Hands On Learning
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PERU: ANCIENT OBJECTS G162

When, in 1526, the Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro first visited the area now known as Peru he found it the centre of a huge empire - the empire of the Incas. This empire was, however, a relatively recent development.





The history of the Inca people began around the twelfth century. They formed the small city-state of Cusco, which is shown in red on Map 1. Other important tribal areas, such as those of the Chimor and the Wanka, can be seen scattered to the north and south.



In 1438 the Inca, under their leader Pachacuti ('Earth Shaker' - left), brought much of the area that is now modern Peru and Ecuador under Inca control (Map 2).

The Incas ruled though deputies. After conquering a people, they would reward those who fought for them and allowed local rulers to continue in power. Their empire was a confederation of tribes with a single people, the Incas, more or less in control.

Under the rule of Huayna Capac (1464-1527) Inca territory included Peru and Bolivia most of what is now Ecuador and a large portion of what is today Chile north of Maule River. Map 3 shows the extent of their control at the height of Inca power.



In 1532/3 Pizarro returned to Inca territory with just 180 men, 1 cannon and 27 horses. He killed the ruler Atahualpa and the Inca empire rapidly disintegrated. In 1572 the last Inca stronghold was discovered and the last ruler, Túpac Amaru, was captured and executed, bringing what was left of the Inca empire to an end.

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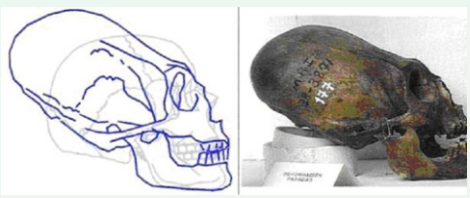
The ruler of the Inca empire was called the Inca, who had absolute power. Below the Inca was the royal family which consisted of the Inca's immediate family, concubines, and all his children. Each tribe had tribal heads and each clan had a clan head. At the very bottom were the common people who were all grouped in squads of ten people each with a single leader. This centralised system helped the Inca to conquer and control others, but it also enabled the Spanish to conquer the Inca territories with lightening speed once they had killed the Inca himself.



Agriculture was tough in the Andes. The Incas carved up mountains into terraced farmlands. They ate potatoes, supplemented by fish, vegetables, nuts and maize. They raised llama (left) and alpaca for food and for wool. Guinea pigs were also eaten in large quantities. The Inca road system allowed the distribution of food over long distances. They also constructed vast storehouses, which allowed them to live through years of poor harvest while neighbouring peoples suffered.



The Incas were brilliant engineers. They constructed massive forts with stone slabs so perfectly cut that they didn't require mortar (right). The rocks used in construction were sculpted to fit together exactly by repeatedly lowering a rock onto another and carving away any sections on the lower rock where the dust was compressed. The Incas never used wheeled transport and they must have used hundreds of men to push and pull the stones into place. The most famous surviving example of Inca building work is at the small town of Machu Picchu (top right).

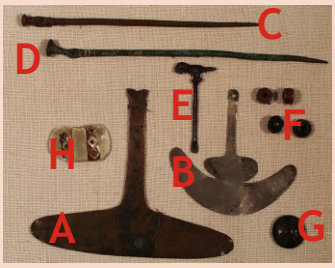


The central god of the Incan religion was the sun-god, the only god that had temples built for him. They had no writing system at all, but they kept records on various coloured knotted cords called *quipu*. The Inca also practiced cranial deformation (left). They achieved this by wrapping tight cloth straps around the heads of newborn babies in order to alter the shape of their still-soft skulls into a conical shape.

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It is not known where exactly in Peru these objects were collected from or when they date from. The photograph on the right can be used to link the notes with the object they refer to.



A/B Tumi



The Inca people did not know how to make objects from iron. They had, however, a long metalworking tradition and made objects in gold, silver, copper, and bronze. They brought metalworkers from all over the empire, especially the north coast, to their capital Cuzco, to make tools and ornaments for them.





Knives, or tumis, were among the most common and widely distributed metal tools produced in Inca times. Typically made of copper or tin bronze, Inca tumis have a long, curved blade at right angles to the handle. The handles could be flat or round, and many have decorated tops. Suspension loops at the top of the shaft suggest they were hung from the belt or necklace.

