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CHAPTER 1

In Search of the Past

FACT AND FABLE

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writing on the Incas was mainly the preserve of Spanish chroniclers. In the absence of abundant data in the native Quechua, much of our knowledge of the Inca past derives from these texts; though their opinions may differ, they all tend to describe native society from a Spanish viewpoint.

As early as the eighteenth century, reports of a boundless realm centered in the High Andes and endowed with fabulous riches began to attract the attention of a wider audience. Voltaire chose Lima as the setting of his *Alzire*, an extremely successful play. His most famous work, *Candide*, published in 1759, offered a rather idealized account of the denizens of an American El Dorado; they supposedly descended from the Incas. Jean François Marmontel's drama *Les Incas o la Destruction de Pérou*, dedicated to King Gustav III of Sweden, was published in 1777. The action, concerned with the fall of Atahualpa (aided by refugees from the kingdom of the Aztec Moctezuma!), takes place in Quito.

Whereas such works were permeated with the notion of the "noble savage" fashionable at the time, William Prescott's *Conquest of Peru*, published in the 1840s, provided a less romantic view. Methodically citing the sources then available, he related in his stately prose the story of Francisco Pizarro's encounter with the Emperor Atahualpa and all that followed.

In the early twentieth century a rather different concept came into vogue. No longer portrayed as greedy and gaudy capitalists obsessed with the urge to increase their immense hoard of gold, Incas were now cast in a new role. Certain authors depicted them as the world's first socialists, at times even describing them as communists! Such notions, as we shall see, are less acceptable to the present generation of ethnohistorians.

EARLY ACCOUNTS

That Europeans were fascinated by Peru is hardly surprising; it was surely among the most exotic of all the lands that their voyagers discovered. The Inca realm was indeed a land of total contrast, stretching two thousand miles from Ecuador to Chile. The coastal land was a stark and lifeless desert intersected by many rivers, whose oases gave sustenance to thriving polities. Wholly different from this bleak shore was the Incas' native habitat. Even the more temperate parts of this forbidding tableland that rises so abruptly from the coast stand at an altitude of nearly 9,000 feet. Though much of this altiplano is fertile, rock is more plentiful than wood, and houses were built more of stone than of timber. Beyond the Andean tableland lies a third ecological zone known as the *montaña*. Embracing the eastern slopes of the great mountain chain and matted with a carpet of lush forest, it is intersected by swiftly running rivers. Into this fetid land, so distinct from their more austere homeland, the Incas feared to tread, and their penetration was limited.

A review of the Inca achievement can hardly be undertaken without a brief résumé of the sources now available and of the problems that they present. The Spanish chroniclers' writings are rich in content but are often ambiguous and at times contradictory. Any quest for truth therefore requires rigorous scrutiny and cautious interpretation. Fortunately, contemporary archaeological research has done much to clarify some of the questions unanswered by earlier writers. Any work on the Incas becomes meaningful only if one takes the fullest account of such research, as well as of renewed studies of certain early colonial sources.

In the absence of native written documents, chroniclers were dependent on oral traditions. Moreover, much of their information derives from the elite of Inca Cuzco and therefore reflects more the state system of the capital than the administration of the Empire as a whole. In such a monolithic society one might presuppose the existence of a single official version of past events. But because of the Incas' bizarre custom of preserving the mortal remains of the previous rulers, each maintained by a vast household of highly placed descendants and retainers, alternative versions tended to survive, perpetuated by the loyal scions of these households (*panacas*). From these the chroniclers might obtain not so much eyewitness accounts as oral traditions related within a ritual context.¹

Wedin suggests that the greater part of the available data comes not from official "historians," whose contribution was limited, but from other

informants.² As a result, the chroniclers tend to offer conflicting evidence, though in certain specific instances they do more or less coincide and appear to follow a single original or official tradition.

