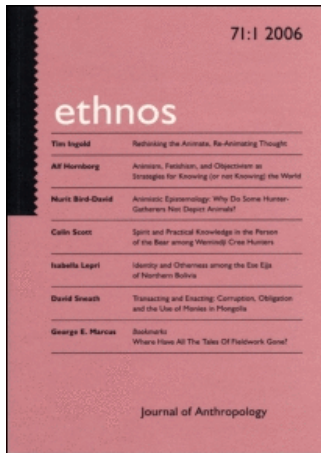


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## Looting and the politics of archaeological knowledge in Northern Peru

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# Looting and the Politics of Archaeological Knowledge in Northern Peru

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**ABSTRACT** *A closer examination of the ways archaeological knowledge is spoken about and represented locally provides significant insights into social divisions and power struggles within Peru. In an account of the ambivalent relations between archaeologists and local experts in the prehispanic past, this article considers how the authority that enables the construction and maintenance of sociopolitical models (such as the 'nation') is itself constructed, not just from above, but also at the local level. The relationship between power and authority grants legitimacy to historical discourses justifying sociopolitical inequality and reinforces the centralized power structure of the Peruvian state. The article discusses the implications of these local perceptions for archaeology, both as a discipline practiced within the local setting, and as a category through which the Peruvian government expresses tropes of a unified modern identity.*

**KEYWORDS** *Knowledge, authority, politics of archaeology, looting, gender, Peru*

**B**etween April 1997 and November 1998, I lived in Magdalena de Cao, a coastal village in northern Peru.<sup>1</sup> Now situated about five kilometers inland, the village was until recently located at the very edge of the ocean, atop early prehispanic settlements within an immense archaeological complex (cf. Ramírez 1995). Although archaeological and other excavations are carried out in the lands surrounding Magdalena, and pre-Hispanic symbols have been painted on murals in the plaza and on the arch at the entranceway to the village, the sites themselves do not figure strongly in local imagination.<sup>2</sup> Few people in Magdalena can name the various mounds within the El Brujo complex. Nonetheless, even the children know the myth associated with the site. According to legend, an enormous cart of gold rises at midnight out of the crevice that divides one of the mounds in two, its

unearthly luminosity attracting viewers and simultaneously frightening them. Those who are not careful to avert their eyes find themselves running after the cart, lured by the golden glow, unaware of their plight until the waters of the Pacific close over their heads for the last time. The cart always returns to the ocean, and is reborn daily within the silent pyramid, waiting for the next journey through a landscape that, in the popular imagination, is filled with both gold and danger.

Hovering in the almost constant mist next to the sea, the archaeological complex of El Brujo is a triangular area bordered by cane fields on two sides and the Pacific on a third. Between the two main pyramids, and indeed on the entire raised geological triangle, the ground is so pocked with 'looters' pits' (*pozos de huaquero*) that comparisons to the surface of the moon have become clichés. The road from nearby villages to the sea passes through the site, and fishermen come and go on their bicycles on schedules set by the tides. Ten years ago, they passed only *huaqueros* on their way to the sea. Today, they pass archaeologists.

The word *huaquero* comes from *huaca*, a Quechua term meaning sacred, strange, or special; in modern coastal Peru, *huaca* usually refers to prehispanic archaeological sites. A *huaquero*, then, is one whose work revolves around *huacas*. The usual translation is 'looter' or 'clandestine excavator.' However, both terms have their own translations in Spanish – *saqueador* and *excavador clandestino* – and *huaquero* is a separate word, with different local connotations. While a looter may be anyone, of any background, who digs in search of any sort of artifact, a *huaquero* is a sort of local specialist, one who knows a great deal about archaeology and archaeological sites. Looters may live anywhere; indeed, they are often city dwellers that travel occasionally to rural areas in order to loot. A *huaquero*, on the other hand, is always a member of a smaller rural community, a place with direct access to archaeological sites. If a *huaquero* moves to a city, it implies that he has become a collector or a small-scale dealer, acting as an intermediary between former colleagues and a tight group of international dealers and collectors in Lima. If a *huaquero* becomes a dealer – and this is not a typical goal – his income may increase substantially, but his status in the local setting changes and may disappear entirely, because dealers are perceived as having stronger connections to the non-local than to the local and are therefore not considered trustworthy.

Victor Pimentel, a Peruvian archaeologist who has done anthropological studies of *huaqueros*, divides the groups' activities along similar lines:

A first type is what could be called ‘commercial *huaqueo*,’ an activity whose purpose is strictly the commercialization of the objects extracted from archaeological sites. The principal actors in this type of *huaqueo* are individuals from the city, who finance the furtive doings. Generally, the people who finance these clandestine excavations are Peruvian traffickers who may form part of international webs of traffic in works of art...

This first type of *huaqueo* may be carried out during either day or night, and at times relies on protection by local authorities...

A second type is what I would call ‘traditional *huaqueo*.’ Although this activity may well have commercial leanings, they are not its ultimate goal. The primary actors are the *huaqueros* of peasant extraction, individuals who live permanently in rural settings (2000:2; my translation).

