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INTRODUCTION

Tikal in Guatemala, Machu Picchu in Peru, Marajó in Brazil, broken pots or stone axes in grandma's kitchen hut, most anywhere in Native South American or Mesoamerican villages . . . Many if not most contemporary Amerindian peoples live surrounded by ruins, relics, and other vestiges of the past. Some, such as pyramids, fortresses, or petroglyphs, are tokens of bygone splendor. Others are mere heaps of stone or modest pottery sherds half buried in backyards, swidden gardens, or the garbage piles of abandoned villages. Some are major tourist attractions, well-maintained or even revered; others are simply ignored, by locals and foreigners alike, or even feared, strictly avoided or kept secret. Such places are subject to elaborate narratives, surrounded by sophisticated beliefs, and loci of ritual activity, all of which have heretofore received insufficient attention. This volume aims to fill that gap by exploring Native South American and Mesoamerican peoples' perceptions and conceptions of ruins and other highly significant traces of the past. Our title, *Living Ruins*, emphasizes the fact that many Amerindians live in close proximity to such places and traces. It also alludes to these places' intrinsic "aliveness," antiquities (including ruins) often being endowed with agency of their own or secondhand animacy brought about by spirits entrapped in them. For better or for worse, vestiges are therefore both something you live with or near and also something with a life of their own.

*Living Ruins and
Vertiginous Vestiges*

*Amerindian Engagements
with Remnants of the Past*

PHILIPPE ERIKSON AND
VALENTINA VAPNARSKY

<https://doi.org/10.5876/9781646422869.c000>

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In recent years, the study of cultural heritage has become a major issue (Stefano and Davis 2016), and conservation or management of the so-called “sacred” sites and landscapes of the Americas has attracted increasing scholarly interest (Bassie-Sweet 2008; Liljeblad and Verschuuren 2019). In the aftermath of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990, the issue of cultural affiliation in relation to Native peoples’ engagement with sites has triggered lively debates in the United States (Liebmann 2008). An important body of work has probed the extent to which procedures leading to cultural heritage are enmeshed with ethnic demands and Indigenous revival movements, ruins playing an essential role in this process (Sarmiento and Hitchner 2017). Community-based archaeology—along with its variants known as collaborative, intercultural, or multicultural archaeology—has also been booming, even deep in the Amazon rainforest (Cabral 2015; Schaan 2012). As a result, interaction between archaeologists and Native communities has been closely scrutinized, highlighting the ambivalence and multiplicity of these relationships, as well as the extent to which archaeological work has sometimes transformed the way Indigenous people envision their landscape, ethnicity, and history (Castañeda 1996; Gnecco and Ayala 2016; McAnany 2016; Smith and Wobst 2005). Several books explore the issue of past conceptions of ruins, especially in Mesoamerica (Kristan-Graham and Amrhein 2015; Stanton and Magnoni 2008). Ours is therefore not the first edited volume to examine Indigenous perceptions of ruins—or vestiges, as we prefer to call them to acknowledge the well-known fact that “authentic ruins” exist only as a product of modernity (Hell and Schönle 2009). However, such topics have been tackled mostly by archaeologists, with more weight placed on bygone rather than contemporary societies. Other contributions have generally come from scholars whose interests lie in geography, environmental studies, history, political science, sociology, or cultural studies (DeSilvey and Edensor 2013; Kaltmeier and Rufer 2016; Lazzara and Unruh 2009). Very little research has concentrated specifically on emic perspectives on vestiges, and most studies have focused on ethical and methodological matters rather than Indigenous narratives and perspectives. Insights from social and cultural anthropologists, with long-term commitment to deep ethnography, are still too rare and much in need.

This volume emerged from a major research program devoted to heritage and patrimonialization (or cultural heritagization) in Amerindian societies, with a strong emphasis on emic perspectives.¹ An international array of anthropologists, all experienced fieldworkers with strong command of vernacular languages, spent several years exchanging ideas about Amazonian, Andean, and Central American regimes of historicity. Particular attention was paid to how recently

imported Western concepts such as folklore, heritage, and culture were incorporated into Native narratives and traditional ways of reconstructing and relating to the past (Ariel de Vidas and Hirtzel, forthcoming; Charlier and Vapnarsky 2017). The underlying conceptions of space and various theories of knowledge and materiality were also closely scrutinized. Along the way, an increasingly complex picture of ruins, vestiges, and other salient loci of remembrance gradually emerged from our collective endeavor. That led to this book, which aims to decenter and decolonize—and thereby recenter and revernacularize—the study of relationships between Indigenous people and the vestiges they live among. Our main goal is to draw a more meaningful portrait of Amerindian peoples’ practices, discourses, and ideologies in relation to ruins, relics, and other vestiges, as envisioned from their own perspectives.

None of the authors are themselves members of Indigenous communities but all have spent decades learning Amerindian languages and gaining in-depth, intimate knowledge of the people they have lived with and learned from. Even though research conducted by Indigenous people is a welcome step on the road toward decolonizing imperial Western knowledge (Chilisa 2012; Fabian 2006; Rivera Cusicanqui 2012), anthropology is certainly not about *being* or *becoming* Other (Brown 2003; Kuper 2003). Even when practiced by Native anthropologists, its endeavor is rather to *understand* alterity and, through cultural translation, to make such understanding cross-culturally accessible. This is not cultural extractivism or appropriation but, we hope, a way to preclude narcissistic solipsism and pave the way to comparative analysis. In other words, anthropology is about getting to know people well enough to grasp *their* point of view and empathetically explain social phenomena from *their* perspective. It is an exercise in reflexive open-mindedness and ideational cross-fertilization. In this respect, the use of academic metalanguage to rephrase Indigenous concepts stands out as the best way to make the “exotic” “intelligible.” However cumbersome, it is not meant to impose symbolic domination or a Western lens on Indigenous narratives but, on the contrary, to rid such narratives of what, inspired by Edward Said (1978), we might call the “orientalist” strings with which they come attached and acknowledge their sophistication. Ever since Boas, no better way has yet been found to celebrate cultural diversity and honor its complexity.

Another advantage of a methodology based on long-term commitment to extensive fieldwork is that it also wards off the predicament of what could be labeled “indigenized stereotype,” that is, the mere repetition of cultural clichés that bilingual consultants have learned to flatter their “gringo” interlocutors, feeding them what they know they want to hear and/or are able to understand.

What Alcida Ramos (1998) aptly labeled “the hyperreal Indian” (the idealized simulacrum of an “Indian” created in the image of the NGOs’ ethically perfect hologram) actually does exist . . . at least as a posture adopted for tourists or during superficial interviews. The contrast between what people tell each other in their native tongues and what they routinely tell outsiders when asked about the same topic is often enormous. This is particularly true when it comes to discussing foreign concepts such as cultural heritage and other interculturally sensitive issues.

REVISITING A FEW COMMON NOTIONS

Amerindian peoples maintain a vast array of attitudes and feelings with regard to vestiges, instantiated by ritual and nonritual acts as well as by explicit and implicit narratives. Yet, we often fail to perceive these because of false or stereotyped impressions brought about by our own conceptual toolkit. This invites us to question some of the pivotal terms of heritage studies. Specifically, we will concentrate on “ruins/vestiges,” “sacredness,” and “continuity.”

RUINS/VESTIGES

To start with, let us rehabilitate the concept of “vestiges,” which we suggest using on par with, if not in preference to, “ruins.” Most research on material traces of the past tends to concentrate on architectonic monuments. Yet such structures—usually abandoned, destroyed, or diverted from their original function, and often eroded and damaged by the passage of time—are far from being the only ones worthy of remembrance or invested with commemorative value. Natural elements such as mountains, boulders, waterfalls, lakes, and large trees are just as liable to emerge as pointers to past events. As one of our authors once phrased it, history can also be written in the landscape (Santos-Granero 1998), even if some of the markers are sometimes barely perceptible, covered by forest regrowth or layers of topsoil. Geoglyphs and mounds, palm groves, layers of pottery sherds, and even anthropogenic dark soils are some of the many other remnants or traces just as worthy of study as temples, pyramids, or palaces (Virtanen and Stoll, chapter 5). Even the seemingly spontaneous emergence of cultivars in Amazonian swidden gardens elicits numerous comments, being (correctly) assumed by Amerindians, such as the Makushi or the Matis, to be the product of past agricultural activity (Rival and McKey 2008). Plants can also be remainders, and thereby reminders, of the past.²

To take into account such variety, the term *vestiges* is often more adequate than *ruins*. *Vestiges* comes from the Latin *vestigium*, “a step’s imprint,” “a human or animal footprint,” and this etymology points to the more general notion of “trace.” In more recent times, in the wake of Romanticism, the term *vestiges* has taken on the meaning of what remains of something that has disappeared or been destroyed (Stoler 2008). This places emphasis on what no longer is, to the detriment of an indexical relation to a living presence, obscuring the fact that this indexical function is precisely what often makes vestiges so salient in Amerindian cultures. Throughout this volume, wherever Amerindian engagement with historicity is at stake, the term *vestiges* should be read with this etymology in mind, all romanticism aside.

