

*Inge Schjellerup, Carolina Espinoza Camus, James Rollefson, Victor Quipuscoa Silvestre, Mikael Kamp Sorensen, and Victor Peña, **La Ceja de Montaña – Un paisaje que va desapareciendo: Estudios interdisciplinarios en el noreste del Perú [La Ceja de Montaña – A Disappearing Landscape: Interdisciplinary Studies from North-eastern Peru]**, Ethnographic Monographs (3), Copenhagen: The National Museum of Denmark, 2009.*

The “ceja de montaña” in the title of this work refers to the cloud forest arranged along the easternmost slope of the Peruvian Andes from north to south. This study covers about 800 km² of that environment overlapping the two departments of Amazonas and San Martín. Vehicular roads are few and the mule trails are most often quagmires. Frequent landslides cut off communication and the forests are so dense as to be almost impenetrable. Drenched in constant rain, the humidity is so high that green mold grows everywhere. To carry out a research program in such a difficult setting constitutes a major challenge. Danish scholar Inge Schjellerup has led a multi-faceted project over more than a decade in northeastern Peru that has resulted in many publications, including three monographs of which this volume under review represents the third and last in the series.

Following a short introduction to the study area, five substantive chapters organize the work. The discovery of 29 pre-Inca (Chachapoya culture) or Inca surface sites provides evidence of prehistoric settlement going back to approximately 800 A.D. Constructions catalogued include circular or rectangular structures, platforms, terraces and stone inlaid trails between sites. Moving up in time, the next chapter on ethnohistory covers indigenous groups of the area, Spanish settlement foundations, and the early missionary presence. A subsequent chapter provides contemporary cultural descriptions that focus primarily on twentieth-century colonization of the area from elsewhere in Peru. Much of that settlement has occurred in the lower montane zone where trees yielding high quality wood, especially mahogany and cedro (*Cedrela*) grow. Once the forested land is cleared or partly cleared, coffee is planted and is everywhere in the region the main cash crop. Wood in the forests at higher elevations, above 2,500 m and up to 3,400 m is much less valuable and the climate is unsuitable for coffee. Thus the upper zone of the ceja remains more intact than the lower elevations. Clear discussions of rural livelihoods, plant use, land tenure and

health and disease issues, together with several vignettes that give voice to individuals who spoke of their origins, conditions or concerns, provide a balanced understanding of these colonizers.

Appropriately, in this green world of the *ceja*, vegetation gets substantial attention whose botanical descriptions were based on extensive plant collection and identification. When primary forest is cut, secondary forest (*purma*) or invasive grasses, used as livestock pasture, replaces it. In this same chapter a strong section on ethnobotany documents almost 400 useful plants neatly assembled as an appendix. A separate discussion is included of the spontaneous vegetation growing at archaeological sites. The question of whether there is any connection between the sites and the character of the vegetation was not examined. The last chapter, dealing with changing land use, documents by means of satellite imagery and GIS the decline between 1987 and 2009 of primary forest from 77 percent to 68 percent. Throughout the book, illustrations, many in color, effectively complement the text.

Beyond the plethora of research data generated, two particular dimensions enhance this work. Its strong empirical foundation eschews trendy and ephemeral theories in favor of solid observation and a series of baselines for future investigations. A second point in its favor is its integration of the spatial and temporal dimensions, a convergence that leads to a realization of how much a strong sense of the past enriches understanding of the place studied. A diachronic perspective opens the mind, for example, to a view of colonization in the *ceja de montaña*, not as something ‘new’, but as a retake of an ancient, but also ultimately impermanent, process. In the same way, deforestation analyzed diachronically allows one to better grasp the concern for the eventual disappearance of the primary forest in this godforsaken region of Peru.

Nothing is rarely ever perfect, this book included. The ethnohistory narrative is disjointed, though in fairness, the spottiness of the recorded past accounts for some of that dissatisfaction. The word “landscape” is used to describe the primary forest, a narrow application of a term that, in fact, includes everything that we see in front of us at any particular time. I also call into question some aspects of the editorial process. A copyeditor’s hard red pencil would have tightened up the abundant prolixities of a loose prose style. Many citations intercalated in the text are inexplicably not in the list of references. Lack of an index will frustrate those seeking a specific piece of information in a volume brimming with a wide range of facts.

But such comments amount to quibbles to be put aside for the big picture. To really appreciate this book and its intent, one needs to put it into

a larger epistemological perspective. It represents a fundamental regional inventory of a poorly known part of the Peruvian Andes. By contrast, in Sweden, such inventories were largely accomplished by the late eighteenth century and in North America by the late nineteenth century. In Latin America, retrieval of such knowledge began essentially in the eighteenth century, but inaccessibility and isolation have left big chunks of territory virtually unknown into the present. For example, no other part of the Peruvian *ceja de montaña* has yet been surveyed in the way carried out in the project. Much of the data is perforce of a survey nature: no detailed archaeological trench work (yet), no vegetation reconstruction from pollen analysis (yet), and no vegetation relevés of the kind found in the plant ecology journals. In the conclusion, Schjellerup points out how fruitful an interdisciplinary approach was in this work. Such collaboration may be less achievable at the next stage of fieldwork.

Just as Alexander von Humboldt had done when he visited the Andes from 1799 to 1803, Inge Schjellerup and her team used a bold mix of enlightenment science and romantic sensibility to reveal the past and present lifeways of the remote and recondite. Dr. Schjellerup also made this project a model of international cooperation in science and scholarship. With support from the V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation of Denmark, the project involved the institutional cooperation of six institutions in Peru, two in Denmark, and one in Chicago. Three Peruvians, a botanist (Quipuscoa), anthropologist (Espinoza), and archaeologist (Peña), are among the six authors. The bilingual edition will greatly increase its usefulness in Peru where the largest group of readers can be expected. The book's imprint is the National Museum in Copenhagen, but the actual printing of it was done in Trujillo, Peru. Such a high degree of collaboration is worthy of emulation for social and political reasons but also because it is the ethical thing to do. Dr. Schjellerup's vital role in planning and executing this project, as well as her other contributions on Peru, were acknowledged in 2009 when she received from the President of the Republic of Peru, Alan García, the title of commander (*comendador*) of the Orden El Sol del Perú.

Daniel W. Gade

University of Vermont, Burlington, USA