

Fall of the Inca Civilization

1438–1533



Francisco Pizarro and a group of Spanish conquistadors arrived in the Incan Empire in South America in 1532. Upon arrival, Pizarro and his men arranged a meeting with Atahualpa, the Inca emperor. This was a trick. Pizarro and his men abducted the emperor and held him for ransom. The Incas paid the ransom to secure their ruler's release, but the Spaniards murdered Atahualpa. With their newfound wealth, Pizarro and his men marched to the Incan capital of Cuzco.

Once there, the Spanish were amazed at what they saw. Cuzco was rich with gold. Pizarro and the Spaniards had believed the Incas to be nothing but savages, but they were amazed by the extravagance of the temples, roads and gardens in Cuzco. The Incan pottery, such as vases and pots, was made of gold and silver and encrusted with emeralds. Conquering the Inca civilization was not difficult for the Spaniards. The Incas were not conquered by war, but by diseases the Spaniards introduced to the New World. Old World diseases, such as smallpox, nearly eradicated the entire Incan population. When Pizarro returned to Spain, the Spaniards controlled the Inca civilization. Spanish culture, religion, and language replaced Incan life; and only a few traces of Incan ways remained in the native culture. Pizarro returned to Spain with massive amounts of gold and riches from this civilization.

Most of the Incas' most-prized possessions were hidden so the Spanish could not steal them. One example was Machu Picchu, a sanctuary on a mountaintop along the

Urubamba River in what is now the Peruvian jungle. It consisted of grand steps and terraces with fountains, lodgings, and shrines flanking the jungle-clad pinnacle peaks surrounding the site. This location was hidden for centuries. Hiram Bingham rediscovered Machu Picchu in 1911. Pizarro wanted to avoid an Incan uprising. Therefore, he appointed Manco Capac, an Incan, as emperor. However, Pizarro really controlled Manco Capac. Nevertheless, Manco Capac led an uprising against the Spanish. Pizarro's brother, Hernándo Pizarro, battled the Incas. The Incans were able to mimic some of the European war tactics. Still, the Spanish conquistadors were too strong for the Incans. Manco Capac and his men were forced go into hiding. For years, they hid in the jungle and resorted to guerrilla fighting tactics. Manco Capac was killed in battle in 1544.

In 1541, the tables were beginning to turn on Francisco Pizarro. He cut Diego de Almagro, another Spanish conqueror, out of his fair share of the Incan treasures. To appease de Almagro, Pizarro offered him the land now known as Chile. De Almagro went to Chile in hopes of finding gold and other treasures, but he came back empty-handed. A war ensued between the Pizarros and Diego de Almagro. Hernándo ordered de Almagro's assassination. When he was assassinated, the Pizarros reclaimed the land Diego de Almagro had conquered. That left de Almagro's son, also named Diego, with nothing.

The younger Diego plotted Francisco Pizarro's assassination. Diego and his men stormed Francisco Pizarro's palace, and a battle occurred. Pizarro killed two of the attackers, was stabbed several times, and eventually died.

Name: _____

Date: _____

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Discussion Questions:

1. What happened between Francisco Pizarro and the Incan emperor, Atahualpa?
2. What were the Spaniards amazed to see when they reached Cuzco?
3. Why did the Spanish easily conquer the Incas?
4. What did Hiram Bingham rediscover in 1911?

5. What happened when Pizarro appointed Manco Capac emperor of the Incan civilization?

6. What happened when Diego de Almagro returned from Chile?