

# EMPIRE OF THE INCAS    Script

## Introduction

For nearly 100 years, the Incas under the rule of many great leaders, and with a powerful, well organised army, forged a magnificent empire. Today we marvel at their society, art, science, buildings, engineering and their devotion to the gods.

## EMPIRE OF THE INCAS    main title

These women are direct descendents of the Incas and spin wool using a technique dating back many centuries. Their clothing is similar to the traditional style of the Incas. They speak Quechua, a native language which was used by their forefathers, who originated from the highland centre of Cuzco in Peru.

By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Incas had created an empire of nearly 15 million people. From their base in Cuzco, they ruled the largest territory in South American history. They were brilliant engineers, constructing magnificent forts and cities; building roads, tunnels and bridges through mountains, and terracing hillsides for agriculture. The Incas were extremely advanced in medicine and surgery, and had a society based on cooperation and community, ensuring that there would be enough resources for everyone. They worshipped many gods, but Inti the Sun-God was central to their faith and the only God to whom they built temples.

For all their sophistication, the Incas made no written record of their history. Much of what we know today was recorded by chroniclers who arrived with the first Europeans around 1530. Their observations have provided much of what we understand of Incan life.

## Empire Builders

Today, Cuzco is a thriving regional city and tourist centre located 500 kilometres from the Peruvian capital of Lima. In the streets of Cuzco, remnants of the ancient city can be seen. It was the centre of power and at its peak 20,000 people inhabited the Cuzco region. It was here that the Inca people formed a tribe, settling in the densely populated and fertile Cuzco valley around the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD, under the leadership of Manco Capac. Three hundred years later, led by Yupanqui a descendant of

Manco Capac, they were victorious over a rival tribe, the Chancas. Yupanqui consolidated his control of the region, crowning himself ruler and assuming the awe-inspiring name of Pachacuti, which means 'Cataclysm' or 'upheaval'.

Pachacuti's reign is estimated to have begun in 1438, when he launched the Incas on a path of empire building. By the early 1460s he had extended his realm south to Lake Titicaca and north into present day Peru. After Pachacuti's death in 1471, his son Tupac Inca expanded the empire southward into Chile, and north to what is now Columbia. Tupac's son Huayna Capac extended the realm into southern Chile and consolidated all tribes north to Columbia, mostly between 1493 and 1525.

The Incas had the most formidable and well organised army in South American history prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. The **mita** or tribute system was used to maintain the army. Apart from the imperial bodyguard, it was a citizen army where men between 25 and 30 years of age could be drafted for a period of up to 5 years. The 1,000s of kilometres of roads and food depots placed at strategic points ensured a constant supply line for the army. In battle they had short and long range weapons, consisting of slings or **huarca**, javelins, star-headed maces, axes and a bola which had 3 stones attached.

Military conquest was by no means the only tactic employed by Pachacuti and his heirs to expand the empire. Spies were sent to report on the political structure, military strength and wealth of regions they wanted to acquire. Messages were sent to regional leaders, extolling the benefits of such a liaison. They offered luxurious presents and the promise of material riches under an Incan umbrella. Most accepted the rule of the Inca as inevitable and acquiesced peacefully.

The Incas governed by proxy, incorporating local rulers into their imperial system. It was not an empire in the traditional sense but rather a confederation of tribes with a single people, the Incas, in control. Each of these tribes was governed independently by a council of elders, whose allegiance was to their chief and to the emperor.

## Social Structure

The social structure of the Incas was extremely inflexible. The supreme leader or "Sapa Inca" and his wives, the Coyas, had control over the empire. The "Sapa Inca", was divine, a direct descendant of Inti the sun-god. His principal wife was usually his sister, a person of considerable

influence. Below the Inca was the royal family, consisting of the Inca's immediate relatives and concubines. This royal family was the ruling aristocracy. Each separate tribe was ruled by a council of elders, who gave allegiance to their chief and the Sapa Inca.

The High Priest and Commander in Chief were next, followed by the Four Apus, the regional army commanders. Next were temple priests, architects, administrators and generals. Artisans, musicians, army captains and the quipucamayoc, or Incan accountants, formed the second lowest tier. At the bottom were sorcerers, farmers, herding families and conscripts.

Rulers of conquered nations would send their children to Cuzco to be educated. Here, they would learn Incan administration, government, religious rites, history, military tactics and culture, before returning to their own lands. With luck, Incan children would marry into some of these regional ruling families, spreading influence into the far corners of the empire.

