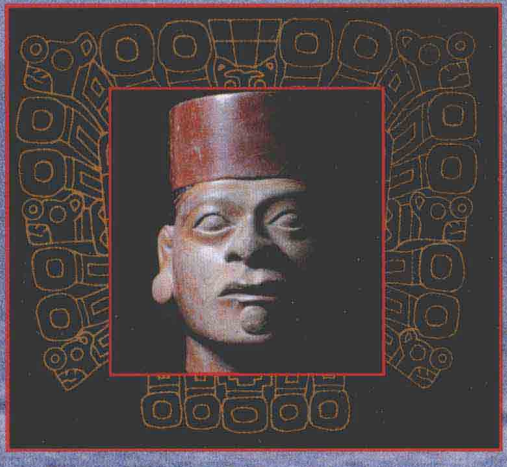
VALLEY OF THE SPIRITS

A Journey into the Lost Realm of the Aymara



ALAN L. KOLATA

THE SPIRITS

Lost Realm of the Aymara

Alan L. Kolata

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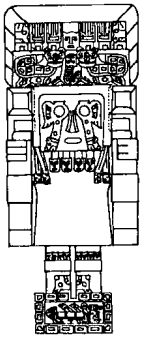

A Journey into the

For my daughter Justine

I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read . . .

—"Ozymandias," Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)

Preface

THIS book is about a people known as the Aymara who live along the shores of Lake Titicaca in Bolivia and Peru. The Aymara are an ancient people with a complex and still imperfectly understood history. They are a people rich in myth, knowledge, and spirituality. For the Aymara, the spectacular, awe-inspiring land that they inhabit is alive with vitalizing energy. Mountains are their ancestors, water is their life's blood, and the land they cultivate is infused with spirits.

Nearly twenty years ago, through a serendipitous twist of fate, I journeyed to the land of the Aymara to recapture the world of their ancestors. The Aymara were the authors of a great but little-known culture of the Americas centered in the ancient city of Tiahuanaco. Between A.D. 400 and 1000, Tiahuanaco was the capital of an empire that spanned great parts of the south-central Andes. Only the Inca empire, some five hundred years later, eclipsed Tiahuanaco in size and social complexity. Although my research began as an effort to explore this ancient world, through time I found myself increasingly enmeshed in the lives of Tiahuanaco's modern descendants. This book tells both parts of that tale: here the Aymara's past and present are interwoven and together they offer us glimpses of their future.

All of the information on the Aymara's past presented in this book is the product of a long-term, interdisciplinary research project—a project that continues as I write these words. Some of the reconstruction of the Aymara past described here will change as the research expands and evolves in new directions. But that is what makes this enterprise of writing the history of a people who have been denied their own history so compelling.

I wish to acknowledge the institutions, agencies, corporations and individuals who underwrote, and continue to underwrite, this multi-institutional research program. In Bolivia, the archaeological and paleoecological research is authorized and conducted under the auspices of the Instituto Nacional de Arqueología de Bolivia (INAR), currently under the Secretaría Nacional de Cultura directed by Minister Alberto Bailey Gutierrez. Over the past eighteen years, my research has been authorized through agreements signed by three separate Directors of INAR: Carlos Ponce Sanjinés, Carlos Urquizo Sossa, and Oswaldo Rivera Sundt. I thank each of them for their personal commitment to the project. Our research has been generously supported by grants from the National Science Foundation (BNS-8607541, BNS-8805490, DEB-9212641); the National Endowment for the Humanities (RO-21806-88, RO-21368-86); the Inter-American Foundation (BO-252, BO-273, BO-374, BO374a); the UNESCO/Man and the Biosphere Program (1753-000566); the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (GC-95-174); the H. John Heinz III Charitable Fund of the Heinz Family Foundation; the Pittsburgh Foundation; the Office of Social Science Research and the Campus Research Board of the University of Illinois at Chicago; the Division of Social Sciences of the University of Chicago; Tesoro Petroleum Corporation, San Antonio, Texas; Compañía Minera del Sur, La Paz, Bolivia; and the Occidental Petroleum Corporation, Los Angeles, California.

Additionally, I wish to acknowledge and specifically thank

several individuals who worked intensively with me to identify and secure funding for the research. These include Ambassador Robert S. Gelbard; Kevin Healy of the Inter-American Foundation; and, in particular, Dr. Robert V. West Jr., former chairman and CEO of Tesoro Petroleum Corporation, who has supported the project financially from its inception in 1978. I wish also to acknowledge the staunch support of Connie Thrasher Jaquith of Louisville, Kentucky, who each year contributes generously to the work of the project.

