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Unbundled: European Collecting of Andean Mummies 1850-1930

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Citation

Ordoñez Alvarez, M. P. (2019, June 11). *Unbundled: European Collecting of Andean Mummies 1850-1930*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/74403>

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<http://hdl.handle.net/1887/74403>

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Issue Date: 2019-06-11

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Research in Social Sciences must come from a place of self-reflection (Bourdieu, 1990; Foucault, 2002; Schubert, 1995). It is by questioning our methods, our ways of interaction with the concepts with which we work and the issues we face, that we can engage with, and communicate actively, with the reader. By questioning our practices and knowledge production processes, we can document, in a way, how our own life experiences influence said processes and the results of our research. There is solid justification for the argument that it is not only possible but necessary for social scientists to recognize that there are many interpretations for a single phenomenon, and that knowledge can be read and understood from different perspectives (Clifford, 1988; Schubert, 1995).

This research comes precisely from such an exercise of self-reflection. For a social scientist from Latin America, who has been involved in research with human remains in museum collections both at home and in Europe, it was inevitable to end up questioning not only my personal involvement with these collections but also how I was reproducing and following in the steps of hundreds of others who, in their own way, had taken an interest before me on these contested pieces of the past.

This dissertation is based on the idea that collecting mummies, or any human remains is, quite literally, collecting the other –following the reflections of scholars like Johannes Fabian, Philippe Aries and Peter Mancall. In that sense, not only are mummies bodies turned into “objects¹,” but people turned into narrative. The search carried out for this research within the collections of Andean mummies that are still stored in National European museums, and the effort to contextualize them, takes place in order to understand not only what was collected and how, but why.

This contextualization of remains has compelled the tracking, in very broad terms, of the biography of these mummies, from the moment of death until their transport to their current place of storage. By noting the classification, description and roles within that mummy’s life, is to note also the narratives that are embedded in these mummies and how these have transformed their identity. The definition of identity as constructed by Giddens is that of a symbolic construction of self, culturally dependent and born from opposition (Giddens, 1991). This definition is further explored in the next chapter.

Besides the information that mummified human remains can provide regarding funerary practices and the circumstances of death found within of a population, they also hold an important place in the understanding of the relation between the dead and the living. This last aspect transcends the realm of pre-Columbian interactions (that of the deceased and their relatives), onto the relationship between collector and mummy, and later on between mummies, museums and a wide variety of stakeholders at the forefront

1 Quotation marks are added to the word objects when used to describe animals, human bodies, artwork, etc. that have been collected and inventoried within a particular context and have in that sense transformed into objects (things), though they cannot be described as such outside a collection setting. The following chapter further explores this duality of human remains in museum collections, taking into account the archaeological theoretical approaches to materiality that have led to this interpretation.

of which are the deceased's descendants.

The resulting interactions between the dead and living at different points in history can be seen under different lights. For the purpose of this research, the specific time period of interest is the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Besides the methodological reasons behind situating the problematic at hand in a very precise timeframe, this frame allows a focus on the historical relevance of the narratives surrounding human remains at this particular time in history. In turn, it addresses how the collecting of human remains both supported and challenged the ideas brought to the forefront by those narratives. The place of Andean pre-Columbian populations in regards to the evolutionary structure purported by scholars at the beginning of the nineteenth century is a clear example of one such narrative and one that is extensively explored in the first chapters of this work.

In that sense, this research provides an important case study of the intricate relationships between Europe and the Andes for the proposed timeline. Andean mummies found in collections at national museums in Western Europe were collected within nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and therefore their collective biography can provide a basis for understanding intercontinental relationships in that time period. Moreover, the holding of human remains in those museums opens a window into a series of presently very relevant discussions on the subject of reinforcing identity (of which repatriation is the most visible issue), of both the collectors and the collected, and on the ethical issues surrounding current museum practices.

The research explores these issues starting from a wider picture of the history of collecting, down to the particularities of the Andean region's development, creating a framework of place and time that allows a better exploration of the issues that surround the collecting of Andean mummies by European national museums from the point of view of archaeology. This is to say that although the research focuses on the biographies of these "objects," it will also try and understand those biographies within broader historical perspectives.

It is the dialogue between what is collected and what is exhibited, and how objects, in turn, become the representation of the "other" that became the primary interest of this research.