SACREDNESS/SACRALITY

Many writings on Amerindian conceptions of remnants of the past, especially pertaining to North America, highlight their so-called “sacredness” and the ensuing defilement that any form of trespassing on the part of outsiders might lead to (Sarmiento and Hitchner 2017). Yet, terms such as *sacred* or *sacredness* usually refer to very poorly defined notions used as catchall phrases by many scholars (as well as Amerindian stakeholders) when dealing with ruins or symbolically significant sites and landscapes. These notions, despite their long life in anthropology (Dehouve 2018), are not only fuzzy but have also been imbued with semantic and pragmatic thickness by colonial missionary conversions and recent evangelization processes. They have also been promoted on the world heritage scene by the UNESCO label “sacred site,” which offers official recognition and protection, and has worked its way into Indigenous self-presentation narratives. It has also been influential in important constitutional changes. In Guatemala, the 1996 peace agreements after the civil war, which acknowledged human rights violations and violence against the Indigenous Maya population and enacted resettlement laws, also included an agreement on the right to access and perform ceremonies in “sacred sites” (*lugares sacrados*), including those in protected archaeological sites (Cojtí Cuxil 1994; Estrada Peña 2012).³

These side effects of colonial or modern proselytism often remain opaque to inside and outside viewers. Yet “holy” lurks behind the sacred, and the notion clearly points to Old World values. As shown by the essays in this volume, what is often lumped together under the umbrella label “sacred places” amounts to a ragtag collection of behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and other ways of relating to such places (ritual activity, avoidance, intentional oblivion, narrative shifting,

etc.), which beg for better understanding. Defining a place as “sacred” is just another way of saying it has some kind of importance but diverts us from trying to find out why. In an astute comment on this topic, Keith Basso encourages us to consider “that the Western Apache language contains three distinct words for marking *kinds* of ‘sacredness,’ that at least three Apache terms could be translated (all of them imprecisely) as meaning ‘spiritual’ or ‘holy,’ and that no Apache word comes even close to our own understanding of ‘nature’” (1996, 156).

Aware of this predicament, and to bypass the term *sacredness*, some analysts of archaeological remains have mustered alternative notions such as *animacy* or *ensoulment* (Joyce and Barber 2015; Stross 1998). However, these concepts also have been prone to overgeneralization. Such is the case, for instance, for *ensoulment*, particularly in vogue with Mayanist archaeologists, which has been adopted from specific ethnographies and sometimes uncritically extended to other temporal and cultural contexts (Begel, Chosson, and Becquey 2022). We are still in need of more in-depth reflection on the different conceptions of places and the ontological or relational properties these new labels might be hiding. A distinction should be made between animating in the sense of “giving a soul” vs. “giving life to” vs. “allowing to be a living space,” each implying quite distinct entities and sets of relationships (Pitrou 2015). The notion of “salient places,” with salience precisely defined from a memorial, historical, experiential, sensorial, or praxis-oriented perspective—or any combination of the above—would certainly provide a better operational framework.

ATAVISTIC CONTINUITY

Finally, heritage stakeholders and sometimes even researchers frequently consider a given population’s relationship with vestiges to be based on “continuity,” in other words, as grounded in historical connections and ongoing long-term (continuous or occasional) occupation. In some countries, Native people are now asked, if not forced, to resort to DNA tests with increased frequency to prove the supposed “authenticity” of their “natural patrimonial rights” (Canghiari 2015, 8). Unless they are backed up by solid arguments attesting to “continuity,” claims filed by contemporary occupants or would-be stewards of vestiges, however legitimate, face rejection. In a similar vein, plundering of antiques by Indigenous tomb raiders is often deemed to result from a break in the genealogical link between them and the original occupants of the looted sites. And, indeed, at first sight, opening ruins up for the taking would seem to require a lack of emotional attachment to them. Closer scrutiny, however, shows that ruptures in time, in Amerindian cultures, do not

necessarily imply severance of links. Nor does breaking, throwing away, or selling something necessarily imply indifference (see note 10). The chapters in this volume demonstrate that people can be attached to vestiges precisely because of local conceptions of the historical, memorial, or ontological ruptures that are seen as having founded their attachment. Furthermore, the chapters show that commitment to vestiges often follows dashed lines. It comes and goes, which greatly helps create a sense of abandonment, whether seasonal, episodic, or permanent. As we shall see below, most Amerindians traditionally pay little attention to direct links of ancestry, and they are unlikely to spontaneously highlight continuous occupancy from initial construction to the present day as grounds for legitimizing their rights (Virtanen and Stoll, chapter 5; Vapnarsky, chapter 2). Consequently, even where human remains are involved, such considerations should certainly not appear as a *sine qua non* condition to back their claims and justify Indigenous rights in such matters. The Lenape, despite being the original occupants of the land (Banner 2005), have no chance to reclaim Manhattan on genealogic grounds alone, but that does not preclude legitimate attachment to their new homelands in Oklahoma, Ontario, Wisconsin, or elsewhere.

CONFLICTING CONCEPTIONS OF RUINS, VESTIGES, AND “CULTURAL HERITAGE”

Most tourists—as well as many scholars—tend to believe ruins are places to which Amerindians are emotionally and historically attached, insofar as they are crucial elements of their cultural heritage and reminders of their forebears’ past magnificence. Yet, given how prone we Westerners are to automatically ascribing “cultural” value to just about any old heap of stones, isn’t this a mere reflection of our own ethnocentrism? We celebrate and value hallmarks of cultural heritage and spend fortunes to restore, highlight, and catalog remembrance sites, significant landmarks, and just about any place esteemed for its symbolic, nostalgic, or spiritual qualities. We are fond of memorials and love to place commemorative plaques, headstones, and markers of all kinds to remind passersby that, for better or for worse, something noteworthy happened here or there. As tourists or citizens, we are attracted to such places, hoping we might find some kind of connection with the past just by being there, that we might somehow be able to “feel” historical meaning by our mere physical presence. But why should Amerindian peoples be governed by the same obsessions?

Admittedly, Western reasoning being highly contagious, this sometimes happens. In Mexico, near the Maya ruins of Palenque and Bonampak, for

instance, Tselal immigrants clearly adhere to patrimonial ideals: they explicitly object to ruins being systematically associated with Lacandon, the official, state-sponsored gatekeepers of the ruins, arguing that they, too, are equally heirs of Maya past splendor and are therefore wrongly being despoiled of their heritage (Balsanelli 2018). Actually, from an archaeological perspective, the Tselal and the Lacandon are equally right, since they are indeed both of Maya descent, even though the ruins were built by the ancestors of yet other Maya groups, of the Cholan branch (Palka 2014, 31). Nearby, in Tikal (Guatemala), lowland Itza Maya ritual specialists—who consider themselves descendants of the pyramid builders—make a living as *guías espirituales*, spiritual guides, entertaining visitors with generic Maya ceremonies and esoteric calendrical lore they have recently learned from highland K'iche' teachers sponsored by the Academia de Lenguas Mayas (Estrada Peña 2012). Here, again, ruins can indeed appear as something to be proud of and identify with, specific ethnic affiliation notwithstanding. If direct genealogical links are critical for political claims, they are much less indispensable when it comes to spiritual matters.

The strategy of claiming rights derived from some generic Native birthright is more and more widespread. The Paresi (Mato Grosso, Brazil) have recently integrated local petroglyph designs into their repertoire of body-art motifs to stress alleged continuity and justify land claims (Prado Moi and Fagundes Morales 2016).⁴ Likewise, much to the Wayana's dismay, the Teko in French Guiana are now making (and selling) painted wooden carvings resembling those of their Wayana neighbors, but they take great care to use “generic Indian” petroglyph motifs rather than traditional “specifically Wayana” designs, so as to legitimize their sharing in this valuable heritage (Kulijaman and Camargo 2012). Similar examples of neopatrimonial enthusiasm are found all across the Americas, sometimes even reaching religious proportions, especially in the wake of New Age movements (Galinier and Molinié 2013).

