

4 The Inca Create a Mountain Empire

TERMS & NAMES

- Pachacuti
- ayllu
- mita
- quipu

MAIN IDEA

The Inca built a vast empire supported by taxes, governed by a bureaucracy, and linked by extensive road systems.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The Inca system of government was similar to some socialist governments in the 20th century.

SETTING THE STAGE While the Aztecs were ruling in Mexico, another people—the Inca—were creating an equally powerful state in South America. From their capital in southern Peru, the Inca spread outward in all directions. They brought various Andean peoples under their control and built the largest empire ever seen in the Americas.



This gold mask is covered with cinabar, a red ore. The eyes are formed of tree resin. The ear spools are marks of nobility. The mask is from the Siccan culture, which was conquered by the Chimú.

The Inca Come to Power

Like the Aztecs, the Inca built their empire on cultural foundations thousands of years old. Ancient civilizations such as Chavín, Moche, and Nazca had already established a tradition of high culture in Peru. They were followed by the Huari and Tiahuanaco cultures of southern Peru and Bolivia. The Chimú, an impressive civilization of the 1300s based in the northern coastal region once controlled by the Moche, came next. The Inca would create an even more powerful state, however, extending their rule over the entire Andean region.

Incan Beginnings The word *Inca* was originally the name of the ruling family of a group of people living in a high plateau of the Andes. After wandering the highlands for years, the Inca finally settled on fertile lands in the Valley of Cuzco. By the 1200s, the Inca had established their own small kingdom in the valley.

During this early period, the Inca developed traditions and beliefs that helped launch and unify their empire. One of these traditions was the belief that the Incan ruler was descended from the sun god, Inti, who would bring prosperity and greatness to the Incan state. Only men from one of 11 noble lineages believed to be descendants of the sun god could be selected as the Incan leader. These 11 families were called *orejones*, “Big Ears,” because of the large plugs they wore in their earlobes.

Another tradition was the custom of worshiping dead rulers, who were preserved as sacred mummies. The mummies were brought to all important events and housed in special chambers. These royal mummies and their descendants retained rights to all the wealth and property accumulated during the king’s lifetime. Succeeding rulers had to acquire their own wealth, which led them to conquer new territories.

Pachacuti Builds an Empire At first the Incan kingdom grew slowly. In 1438, however, a powerful and ambitious ruler, **Pachacuti** (PAH-chah-KOO-tee), took the throne. Under his leadership, the Inca expanded quickly, conquering all of Peru and then moving into neighboring lands. By 1500 the Inca ruled an empire that stretched 2,500 miles along the western coast of South America, from Ecuador in the north to Chile and Argentina in the south. The Inca called this

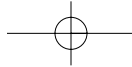
HISTORY MAKERS

Pachacuti

As the second son of the Inca ruler Viracocha, Pachacuti was not in line to succeed his father. In the early 1400s, however, Cuzco was attacked by the enemy state of Chanca. Viracocha and his first son, Urcon, fled the city. However, Pachacuti stood his ground and defeated the enemy. He then seized the throne from his brother to become the new king.

Pachacuti, whose name meant “World Transformer” (or in some translations “Earthshaker”), ruled for 33 years, until 1471, creating the largest empire in the Americas.

Pachacuti has been compared to Philip II of Macedonia. His son, Topa Yupanqui, who further enlarged the empire, has been compared to Alexander the Great.



South American Cultures, 100–1535



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

- Place** The lands of which earlier South American cultures were included in the Incan Empire?
- Human-Environment Interaction** Look at the shape and terrain of the Incan Empire. What problems related to geography might occur in controlling the land?

empire Tihuantinsuya, or “Land of the Four Quarters.” It included about 80 provinces and perhaps as many as 16 million people.

Pachacuti and his successors accomplished this feat of conquest through a combination of diplomacy and military force. The Inca had a powerful military but used force only when necessary. The Inca were clever diplomats. Before attacking, they typically offered enemy states an honorable surrender. They would allow them to keep their own customs and rulers in exchange for loyalty to the Incan state. Because of this kind treatment, many states gave up without resisting.

