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WHAT IS REAL? A New Look at PreColumbian Mesoamerican Collections

by Jane MacLaren Walsh



[Editors' Note: Museums are increasingly seen as educational institutions for the 21st century. In the midst of "reality" T.V., we find increased demand among the public to see "the real thing." Meanwhile, behind the scenes, museum anthropologists, archaeologists, and art historians use collections not simply for exhibition, but as texts that can be read, compared, contrasted, deciphered, and analyzed. Museum collections, because of their size and historical depth, allow the people studying them to gradually develop and enhance their expertise, by exploring a variety of avenues of inquiry. This process inevitably leads to new information and ideas and is one of the principal reasons collections are kept. In the following article, Jane MacLaren Walsh, who has worked with the Smithsonian's Mesoamerican collections for over 30 years, takes a new look at some old collections, raising provocative questions that require new examination of important museum objects.]

Introduction

Pre-Columbian art and artifacts exist in extraordinary variety and in great abundance in museums and private collections throughout Europe and the Americas. Many of these collections were begun in the nineteenth-century, before any serious archaeological investigation had been accomplished, and when large national museums were seeking to fill out their inventories of world prehistories. These pre-Columbian collections were often amassed by amateurs, tourists, and, occasionally collectors, who purchased attractive or unusual items from local and international dealers. They sought objects that appealed to their own taste and to their own concepts of fine workmanship

and beauty, which determined the focus and nature of what they collected. Inevitably these objects lacked any reliable provenience data, since they were often purchased from dealers located outside of the country of origin or from sellers within the country who attempted to obscure the actual origins of individual objects.

The scientific and technological advances of the twenty-first-century afford us an important opportunity to reexamine these nineteenth-century objects to verify their authenticity, and confirm that the materials and techniques employed in their creation are representative of pre-Columbian art and culture. We are also compelled in this endeavor to reexamine our own history of acquiring, exhibiting, and publishing these artifacts that have become icons of Western notions of exotic and beautiful "primitive" art. The Smithsonian's William Henry Holmes warned 115 years ago that there is "pressing need of clearing away much useless and harmful debris" of fake antiquities, confusing and distorting our understanding of pre-Columbian art and artisanry (1889:334). Just as the problem of fake antiquities confronted Holmes at the end of the nineteenth-century, so the problem is no less irksome for us at the beginning of the twenty-first.

Until nearly the turn of the twentieth-century, little was known about Mesoamerican iconography, its cultural and stylistic differences. The range and choices of materials utilized by Pre-Columbian artisans were neither well-documented nor well-understood. As a result, nineteenth-century collections of pre-Columbian artifacts often contain objects that appear anomalous when compared to artifacts actually found in documented archaeological context. Despite this fact, the



presence of these anomalies in important collections and the passage of time has contributed to the odd consequence that many of these objects are now considered masterpieces because they are, in fact, unique. In many, if not most cases, this designation seems to be principally a response to “their aesthetic appeal to the Western eye and their ‘authentic’ — that is, untainted by Western intervention — character” (Baudez 2002:139). As masterpieces, they have invited various forms of stylistic and historical analyses, from which iconographic, mythologic, and cultural information have been extrapolated. The body of scholarship that centers on anomalous, unprovenanced, and surely suspect artifacts is quite diverse and impressively large.

It is my opinion that many of these unprovenanced, “pre-Columbian masterpieces,” well-known and often the subject of scholarly papers, are not authentic, but instead represent the inventive creations of nineteenth-century artists and artisans. Among my reasons for drawing this conclusion are that these objects that bear little relationship to documented pre-Columbian artifacts present obscure, misinterpreted, and often incorrect iconography. The carving style may be too crude or too refined for the subject or the time period. The material the object is made of is often entirely wrong — stone where it ought to be ceramic, or ceramic when it should be stone — and occasionally the wrong type of material for the class of artifact or for the subject depicted.

Perhaps, as Esther Pasztory of Columbia University has pointed out, it is because “forgeries are better than the real thing because they fit our ideas better” (2002: 162). Pasztory is one of the recent scholars pointing to fakes and forgeries in Pre-Columbian collections, but she follows a distinguished cadre of earlier scholars, as will be documented in this article.

For a museum anthropologist, it should be abundantly clear that weeding out, or at the least identifying, unprovenanced anomalies masquerading as pre-Columbian artifacts is an important and valuable pursuit: fakes and forgeries distort the picture of pre-Columbian art and culture history. We should maintain and document our museum collections to better educate our eyes, to strengthen and improve our expertise, and to fill in the blanks in our knowledge, thereby enlarging our often fragmented view of the worlds we study.



Green stone mask from the 1880s. Smithsonian collection.

Early Writings

“Skillful archaeological frauds, especially artistic ones, characteristically only seem obvious later, when the fund of knowledge and experience of the subject has improved (Vayson de Pradenne, 1932, in Sturtevant 1983: 347).

The problems created by fakes in archaeological collections, in general, and the subject of faking pre-Columbian art and artifacts, in particular, have been written about for quite some time, and a surprising number of authors have published treatises, some of them as early as the mid-nineteenth-century. One of the first to address the subject was Edward B. Tylor, the founder of social anthropology, who spent four months in the 1850s traveling throughout Mexico with the British banker Henry Christy. Mr. Christy, possibly with the advice of Tylor, purchased pre-Columbian objects, which he eventually bequeathed to the British Museum (King 1997: 138). In Tylor’s classic work, *Anahuac*, he describes his astonishment at viewing a shelf in the National Museum of Mexico that contained “a number of the sham antiquities, the manufacture of which is a regular thing in Mexico, as it is in Italy.” In his opinion, the fake artifacts were principally “vases and idols of earthenware,” for as far as he knew, “the art of working obsidian is lost, and

there can be no trickery about that” (1861: 229). Tylor is mistaken in this assessment, since fake obsidian idols, masks, knives, and other implements have been in fairly constant production to this day.

