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SUCCESSION, COÖPTION TO KINGSHIP, AND ROYAL INCEST AMONG THE INCA*

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THE FRATRICIDAL WAR between Huascar and Atahualpa, which aided the Spanish conquest of the Inca state, was neither an isolated nor a new phenomenon in Andean history. Given the rules of succession, the struggle for power took place with greater or lesser intensity at the death of each king, since all sons of the Inca had equal accession rights and could aspire to power.

In writing of ancient Peru, the chroniclers took for granted that in the New World the senior legitimate son of the monarch would inherit the throne as he did in Europe. As we study the chronicles and check the events following the death of each Inca, we discover that the forms of royal inheritance were completely different.

Through their *quipus* and formal praise songs, the Inca kept track of detailed genealogies of their royal houses. At the death of the last member of a given branch, they could specify who was next in line. Instead, we discover that among the royal Inca, such lineage reckoning was disregarded in favor of *panacas*[1] or royal, status *ayllus*. Most chroniclers use this term to mean a new, separate kindred formed by the descendants of a reigning monarch, while his siblings and their progeny continued their affiliation with the *panaca* of their common grandfather. Such automatic creation of new *ayllus* in each generation was presumably absent in peasant *ayllus*, but information on this is inconclusive.

Among modern commentators concerned with the *ayllu*, Kirchhoff defines it as "a permanent group based on actual or supposed common descent of its members."[2] Rowe finds that "any attempt to establish the nature of the ancient *ayllu* by study of the chroniclers faces the serious difficulty in the looseness of Quechua terminology. The word *ayllu* is used in Spanish with several different meanings: 1) the lineages of the Inca royal class . . . ; 2) the social unit of several extended families . . . ; 3) occasionally the moiety." Rowe concludes that the Inca *ayllu* "was a kin group with theoretical endogamy with descent in the male line, and without totemism. It was, therefore, not a clan in the classical sense at all."[3]

* I would like to acknowledge the assistance of John V. Murra in the preparation of the final version of this paper; he also translated it from the Spanish.

1 González Holguín [1608], 1952, p. 277. (The date in square brackets following the name of the chronicler refers to the year of first publication or writing. The second, modern date refers to the edition used by the writer in the present article.)

2 Kirchhoff, 1949, p. 293.

3 Rowe, 1946, p. 253.

According to Valcárcel, the *ayllu* is primarily an economic unit, characterized by joint control of lands and labor.[4] Baudin thinks the *ayllu* was formed by all the descendants of a real or postulated ancestor; in addition to land tenure, Baudin emphasizes the religious bonds uniting the *ayllu's* members through the "worship" of their dead. In the twelve royal *panacas* this took the form of venerating the sovereign from whom they were descended.[5] In addition to these twelve, Molina, in his description of the *citua,* a purification ritual, mentions two other groups: Cuzco *panaca* and Masca *panaca;*[6] Sarmiento de Gamboa adds the Sauseray.[7] This may indicate that there had been other monarchs, not listed on the official roll, or *panacas* descended from kings who reigned before the Inca conquest of Cuzco.

The major stated function of the *panaca* was to perpetuate the memory and the mummy of its founder. This was done through *quipus* and particularly through chants and rituals which took place on ceremonial occasions in the presence of the sovereign and of the mummies of other dead Incas. A good example of such mixture of ritual and administrative privilege are the descendants of Inca Roca: Cieza tell us[8] that when this king was initiated and his earlobes pierced, the pain was such that he left the crowd and went out into the countryside. A great storm came upon him and he lowered his head in fear; suddenly he heard the noise of subterranean waters. At the time the Cuzco water supply was limited to small springs.[9] The news of the underground river were received with great joy and the work was begun to bring its waters through the city in stone-lined canals. Sarmiento confirms that Inca Roca discovered and channeled the creeks of Cuzco[10] and that his sons and heirs kept the rights to water distribution until the 16th century. When the drought was severe, the mummy of this king was carried, with its face covered, through the fields and pastures.[11]

