

The Making of Place :
Myth and Memory at the site of Tiwanaku, Bolivia

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Abstract. The sacred site of Tiwanaku, Bolivia, the first major city-state in the Central Andes, has, for almost 3,000 years, been appropriated for various intents by the Inca, the Spanish, the Bolivian state, European travelers, spiritualists, and the indigenous Aymara people who claim the World Heritage site as their ancestral home. Investing the site with meanings, myths, memories, each group has created – or re-created – the spirit of the site of Tiwanaku. Today, the site of Tiwanaku continues to be a vortex of competing claims and a location for multiple intangible heritages, such as Aymara cultural ceremonies and modern music videos; a newly-created solstice festival that is held yearly at the site; and, arguably, the rituals of archaeology and world heritage. This paper traces the making of place and heritage: how, from its inception through today, multiple histories and collective memories have physically altered the site of Tiwanaku, impacting its excavation, conservation, and presentation; and how intangible acts shape the tangibility of place.

The World Heritage site of Tiwanaku, located near the border between Bolivia and Peru, dominated the Central Andes between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1000, its political and cultural influence spreading far into what is present day Peru, Chile and Argentina. Utilized by the Inca in the 15th century and appropriated to justify their own powerful empire; a source of awe and building material to the conquering Spanish in the 16th century (who by dismantling the site also sought to destroy the myths and historic memory associated with it); the subject of inspired travelers' accounts for hundreds of years; the focus of Bolivian pride since the 20th century; and more recently, the symbolic location of Aymara identity, the site of Tiwanaku exemplifies the

concept of “place-making”, as it has been continually created and re-created for thousands of years. Tiwanaku continues today to be a site of contention and multiple visions—claimed by the local Aymara people who believe it to be their ancestral home; considered a place of national pride and importance to the nation of Bolivia (indeed, almost every schoolchild visits the site); visited by thousands of foreign tourists a year, many of whom come to experience a newly-created version of a traditional solstice festival; and highly valued by archaeologists hoping to understand the Tiwanaku civilization.

Among the different cultural, political and research groups invested in the site, the most vocal has been Bolivia’s Aymara-speakers, who perform sacrifices and religious rituals at the site. In 2001, the ancient site was taken over by the Aymara in a violent struggle with the government as part of the Aymara demand for recognition of their autonomous territory and the Aymara Nation. The belief that the site of Tiwanaku is the Aymara ancestral homeland is strongly embraced among the Aymara people. As the anthropologists Denise Arnold and Juan de Dios Yapita observe, “Even young urban musicians of Aymara descent like to flaunt themselves in front of Tiwanaku’s ‘Gateway of the Sun’ in their digital videos” (2005:146). The incorporation of this nationally significant monument by young Aymara artists, in such a contemporary medium, illustrates the competing uses of the site of Tiwanaku and exemplifies the fluctuating relationship between the tangible and intangible that occurs at this site.

This paper will examine how the history of use, appropriation, excavation, reconstruction, presentation, and interpretation, has altered the physicality of the site of Tiwanaku through time; and how the site that is presented to us today is a confluence of tangible and intangible forces. These multiple heritages, set within a context of competing claims, ideologies, and interests, must be taken into account when addressing the issues of conservation and management that face the site of Tiwanaku. An understanding of how the site of Tiwanaku is made is crucial if any management plan is to succeed.

The Making of a Place AD 500 – AD 1400 : the Tiwanaku

The first true city-state of the south-central Andes, the site of Tiwanaku was designed to impress its visitors. Beginning as a small

settlement around 1200 B.C. and located on a flat Altiplano about 20 km from the south shore of Lake Titicaca, the site of Tiwanaku rapidly expanded into a small town. Raised-field agriculture supported increased food production, encouraged population growth and the development of organized labor, leading to the development of large settlements, social stratification, and craft specialization (Binford et al. 1997). State-sponsored religious ceremonies and practices transformed the site of Tiwanaku into a vast ceremonial center that materialized into a distinct artistic style, expressed in architecture, sculpture, textiles, metalwork, and ceramics. Recent investigations support the interpretation of the site of Tiwanaku as a major planned city with a large urban and regional population (Stanish 2002). The site of Tiwanaku is largely defined by and revered for its remote location. Despite the harsh environment, some researchers believe the site of Tiwanaku's location is deliberately due to the site's orientation to four major geographical features, as well as its arrangement among countless other peaks, that contribute to the dramatic vistas.