These newer examples reflect a clash between the younger generation's point of view and that of their elders. Lacandon youngsters, for instance, associate the ruins in their surroundings with their direct ancestors, whereas older people attribute them to the gods or to extinct, previous forms of humanity (Balsanelli 2018, 236–37). Referring to the Yucatec Maya, who also live near massively popular archaeological sites, Robert Redfield clearly stated, nearly a century ago, that “it is the archaeologist, not the Indian, who sees the grandson living in the broken shell of the grandfather's mansion; certainly the Indian attributes to the situation no quality of pathos. The ruins are not, for him, a heritage” (1932, 300). Their descendants now listen to Maya rap songs promoting essentialist views of their culture (Cru 2015) and collect (if only to

sell) the ancient clay figurines that their ancestors systematically smashed for fear they might be housing harmful entities (Armstrong-Fumero 2001, 73; 2014, 766). Likewise, around the Uyuni Salt Flat, Andean people have recently created new links to idealized ancestors attached to the ruins. As a result, weddings and other community celebrations are now held in places that once were feared and avoided (Cruz, chapter 8). Many Amazonian peoples, especially in Brazil, now cherish ritual objects they traditionally would have discarded once the ceremony was over (Brown 2003), and many have introduced indigenized reflexes of the word *cultura* into their lexicon (Carneiro da Cunha 2006; Vapnarsky, Yvinec and Becquey 2022). Deforestation transforms the memorial value of geoglyphs, and new laws on Indigenous territorial rights induce narrative shifts toward “ancestral land” and “sacred sites,” in total contrast with the attitudes and beliefs of previous generations (Virtanen and Stoll, chapter 5). Radical changes, indeed, bringing about important consequences.

Increased acceptance of the Western notion of “cultural heritage” obviously results from contemporary contact with mainstream Western ideology. It also is frequently enhanced by financial incentives from the tourism industry, national funding programs, preservation NGOs, or a longing for autochthony driven by political agendas or territorial claims. “Cultural heritage” and stances of ancestrality are also critical in Indigenous environmental struggles against the encroachment of extractive industries (e.g., mines and pipelines) and, more basically, in support of land claims. In an age of neoliberal multiculturalism and contested indigenities (Muehlmann 2009), what Molinié (2016) aptly labels “the globalization of tradition” has become a trend in most parts of the Americas. Yet, the chapters in this volume clearly show that “cultural heritage” is a foreign concept for most Amerindian peoples, who relate to vestiges in their own distinct ways. They might consider ruins to be theirs when they endorse a generic Pan-Amerindian status but adopt a different stance away from interactions with tourists and other outsiders. Village life and more intimate settings allow for the expression of distinct sets of ideas based on the Indigenous logics and emic perspectives this book intends to elucidate.

To state it slightly differently: in public discourse, archaeological sites are increasingly becoming “sacred” and promoted as tokens of “ancestral links with mother earth,” emerging places of *sumak kawsay* (*buen vivir*, good life), and so on. Paradoxically, however, this often happens in cultural environments in which such notions previously had little if any relevance and sometimes even clashed with traditional ways of relating to the land and to the past. The incongruity of “sacredness” has already been discussed, and the numerous misunderstandings engendered by the artificial notion of *sumak kawsay* are well known (Alonso

González and Vásquez 2015; Quick and Spartz 2018; Whitten and Whitten 2015). Let us now turn to ancestry, a pivotal concept with respect to *Living Ruins*.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE ANCESTORS GONE?

Diverging conceptions of generational succession and its ultimate meaning is certainly one of the main reasons why the notion of “cultural heritage” fails to account for Amerindian peoples’ relations to vestiges. Ever since Manuela Carneiro da Cunha’s groundbreaking work on this topic, the Americanist literature, especially that pertaining to Amazonia, has been replete with considerations about the clear-cut desire to sever links with the world of the dead (Carneiro da Cunha 1978; Fausto and Heckenberger 2007). This leads to what is commonly known as genealogical amnesia, which drives people to “remember to forget,” to use a phrase coined by Taylor (1993). The Amazonian Matis, whose autonym is *deshan mikitbo* (“upstream people”), have a fitting metaphor to express their version of this script (Erikson 2007). They consider life to be a constant struggle to flow upstream, fighting against the current. Facing downstream, while bathing or even just lying in a hammock, is deemed to have detrimental effects on one’s longevity and prospective progeny. Downstream is the realm of the deceased, of dangerous spirits, and, incidentally, of white men. The past is therefore literally what you turn your back to, certainly not what you celebrate and strive for. Such views—reflections of which are found among numerous other groups—have strong implications for how people relate to ruins, remnants, or relics of any kind.

Admittedly, Andean and Mesoamerican peoples are clearly less averse to the idea of continuity and the linear succession of generations (Fitzsimmons and Shimada 2011; Salas Carreño 2019). Centuries of missionary attempts to disconnect would-be converts from their “pagan” ancestors have not entirely succeeded. Ironically, destruction of the material basis of their “idolatry” often resulted in the emergence of ritually significant vestiges. But even in those Christianized parts of the Americas, identification with the primeval builders of surrounding ruins is far from systematic, and other cultural constraints can hinder strong connections with them or even emphasize ruptures. After all, acknowledging ancestry does not necessarily imply your ancestors were the ones who built the surrounding structures. Many groups ascribe the origin of what are now ruins to entities of entirely different ontological status: monsters, giants, spirits, or protohumans from mythological times. In other cases, ruins might simply be neglected despite the acknowledgment of a direct link with the initial builders. The ruins are then left in the custody of whoever took over,

such as “White Men” or any other type of malevolent being (Santos-Granero, chapter 1; Becquey and Chosson, chapter 3). People can also value “foreign” vestiges, such as those encountered during journeys or pilgrimages through other ethnic territories. When it comes to relating with ruins, acknowledgment of direct descent is therefore a secondary issue: links with the predecessors are sometimes explicitly rejected, or implicitly reframed, rupture being favored instead, as shown by several chapters in this volume (Charlier Zeineddine, chapter 7; Cruz, chapter 8; Vapnarsky, chapter 2; Virtanen and Stoll, chapter 5). This comes as no surprise, given the nature of Amerindian regimes of memory and the fact that the status of owner or master (even for kinship) is more often achieved than ascribed (Fausto 2012).

In Native South America, what is considered to be truly yours is that which you have produced with your hands, body, or thoughts, or which comes from the outside and which you have conquered in one way or another, rather than something you have inherited and that is passed down from one generation to the next. In fact, “appropriation” is often what makes “property” legitimate; in some instances, even proper names, far from being passed down through the family, are systematically acquired from the outside world of animals or enemies. This accounts for the fact that, even in the absence of genealogical connections, it is always possible to create links with whoever controls the vestiges, be they gods, spirits, guardians, or other entities. Seducing, appeasing, summoning, or taming them can suffice, and, in some cases, it is even possible to retrospectively “adopt” ancestors, as happens among the Quechua and those they call *awlanchis* (Salas Carreño 2019, 207). In other words, connections with vestiges do indeed occur, but they are based on very different grounds than those usually stressed when cultural heritage is at stake. Legacy is certainly not a key concept in Native America.

As an increasing volume of scholarly writing demonstrates, Amazonian “property rights,” particularly with regard to land tenure, derive less from inheritance, transmission, and permanence than from appropriation, that is, the ability to gain control over a plot and temporarily become its custodian and master (Brightman, Fausto, and Grotti 2016; Santos-Granero 2015). Once the human owners/masters are gone, fallow fields, ancient households, and ruins are “up for grabs” by a vast array of ghosts, spirits, and malevolent entities, turning them into dangerous rather than attractive places. Even in areas of greater sedentism, such as the Andes and Mesoamerica, “taming” the land remains an issue (Vapnarsky, chapter 2). Moreover, in these regions, as Byron Hamann noted in a discussion of pre-Hispanic Aztec, Mixtec, and Yucatec conceptions of the physical remains of their past, “Ancient artefacts

are repeatedly interpreted as relics from a previous age of creation, a flawed era subsequently destroyed to make way for the properly ordered ‘present’” (2002, 352; see also López Luján 2019). The picture is very much the same for the Andes, as shown by the chapters by Charlier Zeineddine, Molinié, and Cruz in the present volume.