Throughout these pages it is apparent that, from the perspective of this study, research in Latin America should not just be self-reflection, but should integrate subjectivity, as an intellectual exercise directed at countering the unequal (colonial) power structures embedded in today's academic knowledge production. As complex as this proposition sounds, what it means is that it is important to find the hidden actors, highlight the importance of the agency of the people whose heritage is collected, both native and mestizo, and to allow, through research a reconfiguration of what was thought of the role of these people in the process. Doing so proved to be challenging. Some links are explicit, such as the correspondence between Peruvian collectors and their European counterparts. Often

times, however, the push to explore a specific site, the local guides, gift giving or antiquities, and the preparation of exhibitions for international display have all had to be seen under a different light, linked to national identity building as well as to personal gains.

As such, the main question posed by this research is: What are the relationships between Andean and Western European nations that can be evidenced by looking at the collections of mummified human remains formed for National Western European Museums from the mid-nineteenth century until 1930 and what do they tell us about those collections today?

From there, this research seeks more particular information such as: What are the regions, cultures and populations represented in Andean mummy collections in Western Europe and what is their relevance in relation to archaeological collections of the same nature in their countries of origin? How does the place of Andean mummies in Western European museum collections, from the time of their acquisition until today, reinforce or not the representation of the Andes in Western Europe? How has the place of Andean mummies within Western European museum collections changed from 1930 until today?

This primary question will be addressed by approaching a series of supplementary questions, the same ones that will be answered in the conclusion chapter. This supplementary questions are: What are the regions, cultures and populations represented in Andean mummy collections in Western Europe and what is their relevance in relation to archaeological collections of the same nature in their countries of origin? How does the place of Andean mummies in Western European museum collections, from the time of their acquisition until today, reinforce or not the representation of the Andes in Western Europe? How has the place of Andean mummies within Western European museum collections changed from 1930 until today. In that sense, the main objectives of this research are focused on gathering the information necessary to answer these primary and secondary questions. Those objectives are organized in three areas:

- The description and comparative contextualization² of the Andean human remains extant in European national museum collections.
- The description of the events moments (such as wars) and relationships (economic, military and cultural) between the Andes and Western Europe that led to the creation of these museum collections in the period of 1850-1930.
- The identification of the roles and the scientific and museological interpretation given to Andean mummies within European museum collections, and in turn their relevance – or lack thereof – for the contemporary conception of the Andes in those museums.

² In this case, the reference is to individual mummies as compared to each other. Similarly, the milieu of Andean mummified remains in Latin American National and Site museums, which have a more nuanced provenience useful for contextualization, are used for this location search.

It is of interest to this research to understand that the political preoccupations of archaeology have affected the way in which material culture has been classified and interpreted, and in doing so, has also permeated the ambit of collections. The link between archaeology, the construction of national identities and the collecting of antiquities is tangible and as visible in contemporary museum practice as it is in the historical record (Shanks, Tilley, & others, 1987).

Nevertheless, it is useful here to specify that, although collecting as a practice was conducted from the beginning of the colonial period in the fifteenth century, the goals behind it were quite different from those that would appear at the end of the eighteenth century and that continue in some measure in different areas of the world in the twenty-first century. The collecting practices of national museums in LA during the late 1990s are an example that will be further explored in subsequent chapters. It is pertinent to emphasize that it is only in the eighteenth century that European military and naturalist voyages start collecting antiquities in the Andes, as a sideline to their activities. It is not until the nineteenth century that expeditions with the sole purpose of collecting antiquities and illustrating them on site became common (Gänger, 2014, 47 -49).

1.1 The Andes as a Collected Region

The history of collecting the Latin American archaeological and historical past, and the ethnological present, is linked unavoidably with the history of Europe's first forays into the Americas, and more so, with the encounters between Europeans and indigenous inhabitants of those lands (Bleichmar & Mancall, 2011; Cañizares-Esguerra, 2007).

Precisely, the variety of these encounters gave way to distinct – though most of the time similar – interactions. Therefore, the experiences of conquest and colonization, and later on, of the formation of nation-states throughout the Americas, are as akin as varied. Conceptualizing what the Andes encompass, as a cultural region, is pivotal. The understanding of the Andes as the area surrounding, and influenced by, the mountain chain with the same name, includes the countries of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina³.

