

# Connecting the threads: From Altiplano to Airedale

## 2. Life on the Altiplano



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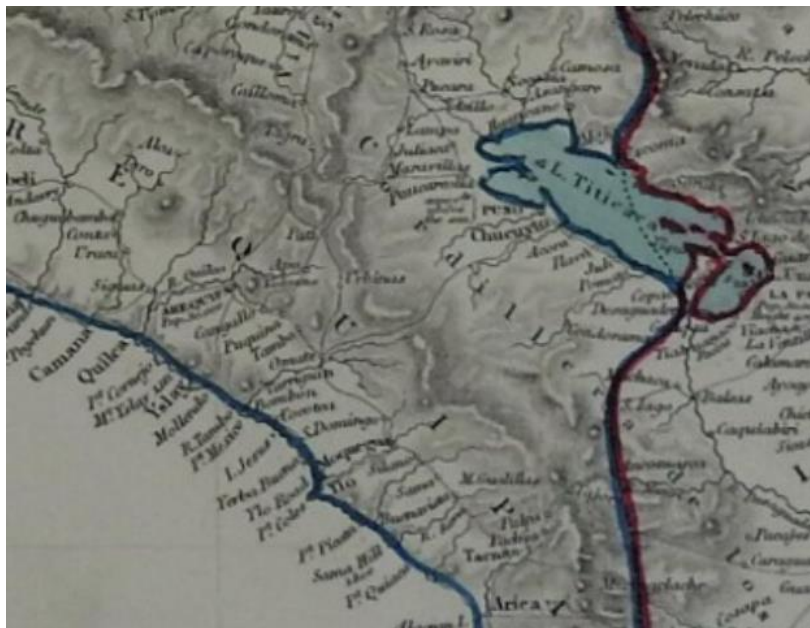
Steve Day, 2022

The raising of alpacas and the production of their wool was primarily in the hands of the indigenous people high in the altiplano (high plateau) of the Andes. The Spanish colonialists, and the Peruvians after independence, might have had political control but in terms of day to day work on the land that was left to those who had worked it for generations. This section is not about the practical tasks involved in the raising of the alpacas or the shearing of the wool. Rather it focuses on the relations of production and the roles taken on by various groups in the process.

In a volume covering Peru and Chile by Josiah Conder, published in 1830, Conder provides a quote from the biography of a General Miller (published in 1828), who saw action in Peru during the Wars of Independence. The quote refers to the department of Puno. The settlement of Puno is located high up in the altiplano close to Lake Titicaca. Citing the biography, Conder's volume notes that:

*"The department of Puno...contains about 300,000 souls, five-sixths of whom are aborigines. Puno, the capital has about 7,000 inhabitants. The surface of the country is nearly all table land, and, in few places, less than 10,000 feet above the level of the sea. The climate is cold, as compared with the coast, and very healthy. Its productions are cattle, in great abundance, barley, always cut green for horses, and potatoes. It also has some manufactories of woollens, and supplies Arequipa and Lima with those articles. The llama, the vicuña, the guanáco and the alpáca are very numerous in this district...Alpácas are kept in flocks for the sakes of their wool."* (Conder, J. 294 - Accessed via google books here:

<https://books.google.es/books?id=EIJKAAAIAAJ&pg=PR7&dq=Haigh+Sketches+of+Peru&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewiBnKL40NfxAhVPKF AKHYXCZQQ6AEIVDAI#v=onepage&q=Haigh%20Sketches%20of%20Peru&f=false> )



Puno can be located on the southern bank of Lake Titicaca. Arequipa is to the SW not far from the coast. Islay and Mollendo can be seen on the almost directly below Arequipa.

Of course, this was before the alpaca trade took off. For more contemporary accounts we can turn to the British Parliamentary Papers. It was historian Rory Miller who advised me to consult the Consular Reports contained in the Parliamentary Papers housed in the British Library. The reports are digitalised but are only accessible on the computers inside the British Library. It is not permitted to print off copies or take photos of the screens so it meant several visits to north London in order to take notes.

