

The “Andean Worlds” Institute: Rationale and Project Description

by

Laraine Fletcher and George Scheper, Project Directors

Why Study Andean Culture?

The Inka have fascinated European and North American scholars as well as the public for generations, indeed since the time of first contact. There is first of all the drama and tragedy of the encounter narrative itself: Pizarro’s overthrow of the Inka Empire and the execution of Atawalpa despite the amassing of the Inka king’s ransom, a story enshrined in popular culture from the earliest Spanish chronicles, through Prescott’s 19th century classic *The Conquest of Peru*, to Peter Shaffer’s drama “The Royal Hunt of the Sun.” Such popular cultural representations of the Inka are interesting in their own right as examples of how different eras and authors have projected their own preconceptions onto the native subject, but they are no substitute for academic scholarship that deals with the knotty issues of sorting out from the available sources the multiple strands of Inka myth and Inka history, as is done in current Andean scholarship, including recent work by our Institute scholars, including Frank Salomon, Charles Stanish, Richard Burger, Tom Cummins, Rolena Adorno and Regina Harrison.

Inka art and architecture have been a source of endless fascination and research, not least the extraordinary cyclopean stonework seen at such sites Machu Picchu, widely considered the most spectacular archaeological ruin in South America and, for many, in the world. What the Inka achieved there, and in such other sites as Sacsahuaman and Ollantaytambo was an unprecedented manipulation of the line of the earth itself, in buildings, terracing, walls, earthworks and waterworks that coordinate and bind the built environment with the sacred geography of the place. It is particularly impressive that the terraces and waterworks continue to function, and that Inka residential buildings, in the case of Ollantaytambo, continue to house a Quechua-speaking community, making it the oldest continuously inhabited city in the Western Hemisphere. Institute scholars will guide on-site study of these and other Andean monuments, enabling participants to bring this invaluable first-hand experience back to their classrooms and to their ongoing individual research.

Andean scholarship on socio-political issues has always had to come to terms with the sheer *scope* of the Inka Empire. At the time of the Spanish incursion, as scholar Michael

Moseley has noted, the largest polity on earth was “not Ming China or the Ottoman Empire, but Tahuantinsuyu, the ‘Land of the Four Quarters’ as the Inkas called their sprawling realm,” extending more than 2,500 miles along the spine of the Andes (*Incas and their Ancestors* 7). Such an enterprise required an unprecedented infrastructure, including an extensive system of roads exceeding that of the Roman Empire, a construction which art historian Rebecca Stone-Miller has aptly called the largest archaeological monument in the world (*Art of the Andes* 192). Because the Inka Empire encompassed a multitude of ethnicities and an extraordinary range of ecological extremes from frozen alpine, to arid coastal desert, to tropical rain forest, scholars continue to be intrigued with the impressive Inka management of water, land and labor, centering on a principle that Andeanist John Murra has called “verticality.” According to this interpretation, instead of an economy based on markets and trade, the Inka successfully imposed a system of asymmetrical reciprocity consisting of a centralized collection and redistribution of goods through and between the different ecological zones and microenvironments of their realm, along with employment of corvée labor (*mit’a*), and forced resettlement of populations (*mitima*) – arrangements that the Spanish for a time appropriated, until the system broke down under their own new colonial impositions.

Moreover, the fact that the Inka imperial system had arisen with meteoric rapidity, and was only 150 years old when the Spanish overthrew its leadership, has made it an intriguing case study in state formation, giving rise to a whole literature of controverted socio-political interpretations. Over the years, the nature of Inka power and hegemony has come in for every manner of analysis, from colonial chronicles which portrayed Inka government as despotic in order to legitimate Spanish rule, to representations of the Inka polity as a “feudal utopia” or even as a communitarian socialist state – all of which are now viewed as highly invested readings.

Having said all this about ongoing scholarly interest in the Inka, it must be emphasized that improving our understanding of the Inka is far from the whole task, and our study *will not simply equate Inka culture with Andean culture*. The Inka phenomenon, after all, represents only a thin stratum of some hundred and fifty years atop multiple layerings of millennia of pre-Columbian cultures in the Andes, where monumental building is as old as Egypt, and where some of the largest monuments predate the rise of Maya civilization in Central America by 2,000 years, and predate the Aztecs of Mexico (and the Inkas themselves!) by 3,000 years. Culture by culture, the incredibly rich pre-Inka Andean mosaic is starting to take shape in scholarly research

and even in the popular imagination, thanks in large part to spectacular recent excavations and finds (including the famous “Ice Maiden” and other frozen and mummified remains) and to recent block-buster museum shows. The “Lords of Sipán” exhibit that toured the United States in the 1990’s, for example, which featured a set of unlooted Moche tombs from the sixth century A.D., included the single richest pre-Columbian tomb ever excavated in the Americas.

