

## ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### ATAHUALPA'S CUP

When the Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro arrived in South America in 1532, the Inca empire hung at stake in civil war between two half-brothers, Atahualpa and Huascar, sons of the last Inca emperor. This war of royal succession was waged with the same military means that had won the Inca empire, and that had been gradually developed over centuries in the Andes: armies of hundreds of thousands of foot soldiers with trains of pack llamas and auxiliaries on a vast scale, led by a nobility trained from boyhood in the arts of war, and supported by a monumental infrastructure of roads, storehouses, and forts, and a taxation bureaucracy that ballooned as the empire grew.

But the royal brothers also waged war with symbols and signals (Figure 1.1). In front of the Spanish conquistadors, Atahualpa drank from a cup fashioned from the skull of another of his half-brothers, Atoc, who had led an army for his rival Huascar.

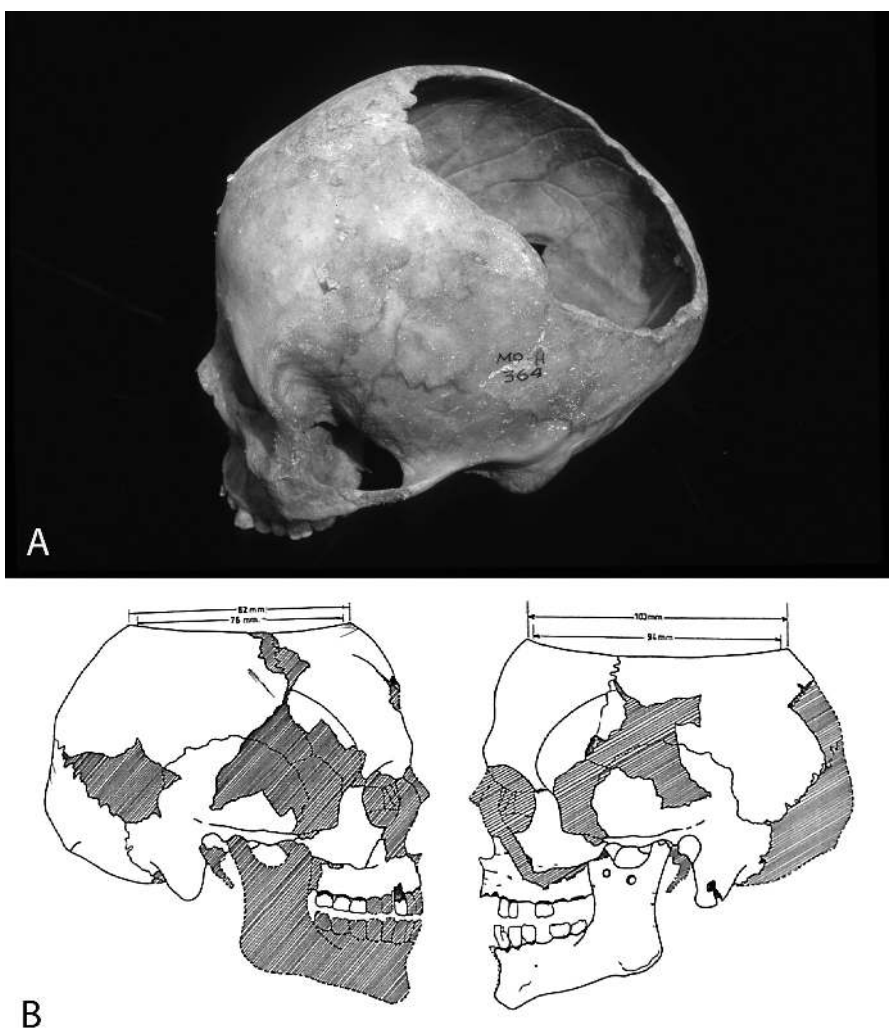
A few days before in a province called Huamachuco, [Atahualpa] had killed many people, and he had captured one of his own brothers, who had sworn he would drink from the head of Atahualpa; and Atahualpa drank from *his* head. For I saw it, and so did all who were there with Hernando Pizarro. And he saw the head with its skin, and the dry flesh and its hair, and it had its teeth shut, and there it had a tube of silver, and on top of the head it had a cup of gold attached, where Atahualpa would drink when he remembered the wars his brother had waged against him,



