problem of levels of culture and agency, of the articulations of structure and process, and of the unfolding of complexities that far exceed any single substantive or analytic consideration. Nothing makes that clearer than this most erudite and clever thesis.

Sahlins has constructed this model of historical sensibilities over a lifetime of research on Pacific cultures, including kinship, politics, and the processes and concepts that connect people to other people and their strategic resources everywhere, especially in the tribal world – exactly the kind of information omitted by Thucydides in his account. In that sense, it is Sahlins’s own particular history that makes his latest tome so important. We have come to think differently about the Pacific and its history, not to mention history itself, as a result of his influence. More in the realm of the global academy than the global economy, Sahlins is none the less a Great Man of History in his own right, and the question by his own measure must now become: could (or would) we in the social sciences and the humanities (and the historiography that tags up in both directions) have reached the same overarching contributions to history and anthropology without him? I think not. This is a personal achievement, not lacking in cultural structure or process, but personal in its genius and mastery of cross-cultural and historical detail. So perhaps we should construct his monument now. Or better, since there will be more from Sahlins down the line, just buy the book and keep the structure of this conjuncture and its associated conversation going. Every future can use a large-minded past and a large-minded practitioner or two. This is a book to build on.

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This book is an amplification of Thornton’s 2001 presidential address to the Population Association of America (*Demography* 38, 449–65). It is the product of great scholarship with around one thousand bibliographic listings and perhaps five thousand text references, mostly at the foot of pages. The book has two major themes. The first is that of ‘reading history sideways’, which is defined to mean taking cross-sectional data at any specific time to conclude that it demonstrates a progress from some less developed to more developed state, thus showing the direction of change. This is called the ‘developmental paradigm’. The argument in the book is that from about AD 1500 European voyagers discovered what were held to be more backward societies than their own (especially with regard to the nature of the family), and that European thinkers consequently concluded that European societies had developed from such origins. The second is that the developmental paradigm has given birth to ‘developmental idealism’, which is the ideology that a central aim should be to accelerate change in developing world families, and perhaps much of their societies, towards that of the Western model.

The error of the developmental paradigm is shown by summarizing the findings of the Cambridge Group’s work on the English family (Laslett and associates, Wrigley and Schofield, McFarlane) back to the early sixteenth century, and McFarlane, with shakier data, to 1300. There is much discussion of English individualism and nuclear family residence but little note of Goody’s ideas on the very peculiar nature of Western European society emerging from the Roman Empire under the moulding influence of the Western Catholic Church. The strongest part of the book is the analysis of how the discovery of very different societies around the world shaped the beliefs of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century philosophers about the earlier evolution of the European family.

What is much less convincing is the argument that developmental idealism emerged from belief in the developmental paradigm. My impression is that early voyagers were intrigued by societies very different from their own, thought many of them lacked the institutional structures of Europe, and were convinced that they had suffered from a lack of Christianity. Certainly, nineteenth-century missionaries thought that they were bestowing Christian enlightenment, which, admittedly, had as major elements the Christian (or European) family and biblical literacy. The most contentious argument, and the one on which the work owes its strongest claim to furthering the advance of knowledge, is that modern development advocacy owes its origin to mistaken ideas about how the European family evolved. On the contrary, such advocacy seems to me to be based on the obvious difference in wealth and living standards.
between the West and most of the rest of the world. There was increasing agreement first between Third World populations and colonial administrators and then between the former and international agencies that becoming richer was a worthy aim. This meant identifying those Western institutions that appeared to be helpful in furthering that quest. Certainly, small families were hardly likely to be part of that agenda before the twentieth century. Even when the family planning movement began its great leap forward in the second half of that century, the central aim in developing countries was to slow societal population growth to allow economic development and lessen the chances of famine. One problem in the second half of the book is that lessons learned from the development (or lack of development) of the English family seem to be subtly transferred to understanding all social change.

On the family and its change the book is an encyclopaedic source. The main difficulty in following up references is that the great majority, even when substantiating very specific points, do not provide page numbers. Instead we are pointed to whole works, often very large books, with up to ten undifferentiated books in a single footnote. Either the author or the University of Chicago Press have developed large books, with up to ten undifferentiated books in a single footnote. Either the author or the University of Chicago Press have developed beyond referring to centuries. Indeed, it becomes something of a shock to realize that the 1900s is no more likely to refer to the first decade of the twentieth century than to the last. Yet, there are provocative ideas in the book which may provide an agenda for anthropological research.

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URTON, GARY. Signs of the Inka khipu: binary coding in the Andean knotted-string records. xi, 202 pp., figs, tables, illus., bibliogr. Austin: Univ. Texas Press, 2003. $40.00 (cloth)

The Incas have been cited as a civilization that presents a paradox to historians and social theorists: a society with a high degree of state centralization and bureaucracy but, apparently, no written records. Famously, Lévi-Strauss speculated that lack of writing, an important tool ‘indispensable for the strengthening of dominion’, might be responsible for the short duration of Inca rule and the ease with which Pizarro conquered a realm already ‘in a state of advanced decay’ (Tristes tropiques, 1976, p. 393). However, as they raided Inca storehouses, Pizarro’s followers observed Inca functionaries engage in a practice reminiscent of double-entry bookkeeping using a system of cords and knots. Such systems of cord records are called khipu in the Quechua language. In the early days of the Spanish conquest they were accepted as evidence in colonial courts, but their destruction was ordered around the turn of the seventeenth century by extirpators of idolatries.

Khipu have received a fair amount of attention from scholars of the Andean region: Leland Locke (The ancient Quipu or Peruvian knot record, 1923) demonstrated that many were used to record numbers in decimal form, and our understandings were pushed further by Maria and Robert Ascher (e.g. ‘The Quipu as visible writing’, in Visible language IX, 1975, pp. 329–56) who drew our attention to various features of museum specimens, arguing that these reflect Inca values and ways of doing and organizing things. However, scholarly attempts to interpret surviving khipu are hampered by the lack of a colonial specimen together with its ‘transcription’. It is by no means clear whether khipu recorded narrative as well as numerical data, and if so, whether this was recorded in verbal form.

Gary Urton’s Signs of the Inka khipu advances our understandings of these devices. It is based on the study (and fastidious documentation) of around 450 museum specimens. Urton is an ethnographer as well as an anthropological historian of the Andean region and khipus have long been one of his fields of research: it was this interest that prompted his inspired ethnographic study of number and arithmetic in the Quechua language (The social life of numbers, 1997).

Urton believes that the Incas must have imposed a standard technique of khipu construction and is thus critical of recent essays by Salomon and Tristan Platt arguing for local particularities (in Urton and Quilter [eds], Narrative threads: accounting and recounting in Andean Khipu, 2002). He does not dismiss the idea that they may have contained narrative and even verbal data.

The contribution of Urton’s new volume is to draw our attention to the binary coding inherent in khipus and readily explicable by analogy with low-level computer coding. Urton’s theory is that the details of construction of a khipu resulted from a series of binary choices: of construction material, direction of spin and ply of threads, knot direction, and so...