In this essay, I use *huaqueros* to refer solely to Pimentel’s category of ‘traditional *huaqueros*’ – local experts on the local past and the local landscape – rather than to the city-dwelling *excavadores clandestinos* whose only goal is the resale of archaeological objects. The distinction is an important one. Traditional *huaqueros* collect various kinds of knowledge about the past – sensory (tactile familiarity with excavation techniques and artifact types; visual recognition of typical site arrangements and earth stains indicating sites; olfactory knowledge of when a site contains undisturbed human remains and when it does not), abstract (a broader familiarity with the area and with theories of cultural sequences), and concrete (the artifacts themselves). They consider the lifelong process of knowledge collection and transmission to be their vocation. In addition, they feel a certain responsibility toward the local past, voicing concerns about the careless destruction of sites through agricultural expansion or the rampant amateur looting that takes place during Holy Week (Smith 2001), refusing to sell unique local artifacts, and teaching their apprentices to excavate with care. By contrast, commercial looters consider it a job through which they can make money; they join together for short periods in which they ransack sites thoroughly, destroying all but the ‘best’ artifacts, since they cannot transport large numbers of ceramic vessels without drawing attention to themselves, and because they wish to hide evidence of the kinds of artifacts they have encountered in an area to keep amateur looters from finding related sites. In my experience, the two groups – traditional *huaqueros* and commercial looters – never mix. However, archaeologists conflate the two groups within discussions of looting, resulting

in the production of their own academic authority at the expense of deeper ties to the local communities where they work.

In a given community in northern Peru today, there is usually not more than one individual or small family group recognized as traditional *huaquero*(s). The vocation often runs in families, although a *huaquero* takes apprentices from other families if their interest is sufficient. Of the group of locals who accompany him and who provide labor needed in excavation, usually only one or two are apprentices. Importantly, it is precisely through the processes of sharing expertise and of both imparting and acquiring knowledge that a strong sense of loyalty and community is generated among the *huaquero*, his apprentice(s) and the accompanying workers. In other words, for *huaqueros*, knowledge enhances their local status within both their work-group and the broader community – but this happens precisely because they choose to create bonds through sharing their knowledge, rather than trying to control access to the processes of acquiring knowledge and thereby to create hierarchical divisions within the group. This distinction is quite important when we consider the social value of knowledge to archaeologists, as I will detail below.

Most *huaqueros* have other non-permanent jobs as well – day labor in agriculture, construction, or fishing – and do not rely on *huaqueo* for their everyday income. Some have attained sufficient familiarity with prehispanic art styles that they now make the better part of their income through the production of replicas, occasionally passing them off as original antiquities to dealers, something they relate with a pleasure deriving equally from the recognition of their expertise and from the irony of being able to turn the tables on those who usually try to exploit them. *Huaqueros* do periodically sell original pieces out of financial need (to middlemen, usually from nearby cities, who know both *huaqueros* and local collectors and make their living connecting the two), but excavate them primarily for their personal collections, about which they are passionate.

Unlike commercial looters, traditional *huaqueros* are recognized, by locals and archaeologists alike, as important sources of information about archaeological sites. From the earliest Peruvian excavations to the present, *huaqueros* have been central participants in archaeological investigations (e.g., Strong *et al.* 1952; Zevallos Q. 1994; Wiese 1995). Recognition of the centrality of the local expert's knowledge, however, is far from straightforward. Importantly, when archaeologists consult local specialists, these are always traditional *huaqueros* – but, as noted above, when archaeologists speak derogatorily of

'looting' (*huaqueo*) they conflate the various groups (commercial *huaqueros*, traditional *huaqueros*, and even archaeologists whose field techniques are seen as sloppy). Furthermore, archaeologists employ a number of discursive strategies to devalue *huaqueros* and their knowledge. Ironically, as a result, the definitions of 'looting' and 'excavating' also become confused in local perceptions of archaeological discourse, as will be discussed below. A closer examination of the ways archaeological knowledge is spoken about and represented provides significant insights into social divisions and mechanisms of power within Peru.

### **Huaqueros in Archaeological Narrative: Sipán and El Brujo**

Archaeology, and the vision of a unified 'Peruvian' past expressed through archaeology, are categories that public officials and the Peruvian media often employ to define and narrate 'Peru' as a unified entity in the present (Smith 2001). After the turbulent, terrorist-dominated 1980s and the subsequent plunge in the Peruvian economy, including the tourism industry, the Peruvian government began to search actively for positive images through which to represent Peru – particularly to foreign investors. The discovery of the gold-laden site of Sipán by *huaqueros* in 1987 provided a serendipitous source of images of wealth, culture, and continuity or stability. Through these images, archaeology once again became a central symbol of Peruvian-ness, and interest in archaeology increased dramatically on the part of government officials, national and international investors, and tourists, as well as archaeologists themselves. Versions of the 'exciting Indiana Jones-like adventure' story<sup>3</sup> surrounding the original finds at Sipán have appeared not only in Peruvian periodicals, televised media, and archaeological publications, but also in international news, culture, and travel magazines, as well as in longer popular accounts such as journalist Stanley Kirkpatrick's *Lords of Sipán: A True Story of Pre-Inca Tombs, Archaeology, and Crime* (1992).

Fueled by the discovery of the golden Sipán tombs, archaeological investigations along the north coast of Peru have proliferated in the past fifteen years, the majority run by archaeologists born and educated in northern Peru. The original 'discovery' of Sipán is attributed to a group of local *huaqueros*. Within days of recovering some of the first artifacts taken from the mounds, police and archaeologists from the Peruvian department of Lambayeque 'reclaimed' the mounds in an armed struggle, citing the need to preserve the remaining burials for scientific analysis. Since then, police have guarded the site around the clock. Access to the area is restricted, and though a museum

has been erected amidst the mounds, it holds only simulacra – photographs and models of the finds – while the real artifacts tour the globe or are held in national or departmental museums.

