



Machu Picchu

Art of Peru

Rebecca Hinson

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Note: Some modern scholars prefer “Inka” as a more accurate transliteration of the original Quechuan word.



Built in the mid-1400s by Shapa (ruler) Inka Pachacuti Yupanqui to celebrate his conquest of the Chancas, Machu Picchu (Old Peak) sits at 8040 feet, 13 degrees south of the Equator, on a narrow ridge between Machu Picchu Mountain and Huayna Picchu Mountain in a tropical mountain forest.

Used for part of the year by Pachacuti's royal court, courtiers, and household servants, this Inka royal estate contains terraced fields and two hundred white granite buildings: including residences, temples, shrines, fountains, baths, and stairways. Encircled on three sides by the sacred river Urubamba (2000 feet below), the location was chosen for its alignment with sacred mountains and water springs, celestial activities, and other royal residences.

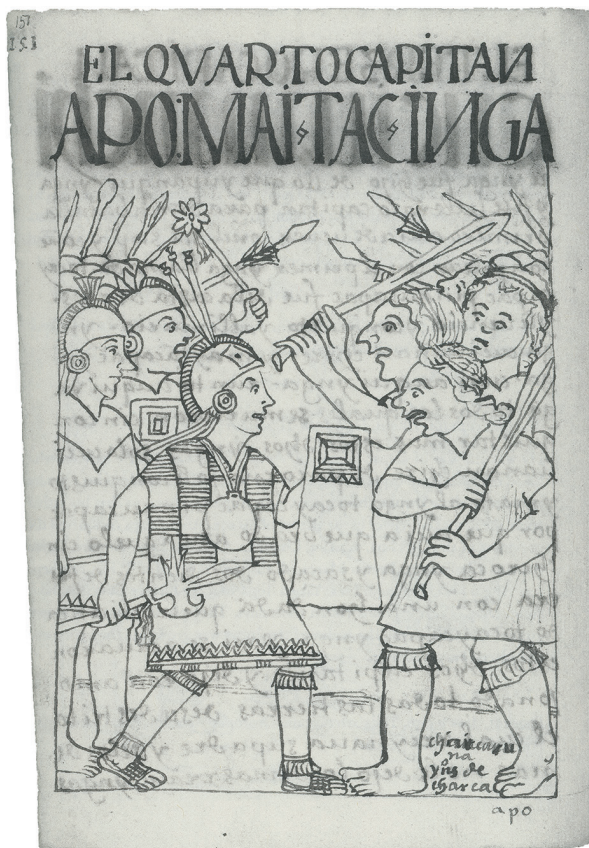
Machu Picchu beckons us to the empire of Tawantinsuyu, where Pachacuti served as the ninth Shapa Inka from A.D. 1438 to 1471.



Pachacuti (earth shaker) first came to power by repelling a Chanca invasion of the Inka capital, Cusco (center of the world), ruled by his Father, Huiracocha Inka.

As ruler, Pachacuti's goal was to subdue neighboring territories and acquire resources. He sought to bring order and religion to all the world, as Inti (Father Sun) had commanded of the first Inkas. Emerging from Lake Titicaca, Manco and Mama were sent to earth to found a holy city; conquer the nations to the north, south, east, and west; and civilize the world. Manco, the first Shapa Inka, founded the city of Cusco.

Pachacuti sent captains with troops to neighboring regions, promising the people that they would be treated as brothers if they accepted his divine sovereignty. The captains affirmed that Pachacuti was the son of Inti and that they should follow him. After sending emissaries with gifts of coca, blankets, clothing, and women, his army entered many lands without war.



If defied, Pachacuti led up to 200,000 men into battle brandishing spears, clubs with metal or stone heads, slings and stones, javelins, rope and spiked maces, and bolas. Some said these mere mortals transformed into ferocious jaguars, mountain lions, vultures, foxes, wild cats, and hawks during battle.

After fierce battles, all pledged their allegiance. New subjects at once received all rights and benefits enjoyed by the rest of the community. Whatever they lacked, they were provided: be it food, flocks, fine wool, or supplies. In large provinces, the Inkas built a Temple to the Sun and lodgings. They built two colcas (storage houses) in every village; the first kept for the use of the people in lean years, and the second for Inti and the Shapa Inka. Each province had to fill the colcas of Inti and the Shapa Inka with a moderate amount of what its territory produced as a tribute.

The kingdom of Cusco expanded into an empire—Tawantinsuyu (four corners of the earth).



For each department of ten thousand inhabitants, Pachacuti assigned governors from the Inka nobility and captains to rule, teach the people to cultivate and irrigate crops, speak Quechua, follow Inka laws, and worship the sun. Native lords retained authority over local rituals and traditions. Pachacuti did not deprive them of their customs, as long as they also followed his.

All laws emanated from Pachacuti. He established the Inka calendar based upon solstices, equinoxes, and other astronomical observations, to determine when to plant crops, prune, irrigate, harvest crops, conduct religious rituals, and hold festivals.