Once an area was defeated, the Inca would make every effort to gain the loyalty of the newly conquered people. According to a 16th-century Spanish observer:

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

The Inca always had the mastery, but when the enemies were vanquished, they were not destroyed; on the contrary, orders were given to release the captives and restore the spoils, and allow them to retain their estates. For the Inca desired to show them that they should not be so mad as to revolt against his royal person and reject his friendship; rather they should wish to be his friends, as were those in other provinces.

PEDRO DE CIEZA DE LEÓN, *Chronicle of Peru*

Incan Government Creates Unity

The Inca were also extraordinary organizers and administrators. To control the huge empire, the rulers divided their territory and its people into manageable units, governed by a central bureaucracy. The Inca created an efficient economic system to support the empire and an extensive road system to tie it together. They also imposed a single official language, Quechua (KEHCH-wuh), and founded schools to teach Incan ways. Certain social groups were identified by officially dictated patterns on clothing. All of these actions were calculated to unify the variety of people controlled by the Inca.

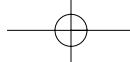
Incan Cities Show Government Presence To exercise control over their empire, the Inca built many cities in conquered areas. The architecture of government buildings was the same all over the empire, making the presence of the government apparent. As in Rome, all roads led to the capital, Cuzco. The heart of the Incan Empire, Cuzco was a splendid city of temples, plazas, and palaces. “Cuzco was

grand and stately,” wrote Cieza de León. “It had fine streets, . . . and the houses were built of solid stones, beautifully joined.” Like the Romans, the Inca were masterful engineers and stonemasons. Though they had no iron tools and did not use the wheel, Incan builders carved and transported huge blocks of stone, fitting them together perfectly without mortar. Many Incan walls still stand in Cuzco, undisturbed by the region’s frequent earthquakes.

Incan Government Organizes Communities The Incan system of government was based on age-old patterns of community cooperation. Small groups of people known as **ayllu** (EYE-loo) worked together for the common good, building irrigation

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

A. Forming and Supporting an Opinion Of all the methods used to create unity, which do you think would be most successful? Why?



canals and agricultural terraces on steep hillsides. The ayllu also stored food and other supplies to distribute during hard times.

The Inca took this principle of community organization and welfare and applied it to their empire. They incorporated the ayllu structure into a governing system based on the decimal system. They divided families into groups of 10, 100, 1,000, and 10,000. Each group was led by a chief. He was part of a chain of command. That chain stretched from the community and regional levels all the way to Cuzco, where the Incan ruler and his council of state held court. In general, local administration was left in the hands of local rulers, and villages were allowed to continue their traditional ways. If a community resisted Incan control, however, the Inca might relocate the whole group to a different territory. The resisters would be placed under the control of rulers appointed by the high rulers.

The main demand the Incan state placed on its subjects was for tribute, mainly in the form of labor. The labor tribute was known as **mita** (MEE-tuh). It required all able-bodied citizens to work for the state a certain number of days every year. Mita workers might labor on state farmlands, produce craft goods for state warehouses, or help build public works, such as roads, palaces, or irrigation canals.

Roads Link the Empire The most spectacular public works project was the Incan road system. A marvel of engineering, this road system symbolized the power of the Incan state. The 14,000-mile-long network of roads and bridges spanned the empire, traversing rugged mountains and harsh deserts. The roads ranged from paved stone to simple paths. Along the roads, the Inca built guest houses to provide shelter for weary travelers. A system of runners, known as *chasquis* (SHAH-keys), traveled these roads as a kind of postal service, carrying messages from one end of the empire to the other. The road system also allowed the easy movement of troops to bring control to zones where trouble might be brewing.

