

Chapter 5

The Inca: Lords of the Mountains

Here Comes the Sun It is the year 1500. You are standing along a road in South America in a crowd of people. You seem to be at some kind of parade. You look down the road and see a gleaming, golden litter carried on the shoulders of several men. Inside the litter is a man wearing furs and golden jewelry.

The Big Question

Why were llamas so important to the Inca?

As the litter gets closer, the people around you go down on their knees and touch their foreheads to the ground. You are the only one

Vocabulary

Inca, n. a civilization that thrived from 1438 to 1532 on the western coast of South America, including most of modern-day Peru and parts of Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina

still standing. Suddenly you notice several people yelling at you. An angry soldier is running at you with a raised club. You begin to run. With a start, you wake up and realize you were having a dream.

It's a good thing you woke up. The people in your dream were bowing because the Sapa Inca, the king of the **Inca** people, was approaching.



The Sapa Inca was the ruler of the vast Inca Empire, which stretched over two thousand miles of the South American coast.

The Inca believed that the Sapa Inca was the son of Inti, the sun god. No one was allowed to look at this powerful king—and you were staring right at him! If you had not woken up, your dream would have had a terrifying ending: you would almost certainly have been killed by the soldiers for being so disrespectful to the son of the sun.



The Empire of the Sun

Who were the Inca? They were people who built a great civilization on the western coast of South America. The first Inca people lived in the area around Cuzco in modern-day Peru. In the early 1400s, these people began conquering neighboring lands and extending their empire. By the time the Spanish **conquistadors** (/kahn*kees*tuh*dorz/) arrived in the 1530s, the Inca Empire was the largest in the Americas—larger even than the Aztec Empire had been.

Inca soldiers helped to conquer a huge empire in a short period of time.

Vocabulary

conquistador, n.
the Spanish word for conqueror

The Sapa Inca ruled over more than twelve million people. His territory stretched for more than two thousand miles along the Pacific Coast. The empire covered an area so large that most of modern-day Peru and parts of Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina would lie inside its borders.

This is a region of great **geographical diversity**. Arid plains stretch along the western coastline. This region is so dry that not even a cactus can grow. Farther east, the twin ranges of the snow-capped Andes Mountains rise toward the skies. Between the ranges lies a high **plateau**. Land here is sizzling hot by day and freezing by night. East of the Andes are thick forests where heavy rains feed the mighty Amazon River. All these lands were ruled by the Sapa Inca.

Vocabulary

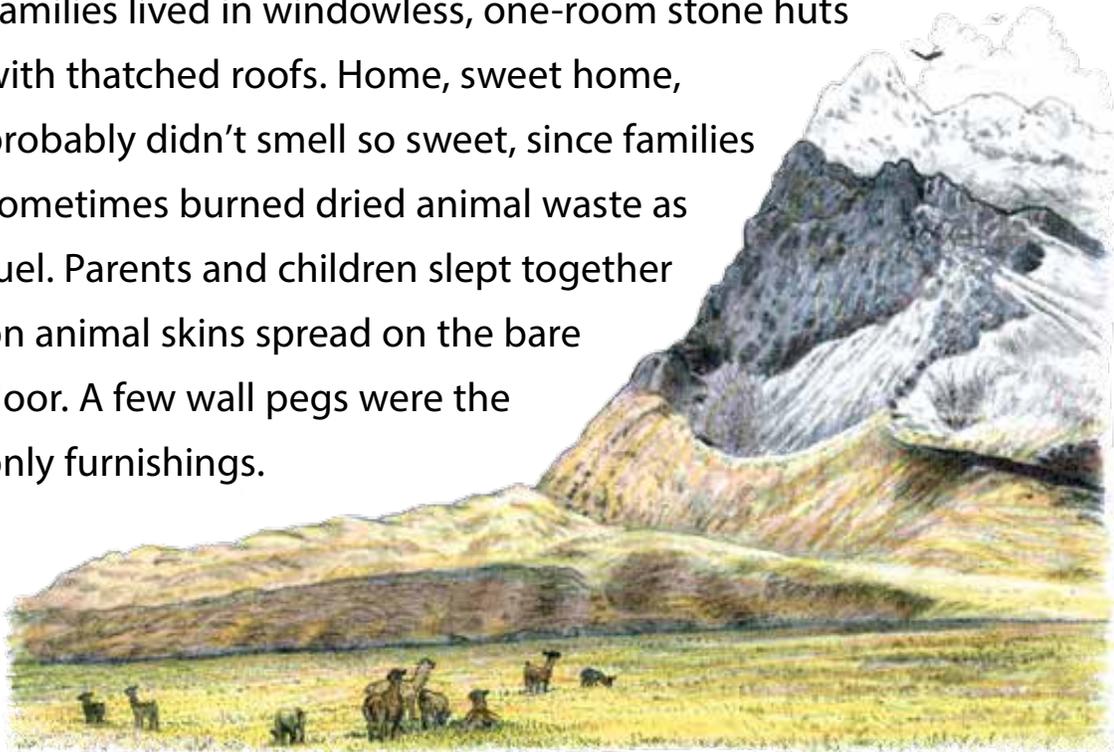
“geographical diversity,” (phrase), the presence of many different kinds of landforms, waterways, or other geographic features in a region

