

1 A Personal Odyssey

[It has been] argued that “native” histories are mentally enigmatic to the Western observer because they respond to a cultural logic that is impenetrable to Western modes of thought.

— Neil L. Whitehead

The exploration of “the other” has been a fascination and a challenge to scholars and other curious beings for centuries. This is certainly true of Western observers on the subject of the Incas and other Andean peoples since first contact. The result of both casual and intimate association has been a corpus of firsthand descriptions, what I call the classical chronicles, that inform us that the Incas had built a huge empire. At its largest the empire extended over territory that is now defined as southern Colombia; highland and coastal Ecuador and Peru; highland Bolivia; northwestern Argentina; and about half of Chile. Travel and communication throughout this landmass was facilitated by an intricate system of linked roads that went north and south in the mountains and along the coast, tied together by east-west trails through the river valleys. Messengers (*chasquis*) ran relay style along these highways, carrying messages and fresh fish, stopping at way stations to pass on their responsibility to another, who sprinted on to the next stop, and so forth. The Inca rulers had urban complexes built, we are told, at various spots throughout the empire: at Cuzco, considered the capital of their jurisdiction; at Huánuco Viejo; Incahuasi; Tomebamba; and elsewhere, places that the native chronicler Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala identified as many Cuzcos. But most of the population of this multiethnic empire were peasants, who cultivated the land to produce maize, potatoes, maca, and other vegetables and fruit, and shepherded large numbers of llamas and alpacas. They also, as tribute, lent their labor to build the roads, bridges, storehouses, ceremonial centers, and irrigation canals and agricultural terraces that directly benefited themselves or others like them. Smaller numbers served as fishermen and skilled artisans and specialists. This was an organized, rationalized realm with a bureaucracy. Officials had jurisdiction over units of population, categorized according to a decimal system, beginning with units of forty thousand households and extending down to as few as five.¹

These early eyewitness descriptions include less information about native religion, initially, because the Spanish, confident that the Christian god had given them victory against the Moors on the Iberian peninsula and opened the Americas to them to continue to spread their faith, dismissed the Andeans as pagans and infidels whose gods were fictitious, impotent inventions and, therefore, of little importance. But short or fragmentary references to ritual, polytheism, ancestor worship, and the attendant human and other animal and plant sacrifices, even in the earliest documents, provide sound evidence that the Andean people were profoundly spiritual beings.

Given that these chroniclers rarely recorded the native voice in the first decades after the invasion and first encounters, the Spanish depictions and view became predominant. They established what amounted to a near monopoly on the selection, summation, and transmittal of information. So their view, in large part, became the basis for our views. Scholars have read, analyzed, and synthesized these mostly Spanish accounts to write myriad interpretations of various aspects of Andean civilization. William Prescott used them in the nineteenth century to produce a sweeping, aggressive history of the Incas. In the twentieth century, Heinrich Cunow used the same sources to describe this civilization, in whole or in part, as a socialist paradise where the needs of all were met in a communal setting. Karl Wittfogel thought the Andean people were a good example of an oriental despotism. More recently, several authors described the Andean realm in Marxist terms.²

During the last several decades, other approaches to the study of the Incas have dominated scholarly endeavors. Basing his writings on a detailed analysis and mostly literal interpretation of his sources, the archaeologist John Rowe developed what has been labeled a historicist approach in some classic articles that are often cited and are only now being, in part, revised. The anthropologist John V. Murra's political economy approach, which emphasized verticality, reciprocity, and redistribution, added new insights to sometimes ambiguous, contradictory, and hard-to-understand economic data. Finally, R. Tom Zuidema's structural interpretations, beginning with the shrine system (*ceque*) near the purported Inca capital, have drawn attention to rituals and belief systems. The publication and use of more localized notarial and administrative and judicial records—pioneered by Waldemar Espinoza Soriano, María Rostworowski, John V. Murra, Franklin Pease, and Noble David Cook—moved studies down to a more personal level, resulting in a sometimes daily and more intimate glimpse of an active population. Such work showed the often large gap between imperial generalization and local, practical, semiautonomous reality.³