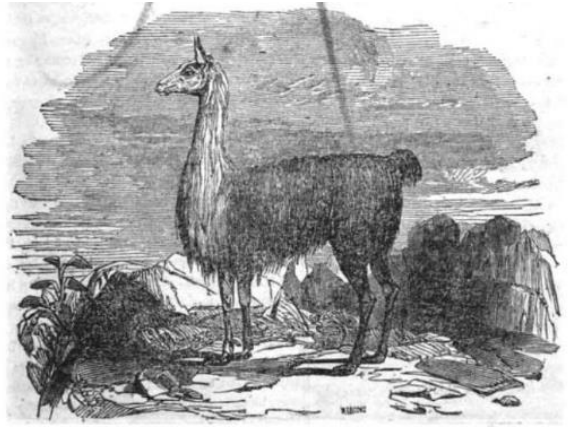
The most relevant reports for our purposes were those despatched from the small port of Islay (and later Mollendo) that served the city of Arequipa, which is located further inland and where the various merchants engaged in the alpaca wool trade were based. More about them in a later chapter. In the report for 1870-71 sent by Consul Vines we can read the following account of the population and economic activity made around 40 years after the comment above:

*"There being no domestic manufacture and the dwellers in and near the departmental cities of Arequipa, Puno, Cuzco and Moquega numbering together not more than 80,000...as more than four-fifths of the population are made up of half castes and Indians, distantly scattered. On the other hand the greatest mineral, vegetable and pastoral resources of the country, which are enormous, are to be found far inland converging upon those cities, and hitherto cut off from the Pacific coast by the breadth of an arid and seemingly inhospitable tract stretching westward from the cordilleras and measuring 100 miles, more or less, which has afforded no other means of transit but sumpter-mules, and which has been chiefly dependent for the necessities of life upon the navigation along the coast".*

He later writes:

*"The retail trade and other industries inland, in the territory of Arequipa, for instance are exclusively engrossed by natives, who derive their foreign supplies through some fifty European residents, comprising the merchants and their adherents, besides perhaps a few adventurous North Americans and their technical advisers".*

*"The five interior provinces of of the same department, namely those of La Union, Condesuyos, Castilla, Caylloma and Arequipa, inclusive of the city at last named, contain little less than 130,000 inhabitants, comprehending those occupying the cultivated territory around the city, where the conditions are favourable to agriculture; although the necessity for such numbers of sumpter animals for transit heretofore has engrossed the larger proportion of land for cultivation of fodder."*



From Walton, William, 1845, *To the Farmer & Manufacturer*

What Consul Vines omits to say is that high up on the altiplano conditions are more challenging, not least the lower levels of oxygen in the air. The indigenous peoples being better adapted to such an environment the Spanish colonialists had long been content to leave them to deploy their local knowledge in the raising of livestock and production of crops while the Spanish occupied the zones where conditions were more tolerable. This state of affairs continued after gaining independence from Spain in 1821. However, earlier in the report he refers to the

*"curious seclusion of the Indian race", intelligent aborigines"* and writes of gaining knowledge from them *"to the great advancement of science as well as trade"*.

Unfortunately, the consular reports do not make direct comments on the production of alpaca wool. Sigsworth makes no references to the consular reports either in his study of Black Dyke Mills but he does reproduce a letter sent to Foster's outlining the process of production in the altiplano. According to Sigsworth, Fosters (owners of Black Dye Mills) had contact with a local clergyman who had a brother who was a doctor in this part of Peru, a Dr. Graham. In the letter, dated 20th May 1857, he describes the alpaca wool as being:

*"...collected in the Sierra, or mountainous interior, much as eggs are collected in Ireland, that is to say, a fleece here and there until they collect a quantity as from 1-3 quintals. A number of Indians will then collect their llamas and march down to Arequipa, the sole entrepot, to sell it best they can at the price of the day to one of the houses that buy. These are Jack Bros., Messrs Gibbs, Harrison, Braillard, Escovedo and Jose Maria Peria, these last two being natives.*

