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TIME AND MYTH IN THE AMAZON AND ANDES OF PERU

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lt is implicit in many perspectives within the human sciences that there are certain "elementary ideas‘. or experiential "archetypes" to be found at some level among all humankind, but that these fundamentals - however termed and however conceptualised - are differently articulated and elaborated in different, historically specific cultures. Theories differ over the relative weight they give to what is assumed to be common to all the human race, and what is conditioned by or adapted to particular, variable circumstances (Campbell 1985: ch. 1). What must be clear, however, is that these two poles, so easily separated from each other in analytical abstraction, are in reality always totally interwoven.

lt is important to hold this in mind when examining historical changes in mythology, underlying which, of course, human existence within some terrestrial environment remains a constant. In this paper l shall consider the point of view that suggests there was an historical continuity of development in pre-Columbian Peru from Amazonian rain-forest societies through to "Andean civilisation“ (using the latter term in its broad sense, to include the coastal region; see Doig 1983: 23), and ask if Andean mythological and cosmological ideas of time can fruitfully be understood as transformations of and developments from characteristic jungle forms.

The Peruvian archaeologist, Federico Kauffmann Doig, considers present knowledge points to the view that Andean "high culture” (the first of whose three Horizons commences about 2000 BC) evolved in interconnected unity with meso-America, the first steps being taken before this on the coast of what is now Ecuador (Doig 1979: 8; 1983: 146-53). There is evidence that convinces a good number of scholars that this represents a process of cultural evolution stemming from the upper Amazonian rain-forest. Thus Lathrap, along with Marcos and Moseley, consider that an ancient "Tropical Forest Culture” was ancestral to the early coastal and Andean steps toward civilisation (Lathrap 1965, 1968), and that waves of migration from the upper Amazon into the eastern Andean foothills persisted until the Spanish Conquest (Lathrap 1972: cf. Handbook: 3.885). Mario Rivera (1975) has claimed evidence for his belief that populations emanating from the Amazon river basin arrived on the aitiplano surrounding Lake Titicaca between 8000-4000 BC. Daniel Gade (1972: 209-10) points to lines of influence from rain-forest to the pre-Columbian coast and Andes, in respect of use and knowledge of plants and animals like coca, monkeys and parrots, and in respect of pharmacopoeial knowledge in Inca times that derived from the jungle. Alejandro Camino states explicitly of Amazonian mythical traditions that "their elements took root in the most remote Andean myths” (1980: 528, my translation).

The view of Lathrap and others is that the Tropical Forest Culture which was the precursor of Andean civilisations was a sedentary, riverine society that practiced incipient root-crop agriculture and introduced the potato and manioc to the Andes. Lt was thus somewhat more evolved than the simpler, more nomadic groups that lived and still live in the forest away from rivers. The thesis cannot perhaps be regarded as unequivocally proven but, as it convinces a good number of scholars who have addressed the question and seems implicit in the perspectives of others, it can be taken as probable for the purpose of present considerations. It is significant to note that one of the lnca myths concerning their origins attributed it to the jungle, and this myth persists among Quechua Indians today. The dance groups called *ch'unchos* common in fiestas in parts of Cusco Department, represent with their bright costumes and macaw feathers, jungle savages who are the ancestors of the Quechua people. They are thought to be especially favoured by Christ and the Virgin, as 'poor' and 'naked', and are associated with ideals of equality held to by campesino communities, in spite of inequalities evinced in reality (Gow 1974: 72-3).

Thus, the reconstruction of a possible historical development of mythological and cosmological understandings of time - undertaken here in very brief, skeletal form - is speculative, schematic, and only suggestive in intention. But even if it were to be shown subsequently that Andean civilisation did not evolve from Amazonian iungle peoples - even via coastal developmental stages - i.e. that it developed out of migrations of people direct from meso-America, or even Asia, Polynesia or Melanesia, the general pattern sketched here might retain value. For many features of Amazonian mythology and social experience of time are common to all 'primitive", i.e. classless and stateless societies so far studied, and would therefore have been aspects of the primitive societies in which such hypothetical migrations took place. Furthermore these latter may have evolved in similar jungle environments themselves. According to Wendell Bennett, for example, Andean peoples evolved from migrations through the Panama Isthmus (Handbook: 2.4). It seems justified therefore to look for 'remote cognates', to use Joseph Campbell's phrase (1985: 234), for the Andean and Amazonian worlds.

