

Recognising strategies for conquered territories: a case study from the Inka North Calchaquí Valley

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In this detailed study of fifteenth-century settlements in Argentina, the authors show how the Inka did not just use force, production and ritual to subdue the indigenous population. The conquerors' strategy included the re-ordering of settlement plans, routeways and landscape, class separation and even the imposition of a rigorous discipline on the indigenous vision, controlling what could be seen looking out or looking in. The material readings made in these South American examples have much to offer to archaeologists working in colonial periods elsewhere.

Keywords: Argentina, Inka, fifteenth century AD, empire, colonialism, settlement, landscape, use of space, pathways, viewsheds

Introduction

One intriguing question in the study of early empires is how they controlled their subjects and maintained their domination (see Alcock *et al.* 2001). This article explores methods of colonisation and legitimacy, using the Inka empire as the object of study. Due allowance is made for the fact that the Inka empire or *Tawantinsuyu* was the outcome of a particular historical and socio-cultural trajectory and geographical context and, therefore, the nature of its power strategies and methods of domination differed from other ancient or modern forms of imperialism. But we believe that the particularities of a case are sometimes more interesting than their generalities since they allow us to appreciate the diverse ways in which societies order and understand the world. In particular, we examine the mechanism

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of Inka rule over the North Calchaquí Valley (Figure 1), showing that the strategic use of architecture and the manipulation of pathways and views within Inka places were key aspects of Tawantinsuyu's domination in the region.

Inka strategies

During the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries AD, the Inkas conquered a vast territory in pre-Columbian South America and exerted rule over numerous polities and ethnic groups, ranging from powerful states, such as Chimú on the Peruvian north Pacific coast, to the large chiefdoms of the Titicaca basin, and from the indomitable Cañaris of Ecuador to the less complex communities of the South Andes. In order to control these multiple lands and peoples, they applied a variety of strategies of domination which encompassed the thorough bureaucratic administration of provincial lands (D'Altroy 2002; Covey 2008; Urton 2008), an overarching financial system based on *corvée* labour, attached craft specialists, state farms, storage facilities (Murra 1978; Earle & D'Altroy 1989; D'Altroy 2002), the manipulation of native structures of power, the forced relocation of ethnic communities (Murra 1978; Hyslop 1979; Pease 1982) and control over feasting and ritual activities, including the co-option of paramount Andean pilgrim centres and indigenous shrines (Bauer & Stanish 2001; Dillehay 2003; Morris & Covey 2003; Morris & Santillana 2007; Besom 2009).

Landscape and architecture were actively deployed in all of these strategies of control (Morris 1987; Hyslop 1990; Niles 1992, 1999; van de Guchte 1999; Troncoso 2004; Coben 2006). Architectural forms, spatial layout and internal circulation were used to construct a specific social order and to fix social relations. Inka spatiality not only represented Tawantinsuyu's social structure but also made people conform to it and live their lives accordingly. As at Cuzco, the imperial capital, the Inkas employed space to put people in their 'right' places (Morris 1987; Hyslop 1990; Acuto 2005). Space was oriented to the construction and imposition of distinct social identities: to mark the subordinate rank of indigenous people, limiting their capacity for action, and to support the status and social reproduction of the colonisers who, in the North Calchaquí Valley, as in many provincial areas, were Inka allies from other regions who played the part of representatives of Tawantinsuyu (Malpass & Alconini 2010). In addition, we show that the Inkas pursued the manipulation of bodily experiences to create a sense of inclusion and exclusion and to theatrically display the new order of things and their intervention over the conquered region.

The use of space in indigenous settlements

At first glance, the residential settlements that North Calchaquí indigenous communities built in the Late Intermediate period (AD 1000–1450) and during Inka occupation (AD 1450–1536) appear as large agglomerates of stone structures (from 200 to more than 500 in some cases) arranged in a cell-like pattern, as we can see from the example of the indigenous site at La Paya (Figure 2). Although the spatial layout of these sites seems quite chaotic, agglomeration and cell patterning of itself should not be irrevocably interpreted as the total



Figure 1. The North Calchaquí Valley, Argentina, showing the sites mentioned in the text: 1) La Paya; 2) Guitián; 3) Cortaderas Bajo; 4) Cortaderas Alto; 5) Cortaderas Izquierda; 6) Cortaderas Derecha.

