Chapter 6

From Stew-Eaters to Maize-Drinkers
The Chicha Economy and the Tiwanaku Expansion

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They make chicha from a lot of things . . . with every nation accommodating to those seeds and fruits that their land produces in abundance . . . But the best chicha of all, the one that is most generally drunk in this land, and the one that, like a precious wine, takes first place above all the other Indian drinks, is made from maize.
—Cobo 1890 [1653]:347

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I consider the close correlation of dramatic changes in culinary traditions with the political development of one of the New World’s earliest expansive state societies. A comparison of Tiwanaku’s ceramic assemblages with those of its antecedents, as well as settlement pattern and household archaeology and preliminary isotopic data on diet, suggest that the Tiwanaku phenomenon was accompanied by revolutionary new patterns in food, drink, and daily domestic life. In examining these changes in the Tiwanaku core region and in its peripheries my goal is to consider the intersection of shifts in culinary traditions with changes
not only in domestic and political economy, but in the social and cultural realities and identities signified by quotidian daily life. I argue that radical culinary change was a crucial aspect of the incorporation of disparate peoples into the Tiwanaku civilization. The growth of Tiwanaku as a polity and a shared corporate identity was accompanied by three simultaneous and related phenomena: 1) the development and rapid diffusion of a hitherto unseen functional assemblage dedicated to preparing and serving maize beer, 2) the successful long-term colonization of maize-producing regions, and 3) the promulgation of a shared corporate identity among confederated ethnic groups and clans linked by a common ideology. This incorporation appears to have been largely consensual, rather than coerced, and the principal culinary factor was a mania for maize beer that took root everywhere Tiwanaku influence was accepted.

The archaeology of Andean states and empires has benefited from a flood of new research on Tiwanaku political and domestic economy. Much of the recent work has explicitly privileged household archaeology (Bermann 1994, 1997; Goldstein 1989, 1993a; Janusek 1994, 1999; Kolata 1993; Stanish 1989) and regional settlement pattern studies (Albarracín-Jordan 1996; Goldstein 2000a; Higuera 1996; McAndrews et al. 1997; Stanish 1992; Stanish and Steadman 1994) as our most reliable indicators of changes to the political economy. This emphasis represents a necessary departure from an earlier era’s over-reliance on artifact styles to understand the expansion of state societies and the development of their political economies. It is possible to take a good thing too far, however. Some discussions of Tiwanaku expansion have emphasized household continuity even in cases where there are dramatic changes in material culture. While it is a tenable position to downplay the political importance of emulative stylistic change, important assemblage changes in ceramic form and function (and the shifts in domestic lifeways that they represent) are sometimes dismissed along with stylistic shifts as not germane to significant social or political process (e.g., Bermann 1994:32, 252). The same tendency is evident in settlement pattern studies, which tend to see constancy of site location as the supreme indicator of cultural continuity, regardless of changes in material culture (Stanish 1992). One recent study even promotes a model of “status quo” simply because dramatic domestic changes in material culture, mortuary practice, and architecture are not matched by a major shift in settlement pattern (Higuera 1996).

When household and settlement studies do address widespread domestic assemblage change, it is often analyzed entirely in the context of state tribute extraction. Changes in the domestic economy—an extra spindle whorl here, an enlarged storage bin there—are evaluated first and foremost as markers of supra-household production to support state political economies. This is seldom the entire story. State hegemony is not simply a matter of tinkering with subject peoples’ households in order to increase tribute. Participation in an expanding state brings with it an array of cultural changes that may relate only indirectly to the extraction of