1.5
The Andes–Amazonia culture area

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In this chapter I do not intend to point out the obvious contrasts between the Andean mountains and Amazonian lowlands and the peoples living there, nor will I enter into a history of contact between the two areas. Instead, I wish to stress their common background and the essential similarities between their cultural systems, both social and ritual. I will address the issue primarily with regard to the Central Andes, as unified under the Inca Empire, and peoples living far to their east, in particular the Ge and Bororo of Central Brazil and the Tukano of north-western Amazonia. An additional and practical reason for this choice is that those peoples have become particularly well known to us.

I see the problem at hand also in wider terms, however. When studying general anthropology and reading ethnographies from all over the world, it struck me that theoretical approaches to studying them showed differences not only between continental areas but also between the cultures within each continent. For instance, Australian systems of kinship and social organization, in their explicit forms, occur almost uniquely in their own continent. Aside from Australia, South America is the most isolated of the continents, and Andean civilization arose independently, more so than any other. Popular arguments for this independent character include the claims that Andean civilization never developed the wheel or writing. But currently of more interest may be, for instance, to emphasise the exclusively South American character of Andean kinship systems and nomenclatures (Lounsbury 1986; Zuidema 1977). The same idea was developed, albeit in a more restricted and specific way, by J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong (1983) for the Indonesian archipelago, and further applied by others, in particular Van Wouden (1968, 1983). Here I will consider basic social and ritual systems in the Andes, alongside those for Ge, Bororo and Tukano peoples (Zuidema 1965).
The villages of the Ge people, of which I take as an example one of the Canela villages (also called Eastern Timbira) in eastern Brazil, are characterized by four fundamental properties:

1. matrilocal family houses, arranged in a circle
2. the use of the central plaza by males
3. plaza moieties and six (primarily male) plaza groups, in two moieties of three
4. four active male age-classes, plus two inactive ones.

In addition to these, a final, fifth property is that each of the foregoing organizations also has a two-way division, but without them becoming exogamous moieties (though the idea of exogamy is known of in a ritual way). The houses in the village circle play hardly any formal role in the other organizations, though such connections are found in cultures further towards the Andes – that is, in other Ge cultures, the Bororo, and peoples of lowland Bolivia. In the Canela system, succession is conferred by inheriting personal names, in particular for membership in the plaza organizations. For men this is passed on matrilineally to a sister’s son, and for women patrilineally to a brother’s daughter. Such a custom of name succession is also mentioned for the Aymara around Lake Titicaca (Bertonio 1984). Elsewhere, however, plaza groups may become related to the matrilineal houses on the village circle. I return to this issue below, and a very explicit example, also from the Bororo.

Let us turn now to the Canela age-class system, which bears a formal similarity to that of the plaza groups yet serves a totally different and opposing function (Nimuendajú 1946). We are dealing here with a theoretical problem of great importance, and one which was echoed in a similar function in Inca society.

When youths begin to form a new age-class of men aged 20–29 years, such as the one on the east side in the year 1920, the age-class residing there moves into the position of the 40–49 age-class. At that point there is no movement on the west side. Ten years later, youths enter on the west side, with the same result for the age-class 20 years older (30–39): they move into the position of the 50–59 age-class.

Table 1.5.1 Canela age-classes (20–, 30–, 40–, 50–) in their East and West moieties. Note the places within the structure for youths (~20) and old men (60–). © The estate of R. Tom Zuidema.
So the moieties are in fact in a way endogamous in their relations to each other. Their role is totally different from the plaza groups, for example, although in cultures further to the west, nearer the Andes, the ritual action of moieties and plaza groups may become integrated with each other in certain ways. But in part this growth may also have been a misunderstanding on the part of ethnographers. While kin groups clearly highlight lineage continuity through multiple generations, age-class systems, too, can establish temporal contrasts between longer, regular time-spans, including generations. These contrasts were a significant feature of Canela and Inca concepts of the past. In fact, Nimuendajú mentions examples of how the Canela remembered historical events back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, by reference to successive 40-year cycles. I will argue below that this was also a feature of the Inca age-class system, and over even longer periods.

As for the Bororo, their village organization bears a remarkable similarity – all villages following exactly the same schema and group names – to that of Cuzco, the Inca capital (Fabian 1992). Where in Bororo villages houses are connected through paths that all lead to the men’s house, in Cuzco (and in Inca provinces, towns or villages) these paths became the ceque directions leading from the central temple of the Sun, the Coricancha (house of the Sun), out to the horizon, and documenting the locations of huacas, each one worshipped by a different family on a different day. There is also an impressive coincidence in the number of groups in the Bororo and Inca systems, save for one difference. In Cuzco there are two moieties, four quarters (suyu), and nine ceques in each suyu (that is, three groups of three ceques each) – with the exception that in the lowest ranked suyu, some ceques were each split into two minor ones. In a Bororo village there are two moieties, four quarters, but only two (not three) lineages in each quarter, although each lineage is again divided into three sub-lineages. It is noteworthy that there were more houses in the lowest quarter than in the other quarters, a feature similar to the Cuzco system (and some other Peruvian cases). Despite the great similarity of the Bororo model to that of Cuzco, there is no reason to suggest that Inca culture, or any similar pre-Inca culture, had spread to Bororo territory, either by conquest or any other long-term domination. It seems that we must simply accept that there existed a fundamental similarity between cultural models in Central Brazil and in the Central Andes.

