Rethinking the Andes–Amazonia Divide

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The Pacific coast and Andean highlands/Amazonia
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Introduction

During the 2014 Leipzig conference ‘Rethinking the Andes–Amazonia “divide”’, archaeologists, linguists, bio-anthropologists and ethno-historians came together to discuss the historical connections between these two vast geographic and cultural areas. It became clear during our discussions that many participants implicitly assumed that if the historical relations between the Andean highlands, including the eastern slopes or the montaña or ceja de selva, and the flat, western Amazon basin could be understood, then generally speaking, by extension, so could any linkages between Amazonia and the narrow desert Pacific coast of Peru. Traditionally, archaeologists have treated the coastal strip and the highlands as a dynamic core area, with montaña and western Amazonian societies generally perceived as peripheral participants.

Although fallen from use today, scholars have historically thought of the coastal strip and the highlands of the Central Andes as an interactive ‘co-tradition’. This emphasis on coastal and highland relations began formally when Bennett pointed out the need for a culture-time-space unit in archaeological-historical interpretation, for which he proposed the term coastal and highland ‘co-tradition’. This was ‘the over-all unit of culture history of an area within which the component cultures have been interrelated over a period of time’ (Bennett 1948, 1). The co-tradition model focused on the idea that interaction among all these various societies through space and time created a major unit of analysis. Despite its implicit use today, this unit still dominates Central Andean archaeology.

As discussed below, such an approach is understandable, given that the majority of archaeological research in the Andes has focused on the coast and the highlands, and that so little is known about the eastern montaña and the western Amazon basin. Other chapters in this volume examine this traditional approach from the perspective of different disciplines. In this brief chapter, we explore an alternate viewpoint, one that, for the sake of argument, treats the coast as a
separate cultural entity interacting independently with different geographic areas, as opposed to an Andean highland and Amazonian co-tradition. This heuristic perspective allows us to play with different possible interpretative scenarios and to begin to ask some different questions about cultural transmission and interregional interaction from east to west and vice-versa across the Andes.

The Central Andes

Three basic types of physical environments characterize the Central Andes: western desert, mountain and mountain valleys and eastern tropical lowlands. On the west are the tropical lowlands of the Pacific coast and the wet and seasonally dry tropical forest on the slopes of the Andes of Colombia, Ecuador and extreme northern Peru. To the immediate south is the arid coastal strip and western highlands of Peru and north Chile, one of the great deserts of the world. Life would be impossible here without the river valleys that cross the deserts from east to west. These valleys appear as a succession of narrow green oases amid stretches of arid land. They vary greatly in size though the larger ones are in northern Peru. Once the population had increased, the rivers imposed either unity or conflict on the coastal inhabitants. The western littoral provides immediate access to some of the world’s richest marine resources. A short distance inland rise the foothills and higher grassland and often forested valleys of the Andes. Immediately east of the Andes are the forested tropical slopes of the montaña and the adjacent flat, seasonally flooded lowlands of western Amazonia (see Figures 3.7.1 to 3.7.3).

This brief description of the Central Andes gives the impression of a conveniently divided continent from north to south and from east to west, defined by mountains and connected by river valleys (see Figure 3.7.4).

The Andean mountains offer compacted and vertically positioned environments, with the coastal strip and tropical lowlands horizontally extending spaces. Yet, within each of these spaces are hundreds of distinct ecologies forming mosaics of adjacent environments, each offering a different mixture of resources, different resource procurement strategies and different cultures with different histories.

