

Empires

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1. INTRODUCTION

As a beginning graduate student in anthropology in the late 1970s, I took my required core course in the archaeology of complex societies from one of the leading scholars in the discipline. The semester was spent developing data-rich theoretical models for the emergence of social inequality, ranked societies, and the origins and functioning of early states. Discussion of empires, the largest premodern states, filled less than an hour on the last day of the semester (admittedly with the acknowledgment that this was a topic worthy of further study). Similarly, in the last major assessment of the status of North American archaeology published on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Society for American Archaeology (Meltzer et al., 1986), the only article on complex societies addressed primary state emergence (Wright, 1986). Larger and later states were not considered. That this volume considers an article on the archaeology of empires a worthy contribution attests to some significant changes in disciplinary focus over the last 20 years.

To a considerable extent, current interests in empires and imperialism within anthropological archaeology are part of broader developments in both academic and public discourse. Certainly, imperialism and its aftermath have been major topics of study in political science, sociology, and sociocultural anthropology, as well as in contemporary global politics and international relations. The term “postcolonial” has become nearly as ubiquitous as “postmodern” in many domains of academic rhetoric; from a very different perspective, at least one Cold War scholar and military advisor, Edward Luttwak, has explored both the Roman Empire (1976) and the Soviet Union (1983) in similar terms.

Within anthropological archaeology, an increased emphasis on the study of empires also must be situated in broader disciplinary trends involving the (re)integration of archaeology (and anthropology more generally) with history (e.g., Kepecs and Kolb, 1997; Knapp, 1992). The accommodation of archaeology and history has been brought about by a number of factors, not the least being the impact of postprocessual critiques of the ahistoricism of some early processual archaeology (critiques that are themselves a product of broader intellectual trends in the social sciences and humanities). In addition, the last few decades also have witnessed increased interaction between anthropological archaeology and other historically oriented fields, such as classical studies and classical archaeology, art history, and areally based historical disciplines such as Egyptology, Sinology, and Assyriology. This crossing of traditional academic boundaries has contributed to a broader inclusion of

diverse geographic regions and polities into comparative research on early empires (see later and Table 13.1).

An additional factor in both the renewed interest in empires and imperialism and the rapprochement of archaeology and history lies in the increased acceptance and visibility within anthropological archaeology of traditionally defined North American historical archaeology, with its emphasis on Euroamerican imperialism in the Americas. This, in turn, has contributed to a questioning of the widespread intellectual distinctions between premodern, early modern, and modern historic and temporal boundaries (as, e.g., presented in Wallerstein, 1974) and has allowed scholars of empires to explore similarities and differences in imperial processes over the *longue durée*.

Both writing, in general, and the writing of histories, in particular, were features of virtually all Old World empires (exceptions include the various central Asian empires that are largely known to us through the lenses of Chinese sources), and the increased interest in the appropriate use of historical sources opens additional lines of evidence to archaeologists interested in these very large polities. The two most intensively studied indigenous New World empires—the Inka and Aztec—benefit from the availability of Spanish colonial sources (although like all sources of evidence about the past, these are not unproblematic). Challenges in addressing possible imperial states that lacked historic documents (e.g., Wari, Tiwanaku, Chimú, Zapotec, Teotihuacan) are considered below. The interplay of the written and material sources of information available for the study of most early empires is extraordinarily valuable. The texts allow insights into motivations, beliefs, and individual actors that are difficult to obtain from archaeological data alone; the archaeological evidence allows us to explore broad material consequences of empire and the lives of nonelites in ways that texts seldom afford.

Like other areas of archaeology, studies of early empires have drawn theoretical inspiration from the writings of a range of scholars outside our discipline, including historians, sociocultural anthropologists, philosophers, and sociologists. The writings of Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) and Michael Mann (1986) have been particularly influential among scholars of empires, and I return to their contributions below. Eric Wolf's book *Europe and the People Without History* (Wolf, 1982) also has been important in bringing to the forefront the roles of nonelites in complex societies, including but not limited to empires. Also influential have been the agency-centered or "practice theory" approaches of Anthony Giddens (1979) and Pierre Bourdieu (1977), which call for an examination of social actors and the intended and unintended consequences of action in the construction of human societies.

Wallerstein's (1974) writing on the rise and organization of the modern "world system" provided a valuable way to explore large-scale economic and political processes, within and beyond political boundaries. Although Wallerstein himself was concerned with the rise of capitalism in early modern Europe, elements of his approach were widely adopted by scholars working on precapitalist states and empires in Mesoamerica (e.g., Blanton and Feinman, 1984; Blanton et al., 1992; Smith, 2001) and the Near East (Edens, 1992; Ekholm and Friedman, 1979; see also Kardulias, 1999; Sanderson, 1995).

Michael Mann's influential book *The Sources of Social Power* (1986) argued that scholars of human societies should disassemble their subject to view societies as comprised of multiple overlapping networks of power rather than as unitary coherent phenomena. In particular, Mann focused on four sources of power—economic, military, political, and ideological, each of which is internally differentiated. This creates a much different

Table 13.1. Some Major Empires Studied by Archaeologists^a

Name	Dates	Modern Geographic Region (at Maximal Imperial Extent)	Capital City	Some Recent References
<i>New World Empires: South America</i>				
Wari	ca. A.D. 750–1000	Andes and coastal desert of Peru, Ayacucho Basin core area	Wari	Isbell and McEwan, 1991; Schreiber, 1992
Tiwanaku	300 B.C.–A.D. 1100	Bolivia (Lake Titicaca)	Tiwanaku	Kolata, 1993, 1996
Chimú	A.D. 900–1470	Peru (north coast)	Chan-Chan	Moseley and Cordy-Collins, 1990
Inka	ca. A.D. 1200/1300–1532	Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, parts of Columbia, Chile, Argentina	Cuzco	D’Altroy, 1992; LeVine, 1992; Murra, 1980
<i>New World Empires: Mesoamerica</i>				
Zapotec		Oaxaca	Monte Albán	Marcus and Flannery, 1996; Redmond, 1983
Aztec	A.D. 1428–1521	Highland Mexico	Tenochtitlán	Berdan et al., 1996; Hodge and Smith, 1994; Smith, 1996
<i>Old World Empires: Middle East/Anatolia, Europe</i>				
Akkadian	ca. 2350–2150 B.C.	Northern Mesopotamia, Mesopotamia	Agade (location unknown)	Liverani, 1993
Ur III	ca. 2100–2000 B.C.	Mesopotamia, southwestern Iran	Ur	Gibson and Biggs, 1987
Old Babylonian	ca. 1900–1600 B.C.	Mesopotamia, southwestern Iran	Babylon	Stone, 1997
Hittite	ca. 1460–1180 B.C.	Central Anatolia, Syria	Hattusa	Astour, 1989b; MacQueen, 1986
Egypt (New Kingdom)	ca. 1550–1070 B.C.	Egypt, Nubia, Levant	Memphis	Kemp, 1978; Morkot, 2001; Smith, 1995
Assyria	ca. 900–612 B.C. (Neoassyrian empire)	Mesopotamia, Syria, Anatolia, Levant, Egypt	Nineveh	Liverani, 1988; Postgate, 1992
Urartu	ca. 850–600 B.C.	Eastern Anatolia, Caucasusaq,	Tuspa (near modern Lake Van)	Zimansky, 1985, 1995
Achaemenid	ca. 550–330 B.C.	Iran, central Asia, Levant, Mesopotamia, northwestern India	Persepolis, Pasargadae	Kuhrt, 1995 ^b ; Petit, 1990 ^b
Alexandrian (Macedon)	350–325 B.C.	Greece, Egypt, Iran, Afghanistan, northern India	(Pella)	Trittle, 1997 ^b
Seleucid	ca. 310–95 B.C.	Tukey, Syria, Mesopotami, Armenia, Iran, Bactria–Sogdiana, Afghanistan	Sardis, Antioch, Seleucia–Tigris, Susa, Ecbatana	Sherwin-White and Kuhrt, 1993 ^b