Though the Incas did not possess a writing system in the accepted sense, they had an excellent method of compiling data: The *quipu* knotted cords constituted an elaborate means of keeping records. The *quipocamayos* who managed the system were a privileged class of highly skilled specialists. They were able to provide information, for example, on crop yields and storage capacity throughout the Empire, how many men in a given village were available for army service, or how many could work in mines. Shortly after the Conquest, they even recorded the damage done to crops and homes in places where Spanish forces had passed.³

Paradoxically, little of their data seems to have become directly available to the Spanish chroniclers. Cieza de León, among the most informative of the earlier sources, writes of the *quipocamayos*, as well as of other official "historians," yet when he recounts in various instances how he obtained his information he does not mention (except on one occasion) these specialists but rather refers to "Indians" in general, in particular to nobles.⁴ Later chroniclers also refer to conversations with *quipocamayos*, but such statements occur in documents whose material is copied largely from earlier sources. Quipus of which we still have knowledge, taken from cemeteries, unfortunately cannot now be related to the objects with which they were buried.⁵

Only one interview with *quipocamayos* survives: their declaration to Vaca de Castro. This document, however, offers rather scant information, and the years of reign and of life of the Inca rulers are given in round figures only.⁶ Had they so desired, the Incas could surely have recorded more precise dates, but they displayed little interest in chronology, however keenly sought by their European conquerors.

In addition to the *quipu* knots, a form of verbal history existed in the songs (*cantares*) sung on special occasions to celebrate the events of a ruler's reign. But when a new monarch ascended the throne, he would order that fresh ballads be composed to commemorate his own feats; earlier songs and even *quipus* were to be set aside, under threat of dire punishment. Dynastic history, far from being preserved, was periodically re-edited and even obliterated.⁷

THE CHRONICLERS

Louis Baudin divided the chroniclers into five chronological categories, starting with the earliest, who took part in the Conquest, and ending with seventeenth-century Spanish historians.⁸ However, such categories present obvious difficulties: For instance, Cieza de León, who belongs to Baudin's second category because he arrived after the Conquest, completed his work in the early 1550s, whereas Pedro Pizarro's *Relación*, which as an eyewitness account belongs to the first category, was written in 1571.

Those who took part in the Conquest do offer certain unique descriptions of Inca life and ritual. Francisco de Xerez provides a running commentary on the first meeting between Atahualpa and Francisco Pizarro and describes in some detail the ruler's house in Cajamarca. He also wrote of the great temple of Pachacamac, which he visited when it still functioned as a center of pilgrimage.⁹ Pedro Pizarro writes of the vast accumulation of treasure found in Cuzco and gives a fascinating account of the vault below the great fortress of Sacsahuaman containing four thousand bundles of gold objects.¹⁰

Chroniclers who arrived after the Conquest and who relied on native informants are hard to classify. Of their copious writings, certain are of special interest. Cieza de León reached America in 1535 and served as a soldier in Colombia; his first work, *La Crónica del Peru*, was composed between 1541 and 1550 and printed in 1553 in Seville. It was the only part of his writings to be published in his lifetime and describes his travels throughout Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. His second book, *El Señorío de los Incas*, written in about 1550, portrays Inca society and government; its great merit is that Cieza names his sources, including interviews with Inca nobles, and at times makes it clear that he is describing what he saw firsthand. His work was shortly followed by that of Juan de Betanzos, who married a sister of Atahualpa.

Among earlier writers, valuable information is also contained in the work of Damián de la Bandera, an official who was named *corregidor* of Potosí and Charcas (1557). In 1563 Hernando de Santillán adapted de la Bandera's account of Huamanga to the Empire as a whole; however, as Wedin has demonstrated, he copied certain of de la Bandera's passages word for word.¹¹

Certain other chroniclers merit special attention. Unique among these is Huaman Poma de Ayala, who wrote in the late sixteenth century. His

account contains parts written in Quechua and is enriched by sketches offering a vigorous portrayal of every aspect of Inca society. Polo de Ondegardo, a distinguished jurist, is much cited by John Murra in his important studies of social and economic problems. For Inca history and military campaigns, the two principal sources in addition to Cieza de León are Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa (1572) and Cabello de Balboa (1586); the latter spent several years in Quito and describes at length campaigns in that region.

Belonging to another century are the *Comentarios Reales* of Garcilaso de la Vega, published in Lisbon in 1609; the author was himself of Inca lineage. Though he quotes earlier chroniclers such as Cieza and Polo, his portrayal of his Inca forbears as kindly despots presiding over a vast welfare state acquired with a minimum display of force tends to be treated nowadays with circumspection. Nearly half a century later, in 1663, Padre Bernabé Cobo wrote his *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*. Using all the sources then available, in particular Polo de Ondegardo, Cobo's appraisal is in some ways more that of a historian than of a chronicler; he collected a vast amount of material in Peru as the basis for a lucid, comprehensive study that includes valuable data on natural history and family life.

