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Introduction



From Cajamarca to Vilcabamba

The text presented here for the first time in full-length English translation is an account of the cataclysmic events that took place in the Andes during the sixteenth century.¹ Its author, Diego de Castro Titu Cusi Yupanqui (1530?-1571), was the penultimate descendant of the Inca dynasty. His grandfather was Huayna Capac (b. 1493), who once ruled a vast empire that stretched from South America's Pacific coastline eastward across the Andes into the Amazonian lowlands and from what is today southern Columbia southward into central Chile and Argentina—a distance roughly equal to that between New York and Los Angeles. Although the Incas had been a rather insignificant ethnic group

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who controlled little more than their ancestral homelands around Cuzco only a few generations before Huayna Capac's succession, he had inherited the largest polity that the Americas had seen.² His empire was called the Tahuantinsuyu ("the parts that in their fourness make up the whole") because it was composed of four major geographical quarters—the Chinchaysuyu in the northwest, the Antisuyu in the northeast, the Cuntisuyu in the southwest, and the Collasuyu in the southeast (see Illustration 1). These vast territories included scores of other tributary ethnic groups and were connected by a road system whose major highways covered some 25,000 miles—a distance approximately equal to the circumference of the earth. Huayna Capac had just brought under his dominion the northern kingdom of Quito, where he reportedly planned to found a second capital city, when, in 1524, he was informed of the appearance of bearded white strangers, who claimed to have arrived "by the wind" on the northwestern coast of the empire.³ Soon after receiving this news, his army and court were struck by a violent disease that killed thousands, including Huayna Capac and his presumptive heir, Ninan Coyoche, probably in 1526. The epidemic that killed Huayna Capac and his heir was probably smallpox, which had been brought by the Spanish explorers and conquerors from Europe. It had rapidly spread around the Caribbean, Mexico, Central America, and down into South America, killing tens of thousands of Native Americans, who had no biological resistance.

The bearded white strangers who were reported to have landed on the northwestern coast were a band of eighty Spaniards under the leadership of Francisco Pizarro (b. 1471), a hidalgo (petty gentleman) from Trujillo in Extremadura.⁴ He had come to the New World in 1509, participated in Vasco Núñez de Balboa's expedition resulting in the European discovery of the Pacific Ocean in 1513, and subsequently established himself as a colonist living on Native labor in Panama. Inspired by the fabulous exploits of Hernando Cortés in the conquest of Mexico (1520), Pizarro had

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1. Map of Tahuantinsuyu. From Moseley, *The Incas and Their Ancestors: The Archaeology of Peru* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991 and 2001), 24. Reprinted by kind permission of Michael Moseley and Thames & Hudson

entered into partnership with another citizen of Panama, Diego de Almagro, and a priest by the name of Hernando de Luque in order to explore the South American coastline and search for his own Mexico. Although their first expedition ended in failure in 1524, they found many signs of a great civilization during their coastal exploration. More expeditions were mounted and in 1530 a band of approximately 160 Spaniards landed on the Ecuadorian coast under Pizarro's command and made their push inland. The Spaniards, however, found the land in devastation—the result, as they learned from the Natives, of a tremendous civil war that had been ravaging the entire country.

The civil war was the consequence of the untimely deaths of Huayna Capac and his heir, which had left the two eldest of his seven surviving sons fighting for succession to the Inca throne.⁵ Huascar was initially crowned by the Inca nobility of Cuzco and controlled the southern parts of Tahuantinsuyu. His succession was challenged, however, by his half-brother Atahualpa, who controlled the northern territories surrounding Quito and had the loyalty of Huayna Capac's most able generals and their armies. When Huascar rejected Atahualpa's proposals for a peaceful arrangement, a deadly struggle ensued between the northern and southern parts of the empire. Huascar initially appeared to have the upper hand, even capturing his half-brother. But Atahualpa was able to make his escape, and soon the tide turned, partially because of Huascar's unpopularity among his own officers. In a major battle outside Cuzco Atahualpa's general Quisquis defeated Huascar's forces, took Huascar prisoner, captured the capital, and, on Atahualpa's orders, had the Inca nobility loyal to Huascar persecuted and murdered (see Illustration 2).

