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Andean connections: a multi-analytical approach to the circulation of materials and artefacts in pre-Columbian NW Argentina

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To explain interaction South-central Andean scholarship has extensively discussed a variety of circulation and exchange practices, with particular emphasis on llama caravan long-distance trade.

While material culture styles and traits were undoubtedly shared, the unexamined focus on similarities leaves the mechanisms, direction, and intensity of interaction to speculation. Provenance analyses can shed new light on these ancient relationships, yet focusing on single analytical techniques obscures the nuances of early interaction.

To further contribute to the detection of the intricate relationships supporting ancient networks, we implemented a multi-analytical approach to different classes of artefacts traditionally considered separately, such as pottery and stone tools. We focus here on the results of the analysis of 542 pottery sherds from first millennium AD sites from NW Argentina, as well as clay samples, obtained through petrography, NAA, and targeted LA-ICP-MS. We discuss these results against the backdrop of the circulation of other materials such as obsidian and other stones, and the complex and long-standing routes they travelled.

In NW Argentina, traditional approaches proposed that regional interaction was an increasingly centralized process, based on typological similarities observed in a variety of materials across the region. Our results provide a platform to examine close intercommunity links rooted on common craft practices, including but not limited to stylistic aspects, and to explore the ancient circulation of goods, skills, and people without assuming the capacity of early elites to manipulate and capitalize on such networks.

Keywords: ceramics, obsidian, southern andes, interaction

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