

Trade, alterity and cultural misunderstandings: Ashaninka and Inca

Comércio, alteridade e mal-entendidos culturais: Ashaninka e Inca

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Abstract: The pre-Andine Arawak, whose ancestral territory in the Peruvian Amazonia, bordered the Andean Central Region, engaged in intense exchanges with the Incas, a relationship characterized by both opposition and complementarity. Andean influences are particularly notable among the pre-Andine Arawak peoples. Drawing on academic literature and ethnographic research conducted with the Ashaninka of the Amônia River—a community located in the Upper Juruá region of Acre, Brazil—this article examines the connections between the Andes and Amazonia (during pre-Columbian until contemporary times), using the example of the Ashaninka. More specifically, the article analyzes the Ashaninka exchange system known as *ayôpari* as well as the myth of *Inka*. Whereas the former highlights ancient connections between the Incas and the Ashaninka through exchange networks; the latter focus on an Ashaninka myth whose central figure is a cultural hero named *Inka*.

Keywords: Ashaninka. Inca. Exchange. History. Myth.

Resumo: Os Arawak pré-andinos, cujo território ancestral na Amazônia peruana fazia fronteira com a região central dos Andes, mantiveram intensas trocas com os incas, uma relação caracterizada tanto pela oposição quanto pela complementaridade. As influências andinas são particularmente notáveis entre os povos Arawak pré-andinos. Com base na literatura acadêmica e na pesquisa etnográfica realizada com os Ashaninka do rio Amônia — uma comunidade localizada na região do alto Juruá, no estado brasileiro do Acre —, este artigo examina as conexões entre os Andes e a Amazônia (desde o período pré-colombiano até a época contemporânea), usando o exemplo dos Ashaninka. Mais especificamente, ele analisa o sistema de intercâmbio dos Ashaninka conhecido como *ayôpari*, bem como o mito do *Inka*. Enquanto o primeiro destaca as antigas conexões entre os incas e os Ashaninka por meio de redes de intercâmbio, o segundo se concentra em um mito ashaninka cuja figura central é um herói cultural chamado *Inka*.

Palavras-chave: Ashaninka. Inca. Intercâmbio. História. Mito.

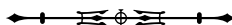
Pimenta, J., & Bertazoni, C. (2026). Trade, alterity and cultural misunderstandings: Ashaninka and Inca. *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Ciências Humanas*, 21(2), e20250041. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/2178-2547-BGOELDI-2025-0041>

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Received on 05/10/2025

Approved on 01/05/2026

Editorial responsibility: Priscila Faulhaber



INTRODUCTION

Historically, academia has framed Andes and Amazonia as two distinct, even opposing, cultural regions. The hierarchical, state-organized, and materially rich civilizations of the highlands were contrasted with the supposedly simple, egalitarian, and technologically rudimentary societies of Amazonia. This perspective was solidified by “Handbook of South American Indians” (Steward, 1948), the first major regional synthesis, which reinforced Western notions of Amazonia and its inhabitants (Taylor, 1992; Bertazoni, 2007). While the Andean Central Region and Mesoamerica were seen as cradles of complex civilizations, the so-called ‘tribes’ of the rainforest were depicted as small, autonomous, and egalitarian villages, constrained by a hostile and unproductive environment that hindered social stratification and political centralization (Meggers, 1954). Although Steward acknowledged some diversity—particularly between riverbank settlements and interfluvial areas—his perspective of Amazonia remained a mosaic of small-scale, socially autonomous societies, dominated by nature and technologically limited by environmental constraints (Viveiros de Castro, 1996).

This image of Amazonia has deeply influenced scholarly thought and has only been challenged in recent decades. Although likely unintentional, it also reinforced Western stereotypes that historically supported civilizing projects for the region and its inhabitants. The ‘invention of the Amazonia’ (Gondim, 1994) portrayed the area as the antithesis of civilization—a natural space that delayed progress and development. This perception easily evolved into the idea of a land that needed to be tamed and civilized. Such imagery fueled the ideas of Brazilian writers like Euclides da Cunha (1998) and Alberto Rangel (2001), as well as policies aimed at colonizing the region and its people.

Although Andes and Amazonia have significant differences, presenting them as entirely separate and independent cultural regions is increasingly unsustainable in light of contemporary scientific evidence. Scholars began questioning this rigid division more than half a

century ago (see, for example, Tello, 1960; Lathrap, 1963, 1970, 1973; Gade, 1972). More recent archaeological, historical, anthropological, linguistic and genetic research has not only dismantled Western myths about Amazonia, but has also highlighted the deep interconnections and mutual influences between the rainforest and the Andes (see, among others, Saignes, 1985; Renard-Casevitz, 1985, 1992, 1993; Renard-Casevitz et al., 1986; Santos-Granero, 1992, 2002; Taylor, 1992, 1999; Pärssinen & Korpisaari, 2003; Kummels & Noack, 2014; Barbieri et al., 2014; Pearce et al., 2020; Wilkinson, 2018, 2022; Bertazoni, 2007, 2014).

The Arawak speaking peoples probably started spreading from Northwest Amazonia around 3,000 B.P., having their major expansions throughout the Caribbean and South America between 500 B.C. and 500 A.D. (Heckenberger, 2002). Nowadays, Arawak communities have their largest concentrations in southern Venezuela; in central, northwestern and southwestern Brazil; as well as in eastern Peru. The Arawak speaking peoples located in eastern Peru are also known as pre-Andine Arawak (alternatively as Southern Arawak) and consist of the Yanesha, Machiguenga, Ashaninka and Yine (Piro). While the Andean cordillera frames the West of their territories, lowland Amazonia lays in their easternmost areas. The arrival and settlement of pre-Andine Arawak groups on the slopes of the Andean cordillera predates far back pre-Columbian times, with their expansion into the Peruvian Selva Central complete around 500 A.D (Wilkinson, 2018, p. 1364). Being ‘squeezed’ between Andes and Amazonia, the pre-Andine Arawak have participated in interactions between highlanders and lowlanders for centuries.

The Ashaninka represent one of the largest indigenous groups among the pre-Andine Arawak, they are around one hundred thousand in Peru where they inhabit a vast and discontinuous territory in the surroundings of the Apurimac, Ene, Perené, Tambo and Upper Ucayali rivers and their tributaries. Others live in the Gran Pajonal and by the Pachitea River (Varese, 1968, p. 11, 2002, p. 3).

Additionally, there are also around two thousand Ashaninka living in Brazil in seven demarcated indigenous territories in the region known as Alto Juruá, all in the Estate of Acre. Their arrival in this region took place more recently, at the end of the XIX century (Pimenta, 2018, p. 201).

