

15.1 Spanish Conquistador Impressed by the Inca Empire (1553)

Source: Pedro Cieza de Leon, *The Second Part of the Chronicle of Peru*, Clements R Markham, trans. and ed. (London UK: The Hakluyt Society, 1883).

Background: There are no first-hand pre-Columbian Andean histories written by the Inca. One of the earliest and best account written by a Spaniard was written by Pedro Cieza de Leon. Cieza de Leon was born in Seville from a *converso*, or converted Jewish family, and probably travelled in South America in 1536 while still a teenager. After participating in a series of military campaigns in Colombia, Cieza de Leon travelled to Peru in 1547 where he studied Inca society and government. Cieza de Leon eventually returned to Spain and wrote a four-volume *Chronicle of Peru*.

Instructions: The edited excerpts below are from the second volume of the *Chronicle of Peru* that was not published until the 19th century. It is available online as an e-book (<https://archive.org/details/secondpartchron00markgoog/page/n6>, accessed February 12, 2019). You can search the *Chronicle* to find answers to your own questions. Topics you can explore include priests, roads, religion, construction, women, temples, and justice. Read excerpts A – D and answer questions 1 – 5.

Questions

1. Why was de Leon impressed by the ability of the Inca to govern their empire?
2. How did the Inca maintain their authority?
3. Why does de Leon believe the Inca were fair rulers?
4. According to de Leon, why was the network of roads such a major achievement?
5. If you could ask de Leon more about the Inca, what would you like to learn?

A. Great prudence was needed to enable these kings to govern such large provinces, extending over so vast a region, parts of it rugged and covered with forests, parts mountainous, with snowy peaks and ridges, parts consisting of deserts of sand, dry and without trees or water. These regions were inhabited by many different nations, with varying languages, laws, and religions, and the kings had to maintain tranquility and rule so that all should live in peace and in friendship towards their lord . . . None of the natives, though they might be more powerful, attempted to rise in rebellion; or if such a thing ever did take place, the town where the revolt broke out was punished, and the ringleaders were sent prisoners to Cuzco (36).



B. All men so feared the king that they did not dare to speak evil even of his shadow. If any of the king's captains or servants went forth to visit a distant part of the empire on some business, the people came out on the road with presents to receive them, not daring, even if one came alone, to omit to comply with all his commands . . . Every district was as well regulated and governed as if the lord was actually present to chastise those who acted contrary to his rules. This fear arose from the known valor of the lords and their strict justice. It was felt to be certain that those who did evil would receive punishment without fail, and that neither prayers nor bribes would avert it. (37)

C. The Incas always did good to those who were under their sway, and would not allow them to be ill-treated, nor that too much tribute should be exacted from them. Many who dwelt in a sterile country where they and their ancestors had lived with difficulty, found that through the orders of the Inca their lands were made fertile and abundant, the things being supplied which before were wanting. In other districts, where there was scarcity of clothing, owing to the people having no flocks, orders were given that cloth should be abundantly provided. In short, it will be understood that as these lords knew how to enforce service and the payment of tribute, so they provided for the maintenance of the people, and took care that they should want for nothing (37).

D. One of the things which I admired most 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 if the road to be made was fifty leagues long, or one hundred or two hundred, 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 one thousand one hundred leagues 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 (42).