Over the past two decades of my research career in Peru and Bolivia I have incurred many debts, both personal and professional. I cannot possibly acknowledge all of the individuals and scholars who have contributed to my professional and personal development in distinctive ways: through providing formal academic training, through sharing field experiences, through intense discussions, and, occasionally, through heated debate. They have, in different degrees, enriched my life. In this group, though, I owe a special debt of gratitude to Michael Moseley, my former academic adviser at Harvard University, who provided me my first opportunity to travel to the land of the Aymara.

I wish to specifically acknowledge here my principal collaborators and senior colleagues in the research in Bolivia: Michael Binford, Mark Brenner, Charles Ortloff, and Oswaldo Rivera. Michael Binford has been the coprincipal investigator on the research project since 1986, and he, along with Mark Brenner and Charles Ortloff, have contributed inestimably to the intellectual excitement and personal pleasure of doing scientific research in the Lake Titicaca basin and beyond. After sharing a decade of intense, difficult, and rewarding work, we continue to conduct research as a team. I owe a special and continuing debt of gratitude to Oswaldo Rivera, currently Director of the National Institute of Archaeology, La Paz, Bolivia. Oswaldo is the codirector of the project and has collaborated closely with me in conceptualizing and organizing the research efforts in Bolivia since I

first arrived in 1978. Oswaldo is both my research collaborator and my *compadre:* I value both roles highly, but the latter is the most important to me. Many other scholars in Bolivia and the United States, including a remarkable cohort of current and former graduate students at the University of Chicago, have participated in the project. I acknowledge and thank them collectively for their key contributions to the conduct of fieldwork on the project.

Speaking on behalf of all the participants in our research project, our most profound social debt is to the many Aymara with whom we have worked. This book is about their history and their culture, and possibly about their future as well. Without their active collaboration and their intense interest in their own cultural heritage, the work which informs this book could never have been accomplished. The number of individuals involved in the work of the project is, quite literally, in the hundreds, and I cannot acknowledge each of them by name here. But the people of the villages of Tiahuanaco, Lukurmata, Chojasivi, Lakaya, Lillimani, Quiripujo, Chokara, Korila, Wacullani, Khonko Wankané, Chambi Grande, Chambi Chico, Wankollo, Huaraya, Achuta Grande, Kasa Achuta, Pillapi, Guaqui, Yanarico, Patarani, Andamarca, Yanamani, Pircuta, Qorpa, Sullcata, Kusijata, and Copajira are involved, to various degrees, in the work and life of the research. I thank them all.

In Tiahuanaco itself, the Asociación de Trabajadores en Arqueología de Tiahuanaco provided the highly skilled workers who participated in all aspects of the research. They are truly extraordinary people. While in Tiahuanaco, the supervisor of the ruins of Tiahuanaco, Cesar Callisaya, my closest Aymara friend, collaborator, and *compadre,* opens his house to me and the entire research team. The generosity of his family cannot go unremarked in any book based on the research of the project. Cesar's knowledge of Aymara communities and his exceptional diplomatic skills have permitted the project to complete its ambitious agenda of research even

under the most difficult of political circumstances. He, along with Oswaldo Rivera, are the two individuals most responsible for the success of our joint project to recapture and remobilize the knowledge of the ancients for the benefit of their descendants.

Although they did not request anonymity, the names of all Aymara people specifically described in this book have been altered to protect their privacy. There are two exceptions to this: Cesar Callisaya and Cosme Uruchi. True to his heritage as a warrior, Cosme insisted that, if I ever wrote any account that involved him, I would use only his true name. I honor that request here.

With regard to the publication of this book, I want to extend my appreciation first to my agent, Bert Holtje of James Peter Associates. Glancing through the *Los Angeles Times,* Bert noticed a report on my research in Bolivia. He had the vision to imagine this book, and the insistent faith to see it through to reality. At John Wiley & Sons, I want to acknowledge my editor, Emily Loose, who inherited this book, but still embraced it wholeheartedly. Her tough but sensitive editing immensely improved the flow of the manuscript, even if some dearly beloved passages were left behind on the cutting floor. I thank also Lisbeth Cobas, Emily's assistant, and Nana Prior, who managed production.

Chapters 3–5 of this book are based on my previous book, *The Tiwanaku: Portrait of an Andean Civilization* (Oxford, U.K., and Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1993). Readers desiring more detailed descriptions and interpretations of Tiahuanaco's natural and social worlds may wish to read that book. Similarly, readers, particularly those with technical training and inclinations, interested in the results of the research on which much of this book is based may wish to consult my *Tiwanaku and Its Hinterland: Archaeological and Paleoecological Investigations of an Andean Civilization, Volume 1: Agroecology* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996). This is a multiple-authored work of our

entire research team that represents the state of the art in our investigations into the Aymara past.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my wife, Anna, and my daughter, Justine, who tolerated endless, difficult separations and, at times, endured the rigors of the Bolivian high plateau while the research described in this book was in progress. Their love sustains me.