This policy of appropriating valuable artifacts for national (pro-tourism) display while stocking local museums with simulacra resonates with the more generalized hierarchization of knowledge and the virtualization of the local in the service of national interest that are central to this essay. Yet to some degree the location of archaeological objects has become irrelevant, for it is the ways tourists imagine *archaeology*, not its material effects, that have been mapped onto new ways to imagine Peru. Representations of Peru on tourism posters, t-shirts, and websites display images of the burials or archaeological sites themselves, rather than the more visually accessible restored artifacts now held in museums. The level of interest in archaeology has been so consistently high in the past decade that the Peruvian government and tourism industries now use Sipán and other sites to represent Peru, both internationally and within the country's borders (Smith 2001).

Perhaps sparked by the memorability and instant cachet of the Sipán saga, the official account of El Brujo also begins with a tale of *huaqueros*. Publications, tour-guide presentations, and local lore all focus on the story of how the site was 'found' – in fact, to date most publications on El Brujo relay far more of this information than of actual archaeological results (Franco *et al.* 1996, 1998, 1999; Wiese 1995). As the story goes, *huaqueros* visited the El Brujo complex one night after hearing rumors that valuable mummy bundles could be found on the north face of the largest platform mound. Brushing dirt from one section of wall, a *huaquero* glimpsed what appeared to be painted adobe figures in high relief. The group leader, Arturo, a respected individual in town, told the rest not to destroy the figures, but to cover them carefully with loose fill and to leave the rest to him. They camouflaged the site and left before dawn. Soon Arturo had spoken with both a local archaeologist and a major financier with a known interest in archaeological collections. After seeing the quality of the relief murals already exposed, the banker agreed to fund a preliminary excavation to uncover and protect the rest. The National Institute of Culture (Instituto Nacional de Cultura) and the Trujillo branch of the National University (Universidad Nacional de Trujillo) each provided an archaeologist, effectively legalizing the operation. In addition, the banker hired a third Peruvian archaeologist who had worked for him on earlier projects farther south.

In return for having discovered and reported the site, Arturo requested that his team be hired as the site workers. The request was originally granted. As excavations expanded and agreements (*convenios*) were signed to prolong the project, however, most of those original workers were dismissed. Arturo protested by refusing to work. He was subsequently brutally harassed by police claiming to be punishing him for his former looting practices. Fearing for his family's safety, he hid in cane fields or beach coves at night, unable to sleep in his own home for weeks. However, when other finds appeared and the physically ailing banker called for urgency in the 'search for tombs,' Arturo was enticed back to the site with a promise to rehire his workers.

As the majority of these interactions occurred within the first two years of excavations, I did not witness them, and only have access to the numerous accounts from townspeople, workers (including Arturo himself), and archaeologists. Thus before addressing the issue at the heart of this paper – the de-legitimization of local expertise – let me add a description of an exchange of 'knowledge' I did observe.

In mid-1998, the first of a series of tombs was found within the El Brujo complex (cf. Franco *et al.* 1999). This was a walled adobe chamber with decorated niches containing the remains of two individuals, as well as several decorated ceramics and other artifacts. At the time, Arturo was not working at the site; a series of verbal skirmishes and petty arguments had resulted in yet another dismissal. Nonetheless, given such a rare find, the head archaeologist knew that the banker would soon visit; thus he felt an obligation to invite Arturo back to the site, fearing a reprimand if Arturo were not present. The negotiations were not straightforward, and Arturo originally refused to return. The banker's trip was postponed, however, and it became increasingly obvious that this was the first of several finds. Despite wounded pride, Arturo returned, his curiosity having gotten the better of him. In punishment for his original refusal to return, Arturo was first stationed at a trench far from the actual burials.

Gradually, the fill atop the burials was removed. One of the head archaeologists called for Arturo, who pointed to the positioning and types of ceramics near the first skeleton's skull and concluded that the individuals buried were female. The archaeologist laughed and openly scoffed at this opinion – based on the scenes represented in the adobe friezes, this was obviously a male-dominated site of ritual and power: why would an important tomb hold women? Arturo, he claimed, was attempting to rile the workers and archaeologists by mocking their find – the implication being that Arturo



was having a petty fit of jealousy, not having found a tomb himself. Arturo shrugged and walked off without a word, though later he mentioned to those of us working nearby that the archaeologists were in for a surprise. Every burial he had ever seen with the spatial characteristics of the current tomb, he said, was of a woman. As he expected, the final report did conclude that both interred individuals were female (Franco *et al.* 1999:48–50).

This example conveys archaeologists' skepticism about the value of *huaqueros'* expertise. When archaeologists are looking for quick additional information to bolster a case for funding, to capture the attention of visiting archaeologists, or for some other momentary purpose, they actively seek information from *huaqueros*. However, that information is not necessarily accepted as valid, particularly when it is given in a public context; second opinions are always sought, and are always the ones cited. This ambivalence in the valuation of local expertise leads us to a series of observations and interpretations concerning social divisions between the two groups of experts.

