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# The Fragility of Imperialist Ideology and the End of Local Traditions, an Inca Example

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*Imperial expansions tend to be legitimated by myths of empire that support the position of a particular group of ruling élite. In order to maintain their power, these élites must take this ideology seriously or risk losing their positions to those that will. In the Inca Empire of the Andes, expansion was justified in large part as a divine mandate to spread a true religion to the people. Although the Inca generally strove to maintain local religions, a long-standing ritual tradition involving painted tablets ended with the Inca conquest of southern Peru. The demise of this practice suggests a greater imperial concern for providing proper gifts to the gods than can be gleaned from the historical records.*

Over the past few decades, archaeologists have become increasingly aware of the need to incorporate an understanding of ideology into our studies of the formation and expansion of early states and empires (Blanton *et al.* 1996; Claessen & Oosten 1996; Conrad & Demarest 1984; DeMarras *et al.* 1996; Demarest & Conrad 1992; Joyce 1997; Joyce & Winter 1996). These scholars have taken great strides in understanding how the dominant ideologies of the state can initiate imperialistic epochs, justify political expansion, and help legitimate state control over subjugated populations. I would argue, nonetheless, that insufficient attention has been paid to the inherent fragility of these ideologies. By recognizing this fragility and how it is derived, we can begin both to better understand the reasons behind certain actions by the state and to uncover aspects of state ideology that are obscured or unmentioned in official histories.

In this article, I will attempt to describe how imperialism by its very nature makes élites in political power increasingly dependent on maintaining the ideology that initially stimulated state expansion. These often simplistic, naturalized, and universalized ideologies of imperialism can easily come into conflict with the complex realities of the regions that fall under state control. Although many of these contradictions will simply be ignored or hidden by

the state (Scott 1990; 1998), ruling élites will invest considerable resources in bringing the more egregious contradictions into closer conformity with their idealized vision of the world (Yates 2001, 368).

An extended example of the demise of a regional ritual tradition after the Inca conquest illustrates how we can use the material record in conquered regions to study the imperialist ideologies of ancient states. In this example, I suggest that Inca imperialism was legitimized through an ideology of religious reform. According to the Spanish chroniclers, this reform was largely based on the development of a state religion in which local people could continue to worship their deities as long as they also worshipped the Inca sun god, Inti, and accepted the core tenets of a reorganized, universal, Andean cosmology (Kendall 1973, 181). Despite a seeming tolerance of local beliefs, however, a widespread and deeply rooted ritual practice involving painted stone and ceramic tablets ended, or at least went underground, soon after the Inca conquest of far southern Peru. Although the tablet tradition is not mentioned in ethnohistorical documents, archaeological evidence suggests that the Inca took steps to stop the use of these tablets. I argue that the empire took these actions *because* the tablets were offerings that ran counter to Inca ideas about the proper way to worship. If this is the case, then we

must reconsider common views of Inca imperial ideology. The legitimation of expansion was founded not only on a *reorganization* of the structure of the cosmos but also on a *standardization* of the offerings that maintained the cosmos.

### Myths of empire and their vulnerability

An ideology can be defined as a set of ideas and behaviours that promotes a social system that benefits some classes or interest groups more than others (after Brumfiel 1998, 3; Knapp 1988, 136; Schumpeter 1955, 24). Ideologies are embedded in the structure of all societies that exhibit some degree of social inequality (Godelier 1978, 765) and the élite who benefit from these social systems endeavour to present a vision of the world that appears natural and timeless (Bourdieu 1977, 164; Giddens 1979, 195; Eisenstadt 1981, 161; Rappaport 1979, 217; Scott 1990, 87). To be successful, ideology must render beliefs that appear innate and self-evident (Foucault 1979) — to make them ‘the “common sense” of a society so that nobody could imagine how they might ever be different’ (Eagleton 1991, 58). Since a significant change in political and economic organization requires a concomitant change in ideology (Godelier 1978), periods of state formation and expansion are intriguing moments in world history. New ideologies are developed but their very newness makes them vulnerable to critique (Eagleton 1991, 58).

Although a state ideology functions to bolster the state and its ruling élite (Claessen & Oosten 1996, 5), it is not homogeneous in its content. Instead, it is composed of a number of competing formulations that are continually being negotiated and recreated (Eagleton 1991, 45). The heterogeneity and complexity of state ideologies are the result of the manipulation of ideology by élites vying for greater political power through factional competition and coalition building (Brumfiel & Fox 1994). As long as no group can gain extensive control over state affairs, no specific ideological strand can become dominant. One of the ideological stances that groups often pursue is the advocacy of an imperialist strategy.

Imperialism can be defined as the insatiable predilection on the part of a state for political expansion (after Schumpeter 1955, 6). Imperialists create their ideology by blending sincere beliefs and tactical arguments into propaganda that legitimates their position (Snyder 1991, 31–2). The expressed reasons behind these expansionist policies are variable. In some cases, it is argued that the state needs to expand in order to defend itself (Snyder 1991, 306). In

other cases, they argue that the state must spread to bring logic to the chaos of the world (Woolf 2001, 311). In still other examples, imperialists demand that the state conquers their neighbours to fulfil a divine mandate of heaven (Yates 2001, 351). Despite their diversity, these ‘myths of empire’ are supported by ideologies that suggest that rapid expansion is an imperative for the continued maintenance of the state (Snyder 1991).

