Ancient Inca

This book offers a detailed account of Inca history, society, and culture through the lens of archaeology, written documents, and ethnographic accounts of native Andeans. Throughout the Andes, public works ordained by the emperors of the Incas dominate and transform the natural landscape. Cities, temples and fortresses of stone, marvelously engineered roads cut through sheer mountain slopes, massive agricultural terraces, and hydraulic works are emblematic of Inca power. In this book, Alan L. Kolata examines how these awesome material products came into being. What were the cultural institutions that gave impetus to the Incas' imperial ambition? What form of power did the Incas exercise over their conquered provinces far from the imperial capital of Cuzco? How did the Incas mobilize the staggering labor force that sustained their war machine and built their empire? What kind of perceptions and religious beliefs informed the Inca worldview?

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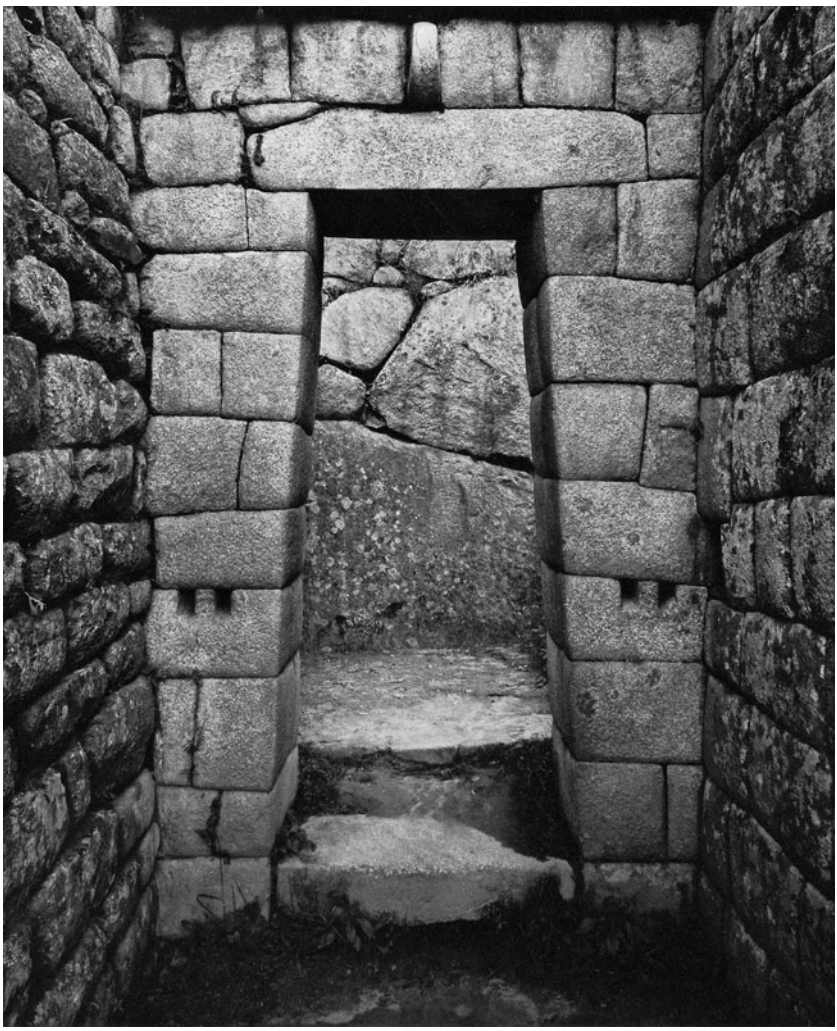

A doorway at the site of Machu Picchu reflects the importance of stone in the Inca world, as well as the exceptional artistry with which craftsmen conceived and carved this elemental material. (Photo © Edward Ranney, from *Monuments of the Incas*, by John Hemming, Thames and Hudson, Ltd., London, 2010)

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521689380

First published 2013

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data
Kolata, Alan L.
Ancient Inca / Alan L. Kolata.
p. cm. – (Case studies in early societies)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-521-86900-3 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-68938-0
(paperback)
1. Incas – History. 2. Incas – Antiquities. 3. Incas – Social life and
customs. 4. Andes Region – Antiquities. I. Title.
F3429.K63 2013
980′.01–dc23 2012021364

ISBN 978-0-521-86900-3 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-68938-0 Paperback

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Acknowledgments

As most authors will understand, writing this book was a labor of love, but one that demanded more time than I ever imagined. I appreciate the preternatural patience of Rita Wright, my friend and colleague, who commissioned me to write this overview of the Inca and then waited much longer than I had promised to see it come to fruition. I wish to thank Beatrice Rehl and the production staff of Cambridge University Press in New York for their meticulous work in bringing this book to its final, published form.