Alan L. Kolata
Chicago, October 1995

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Into the Aymara World

At dawn on an intensely cold, brilliantly clear day in early October 1992, the Aymara Indians of Bolivia reclaimed their past. I glanced out the window of my adobe house as two snaking lines of Indian men and women began to climb the massive remains of a ceremonial pyramid in the ancient town of Tiahuanaco. Grabbing my down jacket and wool stocking cap, I rushed to the pyramid's base to accompany them as a witness in this ceremony of cultural resistance and revival.

The Indians ascended the seven eroded tiers of the stone-faced temple in pairs, male and female in symmetrical counterpoise. The procession was alive with the chatter of morning greetings among close kinsmen. The men wore bloodred ponchos of fine llama wool adorned with intricately woven, multicolored belts and sashes. Across their belts, images of rampaging, sword-wielding soldiers on horseback rode into silent battle. Underneath this eye-arresting regalia, the men wore simple, cuffless pants of cream-colored wool and rubber sandals cut casually from derelict automobile tires. A cluster of men at the head of the line carried staves of dark, burnished wood cut from the cloud forests on the wild, eastern

slopes of the Andes Mountains many generations before. Each staff was capped with ornamental silver finials.

Silver was the prize that inspired unbridled lust in the Europeans who conquered the Andean world in the sixteenth century. The frenzy for veins of silver from the majestic Andes destroyed entire nations of Indians. After decades of warfare, pestilence and famine, the ravaged native populations were subjugated into slave labor in the hellish mines of Potosí in southern Bolivia. Desperate for laborers to work the fabulously rich deposits, Spanish overlords laid claim to the traditional laborers, the *mit'a*, that the Indian nations rendered to their native monarchs. More than one-seventh of the native population between Cuzco in southern Peru and Tarija in southern Bolivia were pressed into service in the mines of Potosí. Conditions in the mines were bestial. Even the Spanish dogs of war were treated with more compassion than the native conscripts who died in unremembered numbers. An eyewitness account conveys the horror with terrible eloquence:

> When the time came for the conscripts to leave for the mines, chained Indians with iron collars around their necks were to be seen everywhere. Women and children accompanied the miserable lines of exiles, with cries and moans, pulling out their hair and singing in their own language songs of death and sad laments. The local chiefs were beaten and tortured if they failed to supply the labor demanded. Once an Indian returned from the mines to find his wife dead and his children abandoned. His chief forced him into a gang leaving for the hell of Potosí. The *curaca* [native chief] answered the wretched man's pleading, saying, "If I do not complete my quota with you, the Spanish will burn me, whip me and drink my blood." Desperate, the man hanged his two children, "so that they may never serve in the mines," and then cut his own throat with a knife.[1]

The miners labored in narrow, twisting, claustrophobic galleries driven deep into the dark heart of Potosí's Cerro Rico, the Rich Mountain. The silver ore was processed with mercury and if a miner managed to survive his turn of service in the mines, he succumbed, in time, to the insidious effects of mercury poisoning. Slowly, fingers, arms, legs, and tongue failed as the body's neurological system shut down.

For decades, the Spanish Crown bankrolled its military adventures in Europe from the seemingly endless stream of silver that flowed from the veins of Cerro Rico. Potosí became the envy of the Spanish colonial world, a shining, white city high in the barren Bolivian plateau. Soaring churches and basilicas appointed with magnificent silver altars and elaborately carved pulpits graced the city. Colonial officials lived in high style behind the massive walls of their palaces. But the transplanted glitter of Spanish style could not obscure vast, desolate encampments of Indian slaves at the edges of the city's opulence.

The Spanish were not the first to covet Cerro Rico's treasure. The native curacas, too, had mined the mountain. Silver and gold were cherished sources of social wealth to the ancients. Fashioned into crowns, fixed in shining plates to sedan chairs and litters, crafted into libation cups and serving platters, these metals served as powerful symbols of the native chieftains' status and authority. The curacas, too, extracted mit'a labor to support their ambitions.

The silver finials on the staves of the Aymara men ascending the great temple that morning in October were symbols of an ancient system of power. The staffs are emblems of authority, symbols of each man's right to represent his community. The men at the head of the line that morning were the *jilakata* of their communities, the supreme political and ritual officers who guide the Aymara both in the rounds of their daily lives and in their relations with outsiders.

The Aymara women were also adorned that day in the