In most cases, imperialist ideologies do not gain enough political support to impact on state policy (Snyder 1991, 310–11). When these ideologies do succeed, they are often short-lived because the state fails in its initial attempt to expand. If, however, states are successful in battle and diplomacy under the banner of imperialism, then these ideologies can begin to enjoy broad support. As this propaganda seizes the imagination of élite and commoner alike in the core, expansion can turn from being a product of political rhetoric to being a ‘divine quest’ (Conrad & Demarest 1984, 32). The success of expansion reinforces both the political strength of the élites that support imperialism and the ideology that legitimates expansion. Since the success of expansion demonstrates the truth of the ideology, the state begins another cycle of conquests (Conrad 1992, 173). As Joseph Schumpeter asserts, ‘Created by wars that required it, the machine [state] now creates the wars it required’ (1955, 25).

Myths of empire, however, are threatened by their nature to become victims of their own success. The power of the élite comes to rest not only on its control over production and the institutions of the state, but also in control of the cosmological elements that legitimate state ideology (Wolf 1999, 281). Not only does this often lead to the self-destructive overextension of states (Snyder 1991, 1), but these élites also become dependent on fulfilling the ideological motives that initially stimulated expansion. The very justifications for positions of power can therefore provide a basis of critique if ideological expectations are not met (Bourdieu 1977, 193). As James Scott argues:

Having formulated the very terms of the argument and propagated them, the ruling stratum can hardly decline to defend itself on the terrain of its own choosing . . . An ascetic priestly caste is profoundly damaged if shown to be promiscuous and gluttonous; the benevolent czar is profoundly damaged if shown to have ordered the troops to fire on his peacefully assembled, respectful subjects; the slave owner’s claim to paternalism is hollow if he can be shown to whip his slaves *arbitrarily*; and the general is compromised if he abandons his troops in

fear for his own life. Any dominant group is, in this respect, least able to take liberties with those symbols in which they are most heavily invested (Scott 1990, 105–6).

The élite must take their ideology seriously or risk losing their power to others that will (Bourdieu 1977, 193–4; Claessen 1996, 51).

In the pre-modern world, those groups that threatened the legitimacy of the imperial ruling élite by challenging their ideological mandate did not generally come from the lower classes. This lack of a challenge from below was in part a result of the state's ineffectual efforts to impress their dominant ideology on subordinate classes. Although the impact of large-scale public events (ceremonies, feasting, ritual) and monumental constructions were integral to creating and maintaining state legitimacy (Kus 1989; Morris 1998), it remains unclear to what degree these ideologies were accepted by the different groups under state control (Gilman 1996, 57; Godelier 1978, 767; Hodder 1996, 58; Shanks & Tilley 1982, 132). In ancient states, there were little to no communications media or institutions of popular education to spread state ideology. Even when the masses became aware of these ideologies, the ideologies were often rejected because they did not resonate well with most people's view of the world based on their lived experiences (Abercrombie *et al.* 1980). It therefore seems unlikely that subjugated populations fully embraced the state ideology. This should be especially true in cases of imperialism where rapid political expansion outpaced the state's ability to spread its ideology effectively. The ideology, nonetheless, often did manage to capture the imagination of at least a subset of the population within the politically enfranchised (Abercrombie *et al.* 1980, 86; Brumfiel 1998, 11; 2001). These élites, both in the capital and in the conquered regions, tended to be more heavily exposed to the dominant ideology, and they had the education and the incentive to understand it. The most critical challenges to the ideological authority of the state, therefore, most often came from these élites, who championed their own causes by noting the discrepancies between how the state ideology was espoused and the way that it was practised (Kuhrt 2001, 110; Scott 1990, 106–7).

One of the important implications of this understanding of dominant ideologies is the recognition that a considerable amount of ideological investment in both the core *and* periphery of empires is spent to legitimate the position of a cluster of the ruling élites *vis-à-vis* other élites (Brumfiel 1998, 11). I do not want to suggest that state ideologies did

not adapt to local circumstances. It is clear that expanding polities adjusted all aspects of their rule to accommodate differences in local environment, social organization, political economy, history, and degree of resistance (Morrison 2001, 277; Schreiber 1992). On the contrary, the diversity of the conquered regions is important because the state had to adjust to local circumstances *without* losing its claims to legitimacy. In studying the adjustments made by the state at the periphery, archaeologists can come to a clearer understanding of what elements of the dominant ideology were most important for maintaining the position of ruling élites.

In the case study that follows, I will demonstrate how this understanding of the interaction between dominant ideologies and local practices can lead to a richer understanding of the Inca Empire. I begin by recounting the Inca myth of empire and then describe some of the principal ideological concerns of the state according to ethnohistorical documents. I then suggest that the examination of the archaeological evidence for religious changes that followed the Inca consolidation of conquered regions can reveal additional ideological concerns that are obscured in the documents. In particular, I argue that the collapse of a regional ritual tradition after the Inca conquest of southern Peru was the result of inherent contradictions between imperial and local concepts of proper offerings. I hope that this study provides an example of how archaeologists can contribute to our understanding of imperial ideologies by examining how local practices are transformed in order to conform to the core myths of an empire.