### Two Ways to Learn Archaeology

Analyzing the practice of knowledge (cf. Bourdieu 1990) – how it is acquired, transmitted, and exchanged on an everyday basis – demonstrates that it is not factual substance that distinguishes local from 'scientific' knowledge in northern Peru. Archaeologists and traditional *huaqueros* command similar knowledge about both excavation practices and the artifacts they reveal. However, the discourse through which archaeologists depict their own work as scientific and hence objective results in a production of authority – which I define as the power to make knowledge public – that depends on the de-legitimization of local experts.

There are obvious differences in the processes of knowledge transmission from the current experts within each group (professors or *huaqueros*) to the 'next generation.' While within the academic setting knowledge is generally passed from professors to students via lectures, a sort of protégé or apprentice relationship informs the interactions between *huaqueros* and interested local youth. *Huaqueros* will take older boys and young men with them as they work, teaching through demonstration and occasional commentary. As I mentioned in the introduction, one result of this process is the creation of community among the workers; greater knowledge gives the *huaquero* an increased social standing, but he tends to employ that social power to enhance community ties.

A good *huaquero* can predict what types of ceramics will be found at a given site, knows how to clean and restore ceramic vessels, weavings, and other artifacts, and recognizes correlations between artistic styles or iconographic motifs and types of vessels in terms of form, fabric, and provenience. Thus *huaqueros* can detect fakes with fair accuracy, often more readily than those archaeologists who spend little time in the field or whose field experience is limited to a particular site.

Although *huaqueros* generally have not received a formal (university) education, they read and cite books on archaeology, and classify their finds through both contextual associations and references to published ceramic sequences. Part of the motivation behind *huaqueros'* referencing of archaeological texts may well be what Pálsson and Helgason (1998) describe as the difficulties that practitioners of a traditional craft or skill encounter in verbalizing ideas without 'knowledge,' that is, without the technical and standardized vocabulary that will help them to be understood. *Huaqueros* not only read theoretical texts; they visit museums, talk to archaeology students and other visitors, and listen carefully to archaeologists' discussions of sites. Through these activities, they acquire the kind (if not the degree) of 'scientific' knowledge archaeologists are presumed to command, but their access to and ability to employ theoretical knowledge is never formally acknowledged – or perhaps even consciously recognized – by archaeologists or others in the scientific community.

Practical information is imparted to apprentices through on-the-job training. Nonetheless, although *huaqueros* do spend time reading theoretical or academic texts, they do not impart this kind of knowledge to their protégés, though books may be lent if owned. I asked Arturo why this was so, and he responded that it was more important that a *huaquero* be able to recognize what he found in the field, arguing that until a person was confident of his own knowledge, books would only confuse him. Arturo added, *yo no soy nadie para enseñar lo que está allí* ('I'm not the person to teach what's in there [in the texts]'). This implies that *huaqueros* feel they lack authority in the sphere of academic knowledge, although Arturo never hesitated to give an opinion on specific artifacts or questions regarding archaeological sites, and even referred to academic texts in answering those questions. It was obviously less a question of being able to command the material for personal use than of feeling qualified to teach it.

Formal students of the academic discipline of archaeology follow a quite distinct path of learning. At Peruvian universities, archaeology is subdivided

into four course types to satisfy distribution requirements – the history of archaeology, and regional, temporal, and practical courses. After completing required coursework, students must apply to conduct their *prácticas* (field research) under the supervision of a University-affiliated archaeologist at a site already being excavated. The field research period could be used to integrate theories with practice, but is unfortunately often viewed simply as a hoop one must jump through before receiving the bachelor's degree. Though some sites provide direct guidance to students, at others the students are left entirely on their own, to plan and execute excavations at sites both physically and theoretically removed from those being investigated by the official team. At El Brujo, for example, students are placed at remote sites, visited perhaps once a week, and asked to explain what they have found. These students have often had no prior field experience, and are not directly taught by archaeologists how to excavate, recognize contexts or patterns in what they are finding, or interpret their finds. Thus in many cases the academic learning environment does not extend beyond the classroom.

Often a worker, frequently a *huaquero's* apprentice, is assigned to help students at these sites with manual tasks. Ironically, he often becomes the person who guides the students' initial excavation experience. Nonetheless, he will rarely venture interpretations, although he is almost certainly far more knowledgeable about the site and what is appearing within it than the students. Students excavating for the first time are often so intimidated – and more experienced students so appalled – by the lack of academic guidance that they leave almost immediately, either applying to work at a more controlled site or, in some cases, leaving the program. Others seek out the younger trench supervisors (*técnicos*) – those who mediate between the 'real archaeologists' and the 'workers' – after work or at meals, to learn from their experience. There is, then, a constant, if not consciously intended, emphasis within northern Peruvian archaeology on the distinction between practical and formal knowledge: they are acquired in spatially different contexts, at different times, from different people.