When the Tiwanaku Empire declined around A.D. 1000, many of the site's monuments and ritual complexes were intentionally dismantled and destroyed, including important religious symbols, gateways, and sculpture, possibly by the departing inhabitants themselves to promote forgetting (Janusek 2005:191-92).

The Making of Multiple Places 1400 – 1950 : Reappropriation

The site of Tiwanaku had been abandoned for hundreds of years when the Inca arrived in the middle of the 15th century. Using the architectural remains of the site to justify their claims for divinity and initial creation, the Inca redefined the site of Tiwanaku, in essence, as the place of their birth. Creating a mythic story, the Inca believed the sculptures of human forms found at the site were the first Andes people created by the Inca deity Viracocha, who made the first Incans out of clay. Appropriated by the Inca people, the region around Lake Titicaca became an important center for Incan power. In fact, the Inca built a palace among the ruins of Tiwanaku in order to associate themselves with the status of the Tiwanaku Empire (Kolata 2003).

When the Spanish colonists arrived in 1525, they were amazed at the scale and age of the monumental architecture at the site of

Tiwanaku and mined the site for valuable precut stone to build their own church, among other structures, in the modern-day town of Tiahuanaco (Janusek 2005). Additionally, intentional destruction of the site's monuments and the elaborately carved sculptures was a way for the Spanish to wipe out the tangible evidence of what they saw as paganism, and to establish power over the area's population by dismantling of the memory and myth of the Tiwanaku and Inca cultures.

Over the next few centuries, numerous European travelers visited the site. Scientific investigation, including the first archaeological research, began in the mid-to-late 19th century, fueled by growing European interests in natural history and ancient cultures (Young-Sanchez 2004). The archaeological studies of Tiwanaku began with Ephraim George Squier's survey of the site in the 1860's. Squier, an American journalist and archaeologist, interpreted the site as a sparsely populated ceremonial center, an interpretation that dominated Tiwanaku studies until the middle of the twentieth-century (Kolata 1993).

The German researchers Max Uhle and Alphonse Stübel published a more scientific and detailed account of the site of Tiwanaku in 1892. Uhle, distressed at the looting and state of conservation of the site, wrote a letter to the Bolivian government in which he discussed seeing stonework from Tiwanaku used for the church, private houses, and other buildings in town, and requested permission to bring stonework back to Berlin for safekeeping. Even more shocking to Uhle, however, was witnessing the Bolivian army using the "best figure" at the site of Tiwanaku as a mark for target practice (Loza, unpublished). Uhle's letter, however, was also possibly written for other motives: museums in both Europe and the United States wanted to acquire sculpture and monuments from the site of Tiwanaku and Uhle hoped to bring some of the monoliths back to Berlin.

Between the turn of the 20th century and the 1940s, a number of researchers have shaped the physicality of the site through excavation, and impacted readings of the site through varying interpretations. In 1903, Arthur Posnansky, a German born Bolivian citizen, began extensive study of the site and introduced the theory that American civilization originated from Tiwanaku, then disseminated throughout South, Central and Northern America (Kolata 1993). During the

1930s, the excavator Wendell Bennett uncovered a massive stele which became the subject of an enduring political struggle between the Aymara and the Bolivian government. The government moved the stele to downtown La Paz against Aymara wishes, where it was severely damaged by air pollution, traffic, and bullet marks, a victim of numerous uprisings and wars. So heavily damaged, the monument was installed in the site museum upon its return.

