The Image of the Incan Empire in European Ideas about Society and the State. The 17th-century evidence: Murcia de La Llana, Hobbes, Locke.¹

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge on the Incan empire is dominated by a centuries-old controversy that originated soon after the Spanish invasion of the central Andes. This controversy has also affected the intellectual and political history of Europe and the Americas ever since. The Incas knew no form of script. The 17th century, while less productive on the subject than the 16th century or the past 250 years, represents no interruption in this development, as reveal the work of mercantilist Francisco Murcia de La Llana and that of the influential social theorists Thomas Hobbes and John Locke.

In the year 1624, in the middle of a financial crisis in Spain caused by the 30-year War, Francisco Murcia de La Llana, ¹

¹I am indebted to other participants in the meeting Looking Through the Habsburgs' Glasses for their suggestions to an earlier draft of this paper. I am also grateful to Constance H. Rose, at Northeastern University, in Boston, USA, for her editorial assistance.
professor of philosophy at the University of Alcalá de Henares, physician and royal proofreader, suggested, in writing, to King Philip IV an ambitious reform of the country's political economy which included, among others, two recommendations without precedence:

1. to establish a contribution in labor for all the king's subjects—in Spain as well as in the Americas, Sicily, Naples, and other territories—which consisted in cultivating, for the kingdom, its unused agricultural land (the king's "baldíos").

2. to raise an annual new revenue in kind (a "socorro"), again from each subject, in the amount of 12 days' worth of food allowances.

These proposals, Murcia de La Llana argued, were not unfeasible. They had been current in the empire of the Incas, in the Andes, where the annual salary of its powerful emperor amounted to no more than what the population spent on food in a single week, and where the sick could be looked after and taxes paid out of the produce of certain lands cultivated every year by every village (Murcia de La Llana 1624: 2v-4r, 18v).

Reference to the Incan empire as a model for political reform, or revolution, in the Andes as well as in Europe, is well known from the 18th century up to the present (Wedin
1966; Katz 1972: 289-91). The 17th century appears as a convenient period for separating the so-called "primary sources" dealing with this empire, mostly written in the 16th century, from modern research and its political use. Yet, references to a model Inca society did exist in the 17th century, as they had existed in the 16th century; the "primary sources" were tainted by their authors' opinions on this pre-Hispanic culture, not unlike modern research has been.

Some of these opinions were negative as well. Indeed, the period of the "primary sources" is also the period when a controversy originated concerning the attributes and composition of the Incan empire. In various forms, depending on the historical context, this controversy has continued up to the present. Distinguishing clearly between "sources" (i.e., the 16th and 17th centuries) and "opinion" (i.e., the modern period) on the Incas has bred the false hopes that settling the matter must rest solely upon the former. However, no fruitful analysis of any writing on the case can ignore the intellectual and historical context to which such writing belongs.²

I shall discuss briefly three of the forms that the controversy took in the 17th century, by demonstrating the

²I have written on this epistemological issue elsewhere (Villarias-Robles 1995).
difference between Murcia de La Llana's understanding of the Incaic order and the interpretations of Thomas Hobbes (1968 [1651]) and John Locke (1948 [1690]), the 17th-century's most important theorists on the constitution of society and the state.

The Origins of the Inca Theme

I need to define first, however, the terms of the controversy, as they had been established in the 16th century.

As it is known, the Incas produced no written records of their empire prior to their encounter with Europeans. Our earliest documents for this political formation were written by the chroniclers of the Spanish conquest which destroyed it. A few years after that destruction, and based on the chroniclers' admiration for the Inca post system, highways, storehouses, fortresses and other architectural remains, Pedro de Cieza de León (1984a [1553], 1984b [1550*]), Cristóbal de Molina de Santiago (1916 [c. 1553*]), and Bartolomé de Las Casas (1892 [c. 1561*], 1958 [1552]), among others, condemned the ruin of the political order which had made those wonders possible.

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3 An asterisk indicates that the work, finished around that year, was not printed until the 19th or the 20th century.
Bartolomé de Las Casas described that political order as that of a well-run monastery—and that was a compliment. The Inca realm was a political society in the Aristotelian sense of the phrase, he wrote; i.e., it was not a barbarian tribe or group of tribes, but a state-organized society, yet without slavery or private property. The highly complex structuring of the society was crowned by the emperor's authority, absolute yet beneficial for the common interests.