A slightly earlier work, *Mexico As It Was and As It Is* (Brantz Mayer), does not specifically discuss archaeological fakes, but contains numerous illustrations of objects from private and public collections that depict fraudulent pieces (1844: 102, 104, etc.). One of the ceramic vessels depicted by Mayer, which Tylor later declared to be fake, in fact, appears to be authentic (1844: 93; 1861: 229). Interestingly enough, Brantz Mayer donated a series of stone and ceramic artifacts to the Smithsonian in 1860, and the few that remain appear to be of somewhat dubious authenticity. Mayer described receiving a number of artifacts from the Count of Peñasco in Mexico, some of which he presumably gave to the Smithsonian (Mayer 1844). The British Museum possesses drawings of archaeological collections that were in private and public hands in Mexico City as early as 1825, and Peñasco’s collection is one of them. Quite early in the nineteenth-century, Mexican artisans were already creating a supply of “ancient” artifacts and passing them off to collectors as antiquities.

French explorer Desiré Charnay, inspired by John Lloyd Stevens and Frederick Catherwood’s *Incidents of Travel (1843-45)*, was one of the first travelers to photographically document Mexican pre-Columbian sites and objects between 1857 and 1861. Charnay made several collecting trips to Mexico and eventually did some digging at archaeological sites. In *Ancient Cities of the New World*, he wrote with great detail about the faking industry in Mexico, for he too had been taken in by it. After a visit to the National Museum in Mexico City, he wrote:

As for the long rows of so-called ‘ancient vases,’ there is not one that is not imitation. This I know to my cost, for with a credulity which subsequent events hardly justified, I no sooner was told that these vases were of great antiquity, than I immediately ordered three hundred to be cast from them, which I caused to be placed in the Trocadero during the Paris Exhibition; but on an expert in such matters seeing them, he at once detected and exposed the fraud (1887: 55).

Early Collections

The growth of the forgeries market coincided with the opening of Mexico to foreigners after the first decade of the 1800s at the end of the colonial period, following the War of Independence. It is also a time when many of the great national museums endeavored to complete their inventories of world ethnography and archaeology and became interested in acquiring Mexican archaeological artifacts. The manufacture and trade in fake antiquities had begun around 1820, according to Charnay, with the center of manufacturing being Tlatelolco, a suburb of Mexico City. “If we are to judge from the quantity which we sent broadcast into the world — most museums, nearly all private collections are infested with them, whilst a great number are even now bought by the unwary” (1887: 56).

At a slightly earlier date, Eugene Boban, another French collector, dealer, and student of ancient Mexico, amassed several very large pre-Columbian collections



Eugene Boban at the 1867 Exposition Universale in Paris.
Photo: Museo Nacional de Historia, Mexico City.

(Walsh 1996 & Riviale 2001). He lived in Mexico City during the 1850s and 1860s, and during the French intervention he advertised himself as archaeologist and antiquarian to the Emperor Maximilian. In association with the French Scientific Commission that explored Mexico to evaluate and describe the country's resources, Boban made a large collection of antiquities, many of which eventually became part of the Trocadero Museum in Paris.

As a collector and dealer, Boban also understood the problem of fakes and expounded upon their manufacture in his catalogue of ancient artifacts. He listed them as "contrefaçons d'antiquités mexicaines" (counterfeit Mexican antiquities), saying that they were fabricated (then and to this day) by the Indians in Tlatelolco and Los Angeles, a neighborhood just a few blocks from the central plaza of Tlatelolco. "These objects are neither molded from casts nor copies of ancient monuments of the country, they are pure fantasy, and are a type of bizarre caricature whose inspiration escapes us but whose principal purpose is to trick the public" (1881: 47-48). Boban was upset by the fact that the objects cast disfavor on authentic pre-Columbian art, and noted that unfortunately "as they are very easy to obtain and very cheap . . . many of these monsters strut about in the beautiful glass cases of our museums in Europe" (1881: 48).

Boban amassed material from travelers and collectors for several decades, selling, trading, and writing about these artifacts for nearly a half century. Pre-Columbian ceramics and stone sculpture sold by the French antiquarian have turned up in numerous important public and private collections, and I believe that his impact on certain embedded notions about pre-Columbian art was profound (Walsh 2004).

Boban corresponded with William Henry Holmes of the Smithsonian Institution during the late 1880s, principally to discuss the sale of some of Boban's Mexican artifacts to the Institution, but he also addressed the subject of fakes. Holmes had published an article in *Science* on Mexican pre-Columbian fakes. Boban informed Holmes of the Mexican lapidary named Juan Bobadilla, who he said "has fabricated and still fabricates numerous statues or idols in hard stone, obsidian, jadeite, etc." Boban went on to identify other fakers: "Mr. Amador, who worked for the French legation, also carved objects in hard stone; and there was a Frenchman named Praget



This elaborate "excess" with lid and pedestal was exhibited in the National Museum of Mexico in 1880. Photo: William Henry Jackson, 1884.

whose specialty was bronze work." His personal opinion was that all obsidian statues representing small idols with arms and legs could be definitely considered false (Boban 1887, unpublished letter).

