

Chapter 19

Looking for an Identity: Archaeologists, Local Communities, and Public Archaeology in Peru

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Introduction

In Peru, public archaeology has not yet been firmly established as a field of archaeological study. There is no formal education in the field, although there are diplomas or master's courses focusing on Cultural Resource Management and undergraduate courses on museum studies and ethical issues relating to archaeology. Traditionally, most of the efforts to disseminate information about archaeological discoveries and theories to the general public have been made through school textbooks, newspapers, and exhibitions in local museums and archaeologists have seldom been in direct contact with the public; their studies have usually been discussed only in specialist circles.

Today, however, archaeologists in Peru have an increasing interest in engaging with the public, and there are a growing number of examples that can be considered oriented towards public archaeology. In this paper, I wish to present a few examples taken from the north coast of Peru to illustrate the attempts Peruvian archaeologists are making to reach and address the public. What becomes clear from these examples is that archaeologists and the public share the same interest in the past; revaluing and reconstructing their identity, be it locally, regionally, or nationally.

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Background of Public Archaeology in Peru

About the Term “Public Archaeology”

In Peru, many people are likely to consider the word “public” (*pública* in Spanish) in “public archaeology” as something opposite to “private.” When the word is used in the sense of “audience” (*público* in Spanish), it is probably closer to the meaning of public archaeology as intended by archaeologists in English-speaking countries. In this sense, the most adequate translation of “public archaeology” in Peru might be “archaeology towards the public” (*arqueología para el público*) – and this phrase seems to represent the usual approach taken by archaeologists seeking to engage with the public, as the examples below demonstrate.

Gradual Increase of Archaeologists’ Engagement with Local Communities

In order to understand how Peruvian archaeologists have become interested in public engagement, it is useful to briefly review the history of archaeological projects in Peru. Castillo and Holmquist (2006) introduce us to a good example for the north coast region. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the priority of archaeological projects was to collect data for the investigation of past societies. Most of the projects in this period were directed by foreign researchers, who returned to their countries after finishing the field season. In the following period, large-scale projects took place, but most of them were still concerned only with research about the past, and there was virtually no interaction between archaeologists and the public.

However, from about the late 1940s to the late 1980s, archaeologists grew in number and began receiving more formal education, with many of them following postgraduate programs abroad. Cultural Resource Management and museum studies were introduced by these archaeologists on returning to Peru, and they sought to apply these new principles to their field practice. In terms of interaction with the public, Peruvian archaeologists had obvious advantages over their foreign colleagues because they were able to spend more time in the field and were more familiar with the traditions and customs of many local communities.

The 1990s in Peru followed a long political, economic, and social crisis, which had generated a socioeconomic divide between the capital city, Lima, and the provinces. There was a nation-wide interest in developing rural areas to narrow down the divide, and in this context Peruvian archaeologists started seriously considering how to make archaeology beneficial to local communities, most of which still lacked basic infrastructure (including education). Thus, the integration of archaeology and the development of local heritage tourism became an important task for archaeologists.



Fig. 19.1 Map of the north coast of Peru showing the places mentioned in the text

Change in the Public Perception of Archaeology: The Discovery of the Royal Sipán Tombs

As tourism became an important industry in many areas of Peru, long-term archaeological projects, often codirected by foreign and Peruvian archaeologists, increased the presentation of their results to the public through the media. These media emphasized the potential of developing heritage tourism based on archaeological resources and stressed the importance of protecting sites against looting. The impact of such media coverage on the public perception of archaeology was significant, especially when “great discoveries” were concerned. The case of the discovery of the Royal Sipán Tombs was a case in point (Fig. 19.1). Map of the north coast of Peru showing the places mentioned in the text.

The north coast of Peru, where the Tombs were located, has been considered as one of the most interesting areas for archaeological study in the country since the establishment of Peruvian archaeology (Bawden 1996), and the remains of prehispanic sites

representing Cupisnique, Viru, Mochica, Gallinazo, Sicán, Lambayeque, Chimú, and many other cultures are still visible today. However, looting of archaeological sites was a common practice in this region over the centuries; in particular, gold and silver ornaments and fineline-painted ceramic vessels were extensively plundered for different reasons (Gündüz 2001; Ramirez 1996). The expansion of agricultural fields and the illegal appropriation of land also threatened many ancient temples and cemeteries.

Despite this situation, there was a lack of support from the central government for the protection of archaeological sites. The underlying problem was the scarcity of information available to local people about the importance of these sites; only those contracted as workers for excavation projects were able to acquire some knowledge about them. There was thus a psychological distance between past societies as evidenced by the archaeological sites and the modern population living near these sites. Indeed, local people often did not consider archaeological sites as useful; they were sometimes even regarded as an obstacle to development.