The royal *ayllus* enjoyed considerable autonomy, each controlling its own lands and its own retainers. According to Cobo, in the last years of the Inca state they had taken over "the best farms."[12] King Huascar, who showed little skill in his dealings with the *panacas,* could attribute several of his defeats by his royal

4 Valcárcel, 1943-49.
5 Baudin, 1943, pp. 148-149.
6 Molina [1575], 1943, pp. 31-32 (second paging).
7 Sarmiento de Gamboa [1572], chap. xiii; 1943, p. 130.
8 Cieza de León [1550], bk. II, chap. xi.
9 *Idem,* bk. II, chap. xxxiv.
10 Sarmiento de Gamboa [1572], chap. xix; 1943, p. 144.
11 Cobo [1653], bk. XII, chap. ix; 1956, p. 73. For additional data, see the author's forthcoming *Ayllus y Panacas del Cuzco.*
12 Cobo [1653], bk. XIII, chap. x; 1956, p. 164.

brother to friction with the royal lineages. The *panacas* played an important administrative and political role in the Inca state and the enmity of influential royal *ayllus* could threaten the throne.[13]

Although the study of *panacas* and other kinship units is far from complete, the data in the chronicles do indicate that neither primogeniture nor the European notions of bastardy prevailed in the Inca state. In earlier times, the *sinchi* or war leader had been selected by the elders for his skill and valor. Garcilaso[14] mentions the existence of a variety of inheritance customs among the ethnic chiefs before the Incas, a variability which was not seriously affected by the expansion of the Cuzco domain. While he does mention primogeniture for some provinces, he also reports succession by "the son best loved by his vassals," which suggests election, not inheritance. Elsewhere, succession devolved on each brother in turn before returning to the sons of the senior brother. The inquiry conducted in the valley of Chincha,[15] on the coast, revealed that before and during Inca rule, the governing chief would select the fittest for the job; it did not matter if he was son, uncle, brother, or cousin to the ruler. There are numerous references in Toledo[16] about the selection of the most competent among the sons of a chief. Cobo[17] asserts that at the death of a local leader the Inca left authority in the hands of the oldest son, if he was able, and if not, picked another; Santillán states[18] that at the death of a *pachaca*-leader (one hundred households in the decimal administrative system), a "virtuous and competent" man was selected from the group without reference to his being kin of the deceased.

Las Casas affirms[19] that succession to chieftainship consisted of election of the man fittest to rule, with sons preferred to the rest. The one selected "was assigned government tasks as a test . . . while the lord was still alive and could correct and change the errors." Las Casas implies that this was common in all the Indies.

In the royal *panacas*, all sons born to the king's women had the same rights and thus all could aspire to succession. Here also, we find in the chronicles that "the ablest" of the sovereign's sons was "elected," meaning the one who managed to overcome his brothers either with weapons or by attracting greater support among the decision-making *ayllus*.

13 Pedro Pizarro [1572], 1844, pp. 53-55.
14 Garcilaso [1604], bk. IV, chap. x; 1941, p. 325.
15 Castro and Ortega [1558], 1934, pp. 144-145.
16 Toledo [1572], 1935, vol. 2, pp. 46, 50-51, 57.
17 Cobo [1653], bk. XII, chap. xxv; 1956, p. 115.
18 Santillán [1563-64], chap. xviii; Jiménez de la Espada, vol. 2, p. 72; vol. 3, p. 111; Cabello Valboa [1586], bk. III, chap. xvii; 1951, p. 330.
19 Las Casas [pre-1555], chap. xiv; 1923, pp. 75-76.

