

# Resistance, Persistence, and Incorporation: Andean Cosmology and European Imagery on a Colonial Inka *Kero*

Resistencia, persistencia e incorporación: cosmología andina e imagería europea en un *kero* inca colonial

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**Abstract:** This study examines imagery and symbolism on a Colonial Inka painted wooden *kero*. The *kero* portrays a ceremonial battle scene on one side and, uniquely, a 'life stairs' scene derived from a European print on the other. Despite the fact that 'life stairs' scenes are seemingly at odds with Andean conceptions of aging and death, the scene was incorporated into the vessel's decoration and modified to convey Andean symbolic content and the status of the vessel's owner. The imagery on both sides convey important Andean cosmological themes, and suggests that the vessel was used in ritual drinking during men's coming of age ceremonies and the advent of January rains. The probable owner of the *kero* was a *kuraka*, an indigenous noble who acted as an intermediary between Spanish colonizers and colonized Andean subjects. *Kurakas* commissioned objects such as painted *keros* that were not byproducts of hybrid identities, but sent deliberate messages conveying symbols of power, prestige, and adherence to tradition to Spanish and Andean viewers alike.

**Keywords:** kero; cultural hybridity; colonialism; Inka; cosmology; colonial period.

**Resumen:** Este estudio examina las imágenes y el simbolismo de un *kero* de madera pintado de la época colonial inca. Por un lado, el *kero* muestra la escena de una batalla ceremonial y, por el otro, de manera única, la escena de la 'escalera de la vida' obtenida de un grabado europeo. Aun cuando las escenas de 'escaleras de la vida' parecieran estar en desacuerdo con las concepciones andinas sobre el envejecimiento y la muerte, la escena fue incorporada a la decoración del recipiente y modificada para transmitir el contenido simbólico andino y el estatus del dueño del *kero*. Las imágenes en ambos lados hablan de importantes temas cosmológicos andinos y sugieren que el recipiente fue usado en un ritual que marca la transición de la adolescencia a la madurez en el varón, así como el inicio de las lluvias de enero. Probablemente, el dueño del *kero* fue un *kuraka*, un noble indígena que actuó como intermediario entre los colonizadores españoles y los súbditos andinos. Los *kurakas* encargaban objetos como los *keros* pintados que no eran un producto de identidades híbridas, sino que enviaban mensajes deliberados que transmitían símbolos de poder, prestigio y de apego a la tradición tanto para los espectadores españoles como para los andinos.

**Palabras clave:** kero; hibridación cultural; colonialismo; inca; cosmología; época colonial.

## Introduction

In an influential essay, Kubler (1961, 26-27) listed Inka wooden ceremonial drinking vessels, known as *keros*, among the few vestiges of pre-Hispanic culture that managed to survive and retain their meaning through the course of Spanish colonization of the Americas. For Kubler, the suppression of indigenous beliefs and practices and the imposition of Spanish religion and ideology were so extensive that, beyond quotidian objects and practices that were not considered a threat to Spanish authority, there was little chance that symbols and objects of the pre-Hispanic past could survive as meaningful, purely indigenous forms of expression. In the same edited volume, John Howland Rowe argued that wooden *keros* not only survived the Spanish invasion, but the genre flourished and expanded with the addition of Spanish pictorial conventions and media such that they were potent symbols of the vitality and resilience of pre-Hispanic Inka traditions. In regard to painted imagery that appears on Colonial *keros*, he states: “Many of these pictorial scenes are so purely Inca [sic] in feeling and interest and show so little trace of Spanish influence that the cups they appear on have commonly been attributed to pre-conquest times” (Rowe 1961, 340). Contrary to Kubler and Rowe, *keros* were not quotidian objects that survived because they escaped the attention of the Spanish, nor were they devoid of Spanish influence. In fact, painted *keros* were highly valued ritual objects that changed dramatically with the influence of European art styles. Colonial painted *keros* reflect the status of their owners, indigenous rulers (*kurakas*) whose position was based on Imperial Inka heritage and Andean tradition, but supported by Spanish authorities. *Keros* were used publically and buttressed the role of *kurakas* as intermediaries between colonizer and colonized who drew power from the Imperial Inka past and the Colonial Spanish present.

The focus of this study is a polychrome Colonial Inka *ke-ro* (Figure 1) with decoration that clearly incorporates European subject matter, perhaps to a greater extent than other surviving examples, but not at the cost of its Andean symbolic content. It is rendered in the Free Style, dating to after 1630, according to the chronology established by Rowe (1961) and Wichrowska and Ziólkowski (2000, 116). The *ke-ro* is purportedly from Cuzco, and was donated to the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin by German anthropologist Arthur Baessler (Wichrowska and Ziólkowski 2000, 116). The lacquer-painted exterior of the vessel is divided into two horizontal registers, with the smaller lower register consisting of a series of geometric designs referred to as *tokapu*, and the larger upper register bearing two separate painted scenes. The painted scenes in the upper register are partitioned by two three-dimensionally carved spotted felines that disrupt the planar surface of the vessel and serve as handles. One scene portrays two armed combatants facing each other, and the other represents a series of human figures standing on a stepped pyramidal structure. The pictorial style in which the decoration is rendered on the *ke-ro* is common to the Colonial period, but marks a divergence from pre-Hispanic Inka modes of representation, which favour abstraction and the use of incised geometric shapes. Although pictorialism in Colonial Inka *keros* denotes



Figure 1. Colonial Inka *kero* (two views). Redrawn by the author after Wichrowska and Ziółkowski (2000, Ill. 40).

European influence, it may be most appropriate to view shifting modes of representation as adaptive, selective, and strategic processes, rather than forced imposition or capitulation to the demands of Spanish patrons.

Although painted *keros* were produced for European and Andean markets, they remained vital ceremonial objects used in the ritual consumption of *chicha*, maize beer. Drinking rituals involving *keros* marked ceremonial occasions, paid homage to supernatural beings, solidified social relationships, and reinforced indigenous social hierarchy. Colonial-period Inka elites, known as *kurakas*, were primary consumers of painted *keros*, and likely played a central role in influencing the types of imagery that the vessels portray. As intermediaries between Spanish officials and Andean commoners, *kurakas* required clothing and accouterments that on one hand legitimated their status, and yet on the other, did not pose a direct threat to Spanish colonial rule. Imagery on painted *keros* reiterates symbols of Andean authority and cosmology through skilful manipulation and balance of tradition and the novel incorporation of European-inspired subject matter and style.

