



ALSO BY KIM MACQUARRIE

Gold of the Andes: The Llamas, Alpacas, Vicuñas and Guanacos of South America

Peru's Amazonian Eden: Manu National Park and Biosphere Reserve

Where the Andes Meet the Amazon

THE LAST DAYS OF THE INCAS

Kim MacQuarrie

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To my parents, Ron and Joanne MacQuarrie

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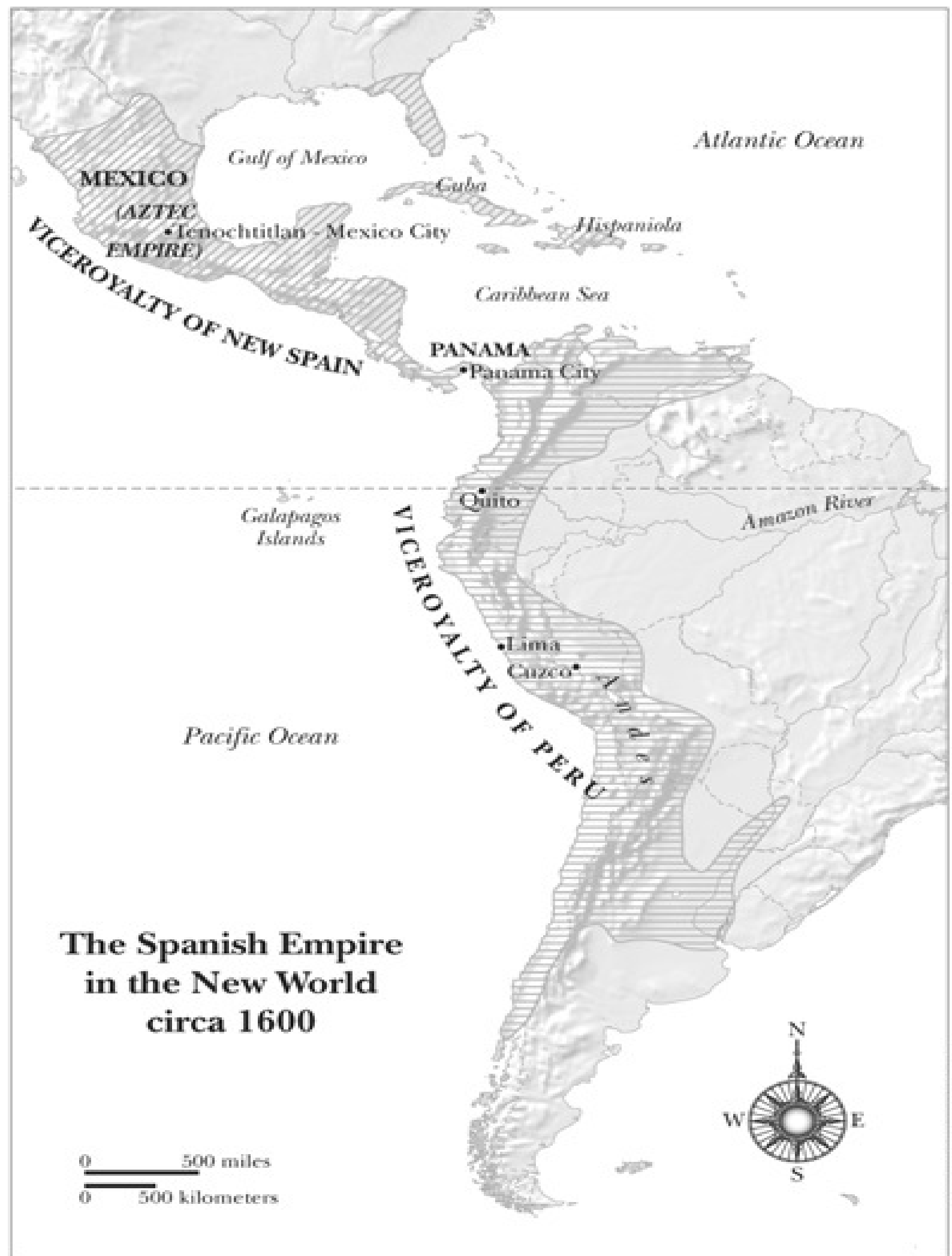
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The Four Suyus of the Inca Empire circa 1530





CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

- 1492 Columbus lands in what is now called the Bahamas; this is the first of his four voyages to the New World.
- 1502 Francisco Pizarro arrives on the island of Hispaniola.
- 1502–1503 During his last voyage, Columbus explores the coasts of what will later be called Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama.
- 1513 Vasco Núñez de Balboa and Francisco Pizarro cross the Isthmus of Panama and discover the Pacific Ocean.
- 1516 The future Inca emperor Manco Inca is born.
- 1519–1521 Hernando Cortés conquers the Aztec Empire in Mexico.
- 1524–1525 Francisco Pizarro's first voyage heads south from Panama and explores along the coast of Colombia. The trip is a financial failure. Pizarro's colleague Diego de Almagro loses an eye in a battle with natives.
- 1526 Pizarro, Almagro, and Hernando de Luque form the Company of the Levant, a company dedicated to conquest.
- 1526–1527 Pizarro and Almagro's second voyage. Pizarro makes his first contact with the Inca Empire at Tumbes.
- c. 1528 The Inca Emperor Huayna Capac dies from European-introduced smallpox. His death sets off civil war between his sons Atahualpa and Huascar.
- 1528–1529 Pizarro journeys to Spain, where he is granted a license to conquer Peru by the queen.
- 1531–1532 Pizarro's third voyage to Peru. Pizarro captures Atahualpa.
- 1533 Atahualpa is executed; Almagro arrives; Pizarro captures Cuzco and installs seventeen-year-old Manco Inca as the new Inca emperor.
- 1535 Pizarro founds the city of Lima; Almagro leaves for Chile.
- 1536 Gonzalo Pizarro steals Manco Inca's wife, Cura Ocllo. Manco rebels and surrounds Cuzco. Juan Pizarro is killed, and the Inca general Quizo Yupanqui attacks Lima.
- Almagro seizes Cuzco from Hernando and Gonzalo Pizarro. Rodrigo Orgóñez sacks Vitcos and

- 1537 captures Manco Inca's son, Titu Cusi. Manco escapes and flees to Vilcabamba, the new Inca capital.
-
- 1538 Hernando Pizarro executes Diego de Almagro.
- 1539 Gonzalo Pizarro invades and sacks Vilcabamba; Manco Inca escapes but Francisco Pizarro executes Manco's wife, Cura Ocllo.
- 1540 Hernando Pizarro begins a prison sentence of twenty years in Spain.
- 1541 Francisco Pizarro is murdered by supporters of Almagro. One of his assassins, Diego Méndez, flees to Vilcabamba.
- 1544 Manco Inca is murdered by Diego Méndez and six renegade Spaniards. Gonzalo Pizarro rebels against the king of Spain.
- 1548 Battle of Jaquijahuana; Gonzalo Pizarro is executed by representatives of the king.
- 1557 The Inca Emperor Sayri-Tupac leaves Vilcabamba and relocates near Cuzco.
- 1560 Sayri-Tupac dies. Titu Cusi becomes Inca emperor in Vilcabamba.
- 1570 The Augustinian friars García and Ortiz attempt to visit the capital of Vilcabamba; Titu Cusi refuses to allow them to enter. The friars burn the Inca shrine at Chuquipalta, and friar García is expelled.
- 1571 Titu Cusi dies; Tupac Amaru becomes emperor.
- 1572 The Viceroy of Peru, Francisco Toledo, declares war on Vilcabamba. Vilcabamba is sacked and Tupac Amaru—the final Inca emperor—is captured and executed in Cuzco.
- 1572 The Inca capital of Vilcabamba is abandoned; the Spaniards remove the inhabitants and relocate them to a new town they christen *San Francisco de la Victoria de Vilcabamba*.
- 1578 Hernando Pizarro dies in Spain at the age of 77.
- 1911 Hiram Bingham discovers ruins at Machu Picchu, Vitcos, and a place called Espíritu Pampa, which local Campa Indians refer to as "Vilcabamba." Bingham locates all three of these sites within four weeks.
- 1912 Bingham returns to Machu Picchu, this time with the sponsorship of the National Geographic Society—its first sponsored expedition.
- 1913 *National Geographic* dedicates an entire issue to Bingham's discovery of Machu Picchu.
- 1914—Bingham's third and final trip to Machu Picchu. He discovers what is now called the "Inca

1915 Trail.”

- 1920 Hiram Bingham publishes his book *Inca Land*, in which he states that Machu Picchu is actually the lost Inca city of Vilcabamba, the final refuge of the last Inca emperors.
- 1955 The American explorer/writer Victor von Hagen publishes *Highway of the Sun*, in which he argues that Machu Picchu cannot be Vilcabamba.
- 1957 Gene Savoy arrives in Peru.
- 1964–1965 Gene Savoy, Douglas Sharon, and Antonio Santander discover extensive ruins at Espíritu Pampa, which Savoy claims is the location of Vilcabamba the Old.
- 1970 Savoy publishes *Antisuyo*, an account of his explorations at Espíritu Pampa and elsewhere. Savoy leaves Peru and relocates to Reno, Nevada.
- 1982 Vincent Lee visits the Vilcabamba area while on a climbing trip.
- 1984 Vincent and Nancy Lee discover more than four hundred structures at Espíritu Pampa, confirming that it was the largest settlement in the Vilcabamba area and thus was undoubtedly the site of Manco Inca’s capital of Vilcabamba—home of the last Inca emperors.
- 2002–2005 Peru’s *Instituto Nacional de Cultura* (INC) conducts the first archaeological excavations at Vilcabamba.

