

Class 7

The Age of Discovery

Week 2

Tuesday 28th July 2020



ATAHUALPA, INCA XIII.

Fall of the Incas

The two soldiers and translator had gone to invite the Inca king for a friendly visit with Pizarro. They were in awe of the civilisation they came across in the great city. The king they were going to see was called Athualpa, and besides his army of thirty thousand men, he had a personal bodyguard of two thousand. In these men alone Athualpa had ten times the number of people than the handful of white men who had arrived. It did not even occur to Athualpa that these men would try to do anything to harm him or his people.

The Inca king was curious, not fearful, to meet these men who grew hair on their faces (for the Incas had no beards), so he came the next day to visit with Pizarro.

He was carried in a litter by the highest noblemen, covered with plumes, golden ornaments and jewels. Behind him came thousands of his warriors with their obsidian spears.

Pizarro sent an interpreter and a monk to meet the approaching King Athualpa. The monk approached him and made a long speech about Christianity and told the king he should become Christian. Athualpa could not understand the monk but listened politely. The monk went on about the Old Testament and the New Testament but Athualpa couldn't make head or tails of what he said, so Athualpa shook his head.

This infuriated the monk. "It's all written in this book!" shouted the monk in frustration. The Incas had no writing and the king had never seen a book before. He took it in his hands in amazement. "It tells you everything," yelled the monk.

Athualpa put the book to his ear as if to hear its message. "No, it does not tell me anything," he said. "Cursed heathen! Is that how you treat the holy word of God?" shouted the monk.



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At that moment Pizarro, who had been staying in the background, gave a sign. With a crack of thunder the cannon fired into the mass of Inca warriors. Hundreds of Incas were struck down and at the same time the conquistadors charged towards the Incas with swords drawn, and cut them down.

You can imagine the surprise and shock the Incas must have felt at this sudden attack. King Athualpa was torn from his litter and taken prisoner. Within half an hour, four thousand of his warriors, along with his noblemen, were killed – their obsidian spears useless against the iron swords. The remaining thousands of warriors fled. This was like the end of the world for them: they had heard and seen thunder and lightning in the cannons, and they had seen their king handled roughly.

‘Who are these people who commanded thunder and lightning and sent my whole army running?’ thought Athualpa in a daze. He feared for his life now and was willing to do whatever these people wanted in order to be set free.

He was told that all they wanted was gold. Athualpa was surprised, for to the Incas, gold was not particularly valuable. They used it for decoration and as ornaments. It was considered beautiful, but not special. Once Athualpa realised the invaders were hungry for gold he struck a deal with Pizarro. “If you spare my life and set me free, I will give you enough gold to fill this room, as high as my arms can reach.”

This was good news for Pizarro – he could hardly believe his ears. He made a promise to Athualpa to let him go as soon as the gold was delivered. A messenger was sent to tell the Incas to bring gold quickly, and over many days all sorts of gold pieces were brought to the room. Cups, plates, and statues which were taken from the temples and from their wives started to fill the room higher and higher.

It would have been difficult to share all these different objects between the Spaniards, so the Incas had to melt all the things down to make gold bars. Many works of art were destroyed.

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Finally, all the gold had arrived, and the room was now stacked with gold bars. Once this was done, Pizarro gave the order to kill Athualpa. The king was strangled in the marketplace before his people. Now the Incas were like bees without a queen. ‘These people who have killed our king must be god-like themselves,’ they thought. They looked at the Spaniards with fear and obeyed them implicitly.

This is the story of the swineherd who became rich beyond his wildest dreams. It was through treachery and surprise that he destroyed a great kingdom and became the governor of the wealthiest American colony, for the King of Spain had granted him permission to govern future lands he discovered. But there came a time when Pizarro would pay for his deeds.

Almagro was not satisfied with his share of the treasure and some conquistadors sided with him. Tension between Almagro and Pizarro mounted, and it came to a terrible battle between the Spaniards and Almagro, which Almagro lost. Pizarro, as governor, ordered that Almagro be hanged.

Almagro had a son, called Diego, and he ran away and his friends who kept him hidden from Pizarro’s spies. This drew the attention of many Spaniards, who secretly came to Diego to plot against Pizarro (who was cruel to the conquistadors who had fought the Incas for him).

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One day, eighteen men came shouting, “Death to the tyrant!” and stormed Pizarro’s house. There were officers with Pizarro, as protection, and they drew their swords. They fought the rebels, but one by one Pizzaro’s officers fell. Pizarro fought as best he could, but finally, exhausted and breathless, he sustained a fatal strike to his chest. He died as he had lived – by the sword and without fear.

Another conquistador, Hernan Cortez, also with a group of men, conquered the Aztec kingdom of Mexico. The king of the Aztecs at that time was a man called Montezuma. This

was also a story of murder, treachery, and courage and involved a vast amount of gold and treasure. The gold found by these conquistadors, and those who followed, was taken back to Spain and Spain became the richest nation in Europe.

Columbus had died in absolute poverty, but his discovery made Spain the richest and most powerful country of all.



Cortez and Montezuma encounter each other.