Continued

Table 13.1. *Continued*

Name	Dates	Modern Geographic Region (at Maximal Imperial Extent)	Capital City	Some Recent References
Parthian	ca. 250 B.C.–A.D. 230	Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaidzhan, Turkmenistan, Afganistan, Pakistan, Ssyria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel	Dara, Nisa/Mithradatkirt Seleucia-Tigris, Assur, and others	Wenke, 1987; Yarshater, 1983 ^b
Rome	ca. 200 B.C.–A.D. 400 (principate 27 B.C.–A.D. 235)	Mediterranean, Europe, North Africa	Rome	Alcock, 1993; Barker and Lloyd, 1991; Greene, 1986
Sasanian	ca. A.D. 224–630	Iran, Bactria, Afghanistan	Nasibin, al-Haditha, al-Anbar, al-Hira, Kaskar, and others	Morony, 1982 ^b ; Yarshater, 1983, ^b
Byzantine	ca. A.D. 330–1453	Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Bulgaria, Balkans, Italy, North Africa	Constantinople (Istanbul)	Foss, 1990, 1996; Kazhdan and Epstein, 1985 ^b
Ottoman	A.D. 1543–1917	Anatolia, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Hungary, Albania	Constantinople (Istanbul)	Kafadar, 1995 ^b
Merovingian	A.D. 450–750	France, Germany	Rehims, Metz	Geary, 1988 ^b ; Halsall, 1995
Carolingian	A.D. 750–	France, Italy, northern Europe	None	McKitterick, 1994 ^b ; Moreland, 2000
<i>Old World Empires: South Asia</i>				
Mauryan	ca. 322–187 B.C.	India, Paksitan, Afghanistan (core area Ganges Basin)	Patilaputra	Thapar, 1997 ^b
Satavahana	ca. 100 B.C.–A.D. 200	Peninsular India	Paithan	Margabandhu, 1985; Ray, 1986
Vijayanagara	ca. 1350–1700 A.D.	Southern India	Vijayanagara	Morrison, 1995; Sinopoli and Morrison, 1995; Stein, 1989 ^b
Mughal	ca. 1526–1720	Indian subcontinent	Delhi, Agra, Fatepuhri Sikri	Asher, 1992; Richards, 1993 ^b
<i>Old World Empires: East and Central Asia</i>				
Hsiung-nu	209 B.C.–A.D. 155	Eurasian steppes (Mongolia, Manchuria, Turkestan, North China)	None	Barfield, 1989 ^b
Mongol (Yuan dynasty)	A.D. 1206–1368	Eurasian steppes, China	Karakorum, Beijing	Barfield, 1989 ^b
China	221 B.C.–A.D. 1912	China	Beijing	Waldron, 1990; Yates, 2001 ^b

^aNot all scholars agree on the appropriateness of classifying some of these societies as empires, nor on their precise chronology. I include here cases where there is at least some archaeological literature concerning imperialism.

^bPrimarily historical rather than archaeological.

understanding of states than earlier approaches that focused on a single dimension of hierarchy or centralization. Given the diversity, complexity, and lack of coherence that characterized many historic empires (see later), it is not surprising that Mann's framework has had considerable appeal to archaeologists (for explicit applications, see, e.g., D'Altroy, 1992; Sinopoli and Morrison, 1995).

Although broad theoretical and disciplinary developments have played important roles in recent studies of empire, it is equally important to acknowledge that research has benefited greatly from the cumulative growth of knowledge in archaeology. Given the geographic scale and organizational variability that characterized most early empires, the integration of data from large numbers of sites and broad areas is essential to assessing imperial organization and imperial histories. Although theoretical perspectives and ways of approaching the archaeological record change fairly rapidly, it is nonetheless the case that over the past century scholars from different backgrounds and perspectives have contributed to the accumulation of information valuable to researchers interested in big-picture questions in many areas of the world. Recent publications on the Mesoamerican Aztec empire (e.g., Berdan et al., 1996; Hodge and Smith, 1994) are impressive examples of the importance and effectiveness of collaborative discussions among diverse scholars with different background and approaches.

A large number of historic and prehistoric empires have been the focus of recent anthropological research, particularly since the mid-1980s (see Table 13.1). Nonetheless within Americanist archaeology, three geographic regions have been in the forefront of scholarship on empires until quite recently. These are the various early empires of the Middle East (e.g., Akkadian, Assyrian), where the world's first imperial state emerged in the mid-third millennium B.C., Mesoamerica (particularly the Aztec empire), and Andean South America (particularly the Inka empire, also Wari, Tiwanaku, Chimú). The prominence of these three regions in anthropological archaeology may seem peculiar to the non-professional, especially given the prominence of Rome in our vocabulary of empire and in popular understandings of imperialism. However, the historic academic barriers discussed in the preceding—between classics and Americanist anthropological archaeology and between prehistorians and those who work with texts—have limited dialogue between scholars of different academic traditions until quite recently (see Alcock et al., 2001).

As discussed previously, conventional academic barriers are increasingly dissolving, and in this chapter I draw on recent research from a wide range of historical empires. I explore a number of recent trends and current theoretical issues in the study of early empires, drawing on research from both the New and Old World. I do not, however, attempt to present a comprehensive review of the copious literature on the study of empire (see Alcock et al., 2001; D'Altroy, 1992; Sinopoli, 1994a) and instead limit my focus to current research perspectives and questions that I find especially cogent. My approach is explicitly comparative, and I suggest that even in the case of these data-rich and highly variable archaeological and historic contexts, scholarship on empires benefits greatly from comparative understandings of processes and structures. Such comparisons make possible the contextualization of the historic particularities of particular cases and permit us to explore empire as a kind of sociopolitical formation and the process of imperialism, at higher levels of abstraction.

I begin with a brief discussion of definitions and general characteristics of imperial states. Although empires are often viewed in popular thought as powerful and highly centralized states that penetrated deeply into the lives of subject populations, I emphasize instead their relative fragility and the high diversity, regional autonomy, and relative lack

of centralization that characterized many early empires. In large part, the diversity, and fragility, of empires is a consequence of their geographic and cultural scale, and resultant logistical and communicative challenges. In the following section, I address these issues of scale. I approach this topic from three perspectives: the spatial and cultural scale of empires; the temporal scales of imperial formation, consolidation, and collapse; and scales of interaction within empires and between empires and neighboring polities. In each case, I emphasize the challenges of scale to archaeological analysis and interpretation. Next, I turn to the human constituents of empires, imperial elites, and the diverse subjects of empire. I consider how different categories of people are affected by their participation in empires and the kinds of archaeological and historical sources available to study them.

Although empires are often formed relatively rapidly as a result of military conquest, the transformation of conquest states into more durable political structures is a far longer and more complex process. In a subsequent section, I turn to a discussion of imperial consolidation and administration. I look at various factors that contribute to binding empires together, including administration and record-keeping practices, religion, and ideologies. I consider the creation of imperial identities, including the constructions of shared histories, and how knowledge of the past is used to understand and alter the present. I also consider factors that tear empires apart, particularly various kinds of resistance to imperial incorporation.

Many of the issues discussed throughout the chapter entail the study of both archaeological and written sources. In the final section, I turn specifically to archaeological evidence and the challenges posed in the study of empire through archaeology. This issue is of particular relevance to those empires for which we lack historical sources, but the material consequences of empire and their consequences for archaeological methods and interpretations are critical to the study of all empires. I conclude with a brief review of current understandings and future directions.

2. DEFINITIONS

The definition of an empire is, in many senses, relatively unproblematic (see D'Altroy, 1992; Doyle, 1986; Sinopoli, 1994a). Empires are large states with heterogeneous ethnic and cultural composition. They are formed through conquest or coercion, including both the application and/or the threat of force, through which powerful states incorporate less powerful polities and regions (Figure 13.1). A primary goal and/or consequence of imperial incorporation is the extraction of wealth, in the form of subsistence and other resources (including human labor). Additional goals may include the establishment of military security and the effecting of cultural transformations, such as religious conversion (e.g., in various Islamic empires and sixteenth century European expansion to the New World).

As large states, empires share many of the problems and characteristics of other states. However, imperial states typically differ from smaller states in both physical scale and in their heterogeneity and, consequently, in the costs of and ability to exercise authority over the territories they claim to rule. According to Barfield (2001:29), empires are "organized both to administer and exploit diversity." This is often accomplished through relatively fragmented systems of control as compared to those found in more centralized territorial states. In most (all?) early empires, much decision-making power and political authority remained vested in regional rulers and local administrative systems (whether preexisting



Figure 13.1. New Kingdom Egyptian Ruler Seti I (in chariot) in battle against the Hittites; Temple of Amun, Karnak. (Photograph by Janet Richards)

elites or newly installed ones). Thus a comparatively small group of ruling elites and administrators, based at imperial centers, interacted with and were dependent upon widely dispersed local elites and/or semiautonomous officials who were responsible for day-to-day decision making and control in incorporated territories. The participation of these local authorities was based on a combination of economic, social, and ideological rewards and the threat of negative consequences for failure to cooperate.

Both the tolerance (or even enforcement, see Wachtel, 1982, on the Inka) of diversity and the limitations of imperial control may, in many contexts, contribute to relatively high degrees of continuity in areas incorporated within empires—in social structures, beliefs systems, and, to variable extents, in economic practices. Exceptions to this are expected, for example, in areas of high resistance or potential threat to imperial incorporation, or in areas that lacked a developed infrastructure prior to incorporation.

Although the direct impact of empire is often likely to be limited to particular domains of interest to the state (and these domains are expected to vary among cases and between regions), the indirect impact may be far more wide ranging—affecting cultural identity, belief systems, social relationships, demography, economy, and many other cultural domains. Thus we may find archaeological evidence for change after the arrival of empire, but it is often difficult to parse out its precise cause, whether the result of direct imperial practices and decisions or a consequence of more wide-ranging cultural transformations. The latter may result from two-way interactions between imperial and regional traditions (see Woolf, 1997, and later), as well as broader cultural processes that transcend political boundaries (see Sinopoli, 2001).