### **Imperialism and state religion in the Inca Empire**

The Inca were just one of several small, rural societies in the central Andes in the period preceding the formation of the Inca state (Conrad & Demarest 1984, 96; Rostworowski 1999, 28). The core élite of this petty kingdom was made up of at least eighteen matrilineal groups or lineages called panacas. The court of the king, or Sapa Inca, included all of these panacas and they exercised considerable influence over the affairs of the polity (Gose 1996, 389–90; MacCormack 2001, 429; Rostworowski 1999, 15–17). Court intrigue became more feverish during periods of succession since the Inca did not follow a law of primogeniture. Instead, the position of Sapa Inca was given to the heir who demonstrated the greatest fitness to rule (Gose 1996, 406; Rostworowski 1960). According to ethnohistoric accounts, the imperial expansion of the Inca began during a crisis of leader-



**Figure 1.** Early colonial drawing of the indigenous writer Guaman Poma de Ayala depicting the Sapa Inca Topa Inca Yupanqui admonishing a group of local religious idols to behave in accordance with the wishes of the state (ill. 62).

ship in which the ability of the aged Sapa Inca and his probable heir were questioned.

In these accounts (following Conrad & Demarest 1984, 110–12), the reigning Sapa Inca, Viracocha Inca, had grown old and had chosen one of his sons as his successor, Inca Urcon. Before a transfer of power could occur, a rival group, the Chanca, invaded the Inca territory, broke the Inca's initial resistance, and surrounded the principal town of Cuzco. The Sapa Inca and his heir fled the city and another son, Cusi Inca Yupanqui, was left to defend Cuzco against overwhelming odds. As he, and the forces under his command, awaited certain death at the hands of the Chanca, Cusi Inca Yupanqui had a vision. The creator god, Viracocha, came to him and addressed him warmly as his son. He told Cusi Inca Yupanqui that *if he spread the true religion, he would be a great ruler*

and conqueror. Inspired by his vision, Cusi Inca Yupanqui broke the siege and then went on to rout the Chanca. To the outrage of some of the panacas, he was crowned the Sapa Inca and took on the name of Pachakuti — 'Cataclysm' or 'He who remakes the World'. As Pachakuti, he began a series of conquests that created the Inca Empire.

To follow the mandate of Viracocha, Pachakuti organized a great council to discuss the religious organization of his growing realm. The new Sapa Inca felt that the religious systems in the provincial areas were in chaos. The duty of the council was to bring order to this chaos and to re-establish the true religion that had been corrupted over time. The council organized the gods into a hierarchical pantheon and distilled complex Andean beliefs into a unified cosmo-vision (Fig. 1). The creator god Viracocha was confirmed as the sole supreme being of the universe. The sun god Inti, Viracocha's intercessor in affairs of the earth, occupied the penultimate position in the hierarchy. Subsequent positions were held by the moon, thunder, earth, etc., in cascading order of authority down to the deities and ancestors that were of local importance to provincial groups (Brundage 1963, 162–5; Cobo 1990, 22–36; Laurencich Minelli 2000, 7; Marzal 1993, 88–92). By reorganizing the pan-Andean religious structure, the Sapa Inca hoped to improve the cosmic flows needed to sustain human, animal, and plant life (Gose 1993, 480). The council conceived of the Inca as having a privileged position in the sacred hierarchy. The sun god Inti was the patron god of the Inca and the Sapa Inca was thought to be the son of the sun (Conrad & Demarest 1984, 109; Kendall 1973, 181). Pachakuti's conquests were thus not only the fulfilment of the divine will of Viracocha, they were also the triumphs of a divine ruler.

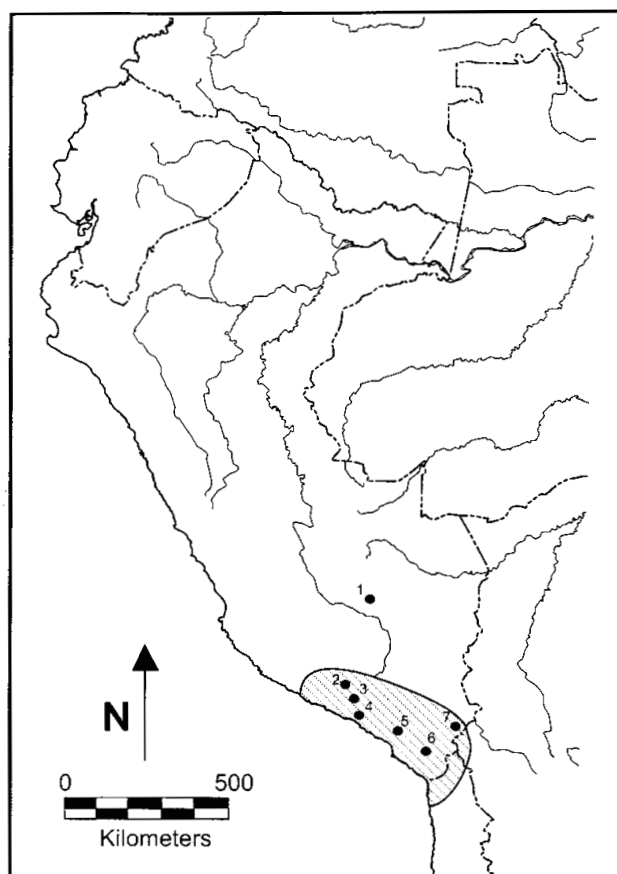
It is clear that these accounts should not be taken at face value. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Inca expansion was based not on the acts of a single ruler but on a longer period of consolidation and centralization (Bauer 1992, 141). The story itself is clearly mythic and many of its details seem to reflect the imposition of Spanish ideas (Rostworowski 1999, 29). Yet it does provide us with a clear sense of the primary role that religion played in the legitimation of the Inca expansion. In the same way as many other ancient states (Claessen & Oosten 1996, 392), Inca imperialism was premised on bringing religious reform to the masses (D'Altroy 2001, 209). Inca ideology not only put significant pressure on the Inca to continue to 'prove his divinity through conquest' (Gose 1996, 384), it also forced the Sapa Inca to demonstrate that his conquests were part of a

campaign of religious reform (Urton 1999, 62).

