

BOOKS BY RONALD WRIGHT

*Cut Stones and Crossroads:
A Journey in Peru*

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Quechua Phrasebook

Time Among the Maya

*Stolen Continents:
The Americas Through Indian Eyes
Since 1492*

STOLEN CONTINENTS

THE AMERICAS THROUGH
INDIAN EYES SINCE 1492

RONALD WRIGHT



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THREE INCA



O Peru! Land of metal and of melancholy!

— Federico García Lorca

Stout Cortés never did cross the Isthmus of Darien (*pace* Keats), but among those Europeans who first gazed on the Pacific in 1513 was another squat Castilian, Francisco Pizarro. Pizarro became a wealthy citizen and mayor of Panama, the town the Spaniards built beside the new ocean they called the South Sea. But he was not content with a burgher's life in a frontier port. Hearing rumors of a golden land, far to the south, called Viru or Peru, he resolved to find and conquer it.

Several early expeditions down the South American coast were failures, but in 1526 one of Pizarro's ships intercepted a strange vessel near the equator. It was a great balsa raft of the kind the Incas used for trading with Central America and exploring the Pacific, one of a fleet heading north. Its size and sophistication immediately impressed the Europeans: "It carried masts and yards of very fine wood, and cotton sails in the same shape and manner as on our own ships."¹ The craft had a twenty-man crew and thirty tons of freight — close to what a caravel could hold. The cargo excited the Spaniards more than anything, for here was a showcase of the products of a rich, advanced, and unknown civilization. And there was plenty of that magical substance for which they would risk all.

They were carrying many pieces of silver and gold for adorning the body . . . crowns and diadems, belts and bracelets, armour for the legs and breastplates . . . mirrors decorated with silver, and cups and other drinking vessels. They carried many wool and cotton mantles, shirts and *aljulas* [Moorish-style tunics]. . . . They had some small weights to weigh gold, resembling Roman workmanship.²

The golden land of Peru was a fable no longer. The Spaniards seized the ship and three of its crew to train as interpreters (the rest jumped overboard or were marooned). In the following year, under instructions from these captives, Pizarro reached their home port, Tumbes, the northernmost coastal city of the Inca Empire. There he was greeted by a flotilla of ships carrying imperial troops on a campaign against the Puna islanders, notorious cannibals who fourteen years later had the distinction of eating the first bishop of Cusco.³

At Tumbes an Inca noble, a high official of the empire, made it his business to visit the bearded strangers. He came on board, examined the ships closely, and asked the foreigners what they were doing. Pizarro did not have enough men to begin his conquest, but he thought he might as well get over the formality of reciting the Requirement, that shabby document intended to remove the stain of innocent blood from the Spanish king's immortal soul. It informed foreign powers that their lands had been "donated" to Spain in 1493 by Pope Alexander VI (better known as Rodrigo Borgia, father of the infamous Lucrezia).

That night off Tumbes the Peruvian heard this:

I, Francisco Pizarro, servant of the high and mighty kings of Castile and León, conquerors of barbarian peoples, and being their messenger and Captain, hereby notify and inform you . . . that God Our Lord, One and Eternal, created Heaven and Earth and a man and a woman from whom you and I and all the people of the world are descended. . . . Because of the great multitude begotten from these over the past five thousand and some years since the world was made . . . God placed one called Saint Peter in charge over all these peoples. . . .

And so I request and require you . . . to recognize the Church as your Mistress and as Governess of the World and Universe, and the High Priest, called the Pope, in Her name, and His Majesty [king of Spain] in Her place, as Ruler and Lord King. . . .

And if you do not do this . . . with the help of God I shall come mightily against you, and I shall make war on you everywhere and in every way that I can, and I shall subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and His Majesty, and I shall seize your women and children, and I shall make them slaves, to sell and dispose of as His Majesty commands, and I shall do all the evil and damage to you that I am able. And I insist that the deaths and destruction that result from this will be your fault.⁴

Reading this document now, one wonders, like the humanitarian Las Casas, "whether to laugh or cry."⁵ It is at once primitive in conception and maniacal in grasp. Nothing proclaims more loudly the arrogance of European man and the meanness of the mental prison he inhabited. One can imagine the smiles of the Maya, who knew the scale of eternity, on being told that the world was made "five thousand and some years ago." And one applauds the chiefs of Sinú, among the first to hear the document, when they answered, "The holy father has indeed been generous with others' property."⁶