In such a context, Amerindians’ seeming lack of interest in vestiges comes as less of a surprise. It reflects the low value they might place on past human production in general. As a man from Aguacatenango once told Marie Chosson (chapter 3): “[Archaeologists] found some old knives. Those are our ancestors’ knives, but why would anyone want to keep them? I don’t think they still cut, and we have our own knives. If I throw away my machete because it’s broken, do you think my grandchildren want to keep it?” Charlier Zeineddine (chapter 7) also mentions antique Andean artifacts and pottery being discarded because of their uselessness. By contrast, other remnants receive a good deal of ritual attention, especially when they are linked to other-than-human creators (see below). Coin-sized pottery sherds found on the Andean altiplano are usually ignored, but sometimes they are used as currency for ritual payments to ancestral spirits. Antique half-moon-shaped stone axes figure prominently in one of the major Krahô rituals, to the extent that the Museu Paulista solemnly agreed to return one such axe from their collection in 1986. Yet: “an intriguing aspect of the entire episode was that *this axe was nothing like the ordinary archaeological ones that villagers found so easily in the ground*, which they repaired by replacing the handles, ornaments, and designs. Rather, this was their supreme axe, the one that used to sing in the distant past, the axe that, according to another narrative, their ancestors used to kill the chief of a mythical people known as the Cokâmkiere” (Melatti 1999, emphasis added). A fondness for the accumulation of ancient things has also been observed among the Trio, but as a token of one’s own past achievements rather than as heirlooms (Grotti 2011). In Mesoamerica, it is not rare to find ancient half-broken clay figurines and even potsherds on the altar of ritual specialists, where they may act as therapeutic instruments, spiritual attractors, as well as connectors between distinct intersecting temporalities (Armstrong-Fumero 2011; Galinier 1990, 549; Hanks 2000). Whether artifacts are disregarded or not, Amerindian attitudes toward vestiges and remainders are essentially ambivalent, oscillating between fascination and fear and, in modern settings, between patrimonial pride and (meta-)physical discomfort. With regard to ruins, stakeholder communities seem stuck between the rock of strong incentives for preservation and the hard place of what McAnany (2016) aptly labels the “haunting question” of their eerie animacy.

RELUCTANT HEIRS, AMBIVALENT HERITAGE

Most of the case studies collected in this volume eloquently emphasize the very ambivalent nature of ruins for Amerindian peoples, and lead to the conclusion that, despite intensive exogenous efforts to turn vestiges into “precious heirlooms,” “valued legacies,” or “cultural heritage,” many groups would rather relegate them to oblivion. Santos-Granero’s contribution to this volume neatly makes this point (chapter 1). He argues that the Yaneshas of Central Peru are strikingly averse to the current patrimonial frenzy, to the point of considering it a form of defilement or even “zombification,” as he phrases it. In spite of their crucial role in Yaneshas cosmology and mythology, places such as the Palmazú shrine, the Cerro de la Sal, and Juan Santos Atahualpa’s tomb are, to use the author’s words, systematically “disremembered.” Why glorify the past if it was anything but glorious and attracts the attention of frightful foreigners?

Becquey and Chosson (chapter 3), in their comparison of Tseltal and Ch’ol apprehension of vestiges, stress local disbelief that the impressive pre-Hispanic monuments that tourists flock to could ever have been built by ordinary humans. Their very imposing dimensions rule out the possibility that they could have been built solely through traditional construction techniques. Only spirits and chthonian entities could have erected them, just as stone churches—the real locus of village identity—could never have been built without the divine intervention of the Virgin Mary and her possum helpers. This translates into a lack of interest in ruins, which sometimes leads to the deterioration or even plundering of the structures.

Vapnarsky (chapter 2) argues that, despite their proximity to prominent tourist destinations like Tulum and Coba, few local Yucatec Maya have ever bothered to visit these ancient sites, in part because they have been dispossessed of their ownership and even custody. The ruins nonetheless play a crucial part in their history of past humanities and future expectations since, according to a well-known prophecy, the petrified beings who are entrapped in the stelae erected in those sites will someday arise and help the contemporary Maya recover their political autonomy. On the other hand, Yucatec Maya relate in more interactional and complex ways with discrete pre-Hispanic mounds and ancient—but comparatively modest—structures found closer to their homes. Although hidden in the forest, these locales, where rituals are held, have ambivalent properties that make them more significant than the major sites advertised by flashy road signs and on soft drink cans all around the so-called Riviera Maya.

Turning to Amazonia, Virtanen and Stoll (chapter 5) describe how the Apurinã and Manchineri people of the upper Purus River region tends to

avoid the spectacular geometric precolonial earthworks that abound in their environment, considering them to be crucial sites of transformation, both dangerous and powerful. They are strictly avoided for the fear of the presences of nonhuman beings of the past. In his discussion of the Chácobo of the Bolivian lowlands, Erikson (chapter 4) shows how contemporary narratives about an abandoned village site in which an inordinate number of people died a couple of generations ago figure significantly in their eschatology. Recently deceased people are said to be systematically drawn there, even if they had never been there during their lifetimes. This provides yet another example of vestiges no one has any real reason to be attracted to, being places associated with malevolent spirits, to be avoided at all costs.

The last three chapters show that, albeit with some variation, Andean peoples display comparable attitudes toward ruins, relics, burial grounds, and other ancient remains. Bolivian and Peruvian peasants of Aymara or Quechua descent see such vestiges as traces of the *ch'ullpa*, the “people of before,” who are considered predecessors rather than ancestors and whose ontological status differs from that of contemporary humans. Rather than initial creation followed by gradual evolution, Andean cosmology envisions the timeline as a succession of eras (called *pachakuti*), each ending in a major collapse that gives way to a new creation and new forms of life. Mummies, in that respect, are considered to be the charred remains of presolar beings who were burned to death when the current age, and its gruesomely radiant sun, came to be. Consequently, Charlier Zeineddine’s interlocutors were rather appalled by former Bolivian president Evo Morales’s attempts to glorify the past by celebrating a so-called “Andean New Year” in salient places like Tiwanaku. The government and contemporary activists⁵ saw this celebration as an attempt to abolish the deleterious impact of European colonization by bridging the gap between contemporary society and the pre-Hispanic period when such structures were built. Ordinary peasants, on the other hand, expressed their fear of the calamities likely to result from such imprudent redemption of bygone times characterized by chaos and monstrosity.

Molinié’s chapter 6 also addresses the perils ascribed to ruins by the Quechan-speaking inhabitants of Yucay, in Cuzco’s Sacred Valley of the Andes, in Peru. As the author learned at her own expense when attempting to visit the monumental Inca stone terraces in the vicinity, contact with such places, especially burial sites, is particularly fearsome. They expose one to the daunting *ch'ullpa* disease, which causes the skin to burst at the joints to let the remnants of prehuman ancestors flow out in the form of yellowish burned bones. Cruz (chapter 8) describes how other Quechan speakers living

much farther south, in the Salar de Uyuni region, resort to elaborate strategies to avoid similar perils. They take turns staffing the reception desks at local museums to minimize exposure time to the dangerous relics housed within. Human remains are shuffled around and elaborately staged to attract tourists, or to create new links with the past, but not without great anxiety and extreme caution. In the absence of high-tech solutions, such as the glass frames used by major museums to protect humans from too-intimate contact with the dangerous emanations from mummies and skeletons, sophisticated and exhausting prophylactic mental tricks are required. To avoid highly hazardous interactions with *ch'ullpas*, one must constantly endeavor to refrain from thinking about them (a strategy also noted by Charlier Zeineddine).

Most of the case studies in this book stress discontinuity between contemporary Amerindians and the “ancestors” deemed responsible for building ancient structures. All assert the ambivalence, complexity, and indirectness of the relations with the entities lurking in the ruins. Admittedly, especially nowadays, vestiges are increasingly becoming tokens, if not totems, of people’s identity: they have been promoted to the status of relics of a glorious past, and they have become welcome (or unwelcome) sources of income, turning local people into willing (or unwilling) stakeholders in the tourism industry or partners in archaeological projects. Modern cults have also turned ruins and vestiges into places of worship, where capitalism, ecology, decolonization, and/or New Age values are celebrated from high noon to full moon, regardless of Amerindian conceptions of ritual time and cyclicity.⁶ But, as we have seen, vestiges are just as often considered mere heaps of useless, even sinister, stones. Spirits often lurk nearby, and local Amerindians, unlike New Agers, refuse to consider them as a limitless source of positive energy or “good vibrations” (Molinié, chapter 6). In fact, it is precisely because of their connections with death and the past that ruins, fallow plots (their Amazonian counterparts), and other derelict spaces are as likely to be feared and avoided as placed in the spotlight. Yet, this is not to say that vestiges play a secondary role in Amerindian lives. On the contrary, they strongly impact Native people’s daily routines and eventually work their way into their cosmology and value systems.