Most archaeology students in Peru learn little about publishing or otherwise disseminating information (see Higuera 1995); rather, by observing 'real archaeologists' they often learn to hoard information. Access to reference books and academic publications is extremely limited in Peru, due to their relatively high cost, short production runs, and the limited availability of foreign texts in Spanish translation. Thus access to a text is perceived as an advantage over other students competing for limited positions and resources,

and texts are rarely shared. Furthermore, in many archaeological projects, students are forbidden to publish any of their work, as it 'belongs' to the project in the person of its director(s). Frequently, students do not appear as second authors on their own work when it is published – an ignominy they must endure if they expect to receive the degree that may ultimately gain them a site of their own, since project directors are generally their academic advisors as well. There are notable exceptions to this; however, at many sites no publications of note appear at all, and site reports themselves are almost never published. This creates a quandary for the archaeology student, who must publish to be recognized, but who may not use any of the data he or she has collected over what may be years of work at a given site. Students do publish speculative articles in local or student-run journals, but these are rarely read or cited by the wider academic community, precisely because they do not refer to specific cases (since such information is off-limits to them) (cf. Vargas Arenas 1995). Not only does this situation make it very difficult for students to advance within archaeology; it also means that information itself is not disseminated, whether to the archaeological community, the general public, or other students.<sup>4</sup>

Scientific knowledge, then, is seen as something economically, politically, and socially accessible only to a select few. Maintaining those divisions and hierarchies is essential to sustaining the social value of knowledge within the academic sphere. In other words, within the field of archaeology, expertise creates social (and thereby economic) divisions. If knowledge acquired through and legitimized by a formal education generates power, that power is expressed through authority, which tends to isolate individuals. By contrast, the power inherent in the expertise of *huaqueros* has no wider authority – it is a private knowledge, but it serves to enhance the *huaquero's* standing within his community as both guardian and teacher of local history, and as I argue elsewhere (Smith 2001), social standing in rural Peru is directly related to the number of social ties one has. In effect, for *huaqueros*, knowledge as a social process works to create community, whereas for archaeologists, it creates divisions. Archaeologists enhance their academic authority in part through maintaining a social (and economic) distance from the communities where they work. One of the head archaeologists at El Brujo was originally from a nearby town in the same valley, and lived in the compound of his mother's relatives in Magdalena, but chose to abandon the village when-ever possible; the few villagers with whom he associated openly were those who accompanied him to Trujillo and more specifically to the university. Emphasizing

social divisions, however, only enhances local perceptions of archaeologists' activity as extractive and exploitative – if their actions were indeed as ethical as they claimed, they would let villagers see what they were doing, and would maintain local social relationships.

Such divisions also inform the interactions between the two groups of experts. While archaeologists consult *huaqueros* throughout the fieldwork process, their expertise is rarely acknowledged in written discussions of finds, and then usually in the form of a whimsical anecdote. No one cites *huaqueros* as sources of knowledge – only as discoverers of sites.<sup>5</sup> Theoretical, published knowledge is granted precedence in archaeologist's interpretations of the past: I have witnessed experienced archaeologists assign ceramic vessels to a particular period based on their field knowledge, but then change their assessment entirely upon finding a single published opinion to the contrary, regardless of the qualifications of the publication's author. Thus within the scientific community – the only group with either the means or the perceived authority to speak to a wider audience – theory is worth more than practice, and consequently, archaeologists more than *huaqueros*.<sup>6</sup>

*Huaqueros* do protest the resultant hierarchization, but do not argue directly with archaeologists. When archaeologists contradict a *huaquero's* opinions, the *huaquero* usually remains silent rather than challenging the 'experts' openly. If the matter comes up again later, among archaeologists the *huaquero* will generally revise his stated opinions to coincide with the official interpretation. Among the workers, however, he will almost invariably maintain his original evaluation. These contradictory stances suggest that while *huaqueros* do not question their own expertise, they are aware of the differences in power and perceived authority that grant archaeologists' opinions legitimacy, and are loath to risk their jobs just to make a point.

Power hierarchies are also reflected in the matter of private collections. While *huaqueros* – rurally-based individuals with ties to the land and to working-class families – are denied the legal right to own private collections, nearly every wealthy family from the former *hacendado* class – and this includes most Peruvian archaeologists – has a private collection of artifacts which are frequently not catalogued or open to public viewing despite national laws demanding that all privately held artifacts be registered with the INC. Wealthy families and archaeologists who do catalogue and register their collections are thereafter permitted to maintain those collections in their homes – while rural families who register their few artifacts are almost always required to turn them over to the INC. Arturo himself was frequently persecuted for his

meager collection of ceramic vessels to which he had a particular aesthetic attachment. Whenever Arturo voiced his complaints too loudly at work, police would raid his home, and he would have to spend days or even weeks hiding in the cane fields to avoid arrest. During the same period, his employer, owner of a vast private collection, was honored nationally as a 'protector of cultural patrimony.' The continued existence of such double standards, as seen both in disparate legal rights and in the de-legitimization of local knowledge, has strong implications for local perceptions of archaeology, as I argue below.

### Gendered Knowledge

An examination of the ways archaeologists consult *huaqueros*, and of how and in what contexts they use the resultant information, reveals striking similarities to the ways women's opinions are treated in rural northern Peruvian communities. In public settings, archaeologists tended first to request and then immediately to discount the opinion of *huaqueros*. Such ambivalent attitudes resembled the public treatment of women. While women were asked their opinions in attempts to include them in male-dominated conversations, those opinions, once given, were often laughed off, though not necessarily in ways intended to be insulting. Women, in fact, expected such reactions and few were offended. Those rare women prepared to defend their own opinions were invariably considered city-dwellers or foreigners, not locals.

