

## ***The Incas***

### **Machu Picchu**

Built in the 15th century, most archaeologists believe that Machu Picchu was created as an estate for the Inca emperor Pachacuti, though other theories suggest it was a religious site.

The site was abandoned by the Inca around the time of the Spanish Conquest and, because it was never known by the Spanish, it has remained a relatively intact cultural site.

Machu Picchu was built in the classical Inca style, with polished dry-stone walls that fit together tightly. It is said that not even a blade of grass can fit between the stones.

The space is composed of 140 structures or features, including temples, sanctuaries, parks, fountains, residences and long flights of stone steps. The most prominent features include the Intihuatana, the Temple of the Sun and the Room of the Three Windows, all used to worship the Inca sun god.

### **Machu Picchu**

*Machu Picchu* is a pre-Columbian 15th-century Inca site located in the *Cuzco Region of Peru*, South America (Figure 1). Often referred to as the "*City of the Incas*", most archaeologists believe that it was built as an estate for the Inca emperor Pachacuti (1438–1472).

The Incas started building the "estate" around 1400, but abandoned it as an official site for the Inca rulers a century later at the time of the Spanish Conquest.

Because the site was never known to the Spanish during their conquest, it is highly significant as a relatively intact cultural site. Machu Picchu was declared a *Peruvian Historical Sanctuary* in 1981 and a *UNESCO World Heritage Site* in 1983. In 2007, Machu Picchu was voted one of the *New Seven Wonders of the World* in a worldwide internet poll. Since it began drawing international attention in 1911, a long restoration process has been underway (and continues today) to reconstruct it to its original glory.

### **The Inca**

The Inca absorbed much of their technical skill from the cultures they conquered. They disseminated this skill, along with standard shapes and patterns, throughout their area of influence. Many of the Inca's monumental structures deliberately echoed the natural

environment around them; this is particularly evident in some of the structures at Machu Picchu.

Machu Picchu was built in the classical Inca style, with polished, dry-stone walls. The Incas were masters of this technique, called *ashlar*, in which blocks of stone are cut to fit together tightly without mortar. Many junctions in the central city are so perfect that it is said not even a blade of grass fits between the stones.

Peru is a highly seismic land, and mortar-free construction was more earthquake-resistant as it allowed for the stones to move slightly and resettle without the walls collapsing. Other design details that protected against earthquakes included trapezoidal doors and windows that tilted inward from bottom to top; rounded corners; and "L"-shaped blocks used to tie outside corners of the structure together.

The space is composed of 140 structures or features, including temples, sanctuaries, parks and residences. There are more than one hundred flights of stone steps — each often carved from a single block of granite — and numerous water fountains. These were interconnected by channels and water-drains, perforated into the rock, that were designed for the original irrigation system.

According to archaeologists, the urban sector of Machu Picchu was divided into three great districts:

- The Sacred District contains the archaeological treasures of the *Intihuatana*, the *Temple of the Sun* and the *Room of the Three Windows*, all dedicated to Inti, their sun god and greatest deity.
- To the south, the Popular District (often referred to as the Residential District) is the place where lower-class people lived, and includes storage buildings and simple houses.
- The District of the Priests and the Nobility is a group of houses located in rows over a slope. The residence of the *Amautas* (wise persons) was characterized by its reddish walls, and the zone of the *Ñustas* (princesses) had trapezoid-shaped rooms. The *Monumental Mausoleum* is a carved statue with a vaulted interior and carved drawings, believed to have been used for rites or sacrifices.

As part of their transportation system, the Incas built a road to Machu Picchu. Today, tens of thousands of tourists walk the *Inca Trail* to visit Machu Picchu each year (Figure 0).

### **Sacred or Settlement?**

Some researchers believe Machu Picchu to be a sacred religious site, based on its location. The city was built on and around mountains that hold high religious importance

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in the Inca culture, as well as to previous cultures that occupied the land. Certain stylistic stonework points to the possible use of ritual. Other theorists maintain that Machu Picchu was an Inca *llaqta*, a settlement built to control the economy of conquered regions. Others assert that it may have been a prison, an agricultural testing station, an abode for the deities, or a site for the coronation of kings.

## Textiles

Inca textiles were widely manufactured for practical use, trade, tax collection and decorative fashion.

Cloth and textiles were divided by class, with llama wool used in more common clothing and the finer cloths of alpaca or vicuña wool reserved for royal and religious use. Specific designs and ornaments marked a person's status and nobility.

The weaving tradition was very important to Incas in the creation of elaborate woven headdresses.

Textiles were widely prized within the empire - in part because they were somewhat easily transported - and were widely manufactured for tax collection and trade purposes. Cloth and textiles were divided among the classes in the Inca empire.

