Inca: Before The Conquest

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Dedication
My deepest thanks and love to my Mother Ann, who supported all that I have ever achieved, and even those things that I tried but failed at...each experience is a lesson. To the memory of the Inca, and the few descendants that are still amongst us. They were amongst the greatest of humans and teachers that the world has ever known; may the light of their hearts and accomplishments glow brighter with each passing day. And my dearest Irene, you are the gift and treasure that makes me daily believe in the existence of a caring and loving world, and gives me faith in the future of humanity. Let us all learn the lessons of the past, good and bad, and support the good at all cost.

1/ Introduction

Inca; a small word, and yet, ask practically anyone who knows anything about history, especially Native history, from around the world, and they will know that the Inca were a mighty empire of Indigenous people who lived somewhere in the Americas and were destroyed by the Spanish, some time after the arrival of Columbus in the “New World.” However, their true history, although it has been compiled since the time that Francisco Pizarro and the “Conquistadors” first assaulted and then destroyed them in the 1530’s, has been largely a very subjective affair, the accounts mainly being of Spanish writers. By and large, the Spanish were not educated men, in fact, very few could read or write. Their “adventures” into the “New World” were by and large the direct result of the poverty that they experienced at home in Spain. Francisco Pizarro, for example, was the son of a swine herd, and an illegitimate one at that. He clearly saw no future for himself in the “Old World” and therefore he, and the underclass that he was a part of, which also represented the vast majority of the population, cast their eyes toward the lands to the west that Christopher Columbus, whose real name was Christobel Colon by the way, had found after setting sail in 1492.

This book is, by its title, the true facts about how the Inca lived, and what the structure of their society was prior to the invasion of the Spanish, but I feel I do have to explain a few things about the Conquistadors first. As a result of their poverty at home, and the wild stories, clearly exaggerated, that came back from the “New World” as to the untold riches, especially in gold that existed there, no
wonder these men of low means decided to take passage aboard westward bound ships that supposedly would take them to a land and life of wealth and glory.

Most of them could not afford the passage, but agreed to pay loans back which they would be able to do so once they established themselves in this new land. This was of course a trap that these ignorant and desperate men fell into. Many landed in the area of present day Panama, and soon found that there was not gold lying on the ground simply to be scooped up, nor gainful employment. It was from these poor derelicts and cast offs that an enterprising and no less debt ridden Pizarro found the bulk of his crew.

It took 3 voyages, from 1524 to 1532, for Pizarro and his men, a force of between 160 and 184 (opinions and sources differ of course) to finally establish a stronghold in the north of Peru, and largely crush the Inca by 1533. As one reads the accounts of each successive journey, one learns that the Pizarro enterprise increasingly depended upon loans, and then with the “support” of the Emperor of Spain, Carlos the Fifth, the final voyage did glean success for the Conquistadors, their financial backers, and utter destruction of the Inca.

The support of Charles should more properly be described as the final financial straw. In return for his financial patronage, as in funding, Charles was to receive 20 percent of all of the gold, silver and gems that the Conquistadors found. Some accounts expand on this, saying that this 20 percent also included land, and those persons, as in Native people, who lived on them.

Thus, what I am achieving to do in the book so far, is to attempt to explain the mind set of the Spanish, as in their psychological condition, when they met with, and so cruelly destroyed practically every aspect of what the Inca had achieved, and what they represented. I am in no way excusing their actions in any way, shape or form, but this presentation helps the reader to hopefully appreciate the vastly different way in which the Inca civilization functioned, as compared to that of Spain, and possibly all of Europe in the 16th century. A full recount of the conquest by the Spanish can be read in my first book: A Brief History Of The Incas, From Rise, Through Reign, To Ruin.
As a sideline, and jumping ahead to the 21st century, we can, as a result of this study, in some ways see how Peru, and many other Latin American nations “function” today. In general, the Spanish descendants still hold most of the highest seats of power and influence in religion, politics, the military, and economics, while the Native population still languish in poverty; 500 years after the arrival of the Conquistadors. However, one thing that can be said in a very positive note as regards Peru today; the Native languages still to some degree flourish, as do traditional arts, such as dance, ceramics, etc. This is less the result
of a tolerant government as the strength and will of a proud and beautiful cluster of civilizations stretching from the coast, through the highlands, and into the Amazon jungle.

