

# Introduction

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It is a distinct pleasure to introduce readers to the 1994 *Yearbook*. As in past volumes the present contributions reflect the diverse interests, methods, interpretive stances, and styles of presentation of our increasingly interdisciplinary colleagues. This volume includes the works not only of geographers, but also those of an historian as well as a textual studies scholar. We welcome them to the geographical discourse, and hope that they will spread the word that geographers, and especially Latin Americanists, are always ready to hear from experts in adjacent fields.

The first study reminds us of how little we know of such commonplace features as the stone cairns that litter the landscape of Latin America. Their age, their distribution, their meaning, their relevance --all these and more are questioned. They speak, of course, of a lost pedestrian past, of a world in which distance was measured in the Andes in the interval of time one could travel without replenishing one's wad of coca (*una cocada*). Their role as shrines and their relation to altitude and relief make them all the more fascinating. Yet they can be seen to be a highly problematic topic for investigation. A full understanding probably depends on that most inaccessible of all data sources, local knowledge, local knowledge that has evolved over centuries if not millennia, only sporadically captured in the occasional written record of observant travelers. How many of us could add to the author's meager data base?

In the second study some of our basic modernist spatio-cultural assumptions are challenged. Instead of being asked to "read" the Andean landscape (which some find difficult enough), it is argued that the landscape itself may have "spoken" to its pre-Hispanic inhabitants. We are asked to interpret "from within" in order to capture the aboriginal (es)sense of place. Topo-graphy becomes simultaneously topic and tropic, geo-glyphs and myth-histories of the Nasca plains and the peaks of *huarochiri* narrate in distinctive modes of expression. We are forced to learn new ways of interrogating toponyms, of thinking in pan-Andean macrocosmic and structural terms, when geography and life were one.

One of the most popular modes of historical analysis, the regional, is reappraised in the third paper. The author demonstrates with the use of Mexican examples (a context that provides some of the best and worst examples of the genre) just how fragile or non-existent are the theoretical bases of many such studies. He suggests ways in which the varied regional scales might better be defined and utilized in historical analyses, emphasizing the dynamic qualities of these historically contingent mental constructs. His articulation of the empirical relations between social processes and regional formations in late-colonial Mexico will come as welcome news to geographers still struggling with the implications of structuration theory. However, a basic question remains: can geographers help the historians to refine their methodologies? Have there been no significant advances since Carol Smith's Guatemalan analyses?

Just how the relative significance of a specific place can change through time provides the focus of the fourth paper, in which the episodic developments of the strategic southern Andean Uspallata Pass are analyzed. While one might think that in these days of mountain-boring machines, passes are passé, the [end. p. v] author demonstrates that whether mountains are climbed or tunneled depends more on the political conditions and relations of those who live on either side, than it does on the nature of the physical barrier. She narrates the complex history of Uspallata from site of pre-Hispanic trail, nineteenth century railway adventure, to potential inter-American multi modal trans-conic corridor.

Echoing the efforts of Wheelwright and the Clarks who modernized Chile and Argentina with their railways, the fifth study demonstrates some of the consequences of Rio de Janeiro's acceptance of Canadian entrepreneurs and British capital to construct the revolutionary urban electric tramway systems. While the "Light and Power Co." facilitated the expansion of the rapidly-growing urban area, thereby peripheralizing the poor and benefiting the rich and powerful, it also engaged in dubious negotiations with local municipal administrations, as well as provoking significant clashes with its riding public. Profit margins, fare manipulations, rioting *cariocas*-- these are just some of the modernizing "processes" that we often overlook in our accounts of the past, but which as the author shows, were characteristic of not only this case, but many others.

From the hectic early twentieth-century urban scene of the east coast, the sixth study moves us to the more placid context of underdeveloped Guerrero in western Mexico. Here the story is one of colonial peripheralism, half-hearted colonization attempts in the nineteenth century, and modern federal neglect. The author is able to demonstrate that when development did take place it was spatially very uneven, and in spite of transportation improvements and agrarian reform much remains to be done. The worlds of Acapulco and Malinaltepec are more than distinctive, they reflect the many Mexicos that endure still today and which are growing increasingly impatient with each other, much to the consternation of the institutionalized political machine that has controlled Mexico for so long.

Yet if western Mexican *campesinos* still endure the slight of their national government, the story in the north is vastly different. In their study of the morphological and functional evolution of Ciudad Chihuahua, the authors of the seventh article are able to demonstrate the dynamism and rapid cultural modifications that have characterized this node in a system of northern Mex-American cities which, while not close to the international border, is suffused with its transnationalism. Utilizing an adroit blend of field survey data and historical research they show how *maquiladoras*, shopping plazas, the *periférico* and those new multi-story symbols of progress, the banks and hotels, have impacted the physical structure of the urban area. The core and frame have, however, differentially benefited and suffered from recent development. One has only to wander with them through the residential districts to realize that progress remains a very relative term.

One of the most rapidly-developing Latin American "industries" is that of tourism, and the authors of article eight provide us with an exemplary account of the development of resort tourism in the Dominican Republic, a site that seems to dominate the "package tours" adverts of major US newspapers. We can trace the deliberate "selling" of coastal resort sites, the identification of tourism growth-poles, and the provision, mostly by foreign TNCs, of the physical infrastructure that non-local tourists demand. With its capital designated as a "World Heritage City", the Dominican Republic has many advantages over its Caribbean competitors. Its government has studiously avoided the opinion and opposition of local residents affected by such monuments as the Columbus Lighthouse, and some would argue that the landscape of eco-tourism in the Cordillera Central has now reached its carrying capacity limit. But if tourism brings in a billion US dollars a year, and one considers the limited alternatives for development, so what if there are problems? Success, after all, has always involved costs.

The ninth study of this volume turns our attention to the most profitable (though illegal) industry of all in contemporary Latin America --coca-cocaine production. In a study of the Chapare region of Bolivia the authors identify an important relationship between rainfall frequency and coca production. The results appear to indicate that for successful coca-leaf drying three rainless days are required, and if they are not available, production falls off sharply. For those who wish to interfere with coca production in order to prevent its progress north to sites of conversion to cocaine, such results would seem to [end p. vi] offer the possibility of using H<sup>2</sup>O rather than more expensive chemicals, though producing rainfall on demand is also a rather difficult business.

The volume closes with a study of novel experiments in primary school education in rural Ecuador. Here the contextual education of children is being stressed, with emphasis on the environment and the local culture. Key items in this experiment include the decentralized nature of instruction, the new systemic relations between selected central schools and their peripheral satellites, and the wholesale participation of the community in the educational enterprise. By using detailed case-study documentation, the author is able to demonstrate the benefits as well as the limitations of this Ecuadorian experiment in rural education. "Traditional" culture is seen not as backward or as an obstacle to "progress", but rather as the most meaningful context within which to educate future generations.

In summary, the volume contains an abundance of empirical evidence, suggestive ideas, and questions for future research.

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My final thanks go to all of the authors for their patience and understanding when their texts had to be modified, their maps reduced, their photos excluded. Simpaticos todos! **[end p. vii]**