THE LAST DAYS OF THE INCAS

PREFACE

NEARLY FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, ROUGHLY ONE HUNDRED and sixty-eight Spaniards and a handful of their African and Indian slaves arrived in what is now Peru. They soon collided with an Inca empire ten million strong, smashing into it like a giant meteor and leaving remnants of that collision scattered all over the continent. The modern-day visitor to Peru, in fact, can still see the results of that collision almost everywhere: from the dark brown skins of the very poor to the generally lighter skins and aristocratic Spanish surnames of many of Peru's elite; from the spiked silhouettes of Catholic cathedrals and church spires to the presence of imported cattle and pigs and people of Spanish and African descent. The dominant language of Peru is also a forceful reminder. It is still referred to as *Castillano*, a name derived from the inhabitants of the ancient Spanish kingdom of Castile. The violent impact of the Spanish conquest, in fact—which nipped in the bud an empire that had existed for a mere ninety years—still reverberates through every layer of Peruvian society, whether that society exists on the coast, or in the high Andes, or even down among the handful of uncontacted indigenous tribes that still roam Peru's Upper Amazon.

Determining precisely what happened before and during the Spanish conquest, however, is not an easy task. Many of the people who actually witnessed the event were ultimately killed by it. Only a handful of those who survived actually left records of what occurred—and not surprisingly most of those were written by Spaniards. The literate Spaniards who arrived in Peru (only about 30 percent of Spaniards were literate in the sixteenth century) brought with them the alphabet, a powerful, carefully honed tool that had been invented over three thousand years earlier in Egypt. The Incas, by contrast, kept track of their histories via specialized oral histories, genealogies, and possibly via *quipus*—strings of carefully tied and colored knots that held abundant numerical data and that were also used as memory prompts. In a relatively short period of time after the conquest, however, knowledge of how to read the *quipus* was lost, the historians died out or were killed, and Inca history gradually grew fainter with each passing generation.

“History is written by the victors,” the adage goes, and indeed, this was as true for the Incas as it was for the Spaniards. The Incas had created an empire 2,500 miles long, after all, and had subjugated most of the people within it. Like many imperial powers, their histories tended to justify and glorify both their own conquests and their rulers, and to belittle those of their enemies. The Incas told the Spaniards that it was they, the Incas, who had brought civilization to the region, and that their conquests were inspired and sanctioned by the gods. The truth, however, was otherwise: the Incas had actually been preceded by more than a thousand years of various kingdoms and empires. Inca oral history was thus a combination of facts, myths, religion, and propaganda. Even within the Inca elite, divided as they often were by different and competitive lineages, histories could vary. As a result, early Spanish chroniclers recorded more than *fifty* different variations of Inca history, depending upon whom they interviewed.

The record of what actually occurred during the conquest is also skewed by the sheer disparity of what has come down to us; although we now have perhaps thirty contemporaneous Spanish reports of various events that occurred during and within fifty years of the initial conquest, we have only *three* major native or half-native reports during that same time period (Titu Cusi, Felipe Huamán Poma de Ayala, and Garcilaso de la Vega). None of these three chronicles, however, were written by native authors who had personally witnessed any of the events during the critical first five years of the conquest. One of the earliest of these sources, in fact—a report dictated by the Inca emperor Titu Cusi to visiting Spaniards—dates from 1570, nearly forty years *after* the capture of his great uncle, the Inca emperor Atahualpa. Thus, in trying to determine who did what and to whom, the modern writer

encounters a historical record that is inevitably biased: on the one hand we have a pile of Spanish letters and reports and on the other we have only three indigenous chronicles, with perhaps the most famous of them (by Garcilaso de la Vega) written in Spain by a half-native writer who published his chronicle more than five decades after he had left Peru.

Of the Spanish records that have survived, there is a further barrier in trying to determine what happened: the Spaniards wrote most of their early reports in the form of documents called *probanzas* or *relaciones*, which were largely written in an attempt to try and impress the Spanish king. The authors of these documents, often humble notaries temporarily turned conquistadors, were well aware of the fact that if their own exploits somehow stood out, then the king might grant them future favors, rewards, and perhaps even permanent pensions. The early writers of the Spanish conquest, therefore, were not attempting necessarily to describe events as they actually occurred, but were more inclined to write justifications and advertisements about themselves to the king. At the same time, they tended to downplay the efforts of their Spanish comrades (the latter were, after all, competitors for those same rewards). In addition, Spanish chroniclers often misunderstood or misinterpreted much of the native culture they encountered, while they simultaneously ignored and/or downplayed the actions of the African and Central American slaves the Spaniards had brought along with them, as well as the influence of their native mistresses. Francisco Pizarro's younger brother Hernando, for example, wrote one of the first reports of the conquest—a sixteen-page letter to the Council of the Indies, which represented the king. In his letter, Hernando mentioned his own accomplishments repeatedly while mentioning the exploits of only *one* other Spaniard among the 167 who accompanied him—those of his elder brother Francisco. Ironically, it was these first, often self-serving versions of what had occurred in Peru that became instantaneous bestsellers in Europe when they were published. It was also from these same documents that the first Spanish historians fashioned their own epic histories, thus passing the distortions of one generation on to the next.