I am proud to live in this country, which presently, in geographic terms, was the heartland of the Inca civilization; though their power was usurped, their people brutalized, and their land beaten into submission, but no power on earth can dampen the hearts and smiles of these people, and the echoes of the brilliance of the Inca increase in volume each day, as their wisdom and grace rise again; lessons of compassion and sharing that this world in crisis truly needs. This is their story as best as I can offer, based on 5 and a half years of loving and respectful research...

In order to start from the beginning, well, what was the beginning? Where did these people we call Inca come from? The most widely held belief, both from oral traditions and archaeological evidence, as well as the field of anthropology, is that the Inca came from the area of Lake Titicaca, the largest navigable lake in the world, the northern edge being located about 200 km from Cuzco, which you probably know was the capital of the Inca.
The legends, as in oral traditions passed on to the Spanish chroniclers of the 16th century and later, as well as those passed down to the descendants by the Native people, say that the Inca either descended from the heavens from a command by their Creator god, or rose from the waters of Lake Titicaca, again commanded or summoned from the same Creator god. In the case of the descent from heaven, which is not as common a tale as the one about “rising from the waters,” most readers will likely leap at the idea that they were extraterrestrials. Interesting idea, but how could one prove such a thing? If we look again at the oral traditions, there is a keen interest in the Pleiades star system, which was used as an agricultural indicator of crop cycles, such as maize (corn) and researcher Wayne
Herschel has speculated that on the Sun Shield located in the most holy of Inca Cuzco sites, the Coricancha, has a portrayal of the Pleiades as being the source of where the Inca came from.

Replica of a gold shield thought to have originally been in the Coricancha

It is, for most readers, a far fetched speculation that Inca had their source in the heavens, but the Pleiades do hold very strong significance in many cultures from around the world. They are commonly called the “Seven Sisters” in many traditions, including the Hawaiians, some Indonesian tribes, the Greeks and Native American people who live near Devils Tower in Wyoming. The re-occurring theme is that seven sisters came down from heaven, and one remained, while the six returned to their home in the sky. The one that remained mated with an earth human, giving birth to hybrid beings. However, I have not found a local oral tradition source in Peru that say whether or not this particular theme was also an Inca belief.

As regards the story of the Inca having “risen from the waters” of Lake Titicaca, however, this, in general, is the more plausible of the two theses. What one must understand when reading or listening to oral traditions is that, in general, they are not to be taken literally. Native teachers that I have had, whether in Hawaii, the west coast of Canada, or Peru all have told me that oral traditions must be seen as
poetic descriptions of real historical events. The reason why poetry was used is actually quite simple; straight facts and timelines are very boring to listen to, whereas poetic portrayals are more interesting, and thus probably easier to remember. The “rising from the lake” most probably means that the Inca came from the area of Lake Titicaca, rising from earlier cultures and traditions.

What is most commonly known and or believed about the Inca is that they were master stone masons, as evidenced by the beautiful walls and agricultural terraces that the visitor can still see today, in Cuzco, the Sacred Valley and as far a field as their civilization stretched up until the Spanish arrived. So, where in the area of Lake Titicaca do we find major stone constructions, especially megalithic ones? The oral traditions, and Spanish chronicles, which are based on what was left of the Inca story tellers after the conquest, give us two main possible centers; Island of the Sun, in Lake Titicaca on the Bolivian side, and Tiwanaku, some times written as Tiahuanaco, which is about 11 km south east of the southern end of the lake, again, on the Bolivian side.

Sunken terrace looking towards the Kalasasaya complex at Tiwanaku
I have been to the Island of the Sun, and was actually quite disappointed with what I found there, as regards megalithic structures. True, there are magnificent and large agricultural terraces climbing the hillsides, which were hall marks of the Inca, and quite an impressive stone stairway at the southern end of the island, which rises a couple of hundred feet or so, but nothing much else. At the north end, where the first two Inca, the brother/sister and Husband wife pair named Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo are said to have either been created or descended from the heavens, there are some roughly shaped stones which appear to have been seats, with a stone table in the center, and dry stacked stone buildings in the background, but again, nothing that appears very impressive.

