

Pachacamac--An Andean Oracle Under Inca Rule

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Pachacamac, the creator of the world and the earth shaker, was one of the most influential and powerful wak'as in the central Andes when the Spaniards invaded the Inca Empire in 1532 (Calancha 1638:92). Under the Incas, this oracle established a sphere of influence that was simultaneously linked with that of the imperial state and separate from it (Estete 1947:339). Inca rulers and claimants to the throne, from Topa 'Inka Yupanki onwards, sought its counsel on matters of state (Santillan 1927:29-31; Pizarro 1965:181-183; Cabello Valboa 1951:397-398). At the same time, Pachacamac collected tribute from as far north as Esmeraldas, which was effectively beyond the imperial frontiers, and founded a series of branch oracles throughout the central part of the empire (Estete 1947:339; Santillan 1927:29-31; Davila Brizena 1965:163; Dioses y Hombres 1966:113-119; Albornoz 1967:33-35; Netherly 1977:321). At first sight, the influence of the oracle seems almost paradoxical, for the oracle was not an Inca wak'a and the priests and spokesmen of its principle shrine on the coast near Lima were not Incas but came instead from an ethnic group known as the Ichma (Rostworowski 1972a). Furthermore, it was not the only wak'a in Ichma, for Albornoz (1967:33-35) mentions several others, including the talking one called Rimaq. If we can account for this seeming incongruity in terms of the kinds of relationships that developed between the oracle, on the one hand, and the Incas and other polities and communities, on the other, we can gain a clear understanding of the formation and structure of pre-Columbian states in the Andes.



When the Spaniards arrived, competition, rivalries, conspiracies and plots--not harmony and tranquility--characterized the Andean world. A civil war raged between two brothers over succession to the throne. Both had forged alliances with royal kinsmen and with members of other ethnic groups, and both had sought the support of wak'as including Pachacamac. Struggle and conflict were not the exclusive domain of the Incas, for neighboring ethnic groups in central Peru--traditional rivals from time immemorial--went to court to settle a dispute in which all of the parties concerned claimed ownership of the same rich farmlands near Quives (Rostworowski 1972b).

One of the peculiarities of Inca social structure was that no emperor could inherit the property of his predecessor. The throne passed to one of his sons--all of whom, at least theoretically, had the same rights and could aspire equally to the royal tassel (Rostworowski 1960). The remainder of the property passed to his other descendants who formed a corporate landholding group called a panaqa; they used it to support themselves and the mummy bundle of the founder and to maintain a cult in his honor (Rowe 1967:60-61, 67-68). Upon ascending to the throne, the new ruler had to establish his own corporation by securing lands and servants to support his wives and their children. The early emperors had estates in Cuzco and its environs; however, Pachakuti 'Inka Yupanki and his successors had lands in the provincial areas of the empire (Patterson 1984). This continual demand for land and labor by the Inca rulers placed a growing burden on the Andean peoples. It was the food that nourished conflict, rivalries, and revolts against the state.

The panaqas wielded considerable power in the empire. Their members held important positions in the state apparatus; they were generals,



administrators of the highest ranks, and influential priests in the state religious cult (Murra 1980). Their women were often the wives of the ruler and, as a result, frequently the mothers of potential heirs to the Inca throne. The influence of the corporations and the potential for conflict between them seem to have been heightened during times of succession. This is particularly evident in accounts of the deteriorating relations that developed between the panaqas of Pachakuti and Topa 'Inka during the period when the latter co-reigned with his father and after he ultimately succeeded him. Pachakuti became concerned over the exploits of his son and named two of his brothers to inspect conditions in the newly conquered lands (Sarmiento de Gamboa 1960:249-252). Subsequently, he had his brothers killed for disobeying orders; the brothers, who belonged to the panaqa founded by Pachakuti's father, had been close allies of Topa 'Inka during the conquest of chinchaysuyu--the northern quarter of the empire (Sarmiento de Gamboa 1960:250-252). Royal counselors--quite probably members of Pachakuti's corporation and their allies--prevented one of Topa 'Inka's sons from taking lands north of Lake Titicaca--an area incorporated into the imperial state by Pachakuti himself (Cobo 1956, vol. 2:86-88; Rowe 1945:270 and fig. 20). Topa 'Inka killed an inspector for fomenting a rebellion among his servants; the man was his brother and belonged to the panaqa of Pachakuti (Sarmiento de Gamboa 1960:256). Finally, the old, retired emperor wanted Wayna Qhapaq--his favorite grandson, the son of his daughter--to succeed Topa 'Inka on the throne, while the latter apparently wanted to name a son by another woman (Sarmiento de Gamboa 1960:252-253). Topa 'Inka died under mysterious circumstances and may have been killed by his father's descendants, for Wayna Qhapaq eventually succeeded him to the throne (Rost-



