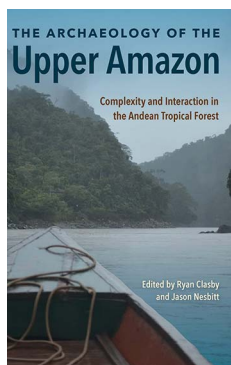


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RYAN CLASBY & JASON NESBITT (ed.). 2021. *The archaeology of the Upper Amazon: complexity and interaction in the Andean tropical forest*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida; 978-0-8130-6690-5 hardback \$90.



The archaeology of the Upper Amazon focuses on the small corner of the Amazon Basin wedged against the Central Andean cordillera. The 14 chapters highlight the vital importance of the area over the last five millennia, particularly the interaction networks along major rivers, which facilitated the movement of people, resources and ideas between the Andean highlands and Amazonian lowlands. The papers present state-of-the-art archaeological case studies from diverse settings, informed by ethnography and linguistics, ethnohistory, palaeoecology and geospatial science. The volume presents a balanced overview of current archaeological knowledge through detailed and evocative case studies by diverse young, mid-career

and senior scholars, which greatly expand our knowledge of interaction and complexity in local, regional and macroregional systems that straddle the two regions. Eschewing overly general notions of tribalism or statism, the studies reveal remarkable achievements and dynamic systems on both sides of the continental divide. Far from cultural backwater or periphery, the forested flanks were a conduit of extensive traffic, a centre of innovation and connectivity, and filled with diverse human agents negotiating complex socio-political systems within world systems that span the continent and extend over millennia.

The chapters reveal compelling details of interaction along this dynamic frontier, confounding facile binary contrasts while not diminishing the fact that the Andes/Amazon boundary is often marked by stark contrasts, steeply sloped gradients, and challenges for human traffic across them. The contribution by Young, a human geographer, describes the difference succinctly, notably in terms of human habitation and routes of access, not to mention the diverse perceptual and experiential contrasts across this biocultural seam. Socio-cultural anthropologist Hastings takes up this basic question with respect to the herders of the central highland plateau, who had outposts within sight of lowland villages. At its eastern fringe, the vertical archipelago model dissolves into multi-ethnicity and territorial detachment.

Church's paper describes human habitation and interaction revealed at Manachaqui Cave in the forest fringe of north-eastern Peru—a way station for trade between the high Andes and the Amazon from Late Pleistocene to modern times—as well as later developments in southern Chachapoyas, such as emerging complexity revealed at Gran Pajatén. Subsequent chapters focus on emerging socio-political complexity in the Formative and Regional Development periods in Ecuador and Peruvian Late Preceramic to Early Intermediate periods. Vasquez describes the Santa Ana-La Florida site in the upper Marañon River basin, one of the earliest monumental sites poised at the edge of the forested lowlands in the Ecuadorian Early Formative, from about 5500–2500 BP. Architecture and art are seen

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as an expression of common beliefs and practices, including Andean stirrup-spouted vessels, werehumans (e.g. shapeshifters), circular stone structures, and practices and values shared with lowlanders in systems that highlight hybridity and local negotiation of belief systems and practices. In the Huancabamba Valley to the west, Yamamoto argues for a ‘bottom-up’ perspective, evolving over the period from 4500–2500 BP. He highlights how active agents strategically manipulate diverse resources and positionality within broader networks of interaction within the frontier of a nascent world system. The study by Nesbitt, Johnson and Asencios at Canchas Uckro, in the headwaters of the Marañón, suggests emerging peer polities and multi-ethnic interaction in the heartland of early Chavin. By the early first millennium BC, this area was the core of an emerging world system built on esoteric knowledge, prestige goods, ritual and art, and other ideological linkages that defy ecological boundaries on either side of the continental divide.

Pazmiño’s discussion of Sangay along the Upano River in Ecuador during the mid first millennium reveals the varied “colors of Amazonian complexity” (p. 129) along the forested edge of the Andean world. Sangay is reconstructed as an economy of prestige goods and public ceremony, which focused on the circulation of social, symbolic and political capital in the social space created by the densely packed plazas and mounds of this regional centre. The detailed ground plan, revealed in recent Lidar maps, suggests a core town or central node in broader networks, again reflecting the interplay of centralising and decentralising forces within socio-political units of varying scale. Raymond’s long-standing study of the Apurimac River highlights complementarity within regional systems and geo-political texture, enclaves and buffer-zones, as well as the oscillating tendencies or cycling of frontier societies—again compelled internally by centripetal and centrifugal forces or strategies, and the political stabilities and instabilities caused by traffic among them.

Clasby’s discussion of the Jaén region describes changing patterns of interaction in the upper Marañón River in north-eastern Peru following the decline of Chavin (1000–400 BC) and Chorrera in Ecuador (1300–300 BC) and increased regionalism in the Central Andes. In the eastern forest margins, the same period lacked evidence of cultural disruption and even witnessed increased regional connectivity, including with highland and coastal areas. There was also integration within densely settled tropical forest populations in diverse frontier areas—each following their own trajectories—such as urbanised landscapes in the south-western Amazon and western Orinoco during the subsequent Middle Horizon empires of Tiwanaku and Wari (c. AD 600–900). Hechler’s study expands the scope of the volume to northern areas, reconstructing Barbacoan political economic networks in the Late Integration Period in northern Ecuador, the Chibchan sphere and Intermediate Area, and changes resulting in Late Period imperial expansion. The fluidity of political, economic, multi-ethnic exchange systems disorientated Inka and later Spanish colonisers along the frontier, but also created a trajectory of heightened interregional exchange. Schjellerup reflects on the view of Andean superiority, shared by the Inka and the Spanish, by traversing the Inkan roads from Chachapoyas to Moyobamba, moving east to “where the sun rises” (p. 229). This again illuminates both the vitality and volatility of the ‘tribal zone’, the dynamic fringe of empire. Alconini’s chapter on the southern Andean fringe reminds us that Inka authority extended well into the

lowlands, but resistance and political motivations of more mobile tropical forest peoples were also a dominant feature of the southern fringe of Andean empires. The Tupi-Guarani barbarians at the gates of the Andean world in the Llanos de Mojos—a melting pot of hybrid subjectivities and identities—threatened the status quo of both settled Arawakan and expansionist Andean empires.

The case studies show how archaeological science can reveal resonances across scales and perspectives about how bodies, practices and technologies move, are locally reproduced, and connect across highly dynamic borderlands of emerging Indigenous world systems. The power of detailed archaeology to answer questions that extend far beyond regional archaeology is eloquently summarised in Deboer's magisterial overview. This prompts us to ask: what does this well-organised and lavishly illustrated volume have to say, exactly, beyond archaeology? The region is beset by powerful forces, climate change, deforestation, pandemics and violence, which also shaped deep history. Alongside these are the contentious politics that pit oil companies and clandestine economies against biodiversity, conservation and local communities, notably the heritage and voices of Indigenous peoples, including the many sustainable ways to work with Amazonian nature suggested in *The archaeology of the Upper Amazon*. This is an archaeology that lies yet in the future, but as an archaeological primer, it will stand for many years as the high-water mark.

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