The modern writer—especially the writer of a historical narrative—must therefore and by necessity often choose from among multiple and conflicting accounts, must rely sometimes by default upon some authors not known for their veracity, must translate from misspelled and often verbose manuscripts, and often must use third and fourth person sources, some of which have come down to us as copies of copies of manuscripts. Did the Inca emperor Atahualpa really do such and such or say such and such to so and so? No one can say with certainty. Many of the quotations in this manuscript were actually “remembered” by writers who sometimes didn't commit their memories to paper until decades after the events they described. Like quantum physics, we can thus only *approximate* what actually happened in the past. The abundant quotations used in the book, therefore—the vast majority of them dating from the sixteenth century—have to be viewed for what they are: bits and fragments of colored glass, often beautifully polished, yet which afford only a partial and often distorted view onto an increasingly distant past.

All histories, of course, highlight some things, abbreviate others, and foreshadow, shorten, extend, and even omit certain events. Inevitably, all stories are told through the prism of one's own time and culture. The American historian William Prescott's 1847 tale of Pizarro and a handful of Spanish heroes defying the odds against hordes of barbaric native savages not coincidentally mirrored the ideas and conceits of the Victorian Age and of American Manifest Destiny. No doubt this volume also reflects the prevailing attitudes of our time. All a historical writer can really do, to the best of one's ability and within one's own time, is momentarily lift from the dusty shelves of centuries these well-worn figures—Pizarro, Almagro, Atahualpa, Manco Inca, and their contemporaries—clean them off, and then attempt to breathe life into them once again for a new audience so that the small figures can once again replay their brief moments on earth. Once finished, the writer must then lay them gently

back down in the dust, until someone in the not-so-distant future attempts to fashion a new narrative and resuscitate them once again.

Some 400 years ago, Felipe Huamán Poma de Ayala, a native from a noble family that lived within the Inca Empire, spent much of his life writing a more than 1,000-page manuscript, accompanied by 400 hand-drawn illustrations. Poma de Ayala hoped that it would one day cause the Spanish king to rectify the abuses of the Spaniards in post-conquest Peru. Somehow, Poma de Ayala managed to carry his bulky manuscript about the country with him, wandering through the wreckage of the Inca Empire interviewing people, carefully recording on his pages much of what he heard and saw, and all the while guarding his life's work from being stolen. At the age of eighty he finally finished his manuscript, sending the lone copy by ship for the long voyage to Spain. The manuscript apparently never arrived at its destination or, if it did, was never delivered to the king. More than likely it was filed away by some low-level bureaucrat and subsequently forgotten. Nearly three hundred years later in 1908, a researcher accidentally discovered the manuscript in a library in Copenhagen and with it found a treasure trove of information. Some of its drawings have been used to illustrate the narrative in this book. In his accompanying letter to the king, an aged Poma de Ayala wrote the following:

In weighing, cataloguing and in setting order [to] the various [historical] accounts I passed a great number of days, indeed many years, without coming to a decision. At last I overcame my timidity and began the task which I had aspired to for so long. I looked for illumination in the darkness of my understanding, in my very blindness and ignorance. For I am no doctor or Latin scholar, like some others in this country. But I make bold to think myself the first person of Indian race able to render such a service to Your Majesty. . . . In my work I have always tried to obtain the most truthful accounts, accepting those which seemed to be substantial and which were confirmed from various sources. I have only reported those facts which several people agreed upon as being true. . . . Your Majesty, for the benefit of both Indian and Spanish Christians in Peru I ask you to accept in your goodness of heart this trifling and humble service. Such acceptance will bring me happiness, relief, and a reward for all my work.

To which the present writer, having undergone a similar yet far less imposing challenge, can only ask for the same.

Kim MacQuarrie
Marina del Rey, California
Sept. 10, 2006

1 THE DISCOVERY

July 24, 1911

THE GAUNT, THIRTY-FIVE-YEAR-OLD AMERICAN EXPLORER, Hiram Bingham, clambered up the steep slope of the cloud forest, on the eastern flank of the Andes, then paused beside his peasant guide before taking off his wide-brimmed fedora and wiping the sweat from his brow. Carrasco, the Peruvian army sergeant, soon climbed up the trail behind them, sweating in his dark, brass-buttoned uniform and hat, then leaned forward and placed his hands on his knees in order to catch his breath. Bingham had been told that ancient Inca ruins were located somewhere high up above them, nearly in the clouds, yet Bingham also knew that rumors about Inca ruins were as rampant in this little explored region of southeastern Peru as the flocks of small green parrots that often wheeled about, screeching through the air. The six-foot-four, 170-pound Bingham was fairly certain, however, that the lost Inca city he was searching for did not lie ahead. Bingham, in fact, had not even bothered to pack a lunch for this trek, hoping instead to make a quick journey up from the valley floor, to verify whatever scattered ruins might lie upon the jagged peak rising above, and then to hurry back down. As the lanky American with the close-cropped brown hair and the thin, almost ascetic face began to follow his guide up the trail again, he had no idea that within just a few hours he would make one of the most spectacular archaeological discoveries in history.

