

The Past Ahead

Language, Culture, and Identity
in the Neotropics

Edited by Christian Isendahl



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Abstract

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In Andean cognition the embodiment of the past is different from many other ways to spatially relate the position of the body to time. This epistemology is for instance expressed in the Quechua word *ñawpa*, which signifies that the past is “in front of us;” it is known and can be seen. Seeing and knowing the past in this way reverberates within the historical ecological argument that the present is contingent with the past and is explicitly reflected within the contributions to this volume. “The Past Ahead: Language, Culture, and Identity in the Neotropics” forms a collection of reworked papers originally presented in shorter format by archaeologists, anthropologists, and linguists at the research symposium “Archaeology and Society in Bolivia” organized at Uppsala University by the editor. The volume includes chapters by Jan-Åke Alvarsson, Lisbet Bengtsson, Roger Blench, Sergio Calla, Christian Isendahl, Carla Jaimes, John Janusek, Adriana Muñoz, Heiko Prümers, Walter Sánchez, Per Stenborg, Juan Marcelo Ticona, and Charlotta Widmark examining a series of different aspects of agriculture, complex societies, identities, landscape, languages, and urbanism in the highland and lowland Neotropics that all highlight the significance of the past in the present.

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Contents

Introducing the Past Ahead	7
<i>Christian Isendahl</i>	
The Role of Agriculture in Explaining the Diversity of Amerindian Languages	13
<i>Roger Blench</i>	
Undercover: Mimicry and Clandestine Identities of the Past	39
<i>Per Stenborg</i>	
Why Go Back to the Old Ways? Bilingual Education and Ethnogenesis among the 'Weenhayek of the Bolivian Gran Chaco	59
<i>Jan-Åke Alvarsson</i>	
Urban Aymara Speakers in Bolivia and the Processes of Culture and Identity Formation	79
<i>Charlotta Widmark</i>	
Bolivians in Gothenburg: The Archaeological and Ethnographic Collections at the Museum of World Culture	93
<i>Adriana Muñoz</i>	
Understanding Tiwanaku Origins: Animistic Ecology in the Andean Altiplano	111
<i>John W. Janusek</i>	
El Proyecto Lomas de Casarabe: Investigaciones arqueológicas en los Llanos de Mojos, Bolivia	139
<i>Heiko Prümers</i>	

La cerámica de dos montículos habitacionales en el área de Casarabe, Llanos de Moxos	161
<i>Carla Jaimes Betancourt</i>	
The Whispering Winds: The Sacredness of Walking in the Andean World	185
<i>Lisbet Bengtsson</i>	
Cruzando paisajes, transitando caminos: El ramal Inca de Sipe Sipe hasta Inkachaca (Cochabamba, Bolivia)	207
<i>Walter Sánchez Canedo</i>	
Cultivating the Yungas: Notes on Current Farming at Rasupampa and Tablas Monte	229
<i>Christian Isendahl, Juan Marcelo Ticona, and Sergio Calla Maldonado</i>	

Introducing the Past Ahead

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This volume forms a collection of papers that emanates from a research symposium on “Archaeology and Society in Bolivia” organized by the editor at Uppsala University on September 27–28, 2008. The purpose of the meeting was to bring together scholars interested in the prehistory, history, and society of Bolivia and its neighbors, to exchange data and research experiences, discuss interpretations, and investigate the potential for future collaborations. The symposium was organized on the occasion of two Bolivian Ph.D.-dissertations being publicly defended at the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History. On September 26, Marcos Michel (Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, La Paz [UMSA]) successfully defended a dissertation on pre-Columbian settlement patterns on the Bolivian Altiplano, “Patrones de asentamiento precolombino del Altiplano Boliviano: Lugares centrales de la región de Quillacas, Departamento de Oruro, Bolivia” (Michel 2008). John Janusek (Vanderbilt University, Nashville) was the opponent and offered a sharp assessment of Michel’s work. Walter Sánchez (Universidad Mayor de San Simón, Cochabamba [UMSS]) followed the next day, defending his research on social change and cultural landscapes of the valleys and Yungas of Cochabamba in the dissertation “Inkas, ‘flecheros’ y mitmaqkuna: Cambio social y paisajes culturales en los Valles y en los Yungas de Inkachaca/Paracti y Tablas Monte (Cochabamba-Bolivia, siglos XV–XVI)” (Sánchez 2008) which was critically examined by the opponent Clark Erickson (University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia). Apart from its academic goals, the research symposium in a sense marked an intellectual celebration of our Bolivian colleagues; a ritual closure of the stellar achievements that those five years of research studies at Uppsala and in the field in Bolivia had produced. As the assistant supervisor of both Marcos Michel and Walter Sánchez I must take this opportunity to thank them for these years of stimulating intellectual interactions and for the friendships these forged.