These, then, are the justifications behind any attempt to find, in the kinds of ways that contemporary native groups in the Peruvian rain-forest render the annual cycle in time-reckoning, in myth and cosmological beliefs, archaic forms that underlie their more complex counterparts in Andean cultures. The kinds of constraint on social evolution that the Amazonian jungle environment exerts on pre-modern societies, and the commonality of basic features noted among societies separated by great distances in the post-Hispanic era, allow us to imagine certain parameters of Amazonian experience that might have laid the ground for consciousness of time for the earliest peoples that developed more complex societies in the Andes. Here, sophisticated agricultural societies evolved conceptions of much longer-term cycles of time, a mythical and historical sense of linear progress of time, and also a more stable, static dualism of divine and terrestrial realms characteristic of hierarchical societies with rigid divisions between mental, administrative and spiritual activities on the one hand, and physical, manual labour on the other. Agricultural producers became distinct from rulers, administrators, and priests; such intellectual producers, or ideologists, developed calendric and cosmological notions of time suited to the co-ordination of a sophisticated agriculture undertaken over ever larger areas, inseparabiy from mythologies orientated to the legitimation of centralised political power, i.e. the class ideologies of

civilisations. In this evolution the primitive "calendar", limited to the lunar and annual cycle, and primitive cosmology with its non-dualistic pantheism, endless flux and transformation, is gone beyond. But much of it is retained in these mutations even as, to quote G.LS. Shackle (1978: 47):

“Upon its experience of the solitary present thought builds the calendar with immeasurable imaginative daring . . . time, in imaginative thought becomes extension. This extension *makes room* for the conception of history, time as extension is a *space* in the abstract sense, a range of choices of places on which to focus, now here, now there, our momentary attention. By this means we can in thought imitate nature by shifting our focus of thought along the calendar-space from point to successive point, as the present itself can be supposed to move. We can as historians participate in history, marching with Xenophon and rejoicing in the sudden apparition of the sea. But also, the range itself can be contemplated as a unity, can be considered as a thing-in-itself. We can as scholars stand outside the calendar axis and look upon it "as a whole". . . . History is constructed in the mind of the historian, and exists there, and only there; exists all at once in his present moment: Time and History, vast works of imagination.”

Assuming our thesis then, the fundamental experience of time in the classless, stateless societies of the Amazon basin, with their small separate territories and populations, would have been transformed within the vastly different geographical environment of the Andes, as part of the evolution of hugely more complex societies - civilisations with classes, states, large (relatively) unified territories and populations.

The relation between society and nature is dialectical: that is, it consists of mutual multi-faceted influences. Social evolution is not a passive adaptation to nature or natural change (which could never explain historical development within an unchanging environment), but rather a process in which human activity, *praxis*, constantly changes nature, society, and the relations between them, such that society develops and transforms its mode of metabolism with nature (Nugent 1981). Hence, in historical evolution a natural environment that remains unchanged can in different historical contexts condition or delimit social organisation and practice in different ways. At a given stage of development a society may not be able to evolve greater complexity of organisation within a particular environment (though it may advance as regards sophistication of beliefs, rituals, art, sensibilities etc.). lt would appear that, with no external social influence from a completely distinct civilisation much more technologically evolved, primitive rain-forest societies would only be able to progress beyond hunter-gathering to simple (incipient) agriculture, or chiefdoms, and this only in riverine areas. Even the Inca civilisation was not able to advance fundamentally the social level characteristic of jungle society. Because of the lack of natural materials, and due to environmentally imposed restrictions upon the scale, the degree of continuity, and the productivity of agriculture, only modern industrialised societies appear able to transform fundamentally social existence in the iungle (albeit disastrously for the most part). ln the past, movement into the coastal or Andean regions of South America would have allowed the development of larger-scale and more productive agriculture, which would have in turn allowed the emergence of more complex societies; indeed, the new environments might have provided strong stimulation for such development if the migrating peoples were to survive in the long term. Coastal and Andean environments would present relatively greater insecurity for simple productive strategies than would

the jungle. It is in relation to this consideration that the idea of the coastal environment representing a "step" between primitive jungle society and Andean High Culture, is particularly interesting. The adaptation of economic activities to exploit higher techniques, find and use new crops etc. would occur as part of a continuous interaction with the evolution of beliefs and rituals. Earlier forms of belief and ritual would undergo transformation and development, not simply as a *passive* adaptation to the new natural environment, nor to changes in economic practice and social organisation, but also as pan of the society's active process of changing itself and its relations with nature. We are concerned here with certain facets of pre-Columbian society's development of beliefs concerning time, understood in this light.