On Holmes' first trip to Mexico in 1883, at the expense and behest of one of the developers of the Mexican Central Railroad, he accompanied Mr. J. A. Chain of Denver; Chain's wife, a landscape painter; and the renowned photographer, William Henry Jackson. They traveled throughout the Mexican republic, or at least as far as the railroad could then take them. In Mexico City, they lived in a train car stationed in the central railway yard of the Valley of Mexico. Holmes spent some of his spare time collecting potsherds he found nearly everywhere he looked. These collections eventually convinced him that most of what was being sold to tourists and foreign collectors as ancient Aztec pottery was fake, bearing no resemblance to what he had been picking up in the railroad yard. Holmes wrote:

In pre-Columbian times the native potter of that country had reached a high degree of skill in the handling of clay.... It is very easy, therefore, for the native artisan to imitate any of the older forms of ware; and there is no doubt that in many cases he has done so for the purpose of deceiving. A renewed impetus has been given to this fraudulent practice by the influx of tourists consequent upon the completion of numerous railways (1886: 170).

Professor Gumersindo Mendoza, director of the Museo Nacional, had concluded that the pottery in question, what Holmes called in his 1886 *Science* article “eccentric black ware excrescences,” was ordinary domestic Aztec ceramic ware. These ceramic productions were often large, heavy, clumsy vessels in a variety of odd and baroque shapes, usually covered with irregularly attached figurine heads sometimes made from pre-Columbian molds. Mendoza assumed that these black wares (also in a dark brown and red variety) had continued unchanged from pre-Columbian times to the present day and could, therefore, be considered Aztec. “It was not all that science demanded,” Holmes wrote, so he “undertook to examine into the subject more closely” (1889: 320-1). Despite the fact that Holmes recognized these wares as fraudulent in the 1880s, the Smithsonian’s Department of Anthropology collections still maintain some 50 or more examples.

Following his first visit to Mexico, Holmes, an archaeologist, geologist, and academy trained artist, started to develop a theory of pre-Columbian art. He began by attempting to distinguish between genuine pre-Columbian artifacts and contemporary folk art, masquerading as antiquities. He published two seminal articles on the subject, “The Trade in Spurious Mexican Antiquities,” in *Science* (1886) and “Spurious Mexican Antiquities,” in the *Smithsonian Annual Report* (1889). Holmes wrote that despite his previous warnings, the Smithsonian was still being offered the blackware pottery inventions he had so clearly condemned. He also delivered a more sweeping condemnation of fakers and their products.

Spurious [Mexican] objects are executed in wood, stone, and metal, and experts of no mean order of talent ply their trade within the valley of Mexico. One reproduces ancient instruments of music, the curious teponaztli, for example, in worm eaten wood and with surprising cleverness; another forges articles of bronze and copper in divers well-known, as well perhaps as heretofore unknown, forms; whilst many carve in stone, rivaling the ancient lapidaries in shaping even the harder forms of quartz. .. Three-fourths of the objects of copper and perhaps one-third of those of stone now found in American collections are frauds (1889: 320).

Mexicans were the last to recognize, or at least to publicize their pre-Columbian fake problem, perhaps out of fear of discouraging the lucrative “antiquities” market, not to mention disappointing the growing number of tourists. In 1910, the year of the overthrow of his benefactor, President Porfirio Díaz, the Mexican archaeologist Leopoldo Batres, protector and conservator of monuments, published *Falsificaciones y Falsificadores (Fakes & Fakers)*. In it he writes that the Tlatelolco blackware fakes, which Holmes had written about twenty years before, were first manufactured in the seventeenth-century, although Batres does not say how he knows this. He describes ceramic fakes, which had fooled many colleagues, or at least his contemporaries, all of whom are either named or described in unmistakable terms. In addition to fake ceramics, he lists fake pre-Columbian objects of shell, bone, copper, gold and silver. In discussing some of the hard stone carvings, Batres notes:

The falsification of obsidian objects has reached a high degree of art. The fakers have managed to master the obsidian to such a degree that sometimes only the eye of a very expert person can distinguish the fakes, for the form of the piece being generally fantastic, although trying to imitate ancient pieces, or the manner of manufacture is distinct from how the Indians would have made it” (1910: 29).

More Recent Scholarship

In the mid-twentieth-century two archaeologists, Frederick Peterson and Gordon Ekholm, revisited the subject of Mexican pre-Columbian fakery. Frederick Peterson wrote two articles, one in Spanish and the other in English, about fake stone carvings from the Mexican state of Guerrero. He was particularly interested in fake Teotihuacan masks, as well as other stone masks and figurines that displayed strong Olmec features. He estimated at one point that there might be as many as 5,000 fake stone artifacts in museums and private collections, and that was in 1952! Some of the so-called Teotihuacan masks were so obvious to his eye, that he had dubbed the carvings as emanating from the "Taxco School" (Peterson 1953: 16).

In 1964, Gordon Ekholm wrote an article about pre-Columbian fakes in which he condemned an entire category of objects — obsidian masks — once prominent in public and private collections. Obsidian, he noted, "is a beautiful material closely identified with Mexico, but one which has been so commonly used by fakers that it can be stated almost as an axiom that all larger objects carved of obsidian must be viewed with suspicion." Aztec lapidaries, Ekholm contended, used obsidian for tools and small ornaments but did not generally

make masks or large carvings out of the material. Despite the fact that "Masks, figures, and effigy vessels occur in great variety, and because they are often very beautiful objects, they have had a fatal appeal to many collectors" (1964: 25).

