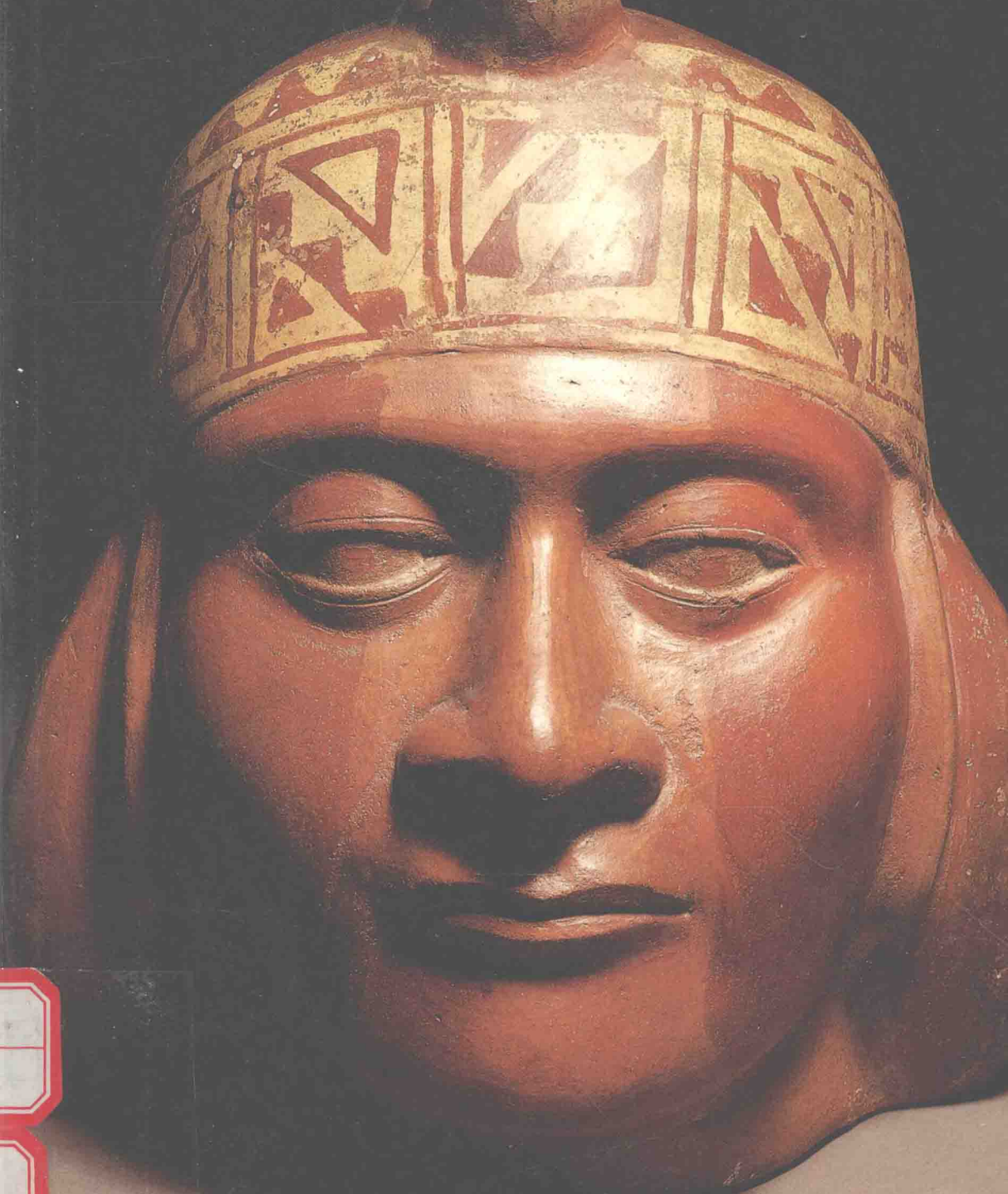


# THE INCAS

## AND THEIR ANCESTORS



The Archaeology of Peru MICHAEL E. MOSELEY



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THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF PERU

*With 225 illustrations*



THAMES AND HUDSON

## *Author's Note*

Knowledge about the ancient Andes is increasing rapidly. A great deal of new information remains unpublished, and I am indebted to multitudes of colleagues for generously sharing their findings. I also draw upon my own research which began in the Ancon-Chillon area, shifted north to the Moche valley, and then moved to the southern Moquegua drainage. Investigating the national patrimony of Peru has been a great privilege, and I warmly acknowledge the people, scholars and officials who have graciously hosted my field studies for many years.