### Hybridity and *kero* painting

European influence is commonly regarded as a force that corrupts the ‘authenticity’ of native peoples (Cummins 1998, 93). During the half-century following the publication of Kubler’s and Rowe’s essays, scholarly focus in Colonial Latin America has shifted away from the search for ‘authentic’ remnants of the pre-Hispanic past, with the recognition that this approach risks casting indigenous peoples of the Americas as culturally static unless forced to change through external pressure. Emphasis has moved toward exploring the syncretic merging of Spanish and indigenous beliefs, customs,

practices that gave rise to hybrid social identities and art objects. However, the search for ‘authentic’ or ‘pure’ cultural elements may still lie at the heart of explorations of hybridity. The ‘hybrid’ is something that fits neither what we consider to be European nor indigenous cultural norms, and its identification often depends on our own conceptions of ‘pure’ cultural origins and our recognition of pre-Hispanic forms and motifs (Dean and Leibsohn 2003). Furthermore, discourses of hybridity often homogenize European and non-European oppositions (Dean and Leibsohn 2003, 6). Thus, in attempt to dismantle the colonial legacy that pits the dynamic colonizer against the static native, we risk rebuilding the edifice in different form using the same materials.

Our scholarly practices often limit colonized peoples to two options: resistance or capitulation. However, while not on equitable terms, the colonial encounter involves degrees of negotiation on both sides. As Allen (2002, 187) notes, “[...] any colonial situation involves resistance and accommodation simultaneously”. Cultures have never been isolated, bounded, static, or homogeneous entities, and culture might be more accurately viewed as a process that, among other things, constantly negotiates whether to reject, accept, or assimilate external influences. Furthermore, in Colonial Peru, neither ‘European’ nor ‘Andean’ was a uniform collective entity, but rather both categories of colonizer and colonized consisted of a broad array of constituents representing various intersections of ethnicity, class, gender, and other factors that shaped and defined identity and the lived experience.

Hybridity was unsettling and a fundamental concern to European colonizers, as it threatened the integrity of rigid ascribed cultural categories and thus called into question the colonial agenda by blurring distinctions between the colonizer and the colonized. Anxieties over cultural blending may account for the popularity of *casta* painting during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which sought to reinscribe cultural categories and reinforce the distinction between colonizing Self and colonized Other (Dean and Leibsohn 2003, 9-11; Katzew 1996). However, hybridity was seemingly not particularly noteworthy to indigenous colonized peoples of the Americas (Dean and Leibsohn 2003, 11-12). We too may recognize practices, beliefs, and objects as hybrid, contradictory, or awkwardly juxtaposed when they might not have been considered uncanny or out of the norm in the past. For example, we may view normative Catholicism as largely incompatible with Andean religious beliefs and worldviews, and indeed from the perspective of Spanish extirpators it may well have been. However, by the middle of the Colonial period, Catholicism was inextricably woven into the Colonial Andean cultural fabric. In other words, it had become an Andean religion, and Christian beliefs and non-European cosmology did not appear to exist in conflict from many Andean perspectives, but rather formed a coherent and intact worldview. As summed up by Dean (2005, 96), “[...] it is quite simply inappropriate for modern scholars to read all signs of Inka Catholicism as evidence of capitulation, compliance, and passive acquiescence to colonial authority”. It is telling that indigenous rebellions spurred by Juan Santos and, later, Tupac Amaru II, as well as the writings of Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, did not call for a rejection or

disavowal of Christianity. Rather, they wished to be rid of oppressive Spanish authorities and colonial institutions and to return to indigenous rule.

The adoption of European pictorial styles by Andean artists has historically been a viewed as a sign of hybridized identity. The liminal netherworld of hybridity – constructed by the modern scholar – of Andean peoples being caught in flux between the static and authentic pre-Hispanic past and the dynamic yet corrupting European influence in the colonial present, downplays agency and selectivity in the artistic process. Defining and assigning liminality ignores the lived experience and disregards the ability of individual actors to constitute, construct, preserve, and define their own sense of meaning. By the end of the sixteenth century, Andeans did not appear to consider traditionally European media such as portrait painting foreign expressive forms (Dean 2005, 96). Similarly, painted *keros* may have been viewed as colonial oddities to European collectors and modern scholars, but there is no evidence that Andean peoples viewed them as exotic objects that fell outside of normative Andean traditions. It was not historically inevitable that artists would integrate European-style pictorial conventions and materials as a reflection of a new hybridized identity, but rather those who introduced painted scenes to *keros* chose to do so because they (or their patrons) sought to incorporate new modes of expression and aesthetic sensibilities into a vital genre, and perhaps create objects that were appealing to both local and foreign markets.

### **Kero production, use, and consumption**

Although the term *kero* technically applies only to Inka drinking vessels made of wood, vessels of similar shape and function were also produced out of ceramic and precious metals. *Aquillas* are the gold and silver counterparts of *keros*. The chronicler Fray Bernabé Cobo (1990, 194-195) states that silver *aquillas* were used by the wealthy, and he implies that golden drinking vessels were of higher status, but seldom used during Colonial times. *Aquillas* were essential emblems of Inka rulership, and a pair of the golden drinking vessels (*tupa kusi*) was given to an Inka ruler upon investiture (Cummins 2002, 76). The production of *keros* and *aquillas* in the Central Andes predates the Inka Empire, traceable to prior cultural traditions such as Moche, Chimú, and Tiwanaku (Flores Ochoa, Kuon Arce and Samanez Argumedo 1998, 4-11), and *keros* continue to be used in present-day ritual (Allen 2002; Flores Ochoa, Kuon Arce and Samanez Argumedo 1998, 40-41). Some *keros* and *aquillas* were clearly produced in pairs, cut from the same block of wood, or produced from the same metal (Cummins 2004, 7; 2007, 274). Although its counterpart is missing, the painted *kero* considered in this study was likely conceived as one member of a pair and could have been created with a counterpart from a single block of wood. *Kero* pairs were not identical, but bore slight differences, which is significant in terms of widely held Andean conceptions of dualism. Asymmetrical duality is observable in drinking vessels of earlier traditions, such as paired Moche ceramic drinking vessels of the Early Intermediate period (AD 100-800) which



Figure 2. Page from *Nueva corónica i buen gobierno* showing kero offering to the sun. Redrawn by the author after drawing by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (1615, 246 [248]).

transform them into objects that reflect imperial order, as manifest in Inka stonework. Imperial Inka *keros* played a central role in reinforcing the power through ritual and redistribution of *chicha*.

