

# Embodied Heritage, Identity Politics, and Tourism

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**SUMMARY** *In this article I interrogate the conjunction of archaeological discovery, narrational packaging of the past for tourism, and discourses of identity, using as my example spectacular burials discovered on the north coast of Peru. I argue that the ancient elite bodies are being manipulated and interpreted within a framework of international cultural heritage tourism, nationalist ideology, and regional assertions against the centralized government in Lima. The archaeological discoveries are being used in their local context to promote economic development around tourism and social well-being around identity on the basis of a newly valorized archaeological past.* [Keywords: archaeological past, heritage, identity, tourism, Peru]

## Introduction

There is currently a widespread Peruvian discourse promoting identity assertion on the basis of ancient glory and the tourism that extraordinary archaeological sites can attract (see, e.g., Silverman 2002). In this article I interrogate the conjunction of archaeological discovery, narrational packaging of the past for tourism, and discourses of identity. I use as my example the series of spectacular burials discovered at the site of Sipán in the Lambayeque Valley on the north coast of Peru. It is the conjunction of cultural heritage tourism with Peru's late-twentieth-century/early-twenty-first-century discourse of national identity that is the framework within which Sipán's ancient elite bodies are being manipulated and interpreted. I argue that the naming of the Sipán rulers by their discoverer and the popular media has embodied and empowered an ideology of regionalism in Lambayeque. This ideology seeks to promote economic development around tourism and social well-being around identity on the basis of a newly valorized archaeological past. The revival and invention of a Mochica identity in Lambayeque and the espousal and conscious construction of "lambayecanidad"—"Lambayequeness" or local Lambayeque identity—are embedded in larger national and international contexts.

## The Sipán Burials

In 1987 archaeologists began to recover at Sipán the intact tombs and preserved bodies of the rulers of an ancient society known as Moche or Mochica, which flourished on the north coast of Peru in the first half of the first

millennium A.D. (see Bawden 1996). These finds have received national and worldwide media attention because they are the richest unlooted burials yet reported for the New World (see, e.g., Alva 1988). *National Geographic* has been especially active in keeping the public informed about the ongoing discoveries. The magazine's role in constructing popular attitudes toward the past and toward foreign ("exotic") societies is well known (Lutz and Collins 1993).

Beyond archaeological interest in Sipán, the most fascinating aspect of the burials, for me, is the naming of the occupants of the excavated tombs. Beginning with the announcement about the first discovery (Alva 1988) and in popular and scholarly accounts about subsequent discoveries, the occupants of Sipán's tombs have been named. The most famous of these burials are the Lord of Sipán (Alva 1988), Old Lord of Sipán (Alva 1990), and Priest (Alva 1994) (see Alva 2004 for the most recent discussion of the thirteen excavated tombs and the Looted Tomb that led to the original archaeological intervention). Once named by Dr. Walter Alva, their excavator, these individuals acquired new lives as the known rulers of an ancient Peruvian realm, particularly the Lord of Sipán.

The media immediately seized upon the name, Lord of Sipán. This mute skeleton became a person, indeed a celebrity, given life as much by the artistry of *National Geographic* and concomitant media attention as by archaeological interpretation. So important did this named ancient person become that in 1993, Peru's former president, Alberto Fujimori, welcomed back from Germany the conserved skeleton of the Lord of Sipán in a ceremony that treated the skeleton with the same state honors extended by protocol to any visiting head-of-state.<sup>1</sup> In his speech President Fujimori said: "Ladies and gentlemen, we greet the return to Peru of the Lord of Sipán, Lord of Lords, with undescrivable joy and pride as Peruvians." At the ceremony, the German ambassador to Peru replied, saying, "Mr. President, it is a great honor and pleasure to deliver to you and the Peruvian people the remains of a worldwide famous Peruvian."

