

The Inka in Chile 1470 -1536 CE

(Inka Period)

Environment and Geography

Tawantinsuyu, the name given by the Inka to their empire, was divided into four large provinces with the Inka capital of Cuzco at the center. To the North was *Kuntisuyu*, to the East *Antisuyu*, and to the West, *Chinchasuyu*. The southern province of *Kollasuyu* extended southward into what is today part of Bolivia, northeast Argentina and Chile, ultimately extending just south of the Maipo River in Central Chile.

Economy

The Inka's main interest in Chile was its mineral wealth, and they extracted those resources through their labor tribute system (*mita*), in which community members were obliged to serve the imperial rulers. In this way they specialized the workforce, which in Chile led to more intense agricultural and livestock production to feed the *mita* laborers brought in to work the mines. In Central Chile the Inka mined gold and silver, while in the arid and semi-arid North they extracted copper. Most of what they produced was taken in crude form to special metallurgical centers in Northwest Argentina, although they also operated some smelters and toolmaking centers in Chile.

Art

Textiles were a basic commodity of the Inka State, and served as status symbols, political gifts and as offerings. The Inka and their subjects wore clothing that differentiated them by both gender and social standing. In *Kollasuyu*, Inka textiles combined the esthetics of *Tawantinsuyu* with the traditional styles of the region. The same was true of ceramics, as local production continued but with some Imperial stylistic influences, especially on the form of the ceramic vessels produced. Imperial style Inka vessels were sometimes given as gifts to distinguished local leaders in recognition of their service to the State and as part of the traditional Inka policy of reciprocity. Metals were considered sacred to the Inka, as a medium that linked the supernatural world with social identity, prestige and power. Gold and silver were used to manufacture fine adornments that exclusively for high ranking officials and religious rites, while bronze was less precious and was also used to make tools. Rock art, for its part, incorporated new styles during this period. In the North, the typical figurative camelid designs became the most prevalent image, although three dimensional models of agricultural fields and irrigation canals also appear. In the central zone of Chile large engraved geometric figures predominated, motifs that were similar to those used to decorate Inka and Inka-influenced ceramics.

Social Organization

The different societies living in *Kollasuyu* in the mid-15th Century were organized into estates with different levels of social complexity. Local leaders were placed in charge of small territories, and the new political order required the division of valleys into two halves, each under its own authority. This kind of dual sociopolitical structure had been seen before in the region, but under the Inka it became more prevalent and was structured rigorously around the characteristic Cuzco system. During *Tawantinsuyu* rule, work was highly specialized within the *mita* or labor tribute system, with Inka subjects having to provide free periods of service to the State.

Religion and Funerary Rites

The Inka ruled a theocratic state in which social and economic life were governed by religious beliefs. Their central deities — *Wiraqocha* (the creator), *Inti* (sun god) and *Killa* (moon god)—stood at the pinnacle of a vast pantheon of gods represented as celestial bodies, natural phenomena, mountain peaks and other features of the landscape. The Inka also revered their ancestors. The Imperial rulers established their dominion by symbolic means especially, endowing local cultures' ancient places of worship with Inka sacred meaning. Examples of this can be seen in the Imperial architecture and especially in the *Capacocha* rites. These ceremonies were performed on high Andean peaks in the lands under their dominion, and sometimes involved human sacrifice. Practice of the Inka religion was mandatory for local populations, who were forced to replace their ancient shamanic traditions with institutionalized religious practices that were much more inflexible and presided over by Inka priests.

Settlement Pattern

The Inka used architecture as a means to subjugate local populations, transforming physical space to express power and domination throughout *Tawantinsuyu*. Emblematic Inka structures are identifiable by their perpendicular geometry, their solid rectangular form, their imposing height and well crafted masonry. Trapezoid doorways, windows and niches are also typical. Inka settlements were centered around a large rectangular area enclosed by walls, called a *kancha*, inside which they built structures that served different functions. The *kancha* also had a central plaza-like area that the buildings within the enclosure opened onto. Walls were crafted with incredible skill in stone and adobe, while the A-framed straw and mud roofs were supported by wooden beams. Noteworthy among Inka buildings were the immense *kallankas*, as well as *kollkas*, ventilated food storehouses, usually built in airy places. The *ushnu* was a ritual Inka platform of great ideological importance. The vast territory of *Tawantinsuyu* was united by the *Capac Ñam* or Inka Road, which boasted complex engineering works such as bridges and stone staircases. *Tambos*, located at regular intervals along the road system, served as way stations and offered rooms and corrals. The Inka settlements of Chile were often built apart from local villages, indicating the Inka's intention to differentiate themselves from the local population. Just south of Santiago, there are three Inka *pukaras* (Chena, Chada and Cerro Grande de la Compañía), located strategically on hilltops with panoramic views of the valley below. These sites served the Inka as forts as well as emblems of their authority, and mark the southernmost reach of *Tawantinsuyu*. Their military function also points to periods of conflict between the Inka and the local population.

History

Early historians recount that around 1471, the Inka ruler *Topa Inka Yupanki* sought to expand his rule over *Kollasuyu* south of the Aconcagua River. Later his son, *Wayna Kapac*, extended *Tawantinsuyu* to its southernmost frontier, just south of the Maipo River in Central Chile. As the Inka conquered what is now Chilean territory, they came up against a variety of local cultures, which archeologists have named as follows (from north to south): Arica, Tarapacá, Atacameño, Copiapoe, Diaguita and Aconcagua. The Inka maintained their rule by making effective use of the principle of Andean reciprocity, although the conquest was not without armed conflicts. In the northern semi-desert, the Empire found close allies in the Diaguita, who helped the Inka to expand into neighboring areas, thereby extending the reach of their own culture over a vast region. In the mid-16th Century, indigenous groups witnessed the arrival of a host of new colonizers who came from Europe and would eventually destroy these ancient cultures.