Although there are some notable exceptions (MacCormack 1991, 143; Uhle 1991, 54), conquered regions did not openly resist the imposition of the Inca religious reorganization. This success contrasts with the difficulties of the Spanish in introducing Christianity (e.g. Boone & Cummins 1998) and was largely due to two factors. First, it was not necessary for the Inca to initiate radical religious reforms to achieve their cosmological reorganization (Rowe 1982, 94; Patterson 1986, 82). Instead, the Inca strove to find ways to work local traditions into official imperial cosmology (Urton 1999, 61–2; Kolata 1997, 249). Second, Inca religion was anchored in systems of beliefs that were commonly held throughout much of the central Andes (Conrad 1992). The core tenets of imperial religion were therefore easily recognizable and believable to conquered groups who held similar ideas about the world around them (MacCormack 1991, 149; Van Buren 2000, 82).

The general strategy pursued by the Inca in regard to local religion, therefore, was to allow the continuation of worship of ancient, local gods (Cobo 1990, 3; Espinoza Soriano 1997, 435; Spaulding 1984, 82; Valcárcel 1981, 77). As long as religious traditions did not conflict with Inca ideas, local practices could be maintained without undermining the empire's ideology of expansion. The end result of the Inca religious reform, therefore, was paradoxically a great degree of religious freedom in the provinces (Kendall 1973, 181). Were there limits, however, to the degree of freedom that the Inca would allow for local religious practices? If the Inca ideology of expansion was centred on the spread of the true religion, then it seems likely that the Inca were concerned with more than just organizing deities into their proper positions. Did the Inca, who closely monitored the form of major state rituals (Cobo 1990, 110), take steps to ensure that local ritual practices conformed in some degree to important Inca concepts? We have indications that at least in one region the empire took such steps.

In the coastal valleys of southernmost Peru, there is evidence for the termination, or at least dramatic curtailment, of a widely-held, deeply-rooted ritual practice at the time of the Inca conquest of the region. These developments, I suggest, stemmed from the threat that the practice held to the legitimacy of the dominant Inca ideology. Perhaps through an Inca desire to downplay the religious diversity that they encountered during their expansion, there are no written accounts of this tradition nor of the Inca reaction to it. Nonetheless, archaeological evidence

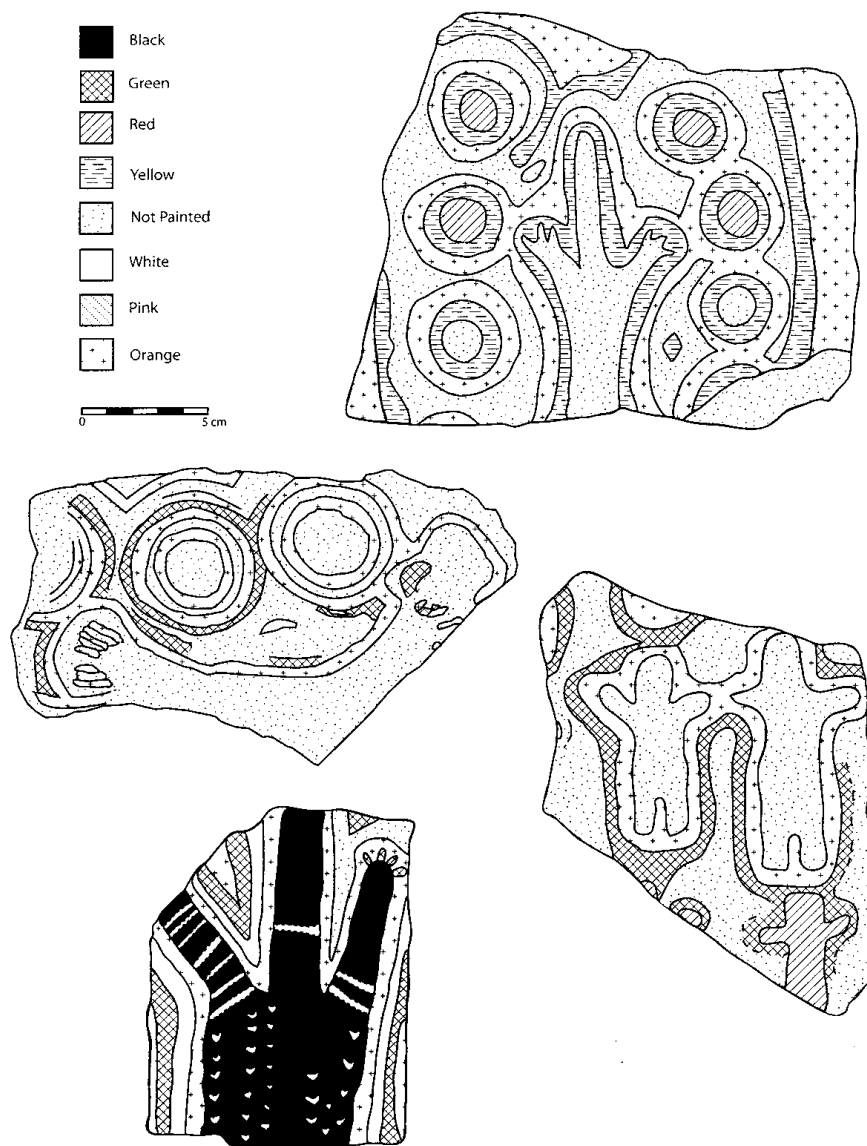


**Figure 2.** Map of Peru, showing where painted tablets are found (hatched area). Sites discussed in the text: 1) Cuzco; 2) Ancient Alca and Oshpacullta; 3) Chucu; 4) Cabezas Achatadas and Huacapuy; 5) Quillcapampa la Antigua; 6) Toquepala; 7) Quelcatani.

