

Peruvian pre-Hispanic antiquities in the creation of a Chilean “prehistory:” the case of the Sáenz collection

GARRIDO, Francisco; VALENZUELA, Carolina. Peruvian pre-Hispanic antiquities in the creation of a Chilean “prehistory:” the case of the Sáenz collection. *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*, Rio de Janeiro, v.29, n.3, jul.-set. 2022. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0104-59702022000300011>.

Abstract

In 1895, Nicolás Sáenz proposed to the Chilean government to purchase a collection of “Inca” objects brought from Lima. This acquisition was approved in 1897. Despite the difficulties caused by the War of the Pacific, the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural (Chile) continued to acquire Peruvian antiquities, following a tradition of comparative studies of material culture. Within the framework of social evolutionism, these antiquities were a measure of civilization, a reference from which to evaluate the material culture of the pre-Hispanic peoples of Chile. This article analyzes the acquisition of the Sáenz collection as the culmination of a process of transition towards an archeology that focused on the new post-war territorial acquisitions in the Pacific.

Keywords: Nicolás Sáenz (1841-1896); Museo Nacional de Historia Natural (Chile); Peruvian antiques; social evolutionism; prehispanic peoples.

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Received on 7 May 2021.

Approved on 30 Sept. 2021.

Translated by Natalia Lugaro.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0104-59702022000300011>



During the nineteenth century, the archaeological collections of the National Museum¹ played a relevant role in making the pre-Hispanic past known and in offering a discourse of identity to the Chilean nation-state. The prevailing social evolution paradigm was instrumental in allowing artifacts to be classified into comparative categories of social development, which allowed, on the one hand, to deepen the temporal framework of development of local cultures, while on the other, to support the construction of a pre-Hispanic past that justified the role of the elites and their Eurocentrism. Derived from the ideas of Darwin and promoted by scholars such as Spencer, Morgan, and Lubbock, the classification of societies under the framework of unilinear and progressive development was a relevant milestone in the legitimization of national states, colonialism, and scientific racism (Trigger, 2009). Beyond its ideological role, the comparative evolutionist perspective also helped to advance in the understanding of the antiquity of humanity and their cultures. This paradigm made possible to generate the first archaeological interpretations based on the material culture of pre-Hispanic peoples in the Americas, going for the first time beyond the time limit imposed by the chronicles produced at the time of the Spanish conquest.

In this article, we argue that the comparative classification of the pre-Hispanic peoples of Chile required a reference for comparison based on foreign material culture, where the Andean one cataloged as “Inca” had a predominant role. Such a situation required the availability of foreign collections, which became a comparative pattern for scientific study. At the same time, the foreign collections enabled the diversification of the exhibition in the National Museum, an institution that aspired to present itself as a global cultural referent (Schell, 2009, 2013). Thus, we also reveal how the circulation of objects enabled the development of museums and science in the Hispanic American context. Given the lack of detailed studies and archaeological catalogs during the nineteenth century, material culture collections were fundamental in the interpretation of the past. Of the multiple collections from the central Andes that became part of the National Museum through donations and purchases, the most relevant one was the Nicolás Sáenz collection, acquired in 1897. This collection marked the closure of a process in which the material culture of Peru was essential to compare local pre-Hispanic artifacts to interpret their “degree of civilization,” under the evolutionist schemes of that time.

In this article, we follow the work of Stephanie Gänger (2009, 2014, 2018) and Patience Schell (2009, 2013), and seek to contribute to the history of collectors of pre-Hispanic “antiquities” and to reveal the role of museums in the construction of a national identity. Moreover, we also aim to show how the construction of a national past was based on a social evolutionist framework, using foreign material culture as a point of comparison with the local one. We also provide unpublished data about the origin and composition of Nicolás Sáenz’s collection of antiquities. Although this collection was not a fundamental part in the debates and scientific discussions of the period, it signals a transition point in the process of acquiring collections from Peru, just before moving on to a stage of greater emphasis on the exploration and study of the new territories acquired in the “Great North” after the War of the Pacific (see Gänger, 2009).

Comparative archaeological interpretation in the nineteenth century

The information provided by the Hispanic chronicles about the process of conquest was influenced by a notion of similarity between the native peoples that led to reasoning about them by “arguing similarities, real or capricious, with European cultures, evidence to corroborate the thesis monogenic or diffusionist and causal and narrow temporal sequences” (Gerbi, 1975, p.18).² During the eighteenth century, debates on the history of the New World questioned the authority and reliability of traditional sources regarding pre-Hispanic societies, which focused on the study of writing systems as tangible evidence to reconstruct, based on conjectures, migrations and past events (Cañizares-Esguerra, 2007). However, towards the second half of the nineteenth century, there were very few references regarding the material culture of pre-Hispanic societies. Among the few reference publications for the Andean world, the book *Antigüedades peruanas* by Rivero and Tschudi (1851) stands out, becoming the first great synthesis of the material culture of the Andes, particularly highlighting the Inca imperial past. Mariano Rivero was one of the promoters of the first museum in Peru, inaugurated in 1826, supporting the idea that the State was the owner of the archaeological remains of the nation, thus contributing to a project of construction of a national identity (Asensio, 2018; Riviale, 2015). The publication of this book, which is accompanied by an atlas of colored illustrations, was an important source for the creation of a synoptic vision of the pre-Hispanic past, which at that time did not go before the Incas in terms of temporality. We also highlight the book *Peru: incidents of travel and exploration in the land of the Incas*, by Ephraim Squier (1877), which offers an important study and description of the architecture of various archaeological sites in Peru, as well as it illustrates artifacts and their iconography.