In the 1960s a new dimension was added to ethnohistoric studies of the Andean past: an intensified focus on regional sources. A rich store of information was made available with the discovery in the Archivo de Indias in Seville of the report of the *visita* of Garci Díez de San Miguel, made in 1567 to the Aymara province of Chucuito, together with the 1562 *visita* of Iñigo Ortiz de Zúñiga to the province of Huánuco. Scholars were quick to draw attention to the significance of these documents as part of a whole series of *visitas* now available. These were the product of administrative inspections made by the Spanish authorities after the Conquest. Franklyn Pease, in listing the principal *visitas* either published or known to scholars, suggests that the study of regional documents has revolutionized Andean historical research.¹²

SPECIAL PROBLEMS

Because we possess so few transcripts in the Quechua language, we depend upon sources written by Spaniards and, only decades later, by hispanicized natives. Such documents were written from a Spanish viewpoint,

in terms intelligible to contemporary European readers. But, as Tom Zuidema points out, any attempt to reconstruct the Inca past must involve the difficult process of first asking how the Incas themselves conceived it.¹³

Unfortunately, however, the basic concepts of native informants bore scant relation to those of the chroniclers. Absolute veracity and precise dates were hardly relevant to informants, and a strictly *historical* view of events in a European sense was of even lesser consequence. Moreover, such a view was scarcely available; as we have already seen, songs, stories, and even quipu records were apt to be re-edited to satisfy the whims of a new ruler. Inca history had already been refashioned by the great ruler Pachacutec, whose reign is traditionally dated from 1438. Salomon points out that the Inca perception of diachrony had little to do with what we call history; the concept of action over time was conceived of not as changing the world but as conveying certain ritual notions based on the use of imagery and on social interaction through ritual.¹⁴

A further problem was posed by the preconceived notions of the chroniclers themselves, who were ill prepared to face the challenge of alien concepts. Imbued with notions of primogeniture, they paid little attention to the Inca system (or lack thereof) of royal succession. The chroniclers' view of the process of history as the salvation of the world through Christianity, incomprehensible to their informants, impeded efforts to understand Andean religious and social thought.

Another basic question is posed by the sources' attitudes to a recurrent theme: Were the Incas good or bad? Many writers were under pressure to portray Inca religion and government as harshly cruel in order to legitimize the Conquest in face of the indigenous population's prolonged opposition to Spanish control. In 1571 and 1572, following extensive inquiries, the Viceroy Francisco de Toledo sent a series of *informaciones* to King Philip II in which he demonstrated that the Incas were only recent conquerors and therefore had no hereditary claim to rule Peru. His final dispatch, dated January 1572, even cited survivors of tribes who had reportedly occupied the valley of Cuzco before the Incas arrived and still nursed a bitter hatred of the imperial rulers. It was Toledo who commissioned Sarmiento de Gamboa to write his history; though Sarmiento's work was carefully researched, it served to perpetuate Toledo's claim that the Incas were usurpers rather than legitimate rulers.

By contrast, the exponent par excellence of the pro-Inca case is Garcilasco de la Vega, who describes the Incas as benevolent rulers over a

realm in which hunger and even poverty were unknown. The works of earlier writers such as Cieza and Polo, as well as the much later account of Cobo, tend to present a more favorable or at least impartial picture of Inca rule.

MODERN STUDIES

As a result of such differences of opinion over the merits of Inca rule, earlier modern studies of Andean history tend to divide the chroniclers into two schools: the Toledan and the Garcilaskan. In the early twentieth century the Garcilaskan school came into favor, and the concept of the Incas as the world's first socialists enjoyed a certain vogue at a time when Marxist dogma was as yet unsullied by experience and when socialism was often viewed as the ultimate utopia.

Among the first to express such ideas was Louis Baudin, whose work, *A Socialist Empire: The Inca of Peru*, was written in 1928, though not translated into English until 1961. Notwithstanding his title, Baudin offers both praise and criticism, writing, "The Incas plunged their subjects into a sleep that was akin to death and robbed them of all human dignity."¹⁵ In his *Ancient Civilizations of the Andes*, published in 1931, Philip Ainsworth Means tends to accept the Garcilaskan view of the Inca state as primarily dedicated to the well-being of its subjects.¹⁶

Louis Valcárcel, who wrote his two-volume history between 1943 and 1949, has the great merit of being among the first to incorporate the findings of early archaeologists such as Julio Tello into his overall picture. However, he also describes the Incas as socialists and even communists. He affirms that their benign rule, far from pandering to the nobility and other privileged classes, was so structured as to attend to the welfare of the population as a whole.¹⁷

In addition to differences over the nature of the Inca Empire, further disagreements arose over how it was acquired. Those who lean toward the Garcilaskan school regard the process as gradual and generally peaceful. But in the 1940s John Rowe, drawing support from major chroniclers, opposed this view and insisted that the Inca conquest of empire was swift and violent, a notion now heavily supported by archaeological research.