State Controls the Economy Incan power was also evident in economic life. The Incan state controlled most economic activity, regulating the production and distribution of goods. Land was organized into upper and lower geographical units, each producing goods the other could not. The units were linked together to create a total economy. Unlike the Maya and the Aztec, the Inca allowed little private commerce or trade.

Historians have compared the Incan system to a type of socialism or a modern welfare state. Citizens were expected to work for the state and were cared for in return. For example, the aged and disabled were often supported by the state. The state also held public feasts, distributing food and maize beer as a reward for citizens' labor.

Land ownership was divided in three ways: state lands, religious lands, and community lands. Farmers worked on all three types of land. Expanding on irrigation systems developed by earlier people, the Inca created a massive water management system that stored water for the dry season. They even straightened an entire river channel to better provide water for agriculture.

With a terracing system they produced crops such as maize and quinoa, a grain native to the Andes. The Inca developed a method for freeze-drying potatoes. They then stored the freeze-dried potatoes, called *chuño*, in huge warehouses for times of shortages of food. The *chuño* could be kept indefinitely.

Government Keeps Records Despite the sophistication of many aspects of Incan life, the Inca never developed a writing system. History and literature were



A miniature silver llama illustrates how important the llama was in Incan society. It helped transport goods and food in the mountains, provided wool and meat, and was offered to the gods as a sacrifice.

SPOTLIGHT ON

Incan Relay Messengers

Communication in the Incan Empire was the task of runner-messengers called *chasquis*. The system worked like a modern relay race. A runner would "hand off" a memorized message or package to another runner waiting at a way station. That runner would sprint to the next station along the road.

The stations were placed about every mile or so along the main roads, which covered about 3,100 miles. In this way, a message could travel 140 miles a day. The distance from Cuzco to the coast could be covered in just three days. A century later, the same journey took the Spanish 12 days on horseback!

The *chasquis* who traveled the Inca roads served in 15-day shifts. This job was a part of their mita labor tax.

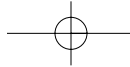
THINK THROUGH HISTORY

B. Recognizing

Effects How would relocating troublesome people help government control of an area?

Background

The irrigation systems were originally built by the Moche, Chimú, and Tiwankans.



One and one-half miles up a mountain, Machu Picchu could only be reached by a log bridge across a deep canyon. Although the details of its origin and its abandonment are unclear, some historians believe that it was a religious or ceremonial city.

memorized as part of an oral tradition. For numerical information, the Inca created an accounting device known as the **quipu** (see “Spotlight” on page 18), a set of knotted strings that could be used to record data. The knots and their position on the cord indicated numbers. Additionally, the colors of the cords indicated categories of information important to the government. For example, red strings were used to count warriors.

The Inca also developed an elaborate calendar system with two types of calendars, one for night and one for day. They were used primarily for religious purposes. Like the calendars of the Maya and the Aztec, the two calendars provided information about the gods who, the Inca believed, ruled the day and time. Like the Maya, Incan mathematicians and astronomers used complicated methods to create calendars necessary for the proper worship of the gods.

Religion Supports the State

As in ancient Mexico, religion was important to the Inca and helped reinforce the power of the state. The Inca worshiped fewer gods than the Aztecs. The Inca focused on key nature spirits such as the moon, the stars, and thunder. In the balance of

nature, the Inca saw patterns for the way humans should relate to each other and to the earth. Chief of the Incan gods was a creator god called Viracocha. Next in importance was the sun god, Inti. Because the Incan ruler was considered a descendant of Inti, sun worship amounted to worship of the king.

Incan priests led the sun-worship services, assisted by young women known as *mamakuna*, or “virgins of the sun.” These women, all unmarried, were drafted by the Inca for a lifetime of religious service. The young women were trained in religious activities, as teachers, spinners, weavers, and beer makers. Young men, known as *yamacuna*, also served as full-time workers for the state and in religious activities. Sacrifice of llamas and exchange of goods were a part of the religious activities. The goods were distributed by the priest to the people as gifts from the gods.