In the case of Chile, a relevant landmark in the development of archaeological interpretation based on material culture occurred with the foundation of the Archaeological Society of Santiago (1878) and the publication of the book *Los aborígenes de Chile* in 1882 (Orellana, 1996). This last book is crucial in the emergence of archaeological interpretation in Chile, where the historian José Toribio Medina (1852-1930) explicitly states that there was a lack of chroniclers who would provide a historical base to study the deep past of the nation; therefore, it was necessary to study the material culture of the past: “The traces of our aborigines, as a general rule, are to be found in the tombs that enclose their mortal remains, and after long and repeated observations, it is possible to reach a synthesis that would allow us to barely establish the degree of progress they achieved” (Medina, 1882, p.XI). While expressing the importance of the artifacts of the past, Medina (p.XI) also emphasizes the idea of their rapid disappearance due to modern progress and the lack of interest of the population: “But in Chile, with poor and backward people, those [archaeological] remains are much scarcer, and what is worse, much less important and have continued to disappear ignored, thanks to the negligence and ignorance of our ancestors, and also because of the increasing demands of the industry and agriculture.” Regarding his interpretive framework, Medina applied social evolutionism under the “Three Age” model (stone, bronze, and iron), which was created by the Danish Christian Thomsen and popularized by Sir John Lubbock (1872),

who was strongly influenced by Darwinian ideas applied to human evolution (Trigger, 2009). Following such an approach, Medina considered the Inca case as the pinnacle of Andean social evolution and the greatest reference to civilizational advance. He affirmed that the areas with the greatest “advancement” were due to the influence of that empire: “In Chile, at the time of the Spanish conquest, there were two areas that had reached different degrees of advancement: the northern part of the country was in the bronze age, thanks to the conquest and the influence of the Inca civilization, while the south barely reached the polished-stone age” (Medina, 1882, p.XV).

Besides using historical sources, much of Medina’s book is based on the material culture from the collections of the National Museum in Santiago, his own collection, artifacts possessed by private collectors, and the reference texts from Rivero and Tschudi (1851) and Squier (1877). Especially for the book by Rivero and Tschudi, the citation and comparison of illustrations of artifacts are constant. In this way, Medina (1882) established a series of cultural and technological influences that the Incas would have introduced in Chile, such as, in the case of fishhooks, “the Peruvians introduced in Chile the use of metal for these utensils” (p.187); speaking of footwear, he mentions that “the Peruvians introduced the ojota, uchuta, which was like espadrilles” (p.411); and that “in Copiapó, Vallenar, Illapel and in Aconcagua, their artifacts manifest a pronounced Peruvian style” (p.261). These statements are inferences that demonstrate the interpretive potential of material culture for large-scale comparisons. Although the current archaeological knowledge has established that metal artifacts were present in the Chilean territory many centuries before the Incas, Medina argued that they represent the beginning of the “Bronze Age,” consolidating the use of metals within their area of conquest and influence. Although Medina shows the Incas as an advanced civilization, he understood their influence not as a case of cultural transmission; instead, he used a militaristic approach that underlined a nationalist discourse. In fact, Medina (1882, p.329) raised the question about the maximum advance of the “soldiers” of the “Peruvian army” in Chile, during the times of the War of the Pacific, evoking a kind of parity regarding the Chilean invasion of Peru at that time. More than a desire for revenge, the implicit idea was that the invasions were promoters of civilization, thus ideologically justifying the events of the moment.

Contemporary to Toribio Medina, the historian Diego Barros Arana (2000, p.31) in his *Historia general de Chile*, from 1884, takes a similar interpretive position about the pre-Hispanic past by establishing that: “Chilean territory was occupied until the time of the Inca conquest during the fifteenth century by barbarians who had not moved beyond the first degrees of the Stone Age.” In his opinion, marked by a primitivist vision of the indigenous world, the “wild men” who inhabited the Chilean territory were oblivious to progress and lacked the intellectual development to exploit the natural resources of the land. Barros Arana (2000, p.54) points out that:

Without a doubt, the Indians of Chile were then as barbarous as the rudest tribes that the conquerors found in America. Nevertheless, the lack of reliable sources makes impossible for history to describe their ways. The indigenous that we know from the oldest documents, were in contact with a strange and superior civilization

[the Inca], which undoubtedly modified their habits in some way. The historian ... cannot distinguish in the social situation found by the European conquerors, the part that corresponded to the primitive state of the nation, and the one belonging to the revolution that had just passed.

As we can see in the previous quote, the author sustained that the Inca influence had a decisive role in giving a "civilized" character to the indigenous peoples of Chile, attributing to them even the expansion of agriculture, irrigation, and pottery: "The conquered territory had to be subjected to the industrial exploitation of a more intelligent and more civilized race. The Peruvians, essentially farmers, found a fertile land that only needed to be irrigated in the dry season... They did there what they had practiced in Peru, that is, they dug canals from the rivers and cultivated the fields" (Barros Arana, 2000, p.57). To this, he adds that: "The introduction of pottery or the manufacture of clay vessels is due to the vassals of the Inca, an industry that we consider rudimentary, but which denotes great progress in the development of primitive civilization" (p.63).

