

# Peru's abundant ruins feel the squeeze of urbanization

November 28 2017, by Franklin Briceno And Rodrigo Abd

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In this Sept. 22, 2017 photo, the pre-Columbian archeological site La Luz is flanked by a private soccer field players rent in Lima, Peru. Many people in modern-day Peru are raised among the Incan ruins built before the Spanish colonized South America. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)

From her small home near two golf courses and three slums, Gianina Rojas gazes up at a crumbling adobe pyramid, remnants of the vast Inca

empire that flourished more than six centuries ago.

Like many people in modern-day Peru, Rojas was born and raised among Incan sites that were built before the Spanish colonized South America.

Now 26, she recalls treasure hunting as a child—hiding away pieces of ceramic pots, textile scraps and even human bones.

"Lima is full of places like this," she said.

The pyramid is just one of thousands of historic sites, or "huacas," that are being crowded out or destroyed as roads, schools, residential neighborhoods and stadiums are built to meet the population's growing demands.

High-rise apartment buildings tower around one site. Highway traffic barrels through a pair of tunnels newly burrowed under an adobe palace at a 900-year-old cemetery.

One of the few well-preserved pyramids sits across from the mansion of President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, highlighting the creeping pace of urbanization in Peru's bustling capital.

An estimated 46,000 pre-colonial sites dot Peru's landscape. About 400 of them are in Lima, which is home to the biggest number of pre-colonial archaeological zones of any city in South America.



In this Oct. 5, 2017 photo, homes in the Lurin district stand near the pre-Columbian archeological site Pachacamac in Lima, Peru. Many people in modern-day Peru recall treasure hunting at ruins as children, hiding away pieces of ceramic pots, textile scraps and even human bones. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)

Yet Peru spends only enough to protect just 1 percent of those sites, according to official data, leaving hundreds of ruins abandoned or relegated to becoming public trash dumps.

"Since the founding of Lima, there has been no relationship between the people and the huacas, beyond seeing them as mounds of earth or places to search for treasures," Lima-based archaeologist Hector Walde said.

He spoke while excavating carefully at a 3,500-year-old temple that has walls painted with ancient reliefs depicting mythological animals.

Lima's first urban explosion in the 20th century was accompanied by large-scale destruction of pre-colonial sites. The walls of one temple were pulverized to make bricks for new homes beginning in the 1980s, while around that time guerrillas used dynamite to attack an electric tower standing on a pyramid.

Today, a small group of archeologists and officials are stepping up efforts to reverse course and preserve sites being squeezed by urban sprawl.



This Oct. 11, 2017 photo shows a municipal basketball court that was built near the pre-Columbian archeological site Limatambo in Lima, Peru. Thousands of historic sites are being crowded out or destroyed as roads, universities, stadiums and neighborhoods are built to meet the population's growing demands. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)

"The idea is for Peruvians to feel that heritage is something that is enjoyed," Deputy Minister of Heritage Jorge Arrunategui told The Associated Press.

A public awareness campaign he has helped lead since July grants free admission to related museums and dozens of archaeological sites across the country, with the hope of reconnecting Peruvians with their heritage.

The campaign to bring new protections hasn't brought a heated debate over what needs to be done.

Officials say a new antiquities law will preserve the nation's cultural legacy by giving historical sites stronger legal protections. Activists fear it will diminish protections for thousands of sites because the law affects only those designated as archaeologically significant by Peru's minister of heritage.

The push to save the country's rich heritage also has not been widely embraced by everyday Peruvians. They sometimes take their ancient culture for granted, having lived their entire lives alongside the huacas—an indigenous Quechua word meaning "oracle" or "sacred place."



In this Oct. 10, 2017 photo, the pre-Columbian archeological site Pucllana is surrounded by urban sprawl in the Miraflores district of Lima, Peru. An estimated 46,000 pre-colonial sites mark the country's landscape, and about 400 of those are located in Lima, which has the largest number of pre-colonial archaeological zones in South America. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)

Krzysztof Makowski, a University of Warsaw archaeologist who has led excavations in Peru for 30 years, said it will take more than money to protect the sites.

"Museums have to investigate, and the same goes for universities," Makowski said. "When you have those people interested, it is easier to protect the heritage."

Like many people in Lima desperate for a place to raise her family,

Rojas' mother built her small home in 1985 where she could find a spot. It is next to a 2,100-year-old complex of buildings and pyramids once used as a center for religious and burial ceremonies.

They vowed to care for the site, which has been challenging. Rojas recalled once finding a body dumped among the ruins. She has also seen people shooting guns into its walls as target practice.

"Most people do not know how dangerous it is to care for a huaca," Rojas said. "You have to face land traffickers, thieves and bad people. The worst part is that the state never recognizes or thanks you."



In this Oct. 6 2017 photo, the pre-Columbian archeological site Pucllana is divided by Independence Street in the Miraflores district of Lima, Peru. "Since the founding of Lima, there has been no relationship between the people and the huacas beyond seeing them as mounds of earth or places to search for treasures,"

said Lima-based archaeologist Hector Walde. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)



In this Oct.13, 2017 photo, residents play soccer inside the pre-Columbian archeological site Puruchuco in the Ate district, where there are few recreational spaces open to the public in Lima, Peru. Peru spends enough to protect just one percent of its pre-colonial archeological sites, according to official data, leaving hundreds of ruins abandoned. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)





In this Sept. 4, 2017 photo, high-rise apartment buildings surround the Huantinamarca pre-Columbian archeological site, along Pacifico Avenue in Lima, Peru. A small group of archeologists and officials are stepping up efforts to preserve the sites being squeezed by urban sprawl. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)



In this Oct. 4, 2017 photo, a highway passes the pre-Columbian archeological site Puruchuco in the Ate district of Lima, Peru. Lima's first urban explosion began in the 20th century, accompanied by the large-scale destruction of pre-colonial sites. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)



In this Sept. 22, 2017 photo, the pre-Columbian archeological site Huantillo, right, is hugged by apartments and a market in the Cercado de Lima area of Lima, Peru. Many residents of Peru's capital live among remnants of the vast Inca empire that flourished here more than six centuries ago. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)



In this Oct. 6 2017 photo, tourists walk the trails of the pre-Columbian archeological site Pucllana, surrounded by modern high-rises in the Miraflores district of Lima, Peru. Peruvians have lived their entire lives alongside the "huacas," an indigenous Quechua word meaning "oracle" or "sacred place." (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)

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