Frank Salomon and Stuart B. Schwartz, eds. *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas: Volume III*

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BOOK REVIEWS


Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested. Francis Bacon specialists in any of the several fields represented in the two parts of this history of native peoples of South America may quickly find their favorite chapters and start chewing, swallowing, and digesting substantial quantities from the aristocratic banquet table. Thinking of a somewhat wider audience, I would like to encourage adventuresome general readers to taste intelligently and chew according to their preferences for either flavor or substance.

This series, entitled The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas, devotes Volume I to North America, Volume II to Mesoamerica, and Volume III, the one under review here, to South America. Volume III (in its two parts, each a substantial volume in itself) encompasses an introduction and 26 chapters arranged topically and chronologically. Twenty of these chapters are at least 50 pages long. Shimada’s “The Evolution of Andean Diversity: Regional Formations (500 B.C.E. — C. E. 600)” is itself book length with its 168 pages of richly informative and beautifully illustrated archaeology. Volume III as a whole carries sketches, maps, photos, and drawings. In Chapter 23, a particularly stunning series of portraits is reproduced that portrays individuals artificially posed to represent native faces calculated most to tantalize tourists and to categorize the inferior and superior races.

It would be a shame for these two massive parts of Volume III to gather dust on the shelf because generalists, and, in some instances, even specialists, did not learn how to use them. So, at the risk of accentuating the obvious, I am going to give some basic information and tips that were not always obvious to me, but emerged boldly with study and use. For example, a serious reader does not have to know Spanish to benefit from this volume, but it is wise to have a Spanish dictionary at hand for full enjoyment and comprehension. Points to pay close attention to in the work as a whole and in individual chapters are purpose, structure, dates, and authors’ perspectives and presuppositions. Readers should be aware that each chapter ends with a full bibliographic essay. The novice can thus learn of the latest definitive study on his or her special interest.

If Volume III of the Cambridge history were one of those mammoth
historical novels, its general development in time, topics, and “characters” (peoples, cultures, and civilizations) would be as follows. Chapters 1 and 2 are analogous to the novelist’s explaining in a special section the kinds of sources and authorities for the narrative, how close the story sticks to “the facts,” and the rationale for any unusual interpretations of the period, peoples, or places treated. Chapters 3 and 4 give an overview on early South American “lifeways” and the “origins of complex culture.”

Chapters 5-9 survey by regions and topics the developments from 500 BCE. to the invasions beginning in 1492. Chapters 11-14 all deal with “The Crises and Transformations of Invaded Societies” from 1492 to 1650 in the Caribbean, the Andean area, coastal Brazil, and the La Plata Basin (the southeastern part of South America). The editors and authors everywhere avoid imposing modern political boundaries or names on areas and peoples originally having quite different configurations. Chapters 15-22 deal with 16th through 19th century colonial conditions of rule, warfare, reorganization, resistance, revolt, and transformation. The last chapters of the book cover the Andean and lowland peoples in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The two indexes provide a terse glossary of alternative spellings, Spanish terms, and words from other languages, especially for readers who are willing to look up more than one reference for a term. The first page listed does not always provide identification for the term being investigated. Do not panic if you fail to find the Incas. From the Contents you may correctly infer that in this volume they are the Inkas (a Quechuan spelling). Also here quipu are khipu.

This review will use the more common English spellings, except in specialized contexts that more or less directly cite the Cambridge history. Linguistically- and sociologically-minded readers would do well to note the volume’s operating assumption regarding spelling proper names: “The editors regard the problem of standardizing names of groups as an insoluble one. . . “. In their six-page explanation of this statement they discuss political and other factors occasioning so much confusion about the spelling of names and terms in South American history.

One interesting fact is that the Spanish inadvertently created names for people who had no prior existence as social units. A name for a people living in the bend of a river might become the name of a supposed “nation.” Unfortunately, some of the names that stuck were clearly pejorative. The editors predict that anyone who has “browsed ... the
comprehensive current website Ethnologue [sil.org/ethnologue] will have been startled by the number of bewildering names that attach to each seemingly discrete ‘tribe’ and to its ‘subgroups.’”

Part I.

The Introduction and first two chapters discuss the sea changes, as well as some degree of continuity, in the evolving interpretations of the history of native peoples in South America. The editors’ perspectives and presuppositions are to a large extent substantiated in the whole work. Two theses are clearly identified and persuasively supported. First, the history of the Indians (by invaders and other outsiders) is one thing and Indian history is quite another. Considerable attention is given to trying to find out how the native peoples have told their own story and where their versions of their history may be found. Written litigation and governmental documents are a surprising source for both history of the Indians and Indian history. Other sources are Iberian chronicles, numerical and nonnumerical data in the quipus, church and native testimony (even when gained under duress or by inquisitorial methods), and native chroniclers and native historical enquiry. The strengths and limitations of each kind of historical source are helpfully evaluated.

