

REVIEW

Cultural Identity, Transition, and Interaction at Salango, Coastal Ecuador: A Study of Pottery from the Early Regional Developmental Funerary Precinct. Richard Lunniss. 2022. BAR International Series 3109. British Archaeological Reports, Oxford. xiii–148 pp. £48.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4073-5997-7.

The Sequence of Late Formative Structures at Salango, Coastal Ecuador: A Reconstruction and Interpretation. Richard Lunniss. 2023. BAR International Series 3117. British Archaeological Reports, Oxford. xiii–93 pp. £33.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4073-5995-3.

James A. Zeidler

Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO, USA

When compared to its Andean neighbors to the north and south, Colombia and Peru, the pace and breadth of archaeological research in Ecuador often seems to lag. This can certainly be said for the publication of major monographs on research findings from key archaeological sites. These two companion BAR volumes by Richard Lunniss help remedy that problem as both deal with Salango (OMJPLP-141B), one of the most important archaeological sites on the central coast of Ecuador from the Formative period to the Spanish conquest. Interestingly, they focus on different but contiguous chronological periods as well as different datasets. The first volume, published in 2022, treats pottery from the Early Regional Development funerary contexts dating from 100 BC to AD 300, while the second, appearing in 2023, provides a reconstruction and interpretation of the sequence of ceremonial structures in the preceding Late Formative period dating from 600 BC to 100 BC. Both volumes are detailed and thoughtful treatises on their respective contents and interpretive themes, and both are copiously illustrated with color and black-and-white photographs as well as line drawings.

The first volume is composed of five chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction presenting the aims and scope of the monograph followed by a review of previous archaeological research relevant to southern Manabí, specifically the Early Guangala and Bahía II cultures along with their associated absolute chronologies based on radiocarbon determinations. This is followed by a summary discussion on the biogeography on the central coast and a discussion of previous research at Salango, particularly in the Trench 3 area of 141B, which provided the Regional Development funerary contexts for the pottery study. Chapter 2 treats the pottery descriptively, beginning with a section on “The Sample and the Method of Analysis” followed by sections on each of four major vessel forms comprising serving bowls, kitchen bowls, serving jars, and kitchen jars, along with several outlier categories. The methodology follows a modal analysis approach, such as that described by Irving Rouse, Donald Lathrap, Peter Roe, and J. Scott Raymond, among others, that seeks to identify modal combinations of attributes to then develop relative frequencies of similar combinations. These include specific combinations of fabric/paste, vessel form, surface treatment, decorative technique(s), and decorative motifs. Sherd samples are derived from five separate archaeological contexts: stratigraphic layers, rubbish pits, grave goods, grave fills, and other negative features, all pertaining to the Early Regional Development period. Of special interest are the iridescent painting on serving bowls (which began in Chorrera/Engoroy times) and red finger-painting on kitchen jars, both of which dominate the assemblage and provide a wide variety of unique decorative motifs. Chapter 3, titled “Analysis of the Assemblage,” discusses

sample composition, vessel frequency, and distribution by context and building phase association followed by a summary of temporal trends in form, decoration, and surface finish. After a short section on unusual vessels and imports, the chapter ends with a lengthy section titled “Comparison, Correlation, and Chronology” in which the Salango assemblage is discussed with reference to the two overriding influences of the Early Guangala and Bahia II cultures and previous archaeological work on their respective ceramic assemblages. It concludes with a brief mention of the “double *compotera*” vessel form with a dragon motif depicted with iridescent paint on the interior surfaces as an emblematic vessel with origins in Chorerra/Bahia times. Chapter 4 provides a general discussion of the Salango site as “a focus for a complex set of political and social forces” located as it is in a transition zone between the Bahia II and Early Guangala cultures. He suggests that this would have created a competition between the two “in so far as eligibility of the dead for access to the funerary enclosure seems to have been controlled by one main group at the expense of the other” and that “the funerary nature of the site itself suggests that the purpose on this competition may have been to establish and validate claims, as aspects of ancestral rights to the site and the spiritual and material resources available through it” (p. 137). Finally, a short concluding chapter charts the way forward with a several lines of future enquiries. The volume will stand as a landmark compendium of ceramic description and analysis for the Early Regional Development period of the central Ecuadorian coast.

