

Imperial Encounters: Historical Contingency, Local Agency, and Hybridity¹

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This paper is concerned with issues of agency, identity, and hybridity in the context of the late pre-Columbian Andes. This constellation of concepts informs my approach to a particular category of ceramic vessels associated with the Inca Empire traditionally labeled “Inca-local” or “provincial Inca”. These artifacts constitute the material focus of this chapter. While I consider the three concepts mentioned to be indivisibly linked for purposes of the present discussion, I unpack each individually in order to reflect more systematically on how one is entangled with the other. With respect to agency, I am interested in that of both human actors and objects. Here, I divide human actors into the categories of imperial elites, local elites, and non-elite locals. With regard to objects, I am concerned with the systems of meaning they generate among themselves as well as their active involvement in the construction of social and cultural identities. In focusing on hybridity, I aim to highlight issues of cultural difference, cultural boundaries, and cultural interaction, as well as critique the idea of “pure forms” and the essential coherence of meaning. In this way, I intend to bring the contingent and historical nature of what and how things mean to the fore. My long-term concerns with the Inca Empire, ancient imperialism, and ways of linking the past to the present takes much inspiration from the early mentorship and role-modeling of Professor Susan Pollock during my years as a graduate

student at Binghamton University. Her ongoing evolution as a politically-committed feminist and scholar continues to inspire to the present and I am honored to count her as my friend and colleague.

Over the course of the 15th century CE, the Inca assembled the largest empire ever created in the Americas (**Fig. 1**). Outside of their capital city of Cuzco and authorized state installations (of which there were relatively few), material correlates of Inca culture are sparse. What we see instead is the selective inclusion of a limited number of Inca elements into the material worlds of extant Andean communities. As with many other aspects of Inca imperial practice, this is interesting both from a comparative perspective *vis-à-vis* other archaic empires, and with respect to ideas about the relationship between agency, material culture, and identity. What does the lack of a shared culture, insofar as it is evidenced in material form, signify in this case? Resistance to imperial domination? Restricted or limited access to state symbols and goods? A dissonance between state and local value systems? In this paper, I juxtapose these questions about the absence of a unifying cultural overlay with a consideration of where and when we do find material elements of recognizable Inca affiliation around the Empire, the forms these take, and the contexts in which they are found.

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Fig. 1. Map of Inca Empire indicating locations of sites discussed in text. Map by T.L. Bray.

Given that Inca-style pottery constitutes the most plentiful category of imperial artifact available, I take it as the focus of the present study. With regard to this corpus, I am particularly interested here in items that mix elements of imperial and local styles – e.g., objects typically subsumed under the hyphenated label “Inca-provincial”. Such hybrid items have rarely been considered with regard to material practice or social strategies beyond the occasional reference to notions of acculturation or emulation. Taking inspiration from recent discourse

in post-colonial theory, the present study seeks to move the discussion of hybridity, hybrid personae, and hybrid cultures into the realm of the material. As such, it is informed by an interest in the agency of the indigenous makers and users of these objects, as well as in the material agency of the objects themselves. Rather than considering such artifacts *a priori* as poor or diminished imitations of purer forms, I attempt to understand their role *vis-à-vis* local systems of meaning, strategic maneuvering, and emergent identities.

In similar fashion, I work from the position that Inca culture at the imperial center was an evolving construct continuously re-shaped in its ongoing encounters with other indigenous peoples through the processes of imperial expansion. Among Inca scholars, written sources have traditionally been privileged over archaeological ones. The historic record conventionally associates the beginnings of Inca imperialism and state expansion with Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui circa 1438 CE (Betanzos [1551] 1987; Rowe 1945; 1946).² Following his miraculous defeat of local rivals and subsequent ascension to the throne, Pachacuti is said to have embarked upon a sustained campaign to bring other ethnic groups in the immediate vicinity of Cuzco under Inca control. In addition to consolidating the heartland, he is credited with inventing and realizing the trappings and apparatuses of an imperial state government, starting with the extreme make-over of Cuzco but extending to many other domains of material symbolizing as well (see Betanzos [1551] 1987; Rostworowski 1953; MacCormack 1991).