During almost the entire nineteenth century, there was no deep temporal vision of the pre-Hispanic past before the Incas. Although Medina acknowledges the possible coexistence between humans and extinct "antediluvian" fauna under the biblical logic of creation, along with the researchers in Peru, he recognized that there was a diversity of cultures in the Andean territory, but they assumed that these were contemporary to the Incas, as part of their empire. The lack of concern for stratigraphy, context, and associations between artifacts obtained by collectors contributed to this panorama, where a more systematic study of the pre-Inca temporal antiquity began only around the 1890s (Gänger, 2014). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the German archaeologist Max Uhle gave a strong impulse to the archeological research in Peru, elaborating one of the first relative chronologies of pre-Hispanic peoples before the Inca period, based on stratigraphic excavations (Ramón, 2005; Kaulicke, 1998). This was crucial for the origin of modern archeology in Peru, which was also strongly influenced by Julio C. Tello between 1915 and 1940, who tried to prove the common origin and cultural unity of the Andean cultures, promoting them as part of the local national identity (Asensio, 2018).

Based on the above and considering the relevance of the acquisition of archaeological collections from Peru as the base of a comparative framework for the interpretation of the past and for exhibition purposes, we will continue with the analysis of the Nicolás Sáenz collection and its purchase by the National Museum between 1895 and 1897. This was the largest acquisition of foreign archaeological artifacts made by the museum, signaling the climax of a period marked by the archaeological interpretation based on social evolutionism, and a strong sense of nationalism during the aftermath of the War of the Pacific. The sources used for this study come from the administrative archives, inventories, and archaeological collections of the National Museum of Natural History of Chile (Museo Nacional de Historia Natural, Chile), as well as documents from the National Archives of Chile (Archivo Nacional de Chile) and the Ethnological Museum of Berlin (Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin).

The National Museum and its collections of “antiquities”

Towards the beginning of the twentieth century, the National Museum had a significant number of archaeological and ethnographic artifacts from Chile and abroad. Analyzing the museum’s inventory records, we can see that until 1927, there were 6,334 records of archaeological-ethnographic artifacts. Chile represented a 59.1% of the collection with known provenance, while Peru represented 27.7% of it. The rest of the collection consisted of artifacts from other parts of South America, Polynesia, Africa, and to a lesser extent Europe. As we can see, almost 1/3 of the museum’s collection with recorded provenance corresponded to artifacts from Peru, especially from the collection acquired to Nicolás Sáenz. Besides Sáenz, other collectors who donated Peruvian collections to the museum were Rafael Garrido, Luis Montt, Francisco San Román, Carlos von Patruben, Exequiel Allende, Eduardo Lira, José Toribio Medina, among several others. In general, the archaeological artifacts from Peru contributed to generating a comparative vision between what is supposedly “Inca” and what is local, not only for the exhibition of the National Museum but also in terms of scientific publications, such as the already mentioned book *Los aborígenes de Chile* by Medina and some publications by Rodolfo Philippi (1808-1904). It is important to note that Rodolfo Philippi, the director of the National Museum, was not only interested in biological taxonomy, but was also a promoter of the relevance of material culture for the interpretation of the past. Similarly to Medina, he also stated:

I often hear that tombs of the ancient Indians have been found with their bones, pots, idols, stone, bronze, and copper tools, which are lost due to the negligence of the people who find such things, which is regrettable because these remains give a more exact and complete idea of the state of the industry and civilization of the inhabitants of Chile before the conquest, than the narrations of the ancient historians of our country, and they are very interesting when they are compared with the remains of the ancient Peruvians, Quito, Mexicans etc. The philosopher and the historian will know how to extract important results from these remains, and for this reason, I feel deeply sorry that in many cases they are lost because of the people who find them do not know how to appreciate their importance (Carta..., 31 ago. 1876).

Likewise, Philippi expresses the need for the State to take care and safeguard the archaeological heritage, asking the government to send a memorandum addressed to public officials and railway, bridge, and road engineers to: “Have the above-mentioned objects collected, as well as the fossil bones of antediluvian animals, which they could find in the works whose execution they are entrusted with, and to send them to the National Museum” (Carta..., 31 ago. 1876). Ceasing to consider the pre-Hispanic objects of the National Museum as simple antiques, Philippi published various articles about some anthropological collections, going beyond his role as a naturalist. Among his most outstanding works on the subject are: *Ídolos peruanos* (1879), “Antropología americana: una cabeza humana adorada como dios entre los jívaros (Ecuador): comunicación del doctor don Rodolfo A. Philippi” (1872), “Arqueología americana: sobre las piedras horadadas de Chile” (1884), “Aborígenes del Perú: artículo sobre sus perros” (1886b), “Aborígenes de Chile: artículo sobre un pretendido ídolo de ellos” (1886a), “Observaciones sobre una