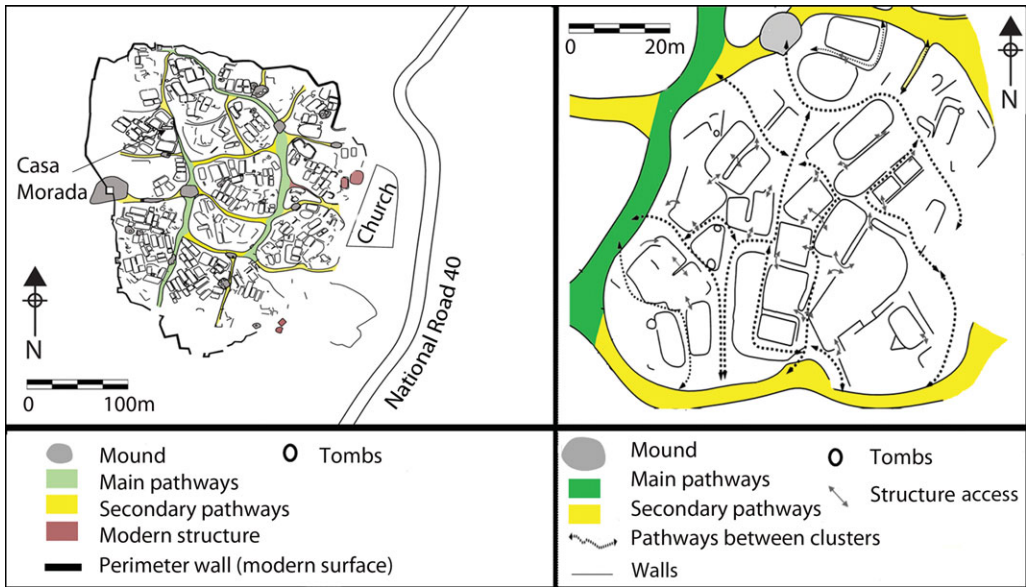


Figure 2. A) The North Calchaquí indigenous site of La Paya. B) Interior circulation within a cluster of structures.

absence of order. A closer look into these sites shows specific patterns of organisation (Acuto *et al.* 2008). There are discrete clusters of structures, defined and divided by long and wide artificial mounds and/or raised pathways. Principal passageways encircle these clusters, connecting them and permitting access. The clusters themselves share similar buildings and construction techniques. Inside each cluster there are residential compounds (generally a combination of a large, open multi-activity patio connected to two or three smaller rooms), circular stone tombs and earth mounds. Buildings are semi-subterranean and usually have shared walls, halls and passages.

The residential compound was the North Calchaquí settlements' principal building block. There is no evidence for administrative buildings or formal public spaces that might indicate the existence of centralised political institutions. Storage took place at the household level.

These sites do not have central and formally designed plazas. They do, however, contain several large patios in different areas of the settlement that may have served for communal meetings or joint activities and work, as the concentration of grinding stones in some of them seems to indicate. The presence of more than one open space suitable for large-scale gatherings suggests that, within a single community, different groups, on different occasions, might have convened and hosted particular events.

Surface collection and excavations have shown that there are no major differences between these clusters in the artefacts their residents employed or the goods they consumed. For example, decorated and non-decorated ceramics are abundantly and homogeneously distributed throughout these settlements and among clusters; and the same is true of various instruments of production and domestic tools, such as spindle whorls, grinding stones, cooking pots, lithic raw material and instruments, and basic resources for ceramic manufacture (clay and pigments) (see Díaz 1978–84, 1981; Acuto *et al.* 2008). Moulds and

crucibles are frequently found within domestic compounds but there is no evidence for craft specialisation, such as metallurgy workshops, and copper objects, such as pectoral plaques and small instruments (especially chisels and tweezers), are widely distributed (Acuto *et al.* 2011). The only unique item found in this region is a decorated bronze disc (230mm in diameter) found in tomb 164 at La Paya. Camelid bones are also ubiquitous elements in residential compounds, as well as containers for storage, either specially prepared pits or semi-buried ceramic vessels.

Burials do not show significant differences regarding offerings or tomb architecture. There are no large tombs, or tombs constructed with different architectural techniques or materials or presenting special assemblages of goods. All graves are marked by shallow, circular stone structures. Burial location does not seem to have been used to underpin social distinction. No burial was placed in a special topographic location or in association with outstanding built structures or natural features. On the contrary, every burial is either inside the settlement and in connection with a domestic compound, or outside and right next to the site. It is interesting to note that tombs exhibit the same building techniques and materials employed to construct domestic compounds and that the great majority of grave goods were everyday domestic objects. Thus, the materiality of death was the materiality of daily domestic life.