Rowe may be called the pioneer of "modern" Peruvian ethnohistory. His writings sought to evaluate the work of the chroniclers in a more

Andean and less European context. Rowe's description of Inca culture, published in the *Handbook of South American Indians* in 1946, became the standard, or orthodox, version of their past. He did not confine himself to the written sources, having already produced a study of the archaeology of Cuzco.¹⁸

The 1950s witnessed the outstanding contributions to Andean studies of John Murra and Tom Zuidema. At this time also Richard Schaedel and María Rostworowski began to publish; among the latter's principal achievements was her reinterpretation of the significance of the peoples of the south-central coast of Peru based on close study of unpublished documents from Peruvian and Spanish archives. The early 1970s were marked by the first of many contributions by Franklyn Pease and Craig Morris, whose studies have consistently sought to combine archaeological and ethnohistorical data.

In the late 1970s and the 1980s so many scholars from around the world have entered the field and added to our understanding of the Andean past that it would be hard to single out specific names; many will be cited in this work. They generally seek to subject the sources to an objective analysis reinforced by the more recent archaeological findings. Far from being confined to the core region of the Inca Empire, much of their work concerns outlying provinces, ranging from Ecuador in the north to Chile and northwestern Argentina in the south. Increasing attention is also directed to the kingdom of Chimor, seen by some as exercising a major influence on Inca statecraft.

THE FINDINGS OF ARCHAEOLOGY

The era of modern archaeology began in Peru with the work of the great German archaeologist Max Uhle, who excavated the coastal site of Pachacamac in 1896. His report, published in 1903, was the first truly stratigraphical study in the Americas.¹⁹ Early investigations such as Uhle's tended to concentrate on the civilizations of the coast, including the kingdom of Chimor; a few were also dedicated to the imposing ruins of Tihuanaco. Nonetheless, certain Inca sites, apart from Cuzco itself, attracted attention at a relatively early stage.

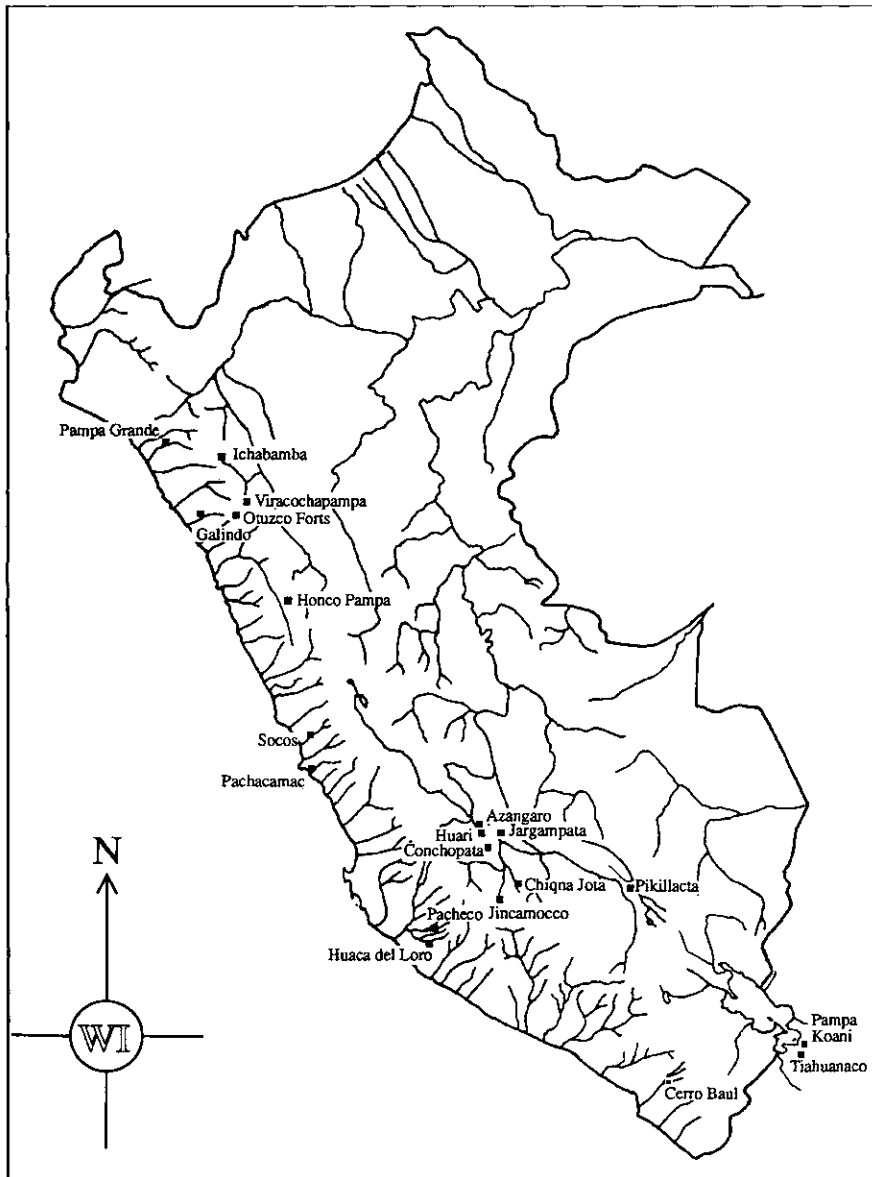
Uhle was also the author of a series of studies of the Inca past, the first of which was published in 1909. In addition, he wrote a description of the