How much was rendered into Quechua, the Inca language,⁷ is unclear. Conquistadors were not sticklers about such things: the Requirement was largely symbolic, like crossing fingers while telling a lie. Sometimes it was read to empty streets and squares, even from ships at sea; seldom was it well translated. (Much of it is untranslatable outside a European context anyway.) The Inca noble, member of a people known for their reserve, gave no reply. He dined with Pizarro, politely praised the strange food and wine, and invited the Spaniards to visit him in Tumbes. He sent fruits, vegetables, and llamas to the caravels; in return, two Spaniards and an African slave took a gift of chickens and pigs ashore. The Spaniards astonished the Peruvians by firing a *harquebus* at a target; they were themselves astonished by glimpsing the riches of an Inca temple.

Pizarro left two Spaniards behind to learn the language and sailed back to Panama. He had the evidence he needed to persuade investors, the Crown, and would-be conquerors to join him in a definitive assault on the last great realm of gold. From Panama he went to Spain for a *capitulación* (a royal license to conquer), which was granted after much delay. Pizarro was

illegitimate, illiterate, and a poor horseman — all strikes against him at court — but his exceptional tenacity saw him through. Little is known about his appearance, but his character has not gone unremarked. Courageous, ruthless, and devious was the opinion of most who met him. As a Peruvian prince named Atawallpa would discover, Francisco Pizarro was not a man of his word. He returned to Panama in 1530, and at the end of the year sailed again for Peru with his brothers,⁸ partners, and about 200 men.

The Spaniards had seen precious metals, strange animals, large ships, orderly towns built of stone and adobe, irrigation canals and fields laid out beneath the hard sun of an arid coast, the crops a brilliant green against tawny desert and the lion-colored foothills of the Andes. But they still had little understanding of what they faced. Despite the visit to Tumbes, they had grasped neither the name of the capital, Cusco, nor of the reigning emperor, Wayna Qhapaq. They had no idea that the empire was 3,000 miles long and several hundred miles wide, stretching from southern Colombia to central Chile, from the Pacific Ocean to the Amazon forest. They hadn't even learned that the builders of this empire were an energetic mountain folk called Incas.



His Catholic Majesty must know that we found these countries in such a condition that there were no thieves, no vicious men, no idlers. . . . We have transformed these natives, who had so much wisdom and committed so few crimes. . . . There was then no evil thing, but today there is no good.

— Mancio Sierra (a conqueror of Peru), 1589

Peru differed from Mesoamerica as greatly as pharaonic Egypt from Periclean Athens. It shared certain ideas and food staples with that other cradle of American civilization, but human society had made unique responses to its formidable terrain. While Mesoamerica was an urban and entrepreneurial world

with busy markets, a large merchant class, competing cities, and a monetary system based on copper and cacao, Peru was rural, centralized, and its primary medium of exchange was labor.

The Inca Empire comprised modern Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, half of Chile, and northwestern Argentina: a land of desert in the west, endless rain forest to the east, and between these extremes the high plateaus and glacial peaks of the Andes, which form its spine. Civilization had arisen in cool mountain basins and the small hot river valleys that segment the arid coast like cracks across a bone. The oldest temples in Peru are found in both these zones and date from before 2000 B.C. Jungle peoples — then much more numerous than now — contributed certain crops, pharmaceuticals, and religious ideas to the interplay of the “three Perus.” Technology, as I’ve said, is not a good classifier for American cultures, but it bears mentioning that Andean peoples made greater use of bronze than did those of Mesoamerica and were highly skilled in working gold, silver, and platinum, though they lacked iron. They raised llamas and alpacas (domesticated from wild camelids) for wool, meat, and as pack animals.

Little is known of the Incas’ intellectual life because they kept their records by quipu, a medium the invaders never mastered. Quipus are strings tied in long fringes, making elaborate use of knotting, color, and position. The system may seem laborious to us, but it was the creation of a society that produced the world’s finest weaving and set great store by the practical and metaphorical properties of thread. The conquerors attested to the uncanny accuracy of these records, yet burned whole archives of them without a thought. The system died out with the statisticians and chroniclers who ran it. Modern research on quipus has revealed that the Incas, like the Mayas, had an advanced arithmetic using zero and place notation. They, or their predecessors, seem to have invented this independently, for they reckoned in tens, not the twenties of Mesoamerica.⁹

In statecraft, the Incas had moved far beyond the crude domination of client states practiced by the Aztecs. They created a true empire, with 14,000 miles of paved roads,¹⁰ colonial cities that reproduced the style and institutions of the capital, a state courier service, an official language, and a policy of forging

one nation from many ethnic groups by moving people about within the empire. Warfare was a practical matter: the Incas kept a standing army and a network of garrisons, but there was no militaristic cult of human sacrifice. They encouraged independent kingdoms to join their empire peacefully, offering genuine inducements for doing so. Chief among these were safeguards against famine, which only a large state with good stores and communications could provide.

