Looking for "Lost" Inca Palaces

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The Incas, at the time of the Spanish Conquest in 1532, occupied the largest of the native Pre-Columbian states, with an empire that stretched from Colombia to Chile. At the top of a complex hierarchy of administrators was the king, the ruling Inca, who was divine. The capital at Cuzco was the ceremonial and religious center of the empire, and was the seat of the royal families. Each Inca had a palace there and also held land in the countryside outside the capital city. Today, these structures have been located and studied, many remain to be identified.

Ethnographic Sources on Inca History

The Incas kept strict accounting of the deeds of their kings, recording all the tributes conquered and forts toppled by means of a knotted string cord called a quipu, which served as a mnemonic device for retelling epic in court. There was no native tradition of written language, and all the knotted cords that have come down to us cannot be deciphered.

We do, however, have a number of written sources that help us to understand the workings of the Inca empire (see box). The administrative strategy and military might used to govern this domain greatly impressed the European invaders, who left descriptions of the organization of the Inca state. An overview of native culture based on these sources is presented by Rowe (1946). Eyewitness accounts, some by soldiers and Spanish administrators, and others by priests and court-appointed legal investigators, help us to understand the Inca's culture, and to unravel their history. These documents, called ethnographic sources, are useful, for they give us a chance to understand the history of a people who did not themselves leave any written records, and they are particularly valuable for anthropologists who wish to supplement the archaeological record in understanding the culture of the Incas more fully.

Inca Royal Estates

From the ethnographic record we know that much of the land around the Inca capital of Cuzco was devoted to royal estates. These properties were developed primarily by royal administrators appointed him and his court in his lifetime, and to provide for the maintenance of his mummy after death. Buildings were constructed on most estates to house the Inca and favored members of the court. In addition to the estates that lined the Huatanay Valley around Cuzco, there were extensive royal holdings in the peripheries of Vilcanota-Urubamba Valley, or, as the Incas called it, the Yucay Valley. All of the Incas from Viracocha on (see Table 1) held land in or near the valley, where they built country palaces for their pleasure and for conducting state business while the king was in residence (Rowe 1947, 1969; Niles 1957b).

Many of the archaeological sites that attract tourists today because of their spectacular locations and impressive architecture were once the estates of Inca kings. For example, Pisac was an estate built by Pachacutec, who also developed Ollantaytambo (see Fig. 1). His son, Topa Inca, constructed the halls and terraces of Chinchero. The ruins of these and other palaces outside of Cuzco rarely show the careful cut and fit masonry that

Table 1

Traditional Succession List of Pre-Incaus Incas

(Based on Rowe's presentation of dates given by Cabello Valbuena 1944:57-58)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ruler</th>
<th>Approximate Reign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manco Capac</td>
<td>mythical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacsqui Roca</td>
<td>mythical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruqui Tupaqui</td>
<td>mythical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayta Capac</td>
<td>mythical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caca Tupaqui</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inca Roca</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuchay Huacac</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viracocha</td>
<td>until 1438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pachacutec</td>
<td>1438-1471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topa Inca</td>
<td>1471-1493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huayna Capac</td>
<td>1493-1525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inca</td>
<td>1525-1532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atahualpa</td>
<td>1532-1533</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The town of Urubamba, viewed from the south. The Inca road described in the Spanish document comes in from the right, near the base of the forested portion of Urubamba City, one of the named places, is the canyon wall behind the trees.