It was in the immediate aftermath of these turbulent events that the Spaniards appeared on the scene in Peru and first met with the victorious Atahualpa at the northern town of Cajamarca on 16 November 1532 (see Illustration 3). The Spaniards came to the meeting with a plan, well tried in the conquest of Mexico, of

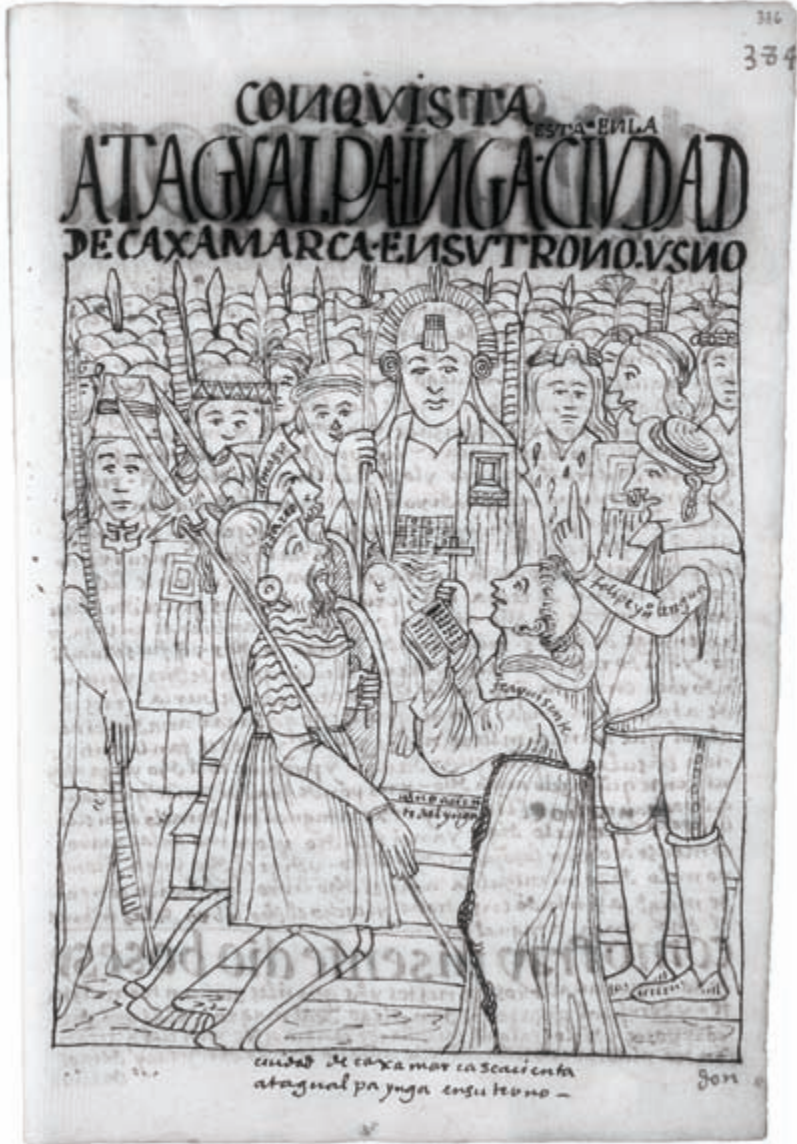


2. Huascar Inca (the Twelfth Inca) is taken prisoner by Atahualpa's generals. From Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno*. By kind permission of the Royal Library at Copenhagen (GKS 2232 4to), which owns the original manuscript and has published the full facsimile and a transcription on-line at <http://www.kb.dk/elib/mss/poma/index-en.htm>

taking the enemy leader hostage and using him as a puppet to control his subjects and extort gold and silver. Atahuallpa, underestimating the small band of strangers, left behind the greater part of his army, at least forty thousand strong, and came to the meeting in the enclosed main square of Cajamarca accompanied by only a lightly armed contingent of five or six thousand men. There he was ambushed by the Spaniards, who wreaked havoc among the terrified Andean warriors with arquebuses, cannons, and cavalry. The Spaniards killed at least 1,500 Andeans on that infamous day and took Atahuallpa prisoner without suffering a single casualty.

