

Oral Testimony Before the
U.S. Cultural Property Advisory Committee
U.S. Department of State
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13 June 2001

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is Donald Craib and I am counsel for the Society for American Archaeology. I thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee on behalf of SAA. With more than 6800 members, SAA is an international organization dedicated to researching, interpreting, and protecting the archaeological heritage of the Americas.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to make one observation before I begin my testimony. The timing of this meeting to consider the proposed extension of the agreement with Peru is unfortunate because at this time of the year many archaeologists who conduct their fieldwork in Peru, and thus have firsthand knowledge of the looting problem, are now in South America and unable to testify before this Committee. Several were willing to travel to Washington and share their experiences with this Committee, but unfortunately the timing of this meeting conflicted with their fieldwork schedules, which normally run from late May until early August. Their testimony would have been of benefit to the Committee as many have witnessed the consequences of looting and were willing to explain how the destruction of archaeological sites robs Peru of its cultural patrimony. Sadly, rather than having an energetic and exciting archaeologist come before this Committee, you get to listen to one more lawyer. Perhaps the

Committee can take into account the timing of archaeologists' fieldwork season when scheduling meetings in the future.

SAA encourages this Committee to recommend an extension of the current Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the United States and the Government of Peru. It should be emphasized that the agreement does not prohibit trade in archaeological and ethnographic materials that have been properly exported; it deals only with artifacts that have been illegally removed and exported.

Many of SAA's members, U.S. nationals as well as members from South America, Europe, and Asia, have long-term research interests and fieldwork experience in Peru. They have observed firsthand the destruction of the archaeological record of both coastal and Andean Peru as a result of the flourishing and enlarging global market for illegally excavated antiquities. The loss of scientific value is enormous. Peru and the world as a whole are losing a rich and diverse cultural heritage, and continued action by the U.S. Government is necessary in order to prevent further plundering of Peru's past.

Several recent articles in the national press highlight the kinds of looting problems that Peru is confronting. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, for example, ran a series of excellent articles on the destruction of archaeological treasures throughout the world. Researched and written by Pulitzer Prize-winning science writer Mike Toner, the series titled *The Past in Peril: Threats to the World's Archaeological Heritage* provides a detailed account about current threats to the world's cultural legacy. I brought with me this morning several copies of these articles for the Committee. In section one of his series, Mr. Toner focuses on the *Lost Treasures of Peru*. He describes recent plundering of Peru's past, a problem that has steadily increased over the

years, and notes that many of these illegally obtained treasures are showing up on the international market.

In another recently published article titled *Ancient History Imperiled in Peru*, Anthony Faiola of the *Washington Post* points out that “one of the most troubling problems has been the surge in tomb-looting.” Associated funerary objects found in tombs are highly prized on the illegal antiquities market because they often include gold ornaments and other sought-after artifacts. There appear to be few problems in smuggling these sacred objects out of Peru. According to Mr. Faiola, “while it is against Peruvian law to remove pre-Columbian artifacts from the country, ‘artifact mafias’ run by American, Italian, and Swiss dealers have become expert in spiriting out objects, officials say.” Peru’s looting crises is only exacerbated by the clandestine activities of these international parties. According to Peruvian archaeologist Jorge Siva, “smugglers use some of the same peopleand routes that the drug traffickers do.”

The last issue I would like to briefly touch on this morning is the expanded sales of antiquities on the Internet and its impact on looting in Peru. It has long been clear that the commercial market for antiquities is the primary stimulus for the looting of archaeological sites worldwide. The Internet sale of antiquities has noticeably heightened the already severe problems created by the market for antiquities. The Internet has created an explosion in the number of people who can engage in this trade, and with less concern about the enforcement of existing law. It should not be surprising then, that an increase in pre-columbian Peruvian antiquities has appeared on several Internet auction sites. The buying and selling of Peruvian archaeological objects over the Internet has created a new market that looters must supply. Indeed, many of the artifacts that are now appearing on Internet sites are considered “low end”

objects that looters would not have pursued in the past. Internet sale of antiquities is an issue that didn't confront us five years ago.

The great tragedy of this indiscriminate looting and plundering is that the entire record of past civilizations is being destroyed as collateral damage. The mining of archaeological sites to recover a small number of art-quality artifacts destroys enormous quantities of information about life in the past. Money can't measure the loss. This is not a dispute between archaeologists and antiquities dealers over who gets possession of pretty baubles from the past; it is about the loss of knowledge and educational opportunities.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I encourage each of you to read the cited articles as the destruction portrayed is a tragedy, not only for Peru, but for the whole world. SAA asks that the Committee recommend the extension of the current import restrictions.

SAA stands prepared to assist the Committee in preventing the loss of Peru's cultural patrimony and in protecting archaeological sites worldwide. Thank you for providing me this opportunity to address the Committee.

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