



## YALE RETURNS INCAN ARTIFACTS TO PERU 100 YEARS LATER

November 14, 2007

*After years of tense negotiations, Yale University agreed in September to return a massive collection of ceramic, bone, metal and stone artifacts taken from Peru's Machu Picchu ruins nearly 100 years ago.*

The more than 4,000 artifacts were excavated from the ancient Inca city of Machu Picchu, now believed to be the summer sanctuary of the Inca Emperor Pachacutec, by Yale professor Hiram Bingham III in a series of archeological digs that took place between 1912 and 1915.

Over the course of those digs, Bingham shipped crates of artifacts back to Yale in Connecticut, where the collection has remained to this day.

### **Yale and Peru fight over ownership**

In 2002, disagreement erupted between Yale and the Peruvian government over rightful ownership of the artifacts.

The Peruvian government contended that the artifacts were merely on loan and that their return was long overdue. Yale disagreed, arguing that it kept only those objects that it fully owned after returning any loaned objects in the 1920s.

Negotiations over ownership of the artifacts lasted for several years, and tensions escalated, with former Peruvian president Alejandro Toledo at one point threatening to sue the university.

"This is our patrimony. This is everything to us — proof that even though today we are poor, our ancestors lived great and proud," David Ugarte of Peru's National Culture Center told USA Today last year. "Bingham said he was going to study those pieces and give them back. It was clear to all they were to be returned."

In 2006, talks between the Ivy League university and the South American nation broke down.

### **New collaboration**

But negotiations resumed when Toledo left power later that year, and an agreement reached Sept. 14 between Yale and the Peruvian government ended the standoff.

According to the agreement, outlined in a joint statement issued by Yale and the Peruvian government, official ownership rights to all of the artifacts will go to Peru.

The agreement also establishes a new collaborative relationship between Yale and Peru. The two will co-sponsor an internationally traveling exhibition featuring artifacts from the collection.

After its world tour, the exhibition will find a permanent home in a new museum to be built in Cusco, a historic city near Machu Picchu. The new museum, for which Yale will serve as an advisor, is slated to be completed in 2010.

“This understanding represents a new model of international cooperation providing for the collaborative stewardship of cultural and natural treasures,” Yale said in the statement.

### **Ancient relics from an ancient city**

The Incas built the city of Machu Picchu around 1450 along a ridge between two mountain peaks in the Andes. Constantly surrounded by a layer of clouds, Machu Picchu boasts an elevation of nearly 8,000 ft.

For many years, it sat shrouded in the clouds, forgotten by all but a handful of local farmers. The city was so high, even the Spanish conquerors missed it in the 1500s.

The city was “rediscovered” in 1911 by Hiram Bingham III, a charismatic Yale professor and adventurer who originally excavated the artifacts and sent them back to Yale.

Today, Machu Picchu is one of South America's top tourist attractions with stone palaces, baths, temples, tombs, sundials, agricultural terraces and also llamas roaming among hundreds of small grey houses.

### **Who owns the artifacts?**

The question of who owns cultural objects is not unique to the dispute between Yale and Peru.

Museums worldwide are facing pressure from countries like Greece and Italy to return ancient artwork and other cultural artifacts.

In many cases, the countries contend that objects were illegally looted.

Last month, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, Calif., returned four Italian ceramic objects dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. and the Princeton University Art Museum agreed to return 15 disputed antiquities, including a Greek painted vase dating from 510-500 B.C.

*--Compiled by Sarah Murphy for NewsHour Extra*