

## CARAVAN RESTING AREAS AND THE REPRODUCTION OF PASTORAL SOCIETY IN THE SOUTHERN ANDES

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Ethnoarchaeological research conducted in the southern Andean Altiplano (Potosí, Bolivia) has shown that caravan resting areas are important components of road systems supporting long distance journeys with llamas (Nielsen 1997, 2001). Since llamas only walk and eat during the day, when travelling they can only graze for a few hours at the end of the day. This means that in long distance trips –i.e., more than five days or 100 km— caravans need to stop for one or more complete days to let llamas graze properly and replenish their strength. Herders take advantage of these stops to rest, repair their travel gear, cure the animals who may have hurt their feet or replace their shoes. On these occasions, they address the deities or *wak'as* whose intervention is considered important for the success of the journey. Presently, these rituals involve mountains (*Mallkus*), outstanding outcrops (*qaqhas*), water springs, narrow passages (*punkus*), and high passes (*abras*), among the main animated places and landscape features found along the way, but also the llamas, the goods carried for trade, and the trail itself (*ñan*) all of which are considered sentient beings who have to be invoked and honored with offerings. According to my informants, in the old days, when hundreds of trade caravans from different corners of the highlands travelled every winter to the valleys, many of them would meet at these places, exchanging information about trade opportunities in the lowlands, playing special games, and sharing these rituals or *costumbres* ("customs") as herders currently designate practices in which they address powerful non-human persons.

Good pastures and water are the most important resources that have to be present in caravan resting areas, although pastoralists also value the presence of firewood and prefer isolated places, removed from densely settled and farmed areas in order to avoid conflicts with local communities that could be generated by the presence of the herds in transit. These grazing areas are seldom empty or unclaimed, but belong to local groups with whom travelling pastoralists need to negotiate use rights in some way. On the eastern Andean flanks, where resting areas have been ethnographically documented, they tend to be located on the upper portions of the mountain ranges that frame the valleys, areas that are sparsely populated at present or that are used on a temporary basis by transhumant herders or agro-pastoralists who have their main residences near the valley bottom. Caravans which stop in these areas honor local people's rights through generous transactions and gifts. Unfortunately, there are no ethnographic accounts of such stops on the western flanks of the southern Andes, but the extreme circumscription of resources in this arid environment must have forced passing caravans in the past to negotiate areas to rest with the more populous local communities who lived in the oases and river valleys. The institution of *caseros* may offer an ethnographic analogue for these arrangements; these are families of farmers in the eastern valleys who provide highland caravans with

fodder and corrals for the animals, food and shelter for the drovers in return for trade privileges.

These data suggest at least four interrelated ways in which caravan resting areas may have played an important role in the reproduction of ancient pastoral society in the southern Andes. Firstly, as *provisioning stations* they offered necessary logistical support for the operation of long distance caravan traffic. Secondly, as *caravan hubs* they were one of the few (perhaps the only) places where pastoralists coming from distant places and different local communities would physically meet, offering a unique opportunity for the development of far-ranging social and political relationships. Thirdly, they acted as territorial hinges articulating the long-distance road network with the local agro-pastoral settlement systems. This function involved negotiations between travelling pastoralists and local herders which must have involved distinctive political and ritual codes that must have varied in changing historical junctures. Finally, in the context of an animist ontology, all these functions must have involved the participation of powerful non-human persons (*wak'as*), highlighting the ritual importance of resting areas as *pastoral shrines*.

Using this ethnoarchaeological model as interpretive framework, I discuss a few Late Prehispanic sites in the southern Andes (NW Argentina, SW Bolivia, and N Chile) that may have served as caravan resting areas. Taking into consideration several lines of evidence (site layout, rock art iconography, ceramics, lithics, archaeofaunas, etc.), I explore different ways in which these places may inform on the organization and reproduction of pastoral society at the time.