Inca religion was hyltheistic: all matter was divine. The creator, Pachakamaq, was “the soul of the universe” and worship of him or her took forms reminiscent of Shinto and Zen. A diffuse godhead included Pachamama, Mother Earth, and a complex sky deity whose most obvious symbols were the Milky Way, the Rainbow, and Inti, the Sun. The world was alive with numinous rocks, springs, and peaks, known collectively as *wak’a*. These were regarded as shrines to the Creator and as totemic ancestors of human groups. Some *wak’as* had temples and rock-hewn altars; others were left in their natural state. Inca iconography, like Inca architecture, was largely abstract and geometric, very different from the baroque of Mesoamerica. Buildings and sculpture were adapted to natural formations with a bold simplicity that is almost Scandinavian. There were few “idols” to outrage the invaders; adornment was confined to precious metalwork and sumptuous weaving. Gold and cloth the Spaniards could understand, but the austere and faultless stonework chilled them. To a culture of facade, the perfectionism of the Incas was a constant rebuke that unsettles the conquerors’ descendants to this day.

Except for Cusco itself, which had between 50,000 and 100,000 citizens, Andean cities were small. Huánuco, a typical provincial center, was home to only 15,000, and many of its buildings were for itinerant public servants, work parties, and troops. Most people lived on the land in small towns and villages; the movement of supplies — except for coastal trading — was organized collectively by ethnic groups and the state. These economic and political structures, which have seemed “socialist” and “totalitarian” to modern writers, were not necessarily the invention of the Inca rulers. They had their roots in the social organization of ancient farming communities, called *ayllu*,

which owned land in common and tried to control a variety of ecological zones in the vertical mountain world. The Andes present severe difficulties to human settlement. One in three crops is lost to hail, frost, or drought; landslides are common, and transportation over snowbound passes can be very difficult. Only by having colonies of ayllu members on the high pastures, the hot lowlands, and the temperate zone in between could a community guarantee its members a balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, corn, other grains, meat, and potatoes. It was often easier to rotate people at different times of the year than to move goods.

The Incas expanded ayllu organization to an imperial scale. They taxed people in labor more than in kind, using it to extend scarce arable land with terracing and irrigation projects. Much of the surplus thus raised supported the Inca royalty and priesthood, the army and bureaucracy, but the Incas returned enough to the people to legitimate their rule. Andean societies, like many others in the Americas, were built on the ethic of reciprocity, not rapacity. The state demanded much of its people, but the people expected — and received — much from the state. Even today, a person rises in Andean village life by gathering wealth and giving large parts of it away (as in the North American potlatch). Since power rested on the ability to control labor and redistribute resources — because people, rather than things, were wealth — it was in the Incas' enlightened self-interest to take good care of their subjects. This alien thinking impressed the better European minds, especially the conqueror and chronicler Cieza de León.

At the beginning of the new year [officials] used to come from Cusco with their *quipus*, by which it was known how many births there had been that year, and how many deaths. And in these there was great truth and accuracy, without any fraud or deceit. In this way the Inca and the governors knew which of the Indians were poor, which women had been widowed, and whether they could afford to pay their taxes. . . . And in each head province there was a great number of storehouses full of supplies and provisions . . . and if there was no war all these supplies were divided among the poor and widows, the old, the lame, the blind, [and] the crippled. . . .

It is no small sorrow to reflect that those Incas, even though they were heathens and idolaters, knew how to keep such good order . . . and that we Christians have destroyed so many kingdoms.¹¹

Modern archaeology bears out Cieza's claims: the Inca ruins of Huánuco contain 500 warehouses with a total capacity of more than one million cubic feet.¹²

What is most extraordinary is that the Inca Empire was scarcely a hundred years old when Europeans arrived. Its formation, beginning around 1400, had ended a long period of warring states, which had in turn been preceded by an empire known as Wari-Tiawanaku.¹³ The Incas managed to pull these fragments together and draw on the best features of their rivals and predecessors to build their system. Yet the Inca period was no mere copy of things that had gone before: it was a brilliant synthesis of Peruvian civilization, the fruit of thousands of years. The empire's physical remains — its roads, suspension bridges, temples, towns, fortresses, and irrigation canals — can still be seen everywhere, overshadowing what went before and what has followed. Only in the past twenty years has the acreage under irrigation on the Peruvian coast reached its 1520 extent, while food production in the mountains is far lower today than then. So effective were Inca social policies that the Quechua language predominates in the Andes despite centuries of pressure from Spanish. To visit the Andean highlands today is to see a place where something important happened in the past — and nothing comparable has happened since.