For several days after his return to Peru, the Lord of Sipán lay in state at the Presidential Palace in Lima—again signaling the national importance of the body. This event and its discourse of ancestral political genealogy served to legitimate Fujimori as president and the Peruvian people as a deeply historical nation-state. But the appropriation was not uncontested. Critics of Fujimori seized upon the opportunity to mock the president, calling him the "Lord of Sin Pan" (*Caretas*, 11 March 1993)—a clever play on Sipán: the president as the Lord of the Realm of People Without Bread (i.e., food), a president who glorifies the past and his legitimation from it, but who is unable to feed and employ millions of poor Peruvians.

At the local level, the people of Lambayeque basked in the privileging of their region's contribution to the grand civilizational sweep of Peruvian history. The remains of the Lord of Sipán were greeted by massive crowds when they were returned to their place of origin. At the Chiclayo airport, in a ceremony paralleling that in Lima, Walter Alva reiterated the message of the President saying, "For us, the Peruvian past is not merely inert objects. It is a vast spiritual presence that nourishes the deep roots of the Peruvian nation." Alva explained the significance of the actual Lord of Sipán saying that the remains "are not merely archaeological findings, but the people of Lambayeque are meeting their own Mochica ancestors."<sup>2</sup>

## The Mochica Revival and Local Resistance

Although the major archaeological sites and ancient cultures of Lambayeque have always been known by local people as a result of the visibility of the archaeological monuments and public education, until the discovery of the Lord of Sipán and his ancient counterparts, Lambayecanos were more focused on their present and future in terms of the region's productive agro-industrial complex than on the pre-Columbian past. Today, however, Lambayecanos bask in the privileging of their region's contributions to the grand civilizational sweep of Peruvian history. Identification with Sipán's rulers and ancient Mochica culture is running rampant. A private university, a hospital, shops, and several clubs have adopted the name of "Señor de Sipán." There is also a new Sipán brand of "King Kong," a traditional large, rectangular, layered cookie with a sweet fruit filling. An extravaganza called the Sipán Cantata has been performed since 1990, which combines song, music, dance, and drama to present the epic story of the Lord of Sipán and praise Mochica cultural achievements. The Cantata explicitly espouses mestizaje and cultural continuity between the current population of Lambayeque and the ancient Mochica one. As enunciated by the group's founder, Edgar Dante, the Cantata serves to "integrate local culture in the process of continental and universal development" (quoted in *La Industria*, 26 June 1999). Dr. Alva, the Cantata's consultant, says that the performance "exalts the permanent presence of the [Mochica] roots of our nationality" (quoted in *La Industria*, 26 June 1999). This invented link to the past became hyperreal in 2002 when a local politician sought to gain official recognition of the Cantata as an authentic element of Peru's cultural patrimony. His proposal was categorically denied by a congressional commission's determination that the performance was fully of recent origin, notwithstanding its theme (*La Industria*, 12 March 2002, 28 August 2002). Also, a "Mochica village" of living artisans was recently established alongside the Royal Tombs of Sipán museum (Figure 1). The village is intended to present a recreation of Mochica craft activities, as carried out by "the descendants of this culture" (*La Industria*, 3 October 2002), as if Mochica talents had been genetically transmitted across the centuries.<sup>3</sup>

The local visibility and accessibility of the excavated remains from Sipán and revival of ancient and traditional crafts surely contribute to popular interest in and identification with the Mochica in Lambayeque. Editorials in Chiclayo's newspaper, *La Industria*, repeatedly emphasize that Lambayeque's tourism potential rests principally in the discovery of the Lord of Sipán. But I want to caution that in Lambayeque references were being made to the local ancient past before the Sipán tombs were discovered. A housing development called "Los Mochicas" already existed, as did a local musical group called "Naymlap," after the first king of the Lambayeque Dynasty (see Donnan 1990). Indeed, throughout Peru the names of ancient cultures and ancient kings are frequently used iconically in schools, housing developments, sports arenas, restaurants, manufacturing industries, and stores. Moreover, these names are translocal (not location specific). So the use of the name Sipán is hardly the first time that an archaeological name has been appropriated for a civic or commercial venture in Lambayeque or elsewhere in Peru.

