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Building Community in Coastal Deserts: Perspectives from Western South America

GABRIEL PRIETO and DANIEL H. SANDWEISS, eds. 2019. *Maritime Communities of the Ancient Andes*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 462 pp., ISBN 13: 9780813066141

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Michael Moseley emphasized the importance of maritime resources to the development of social complexity in the Andean region in his theory articulated in his *Maritime Foundations of Andean Civilization* (1975), which became a central (and controversial) text in the field. This volume builds on his and others' foundational work and asks, "how did ancient Andean coastal communities build themselves, and their identities, around their proximity to the Pacific Ocean"?

Maritime Communities of the Ancient Andes, edited by Gabriel Prieto and Daniel Sandweiss, is based on a session conducted at the 2014 Society for American Archaeology annual meeting. The book contains an introductory chapter followed by 14 chapters in four sections organized by time interval, beginning with the first human occupations of the Pacific littoral of western South America and culminating in the 17th century CE colonial period.

The introduction orients the reader around the goals, themes, and contents of the volume well. The editors trace the history of coastal research in Andean archaeology, including questions regarding the timing of human migration into the region, human-environment interactions, the emergence of economic specialization, and the development of social complexity from the exploitation of abundant marine resources. They compare these trends with new research, including the rest of the volume, which seeks to delve into more complex perspectives on the development and history of Andean Maritime Communities (AMCs). They emphasize a key issue: the lack of a clear

delineation between fishing and farming, and that the two economic practices combined were likely what led to social complexity along the Andean coast.

Section I focuses on early AMCs spanning the period 13,000-5,500 BP. The first two chapters examine what is now northern Chile and far southern Peru, specifically the Atacama Desert. In Chapter 2, Santoro et al. emphasize that inland communities become sources of agricultural goods unavailable to AMCs along the arid coast in trade networks that spanned both time and space. In Chapter 3, Salazar et al. suggest that members of AMCs gained social capital via travel to highland areas for lithic resources, which alongside other specialized skills became the basis for increased social complexity, semi-sedentary behavior, and territoriality. In Chapter 4, Dillehay discusses northern Peru, specifically the site of Huaca Prieta in the Chicama Valley. Examining ~9,000 years of human occupation (~12,500 cal. BP – 3,800 cal BP), Dillehay summarizes previous research and emphasizes the importance of both marine and terrestrial resources and exchange systems in the development of social complexity.

Section II examines the emergence of more complex social systems 5,500 - 2,500 BP. In Chapter 5, Creamer and Haas discuss developments in the Norte Chico, a region of north-central Peru spanning four valleys, from 3,000 - 1,800 BCE. Creamer and Haas present evidence for economic and ideological power as drivers of social complexity, noting that they have not found evidence for state-sponsored violence in the preceramic Norte Chico. In Chapter 6, Helmer shifts the focus north to the Nepeña Valley, discussing AMCs and early urbanization, specifically the Early Horizon (900 - 200 BCE) settlement of Samanco. Helmer notes that despite intensified irrigation agriculture, marine resources from settlements like Samanco played a key role in the economy of the Nepeña Valley during this period, especially in trade with inland communities. Chicoine et al. continue the discussion on the Nepeña Valley in Chapter 7 with an examination of the faunal remains recovered from Caylán, the largest Early Horizon center in the lower Nepeña Valley. Though ~15 km inland, Chicoine et al. note that marine fauna were key to the subsistence of Caylán's residents. Prieto moves the discussion north in Chapter 8, discussing evidence for AMCs conducting subsistence agriculture during the Initial Period (1,800 - 900 BCE) at the site of Gramalote. Drawing together multiple lines of evidence Prieto concludes that fisherfolk in the lower Moche Valley were likely cultivating plants in household plots for their consumption and use in fishing technologies. Sutter and Prieto continue discussing Gramalote in Chapter 9,

examining bioarcheological data for evidence of ethnic identities unique to AMCs. Using biodistance analysis, which allows researchers to assess the genetic relationship between individuals based on dental morphology, Sutter and Prieto find that the residents of Gramalote were not genetically isolated, but regularly intermarried with inland agropastoralists in the Moche Valley.

Section III discusses the role of AMCs in larger social networks and organizations 2,500 - 600 BP. In Chapter 10, Billman et al. examine household life at Cerro la Virgen, a town belonging to the Chimu empire and located close to the capitol city of Chan Chan in the Moche Valley. Combining faunal, botanical, and artifact analysis, they find no specific economic focus within the house compounds examined, suggesting that the settlement was likely self-sufficient rather than a specialized production center supplying Chan Chan. They note that the agricultural activities conducted in the *pampa* would have required extensive irrigation provided by the Chimu state, and residents may have "paid" tribute in the form of agricultural products or textiles for usufruct rights to irrigation. Goepfert et al. bring us to the far north of Peru in Chapter 11, providing new data about the Early Initial Period (200 BCE-600 CE) to Middle Horizon (600 – 1,000 CE) transition in the Sechura Desert. They report the discovery of a resource processing area rich in marine animal remains, which they suggest was likely part of an extraction and preparation network for export to settlements associated with the Moche culture. In Chapter 12, Stothert et al. discuss increasing social complexity and economic specialization and intensification in coastal Ecuador from 700 – 1,500 CE. They argue against the hypothesis that increased demand for *Spondylus* shell from northern Peru drove social complexity, noting such demand occurred alongside other cultural developments in Ecuador that led to a unique form of decentralized chieftainship.

Section IV completes the volume by examining ethnohistoric and historic data regarding AMCs from 600 - 300 BP, or the spread of the Inka empire through the early Spanish colonial period. In Chapter 13 Marcus et al. discuss how zooarchaeological evidence from the site of Cerro Azul in southern Peru could reflect El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) activity. Their results are inconclusive, but they note that other studies successfully used the biogeography of various species recovered from archaeological contexts to reconstruct shifts in ENSO. Van Valkenburgh et al. bring the discussion back to northern Peru in Chapter 15, focusing on evidence for maritime subsistence strategies at the late Prehispanic to Colonial period settlement of Carrizales in the Zaña

Valley. They contend that leaders of AMCs claimed identity as exclusively extractors of marine resources to avoid tribute burdens from Spanish colonial authorities, noting that species richness in both faunal and botanical remains increased during the colonial period and included a wide variety of terrestrial organisms. In the final chapter, Susan Ramírez reexamines documentary evidence for specialized fishing communities in the early Colonial Period. She notes that while there is extensive documentary evidence for AMC specialization, there is also evidence for their interdependence with agricultural communities and fluidity of economic identity.

This volume is a comprehensive collection of recent scholarship on coastal life in prehispanic western South America, and as such is a vital resource for anyone looking to increase their knowledge on the subject. While likely too advanced for introductory archaeology courses, this text would be excellent for use in advanced regional courses and discussions on broader topics such as human-environment interactions or the development of social complexity.

Works Cited:

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