

Las Vegas: The Early Holocene Archaeology of Human Occupation in Coastal Ecuador / Las Vegas: La Arqueología de la Ocupación Humana en la Costa del Ecuador durante el Holoceno Temprano. PETER W. STAHL and KAREN E. STOTHERT, editors. 2020. University of Pittsburgh Memoirs in Latin American Archaeology No. 25. University of Pittsburgh Center for Comparative Archaeology, Pittsburgh. 208 pp. \$28.00 (paperback).*

Reviewed by James B. Richardson, Curator Emeritus, Carnegie Museum of Natural History, and Professor Emeritus, University of Pittsburgh

As the editors rightfully point out, this Las Vegas memoir is one of the most comprehensive interpretations and reconstructions of an Early through Late Pre-ceramic (Archaic) site in the Americas. The 14 authors provide detailed discussions of present and past environments, subsistence and burial patterns, and landscape alterations from Early Vegas dating to 10,000–8000 BP radiocarbon years (RCYBP 11,000–9000) and Late Las Vegas dating to 8000–6600 BP (RCYBP 9000–7300), with evidence of a Pre-Las Vegas presence dating to around 10,840–10,510 BP (RCYBP 13,820–10,850). Thirty-two Las Vegas period sites were recorded, with excavations in 1970–1971 and 1977–1985 on the Santa Elena Peninsula in southwest Ecuador at Site 80, a major base camp and cemetery; at Site 67, a smaller base camp and cemetery; and at four small campsites. The 12 chapters explore the adaptation of Las Vegas peoples to a mangrove environment with abundant terrestrial and marine resources that resulted in a sedentary society.

In the introduction, Karen Stothert provides an overview of the volume and dating of the Las Vegas periods. This is followed by Xavier Cornejo's masterful discussion of the ecosystem and present vegetation that form part of a bioregion extending from Manabi

Province in Ecuador to the Department of Piura in northwestern Peru. He points out that much of the old growth vegetation has been affected by timber exploitation and commercial agriculture. Using the remaining vegetation, historical accounts, data from the Pleistocene tar pits on the Peninsula, sediment cores, and archaeological evidence, however, he reconstructs the environment as mega mangrove forests that provided extensive wild plant and animal resources to the Las Vegas populations. Deborah Pear-sall, Neil Duncan, John Jones, and Dorothy Friedel use sediment cores from the Río Grande at Punta Carnero that record lower sea levels, El Niño events, and pollen and phytoliths of wild and domesticated plants. Miriam Dominguez examines mangrove formation in relationship to sea level rise and tectonic uplift of the coast that place the former coastline between 5 and 10 km from the modern shore during Early Las Vegas, where underwater sites must exist.

The analyses by Douglas Ubelaker of 192 burials from Site 80 reveal that the Las Vegas population was healthy, probably as the result of a well-balanced diet. This is reflected in the comparative data with later skeletal assemblages into the historic period, in which the Las Vegas incidence of dental loss was lower and life expectancy higher than in five later time periods. Dolores Piperno conducted starch grain analysis on seven human teeth from Site 80 identifying domesticated *Cucurbita moschata*, *Phaseolus* (probably lima beans), and possible maize in Late Vegas contexts.

Mollusks from seven Las Vegas sites were studied by Karen Stothert and Kate Clark, with mangrove species being the predominant molluscan food source. That there was a total of 87 species demonstrated that Las Vegas people exploited diverse marine habitats such as mangroves, estuaries, shallow waters, intertidal zones, rocky areas, and freshwater ponds, rivers, and wetlands. Some of the shells were used to scale fish and for other uses and were placed in some burial offerings. The 41,000 mammalian bones from seven sites, analyzed by Peter Stahl, included rodents, rabbits, deer, ocelot, agouti, opossum, and peccaries.

*Full text in PDF format is open access; bilingual English-Spanish.

The finds of large number of bones of the desert fox deserve special mention, because they raise the possibility that this animal may have been domesticated. Philippe Béarez and Peter Stahl explore the fish resources comprising 38 species but dominated by sea catfish. Modern capture methods include spearing, gill netting, trawls, and purse seines. No Las Vegas fish-hooks were found, and the presence of deepwater fish species, in my estimation, suggests the use of watercraft. Avifauna, dominated by doves, ducks, and rail species, are discussed by Markus Tellkamp and Peter Stahl.