It isn't easy to account for the Inca Empire's rapid success, but part of the explanation must be that it was an idea whose time had come. It fulfilled in real terms an order remembered from previous Andean empires and idealized as populations rose and rubbed against one another in chronic strife.¹⁴ Peruvians, like most American peoples, thought of space as a *quincunx*: four directions united by a central principle. This scheme was writ large in both the structure and name of the Inca Empire, which was not called Peru.¹⁵ Each cardinal direction was a great *suyu*, or province, and together they formed Tawantinsuyu, the United Four Quarters. The capital at the pivot of the

four was the unifying principle, and the city's name is no less revealing: Cusco is a Quechua word for "navel." Through Cusco, heaven nourished the earth.

The word *Inka* is often translated as "king" or "emperor" and loosely applied to ancient Peruvians as a whole, but its primary meaning in Quechua is "archetype." "*Inka*," a modern anthropologist was told, "is the original model of all things."¹⁶ The monarch was sometimes called *Sapa Inka*, Unique Inca, or *the Inca*. Like the emperors of Egypt, China, and Japan, he was a god-king, a son of heaven, a child of the sun. His title applied more to the office than the man. *Sapa Inkas* were born, made love, fought, and died like men, but once secure in office the ruler became the representative of humanity to the gods, and of the gods to man. He was the hub around which the four quarters of the world revolved. In Western terms, a *Sapa Inka* was Adam, Christ, and king.



They say that a great plague of smallpox broke out [and] spread to all parts of the kingdom. . . . In the days of the Incas there was very little arable land . . . that was not under cultivation, and all as thickly settled. . . . Now there are few natives . . . their number has diminished to what we now see.

— Cieza de León, c. 1545

While Pizarro was "discovering Peru," the throne of the Tawantinsuyu was occupied by Wayna Qhapaq, the eleventh Inca according to the traditional list of kings.¹⁷ Indeed, only he, his father, and his grandfather were true emperors: the first eight had ruled little more than Cusco and its hinterland. Wayna Qhapaq was crowned in 1493, the year in which Pope Alexander gave the New World to Portugal and Spain. America's quarantine had been broken, but the biological consequences took another thirty-four years to reach Wayna Qhapaq. Though he did not know it until the end, he lived his long and illustrious reign on borrowed time.

In Cieza's account, he was a formidable ruler, "not very large in stature, but sturdy and well made, with a fine face and grave expression; a man of few words and many deeds."¹⁸ Pedro Pizarro, Francisco's cousin and page, was told of Wayna Qhapaq's lighter side: "The Indians say he was a great friend of the poor and that he ordered they should be given special care throughout the land. They say he was affable with his people yet august. They say he could outdrink three men but they never saw him drunk."¹⁹

In 1527, couriers ran up into the mountains with the news that strange foreigners were probing the fringes of the empire and that two of them — the men Pizarro had left behind — were being held in custody on the coast.²⁰ The Inca, in Quito consolidating his annexation of Ecuador and pondering whether to push on into what is now Colombia, ordered that the two strangers be brought before him. But at that very moment the Spaniards' invisible allies reached Peru. The pandemic that had devastated the Aztecs and the Mayas may have been carried south by Pizarro himself; more likely it spread overland through Darien and Colombia and then burst upon Wayna Qhapaq's 20 million subjects.²¹ As in Mesoamerica, it killed at least half the population and toppled the leadership: Wayna Qhapaq died, past fifty but still in his prime, and so did the son likely to have been his heir.²² History does not record whether he had time to question the Spanish captives personally, but shortly before his death the Inca warned his children and governors to prepare themselves for an invasion from beyond the known world.

Pachakuti Yamki, an Indian noble writing in southern Peru at the end of the sixteenth century,²³ tells of Wayna Qhapaq's death in a story reminiscent of Pandora's box.