Although archaeologists geographically separate these spaces, addressing them as distinct coastal, highland and eastern montaña and lowland or as Amazonian environments with different culture areas, they also view them as different, sometimes overlapping, spheres of cultural interaction over time, characterized by demographic movements, contacts, exchange networks, cultural transmission and dominant/subordinate relations of power. Archaeological thinking on these variable types of relationships has included a myriad of interpretative concepts, including transhumance (Lynch 1973), trade caravans (Browman 1975; Núñez and Dillehay 1979), colonization (cf. Mayer 2002), lo andino (for example, Jamieson 2005), diaspora (Skar 1994), co-tradition (Bennett 1948), verticality (Murra 1972), horizontality (Shimada 1982) and others, all of which have focused
on the common themes of mobility, political economy and cultural transmission. Most of these concepts, however, and the archaeological and historical data of the Central Andes in general, have been interpreted as the encroachment of highland Andean cultural values and technologies primarily onto the coast and secondarily into Amazonia. Only occasionally has reference been made either to montaña and lowland Amazonian traits appearing in the highlands and beyond down to the Pacific coast (for example, Lathrap 1971; Tello 1960), or to the reverse, that is,
coastal influence into the highlands and beyond down into the eastern lowlands (see Chapter 2.4).

Most archaeologists have viewed the later, more complex societies of the Andean highlands (for example, Chavin, Wari, Tiwanaku, Inca) as integral to these
encroachments because their archaeological records suggest that they had the ideas, resources, energy and people to hegemonically explore and influence, if not even in some cases directly control, distant lowlands to both the east and west. In the eastern montaña of the Andes and the western fringe of the Amazon basin proper of Peru, an area collectively referred to as the montaña (in the sense used by Raymond 1988), their relative power and influence is much less clear-cut, in part because so little archaeology has been done in this region. The general perception is that montaña and western Amazonian societies were mobile, egalitarian, less complex and thus less capable of engaging in long-term, productive and influential interregional exchange relationships (Kojan 2002). As a result, the montaña has generally been seen as peripheral to major cultural centres on the coast and in the Andean highlands (Lyon 1981) as well as to late pre-Hispanic Amazonian centres of population farther to the east (Reeve 1994; Chapter 3.1).

Yet, on the other hand, there also has been a long tradition in Andean studies to classify any iconography depicting felines, raptorial birds and serpents as eastern montaña and Amazonian influence (for example, Tello 1960; Lathrap 1971; Raymond 1988), especially during the Early Horizon or Chavin period. Most archaeologists presume that any tropical traits in the highlands and on the coast of Peru were derived from the eastern side of the Andes, which may not always be correct because many of the same traits are found in the tropical environments and cultures of the coast and western Andean slopes of Colombia, Ecuador and northern and central Peru (cf. Chapter 2.4).
In summary, there has been a strong tendency in Andean studies to over-dichotomize, to construct differences and to essentialize broad interregional contacts and movements in terms of uni- or bi-directional influences, with most thought given to mutually serving coastal and highland relations, Bennett’s co-tradition, and to give relations with the eastern montaña and Amazonian lowlands much less attention. It is granted that the vast majority of research has been carried out in the highlands and on the coast, presenting a much smaller archaeological base to work with in the montaña and western Amazonia. Nonetheless, conceptual models need to consider the possibility of other types of co-, tri- or other- traditions, such as a combined highland and eastern lowland co-tradition that might have influenced the coast. (It is recognized here that the concept of co-tradition has fallen out of use in recent decades, but we employ it heuristically for the sake of our discussion.) Any movement of people, ideas and goods from the eastern montaña and Amazonian lowlands to the coast had to have passed through the highlands, most likely producing a hybridity of cultural traits and values from both the highlands and the montaña. These movements most likely travelled through the lowest elevations of the highlands, especially in southern Ecuador and northern Peru where the mountain ranges are low and narrow (see Chapters 2.4 and 2.5).

Furthermore, often forgotten in broad-sweeping discussions of co- and other-traditions (for example, highland Andean and Amazonian, coastal and western tropical areas of Ecuador and Peru) are the intra-regional interactions that occurred within small, diverse, little known or presently undefined archaeological societies situated within these wider geographic settings (cf. Cárdenas-Arroyo and Bray 1998; Lathrap 1970; Raymond 1976). If more local and regional archaeological data were available, further divisions would be possible because in some areas there is growing evidence to suggest significant sub-areal cultural differences within the littoral (that is, intertidal zone and shoreline, shoreline and inland lagoons), coastal strip (grassy plains and extended foothills of the Andes), interior coastal valleys, highland puna and tundra, and eastern montaña, each with different geographic vectors and scales of contact and influence. Each of these areas and sub-areas is not merely a copycat following a dominant outside model, or an unthinking institutionalization of ideas imposed by expanding emergent societies or later states.

