

The Incas, Part 1

By Jane Runyon

Far to the south of Mexico, the largest empire of the western hemisphere was established. At its height, Inca land covered most of the western edge of what is now South America. This empire began somewhere around 1200 A.D. Three stories have been passed from generation to generation about how the Inca Empire was founded.

The first story tells of a man who decided to start his own village. He and his four sons, four daughters, and their husbands and wives walked until the grandchild of the man led them to a valley. It was there that they decided to live. The child's father, Manco Capac, became the leader of the village.

In another story, Manco and his wife were ordered to leave the bottom of Lake Titicaca and go into the mountains to create a city by the sun god, Inti. They discovered a series of underground caves and tunnels which led them to where the city would be built. The city was to be called Cuzco.

The third version of the story has a sun god complaining to his wife that he is lonely. She suggests that he create a whole new civilization. He could order the people to worship him. That way he would never be lonely again. He liked this idea and created the Incan people. He put the people high up in the Andes Mountains so that they would be closer to him. It would be easy to worship the sun god from there.

The Incas left no books or written history so all of these stories were told to succeeding generations. However the Incas came to be there, scientists can trace their existence to the late 12th and early 13th centuries. The capital of Cuzco was a city-state. There is proof that Manco Capac was the first leader of note.

About 1438, the Incas decided to organize their kingdom. The land they had acquired through war and through peaceful negotiation was divided into four sections, the northwest, southwest, northeast, and southeast. At the corner where each of these sections met was the city of Cuzco. If the Incas found a territory that they wished to add to their kingdom, the leader sent messages to the leader of the territory. He offered them luxury goods and protection if they joined the Incas. The weaker territories couldn't pass up this opportunity. The children of the territory's leader were sent to Cuzco. Here they were trained in ways to govern the territory and to be good rulers. They then went back to their homes and did the bidding of the Inca leaders.

The leader of the Incas was called the Inca. The Inca usually remained in the same family. It was tradition that the son of the Inca would be the leader of the empire's military forces. One such son was able to take territories in what is now Peru and Bolivia. He also took parts of Chile, Argentina, and Columbia. Territories conquered by the Inca were required to pay taxes to the ruler. Since there was no official money system, the taxes could be paid with goods or even by working for the empire. It was understood that each family under Incan rule would provide one member of the family to work in the silver and gold mines. When this person died, another would





be sent to take his place. It has been told that the tax collectors even took lice from the heads of people too old to work or unable to work. This was a sign that everyone was responsible for tribute of some kind.

A Spanish conquistador named Francisco Pizarro landed in Panama in the early 1520's. By 1526, he and his men had reached the Inca territory. They knew right away that this was a very wealthy kingdom. It didn't take Pizarro long to decide that this was a territory that Spain needed. It also didn't hurt to know that conquering this kingdom would make him a very wealthy man. He went back to Spain to tell the king of his findings. The king sent him back in 1532 with orders to make this kingdom a Spanish territory.

Pizarro had only 180 men to the Inca's army of over 80,000. The new leader of the Inca was Atahualpa. He had just become the leader after defeating his own brother in a civil war. Smallpox had killed many of his people. He looked at Pizarro as someone who could help him maintain control of his country. Pizarro and Atahualpa met with a few of their people. A Spanish priest tried to explain Christianity to the Incan leader. Both sides had trouble understanding each other. Pizarro got tired of trying to explain things to the Incan leader and finally took him prisoner.

Atahualpa tried to bargain with the Spaniards. He offered to give them enough gold to fill the room in which he was being kept. He offered twice that much silver also. Pizarro took the gold and silver. He then had Atahualpa executed, saying that he had committed crimes against his own people.

Although another Inca was put on the throne, the Spanish were now in control of Cuzco and the Inca Empire. By 1572, all traces of Inca rule had been erased from the vast empire. The Spanish were brutal leaders. They destroyed all of the innovative systems that the Incas had created for farming, trade, and government. The courage of the Incan people to resist Spanish rule served as an inspiration to generations in future.

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Questions

- _____ 1. The Incan Empire was located in South America.
- A. True
 - B. False
- _____ 2. According to myth, which god created the Incas?
- A. Moon god
 - B. Sun god
 - C. Star god
 - D. Earth god

Name _____



Date _____

_____ 3. How do we know the myths told about the creation of the Incan Empire?

- A. They are recorded in cave paintings.
- B. They were told from father to son.
- C. They were written in Incan history books.
- D. They are found on scrolls.

4. How was the Incan Empire organized?

5. What happened when Francisco Pizarro met with the Incan leader Atahualpa?

_____ 6. What did Pizarro believe he would get from conquering the Incas?

- A. Dignity
- B. Wealth
- C. Land
- D. Slaves

_____ 7. What did Atahualpa offer Pizarro to let him free?

- A. A room full of gold and twice as much silver
- B. His throne
- C. Enough land to start his own city
- D. All the slaves he could use

_____ 8. When did the Incan civilization begin?

- A. In the 20th century
- B. Before Columbus arrived in the New World
- C. After Columbus discovered the New World
- D. At the same time Columbus arrived in the New World