ruins of Tomebamba in Ecuador, the capital of the emperor Huayna Capac. In 1911 Hiram Bingham first located the spectacular site of Machu Picchu, a discovery that has played a dramatic role in focusing public attention upon the Incas.²⁰ However, the most prominent field investigators of the 1920s and 1930s — Alfred L. Kroeber, Wendell C. Bennett, and Julio C. Tello — tended to excavate pre-Inca sites, and it was not until 1966 that Cuzco itself was fully treated in Rowe's *An Introduction to the Archaeology of Cuzco*. Rowe, after describing pre-Inca remains in the Cuzco Valley, writes in some detail of the great fortress of Sacsahuaman, drawing attention to major differences in its masonry style as compared with that of Tihuanaco. The latter is built with massive square or rectangular blocks of stone, whereas those of Cuzco are mainly huge irregular polygons.

The modern period, following the end of World War II, has witnessed a notable expansion in field investigation of the Inca past. This research is remarkable both for its extent and depth; almost every facet of the Inca achievement has been studied. Such key factors as the road network and the storage system, so basic to the process of social expansion, have been examined in detail, as have typically Inca sites such as Huánuco Pampa and fortress settlements in more remote parts of the Empire. Numerous studies have also been published of the coastal provinces. In order to better understand the Andean past, archaeologists now also study present-day ways of life. Researchers may compare their own findings not only with tools described in earlier documents but also with those still used in the Andes, some of which have scarcely changed over the centuries.

Apart from the core regions, Ecuador has received close attention as the scene of fierce hostilities between Inca rulers and local tribes. Much fieldwork has also been carried out in the southern reaches of the Empire, stretching as far as Santiago in central Chile. Recently more attention has also been paid to the final boundaries of the Inca domain, on which the sources' information is rather vague.

An additional factor, most relevant to any study of the Inca, is the information provided by archaeological research about the possible role of Huari as a potential conquest state and thus, in a certain sense, a predecessor to the Inca Empire. This vast site twenty-five kilometers northeast of Ayacucho was visited by Tello as long ago as 1932, but he never published his findings, and Huari remained unknown. Rowe, Collier, and Willey made a further reconnaissance in 1946 and produced a report seeking to relate Huari to other Andean sites, including Nazca and Tihuanaco.²¹ Ben-



The Major Middle Horizon Sites in Peru. From Huari Administrative Structure by William H. Isbell and Gordon McEwan, 1991. Dumbarton Oaks. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

nett conducted the first excavations, and his published account included a sketch map.²² Subsequently the Huari Urban Prehistory Project excavated the site under the direction of William Isbell, discovering much evidence of the evolution of state administrative architecture.

