be here,” said Susie in her pixie way. “You can depend on me.”

That was reassuring to me.

However, what was not reassuring to me was the noticeable hobble that Susie tried to conceal as we walked down the street from Alegria's Hostel the following morning.

“How's your toe?” I asked as we headed towards the La Candelaria, the main historical and cultural area of Bogota.

“It hurts to step on it, and I have to plant my right foot on the insole so I don't feel the little toe,” explained Susie.

I recalled the shock I felt when I read her Facebook comment a week earlier: “I am amazed by my clumsiness yet again. I broke my toe last night against my friend's shoe. Luckily, the doc says I can totally do Machu Picchu in June.”

When I wrote an email to her and asked if it was an actual break, Susie responded: “It was an actual break. I'm able to walk on it slowly with minor annoyance, and it should be good by next week more or less, and completely fine in two weeks. I'll just

have to avoid super long walks when possible and take taxis or buses instead of walking that mile or two in a city, like I usually would.”

“That Colombian cure works quite well,” remarked Susie as we walked slowly on the wet sidewalk. There was a mild morning drizzle coming down.

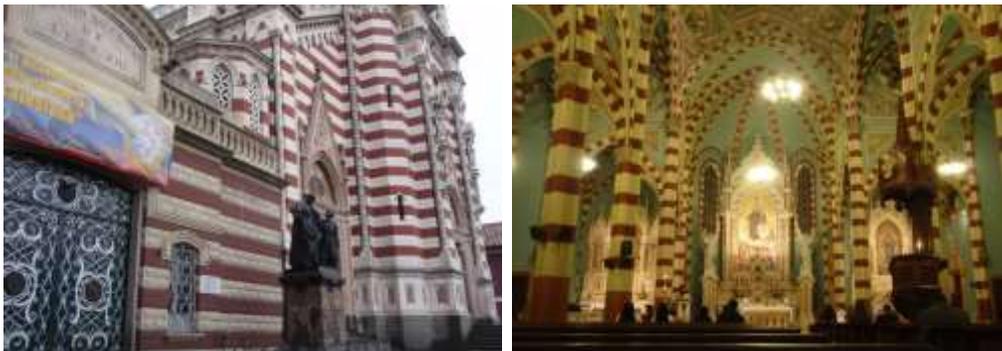
“What’s the Colombian cure?” I inquired.

“I soak the foot in hot water with salt,” answered Susie. “Then I apply the solution with a wash cloth repeatedly. It helps keep down the swelling.”

As we continued walking down Calle 9, my eyes were diverted to a colorful red and white building. The unusual alternating horizontal red and white stripes reminded me of the stripes on the American flag. The red and white colors spoke to me of valor and self-sacrifice, and purity and innocence.

“Let’s take a look at that building,” I said, turning left to find out what the building was all about. An inscription in stone above an adjacent building said: “Colegio Salesiano de Leon XIII.” A statue of a priest and a boy stood nearby -- in memory of Saint John Bosco of the Salesian Society and his dedication to the education of poor youngsters.

I walked up the steps to the entrance of the Gothic church, built in the Moorish Revival architectural style. The interior of the church had the same pattern of horizontal red and white stripes on its pillars and arches. However, the colors were more brownish-red and off-white or cream. I learned afterwards that those were the colors of the Carmelite Order.



“Let’s go inside,” I said to Susie, who was accustomed to my religious propensities and interest in churches and temples. She reluctantly acquiesced and followed me into the sanctuary. A service or mass was in progress. We quietly made our way towards the front, where a large painting of Our Lady of Carmen beckoned us

like a beacon of light. Two angelic statues flanked the sides of the awe-inspiring vision of the Queen of Heaven and Earth enveloped in a golden aureole with the Divine Child standing on a cloud by her left side. She was clothed in a brown garment, which was the scapular or habit of the Carmelite Order. On top of her white head covering sat a golden crown. It appeared as if her elevated divine position served to draw suffering humanity upwards into the divine realm.

Down one of the side aisles, I stopped to admire a painting of a red-robed El Nino (the Divine Child), dancing on top of a revolving earth. One foot was on the land, and the other foot was on the ocean. I thought of the scientific concept of changes in weather due to the El Nino effect in the equatorial Pacific Ocean. That's where we were headed in several days – south to Ecuador.



