Manco Capac Biography

Manco Capac

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Contents

Manco Capac Biography.....1

Contents.....2

Biography.....3

Biography

The Inca emperor Manco Capac (ca. 1500-1545), though initially used as a puppet by the Spaniards, later took to guerrilla warfare against them but could not stem their conquests.

Manco Capac, who carried the same name as a famed early (11th century) founder of Inca civilization, was one of the many sons of Huayna Capac, last ruler over an undivided Peruvian empire. Two of Manco's half brothers, Atahualpa and Huáscar, had divided the empire on the father's death (ca. 1528). In the civil war that ensued, Huáscar was assassinated by order of Atahualpa, who in turn was captured and executed in 1533 by the Spaniards who had just invaded Peru under the command of Francisco Pizarro.

In order to reinforce his authority over the Peruvians, Pizarro placed Manco on the throne of the Incas in the imperial city of Cuzco (1534). But the puppet emperor came to resent his role and the quickening Spanish destruction of Inca civilization. He fled from Cuzco, organized Indian forces, and returned in 1536 to lay siege to the capital, as well as to other Spanish bases in Peru.

Despite the great numbers of the besiegers, the destruction of many buildings, and the menace of starvation, the few hundred Spaniards in Cuzco managed to hold off the attackers for more than a year, until the siege was broken, in part by the return from Chile of a Spanish expedition commanded by Diego de Almagro, Pizarro's partner, and in part by the disaffection of the besieging natives, who returned to their homes and fields.

Manco fled with his supporters into the rugged backlands of Vilcabamba, northwest of Cuzco, where he sought to maintain the vestiges of royal power at a place called Vitcos. The Spaniards fell to quarreling among themselves over the spoils of empire, and Manco took up the cause of whichever side opposed Pizarro and his followers. Manco's sporadic forays against the Spaniards were of little significance in stemming the conquest, yet the inaccessibility of his retreat protected him from attack. Death came to the Inca when he was murdered in a quarrel over a game that he was playing with some renegade Spaniards whom he had sheltered in his camp.