Based on bibliographic analysis and ethnographic information, this article is the result of an interdisciplinary dialogue, and seeks to demonstrate how ethnography, enriched by history, corroborates the existence of intense relations between the so-called highlands and lowlands in pre-Columbian period, reaching contemporary times. The ethnographic data used in this study was collected among the Ashaninka of the Kampa Indigenous Land of the Amônia River, a region in the Brazilian state of Acre, near the Brazil-Peru border. Although geographically distant from the Andes, this community, as we will show throughout the text, continues to preserve traces of their ancestors' interactions with the Inca Empire.¹ The Ashaninka of Brazil represents a unique case for analyzing the relationship between Andes and Amazonia in ancient times as well as its resonances in contemporary times.

We begin by concisely addressing the complex and ambiguous relationships between the Incas and the peoples of Western Amazonia, particularly the pre-Andine Arawak, who played a key role as intermediaries between the highlands and lowlands along the eastern border of the central Andes. We then briefly explore how interactions between the Inca Empire and pre-Andine Arawak groups were shaped both by conflict and opposition, and by various forms of exchange. Within this dynamic landscape of mutual influences between the Andes and Amazonia, we focus on two examples which are the central part of this article. Firstly, we look at the Ashaninka traditional exchange system, known as *ayompari*, and secondly, we analyze elements of Ashaninka mythology, particularly the

myth of the *Inka*, revealing traces of Andean, particularly Inca, influences among the Ashaninka of the Amônia River.

INCAS AND ANTIS: AN AMBIVALENTE RELATIONSHIP

The rise of Inca hegemony in the Andean Central Region around the 13th century triggered profound transformations across the region, ultimately leading to the formation of *Tahuantinsuyu*—the empire of the four quarters. This vast domain encompassed *Chinchaysuyu*, *Collasuyu*, *Condesuyu*. Western Amazonia was referred by the Incas as *Antisuyu*, its inhabitants as *Antis*. Later, in the colonial sources, Western Amazonian peoples were broadly categorized under terms such as *Antis*, *Andes*, or *Chunchos*. These labels were often used interchangeably or with slight distinctions by the Spanish to refer to the inhabitants of the empire's eastern frontier (for a detailed discussion, see Varese, 1968, pp. 26–31, 2002, pp. 38–43).

Far from being a culturally homogeneous group, the *Antis* encompassed a diverse array of peoples, distinct from one another. Along the eastern border of the central Andes and Amazonia, they primarily belonged to the Pano and Arawak linguistic families, particularly the so-called 'pre-Andine Arawak.' However, due to the shifting nature of ethnic and linguistic boundaries, the exact composition of this group remains a subject of debate in academia. Generally, the term 'Pre-Andine Arawak' refers to the Ashaninka (Asháninka and Ashéninka), Matsiguenga, Nomatsiguenga, Amuesha (Yanesha), Piro (Yine), and some smaller groups (Santos-Granero & Barclay, 2005, p. XV; Santos-Granero, 2002, p. 29; Renard-Casevitz, 1992, pp. 202–203, 1993, p. 26). However, these groups also exhibit significant internal variations. The Amuesha (Yanesha), who underwent extensive linguistic and cultural interactions with pre-Inca Andean groups as well as the

¹ The Ashaninka, including the closely related Asháninka and Ashéninka groups, now number around 100,000 people. They are the largest indigenous group in the Peruvian Amazon and one of the most significant in the entire region. The majority live in the Central Jungle, east of the central Andes, while a small Asháninka/Ashéninka diaspora (c. 2,000 inhabitants) is also present in Brazil, in the Alto Juruá region of Acre.

Incas, and the Piro (Yine), influenced by neighboring Pano peoples, display greater cultural and linguistic cohesion compared to the others, despite minor differences. For this reason, until the 1980s, the generic term *Campa* (or *Kampa* in Brazil) was commonly used to refer to the Ashaninka (Asháninka and Ashéninka), Matsiguenga, and Nomatsiguenga, and occasionally also included the Amuesha (Yanesha) (Santos-Granero, 2002, p. 29). Under pressure from the Pano, who gradually expanded into the Ucayali region, the pre-Andine Arawak were pushed toward the foothills of the central Andes, while the Piro settled along the Urubamba River (Santos-Granero, 2002). As a result, this western branch of the pre-Andine Arawak family—already neighbors of the Wari Empire—became, later, strategic neighbors of the Inca Empire as well, along its central frontier from eastern Huánuco to Madre de Dios (Renard-Casevitz, 1992, p. 199), thus occupying a pivotal position between the Andean Central Region and Western Amazonia.

Before the European invasion, relations between the Incas, the pre-Andine Arawak, and the Pano fluctuated between periods of conflict and alliance. Shaped by partially contrasting worldviews and political ideologies, the Inca and Amazonian societies often stood in opposition. Antisuyu held an ambiguous place in the Inca worldview. On one hand, it was conceptually integrated into the empire as one of its four *suyus* (quarters) and was symbolically linked to Chinchaysuyu, the most important region in the Inca system. In this sense, the empire itself could scarcely be imagined without Antisuyu. On the other hand, the peoples, flora, fauna, and landscape of Antisuyu were depicted in stark contrast to Andean civilization. According to this Inca view, the *Anti* Indians were portrayed as uncivilized peoples who practiced anthropophagy, and whose ceremonies, architecture, and language were considered rudimentary compared to those of the Incas. Although Antisuyu was formally part of the empire, Inca perceptions of Western Amazonia and its inhabitants cast them as the 'Other,' defined in opposition to the Andean ideal.

The region was both feared and valued: a land abundant in resources and shamanic power, inhabited by fierce warriors, yet also seen as a domain of uncivilized peoples who resisted full submission to Inca rule (for a detailed discussion see Bertazoni, 2020).

In contrast, the western Amazonian peoples—particularly the pre-Andine Arawak and Pano—viewed their powerful Andean neighbors as a society built with rigid hierarchies, fundamentally incompatible with their values and way of life in the forest. As Santos-Granero (1992) argues, groups that had direct contact with the Inca Empire, such as the Amuesha, Ashaninka, Machiguenga, and Huni Kuin, held radically different philosophical views on society and power. They saw the Incas' highly centralized and authoritarian rule as the very negation of society itself. For the Huni Kuin, the Inca redistributive system contradicted their principles of symmetrical reciprocity and represented an illegitimate claim to power (Santos-Granero, 1992, pp. 287–288). The Amuesha, on the other hand, perceived Inca authority as oppressive, built on economic exploitation, political absolutism, and the control of personal freedoms—including sexuality, as exemplified by the emperor's right over the *acillakuna* or virgins of the Sun. To them, the Incas exercised a truly despotic power, even asserting the right to take their own lives—an idea entirely incomprehensible in their worldview (Santos-Granero, 1992, pp. 291–292).

