

UC Riverside

UC Riverside Previously Published Works

Title

Regionally Constant but Societally Varied Beyond the Nasca Lines: Ancient Life at La Tiza in the Peruvian Desert . By Christina A. Conlee. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/006356zj>

Journal

Current Anthropology, 58(3)

ISSN

0011-3204

Author

Becker, Sara K

Publication Date

2017-06-01

DOI

10.1086/691991

Peer reviewed

Book and Film Reviews

Regionally Constant but Societally Varied

Sara K. Becker

Department of Anthropology, University of California, Riverside, California 92521, USA (sara.becker@ucr.edu). 6 III 17

Beyond the Nasca Lines: Ancient Life at La Tiza in the Peruvian Desert. By Christina A. Conlee. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016.

Beyond the Nasca Lines does exactly that, goes beyond one of Peru's best-known modern tourist landmarks to discuss the span of civilizations that survived in one of the driest places in the world, the Atacama Desert. Christina Conlee covers the emergence and reemergence of complex civilizations in this region through an almost 5,000-year period and places her archaeological site of La Tiza within the larger context of ancient societies in Peru. This book is an important diachronic study, noting the long-standing economic, political, and religious complexity that has not always been recognized in this area or, specifically, at La Tiza. Conlee's book covers multiple Andean civilizations and uses the Nasca region as a focal point, providing a dynamic picture of various groups who settled, survived, flourished, fell, and rebuilt in what, by some, might be considered a harsh landscape.

This book is an important volume that covers change in Nasca-based civilizations, the extended time depth of human habitation in this area, the ecological complications that come with living in this region, and how the evidence of economic, political, and religious identity in this area compares locally, as well as to Andean complexity within Peru. It is accessible to specialists and nonspecialists alike, providing a general primer to those new to Andean archaeology using a variety of source materials, while delivering an abundance of detail to those who are familiar with the geography and chronology of the Nasca area. The focus on the site of La Tiza helps keep Conlee's volume fixed on a bottom-up evidentiary approach with top-down descriptions to set the spatial and historical perspective in the region.

Beyond the Nasca Lines has nine chapters, primarily chronologically oriented, that cover various aspects of residents' lifestyles, the regional archaeology, and the theoretical approaches taken by scholars working in the Nasca region and in the Andes generally. The first chapter introduces the volume, placing the reader spatially in the region and describing the unique ecological characteristics, such as the unpredictability of the river system or the lack of major, wide-ranging coastal settlements as compared to elsewhere in the Andes. Conlee notes that this

unique background, where all higher-elevation feeder rivers drain into one larger river, creating a landscape that "resembles the surface of the moon" (2) when one moves away from the river. In addition, the author introduces the complex questions that span the various time periods for this area, such as the level of complexity achieved, as well as the economic, political, and religious organization of the denizens of Nasca. Stepping away from Nasca explicitly, chapter 2 theoretically orients the reader to the rise, fall, and reemergence of various northern and central complex polities throughout Peru, describing the workforce, resources, and complex irrigation systems in order to survive and farm coastal deserts. From this, chapter 3 further develops the environment and geography of the Nasca, showing how the region has been split into northern and southern areas, where both rely less on monsoonal drainage and more on a system of aqueducts. Chapter 4 begins to describe residents in this area, moving chronologically from some of the earliest seasonal hunter-gather settlements and preceramic cultivators into chapter 5's description of regional farming settlements and growing political and economic relationships, including the unexpected size of the settlement at La Tiza and the likely status differences (83) during the Early Horizon period. Chapter 6 describes the Nasca culture, whose people were the creators of the geoglyphs and are for whom the area is named, noting more of the earmarks of complex society while also addressing the argument of to what "level" of society (e.g., chiefdom, middle-range, state, empire, etc.) Nasca culture should be designated. While the author leans toward a "middle-range" designation, the following chapter on the Middle Horizon's Wari state influence leaves no question as to the alternation and inclusion of Nasca culture in wide-ranging regional complexity. This chapter also covers some of the best mortuary and osteological evidence from La Tiza, detailing the potential exchange of people and resources. Chapter 8 begins with the Wari collapse of influence across the Andes, while also noting that the largest population at La Tiza is from this Late Intermediate Period, moving into Late Horizon Inca influence. Finally, in looking at societal complexity in the Andes, chapter 9 summarizes the rise and fall of Nasca-based societies, as well as briefly introduces and describes documented and familiar post-European contact changes to the peoples of this region.