1.1. Inca general Auqui Tupac Inca Yupanqui presents his father, the fifth Inca emperor Capac Yupanqui, with the severed head of an enemy as a proof of victory. Guamán Poma de Ayala (1936: 109 [1615: 153]), Royal Library of Denmark manuscript.

and they poured the *chicha* in that cup and it came out of the mouth and through the little spout where he drank. (Mena 1967: 90 [1534: f. 131])

This gruesome artifact was lost or destroyed, so we do not know much about it beyond the conquistadors' descriptions (see also Levillier 1940: 200 [1572]; Estete 1924: 36 [1547]; Cieza 1985: 203 [1553: bk 2 ch. 73]). It may have resembled rare cases of skulls from Andean museums or excavation contexts in



1.2. (A) A possible Inca skull drinking vessel from the Museo Inka in Cuzco. Photo courtesy of John Verano. (B) Probable skull vessels excavated from the urban sector at Huacas de Moche. Modified from Verano et al. (1999).

which a portion of the cranial vault has been removed to make a circular opening (Figure 1.2). Going by Mena's description, a golden cup had been inserted into the skull; the silver spout came out of the mouth, from which Atahualpa drank, thus staring his unfortunate brother in the face as he gloated over his victory (Ogburn 2007: 512).

To the Spaniards, as to us, this artifact seemed horrible and shocking. But to Incas and their subjects the cup conveyed much more than that, for it was enmeshed in several strands of Andean meanings, some of them very old (Figure 1.3). They included the value of drinking *chicha* to mark and seal any important encounter between mortals and deities, rulers and subjects, or the



1.3. (A) A colonial wooden *kero* (drinking cup) representing the head of an inhabitant of Antisuyu, possibly referencing a skull cup. Metropolitan Museum of Art (1994.35.26). (B) A Chimú bowl with paired gold and silver surface enrichment. Museo Larco – Lima, Perú (ML100865). (C) Chimú and Inca ceramic *pacchas*: liquid is poured into the top, flows through a drinker, and comes out at the tip of a foot-plow. After Carrión Cachot (1955: 107).

living and the dead. Atahualpa's drinking vessel, which commemorated the defeat of a hated enemy, specifically inverted the Inca tradition of celebrating the peaceful submission of a people with toasts of *chicha* between the Inca ruler and the newly subservient native lord (Cummins 1988: 211–216). The cup's pairing of gold and silver was a harmonious marriage of opposites, recalling pairings of male/female, sun/moon, and other dichotomies underpinning the Andean universe. Certainly, the cup invoked a particular magic known since ancient times: that of a human head taken from a dead body, particularly a slain enemy, curated and crafted into an object of potent value. As a tangible memento, a physical witness of past events, the cup crystallized and renewed Atahualpa's military victory, embedding the past within the present. Finally, it alluded to a tradition of conjuring fertility by ritually pouring liquid through *pacchas*, special vessels with double openings (Carrión Cachot 1955; Lothrop 1956: 237). Atahualpa's cup wove these threads, and perhaps others that are less clear to us, into one multilayered object of great significance.

