



What to do with the predator in your bibliography?

written by Daniel Souleles
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In the early summer of 2020 I submitted what I presumed was a final round of extremely minor revisions to an [article](#) that I'd been working on in one way or another since 2014. The article compares the ways in which contemporary private equity financiers and Inka accounting specialists manage labor, suggesting that the study of finance can encompass both capitalist and non-capitalist instances of financial governance.



The article itself was hard to write. I'm not trained as an archaeological anthropologist (I'm an ethnographer) and had to spend a lot of time learning how to use archaeological scholarship profitably in my comparison with contemporary ethnographic work. As such, the article had a long trail of draft versions, rejections, and (often quite harsh) criticism, finally finding a home in the *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*.

After I submitted my final revisions, I learned that one archaeological author that I lean on quite a bit in my analysis of accounting in the Inka context, Gary Urton, stands/stood accused of a decades-long pattern of leveraging his position within Harvard's anthropology department and within Andean archaeology to coerce students and colleagues into unwanted sexual relationships. The initial allegations are spelled out [here](#); the allegations are further specified and elaborated [here](#); and Urton's retirement in the face of these allegations is noted [here](#).

It's not just that Urton is cited, either. He actually ended up being one of the blind reviewers on the article, and a year or two ago, responded to an unsolicited email of mine, read an earlier draft of the manuscript and offered helpful, encouraging notes.

Who wants to cite an alleged predator?

So, here's the dilemma: what to do in such a situation?

Should you want to write about accounting in the Inka empire, it is (or was) inevitable that you would get steered towards Urton's work on numeracy, accounting, and the *kipu* knot record. Yet, after learning about what was going on at Harvard, and fully aware that citation is a sort of [complicated gift](#), I quite simply didn't want to cite the guy anymore. Who wants to cite an alleged predator? Who wants to accelerate the reach of a possible creep? And if there were reasons to cite him, I didn't want to do so in an unmarked way.

Honestly, I didn't and still don't know how to approach this. I'd never seen journal



or editorial guidelines for this sort of situation. Moreover, citation basically seems binary—you're in or you're out. Insofar as there are grounds to critique the person of a cited author, it's in the context of the bad work they've done, or the way that their bad behavior led to bad work (as in, say Napoleon Chagnon's work which is critiqued [here](#) and [here](#).) As near as I can tell, Urton's work is not just passable, it was widely lauded until allegations against him broke.

In what follows, then, I'll explain how I attempted to revise my own article; how and why my attempts failed; and a series of questions and reflections I'm left with. My hope is that this post will generate discussion in the comments or on twitter. I'll then be able to synthesize those into publication guidelines that journals and presses may want to adopt.

But first, an inventory of failure.

Unmarked to Marked

The simplest thing to do would have been to pull the article. After all, no article, no citations. And then, silence. I decided not to do this, though, in part, because I wanted to use the opportunity to try and figure out a way to mark what Urton is alleged to have done in an academic format. I wanted to deal with this explicitly and openly. I wanted to come up with a template for how to deal with this *in our published academic work* that might stand for others in a similar situation.

Given that decision, I wrote to or called a number of colleagues to talk through how to approach this, and ultimately decided to revise my manuscript with three priorities in mind—first I'd see all the Urton citations I could dilute or replace with other Andeanists. Second, I would mark all remaining Urton citations with an asterisk (e.g. *Urton) to both shade the name and draw attention to a note at the end of the article. Third, I would explain my thinking and revisions in a note at the end of the piece.



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Accordingly, I revised and removed and then added as many citations as I could; I added a handful of asterisks; and then, appended the following note:

*** A note on Gary Urton:** *In the late Spring of 2020, a few weeks after submitting a second round of relatively minor revisions of this article, hoping to finally hear that after years of work it would be accepted, I learned that Gary Urton had a long history of using his position as a tenured professor at Harvard University and a senior authority on the Khipu to coerce students, advisees, and colleagues into unwanted sexual relationships (Bikales 2020a). This sort of sexual propositioning is the definition of sexual harassment. Professor Carrie Brezine sums it up in a follow up article observing, “If you have cited the Khipu Database Project, or found it interesting, you should know that it was first created on the sexual exploitation of a staff/graduate student...If you have ever cited an article of Gary’s on which I am co-author, know that it was written in an atmosphere of sexual coercion and emotional manipulation and abuse” (Bikales 2020b). Suffice it to say, Gary Urton’s actions have illuminated a set of nesting crises in Andean scholarship, archaeological anthropology, and Harvard’s anthropology department, all of which both reflect on and have implications for the practice of anthropology writ large. More to the point, several of these crises intersect in this article.*

As is apparent to anyone studying accounting in the Inka empire, Andean numeracy, or the khipu, Gary Urton’s scholarship is central and unavoidable. He has published widely, often with others, across myriad respected academic venues. Closer to home, Urton in fact read and commented on an earlier draft of this manuscript, and ended up being one of the peer reviewers at the Journal of Anthropological Archaeology. Moreover, unlike a eugenicist biologist or an evolutionary psychologist, it doesn’t appear that Urton’s scholarship specifically advocates for his brand of predation. What, then should we do?



