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Erica Meyer

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Erica Meyer  
Hst 352  
Rector  
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### Archeology: Butting Heads and Loosing Ground

The modern scholarly community is, brick by brick, building an increasingly large knowledge base concerning the cultures and history of the pre-European conquest Andes. This knowledge leans heavily upon archeology, and is therefore subject to interpretation from viewpoint and to limitation from the loss of evidence.

There are numerous sources of information with which to research the history of the Andes, written record, oral history, ethnographic study, and archeology are four of them. Each has strengths, and each has weaknesses. While written records can provide detailed accounts, the Incas had no writing system, leaving this record highly biased by Europeans. Oral histories provide a native voice, but these have mostly survived by being recorded, and thus also face the written bias. Though, to be fair, these histories are also subject to native bias; Incan accounts aren't likely to discuss pre-Incan life<sup>1</sup>.

Ethnographic studies rely on present cultures to reflect past ones; this offers a source direct source of native voice, but it suffers from the change of cultures over time. Modern Incan descendents are not the same as ancient Incans. Archeology interprets another source of information, the remains of past civilization. This field relies heavily upon the researcher and, unlike ethnography, looks into the far past. However, archeology is a field rife with contention.

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon F. McEwan, Melissa Chatfield, and Arminda Gibaja, "The Archaeology of Inca Origins," in *Andean Archeology I: Variations in Sociopolitical Organization*, ed. William H. Isbell and Helaine Silverman (New York: Kluwer Academic/ Plenum Publishers, 2002), 288.

Archeology, like all sciences, is a changing field. Indeed, according to Isbell and Silverman, it is a field that undergoes significant theoretical changes every fifteen to twenty years<sup>2</sup>. Today, archeology in South America is oriented towards the Andes<sup>3</sup>, leading to a dramatic increase of knowledge of the pre-European conquest life in this area<sup>4</sup>. It has been said that, “Today, Andean archeology is dynamic, theoretically aware, and engaged in productive self-criticism.”<sup>5</sup> This is high praise considering the history of authority’s interaction with artifacts and ruins in the Andes.

Even before the European conquest there was a distinct interest in ancient object; it was an interest that took the form of looting and an interest that was readily taken up by the conquering Europeans. It wasn’t until the 16<sup>th</sup> century that the first seeds of archeology were planted in the Andes; this was when Cioza de León pioneered the recording of ancient works. The next major step occurred at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Bishop Martínez de Companón commissioned the mapping of several ancient monuments, including the Pyramid of the Sun. By early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 1814, the first work to systematically look at ancient monuments was published by Alexander Von Humbolt.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Max Uhle began his work. Another pioneer, his frontier was stratigraphy. Delving down into the earth, he found that artifacts could be found in distinct layers of artifacts, known as horizons, that indicated depth of time, and that civilization in the Andes predated the Incas. In the 1920s and 1930s, Uhle and his

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<sup>2</sup> William H. Isbell and Helaine Silverman, *Andean Archeology I: Variations in Sociopolitical Organization* (New York: Kluwer Academic/ Plenum Publishers, 2002), 337.

<sup>3</sup> David L. Browman, “Evolving Archeological Interpretations of Inka Institutions: Perspectives, Dynamics, and Reassessments,” *Latin American Research Review* 31, no.1 (2001), 228.

<sup>4</sup> Browman, 227.

<sup>5</sup> Isbell and Silverman, 378.

students at Berkeley published a series of reports concerning these. Ulhe and his students formed the 'Berkeley school' of Andean studies.

The 'Berkeley school' has been very important in Peruvian archeology, but it is not without rivals. In fact, it is rivalries that have refined archeology to what it is today<sup>6</sup>. One rival, the 'Peruvian school' came to existence around 1890 with Julio C. Tellu. Tellu sought a wholeness in history. Where the 'Berkeley school' focused on the change of artifact over space and time, the 'Peruvian school' sought to explain such social aspects such as community organization and subsistence strategies.

