Turn Right at Machu Picchu: Rediscovering the Lost City One Step at a Time (review)

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individual research, and the actual the state of knowledge in the environmental sciences concerning biodiversity and sustainable development as they relate to climate variability.

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Turn Right at Machu Picchu: Rediscovering the Lost City One Step at a Time. Mark Adams. New York: Dutton, 2011. 333 pp. maps, photographs, glossary, chronology, notes, selected bibliography, index. \$26.95 cloth (ISBN 978-0-525-95224-4).

This book documents the journey the author, Mark Adams, undertook to visit the Inca ruins that Yale University historian Hiram Bingham III sighted in his exploratory trips during the 1910s. Bingham gained international fame for allegedly discovering these ruins, Machu Picchu in particular. At the same time, Bingham was notorious for overstating the significance of his findings, especially considering that Machu Picchu had been locally known—and probably looted—before Bingham saw it for the first time in 1911.

Initially, Adams' travelogue seems to serve mainly as a device to recount Bingham's archeological trips and assess what the academic community, politicians, and even pop culture have made of Bingham's legendary findings. To this end, Adams alternates his travel journal with a narrative of Bingham's life and times, especially unraveling Bingham's exploratory trips in tandem with his own progress in reaching the same archeological landmarks. This narrative allows Adams to discuss in a refreshing way what has happened to these ruins since Bingham brought global attention to them. Archival research and a review of Bingham's Inca-related publications and personal journals add an important historical component to the book. Adams' historical accounts seek to fill the gaps between 1) what was known about these abandoned Inca settlements at the time Bingham conducted his explorations; 2) what Bingham theorized about Machu Picchu and other findings; 3) what Bingham might have deliberately avoided discussing in his publications in order to establish the relevance of his discoveries and the validity of his theories; and 4) what is known contemporarily about the original function and meaning of these settlements and constructions. For instance, a historical thread in the book focuses on the conflicted relationship between Manco Inca Yupanqui and Francisco Pizarro, the *conquistador* who originally instrumented Manco Inca's rise to power. Adams indicates that while Bingham believed Machu Picchu might be Vilcabamba, the city where Manco Inca retreated when pursued by Pizarro in the 1530s, current theories establish that Machu Picchu was devised and erected under Pachacutec's rule (1438-1471).

For all the historical review and discussion of Bingham's works and field adventures, it is Adams' travelogue that constitutes this book's backbone. The author vividly—and often humorously—recounts the physical and emotional hardships of his personal journey, providing a candid account of his interactions with local guides, villagers, and government employees working in the archeological sites visited. Adams hired the Australian explorer John Leivers to organize and lead two excursions to Machu Picchu. Surprisingly, as the relationship between the author and Leivers is shown to deepen, Leivers becomes an increasingly important presence in the book, whose passion for exploring is at times compared—in a positive light—to Bingham's thirst for adventure and

discovery. Leivers' accounts of how Machu Picchu and some of its particular features align with the solstice sun of June provides one of the most interesting examples of the sophisticated local- and landscape-level engineering that the Incas devised in order to connect with the overarching physical and spiritual dimensions of their environment. The Inca Trail—one of the earliest, most important, and still-used routes to Machu Picchu—may have had an original purpose similar to that of spiritual pilgrimage route that many tourists confer on it nowadays. While at the beginning of his journey Adams looks for pragmatic explanations for the monumentality of Machu Picchu's architecture, by the end of the book he seems to favor theories that attach a sacred meaning to the citadel.

One may have the impression that the author embarked on such a journey so that he could write about Bingham from a perspective that considered the physical and cultural hardships of traversing (as a foreigner) the Andean-Amazon transitional landscape where Machu Picchu and other Inca ruins are located. Yet, for most of its pages, this book offers little sympathy for Bingham, who is often portrayed as an arrogant *gringo* explorer driven by the ambition of surpassing the accomplishments of his peer scholars and explorers. Bingham is also portrayed as a mediocre writer who penned dry and unfocused pieces on topics that were supposed to be enthralling. Adams, however, partially redeems Bingham towards the end of the book, suggesting that Bingham would have agreed with the return (to Peru) of the artifacts he obtained (from excavations and transactions in the black market) for Yale University in his expeditions, a measure recently—and finally—approved by the institution. More importantly, Adams ends up recognizing a positive aspect of Bingham's legacy:

... he [Bingham] did something less romantic but ultimately much more important than *discovering* Machu Picchu. He saw the ruins, quickly determined their importance (if not their origin) and popularized them to a degree that they couldn't be blown up with dynamite or knocked over in the search for buried gold, as Vicos had been. Would Machu Picchu exist if Hiram Bingham had never seen it? Of course. Would it be the same Machu Picchu we know today? Almost certainly not. (p. 283)

In summary, this book combines a well-researched synthesis of the theories exploring the origin of Machu Picchu and other ruins in the region, the history of their discovery by Bingham, and a personal account of what it takes today to reach these ruins and the diverse peoples that currently populate this landscape, including villagers, tourist guides, and a wide range of tourists, from spiritual pilgrims to hiking athletes. I would have liked to have seen more research focused on interviews and archival research done in Peru, with Peruvian scholars and experts. The only conspicuous interview with a person somehow providing a Peruvian perspective is with former first lady Eliane Karp-Toledo, who did not add much to her already known discourse regarding Yale-Bingham related artifacts. This is, though, a relatively small criticism for a book I consider important for geographers and scholars interested in Inca and Machu Picchu history, sacred (indigenous) places, and the ethics of the preservation and research of archeological sites and artifacts.

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