

*Sobre Campos De Batalla:
Arqueología de Conflictos
Bélicos en América Latina*

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Aspha, Ciudad Autónoma de
Bueno Aires, Argentina, 2014. 248
pp. \$23.50 paper.

This book offers a timely and needed discussion on the developing interest of conflict archaeology and the historical importance of warfare recognition in archaeological records in Latin America. Carlos Landa and Odlanyer Hernández de Lara have assembled a collection of articles on the subject of conflict archaeology covering the areas of Latin America, Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, and Uruguay. The articles provide an update on the relevant work on the subject taking place in the region. They also provide a historical assessment of the present state of this field of research and address what conflict archaeology could offer as it develops.

The prologue of the book, written by Tony Pollard, director of the Centre for Battlefield Archaeology and cofounder and editor of the *Journal of Conflict Archaeology*, describes the growing worldwide interest in the subject of conflict archaeology and the significance of the articles presented in this book. Pollard points out that this book is the first dedicated exclusively to the subject, and its relevance is not only geographical, as it encompasses a large area void of related studies, but also provides a wide-ranging

overview of different research methodologies and site types.

In his presentation of the book, Mariano Ramos highlights issues associated with social research in Latin America, its endeavors and data sources, and the difference between conflict and violence as labels used in social research. He also emphasizes the influence on the historical record of what he calls taboo themes, which are topics or arguments that contradict or alter the sociopolitically sanctioned “official history,” and he calls for a more holistic approach to counteract this bias.

In the introduction, Landa and Hernández de Lara briefly define archaeology of conflict, archaeology of violence, and archaeology of war as the three major focus areas of the research. They rationalize that these categorizations are somewhat of a foreign construct, with methodologies developed by North American and European researchers and applied locally without major revisions or modifications to account for local context.

The first chapter, written by Angélica María Medrano Enríquez, provides a short historiography of battlefield archaeology, indicating the absence of a body of work on the subject in Mexico. Using two samples of known conflicts, one from the American invasion in 1846–1848 and another from the Guerra del Mixtón in 1541–1542, the author explains that the original efforts to locate and mark the battle site have not been followed up with systematic archaeological research. The study of material remains dating back to the colonial and republican

periods is still eclipsed by the archaeology of pre-Hispanic cultures sponsored by the state.

The second chapter of the book combines over 14 years of research associated with two battlefields along the Parana River. A multidisciplinary group led by Mariano Ramos recapitulates the research methodologies, strategies, and field techniques applied during many years of investigation.

Chapters 3 and 4 are also collaboration studies of two battles in Argentina, the second Battle of Cepeda in 1859 and the Battle of El Verde in 1874. The archaeological investigation, conducted by Juan B. Leoni, Lucas H. Martinez, María A. Porfidia, and Mauro Ganem, on the second battle of the Cepeda site is reported, and the methodology that the researchers use attempts to correlate the sparse artifact assemblage with the battle accounts. Based on this approach, the researchers propose and discuss four possible interpretations of the events. The following chapter is a collaboration of 12 authors led by Landa, a coeditor of this book. A methodical integration of field reports, geographic information systems data, archaeometallurgical reports, and historical records is undertaken, endeavoring to develop a conceivable historical context for the event and the consolidation of five years of fieldwork.

Chapters 5 and 6 shift the location of the research to Cuba. First, Roberto Álvarez Pereira sets out to answer questions about historical context preceding the building of the military installations and the effect of said fortification lines on the development of

interior political boundaries by the Spanish Colonial administration. Next, Hernández de Lara, coeditor of this volume, and four contributors present a summary of the surface and underwater excavation results since the 1970s, gray literature, eye witness accounts, and abundant archival records associated with the Spanish American war period. The bombardment of the San Severino Castle was the first act of conflict and a significant event that has been overlooked by earlier archaeological research.

In the concluding chapter, Jaime Mujica Sallés and Lúcio Menezes Ferreira address the issue of artifact conservation. This chapter outlines the importance of artifact preservation during the planning, recovery, and curation of material from a battlefield site. The authors call special attention to the need to evaluate soil characteristics to determine the soil condition, the effects of soil chemistry on artifacts, agricultural practice, and the use of agrochemicals; all of these have a significant impact on the survivability of vulnerable battlefield assemblages.

A common theme in the book is the longing for greater efforts to be made in the preservation of archaeological resources associated with battlefield and conflict sites in Latin America. Moreover, this singular book is a groundbreaking contribution to an otherwise scarcely published subject in Latin American archaeology.

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