The Moche, who were contemporaries of the Maya, and who may even have had some long-distance contact with them through Pacific trade, produced spectacular gold and silver jewelry, fine-line painted ceramics (featuring intriguing depictions of sacrifice ceremonies), and extraordinarily naturalistic sculpted portrait effigy jars – artifacts so disarmingly realistic, as Stone-Miller says, that the challenge is to realize that their iconography was highly symbolic. Equally impressive and important are the magnificent textiles produced by various pre-Inkan Andean cultures, most notably by the Paracas culture whose finest mantles, such as the magnificent 2,000-year-old example at the Brooklyn Museum, were used as wrappings for revered mummies. [The chief conservator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art once called the Brooklyn Museum’s Paracas textile “the most exquisitely executed fabric ever produced in the Western Hemisphere” (Reif, *NYT* 14 April 1991 H37).] And then there are the Nazca Lines, vast earth-line drawings discernible only from an aerial perspective, “notoriously” and misleadingly familiar to the general public because of fanciful “Chariots of the Gods” interpretations. Modern scholarly study by Anthony Aveni, Jean-Pierre Protzen and others has “demystified” the construction of such Andean monuments, without in any way diminishing their impressiveness.

The results of modern scholarly study of these pre-Inka cultures and of their intriguing and complex artifacts not only is advancing our understanding of the earlier Andean cultures themselves, but is also significantly enhancing our understanding of the Inka phenomenon as well, by showing how much cultural tradition the Inka were able to build upon in their own state formation.

What’s New in Andean Studies?

Andean studies today have reached a ‘tipping point,’ not only because exciting new excavations, discoveries and documents are constantly being reported, but because Andean scholars are currently working with new methodologies, new paradigms and new kinds of sources that are dramatically shaping the kinds of questions being asked and the kinds of models and answers being proposed. As archaeologist Steve Bourget of the

University of Texas at Austin put it recently, with reference to his work at a Moche site, “This is only the beginning. We’re entering a new era; we are now where the Mayanists were 20 years ago”; and recently two Peruvian archaeologists called for a crucial “Interamerican Dialogue” toward collaboration on shaping the future of the rapidly burgeoning and transforming field of Andean Studies [Bourget, cited in Popson, *Archaeology*, March/April 2002: 35; Castillo Butters and Mujica Barreda, “Peruvian Archaeology: Crisis or Development?” *SAA Bulletin*, 13.3].

The field of Andean studies has changed so dramatically in the past generation that it is difficult to summarize within a brief compass, but fortunately a substantial review of research occurs in the Introduction to the volume on *South America* in the new *Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas* (1999), the first such comprehensive reference volume since the *Handbook of South American Indians* of 1946. In this introductory essay, editors Frank Salomon and Stuart Schwartz survey and analyze the new Andean scholarship, emphasizing not so much the accumulation of new data as the introduction of new paradigms. In particular, following the suggestions of earlier Andeanists, such as John Murra, they call for study of new sources of documentation that emphasize indigenous peoples’ agency and their own reported or self-documented ideas about their present and past worlds, sources that supplement “histories of Indians” with “Indian histories” (2) -- without romanticizing or exoticizing some imagined “pure” pre-contact culture and its presumed “authentic” continuities (4-5).

The key question for Andeanists has been, in the absence of a known system of indigenous writing, such as the Maya are now understood to have possessed, where to find such indigenous-centered “texts.” We have, of course, accounts of indigenous Andean culture, myth/history and oral tradition as reported in colonial era Spanish chronicles and writings of missionary friars such as Bernabé Cobo, but in these texts the data are filtered through the various agendas of the colonizing, evangelizing writers. We also have colonial era chronicles by such Andean mestizo writers as Joan de Santa Cruz Pachacuti Yamqui, Garcilaso de la Vega, and Guaman Poma de Ayala – each of whom has a very distinct point of view. For instance, Garcilaso, of Inka descent, presents a highly favorable account of Inka history and culture, whereas Guaman Poma, a non-Inka Andean Christian, holds up an image of a primordial Andean Christian world to be cleansed of what he considers the corruptions of both the Inka and the