If we again look at oral traditions, and here I must state, that the stories of the Inca are not as common as some may think, as the result of 500 years of political and religious persecution by the Spanish, the lack of stone structures is explained this way. The Spanish, upon entering the northern Inca city of Cajamarca in 1532, and having held for ransom and then killed the last of the Inca rulers, Atahuallpa, set their greedy little eyes on the capital of Cuzco, to the south. Atahuallpa’s ransom, which procured by the looting of the temples of first Cajamarca, and then Cuzco, is vividly described in my A Brief History Of The Incas book.

The amount of gold brought back for the ransom was but a small percentage of what resided in Cuzco, especially in the Coricancha, which is now called the Church of Santo Domingo in the heart of the city. The Spanish built their church right on top of the most sacred of Inca buildings, because it was a way to “introduce” their belief system to the Native people, by having them seek spiritual guidance and solace at the same site that they had revered for centuries. This was not a unique occurrence, the same “replacement” of one people’s belief system and sacred structure by physically imposing another building on top of the former was a common practice throughout history, and the world. For example, most European cathedrals and churches have been planted on top of earlier “pagan” sacred structures.

The Spanish knew that there was far more gold in Cuzco than had been presented to them in Cajamarca, so having executed, by garrotting Atahuallpa, who had
consented to being baptized a Christian since his alternative was to be burned at the stake, they prepared to move onto Cuzco. What the Spanish did not know was that word had been sent out, via the Inca relay runners, known as Chasqui, who commonly carried messages and even food stuffs to the Inca court at Cuzco prior to the Spanish arrival, made it to Cuzco and beyond first. There they told the officials that the Conquistadors were on their way, and so immediately all of the gold that could be, was hidden into caves and sealed, still hidden to this day. But also, it is believed that the Chasqui also made it as far as the Island of the Sun, where the priests and other officials threw all gold and silver objects into the lake, and tore down the temples that existed there, in an attempt to thwart the Spanish from stealing their precious objects, and indeed not give them a place to find shelter. This of course is but a story, and how much actual proof there is remains unknown.

The other main candidate as the Inca homeland, as I have said, is Tiwanaku. Here there remain megalithic constructions that startle and amaze visitors even today. The age of Tiwanaku is still hotly debated; conventional academics believe it to be amongst the oldest surviving vestiges of pre-Columbian societies, whose origins, based on carbon 14 dating, began at about 200 AD. The culture grew and flourished up until about the 10th century, when a 40 year long El Nino reduced the ability of crops to grow, and this exacerbated the fact that growing food at 13,000 was difficult enough.

The Bolivian archaeologist and engineer, Arthur Posnansky, controversially dated Tiwanaku at 12,000 BC; based on the solar alignment of some of the stone features at Tiwanaku, and how they seemed to be slightly out of sync with the winter and summer solstice. He believed that since the buildings at Tiwanaku were built so well, that the makers of these structures must have built them in the distant past, when the sun’s alignment to the cardinal directions was slightly different. To show this, he employed techniques commonly known as those of archaeo-astronomy.

The basic principle of this are described as follows. Since Earth is tilted on its axis in respect to the plane of the solar system, the resulting angle is known as the
"obliqueness of the ecliptic" (one should not confuse this with another astronomical phenomenon known as "Precession", as critics of Posnansky have done). If viewed from the earth, the planets of our solar system travel across the sky in a line called the plane of the ecliptic.

At present our earth is tilted at an angle to of 23 degrees and 27 minutes, but this angle is not constant. The angle oscillates slowly between 22 degrees and 1 minute minimum to an extreme of 24 degrees and 5 minutes. A complete cycle takes roughly 41,000 years to complete. The alignment of the Kalasasaya temple at Tiwanaku depicts a tilt of the earth's axis amounting to 23 degrees, 8 minutes, 48 seconds, which according to astronomers, indicates a date of 15,000 B.C.