Yet even so – even at a moment of calamitous misapprehensions between Inca and Spanish ways of seeing (Lamana 2008) – the Spaniards understood perfectly

well the cup's most basic meaning. It shocked them and struck fear into them, because it was meant to. The cup made a terrifying display of dominance, ruthlessness, and proven victory. And its use at this moment was surely not casual: Atahualpa, who shortly before had the Inca empire nearly in his grasp, and was now held in Cajamarca in a comfortable but helpless captivity, was clearly aware of his audience when he chose to fill and drink from the cup.<sup>1</sup>

Atahualpa's cup encapsulates the complex nature of war-related acts and symbols. Like warfare itself, it conjoins realms of religious tradition and practical politics, realms that archaeologists have typically treated as analytically distinct. The cup drew on traditions that were uniquely Andean, so it cannot be fully understood out of its cultural context. But it was also a simple and unmistakable tool of intimidation. Incas used skull cups and skull trophies in nakedly strategic ways in their wars with foreign enemies, rival Inca factions, and rebellious subjects. They drank from the skulls of rebel leaders and traitors in celebration of victory, and threatened other enemies with the same fate (Guaman Poma 1980: I.287 [1615: 15 f. 314]; Sarmiento 2007: 129 [1567: ch. 37]). They displayed the decapitated heads of enemies on pikes, and sent them to others as proof of victory (Ogburn 2007). There was nothing uniquely Andean about this. Human societies in all major world regions, including Europe, have taken, used, and prominently displayed the heads of war enemies (Chacon and Dye 2007a). Indeed, as Ogburn points out (2007: 509), in the Spanish civil wars that swiftly succeeded the conquest of the Incas, Spaniards repeatedly decapitated their enemies and publicly displayed the heads. When Gonzalo Pizarro's rebel forces killed Peru's first viceroy, Blasco Nuñez, in 1546, they placed his head on a pike in Quito's square. Two years later, Gonzalo Pizarro was captured and executed, and his head in turn was displayed in Lima's main plaza alongside that of Francisco de Carvajal. Tupac Amaru, the last of the resistant Inca dynasty after the Spanish conquest, was beheaded and his head displayed on a pike in Cuzco (Hemming 1970: 449–450). Violent spectacles like these needed no translation.

Inca wars and Inca skull cups were preceded by 4,000 years in which Andean conflicts unfolded in a kaleidoscopic variety of forms. Over this time, populations, production regimes, and systems of political authority fluctuated, influencing why and how Andean people fought wars. Meanwhile, Andean leaders and groups produced a panorama of war-related symbols and performances: modified body parts from slain enemies, the sacrifice of captives, militaristic images, and so on. These phenomena, which I call "war-related spectacles," participated in an evolving tapestry of religious beliefs, and they could be magically efficacious. But they were also a key form of political rhetoric. With these displays, as with Atahualpa's cup, the visceral impact of war violence was amplified and recapitulated in specific social settings. Disentangling warfare from war-related spectacle, and asking how and why they both changed over time, is the aim of this book.



## WHY IT MATTERS

This book had its inspiration in a reviewer's comment. Charles Stanish and I had written an article (Arkush and Stanish 2005) that grappled with a recurrent scholarly debate about Andean warfare: how similar was it to “Western war”; how serious and destructive? How ritualized, religiously motivated, limited in severity, or uniquely “Andean”? We argued that Andean warfare was indeed “real war” – it was destructive as well as ritualized, and it had been frequently underestimated by archaeologists. In response, Theresa Topic, one of the invited commentators on the article and a longtime advocate for a different view of Andean war, objected that we were painting the Andean sequence with too broad a brush, glossing over its variations in time and space. This was true, and it planted a nagging doubt that bothered me for years.

Over those years, I came to think that one of the most fascinating projects that faces archaeologists is charting the great *variation* in wars and war-related acts in the past, and asking what different conditions made them possible. This is rich, largely unexplored territory for several world regions, including the Andes. The archaeological study of warfare is still a relatively young field, and at first much of the literature was devoted to the “where and when” of war and to methodological and interpretive issues. Only in recent years have scholars been tracing the pervading legacies of warfare on long-term regional histories, and exploring the connections between warfare and other aspects of society (Scherer 2021). In addition, anthropologists over the last half-century have relied on a broad, expansive definition of warfare that encompasses a very wide range of hostile acts and situations (Ferguson 1990; Kissel and Kim 2019; Solometo 2006). This inclines us to take the warfare of small-scale and noncentralized societies seriously, as seriously as the wars of states (Keeley 1996). So we should. But with such a wide definition, much of the variation it includes has gotten overlooked. Finally, the study of warfare still occupies a slightly disreputable neighborhood in archaeology. It is an unpleasant topic with potentially unpleasant political implications. However, it matters too much to be neglected.