*"A great part of all the alpaca wool is bought in Arequipa in small lots directly from the Indians and for cash down. However, at a fair held in Bilqui in the Sierra, near to Puno, certain Indians or natives, creoles, enter into contracts to deliver the wool in Arequipa as from 8 to 12 months and receive half down in advance in cash, at the same time it is to observe that the alpaca which, if they were to bring it in and sell at 50 dollars in Arequipa, in this method they are only paid at the rate of 40 dollars. I should mention that one house in Arequipa keeps a wool clerk, a native, who every day very early goes out on horseback to meet the Indians and make bargains with them before they have time to do business with other houses; in fact they forestall.*

*"Some of the houses have collectors... There is no market in Arequipa nor in any other part. The Indians (not contracted) enter and sell to ever who gives the most... The*

*merchants always give a higher price for a large lot as a kind of premium."* (Sigsworth, E. 236-7).

This all sounds very benign. However, as we shall see later. The process was more complex than this and often involved various degrees of coercion. What we do get here is an indication of the reliance of the merchants on indigenous people to help facilitate the trade.

Dr Graham only provides a few details of the fair held in Vilque (or Bilqui as he spells it) in between Puno and Juliaca by the lake close to Mañazo but we can get a more colourful description from a Victorian traveller and explorer. Yorkshire born Clements Markham made his journey in 1860 and this passage from him is cited by Nils Jacobsen in his book on the alpaca trade:

*Outside the town there were thousands of mules from Tucuman waiting for Peruvian arrieros [muleteers] to buy them. In the plaza were booths full of every description of Manchester and Birmingham goods; in more retired places were gold dusts and coffee from Carabaya, silver from the mines, bark and chocolate from Bolivia, Germans with glassware and woollen knitted work, French modistes, Italians, Quichua and Aymara Indians in their various picturesque costumes—in fact all nations and tongues. . . . The road was crowded with people coming from Arequipa to the fair at Vilque: native shopkeepers, English merchants coming to arrange for their supplies of wool, and a noisy company of arrieros on their way to buy mules, and armed to the teeth with horse-pistols, old guns, and huge daggers, to defend their money-bags. (Jacobsen, N. 70)*

This fair was important, as **British Consul Wilthew** wrote to the Foreign Office in **1859**, the

*success or failure of the fair is a matter of no small consequence for the commercial community," and "numerous contracts for the delivery of wool" were concluded.*  
(Jacobsen p 70)

All in all a notable indication of the impact of 19th century globalisation, and the exchange of goods, on a small community in the highlands of Peru in the district of Puno.

The story of Clements Markham is interesting in itself as he was more than a curious traveller but on imperial business to source chinchona trees. The bark of the tree was an important export. The plan, in which he was successful, was to smuggle them out to India in order to produce quinine in the fight against malaria. (Accessed via google books here:

<https://ia800307.us.archive.org/26/items/travelsinperuan02markgoog/travelsinperuan02markgoog.pdf>)



Fiction has also been a valuable source for this study. The Peruvian writer Clorinda Matteo de Turner published "Torn from the Nest" (*Aves Sin Nido*) in 1889. (She had married a British man, hence the 'Turner'). She began her career as a journalist before turning to novels and her approach to fiction was to record the realities of life of 19th century Peruvians. Having been born in Cuzco she had strong local knowledge of the Andean altiplano and the indigenous peoples who lived and worked there. In the opening pages of the novel, the reader comes across the following description:

*"In almost every province where alpacas are raised and the wool trade is the chief source of wealth, the principal merchants, some of the richest men in town, practice the custom of advance payment. They force money on the Indians; and they appraise the wool that these Indians must deliver to repay these advances at so low a price that the capital they invest yields them in excess of five hundred percent, a degree of usury so extreme, and obtained with such extortion, that there almost has to be a hell to punish the savages who practice it.*

