Chapters 3 and 4 focus mostly on the Aztec economy. Chapter 3 provides a summary of the ecology of central Mexico, Aztec demography, agricultural techniques, irrigation, and household provisioning. Chapter 4 focuses on craft production, trade, marketplaces, and merchants. Unless I underestimate undergraduate students' interest in the details of ancient economies and craft production, Chapter 4 is the only chapter that might be too heavy for many undergraduate students. In this chapter, the level of detail reflects long-standing debates on Aztec craft production and all of the dimensions and abstractions of those debates. The discussion is long and in-depth, and scholars who are interested may find information on many aspects of production, including its context, intensity, diversity, concentration, and organization, as well as aspects of the production process, exchange of goods, types of marketplaces, and different kinds of merchants.

Chapter 5 directs attention to Aztec imperial politics, from the city-state to the empire, touching upon rulers, the duties of rulers, the bases of power, conquest warfare, and the strategies of both the empire and the provinces in the empire. This chapter excels at showing two patterns at once: historical change in the way power was exercised in the Aztec empire, and regional variation in terms of power and political organization. Even though Berdan takes the time to show both synchronic and diachronic variation, she manages to convey the political strategies and organization of the empire with clarity. In addition, the chapter includes perhaps the most amusing case study in the book, dealing with how the Aztecs moved (or did not move) a giant boulder to create a monument for Motecuhzoma.

Chapters 6 and 7 focus on society and culture, with Chapter 6 dealing with social status and daily life, and Chapter 7 dealing with religion, science, and the arts. Readers may learn about social classes and social mobility in the Aztec world, family life, life trajectories, marriage, gender, and even how Aztec society dealt with criminals. The chapter on religion, science, and the arts provides a discussion of how these three aspects of Aztec culture were interconnected in many ways. Particularly interesting is the discussion on Aztec science, in which Berdan explains that science and medicine had ritual religious aspects but were also based on empirical observation. The efficacy of many Aztec cures has been verified by modern science, as Berdan explains in an interesting passage.

The final chapter develops three case studies at length to highlight how different aspects of the Aztec world, from cosmology to trade to politics, were interconnected in all aspects of Aztec life. The case studies are: military regalia, the Aztec world system, and the Spanish conquest. In these case studies, Berdan ties together the main themes discussed in the first chapter with empirical cases.

The goal of the Cambridge World Archaeology series is to provide surveys of archaeological cases that will be useful to students as well as academics and professional archaeologists. In this excellent volume, Berdan has met those goals by providing an up-to-date synthesis of the Aztecs, as well as glimpses of new frontiers in Aztec studies. The volume is highly recommended for use in the classroom or as a first stop when learning about the Aztecs. It is a real contribution to Aztec studies.


Reviewed by Gary Upton, Harvard University.

This volume represents the most important advance in decades in our understanding of what is known in the West as "religion" among pre-Columbian societies of the Andes. The 11 chapters of The Archaeology of Wau’ac, each written by an eminent Andean specialist, plus the cogent introductory chapter by the editor, Tamara L. Bray, move the study of the "sacred" to a new and higher plane than has been realized previously.

From the title, it is obvious that what is at issue is the term, concept, and body of objects referred to as wau’a (also spelled huaca, and guaca). For anyone who is familiar with recent Andean studies, the term wau’a will be recognized as having a long pedigree, going back to the middle of the twentieth century, especially in the works of the ethnohistorian R. Tom Zuidema. In his study of the social, political, and ritual organization of the Inka capital, Cusco, Zuidema focused on the ceque (or ziku) system, an arrangement of 41 conceptual, or imaginary, lines extending from Cusco to the horizon in as many different directions. Each (imaginary) line was an alignment of 3 to 15 sacred places in the landscape, each termed a wau’a. Each wau’a was named, was offered sacrifices, and had its day in the Inka ritual calendar. By the time the ceque system was recorded in a written document, it had become an artifact. The written text was a description of an arrangement of what, before the conquest, was a dynamic organization of places in the landscape, each wau’a of which was linked to myths, ceremonial actions, and other rituals. By virtue of the persecution of indigenous religious practices by the Spanish Catholic conquerors, the system became frozen in time.

