

Inca Readings

Part One: The Various Peoples and Provinces of the Inca Empire; and the Inca Capital, Cuzco

From Pedro Cieza de León, The Second Part of the Chronicle of Peru:

This land, from Tumbes to Chíncha has [a width of some] thirty miles, in some places more, in others less; it is a broad, flat, sandy land in which no grass or herbs grow and where it rains but little; it is [in places] fertile in maize and fruits because the people sow and irrigate their farms with water from the rivers that come down from the mountains. The houses which the laborers use are made of rushes and branches, because, when it does not rain, it is very hot, and few of the houses have roofs. They are a wretched folk, and many of them are blind on account of the great amount of sand that there is. They are poor in gold and silver, and what they have is because those who live in the sierra exchange it for goods. All the land beside the sea is of this description as far as Chíncha, and even 150 miles beyond there. They dress in cotton and eat maize both cooked and raw, and half-raw meat. At the end of the plains which are called Inges are some very high mountains which extend from the city of San Miguel as far as Xauxa, and which may well be 450 miles long, but have little breadth. It is a very high and rugged land of mountains and many rivers; there are no forests save some trees in places where there is always a thick mist. It is very cold because there is a snow-capped mountain range which extends from Caxamalca to Xauxa and on which there is snow all the year through. The people who live there are much more advanced than the others, because they are very polished and warlike and of good dispositions. They are very rich in gold and silver because they get it from many places in the mountains. None of the lords who have governed these provinces have ever been able to make any use of these coast-people, as they are such a wretched and poor folk, as I have said, that they are fit to be used for nothing else than to carry fish and fruits [up into the highlands], for as soon as they come into the mountainous regions, their own land being very hot, they sicken for the most part; and the same thing happens to those who inhabit the mountains if they go down into the hot country. Those who dwell on the other side of the land, beyond the summits of the mountains, are like savages who have no houses nor any maize save a little; they have very great forests and maintain themselves almost entirely on the fruit of the trees; they have no domicile, nor fixed settlements that are known; there are very great rivers, and the land is so useless that it paid all its tribute to the lords in parrot feathers.

Cuzco, the Capital (from Chapter 17 of From Pedro Sancho, Secretary to Pizarro and Scribe for his army, An Account of the Conquest of Peru):

On the side toward the city, which is a very steep slope, there is no more than one wall; on the other side, which is less steep, there are three, one above the other. The most beautiful thing which can be seen in the edifices of that land are these walls, because they are of stones so large that anyone who sees them would not say that they had been put in place by human hands, for

they are as large as chunks of mountains and huge rocks, and they have a height of thirty palms and a length of as many more, and others have twenty and twenty-five, and others fifteen, but there is none so small that three carts could carry it. These are not smooth stones, but rather well joined and matched one with another. The Spaniards who see them say that neither the bridge of Segovia nor any other of the edifices which Hercules or the Romans made is so worthy of being seen as this. The city of Tarragona has some works in its walls made in this style, but neither so strong nor of such large stones. These walls twist in such a way that if they are attacked, it is not possible to do so from directly in front, but only obliquely. These walls are of the same stone, and between wall and wall there is enough earth to permit three carts to go along the top at one time. They are made after the fashion of steps, so that one begins where another leaves off. The whole fortress was a deposit of arms, clubs, lances, bows, axes, shields, doublets thickly padded with cotton and other arms of various sorts, and clothes for the soldiers collected here from all parts of the land subject to the lords of Cuzco. They had many colors, blue, yellow, brown and many others for painting, much tin and lead with other metals, and much silver and some gold, many mantles and quilted doublets for the warriors. The reason why this fortress contained so much workmanship was that, when this city was founded it was done by a lord *orejon* who came from Condisuyo, toward the sea, a great warrior who conquered this land as far as Bilcas and who, perceiving that this was the best place to fix his domicile, founded that city with its fortress. And all the other lords who followed after him made some improvements in this fortress so that it was ever augmenting in size. From this fortress are seen around the city many houses about 10 miles away, and in the valley, which is surrounded by hills, there are more than five thousand houses, many of them for the pleasure and recreation of former lords and others for the caciques [chiefs] of all the land who dwell continuously in the city. The others are storehouses full of mantles, wool, arms, metals, and clothes and all the things which are grown or made in this land. There are houses where the tribute is kept which the vassals bring to the caciques; and there is a house where are kept more than a hundred dried birds because they make garments of their feathers, which are of many colors, and there are many houses for this [work]. There are bucklers, oval shields made of leather, beams for roofing the houses, knives and other tools, sandals and breast-plates for the warriors in such great quantity that the mind does not cease to wonder how so great a tribute of so many kinds of things can have been given. Each dead lord has here his house and all that was paid to him as tribute during his life, for no lord who succeeds another [and this is the law among them] can, after the death of the last one, take possession of his inheritance. Each one has his service of gold and of silver, and his things and clothes for himself, and he who follows takes nothing from him. The caciques and lords maintain their houses of recreation with the corresponding staff of servants and women who sow their fields with maize and place a little of it in their sepulchres. They adore the sun and have built many temples to him, and of all the things which they have, as much of clothes as of maize and other things, they offer some to the sun, of which the warriors later avail themselves.