Spanish. And then there is the uniquely valuable document in the Quechua language, the Huarochirí Manuscript (c. 1608), which offers a view of a more localized version of Andean myth/history in its own language. In addition, there are whole other genres of written material just beginning to be accessed: litigations, secular and ecclesiastical court testimonies and other emic, native-centered documents. With regard to mining this new material, Salomon argues, “The task remains almost as incomplete after the quincennial as it was before. But the nature of the job becomes clearer” (89). Like the new *Cambridge History*, our Institute hopes to “emphasize research that allows us to see how the indigenous peoples of South America conceived of their social universe in terms of personhood, identity, gender, freedom, obligation, and constraint at different historical moments and under varying conditions” (4), and to make the fruits of this new generation of Andean scholarship available to the humanities classroom. Institute seminars will take participant fellows into the thick of this new research.

In addition to these written texts, Andean scholars are actively pursuing the possibilities that textual information is encoded in other sorts of Andean artifacts. Art historian Rebecca Stone-Miller, for instance, has suggested how we can “read” an Inka wall: “Practical, beautiful, organic, geometric, standardized, individual, reproducible, elitist, technologically simple, and incomparably elegant, the wall epitomizes Inka aesthetics. *It can also be seen as a social statement: divergent people were enjoined to interlock, adjust, and resettle into a dynamic whole by pooling their varying forms, smoothing their ethnic edges, and holding together with no visible means to face the hostile environment.*” (*Art of the Andes*, 2002: 193, emphasis ours). This, of course, remains a semiotic reading of an essentially aniconic artifact. But Moche fine-line ceramics, with their very detailed images of narrative or at least ritual scenes, offer the possibility of being read somewhat in the manner of Maya codex-style vases. Such attempts to read Moche ceramics have been given a huge boost by the excavations in 1987 by Walter Alva of the Moche tombs of Sipán, which have provided material remains of the ceremonial gear and dress depicted in the ceramics.

In the case of textiles, textual reading of encoded information seems even more of a promising possibility. Darrell Gundry, for example, has proposed a detailed sidereal lunar calendar reading of the Brooklyn Museum Paracas textile (*Archaeology*, 2000: 46-51), and many scholars are working on possible decipherment of the *tokapus*, the small squares containing a variety of heraldic-like geometric designs, which constitute the whole surface pattern of the

highest status Inka tunics, such as the magnificent example at Dumbarton Oaks. Most intriguing of all, as holding out the possibility that we may yet find and decipher an Andean writing system, are the *kipus*, the knotted strings whose use for record keeping by the Inka is well attested in colonial writings and depicted by Guaman Poma. Many Andeanists have proposed that the *kipus* are not just mnemonic devices and indeed contain many more kinds of information than enumeration, perhaps even narrative history. Most recently, Institute consultant Gary Urton in *Signs of the Inka Khipu* (2003) has made the case for, as his subtitle says, “binary coding in the Andean knotted-string records.” Urton leaves open the question for future research whether this binary coding represents “a full-fledged writing system, capable of signing values from phonograms to logograms, as well as ideas, mythemes, and other general conventional values,” or whether it represents another, not yet well defined system of record keeping (161). In any case, Andean research has reached an exciting new threshold.

Narrative of Activities

[For a detailed day by day of activities, please click on “Daily Schedule”]

This exciting and exacting Institute involves a very full schedule combining seminars, field study and travel, providing participants with the opportunity to share with a community of scholars the most recent developments in the field of Andean Studies.

The Institute will run for five weeks, from June 26 through July 31, 2005, on-site in Peru, with a study visit inside Bolivia. The visiting scholars will conduct seminars as well as lead on-site study visits throughout. Typically we will have morning seminars, usually from 9 – 12, held in the setting of a cultural or academic institution (for example, in Cusco at the Museo Inka of the Universidad Nacional de San Antonio Abad del Cusco; and in Pisac at the newly-constructed seminar/retreat space at Inti Wasi). The morning seminars are followed by lunch, often with the visiting scholar. An occasional informal luncheon roundtable works well to continue discussions of the week’s topics as well as to air any other issues, which participants might want to bring up. The afternoons are usually reserved for on-site study trips, which include visits to museums, city tours of historic districts, markets, archaeological sites and field demonstrations (including scheduled demonstrations of adobe construction, llama ranching, weaving, and traditional healing, for example). All on-site visits are accompanied by either the visiting scholar and/or our local guide for the occasion.