suggests that the empire took actions, probably through a mixture of force and persuasion, to end this regional practice. These findings imply that Pachakuti's reforms were concerned more with the appropriateness of offerings than can be gleaned from the written record.

### The painted tablet tradition

From the Middle Horizon (AD 700–1050) to Late Intermediate Period (AD 1050–1476), a tradition of painted stone and ceramic tablets flourished throughout much of what are now the Peruvian departments of Arequipa, Moquegua, and Tacna (Fig. 2) (Kauffmann-Doig 1991, 35–6; Linares Málaga 1970, 86; 1973, 249–50; 1988, 56, 62). There is a scarcity of quantitative data on the tablets because of the paucity of detailed publications or reports on excavations or surveys where tablets have been found.



**Figure 3.** Painted stone tablets from the site of Oshpacullta in the Cotahuasi Valley.

Nonetheless, the available data does allow one to understand the development and practice of the tablet tradition in broad outline.

The painted tablets of southern Peru vary in size from the largest at 35.2 × 19.8 cm to the smallest recorded tablet measuring 1.5 × 1.2 cm (Kauffmann-Doig 1991, 21; Sciscento 1989, 128). The average length of the tablets ranges from 10–20 cm depending on the collection (Cardona Rosas 1993, 116–19; Kauffmann-Doig 1991, 21). The ceramic tablets were made from pieces of large, undecorated jars that were fired, smashed, and then painted (Kauffmann-Doig 1991, 21), while the stone tablets were generally made

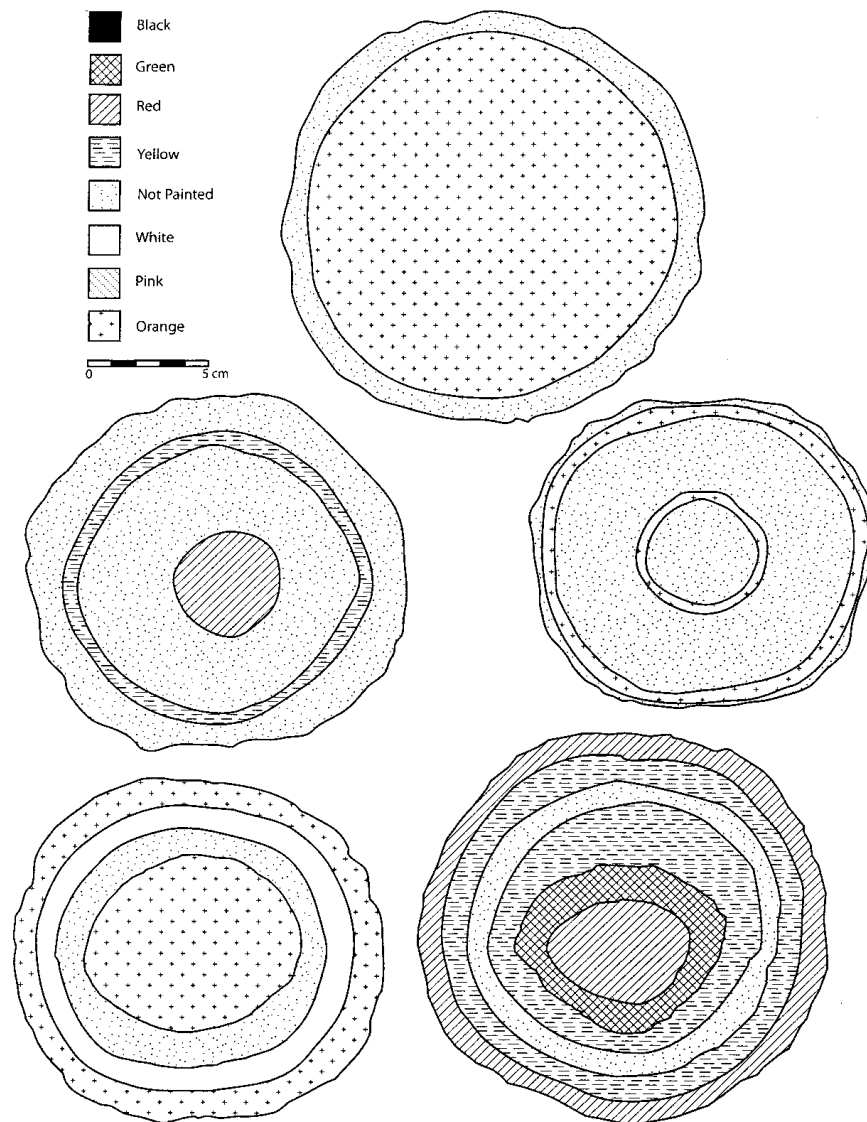
from thin slabs of sedimentary rock or round river cobbles (Linares Málaga 1988, 54; Ratti de Luchi Lomellini & Zegarra Arenas 1987, 117). Although they display similar motifs, stone and ceramic tablets are not normally found together (e.g. Cardona Rosas 1993, 116–19; Kauffmann-Doig 1991; Ratti de Luchi Lomellini & Zegarra Arenas 1987, 117). People made designs on tablets using a palette of eight colours with up to six colours used in each example. Colours, however, vary widely between tablets such that orange, for example, comes in an array of shades and textures. Designs on the tablets vary widely and include representations of humans, animals, celestial objects (sun, moon, rainbows, etc.), and geometric patterns (Figs. 3 & 4). Tablets are almost always painted on only one side.