plateau, n. a large area of high, flat ground

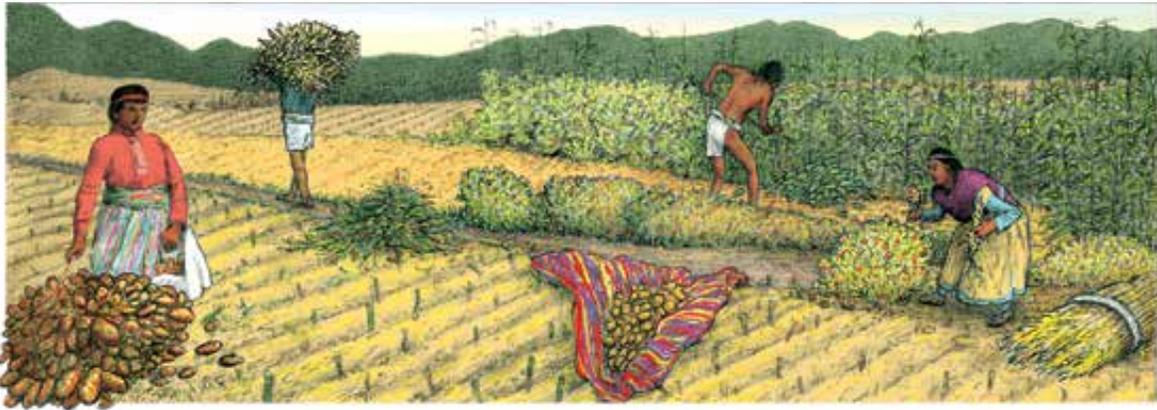
clan, n. a group of families

Inca Life

The Inca people were organized into **clans**, or groups. Every Inca family was part of a clan, and each clan farmed a piece of land. Families lived in windowless, one-room stone huts with thatched roofs. Home, sweet home, probably didn't smell so sweet, since families sometimes burned dried animal waste as fuel. Parents and children slept together on animal skins spread on the bare floor. A few wall pegs were the only furnishings.



The Inca Empire included a wide range of different geographic regions and features.



Inca farmers used ingenious methods to farm in the challenging environment of the Andes Mountains.

Boys followed their fathers' trades. Girls copied their mothers'. Most Inca were farmers. They grew corn, squash, tomatoes, peanuts, cotton, and more than a hundred varieties of potatoes. The potato was the main crop for the Inca. It grew well even at high altitudes on the slopes of the Andes Mountains.

Inca farmers also raised livestock. This included guinea pigs, **alpacas**, and **llamas**. The guinea pigs were raised for food. The alpacas were a source of wool. The Inca used llamas for all sorts of things, but especially as pack animals.

