Unbundled: European Collecting of Andean Mummies 1850-1930

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Chapter 8

Conclusions

The work presented in the previous chapters represents the effort to investigate a particular group of "objects," Andean mummies, from two complementary perspectives: historical and archaeological. As has been emphasized during this thesis, the descriptions of the physical properties of these human remains, their materiality, and the discourses written about them through time allow a reconstruction of object biographies. Through the biographies of objects and people, in this case indeed of both, a practice charged with power relations, such as collecting, can start to be untangled.

This chapter is thus a summary and reflection of the journey followed through these pages to answer the initial question posed by this research: What are the relationships between Andean and Western European nations that can be evidenced by looking at the collections of Andean mummified human remains formed for National Western European museums from the mid nineteenth century until 1930, and what do they tell us about those same relationships today?

Answering these question demanded, as explained in chapter 2, an understanding of collecting as the transformation of things into objects of signification, where the systems of circulation in which they move in one point or another of their histories become a reflection of History.

The historical moment represented in the collections of which this research encompasses is the period between the mid nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. As a consequence of the timeframe chosen, the first conclusion that can be drawn is that ***the collections researched show commonalities born out of a global change in the way culture is perceived, and as such can be compared and discussed outside of the specific museum to which they belong***. Though this conclusion may seem obvious, it is important to consider that, for Andean mummy collections in Europe, a comparative approach has not been used before.

The description and comparative contextualization of the Andean human remains extant in European national museum collections was one of the objectives of this work, and that exercise introduced the possibility of considering these collections on a macro level, and as such, to exchange information between them regarding "objects" and collectors. In that line, this thesis has stressed that it is of vital importance to understand the political process in which these collections are circulating. The way these mummies move and are transacted is embedded with the meaning given to them by the agents/actors who moved them. These actors are not constrained to fixed spheres: a collector can be at the same time a political personality, a private donor of antiquities, and an ethnology enthusiast.

The second conclusion of this thesis is that, ***though the sphere in which this exercise has been undertaken is that of national museums, the history of the collection of Andean mummies in Europe, told through this research, is not only applicable to that particular realm.*** Collections are being formed in universities and private institutions fol-

lowing similar trends, in line with the intention to construct national identities. In that regard, museum collections are seen as platforms for the expression, and construction through opposition, of identity.

Looking at the collections as a whole highlights the process of change of cultural institutions in Europe; how the collections of Andean mummies, and of American objects in general, have changed through time. The historical narratives and circumstances visible through those processes show that there is a perhaps unconscious connection between the experiences of all these collectors, and in consequence between the collections made for each museum. Unconscious in the sense that these connections are formed from temporal coincidences, more than from a deliberate intent to connect and collect similarly, but are nevertheless conducive to the same results. The idea of a museum as an heteropia, in Foucaults terms, aligns with this vision of the museum as a sum of all these conscious and unconscious efforts to collect, joining together in a transformative space.

Secondary questions posed at the beginning of this work are answered from this perspective: 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?

The re-contextualization of remains that took place during this thesis shows a number of sites and the cultures mentioned which need to be updated. Nevertheless, there is still a considerable prevalence of Peruvian objects in the collections analyzed. Chapter 6 mentioned that documentary information pointed out that half of the mummies of all the collections are currently described as coming from Peru. The second largest provenience was recorded from archives as being Chile, but lagging far behind from Peru. In third place came Argentina, followed closely by Bolivia, and in last place Colombia.

After re-contextualization, the data presented by this thesis positions Peru as the place of origin of 78% of the human mummified material collected. Bolivia, however, gained prominence with 12% of the total, followed by Chile and lastly Colombia. This difference is due to the ambivalence of remains that are now identified as coming from the Tiahuanaco area, which included modern Peruvian borders to the Pacific, but that is taken here in relation to the center of power, which is located in Bolivia.

An important conclusion can be made from these statements: ***Peruvian material, including mummified remains, was the most commonly collected by European museums in the mid nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.*** In terms of cultural archaeological groups represented in the collections, those associated with the regions occupied by the Chancay and Lima affiliations are the most common. The Tiahuanaco, Arica, Wari, Muisca, Inca and Chinchorro classifications make up the second largest group; while Paracas and Chimú-Inca are almost absent.

The geographic spread of what was collected is another important dataset that needs to be considered. Though the timeframes of collecting point to historically signif-

icant moments and motivations, the spread of where these remains were collected can certainly help reinforce or reject those temporary links. Not only do they convey areas of interaction for collecting, but these locations of collecting also point to routes of trade in objects and ideas. Furthermore, they speak of limitations of movement and, more importantly, they also show a first indication of the cultural representations that were sought for the Andes, aided by the interactions with local scientists, and reinforced by continuous visits to the same places that had been already proven to yield a high quantity of objects.