What is noteworthy and different in the case of Sipán, however, is the intensity and rapidity with which this nomenclatural borrowing has occurred. Sipán



**Figure 1.**  
Mochica village on the grounds of the Royal Tombs of Sipán Museum.

fervor is overtly linked to a local movement to establish a regional identity and promote tourism as a competitive response to what is perceived, in Lambayeque, as a lack of a cultural politics in contrast to the inculcation of identity in other Peruvian regions, especially Cusco. This discourse mushroomed in 2000 when, to rectify the perceived disadvantageous situation, the first “Lambayeque Cultural Identity Week” was organized. The two professors in charge of this project stated that from ancient times a festival spirit has characterized the people of Lambayeque and that agriculture, crafts, fishing, and shamanism still link the past and present. The president of the organizing committee said that the event sought to create “a space in the calendar of Lambayeque festivals for the affirmation of our identity” (quoted in *La Industria*, 20 August 2000). Lambayeque’s “Cultural Identity Week” continues to be celebrated yearly.

This hyper-Lambayeque ideology is being orchestrated and disseminated through frequent exhortations in *La Industria* and by activities undertaken by schoolteachers and local civic institutions. *La Industria* publishes news of great archaeological finds in the region, along with guest editorials, and informs readers about the nature and locations of identity-affirming activities sponsored by civic and private entities. In 2002 the newspaper decided to take direct action by convening a colloquium for its avocational high school journalists in order to “create awareness about tourism and strengthen the Lambayeque identity and national identity” (*La Industria*, 11 August 2002). Professional journalists, professors, and educated laypeople write frequent editorials in *La Industria* arguing that there should be academies of lambayecanidad, professoriates of lambayecanidad, and agoras of lambayecanidad so that “we are catalyzed into knowing who we are and how we should elevate lambayecanidad to the highest category of our identity in concert with all the people of Peru and the world” (editorial by Estuardo Deza Saldaña in *La Industria*, 6 August 2000).

Sipán has been conscripted to this effort of local identity creation. A professor of pedagogy and history at the national university in Lambayeque, for instance, argued repeatedly in *La Industria* that the region's tourist potential lay principally in the discovery of the Lord of Sipán and also that "around this find should be generated a good part of the Lambayeque identity" (editorial by Pedro Delgado Rosado in *La Industria*, 15 May 2000). President Alejandro Toledo (who was elected after Alberto Fujimori in June 2001) said, at the inauguration of the new Sipán museum, "A people without history is a people without culture, a people without culture is a people without soul, and for this reason this museum must be visited first by the Lambayecanos" (quoted in *La Industria*, 9 November 2002). *La Industria* (10 November 2002) commented that "the Lord of Sipán in his new home re-encountered his people, represented by the different communities [of the Lambayeque region] that came to the museum the second day it was open." Walter Alva himself said, "The rulers of Sipán have awoken to bring us a message of their great cultural quality, of their impressive knowledge about the world and, above all, to show us that the roots of their society are also ours and are the essence of our identity" (quoted in *El Comercio*, 9 November 2002).

Attention to Sipán and the Mochica has facilitated the valorization of regional identity in Lambayeque, already premised upon Lambayeque's distinctive cuisine, traditional handicrafts, particular saints, and vernacular villages such as Morrope, Puerto Eten, and Monsefu. Links to an ancient Mochica identity are being added to these features and foregrounded. The current revival of Mochica identity in Lambayeque is particularly interesting since the indigenous Muchik language died out at the beginning of the twentieth century, and Mochica culture has all but disappeared save in the faces of some people, local surnames and toponyms, particular shamanic practices, and the traditional reed fishing boat. The reinvention of Mochica identity today is being conducted as a very contemporary project of modernist discourse and practice.

But we would be severely mistaken if we regarded this affection for the past as locally unanimous: quite the contrary. In the very town of Sipán, where the burial mound is located, memory is still quite fresh of the armed struggle between looters and the police that led to archaeological intervention in the site and the exclusion of town residents from the mound, thereby cutting off a much-needed source of income (see details in Kirkpatrick 1992).