The Temple of the Sun in Cuzco was the most sacred of all Incan shrines. It was heavily decorated in gold, a metal the Inca referred to as “sweat of the sun.” According to Garcilaso de la Vega, the son of an Inca princess, the temple even had a garden crafted entirely from precious metals.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

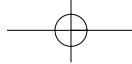
Here could be seen all sorts of plants, flowers, trees, animals, both small and large, wild and tame, tiny crawling creatures such as snakes, lizards, and snails, as well as butterflies and birds of every size. . . . All of these valuable works were made by the goldsmiths attached to the Temple, from the tribute of gold and silver that arrived every year from all the provinces of the Empire.

GARCILASO DE LA VEGA, *The Incas*

THINK THROUGH HISTORY
B. Recognizing Effects How might Incan achievements in math and astronomy have helped create a strong government?

Background
 Notice the similarity to the Egyptian ideas about the sun and the ruler.





In addition to producing beautiful gold and silver articles, Incan artisans even covered walls in Cuzco with shining sheets of gold.

Cuzco was the administrative and ceremonial capital of the Incan Empire. It included a sun temple and storage areas. Other Incan cities also had monumental architecture and seemed to have multiple purposes. For example, Machu Picchu, discovered by Hiram Bingham in 1912, was isolated and mysterious. Like Cuzco, Machu Picchu also had a sun temple, public buildings, a water system, and a central plaza. Some sources suggest it was an estate of Pachacuti. Others believe it was a retreat for Inca rulers or the elite. Its true function has not been determined.

Discord in the Empire

In the early 1500s, the Inca empire was at the height of its glory. King Huayna Capac toured the empire in a royal litter, covered with gold and surrounded by attendants. Trouble was on the way, however. Stopping in Quito, Ecuador, the king opened a gift box. Out flew butterflies and moths, considered an evil omen. About 1525, while still in Quito, Huayna Capac died of disease. Soon after his death, civil war broke out between Huayna Capac's sons, Atahualpa (ah-tah-WAHL-pah) and Huascar (WAHS-kahr), who both claimed the throne. Atahualpa won, but the war tore the empire apart. As you will learn in Chapter 20, within a few years, the Spanish arrived. Taking advantage of Incan weakness, they would soon divide and conquer the empire.

Vocabulary

litter: a chair that is carried by bearers

Inca		
Traits of Civilization	Strength Leading to Power	Weakness Leading to Decline
Religious beliefs and theocracy	United culture Loyalty to the emperor	Many physical and human resources funneled into religious activities
Major road systems	Connected entire empire and aided control	Enemy could also use roads to move troops
Type of welfare state with huge bureaucracy	Care for entire population during good and bad times	People unable to care for themselves with the elimination of the welfare state

SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts

- In your opinion, which of the three traits leading to power was the most valuable? Briefly discuss your reasons.
- Which trait did you find repeated in the Maya and Aztec Empires?

Section 4 Assessment

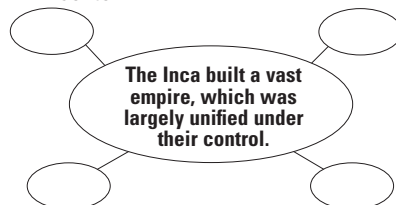
1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- Pachacuti
- ayllu
- mita
- quipu

2. TAKING NOTES

Draw a diagram like the one below and fill in the methods the Inca used to achieve the idea in the center.



Which of these methods for unification were acceptable to the conquered people? Explain.

3. ANALYZING MOTIVES

Why do you think the Inca used the ayllu system as the basis for governing the people of the empire?

THINK ABOUT

- ways to control a large empire
- the ease of using a system that already existed

4. THEME ACTIVITY

Power and Authority Choose a partner to debate the value of the welfare state of the Inca. One partner should support the welfare state and the other should be against it. Focus the debate on the advantages and disadvantages of the Incan welfare state.