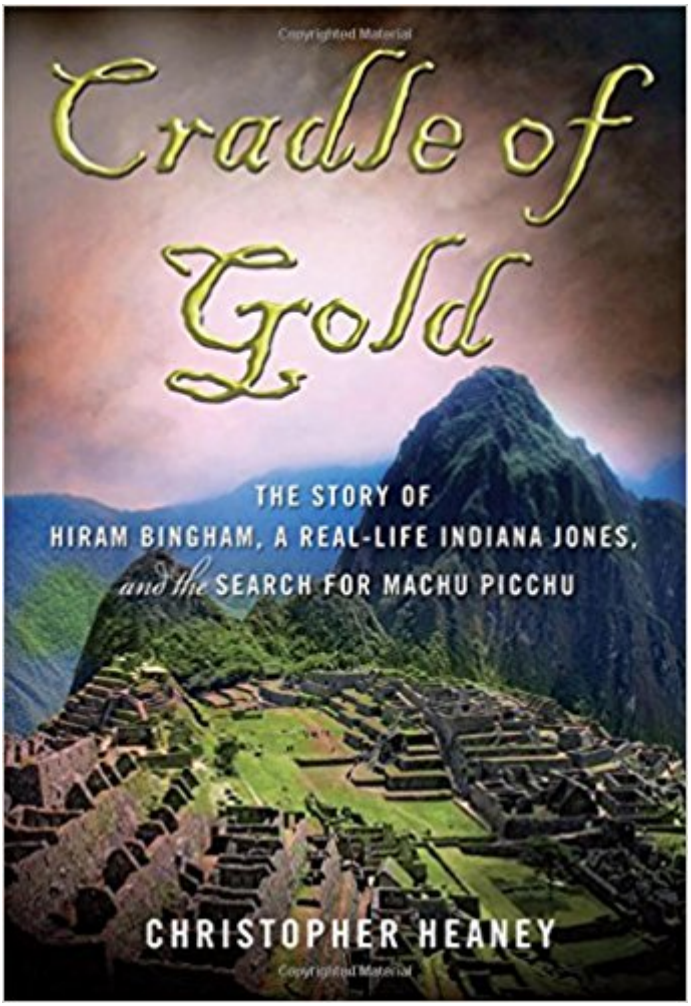
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Cradle Of Gold: The Story Of Hiram Bingham, The Real Indiana Jones, And The Search Of Machu Picchu



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Synopsis

In 1911, a young Peruvian boy led an American explorer and Yale historian named Hiram Bingham into the ancient Incan citadel of Machu Picchu. Hidden amidst the breathtaking heights of the Andes, this settlement of temples, tombs and palaces was the Incas' greatest achievement. Tall, handsome, and sure of his destiny, Bingham believed that Machu Picchu was the IncasÃ¢â ¬â„¢ final refuge, where they fled the Spanish Conquistadors. Bingham made Machu Picchu famous, and his dispatches from the jungle cast him as the swashbuckling hero romanticized today as a true Indiana Jones-like character. But his excavation of the site raised old specters of conquest and plunder, and met with an indigenous nationalism that changed the course of Peruvian history. Though Bingham successfully realized his dream of bringing Machu PicchuÃ¢â ¬â„¢s treasure of skulls, bones and artifacts back to the United States, conflict between Yale and Peru persists through the present day over a simple question: Who owns Inca history?In this grand, sweeping narrative, Christopher Heaney takes the reader into the heart of Peru's past to relive the dramatic story of the final years of the Incan empire, the exhilarating recovery of their final cities and the thought-provoking fight over their future. Drawing on original research in untapped archives, Heaney vividly portrays both aÃ Â stunning landscape and the complex history of a fascinating region that continues to inspire awe and controversy today.