The Making of a Place 1950 – 2000 : Nationalism and Beyond

Bolivian supervision and involvement in archaeological research at the site of Tiwanaku did not occur until the 1950s. As a direct response to the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), which gained control of the Bolivian government in 1952, the excavations, led by party member and archaeologist Carlos Ponce Sangines, focused on creating a national emblem for Bolivia. The ultimate goal of the excavations was documentation and exposition of the structures in order to promote tourism. Propelled by governmental request as well as his own staunch nationalistic ideology, Ponce Sangines reconstructed architectural elements and discarded any architectural features that were not considered sufficiently monumental. A new interpretation of the site arose from these excavations which declared the site of Tiwanaku a major pre-Inca urban center by calculating the total area of occupation and the estimated population density, discarding the previous perception of the site as only a religious center (Isbell and Vranich 2004). Ponce Sangines, overall, wanted to present the site of Tiwanaku as a monumental apogee of Bolivian civilization and history—a site that could compare with Peru's Machu Picchu.

In 1978, Alan Kolata began a project sponsored by the Bolivian National Institute of Archaeology (INAR) to explore Tiwanaku's hinterland. This multidisciplinary study investigated technology and agricultural production through the excavations of smaller hamlets, subsidiary sites, and raised fields in the Tiwanaku area (Kolata 1993). Reflecting larger trends in archaeological research abroad concerning the archaeology of landscape, this project expanded the boundaries of the site beyond its monumental core, enlarging the region of interest to the larger Tiwanaku area and its landscape.

While the site of Tiwanaku has been studied, excavated, and reconstructed for over one hundred years, very little attention has been directed towards the conservation of the site or its monuments. In 1987, the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) offered a course at the site of Tiwanaku in the field conservation of objects and buildings. Reflecting broader interests in the management of archaeological sites, this workshop included a proposal for the conservation of one of the complexes, an analysis of the current tourist flow and its impact on the site, and recommendations for improving the visitor experience (DINAR 1989). Presently, archaeologists from the University of Pennsylvania excavations are applying some of these recommendations, including supporting exposed excavation trench walls with adobe and filling in gaps of the architecture with adobe so that visitors and researchers can observe the difference between ancient and modern construction and material (Vranich 2006a).

Despite these efforts, an ICOMOS statement of September 2000 declared that “little, if any, conservation has taken place.” (ICOMOS 2000) ‘Conservation work’ has been focused on the confiscation of specific artifacts deemed important works of art and the reconstruction of certain monuments. The Kalasasaya Platform was reconstructed by Ponce Sangines in the 1950s and 1960s as a direct response to the Bolivian nationalist movement to create a national site that would attract tourism. Some scholars, however, question the accuracy of this reconstruction. Likewise, the monumental Gateway of the Sun, the most emblematic structure of the site, had been partially restored by the Ponce Sangines team in the 1950s, and the authenticity of its present location is in question by scholars.

In the year 2000, Tiwanaku was listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. This listing has brought worldwide attention to the site, as well as contributing to the national pride felt by Bolivians about their site and perhaps increased interest by the Aymara.

Through the years, Tiwanaku’s origins became fodder for the strange. The creation of the site has been attributed to such causes as aliens and a moon crashing, among other theories. Additionally, thousands of visitors come to the site every year, many for the summer solstice to watch the sun rise over the monuments at Tiwanaku. This mass influx of visitors directly impacts the monuments and the conservation of the site, affecting visitor experience and material conditions. To provide easier access to

tourists, two highways were built across a portion of the site, destroying remains and detracting further from the monumental setting.

Tiwanaku Today

The appearance of the site of Tiwanaku today is the result of a millennium of growth and construction, including several building campaigns, centuries of abandonment, extensive looting of stone for building materials, reconstructions, and excavations. During the early 20th century, a railroad was built through the site of Tiwanaku, further denigrating the site and increasing the rate of pillage (Isbell and Vranich 2004). A combination of severe destruction through looting, uncontrolled and unmanaged development surrounding the site, limited management of the site itself, and irresponsible excavations and reconstructions have resulted in a site with serious problems of erosion, illegibility, and poor conservation.

Today's visitors to the site of Tiwanaku encounter a rather empty expanse of reconstructed temples and fields of large stones. The site of Tiwanaku, composed mainly of a monumental core, contains architectural remains that, while certainly impressive, do not necessarily inspire great awe, as they once did. Recent research hypothesizes that the role of the architecture was not to inspire visitors on its own; rather the role of the monuments was to harmonize with the landscape and the magnificent views of the mountains and the then-nearby lake (Vranich 2006b). Uncontrolled development of the modern town of Tiahuanaco, however, is threatening the view sheds from the pre-Columbian site. Additionally, questionable reconstructions, ongoing excavation, and poorly planned visitor accoutrements, such as modern staircases, barbed wire fences, and cement platforms, not only create an unattractive site, but an inauthentic one as well.

