Historical Archaeology in South America

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Introduction

South America is a huge subcontinent that encompasses a wide variety of physical landscapes and environments. It includes different peoples, languages, and cultures, even if outside observers tend to look at it as a single entity. In the first three centuries of European colonization, the main division within this continent was between those areas controlled by the Portuguese and those controlled by the Spaniards, but within these vast territories the distinctions between colonists, natives, and African slaves also shaped society, resulting in diversity rather than homogeneity, and undermining any essential common features that could foster forms of identity beyond the local. In the nineteenth century, with the struggle for the end of direct European rule, movements for political independence attempted to create new national identities almost out of the blue, sometimes resulting in the expansion of regional identities, as happened with the creation of the very concept of Argentina in the minds of the elites, who imagined the country as an extension of Buenos Aires. In contrast, in the case of Brazil, a national identity was created out of an opposition to Spanish-speaking and republican Hispanic America, the Brazilian Empire conceiving of itself as a Portuguese-speaking kingdom in the New World. Still others would emphasize the indigenous contribution to the new national identity, as was the case in Peru.

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Whatever the case may be, the very concept of Latin America was foreign to the subcontinent. However, there are several common features that permeate, to a variety of degrees, South American societies, both in terms of their history and cultural characteristics. The Iberian colonization brought with it both a specific worldview and a way of dealing with social life in general. Portuguese and Spanish *conquistadores* (conquerors) brought with them a medieval, Catholic outlook directly linked to the Crusades and the *reconquista* (or recovery) of Muslim lands on the Iberian Peninsula itself, resulting in a strongly Catholic civilization in the Americas. A hierarchical Mediterranean social structure, based on patronage and status, was also brought to South America, being compounded here by new forms of subordinate social groups, notably the native inhabitants and African slaves. The overall historical context was also the same: South American colonial areas were doomed to produce raw materials for the profit of colonial powers.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, independence movements would further hinder communication inside the subcontinent, but the common features and international context would, on the other hand, produce similar trends in the different countries. Aside from the continuity in cultural traits already mentioned, there was an increase in economic, political, and cultural influence by new foreign powers. These were most notably Britain, France, and the United States, formerly inaccessible as a result of strict control by both the Spanish and Portuguese crowns over the colonies. The political systems of different countries varied considerably, but the common feature was the

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continuation of oligarchic rule, usually by means of authoritarian social control. The twentieth century witnessed a succession of dictatorships being interrupted time and again by liberal democratic periods; for the first time in the history of the area, most countries have been ruled by elected authorities since the middle to late 1980s.

It is in this overall historical context that we can talk about the history of historical archaeology in South America, keeping in mind the various sources of diversity as well as unity. Archaeology began here as a discipline derived from that of the United States, a branch of anthropology focused on Native American, or indigenous, North American preconquest populations, even though the influence of European prehistory has always been felt throughout the area. The first, and still most prestigious, archaeological field to develop was the study of the so-called high civilizations, first and foremost the Inca, but also other prehistoric Andean societies. Prehistoric archaeology lagged behind elsewhere, finally taking off after World War II thanks both to the renewed interest in "primitive" societies and to the expansion of the interests of European and United States scholarly establishments in peripheral areas such as South America. Even though there was no historical archaeology as such, heritage management concerns led to the enactment of historic-building protection laws and to the development of heritage institutions—mostly due to the activities of architects, art historians, and other scholars concerned with the preservation of historic assets.

Historical archaeology developed only recently, in the last 10–15 years, depending on the country (Funari, 1996). This development is the result of the triumph of liberal democracy since the 1980s, as for a long time authoritarian regimes did not support archaeological studies of the historical period because archaeology almost inevitably deals with ordinary people's lives. Freedom fostered international contacts so that archaeologists in South America could, for the first time, try to emulate their U.S. colleagues in studying the material culture of the historical period. Its recent upsurge was also fostered by laws enforcing the protection of historical material culture in the context of both urban and rural development, in the latter case mostly due to the construction of hydroelectric dams. The growth of interest in historical archaeology can be estimated by the increasing number of papers given at archaeological conferences and by the publication of articles in journals. In 1994, at the World Archaeological Congress 3, in India, for the first time there was a whole theme on historical archaeology, co-organized by a European, an African, and a South American. This indicated that Latin American historical archaeology has a new place within the discipline in contributing to its development worldwide (Funari et al., 1999).

Subjects of Investigation

Historical archaeology in South America is a diverse field. This section is an overview of the most relevant historical archaeological investigations conducted to date in South America, dividing them into projects focusing on colonial archaeology and those using the archaeology of capitalism as a theoretical perspective. This division provides an appropriate temporal and conceptual framework for the research topics discussed below.

