

## Inca Rulers Maintain a Large Empire

The most powerful of the Andean civilizations—the Inca civilization—came into being in the 1100s with the founding of its first dynasty. For the next three centuries, the Inca civilization stood out no more than any other. But in 1438, a historic change occurred. **Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui** (pahch ah KOO tee ING kuh yoo PANG kee), a skilled warrior and leader, proclaimed himself **Sapa Inca**, or emperor.

From his small kingdom at Cuzco in a high mountain valley, Pachacuti set out on a campaign of conquest. Once he subdued neighboring peoples, he enlisted them in his armies. His son, emperor Topa Inca Yupanqui, continued the expansion. With **Cuzco** as its capital, the resulting empire stretched more than 2,500 miles along the Andes, from Ecuador in the north to Chile in the south.

**The Emperor Rules Over All** The Sapa Inca held absolute power. Claiming to be divine, the son of the sun itself, he was also the empire's religious leader. Gold, considered the "sweat of the sun," served as his symbol. His queen, the Coya, carried out important religious duties and sometimes governed in his absence.

The Sapa Inca laid claim over all the land, herds, mines, and people of his empire. Thus the people had no personal property, so there was little demand for items for barter or sale. As a result, trade did not play a major role in the Inca economy. Instead, the Sapa Inca kept the people fed and public works projects staffed using a labor tax. Periodically, he would call upon men of a certain age to serve as laborers for short periods, perhaps a few months. By so doing, he could access millions of laborers at once.

Inca rulers ran an efficient government. Nobles ruled the provinces along with local chieftains whom the Inca armies had conquered. Below them, officials carried out the day-to-day business of enforcing laws and organizing labor. Specially trained officials kept records on a **quipu**, a collection of colored strings that were knotted in different ways to represent various numbers. Scholars think that the Inca, who never invented a writing system, may have used quipus to record economic, bureaucratic, religious, and other information.

**Uniting the Empire** To unite their empire, the Inca imposed their language, Quechua (KECH wuh), and their religion on the people they conquered. They also created one of history's great road **networks**. At its greatest extent, it wound about 14,000 miles through mountains and deserts, passing through an area inhabited by almost 10 million people. Hundreds of bridges spanned rivers and deep gorges. Steps were cut into steep slopes and tunnels dug through hillsides. The expanse of the Inca road system was unmatched in the early Americas.

The roads allowed armies and news to move rapidly throughout the empire. At stations set regular distances apart, runners waited to carry messages. Relays of runners could carry news of a revolt swiftly from a distant province to the capital. Inca soldiers stood guard at outposts throughout the empire. Within days of an uprising, they would be on the move to crush the rebels. Ordinary people were restricted from using the roads at all.



## BIOGRAPHY

### Pachacuti


Growing up, Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui (1391?–1473?) did not seem destined to rule the Inca people. True, his father, Viracocha, was their king. But Viracocha had chosen another son—Urcon—as his successor.

According to Inca sagas, one day the army of a powerful neighboring people, the Chanca, threatened to sweep down on Cuzco. With the Chanca army quickly approaching, Viracocha and Urcon withdrew from Cuzco to a nearby fort. Pachacuti remained to defend the city, commanding the army and inspiring his warriors on to a stunning victory. Pachacuti then set himself up as king of Cuzco, eventually reuniting the entire Inca state under his rule. **What traits and skills must Pachacuti have needed to become emperor?**

### Vocabulary Builder

**network**—(NET wuik) *n.* a widely distributed group of things that work together as a unit or system

**Cuzco as Capital** All roads led through Cuzco. People from all the culture groups ruled by the empire lived in the city. Members of a given group lived in a particular part of the city and wore the traditional clothing and practiced the traditional crafts of their region of origin. In the heart of the city stood the great Temple of the Sun, its interior walls lined with gold. Like Inca palaces and forts, the temple was made of enormous stone blocks, each polished and carved to fit exactly in place without mortar used to secure it. Inca engineers were so precise that many of their buildings have survived severe earthquakes.

 **Checkpoint** Describe three ways that the Inca united their empire.

## Daily Life of the Inca

The Inca strictly regulated the lives of millions of people within their empire. The leaders of each Inca village, called an **ayllu** (EYE loo), carried out government orders. They assigned jobs to each family and organizing the community to work the land. Government officials arranged marriages to ensure that men and women were settled at a certain age.

