



Archaeology and Indigenous Peoples

**CULTURAL HERITAGE
MANAGEMENT AND
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN THE
NORTH OF COLOMBIA
BACK TO THE ANCESTORS' LANDSCAPE**

Wilhelm Londoño Díaz



ROUTLEDGE



Cultural Heritage Management and Indigenous People in the North of Colombia

Cultural Heritage Management and Indigenous People in the North of Colombia explores indigenous people's struggle for territorial autonomy in an aggressive political environment and the tensions between heritage tourism and Indigenous rights.

South American cases where local communities, especially Indigenous groups, are opposed to infrastructure projects, are little known. This book lays out the results of more than a decade of research in which the resettlement of a pre-Columbian village has been documented. It highlights the difficulty of establishing the link between archaeological sites and objects, and Indigenous people due to legal restrictions. From a decolonial framework, the archaeology of Pueblito Chairama (Teykú) is explored, and the village stands as a model to understand the broader picture of the relationship between Indigenous people and political and economic forces in South America.

The book will be of interest to researchers in Archaeology, Anthropology, Heritage and Indigenous Studies who wish to understand the particularities of South American repatriation cases and Indigenous archaeology in the region.

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Back to the Ancestors' Landscape

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Back to the Ancestors' Landscape

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**To Eloisa and Yebrail who gave me life; to all Indigenous people
from Colombia who taught me how to resist**



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Of course, I want to acknowledge all the *ezuamas* that connect me with the world: because of them I’m still breathing, even in the middle of this pandemic. As they told me when I was walking to the streets of Taganga, the time of *anthropoceno* has come, and now we need to move forward to this society where the *ezuamas* rule.

List of abbreviations

CGSM	Ciénaga Grande de Santa Marta
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
FARC – EP	<i>Fuerzas armadas revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejercito del pueblo</i> (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces – People’s Army)
GHF	Global Heritage Fundation
GKM	<i>Gobernación Kogui Magdalena</i>
ICANH	<i>Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia</i>
MET	Metropolitan Museum
NMAI	National Museum of American Indians
OGT	<i>Organización Gonawindua Tayrona</i>
PNN	<i>Parque Nacionales Naturales</i>
PNNT	<i>Parque Nacional Natural Tayrona</i>
SNSM	<i>Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta</i>
UFC	United Fruit Company



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Introduction

This book is about the principles of life in the world of the Indigenous peoples of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (SNSM thereafter). Those principles are in the immense cliffs that crown the highest parts of the SNSM, and they are also in the sea in the small islets that stand out on the coast, they are in small mounds that are in the low parts of the beach.

Many anthropologists and explorers went to sacred places like Makotama (see [Figure 0.2](#)) to understand this philosophy. For those of us who share this experience, the magnificent cliffs that face Makotama are the great examples of the beginning of the world. That is why the houses, which represent the mens' hat, are established to contemplate timeless creation. On the shoreline

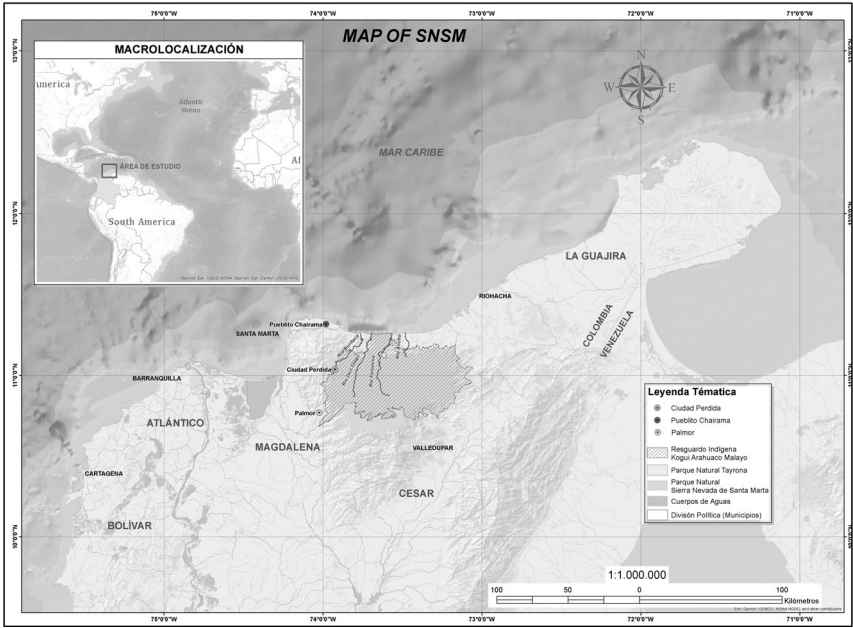


Figure 0.1 General map of northern Colombia with the areas mentioned in the book
Source: Map by the author, 2020.

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Figure 0.2 Makotama

Source: Photo by the author and Anghie Prado, 2017.

below, there are a few small slabs that resemble the great crags of Makotama. There, payments are made that are rituals where life is appreciated. As the *mamos*, culture connoisseurs, explain, upon the arrival of the conquerors these sacred places, called *ezuamas*, were destroyed. The few that remained were then looted. Until finally, the villas where the sacred rituals were performed became archaeological parks. So this book is an account of the process of recovering the sacred sites known as *ezuamas*. It is also an account of the role of archaeology in these processes of struggle of the Indigenous social movement. The ideas presented are based on the collaborative participation that I have had with the Indigenous social movement of the SNSM.