The second volume comprises six chapters. Chapter 1 provides background on the aim and scope of the study, previous research on the Late Formative period of coastal Ecuador, and more detailed archaeological background on the Salango site and the two excavation areas of interest, T3 and T4, representing separate campaigns of stratigraphic excavation (1983–1986 and 1988–1989, respectively) that together exposed the full sequence of ceremonial structures in eight construction episodes. Chapter 2 then provides a short description on excavation methodology and includes a useful Harris Matrix (Figure 2.1) that correlates the T3 and T4 contexts and visually explains the eight construction episodes and their seven associated ceremonial structures erected on larger yellow-clay platforms. In Chapter 3, these construction episodes and their corresponding structures and features, associated human and animal (canine and avian) burials, and ritually deposited artifacts are all described in meticulous detail with the aid of line drawings and photographs. Chapter 4 provides an interpretive synthesis of the “complete configurations” for each of these architectural and artifactual episodes over the 500-year time span (600–100 BC), again with maximal use of line drawings for each structural configuration supplemented by corresponding excavation photographs. Chapter 5 delves deeper into the meaning of these ritual structures. It considers the changing use of internal space and the placement and use of hearths over time, the significance of their spatial orientation with stepped entryways facing northeasterly alignments, and the meaning of ritually deposited human and animal burials. It also addresses a plethora of ritually deposited artifacts such as stone and ceramic figurines and shell ornaments made of thorny oyster (*Spondylus* spp.) and other marine shell, stone disks, and beads. These include a small sample of ceramic lime containers (*Ilipteros*) that imply ritual ingestion of coca (*Erythroxylon* sp.).

This mass of architectural and artifactual data, when sorted stratigraphically and contextually, allows Lunniss to make several convincing claims regarding their probable meaning. During Episode 2, the ritual structure is seen as,

a model of the cosmos and a place that could be identified as the cosmos itself . . . , [while] the design of later structures [Episodes 3–8], with their use of different media for the differentiation of space, put increasing emphasis on the demarcation of the sacred centre.

According to Lunniss,

sacred objects and substances contributed extra *cosmic power* to the overall building design. With each [succeeding] episode, the new structure was validated by the incorporation of and foundation upon what had preceded it. And while the human dead endowed the site with *proximate ancestral power*, the incorporation of shell and stone figurines [in ritual deposits] saw the addition

also of *original ancestral power*. Eventually, Salango was explicitly configured as an origin site and was linked to coastal communities from the Santa Elena Peninsula in the south to Manta in the north [p. 77; emphasis added].

The volume concludes with Chapter 6, which reiterates both the uniqueness and significance of this Late Formative manifestation of ritual practice in Chorrera/Engoroy culture, noting that it permits “discussion of ritual activity and artefacts for this period in terms both of architectural context and historical trajectory” (p. 89).

The Late Formative period was a pivotal time for cultural development on the Ecuadorian coast, both in terms of materiality (especially innovations in ceramic manufacture and use) and in the formalization of ritual practice in platform mounds and specialized religious structures. The detailed architectural data and associated features and artifacts from the Salango site are perhaps the best example of these developments. More importantly, these findings also imply the presence of dedicated ritual specialists, perhaps signaling a shift from shamanism and small-scale ritual to institutionalized priest-hoods engaged in routinized public ritual at fixed sacred localities. Although well beyond the scope of this masterful 2023 monograph, the Salango evidence invites a close comparison with contemporaneous developments in Peru, most especially with respect to a possible Chavin-Cupisnique connection in Chorrera/Engoroy ceramic manufacture and design as originally postulated by Donald Lathrap in *Ancient Ecuador: Culture, Clay, and Creativity, 3000–300 B.C.* (Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, 1975). It has been more recently explored by Yumi Park Huntington in her 2018 chapter “Emblems of Cultural Identity in Early Andean Art: Engraved Head Motifs on Cupisnique Ceramics” (in *Ceramics of Ancient America: Multidisciplinary Approaches*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville). This comparison also dovetails nicely with Hugo Ikehara-Tsukayama’s 2023 study of ritual practices and sacred spaces in the Chavin-Cupisnique sphere (in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford). Seen within this larger Andean context, the Late Formative Salango sequence of religious architecture, ritual practices, sacred artifacts (especially *Spondylus* shell figurines), and intentional human and animal burials at long last provides well-documented physical evidence, albeit more modest in scale and complexity, allowing detailed comparisons to be made with its Peruvian counterparts. This should also provide new insights into the nature of this interregional interaction and material exchange.