All this information demonstrates that the groups that resided in each cluster of structures not only consumed and employed similar items, but were also involved in the same type of activities: textile production, manufacture and use of ceramic and lithic instruments, food processing, storage and consumption, metallurgy, and burial practices.

Besides being places marked by material uniformity, indigenous settlements were highly articulated localities, with a comprehensive internal circulation. The elongated artificial mounds and the raised passageways that ran between clusters of structures, together with the 1m-wide and 1m-tall walls of the open, semi-subterranean patios, created an extensive network of paths that reached almost every corner of the town (Figure 2B). While the former comprised primary trails that allowed communication between clusters and pedestrian circulation throughout the settlement, the latter were ancillary paths that facilitated access to each cluster from various directions, as well as movement inside them. Although it is difficult to establish whether or not there were symbolic restrictions to circulation, there were certainly no material barriers.

The combination of semi-subterranean architecture and raised pathways meant that a person walking around a North Calchaquí town was almost never confined between walls but overlooked enclosure interiors (Figure 3 shows a reconstruction drawing from the site of Tastil). Photographs taken at the beginning of the twentieth century (Ambrosetti 1907) confirm that these internal trails were not constrained by high walls. Around 85–90 per cent of the built space belonged to large unroofed patios (Gifford 2003: 242), where many activities were held, from cooking and food consumption to artefact production and weaving, storage and burial of the dead (Díaz 1978-84, 1981). Therefore, every resident was able to witness the activities of other households, the goods they consumed, or the rituals they performed. The architecture does not seem to be oriented towards features of the surrounding landscape, but while walking about the town people were able to look in almost any direction at the natural world outside the settlement.

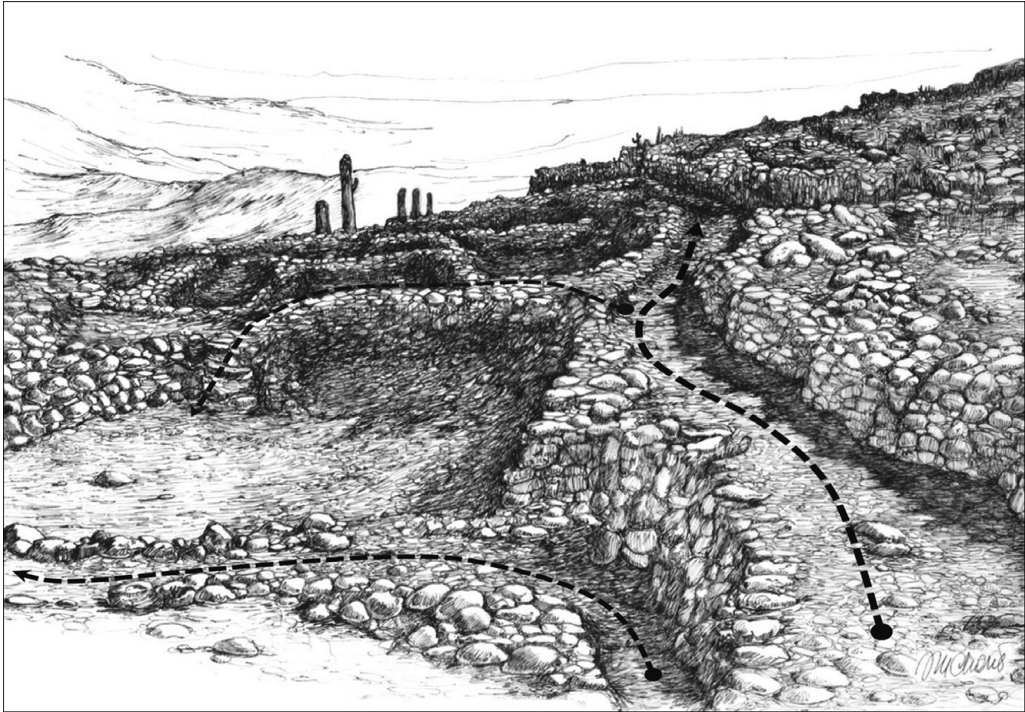


Figure 3. Perspective on internal circulation within an indigenous settlement: Tastil site (drawing courtesy of Alicia Charré).

The architectural forms and spatial organisation of these North Calchaquí sites show no evidence of social stratification, political centralisation or the existence of an institutionalised ruling elite. On the contrary, the residents of North Calchaquí settlements experienced within these places a profound sense of material homogeneity and spatial permeability.