Rather than assuming that Pachacuti created the accoutrements of imperial Inca culture in one brilliant stroke, as is often implied, I suggest that it might be useful to consider the invention of Inca traditions and accompanying signifiers as a process with a temporality that evolved in conjunction with imperial expansion and cultural exchange. Just as engagement with the Altiplano kingdoms to the south influenced imperial Inca architecture (Protzen 1993, 257–60), or the conquest of the north coast introduced new ideas for materializing royal status (Netherly 1977), so too native elites and non-elite natives seem to have adapted at least some elements of Inca symbolizing and material practice to their own cultural worlds (Menzel 1976; Julien 1983; Wernke 2006a). Through the processes of more or less violent

interactions, each community was to a greater or lesser degree transformed in its encounter with the Other(s). I suggest that the nature of the changing relationships, the negotiation of new identities, and the emergent nature of culture may to some extent be discernible in a contextual reading of late pre-Columbian period hybrid objects both in the hinterlands and in the heartland.

Provincial Inca pottery

Before proceeding, it is useful to clarify how the term “provincial Inca” is employed in this paper. When first introduced by John Rowe in 1944, it was used to refer to ceramics from the Cuzco region that pre-dated materials associated with the classic Inca period. In other words, the term “provincial Inca” was employed in a chronological sense. Later, the concept of “provincial Inca” was adapted by Dorothy Menzel (1966) in her study of ceramics from the Chincha valley to refer to Inca pottery made in the provinces. In her appropriation, it thus acquired a spatial as opposed to temporal connotation. Miguel Rivera (1976, 34), working with the ceramic collections from the site of Chinchero, subsequently defined “provincial Inca” as a specific category of Late Horizon pottery produced outside of Cuzco proper that was based in local traditions but which incorporated typical Inca features (see also Menzel 1976). This is probably the most widely understood meaning of the term today.

Over the years, various authors have attempted to further sub-divide the category of “provincial Inca” based on degrees of difference or similarity with the classic Inca polychrome pottery assemblage from Cuzco. This has resulted in a proliferation of terms ranging from “imitation Inca” to “Inca-influenced.” Given the lack of agreement on exact definitions, I prefer to steer clear of

² The fact that a critical mass of radiocarbon dates from throughout the Empire have pushed the likely expansion of the Inca Empire back by several decades is not critical to the discussion here, though of course important to recognize.

these. As used here, the term “provincial Inca” functions simply as a convenient label to refer to pottery that is clearly not of the classic Cuzco-style but which nonetheless exhibits some recognizable features associated with the imperial corpus. For the moment, it is not intended to imply anything about where, when, or by whom these objects were produced.

The coastal region

Dorothy Menzel’s (1976) analysis of Max Uhle’s collections from the Ica valley, south coast of Peru, stands as one of the most detailed and ultimately insightful studies of provincial Inca pottery ever published. I begin my survey of hybrid forms by highlighting some of her key observations. Working with a series of funerary assemblages dating from approximately 1350 CE to the Colonial era, Menzel demonstrated that the local Ica ceramic tradition underwent a number of significant changes during the Late Horizon following the Inca occupation of the valley. These changes were found to occur with respect to form, style, and technical detail. Her analysis revealed first that the provincial Inca vessels made at Ica and found in burials comprised a limited number of Inca shapes. The most common Inca forms found in Ica burials were small to medium-sized Inca jars (*aríbalos*), shallow plates, and pedestal-based *ollas* (1976, 68; **Fig. 2**). These three vessel types also constitute the most common forms found overall in the imperial Inca ceramic assemblage (Bray 2003a). Based on a functional analysis of the imperial assemblage, it has been suggested that the *aríbalo* was principally used for the storage, transport and serving of chicha; that the shallow plate likely represents an individual serving platter for solid or semi-solid foods, possibly meats; and that the footed *olla* likely served as a cooking vessel and was perhaps designed explicitly for portability (Bray 2003a). Menzel (1976, 69) notes that the pedestal-based pots in the Ica collections show no sign of usewear, leading her to suggest that they served more as



Fig. 2. The three most common vessel forms in the imperial Inca assemblage and in Late Horizon period burials in the Ica valley, south coast of Peru: the pedestal-base pot, the tall-necked Inca jar, and the shallow plate. Photo: T.L. Bray.

status markers than utilitarian vessels in this provincial context.

In the Ica study, it was noted that only with the larger-sized *aríbalos* did the potters attempt to adhere to the decorative canons of the Cuzco Inca style (Menzel 1976, 69). Interestingly, the large *aríbalos* were most commonly found in the refuse deposits associated with the site rather than in burials. On the smaller and mid-sized *aríbalos*, more often associated with burials, the designs employed did not attempt to reproduce the Cuzco style. Rather, the potters selectively chose only specific design elements from the imperial canon (**Fig. 3**). The same is true in the case of the shallow plates (Menzel 1976, Pl. 40, 60, 62). This type of patterning suggests a possible correlation between the deployment of imperial design motifs and the public use of ceramic containers, perhaps in conjunction with public feasting events, while in the case of those destined for more private affairs, the intent may have been to emphasize local ethnic traditions and continuities.



