

Upstairs Gallery

Case 2: The Peruvian mummy

Ethics and her presence and display here: Elgin Museum is very aware of the need to take an ethical approach to the care and display of all objects entrusted to its care. The Peruvian mummy poses serious questions and many hours of debate have taken place within our organisation and with visitors, ethnographic specialists and researchers; more recently discussions have opened with authorities in Peru.

We are pleased that she has been the subject of scientific research at Dundee University, thanks to Professor Caroline Wilkinson. At least a contribution to scientific and historic knowledge has been made possible by her being here in the Museum. Her presence is a prime example of the “that was then, this is now” 21st century and evolving attitude to collecting by museums, and she is displayed here in that context.

Who was she?: She was an Aymara girl, a pre-Inca culture that still exists, and died when about 13-16 years old. From carbon dating, she lived in the 15th Century AD. She was about 5' 4" tall with a sugar-loaf shaped head from the practice of head-binding in infancy. No cause of death was identified. To facilitate rebirth, bodies were allowed to mummify in the crouched or foetal position in caves in the mountain air; her body was taken by the donor from a cave in Maretasse, an islet of Lake Titicaca, 3810m above sea level.



ELGNM: 1846.3



ELGNM: 1846.4

The donor: James Jack (1807 – 1885), later Fletcher, was born in Elgin, son of a nailer in Charles Close. The Jack brothers had a business in Liverpool, importing the wool of alpaca from Peru, with a base at Arequipa in the district from where James Jack took the mummy. At Avoch, across the Moray Firth, where James established Rosehaugh estate, he was evidently a family man and a benefactor within the local community. A collection of Early Bronze Age flat axes from Avoch (on display downstairs in the rear gallery, ELGNM: 1868.1a-e) and the Peruvian dishes in this case were also donated by him (ELGNM: 1846.3 & 4).

Further information available on request:

Restitution and Repatriation, Elgin Museum Policy and Procedure 2019
<https://elginmuseum.org.uk/policies/>

Power Point Presentation on the Elgin Museum Peruvian mummy by Dr Caroline Wilkinson in 2012, describing the research and results.

James Fletcher, né Jack (1807 – 1885) by Janet Trythall, in Moray Field Club Bulletin Number 44 December 2016, p 18 – 25.

Peruvian mummy (ELGNM: 1846.14.1)

Earthenware dishes (ELGNM: 1846.14.3 and .4)

22/7/2021 JT