

chapter one

Introduction

On Friday, November 15, 1532, a force of 168 frightened Spaniards walked into the maw of the most powerful empire ever seen in the Americas. Francisco Pizarro's brigade entered the plaza at Cajamarca, an imperial Inca center in the Peruvian highlands, late in the afternoon, dismayed by the military display that blanketed the hillside that lay before them. Near the town, in the midst of his 80,000-man army, the Inca prince Atawallpa was just completing a fast at the nearby hot springs of Kónoj and savoring his recent victory in a war over Cuzco's throne. Atawallpa declined an invitation to disrupt his solemn duties and meet his unwanted guests in the city that afternoon, but agreed to receive them after a night's rest. Astonishingly, he was Pizarro's prisoner by the next evening, captured during a surprise strike that was underpinned by equal parts of bravado, armaments, and faith.

Over the next eight months, the Spaniards extracted a ransom fit for a deity on earth in exchange for Atawallpa's freedom. More than \$50 million of treasure was melted down from the empire's architectural ornaments, personal jewelry, idols, and service ware hauled off from temples, aristocratic households, and perhaps even from graves. Once the ransom had been paid, Pizarro gave the order for Atawallpa to be tried and executed on July 26, 1533, overriding the grave misgivings voiced by some members of his party. The power that the Inca had wielded over his vast domain even while captive convinced the Spaniard that decapitating the state was his best hope of staying alive and asserting his own control. In light of the divisions that had already riven the empire, his decision touched off the collapse of *Tawantinsuyu*, or "The Four Parts Together," as the Incas called their grand realm.

Fittingly, the Incas already had a word for a cataclysmic change of such enormity. They called it a *pachakuti*, a "turning over of time and space" – a moment when history ended and then began again. In their eyes, it was not the first time that the world had been destroyed, nor

would it be the last. Native chroniclers explained that all of creation had been wiped out four times in the ancient past, each time after a cycle of a thousand years (Guaman Poma 1980; see Urton 1999:41). The first age was a time of darkness when the world was inhabited by a race of wild men. In each successive epoch, humans progressed, as they learned to farm, to make crafts, and to organize themselves for war and peace. The fifth “sun” was the age of the Incas. In their self-promoted vision, it was a glorious era during which they brought civilization and enlightened rule to a chaotic world. And under the circumstances, it was only suitable that the man who had created the empire took *Pachakuti* as his title. After all, he was the son of the Sun, a living deity who remade the world.

Less than a century after Pachakuti joined his celestial father, Atawallpa closed the war with his half-brother Waskhar. According to one native account, his victorious generals declared that it was time for another *pachakuti* (Callapiña et al. 1974). To help move the process along, they massacred Waskhar’s extensive family and members of several other royal kin groups who had cast their lot with him. They also killed all the historians they could find and destroyed the knot-records called *kipu* (see below, “Literacy and Data Recording”) on which the past was recorded, so that the era could begin unburdened by its past. Before he could properly launch the new epoch, however, Atawallpa fell into Spanish hands and a century of rule by gods on earth came to an end.

The Spanish encounter with the Incas, despite its impact, was not a complete surprise to either people. In 1519, Hernán Cortés had overthrown the Aztec empire of central Mexico through a similar attack on the ruler with the aid of allies made in the new land. The descriptions of Mexico’s cities and riches that made their way back to Spain fired enthusiasm for more adventures in the Indies. Many of the men who accompanied Pizarro to the Andes had already seen action in Central America and the Caribbean, while others had just come over to seek their fortunes. Pizarro himself had been in the Americas for thirty years and was hungry to make his mark in an uncharted land called *Pirú*. In the 1520s, a few Spaniards or Portuguese had actually penetrated the Inca domain, but left no significant impression on the Andes or reported back to the Europeans. A tangible glimmer of what the Spaniards were to find reached them in 1527, however, when an expedition captured a boat off Ecuador filled with cloth, metal ornaments, and other riches, but they were still not prepared for the grandeur of Peru.

In 1532, Tawantinsuyu was the largest polity ever created in the native Americas. Its ruler was a hereditary king who the Incas claimed had descended in an unbroken string from a creation separate from the rest

of humanity. Though a powerful monarch, the *Sapa Inca* (“Unique Inca”) did not rule alone. As the invaders soon discovered, he was counseled by mummies of his immortal ancestors who, along with their descendants, also joined him in Cuzco’s most solemn ceremonies and drunken revelry. Totally unpersuaded by the Incas’ claims of divinity and appalled at their heresies, the Spaniards were still dazzled by the ruling dynasty’s riches and achievements. The early writers often drew on familiar referents to convey images of the realm for their countrymen, but some customs defied a search for analogy. Pedro Sancho de la Hoz and Pedro Pizarro, both members of the original expedition, have left us some impressions of the capital:

There is a very beautiful fortress of earth and stone with big windows that look over the city [of Cuzco] and make it appear more beautiful . . . [The stones] are as big as pieces of mountains or crags . . . The Spaniards who see them say that neither the bridge of Segovia nor other constructions of Hercules or the Romans are as magnificent as this . . . (Sancho de la Hoz 1917:193–4)

Most of the people [of Cuzco] served the dead, I have heard it said, who they daily brought out to the main square, setting them down in a ring, each one according to his age, and there the male and female attendants ate and drank. The attendants made fires for each of the dead in front of them . . . and lighting [them], burned everything they had put before them, so that the dead should eat of everything that the living ate . . . (P. Pizarro 1986:89–90)

Everywhere they traveled, the invaders saw the imperial imprint, whether it was in Cuzco’s grand architecture, the roads that traversed 40,000 km of rugged terrain, thousands of provincial installations, stocks of every supply imaginable, works of artistry in precious metal, stone, and cloth, or the government designed to manage the whole affair. About twenty years after the conquest, the soldier Pedro Cieza de León (1967:213–14; translation from Hyslop 1984:343) expressed his admiration for the entire system:

In human memory, I believe that there is no account of a road as great as this, running through deep valleys, high mountains, banks of snow, torrents of water, living rock, and wild rivers . . . In all places it was clean and swept free of refuse, with lodgings, storehouses, Sun temples, and posts along the route. Oh! Can anything similar be claimed for Alexander or any of the powerful kings who ruled the world . . . ?