The reaction of some of these sub-areas was probably very different from each other. For instance, those of the Pacific maritime littoral culture of Peru were not purely coastal or Andean where agriculture probably was first practiced (Dillehay 2017). Some littoral areas, such as the lower Chicama Valley, were mainly associated with the exploitation of marine resources, at least at the outset of human colonization and during a long Holocene process of settling in that lasted until agriculture was introduced around 7,000 to 8,000 years ago. It was not until the lower valley began to establish permanent exchange networks with inland coastal areas (for example, in Norte Chico) and an intensified agricultural economy co-existed
with a maritime one that it blended littoral maritime and coastal and highland agricultural economies. The same could probably be said for other sub-areas geographically situated within these broader environments, but culturally located within their own social and institutional setting and not yet transformed into a wider Andean society, whether it was coastal, highland or eastern montaña and Amazonian. On the other hand, some marginal sub-areas may never have become fully ‘Andean’ (meaning coastal and/or highland influenced) and simply remained in a process of becoming Andean. The point is that in the Andes, archaeologists have given little thought to the mosaic nature of local societies and cultures and how they acted independently of neighbouring areas, state control and interregional relations, to establish their own identities and trajectories (Dillehay et al. 2006). It is these concerns and different types of Andean co- and possibly other-traditions that are the main topics of discussion in this chapter.

Traditional approaches to interregionalism

The greater concern with coast–highland connections in the Central Andes is the result of more archaeological work in and information on these regions since the early 1900s. This emphasis may represent a historical and archaeological reality, that is, in pre-Hispanic times there always was a stronger presence of highland Formative and subsequent state societies on the Peruvian coast (see Figure 3.7.5).

This pattern may be explained by the rivers descending from the western Andean slopes that were used to irrigate the coastal desert valleys and by the establishment of strong mutual exchange networks that probably facilitated and channelled the movement of highlanders to the coast. Furthermore, in the highlands, as well as parts of the coastal valleys, interactions were stimulated by the spread of camelids, trade caravans and expansive religious networks (Browman 1989; Dillehay and Núñez 1988; Núñez and Dillehay 1995; cf. Chapter 3.1). When considering interregional human movement and exchange in the Andes, we should also keep in mind that the little-explored great rivers of the Andes lie on the eastern, not the western slopes. Though the upper reaches of the easterly descending Amazon and its tributaries are largely non-navigable in the montaña, these important transport and communication routes must have facilitated more movement and exchange through time than we have yet to realize. With the exception of a few large rivers in southern Ecuador and extreme northern Peru, none of the other Peruvian coastal rivers are navigable. So one of the most common forms of human communication and transportation in history – by river – was greatly reduced, or simply not possible here.

An important dimension is geographic. In Peru, contact between Amazonia and the Andean valleys is controlled by valleys whose rivers flow northward to the Amazon. Many of these valleys are deep and serve to bring the warm Amazonian flora far inside the highland region. It is also important to understand that there
are discrete geographic areas where contact is much easier. As noted later, Chachapoyas is one, but there was another in the Balsas to Olmos transect across the lower Andes of northern Peru. Drainages to the north in the Huancabamba/Loja region are other possibilities, particularly the San Isidro/Puyango/Tumbes drainages and the Catamayo–La Chira, which enters Piura in north coastal Peru (cf. Chapter 2.4). The same can be said for southern Ecuador. More careful archaeology, directed toward recovering household and community religious practices, recovering the paraphernalia of offerings and small informal shrines, will no doubt increase our understanding of the ontology and its ties to the Amazon.