Archaeologists have discovered tablets in a number of contexts — in graves, on top of animal sacrifices, within rock hollows, next to springs, on top of hills, and beneath wall foundations (Jennings 2002, 357–70; Ratti de Luchi Lomellini & Zegarra Arenas 1987, 117; Sciscento 1989, 129–31). Although lone tablets can be found, they are far more commonly found in groups. Tablets are often discovered in pairs with the painted surfaces facing each other. In some cases, a piece of fine gold leaf was used to separate the design surfaces and the pair of tablets was wrapped in leaves and fibres of the *achira* plant (Escomel 1934; Linares Málaga 1978, 381). On occasion, these pairs are found stacked into larger groups of 4–12 tablets. The largest caches of tablets are found within rock hollows (Ratti de Luchi Lomellini & Zegarra Arenas 1987, 117; Sciscento 1989, 130). For example, at the site of Chucu in Chuquibamba, Federico Kauffmann-Doig excavated hundreds of richly-decorated ceramic tablets that were

found deposited within rock hollows and fissures that had been expanded and roofed (1991, 17–19).

The specific meanings behind the tablets and the motifs painted upon them may not be recoverable. Nonetheless, direct historical analogy from the context within which these tablets are found suggest they served as offerings to the gods. During the Inca period, offerings were placed in the same kinds of contexts where archaeologists have found painted tablets. In the case of the Inca, the offerings were given in order to appease the gods so that life energy would flow cyclically from the sky through the earth to the sky again (Cobo 1990 [1653], 6; Valcárcel 1981, 91). Like other core Inca concepts that remain important in modern Andean cosmology (Allen 1984, 152; Arnold 1991, 45–7; Urton 1981), many indigenous communities in the southern sierra of Peru premise much of their ritual activity on the belief in a circulating life force. This belief drives supplicants to make offerings in similar locations to those used during the Inca Empire (Allen 1982, 179; 1988, 226; Bolin 1998, 232; Greenway 1989, 9 as quoted in Ackerman 1991, 73). The connection between modern offerings and painted tablets was made even more explicit to me in the course of research in the Cotahuasi Valley. In two cases, I found modern offerings of alcohol and pottery placed in locations that also contained stone tablets. The use of the tablets in contexts similar and at times identical to those used over the last five hundred years to make offerings to the gods strongly suggests that the tablets most likely also served as offerings.

The tablet tradition appears to be founded on local practices that extend back to at least 2000 BC. At



**Figure 4.** Painted stone tablets from the site of Ancient Alca in the Cotahuasi Valley.

the site of Toquepala, for example, Rogger Ravines found *in situ* eight stone tablets painted with zoomorphic and geometric designs that may date from three to seven thousand years ago (1970, 316). Although the dating of these early levels at Toquepala has been questioned, Mark Aldenderfer also excavated painted tablets at the site of Quelcatani with motifs similar to those found on Middle Horizon–Late Intermediate Period examples. Radiocarbon results from the levels demonstrate that these tablets can be dated securely to the Formative Period (3000–2000 BC) (pers. comm. 2001). The tablet tradition continued after the introduction of agriculture into the

region: as witness two slabs with geometric and anthropomorphic designs found in a tomb at the site of Cabezas Achatadas dated to *c.* AD 100 (Linares Málaga 1978, 385),

In the Middle Horizon and the Late Intermediate Period, the use of painted stone and ceramic tablets became more widespread in far southern Peru (Cardona Rosas 1993, 114–17; Huaco Durand 1986, 140–41; Kauffman–Doig 1991; Linares Málaga 1970; 1973; 1978; 1988; Ratti de Luchi Lomellini & Zegarra Arenas 1987, 117; Sciscento 1989, 128–31). The apogee of the tablet tradition corresponds to the intensification of agriculture in the region and an increase in inter-regional interaction (de la Vera Cruz 1996, 146), when a number of powerful confederations, like the Arunis and the Collaguas, controlled the region (Neira Avendaño 1998, 37–48). Since no radiocarbon dates have been run for painted tablet contexts in these later periods, direct associations with diagnostic ceramics have been used to date tablets. In my excavations of the site of Ancient Alca in the Cotahuasi Valley, for example, we found three painted tablets associated with a Middle Horizon camelid sacrifice and a fragment of a fourth tablet embedded within a Late Intermediate Period temple floor. We also encountered tablets inside tombs at Ancient Alca and elsewhere in the valley that were associated with ceramics from these periods (Jennings 2002, 357–70).