Fig. 3. Example of Inca vessel form with non-traditional design elements suggesting an affinity with local Ica motifs and decorative preferences: medium-sized aríbalo with Menzel's "tadpole" design element (American Museum of Natural History, New York; Cat. no.: 41.2/7525). Photo: T.L. Bray.



Fig. 4. Left: Inca aríbalo from Ica valley with checkerboard design pattern and unique filler motifs in white squares (Menzel 1976, Pl. 38); right: Inca shallow plate with insect and catfish elements from Burial Tk, Ica valley. Phoebe Hearst Museum, University of California, Berkeley.

As Menzel points out, the Inca motifs that appear with the greatest frequency in this region are those with analogies in the Ica tradition (Menzel 1976, 159). Consequently, one finds designs that are relatively rare on Cuzco Inca vessels appearing far more often on the provincial Ica-Inca wares. A specific example of this is the checkerboard pattern, which has a referent in antecedent Ica decoration, and though known in the classic Inca corpus, rarely encompasses the entire front panel in the way seen in **Fig. 4 (left)**. The filler design inside the fugitive white squares in this particular vessel is also uniquely Ica (Menzel 1976, 163). Another Ica preference is for figurative motifs such as insects, birds, and fish, which again, while present in the classic Inca canon, are not particularly common (**Fig. 4, right**).

Based on comparisons with earlier Ica grave lots, Menzel also discerned that the Ica bottle, a local prestige vessel form in earlier Ica periods, disappears completely during the Late Horizon and is replaced by "Inca-influenced" shapes that she calls "lamp bottles" (**Fig. 5**). The structural elements of this new hybrid form are borrowed from several different Inca shape categories (Menzel 1976, 52). On these Ica-Inca vessels, the decoration combines features of Cuzco Inca patterns with traditional Ica arrangements (Menzel

1976, 151). The Ica-Inca lamp bottles are found only in the graves of local Ica nobility during the Late Horizon. Non-elite natives apparently did not have access to these forms as none are found in the more modest grave lots. Menzel also observes that most of the Inca-associated prestige items in the tombs of nobles have a distinctive local character and that they replace similar categories of Ica-tradition prestige objects (Menzel 1976). This is in contrast to another grave lot (Tk) in the Ica valley which was found to contain several rather ordinary Ica pieces together with a number of provincial Inca pots, a *quipu*, and two Cuzco Inca style vessels believed to be imports – the only two such classic Cuzco Inca vessels recovered here (Menzel 1976, 67–76). This burial was interpreted as that of a local functionary of the state who was not a member of the native elite.



Fig. 5. Example of Menzel's hybrid lamp bottle (American Museum of Natural History, New York; Cat. no.: 41.0/1360). Photo: T.L. Bray.

In sum, Menzel's study suggests that the Ica-Inca style was used to express rank within the native Ica nobility rather than to indicate direct linkages with the Inca state. The selective use of Inca features in the Ica valley signaled the prestige of the native elite within the traditional local hierarchy. But now, as subjects of the state, prestige was expressed through the symbols of a new imperial authority. The hybrid objects created in the process of negotiating the changed political landscape underscore both the agency of the local actors and the dynamic nature of material symbols.

Numerous other examples of hybrid vessels have been recovered from coastal sites with Late Horizon components, including Pachacamac (Uhle [1903] 1991), Maranga (Jijón y Caamaño 1924), Túcume (Heyerdahl et al. 1995) and various north coast settlements (e.g., Donnan 1997; Hayashida 1999). At Pachacamac, grave lots from Cemetery VI located on the outskirts of the urban center produced examples of both local and Cuzco style pottery, as well as, in Uhle's words, "a number of objects which belong exclusively neither to the one nor the other but may be said to form a combination of both, and to create new types" ([1903] 1991, 63). The principal variety of hybrid vessels in this cemetery consisted of typical Cuzco Inca forms, such as *aríbalos*, face-neck jars, and flat-bottom jars, produced in the burnished blackware characteristic of the north-central coast of Peru (Uhle [1903] 1991, 62–66; Fig. 6). Not only were these hybrid coastal-Inca forms fabricated using local raw materials, but many also appear to have been manufactured using distinctive regional methods such as press-molds and paddle and anvil techniques (see Hayashida 1999).