In particular, three organizations have allowed me to establish a dialogue. One is the Gonawindua Tayrona Organization (OGT thereafter), run by José de los Santos Sauna. The other organization is the Kogui community of Palmor with Francisco Gil's accompaniment. Finally, there is the Indigenous community of Taganga, with their highest dignitaries being David Cantillo and Ariel Daniels.

I present the regional case to the reader so that they can have an image of a complex internal process with various nuances, given that the examples cover a large area of South America. Since archaeology for almost a century has meant the destruction of sacred sites in the SNSM, the word archaeology does not accompany many of the efforts of the Indigenous partner movement to decolonize archaeology to produce a local history – Indigenous archaeology.

In much of Latin America, Indigenous people have been excluded from their territories and their memories. For much of the 19th century, the Colombian state invested resources to educate Indigenous people, which in

practice meant taking away their autonomy. As the Colombian state was configured as a Catholic state, various rulers thought it was better to leave Indigenous education to the church. This process was entirely an internal process of colonization; it means an endocolonialism. For this reason, when the first ethnological institutes were founded in Colombia in the 1940s, the students and professors of those institutes had to deal with a negative image of Indigenous cultures. Doing anthropological research involved a double task: helping Indigenous social movements in their mission of fighting the forces that advocated their disappearance, and doing research to understand local cultures, their worldviews, and their life expectations. In this case, this book is a summary of the organizational processes of the Kogui nation that inhabits various places in northern Colombia, and that has different historical backgrounds. Here we explore the recovery process of the sacred Teykú site that is traditionally known as Pueblito Chairama archaeological park.

In this process, I had participated at different levels and moments. This process involved various activities concerned with how to bring the voice of Indigenous communities to the academic settings of archaeology; and also to generate content, audiovisual and written, to spread the thinking of Indigenous communities. Likewise, to legally support claims for political recognition. Thus, this book is the narrative of that process that is related to others such as the political recognition of some clans, and the fight for the land in general.

In many of the political agendas of Indigenous social movements, archaeology is one of the fronts to attack, so in much of South America and Latin America the expression “decolonial archaeology” is used for practices where archaeologists support these political agendas. In many cases, this means fighting against the bureaucracies and archaeologists that do not want to forefront the Indigenous peoples’ rights. In particular, the Indigenous people of northern Colombia are reluctant to accept positive evaluations of archaeology. In this context, the term “Indigenous archaeology” is used more for projects where Indigenous people are called to help interpret data. But these methodologies are questioned because they are not explicitly aimed at generating results for the agenda of the Indigenous social movement. As we will see, the main topic of the agenda is the recovery of some sacred sites used by the state as archaeological parks. In some cases, like this one, archaeology is more the obstacle and not the objective.

In this sense, this book is not a kind of attempt to use the philosophy of Indigenous people to interpret data or to make it more accessible to the public; on the contrary, it describes the agenda of the Indigenous social movement in northern Colombia that has had critical political achievements, as in the recovery of sacred sites, and legal and political recognition of some clans. In this agenda, fighting against archaeology and archaeologists has been a constant.

As the Kogui nation is so large, here in the book we mention only the main fieldwork scenarios: the first one is Teykú, the second Taganga Bay, and the third is the town of Palmor. Those are specific sites where it is possible to

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appreciate different aspects of the relationship between political concerns and archaeological sites.

I was motivated to write this book by various Indigenous authorities (as we will see in the course of the book) mainly because it is necessary to know the problems that archaeology has been causing. For decades archaeologists have claimed that the sacred sites are pre-Hispanic garbage dumps. For decades archaeologists have said that today's Indigenous people have nothing to do with pre-Hispanic societies. With this background, it is possible to understand how problematic it is for the Indigenous social movement in northern Colombia to use the word archaeology in naming any of the items on their political agenda. Despite that, there is the borderland archaeology where Indigenous leaders and decolonial archaeologists find each other. This archaeology wants to rewrite history to show the deployment of colonialism for the domination of Indigenous people.

This book was originally planned in the early 2010s. On that occasion, a meeting was held at the Universidad del Magdalena, where several leaders of the Indigenous peoples of Northern Colombia attended. It was a clandestine meeting that allowed the spiritual leaders (mamos) to see what happened to their objects stored on the shelves of an archaeology deposit. There the mama told me that it was necessary to free some spirits that were in the prison of archaeology (Londoño 2012a).

Since this was a kind of commitment with some mamos, I dedicated myself to understanding what archaeologists called an archaeological site looked like from the Indigenous point of view. Only when I had understood this did I feel fit to write about it. To understand what it means to transform the history that has been woven about the Indigenous peoples of northern Colombia, it is necessary to know how they have been constructed as an object of study. Then we could hear some local voices and what they have to say about their sites. When Indigenous people talk about their sacred sites, this could be considered Indigenous archaeology, but in any case in northern Colombia, the concept is problematic. This requires an extensive discussion that I cannot exhaust in this book, and I am only interested in leaving some ideas that can be taken up.

The modern images of Kogui people were constructed mainly by American anthropologists and archaeologists; they were the first to generate reports on the Koguis and the archaeological sites in their territories. For me and some Indigenous leaders, it was even necessary to understand how anthropology had built northern Colombia as a research space. So, when I decided to get involved in the struggle of the Indigenous people of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, I localized myself as an archaeologist that could help to understand why and how archaeology had helped to destroy sacred places. As we could see during the book's planning, in northern Colombia, Indigenous archaeology could be more connected to the history of colonization by Europeans, so in that case, the main activity of that archaeology would be to understand the European way of thinking and its destructive ontology.