In revising this manuscript with this question in mind, I've proceeded according to two assumptions: First, Urton's scholarship, as Andean research currently stands, is integral to studying the operation of tribute, numeracy, finance, and accounting in the Inka empire. Second, and more importantly, this knowledge is not his alone. As attested in numerous co-authored works, edited volumes, acknowledgments and collaborations, knowledge of the khipu and the Inka is the product of a community of scholars, all of whom deeply care about their topic and the knowledge they generate on this topic. They also believe that this knowledge of people known from archaeology, ethnohistory, ethnography, and in chroniclers' echoes is worth perpetuating and understanding as part of our common human inheritance. Given that, I see my task given present circumstances as not so much one of erasure, but as one of 1) acknowledgment, 2) comparative scrutiny and provision of alternatives, and 3) eventual transcendence. I will explain how I've pursued these goals:

- 1. Acknowledgment: In this note I've tried to narrate as succinctly as possible what we now know about Gary Urton, what he's done to those in his care, and how these circumstances reverberate through and compromise our common task as academics. I've also marked with an asterisk all remaining Urton citations in this article to draw the reader to this explanation.*
- 2. Comparative Scrutiny and Provision of Alternatives: A number of archaeologists have helped me in guiding me towards other work on khipu and Inka administration (thank you to Charles Golden, Darryl Wilkinson, John Millhauser, Mary Wiesmantel, Terence D'Altroy, and Sarah Rowe for advice and suggestions, as well as to Kylie Quavie for collating a list of alternative scholars to cite). After reading and digesting as much of this work as I could access, I looked at every time I cited Urton as a single author and asked first if I could replace the citation with someone else, and second, if I couldn't replace it, if I could at least provide further citations to dilute his authority and open up other approaches. I allowed collaborative scholarship to remain as it felt wrong*



to erase one academic due to another's sins, particularly if one had been harmed by the other.

3. *Transcendence: This last point has more to do with hope than anything else. Khipu scholarship, despite being a small community of scholars, moves fairly quickly. I suspect with this sort of comparative scrutiny and replacement we can get to a place where Urton's interpretations need not be central to our conversations. This work will likely be deliberate and incremental. With luck, this article can perhaps be a start in that direction.*

After revising the manuscript in this way, I sent it to the editors of the special issue this article was to be a part of. The issue editors approved the changes. Then I formally submitted the manuscript to the journal editor (it's worth noting that this is an Elsevier journal and to acknowledge all the [baggage](#) that comes with a large, risk-averse, for-profit publisher).

Shortly thereafter I heard back from the journal editor, who had forwarded my manuscript to Elsevier's legal department. The editor let me know that Elsevier could not publish my manuscript as it stood because they were worried about getting sued for libel. I didn't get an elaboration on what specifically they were worried about.

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I asked if the legal department might revise my note to make it libel-proof. This request was ignored.

After a bit of correspondence between the two levels of editors, we decided that my revised citations could stand, I should strip out the asterisks and the note, and that I could start the article with a generic dedication to people working on removing sexual harassment and predation from archaeology. I could also cite some of their work in that dedication. The idea with the dedication is that it would boost the work of people trying to stamp out Urton's alleged behavior. It would



also suggest by implicit juxtaposition that I and/or the journal are upset about predatory behavior in the discipline. This is as direct as the journal was willing to be. Here follows the dedication:

I dedicate this article to those striving to make archaeology safe and open for all who wish to learn about the traces of our common humanity ([Rosenzweig 2020:12-13](#); e.g. [Colaninno et al. 2020](#)).

I confess I'm ambivalent about the dedication. I think the sentiment is good. But, without any further explanation, honestly, it can read like trolling:

Oh! Here's a dedication to making archaeology safer. That's nice.

Oh. And here are pages of close engagement with Urton and collaborator's work on Khipu accounting.

Bit of a mixed message, really.

I decided to go with the dedication in spite of that because, well, it pushes the issue. I don't think this is a terribly good solution, but it seemed to be the best I could manage given the circumstances. In an indirect way, some problems with some of my sources are marked.

Where to go from here?

In addition to a miasma of discontent and frustration, I'm left with some questions and reflections about the ethical standards academic writing should abide to. In what remains, I'd like to lay them out and invite comments here or on twitter.

First, how should we think about a person's scholarship when they've done things we think are bad?

Related, do we have a hierarchy of bad things that are consequential? Do we see



tax evasion and being a landlord as different from violent or sexual crimes? Do we see bad actions as being worse if they happen in and to people in the discipline?

What sort of restitution or reparation could we accept to lift a social, criminal, or moral taint and allow citation to go on in an unmarked way?

Second, what obligation does someone have to citing an academic's work when they personally object to the bad things that a person has done, despite the scholarship being passable or perhaps necessary or maybe even good?

Do we have a hierarchy of bad things that are consequential?

Third, when are we comfortable separating a person's actions from their work? (Anyone who cites Heidegger, feel free to chime in...)

What relationship should personal disgust have with academic engagement? Is there a temporal element to this? Does disgust and revulsion fade with time? Should it?

Fourth, what latitude can academic publishing venues offer people beyond the binary of cite or not cite to explain their relationship to disciplinary or academic authorities?

How should any of this turn into journal or press editorial policy or disciplinary ethical practice?

Should we allow for expanded notes? Should we allow people to put asterisks on authors they despise?

And if we say yes, and if for-profit, libel-fear-mongering publishers do not allow this sort of latitude; this sort of academic freedom, doesn't this give us a bullet-proof argument that we should migrate en masse to [open access platforms](#) which we, as academics, [control](#) democratically?



Fifth, how should any of this turn into journal or press editorial policy or disciplinary ethical practice?

Thanks for reading and considering this. I'm looking forward to seeing what we come up with. If trends emerge in the comments on this post or on social media (at either my [[@dansouleles](#)], or Allegra's [[@allegra_lab](#)] twitter accounts), I'll do my best to collate them and write a follow-up. You can also reply to this post by writing a follow up post (send your piece to: submissions@allegralaboratory.net). Folks can also email me at ds.mpp@cbs.dk.

[Marcel LaFlamme was kind enough to read and critique an earlier version of this post]

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