*The Indians who own alpacas leave their huts when the time for these advances comes so not as to receive money that is accursed for them as the silver coins of Judas. But can they find safety by leaving their homes and roaming the solitary peaks? No. the collection agent, who also distributes the advances, breaks into the hut, whose flimsy lock and leather door offer no resistance; he deposits the coins on top of the corn mill and leaves at once. A year later he returns to collect, armed with a list that for the unhappy and unwilling debtor is the sole witness and judge, and accompanied by an escort of ten or twelve mestizos, sometimes masquerading as soldiers." (Matteo de Turner, C. 4)*



clorinda  
matto  
de turner  
*Torn from the Nest*

The mention of mestizos refers to the mixed heritage population (the half-castes referred to by Consular Vines above) a group viewed with suspicion by the Indians but looked down upon by those of Spanish descent. The novel is a fierce critique of the rural elites and the clergy recounting the exploitation and injustices visited upon the indigenous peoples including the sexual abuse of the women. Although this is a work of fiction and thus open to the charge of exaggeration for the purpose of dramatic effect, a similar account can be found in the pages of the Journal of the Society of Arts from February 1861. The journal reproduces a paper read by a George Ledger on the alpaca and its introduction to Australia. Ledger drew heavily on the knowledge of his brother Charles who had extensive experience in the trade and was a leading figure in an attempt to introduce alpacas to Australia. Ledger includes the following account in his paper:

*"A party, by some means or other, procures the appointment of 'Governador' of a district, and quickly enters into a contract with some mercantile establishment on the coast for a supply of, say, 500 to 1,000 quintals (100lbs) of alpaca wool at 50 dollars (Peruvian) per quintal. As soon as the contract is made he orders the appearance before him, on the day fixed, of all the 'Ylacatas,' chiefs, or heads of communities, within his jurisdiction; he then apportions the quantity of alpaca wool to be delivered by each, according to the number of alpacas possessed by the community he represents; payment in full is then made in advance, at rates varying from 10 dollars to 15 dollars per quintal - the wool thus collected is tightly pressed by the hands and feet into sacks, weighing 100lbs, and the Ylacatas are ordered to supply, the requisite numbers of llamas for the carriage of wool to its destination. Any resistance on the part of the Indians to supply the wool and the llamas for its carriage is met by the governador by imposition of most harassing gratuitous service to the State, such as repair of roads, foot postmen, domestic servitude; if the Indian sees the Ylacata coming towards his hut, and divining his intent, runs away to hide himself, he does not avoid his persecutor. On his return he finds the money on the floor, or suspended in a bag from the rafters, with an intimation of the quantity of wool required at 10 to 15 dollars per quintal, and the time of delivery; he cannot help seeing it, and is obliged to take it and supply the wool. If he does not his alpacas are shorn, and even then, if there is not wool enough to make*

*up the quantity he is put in prison to force him to pay the deficit at the price contracted to the merchant, and, if this is not paid, his flocks of sheep, alpacas, llamas &c., are sold to make up the amount."*

(Ledger, George: The Alpaca: Its Introduction into Australia and the Probabilities of its Acclimatisation There in the Journal of the Society of Arts from February 22nd, 1861; accessed online via Google Books here:

[https://books.google.es/books?id=SQ\\_SAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA212&dq=George+Ledger,+The+Alpaca:+Its+Introduction+into+Australia&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjvz9SS54vqAhWE2eAKHXrbAVOQ6AEIMDAB#v=onepage&q=George%20Ledger%2C%20The%20Alpaca%3A%20Its%20Introduction%20into%20Australia&f=false](https://books.google.es/books?id=SQ_SAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA212&dq=George+Ledger,+The+Alpaca:+Its+Introduction+into+Australia&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjvz9SS54vqAhWE2eAKHXrbAVOQ6AEIMDAB#v=onepage&q=George%20Ledger%2C%20The%20Alpaca%3A%20Its%20Introduction%20into%20Australia&f=false))

It is intriguing to reflect upon how much the Bradford mill owners involved in the alpaca trade knew of the reality outlined above. Titus was MP for Bradford during a brief spell from 1859 to 1861. Perhaps he was in Parliament long enough to take a personal interest in the Consular Reports sent to Parliament from all over the world, but especially the ones that affected business in Bradford as a whole, and in particular his own. We know that the Fosters had possession of the letter from Dr. Graham cited above. However, in comparison to the two other sources referred to, the doctor's letter presents a benign account of what happened in the highlands. That is not to suggest that the contents of the letter are not accurate as far as they go but, for whatever reason, Dr. Graham was either in ignorance of the more exploitative side of the operation or chose not to report on it. Whether Titus knew of the contents of this correspondence is not known. The novel was published 1889, several years after the death of Titus and so was obviously unknown. However, the paper of 1861 from the Journal of the Society of the Arts is a different matter.