clase de ornamentación prehistórica, y sobre pinzas prehistóricas” (1889). Specifically, in this last article, Philippi (1889) applies social evolutionism by comparing the “state of development” of the indigenous peoples of Caldera and their material culture, with the Slavs of Brandenburg, concluding that “at points so distant of the globe the industry had arrived to the same result, it continued using stone tools, when it had already managed to work copper or bronze, and, in the special case of the *changos* from northern Chile (an indigenous group) and the Brandenburg Slavs, both of them used the same shape and even the same size for their stone arrowheads and metal tweezers” (p.111). This is a typical case of the comparative perspective of social evolutionism during the nineteenth century, which positioned the peoples of the past on the same scale of development, using in this case their attributes of material culture related to their technological and artistic capabilities. In this sense, the discovery of America presented Europeans with an opportunity to compare distant barbarians with those closer to their places of origin, establishing a relationship between the modern and the ancient world through the study of customs that seemed to be similar (Schnapp, 2011). Like Medina, Philippi also used the work of Rivero and Tschudi, as a benchmark for contrast and comparison for the interpretation of the museum’s national and foreign material culture. Despite Philippi’s incursion in studying pre-Hispanic artifacts, he would develop a much more systematic work with natural history collections. The archaeological-ethnological exhibitions of the National Museum, such as the one in 1878 when the new building was inaugurated in the Quinta Normal, would be much more focused on antiquarianism and exoticism than on a coherent classification or interpretation of the peoples and cultures of the past (Garrido, 2018).

Beyond the interpretive framework of social evolutionism, the influences of classicism are also evident within the interpretation of the pre-Hispanic past of the Americas. During the nineteenth century, the comparison between the Inca and the Europeans became recurrent, as well as with other civilizations such as the Egyptian or the Etruscan. These interpretations have a partial origin in the humanistic education received by European and American archaeologists, antiquarians, and naturalists.

Characters such as Wilhem Reiss, Alphons Stübel, and Max Uhle compared the Inca past with the Greek and Roman one, considering them civilized people – due to their monumental works and political organization – and therefore, on the same level with classical cultures (Gänger, 2006). This attitude is also manifested in the interpretation of Peruvian antiquities, such as in the case of the collector Emilio Montes, who categorized his objects from Cuzco in relation to their similarities with the pieces found in the excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum. For Montes, the pottery of the Andes had reached a state of perfection equivalent to Greece or Etruria, by “being ‘identical’ in their forms, enamels, drawings, and reliefs to classical antiquities. The most expert eyes of European antiquarians had been wrong more than once in attributing a vessel from the *huacas* of Cuzco to the island of Pafos or the city of Cortona” (Gänger, 2014, p.59).

The advances in the archaeological excavations carried out in Pompeii and Herculaneum seemed to inspire the potential archaeological discoveries of the Inca culture. Thus, Rivero and Tschudi (1851, p.309) called on the scholars and artists of Peru to join forces with the government to unearth “Peruvian civilization from the dust that covers it, like Pompeii and

Herculaneum in the recent times, from the lava that buried them for so many centuries.” This reference highlights the impact that these excavations represented on the development of archaeology since that discovery meant seeing the past in a different way: excavation, restoration, and conservation were required on an industrial rather than artisanal scale, prefiguring archaeology in its modern sense (Schnapp, 2011).

The Chilean antiques were interpreted as pieces of lower artistic value compared to antiques that came from Peru. For Philippi, the level of the Mapuche pieces is inferior to the Peruvian ones. In his “Aborígenes de Chile: artículo sobre un pretendido ídolo de ellos,” he refutes the possibility that this idol, considered to be of higher artistic quality, is a piece buried in Chilean territory, but rather it could be a piece brought by Indians from Peru on an expedition (Philippi, 1886a). On the other hand, there are very few comparisons between the pre-Hispanic pieces found in Chile with the aesthetic referents of classical culture. Exceptionally, Philippi attributes to a white marble statue found in a *huaca* in Vichuquén the characteristics of a Greek idol, as a way of exalting the aesthetic value of the piece and describing it in terms that are relatively familiar to the public that visited the Museum.³ However, observations of this type are rare in the sources.

From a point of view oriented toward nationalism, after the War of the Pacific (1879-1883), there was polarity in the representation of the Inca empire from despotic and usurpers as in the case of the historian Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, to agents who brought civilization to a supposedly primitive local population, such as in Diego Barros Arana’s case (Pavez, 2015). Therefore, Chile would identify with a young culture comparable to Germania at the time of its confrontation with Rome, the empire that had already reached its decline (Gänger, 2011; Pavez, 2015). In this sense, the comparative history of the indigenous people provided academics with a mirror that allowed them to use the present to reflect on the past. Thus, the ancient Germanic cultures would be homologous to some American cultures, which would provide elements to understand better the original inhabitants of the non-Romanized areas of Europe (Schnapp, 2011).

In Chile, after this moment of nationalist boom and thanks to the emergence of disciplines such as archaeology and anthropology, it became imperative to determine the real extent of Inca influence on local cultures from an empirical point of view. This task was continued by new researchers such as Ricardo Latcham, Max Uhle, Tomás Guevara, and Aureliano Oyarzún during the first decades of the twentieth century, through the National Museum of Natural History and through the Museum of Ethnology and Anthropology (Polanco, Martínez, 2021).

Despite the influences of Chilean nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century, the National Museum continued to be interested in acquiring antiquities from Peru, due to the contribution they could make to the study of the pre-Hispanic material culture of South America. Thus, during this period, and in parallel to the intense archaeological work carried out in the new post-war Chilean territorial possessions (Gänger, 2009), the National Museum acquired a spectacular archaeological collection that belonged to the professor and antique dealer from Lima, Mr. Nicolás Sáenz.

