

October 12, 2020

I am Maria Bruno, Associate Professor and Department Chair of Anthropology and Archaeology at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. I have been conducting archaeological and cultural anthropological research in Bolivia since 1999. My research focuses on the development of agriculture across several regions of Bolivia. I have primarily conducted my research in the Lake Titicaca Basin on the Taraco Peninsula and at the UNSECO World Heritage site of Tiwanaku, in the Department of La Paz. I have also conducted research in the Llanos de Moxos region of the Amazon Basin, in the Department of Beni. I am testifying on behalf of myself and of the Society for American Archaeology, of which I am a member, in strong favor of the renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the U.S. and Bolivia.

All of my work has been in collaboration with Bolivian archaeologists who have served in governmental capacities in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Unidad Nacional de Arqueología y Museos, those in charge of individual sites such as the Centro de Investigaciones Arqueológicas, Antropológicas y Administración de Tiwanaku, as well as professors and students of the Anthropology and Archeology Department and the Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas y Arqueológicas at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés in La Paz. Together, we collaborate to study the rich and important ancient history of Bolivia and South America through archaeological research but also to educate the public and advocate for the protection of the archaeological record that is under constant threat of destruction.

Often times, in discussions about cultural patrimony from archaeological sites, we think of beautiful pottery or textiles, which are often the objects sought out on international art markets. When such items are looted, the country of origin not only loses those important objects, but the

destructive and undocumented processes by which they are taken from the ground, causes damage to the entire archaeological site and all of the information in it. The research I conduct considers some of the smallest fragments of the archaeological record, microscopic pieces of plant remains left behind from ancient fields and meals. These can be found in soils as well as residues on ancient stone tools and pottery. These small finds attest to the significant role indigenous peoples of the Bolivian Andes and Amazon played in developing some of the most important food resources in our world today: quinoa, potatoes, manioc, peanuts, maize, and many others. While much of this knowledge is sustained in the practices of Bolivian farmers today, the changes and antiquity of these practices is also preserved in Bolivia's rich archaeological record. For example, the small pieces of fragmented plants that I study, which have verified over 3000 years of quinoa farming in the Lake Titicaca Basin, are only recovered from the soil of excavations through a process called flotation. These tiny ancient quinoa seeds are not detectable by the naked eye and would be overlooked and lost if not recovered this way. Additionally, careful recovery and specialized analyses of residues on pottery reveal tiny fragments of the earliest maize present in the Lake Titicaca basin around 800 BC, and chemical analysis reveals the changing relative importance of meat coming from both camelids and fish in the diets of these ancient farmers.

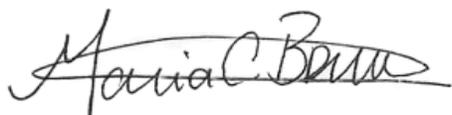
We can only recover this crucial information if it remains intact and, if extracted through scientific excavation, done so with the careful and precise record-keeping practiced by the archaeologists who are fortunate enough to work in Bolivia. The governmental agencies of Bolivia have put in place important domestic regulations and a process of evaluation for all archaeological projects conducted there, in order to assure the proper protection of these resources.

As with many culturally rich countries around the world, Bolivian patrimony remains in jeopardy from pillage through the illicit excavation of archaeological sites with the purpose of selling desired objects. Bolivian governmental and volunteer organizations work tirelessly to protect archaeological sites from destruction and to educate the public on the value of preserving their ancient past - whether it be during construction of a road or the damage caused by the looting of objects for sale. Even local communities, such as Chiripa on the Taraco Peninsula, work together

to protect their local patrimony from destruction as the revenue generated from tourism to the site helps support local projects, provides jobs, and contributes to the local pride in this deep history of this “comunidad milenaria”. When objects are accidentally uncovered from plowing in fields, the community members of Chiripa inform archaeologists and bring those materials to the local museum. Together they assure those objects remain in the community and in Bolivia. Not all communities have such a long history and knowledge of their archaeological record, and it’s important that such educational and conservation efforts are supported both locally and from afar.

The United States plays a key role in helping to protect Bolivian archaeological sites from damage by maintaining our agreement to prohibit and discourage the purchase of cultural objects from Bolivian archaeological sites. The application of import restrictions - still provides a substantial benefit in deterring pillage, and we must maintain and strengthen this work through the renewal of the MOU.

I consider it a privilege to be able to study Bolivia’s past, and while I can maintain my good standing in the country by following their laws as an individual archaeologist, it is also essential that the country I represent also supports all efforts to respect and protect Bolivia’s cultural patrimony through our bilateral cultural property agreement. This will encourage and support the on-going interchange of cultural property for scientific, cultural, and educational purposes.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maria C. Bruno". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underlining the name.

Maria C. Bruno