![Diagram of the concept of the Obliquity Of The Ecliptic](image)

Between 1927 and 1930 Prof. Posnansky's conclusions were studied intensively by a number of authorities. Dr. Hans Ludendorff (Director of the Astronomical Observatory of Potsdam), Friedrich Becker of the Specula Vaticana, Prof. Arnold Kohlschutter (astronomer at Bonn University), and Rolf Müller (astronomer of the Institute of Astrophysics at Potsdam) verified the accuracy of Posnansky's calculations and vouched for the reliability of his conclusions.
The site called Puma punku, which is very close to Tiwanaku, is perhaps the most perplexing archaeological site not only in the Andes, but all of South America. What is left of Puma punku (the gate of the Puma) is only a small percent of what must have once been there. Today we find the shattered remains, in red sandstone and diorite, of what must have once been an incredibly sophisticated technological culture. Much of Puma punku, and Tiwanaku have been removed over the centuries by local people and government officials in La Paz, Bolivia, to make other buildings, and indeed, many of the stones which made up these places were crushed to make the rail bed of the train transport system.

The entryway of this Tiwanaku area farm house has used Puma punku stones

Most researchers, be they anthropologists, archaeologists, or experts in oral traditions of the area agree that the Tiwanaku/Puma punku area are where the Inca came from. Why? Because they showed up, supposedly in the 13th century AD, in the Cuzco/Sacred Valley area a fully developed civilization. Indeed that
seems to be why they were so successful at becoming the dominant group in the area at the onset. The timing of the El Nino event, which as I have said is believed to have lasted 40 years, during the 10th century AD, clearly caused not only strife, but would have forced the last of the survivors to flee. Local Aymara speaking Natives are said to have capitalized on the plight of the Tiwanakans, and attacked them at this time. From a population estimated to have been as high as 500,000 or more people, what remained at Tiwanaku are believed to have been just the priest kings, the other residents having died, or moved on to more productive lands elsewhere.

A visitor today to Tiwanaku and Puma Punku will see a small and forlorn place, with biting cold winds that sweep the land, coming from Lake Titicaca. So where are all of the houses and other buildings that the vast populace of 500,000 plus would have inhabited? It is believed from relatively recent research that all but the temple structures that remain there, constructed of andesite, diorite, and red sandstone, were made from adobe; a hard clay which modern farm houses in the area are still commonly constructed from. The roofs, which presently are tin, aluminium or fired clay, would have been straw. It would not have taken too many years, let alone centuries, without maintenance, for the buildings to simply crumble back into the earth, with the lashing rains that are a climatic characteristic of the area.
So the priest kings, the last to inhabit the area, according to the oral traditions, left. But where to go? It is known that they headed north, and about the year 1200 AD they entered the Sacred Valley, and Cuzco. As I have said earlier, the fact that they arrived as a fully evolved civilization, lends credence to the idea that they came from Tiwanaku. Some archaeological evidence which supports this connection include similarities in language; the language of the Inca, commonly called Quechua but more properly known as Runa simi, contains some 33.73% of the cognate roots of Puquina, a language which became extinct in the mid 17th century. It is Puquina which has been proposed by Torero (1972: 59) as having been the language spoken at Tiwanaku.

Also, similarities in ceramic and wooden drinking vessels, such as the famous Qero, as well as the portrayal of serpents, puma and condors, especially on architectural stone surfaces, add further evidence. A full description of the symbolism of these three animals shall be discussed later on in the book.

What also should be discussed is the nature of the Creator god. In most of the traditions, the supreme deity who created the first Inca, Manco Capac and Mama
Ocllo, is called Viracocha. Again we find evidence of the connection that the Inca had with Tiwanaku in that the famous Sun Gate, made from very hard diorite stone and is probably the most photographed stone at Tiwanaku, portrays, at top center, a relief carving of Viracocha. He stands, human like in appearance, holding a staff in each hand. Ancient astronaut theorists of course believe that Viracocha was an extraterrestrial, and that the staffs that he holds are either weapons or some other kind of high tech instrument. However, close examination of them shows, to me at least, that the staffs represent the serpent or snake, and on the ends are the heads of condors. As well, the so called tears that he sheds, according to some researchers, are in fact puma heads. Again, we will get into the symbolism and meaning of these three animals later in the book.
Viracocha is said to have caused the Great Flood which swept the area of Tiwanaku in the distant past, being angry, according to some sources, at the unruly giants that he had created earlier and who had betrayed his laws...hmmm, I think the Bible has a similar story... In any event, after this he raised the land, put the sun moon and stars back into their proper positions, and then created the Inca, plopped them onto the earth, or pulled them out of the water, as we have already covered. He then sent them forth to create a new civilization, and this is where we pick the story of the Inca leaving to find a new land once again.