My graduate students in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago have collaborated with me to articulate many of the theoretical concepts and interpretive directions in evidence throughout this book. In recent years, the roster of my current and former graduate students with whom I have most intensively worked on matters Andean includes Jonah Augustine, Zachary Chase, Nicole Couture, Anna Guengerich, Steven Kosiba, David Pacifico, Steven Scott, Edward Swenson, and Tien-Ann Tshih.

In particular, I deeply appreciate the substantive contribution of Zachary Chase and Steven Kosiba, with whom I shared many hours of vigorous, fruitful debate that resulted in the elaboration of the concepts of hegemony developed at length in the first chapter of this book. They are truly coauthors of this section of the chapter, and I acknowledge with deep appreciation their friendship and the intellectual stimulation they have provided me over the past few years.

I also wish to acknowledge Anna Guengerich's exceptional service as my research assistant during the latter stages of the production of this manuscript. Anna read the manuscript with skill and sensitivity to eliminate flaws of many kinds, ensuring that the text was coherent, consistent in its arguments, and as technically impeccable as possible. She handled all of the critical details concerning manuscript format and content, including citations, footnotes, maps, illustrations, and reproduction permissions, with efficiency and grace. In this latter regard, I also wish to thank the institutions and individuals who responded to Anna's requests

and generously extended permission for the reproduction of the extraordinary graphics and images incorporated here.

Finally, I wish to dedicate this book to my wife, Anna, and my daughter, Justine, who traveled with me many times to Bolivia and Peru. They lived there for months on end enduring the rigors of high altitude, intense cold, driving rain, hurricane-force winds, sudden dust storms, lip-cracking aridity, and some of the most terrifying roads in the world. They also came to experience the intense, hallucinatory beauty of the Andean world and the deep generosity and spirituality of the Aymara people among whom we lived. Sharing all of this with Anna and Justine, the hardships and the beauty, makes this a life worth living.

Preface

In the fall of 1492, as the small fleet of Christopher Columbus approached landfall in the Caribbean, far to the southwest a native lord of the Andes was preparing to take dominion over the largest empire ever forged in the Americas. In that year, the Inca Wayna Qhapaq, the last independent heir to a remarkable Andean culture grounded in aggressive religious and cultural proselytism, found himself the supreme lord of a domain of startling proportions. The Incas' own name for their empire reflected their belief that they had conquered the known world: Tawantinsuyu, the "Four Parts Joined," or the Realm of the Four Quarters. The lands of this realm incorporated a dazzling and sharply juxtaposed series of physical landscapes that ranged over the territories of five modern Andean republics: Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, and Ecuador. The world of the Inca contained an astonishing array of radically different environmental zones, replete with brusque contrasts in climate, vegetation, topography, soil, and other more subtle biological and physical associations. This wild diversity of terrain, and therefore of ecological potential, represented both a significant impediment to the achievement of regional political integration and an exceptional concentration of natural resources with the potential to underwrite imperial-scale economies. Despite the physical difficulties of the terrain, Inca armies were able to extend the power of their lords from the tortuous, dissected mountain slopes and valleys of highland Peru to the perpetually arid coasts strung along the western margins of the South American continent, and from the humid, subtropical enclaves encrusted in the great eastern flanks of the Andean massif to the cold, austere, and seemingly endless high plains of the Lake Titicaca basin. The social obstacles that confronted the Inca political, economic, and military apparatus in its drive to power were no less bewildering in their diversity or daunting in their complexity. The Inca Empire, at its apogee, incorporated more than two hundred separate ethnic groups, most speaking mutually unintelligible languages. Their emperors strained to conquer, and then to administer, societies that covered the entire spectrum of human organization from small,

mobile bands of hunters and gatherers who inhabited isolated areas in the densely forested regions of eastern Ecuador and Peru to the powerful, immensely wealthy indigenous states of the Pacific coast and the Andean high plateau, such as the kingdoms of the Chimú, Chincha, Lupaca, and Colla peoples.