Moreover, the new state-of-the-art Royal Tombs of Sipán Museum was not constructed at Sipán, but rather was built in the town of Lambayeque, more than thirty-five kilometers from Sipán but just a few minutes from the provincial capital of Chiclayo. It was inaugurated on 8 November 2002. The Sipán townsfolk vigorously protested the new museum's location from the time it was announced, but to no avail. Clearly, the rustic site museum at Sipán (Figure 2) is unable to compete with the magnificent new facility in Lambayeque (Figure 3), which displays the fabulous original artifacts from the tombs and reproduces the burials with the conserved skeletons themselves (photographs may not be taken inside; for images of the exhibits see <[http://www.tumbasreales.org/MAR\\_SUP.htm](http://www.tumbasreales.org/MAR_SUP.htm)>), thereby obviating the need to see the original locale among all but the most authenticity-seeking tourists. Place of discovery is superseded by place of representation.





**Figure 2.**  
The modest site museum at Sipán where the great Mochica burials were found.



**Figure 3.**  
The magnificent Royal Tombs of Sipán Museum in the town of Lambayeque, near Chiclayo.

For all the national and international attention that ancient Sipán has received, contemporary Sipán still lacks basic infrastructure. Townsfolk have been insistent in their demands for running water, sewers, paved roads, and other amenities. Indeed, on 22 September 2001 residents put up roadblocks to prevent tourists from gaining access to the site so as to draw attention to their demands. But Walter Alva said, the day after, that although the residents were right in their demands, their social concerns must not be mixed with scientific work (quoted in *La Industria*, 23 September 2001). And herein, of course, lies the source of conflict and ethical debate. Archaeology should not be removed from



**Figure 4.**  
Kiosks of local townsfolk alongside the Sipán archaeological mound.

its social context. The lives of living people must be considered as we investigate and appropriate the lives of the dead. One of the kiosk owners at Sipán told me in June 2004 that if Walter Alva excavates again at Sipán the townsfolk are going to insist that the recovered remains stay in Sipán so that they get more tourist visits. But, she said, they really do not want him to return at all because he controls their activities by having declared the ground under and around their homes an untouchable archaeological zone (*zona intangible*). And she continued, "This is not fair; we are poor." They have formed a community commission to try to protect their interests.

Living alongside an ancient site that yielded incalculable wealth beyond their reach, the contemporary residents of Sipán, an annex of the Tumán Agrarian Cooperative, try to get a legal piece of the tourist action by setting up vernacular service stands alongside the ruin and selling kitschy crafts and the occasional looted trifle (ancient beads and broken figurines on the day of my most recent visit) in addition to soda, crackers, and candy (Figure 4). Over the past few years infrastructural improvements (for instance, electricity) have begun to be made in and around Sipán by the regional government. These improvements are necessary because of the poor impression contemporary Sipán makes on tourists in comparison to its ancient glory. But given the years of antagonism between the townsfolk of Sipán and the archaeological and political establishment, and the relocation of the actual remains from their site of origin to the new museum in the town of Lambayeque, it is difficult to conceive of the residents of Sipán ever becoming and feeling like stakeholders.

### The Legitimizing Body

As I consider the zeal with which a multidomain and multimedia discourse about lambayecanidad is being locally disseminated, I keep returning to the

animating significance of the actual bodies at Sipán. Would the reception of these tombs have been the same without the actual bodies? I think not. Indeed, it is not coincidental that the Royal Tombs of Sipán Museum is referred to as “the new house of the Lord of Sipán” (e.g., *El Comercio*, 26 October 2002) and a “palace of the Mochica dynasty” (e.g., *La Industria*, 8 November 2002). In Walter Alva’s words, the new museum is “an appropriate space for a ruler, a kind of museum and at the same time a mausoleum, where not only are jewels, emblems and ornaments exhibited that served to forge cultural identity and establish the rank and power of a ruler of ancient Peru, but also where we are going to conserve for posterity the remains of this person” (quoted in *La República*, 9 November 2002). This discourse is repeated by the museum’s well trained and smartly uniformed tour guides, three of whom enthusiastically told me, in June 2004, that the museum is not just a museum “but a sacred mausoleum. The Lord of Sipán is very happy here because everything he did in life and as confirmed by Mochica iconography indicates that he wanted to be seen and admired in the next life, and now he is admired internationally. He is happy here in this other place [the museum], resting and being exhibited.”

