

ancient Maya truth” (p. 273). Subsequent chapters employ a similar methodology to propose the *Theologia Indorum*’s influence on various Highland Maya texts, including the *Title of Totonicapán* and other *títulos* and notarial texts. Throughout, Sparks emphasizes the hyperlocal audiences and perspectives of such texts and the need to read all such K’ichean texts intertextually to achieve a full understanding of their content. The role of the Maya author Diego Reynoso in composing and extending the influence of the *Theologia Indorum* also appears in more detail throughout these final chapters. Overall, Sparks’s work offers various new proposals for scholarly debate, and reveals even more the significant role of the *Theologia Indorum* and its composers while exemplifying the importance of considering locality, various European and Indigenous influences, and intertextuality in the study of colonial religion.

Las Varas: Ritual and Ethnicity in the Ancient Andes. HOWARD TSAI. 2020. University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa. 160 pp. \$49.95 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-8173-2068-3.

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Andean archaeologists have tended to focus their work on either the coast or the highlands, leaving ecologically and culturally peripheral or intermediary zones on the eastern and western slopes of the Andes understudied. This book represents a welcome addition to a growing body of research on the prehistory of the *chaupiyunga*, or middle valley region, on the western slopes. Howard Tsai explores how ritual provided the context for the expression and negotiation of ethnicity in the *chaupiyunga* community of Las Varas in the middle Jequetepeque Valley.

In Chapter 1, Tsai traces anthropological thinking about ethnicity. Early nationalist and evolutionary archaeologies saw ethnic groups as stable, homogeneous entities. Later work by Leach, Barth, and Hodder questioned the existence of immutable ethnic groups or identities and instead called attention to the social dynamics through which heterogeneous ethnic groups persist or change. Bourdieu and Rappaport proposed that identity and culture are shaped by practice, performance, and ritual. Building on these ideas, Tsai argues that ethnicity is “the product of interaction and not isolation” (p. 22): it is an historical and cultural construct maintained by strategic practices such as ritual. Rather than using patterned differences in

material culture to draw boundaries around groups, Tsai suggests, archaeologists should focus on how past people used material culture to signal difference in relation to others and to mediate interactions among different groups.

Chapter 2 sketches the ecological and historical context of the *chaupiyunga*, the warm, agriculturally rich, coca-growing zone between the Pacific coast and Andean highlands. The *chaupiyunga* is both ecologically transitional between the coast and the highlands and socially distinct. Tsai uses early colonial sources, including the Huarochirí manuscript and records of legal disputes, to show how highlanders defined themselves as distinct from those dwelling at lower altitudes, whom they called *yuncas*; this relational distinction was embedded in myth and reenacted through ritual performance.

Chapter 3 introduces the central case study of the book: Las Varas, a community in the middle Jequetepeque Valley occupied around AD 1000. The high concentration of Coastal Cajamarca painted bowl sherds visible on the surface of Las Varas sets it apart from neighboring middle valley communities, where ceramic assemblages and architecture largely follow coastal canons. Tsai’s research aimed to test whether Las Varas was a highland colony (as suggested by Murra’s classic vertical archipelago model), but his findings question a strict coast–highland dichotomy by providing evidence for *chaupiyunga* agency and identity.

Chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to archaeological data. Chapter 4 describes household architecture and contents, supported by a rich collection of photographs, plan and profile drawings, and architectural reconstructions. Tsai finds numerous affinities with highland domestic architecture and household activities and little emphasis on coastal material culture in Las Varas houses. I wish that the descriptive summary had been accompanied by more detail on household assemblages, especially subsistence remains and utilitarian ceramics. In particular, more quantitative data would facilitate comparisons of these assemblages to those at other sites. Tsai does discuss in detail the distinctive Coastal Cajamarca style that dominates the Las Varas ceramic assemblage. He argues convincingly that, even though this style is visually similar to highland Cajamarca cursive styles and often found at coastal sites, its origin lies in the *chaupiyunga*.

Chapter 5 describes two ritual spaces at Las Varas, which Tsai refers to as the Reception Platform and the Plazas of the Malquis. The Reception Platform, at the western end of the site, has more coastal ceramics and shellfish than any other context at Las Varas, which Tsai reads as evidence that visitors coming from the

coast were ritually received here. The interconnected Plazas of the Malquis, named for their highland-style cist tombs, could have held larger gatherings and feasts with visitors coming from the south. Ultimately, Tsai sees these two spaces as hosting people from different regions at rituals that displayed and reinforced ethnic distinctions. A strength of this book is its thoughtful engagement with ethnohistorical accounts and ethnography. Tsai supports this argument by citing a colonial account from Huacho and ethnographic cases from Ayacucho and Bolivia, examples in which ceremonial spaces and ritual performance marked ethnic identities and boundaries.

This slim volume covers a surprising amount of ground, from Leach's politically and ethnically dynamic Shan and Kachin in highland Burma, through a careful reading of the performance of ethnic distinctions by humans and *huacas* in the Huarochirí, to stratigraphic profiles and artifact descriptions at Las Varas and the author's own experiences participating in exchange and interaction in the middle Jequetepeque Valley. Chapter 6 attempts to draw together

these threads. Tsai advocates for a multicontextual approach to ethnicity rather than one that privileges a single domain of ethnic expression. His multiple lines of evidence from household and ritual contexts make a strong case that Las Varas was a *chaupiyunga*-identified community where different coastal, highland, and middle valley identities were performed and reinforced through public rituals.

This book contributes usefully to local culture history by complicating coast–highland dichotomies and situating the Coastal Cajamarca style in the *chaupiyunga*. More broadly, it offers an example of an archaeology-driven approach to ethnicity that moves beyond identifying ethnic affiliation based on material patterns. By framing ethnic interactions in terms of game theory, Tsai emphasizes the role of strategic action within ritual structures in shaping contingent relationships of competition, exchange, and alliance among coast, *chaupiyunga*, and highland communities. This ultimately offers an interesting framework for thinking about ethnicity and interregional interaction in the Andes.