As the Cuzco federation extended its borders and forged an empire, the intrigues and struggles for power became bloodier and a threat to the state. Is it possible that the civil wars marking each succession were the major reason for the growing preference that the number of possible mothers of the heir be reduced to one? Known as the *coya* (queen) or *pisi huarmi* (only woman),[20] she was the woman the Inca married on the day he received the royal tassle, either as king or as an associate in kingship; she was given to him in marriage by the Sun, his father. Marriage and assumption of full adult duties go together elsewhere in the Inca state. In the peasant community, marriage was the threshold to becoming a *hatun runa* (big man), which at the state level meant that one was now enumerated by the census as liable for labor services to the state.[21]

Betanzos indicates[22] that the oldest son of the *coya* was the heir, but adds that if she had only daughters, they selected from among the sons of the other royal women the "one who seemed to be more capable to rule and govern his kingdom and state." Huamán Poma tells us[23] that the heir had to be the son of the *coya*: "they paid no attention if he was older or younger but the one selected by the Sun." Morúa identifies[24] the sons of the *coya* as the natural heirs of the royal tassle: the one who succeeded among them "was the one most cunning and capable at war and rule . . . and if the inheriting prince was not fit to govern and had no brothers, they picked the one among the bastards who was more of a man and had the qualities that were needed." El Palentino assures us[25] that the woman the king married during the accession ceremonies was "the queen and the one who ruled all the other women." If she had no male offspring, the royal elders selected the heir from among the other sons of the monarch and made the queen adopt him. The same happened if the *coya's* son was unfit, as "they did not consent that such a one should succeed." In a letter to the king of Spain in 1572, Viceroy de Toledo recorded: ". . . in the succession to the empire they did not select the first born but the son who showed most capacity to govern."

The tradition of leaving the kingdom to the ablest prince, in other words, to the one who could enlist the most influential of partisans, must have led frequently to favoritism, intrigues, and assassinations; so the elections came to be governed less by merit than by the secret maneuvers of the candidates and their kin.

20 González Holguín [1608], 1952, p. 291.
21 Murra, 1958, p. 33.
22 Betanzos [1551], chap. xvi; 1924, p. 185.
23 Poma [1615], 1936, p. 118.
24 Morúa [1590], bk. III, chap. vi, 1946, p. 175.
25 Fernández (El Palentino) [1571], bk. III; 1876, pp. 360-361.

Given the anarchy in Cuzco at the death of each king, it is probable that the custom of coöpting the future heir to kingship during the sovereign's lifetime was an effort to reduce strife. In talking about inheritance among the Inca, Santillán reports that the heir "was not necessarily the eldest but the one preferred by the father and whom he wanted to leave as king; and while still alive, he gave him the tassle which was the symbol of kingship and with it he was left, elected to rule at the death of his father. . . . the Inca always selected the most worthy of his sons, or the one born of his sister or a woman of his own lineage." If both the Inca and his heir died, "the big ears" or royal dignitaries "selected another brother and gave him the tassle."[26] The evidence indicates that this coöption could be canceled, and the co-ruler replaced.

Another method used to protect the heir from murder and rebellion was to hide the news of the death of the sovereign.[27] If the Inca fell seriously ill, he was taken to a faraway wing of the palace where he could be visited only by his favorites among wives and offspring. If he got worse, the efforts to censor all news intensified, and if he died, they tried to keep his death a secret for as long as a month. Meanwhile, the heir informed the governors in the provinces of the events, and urged increased vigilance within their jurisdiction. Once the control seemed secure and peace more likely, the death of the sovereign was announced and the official funeral ceremonies begun.