The Incas’ feats seemed all the more fabulous when the conquistadores learned that the realm was only about four generations old. As the Incas

Table 1.1 The conventional Inca king list

Name as ruler	Gloss	Given name
1 Manqo Qhapaq	Powerful [Ancestor]	—
2 Zinchi Roq'a	Warlord Roq'a	—
3 Lloq'e Yupanki	Honored Left-handed	—
4 Mayta Qhapaq	Powerful Mayta	—
5 Qhapaq Yupanki	Powerful Honored	—
6 Inka Roq'a	Inca Roq'a	—
7 Yawar Waqaq	He Who Cries Bloody Tears	Inka Yupanki, Mayta Yupanki, Titu Cusi Wallpa
8 Wiraqocha Inka	Creator God Inca	Hatun Thupa Inka
9 Pachakuti Inka Yupanki	Cataclysm Honored Inca	Inka Yupanki, Cusi Yupanki
10 Thupa Inka Yupanki	Royal Honored Inca	—
11 Wayna Qhapaq	Powerful Youth	Titu Cusi Wallpa
12 Waskhar Inka	Golden Chain Ruler	Thupa Cusi Wallpa
13 Atawallpa	—	—

explained it, the empire was launched when Pachakuti usurped the throne from his father Wiraqocha Inka and began to conquer the peoples around Cuzco. His victories and organizational genius were followed only by those of his son Thupa Inka Yupanki and grandson Wayna Qhapaq, and then by the final dynastic war (table 1.1).

For their part, the Incas were taken aback by the Spanish invasion, although they would recall legends that had predicted the return of white, bearded strangers from the sea. Even so, their initial response was less one of awe than of anger and disbelief at the invaders' arrogance. Who were these men who dared to kill the *Sapa Inca's* subjects and seize the holy women for their carnal pleasures? Rather than wipe them out directly as they so richly deserved, the Incas let their curiosity get the better of them and allowed the interlopers to ascend the Andes to be examined first-hand. To Atawallpa's everlasting regret, the Spanish incursion could not have been more propitiously timed. The prince, contemplating his recent victory and anticipating reunification of the empire, had nothing to fear from a small band of foreigners, as outrageous as their conduct might be. He was wrong.

My goal in this book is to describe the Incas, their emergence as rulers of an empire, and the nature of their society. That sounds straightforward enough, but the Incas have proved to be remarkably malleable in the hands of historians and archaeologists. Depending on the author,

Tawantinsuyu has been held up as an exemplar of almost every form of political society except representative democracy. Garcilaso de la Vega (1966), son of an Inca princess, immortalized Tawantinsuyu as a supremely well-run, homogeneous monarchy ruled by an omnipotent and benevolent king. Although he was writing in 1609 to exalt the glories of his ancestors to a Spanish audience, Garcilaso's vision is still popular today. His efforts aside, other authors have seen the realm in radically different lights – as a type of primitive communism, a feudal society, a despotic Asiatic state, and a territorial empire. Some modern scholars even doubt that an empire existed and instead see a patchwork of ethnic groups that were never truly unified.

How could one polity inspire such contradictory views? Part of the answer lies in the fact that no one who grew up in Tawantinsuyu ever wrote about it. Although they had the tools to record data very precisely, the Incas had no writing system that we have been able to recognize and decipher. Instead, history was kept as oral tradition. In Cuzco, poet-historians called *amautas* and knot-record masters called *khipu kamayuq* recited sagas of the royal past at the bidding of the court. The *khipu* themselves seem to have registered information in ways that had as much to do with cultural visions of power and space as with linear history. Aristocrats also memorized epic poems, some of which they recounted to the Spaniards. Not surprisingly, the descendants of different rulers called up versions of the past that favored their own ancestors, while public recitations by the *amautas* were tailored to please the audience (Rostworowski 1999:vii–ix). Cieza (1967:32) explained things this way:

... and if among the kings one turned out indolent, a coward, given to vices and a homebody without enlarging the domain of his empire, it was ordered that of such [kings] there be little remembrance or almost none at all; and they attended to this so closely that if one [king] was found [in the histories] it was so as not to forget his name and the succession; but in the rest they remained silent, without singing the songs [as they did] of the others who were good and valiant.

Cieza and other Spanish authors thus had to choose among a wide variety of stories in composing their chronicles. Many resolved the problem by favoring the accounts told by their oldest and most aristocratic witnesses and by dismissing reports by common Indians. These circumstances meant that the documentary history of the Incas has been filtered through competing native views, translators, scribes, conflicting mores, and differing notions of the value of the past. Conversion of Andean history into a European-style chronicle is therefore an uncertain task; similar obstacles face us when we try to understand Andean social

order, economics, or world views. Fortunately, archaeological research into the Incas has become more active in recent years, so that historical and archaeological study can be viewed as complementary sources of information in a way that was impossible not long ago. Even so, we still have less direct information to work with than scholars who have studied many of the great empires of the Old World. In this introduction, then, I would like to sketch out how we can come to an understanding of the Incas, beginning by outlining how scholars have thought about empires and then by describing the documentary and archaeological information that we have for the Incas themselves.

Investigating Empires

Empires like Tawantinsuyu were the largest and most heterogeneous of the ancient societies, which makes studying them confoundingly difficult. By the term empire, I am referring to an extensive polity – often containing millions of subjects and covering hundreds of thousands of square kilometers – in which a core polity gains control over a range of other societies. The dominion may be political, military, or economic, and it may be remote or immediate, but the essence of an empire is that the core society is able to assert its will over the other peoples brought under its aegis. In the pre-industrial world, there was only a relative handful of such polities. In the Old World, the Q'in and Han Chinese and their successors, New Kingdom Egypt, the Macedonians maybe, the Assyrians, Romans, Parthians, Sassanians, Persians, Mongols, Mughals, Mauryas, and Vijayanagara, among others, can fairly be considered to have been empires. In the Americas, the Aztecs, the Incas, and perhaps the Wari qualify, although there is some dispute about the status of each of them. The scale and diversity of these polities make their analysis an enormous challenge. Anyone studying the Romans, for example, might have to consider evidence drawn from more than forty modern countries, written in dozens of languages. Even the Inca empire took in lands that now fall within six countries, whose native inhabitants spoke scores of languages.

