

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

But their roads... 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.