The use of space in Inka centres

The indigenous people who visited Inka centres to participate in a special event, who allied with the colonisers and lived in these settlements, who were forced to move into these places, or who were required to work in activities hosted by the Inkas, confronted places whose spatial, material and symbolic nature was dramatically different from that of North Calchaquí towns. Inka localities exhibited and created a clear-cut segregation between the realms of the colonisers and those of the colonised. In these places, homogeneity, similarity and connectivity disappeared to be replaced by a material environment that promoted estrangement and hierarchy.

Cortaderas, located in the north-east of the region, is a good example of this. The settlement area consists of four main centres (Figure 4). Cortaderas Alto was a pre-Inka stronghold or *pukara* strategically placed on the top of a hill, 250m above the riverbed (Figure 5). This indigenous fortified enclave served to control one of the main routes into the Calchaquí Valley from the north-east and was vacated when the Inkas conquered the region (Gifford 2003: 329). Cortaderas Bajo, immediately below Cortaderas Alto, has a

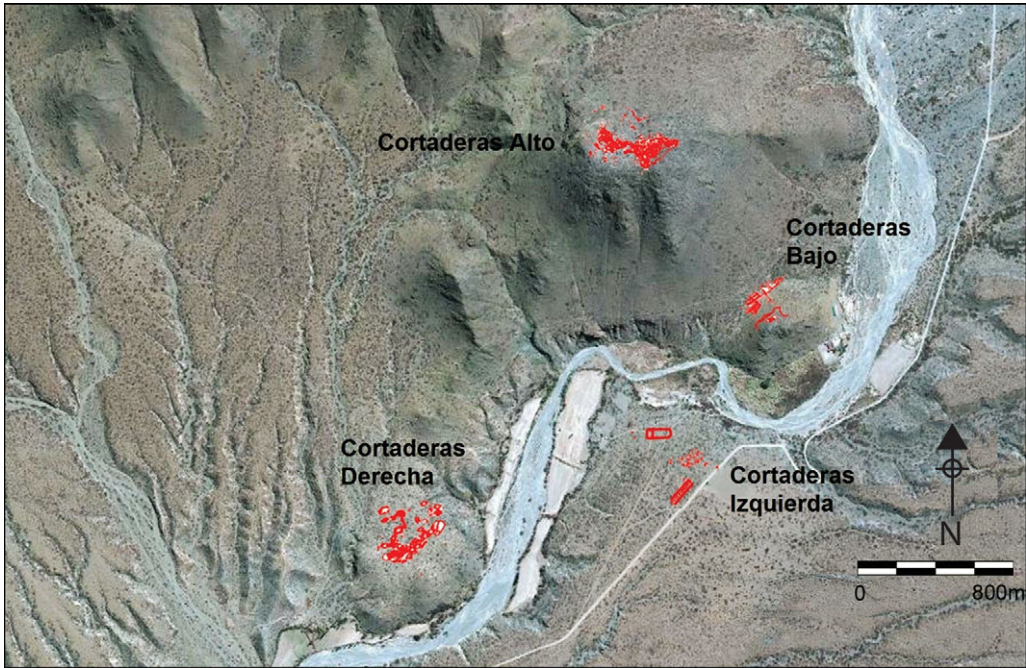


Figure 4. Cortaderas aerial perspective.

large plaza and several massive rectilinear Inka-style compounds. These administrative-type buildings contained a number of storage facilities or *qollca*. The north area of Cortaderas Bajo features large Inka residential compounds.

The most intriguing building at Cortaderas Bajo is the solid structure the Inkas constructed on the crest of the low knoll to the south, encircled by a perimeter wall that runs across the east, north and west slopes (Figure 6). Although archaeologists have usually classified it as an Inka fortress (D'Altroy *et al.* 2000), we have recently begun to revisit this interpretation and re-study this building, paying careful attention to its design, masonry, wall preservation and amount of debris around it. Although this structure might have first functioned as an Inka fortress, as the solid perimeter wall suggests, it was later modified to become a ceremonial structure or *ushnu*. *Ushnu* were stone platform-mounds connected with public spaces that served as thrones, places for rituals, libations and sacrifices, and as stone altars (Zuidema 1989; Hyslop 1990). *Ushnu* were key features for astronomical observations related to the agricultural calendar. As Staller explains, *ushnu* also served for “the veneration of ancestors, and the channeling of fluids to both sacred places (*huacas*) and surrounding agricultural fields” (Staller 2008: 285). Through these structures, and the knowledge to use them, the Inkas controlled calendric information and, during public activities, established subjects’ annual labour obligations toward the Inka empire (Zuidema 1989; Villacorta 2003). Like *ushnu* in other parts of Tawantinsuyu, this massive structure at Cortaderas Bajo is a stone platform. It has two small rectangular structures on the top, too small to be rooms and more likely to be receptacles for libations. A similar interpretation is suggested by Farrington and Zapata (2003) for an Inka site in the Cuzco