Furthermore, in Lambayeque interest in Sipán and the Mochica has led to a resurgence of local interest in the other local ancient cultures. Thus, in 1999, the group that performs the “*Cantata al Señor de Sipán*” presented a theatrical work called “*Ode to the God Naymlap*,” stating that this work reflects the origins of the local Lambayeque culture. The case of Naymlap is especially interesting because here we have a historically preserved pre-Hispanic name, but no body. With Sipán we have no idea what the leaders were actually called, but we do have their bodies in their tombs. The archaeological Sicán culture (see Shimada 1981, 1990, 1995, 2000) is also being promoted and counts with its own fine museum in Ferreñafe, similarly not located at the principal archaeological site. I paraphrase here the comments of Srta. Orly, an enthusiastic young schoolteacher earning extra money as a waitress at the Hebron Restaurant in Chiclayo. Upon ascertaining my interest in the region’s past, she proceeded to lecture me on the difference between Sipán and Sicán, identifying herself with Sicán rather than Sipán by virtue of her original residence in Ferreñafe, while taking pride in all of Lambayeque’s prehistory.

The discoveries at Sipán have been locally managed as a brilliant public relations triumph with major exhibitions of the funerary materials in Lima, the United States, and Japan. That the town of Lambayeque has been able to gain possession of the spectacular artifacts and acquire a five-million-dollar state-of-the-art museum is remarkable given the strong centralization of archaeology in Lima. Justifiably, Walter Alva has become a local hero—except at Sipán itself, according to local people interviewed there—because of the world-class excavation he has conducted and his dedication to the town of Lambayeque and its rights to its region’s cultural patrimony, including the contribution that his discoveries make to the economic development of the Lambayeque region and Peru through the tourism that is attracted. Dr. Alva even appears in children’s cartoon books about Sipán.

Tourism is being managed and promoted locally in Lambayeque, with the agro-industrial and commercial resources of the region<sup>4</sup> providing a strong base for continued development. The presence at the new museum’s inauguration of the current President of the Republic, Alejandro Toledo, and the First



Lady, as well as cabinet ministers, national dignitaries, numerous foreign ambassadors, and international businessmen, indicates how very important this ancient assemblage is to the future of Lambayeque and the nation-state. In this matter of the relationship between the museum and tourism in Lambayeque, I am reminded of Bruner's keen observation:

Museums preserve; tourism markets. . . . Both museums and tourism are engaged in the production and exhibition of culture, and both depend upon an audience. . . . Both are in the business of representing the culture of others, usually those who have lived in another time or in another place. Both must construct and hence invent what they display. Both . . . valorize some [objects] as worthy of exhibition. Both are engaged in the enterprise of informing, educating, and entertaining an audience. Both museums and touristic sites have themselves been constructed in a particular social context and historical period, and are embedded in the politics of their settings. . . . both museum and tourism are the result of travel, as the objects, the traditions, and the visitors all travel, to and from the site. [1993:6]

### Comparisons

A couple of valleys to the south of Lambayeque, in Jequetepeque, the intact tomb of a female officiant of the local Mochica court was discovered in 1991 (Donnan and Castillo 1992). She has been named "The Priestess" by her excavators and is referred to as such by local people. Indeed, the Mochica Priestess has been seized upon by the nearby small town of Chépén as the vehicle for its own claim to attention on the national and international tourist stage. A statue of the Priestess has been erected at the entrance to town (Figure 5), depicting this archaeological skeleton in fully fleshed form, and local people are now talking about themselves as descendants of the Mochica. The Priestess is said to be the "novia" (bride) of the Lord of Sipán (Krzysztof Makowski, personal communication).