Most recently the subject of fakes has been considered by Esther Pasztory in two important articles (1982 & 2002). The earlier article dealt with several Aztec stone masks in European collections that she believes to be forgeries, one of which had been sold by Eugene Boban. The fact that these masks had incised, striated hair, a design feature uncommon to most Aztec carving, first caught her attention. In further analyzing the iconography of one of the masks, she discovered an element that no Aztec artist would have included, the depiction of a deity with four arms. Pasztory believes that this had to have been a misinterpretation of iconography made by a nineteenth-century carver. In an even more recent article, "Truth in Forgery," she reiterates the fact that during the nineteenth-century, when many of the best known Pre-Columbian objects were collected, an enormous market existed in Mexico especially aimed at foreigners. To "understand how those collectors saw Aztec art, we have to interrogate the forgery that was made to fit their tastes and interests." The masks she had studied, interrogated, could be seen to "embody Western taste at a particular time" (2002: 159).

My museum research into museum collections also has involved studying pre-Columbian artifacts to determine authenticity. My initial studies focused on rock crystal skulls; two of the most famous skulls in museum collections were, in fact, sold by Eugene Boban. Using a variety of scientific testing at the British Museum, my colleagues there, Margaret Sax, Ian Freestone, and Elizabeth Carmichael and I determined that all of the crystal skulls, including the one in the Smithsonian's collection, were modern manufactures.

The Forces of Supply and Demand

The European rediscovery of Mexico during the early nineteenth-century, and the American rediscovery in the later part of that century brought enormous popular attention to all things Mexican, particularly "ancient" Mexican. The nascent exploring and tourist industry inadvertently combined with European and American museum efforts to amass large and important collections of pre-



Obsidian mask collected c. 1870. Smithsonian.



Jane Walsh with a fake pre-Columbian crystal skull.
Photo: James Di Loreto

Columbian art. It was that combination that undoubtedly created the demand that almost certainly exceeded the supply.

Despite the fact that some archaeological ruins were known, and had been described by the end of the 18th century, systematic excavation of pre-Columbian sites by archaeologists did not begin until the late 1880s. The result was a significant lack of any real knowledge of what pre-Columbian ceramics, sculpture, and stone carvings actually looked like. Additionally, by mid-century tourists were visiting the central valley where they found an abundance of opportunities to purchase artifacts, purportedly ancient. By the turn of the century, despite the paucity of knowledge and information about artistic styles, choices of materials, and iconography, private collections of so-called Toltec and Aztec ceramics, stone carvings, and sculptures became almost too numerous to count. Additionally the British Museum in London, the Louvre, and later the Trocadero in Paris, various royal cabinets in Italy, Denmark, Germany, and Russia, as well as some select museums in the United States, including the Smithsonian Institution, all acquired large numbers of ancient Mexican art works by the 1860s through the 1890s. Like the Smithsonian, it may be fair to assume that most if not all of these institutions purchased pre-Columbian artifacts from collectors, dealers, and interested amateurs whose principal source of knowledge about ancient Mexican art was what had been told them by the purveyor. Many of these artifacts passed through the hands of antiquities dealers, with Eugene Boban being one of the principals. He definitely had more

expertise than the tourists and other amateur collectors, but he, like Desiré Charnay, was taken in by indigenous sellers with good stories. He may well have made up a few of his own.

Connoisseurship vs. Expertise

The last quarter of the nineteenth-century saw a significant increase in the number of Mexican pre-Columbian art collectors who purchased artifacts not only in Mexico City, where antiquities shops were ubiquitous, but also from dealers in European capitals, with Paris apparently leading the trend. Collectors of pre-Columbian art came from all walks of life — diplomats, industrialists, bankers, naturalists, mineralogists, historians, physicians and a variety of other interested amateurs — who generally relied on what dealers told them of provenience, and otherwise trusted their own eye for each special acquisition. Private collections always reflect the tastes and interests of the people who amass them, since collectors focus on what especially appeals to their particular sensibilities. In the nineteenth-century, the common traveler purchased small and portable items, mostly ceramic pieces, which could be easily and economically obtained. This custom continues to this day. Wealthier travelers, on the other hand, with dreams of establishing important collections, demanded finer objects, not only of finer craftsmanship but also fashioned from rare and intrinsically valuable materials like gold, silver, jade, or rock crystal (Pasztor 1982: 94).

In an article describing the Robert Woods Bliss pre-Columbian collection at Dumbarton Oaks, Michael Coe took particular note of the notion of “connoisseurship,” and the fact that he considered it to be crucial to an understanding of collecting and the art market. Coe writes: “Bliss was a close counterpart of those Renaissance collecting princes who amassed rare and beautiful objects fashioned from expensive materials — what are known as *objets de vertu*. Gold and jade fascinated him, and stone objects had to be highly polished and of superb workmanship” (1993: 277). Mr. Bliss, in speaking about his long collecting career, noted that he had acquired from time to time in “Europe or in the United States examples of fine workmanship or of an arresting concept. But not one did I ever find in the country of its origin!” (Lothrop 1957: 7).