The Inca went to Quito to rest and to issue new laws and taxes; and then from Cusco came the news that there was a plague of smallpox. . . . And when he turned towards the sea with his entourage, there were seen at midnight, as if surrounding him, a million million people, and it was not known who they were. And they say that [the Inca] said they were living souls . . . meaning that so many were about to die in the pestilence. . . .

At dinner time a messenger in a black cloak arrived, and he kissed the Inca with great reverence and gave him a *p'uti*, a small case locked and with a key, and the Inca told the Indian to open it, but he asked to be excused, saying that the Creator had commanded that only the Inca should open it. And seeing that this was so, the Inca opened the box and there came flying out [things] like butterflies or scraps of paper, scattering until they vanished; this was the smallpox plague. And so within two days General Mihacnacamayta²⁴ died, along with many other captains, and all their faces were covered in burning scabs. And when the Inca saw this, he ordered that a stone house be built in which to isolate himself . . . and there he died.²⁵

It is tempting to infer that the Spaniards sent a gift of infected material to the Inca court (as the British later did in North America). But it's unlikely that Pizarro knew enough epidemiology for such a scheme. Pachakuti Yamki's story is symbolic, reflecting the trauma of sudden mass death. Children lost their parents, parents their children; fields and canals went untended, buildings lay unfinished, and vital links were struck from the chain of command.

Had it not been for this plague, the Spaniards would have had to face a shrewd, experienced, and venerated ruler at the height of his powers. As Pedro Pizarro admits: "If this Wayna Qhapaq had been alive when we Spaniards invaded this land it would have been impossible to win, for he was greatly loved by all his vassals. . . . Had the country not been divided by the wars between Waskhar and Atawallpa, we could neither have invaded nor triumphed — not even if more than a thousand Spaniards had come at once."²⁶

Wayna Qhapaq's warnings were soon forgotten in the war of succession that broke out between two of his surviving sons: Waskhar, favored by Cusco, and Atawallpa, based in the north. The wars not only divided the Inca royalty but gave restive subjects a chance to revolt. The rule of the Tawantinsuyu, benign though it was, did not go unchallenged; there were always those who thought they could do better on their own, and these elements became active whenever an Inca died and a successor had yet to establish himself.

Just at this moment of depopulation, discord, and civil war,

Francisco Pizarro reappeared with 200 men and 70 horses.²⁷ The Spaniards found Tumbes, where they had planned to set up a bishopric, deserted and in ruins. The extent of the Tawantinsuyu's preoccupation with dynastic troubles is clear from what happened next. Pizarro was able to move south, occupy the fertile Piura valley, enslave what remained of the locals, and start building a Spanish town, complete with a church and town hall.

The Europeans stayed there in San Miguel de Piura — today a dusty, rather stuffy provincial center and a shrine of *hispanismo* for Peruvians who identify with the conquerors — for several months, ignored by the Inca state. During this time they heard tantalizing reports about the war between the brothers. Up in the highlands great armies were clashing, disputing the roads and cities along the backbone of the empire. From time to time word reached Atawallpa that bearded foreigners were pillaging parts of the coast. Waman Puma, a native writer from whom we shall hear more in Part 2, gives an idea of these reports.

The Christians did not sleep. (This was said because they stayed up late at night.) They ate silver and gold . . . and day and night each one spoke with his papers and writings. And they were all encased [by armor] and their faces completely covered in wool, so that all that could be seen were their eyes. . . . And they had no great lord among them, for all seemed to be equals in their . . . manner of speaking and eating and dressing.²⁸

Atawallpa was too busy defeating his brother to take much notice, but he did send a senior official, who "entered as casually as if he had been brought up all his life among Spaniards [and] enjoyed himself for two or three days among us."²⁹ Pedro Pizarro describes the investigator's methods.

It was this Indian's intent to count how many people we were, and what sort of men we were, and so he went around provoking the Spaniards by mocking them, and asking them to draw their swords. It happened that he went up to one Spaniard . . . and put his hand on his beard, for which the Spaniard gave him many blows. . . . After having counted the Spaniards, the Indian returned to his lord Atawallpa and told him everything he had seen, and he said that there were about 190, including ninety

on horseback more or less, and that they were lazy robbers . . . bearded thieves who had come from the sea, and that they came riding on some llamas like those of Qollaw [Bolivia], which are the largest in this land. . . .

