



Gary S. Vescelius (1930-1982)

Gary Vescelius (right) studying and interpreting the "Vilcabamba" material recovered by Gene Savoy (left), Lima, Peru, 1964. (Photograph by Thomas F. Lynch)

GARY S. VESCELIUS (1930-1982)

Richard L. Burger
Yale University
Thomas F. Lynch
Cornell University

On November, 1982 Gary S. Vescelius died of a heart attack while completing a study of the archaeological resources of Vieques Naval Reservation in Puerto Rico. Vescelius was an influential figure in the history of Peruvian archaeology and his sudden death at the age of 52 deprived the field of one of its most stimulating thinkers. Vescelius was born in Glen Ridge, New Jersey on October 16, 1930. While still in high school, he conducted archaeological research in New Hampshire and assisted Junius Bird at the American Museum of Natural History. At least equally important, surely, to this son of a hotelier, was the experience of living and learning with the Bird family from his guest quarters in the garden shed. Vescelius attended Yale University and during those years at the university he carried out fieldwork in various parts of the United States (Connecticut: 1949, Kansas: 1948-8, South Dakota: 1950) and directed an archaeological survey of St. Croix (1951), the largest island in the Virgin Islands. He graduated *magna cum laude* with a B.A. in Anthropology in 1952 and then began graduate work at the University of Michigan, where he received his M.A. in 1954. His archaeological work was interrupted by a tour of duty in the U.S. Army (1956 to 1958), but he returned to do fieldwork in South America when he was discharged from military service.

In 1958, Vescelius went to Peru for the first time under the auspices of the Fulbright Program of Educational Exchange and from 1958 to 1961 he surveyed the far south coast of Peru from Atico to the Chilean border. During this time he was a research associate of the Instituto de Etnología y Arqueología de la Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos and taught as well at the Universidad de San Agustín (1960-1961) in Arequipa, where he was also associated with the U.S. astronomical observatory. This extended research was immediately followed by a four-year study of the archaeology of the Marcará area in the central Callejón de Huaylas (1961-1965), which included excavations at Huaman Huilca, Ullmay, Honcopampa (Queque), Huanagrán, Queyash, and Huaricoto. Conducted with Henry Dobyns, Thomas Lynch, and Hernán Amat Olazabal, this work was part of the interdisciplinary Vicos Project of Cornell University, directed by Allan Holmberg. Short term investigations in Peru were made by Vescelius in the lower Santa (1964), at Wichqana and Huari in Ayacucho (1970) and in Cuzco (1970).

The NSF-supported Vicos archaeological program provided Vescelius with the funds, institutional backing, and influence among Peruvian and North American archaeologists that established him at the fore of his profession. His reputation for an almost omniscient control of the details of Peruvian archaeology, combined with strongly held opinions of virtually all topics, was grounded in extensive fieldwork from this period. Vescelius's renowned expertise on the Andes persisted to his death. Nor will we soon forget the delightfully cavalier approach and style he brought to the use, and even domination, of Peru's roads, vehicles, telephone offices, restaurants, and the like. Patience was not Gary's forte, and the fast lane had its hazards, but most Peruvians accepted his

outbursts along with his fine sense of irony and humor. Vescelius was always respected, generally understood, and well liked.

The impact of Vescelius's fieldwork in Peru and the breadth of his knowledge of Andean archaeology is not adequately reflected in his publications. Unfortunately, Vescelius had difficulty in writing up his findings and his output was limited to a few short reports and book reviews. He did, however, disseminate the results of his research widely at conferences, classrooms, and bars of Peru and the US. He was influential as a professor of anthropology at City University of New York, Queens (1967-1972) and the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana (1972-73), and his informal discussions of his findings and new ideas were both spellbinding and unforgettable. Vescelius was always fascinated with quantitative techniques and their application to archaeology, and his best known publication was a pioneering article on archaeological sampling written in 1960. His mathematical skills also served him well in his unpublished research on radiocarbon dating and the ceque system of Cuzco.

In 1975, Vescelius was appointed by the US government as the Territorial Archaeologist for the U.S. Virgin Islands and even after he left this position in 1979, he continued his research in the Caribbean as a consultant for private firms. During these years, he was recognized as one of the leading figures in West Indian archaeology. However, he never lost interest in Andean archaeology and just before his death, he published a lengthy review and reinterpretation of Thomas Lynch's *Guitarrero Cave* (Academic Press, 1980). Vescelius stated several months before his death that he intended to return to the US from the Virgin Islands and begin the process of publishing the results of his earlier work in Peru. It is the hope of his friends and colleagues that it will be possible to publish posthumously these important contributions to Peruvian archaeology.

Bibliography, Gary S. Vescelius

- 1952 Excavated Material from Pine Orchard Swamp, Branford, Connecticut. *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of Connecticut* 26: 51-53.
- 1956 Excavation at Pattee's Caves. *Bulletin of the Eastern States Archaeological Federation* 15: 13-14.
- 1957 Mound 2 at Marksville. *American Antiquity* 22: 416-420.
- 1960 Archaeological Sampling: A Problem of Statistical Inference. In *Essays in the Science of Culture in Honor of Leslie A. White*, edited by Gertrude Dole and Robert L. Carneiro, pp. 457-470. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell.
- 1960 Rasgos naturales y culturales de la costa extremo sur. *Antiguo Perú: Espacio y Tiempo*, edited by Ramiro Matos M., pp. 381-383. Lima: Editorial Juan Mejía Baca.
- 1963 Some New Finds at San Nicolás. *Nawpa Pacha* 1: 43-46.
- 1966 Review: Masks, Mummies and Magicians by Simone and Roger Waisbard. *Natural History* 75(10): 64-67.
- 1967 Review: The Desert Kingdoms of Peru by Victor von Hagen. *American Antiquity* 32: 125-127.
- 1977 A Bibliography of Virgin Islands Archaeology. *Journal of the Virgin Islands Archaeological Society* 4: 1-16.

- 1977 Historical Archaeology in the Virgin Islands: Some Recent Developments. *Information Newsletter of the Virgin Islands Bureau of Libraries, Museums and Archaeological Services* 2(3): 1-3.
- 1981 Early and/or Not-So-Early Man in Peru: Guitarrero Cave Revisited. *Quarterly Review of Archaeology* 2(2): 8-13, 19-20.