**Archaeological Reconnaissance in Arequipa, Peru**

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For an archaeologist, Peru is heaven, serving as home to countless unique cultures, states, and empires. Excepting some of the more extreme high-altitude environments, there are few places in the Peruvian Andes that have not seen human life. As is well known today, the modern city of Cusco is laid upon the foundations of the Inca capital. A few hours from Lima, the country’s largest city and capital, lies Caral, perhaps the Andes’ oldest civilization. Trujillo is within an hour of both the Moche capital at Cerro Blanco and the Chimu capital at Chan Chan. The same goes for almost any small town you might randomly select from a map. Modern Peruvian’s lives spatially overlap with the lives of ancient people.

As part of my research this summer, funded graciously by the Tinker Foundation, I spent some time getting to know the people in a large rural town named Cabanaconde along the lower portion of the Colca Valley. By extension, I came to know more about the ancient people who used the land over the course of more than 1,000 years. The town of Cabanaconde is the capital of a district of the same name with a population no greater than 3,000 people. It is located within the province of Cayllomain the region of Arequipa in the southwest of Peru. The Cabanaconde district is particularly famous for its ever-present agricultural terraces that have been producing some of the best-regarded maize in Peru since well before the Inca Empire arrived.

Aside from the site of Kallimarka, which requires an hour and a half hike uphill to reach, the archaeological sites surrounding Cabanaconde are in a state of disrepair. Architecture is often very difficult to discern as the stones have been harvested for re-use in the more-recent construction of homes, walls, fences, and terraces. For the most part, all that can be seen is the tops of stones sticking out of the ground in linear and circular patterns. Within the town itself, there are two instances of standing Inca masonry. I was granted access into the backyard of a very gracious bodega owner to inspect it. There was a sense of pride behind its presence. I was told by several people there that the Inca were a great people. The bodega owner said that her husband is very protective of the Inca gate and that I could come back to look and take photos so long as he was not around. Whether the gate is legitimate or the result of colonial period destruction, redistribution, and re-use of previously standing structures has not been determined.

One site, Achachiwa is located just a 15 minute walk east from town along a clearly marked path. The site, once a highly fortified Wari citadel characterized by still-standing (in parts), meter-thick stone walls. Today it is a small hike frequented by tourists to the mirador, or viewpoint, overlooking the scenic Colca canyon and the oasis more than a half-mile below. In the center of the site, a full-size soccer field built several decades ago obscures the ability to see archaeological details without excavation. I was told by several people that it was rarely ever used, as there is one in town that is much preferred. Atop a hill pitted with tombs of unknown ages, a large cross sits. Separated by a thousand years, the people of the Colca Canyon have always seemed to recognize it as a place of ceremonial importance.

The same ceremonial continuity is visible at the site of Antisana (one of two centers during the period of Inka occupation) which sits atop the hill adjoining the southern part of town. Walls lined with stone circles of unknown purpose run parallel with a modern path on their way to a flat surface at the peak of the site. It is difficult to tell what lay here in prehistory as an abandoned Catholic Church remains, which is still used periodically for offering ceremonies to the local patron saint. Along the north edge of the site, as it approaches the canyon, other burials exist. A local landowner told me that his land is an old Wari graveyard, where strong forces still exist. Animals react strangely here, people avoid it at night, and those who have slept anywhere within the bounds of the site supposedly always have strange dreams. Whereas the Inca are a past civilization that the people respect and understand to some extent, the Wari represent much more distant ancestors.There is something more mysterious about the Wari, which is, at least to some, something to tread lightly about.

The site of Umawasi has seen the most recent alterations however. This site is a lengthy knoll running alongside the southern edge of the canyon. To the west, farmland has long sat atop it, possibly to the south as well. On the far southeast corner, a four-story museum is located. Construction of this museum has been complete for more than six months at the writing of this article, and it still contains no displays or artifacts. It was built to house the mummy of the “Ice Maiden,” which is researched, stored, and displayed at a museum in Arequipa. Despite an active petitioning process, there appears little realistic hope for the mummy to ever make it to Cabanaconde, as the town has no legitimate claim to it. Though the museum was built on land considered to not be a part of Umawasi, it nevertheless was constructed atop archaeological remains. I personally discovered Inca walls very nearby that were only exposed because of the recent construction activity. Furthermore, one of the security guards there showed me his personal stash of ceramic sherds recovered on museum grounds. Boundaries of archaeological sites are never clear. People live their lives in a broad area beyond where the physical houses end. An adjacent site on an area locally known as Amarupampa has been recorded by past researchers as fairly small and only periodically occupied. Based on my time surveying here, I believe these two sites to be one continuous occupation area. This is why it is problematic that in between the two sites, a large soccer field with bleachers was started a few years ago, and still remains unfinished. Again, Inka structures are visible not 10 feet away from the construction.

In the past year, the land to the south of Amarupampa has been divided up and sold for the construction of personal homes. Construction was just beginning during my time there. Prehistoric terraces stretch from the recognized site into this construction area. It is impossible as an archaeologist to not be upset by the destruction and further obscuration of the archaeological record in this area. To see two soccer fields and one museum be constructed without proper forethought on top of archaeological sites is unthinkable. The irony of the hollow shell of an archaeological museum sitting atop potentially valuable finds and information is difficult to escape. Still, it must be remembered that the people living here are the descendants of those that came before. It is their right to decide what they do with the land that they own rightfully. I see nothing wrong with utilizing undeveloped land that may have archaeology below the surface if the construction project is productive in any way. As I have pointed out, the Andes and even many other regions of the world are littered with the remains of past civilization. It would be a mistake to prioritize the information under the surface at the expense of the living people in these areas. There is most likely no room in the budget and infrastructure of Peru for thorough surveying prior to construction, but building massive, unnecessary, and unwanted structures atop and adjacent to well-known sites could easily be avoided. I do not pretend to have the solution, but making these situations known is one of the first steps. I visited many areas in the search for dissertation research, but it seems more and more likely that I will work in Cabanaconde. Beyond there being a wealth of information present here and people eager to know more about their past, there is a need for archaeological presence in the area before certain areas are built over and made inaccessible for the foreseeable future.