There is no need here to enumerate the details of each succession. The data on the early reigns are sketchy, frequently contradictory; the salient facts are the intrigues, the fratricidal struggles, and the efforts by the king to pick his own successor from among the many sons who may have shown the required talents. Apparently coöption did work at least once among the early kings: at the death of Inca Roca, we are told that his son Yahuar Huacac, the *coya's* first-born, succeeded to the throne without strife.[28]

During this king's reign—so legend records—conspiracies and rebellion among the chiefs of the Cuzco area were frequent. Following his father's example, Yahuar Huacac tried to coöpt to kingship the second son of his *coya,* Pahuac Gualpa Mayta, but the latter died soon afterward, murdered through the intrigues of one of the king's women who wanted her own son picked for co-ruler. Soon the king himself died in a conspiracy; the royal elders then selected Viracocha.[29]

26 Santillán [1563-64], chap. xviii; Las Casas [pre-1555], chap. xiv; 1923, pp. 75-76.

27 See succession of Sinchi Roca in Cabello Valboa [1586], bk. III, chap. xi; 1951, p. 274; Sarmiento de Gamboa [1572], chap. xiv; 1943, p. 133. For additional data on royal succession see Rostworowski de Diez Canseco, 1953.

28 Sarmiento de Gamboa [1572], chaps. xxii-xxiii; 1943, pp. 153-155.

29 Cieza de León [1550], bk. II, chap. xxxvii.

Eventually this king chose as his successor one Urco, son of one of his many women, and associated him at the throne. At about this time, Cuzco was threatened by Chanca troops and the two kings withdrew from the city. The defense and eventual victory of the Cuzco-dwellers, captained by another son of Viracocha, Pachacuti, led to this prince assuming power as "the most able," even while his father was still alive.

After a long reign, Pachacuti coöpted his son Amaru Yupanqui,[30] a nomination he withdrew some years later since he decided that Amaru did not have all the qualities he wanted to see in his successor. Apparently the heir was not "war loving" enough. One of the younger sons of the *coya*, Tupa Yupanqui, was then selected.

According to many sources, it was at this time in Inca history that the custom of the heir or co-ruler marrying his sister was introduced.[31] El Palentino affirms[32] that they only married a half-sister, and the only one who did it "was the one who was going to be king and heir and no other." It is my conjecture that the custom of royal incest arose as a way of strengthening the succession rights of the *coya's* sons and as a method, beyond co-rulership, of avoiding strife and civil war at succession.

During Tupa Yupanqui's reign and despite his "ability to reign," there was an attempted coup initiated by a royal brother, Tupa Capac, who felt he had been cheated. He took advantage of his rank and the responsibilities entrusted him by the king, to rise in the very city of Cuzco. Defeated, he was condemned to death.[33]

According to Viceroy de Toledo's informants, Tupa Yupanqui was not very aged at his death; he is reported to have been neither young nor old.[34] Possibly this is the reason he had not coöpted anybody to his rule; in any case, his death is mysterious. Cabello says he died in Cuzco, but also reports that his heir went to mourn him in Caxamarca. Morúa asserts that he died from an arrow, while Cabello mentions poison.[35] Events determining the succession are also unclear. The king had

30 Sarmiento de Gamboa [1572], chaps. xli to xliii; Las Casas [pre-1555], chap. xxv; Cabello Valboa [1586], bk. III, chap. xviii; 1951, pp. 334-335; Santa Cruz Pachacuti [1613 ?], 1927, pp. 189-194.

31 Cobo [1653], bk. XII, chap. xiv; 1956, p. 83; Poma [1615], 1936, p. 139; Sarmiento de Gamboa [1572], chap. xliii; 1943, pp. 206-207.

32 Fernández (El Palentino) [1571], bk. III; 1876, pp. 360-361.

33 Santillán [1563-64], chap. ix; Sarmiento de Gamboa [1572], chap. li; 1943, pp. 228-229; Cabello Valboa [1586], bk. III, chap. xix; 1951, p. 346.

34 Toledo [1572], 1935, vol. 2, p. 148.

35 Sarmiento de Gamboa [1572], chap. liv; 1943, p. 234; Cabello Valboa [1586], bk. III, chap. xx; 1951, p. 358; Morúa [1590], bk. I, chap. xii; 1946, p. 74.

originally leaned toward the youngest son of the *coya*, Mama Ocllo.[36] Before the king's death, however, this appointment was withdrawn in favor of Capac Huari, the son of another woman. Although selected in this way, Capac Huari never became co-ruler; perhaps because he was too young.