In general, and particularly in public, rural settings, *machismo* is alive and well in northern Peru. A wide and colorful vocabulary exists for the ways a man must treat a woman, including pejorative terms for men and women who do not emulate this model. Any (public) deviance from the patriarchal image of man-as-decision-maker is automatically assumed to reveal a weakness on the part of the man, or an 'unnatural' strength on the part of the woman. The possibility that such a situation could result from conscious choice is never entertained. These norms imply that, regardless of the actual distribution of power, a particular image must be maintained – one that often belies reality, as within the walls of the household women's opinions and decisions tend to hold a great deal of weight.

According to the tenets of *machista* culture, a man should never admit his ignorance, particularly not in the face of those classed as 'women' relative to him. Consequently, an archaeologist who seeks the opinion of a *huaquero*, especially when this concerns a matter with which the archaeologist is unfamiliar, does so generally after sundown. He will go to the home of the *hua-*

*quero*, usually in the early evening, when it is dark outside but still a reasonable hour for social calls. There is a furtive quality to this sort of encounter. Within small towns, social visits are usually commented upon openly, particularly since nearly everyone knows everyone else's whereabouts anyway. Those which are not openly acknowledged are generally of an illicit nature, such as extramarital rendezvous, or are the initial, nervous visits of a suitor to a young woman, when he still fears rejection and hence prefers to escape the town's watchful gaze.

The act of requesting information is itself couched in the guise of a social visit – the archaeologist is received formally in the front room, where guests on less than intimate terms with the household (including men courting young women) are traditionally entertained. Such a reception serves two purposes: it overtly appears to acknowledge the superior social status of the archaeologist, yet it covertly implies that the archaeologist is not on familiar terms with the *huaquero* (his having hired the *huaquero* as an excavation crew member notwithstanding).<sup>7</sup> The *huaquero* may decide not to appear, even if he is present; this is a strategy of preserving power within one's own home. Women in courtship do the same, to establish a more independent position for themselves once an alliance is agreed upon, when they are not certain if their suitors have honorable intentions, or as an indirect way to convey their rejection of the suitor.

If the *huaquero* chooses to accept the visit, he will appear and sit opposite the visitor. At this point small talk is exchanged for quite some time. Usually, the archaeologist will work his matter of concern into the conversation, rather than stating it openly – as when suitors hint at their intentions until they are certain they will not be rejected. The *huaquero* usually replies obliquely, attempting to get the archaeologist to specify precisely what he wants to know, and why. If the *huaquero* decides to provide the information, the archaeologist will change the subject immediately afterward, as if to deny the purpose of his visit. He will briefly continue exchanging small talk before taking his leave. Unlike typical social visits, this sort of visit will not be subsequently remarked upon by the archaeologist; he may even deny that it occurred if confronted, just as an embarrassed lover may deny visiting a woman. Like the woman, the *huaquero* may feel slighted by this treatment, so tends to avoid mention of the visits as well.

While the structural similarities between the public treatment of women and of *huaqueros* are not consciously acknowledged by any of the participants, analyzing these interactions suggests that archaeologists construe

*huaqueros* as symbolic females. The information exchange, so engendered, acts to enhance the authority of the archaeologist – not only because he acquires knowledge in the process, but because the terms of exchange position archaeologists and *huaqueros* within an existing social structure that values the male over the female, especially in public contexts. Engendering this process further implies that archaeologists both rely on, and are wary of being perceived as relying on, the knowledge or expertise and concurrent power of *huaqueros*. Such dependence is at odds with archaeologists' position that their science is a privileged type of knowledge, inherently more valuable than mere field familiarity, and that archaeology itself is a more ethical approach to gathering information about the past.

Although the above analysis suggests a simplistic binary opposition of men as powerful and women as weak, the distinction is more precisely one of male strength:public display::female strength:private interactions (Smith 2001). The public/private distinction apparent in the gendering of relations between archaeologists and *huaqueros* mirrors the practical relationship between them as well – in a sense, archaeologists do publicly what *huaqueros* are forced to do privately, despite similar expertise. In an inverted reading of this, of course, archaeology could be considered simply the public face of looting, and ironically, it is precisely archaeologists' insistence that *huaqueros* are no more than looters that tends to lead locals to this logical conclusion. Ultimately, it is precisely the similarity in both knowledge and intent between *huaqueros* and archaeologists that leads to this confusion; were archaeologists to focus their concerns on eradicating commercial looters and international collectors, their criticisms would seem more logical and valid, rather than yet another attack on local authority.

### **Social Criticism within Local Celebration: Irony and Wordplay**

The creation of sociopolitical hierarchies through both state policies and the discursive practices of archaeologists may limit the ways locals express their opinions, but by no means does it silence them entirely. *Huaqueros* and other locals construct collective narratives exposing the essential hypocrisies dividing archaeological theory from practice, many of which emerge within the contexts of public celebrations.

Drinking is central to even the most familiar types of small-town celebrations and gatherings in Peru (Smith 2001). The extremely ritualized nature of the drinking process at such gatherings quite effectively creates, through symbols, phrases, and actions, the illusion of equality among all participants



for the duration of the gathering. Larger or more formal celebrations within the smaller villages where I lived could include virtually the entire local population, making ritual equality all-encompassing at a local level.

