A VISUAL LEGACY OF THE PERUVIAN POPULATION AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY. MAX UHLE’S PHOTO COLLECTION AT THE IBERO-AMERIKANISCHES INSTITUT BERLIN

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The life and work of Max Uhle

Max Uhle (1856-1944) was one of Germany’s most important archaeologists and specialists in ancient American history. He developed a new chronology of Andean cultures based on the findings of stratigraphic excavations in South America and empirical data (Bischof 1998: 37-78) and is thus often referred to as the “father of Peruvian archaeology” in academic literature (Rowe 1954). He also did a great deal of work on ethnological and linguistic issues (Höflein 2002), compiled data on indigenous languages, such as Aymara, Uru and Chipaya, and collected narrative texts and songs in Quechua (Hartmann 1987: 321-385). Exploring the cultural history of the Central Andes became his “scientific mission in life” (Bankmann 1995: 253), to which he devoted his many years of meticulous research in South America. He played an integral role in creating an institutional framework for archaeology and helping to establish museums in Lima, Santiago de Chile and Quito.

After obtaining his doctorate (1880), Max Uhle worked at the Royal Zoological and Anthropological-Ethnological Museum in Dresden and from 1888 at the Royal Museum of Ethnology in Berlin. From 1892 to 1933 he mainly lived in South America, where he embarked on a number of research trips. He was firstly commissioned by the Royal Museum of Ethnology in Berlin to travel to Argentina and Bolivia (1892-1895) to acquire archaeological and ethnological artefacts. He also organized small-scale excavations and scouting expeditions (Bankmann 1995: 254 and 1998: 14, 19-23). His second and longest research trip took him to Peru (1896-1911, with short interruptions). It was here that Max Uhle carried out his most important excavations for the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia) at the ruins of Pachacámac, located south of Lima (Uhle 1906a: 568). During a stopover in Philadelphia (1897-1899), Uhle penned his monograph on Pachacámac (Uhle 1903), which helped establish his reputation worldwide. The University of Berkeley (California 1899-1903) subsequently commissioned him to carry out research in San Francisco Bay (Uhle 1907: 1-106). At the end of 1903, Max Uhle returned to Peru and devoted himself to conducting excavations on the Peruvian coast in Ancón, Chancay and Supe as well as in Cusco (Mason/Krause 1999: 16). In 1906 he became head of the archaeological division of the Museo Nacional de Historia in Lima; in 1907 he was appointed overall director. His last two research stations were based in Chile and Ecuador (1912-1933). Max Uhle was invited by the Chilean government to help establish the Museo de Etnología y Antropología and also conducted archaeological excavations (Dauelsberg Hahmann 1995: 371-394). In 1919 Max Uhle travelled to Ecuador after the independent scholar and politician Jacinto Jijón y Caamaño offered to fund his research projects; in return, he asked Uhle to help create an institutional framework for archaeology (Larrea 1956: 16-18; Höflein 2001: 329-347). In 1933 Max Uhle returned to Berlin, worked at the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut (Ibero-American Institute, IAI) and lectured...
A group of fishers and reed boats, Eten (between 1896 and 1911)
at Friedrich Wilhelm University, today’s Humboldt University of Berlin. On 11 May 1944 Max Uhle died in Loben (today’s Lubliniec/Poland) at the age of 88.

Image Archive at the Ibero-American Institute Berlin and other holdings

Scope and impact

Due to his constant change of employer and range of different research projects, Max Uhle’s papers and manuscripts are spread across the world at numerous institutions, including the Ethnological Museum and the Prussian Privy State Archives of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation in Berlin, Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology and the Bancroft Library of the University of Berkeley (California), at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and at various institutions in Peru, Chile and Bolivia. The majority of his materials and documentation became part of the holdings of the Ibero-American Institute in Berlin after his return to Germany (Wolff 2004).

The papers at the Ibero-American Institute comprise manuscripts for lectures and presentations, notebooks, plans, drawings, sketches, personal papers, newspaper cuttings, postcards and letters, as well as an extensive photo collection featuring a total of 4,898 photos and 1,951 negatives, divided into 79 thematically arranged compilations of materials (Wolff 2010: 379-384).

The collection contains Uhle’s own work as well as pictures by other photographers, such as Paul Félix Bonfils, Heinrich Brüning, H. Ehlen, Pedro Emilio, Fernando Garreaud, Obder W. Heffer, Georg Huebner, J. Charles Kroehle, Gustavo Milet Ramírez, Max T. Vargas and Charles Burlingame Waite.

The photo collection is an impressive example of the varied scope of Max Uhle’s projects in South America. As a socio-historical compilation of materials, it is also an invaluable resource for researchers from a range of disciplines. Furthermore, the combination of the photographic documents and Uhle’s meticulous accounts of his experiments and experiences with the camera (Mihok 2012: 32-46) makes a key contribution to the history of photography.