George's brother Charles had been in contact with Fosters with regard to his unsuccessful attempts to take alpacas to other parts of the British Empire. In the first of two letters (1862 & 1863) that I have read from the archives, Charles declares that he is unknown to Fosters but in the second, he is offering to do business with them in the supply of alpaca wool. He says that he is familiar with the ways of the natives, speaks their languages and has dealt with them extensively. However, in neither of the letters does he refer to the exploitative techniques outlined by his brother in the paper.

In his paper, George Ledger references knowledge of Titus Salt and his close association with the alpaca but there is no indication of them being in contact with each other, direct or otherwise. Whether Titus or Fosters were aware of the contents of this paper reproduced in the Journal of the Society of Arts we will probably never know.

For the full complexity of the relations of production, we need to turn to the research of Nils Jacobsen in his book "Mirages of Transition". It is a case study based on Azángaro province near Puno, which can be read in full online here:

<https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft3v19n95h&chunk.id=d0e31&toc.id=&brand=ucpress>

From the letter we have already seen from Dr Graham, cited by Sigsworth, we get a brief account of 1. The fair; and 2. The peasants selling directly to the merchants. However, Jacobsen's research reveals a 3rd channel - the wool bulking at regional and provincial level by hacendados (estate owners) and merchants in the interior. So, in this case the merchants in Arequipa would be dealing with these agents in the interior.



Wool bulking took place at the local, provincial and regional levels, according to Jacobsen, and was controlled largely by altiplano hacendados. It was in this process that the more exploitative nature of the transactions probably occurred.

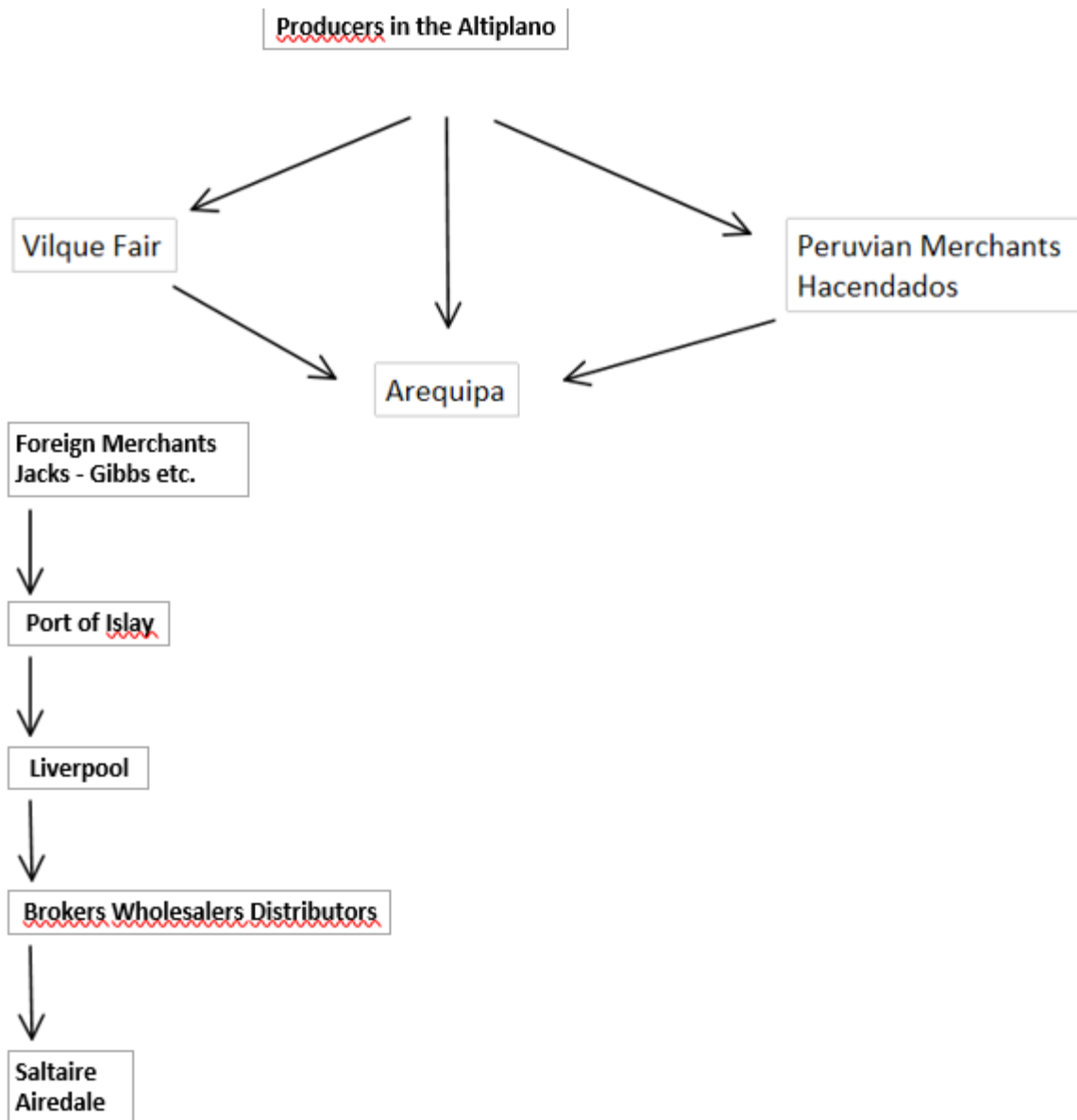
Jacobsen describes it as an atomistic nature of production (a dendritic system according to another scholar) with thousands of Indian peasants supplying half of all raw wools as late as the 1870s. Thus, it resembled a huge funnel directed towards Arequipa and Islay, the port on the coast.