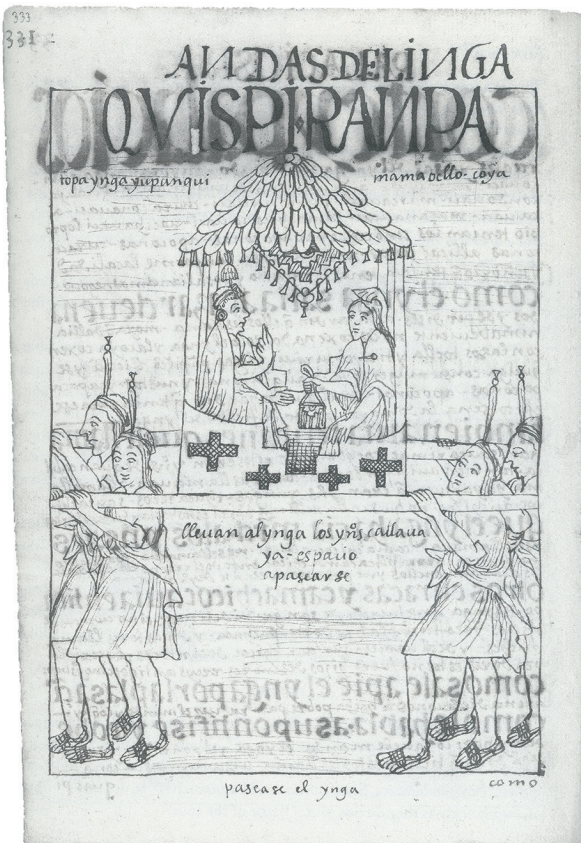
Establishing the purity of rulers as a chosen people through brother-sister marriage, Pachacuti married his eldest sister, Mama Ana Uarque. He had many other wives and many children. Later his son Topa Inka Yupanqui would succeed him and marry his own sister Mama Ocllo.



When Pachacuti conquered new regions, he built roads and bridges. The Qhapaq Ñan (Royal Road) extended ten thousand miles to facilitate movement of the army, communication between the capital and the far reaches of the empire, and transport of tribute goods.

The Inkas built two thousand miles of road using heavy freestone or cement. Every half-league, they built tambos (huts) for chasquis (fleet footed messengers) who carried Pachacuti's orders, news, or sometimes fish, fruits, or game. Chasquis passed verbal dispatches or quipu (a numerical device made of threads and knots) from one messenger to another at the pace of a hundred and fifty miles a day. Chasquis also passed signals using smoke during the day, or flames at night.

The Inkas built bridges of hand-twisted grass ropes, braided into thick cables for floors and handrails. Master bridgebuilders wove sides from both ends, meeting in the middle. Pachacuti ordered that bridges be kept in good repair. The Huinchiri, Chaupibanda, Choccayhua, and Ccol-lana Quehue communities still maintain the Q'eshwachaka Bridge today.



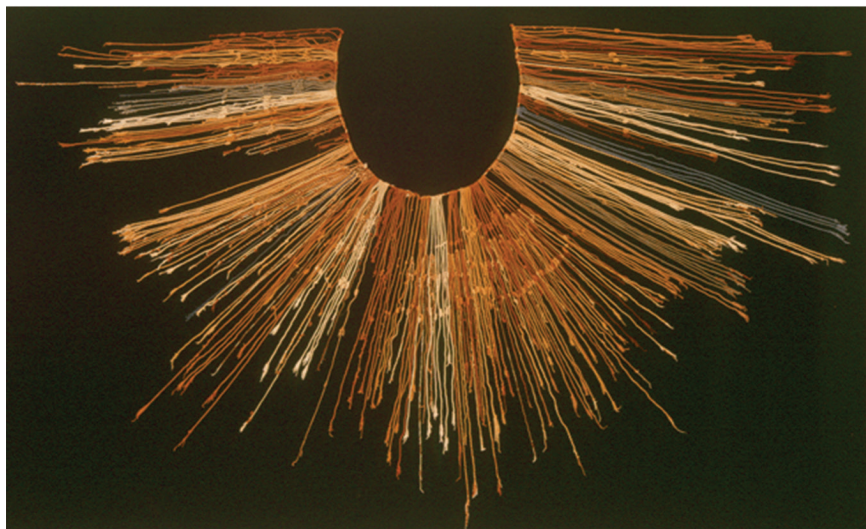
Pachacuti and his Coya (main wife), Mama Ana Uarque, a daughter of the Moon, traveled throughout the empire in an elaborate litter encrusted with gold, silver, and precious gems. Their children—Mama Oello, Topa Inka Yupanqui, Cuci Huanan Chire Inka, Manco Inka, Topa Amaro Inka and Maytac Inka—also traveled by litter, as did the Shapa Inka's other wives, children, and associates. Troops and attendants accompanied them.