The meetings joined together scholars from Argentina, Bolivia, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Sweden, and the United States in different roles: Ph.D.-dissertation defendants, dissertation opponents, committee members, and paper presenters. At the symposium, 13 scientific papers were presented by anthropologists, archaeologists, and linguists, including Jan-Åke Alvarsson (Uppsala University), Lisbet Bengtsson (University of Gothenburg), Roger Blench (Kay Williamson Education Foundation, Cambridge), Clark Erickson, Alf Hornborg (Lund University), Christian Isendahl, Carla Jaimes (German Archaeological Institute), Marjut Jalkanen-Mäkelä (Helsinki University), John Janusek, Marcos Michel, Adriana Muñoz (Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg), Heiko Prümers (German Archaeological Institute), and Per Stenborg (University of Gothenburg). An invitation to contribute a text to the proceedings was extended to all participants in the meetings, and this volume is the final product. Nine presenters answered the call to rework their papers for publication. In addition, Walter Sánchez and Charlotta Widmark (Uppsala University; and member of Marcos Michel's doctoral committee) contributed a chapter each to this book, thus totaling 11 chapters, the present introduction excluded. Contributors were free to compose their chapters in either English or Spanish. As the organizer of the meetings and the editor of this book, I am most grateful to all contributors.

Marcos Michel's and Walter Sánchez' doctoral studies at Uppsala University formed part of a larger cooperation framework between Uppsala and Bolivia burgeoning in the early 2000s and made possible by Sida's (the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) major program to support higher education in Bolivia at that time. UMSA offers a good undergraduate program for the *Licenciado*-degree in archaeology, but there is no archaeological Ph.D.-training program at any university in Bolivia. Five archaeologists and anthropologists affiliated with UMSA and UMSS took the opportunity to pursue their doctoral dissertation work at the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History in Uppsala: Raúl Meneses, Marcos Michel, David Pereira, Virginia Sáenz, and Walter Sánchez. Vicky Sáenz was the first participant of the Ph.D.-training program to earn the doctoral degree at Uppsala University, defending her dissertation on "Symbolic and Material Boundaries: An Archaeological Genealogy of the Urus of Lake Poopó, Bolivia" (Sáenz 2006) in November 2006. Per Stenborg was the faculty's opponent and offered a critical reading and discussion of Sáenz' dissertation research. Part of the department's engagement with Bolivian archaeology, particularly through the efforts of Frands Herschend, Paul Sinclair, and myself, the September 2008 symposium was the second international scholarly meeting at Uppsala University. The first was a workshop organized by Frands Herschend in August 2005, bringing together Swedish, Finnish, and Bolivian archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians with a research interest in the archaeology and early history of Bolivia to "compare notes" and explore common ground for potential future institutional educational and research cooperation. The meeting was highly valuable as a networking event by providing an opportunity to discuss training needs and research priorities. As I write this in early 2012, the depart-

ment's involvement in Bolivian archaeology is steadfast, with continued Ph.D.-training support and research cooperation in Cochabamba (see Isendahl et al., this volume).

