

The Inca Empire

By

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Around the year 1200, the Inca Empire left its first mark on this world. This civilization was mainly based on agriculture, and ruled by a dynasty of emperors. Unlike many civilizations in other parts of the world, poverty and disease was not a problem. But later we will learn that fear and misery was to be introduced by outsiders that scarred them into cultural extinction.

The Empire was made of the modern day countries of Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile. The physical aspect of the land, pertaining to its strip like shape, was influenced by geographical boundaries. To the west you had the massive Pacific Ocean, to the north & east the jungle, and to the south the desert. This environmental diversity was the key to the agricultural richness they enjoyed.

As just mentioned, the land was ruled by its environment, which divided the empire in regions. In the coast you had a lifeless arid desert that continued into the semi-sierra where you can start seeing cerros¹ that were surrounded by a more fertile ground. These cerros were increasingly irrigated by the streams coming down from the mountains. This chain of mountains is called "La Cordillera de los Andes", Andes Mountains. Of course, it doesn't take one hour to get there, especially by foot from the coast. The mountains owned by the

¹ These are hills seen throughout the city of Lima and other coastal cities.

Incas were, without question, the most important natural resource the possessed.

One might wonder how this civilization spawned without any close neighbors to be influenced by. The Incas believed in many Gods, the primary was The Sun. The story or, more accurately, myth, tell that The Sun sent its daughter and son, respectively called Mama Ocllo and Manco Capac, to educate the people of the land in different tasks in order to evolve into a civilization. They walked out of Lake Titicaca with a golden wedge held by Manco Capac, and wherever it sank, it would establish the chosen land of the Incas with its capital named Cuzco². The fortress in this capital, made out of pure stone, had stones as tall as thirty-eight feet that were fitted perfectly with other massive stone structures without the help of modern European tools. It is said that twenty thousand men were used to make this structure in a fifty year timeframe.

The ruler of the empire came down from the family line of the son and daughter of the Sun. They “descended in unbroken succession from father to son, through their whole dynasty” (25 Prescott). Incan nobility was partitioned in two important levels. The one that held most of the power was the Incas, and within them they were differentiated by their level of purity, namely, how closely related they

² This word meant navel of the world.

were to the first Inca ruler. An obvious way to distinguish them was to follow a particular dress code that was manufactured according to the level one possessed in the nobility, this also applied to tribes under the empires rule, to break apart regions and define their diversity. The privilege of priesthood was also reserved for Incan descendants, as was polygamy and immunity of common judicial laws.

In the other hand of this nobility, you had the Curacas, who were the rulers of the land before it was conquered by the Incas, they were left to distribute and manage the region. Rights to education were given, but in no way they were the highest ranked people in the state. The nobles of pure blood always had extensive power without comparison.

The Empire's system of justice was structured under rules and customs, breaking the rules was equivalent to going against the word of the Emperor, which in any case would lead to death. Everything was very much controlled, somewhat like a communism, with the major difference of a royal family with advantages beyond the reality of any peasant. All people under the Inca rule did not lack food or medical assistance, crime was very low and quite effectively kept that way.

Their knowledge of the land was very precise in all Suyos³, so they could distribute it in control and in any way they saw fit. When it

³ Is the plural word for world, referring to a different part of the Tahuantinsuyo.

came the time to distribute it, they had three recipients in mind, The Sun, The Inca, and the people. How much of it was given to any particular one of them? It is unknown, but it seemed to have to do with the population quantity. The land given to the Sun was used as land to worship, namely to build temples or any other ceremonial structures. As for the people, a piece of land was given to newly weds, and the quantity would increase as they started procreating.

Worship for the Incas was fairly focused on the Sun, but other symbols of nature were also venerated. The adoration they had towards them was based on the power these environmental figures held, which explains why the Sun is the primary God figure.⁴ Usual ways to show respect and admiration for the Sun was to have either human or animal sacrifices in ceremonies throughout the year or even worshipping the moon, which was believed to be its sister/spouse, they also looked at other planets like Venus, but their astronomical knowledge was not very developed.

As hinted before, education was only for the privileged, Incas and Curacas. It was more so for the Incas as they possessed the purity of blood, for that they were trained to hold specific titles in society such as priests, politicians and royal positions by or as the emperor. School would be very close to the nobility and taught by an

⁴ The Sun is the source of life in nature, it heats the inhabitants and helps plants grow, showing power to give existence.