The Incas had one of the first socialist societies, based on cooperation and communality. This ensured everything was shared and no one went without. The concept of centralized authority, however, meant that there was no chance for individual advancement, which was not valued.

Kinship and mutual exchange of labour was the key to success. Relatives were responsible for the maintenance of land when the owner was absent. Landowners lent their labour to the village leader or curaca in exchange for services. This included distribution of food to the old and infirm and, at festival time, to the whole community. In Incan society, currency existed in the form of work. Each subject of the empire paid taxes by labouring on roads, terraces, irrigation canals, temples and fortresses.

Incan society was structured and sophisticated, but crime was severely punished. For murder or insulting the Sapa Inca and the Gods, the offender was thrown off a cliff. Adultery was punished with the couple being hung by their hair and left to starve to death. Lesser crimes resulted in the removal of hands and feet or the gouging out of eyes.

### Inca Engineering

The Incas were remarkable engineers. Living in the Andes, they built a sophisticated road, tunnel and bridge system that traversed mountains

and valleys. These were built to last and to withstand the extreme natural forces of wind, floods, ice, and drought. Over 30,000 kilometres of roads allowed communication and transport to be efficient and speedy. They linked the mountain peoples and lowland desert dwellers with the capital Cuzco. Many of the roads are still in use today.

The expansion of the Incan Empire allowed access to the skills and knowledge of many different people. When areas south of Lake Titicaca were conquered, they were impressed by the local stonework. The great city of Tiwanaku in present day Bolivia is a magnificent example of this skill. The Incas imported stoneworkers to Cuzco and examples of their skills can still be found in the city and its environs.

The magnificent fort at Ollantaytambo utilised the expertise of the stoneworkers to great advantage. All Inca construction in this area incorporated trapezoid doorways and wall niches, which were narrower at the top. This was a means to prevent damage from earthquakes. Bevelled edges on the stone blocks created striking patterns as the sun moved across the sky.

The marvel of this technique is the perfect fit of these enormous boulders, without the use of mortar to join them. The fit is so accurate a knife cannot be inserted between them. The Incas had no iron tools, only stone hammers and bronze chisels. To cut the stone, holes were drilled. Wood was then inserted into the holes, then dampened, allowing the expanding wood to create natural splits. To manoeuvre stone blocks weighting many tons, huge teams of men were required. Using wooden rollers, levers and ropes, the stone was hauled up an earthen ramp and positioned into the wall. The installation was complete by repeatedly lowering one rock onto another and carving away, on the level below, where the dust was compressed. The tight fit and the concavity on the lower rocks made the walls extraordinarily stable.

To obtain enough workers for these projects, the *mita* system was used. This was a form of tribute, where men between the ages of 25 to 50 were required to work on various tasks for a limited period each year.

The construction of the great complex of Sacsahuaman above Cuzco required the efforts of 50,000 men over a period of twenty years, most certainly under their mita obligations. At any one time, four thousand of them quarried and cut the stone. Six thousand hauled the stone with great cables of leather and hemp. Others dug ditches and laid foundations, or cut timber for the poles and beams.

## Everyday Life

A train and a bus take tourists to the imposing mountaintop citadel of Machu Picchu. It was unknown to the outside world, undiscovered by the Spaniards, until found by the explorer Hiram Bingham in 1911. What Bingham found, overgrown by jungle, was a remarkable archaeological site. There were over 200 residential buildings, and a number of unique structures for spiritual or ritual functions. These structures included Intihuatana, the seasonal sun dial, Sacred Rock and the Temple of the Condor. The Temple of the Sun has a tapering tower which points through a window to the rising sun of the June solstice. Machu Picchu provides an unspoiled insight into the everyday life of the Incas.

Agriculture was extremely difficult in the Andes. The Incas actively set about successfully carving up mountains into terraced farmlands. This terracing helped prevent erosion, and made irrigation easier with water channels running alongside the terraces. By 1500 AD there was more land in cultivation in the Andean highlands than today. All members of a family worked the land, celebrating the seasons for ploughing and harvesting with a feast to the Moon and Sun, called **pacha-puchuy** or earth ripening. They cultivated corn, many varieties of potatoes and tomatoes, and beer was fermented from maize. Much of this produce was held in large government warehouses, ensuring equal provision to everyone. Llama and alpaca were raised for food, clothing and transport.