There are not only differences at the same time, there are, quite understandably, changes over time. In the 1950s, for example, changes shown by cultural horizons were understood to be brought about through cultural impacts only, such as, to borrow from Moseley, invading armies and religious conversion<sup>7</sup>. However, it has been said that it is, "now obvious that Andean civilization matured within a very dynamic landscape."<sup>8</sup> For instance, changes could be stimulated by natural disasters such as droughts.

Another example of a shift over time would be the concept of cultural evolution, a theory holding that cultures advance through three epochs: savagery, to barbarism, to civilization. At each stage, culture grows more complex. The theory of cultural evolution has been used in the past to aid in examining the history of the area. However, this is a theory that has more recently been called into doubt. As it has been asserted, "We must be careful not to dilute the 'Andeaness' of the ancient societies of the Central Andes by

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<sup>6</sup> Isbell and Silverman, 375.

<sup>7</sup> Michael E. Moseley, *The Incas and Their Ancestors: The Archeology of Peru* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992): 21.

<sup>8</sup> Moseley, 21.

imposing on them the ideal cultural types provided by cultural evolution.”<sup>9</sup> Roughly restated, cultural evolution uses stereotypes that don’t fit South America.

Yet one more transformation has come from an expanding knowledge base gained from excavations. New arguments now circulate that hold that previous studies have been far too centered on capitals<sup>10</sup>. It has been noticed that, in the horizons, changes in household ceramics do not always follow changing ceramic styles. This has begun to be interpreted as showing that the great capitals were not all-controlling, unchanging states. Rather, there is a more patch-work view where power shifted, states rose and fell, and rural communities were not automatically whitewashed by the ruling culture<sup>11</sup>.

These examples of differences and changes are only a few of many. However, as has been stated, these tensions have sparked debate and have shaped modern archeology in the Andes. There are some conflicts though that aren’t having such positive effects.

As previously mentioned, looting is a reality in the Andes. It was present before European contact and is still very much an issue today. For, while looting has uncovered many artifacts, it damages the archeological record both through wrecking sites and harming evidence viewed as not valuable as well as by removing artifacts viewed as valuable. The items taken are displaced from their settings and thus have erased a good deal of information concerning it. Not only this, but objects recovered this way have a tendency to disappear into the clutches of private collectors, vanishing from the reach of researchers.

Looting has been a very profitable business in the Andes, it is unfortunate to say. Moseley holds that, “Within a generation of the conquest, looting operations grew so

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<sup>9</sup> Isbell and Silverman, ix.

<sup>10</sup> Browman, 36.

large and financially rewarding that they became legally synonymous with mining.”<sup>12</sup> He does not simply say this to be dramatic. Monuments were divided into legal land claims, looting was given the same tax as geological mining, and metal artifacts were often melted down into bouillon for shipping. The Pyramid of the Sun is an example of a monument that suffered from such an attitude. Colonial looters washed away two thirds of the pyramid through hydraulic mining; they diverted the Rio Moche to do their work for them. It is lamentable that this happened, and even more so that it occurred before Bishop Martínez de Companón’s mapping project,

Fortunately, there is some good news concerning the record previously lost to looting, at least concerning metallurgy. In this field, stratigraphy has come to the rescue. Researchers have been studying lake sediments near major silver deposits, searching for signs of metals associated with smelting, and have found evidence of events during 1000-1200 AD and 1400-1650 AD<sup>13</sup>. The first time span lines up with the terminal stages of Tiwanaku and the second with the late Inca to early colonial period. What this study of sediments offers is that archeologists can uncover a timeline for metal production despite intensive looting<sup>14</sup>.

Tourism is another problem that is an active destructive force on the archeological record, and thus, another conflict of interests with archeologists. As of 2001, tourism in Peru was a one billion dollar a year industry<sup>15</sup>, and the Incan city Machu Picchu is the most famous attraction. In fact, Machu Picchu draws over 2,200 visitors a day in the dry

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<sup>11</sup> Browman, 42.

<sup>12</sup> Moseley, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Mark B. Abbot and Alexander P. Wolf, “Intensive Pre-Incan Metallurgy Recorded by Lake Sediments from the Bolivian Andes,” *Science* 301, no.5641 (2003): 1893.

