

INCA CULTURE

LOCATION:

The Inca Empire developed between 1400 and 1500 AD in an area which is now Peru. Before the 15th century the Andean region was populated by many different tribes of people. Under the military leadership of Pachacuti and his son Topa Inca, who were Inca emperors between 1438 and 1493, the Inca state expanded into a great empire.

From a geographic point of view, the Inca empire was not a very attractive place to live. The north-western border is the coastal region of the Pacific Ocean, which is the driest desert on earth. Not a drop of rain has fallen there in over 500 years. The towering Andes Mountains begin east of the desert, with steep slopes that make agriculture a serious challenge. The Inca solved that problem by creating terraces and filling them with fertile earth brought up from the mountain valleys. To the east of the Andes, lay the vast and humid jungle of the Amazon River Basin, inhabited by fierce tribes whom the Inca never managed to conquer.

HISTORY:

The Inca empire and culture was largely destroyed by the Spanish in the most brutal conquest seen on the American continent. Under the leadership of Francisco Pizarro the Spanish stole over 280,000 kilograms of gold from the Inca, destroyed and prohibited all expression of native religion and culture. Yet many traditions managed to survive in the myths and culture of Peru, Ecuador and Columbia.

The present-day Quechua-speaking peoples of the Andes are the descendants of the Inca. They make up almost 45 percent of the population of Peru. They live in close-knit communities and combine farming and herding with simple traditional technology. Much of the agricultural work is done cooperatively. Even though Catholicism is now the official religion in these areas, in practice it is a blend of Western and native Andean religion and culture.

RELIGION:

Pachacuti drastically reorganized the Inca religion. He claimed to be the direct descendant of the Inca Sun God Inti, which made his people extremely obedient. Their daily work tasks almost became a religious duty. Pachacuti created a cult around himself and the sun-god Inti. Every day the emperor would wear new clothes, the old ones from the previous day had to be burned, and he would only eat from golden plates. Inca society was a theocratic society, meaning that politics and religion were completely intertwined. The Inca religion combined features of animism, fetishism, and the worship of nature gods representing forces of nature. Inca rituals included elaborate forms of divination and the sacrifice of humans and animals.

SOCIETY, ECONOMY AND POLITICS:

Pachacuti and his son Topa Inca managed to reform these vastly different regions, inhabited by over 100 different tribes of people into a political union that could feed and clothe millions of people, carry out tremendous construction programs, and supply large armies. He called his new united kingdom Cuzco, and he introduced an ingenious system of government, social system, economy and religion. He was one of the most powerful single ruler that ever existed in world history. He did not depend on a council of advisors, but made all the decisions for his people alone.

The Inca emperor Pachacuti first of all appointed himself as a holy emperor. He claimed he was the direct descendant of the creator god Pachacamac (also called Viracocha). Under his rule, Cuzco became a 'huaca', or holy place, dedicated to the sun god Inti. Pachacuti tore down the old adobe structures and had the entire city rebuilt in stone. On the south-end of town he built a temple dedicated to the sun and, at the same time, to himself. Its walls were covered with vast quantities of gold.

One of the problems of government was the redistribution of food and clothing. The corn, potatoes and cotton needed by millions of people were all produced in different areas of the empire. The Inca solved this by developing a form of practical socialism. Each village produced what its ecosystem would permit and gave its surpluses to other villages in different areas. In return, poorer villages farming in the infertile mountain terraces received the products that they could not grow themselves. Some of the surplus was stored to feed soldiers or labor crews that

were building temples or roads. This is called a system of reciprocity, and that is why the Inca did not have markets. Everybody supplied and received the necessities of life through this system of reciprocity.

CULTURE:

Every Inca citizen was assigned a very strict task in life, connected to their age, gender and social position. For example children over five years of age had the responsibility of carrying water up to the fields where grown-ups were growing crops. And women older than fifty had to weave cloth for making clothes. Even the physically and mentally disabled were given daily tasks that were attuned to their capabilities. One of these tasks was chewing maize or corn and spitting it back into a big bowl. By letting this substance ferment the Inca made their own special corn beer called Chicha which they drank on festive occasions.

All of the individual responsibilities were recorded by bureaucrats through a system called the Quipu. It was an intricate form of communication using colored strings tied into knots. This was the Inca alternative to writing since they did not develop a written language of their own. Emperor Pachacuti also created religious holidays for his people. Six times a month the entire empire was shut down for festivities, lectures and parades.

The Inca were incredible builders and architects. Their irrigation systems, palaces, temples, and fortifications can still be seen throughout the Andes. They had an efficient road system which was mainly used for government and military purposes. Couriers would carry messages in the form of knotted cords all over the empire. Unfortunately, this road network was also used by the Spanish, which greatly facilitated their conquest of the Inca Empire.