Rather than deal with all aspects of Peruvian prehistory, I have attempted to weave together evolutionary themes that highlight the major Andean developments. I have also sought to bring native Quechua and Aymara people into the picture. They provide rich insights into the past accomplishments of their ancestors. This volume is dedicated to these people as well as to Maya Elena and the younger generation.

*Frontispiece: A female Staff God representation on painted cotton cloth found at Karwa.*

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The Inca called their sprawling realm Tahuantinsuyu, or 'Land of the Four Quarters', and on the eve of Columbus' Caribbean landfall it probably surpassed Ming China and the Ottoman Empire as the largest nation on earth. Stretching down the mountainous Andean backbone of South America for more than 5,500 km, it was the biggest native state to arise in the western hemisphere, and also the largest empire of antiquity ever to develop south of the equator. By dint of armed conquest the masters of Tahuantinsuyu governed the most rugged mountain chain on the face of the earth, second only to the Himalayas in height and harshness. To the west their sovereignty reached over the dry Atacama desert; to the east it included the flanks of the Amazon rainforest. Inca legions – like their Roman counterparts – marched far beyond the frontiers of civilization to dominate barbarian tribes, and heterogeneous societies. At its height, the imperial capital of Cuzco exercised rule over northern Chile, upland Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, and the south of Colombia. No contemporary Andean nation compares in magnitude or prosperity, and the great wealth of Tahuantinsuyu fostered its downfall.

The conquest of Mexico whetted the Spanish appetite for gold. Yet hopes of securing truly prodigious quantities of precious metal eluded the *conquistadores* until 1532. That year Francisco Pizarro and a small contingent of mercenaries disembarked on the desert coast and ventured into the Andean uplands. At the town of Cajamarca the Inca emperor was enticed to a supposedly peaceful meeting, then kidnapped and ransomed for a room full of gold, and two of silver. After payment of about \$50 million by today's bullion standards, the soldiers of fortune garroted the monarch, and marched to Cuzco, the capital and heart of Tahuantinsuyu.

The great metropolis was first sighted by a cavalry vanguard. By all accounts it was unbelievable – it was alien – and it was magnificent. The many distant buildings were clustered so close to the clouds that men and horses of the expeditionary force fought for breath in the oxygen-deficient altitude. Catching and reflecting the sun, towering stone walls shimmered with brilliant hues of gold and silver. Ascending a broad highway into the urban nexus, the party of mounted men was greeted by a brilliantly clad entourage of nobles and attendants, stately but fully foreign in physique and attire. Led across spacious malls with sparkling fountains, and along paved avenues flanked by cut-rock palaces, villas, halls, temples, and shrines, the awe-struck visitors beheld imposing edifices encrusted with precious metals that played dazzling light on all beholders near and far.



Plates 12-14

The city was unbelievable because there was nothing of comparable splendor in the soldiers' Castilian homeland. It was alien because the troops had journeyed from an old, familiar world to a new and unusual one. It was magnificent because Cuzco was the home of the Sun, the god Inti, and gold was his essence. Inti was the sacred patron of the city and its empire. Images of the solar deity and other luminaries of the imperial pantheon resided in an opulent sanctuary, the Coricancha or 'House of the Sun'. A glimpse of this remarkable palace of the gods survives in the thoughtful reflections of Cieza de León, *conquistador* and author of *Chronicle of Peru*. Striding around the temple he found that it measured 'more than four hundred paces in circuit' and was of finely hewn masonry.

The stone appeared to me to be of a dusky or black color, and most excellent for building purposes. The wall had many openings, and the doorways were very well carved. Round the wall, half way up, there was a band of gold, two *palmos* wide and four *dedos* in thickness. The doorways and doors were covered with plates of the same metal. Within were four houses, not very large, but with walls of the same kind and covered with plates of gold within and without . . .