The air lay humid and warm upon them, and, looking up, they saw the ridgetop they were seeking stood another thousand feet above, obscured by sheer-sided slopes festooned with dripping vegetation. Above the ridge, swirling clouds alternately hid and then revealed the jungle-covered peak. Water glistened from freshly fallen rain, while an occasional mist brushed across the men's upturned faces. Alongside the steep path, orchids erupted in bright splashes of violet, yellow, and ocher. For a few moments the men watched a tiny hummingbird—no more than a shimmer of fluorescent turquoise and blue—buzz and dart about a cluster of flowers, then disappear. Only a half hour earlier, all three had carefully stepped around a *vibora*, a poisonous snake, its head mashed in by a rock. Had it been killed by a local peasant? Their guide had only shrugged his shoulders when asked. The snake, Bingham knew, was one of many whose bite could cripple or kill.

An assistant professor of Latin American history and geography at Yale University, Bingham ran a hand down one of the heavy cloth leg wrappings that he had wound all the way up from his booted ankles to just below his knees. Might prevent a snakebite, Bingham no doubt thought. Sergeant Carrasco, the Peruvian military man who had been assigned to the expedition, meanwhile, undid the top buttons to his uniform. The guide trudging ahead of them—Melchor Arteaga—was a peasant who lived in a small house on the valley floor more than a thousand feet below. It was he who told the two men that on top of a high mountain ridge Inca ruins could be found. Arteaga wore long pants and an old jacket, and had the high cheekbones, dark hair, and aquiline eyes of his ancestors—the inhabitants of the Inca Empire. Arteaga's left cheek bulged with a wad of coca leaves—a mild form of cocaine narcotic that once only the Inca royalty had enjoyed. He spoke Spanish but was more at home in Quechua, the Incas' ancient language. Bingham spoke heavily accented Spanish and no Quechua; Sergeant Carrasco spoke both.

“Picchu,” Arteaga had said, when they had first visited him the day before. The words were difficult to make out, filtering as they did past the thick gruel of coca leaves. “Chu Picchu,” it sounded like the second time. Finally, the short peasant had firmly grabbed the American's arm and, pointing up at a massive peak looming above them, he uttered two words: “Machu Picchu”—Quechua for “old peak.” Arteaga turned and squinted into the intense brown eyes of the American explorer, then turned toward

the mountain. “Up in the clouds, at Machu Picchu—*that* is where you will find the ruins.”

For the price of a shiny new silver American dollar, Arteaga had agreed to guide Bingham up to the peak. Now, high on its flank, the three men looked back down at the valley floor, where far below them tumbled the Urubamba River, white and rapids-strewn in stretches, then almost turquoise in others, fed as it was by Andean glaciers. The river would eventually flatten out and coil its way down into the Amazon River, which stretched eastward for nearly another three thousand miles, across an entire continent. One hundred miles to the west lay the high Andean city of Cuzco, the ancient capital of the Incas—the “navel” or center of their once nearly 2,500-mile-long empire.

Almost four hundred years earlier, the Incas had abruptly abandoned Cuzco, after the Spaniards had murdered their emperor and installed a puppet emperor on the throne. A large number of them had then headed en masse down the eastern side of the Andes, eventually founding a new capital in the wild Antisuyu—the mostly jungle-choked eastern quarter of their empire. The Incas called their new capital Vilcabamba and for the next nearly four decades it would become the headquarters of a fierce guerrilla war they would carry out against the Spaniards. In Vilcabamba, Inca warriors learned to ride captured Spanish horses, to fire captured Spanish muskets, and often fought alongside their nearly naked Amazonian allies, who wielded deadly bows and arrows. Bingham had been told the remarkable story of the Incas’ little known rebel kingdom a year earlier, while on a brief trip to Peru, and was amazed that no one seemed to know what had become of its capital. A year later, Bingham was back in Peru, hoping that *he* would become the person to discover it.

Thousands of miles from his Connecticut home and clinging to the side of a cloud forest peak, Bingham couldn’t help but wonder if his current climb would result in a wild-goose chase. Two of his companions on the expedition, the Americans Harry Foote and William Erving, had remained on the valley floor in camp, preferring that Bingham go off in search of the ruins himself. Rumors of ruins often remained just that—rumors—they no doubt thought. One thing his companions knew well, however, was that no matter how tired *they* were, Bingham himself always seemed tireless. Not only was Bingham the leader of this expedition, but he had also planned it, had selected its seven members and had raised the financing bit by difficult bit. The funds that now allowed Bingham to be hiking in search of a lost Inca city, in fact, had come from selling a last piece of inherited family real estate in Hawaii, from promises of a series of articles for *Harper’s* magazine on his return, and from donations from the United Fruit Company, the Winchester Arms Company, and W. R. Grace and Company. Although he had married an heir to the Tiffany fortune, Bingham himself had no money—and never had.