But in the eponymous Moche Valley, a strong discourse about the past is largely absent, even though the greatest pan-regional Mochica capital city (Huaca del Sol-Huaca de la Luna) is located here and extraordinary Mochica discoveries are being made on a regular basis, from exquisite murals (Uceda et al. 1994) to ancient massacres (Bourget 2001). And on the other (north) side of the Moche River, on the outskirts of the contemporary city of Trujillo, lie the spectacular ruins of the vast mud-walled city of Chan Chan, former capital of the Chimú Empire, historical successors to the Mochica (Moseley and Day 1982). Why are Mochica and Chimú not an evident part of daily discourse and public ideology in Trujillo, as Mochica is in Lambayeque? This question is all the more perplexing because Trujillo has long been a tourist city owing to the colonial architectural fabric of its historic center, the grandeur and accessibility of Chan Chan, and now Huaca de la Luna with its stunning polychrome friezes and recently revealed architectural complexity. Moreover, Trujillo needs tourism far more for its economic well-being than the richer city of Chiclayo and the larger and more fertile Lambayeque Valley. I think that Trujillo's fabulous pre-Columbian architecture is trumped by the human remains and funerary contexts removed from the small mound at Sipán and housed in the town of Lambayeque.

These comparisons may be extended. For instance, at Paracas, on the south coast, in the late 1920s, the discovery of dozens of elite men, perfectly



**Figure 5.**  
**Statue of the Mochica Priestess in Chepén.**

preserved in their exquisite ritual garments, provoked no interest in them as persons, only in their fabulous paraphernalia (see Tello 1959; Tello and Mejía Xesspe 1979). There was no clamor on the south coast or nationally that at Paracas were buried the earliest known rulers of ancient Peru. Indeed, once Peruvian archaeologists had opened the two-thousand-year-old mummy bundles, the skeletons were quickly separated from their glorious textile wrappings and the human remains received no further attention.

And in 1946, in the Virú Valley on the north coast, William Duncan Strong (1947) discovered a rich Mochica tomb containing the remains of an individual he named the Warrior-God, replete with an exceptionally fine array of funerary goods. The body, however, disintegrated immediately upon exposure to the air. But I suspect that the skeleton would have received no further attention, even if it had survived, because Julio C. Tello, then Peru's leading archaeologist, was more upset with the fact that a North American project had made a find of great objects, than that they had recovered actual evidence of an ancient Mochica lord, known only iconographically until that time (letter from Julio C. Tello to Toribio Mejía Xesspe, 9 November 1946, photocopy in possession of the author).

Moreover, despite the important discovery by Izumi Shimada (2000) of an extraordinarily wealthy post-Mochica Sicán culture tomb (the East Tomb) at

Batan Grande in the Lambayeque region itself, the superb National Sicán Museum he was instrumental in creating in Ferreñafe to house the fabulous excavated archaeological material as well as the museum's outstanding exhibition script covering the whole prehistory of the region (much of it revealed by Dr. Shimada's long-term research), and the local creation in Ferreñafe of a *Cantata del Señor de Sicán*, this archaeological culture and excellent museum have not attracted the same degree of attention as Sipán. The public, popular media, and tourism industry appear unable to concentrate on more than one great ancient lord at a time, in this case the Lord of Sipán discovered by Walter Alva.<sup>5</sup>

### **Analysis**

Like many nation-states, Peru has deployed its magnificent archaeological past at particular moments and for specific political purposes (see, e.g., Silverman 1999). But the social and political realities of Peru prior to recent years were such that a true genealogical connection with indigenous civilizations and indigenous people was eschewed. Indeed, it was only a decade ago that the wall between the adjacent National Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology and the National Museum of History in Lima was broken through so that a continuous developmental narrative could be told about Peru. The widely perceived and structurally propagated disjunction between Peru's past and present may account for the object-focused interest in the great mummy bundles at Paracas and the Tomb of the Warrior-God in Virú at the time of their discoveries.

