

Preface

Study of the origin and development of civilization is of unequalled importance for understanding the cultural processes that create human societies. Is cultural evolution directional and regular across human societies and history, or is it opportunistic and capricious? Do apparent regularities come from the way investigators construct and manage knowledge, or are they the result of real constraints on and variations in the actual processes?

Can such questions even be answered? We believe so, but not easily. By comparing evolutionary sequences from different world civilizations scholars can judge degrees of similarity and difference and then attempt explanation. Of course, we must be careful to assess the influence that societies of the ancient world had on one another (the issue of pristine versus non-pristine cultural development: see discussion in Fried 1967; Price 1978). The Central Andes were the locus of the only societies to achieve pristine civilization in the southern hemisphere and only in the Central Andes did non-literate (non-written language) civilization develop. It seems clear that Central Andean civilization was independent on any graph of archaic culture change.

Scholars have often expressed appreciation of the research opportunities offered by the Central Andes as a testing ground for the study of cultural evolution (see, e.g., Carneiro 1970; Ford and Willey 1949: 5; Kosok 1965: 1–14; Lanning 1967: 2–5). We must be careful not to dilute the “Andeaness” of the ancient societies of the Central Andes by imposing on them the ideal cultural types provided by cultural evolution, the archaeological record of other world areas, and features from comparative ethnography. Otherwise, without caution and rigor, we may construct an Andean past that falsely approximates the pasts of other, non-Andean civilizations. In so doing, we would fail to understand the nature and achievements of Andean cultural development. It is this historical processual and particularizing attention to the Central Andes that enables subsequent insights through comparisons with the developmental processes that occurred in other independent archaic civilizations.

In general, there are five ways to construct knowledge about the prehistoric past. Archaeologists’ inferences almost always employ several of them simultaneously. Perhaps the most influential is *conviction based on theory*. Second and perhaps equally popular is *political conviction*. Third is the use of *recorded history*, and the belief that certain historical descriptions also describe societies more

distantly removed in time. Fourth is *ethnographic information*, usually descriptions of fairly traditional communities in the same area as the cultures investigated archaeologically. This basis of knowledge assumes that distance is similar to time (see Fabian 1983). The fifth and most robust means of constructing the prehistoric past is inference based on *material remains from archaeological contexts*. This is the only approach that is actually articulated with the past we seek to know. Of course, inference based on material remains must be combined with other ways of knowing, so material remains may be used to interrogate knowledge anticipated by theory, politics or other convictions. Clearly, however, material remains provide the only means of verifying expectations about the past, justifying their elevation to the status of knowledge.

The most popular theory informing many archaeologists investigating the Central Andean past is processual cultural evolution, or neoevolutionary theory, although it has diversified into several related schools in recent years. Essentially, these theories propose a sequence of ideal cultural types as stages through which societies pass in the process of increasing complexity. Advocates tend to assign actual prehistoric societies or, more correctly, material assemblages believed to represent past cultures, to these ideal types on the basis of certain material remains considered diagnostic. But, sometimes, far too much is assumed about an archaeological culture based on what is believed to be true about the ideal type. If knowledge of this sort is used in comparisons intended to produce more general understandings, our goals are thwarted for what we are really learning about is the implications of our theory, not regularities and variations in past processes of culture change.

Another popular paradigm for achieving an archaeological understanding of the Andean past is climatic or environmental determinism, particularly interesting for its recursive intersection with the present. If ancient civilizations were disrupted by climatic changes, then modern politicians must take more seriously the threat of current and future catastrophes, such as global warming. However, actual evidence for environmental changes in the prehistoric past is often inconclusive. And such change is not always well dated (absolute date and duration) or calibrated (intensity) in relation to sequences of human events, so it is difficult to achieve a true measure of how great a particular environmental impact would have been on the lived experience of ancient people. Nonetheless, climate change is one of the most popular mechanisms for explaining prehistoric culture change, especially collapses, and it appears to be gaining popularity proportional to its closely related political issues (see critical discussion in Erickson 1999). Seen in a more positive light, some archaeological projects have been quite successful in showing the great productivity of traditional agricultural practices in the context of the harsh and variable Andean environment (e.g., Erickson 1993; Erickson and Candler 1989). And “lost crops” of the high Andes (such as quinoa) have become newly fashionable dietary additions as their significant nutritional value is again appreciated.

"Postmodern" paradigms emphasizing structure, agency and practice are entering the Andeanist literature. We note especially Isbell's (1997) treatment of the ayllu and Central Andean social organization, Goldstein's (2000) recent application of an agency-oriented local perspective to explain the role of exotic goods in Moquegua Valley society during the Early Intermediate Period, and Silverman and Proulx's (2002) discussion of power and identity negotiation in the dynamic world of Nasca 5 chiefs.

Historical information and modern ethnography are important backbones of Andean prehistory. Together they show us what Andean culture was and is. But ancient Andean societies were dynamic and multivocalic. It behooves archaeologists to explain their synchronic variation as well as change over time. The material archaeological record is the most robust and reliable way of knowing the prehistoric past. We depend on archaeological remains for inferences about prehistoric cultures and societies. For instance, archaeologists examine material evidence such as the shape, size and distribution of dwellings, along with the placement of hearths and other facilities to make inferences about household organization. Interpretations implied by theoretical or political expectations must be verified with material remains. Processual cultural evolution tells us that hierarchical administration is associated with regional settlements of different sizes, in which communities of higher political order possess proportionately larger populations. But there are many other causes of difference in site size. Convincing inference that centralized political hierarchy was responsible for a prehistoric site size distribution requires material validation, such as administrative artifacts found in the higher order centers (see Isbell and Schreiber 1978; Wright and Johnson 1975). By the same token, if a prehistoric settlement is inferred to have been a ceremonial pilgrimage center instead of a city, it is necessary to show what one means by "pilgrimage center," and what kinds of remains characterize pilgrimage. Then the archaeologist must demonstrate that those materials characterize the prehistoric site in question (see Silverman 1993, 1994). Material remains are not always easy to understand, but they are essential for constructing convincing knowledge about antiquity. Archaeologists can avoid creating a homogeneous and essentialist past by focusing more on material remains, thoughtfully associating material culture with institutional behavior, and interrogating interpretive arguments with the material remains.

This volume could have been organized around a popular theoretical issue, or a new interpretative model, but one of our long-term professional goals has been the promotion of materially-based knowledge about the Andean past. The papers in this volume reflect an emphasis on material remains as the primary source of knowledge about the past. We have not sought a complete and balanced coverage of Andean prehistory, but have emphasized new research and new interpretations of data based on recent archaeological and ethnohistorical field work. Inspiration for the volume came from the 17th Annual Northeast Conference on

Andean Archaeology and Ethnohistory, held at the State University of New York at Binghamton in 1998. Several of the chapters were originally delivered papers at that conference. We also have included other papers so as to more broadly represent the results of current programs of research in the Central Andes. We hope that we have achieved our goal of assembling a significant sample of the most exciting new research results.

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