

Case #6

Alejandro Toledo, President of Peru, has launched a public campaign demanding that Yale University return to Peru Incan artifacts excavated at Machu Picchu in 1912. Yale professor Hiram Bingham III, guided by a native Peruvian, came upon the Incan city of Machu Picchu in 1911. Bingham secured backing from the National Geographic Society and support from Peru's government for archeological excavations at Machu Picchu in 1912 and again in 1914-15.

In October 1912, Bingham gained the Peruvian government's permission to bring to Yale for research the contents of 170 tombs in Machu Picchu. The decree allowed that Peru reserve the right to ask for the return of the objects.

By 1916, Peru, suspecting Bingham of secretly taking Incan gold, ended Bingham's work at Machu Picchu. The items taken to Yale from the 1914-15 excavations were loaned for only 18 months. Yale has refused several Peruvian requests for return of the artifacts.

Today, Yale claims that they have complied with the 1912 and the 1916 agreements, returning the objects to Peru during the 1920's. Yale sees no similar responsibility to return the items taken from earlier work. National Geographic Society records show that about half of the items were returned to Peru, with no mention of the remaining artifacts.

Luis Guillermo Lumbreras, the director of Peru's National Institute of Culture in Lima, claims that Yale has had 90 years to complete research on the objects, and now Peru wants the items returned. Peru elected its first indigenous president—Alejandro Toledo, who honored the nation's Incan heritage by holding part of his inauguration ceremony at Machu Picchu in 2001. In part due to his influence, Peru wants possession of the artifacts, which have formed the core of Yale's impressive, scholarly exhibition: *Unveiling the Mystery of the Incas*. After traveling to six cities and attracting over a million visitors, the exhibit now resides at Yale's Peabody Museum of Natural History in Connecticut.

The recent research of Yale professors Lucy Salazar and her husband Richard L. Burger, including extensive scientific analysis of burials, has provided the most reasonable explanation for the existence of Machu Picchu. Rather than supporting the earlier ideas of the city as a center for religious activity including the sacrifice of virgins, the professors' research has suggested that the city served as a simple country retreat from the Inca capital of Cuzco.

The number and kinds of artifacts taken to Yale from Machu Picchu is in dispute. Yale has offered to return some of the pieces to Peru, if Peru allows it to keep others at the Peabody Museum of Natural History, where Machu Picchu is the prize exhibit.