# STUDIES OF PRE-HISPANIC NEW WORLD CULTURES

*AN ANCIENT WORLD PRESERVED: RELICS AND RECORDS OF PREHISTORY IN THE ANDES*. By FREDERIC ANDRE ENGEL. (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1977. Pp. 314. $12.95.)

*THE ANCIENT AMERICAN CIVILIZATIONS*. By FRIEDRICH KATZ. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974. Pp. 386. $5.95.)

*TWO EARTHS, TWO HEAVENS: AN ESSAY CONTRASTING THE AZTECS AND THE INCAS*. By BURR CARTWRIGHT BRUNDAGE. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975. Pp. 128. $6.95.)

These books exemplify three different approaches to the study of indigenous New World culture: the first stresses archaeology, the second a combination of archaeology and history, and the third relies almost wholly on historical European contact period documents. Besides these differences in method there are contrasts in style and quality of scholarship.

Have you ever been told by a publishing house representative that, given your vast experience in the field and classroom, you could easily whip out a book based on lecture notes and personal fieldwork recollections? If you would like to know what the result might be, read this book by Engel. You might guess that such a method could result in difficulty citing accurately the published works of other researchers. Engel's book has no bibliography. The author says bibliographic citation would make the book too "heavy," and besides it is not intended for the "specialist" (p. 1). He does refer to some publications in the text, one of the most basic of which, the "Handbook of South American Indians,"[1] is cited incorrectly as the "Handbook of American Indians" (p. 2). You might also imagine that trivial, albeit interesting, information could outweigh the essential. For example, we learn more about the obsidian "arrowheads" (presumably spear or dart points) found by the author on the banks of a lake in central Peru (p. 239) (and of uncertain Paleo-Indian affinity), than we do about the fluted points and associated artifacts from El Inga in Ecuador—a well-known and important Paleo-Indian site. We also hear nearly as much regarding problems Engel had with his domestic help and the day his dog was eaten by a Puma in the high Andes as we do Pizarro's conquest of the Inca. Engel's method of writing also fosters sweeping generalizations occasionally ill-served by a faulty memory. For example, "Who will write a treatise on the diplomacy and war policies of the princes of Cuzco?" (p. 290), when Bram[2] already has.

Engel is at his best in this book when discussing the excavations he has conducted, observations he has made on Andean ecology, and problems of archaeological resource destruction. He has previously given us some good technical reports on sites and cultures he has investigated, such as the Asia site, El Paraiso, the Chilca caves, etc. Perhaps the strongest point of this contribution

is the recounting of his personal field experiences at those sites and the insights he has gained from their study. Examples would be his discussion of the clothing worn by inhabitants of the Chilca Basin some 3,500 years ago (p. 81), his description of a reed raft excavated in southern Peru (p. 90), and the information he presents regarding the huge early (ca. 1500 B.C.) settlement at El Paraiso (p. 102).

Another strong point of the publication has to do with the ecological observations Engel has made during the approximately twenty years he has been in Peru. Some of these show how modern farmers find and utilize water from unusual sources (p. 189), chronicle the modern decline of arable land through ecological mismanagement (p. 230), or impressively demonstrate how vast areas now practically uninhabited once supported a dense pre-Columbian human population. This latter discussion is summed up in a stimulating and convincing argument for the value of archaeological data in developing modern governmental agricultural policy in Peru (p. 276). Finally, Engel's witness to the lamentable progress of site looting and destruction makes him seem a sort of Jacques-Yves Cousteau of Andean archaeology.