Though pre-Columbian occupation of the region was far from homogenous, ample trade routes and exchange systems were in place before and after Spanish colonization (Cañizares-Esguerra, 2001; F. Salomon & Urioste, 1991; Thurner, 1997). Perhaps the best known area is the Inca Empire (Tawantinsuyu by its Quechua name) of the fourteenth

³ Though current geopolitical associations tend to exclude Chile, Uruguay and Argentina from the Andean area, culturally and historically they have shared similar processes. This is due to a political and economic trade history that, starting with Bolívar's Gran Colombia project (1819-1831), consolidated Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia in a subgroup within South America. Recent trade agreements like the Comunidad Andina de Naciones (CAN), the Sistema Andino de Integración (SAI) and the Pacto Andino are clear examples of this block unit. Similarly, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil have created organizations such as the Merco Sur, though this one has opened to other Andean nations in the last few years.

century. The Tawantinsuyu included territories from central Chile and western Argentina to the south of Colombia. Additionally, we should also take note of earlier chains of more localized interactions like those around the Arica desert, lake Titicaca (Tiahuanaco), the Amazon plains (with people ethnohistorically grouped as Jivaros), the Pacific coast (for example, in the central areas with the Chavin, Moche, and Wari cultures, and in the northern region the Tumaco-Tolita, Manteño and Quimbaya cultures), the Caribbean coast (Tairona) and the Inter-Andean mountain ranges (Isbell, 2008; Isbell & Schreiber, 1978; Silverman & Isbell, 2008).

Language, agricultural traditions, and knowledge flowed within the region at different rhythms during different moments in time. After the conquest, for example, the Spanish crown made use of the preexisting links within the region to establish the three *Virreinos* (Viceroyalties) of Nueva Granada, Peru and La Plata, and two *Capitanías Generales* of Venezuela and Chile, which remained largely unchanged⁴ from the sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries (Cañizares-Esguerra, 2001). These administrative areas linked the history of the region even further and, eventually, led to the wars for independence that marked the nineteenth century (Cadena Montenegro, 2012; Cañizares-Esguerra, 2001; Thurner, 1997).

During the last two centuries, the Andes would share a series of parallel political experiences, from military dictatorships during the 1970s and 1980s, to indigenous participatory movements during the late 1980s and 1990s, and the current struggles for political representation, of which the “New Latin America Left” governments of the last fifteen years in Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia and Argentina are clear examples (Assies & Gundermann Kroll, 2007; Boccara, 2002; Chaves García, 2010; Hernández Alvarado, 2007; Natanson, 2008).

In addition to the similarities found within the Andean region, it is important to also show the diversity that lies within it, starting with the landscape. Although the main feature in the region is the Andes mountain range, several other important features shape the individual countries that constitute it, such as the Argentinian pampas, the Atacama desert and lake Titicaca, the inter-cordillera mountain range in Ecuador and Colombia. Just as important are the changes in climate, vegetation and food sources that diverse sea currents and landmasses foster, allowing each country a considerable level of distinctiveness. If we factor in the human component, the diversity of dialects, indigenous ethnicities or

4 Given the type of control, both economic and political, that the Spanish crown structured in the area, very few important changes were introduced until the period of independence. Most of the changes that did occur had to do not with the larger structure of these *Virreinos* and *Capitanías Generales* but with the local restructuring of the chains of command, economic treaties and internal demographic reorganizations like those consequence of the *Reducciones*, which come into effect after the second Toledan reforms in the 1700s.

nationalities⁵, and cultural identities found within those countries, the Andes mountain range, although very relevant, is no longer the only predominant aspect. Similarly, it is vital to understand that as Coastal, Amazonian, and highland populations are different from each other, people who live in particular Andean countries are likewise very different. Crudely put, the picture of the snow-capped highlands with llamas and pan flutes does not represent the majority of Andean lives, but rather a section of it, and as such should not be taken as the singular representation of the region, as it has been in Western European imagination until today (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995).

This leads us to ask, how can such a region be represented, explained or even understood outside of its borders? By looking at how the narrative regarding the collections from the Andes changes during the period of 1850 to 1930, it is evident that political self-recognition and internal political conflicts between Andean nations can impact the way their objects are cataloged in Europe. Hence, the process of consolidation of these nations as viewed by their material exports during the period must be addressed. Emphasizing that, though the region is widely heterogeneous, the representations in Europe of its identities have been hugely generalized and homogenized (Ahmed, 2000; Escobar, 2004; Schmidt-Nowara, 2008), to the point where landscapes, languages, cultures, and time periods are clumped together in exhibition rooms that, as stated above, fail to convey the diversity of the region. Mummies, or more broadly human remains, have been classified as “objects” that belong to ethnographic, historical, archaeological and natural sciences, and therefore can be found in museums that concentrate on those subjects.

