
This is a collection of four essays dealing with the Inca state of Tawantinsuyu, two Aymara ethnic groups under both Inca and Spanish domination, and an overview of the Peruvian Andean past up to the post-independence period. The author, a professor of history at the Catholic University of Peru, focuses on continuities of Andean life which have endured despite changes produced by the conquest. Dissatisfied with the chroniclers' propensity to cast Andean mores in European molds, Pease makes extensive use of sixteenth-century visitas and modern anthropological hypotheses.

Redistribution of desired items, such as maize, coca, and clothing, among widely separated Andean peoples constituted one of Tawantinsuyu's principal means of expansion. The Inca domain embraced many nucleated ethnic groups which survived the destruction of the Cuzco-based state much longer than generally accepted. In discussing two such groups, the Lupaqa and the Collaguas, Pease is indebted to anthropologist John V. Murra who has demonstrated the value of visitas as historical documents and holds that Andean groups exploited ecological settings at various elevations to harvest a diversity of agricultural products. Pease tests this hypothesis on a people undergoing drastic changes due to the conquest, the Lupaqa, and confirms Murra's model in the study of the Collaguas.

Ultimately, city-based Spaniards effected desestructuración of Andean cultures through the mita, tribute, reducción, and evangelización. While Pease notes the actions of Viceroy Francisco Toledo (1569–1581) in furthering these destructive practices, he also identifies a group of Spanish officials, active prior to Toledo's arrival, who were genuinely interested in understanding the Andean people.

Pease is engaged in a fruitful exchange with other scholars, principally anthropologists, on the Andean past. It is sometimes difficult to discern a dividing line between Pease's own work and that of others. It is clear, however, that with this book he has made a contribution to the study of Peruvian history by engaging in that exchange and by providing a valuable discussion of sources.

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