The Incas carried out periodic incursions into the eastern regions, aiming to impose their hierarchical system and subjugate the peoples of Amazonia. In response to the threat posed by this powerful neighbor, Amazonian groups—skilled warriors and deeply knowledgeable about their environment—joined forces to resist the expansionist ambitions of a shared enemy (Renard-Casevitz, 1992, p. 200, 1993, p. 34). Whenever the Inca Empire threatened to conquer the forest, pan-ethnic confederations emerged, bringing together pre-Andine Arawak and Pano groups. Though unstable and temporary, this pan-Amazonian confederations successfully prevented Inca expansion and

large-scale incursions of non-Amazonians into the lowlands for centuries.² The peoples of Antisuyu repeatedly repelled Inca attempts at domination. According to Renard-Casevitz (1992, p. 200), a stretch of rainforest known as the *ceja de montaña*, situated at around 2,000 meters in altitude, became a buffer zone—neither fully controlled by the empire nor by its closest Amazonian neighbors, the pre-Andine Arawak.

Conflict in the region was not limited to wars between the Incas and the Western Amazonians. The pre-Andine Arawak also fought periodically with their Pano neighbors, who in turn clashed among themselves. Marie-France Renard-Casevitz has extensively analyzed these complex interethnic dynamics before the European invasion, focusing on the shifting relationships between the Incas, pre-Andine Arawak, and Pano peoples (see Renard-Casevitz, 1985, 1992, 1993; Renard-Casevitz et al., 1986). Her work highlights how these groups alternated between war and trade depending on circumstances, with the pre-Andine Arawak occupying a particularly advantageous position. Although they lacked a centralized political system, the Arawak were part of a vast network of political and economic cooperation, sometimes extending to Pano groups. United by a strong sense of identity, they formed a distinct *nation*, characterized by shared cultural elements such as the *cushma* (or *kushma*, a traditional garment) and common mythological references. Among their most notable cultural traits,³ scholars have emphasized

their absence of endo-warfare distinguishing them from their Pano neighbors, with the exception of the Piro (Heckenberger, 2002, p. 115; Hornborg, 2005, p. 592; Renard-Casevitz, 1985, p. 90, 1992, pp. 204–205, 1993, p. 31; Santos-Granero, 2002, pp. 41–42).⁴ Thus, the prohibition of endo-warfare differentiates the pre-Andine Arawak from the Pano, their Amazonian neighbors. Although the Arawak maintained peace among themselves, they fought not only against the Inca, but also against the Pano.

The political alliance between the Arawak and the Pano, which periodically formed in response to Inca incursions, was rooted in intra-Amazonian trade networks, where salt blocks served as a form of currency (Varese, 1968). Salt was highly valued among Amazonian peoples—not only for enhancing food flavor but also as an essential means of preserving food in the region's hot and humid climate. One of the main and most important salt sources, Cerro de la Sal (*Tzivi* in the Ashaninka language), was located in Arawak territory and held great significance as the political, economic, and spiritual center of the pre-Andine Arawak. Beyond being a source of salt, Cerro de la Sal was (still is) a mountain-divinity, a powerful place, a non-human being with agency and personhood. Additionally, it was also a hub where different ethnic groups would meet not only for salt trade, but also for spiritual practices. These attributes made Cerro de la Sal a unique place within the cosmology of the pre-Andine Arawak.⁵

² With the European invasion, the Antis united to resist Spanish colonization. One of the most notable multi-ethnic Amazonian war confederations in Peruvian history was led by Juan Santos Atahualpa, who in 1742 rallied various Central Forest peoples to oppose Spanish expansion. His movement successfully kept much of the region off-limits to Europeans for nearly a century. However, this resistance began to lose force with the intensified incursion of outsiders during the rubber boom in the late 19th century (Renard-Casevitz, 1992, pp. 207–208). Before that, Old Vilcabamba was also very well-known and was a place for Inca refuge during the early sixteenth century just after the Spaniards invaded Peru. It was in this Inca city that, in 1536, Manco, half-brother of Atahualpa, escaped and resisted the Spaniards until 1544 when the Spanish had him killed. Afterwards, his two sons, Titu Cusi and Tupac Amaru, continued to demonstrate some resistance to the Spaniards, but Titu Cusi died mysteriously and Tupac Amaru was captured and executed in Cuzco by the Spaniards (Regalado de Hurtado, 1997). During this resistance in the east of the Andes, the Incas probably found refuge and support among the pre-Andine Arawak.

³ Cultural trait is understood here as a tendency, rather than a rule.

⁴ On the general characteristics of the Pano ethnolinguistic group, see, for example, Erikson (1992, 1993).

⁵ Unfortunately, Cerro de la Sal and several other sacred sites significant to the Ashaninka—both in Brazil and Peru—are now located on private property, restricting access and often requiring permission from landowners who frequently deny entry.

With access to the Cerro de la Sal, the pre-Andine Arawak played a central role in intra-Amazonian trade and served as key intermediaries between the Incas and the Pano peoples of the Ucayali, thanks to their strategic position between the Andes and Amazonia. Despite philosophical and social contrasts, the boundaries between the Andes and Amazonia—between the Incas and the Antis—were not entirely impermeable. While conflict was a persistent threat, periods of peace fostered friendly relations and extensive exchanges (not only of goods) between the Incas and Amazonian peoples. As Renard-Casevitz aptly summarizes, the two worlds stood in opposition yet also complemented each other:

Between the empire and the Antis there were multiform relationships, economic, political, ritual, shamanic, therapeutic and even matrimonial.⁶ So much so that the ideological separation introduced by the Inca Empire between the highlands and the savagery of the forest is partial, giving an important place to the complementary opposition between high and low and integrating the forest into the imaginary as the lower half of the global dualistic scheme, even going so far as to consider the Anti and the Chunchu as descendants of the great ancestors who took refuge in the darkness of the forest when the Inca sun emerged and the source of shamanic and therapeutic powers. (Renard-Casevitz, 1992, p. 200).⁷