The use of *keros* marked important ceremonial events and mediated relationships between humans and supernatural beings. In the aforementioned illustration by Guaman Poma (Figure 2) an Inka noble drinks, while another *kero* is carried to the sun by a demon. Such offerings made to the sun captured the attention of Spanish authorities during the Colonial period (Cummins 2002, 199). *Keros* may have also provided an important link between the living and the deceased, and they accompanied the dead as grave goods before and after the arrival of the Spanish (see Rowe 1961, 318-326). Another illustration by Guaman Poma portrays the use of pairs of *keros* in a funerary context (Figure 3). The title of the scene reads “Inca Illapa defunto”, indicating that the viewer is witnessing the funerary ceremony of a royal Inka. The probable setting of the scene is an ancestral tomb, perhaps an above-ground stone rectangular or cylindrical *chullpa*, of the type constructed in the Aymara region in the southern Inka Empire, denoted by the ashlar structure in the background containing skeletal remains. A man

were also often deliberately produced with subtle differences in imagery and scale (Quilter 2010, 134).

During the Inka Imperial period, *keros* were used in state-sponsored drinking rituals. *Keros* were used in conjunction with large *chicha*-storing and -serving vessels called *urpus* (also known as *aribolas*). An early seventeenth-century illustration by Guaman Poma depicts a woman pouring *chicha* from an *urpu* into a pair of *keros* (Figure 2). Bray (2000) argues that the form of the *urpu* is an abstracted and essentialized representation of the body of the Inka ruler (see also Allen 2015). *Urpus* containing *chicha* may have been distributed across the empire in order to establish the presence of the Inka through ritual drinking (Bray 2000, 178). The *urpu* may thus embody the Inka ruler and his role in the production and redistribution of finished goods from raw materials (in this instance, the transformation of maize into maize beer). Dean (2007, 510) discusses similar notions of the Inka’s ability to ingest raw materials and



and woman, wearing the accouterments of Inka elites, approach from the pictorial right while drinking from *keros*. The male figure in front holds a *kero* to his lips with his left hand while he pours the contents of another into a vessel with his right hand. The vessel that receives the libation is placed in front of an elite male who is seated on a *tiana*, a royal throne. The closed eyes of the seated figure and those of the female figure behind him indicate that they are deceased, which is affirmed by Guaman Poma's label "Yllapa – defunto", in front of the face of the seated male figure. Pairs of *keros* have also been found incorporated into the walls of *chullpas* above the lintels (Cummins 2002, 135; 2007, 287; Gisbert *et al.* 1996, 47). Furthermore, the tall, cylindrical *chullpas* of Sillustani, Peru resemble enormous *keros*, and link ceremonial drinking to important ancestors.

Paired *keros* embodied the important Andean concept of *tinkuy* (Allen 2002; Cummins 2002). *Tinkuy* is a symbolically charged convergence or encounter between opposed complementary pairs, such as the conjoining of two streams of liquid, such as rivers, or the meeting of two opponents on the battlefield. It is important to note, however, that oppositional pairing does not imply that both members of a pair are equal. As a manifestation of this cosmological organizing principle, Cuzco, the Imperial Inka capital was divided into *hanan* and *hurin* moieties. *Hanan* is associated with qualities such as masculine, upper, and right, whereas *hurin* is conceptualized as feminine, lower, and left. The opposed members converge to make a conceptual whole. *Hanan* and *hurin* social organization was carefully observed during drinking rituals, with members of each respective division arranged in parallel lines and facing each other (Cobo 1990, 199). *Keros* and *aquillas* exchanged in drinking rituals and given as gifts played a key role in securing alliances or social bonds between Inka rulers and their vassals, which, in part, reified conceptual organization of the cosmos (Allen 2002, 187; Cummins 2002; 2004, 8; 2007, 274). *Keros* were essential in cementing social bonds, and they were among the first objects exchanged by Atahualpa and Pizarro upon meeting at Cajamarca (Cummins 2002, 14-20).

Little is known of the precise origin of the *kero* painting tradition in the early Colonial period. Painted *keros* are not mentioned in Colonial texts until the 1570s,

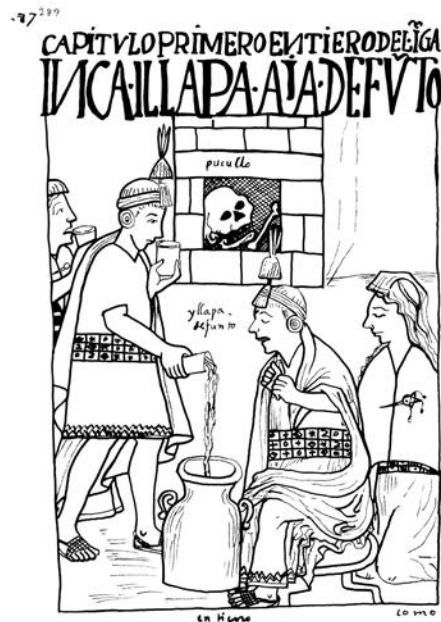


Figure 3. Page from Nueva corónica i buen gobierno showing a royal funeral. Redrawn by the author after drawing by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (1615, 287 [289]).

and commercial production may have begun around that time (Cummins 2002, 137, 210). After a final major defeat of Inka rebels in 1572, a series of reforms in the late Sixteenth Century by Viceroy Francisco de Toledo dictated that *kero* imagery could not convey Andean symbolism (Cummins 2002, 155-156). The production and use of *keros* continued into the Colonial period, despite numerous attempts at repression. While drinking among native populations in the Americas was considered a nuisance by Spanish authorities, it was grudgingly tolerated. Repression of *kero* use and production was inconsistent, relying on contextual observation and European distinctions between sacred and secular that may not have been readily applicable in the Andes. Extirpators confiscated *keros* that they considered to be of ceremonial use, while permitting the use of *keros* that they believed to be of quotidian use (Cummins 2002, 197-201).

