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DOUBLE TAKE

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Precious jewelry, vessels, and other art objects were collected by the Spanish conquistadors in the Americas during the 16th century. Theodor de Bry's copperplate engraving from 1594 (left) shows an Inca prince in what is now Panama in front of General de Balboa. The conquistadors had many of these works of art melted down and shipped off, some in the form of flat discs about 12 cm in diameter (right), marked with royal Spanish tax and coinage stamps. The "XIX" stamp with the three dots shows that the disc is 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ carats. Art historians in Rome are investigating how art objects were moved, modified, and reclassified as a result of the conflicts in the early modern period. They are also discovering the treasures that were thus irrevocably lost in the melting pot.

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