Later in the century the Jesuits elaborated on this description. The first was José de Acosta. Relying on the work of Polo de Ondegardo, a former sheriff of the Inca capital of Cuzco, Acosta wrote that Inca rule had revealed the advantages of a society based on collective rather than private property (Acosta 1962 [1590]: bk. 6, ch. 15). Their polity, like that of the Aztecs, was at the peak of an indigenous line of evolution which had started in the Americas in a "barbarian" stage, then moved up to a "chiefdom" age (the Spanish term is "behetrias"), then to a final stage, achieved just before the Spanish conquest, of "monarchies or kingdoms," such as that of the Incas (ibid.: bk. 6, ch. 11, ch. 19).

A few years later, in 1609, the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega made even more dramatic the contrast between the pre-Inca period and that of the Incas. He was no Jesuit, but was heavily influenced by the view which Acosta defended. Before
the Incas, Garcilaso wrote, people lived in a chronic state of war with one another. They neither had adequate housing nor wore decent clothes, ate poorly and practiced human sacrifices, were idolaters and cannibals. Weak and unstable, their governments rarely reached beyond the limits of their villages. The Incas put an end to all of that. Their empire brought peace, prosperity, morality, and the worship of a Creator. Their rule was indeed autocratic, but by no means arbitrary or unfair, for it had a purpose, and that purpose was the well-being of all (Garcilaso 1991 [1609]: bk. 1, chs. 9-15).

There was an argument that run counter to this view which I shall call "Las Casas' view." At issue was the legitimacy of the Spanish claim to rule—in Peru in particular and in the Americas in general—which a praise of the Incaic order called into question. Agustín de Zárate (1853 [1555]) and Francisco López de Gómara (1932 [1552]) pointed to the barbaric aspects of that order—such as the lack of writing and iron tools, the polygyny of the king, or the political abuse of the conquered population—to sustain this opposition.

In the 1570s the 5th viceroy of Peru, Francisco de Toledo, conducted, with the help of Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa, a thorough investigation into the Peruvian past, to prove that the Incan empire had been illegitimate and that the Spanish
conquest had been justified (Toledo 1882 [1570-1572*],
Sarmiento 1988 [1572*]). The Incas, they concluded, had not
been just barbarians, but political usurpers as well, and had
treated the population they dominated viciously.
Paradoxically, however, some reforms of the colonial
administration that Toledo carried out in the same decade
(particularly with regard to mining) followed the Incan
organization of labor. For this reform Toledo heeded the
advice of Polo de Ondegardo, Acosta's main source.

Acosta's view (i.e., that of Las Casas) represented the
view of the majority, and quite soon became very popular in
Europe among scholars who had no first-hand knowledge of
Andean America, such as Michel de Montaigne in the 1580s
(1985-87). The distinctive tenets of this view appear again
in Murcia de La Llana's proposals.

Murcia de La Llana

While some aspects of such a view had been put into
practice by Toledo during his Viceroyalty in Peru, and more
clearly by the Jesuits in their missions elsewhere in South
America (Baudin 1928: 247-248), Murcia de La Llana's
proposals, printed in 1624, was the first attempt to bring the
model Incas to bear on Europe itself. His paper, entitled
Discurso político del desempeño del reyno, seguro de la mar y defensa de las costas de la monarquía de España, was just one among many of a genre known at the time as the "arbitrio" or free suggestion, addressed to the king and aimed at correcting policies which had precipitated the Spanish empire's decline (Sureda Carrión 1949; Vilar 1973; Maravall 1982: 247-303).

What is peculiar about Murcia de La Llana's arbitrio is that he advocated a deep intervention in the economy by the king's government and then pointed to the monarchy of the Incas as exemplary. It matters little whether the Inca emperor's salary amounted to no more than a week's worth of food allowances, as he wrote. As far as I know, no chronicler of the 16th century actually made that statement; many did write, however, that the Inca state income came from the cultivation of certain lands. The fact that Murcia de La Llana's only named source is Juan de Vilela, president of the Council for the Indies, indicates how widespread the view of Las Casas was at that time.

Murcia de La Llana's work was prompted by a period of high inflation and a new budgetary crisis of the Habsburg monarchy, the fourth in less than fifty years and the one which led to the bankruptcy of 1627 (Domínguez Ortiz 1960: 3-

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4There is a copy at Spain's National Library, in Madrid, Rare Books and Manuscripts Section; its call number: R/31550.
33; Lynch 1975: II, 111-121; Elliott 1986: 299-304). The Discurso was also his reaction to a number of exploits by pirates who menaced Spanish and Portuguese trade, a sign of the Crown's increasing vulnerability. As in the case of other arbitristas,\(^5\) his awareness of the Spanish empire's weakness helps explain the nationalistic overtones of other measures that he recommended. Thus, besides the new sources of income proposed (the contribution in labor and the new tax in kind), he wrote that additional moneys were to be raised by levies on foreigners, by a curb on foreign imports, and by the withdrawal of the Spanish armies abroad, an unnecessary drain of money, men, and materiel which could be replaced by a strong fleet at sea. He believed that his program, if implemented, would cause the Spanish state to regain its hegemony. With its Christian allies, the new Spain would stand up again to the threat of the Turkish empire in the Mediterranean and could succeed in an attempt to reconquer the Holy Land (Murcia de La Llana 1624: 2v, 4r-16r, 22r).