Amauta, or teacher. These education centers were located in the city of Cuzco, which in this time period was boasting with elegance as one saw the architecture erected by the Inca, managing to cover the city with a stone and gold infrastructure so exact and relevant to their own culture.

With only two hundred years of existence, they made advancements in agriculture that in some aspects was not expected. A system of aqueducts helped irrigation in parts of the west coast that lacked a proper water system. They grew their crops even up on the mountains by shaping the sides as a flat surface and wrapping them over with stone.

In every region there was land separated for herding or crops, which was tightly recorded through the *quipu*⁵. Quipu were strings of colors made into knots, usually for arithmetic necessities, colors were a way to distinguish what was being counted. This system was a combination of these knots and memory, because at one time yellow could mean gold, but another it could be corn. This also served as way of communicating as they never developed writing.

As we all know, this part of the world lacked animals used for transportation, like the horse or any other, but nonetheless, their road system was formidable. Every particular number of kilometers there

⁵ The quipu was even known to be beneath any other symbolic way of expression like the Egyptians used on their walls.

was a post with provisions for the army and for the locals. It was also used for the courier program they ran called *Chasqui*. The Chasqui was precisely that, a courier, so they ran from post to post either carrying a quipu or delivering a message verbally to the next courier. An old story says that the emperor, all the way in Cuzco, used to ask for fresh fish every now and then, and through the chasqui, it would get from the coast to the mountains without spoiling.

Throughout this paper there has been an absolute lack of reference to other civilizations, like the Aztecs, Chinese, or Hindus, as they were very similar to the Incas. The reason why is because one might lose perspective on what the point is. This is to see them for what they were, and not for how familiar you can become with them. Their existence was prosperous in their own right, without outside help, or influence. For the only possible factual influence they might have had were previous tribes in the region. There is not much else to say after you can influence yourself into one of the most sophisticated culture in the continent.

Far away from South America, in the years 711 to 1492, Spain was going through a bloody war in southern part of the country against the Moors of northern Africa, this was called the *Reconquista*. In the year 1492 Colombo sailed to change the fate of an unknown culture. They explored the continent, first trying to establish in the

northern part of Colombia, but they were attacked and backed off. By this time they already had Francisco Pizarro⁶ with them.

Vasco Nunez de Balboa helped the cause; he led the remaining conquistadores to a strip of land between North and South America. They eventually acquired some gold from the locals in exchange for their help against a local tribe. They were told that it came from a place behind the mountains.

Pizarro eventually took over the group of Spaniards looking for the city of gold, and settled in Panama City. He lived comfortably there where he was a land owner, but when he heard of a distant cousin called Hernan Cortes colonizing the Aztecs; he started to wonder about Balboa's stories of great wealth in the south. Learning that there were no Indies around that area through Magellan's expeditions, the Spaniards decided to explore further. In one of these expeditions, they landed again in Colombia and met with a native. It was noticeable that the indigenous had golden ornaments around his neck, they asked where did he get it, and he ended up telling the explorers the word Biru⁷, which the Spaniards mispronounced and said Peru.

After many discrepancies with locals back and forth, the Spaniards knew where Peru was located. They were low in supplies and Pizarro's ally and partner in this, Almagro went back to Panama to

⁶ He was born in Extremadura, Spain but grew up in Italy.

⁷ This is the native word for river.

get provisions and men for the journey that awaited them. They were dropped off at Island Gallo, until Almagro came back. Here is where many of the remaining conquistadores complained to Pizarro, and this made him make a tough decision, he stood in front of them and drew a line with his sword, those who wanted to continue would stand on his side of the line. They later sailed back to Peru, to the city of Tumbes, they reached it in 1527 and Pizarro's dreams of wealth and power lived on as he heard he was close to the City of Gold, Cuzco.

At that time, the Inca Empire was ruled by Inca Huayna Capac. He had two sons, Huascar and Atahualpa, the latter one was his favorite but the first one was his direct heir to the throne. Atahualpa was given the city of Quito to govern, especially because this was his father's favorite city. After Huayna Capac died, Huascar rose to the throne but Atahualpa refused to accept this and gathered the army to his side for a forthcoming conflict with his brother, this would be ideal for conquering the Incas.