A different perspective on Andean and Amazonian interactions comes from the non-tropical southern Andes where the proto-Mapuche and Mapuche cultures had Amazonian connections, as revealed in archaeological, linguistic and genetic records. This region is especially significant, because the closest tropical forest is 2,500 km to the north, in southern Bolivia and northwest Argentina. Latcham (1928), Menghin (1962), Dillehay et al. (2007) and others have recognized the influence of tropical or southern Amazonian design motifs in late pre-Hispanic Mapuche pottery. It is not known whether these contacts were indirect or direct, or when they were made. Today, machi shamans report that until the late 1800s, special Mapuche healers crossed the Andes and travelled to southern Bolivia and northwest Argentina where they conferred with shamans.
In summary, as noted above, we should be considering other cultural and environmental categories that may reveal other types of co- or other-traditions through time. For instance, can we speak of an Andean highland and a western Amazonian co-tradition or a north coastal Peru and eastern montaña co-tradition (cf. Chapter 3.1)? Within such a possible connection, could some coastal areas have been separated historically and culturally from these two regions in some places, especially before large irrigation canals connected the western Andean slopes and the coastal plains? Are there places where we can recognize a possible co- or tri-tradition, which would include the coast and its littoral, the highlands and the eastern lowlands? The likeliest such area is the narrow and low mountain ranges that separate the páramo Andes in southern Ecuador from the puna Andes in northern Peru, and thus connect the arid coast, together with the western coastal and montaña tropics to its north, to the Andean slopes of northern Peru and the adjacent eastern tropics (for example, Guffroy 2008; Chapter 2.4). Are there other areas and geographical vectors of movement and exchange that have not yet been hypothesized or identified empirically in local and regional archaeologies, such as areas in north-western South America and in the southern cone of South America?

**The eastern montaña and tropical lowlands**

Curiously, the eastern montaña and tropical lowlands once held a more prominent role in interpreting the origins of, and influences on, coastal and highland Andean society. For example, the Peruvian archaeologist Julio C. Tello pointed to the eastern tropical lowlands as the source for much of the iconography at the highland Formative site of Chavin de Huantar, where tropical animals dominated the artwork. In fact, Tello proposed that the roots of Chavin and Andean culture were in Amazonia (Tello 1960). Despite Tello and later scholars such as Lathrap, Roe, Raymond, DeBoer and others who focused on the lowland tropics, we do not have much empirical data for highland and eastern lowland relations over time, although the Formative period is still better understood than the later cultural periods (Burger 1992; Guffroy 2008; Shady and Rosas 1979). Furthermore, most archaeological effort in the eastern lowlands and Andean Formative periods has gone into investigating a handful of what are considered primary traits – architecture, food crops and iconography. The most significant and shared aspect is pottery style, and particularly iconographic motifs shared among emerging complex societies, not merely materialization but the probable adoption of ideological symbols and technologies from the montaña or eastern lowlands (for example, Lathrap 1970, 1971). It also has been and still is a tradition in Central Andean archaeology to classify any iconography depicting felines, raptorial birds and serpents as having origins in the montaña and eastern tropical lowlands (see Chapters 1.4 and 2.4).
More explicit consideration of contact and cultural transmission between the highlands and eastern tropical lowlands once involved intense debates about whether Amazonian culture influenced Andean culture (for example, Lathrap 1970; Sauer 1952; Tello 1960) or the reverse (for example, Meggers and Evans 1957). As noted above, these debates relied heavily on the interpretation of iconography, pottery styles and exotic goods. Within these debates, the Formative phases of Andean civilization initially appeared as multiple but distinct coastal and highland traditions of social and economic complexity, developing independently but also in tandem as a result of comparable socio-evolutionary processes made widespread by extensive long-distance contacts with the tropical lowlands, wherever that may have been. At the time and still today, there was and is not enough solid, well-dated archaeological evidence from the eastern Andean montaña and the western Amazon basin to resolve these debates.