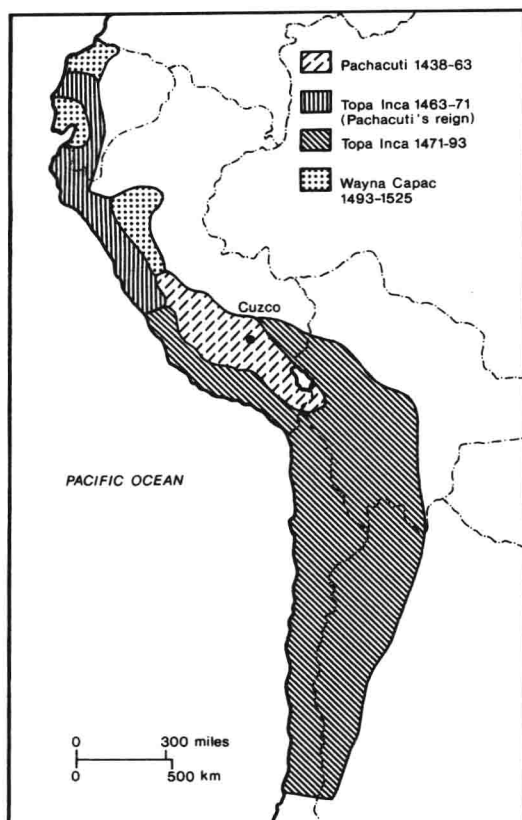
In one of these houses, which was the richest, there was the figure of the sun, very large and made of gold, very ingeniously worked, and enriched with many precious stones. . . .

They had also a garden, the clods of which were made of pieces of fine gold; and it was artificially sown with golden maize, the stalks, as well as the leaves and cobs, being of that metal. . . . Besides all this, they had more than twenty golden sheep [llamas] with their lambs, and the shepherds with their slings and crooks to watch them, all made of the same metal. There was a great quantity of jars of gold and silver, set with emeralds; vases, pots, and all sorts of utensils, all of fine gold.

Indeed the splendor of the Coricancha and the elegant wealth of Cuzco were so overpowering that the narrator was compelled to conclude, ' . . . it seems to me that I have said enough to show what a grand place it was; so I shall not treat further of the silver work of the *chaquira* [beads], of the plumes of gold and other things, which, if I wrote down, I should not be believed.'

If a *conquistador* felt his eye-witness account of Inca accomplishment would be beyond belief, then it is little wonder that four centuries later archaeologists confront a uniquely difficult task in attempting to reconstruct this bygone achievement, describe its evolution, and make Andean civilization intelligible to Western society.

Many aspects of Andean accomplishment are only intelligible as adaptations to environmental extremes, particularly life at extremely high elevations. The towering Cordillera is, after all, the only cradle of ancient civilizations where tourists must worry about heart seizures in the rarefied air, and visitors regularly experience altitude sickness due to anoxia. If an eminent empire had once flourished atop the Himalayas, then Tahuantinsuyu could be studied in



1, 2 (Left) The growth of the Inca empire. Dates for the Inca rulers are the subject of scholarly debate, and are given here as a general guide only. (Right) The Inca road network.

comparative perspective and might seem less alien. Yet, this is not the case, and many aspects of Andean civilization are unprecedented, and thus unique.

Because of these factors we must first understand the geography of Tahuantinsuyu and the nature of Inca rule before turning to the prehistoric record to examine how this way of life and government evolved. An understanding of Inca society and statecraft will serve as a guide for interpreting the archaeological data. However, after reviewing the Inca as an interpretative model, I will turn to the earliest inhabitants of the Andes and trace the evolution of native society and statecraft forward in time to its culmination on the eve of Spanish conquest.

## The Inca

It is important to note that the term 'Inca' refers only to a small group of kindred, less than 40,000 individuals, who built a great Andean state by force of arms, and who ruled as the realm's governing nobility. The head of this royal family was the head of state, and at the height of the empire his dominion extended over ten million people or more. These individuals were Inca *subjects*, but they were *not* Incas because this was a closed ethnic body.

The Inca empire incorporated multitudes of polities, chiefdoms, and tribes that the Spanish loosely referred to as *señorios* and *parcialidades*. Major mountain chains are notorious refuges for divergent types of plants, animals, and people. The many ethnic groups sheltered in these topographic pockets are often not at peace either among themselves or with the greater political order. The rugged Andean Cordillera housed a myriad large and small populations with distinct ethnic identities and strong separatist tendencies. This rich diversity played both for and against empire-building. Ethnic separatism made conquest relatively easy, but consolidation extremely difficult. Small competing polities were played one against another and conquered piecemeal or coerced into allegiance with Tahuantinsuyu. But to integrate these hostile groups into a national whole under a *Pax Incaica* was the single greatest task confronting Cuzco's rulers.