(continued on page 17)

FROM ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE TO NATIONAL MONUMENT: CHILE'S MONTE VERDE

by Tom D. Dillehay



[Editors' Note:

Rarely does an archaeologist's field site become a National Monument, but the story of Monte Verde in Chile has unfolded in remarkable and unexpected ways. The story of the site documents major discoveries in early New World settlement, but it also reflects some exciting and dramatic developments that have transformed the fields of archaeology and anthropology in recent years. Most significantly, this site's rich lode of evidence reveals a much more complex social and economic organization than was previously expected of early New World cultures, as explained in this fascinating article by Monte Verde's lead archaeologist, Tom Dillehay. As explained in the article, the long sequence of radiocarbon dates on the different materials from the site clearly placed the Monte Verde II occupation at about 12,500 B.P. (Before Present); Monte Verde I has an even earlier dating sequence. The site is one of the most significant ever excavated in the New World, and for a young archaeologist like Dillehay, who began his Monte Verde journey in the 1970's, this was surely the opportunity of a lifetime. In more recent years, the story has continued to unfold with ever more fascinating developments.]

Introduction

Today, the site of Monte Verde is preserved and protected by Chilean law, which has declared it a National Monument. I am currently working with the same interdisciplinary research team that excavated the site in the late 1970s and 1980s, working to build a site museum where the artifacts will be permanently housed and duplicated in life-size form, which will reconstruct the activities carried out by the Monte Verdeans nearly 13,000 years ago.

Monte Verde was discovered in 1976 while I was teaching at the Southern University of Chile in Valdivia, a city located about 400 km north of the site. Initially, the locality was visited by colleagues from the university's museum, who found large animal bones and teeth eroding from the creek bank and thus thought they were examining a paleontological site. However, when my stu-

dents and I later visited the site, we discovered human artifacts associated with mastodont bones and reclassified Monte Verde to a late Ice Age archeological site. Beginning in 1977, I assembled a team of archeologists and geologists to study the site environments and to cautiously excavate the buried remains there. Eventually, we carried out seven field seasons at Monte Verde and added more than sixty different specialists drawn from various scientific disciplines, including parasitologists, geneticists, entomologists, and many others. By 1985, the research team produced one of the most highly diversified and largest interdisciplinary studies ever done in world archaeology, which resulted in the two large volumes published by the Smithsonian Institution Press.

Dialogue with Modern Day Inhabitants

An important aspect of our current research has involved establishing dialogues with indigenous groups (Huilliche and Mapuche) in southern Chile, to listen to their ideas about Monte Verde, and what the site means to them. The idea is not to treat the site as dead or past history, but as a past lived everyday into the present. Indigenous people in the forested region, where Monte Verde is located, still exploit the same kinds of economic resources (except for the extinct mastodons) that were hunted and gathered 12,000 years ago. To these people, sites like Monte Verde are not dead or inert, but live in their cultural memory and in their everyday practices. For them, their ancestors still live in and walk about the sites. As a result of the indigenous interest in Monte Verde and other archeological sites, we have begun to share the scientific information that we have collected from the site. In turn, we have actively sought their interpretations of the site and their opinions of our interpretations.

Although we always have shared our experiences at Monte Verde with the public and with indigenous communities, the increased dialogue and communication that we have had with them has significantly enhanced our understanding of Native American concerns, of the archeological record in general, and of our relations with indigenous communities. Only a few years ago, there was

a broad notion within the disciplines of archaeology and bio-anthropology that to acknowledge the interests of indigenous people would compromise the integrity of science. The scientific position was that close relations with indigenous groups and [recognizing] their concerns might limit archeological field work and require the return of excavated materials to local communities. Many archeologists believed that science was objective, neutral and for the benefit of all, while the religious and political claims of indigenous people were sectarian, subjective, and for the benefit of the few. However, as the years have passed more and more archeologists have changed their ideas and have begun to work much more closely with indigenous groups. Increasingly, indigenous voices are being heard in dialogue with archeologists.

As part of the sweeping changes in the discipline, we have obtained scholarships for Huilliche and Mapuche students to study anthropology at the Southern University of Chile, in order to establish an indigenous-regulated archeology that makes more use of their concepts of time, space, and the material world in the excavation of sites and in the interpretation of archeological remains.

From the perspective of these students, “the scientific, objective measuring and recording of sites is combined with their living past.” As a result of these changes, our practice of doing archeology has changed considerably in the past few years, especially where we and other archeologists are excavating on or near indigenous lands. Both archeologists and indigenous people are now forming partnerships to study the past from the perspective of the “past still living.” This new perspective has opened up the possibility of other kinds of archeological practices, archeologies done by and for the Huilliche and Mapuche. Our research at Monte Verde and the dialogues we have established with indigenous peoples have given a more meaningful historical context to the site.

Historical Background

Between 1976 and 1987, as explained above, I directed a large interdisciplinary research team to study the archeological settlement of Monte Verde in south-central Chile. Monte Verde is an open-air campsite on the banks of a small stream, surrounded by sandy knolls, small bogs, and damp forests that have been there since late Pleis-



General view of Monte Verde and today's Chinchihuapi Creek. The 12,500 year-old site is buried in the terrace in the background. Photo, courtesy of Tom Dillehay.

tocene times. The bog later developed in the stream basin, covering the abandoned site under a layer of peat. Because the lack of oxygen in the bog inhibited bacterial decay and because the constant saturation prevented drying for thousands of years, all kinds of organic materials that normally disappear from archaeological sites had been preserved. An interdisciplinary research team of more than sixty scientists studied the remains excavated from two areas at the site, called Monte Verde I and Monte Verde II. The results of this study were published in two large volumes by the Smithsonian Institution Press (Dillehay 1989, 1997).