In contrast to the hybrid nature of the objects found in Cemetery VI, the pottery associated with the burials below the Temple of the Sun at Pachacamac, in what Uhle referred to as the Cemetery of the Sacrificed Women, was



Fig. 6. A hybrid Inca *aríbalo* vessel form produced in the burnished blackware style of the north-central coast of Peru (Maranga; Museo Jijón y Caamaño, Quito; Cat. no.: P/1016). Photo: T.L. Bray.

considered to be of the finest Cuzco Inca quality based on the "perfection" of vessel forms, decorative treatment, and paste types (Uhle [1903] 1991, 84). Both the associated artifacts and the context of the burials led Uhle to conclude that the sacrificed women were likely of non-local origin and directly affiliated with the Inca state. At Pachacamac, as in the Ica valley, the differential distribution of imperial and hybrid wares suggests the active role of these objects in the construction of individual identity and emergent factions, in the negotiation of new vectors of power, and in the material calibration of status.

The northern Andean highlands

Turning now to the northern highlands of the equatorial Andes, I consider Inca vessel forms and styles from Ecuador in light of the above insights. The Quito-Otavalo-Ibarra region of northern Pichincha and Imbabura provinces comprised the northernmost sector of the Inca Empire. This was the homeland of the confederated Caranqui and Cayambe nations during the late pre-Columbian era. The basic vessel assemblage found throughout this territory from approximately 700 to 1600 CE consisted of tall, wide-necked jars known as *pondos*, tripod and round-bottomed *ollas*, tall pedestal-based dishes known as *compoteras*, simple bowls, and large flat toasting platters



Fig. 7. Vessel forms comprising basic late period ceramic assemblage from the northern Ecuadorian highland region: pondo, tripod vessel, compotera, simple bowl, olla. After Meyers 1981.

(Meyers 1981; Bray 2003b; Fig. 7). The ceramic vessels from this region were rarely decorated beyond the application of red slip, the use of patterned burnishing, and the occasional use of negative or resist painted design (Bray 2003b). After the Inca conquest, potters in this region began to produce Inca vessel forms in the local style (Fig. 8, a–c). A preliminary study of Inca and Inca-local ceramics from this region using neutron activation analysis indicates that the majority of these items were manufactured using local raw materials (Bray and Minc 2008). In addition to creating hybrid forms and styles, local potters were also clearly capable of producing “classic” Inca pottery that closely resembled imperial wares in details of style and form (Fig. 8, d).

Burial data from the northern highlands provides some insight into the ways in which imperial vessel forms articulated with local systems of meaning and ritual. Late pre-Columbian period burials (e.g., 1250–1535 CE) have been excavated at several sites in the region, including Cochasquí (Oberem 1981), Cumbayá (Uhle 1926; Buys n.d.), and the Nuevo Hospital site in Quito (Jijón y Caamaño and Larrea 1918). In terms of vessel types, nearly three-quarters of the 32 burials for which data is available contained from one to seven jars and approximately half contained one or two *compoteras* and/or an *olla* or a tripod vessel (Tab. 1). The jars in these assemblages are one of three varieties: local Caranqui,



Fig. 8. Inca-style pottery from northern Andean highlands; a–c: imperial vessel forms produced in the local style; (a) aríbalo with flat base and modeled face on neck; Azuay Province (Cuenca Municipal Museum; Cat. no.: IM2-8971-87); (b) plain, red-slipped aríbalo; Cotopaxi Province (Casa de Cultura, Latacunga); (c) kero form with negative design (Museo de Jijón y Caamaño, Quito; Cat. no.: 0/5296); (d) imperial style Inca aríbalo from burial at site of Cumbayá, Quito basin, Ecuador. Photos: T.L. Bray.

Panzaleo, or Inca (i.e., *aríbalos*). Panzaleo wares are non-local in origin and likely imported from the eastern flanks and foothills of the Cordillera Real (see Bray 1995). Most of the Inca *aríbalos* in the sample appear to be of local manufacture, and the majority are undecorated (77 percent). Interestingly, the three varieties of jars appear to be mutually exclusive of one another in the mortuary assemblages. In only two cases was a Panzaleo and a local jar found in the same burial, and in no case was an Inca *aríbalo* associated with any other type of jar. The inclusion of local style Caranqui *compoteras* and *ollas* in the grave lots, however, does not appear to correlate with the type of jar present.