LIVING (WITH) VESTIGES

It should be clear by now that the title we chose for this book, *Living Ruins*, is not meant to promote the “lively,” attractive, or positively valued properties of vestiges. Rather, it points toward our main interests: first, the way Native South

and Mesoamerican peoples live in the vicinity of ruins and other remnants of the past; and, second, the way these places are brought to life, endowed as they are with moral and supernatural agency. The contributors to this collection are as interested in the connections to vestiges forged through daily habitation as in the elaborate metanarratives about them. So before turning to the more cosmological dimension of ruins, let us first concentrate on what actually happens there, on what people do and feel, in practical terms, during ordinary interactions, as well as on the tactile, sensorial, and emotional levels involved.

Obviously, people's intimate feelings and complex sensory experiences when they are near vestiges are far from easily observable. Yet, there are many hints that local inhabitants, when in the immediate vicinity of ruins, are likely to experience a certain sense of "otherness," or even a feeling of "otherworldliness," as though confronted with a different kind of reality. This could be due in part to physical characteristics such as thermal shocks, or the pleasant yet eerie sensation produced by cooler air blowing in and around ruins. Vapnarsky (chapter 2) describes how such breezes—produced by the presence of underground cavities—are deemed particularly dangerous. Anyone who chances to find a treasure near an ancient mound is encouraged to leave it untouched, for fear of the airborne diseases that likely surround the mounds. Pathogenic winds associated with ruins are also a recurring topic in the Andean and Amazonian regions, and are discussed in several chapters in this volume (Charlier Zeineddine, chapter 7; Erikson, chapter 4; Molinié, chapter 6; Santos-Granero, chapter 1).

Sounds produce another kind of connection with vestiges. The specific acoustics of ruins, in particular, elicit revealing comments. Echoing a foundational paper by Stobart (2006), Charlier Zeineddine (chapter 7) speaks of the "animated soundscape" and the intriguing "inner sounds" of Andean ruins, emphasizing the sound-based inferences they produce for the people who live near or approach them. Vapnarsky (chapter 2) makes similar observations for the Yucatec Maya, who also consider the sounds of conversations or domesticated animals sometimes heard in the midst of ruins a clear indexical sign—if not irrefutable proof—of the presence of invisible but perceptible entities living within them and within earshot of passersby. This phenomenon is widespread throughout Mesoamerica (López Austin 2015, 184). Much has been said about shape-shifting and the versatility of body forms in Amerindian ontologies, but the aural is often perceived as more difficult to alter, thus providing a more fundamental exposé of the true nature of beings (Civrieux 1980, 2–3).

In addition to such sensorial experiences of vestiges, there are other forms of everyday engagement with remnant spaces that stem from their economic

potential and the opportunity they afford to collect useful products. Stones can easily be recycled as simple construction elements, for decorative purposes, or as raw material for ritual accessories. Even stelae can have what archaeologists and art historians call “reuse value” (Brilliant and Kenney 2011), just as bones from pre-Hispanic skeletons can be shuffled around, circulated, or reprocessed for prophylactic, commemorative, or ritual purposes (Cruz, chapter 8). Furthermore, the sale of antique artifacts has become an economically significant activity for many Amerindians. These practices can lead to conflict between Indigenous peoples—seen as a threat to the sites—and the official heritage wardens or scholars who are ethically obliged and legally empowered to protect them (Armstrong-Fumero 2014). Even more significantly, perhaps, the lands surrounding ruins are, as we shall see, noteworthy for the subsistence activities they allow.

It is now well-known that Amerindians have greatly altered the layout of their lands, modifying the distribution of plants and animals and the quality of soils in ways favorable to human occupation. Protásio Frikel (1978), for trees, and Olga Linares (1976), for animals,⁷ were among the first scholars to raise these groundbreaking ideas, which were systematically explored and popularized in the late 1980s by the innovative work of Bill Balée, followed by a whole generation of academics (Balée 2013; Balée and Erickson 2006; Posey and Balée 1989). Unsurprisingly, prehistoric occupancy and contemporary fertility are closely associated in both subsistence practices and symbolism, as was neatly summarized by Descola’s concept of “domesticated nature” (Descola [1986] 1996). Ancient sites, in the most down-to-earth manner, are bountiful places, lush with natural (and supernatural) resources.

Throughout the Americas, dark soil is considered the most fertile, and black earth is systematically associated with past human (or superhuman) occupation (Virtanen and Stoll, chapter 5). In Brazil, black soil is known as “*terra preta do Índio*,” or “black earth of the *Indian*” (emphasis ours). In Maya lowlands, ancient occupation is seen as a criterion of soil fertility (Teran and Rasmussen 1994, 139), and the Otomi go so far as to collect soil from graveyards to fertilize their fields (Galinier 1990, 544–45).⁸ Ancient dwelling sites are also places where products are plentiful, some of them not found elsewhere. In the Andes, where potatoes are commonly considered akin to human beings (and dehydrated ones, known as *chuño*, akin to mummies), wild varieties known as *atuq papa* are found in abundance near ruins, where they are collected for their medicinal properties (Hall 2018). Corrals are built close to the ruins so that llamas and other animals may profit from the energy emanating from them (Salas Carreño 2019). In Amazonia, people such as the Matis

can name a wide range of semiferal edible plants found in abandoned gardens, which grow nowhere else. More significantly, the peach palms (*Bactris gasipaes*) planted in their swiddens—a major seasonal foodstuff—give fruit only several years after the gardens have been abandoned. This important resource is thus closely associated with the past, previous generations, and estranged ancestral spirits (Erikson 1996). A comparable situation holds for the *ramon* (breadfruit tree, *Brosimum alicastrum*) in the Maya lowlands of Mesoamerica. Indigenous populations as well as archaeologists acknowledge that this tree, which is especially valued for its fruit, abounds near ruins.⁹

RUINS AND VESTIGES AS LIVING ENTITIES

Another facet of vestiges is precisely their aliveness, that is, their qualification as “living” entities. Hence, “living vestiges” means living amid them but not just in a topological sense. Ruins provide more than a picturesque setting for daily lives: they can also be considered partners in their own right, imbued with what Santos-Granero (2008) aptly calls an “occult life.” Ruins are neighbors as much as they are material background. They are far from inert, but the difficulty lies in understanding precisely what makes these places alive and what distinguishes them from other living materials, places, or landscapes. As shown by a growing body of recent work, the “living” properties of things may be related to distinct types of processes and causalities, from being alive to giving life (Hall 2012 for the Andes; Pitrou 2015 for Mesoamerica; Praet 2013 for lowland South America). Regarding vestiges, this aliveness may be provided by the nature of the materials they are made of, by the acts involved in their transformation into artifacts and structures, by the presence of nonhuman (spiritual, divine, prehuman, or other) inhabitants of the “abandoned” places, or by their multitemporal liminal status. In fact, these different aspects are usually found in various combinations that uphold the aliveness of vestiges.

In the Andes and Mesoamerica, most salient vestiges are made of stone, and stones themselves are imbued with their own life and agency. From an Andean perspective: “every wrinkle in the Earth’s physiognomy—every hill, knoll, plain, ridge, rock outcrop, or lake—possesses a name and a personality” (Allen [1988] 2002, 41). In this animated rocky landscape, mountains, ghost-haunted ruins, but also lithomorphs and other “sacred” lithic entities, as well as many other stones (*waqa*, *illa*, “compassion stones”), have “vital energy” (*sami*) and agency in their own way (Allen 2016; Charlier Zeineddine, chapter 7). The compact hardness of stones, which makes them—like certain skeletal remains—powerful agents and the most potent sources of energy, does not

imply “a lack of animation, but a different state of animation—life crystallized, as it were” (Allen [1988] 2002, 63). This force is intimately connected with lightning and sunlight, whose power they absorb and condense.