Before the European invasion, trade networks between Andean and Amazonians facilitated a flow of goods in both directions: down to the forest and up to the mountains. During times of peace, especially in the summer, delegations of Amazonian, primarily pre-Andine Arawak and Pano, would travel to the nearest Inca cities, bringing forest products such as wild animals, skins, feathers, wooden objects, medicinal plants, honey etc. In exchange, the Antis would return to their territories with textiles and, notably, metal objects like gold and silver

jewelry, and copper axes. Many of these goods were subsequently redistributed through kinship networks and intra-Amazonian trade. While the full extent of these trade networks as well as potential markets remains unclear, some authors (Valensi, 1974; Hirth & Pillsbury, 2013) discussed whether the Incas tried to eliminate these markets and exchange networks, most likely in order to promote the inca redistributive system as the main economic force of the Tahuantinsuyu. Richard Chase Smith (2006) offers a fascinating study of the sacred sites of the Amuesha in the Andes and reveals the breadth of their trade routes that crossed the mountain range until the Pacific coast. Beyond the oppositions between Incas and Arawak, some authors emphasize the importance of exchanges, interdependence, and complementarity between them. For example, Wilkinson (2018) associated the bulk exchange of Amazonian feathers with the development of centralized power in the Andean Central Region around 500 A.D. onwards (the time when the pre-Andine Arawak were completing their migration in the Andean piedmont which coincides with the onset of the Wari civilization), suggesting that the impact of Amazonia in the Andes during this period has been largely underestimated. The author claims that Amazonian developments during this period influenced State emergence in the Andean Central Region, thus reversing the traditional view of Amazonia as unable of supporting complex societies. In a later article, through a multidisciplinary approach—considering archaeological, linguistic, genetic, and historical data—Wilkinson (2022) argues that the relationship between the Incas and the pre-Andine Arawak was mostly amicable, marked by ritualized warfare rather than the overt hostility the Incas exhibited toward non-Arawak Amazonian peoples. Wilkinson (2022) also challenges the common academic equivalence of

⁶ An article published in 2023 by Salazar et al. reinforces this by demonstrating, via DNA analysis, the presence of an Ashaninka woman who was buried in Machu Picchu (Salazar et al., 2023).

⁷ This dynamic was not unique to the border between the Andes and Amazonia. A similar situation was documented by Taussig (1987) in his study of Colombia's Putumayo region, further to the north. He highlights the Incas' ambivalent attitude toward Amazonian peoples—an intriguing mix of fascination and fear. The Incas viewed them as possessors of deep botanical knowledge and powerful magical practices, capable of both witchcraft and healing (Taussig, 1987). Translated from the Portuguese to English by the authors.

the terms *Anti* and *Chuncho*, suggesting that these terms refer to different types of relationships and should not be used synonymously. According to his view, *Anti* refers to a complementary and special relationship, characterized by ritual warfare, and applies to the pre-Andine Arawak to the north and northeast of Cuzco. In contrast, *Chuncho* was used to describe the peoples of the piedmont to the south and east of Cusco, as well as those of the lowlands, all of whom were considered 'savages' by the Incas, with whom they established a bellicose relationship (Wilkinson, 2022). Considering other research done about the Incas-Arawak *modus operandi* (Bertazoni, 2007, 2014), these are positions that we strongly embrace, although more research is needed to solidify this perspective of the Incas-Arawak special relationship.

More recently, Olah et al. (2026) reconstructed the journey of Amazonian parrot feathers recovered from an elite tomb at the religious centre of Pachacamac, on the Peruvian coast, associated with the pre-Inca Ychsma culture that flourished during the Late Intermediate Period (ca. 1000–1470 CE). Their findings point to a sophisticated trade network in which Arawak-speaking groups appear to have played a key role as intermediaries, with a central trans-Andean corridor linking the coast to their territories, and Cerro de la Sal among the key nodes within this network.

ASHANINKA *AYOMPARI*: NEGOTIATING ALTERITY THROUGH EXCHANGE

Ethnographic studies with the pre-Andine Arawak and Pano peoples of Western Amazonia continue to reveal Andean, and particularly Incan, influences in their cultures. Some of these influences are so evident that they require little explanation. For instance, visitors to the Apiwtxa village of the Ashaninka on the Amônia River often draw immediate parallels with the Andes and specially the Incas. The Ashaninka chew coca leaves and use musical instruments like drums and pan flutes, which closely resemble those found in the Andes. Ashaninka women are also skilled weavers, producing

the *kitharentsi* (also known as *kushma*) on looms. This garment, a key symbol of Ashaninka identity (Beysen, 2008; Pinhanta, 2019), bears a striking resemblance to the tunics worn by Andean indigenous peoples.

Beyond material culture, deeper connections with the Andes, possibly predating the Inca, can be found in subtler aspects of Ashaninka culture. Before exploring the myth of the *Inka*, we shall examine the Ashaninka system of exchange, known as *ayōpari* in their language. Both *ayōpari* and the *Inka* myth offer compelling examples of the intertwined history between the Incas and the Ashaninka.

Given the limitations of oral history, it is unrealistic to expect the Ashaninka of the Amônia River to provide precise accounts of exchanges with the Incas before the European invasion. Instead, they speak in broader terms, recalling trade with other indigenous Amazonian peoples before the arrival of the whites. The Huni Kuin, Piro, and Shipibo are the groups they mention most often. Most of the Ashaninka of the Amônia river also say they used to trade in the past with 'indigenous people of the mountains,' without specifically identify the Incas. However, in 2015, a group of Ashaninka from both Brazil and Peru visited several sacred sites located in the Peruvian Selva Central. During this visit, they stopped in the town of Muruai where Benki Pyiäko—one of the leaders of the Ashaninka of the Amônia River—stated that this was a place where their ancestors would receive blessings before entering entering trading routes between the Selva Central and the the Andean Central Region in order to trade with the incas (Comandulli, 2015, p. 8).

The Ashaninka of Brazil interpret their interactions with different groups across various historical periods through the lens of their traditional trading system called *ayōpari* (Pimenta, 2006, 2009). Their engagement in extensive intra-Amazonian trade networks during pre-Columbian and possibly early colonial times, as well as their peaceful exchanges with the Incas, is understood as a type of *ayōpari*, reinforcing its central role in their social and economic relationships.

Although there is a vast ethnographic literature on the Ashaninka, particularly in Peru, studies specifically focused on *ayōpari* represent only a portion of this broader scholarship. Notable early contributions include the pioneering work of Varese (1968, 2002), followed by Bodley (1973, 1981) and the comprehensive work done by Schäfer (1991, 2023), all of whom highlighted the central role of exchange in Ashaninka society. Drawing on his fieldwork among the Ashaninka of the Gran Pajonal, Pichis, and Ucayali regions in the 1960s, Bodley (1973) characterized their traditional exchange system as a form of ‘deferred exchange’. More recently, *ayōpari* has been examined by Hvalkof and Veber (2005, pp. 226–235), Killick (2008), and Pimenta (2006, 2009) in the case of the Ashaninka of Brazil.