Are features in common to the calendric ideas of the Andean and Amazonian worlds too specific to be merely the consequence of existence in the same hemisphere and latitude? They are associated with the central importance of linking celestial events with human, seasonal activities. Among Amazonian peoples, the appearances, movements, and cycles of the moon and stars are observed and named as 'the time in which" or "the time when" particular species of animal or plant appear, or enter crucial phases in their reproductive or migratory cycles (Handbook: 5.S06~7; Fraysse-Chaumeuil 1985: Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971: 237-41). Close anthropological studies of numerous groups, from the Yagua in Peru to the Desana in Colombia, portray a common pattern in which reference points for time-reckoning denote moments in natural processes of metamorphosis, and announce that particular hunting, fishing, gathering or planting activities are appropriate. The mental mnemonic process indicates reversals to varying degrees, so that observations of terrestrial biological activities are proiected onto the skies. As Alfred Métraux put it (1970: I31):

"The primitive tribes of the Amazon attribute to every animal or even vegetable species a "spirit" that watches over their increase and guards them from useless destruction. With the Peruvian Indians this belief developed into the worship of certain groups of stars in which they perceived the likeness of a celestial animal, patron and guardian of its earthly counterparts."

Métraux seems to assume that this transposition into the sky of Amazonian 'species masters' is the basis of pre-Columbian Andean cosmology. Gerald Weiss considers that "Campa mythology is largely the history of how one after the other of the primal Campas came to be transformed, each into the first representative of some species of animal or plant, or into some astronomical . . . feature' (1972: 204). The Pleiades constellation and the Milky Way are central to this and other Amazonian cosmologies, as they were in the Andes up to and including the lncas (Handbook 5.610; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971: 239; Weiss 1972: 191-2; Urbano 1974: 14). As Gary Urton summarises the latter (1982: 22):

"Studies dealing with the astronomy of lnca, Colonial and contemporary populations, have made it clear that a relatively small number of celestial phenomena were central to the astronomical and calendrical systems which were, and still are, adapted to this region….. The principal phenomena are:

a the rise and set of the Pleiades:

b the sunrise and sunset on the day of passage of sun through zenith;

c the sunrise and sunset on the day of passage of sun through anti-zenith.

These phenomena, important primarily because they relate to critical periods in the agricultural and ritual cycles, were of utmost importance in lncaic astronomy and calendrics, and they are still employed usefully… among Ouechua-speaking populations in the Department of Cusco.

Martin Nilsson described, in general terms, how time-reckoning evolves as a primitive society develops into a more complex one. Primitive time-reckoning is concrete, its units are (mainly) discontinuous, overlapping and successive (1920: ch. 15). They are unnumbered, and without divisions of definite length. Gradually, more complex societies evolve more abstract understandings of complete days and years “joined together in continuous circles" (1920: 357). Nilsson writes (359):

“The continuous time-reckoning arises neither from the daily course of the sun - which indeed is a unit but has no natural sub-divisions – nor yet from the year, the consistent length of which is at first concealed by the variation of the natural phases….. The only natural phenomenon which from the very beginning meets the demands of the continuous reckoning is the moon.”

Lunar months have continuous but limited periods of fixed length, with a natural sub-division into parts of equal lengths (days). At first they are named after coincident seasonal happenings, as we have already noted. "But this is not done without confusion, for both seasons and months fluctuate in reference to their position in the solar year, and the seasons are not limited in length and duration and still less do they cover the months" (Nilsson I920: 360).

Only with the theoretical and observational resources of a priesthood in a civilisation is the problem of making the lunar months fit into the solar year properly faced, as it was in the Andean civilisations. The difference between the Yagua calendar, typical of an Amazonian culture, and the pre-Columbian Andean calendars, represents in classic form the distinction between a primitive, concrete conceptualisation and an abstract (particularly sophisticated) one. The question of interest to us is, can we discern an extent to which the specific forms of concrete and abstract reckoning, characteristic of Amazon and Andes respectively, share common mythical adumbrations or use the same kind of natural phenomena for reference - beyond what common hemispheric context would make us anyway expect?

