

Growing the Taraco Peninsula: Indigenous Agricultural Landscapes. By Maria C. Bruno. 2024. University of Colorado Press, Denver. 232 pp.

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Amongst Andeanists, perhaps no long-term research site is more renown than the Taraco site on the southern banks of Lake Titicaca. Since 1992, when Christine Hastorf began to study the archaeology, and particularly the archaeobotany of the Taraco peninsula, this peninsula in Lake Titicaca on the Bolivian side of the Altiplano has been providing insights into various aspects of Indigenous life in the Andes, from early human settlement to contemporary peoples. The Taraco Archaeological Project includes ethnographers, zoologists, botanists, and of course archaeologists, and is the home to some of the most interesting work in the Andes today, including the work of the Maria C. Bruno, who now co-directs the project, and author of *Growing the Taraco Peninsula*.

Growing the Taraco Peninsula is a synthesis of Taraco Archaeological Project's last thirty years, especially as regards agriculture. It provides readers with an overall picture of the goals of the Taraco Archaeological Project, going from a bird's eye view to detailed case studies of plant use and environmental change in the region. It has unique value in integrating ethnographic findings of the contemporary Aymara residents of the Altiplano with palaeobotanical information, allowing readers to see continuity from past to present Andean societies.

The tone, which has an almost novelistic quality, is set from the beginning. The book begins with a description of the morning routine of the Quispe family, *campesinos* in whose house Bruno stayed during her doctoral fieldwork, before transitioning to a more detailed discussion of Andean agriculture and Aymara ethnogenesis. Most chapters of the book follow a similar pattern, starting with ethnographic accounts of

early twenty first century Aymara, followed by technical discussion of the chapter's topic, allowing readers to see change and continuity between the archaeological record and modern Andean peoples. Apart from the first and final chapter, each chapter covers a different aspect of food preparation, from planting the fields to cooking the meal. The final chapter is more of a reflective one, focused on the role of ethnobiology and archaeology in informing sustainable practices, both in the Altiplano and beyond.

Chapter 2 focuses on the various communities which have inhabited the Taraco Peninsula, and how the Taraco archaeological project has informed us of how their waxing and waning has been influenced by, and influences, the wider Altiplano environment. We learn about continuity in the social structure of Chiripa, such as the nineteenth century mestizo manor house having been built near one of the major pre-Columbian mounds, and change, such as the increasing prominence of female *mallkus*, or community leaders, in Chiripa. We get a broad timeline of social change in the Altiplano, which grounds the rest of the chapters.

Chapter 3 focuses on field preparation. The chapter discusses how the agricultural calendar of the modern Aymara campesino follows the same pattern described nearly 500 years ago by early Spanish chroniclers, starting with *qhulltayxasina*, or the clearing of the field of rocks, removal of vegetation, and breaking of dirt clods. We learn about the paleoclimate of the Altiplano, and how lake levels have fluctuated considerably over its history, and how these changes in lake levels and precipitation have

caused ancient societies in the region to rise and collapse. There is also a discussion of one of the most well studied aspects of pre-Columbian agriculture, raised fields (Erickson 1992; Janusek and Kolata 2004), which required entire communities to engineer and maintain, and how they fell out of use as a result of first Incan, and then Spanish, imperial conquest and governance.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on planting, and harvesting respectively, but can be considered two halves of the same chapter, as both deal with the biological aspects of the plants and animals used by Andean peoples. Chapter 4 focuses on domesticated plants, such as potatoes and quinoa. Perhaps unsurprisingly given Bruno's specialty (Bruno 2003; Bruno and Whitehead 2003), the most detailed subsection is that devoted to chenopods, such as quinoa, and their history. Chapter 5 focuses on wild plants. The author discusses how there can be species where the line between domesticated and wild are blurry, such as wild chenopods historically eaten in times of poor harvest and now seen as sources of new varieties of high value quinoa.

Chapters 6 and 7 are explicitly labelled as parts 1 and 2 of the transformation of plants to food. The first part focuses on the harvest, where we learn how, after centuries of relatively little change in how crops are harvested in the Altiplano, the last few decades have seen a revolution as the tractor replaces hand harvesting in much of the region. Chapter 7 focuses on food preparation. The remarkable aspect of food preparation and its history in the Taraco Peninsula is how conservative it is; as far as the archaeological evidence can show us, for all the political, social, and environmental changes which the Altiplano has experienced over the last several millennia food has remained relatively unchanged. New ingredients get added and old ones forgotten, and no doubt recipes change, but the core of the Andean diet, being tubers and chenopods, remains unchanged from the start of Andean agriculture to today.

In both the introduction and the final chapter, Bruno argues that the agricultural practices of the Taraco Peninsula can inform sustainability as "resurgent communities; whose practices allow for human communities to endure in an area for a long time without exhausting the organic and inorganic entities that they depend upon" (p. 23). Bruno does not ignore the difficulties of scaling up Indigenous agricultural practices, or how "sustainability" has

become a buzzword in certain quarters. She recognizes that many practices of traditional Taraco agriculture are not scalable. She also mentions how many traditional practices are being left by the wayside by the people of Taraco itself, as the youth move to cities like El Alto and bread and pasta replace traditional grains in the diet. While arguable beyond the scope of a book focused on the Taraco Peninsula, there is no grappling with the economic causes as to why rural youth prefer city life to the life of their ancestors. Nor are there specific testable hypotheses about what aspects of traditional Andean agriculture can be used to inform sustainable agriculture (e.g., Jago and Borrell 2024) in a world where smallholder agriculture is increasingly giving way to industrial agriculture.

This book is the culmination of over thirty archaeological field seasons in the Taraco Peninsula and deftly incorporates contemporary ethnography and Aymara voices with archaeological evidence to trace cultural and environmental change in the Altiplano. For Andeanists and environmental anthropologists, this book is a necessary addition to their bookshelves. For environmental anthropologists, it showcases the importance of combining multiple strands of evidence, historical and contemporary. The accessible writing style means it can be assigned to upper-level anthropology classes as an example of how to write about interdisciplinary projects.

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