The main themes of Max Uhle’s photography

Max Uhle did not work as a professional photographer. However, a look at the notes accompanying his images and his lists of photos reveals that he mastered the technical challenges involved in producing photographs and constantly developed his knowledge in this field (Mihok 2012: 32-46). The first documented images were taken in Argentina and Bolivia, including a number of particularly striking shots of indigenous dances, such as the Ojesere and Auki-auki dances. Over the course of his travels in various other locations in South America, Uhle frequently captured everyday scenes on camera and collected work by other photographers. In addition to the numerous images of excavations in locations such as Ancón, Sacsayhuamán, Ica, Pachacámac and the Supe Valley, Uhle produced photographs of landscapes, cities, ports, churches, buildings, machines and everyday scenes. He photographed the indigenous population in various regions at work, at leisure and during festivals, and also took portraits and group shots. Uhle’s keen interest in photography is particularly illustrated by the wealth of photographs he took in Peru (Mihok 2012: 31-119).

Photographic documents from Peru

The photographs of Peru, which date from between 1896 and 1911, form the largest part of the photographic leg-
Visitors and stalls at a market, Tarma (between 1896 and 1911)
acy, as Uhle spent most of his academic career in this country. The Ibero-American Institute has compiled Uhle’s original photographs from Peru and copies of his work into various folders. The IAI also houses a number of other photo albums in which Uhle recorded his impressions of Peru. Alongside shots of the coast (in Paita, Lambayeque, Chiclayo, Chancay and Lurín), there are also images of inland Peru (in Huamachuco, Tarma and Arequipa) and the cities of Lima and Cusco. Uhle’s notebooks add another layer to the images, as he goes beyond the purely “visual” level and discusses background issues, such as the rural, social and political conditions, festivals and rituals, traditional medicines, and the general living situation on the Haciendas.

These research photographs were taken at a time when there was barely any photographic record of the country. Photography was an emerging technology in Peru and there were very few researchers and photographers documenting the country and its people (Mihok 2012: 23-26). Uhle’s own publications and the research projects of other scientists (Uhle 1903; Masson/Krause 1999) only featured his archaeological photographs. However, his scientific interests went beyond purely archaeological matters. This can be seen in his notes on indigenous languages and cultures and is also clearly illustrated by his photographs of the indigenous population, which had received very little attention from scholars up until then. There is no doubt that Max Uhle’s photo collection is an important testimony to Peru’s culture and history, providing a glimpse of how indigenous people lived over 100 years ago.

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Seitenblicke. Max Uhles Fotografien aus Peru (Side Glances: Max Uhle’s Peruvian Photographs) (Mihok 2012) was the first publication to examine the sections of Uhle’s photographic legacy which document the various stages of his travels and work in Peru. Mihok uses correspond-

tence dating from 1896 to 1911 as well as private records to demonstrate Uhle’s passion for photography and interest in Peruvian culture. The selection, classification and analysis of 60 images from Lima, Lurín, Eten, Lambayeque, Chiclayo, Tarma and Huamachuco pay homage to Max Uhle as a photographer.

By capturing everyday scenes with his camera, Uhle revealed striking parallels between the past and the present:

Pero para comprender la vida del pasado nacional es necesario que estudiamos el presente en sus costumbres y usos, en la técnica, en los idiomas, en el folclor y en la música de los indios de nuestro tiempo. (Uhle 1906b: 413)

During his time in Peru, Uhle attended numerous traditional festivals and his images of the people at work and in their everyday lives depicted traditional utensils and objects, making each photograph an important socio-historical and ethnographic record. In his speech at the opening of the Museo de Historia Nacional del Perú, Uhle noted that many of the traditional pre-Columbian techniques were still in use and expressed his hope that some of these technologies would survive, in spite of modern industrial developments (Uhle 1906b: 413). At the same time, Uhle used his camera to portray modernization processes, photographing, for example, technical achievements in the fields of agriculture and boat-building. The clothes in his images also demonstrate this back-and-forth between tradition and modernity: the festive clothing worn on special occasions was strongly inspired by European styles, while the majority of everyday activities were carried out in traditional garments.

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A group of musicians with representatives of the village of Lurín (between 1896 and 1911)
A visual legacy of the Peruvian people at the beginning of the 20th century

Due to Max Uhle’s renowned standing as an archaeologist, scholars to date have focused solely on the photographic documentation of his excavations. These include archaeological photographs of burial finds, earthenware jars and excavation sites. The images documenting the everyday lives of the Peruvian population around the turn of the century are unique in that Uhle did not parade his subjects to the public. All available research indicates that he had no intention of publishing these photographs or marketing them in any other way, nor was he commissioned to take the pictures by a museum or a research institution. As Max Uhle’s chief aim was not to produce the photographs for publication or for the scientific community, it can be assumed that his interest was mainly a personal one.

The selection of motifs in Uhle’s photographs is by no means free of subjective preferences and his images therefore show us his own personal view of Peru’s indigenous population. Uhle has been described as a reserved man who did not conduct extensive interviews (Masson/Krause 1999: 22). However, this does not necessarily mean that he did not participate in the cultural life of the Peruvian people. On the contrary, his photo collection illustrates that he experienced numerous everyday situations and special occasions during the long periods he spent in South America.

Max Uhle’s photo collection features a wide range of subjects, making it an integral part of the visual heritage of the Peruvian people around the turn of the century.
Image of a religious procession, Chancay (between 1896 and 1911)
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Portrait of a woman with a child (between 1896 and 1911)