

Spell of the Urubamba: Anthropogeographical Essays on an Andean Valley in Space and Time

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Spell of the Urubamba: Anthropogeographical Essays on an Andean Valley in Space and Time

By Daniel W. Gade. Cham,
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A fascinating witness of Incan culture in the Peruvian Andes, the Historic Sanctuary of Machu Picchu, situated in the Urubamba Valley, is not only one of South America's most visited tourist destinations, but also one of only two mixed—natural and cultural—UNESCO World Heritage Sites on the subcontinent (the other being the Río Abiseo National Park in northern Peru). Yet if the Santuario Histórico de Machu Picchu, an IUCN Category III protected area, is to be understood, the relation of nature and culture in this area created by the presence of people has to be seen in a broader geographical context.

This is the last *œuvre* of cultural-historical geographer Daniel W. Gade (1936–2015), the author of *Plants, Man and the Land in the Vilcanota Valley of Peru* (Gade 1975) and *Nature and Culture in the Andes* (Gade 1999). This monograph on the Urubamba Valley—consisting of 354 pages, with several instructive maps and photographs—clearly contributes to a better understanding of the nature/culture *gestalt* in the southern Peruvian Andes. It consists of 10 rather independent essays mostly situated at the interface of geography and anthropology (thus “anthropogeographical”). Each has an abstract and a list of references, plus a useful glossary and a short list of variations of proper names.

In “The Urubamba in Panoptic Perspective” (Chapter 1), Gade provides an overview of the Urubamba River and its valley's

landforms, climate, vegetation, and human settlement. Drawing on his own experiences in the valley since 1963, he also considers changes, for “only years after a field experience does the realization sink in that the research one has conducted captures a particular time” (p 48). The concluding very interesting reflections on his personal fieldwork in the area over 50 years are followed by Chapter 2, “Urubamba Travelers as Generators of Knowledge.” Similar to his 2011 monograph (Gade 2011), this chapter presents a series of short biographies of curiosity-driven individuals (mainly from the 19th century) traveling the Urubamba Valley, including the Vienna-born explorer Charles Wiener, Italian *Naturforscher* Antonio Raimondi, and American geographer Isaiah Bowman. Of particular interest are the short biographies of Peruvians such as the explorer José Benigno Samanez y Ocampo and the botanist César Vargas Calderón. In Chapter 3, “Urubamba Verticality: Reflections on Crops and Diseases,” Gade focuses, from a cultural ecology perspective, on the hypsometric variations of geographic forms, a topic central to scholars such as Alexander von Humboldt, Carl Troll, Olivier Dollfus, John Murra, or Javier Pulgar Vidal. He then takes the Urubamba Valley as an example and reflects on crop boundaries, diseases, and land use differences/ecological exchange between the valley's upper and lower parts. Chapter 3 also includes an interesting section on verticality and exemplary photographs. Chapter 4, “The Sacred Valley as a Zone of Productivity, Privilege and Power,” is a regional geographic essay focusing on agricultural land use and settlement in the middle part of the Urubamba Valley. More recent socioeconomic changes, often driven by tourism development, are mentioned and will make the self-reflective traveler think about his or her own actions.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on plant use and human–animal relations,

using the examples of the legume vilca (*Anadenanthera colubrina*) and the spectacled bear (*Tremarctos ornatus*), and also raise issues of conservation. In Chapter 7, “Urubamba Ramble: Hiram Bingham (1875–1956) and His Artful Encounter with Machu Picchu,” the famous “lost city” of the Inca and its “discovery” by Bingham are at the center of interest. Parts of this essay also address the social intercourse between scholars and the human need for admiration or *Geltung* existent in some cases—a timely topic. Gade's fieldwork in the cordillera of Vilcabamba is at the center of Chapter 8, “Vilcabamba: Fabled Redoubt of the Urubamba Region.” This is a reflection on his own experiences (partly presented in the form of a log), interesting to read, but perhaps the least relevant to mountain researchers or managers. Chapter 9, “Highland and Lowland Peoples in Contact in the Tropical Urubamba,” concentrates on interactions between inhabitants from the upper and lower parts of the Urubamba Valley, giving special attention to the Matsigenka and Piros people. What perceptions did the Incas have of the lowlands? How did contacts between “lowlanders” and “highlanders” evolve over time? Which economic and demographic changes were induced, particularly in the 20th century? This chapter is highly recommended to scholars and practitioners in the field of mountain research, for it exemplifies how highland–lowland interactions, different forms of worldviews, and exogenous ideas of land use alter humans and their environment. In “Conclusion: The Spell is Cast” (Chapter 10), Gade summarizes the aim of this book to combine “survey information, personal experiences, landscape descriptions, commentaries on trends, analyses of past events, and detailed studies of specific elements to convey a diachronic semi-personalized view of a compelling region” (p 333): an objective he definitely reached.

This fascinating collection of essays—written from a Sauerian cultural-historical geography perspective—reflects the deep interest in Andeanist geography pursued by the author over 50 years of scholarly life. Daniel W. Gade submitted this manuscript shortly before he passed away in June 2015. *Spell of the Urubamba* is highly recommended to all those interested in Central Andean nature and culture. I am intrigued by the specific way Gade links the material and the nonmaterial, always connecting past and present, without getting lost in

theoretical or conceptual details. Unfortunately, the price is too high for most potential readers. Readers with a particular interest in the development of mountain areas may prefer to download single chapters of the e-book version (DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-20849-7). A future Spanish-language softcover version of the book—at an affordable price—would be desirable.

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