The discovery of the Royal Tombs of Sipán in 1989 greatly changed this situation (Alva 1999). The discovery was made after a disagreement amongst looters who were plundering an elite tomb of the Mochica Culture (c. AD 100–700). When the police intervened, local archaeologist Walter Alva was called to examine the looted objects. Consequently, excavation of the site started as rescue research, which led to the discovery of the richest and most complex tombs in South America. The discovery brought about a significant growth in the interest of the media and the general public in archaeology as well as the development of heritage tourism in the region. One of the indicators of this development was the opening of the Royal Tombs of Sipán Museum in 2002 in Lambayeque city, near the original site; the objects recovered from the tombs were stored in the museum.¹ The discovery even changed the public attitude to archaeology in Lima, where an exhibition of the recovered objects was held. The exhibition was successful and was taken abroad afterward.

Interaction between archaeologists and the public

Archaeological discoveries, such as that of the Royal Tombs of Sipán, have contributed to a change of the public perception of archaeology over the last few decades. There has been a realization that archaeology can be used for the development of tourism and, ultimately, the economy. Consequently, archaeological projects in Peru have come to be situated between academic objectives and the expectations of the public. What is at stake today is to develop communication between archaeologists and the public – indeed, a number of projects are seeking to fulfill this new challenge.

Below, three examples that can be related to Public Archaeology's objectives are presented: the Sicán National Museum; the San Jose de Moro Archaeological Project; and *Arkeos*, the electronic journal of archaeology from the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP).

¹The Royal Tombs of Sipán Museum and the Sicán National Museum were the first large-scale museums built outside Lima.

The Sicán National Museum

The Sicán National Museum was established in the year 2001 following the discovery of two rich elite tombs of the Sicán culture (c. AD 1000–1200) during an excavation directed by Japanese archaeologist, Izumi Shimada. The museum was constructed in Ferreñafe city, near the excavation site. The museum aims to present the objects from the tombs and also to show the way of life of people of the Sicán culture, their beliefs, and technical developments. By carrying out these aims, the museum seeks to reconstruct – or better, recreate – the “Muchik Identity” (Elera and Curay 2005).

The “Muchik Identity” refers to the sociocultural identity of the people who lived on the north coast of Peru, which is believed to have effectively disappeared at the beginning of the 20th century. The museum seeks to recover, preserve, and promote the Muchik Identity by linking its characteristics to present local communities. By highlighting the cultural connection between past and present, the museum aims to revalue and protect the remains of the Sicán and succeeding cultures as part of local people’s identity (Elera and Curay 2005). Interaction between archaeologists and local communities has been essential for this process.

The Sicán National Museum is different from previous museums in Peru in several aspects. Most importantly, it functions both as a tourist attraction and as an educational and research institution (Museo Nacional Sicán 2005); this characteristic has given it an identity of a “local museum,” where local people take part in its activities – such as temporary exhibitions on recent archaeological research, the rescue of past craft production techniques, and local modern art – so that they can contribute to the promotion of local cultural activities (Fig. 19.2). These activities are undertaken with the support of the local community, regional and local government, and archaeologists. The museum also hosts conferences on the regional culture and festivals with folkloric dances and music.

The museum has developed an educational program that aims to emphasize the importance of regional identities through education and schooling (Museo Nacional Sicán 2005). Archaeologists involved in this program first inform local school teachers of the cultural link between past and present societies. Consideration is given here as to how to coordinate classroom activities and school visits to the museum; such planning contrasts with similar programs previously implemented at other museums in Peru, in which teachers needed to make plans for classes and museum visits by themselves and interacted with archaeologists only at conferences organized exclusively for them.

The steering group (*patronato*) is another interesting characteristic of the museum. This group is made up of archaeologists, intellectuals, and teachers from the local community. The main objective of the group is the same as that of the museum – the protection and promotion of the local identity – but it functions as an outward facing manifestation of the museum and engages in activities aiming to reinforce the identity of local communities. One example of such activities is the



Fig. 19.2 Local representation of the Lord of Sicán (photo courtesy of Sicán National Museum Archives)

“Cultural Festival for the Identity of Ferreñafe,” which is organized with the help of the city hall and takes place for a week showing different cultural aspects of Ferreñafe city (Fig. 19.3). The steering group also helps people living near archaeological sites to develop self-sustainable tourism, which is expected to increase the economy of the region and at the same time contributes to the preservation of the local traditions and customs (Museo Nacional Sicán 2005).