In the case of Cumbayá, the two burials with the largest assemblages (No. 21 and C-2)

Site	Burial No.	Jar – Local	Jar – Panzaleo	Jar – Inca (<i>aríbalo</i>)	<i>Compotera</i>	Bowl	<i>Olla</i>	Tripod	Reference
Cumbaya	1		2						
	2	1					1		
	3	1	1						
	4				2		1		
	5		1						
	6	2	1		2 ^[1]				
	9a				1				Uhle 1926
	9b	2							
	9c						4		
	16							2	1
	18	1						1	
	21			3		1	4	2	
	24	1				1			
	C-1				2				
C-2				4 ^[2]	2	1 ^[3]	2		Buys (n.d.)
Cochasqui	1		1					2	
	2		1		1	1		1	
	5				1		2 ^[4]		
	6		1		1			1	
	7				2			1	Oberem 1981
	15				1			2	
	Mnd A			4					
	Mnd M	2			1				
	Mnd N			7			4	5	
Nuevo Hospital, Quito	I			2	1	2			
	II			1	2				
	III			1			1		
	IV			1			1		Jijón y Caamaño and Larrea 1918
	V					1	1	1 ^[5]	
	VI			1	2				
	VII			1					
Inca-Carranqui	1				1				Bray and Echeverría 2008

[1] One of the two *compoteras* was Panzaleo.

[2] Contained one pair of decorated and one pair of undecorated *aríbalos*.

[3] Inca deep dish (*cazuela*) rather than a local bowl.

[4] Both are *zapatiforme ollas*.

[5] Tripod vessel had oblique strap handle like the Inca pedestal-base pot (Jijón y Caamaño and Larrea 1918, 12).

Tab. 1. Late Period Burials Sites and Assemblages from Northern Highland Ecuador.

also contained the largest number of Inca and Panzaleo jars, suggesting a possible association between the non-local styles and relative wealth. At the site in Quito, on the other hand, while the funerary assemblages are far from rich, the exclusive use of Inca *aríbalos* as the sole jar form suggests that these vessels likely played a role in the creation of a shared identity among the users of this cemetery. In the one burial at the Nuevo Hospital site that lacked a jar (Tomb 5), the deceased was provisioned with a hybrid tripod cooking vessel that clearly expressed an understanding of its imperial counterpart through the use of an appropriately placed strap handle (Jijón y Caamaño and Larrea 1918, 11–12). Overall, the data from the northern Ecuadorian highlands indicate that imperial Inca vessels were interpreted in terms of local systems of meaning and selectively incorporated into extant material traditions associated with culinary practices and mortuary ritual. Their hybrid nature suggests their role as bridging devices and an emphasis on regional continuity. The relatively restricted distribution of these vessels among the burials sampled, as well as the humble nature of the assemblages in which they occur, suggest that they served in the creation and calibration of both status and group membership at the local level rather than as expressions of direct linkages with the Inca state.

Moving slightly south to the Riobamba-Ambato region of the central Ecuadorian highlands, the documented evolution of one specific local Puruhá vessel form provides further insight into how the encounter between imperial Inca powers and native elites played out in the material realm. Archaeological evidence indicates a tradition of small to medium-sized anthropomorphic vessels in this region that pre-dates the Inca incursion by half a millennium or more (Jijón y Caamaño 1927; [1952] 1997, 206–17) (Fig. 9). Based on their size range and formal characteristics, it is reasonable to suggest that these anthropomorphic vessels likely served

as drinking cups. The historical, political, and social significance of drinking and toasting in Andean society is well documented (Arnold 1997; Cummins 2002; Jennings and Bowser 2008). The formal and stylistic analogies made by local potters in the manufacture of these cups following the Inca incursion provides insight into functional equivalency, symbolic significance, and the ontological status of both local and imperial vessels (Fig. 10). As in the case of the Ica valley in southern Peru, newly minted imperial subjects in the central Ecuadorian highlands appear to have selectively adapted those aspects of the Inca state style most congruent with their own traditions – a practice that resulted in the generation of novel forms and products. The hybrid outcome of the Puruhá-Inca encounter – the anthropomorphized *keero* – reflects an acute awareness of the evolving political landscape, the politics of drink, the role of objects in the negotiation of power, and the agency of local actors.