The origin of the term *ayōpari* remains a subject of debate. Some scholars suggest that it derives from a modification of the Spanish word *compadre*, introduced into the central Peruvian jungle by indigenous Quechua speakers. In Quechua, *compadre* evolved into *cumpari*, which was later adapted into Arawak as *yumparai* or *yompari* (Schäfer, 1991, pp. 45–46; Hvalkof & Veber, 2005, p. 228). In the Ashaninka language, *ayōpari* consists of the inclusive first-person plural prefix *a-* (‘we’), followed by *yōpari*, which can be translated into English as ‘friend’ or ‘exchange partner’. When referring to a specific *ayōpari*, an Ashaninka man uses the first-person singular possessive form, *nyōpari* (‘my friend,’ ‘my exchange partner’).

The Ashaninka of the Amônia River explain that *ayōpari* has multiple meanings and can be used in different contexts. At its most basic, *ayōpari* refers to a friendly social interaction between Ashaninka individuals who do not know each other personally and are not related by blood or marriage. For example, when traveling to a distant region where he has no relatives, an Ashaninka will introduce himself as *ayōpari*. In this context, the term serves as a kind of ‘visiting card,’ signaling that the newcomer belongs to the same people and arrives with

friendly intentions. As an ‘unknown relative,’ the *ayōpari* represents an ‘other-yet-similar.’ Although *ayōpari* can simply describe a social interaction between unfamiliar Ashaninka individuals, it also signifies a deeper relationship between two people who choose to ‘do *ayōpari*,’ meaning they become ‘true friends’ and ‘exchange partners.’ It is this latter meaning of *ayōpari*—as both ‘friend’ and ‘exchange partner’—that is of particular interest here.

The *ayōpari* system enables a person to establish relationships of friendship and partnership with someone outside his kinship network through the exchange of goods. This exchange is a key element of the *ayōpari* bond. As observed in the Gran Pajonal (Schäfer, 1991, p. 50), the Ashaninka of the Amônia River describe an *ayōpari* as a “friend who gives me things.” Similar to the exchange expeditions discussed in the previous section, *ayōpari* visits typically take place during the dry season. The goods exchanged vary widely, including both traditional indigenous items such as clothing, bows, and arrows, hunting dogs, as well as industrial products like machetes, rifles, and cartridges. With colonization, Western goods became integrated into indigenous exchange networks, acquiring new meanings in the process (Schäfer, 1991; Hugh-Jones, 1992). For centuries, *ayōpari* partnerships allowed Ashaninka communities—particularly those more isolated from the Western world—to access industrial goods by leveraging extensive exchange networks. Over time, these products came to play an increasingly central role in *ayōpari* transactions (Bodley, 1973; Schäfer, 1991, 2023).

The *ayōpari* relationship extends beyond economic exchange; it establishes a bond between partners who commit to a moral contract and cultivate a close interpersonal connection, where prestige and honor play fundamental roles. Schäfer (1991, 2023) explored the social, cultural, and emotional dimensions of *ayōpari*, highlighting how it is governed by ethical principles and predefined behavioral norms. Exchange partners are bound by mutual protection and support, with trust,

loyalty, honesty, and generosity being essential virtues in maintaining the relationship.⁸ Despite the colonization of the Peruvian Amazonia and the increasing sedentarization of indigenous peoples within defined territories—such as *native communities* (*comunidades nativas*) in Peru and ‘indigenous lands’ (*terras indígenas*) in Brazil—which have restricted mobility and made exchange relationships more challenging, the *ayōpari* tradition has persisted. The Ashaninka of the Amônia River affirm that they continue to maintain trading partnerships across the Brazilian and Peruvian border (Pimenta, 2009). Although, as demonstrated by Schäfer (1991, 2023), the *ayompari* among the Ashéninka was marked by a system of reciprocal exchange grounded in cooperation. Its primary aim extended beyond the mere acquisition of goods to include the cultivation and preservation of harmonious social relations. This practice can be seen as a form of agreement built on trust and enduring social ties, in which greed had little or no place. However, the arrival of colonizers brought profound changes to this system. The exchanges between the Ashéninka and the *colonos* became deeply unequal and exploitative, frequently marked by violence, including flogging and other forms of abuse.

The extensive ethnographic literature on the lowlands has demonstrated that indigenous openness to otherness is rooted in the possibility of forging alliances with the ‘Other’—expanding kinship networks and integrating outsiders to neutralize real or potential threats. Among the Ashaninka of the Amônia River, the institution of *ayōpari* appears to fulfill this function. Across different historical periods, it has enabled local groups to engage

with outsiders, effectively ‘domesticating’ or ‘familiarizing’ them, as the ‘Other’ is always a potential adversary. In this sense, *ayōpari* serves as an interpretative model through which the Ashaninka qualify relationships of friendship and exchange with various Others.⁹ Shaped by historical circumstances, these relationships can extend beyond indigenous groups to include whites who are considered ‘friends,’ forming what could be described as an ‘interethnic *ayōpari*’ (Pimenta, 2006, 2009). As mentioned before, when asked about their exchange relationships prior to European colonization, the Ashaninka of the Amônia River explain that their ancestors ‘did *ayōpari*’ with the Huni Kuin, the Piro, and also with ‘Indians from the mountains.’¹⁰

THE *INKA* ASHANINKA AS AN INTERETHNIC MISUNDERSTANDING

A central character that permeates the symbolic and mythological universe of the Amazonian indigenous peoples living near the Andean Central Region is the *Inka*.¹¹ In Pano ethnographic literature, a substantial body of myths revolves around this character, though his presence and significance vary across different Pano speaking groups (Lagrou, 2006; Brabec de Mori, 2019; Calavia Sáez, 2000). Erikson (1992, p. 245), for instance, highlights myths from the Huni Kuin, Cashibo, Conibo, and Shipibo, which explicitly recall a time when they “lived under the dominion of the *Inka*.” Similarly, the *Inka* appears in the traditions of the Amuesha and other indigenous peoples of the Andean piedmont (Santos-Granero, 2002, pp. 279-304).

In the mythology of many Ashaninka communities, references to the *Inka* are also common, although, as

⁸ The Ashaninka of the Amônia River say that the *ayōpari* system also exists between women. In this case, the products exchanged are mainly textiles, baskets, pots, etc. In its female version, the system is called *ayōpao*, a term also used by women to refer to their ‘exchange partners’ or ‘friends’ (*nyōpao*). Schäfer (1991, 2023) also mentions *ayōpari* among women.

