

Offspring of the marriage of archaeology and ethnography in the Andes

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DENISE Y. ARNOLD & CHRISTINE A. HASTORF. *Heads of state: icons, power, and politics in the ancient and modern Andes*. 294 pages, 42 illustrations. 2008. Walnut Creek (CA): Left Coast Press; 978-1-59874-170-4 hardback £35; 978-1-59874-171-1 paperback £18.99.

WILLIAM J. CONKLIN & JEFFREY QUILTER (ed.). *Chavín: art, architecture and culture* (Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Monograph 61). xxxii+336 pages, 195 illustrations, 3 tables. 2008. Los Angeles (CA): Cotsen Institute of Archaeology; 978-1-931745-45-1 paperback.

The Andean region, one the world's rare hearths of agriculture and civilisation, is of considerable significance to the



story of humanity. Moreover, for scholars, students and tourists alike, few vanished ancient civilisations outdo those of the Andes in mystique: their breathtaking natural settings, the enigmatic beauty of

their material culture, and of course their ultimate fate in the cataclysm of their confrontation with Europe. Yet, for reasons largely of historical happenstance, its archaeology is arguably the least well-studied of all the so-called 'pristine' civilisations worldwide. The books reviewed here have in common a focus on the prehistory of the Andes, but through very different lenses. They nonetheless usefully highlight some striking differences in how archaeology is conceived and practised in the Andean region as opposed to elsewhere.

Heads of state is a highly provocative attempt to synthesise the findings of two leading authorities in their respective disciplines in the Andes, anthropologist Denise Arnold and archaeologist

Christine Hastorf, across more or less the complete gamut of Andean prehistory. *Chavín: art, architecture and culture*, edited by William Conklin and Jeffrey Quilter, brings together papers from eleven scholars of Andean archaeology, ethnohistory and art history, between them covering most of the on-going research on Chavín and effectively representing the 'state of the art' of knowledge on what was once known as the 'mother culture' of the Andes. Brief mention is also made of *Excavations at Cerro Azul*, the latest report on an important Late Intermediate site on the south-central coast of Peru.

Heads of state

Heads of state provides the most straightforward example of the distinctions inherent in Andean archaeology, not least because it is co-authored by an anthropologist. The book's thesis is that the taking and curating of human heads, recorded ethnographically and widely evident in the archaeological record of the Andes, were not simply ritual practices but *political* ones, representing the taking and accumulation of power. The authors bring many theoretical perspectives to this thesis, but in particular that of Fausto, derived from work on lowland Amazonian Tupi-Guaraní groups. This seeks to categorise societies as either expansive ('centrifugal') or inward-looking ('centripetal') in nature; and then goes on to identify the former with the acquisition of power through the aggressive taking of enemy trophy heads, and the latter with the perpetuation of kin-based identities through the curation of ancestor heads. The link between Amazonia and highland archaeology is provided here through Arnold's own work on the *ayllu* of *Qaqachaka*, a highland Aymara-speaking group living on the border between the departments of Oruro and Potosí in Bolivia. The first part of the book sets out the modern ethnography which provides a theoretical

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framework for the second part, where it is applied to an archaeological record comprising human heads in many forms. This latter section is presumably largely contributed by Hastorf, whose wide archaeological scholarship covers ancient diet in the central Peruvian highlands and early developments in the Lake Titicaca region. The two parts of the book are finally brought together to distil '*nine axes of current and future research*'.

Thus the central device of *Heads of state* – indeed its *raison d'être* – is to use modern ethnographic material to inform archaeological interpretations. And this is attempted on a huge scale, back to the very origins of complex society in the Andes some four millennia ago. The book is therefore a seemingly extreme example of something that animates much Andean archaeology: its tendency to project ethnohistorical or even ethnographic models back into the ancient past. Elsewhere the dangers of glib ethnographic analogy in archaeological interpretation have been widely debated; yet analogy necessarily remains intrinsic to our discipline – indeed, how else would we recognise an archaeological site at all? As Wylie (1985) and others have pointed out, the problem is not analogy, but the ways it is applied.

