INTRODUCTION

RETHINKING DUALITY IN THE ANDES: THE INCA CASE

At the time of the Spanish invasion, Tawantinsuyu, the empire of the four parts, embraced a vast mosaic of ethnic groups living in different ecological zones, from the desert coast, across the high plateaux, to the lowland Amazonian forest. These communities, which depended on various means of subsistence, had elaborated labour practices specific to their environment and forged discrete networks with neighbouring populations to compensate for labour and product deficiencies. Some of them were grouped in confederations that had gained control over large territories and competed with other important chiefdoms.¹ The material gathered from primary sources on ancient Peru as well as archaeological surveys suggest that Inca sovereignty began in a similar fashion, by developing matrimonial alliances and military pacts with neighbouring etnías. The small cuzqueñan confederation increasingly expanded its control over the land, supplanting the local and regional coalitions with an imperialist superstructure based on a centralized administration and unilateral tributary system (mit’a).² Fundamental to the maintenance of its authority was the ruling elite’s exclusive access to and redistribution of rare and valuable goods originating from the various niches that formed the bountiful topography of the Inca territory. This strategy of supply regulation, adapted from pre-existing economic structures, ensured the allegiance of native lords who retained many of their former privileges, including polygyny, access to prestige goods, and exemption from subsistence production. It also constituted the grounds for labour obligations invested in building projects as well as agricultural and industrial products, particularly textiles and maize beer (aqha, also chicha). Within this ruling apparatus, not only goods but also people were subject to large-scale redistributions as a means of regulating alliance-making and ensuring political stability.³ To achieve this design, the Incas established a series of institutions. The akllas, for example, were literally “chosen women” of both the royal descent group

¹ Broadly defined, chiefdoms are kin-based, stratified, societies in which leadership is based on genealogical considerations and ability to govern.

² The word mit’a evokes an event that occurs periodically; it also refers to the season.

and provincial elites removed from their homeland and confined in state facilities. Depending on their abilities and rank, they served in religious activities as officiants and producers of ritual offerings, or were distributed as wives for important officials in name of the Inca king. The *yanakuna* were also another class of individuals originating from various ethnic backgrounds. Described imperfectly as retainers in Spanish chronicles, they were attached to the Inca nobility but exempted from tribute and reciprocal obligations to their native communities. Some of them were kinsmen (by blood or adoption) of the person they attended and may also have fulfilled prominent positions as local-level lords. The *mitmaqs*, likewise, were colonies permanently displaced from their place of origin and assigned lands in other parts of the empire. They served as loyal strongholds in newly conquered areas and as labour forces in agrarian, building, and maintenance projects. All these institutions coexisted with the great masses of commoners liable for tax labour. These men and women, who made up the majority of the empire’s population, were organized into a decimal administrative organization overseen by a hierarchy of Inca and indigenous officials in charge of enforcing the rules of the state.

This hegemonic machinery did not end with measures of socio-economic control. In the religious domain, the rulers would oblige their subjects to pay respects to their tutelary god, whom the Spanish identified as the Sun, and ordered the construction of temples dedicated to him throughout the conquered territory. This imperialist policy went hand in hand with a certain tolerance towards local ancestral beliefs, which continued to flourish and were sometimes incorporated into the ritual praxis of the ruling elite. Colonial records attest to the powerful influence some of these cults, particularly oracles such as Pachacamac or Apurimac, had on the course of action taken by the rulers of Tawantinsuyu. These leaders would regularly consult local deities on strategic issues and brought them offerings in return for their support and benevolence, but also required that their images be sent to the capital annually for the cleansing celebration of Citua (*sitwa*), when the governing elite paid them homage. These reciprocal relations were not always harmonious; in fact, they often implied elements of subordination that were expressly enacted in the course of the official festivals held in Cuzco. Furthermore, no deity, however influential, could escape retribution if the ruling power felt threatened. Atahualpa’s destruction of the oracle of Catequil is a case in point. The

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