Moreover, these debates have generally presented a simplistic version of interaction between the highland Andes and the eastern lowlands (see Koschmieder 2012; Narváez Vargas 2013; Ruiz Barcellos 2011). This has begun to change over the past two decades, however, with connections between each region being treated more explicitly (Barbieri et al. 2014). As a result, the differences between them have been reified, magnified and redefined, especially with regard to models of long-distance exchange and interregional connections in the Amazonian lowlands (for example, Heckenberger 2008; Hornborg and Hill 2011). Two exchange models are now postulated to explain interregional linkages: lowland groups specialized in riverine trade, and others engaged in exchange partnerships between individual and lineage-based groups along interfluves of the eastern montaña (A.-C. Taylor 1999, 199). As a result of these and other models (Heckenberger 2011; Hornborg 2005; McEwan et al. 2001; Neves 2001; Pärssinen and Korpisaari 2003; Walker 2012), archaeologists are reconsidering the role of specific areas and sub-areas within broader and different spheres of interaction, and especially riverine models of movement and exchange, which to date have received little attention from archaeologists as strategies of cultural transmission outside navigable valleys. Where attention has been given to specific areas and to their possible ties to adjacent regions, there have been some new, often conflicting, thoughts on the nature and origin of local cultures (for example, Chapters 2.5 and 3.1). For instance, one such area is Chachapoyas, located on the mountainous slopes or montaña of north-eastern Peru, where the archaeologists view the pre-Hispanic polity either as 'Andean' (for example, Narváez Vargas 2013), 'Amazonian' (for example, Koschmieder 2012), or an autochthonous development (for example, Church 1996).

As more archaeological research is carried out in more regions from the montaña to the littoral and western coastal strip, the data will probably show that technological and symbolic transfers resulted from many different waves of innovations flowing from east to west, west to east, north to south and south to north. These data will also probably reveal many different combinations of artefacts and
technologies, developing through interaction with different types of societies in multiple directions and through local or self-generated reconstruction and accommodation as they interacted with more widely spread societies in the past, changing themselves according to their own local structures.

In summary, although archaeologists generally have viewed all coastal, highland and montaña culture areas as essentially Andean, all three regions over time were home to many separate areal and sub-areal cultures, none especially widespread or dominant over the others until perhaps late Formative times (1000–500 BC), implying a prehistory markedly different from each other but also blended or hybridized in some ways, especially in terms of certain architectural and iconographic features (cf. Chapters 2.4 and 3.1). That is, if we could access the historical truth, it likely would show that the dissected environment of the Central Andes and peripheral areas contained many different cultures and societies that comprised shifting social, residential, ethnic and other groups through space and time, mixed with different groups, and the pattern more than not with never a single group occupying a territory for a prolonged period of time. The story is probably one of demographic movement and technological and symbolic transfers always complicating matters. This does not necessarily imply the absence of stable cultures and linguistic territories, but simply different culture areas.

**The gateway corridor: Eastern Andean montaña and western Amazon**

Many of the connecting areas of the eastern Andean montaña and tropical lowlands remain primarily uninvestigated and yet provide significant opportunities for exploring the development and nature of interaction between them and overlapping cultural and political influences. Throughout the Preceramic and early Formative periods, the lowland societies bordering the eastern montaña must have played a critical role in the movement of goods, people and ideas between the more distant higher Central Andes and the western Amazon basin (Church 1994, 1996; Shady 1974; Shady and Rosas 1979), whether that movement went east or west or likely both ways. This movement is perhaps best attested by the presence of various food crops in the highlands and on the coast that probably had their origin in Neotropical lowland forests and savannahs (Piperno and Pearsall 1998). There is also the issue of iconographic influence from one zone to another. As mentioned above, many Andeanists and Amazonianists once claimed that all carnivorous elements (that is, felines, snakes, caimans, harpy eagle) in early Andean iconography were derived from the eastern montaña or Amazonian lowlands. But some could also have been derived from the tropical areas on the western slopes of the Andes from Colombia, Ecuador and northern Peru, where tropical forests and similar plants and animals once existed or exist today (Piperno and Pearsall 1998). North to south movement along the Pacific littoral probably would have facilitated such contacts more rapidly and directly.
Although the early archaeological record from the eastern montaña and the western fringe of the Amazon basin is generally little known, some insight into the types of different relationships that perhaps once existed between them in earlier times can be gained by brief consideration of the later and better known archaeological and archival records. The heartland of interaction between the east and west was the eastern slopes of the Andes, which to date has received little archaeological attention except in areas such as Chachapoyas in north-eastern Peru and more recently the eastern slopes of Ecuador. (Moreover, most of the archaeology in Chachapoyas has concentrated on elaborate architecture and tombs of the late pre-Inca and Inca periods, and not the earlier periods.) Unlike other culture areas, Chachapoyas is located in the narrow and low Andean corridor between the Amazon basin and the coast. It is thus in some ways exceptional, and not truly representative of other interregional interaction areas in the Andes, such as the wider mountainous areas of central Peru, Bolivia and north Chile.