Atahuallpa, now in captivity and fearful that Huascar might try to take advantage of the situation by aligning himself with the strangers, gave orders to have his brother murdered. After Huascar's death, Atahuallpa attempted to ransom himself by paying the Spaniards an enormous treasure of precious objects, which the Spaniards melted down to more than eleven tons in gold and thirteen tons in silver. Atahuallpa, despite Spanish promises, was not released and ruled the country from his captivity for half a year before he was finally garroted by his captors in July 1533 (see Illustration 4).⁶

With both warring contenders for the Inca royal tassel dead and the Spaniards greedy for more gold, the conquerors marched on Cuzco. En route they were engaged in several fierce battles by the warriors of Atahuallpa's general Quisquis but received a friendly reception from Atahuallpa's enemies, both among the Inca nobility of Cuzco and among other ethnic groups who had been loyal to Huascar in the civil war.⁷ As a result, the Spaniards succeeded in capturing the Inca capital on Saturday, 15 November 1533. Eager for a new puppet-Inca who would exercise control on their behalf, the Spaniards proclaimed Atahuallpa's and Huascar's younger brother Topa Huallpa as the successor to the crown. When Topa Huallpa suddenly died en route to Cuzco in December 1533, Francisco Pizarro crowned their brother Manco



3. Atahualpa meets Francisco Pizarro, the priest Vicente de Valverde, and their translator Felipillo. From Guaman Poma de Ayala, *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno*. By kind permission of the Royal Library at Copenhagen (GKS 2232 4to)



4. Atahualpa is executed by the Spaniards. From Guaman Poma de Ayala, *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno*. By kind permission of the Royal Library at Copenhagen (GKS 2232 4to)

Inca, who had lived in Cuzco and had still been an adolescent during the Inca civil war between his two older half-brothers Atahualpa and Huascar.

Initially, Manco Inca collaborated with the Spaniards in the ongoing fight against Atahualpa's generals. As the Spaniards' greed and treatment of Manco Inca became increasingly intolerable, however, the old divisions between the loyalists of Atahualpa and Huascar gave way to a shared resentment of the Spanish invaders. In 1536 Manco Inca fled Cuzco in order to take command of an enormous army of 100,000 warriors who had gathered outside the capital, ready to throw off the Spanish yoke. Under Manco Inca's command, the Native armies simultaneously besieged Cuzco and Lima, cutting off communications between the two Spanish strongholds.⁸ Although they brought the Spaniards to the brink of disaster, even killing one of the Pizarro brothers, Juan, in the process, the effort ultimately failed, and the rebellious Andeans withdrew to the tropical lowlands of Vitcos and Vilcabamba on the eastern slopes of the Andes the following year (1537). In this remote refuge, Manco Inca re-created a neo-Inca state that resisted all Spanish incursions for more than thirty years, waging a guerrilla war on Spanish trade routes and towns as well as neighboring ethnic groups subjected to Spanish rule.⁹