Engel is at his worst in this book when discussing long-range cultural contacts or making far-flung cultural comparisons, in his heavy reliance on invasion to explain culture change, and in the near exclusion of ethno-historical data. It is perhaps not surprising that, having been trained in France, Engel would rely heavily on the contributions of French colleagues to South American studies. However, it does the layman a disservice to present as alive and well in the anthropological literature Rivet's old ideas that "immigrants from Australia by way of Antarctica may have entered the continent through the island of Tierra del Fuego" (p. 245) or that there may have been strong African influence on pre-Columbian South American culture (pp. 305, 46). Worse is the discussion (p. 44) that gives some credibility to the idea that mankind may have originated in South America—an idea that, since its proposal by the Argentinian anthropologist Fernando Amenghino in the late 1800s, has not been supported by a single bit of scientifically validated fact.

When Engel leaves his Andean home-ground he sometimes indulges in flights of fancy, such as the statement that "Only a blind man or a person of bad faith could deny the southern Asiatic traits visible in Maya art, the Indonesian reminiscences in the architecture and decoration of Central America and even in the Chavin society in Peru" (p. 47), or that a comparison of the *danzantes* at Monte Alban in Mexico with the monoliths at Sechin, Peru yields impressive similarities (p. 124). Both statements can be extensively challenged and are hardly exemplary of the method of "controlled comparisons." Furthermore, Engel's data are sometimes erroneous, for example: "The northern continent produced no monuments of any importance. Only the Southwest has left us compact settlements, with houses made of unfired clay bricks" (p. 37); or "The great Snaketown canal was 480 miles long" (p. 181). North American archaeology has uncovered compact settlements and impressive monuments outside of the Southwest; Cahokia on the outskirts of East St. Louis, Illinois is a site with both. A canal at Snaketown that is as long as the state of Arizona is wide would be an impressive monument to American Indian work ethic. However, as far as I can

determine, the longest canal at Snaketown was found to be 5.799 kilometers long (ca. 3.6 miles) and the total of all canals studied at the site, main and lateral, was 74.69 kilometers (ca. 46 miles).[3]

Engel's text is permeated with an endless parade of "invaders," usually originating in some undesignated "other area." Invasion seems to be the only real way to explain the majority of cultural changes attested to in the archaeological record.[4] This strikes me as odd when considered in juxtaposition with Engel's excellent sections on Andean ecology, but perhaps it stems from his European academic training at a time when invasionism was popular.

Lastly, it is a basic thesis of Engel's that "What the chroniclers tell us and what the mixed-blood people of the two worlds (such as Garcilazo) wrote are unreliable" (p. 291). This theme is repeated throughout the text. Now there is some truth in this. Culture historians must use considerable care interpreting the ethno-historical accounts available. But it seems irresponsible to ignore what such accounts have to offer while placing heavy emphasis on the kind of archaeological reconstruction such as that based on the interlocking fish-head art motif presented on page 293. If anything, New World archaeologists have slighted to their detriment the use of ethno-historical information, not having overly relied on it as Engel proposes.

In this respect, Engel's work stands in contrast to that of Katz who, although recognizing limitations to the use of contact period documents, emphatically states that "no specialist can afford to dispense with these records" (p. 4), and further stresses that new early written documents are constantly being discovered and allow for increasingly critical scholarship (p. 7). As a matter of fact, Katz's book is a fine example of how a scholar can tap both archaeological and historical resources to produce a lucid synthesis of the culture history of an area. Katz begins with a discussion of the sources available to the researcher, then proceeds to reconstruct the development of Nuclear American civilizations up to their collapse under the strain of conflict with European invaders. He includes discussions of such topics as the origins of the native peoples, birth of agriculture, end of the Classic cultures, and Conquest period cultures. Throughout, he blends in well-selected excerpts from the original ethno-historical accounts.

Although Katz's approach is generally in striking contrast to Engel's, there are a few specific points of similarity. One of these is the stress on understanding the ecology of New World civilizations. Katz has set himself the task of comparing the pre-Columbian development of culture in Mesoamerica and Andean America, and the contrasts in the natural environments to which the people adapted in these two areas is an important focus of his analysis. He asks how a neolithic Mesoamerican culture was able to feed a much denser population than the Spanish society which possessed iron, steel, and the wheel (p. 185). This is reminiscent of Engel's observations that the ancient Andean inhabitants achieved a better and more extensive agricultural adaptation to some zones than has been possible in modern times. Katz cites many of the agricultural achievements within Nuclear America, including aqueducts, irrigation systems, and *chinampa* lakebed farming, which allowed for increased population density.

