

# Government

The Inca were ruled by one person. He was known as the *Sapa Inca*. The *Sapa Inca* was considered to be a descendant of the sun god. He owned all land and made all laws. He was responsible for maintaining the roads and irrigation systems. He made sure that all Inca people had enough food, clothes, and a place to live. The *Sapa Inca* had many government officials to help him run the government. These officials carried out the *Sapa Inca's* laws, collected his taxes, and made sure all duty work was done. The land was divided into 4 provinces. A noble was given the position of governor of each of the provinces. Areas within the provinces also had local leaders. All reported to the *Sapa Inca*. The *Sapa Inca* would choose who was to rule after him. They would rule together for a while to help the transition from one ruler to another.

# Economy

The Inca government also controlled the economy. Instead of paying taxes, Incas had to “pay” their government in labor (usually several weeks per year). This labor tax system was called the *mita* (*MEE-tah*). Under the *mita*, the government told each household what work to do. Farmers would spend the weeks of their *mita* working in government-owned farms. Some villages would have to produce cloth for the army. Other Incas worked in mines, served in the army, or built road to pay their labor tax.

There were no merchants or markets in the Inca Empire. This means **no trade!** Instead, government officials would collect surplus goods from villages around the empire and goods collected through the *mita* and redistribute them to people in need or store them for later use or in case of emergencies such as drought. It was the responsibility of the government to ensure that the basic needs of every citizen were met. Citizens who wanted “extras” could barter or exchange with others to get additional wanted goods.

# Religion

The Incas were polytheistic. The Incas built the most temples to the sun god, *Inti*. The Inca ruler, *Sapa Inca*, is believed to be descended from the sun god. The Incas believed that the gods were responsible for the things that happened in their everyday lives. Therefore, they believed that they needed to keep the gods happy with offerings and sacrifices. Offerings of burned food and cloth and sacrifices of animals such as llama were made to the gods. The Inca rarely sacrificed humans.

The Inca also worshipped nature. There were special holy places within nature, often near rivers and mountaintops, where the people would go to pray and leave offerings.

The Inca believed in an afterlife. They buried the dead with items they would need in the afterlife. The Inca mummified their rulers and members of the royal family. Mummies were treated like living people. Family members would visit the mummy and ask for advice. Mummies of dead rulers were often taken into battle.

# Social Structure

Inca society was made up of two main social classes, an upper class and a lower class.

## Upper Class:

The Incas from the original group from Cuzco made up the upper class. The ruler and his family were on top. Below them were the nobles and priests. Upper class families had many privileges. They lived in stone houses and wore the best clothes. They did not have to pay the labor tax. They often had servants. However, as part of the government, they had the duty to make sure that all people in the empire had what they needed to survive.

## Lower Class:

As they conquered new lands, the conquered people became the lower class. Lower-class men and women farmed on government land, served in the army, worked in mines, and built roads. Artisans were part of the lower class but were considered higher than farmers. There were very few slaves in the Inca society. These people lived in small villages. By law they had to wear plain clothing and could not own more goods than they needed to meet their basic needs.

# Agriculture

Because of the environment in which they lived, the Inca had to use terraces or steps to farm on the steep slopes of the mountains. This gave the farmers thin bands of flat land to farm. Incas developed irrigation systems to get water to their crops and they also used bird droppings and human waste as fertilizer.

Farmers grew corn, potatoes, squash, peppers, avocados, and cocoa. They also kept llamas and alpacas for their wool. The upper class also ate the meat of the llama. Corn was the most important crop. The Inca grew over 500 different varieties of corn. It could be made into a variety of dishes including bread, porridge (oatmeal/soup like food) and a drink. Religious ceremonies took place during the corn planting season.

Farmers were only allowed to keep the amount of crop needed by their family. All surplus amounts were given to the government. This was either redistributed to other families or placed in storage to be used at a later time.

# Roads

At its height, the Inca Empire stretched for over 772,000 miles. To help connect and rule such a vast empire, the Inca built over 14,000 miles of roads. These roads and bridges connected people across jungles, river, mountains, and deserts.

The roads were primarily used to conduct the business of the government. Government officials, the army, and supply transporters mainly used the roads. The Inca did not have the wheel. Therefore, llamas were used to carry heavy loads of food and cloth on the roads.

Trained runners called *chasquis* (*CHAH-skis*) carried governmental messages along the roads. The Inca had no written language. Therefore, each *chasquis* would have to memorize the message and then relay it to the next runner in line. In a sort of relay race, the message was passed off from person to person until it reached its destination. A message could travel up to 150 miles in one day.

*Tambos*, or rest stops, were built along the main roads. These provided runners and others traveling on the roads places to rest while on their journey. The Incas also built storehouses near the roads. This made the storing and redistribution of food easier.