⁹ Not by chance, the Ashaninka cooperative in the Amônia River is called *ayōpari*.

¹⁰ It may seem anachronistic to say that the Ashaninka’s exchange relations with the Incas before the European arrival were *ayōpari* relationships, given that the term likely emerged during colonial times. However, what matters is not determining exactly how these exchanges took place in the past—a task that may well be beyond our reach—but understanding how the Ashaninka of the Amônia River today construct and interpret their past interactions with the ‘Indians of the mountains.’

¹¹ We have chosen to use the spelling *Inka* here, in italics and with a k, for the sake of clarity, i.e. to differentiate the Amazonian *Inka*, a mythical character, from the historical Incas.

with the Pano, this is not true for all of them.¹² When the *Inka* appears among the Ashaninka, as in other Andean piedmont societies (Santos-Granero, 2002, p. 295), he is closely tied to the emergence of the white man. In fact, among the Ashaninka of the Amônia River, the myth of the white man and the myth of the *Inka* are often intertwined. For them, telling the history of the *Inka* is essentially explaining how the white man came into the world.

The myth of the *Inka* or the myth of the white man has been documented in the literature of the Ashaninka since the earliest ethnographies (see Varese, 1968, pp. 124-133, 2002, pp. 152-162; Weiss, 1969, pp. 342-354). This myth has also been used to explain the messianic attitudes of the Ashaninka people (Brown & Fernández, 1991). Below, we present a summarized version of this myth, collected in the Apiwtxa village on the Amônia River, to highlight some of its key dimensions.

In the past, the *wirakotxa* (the white man) lived in a lake. Under the sight of *Pawa* (the main Ashaninka solar divinity), *Inka* went fishing with another Ashaninka at dawn. They heard a chicken at the bottom of the lake, and the *Inka* said:

Inka: Boy, are we going to catch that?

Ashaninka: No need, just leave it. We're not going to touch it.

The next day, the same thing happened. Again, while fishing in the lake, he heard a chicken and then a dog barking at the bottom. He didn't know what it was, but his curiosity grew . . . The *Inka* went to see *Pawa*, who warned:

Ashaninka: Don't move, my son!

But the *Inka* didn't listen and went fishing. He heard chickens very close, and dogs.

'I'm going to catch the chicken,' the *Inka* thought.

He set a hook with a banana . . . The chicken appeared, and when he put it in again, a dog came out. After hearing

another noise, he picked up the banana, and out came the white man. This is how the *wirakotxa* came to earth. *Pawa* became angry and asked:

Pawa: Why did you bring the *wirakotxa*?

Inka: Father, I went to catch some chicken, and the *wirakotxa* came out instead.

Pawa: I didn't want this white man with us. I left him at the bottom of the lake, but you liked him. Now you can keep him! I'm leaving, and you [Ashaninka] will stay with the *wirakotxa* and work for him.

The *Inka*'s disobedience profoundly disrupted the natural order established by *Pawa*. As a result, the white man spread across the land, which had originally been inhabited only by the Ashaninka. He began to 'walk in every corner,' making life unbearable for the indigenous people. While different versions of the myth of the *Inka* exist, varying depending on the storyteller, they all share common elements.

The first point that we consider important to emphasize is that *Inka* is an Ashaninka. He is a powerful *tasorentsi*,¹³ one of the first sons of *Pawa*. He is not, therefore, the historical Inca. According to Ashaninka accounts, at the beginning of time, they were the sole inhabitants of the Earth, where *Pawa* lived with his family. *Inka* was responsible for the emergence of the white man, called *wirakotxa*—a term of Quechua origin.

In Inca cosmology, *Viracocha* was a world creator deity who emerged in the primordial times and created the universe, the sun, the moon, the stars, as well as all living beings. The word *viracocha* is usually translated as 'Foam of the Sea.' However, some authors (Steele & Allen, 2004) prefer the term 'Reservoir of Fat' as the most plausible translation, both grammatically and culturally. During colonial times, the term *viracocha* was also used to refer to the Spaniards. Still nowadays, the Ashaninka use this term to refer to the white people.¹⁴

¹² Interestingly, there is no reference to the *Inka* among the Ashaninka communities of the Ene River, despite their geographic proximity to the central Andean region (Viana, 2019).

¹³ *Tasorentsi* is as a kind of demigod, children of *Pawa*, who made the world what it is today.

¹⁴ This term is also used by other indigenous peoples in Western Amazonia to refer to white people, such as the Piro of the Lower Urubamba (Gow, 1991, p. 85, note 25).

In the myth of the *Inka*, the emergence of the *wirakotxa* is the result of *Inka*'s disobedience to the god *Pawa*, who, when creating the world, had separated the Ashaninka from the white people. According to Weiss (1969) in Ashaninka cosmology:

lakes are confined to the more inaccessible uplands, and while their existence is known, they are ascribed marvelous properties. It is believed that within them live human beings adapted to breathing water as we do to air, together with all their houses, livestock, etc. It is in fact believed that the white race emerged from just such a lake. It is further believed that the waters of these lakes are capable of rising up to engulf the unfortunate Campa who ventures too near (Weiss, 1969, p. 67).

Lakes are precisely the gateways to the underwater world, ruled by the great anaconda (*nōke*) and inhabited by malevolent spirits that bring disease and death (Varese, 1968, pp. 129–130, 2002, pp. 157–158). The Ashaninka of the Amônia River regard the anaconda as both the 'Mother of the waters' and a malevolent spirit (*kamari*). *Inka*'s disobedience and irresponsibility are yet another example in a long list of mistakes made by *Pawa*'s first children in primordial times. These transgressions served to justify the current state of the world and its imperfections.

The presence of the chicken and the dog in the myth is also not coincidental. These animals are associated with white people and were unknown to the Ashaninka, who possess a rich body of myths explaining the origins of their endemic fauna. At the beginning of time, many animals were originally Ashaninka, unlike the chicken and the dog. For various reasons, these two animals were transformed by *Pawa* (or by a *tasorentsi*), losing their human form. Among the Ashaninka, there is an extensive repertoire of stories that recount the transformation of humans into animals and plants.¹⁵ However, at least among the Ashaninka of the Amônia River, we have not found any myths that explain

the appearance of the chicken and the dog. Although both animals have Indigenous names—*txaapa* for chicken and *otsitsi* for dog—the only mythological reference to them appears in the myth of *Inka*.¹⁶ In this story, they emerge from the bottom of a lake, where they had been faithful companions of the white man. *Inka*'s first capture of these two animals is interpreted as a warning from *Pawa* to his son, urging him to cease his dangerous actions. By breaking the divine rules, *Inka* provoked the wrath of *Pawa*, the Creator-God. Tired of his children's repeated disobedience—despite his efforts to 'teach them how to live'—*Pawa* chose to leave the earth and reside in the heavens, enjoying immortality and an ideal world, while leaving the Ashaninka to endure the imperfections of the terrestrial world.