In another example, hundreds of painted tablets were excavated from caches underneath boulders at the site of Chucu in the Chuquibamba Valley. The tablets were found *in situ* with ceramics dating from the Middle Horizon and the Late Intermediate Period (Kauffman–Doig 1991). The Peruvian-German Expedition of Archaeological Excavation also found many painted stone tablets during their excavations at the Middle Horizon site of Quillcapampa la Antigua in the Siguas Valley (Linares Málaga 1990, 318) and Hans Diesselhoff's excavations at the Huacapuy cemetery uncovered painted tablets in tombs dating to both the Middle Horizon and the Late Intermediate Period (1968). In a final example, Eloy Linares Málaga has written extensively on painted tablets and has identified at least 19 sites with tablets in the Ocoña, Tambo, Quillca, Majes, and Kupara valleys. He suggests that these tablets are found with ceramics that date to the Late Intermediate Period or earlier (1970; 1973; 1990, 316, 408).

Although some of the sites where tablets are found on the surface continued to be occupied after the Inca conquest, there is no published evidence for tablets in primary archaeological context with mate-

rial dating from the period following the Inca conquest of the region. Since local ceramic styles in the region *did* generally change during the Late Horizon (García Márquez & Bustamente Montoro 1990, 40; Jennings 2002, 344; Malpass & de la Vera Cruz 1990, 57; Wernke 2001), these data are striking because they suggest an abrupt end to the centuries of use of the tablets. At the height of its popularity, the painted tablet tradition appears to have collapsed.

A number of factors suggest that the Inca expansion caused the tablet tradition to end or, at the very least, drastically decline in importance. The tablets were used across a wide array of local cults, language groups, political structures, economic organizations, and environmental zones throughout far southern Peru (de la Vera Cruz 1996; Galdos Rodríguez 1990; Neira Avendaño 1990; 1998). While some groups in this region violently opposed the Inca armies (Trawick 1994, 74), other groups acquiesced to Inca rule without putting up a fight (Brooks 1988, 91). Different groups within this region were also incorporated into the Inca realm in a number of ways depending on local conditions and imperial interests (Covey 2000; Galdos Rodríguez 1985). For example, some areas were disrupted by massive resettlement projects (Chávez Chávez & Salas Hinojoza 1990; Denevan 1987, 33; García Márquez & Bustamente Montoro 1990, 40), while in other areas settlement systems remained largely unmolested (Jennings 2002, 203–4). If local conditions explained why people stopped using painted tablets, then it would be difficult to explain why the practice was abandoned across this large region. Instead, it is more likely that the explanation for the end of the painted tablets stemmed from a circumstance that linked this entire region. Despite earlier assertions (Graffam 1992), there is no clear evidence for a major environmental shift in the Southern Andes near the end of the Late Intermediate Period (Abbot *et al.* 1997, 177, 179; Binford *et al.* 1997, 243; Goodman *et al.* 2001, 19). The most plausible explanation, therefore, is that the Inca expansion was the primary cause of the demise of the tablet tradition because it impacted on the entire region. To understand why this occurred, one needs to understand how the tablet offerings conflicted with Inca ideas of proper offerings.

### Inca offerings and painted tablets

Offerings were a major part of Inca rituals. The offerings and the practices surrounding them were broadly similar across a large range of rituals because the ultimate goal of these rituals was to ensure



the cooperation of the gods by giving them offerings that would please them (Fig. 5). Since the gods were seen as having human wants and needs, people generally offered items that they themselves would desire. Although some minor offerings, such as that of the hair from one's eyebrows or eyelashes (Valcárcel 1981, 133), may be exceptions to this general rule, the most common offerings given to the gods were highly-desired goods, such as animals, cloth, ceramic vessels, seashells, food, and drink (Cobo 1990, 112–15; de Molina 1989, 121; Guaman Poma de Ayala 1987, 262; Rowe 1946, 306–7; Silverblatt 1987, 34). These items were valued commodities for the living and thus were thought to be of value to the gods. The more valuable the item, therefore, the more effective was the offering. Following this logic, gold, silver, *cumbi* cloth, and on rare occasions, sacrificed humans, were thought to be the most powerful of offerings (Cobo 1990, 109–17; Gracilazo de la Vega 1966, 359; Murra 1970, 593–4; Valcárcel 1981, 133). Since the Inca Empire had the ability, and sometimes the sole right, to provide these prestige offerings, state power was in part legitimated by its sponsorship of critical ritual events (Bauer & Stanish 2001, 7).

Offerings were directed to the gods through gestures, speaking, and dancing (de Betanzos 1996, 56; de Zárate 1933, 39; Pizzaro 1921, 253; Ramos Gavilán 1988, 148–57). While much of the formal prayer was apparently standardized (Niles 1999, 29–30), supplicants could also make up phrases that were appropriate to the specific situation (Kendall 1973, 194). The supplicants would pray to the gods from whom they sought assistance and then give their offerings in the hopes that their prayers would be answered. In most cases, the prayer was first made to the creator god, Viracocha, whose paramount position in the cosmological hierarchy was recognized (Marzal 1993, 88–90). In some cases, the prayers would also contain pleas for the health of the Sapa Inca (Cobo 1990, 109–17). For the Inca, prayer on the part of the supplicant was necessary to explain the purpose of offerings and direct them to the chosen deities.