Early Excavation Discoveries

At Monte Verde we uncovered a number of remarkable and unexpected finds that included not only stone flake tools, typical of many early South American sites, and animal bones, but also long spear points and a wide variety of plant remains and numerous wooden objects. The organic remains indicated the importance of plants as well as animals in the inhabitants' diet. The existence of wood and wooden tools, more common at Monte Verde II than stone artifacts, provided an intriguing look at tools and equipment rarely seen in late Ice Age archaeological records. I will briefly describe the implications of what we found at Monte Verde I and Monte Verde II.

Around 12,500 B.P. at Monte Verde II, perhaps twenty to thirty people built a 20-meter-long tent-like structure out of wood and animal hides. The frame was made of logs and planks anchored by stakes, and the walls were poles covered with animal hides. Several pieces of cordage and string made of reed wrapped around wooden posts and stakes, recovered among the architectural remains, show that the people planned a lengthy stay. The tent's dirt floor was embedded with hundreds of microscopic flecks of hide tissue, suggesting that it was probably covered with animal skins. Inside the tent, individual living spaces were divided by planks and poles. On the floor of each living space were brazier pits lined with clay and surrounded by stone tools, as well as the remains of edible seeds, nuts, and berries. Outside the tent were two large communal hearths, a store of firewood, wooden mortars with their grinding stones, and even three human footprints near a large hearth, where

someone had walked across the soft, wet clay brought to the site for refurbishing the firepits. All of these remains indicate discrete tasks, primarily food preparation and consumption, tool production and maintenance, and the construction of shelters.

The second structure is wishbone-shaped in ground plan and made of wooden uprights set into a foundation of sand and gravel hardened with animal fat [see photograph on next page]. In this structure we found butchered parts of mastodon and paleo-llama carcasses and evidence of hide preparation and manufactured tools, activities suggesting a public non-living area. It also is probable that this was a place for healing the sick. Eighteen probable medicinal plants were found at this site—the same species the Mapuche people, who live in the area today, use to treat various diseases. Although some of these plants grew locally, about half came from coastal environments, approximately 70 kilometers to the west. One plant can only be found in arid regions about 700 kilometers to the north. Since only the medicinal parts of the plants were found at the site, we know they could have had only one use by the Monte Verdeans.

In addition to medicinal herbs, the remains of a wide variety of edible plants were recovered from the hearths, living floors, and small pits, along with the remains of mastodon, paleo-llama, small animals, and freshwater mollusks. Aquatic plants from the freshwater marshes and lagoons of the flood plain and from brackish marshes of the river delta provided the greatest variety and, along with meat and wild potatoes, comprised the bulk of the Monte Verdeans' diet. Most of these ecological zones are located far away along the Pacific shoreline or in the Andean mountains.

The presence of exotic foods and other items at the site shows that coastal habitats provided important resources to the Monte Verde economy. But the preserved remains of wild potatoes particularly add a new dimension to the history of a food crop that has become one of the most important in the world. The presence of tuber remains at Monte Verde bears out the prediction of Russian botanists, who, in the 1930s, said that the potato originated both in Peru and in southern Chile.

The wooden artifacts excavated at Monte Verde include digging sticks, mortars, fragments of two lances, stakes, and building poles. Bone artifacts consist of a baton for striking flakes off stones, tools made of mastodon tusks, and digging and prying tools. The site shows three different stone tool technologies.

To be able to exploit this wide range of resources, the residents undoubtedly needed sophisticated knowledge as well as a division of labor. This is suggested by the separation of the site's residential from nonresidential areas and by the association of distinct activity areas and living spaces with different tool types and food remains. The distinct living structures, features, and concentrations of specific materials indicate that occupation was continuous and that some portions of the site were used more intensively than others.

The many different artifacts give evidence of a wide variety of activities carried out. Evidence also ex-

ists for specific family or social unit tasks, special purpose activities, and spatial separation between domestic and nondomestic tasks. One living space, for example, contained stone artifacts made of quartz, coupled with edible fruits and tubers from plants that grow only in brackish estuaries. This suggests that the occupants may have specialized in collecting resources from the coast. Elsewhere in the living tent, stone scrapers and pieces of animal skin were found in a hide-working zone. The internal division and size of the tent suggests that a large group of people had a mixed hunting and gathering economy that focused on many different ecological zones.

All this evidence reveals a much more complex social and economic organization than was previously expected of early New World cultures. A long sequence of radiocarbon dates on the different materials from the site place the Monte Verde II occupation at about 12,500 B.P.

(continued)



The architectural foundation of a wishbone shaped hut dated about 12,500 years ago and associated primarily with the remains several medicinal plants. A residential tent was located about 30 meters away, suggesting that this was a medicine hut. Photo, courtesy of Tom Dillehay.

Monte Verde I

In the deepest levels of Monte Verde, separated from the later 12,500 year-old settlement and buried in a different area of the site, we found a possible earlier occupation, which we called Monte Verde I. Here we found twenty-six stone tools and three burned clay features. Radiocarbon dates placed this possible occupation around 33,000 years ago, a remarkably early date for New World settlement. Although the geology is intact, the radiocarbon dates are valid, and the human artifacts are genuine, I hesitate to accept this older level without more proof and without evidence of sites of comparable age elsewhere in the New World.