He put the blame for the decline on the king's borrowing from foreign bankers, on the deficit in the balance of payments, and on the misuse of the Crown's resources. Although he did not go so far as to call for the abolition of

\(^5\)For instance, Antonio Martínez de la Mata (Maravall 1972: 223-224) or Sancho de Moncada (Vilar 1974).
private property, he did make it very clear that the effort had to come from all able subjects and all institutions, including the Church, the military orders, and the landed aristocracy. In addition, all provinces, not only Castile, too exhausted to carry on as the Crown's only support, had to share financial responsibility.

Murcia de La Llana's advice was not heeded by the government. Within the literary class, Miguel de Cervantes had regarded it as unrealistic, while Francisco de Quevedo viewed it as dangerously subversive of Spain's political traditions (Vilar 1973: 202-203, 267-273). Nonetheless, late 19th-century Spanish jurist and sociologist Joaquín Costa considered the Discurso as one of the earliest of modern doctrines on state collectivism (Costa 1983 [1898]: I, 137-139). Murcia de La Llana's doctrine would be followed up in

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6 Costa wrote nothing of Murcia de la Llana's life, however. More recent scholarship is not a big help in this respect, either. One must rely, instead, on the work of bibliographers, such as Nicolás Antonio (1783-1788: I, 451), Cristóbal Pérez Pastor (1891-1907: II, 384-389), Rafael Ramírez de Arellano (1921-1923: I, 421-422), Antonio Palau y Dulcet (1948-1973: X, 356-357), and José Simón Díaz (1948, 1992). Nicolás Antonio, and later C. Pérez Pastor and A. Palau y Dulcet, failed to distinguish our man from one of his sons, also called Francisco Murcia de La Llana, who inherited his father's job as royal proofreader in Madrid and who was also a poet; see Agapito Rey & José Manuel Blecua 1953. The huge Enciclopedia Espasa (70 vols.) mentions this son but not his father.

Born in the town of Priego (province of Cordova, Andalusia), Murcia de La Llana was a physician as well as a professor of philosophy and theology at the University of Alcalá de Henares. In the early decades of the 17th century he published a number of commentaries on Aristotle and other philosophical writings. In Laurel de Apolo Lope de Vega refers to him as "an eminent man who twice crowned his head with laurels, by writing in Latin as well as Castilian" (Vega Carpio 1630: 72v-73). As royal proofreader in Madrid, a job he held from 1609 to his death in 1639 in Madrid, Murcia de La Llana supervised the printing of Cervantes' Don Quixote, as well as Lope de Vega's Laurel de Apolo and other works of the
later centuries by attempts at political and economic reform or revolution inspired by similar ideas about the organization of the Incan empire. I can only mention here as European examples the works of 18th-century utopians (such as Morelly, in Gonnard 1946: 83-87), 19th-century economic reformers (such as Álvaro Flórez Estrada, in Costa 1983 [1898]: I, 91-96, 139), and 20th-century utopian socialists (such as Adolphe V. Bonthoux, 1927); for the Andes, I can mention the revolutionary indigenist movements of the 1920s and 1930s (Marof 1926; Mariátegui 1943 [1928]; Valcárcel 1972 [1928]).

Thomas Hobbes and John Locke

I will now turn to Hobbes and Locke, who together represent a clear departure from this line of understanding the Incan empire as a model society. Both authors were certainly familiar with the view of Las Casas, though probably not with Murcia de La Llana's political program.

Hobbes knew at least of Garcilaso's work. The opposition that he established in his *Leviathan*, published in 1651,

