

# ISLAND OF THE SUN

# ISLAND OF THE MOON

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, chronicler Bernabe Cobo wrote: "People came to this place, on pilgrimage, from everywhere, and there was always a large gathering of people from far away, there. Thus this place became so famous that its memory will live on among the native nations, for as long as they will last", referring to the Island of the Sun, and mentioning that, in addition, "given its religious status, this sanctuary was the third in reputation and authority, after the Qoricancha (Temple of the Sun), in Cusco, and the Sanctuary of Pachacamac, on the Peruvian coast."



The Island of the Sun is situated in the immense Lake Titicaca, on Bolivian territory. Its counterpart is the Island of the Moon, and both islands were places of spiritual pilgrimage, in Incan times (1400 – 1532 a.D.). As Bernabe Cobo describes it, the access point to these two sanctuaries was Copacabana which served as a regional administrative center for the peninsula, and was responsible for controlling the access to the Sacred Islands, the inhabitants of which were priests, priestesses, acllas (Chosen women) and numerous mitmaqs (Colons transferred there by the Incas, to ensure the islands' maintenance, as well as that of their places of worship).

Diverse temples and altars were erected on both islands, and there are several sacred rocks, with mythological background.

Also, important astronomical observatories were built, as researchers Bauer and Stanish confirm it: "We directed archaeo-astronomical research on the islands, and identified the remains of two towers that marked the June solstice sunset, as can be observed from the Sanctuary, on the Island of the Sun."

## **The Sacred Islands, an ancestral heritage**

Matthew S. Seddon concludes that: "Up to now, the results of surveys and test excavations on the Island of the Sun indicate a major and intense occupation of the island, during the Tiwanaku period." In fact, a variety of ceremonial

utensils, terraces and remains of homes that correspond to the Tiwanaku culture (2000 b.C. – 1000 a.D.), were found, as proof that these sanctuaries are ancestral and that they were passed on to us by the Incas.



### **The Pacha Mama is alive and the Achachilas are observing us**

After the Spanish conquerors' arrival in the Incan State (1532), the Catholic armies which had decided to exterminate the indigenous religion, seemed not to have yet fulfilled their purpose on those islands.

Today, the inhabitants of both islands are Aymaras, and their practices of traditional spirituality and religiousness are still very intense. Thus, talking with locals is like entering a magical world. They tell us that the islands are under the tutelary guardianship of a set of Achachilas or Sacred Mountains, and of that of the Pacha Mama (Mother Earth) who provides them with the necessary support for their subsistence. During the agricultural year, community members fulfill a strict ritual calendar, in which appear the celebrations of the solstices and equinoxes, the Wilancha which consists in the sacrifice of lamas, and the offerings to the Pacha Mama, as a sign of gratitude.



They say that, in immemorial times, the Sun had risen from the Titikala, a Sacred Rock already described, even by Colonial time chroniclers, as well as the first couple of Incan rulers, Manco Capac and Mama Occlo who had also come out of Lake Titicaca.