Overall, this book provides an abundance of information for the region and beyond, fitting the peoples of this area into a larger picture of life during precontact times in the Nasca region of southern Peru. Depending on a reader's focus—be it ceramics, lithics, human remains, the mortuary record, faunal evidence, households, or architecture—Conlee provides any and all evidence found at La Tiza for each sector and each time period within the site, relating it to other sites within the same region/time period and to Andean complexity. However, what information is provided can at times seem like an overabundance of data that is difficult to parse, making the book less of a read and more of a reference volume. Various ideas and cultures are discussed but sometimes seem incompletely re-

lated, from local La Tiza evidence to the grander picture of Andean complex society. Conlee's effort to describe the range of the details from local to regionally Andean is to be commended, but the approach can sometimes leave the reader questioning why certain areas outside of Nasca are discussed or certain details provided while others are not—a likely critique of any scholar covering a range of time and information. Nonetheless, *Beyond the Nasca Lines* is a boon to readers who are interested in the Nasca region. It provides a multifaceted approach to the Nasca area using site-based evidence from La Tiza and goes beyond a typical site-only focus to discuss regional evidence and diachronic change, as well as to fit people who lived and died at La Tiza within understandings of early-to-recent Andean civilizations.

Psychiatric Temporality and Its Moral Agents

Peter Soles Muirhead

Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto, 19 Russell Street, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2S2, Canada (peter.muirhead@mail.utoronto.ca). 6 III 17

Recovery's Edge: An Ethnography of Mental Health Care and Moral Agency. By Neely Laurenzo Myers. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015.

In recent years, recovery has emerged as a valued yet contested concept in mental health activism and policy. As an ethnographic object, it reveals the ethical and political-economic underpinnings of wellness and health, as well as implying a particular temporal ordering of lived experience. Recovery has become both a buzzword and an individualized futurity par excellence. Practically, it provides the ideological basis for the management of mental health clinics, for the empowerment of certain forms of patient choice as being “patient-centered,” and for the elevation of successful individuals to the roles of peer staff or “poster child” clients. Neely Laurenzo Myers's eminently readable and theoretically incisive book *Recovery's Edge* advances the anthropological critique of recovery. Based on the author's long-term ethnographic engagement at Horizons, a government-funded rehabilitation organization located in the Midwestern United States and serving upward of 6,000 individuals, the book chronicles how staff members at Horizons Recovery Center adopt a recovery-oriented framework in an effort to responsabilize long-term, sporadically housed clients. Crucially, Myers also documents a peer-led empowerment program at the same center.

The people who use Horizons (itself an apt pseudonym) are asked to take an impossible “recovery journey” of three steps: “to become rational, and then autonomous, and then hard working, and so prove themselves worthy of intimate connections with others” (155). This journey is reflected in how Myers structures the book, mapping the failures, questions, and client commentary that arise at each “step.” This tempo-

rality projects a move from repeated “social defeat” (Luhrmann 2007) to rich and sustaining sociality, rather than providing the latter from the beginning. A “recovery journey” ordered in this way is what leads Myers's interlocutors so frequently to cyclical failure, disappointment, and intractable conflict with the system itself. Within a clinic operated by Horizons, Myers's interlocutor, Vera, starts the Peer Empowerment Program (PEP) as a way for clients at the clinic to have a greater say in its operations and in regaining their own autonomy. The politics of running the clinic, including the use of shared spaces and the everyday effects of a language of empowerment, make for rich institutional ethnography. The broader bureaucratic aspects of neoliberal mental health care become more apparent as the ethnography moves through the middle years of George W. Bush's presidency. The political context that frames and ultimately hinders her interlocutors' efforts—the 2004 New Freedom Commission on Mental Health—results in Horizons staff having to bureaucratically account for the recovery value of every 15-minute period with their clients. By the end of the book, the imperfect space of intimate connection that PEP members attempt to cultivate is being overtaken by strict policies of “medical necessity” for treatment.

Movement between drug rehabilitation programs, hospitals, single room occupancy housing, the street, and state-run nursing homes complicates the struggle for moral agency for Myers's interlocutors. Indeed, several key interlocutors at the clinic disappear throughout the text, and the cyclical tragedy of the clinic's recovery “poster children” rings through Myers's writing. As she states, “mental health care reform efforts at Horizons, despite stated good intentions, continued to foreclose opportunities for members” (155). What is most striking to me as a reader is the depth and dynamism in how Myers describes, portrays, and interacts with her interlocutors. Intense interpersonal moments are juxtaposed around key themes for powerful effect. The personalities and stakes at work in the clinic reveal the complexities of not only running a peer support program within the confines of a state-funded health care system but also of facing the quotidian moral challenges, internal politics, and humor of the institutional setting. There are no flat characters in this text; Myers herself is represented in a highly reflexive ethnographic mode, subject to the dilemmas of fieldwork across class and experiential divides, frustrations with the bureaucratic barriers and personal losses endemic to her field site, and the struggles of a family member who brought her to this topic to begin with.

Myers draws the text's central concept, “moral agency,” from bioethicist Erika Blacksher's (2002) work as “a person's moral freedom to aspire to a ‘good life’ in a way that leads to intimate connections with others” (13). Interestingly, the ethnographer makes very little engagement with the anthropology of ethics—which I think is commensurable with her approach—drawing instead from social and cultural psychiatry. Myers does not attempt to conclusively answer the larger questions that motivate her research—that is, how can consumer-