Certainly I find that some of the interpretations in this Andean example do not stand up. An argument is advanced, for instance, that the origins of the knotted cords (*kipu*) by which the Incas encoded their records, and indeed the origins of weaving itself, lie in some vaguely construed way in the curation of (the hair of) trophy heads. This seems particularly contrived, in the light of the large body of data which traces the roots of the extraordinary Andean textile tradition directly back to fishing, the underpinning of the subsistence regime of the first sedentary societies on the Peruvian coast. Other interpretations are expressed in such over-arching terms that they lose thrust. Thus Fausto's structuralist approach, while promising much as a way to unveil the nature of those societies that underlie the archaeological record, turns out – when applied on the scale attempted here – to involve so many contradictions that its potential is emasculated. A separate criticism is that I found some of the writing in this book impenetrable. To illustrate: '*there, the calculations of the value equivalence of commodities in warfare, worked out in the play of quantities and the states of mind that characterize a tournament economy and what we call the "spirit of calculation" become autonomous substitutes for the flow of booty, while adding cultural value to them*' (p. 222).

Perhaps the book's interdisciplinary synthesis requires such language. One suspects, however, the hand of Dawkins's (2004: 8) 'Law of the Conservation of Difficulty' at work here, as it is in so much academic writing.

Yet such criticisms should not be allowed to overshadow the overall impression left by *Heads of state*: one of powerful insight. For it establishes an unambiguous link between, on the one hand, an archaeological record that offers abundant evidence, at least in certain periods and places, of both trophy heads and ancestor veneration; and on the other, the recent ethnography of such practices by some societies. Indeed so evident and potentially informative is this insight that one wonders why it has not been argued in such detail before. To my knowledge it has not. In so doing, and with such rare interdisciplinary ambition, Arnold and Hastorf have produced a book that will stimulate much fresh thinking and debate.

Chavín

Ethnographic analogy features too in some of the papers in *Chavín: art, architecture and culture*. Ever since the 1930s, when the great Peruvian archaeologist Julio C. Tello identified it as the font of Andean civilisation, the monumental site of Chavín de Huantar, high in the Central Andes in Ancash, has loomed over Andean prehistory. And while this status has long been under assault, Chavín material culture – the so-called 'Early Horizon' – continues to mark the first period in which some degree of unity is visible in the archaeological record across great expanses of the Central Andes. For Richard Burger and many others its iconography of fanged 'chimeras' – wonderfully illustrated in this publication – conveys dread purpose. Burger (p. 91) evokes precisely this in his proposed name of *Manchay* (from the Quechua for 'to be afraid') for a currently unnamed precursor culture of the Central Coast. Indeed this illustrates how relatively unexplored the archaeology of the Andes still is; for where else do entire 'cultures' still remain nameless? Burger is perhaps the leading authority on the Early Horizon and he contributes two papers to this volume, the product of a round-table at Dumbarton Oaks held some three decades on from a precursor meeting there published under the same title. This collection benefits from the excellent editing of Quilter and Conklin, the latter also contributing a typically lucid chapter on Chavín textiles. As Quilter notes in his

preface, in the long interim between the two meetings 'there had been many changes and yet many things were still the same' (p. xxiv).

For instance, the chronology of the Early Horizon established by Burger has come under question again, this time by John Rick and Silvia Rodríguez Kembel, whose investigations bring the latest three-dimensional survey techniques to bear on Chavín de Huantar itself. The evidence behind these two different interpretations is laid out here in the clearest form yet, and has some quite profound implications for the relationship between Chavín de Huantar and earlier developments. The jury is still out on these matters. The intricate computer-generated architectural models presented by Kembel are a wonderful tool, but in and of themselves do not, of course, change our understanding of the past. I find Kembel's claim that '*most of these analyses are possible exclusively via the computer model*' (p. 44) disconcerting, since it seems to imply that they are thereby inaccessible for objective critical analysis.

The excavations reported by Rick reveal one facet of the society that made Chavín de Huantar so far under-appreciated amid all the 'baroque' splendour of its artwork: namely, just how fundamental were its achievements in civil engineering, wrought here some three thousand years ago. And regardless of how the ongoing chronological debate on the Early Horizon is eventually resolved, one aspect that is happily still typical of 'doing archaeology' in Peru comes in Rick's acknowledgements to '*Peruvian colleagues and the National Institute of Culture for their generosity and willingness to permit a foreigner to conduct research at such a recognized site and national treasure as Chavín de Huantar*' (p. 34). For indeed Chavín is of as much import to the wider story of humanity as to the modern nation state of Peru.

Meanwhile ethnographic analogy is richly dealt with in the volume, not least by Gary Urton who takes a new look at the complex iconography displayed on one of the central icons of Chavín: the Tello obelisk, now in the Museo Nacional in Lima. The results of applying what he terms 'Quechua ethnoanatomy' are intriguing but the methodology itself begs some questions. For, of course, it is based on the great and acknowledged assumption that the society responsible for making this object actually spoke some form of Quechua, and one so little changed over time that we can safely infer meanings back through the two to three millennia that separate Chavín from our modern linguistic data.