Secondly, from the native perspective and from recent ethnographic studies, native peoples were not always, if ever, merely passive subjects during the periods of conquest and colonization. Frank Salomon in the first chapter, ‘Testimonies,’ speaks of a “new awareness that colonial history, as much as any other, is history made by, and not just inflicted on, American peoples.” To discover and report their own story, where possible in their own words, is both a goal and an accomplishment of this volume in the Cambridge series.

The last “benchmark compilation on the peoples of South America” was Julian Steward’s *Handbook of South American Indians* (1946). The present volume is an effort to integrate what has been learned in the half-century since that handbook appeared. As a philosopher, I was delighted to learn that this volume is not a handbook or encyclopedia, but rather “an idea-oriented history.” Some of the key ideas by which the work is oriented are: —“Highland” and “lowland” societies were permeable rather than sharply separate and unequal. Many authors now repudiate the dichotomy between the “civilized” Andean empires and “primitive” or “simple” lowland societies “[W]e have emphasized native people’s agency and individuality, which extended through and beyond the conquest.” — Instead of focusing on the “authentic” or
“real” native groups, the authors have emphasized the “shifting historical nature of such categories.” “Priority has also been given to large periods often neglected.

Some matters in Part I can help us clarify and critique some findings characteristic of Volume III as a whole. I have chosen issues that should interest the members of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations (ISCSC) and other readers of ISCSC’s Comparative Civilizations Review.

The term “civilization” does not occur in the index for either part of Volume III. Nevertheless, some of the issues scholars of civilization try to address do arise in the discussions. These issues concern invaders vs. invaded, Andean vs. lowland societies, diffusion vs. independent invention, Franciscan vs. Jesuit utopias, urban vs. rural cultures, Western European (as exemplified by Portugal and Spain) vs. native peoples, “simple” vs. complex native societies (some of the latter on some civilizational lists), and linear (“biblical”) time vs. cyclical time.

I have used “versus” not just in the adversarial but also in the comparative sense. Even beyond the adversarial and comparative nuances of these polarities comes a symbiotic kind of relationship discussed by many of the authors of this Cambridge history. A typical example: for good, and too often for ill, native peoples or their agents cooperated with each other and even with their invaders and colonizers. Often such cooperation was for military or mercenary reasons, if not blatant personal preservation and self-promotion. But in some instances, cooperative action protested cruelty, injustice, slavery, and truly “uncivilized” behavior; it sometimes sought reform, independence, or revolution.

In spite of not being indexed, the term “civilization” does occur in these pages in some very significant contexts. When the Spanish first arrived they accepted the Inca view that they, the Incas, were civilized and had taught the barbarians the “arts of civilization such as agriculture and weaving . . . .”. Further experience taught the Spanish and their successors that many features of Andean culture were continuous throughout a region wider than the Andes alone. In Chapter 2 on “Ethnography in South America,” Sabine MacCormack writes of features that Inca society had in common with other South American societies; it is inaccurate to picture “barbarian” tribes always learning from the “civilized” Incas.

Thomas Lynch, in the process of searching out the roots of “Earliest South American Lifeways” (Chapter 3), sounds even more radical. (Bear in mind that Lynch is speaking mostly of what many still regard
as prehistory because it is preliterate.)

"Throughout most of their history, the Americas were hardly a multicultural society; values were shared, communication was easy, and neighbors were more remote than despised. Only in a few nuclear areas of resource diversity and concentration had there been opportunity for the development of a critical mass that would lead to the excesses—some beautiful, some brutal—of 'civilization.'"

Using DNA studies, Lynch summarizes evidence that would even point to "a primal Paleoindian group [that] had only four women whose children survived. Some 600 or 700 generations later, their DNA morphs survive in the blood of the people of South America." Some of Lynch's claims here are legitimate topics for debate, but the lines of DNA evidence receive clear exposition in this chapter. Lynch believes there was originally a relatively homogeneous linguistic as well as genetic group. In it "class-ranked societies and conquest states were relatively slow to evolve in America, and then only in nuclear areas."

