

**ON THE AYMARA
INDIANS OF
BOLIVIA AND PERU**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649456178

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Cover @ 2017

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DAVID FORBES

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BOLIVIA AND PERU**



T. M. Dale.

AYMARA MAN

C. W. Peck, 1887.

ON
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OF
BOLIVIA AND PERU.

BY
DAVID FORBES, Esq., F.R.S., F.G.S., &c.

[*Communicated June 21, 1870, to the ETHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF
LONDON.*]

LONDON:
PRINTED BY TAYLOR AND FRANCIS, RED LION COURT, FLEET STREET.

1870.

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Tr. ^{of} M.C.Z

Rec. Oct. 30, 1925

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THE country inhabited by the Aymara race of Indians is nearly equally divided between the two South-American republics of Bolivia and Peru, forming the most northern or, rather, north-western part of Bolivia and the southernmost of Peru.

From north to south it extends from about 15° to 20° of south latitude; but from east to west it is more difficult to define its limits with any approach to exactitude, owing to the existence of several outlying colonies of these Indians; the Aymara country proper, however, may be regarded as bounded by the two great chains of mountains called by the Spaniards the Cordilleras de la Costa, or Coast Andes, and the Cordilleras de los Andes, or High Andes, which in this part of South America traverse somewhat obliquely the provinces of Peru and Bolivia, situated between the longitudes 67° and 72° west of Greenwich. The district itself, now only sparsely, but in former times much more thickly populated by these Indians, may be estimated as about 300 English geographical miles in length, with a breadth of about 150 miles, and consequently represents a superficial area of about 45,000 square miles.

The whole of this country is situated at a great elevation, and may be looked upon as an extensive table-land, having a minimum altitude of 10,000 feet, above which again rise several more or less parallel north and south mountain ridges, whose snowy peaks frequently attain double that height, or more than 20,000 feet above the Pacific Ocean; amongst these might be mentioned the volcanic cones of Sajama and Tacora, in the

western range, which, upon measurement, were found to be 23,014 and 22,687 feet, as also the Silurian mountains of Illampu (Sorata) and Illimani, in the most eastern chain, respectively 24,812 and 24,155 feet above the level of the sea.

This high plateau extends further both to the north and south, but upon its other two sides it terminates abruptly by rapid descents into regions but comparatively little elevated above the level of the sea, which differ very greatly from it, as well as from one another, in both climate and general geographical features. On the east side, the greatest heights of the Andes look down like precipices upon the virgin forests and the low, humid, hot valleys and plains, irrigated by copious rains, and traversed by mighty rivers, which divide the republics of Peru and Bolivia from the empire of Brazil, the change being so sudden that the traveller descending from the perpetual snows of the Andes finds himself in the course of but a few hours' journey amongst the palms and luxuriant hothouse vegetation of the tropics.

On the western side, however, the change, although seen to be equally sudden, is altogether different in character; for upon leaving behind the cold misty mountains and streams of the Aymara highlands and crossing, as it were, an almost sharply defined line, every thing in the shape of moisture vanishes; the air becomes all at once clear, dry, hot, and scorching; and the mountain-declivities and sloping plains, which extend to the Pacific Ocean, present the appearance of an arid and, in many parts, saline desert,—a rainless region, destitute of water and, consequently, of verdure, in which few living creatures are to be seen, other than the numerous lizards basking in the sun, or the occasional huanaco which has strayed down from the mountains above. Vegetation is altogether absent, or at most only represented by a few solitary cactus trunks, except only in some few favoured small valleys (like cañons) far distant from one another, in which some small rivulet or natural spring exists, furnishing the basis for a luxuriant vegetation, like an oasis in the midst of a desert.

If the latitude of this country be alone taken into consideration, and its altitude above the sea-level neglected, the climate of this high table-land will be regarded as an extremely severe one. Above 17,000 feet the mountains are covered with perpetual snow; but below this elevation the snow seldom remains for more than a few days at a time. The year may be divided into a rainy and a dry season; the rainy season, commencing in November or December, continues until April, with heavy rains and occasional snow-storms, the weather usually cold and raw, the thermometer indicating between 40° and 50° F., and not

unfrequently descending to the freezing-point, or even some few degrees below it, whilst the air is usually damp, and the mountains are enveloped in dense misty clouds.