Scholars have devised a number of ways in which to reduce the enormous complexity of early empires to manageable concepts that provide a basis for comparison (Sinopoli 1994; Alcock et al. 2001). The most widely used approach divides empires into their *core* and *periphery*. The core is envisioned as the political, economic, and cultural heartland of the empire, while the periphery consists of the societies that are ruled and exploited by the core. Frequently, the relationship between the core and the periphery has been seen in terms of both power and space. The

societies of a centrally located core were visualized as having been more complex politically and economically and more sophisticated culturally than the often barbaric peripheral societies. As the power of one core waned, it would be replaced by another center, usually at the margins of the previous heartland. This view owed much to the nature and histories of the Roman and Chinese empires, in which heartland areas were periodically beset by troublesome borderlands peoples.

As historians became more discerning in their analysis of empires as complex systems, they focused less on the layout of empires and more on the relations of inequality between the heartland and surrounding areas. Immanuel Wallerstein's (1974) world-systems model has been widely applied to early empires, even though the scholars who use his concepts often disagree with some of his own notions about pre-modern empires. Wallerstein observed that macro-regions are often organized by economic relations that exceed political boundaries. Labor organization, resource extraction, accrual of wealth, and market relations, for example, result from relationships that integrate vast areas and, frequently, many politically independent states. Archaeologists have adapted this general idea to study relations between the heartlands of ancient states and neighboring regions (e.g., Chase-Dunn and Hall 1991; Algaze 1993).

An alternative conception focuses on strategies of imperial rule according to their intensity and mix of different kinds of power: military, economic, political, and ideological (Mann 1986). At the low end of a continuum of intensity is a *hegemonic* strategy, which produces a fairly loose, indirect kind of imperial rule (Luttwak 1976; Hassig 1985:100–1; D'Altroy 1992:18–24). A hegemonic empire is built on a core state society that comes to dominate a series of client polities through diplomacy or conquest. The goal of a hegemonic approach is to keep the costs of rule low, but a low investment in administration and physical facilities is offset by a relatively low extraction of resources and by limited control over subject peoples. The Aztecs provide a classic case of a hegemonic empire (Hassig 1985; Smith 1996). At the other end of the continuum is a *territorial* strategy, which is an intense, direct approach to ruling subject peoples within an empire. This is a costly approach to governance, since it requires a heavy investment in administration, security against external threats, and the physical infrastructure of imperial rule, such as roads, provincial centers, and frontier defense. The costs may be necessary to ensure the empire's continued existence, however, or to satisfy the demands of the upper classes. Rome of the first century AD and the Han Chinese provide good examples of territorial empires. These two poles grade into each other, of course, and may be applied selectively in different parts of the empire or at different

times as the situation changes. Among the factors that may contribute to a particular choice of strategy are the organization of the central polity and the various societies that it annexes, historical relations between the central society and subjects, political negotiation, the distribution of resources, transport technology, and the goals of the imperial leadership.

An approach based on strategies of imperial rule helps us to overcome some problems seen in traditional models (see Stein 2000) and in our analysis of the Incas in particular. One concern is that the division of an empire into a complex, cosmopolitan core and a less developed periphery is simply wrong on empirical grounds in a number of cases. Some imperial societies dominated peoples who surpassed them in urbanization, urbanity, population, social hierarchy, and economic specialization. The Incas are among the most prominent of these counter-examples, which also include the Mongols, Mughals, and Macedonians. A second concern is an unwarranted overemphasis on the power of the core society. Historical records indicate that many empires rose to power through coercive means – often conquest coupled with diplomacy that was backed by not so latent force. Even so, it has become clear that the relations between the imperial elites and peripheral societies were far more negotiated and dynamic than often thought not too long ago. To take just one counter-intuitive example, Barfield (2001) points out that, rather than extracting resources, Chinese emperors paid tribute to the steppe nomads to keep them at bay.

As useful as they are, both the core–periphery and territorial–hegemonic approaches have a major weakness – they focus our attention almost exclusively on the activities of the imperial elite or on interactions between them and subject elites. As research in provincial regions has advanced, especially within local communities, it has become increasingly clear that many important activities in ancient empires occurred without the intervention, interest, or awareness of the central authorities. Historians have long recognized that the grandiose claims of ancient emperors were often exaggerated and that imperial histories, whether inscribed on monumental architecture or written in texts, often attributed all decisions and power to the ruler. In part, that was a literary convention or imperial propaganda, but modern authors still commonly describe the functioning of empires in terms of individual rulers. I feel that this perspective attributes too much power to rulers, who were often at odds with factions made up of their closest associates, and emphasizes a top-down vision that misleads us about household and community life.

Those concerns lead me to the approach taken in this book. My view is that an adequate explanation of an early empire must take into account

both the actions and interests of the dominant powers and those of the highly varied mass of subject peoples, if we wish to make sense of life at the grand and small scale. The overarching goal here is to balance and integrate information drawn from historical, anthropological, and archaeological sources. This approach differs from most other overviews of the Incas, which often rely on early documents because they provide a wealth of detail about Inca history, social life, and rationales for behavior that are not available through archaeological sources (J. Rowe 1946; Davies 1995; Rostworowski 1999). When archaeology is brought into overviews, it is often used to illustrate the elegance of Inca architecture or objects or to describe the road system or provincial administrative settlements. The early written record, however, is heavily weighted toward the life and times of the royalty and other elites, especially in and around Cuzco. More troublesome is that vast areas of the empire, especially in the south, are largely blanks in the written record. Conversely, treatments of Inca archaeology are generally descriptive and draw on documents to explain sites' functions or place in the empire's historical development. Some works, especially John Hyslop's (1984, 1990) exceptional studies of the Inca roads and settlement planning, consciously weave the two lines of evidence together. Even so, no overview of the empire that I am familiar with systematically integrates history and archaeology. Because they provide different information and sometimes lead us to incompatible conclusions, I will try to highlight where variations arise and how we might resolve the conflicts.