These results are probably a caused by the familiarity with Peruvian archaeology that early collecting had sprouted, and by Latin American collectors who specialized in the area, such as Mariano Macedo, as much as by political circumstances, wars and diplomatic postings.

As important as the descriptions made of where and when mummies were found in the Andes, the collectors, donors, and sellers of these remains offer a different insight to the collections in this research. The information available on documents and archives comes precisely from what those sellers and collectors have deemed appropriate to convey to the museum. In that sense, the direct interlocutors for the mummies are their collectors. Therefore, the relevance of understanding who collected the remains now present in museum collections has to do with the veracity and validity of the information provided about them.

Through the available archival information, it becomes evident that there were at least three very well-defined groups of collectors, which provided not necessarily different types of information on the mummies, but rather a more or less nuanced recording of said information. A general way to describe these actors is calling them nineteenth century travelers. ***Though the collectors of mummies are indeed travelers from Europe to the Americas, lumping them all together under the same category diminishes the complexity of their travels.***

The veracity of their claims and the authenticity of the information provided with the mummies should still be taken with healthy skepticism, more so in the case of private sellers or sponsored scientific collectors, as their bending of the truth may have served their economic intentions – and we are not privy to those through documentary evidence.

How these collectors moved and finally donated the remains they had collected is also a point of interest. In that regard, one of the important concerns of this research was to try and untangle, from the places where mummies were collected to their ports of arrival, if there were particular routes, areas or transports on which these mummies were taken on their way to Europe. In that sense, the author aspired to map the journeys of these Andean remains from their origin sites to Europe. Ultimately, mummies themselves, as well as antiquities, were not traveling or moving in particular circles or specialized vessels from America to Europe, but rather as all other freight, they followed the same routes as other imports.

Chapter 5 described the political 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 between 1850-1930. The first political changes: independence, nation formation and early border disputes take place in the Andes in the early-nineteenth century, up until the 1860s. Later on, three moments of conflict coincided with popular periods of mummy collecting, particularly from 1865 to 1900: one is the end of the Civil War in the United States, the second, the War of the Triple Alliance, and the third, the War of the Pacific. In that regard, as has been argued***, the independence process and the disputes for borders at the time are very much linked with the collecting opportunities for archaeological artifacts.***

Similarly, the shifts in cultural displays introduced by World Exhibits provided a stimulus to anthropological research. These included the Paris exhibits of 1878 and 1889, and continued during the Chicago Exhibition in 1892.

The human remains in which this research focuses clearly highlight that collecting practices involving human remains should be embedded within the history of anthropological practice, as much as the practice of collecting. The transformation of collectors' interests, from the admiration of sacred practices to that of scientific curiosity, is extremely important when considering sensitive objects such as Andean mummies. Likewise, the practice of anthropological collecting, changing from the collecting of mummified remains to that of skeletal material, is vitally important when looking at the conditions of the remains once they are integrated into collections. It is on par with the importance of the type of museum and collection into which they are integrated, whether they focus on archaeology, ethnology, or natural history.

The relation between what was collected in the nineteenth century by Europe and what has been left behind and collected in Latin America is interesting in that it shows two things: that European collectors had been coached and aided by local archaeologists and enthusiasts; and that what is collected in Europe does not always represent the most interesting items discovered to date.

In that regard, this thesis has shown that in Latin America the remains are presented within their specific burial contexts, with their offerings and, when possible, within their original bundles. As such, the exhibition halls present a full overview of mortuary practice, rather than only the bodies of the dead.

This leads to answering another of the secondary questions posed: 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 the West? Chapter 7 focuses on showing how source nations have handled their remains in a more integrated way. Archaeology and the exhibition of mummies have shifted together, not with one leaving the other behind. In Europe, the Andean mummy context has long been overlooked, with only now a few cases where they are integrated into projects concerning

mummified remains. It is worth pointing out, though, that those projects were originally born of inspiration from Egyptian mummies and not Andean mummies.