Also, in part, we may understand the current appreciation of Sipán's burials in terms of advances in Mochica iconographic analysis (references too numerous to cite here) and the contemporary engagement of archaeology with particular theoretical paradigms of personhood, legitimation, and materiality (again, references too numerous to cite here). Thus, although William Duncan Strong (1947) explicitly stated that the old man buried in the Virú Valley tomb was a priest, a warrior, and the impersonator of a Mochica god, Strong did not theorize his conclusion and his idea received no further discussion. But today's archaeological discourse emphasizes that Sipán and other newly discovered related burials demonstrate that Mochica iconography was depicting individuals who fulfilled in life the ritual roles portrayed on pottery. Indeed, Sipán seems to be claimed as the first evidence of such a link, disregarding earlier work.

But, returning to this article's central contention, I think the most salient reason explaining why Sipán is having such great regional and national impact is that the preserved occupants of the tombs have been named: Lord of Sipán, Old Lord of Sipán, The Priest, and, at San José de Moro, The Priestess. Through massive public attention these inert skeletons have morphed into today's celebrities and cultural icons.

### **Conclusions**

Case studies from around the world demonstrate that a discourse about the past and the practice of archaeology may intersect to play important roles in

nation-building (see, e.g., Kohl and Fawcett 1995). Arguably, the most salient of these cases is the story of Masada for Israel (Bruner and Gorfain 1984). Although Peru lacks a single narrative of this transcendence, archaeology—understood broadly—in Peru contributes significantly to various contemporary projects, from the construction of national and local identities to economic development (e.g., Silverman 2002).

Throughout time and around the world, particular dead bodies have enjoyed a political life (see, especially, Verdery 1999), whether Evita Perón, Lenin, Rameses II,<sup>6</sup> or the mummies of Inca kings. The Sipán burials are particularly interesting as a site of contested and negotiated performances. But why have the Sipán burials become such potent symbols now? Why have the ancient Sipán dead been named, personalized, and paraded? Why have they been adopted so enthusiastically by so many Lambayecanos? Why were they important to two successive Peruvian presidents?

On the *local* level, the visibility and accessibility of the excavated remains from Sipán, and other archaeological sites in the Lambayeque region, contribute to interest in and identification with the ancient Mochica. The naming of the Sipán burials and their popularization have literally embodied and empowered an ideology of regionalism in Lambayeque. This ideology seeks to promote local economic development through tourism and social well-being around identification with a newly valorized archaeological past. The ideology is animated by newspaper campaigns and a range of civic activities. At the same time, the agro-industrial and commercial wealth of Chiclayo and its surrounding region is significantly underwriting this effort.

Moreover, the burials themselves are *localized*. They were found alongside a contemporary village. This contrasts significantly with the recent discovery of another, now world famous, ancient Peruvian: Juanita, the young woman sacrificed by the Incas atop one of the highest mountains in the Andean range (Reinhard 1996). Here, too, a name was conferred on the anonymous deceased, leading to the humanization of the victim in this formerly sacrosanct burial. However, there is no local community to claim and appropriate Juanita for the purpose of a neo-Inca identity formation nor can adventure tourism to sacred peaks promote the kind of mass tourism occurring in Lambayeque.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond this local framework, there is the *national* position of Lambayeque as it asserts itself among commensurate regions elsewhere in Peru and with regard to the highly centralized government in Lima. Ancient Sipán underwrites local calls to strengthen local identity and promote tourism as a competitive response to what is perceived as a lack of cultural politics in Lambayeque, in contrast to the inculcation of identity in other Peruvian departments, especially Cusco, seat of the ancient Inca Empire. Former President Alberto Fujimori's attention to the returning Lord of Sipán was an attempt to assert national influence over the region while seeking to bolster his own position within the country and internationally.