Some tumis, particularly those which were used in ritual sacrifice, could be very elaborate and must have been very costly (above right). Others, for more everyday use, were made of less precious metal and were simpler (above left). Item B in this collection was originally described as a 'silver ornament', but it could equally well be a tumi. It is made from a thin and relatively soft metal, so it may have been intended to cut something such as thread.

The Incas also used tumi to perform trepanation - the careful removal of bits of skull in the belief that it would cure illness. Many skulls, such as the one shown on the right have been found, in which tumi cut-marks can still be seen.



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C/D Shawl Pins



These two pins are probably shawl pins, which were called tupu in the Inca language. Inca women wore ankle-length dresses, bound at the waist by a wide ornamental sash, and a shawl. Like all garments, women's dresses were simply a large rectangular piece of woven cloth, wound around the body and fastened with pins over the shoulders. The shawl was thrown over the shoulders and fastened on the chest with a large decorative metal tupu.



As Inca women did not pierce their ears or wear any kind of earrings, tupus provided a way for women to show off their taste and social position. Tupus were made of cheap metal, copper, silver, or heavy gold, depending upon their wearer's status. They often had large heads of various shapes, sometimes in the form of animal or human figures (right). Most commonly they ended in a large and thin circular or semicircular disk, the sharp edges of which could also be used as a knife (above left). These two copper examples are very simple and presumably reflect their owner's lowly position.



Right: This Inca figure was found dressed in a set of replica miniature clothes. Note the golden tupu pinning the shawl/cloak around the figure's shoulders.

E Ear Scoop



Inca men and women took care of their appearance. It is thought that men removed facial hair with metal tweezers (below left). Many ear scoops like this one have been found. They are often decorated with representations of a hummingbird (right), perhaps because the humming bird's method of feeding by poking its beak into flower heads somewhat resembles the action of scooping out ear wax!



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F/G Beads

Both men and women wore necklaces. These beads are fairly plain and it is not known where they are from. Beads have been found around the necks of mummified Inca bodies.

H Decorative Shell Fragment



It is not known what kind of object this fragment was originally part of. If it was an item of jewellery a male probably wore it, as men seem to have decorated themselves in this way more than women. Probably most men wore earplugs made of various materials - often shell, or for men of higher rank, gold or silver. At their coming of age ceremony at age 14, boys' ears were pierced and a disk was inserted in their earlobes. Bigger disks were continually added. Earplugs for the rich and men of royal lineage were so heavy that their earlobes stretched until they rested on their shoulders. The photograph on the right shows a very elaborate set of ear and nose plugs on display in a Museum in Peru.



The nobility wore such great plugs that their ear-lobes stretched to form loops. These nobles were called *Orejones* by the Spanish conquistadores, which means 'Big Ears'. The Inca statuette on the left shows a man with large ear loops.

Men also wore wide gold and silver bracelets, and metal disks (awarded for military bravery) around their necks or on their heads. Miniature gold masks were also worn occasionally on the sandals, the shoulder, or at the knees.

Ear and nose plugs were also favoured by other peoples in the area. The photographs below show face masks made by the Moche people, who flourished in northern Peru from about AD 100 to AD 800. The Moche produced marvellous metal work and pottery.





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Two Replica Chancay Dolls



Dolls like this are associated with the Chancay people who inhabited the central coast of Peru. The Chancay were neighbours of the Chimor people, with whom they were often in conflict. Both people were later conquered by the Inca.

The Chancay are well known for their textiles. Thousands of Chancay textiles survive in museums around the world. This is in part due to a good environment for preservation on the Peruvian coast, but is also probably the result of extensive production.

Most of the surviving ancient Chancay had been placed as grave furnishings. It is not known whether Chancay dolls were made specifically to be placed in tombs as funerary offerings, or if they represent possessions from life that were buried with their owners.. They may have served in memorial celebrations or as companions for the dead (similar to the Egyptian Ushabti figurines), but no one really knows.

Modern replicas can be distinguished from original dolls by the fact that the ancient dolls usually had woven faces. Modern dolls have their faces embroidered onto plain cloth. Modern Chancay dolls are often made by Peruvian people to be sold to tourists. Two original dolls can be seen in the photographs below.