But the secular focus continued to predominate, with a few recent exceptions, such as the notable essays on Andean religion of Luis Millones; subsequent publications by historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists such

as Guillermo Cock Carrasco, Mary Doyle, Lorenzo Huertas, Liliana Regalado de Hurtado, Arthur Demarest, and Geoffrey Conrad; and more recently, by Peter Gose and Kenneth Mills. Many of these, to a lesser or greater extent, relied on the records of idolatry that are most abundant for the seventeenth century. It was after 1600 that the viceregal ecclesiastical establishment became aware that the native conversion to Catholicism was superficial and that elements of local cults, most dedicated to the ancestors, had survived hidden from the eyes of or with the tacit consent of Spanish authorities. Alarmed at this chilling realization, clerical judges traveled to distant settlements to survey these survivals and look underneath the thin veneer of Christianity in an effort to “know thine enemy.” These tours of extirpation became one of the first systematic efforts to eliminate Andean religions. The investigators who used these local documents deepened our understanding of Andean belief systems that had eluded or been neglected by earlier generations.⁴

In this process of writing and rewriting Andean history, scholars began to recognize that each manuscript has a perspective and conscious or unconscious objectives. Even native sources, such as those written by the Spanish-schooled Guamán Poma de Ayala and the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, must be read with caution and questioned, for peculiar to each are its own filters, biases, and goals. Gary Urton’s work on Pacaritanbo (also Pacariqtambo or Pacarictambo) provides a good, accessible example at a more localized level of how to decode, appraise, and evaluate a document to better ascertain the reliability of the information it contains. Karen Powers’s ingenious work on indigenous wills also comes to mind. These scholars comprehended that words cannot be taken literally, uncritically, and out of context. Meanings change over time; the same words had other connotations in other temporal and geographic settings. For instance, the field moved from thinking that the *encomienda* had a territorial dimension to its rightful definition of the labor obligations of a given social group; and that “tribute” in the pre-Hispanic Andes was not assessed as quantities of goods as it was under the Nahuatl-speaking Mexicas, but instead that it was measured in terms of labor service. Likewise, a structure identified as a “fortress” by sixteenth-century Spanish observers was not necessarily strictly defensive, but instead a temple and sacred precinct within sometimes labyrinthine protective walls. In other words, the world portrayed by the Spanish and Hispanicized native writers in early colonial times is not necessarily and in all aspects what their words lead us to imagine it was today.⁵

Yet, for all the advances, many still cling to an image of an empire ruled by a king who himself had a clear order in a dynastic sequence; where primogeniture was indicated and normative, if not always the followed preference in choosing an heir; where the empire was demarcated and its far-flung corners were well connected through a series of admirably engineered roads and bridges; where an elaborate and ubiquitous bureaucracy

controlled every “province”; where every person and every tribute-produced carrying cloth and tunic were counted and accounted for; and where centralization was omnipresent and inescapable. In sum, this is what we think we know about the Incas.⁶

I write “think we know” because the records contain other problematic words, inexplicable phrases, contradictions, inconsistencies, and unexpected silences and gaps that lead me to think that we still have much to learn about native society as it existed at the time of or shortly after contact with the Europeans. For example, in the few instances where the native voice is recorded, I found phrases or statements that were intriguingly incomprehensible and obtuse at first. I happened upon two such statements researching my last book. Both pointed in the same direction. They taught me to slow down, to ponder, to imagine, to empathize, and to question the sources, my own assumptions, and the meanings of words, whose conventional, present definitions did not fit the context and circumstances in which they were used. They sent me into the archives to read and reconsider the records of idolatry. These detailed reports of religious persecution by sometimes overzealous extirpators charged first with uncovering the secret religious practices of the provincial natives, and second, with converting the practitioners, contained information on the cosmology or belief system of peasants and the organization and practice of ancestor worship, including accounts of divination and other esoteric and occult rituals. The continuities in thought and deed, between the state theater that I read about in the chronicles and the ceremonies that were still practiced among the distant rural peoples in the late sixteenth and early and mid-seventeenth centuries, helped me comprehend the words and phrases that, at first, had been beyond my understanding. In other instances, I did not find the documentation to support what I assumed to have occurred. These frustrations and appraisals pried open my own window to the past and helped me see through the filters of the Spanish and Hispanicized native writers and (more important) my own. Opening was slow and gradual; the vision was fuzzy at first. The outlines became progressively less blurry as multiple documents were found; as the various possible definitions of words were considered; and as words were compared to behavior to better envision context. I finally realized that we, in part, were the distortionists.⁷