We know that in late pre-Hispanic and early colonial times, a wide range of goods were exchanged between the western Amazon basin and the Andes via the Chachapoyas area, as seen in early documents, ethnographies and archaeological studies (Espinoza Soriano 1967; Garcilaso de la Vega 1609/1985; Guamán Poma de Ayala 1615/1987; Salomon 1986; Schjellerup 1997, 2003). For example, local goods exchanged from Chachapoyas were human resources, gold, coca, cotton and ceramics (Church 1996; Church and Von Hagen 2008; Schjellerup 1997). Exchanged goods from the highlands included ceramics, metal figurines, metal and stone tools, and beads (Church 1996; Church and Von Hagen 2008; Hastings 1987; Salomon 1986). Commodities from the coast included Spondylus shells (Church 1996; Guengerich 2012). Amazonian items included ceramics, cinna- mon, coca, slaves, clothing, medicinal plants, herbs, honey, beeswax, cacao, wild vanilla, cotton, vegetal dyes, animals, animal pelts, hardwood chonta palm and feathers (Church 1996; Church and Von Hagen 2008; Salomon 1986). Evidence of exchange goods from the Pacific coast and Andean highlands passing through the Chachapoyas area is also reported in ceramics, faunal remains, shells, lithics and iconography (Church 1996; Church and Von Hagen 2008; Ruiz Estrada 2009; Schjellerup 1997, 2003). We also know that some Amazonian trade goods reached coastal Peru, as evidenced by the presence of tropical food crops, feathers, medicinal plants and other items at Formative and later sites. In late pre-Hispanic and early Colonial times, mitmaq groups from the north coast of Peru were documented in the Cajamarca and Utcubamba areas of the north central and eastern montaña of Peru, respectively (cf. Reichlen and Reichlen 1949, 1950; Netherly 1977, 89–100).

Exchange routes and strategies that people in Chachapoyas may have used in mediating exchange between the Andes and Amazonia remain mostly unknown. The early historic accounts of interregional trade describe periodic communal gatherings for exchange between lowland and highland groups at locations along the lower Andean and montaña interface. The early Spanish referred to these
gatherings as marketplaces, though they were not formalized to the same extent as those in Mesoamerica (Lyon 1981; Oberem 1974, 1980; Salomon 1986; Schjellerup 2003; A.-C. Taylor 1999). Strategies of interregional exchange that did not involve communal gatherings were also possible, including long-distance traders such as mindalaes and barter fairs, such as those described in Ecuador (Salomon 1987), or people traveling to lowland religious specialists for curing and thus trading while there (A.-C. Taylor 1999, 198).

The motivations that drove South American peoples to seek and to use goods and knowledge from outside their own area are not known. Clearly there can be no definite answer to such a question and no clear understanding of the diachronic relationships between the east and the west, given variations in motivation from region to region and between social groups within any society and culture over time. More inclusive models of culture contact and interregional interaction should view earlier cultural change as developing through both direct and indirect interactions that pertained to varying levels of social complexity. The dynamics of social complexity in overlapping zones of interaction such as Chachapoyas are considered here as resulting from cultural changes that are perhaps best understood as processes that involved a combination of local developments and extra-local traditions adopted and adapted through continuous culture contact. The development of later centralized authorities in such systems, such as the strong Inca presence in Chachapoyas, has been addressed most commonly with migration, diffusion, acculturation and world-systems approaches to interregional interaction and state expansion, that highlight asymmetrical power relations and core-periphery relationships. Archaeology now needs to clarify how local production was organized in places like Chachapoyas and to determine which commodities groups exchanged in order to reconstruct power relationships in the political economy of interaction.