There is no question that the younger 12,500 B.P. Monte Verde II occupation represents a human settlement practicing a generalized economy throughout most of the year. The archaeological evidence suggests that the settlement was formed by a group of exploratory or incipient colonizers who lived along the banks of the small stream. Although few contemporaneous sites have been found in the Americas, it is probable that the Monte Verdeans were part of a low-density colonizing population adapted to a cool, temperate, wetland-and-forest environment in times of advanced deglaciation.

Conclusion

In the end, Monte Verde has made us question the notion that all Ice Age people were nomadic big-game hunters, since the area there was probably occupied throughout the year by at least a portion of its inhabitants who gathered a wide variety of plant and animal foods. The site is one of the richest excavated in the New World, and the interdisciplinary team that first worked there continues their work, albeit with new kinds of investigations and new kinds of outreach activities. As the result of changes in the field of archaeology and changes in our own awareness of the indigenous peoples' interest in this and other archeological sites, we have begun to share the information we have collected from the site with peoples living in the area. In turn, we have actively sought their interpretations of the site and their opinions of our interpretations. This new dialogue has significantly enhanced our understanding of Native American concerns and of the archeological record, but it has also enriched our relationships with indigenous communities.



Mapuche crew with Dillehay (center) excavating test pits near Monte Verde. Photo, courtesy of Tom Dillehay.

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Teacher's Corner: *From The Inside Out*, A Documentary Film

by Jennifer Lacroix
◆◆◆

[Editors' Note: Documentary Educational Resources (DER) is a non-profit educational organization in Watertown, Massachusetts, dedicated to producing and distributing anthropology films and videos for the purpose of fostering cross-cultural understanding. Written texts and study guides accompany many of the films, which have been used in anthropology classes throughout the U.S. and abroad. DER's collection includes John Marshall's series on the !Kung San, which will be the focus of a forthcoming *AnthroNotes* article.]

From the Inside Out. 2003. April Chabries, W. Grant Williams, Dan Fredley (27 minutes). For all ages. Classroom lesson plans for K-12. Visit <http://www.der.org/films/from-the-inside-out.html>

The Ethnographic documentary film, *From the Inside Out*, explores the evolution of basket weaving in Navajo cul-

ture, as told by Navajo basket weavers living in Utah. As the basket weavers go through the complex process of basket construction, they share their oral histories, revealing the important contribution baskets make to the balance, harmony, and beauty of Navajo life. Once produced for purely functional purposes, baskets gradually became integrated into various Navajo ceremonies, elevating them to sacred and symbolic significance.

This film is informative and easily accessible to many audiences and ages. It is also well-paced, moving quickly from one participant to the next as it serves as "a story board of information." *From the Inside Out* would be of particular interest to teachers and students of geography, social studies, anthropology, sociology, and U.S. history.

As cultural objects, baskets reflect the adaptations of a people who experienced a turbulent history and had to adapt in order to survive. The influences of cultural oppression, trade, and technology over time led to a diminished number of basket weavers in Navajo society, but in the 1970s Navajo culture experienced a renaissance in basket making, for both ceremonial and secular purposes, initiated by a group of families from the Douglas Mesa region of the Utah reservation. This



From the film, *From the Inside Out*

renaissance led to a thriving trade in Navajo baskets, which is still seen today. *From the Inside Out* clearly demonstrates how basket making is integral to the culture and livelihood of the Navajo.

Accompanying this engaging 27-minute film are lesson plans particularly relevant for grades 3-12. These can be found at the Documentary Educational Resources' website (www.der.org). Below are some examples of lesson plan objectives and questions relating to the film.

Lesson Plan Objectives

Students will:

- Examine what role tradition plays in societies.
- Explore issues of representation, particularly of Native Americans.
- Reflect on the value of oral history and storytelling.
- Analyze the role of the arts as a form of communication and response to tradition and change.
- Explore issues of identity and land rights within minority groups.
- Evaluate documentary film for its insider/outsider view points, events (visual, sound, editing), and/or anthropological uses.

Before the Film

Reflect on one or all of the following:

- What do you know or believe to be true about the Navajos and how they live?
- What are some similarities and differences between their lives and yours?
- What are some of the ways in which you could discover the answers to these questions?
- What kinds of rituals or significant experiences do all workers go through as they move from novice to expert in their field?
- If you could pick a craft for yourself, what would you pick and why? What would this art form represent to you and/or others?
- How would you describe America to someone who has never been here? What material items or objects represent your cultural experience of America?
- In order to consider yourself successful, what must you have, do, or achieve?

- Have students write five to ten questions that reflect what they might want to know about the Navajo people specifically or American Indians in general.

During the Film

The film begins with an older generation of Navajo basket weavers speaking in their native language. Then a younger English-speaking member of the Navajo tribe, Lorraine Black, describes the ancient Navajo way of basket weaving. Discuss with your students this cultural transformation from older to younger generation, especially as it pertains to the concept of "cultural change." What do surface indicators such as dress, jewelry, or long hair tell you about Lorraine, her identity, her lifestyle, and her history? What are your expectations for the rest of the film, as based on this first scene? The teacher may choose to stop the tape when Charlie Todachinnie, the Medicine Man, appears to discuss this first question.

After watching the rest of the film, address the following questions:

- What is your initial impression of Lorraine when she first explains the process of basket making versus when you hear all of the various stories about Navajo life by the end of the film?
- What messages are the Navajo in the film trying to convey to a larger audience?
- American history students might explore the deeper representations within the artistic designs of the baskets while drawing connections to such issues as exploration, conquest, land rights and uses, and environmental sustainability.