What is collected, and from whom, has changed repeatedly since the fifteenth century, but the principle of collecting archaeological and ethnographical objects remains constant: the desire to understand the “other” (be it a people, a moment in time or a tradition) (Anishanslin, 2013; Bleichmar & Mancall, 2011; Pearce, 1994). Collections are classified, organized and arranged for public or private viewing, and therefore, they are not only a display of history but intend to reproduce our understanding of it (Bernstein, 1989). These “others” are then not only understood by the collector, but represented to an intended audience in an effort to communicate –and allow them to share– this understanding (Pearce, 1994).

Although the vast majority of the literature for the time period used in this research focuses on the practices of collecting in the New World by European explorers, the research concurs with Kohl, Ganger, Podgorny and others, in stating that, in fact, there is an equally important dimension of local collecting in the Andes (Kohl, Podgorny, & Gänger, 2014). By the eighteenth century, many Americans had joined in collecting the pre-Columbian past, and the evolution of what is collected and sold intersects with what is known from European expeditions.

⁵ On the subject of indigenous nationalities within a nation state, see the case of Ecuador and the pronouncement by the CONAIE (CONAIE, 1988). The Mapuche Nationality case in (Foerster & Vergara, 2000; Marimán, 2005).

The role of native collectors and more so of indigenous workers who helped loot and extract antiquities has only recently become a preoccupation in history and archaeology. In that regard, there are few sources that give a notion of their involvement. As I have commented elsewhere (Ordonez 2019) the scale of the participation of indigenous people on the looting of archaeological sites is unclear for the first years of the colony, however by the late sixteenth century looting was an activity that occupied primarily people in positions of power: hacendados, encomenderos and the like (Richardson 2001). The workers in the haciendas were very often indigenous communities that had a deep rooted past in those same lands. The changes in land tenure and the encomienda system that followed the introduction of the New Laws of Indias in 1542, facilitated the control of looting by land owners and mine concessions, mostly mestizos. The hacienda system provided an ideal structure to organize the looting of particular sites with more intensity than others, and allowed for specific actors to become collectors of the Andean past. There are very few cases in which workers refused to dig certain areas, in which cases they were penalized or changed for others more willing (Tantaleán 2014).

This trend continued until the late eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, when independence brought further restructuring of land rights, and most importantly, when the interest of countries such as England, Germany and France in the past and present peoples of the region could no longer be curtailed by the roadblocks of Spanish control.

In that regard it is vital to mention the work of Christopher Heaney in relation to these same topics in the Anglo-speaking world, especially the United States and England as an important complementary research and necessary insight into the topic of mummy collection and the history of human remains collection as a whole. Furthermore, he has drawn meaningful comparisons between Egyptian mummy collecting and Andean mummies, which are not the focus of this dissertation, but that highlight relevant points regarding periods before the nineteenth century.

As Heaney points out: *“As scientific objects, mummies were born of Europe’s encounter with two “ancient” bodily knowledges. The first is well known: the embalmed Egyptian dead who were ground into a materia medica named mumia and later were collected as “mummies” themselves. Yet mummies owe their global possibility— of ancient sciences of embalming and environmental manipulation apprehensible worldwide—to the sixteenth-century Spanish encounter with the Incas’ preserved dead, the yllapa”*. (Heaney 2018) This medical view of the mummy itself is another point that cannot be discussed in this research as it is extensive, but one which Heaney has begun to explore (Heaney 2018).

Following the previous references, it is relevant here to point out that, though Andean and Egyptian mummies were indeed collected in a similar manner and share similar paths, this intersection will not be explored in this thesis. The limitations of conducting research tied to a particular geographical network, as well as those of the expertise in

Andean human remains of the author, limit the amount of information regarding Egyptian mummy collecting that would enhance the discussions undertaken in this dissertation. It is however, a topic of high relevance and that should be explored in the future, if not by this author, by similar minded professionals.