It is a theoretical near impossibility to totally penetrate the mind of another, especially of a person or people brought up in a different tradition. The question is how to understand the other’s worldview from the outside and, then, how to translate that belief system and culture into terms that can be understood by a Western audience of one’s peers. How to bridge the gap between our own and native concepts is also a challenge of modern ethnographic work. The same decentering task faces the ethnographic historian.

But the task of historical anthropology is even harder than that of ethnography because scholars must rely on the reports of Europeans (or the Europeanized) who were not consciously attempting to be anthropologists but were nonetheless often trying to explain to their colleagues and superiors the native situation for their own purposes. Moreover, we cannot go back and rephrase and decenter questions to comprehend better original meanings and intent, to penetrate the sometimes hastily stated colloquialisms or idioms that are replete with assumptions about basic local lore. Therefore, investigators must excavate mentally through various layers of meanings. They must unpack the historical records that usually contain the words of Lima or provincial urban lawyers, court-appointed translators (*lenguas*), or officials (such as the protector of Indians), who reframe what native informants said that they thought, saw, heard, or experienced. This usually implies the translation of native words from the original languages, such as Quechua, Aymara, Mochic (or Yunga), or any of the others that were spoken in the Andes, into Spanish. We scholars, then, translate them again sometimes into English, Portuguese, German, French, Japanese, Polish, and other languages. Translations are never totally equivalent. Because the sense of words changes over time, the Spanish words used by the classic chroniclers and the translators of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries must be kept in historical context to understand their referents. Translating meaning between two cultures also involves conveying one conceptualization into terms and categories that are often foreign to the original.

Imprecision also hinders understanding. As will be shown in Chapter 2, the Spanish often used words like *province* without ever establishing a generic and universally accepted definition or telling us to what they precisely referred. They used a word like *tierra*, literally understood as “land,” when they specifically referred to people or persons.⁸ Complicating things, too, were the terms native Andeans used to refer to phenomena outside their everyday experience. Like the Nahuatl speakers of central Mexico, who called Hernando Cortés’s boats “towers” or “houses,” and horses “deer,” and who also equated the Spanish to gods because their use of muskets and cannons made them think that the Spanish controlled thunder and lightning, the Andeans fit occurrences into their own cultural context as best they could. Edmundo Guillén Guillén amassed the early testimonials of Andeans showing that they called the Spanish *viracochas* after an all-powerful creator god.⁹ Indigenous informants elsewhere talked about planted fields (*chacras*). The Spanish translated the word sometimes as “lands,” sometimes as “properties,” not comprehending that the natives distinguished between planted land and unplanted land, and that unplanted land was not a *chacra*. This gave rise to debates over private property that, in the Andes, was not entirely equivalent to the Western institution before the Spanish incursion. The prob-

lem becomes one of how, if one can somehow understand them, a native mind-set and culture can be described accurately so that a Westerner can comprehend them without distortion and loss of the essence of that understanding. The challenge is to make sense of the other's world without deforming it or depicting it as a pale reflection of one's own culture.¹⁰