In consequence, although changes in social and material life are expected to result

from imperial incorporation, the extent of such changes and of their archaeologically detectable manifestations are likely to vary widely. Some areas of an empire may undergo dramatic transformations as a result of imperial incorporation—in population distributions, economic practices, belief systems, architecture, and material culture. Others may experience far less dramatic change, with little material impact. Archaeological research in the latter may yield little evidence of the nature or even the existence of their relationships or position within the larger polity to which they belonged (Smith, 2001; Smith and Berdan, 1992), or of causal factors for the changes that are evident. The identification of empire can thus become a particular challenge in the case of nonliterate states where we do not have written evidence for conquest or of the political relationships between imperial rulers and members of incorporated polities.

Given the limits of imperial authority in many realms, it is valuable to explore how and what rulers of particular empires seek to attain control over, for example, the military, agricultural or craft production, communication infrastructures, coinage and revenue collection, or ideological structures (see Mann, 1986; Sinopoli and Morrison, 1995) and the coercive and noncoercive mechanisms used to incorporate diverse imperial subjects into a single polity. As discussed later, such explorations must also have a temporal dimension, as imperial practices at the initial period of conquest and incorporation are expected to be quite different than mechanisms and relationships of rule decades or centuries later.

The definition of empire given in the preceding is a political one. It requires that the components of an empire be integrated into some kind of hierarchical organizational framework (albeit often a weak one) in which political authority is focused on a center or a core group of elites that can seek, directly or indirectly, to enforce decisions over and extract resources from the territories and peoples over which they claim sovereignty. I therefore do not include Algaze's example of the Uruk "informal empire" (1993:115; or other kinds of "civilizational" or "world systems") under this rubric. Nor do I consider expansionist religions such as Islam in this chapter (that is, whereas there were many Islamic empires, the spread of Islam as a religion was a much more complex process than the expansion of a single conquest state or imperial polity).

This definition of empire also implies a geographic dimension; imperial centers ruled imperial territories, typically organized into provinces or districts. However, it is important to note that these territories could be, and often were, discontinuous and that autonomous regions and communities often survived within imperial borders. Similarly, nomadic groups or other "unincorporated communities" (e.g., merchants, religious mendicants, pastoralists, itinerant artisans) may have moved through and between an empire's territories without being regularly subject to its political authority. The kinds of territorial arrangements that existed in early empires thus varied widely. Examples include empires without fixed capitals, such as the Carolingians of Europe, whose rulers moved from palace to palace (Moreland, 2001; Moreland and van de Noort, 1992) or the early central Asian nomadic empires, such as the Hsiung-nu, whose leaders dominated central Asia and, at times, China from the backs of horses (Barfield, 1989, 2001). Early European expansion into the Americas created empires in which small cores of comparatively low populations ruled vast subject territories from which they were separated by enormous physical distances and even greater cultural ones, whereas maritime empires such as the Portuguese "Estada da India" (Subrahmanyam, 1993) were characterized by a network of seaports, with no claims to inland territories. Simple concentric core-periphery models are not sufficient to account for the complex geography of most empires.

It is relatively easy to agree on a broad definition of empire; defining precisely how large or how heterogeneous a polity must be to be classed as an empire is less straightforward and must be historically contextualized. Similarly, the nature and effectiveness of political and economic hierarchies may vary considerably between empires and within a single imperial state. It is perhaps not surprising that in many areas of the world scholars have engaged in extensive debates about whether or not particular polities should or should not be classified as empires. In many cases, rather than an internal analysis of textual or archaeological evidence of political organization, conquest, or relationships of subjugation and sovereignty, such debates have entailed holding a particular case up to the light of an external exemplar perceived as particularly effective or paradigmatic (often the Romans of the first two centuries A.D.) and then assessing whether the polity under consideration ranks as comparable. For example, Indian historian Romila Thapar (1987) observed that the Vijayanagara state of southern India was not an empire because it lacked the effective and integrated administrative hierarchy attributed to an earlier South Asian empire—the Mauryans of the Ganges Basin (themselves not unproblematic attributions). Nonetheless, despite the lack of a pervasive centralized administrative hierarchy, the rulers of Vijayanagara conquered vast culturally diverse territories whose indigenous rulers swore fealty to the imperial court, instituted various forms of direct and indirect political control over these territories and collected revenues from them, and endured for more than 200 years (Karashima, 1992; Sinopoli and Morrison, 1995; Stein, 1989).

I do not wish to deny the importance of having criteria to enable the classification of particular cases, since this is an essential first step of research. However, I do think that it has been the case that these arguments have sometimes derived from a failure to acknowledge the inherent organizational variability (and ineffectiveness) of many early empires, substituting instead a formal definition based on a model of an ideal, highly centralized, highly effective imperial state of a kind that was, in fact, quite rare historically. In any case, rather than focus on classificatory exercises, it is for me far more interesting to tolerate some fuzziness at the extremes of our definition and to focus instead on exploring the variability within and between empires, over both time and space.

3. PROBLEMS OF SCALE

Questions of scale are a concern of all archaeologists. How big should our survey regions, excavations units, or artifact samples be to answer the kinds of questions we are interested in asking? What are the appropriate temporal and geopolitical scales at which to examine the relevant cultural/ political/ economic/ ideological/ historic/ ecological phenomena that we seek to explore? In the study of empires, scales of research and interpretation easily become daunting, both in the physical space many empires encompassed and in the sheer quantity and diversity of relevant data. Several issues of scale are pertinent to this discussion. These include the physical scale of our archaeological research focus and the temporal scales of our chronologies, which are often much grosser than the pace of political transformations. In addition, we also must consider the cultural scales of the phenomena we seek to explore, whether local responses to empire or empirewide phenomena, potentially involving both internal and external processes and relations.

3.1. Spatial Scales

The large territorial extent of many empires has an impact on our ability to study them. Geographically, we may distinguish imperial centers or cores (often a capital and its surrounding territories) from diversely organized provincial or incorporated regions. Such core areas may be the ancestral homeland of the imperial dynasty or the locale from which a ruling dynasty or ethnic group began its outward expansion. Although both the Aztecs and Romans, for example, had origin stories that placed them as foreigners in the cities from which they began their outward expansion (Tenochtitlán and Rome, respectively; as also did the Inka [Bauer, 1996] and Ottomans [Kafadar, 1995]), those capital cities became key symbols and embodiments of empire. Although it is essential to distinguish imperial cores from provincial regions, it also is important to acknowledge that the boundaries and definitions of such areas may shift over time, as capitals or *de facto* centers of power change, or as previously peripheral regions become more closely bound to, and part of, the imperial center.

As noted earlier, imperial territories are often discontinuous. Incorporated provinces and unincorporated zones and communities are seldom neatly organized in space and are often best conceived as a complex and shifting mosaic of discontinuous and variously organized territories, each with different histories, resources, cultural traditions, and populations. The study of only one region of an empire is thus likely to give only a very partial view of the broader polity of which it was a part.

This is not to imply, however, that we cannot learn a great deal from tightly focused and localized research and questions. Quite the contrary. To understand the impact of empire on the daily lives of imperial subjects in particular places and sociopolitical contexts, it is essential to undertake fine-scaled research focused on large and small settlements and other site types, and the diverse households and locales that comprise them. For example, excavations and artifact analyses in household contexts (as well as textual studies, e.g., of tribute lists, wills, or other documents that record household resources) can allow explorations of the impact of empire on these basic core social units (e.g., Evans, 1993; Otis Charlton et al., 1993), as well as on labor organization (e.g., Costin et al., 1989; Hastorf, 1990), access to resources and property (e.g., Costin, 1998; Hudson, 1998), and gender relationships (e.g., Brumfiel, 1991, 1996), among other questions. Beyond the household, analysis also can focus on intra- and intercommunity-level variability within and among imperial territories or provinces. The comparison of such evidence from multiple areas of an empire can allow us to consider the extent to which the impact of empire on households, communities, and local economies was uniform across diverse regions or whether imperial hegemony differentially affected imperial subjects and imperial territories, and how this changed over time.

3.2. Time and Process

Like all social formations, imperial states are not static entities. Many were short lived and were, for various reasons, unable to transform military victories into effective long-term systems of rule and integration. For example, the Timurid empire of central Asia (A.D. 1370–1405) began to disintegrate immediately after the death of its first ruler and founder, Timur, or Tamerlane (Manz, 1989). Some empires, such as the Chimú and the Inka and Aztec empires, were conquered by other empires (the Inka and Spanish, respec-

tively). Others, such as the Byzantine, Chinese, and Ottoman empires, were able to weather dynastic transitions and political turmoil at their centers and warfare beyond and endure for many centuries. It is therefore useful to distinguish the processes, events, and causes of imperial formation from those of imperial consolidation.

The initial emergence of an empire and the establishment of key imperial territories are often extraordinarily rapid processes, although territory acquisition and loss through warfare and attrition may continue throughout the polity's duration, creating a dynamic situation of shifting borders and areas of control. The rapidity of imperial creation is typically far greater than can be identified with archaeological data, where our chronological phases are often in decades or centuries (although this is less of a problem where we have inscribed coins or other kinds of high-resolution datable materials).