Readers familiar with non-western polities will probably not be surprised that the chapter categories of this book do not fit very well the way that the members of Inca society thought about their world. The Incas did not distinguish neatly between political and ideological leadership, for example, since the ruler was both a deity and the head of government. Military power arose from a tangled mix of supernatural forces and human endeavor, while economic productivity resulted from the gifts of the earth, labor shared through social ties, and the favor of deities. Priests could be generals and the dead could contribute to political decisions. Any explanation of Inca behavior or organization, therefore, must balance modern western analytical categories with the ways in which the Incas might have viewed any situation and what options may have appeared within their social logic, at least to the degree possible.

The Written Sources

Of the thousands of known documents that contain information on life under the Incas, no more than about fifty contain accounts of Inca

history per se. The earliest eyewitness accounts were written by official scribes and soldiers in the heat of a military invasion of an alien land. Their comments were impressions written without time for reflection or understanding of the civilization they were observing. As the Spaniards learned Quechua and began to understand the Andes better, the indigenous peoples found more reason to conceal their activities and beliefs. The situation came to a head in 1559, when the Spaniards were stunned to discover that the Incas around Cuzco were still venerating the mummies of their past kings. In Spanish eyes, the native peoples – far from having assimilated the word of the true church – were still inebriated with their blasphemous beliefs in living ancestors and an animate landscape.

The simultaneous clash and syncretism of cultures, combined with a gradual increase in mutual knowledge, meant that descriptions of the empire are never both immediate and informed. The eyewitnesses who wrote reflectively were very few – Pedro Pizarro stands out among them, and he did not put his quill to parchment until almost forty years had elapsed. They were followed by an assortment of soldiers, administrators, and priests, who prepared their manuscripts as part of their duties or for personal gain through publication. A number of them spoke good Quechua and they were often better informed than the earlier authors, but their reports drew from the memories of informants, rather than from first-hand knowledge of the empire. By the time that the Spaniards took a real interest in the Inca realm, their witnesses provided memories colored by time, political and economic objectives, and wariness of Spanish repression. Some of the authors of the first fifty years conducted or drew from the official inquiries that were periodically undertaken to assess the state of affairs in the Viceroyalty. The questions posed were often slanted by Crown interests in denying Inca legitimacy, rooting out heresies, or discovering effective ways to exploit the rapidly declining population. In contrast, the native peoples did not begin to set down their visions of Tawantinsuyu until the end of the century, a long lifetime after the collapse of Inca power, and they all wrote from the perspective of Christians with a foot in two cultures.

Historians have paid close attention to the lives of these authors, since the context in which the documents were produced heavily affected their content. The first few decades of Spanish rule were a tumultuous era, marked by Inca resistance, Spanish civil wars, and conflicts among clerical, administrative, and private interests, as well as by personal antagonisms. In the practice of the day, authors freely borrowed from one another without citation and could reinforce errors simply by repeating them. For readers interested in more detail on the subject, I recommend a number of works that are devoted to critical examinations of

these documents and potential sources of bias and cross-use.¹ What I present here simply highlights some of the major sources of information and how they were composed.

Eyewitness Accounts

Among the earliest writers were Hernando Pizarro, Pedro Sancho de la Hoz, Miguel de Estete, Francisco de Xérez, Cristóbal de Mena, and Juan Ruiz de Arce. All of these men were part of the invading force that captured and killed Atawallpa at Cajamarca and then seized Cuzco. Sancho and Xérez, secretaries to Francisco Pizarro, were charged with keeping official records for the Crown. Their journals provide a virtual day-by-day time line of the initial Spanish experience, without the understanding or revisionism that hindsight can bring. De Mena, on the other hand, was a soldier who returned to Spain and quickly published an account of his experiences in the new land, with the intent of profiting from the work. Pedro Pizarro, younger cousin to the expedition's leader, did not finish his memoirs until 1571. As a result, he could provide a perspective on the Incas that included a feel of immediacy, tempered by knowledge gained and memory lost over decades of life in Peru.

The Sixteenth-Century Spanish Chroniclers

The Spanish authors of the mid-sixteenth century provide our greatest source of information on the Inca empire. Pedro de Cieza de León, a common soldier with an uncommon eye for detail, wrote one of the great early accounts. After spending a number of years in the Indies, he arrived in the northern Andes in April of 1547, at the age of twenty-nine. For the next three years, he traveled through the north half of the realm, making observations and inquiring about climate, constructions, daily life, local customs, myths, and sexual practices. When in Cuzco, Cieza interviewed Inca aristocrats about their past and the nature of their government. He wrote copiously on what he had seen – four volumes of his writings have now been published, but only one appeared in his lifetime (Cieza 1967). Cieza's accounts are filled with admiration for the Inca achievements, blunted by horror at the diabolically inspired religions and sexual customs that he learned about. Many of the best descriptions of Inca rule, the roads, the provincial centers, and Cuzco itself, come from his pen.

Juan de Betanzos's *Narrative of the Incas* (1996) describes Inca history in a form that comes as close as any known source to a version told by

a single royal family. Born in Spain, Betanzos lived in Peru during his adult life, becoming the most respected Quechua–Spanish translator in the Viceroyalty. In 1542, he may have served as an interpreter at an inquest held in Cuzco and soon thereafter was commissioned to prepare a bilingual doctrinal volume. He married Doña Angelina Yupanque (i.e., Cuxirimay Ocllo), an Inca princess who experienced a remarkable life. Niece to the emperor Wayna Qhapaq, she was betrothed to his son Atawallpa at one year of age; she married him in 1532 when she was ten, near the end of his war to unseat Waskhar. About 1538, Francisco Pizarro took her as his mistress and she bore him two sons. After Pizarro met his own death in 1541, she married Betanzos, bringing him enormous wealth and status. So adept at the language and so close to a royal family, Betanzos was uniquely suited to write the account of the Incas that Viceroy Mendoza commissioned in 1551 and that was completed in 1557. He apparently drew a great deal of his information from his in-laws, who were members of Pachakuti’s descendant kin group (Hamilton 1996:xi). The first part of the account is thus largely a heroic biography of Pachakuti, while the second describes the Colonial era. The Incas’ own rationales for proper behavior come through clearly in his narrative, which is only modestly filtered through European eyes. For all its richness, Betanzos’s account is notable for its partisanship in favor of Pachakuti and the legitimacy of Atawallpa’s cause.