For foreign merchants, according to Jacobsen,

*all the expenses, uncertainties, and delays in communication and transportation made it difficult and potentially unprofitable to attempt to control the trade circuits connecting the entrepôt (Arequipa) and port cities (Islay, Arica) with the interior.*

Jacobsen gives us an example of a Provincial Wool bulker by the name of Juan Paredes who was the son of a muleteer who went on to become a trader and estate owner. He bought wool throughout Azángaro province (near Puno) from owners of medium to small haciendas, indigenous peasants or district level wool bulkers. From October to March contracts would be drawn up specifying how much wool would be delivered to Paredes. Advances were made by purchasers like Paredes to their suppliers. However, advances would also be made to Paredes from further down the chain. Sometimes from larger regional bulkers or sometimes from Peruvian or foreign Merchant houses in Arequipa. (Jacobsen, N. 67-68)

In the diagram below I've produced a simplified version of the commodity chain from the Altiplano to Airedale:



One of the things that initially puzzled me when I began to investigate the alpaca wool trade was how it might be that the indigenous population of the altiplano, apparently wedded to a self-sufficient peasant economy, were so engaged in a global market for alpaca wool. As Consular Vines comments in the same report referred to earlier, in his view the native population were

*“mostly scanty producers beyond their own wants, and also very spare consumers. They are not traders by instinct; and so, in fact, the actual commerce is confined to the department cities, and there, also, to those residents who are of Spanish origin... but it must be borne in mind that the natives, including those of Spanish descent, in the interior are mostly inert by habit...”*

In a paragraph referencing Titus Salt Jacobsen has this to say

*The export of alpaca wool to Europe began later than that of sheep wool. Only some twelve years after independence were the first samples of the fiber sent to England by*

*British export houses, notably that of Mohens and Company. Since the alpaca fiber is much finer than sheep wool and can reach up to one foot in length, its processing required special machinery. Once this machinery was developed by the British manufacturer Titus Salt, the volume of Peruvian exports soared. From a humble beginning of fifty-seven quintales in 1834, within the short period of seven years total alpaca wool exports from Peruvian ports reached 16,500 quintales by 1840 (Jacobsen, N. 60)*

How was it possible that a peasant production system could respond so rapidly to the sudden demands of the market. One of my problems was initially thinking of the indigenous population as an undifferentiated homogenous mass. As we will see, there were those who embraced the marketised economy. However, it seems that coercion played no small part in this system for, as Consul Vines suggested, they were not traders by instinct. Perhaps one only has to consider the reluctance with which the British agricultural workers and those engaged in the cottage industries resisted the enclosure movement and the factory system to understand why coercion was deployed in the Andes.