Considering that Huari-related ceramics are widely distributed across Peru, archaeologists concluded that Huari constituted a “horizon style” — that is, a style encompassing the whole cultural area. The horizons concept was originally defined by Geoffrey Bushnell, with the major categories identified as Formative, Classic, and Postclassic.²³ The concept was later much modified; the Huari-inspired period is now defined as the Middle Horizon, dated from approximately A.D. 600 to 1000. It is preceded by the Early Intermediate (A.D. 0–600) and followed by the Late Intermediate, or pre-Inca, Period (A.D. 1000–1400). Isbell, who offers an estimate of five hundred occupied hectares for the site of Huari, suggests that a figure of ten thousand to twenty thousand inhabitants is acceptable, though the population might have ranged between twenty thousand and thirty-four thousand.²⁴ Isbell writes of massive walls that divide Huari into irregular sectors; the complexity and poor preservation of the architectural remains hinder the task of interpreting the settlement’s form and organization. These large walled enclosures divided into barracklike residences are the dominant feature of Huari architecture.²⁵

In addition to the wide circulation of Huari-inspired ceramics, there also appeared at this time in areas outside the Huari heartland large administrative centers, one of which (Pikillacta) lies in the Valley of Cuzco. The resemblance of their planned enclosures to those of Huari, together with the presence of Huari-style pottery, led Isbell to suggest that they might have belonged to a Huari provincial organization.²⁶ In another context he wrote that Huari became the capital of a state that had conquered a substantial territory, the control of which would require a bureaucratic hierarchy of administrators.²⁷ Lumbreras offers a similar interpretation of Huari as a conquest state and even provides a map of the Huari Empire. For Lumbreras, urbanism and militarism began with Huari and gradually affected all central Andean societies.²⁸

In many respects, perhaps including road and storage systems, precedents for Inca achievements do exist. However, in contrast to Tula, the pre-Aztec conquest state of Mexico, Huari left behind no written records of any conquests, and the scope of a possible pre-Inca empire is thus harder to define.

Tihuanaco had emerged as an equally powerful highland state. Its earlier phases predate Huari, to which its exact relationship remains rather obscure. According to Isbell, Huari and Tihuanaco display common cultural attributes, and some interaction undoubtedly took place between the two.²⁹ Moreover, Tihuanaco and Huari shared a common iconography, of which a dominant theme was the classic image of a staffed front-facing deity on a pedestal, flanked by two or more rows of profile attendants. Variants of this image appear on the Gate of the Sun at Tihuanaco and on ceremonial urns and jars from the site of Conchopata, near Huari.³⁰ A certain rather ill-defined relationship is apparent between the "gateway god" and the Inca creator deity, Viracocha, who according to legend appeared in Tihuanaco at the beginning of the world. Rowe, however, sees the Middle Horizon deity as more related to Illapa, the Inca thunder god, or to his Aymara equivalent, Thunapa.³¹

Hence, one may conclude that some antecedents not only of Inca statecraft but also of Inca religion may be found in the comparatively remote Middle Horizon, which ended in about A.D. 1000. From the Late Intermediate Period, an interval of up to four centuries between the end of the Middle Horizon and the rise of the Inca, no evidence survives that suggests the emergence of a paramount power in the central Andes. Certain aspects of leading principalities that existed during this period, all eventually absorbed into the Inca Empire, will be considered later. Outstanding among these are the kingdom of Chimor, the principalities of the Ica-Chincha coastal culture, and the successor states of Tihuanaco, in particular the independent Colla and Lupaqa kingdoms that arose during the Late Intermediate and were among the early Inca conquests. But because the written sources relate to the period after they had become part of the Empire, their previous history and territorial extent are ill-defined.

A CAUTIOUS APPROACH

Though archaeological research has thus enriched our knowledge both of the Incas themselves and of possible Middle Horizon precedents, in many respects its findings tend to confirm as much as to deny the accounts of the primary sources. These, for instance, generally define the Inca realm as stretching from northern Ecuador to central Chile, thus very approximately corresponding to the traces of Inca occupation as now identified by

archaeologists. The latter offer much data, but it would be hard to base an account of the Inca achievement exclusively on either their findings or the reports of the historical sources. The sources are rich in detail but often lack credibility except where more concrete proof is offered. To cite a single example, Cabello's vivid account of the wars waged by Huayna Capac against the tribes of northern Ecuador, in which he describes the tribes' use of a series of mountain fortresses for defensive purposes, might well be dismissed as just another colorful fable.³² But Plaza Schuller lends support to Cabello's tale in the form of archaeological evidence indicating that defenses of this very kind existed. The evidence includes a map depicting a ring of fourteen simple forts stretching from the northwest to the southeast of Ibarra, situated in the extreme north of Ecuador — in the precise region where Huayna Capac campaigned.³³ Nonetheless, the sources by their very nature pose so many questions as to lead certain scholars to treat them with limited credulity. However, these written sources remain indispensable in the study of certain questions; archaeological research alone simply cannot provide the kind of data needed to examine, say, the role of the Inca ruler or the workings of the Cuzco hierarchy.