Despite the paucity of data, we also can determine from places like Chachapoyas that interregional interaction incorporated a variety of different but often overlapping forms such as exchange, emulation, colonization and military conquest. Furthermore, if any region perhaps comes close to a tri-tradition, it may be areas of the Andes such as Chachapoyas where the mountain ranges are narrow and where there are mixtures of highland, lowland and coastal traits. Accordingly, the montaña and Andean interface or corridor in this area was well suited to the exploration of cultural transformations, particularly those relating to the rise of centralized political authorities and their contemporary interactions with states in neighbouring cultural spheres in the central and eastern Andean highlands.

Lastly, given the presence of a few Chimu and perhaps other coastal traits, such as ceramic forms and motif styles, in Chachapoyas, this area is one of the few known where the montaña and the highlands form a stronger cultural bond with the coast, similar to those cases documented for certain coastal and highland areas (Reichlen and Reichlen 1949, 1950). Surely, there are other areas of the eastern Andes, perhaps from north-west Argentina and transects across Ecuador and northern Peru, that reveal similar patterns.
Discussion

In the opening paragraphs, we stated our two goals here: (1) to consider alternative possibilities of combined interregional exchange across and beyond the Andes to the east and the west, specifically in this case highland and eastern montaña and western Amazonian influence on the coast, and (2) the need for greater recognition of local diversity independent of wider interregional influences from the major cultural areas and later more complex societies. The periods and places in the Andes most intensively studied by archaeologists are Formative and later state societies (the co-tradition model). Whether it be Huari, Tiwanaku, Chimú, Inca or modern cultures and globalization, we are dealing with the complex interplay between local context and global content, rather than arguing for the primacy of one over the other. However, most archaeologists still treat the Andean past as the inevitable appropriation of local populations by more complex and expansive societies, but this was not always the case. In commenting briefly on these and other issues here, we have created many more questions than we have answered.

Current thinking on coastal, highland and Amazonian relations should consider more the premise that people were in contact with other regional populations at the outset of human dispersion during the late Pleistocene and early Holocene period. Convention once dictated that later social complexities in the montaña and western Amazon basin, beyond small groups of hunters and gatherers, took hold only when more advanced agriculturalists arrived from the Andes with more ideologically and perhaps agriculturally advanced lowland groups moving into the highlands. Some of the more recent data obtained from the eastern montaña have changed this thinking and now present a cultural landscape with more complex societies based on the management of forest and riverine resources (Hornborg and Eriksen 2011; Kracke 1993; Schaan 2012). As more research is carried out in the montaña and western Amazon basin these and other findings will surely change our thinking even more.

In considering the likelihood of influences between Amazonia and the coast, several pitfalls should be avoided. The first is the expectation that contacts or influences will be uniform through time and space – always moving from east to west, for example. If, as seems clear, during the late Pleistocene and early Holocene there were repeated long-distance contacts between the two regions, involving down-the-line exchange or movement of particular individuals over long distances (Lathrap 1973), the nature of influences on the coastal societies and cultures certainly changed over time. The reason for these changes may lie in a shift from the identification of early cultivars and the technology of production, which is feasible archaeologically, to an ontology perhaps initially infused with Amazonian religious concepts, which may be difficult to verify archaeologically. That is, there seems to have been a strong influence of religious imagery and art styles infused with Amazonian concepts represented by plants and animals of the tropical forest,
stronger in some places and weaker and more diffuse in others (Lathrap 1974; Morales 1979).

However, through time this ontology may have become more archaeologically invisible as it was expressed in folk practice. A clue to the nature of a possible shift is found in Dillehay’s analysis of the ontology of the populations at Huaca Prieta on the north coast of Peru over four millennia (Dillehay 2017). It is probable that the mechanism of diffusion lay with the travels of shamans or healing specialists for training and vision quests. Ethnographic information obtained by Dillehay (2017) in the Chicama Valley, where the Huaca Prieta mound is located, reveals that curandero or shamanic folk practices associated with tropical areas farther north in Chiclayo and Piura still continue today. These folk level religious specialists travel to Salas in Incahuasi in the highlands of Lambayeque, northern Peru, where they work with specialists who surely are in contact with others in Amazonia. More concretely, as noted earlier, the Mapuche shamans of southern Chile once undertook long journeys over the Andes and north along the eastern front of the cordillera in Argentina to reach the valleys of southernmost Amazonia where they engaged in training and vision quests (Dillehay et al. 2007). Thus we see that at the level of contemporary folk practice the influence of Amazonia continues.

