

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

Peruvian archaeologists called for a crucial “Inter-American Dialogue” toward collaboration on shaping the future of the rapidly burgeoning and transforming field of Andean Studies.¹

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 Stuart Schwartz and Frank Salomon (one of our Institute scholars) 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.

A 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. Institute scholar Frank Salomon, co-editor of the published Huarochirí Manuscript, will devote a seminar to this crucial text.

Today, there are whole other genres of Andean written material just beginning to be accessed: litigations, secular and ecclesiastical court testimonies and other emic, native-centered documents. 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” (1999:4), 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*

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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, as mentioned earlier, with their very detailed images of narrative and ritual scenes, offer the possibility of being read somewhat in the manner of Maya codex-style vases.

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 abacus-like knotted strings whose use for record keeping by the Inka is well attested in colonial writings and depicted in Guaman Poma's 16th century manuscript. 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, 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. Meanwhile, Institute scholar Frank Salomon has been working on patrimonial quipus in contemporary Andean communities (*The Cord Keepers: Khipus and Cultural Life in a Peruvian Village* [2004]), the subject of another of his Institute seminars.

Recent scholarly conferences highlight these and other new directions in Andean scholarship. In the Fall of 2005, the Peabody Museum at Harvard hosted a conference on "Exploring the Maya and Moche Worlds," in connection with a new installation of Moche art. At the Spring 2007 conference of the Society for American Archaeology a number of sessions were devoted to new scholarship in the archaeology of the Andean cultures, including five sessions devoted to discussions of the latest scholarship on the Inka: new horizons in Inka archaeology; a new look at Cusco before the Inkas; a re-analysis of Inka architecture as an instrument of power; discussion of the Wari and their descendants and the imperial transformation of Cusco; and a working group with a focus on Inka imperial expansion -- all topics that our guest scholars will be addressing in Institute seminars.

Narrative of Activities

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