We begin the institute in Lima with seminars on the pre-Inkan cultures by Dr. Richard Burger, a foremost authority on Chavín and other early Andean cultures. This is followed by two seminars by Rolena Adorno, the leading scholar in the field, who will be guiding our participants through the exciting new research on the Guaman Poma manuscript, as presented on the Royal Library of Denmark's recently established Guaman Poma Website. She will be suggesting classroom uses of the materials now available on this website, which include the transcription of the work and the current digital facsimile of the autograph manuscript. Local scholars Carlos Velaochaga and Mario Amano will guide visits to Lima's most important museums and collections.

A six-day trip to archaeological sites in northern Peru is escorted by Professor Giovanni Mitrovich. The trip includes a seminar with Walter Alva, Peruvian archaeologist and chief director of the excavation of the royal tombs at Sipán, and a site visit to Chan Chan, imperial capital city of the Chimor, the second largest native state in South America, as documented both by archaeological evidence and ethnohistorical accounts. The project then moves south to Pisac for five days of seminars and the process of acclimatization. We are joined by guest scholar Tom Cummins, an Andeanist who specializes in pre- and post-contact Inka iconography. Cummins will be our scholar-guide, providing seminars and on-site study visits as we learn to "read" the walls and architectural complexities of the Inka at the archaeological sites of Pisac, Ollantaytambo and Machu Picchu. Prof. Cummins continues with us to Cusco, to engage the group in the interpretation of the Inka sacred capital, including a study tour of the Coricancha ("Golden Courtyard"), the Inka Temple of the Sun and astronomical observatory. We will see how the layout of Cusco, as well as of other Inka and pre-Inka sites, functions as a cosmogram intended to legitimize the ruling religious and political systems to their subjects.

Other seminars in Cusco will be conducted by Frank Salomon, who will present the latest scholarship concerning interpretations of the knotted string *kipus* as well as on interpreting the documentary sources on Inka myth. Salomon, as well as Prof. Castro-Klarén, will discuss new understandings of Inka social organization and statecraft. Prof. Regina Harrison will bring the study of Andean culture into colonial times and indeed into the present with seminars on Quechua oral performance.

In order to get a cultural view away from the Inka center, and into Aymara-speaking territory, for our last week we travel further south to Puno, where we meet with Professor Charles Stanish, who will give seminars and accompany the group to the site of Tiwanaku and the sacred pilgrimage sites of Isla del Sol and Isla de la Luna in Bolivia. Dr. Stanish, who has worked in this southern area for many years, provides us with a view from the periphery, and new data from his excavations, which indicate use of these islands as, pilgrimage sites long before the Inka.

Thus, while the major focus of the Institute will be on the Andean cultures prior to the arrival of the Spanish, with an emphasis on the Inka, we also examine the period of the invasion/encounter and its aftermath, with Adorno specifically looking at “writing and resistance in Colonial Peru” and “the emergence of a uniquely Latin American voice.” In fact, some scholars would argue that with these Andean mestizo writings we have the beginning of *American* literature itself, properly speaking (as distinct from Native American, European, or European-American). We also, therefore, include seminars, which look at those areas of Andean culture, which exhibit continuity — specifically in the areas of textile production and traditional healing. We are privileged to have Dr Gladis Oblitas, who will be giving a seminar on traditional healing, and Nilda Callañaya, an expert weaver and scholar, who has given presentations at Harvard, Cornell, Brown and The Textile Museum in Washington, will join us to give a seminar on textiles. Throughout the project, guided curatorial visits to the key museums in Lima, Chiclayo and Cusco, with their significant collections, will be integrated into our ongoing discussions and will form an important component in our attempt, during these five weeks, to create a new understanding of the Andean Worlds.

All participants receive bound notebooks with carefully selected reading materials, as well as a book list, prior to commencement of the Institute. We have a full schedule, and although we allow time for reading during the Institute, we suggest that as much reading as possible be done in advance. All seminar discussions and assigned readings are in English or English translation. While fluency in Spanish (or Quechua) is obviously advantageous, it is not a requirement and will not pose an obstacle to full participation in the program.

We are mindful of the demands on each participant of such an ambitious schedule and we have built into the program a number of optional field trips to allow individuals some option for rest, reflection and solitude, if they so choose. We are very aware of the possible effects of

Cusco's altitude on particular individuals, and have designed our program to allow for the maximum time for acclimatization: we spend the first eleven days on the coast (Lima, Chiclayo and Trujillo) and then five days in Pisac in the Sacred Valley, the traditional place used by travelers to begin the acclimatization process before proceeding on to Cusco.

We look forward to an exciting and productive five weeks in the field with our visiting and local scholars sharing a unique intellectual adventure with a collegial and diverse group of nationally selected Institute fellows.

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