It matters because it is interconnected with everything else about society. Although war is inherently destructive, it is also highly ordered, meaningful, governed by norms, and generative of social and political relationships (Reyna 1994; Whitehead 2004). Pitting “us” against “them,” warfare defines social groups. It forms a central core of cultural ideals of masculinity (Ferguson 2021). Certain forms or trappings of war violence are important class markers that particularly distinguish elite men. War and war-related symbols are profoundly political acts that make statements about power and power imbalance, so they are extremely effective at creating and remaking forms of social order (Campbell 2014; Whitehead 2004; Carneiro 1970). War also maintains cosmological order, for war-related violence is often a crucial part of understandings

of world-renewal, ritual transformations, and rites of passage (Bloch 1992, discussed in Duncan 2005; Viveiros de Castro 1992). Thus warfare is, as Lau (2004: 164) puts it, a site of cultural production – “an especially key field for creative expression, innovation, and socialization.” Even while it destroys lives, groups, and individual political regimes (e.g., Nordstrom 1997; Das 2007), war also generates and defines hierarchy, gender, social roles, community and nation, and supernaturals.

To acknowledge the deep connections between warfare and other social realms is to recognize and explore the true multidimensional variability in it – the whole “shape of the beast.” In this book I attempt to move beyond a narrow focus in which warfare is seen only as an aspect of external relations with outsiders (enemies) and only as a technique of coercion. In fact, warfare is deeply rooted in *internal* politics, and some of its most important ramifications have to do with political relations internal to societies and groups. These relations are much more than purely coercive. In the past as in the present, warfare and war-related acts have been related closely to individual reputation, social worth, and understandings of duty. By extension, they have figured centrally in political relations of attraction between leaders and constituencies, and competition between elite factions for the labor and loyalty of people. At other times, they could be closely related to communitarian relations of group-hood and solidarity. The changing balance of attraction, coercion, and solidarity in political relationships is key to understanding both war and war-related spectacle. An inquiry into war and spectacle over the archaeological sequence is not only fascinating in its own right; it also says a great deal about the nature of power and social relationships in human societies through time.

#### THE ANDEAN CONUNDRUM: RITUAL BATTLE, REAL WAR, AND RED HERRINGS

My approach is based on the premise that the great variability in warfare and in violent spectacle is (partly) patterned across cultures. So this book rests on a vision of warfare that, while sensitive to cultural and historical particulars, is ultimately comparative. But is this approach justified? Can cross-cultural comparison be reconciled with cultural specificity and regional tradition (Nielsen and Walker 2009)? In short, how do we properly approach Atahualpa’s cup – its Andean meanings *and* its universal politics?

These are important questions, but they have been difficult to answer because they are muddled by a long-running scholarly debate, old enough to be a little shopworn by now. For many years, archaeological studies of Andean war and war-related spectacle have taken two main approaches. One of them has stressed infrastructural and structural conditions that influence war, and investigated links between war and major transformations such as the adoption of agriculture or the

rise or fall of states. Implicit in such studies is the assumption that Andean war was similar to war in other world regions. Scholars taking this approach have argued that Andean war could be serious and destructive, and had major effects on Andean culture history. Many of them, especially in earlier years, viewed war (“real” war, that is) as territorial: waged for land seizure or the conquest of foreign populations on their lands (Carneiro 1970; Chamussy and Goepfert 2019: 10; Lanning 1967; Lumbreras 1974; Proulx 2001; Wilson 1988). The other approach has focused on the cultural-religious worldviews that informed Andean war, exploring, for instance, the meanings of Moche sacrifice or Nasca head trophies. Scholars following this approach have proposed that Andean war itself – not just its symbols – was strongly shaped by ritual and ideological concerns, so it cannot be profitably compared to other cultures (Topic and Topic 1997). In its extreme form, this view casts Andean warfare as part of an ancient and enduring substrate of Andean culture or “lo andino.”<sup>2</sup>