Despite these formidable environmental and social barriers to empire, within the evanescent space of three generations during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the Incas succeeded in transforming themselves from a congeries of small, ethnically related social groups jockeying for power in the mountainous regions around Cuzco in southern Peru into the greatest single Native American political entity ever to emerge. Extending their authority over an area of some forty-eight hundred kilometers in length from north to south, they ruled over several million people and developed a massive imperial infrastructure, the material remains of which still inspire awe and admiration. No other Native American society, not the Aztec, Maya, Toltec, or Teotihuacán in Mesoamerica, ever forged an empire of such scope and social complexity. What, then, was special about the ancient Inca and their world?

Throughout the Andes, public works ordained by the emperors of the Incas dominated, and at times transformed, the natural landscape. Cities, temples and fortresses of stone, marvelously engineered roads cut through sheer mountain slopes, and, most especially, massive agricultural terraces and hydraulic works were emblematic of Inca power and productive capacity. Yet it is not so much these awesome material products of the Inca Empire that claim our curiosity but, rather, the social processes that brought them into being. What, for instance, were the cultural institutions that structured and gave impetus to the Incas' imperial ambition? What form of power did the Incas exercise over their conquered provinces far from their imperial capital of Cuzco? How did they mobilize the staggering labor force that was required to sustain their war machine while simultaneously erecting and maintaining extensive and monumental public works? What kind of perceptions, thought processes, and beliefs informed the Inca worldview, confirming in their own minds their right to rule other nations? What impact did the radical social transformation that the Incas experienced in their move toward statehood and imperial power have on the structure of the Inca nation itself and on other ethnic groups that they subjugated? These are the principal questions that will orient this book.

Answering these questions engages us in an exploration of the social history and the cultural dynamics of civilizations throughout the Andes. The imperial achievements of Tawantinsuyu were not simply the brilliant

invention of the kings of Cuzco, the triumph of civilization over barbarism, as Inca court propagandists would have us believe. They had not occurred in a cultural vacuum. The roots of Inca civilization, much like those of their Mesoamerican counterparts, were firmly planted in the deep bedrock of earlier cultural traditions. Before the Incas, the political history of the Andes had been marked dramatically by the ebb and flow of other, more ancient states and empires. The Wari and Tiwanaku of the Andean highlands and *altiplano* had left an enduring legacy of state expansion in the same regions that the Incas would conquer some five hundred years later. Many of the organizational tools that the Incas used to bind local populations to the yoke of their government had been devised and elaborated in the centuries before the Inca by these early predatory states, and they had long been common currency in the pan-Andean repertoire of state formation. Similarly, on the desert coast of northern Peru, the kingdom of Chimor was once ruled by a dynasty of divine kings who had forcefully commanded the resources and the obeisance of a large population generations before the Incas even had pretensions to imperial rule. The richly decorated palaces and royal sepulchers at Chan Chan, the remarkable capital city of Chimor, had been the scenes of unimaginable exhibitions of kingly power and wealth when the first leaders of the Incas had been nothing more than competing petty warlords living in crudely fortified compounds. The ideology and practice of divine kingship, like other institutions that became indelibly associated with the Incas, were clearly not exclusive to the lords of Cuzco. The Inca inherited a rich stream of existing cultural beliefs, social institutions, political strategies, technological capacities, and economic systems that shaped the essential contours, if not the precise course, of their history.

The story of the Incas, who in 1492 were in the midst of extending their domain in the Andes, was the final pre-Columbian chapter of a complex saga of human adaptation over several millennia in a context of formidable environmental and social challenges. We will come to understand the Incas and their empire in terms of continuing interactions between individual and collective social agents pursuing their own interests and enduring sociocultural structures that shaped Andean societies over many generations. That is, we will come to know Inca society and history as the complex product of individual and collective agency and deeply embedded Andean social structures. This book, then, will do double duty, providing detailed descriptions and analyses of Inca history, social organization, political economy, statecraft, and religious ideology, while offering an interpretive framework of Inca society and

politics derived from comparative social theory. As we shall see, the social structures, political concepts, economic systems, religious practices, strategies of power, and cultural dispositions of the Inca have general comparability to those of other indigenous states and empires, but they also possess unique features that make exploring the Realm of the Four Quarters a particularly fascinating study in social analysis.

A Note on Orthography

Many of the terms used in this book are Quechua, the language spoken by the Inca. In part because Quechua originally existed only as a spoken language, a great deal of variation in spelling continues to exist. Many scholars use an older system of standardization, based on Spanish orthography, and some terms may be recognizable to the reader in this form, such as "*quipu*" for "*khipu*." In most cases, this book adopts spellings in accordance with the most recent system of standardization (post-1970s). Only those terms that are well known in their Hispanicized version retain these spellings here – including "Cuzco" and, of course, "Inca" (now often spelled "Inka").