As the late great Frank Zappa once remarked, to organize a series of independent works into a whole and in an order that follows some kind of “conceptual continuity” is a most delicate issue. This is as true when it comes to book editing as it is in the world of music, and in particular with an eclectic series of papers such as this. Similar to the concern of ordering, there is the dilemma of titling an edited collection of papers that does justice to all its parts. Choosing to refrain from paraphrasing any of Zappa's overtly imaginative titles such as “We're Only in it for the Money,” “200 Motels,” or “Joe's Garage,” which to greater or lesser success could perhaps have been used to describe some realities of being a field-working archaeologist, anthropologist, or linguist, the title of this book—“The Past Ahead: Language, Culture, and Identity in the Neotropics”—has an underlying meaning that many readers will immediately recognize. It is a reference to the embodiment of the past in Andean cognition that is different from many other ways to relate the position of the body to time, and which for instance is expressed in the Quechua word *ñawpa* and cognate terms (Bengtsson 1998:121). *Ñawpa* signifies that the past is “in front of us;” it is known and can be seen. Similarly, the Quechua term for the future—*qhapa*—places the future “behind us;” where we cannot see it (see Bengtsson 1998 for a great treatment of the concepts of time and space in Quechua). “Seeing” and “knowing” the past in this way nicely reverberates within the historical ecological argument that the present is contingent with the past (e.g., Balée 2006; Crumley 1994) and is reflected in many different ways within the contributions to this volume.

In Chapter 2, historical linguist Roger Blench critically examines the thesis—argued by Peter Bellwood among others—that many language phyla have expanded as a result of the development of agriculture and consequent demographic growth. Providing an excellent overview of the diversity of language phyla in present-day Latin America, the explanatory models proposed to account for their distribution, and the available evidence that may substantiate or invalidate these hypotheses, Blench argues that a diversity of drivers is necessary to account for the global pattern of language distribution and suggests that plant domestication in the Neotropics was a response to demographic growth rather than a cause of it.

In Chapter 3, archaeologist Per Stenborg discusses the dynamics of the social construction of identities as a political strategy. Drawing on a case study of Inca expansion into the southern Central Andes, Stenborg introduces the term “mimicry”—borrowed from biology—to analyze the construction of clandestine identities as a strategic response against political control and cultural domination. Emphasizing local agency and intentionality, the approach offers a thoughtful and innovative incipient heuristic framework that cautions against simplistic notions of material culture as identity markers and provides a highly useful analytical model for understanding cross-cultural interactions.

In Chapter 4, anthropologist Jan-Åke Alvarsson explores the historical processes over the 20th century that led to a phase of ethnoregenesis among the ‘Weenhayek of southern lowland Bolivia in the early 2000s. Based on extensive fieldwork in the Gran Chaco and drawing on Bateson’s work on cybernetics and Ahearn’s agency-concept, Alvarsson’s historical ethnographic analysis of the socio-political dynamics of cultural identity construction clearly demonstrates how the ongoing process of ‘Weenhayek ethnoregenesis is intrinsically linked to changing attitudes towards the past.

In Chapter 5, anthropologist Charlotta Widmark similarly applies a constructivist perspective on the formation of ethnic identities as an on-going process, investigating the dynamics of the social construction of culture and identity in relation to historical and socio-political contexts. Studying processes of identity transformations among bilingual Spanish and Aymara immigrants to the urban zone of La Paz over the last two decades, she discusses the complexities and paradoxes of ethnic identities among indigenous societies within the “pluri-national” discourse in contemporary Bolivian society.

In Chapter 6, archaeologist Adriana Muñoz presents an overview of the extensive collections of ethnographic and archaeological artifacts from Bolivia held at the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, Sweden, and discusses some of the social and political ramifications of these collections. She investigates the potential role of these objects to contribute to new forms of cultural and historical understanding, appreciating the significance of these for people today, in particular as multi-vocal carriers of individual and social memory. Muñoz offers an insightful contextualized perspective on museological issues in a globalized world that reaches far beyond simplistic quick-fix repatriation solutions.

