

Review / Reseña

Bennison, Sarah. *The Entablo Manuscript: Water Rituals and Khipu Boards of San Pedro de Casta, Peru*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2023. 296 pp.

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Sarah Bennison's work illuminates the profound significance of a single text that encapsulates a series of traditions, responsibilities, and obligations related to the annual October canal cleaning ritual, known as the *champería* or *walla-walla* (3), in Casta, Peru. Water customs, deeply rooted in the Peruvian highlands, play a pivotal role in sustaining the water supply and community solidarity. Yet these offerings and ceremonies are not a modern phenomenon. They predated the Incan expansion, underscoring their enduring importance.

Ritualized ceremonies honor water *huacas* (spirits) and are accompanied by gifts, prayers, and music seeking blessings for bountiful harvests, sufficient precipitation, and overall prosperity. Pragmatically, these episodes bring together groups of people to tackle large tasks such as cleaning and repairing irrigation lines, thereby ensuring the preservation of the aquatic infrastructure. Socially, they ensure a degree of community cohesion. All residents play a role, but the chief functionary role (*cargo*) passes to a new individual each year, tasking them with securing an abundance of coca leaf, food, alcohol, and other items needed to execute a successful ritual. Failed rituals belie intracommunity conflict and represent "an existential threat to the community as a legitimate productive unit" (7). Subpar ceremonies indicate

community elders neglected ritual law and compliance with ritual functions and rites. The ramifications transcend social strife and foreshadow community crises.

For this reason, documenting the roles, responsibilities, and hierarchy associated with water rituals can safeguard their satisfactory execution. Yet surprisingly, few known documents preserve these traditions. The scarcity of such texts makes Bennison's reproduction of the text and her critical analysis even more valuable. The *Entablo* is one of the only known surviving sources of its kind. When written down in 1921, it aimed to delineate the process of community-driven canal cleaning. Such documentation ensures that expectations are transparent. For example, Bennison notes that ritual payments like coca leaf are publicly weighed, with punishments for those who skirt their obligations (12-13). Moreover, pre-determined procedures for justice mandate that the punishments and arbitrations are conducted publicly in front of sacred sites and community elders, ensuring public and cosmic accountability.

According to Bennison, a previous study of the *Entablo* presented the document as a sacred text, disassociated from village politics. In contrast, Bennison takes a substantial chapter to examine the context in which the *Entablo* was written and what it tells us about highland culture and politics in the 1920s. The book contains two additional chapters. Chapter 2 provides an English translation of the manuscript. Chapter 3 offers a diplomatic transcription of the original text. In addition to offering the first published transcription of the *Entablo de San Pedro de Casta*, Bennison reveals the dynamic nature of the text, which was produced through collective agreement, memory, and narrative.

The *Entablo* documents the coexistence of oral, customary, and state-sanctioned laws. But how and why did traditional Andean communities like Casta begin embracing external legal systems? The timing of *Entablo's* publication provides an answer, appearing one year after the Peruvian Constitution formally recognized Indigenous communities and laws. Bennison argues that the *Entablo* responded to this legal opening, taking advantage of an opportunity to document and obtain legal recognition for community autonomy. She writes, "The Entablo...represents an ideological response to the economic, political, and spiritual threat of modernity and development associated with increased state intervention in Indigenous community affairs and codes of justice, interpreted as an existential threat to community autonomy" (29). By appropriating a Spanish-language constitutional model, Casta's residents legitimized indigenous water laws (30).

The translated text in Chapter 2 is accessible and well-written. Bennison provides a generous number of footnotes that guide the reader through documental layers that its creators may have taken for granted. These include definitions for specific terms, explanations of protocols, comments about additions/changes to the text, changes in ink and legibility, and even insights into paleography norms. The study illuminates the complex relationship between Andean water management and culture. It will interest those studying water laws, canal systems, and the persisting legacies of reciprocal labor and ritual economies. It also appeals more broadly to Latin American scholars and those interested in the intersection between environment, religion, and politics.

Bennison reminds us that more accounts like Huarochirí and the *Entablos* existed. But just how many is an impossible question to answer. An anecdote from her 2022 fieldwork in Casta confirms this. It recalls the removal of several wooden *entablos* in the twentieth century. The witness remarks, “But wherever could they be now? Someone has taken them” (xv). The disappearance of the *Entablos* is a familiar problem. The loss of an immeasurable number of historical records from municipal, regional, and national archives and libraries in Peru is a deplorable and unbroken reality dating back to the early colonial period. The fragility of the documentary record reminds us how studies like this one curb the erasure of irreplaceable historical data.