Music is a constant companion to drinking in these celebrations. From the highlands to the coast, the most popular drinking songs are repeated everywhere – with a repertoire of fifteen or twenty songs, one could get by in nearly any gathering in northern Peru. One popular *marinera* caught my attention early, since it referred to *huaqueros*:

Yo soy el huaquero viejo que viene de sacar huacos  
*I'm the old huaquero who comes from taking treasures*  
 De la huaca más arriba ¡ay! y de la huaca más abajo  
*From the highest treasure mine, oh!, and from the lowest*

Yo tenía una cholita que se llamaba Jacoba  
*I once had a little peasant girl whose name was Jacoba*  
 Que todititas las noches ¡ay! movía la barbacoa  
*Who every single night, oh!, made the hammock-cloth sway*

Huaquero, huaquero, huaquero, vámonos a huaquear  
*Huaquero, huaquero, huaquero, let's go dig for treasures*  
 Cova, cova, cova al amanecer, cova, cova, cova al anochecer  
*Root, root, root around at dawn, root, root, root around at dusk.*

The *marinera* rhythm usually accompanies an elaborate traditional northern dance showcasing both intricate footwork and a tangible, elegant flirtatiousness. The lyrics of this particular example, full of sexual *double entendres*, are typical of the style, and enhance audience enjoyment. The first stanza could refer to the exploits of a *huaquero*, or of a *viejo verde* (dirty old man), depending on the 'mines' being exploited for their 'treasures.' The second is similarly ambiguous – Jacoba is either sifting dirt through cloth to help the *huaquero* find treasures, or she is making the hammock sway by having sexual relations with him. The refrain uses the northern Peruvian idiom *covar* (instead of the more common verbs *cavar* or *excavar*, all meaning to dig or to excavate), both because it repeats the sounds of the woman's name (turning that name into a play on words), and because it is a more forceful verb: *covar* implies to plunge deeply into the earth and root around, enhancing the sexual overtones of the lyrics.

At northern Peruvian gatherings, the ability to feed the constant undercurrent of sexual innuendo in songs, jokes, and general commentary is central

to one's popularity. No opportunity to insert a clever *double entendre* into the conversation is passed up. In Magdalena, however, I repeatedly heard a different version of this song, in which the sexual allusions were absent. This version was sung by laborers from the El Brujo project, which was still being funded by the elderly banker – who had a rumored tendency to 'collect' pieces from the sites he sponsored,<sup>8</sup> and who hand-selected the archaeologists in charge of the project. The conscious (and repeated) decision to substitute these lyrics for the traditional ones caught my attention:

Yo soy el huaquero viejo, yo vengo de vender huacos

*I'm the old huaquero, I come from selling treasures*

Pero los que me quedo,<sup>9</sup> ay, cuestan más trabajo

*But the ones I keep, oh!, take more work*

Me los traen los que saben, que saben que no deben

*They're brought to me by those who know (experts), who know that they shouldn't*

Y así no me deben, ay, más de lo que saben

*But that way they don't owe me, oh!, any more than what they know*

A–, A–, A–, vámonos a huaquear,

*[Name of one lead archaeologist], let's go dig for treasures*

B–, B–, B–, vámonos a huaquear,

*[Name of another], let's go dig for treasures*

Cova, cova, cova al amanecer, cova, cova, cova al anochecer

*Root, root, root around at dawn, root, root, root around at dusk.*

*[Simultaneous second voice:]*

Cova, cobarde! al amanecer, cova, cobarde! al anochecer

*Dig, coward! at dawn; dig, coward! at dusk.*

The second stanza plays with the various meanings of two verbs, *saber* and *deber*. The first connotes having concrete, acquired, and/or common-sense knowledge. The second verb has a meaning similar to 'should' or 'ought to' in English, but also means 'to owe.' The implication is that the 'old looter' – a commercial rather than a traditional *huaquero* – loots with the permission and the aid of the *archaeologists* – who 'should know better,' but who are in his debt (for he has given them not only jobs, but also cultural capital in the local setting, the archaeological community, the university, and other social spaces). The refrain spells out who the responsible parties are, and implies that they are not only guilty of going against professional codes of behavior, but are weak or cowardly as well (for maintaining the hypocrisy, unable to defend their own positions). Revising the song in this way permits community

members to vent some of their frustration at confronting double standards. However, it also serves to heighten the ambiguities already present in the definition of what constitutes archaeology, and what is simply looting.

### **Who is Driving the Golden Cart?**

El Brujo's symbolic riches, extracted daily in the mythical *carreta de oro*, also star in more modern tropes of exploitation – highlighting the ways that archaeology and its authority are conceptually linked both to still-colonialist state policies and to local views of outsiders more generally. In northern Peru, archaeological projects have provided fodder for a set of interrelated folktales and gossip concerning archaeologists who supposedly escape seaward (via airplane, submarine, or other technological device), taking the wealth of the ransacked landscape with them.<sup>10</sup> Through such tales, locals express real concerns about power and the processes of authority production. Logically, the ability to access the wealth of the local landscape ought to reflect other areas of access – to knowledge as productive of power, to technology as a powerful and symbolic corollary of knowledge. Yet while both archaeologists (the signifiers in which the signified qualities of wealth, power, and authority reside) and locals have similar degrees of access to the material past, it is only the archaeologists who have the authority that enables them to profit from the looted landscape. In local perception, it is precisely the non-local nature of the archaeologists that gives them both the power to transport the riches of the local past beyond local contexts and the authority to make that rich past meaningful in a wider sphere, economically, politically, and academically.