With Manco Inca defiant and out of their control, the Spaniards in Cuzco crowned another of Huayna Capac's sons as their new puppet ruler—Paullu Topa (1518–1549), who had remained loyal to the Spaniards during the siege of Cuzco and continued to assist with their numerous attempts to quell the resistance of the neo-Inca state at Vilcabamba. Now, however, the Spaniards were falling out amongst each other. Whereas Pizarro's men had become fabulously rich in the extortion of Atahualpa's ransom at Cajamarca, the men of Almagro's party, who had not been in Cajamarca at that time, had received only small portions. This caused deep resentment between the pizarrista and almagrista factions and escalated into a fierce struggle from which Pizarro

emerged victorious. In 1538 Almagro was executed by one of Pizarro's brothers, Hernando, after having lost the decisive battle of Las Salinas outside Cuzco. Almagro's death did not, however, end the hostilities between the two factions. In July 1541 Francisco Pizarro was assassinated by Almagro's son, who proclaimed himself governor but was later condemned to death by the official governor sent by the Crown in order to settle the dispute. The chaos in Spanish-controlled Peru was further aggravated when the youngest of the Pizarros, Gonzalo, rebelled against the authority of the first viceroy sent by the Crown, Blasco Núñez Vela. Although the insurgent initially was victorious against the royalist army in the battle of Añaquito (1546), in which the viceroy Núñez Vela was killed, Gonzalo Pizarro was finally defeated and executed in 1548 by an army loyal to the Crown led by the new royal governor Pedro de la Gasca.¹⁰

Manco Inca had observed these wars among the Spaniards from his remote outpost at Vilcabamba with great interest, providing occasional help to the weaker almagrista faction in the hope that the Spaniards would ultimately destroy, or at least significantly weaken, one another. After he had granted refuge, however, to some Spaniards who had been on the run for their role in Francisco Pizarro's assassination, in 1545 he was treacherously murdered by his Spanish guests, who might have been instigated to do this in exchange for Spanish officials' assurances of clemency in regard to their murder of Pizarro (Hemming, 276). Upon his death, Manco Inca left his oldest son, Saire Topa, as his successor. But Saire Topa was seen as a weak leader by the Inca nobles in Vilcabamba and in 1556 he moved to Cuzco to live under Spanish rule, accepting an offer of a repartimiento (an allotment of land and Native tributaries) from viceroy Andrés Hurtado de Mendoza. After Saire Topa's departure, his half brother Titu Cusi Yupanqui, author of the text translated here, was left in charge of Vilcabamba. When news of Saire Topa's sudden death arrived from Cuzco four years later,¹¹ Titu Cusi was officially crowned

Inca. Through shrewd politics of resistance and negotiation, Titu Cusi was able to maintain the independence of the neo-Inca state at Vilcabamba for another decade. He died under mysterious circumstances (probably from pneumonia) in 1571, leaving his younger brother, Topa Amaru, in charge of Vilcabamba. In 1572 a Spanish army sent by the new viceroy, Francisco de Toledo, succeeded in invading Vilcabamba and in capturing Topa Amaru. Topa Amaru's subsequent execution on the main square of Cuzco marked the end of the neo-Inca state at Vilcabamba and of the paternal line of the Inca dynasty. Andean resistance against the Spanish invaders, however, continued. Even two hundred years later, major Native rebellions shook Peru, instigated by leaders who claimed descent from the Incas by the maternal line—such as Juan Santos Atahualpa in the 1760s and José Gabriel Condorcanqui Topa Amaru II in the 1780s.¹² Even to this day, the Incas' imperial legacy is frequently appropriated by Peruvian resistance fighters who violently reject the neo-European social order of the American nation states.

Titu Cusi's Hybrid Account of the Conquest of Peru

The brief summary of the main historical battles and events of the Conquest of Peru above conveys a sense of the extraordinary violence at the foundation of European empires and American nation states in the New World. It cannot do justice, however, to the whole story of Andean resistance and survival. Aware that their clubs, pikes, and slingshots were largely ineffective against the armored and mounted Spanish conquistadors, Native leaders soon learned to appropriate not only the foreigners' use of swords, firearms, and horses but also the most powerful weapon that the invaders had brought: the written word. The text presented here tells an early chapter in the long history of Native appropriation of this European medium. It tells the story of the Conquest of Peru not from the familiar perspective of the Spanish