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Andean Time

Review by Jerry D. Moore

Edward Swenson and Andrew Roddick, editors, 2018 *Constructions of Time and History in the Pre-Columbian Andes*, University Press of Colorado Louisville: University Press of Colorado, 288 pp, ISBN: 978-1-607326410.

In northern Colombia, Kaggaba (Kogi) priests (*mamas*) turn back the Sun at the solstices and equinoxes, a cosmic effort that involves extensive training and engagement with ritual and time. At the opposite end of the continent in Tierra del Fuego, the historical Selknam distinguished five verb tenses: Present, Recent Past, Remote Past, Beyond Past, and the Mythical Past. Between these two geographical and conceptual poles, traditional South American cultures employed diverse concepts of time, the broad focus of this collection.

Originating as a 2013 symposium on “Envisioning Time and Imagining Place in Pre-Columbian Landscapes,” this volume has a narrower focus on the Central Andes, principally the north-central Peru, the Titicaca Basin, and the heartland of the Inca Empire. The archaeological and cultural traditions discussed include Chavín, Moche, Tiwanaku, Inka, and Colonial cultures.

The volume considers “indigenous temporalities and modes of historical production” (p. xiii), contributing to broader, ontological shift in archaeological approaches to time, as seen in Gavin Lucas’s 2005 *The Archaeology of Time* or the 2019 volume *Andean Ontologies: New Archaeological Perspectives*, edited by Maria Cecilia Lozada and Henry Tantaleán. These works mark a departure from concerns with archaeological sequences (relative time) or dating techniques (absolute time), instead exploring a) how time was conceived and expressed by other societies in prehistory and b) how those temporal conceptions might be reflected or obscured in archaeological inquiries.

This requires an analytical compromise between looking at broad analogies and attention to significant variations. The editors write, “Despite considerable diversity in premodern Andean representations of time, [...] it is worth identifying some general trends in Andean time reckoning and historical consciousness” (p. 14). In this effort—not surprisingly—the Incas loom large.

In an intriguing essay, Wilkinson and D’Altroy draw attention to the “lack of figurative imagery in Inka material culture” (p 107). (Ironically, our visualizations of Inka culture largely are based on the detailed and remarkably accurate drawings of the mestizo savant, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (ca. b. 1535/1550- d.1615)). Wilkinson and D’Altroy argue that the absence of prehispanic

commemorative drawings is consistent with an Inca view that engaged with the past via social relations “and more specifically, kinship relations” such that the “past existed in the form of living and sentient nonhuman actors who were made the kin of the Inkas” through material exchanges as with other Andean kinship ties (p. 127). Thus “past” encounters were not depicted, Wilkinson and D’Altroy argue, because they remained in the “present” via such exchanges and engagements.

If figurative depictions were absent in Inka culture, they are prominent in Andean archaeology of time, as Roddick explores in his study of *chronographics*: “those charts, figures, and illustrations used to represent time” (p.67). These chronographics not only include timelines and chronological charts, but also visualizations of distinct ceramic pastes or a Harris Matrix that displays reconstructed depositional order but not the differential duration of deposits. Rather than abandon such visual displays, Roddick argues that we can use them “to seek out temporal discordances and to work toward an understanding of temporally complex but always fully inhabited landscapes” (p.94).

Such dynamic engagements are also found in Chase’s thoughtful comparison of the “canonical prehistory” of *The Huarochiri Manuscript* with the archaeology of the region it describes. Produced circa 1608 under the direction of Father Francisco de Avila (1573-1645), the “extirpator of idolatries,” the text describes a pre-Inca era in which cannibals and superhumans vied for supremacy. Instead, the archaeological evidence points to a much later, Inka period presence, which leads Chase to suggest that the narrators of the Huarochiri Manuscript “were not attempting to ‘do history’ but instead were performing a successful, fertile *llacta*” (p. 153), a mythic charter recounting the existence of competitive, complementary, and dualistic social groups who drew on distinct domains, thus creating unity via opposition.

The Rowe-Menzel chronology is a classic representation of the Andean past, envisioning a sequence of ‘horizons’ interspersed by ‘intermediate periods.’ Sayre summarizes the scholarship and assumptions embedded in the definition of the Early Horizon, focusing on the site of Chavín de Huantar and arguing how a focus on ceramic styles “forces us to think in terms of horizons,” that silences other aspects of ancient life. Sayre calls for an archaeology “that investigates the rhythms and patterns of domestic life at Chavín” that will allow “scholars to try to understand Andean temporalities and through a more emic lens” (p. 60)

Moving to the North Coast of Peru, Swenson discusses “shifts in political and religious ideologies in the Jequetepeque region” (p. 175) as reflected by variations in the use and construction of residential and public space at the Late Formative (500-100 BCE) site of Jatanca and the Late Moche (AD 650 -850) center of Huaca Colorada, which rises stepwise as three principal sectors climb to a height of 20 meters. The restrictive access to Jatanca’s walled compounds contrasts with “Huaca Colorada’s vertical design and history of constant renovation” (p. 179), and thus “The affective time of the huaca [Colorada] thus departs from the feelings of anticipation and suspense engendered by the horizontal and labyrinthine compounds of Jatanca” (p.193). In another look at Moche culture, Spence Morrow considers miniature architectural models or *maquetas* recovered from tombs at the site of San Jose del Moro, models apparently patterned on the compounds at Huaca Colorado, arguing “Both the incremental ritual renovations at Huaca Colorado and inclusion of *maquetas* in the tombs at San Jose del Moro served to make and order time” (p. 229).

In a thoughtful study of “shifts in time reckoning and conceptions of history in the ancient Andes”

(p. 247), Seone and Culchuchion-Venegas explore variations in site orientations in which early Preceramic sites like Caral were aligned with constellations such as the Southern Cross and Milky Way, while Late Intermediate sites (AD 650 -1400) incorporated additional organizing entities such as the Equinox. Intriguingly, at the site of Moche itself, the nocturnal observations and orientations of the Old Temple at Huaca de la Luna were replaced by diurnal events, a “structural reorganization of religion and cult as conforming to an ideological move to re-center the Moche world in a solidified and continually rejuvenated ‘present’” (p. 251).

In an outstanding and wide-ranging final essay, Bray observes “taking the dimension of time as a matter of concern rather than an assumed universal suggests new ways of recalibrating not only the traditional segmentation of pre-Columbian history in the Andes—incorporating important ideas about synchronicity, persistence, and overlap—but our own culturally specific notions of time as linear, homogenous, and universal” (p. 263). The studies in this volume suggest new directions for such archaeological recalibrations of the past.

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