Part Two: The Wealth of the Inca Empire

From the account of Pedro de Cieza de Leon:

As this kingdom was so vast, in each of the many provinces there were many storehouses filled with supplies and other needful things; thus, in times of war, wherever the armies went they drew upon the contents of these storehouses, without ever touching the supplies of their confederates or laying a finger on what they had in their settlements....Then the storehouses were filled up once more with the tributes paid the Inca. If there came a lean year, the storehouses were opened and the provinces were lent what they needed in the way of supplies; then, in a year of abundance, they paid back all they had received. No one who was lazy or tried to live by the work of others was tolerated; everyone had to work. Thus on certain days each lord went to his lands and took the plow in hand and cultivated the earth, and did other things. Even the Incas themselves did this to set an example. And under their system there was none such in all the kingdom, for, if he had his health, he worked and lacked for nothing; and if he was ill, he received what he needed from the storehouses. And no rich man could deck himself out in more finery than the poor, or wear different clothing, except the rulers and the headmen, who, to maintain their dignity, were allowed great freedom and privilege.

From Pedro Sancho's account, Chapter 14:

Of the great quantity of gold and silver which they caused to be smelted from the figures of gold which the Indians adored. Of the foundation of the city of Cuzco where a settlement of Spaniards was established, and of the order which was set up there.

When this good news was learned by the Governor, he had it published at once, and because of it the Spaniards were filled with content and gave infinite thanks to God for having shown himself favorable in everything to this enterprise. Then the Governor wrote and sent couriers to the city of Xauxa, giving to all his congratulations and thanking them for the valor they had shown, and especially his lieutenant, asking him to give him information of all that took place in the future. And in the meanwhile, the Governor hastened matters for setting out thence, leaving affairs provided for in the city, founding a colony, and peopling plentifully the said city. He caused all the gold which had been collected to be melted, which was in small pieces, an operation quickly performed by Indians skilled in the process. And when the sum total was weighed, it was found to contain five hundred and eighty thousand, two hundred-odd pesos of good gold. The fifth for His Majesty (the Spanish king) was taken out, and it was one hundred and sixteen thousand, and seventy-odd pesos of good gold. And the same smelting was performed for the silver, which was found to contain two hundred and fifteen thousand marks, a little more or less, and of them one hundred and seventy thousand or so were fine silver in vessels and plates, pure and good, and the rest was not so

because it was in plates and pieces mixed with other metals from which, according, the silver was extracted. And from all this, likewise, was taken the fifth of His Majesty. Truly it was a thing worthy to be seen, this house where the melting took place, all full of so much gold in plates of eight and ten pounds each, and in vessels, and vases and pieces of various forms with which the lords of that land were served, and among other very sightly things were four sheep in fine gold and very large, and ten or twelve figures of women of the size of the women of that land, all of fine gold and as beautiful and well-made as if they were alive. These they held in as much veneration as if they had been the rulers of all the world, and alive [as well], and they dressed them in beautiful and very fine clothing, and they adored them as Goddesses, and gave them food and talked with them as if they were women of flesh. These went to form a part of the fifth of His Majesty. There were, besides, other odd silver objects of like form. The seeing of great vases and pieces of burnished silver was certainly a matter for great satisfaction. The Governor divided and distributed all this treasure among all the Spaniards who were at Cuzco and those who remained in the city of Xauxa, giving to each one as much good silver, and as much impure, together with as much gold [as he deserved], and to each man who had a horse he gave according to the man's merit and that of the horse and in accordance with the services he had done; and to the peons he did the same according to what was posted up to his credit in the book of distributions, which was kept [for this purpose].

Part Three: Inca Roads

From Chapter 15 of Pedro de Cieza de Leon's account:

One of the things which I admired most, in contemplating and noting down the affairs of this kingdom, was to think how and in what manner they can have made such grand and admirable roads as We now see, and what a number Of men would suffice for their construction, and with what tools and instruments they can have leveled the mountains and broken-through the rocks to make them so broad and good as they are. For it seems to me that if the Emperor should desire to give orders for another royal road to be made, like that which goes from Quito to Cuzco, or the other from Cuzco to go to Chile, with all his power I believe that he could not get it done; nor could any force of men achieve such results unless there was also the perfect order by means of which the commands of the Incas were carried into execution. For if the road to be made was 150 miles long, or up to 600 miles, and though the ground was of the most rugged character, it would be done with diligent care. But their roads were much longer, some of them extending for over 3300 miles along such dizzy and frightful abysses that, looking down, the sight failed one. In some places, to secure the regular width, it was necessary to hew a path out of the living rock; all which was done with fire and their picks. In other places the ascents were so steep and high that steps had to be cut from below to enable the ascent to be made, with wider spaces at intervals for resting-places. In other parts there were great heaps of snow, which were more to be feared, and not at one spot only, but often recurring. Where these snows obstructed the way, and where there were forests of trees and loose clods of earth, the road was leveled and paved with stones when necessary....

The manner of making these roads and their grandeur being understood, I will explain the ease with which they were constructed by the natives, without increasing the death-rate, or causing excessive labor. When any king determined to have any of these famous roads made, much preparation was not necessary, but it was merely needful that the king should give the order. For then the overseers went over the ground to make a trace, and the Indians received instructions to construct the road from among the inhabitants who were on either side. One province completed the section within its limits, and when it reached the boundary it was presently taken up by the next: and if it was urgent, they all worked at one time. When they reached the uninhabited parts, the Indians of the nearest inhabited districts brought provisions and tools, in such wise that, with much rejoicing and little fatigue, it was finished. For there was no apprehension, and the Incas or their servants interfered in nothing.