The Licenciado Juan Polo de Ondegardo was probably the best informed of all the administrators of the first fifty years of Colonial rule. He served two terms as the magistrate of Cuzco and one at Potosí. Polo undertook a variety of inquiries in Peru and Bolivia both for the Crown and to satisfy his own curiosity. His concern – as with much of the Spanish attention paid to native institutions – arose from his interest in using existing practices for more effective administration and not from preserving them for their own sake. His view was that the people could best be managed for Spain’s interests if its officials understood how indigenous institutions worked. His numerous treatises on Inca religion, economics, politics, social relations, and other elements of native life were used by the Spanish authorities in setting policy, although not as widely as he wished. One of his great successes occurred in 1559, when he discovered the whereabouts of the royal mummies that had been spirited from one hiding place to another around Cuzco since the conquest.

The arrival of the Viceroy Francisco de Toledo in Peru in 1569 irrevocably changed life in the Andes. A controversial figure then as today, Toledo undertook a comprehensive series of reforms that included forced resettlement of natives to communities near Spanish centers, where they could be more easily controlled. He finally defeated the neo-Inca state in

Vilcabamba in 1572 and supervised the execution of its Inca ruler Thupa Amaru over the strenuous objections of many of his compatriots. Three volumes of papers produced by Toledo, which include verbatim interviews with Inca and other elites in 1570–2, as well as petitions brought to his attention, provide useful detail on life in Cuzco and the provinces (Levillier 1940).

Toledo gave one of his assistants, Pedro de Sarmiento, the responsibility of compiling an official history of the Incas, which he completed in 1572. Sarmiento wrote that he had interviewed more than a hundred record-keepers and royal historians in Cuzco and then had the work's veracity confirmed through a public reading before forty-two Inca nobles. Although his work is one of the major sources on the Incas, it is clouded by Toledo's express interest in demonstrating the illegitimacy of Inca rule. Perhaps more than some other chronicles, Sarmiento's treatise was a composite vision that was influenced by the interests of his informants. It is worth noting, for example, that Atawallpa's kin were not represented. Similarly, the descendants of the rulers Thupa Inka Yupanki and Waskhar had been largely wiped out. Despite his efforts to produce a synthesis that suited official interests, Sarmiento's account is salted with examples of unresolved differences among Cuzco's factionalized aristocratic families.

Several important early documents were written by priests either as an official charge or from their own interest.² Bartolomé de Segovia (1943), for example, wrote an eyewitness description of the last major Inca solstice ceremony in 1535. Cristóbal de Molina, a hospice priest in Cuzco for most of his life and exceptionally well informed about Inca religion, wrote several manuscripts on the subject. One of his treatises, completed in 1575 (Molina 1988), described Inca rituals in detail. He worked closely with another cleric, Cristóbal de Albornoz (1989), who crusaded against heretical religion from 1568 until 1586. Albornoz helped put down the millenarian Taki Onqoy movement and claimed to have personally demolished over 2,000 native shrines in the Huamanga region. Miguel de Cabello Valboa (1951) wrote a lengthy opus, which probably borrowed from Betanzos and Sarmiento, that interweaves Inca history with a love story. Cabello Valboa is notable for proposing the imperial-era chronology that is most widely used today. Fray Martín de Murúa (1986) also borrowed heavily from earlier authors, but provides quite a few details about Inca life and times that appear to be independently derived.

Among a host of other authors³ who provide crucial information were the clerics Bartolomé de Las Casas, José de Acosta, Francisco de Avila, and José de Arriaga, who wrote or commissioned important works. Other valuable manuscripts were prepared by Falcón, Santillán, Zárate,

Bibar, Matienzo, Lizárraga, and Valdivia. The last four constitute the few major works that we have by authors who visited the southern Andes in person. Two Quechua lexicons, by Domingo de Santo Tomás and González Holguín, and one in Aymara by Fray Bertonio, are also useful for their clues to social structure and conceptual linkages.

The Native Authors

The earliest native source on Inca royal history may be a disputed account known as the *Quipucamayos de Vaca de Castro* (Callapiña et al. 1974). The document surfaced in 1608, but part of it was ostensibly recorded in an inquest conducted in Cuzco in 1542 by the Licenciado Vaca de Castro. Two of the four witnesses claimed to have been record-keepers (*kipu kamayuq*, or *quipucamayos*) from the descendant kin group of the emperor Wiraqocha Inka (see sidebar on *Literacy*, below). There is little doubt that the 1608 document manipulated mytho-history to sustain a fraudulent royal genealogy, but scholars disagree – despite considerable historical sleuthing – about the authenticity of the 1542 source (Duviols 1979a; Urton 1990; Pease 1995:23). The account emphasized the exploits of Wiraqocha Inka and earlier kings, attributing to them many of the conquests that are usually assigned to the conventional founder of the empire, Pachakuti. The Quipucamayos claimed that Betanzos participated in the inquest but, as just observed, his chronicle closely reproduced the vision of Inca history put forward by Pachakuti's descendants; it conflicted outright with many elements of the Quipucamayos' version.

Both the Quipucamayos and Betanzos differ from another native source, known as the *Probanza de Qhapaq Ayllu* (Rowe 1985b). In 1569, the survivors of a massacre that occurred in Cuzco at the end of the final Inca civil war filed claim to regain their lost estates. The *Probanza* listed the conquests of the emperor Thupa Inka Yupanki, apparently dictated from *kipu* records. It claimed for him alone many of the conquests that are often attributed to his father as monarch, but Thupa Inka Yupanki as general. The conflicted and flexible views of the Inca past seen in these three sources, each told from the perspective of a particular royal kin group, highlight some of the problems in making sense of Inca history in a European framework.

Over the last four centuries, the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega has easily been the most influential Inca chronicler. Son of a Spanish soldier and an Inca princess, Garcilaso lived in Cuzco until 1560, when he turned fifteen and moved permanently to Spain. Late in life, he wrote extensively on the Incas, the most important of his works being the *Royal*

Commentaries of the Incas, which he completed in 1609 (Garcilaso de la Vega 1966). Garcilaso wrote from the perspective of a Christian educated in Spain, with a passion for redeeming his ancestors' reputation. Garcilaso's status as the pre-eminent authority on the Incas stood for centuries and the *Royal Commentaries* are still cited as the earliest literary masterpiece written by a native American. Beginning with Rowe's (1946) critical assessment in 1946, however, the Inca Garcilaso has fallen mightily and he is valued today more for his recollections of Inca customs than for his vision of history. His portrayal of benevolent and omnipresent Inca rule, in a land in which no one ever went hungry, is considered by scholars to be more a rose-colored apology than a portrait of reality, but it remains the dominant image of the Incas in popular publications.