With this Atawallpa was reassured, and he took [us] for nothing.³⁰

The incident is important for what it says about the white god myth. Tzvetan Todorov, the French critic who has written about America's failure to perceive the "Other," further claims that ability to detect the "Other" is related in some way to literacy. Because the Incas are less literate than the Mayas and Aztecs, he asserts, they "firmly believe in [the Spaniards'] divine nature."³¹ The facts say otherwise. Of the three, it was the Incas who made the most practical investigation of the strangers, and, like the Mayas, they clearly treated them from the start as men. Peruvians certainly found Spaniards strange, but they despised them for their unruly behavior, their lack of hierarchy, and their filthiness. All the actions of Inca Atawallpa, his envoys, and officials point to this. Atawallpa's mistake was the opposite of Moctezuma's: the new Inca, puffed with recent victory, fatally underestimated the barbarians.



So fell Peru. We gave her greed, hunger and the Cross: three gifts for the civilized life. The family groups that sang on the terraces are gone. In their place slaves shuffle underground and they don't sing there. Peru is a silent country, frozen in avarice.

— Peter Shaffer, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, 1964

In September 1532, Pizarro set out from his base at Piura with about 170 men and 62 horses. His battle standard has survived, a childish piece of embroidery showing a knight on one side and the Hapsburg arms on the other. Atawallpa, resting with his army at Cajamarca, a highland city in northern Peru, allowed the strangers to climb into the mountains and cross formidable passes unmolested. Because the Incas used no wheels, their roads did not avoid steep inclines — they took the shortest

route, often ascending thousands of feet in flights of stone steps. If Atawallpa had wanted to kill the invaders he could have done so easily. Spanish forces of this size were annihilated in such terrain by Inca armies four years later.³²

But Atawallpa, who now had leisure to examine the foreigners himself, thought he might be able to use them somehow to enhance his victory celebrations. He admitted as much after his capture, explaining that he had planned to breed the horses and make the Spaniards into court eunuchs.³³ His judgment was impaired by arrogance, the arrogance of one who thought he had just become ruler of the world.

There are many versions of the events at Cajamarca on the fifteenth and sixteenth of November 1532, but though they vary in detail and in point of view, they do not differ much in substance. Of interest here are the two main accounts by writers from the Inca side. The earlier and more authoritative is that of Titu Kusi Yupanki, Atawallpa's nephew, who was a small boy at the time his uncle was overthrown but later led the Inca resistance from a mountain stronghold near the famous ruins of Machu Picchu. In 1570, he dictated a document that is part history, part memoir, and part protest to the Spanish regime: "May those who read this letter know that I, the Sapa Inka . . . Titu Kusi Yupanki, first-born son of Manku Inka Yupanki, and grandson of Wayna Qhapaq, who were the natural lords of these realms and provinces of Peru, say this."³⁴ Most of his *Relación*, which runs to more than a hundred pages, tells the Inca side of the great "rebellion" launched by his father, Manku, in 1536.

His version of what passed between Atawallpa and the Spaniards at their first meeting — on the day before the massacre — is most important for its depiction of an exchange that would become symbolic of cultural hostility and incompatibility in Peru from that day to this.

Some lowlanders brought two of these *wiragochas* [Spaniards] to my uncle Atawallpa, who was in Cajamarca at the time. He received them very well and gave one of them our customary drink, which is called *chicha*, in a gold chalice. The Spaniard took it from his hand and tipped it on the ground, which angered my uncle very much. After this, those two Spaniards showed my uncle a letter or a book, or whatever, saying that it was the writing

of God and the king. And my uncle, offended by the spilling of the chicha, took the letter . . . and threw it down, saying, "How should I know what you are giving me here? Away with you! Go!"³⁵

Thus, each side abused what the other held dear.

Spanish accounts gloss over the spilling of the chicha, but they do mention the frosty reception that Atawallpa gave Hernando de Soto and Hernando Pizarro at some hot springs a few miles outside the city. Atawallpa was a thickset man in his early thirties, a generation younger than the Spanish leader. He had "a large face, handsome and fierce,"³⁶ was grave with his subjects, but cheerful in private and fond of debate. When the Spaniards came to understand his conversation they found him intelligent and quick with sarcasm.

The Inca was fasting and taking the waters. He told the Spaniards he knew that they had been mistreating his subjects; one lord had sent him an iron slave collar and reported that he had killed three white men and a horse. Hernando Pizarro protested that such a killing was impossible and began to boast of Spanish valor. Atawallpa, who sat on a low stool throughout the meeting, "smiled, as someone who did not think much of us."³⁷ He kept his composure even when Soto's horse came so close that its breath stirred the *maskhapaycha* on his forehead, the crimson fringe of vicuña threads that was the Inca crown.