Wealthy Inca men wore large gold and silver pendants hung on their chests, disks attached to their hair and shoes, and bands around their arms and wrists. Inca women adorned themselves with a metal fastening for their cloak called a tupu.

## Background

The Incas were highly regarded for textiles influenced by the artistic works of the pre-Inca Chimú culture. The Chimú arose about 900 AD. The Inca ruler Tupac Inca Yupanqui led a campaign that conquered the Chimú around 1470 AD.

The Chimú embellished their fabrics with brocades, embroidery, fabric doubles and painted fabrics. Textiles were sometimes adorned with feathers, gold or silver plates. Colored dyes were created from plants containing tannin, mole, or walnut. These dyes also came from animals like the cochineal and minerals like clay, ferruginosa and mordant aluminum. Garments were made of the wool of four animals - the guanaco, llama, alpaca and vicuña. The people also used varieties of cotton that grew naturally in seven different colors. Clothing consisted of the Chimú loincloth, sleeveless shirts, small ponchos and tunics.

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purposes. Cloth and textiles were divided among the classes in the Inca empire. *Awaska* was used for common clothing and traditional household use, and was usually made from llama wool. *Qunpi*, a finer cloth, was divided into two classes - it would either be made of alpaca wool and collected as tribute for use by royalty, or woven from vicuña wool and used for royal and religious purposes. The finest textiles were reserved for the rulers as markers of their status. For example, Inca officials wore stylized tunics decorated with certain motifs, and soldiers of the Inca army had specific uniforms (Figure 0).

## The Weaving Tradition

The weaving tradition was very important to Incas in creation of beautiful and elaborate woven headdresses. Royalty was clearly distinguished through decorative dress. Inca emperors, for example, wore woven hats trimmed with gold and wool tassels or topped with plumes or showy feathers. Incas also created elaborate feather decorations for men like headbands made into crowns of feathers, collars and chest coverings. Wealthy Inca men wore large gold and silver pendants hung on their chests, disks attached to their hair and shoes, and bands around their arms and wrists. Inca women adorned themselves with a metal fastening for their cloak called a tupu. The head of their tupu was decorated with paint or silver, gold, or copper bells.

## Metalwork

Drawing much of their metalworking style from Chimú art, the Incas used metals for utilitarian purposes as well as ornaments and decorations.

Copper and bronze were used for basic farming tools or weapons.

Gold and silver were reserved for ornaments and decorations in temples and palaces of Inca royalty. Gold was especially revered for its sun-like reflective quality.

Even though the Inca Empire contained many precious metals, the Incas did not value their metal as much as fine cloth.

The Inca people's reverence of gold has much to do with their worship of the sun and the sun god, Inti.

## Golden Plaque from Chimú Culture

The Incans adopted much of their metalworking characteristics from the metalwork of Chimú. Because of their expertise, many metalworkers were taken back to the capital city of Cuzco to continue their metalworking for the emperor.

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## Background

The Inca were well known for their use of gold, silver, copper, bronze and other metals. Drawing much of their inspiration and style in metalworking from Chimú art, the Incas used metals for utilitarian purposes as well as ornaments and decorations (Figure 0).

As part of a tax obligation to the commoners, mining was required in all the provinces. Although the Inca Empire contained a lot of precious metals, the Incas did not value their metal as much as fine cloth. The Incas adopted much of their metalworking characteristics from the metalwork of Chimú (Figure 1). With their expertise, many metalworkers were taken back to the capital city of Cuzco after the fall of Chimú to continue their metalworking for the emperor. Copper, tin, gold and silver were all obtained from mines or washed from the river gravels.

Copper and bronze were used for basic farming tools or weapons. Some common instruments included sharp sticks for digging, club-heads, knives with curved blades, axes, chisels, needles and pins. The Incas had no iron or steel, so their armor and weaponry consisted of helmets, spears and battle-axes made of copper, bronze and wood. Metal tools and weapons were forged by Inca metallurgists and then spread throughout the empire.

## Ornaments and Decorations in Metalwork

Gold and silver were used for ornaments and decorations and reserved for the highest classes of Inca society, including priests, lords and the *Sapa Inca*, or emperor. Gold and silver were common themes throughout the palaces of Inca emperors. The temples of the Incas were also strewn with sacred and highly precious metal objects. Thrones were ornately decorated with metals, and royalty dined on golden-plated dishes inlaid with decorative designs. Headdresses, crowns, ceremonial knives, cups and ceremonial clothing were often inlaid with gold or silver.

The Inca people's reverence of gold, in particular, has much to do with their worship of the sun and the sun god *Inti*. Gold's sun-like reflective quality made the precious metal even more highly regarded.