

RESEÑAS / REVIEWS

NAYIBE GUTIÉRREZ MONTOYA, *Las ciudades olvidadas: Las sociedades originarias de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta Ocupación espacial y desarrollo arquitectónico. Siglos X al XVI*, Ediciones Doce Calles, Universidad Pablo de Olavide, Área de Historia de América, Instituto Colombiano de Arqueología e Historia, Universidad del Magdalena, Santa Marta, Madrid, 2022, 416 págs., ISBN: 978-84-9744-269-5.

The disciplinary barriers, due in part to overspecialization, tend to hinder a holistic approach, opposing prehistory to history, archaeology to documents, architecture to material culture, ethnology to geography, among others. National biases are also common in the humanities and social sciences, as those disciplines are well inserted in national scholarly traditions and historiographies. Nayibe Gutiérrez Montoya has a unique background to break those boundaries. Gutiérrez is Colombian, having studied architecture in Medellín (2002), continued her studies in Latin American history in Seville (2013), Spain, then she is now a lecturer there. Meanwhile, she also lectured in Libreville, Gabon, as well as carried-out fieldwork or studies in several countries, such as Peru, Mexico, Portugal, Chile, Cape Verde, Brazil. All of this contributed to her open-mindedness in producing an innovative book on the forgotten cities at the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, 10th to 16th c. The multidisciplinary approach is really impressive from the start, as she produces a first chapter on the environment, different ecosystems, from the Caribbean beaches to heights of seven thousand meters above sea level, only 60 kms from the coast. The second chapter discusses the ancient habitats, from the southern Caribbean coast to the highlands, migrations, influences, all of this overtime.

In the third chapter, the main analysis centers on high cultures, cities and complex societies. The material culture is sophisticated, there were developed successful food production strategies, mainly maize and manioc. The architecture is impressive, with resistant buildings, water control and drainage, terraces, roads, all of these in the difficult hilly areas. This impressive growth of much earlier settlement is dated to the 9th c. The name applied to these groups, Tairona, perhaps refers to "Males" or "sons of the Jaguar." Gold handcraft was well attested, using gold coming from afar, confirming the fact that there were long-distance trade contacts, stretching to Panama. These artefacts were worked there, including lithics, shells, necklaces, among others. The settlements are detailed

in the fourth chapter. There were large, mid and small centers, linked by paved roads, including peripheral quarters, all of these in an impressive relation with the natural environment. The name of the volume itself, forgotten cities, refers to Buritaca or the Ciudad Perdida (lost city). A key aspect is dealt with in the fifty chapter: roads, stairs and architecture. There is a complex system, including bridges, channeled rivers, wells, buildings, small and large houses, paved ways and roads, all of these now considered as heritage. Particular attention is paid to the study of intricate building foundations, in this challenging hilly environment. Experimental archaeology enables to propose how those buildings may have been, inspired in the analogy of vessel-shaped forms. Tombs, funerary practices, burials, cemeteries are in the lowlands, not in the highlands, implying people living in the lowlands, but going also to the highlands. The sixth chapter concludes the volume by discussing the so-called *encontronazo* (clash) between the indigenous and the invading Spanish. 1599 was a key moment, with massacres, chiefs were killed, there were transfers of population from the highlands to the lowlands, enabling an easier control of people, even though there was resistance. This strategy of resettling people from the mountains to the plains is well-attested in several times and spaces, not least in the Iberian Peninsula itself, when Augustus conquered the Cantabrian heights (29-19 BC). As a result, as elsewhere in Latin America, from the 19th century onwards those people do not recognize themselves as indigenous or descendant of the amazing Tairona. There has been a growing discussion of all those mixed issues in the last few decades and the volume attests to this, contributing to highlight heritage, indigenous agency, repatriation, resistance.

The reading of this most enticing volume leads me to elaborate on a couple of aspects, starting by transculturation. This concept, formulated originally by Cuban scholar Fernando Ortíz, tried to address the imperialist undertones of acculturation. Acculturation implies some kind of assimilation of an inferior to a superior culture, as implied in the Latin adverb *ad. Trans*, on the other hand, means going to and from, in a two-way street, with no superior or inferior, shaping a new mixed reality. Others would prefer ethnogenesis as an alternative concept, but they may be complementary. Transculturation was formulated to deal with the results of imperial interactions, like the *encontronazo* in the Americas, but it is most useful and adequate do deal with cultural contact in any time and place. There is no pure people or culture, they are all mixed and the result of a trans (going to and from at the same time) action (or transaction). This may be particularly relevant to understand the complex history of human settlement in Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, in prehistoric and historic periods. The main argument is that there is no pure (*rein*, in German, separate) stuff, be it people, culture, language, whatever. In the hundreds of years prior to the Spanish conquest, different peoples, cultures, languages and customs mixed in a wide variety of mixes from the coast to the highest lands in the Sierra. The contacts extended to the Caribbean and the islands, to the North, to Central America, to the West, to the South and to the West, including the lowlands of the rainforest. It is oftentimes difficult to grasp how a very specific (and huge) are in the Caribbean had such an impressive connected context, since the most ancient times. Transculturation is of course also

most useful to deal with the colonial and national periods. Most of the collapse of the indigenous population may be due to the contact with involuntary diseases brought by Old World people, European and African. In any case, the later clash, mostly from the 17th c. onwards, led to an apparent dim of indigenous conscience. Even if most of the population was and is of some kind of indigenous descent, the shame associated to native ancestry is easy to understand. As mentioned, this is not unique to Santa Marta, it is the case in all the similar colonial contexts, in particular in Latin America, but much beyond, worldwide.

A further aspect must be raised, inspired by this most inspiring volume, and this is repatriation. The heritage of this most elaborate prehistoric cultures is kept sometimes elsewhere. Even the most local heritage is undervalued. The very rich heritage in the mountains is as widely known and valued as it should be. They attest to the human excellence of those indigenous peoples, to their highly elaborate culture, in impressive interaction with the environment. When we as humans face as many challenges in relation to our relationship with the environment, these ancient peoples are witnesses of how to live together. The human character of natives may seem trivial, but it is not. This is why Nayibe Gutiérrez Montoya stresses the high culture of the indigenous peoples: they were as sophisticated as any other humans. This an anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist important message. Repatriation is part of this, as heritage is also affected by imperial and inner colonial forces. Imperial, for heritage has been put in centers such as Europe and the USA, but also inner colonial, as nation states have been keen to keep heritage as national treasures, far from local communities.

Nayibe Gutiérrez Montoya produces a volume full of inspiration. First, it produces a compilation of a variety of evidences, coming from different disciplines, and this is no mean feat in itself. This is a tribute to her, and an important suggestion to all young people: dare to go beyond barriers, disciplinary or otherwise. To build bridges, not walls, an important universal message (pace Pope Francis). Then, surmount present and past, or vice-versa. Present is coming from a conflicted past, but it may foster a different future, prone to cooperation, collaboration, living together, instead of destroying the other, the different. The author is proof that this is not only a wish. She comes from the Medellín, a damned part of the damned world, a woman (yes, a woman!), of mixed descent, now a lecturer in Spain, in Seville, the former colonial power, Spain, in the former main colonial city, Seville. This volume may inspire others to think anew old certainties, to question received wisdom and this is no mean feature. No better way to invite people to read it. It is hard not to be changed by it. And this is indeed most exceptional.

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