Sarmiento de Gamboa and Cabello[37] report the palace intrigues which accompanied the accession of Huayna Capac. The leading royal relatives were still guarding the news of the sovereign's death and went from Chinchero to Cuzco to prepare the ceremonies. One gathers from Sarmiento's text that "the big ears" had not heard of Tupa's alleged last will and were quietly and secretly preparing the transfer of the royal tassle. It is possible that the selection of Capac Huari was extracted from Tupa Yupanqui on his deathbed by the relatives of Chiqui Ocllo, a "concubine" and mother of the candidate. The claim of these relatives was asserted but beaten back by the partisans of the child, Huayna Capac, led by an "uncle," presumably the "brother" of the *coya*, Mama Ocllo. Cieza gives no details,[38] but asserts that "there were difficulties among the very Incas since various sons of Tupa Yupanqui, by women other than the *coya*, tried to claim the royal dignity."

Before he actually took over, Huayna Capac had a tutor from among his relatives, called Hualpaya, who at one point tried to assert the claims to the throne of his own son. The same "uncle," Huaman Achachi, who had repelled Capac Huari's thrust, organized the resistance and Hualpaya was killed.[39]

Although Huayna Capac's death had taken place so recently before the advent of the Europeans, it is nevertheless full of uncertainties; various interpretations of the "facts" are plausible. Huayna Capac had no sons by his sister, the *coya*. Among his sons by other women, three were outstanding: Ninan Cuyuchi, Athualpa, and Huascar. The latter's mother, though not the *coya*, was also a "sister" of the king and she took an active part in the intrigues following the sovereign's death.

Ninan Cuyuchi is mentioned by various sources; Sarmiento and Cabello indicate him as the heir selected by Huayna Capac, who also died unexpectedly. Another version recorded by Vaca de Castro's official informants accuses Ninan Cuyuchi of plotting against Huascar.[40] In a modern study of Huayna Capac's

36 Sarmiento de Gamboa [1572], chap. lv; 1943, p. 236.

37 Cabello Valboa [1586], bk. III, chap. xx; 1951, pp. 358-361.

38 Cieza de León [1550], bk. II, chap. lxi.

39 Sarmiento de Gamboa [1572], chap. lvii; 1943, p. 238; Santa Cruz Pachacuti [1613 ?], 1927, p. 204.

40 Sarmiento de Gamboa [1572], chap. lxii; 1943, p. 251; Santa Cruz Pachacuti [1613 ?], 1927, p. 208; Cabello Valboa [1586], bk. III, chap. xxiv; 1951, p. 394; Vaca de Castro [1540's], 1920, p. 23.

descendants Temple finds considerable evidence that Ninan Cuyuchi was the son favored by Huayna Capac.[41]

There is even more controversy about the birthplace of Atahualpa. An 18th century source, Velasco, tells of the fabulous kingdom of the Scyris and of Huayna Capac's marriage to its dowager queen. Atahualpa is alleged to have been born of this marriage. A different version is found in Cieza,[42] a source frequently very reliable, who inquired "with great diligence" about Atahualpa's birthplace. He was told that the prince was born in Cuzco and was older than Huascar. His mother, according to Cieza, was Tupa Palla, from Quilaco, of the Hurin Cuzco moiety and all other tales are "a deceit." Alternate sources call her Tocto Coca, of Pachacuti's *panaca* or lineage. If we accept the version of most chroniclers, that the mother of Atahualpa was not a Quito princess, but the daughter of one of Cuzco's royal lineages, the whole traditional account of the battle between the rival brothers is upset.

When Huayna Capac left Cuzco to undertake his Ecuadorean campaign, he left Huascar in charge. Such an interim appointment went always to a brother or son of the Inca. Despite his advanced years, he had not designated a co-ruler. There is no way at this time to ascertain the reasons for this neglect, but there is evidence that many "big ears" were discontented and the rivalries between the sons had led to the formation of factions.