The only son of a strict, fire-and-brimstone Protestant preacher, Hiram Bingham III had grown up in near poverty in Honolulu, Hawaii. His impoverished youth was no doubt one of the motivations for why Bingham, even as a boy, had always been determined to climb his way up the social and financial ladders of America or, as he put it, “to strive for magnificence.” Perhaps one episode from Bingham’s younger years best illustrates how he presently came to be scrambling up a high Peruvian mountain: when Bingham was twelve years old, suffocating from what he considered the dreary, strict life of a minister’s son (where for the smallest infraction he was punished with a wooden rod), Bingham and a friend decided to run away from home. Bingham had read plenty of Horatio Alger stories, and, torn between his own dreams and possible eternal damnation in hell, he decided that he might best escape by taking a ship to the mainland, and then begin his climb toward fame and fortune.

That morning, with his heart no doubt pounding and trying hard to appear at ease, Bingham pretended he was going to school, left the house, and, as soon as he was out of sight, went directly to the bank. There, he withdrew \$250, which Bingham’s parents had insisted he save, penny by penny, so

that he could go to college on the mainland. Bingham quickly bought a boat ticket and a new suit of clothes, packing everything into a suitcase he had hidden in a woodpile near his home. Bingham's plan was to somehow make his way to New York City, to find a job as a newsboy, and then—when he had saved up enough money—eventually to go to Africa, where he hoped to become an explorer.

“I believe that he got the fancy from the books he has read,” the wife of a neighbor later told his parents. Indeed, young Bingham was a voracious reader. But his carefully laid plans soon began to unravel, although through no fault of his own. For some reason, the ship on which he had booked passage did not depart that day and instead remained in port. Meanwhile, Bingham's best friend and fellow escapee—whose very different and happy home life hardly justified such a drastic undertaking—had lost his courage and confessed everything to his father. Soon, the boy's father alerted the Bingham household. Bingham's father found his son down at the port in the late afternoon, standing determinedly with his valise in hand before the ship that was to bear him across the seas and ultimately to his destiny. Amazingly, Bingham was not punished; instead, he was given more freedom and latitude. And, perhaps not surprisingly, twenty-three years later Hiram Bingham found himself scrambling up the eastern face of the Andes, on the cusp of making one of the most spectacular archaeological discoveries in the history of the world.

Shortly after noon, on July 24, 1911, Bingham and his two companions reached a long, wide ridgetop; on it sat a small hut, roofed with dried brown *ichu* grass, some 2,500 feet above the valley floor. The setting was magnificent—Bingham had a 360 degree view of the adjacent jungle-covered mountain peaks and of the clouds rimming the whole area. To the left, and connected to the ridge, a large peak—Machu Picchu—rose up and towered above. To the right, another peak—Huayna Picchu or “young peak”—did the same. As soon as the three sweaty men reached the hut, two Peruvian peasants, wearing sandals and typical alpaca-wool ponchos, welcomed them with dripping gourds of cool mountain water.

The two natives, it turned out, were farmers and had been cultivating the ancient terraces here for the last four years. Yes, there were ruins, they said, just ahead. They then offered their visitors some cooked potatoes—just one of an estimated *five thousand* varieties of potatoes that grow in the Andes, their place of origin. Three families lived there, Bingham discovered, growing corn, sweet and white potatoes, sugarcane, beans, peppers, tomatoes, and gooseberries. Bingham also learned that only two paths led to the outside world from atop this high mountain outpost: the path that they had just struggled up and another one, “even more difficult,” the peasants said, that led down the other side. The peasants traveled to the valley floor only once a month, they said. Natural springs bubbled up here, and the area was blessed with rich soil. Eight thousand feet up in the Andes, with abundant sun, fertile soil, and water, the three peasant families had little need of the outside world. A good defensive site, Bingham no doubt thought, as he drank several gourdfuls of water, looking around at the surroundings. He later wrote,

Through Sergeant Carrasco [translating from Quechua into Spanish], I learned that the ruins were “a little further along.” In this country one can never tell whether such a report is worthy of credence. “He may have been lying,” is a good footnote to affix to all hearsay evidence. Accordingly, I was not unduly excited, nor in a great hurry to move. The heat was still great, the water from the Indian's spring was cool and delicious, and the rustic wooden bench, hospitably covered immediately after my arrival with a soft woolen poncho, seemed most comfortable. Furthermore, the view was simply enchanting. Tremendous green precipices fell away to the white rapids of the Urubamba [River] below. Immediately in front, on the north side of the valley, was a great granite cliff

rising 2,000 feet sheer. To the left was the solitary peak of Huayna Picchu, surrounded by ~~seemingly inaccessible precipices. On all sides were rocky cliffs. Beyond them cloud-~~capped, snow-covered mountains rose thousands of feet above us.

