

# The linguistic prehistory of Northern Peru: The case of Chachapoyas

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The dominant indigenous language families of the Central Andes of Peru and Bolivia today are Quechuan and Aymaran. Quechuan in particular has expanded in late prehistoric times at the expense of unrelated, local languages. In this talk, I explore the linguistic situation in Northern Peru as it may have existed before the arrival of Quechua on the eastern slopes of the Andes in the area of Chachapoyas.

Chachapoyas Quechua has some highly unusual typological features from a Quechuan point of view (cf. Taylor 1979): stress falls regularly on the word-initial syllable and concomitantly, elision of vowels creates heavier syllables than in any other Quechua variety. At the same time, local toponymy and personal names are distinctly non-Quechuan. Interference from a local non-Quechua language, which would eventually have been replaced by Quechua and also be the source of local toponymy and personal names, is a real possibility.

Here, I seek to give an identity to this pre-Quechua local language of Chachapoyas, conventionally known as Chacha (cf. Taylor 1990). Specifically, I suggest that this language was closely related to, yet distinct from, the Cholón language, formerly spoken at the intersection between Andes and Amazonian lowlands further south and known through a colonial grammar (Alexander-Bakkerus 2005). This inference is based on evidence from three different types of linguistic evidence:

(i) a significant portion of local Chachapoyas toponymy can be explained through Cholón lexical material. Limabamba, for one, is a small village situated on a plain which is surrounded by a horseshoe-shaped mountain chain. The ending *-bamba* is Quechua and means ‘plain’. Lima, I suggest, has got nothing to do with the Peruvian capital nor with the Quechuan family, but instead reflects Cholón *limay* ‘mountains, highland’ (Alexander-Bakkerus 2005), befitting the situation of the village. Also recurrent endings of Chachapoyas toponyms can be identified with Cholón lexical items. This does not only pertain to the case of *-gat* which resembles Cholón *kot* ‘water’ (cf. e.g. Torero 1989: 236-237), but also to *-mal*, which appears to be cognate with Cholón *mol* ‘ground, day’ (cf. Jolkesky 2016: 241) and to *-puy*, which appears to be cognate with Cholón *pey* ‘earth’. More evidence will be discussed, too.

(ii) the same is true of personal names. Though the evidence here is slimmer, the name Bueloc, for one, likely reflects Cholón *pul(up)* ‘son’, especially because there is a very frequent local name Oc. More evidence will be discussed, too.

(iii) the Chachapoyas Quechua lexicon contains a small number of items that do not have cognates in other Quechua varieties (cf. Taylor 1979). Analysis of these is at present ongoing, but for two items having to do with material and local culture, i.e. those where “substrate” vocabulary is likely retained, Cholón etymologies can already be proposed. For instance, rather than cognate with <*salla*> ‘mat’, a form which

appears in a 16<sup>th</sup> century Quechua dictionary, as suggested by Taylor (1979), the Chachapoyas Quechua form *shalla* ‘basketry’ may more likely reflect Cholón *šala* ‘basket’ (Alexander-Bakkerus 2005).

#### References

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