There was a great variety in the kind, amount, and manner of offerings used in Inca ceremonies (Cobo 1990, 110; Rowe 1946, 306–7). This variability depended on the needs of the supplicants, the occasion of the offering, the perceived desires of the deity, and the economic means of the participants (Cobo 1990, 110; Kendall 1973, 197). Important public ceremonies, however, were more regulated. Not only were the Inca obsessed with the proper scheduling



**Figure 5.** A drawing by the writer Guaman Poma de Ayala illustrating a sacrifice given to a local deity by the people of the Lake Titicaca Basin. Note how the offerings conform to the Inca ideal of what a proper offering should be (ill. 270).

of these major events (Bauer & Dearborn 1995, 152–3), but, at least in the city of Cuzco, the government enacted laws and statutes dictating how these ceremonies should take place (Cieza de Leon 1986, 337). In these cases, specific offerings and actions were scripted and deviations from this script were sharply curtailed (Cobo 1990, 110). The effectiveness of major rituals was therefore in part judged by how well they conformed to Inca concepts of what was the appropriate time to worship, what were the proper prayers to proffer, and what kinds of goods were suitable offerings to the gods.

The painted tablets of southern Peru stood in contrast to Inca offering practices in at least three respects. First, the major offerings in Inca ritual were predominantly goods that the supplicants would desire to eat, drink, wear, or possess themselves. Unlike other local traditions from the Late Interme-

diate Period that centred on consumable offerings, the tablets could not be easily conceived of as desirable goods. Unlike the camelids, corn beer, and cloth given in Inca ceremonies, people did not covet broken pots and stones in their daily lives. These items only became desirable when they were painted and used as an offering in ritual. Second, the power of an Inca offering was linked to its value in society, such that human life, gold, and silver were thought of as among the most sacred of offerings. The ritual potency of the painted tablets, however, did not stem from the value of their constitutive material. The paints, stones, and ceramics used in their manufacture had little intrinsic worth. Finally, the Inca supplicant directed offerings to the deities with his or her vocalized prayers or gestures. While it is likely that prayers were also used in the tablet offering tradition, the diversity and care taken on the various painted motifs suggests that the tablets needed symbolic representations — of humans, fantastic creatures, llamas, rain, rainbows, etc. — painted on them in order to function properly. The images painted on the tablets were integral to the success of the offering.

The demise of the painted tablet tradition likely speaks of a turbulent moment in the region's prehistory. Imperial conquest usually has either a limited impact on the daily lives and beliefs of conquered people or else indigenous ritual practices intensify and metamorphose as local people do battle against a foreign system of ideas (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999, 282–3; Wells 1999, 327). If traditional rituals are changed, there is a significant risk that the community may deem the changes unacceptable (Bell 1997, 145; Geertz 1973, 164). The Inca generally took pains to respect local ritual practices to some degree, especially in those regions that allied themselves with the empire (e.g. Guaman Poma de Ayala 1987, 256–65). The demise of the tablet tradition would undoubtedly have caused a level of stress in the region that the Inca would usually have chosen to avoid. Notwithstanding this, the Inca were forced to take measures to end the use of tablets because these offerings blatantly contradicted Inca ideas.

If the legitimacy of the Inca conquest was in part predicated on the spread of divinely-inspired ideas, then the *natural* right of the Empire to exist could be jeopardized if local practices that contradicted these imperial ideas were allowed to continue. The Inca, through force or other means of persuasion, curtailed the use of painted tablets in southern Peru. This action suggests that the Inca were deeply concerned about the contradiction between the tablet tradition and standard imperial ritual

practices. Their concern is a reflection of the hidden importance that the standardization of offerings had in the Inca ideology of expansion. The chroniclers detailed how the Inca expanded to bring order to the chaos of the world by organizing the pantheon of gods into a more discernable hierarchy. The archaeological evidence in southern Peru suggests that, at least in this region, the Inca were also concerned with setting parameters for items that were acceptable as offerings to the gods. The ruling élite, trapped by their myth of empire, were forced into taking actions that threatened to upset their tenuous control over the people of southern Peru. The tablet tradition had to end since the Sapa Inca and his court could not afford to be seen by rival panacas and other élites to be shirking the duties given to them by the gods.

### Conclusions

Recent research on the organization of archaic states and empires has stressed the great variability seen in consolidation strategies (Schreiber 1992; Alcock *et al.* 2001). This variability is not stochastic and reflects the complex outcomes of the melding of state policies and local realities. One source of this variability is ideological. If states tend to legitimize their expansion through simplified and naturalized myths of empire, then the power of ruling élites becomes wedded to these myths as expansion continues. These élites must take their ideology seriously or risk losing their power. Manipulating ideologies is therefore a tricky business. Myths of empire significantly constrain and channel the action of the state once it is established (cf. Conrad & Demarest 1984, 180). It is not surprising, then, that empires often invest significantly in bringing provincial areas into consilience with imperial ideas. By understanding why the state takes these actions, we can better understand which elements of those myths were most important to the expanding polities. Since written records generally reflect the perspectives of élites in the imperial core, provincial studies can occasionally reveal important aspects of state ideology that are obscured underneath the intrigues and agendas of the capital.

In our Andean example the Sapa Inca, with his divine mandate to bring the true religion to the masses, took great pains to integrate existing local beliefs into the state religion. Broad similarities in Andean cosmology allowed the Inca to grant considerable religious freedom to conquered groups while still maintaining their myth of expansion for religious re-organization (MacCormack 1991, 149; Van

Buren 2000, 82). The demise of the widespread, deeply-rooted tablet tradition, however, suggests that the Inca were not just concerned about placing groups in an overarching hierarchy but also about the types of offerings that were given to the gods. The painted tablets differed in critical ways from those offerings that the Inca felt were acceptable. That the Inca took steps to end the tradition suggests that the practice itself ran contrary to important ideological principles. The end of the painted tablets suggests that Pachakuti and his successors also legitimated their rule by delimiting the kinds of offerings to be used in the rituals performed in the empire.

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