In cases where dramatic destruction of conquered areas occurred, such as the Inka conquest of the Cañari and Caranqui (Patterson, 1991) or the Roman destruction of Corinth (Alcock, 1993), we may be able to document the “instant” of conquest. More often, however, incorporated areas are not destroyed, and dramatic changes in material culture, architecture, and economy may lag considerably behind the initial moments of imperial incorporation. Conversely, such changes may precede political incorporation, for example, the adoption of Roman goods in Gaul decades before imperial conquest (Woolf, 1997).

Imperial consolidation involves the transformation of conquest or incorporation into effective systems of rule. This may involve changes in political, economic, and/or ideological relationships and in the physical landscapes of incorporated regions. Such physical transformations can include the construction of provincial capitals, roads, storehouses, and forts and bastions (Figure 13.2), or demographic shifts, including the depopulation of rural areas or enforced relocation of communities or settlements. The timing, intensity, and na-



Figure 13.2. Aqueduct at the south Indian imperial capital of Vijayanagara. (Photograph by the Vijayanagara Metropolitan Survey Project)

ture of such transformations are likely associated with preexisting conditions in imperial territories and with political, military, and economic conditions in imperial cores.

The acknowledgment of temporal change and process in imperial structures and relationships is extremely important. Empires are not created out of whole cloth, but change throughout their histories in structure, organization, composition, and cultural content. An understanding of any empire thus requires an understanding of its historical trajectory and the nature of and reasons underlying changes in its structure and content. We must be wary of fixing our discussions of any empire at a specific point in time and taking that understanding as representative of the polity throughout its history. Also important is the recognition of the often-contingent nature of imperial formation, consolidation, and collapse. That is, although in hindsight we may be able to detect grand patterns and strategies in imperial expansion and consolidation, I suspect that in many cases imperial actions and decisions were reactionist, as rulers responded to conditions beyond their control (e.g., external threats, internal uprisings). In such contexts, strategies for imperial formation and consolidation may well have been ad hoc responses to particular conditions in incorporated territories. Writing of the European Carolingians, Janet Nelson noted “[e]ach royal regime lurched from one challenge to another, improvising responses to a series of crises” (1996:xvii); this was also characteristic of the Vijayanagara empire of southern India, with which I am most familiar, and, I suspect, of many others.

The extent to which more coherent strategies are developed within particular empires may relate to (1) a polity’s duration (and vice versa), (2) whether or not stable infrastructures are created (including administrative structures, military structures, transport networks), and (3) whether unifying ideological or belief systems are successfully fostered. How and how effectively various empires are able to transform conquests into more stable political structures is a valuable dimension of comparison through which we can explore general processes in imperial consolidation and variability among historical cases.

As noted previously, imperial states have varied widely in duration, from a few decades (e.g., the Qin empire of China) to many centuries. Causes and rates of imperial collapse and political and cultural responses to collapse are similarly diverse (Liverani, 2001; Yoffee and Cowgill, 1988). Like other states, empires can undergo dramatic and often violent transitions in leadership while their political structure remains essentially intact. It is thus important to distinguish the end of a dynasty or transitions in leadership from the collapse or transformation of an imperial system.

Time is, of course, a cultural construct as well as an empirical reality. Cultural knowledge of time can involve the rewriting and expansion or contraction of imperial history (see below). And some empires linger on in historical memories long after their disappearance in fact. In Mesopotamia, for example, stories of the decline of earlier empires and the impermanence of dynasties served as warning and portent for later ones (Liverani, 2001). I consider knowledge transmission and historical memory and forgetting in more detail in the following sections.

3.3. Scales of Interaction

Even a single empire seems a more-than-large-enough research focus for most of us. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that many early empires emerged and existed in a world of competing imperial states, and all had interactions with peoples, territories, and polities beyond their borders. These neighboring polities may have been alternately

perceived of as templates or peers among whom the known world was divided (e.g., the Vijayanagara, Bahmani, and Orissan empires of sixteenth century South India; Wagoner, 1996), as threats or desired potential conquests (e.g., the Inka and the Chimú; see Moseley and Cordy-Collins, 1990), as uninteresting or irrelevant (e.g., hunter-gatherer communities in resource-poor zones), or as uneasy allies that could not be conquered so must therefore be tolerated (e.g., the Romans and Parthians, the Seleucids and Mauryans; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt, 1993:12–13). In many cases, relationships between interacting empires involved a combination of conflict, diplomacy, and alliances (including marital alliances), and such interactions often took place in the context of a great deal of mutual knowledge and historical connections. In rare instances, such as in the context of European expansion into the Americas and the consequent encounters between the Spanish empire and the Aztec and Inka empires, prior knowledge of the other was nonexistent, creating a very different stage for imperial contacts and relationships. In the various forms they can take, the responses of an empire to external polities may come to play important roles in internal developments and must be taken into account in considering imperial practices and trajectories.

4. RULERS AND SUBJECTS

Thus far throughout this chapter I have been writing of empires as coherent entities—“the empire responds,” “the empire expands,” “the empire consolidates.” This is, of course, a gross and potentially dangerous oversimplification. Like all polities, empires are comprised of manifold individuals and social groups, each with unique motivations and scope for social action. Both the contexts of their formation and the tolerance for diversity that defines empires imply that within imperial polities relationships among constituent groups may be particularly contentious. Imperial subjects often speak diverse languages, worship different gods, and inhabit diverse physical and social environments. Further, it is reasonable to assume that many incorporated peoples and polities were not voluntary participants in the polity that claimed to rule them and did not fully share interests with their rulers.

The citizens and subjects of empire include the imperial and regional elites who comprise a relatively small percentage of the total population of any empire and the more numerous and varied nonelite subject populations. Many studies of imperialism have focused on the actions and motivations of imperial rulers and elites at the imperial core. Given the nature of the sources and disciplinary biases, this has particularly been true of the more text-based and traditionally humanistic approaches to the topic. Such a focus on elites and their monuments is, of course, essential to understanding the operation of empires, which were in large part the creation of elite decision making and actions. However, the study of the interplay between imperial elites and the various subjects of empires—both local elites and nonelites—is equally essential.

4.1. Imperial Elites

Among the central elite participants in empires are the members of ruling dynasties and others of the imperial court. These groups are typically situated at imperial centers (or inversely, their location *becomes* by definition the imperial center) and are often riven by internal factions and competition (see, e.g., van Zantwijk, 1994, on the Aztec). Succession

struggles are endemic among the core elite of many (all?) empires and are often most effectively documented through textual evidence and iconographic sources (see later). Conflicts at the imperial center have important impacts on political effectiveness and imperial decision making with repercussions well beyond the core. Thus in many documented cases, periods of weakness at the imperial core are responded to by resistance and uprisings in incorporated areas and/or invasion by external enemies. Such combined circumstances likely contributed to the collapse of the south Indian Vijayanagara empire (Stein, 1989) and no doubt to many other examples of dynastic or imperial collapse.

Where we have written sources, we tend to know a great deal about individual elites at imperial centers, particularly the emperors themselves. Admittedly, such works as royal biographies or heroic sagas of a king's exploits and accomplishments are propagandistic. Nonetheless, careful reading informs both historical events and cultural values. Other "non-material" means (although texts, however they are recorded, have, of course, an essential materiality) of disseminating information about rulers include music, theater, and oral transmission of heroic and satirical poetry and stories. Court musicians, bards, or poets were often key members of the imperial court (and much rewarded; see Sinopoli, 1998). Although access to the works of various court artists may have been most often limited to the court or an elite audience, in some cases these texts may have been more widely transmitted in written or oral forms. Imperial subjects who might never see their rulers in the flesh may still have learned much about them through textual and iconographic sources (Figure 13.3), although they need not have interpreted those materials in the way their producers or the emperor intended.

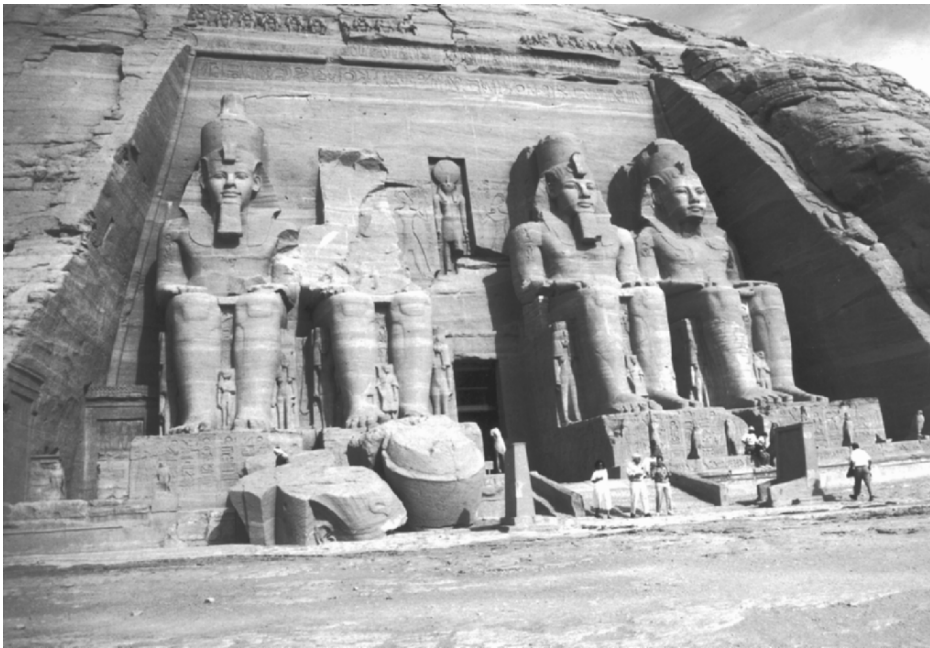


Figure 13.3. Monumental royal images, Temple of Ramses II, Abu Simbel; this outward facing temple in Nubia is a powerful proclamation of Egyptian imperial authority. A lengthy inscription at the temple recounts the military exploits of Ramses II. (Photograph by Thelma Thomas)