To govern this multitude Inca organizers amalgamated different peoples and polities into larger administrative units. This still left Tahuantinsuyu with more than 80 political provinces, each administratively distinct if not ethnically heterogeneous. Linguistic variance was formidable and incompatible with centralized administration. An official tongue was therefore imposed – *Runa Simi*, a version of Quechua – as the lingua franca and medium of governmental communication. Communication and contact with the provinces was strengthened by a vast all-weather highway system. Major thoroughfares and trunk lines covered some 30,000 to 40,000 km, and comprised among the best engineered roadways up to the advent of the automobile.

Other integrative policies included relocating entire communities. Called *mitamaqs*, communities from loyal provinces were resettled in new or hostile territories and subversive villages were moved to consolidated regions. At a higher social level, the offspring of conquered rulers were brought to Cuzco to be educated in Inca ways before returning to their homelands to assume the reins of government.

The formidable task of integrating the New World's largest, most diverse empire was disrupted by European contact. Tahuantinsuyu had not submerged ethnic and political opposition, nor matured into a fully monolithic state by the time Wayna Capac, the last Pre-Hispanic emperor died. Insurrections continued during his rule and revolt became rampant upon his demise. When Wayna Capac became the head of state much of Tahuantinsuyu was controlled by the estates of his predecessors. The greatest potential for his own betterment lay with imperial expansion in the north. The monarch therefore took the best of the Inca officer corps and the empire's elite legions, and spent almost all his reign campaigning in Ecuador, where he consolidated a major power base at Tumi Bamba. Near the end of his reign there are suggestions that Wayna Capac was planning to create a second imperial capital at Tumi Bamba, a move not welcomed by the Cuzco nobility. The plan might well have succeeded were it not for the emperor's sudden death in 1526. In many ways the death of Wayna Capac marks the onset of the conquest of Tahuantinsuyu, although almost a decade passed before Pizarro arrived.

## The conquest

How could Pizarro's small fighting force of only 260 Spanish mercenaries – 62 horsemen and 198 foot soldiers – topple what in 1532 was potentially the largest nation in the world? This extraordinary event was largely due to the fact that at the time Wayna Capac died so did most of his subjects. Medical historians leave little doubt that Old World infectious diseases, particularly smallpox, worked decisively to Castilian advantage in the conquest of Latin America by swiftly eradicating millions of opponents and occasioning social upheaval in the wake of demographic devastation. The first New World incidence of smallpox was implanted on the Mexican mainland in 1520. It spread further and faster than did the Castilian explorers. Within five years the natives of Panama were largely gone and once across the isthmus there were no barriers to inhibit its southward progress through the Andes and the continent in general, creating the first great New World pandemic. It was the single most severe and far-reaching loss of life that ever occurred in the Americas. Among unvaccinated groups case mortality is about 30 per cent. Because the New World peoples lacked immunity, mortality estimates are as high as two-thirds and more of the population.

The impact on Tahuantinsuyu was devastating. Wayna Capac was suddenly struck down, as was his heir apparent, and many of the governing élite in Tumi Bamba and Cuzco. The tumultuous consequences must have been broadly akin to the upheavals that racked Europe in the aftermath of the Black Death. Demographic collapse ushered in both a power vacuum and a widespread loss of confidence in the established order. Insurrection spread to many quarters of Tahuantinsuyu, and a violent civil war broke out, pitting remnants of the established Cuzco nobility, under one claimant son Huascarán, against the survivors of the Tumi Bamba court led by Atahualpa, one of the dead emperor's many other sons. The war raged on for more than half a decade.