Colonial Archaeology

Historical archaeology has already proved its potential for the study of European settlement in America. From different perspectives and in several geographic locations, the discipline has been able to shed light on social, economic, ideological, and ecological aspects of colonization and conquest. Archaeological analyses on the subject have usually focused on Hispanic and Portuguese urbanization, daily life in religious missions, ethnicity and contact, among other topics.

The origins of historical archaeology in South America are closely associated with the study of high-profile historical-period sites—often related to European colonization of the continent. As a consequence, the first investigations were oriented toward studies focusing on early colonial cities. In Argentina, there have been relevant investigations since the 1970s. Among them, it is important to take note of the archaeological project developed by

Zapata Gollán in the Spanish city of Santa Fe la Vieja (1573–1660). Zapata Gollán used archaeology as a method to validate historical data regarding location and identification of Santa Fe, as well as different aspects of the city's daily life (Zapata Gollán, 1956, 1970, 1981, 1991). Archaeological remains recovered by Zapata Gollán have been the partial subjects of later studies (Carrara 1996, 1997; Carrara and De Grandis, 1992, 1997; Cerruti, 1983; García Cano, 2000; Senatore, 1995; Zarankin, 1995; Valentini and García Cano, 1997).

Buenos Aires has been the object of intense colonial investigations. Since the 1980s, archaeologist Schávelzon has excavated different areas of the city, and he has published numerous works oriented toward the description and classification of the materials recovered (Schávelzon, 1992a, 1992b, 1994a, 1994b, 1995). At the same time, he has discussed several characteristics of Buenos Aires social life—including the presence of African American ethnic groups (Schávelzon, 1991, 2000, 2003). In addition to Schávelzon, other archaeologists have studied archaeological remains from Buenos Aires, focusing on topics such as fauna (Silveira, 1996), industry (Weissel, 1998), architecture (Zarankin, 1999, 2002), or pottery (Senatore, 1995).

New, innovative colonial studies have recently been undertaken in Patagonia. Senatore has analyzed different colonial urban projects intended to integrate the region under Spanish control. The eighteenth-century village of Floridablanca (1780–1784) represented the Crown's intentions to test a model of social order that had emerged from Enlightenment ideas. The completion of this plan has constituted the main interest of Senatore's (2000, 2002, 2003, 2004) investigations in the village. Two centuries before Floridablanca's foundation, Nombre de Jesús (1584) was established to exercise strategic control over the Straits of Magellan—a region frequently visited by English privateers. Through analysis of osteological remains, material culture, and diverse documentary sources, Senatore (2008) seeks to obtain information about the way settlers lived and died in a hostile place. There has also been archaeological research in the Falklands (or Malvinas) Islands (Philpott and Barker, 1996).

In Brazil, urban archaeological projects are currently underway in several Portuguese colonial cities currently have their own archaeological projects. Salvador—capital of the state of Bahia and first capital of Brazil—has been the focus of many excavations headed by Etchevarne (2001). His investigations have been dedicated to studying Bahia's history from a material point of view. Other cities that—because of their accelerated growth—have developed urban archaeological programs are San Pablo and Porto Alegre. In San Pablo, the work of Andreatta (1981–1982) has stood out since the 1980s, when she started conducting several salvage archaeology projects. In the case of Porto Alegre, Tocchetto has run an interesting study of transformations in local society that focus on material typologies, consumer choice, discard patterns, and urban growth (Santos, 2005; Thiessen, 2005; Tocchetto, 2004; Tocchetto et al., 2001).

In addition to urban archaeological projects in Argentina and Brazil, there have been studies of colonial cities elsewhere in South America. It is worthwhile mentioning Fusco's (1990) investigations in Colonia, Curbelo's (1996) in Montevideo and Punta del Este (Uruguay), Ortiz Troncoso (1970, 1971) and Massone's (1978, 1983) in Rey Don Felipe (Chile), Therrien's (2004) in Bogotá, López and Cano Echeverri's (2004) in Pereira (Colombia), Jamieson's (2000) in Cuenca (Ecuador), Navarrete's (1997) in La Guaira, and Cruxent's (1995) in Cubagua (Venezuela).

The first records of investigations at Jesuit missions—particularly in the area surrounding the limits of Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil—refer to exploratory trips headed by Ambrosetti in the beginning of the twentieth century. It was not until the 1980s, however, that the archaeology of missions began in earnest. At that time, Rovira (1989) focused her work on Mission Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria. Her objective was to study the effects of European colonial expansion on Guarani populations. Meanwhile, Kern (1985, 1987, 1989, 1998) offered an overview of the historical, ethnographic, and cultural nature of Guarani groups who lived in *reducciones* (settlements established within the colonial system where the inhabitants of outlying areas were brought together to live). Other archaeologists are now taking part in restoration activities or ethnoarchaeological investigations at the missions (Poujade, 1995, 1996).