Painted *keros* were considered high-status objects among Andeans, and their production involved the import of raw materials from the margins of the former Inka Empire. According to Cummins (2002, 208-209), most painted *keros* originate from the southern sierra region, with major production centered at Cuzco and Potosí. Wood was taken from several sources, including the eastern slopes of the Andes. Highly specialized decorative techniques involved carving lines into wood and inlaying them with colored resin called *mopa mopa* (Newman, Kaplan and Derrick 2015; Pearlstein *et al.* 2000). A close relationship between Colonial *kero* painters and *kurakas*, as well as the special status of objects decorated with this technique, is suggested by its use on some colonial *tianas* (*kurakas'* thrones) (Cummins 2002, 303). Painted *keros* also appear in wills of high-status Andeans from early 1600s (Cummins 1998, 114; 2002, 211-213).

Painted *keros* and silver *aquillas* were valued commodities among both Spaniards and Andeans. They were frequently confiscated and destroyed in extirpation events of the early 1600s, and yet were praised and highly valued for their artistry by other Spaniards (Cummins 2002, 175-177, 197-198). The value in *keros*, from an Andean perspective, is inherent in their use in ritual and as elite prestige items that recalled traditional Inka royalty, whereas Spaniards likely valued them for their monetary worth and workmanship (Cummins 1998, 130). Seven pairs of silver *aquillas* were recovered from the 1622 wreck of the *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*, a Spanish galleon en route from the Viceroyalty of Peru to Spain (Cummins 1998, 122; 2002, 178-182). While no painted wooden *keros* were among the objects recovered from the *Atocha*, there are records of painted *keros* in European collections (Cummins 2002, 187). Thomas Cummins (1998, 94) notes that the mutual valuation of certain objects, such as *keros* and *aquillas*, among Spaniards and Andeans allowed them to circulate openly through both traditional Andean systems of reciprocity, gift-giving, and obligation, and the Spanish monetary economic system.

There is debate whether, and to what degree, works produced by indigenous artists, such as painted *keros*, represent Andean resistance to Spanish rule. For some scholars, the Colonial *kero* painting tradition marks resistance toward Spanish acculturation through the preservation of symbols of pre-Hispanic Inka authority (e.g. Flores Ochoa



1990, 33; Rowe 1961). For others, the persistence of Inka symbols played a key role in fomenting indigenous rebellion (e.g. Estenssoro 1991; Gisbert 1999, 95). Cummins (2002, 318-319) argues that these symbols of Andean authority were mediated through Western pictorial conventions, and Colonial Andean symbolism was so deeply imbricated within the Colonial Spanish system of authority, that it served primarily as a nostalgic reminder of a bygone era. Allen (2002, 187) draws attention to the ambiguity of such symbols of indigenous authority, arguing that ritual drinking simultaneously preserved Inka heritage and facilitated Spanish colonial rule by fostering obligation between Andean commoners and *kurakas*, who were in turn the subjects of Spanish authorities. Power dynamics and the use of symbols of Andean authority were indeed complex and dual-natured, as demonstrated by the changing views and attitudes of Spanish authorities throughout the Colonial period. The invocation of Inka rulership was ultimately deemed a threat to Spanish colonial rule. After the capture and execution of the rebel Tupac Amaru II in the early 1780s, traditional symbols of Inka authority became a focus of sumptuary laws, which aimed to diminish the power of *kurakas*. However, the extent and effectiveness of these laws is debatable, in light of a remarkable *keero* described by Rowe (1961, 329-330) that appears to commemorate Peruvian independence from Spain, and was painted around 1821, nearly two generations after the execution of Tupac Amaru II.

### **Colonial *kurakas***

Colonial *kurakas* (also referred to as *caciques* and *principales*), who drew power and legitimacy from both Spanish administration and invocation of pre-Hispanic Inka rule, served as intermediaries between Spanish authorities and their indigenous subjects. In attempt to more effectively control indigenous populations, the Spanish made use of preexisting kin-based *ayllu* power structures, headed by descendants of nobles promoted by the Inka, although kurakaships were sometimes occupied by people who were installed by Spanish authorities, but had no legitimate hereditary claim to the position (Cummins 2002, 324-325). Commanding authority over native populations, *kurakas* were necessary components of the Spanish colonial agenda, and in return, they were free from paying taxes and from *mit'a* labor draft obligations (Cummins 1991, 208; 2002, 281). The sons of *kurakas* attended the Colegio de Caciques de San Borja in Cuzco, founded in 1621 by Jesuits, in order to receive training in Catholicism, Spanish law, Castilian language, and other Western subjects (Cummins 1991, 208-209; 2002, 278; Dean 1999, 112), and investiture ceremonies took place before the Spanish viceroy or Audiencia in Lima (Cummins 1991, 212).

Colonial Inka noble costuming conveyed signs of authority to both Spaniards and Andeans. To buttress their potentially tenuous position and to legitimate their authority among their indigenous subjects, *kurakas* often made use of dress and accouterments that recalled Imperial Inka authority. Costumes worn by *kurakas* during festivals are a pastiche of Imperial Inka royal costume, Colonial period invention, and European

elements (Dean 1996, 181; 1999, 122-178; Gisbert 1980, 120-124). The Colegio de San Borja may have been in part responsible for encouraging Inka-style dress among *kurakas* (Dean 1999, 112). Symbols that had been reserved for the Inka ruler became disbursed among the descendants of lower-level elites during the Colonial period. The *maskapaycha* (Figures 2 and 3), a red fringe that was worn on the forehead, became incorporated into costumes worn by *kurakas* and conveyed royal ancestry (Dean 1999, 100-109; 2005, 92-93). Likewise, *tokapu*, rectangular geometric designs arranged in horizontal bands near the waist on royal tunics (Figures 2 and 3), were common on the tunics and mantles of male and female indigenous elites (Dean 1999, 154-155; Pillsbury 2002, 76, 83-84). Colonial *keros* are usually decorated with a horizontal *tokapu* band or belt, conveying elevated status, and Cummins (2002, 201) notes the similar language used to describe fine textiles and painted *keros*. The relationship of the royal Inka body to the *urpu* noted by Bray (2000) may be echoed in painted *keros* that are decorated to resemble elite tunics.