The quintessential evidence for this view is *tinkuy* battles,<sup>3</sup> a fascinating contemporary phenomenon documented by cultural anthropologists (Alencastre and Dumezil 1953; Chacon et al. 2007; Gorbak et al. 1962; Hopkins 1982; Molinié-Fioravanti 1988; Platt 2009; Van Vleet 2010). *Tinkuy* are annual fights linked to Catholic religious holidays between Andean communities or moieties – festive, drunken, and sometimes brutally violent skirmishes, held at an arranged time and place and attended by spectators, that are over the next day with few further consequences. Informants give a variety of motives for participating, but one of them is that the shedding of blood will lead to a prosperous harvest. If pre-Columbian Andean warfare was like *tinkuy*, the argument goes, then it was strongly ritualized, replete with religious meaning, and relatively limited in casualties (Hocquenghem 1978; Makowski 1997; Morris 1998; Romero 1996; Topic and Topic 1997, 2009).

I wish I could ignore this argument, because our 2005 article was written in the misbegotten hope that it would be the last word. But it obviously was not: in fact, the argument shows no sign of petering out (Bischof 2005; Bradley 2005; Castillo 2014; Makowski et al. 2011: 237–243; Ogburn 2011; Swenson 2012; Topic and Topic 2009; Verano 2014). The question is sometimes roughly caricatured as how “ritual” pre-Columbian Andean conflict was versus how “real” or “Western” (see Chamussy 2009: 45). Was it often, perhaps primarily, motivated by religious imperatives such as the capture of prisoners for sacrifice? Or did it spring from materialist and political aims, and result in major effects: the fleeing or extermination of populations, the seizure of land, conquest and dominion over subjects, political supremacy between factions? And, deep in the subtext of this debate, how do we navigate between simplistic and offensive popular stereotypes of Indigenous Andeans as either savage and warlike or peaceful and steeped in ritual (Arkush 2011b)? The subtext is real, rooted in a long and sordid history of discourse about Indigenous Andeans, in which

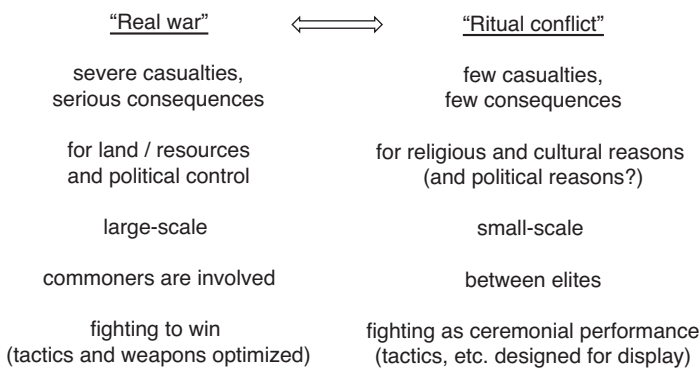


claims about their supposedly violent nature actually served as a pretext for violently oppressing them (Poole 1994). In reaction, as Tantaleán and Gonzales note, the “ritual” side has the dubious benefit of “avoiding the recognition of these practices as violent, and thus granting them positive value as mechanisms of social cohesion” (2014: 180, my translation).