Archaeologist John Janusek examines the origins of urbanism in the Lake Titicaca Basin of the Bolivian Altiplano in Chapter 7, focusing on the social processes and practices that gave rise to Tiwanaku as the primary center in the south-central Andes during the late first millennium AD. He introduces the term “animistic ecology” to describe how emerging urbanism depended on the construction of monuments that in their spatiality, materiality, and iconography animated and referenced perceived hierophanies in the landscape—sanctified natural forces, celestial cycles, and terrestrial features—and legitimized the location of political power to the urban center. The animistic ecology at Tiwanaku as described by Janusek is an excellent case of how historically-based social constructions of ceremonial landscapes form powerful political tools (see Isendahl 2011).

In Chapter 8, archaeologist Heiko Prümers outlines the results from archaeological excavations at two habitational mound sites with monumental architecture at Loma Mendoza and Loma Salvatierra, in the area of Casarabe in the Llanos de Mojos of the Bolivian lowlands. Prümers’ investigations are highly significant not least since excavated archaeological data from habitation sites in the lowlands is very poor (to be contrasted with the quite rich agro-archaeological evidence of pre-Columbian landscape transformations such as ridged fields, drainage canals, and causeways [e.g., Erickson 1980, 1995, 2006, 2008]). The excavated data that

Prümers presents demonstrate a succession of habitation platforms dating from AD 500–1400, with a particularly rich record of burials. Although most of these lack grave offerings, one tomb at the Loma Salvatierra site contained offerings that indicate the burial of a “chieftain,” according to Prümers providing the first direct evidence for pre-Columbian social stratification in the Llanos de Mojos.

In Chapter 9, archaeologist Carla Jaimes offers a detailed and well-illustrated study of the ceramic evidence from the excavations directed by Prümers at Loma Mendoza and Loma Salvatierra. Reporting on an attribute analysis of more than 40,000 ceramic sherds, Jaimes proposes—on the basis of technological attributes, decorative elements, and morphological variables—a sequence of five distinct ceramic phases for this area of the Llanos de Mojos. Despite notable functional, temporal, and regional variation, she finds no major changes in manufacturing technology over time, arguing that this indicates long-term ceramic continuity. The sequence of chronological phases Jaimes outlines in this chapter forms an important and highly useful frame of reference for further archaeological analyses of pre-Columbian ceramics of lowland Bolivia.

In Chapter 10, archaeologist Lisbet Bengtsson picks up on the theme of Andean animistic epistemologies introduced by Janusek in Chapter 7. Arguing that fragments of pre-Columbian cosmology has survived until present time, she offers a vivid narrative of how perceptions of space and landforms as expressed in myths and toponyms in the Peruvian Central Andes carries historical information important for understanding the multi-dimensional ordering of landscape in the past, with a particular reference to the role of traveling and communication networks as cognitive matrixes.

In Chapter 11, archaeologist and sociologist Walter Sánchez further explores the role of communication systems in the Bolivian Central Andes, presenting a case study of one of the main pre-Columbian roads used by the Inca State to connect three biogeographic zones: the Altiplano, the mid-altitude valleys, and the Yungas. Much similar to Bengtsson, he demonstrates the potential of visual narratives as an important resource for integrated archaeological interpretations of multi-dimensional biogeophysical and cognitive ontologies of landscape.

Drawing on a series of interviews with smallholders, archaeologists Christian Isendahl, Juan Marcelo Ticona, and Sergio Calla report local agricultural practices and agronomic knowledge systems in the Yungas of the Bolivian Central Andes in the final Chapter 12. The data presented provide an important baseline for assessing the function and use of a pre-Columbian agrosystem in this area initially reported by Walter Sánchez (2008). This work forms part of an agro-archaeological research cooperation project involving Swedish and Bolivian archaeologists that marks a new phase of scholarly partnership between Uppsala University and Bolivian colleagues.

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