In the dry season, from April to November, the climate is fine and rather agreeable, the thermometer in the shade ranging from 50° to 70° F.; but in the sun the air is extremely scorching, and often accompanied by winds, which are so dry and parching as to affect the face and eyes in an extraordinary degree, blistering and drying up the skin to the consistence of horn, and making it crack and peel off, so as to cause extreme irritation, and even temporary disfigurement—so much so that when travelling in the Puna region it is customary amongst the whites to protect the face by masks or veils. During this season storms of rain and wind, with thunder and lightning, often of a truly terrific nature, are very common, and frequently cause considerable loss of life to man as well as beast; these storms are often accompanied by hail of great size, and, as I have noticed, sometimes of a peculiar conical form.

Situated near the northern extremity of this district is the greatest sheet of water or inland sea of South America, called the Lake of Titicaca*, covering a superficial area of about 2500 geographical square miles, being 100 miles in length from N.W. to S.E., with an average breadth of about 25 miles, although it is some 35 miles across in its broadest part. The surface of this lake is elevated 12,850 English feet above the level of the sea; and its waters are somewhat brackish. When not agitated by the winds, I found the surface-waters almost fresh to the taste; but it was evident that in depth the lower stratum of water was much more saline.

The shores of the Lake of Titicaca still remain the home, and no doubt also were the original cradle of the Aymara race, from which neither the victories of the Incas nor the subsequent conquest by the Spaniards have succeeded in dislodging them, notwithstanding that this has been the case with so many of the other tribes of both North and South America. The Aymara † or, as they were frequently termed by older Spanish

* This name is supposed to have been derived from the Aymara words "Titi" and "Caca." "Titi" is the Aymara name for tin, the ores of which are found in large quantity on the east side of the lake at Carabuco; and "Caca," a rock. Titi is also the name for the wild cat in Aymara; and as there is a tradition amongst the Indians of the appearance at times of an enormous wild cat on the island of Titicaca, some of the old Spaniards have accepted this interpretation.

† It is believed that the name Aymara was applied to this race of Indians even before the foundation of the Inca empire (*vide* Garcilasso de la Vega, Com. Real de las Incas, Book iii. chap. x. p. 84). The name of Colla Indians is of much later date, and is derived from their being inhabitants of

writers, the "Colla" Indians are the only race in Peru or Bolivia at all entitled to the appellation of the "Titicaca race," which term has been quite incorrectly applied by Tschudi and others to the Inca or Quechua nation, a race totally distinct in language, character, and geographical position.

Under the Inca dynasty the Aymaras, although subjugated, appear to have remained more as a tributary people, without ever being actually incorporated into the empire; and consequently they never became assimilated into the great Peruvian or Quechua-speaking nation, as was the case with the numerous Indian tribes both to the north and south of them. Even to the present day they remain more or less isolated, and in many respects almost unchanged, retaining their ancient language, and a sort of national existence more pronounced probably than any of the other Indian races now remaining under the Hispano-American rule.

Most of the Indian languages in both the Americas have become all but extinct, and gradually replaced by Spanish or English. The only ones which, in Spanish or Portuguese South America, have survived are the Quechua in Northern Peru and Southern Bolivia, the Aymara in southern Peru and Northern Bolivia, and the Guarani in Brazil and Paraguay; these three may still be said to remain the languages of the countries, being, like Hindostanee in India, generally spoken by the white inhabitants also, and alone used by them in their intercourse with their domestics and with the mixed and pure Indian population.

The history of the Aymaras calls to mind the ancient history of the Welsh, where the inhabitants of Wales, unable to oppose their more numerous invaders in the open field, retired to their mountain fortresses, and, by their dogged but patriotic character, managed not only to prevent their being absorbed into the mass of their more powerful neighbours, but to preserve their ancient language and many of their customs even down to the present day.

What little is known of the early history of this race may be stated in but a few words. According to Indian tradition, from Aymara as well as Quechua or Inca sources, the inhabitants of this country, even in or before the time of the first Inca, Manco Capac (1021-1062), possessed a degree of civilization higher than that of the Incas themselves, or probably of

Colla-suyo, or the southern division of the Inca empire, which was divided into four grand quarters, known as the Chincha-suyo, or North; the Colla-suyo, or South; the Anti-suyo, or East; and the Cunti-suyo, or West. The term Colla Indians probably included many other Indian tribes in the south, and may be regarded as a purely geographical name.