More on Ethnographic Sources

Much of the important information on the deeds of the Incas is recorded in histories elicited from Inca nobles and set down by Spanish scribes. While their testimony is often partisan, giving special prominence to those royal families with whom they were themselves affiliated, it is usually possible to compare the narratives offered by different chroniclers to reconstruct the truth. Among the histories most important in understanding the royal estates are the earliest ones, especially the accounts by Pedro Samaniego de Gamboa (written in 1572) Juan de Betanzos (written in 1531), Martín de Murúa (written around 1615), and Miguel Cabello Valbuena (written in 1580). Also useful is the 17th-century history by Bernabé Cobo which draws from earlier and some now missing—sources. Accounts of Huayna Capac's construction activity in the Yucay Valley are found in Samaniego (cap. 59, 1600, 200), Betanzos (primera parte, cap. 43, 1567), Cabello Valbuena (tercera parte, cap. 31, 1631-361-362), and Cobo (lib. 11, cap. 16, 1604-99). The Calca region is mentioned by Betanzos (cap. 6, 1609-17) and Samaniego (cap. 25, 1600-230).

Huayna Capac's building activities are described by Samaniego (cap. 60, 1600-230), Murúa (lib. 1, cap. 9, 1602-64, varia, 1140-111), and Betanzos (parte 3, cap. 3, 1567-211).

Another kind of ethnographic source is the legal document, sometimes made at the request of the Spanish crown to bolster land claims of the conquerors, other times made by communities or by cities of the Incas to prove their right to royal lands. These archival sources essentially give quite detailed accounts of land boundaries and the economic potential of the holdings, and often include historical details in the narrative for the claim. The estate of Huayna Capac is described in most detail in the visita transcribed by Villanueva (1571). Some cross-checking for Huayna Capac's lands is possible on the basis of a document transcribed by Rostworowski (1970), and verification of Huayna's interests in Calca and Mina can also be found there (170-254). The range of uses to which royal lands were put is further examined in other claims published by Rostworowski (1962: especially pages 152-153, 1960-249, 1960-291, which deals with a dispute over corn fields).
prevails in the capital, but they do exhibit other of the canons of Inca high-prestige architecture: multiple finished doors and niches usually mark the royal buildings, and palace complexes exhibit large-scale and relatively complex arrangements of buildings (Niles 1962, 1967a, 1967b).

Within these general guidelines, however, there is a great deal of latitude in the design of the country palaces, and identifying them on the basis of standing architecture alone is difficult. A basic understanding of the organization and use of Inca estates, and the palaces on them, comes from ethnohistorical sources. From 16th-century accounts, we know that estates varied in what they produced and also in their size. In addition to the substantial agricultural developments of the Yucay Valley where maize was the chief product, there were also estates that served specialized ends. Some holdings were devoted to pasturing, some to the production of potatoes, and still others to the cultivation of hot peppers. Some lands were left wild as hunting preserves, and others were privately owned forests. There were fields devoted to salt production, and lakes and swamps in which reeds and fish were raised.

The single most useful source in helping us to understand the organization of Inca estates is a field-by-field description of royal holdings that covers roughly 15 km of the Yucay Valley, from an area below Cales to the region approaching Olmataytambo (Villanueva 1971). Two lists, one compiled in August of 1551 and the other in 1552, were the result of a censit made to the area by Spanish officials, in the company of several local nobles from Cuzco to resolve a complicated land claim. The officials visited the fields and interviewed people living there, including elderly men whose fathers had participated in the original construction of Huayna Capac's estate (c. 1493-1525). They recalled that in the construction of that estate alone more than two thousand mitmaqkuna (permanent colonists moved by the Inca) were brought in; one thousand had been brought from Chinchaysuyu and one thousand from Collasuyo, two of the four quarters that made up the Inca empire. There were also 50 special Indians who came from Chinchaysuyu near the modern city of Quito, Ecuador, to care for Huayna Capac's humming bird. Within the portion of the valley that Huayna Capac developed, there are over 40 named plots of land, ranging in size from 1 to 100 topos (the topo is the standard Inca unit of land measurement), devoted to the production of such varied crops as maize, sweet potatoes, and totora reeds, and exotic plots of coca, cotton, and peanuts. In addition to his own many fields and gardens, Huayna Capac's estate included both land and buildings belonging to Raba Oello, the mother of his heir, and to other women with whom he was associated. Nearby, there were grants to his mother and the lord responsible for the manakuna, or Chosen Women. There were also lands and buildings dedicated to the cult of the Sun. Finally, there were parcels within the area under development that belonged to the original inhabitants of the valley, and which fell outside of any Inca private or religious claim.