In fact, as Jacobsen explains, there was a long history of colonial exploitation of the indigenous peasantry by the Spanish. However, there was also collusion in this process by priests and local indigenous elites. Explaining the system as it still existed in the 18th century under the colonial regime Jacobsen states that

Surplus was extracted from the indigenous peasantry in the form of payments in kind, of money, and of labor while leaving the majority of the colonial subjects in their own agrarian society. All members of the provincial elite, from the representatives of the crown to priests, kurakas, and private entrepreneurs, used their authority over the Indian population to benefit personally. Civil and ecclesiastical administration was inextricably intertwined with private appropriation. (Jacobsen, N. 91)

The Kurakas mentioned by Jacobsen in this quote were indigenous chiefs. In some cases, the most powerful could be owners of estates, local officials (given their authority by the viceroy) and merchants. It was not unknown for kurakas to be taken to court by the peasant population for abuse of their power. (Jacobsen, N. 93). Ledger's account of 1861, referred to earlier, makes mention of *the 'Ylacatas,' chiefs, or heads of communities*, rather than kurakas, who are obliged to provide the required quantity of wool from the local producers.

As for the priests, Jacobsen also mentions that they

often came from poor families, and their legal sources of income did not suffice to afford them a comfortable living, particularly if they had to support an illegitimate family (Jacobsen, N. 92).

We might further consider the role of debt in this chain of commercial relationships. Loans were extended from the merchants to the middlemen and then on along the chain until, as we have seen above, the money was forced on to the actual producers whether they wanted it or not. In his book on the history of debt, the late David Graeber writes about the violence that is associated with debt collection. Everyone demands the return for the money that they have loaned out, using varying degrees of force if necessary. (Graeber, D. *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*).

Jacobsen cites a letter Paredes received from Manuel Mestas, one of his suppliers, in 1845. Mestas was a small hacendado from Caminaca, who wrote to tell Paredes that he would not be able to honour his side of a contract.

*I ardently beseech your good heart that as a good friend you may consider the best way of extricating me from the stated problem for now because I find myself incapable of complying [with the contract] I seek with all satisfaction your kindness offering in my insignificance although I am not worth anything maybe I will be able to serve you some day in compensation for the favor for which I am asking you now, for which favor I hope by means of your angelical heart; the eighty arrobas and a bit more is soon ready to have them conducted to that capital [Azángaro] at your disposition according to the contract.*

Jacobsen comments thus on the letter to Paredes

"Mestas was clearly worried about consequences much graver than the simple loss of a business partner should Paredes take any serious steps about the impending breach of contract. Mestas belonged to Paredes's clientele and depended on him for goods and services that may have included access to foodstuffs from Cuzco and Arequipa as well as to imported goods, otherwise attainable only with difficulty or at higher prices; support in the pursuit or retention of local offices such as governor, mayor, or justice of the peace in his district; and intercession on Mestas's behalf in courts. Wool trade constituted only one aspect of the multifaceted relationship of men such as Juan Paredes and Manuel Mestas." (Jacobsen, N. 69)

A major theme of Jacobsen's study is that the elites of this part of Peru did not fully embrace market capitalism. Alongside trade, there was a client relationship as he indicates in the passage above. One can only imagine the pressure on smaller operators to honour their contracts and repay their debts. This might go some of the way to explain how the production of alpaca wool increased so quickly after the success of Titus Salt's technological breakthrough.



So much for the alpaca trade in the altiplano. This account provides an overview of the process and so far, I have not managed to investigate how things might have changed over the decades. That is something for later. Our attention now needs to turn to the remarkable journey that was undertaken to get the fleeces from the altiplano to Arequipa and then on to the coast.

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