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Cultivated Landscapes of Native Amazonia and the Andes  
(review)

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## Book Reviews

Cynthia Simmons, Book Review Editor

*Cultivated Landscapes of Native Amazonia and the Andes*. William M. Denevan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, xxx and 396 pp., maps, photos, appendices, and index. \$1120.00 (ISBN 0-19-823407-4).

Reviewed by Antoinette M. G. A. WinklerPrins, Department of Geography, Michigan State University

As a first-year graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison a summer of years ago, I took a summer hourly job with Bill Denevan. The first thing that Bill did was hand me a copy of John Treacy's dissertation<sup>1</sup> and told me that I was to find every reference in the bibliography and check that John had cited it corrected. That summer I learned a lot about terraces in the Colca valley from John's beautifully put together dissertation. I also learned a great deal about scholarship and the craft of writing for the academy. Over the next two years (the summer job morphed into a two year opportunity) I worked with Bill on a number of projects, including early sections of this book. I had not a clue that the job would have such a profound career-forming influence over me, but it has. Bill demonstrated to me time and again a profound caring and respect for the people he researches and writes about, which is reflected in this book. In addition to opening up the world of Andean terraces to me, he opened up the world of Amazonian cultural ecology, which has become my research focus. Because of my personal experiences with Bill, it gives me great pleasure in writing this review of "the book."

*Cultivated Landscapes of Native Amazonia and the Andes* is part of a trilogy on native landscapes being published by Oxford University Press. The others in the trilogy are William Doolittle's *Cultivated Landscapes of Native North America* (2000) and *Cultivated Landscapes of Middle America on the Eve of Conquest* by Thomas Whitmore and B. L. Turner (2002). As a whole these books demonstrate the sophistication of indigenous agricultural techniques prior to the arrival of European colonization. Denevan's book documents evidence in two very different environments, the Amazonian lowlands (savanna and rainforest), as well as the Andean highlands, two regions in which he spent his career doing field research.

The book is divided into five parts. Part I is an overview section entitled "Introduction: Fields and Associated Features." After placing his work within geographical cultural ecology and giving the reader a sense of the history of the research on the topics at hand, he treats both Amazonia as well as the Andes with brief descriptions of field types (Chapter 2), crops, tools and "soft technology" (Chapter 3) used by indigenous people. This part of the book serves as a guide and sampling to the rest of the book, and will be helpful to readers who are new to the topic. Details of techniques are elaborated in subsequent parts of the book and their chapters. Careful referencing will guide novice readers to further reading in both this book as well as elsewhere.

The next three parts of the book are divided both thematically and well as regionally. Part II focuses on cultivation in the Amazonian basin, broadly defined. The reader is given very detailed descriptions of the complexity, heterogeneity, and diversity of cultivation in riverine, upland and savanna environments. Chapter 4 is an overview of all field types and cultivation techniques in the region. Chapter 5 presents case material that Bill was personally involved in gathering (Mojos in Bolivia; Campa, Bora,

Shipibo in Peru; and Karinya in Venezuela). This chapter illustrates many of the field types and cultivation techniques listed in Chapter 4. In the last two chapters of this section, Bill Tackles riverine and upland cultivation respectively, carefully placing the described management techniques and evidence within theoretical interpretations and implications.

Part II of the volume deals with Andean irrigation and terraces. Chapters 8 and 9 describe the variety of water management features as well as terrace types and their distribution. Chapter 10 considers in detail terrace origins and reasons for their abandonment, again based on Denevan's own field experiences, this time in the Colca valley of Peru.

Raised and drained fields are the topics in Part IV of the book. Relating personal experiences, Bill discusses the discovery of "lost systems of cultivation" that are raised fields (Chapter 11). He then deepens his descriptions of raised fields in two areas: Mojos (Chapter 12) and Titicaca (Chapter 13). In each of these last three chapters Bill not only describes prehistoric raised beds, but also considers their possible restoration. Chapter 14 considers drained fields and canalization.

Part V of the volume consists of only one Chapter (15). This section is the conclusion of the book, offering "Implications of Indigenous Agricultural Technology." Bill discusses his findings in terms of theoretical implications within cultural ecology and archaeology. Included are such concepts as agrarian collapse, persistence of indigenous techniques, carrying capacity, intensification, environmental limitations and sustainability. Bill states that his book is "to a large extent a reference work" (p. xv). Perhaps that is so, however, it is a unique reference work of material never put together in such an accessible manner. This book sets the gold standard for years (decades?) to come, and should be mandatory possession for anyone working on any of these topics in the region. The referencing and bibliography are an absolute bounty. And having worked for Bill on a bibliography, I know to what lengths he has gone to assure accuracy.