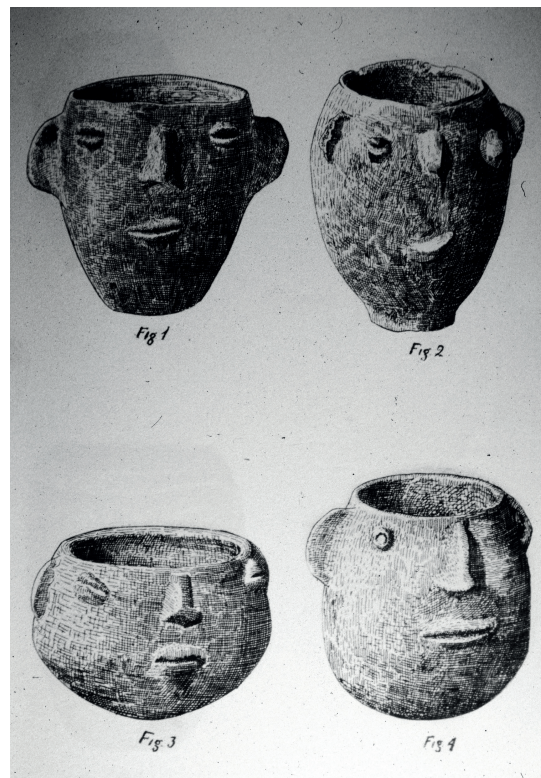


Fig. 9. Local, pre-incaic drinking cups from the Puruhá region of the central Ecuadorian highlands. After Jijón y Caamaño 1927, Pl. 48.



Fig. 10. Transformation of local Puruhá style drinking cups following Inca incursion in central Ecuadorian highlands. Clockwise from upper left, (a) pre-incaic anthropomorphic cup from Puruhá region (Jijón y Caamaño 1927, Pl. 48a); (b) Inca kero (Cuzco area; National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution; Cat. no.: 378129); (c) Inca face-neck jar – note coffee bean eyes and double black line across bridge of nose (Museo Inka, Cuzco; Cat. no.: A-480); (d) hybrid Inca-Puruhá drinking cups (keros) exhibiting selective use of specific attributes of Inca form and decoration from Ambato area (Museo de Jijón y Caamaño, Quito; Cat. nos.: 0/3824 and 0/3833).

The imperial heartland

That the effects of the cultural encounter between imperial elites and local leaders during the Late pre-Columbian era was not unidirectional is implied by the presence of both hybrid and exotic elements in the heartland of the Empire. For example, the Inca stylistic variant known as Urcusuyu, characterized by the use of orange bands often dramatically outlined in black with elaborate polychrome design, is clearly linked to the Titicaca basin and has antecedents in earlier Tiwanaku culture (Rowe 1944, 49; Julien 1993, 190–99). Imperial vessel forms in the Urcusuyu style

are fairly common in Cuzco (Rowe 1944, 48–49; Burger and Salazar 2004, 130–31), and have also been archaeologically recovered at the royal estates of Chinchero (Rivera 1976, 60–61), Machu Picchu (Bingham [1930] 1979, Figs. 78, 81, 115; Burger and Salazar 2004, 130, 142–44), and Ollantaytambo (Gibaja 2004). Another late period style that the Inca evidently thought prestigious enough to appropriate was that of the coastal empire of Chimor. The fine blackware vessels associated with the Chimor were mold-made, highly burnished, and high-fired in a reducing atmosphere (Tschnauer et al. 1994). As a result of the production process, these wares exhibit a glossy surface finish often likened to a “metallic sheen.” In the imperial heartland, such blackware vessels have been found both in Cuzco (Martinez 1986) and Machu Picchu (Bingham [1930] 1979, Figs. 111, 115, 118; Burger and Salazar 2004, 136). The incorporation of these pre-incaic forms and styles into the imperial Inca assemblage as well as their presence in the capital of Cuzco indicates the two-way influence of the ongoing encounters with cultural others in the shaping of symbols that connoted imperial identity.

In the context of this discussion, I want to highlight one vessel in particular that I encountered in the collections of the American Museum of Natural History in 1997 that merits special attention (Fig. 11 left).³ This unique specimen belongs to the general category of vessels from the northern highlands known as *compoteras*. Both the basic morphology and the tall, partially excised pedestal base of this vessel are typical of the Cashaloma style of the Cañari province of southern Ecuador dating to the late pre-Columbian era (Fig. 11 right). Museum records indicate that this piece was acquired by Adolph Bandelier in the Cuzco area in the late 19th century. While the

³ Since the original publication of this paper, I have identified a seemingly identical vessel in terms of both morphology and decorative treatment in the collections of the National Museum of Archaeology, Anthropology, and History in Lima, Peru.