Sarmiento and Santa Cruz Pachacuti tell of a quarrel between the king and some royal relatives after a battle against the Cayambi, in which the Cuzco forces had been defeated and the royal kin had fled, while the king's litter had fallen to the ground. Angry, Huayna Capac cut the rations and the usual gifts to the "big ears";[43] events reached a point where, led by a general called Mihi, the king's relatives decided to return to Cuzco on their own. Huayna Capac had to ask for the intercession of the priests and to offer them many gifts to get them to stay.

Shortly afterwards Huayna Capac fell sick and on his deathbed appointed Ninan Cuyuchi. The royal relative who went to notify the prince found that the heir was also dead, victim of an epidemic which apparently was scourging the area. There is a report that general Mihi also died of this "plague," though it may have

41 Temple, 1937-40.

42 Cieza de León [1550], bk. I, chap. xxxvii; bk. II, chaps. lxii and lxix.

43 Sarmiento de Gamboa [1572], chap. lx; 1943, p. 245; Santa Cruz Pachacuti [1613 ?], 1927, pp. 212, 214; Cabello Valboa [1586], bk. III, chap. xxii; 1951, p. 371. In Tomebamba, King Huayna Capac began to "entertain his captains and soldiers with invitations and fiestas to which he never called the 'big-ears' as he used to, nor did he issue them rations every ten days as was customary, but from month to month."

been convenient for some of the factions to eliminate the leader of an important sector of the royal kin.

At that time Atahualpa, who had partisans among the leaders of his father's army, had no influence in Cuzco administrative and royal circles, since he had been away from the capital (for as long as ten years, say Cabello and Cobo) while Huascar acted in his father's place. In such circumstances Huascar had built up a following with the help of his mother, Raua Ocllo, who was very active on his behalf.

The tensions between court circles who had brought Huascar to power and the army re-emerged later in a battle between the rival brothers. It was not a war between North and South, nor was it a novel phenomenon in Inca history. Each of the two princes felt himself called to reign and one of them was bound to lose. The sequence of events can be reconstructed as follows.

When, after Huayna Capac's death, Atahualpa remained in Quito, Huascar's anxiety over his brother grew. Sarmiento de Gamboa tells us that Huascar had cruelly killed some leading members of Pachacuti's lineage for allowing Atahualpa to remain in the north. This focussed the hatred of the Hanan Cuzco moiety on the king. The latter is reported to have "discovered" that the royal lineages controlled the best lands and enjoyed considerable autonomy. Pedro Pizarro reports that friction arose when the king threatened these holdings; at a given moment the dispute grew so bitter that the Inca threatened to leave the Hanan Cuzco moiety into which he was born.[44] All this must not be underestimated when we search for the reasons for Atahualpa's victories over his royal brother's generals.

CONCLUSIONS

In the early days of the Inca state, succession to power went to a son of the Inca, selected by the reigning monarch, or in an emergency, by a council. The various candidates tried to rally the support of their kinfolk. There was no primogeniture, nor was bastardy an aspect of legitimacy.

All the sons of a king had, in theory, equal rights to the royal tassle. In consequence, intrigues, rebellions, and the violent elimination of rival candidates were common. In an effort to avoid such strife, beginning with Inca Roca, one of the sons was associated as co-ruler with his father and designated as the heir. The co-ruler shared in administrative and military tasks. This co-ruler could be removed by the Inca.

In later reigns, coöption to rule was reinforced by limiting succession to the

44 See notes 12 and 13. Also Sarmiento de Gamboa [1572], chaps. lxviii and lxvii; 1943, pp. 254, 269-270.

"capable and brave" among the sons of the *coya*, the only "queen" among the many wives.

Eventually, and still in an effort to eliminate succession squabbles and civil wars, at the peak of the empire's glory, Tupa Yupanqui introduced royal incest as a way of legitimizing succession by the *coya's* son.

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