Shortly after Garcilaso completed his great work, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala sent a letter of more than a thousand pages to King Carlos V that is a fount of information on life in the Inca realm. A son of mixed ancestry like Garcilaso, Guaman Poma found himself caught between two cultures. Born in Huamanga, he assisted the Colonial administration in a variety of capacities, including efforts to stamp out idolatrous practices. Nonetheless, he was conflicted in his loyalty to things Christian and Spanish and traditional Andean ways of life. In 1613, he completed his epic letter, which included hundreds of drawings of Inca history, religion, and customs, as well as an illustrated litany of Spanish abuses. His drawings are an irreplaceable source of visual detail, while the text – an often incoherent mélange of Spanish and Quechua – contains many useful particulars. Like Garcilaso, Guaman Poma wrote about expansive Inca conquests earlier than most Colonial Spaniards or modern scholars are willing to accept. In recent years, Guaman Poma has excited renewed interest as a resistance author (see Adorno 1986; Pease 1995:261–310).

Literacy and Data Recording: A Problem and its Knotty Solution

Although there was no alphabetic writing system in the Andes that we are aware of, the Incas and earlier societies developed techniques for recording and transmitting information that were remarkably precise and flexible. The best-known tool is a mnemonic device called the *khipu*, or knot-record. Other visual media included painted sticks, designs woven into textiles, and illustrations painted on

continued

wooden boards. The *kipu* is most often associated with Inca accounting, but it was borrowed from well-established Andean traditions that went back almost a thousand years before the Incas. Today, only about 400 *kipu* are known from archaeological deposits, in part because the Spaniards destroyed as many as they could find, distrusting their association with diabolical knowledge. Most that have been found are from coastal sites, where the dry climate aided their preservation (Ascher and Ascher 1981:68).

An individual *kipu* consisted of a longitudinal primary cord or, more rarely, a carved wooden bar to which a multi-colored series of knotted cords were tied. The cords, usually made of cotton and occasionally of wool, were twisted in different directions and a variety of knot forms were employed. They were dyed in hundreds of colors and each shade could have a specific meaning in a particular context. When all the combinations of position, number, order, color, and shape are considered, the possibilities for recording specific information become enormous. Locke (1923) made the first major breakthrough in understanding the *kipu* when he showed that the structure was based on a decimal positional system (see Ascher and Ascher 1981). On a pendant string, the position of the knot group farthest from the primary cord marked units, the next in marked tens, the next hundreds, and so on. A figure-8 knot in a group position marked a unit value; a long knot with the appropriate number of turns marked values from 2 through 9 (figure 1.1). A value of ten was represented with a single “granny” knot and a value of 0 was represented by the lack of a knot in a particular position (Urton 1997:180). The largest decimal position known to have been recorded on a *kipu* is 10,000, although much larger numbers could have easily been registered. Locke also showed that a string superior to the primary cord could represent the sum of several pendant cords.

Using concepts drawn from mathematics and symmetry analysis, other scholars have deciphered a number of other elements of *kipu* structure. Ascher and Ascher (1981) have shown, for instance, that the *kipu* could be organized hierarchically like a branching tree diagram. Within the first level of information, the order of the pendant strings attached to the primary cord signified a ranking of information. By extension, each subsidiary string farther away from the primary cord would record more specific information dependent on the level above. Similarly, various *kipu* could be tied together in a sequence. This format is eminently well suited to data such as census records. For instance, a *kipu* could record the census data

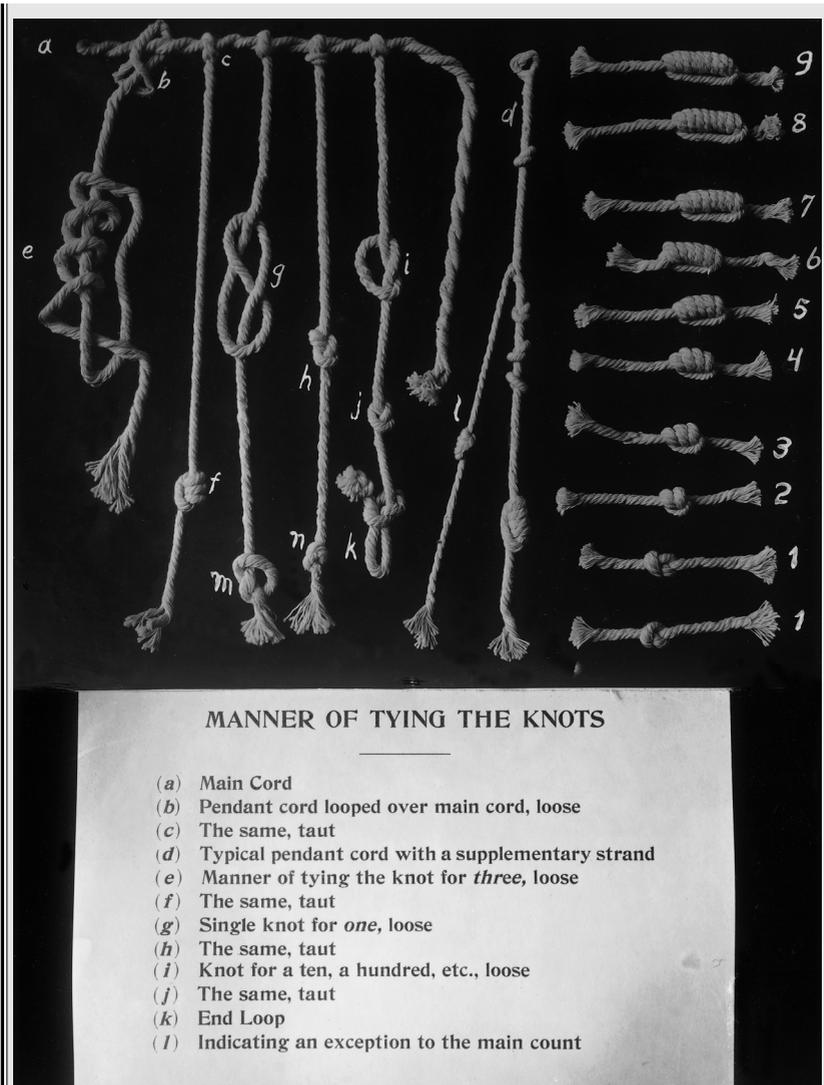


Figure 1.1 Leland Locke's (1923) illustration of the decimal structure of knot-record accounting. Photo courtesy Dept. of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History; used with permission