Atawallpa assigned the strangers empty buildings on the city square for the night and agreed to visit them the next day, little realizing that he had thereby set his own trap. Cajamarca, now a small city of adobe walls and tile roofs, stands at 9,000 feet (not high by Andean standards) on the edge of a broad valley set like a green cabochon among folds of rock. The Spaniards could see Atawallpa's army, stationed in neat rows of cotton tents on the hills. They estimated 80,000 fighting men and said that the campfires that night were "like a brilliantly star-studded sky."³⁸

Only one building of Inca Cajamarca remains, the so-called Ransom Room, a typical structure of large masonry blocks superbly fitted without mortar. Its walls have the usual batter, or incline, giving it a massive and invincible stance; on the inside

the usual row of trapezoidal niches circles the room at shoulder height, a decorative feature perhaps used for lamps and statuettes. The roof would have been a steep crest of thatch. On important buildings this thatching was several feet thick, finely woven and sharply trimmed in shingles and geometrical designs, with embossed sheets of copper, silver, or gold on the ridge and corners. Such roofs complemented and relieved the severe stonework.

It is hard to picture Cajamarca's square — now occupied by a fountain, some topiary, and an army of bootblacks — as it looked in 1532. It followed the standard imperial plan designed for public ceremonies and parades.³⁹ The middle held a terraced platform where the Inca or his representative would sit; around three sides were stone halls, each with a row of large doorways, resembling colonnades. These were intended to shelter the crowd during rainy fiestas; they were also perfect for the ambush the Spaniards had in mind. The invaders hid inside, fully armed, the knights mounted, for most of the day. As hours passed and there was still no sign of the Inca, the suspense grew unbearable. Pedro Pizarro recalled, "The Indians he had spying on us [told Atawallpa] that the Spaniards were all inside the hall, full of fear, and that none were to be seen in the plaza. And it was true what the Indians were saying, because I myself saw many Spaniards who, without knowing it, pissed themselves from pure terror."⁴⁰

Atawallpa came late in the afternoon, so confident of his overwhelming strength that neither he nor his men brought weapons. Files of retainers entered the square through the main gate, each company in uniform, singing a lilting song. After thousands had taken up their places, the Sapa Inka appeared in a rich palanquin carried on the shoulders of his senior lords. When he reached the middle of the square, Friar Vicente Valverde (who later became bishop of Cusco and dinner for the Puna islanders) approached and invited him to speak to Pizarro indoors. Atawallpa said he would not move until the Spaniards had made good everything they had consumed, damaged, or stolen while in his empire, the quipus being very exact in such matters. It seems that Valverde then read Atawallpa the Requirement, and that the Inca replied, "As for the Pope of whom

you speak, he must be crazy to talk of giving away countries which do not belong to him."⁴¹

Here is Waman Puma's account of that bizarre interview.

Atawallpa Inca went from the baths to the city and court of Cajamarca in all his majesty and surrounded by his captains . . . and on the throne called *usnu*, which is at the middle of the public square, Atawallpa sat. And then Don Francisco Pizarro began to tell him, through the interpreter Felipe (a Wankawillka Indian)⁴² that he was the messenger and ambassador of a great lord and that he was his friend and had come only to tell him this. . . . And the Inca replied with majesty that it might be true he [Pizarro] had come from a great lord, since he had come from so far a land . . . but that he [Atawallpa] was also a great lord in his kingdom, and did not need such friends.

After this reply, Friar Vicente approached, holding in his right hand a cross and in his left a breviary, and he said to Inca Atawallpa that he was the messenger and ambassador of an even greater lord and great friend of God [the pope], and that the Inca should become his friend and adore the cross and believe in the gospel of God, and worship nothing else because all else was foolishness. And Atawallpa Inca answered that he worshipped no one but the Sun, which never dies, and the shrines and other gods according to his law. . . .