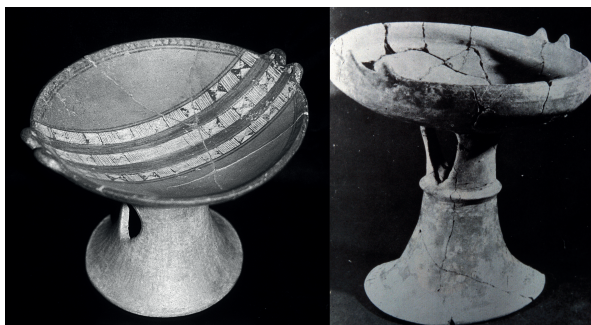


Fig. 11. Left: hybrid Inca-Cashaloma compotera acquired by Adolph Bandelier in Cuzco in late 19th century (*American Museum of Natural History, New York; Cat. no.: B/8268*); photo: T.L. Bray. Right: Cashaloma compotera from the site of Ingapirca; after Fresco 1984, Pl.12a.

compotera form derives from the far northern highlands, the painted polychrome decoration on the interior of this vessel is rendered in the classic Cuzco style typical of the Inca shallow plate. The combination of form and style in this hybrid specimen suggests that *compoteras* were likely seen as the functional equivalent of Inca shallow plates. Given where it was found and the cultural referents it evokes, it is interesting to speculate on the significance of this piece. Was it a gift? A souvenir? The possession of a Cañari resident of Cuzco?⁴ Perhaps the “inca-ization” of this north highland form represented a desire on the part of its maker to elevate the prestige of this particular vernacular item in the most celebrated of all Inca contexts – the capital city of Cuzco. Or perhaps it represented an attempt on the part of a state potter to directly appropriate a prestigious provincial vessel category. In either case, this unique specimen speaks to the ways in which hybrid objects materialize and mediate distinct systems of meaning, as well as to the agency of both their makers and users.

Agency, actors, objects, and hybrids

Hybridity has emerged as a key research theme in cultural and postcolonial studies

over the past two decades (see Bhabha 1994; Gilroy 2000; Hall 1996). Resurrected from a dubious semantic past, the notion of hybridity was re-introduced by Homi Bhabha to capture the essential “in-between-ness” of people and their actions in colonial and contact situations. For him, it represented an attempt to overcome the dualist conceptions of the colonial situation in which distinctions between colonizers and colonized were seen to be both straightforward and stable (Bhabha 1994). In the newly created space of the in-between zone, which Bhabha refers to as the “third space,” people lose their original grounds and mixtures of the old and new transpire with both sides being inevitably transformed.

In the context of post-colonial studies, hybridity has proved a highly productive concept. It has come to refer to a constellation of things relating to the mixings and re-combinations that occur in the shared space of cultural encounters. In the realm of archaeology and material culture studies, the analytic potential of a focus on hybridization has also begun to be recognized (e.g., Antonaccio 2003; 2005; Card 2013; van Dommelen 2006). In these arenas, the concept offers a fresh approach to exploring established notions of ethnicity, stable identities, and the directionality of culture change. The concept of hybridization captures the processes and outcomes of the interaction and negotiation that occurs among actors and groups entangled in colonial situations. In highlighting these processes, the focus is on how specific elements are introduced or acquired and how such elements combine with and reconfigure local traditions, habitats, and systems of meaning through their material effects.

Extending the notion of hybridity to the material realm serves also to focus attention on the material agency of objects. Over the past several decades, agency has become one of

4 For information on the Cañari presence in Cuzco, see Villanueva (1971) and Niles (1999).

the more important concepts in the toolbox of archaeological theory (Bray 2008). The term “agency” has been used widely, if somewhat loosely, to characterize more subject-centered approaches to archaeological inquiry (Dobres and Robb 2000). Beyond human agency, this theoretical orientation holds much promise for furthering our models and understandings of material culture as well. Given such classic anthropological works as those of Gell (1998), Latour (1993), MacKenzie (1991), and Strathern (1999) highlighting the ways in which social agency is not co-terminous with the human body, it is possible to think about how objects, as material extensions of the agency of those who produced them, also participate in systems of social relationships. By attending to the ways in which social relations are created and shaped through the affective properties of things, we can consider the active nature of objects in relation to their ability to elicit and channel particular responses on the part of people (e.g., Gosden 2001; Pollard 2004). This takes us back to the realm of the hybrid.

The empire created by the Inca was territorially extensive and, for the most part, indirectly administered. The importance of the native elite as cultural brokers and intermediary assets to the Cuzqueños and their imperial project is apparent from the ethnohistoric record (see, for example, Wernke 2006b). As with elite members of most societies, we can presume that the actions of local ethnic lords would have principally reflected their own self-interest. In territorially extensive states such as that of Tawantinsuyu, centralized control and patronage of elite craft production was often aimed at promoting a polity-wide uniformity of style (Trigger 2003, 545–52). The elite art and objects thus generated would have played a material role in reinforcing a sense of unity and belonging within the governing class dispersed over a large region (Trigger 2003, 551). In the late pre-Columbian Andes, as in other pre-industrial, pre-capitalist contexts, it may well have been more natural for the lords of Cuzco and the native elites to interact

across ethnic divides rather than to cross the social and class divisions between subjects and rulers. In other words, it seems likely that even during the period of imperial Inca expansion, Andean elites – both imperial and local – did what they had always done: intermarry, create alliances, exchange gifts, vie for power, plot against rivals, and kill one another. Such political strategies and class-conscious actions may well be materially reflected in the spotty distribution of classic imperial style artifacts around the empire.