There is some debate in the literature on whether the majority of the collectors in the Andes during the century were or were not politically motivated in their endeavors. However, as Gänger explains: “Collectors and students of antiquities met in the private sphere, but several of them also associated with the public and, in particular, the national museums that were being founded in the aftermath of independence they used museums’ premises for their meetings donated or loaned out antiquities from their own possessions, or they communicated through and with the museums directorates, about their finds and reflections” (Gänger, 2014,8). The gradual integration of private collectors into public spheres is also noted in Europe, where magazines focused on collecting, such as the *Connoisseur*, become a portal for the commercialization of antiquities and the transformation of their role in the construction of national identities (Mahoney, 2012,176).

1.2 On Contested Objects

By considering objects whose roles may become relevant in the construction of identity, the category of “contested” remains becomes extremely relevant. Used as a keyword to denote objects that incite conflict and are charged with intense emotional responses, while at the same time calling into question the very existence of such “objects” in a collection (Lubina, 2009). Ritual, sacred, or very emotionally charged pieces of material culture fit into this description, as do most – if not all – human remains (Painter-Thorne, 2010). The term “contested” is therefore not static; it can be ascribed to or severed from the same object according to circumstances in a particular moment in time, and in some measure to its role within a particular instance of political discourse (the use of repatriation as a national policy is one of those examples).

Precisely the debates and discussion that surround contested “objects” are what allow for the consideration of these particular parts of a collection as the most representative for understanding the relationships between collector and collected. This research focuses on two aspects of these “objects,” their materiality and the narratives they tell. The first is seen through the mummies themselves, while the latter is reflected by the terminology and words that are used to label collection “objects.”

The unique place that human remains, and in this particular case mummies, play in regards to these narratives and representations, needs to be understood in terms of the historical contexts that encompass the moments of their biographies as collected “objects.” The metanarrative posed by the question of the origin of the American human being in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is considered a starting point. This discussion introduces a breaking point in the consideration of the human body as separated by a his-

torical boundary: a medical subject versus a collected subject.

Furthermore, the boundary between object and subject on which human remains seem to fluctuate in archaeology is particularly relevant for the type of human remains that are the focus of this research: mummies. These issues are further explored in the following theoretical and methodological chapter.

The endpoint for this dissertation is the introduction of a series of international pieces of legislation and committees that guard, safekeep and regulate heritage; this includes the creation of the United Nations and all its bodies, such as UNESCO, and those other entities that result from these organizations, such as ICOM and ICOMOS.

This series of changes in the handling of culture, its commerce and perception, in part shifts the nineteenth-century structure that had been in place up until the mid-twentieth century. In consequence, the start of the Second World War becomes a natural stopping point for this dissertation. Further explanation of this will be provided in the following pages.

1.3 Mummy Collecting from 1850 to 1930. Positioning the Research in Time.

As explained in the introduction, the main interest of this research is collections of mummies in National and university European museums that come from the Andean region, and that were collected in the period between 1850 and 1930. Once identified, the history of these collections afforded a glimpse at the transatlantic connections of the period that facilitated the collecting, transport, and exhibition of these human remains. From there, it attempts to link this historic formation of collections with their current roles in the museums that hold them.

Nevertheless, this dissertation is not an attempt to rewrite the history of Latin American-European political relationships by means of a reassessment of mummy collections. Rather, it is a comprehensive approach to collecting Andean mummies in Latin America taking into account the history of those relationships. In that regard, though history is considered vital to understand the collections of mummies in Europe as they stand today, the emphasis of this work is not primarily in the historical processes of collecting or on how collecting may have influenced political and diplomatic relationships. This dissertation focuses on the archaeological relevance of such connections, their impact on object contextualization and how much they can help understand museum assortments.

The time frame selected is at the same time broad and limited. It is broad because the nineteenth century encompasses a series of significant political changes in the Americas and Europe, such as the French Revolution and the fall of the Bourbon dynasty, as well as the development of science as we understand it today. However, the period is brief when we take into account the overall history of collecting between these two regions, and particularly in regards to the total amount of mummies exchanged, which appears

small when compared to objects like ceramics or paintings (Gänger, 2014b).

The mid-nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth-century are crucial when trying to understand the role of museums in the construction of national identities, a practice which has continued to the present. As will be argued in chapter 5, the creation of national museums in Europe and the Andes was almost simultaneous. This indicates a point of convergence and collaboration between those two areas of the world, motivated by communications and by the globalizing political and scientific events of the time. Inspired by Napoleon's public opening of Royal collections and the creation of the British Museum on the basis of private collections, the beginning of the nineteenth century set the stage for what would become some of the most important museums and institutions in the world today (Macdonald, 2012).