In Mesoamerica, the Lacandon paradigmatically illustrate a situation in which stones are endowed with life. Much like the Yucatec Maya (chapter 2), they believe that all minerals live and die, and that their power or vital energy can be increased by their relation to ancient places and the fact that they have been manufactured. The Lacandon consider that all stones are alive and have a soul called “*pixan*” (for this reason, some are placed near houses to protect them), but those found in ruins—as well as lithic figurines, especially those in jade and obsidian—are imbued with a specific power. Thus, until recently small effigies or simple stones collected in ruins were put in each of the incense burners that represented their gods, in the ritual process of giving them life. The incense burners’ renovation ritual consisted of extracting the stone from the previous incense burner (which amounted to “killing” it) and inserting it into the new one (Balsanelli 2018, 448; Tozzer 1907, 109–10).¹⁰ The lithic objects collected in the ruins—terrestrial home of the gods—carry with them some sort of divine essence or potentiality and a vital energy or force, which derive from their origin and are transmissible.

While today’s Lacandon have abandoned these religious practices, beliefs related to the living properties of stones found in ancient places still thrive. We experienced this recently during a stroll in the forested surroundings of a Lacandon village, in Chiapas. A young boy showed us the way to *la tumba de los dioses* (“the tomb of the gods”), guiding us along a steep, narrow path to an overhanging boulder about four or five meters high, at the foot of which a score of burners were scattered around, in rather poor condition, even broken. These living burners had been discarded by the last of the traditional Lacandon leaders to still possess them, their sons refusing to worship them any longer. The site had been desecrated by outsiders, and most of the stones had been stolen. The burners were therefore solemnly pronounced dead. However, our young guide was eager to direct our attention to the boulder that covered the “tomb,” which he described as a “meteorite.” The first time his father had taken him to visit the site, two years earlier, it was much smaller, but, he insisted, it had since grown several meters taller and was bound to keep on growing in the coming years. The burners had been “killed” by the theft of the stones they contained, but we were later told that in this process, their vital energy and the force imbued by ancestral gods had been transferred to the bigger rock, as shown by the dazzling speed with which it grew. In other words, the burners had been traditionally brought to life by powers given by the living stones

found in ruins, but now their mere presence had turned the place itself into a powerful ruin. The depiction of the boulder as a “meteorite” was but a modern and sidereal version of the belief that ruins are the terrestrial abode of gods who came down from the skies.

Such examples show that although ruins can be seen as the products and traces of temporal ruptures, they nonetheless find their way into a continuous flow of animated, personified, living, and powerful materialities and places that make for a complex cultural landscape. This may come as no surprise given the generalized Amerindian proclivity toward animism, brought to light by recent research in the era of the “ontological turn” (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017). This also accounts for the fact that, sometimes, ruins are not even the most prominent item of the series: in chapter 3, Becquey and Chosson show that in Chiapas the ruins of temples and pyramids seem to contain far less agency than mountains or churches, and therefore attract far less attention. In an animist environment, ghosts are but one example of a vast array of spirits, and ruins are but one of the many salient places of the ontological landscape.

In addition to minerals, other materials, such as ceramics, textiles, or bare bones, may also act as powerful living indexes of the past. In the Andes, skeletal remains are reputedly liable to bleed (Charlier Zeineddine, chapter 7), and they are sometimes kept to “protect” places (Allen [1988] 2002, 59). As previously mentioned, Molinié (chapter 6) explains how she discovered that approaching a prehuman tomb causes one’s joints to snap open and release the small bones of *machu* ancestors. Like other similar illnesses of the underworld, this widely diffused Andean affliction (called *ch’ullpasqa*, “of the *ch’ullpa*”) is a progressive possession that culminates in the affected person’s transformation into a *ch’ullpa*, a thing from the ancient times (Cruz, chapter 8). Because of their potential to reactivate the past, and despite the danger this entails, human remains are typically manipulated to reanimate (if not recreate) vestiges. This ranges from the tradition of keeping and carrying along your forebears’ bones, found in some nomadic groups of lowland South America (Erikson, chapter 4), to the possible rearrangement of bones into new bodies and settings. One of the most striking examples of the latter is provided by Cruz in chapter 8, with his description of the baroque and composite scenography that the Quechua people around the Uyuni Salt Flat in Bolivia create with mummies and pre-Hispanic bones (and even Christian ones when there are not enough of the former), ornamented with old and new paraphernalia, such as dogtags, hats, and textiles. These recreations are motivated by Native people’s desire to attract tourists to local “handmade” museums, but the fact that they eventually become new places for community rituals shows that there are more than

economic reasons behind such reshuffling of bones. Foreigners are sometimes accused of robbing and manipulating bones for their own selfish purposes. Santos-Granero (chapter 1) reports how, according to a Yanasha myth, white men once defiled the tomb of Yompor Santo, one of their heroes, and used the bones to make an effigy in his exact likeness. They did such a good job that the figure could never be disassembled and became a church effigy, an object of adoration by the white people.

This dismembering, reshuffling, and reassembling of human remains is similar to the way stones from ruins may be regularly combined with artifacts to create new ritual objects. However, rocks and stones found in ruins probably receive extra attention for having been manipulated in ancient times. They differ from other minerals in that they were cut, polished, piled up, and arranged in architectonic structures that are quite distinct from those built by contemporary humans. Some took the form of spectacular terraces, stunning pyramids, and other impressive monuments. Amerindians willingly offer comments on the unimaginable, perhaps even supernatural, techniques that must have been employed to produce them. Tales are told of stones that were lightened, lifted by giants, made to float by magic whistling, or modeled like clay in days when they were astonishingly more malleable than the unbreakable stones of our times (see Cruz, chapter 8; Charlier Zeineddine, chapter 7; Vapnarsky, chapter 2). Such amazing manufacturing techniques are evidence of the builders of these places and contribute to the energy they are deemed to hold. This energy results from activity itself, as work in its Mesoamerican sense produces more than mere materiality: it more basically generates life, cosmic movements, and social relations (Ariel de Vidas 2020). An extreme form of manufacturing transformation can be found in the process of petrification, or lithomorphosis, which is sometimes seen as the origin of vestiges in the Andes (Charlier Zeineddine, chapter 7), Mesoamerica (Vapnarsky, chapter 2) and, to a lesser degree, Amazonia (Santos-Granero, chapter 1; Daillant 1997; Renard-Casevitz 1993).¹¹

This etiology of the ruins accounts for the continuing presence, in contemporary spaces, of beings from bygone times congealed in stones or stelae. The petrified beings eventually appear as much more than mere memorial indexes. In the present day, at recurrent moments (e.g., certain phases of the moon's cycle in the Andes) or at expected times announced by prophecies (in Mesoamerica), the beings are resuscitated, or rather they regain their dormant mobility. Lithomorphosis is but a temporary state, epitomizing the petrified beings' potential to reunify disconnected temporalities, in a convincing demonstration of the temporal coalescence that vestiges seem to stand for.

The “aliveness” of vestiges may therefore also be largely attributable to their inhabitants, either those whose residual presence is cast in stones, stelae, drawings, or bones or spirits attracted to them at a later time. Ruins can be considered the proper homes of guardian spirits (Vapnarsky, chapter 2) or the dwellings of inadvertently perspectivist gods for whom the remnants of stone buildings look just like the thatched-roof houses in which humans live (Boremanse 1998, 202; McGee 1983, 107). In cases such as these, vestiges appear as mirror images of human dwellings, brought to life by their spirit or god-like occupants whose ontological statuses might be totally different but whose lifestyles mimic those of ordinary humans living in quasi-ordinary villages. Temporal ruptures and ontological disconnections notwithstanding, parallel yet contemporary worlds are thereby established. Ruins can thus be seen as putative extensions of the domestic space in the forest or nonurban space or, conversely, as metaphoric mountains or marks of wilderness in the urban landscape (Halperin 2014.) This leads to hybrid ambivalent forms, beyond nature and culture (Descola [2005] 2013), deemed extremely powerful because of their very liminality and hence considered to be highly significant features of the surroundings.

CONCLUSION

The chapters in this volume present case studies of Amerindian societies ranging from the Uyuni Salt Flat in southern Bolivia to the highlands of Chiapas in Mexico. Despite such broad geographical spread, the chapters show striking similarities in the conception of vestiges, one of the most obvious being that they are systematically imbued with liminal and ambivalent properties. Loci, or even agents, of complex interactions rather than objects of memorial veneration, vestiges act as multitemporal shifters par excellence. In Halperin’s synthesis, vestiges “materialize a distant past and they contribute to a constantly shifting present . . . both stable and unstable, exerting an enduring presence while continuously reconstituted by those who live amongst them” (2014, 339).