Book Information

Hardcover: 272 pages

Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan; First Edition edition (April 13, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0230611699

ISBN-13: 978-0230611696

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 25.4 x 241.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 67 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #853,366 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #80 inÃ Â Books > History > Ancient Civilizations > Incan #148 inÃ Â Books > History > Americas > South America > Peru #418 inÃ Â Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Latin America

Customer Reviews

"An unforgettable journey into the heart of Peru's past that takes the reader on a hunt for the lost cities of the Incas, the famous Machu Picchu among them.Ã Â It's also a sensitively written portrait

of Hiram Bingham, one of the last great explorers of our time--a man set on fulfilling his destiny--and a judicious historical account of the disenfranchisement of the Peruvian people, who had their heritage stolen by those claiming to protect it."--Peter Nichols, author of Final Voyage and A Voyage for Madmen

Christopher Heaney worked as a journalist in Peru on a Fulbright fellowship. He has written articles on Hiram Bingham for the New Republic and The New York Times. A graduate of Yale University, he is currently a doctoral candidate in Latin American History at the University of Texas, Austin.

Here’s a good story, told in a beautiful narrative style by a well-qualified author, but here’s the thing: This book isn’t so much a biography of Bingham or a study of the fall of the Inca empire as it is the story of the intermingling of institutions and their claims upon sites and artifacts in Cusco, Peru. It is a careful analysis of cultural ownership, and if such a concept is even possible.Yale, and its various sponsored expeditions, are central to the story. In fact, I’d say the author gives us too much here. Throughout the book the reader may forget that we’re supposed to be learning about the rediscovery of Machu Picchu because we’re reading about the history of Yale University. Perhaps that’s what the author intended.That minor complaint aside, the reader is treated to a beautifully told story in the history of American anthropology. It really DOES read like a real-life Indiana Jones story, and Bingham was a huge figure, much like his fictional counterpart.Still, this is ultimately a book about institutions and politics, and those looking for a detailed biography or a detailed history of the end of the Inca empire will be disappointed.

On the morning of July 24, 1911, a tall lecturer-cum-explorer from Yale University set off in a cold drizzle to investigate rumors of ancient Inca ruins in Peru. The explorer chopped his way through thick jungle, crawled across a "bridge" of slender logs bound together with vines, and crept through underbrush hiding venomous fer-de-lance pit vipers.Two hours into the hike, the explorer and his two escorts came across a grass-covered hut. A pair of Indian farmers walked them a short way before handing them over to a small Indian boy. With the boy leading the way, Hiram Bingham stumbled upon one of the greatest archaeological finds of the 20th century; and what was named in 2007 as one of the new seven wonders of the world: Machu Picchu.Christopher Heaney’s "Cradle of Gold" recounts the discovery of Machu Picchu , but also dives deeply into the expeditions leading up to this seminal archaeological discovery, as well as later expeditions and the political intrigues that still exist today.To be clear, Bingham didn’t truly ’discover’ Machu Picchu. There were two

Indian families living on the mountain who were even using the broad Machu Picchu plaza as a garden. It’s common in modern times to reference Bingham as the "scientific" discoverer of the mountain top Inca citadel. According to Heaney, it was common during his day as well. Within the last two years, research has emerged that indicates that not only did locals know of the ruins perched above the Urubamba River, but foreign interests were both aware of Machu Picchu, and had sought out (and possibly found), treasure among the ruins. Heaney points out that the debate of who ’discovered’ Machu Picchu began the moment Bingham reached the ruins and saw a name clearly scratched in charcoal on an ancient Inca wall.Heaney spent years researching the story in Peru, the UK and across the United States to compile fresh and historic perspectives on Bingham the man, and Bingham the explorer. Heaney covers Bingham’s childhood where he group up in Hawai’i with a deeply religious father and grandfather, both of whom were, and are, renown for their work in spreading and reinforcing Christianity across the Pacific.According to Heaney, Bingham found himself caught between the very conservative world of his religious upbringing, and a strong desire to explore. Additionally, he had to live up to a well-known name and reputation that was generations-old. He ended up marrying an heiress to the Tiffany fortune which provided the early funding of his first trips to South America. He had a knack for history, writing, and leadership. The combination of the three landed him in Peru in 1911.A second ruin-hunting expedition, with primary funding from Yale University, where Hiram graduated and lectured, and the National Geographic Society, returned him to Peru to flesh out his previous discoveries and the historical theories he proposed. Bingham explored, excavated and publicized on his own behalf. Ultimately the world embraced his Lost City which he thought was the first and last cities of the Incas. It is, in fact, the strongest of Bingham’s legacies.But there’s more to the story than discovery. There’s a political side that adds a rather distasteful bit of reality to the dream-like elements of the Inca city in the clouds. Within the last three years, Peru has been pushing Yale, in the press and in the courts, to return the artifacts that Bingham purportedly took with him from Peru during his series of expeditions. This dark cloud hangs over Machu Picchu which is set to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Bingham’s revelation to the world. This political battle is not new. It emerged essentially as Bingham was making his round of celebrity lectures in the U.S. lauding his discoveries. And the battle didn’t simply occur around Bingham, he was often right in the middle of the fray. Heaney also makes it clear that Bingham was not a mere innocent bystander, but he helped create a problem that has lasted almost a century.Heaney’s story is very detailed and extremely well researched as evidenced by 20+ pages of references and footnotes. He got his hands on several archives rich in journals and personal correspondence related to Machu Picchu and Hiram Bingham. Heaney provides a thrilling account