What intrigues me is that the oral traditions don’t speak of the parent culture of the Inca; they are portrayed as having been specially created by Viracocha, and immediately sent from their birth place to find new lands in which to establish themselves. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the devastating El Nino that I wrote of earlier was in fact so severe that very few people were left alive to flee once the Aymara neighbours saw their weakness?

And what is also clear is that very few of the local people in the area of Tiwanaku today have much of a clue as to the ancient history of the area, and who the great builders were. This could very well be the result of the fact that these are Aymara people, and not Tiwanakan descendants; why would they know about structures or an earlier culture that they have no genetic links to?

2/ Manco Capac: “Leader With Strength:” First Sapa Inca
Viracocha gave Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo a staff of gold, and according to Garcilaso de la Vega, who was royal Inca on his mother’s side, and Spanish on his father’s, the staff was a little shorter than a man’s arm and the width of two fingers. At Viracocha’s command, the couple were to plunge the staff into the ground, whenever they stopped to eat or sleep, and if the staff sunk completely into the earth, it was there that they were to settle.
Garcilaso de la Vega

Garcilaso is now a Peruvian icon; he was born in 1539, just 6 years after the destruction of the Inca, and converted to Catholicism prior to leaving his homeland for Spain at the age of 21. But before leaving he took copious notes, listening to all of the members of his mothers’ Inca relatives, visiting Native villages, and investigating the minutest aspects of what was left of his Inca heritage. In Spain, where he spent the rest of his life, he took part in the wars against the Italians and Moors, and late in life retired to a religious vocation in the
city of Cordoba. At the age of 69 he had published the first volume of his very famous work, the Royal Commentaries, in which he recounted what he had learned, early in life, of the glorious past, and downfall of his illustrious Inca ancestors. He went on writing up to his death in 1616, and now his works are regarded not only as classics of the time in which he lived, but perhaps the truest exploration of who the Inca were, and what they accomplished. I have chosen to borrow quite heavily from his writings, because he was a descendant of the Inca, and thus had access to information that only a relative would have. The unfortunate thing is that he waited so many years to compile it, and was obviously at least to some degree subjective in his presentation, because he obviously was writing for Spanish people, and thus had to please them. His vehement hatred of Atahuallpa, the half blood and last Inca ruler prior to the Spanish Conquest is something that we shall explore in great depth later on.

There were of course many Spanish authors, who lived in Peru soon after the conquest and wrote lengthy discussions about the Inca, however, their sources, the now subdued and abused remnants of a once great people could very well have lied or stretched the truth to the Spanish, for reasons of protecting what was left of their traditions, or appeasing their new overlords. But now let us return to Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo, and their journey north...

At this point I wish to paraphrase the work of Garcilaso, because he has put it much more eloquently than I ever could. “To the entire world, (added our father the Sun) I give my light and brilliance; I give men warmth when they are cold; I cause their fields to fructify and their cattle (llama, alpaca, guanaco and vicuna) to multiply; each day that passes I go all around the world in order to have a better knowledge of men’s needs and to satisfy these needs: follow my example. Do unto all of them as a merciful father would do unto his well-beloved children; for I have sent you on earth for the good of men, that they might cease to live like wild animals. You shall be the kings and lords of all the peoples who accept our law and our rule.”

What is perhaps most interesting here is where Viracocha, the creator god, seems to have been replaced by Inti, the sun. In actual fact, the Inca perhaps chose to
use the sun as a symbol of the creator; Inti was something physical that they could observe everyday, and see the proof in his power through the manifestation of his energy; helping crops to grow, bringing warmth and light. It is possible that Viracocha was kept as the symbol of creation, but that this knowledge was part of the secret and sacred knowledge kept away from the general public.

And now also seems the right time to talk, at least to some degree, about gold and what it meant to the Inca, since it has been the subject of novels, movies, and the lure of adventurers into the Andes and the depths of jungles; the quest for Eldorado. Gold symbolized the sun, and had no inherent value to the Inca. Most commonly it was regarded as the sweat of, and sometimes the tears of the sun. Only the Inca were allowed to wear gold ornaments; since they were, or at least regarded themselves as the “Children of the Sun,” they believed it was their divine right to do so.