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This issue of Totem has presented us with an interesting technical challenge. We decided to accompany the text of one of the papers with a significant number of photographs. Seeing the finished results, it seems very much worth the trouble, and we are very pleased that we were able to do justice to some of the splendid photographs taken by James Huffman, Dr. Andrew Nelson, and Chris Nelson during their excavation last summer at a Moche site in Peru.

Huffman’s paper gives us an overview of a Moche dig in progress, a site situated in the tiny Peruvian village of San José de Moro. He describes, using evocative photographs, the history of the region, the problems created by scavengers, the symbolism and reality of Moche sacrifice rituals, and the significance of some of the artifacts discovered in the tombs at San José de Moro in the first year of the project.

Kimberly Ferns has written a wry and incisive analysis of the structure of the excuses that Primary and University students make to themselves and to others in accounting for less than exemplary work. In doing so, she suggests ways in which such excuses function as a face-saving mechanism, as essential for the individual’s own self-image as for creating good impressions in others.

Rob Wishart explores the significance of beer drinking rituals amongst graduate students and faculty in the Graduate Club at the University of Western Ontario. Thought-provoking and colourful, his paper guides us through the history and symbolism of drinking in the Western world. Wishart discusses typical drinking behaviour and explains how drinking behaviour in the Graduate Pub is distinct. This is followed by an explanation of why and how, in providing an informal setting for intellectual discussion, drinking among faculty and graduate students facilitates learning and thought. Wishart observes that many patrons drink foreign beer only while in the Graduate pub and not elsewhere, and suggests ways in which this fact is significant in explaining the creation of a sense of intellectual communitas.

Harry Lerner presents a number of competing theories about the development of Mayan cities and attempts to resolve some long-standing issues about the subject. He shows how the increase in the amount of archaeological data has enabled us to be in a better position to evaluate these competing theories. Lerner cautions us, however, that the surviving material remains are variable, which makes it impossible to be completely sure that they represent actual historical reality.

Angela Aristone offers a thorough exploration of the problems involved in diagnosing syphilis in skeletal remains. She discusses the various theories of the origin of syphilis within the human population, the history of its diagnosis, how syphilis is distinguished from similar diseases, and how more hygienic and less crowded living conditions substantially reduce the incidence of syphilis in a population.

It is both a thrill and a challenge putting an issue of Totem together. Whenever an article is submitted, it feels like Christmas, a new intellectual bon-bon to be unwrapped and savoured. With each issue, we try to bring you the best of what comes through our hands, and give the reader a sense of the breadth and diversity of Anthropological thought and research being conducted at the University of Western Ontario. We hope that you will find the papers presented herein both interesting and enjoyable.