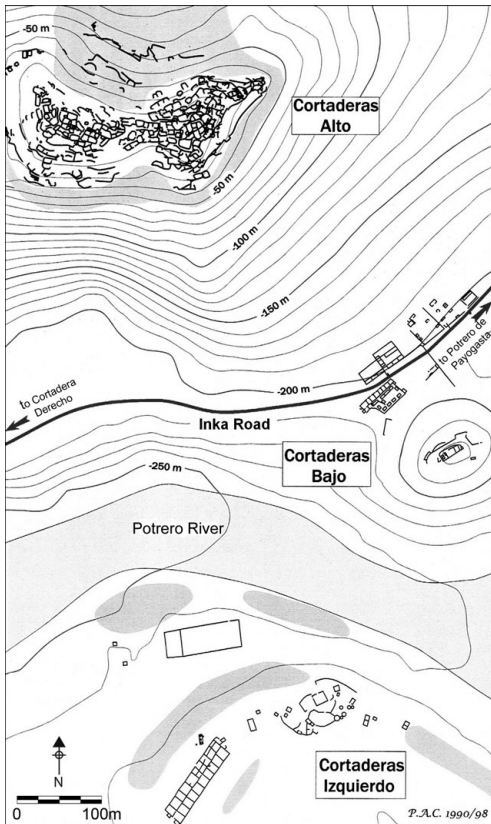


Figure 5. Cortaderas Alto and Bajo (after D'Altroy et al. 2000: fig. 5).

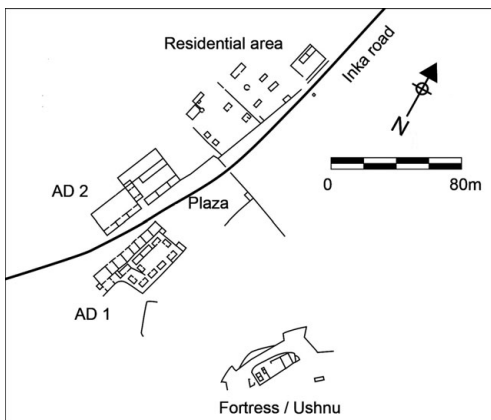


Figure 6. Plan of Cortaderas Bajo, showing the probable ushnu.

region. The main site here has a central rectangular plaza with no evidence of an *ushnu*, but to the west there is a round hill that local people nowadays call *Colina del Ushnu*. At its summit is a platform and a variety of constructions on its east and south slopes (among them stairs, canals, and baths). The architecture in the plaza is oriented towards the crest of this hill. The authors argue that this modified natural feature was actually an *ushnu*.

Cortaderas Izquierda, which lies on the left bank of the Potrero River, south from Cortaderas Bajo (Figure 5), contains more than 50 Inka buildings, most notably a group of circular storage rooms and a large compound (approximately 130 × 35m) with 20 rectangular enclosures arrayed in a double row; a typical state-oriented building found in other Inka sites throughout the Andes.

Finally, on the right bank of the Potrero River, 1km south-west from Cortaderas Bajo, lies a small local village we call Cortaderas Derecha. According to our studies and excavations, this village was established during the Inka period. We have argued that the Inkas resettled in this place a group of local people who were permanently attached to Inka projects and activities. The enormous amount of camelid bones recovered during the excavation of Cortaderas Derechas' middens, and grinding stones and stone shovels recovered from this site's surface, clearly show that crop-processing and camelid husbandry and butchering were major and intensive activities here (Acuto 2004: 212). The smaller domestic compounds and large middens in the local area of this settlement provide a contrast to the well-constructed administrative buildings, spacious residential compounds, formal public spaces, storage facilities and monumental ritual structures encountered at Cortaderas Bajo and Cortaderas Izquierda.