One thing that could be added to his discussion is the importance agricultural terracing apparently had for the Aztec period Valley of Mexico economy. Vast terracing systems are an impressive and well-known feature of Andean agriculture. It is not so commonly known that the late Postclassic cultures of the Valley of Mexico brought the steep slopes of the southern and eastern parts of the Valley under agricultural productivity through extensive terracing[5]—a Mesoamerican practice that dates back at least to late Preclassic times.

Katz uses comparative ecology to develop a theory that could explain why warfare played a greater part in the Andean Classic than the Mesoamerican Classic. He suggests that "in the Andean region there was less land suitable for cultivation, and as soon as the available land in a valley had been settled the temptation arose to conquer fresh land in neighboring areas. In Mesoamerica, where by comparison there was more land available for cultivation, there always existed the possibility of colonizing fresh land peaceably" (p. 115). From his discussion there is a further implication that land did eventually become scarce in Mesoamerica, in the Postclassic, and this diminished the difference between the Mesoamerican and Andean areas in regard to warfare. Other ways in which Katz utilizes man's relation to the environment to explain cultural developments can be seen in his suggestion that the spread of Chavin culture in Peru may be linked with the progressive adoption of maize agriculture, and that the Toltec expansion in Mexico correlates with many areas where cacao was produced.

All too often authors present their facts as if they were cast in bronze. One highly useful and stimulating aspect of Katz's book is the constant reference to questions and debates that surround the stuff of New World culture history. It is refreshing to read entire paragraphs almost wholly devoted to questions yet unanswered regarding the interpretation of Nuclear American cultures. Here is a paraphrased sample: Did intensive agriculture cause the rise of Teotihuacan (p. 51); Why did the Aztec not find it to their advantage to put captives to work for the state instead of sacrificing them (p. 171); Were there merchants or large merchant guilds that vanished during the Inca supremacy (p. 320)? Likewise, rather than present what he believes to be the most acceptable interpretation, Katz chooses to stress debates surrounding interpretation, for example: Did Aztec human sacrifice have to do with population planning (p. 170), fertility rites (p. 169), or direct communion with the gods (p. 165); Which was of most importance in the rise of urban Teotihuacan, irrigation agriculture, craft industries, or religion (pp. 50–51); Did the Inca practice a form of socialism and create a model welfare state or is this a fanciful interpretation of writers like Garcilazo (pp. 287–94)?

All things considered, Katz's book is an excellent synthesis of knowledge about ancient American civilizations at the time of its first printing—1969. There are several places, especially in the sections on archaeology, where the data have been superseded in the past ten years. However, these do not as yet seriously mar the overall worth of the book. This is especially true because of the rarity of publications that have attempted the comparative analysis of Nuclear American civilizations. Errors of fact are minimal. There is one frequent erroneous designation of llamas and alpacas as "cattle" when the correct designation should be

"camelids," but generally the text shows repeatedly how a thousand words may be used to compose an excellent picture.

The final chapter, appropriately titled "The End," is a marvelous description of the Aztec and Inca collapse. I enthusiastically recommend it to the reader. And if you are as sorry as I was to reach the end of this chapter, I suggest that you follow it with A. W. Crosby's book *The Columbian Exchange*,[6] which goes on to explore the biological and cultural consequences of the early contact between Europeans and New World civilizations.

