

## Culture



# Payson D. SHEETS, *The Ceren Site: A Prehistoric Village Buried by Volcanic Ash in Central America*, Case Studies in Archaeology Series, Jeffrey Quilter, Series Editor, Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992; 150 pages

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développement, Identité ethnique et préservation culturelle, Culture et politique, Méthodologie de l'action culturelle, etc.), qui inclut les adresses de centres de recherche et d'institutions en relation avec le sujet. Le livre comprend en outre un index thématique. Des photos, poèmes et textes de chants rituels illustrent également plusieurs des rapports d'expérience.

Ce livre frappe par le type d'approche préconisé, par la créativité et les initiatives des individus, ou d'une communauté, pour faire face aux problèmes rencontrés. L'expression culturelle n'est plus dissociée du développement mais participe ou même est l'instigatrice de celui-ci, comme le montrent plusieurs rapports de projets. Le but des projets est de revaloriser, de motiver, de redonner un pouvoir de décision et une autonomie de pensée. L'identité culturelle révélée dans toutes sortes d'expressions culturelles (musique, danse, contes, artisanat) et le contrôle de son propre développement en recherche-action participante sont les clés de voûte de ce type de développement. On constate que les résultats dépendent de qui contrôle le développement, et du degré de motivation.

Ce livre incite à la réflexion sur notre propre culture, sur nos traditions culturelles et leurs implications dans les changements et adaptations qui modèlent toute culture. Il est porteur de beaucoup d'espoir et de combats de longue haleine qui forcent l'admiration. Comme le souligne Kleymeyer, il ne s'agit pas de romanciser l'aide au développement. Les chapitres décrivent les projets de leur initialisation à leur réalisation. L'analyse des causes et des effets, l'identification des problèmes et de leur résolution, les liens entre tradition culturelle et développement rendent ces rapports d'expériences très intéressants et riches d'enseignement. La diversité des sujets, présentés clairement en quelques pages, permet un tour d'horizon du développement alternatif qui incite à approfondir le sujet. La lecture de l'ouvrage est, de plus, facile et passionnante.

Payson D. SHEETS, *The Ceren Site: A Prehistoric Village Buried by Volcanic Ash in Central America*, Case Studies in Archaeology Series, Jeffrey Quilter, Series Editor, Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992; 150 pages.

By Jane H. Kelley

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The Ceren Site is a small, rural hamlet in the Zapotitan valley of El Salvador just five kilometers from the important site of San Andres which served as the political, economic, and religious centre of the valley. Ceren was buried under some five meters of volcanic ash from the Laguna Caldera eruption between A.D. 500 and 690. While delineating the actual year of the event is constrained by the limitations of the Carbon 14 dating technique, botanical evidence of seasonality indicates the event happened in the month of August. The rapid covering of the agricultural fields and buildings resulted in exceptional conditions of preservation heralded in the press as the Pompeii of the New World. Exploratory work in 1978 established the age and nature of the site; the next two seasons were spent in experimenting with geophysical techniques for locating buried structures. Civil unrest in the country delayed further field work until 1989.

The study is firmly focused on the household, "the coresidential task-oriented social and adaptive unit intermediate in organizational level between the individual and the neighborhood" (p. 22), as the unit of primary theoretical and analytical interest. Using the results of subsurface mapping, the project has identified at least four household units that have been investigated to varying degrees. Households consist of a variety of individual buildings, activity areas, and the surrounding gardens and fields which were occupied by the smallest social unit within the society. Because of the rapid swamping of the hamlet with ash, the buildings were "frozen in time" with what appears to be their complete inventory of household effects. The result is an incredibly rich picture of the way people actually lived. The number of pots of different categories and their distribution within the household unit, the number and placement of grinding implement positions for processing food products can be tallied. The localization of foodstuff storage, food preparation and consump-

tion can be identified. Finger swipes across the bottoms of food serving bowls are preserved. Patterns of storing goods on top of walls and in the roof can be seen. The rodents and insects that shared the harvested crops with the people are represented. This level of detailed knowledge about past living conditions is quite rare in the world. Interestingly, each of the households investigated to date has its own character, with bodegas or storage buildings, kitchens and living quarters probably being present in most household groupings, but other kinds of outbuildings, a "sauna" and a possible communal building appear to be unique among the groupings investigated to date.

When the ash fell, it sometimes created molds of the organic materials such as living plants that were themselves incinerated. The investigating group created a series of techniques to locate these molds or cavities in the ash, investigate them with a fiber optic technology, and then fill the cavities with dental plaster to produce casts – some of which were faithful to the original object at the cellular level. In the garden plots adjacent to the houses, the wide variety of plants identified from these casts show the diversity and richness of the gardens. In the fields are corn plants arrested at different stages of maturity, including one patch in which the stalks holding mature ears had been doubled over in a storage technique still used in the area. Although no human remains pertaining to the eruption were encountered in the household units, they found a hollow cavity (not yet fully investigated) in the tephra on a low hill near the river which is believed to represent the mold of a person caught in the eruption, perhaps as the people fled toward the river. The drama continues to build.

This book, intended for college student usage in much the same format as the old Holt, Rinehart and Winston Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology series, will first catch the imagination of students, and then present them with an exceptionally well balanced account of this unusual site, its place in a larger regional context, the theoretical framework guiding the research, the methods that have been developed to retrieve and interpret the archaeological and geological evidence, and an epilogue that offers a glimpse of what it is actually like to undertake archaeology in a politically challenged country such as El Salvador. The clear explication of the strategies employed and the choices made in exploring the site make excit-

ing reading. In an unusual linking of the past with the present in a comparative framework, Sheets comments that "the richness of life at Ceren fourteen centuries ago puts in stark contrast the desperation in the lives of many Salvadorans today" (p. 26). All of the Salvadoran workers associated with the project live in smaller spaces with fewer possessions than did the prehistoric inhabitants of this same corner of the planet.

This slim volume, which is more accessible in terms of distribution, cost, and writing style than the impressive number of other publications dedicated to the site and its environs, will of course be of interest to Mesoamerican and Central American archaeologists. Its real niche, however, will be for students in introductory anthropology and archaeology classes. They will love it, as will their instructors.

Suzanne CHAPPAZ-WIRTHNER, *Le Turc, le Fol et le Dragon. Figures du carnaval haut-valaisan*, Neuchatel: Éditions de l'Institut d'ethnologie et Paris: Éditions de la maison des sciences de l'homme, Recherches et travaux de l'Institut d'ethnologie 12, 1995, 440 pages, 140FF (broché).

Par Jocelyne Mathieu

Université Laval

L'étude très consistante de Suzanne Chappaz-Wirthner propose une nouvelle analyse du carnaval où elle fait progresser la compréhension de cette fête en conjuguant les approches contextuelle et symbolique, en croisant les dimensions historiques et sociologiques. Sept chapitres composent cet ouvrage, articulé selon la démarche scientifique. L'état de la question sur le carnaval précède la mise en place de l'objet d'étude et les méthodes utilisées par la chercheuse. Sont posés par la suite cinq regards différents sur la fête: dans son contexte, comme emblème, en images, dans sa fonction critique et son rapport cosmique.

Si le carnaval constitue le nœud de l'étude, il devient aussi prétexte à camper l'ethnologie, à expliquer conjointement l'évolution disciplinaire et les changements sociaux, particulièrement dans les deux premiers chapitres, mais aussi tout au long du texte. La construction de la notion de «peuple national» et de «tradition populaire» mise