There was, therefore, a well-defined demarcation between the ritual-administrative spaces of the Inkas, on the one hand, and indigenous work-areas and residences, on the other. Archaeological evidence indicates that the Inkas promoted different social practices in each part of Cortaderas. Rulers connected themselves with new ritual practices, materialised in the ample public space and *ushnu* of Cortaderas Bajo. The concentration of storage facilities in Cortaderas Bajo and Cortaderas Izquierda suggests that Inka representatives also held administrative duties and controlled the goods produced in Cortaderas, and perhaps in other parts of the region. Moreover, the imperial delegates seem to have monopolised military activities, as the destruction of the indigenous *pukara* of Cortaderas Alto and the construction of an Inka fortification in Cortaderas Bajo indicate. On the other hand, those indigenous individuals who resided in Cortaderas Derecha, not only found themselves stripped of military power and alienated from the goods they produced, but they were also relegated to simpler and lower-prestige tasks, such as staple production and food-processing.

Restructuring the landscape

At Cortaderas, the river served to demarcate the separation between physical places and social realms (Figure 4). This division was instrumental in the creation of a novel sense of place and the constitution of new identities for those who inhabited or visited this locality. Cortaderas' spatial order produced and reproduced two alienated social spheres and identities: those of the Inkas and those of the subjugated others, conquerors *versus* conquered, elite *versus* commoners, imperial *versus* colonial, sacred *versus* profane. In summary, the sense of homogeneity and relatedness experienced in local settlements disappeared within this Inka centre, replaced by social distance and distinction.

In the area of La Paya in the middle part of the North Calchaquí Valley, Inka intervention also changed the nature and sense of place and, henceforth, indigenous experience of the landscape (Figure 7). Less than 400m across the river from La Paya, a major indigenous town (see Figure 2), the Inkas placed the small but very interesting site of Guitián. This comprised four large Inka residential compounds and a classic Inka administrative building or *kallanka* adjoining a square plaza with an *ushnu* platform (Figure 8). The east side of the site, away from the public space, includes a group of indigenous residential compounds. There is more indigenous domestic architecture right outside Guitián's perimeter wall, and beyond a natural ditch, towards the west and south-west (Figure 7, no. 2). Recent excavations in the *ushnu* and the plaza yielded evidence of feasting and offerings. We found inside this *ushnu* a small, semi-circular stone structure, probably a receptacle for libations, and fragments of ceramic vessels and camelid bones deposited in small pits. In addition, a large midden pit full of camelid bones and fragments of Inka, local and non-decorated ceramic containers was discovered inside Guitián's plaza. Excavations in a local domestic compound yielded a large hearth, a significant amount of corn kernels and fragments of cooking pots and Inka storage jars or *aryballoi*, that suggest that its residents engaged in corn beer (*chicha*) brewing and storing. Based on Guitián's layout, architecture and the results of our excavations at the site, we propose that Guitián's main function was ceremonial.

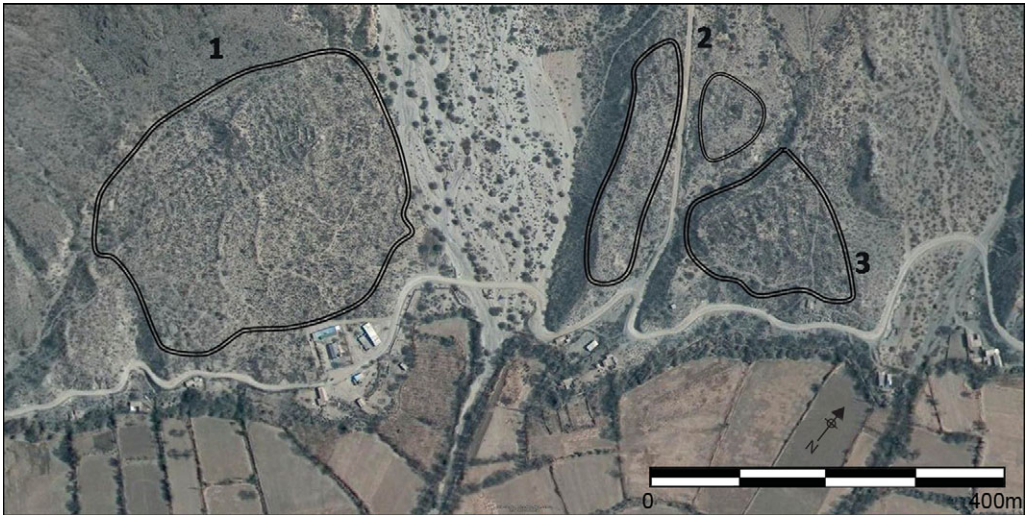


Figure 7. The landscape at La Paya: 1) site of the indigenous town, La Paya (for a plan see Figure 2); 2) unmapped local residential compounds outside Guitián's perimeter wall; 3) Guitián.