worowski 1960).

Another way the panaqa of a new ruler could gain wealth, power, and prestige--besides acquiring new lands and servants--was to take over the care and maintenance of a wak'a in order to ensure that the appropriate ceremonies were performed. Pachakuti, who initiated the wars of conquest leading to the formation of the imperial state and who had one of the wealthiest corporations as a result, is said to have created nearly a dozen new wak'as in the Cuzco area, to have rebuilt and endowed the Temple of the Sun, the most important Inca shrine in Cuzco, and to have organized the entire system of Inca state shrines, alienating lands and assigning servants for their maintenance (Cobo 1956, vol. 2:169-185; Rowe 1979:10). There was a close relationship between Pachakuti and the state-sponsored Sun Cult (Patterson 1984). In spite of this, the Son of the Sun, as the ruler was sometimes called, was not the principal spokesman of the state cult. Instead, the top of the imperial religious hierarchy was occupied by a royal or noble kinsman, a collateral relative of the emperor who belonged to a different panaqa or noble ayllu (Murra 1980:161).

Topa 'Inka seems to have had a very different relationship from that of his father with the wak'as of Cuzco and with at least some of the shrines in chinchaysuyu--an area that was largely incorporated into the imperial state under his leadership or rule. He apparently neither created nor maintained new wak'as in the Cuzco area as his father, his brother, and his son who followed him to the throne had done (Rowe 1979:10). He is also said to have been very critical and demanding of the wak'as, holding them in strict account for what happened (Huaman Poma de Ayala 1936:261; Pachakuti 1879:283-284). According to one story,



after much fighting in which he could not defeat his enemies, Topa 'Inka called together all of the wak'as he had served with gold, silver, cloth, and food and asked for their help. When none responded, he became furious and threatened to burn all of their possessions. Finally, one of them-Macahuisa, the son of Pariacaca, a famous wak'a in the mountains of Huarochirí--vowed to help the Inca ruler. After the wak'a helped him destroy the enemy, Topa 'Inka revered Pariacaca even more, giving him fifty servants, and asked what more he could offer the shrine (Dioses y Hombres 1966:131-135). In other words, Topa 'Inka established an alliance or working relationship with a wak'a that apparently did not have close ties with the panaqa of his father.

Topa 'Inka developed an especially close relationship with at least one wak'a in chinchaysuyu--Pachacamac--which was located in the land of the Ichma. The chroniclers suggest two reasons why this happened. One is that the Inca leader who was attacking the Chimú armies from the north and east, made an alliance with the Ichma, an enemy of the Chanchan rulers who lived on the southern edge of that coastal state. This was a seasoned Inca battle tactic (Calancha 1638:549-551; Cieza de León 1967:194-197; Bram 1941). The Incas and the Ichma probably saw themselves as allies fighting a common enemy. After Chimor was defeated, the two remained allies. Topa 'Inka incorporated Ichma into the imperial state, establishing a provincial capital at Pachacamac, which included the construction of a shrine dedicated to the Sun cult.<sup>1</sup>

