

# Dis-embedded centers and architecture of power in the fringes of the Inka empire: New perspectives on territorial and hegemonic strategies of domination

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## Abstract

Empires were expansive polities based on the extraction of resources and economic surplus from subdued territories and people through a range of strategies of domination. Based on research on Oroncota in the Southeastern Inka region, this article presents evidence from architecture, settlement shifts, storage capacity and artifacts distribution, to illustrate the mechanics of dis-embedded Inka imperial centers. As an alternative form of control in the territorial and hegemonic spectrum, this research focuses on the nature and evolution of Inka dis-embedded centers as an alternative form of provincial control based on the use of architecture of power.

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## Resumen

Los imperios fueron entidades políticas expansivas basadas en la extracción de recursos y excedentes económicos de poblaciones y territorios conquistados a través de una serie de estrategias de dominación. Con base en investigaciones en Oroncota en la región Sudeste Inkaica, este artículo presenta evidencia de estudios de arquitectura, cambios poblacionales, capacidad de almacenamiento y distribución de artefactos que ilustran la mecánica de centros administrativos inkas divorciados de procesos locales. Como una alternativa forma de control en el espectro territorial y hegemónico, esta investigación se enfoca en la naturaleza y evolución de estos divorciados centros Inkas como una alternativa forma de control provincial en base al uso de arquitectura de poder.

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During the 15th century AD, the Inka constituted the largest empires of the Pre-Columbian World. With its political core in Cuzco, the Inka Empire extended over a array of environments including the dry coast, the tropical *montaña*, and the cold highlands. This ecological diversity was also accompanied by the incorporation of a myriad

of polities varying in political complexity, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, including the powerful Chimu state in the Pacific coast, and a number of chiefdom-level and tribal organizations from the Andes and Amazonian margins (Rowe, 1946; Patterson, 1991; DeMarras et al., 1996; Rostworowski de Diez Canseco, 1999; D'Altroy et al., 2000). In recent years, substantial research was conducted on the imperial core and its provinces to understand the evolution of this empire, the economic strategies of control at regional and household scales and the associated changes in the indigenous settlement patterns and cultural

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materials (Morris, 1982; Costin and Earle, 1989; Hastorf, 1990; Hayashida, 1995; Stanish, 2001; Mackey, 2006).

With regard to the more distant frontier regions, current research is also revealing the different kinds of Inka frontiers and their related socioeconomic changes in the local structures (Lorandi, 1980; Dillehay and Netherly, 1988; Bray, 1991; Pärssinen and Siiriäinen, 1998; Raffino and Stehberg, 1999; Lippi, 2004). My own investigations in the Southeastern Chaco piedmonts conducted several years ago, documented the uneasy interaction between the Inkas and the tropical Chiriguano-Guarani tribes from the Amazons (Garcilazo de la Vega, 1960 [1609]; Barragán Romano, 1994; Alconini, 2002, 2004). Beyond traditional frontier models my results revealed that the Southeastern Inka frontier was consistent with a “soft military perimeter”. In this type of frontier, the defensive system was formed by small outposts at strategic nodes of communication instead of representing true garrisons with large standing armies. Within the margins of the frontier, administrative centers were established in order to facilitate government and control of the frontier region and within. As in the case of Oroncota, this was supplemented by the construction of fine Inka architecture. However, these centers within and without did not disrupt existing socioeconomic trends and did not have significant effects on the local political economies (Alconini, 2002, 2004).

In the Oroncota region, within the frontier margins, Inka control was manifested in the establishment of a dis-embedded administrative center. This Inka center relied in the construction of fine architecture to compensate for a rather minimal imperial presence. In this paper, I will discuss the nature of dis-embedded centers, and argue that these settlements combined hegemonic and territorial strategies of domination by emphasizing architecture of power despite the low imperial revenues. In order to explore the unique ways in which dis-embedded centers fall in the territorial-hegemonic spectrum, I will summarize in the sections that follow the different ways in which both the territorial and hegemonic strategies are understood by scholars studying ancient empires, including the Inka. I will then discuss the different forms of Inka provincial power in order to shed light on the nature of Inka control in the Oroncota region.

### Territorial and hegemonic control: contending views

Empires are often characterized as highly extractive polities, expanding over vast territories through a combination of political, ideological, economic and military subjugation (Mann, 1986). Depending on the focus, different theoretical frameworks are often used to understand the mechanics of imperial expansion including the core-periphery model with a top-down approach (Wallerstein, 1976), or more agency-oriented views where the peripheries are seen as the catalysts of imperial expansion (Doyle, 1986). In recent years, new models seeking to understand the wide variation

of power strategies exercised by ancient empires are explored.

The territorial and hegemonic theoretical framework stands as one of the most influential approaches emphasizing the variation of imperial strategies of domination in a spectrum of possibilities, depending on the degree of interaction between imperial cores and subject provinces, and the varying scales of military, political, economic and ideological control (Luttwak, 1976; Hassig, 1985, 1992; D’Altroy, 1992). Formulators of this model have argued that rather than constituting isolated typologies, territorial and hegemonic strategies constitute ends of a continuum of direct and indirect forms of domination where we should not only consider the vested interests of the empire, but also the varying reactions of native elite and local populations, the existing levels of political complexity and the kinds of resources in dispute (Luttwak, 1976; Hassig, 1985, 1992).

The territorial strategy, at one end of the spectrum, typified a direct form of imperial control. Because of the linear correspondence between control and economic benefit, this strategy was characterized by a high control-high extraction strategy (D’Altroy, 1992; Hassig, 1985, 1992; Luttwak, 1976). Therefore high levels of control conditioned significant levels of economic extraction (Table 1). Politically, the subdued regions were under direct rule through imperial elites and bureaucrats, while the provincial centers were enclaves of large-scale production of materials destined to supply the core’s needs. Standing armies in the provinces were also a requirement of imperial rule in order to strengthen inner security, and therefore, the direct administration of the provinces (D’Altroy, 1992; Hassig, 1985, 1992; Luttwak, 1976).

Territorial control also involved significant levels of investment in administrative infrastructure in order to tap local resources for imperial ends. This involved not only the deployment of bureaucrats and entire armies into the subjugated provinces, but also the construction of all kinds of imperial installations aimed at facilitating the management of local resources and labor. For the Inka, this was manifested in the significant investment of constructions such as administrative centers, storage facilities, roads or

Table 1  
Forms of provincial control based on the combination of investment and revenues

		Investment	
		High	Low
Revenues	High	High investment and high revenues (Territorial control)	Low investment and high revenues (Optimum control)
	Low	High investment and low revenues (Dis-embedded centers)	Low investment and low revenues (Hegemonic control)

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