Peter Furst has suggested that the basic characteristics of Tropical Rainforest Culture were laid down by at least 3000 BC, and that these included the centrality of the shamans’ visions induced by hallucinogens. "For Tukano mythology," he writes (1980: 93), "the origins of *yajé* are inseparable from the origins of society, for it is said that it appeared in human form after the masculine Sun had fertilized the feminine Earth with the phallic ray and the first drops of semen were convened into the first people. Among them was Mother *Yajé*…. How close this image is to the Andean myth recounted by Zelia Nutall and referred to by Luis E. Valcárcel in Handbook 2.472:

"….. the time between the equinoctial days in Lake Titicaca corresponds to the period of human gestation, that is, 9 months. In the myth, the Sun descends to live among men, and impregnates a woman or several women, who bring forth their offspring so that their divine spouse will return."

Yajé or *ayahuasca* in many Amazonian cultures is thought of as a microcosm of the creative process, "homologizing the personal with the universal", to use another phrase from Joseph Campbell (1985: 64). The Tukano think of *yajé i*n a container as a gestation within the mother's belly: the participant in a *yajé* ritual is able to return to the uterus through a vagina painted on the vessel's base, to "see' the tribal deities and the creation of the universe and humanity (Furst 1980: 94-7; Sullivan 1988: 817). For the Campa, the ayahuasca plant is a shaman's "spirit wife' (1972: 204). It is tempting to see continuity and development of this into the Andean belief that *chicha* symbolises the sun's generative power. As the sun makes it possible for maize to grow, so does maize creatively transform itself into *chicha* (helped in lnca times by women's saliva, as today still in the Amazonian region). To partake of chicha in a festival is to enter into, and affirm, the creative processes of the cosmic and social orders (Handbook 5.544-5). Was not the kind of festive dance and drinking of chicha, described by Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff (1971: 241) for the Desana at their time for receiving foods from the fertilising Sun, still perhaps alive in the lnca festival of the Sun at the June solstice, when according to Garcilaso de la Vega (Métraux 1970: 135) the lnca drank with the Sun? There is a similar echoing between Amazon and Andes for the Milky Way (Furst 1980: 95). The Milky Way first fertilised the Sun, and the first Mother emerged from a river, followed by the first human couple, and the prototypes of the animals and plants. In pre-Columbian Andean belief, Viracocha created the Sun. and the first people emerged from lakes and rivers (Sherbondy 1982). As for contemporary Campa, the Milky Way in Andean belief is a river in the sky (Weiss 1972: 191). The relations between the Milky Way, rivers, birth, death. and rebirth, in the Andes of lnca times are summarised by Carolyn Jongewaard (1986; 14):

"A route travelled by priests from Cusco was more than a terrestrial pilgrimage. The annual ritual journey to La Raya along the Vilcanota River involved more than the renewal of the Sun and the lnca. It was a re-enactment of the creation of the universe by Viracocha. The journey was equal to a walk along the Milky Way to the point of origin of the universe. The river was perceived as a mirror of the Milky Way.

"The river is a primary symbol of time. As the river flows down the mountain from its source, it takes part of the body of the mountain with it, and in so doing symbolically carries the history and transitory experience of the mountain people. ln this sense the river represents linear time. But the river also has a restoring nature by its continuous link with *uma pacha* — the original time and place from which all life begins and to which all life returns. The Kaatan people say that the dead travel by means of an underground river and are returned to the place of origins in the lake at the top of the mountain. And the Misminay say the sun is following an underground river from its place of setting to its place of rising."

The idea that Andean mythology concerning the Creator of the Sun is a development from a more primitive one, of the kind found in the Amazon, is implicit in Métraux's comments (Handbook 5559-60):

“We may well surmise that . . . the original Culture Hero of the Quechua or some other Andean people. . . , in the course of time and through the speculations of priests, was elevated to the position of a Supreme Deity, greater than all the other gods, even the Sun God.”

In an article (1985) that compares myths and rites in the contemporary Andes and Amazon, the Peruvian anthropologist Alejandro Ortiz Rescaniere considers points of similarity and difference between the two areas. For Rescaniere, a central opposition between them lies in the preeminence of rite over myth in the Andes, which inverts the preeminence of word over gesture in the Amazon. ln the Andes lavish fiestas contrast with what he sees as the relative simplicity of the myths surrounding them. ln the Amazon, by contrast, rich myths accompany a much poorer realm of religious ritual.