Figure 13.4. Royal residential area at the Mughal imperial capital in Agra (note another imperial monument, the Taj Mahal, in background). (Photograph by Kathleen D. Morrison)

Beyond the written word or musical composition, the physical representation and indeed the person of the emperor (and even their dreams, see Dutton, 1994; Kafadar, 1995:8, 132–133) often assume key roles in political ideologies. Like the imperial capital, the emperor may both embody and represent the empire. Thus in many Old World empires, the economic surety of the state was made manifest through currency bearing royal portraits (and subsequent kings might deface the currency of their “illegitimate” predecessors; Sinopoli, 2001). Among the Inka, the mummified bodies of the emperors were a focus of worship (Zuidema, 1990). In other cases (although certainly not all), royal tombs or portraiture may have had a similar impact, as we see, for example, in the many sculptures of Roman emperors that were displayed throughout the empire, often depicting the emperor clad in the traditional dress of the local region (Price, 1984; Zanker, 1988).

The category of imperial elites includes more than the emperor and members of the ruling family; it also includes retainers associated with the imperial court (such as the court bards described earlier), imperial administrators within the capital and at provincial centers, leaders of the military, and sometimes religious leaders. In some cases, such as Han China (Hsu, 1988), administrators may have been organized into effective semiautonomous bureaucracies; in others, such as Mughal India, Weber’s model of a patrimonial household centered around and dependent on the ruler may be more appropriate (Figure 13.4; Blake, 1990, 1997).

Military leaders may pose a particularly problematic category of imperial elites (from the perspective of the emperor). As leaders of large bodies of armed troops often dispatched to distant territories beyond the range of rapid communications with the court, such individuals typically had considerable autonomy. They had both resources and oppor-

tunities to wield considerable power on their own behalves and to generate loyalties among their followers that could challenge those bestowed on distant rulers. It was not uncommon that emperors themselves were leaders of the military troops and accompanied them on campaigns. In some empires, this was particularly the case in the early years of rule; for example, Aztec and Egyptian rulers were expected to prove themselves as warriors in the beginning of their reigns. In other empires, the role of king as warrior persisted throughout an emperor's reign, for example, among the Mughals, whose kings often spent much of their reigns on the move with their forces (Sinopoli, 1994b).

Although granting military leadership to close relatives was a strategy used by many imperial rulers to minimize the probability of rebellion, this also was not without risk, given conflicts endemic within ruling families. Imperial courts could woo the loyalties of military leaders and troops through the granting of substantial economic (i.e., land and booty) and social rewards to successful warriors. Even so, such individuals were often threats to the security of individual rulers and ruling families, especially in times of weakness at the center.

4.2. Regional Elites

Moving beyond the imperial center, regional elites may become incorporated into or may be created by expanding empires. Given the scale of empires and the ultimate limits of coercion, the collaboration and participation of subject elites in imperial administration at the regional level is essential to an empire's survival. These elite may include preexisting local rulers or ruling families, who in exchange for their cooperation maintain rights to some degree of local autonomy and receive economic, social, and ideological benefits. Material benefits may include the ability to collect taxes or other revenues in excess of what is passed on to the imperial center, the ability to maintain their own military forces, or to mint coinage and engage in long-distance trade. Elite collaboration also may be encouraged through intermarriage with the imperial family and by fostering the children of regional elites in imperial courts. The latter has, of course, a not so implicit coercive dimension, as such children also are hostages. Among the Inka, male offspring of regional elites (particularly the eldest son) were required to be fostered in the Inka court (Rowe, 1980). In a rather different strategy, elite women were brought to Cuzco to serve as *aqlla*, or "chosen women." These women were brought to state installations where they wove cloth and brewed beer until they were bestowed by the emperor as wives of loyal retainers or as sacrifices to the gods (Silverblatt, 1988:93–94). The *aqlla* were thus removed from their kin groups in ways that honored and acknowledged those groups while highlighting their subjugation.

The creation of new elites may occur in various contexts. In incorporated areas that lack a developed infrastructure, imperial decision makers may seek to create one by appointing officials from local populations or by settling soldiers or colonists and appointing nonlocal individuals to positions of authority. On the other hand, in contexts with well-developed infrastructures and centralized political systems, imperial rulers may seek to undercut leaders who could potentially threaten their sovereignty. This may involve forced deportation or violent annihilation, followed by the deputation of new administrators whose loyalty to the state is more secure.

In considering the role and status of regional elites in imperial systems, it is important to remember that, like political relationships at imperial centers, those in subject regions may also be fraught with internal conflicts and contradictions (Brumfiel and Fox, 1994;

Ortner, 1995; Silverblatt, 1988). Local rulers may face resistance from various communities within their own polities that predate and may endure throughout periods of imperial hegemony. For such communities, the arrival of imperial powers may provide opportunities for internal factions to transform the nature of their local political relationships (see Hicks, 1994a, on the importance of this process to Aztec imperial expansion). Such groups may ally with imperial forces to undermine local political systems and may, in return, be awarded positions of authority in the imperial system. The internal politics of a region can thus have an important role in how individuals and communities react to an incoming imperial power. For example, the Cañari, unwilling subjects of the Inka, allied with the invading Spanish troops against Cuzco (D'Altroy, 1992), as did the Tlaxcalans against the Aztec (Deeds, 1998:28), using an unknown imperial power to resist a more immediate imperial enemy.

Across empires, the kinds of relationships established between regional and imperial elites may range from those structured at the individual level to more formalized empirewide structured relations of obligation and hierarchy. For example, as discussed later, in the Vijayanagara empire tax obligations and other relations were negotiated between individual local rulers and communities and the imperial center; universal policies did not exist. In contrast, the Inka decimal administration for assessing labor obligations to the state was applied (more or less) uniformly over the empire (Julien, 1988).

The relationships between imperial centers and regional elites can have an important effect on whether regional elites could define themselves or act corporately. For example, Kafadar has observed that Ottoman regional policy resulted in

... the creation of multiple layers of winners and losers among the elites. Within each group of provincial officials, the state managed to divide in such a way as to set landholder against landholder, governor against governor, and governor-general against governor general. In the general atmosphere of competition, elites were unable to organize concerted action against the state. (Kadafar, 1995:56)

Although Kafadar acknowledges that this may not have been a result of conscious or deliberate policy at the center, the consequences certainly benefited imperial stability.

4.3. Nonelites

If local elites are diverse, the nonelites who constitute the majority of the population of any empire are even more so. Their relationships with and responses to local and imperial political authorities, and their experiences of empire necessarily vary widely over time, space, and among individuals and various kinds of social groups. For some, empires provided possibilities for social and economic enhancement through military service or through other forms of valued labor (e.g., production of valued craft or other resources). For others, the coming of empire meant death, enslavement, loss of property, or forced resettlement.

Demands may be imposed on nonelite imperial subject populations in various ways and by various parties (e.g., imperial elites, regional elites, communities, and kin groups). Included are demands for labor service and demands for goods—agricultural and other products, or currency. Obligatory labor—through conscription into military service, labor on state agricultural estates, or other state enterprises (e.g., craft workshops or construction projects)—impacts how individuals, households, and communities can structure time

and organize necessary maintenance tasks and social obligations. Demands for tribute goods also might restructure domestic and regional economies and the organization of labor in fundamental ways. For example, Aztec demands for tribute cloth, produced by women, appear to have affected the scheduling and nature of household activities such as food preparation and agricultural production (Brumfiel, 1991). Aztec tribute cloth also was acquired at regional markets, and increased demands for cloth could have far-reaching implications for household, local, and regional economies (Hicks, 1994b).

The kinds of changes that occur as a result of tribute or other imperial demands are complex and likely to vary over time and space. Continuing with the Aztec example, Brumfiel (1991) has argued that at Xico (Valley of Mexico) the demands for tribute cloth were met through more intensive participation in the market through production of agricultural surpluses rather than through increased cloth production. In fact, somewhat counterintuitively, cloth production appears to have declined dramatically in this particular region following imperial incorporation.

Increased market participation also is evident over the course of the fourteenth through seventeenth century A.D. south Indian Vijayanagara empire. Here we see a transition from an economy based largely on payment in kind to one based on both goods and coinage. Demands for tax and tribute in currency pulled even peasants and small-scale producers into at least a partly monetized economy and system of market exchanges (see Stein, 1989:41–42). Such changes likely affected both economic relations and social interactions in significant ways.

