

REWRITING THE HISTORY, REDRAWING THE MAP: A RADICAL NEW VISION FOR LINGUISTICS AND ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE ANDES

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ABSTRACT (673 WORDS)

As so ambitious a title suggests, the goal of this article is deliberately provocative: to fire a new debate and a radical interdisciplinary rethinking of Andean prehistory, for the purposes of this symposium and this book. Its ambition, moreover, is born out of frustration: at the meagre progress to date in bringing together the disparate visions of archaeology and historical linguistics in the Andes.

The greatest surviving language family of the New World – Quechua – has traditionally been classified in terms of a primary division and deep-time bifurcation into two main branches: that of central Peru, ‘QI’; vs. that of all other regions, ‘QII’. In recent years this model has begun to come apart at the seams, as linguistic evidence accumulates to leave the binary QI~QII vision untenable in principle. We bite the bullet, to argue that the traditional branching ‘family tree’ classification should be abandoned, in favour of an initial dialect continuum model instead.

As this edifice crumbles, down with it comes the traditional scenario, founded squarely upon it, of how the origins of the languages of the Andes relate to ‘cultures’ in the archaeological record. Torero’s (1964) branching classification required him to find separate homelands and expansion episodes for Proto-QI, Proto-QII, and each of their putative sub-branches. The result was an unlikely, piecemeal and involved hypothesis, beset with contradictions, with small-scale Intermediate Period polities invoked to drive great language expansions. But however unconvincing, no coherent alternative was offered by archaeologists, many of whom worked on among linguistically untenable assumptions that attributed the spread of Quechua to the Incas, and that of Aymara to Tiyawanaku (*sic*).

Here we start afresh, taking a step back from all existing proposals to return to first principles in how to go about linking linguistics and archaeology. We structure this article by the various levels on which to approach the task: chronology; geography; causation. In the last particularly, any association of language expansions to the real world forces that may drive them (demographic, economic, cultural) must respect the principle that such causes be *commensurate in scale* with the linguistic effects attributed to them. This logic is simple, but powerful, and points to a straightforward, albeit revolutionary, scenario for Andean prehistory.

Within the archaeological chronology, the prime candidates to drive great language dispersals are not the regionally circumscribed polities of the Intermediate Periods, but the Horizons, when the material culture evidence points to cultural influences extending across wide expanses of the central Andes. But the archaeological record attests to *three* Horizons, while the linguistics features but *two* major language expansions, those that gave rise to the Aymara and Quechua families.

As linguists have long appreciated, however, the Inca Late Horizon can safely be excluded as a prime driver of either, for it is far too recent to be compatible with the diversity and time-depth of either language family. Likewise, any period before the Early Horizon, including notably the Pre-Ceramic, is far too early to explain them. This duly leaves but two Horizons in contention as drivers for our two language expansions.

Chronology, geography, and commensurate scale in causation all point to a one-to-one match here that entirely overturns the traditional model. The language spoken and spread by the Wari Middle Horizon was not Aymara but Quechua. This overlay the far older expansion of Aymara: the work of the Chavín Early Horizon, whose greater age and lesser intensity leave a fainter trace, both archaeological and linguistic, across the Central Andes. These two highland centres, not Torero's coastal ones, were the homelands of the respective proto-languages.

In turn, this new synthesis informs the intense archaeological debates about Andean archaeological horizons. Great language expansions in pre-modern times are the consequence of major demographic changes: most plausibly associated with military, expansionist empires, enabled by, and driving further, the crossing of agricultural intensity thresholds.

The task of this article is to demonstrate how not just in principle, but even down to the fine detail, the linguistic and archaeological records corroborate our radical new proposal for a coherent and holistic cross-disciplinary vision of Andean prehistory.