

The “Andean Worlds” Institute Rationale and Project Description By

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A) 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 Richard Burger, Jeffrey Quilter, Michael Moseley, Sara Casro-Klarén 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 Sacsayhuaman, Pisac 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 (not surprisingly, past participants frequently noted what an experiential delight it was to *hear* as well as see the great Inka sites). It is also notable that, in the case of Ollantaytambo, Inka residential buildings continue to house a Quechua-speaking community, making it probably 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 Institute scholar Michael Moseley has noted in one of our texts, 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. Such an enterprise required an unprecedented infrastructure, including an extensive road system exceeding even 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 across an "archipelago" of Andean resource distribution, a principle that late 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. While the unique "verticality" of resource distribution of the Andean landscape has been pointed out by the late Peruvianist John Murra, the importance of early development on the coast of Peru and the role of maritime resources has been a focus of investigations since the 1970s by our guest scholar Michael Moseley. In addition, his research on the constraints as well as advantages of the varied ecological zones and the human adaptations to the environmental stresses of high altitudes is a topic he will address during the institute.

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.

That being said 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. For this 2008 Andean Worlds proposal we have included several new components to our program (as presented in 2005) intended to broaden and deepen our study of new directions in scholarship on pre-Inkan Andean cultures.

Guest scholar Jeffrey Quilter will specifically address the extraordinary and precocious advances made early in Andean prehistory during the Preceramic period, an era which deserves special attention in that it presents theoretical issues about the conditions under which stratified, class-based societies develop. There is an on-going and active debate among Peruvianists concerning, for example, the nature and role of such important Preceramic sites as Caral, located in the Supe Valley, and featured by many tour companies as "the oldest city" in the Western hemisphere. Dr. Quilter will devote one of his two seminar sessions to a discussion of the latest thinking on Caral and on the Preceramic period in general. The importance of early development on the coastal zone of Peru and the role of maritime resources will also be a focus of one of the seminars by Michael Moseley.

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 featured in National Geographic, educational television documentaries, and 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. [As in 2005, our group will meet the chief excavator of the site, Dr. Walter Alva, at the new Museum of the Royal Tombs in northern Peru.]

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. Institute scholar Christopher Donnan will share with participants his extraordinarily productive research on Moche fineline ceramic painting, including his revolutionary discoveries of the match-up between depictions of elaborate sacrifice ceremonies depicted on much of the pottery and actual tomb artifacts found in Moche excavations, including his collaboration with Walter Alva in the "Lords of Sipán" project..

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. 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.

B) 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 the current generation of scholars are 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

