The Conquest of the Inca

- The Inca Empire was bigger than Ming China and Ottoman Empire at the time—the biggest pre-Columbian nation-state ever in the Western hemisphere
- Aztec conquests of earlier years led Europeans to believe there was more gold and silver to be found in the New World, so…
- Spaniard Pizarro embarked for New World in 1532
- Spaniards quickly dominated the Inca
- The Inca empire fell rapidly, due to multiple factors
- There are many persisting aspects of the Inca past which are present in archaeological remnants and current cultural practices
- The invaders really did a poor job at recording Inca life—a tragedy; but historical and prehistorical archaeology have helped us learn a lot about the Inca
The Inca

• “The Inca” refers to a small group of kindred, less than 40,000 individuals, who built a great Andean state by force of arms, and who ruled as the realm’s governing nobility.

• At the height of the Inca empire, this head of state family’s dominion extended over 10 million+ people; these people were not Inca, but Inca subjects; the Inca were a closed ethnic body (for comparison, the population of the dense Los Angeles metropolitan area is about 13 million).

• We may popularly call the Inca plus their subjects “the Inca,” but archaeologists more accurately call the participants in this empire “Tahuantinsuyu,” or Land of the Four Quarters (Quechuan language).
The expanse of the Inca empire at its height: Centered in the Cuzco Valley and extending over Bolivia and Argentina to Central Chile and north through Ecuador.
Four Quarters

• Four suyus

• Heart of land is Cuzco, the origin point of the division of the 4 regions (maps in next slides)
  – Antisuyu, stretched to the east of Cuzco and contained deep, forest-covered valleys that gradually descended into the jungles of the Amazon basin
  – Cuntisuyu included all the land west of Cuzco, including the coastal regions of Peru from Chan Chan to Arequipa.
  – Collasuyu was the largest of the quarters. Located south of Cuzco, it took in Lake Titicaca and regions of Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina.
  – Chincasuyu contained the remaining land to the north of Cuzco.

• Cuzco connected by roads to the different areas (all roads lead to Cuzco)
*Note the ‘Suyus’*
Inca Ways of Life

- Society
- Economy
- Weather, geology
- Tax
- Religion
The basis of Inca society was the ayllu. Typically ayllus were families living together and communally working land, animals, and crops, and sharing the harvests. The ayllus varied in size, from small farming villages to larger towns. Everyone belonged to an ayllu. An individual was born into an ayllu and died within it. Even the choice of a mate could be determined by the ayllu. If an Inca man did not marry by the age of 20, the head of the ayllu selected a mate for him. Most Incas were farmers who worked land owned by the state head; land allotments determined by ayllu units. Aside from producing their own food, each ayllu worked additional fields to support the emperor and the state religion.
Society

• Different social classes
• Royalty and nobility were exempt from taxation and had such privileges as land, llamas, fine clothing, and litters, which were mats upon which the royalty and nobility would sit and be carried around by people of lesser social levels. Nobles were often polygynous (emperor and sister married to produce heir with uninterrupted links to the god Inti).
• Inca farmers led a life of hard work. After breakfasting at daybreak on chicha, a kind of thick beer made from fermented corn, the entire family worked in the fields until midmorning. Then they ate the day’s main meal, consisting of such foods as corn kernels boiled with chili peppers and herbs; soup or stew of guinea-pig meat thickened with potato flour; or cornmeal bread. Potatoes were a staple, especially in the mountains. In addition to working in the fields, women made chicha, ground corn and potatoes into flour, and produced cloth by spinning and weaving cotton or wool. If an Inca man were not a noble, he could have only one wife.
Society

• A typical Inca house was a one-room rectangular building of adobe brick or stone with a thatched, gabled roof, and without windows or a chimney. At night people slept on the floor around a crude stove, which was made of stone cemented with mud. During the day, people spent most of their time outdoors. Upper-class houses were often larger and partitioned into several rooms.

• Basic clothing somewhat consistent across classes: men wore breechcloths, sleeveless knee-length tunics, and cloaks or ponchos.; women wore long dresses and capes fastened with a pin of copper, silver, or gold. The men fixed their hair in a distinctive style to signify the allyu to which they belonged and wore decorative earplugs of shell or metal.

• Specially gifted boys were trained in crafts or in keeping records and used their skills to serve the emperor.