As we walked out of the Gothic church, I marveled once again at the red and white colors of the church exterior. My mind reflected on the juxtaposition of those alchemical colors, which symbolized the polarities of the Red King and the White Queen (the solar spirit and the lunar soul). I thought of the masculine (red) and feminine (white) brought together into a unity of Father Sky and Mother Earth. I was to discover later that the indigenous people of South America called them Pachacamac and Pachamama.

We continued walking down to the Plaza de Bolivar, the heart of the original town of Santa Fe de Bogota. Susie checked the map to make sure we were headed in the right direction. The large square opened up before us as we passed the neoclassical style building – the Capitolio Nacional, the seat of Congress. Across the square on the northern side stood another monumental edifice, the Palace of Justice, the seat of the Supreme Court. A bronze statue of Simon Bolivar on a raised pedestal stood in the middle of the plaza. There seemed to be some activity with lots of curious bystanders

watching a film crew on the raised platform around the statue. When Susie asked some onlookers about the film crew, nobody seemed to know what it was all about. I thought perhaps it had something to do with Simon Bolivar, who played a key role in the independence of South American countries from the Spanish Empire. I gazed up at the graffiti-covered pedestal and thought of the military liberator, who stood with sword in hand and looked over the land that he ruled from 1819-1830. That was when he was president of Gran Colombia, a short-lived republic that encompassed the territories of present-day Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Panama.



We had decided earlier in the day to make a visit to the Museo de Oro (Museum of Gold) our top priority in Bogota. Susie figured a ride on the TransMilenio would take us directly there. We boarded the red articulated bus at an elevated station in the middle of the avenue. I marveled at the above-ground rapid bus system. It seemed to be an inexpensive solution for a large city that couldn't afford the time and money to build an underground metro system.

Entering the Museo de Oro was like entering the magical land of El Dorado. It was a land of "the Golden One," a land of sacred gold emanating from the solar deity, a manifestation of the cosmic electro-magnetic energy within the fertilizing power of the sun. Here was the world's biggest collection of golden masterpieces, about 50,000 pieces of goldsmith work from the different Pre-Hispanic cultures of Colombia. Here was the gold that was hidden from the greedy Spanish conquistadors, who traveled up and down the Americas in quest of the precious metal for use in enriching the Spanish Empire. The four exhibition galleries of the museum formed a veritable kingdom of the legendary "Lost City of Gold," which housed gold objects from the ancient societies of Colombia: Narino, Tumalo, Calima, San Agustin, Tierradentro, Tolima, Quimbaya, Cauca, Zenu, Tairona, Muisca, Uraba and Choco. The quest for the "City of Gold" ended at the Museo de Oro.

We walked slowly from exhibit to exhibit, from the Mining and Metallurgy gallery, to the People and Gold in Pre-Hispanic Colombia gallery, to the Cosmology and Symbolism gallery, and culminating in the brilliant gallery of the Shamanic room

called The Offering. We marveled at the golden masterpieces from the various cultures, learning about their life, customs, and beliefs that were embodied in the gold objects.

I was astonished to discover that photography of the gold objects was permitted, as long as the flash mode was not used. And so I offer a photographic journey through the “City of Gold,” with a slide show that includes the labels (in English) that were provided at the museum. [Note: My visit to the Museo de Oro can be viewed as a slideshow at:<http://wigowsky.com/travels/inca/col/oro/oro.htm>]

More information about the gold objects and the Pre-Hispanic cultures is available at the Banco de la Republica Gold Museum web site:<http://www.banrep.gov.co/museo/eng/home.htm>