Vestiges are not just a time capsule but an ontological space shuttle. In disruptive—yet alluring—ways, they connect the living with the dead, people with spirits, and present-day humans with long-gone prehumans. They make the past merge with the ongoing present and other parallel times but link them with much more complex, albeit tenuous, threads than those that string together the continuous lines presupposed by the Western model of cultural heritage, based on ancestry and inheritance. Vestiges are also thought of as places that link seemingly opposite spaces, for example, high and low

territories, mountains and caves, the celestial world and the underworld, urban and forest realms. Usually simultaneously dangerous and beneficial, they are either avoided or are approached with great precautions, despite their appealing fertility and active powers. They may be diverse in nature and be integrated into complexes of animated places, of which they may not be the most salient. They are sometimes ignored, until patrimonialization rears its ugly head and places them in the spotlight.

In this introduction, we have mainly focused on the similarities found across the continent, more patent between the Andes and Mesoamerica, but sometimes shared with Amazonian societies as well. However, the chapters also show some contrasts, both clear-cut and subtle, expressing internal and sociohistorical conditions, that should be further explored. In particular, the chapters show differing regimes of historicity and the role of forgetfulness in the construction of the collective self, and with conceptions of personhood and nonhuman agencies. Such contrasts involve colonial history and Catholicism's influence on eschatology and the properties of ritual objects and places. They also may stem in part from the affordances of the surroundings and their topography, the presence (or absence) of stones, and environmental factors in the durability of architectural structures, for example, the high, freezing, rocky plateau of the Andes, where everything remains, as opposed to the tropical forest of Amazonia, where everything seems to quickly disintegrate.

Another factor to consider is the influence of postcolonial politics, which led to the implementation, in the 1940s, of national institutes dedicated to the conservation and promotion of "culture heritage" and officially recognized "archaeological sites."¹² Imbued with the Western ethics of preservation at all costs, these government agencies have usually dispossessed autochthonous populations of access to ruins or, at the very least, distanced stakeholder communities from stewardship of their ancestral landscape. Initially driven by similar ideologies in all countries, these politics have subsequently diverged, evolving over the years in different directions. In Guatemala, for instance, the Maya gained the official right to practice (nontouristic) ritual ceremonies on archaeological sites in the 1990s, whereas Mexico still forbids—or only barely tolerates—them.

Over the years, and increasingly so in recent times, Amerindian peoples' territorial, cosmological, and eschatological conceptions have undergone rapid transformations. Relationships with ruins are no exception, however counterintuitive this notion might seem due to our preconceived idea that, because of their antiquity, ruins would serve as the cornerstone of continuity. The chapters in this volume show that vestiges are indeed a moving field,

where notions have been rapidly altered in the wake of historical transformation. Among the numerous factors involved, the influence of colonial and Christian values are of prime importance, as they have radically transformed ritual life and relationships with (dead) souls and ancestors. This has sometimes brought about the rejection of the “pagan” past associated with vestiges. Sometimes, to the contrary, vestiges have been promoted to main protagonists of millenarian scenarios. Moreover, the systematic employment of local Native people as workforce in archaeological excavations was certainly influential. It left them with the challenge of reconciling their traditional views of ruins with the academic narratives and sometimes-transgressive routines regulating the manipulation of ancient artifacts. Modern nationalism has at times led to the expropriation of the Indigenous past by the state, resulting in a rather complex situation, often exacerbated by NGOs and other patrimonial stakeholders. The promotion of cultural heritage has led to identity crises and conflicts surrounding issues of cultural legitimacy and ownership of the past. Living vestiges are increasingly subject to litigation. Consequently, as the loci of political and symbolical antagonism, they have acquired cultural hybridity of sorts, in a no-man’s land halfway between zombification and glorification.

On a more theoretical level, in articulation with more ethnographically oriented perspectives, the chapters in this volume engage with recently debated issues, such as regimes of historicity and regimes of knowledge, cultural landscapes, conceptions of personhood, artifacts, and materiality. They also add to the lively body of work on the invention of tradition, neo-Indianism, and what we might call “retrospective ethnogenesis.” Beyond nourishing these crucial topics in anthropology, our in-depth case studies, we hope, facilitate a greater self-expression of Indigenous views and provide new insights for a better understanding of the various types of reactions to and involvement with cultural heritage programs among Native communities, with implications for project management.

The chapters reveal a plurality of ways of perceiving and interacting with vestiges across the Americas. Many shared principles have emerged, as well as significant variations between different groups, resulting from different historical and sociocultural backgrounds. Clearly, ruins and remnants are highly salient for Amerindian peoples, but in subtle ways, whose complexity is only reinforced by the strings attached to their rephrasing in the idiom of cultural heritage. Illustrating and deciphering such complexity is the task we have taken on in this ethnographic survey of traces of the past in Native Amazonia, Mesoamerica, and the Andes.

OVERVIEW OF THE VOLUME

In chapter 1, Fernando Santos-Granero studies how Yanesha people have been particularly reluctant in the face of past attempts at patrimonialization. Through an analysis of the historical trajectories of three ancient landmarks, he explores the reasons for such reticence, arguing that it might stem from the association of these sites with the notions of *a'tsepeñets*, a failure in the completion of ritual undertakings, which leads to defilement, and *a'mchecheñets*, the desoulment or loss of the power/vitality contained in ritual objects, places, and specialists as a consequence of defilement. Patrimonialization efforts, in this context, are perceived as a “zombification” of cultural heritage, that is, a futile attempt to bestow a semblance of life on something long dead and deprived of mystical power. Santos-Granero proposes that Western proclivity for patrimonialization, on the one hand, and Yanesha reticence, on the other, express not only contrasting regimes of historicity but, above all, opposing cultural strategies for building collective identities—one based on an “omnivorous memory,” the other on “selective amnesia.” A greater openness to patrimonialization in recent years could be a sign, however, of a shift in Yanesha modes of conceiving and dealing with the past.

Maya conceptions of history are structured by beliefs in a series of successive humankind that have left their imprint on today's landscape. As revealed by the chapters in the book, however, different Maya groups instantiate this articulation between history and cultural space in contrasting ways. In chapter 2, Valentina Vapnarsky shows that the Lowland Yucatec Maya conceive of vestiges as living, generative and demanding places, which interlace different temporalities, either as dwellings of the guardian spirits—creating a memory of ritual practice, habituation, and regeneration—or as remnants of petrified dormant cultures, instantiating a state of latency and constitutive of cyclical history. They act as sorts of hotspots that materialize the tenuous and essential link between humans of previous eras, spirits, and the deceased. Their significance is based on different kinds of ruptures: historical, ontological, and interactional. The need to maintain these constitutive ruptures also accounts for the eagerness of some Maya communities to protect ruins from being explored, studied, rebuilt, or turned into touristic attractions.

In contrast, in chapter 3 Cédric Becquey and Marie Chosson illustrate how some of the Maya people from Chiapas—the Chol and the Tseltal in particular—consider nearby monumental sites only as remains of past corrals in which previous forms of humanity herded monstrous jaguars. Ordinary Maya humans, they believe, could not possibly have erected such imposing, oversized, roofless, and collapsed structures. The true chosen homes of

spirits, souls, saints, and other celestial entities worthy of worship are mountains, volcanoes, ravines, and churches—not ruins. These constitute their “salient spaces,” objects of collective interest, because their physical and/or symbolic characteristics make them distinctive on the community landscape. The authors highlight the diversity of places where community memories are anchored, places where spirits, souls, and other entities are thought to be present. They also show how the dynamic and mobile nature of these entities, and the constant nurturing of relations with them, facilitates the possibility for new sites to emerge, often in connection with a desire to regain control of previously neglected places. These salient sites include archaeological ruins, due to their contemporary significance gained thanks to new discourses circulated by state-induced patrimonialization.

In chapter 4, Philippe Erikson argues that, in the Bolivian Amazon, Chácobo eschatological narratives have paradoxically turned a place of past suffering into one of future bliss. He explains how the remains of Xabaya, an abandoned village site where innumerable people suffered and died in the late 1960s, have retrospectively been ascribed positive valency: the spirits of recently deceased people, instead of being scattered in the forest as they used to be, now allegedly converge there for lavish postmortem feasts. He argues that this paradoxical turn of events probably results from the fact that Xabaya is also remembered as the locus of emerging ethnicity, being the place where the battered remaining members of previously dispersed groups, each bearing a different name, regrouped and collectively became the unified people now known as Chácobo. The ruins of Xabaya, far from vestiges of unspeakable past suffering, became a marker of collective identity, converting remainders of a past tragedy into hopes for a bright future.