On the Amônia River, information about *Inka*'s fate following his unfortunate fishing expedition is imprecise and have different versions. Some Ashaninka say that, after the white man emerged from the bottom of the lake, he captured *Inka* and took him to a distant land, where he has been held prisoner ever since. The hope for the 'return of *Inka*' to redeem his people—an idea that has gained traction in some Ashaninka communities in Peru (Brown & Fernández, 1991)—is occasionally mentioned, though usually in a humorous or ironic tone. Some Ashaninka even describe *Pawa*'s son as a traitor who simply forgot his people and chose to live voluntarily among the whites. It is worth noting that in several accounts, the Ashaninka of the Amônia River locate the lake of the *Inka* myth—the supposed birthplace of the white people—in the 'mountains,' that is, the Andes. Similarly, *Inka* is said to have either been taken or to have gone willingly to live with the white man in the mountains. The first *wirakotxa* that the Ashaninka of the Amônia River claim to have encountered was a Spanish.

¹⁵ A detailed exploration of the complex classifications the Ashaninka make of what we commonly refer to as the animal and the vegetable world lies beyond the scope of this paper. Among the anthropologists who have conducted research with the Ashaninka, Lenaerts (2004) has produced the most comprehensive study on this topic.

¹⁶ For a discussion about the domesticated dogs in pre-Columbian Andes and Amazonia, see Sánchez-Villagra et al. (2025).

Colonial records from the conquest of Peru confirm that the Spanish (or missionaries serving the Iberian Crown) were indeed the first whites to come into contact with Ashaninka communities, as early as the late 16th century, descending from the highlands into the Amazon.

It is also important to highlight that the myth of the *Inka* is closely associated with technological power and Western commodities. The Ashaninka of the Amônia River say that *Pawa* was an all-powerful god who possessed all forms of knowledge—including technological knowledge—which he entrusted to his son *Inka*, who was meant to share it with the Ashaninka only. However, when *Inka* went to live among the whites, this knowledge ended up in their hands instead.

The association between *Inka*, white people, and industrial goods is a recurring theme in the ethnographic literature on the lowlands and is not new in the case of the Ashaninka. It was already noted in the earliest ethnographies on this Indigenous group (see, for example, Weiss, 1969, pp. 348-355). Nonetheless, it is worth making a few additional comments in order to understand how the Ashaninka interpret their current economic dependence on whites. Despite minor variations, all versions of the myth of the *Inka* collected along the Amônia River converge in portraying industrial goods as having a native origin. These goods were given by *Pawa*¹⁷ and were originally meant to benefit the Ashaninka. It was *Inka*, an Ashaninka deity (*tasorentsi*), who passed

on to the whites the technological power required to produce such goods. In other words, for the Ashaninka of the Amônia River, the technological and economic superiority of the Western world is the result of the theft of sacred knowledge that was originally intended for the Ashaninka. This is seen as the immoral outcome of a type of social behavior that is unacceptable within Indigenous society, but characteristic of the white man—greed that leads to plunder. Whereas Indigenous society is founded on principles of exchange and generosity, whites are perceived as guided by avarice and theft. Robbed of technological knowledge in mythical times, the Ashaninka became economically dependent on the whites and, against their will, were forced to learn how to interact with them—namely, through barter and through the practice of *ayōpari* (Pimenta, 2006, 2009). Some Ashaninka associate this economic dependence to the progressive loss of the Cerro de la Sal which were taken from the Ashaninka by the Peruvian State in the mid-19th century.¹⁸

The character of the *Inka* in Ashaninka mythology is therefore different from the Inca empire. Although scientific research reveals strong historical connections between the Ashaninka and the Inca, the same word refers to two different cognitive and discursive worlds in this specific case. *Inka* and Inca are not to be confused—which is why we have chosen to write them differently here. Nevertheless, in interactions between the Ashaninka and non-Indigenous people, it is common to

¹⁷ In the pre-Columbian Andes, *Pachacamac* is an important pre-inca divinity. However, Varese mentions an Ashaninka deity of similar name, *Pachakamaite*, as the owner of goods (including industrial ones) who is also identified by the Ashaninka as *Pawa*. Varese presents a myth that clearly associates *Pachakamaite* with *Pawa*: “Pachakamaite is Páwa [Father and God] and lives downriver. He is not a *virakocha*, he is not a *chori* [Andean]. He is the child of the Sun . . . Pachakamaite makes everything: machetes, cooking pots, gunpowder, cartridges, salt, shotguns, ammunition, axes. Because previously, the Asháninka were poor and had nothing; they had no machetes, axes, nothing. Where did the Asháninka get everything? Back then they would go there, to Pachakamaite, and there they got everything. That is the way it was before; now we do not know. In the past the Asháninka used to know” (Varese, 1968, pp. 138-139, 2002, pp. 168-169).

¹⁸ In addition to learning how to trade with whites, the Ashaninka also had to learn to read and write. One version of the myth of the *Inka* collected on the Amônia River makes an explicit connection between the economic supremacy of the whites and literate knowledge. According to a shaman, *Pawa* also possessed the ability to write and had carefully recorded all his knowledge in a book, which he entrusted to *Inka*. When the white man captured *Inka*, he seized the book, studied its contents, and thus gained control over the production of industrial goods—leaving the Ashaninka without this knowledge and economically dependent. Our interlocutor viewed modern schooling, which promotes reading and writing, as a path for the Ashaninka to reclaim this knowledge—knowledge that was originally meant for them but was stolen by the whites.

witness situations in which the myth of *Inka* and historical narrative become entangled, leading to misunderstandings and the kind of cultural misalignment so familiar in ethnographic encounters.

In interactions between the Ashaninka and non-Indigenous people, the mention of the word *Inca* immediately opens up a semantic field filled with ambiguities and interpretive conflicts. As previously noted, intrigued by certain diacritical elements of Ashaninka material culture that they automatically associate with Andean peoples—such as clothing or musical instruments—many white visitors to the Ashaninka of the Amônia River make an immediate connection between them and the ancient Incas. Due to a cultural misunderstanding, they often assume that the Ashaninka are simply ‘descendants of the Incas.’ This unfounded assertion has become increasingly common among journalists, as well as tourists and members of NGOs visiting the Apiwtxa village. At times, it causes some discomfort among the Ashaninka, who find themselves constantly needing to clarify and ‘update’ their ‘story of the *Inka*.’ After all, how could the Ashaninka be descendants of a people called the ‘Inca’ if *Inka* is Ashaninka himself? If *Inka* is one of the first offspring of *Pawa*, the existence of a people and an empire with the same name—recorded in the history books of the whites—can only be explained through some event connected to the mythic figure of *Inka*.

