

# A GEAR IS A GEAR IS A GEAR, EXCEPT WHEN IT ISN'T

ALEX CANNELLA

**Look at that picture right over there on the right.**

That's one of the Bronze Wheels of Peru. Looks like a gear, doesn't it? If you knew nothing about it or the culture it sprang from and just happened to see it on the street, you'd probably label it as such. So many people have had that same thought, in fact, that the set has picked up another name: the Bronze Gears of Peru.

Here's the thing: they aren't gears. Despite appearances, the Bronze Wheels of Peru are actually mace heads.

Much like with our own modern culture, everything is connected to everything in the ancient civilizations archaeologists study. The issue, and the reason that myths like these "gears" pop up, is that the archaeologists know enough to put those connections together, while the laymen just look at the Bronze Wheels and dub them gears.

Here's where things get even dicier. If the Bronze Wheels were, in fact, gears, they would be what people call an "out-of-place artifact." Out-of-place artifacts are basically archaeological "finds" that, according to the years of study and evidence that forms our understanding of conventional archaeology, just plain shouldn't exist. The Bronze Wheels of Peru, for example, were created in a time and place where gears aren't recorded existing.

The problem is that out-of-place artifacts aren't exactly scientific. They're basically fodder for every conceivable form of pseudoscience and conspiracy theory you can think of, from aliens giving us technology in ancient times to the actual, literal existence (or rather, former existence) of Atlantis. The reason many out-of-place artifacts "shouldn't exist" isn't because we've never found any of them before, but because there's a wealth of evidence actively pointing out that, in fact, they shouldn't. Often, these artifacts are touted about as incredible new dis-



**Copper mace head, 200 B.C - A.D. 200, from the Vicus culture of Peru. Photo courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Bequest of Jane Costello Goldberg, from the Collection of Arnold I. Goldberg, 1986).**

coveries that will revolutionize our view of an entire culture, but the reason they go against the grain is usually because one person screwed up and made a faulty leap of logic rather than because all of generally accepted archaeology is wrong.

People sensationalize and cling to these artifacts for the same reason that sci-fi in almost every form of media loves to drop the line "Einstein was wrong!" It's exciting! It fundamentally changes something about the way the world works! And unless you dig deeper than that enthusiastic Facebook post, it makes perfect sense! When looking at the logic behind the Bronze Wheels of Peru and other out of place artifacts as a wholly insular bubble, it holds up solely because there's nothing to contradict it.

In the Bronze Wheels' case, yes, they look like gears. This is how archaeologists and regular people alike jump to incorrect conclusions. But remember: In archaeology, as with any other culture, everything informs everything, and in the case of the Bronze Wheels, everything else points to a different explanation.

Everywhere the Bronze Wheels are referred to as gears, the name Rafael Larco Hoyle also comes up. Hoyle was a professor and museum curator who lived in the 20th century. His book, "*Peru*," is one of the first sources to ever mention the Wheels. The only problem with conspiracy theorists that name drop Hoyle is that he has never, at any point, referred to them as gears. In fact, he states in his book that they are mace heads belonging to the pre-Columbian Vicus culture, putting him in agreement with conventional archaeologists.

The moral of the story? Don't trust everything you find on the Internet, and always dig a little deeper than just a single post. Otherwise, you might get caught up in a conspiracy theory about aliens giving us gears. ⚙️



**These bronze mace heads were first described in the book *Peru*, by Rafael Larco Hoyle. Unfortunately, they've also been described as gears on a number of conspiracy sites online.**