Spanish Golden Age (Simón Díaz 1948: 185). In 1620, four years before writing his *arbitrio*, he asked the king to raise his salary as proofreader, "atendiendo a sus serviçios, y a la carestía de los mantenimientos; q[ue] quando se señaló el ... salario de 50.000 mrs [=maravedises] a sus anteçesores [=previous proofreaders], fue en tiempo que valían los mantenimientos tan varatos que se pudo tener por bastante." His request was turned down; "No es tiempo de creçer salarios," the king decreed (in Díaz, *ibid*: 185-186).
between what he called the "state of nature" and the "commonwealth" (or "Leviathan")—i.e., the state—is reminiscent of Garcilaso's ideas on Peru's cultural evolution. For Hobbes, the state had come into being as a result of an ad hoc agreement (a "covenant," he wrote) by men who, up to that point, had been politically free and equally powerful among themselves. They had decided to put an end to the chronic condition of war that then existed, caused precisely by their being free and holding equal power; in other words, by the "state of nature" in which they lived. Their agreement consisted in relinquishing their powers—and thereby their freedoms—and turning them over to a single, new power, the "commonwealth," which from that point on would rule over all subscribers to the covenant as well as their descendants. The "commonwealth," he added, was the necessary condition for Man's material and moral progress; in fact, the establishment of the "commonwealth" meant to him the same as the constitution of society itself (Hobbes 1968 [1651]: ch. 13, ch. 17, ch. 18).

Among all the possible forms of the "commonwealth," Hobbes favored absolute monarchy. To him, absolute monarchy was the form that guaranteed more effectively than any other the key term of the covenant: that is, that there was no sovereign power in a society other than that of the state.
One must not forget the historical context of his work: the English civil war that anticipated the overthrow and death of King Charles I (Hill 1972: 127-214). The government of the Incas, as understood by Las Casas, Acosta, and Garcilaso, appeared to meet that condition better than any other European state, including England. In any event, he understood that the Incas presented a case clearly different from that of the Indian tribes of North America, who for Hobbes were the model of "the state of nature."

However, he refused to consider the Incas' absolute monarchy as the model for his ideal Leviathan. The reason for this refusal was the old modernistic assumption—presented quite cogently by Jean Bodin as early as 1576 (Bodin 1967: bk. 1, chs. 2-5; bk. 2, ch. 2; bk. 5, ch. 2)—that private property was the most important material basis for human progress; so that, in establishing the commonwealth, men gave up their freedoms to protect their property. Because of this assumption, it was difficult for Hobbes to accept—let alone use as a model—the concept of an absolute monarchy, such as that of the Incas, that sought the well-being of its subjects without the necessity of defending or encouraging private ownership.

Unlike Hobbes, John Locke believed, in his Second Treatise on Civil Government, of 1690, that private property
had existed unfettered in Man's "state of nature," which was not, therefore, a chronic state of war (Locke 1948 [1690]: ch. 2, ch. 3). Like Hobbes, however, Locke defended the theory of the covenant to account for the constitution of society and the state, and regarded the Indian tribes of North America as the example of Man's pre-social age (ibid.: ch. 5, ch. 7).

"In the beginning, all the world was America," he wrote (ibid.: ch. 5), meaning: "in the beginning, people lived like those tribes." Modern man had evolved from that stage.

So, if Hobbes echoes Garcilaso, Locke echoes Acosta. Locke argued against the conventional wisdom—suggested by the Bible and accepted by Hobbes as well as Bodin—that the earliest commonwealths in history had been monarchies, which was another reason to prefer them over other forms of state. Locke, whom Bertrand Russell called "the apostle of the [English] revolution of 1688" (Russell 1945: 604), cautioned that those monarchies could have been in fact elective chiefdoms, the "behetrías" reported by Acosta for pre-Inca Peru. Locke even conceded, again quoting Acosta, that in some parts of the world the political development leading from those chiefdoms to the formation of the monarchical state offered an alternative to the covenant (ibid.: ch. 8).

Yet he failed to draw the logical conclusion from Acosta's evolutionary thesis: namely, that the Inca monarchy
(as well as the Aztec one) had therefore been real monarchies, i.e., commonwealths. The reason for that failure has again to do with the modernistic opinion on private property, a matter on which Locke was less refined and more adamant than Hobbes and Bodin. For him, the state had no reason for being other than the defense against external aggression and the protection of private property, which was the basis of political freedom, and an orderly life (ibid.: ch. 1, ch. 7, ch. 9). Because the so-called "kingdom of Peru" referred to by Acosta did not fit that description, Locke chose not to consider it a commonwealth; he believed that kingdom still belonged to "the state of nature."

In summary, both Hobbes and Locke acknowledged the Incan empire to be a highly developed social and political formation, distant from what they called Man's "pre-social" age. But they refused to call it a state and, therefore, a modern formation, even though they knew the sources which did consider it a state. This opinion, so at odds with that of Murcia de La Llana, helped maintain alive the non-mainstream view of authors such as Zárate, Toledo, and Sarmiento: that is, that the Incan empire was barbaric, illegitimate, and technologically unimpressive. In the late 18th century Adam Smith (1937 [1776]) would renew this argument and, after him, so would all those who could not believe that the Incas had
been rulers of a model, socialistic state; e. g., Heinrich

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