Into the beautiful and harmonious segments of South American history the authors have often had to drop events and practices that are neither beautiful nor harmony producing. When Europeans made first contact with native peoples in South America, three things shocked and puzzled them: the seeming absence of religion in some of the cultures, the practice of nudity without shame, and cannibalism. Cannibalism (also referred to in the book as "anthropophagy") provides a test case for comparative cultural study and reflection dating back at least to Montaigne's classic 16th-century essay, "Of cannibals." Montaigne wrote, "I am not sorry that we should here take notice of the barbarous horror of so cruel an action, but that, seeing so clearly into their faults, we should be so blind to our own." A complex question is, "Did any of the higher, at least more complex and extensive civilizations and empires other than the Aztecs ever condone cannibalism?"

Strangely enough, the phenomenon of cannibalism is helping resolve a huge debate about South American societies, the debate about whether native peoples were incapable of seeing time in terms that were not ahistorical, mythological, or, if you will, supernatural to the point of fatalism. The debate might have worn itself out into a tired draw between myth, which emphases the enduring, almost timeless strata of social experience, and history, which discloses the importance of change due to human agency.

However, the Cambridge history displays a substantial and complementary place for both myth and history. Frank Salomon in his
"Testimonies" (57) cites a study of the cannibalistic Tubinamba as evidence that a South American people thought in terms other than cyclical or mythical time. The acts of killing enemies or defiantly suffering death at their hands were the Tubinamba way of punctuating the drama of historical time. Salomon writes that in Carneiro and Viveiros's judgments, Tubinamba acts of vengeance were not a way to honor a mythological origin in order to restore the integrity of society.

Revenge raids constituted society again and again without reference to ahistorical myths or primordial models. "No other institution but war," Salomon explains, "located past, present, and future in an intelligible world of change. The Tubinamba warriors "vindicated their group's dead by taking captives, incorporating and even glorifying enemy warriors, then killing and eating them so as to restore honor—and so as to garner the enmity of others, which was itself the sine qua non of intelligible social action."

In fairness to the Tubinamba, I should explain that this native people had a consultative, persuasive form of leadership that did not fit into the hierarchical, chain-of-command categories of Spanish political thought. As Sabine MacCormack explains (119), "Among people profoundly disinclined to obey orders, a good leader had to speak eloquently if his followers were to join in collective action such as hunting and warfare. (And the Tubinamba were not the only South American group who, to European eyes, lacked visible means of governing themselves or a proper code of deference toward superiors.)

According to MacCormack (121), for Europeans who had lived through the French wars of religion "even vengeance and anthropophagy were intelligible." It is no accident that "Montaigne, who observed the calculated atrocities of confessional warfare, found Indian man-eating less inhuman than the deeds of his own countrymen." Jean de Lery, one of the most acute observers of the Tubinamba, "was one of some 500 persons to survive the siege of Sancerre in 1573; there, during the last desperate months when all stores had been used up, human flesh was eaten."

In John Monteiro's discussion of coastal society in Brazil as an invaded society (Chapter 13) the point is emphasized that modern authors too often have lifted South American cannibalism out of its historical context and so exaggerated or distorted its importance. Cannibalism in South America should not be viewed apart from the warfare-vengeance-sacrifice context. "It is interesting to note, for example, that while the Jesuits managed to persuade many groups to give up
eating their sacrifice victims, they failed miserably in their attempt to curtail the ritual sacrifice.

This suggests, once again, that the consummation of vengeance, whether or not cannibalism was included, constituted the driving force behind indigenous warfare in coastal Brazil.” (989) (Incidentally, as I end this repugnant discussion, I should mention that some integration of the details on South American cannibalism is possible for any reader willing to use the volume’s indexes, which are quite complete on this topic.)

In concluding this review of Part 1, I would be remiss if I did not urge the reader to exercise careful assessment of one standout assertion by the editors and publishers. It is that the European conquest should be viewed “not as an apocalyptic event, but rather as part of an ongoing process of historical change.” While I can understand the desire to counteract the overemphasis on 1492 as “the cutoff date for whole ways of life,” I ask the reader to judge on the basis of the volume’s chapters, whether the editorial objection to the adjective “apocalyptic” is not a bit excessive itself.

I for one find that the invasions were one whole series of catastrophes. In editor Salomon’s chapter on “Testimonies,” where he discusses the colonial imposition of writing on native peoples, he quotes extensively from the “School Myth” because it represents one way Quechua-speaking peasants felt about Spanish education. Here I abridge and paraphrase (78-79). God the powerful had two sons, the Inca and Sukristus [i.e., Jesus Christ]. Inka. said to us “talk” and we learned to talk.... In Cusco, Inka built a tunnel. Through it he visited Mother Earth. Eventually Inka married Mother Earth, and they had two lovely babies.... Jesus Christ felt a lot of rage and pain. He wanted to overcome his elder brother the Inka. He asked, “How shall I beat the Inka?” The Moon wanted to help Jesus. She let drop a leaf with writing on it; it scared Inka so that he ran away. The pumas helped Jesus Christ try to capture Inka....