After resting awhile, Bingham finally stood up. A small boy had appeared—wearing torn pants, a brightly colored alpaca poncho, leather sandals, and a broad-rimmed hat with spangles; the two men instructed the boy in Quechua to take Bingham and Sergeant Carrasco to the “ruins.” Melchor Arteaga, meanwhile—the peasant who had guided them here—decided to remain chatting with the two farmers. The three soon set off, the boy in front, the tall American behind, and Carrasco bringing up the rear. It didn’t take long before Bingham’s dream of one day discovering a lost city became a reality.

Hardly had we left the hut and rounded the promontory, than we were confronted by an unexpected sight, a great flight of beautifully constructed stone-faced terraces, perhaps a hundred of them, each hundreds of feet long and ten feet high. Suddenly, I found myself confronted with the walls of ruined houses built of the finest quality Inca stone work. It was hard to see them for they were partly covered with trees and moss, the growth of centuries, but in the dense shadow, hiding in bamboo thickets and tangled vines, appeared here and there walls of white granite carefully cut and exquisitely fitted together.

Bingham continued:

I climbed a marvelous great stairway of large granite blocks, walked along a pampa where the Indians had a small vegetable garden, and came into a little clearing. Here were the ruins of two of the finest structures I have ever seen in Peru. Not only were they made of selected blocks of beautifully grained white granite; their walls contained ashlar of Cyclopean size, ten feet in length, and higher than a man. The sight held me spellbound. . . . I could scarcely believe my senses as I examined the larger blocks in the lower course, and estimated that they must weigh from ten to fifteen tons each. Would anyone believe what I had found?

Bingham had had the foresight to bring a camera and a tripod, just in case, and thus spent the rest of the afternoon photographing the ancient buildings. Before a succession of splendid Inca walls, trapezoidal doorways, and beautifully hewn blocks, Bingham placed either Sergeant Carrasco or the small boy—and asked them to stand still while he squeezed the release to his shutter. The thirty-one photos Bingham took on this day would become the first of thousands that Bingham would eventually snap over the coming years, many of them ending up within the covers of *National Geographic* magazine, which would co-sponsor subsequent expeditions. Only a week after having left Cuzco, Hiram Bingham had just made the major achievement of his lifetime. For even though Bingham would live nearly another half century and would eventually become a U.S. senator, it was this brief climb up to an unknown mountain ridge in Peru that would earn him everlasting fame.

“My dearest love,” Bingham wrote his wife the next morning from the valley floor, “We reached here night before last and pitched the 7 x 9 tent in a cozy corner described above. Yesterday [Harry] Foote spent collecting insects. [William] Erving did some [photographic] developing, and I climbed couple of thousand feet to a wonderful old Inca city called Machu Picchu.” Bingham continued: “The stone is as fine as any in Cuzco! It is unknown and will make a fine story. I expect to return there shortly for a stay of a week or more.”

Over the next four years, Bingham would return to the ruins of Machu Picchu two more times, clearing, mapping, and excavating the ruins while comparing what he discovered with the old Spanish

chronicles' descriptions of the lost city of Vilcabamba. Although he at first had some doubts, Bingham was soon convinced that the ruins of Machu Picchu were none other than those of the legendary rebel city of Vilcabamba, the final refuge of the Incas.

In the pages of his later books, Bingham would write that Machu Picchu was “the ‘Lost City of the Incas,’ favorite residence of the last Emperors, site of temples and palaces built of white granite in the most inaccessible part of the grand canyon of the Urubamba; a holy sanctuary to which only nobles, priests, and the Virgins of the Sun were admitted. It was once called Vilcapampa [Vilcabamba] but is known today as Machu Picchu.”

Not everyone was convinced that Bingham had discovered the Incas' rebel city, however. For the few scholars who had actually read the old Spanish chronicles, discrepancies seemed to exist between the Spaniards' description of the city of Vilcabamba and the admittedly stunning ruins that Bingham had found. Was the citadel of Machu Picchu *really* the last stronghold of the Incas as described in the chronicles? Or could it be that Hiram Bingham—a man now feted and lionized around the world as an expert on the Incas—had made a colossal error, and the rebel city had yet to be found? For those scholars who had their doubts, there was only one way to find out—and that was to return to the sixteenth-century chronicles in order to learn more about how and why the Incas had created the largest capital of guerrilla fighters the New World had ever known.

2 A FEW HUNDRED WELL-ARMED ENTREPRENEURS

“In the last ages of the world there shall come a time when the ocean sea will loosen its bonds and a great land will appear and a navigator like him that guided Jason will discover a new world, and then the isle of Thule will no longer be the final limit of the earth.”