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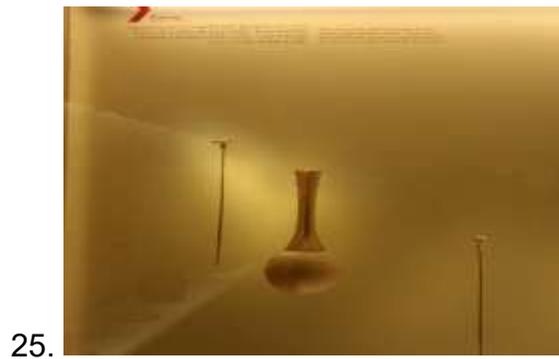
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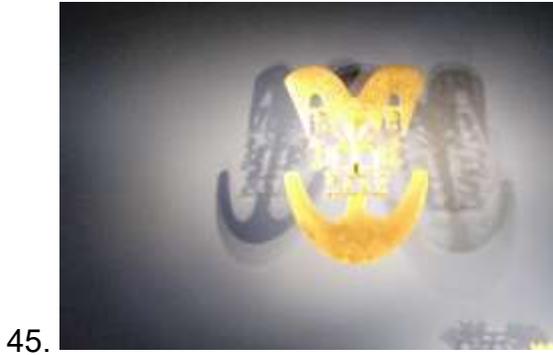
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- Transcribed Notes from Museum labels (not available for all pictures):
4. Lime container from middle Cauca Valley. After removing the charcoal from inside, the openings left by the pins in the walls of the object were filled with plugs made of the same metal.
  5. Seven sheets of fine gold, which had been embossed beforehand on a matrix, were assembled using metal nails to make this anthropomorphos container from Calima region.
  7. With use or with the passing of time, the surface gilding of these objects has deteriorated, revealing the tumbaga that is inside them. [Tumbaga was the name given by Spaniards to a non-specific alloy of gold and copper which they found in widespread use in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica and South America. Tumbaga was widely used by the pre-Columbian cultures of central America to make religious objects. Like most gold alloys, tumbaga was versatile and could be cast, drawn, hammered, gilded, soldered, welded, plated, hardened, annealed, polished, engraved, embossed, and inlaid. Wikipedia article on Tumbaga ]
  10. Eye-catching ornaments with geometric and abstract designs were part of the attire of the other group of lords, in addition to luxury objects like pyrite mirrors and necklaces made of snails from the coasts of Ecuador.
  11. The jaguar and puma symbolize male power and strength in Amerindian thought, also the skill and wisdom of the hunter and the warrior.
  12. The chieftains controlled economic and ceremonial life. At death they were buried

under mounds, known as "tolas".

13. Masks in the form of skulls or lifeless faces were placed on the dead person, one on top of the other. Most Malagana goldwork was made for funerary regalia.

14. This regalia, which was found in a Yotoco-period tomb, related its owner to feline figures and their powers. The circular plates on the nose ring imitate the jaguar's spots, and the prolongations, his limb.

15. Luxury objects were used and worn by leaders as symbols of their political, economic, and ritual dominance over their community. When they died, these objects were buried with them.

16. The same gilded face, uniform and enigmatic, is repeated on diadems, breastplates, and pendants. This icon expressed values, beliefs and ideals of beauty.

18. The Yotoco icon symbolized ideas of cosmology, and these lent support to the power of whoever exhibited it. The impassive face transmits the idea of a stable, powerful leader.

21. When he is transformed into a bat and jaguar, man evokes and merges the powers, knowledge, and habits of these two animals, and reveals the secrets of life and death.

22. The Shamans of numerous present-day indigenous groups heal the sick by rhythmically stirring palm leaves, just as this person seems to be doing.

23. The sticks are often topped off by rattles, which sounded when the stick was used for extracting from the poporos the lime that was needed when coca leaves were being chewed. In indigenous thought, containers are like women: they hold substances which get transformed and give rise to life.

24. The colours, shapes and shine of the gourds, pumpkins, marrows and women were an allusion to fertility, and stimulated this. Coca was used by chieftains and shamans to help them to think and to renew and transmit sacred knowledge, because of the effect it had in activating the powers of concentration, memory and speech.

25. The ashes of the dead were kept in urns inside single-chambered tombs. These urns were shaped like gourds or pregnant women, as if they were wombs where life was reborn.

26. Hammered gold or tumbaga helmets or crowns were the leaders' largest and most visible emblems.

27. The bird-men in these ornaments have twisted nose rings with circular tips instead of a beak; they are elements in the transformation into a bird which allude to the ecstatic flight of the shaman.

28. The chieftains wore a long loincloth like a tail and animal skins on their backs, and they let their nails grow long like claws. The jaguar-man, frog-man, and lizard-man in these breastplates depicted the chieftains wearing their religious animal transformation finery.

29. Lords, perhaps mythical characters, borne aloft on platforms and relating to the sun, with birds and two-headed snakes, were repeatedly portrayed on breastplates made of metal or from shells.