It can be argued that the Sicán National Museum presents a model for future museums in Peru. Museums should involve local communities in their activities, especially in the planning and decision-making process. Although this objective requires persistence and hard work, the results tend to be of great benefit to both local communities and archaeologists, since the interaction of the two parties allows the integration of tourism and heritage protection.

The San Jose de Moro Archaeological Project

The site of San Jose de Moro is located in the town of the same name, in the province of La Libertad; the modern town was built over the site. The site was one of the most important settlements in the Jequetepeque valley, representing the Mochica



Fig. 19.3 Cultural festival for the identity of Ferreñafe (photo courtesy of Sicán National Museum Archives)

culture (Castillo and Donnan 1993). Many elite tombs in this area have been looted as they often contain fine ceramic vessels and metal ornaments.

The research project at this site (directed by Peruvian archaeologist Luis Jaime Castillo) has developed an interesting integration between archaeology and the local community. Since 1991, the project has focused on a Mochica cemetery and its surrounding ceremonial structures. Archaeologists and the local population have worked together from the beginning of the project: residents of the town have been employed as workers in the excavation, many of whom used to be *huaqueros*, (tomb looters). Meanwhile, after the excavation of two rich tombs of elite women, local people's interest in archaeology increased, and they started to identify with the Mochica past. Archaeologists facilitated this process by explaining the results of the excavation constantly to the local community.

The archaeological project became more of a feature in the town's development after the planning and building of an open-air Modular Museum System (Castillo and Holmquist 2006). This system showed the process and results of the archaeological excavation through open-air modules installed at various places in the town. The modules consisted of explanatory panels that showed the progress of the excavation. All of them were made with local materials, and the modules were economical and easy to maintain. One module was specially made for children so that they could experiment with an archaeological excavation. Additionally, one of the important aims of the open-air Modular Museum System was to encourage visitors to visit not

only the excavation site but also the town. As a result of such visits, local people had the opportunity to offer their products and handicrafts inspired by Mochica culture for sale.

The role of the archaeologists involved in the project was to inform local people of archaeological findings and also to stimulate the local economy by creating new job opportunities relating to heritage tourism. Their enthusiasm was shared by local authorities and the population of the nearest city, Chepén; a large statue of one of the elite women found in the tombs was produced and installed at the entrance of the city to welcome visitors. Further, a representation of a burial ceremony made by local children was presented on the site on July 28th (during Independence Day festivities), and there was even a cultural association made up of local amateurs, who have since endeavored to examine various representations of the Mochica culture.

A significant result of the project is local people's identification with the archaeology of the site of San Jose de Moro. Archaeologists helped them rebuild connections with their ancestors, and thus facilitated the development of their identity based on their past culture. Through this interaction, local people have come to understand the value of the remains beneath their houses and learned to appreciate and protect them.

Arkeos, the Electronic Journal of Archaeology of PUCP

One of the biggest problems in Peruvian archaeology is the lack of publications for the general public. Two factors account for this lack. The first is the excessive cost of printing and publishing; in a country where books may cost as much as half of the monthly budget of a family, it is difficult to make archaeological publications reach the public. The second factor is that most books on archaeology are written in specialized language; this factor largely occurs because the readers of these books tend to be archaeologists themselves, and also because most archaeologists do not have the skills for communication with the general public.

In order to tackle this problem, some archaeologists have started to explore other means of communication with the public, particularly the Internet (Childs 2002; Saucedo-Segami 2006) *Arkeos*, the electronic archaeological journal of PUCP launched in March 2006, was one such attempt (Saucedo-Segami 2010).² *Arkeos* was conceived as an open arena for students studying archaeology at *Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú* (PUCP) so that they could develop writing skills and also experience direct communication with the public. The journal allows for interaction between archaeologists and the general public in two ways: readers can leave comments for both article authors and the editorial committee, and there is a section where a range of specialists in archaeology can leave their email addresses so that interested readers can contact them.

²The website address is: <http://miletto.pucp.edu.pe/arkeos>.

The journal reflects PUCP's interdisciplinary activities. Its graphics are designed by computer engineers at the university while its contents are managed by undergraduate and graduate students of the archaeology department. Interaction with specialists from different disciplines allows archaeologists accessing the journal to acquire various types of research information. The journal plans to expand this characteristic by inviting more "nonarchaeological specialists" to publish articles.