<sup>14</sup> Abbot and Wolf, 1894-1895.

<sup>15</sup> “Road to Ruin,” *Economist* 360, no.8231 (2001): 30.

season of May through September<sup>16</sup>. In 1997 it was drawing 300,000 tourists a year in spite of violence and upheavals<sup>17</sup>.

The city is so popular that in 2001, when a Japanese team of scientists reported that Machu Picchu was falling at .4 inches per month and would eventually suffer an all-out collapse, rumors began to circulate that there was an conspiracy. The gossip went that Former president Alberto Fujimori, a man of Japanese decent who fled to Japan after a political scandal, sent the team over to destabilize tourism<sup>18</sup>. As of July 2001, the slide was proven false<sup>19</sup>.

Regrettably, the site is very fragile. The ancient Incans could hardly, after all, expect the city to be put under the pressures that it faces today<sup>20</sup>. One very modern instance of damage occurred in 2000. A beer commercial was being filmed in the city when a cameraman fell onto a sacred sundial and broke a fragment off<sup>21</sup>. Then there are also the thousands of tourists who tramp through daily on structures built centuries ago for only hundreds of people<sup>22</sup>. Propping up walls and roping off areas is not helping dam up the damage, and while other steps have been taken to protect Machu Picchu from the tourists, such as the entry fee being doubled to \$20 as of April 2001 and the number of hikers being limited<sup>23</sup>.

The strained relationship between tourism and archeology does not merely include the great, well known, and highly publicized monuments such as Machu Picchu.

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<sup>16</sup> "Road to Ruin," 30.

<sup>17</sup> Alex Emery, "Machu Picchu: Ancient City Hidden in the Clouds," *Christian Science Monitor* 89, no.162 (1997): 162.

<sup>18</sup> Howard LaFranchi, "A Letter From Machu Picchu, Peru: Machu Picchu's Slide," *Christian Science Monitor* 93, no.112 (2001): 7

<sup>19</sup> "Road to Ruin," 30.

<sup>20</sup> LaFranchi, 7.

<sup>21</sup> "Road to Ruin," 30.

<sup>22</sup> LaFranchi, 7.

Adventure tourism is a growing industry, and while all claims over archeological sites in Peru belong to the government, the government does not have the resources to keep watch over them all<sup>24</sup>. These two realities are the cause for a good deal of worry. Take, for example, Cotahuasi Canyon.

Cotahuasi Canyon, in Southern Peru, is only really accessible by the rapids-riddled Cotahuasi River. First successfully traversed in 1995, the river began to draw rafting adventure enthusiasts soon afterwards. This has had the side effect of giving these people access to previously tourist inaccessible archeological sites. Some rafters have taken trophies such as ancient textiles or sherds of pots. Others have damaged not through looting, but through other actions. Rafters have climbed upon fragile walls and accidentally kicked over parts of ancient ruins<sup>25</sup>. Since the government cannot, realistically, protect all these backwater sites, it is left in the hands of the tour companies<sup>26</sup>.

Another conflict that archeologists face is development of many different sorts. Cuzco provides a model of one damaging aspect of progress. This city is located in a highly seismic area, meaning that earthquakes are a constant threat. The ancient Incas builders took this into consideration, and their architecture has proven to be more reliable during tremors than either colonial or modern building styles<sup>27</sup>. The 'old city' section of Cuzco, home to numerous Incan monuments, is facing Urban sprawl. It is the tourist service center of the city and new developments are crowding into this relatively small sector. While the developments may have no direct impact on the monuments, they

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<sup>23</sup> LaFranchi, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Justin Jennings, "Ruins on the Rapids" *Archaeology* 56, no.6 (2003): 30-35.

<sup>25</sup> Jennings, 30-35.

<sup>26</sup> Jennings, 33-35.



nevertheless endanger them. In fact, due to overcrowding in the area and unsafe planning, a 1950 earthquake caused 70% of the cultural heritage sites in Cuzco to be destroyed<sup>28</sup>.