It is also true, however, that the Inca Empire was built on the backs of a multitude of agricultural communities largely comprised of average peasants. Though many of these Andean communities were ethnically distinct, it seems likely that they nonetheless shared similar world views and social orientations. In most historical contexts, rural peasants were typically bound by customary norms and obligations to their lords and patrons. Such communities tend to form small-scale, cohesive entities that are generally conservative in outlook and resistant to change. While tastes and fashions among elites may have come and gone, change among the conservative rural farmers and herders who accounted for the bulk of the Inca Empire’s population was likely to have been limited and slow. In the late pre-Columbian Andes, this is attested by the stability of local settlement patterns, productive activities, architecture, and material culture.

Yet the presence of hybrid Inca-local objects amid the archaeological assemblages of such small and seemingly inconsequential communities as Guano (Jijón y Caamaño 1927; Davies 1996) and Agua Blanca (McEwan and Silva 1989) in Ecuador, Ichu in Peru (Thompson 1967), and sites in the Elqui and Limarí valleys in north-central Chile (Cantarutti 2002; González Carvajal 2008), to name but a few, suggests the importance of social distinction, hierarchical ranking, and cultural awareness and interconnectedness at

even the most remote of rural locations during the Late Horizon. To argue that individuals were cognizant of shifting landscapes of power at the broader macro-regional level, as well as alert to potential effects and possibilities at home, seems warranted by such artifacts. The nature of these objects and the contexts in which they have been found gives new meaning to the old maxim that “all politics is local.” The vessel forms and representations so often construed as but poor imitations of imperial products may, from a different vantage, be viewed as the material expression of local political maneuverings, the acuity of local political actors, and a clear understanding on their part of the agency of objects. Approaching provincial Inca objects as evidence of interested and informed social agents offers a new avenue for exploring the social motives and regional interconnectedness of peoples and communities during the Late Horizon.

Concluding thoughts

Provincial Inca pottery has often been referred to as an imitation of the “originary” imperial wares presumed to have been produced in Cuzco. The word “imitation” traditionally carries negative connotations. Meyers (1975, 9), for instance, defined “imitation-Inca” pottery as “*defective or crude copies that are easily recognized in terms of technique, form, and decoration.*” Calderari and Williams (1991, 79), in their discussion of provincial Inca pottery from Argentina, defined this class of materials as “*copies produced by less expert hands than those of the artisans of Cuzco.*” Such negative attitudes may ultimately stem from Veblen’s ([1899] 1953) early formulation of the concept of emulation in which persons in socially inferior positions were seen to be the ones mainly engaged in this activity. More recent works have taken a broader view of the concept of emulation. Carolyn Dean (1999), for instance, in a study of Inca symbols from Colonial period Cuzco, draws a distinction

between slavish imitation and selective appropriation of symbols and forms. In her discussion, she likens the notion of imitation to that of “quotation.” From her perspective, “quotation,” like imitation, is undertaken from a position of weakness because such acts give authority and voice to another. She contrasts the idea of “imitation,” however, with that of “citation,” suggesting that the latter implies a positive sense of individuals’ selectively employing knowledge of the Other to further their own ends.

One of the salient points from Dean’s (1999) study for the present discussion is that the ability to choose what aspects to incorporate and what to leave out, as in the case of “citation,” implies agency, knowledgeable actors, and (limited) power. Rather than simply writing off provincial Inca pottery as poor imitations produced by “backwoods wannabees,” I suggest that such objects are better understood as representations of the material strategies of socially savvy actors in the newly created third spaces of colonial encounters. Such hybrid objects would have aided in the creation of structured systems of difference *vis-à-vis* others, both at home and away. The various archaeological contexts in which these objects are found, relating to both consumption and ritual, indicate their active involvement in the expression of identity and the promotion of specific, hoped-for kinds of social engagements and outcomes. The presence of such hybrid objects in both the imperial center and in the hinterlands, as well as the fact that both Inca and local forms experienced “hybridization,” indicate that culture change was multi-directional rather than unilateral and imposed from above. The significance of imperial Inca pottery as a marker of imperial reach is underscored by its widespread appropriation and its apparent flexibility as a symbol that could be made to serve multiple sectors of late period Andean society with divergent agendas.

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