The centerpiece of Huayna Capac's estate was a palace called Quispiguana. There are references to its construction in the histories of Caballo Volcano, Sarmiento, and Cobbo, and there is mention of its destruction by Maxo Inca in his retreat from the Spanish (Restorowowsky de Diez Canseco 1970: 257).

The Palace of Quispiguana

During the summer of 1986, I spent some time reading the Yucay document transcribed by Villanueva to see what information it contained on architecture. There were many sites of reference to buildings in the document, and none was more intriguing than the palace of Huayna Capac named Quispiguana.

The Yucay document gives extraordinary detail on the location of fields and buildings. The portion that refers to Quispiguana begins with a listing of fields of reference to the town of Yucay, heading down valley toward Urbamba. Much of the land described here is visible in the overview of modern Urbamba seen in Figure 1. The document follows an Inca road that runs right to left, in the middle ground.

On the other side of the tambu (of Yucay), between it and the terraces on the right hand there is a pleasure garden which abuts these terraces in which there are some fountains where the Inca had fish and took a red which he used to pierce his ears... Going farther along, on the other side of a canyon there is a piece of land called Collabamba which belonged to Huayna Capac... Next to this field on the right hand toward the mountains there is a town of Indians called the Chichos... to whom belong the lands of Chichabamba, which go as far as the mountains and as far as Quispiguanta [sic]. Beyond the lands of Chichabamba on the other side of a road there are some buildings called Quispaguana which were Huayna Capac's. To the right of these buildings is a valley between two mountains called Chichón which was a garden of Huayna Capac... To the left hand of the house of Quispiguanta alongside it there is a park and lake which belonged to the Inca... (Villanueva 1971: 38)."
The ruins of Quispiguanca comprise large open spaces surrounded by a tall wall, with formal entrance provided through gatehouses and monumental doorways as shown in the plan of the site, Figure 3. The walls have foundations of large blocks fitted together with abundant clay mortar, topped by sun-dried adobe brick. Several features of the site bear comment here.

Its best-preserved building, now called Cuchiunchu (A on Fig. 3; Fig. 4), was a gatehouse, providing access into and out of the walled compound of Quispiguanca through wide, double-jamb doors (double jams on doors or niches are markers of prestige in Inca architecture). The interior dimensions of the structure are 3.35 m by 5.20 m, and there are symmetrical arrangements of niches on the building interior. There are also paired bowl-shaped devices on the building interior next to each doorway, probably to anchor a symbolic "no entry" cord across the opening. On the building's exterior, facing toward the inside of the compound, there is an oversized doorway at ground level, and above it, a symmetrical arrangement of windows flanking a double-jamb niche. Although easily accessible from the interior of the compound, the doorway to the outside of the surrounding wall stood several meters above ground level. Cuchiunchu was paired with an identical building, which is not as well preserved nor as photogenic (B on Fig. 3).

More impressive and even more impressive, access to Quispiguanca was provided by a tall, triple-jamb gateway through which the Inca road passed (C on Fig. 3). The gateway seen in Figure 3 is defined by a pair of tall towers, originally at least two stories in height, that had interior dimensions of about 2.5 m on a side. The paired towers are arranged to form a monumental doorway with jams nearly 4 m thick. The use of towers to flank a road is without parallel in highland Inca architecture. Also unusual for Inca design is the asymmetrical placement of ornamental detail within the buildings, and the extremely narrow doorways into the towers.