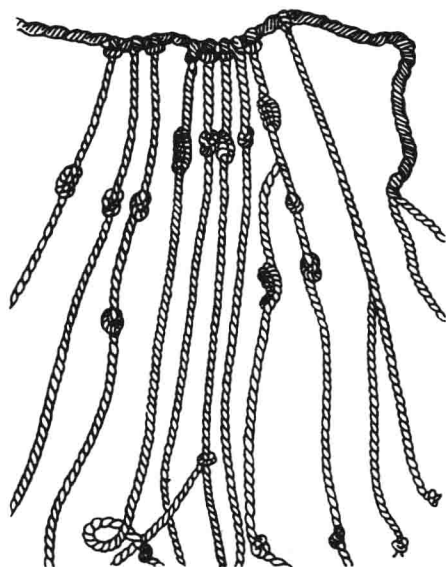
On the eve of the Spanish arrival civil hostilities had only drawn to a partial close. Huascarán had been captured, and Atahualpa was marching south through the mountains in slow and stately procession with much of his court and thousands of troops to take possession of Cuzco. Landing on the desert coast, Pizarro learned of Atahualpa's general itinerary and without opposition moved the small Spanish expeditionary force up the Cordillera and into the highland town of Cajamarca. Atahualpa accepted a treacherous offer to go unarmed and without troops to meet the alien interlopers who kidnapped, ransomed and killed the king. This reignited the Tumi Bamba–Cuzco civil conflict, and aligned Pizarro with the latter faction, who then provided the Spanish with auxiliary troops and welcomed their presumed liberators into the capital. Initiated by disease and concluded with deceit, the conquest of Tahuantinsuyu was largely accomplished without major battles. Violent opposition and fierce battles did ensue. However, Atahualpa's ransom and the sack of Inti's golden city produced such immediate wealth that well-armed Castilian reinforcements arrived in great numbers, and Pizarro's concerns shifted from conquest to consolidation.

## The historical record

Demographic devastation by disease, protracted civil war, and Castilian conquest pose problems for understanding what Tahuantinsuyu may have been like in a pristine state. Record-keeping is essential to all empires, and Inca lords kept a vast body of information – ranging from census and tax data to imperial history – recorded upon *quipu*. Deriving its name from the word ‘knot’ (*Khipu*), a *quipu* consisted of a length of cord held horizontally and from which numerous other yarns of various colors were vertically suspended. Each of these secondary members, in turn, supported a descending hierarchy of dependent colored strings. Different numerical data were entered by different types of knots, and other information was encoded by cord length, color, and hierarchical position. Unfortunately, in the wake of foreign conquest the entire record keeping system disintegrated as rapidly as the royal court that had supported it.

Neither Pizarro nor those under his command were concerned with recording current events, or the achievements of their native adversaries. Indeed, most of the mercenaries were illiterate, and with few members of the initial expeditionary force leaving memoirs there is woefully little information about the Castilian side of the conquest, and even less from the Inca perspective. One insightful account from a native point of view was written by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, who illustrated his observations with hundreds of charming drawings. Yet he wrote long after the fall of the Inca. Almost all records about Tahuantinsuyu were written well after the conquest and extracted from Indian witnesses who were not unbiased by their circumstances. Arriving with troop reinforcements two decades after the death of Atahualpa, Pedro Cieza de León was one of the first chroniclers sympathetic to the natives. Yet even his detailed account of Tahuantinsuyu must be regarded as an historical reconstruction, and all later writings by other authors are of similar nature. These early accounts about the Inca contain a great deal of fundamental information, but the sources are often contradictory and must be assessed with care. For centuries scholars have taken the early chronicles to be relatively realistic and historically accurate. However, a recent school of analysis sees the accounts as rather idealized expressions of Inca values and norms shaped by how the surviving lords of Cuzco and other native informants wished to have the nature and history of Tahuantinsuyu portrayed to their alien conquerors. No doubt there is a mixture of fact and fiction.

I believe that what colonial sources reported about matters such as native organization and statecraft is substantially more reliable than what is reported about Inca history. Historical information about Tahuantinsuyu suffers from the problem that Andean people conceived of time as cyclical. This was little understood by the Spanish, who framed what the Inca said about history in lineal time. There has been little awareness of this problem and Inca historical lore has traditionally been accepted at face value. This viewpoint has had a pervasive and lasting impact on Western perceptions of Andean civilization,



3 Part of a quipu recording device of cord and string.



4 Guamán Poma's sketch of an imperial clerk with a quipu record made of cord and string.

and on the development of Andean archaeology. For example conquerors often rationalize their acts both to themselves and to their new subjects. For the lords of Cuzco the rationalization process came to include a special creation myth. Inti, the essence of the Sun, was declared the progenitor and spiritual father of the Inca. By this doctrine, the Inca were Inti's chosen 'children of the sun', and the emperor, a demigod, was his executor on earth. From Inti came divine edicts for his children to transform Cuzco into the imperial navel of the universe and to conquer the world as its empire. Dogma held that before Tahuantinsuyu there was only savagery and barbarism, while in the wake of Cuzco's holy wars came civilization and enlightenment. Two remarkably able emperors, Pachacuti and his son Topa Inca, reputedly spread this enlightenment and conquered more than three quarters of Tahuantinsuyu. The historical message was simple: civilization originated at Cuzco and then spread over the Cordillera as a vast horizon of enlightenment within a span of two generations. This is the basis for what may be termed the *origin center* → *civilization horizon* concept by which Western society has long interpreted the Andean past.