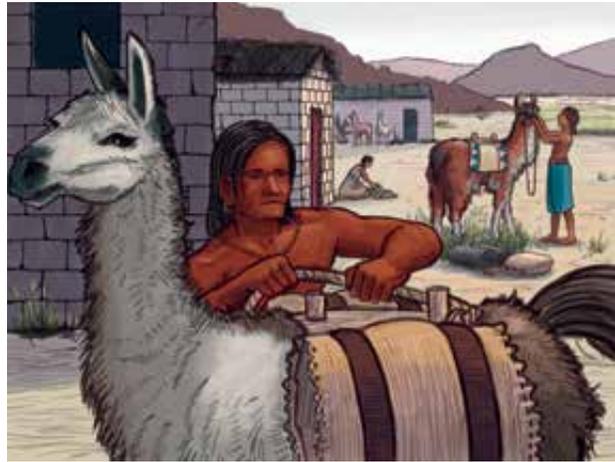
The llama is truly an amazing animal. It is a smaller cousin of the camel. A llama stands about four feet high at the shoulder and weighs about 250 pounds. Like its camel cousin, the llama has great strength and endurance. Llamas can carry loads up to 125 pounds for fifteen to twenty miles a day. They will eat just about anything and can go long periods without drinking. Llamas are also gentle animals. But if they are mistreated or overloaded, they

Vocabulary

alpaca, n. a South American mammal valued for its long, woolly coat

llama, n. a South American mammal valued for its endurance and for its woolly coat and meat

will let you know it. A llama may simply sit down and refuse to move. An unhappy llama may hiss and spit to make its point. Llama spit is not just wet and nasty. It can include hard pellets of food, which can cause pain if they hit you.



The llama is a useful animal that served the Inca people mainly as a pack animal.

The Inca used llamas to transport goods. They also used the llama's wool for cloth, its hide for rugs and coats, its waste for fuel and fertilizer, and its meat for food. When a llama died, the Inca cut the meat into strips and dried it in the sun. They called these strips *charqui* (/chahr*kee/). This is the source of our own word for dried meat, *jerky*.

Inca women were skilled weavers. They made clothing from the cotton they grew and from the wool of their llamas and alpacas.

For the Good of the Empire

Inca families worked for themselves. In addition, they were required to spend part of their time working for the Sapa Inca and the empire. Farmers raised crops for themselves and also for the empire. Inca men also had to donate time by working on construction projects, building roads, or serving in the military.



The Inca used cotton and wool from llamas and alpacas to make their clothing.

The Inca people understood that their labor was necessary to maintain the empire and to help protect them and their families. As a result, they worked willingly. The Sapa Inca and the priests used only a small part of the goods produced. The rest were stored in warehouses and given to those who were too old or too sick to work. When crops failed



Every Inca subject was required to spend part of his or her time working for the emperor.

and times were hard, food and goods were given to the working people, too. This system ensured that no one went hungry.

The rule of the Sapa Inca was absolute. Many government officials traveled throughout the empire to make sure his laws were obeyed. One of those officials was known as *He-Who-Sees-Everything*. He-Who-Sees-Everything was responsible for visiting Inca villages and making them pay their taxes. Oddly enough, he also served as a matchmaker.

He-Who-Sees-Everything would arrive in an Inca village every few years. When he arrived, he ordered the villagers to gather so that he could take a **census**. The more people in the village, the more the village had to pay in taxes.

Vocabulary

census, n. a count of the number of people living in a certain area

Once the counting was over, He-Who-Sees-Everything asked unmarried women over a certain age to step forward. The official interviewed each young woman. If one was found especially worthy, she was sent to Cuzco to become one of the Sapa Inca's many wives.

Once these chosen few had been selected, He-Who-Sees-Everything called all the unmarried young men before him. He proceeded to pair off the young men and women. He could make dozens of marriages on the spot. No questions were asked. After all, He-Who-Sees-Everything was a servant of the Sapa Inca. The marriages he was arranging were for the good of the empire.

The Inca Empire lasted only from the beginning of its expansion in 1438 to the Spanish conquest in 1532. But it was a century of towering achievement. The Inca did not just conquer people. To keep their empire unified, they changed every place they conquered. Read on to find out how the Inca conquests changed the face of South America.