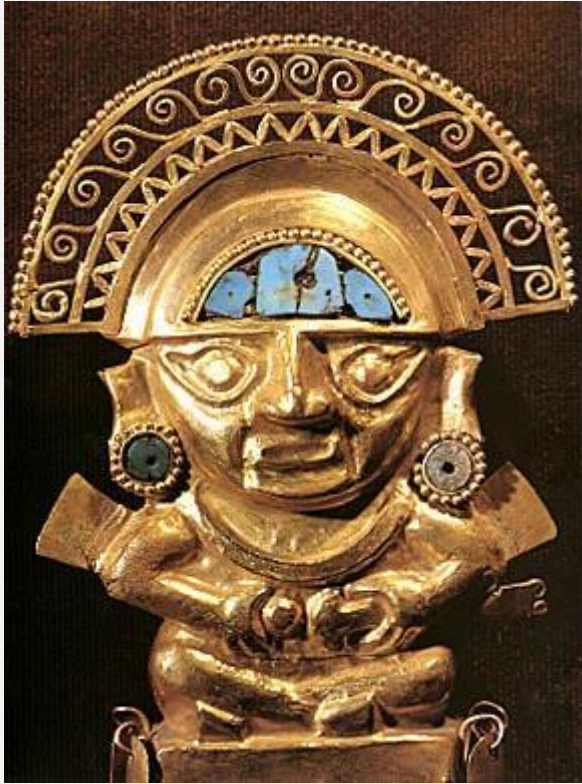




Inca Culture



In the early decades of the 13th century, an obscure people whose rulers claimed descent from the sun embarked on a series of conquests that would enable them to dominate the last hundred years of Andean history. Although their subsequent supremacy was often achieved through diplomacy, the Incas boasted one of the most well organized and ruthless armies of the ancient world.

The Incas maintained their realm with astonishing efficiency. They called their empire Tahuantinsuyu, "the land of the four quarters," reflecting a fourfold geographic division that was in turn subdivided into more than 80 provinces. Taxpaying citizens in carefully documented groups populated these provinces.

The use of Quechua, the Inca language, as the common tongue of administration helped to unify the patchwork population, as did commerce and the institution of the Inca pantheon as the official state religion.

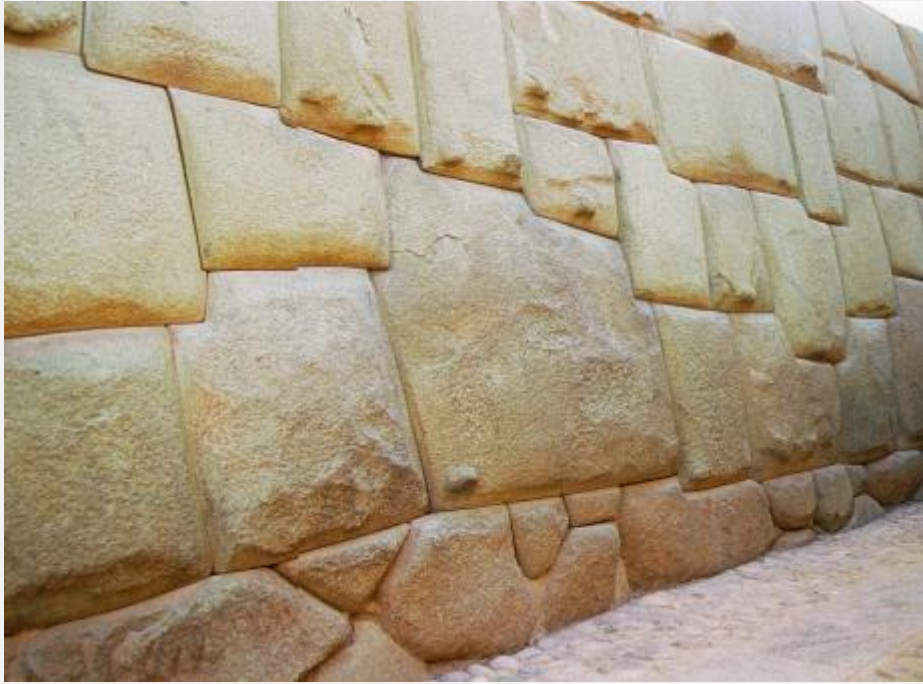
Pachacuti a military strategist, statesman, and diplomat of enormous skill, structured and commanded the armies. Armies under Pachacuti and his son (and successor), Topa Inca, conquered the entire mountainous area

from Quito south past Lake Titicaca. Topa Inca also subjugated the coastal kingdom of Chimor, and extended the Inca domain farther south, as well as east to the fringes of Amazonia.

The "Unique Inca," (the emperor) stood at the apex of power, a divine representative of the sun. From him control filtered downward through an elite class of nobles. Some were hereditary. Other select groups in conquered lands who were willing to cooperate with their new leaders became "Incas by privilege." The majority of the empire's able-bodied citizens sustained its economy with the Mita (service tax), in the form of agricultural work, labour in government-owned mines, or the building of bridges, buildings, and roads.

In return, the system guaranteed that every individual even the old or disabled would receive his or her basic needs. A highly authoritarian bureaucracy controlled the diverse peoples of the empire. Potentially rebellious groups were transplanted into the midst of loyalists, while trustworthy subjects were moved to areas of dissent. The military garrisons that dotted the land served as constant reminders of Cuzco's might.

Inca roads in the highlands were especially designed for the challenging terrain. Switchbacks scaled the steepest slopes, much like their modern counterparts. Sometimes paved with stone, the thoroughfares were often supported by retaining walls that have lasted for more than 500 years. To bridge rivers, the Incas lashed balsa-reed boats together or built sturdy stone spans. The deepest ravines they conquered with the world's first known suspension bridges, swinging constructions of braided fibre and vine anchored to pillars on opposite sides of a chasm. The anonymous Inca engineers achieved artistic immortality with the design of massive masonry walls that incorporated stones weighing more than 100 tons. The irregular but fastidiously finished blocks interlock so perfectly the joints between them appear as mere hairlines.