The archaeological collection of Nicolás Sáenz

Nicolás Sáenz Bueno (1841-1896) was a professor and director of the Liceo Peruano in Lima, a private higher education institution,⁴ and one of the most important collectors of pre-Hispanic antiquities in Peru during the nineteenth century. In addition to Nicolás Sáenz, Ana María Centeno, Emilio Montes, José Caparó, José Condemarín, and Christian Gretzer stood out among the collectors of that country, all of whom classified their collections of antiquities as “Inca,” due to the lack of pre-Inca chronological knowledge (Ganger, 2014, 2018). At that time in Peru, the most important archaeological collections were in private hands rather than in state museums. Given the scarce resources and administrative problems of the National Museum of Lima during the nineteenth century (Asensio, 2018), this institution could not approach private collectors to acquire their collections, remaining in a marginal place in the development of archeology and the interpretation of the pre-Hispanic past.⁵ Although collectors possessed pre-Hispanic artifacts as “relics” of aesthetic enjoyment and as signs of social distinction (Asensio, 2018), they also had an important role in identifying their function, autochthonous names, and interpreting their use. However, as we have mentioned, they resorted to European classicism and Greco-Latin examples to highlight their aesthetic values and assess their importance (Gänger, 2014).

The collection of Nicolás Sáenz (Figure 1) had around 1,123 artifacts, where pottery represents 43.5% of the general total, followed by 27.4% of metal artifacts, 9.9% of textiles, 8.9% of wooden artifacts, 7% of lithic artifacts, among others represented in smaller percentages:

Table 1: Collection of Nicolás Sáenz

Artifacts category	Number of artifacts
Pottery	488
Metals	308
Textiles	111
Wooden artifacts	100
Lithic artifacts	79
Bone artifacts	21
Malacological	7
Pigments	3
Archaeofauna	2
Human teeth	1
Fossils	1
Vegetal fibers	1
Leather artifacts	1
General total	1,123

Source: Administrative Historical Archive/Museo Nacional de Historia Natural, Chile.



Figure 1: Archaeological pieces belonging to the collection of Nicolás Sáenz (Museo Nacional de Historia Natural Collection; photograph by Francisco Garrido; copyright-free image)

Most of the objects came from the northern coast of Peru and can be attributed to the Moche and Chimú cultures, although there are also Inca, Chancay, and Tiwanaku artifacts, among others. Regarding the origin of the collection, most of the pieces do not indicate the place where they were obtained; however, the towns of Trujillo and Chimbote are the most recorded locations. To a lesser extent, Santa, Piura, Ancón, Tacna, Cuzco, Pisco, Lambayeque, Puno, Casma, Nepeña, Lurín, Lima etc. are also mentioned. Despite the diverse origin of this collection both in time and geography, the collection was titled “Inca antiquities” at the time of its acquisition, following the ideas of the time. This situation is similar to the collection of José Mariano Macedo, in which despite being called Inca, only 5% of the total could be classified as such (Gänger, 2018). As a sign of authenticity and guarantee, most of the pottery vessels in the collection had a blue ink seal stamped on

their base saying “Antigüedades peruanas de Nicolás Sáenz” (Figure 2). However, Nicolás Sáenz did not participate directly in obtaining the objects of his collection, since when he was consulted in Chile by the commission of experts that recommended their purchase if any of the objects were excavated directly by him from “*huacas*,” Sáenz replied “none, all of them have been bought” (Informe..., 10 ene. 1896). Thus, we can see that Sáenz must have had contact with various intermediaries who sold him collections mainly from the north coast of Peru. On the other hand, the possession of the collection in his house, which was also a private high school, suggests that Sáenz could have used his collection as a pedagogical tool with students.



Figure 2: Ownership seal “Antigüedades peruanas de Nicolás Sáenz,” bottom view of a ceramic vessel from Trujillo (Museo Nacional de Historia Natural Collection; photograph by Francisco Garrido; copyright-free image)

The Nicolás Sáenz collection represented the Peruvian nation at the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1878 (Catálogo..., s.f.-b), in which even the Peruvian pavilion was inspired by the Inca and Tiwanaku architecture (Riviale, 2015). Later this collection was exhibited at the National Exhibition of October 1892, held in Lima as part of the fourth centenary of the discovery of America. Sáenz was part of the commissioners responsible for organizing the Archaeology and Anthropology Section of the exhibition and was also one of its main exhibitors (Rodríguez, 2016). The Sáenz collection shared space with the Montes and the Ortega collections, but due to its magnitude, it occupied an entire room at the Palacio de la Exposición. In the advertising for the exhibition, both collections were described as far superior to those of the best museums in the world, such as in the case of the Ethnological Museum of Berlin, and each of them easily exceeded \$100,000 soles

in price (Riviale, 2015). The objective of this exhibition of “antiquities” was to show the Inca past as a civilized but unfinished age, articulating a pre-Hispanic narrative in the image and likeness of the elites of that present (Rodríguez, 2016).