Furthermore, the interactions between different Andean and Amazonian societies did not always consist of common Andean or Amazonian content, a lexicon of goods or knowledge. Instead, it likely was a common set of broader, even non-Andean and non-Amazonian or hybrid formats and structures that mediated between more or less different degrees of ‘being Andean’ or ‘being Amazonian’ (for example, marginal lowland cultures along the eastern flanks of the Andes; northern and southern Andes as well). That is, this interaction was something more than a flow of goods and ideas, or of the meanings attached to them, or even the political, economic and social channels along which those goods, ideas and meanings flowed. Furthermore, the connections between interacting groups were probably created by widespread forms of Andean, Amazonian and non-Andean and non-Amazonian contexts, all of which may have influenced decisions over what to produce and to consume. These contexts probably followed both Andean and Amazonian geographic channels that placed diversity in a recognizable frame, so to speak, and scaled it along a limited number of possible outcomes and dimensions, whether those were conquests, commensal feasts, physical conflicts, alliances, etc., all facing dissimilarities, similarities, and submerging others. As yet, these outcomes and dimensions have not been fully identified and incorporated into Andean and Amazonian archaeological studies.

In any of the regional archaeologies of overlapping interaction spheres in the Central Andes, from the littoral to the montaña and western Amazon basin, the material correlates of some social, economic, political, or ritual activities show evidence of external influence, while those of other activities may not, even though change may still signify evolving local conditions during certain cultural periods. Furthermore, it is to be expected that in such contexts the intermixing of the
external with the local and traditional may result in an adaptation of both that produced something entirely new and different, especially along the interfacing corridors between the highlands and the montañá.

In the future, in order to better understand the processes of culture contact and transmission between the coastal and highland Andes and the montañá and western Amazonian lowlands we need to think more in terms of demographic processes rather than the migration of one or a few groups settling into a new area or just the diffusion of ideas across multiple groups. The time and space distances across the continent are too great to consider single populations, cultures and unidirectional exchanges. We should also consider several interrelated processes to attempt to explain east and west connections and cultural transmissions: diaspora, socialization, hybridization, conversion, and so forth. Furthermore, the local network of sites and the connective characteristics of both the eastern and western river valleys are well suited to the application of network analysis in archaeology. In investigating both local and interregional interactions, current thinking about network analysis would perhaps provide a model for exploring nodal relationships between varying types of social groups based on large, multicomponent datasets, to reveal very subtle or even tangential associations.

To conclude, the flow of knowledge between eastern, central and western Andean societies had to have gone in multiple directions. The diffusion of cultural constructs from all sides must have served to provoke advances or delays in cultural transmission and change or have made manifest lacunae in any one cultural domain. The confrontation with something unknown – be this of a social, ritual, technological, political, economic or aesthetic kind – may or may not have struck a cultural resonance with any one group at any one time. If something that presented itself found a resonance among a sufficient number of people in a group, such as a new ideology and its symbols, or exotic cultigens, then it may have been borrowed, transformed to fit local perceptions (recontextualized) and become part of a local discourse; in short, conventionalized. Thus, exotic artefacts, words, practices, crops or ideas would have been absorbed selectively and for different reasons, making for continuous inter-societal flows of knowledge that may not always be archaeologically visible. Lacunae, in this sense, are probably present in all systems of eastern and western cultures of the Central Andes. Social anthropologists have repeatedly warned against drawing conclusions from the comparison of cultures, preferring to interpret the context in which change actually occurs. Unfortunately, we do not yet archaeologically know very much about the specific contexts within which socio-cultural changes took place between eastern and western societies in South America, or what they imply in regard to cultural transmissions and legacies.