The oral traditions behind this concept reach back several centuries before the coming of the *conquistadores*, to times when the Cuzco or Huantanay Valley housed a number of small peasant populations who were hostile to one another. These rude conditions purportedly typified the universe in general following its relatively recent creation. Called Viracocha, the Creator had caused the sun to emerge from the waters of Lake Titicaca. He then went to the ancient lakeside metropolis of Tiwanaku, which in a former time had been inhabited by a race of giants. Here he gathered primordial clay and modeled animals and people. On the human models Viracocha painted the different clothes and distinct costumes that would distinguish the many different ethnicities of the



Andes, and each group was instructed in its different language and customs. The creator ordered the people to descend deep into the earth and mountains and then to emerge separately from caves, springs, lakes and hills in different homelands.

In some stories the founder of the Inca royal family, Manco Capac, along with three brothers and four sisters, emerged from Lake Titicaca, while in other versions they emerged from a cave southeast of the Río Huantanay. Gathering a small following, the siblings set off in search of a place with rich soils to settle. A long and adventurous journey sees several of the brothers turned to stone, entombed in mountains, and the like. Eventually, Manco Capac and his sister, Mama Oqlyo (his bride and wife) arrived near the spot where the Río Tullamayo joins the Huantanay. Here the founder plunged a golden staff into the soil to test it. Finding it auspicious, they drove away the local inhabitants and established a settlement at the locality that would become the Coricancha. After founding Cuzco and establishing a family, Manco Capac turned to stone. This ancestral stone was one of the Incas' most sacred objects or *huacas*.

By official accounts Cuzco remained a simple village through the reign of its eighth headman, Viracocha Inca. Late in life, after rule had been passed to his chosen heir, Inca Urcon, a powerful chiefdom from the northwest, the Chanca, amassed to attack Cuzco. The threat was so great that Viracocha and his heir fled the town and took refuge in a distant fort. However, a once troublesome royal son, Yupanqui, some capable generals and various settlers refused to desert their homes. Defenses were hurriedly organized under Yupanqui's command and reinforcements from neighborhood groups secured. When the more numerous Chanca pressed their attack and tried to take Cuzco by storm, they were heroically resisted. In the heat of the great battle, just when it appeared defenses might give way, Yupanqui cried out that the very stones in the fields were turning to armed men to repel the attackers. Cuzco's forces rallied and the Chanca were bloodily repulsed. The thankful commander immediately had the field stones collected and distributed among the city's shrines which they had helped to save.

The victorious Yupanqui, Cuzco's savior, then turned his attention to practical matters and usurped the throne. Although his father was allowed to live out the rest of his life in disgrace, his brother Inca Urcon's name was stricken from the dynastic king lists. I suspect that the usurper – who assumed the imperial title of Pachacuti or 'Earthshaker' – recast far more Inca history than simply striking his brother's name and memory from the royal record. This is because his reign marks a sudden, major change in Inca official history. After having rallied Cuzco's forces behind the banners of defense, Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui unfurled the banners of offense for a long series of aggressive foreign wars. He united the inhabitants of the Huantanay Valley and made local Quechua-speakers honorary Inca citizens, and then turned abroad to the great Titicaca Basin, largest demographic center in the Andean uplands. Credited with subjugating the Lupaqa, Colla, and other kingdoms around Lake

Titicaca, the great defender of Cuzco had amassed a tremendous power base and became concerned with developing institutions of statecraft that would consolidate Inca gains. He therefore returned to Cuzco, relinquishing the imperial legions to his son, Topa Inca. While Topa pursued a victorious career, Pachacuti invented statecraft and institutions such as the national taxation system, the highway and communication system, and the state's extensive warehousing system.

Inti, the Sun God, had appeared to Pachacuti in a vision when he was a young man and provided inspiration for the great deeds that had to be accomplished for humanity's betterment. In appreciation the emperor elevated the cult of the sun to that of Cuzco's patron god and commissioned construction of the marvelous Coricancha. Cuzco had been little more than a humble village until the defeat of the Chanca. Pachacuti tore down the old settlement and designed a new one befitting Cuzco's status as the navel of the civilized universe. By some accounts streets and buildings were laid out so that the new celestial city looked, in outline, like a vast puma. At his death in 1471 the deeds and accomplishments of Pachacuti were so numerous and far-reaching that he had literally transformed the Inca realm from the Creator, Viracocha's, humble and somewhat unfinished handiwork, to that of Inti's divinely commissioned center of the civilized universe.