The other reason has more to do with the political intrigues of the royal corporations, their noble kinsmen, and their neighbors in Cuzco. More specifically, it focuses attention on the role women played in these intrigues and on the ways they maintained their interests and



those of their kin in these situations.<sup>2</sup> One account indicates that Topa 'Inka's mother--Mama Anahuarque, who was from Choco and, thus, not a member of a panaga--had a revelation while she was pregnant with her son, the future ruler (Santillan 1927:29-31; Sarmiento de Gamboa 1960:238-239; Cobo 1956, vol. 2:77; Cabello Valboa 1951:303). She learned that Pachacamac was the creator of the world. After Topa 'Inka was born, his mother told him of the vision, and he was determined to seek out this wak'a in the land of the Ichma. The Inca leader and his retinue spent many days at the site of Pachacamac. They sacrificed llamas and burned many shirts to thank the oracle for his assistance. After fasting for forty days, Topa 'Inka spoke with the wak'a and asked him what else he could offer. Pachacamac responded that he had a wife and children and that the Incas could build them a house--i.e., enlarge the Temple of Pachacamac.<sup>3</sup> The oracle also told the Inca leader that he had four sons and that the Incas should also build houses for them.

The sons of Pachacamac were branch oracles. Building shrines for them outside the land of the Ichma permitted the caretakers of the principal shrine to extend their influence into other areas. The wak'a specifically requested that the Inca leader build a house for one son in Mala and another in Chincha. These were coastal valleys south of Ichma, and, at the time the branch oracles were established, neither had been conquered or incorporated into the imperial state (Santillan 1927:29-31; Menzel 1959; Menzel and Rowe 1966). The third son had a house built in the sierra, either at Andahuaylas near the oracle of Apurimac or at Andahuaylillas near the shrine dedicated to Tegu Wiracocha, an important Inca deity closely related to the panaga of Pachakuti's father.<sup>4</sup> The fourth branch oracle would travel with Topa 'Inka to protect him and



answer any questions he might have.

The location of the branch oracles mentioned in this account provides some information about the kinds of relationships that were developing between the guardians of Pachacamac's shrine and the Incas. Two of them were established beyond the imperial frontiers in lands the Incas coveted and planned to conquer in the near future (Menzel and Rowe 1966). These shrines permitted the priests to gather information about the social conditions that existed among the peoples of those lands. They could not only provide the Inca ruler with information about those peoples but also begin to play an increasingly important role in what was happening in the frontier areas of the empire. The branch oracle established in the sierra provided them with the opportunity to learn about the activities and intentions of groups who controlled powerful shrines that were not part of the state cult. The travelling branch oracle who accompanied the emperor was in a position not only to collect information about matters of state but also to advise the Inca leader on the course of action he should follow.

These were not the only kinsmen of Pachacamac--i.e., branch oracles--who had houses outside of Ichma. He had wives in Chincha and Mamaq, sons in Huarochirí, and a house near Chanchan (Albornoz 1967:33-35; Davila Brizeño 1965:163; Dioses y Hombres 1966:113-119; Netherly 1977:321). One account relates how these branch oracles were established and how they operated in areas that had already been incorporated into the Inca state (Dioses y Hombres 1966:113-119). According to this story, a woman from Huarochirí found an object in a field. Thinking it might be important, she took it home and showed it to her parents and neighbors. The object identified himself as the son of Pachacamac and said that his



father had sent him to protect the people of Huarochirí. They built a shrine and set aside one month each year when they honored him with sacrifices and gifts. After many years, the branch oracle disappeared and the people were saddened. They went to Pachacamac with gifts of llamas, guinea pigs, and fine cloth and begged him to have his son return to their community. Pachacamac consented and the branch oracle returned. The people were elated and gave Pachacamac more llamas and pasture to graze them. From then on, they made sacrifices and gave gifts to the branch oracle on one day and to Pachacamac on the next.

This account is a thinly veiled description of how the caretakers of the principal shrine at Pachacamac and one of the branch oracles began to appropriate the surplus labor and social product of others. A kin group from Huarochirí built a shrine dedicated to Pachacamac's son and assumed responsibility for its maintenance and for the performance of the appropriate ceremonies. This enhanced the prestige of the group, because its members were associating themselves with a wak'a whose fortunes were rising in the Andean world. Some of the surplus labor and gifts they received were undoubtedly used to maintain the local shrine and its staff; others may have been used to support the Temple of Pachacamac. After a period when no harm befell the peoples of Huarochirí, during which their gifts to Pachacamac's son prevented the earthquakes which the wak'a could bring, the caretakers of the principal shrine removed the branch oracle and demanded larger payments for their continued protection and prosperity.<sup>5</sup> The people of Huarochirí met these demands, and their surplus social production was appropriated by both the principal shrine and the local branch.