Though the particular histories of the museums that form the universe of this research will be described in more detail in chapter 4, there is a parallel between the way Europe and the Americas sought to present their histories during the nineteenth century. The dates of their creation and the type of collections acquired show commonalities born out of a global change in the perception of culture.

It has been argued that South American museums do not really function as such until after the celebrations of the centennial of the discovery of the Americas in 1892, and the accompanying World Exposition in Madrid (Bedoya 2016). Though these museums do not yet function in this period as they would in later years, the relationships between those incipient museums and their already consolidated counterparts in Europe should not be discounted. Nevertheless, the first instance of transatlantic commonalities can be seen in the origins of the collections that will later be formalized by museums. It is in that sense that first overarching theoretical considerations for this research had to do with the subject of collecting.

The aim of this research is to discuss how the history of the relationship between the Andes and Europe can be perceived through the trade of Andean mummies, which serve as a very specific and localized section of the collecting network. It is by first looking at what the "objects" in and of themselves are saying that we can more accurately reconstruct the narratives that they come to represent in their current holdings. Here is where this research differentiates itself from previous work on the history of collecting: by focusing on specific objects —Andean mummies— and their biographies as a starting point.

Appadurai has contended that by concentrating on the objects exchanged, and not in the way they are exchanged, it is possible to see what links exist between the value and paths of objects and politics (Appadurai, 1994:76). The way these objects, or in Appadurai's terms, commodities, move and are transacted is embedded with meaning given to them by the agents/actors who moved them (Appadurai, 1994, p. 76). This connection between actors and things is the cornerstone of material culture studies in archaeology and is discussed further in the section regarding mummy materiality.

1.4 Structure of the Dissertation

In order to further unpack the subjects approached in the pages of this introduction, the current dissertation has been structured into eight chapters. **Chapter 1** is a brief introduction into the relevance of the research and the main questions and objectives posed to understand the subject addressed.

In **Chapter 2**, the Theoretical Framework, concepts and wording used are presented at length, followed by **Chapter 3** where a step-by-step description of the methodology applied for data collection is discussed, as well as the limitations found during the research.

Chapter 4, entitled “America Goes to Europe,” approaches the history of the formation of national museums in Europe and of the collections on which this research focused.

Chapter 5, “Collecting the New World: Travelers, Scientific Missions and the Search for Andean Mummies: Reinventing the Pre-Columbian Past,” is dedicated to the relationship between collectors and objects. It describes the distinct roles of travelers, scientific missions, military expeditions and diplomats. A detailed picture is given of each of the collections, in terms of the documentary/inventory information present in each museum.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to “Rethinking Bodies,” or a bio-archaeological approach to the same collections described in Chapter 5. This allows for provenience and cultural reclassifications, as well as a more nuanced view of the demographic component of said collections, how they have been exhibited and stored in their current holdings, and the research that has been conducted with them.

A comparative view of the presented data presented can be found on **Chapter 7**: “The Imagined Versus the Uncovered.” The connections and divergences of data among museum databases and archaeological contextualization is discussed here. A further sub-chapter is dedicated to Andean mummy collections in Latin American museums, located in the same areas from which the mummies of the European Museums originate.

The final chapter, **Chapter 8**, contains answers to the questions posed in this introduction, taking into account the discussion of Chapter 7, and the limitations and issues presented in Chapter 3. These conclusions have led to recommendations regarding new research opportunities with individual collections, as well as with collections in general.

The world of mummy studies is fascinating. To look at ancient human remains, surrounded by their funerary attire and the objects that accompany them in the afterlife, is certainly humbling. The expression of cultural beliefs, of empathy and loving tribute that they carry with them seem sometimes to be forgotten in the rush to dissect them scientifically. Experiences in the storage rooms of more than eighteen museums whose collections were explored in this research has granted a unique perspective. It has also highlighted the importance of discussing these contested materials as often as possible and under the

guidance of as many theoretical premises as available.

This thesis is by no means a finalized work, but rather constitutes the first steps towards understanding these collections, collectively and individually, and trying to lay the groundwork for future discussions and finds. The seven chapters that follow contribute information that has been missing in the discussion on human remains collecting by European national museums, combining historical and archaeological approaches.