*Plate 15*

Although not the reputed inventor of statecraft that his father was, Topa Inca was by official accounts the Alexander the Great of the continent. From the time of first assuming command of the army to the end of his reign one year after Columbus' discovery of the Caribbean, this gifted tactician expanded the imperial frontiers along more than 4,000 km of the Cordillera, from central Ecuador to central Chile. Subsequently, Wayna Capac's reign was one of consolidation, with relatively modest imperial expansion into the tropical frontiers of Tahuantinsuyu before the chaos of the first smallpox pandemic and the ensuing civil war.

This brief synopsis of Inca historical lore does injustice to its rich but often contradictory detail. It does, however, capture two basic tenets of imperial propaganda: first, that civilization did not exist before the Incas; second, that it was invented at Cuzco and spread from there with remarkable rapidity to the rest of the Cordillera. The first tenet denied any time-depth to Andean development, and it took almost four centuries for Europeans to discover this to be in error. The second tenet limited development of civilization to a single ancient city serving as the fountainhead for invention and diffusion, and it has taken even longer to assess the legitimacy of this notion.

It did not befit the Incas' self image to admit that powerful states had contested Cuzco's rule, or that great civilizations had thrived long before the rise of Tahuantinsuyu. Yet, there were a few great cities in their vast realm that the masters of the Inca realm did not claim. Ultimately each would rise like an archaeological phoenix to challenge the claims of Cuzco. One was the venerable monument of Tiwanaku (Tiahuanaco) on the shores of Lake Titicaca. Renowned for towering stelae in human form, the site figured as a primordial

*Plates 79–83*



center, built and inhabited long ago by giants whom Viracocha had turned to stone before he created people. Cieza de León visited the site and wrote that the Inca had found it in ruins and regarded it with great reverence.

Plate 6

Pachacamac was another great city that the Inca could not claim. Located near the sea at the mouth of the Río Lurin, south of Lima, it was the home of a widely sought oracle with a powerful cult following. Drawing pilgrims and devotees from all quarters of the Cordillera, Pachacamac was the most revered city in the Andes. Probably something of a thorn in the imperial side, the Inca told Pizarro that the city contained immense riches, whereupon the *conquistador* dispatched his brother and a contingent of troops to sack the sacred center. Although great wealth was not found one officer did provide a short eyewitness account of finding and destroying the idol which was the oracle.

Plate 99

Finally, the Inca admitted to conquering the sprawling metropolis of Chan Chan at the mouth of the Río Moche on the northern coastal desert. This was the capital of Chimor, the second largest New World empire, whose frontiers were recorded by Spanish ethnohistorical sources. Spanning 1,000 km and encompassing two-thirds of the irrigated Andean coastlands, Chimor reached from southern Ecuador to just north of Pachacamac. It was the largest nation to contest Tahuantinsuyu and a protracted struggle was won by the Incas several generations before Pizarro's arrival. The official history of Cuzco made but passing mention of their greatest adversary, but survivors of the old empire made the Spanish aware that it had not been of Inca origin.

### The archaeological record

Just as the historical accounts of Tahuantinsuyu are not without prejudice, the archaeological record did not remain unbiased by the Spanish arrival. The conquering forces quickly learned that great stores of precious metal existed in the ground. Much was purely geological in context, but the tombs of past lords and nobles also contained enormous stores of gold and silver. Within a generation of the conquest, looting operations grew so large and financially rewarding that they became legally synonymous with mining. Ancient monuments were divided into claim areas with titles registered in notarial archives. Title holders established chartered corporations to mobilize massive work forces and systematically quarry ruins. As with geological mines, the Castilian king was entitled to a 20 per cent tax on all wealth extracted from the ground. Within a short span the Crown established a royal smelter in the Moche Valley, not because of any local geological wealth but because the royal mausoleums of Chan Chan had been discovered and looting of the nearby Pyramid of the Sun was underway. By rendering the plundered treasures into bullion, overseers of the Crown foundry ensured collection of the royal tax.

From these lucrative beginnings commercial exploitation of antiquities has remained a large-scale business, and the Andean Cordillera is probably the most intensively looted ancient center of civilization in the world. Early in the