When asked whether they are ‘descendants of the Incas,’ and aware that their white interlocutors do not share the same cognitive universe, the Ashaninka usually reply politely but vaguely that they are not ‘descendants,’ but rather distant ‘relatives’ of the Incas. When they sense their interlocutor is more open to listening, they may add that they cannot be descendants of the Incas—because, in fact, it is the Incas who are descendants of the Ashaninka. That is how one of the main leaders of the Ashaninka from the Amônia River responded to a journalist from a satirical magazine from Rio de Janeiro who asked whether they were related to or descended from the Incas:

Related. That’s what the *yacuxa*¹⁹ people say—they say we’re descended from the Incas. But from what I see in our history, it’s the Inca who’s descended from the Ashaninka, who came from the Ashaninka people (“Índio não é tudo igual”, 2000, p. 7).

This inversion may have left the journalist confused. It might seem like a presumptuous or even arrogant response to some non-Indigenous people, but it is entirely logical and understandable within the Ashaninka worldview. *Inca* and *Inka* are not the same. While the journalist is asking about the historical Incas, the leader is responding about the mythical *Inka*. Neither is wrong. The interlocutors are simply talking about different things. It is a confusing dialogue, a semantic misalignment created by the encounter of two distinct cultural universes. Although the terms are identical, each point to different ontologies, each with its own premises rooted in specific cognitive frameworks of being and perceiving the world. *Inka* and *Inca* serve as an example of what Viveiros de Castro (2004) called ‘controlled misunderstandings,’ which lie at the heart of the anthropological endeavor.

In any case, the Ashaninka statement that it is the Incas who are descendants of the Ashaninka, not the contrary, is in agreement with scientific data. As already mentioned above, according to the archaeological records, the Ashaninka, or at least their closest ancestors, inhabited the Andean piedmont since at least 500 A.D. much before the Incas who arrived in the Andean Central Region only around the 13th century.

Another possible reading of the *Inka* myth is that it is trapped into two different expressions of history, namely history as a discipline as the Western tradition understands it, and mythology as an expression of history as understood by the indigenous tradition. The relationships between myth and history have been extensively addressed by both anthropologists and historians. In anthropology, the most famous example is certainly Captain Cook’s encounter with the Hawaiians, which led to the Briton’s tragic fate (Sahlins, 1981).

¹⁹ This is a transcription error. The journalist transcribed the term *wirakotxa* (white) as ‘*yacuxa*.’

Although it is not the case to enter into this discussion here, it is important to reinforce that, as put by Bianchi (2023), myths and history should not be understood in opposition to each other: myths and cosmologies are also narratives about history, even though they are not historical narratives. Additionally, as written by Hill (1988, p. 5): “both myth and history are modes of social consciousness through which people construct shared interpretative frameworks.”

Looking at the *Inka* myth in this light, it is possible that the myth of the *Inka* was a way of the Ashaninka to include new events (as well as the foreign animals: the chicken and the dog) that happened after 1532 into their repertoire of myths or in their expression of history. Through this reading of the myth in question, *Inka* is indeed not the historical Incas. Nevertheless, within Ashaninka history, perhaps the Incas and the *Inka* are not completely dissociated from each other. In this specific case, myth and history seem to be intertwined, suggesting that a sharp severance between the historical Inca and the mythological *Inka* is more an understanding of a type of (modern) history that sees these two expressions of history as opposed. Although the purpose of this analysis is not to offer a detailed interpretation of the *Inka* myth, the Ashaninka have alternative ways of incorporating and interpreting important events into their own historical narrative in a fashion that makes sense within their own internal logic and in dialogue with their cosmology. Rather than deducing whether the Inca and the *Inka* are part of the same historical narrative, a more interesting exercise is to reflect upon the particular ways in which history can manifest itself in different cultures.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

No scholar today would deny the intense connections between the Andes and Amazonia in pre-Columbian times. In various fields, contemporary science has provided solid empirical evidence of the mutual influences between these two geographic regions, which for a

long time were crystallized as radically distinct and even opposing cultural areas. Beyond the Andes/Amazon division, the broader division between highlands and lowlands also needs to be questioned. As Combès (2012) has shown, the history and culture of the indigenous peoples who currently inhabit the Bolivian llanos region also reveal the intense exchanges they had with the Inca, but the Andean influences in the lowlands extend beyond the Bolivian Amazon and are visible even in the Chaco (Villar & Combès, 2012; Combès, 2021).

Situated between the eastern slope of the central Andes and the lowlands of the Amazon, the pre-Andine Arawak, including the Ashaninka, exemplify the complexity of these interrelations between the highlands and the lowlands. Even today, despite living far from the Andes, the Ashaninka of the Amônia River continue to carry the marks of the mountain range and of the Incas. By combining a historical perspective with an ethnographic approach, this article aimed to highlight how Andean influences and the legacy of the ancient Inca Empire continue to be present among the Ashaninka of the Amônia River. The exchange relationship of *ayompari* and the myth of *Inka* were the chosen examples to demonstrate these connections. Further in-depth and targeted research would undoubtedly open up other avenues to explore. Beyond these specific relationships and their particular characteristics, open to interpretations and academic debates, this article also sought to emphasize that the Ashaninka were never passive objects in the history of the Others, whether Andean or European. Depending on the context, their relations with the ancient Inca Empire in pre-Columbian times were marked by opposition, ambiguity, but also complementarity. As Mauss (1990 [1925]) famously said over a century ago in his “The gift: the form and reason for exchange in archaic societies”, there are only two ways to relate to the Other: war or exchange. Whether in war or in exchange, in indigenous myth or in the history of the whites, the Ashaninka have always asserted their agency and protagonism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

José Pimenta thanks the *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* (CAPES) for partially funding his research work (Finance Code 001). Cristiana Bertazoni was funded by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG, German Research Foundation) – project number: 510844672. The authors would also like to thank Guilherme Bianchi for his comments on a previous version of this article and the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions.

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

The authors declare that they actively participated in all stages of the manuscript's preparation.

RESEARCH DATA

The data have not been deposited in a repository.

PREPRINT

Not published in a repository.

PEER REVIEW

Double-blind, closed review.