Although the great collectors of Peru were well-known public figures in their country, the possibility of acquiring resources and international recognition led to some of them to offer their collections to museums abroad. Also, there was in Europe and North America a romantic view about Inca antiquities, which helped create a highly demanded global market (Gänger, 2018). Among the most prominent were the collectors Mariano Macedo, Miguel Garcés, Emilio Montes, and Ana María Centeno, who negotiated the sale of their collections with the Ethnological Museum of Berlin, the Columbian Museum of Chicago, and the American Museum of Natural History (Gänger, 2014; Riviale, 2015). Nicolás Sáenz also tried to sell his collection to Berlin, writing several letters to the German ethnologist Adolf Bastian in 1888 (Gänger, 2014). In them, Sáenz (Carta..., 6 out. 1888) promoted his collection as “perhaps the most exclusive that has been formed until today..., because as my goal was none other than to study the civilization of the ancient Peruvians, not in their early beginnings, but in the time of their greatest advance. Therefore, I have only collected what concurred to my purpose.” The communication between Nicolás Sáenz and Adolf Bastian continued in 1889 when Sáenz sent a general catalog of four hundred objects from the collection together with example photographs, for which he asked for the sum of \$2,500 soles (Carta..., 23 abr. 1889). In the photographs delivered by Sáenz to Bastian,⁶ it can be seen how the archaeological pieces were mounted in a studio with a neutral cloth background and organized by categories such as *huacos*, portraits, pottery molds, metals, etc. The sale negotiation with the National Museum in Chile may have also involved the prior sending of photographs, but unfortunately, we have no evidence of this.

Apart from attempting sales to museums, Sáenz sold furniture, art, and antiques to private individuals through auctions. Dated May 18, 1886, Sáenz auctioned in his house at calle de la Caridad, cuadra Junín 194, antique “Luis XVI” style furniture covered in silk, “Luis XV” style covered in velvet, mirrors, tables, planters, rugs, oil paintings by “Basano, Pedro de Cortona, Rivero and Merino,” as well as natural history objects such as molluscs, physics instruments, busts of famous people and “antiquities of merit” (Remate..., 17 mayo 1886). We do not know if this type of sale was a frequent practice for Sáenz, but it is possible that due to the type of objects that include physics and natural history devices, he auctioned the objects of the high school that he directed at his residence.

The sale of the collection to the National Museum in Chile

As Stephanie Gänger (2014) has analyzed in detail, at the end of the nineteenth century, there was strong competition between international museums to ensure the possession of archaeological pieces from Peru, within an international process of commodification of pre-Hispanic “antiquities.” Within this framework, the National Museum of Chile, in charge of Philippi, had in its sights collections that were disputed by museums in the US and Europe. This was a way of internationalizing the museum and maintaining a cosmopolitan standard.

Although we do not know the exact details of how Nicolás Sáenz encountered Rodulfo Philippi to offer the collection, the latter possibly obtained information about Sáenz's collection from Adolf Bastian, with whom he had been in contact since the 1870s (Philippi, 1870). After the failure of the sale of the collection to Berlin, Nicolás Sáenz proposed the sale of his collection to the Chilean government for the National Museum. The sale process started in November 1895, when he traveled from Lima to Santiago with his family and his collection.⁷ In Santiago, his collection would be evaluated by a committee of experts, who would decide on the convenience of its purchase. The interest of the Ministry of Public Instruction in acquiring this collection for the National Museum was such that it was decided that the government would pay for the expenses of handling, freight, and installation of the objects in the country (Carta..., 20 nov. 1895). Among such expenses, there was the trip of Nicolás Sáenz and his family to Chile (Carta..., 27 abr. 1896).

It is interesting to analyze some of the main points that Sáenz promoted in the catalog that accompanied the offering of the collection to the National Museum, in which the description and list of artifacts are combined with some notes and interpretations about them. The heading of the catalog begins by saying that the origin of most of the objects is from the Chimbote region, while the copper and silver objects were from Pachacamac. In the final part of the catalog, Sáenz gives an account of the recognition received by his collection at the National Exhibition in Lima, the offer price at which he offered it to the museum, the years it took to put together this collection, and the guarantee of its authenticity: "This exclusive collection, which won first prize at the Exhibition of [18]92, has cost me four thousand pounds (£4,000) and twenty years of work, and is being sold at a 50% loss, that is for £ 2,000 guaranteeing its authenticity" (Catálogo..., s.f.-a).

Regarding the description that Nicolás Sáenz makes of the objects in his collection, his mention of figurative pottery stands out, whose pieces represent daily activities of the past: "For the most part figures that represent men, animals, customs, utensils of all kinds, interesting allegories" (Catálogo..., s.f.-a). Most of the objects have only a generic name such as "idol," "ring," "head ornament," "little pot," "glass," "plate," "mortar," "fabrics" etc. However, on some objects, there is a longer description with an explanation of their use. Among these, the "ear lobe expanders" stand out, which, being rare, appear with a more extensive definition: "Those thick cylinders that the Indians used as earrings are called ear lobe expanders (*orejeras*). These ear lobe expanders have a large disk on the front, carved and inlaid if they are made of wood and chiseled when they are made of metal" (Catálogo..., s.f.-a). In other cases, the description is more extensive to account for the function of the artifact: "Wide rings with bells that, placed on a stick, work like rattles. Two of these represent deer whose heads are very correct" (Catálogo..., s.f.-a). In another case, Sáenz highlights the unique character of an instrument: "34cm long porphyrite rolling mill. This extremely rare instrument, more perfect than the *chamborote* still used by some silversmiths, has attracted the attention of antique dealers. It is the only one that has been found in the huacas until today" (Catálogo..., s.f.-a). In the same way, Sáenz compares some of his pieces with those of other collectors to highlight their value, as in the case of a mosaic: "Owl, precious mosaic of malachite, lapis lazuli, iron pyrite, gold, and shell. A mosaic inferior to this one, which represents an idol, was bought in Cuzco

by Don Emilio Montes for 800 pesos and he recently sold it to the collector Dr. Caparo Muñoz, from Cuzco, for 20 American eagles” (Catálogo..., s.f.-a). Finally, a piece of metal and ropes from the north coast of Peru, Sáenz interpreted it as a *quipu*, emphasizing the Inca character of the collection: “Adornment to be worn around the neck. It consists of strings of beads of different sizes, which are attached to a silver rod, with copper tweezers and mother-of-pearl fish at the bottom. This piece must be a *quispus* [sic] or the history of a family” (Catálogo..., s.f.-a).