• Some Inca girls also received education and distinction as “chosen women.” The most beautiful 10-year-old girls of each ayllu were selected. After studying religion and domestic arts, they were placed in the households of the emperor and his nobles. Sometimes they were sacrificed to the gods and buried atop Andean mountain peaks.
Economy

- Agriculture was the basis of the economy,
- Foods: more than 20 varieties of corn; 240 varieties of potato; as well as one or more varieties of squash, beans, peppers, peanuts, and cassava (a starchy root); and quinoa, which is made into a cereal. By far the most important of these was the potato. The Incas planted the potato, which is able to withstand heavy frosts, as high as 4600 m (15,000 ft)
- The Incas faced difficult conditions for agriculture. Mountainous terrain limited the land that could be used for agriculture, and water was often scarce. To compensate, the Incas built stone walls to create raised, level fields. These fields formed steplike patterns along the sides of hills that were too steep to irrigate or plough in their natural state. Terraces created more arable land and kept the topsoil from washing away in heavy rains.
- The Incas constructed complex canals to bring water to terraces and other patches of arable land.
Economy

• Llamas and alpacas
• These camelids were very important to the economy.
• In addition to carrying burdens, llamas and alpacas were raised as a source of coarse wool and of dung, which was used for fuel.
• The finest-quality wool came from the wild vicuña, which was caught, sheared, and set free again.
• The Inca also raised guinea pigs, ducks, and dogs, which were the main sources of meat protein.
The Environment: Stressful

- Very diverse with a lot of extremes
- Many high altitude areas: low oxygen (hypoxia)
  - The Spaniards had a hard time fighting in the areas with high altitude (altitude sickness)
  - Those living in high areas have larger lung capacities, increased circulation and ventilation, and higher red blood cell counts
  - 17th century Spanish colonists in high areas suffered markedly low fertility, probably as a result of low oxygen
  - To some extent this limited economic exchange between mountain and other populations, especially exchange related to the development of long term social ties via, e.g., intermarriage
The Environment: Stressful

• Significant earthquakes occur roughly every generation, triggering mountain avalanches, and killing thousands of people
• Major volcanic eruptions less frequent but still devastating
• Slow tectonic movement undermines canals involved in human-built irrigation systems (thus impacts crops)
• Erratic rainfall in the Andes
• El Nino: torrential rain in the north and drought in the south
• Major impact on agriculture/pastoralism
Tax

- Most people incorporated into the Inca Empire to provide labor for public works during certain portions of each year. This labor tax supported large-scale public works such as forts, roads, and bridges, or the mining of metals and gems.
- Road building was important to establishing communication throughout the huge, complex empire. The Inca emperors built a 16,000-km (10,000-mi) network of stone roads. Trained runners carried official messages, working in relays to cover up to 400 km (250 mi) per day.
The Inca had no system of writing but did have a thorough record-keeping system. The Inca government kept detailed inventories of all the people, livestock, gold, land, crop harvests, armies, and projects of the empire. The Incas kept these records by means of quipus, a series of knotted strings hung from a main top string. The Incas encoded numerical data in the strings by varying the spacing of the knots and strings, as well as colors. Following the Spanish conquest and the introduction of records written in Spanish, the Incas lost the ability to read quipus. Modern scholars still have not fully deciphered the complex codes used in the creation of quipus.
Religion

- The supreme god of the Incas was the creator god, Viracocha.
- The Incas also worshiped the sun god, Inti, from whom the royal family was believed to be descended, and a number of other nature gods that were vital to the success of their crops.
- The Incas also believed that certain objects and places were sacred. They called these objects and places huacas. A huaca might be a great temple built by humans; an object found in nature, such as a hill, spring, stream, or rock; or a small amulet, or charm. Offerings were repeatedly given to the huacas to maintain balance in nature and society.
- The Incas also believed in an afterlife and worshiped the spirits of their ancestors. The bodies and tombs of the dead were treated as huacas. The bodies of dead rulers were among the holiest shrines in the empire. These rulers were treated as if they were still alive, attended to by servants in their palaces and consulted for advice on daily affairs.
- The Inca state religion was highly formal, with a large number of priests to conduct its many rituals and ceremonies. In many rites, live sacrifices were offered to the gods. The sacrificial offerings were usually llamas or guinea pigs, but on the most sacred occasions or in times of disaster, human children or chosen women might be sacrificed.
- The chosen women served the gods, especially Inti, and certain of them, called virgins of the sun, took vows of chastity for life.
The Demise of the Incan Empire

- 40,000 Inca + 10 million ruled people
- ~260 Spaniards (198 foot soldiers and 62 horsemen): Pizarro’s small fighting force of mercenaries (looking for fortune; most were non-literate)
Causes of the Demise

• Diseases, especially smallpox, gave the Spaniards an advantage by eradicating millions of opponents, contributing to the rapid demise of the empire.
• Civil war contributed to the rapid demise of the empire.
• Contact and conquest contributed to the demise of the empire.
Inca Infrastructural Collapse