Another example, this time with a more direct impact, is the controversy over installing cable cars that lead up to Machu Picchu. In September 1999 the site was declared by the World Monument Fund to be one of the most endangered monuments in the world, yet this didn't immediately halt the cable car plan which stood to turn the 300,000 a year tourist flow to 1.5 million a year<sup>29</sup>. Not only would it increase tourist flow, but the construction would endanger the structural stability of the area. The company chosen for construction was, cable car opponents insist, selected through backroom dealing full of irregularities<sup>30</sup>. It was picked before its environmental and archeological impact was even approved<sup>31</sup>. In 2001, due to great outcry, the project was put under the indefinite suspension. It hasn't been removed.

The complete destruction of a site is, perhaps, the most heinous of the effects of development on archeology. Ancient ruins are sometimes demolished to supply space for modern usage. These sites are more or less wiped from the historical record. Some knowledge of the areas may persist, but the sites themselves are gone.

Capturing aerial images has proven valuable in preserving the ghosts of sites. Around in Peru since 1931, when geologist Robert Shippee and aerial photographer George R. Johnson began capturing images, aerial photography has provided evidence of many sites long gone. Archeologist Morris Craig, for example, researched the history of Chincha Valley and relied heavily on such shots. He holds that, "These photographic

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<sup>27</sup> Chloe Fox, "Cuzco: Back to the Future," *UNESCO Sources* 117 (1999): 13.

<sup>28</sup> Fox, 13-14.

<sup>29</sup> Catherine Elton, "Cable Cars Invade Inca 'Lost City'," *Christian Science Monitor* 91, no.228 (2001): 6.

<sup>30</sup> Elton, 6.

records from the air provide important evidence of the way things used to be.”<sup>32</sup> One site which is today a field, bulldozed clear in the 1950s, is shown as possessing archeological remains in a 1931 Shippee and Johnson photograph<sup>33</sup>.

One last conflict that archeology faces is not often reported in the news, but infects other media with a rampant contagion. This conflict is romanticism, and one can describe it with one quick illustration; the article “Cable Cars invade Inca ‘Lost City,’” refers to Macchu Pichu as a ‘lost city’<sup>34</sup> in spite of the fact that it has been known to the west since 1911 and is Peru’s largest tourism draw. How can something be lost if a good part of the world’s population knows where it is?

It is not only monuments that are given a romantic mystique. The profession of archeology itself is often viewed through a Hollywood bias. Archeologists have been portrayed as whip-bearing adventurers who fight against Nazis, or perhaps as all-knowing innovators of theory who crack the key to reach another world. Then let’s not forget the brave tomb raider who goes head to head with a cursed mummy or two. This glamour leads to misconceptions and misunderstandings.

The romantic notion of archeology also impacts research. It is held that, “The field is regularly rocked by fantastic assertions, from rumors of ‘lost’ cities such as Atlantis to claims that space aliens built the pyramids of ancient Egypt.”<sup>35</sup> One such rumor is the city of Paititi in the Andes. Said to be where gold was hidden from Spanish conquerors, Paititi has never been proven to exist. Such claims are far more interesting to the mass populace than, say, projects that assess ancient metallurgy through lake

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<sup>31</sup> Elton, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Morris Craig, “Airborne Archeology,” *Natural History* 104, no.12 (2001): 72.

<sup>33</sup> Craig, 70-71.

<sup>34</sup> Elton, 6.

sediment stratification., and they tend to, “Inspire treasure hunters and other uncredentialed people to organize expeditions.”<sup>36</sup> These expeditions are prone to draw more funds than more down to earth and boring research.

Through theoretical conflict modern archeology has taken form, but not all conflict has had a positive impact. Challenges such as looting, tourism, development and romanticism actively hinder archeology in the Andes. The modern scholarly community leans heavily upon archeology for knowledge of the past and its culture, and, therefore, this knowledge is subject to interpretation from viewpoint and to limitation from the loss of evidence.

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<sup>35</sup> Emily Laber, “Skeptical Enquirer: The Sensational Discovery that Wasn’t,” *Sciences* 41, no.1 (2001): 7.

<sup>36</sup> Laber, 7.

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