for a province; levels of information on pendant and subsidiary cords could include data on decimal subdivisions, males and females, age-grades, marital status, and so on. Scholars have also shown that cords were arrayed in ways that made cross-reference to one another,

continued

and Urton (1995; 1997:30–1, 178–87) has suggested ways that the direction of knot tying was linked to data-recording structures.

Inca *kipu* were used to record a wide range of numerical data, from census records, to warehouse contents, counts of the royal flocks, tax obligations, land measurements, military organization, and calendrical information. They aided in keeping royal genealogies, conquest sequences, and myths, and were even used as aids for literary works, such as poetry. The everyday populace used them to keep track of such things as community herds, a practice that continues today. Each *kipu* was accompanied by an oral account memorized by a knot-record keeper, or *kipu kamayuq*. The position passed down from father to son, along with the oral information that was needed to read each record fully. The Incas made this position into a professional office and ranked the specialists according to the level or kind of information that they were responsible for. Since *kipu*-accounting was common, the Incas probably found it fairly easy to recruit individuals to fill the state offices in many places. Several different forms of tying the *kipu* existed, however, and we do not know if the Incas allowed local techniques to continue or standardized them across the realm. The Spaniards found the accounts to be so reliable that they allowed witnesses to read their data into court records as part of their testimony. The *kipu* was an instrument for recording information, however, and not for doing arithmetic calculations: for that purpose, the Incas used piles of pebbles or grain, or by moving counters about on a tray with rows of compartments (Rowe 1946:326). The amount of oral information needed to read a *kipu* – or conversely the amount of information embedded in a *kipu* that any specialist could read – is still uncertain. Despite the progress that has been made, *kipu* clearly contained a more nuanced code than researchers have been able to crack. The message transmitted by the *chaski* (postal messengers), for example, often consisted of a short verbal message accompanied by a *kipu*. In addition, the way in which the knot-records were used to record narrative verse and other non-numerical information has always been a puzzle.

Some testimony read into Spanish court records helps us to understand the cultural logic embedded in the *kipu*'s structure. For example in 1569, the survivors of Thupa Inka Yupanki's descendant kin group tried to recover the lands that they had lost in the aftermath of the dynastic war and Spanish conquest (Rowe 1985b). In their testimony, they listed the peoples and forts that their ancestor had conquered. The list was organized sequentially from quarter to

quarter, starting with the quarter of Chinchaysuyu and running clockwise around to Cuntisuyu. On occasion, the list may have given priority to the status of the conquered people over the chronology of events. This approach to history meant that anyone attempting to create a linear history of the conquest sequence would need additional information in order to intercalate the four parts. Other documents help us understand the cultural values of the labor and goods that the accountants kept track of (see chapter 12).

Over the years, some scholars have suggested ways to link *kipu* to other visual records, such as the geometric designs in some of Guaman Poma's illustrations, or to coded information in other manuscripts (e.g. Laurencich-Minelli 1998), but none has proved really convincing yet. A newly found cache of 32 knot-records from the Chachapoyas area of northeastern Peru, however, holds promise for some advances. Gary Urton's (2001) analysis of the structure of one of those *kipu* provides the first persuasive interpretation of a specific record. While acknowledging that his explanation requires making certain assumptions such as duality in the knot-record's structure, Urton deduces that the *kipu* was a calendrical device that recorded a two-year solar calendar, lunar cycles, and various correlations between solar and lunar periods over several years. He also observes that the total knot count (3,005) on the paired strings on the *kipu* corresponds closely to the number of local taxpayers (~3,000) serving under Inca rule. Linking the two deductions, Urton infers that the *kipu* may have registered a two-year cycle of tribute obligations to the state, kept by a Chachapoya lord named Guaman who provided census information to the Spaniards in 1535.

The Later Spanish Chroniclers

As the seventeenth century moved along, the flurry of manuscripts on the Incas subsided, but some important documents were still produced. The most prominent is the multi-volume work on Inca history, religion, and customs written by the Jesuit priest Bernabé Cobo. Born in Andalusia, Father Cobo traveled widely in his lifetime. He visited Mexico, but spent most of his adult life in Peru, where he completed his great work in 1653 (Cobo 1956; see Rowe 1979b). His writing is lucid and well organized, but Cobo was a naturalist and historian whose descriptions of the Incas were drawn from earlier manuscripts. Since he had access to several manuscripts that are now lost, such as the full account of

Cuzco's shrine system, his work is an invaluable source. Modern authors also rely on Cobo for his descriptions of daily life, even though the Jesuit applied his own observations to the prehispanic past a century after the empire's fall (Rowe 1990a).

Spanish Inspections and Court Records

In the latter half of the twentieth century, historians turned their eyes from the classic chronicles to the Andean and Spanish archives. During the early Colonial era, representatives of the Spanish Crown and the Church produced a blizzard of documents about the people, customs, and resources of their new holdings. Many of those documents were intended to provide information to the Crown that would facilitate administration of the new land and extraction of its wealth. In 1549, for example, the Crown ordered detailed inspections (*visitas*) of its holdings, region by region. The inspectors used a standardized series of questions about life before and under the Incas and recorded information about the natural resources of each region. In part because conditions were changing so rapidly with the decline of the native population and administrative reforms, new inspections were ordered in the 1560s. More inquests were held with Viceroy Toledo's vast restructuring program in 1570–2. Many of the inspections recorded from 1557 through 1585 have been published in the *Relaciones Geográficas de Indias* (1965; hereafter RGI). The Toledan and RGI sources are useful as regional snapshots of the realm that drew from interviews with local native elites.