In the centre is the famous twelve-angled stone.



An Inca wall of carefully cut masonry that formed part of the palace of Inca Roca in Cuzco.





Remains of the huge Inca fortress of Sacsayhuaman on a hill overlooking Cuzco, Peru.

Such walls make up fortresses of sophisticated military design, like Sacsayhuaman on the outskirts of Cuzco, and temples whose remains lie undisturbed beneath modern towns. The stonework even provides the foundation for great cities like Machu Picchu, the spectacular outpost of Inca culture that still crowns its mountaintop site high above the turbulent Urubamba River.

A vast network of highways (thoroughfares) linked all parts of the Inca Empire. Often the Inca himself, borne on a golden litter, travelled along the roads, followed by an elaborate entourage of courtiers, entertainers, soothsayers and concubines.

Also using these thoroughfares (highways), were mobile army units (accompanied by pack trains of llamas) and Chasquis, specially trained runners who relayed memorized news and the orders of the empire between carefully spaced Tambos, or way stations. These messengers formed a communications system that could guarantee one-day delivery for every 140 miles of road. Topa Inca's son, Huayna Capac, pushed the boundaries of his realm even farther north and ruled over the greatest period of Inca magnificence. But Huayna Capac died suddenly in 1525. Infighting over succession followed, spurred by the spread within the royal line of contagious diseases introduced by the earliest European explorers.

These factors, coupled with a growing number of rebellious subjects throughout the far-flung Inca territories, rendered the empire particularly vulnerable to the armies of Francisco Pizarro in 1532.

The earliest systems of irrigation canals eased the lives of settlers along the strip of desert coast, where the only sources of water were narrow rivers. In the highlands massive stone terraces transformed the steep Andean slopes into fertile fields. The most amazing achievements of engineering, however, are to be found in the roads, bridges, storehouses, fortified towns, and way stations built by the Incas.

Given the raw materials and tools available to them and their predecessors, these accomplishments seem almost miraculous. What they did achieve was largely due to their organizational abilities. As soon as the Spaniards had disrupted the state's monolithic bureaucracy, the sun began to set on ancient South America's most spectacular civilization.

There were six Inca gods, Viracocha, the mother and father of the sun and moon god, Inti, the sun god, Quilla, the moon god, Pachamama, the earth goddess, Illapa, the god of thunder and lightning, and Mamacocha, the sea goddess.

The Incas 'were' highly skilled architects, yet they did not have a written language. With no written language, the Inca devised a tool for recording the movement of people and goods. The quipu is a series of coloured, knotted strings. The type of knot indicated a number, and the knot's placement signified units of 1, 10, 100, or more. All the cords hung from a main string, and their positions and colours likely signalled what was being counted—gold, corn, or other goods.

The Incas also carried agriculture and animal breeding to great heights. The traditional use of the cocoa leaf dates back to the pre-colonial days. Inca legend has it that the son of the sun god delivered the leaf to them when he magically appeared on the Isla del Sol in Lake Titicaca. Cocoa leaves were chewed by the Incas to combat the effects of altitude and fatigue. They developed the white potato, several types of corn, a wide variety of beans (including the lima bean).

The Incas also showed great skill in domesticating animals. They bred the llama and alpaca from the guanaco (The Native American Camel). Llama figurines were often buried with the Inca dead, perhaps as offerings to the gods to ensure the fertility of the Inca herds. Llamas played an important role in Inca culture. They were the primary transportation source for the empire, which had a vast mountain road system. Hardy animals, llamas carried all sorts of loads, from water to building materials. Llamas also provided dung (which served as fuel and fertilizer) and wool for textiles. After their deaths, llamas provided hide for leathers and meat for food.



Master engineers, the Inca built structures that are still standing today. At Machu Picchu, the most famous Inca settlement, stone terraces prevent erosion and provide level spaces for planting, making the most of difficult terrain. The Inca's best known building technique is that of fine masonry, in which carefully shaped stones fit together perfectly without mortar or cement. Only the most important buildings were built using this tedious and slow method.

Machu Picchu - This lost city was discovered five hundred years after the Inca's had abandoned it.

The Incas also developed drugs such as quinine and cocaine and Orchids were grown for medicine.



A new study by two American anthropologists now provides evidence that the Incas performed trepanation to treat head injuries. The procedure was far more common than previously thought and the Incan practitioners of trepanation were highly skilled surgeons with a detailed knowledge of the anatomy of the human skull. The formation of scar tissue indicates that many of the patients actually survived the operations.

Whole families may have been buried in one mummy bundle. In Tupac Amaru, Peru, up to seven bodies have been found in a single bundle. Personal effects such as pottery, food, and clothing were usually wrapped with the bodies. Other objects revealed the deceased's social status. A feathered headdress, for example, might accompany a member of the upper class, and a powerful warrior might be buried with a mace. A 500-year-old figurine, found

buried with an Inca mummy, echoes back to a time when the Inca Empire stretched from Colombia to central Chile and ruled more than 12 million people.

Art was a large influence on culture and life within the Inca people. The Incas presented their art with their tombs, temples, cemeteries, and religious buildings. The Incas were known for their gold and silver, as well as their ceramic pottery work. As for their tombs, they were used for major figures within their government and culture. The tombs were created with extravagant art to represent their major figures in the appropriate way.

Rich in colourful textiles and well-ordered cities marked by occasional human sacrifices and mummifications, the empire was conquered by the Spanish in 1532 but retains its hold on the human imagination.

[cosmic]