

THE INCAS AND THEIR ORIGINS: A CROSS-DISCIPLINARY CONSPECTUS

Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, Germany — Fri. 13 – Sun. 15 June, 2014

Quechua was “the language of the Incas”, driven by their conquests to the farthest corners of their realm. This, most Andeanists have long presumed as common knowledge — but should we? Is the truth not more nuanced? And can those nuances not help us better understand Andean (pre)history? They serve, indeed, as one illustration of the potential in data still untapped *between* the disciplines, to round out a more holistic vision of the Inca “phenomenon”.

This symposium aims to foster a meeting of minds across our various disciplines. It continues a series of meetings on the Andean past more broadly (Cambridge, London, Lima, Leipzig, 2008–2011), where many of the key cross-disciplinary issues to arise revolved around our understanding of the Incas — hence our focus now specifically on them. Here we aspire to a new perspective, more coherent across the disciplines, of who the Incas were, their immediate and ultimate origins, and the scale and nature of their impacts on populations across the Andes.

It turns out, for instance, that the idea that all Quechua stems from the Incas is a flawed anachronism, and our understanding of the Incas themselves all the poorer for it. The rich and structured regional diversity across the Quechua language *family* reveals a very different story, with much to tell us on the nature of Inca impacts from one region to the next, and the scale and origins of population displacements. On Inca origins, too, the linguistic sources are far richer than Quechua alone, as explored in Rodolfo Cerrón-Palomino’s (2013) timely new book *Las Lenguas de los Incas*. Aymara is writ large into the very placenames of the Inca heartland, while the enigmatic Puquina makes for an intriguing candidate not only for the native tongue of the ancestral Incas themselves, but also of the Titicaca Basin, and Tiyawanaku.

Likewise, it is high time to look anew at the Incas from the novel perspectives fast opening up thanks to advances in other disciplines, not least genetics (e.g. ancient DNA analysis, full-genome sequencing), bioarchaeology (e.g. isotope provenience data) and palaeoclimatology. How might this new potential best be harnessed to complement the latest findings in the archaeological, linguistic, art- and ethno-historical records? We look forward also to debating the latest findings from the wide-ranging contributions to Izumi Shimada’s edited volume on the Incas, currently in press.

Day 1 of our symposium will survey the imperial period. Variation across Tawantinsuyu manifests itself across the independent data-sets proper to each of the disciplines. Here, we aim to compare, contrast and combine those perspectives into a more comprehensive overall picture of the nature of Inca rule and its impacts across the disparate regions of the Empire (not least through the *mitma* resettlement policy).

Over the next day and a half, our focus will shift back from Tawantinsuyu itself to the question of Inca origins, and the wider contexts of Andean civilisation out of which they emerged. Progressively, we step further back in time, in search of a more coherent picture of the Incas’ roots — ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and other. We look first to the immediate rise of the Incas within their core Cuzco region during the Late Intermediate Period, and the strength of any evidence for their relationships and rivalries with other groups (such as the Chanca, Chíncha and Colla); secondly, to the origin myths and modern hypotheses of links back to Lake Titicaca and Tiyawanaku; and finally, to the other main Middle Horizon polity, Wari in south-central Peru.

SYMPOSIUM FORMAT AND CONTRIBUTIONS

This symposium continues our innovative symposium format, conceived to foster awareness, discussion and co-operation across the divides between disciplines. Participants are *not* asked to present a long, formal paper, nor to report only on individual studies. Rather, they are invited to give two or more brief synopses (of five to ten minutes each) on those session themes in which they have particular expertise or interest. These synopses serve to set out the perspective on that theme from their own discipline, but as relevant to and in terms intelligible to all the others. On each theme, the session will open with synopses from various disciplines, as a basis to launch the ensuing discussion between them, to which at least half of our timetable will be dedicated.

Our symposium will duly give rise to a corresponding volume, to bring together essays by our participants to arise directly *out of* our debate. As with the meeting itself, this book's novelty will lie in the explicitly cross-disciplinary remit that all contributors are to follow, enshrined also in a peer-review and editorial process led by the two conveners, from the combined perspectives of their own respective disciplines.