When the collection arrived at the National Museum in Santiago, it was necessary to build shelves and pay workers for their construction, for which the sum of \$49.95 was spent (Carta..., 24 jan. 1896). In the meantime, a group of experts was commissioned to carry out its evaluation. The commission members were Mr. Rodulfo A. Philippi, Joaquín Santa Cruz, Julio Bañados Espinosa, Luis Montt, and José Toribio Medina, who had the aim of “informing about its merit and the convenience of acquiring it, indicating the price that could be paid for it” (Carta..., 30 dic. 1895).

Beyond the assessment of the patrimonial merit of the collection, it was important to set the price as soon as possible “to request the funds from the Congress in time (for) when they discuss the current yearly budget” (Carta..., 3 ene. 1896).

The evaluation of the collection by the committee was made during the first days of January 1896. Its acquisition was approved, arguing that many of the objects offered had not been previously represented in the National Museum, with particular emphasis on those of silver and gold. However, the report also argues that:

We have noticed at the same time serious defects that greatly diminish its value. No object has a sign indicating its origin and there is no catalog of the objects... (and about the purchase of objects from third parties) ... this explains how there is in the collection, especially in the pottery part, a very large number of objects, perhaps half, which in the unanimous opinion of the commission are forgeries; Mr. Sáenz has been cruelly deceived by the manufacturers and sellers of antiques. Thus, to give a few examples, a glass used to this day in Spain, figures with mustaches, and four trumpets made of pottery; Among the fabrics, a good part is of very recent manufacture, surely, they have not been buried for four centuries in the *huacas*. We believe it is superfluous to go into more details (Carta..., 24 ene. 1896).

For this reason, the commission estimated that it would only be advisable to buy the collection at a price not exceeding 1,500 sterling pounds, instead of the two thousand requested by Sáenz. It is relevant to realize that the criteria used to guarantee the authenticity of the collection were mainly based on the knowledge of pre-Hispanic Andean artifacts from the National Museum, as well as on the aforementioned Peruvian Antiquities catalog by Rivero and Tschudi (1851). For this reason, some statements such as that of the “pottery trumpets” that were considered as forgeries, reflect the lack of knowledge of the Moche ceramic trumpets. The same is true of the characters with mustaches, which in many cases can represent a figure with a metal nose ring from the same culture or some Nazca character. The supposed presence of forgeries in the collection led the committee to lower the offered price, but, interestingly, such pieces were not removed from the collection and remain until today in the National Museum of Natural History.

Given the go-ahead for the purchase of the collection, the acquisition process began. We do not know the details of the negotiation with Nicolás Sáenz, but he finally accepted the offer at some point during 1896. Unfortunately for Sáenz, his health worsened during his stay in Santiago, dying on November 19 at 8 p.m. due to a “cervical carcinoma,” a tumor in the neck (Certificado..., 1896). Due to this type of illness, it is plausible to think that he may have begun to show symptoms before he arrived in Chile, and that was also one of the reasons that motivated him to offer his collection, daring to travel with it to a foreign country.

The death of Nicolás Sáenz was an adverse situation for the family, who had to be recognized as his legal heirs in order to continue with the sale process. Finally, on March 6, 1897, the decree number 539 resolved the following:

The fiscal treasury of Santiago will pay to Nicolás A. Sáenz heirs the sum of twenty thousand pesos (\$20,000) that the item 26 of entry 137 of the Public Instruction budget consigns for the purchase of a collection of Inca antiquities. This sum will be delivered once, through a certificate from the Director of the National Museum, the delivery of the aforementioned collection is verified. Errázuriz – Elías Fernández (Carta..., 6 mar. 1897).

Rodulfo Philippi was pleased with the purchase, congratulating how the “liberality of the supreme government has enriched the museum with extremely valuable collections” (Carta..., 24 abr. 1897).

Similarly, Philippi expressed that this collection of Peruvian antiquities “is the admiration of visitors” (Schell, 2009), despite their complaints about the lack of space necessary to fully exhibit it to the public. Over time, the Nicolás Sáenz collection became the center of the museum’s “American collection” and was exhibited in various forms until the 1980s. During the twentieth century, this collection was also part of exchanges to obtain new foreign collections. Thus, in 1930, the National Museum exchanged some archaeological artifacts with the Museum of the American Indian, which at that time belonged to the Heyes Foundation. At least six pieces from the Sáenz collection, which included two *keru* cups, a metal pin or *tupu*, and skeins of textile fiber, were part of the exchange. In this way, the museum obtained an important number of archaeological artifacts from the US and Central America, which allowed the institution’s collection to be further diversified and internationalized.

