

Ancient Peru Unearthed: Preview

by: **William Thorsell, Director and CEO, and Justin Jennings, Associate Curator, New World Archaeology**
Royal Ontario Museum

[Audio ROM sound sting]

William Thorsell: Good morning ladies and gentlemen and welcome to the Royal Ontario Museum. Bienvenue au Musée royal de l'Ontario, and to this wonderful opening of the exhibition *Ancient Peru Unearthed: Golden Treasures of a Lost Civilization*. And, in this case, the title is not an overstatement; it really is a tremendous collection that has come to our attention and in the world in only the last fifteen or twenty years in this particular case. This exhibition will open next Saturday, with a number of special events in anticipation of its opening. And it opens after quite a bit of already dynamic work with the communities in Toronto, the Peruvian community here, a lecture series that will continue... One of the really fulfilling things when we have exhibitions that touch new areas of the world, is discovering much more fully how many of those cultures live down the street here in Toronto and in Ontario. So, this is an important community in our city and in our country. It is an important social and political fact in the Western hemisphere, in to coming to the United States, of course. And it is a wonderful tapestry of history; deep and interesting histories. And, the ROM does have a history of working in Central America and South America. We do have some significant collections from this part of the world which have not been on public view for at least a generation or two, but will be part of a new permanent gallery in the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal, which will open next winter. We're very happy to be developing our relationships now with the Peruvian community, communities in South America, and particularly in the light of the fact that we have finally hired a curator, Associate Curator, for Central American Archaeology, Justin Jennings, who you will hear from shortly. I went through the exhibition with him yesterday, for about an hour, and he said something very interesting to me about this. Of course, the exhibition is filled with wonderful objects that stand on their own as elements of beauty. But, he, and I really like this about the ROM, he said that it's really the *story* that brings it all alive. And he took us through, Mark Engstrom and I, and told us the story of these people and meaning and the context of all these things, which you will be able to get on our audio guides, I think. And maybe you will be lucky enough to have a tour with Justin Jennings, but there is a wonderful story here that we will be telling in many ways – through lectures, through school programs, through audio guides, and other ways during the life of this exhibition, which runs well into the summer. I'm pleased to introduce Justin Jennings, who is our new Associate Curator of New World Archaeology.

Justin Jennings: On behalf of the whole exhibition team, I want to thank you for coming to this media preview. Of course, this exhibition is about the Sicán, and the Sicán are a fairly poorly known culture. Most of us here may know about the Incas, but the Sicán dominated the North coast of Peru from about 900-1100 A.D. You may know, you may not know about the Sicán, but they were very important. Sicán, the capital of Sicán, is perhaps the most looted site in the world. There are over one hundred thousand looters holes around the site. And countless tombs have been

sacked by looters over the last century. But, fortunately for us, archaeologists were lucky, and in 1991, Dr. Izumi Shimada and Dr. Carlos Elera found the East Tomb, a veritable treasure trove of 1.2 metric tons of grave goods. 75% of these were metals; much of this was gold and gold alloy. 107 of the 122 objects you'll see today come from that tomb. And the exhibit tells the story of those excavations, the Sicán Lord buried in that tomb, and the Sicán themselves. This exhibit of course, would not be here without the help of two fine institutions. First of all, the Nickle Arts Museum in Calgary – our profound thanks in their help for organizing this. And of course, also, the Museo Nacional Sicán, with Dr. Carlos Elera, their director. This is a project over ten years that it took from its inspiration that Dr. Carlos had of doing this, to actually having it come to the Nickle and then traveling across all of Peru. So, our thanks to both of those institutions. What we've done, is built upon what the Nickle has provided us. We've added some extra features, both within the space, and as an introduction to the space as well. One of the more interesting features that you'll see is an introduction from the north coast of Peru, where we talk about Moche, Sicán, Chimú, and Inca cultures, those cultures that were in the north coast of Peru from before and after the Sicán. We'll have on display some of our own ROM objects. For example, a wonderful Inca feather mantle, a gold mask, as well as perhaps most impressively, three wonderful gold objects from the Linden Museum in Stuttgart, two gold death masks and one fox head from a royal tomb in Huaca de la Luna in the Moche capital.

William Thorsell: So please do join us to see this exhibition. It's on the third floor, up the 1931 stairs, or there's an elevator there. And I must say, the elevator has been somewhat reconfigured with this exhibition, so at least going up or down, you might want to try the elevator – it's kind of an adventure. Welcome to the ROM. Thank you for your presence here.

[Audio ends with ROM sound sting]