Since the 1990s, there has been an increase in studies focusing on the history of social minorities—ethnic,

age, and gender groups that persisted despite being invisible in official narratives. Within this context, the study of African American populations became relevant in South America. Without a doubt, the most important project developed in the region has been the study of the Palmares Quilombo (Alagoas, Brazil), which constituted a long-lasting example of slave resistance. Investigations at Palmares have allowed Funari, Orser, and Rowlands to investigate subjects new to South American historical archaeology, such as identity, the active role of material culture, and the social use of the past (Funari, 1995, 1999; Funari and Vieira de Carvalho, 2005; Orser, 1994; Rowlands, 1999).

Agostini was one of the first archaeologists to study African pipe collections excavated in Vassouras, as well as the permanence of African cultural traditions in present Brazilian society (Agostini, 2002). Another investigator interested in studying African American groups was Schávelzon. In *Buenos Aires Negra* (2003), he analyzed diverse archaeological collections to distinguish a characteristic African "type" of artifacts. As a consequence, he stressed the relevance of African American groups—now almost invisible—in Buenos Aires's colonial past.

Interest in ethnicity does not stem exclusively from research on African American groups, but also refers to the construction and negation of post-contact identities—including relationships between conquerors and conquered indigenous societies. In general, most studies conducted in colonial cities and religious missions consider this subject of investigation. Nevertheless, there are many archaeological projects that deal with colonial contact at a regional level, such as Rafael Goñi's work in Neuquén (Argentina), Alicia Tapia's (2005) in la Pampa (Argentina), and Scaramelli and Tarble de Scaramelli's (2005) in Orinoco (Venezuela).

Archaeology of Capitalism

In recent work, historical archaeology has usually been understood as a discipline concerned with the formation of the modern world—associated with capitalism and a new social order (Johnson, 1996, 1999; Leone, 1988, 1995, 1999; Orser, 1996, 2000). Under the post-processualist umbrella, major topics of discussion have revolved around the appearance and consolidation of new discourses, practices, and identities; the construction of national states and boundaries; and such contemporary cultural interests as the consequences of political repression during military regimes or the social use of the past, among others.

Without identities there is no society. The understanding of modernity requires considering changes in the relationships among individuals, as well as between individuals and things (Zarankin and Senatore, 2002). This theoretical perspective forces archaeologists to analyze singularities in local practices, deconstructing hegemonic discourses and stressing the multiple trajectories upon which South American society was built. One of the most interesting studies on the subject has been conducted by Andrade Lima (1996, 1997, 1999), who analyzed the appearance of new practices and the construction of different class and gender identities in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro. Different archaeologists have considered transformations in nineteenth-century South American cities—such as Tocchetto (Symanski, 1998; Thiessen, 1999, 2005; Tocchetto, 2004), who studied Porto Alegre's society; Plens (2004), who discussed spatial organization in San Pablo's workers' villages; Therrien (2004), who considered consumer behavior in Bogotá; and Zarankin (1999, 2002), who analyzed transformations in domestic and public architecture in Buenos Aires.

Another subject gaining the attention of archaeologists is the expansion of national boundaries during the second half of the nineteenth century. In Argentina, several forts have been excavated with the aim of understanding conquest strategies and ethnic relationships between indigenous populations and groups of European descent. It is particularly important to mention Goñi's investigations (Goñi and Madrid, 1999) in Fuerte Blancagrande; Gómez Romero's (Gómez Romero, 2005; Gómez Romero and Ramos, 1994) in Fortín Miñana; Guerci and Mugueta's in Cantón Tapalqué (Guerci et al., 2004); and Langiano, Merlo, and Ormazabal's in Fuerte San Martín or Sauce Corto (Langiano et al., 2002). Several archaeologists are also excavating aboriginal settlements to investigate changes experienced by local societies during contact and conflict with national states (Goñi, 2000; Pedrotta, 2002; Pedrotta and Bagaloni, 2005; Tapia, 2005).

Historical archaeology in South America has also proven its political commitment to contemporary human rights causes. In particular, it has supplied tools for the study and elucidation of the consequences wrought by dictatorships in the region. The Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense (EAAF) gives us a clear example. By excavating common graves in cemeteries and at army bases, EAAF has been able to shed light on the killing of thousands of people during military regimes, as well as to give back the remains to their families (Doretti and Fondebrider, 2001; Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense, 1990, 1991, 1993). New projects are now focusing on clandestine detention centers, where—besides constructing a "material memory" of genocide—different repressive strategies and resistance practices might be studied (Funari and Zarankin, 2006).