• Political conflict was going on before the Spaniards got there
• In ~1525 both emperor Huayna Capac and his appointed heir died within a few days of each other, probably from one of the European diseases that accompanied the arrival of the Spaniards (migration of diseases from other areas that had contacted Europeans). Their deaths set off a struggle for power between two of Huayna Capac’s remaining sons, Huascar and Atahualpa. Civil war weakened the empire until Atahualpa captured Huáscar and ordered his execution in 1532.
• Various groups controlled by the Inca were fighting with the Inca and with each other
• The alliances and conflicts among these factions were exploited by the Spaniards, but the factions were also acting in their own political interests (Cortez used similar strategies with the Aztec)
Contact

- Several of Pizarro’s men had already been involved in conquests in the Caribbean
- Other Spaniards and Portuguese had already been to the Andes
- Inca were curious about the Spaniards, and the norm was to greet newcomers peacefully.
- The Incas at first may have believed Pizarro to be their creator god Viracocha, just as the Aztecs of Mexico had associated the Spanish explorer Cortez with their god, Quetzalcoatl.
- The Inca leaders, including the emperor Atahualpa, agreed to a peaceful meeting with Pizarro.
- What happened next?
Contact and Conquest

- The Spaniards kidnapped Atahualpa, the Inca leader at the time Pizarro arrived; demanded a ransom of over $50 million in precious metals
- Got the ransom…
- Then tried and executed Atahualpa anyway!
- Because it was clear Atahualpa had so much power, and it could undermine Spaniards’ goals
- The conquest contributed to the rapid demise of the empire
- Recall that, just before that, Atahualpa killed his half-brother, Huascar, as well as Huascar’s entire family, (related to civil war and power struggles due to recent smallpox-related death of Huayna Capac and his heir)
The Conquerors

- The conquerors didn’t care about recording the Inca way of life
- Many of Pizarro’s mercenaries were illiterate anyway
- The Inca didn’t have written alphabet, but had other ways to record and transmit information, e.g., quipu)
- Historical accounts of the Inca and the conquest are small in number
Pictures of the Inca

- Many drawings were made by Felipe Guaman Poma De Ayala, a person of both Inca and Spanish origin (and conflicted over loyalties to the Andean way of life and Christianity)
- In 1613, he completed a 1000 page document with drawings of Inca religion, history, customs, as well as Spanish abuses
- His drawings are an extremely valuable record of Inca life
- Drawings contain Andean elements—Guaman took great care to represent the clothing and adornment of the subjects—as well as European influences
Pachacuti expanded the empire outside of the Cuzco heartland, including to Lake Titicaca, a sacred place for the Inca. With his son, Topa Inca they spread through the Peruvian coasts.
CONQUISTA EN LOS BAÑOS DE TAVALLAICA

Hernando Pizana

Hernando Pizana
Inti
(the sun god)
Today, descendents of the Inca honor their heritage at the Inti-Raymi festival for the Sun God!
Inti-Raymi

- The ceremonies took place at the winter solstice, when the sun is farthest from the earth. Fearing the lack of sun and ensuing famine, the ancient Incas gathered in Cuzco to honor the Sun God and plead for his return. The celebrants fasted for days before the event, refrained from physical pleasures and presented gifts to the Inca, who in return put on a lavish banquet of meat, corn bread, chicha and coca tea as they prepared to sacrifice llamas to ensure good crops and fertile fields.

- In 1572, Viceroy Toledo banned Inti Raymi celebrations as pagan and contrary to the Catholic faith. Following the edict, the ceremonies went underground.

- Today, it's the second largest festival in South America. Hundreds of thousands of people converge on Cuzco from other parts of the nation, South America and the world for a week long celebration marking the beginning of a new year, the Inti Raymi, the Festival of the Sun.
Cuzco Today...
Note the knobs!
Use of Pre-existing Materials

• The Spanish used pre-existing Inca building materials to build European-style Spanish buildings—much like Cortez and his people did with Aztec building materials in Mexico
Advanced irrigation technology
Sacsahuaman
Architecture

• Among the most impressive of the Incas’ building projects were their vast roads, temples, palaces, terraces and fortresses.

• Labor was a form of tribute (tax) required of Inca subjects

• Massive stone buildings, such as the fortress at Sacsahuaman near Cuzco, were skillfully erected with a minimum of engineering equipment.

• The wall of Sacsahuaman was made of enormous stones, the largest of which weighed 200 tons. Stones were transported with the help of wooden rollers, and they fitted together so exactly that no mortar was necessary.
No mortar; the boulders fit together perfectly because of a technique of grinding them into place; pulleys, ra...
Since they were made, hundreds of years of earthquakes still have not destroyed the well-engineered walls here (knobs and sockets!).