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REVISITING THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE HISTORY OF THE CENTRAL ANDES

Vortrag am 09.12.20 um 18 Uhr c. t.

In this presentation, I present an overview of recent research on the linguistic (pre)history of the Central Andes of Peru and Bolivia, a culturally precocious region of South America that is characterized by a rich cultural prehistory of complex societies that culminated with the Inca Empire.

After an introduction to the physical geography and cultural history of the region, I sketch how the linguistic landscape changed from the early 16th century to the early 21st century. Taking the much richer linguistic diversity that can be reconstructed for the early 16th century as the point of departure, I explore the idea that the reduction of linguistic diversity in historic times is a more or less seamless continuation of processes that began in late prehistory when Quechuan languages expanded into the peripheries of the Inca state in what is today Ecuador, Northern Peru, and Bolivia. To investigate these, I combine analyses of toponymy, lexical items with non-Quechuan origin in the expanding Quechuan varieties, and structural changes that they have undergone to recover earlier linguistic distributions before the spread of Quechuan to these regions.

Combined with an appreciation of what can be learned on the structures of the local languages that were replaced by Quechuan or later Spanish, this allows to outline a more inclusive and refined picture of the areal typology of the Central Andes. Especially notable is that a contrast between northern and southern spheres in terms of language geography and language typology emerges.

A similar divide is visible also in recent genomic studies, and appears deeply entrenched, too, in the material culture of the pre-Hispanic peoples of the Central Andes, so that the refined picture now available from linguistics can fruitfully be placed in an interdisciplinary context and contributes to refining our picture of the rich cultural prehistory of the region.