

A Center in Peru

Chavín and the Origins of Andean Civilization. RICHARD L. BURGER. Thames and Hudson, New York, 1993 (distributor, Norton, New York). 248 pp., illus. \$49.95.

The ancient archeological site of Chavín de Huántar in the northern highlands of Peru is still today a visually and spiritually powerful temple complex adorned with fine stone carvings. One can only imagine its impact on those who visited it during the first millennium B.C., when it was a locus for the development of civilization in the Central Andes. Precisely because it is so impressive, Chavín de Huántar for years was seen as the great progenitor of other Andean sites that share with it architectural, technological, and stylistic features. This view is challenged by Richard Burger, who, drawing upon his own archeological investigations as well as those of many others who have worked in the Central Andes over the last two decades, argues instead that Chavín de Huántar must be seen as a unique synthesis of preceding cultures. To demonstrate that Chavín civilization emerged from the interplay among societies of the coast, highland, and eastern lowlands of Peru, Burger examines the role each area played in the development of Peruvian civilization.

Before describing the site of Chavín de Huántar, Burger lays the groundwork for a series of comparisons and contrasts with the architecture and sculpture of earlier Preceramic and Initial Period societies. For instance, he discusses the central coast tradition of U-shaped public buildings and sunken circular courts; the north-central coast tradition of pyramids with quadrangular sunken plazas, dressed stone architecture, and stone sculpture; the creation of elaborate colonnades in the monumental architecture of the north coast; and the construction of sophisticated hydraulic systems in northern highland centers. He also seeks to understand the religious beliefs that underlay these building programs. By the time the reader journeys through prehistoric time to Chavín de Huántar, its heritage of architectural forms, construction techniques, technology, and ideological concerns is clear.

The principal components of Chavín de Huántar are the Old Temple (founded around 900 B.C., at the end of the Initial Period) and its extension, the New Temple (probably started around 500 B.C., in the Early Horizon). The earlier U-shaped pyramidal platform encloses a sunken circular courtyard between its arms, whereas the much larger New Temple has carved columns flanking a portal and a rectangular sunken plaza in front of its eastern face.

Both are constructed with dressed stone architecture, and both are honeycombed with dark narrow passageways leading to small chambers, with no source of natural lighting. The interior of this massive structure is also riddled with canals; when water roared through these drains it may have projected a thunderous sound onto the plazas below. These features, in conjunction with the absence of visible entranceways to the summit, lend the complex an air of "mysterious inaccessibility" that probably enhanced the supernatural power and authority of the temple. Burger notes that, as in pre-Chavín Andean societies, religious ideology rather than a coercive state was the organizing principle in the Chavín cult.

An essential component of Chavín de Huántar is the exquisitely executed stone sculpture that is integrated into its architecture. These sculptures are the most direct link to Chavín ideology, and Burger convincingly explores their difficult-to-retrieve meanings. For example, the 4.53-meter-tall Lanzón, a granite shaft located at the center of the central wing of the Old Temple, is carved with the image of a fanged anthropomorphic cult image that has one arm raised with its palm exposed and the other lowered with the back of the hand visible; the author writes (p. 136) that "this pose eloquently expresses the role of the deity as a mediator of opposites, a personification of

the principle of balance and order." Other sculptures and architectural layouts, such as the Tello Obelisk and the Black and White Portal, also are seen to embody expressions of complementary opposition, a specifically Andean concern that can be traced back to Preceramic and Initial Period coastal and highland societies.

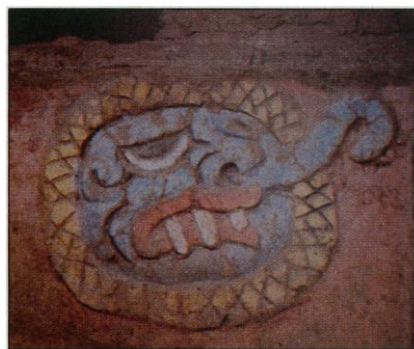
The eastern lowlands also contributed significantly to the formation of Chavín culture, with much of the fauna and flora depicted on the sculpture (such as the cayman, the crested eagle, the jaguar, the anaconda, manioc, and hot peppers) derived from tropical forest habitats. Burger reiterates the theory that this iconography indicates that the myths that form the basis of the Chavín religious system had their origin east of the Andes.

One of the conclusions reached in this book—that many of the specific elements of Chavín civilization can be traced back to societies that flourished during the 1000 years that preceded it—in no way diminishes the significance of Chavín de Huántar, where South America's oldest complex society first developed. Rather, it underscores the longevity and tenacity of many of the basic cultural elements that are distinctive of pre-Hispanic Andean civilization.

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"Detail from the clay frieze that decorated the walls of the Middle Temple central atrium at Garagay," a site now within the city of Lima. This head represents "a supernatural with spider attributes. . . . The cross-hatched band surrounding the head represents a spider web and the nasal extrusion corresponds to the pedipalp of the arachnid (it may also represent the nasal discharge associated with the inhalation of hallucinogenic snuff)." [From *Chavín and the Origins of Andean Civilization*]

Gold crown excavated by the University of Tokyo from a shaft tomb on the summit of Kuntur. "While dating to the Chavín horizon, the style and theme of this crown draws on the Cupinisque tradition of the north coast. Height 18 cm." [From *Chavín and the Origins of Andean Civilization*; courtesy of Yoshio Onuki]



"Among the grave goods at Puémapa was this miniature ocarina, modeled in the form of a spotted snake; red and white post-fire paint was used to fill the incisions in the dark-gray clay." [From *Chavín and the Origins of Andean Civilization*]