*Keros* and their ceremonial usage reinforced the status of *kurakas* as intermediaries between the Spanish authorities and their Andean subjects. The distribution of *chicha* to community members continued to be a duty of *kurakas* during the Colonial period, despite Spanish efforts to curb Native drinking (Cummins 2002, 307-309). *Chicha* distribution and the exchange of *keros* at events such as public banquets may have been viewed as a necessary evil by Spaniards by mitigating traditional obligations of kin-based reciprocity and *mit'a* labor obligations on the one hand, and service that benefitted the Spanish crown and labor extraction on the other (Allen 2002, 187; Cummins 2002, 326). In other words, painted *keros* supported the role of the *kuraka* as occupying a space between traditional Andean power structures and Colonial administrative hierarchy (Cummins 1991, 208-209; 2002, 282). Through the incorporation of representational pictorial styles into objects such as *keros*, *kurakas* used symbols of authority that were acceptable to Spanish sensibilities, yet retained traditional symbolic meaning and content. The three-dimensionally carved jaguars that flank the rim and break the planar surface of the painted *keros* considered in this study illustrate this point, and may have carried symbolic value that was meaningful to Spaniards and Andeans. Felines were associated with Inka royalty before and after the Colonial period (Pillsbury 2002, 93). Likewise, lions symbolized courage and rulership across Europe. The jaguars convey an additional, perhaps covert, layer of meaning in their *tinkuy* opposition. Colonial Inka elites used such objects to negotiate a dual role as both ruler and subject, simultaneously legitimating their authority to both sides by showing their conformity and allegiance to Spanish standards, *and* their resistance to Spanish authority and invocation of pre-Hispanic rule.

### **Tinku and tinkuy**

One of the painted sides of the polychrome *kero* discussed in the present study (Figure 4) reflects Andean concepts of cosmological organization. These cosmological principals shape social organization and were, and continue to be, reinforced through festivals. Two warriors in the foreground who confront each other are the primary focus of the scene, indicated by their central placement and large relative scale in comparison to the other elements in the scene. Above the warriors, sun and moon, each with a human face, are placed on either side of a flowery field inhabited by two animals, perhaps a puma and a llama. A blue stream descends from the field, flows between the two warriors, and parts at their feet. Two smaller figures, stooped-over behind each warrior, appear to clean the canals with hoes (Wichrowska and Ziółkowski 2000, 116).

The river in the scene flows down from the background to the foreground, linking the two planes of the image. The flowery field in the background inhabited by a possible llama that rears on its hind legs and a puma (whose head is the same shape as that of the feline at the bottom of the scene between the feet of the two warriors) likely represents the Altiplano. In the Andes, mountains are often considered a source of water, which cyclically flows through the valleys to the coast and is recycled back to the mountains (Salomon 1991, 15; Urton 1981b, 60). A feline head marks the point where the stream

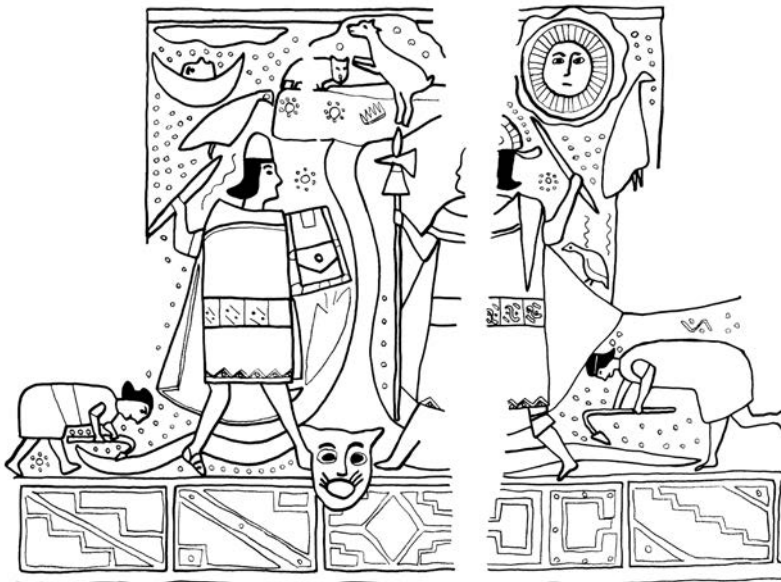


Figure 4. Rollout view of side of Colonial Inka *kero* showing a battle scene. Redrawn by the author after Wichrowska and Ziółkowski 2000, Ill. 39 and 40.



Figure 5. Page from *Nueva corónica i buen gobierno* showing January hoeing scene. Redrawn by the author after drawing by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (1615, 1132 [1142]).

right, and on the other side of the vessel.

Gender is a key aspect of Andean worldview and cosmological organization. Objects, people, and places may be gendered. The sun, for example, is masculine and the moon is feminine. In Colonial representations the sun and moon are often portrayed as anthropomorphic entities with human faces set within disks. Gold and silver, which are respectively considered the sweat of the sun and the tears of the moon, also carry the genders of the celestial bodies with which they are associated. However, Andean gendering is not equivalent to the Cartesian dualism that is incorporated into European worldview, but rather is relational and complementary, rather than fixed and in perpetual tension. On this side of the painted *kero*, the pairing of the gendered sun and moon, the convergence of two warriors, and the divergence of the river exemplify Andean worldview and the concept of *tinkuy*. Typically in Colonial Andean images that portray the sun and moon, the sun appears on the pictorial upper right of a scene, and the moon appears in the upper left. Curiously, the placement of the celestial entities is reversed in this scene, with the moon on the pictorial right and the sun on the pictorial left. This may denote the time of year, or possibly time of day. In Guaman Poma's January hoeing scene (Figure 5), the moon likewise occupies the pictorial upper right of the scene.