30. The roundness of the breastplates, that were worn by important women and chieftains, alluded, as did the burial mounds, to the place where fertilization, gestation, and rebirth took place.
31. The religious leader, a man transformed into a bat, was depicted on metal breastplates, pendants and bells, on stick heads carved out of bone, and on pottery objects.
33. Political and religious leaders on the high plains wore ornaments with openwork decoration and hanging plates. Farmers, artisans, traders and ordinary people wore small simple ornaments.
34. Ancestral mummy.
35. This group was part of the exquisite funerary attire of a leading person who was buried in Sogamoso, a Muisca pilgrimage site that was famous for its Temple of the Sun.
36. During ceremonies, the hanging plates on ornaments twinkled in the light and gave off metallic sounds which helped transform those present and enabled them to communicate more easily with the gods.
37. The snake with a head at each end appears associated with the sun, as a symbol of its eternal movement to and fro between two opposite points on the horizon. It was from this movement that life originated.
38. Priests and shamans, some of them regarded as being genuine bird-men, made a magical flight through the universe. Their paraphernalia, with figures of birds, gave them powers to undertake long journeys.
41. A leading figure with a fan headdress, the Sun, on a bar carried by figures makes the journey between the solstices. Bats from the underworld can be seen underneath or at his sides.
42. This sumptuously attired female chieftain has adopted a solemn, engrossed attitude. Shaman, chieftains, potters and goldsmiths performed rituals to ensure that the cyclical processes of nature would continue.
43. Because of its golden, shiny skin and its aggressiveness, astuteness and vitality, the jaguar was associated with the regenerating powers of gold and the sun.
44. It was with this lime container, which was found in Antioquia in the 19th century, that Banco de la Republica started its Gold Museum in 1939. It is an imitation of a gourd, the rounded features of which were associated with the female body.
46. Golden Boat of Lake Guatavita (the legendary place of El Dorado).
47. Lake Guatavita (the place of the legendary El Dorado).

The Offering gallery was the last place we visited. It was the culmination of the El Dorado experience, which I was able to preserve as a video: [Museo de Oro video on YouTube](#)  
Listen to the haunting chant of the Shaman (El Dorado, "the Gilded Man" who rules the

three worlds of the Andean cosmos) and peer into the depths of Lake Guatavita as you take a mystical journey on the "Golden Boat" of the Imagination.

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The dream of El Dorado dematerialized when we left the museum and began interacting with the noontime traffic on the streets of a city of nearly eight million people. Images of gold objects, however, continued to appear in my mind's eye. I thought of the tears or sweat of the sun that produced the gold deposits, according to the Inca and Andean perception of the solar deity and the solid substance it produced. A picture formed in my mind of the fiery rays of the sun-god penetrating deep into the bowels of the earth-goddess (Pachamama), producing a noble metal with a radiant sun-yellow texture. I felt as if I had glimpsed the essence of the Andean sun-god in the Temple of the Sun. Another image, a haunting specter of the ancestral mummy, was relegated to my subconscious mind.

The rest of the day was spent walking – and riding – through the modern streets of what was once known as Bacata, the original Muisca name of Bogota meaning “planted fields.” We went to the Museo de Arte Colonial, where I saw a curious painting of what appeared to be a mystical decapitation (i.e. the saint was holding his head in his hands , and a red heart with golden rays and a dove hovered over the space where his head had been removed). The thought of self-sacrifice flashed through my mind. We went to the Botero Museum, where the famous Colombian artist Fernando Botero had his paintings of proportionately exaggerated corpulent (or large) people on display.



Everywhere on the streets, I saw smiling, friendly faces, as if they were solar-powered by the sun-god Inti himself. A beggar I met on the street (I gave him a few

coins) seemed to be the legendary Viracocha, who was known to appear in various guises (incognito) as he traveled on the face of the earth.



The highlight of the day for me was our ride on the funicular up to Monserrate Hill, where the panoramic view of the sprawling city – from north to south – was absolutely spectacular. It was as if I were standing at the Parthenon and looking down at the “Athens of South America.”



After enjoying the expansive view for a while, we continued up a path past the fourteen stations of the cross to the Santuario del Señor de Monserrate (Shrine of the Fallen Lord). An additional fifteenth station of the cross was erected to the right of the whitewashed building with the words “Jesus Resucita al tercer dia” (Jesus rises on the third day) engraved in stone below a loincloth-clad Christ-figure rising from the underworld with a Latin cross uplifted in his right hand. Going up the numerous steps to the crest of the hill, where the sanctuary welcomed the pilgrim with the slogan “Pasion de Cristo Confortanos” (Passion of Christ comforts us), was like climbing the steps of a pyramid to the temple. A commemorative inscription on a plaque to the right of the entrance gave a history of the sacred images inside the sanctuary.



