Archaeological explorations of ritual are published at a breakneck pace. In the past 10 years, we have seen handbooks (Insoll 2011), critical reviews (Fogelin 2007; Swenson 2015), cross-cultural edited volumes (Kyriakidis 2007; Rowan 2012), and a number of creative approaches to religion and ritual deposition (Fowles 2013; Mills and Walker 2008). Silvana Rosenfeld and Stephanie Bautista’s contribution to this corpus is a collection of Andean case studies from a recent SAA session. Their goals, discussed in chapter 1, are modest: (1) define the methods archaeologists employ to identify traces of ritual and (2) examine the role of ritual in the forming, reproduction, and changes in Andean communities. The editors spend little time defining terms, instead deferring to John Rick’s rather functionalist definition of ritual as, “customary actions that are effective in obtaining outcomes over which the participants have little controlling power” (22).

The first three contributions explore Central Peruvian highland architecture from an evolutionary perspective. In chapter 2, John Rick traces the “taphonomy of ritual” (a theme further explored in later chapters) across built spaces and deposits at Chavín de Huántar. He explores the role of water in Chavín ritual practices, touching on the well-known (and sometimes abused) ethnographic concept of tinkuy, which roughly translates to “the meeting of forces.” Rick believes that emerging elites used rituals at ceremonial centers to “differentiate” themselves. In chapter 3, Daniel Contreras explores Mito style architecture at Chavín, suggesting its presence may extend the tradition from the conventional span of 2500–1800 BCE forward 1000 years to 800 BCE. Contreras, critical of simplistic evolutionary models, develops a heterarchical approach to ritual architecture that draws on the eclectic ritual landscape of Chavín. In chapter 4, Yoshio Onuki discusses the Mito type site of Kotosh, well-known to Andeanists for the “entombment” of public architecture. Onuki suggests that the ash layers deposited in these construction projects might be analogous to Amazonian slash-and-burn agriculture, where ethnographers have noted an association between ash and serpent myths. Onuki argues that ritual practices in earlier smaller structures were relatively ideologically free. It was only later, when larger temples were built and elite competition was in full swing, that ritual was associated with ideological “sophistication.” This evolutionary narrative is unconvincing, particularly as inter-community competition and elite control has been found to not be necessary in mound construction (as discussed by Moore in the concluding chapter).

The authors of chapters 5 and 6 report on their spatial analyses on the Peruvian coast. Rafael Vega-Centeno Sara-Lafosse explores ritual practices at the large site of Pampa de la Llama-Moxeke in the Camas valley. He draws on diverse theoretical sources (Durkheim, Turner, and Bourdieu) and the method of “gamma analysis” to investigate the cellular architecture of Huaca A (1800 BC–1200 BC). He believes he has identified sixteen social units organized into two moieties, a “sociopolitical map” that he admits may not reflect a “real sociopolitical scenario.” But surely there were historical dynamics over the long occupation of the building? In Chapter 6, David Chicoine, Hugo Ikehara, Koichiro Shibata, and Matthew Helmer employ visual analysis to explore territoriality in Formative period...
Nepeña. Their argument hinges on leaders and architects using ceremonial monuments, “attractive tools for social control and political integration” (145).

The authors of the next four chapters consider closing rituals and sociohistorical transformation. Matthew Edwards begins chapter 7 by explicitly moving away from the Durkheimian functionalism of earlier chapters in favor of an emotive perspective on ritual. Edward’s nuanced approach to collapse highlights the timing of a number of special ritual deposits at the Wari site of Pataraya. Caches of whole ceramic vessels, deposits of white sand, and Spondylus shell artifacts all give a sense of a “private affair” before the site was “quietly forgotten.” In chapter 8, Fernandini and Ruales go beyond special deposits, instead engaging with “quotidian ceremonialism” at the site of Cerro de Oro. The authors are right to explore Andean domestic ritual, but I am not convinced that the pits they discuss are traces of ritual practice. Their post-abandonment deposits are more compelling, in particular, their interpretation of Wari funerary deposits as attempts to re-appropriate this earlier settlement.