Andrei Tabarev and Yoshitaka Kanomata compare the Las Vegas lithic assemblage with similar ones from Russia and Japan, respectively. The Las Vegas assemblage has no projectile points, bifaces, or evidence of pressure flaking, with tools produced by direct percussion from materials obtained from near the five sites of Early and Late Las Vegas. The lithics consist of chopper and flake tools that may have been used to manufacture wooden and other perishable tools and to process animal resources. The use of wooden spears is suspected. The Siches site near Talara, Peru, a mangrove-adapted society of the same time period as Las Vegas, has a similar tool assemblage.

The Las Vegas site has proved, through extensive excavations and analysis of the subsistence remains, to have been a mangrove-adapted sedentary society with a settlement pattern that included several base camps and numerous campsites. Its diversified economy was based on marine and terrestrial resources and horticulture; it endured for more than 5,000 years. Karen Stothert and Peter Stahl must be congratulated for working with their 12 colleagues to produce what will become a classic in the study of coastal Pre-ceramic societies in the Americas because of its in-depth, multifaceted approach that provides a window into Las Vegas environment and culture. As an aside, Karen Stothert and I were both born in same small town of Longmeadow, Massachusetts, and ended up researching the same time period and culture, she at Las Vegas and I at Siches.

Iguals pero diferentes: Trayectorias históricas pre-hispánicas en el Cono Sur. LORENA SANHUEZA, ANDRÉS TRONCOSO y ROBERTO CAMPBELL, editores. 2020. Social-Ediciones, Santiago. 244 pp. CLP\$10,000 (paperback), ISBN 978-956-19-1175-8.

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Considero que la palabra diversidad es la que mejor representa la problemática sociocultural desarrollada en este libro, ya que sus editores supieron captar cabalmente en su título la “paradoja de la igualdad” que caracteriza a las sociedades englobadas bajo la categoría arqueológica de no-jerárquicas o heterárquicas. La diversidad de esas configuraciones sociales, que en los marcos evolucionistas están a medio camino entre “lo simple” y “lo complejo”, fueron producto del entretrejo de múltiples convenciones culturales que entretrejieron una compleja red de relaciones, a modo de “programa político”, para evitar que surjan esas jerarquías institucionalizadas.

Puede decirse que el libro da cuenta de las trayectorias históricas de sociedades que englobamos dentro de términos genéricos para referirnos, por un lado, a los componentes que comparten y, por otro, a los que las diferencian y las distinguen. Tanto unos como otros caracterizan, representan y dan cuenta de la diversidad existente en esas formaciones sociales, políticas, económicas e ideacionales. Además, del libro surge que entran en esa categoría grupos con economías cinegéticas (cazadores recolectores-pescadores) y también productivos (comunidades agropastoriles) que fueron analizados en escalas espaciotemporales diferentes, que habitaron ambientes contrastantes con la habilidad para complementarlos, y que produjeron una cultura material diversa. Así, los editores lograron captar en el título “iguales pero diferentes” y en los ocho capítulos que lo conforman, las diversas realidades de esas sociedades del pasado, donde queda argumentado que no son “un pasaje” a otro estadio “más complejo”, que las trayectorias históricas son múltiples y no lineales, y que los cambios no siempre conducen a la conformación de sociedades con desigualdades sociales institucionalizadas.

Cada capítulo del libro ocupa un lugar con relación a los temas que aborda en diferentes escalas temporo-espaciales, donde están representadas las regiones del norte, centro y sur chileno, con excepción de un caso que proviene del noroeste argentino. El recorrido se inicia con las investigaciones dirigidas al estudio de aspectos económicos relacionados con la circulación, el acceso y la distribución de bienes, los que son transversales tanto para las sociedades cinegéticas como para las productoras, porque incidieron en sus configuraciones sociales e históricas. La segunda problemática tratada se centra en el estudio de comunidades que se desarrollaron en distintos momentos en el norte de Chile, para lo cual se focaliza en el estudio de las prácticas sociales que se materializan en la construcción de espacios públicos donde los túmulos funerarios, el arte rupestre y algunos tipos de objetos cerámicos fueron los grandes articuladores de