Let me now pay attention to the parallels between two other distinctive features of Bororo and Andean cultures. Perhaps because the Bororo moved various ritual features from the plaza to the houses in the village circle, some of the contrasts between lineages and age-classes have become less marked over time. Recent reports on Bororo rituals and the myths that belong to each lineage no longer mention age-classes. Nonetheless, according to Fabian (1998), who conducted a specific study of social and temporal organization, calendars and astronomy in a Bororo village, older people still remembered the role of age-classes, and references to them are found in the myths belonging to various lineages.
This first problem may be related to a second one, which played an important role in the Andes as well as in Bororo society. Bororo moieties are exogamous. Both are also divided into quarters. The two hereditary village chiefs each belong to the leading lineage of a different quarter in the higher-ranked moiety. They have the unique prerogative of marrying endogamously, each within his quarter. Here we are dealing with a problem of political hierarchy that was all-important in Cuzco, too, as the capital of Inca society and empire, and which still leaves traces to this day.

It is well known that the Inca king could marry his own sister. In fact, we have here a hierarchical system where people of higher ranks marry ever closer relatives, within more endogamous groups (Zuidema 1990). However, men of higher rank were also allowed to marry, exogamously, further secondary spouses, thus building up larger political networks. These two features influenced social and political situations that can still hold today, in relationships between moieties, for instance. In Inca Cuzco, there was a well-described ranking difference between the city’s two moieties, in which Inca high nobility belonged, endogamously, to the upper moiety. Nonetheless, our first and best-informed chronicler, Juan de Betanzos, claims to the contrary that Inca moieties in the Cuzco province were exogamous; he is, in fact, the only chronicler to make such an explicit claim. The issue is of even more interest in that Polo de Ondegardo, an equally well-informed early chronicler, explicitly states and concludes that people of one of the Cuzco moieties could not possess and inherit land in the other moiety, thus implying that these moieties were endogamous, contrary to Betanzos (Zuidema 2013). The apparent contrast is resolved when one realizes that Betanzos was referring to secondary marriages, and Polo to primary ones. Similar problems are still important today. Moieties in local communities are frequently claimed to be strictly endogamous. In one village where I have conducted fieldwork (Sarhua, in the Ayacucho department), one family belonging to the upper moiety claimed Inca descent and was said to engage in more endogamous marriages than was permitted to other families.

So far, I have introduced only in rather general terms the formal similarities between the Ge-Bororo and Andean social and ritual systems. Let me now move on to more precise descriptions of two mutual, complementary models within the Inca age-class system. In particular, I will stress how the second of these models shows great similarity to the Canela model. This leads me to argue also for a basic similarity with the Tukano social system.

The first model is one mentioned by various chroniclers of Inca culture, in which adults were grouped into five age-classes, of five years each. Other sources mention that there could be a further, sixth age-class, either as an introductory or as an exiting class. In one source, the Huarochirí manuscript, the model is described also as a hierarchy of five or six brothers and as many sisters (G. Taylor 1999), with the fourth child nonetheless being called ‘youngest’. Such a model is still a popular conception of a ‘complete’ family – with the fourth child called ‘youngest’, and two extra children – in Andean society today (from my own fieldwork
The chronicler Guamán Poma de Ayala gives us a detailed description of the age-class system of the Inca acllas, ‘chosen’ virgins (Guamán Poma de Ayala 1987/1615; Zuidema 1990; on Guamán Poma, see Chapters 5.1 and 5.2). Since I have analysed elsewhere the very intricate but consistent information that Guamán Poma provides, I will here limit myself to some relevant conclusions. First, the author mentions the age-classes in a kind of alternating hierarchical descending sequence (1, 3, 2, 4, 5, 6) that I present as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age-class 1: 20–25 years</th>
<th>Age-class 3: 30–35 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age-class 2: 25–30 years</td>
<td>Age-class 4: 35–40 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age-class 5: 40–50 years</td>
<td>Age-class 6: 50–60 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since ranks 1 and 3 represent a clear inside–outside opposition (worship of the sun in the city’s supposedly central temple of the sun, as opposed to worship of Huanacauri mountain on the flanks of the Cuzco valley), I assume that the opposition holds also for the two columns. There is a close correspondence with the Canela age-class model.

The second model concerns the ten ranked sons – or probably better, ten groups of sons – of the Inca, called panaca, five panacas belonging to the upper moiety and five to the lower one. While later sources would seriously distort the essence of the system in order to serve Spanish interests, here I follow both the earliest description, derived from our most trustworthy and knowledgeable source (Las Casas 1967), and the one that remained closest to the pre-Hispanic value of the panaca system (Santo Tomás 1995). One later but still trustworthy reference, however, also implies a sixth position of younger sons in each moiety who had not yet entered into the system (Cobo 1636/1964; Zuidema 2011). In line with the ten panacas, the Cuzco valley was itself divided into ten ranked administrative sections, called chapa. All bordered on the river Huatanay, flowing west to east, with the five Hanan sections arrayed in sequence to the north of the river, and the five Hurin sections south of it. Each chapa and its inhabitants was governed by a panaca member. Each panaca was also in charge of the rituals of one particular month in the Inca calendar. In conclusion, we are clearly dealing here with the age-class system in its highest and most elaborate form. It was also thus the instrument perhaps best expressed in Inca rituals, Inca religion, Inca ideas about the past and Inca art.