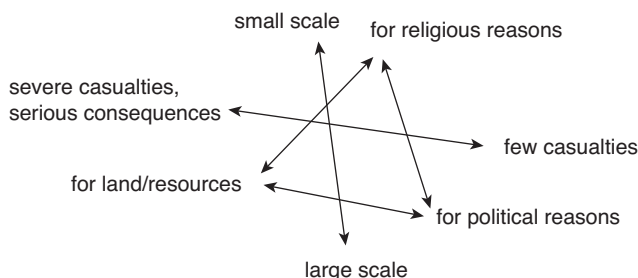
There are several big problems with this debate. First, as Topic noted in her comment, it tends to essentialize Andean warfare. Each side imposes an artificial sameness on the Andean sequence, when in fact there is tremendous diversity. It encourages scholars to make speculative equations between Inca- or Colonial-period practices (such as *tinkuy*) and patterns we observe across a hiatus of a thousand years back or more. And it obscures the possibility of historical change, of recognizing how both warfare and war-related spectacle developed out of older forms and techniques. Attending closely to the archaeological record reveals surprises that are glossed over when the sequence is assumed to possess an inherent continuity and a deep coherence.

Second, the “ritual” versus “real” dichotomy is a red herring (Figure 1.4). It conflates several axes that should be separated: the severity and impact of

*A poor model of conflict as a dichotomy*



*A more complex space of possibilities*



1.4. Conceptual models for conflict and warfare.

conflict on people's lives; territorial expansion versus nonterritorial goals; religious versus secular motivations for leaders and warriors; and the degree to which warfare and related acts are ritualized and rule-bound, becoming codified performances (Bell 1992). When these axes are bundled together, the result is an imaginary spectrum of conflict that ranges from "ritual battles" like *tinkuy* to War with a capital W: large-scale, destructive, secular conquest war between states. But a cursory scan through the thick historical and ethnographic casebook on war shows that this imaginary spectrum is hopelessly wrong. Small-scale raids in "tribal" societies such as the Yanomamö or Waorani had extremely severe consequences, both for individual life histories and aggregate populations, without involving the seizure of territory or the conquest of enemies (Keeley 1996; Redmond 1994). Although it is true that especially severe wars often emerged in situations of scarcity, wars also arose in settings of plenty, for different reasons. Wars with explicitly religious justifications, such as the Crusades, might involve little ritualization and also result in territorial conquest. Indeed, "secular war" is a meaningless concept: all war prior to the industrial era was infused with religious meanings and valences, and all war is informed by cultural norms (Nielsen and Walker 2009).

We can return to Atahualpa's cup and its broader context of the Inca civil war to help think through these points. The Inca civil war was "real" in that it was fought for sovereign control of an empire, factional rivalry, and all the things that wars in state societies are about in other parts of the world. It did not have much explicit connection to religion. It involved real-sounding ingredients like armies, generals, military stratagems, and months-long campaigns. It was terrifically expensive, and drew heavily on the Inca financial apparatus of labor tribute and stored wealth. Many real people died or were injured, either in battles or the reprisal massacres that followed Atahualpa's victory: that is, it really did matter which side you were on. But the Inca civil war was also informed by its particular cultural context. For instance, Inca emperors were conceptualized as warrior-kings, more than other possible roles (such as scholars, or patrons of the arts). In waging war against his half-brother, Atahualpa was conforming to this familiar and respected role of emperor-as-warrior (Ziólkowki 1995). And although he was not the favorite of the Cuzco nobility, he could model himself on the legendary precedent of Pachacuti, the ninth Inca emperor, who likewise had not been chosen crown prince but achieved the throne at a moment of crisis through his extraordinary military talents. As the other players fought for their lives and futures, from Inca nobles to common foot soldiers and resentful deserters, they too performed honor, masculinity, community, and ethnicity. Finally, the Inca civil war followed some recognized rules and conventions and included ritual elements, like the trophy cup itself (Ziólkowki 1995). This war, like nearly all wars, was both "ritual" and "real": that is, it was