Inside the sanctuary, a scene in the distance captivated my eyes and drew my steps toward it. As I walked towards the front, I saw that I was looking at the figure of the Fallen Christ. It appeared that the suffering man had fallen with the cross to the ground, and he was trying to get up. His right hand was partially extended, as if asking for help. The image touched my heart, and I wanted to extend a helping hand out of compassion for the suffering humanity that the figure represented for me. The words of Jesus reverberated in my ears: “Inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you have done it for me.” Here was a display of the ultimate sacrifice and a call to follow the example of the master: “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

An equal-armed cross was displayed behind the fallen Lord. It was the cross potent with a crossbar at the end of each of its arms, symbolizing the four directions, elements, seasons, etc. On each side on an elevated platform – which housed a central cylindrical tabernacle – stood a majestic winged-angel. The high altar (the place of sacrifice) seemed to be made of marble, and four evangelists with their mystic emblems were sculptured in high relief on the front: Matthew with the son of man, Mark with the lion, Luke with the ox, and John with the eagle. I knew that the four living creatures were also known as the Tetramorph (four shapes), which also represented the four elements (air, fire, earth, water) and the fixed cross of the zodiac (Aquarius, Leo, Taurus, Scorpio).

“You can go behind through a corridor to see the Fallen Lord up close,” said a church attendant, who noticed I was enraptured by the scene.

We went behind where the kind man indicated and saw the suffering, fallen Lord through a glass enclosure. It was a sight to behold the man on the cross, both of which

were laying on the ground in a helpless situation. There was much to contemplate in that artistic representation of suffering humanity.



“Be sure to visit the Black Madonna, also,” directed the same man as we returned to the main sanctuary. He pointed to a small shrine to the left. “She is also called La Moreneta, the little dark-skinned one, and the indigenous people who visit her shrine associate her with Pachamama.”

Pachamama! Mother Earth, Mother Nature! That was what I imagined as I approached the dark-faced Virgin with an equally dark-faced divine child (El Nino) sitting on her lap. The Black Virgin had a gold sphere in her right hand. “She has the whole world in her hand,” I thought as I tried to decipher some of the symbolism behind the imagery. I also thought of the Egyptian goddess Isis and other archetypal mother figures who represented the fertility of the earth.

As we left the shrine of the Black Madonna, which was patterned after the Black Virgin of Montserrat in Barcelona, Spain, I noticed a group of indigenous Colombians walking further up the hill. It was the same group that I had noticed looking at the ancestral mummy in the Museo de Oro, and the same group that rode in the funicular with us.

“There must be some sacred ancestral site at the top of that hill,” I commented to Susie. “Let’s follow them a little way.” Susie was not interested in invading someone’s privacy, so I just watched them at a distance as they ascended the hill behind the sanctuary to what I presumed to be a private sacred ceremonial ground.

Before we descended from the eastern Montserrat (“serrated mountain”) Hill, I glanced across at the other prominent peak across the way – Guadalupe Hill. On top of that hill I could see (with my binoculars) a large white statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe with outstretched arms. It was as if she was offering solace and protection for the people of Bogota down below. Later, I learned that the 15-meter sculpture was created by Gustavo Arcila Uribe. It was truly a majestic work of inspired art.



The rest of the day was spent taking either a taxi or the TransMilenio bus system to various parts of the city. It was a combination of a riding and a walking tour of city attractions. Some of the attractions included statues of the heroes of independence: Caldas, Santander, and Bolivar. The memorial to Bolivar Libertador (“the Liberator”) was the most impressive; it had Bolivar on his horse and a list of momentous battles (Boyaca, Carabobo, Bombona), where he fought for the cause of independence.



On one of the streets, I was greeted by a colorful mural that resided in my heart and mind throughout my pilgrimage in South America. It was a symbolical mural of Father Sky (Pachacamac) and Mother Earth (Pachamama). One circular mandala (sacred circle) on the left depicted a Solar (Sky) deity with symbols of the planetary beings: Sun, Neptune, Mercury, Jupiter, Uranus, Earth, Moon, Mars, Pluto, Venus, and Saturn. Another mandala on the right depicted the Mother Goddess (Pachamama) with the lunar phases around her. I was beginning to see that the Circle of Life in Andean cosmology portrayed the supernal concepts of Father Sky and Mother Earth (the masculine and feminine polarities) in various forms and guises. They were ubiquitous.