Having worked in the northern provinces of Peru for most of my professional life, dealing with regional aspects of the local political economy and social structure—and, of late, particularly the native chiefs (*curacas*, *caciques*) and their people—I was immediately struck with the bravura and obviously exaggerated stories of the Incas portrayed in some of the chronicles, when I had the opportunity to revisit them in recent years. The vision transmitted in many of the early Spanish or Hispanicized native accounts was, it soon became clear, often a largely Europeanized, sanitized, and simplified one. Research into the authors' lives, travels, professions, the other experiences, and the motivations behind their writings by me and others taught me to be wary of their class biases and skeptical (sometimes in the extreme) of their blanket statements. Many early reports I found to be Cuzco- and Inca-centric, just like later histories of the colonial and republican eras tended to be Lima- and elite-centered. Moreover, as research into a chief and his people, or chieftainships (*curacazgos*, *cacicazgos*), brought me inevitably into the study of the relationship between local polities and the imperial state, I realized just how the Spanish cultural predilections and my own had prevented us from "seeing," just how much our upbringing and learning determined how we reconstructed the past, and just how many scholars tended to disregard native voices, even when we encountered them.¹¹

A major breakthrough in my thinking occurred soon after the Quincentenary, the five-hundredth anniversary of Columbus's "discovery" of the so-called New World, when a statement in a 1990 article by Franklin Pease made me recall a footnote in a book by Raul Porras Barrenechea. Both authors, the acknowledged experts for their time on the Incas and Peruvian history in general, stated and then dismissed as obviously wrong the incontrovertible fact that in the earliest accounts and reports from the "front(ier)" between Pizarro's moving expeditionary force and the natives of the west coast and highlands of South America, the individual rulers were called "the Cuzco." That statement, so casually and confidently disregarded, got stuck somewhere in my subconscious. I pondered that enigma throughout the next few years, until one day, when I was about to write the second chapter of another, earlier version of this book and had just turned on my microfilm reader to read the "last" manuscript before finishing my analysis, the statement resurfaced from the depths of my memory and seriously disrupted my concentration. So after a few hours, I turned off the reader and began to write and diagram, asking myself how the first accounts could all be so wrong.

After reading and rereading, checking and rechecking, discussing and debating with anyone knowledgeable enough to have expressed an interest in the topic at one time or another, I got to a point where I had to suppose that the informants and translators were right. If they were correct, what would the fact that the Cuzco was a person tell us about the organization of the empire and the empire itself? Where would the pursuit of the answer to that question lead me? It was a very frightening prospect.¹²

This conundrum and the results of ten intense months of daily and persistent research led me into the depths and labyrinths of library stacks to areas most have rarely seen or thought about; into other people's lives as I pestered them for bibliography on other examples in other times and places of what I was "seeing" and thinking; and into serious but collegial and usually congenial, intellectual confrontations with other scholars and friends. They told me that the archival and manuscript paths I was following would surely lead nowhere. When I began to deconstruct the old and fashion a different vision, they told me that I was wrong, so challenging were my then tentative assertions and overstatements about what I was finding and where the path was leading. They said that if I persisted and published my vision, I would be dismissed, as Pizarro's young interpreters were by Pease and Porras Barrenechea. But I proceeded and, finally convinced of the validity of my inquiry, though fearful of reaction, sent a draft to select colleagues and friends.

This is the story of the second chapter of this book, where I argue that the person of "el Cuzco" was indeed the center or navel of the Inca world. The phrase "el Cuzco" did not solely refer to a place and capital, as usually portrayed in the classical literature. I argue that the Incas had a living center, the person of the Inca or king or emperor himself, who as the navel of the universe—in both the physical and symbolic senses—connected his living subjects to his dead ancestors and ultimately to the sun and moon. His rhetoric and behavior aimed at establishing kinship ties that ideally would connect all subjects to him and his divine lineage and thus to each other.

In Part 2, Chapters 3 and 4, I rethink the way the natives thought their world worked, their cosmology or worldview, the ideological bases of legitimacy and succession of the Incas and curacas, respectively, and the interaction between these two levels of authority.¹³ I argue that both the Inca ruler and local ethnic authorities were nexuses between the common folk and the gods and that the ritual and magic, described by the Spanish as infidelities, were some of the many ways of accessing the future and unknown and of legitimizing power. In doing so, I reconfirm Sabine MacCormack's finding that the Inca state-level cult disappeared quickly after 1532. What resisted and survived into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was not the

master imperial tradition but the ancestor worship, the small or folk tradition, of the provincial peoples.¹⁴

In Part 3, the ritual and symbolic manifestations of this cosmology and organization are described briefly. Such ritual and public demonstrations and portrayals of the past were ways of immortalizing the leader heroes and great men of the times and of inculcating values of this multiethnic and often conflict-ridden society.

