

Muyu Muyu, the oracle of Solimana: the remodelling of the local sacred space by the Inca Empire

In the Inca Empire, mountain peaks were worshiped as powerful gods, bearing the title of *Apu* (“Lord” in quechua language). The volcanoes of Solimana and Coropuna were considered the main *apu* for the Kuntisuyu area (one of the four “parts” - *suyu* – in Inca administrative division of the empire). The cult of Solimana in the Inca times was associated with intense and varied ceremonial and religious activities, including celebrating festivities, making sacrifices and pilgrimaging to seek the oracle’s answers. For these purposes, the Incas erected the main sanctuary / oracle of Solimana, which served as the local ceremonial center. Historical sources mention that the former ceremonies of the pre-Spanish “pagan cult” were still held there during colonial times, in the second half of the 17th century. A similar sanctuary, associated with the cult of neighboring volcano Coropuna, was the site of Maucallacta.

Preliminary results of archaeological research conducted in the Solimana area in recent years by the Condesuyos Archaeological Project indicate that the Muyu Muyu archaeological site was most likely the main sanctuary of a sacred volcano known from historical sources. The site takes its name (quechua: “Round”) from the two oval platforms located in the main part of the complex. Muyu Muyu has an architecture with typical imperial elements such as the ushnu ceremonial platform. This structure was initially examined during the excavations in 2017. The results showed the existence of different construction phases and masonry beneath the present surface of the terrace on which the structure was situated. The presence of cultivated terraces suggests that the Incas created a developed agricultural system to provide food for the center.

The main goal of the project is to finally confirm the hypothesis about the role Muyu Muyu played in the cult of Solimana (i.e. its importance as a ceremonial center), and to reconstruct its chronology and construction phases through excavations in selected, most interesting parts of the site.

The chronicler Cristóbal de Albornoz wrote that the sanctuary was renovated by the Incas and received a service of *mitimaes* (settlers displaced from other parts of the Empire). Such a statement suggests the existence of an even older ceremonial center in this place, probably of local range, which the Incas adapted to the requirements of imperial cult. The aim of this research will also be to search for traces of the presence of these settlers, brought by the Incas, and to try to establish their social identity within the framework of the functioning social structure in the sanctuary. A comparison between the sites of Muyu Muyu and Maucallacta (the Coropuna volcano sanctuary, also studied under the Condesuyos Archaeological Project) will identify the forms of ideological and economic control imposed by the Incas on conquered regions.

The research plan primarily involves the archaeological excavation of the main Muyu Muyu ceremonial complex. In addition, radiocarbon dating of samples from the excavations will be performed to properly interpret the Inca expansion in the region. Genetic and isotope studies of strontium, oxygen and hydrogen will help to determine the presence of *mitimaes* and to distinguish them from local residents.

The proposed research will make a significant contribution to the reconstruction of the religious and economic system in the Inca Empire. Muyu Muyu archaeological complex, including its satellite sites, may be, in terms of its network structure, similar to the ceremonial centers system already known from Maucallacta. The existence of such similarities would suggest that Muyu Muyu had a strictly defined function in the ceremonial network of the region. Solving the research problem concerning the functions and chronology of the Muyu Muyu complex will be a big step forward in the research of the Inca conquests, as well as the subsequent Inca administration in the subordinate provinces.