Another characteristic of the journal is its quality as a "virtual" forum. Since archaeological discoveries are made almost every week in Peru, information on them can be uploaded quickly onto *Arkeos* and then become accessible to a wide audience – in this regard, the Internet has many advantages over traditional paper media because of its rapid communication capacity and also the availability and popularity of many cheap Internet cafes throughout Peru. By publishing online, *Arkeos* is able to reach physically remote places instantly, and even places outside of Peru.³ Furthermore, since access to the journal is free of charge and it is published by open-source software, it is a low-cost project.

Feedback has become an increasingly interesting element of *Arkeos*. In its five years online, the journal received many positive comments from different readers, both in and outside of Peru. Most comments from Peruvian readers are characterized by a sense of pride in Peruvian heritage, and they often request the publication of more detailed information. Therefore, by running the journal, archaeologists are helping to construct the identities of local and regional communities. Although this situation was not conceived as main objective of the journal, according to the feedback received it is clear that *Arkeos* is contributing to the construction of Peruvian national identity based on archaeology.

Conclusion: Toward Peruvian Public Archaeology

The three examples presented above suggest that there are many possibilities for public archaeology in Peru. The example of the Sicán National Museum demonstrates how it is possible for museums to work closely with local communities. Local people's active participation in museum activities gives them an opportunity to connect past and present societies in their locality. It also allows archaeologists and the local population to share ideas and projects. The museums should no longer be a place to exhibit objects but need to become a living representation of the past.

The archaeological project of San Jose de Moro, meanwhile, shows how an ongoing excavation can be used to foster collaboration between archaeologists and the local community. By making use of local workers to create a moveable Modular Museum System, archaeologists can spread archaeological knowledge to local people in an effective manner, and also facilitate their active participation in the reconstruction of their past. The construction of the modules with local materials and techniques

³*Arkeos* is accessed about 1,000 times per month.

helps to maintain a visual harmony with the surrounding environment, and their wide distribution in the town allows local people to interact with visitors. Finally, *Arkeos* shows the possibility of building a “virtual” interactive space, offering an economical and dynamic way of reaching a wider audience.

From these examples, it is possible to identify the role of archaeology and archaeologists in Peru in the reconstruction of local, regional, and national identities through communication of archaeological knowledge to the public. In places where these identities are not well conceived, local populations tend not to appreciate or value archaeology and archaeological sites. Looting and the destruction of archaeological remains are often common, and even socially accepted. In order to change this situation, it is necessary for archaeologists to build a relationship of trust with local communities. Once this relationship is achieved, local communities seek to better understand their past and become the stewards of their culture, be it local, regional, or national.

Some suggestions can be made for successfully building such a relationship of trust. First, looting of archaeological sites should not be seen simply as an activity for economic gain, since it is often related to a lack of self-identification with the past and a low level of consciousness and knowledge of the heritage environment. Heritage protection and community development are strongly related activities, and archaeologists can help to foster them so as to improve economy and access to education in local communities.

In the author’s view, working with local communities at any stage of the development of archaeological research should be compulsory. Showing the process and methodology of archaeology to the public and explaining to them the importance of keeping archaeological contexts intact for archaeological research would be the first step. By engaging with local communities, archaeologists can encourage them to consider why heritage protection is important, and how it can be used responsibly to strengthen the economy of the community through tourism and related activities.

Secondly, interacting with communities should also be a key feature in international archaeological projects. For decades, many of these did not seek to collaborate with local communities. International archaeologists undertaking research in countries (like Peru) where there are large economic differentials should be aware of their responsibility to help improve the quality of life of the people from whom they gather information and who live locally to the archaeological sites they work at. Sharing information with local communities should be as important as any analysis of archaeological materials.

Thirdly, archaeologists should receive more training to help them communicate and interact with local communities. The lack of formal university education on the theory and skills of public engagement might well result in the next generation of archaeologists still being unprepared for such tasks. There is an urgent need to develop courses and classes on public archaeology at the university level. Also, there should be a network for sharing the experiences of different public archaeology projects. The workings and results of each project should be made widely available so that other archaeologists can learn from such experiences.

Up until now, what has happened in Peru might not be called “public archaeology” as defined elsewhere in the world, but it has essentially shared the same objectives and achievements. Today, many Peruvian archaeologists show a stronger interest in public engagement than ever, and this trend is likely to continue in the future. From the examples examined, it is clear that there is a significant role that archaeology and archaeologists in Peru can, and should, play in the construction of local, regional, and national identities, in addition to working with local communities to promote and protect archaeological heritage. The high level of public interest in archaeological resources should be made use of in relation to future projects in Peru, but archaeologists need to be more prepared and active in engaging with the public.

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