

# Research Report

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**Title of Research:** Heritage Protection and Public Archaeology in Modern Peru

## **Purpose of Research:**

The present research was accomplished as part of my activities to gather data for my PhD Thesis *A Public Archaeology Study on the Use of Cultural Heritage in Modern Peru*. This thesis belongs to the field of Public Archeology, which intends to understand the relationships that occur when archaeology becomes part of a wider public culture. In this specific case, my interest focuses in understanding how local communities interact with the local archaeological heritage around their residences.

My thesis aims to propose a model for archaeologists in how to deal with local communities when involving them into archaeological heritage protection. In order to do so, I consider important understanding how interaction between archaeologists and local communities occur. Also important is to understand how local communities define their own past. In order to gather this information, with the support of the Matsushita International Foundation, I conducted a fieldwork research between June and September of the year 2008 having the following objectives:

### **1. To Measure the influence of archaeology in the creation of a local/regional identity in the towns located around the Historic Sanctuary of Poma Forest in Lambayeque Department, north coast of Peru.**

Some members from local communities are taking advantage of the tourism activities related to archaeological heritage. As a result, some economical development can be seen here. Archaeologists promote directly or indirectly these activities, encouraging a new local/regional identity. Direct encouragement can be seen in the activities that local museums organize with local population to develop tourism. Indirect encouragement can be seen in how local population develop their own initiatives to develop tourism in this area by using archaeological information published in newspapers, magazines or books. By analyzing this interaction between archaeologists and local communities, we expected to understand how relationships are built between these two groups, and how these relationships can be improved to protect archaeological heritage.

### **2. To understand how local communities interact with archaeological heritage in this area.**

Although the use of archaeological heritage in this area for tourism development is quite recent, archaeological heritage has been part of the imaginary of local communities always. Before archaeologists worked here, local communities had established different relationships with this heritage through different meanings. Looting has been an activity that has been done here for centuries, and the stories related to it are a way to understand how local communities understand their own past. Shamanism also has been part of local customs to interpret this archaeological

heritage, and it can be seen in how some archaeological sites are considered good or evil. Registering how this “knowledge” has been built and how it is used by local population is necessary to develop an adequate discourse that can reach this population to encourage archaeological heritage protection. Therefore, the present research intends to register and analyze the different stories and beliefs related to the archaeological heritage, paying especial attention to the origin of those beliefs and how they differ from the archaeological interpretation.

## **Content/Methodology of Research:**

### **Background**

The Historic Sanctuary of Poma Forest in Lambayeque Department is an area where many archaeological sites are located. It has been very well known for the rich tombs that have been discovered around several pyramids spread along the forest. For this reason, this area has been target of tomb looters since the colonial period, and many gold objects that are now part of private and museum collections in Peru come from here.

It was in this context that in 1979 the Sicán Archaeological Project, directed by Japanese Professor Izumi Shimada, started its research in this area with the objective of understanding the society that flourished here. As a result of this intense work, the Sicán National Museum was built in the year 2001 with economic support from Japan. This museum is in charge of the research and protection of archaeological heritage not only in the Poma forest, but also in the whole district of Pitipo, where this forest is located. In order to achieve that, the museum has been working with some of the local communities around the forest.

Although in recent years there is an increase in the support from the government and the local population towards archaeological heritage protection, there are several situations that threat archaeological sites. Our project observed these situations, considering possible solutions to them.

Looting, as mentioned above, has a long history in this area. Even though it is widely considered illegal and local communities are helping to fight against it, there are still organized groups that commerce archaeological remains in the black market.

Another situation is the illegal appropriation of land. After the agrarian reform made by Velasco’s military government in the 1960s, land was taken from rich landowners and “returned” to local communities. In many cases, those communities couldn’t manage those lands in an appropriate way due to lack of unity inside the communities, personal interests and lack of management skills. As a result, many areas were not appropriately used for agrarian purposes, and were left abandoned. Some communities from the Andes mountain region, where land is scarce and extremely valued, decided to illegally appropriate vast extensions of land from the coastal communities, in many cases by force. They occupied not only abandoned land, but also built their houses over archaeological sites, in many cases destroying them.