As noted previously, the impact of empire on subject populations is highly variable over place, time, and among social groups or categories. Among these categories is gender. Women and men may be affected by empire in radically different ways. Nash (1978) has noted that among the Aztec military service provided males access to a route to increased social status that was not possible for women. In her research on sixteenth century Spanish colonialism in the Caribbean and Florida, Deagan (1983, 1998, 2001) has argued that indigenous women were important cultural brokers in relationships between Spaniards and indigenous populations. Through their labor in domestic contexts and intimate relationships (both coerced and voluntary) with Spanish colonists, women may have been able to move between imperial and indigenous spaces more easily than men and contributed in significant ways to the creation of a new imperial culture. In the Spanish territories in what is now the southwestern United States, in contrast, it was Puebloan males who were conscripted as laborers and sought as converts, and women may have lost much of their traditional authority as landowners and decision makers (see also Etienne and Leacock, 1980). In a separate vein, ruler–subject relationships may themselves often be conceived of in gendered terms, making gender symbolism very potent symbolically.

5. IMPERIAL CONSOLIDATION AND ADMINISTRATION

Although coercion is essential to the creation of empires and remains important throughout any empire's history, no empire can survive for long if coercion remains the sole element that binds it together (and, as noted earlier, many did not survive long). Additional practices and mechanisms are required to enable imperial rulers to forge their diverse subject populations (or significant/relevant portions thereof) into a single polity. Empires are violent coercive polities that inevitably bring severe negative consequences to many of the

territories and peoples they encounter; yet for them to endure, they must also bring some real and/or perceived benefits to at least some of their subjects. These may include the above-mentioned economic and social rewards granted to select regional elites and nonelites—access to new material symbols of prestige, to wealth, and to elevated social status and prerogatives. Other benefits may include those derived from the creation of an infrastructure of roads and transport networks (Hassig, 1988) and means to secure movement along them. Such facilities may be constructed to expedite the movement of imperial troops, but also can allow for nonmilitary movement and commerce. The forced cessation of endemic local conflicts in regions falling under imperial control (see D'Altroy, 1994:179) may create enhanced security and economic possibilities for resident populations (e.g., if people can shift from upland fortified sites to more fertile lowlands).

A large number of research questions and emphases can be explored in the study of imperial consolidation both within individual empires and in comparing among them. What is the interplay and nature of the various factors operating in the consolidation of an empire—for example, administrative structures, economic mechanisms and relationships, ideological rewards and belief systems, security concerns? How do these vary over space and change over time? Which communities and social groups benefit from imperial incorporation; Which suffer? And how? To what extent is membership in an empire relevant to individual subjects and particular social groups? How are social identities defined and how deeply do imperial identities and imperial ideologies penetrate? Numerous recent archaeological studies (see bibliography) have sought to address these and other questions on imperial systems. In this limited space, I restrict my discussion to a smaller range of issues relevant to questions of imperial consolidation: administration and record keeping, ideologies and identities, historical knowledge, and resistance. This is admittedly a rather idiosyncratic list, and other researchers would no doubt select very different questions and approaches. Nonetheless, they highlight some current issues in the study of empire in general and of specific empires.

5.1. Administration and Record Keeping

If empires are structured, in part, to bring about the flow of economic resources from producers and incorporated communities to state coffers, then decisions must be made to both assess the kinds and quantities of resources owed and monitor their payment. The way this is done can vary widely from simple dyadic agreements between the imperial center and various subjects to more formalized and elaborate administrative structures and hierarchies.

As noted earlier, in the Vijayanagara empire, for example, it appears that tax rates were established between imperial centers, local elites, and other communities, and tended to follow preexisting local rates and traditions (Stein, 1989:41). Although coercive practices, such as forced relocation and military threats, were certainly operative, it also is the case that in some contexts tax obligations could be negotiated, and nonelites could achieve favorable responses through social protest or mass migration (see Karashima, 1992; Morrison, 2001; Sinopoli, 1998). In A.D. 1428–1429 the agriculturists and artisans of several districts of what is now Tamil Nadu organized to protest taxes being imposed upon them by local overlords in the name of the Vijayanagara empire. In a series of inscriptions carved on the walls of temples, the protesters vowed to resist the oppressive taxation they had been subject to by “Brahmans, local rulers, the Vijayanagara military, and other imperial officers” (Sinopoli, 1998) and to restore rates to pre-Vijayanagara levels. These pro-

tests were ultimately successful and tax rates were lowered, but only for the particular communities involved in the protest (although some nearby communities soon thereafter achieved similar results by making reference to their neighbors' success).

The Vijayanagara inscriptions indicate both the multiple participants involved in setting taxation rates and collecting revenues and their contingent nature. Sixteenth-century inscriptions from this region indicate that, over time, tax collecting came to be largely under the control of Telugu-speaking regional rulers, called *nayakas*. Karashima (1992:197) has estimated that these *nayakas* transmitted between 3% and 50% (averaging ca. 30%) of the revenues they collected to the imperial capital; imperial officials are only rarely mentioned in these later inscriptions. Despite, or perhaps because of, this complex and highly localized system of Vijayanagara revenue collections, detailed resource inventories (of agricultural lands, shops, looms, mills, various artisans, and other taxable resources) were maintained at the village and locality levels, and presumably in the imperial center (Stein, 1989:86–87, although none of the latter and few of the former are extant).

The Inka decimal administration (Julien, 1988; LeVine, 1987, 1992) provides an example of a more pervasive structure of administration than evident in Vijayanagara. Although questions remain on the precise details of the system, it was based on a detailed census of imperial populations structured by ethnic group, and a grouping of people into decimal units. Once populations were counted, tribute obligations were determined. These took the form of an assessment of labor obligations owed by groups, usually assessed in terms of units of 100 laborers. This information was recorded on quipu, or knotted rope records, that were maintained in two separate locales to prevent fraud.

Admittedly, the existence of Vijayanagara period records of land units and productive resources or the Inka census tell us little about how effective either polity was in actually generating revenues from the resources they documented. In the case of Vijayanagara, they were, in fact, relatively ineffective, and only a very small portion of southern India's wealth was ever transferred into imperial coffers (Karashima, 1992; Stein, 1989). Nonetheless, and despite the dramatic differences between the two examples described previously, both illustrate an emphasis on the maintenance of up-to-date administrative records—on populations, or numbers of settlements, workshops, or units of land. We see this attention to numeric records in the Aztec tribute lists (Berdan, 1987; Berdan and Anawalt 1997), Roman (e.g., Bagnall, 1991; Lo Cascio, 1994) and Chinese (Yates, 2001) censuses, the extensive Ur III bureaucratic records (Steinkeller, 1987), and Ottoman population surveys and administrative records (Barkey, 1994:250–254).

The importance of numeracy in imperial administration has recently been explored by a number of scholars as a unique dimension of seventeenth to twentieth century A.D. European imperialism (Appadurai, 1993; Cohn, 1996; Pels, 1997). It is certainly the case that there has been a dramatic increase in the pervasiveness and technology of government over the last few centuries. However, concerns with record keeping and knowledge as instruments of control have been important characteristics of all historic empires and are certainly not the inventions of modernity. The study of how this knowledge is codified and how it is employed in imperial domination is as relevant to the study of early empires as it is to more recent European imperialism.

5.2. Ideologies and Identities

In all societies and political formations, ideological justifications exist for the legitimation of existing political and social structures and relation. Several questions arise in the

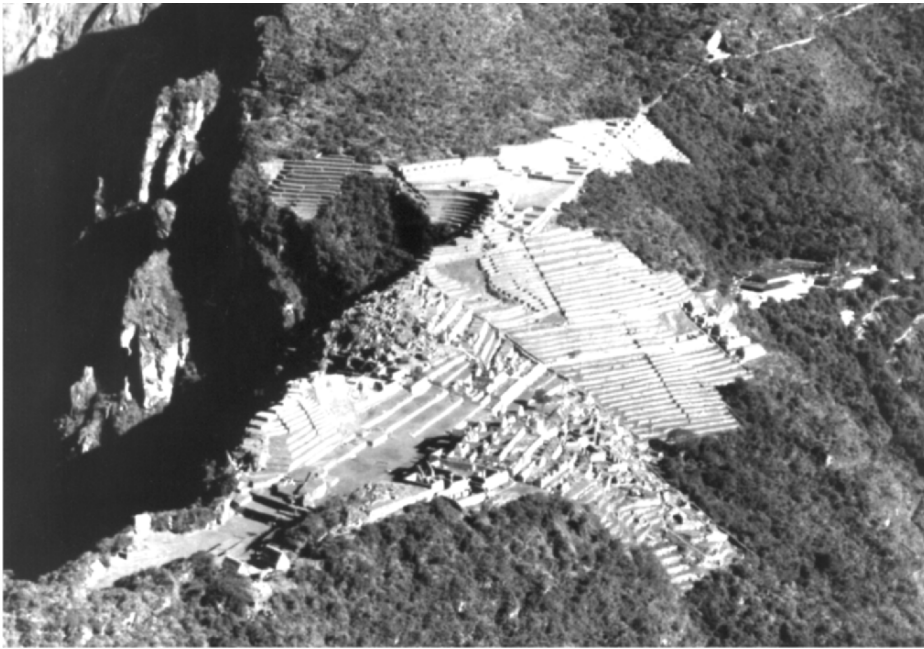


Figure 13.5. Machu Picchu, an Inka residential and ceremonial center, identified in historical documents as the personal estate of the ruler Pachacuti. (Photograph by Frances Hayashida)

study of imperial ideologies. How are preexisting belief systems of various incorporated areas affected by imperial imposition: Are they incorporated into imperial ideologies, suppressed, or do they become media for resistance to empire? How are imperial ideologies expressed materially (see DeMarrais et al., 1996): in monuments (Figure 13.5) iconography, prestige goods, or ritual practices? How are these beliefs and their material correlates expressed at the imperial center and in various subject territories? Are regional practices, practitioners, or deities brought to the imperial center (such as the common practice of bringing the gods of conquered territories to imperial centers)? Are distinctively imperial sacred monuments and iconography imposed upon or adopted in incorporated territories?