In 1968, Karen Spalding and I investigated what was probably the



site of one of the branch oracles. It was located at Mamaq in the Rimac Valley and was dedicated to the wife of Pachacamac (Davila Brizeño 1965:163).<sup>6</sup> The shrine consisted of low platform mounds around three sides of a plaza. The pottery fragments from the site indicate that the structures were built and used after the area was incorporated into the Inca state. Virtually all of the several thousand sherds we examined we made in the local style (Feltham 1983:393-703). About half a dozen fragments came from vessels that were made on the coast in the fancy style of the Ichma potters; they constitute the major evidence for Pachacamac influence at the site. There were no fragments of Inca style vessels around the structures, in spite of the fact that there was a small Inca installation located within shouting distance of the shrine.

The patterns of pottery associations at the site indicate that the branch oracle was controlled and primarily used by local peoples. The presence of a few fancy coastal vessels suggests some connection with the Temple of Pachacamac. The absence of Inca pottery vessels or local imitations of them indicates that the branch oracle was not closely tied to the Inca state apparatus. This also suggests that Pachacamac and the Incas were not seen as being closely linked in this province; this is substantiated by the fact that an Inca inspector in Huarochirí did not know the identity of Pachacamac's son (Dioses y Hombres 1966:113-119).

A different situation prevailed in the Chincha Valley where other branch oracles were located and where Pachacamac held lands (Menzel and Rowe 1966:68). Here, the pottery associations that occur at a number of sites around La Centinela, the local and Inca administrative center of the valley, indicate that there was a very close linkage between Pachacamac and the Incas. Furthermore, it has been argued that Chincha was



subordinate to both in Inca times, because the imitation Inca and central coast pottery types constituted more than three quarters of the pottery vessels found in the graves of the cemetery associated with La Centinela (Menzel and Rowe 1966:68-69; Menzel 1966). In other words, the prestige of the local pottery tradition and its use by the local elite diminished dramatically after the arrival of the branch oracles and the Incas.

It appears that the caretakers of Pachacamac and the Incas were closely linked in those areas which were beyond the imperial frontiers when the branch oracles were established in them. They seem to have been less closely linked with each other in those areas where the branch oracles were established after their peoples had already been incorporated into the imperial state. At Pachacamac, the site of the principal shrine dedicated to the oracle and an Inca provincial capital as well, the patterns of pottery associations do not indicate a particularly close relationship between the Incas and the Ichma caretakers of the shrine. Most of the Inca pottery and local imitations of it are concentrated around the Temple of the Sun and other structures at the northern end of the site that were apparently part of the provincial capital; vessels manufactured in the local pottery style were also used at the Sun temple (Strong and Corbett 1943). Inca pottery and its local imitations were not common in the refuse around the Temple of Pachacamac, and they were very rare among the grave goods of individuals who were buried in front of the shrine after it was enlarged.<sup>7</sup> Inca and the local imitative wares were also uncommon in the walled compounds located near the shrine of the oracle (McDougle, personal communication).

When the Spaniards arrived, Pachacamac's influence was greatest in



the northern and central parts of the empire--the area that was incorporated by the oracle's ally, Topa 'Inka. The oracle was worshipped by coastal peoples from Huarura to Arica, and origin myths in which he was depicted as the creator of the world were known as far north as Piura (Calancha 1638:92, 234-236, 407-410). Pilgrims bearing gifts of gold, silver, and cloth journeyed distances of 300 leagues to consult the oracle at his principal shrine (Estete 1947:339). Traditional leaders from the polities of Mala, Hoar, Gualco, Chinchu, Guarva (Cañete), Colixa, Sallicaimarca, and others brought gifts of gold and silver to Pachacamac after the Spaniards arrived at the site (Estete 1947:340).

The ailing emperor, Wayna Qhapaq, consulted Pachacamac about his failing health shortly before he died (Pizarro 1965:181). Furthermore, the oracle supported Washkar in the struggle that followed over succession to the throne. Both Washkar and his mother are said to have made sacrifices and presented offerings to Pachacamac (Cabello Valboa 1951:397-398; Pizarro 1965:181-183; Gutierrez de Santa Clara 1963, vol. 3:226-228). That Washkar's mother belonged to the corporation founded by Topa 'Inka suggests that the alliance between the Ichma caretakers of the oracle and this panaqa persisted for several generations (Sarmiento de Gamboa 1960:265, 271).