**THE ROMAN PHILOSOPHER SENECA, WRITING IN *HESPERIDIUM* [SPAIN]
IN THE FIRST CENTURY A.D.**

ON APRIL 21, 1536, ON SATURDAY AT THE END OF EASTER week, few of the 196 Spaniards in the Inca capital of Cuzco realized that within the next few weeks they would either die or else would come so close to dying that every one of them would ask for absolution, the forgiveness of the sins, and would entrust their souls to their Maker. Just three years after Francisco Pizarro and his Spaniards had garroted the Inca emperor, Atahualpa (ah tah HUAL pa) and had seized a large portion of an empire 2,500 miles long and ten million strong, things were beginning to unravel for the Spanish conquistadors. For the last few years the Spaniards had consolidated their gains, installed a puppet Inca ruler, stolen the Incas' women, gained dominion over millions, and sent a massive amount of Inca gold and silver back to Spain. The original conquistadors were by now all incredibly wealthy men—the equivalent of multi-millionaires in our time—and those who had stayed on in Peru had already retired to fabulously large estates. The conquistadors were established seigneurial lords, the founders of family dynasties. Already they had shed their armor for fine linen clothes, rakish hats spiked with gaudy feathers, ostentatious jewelry, and sleek linen tights. In Spain and other European kingdoms, and on scattered islands and possessions throughout the Spanish Caribbean, the conquerors of Peru were already legendary figures: young and old alike dreamed of nothing more than walking in these same conquistadors' now finely appointed shoes.

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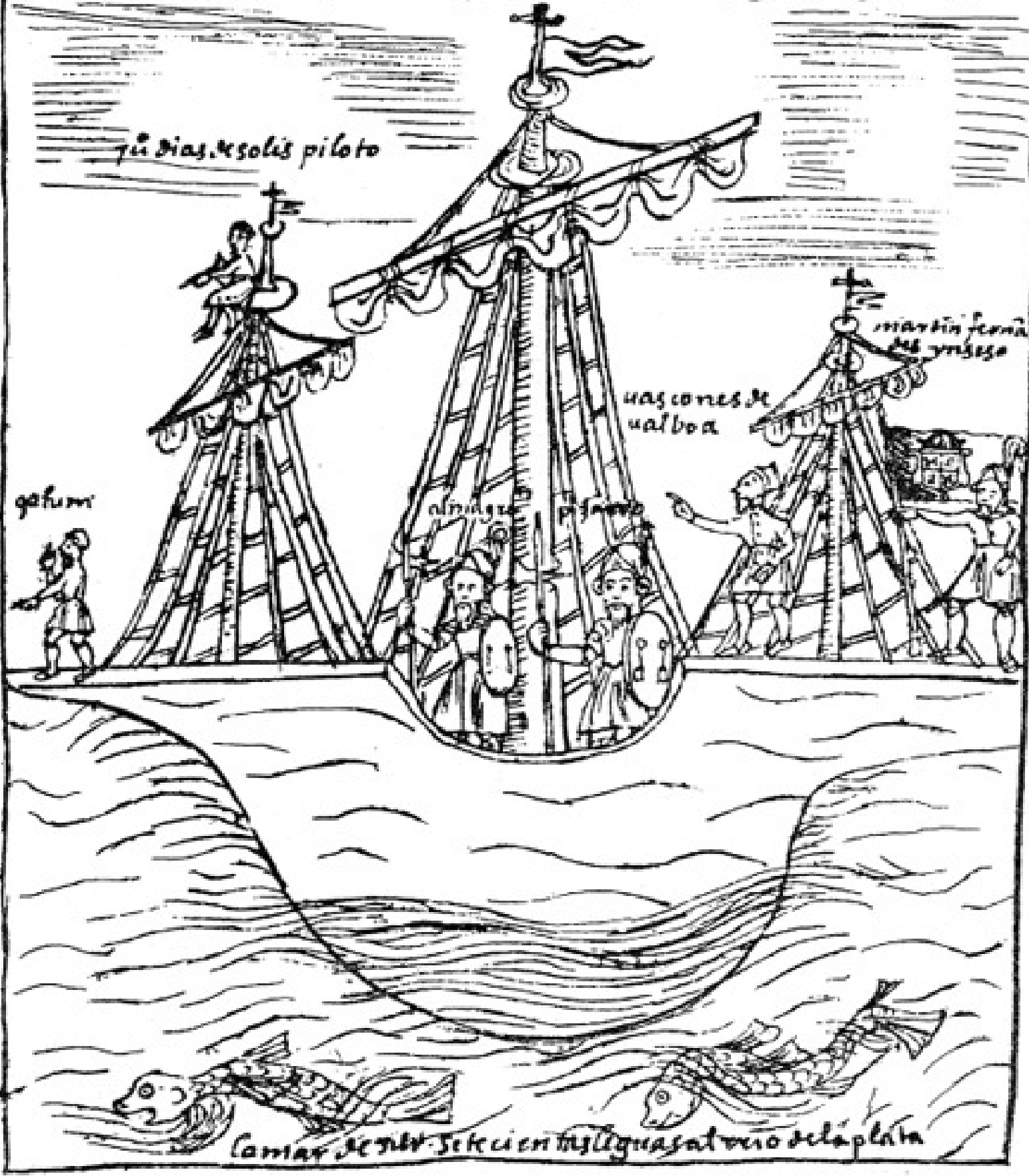
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