The arrangement of the paired towers and gatehouses in the eastern surrounding wall of the Quispiguanca compound gives a feeling of great symmetry to the design of the place. I cannot yet comment fully on the buildings included within the walled area, but one set of ruins does merit discussion. In the part of the site called locally Potracu (that is the long nipple wall marked D on Fig. 3), there is a remnant of a large hall measuring approximately 14.4 m in width and 43.8 m in length (E in Fig. 3). This particular structure also had openings on at least one of the long walls, and had paired double-jamb doorways on the other short end wall. The building was an example of a chacra muro, an Inca building type illustrated by Guaman Poma in the 17th century as an Inca palace (1980:236), and it is plausible to assume that this was one of the more important buildings at Quispiguanca.

There is a great deal more work to be done at the site, not only to understand its design more completely, but also in order to establish its relationship to the monumental terraces and agricultural works nearby, some of which are seen in Figure 6, and to relate it to other architectural and natural features in the area. The work will be continued in upcoming seasons.

The importance of the documentation of the palace of Huayna Capac at Quispiguanca is to show that the substantial ruins might not have been identifiable without such a rich ethnohistorical source as the list of the royal holdings of Yucay. If we had stumbled across it, we might have inferred that the place was special because its design obeys many of the canons of high-prestige Inca architecture, but we would not have known what it was. The historical sources that attribute the construction to the first part of Huayna Capac's reign further help to establish a date for the building in the early part of the 15th century, just a generation before the Spanish visitadores made their inspection of the site.
The Palace at Calca

In the case of Quispicancha, ethnographic historical references allowed us to look for—and find—a "lost" palace. But it is also possible to trip over archaeological remains that look like palaces and then to turn to historical sources for identification. One such complex is in the town of Calca.

Calca is in the middle of the Vilcanota-Urubamba Valley. My attention was first drawn to the archaeological remains when I noticed fitted Inca stonework on a building that faces the main plaza of the town. After consulting with Peruvian archaeologists in Cuzco, who verified that there were Inca remains in the town, I returned to investigate further. In the course of several visits to the site, I found that most of the modern town is built on the foundations of an Inca grid-planned city.

The most remarkable aspect of Inca Calca is the absolute regularity of its plan, as shown in Figure 1 and represented on the plan of Calca by shaded stippling. Many of the foundations in this part of town show evidence of Inca streets, now blocked, and some building interiors still have Inca features. A modern block and a half has walls of coursed stone foundations supporting less carefully fitted modern walls. The coursed stone foundations are shown on the plan with solid black and seen in Figures 10 and 11.

The two blocks that faced one another across the Inca plaza are larger than the other blocks, and both have fitted masonry. The walls that face onto the plaza also had no double perse doors symmetrically placed, probably with respect to an opening in the center of the wall which is, in both blocks, destroyed (Fig. 12). All of these architectural features suggest that these were the most important Inca structures in Calca. The Inca block is that inside the municipal playground, the Parque Infantil. Here, the double-jambed doorway giving access to the interior is present on both the exterior (Fig. 12) and interior. The interior has paired barboid devices similar to those seen at Quispicancha’s gatehouse.

The compound has sufficient interior depth to permit the measurement of niches and wall stubs, and to verify the presence of Inca buildings within the courtyard. Niches placed in the rear walls of these buildings are still visible in the surrounding walls.

Based on the design of other Inca towns (see, for example, the reconstructions of the kasheche [main building] of Ollantaytambo by Gasparini and Marroquin 1980:190, fig. 179), it is most likely that buildings in Calca were the exterior walls of courtyard houses. Groups of buildings within the blocks would have been separated by smaller streets or alleyways, the traces of which have now been obscured by modern construction.

Calca is altogether an impressive place and a remarkable example of Inca city planning. Clearly it was an important site, to judge by the quality of the stonework in parts of it and to judge from the size and scale of component buildings. Having discovered this large, open courtyard site, it made sense to review the ethnohistorical sources to see if it could be identified.