Known for her obedience to her husband, the Coya had a beautiful round face, small eyes, and a small mouth. She had a fair complexion and lovely hands and feet. When angry or amused, she beat her chest and proclaimed, "Bless my soul, Lord Creator of the People." Then her attendants prostrated themselves.



Pachacuti dressed in fine textiles made of richly dyed vicuña wool, sometimes adorned with emeralds, other precious stones, gold, or feathers. Only the Shapa Inka could wear *cusmas* (knee length tunics) covered with *tocapu* (small rectangular units). *Mamaconas* (Virgins of the Sun) combined twenty-three basic patterns into 156 different *tocapu* units, which represent places or lineages. Pachacuti also wore a *Hautu* (turban of many-colored folds) and a red tasseled fringe topped with two *Coraquenque* feathers.

The Inkas herded four varieties of wool-bearing animals: llama, guanaco, alpaca, and vicuña. Only nobles could wear the fine fabric of the vicuña. After royal hunts, servants took wool to *colcas* or Temples of the Sun, where *Mamaconas* dyed it, spun yarn, and wove cloth to create apparel, carpets, coverlets, and wall hangings for the Shapa Inka and his household. The Inkas ate the meat or dried it in the sun and stored it in *colcas*.



Tahuantinsuyu eradicated poverty through the equal distribution of land and goods throughout the empire, made possible by elaborate inventories recorded in quipus.

Two-foot-long quipus with different-colored threads tightly twisted together, from which a quantity of smaller threads descended and were tied in knots, were used to record numbers in a base-ten notation. The Inkas recorded births, deaths, land, tributes, military readiness, the calendar, and employment records. They did not use quipus to count currency, because they had none; but rather to count clothing, fabric, food, weapons, and raw materials like wool or metal, stored in colcas in every village. In spite of poor harvest or ill health, the Inkas guaranteed their own survival through the distribution of goods from the colcas. Based on the quantity and fertility of soil, they distributed land equally. Each man performed a small amount of required public service, with plenty of time to provide for his own household.

At a glance of a quipu, Pachacuti knew the material, labor, and military strength of the empire.

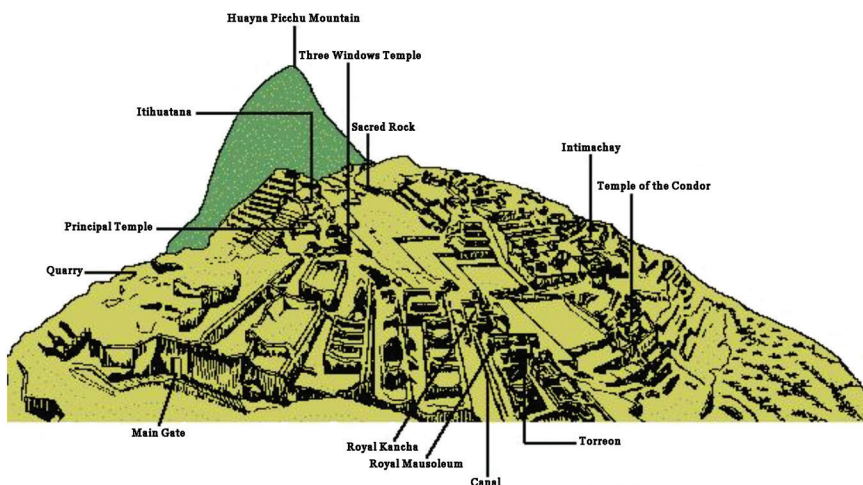


A huge lintel (stone beam) crosses the formal gateway to Machu Picchu. The opening frames the natural beauty of Huayna Picchu Mountain. A stone ring protrudes above the doorway on the inside of the gateway, and recessed barholds inside would have sustained a closure mechanism for a gate.

Pachacuti, his family, priests, and dignitaries entered here with great pomp, having been carried on litters along the Qhapaq Ñan from Cusco.

Llamas carried deliveries through this doorway to colcas which housed food, fine clothing, coarser garments, sandals, and weapons. Servants pushed heavy objects inside, aided by small rolling pebbles underneath.

When the Shapa Inka and his entourage were present, the population swelled to about a thousand.



The Inkas constructed the white granite buildings in Machu Picchu using hammerstones and silver or bronze tools. The thatched roofs are missing today, but the stonework is still intact. Each building's size and quality reflect the prestige of its inhabitants or the importance of the activities within.

Most high-status homes are in the northeast sector (top right). Fourteen kanchas (single-family group compounds) have buildings for sleeping, cooking, and storage within a walled-in area with a courtyard and a single entrance. Three elite kanchas on eastern terraces have walls of finely cut and polished granite, double jamb entryways, and trapezoidal wall niches.

The Inkas performed religious rites at temples and shrines scattered around the estate. They held festivals on the central plaza.