Jennifer Lacroix (M.A. in Intercultural Relations) is a former DER intern who writes film reviews for the Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies.



From the film, *From the Inside Out*

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(continued from page 7)

The central feature of connoisseurship, Coe wrote, was that “according to dealers one either has an eye or one does not. To have an eye means to possess a very good visual memory” (1993: 272). It seems to me that Coe is inadvertently pointing out the basic flaw inherent in many private and some public collections. While connoisseurship is crucial to understanding the idiosyncrasies of collecting and the modes and fashions of the art market, I believe that connoisseurship has had a very different effect on the essential nature of pre-Columbian collections. The “eye” of a connoisseur might also be described as an appreciation of a particular beauty, a look that is appealing to one person’s individual aesthetic sensibilities. The “good visual memory” thus could be the immediate recognition of that particular look or beauty, since the object will naturally be seen as fitting within one of the buyer’s own preordained categories.

The problem arises with connoisseurs buying pre-Columbian art and artifacts during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when they were doing so without any certain cultural or historical knowledge of iconography, of carving styles, or even of what might have been the choice of material made by a pre-Columbian artist. Indeed, as Pasztory has pointed out, a collector’s artistic taste was much more likely to have been formed by a knowledge and appreciation of Western art, and notions of beauty and workmanship founded upon a Western cannon rather than a pre-Columbian Mexican or Mesoamerican one (2002: 159-165). In sum, connoisseurs, or collectors of pre-Columbian art with the means to do so, sought out and purchased what appealed to them — “rare and beautiful,” intrinsically valuable, highly polished, and artistically sophisticated objects, principally without any provenience and mostly from art dealers far removed from the purported original context. Indeed, some of the Bliss collection’s highly polished stone carvings like the Xipe and Tlazolteotl sculptures have come into question in the past few decades by scholars such as Esther Pasztory (2002) and Claude Baudez (1998).

Viewing Collections in the New Millennium

Viewing nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century pre-Columbian collections from the vantage point of the twenty-first-century, with the benefit of more than a cen-

tury of archaeological investigation and new scientific technological expertise, provides an entirely different perspective. The study and understanding of Aztec art, for instance, as Esther Pasztory has pointed out, suffers from the lack of a clear inventory of artistic styles, which has created a number of problems when attempting to judge these anomalous, unique, or unusual pieces (1983: 250). This problem has been somewhat ameliorated by the large number of finds from excavations in the Templo Mayor in Mexico City, which ultimately begins to provide us with enough examples to create at least an outline. In the case of stone carving and sculpture, we can begin to establish a data base of iconographic elements, carving and polishing styles and techniques, choices of materials, and relative measurements.

Yet the problem of unique works of art, unprovenienced “masterpieces” remains, and despite their long exhibition histories and their familiar images gracing the covers and frontispieces of catalogues, many of them call for new analyses. What is perhaps most striking is the number of objects in both the private and public realm that have no apparent iconographic or stylistic counterparts from known archaeological contexts. These objects, collected by people only beginning to understand pre-Columbian art, seem to exist in a class by themselves — unique and anomalous. Yet, despite and at times be-



One of W. H. Holmes’ eccentric “blackware excrescences” donated to the Smithsonian by Mrs. Alfred Gibbs in 1871.

cause of their individuality, they are considered masterpieces, the artistic productions of master craftsmen, because of their technical sophistication and beauty. In a kind of circular logic emanating from connoisseurship and possibly the dictates of the art market, these “masterpieces” seem often beyond suspicion or criticism, in part because of their long term residences in important collections.

All collections go through periods of rethinking. When one encounters one of Holmes’s “blackware excrescences” (see illustration, page 17) or Eugene Boban’s “monsters” in a museum collection today, one wonders who could possibly have been fooled by such a bad fake. “That they were collected at all is embarrassing . . . but though they are fake Aztec, they are genuine embodiments of a European vision of the exotic” and as such they document our own evolution in thinking and expertise (Pasztory 2002: 163).

Looking Back, Looking Forward

A hundred years ago William Henry Holmes analyzed the stylistic and material manufacture of the fake Aztec blackware and found them to be entirely without relationship to documented Aztec pottery. A famous gold pendant, supposedly a depiction of the emperor Tizoc, was X-rayed in the 1960s and found to have been soldered using modern techniques, despite the fact that there had been several scholarly monographs written on the same piece (Easby & Dockstader). In the 1980s, Esther Pasztory employed a stylistic and iconographic analysis of several carved stone masks housed in two different European museums and declared them to be fake. She completed the article leaving doubt in the minds of her readers about several other objects that had certain similarities to those that had failed her analytic test. Pascal Mogne has written about Zapotec so-called funerary urns in European and American collections, many of which appear to have anomalous design elements, although apparently they are related to each other within groups (1987). Mogne completed a project to study some of these ceramic pieces stylistically, and, to verify this approach, he also used a dating technique called thermoluminescence, which measures the energy given off from the breakdown of radioactive elements. This energy is trapped in pottery and given off as light, which can be measured.

My own project to examine the tool marks left on carved stone sculpture has begun. My British museum colleague, Margaret Sax, and I will be using scanning electron microscopy to attempt to verify authenticity and also broadly date pre-Columbian stone objects. The future evidently holds great promise for new techniques and technologies, new analyses and dating possibilities, and altogether exciting new understanding of collections.

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