There are, in the standard histories of the Incas, references to the Calca area, which are: first, that Betanzos and Sarmiento was used by royal families as the resident of the Inca; second, that Calca itself is mentioned in connection with the hill of Huascar; third, that he succeeded to the throne in Cuzco in August 1527, then moved to Calca, at which place he was declared king around 1525 A.D. when his brother, Huayna Capac, died in an epidemic. The deposed Huayna Capac was dispossessed by his brother, Atahualpa, who put him to death in 1532 to the Spanish conquerors. Finally, Huascar commissioned palaces during his brief reign, a standard act for an Inca assuming rule. Amapoqancha was built for Huascar in Cuzco, along with Collcapampa on the edge of Cuzco, and an estate at Mina in the Lurin Basin. One of the Spanish chroniclers, Murúa, says that Huascar built a palace in Cuzco, for which he was granted "an infinite quantity of Indians for its service" (cap. 40: 1522-23, my translation). Only Betanzos describes Huascar’s building activities in the Cuzco region as founding a town (Betanzos 1:3, 1587:611). We also have indirect evidence of his erection of a palace, for Murúa tells us that the ambassador from Quito sought Huascar while he was at Calca (Murúa cap. 40: 1522-64, vol. 1:133), and Cabello Valbo adds that four messengers from the ambassador were put to death in Calca by Huascar (Caballo Valbo cap. 26: 1515:14).

In the case of Calca, Huascar’s palace was lost because we hadn’t really thought enough about the few references to it in the chronicles. The recognition of substantial archaeological remains in the town suddenly made sense of the historical references to Calca, and helped us to rediscover one of the "lost" palaces of Inca Cuzco.

Once identified as the handwork of Huascar, the archaeological remains of Calca can be better understood. In a general way, one can see its resemblance to places that Huascar would have known. There is a reminder of the grid plan of the archaeological site of Khabarriqay near Lurin, where Huascar was born and where he lived prior to the completion of his city palaces. Further, there is a comparison to Cuzco, both in the grid plan and in the names of buildings and of natural features that surround Calca. Finally, there is a general similarity to the broad open spaces and low buildings of his father’s pleasure palace at Quispicancha, which may have been a close-to-hand model of how to organize a country estate.

Conclusion

Archaeologists who work with Inca renaissance are familiar with the problem of trying to sort out the chronology and function of reused structures. (See, for example, Rowe’s discussion of the Temple of the Sun in Cuzco [1944], and Gasparini and Marroquin’s comments on Ollantaytambo [1980:69-71].) It is often true of ancient buildings that has saved them from complete destruction in the face of such threats as the campaigns against idolatry waged in the 17th century, and the advancing urbanism of the 19th century.

The architectural gem that was the palace of Huayna Capac at Quispicancha is hard to recognize in the present-day remains. The walls of the edifice, once used to separate the palace and its grounds from the commoners on work on his lands, now keep pigs from trampling on the carefully planted crops. The royal road leading through the impressive gateway into the palace now carries trucks from Urubamba to the new housing development in ancient Chichco-
bamba. Calca, site of intrigue and assassination during the Inca civil war, is now a bustling mestizo community. The walls of Huascar's palaces are found inside of bars, restaurants, playgrounds, and automobile repair shops. Archaeological survey of such sites means knocking on doors to seek admission to private courtyards, and it means collecting a parade of schoolchildren as eager helpers while one measures the local playground.

But close observation of the architectural details assures us that the structures are ancient, and careful reading of 16th-century accounts of Inca works allows us to visualize the royal activity that took place there. The "lost" palaces of the Incas are where they always have been, but their importance to our understanding of Andean culture history is now found.

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Note: After this paper had been submitted I became aware of an earlier identification of the ruins in Urubamba as those of the palace of Quispiguanca. Ian S. Farrington’s claim of identification was reported in *El Observador,* Lima, February 6, 1983, that announcement contains no discussion of the basis of the claim. The identification and analysis presented here are my own, and are entirely independent of Farrington’s.

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