What does this tell us about the development and structure of pre-Columbian states in the Andes? First, it suggests that the Inca political system was not a stable, fixed structure constructed from the bottom up by builders following the plans of some distant architect. Instead, the Inca state apparatus was like a growth that developed from the continually changing relationships between different groups in Inca society and shifts in their alliances and rivalries with the members of



other Andean polities. It was the product of rough agreements between the rulers and the ruled that were continually tested against what was actually happening and that were modified to bring them into accord with existing practices and conditions.

Second, the power of Pachacamac was based on its alliances with the Inca royalty, especially with the panaqa of Topa 'Inka, and on its control of ideology which was the cement that held Andean societies together. There were two components to this ideology. One consisted of a set of myths that defined the limits of social units through the idiom of descent, that prescribed correct or appropriate behavior toward kinsmen as well as the members of other groups, and defined hierarchical relationships between groups which were expressed in terms of separate origins or genealogical proximity to the founder of a kindred. The other component consisted of a set of ceremonies or rituals. These were celebrations in which all the members of a community participated, and the squabbling, petty rivalries, and competition that characterized the day-to-day relations of a people were either set aside or channeled into directions that were acceptable to all concerned. The control of ideology--the content of the myths and the performance of the ceremonies--allowed the spokesmen of Pachacamac to appropriate, either directly or through intermediaries, the surplus labor and social product of others.

Third, the alliance of the Incas, especially the panaqa of Topa 'Inka, and the Ichma caretakers of the oracle and their policies toward each other and toward other polities and communities in the Andes effectively precluded the formation of an imperial state in which all power emanated from the Inca ruling elite. They undermined any tendencies in this direction by creating the conditions for the transformation



of hierarchically arranged social categories--defined in ideological terms, like descent or separate creation--into social classes that were based on and reflected differential access to surplus social product. At the time of the Spanish invasion, the class structure that was emerging was still seen largely in ideological terms that masked and obscured the true nature of the relations of exploitation that had developed since the empire was formed. As the real nature of these relations was gradually exposed, the Inca state began to appear increasingly more fragile, since its legitimacy and power rested on control of ideological symbols--a control that was slipping away as new forms of exploitation emerged and the composition of the dominant class was transformed (Paterson 1984).

#### Footnotes

1. Cieza de León (1967:195-196). Strong and Corbett (1943) show that the Temple of the Sun at Pachacamac was built after the inhabitants of the area were incorporated into the Inca state. Eugene McDougale (personal communication) indicates that the refuse which accumulated next to the Temple of the Sun contains pottery types that occur only in the middle and later parts of the Late Horizon. This suggests that the shrine was built immediately after the area was incorporated into the imperial state and that refuse began to accumulate next to the Temple of the Sun toward the end of Topa 'Inka's reign--ca. 1493 according to the dates provided by Cabello Valboa.
2. Irene Silverblatt (1976, 1980, 1981) provides the most extensive and insightful analysis of gender relations in the Inca state.
3. Uhle (1903) provides archaeological evidence indicating that the Temple of Pachacamac was enlarged during the Late Horizon after the area was incorporated into the Inca state. See also Dioses y Hombres (1966:127).
4. John H. Rowe (personal communication) has argued that the branch oracle was built near Andahuaylillas, while R. Tom Zuidema (personal communication) has suggested that the third branch oracle was established at Andahuaylas on the road from the coast to Cuzco. For the purpose of this paper, the location of the third branch oracle is not as important as its existence.



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5. Castro and Ortega (1936) indicate that wak'as whose predictions were accurate could ask for larger offerings and sacrifices.
6. This wak'a may well have been identified with a highland wak'a known as Chaupiñamca, the daughter of Pariacaca (Dioses y Hombres 1966:73-75).
7. This statement is based on an analysis of the gravelots excavated in front of the Temple of Pachacamac by Uhle (1903). The materials are located in the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. The gravelot associations were reconstructed in 1966 by Nicholas Hellmuth and me.

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