In chapter 5, Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen and Emilie Stoll’s study shows that for the Amazonian Apurinã and Manchineri, the massive geometric ditched enclosures of their landscape are places to avoid rather than to celebrate. They perceive them as homes to master spirits and other monstrous beings, unfit for human occupation. However, in their attempts to communicate their territorial and political claims to national authorities and administrative agents, they now describe them as precolonial ceremonial sites and also use them to advocate Indigenous politics and advance their territorial demands. Local riverside (*caboclo*) populations in Brazilian Amazonia make similar uses of dark soils, which, being associated with precolonial Indigenous settlements and practices, are apt indicators of their ancestors’ presence, thus backing their claims of continuous occupancy. This chapter offers a fine-grained analysis of these contextually variable “shifting narratives.”

Antoinette Molinié's chapter 6, on the Andes, concentrates on various properties and new functions ascribed to Inca vestiges. She first shows how, in the Yucay region, Inca vestiges occupy a liminal zone that turns them into powerful instruments for structuring the space and time of Quechua communities. For this very reason, locals also see them as places replete with malevolent energy, affecting boundary body parts such as skin and joints. Next, concentrating on vestiges that cater to tourists, such as the ruins of Pisac, she explores the contrast between Western tourists' and local inhabitants' conceptions of these places. The former see them as sources of positive energy, which they come to capture, while the latter fear the malevolent energy emanating from these ruins, which might ravish them in a much more threatening way and must therefore be pacified by offerings and sacrifices. In sum, the high-tech pilgrims visit the ruins hoping to enhance their well-being by absorbing the very forces Quechua people would rather placate.

In her study of Native conceptions of geological formations in North Potosí (Bolivia), Laurence Charlier Zeineddine (chapter 7) shows the intimate and complex relationship between the Quechua-speaking people and these stone formations, believed to have been built by presolar people who were then petrified. These remnants of past generations are considered to be still active today and liable to prey on humans. Indigenous communities therefore were shocked by President Evo Morales's attempts to glorify Native tradition by reinstating the so-called "Andean New Year" and "solar time." For Indigenous communities, the major archaeological sites where the Andean New Year ceremonies take place are not historical landmarks but rather anchors in a complex multitemporal landscape. They seek rupture rather than continuity with past periods, and consider it safer to willingly avoid thinking about stony remains of the past rather than to celebrate them in the name of decolonization. Nowadays, Catholics and Pentecostals display diverging discursive and interactional commemorative practices, but as far as vestiges of the past are concerned, they all prefer to obliterate or forget them altogether, rather than integrate and highlight them.

The last chapter, by Pablo Cruz, explores a paradigmatic case that neatly weaves together the different threads of this book. He observes how the booming tourist industry that has recently emerged in the Uyuni Salt Flat and surrounding region has brought about an intense process of patrimonialization of both the natural landscape and the local culture. Incentivized by tourist agencies, the state, international aid agencies, NGOs, and some academics, campesino Indigenous communities have begun to produce their own tourist attractions. Many of these center on archaeological ruins that have consequently gained the

previously nonexistent local status of “material and tangible heritage,” “archaeological site,” or “patrimonial artifact.” Over the course of just a few years, mummified human remains and ancient objects began to appear in caves, organized into elaborate scenes, many of them idealized reconstructions, and so did different types of museums, sometimes involving the ransacking of other caves and reshuffling of the objects and mummies (*ch'uullpas*) they contained. In a cultural context where Inca burial sites are full of supernatural dangers, this dynamic has led local inhabitants to critically reconsider conflicting narratives about the past. It has provoked redefinitions of the past and of material vestiges that articulate what, to Western eyes, might appear to be incompatible realities.

NOTES

1. Fabriq'Am: The Making of “Heritages”: Memory, Knowledge, and Politics in Amerindia Today, ANR-12-CULT-005 (2013–2016). See: <http://fabriqam.hypotheses.org/>.

2. Conklin (2020) has recently discussed the association of Native Amazonian death rituals with the animacy of social-ecological life processes.

3. In this context, Maya intellectuals actively engaged in the struggle for the official recognition of the concept of “sacred sites” (*lugares sagrados*), which they saw as an alternative to Western notions such as ruins or archaeological sites. In 2012, they lost their fight for the creation of a Congreso Nacional de Lugares Sagrados (National Conference of Sacred Sites) in which representatives of the Indigenous groups of Guatemala would have participated in decision-making about the management, preservation, and use of archaeological sites, as well as research. For practical and legal information about Guatemalan sacred sites, see the official site: <http://mcd.gob.gt/unidad-de-lugares-sagrados-y-practica-de-la-espiritualidad-maya/>.

4. This is reminiscent of the stylistic changes in the Amazonian Yawanawa's body paint after the filming of the 2009 blockbuster *Avatar*, for which one of their most charismatic leaders had served as consultant. In need of a model for the aliens, the film's director drew inspiration from the face paintings of people he had been introduced to by his consultant (a man known as Tashka). This resulted in simplified, grossly enlarged, and rather kitsch motifs that ultimately became trendy among the Yawanawa, who started copying these copies of their former selves. A fine example of how overplaying one's own traditions can retrospectively result in their literal alienation!

5. Including scholars of Aymara descent such as Fernández-Osco (2016).

6. New Agers sunbathing at noon to benefit from the sun's energetic rays is seen as dangerous, if not ludicrous, by local people (Molinié, chapter 6).

7. Olga Linares's innovative concept of “garden hunting” could be extended to

account for “fallow hunting” as well, considering the propensity of fallows to attract game. Someone might also relate this to the belief, commonly held in Amazonia, that ancestors return from the land of the dead and offer their bodies, transformed into peccaries, to feed their descendants.

8. Bernardino de Sahagún, in the famous sixteenth-century Florentine Codex, documented conceptions of Central Mexican Nahuas, stating: “*Ay otra manera de tierra fértil, que se llama Callali, quiere decir, tierra donde a estado edificada alguna casa, y después que se cava y siembra es fértil* [There is another kind of fertile soil, which is called Callali, meaning soil on which a house had been built, and afterwards it is dug out, planted and fertile]” (our translation, Libro undecimo, folio 227 verso). (Thanks to Dominique Michelet for pointing out this reference.)

9. Until recently, breadfruit was used as a maize substitute in periods of famine, and it is known to attract animals who feed on its leaves and fruits (Atran, Lois, and Ucan Ek’ 2004; Dussol et al. 2017; Ford and Nigh 2016; Lambert and Arnason 1982).

10. That many artifacts found in ruins are broken might be seen as a clear indication that they are “dead.” In the Andes, textiles are thought to be alive, which is why cutting them (to make handicrafts, for instance) is a rather dubious act (Desrosiers 2000). Yet, caution is always required. For example, Fernández-Osco (2016, 341) reports a case in an Aymara community where ancient weavings, deemed harmless, had been sold; but the purchasers were asked to return them after an epidemic outbreak, which was assumed to have been caused by this offense to the community’s ancestors.

11. Following Daillant (1997), a process of “salification” akin to “petrification” accounts for the mythological origin of the major source of salt in Chimane territory: a salt mountain said to result from the transformation of a goddesses and her newborn child into salt, the life-giving product people now avidly collect there. Petroglyphs and other markings in the rocks in the vicinity are allegedly the footprints left by the goddess’s demiurge husband to let people know where to find salt, while the nearby river is allegedly the amniotic liquid of the divine parturient: a living, watery ruin of sorts.

12. The Brazilian Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (IPHAN) was originally created as the Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (SPHAN) in 1937. The Mexican Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) was created in 1939, and the Guatemalan Instituto de Antropología e Historia de Guatemala (IDAEH) in 1946. In Colombia, the ICANH (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia) was formed by the fusion of the Servicio Arqueológico Nacional (founded in 1938) and the Instituto Etnológico (founded in 1941). In Peru, the Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología gained autonomy from the Museo Nacional in 1945, whereas in Bolivia, the Instituto Nacional de Arqueología (INAR) was founded in 1975 as an offshoot of the Instituto Indigenista Boliviano of which Carlos Ponce Sangines became head in 1952.

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