Most people lived in a walled, central compound or *cancha*. Here, women and older girls wove clothing, ground corn and prepared food. Dwellings were single storied and built of stone with a thatched grass roof. They consisted of one room, where families slept on the floor, cooked in the centre of the room and hung food from the ceiling. There were no chairs so they sat on rugs to eat. The only entrance was to the courtyard. By contrast, royal palaces had magnificent halls, chambers and gardens. Walls were intricately carved and adorned with gold and silver. The nobles had low stools to sit on and the Sapa Inca was pampered by servants and many wives. Some of his secondary wives were selected from the Virgins of the Sun, chosen from the most beautiful girls in the Empire. These girls were virtuous and devoted to the Gods.

Very few Incas lived in the city, but travelled there to the markets or for festivals. In present-day Puna a pantomime is held in the village square much like a thousand years ago. Descendants of the Incas wear brightly coloured coats or yacollas.

The basic clothing of lower class women was a long sleeveless dress, known as an *anaco*. It was wrapped around the body and fastened to the sides using silver pins, as buttons were unknown. At the waist, the dress was held in with a sash. Sometimes this sash was decorated with square patterns, indicating the woman's lineage or rank.

Men had a basic sack-like garment, or *unco*, with holes for the head and arms, and hung to the knees. They wore a narrow belt or string carrying a coca bag or *chuspa*. This carried small tools, amulets and supplies of coca leaves which were chewed for energy. Men and women wore similar leather sandals, as required by law. In cold weather or on special occasions, they wore long coats known *yacollas*, which were pinned or knotted at the front and slung over both shoulders.

The style of clothing for the nobility was similar, but was richly coloured, beautifully patterned and made from the finest textiles, usually alpaca.

All classes wore headdresses, which instantly identified their place in society. Nobles wore headdresses adorned with coloured feathers, and intricate patterns. When travelling outside of the ayulla or local community, Incas of all classes were required to wear headdresses and coloured wool in their hair. Each nation within the empire had its own distinctive colour, allowing authorities to easily identify visitors.

With such a large and diverse empire, specialisation in trade developed. There were separate communities of farmers and fishermen, who traded goods they could not produce. Much was transported along the sophisticated road system, and these cobblestone roads and pathways remain intact. However, traders also travelled over lakes and oceans in boats made of reeds bound together, similar to this one carrying tourists on Lake Titicaca.

## Art & Technology

The Incas are renowned for their precious metals. Gold was the 'sweat of the sun' and silver the 'tears of the moon.' They were abundant, but were only used for adornment and aesthetics.

The quality and craftsmanship of Incan textiles was remarkable. Capes were delicately encrusted with thousands of tiny, brightly coloured bird feathers, made exclusively for Incan royalty. Wool was pre-died before spinning, and the finest wool came from the vicuna, the smallest of the 3 "Peruvian sheep", producing the richly patterned garments worn only by the elite.

Weaving has changed little over the centuries, with llama bones and wool still in use. In fact, every part of the animal is used either for food, weaving or musical instruments, such as flutes made from bones.

Ceramics were painted in numerous motifs including birds, waves, felines and geometric patterns.

Incan education was divided into distinct categories. Commoners learned farming skills, weaving or building from their parents. The sons of nobles went to Cuzco where they studied religion, poetry, arithmetic, history and Quechua the main language of the Incan Empire. Girls chosen to serve in the temples were educated in special schools or convents.

The Inca depended largely on oral history as a means of maintaining and preserving their culture.

The *quipu*, which consisted of coloured and knotted strings, was used perhaps for accounting and census. The exact nature of its use, however, is unknown. Some quipu have shown to contain numeric data, while the colour, spacing and structure suggests it may have carried information as well. Scholars hope to find that it recorded language.

The Inca made many discoveries in medicine and performed successful skull surgery called trepanation. The patient would drink *chicha*, a thick beer fermented from corn. Under its influence, holes were cut into the skull to release pressure from head wounds. Archaeologists estimate a sixty percent survival rate in these operations, having discovered signs of healing in the skulls. Coca leaves were used for pain and to lessen hunger, which is still the practice in the Andes. The *chasqui* or messengers chewed coca leaves for extra energy to deliver messages throughout the empire.

