

# THE RISE AND FALL OF THE INCAS

The Incas first appeared perhaps in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century in the Andes mountains, near the sources of the River Amazon. To begin with they were a small tribe, no different to the other Native American tribes living around them. Two centuries later the Incas had conquered a great empire, which covered most of the Andes and much of the western part of South America.

The empire was made by two strong emperors. They were a father and son,

**Pachacuti** (1441-1471) and **Tupac**

**Inca Yupanqui** (1471 – 1493). The Incas called their empire **Tawantinsuyu** (or ‘the Land of Four Quarters’), and they called their emperors **Sapa Incas**, ‘the sole emperor’.

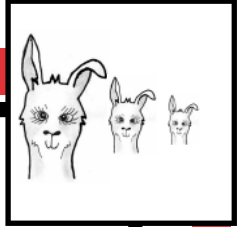
The Incas were a proud people, and the word ‘Incas’ meant ‘lords’. **Pachacuti’s** father, **Viracocha** (around 1438 – 1440), had been named after the god whom the Incas believed had made everything. The

Incas remembered the names of their leaders, and carefully preserved what they claimed were their bodies as mummies.. So we can be reasonably sure that even the earlier ones whose names they remembered were all real people. But we don’t know exactly when they lived.

Viracocha seems to have been a strong Sapa Inca. He was the first one to set out to enlarge the area the Incas controlled. He had a long and successful reign, and had appointed one of his sons, **Urcon**, to follow him as Sapa Inca when he died. According to one story, he lost his nerve when the neighbouring **Chancas**

threatened to attack the Inca capital city of **Cusco**, with a large army. Viracocha and Urcon thought it best to abandon Cusco, and they retreated to a fortress some miles away, which would be easier to defend. But another of Viracocha’s sons, Pachacuti, stayed in Cusco with an army and two of Viracocha’s generals. There they successfully held off the Chanca attack.





Within a few years Viracocha and Urcon were dead, and Pachacuti was the new Sapa Inca (1441). He proclaimed himself the son of **Inti** (the sun god), and began to use the Inca army to defeat not just the Chancas but every tribe that would not submit to him and to the creator-god Viracocha, whom Pachacuti believed had given him the task of conquering the Andes.

Pachacuti was helped by the geography of the Andes. Hemmed in by mountains, the peoples, tribes and kingdoms were arranged in long lines. Pachacuti defeated them one at a time, and they were never able to join forces against him. He began to conquer territories far from Cusco.

Pachacuti then set about improving the running of his empire. He ordered the building of terraces to grow more crops. He rebuilt Cusco. He reorganised Inca religion around Virococha, Inti, and other gods. While he reformed Inca government, he sent his son, Tupac Inca Yupanqui, to continue to conquer even more land. Between them they changed the Incas from a small kingdom to a vast empire, in

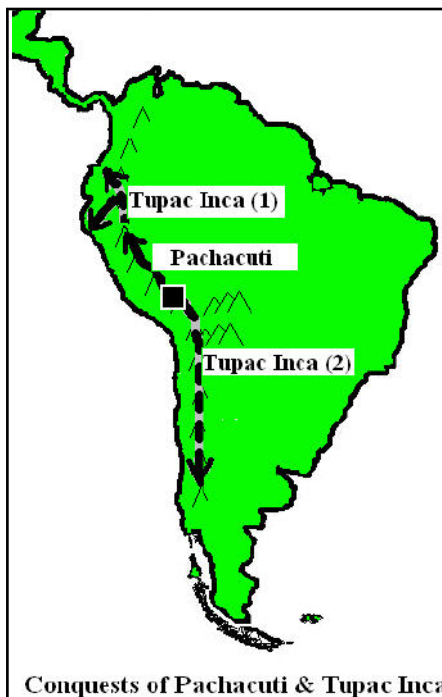
one of the quickest conquests the world has ever seen.

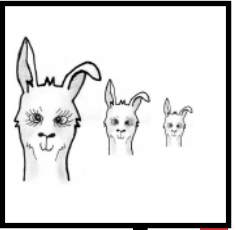
When he was older, Pachacuti appointed Tupac Inca Yupanqui as his **successor**. The wars and conquests continued. Tupac Inca Yupanqui conquered the Andes region as far as Chile in the South and as far North as Ecuador. The

Incas failed in their occasional attempts to fight in the jungles and plains to the East of the Andes, and they also failed against the fierce warriors who lived beyond the River Maule in the South. But nearly the entire Andes region in South America fell under Inca control.

The Incas were clever rulers. They allowed their conquered enemies to

keep their own customs and religion. Enemy leaders were executed only if they resisted the Inca army. However the Incas used leaders who didn't resist, or who surrendered, to continue ruling their own people - but under the control of Inca governors. These **curaca** nobles were important in ruling the empire, because the number of actual 'Incas' in the empire was small.





By 1525 Tawantinsuyu had reached its furthest extent. But it fell very quickly. Many of the people conquered by the Incas were not happy to be ruled by them. Some looked for any opportunity to rebel if the empire grew weak. The empire was always weak when a Sapa Inca grew old, because it was uncertain which of his (many) sons would be the next Sapa Inca .

Tupac Inca Yupanqui's son, **Huayna Capac** (1493-1525), chose his son **Ninan Cuyuchi** to succeed him. However, Ninan Cuyuchi died shortly after the death of Huayna Capac. Both died of smallpox or measles, diseases brought to the American continent by Europeans. Native Americans had no immunity to these diseases, and their effect on the Incas was much like the Black Death in medieval Europe. Hundreds of thousands of Native Americans died of disease, and the survivors were weakened. Meanwhile two half brothers, **Huascar** (1525-1532) and **Atahualpa**, fought a long civil war to decide which of them would be the new Sapa Inca. Atahualpa (1532) won, but not for long.

In the middle of this civil war the Spanish adventurer, Pizarro, arrived in the Northern part of the Empire with about 150 soldiers. They became known as the **Conquistadors**. They ruthlessly killed Atahualpa's bodyguards and captured him. The Inca Empire depended entirely on its emperor. Pizarro used this. He held Atahualpa to ransom for tons of gold.

Atahualpa was forced to order the Inca people to bring the gold to the Conquistadors. Then Atahualpa was executed (1532).

For twenty years the **Conquistadors** roamed Tawantinsuyu, plundering all the gold and silver they could find. Without a Sapa Inca to give orders, and without the city of Cusco to be its capital, the empire fell apart. The Conquistadors then

fought among themselves.

It was not until 1569 that Spain set up an effective government in South America. Peru and the Andes become part of a bigger empire even than Tawantinsuyu, the world-wide empire of Spain.