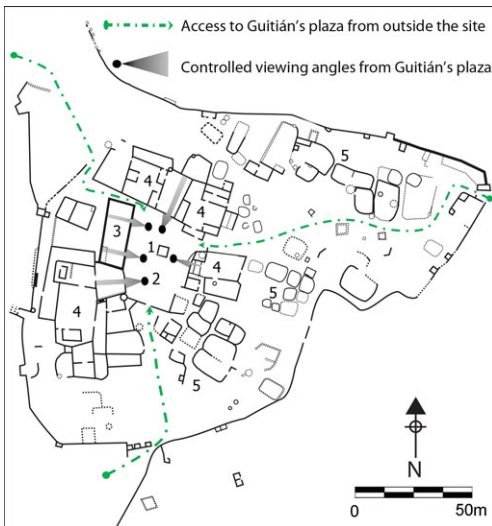


Figure 8. Guitián site: 1) ushnu; 2) plaza; 3) kallanka; 4) Inka-style residential compounds; 5) local architecture (after D'Altroy et al. 2000: fig. 6).

If La Paya offered its residents and visitors a highly integrated and materially homogenous built environment, the addition of Guitián into La Paya's environment meant that connection became fragmentation, homogeneity became difference, and domestic and pedestrian became ceremonial. The spatial sense of La Paya now included a new sector across the river with novel foreign buildings and a formalised public space. This new sector, secluded behind a massive perimeter wall, was fully oriented to ceremonial activities. The Inkas strategically used topography and the built environment to separate and differentiate the realm of the colonisers from that of the subjects, and ritual from mundane. This same scheme was reproduced inside Guitián itself where,

once again, rulers and subjects were apart from each other; the former were in direct association with the public space and ritual and administrative structures, while the latter resided in typical native domestic compounds, on the periphery of the settlement or outside its perimeter wall.

Controlling pathways and vision

The study of Cortaderas' internal pathways showed that circulation within this Inka settlement did not allow a direct and unrestricted access from the indigenous to the Inka area; or from the domestic compounds of Cortaderas Derecha to the ritual spaces of Cortaderas Bajo. Even though Inka roads connected all four Cortaderas' sectors, topography and the Potrero River kept these areas apart. Distance and the irregularities of the terrain limited visual access to the imperial precincts of the site from the indigenous residential area. Probably, Cortaderas Alto was vacated not only for defensive reasons, but also to avoid intrusive views into the Inka precinct.

Once inside Cortaderas Bajo, circulation was limited to the Inka road, the only formal pathway in and out of this Inka section of the site. The road crossed Cortaderas Bajo from south to north. As seen in Figure 6, there were definite doors allowing entrance to Cortaderas Bajo's buildings from the road. There is one unique door in and out of AD 1 and AD 2, as well as just one way to enter the residential area of Cortaderas Bajo. Tall walls and roofed structures constrained visual access. Architectural analysis and excavations indicate that, except for courtyards, the plaza, and possibly the platform/fortress, every building in Cortaderas Bajo was roofed (Gifford 2003). Contrary to local settlements, in Inka centres people did not move above buildings but within high-walled paths. In other words, it was impossible from the Inka road to look inside Cortaderas Bajo's enclosures to see what Inka life was like.

Although Inka architecture did not allow people to look inside houses, their views within Inka settlements were directed towards specific features. Scholars have widely discussed the choreographic character of Inka sites (see, among others, Hyslop 1990; Niles 1992; Bauer & Stanish 2001; Kaulicke *et al.* 2003; Coben 2006), and Cortaderas was no exception to this pattern. Natives visiting Cortaderas in order to participate in public events in Cortaderas Bajo's plaza arrived in this settlement from the south. Once inside the plaza, people confronted a contrasting picture. Whereas toward the west lay the abandoned pre-Inka stronghold of Cortaderas Alto, in the opposite direction people saw the former Inka fortress transformed into a monumental ritual platform or *ushnu*, a construction previously unknown in the region (Figure 9). This would have constituted a startling spectacle for the North Calchaquíes who simultaneously faced a symbol of conquest and defeat and the representation of the new order of things. The counterpoint between the new Inka fortress/*ushnu* and the abandoned indigenous fortified enclave acted as a powerful narrative of conquest and colonisation and a clear representation of the previous order having been suppressed and removed by Inka rule. During ceremonies, the *ushnu* platform, where rituals were performed, was the main focus of attention. People gathering in the plaza below faced this massive stone platform, turning their backs to the local *pukara*. The disposition of the bodies within this public space—geared towards the Inka sphere and leaving behind the local past—would have been a strong metaphor for the new colonial context. In brief, once inside this plaza, topography and the built environment offered a stark reminder of the differences between the old and the new in the North Calchaquí Valley.