Now it may be that Andean culture today does give this impression. Joseph Bastien and Richard Schaedel make a similar observation (1984: 145): ‘Judging from contemporary ethnological studies, celestial systems do not appear prominent in present day Andean symbolic systems, although earlier studies indicate greater importance in preconquest times.’ This is undoubtedly due to the fact that the complex mythical/cosmological realm of pre-Columbian Andean culture was largely the domain of the priesthood, so that much of it was fragmented or lost with and after the Conquest. Elaborate rituals persisted, adapting from their economic, political and religious mobilising and self-organising functions in the complex space-time system of Inca civilisation, to the new colonial conditions. With the deposition of the Inca caste, the coordinating system of beliefs integral to its rule was shattered. As the economic and political system was readjusted to suit Spanish colonial interests, and Catholicism was formally imposed, the links between fiestas and traditional agricultural practices became more tenuous; the link with state politics was broken or became contradictory. Fiestas came to be associated ostensibly with events in the Christian calendar, which were substituted for the nearest pre-Columbian astronomical/religious dates - though in reality they became and still are punctuations in an annual cycle understood through a new Andean religion which is a syncretism of pre-Columbian and Roman Catholic beliefs (Cloudsley 1988). As the pre-Columbian cosmology was concerned with the political and territorial integration of Andean civilisation, and affirmed the traditional religion, it threatened Spanish hegemony. it was thus a target of the systematic "extirpation of idolatries‘. and seemed to disappear. But, as is gradually becoming clear, it did survive — unrecognised — in apparently fanciful and fragmentary myth.

For Rescaniere the complementarity and differences between the Andes and Amazon rest upon a common thematic basis. The Andean ecology came to condition a stratified society practising an intensive agriculture, in which a profusion of religious and magical roles evolved, and a complex structure of religious ritual. By contrast, the rain forest engendered societies unable (until recent times) to evolve beyond hunting, fishing and collecting. In such minimally stratified tribal societies, nomadic existence acts as a constraint against the emergence of sacred places and the specialization necessary for development of complex religious rites. ln the Andes, rituals constantly reaffirmed the collective order of an agricultural civilisation with hierarchical authority, the “wisdom” of myth remaining to a large extent a prerogative of the priesthood in temple cities. ln the Amazon disparate, more or less autarkic ethnic-linguistic groups each had (and have) their own myths and rites, constantly reinvented and transmitted by the shaman, whose rugged individuality contrasts strongly with the more rigidly

structured "office" of the priest. The shaman's narration of myth allows variety, uniqueness in each retelling, novelty in each individual elaboration. It is the religious counterpart to work activities and social interactions, which have a spontaneous, flexible character in primitive societies. Myth is constantly regenerated by the shaman's individual visions: in its spontaneity it reflects the hunter's "luck". By contrast the elaborate rites of an agricultural civilisation are governed by a strict calendar reflecting the need for precise regulation and control over each and every segment of a complex society. Similarly the diversity of roles of the shaman in the Amazon reflects the relative lack of social differentiation; in the Andes, by contrast, religious and magical practices were specialised, iust as they became separated more and more from other activities — productive. political, or military. Though remaining interlinked ultimately in the social totality, different spheres became relatively more autonomous. In mythology concerning the transformation from primitive hunting society to stratified civilisation, we can see the Andean version of a common "moment of solemnity' in human history. In ancient Greek mythology, the defeat of the Titans by the Olympian gods, and the resistance put up by Prometheus to Zeus, embrace most essentially a contradiction felt between the inevitability of civilisation's crushing the hunter-shaman, and a sense of regret for the loss it entailed (Campbell 1985: ch.6).

Within these immense differences between Andean and Amazonian cultures. Nevertheless, there is the commonality. This can be felt at innumerable points, but we will take one striking instance to finish with. Andean myth frequently used architectural images to stand for celestial arrangements. The image of the house and its collapse in a myth recorded by the chronicler Francisco de Avila can be shown to contain an understanding of how the precession of the equinoxes causes the position of the solstitial suns in the fixed stars to change (see Sullivan 1986: 92). The entire system of building in Cusco is in a sense an astronomical "diagram" or "text". One can sense an antecedent to this among Amazonian natives like the Kaliña of Surlnam, who construct a "table" used in the preparation of food following the shape formed by the relative positions of constellations (Orion, the Pleiades, Pegasus, etc.), and construct their houses on the model of Orion, with rows of supports corresponding to the lines of summer and winter solstices and the equinoxes (Magaña 1988).

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