Tupu
Pre-Colombian, Andean
Ca. Middle Horizon (around 600 A.D.)-Late Horizon (c.1475-1532)
Peruvian
Bone
Gift of Mrs. George D. Pratt
AC M.1940.4

The artifact is a tupu, the Incan version of a modern shawl pin. A tupu is a long pin often with a decorative head, used by Andean women to fasten a lliclla. A lliclla is a shawl, which can also be referred to as lliqlla or lliklla. The shawl is pinned in the front with a tupu. This specific tupu is made of bone, which can only be seen after the pattern ends, and has a decorative bird at its top. Other tupus were also be made with silver, gold, copper, and copper alloys. The composition of this particular piece, as well as its pattern scheme and decorative top, reveal that it was most likely made during the mid to Late Horizon period (600-1532 A.D.) Because of its decorative design a woman of high social position, such as priestess, may have worn this tupu. Based on similar archeological findings, it can be concluded that this tupu was from the Moche, Chimu, or Chancay civilizations, although the exact civilization cannot be identified due to the conquest and fighting amongst them.

Women wore tupus to fasten their shawls in the front, keeping them secure on their shoulders. The more elaborate the decoration at the top, the higher position or standing the woman wearing it had. Tupus can have circular heads, which indicates that this particular one could have belonged to a woman of higher standing because of its decorative top. They can be found throughout the central Andean area during the Middle Horizon, and were commonly used by the Incas. In fact, tupus continue to be used in many Andean regions to this day. Throughout the Incan reign in the Andes, tupus were most commonly made of bone because of its ease. Sometimes though, they were made of silver and gold. These tupus look like modern-day shawl pins made of copper and are pre-columbian versions to the broche used today. One could look to the present-day broche or shawl pins to see how their construction is immensely similar to the methods the Incas used hundreds of years ago.

It is surprising that this tupu survived the centuries. Due to the commonly poor preservation of artifacts as a result of the moist climate of the tropical lowlands, it is our good fortune to have it in the collection.

Written by Jordan Roehl & Sean Legister, Class of 2011
Bibliography


<http://www.smith.edu/vistas/vistas_web/glossary.htm>