While new collections from Peru continued sporadically arriving at the museum in later times, the purchase of the Sáenz collection marked a final cycle of major acquisitions of collections from the central Andes. After that, much of the new archaeological explorations would focus on the northern territories acquired after the War of the Pacific, as a way of “conquering” a new past for the Chilean nation (Gänger, 2009).

Final considerations

By studying the case of the Sáenz collection in terms of its acquisition and the role played by foreign collections in the interpretation of the national past, we can explore the

scientific paradigms of antiquarianism and collecting practices in their transition towards the professionalization of archaeology. The institutional consolidation of the National Museum in Chile gave it a relevant role in the creation of a “pre-history,” going beyond the information provided by the writings of the Hispanic chronicles. This was mainly because of the use of the comparative method derived from social evolutionism of the nineteenth century, by which the Chilean cultures were classified within evolutionary stages that were not free from a large dose of scientific racism regarding the understanding of the local indigenous world.

The work of José Toribio Medina was the main attempt to use in Chile the Thomsen Three Age System, popularized by Lubbock. In this way, pre-Hispanic northern Chile was positioned in the Bronze Age, while the southern region was positioned in the Stone Age. The first region was represented by the Incas, from whom it became necessary to have representative collections that would complement the scarce bibliographic information about their material culture.

In parallel, a line of classicist interpretation is manifested during the nineteenth century when the Inca antiquities were compared with the artistic perfection of the classical Greco-Roman culture, establishing a contrast with the material remains of the pre-Hispanic cultures of southern Chile. Paradoxically, the prevailing nationalism after the War of the Pacific, assimilated the Inca legacy as part of a decadent empire like ancient Rome, while Chile was identified with a young Germania. This was a stimuli to search for new empirical answers on the Inca influence in the Chilean territory and a more exhaustive study of the material culture of the Andean peoples.

The Sáenz collection represents the culmination of an intellectual project, which was not free from colonialism in the explanation of the supposedly more primitive character of the pre-Hispanic inhabitants of the south compared to those of the north, while the victory in the War of the Pacific contributed to close the symbolic cycle of the “Peruvian conquest” during the Inca times. While this process was happening in Chile, it is important to note that, in Peru, only after the War of the Pacific the Incas became a fundamental part of an ethnic nationalism that conceived them as “national ancestors,” promoting the idea of continuity between the imperial splendor of the past and the present (Gänger, 2018).

Although the National Museum hosted, before the Sáenz collection, various pre-Hispanic artifacts from Peru, we believe that their acquisition was conceived as a natural step in the museum’s mission and its role in exhibiting the evolutionary development of the Andes. However, the acquisition of the Sáenz collection occurred just when the study and exploration of the territories obtained after the War of the Pacific ended up displacing the direct acquisition of collections from the central Andes to a second place (Gänger, 2009). Indeed, in 1897, Rodulfo Philippi left the direction of the museum in the hands of his son Federico, who, unlike his father, moved away from the study of pre-Hispanic cultures. Although the National Museum had established in its 1889 regulations that it would have two divisions, natural history and ethnography, it would not be until the 1910s when an area of anthropology was implemented, whose first person in charge would be Leotardo Matus. During that period, important new actors appeared in the local archaeological panorama, such as Max Uhle, Martín Gusinde, and Aureliano Oyarzún from the Museum

of Ethnology and Anthropology. They would compete with the monopoly of the National Museum in the interpretation of the national past (Polanco, Martínez, 2021).

In this way, both the Peruvian and the rest of the international collections were acquired as part of the growth of the institution and contributed to creating new scientific knowledge during the nineteenth century. These collections gave way to a new interpretation of pre-Hispanic antiquities, in which Chile’s indigenous past could be placed in comparison to a regional and global scale of development, contrasting with the self-image of advancement and civilization of the nineteenth-century urban elite.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank doctor Stefanie Gänger for her kindness in providing us with notes from the documents about Nicolás Sáenz placed in the Ethnologisches Museum (Berlin) and the Archivo Nacional del Perú. We appreciate the support of the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural (Chile) for the use of its archive and anthropological collections. Funding received: Fondecyt initiation n.11170033; Agencia Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo (ANID).

NOTES

¹ Currently the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural (MNHN), since 1929.

² In this and other citations of texts from non-English languages, a free translation has been provided.

³ “Stone and copper axes; a small white marble idol, representing the seated God with his legs grasped near the knees; the hairstyle is like that of the Greek idols; It was found in a *huaca* near Vichuquén along with jars, pots and plates (Guía..., 1878, p.35).

⁴ The Peruvian Liceo was located at Calle de Junín, number 194, Lima (Holtig, 1876), and is different from the Peruvian Liceo del Callao, founded in 1883 by Elvira García y García, which was one of the first female public education institutions from Peru.

⁵ The National Museum ceased to function after the occupation of Lima in 1880. The next museum that reinvigorated the Peruvian state’s interest in archeology would be the National History Museum (Museo Nacional de Historia), created in 1905 (Asensio, 2018).

⁶ The photographs of the Sáenz collection received by Adolf Bastian are available in the digital collections of the Ethnological Museum of Berlin and can be consulted at <http://www.smb-digital.de/> under the search term “Nicolas Saenz.” The photographer was Rafael Castillo de Lima, the same one who took the studio photographs from the Mariano Macedo collection sent to Berlin (Gänger, 2014).

⁷ Nicolás Sáenz and his family lived at 5A Gálvez Street, now Zenteno Street, downtown Santiago.

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