A final set of archival documents comes from litigation. About two decades after the fall of the Incas, Andean peoples began to use the Spanish courts (*Audiencia Real*) to make claims for services that they had provided the Spaniards and to settle grievances with their neighbors. Many of their complaints arose when local societies tried to regain lands or other resources that had been taken by the Incas and given to colonists resettled by the state. Since several million people moved under Inca rule, the flood of paperwork that fell upon the court system has provided a great deal of useful information on ethnic groups, land tenure and inheritance customs, and land use practices, among many other things. Still other cases stemmed from competition over the inheritance of privileged positions, as local elites learned to make claims based on pre-Inca rights, offices granted by the state, and Spanish laws that favored primogeniture over other traditional customs.

Inca Archaeology

1860–1960

The study of Inca archaeology has a long and often distinguished career, dating back to the nineteenth century. The main figures of the early days were more adventurers than scientists, but some of their contributions to archaeology are still valuable. Among the outstanding figures were Ephraim George Squier, Charles Wiener, and Antonio Raymondi, who traveled throughout the central part of the empire by horse with a pack train, as was typical for the time. They described or mapped many Inca settlements along the main road system and paid special attention to a number of sites in the Urubamba river valley now recognized as royal family estates. The engravings that were featured in their volumes provide indispensable information, even if they were often romanticized, since quite a few of the sites have suffered considerable damage since then.

Just before 1900, a major figure appeared on the Andean archaeological scene – Max Uhle. A remarkably energetic researcher and prolific writer, Uhle set about developing a pan-Andean chronology using the innovative combination of comparisons of ceramic types and analysis of stratigraphic deposits. Uhle took a considerable interest in Inca archaeology, investigating ruins, for example, at the northern Inca capital at Tumipampa (Ecuador), at coastal Pachacamac, in the highland Urubamba valley (Peru), and at Incallacta (Bolivia), thus spanning the coastal desert, the mountains, and the eastern Andean slopes. His studies have proved to be so valuable that some of them are periodically reprinted, not simply out of historical interest, but for the information they contain.

About the same time that Uhle was at work, two other major scholars were advancing our knowledge of what was the southeastern quarter of the Inca empire. Adolph Bandelier, who is also known for his work in the North American Southwest and in Mesoamerica, conducted investigations at a series of Inca sites both on the Peruvian coast and at the sacred islands in Lake Titicaca. In the southernmost part of the empire, Juan de Ambrosetti was working at Inca sites in northwest Argentina. His multi-volume publications from that region describe a variety of sites, notably Puerta de La Paya, where his excavations recovered the most elaborate set of Inca materials yet found in the south Andes.

Inca archaeology did not really catch the public's attention until 1912, however, when Hiram Bingham announced his discovery of Machu Picchu, one of the world's most spectacular archaeological sites. His

claim to have found “the lost city of the Incas” in the eastern jungles and the truly breathtaking character of the remains sparked an interest that remains unabated today. Following on Bingham’s work was a series of studies in the 1930s and 1940s at the capital of Cuzco and its environs. Most of the work was conducted by Peruvian scholars, notably Luis Valcárcel, Jorge Muelle, and Luis Pardo. These investigators were primarily concerned with monumental sites, such as Saqsawaman, describing material culture, and working out chronological sequences that had not yet been defined. Their studies were complemented by Paul Fejos’s work at sites in the Urubamba and by John Rowe’s seminal paper on the archaeology of Cuzco.

1960–2000

Starting about 1960, a transformation began to occur in the study of Inca provinces. Throughout the preceding century, archaeologists working in local contexts had been recording Inca sites, but these were consistently interpreted in the context of the written sources and a Cuzco-centric view of the Andes. In an important paper written in 1959, Dorothy Menzel recognized that the Incas had formed a variety of relationships with the societies of the south coast of Peru. She inferred that Inca rule had been adapted to existing local conditions, which was a major step forward in interpreting an empire that had previously been assumed to be essentially homogeneous. The next year saw the initiation of the Huánuco Project in Peru’s central highlands. This was the first major project to systematically integrate historical and archaeological research in a regional study. The circumstances for the investigation were exceptional, for the Huánuco region boasted both the most spectacular provincial center in the empire and two Spanish inspections, from 1549 and 1562. The research team, led by John Murra, Donald Thompson, and Craig Morris, took full advantage of the conditions, producing a series of publications that remain the standard against which all provincial research is compared. I will refer to the Huánuco project on numerous occasions throughout this book.

Not until the UNESCO project at Cuzco in 1970 was there a concerted effort to identify, map, and conserve the existing Inca architecture in and around the capital. Until recently, these interests – site mapping, architectural description, ceramic analysis, and culture history – have dominated the archaeology of the Inca heartland. A number of projects have made important contributions in this milieu, for example the work of Ann Kendall and her colleagues on estates in the Cusichaca region (e.g., Kendall et al. 1992, Kendall 1996). Oddly enough, however, no

complete survey of the archaeology of the Cuzco region has yet been published, so that we still do not know the full range of Inca sites in the heartland of the empire. That situation has been redressed considerably by study of individual sites, such as the royal estates of Ollantaytambo (e.g., Protzen 1993) and Yucay (Niles 1999), but a reliable archaeological map of the region remains to be published. Other archaeologists have taken a more regional approach to the subject, working from the premise that understanding the formation of the Inca polity and the relationships between the Incas and their surroundings requires study of the sacred landscape (e.g., Bauer 1998; Van de Guchte 1990). Collectively, these studies have moved us much farther ahead in the last decade or so.

These gains have been matched by a proliferation of studies on the Inca provinces by scholars throughout the Andes. Their works are too numerous to mention individually, but their interests take us into topics that were seldom considered before. Most importantly, they are fleshing out how Cuzco interacted with the hundreds of local societies under its dominion and are investigating elements of subject life that were often outside direct state control. Thanks to these studies, we can now recognize stability and change in community life that were beyond our reach until the last decades of the twentieth century. Work on household archaeology now permits scholars to examine how symbols of status, diet, architectural styles, life expectancy, or household labor were impacted (if at all) by the advent of imperial rule. All in all, these advances by hundreds of scholars in the land once encompassed by Tawantinsuyu make this an exciting time to study the Incas.