What are the broader implications of these local perceptions for the goals of archaeologists? Northern Peruvian archaeologists, like their colleagues elsewhere, frequently speak out against looting and looters in attempts to educate the public and thereby protect archaeological sites. However, as this article details, their actions belie their words. Archaeologists are known to seek *huaqueros* out as sources of information on sites – information the *huaqueros* could only have acquired through looting. Furthermore, archaeologists appear to act very much like the groups they denounce. Both commercial looters and archaeologists guard sites at night, when only fishermen are generally active, and both remove objects from sites without granting the local community access to those objects. Thus both legal and clandestine excavations are perceived as secretive, an image heightened in the case of El Brujo since locals who visit the site are generally not permitted to enter at all, and even

if granted a short tour, are never permitted to see the artifacts, murals, or other finds – the tour consists of long-distance views of the mound itself and a quick discussion of the site's importance and chronology. The only locals permitted on site are workers chosen for their experience – most workers are *huaqueros* or their apprentices and laborers, which furthers local confusion about the difference between archaeologist and *huaquero*. Finally, since archaeologists' rhetoric does not distinguish between traditional *huaqueros* and commercial looters, the distinction becomes murkier still.

As a result, local residents come to perceive archaeologists simply as powerful *huaqueros* who operate above the law. From the local standpoint, arguments by archaeologists that looting is destructive and that archaeological sites should be protected and excavated scientifically are perceived merely as a hypocritical defense of self-interest. There is a sense that archaeologists are doing the same things as *huaqueros*, perhaps even as commercial looters, but hiding behind a mask of science. While local people do recognize two separate groups of practitioners, the salient distinction is spatial and economic rather than professional or practical – *huaqueros* are indigent locals, archaeologists are wealthy outsiders. By denying traditional *huaqueros* validity as experts, conflating traditional *huaqueros* and commercial looters, controlling local access to the sites, and including *huaqueros* on the team of workers, archaeologists render their arguments internally contradictory. Ironically, the result is to *prolong* rather than curb looting practices.

Worse, local perceptions come to be centered on the idea that archaeology gains validity not through the superiority of its methods, but rather merely through its inherent connections to the non-local. Through limiting access to and institutionalizing 'scientific' knowledge, both the Peruvian government and individual archaeologists de-legitimize local expertise. The resultant generalized tacit acceptance of the power differentials resulting from the valuation of science and formal education, in turn, paves the way for ongoing sociopolitical inequalities between rural and urban, indigenous and mestizo, female and male, *huaquero* and archaeologist. Thus, archaeological discourse contributes to internal social divisions in Peru, even while state actors rely on archaeological emblems to underpin Peru's image as a unified nation.

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## Notes

1. For three months in 1997, I volunteered as an archaeological assistant at a 2000-year-old platform mound currently under excavation.
2. The lack of connection to the historic landscape derives from hacienda-period agricultural practices. Workers rotated constantly through a landscape divided into numbered work areas. Archaeological remains were renamed after corresponding sector numbers (e.g., *la huaca 31*). Such historical spaces were thus emptied of more specific social meanings, becoming simply examples of *huacas* (Smith 2001).
3. Kirkus Reviews (Kirkpatrick 1992, back cover).
4. *Huaqueros* obviously do not publish their information. Nonetheless, they frequently catalog their finds through photographs of individual artifacts. In addition, since many *huaqueros* have collaborated in archaeological digs, they are aware of the importance of contexts, and some even record this information. Furthermore, every *huaquero* I have asked about a specific artifact can tell me exactly where it came from – information central to the perception of validity in archaeological (scientific) knowledge. This data – the provenience of an artifact – is essential to drawing conclusions about relationships among artifacts, archaeological sites, and prehispanic populations. However, although provenience of a given item may be known it is not readily available, since *huaqueros'* data is unpublished (in fact, it is deemed unpublishable by the academic community – perhaps precisely because to publish something, within these contexts, means to validate its authority).
5. *Huaqueros* are also frequently scapegoats for archaeologists, who occasionally poke around sites (using 'looters' tools') in frankly unscientific manners in order to locate sites for later excavation. It is much easier to claim that a *huaquero* found a site than to produce records of (nonexistent) methodical surveys.
6. Cf. Foucault (1972:15 fn. 2, 194).
7. Honored guests and strangers are treated similarly in northern Peruvian homes. This intentional ambiguity permits later re-interpretations of a visit, particularly when 'honored guests' are not well known or completely trusted. It is also worth noting that Peruvian patrimonial law does not specifically prohibit the hiring of *huaqueros* as team members; this may be a reflection of the great number of Peruvian archaeologists (and public officials) who are also collectors.

8. When Arturo originally informed the banker of the existence of the site, he was only aware that the banker was known as a benefactor and sponsor of archaeological projects, not that he was a collector. This information became common knowledge only after the banker built a house in the village where he kept part of his collection. It was also rumored that the banker paid townspeople to loot tombs on weekends – tombs spatially located not far from the official archaeological investigations he was also sponsoring.
9. 'Quedárselos' is an idiomatic Peruvian expression meaning 'to keep [the referenced objects] for oneself.'
10. Similar myths occur in Mayan areas (Richard Leventhal, personal communication, March 2002). In my dissertation (Smith 2001), I consider at length various tropes linking the archaeological past with (foreign) colonial exploiters, arguing that the northern Peruvian attitude toward the archaeological past is a highly ambivalent one, productive of both fear and desire, precisely because of its foreign associations.

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