Gutián provides another graphic example of control over circulation and vision (Figure 8). While Inka houses had direct gates to the plaza, external visitors who came to participate in

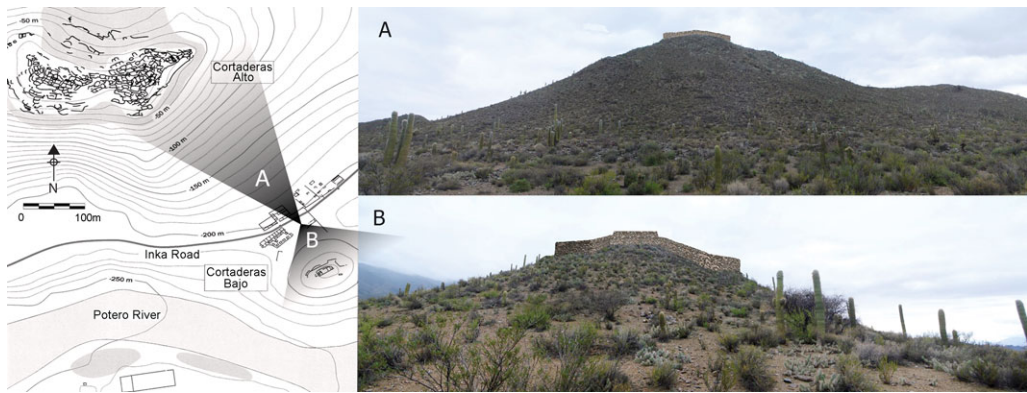


Figure 9. Cortaderas Bajo showing reconstructed views from Cortaderas Bajo's plaza.

a public event had indirect and defined ways to reach Guitián's plaza. Only three entrances granted access to Guitián. Once inside, people approached the plaza by walking between buildings that, like funnels, channelled people's circulation towards the plaza's three public doors. These were not elevated pathways between semi-subterranean buildings that allowed one to watch the interior spaces of the residential compounds. On the contrary, with every step towards the plaza people were wrapped by tall walls and narrow corridors that restrained their movements and vision.

Guitián's plaza was quite a secluded place. Here individuals found themselves encircled by Inka buildings and walls, unable to look beyond them. However, sticking out from behind the tall walls of the Inka *kallanka*, was the snowy peak of Cerro Melendez, a main local *wak'a* or sacred landmark seized by the Inkas, who built a sanctuary on its summit, at 6150masl. Thus, the only feature outside this plaza that people were able to see evoked Inka domination over the vernacular sacred geography.

Conclusion

In summary, inside indigenous sites an extensive network of raised passageways and wide and low walls granted access to almost every area of the settlement, and roofless patios allowed neighbours to look inside each other's homes. But within Inka centres, distance and natural features kept rulers and subjects apart. For those locals who visited Inka places, once inside the imperial space, movement was precisely channelled, and visual and physical access to Inka enclosures was restricted by tall walls and few and asymmetrically located doors. Inka scenography re-oriented views, instead, to special natural features or structures that supported narratives of power and control.

As in Cuzco and other regions of Tawantinsuyu, the imperial rulers used space to create a sense of membership and exclusion, highlighting differences in power and hierarchy between Inkas and locals; differences that were reflected in the spaces each group occupied, the activities they carried out, the goods they consumed and the knowledge they acquired. Moreover, within Inka places, privacy was secured and people's movements and views restricted and directed. The Inkas framed the landscape to create a dynamic representation of the new order of things in the region.

Our examples show that the Inkas actively engaged space, circulation and views in the process of domination (see also Niles 1999; Bauer & Stanish 2001; Kaulicke *et al.* 2003; Coben 2006). Inside imperial places, the colonisers were able to simultaneously enhance their position and constrain subjects' social reproduction by limiting their access to space or, more importantly, by restraining their possibilities of establishing and reproducing their social relations and meanings in the way they did in their own villages and towns. Local peoples' actual encounter with the materiality of Inka places delivered a blunt confrontation with the new social and political order in the region, something that would not have been possible through discursive practices or symbolic exchanges alone.

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