At this point in the myth, consider this terrifying direct quotation. “When the Inka could no longer do anything, Jesus Christ struck Mother Earth, and he cut her throat. Then he had churches built; there he is, he protects us and loves us.”

The myth concludes with the possibility that one of Inka’s sons may return in a time of final judgment. Salomon comments, “It is perhaps more than coincidental that the generation of Ayacuchoarea children that [the School Myth] mentions grew up to include the first gen-
eration of Shining Path guerrillas around 1981.” Surely, so far as apocalyptic events go, the death of the Inka and murder of Mother Earth would qualify! But we must return to history.

Neil Whitehead, in his discussion of the Caribbean as an invaded area (Chapter 11) describes how in the years following Columbus’s first voyage he, “his family, and their [Spanish] opponents had all but destroyed the indigenous population in a series of brutal military campaigns.” Yes, South American history can be characterized as an ongoing process of historical change, but was it not all too often also punctuated with shock, horror, and even apocalypse?

**Part 2**

In this part of the review, we shall examine first some themes and findings characteristic of Part 2, and then some philosophical and concluding comments about the volume as a whole. The dark side of colonial history and its aftermath can be compressed into a sentence. Once the natives are defined out of existence as individuals or legitimate ethnic groups, except perhaps inferior ones, it is just a step to expropriating their lands and denying their human rights. Perhaps the best way to gain a wider perspective on this summary, indeed on Volume III as a whole, is to try to construct a temporal order of oppression, without too much concern for precise dates or the overlap of kinds of oppression. Such an effort yields six colonial imperative verbs—invade, subjugate, civilize, integrate, expropriate, and finally pity. The oversimplification involved in my list is that it passes over any initiatives the natives took (or continue to take) to form their own future or resist encroachments on it.

Some important issues are not always quickly evident in chapter titles or even index entries in Part 2, though the topics are significantly treated in the text. I give only one page number per entry as a teaser: “mutual adaptation between the indigenous peoples and the newcomers” (50), Christian burial vs. worship of the mummies (81), “demographic decline” (399), Brazilians killing natives “like cattle in a slaughterhouse” (275), islands of prosperity and population growth (275), and the ascent of the Creoles (560).

Anne Christine Taylor states that one important misreading of Inca history by the Spanish was to see Inca military actions against lowland “barbarians” as “wars of conquest or enslavement” rather than as “forms of ritual antagonism.” The Inca thought in complementary unity rather than European duality. They saw lowland peoples and cultures as
complementary to highland life; highland and lowland were as necessary to each other as male and female. But the Spanish misread Inca complementarity for the opposition of civilized to the "absolute barbarity" implicit in many European images of the "other" (202-203).

We find two superbly concise summaries (at 50 and 283) in the Conclusions of their respective chapters. This suggests that any reader overawed by the massiveness of Volume III would do well to consult conclusions of other chapters. The last two sentences of Chapter 18 concern the native inhabitants of Paraguay but vividly encapsulate much of the general history we are discussing.

"Conquest, epidemic disease, armed resistance by native groups, messianic movements, and the creation and decay of mission systems disturbed their lives, and they were forced into accommodation with the European invader. Yet native peoples contributed a lasting vitality to the area that is obvious in the late twentieth century." (283)

Historians are only infrequently and indirectly history-makers, but the authors of this volume are doubtless going to help influence advances in both demographic and social justice issues for South America. Population decline, at least of native peoples, was a reality during too much of the period of conquest and colonialism, and even into more modern times. Now population pressure on both the environment and human welfare is epitomized in such headlines as "PovertyVictimizes 600 Million Children," "Buenos Aires Approves New Contraceptive Law," and "Latin Elderly Doubling" (Popline, the bimonthly newsletter of the Population Institute, Vol. 33, July-August 2000).

The killing of people who get in the way characterizes both the history of South America and too much of the contemporary news scene there. The following quotation shows this. "Fr. Roy [Bourgeois] began School of the Americas-Watch after discovering that many of the military leaders responsible for tortures and killings in Central and South America were graduates of the School." The SOA-Watch then began lobbying and holding vigils to close the school (September 2000 newsletter from the Peace and Social Justice Center of South Central Kansas).

NOTE: An ISCSC member who reads Volume III might like to see more give and take among its contributors. Vigorous dialogue at our annual meetings spurs interest and even rivets attention enough to inspire further thought, discussion, research, or action. Any reader feeling the need for more explicit dialogue among the authorities can create it mentally by dedicated use of both the footnotes and bibliographic essays.

—Wallace Gray