In addition to references to wau’a in the ceque system of Cusco, the term appeared innumerable times in other documents on Andean religion, such as in what is known as The Huacañi Manuscript, the most impor-
tant source of information on Andean religion outside of Cusco, and in documents produced by the "extirpation of idolatries," the campaign carried out by Spanish priests to eliminate indigenous religion. From these latter sources (and others), it became clear that the concept of wak'a had a significance far beyond the arrangement of sacred places around the Inka capital. The question was: What was the broader, pan-Andean significance of the concepts, meanings, and principles denoted and connoted by the term wak'a? This is the central question of The Archaeology of Wak'a.

Central to understanding the nature of and role of wak'a is the notion of a power immanent within objects of different materials—but often of stone—and the potential of that powerful spirit or essence to be turned to the benefit of society. The realization of that potential depended on the care and tending of the entity in question, be it a mountain, a pillar, a small piece of stone, a double ear of corn, or a mummy bundle of an ancestor, for example. Such actions as feeding, worshipping, and otherwise tending to the needs of the wak'a ensured, in reciprocal fashion, that it would oversee, protect, and ensure the welfare, fertility, and reproduction of the people (often an ayllu—a kinship, ritual, land-holding group) who accorded devotion to the object. Importantly, the animism, power, and agency accorded to and immanent within wak'a often devolved not to a single entity; rather, these qualities were distributive and puritive, often suffusing an entire landscape.

The chapters dealing with Inka wak'a include Steve Kosiba's study of Inka appropriations of sites and the landscape above Qhuanatajir; Carolyn Dean's analysis of wanku and other stone emplacements; Frank Mel- den's study of ceremonial platforms, uhuwas, around the empire; Colin McEwan's study of concentric arrangements of stones associated with ritual human sacrifices; Krzysztof Makowski's analysis of Inka transformations of the coastal oracular site of Pachaqama; and John Topic's overview chapter, which also deals with the oracle/wak'a of Catequil, in northern Peru. Two chapters concern pre-Inka civilizations: Anita Cook's study of Middle Horizon Wari wak'a, near Ayacucho, and John Janusek's study of wak'a-like monoliths at the site of Tiwanaku. The continuation of Inka/Quechua beliefs and practices through the Spanish conquest and into the colonial era is traced in Zachary Chase's fine study of wak'a in the region of Huaroqini. Two chapters discuss colonial and contemporary ethnographic and linguistic matters: Catherine Allen's introductory essay on Quechua notions of animism and personhood, and Bruce Mannheim and Guillermo Salas Carreño's chapter on linguistics and what they term "entifications" (causing something to become an entity) of the sacred. All chapters contain new information and creative, provocative arguments about wak'a and the nature of the sacred in the Andes. How was the breakthrough in understanding in this volume achieved? I think there are three principal factors. First, Bony and her contributors are heirs to a more voluminous body of ethnohistorical sources than was available to earlier scholars. Second, Andean archaeologists have made tremendous advances during the past quarter century in the study of archaeological sites and what has traditionally been termed "material culture." This has come about primarily because the new ethnohistorical sources available to researchers have prompted archaeologists to ask different questions, to more creative effect, than in earlier eras. And finally, the authors have been influenced by new interpretive paradigms that have only recently emerged in the study of Native South American religions and cultures. These include works by Amazonian ethnographers, especially Philippe Descola and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, on "animism" and "perspectivism"—the granting, or recognition, of agency on the part of animals and other objects and materials (including stone) previously considered as static objects. These are complemented by theories of materiality and, from art history (especially Alfred Gell's Art and Agency [1998]), an insistence on the agency of objects in cultural and social formations. The combined information and influences from these three sources have sparked the revolution represented in this volume.

My own (slight) criticism is with the chapter by Mannheim and Salas Carreño. Their concern is with the distortions of the meaning and significance of wak'a by Catholic priests, who were trying to convert Andeans, and by modern-day archaeologists, who, the authors suggest, have reduced the term to a feature of the landscape. This is all well and good, but what I think is equally important is: What would have been the challenges to understanding when the Quechua-speaking Inkas took their concept of wak'a into the radically multilingual and multicultural world of their empire? What would a speaker of Aymara, Pucará, Uru, Kallur, Yunga, Tallana, etc., have made of this concept, in their own language? Did all Andeans maintain the same concept of the sacred? In fairness, one cannot expect these authors to be conversant in the linguistic subtleties of the sacred in all Andean languages; nonetheless, a nod in this direction would have been salutary.

In sum, The Archaeology of Wak'a is an exceptionally important and ground-breaking volume. It will be a standard work for students of Inka and Andean religions for many years to come.