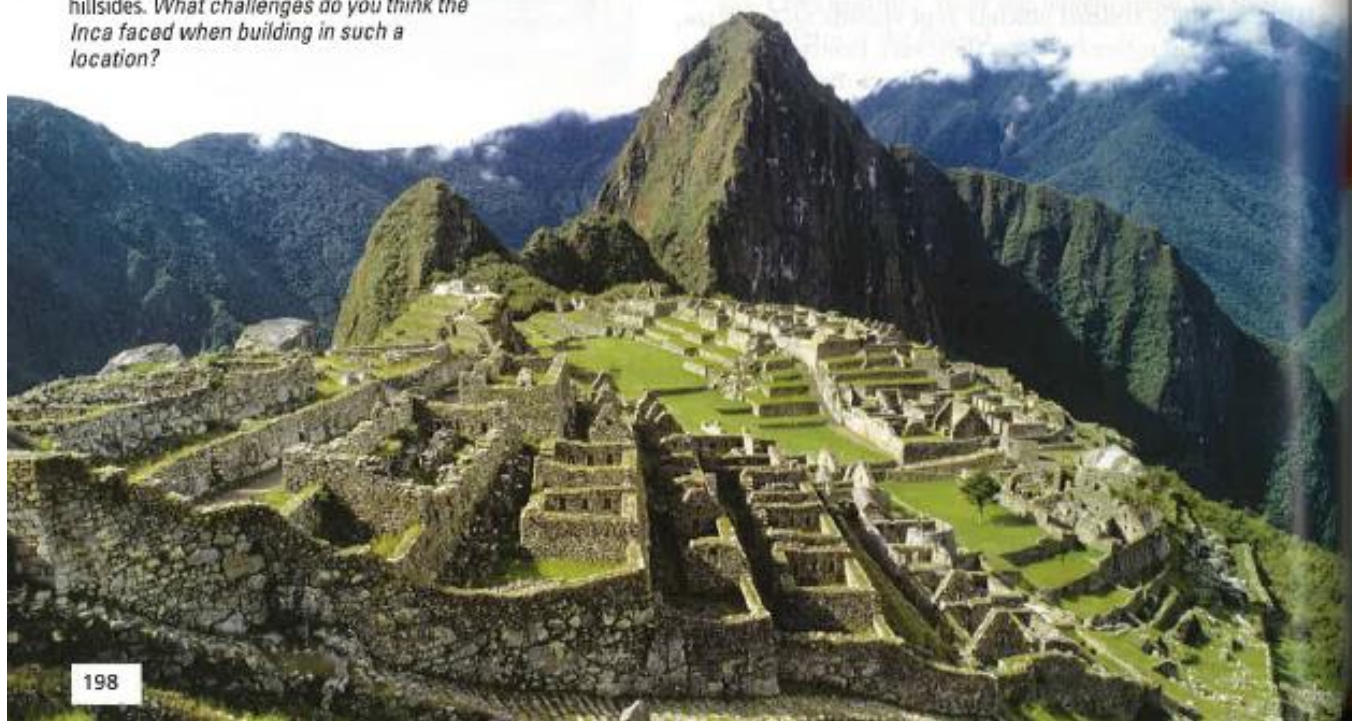
**Farming the Land** Inca farmers expanded step terraces built by earlier Andean peoples. They carved out flat strips of land on steep hillsides and built stone walls to hold the land in place. The terraces the Inca created kept rains from washing away the soil and made farming possible in places where naturally flat land was scarce.

Farmers spent part of each year working land for their community, and part working land for the emperor and the temples. The government allotted part of each harvest to specific groups of people or for particular purposes. It stored the rest in case of disasters such as famine.

**Mastering Metalwork and Weaving** The Inca were some of the most skilled metalworkers in the Americas. They learned to work and alloy, or blend, copper, tin, bronze, silver, and gold. While they employed copper

### The Heights of Inca Stonework

Machu Picchu is the most impressive example of Inca stonework. Built high in the Andes, the large complex of buildings sits at an elevation of more than 7,000 feet. Agricultural terraces line the surrounding hillsides. *What challenges do you think the Inca faced when building in such a location?*



and bronze for useful objects, they reserved precious metals for statues of gods and goddesses, eating utensils for the nobles, and decoration.

The Inca also mastered the art of weaving, a practice passed down to them from earlier Andean peoples. They raised cotton and sheared the wool from llamas and alpacas to create colorful textiles to be worn as clothing or as adornments, such as belts and bags.

**Medical Advances** The Inca developed important medical practices, including surgery on the human skull. In such operations, they cleaned the area to be operated on and then gave the patient a drug to make him or her unconscious—procedures similar to the modern use of antiseptics and anesthesia. The Inca also used medical procedures to mummify the dead.

**Religion and Ritual** The Inca worshipped many gods linked to the forces of nature. People offered food, clothing, and drink to the guardian spirits of the home and the village. Each month had its own festival, from the great ripening and the dance of the young maize to the festival of the water. Festivals were celebrated with ceremonies, sports, and games.

A powerful class of priests served the gods. Chief among the gods was **Inti**, the sun god. His special attendants, the “Chosen Women,” were selected from each region of the empire. During years of training, they studied the mysteries of the religion, learned to prepare ritual food and drink, and made the elaborate wool garments worn by the Sapa Inca and the Coya. After their training, most Chosen Women continued to serve Inti. Others joined the Inca’s court or married nobles.

 **Checkpoint** How did the Inca excel in the arts and in medicine?

## Looking Ahead

At its height, the Inca civilization was a center of learning and political power. But in 1525, the emperor Huayna Capac (WY nuh kah PAHK) died suddenly of illness. Civil war broke out over which of his sons would reign next, weakening the empire at a crucial moment—the eve of the arrival of Spanish invaders.