of Bingham’s journeys, through the multifaceted lenses of those related to his Peruvian expeditions, as well as his own well-known accounts.The story of Bingham’s discoveries evoke the youthful passions to take on incredible challenges in far-off lands. The realities of Bingham’s jungle and mountain adventures are mere fantasies of young boys across suburban America...fantasies that are reinforced through pop culture icons like Indiana Jones. Heaney suggests (even in his title) that Indiana Jones was modeled on Hiram Bingham. He, in fact, references an old Charlton Heston film,"Secret of the Incas", upon which the costumers of Raiders of the Lost Ark based Indy’s outfit. Heston’s character in "Secret of the Incas" is, of course, a dead ringer for Bingham.Like Indy, Bingham’s story has good guys and bad guys. Unlike the movies the good guys don’t necessarily wear the white hats and the bad guys don’t necessarily wear the black ones.

Up to date accounting of the (re)-discovery of Machu Picchu by Hiram Bingham in 1911 now with the final return of artifacts that he collected and deposited at Yale University 100 year later. For all his imperfections, Bingham gave the world one of its wonders which continues to draw visitors internationally. Heaney gives an even handed account of the history up to the present. It is a ’must read’ before a visit to Peru.

This is a must-read for anyone who’s been to Machu Picchu or has ever dreamed of visiting the city in the sky-- which should include everyone. Heaney’s muscular and captivating prose delivers the fruits of exhaustive research in the vessel of a page-turning adventure story. Not only do we get a complete, nuanced, and balanced reporting on Bingham’s expeditions to Peru, but also historical context in the form of "Interludes." The young author’s natural storytelling gifts shine especially bright in these sections, causing you to root in vain for the Incas as the Spanish conquest plays out. All in all a great book appropriate both for the casual reader and for more serious students of Latin American history.

My wife and I just got back from visiting Peru, and before our trip we both decided that we would get more out of it if we did some reading about Machu Picchu. We each read a few books, and while they were all helpful in one way or another, "Cradle of Gold" was by far the most beneficial to our trip."Cradle of Gold" presents the history of Machu Picchu in a straightforward, yet highly readable manner. Both the history of Machu Picchu as a civilization and the story of its "discovery" by Hiram Bingham are fascinating, and Heaney does a wonderful job of telling these stories. He also very fairly presents the controversy surrounding the ownership of the artifacts taken by Bingham, making

what could be a dry legal case into an interesting sociopolitical debate.We found that we got much more out of our trip to Peru, and particularly to the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu, than we would have had we not read "Cradle of Gold." We were able to spend our time with our guide of Machu Picchu skipping over the basic stuff and asking about what interested us most. "Cradle of Gold" provided us with context and a much deeper understanding of what we were seeing, and allowed us to have a much more enjoyable and educational trip than we would have without the book."Cradle of Gold" is a quick and enjoyable read, and one that I highly recommend for anyone traveling to Peru.

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