Let me give two examples. First is a description of the role of the panacas at the close of the highest state rituals in the two royal months around the time of the summer solstice (December). Each panaca offered and sacrificed a llama to a different deity, according to its rank. By weaving together a complete picture out of many sources, we can conclude that the first panaca, in Hanan as well as in Hurin, made
offering to the Sun, the second to Thunder, the third to Viracocha (in whom the Spaniards recognized a creator god), and the fourth and fifth either to the Moon or to the Earth. What we have here is a hierarchy, particularly of the first three gods. Other well-informed chroniclers also make special mention of this religious hierarchy, which moreover conforms very closely with that set out by Guamán Poma in describing the aclla age-classes.

The second example concerns a beautiful Inca tunic, possibly from early colonial times, showing a row of six Inca crowns (mascapaycha). The lower parts consisted of a fringe of red wool, which (according to one chronicler) represented blood dripping from decapitated enemy heads. One of the fringes, however, is of yellow wool, to reflect that it belonged to a person of lower rank, a crown prince, who had not yet killed an enemy. Above the fringe are represented five, not six, decapitated heads, to recognize that they correspond only to the red mascapaychas. In this case we can conclude that the five mascapaychas corresponded to five panacas, and to one other group, explicitly recognized as not being ruled by a panaca in its corresponding month.

One last remarkable property of the panaca system leads me now to close with a direct comparison to an important political concept that unifies the exogamous groups in various political units of Tukano peoples living along headwaters of the Amazon in north-west Amazonia. Given that the social systems of these peoples are very similar to each other, the observations of various anthropologists can be discussed together as part of one and the same system. The male members of one family, as well as those within any one exogamous group, are distinguished from each other as ‘brothers’ of five different ranks and functions. In the following schema I set this structure alongside the ranks in the Andean panaca system (Zuidema 2011).

Although the sequences of functions are not exactly the same in both lists, and at least one function, the fourth, is different, the correspondence is nonetheless remarkable, and even more so given that in Tukano opinion the dancers and singers are most similar to western priests. The correspondence between both orders is further supported when one takes into account the mythical origin of the Tukano peoples all living along the same tributary of the Amazon. They were

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Inca status/function</th>
<th>Tukano status/function</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sun; government</td>
<td>Chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Thunder; warfare</td>
<td>Dancers, singers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Viracocha; priests</td>
<td>Warriors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>(Villagers?)</td>
<td>Shamans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Servants</td>
<td>Servants</td>
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said to be descended from the same ancestor who had travelled upriver from the Amazon. Along that tributary, the first to go ashore and settle was the brother who was to become the chief. Further and further upstream the other four brothers disembarked in the ordained sequence, to become founders of their respective villages. The process also applies over generations, however. Thus when someone from the third village, for instance, that of the warriors, would later visit someone from the first village, he would address the latter as ‘grandson’ and not as ‘younger brother’ (nor as ‘older brother’ as we might expect). Even though the five founders had started out as ‘brothers’, the distinctions between them in time came to be expressed in terms of generations, and inversely to their age rank.

The structural similarity is clear, between the five Tukano brother groups and the five panacas in each Cuzco moiety – who likewise could be referred to by the Inca himself either in an ascending or descending hierarchy. It is also striking that both hierarchies were laid out along a river, even if in the Tukano case the descending hierarchy goes upstream and in the Inca case downstream (along the Huatanay). An essential point is that time distinctions, not only in the past but also in the future, were in both cases made through age-groups. These were primarily age-classes of brothers or of sisters, but also generations, and in the Inca case could span periods much longer still (Ossio 2015; Zuidema 1964, 1995).

The Tukano peoples lived closer to the Andes than the Bororo, but aside from the illustration just given it is difficult to find other examples of similarity between the Tukano and Inca cultures. It is also difficult to argue for historical contacts between the peoples of the Andes and those of eastern Bolivia and Brazil. On the other hand, given the designedly circular forms of pre-Tiahuanaco settlements like Pucara and Chiripa, both on the Altiplano near Lake Titicaca, one might consider that there had once stretched a cultural continuum from the Andes to central Brazil. Ceque systems like that of Cuzco, and age-class systems, had an importance far wider and more profound than is perhaps recognized in modern studies of Andean culture. They were still vital when the Spanish chroniclers reported them, and retain their influence today, even if the study of other matters seems more urgent. And although I have been able here to give examples of continuity only between the Andean and Amazonian culture areas, that continuity probably held much more widely across the South American continent. Age-class systems were a major element of Andean as well as Amazonian cultures, and should be studied intensively, perhaps also with a view to establishing contacts across any putative Andes–Amazonia divide.