Given these fundamental problems, can Inca history be written at all? Or is the would-be historian confronted on the basic issues with little more than an assortment of contrived myths? The dilemma is posed in forthright terms by Tom Zuidema. He argues that the chronicles tend to reflect the differing social classes of their informants and were written by men confused by abstruse and unfamiliar belief systems.³⁴

Though many investigators may not share Zuidema's hesitation to accept the historicity of the main sources, few would deny the relevance of the problems he poses, and most would accept the need for caution in assessing the sources' reliability. One may cite Murra, who stresses the need to transform casual reading of the chroniclers into rigorous examination and affirms that a persistent analysis of the primary sources offers the only alternative to outmoded models based on arbitrary selection of quotations and the resulting compilation of reports of questionable value.³⁵

As a substitute to any such arbitrary selection of quotations, the temptation may also arise to reach conclusions by a kind of head count, presenting as plausible whichever version of a given episode is supported by the largest number of sources. But because the chroniclers often copied each other's works, a point treated as factual by a whole series of writers may in reality emanate from a single informant.

Even if certain special characteristics of the Andean chronicles compel the modern scholar to offer interpretations that reflect his own subjective judgment, this surely does not wholly negate the possibility of objective analysis of the Inca achievement. The problem, far from being unique, is more or less universal. Few students of antiquity today would deny that attempts to retrieve the past are inevitably influenced by subjective judgment. Claude Lévi-Strauss stresses the point: "No one can even write a history of the French revolution; all the historian can do is to reconstruct a myth based on his own selection of fact. History is never, therefore, history, but 'history for. . .'"³⁶

On man's endeavors to accurately record his past, one may also cite the philosopher Michael Oakshott: "There is no history that is not a judgment, no event which is not an inference. There is nothing whatever outside the historian's experience." In another passage of the same work, he writes: "If the historical past be knowable, it must belong to the present world of experience; if it be unknowable, history is worse than futile, it is impossible."³⁷ Such comments may pose in a wider context the question of how far Andean history can indeed be written, as the Incas can hardly be said to belong to the present world of experience.

The lack of precise native-written accounts of what really happened is therefore hardly confined to the Andean region and should not deter the ethnohistorian from at least seeking to outline the actual course of events. Without such an endeavor, social and economic problems become hard to clarify—just as, for instance, it would become almost impossible to define such aspects of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European society if doubts prevailed over such basic facts as whether Frederic the Great lived before Napoleon or whether it was he or Napoleon who invaded Russia and took Moscow.

Modern historians rightly place greater emphasis than their predecessors on socioeconomic conditions, as opposed to offering a mere catalogue of political events, a kind of heroic history based on the lives of rulers and the triumphs of their armies. But as part of the process of clarifying those conditions we must first face the complex task of offering at least *some* overall reconstruction of political events. To fulfill this purpose, in Chapter 2 I cover the shadowy reigns of the first seven rulers. In the following two chapters I sift the evidence available on the events of the great period of Inca expansion, beginning with Pachacutec and ending with Huayna Capac. The latter's reign may be somewhat more clearly defined than that

of other rulers, as the leading informers of the early chroniclers included various sons and grandsons of Huayna Capac. In subsequent chapters dynastic, social, and economic systems will be studied, first those of the metropolis Cuzco, thereafter those of the Inca Empire. I end the book with an attempt to assess Inca motivations and to account for their remarkable achievements.

It must always be borne in mind that for events to become meaningful they have to be considered in the context of the values attributed to them by participants, values that are at least in part ritual. In the case of the Incas, happenings can only be viewed in the light of their relative significance within the framework of their own society. As Marshall Sahlins, in describing Polynesian society, writes: "Events cannot be understood apart from the values attributed to them: the significance transforms a mere happening into a fateful conjecture. What is for some people a radical event may appear to others as a date for lunch."³⁸