And the Inca asked Friar Vicente who had told him such things, and Friar Vicente responded, "The book of the gospels." And Atawallpa said, "Give me the book that it may speak to me." And so . . . he took the book and began to leaf through its pages. And the Inca said, "Why does it not speak to me? This book tells me nothing!" And . . . Atawallpa Inca threw the book from his hands.⁴³

Valverde called on the Spaniards to avenge the insult to the holy volume. A gun was fired; knights charged out and began killing the unarmed courtiers "like ants," in Waman Puma's words.⁴⁴ The massacre took about an hour and a half. When it was over, between 5,000 and 10,000 Peruvians lay dead in the square, including many of the empire's lords. They defended their god-king to the last, supporting the litter on their shoulders even after their hands had been sliced off.⁴⁵ The only injury on the European side was a cut suffered by Pizarro himself as

he parried another Spaniard's blow aimed at the Inca. Pizarro wanted Atawallpa alive as a hostage and a puppet.

Titu Kusi Yupanki:

The Spaniards charged out with great fury into the middle of the square, where there was a high throne of the Inca, resembling a fort, which we call an *usnu*. They occupied this and would not let my uncle ascend it. Before he reached the foot, they pulled him from his litter by force, and turned it upside down, they seized his insignia and headband, which among us is the crown, and they took him prisoner. . . .

That square was enclosed by walls and all the Indians were inside like llamas.⁴⁶ There were a great many of them and they could not get out, nor did they have any weapons — they had not brought them because of the low opinion they held of the Spaniards; all they had were slings and *tumis* [ceremonial knives]. . . .

The Spaniards killed them all — with horses, with swords, with guns — just as one might slaughter llamas, for nobody could defend himself. From more than 10,000 men there did not escape 200.

And when all were dead they took my uncle Atawallpa to a cell, where they kept him bound all night, with a chain around his neck.⁴⁷

Atawallpa soon saw that the acquisition of treasure interested his captors much more than the imposition of Christianity or King Charles, so he made his famous offer: a roomful of gold and two rooms of silver for his freedom. Temples and palaces were stripped. Llama caravans streamed along the roads to Cajamarca for months, bringing the riches of the empire. From the outside walls alone of the main temple in Cusco came a ton and a half of gold plates.

Gold and silver held no monetary value for the Incas; their significance was purely aesthetic and iconic. Gold was the sweat of the sun, silver the moon's tears; one symbolized man, the other woman. The Peruvians were puzzled by the foreigners' inordinate lust for these metals. Among the many pen drawings with which Waman Puma so ably illustrates his chronicle, he shows a meeting between Emperor Wayna Qhapaq and Pedro de Candia, who went ashore at Tumbes in 1527. Concerned

with poetic rather than literal truth (Candía and the emperor never met), Waman Puma dramatized the clash of cultures by having each man speak in his own tongue: "*Kay qoritachu mik-hunki?*" asks the Inca. "Do you eat this gold?" And the European answers yes, "*Este oro comemos!*" "We eat this gold!"⁴⁸

The rooms filled more slowly than Atawallpa had expected, but the quantity gathered was immense: about seven tons of gold and thirteen tons of silver. At a price of \$400 per ounce, the gold alone would be worth nearly \$65 million. This does not convey its true value at the time; no European king had anything like such a sum at his disposal.⁴⁹ As in Mexico, all but a small sample was melted into ingots on the spot. It was a devastating cultural loss, for precious metals were a principal medium of Inca art.

It took the Peruvian goldsmiths about a month to undo their oeuvre, melting down a quarter ton per day. It was no use, of course. When the time drew near for Atawallpa's captors to fulfill their side of the bargain, they put him on trial for treason and condemned him to be burned. The proposed execution appalled the Peruvians not merely for its injustice and cruelty but because the Incas were ancestor worshipers. Dead kings and queens, carefully mummified, behaved as if alive: they threw banquets in their palaces, paraded in Cusco's streets, and with hollow eyes watched dawn after dawn from thrones in the Temple of the Sun.

Without a body, Atawallpa would be denied this busy after-life. So he agreed to baptism in exchange for death by the garrote. He died, as Don Francisco Atawallpa, on July 26, 1533. Some say he was buried in Quito, the home of his mother's people, others that Pizarro cheated him even in death by burning his corpse.

This Quechua elegy, entitled "Atawallpa Wañuy" ("The Death of Atawallpa") was composed in the Quito region:

Like a cloud, the *wiragochas*,
The white men,
Demanding gold,
Invaded us.

After seizing
Our father Inca;

After deceiving him,
They put him to death.

He with the heart of a puma,
The adroitness of a fox,
They killed
As if he were a llama.

Hail fell,
Lightning struck,
The sun sank,
Night came.

And in their terror,
The elders
And the people
Buried themselves alive.⁵⁰