We also may consider the potential audiences for different kinds of ideological messages. Brumfiel (1998) has proposed that among the Aztecs the intended audience for imperial ideologies of warfare and sacrifice were elite male warriors. Through sumptuary goods, titles, rituals, symbolic imagery, and the promises of sacred rewards for sacrifice, these potentially troublesome nobles were transformed into willing participants in the imperial project. Nonelites also were recipients of ideological messages from the center; but, Brumfiel suggests, these were messages of absolute power and subjugation, manifest through massive human sacrifices, skull racks, and monumental constructions, such as the Great Temple at Tenochtitlán.

Brumfiel's argument raises an important issue relevant to the study of many empires. To what extent do the various participants in an empire share knowledge of or identities as participants in the imperial project? What are the criteria by which imperial identities are defined, for example, geography, ethnicity, religion, social status, accomplishments, or gender? For Brumfiel's Aztec, elites and nonelites had knowledge of themselves as ruled by the Triple Alliance, but had very different understandings and knowledge of their status

within the empire (see also Morris, 1995, on the Inka). In contrast, in the Roman Empire, elites and nonelites shared a concept of citizenship that was widely disseminated and highly valued (Laurence and Barry, 1998). Citizens in Rome and in distant provinces perceived jural and economic benefits from their status that were not available to the noncitizen majority.

This concept of citizenship and its deep penetration to diverse subject populations, as we see in the Roman example, seems to be rare in early empires and may be restricted to the particular historic tradition of Greece, Rome, and later European empires. In many empires we have no evidence that such a concept existed or could exist, and identities seem far more focused on town, region, or ethnic group than on polity-wide values. However, few imperial subjects would have been ignorant of the broader political milieu in which they lived, and like all human agents had multiple identities—as members of a state, region, ethnic or religious group, language group, kin group, and occupational group—that could be called upon in particular contexts.

It also is important to acknowledge that imperial identities are not imposed uniformly upon incorporated areas. Instead, they are formed in the context of expansion, incorporation, and contact between diverse cultural traditions and forms of knowledge. Like incorporated areas, imperial centers also are shaped in a nexus of interrelationships—with their diverse subjects and their neighbors. The formation of an imperial culture involves processes of incorporation (of peoples, symbols, material culture, resources, knowledge) and also of reformulation. In a discussion of “romanization” in Gaul, Woolf (1997) has called for a rethinking of this much debated topic to examine both how imperial subjects in incorporated territories were drawn into a complex imperial world and how Roman society itself was altered through its territorial and cultural expansion. Thus he argues that imperial culture and imperial identities must be seen as formed through processes and particularities of cultural interactions that include but are not restricted to coercion and hegemony.

5.3. Historical Knowledge and Memories

In all human societies, people rely on knowledge of the past to understand their place in the present. Such knowledge, transmitted orally through texts and materially through objects (Hoskins, 1998) and lived-in spaces and landscapes (Alcock, 2001), is essential to the construction of identities at regional and imperial levels.

In empires, as in all states, historical knowledge plays a key role in the construction of political identities and in the legitimation of a ruling dynasty and its goals of imperial expansion. Earlier, I briefly noted the long-term dynastic history presented in Mesopotamian king lists, a history that acknowledged both the continuity of Mesopotamian civilization and the inevitability of collapse of individual polities. The Carolingians also called upon their knowledge of earlier empires and viewed themselves as the heirs of Rome and their empire as “Rome reborn”:

Our times are transformed into the civilization of antiquity
Golden Rome is reborn and restored anew to the world. (From a poem by
Moduin of Autun, ca. A.D. 804–810; Kornbluth, 1997:45)

Carolingian rulers modeled themselves on the later (Christian) Roman emperors (Nelson, 1996:89–98) and, to some extent, adhered to Roman administrative structures

(McKitterick, 1989). MacCormack (2001) has suggested that Rome also served as a model for the sixteenth century Spanish empire, serving as a source of knowledge that could be drawn upon to understand the Andean Inka empire, as well as an ideal political form to which they could aspire.

The examples presented above describe cases in which knowledge of past empires was called upon by those who claimed to be their successors. Such practices imply the existence of the “fact” of empire as an accepted way of organizing people and political order. For the Akkadian dynasty, the Qin, and other “first” empires, such knowledge may have been created out of a long-term history of competition among states, or through more revolutionary ideological transformations.

Along with comparisons to earlier empires, knowledge of the more recent past of an empire also may be important to its internal dynamics. In particular, the malleability of historical knowledge may be used to support or challenge particular historical constructions. In a number of historic empires, we have convincing examples of the conscious transformation of historical knowledge for political ends. For example, among the early historic Satavahana empire of central India (first century B.C. to second century A.D.), a wall of royal portraits carved during the reign of the dynasty’s fourth ruler deliberately excluded a portrait of its second king, Kanha. This was apparently done to support claims of legitimacy of Kanha’s successors, who were not his direct lineal descendents, in a deliberate (albeit failed) attempt to excise Kanha from imperial histories and political memories (Mirashi, 1981:18; Sinopoli, 2001). Although we have no direct record of succession struggles following Kanha’s death, his excision from this particular imperial history suggests that one occurred. D’Altroy’s (personal communications) expanded radiocarbon chronology of the Inka empire suggests that the short, orally transmitted Inka king lists contain many fewer rulers than must have existed, also suggesting a rewriting of history, presumably to bolster the legitimacy of later rulers and erase knowledge of succession struggles.

Historical knowledge and memory are, of course, not solely a prerogative of rulers or elites. Various imperial subjects also bring their knowledge of the past to present interactions and relations. Alcock (2001) has emphasized that memory is dynamic and multiple and can provide an arena for political contestation. In particular, she explores how knowledge of the past was reworked in the context of the Roman conquest of Greece. While Romans sought to appropriate various aspects of Greek heritage for their own ends, local elites and commoners reshaped that heritage in such a way as to maintain their identity as Greeks distinct from their positions as imperial subjects. The media for these ideological contestations included festivals and theater, as well as, more importantly for archaeologists, the reconfiguration of monuments and monumental spaces.

5.4. Resistance

In considering mechanisms for imperial consolidation, we also must consider how empire authority is resisted. Where and to what extent is resistance to empire expressed in particular contexts? What forms does that resistance take and who is participating in it (and conversely, who is not)? Are the structures of empire being called into question or is it just particular leaders or practices that are being challenged?

Although resistance can take many forms, its impact and consequences vary widely, and these must be parsed out (see Brumfiel, 1996; Fox and Starn, 1997; Ortner, 1995). Political satire, for example, may provide valuable release from daily frustrations without

greatly impacting those being ridiculed. Other forms of resistance may perpetuate structures while replacing individual players. The overthrow of an “illegitimate” ruling dynasty by a competing one may be presented as an act of resistance to tyranny, but it need not call into question the existence or basic practices of empire.

Resistance also may serve to improve the conditions of imperial subjects in various ways. The Vijayanagara tax revolt described earlier was an act of effective resistance of elite demands by nonelites. It did not, however, challenge the existence, legitimacy, or even the proper recipients of taxes, but focused instead on lowering the rate of taxation. The Greek “memory theaters” discussed by Alcock (see earlier), served to maintain and provide alternate identities that both provided a valuable and distinctive sense of self and could potentially be mobilized for political action. Nonrevolutionary forms of resistance such as these are probably much more common than those that seek to fundamentally challenge political, economic, or ideological structures in radical ways. In thinking about this important topic, we need to be careful in sorting out just what we mean by resistance, how it is enacted, and what its range of consequences might be.

6. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CHALLENGES: HORIZON OR HEGEMONY?