In Chapter 9, Estrata and Lopez-Hurtado focus on “de-animation rituals” and include a valuable synthesis of the kinds and tempos of abandonment seen across the Andes, from the chaotic to more precise ritual practices. Their case study at Panquilma on the Central Coast of Peru draws attention to terminal rituals involving high temperature burning in important spaces, and the wider context of processes afoot across the Lurin Valley. In chapter 10, Abraham discusses ritual spaces of the early colonial period. While this chapter does not explore ritual practices, and stands out as the only historical study of the volume, Abraham’s overview of Andean syncretic spaces is interesting and the case of a provisional chapel a welcome addition to studies of colonial architecture.

The authors of the next two chapters, the strongest contributions of the volume, focus on social landscapes and “ritual gestures.” Nielsen, Angiorama, and Ávila engage with Bell’s concept of “ritualization” and the ontological turn. They investigated 22 high altitude sites in Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina, investigating apachetas (rock cairns) and offering pits from the early Late Intermediate (AD 1000–1450) and Inka periods (AD 1450–1550). They interpret the fan-like deposits as traces of a ritual of sprinkling copper minerals, chert, and whitestone beads in the wind. They ultimately argue that travelers were conducting transactions with non-human entities at these passes, a genealogy of practice that extends over hundreds of years with some historical variation. In Chapter 12, Van Gijseghem and Whalen explore the “ontological underpinnings rather than the substance of ritual gestures.” They provide a valuable summary of research into toponyms and social memory, and demonstrate how attitudes to mining from the deeper past endure in many Andean contexts. The authors argue that Inka and Spanish colonial processes did not erase patterns of landscape cognition formulated in earlier periods, and find some correspondence between names (“volcanic fume,” “serpent,” “to work/toil”) and mining locations in the Upper Ica Valley of southern Peru.

The attention to deposition and landscape in these last two chapters show the payoff of exploring ritual outside public architecture, the focus of most chapters in this volume. Jerry Moore, renowned for his own analyses of Andean ceremonial architecture, drives this point home in the final chapter. Moore also urges us to “broaden our inquiries” beyond our culture area foci. He explicitly points to the Mayan region, but I think examples from further afield might also prove useful. For instance, none of the contributors referenced scholarship into closing rituals and deposition in the Mississippian world, despite Tim Pauketat’s discussant role in the conference session that spawned this book. (Pauketat’s work on the “tragedy of the commoners” may also have informed Onuki’s discussion of building and social change in chapter 3). Similarly, the “taphonomy of ritual” has been explored in a number of contexts in the US Southwest and in the diverse case studies in Mills and Walker’s (2008) volume.
Such a broader engagement might also result in a kind of “ground-clearing,” challenging our assumptions concerning ritual practices. Severin Fowles (2013) argues that archaeologists should tease apart their taken-for-granteds of ritual and religion, and question our reliance on functionalism and materialism. Similarly, Catherine Bell (2007: 288) argues that “we cannot analyze ritual fully if we do not simultaneously analyze theory-making and understand its similarities to – and differences from – ritual or ritual-making, as a cultural practice.” In fact, some Andean scholars have begun to re-think our theory-making, including (but certainly not limited to) archaeologists Tamara Bray and Ed Swenson, ethnographers Frank Salomon, Mary Weismantel, and Marisol de la Cadena, and art historians Carolyn Dean and Tom Cummins. Readers looking for summaries of the state of affairs in the scholarship of Andean ritual studies are encouraged to seek out their work.

In sum, these “case studies in Andean Archaeology” report on recent research at both familiar sites of Pre-Columbian ceremony, and less well-known social landscapes and ritual deposits. Despite a few poorly reproduced figures and inconsistent date scales, this book will be of value to Andeanists. The organization of the volume hints at the varying kinds of Andean rituals, from the theatrics of political ritual to more small-scale engagements with non-human entities. A follow-up volume might consider a less culture-area approach, engaging the dynamic scholarship of ritual studies and the notion of “genres of ritual” (42). Such an editorial choice might encourage contributors to read outside of their culture area and theoretical comfort zones, and generate a volume of interest far beyond the boundaries of Andean South America.

References


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