On the *international* playing field, attention to Sipán enhances the standing of Peru among the community of world nations. The serendipitous discovery of the Sipán burials and Lambayeque's appropriation of the ancient Mochica people coincides with the growing insertion of the north coast and the entire country of Peru into the globalized tourist industry and globalized world economy overall. Thus, a strong recursive relationship between the local and the

transnational is created and reiterated. Moreover, although subordinated to the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and other similar institutions of the developed world, Peru nevertheless is able to flaunt itself on the global stage by the display of its spectacular archaeological treasures, particularly mobile ones such as the Lord of Sipán who has toured the world. Indeed, the Lord of Sipán has been described as “the ambassador of our prehispanic culture” (*El Comercio*, 8 November 2002). Thus, at the inauguration of the new Sipán museum, President Alejandro Toledo stated, “I assume the obligation . . . of showing the world the greatness of our history and selling—in the best sense of the word—the image of the Royal Tombs of Sipán Museum so that three million tourists arrive by 2006” (quoted in *La Industria*, 9 November 2002).

The dead political bodies of Sipán are active social actors in local affairs, national relationships, and foreign dealings at a time of significant change and ongoing political and economic difficulties in Peru. Attention to these dead bodies recognizes and interrogates their importance in contemporary society.

## Notes

1. The return of the remains of the Lord of Sipán was widely reported in Peru in the print and televised news, and a television documentary was made. The remarks by President Fujimori and the German ambassador quoted here were transcribed from the television documentary and then translated by me. All other Spanish language quotes have also been translated by me for this article.

2. Statements transcribed from the same television documentary and then translated by me.

3. The Mochica village was the idea of Walter Alva and Susana Meneses, Walter Alva’s first wife and longtime collaborator; she died in 2002. Dr. Alva’s son, Ignacio Alva Meneses, designed the village. It is composed of eight buildings of differing size, each based on ancient Mochica patterns and decorated with Mochica wall paintings. I interviewed one of the artisans in the village, Sra. Rosa Chapoñán Valdera, from Morrope. She says she is grateful for the opportunity offered to her and other artisans, several of whom are also from Morrope but who now live in Lambayeque and Chiclayo. She says that she and many of her family and friends feel an identity with the ancient Mochica and she describes this identity as providing “a happier life in which one eats with one’s children . . . One prepares cancha [popcorn] toasted in the sand just as the Mochica did, chicha [maize beer]—the same as was drank by the Lord of Sipán, chinguirito [fish macerated with chicha], and my ninety-year-old grandmother weaves cotton just as the ancient ones did. It’s a pretty tradition.”

4. The Lambayeque region has been a center of cultural and political development for more than three thousand years. The contiguity of rivers here creates an exceptionally rich agricultural complex. Indeed, in the late twentieth century this region accounted for almost one-third of the cultivated land on the entire Peruvian coast. Lambayeque is a Colonial Period town built over an indigenous settlement. It used to be the power center in the region because it had the port. But with the opening up of the Pan-American Highway in the 1940s Chiclayo became an important commercial city, growing from about 100,000 inhabitants at that time to at least half a million today. Urbanization is fast joining the town of Lambayeque (population, approximately 51,000 in 1995) to the progressive, bustling city of Chiclayo.

5. Another factor may be confusion among the public between Sipán and Sicán.

6. An article online in *Forbes.com* ([http://www.forbes.com/2002/08/13/0813hot\\_print.html](http://www.forbes.com/2002/08/13/0813hot_print.html)) states that in 1974 “Egyptologists at the Cairo Museum noticed that the mummy’s condition was getting worse rapidly. They decided to fly Rameses II to Paris so that a team of experts could give the mummy a medical examination. . . . Rameses II was issued an Egyptian passport that listed his occupation as ‘King (deceased).’”



7. The Royal Tombs of Sipán Museum is now a major tourist destination for international, national, and local tourists. In June 2004 I saw lines of visitors waiting to enter the museum, and Chiclayo's best hotel (Gran Hotel Chiclayo) appeared full to judge by its crowded restaurant and the tour buses outside.

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