Finally, it is worth noting the development of two different fields of study: public and underwater archaeology. Since the 1990s, public archaeology has been interested in interacting with local communities, democratizing academic production, and protecting heritage resources. At present, several papers explore these subjects (Eremites de Oliveira, 2005; Funari, 2002; Funari et al., 2005a). In the meantime, underwater archaeology is facing the negative impact of treasure hunters. South American archaeologists have excavated dozens of shipwrecks, offering valuable information on consumer preferences, transported goods, ship traffic, and different aspects of sailors' daily lives. They have also contributed methods and techniques for fieldwork and submerged heritage management and protection (Elkin, 2002; Rambelli, 2002). Underwater archaeology has been particularly important to the emergence and development of historical archaeology in South America, as it has been able to reach a broad public and to address a series of both empirical and theoretical issues. Underwater archaeology has had a huge visibility in the media, from newspapers to television shows, not least because of the spectacular images it is able to provide.

Empirical surveys and excavations have produced evidence not only on traditional subjects, such as onboard life, but also on such oft-neglected ones as slave ships. Considering the importance of ethnicity and ethnic issues in South America, the study of the transportation of African slaves is a promising one. Underwater archaeology has also been instrumental in collaborating with historical archaeologists working in coastal areas—as forts, fortlets, and other defensive land facilities are better understood when related to ship movement and control (Funari and Oliveira, 2005). In theoretical terms, underwater archeology has been pivotal for historical archaeologists in South America, as it deals with issues such as onboard, face-to-face, confined life, and provides historical archaeologists working in the continent with insights for understanding other confined institutions, such as slave quarters or detention camps (Funari and Zarankin, 2006).

Final Words

Latin American historical archaeologists have been full participants in the discipline for the last 15 years or so. Charles Orser's (1996) now-classic *A Historical Archaeology of the Modern World,* for the first time in the history of the discipline, pays attention to Latin America, as well as to Europe and the United States. The discipline, previously concerned with a narrow American definition of "post-prehistoric sites in the New World," broadened its scope to include a much more open perspective, including the archaeology of all historical societies (see Andrén, 1998).

In 1994 and 1995, *Historical Archaeology in South America,* edited by Stanley South in the United States, published 16 volumes distributed in the United States and Latin America. This it contributed to an early spread of ideas and interpretations by such young scholars as María Ximena Senatore and Andrés Zarankin, to quote two of the most often cited in the international literature. As a result of the not-irrelevant role of Latin America in historical archaeology, the prestigious *Encyclopedia of Historical Archaeology,* edited by Charles E. Orser, Jr., had seven consultant editors, six from Europe, the United States, and Australia, and one from Latin America (Funari). Several entries were written by Latin American archaeologists (Pedro Funari, Francisco Silva Noelli, Ana Piñon, Gilson Rambelli, Maria Ximena Senatore, and Andrés Zarankin). Another prestigious *Encyclopedia of Archaeology,* this one edited by Tim Murray, also has contributors

from Latin America (Roberto Cobean, Alba Mastache Flores, Pedro Funari, Marion Popenhoe de Hatch, Leonor Herrera, José Luiz Lanata, Matilde Ivic de Monterroso, and A. Lautaro Nuñez). Charles Orser, Jr., in his *Introducción a la arqueología histórica*, published in Buenos Aires in 2000, invites the readers to use books published by several Latin American historical archaeologists.

In 1997, the first journal aiming at a world audience was launched by Plenum. *The International Journal of Historical Archaeology* was established as the standard quarterly on historical archaeology, and the editorial board included two Latin Americans (Pedro Funari and Daniel Schávelzon). Several papers from Latin American authors have since been published, and the scope of this journal for the first time included, as proposed by Latin Americans, the study of historical-period societies in general. The historical archaeology of the Mediterranean has also produced books and a plethora of scholarly articles by Latin Americans—published in English, French, Italian, and Spanish in Europe and the United States—often quoted by their non-Latin American colleagues. In leading, innovative journals, as *Public Archaeology*, *Journal of European Archaeology*, *Journal of Social Archaeology*, *World Archaeological Bulletin*, and *World Archaeology*, several papers by Latin Americans attest to the presence of Latin American authors on the world stage. *Current Anthropology* has also invited and published comments by Latin American archaeologist to papers written by leading European or U.S. authors, attesting again to the growing relevance of Latin American ideas and theoretical stances in world archaeological discourse. Latin America archaeology in general, and historical archaeology in particular, has thus a much broader presence than in the past.

In theoretical terms, the Latin American experience also led to the discussion of such concepts as multiple identities by several archaeologists, such as Lourdes Domínguez and Gabino de La Rosa, from Cuba, which challenged traditional acculturation interpretive models grounded in normative frameworks. The recent publication of *Global Archaeological Theory: Contextual Voices and Contemporary Thoughts,* edited by two Latin Americans (P.P.A. Funari and A. Zarankin) and a North American (E. Stovel), put together archaeologists from different continents to discuss the main theoretical issues of the discipline. Whatever the case may be, Latin American historical archaeology is no longer a simple raw-material contributor—it contributes to the advancement of the discipline as a whole.

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