An inadequate use of archaeological heritage is another situation archaeologists have to face in this area. Due to lack of information and interest in local history, many people living around archaeological sites gives them inappropriate use that eventually creates damage. Some examples can be seen in the use for cattle pasture, garbage dump, chicken farms and personal housing.

## **Methodology**

As part of our methodology, we conducted interviews to three different groups related to the Poma Forest during our field season from June to September of the year 2009. First, we focused in the group of archaeologists working for the Sicán National Museum. Our second group was the local population working with the archaeologists, which also dedicates to other activities related to agriculture and tourism. Our third group was composed by the local population that is not directly related to the museum and it is usually not interested in its activities or criticizes them. We also conducted a participant observation of the activities done by the staff of the Sicán National Museum, focusing especially in those related to the work with the public and the surveillance of archaeological sites.

About our first group, we interviewed archaeologists about the projects that take place in this area to engage the local community into heritage protection and tourism development. They work together with local leaders to elaborate projects that will improve tourism development in the area. Also, they are or were also involved in campaigns to protect archaeological monuments and support local schools with information about archaeology.

Our second group was interviewed about their relationship with archaeologists. We also interviewed them about their relationship with the archaeological heritage in this area. Most of the members of this group have lived in this area for generations and are related to each other. Their interest in archaeology is usually related to the fact that most of them or their relatives worked for the Sicán Archaeological Project.

Our third group was divided into two sub-groups. One of these sub-groups refers to local people who strongly criticize the activities of the museum. This is composed by members of other communities that are also trying to improve their tourist development or people who consider that archaeologists are not taking economical advantage of archaeological heritage. The other sub-group refers to those who have no relationship at all with the museum and usually consider archaeological heritage something not useful for their everyday life. In many cases, members from this sub-group are those that occupy illegally the land in this area.

## **Conclusion/Observation**

During our present research we were able to observe the different groups that interact in this area. It was possible to identify several groups with different interests about the archaeological heritage. This complex situation emphasizes the necessity of creating specific strategies to reach each group in order to engage them into archaeological protection. Also, archaeologists need to understand the different interests that each group has since there is some level of confrontation that can be expected, especially from those groups that are not directly related with them.

During our interviews it was possible to note that archaeology information is not necessarily predominant over other ways to understand the past in this area. Even the closest group related to archaeologists builds their own understanding of the archaeological heritage by mixing some of their own traditions and beliefs with the information provided by archaeologists. This discourse is used by local people when tourists arrive here. Archaeology becomes then just a reference for understanding the past and it gives space to other alternative discourses, even though archaeologists do not intend that. Opening official spaces (like the museum) to show not only archaeologists discourse but also local beliefs could be an interesting way to attract the interest of local communities towards protecting the archaeological heritage.

Another observation is that those groups that are not directly related to archaeologists tend to destroy archaeological heritage because of lack of appropriate information about what defines an archaeological site or what advantages will give to them an appropriate use of that heritage. Although those groups understand the laws that protect archaeological heritage, they are not interested because they see only the direct benefit they can get from the land where it is located. Another element that influences those groups is the fact that most of them are not native to the area, and the way they take advantage of land is different than from those that lived generations here. This element is extremely important, since any future strategy to approach them should not emphasize regionalisms but maybe a common national past. Giving successful examples of how other communities were able to use the archaeological heritage for tourism development could also be a good strategy.

The complexity observed in this area has strong roots in how it became populated, and how archaeologists started to interact with local communities. Our next step will be to try to put in practice some of the strategies that we proposed above and measure the acceptance from local communities. We expect in following seasons to establish those strategies in a practical level and measure their success by noting the interest that local communities (especially those not related to archaeologists) may have towards archaeological heritage protection.