Pizarro returned from Spain with funding and with the rest of the Pizarros (Hernando, Juan, and Gonzalo) in 1530. Almagro was upset at seeing that Pizarro had given all the positions to his family members, this feud would be carried out throughout the conquering process.

The tension of the Inca brothers grew to violence, as Huascar sent troops to terminate Atahualpa and his army. Atahualpa returned

the attack and went into the heart of the ruling empire, killed all the nobility and finally murdered his own brother to later proclaim himself as the absolute ruler of the Inca Empire. He learned of the Spanish "visit", and invited them to see him in the city of Cajamarca. Pizarro went with Hernan Pizarro and De Soto were they had a conversation with the Inca accompanied by some chicha⁸, they agreed that a meeting was to be held soon.

Eventually they did meet, but the reigning ruler of the Empire was not well protected, as he believed too much in the goodwill of the Spaniards. When he got to the meeting point, Pizarro was nowhere to be seen and saw priest waiting for him, he attempted to lecture the Inca about Catholicism and why he should submit to Spaniard Rule, the Inca was not pleased. When was given the bible, he threw it away and the priest ordered Pizarro to punish him for this major insult. The Spaniards attacked.

Afterwards, there were about 2,000 Incas dead, a massacre without boundaries that led to the capture of Atahualpa. In an attempt to buy off the Spaniards, he offered them, in his own words, "I will give you a room full of gold as high as my hand touches, and twice of silver". All in all, the total value of these precious metals given to the

⁸ This is an alcoholic beverage that is very similar to beer.

Europeans was of \$1.4 billion. They eventually got rid of Atahualpa as he was not necessary anymore, he was strangled to death.

A younger brother of Huascar, Manco, was crowned as the new ruler of the Inca Empire under the supervision of Pizarro, more like a puppet ruler. Eventually Manco could not stand this situation as he realized he was betraying his people and was mistreated by the Europeans. When Hernando Pizarro came back from Spain⁹, he stopped this abuse and quickly was summoned by Manco; he offered a life size statue of Atahualpa made of gold for a small journey to the temple to pray. He escaped during this journey and met with a secret army, swearing he would destroy the Castilians.

Their attack was fierce, as they surrounded Cuzco and the newly made capital of Lima. They almost wiped them out but in the last battle they held back as they did not have the full army, so they opted for fighting with the fortress of Sacsahuaman. The Spanish knowledge of castle attack helped for the eventual defeat of the rebellion, the Spaniards grew in size as reinforcements kept coming. The Inca Empire was doomed.

Almagro was outraged, as the Pizarros wanted all of Peru for them, and designed a plan to take over, and be the only ruler of Peru. Francisco Pizarro eventually had Almagro killed, to make even more

⁹ He went back to report the status of the colony.

enemies in Almagro's followers. He was eventually murdered by Almagro's son at his own house on June 26, 1541.

Manco fought for the freedom of his people, and became the last breath of the Inca rebellion when he was murdered by Almagro's followers. Throughout Peru there were disputes of who had the power between the Spaniards for many decades.

A social structure was made, one that would echo until modern times. The owner and ruler was European Spaniard, second rate were the Mestizo¹⁰, and the indigenous, which was regarded as beneath any possible social or human level.

The phrase used before, "Cultural Extinction", it so painfully real and accurate, so contemporary and accepted, one that has been forgotten and ignored of its origin. The fall of an Empire that many say it was so long ago, but why is it that some of us wonder: why are we surrounded by misery and social madness? Maybe opening a book can answer the question, but is it not that knowledge can become disturbing? Many times because you know what everyone wants to ignore. As we carry out a journey to find further authentic reasons, the current status of a culture sunk in serious social depression is kept in a malicious loop by its own people. In conclusion, the demise of the Inca Empire became the beginning of the misery of a nation that suffers of

¹⁰ It is mixture of Spaniard and Indigenous.

many fallacies within political, social, and economic factors. A reality that could have been, in many aspects, more promising without violence, forced religion, the introduction of riches for social status rather than for fair trade, and most importantly, the intolerance of unfamiliar customs.

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