Finally, having argued that cosmology, as a unifying ideology, was an invented and inherited explanation of how and why the universe worked as it did, I expand on the implications of the same. I focus on the idea of community and what it was and what it became. Related to that, I write about identity and how multifaceted, shifting, even fickle, it must have been and how conversion to Catholicism eroded the Andeans' sense of selves. The Incas' grand imperial design was fragile; its degree of centralization was overstated; and the *pax incaica* was a moving and illusive goal, just the wishful memory of a remnant of a once-dominant native elite. In the last chapter, I present some of the lessons that I learned about history and methodology and reflect on the historiography of the topic, including my own.

In short, mine is a contribution in a long line of interpretations, extending from the past into the future. I am not writing a history of the Inca rulers per se. I do not consider the issues and controversies of whether or not there were really more than one Pachacuti or how many Inca kings really ruled. I am more interested in understanding the paradigm, the big picture, and particularly the relationship between cosmology—which I like to think of as software for analyzing and interpreting the world and events—and legitimacy. It is toward a more indigenous vision of the Inca polity, “a less colonized view of colonial times,” to quote Gustavo Verdesio, that I strive. This work is an effort to understand the general forms and rationales of peoples at the provincial and imperial levels and their interactions, to reconstruct the world and worldview of persons who have been denied the power of autodescription by heretofore authoritative and, for too long, nearly unassailable sources. Natives for too long had been silenced by the need to communicate in a language that was not their own, with alien concepts and unfamiliar categories. They had no option but to utilize Spanish institutions to defend themselves and their way of life. In reinterpreting the texts, I attempt to shift the paradigm, to decenter the focus from a fixed place to a line of beings and their attempts to forge lasting ties to a disparate number of groups of people with their own gods and identities. Conrad and Demarest systematize the conclusions of archaeologists studying the material record and Andean memories as conveyed by the chroniclers and others to argue that the Incas expanded to conquer land and other resources. They attribute the expansion

to a need to amass material wealth by each ruler as a basis for establishing his immortality. I argue here (as I have previously), in contrast, that the Incas expanded to conquer people and that labor was the commodity or resource of primary value. The native belief system masked this attempt and made it palatable to the people from whom the leaders extracted the service by which an individual ruler's wealth was reckoned.¹⁵

In exploring these themes, I have had to shed multiple layers of my own culturally imposed ways of thinking and innumerable paradigms, values, and assumptions. In some ways, I think the "Spanish," only then being constructed, were closer to an understanding of certain aspects of the native Andean organization than we are. They, after all, imported institutions, such as the *encomienda*, which was essentially a grant of the power of people and used in a way analogous to the decimal system of the Incas to organize Andean populations. The Spanish did not set off immediately to survey and place boundary markers. For them, the body politic was not synonymous with a delimited country; the idea of an Andean state—or a Spanish state, for that matter—as a unified nation did not yet exist in the sixteenth century. Loyalties were personal. Clientelism defined how society worked. The monarch united the various "kingdoms." Iberians, too, came from a European society where the king and queen had no fixed capital (until the middle of the sixteenth century, 1561, to be exact). A peripatetic, itinerant court was not unusual. And, finally, theirs was a society in which church and state, the religious and secular powers, were tightly enmeshed and interdependent. We are the ones who think of a fixed capital when we read about the place Francisco Pizarro designated as the city of "the Cuzco" in March 1534.¹⁶

Given the sociocultural, economic, and physical or geographic distance between the sixteenth-century Andeans and us, and my own culturally mediated views, I cannot pretend to have gotten my interpretation right in all respects. Look upon these pages then as an initial attempt to approximate better the past of these Andean people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This is a start, a jumping-off point for further research, and an opportunity for others to look closer, to reexamine, and to refine. This history, however, consciously manipulates the data at hand to make this one part of Andean history comprehensible and useful to people like me. Never did I imagine that a serious inquiry into the lives and understandings of the "other" was also a deep inquiry into myself.