divides in the foreground. Points at which two rivers converge or diverge are significant in Andean worldview, and the feline may denote the divergence as *tinkuy*, which is echoed by the confrontation between two combatants. The feline head may also allude to the status of the warriors, with the puma as a symbol of elite masculinity and perhaps ferocity in battle. The two smaller bent figures that use hoes likely indicate that the scene takes place in December or January, during the Inka month of *Capac raymi Camay quilla*, when hoes were used to clean and clear fields and canals in anticipation of rains (Cummins 2002, 241; see MacCormack 1998, 314-316; Zuidema 1989, 260-262). Guaman Poma drew a similar scene set in January that portrays a man and woman hoeing a field as rains, indicated by a series of wavy vertical lines, fall from a cloudy sky (Figure 5). The artist who painted the *kero* made use of the same convention to denote rain, visible behind the back of the warrior on the viewer's

The two warriors facing off on either side of the stream of water are dressed as Inka elites. Both wear *unkus* with bands of *tocapu* on them, denoting high social status. One figure holds a sword and shield, and the other holds a sword and a halberd, also referred to as a *tupa yauri*. The *tupa yauri* is frequently held by Inka royalty in Colonial imagery, and it was among the objects given to an Inka ruler upon his investiture (Cummins 2002, 75). Confrontations between opposed warriors are relatively common subject matter on painted *keros*, and are often depicted as armed conflicts between Antis, from the western jungle region of Antisuyu, and Inka warriors (Bertazoni 2007; Cummins 2002, 193). Colonial and modern festivals include reenactments of such Inka-Anti battles. However, in the painted *kero* scene, neither of the warriors is identifiable as an Anti, which typically sport bows and feathered headdresses.

Ritual battles called *tinku* are carried out annually between January and March in Quechua and Aymara communities in Bolivia (Allen 2002, 192-193; Cummins 2002, 252-254; Platt 1986). Predetermined pairings of men or unmarried women from different moieties engage in violent boxing matches in order to resolve disputes and ensure a good harvest. Blood that falls to the ground is regarded as an offering to Pachamama, the earth, and one or two deaths occur annually as a result of *tinku* matches. Inka men engaged in similar staged ritual battles, and during the Colonial period, *tinku* battles took place during the month of Camay quilla (Cummins 2002, 250-253), reinforcing the temporal setting of the scene on the painted *kero* as on or around the December solstice. Drunkenness is often a central element of *tinku* battles (Cummins 2002, 253), and in this regard *tinku* and Inka-Anti battle scenes are fitting subject matter for portrayal on drinking vessels.

*Tinku* or *tinku*-like battles in the Andes likely predate the Inka. The Moche culture of Peru's North Coast (AD 100-800) appear to have taken part in ritual battles, as suggested by the frequent appearance of opposed combatants on painted ceramic vessels (Donnan 2004, 113-117). Several authors note the thematic similarities of Moche scenes to modern and Colonial *tinku* matches (e.g. Benson 2012, 91-92; Cummins 2002, 257; Hocquenghem 1989, 55). In Moche scenes, warriors are typically paired, and are armed with close-range blunt-force weapons such as clubs (Figure 6). The combatants often bleed profusely from the nose and mouth, and the scenes occur in the desert, suggesting that the battles may be an entreaty for water and agricultural fertility. Painted scenes typically appear on stirrup-spout vessels, which consist of a globular body with two tubes that emerge from the top and conjoin to form a central spout. Quilter (2010, 43) notes that the form of the stirrup-spout vessel creates a *tinkuy* convergence of fluid when poured. Similarly, drinking and pouring offerings of *chicha* from pairs of *keros* was likely a *tinkuy* act and, carved from the same block of wood, the vessels themselves embodied the concept. In this instance, the *tinkuy* properties of a *kero* pair is reinforced by the depiction of a confrontation between a pair of warriors in a *tinkuy* convergence, or *tinku*.





Figure 6. Rollout view of a scene from a Moche vessel. Redrawn by the author after Donnan and McClelland 1999, fig. 4.18.

### The life stairs

The focus of opposite side of the Colonial *keero* considered in this study is a series of nine male figures that appear to age as they ascend and descend a stepped pyramidal structure (Figure 7). Wichrowska and Ziółkowski describe the scene as a “pyramid of life that shows the nine phases of human life, from birth to old age” (2000, 116, my translation). An infant is portrayed at the pictorial right foot of the structure and the figures above the infant on each step become progressively larger and more mature. At the apex of the structure, a presumably middle-aged figure stands wearing a decorated *unku* and holds a *tupa yauri* and shield. Rather than the wide-brimmed hat worn by the other figures in the scene, he wears a headband as an emblem of his elite status. Moving down the structure, the figures become more stooped, and hold canes, until they reach the bottom of the pyramidal structure, where an elderly man supported by a pair of canes is completely bent over. While the scene has been reconfigured with Inka imagery, it appears to be directly inspired by a popular genre of European prints known as “the life stairs” (Figure 8). The incorporation of imagery from European prints into Colonial Inka drinking vessel imagery raises the question of how the painting on the vessel might have been read by different viewers and how life stairs prints were understood and integrated into a Colonial Andean context.

The circulation of imported European prints in the Viceroyalty of Peru profoundly influenced the development of Colonial art. Mid-colonial commissioned paintings were often based on prints, as stated in existing contracts (Dean 1996, 180). Guaman Poma, who wished to give his hand-drawn *Nueva corónica i buen gobierno* the appearance of a printed book, adapted scenes, conventions, and subject matter directly from European prints. According to Guchte (1992, 108), most of Guaman Poma’s European source prints were at least a century older than his 1615 work and were from southern Germany, but Cummins (2011, 220-223) adds that he drew from contemporary prints as well. Andean artists frequently augmented traditional European forms with new meaning in a process that Dean (1996) refers to as ‘renewal’. While the incorporation





Figure 7. Rollout view of side of Colonial Inka kero showing 'life stairs' scene. Redrawn by the author after Wichrowska and Ziółkowska (2000, Ill. 39 and 40).

of European motifs and pictorial conventions into *kero* decoration was not infrequent, the translation of a printed scene to the surface of the vessel discussed in this study is ostensibly unique among *kero* painting.