While for other remains such as stone, textiles and especially ceramics, the Andean world continued to be exhibited, updated and hence reimagined in European museums, the mummies were consistently left behind the veil of nineteenth century discovery, as has been seen by their exhibit cases and documentary information. This leads to the conclusion that ***there has been no translation of meanings, no change of understandings since their inclusions in the collections, and though studies like this one are encouraging in that they show there is an interest from curators and museums to change this, there is still much work to be done.***

In regards to the question posed during the introduction: "How do mummies represent what is thought of as the Andean world in European museums?" the answer is much more complicated. The collecting process of the first half of the twentieth century proposed a way in which the mummies may have had a role in showcasing a part of the Andean culture, but their presentation to the public was not always accurate, complete or contextualized. This is not exclusive to Andean materials, or human remains. Following the critiques explored in chapter 2 of the way museums today present knowledge, it may be that this lack of discernment about what from the Andes is showcased and how is a consequence of colonial thinking and should be looked at carefully for each subset of objects, in each museum in particular, and in comparison with materials from other geopolitical contexts such as Africa and Asia. Another conclusion drawn from these reflections is that ***because of the particular obscure place that mummies have had in the collections researched, there is no systematic approach that can be used to look for a representation of the Andes in the way the mummies are now exhibited or stored.***

In that same line, the intentionality of collecting poses issues when interpreting museum holdings. Although looking at collections as a whole and not separated by museum allows for a macro view of holdings, individual motivations – consideration of taste – cannot be taken into account when looking at collections from this perspective. The personal preferences of collectors in terms of color, details, etc. or even in terms of luggage allowances when making the transatlantic trip, could also be factors that limit what is collected and could skew the interpretations made in terms of the demographic composition of mummy collections in Europe.

The question of how the place of Andean mummies within Western European museum collections has changed from 1930 until today can be answered in the same way. There is no systematic way to account for exhibit and storage changes across the museums explored in this research. The information available on the administration of the collections is limited to the data recorded by curators, conservators, and managers, and so, dependent on what they have deemed important to note. In some cases, it can be detailed from every time a collection is inspected, in others the information is non-existent. In that

sense, sometimes it is not possible to decipher if the remains have been exhibited, for example, or if the curators have treated them with pesticides, resins or coatings. Though directly associated objects are almost always noted – as the case of funerary wares sold or collected with the remains– relationships between mummies and other not directly associated objects is not normally noted, though it is present most of the time in the accession books. To retrace the life of each mummy is very difficult. Though the majority of museums are following the guidelines written by UNESCO and ICOM in regards to the display and storage of human remains, there are a few museums that have maintained displays from the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. This leads to a conclusion that, ***though global trends are reflected in the majority of national museums in regards to the exhibition and storage of human remains, a particular case-by-case story is more telling of national cultural heritage management.***

Considering the methodological challenges faced by this dissertation, there have been several observations that should be emphasized here. The first is that most human remains that have been separated from diagnostic artifacts cannot be contextualized by non-destructive methods. Only by means of isotopic or DNA techniques can these remains be geographically placed, though there is no means to specify the cultures to which they may have belonged.

A second important observation is that most contextualization possible with remains that have associated artifacts has to do with textiles. It is vital then that the existing research with textiles that has already been conducted, sometimes in the same museum collections, be compared to those attached to the human remains in said collections. Similarly, ***the importance of the transformation of the remains, unbundling, textile separation, funerary offerings separation, etc. should be accounted for before contextualization, and the only way to be privy to that information is by looking at the collectors and descriptions found in the museum's accession books and archives***. Thirdly, though there are manuals regarding the storage and conservation of human remains published in the United Kingdom, most museums visited do not have a standardized protocol to deal with the storage demands of the mummified remains in their collections. A comparison between the collections has highlighted these differences and should be further addressed in future research.

The issues in regards to collecting, exhibiting, and storing human remains are far from resolved. However, this thesis points at the history of their collecting at a national level as a means to re-contextualize them in museum collections and as a starting point to embark on further discussion regarding their roles and permanence in those collections.

It is not the aim of this work to suggest practices that should be implemented in the museum collections. That has been done individually with reports to the museums after research visits. What is important here is to emphasize the contribution of comparative work, and more to the point, of comparative work that includes both historical and

archaeological data. Complementary, interdisciplinary research is starting to be the norm in the humanities, and the exploration of human remains collections is a good point to continue with this trend, at the very least with paleo-imaging and other bio-archaeological methods when possible (like DNA and isotope testing).

The analysis of timeframes, actors, and places of collecting, as well as the information recorded about all three by museums, can result in vital information not only about the process of collecting itself, but also about the motivations and contacts between source countries and the European repositories of these remains. Although an interpretation of the consequences of such processes and motivations on the way these human remains have been stored, exhibited and classified in national museums necessitates further observation into their materiality and history once within the museum, the information presented in this dissertation serves as a valuable starting point to continue exploring these critical topics.

In rooms packed with ancient objects, human remains and especially mummies deserve particular attention. Not as materials, but as witnesses of the past, agents of change in of themselves in pre-Columbian times, now transformed into onlookers as the world around them has tried to accommodate them, both in storage and exhibit rooms.

8

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