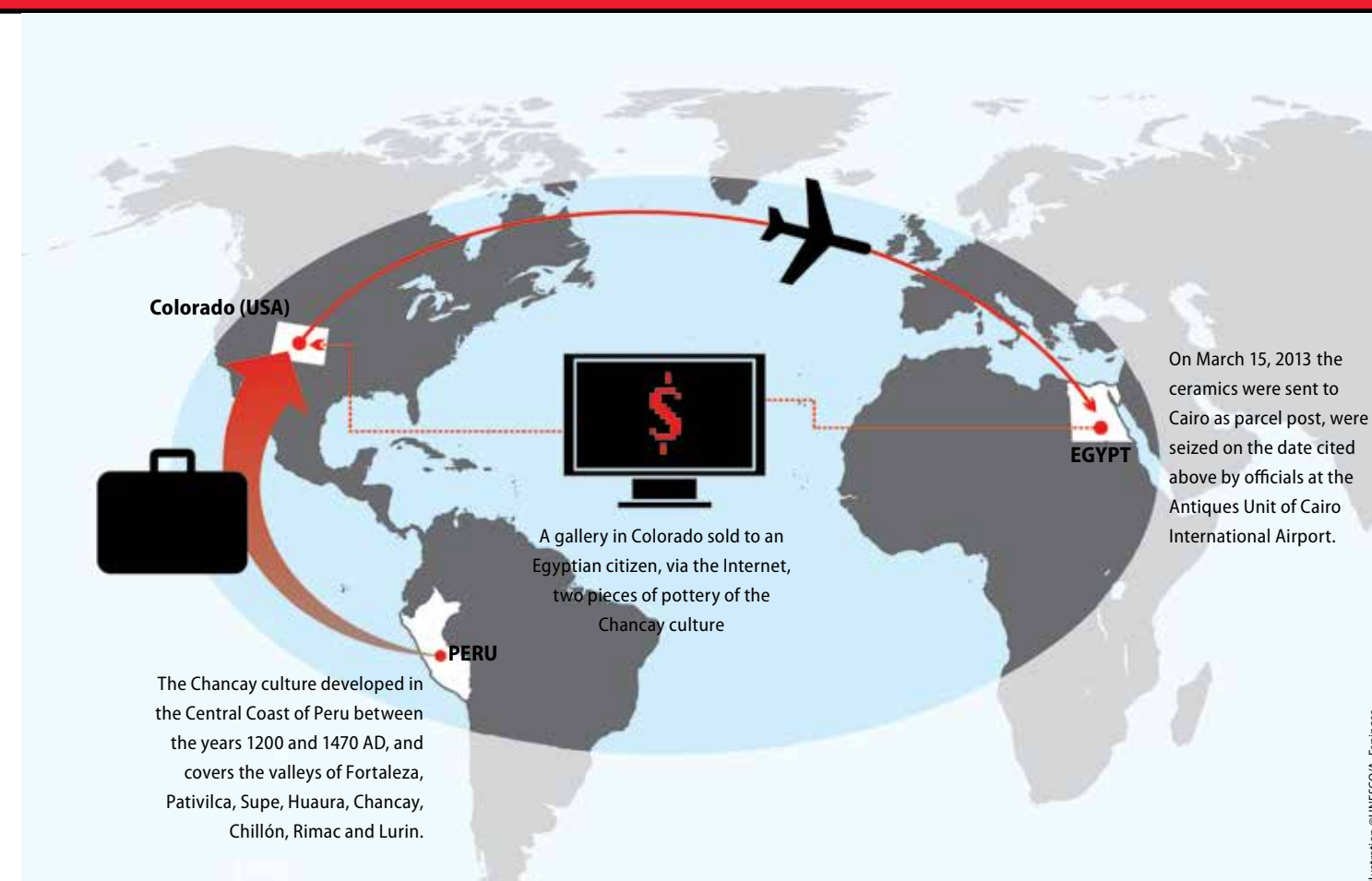


# PERU IN EGYPT



## Archaeological recovery

### ■ Blanca Alva Guerrero

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In May 2005, the Republic of Peru and the Arab Republic of Egypt signed an agreement for the protection and restitution of stolen or illicitly transferred assets, shortly after having penned the 1970 and 1972 UNESCO Conventions as well as the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention. Under this agreement, the two countries undertook to prohibit and prevent from entering their territories any cultural, archaeological, artistic and/or historical assets resulting from theft, illegal trafficking or illicit export and transfer.

On March 15, 2013, the agreement was effectively implemented for the first time. A gallery in Colorado (United States of America) sold to an Egyptian citizen, via the Internet, two pieces of pottery of the Chanca culture (which developed

in the Central Coast of Peru between the years 1200 and 1470 AD, and covers the valleys of Fortaleza, Pativilca, Supe, Huaura, Chanca, Chillón, Rimac and Lurin). The ceramics, which were sent to Cairo as parcel post, were seized on the date cited above by officials at the Antiques Unit of Cairo International Airport.

The ceramics are of small size and are, therefore, difficult to detect. Although parcels usually go through scanners, knowledge, experience and even intuition are required to detect "suspicious" pieces of such features. These pieces, which are anthropomorphic representations known in Peru by the name of *cuchimilcos*, are familiar to any Peruvian researcher, but are hardly recognizable to foreigners. Therefore, the fact that Egyptian officials managed to do so is worth highlighting.

The Ministry of Culture of Egypt reported the finding to the diplomatic representatives of Peru, who in turn asked their Ministry of Culture to determine how old and original the figures were. The archaeologist in charge of repatriation cases examined the photographs and, without hesitation, concluded that they were authentic.

The two are ceramic figurines with the arms extended, the legs put together, embossed facial features enhanced with paint, and painted clothes. They are 17 and 15 inches tall, respectively. The smaller one is what archaeologists call a subtype, a variant of relative rarity, which has not two but four arms, two sculpturally open and away from the body, and two pictorially represented as folded across the chest.

The technical report of the Peruvian Ministry of Culture was sent to the Egyptian authorities through diplomatic

channels. In late September of this year, the two *cuchimilcos* were formally handed over to the Ambassador of Peru to Egypt, returning their ownership to Peru. Still pending is the last stage, that is, to have them returned to the country to be kept at the National Museum.

Egypt and Peru are two of the eighteen countries members of the Subsidiary Committee of the 1970 UNESCO Convention. Both nations have suffered and are still suffering the pillage and plunder of their assets, mainly archaeological. This return clearly shows the excellent cooperation between Peru and Egypt, as well as the commitment of the signatories to the 1970 Convention to the prevention of illicit trafficking in cultural property.