The life stairs genre was common subject matter in prints from roughly 1600 to 1900, and reflects European notions of aging as an ascent to middle age and descent to old age and death that originate in Classical Antiquity and were further developed during the Middle Ages (Ehmer 1995, 53-58; Janssen 2007, 442-446). Life stairs images partitioned men's and women's lives into several numerically based divisions that carry allegorical connotations and characterize each life stage (Seidel Menchi 2001, 52-53). The first life stairs woodcut, titled *Die neun Lebensalter des Mannes* (Figure 8), was produced by Jörg Breu the Younger, a painter from Augsburg, Germany in 1540 (Ehmer 1995, 54). The genre became popularized and spread rapidly through a series of prints in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, produced primarily in the Netherlands (Ehmer 1995, 54-56; Janssen 2007,



Figure 8. *Die neun Lebensalter des Mannes* by Jörg Breu the Younger ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jörg\\_Breu\\_dJ\\_Die\\_Lebensalter\\_des\\_Mannes.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jörg_Breu_dJ_Die_Lebensalter_des_Mannes.jpg) [26.04.2019]).

438-439). In European portrayals of life stairs, but omitted from the representation on the *kero*, each figure often stands above an animal, which serves as an allegory of that age's physical and mental abilities, as well as their social status (Ehmer 1995, 55).

Traditional European conceptions of old age and death differ considerably from widespread Andean notions of aging and mortality. Whereas death may be considered antithetical to human fertility in conventional European worldview, important deceased ancestors were frequently considered to play a direct and ongoing role in the production of rain, crop fertility, increase in herds, and human fertility in the Imperial Inka and Colonial Andes (Classen 1993, 92; Cobo 1988, 125; 1990, 42; Dean 2006, 107; DeLeonardis and Lau 2004, 79; Lau 2008, 1032; Salomon 1991, 20; Sillar 1992, 115). Colonial and modern All Saints or Feast of the Dead festivals, which occur near the beginning of rainy season, emphasize the sustained role of ancestors in crop production (Bastien 1995, 368-369; Carmichael 1994, 83; MacCormack 1998, 310-311; Sillar 1992, 117), and there is strong evidence of similar beliefs in the relationship between the deceased and agricultural and human fertility among pre-Inka traditions, such as Paracas, Nasca, and Moche (Carmichael 1994; Frame 2001, 69-72; DeLeonardis and Lau 2004; Lau 2008; Turner 2015, 56-61). Among the Inka, aging could be considered a gradual 'drying' from soft, wet infancy, to desiccated, hardened, tree- or seed-like ancestors, referred to as *mallkis* (Classen 1993, 15; Salomon 1991, 16; 1995, 328).

The act of burying or entombing dried, mummified ancestors is thus metaphorically comparable to planting seeds or tubers (DeLeonardis and Lau 2004, 102-103; Frame 1995, 14; Lau 2008, 1033). Sillar (1996, 269) argues that in the Andean highlands, the practice of mummification was akin to freeze-drying potatoes. *Chullpas*, the aforementioned above-ground funerary structures, are comparable to Imperial Inka agricultural storehouses known as *collicas*, according to Lau (2008, 1035), and Salomon (1995, 321) notes that a small chamber that held mummified remains was also referred to as a 'collica'.

The European conception of aging and mortality, as portrayed in the life stairs as a gradual ascent from birth to an apex at middle age and gradual descent toward decrepitude and the finality of death, is at odds with Andean views of life and death transformations. In the aforementioned Andean belief systems, the human life cycle mirrors agricultural cycles, and death is not the terminus of life, but rather a change in status that permits the generational continuity of life. The deceased in the Andes are vital, rather than inert, and death may be considered an increase in potency. What then might the stepped structure in the life stairs represent within an Andean conceptual framework? Pyramids are common features of the coastal Andean landscape and are widely regarded as abodes of the deceased, as are mountains in the highlands (e.g. Bastien 1986, 1995). One wonders whether in this instance the pyramidal structure might be read as half of an Andean Cross, or *chakana* (see Kauffmann-Doig 2015), perhaps implying continuity in the cycle of life that is not otherwise represented in life stairs scenes. Alternatively, as a depiction of the growth cycle of an elite Inka male, the scene may be in dialogue with the *tinku* battle on the opposite side of the vessel, as such staged battles often coincide with mens' coming of age ceremonies.

A gabled house flanked by two trees sits in the foreground of the scene, in front of the life stairs (Figure 7). The house recalls the mythological three-window house that Manco Capac, the first Inka ruler, and his siblings emerged from at Pacaritambo, which had a tree of gold planted to its right, representing the father's family, and a tree of silver to the left, representing the mother's family (see Arnold 1991, 54). Gold and silver trees also flank the house of emergence represented in an early 17th century drawing by Santacruz Pachacuti Yamqui (Figure 9).

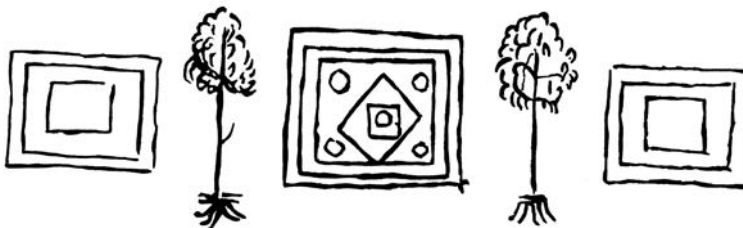


Figure 9. Stylized depiction of house at Pacaritambo flanked by gold and silver trees. Redrawn by the author after drawing by Juan Santa Cruz Pachacuti Yamqui Salcamaygua (Molina 1613, 140).

The trees on either side of the house on the *keru* image and Pachacuti Yamqui's drawing may be analogous to house symbolism among contemporary Aymara-speakers in Qaqachaka, Bolivia, in which the right and left house posts are respectively masculine and feminine, with an ambiguously gendered house ridge, where the sides meet (Arnold 1991, 15, 53). Traditional house-raising in the Andean highlands may be considered an act infused with *tinkuy* (Allen 2002, 193; Mayer 1977). The Qaqa house ridge embodies the term *qhariwarmi* (literally 'man-woman'), as right and left gendered sides converge to make a whole, and serves as a metaphor for the union of husband and wife. The figures on the pyramidal structure above the house are organized similarly with youth on the right, old age on the left, and middle age at the crux, mediating the two halves of the structure as, perhaps, a mediator of opposed stages of the life cycle. On the *keru*, an object that is likely a candle sits in front of the house, and may conceptually be placed inside the house. Arnold (1991, 15) notes that in Qaqachaka, locals pun the Spanish word for 'candle', *vela*, with *wila*, the Aymara word for 'blood', and state that their houses are lit with blood. Light from the burning candle may be conceptualized as the blood or vital force that animates the house.

