

H-Net Reviews

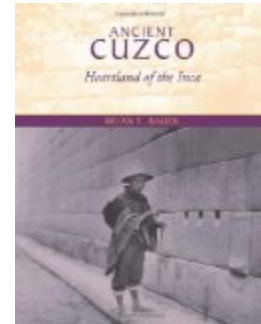
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Brian S. Bauer. *Ancient Cuzco: Heartland of the Inca*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004. 296 pp. Illustrations, photographs, maps. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-292-70279-0.

Reviewed by Craig Hendricks (Long Beach City College)

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Recalling the Inca Heartland

Brian S. Bauer quotes a chronicler on the conquest of the Inca empire, who described “old Indians who, upon seeing Cuzco, stared at the city and gave a great cry, which then turned to tears of sadness, as they contemplated the present and recalled the past” (p. v). Sadness indeed, as the Incan capital was first looted, occupied, then burned, and finally demolished and rebuilt by the conquerors. Although some parts of the city furnished the core of Spanish Cuzco, those who remembered the former architecture and open spaces must have been shocked when they encountered the new reality. Across the centuries it has become more difficult to discover and analyze evidence of the Incan past as modern society gobbles up real estate, often bulldozing away all that remains. In Europe, North America, and Asia, as well as in Peru, housing tracts and shopping centers are steadily erasing evidence of the past.

This compelling fact encouraged Bauer to begin a project that led to *Ancient Cuzco*. He and six contributors present an overview of the “cultural developments” (p. 1) in the Cuzco Valley from the era of earliest habitation to the Spanish conquest and the subsequent remaking of the valley. Bauer and his colleagues succeed well on two broad fronts. They provide a concise, yet thorough march through the history of human communities in the valley from roughly 2000 BC to the first decades of Spanish arrival. On another level, *Ancient Cuzco* also provides the reader with a wealth of information about landforms, agriculture, ceramic history, architecture, political infighting, and warfare in the valley. All this in less

than 270 large-format text pages makes for an excellent introduction to ancient Cuzco and a powerful summation of the achievements and failures of that important human community.

The strength of this approach is in both organizing and explaining a great deal of useful information that is well known to specialists, as well as in presenting newer findings on sites recently discovered and evaluated. The effect is to present the reader with a detailed, clearly written narrative that gives a full picture of the Cuzco valley as it developed over the centuries until the era of Spanish intrusion. Familiar scholars such as Karen Chavez and Terence D’Altroy are cited extensively throughout the book, and the notes and bibliography provide the reader with the scope of recent scholarship on this important topic. Every chapter contains excellent maps and graphs that will be of interest to both specialists and students beginning their study of the Inca.

This reader found much to admire in the discussion of imperial expansion. The idea that Inca state development occurred over a longer period, and was the result of diverse political and economic processes, is fully presented and analyzed. Indeed, as Bauer and R. Alan Covey emphasize, “although Inca imperial expansion appears to have occurred quite rapidly, researchers increasingly view this as the result of antecedent and long-term regional political processes” (p. 72-73). The authors then discuss other views about class conflicts, economic distribution patterns, and dual inheritance as explanations

for Inca state expansion. They then bring into play the new survey and excavation data of the last two decades to bolster their perspective concerning longer-term processes that propelled imperial development. The ample maps of the Cuzco valley in chapter 8 help the reader follow their line of presentation. Details round out the picture of Inca mastery, as the authors describe the level of agricultural surplus demanded by the lords of the valley. In the town of Cajamarca, Spanish conquerors discovered “certain houses filled with clothes packed in bales that reached to the ceilings of the houses.... The greater part of it is very fine and elegant wool and the rest cotton of various colors and rich hues” (p. 96). Cuzco became a “cosmopolitan center” (p. 106) transformed by the labor of provincial populations that the Inca now controlled through military, political, and religious means. An interesting counterpoint to the nuanced description of the valley’s changing aspects that the authors construct over the book’s first nine chapters is the comprehensive discussion of how quickly and vigorously the Spanish rebuilt and remade Cuzco as a European polity. By the 1580s, the character of the valley and the city were changed forever, literally re-constructed with materials from the vanquished Inca capital. Spanish appro-

priation of the past was not limited to stone and timbers, but also included the mummified corpses of Inca rulers. Their bodies, carefully and reverentially embalmed and displayed in elaborate temples during Inca rule, found new homes as some were placed on display in Spanish buildings.

Bauer concludes the study by noting that the “overall goal of this book is to document the settlement patterns for each major time period in the history of the Cuzco valley and to examine how those patterns changed over time” (p. 185). He also has included recent ethnohistoric data, graphs, charts, and lists of key participants in the valley’s history. He and his co-authors have succeeded on every count in producing a highly readable, coherent depiction of the great valley. A very small complaint: a fuller and more detailed description of the Spanish conquest as a separate chapter would make this excellent study even more appealing, even though much of the later conquest took place outside of the valley, and thus beyond the scope defined by the authors. Both specialty and general courses that cover the history and development of indigenous cultures in the Americas could use this book easily, although it might be too advanced for first-year survey courses.

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