In recent years, there have been more concerted efforts to protect the site and collaborate internationally. This has included cooperation with other Andean states and the adoption of international cultural charters established by ICOMOS and UNESCO. However, authority turnover makes the effective implementation of these resolutions a difficult task. Additionally, rapid agency re-organization complicates the situation even further. Overall responsibility for the management

of the archaeological remains at Tiwanaku have generally been the responsibility of the government's department of archaeology (DINAR), while other areas of the UNESCO World Heritage nominated area are still managed by the Roman Catholic Church as well as private individuals (ICOMOS 2000). However, in 2001, after years of disagreement with the national government, the Aymara people took over the site of Tiwanaku and the Municipality of Tiwanaku now makes all management decisions regarding the site, including the approval of excavation permits after they are issued and approved by DINAR (Vranich 2006a).

The importance of the site of Tiwanaku to the Aymara people may be further illuminated by two events. The Bennett Stele was moved into downtown La Paz on July 3, 1932 despite outrage by the local Aymara (Arnold and Yapita 2005). After years of conflict and protest by the Aymara, the Bennett Stele was returned to the site of Tiwanaku in March 2002 in an elaborate processional culminating in a traditional ceremony at the site. And in January 2006, Evo Morales became president of Bolivia. The first Bolivian president of Aymara descent, Morales held his inauguration ceremony at the site of Tiwanaku, dressed in traditional ceremonial robes, and standing in front of Tiwanaku's emblematic monuments.

Despite the competing claims over the site of Tiwanaku, recognition exists by the Aymara of the benefits offered by other interest groups. Although the Aymara attempt to defend their political and cultural interests in the site of Tiwanaku against competing nationalist and World Heritage claims, the Aymara acknowledge that "if it were not for the vigilance of international organizations that have claimed the site [Tiwanaku] as World Patrimony, 'it would have been dismantled already'" (Aymara Today 2001).

Conclusion

Tiwanaku began as a vast ceremonial city-state, dominating much of the central Andes until AD 1000, when its carefully constructed buildings and elaborately carved stone monuments were desecrated, possibly by the Tiwanaku themselves. Both the Inca and the Spanish used Tiwanaku to support their own claims to power, the Inca by building within the existing site and the Spanish by destroying it. Visitors and foreign archaeologists have studied, excavated and

interpreted the site to suit their own intentions and world view, and subsequently strong Bolivian nationalism re-formulated the monuments to fit a nationalist identity. The formalized rituals of archaeology and cultural heritage have contributed to the myth of Tiwanaku by calling it a World Heritage Site in 2000, and in the process increased pressure by both the Bolivian government and the Aymara people to call it their own. The Aymara people, who claimed the site in an extremely tangible way—through violent uprising in 2001—maintain the strongest modern collective memory to the site, as the direct descendents of the Tiwanaku people.

Archaeological sites are formed, and transformed, over time, from countless forces. Thus, understanding the agents that have shaped the site of Tiwanaku in the past, and which forces continue to do so, is integral to the present day presentation and interpretation of the site as well as for making recommendations regarding its future conservation and management. The culmination of the creation and re-creation of these multiple heritages is how the site comes to us today. Any plan for the presentation of the site must include the palimpsest of history represented by the entire site of Tiwanaku, through time, both by its creators and its users.

The site of Tiwanaku and its monuments are at great risk. Lack of previous conservation efforts, inconsistent and short-sighted management decisions, irresponsible excavations and reconstructions, and lack of cooperation between invested parties, has resulted in a site that has been called “disappointing.” Tiwanaku is one of the most important archaeological sites in South America. Cooperation, on the local, national, and international levels, is direly needed in order to insure the long-term preservation of the site of Tiwanaku.

Archaeologists, researchers, the world heritage community, the national Bolivian government, and the local Aymara population need to work together to insure the appropriate stewardship of Tiwanaku, a site that means so much to so many.

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