Drinking and house-building serve an additional ritual function related memory and storytelling. Arnold (1991) notes that, in the absence of written family histories and genealogies, residents of Qaqachaka use alcohol consumption as a means of recounting their heritage through associated drinking songs sung during occasions such as house-building. In this context, the act of drinking is performative and didactic. Men trace their genealogy through a male line known as 'Our Father Pathway', whose ultimate point of origin is the sun, and women's line is known as 'Our Mother Pathway', which originates from the moon (Arnold 1991, 53). The completed house may ultimately be gendered feminine (Allen 2002, 195), but through genealogical drinking songs sung by both genders, a third 'pathway of memory' is formed (Arnold 1991). The convergence of the two gendered pathways is a *tinkuy* convergence which forms the *qhariwarmi* 'pathway of memory', uniting the husbands' lineages with those of the wives. Historical sources indicate that *keros* served as mnemonic devices for recounting history (Cummins 2002, 152). During Colonial and pre-Hispanic periods, *keros* may have been used in similar memory-evoking ceremonies.

Liquid offerings are poured during Qaqa house-building. Men pour libations on the right side of the house, women pour on the left, and the libations converge at the top of the house (Arnold 1991, 15). The Inka practice of pouring offerings of alcohol on the ground during foundation rituals is known as *tinka* (Dean 2007, 506). The poured offerings depicted in Guaman Poma's rendering of a funerary ceremony in front of a *chullpa* may serve a similar function during entombment (Figure 3). Arnold (1991, 6) notes that the construction of the Qaqa house involves not only the construction of space, but also the construction of time, as songs sung during the process recall memories of the dead and the house thus serves as a mnemonic device for recording the past.

An Andean notion of cyclical time is suggested, as ancestral lines are recounted during the building the house. Ancestors are thus present during the event and incorporated into the matrix of the house itself. The life cycle revolving around the house on the painted *keero* may refer to this process, as the house may symbolize the movement of time and the presence of ancestors. The placement of the house and the life stairs on the *keero* likely refers to the recollection of time through the act of drinking, as well as the *keero*'s involvement in the actual performance of drinking and pouring.

As on the other side of the vessel, objects in the sky above the life stairs may temporally situate the scene within the Andean calendar. An anthropomorphic sun is placed on the pictorial upper right of the scene, surrounded by white dots, red objects that may be blossoms, and a small brown bird. A curious six-headed bird faces the uppermost figure on the life stairs, in the pictorial upper left, opposite the sun. Undulating vertical lines, identifiable as falling rain, surround the six-headed bird. The bird could serve a heraldic function, perhaps referencing the two-headed Hapsburg Eagle (see Gusinde 1964). However, the juxtaposition of the six-headed bird against the sun on the pictorial right suggests that it more likely represents a celestial body. Cummins (2002, 264) mentions a two-headed eagle called *cuchucontor*, that is a harbinger of the coming rains. As the bird on the *keero* is surrounded by falling rain, this seems a likely explanation, although it is difficult to account for the number of heads. The smaller bird next to the sun is more readily identifiable. Lacking prominent tail feathers, the bird is not likely an eagle or condor, but may rather represent a ground-dwelling partridge or tinamou. A dark cloud constellation in the form of a partridge or tinamou, called Lluthu (known as the Coalsack in Western astronomy) is visible in the night sky during rainy season from October to July (Urton 1981a, 119-122; Pacheco, Flores and Salazar 2009, 96). Lluthu is at its zenith on the morning of the December solstice and at nadir on the June solstice (Urton 1981a, 122), which may account for the bird's placement next to the sun on the *keero*. December and June solstices may reflect Andean binary oppositions, with a distinction between the mature, powerful sun in December, and the young and weaker sun in June (Dean 1999, 34-36). Temporal placement of the scene around the December solstice is consistent with the *tinku* battle and hoeing scene portrayed on the other side of the vessel, and may hint at a ritual function of the *keero* for making toasts to the powerful sun of the December solstice.

## Conclusion

A European 'life stairs' print was not copied onto the surface of the *keero* in rote fashion, but rather was reconfigured to suit the needs of its patron and the function of the *keero* as a ceremonial object that reinforced the status of its owner. Imagery on both sides of the *keero* suggests usage during festivals around the December solstice that marked young men's coming of age, involved ritual battles that encouraged favorable agricultural conditions, and determined the proper time for cleaning canals and preparing fields. The probable owner of the *keero* was a *kuraka* who used it to reinforce his status



by pouring offerings and drinking during such festivals, and by offering *chicha* to his subordinates. The owner of the *keero* derived power from Inka tradition and Spanish colonial rule. The incorporation of a European scene on the vessel highlights his status as someone who was acquainted with imported European art and perhaps saw a reflection of himself in the figure that ascends and descends the life stairs.

Kubler's assertion that quotidian objects were more likely to survive Spanish colonization than high-status objects does not hold true in the case of *keros*, which clearly evoked pre-Hispanic authority and power structures. *Keros* drew the attention of Spanish as ritual objects, and yet their production and use continued throughout the duration of the Viceroyalty of Peru. The costuming of *kurakas*, worn in public during festivals, also directly referenced Inka rule, albeit with the incorporation of European elements (Dean 1999, 2005). The *keero* considered in this study conveys the status of its owner through reference to Inka authority, Andean tradition, and intimate familiarity with European commodities such as prints. Rather than consider Colonial Inka dress and accouterments such as painted *keros* as hybrid objects that reflect hybrid identities, it may be more productive to question why such objects deliberately and simultaneously reference traditional Andean symbols of authority and European markers of status, and how they were used to consciously negotiate power by social actors.

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