

Powerful Places in the Ancient Andes. Justin Jennings & Edward Swenson, editors [book review]

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Abstract:

The remains of monumental mounds and the skeletons of large-scale irrigation systems, which transformed vast swaths of coastal and highland terrain, have captured the interests of Andean archaeologists asking an array of questions for more than 50 years. Justin Jennings and Edward S. Swenson's edited volume *Powerful Places in the Ancient Andes* critiques these earlier efforts and asserts an ontological vocabulary on studies of the built environment and the animated Andean topography. Many contributors adopt ideas and nomenclature from Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, and several emphasize the importance of circulations between human and nonhuman as essential acts that vitalize both parties. The introductory chapter is a lengthy critique of previous interpretations of space and place and outlines concepts that contribute to an ontological engagement with Andean architectural artifacts. Authors of other chapters offer a wide array of approaches and consider the animacy of built and telluric entities.

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Article:

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In a seeming contradiction, Peter Gose opposes projecting the ontology of the power of animate mountain *apu* of today's Andean communities onto the prehispanic past. Based on written

records, he contends that the Inka held ancestors to be the far more powerful source of animating power and that this life force was shifted to indestructible landscape entities only during the eighteenth century. The archaeologists largely ignored his admonitions and detailed the many material markers of the perceived power of mountains in pre-Inka polities. As Swenson and Jennings argue, evidentiary constraints (à la Allison Wylie, *American Antiquity*, 1992) should filter out false impositions of ethnographic analogy onto the past. I would add that as Andean researchers embrace the “ontological turn” they should heed Gose's general warning that a dramatic *pachacuti* separates current communities from their archaeological forbearers: they should follow Mary Weismantel's lead, and “slow down their thinking” (p. 177) so that the evidence can catch up.

Weismantel's chapter uses archaeological evidence, ethnohistory, and ethnography to consider ontologies of water, which is not technically a place, but is appropriate when looking for powerful animates in the Andean past. She uses passages from the Huarochiri manuscript to underscore the ways in which communities may have interacted with mutable *wak'a* (*huaca*). Because of their desire to form relationships with people, *wak'a* appeared in the form of human bodies, but they could also manifest as storms, rain, or waves. Water was both essential for crops and destructive when floods destroyed canals and fields. Likewise, *wak'a* were cast in the role of affines—unpredictable, possibly dangerous, but necessary. She compares the shape-shifting nature of *wak'a* in the Huarochiri manuscript to the many guises of the decapitator on Moche media. Weismantel suggests that Andean ontologies may have accommodated the unpredictable landscape and the caprice of *wak'a* as one must tolerate unruly kin.

John Janusek and Corey Bowen trace how water entered and moved through the monumental core of the city and relate their data to earlier models of Tiwanaku's infamous “moat.” The sophisticated engineering of flowing water was a practical example of infrastructure that drained the core during the rainy season, but it also appears to have meaningfully framed the entrance to the city's monumental center, which was marked by three stela embellished by aquatic iconography. The channeling of water through stone-lined canals references Mount Kimsachata, the orientation for the early sunken temple and the city's source of building stone and water.

Later in the Tiwanaku era, other mountains, such as Mount Ccapia, were brought into Tiwanaku's cosmological orbit. The Akapana and Pumapunka mimic the channeling of water through mountain streams and “were perhaps built as ‘perfected’ embodiments in honor of those mountains” (p. 226).

George Lau's data from highland Ancash also support the association of mountains with power before the Middle Horizon. He posits that features of the landscape including mountains may have developed their sacred, animate character after the decline of the Chavin cult. Recuay settlements then move to higher locations, arenas of ritual performance are built in lofty locales, the doorways of many funerary chambers are oriented toward nearby hill summits or far-off mountain peaks, and some ceramic vessels depicting Recuay “lords” have a conical shape linking these figures to mountains and their power.

Swenson finds the shape of mountains reproduced at a larger scale. He suggests that the contours of Cerro Cañoncillo are replicated by Huaca Colorado, a Late Moche site in the Jequetepeque

Valley. The ceremonial platforms excavated thus far either face the mountain or share its north-south orientation. Swenson, Elizabeth Demarrais, and Anna Guengerich attribute meaning to acts of construction that built mounds or houses as durable reminders of shared labor, feasting, and the performance of rituals that enlivened the structures through the placement of sacrifices, offerings, or burials.

Bill Sillar expresses a similar sentiment regarding the immense temple built by the Inka at Cacha (Raqchi): he sees it as an example of “technologies of enchantment.” He discusses movement through the building during rituals as a weaving dance that brought adherents in view of ancestral features in the landscape while participating in Inka rites. Guengerich's chapter presents a contrast with that of Sillar in that she examines how sites were structured by communities, rather than by a centralized state imposing constraints on the bodies of subjects. She describes the upward shift in settlement associated with the onset of the Late Intermediate period in the Chachapoyas region and considers how people's relations with mountains changed as they were transformed and domesticated by settlement and cultivation.

Placemaking is also discussed in several chapters. Demarrais addresses it from the perspective of domestic life and the community scale during the Late Intermediate period in Northwest Argentina. Jennings and colleagues examine the marking of trails and paths in coastal Arequipa using petroglyphs, geoglyphs, and other types of offerings. Andrew Roddick and John Janusek approach placemaking of sorts through the potential movement of animated stones and sculptures in the altiplano. Carved stones may have been an active element of the landscape emplaced relative to elements of the built and natural environment and possibly moved to animate new contexts with offerings and rituals.

Roddick and Janusek's chapter and others in the volume show the different ways people engaged with animate “inanimates,” such as carved stones, houses, mounds, rocky outcrops, mountains, lakes, and perhaps even water. This diversity demonstrates that a single Andean ontology cannot be distilled from the ethnographic literature, but rather must be explored with caution in specific powerful places.