The book is highly descriptive and is a compendium of amasses evidence (mostly agricultural techniques) to support the fundamental assertion of the book, which is that people, and especially prehistoric South Americans, were not just pawns in environments that determined their lifeways and cultural levels, but that they were active agents in forming their landscapes. Bill intersperses his detailed descriptions of techniques with sections on theoretical implications (especially in Chapters 6, 7, 10 and 15) to make and remake this fundamental point. However, he ends the book with the rather humble statement that the information contained in it "should have some utility for scholars and others with broader agendas" (p. 306).

The one problem I had with the book is its awkward organization. This is because several chapters, or parts of them, are derivations of previously published material. This resulted in duplications of material and odd repeats of even anecdotal situations. It also means that links between sections do not always exist since they were originally written as separate pieces. An overall smoothness and unity is lacking. It makes the book not an "easy read", in fact it is best read in sections, just as it was put together.

This book is Denevan's lifelong effort in one volume. It puts on the table Bill's lifelong commitment to demonstrating, without a shadow of a doubt, that people (especially in South America) are not "determined" by their environment, but that, through and interaction of the environment and technology (part of culture) people have shaped and formed the environment to suit their needs. And this he has done so very convincingly. I hope that various actors in the region will read this volume, those who already believe in these matters, but especially those who do not. Implications for what Bill has painstakingly presented to us are broad and serious, and move chronologically both

backward to theories on prehistory as well as forward to future use of both regions.

I highly recommend this book to anyone working in the region or within the theoretical issues discussed. Others should be sure that their institutional library obtains a copy since it will be a key reference to the next several generations of scholars.

Key words: *Amazonia, Andes, landscapes, cultural ecology.*

*La Gran Línea: Mapping the United States-Mexico Boundary, 1849-1857.* Paula Rebert. Austin: University of Texas Press. Xvi and 259 pp., maps, photos, notes, appendices and index. \$22.95 paper (ISBN 0-292-77111-8)

Reviewed by Eric P. Perramond, Department of Geography & Environmental Science, Stetson University.

The mapping of geo-political boundaries has always been of primary interest to applied and political geographers. The boundary between the United States and Mexico, and the history of its mapping, is the central issue in Rebert's concise volume. This book, however, provides a service to the history of cartography not accomplished in previous studies of the border's creation.

In six chapters Rebert summarily discusses the importance of the international field surveys, the boundary offices maintained by both the US and Mexico, the cooperation and conflicts arising from surveying and mapping work, and the final products and controversies created by the mapping commissions. The author systematically canvases the importance of joint and separate survey work performed by the U. S. and Mexico field teams. Here, it is clear that less conflict appeared between the two commissions, although later conflicts arose when the actual field mapping occurred and discrepancies were apparent. This book also clarifies the roles of the Boundary Offices for each country, and how they were shaped by their respective national governments. Finally, the work of both commissions is put into perspective, in terms of the technical difficulties that each team faced to calculate an interminably long boundary that stretched across rugged, arid and complex terrain.

Rebert not only discusses the difficulties and differences of 19<sup>th</sup> century mapping technologies, she also successfully analyzes the structural causes of this difference, in essence explaining much of the turmoil in the Mexican Commission due to the lack of funding. Although Mexico had been independent as a sovereign nation for almost thirty years by the time the boundary work was initiated, the young nation-state was faced with internal political conflict, and limitations of technical instrumentation available to the mapping team. To be sure, the author is careful in portraying the struggles, while never failing to appreciate the final work that was produced by the Mexican field survey team. Previous studies of the mapping commissions had severely underestimated, or summarily dismissed, the contribution of the Mexican Commission in constructing the border. Rebert does indeed follow these previous authors in so far as describing how the Mexican authors in so far as describing how the Mexican team was occasionally dependent on the US Commission for producing maps. But unlike previous contributors to this issue, the author clearly describes the vast effort spent by the Mexican surveyors and cartographers in accurately portraying topographical and cultural features. For the US Commission, mapping the boundary was fixated on establishing a line in the sand, so to speak. For the Mexicans involved in this work, this was clearly an issue of extant place recognition, and understanding, and understanding how the boundary would disconnect natural landscapes and physiography. This issue becomes central in the Río Grande (Río