I am not so enthusiastic about recommending *Two Earths and Two Heavens* by Brundage. Brundage has previously written books on both Inca and Aztec society, so it is perhaps logical that he would eventually publish a comparison of both. However, his previous works[7] were more scholarly than this one. This is more of a poetic essay than an analytical treatise. As one bit of evidence, there are no citations of published works in the text. In this essay Brundage presses his own particular point of view, one which almost totally neglects archaeological data and uncritically embraces selected ethno-historical accounts. In this respect his approach is practically the polar opposite of Engel's. Although it is possible to discuss or debate several points contained in this book, I would rather focus on the general theory and method of his approach.

Brundage has studied the Inca and Aztec civilizations and concludes they are quite different. His essay mainly points out contrasts often found to underlie what he perceives to be superficial similarities. I believe this approach must stem from his theoretical bias about history: "In history there are no inner laws . . . nothing which gives us the right to predict," and "we do not succeed ever in reducing the tumbling course of events to coherence" (p. vii); "History does not repeat itself. Being made up of countless intertwined decisions of men great and small everywhere, each of whom is unique and many of whom are mistaken, it cannot ever repeat itself" (p. 101). Given such an orientation, Brundage concludes, for example, that the Mexicans went to war dictated by religious mania and the Inca from a concern to dominate others (p. 17), without exploring, as Katz does, the possible similar underlying economic motivations. The closest Brundage comes to an overall theory of warfare is: "[Pre-imperial] war results from a state of apprehensiveness, a suspicion that neighbors will cast it under the yoke. Pre-imperial war comes from the unsleeping suspicion of these neighbors' intentions" (p. 35), and "imperial warfare is simply a necessary fruit of Empire, that which comes first is the acquisition of dominion over strangers, after which the technology of battle is widely and ingeniously expanded to maintain the dominion already seized" (p. 35).

In many other places Brundage stresses the idiosyncratic, whereas others might find common denominators. For example, he sees absolutely no connection between the Aztec rain god Tlaloc and the god of war Huizilopochtli (p. 91), although an anthropologist would perhaps note the general similarity of both water and blood being symbolic of the fertility and growth of the Aztec state. Brundage portrays the Inca as organizational geniuses and the Aztec empire as nearly in structural disarray. S. F. Moore's analysis of the organizational aspects of the Inca society has produced a very different picture. She notes that the Inca

governmental system has often been idealized out of proportion, and states sarcastically that "no society of ants or bees runs more smoothly than the political system usually attributed to the Inca."[8] Brundage focuses on only one side of the coin. It is no wonder he concludes: "Why the Mexica and Inca should have differed so is a mystery for which we shall never have an answer" (p. 119). If there are new answers to be found, I believe the critical questioning approach combining archaeology and ethno-history used by Katz will prove much more productive than that used by either Engel or Brundage.

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NOTES

1. Julian H. Steward, "Handbook of South American Indians," *Bulletin 143, Bureau of American Ethnology* 1–6 (1946, 1949, 1950).
2. Joseph Bram, "An Analysis of Inca Militarism," *Monographs of the American Ethnological Society* 4 (1941; second printing 1966).
3. Emil W. Haury, *The Hohokam Desert Farmers and Craftsmen: Excavations at Snaketown, 1964–1965* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1975). See his discussion on page 142.
4. My own analysis of how invasion might be evidenced archaeologically using the Inca example has pointed out numerous pitfalls to simplistic inference. Joseph B. Mountjoy, "Culture Change, Archaeology, and Inference: An Inca Example," Archaeological Frontiers: Papers on New World High Cultures in Honor of J. Charles Kelley (edited by Robert B. Pickering), *University Museum Studies* (Southern Illinois University, Carbondale), no. 4 (1976):63–86.
5. In 1966 I participated in a yet unpublished study of the Aztec period terracing near Xochimilco in the southern part of the Valley of Mexico.
6. Alfred W. Crosby, Jr., *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1972).
7. Burr C. Brundage, *Lords of Cuzco* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), *A Rain of Darts: The History of the Mexica Aztecs* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), *Empire of the Inca* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973).
8. Sally F. Moore, *Power and Property in Inca Peru* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958). See her discussion on page 4.