Many of the issues addressed throughout this chapter have drawn from a combination of historical and archaeological sources to consider the dynamics, structures, and participants of empire. For those of us who conduct archaeological research in contexts where we also have historical data, it is clear that history is extremely valuable in allowing us to pursue diverse research questions. However, historical sources alone are not sufficient to answer many of the questions we wish to ask about past cultural processes, nor are written documents necessarily accurate or reliable. Written or verbal claims to imperial status are themselves not sufficient to establish the existence of empire without evidence for imperial economic, political, and coercive structures and dynamics (the character played by Leonardo DeCaprio in the popular film *Titanic* was, after all, not really “the king of the world” despite his statement to the contrary). Like all evidence, historical sources must be carefully evaluated and contextualized, and absences in written evidence must be attended to as we consider what information is present.

Although all archaeologists must be concerned with evidentiary issues, scholars who study prehistoric political formations face challenges that those of us who also have written sources can at least partly circumvent. As I noted earlier, numerous debates exist concerning whether or not particular historically documented polities can really be called “true” empires. And this is even more the case with prehistoric possibilities in Mesoamerica (e.g., Teotihuacan, Toltec, Zapotec) and the Andes (e.g., Tiwanaku, Wari, Chimú, Moche).

How do we identify an empire in the absence of historical evidence for conquest or claims to sovereignty and subjugation? The answer is far from straightforward, not least because diversity and regional variability are defining characteristics of empire. If, as I have argued, the impact of empire is expected to vary widely from place to place and over time, it is to be expected that in some contexts imperial presence and processes will be extremely difficult to detect archaeologically. Also problematic are those contexts in which imperial technologies and material culture move far beyond the political borders of the empires that produced them, for example, the many Roman artifacts and coins found in South and even Southeast Asia (Begley and de Puma, 1991). And, as noted above, we also

may have contexts where imperial influence, in terms of adoption of goods, beliefs, or technologies, may predate political incorporation by years or decades. Further, widespread similarities in material culture and economic and cultural organization exist in many contexts in the absence of political unity—horizons styles in and of themselves do not provide evidence of political hegemony (see Sinopoli, 2001, and M. L. Smith, 1997, for examples from early historic South Asia).

Whereas evidence of contact and similarity is relatively straightforward for archaeologists to document, inferences concerning the kinds of political and cultural relationships that underlie such contact are far more problematic. In particular, it is often extremely difficult to distinguish control from influence and to distinguish among different kinds of interaction and identify causal priorities.

The definition of empire that I presented at the start of this chapter contained several components that lend themselves to archaeological identification. These include coercion, political hierarchy or centralization (including the participation of various categories of elites), and territory. Katharina Schreiber (2001) has recently addressed this issue in the context of her research on the nonliterate Wari empire of Middle Horizon Peru. She emphasizes size and diversity; militarism; administrative centralization, particularly as manifest at the imperial capital; and material evidence of political sovereignty as criteria for identifying empire in prehistoric contexts. Michael Smith (2001) also has presented a polythetic set of archaeological or material criteria for the identification of empire (see also Rice, 1993). Smith's criteria include the imperial capital, evidence for political and economic territorial domination, and, moving beyond imperial boundaries, evidence of "projection of influence in an international context."

For both Schreiber and Smith, the imperial capital is defined a large complex urban center with evidence of ethnic/cultural diversity, administrative activities, and militarism. The capital also serves as a setting for public proclamations of an imperial ideology through architecture, iconography, sacred spaces, and other segregated spaces (Figure 13.6). Beyond the capital, political domination or administrative centralization may be identified via evidence for military conquest and the construction of an imperial infrastructure (e.g., colonies or provincial centers, roads, storehouses, or forts), as well as evidence for administrative hierarchy or the reorganization of settlement systems. The study of interelite dynamics, including the incorporation of local elites into imperial frameworks or a dissolution of interelite relationships at the regional or provincial level, also can help us understand imperial political structures. Economic domination includes evidence of movement of resources between the capital and provinces, evidence for the imposition of tribute or taxes, and evidence for changes in productive structures and relations. Smith's third characteristic—of projection of influence in an international context—brings into play the international dimension of empire discussed earlier, although Smith limits his focus to the outward impact of empire and does not consider the internal effects of interpolity dynamics. Such outward relations may include commerce, military engagement, and cultural influence, including the adoption of imperial goods and symbols in extraimperial territories.

If taken individually, it is relatively easy to pick apart these various criteria, through pointing out counterexamples from specific empires (e.g., the Carolingian lack of an imperial capital) or by identifying similar patterns from indisputably nonimperial contexts (e.g., the southwestern U.S. "Chaco phenomenon"). However, as Smith is careful to point out, archaeological approaches require a polythetic approach relying on diverse sources of evidence, and not all features need be present in any particular case. The aforementioned



Figure 13.6. The massive zigzagged walls of Sacsayhuaman, Cuzco, which served as both a fortress and a ceremonial center for the ruling elite. (Photograph by Frances Hayashida)

criteria certainly do not fully resolve our archaeological challenges, since we still need to come up with good criteria for distinguishing control from other kinds of interaction, for example, or the direct effects of empires from their indirect effects. However, they do help define the kinds of evidence we need to begin to identify the existence of empire in particular cases.

7. CONCLUSIONS

I began this chapter with the acknowledgment that, although individual empires have long been the focus of archaeological and historical study, emphasis on comparative approaches to the study of empires is relatively recent, as is the inclusion of the archaeology of empires within the mainstream of anthropological archaeology. Two intellectual trends within anthropological archaeology contribute to this change. The first is the increased rapprochement between anthropology and historical and humanistic approaches to the past, discussed earlier. The second contribution comes from new theoretical approaches to complex societies that draw from contemporary social theory. Further, the cumulative impact of decades of archaeological and historic research on individual empires has increased our understanding of the complexities of imperial societies and has enhanced abilities to address a range of theoretical and culture–historical questions. I turn to these three issues later.

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, renewed archaeological interest in empires derives in part from the increasing interaction between anthropological and his-

torical approaches to the study of the past and the concomitant expanding interconnections between anthropology and various humanistic disciplines, including, among others, classical studies, Egyptology, Assyriology, and Sinology. Archaeologists who study empires both take advantage of diverse classes of data, including written and material evidence, and use their knowledge of a range of historic cases as a basis for theory building and hypothesis generation. Along with this disciplinary expansion, the past few decades have witnessed an expansion in the range of geographic regions and periods studied by practitioners of Americanist anthropological archaeology, with its distinctive emphasis on comparativism. In consequence, the anthropological archaeology of states now ranges far beyond its traditional emphasis on the five core areas of primary state emergence (see Wright, 1986), and diverse categories of states, including imperial ones, are now part of mainstream research.

Changing intellectual perspectives also have played a role in expanding the kinds of questions that archaeologists ask about state societies (and other sociopolitical formations as well). Prominent among these are the increased interests in dissecting the various sources of power in complex societies (e.g., Mann, 1986, see also Blanton et al., 1996), as well as expanded interest in questions of agency that builds on the writings of Giddens (1979), Bourdieu (1977), and, to a lesser extent, Foucault (1973, see, e.g., Brumfiel, 1992; Dobres and Robb, 1999; Robb, 1999). Early states and empires are no longer viewed as well-integrated homogeneous polities in which economy, beliefs, politics, and social identities change in lockstep, directed from the top. Instead, scholars now seek to explore the complex interrelations among various cultural spheres and the roles of social actors in maintaining or altering the social and cultural contexts in which they live. Such studies embody an acknowledgment of internal contradictions and competing interests, as well as of cultural coherence.

Thus, rather than viewing empires from a top-down perspective as highly centralized polities with all power and control emanating from the imperial core, scholars are increasingly concerned with their internal variability and diversity and the competing goals, strategies, and practices that hold empires together—and tear them apart. The fact that imperial control is often restricted to limited domains of particular interest to the state, whether economic, ideological, defensive, or political, has led to an interest in parsing out which domains are most important in specific contexts, and how these change over time. The recognition of the fragility of many empires and of the limitations of coercion also has contributed to an increased emphasis on the noncoercive means by which large states are held together—ideological, as well as social, administrative, and economic. Further, the anthropological emphasis on the lives of the nonelite subjects of empire has contributed to work on household and community organization, landscapes, and economy, particularly agricultural and craft production. As nonelites are increasingly viewed as conscious social actors, the question of how, or if, empires are resisted also has become an important topic of study.

The theoretical changes we see in the archaeology of empires parallel broader trends in our discipline and in social theory more generally. Ultimately, all of our theoretical approaches must be evaluated against evidence, whether material or written. And given the large scale of empires, archaeologists who study them from whatever theoretical perspective are dependent on the fieldwork and analyses of earlier scholars as well as our contemporary colleagues. The quality and quantity of the empirical data—chronologies, artifact classifications and analyses, environmental studies, site distribution data—that are at the

heart of archaeological interpretation have increased dramatically in recent decades. As research continues and expands in multiple regions of individual empires, we will be better placed to consider the variability, diversity, structural organization, and rates and causes of change at local, regional, and imperial levels.

As we move toward the next century of archaeological research on empires, our theoretical perspectives will no doubt continue to change, and some of the issues addressed in this paper will be superceded or will seem irrelevant. However, just as we draw from the work of our predecessors, so we can be sure that the theoretical frameworks and empirical knowledge of future archaeologists will continue to build upon the decades of fieldwork, data collection, analysis, and interpretations of the scholars who precede them.

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