The Incas had a calendar based on observations of the complex celestial relationship of the Sun, Moon and stars. This calendar provided an orderly basis for their lives. Intihuatana in Machu Picchu is possibly the last remaining seasonal sun dial in Peru. Carved from natural rock, it was aligned with surrounding peaks, pinpointing the cardinal directions of movement of the sun and stars. Other sun dials were destroyed by the Spaniards, who found them to be paganistic.

## Religion

The central God of the Incan religion was Inti the Sun-God. Inti was the father of the royal family, and the Sapa Inca was his direct descendant;

the suns' son and worshipped as a living god. The Sapa's clothing was sacred, worn only once, and then incinerated.

Many other gods were worshiped in rituals and ceremonies. Presiding over these was the high priest who was called Villac-umu, "the sorcerer who speaks." He was also related to the first Inca and was greatly respected. The majority of the ceremonies celebrated annual events such as sowing and harvest time and the paying of taxes. This involved animal sacrifice, usually llamas or guinea pigs.

Human sacrifices were rare, but sometimes beautiful young girls were chosen and were called **capacocha**. This honour was surrounded with glory, and included rewards and promotions being bestowed on relatives. Tanta Carhua is the best documented of these. At the Inti Raymi festival, she and other capacochas were intoxicated with chicha or drugged with a herbal preparation. Wrapped for burial wearing a face mask, she was lowered into a space between walls and sealed in alive. Her father and his descendants became hereditary *curacas* or chiefs of their local district. Tanta Carhua, at the backing of the Inca state, became a local divinity.

The Incas believed in a heaven, a hell, and a resurrection. Ancestor worship was a central part of Incan theology. The nobility were mummified, and entombed in an above ground chulpa and dressed in ornate masks. Often they were buried with the most prized of their possessions; women, servants and an abundance of food and chicha. They were considered to be oracles and were therefore consulted on a regular basis.

The most important and spectacular festival of Inca times, called the Inti Raymi or Sun Festivity, was celebrated on the winter solstice of the Southern Hemisphere, 21<sup>st</sup> June. Here, ancestors played a key role. Their mummified remains were brought to the Cuzco plaza to witness the event. A llama was sacrificed by a priest who would remove its throbbing heart, lungs and viscera and, by observing these elements, could foretell the future. This ceremony was perhaps the most sacred ritual during the Inti Raymi. Holy bread was prepared from maize flour mixed with the blood of the sacrificed llama. Later, people were entertained with music, dancing and abundant chicha. The festival was banned for centuries by the Spaniards, but was revived in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, giving an insight into Incan culture.

## Cultural Legacy

For 100 years the Incan Empire ruled supreme in this region of South America. But, it ran headlong into European expansion. Hernando Cortes had conquered the Aztecs in 1521. This inspired fellow Spaniard Francisco Pizarro in 1530 to invade the Incas. The spread of smallpox from Central America, a war of succession between Huayna Capac's sons Atahualpa and Huascar, and unrest in the newly captured territories, all combined to aid in Pizarro's quest.

Pizarro had just 180 men, 1 cannon and only 27 horses, against an army of 80,000, led by Atahualpa.

At the city of Cajamarca, north of Cuzco, Atahualpa was duped into having a peaceful meeting with the conquistadors. But Atahualpa and his unarmed retinue were tricked. 7,000 Incan soldiers were massacred by Pizarro and his small force, with Atahualpa taken hostage. Atahualpa tried to buy his freedom by having his followers collect a fortune in gold. Pizarro kept the gold and, in 1533, formulated an excuse to have him executed. During the next thirty years, the Spanish struggled against various insurrections, but with the help of native allies, finally gained control of the Incan Empire in the 1560's.

Spanish and Incan influence is evident in the architecture of Cuzco. The church of Santo Domingo rises from the foundations of the Incas' sun temple. In music and dance, Spanish and Incan cultures blend. The Festival of Inti Raymi is still celebrated. Stonework, roads, forts and the magnificence of Machu Picchu still astounds westerners, and is a testament to the history and culture of the Incas.

On Lake Titicaca, people remain whose history pre-dates the Incan Empire. On floating islands constructed of reeds, the Uros people exist the same way they have for centuries, well before the Incan Empire. They live entirely on these islands, using boats also made of reeds to fish and trade with communities on the mainland. A sacrifice is made for the well being of travellers on the Island of the Sun. Incan mythology holds that, from this place, the ancestors of the great Incan rulers originated.

End Credits