

Unit 9: Archeology from Space

Luis Jaime Castillo: We are the detectives of the past. And we have to figure out what happened.

Peru is super special archeologically because this is one of the cradles of civilization. It is where civilization actually arose from nothing.

Sarah Parcak: A little over a hundred years ago, Hiram Bingham went to Peru and, relying on local knowledge, found this crumbling city in the middle of the rain forest. At the time, he used state-of-the-art photography equipment to record what was there.

It was the first scientific archeological expedition that National Geographic funded. And, in some ways, it helped to launch our modern age of archeology.

So, the idea of applying new state-of-the-art technology to map sites in Peru feels like a natural extension of what Hiram Bingham did over a hundred years ago.

Luis Jaime Castillo: One of the dreams of archeology has always been to look from above. As drones became available five or six years ago, archeologists jumped at this opportunity. Finally, we can fly above our excavations and take a picture that reveals everything that we have seen from below.

Now, if you simply go up, up, up into the space and look down with a camera, you can at the same time look at not one square mile, but many square miles. And then you can focus on specific items that you think are important.

Sarah Parcak: Space archeology is the study and the use of satellite images for mapping ancient archeological features and environmental features, by looking at different parts of the light spectrum.

We see subtle changes on the Earth's surface caused by what's buried beneath. And what satellites help us to do is pinpoint areas, and we know to within a few meters exactly where something is from thousands of miles away.

We're the generation with all the tools and all the technologies to be able to map sites and protect them. And using these new technologies, we have a real chance to protect and preserve these sites for future generations.