Today Quechua is the most widely spoken language family in the Central Andes, and it is true that historical linguistics establishes beyond doubt that it is the product of an ancient expansion which took place long before the Incas with whom it is popularly associated (see for instance Heggarty 2007). Cerrón-Palomino's (2003: 22) reflections on its homeland in the central highlands might at least hint at Chavín as a possible candidate homeland, but his reluctance to formalise such a claim is based on misgivings that most other historical linguists share: the Early Horizon seems just too remote to correspond to the expansion of so shallow and compact a family as Quechua. Indeed, Cerrón-Palomino (2000: 378) also reports 'significant' toponymy across precisely this region of central Peru with roots in the other great language family of the Andes – Aymara. These placenames and other linguistic evidence provide '*indirect evidence of the presence of a prior Aru [Aymara] substrate [in Ancash]*' (Cerrón-Palomino 2003: 333, my translation).

But while the assumption behind Urton's paper reminds us of the dangers that lurk in uncritical ethnographic analogy, ironically it serves also to highlight why, in the Andes at least, its judicious use *retains* explanatory power. For Quechua is, by number of speakers, our greatest surviving link to speech in the New World before the European conquest. A real synthesis between historical linguistics and archaeology – like so much else in the Andes – has huge potential to increase understanding of its prehistory. Indeed, notwithstanding its supposed destruction at the hands of a few Spanish adventurers, the Andean cultural trajectory is in fact tremendously conservative and resilient: qualities which convey relative historical *continuity*. So, while in Britain archaeological theory may have become ever more introspective, out in the 'wild west' of the Andes a book of 'big ideas' like *Heads of state* can still be written – fusing archaeology and ethnography and inspiring admiration and annoyance in equal measure.

Even *Excavations at Cerro Azul, Peru: the architecture and pottery* conveys the peculiarities of Andean archaeology in its own quiet exploration of style variation within a single Late Intermediate site. As its title makes plain, this is a field report by the archaeologist Joyce Marcus on her many years of work at an important Late Intermediate site in the Cañete Valley on the south-central coast. Far removed from the daring of *Heads of state*, this carefully assembled addition to the corpus

of archaeological fieldwork shows just how much of the fabric of culture-history remains to be woven in the Andes (details of this publication are given in the reference list below). Peruvian archaeologists with whom I have worked are far too concerned with carefully documenting an enormous archaeological record under daily threat from looters and development – and indeed putting food on the table – to have much patience with some of our theoretical extravagances. They would be astonished to hear arguments that ethnographic analogy has *no* place in interpretation; that phenomenology is something *new*; or that the vast Andean landscape, encompassing the greatest ecological diversity on earth, has *not* dictated the course of cultural trajectories. In my view this is precisely the great strength of the way archaeology is conceived in the Andes.

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British rock art: from discovery to interpretation

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PAUL & BARBARA BROWN. *Prehistoric rock art in the Northern Dales*. 320 pages, 130 illustrations, 35 colour plates. 2008. Stroud: Tempus; 978-0-7524-4246-4 paperback £19.99.

BRIAN A. SMITH & ALAN A. WALKER. *Rock art and ritual: interpreting the prehistoric landscapes of the North York Moors*. 160 pages, 37 illustrations, 24 colour plates. 2008. Stroud: Tempus; 978-0-7524-4634-9 paperback £14.99.

ARON MAZEL, GEORGE NASH & CLIVE WADDINGTON (ed.). *Art as metaphor: the prehistoric rock-art of Britain*. x+256 pages, numerous b&w & colour illustrations. 2007. Oxford: Archaeopress; 978-1-905739-16-5 paperback £19.95.

Over the last two decades the study of British rock art has moved from the margins to the mainstream of archaeology. More than 5000 rock art sites are known in Britain, making them one of our most abundant forms of prehistoric monument. New discoveries are made with increasing frequency and the date of prehistoric carvings, which was previously assumed to be mainly Early Bronze Age, now encompasses

the Upper Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic. Nevertheless, rock art is still under-researched and under-valued.

The growing interest in British rock art is reflected in the expanding literature, which has contributed



significantly to our knowledge, stimulated public and professional interest, and inspired further research. Building on a tradition of

detailed documentation dating back to the nineteenth century, the majority of recent publications are descriptive in nature and focus on previously recorded sites and new discoveries. They are concerned predominantly with just one type of carving – cup and ring markings – and generally concentrate on one geographical area, mostly in Argyll, Northumberland, Cumbria, County Durham, West Yorkshire or the North York Moors. However, many parts of the country still appear blank on our rock art map. This

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