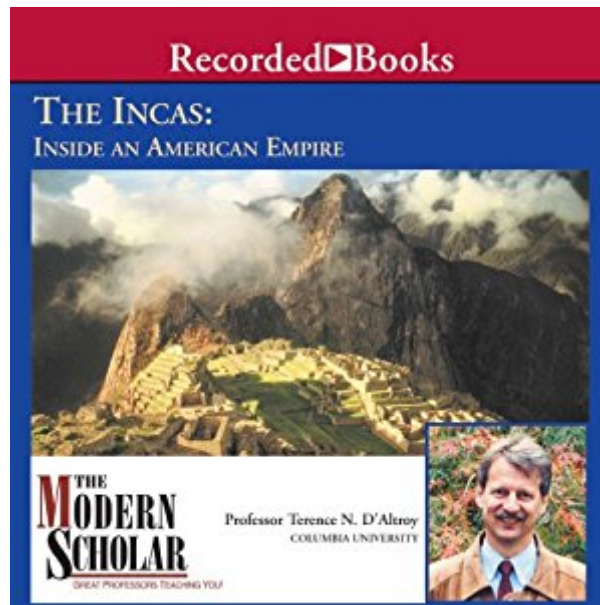


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The Modern Scholar: The Incas: Inside An American Empire



Synopsis

The great empire of the Incas at its height encompassed an area of western South America comparable in size to the Roman Empire in Europe. This book describes and explains its extraordinary progress from a remote Andean settlement near Lake Titicaca to its rapid demise six centuries later at the hands of the Spanish conquerors. A bold new history by the world's leading expert on Incan civilization. Covers the entire Andean region, five countries and ten million people. Heavily illustrated with maps, figures, and photographs.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Incorporating much of the most recent research into Inca history and society, Terence D'Altroy's work is undoubtedly the best (and most readable!) of the serious introductory texts in the field. He covers the various aspects clearly and thoroughly, elucidating the complexities of the historical narrative, social organisation, and economic production, alongside information on ritual practice, accounting methods, architecture and geography. We are given a synthesis of modern research, together with an awareness of how much remains to be understood, such as the quipu rope-knotting techniques that the Incas used to record the movement of goods and transmit laws. There is a wealth of black-and-white photographs and near-contemporary illustrations, and D'Altroy makes extensive, judicious use of both archaeological finds and written sources (native and Spanish) from the decades immediately after the Conquest. The slant is primarily historical, and while - as with any study of Andean history - anthropological theory enters the picture, this is rather less jargon-filled and abstract than the average ethnographic study, but instead shows awareness of historical change and social evolution. Extremely useful.

This book is intended as a synthesis of information on the Inca state. Written both as an introductory book for the broad reading public and as a benchmark for scholars, this book distills historical, archaeological, and ethnographic information into a single nicely organized and written volume. D'Altroy, an archaeologist who has worked extensively in the Andes, covers the prehistory and history of the Inca state, its social and political organization, its religious ideology, and its material culture. The judicious use of historic sources, largely post-Spanish conquest writings, combined with archaeologically derived information is excellent. The writing is free of academic jargon and D'Altroy provides a comparative perspective by sparing but insightful comparisons with other pre-modern empires. It is difficult to write a book that will be interesting to general readers and useful to scholars but D'Altroy has done an excellent job of serving two masters. I've read other books on the Incas and this is beyond question the best single volume on this topic.

Professor D'Altroy, a UCLA graduate in 1981, is director of the Columbia Center for Archaeology and professor of anthropology at Columbia University. His specialty is the Inca, and this volume is a cumulative description of current research on that topic. The Incas is a thorough description of the land and people of the region, including groups and empires that preceded the Inca. Written sources for the information are analyzed for their contemporaneity, reliability, and bias, while archaeological data are used to clarify these accounts where possible. The author discusses not only the rise and fall of the empire but the social order and political and religious ideology as well. The notes to the chapters are interesting in themselves, as they provide additional information that addresses questions that seem to arise from natural curiosity about the details of events. My favorites had to do with the claimed ages of witnesses to events and those claimed for various emperors. The bibliography is truly amazing and contains entries of almost every copyright date, many annotated, recently printed volumes of early explorers' accounts. A casual perusal of the entries suggests that most of these date to 1558 and later. Some of the secondary entries and most of the primary sources are in Spanish, although there are more than enough in English to answer to the needs of the interested. Periodicals are a significant portion of the bibliography, however, and some of these may be difficult to find unless one has access to a large university library. Most of the modern book entries date to the late 1970's, although some of historical interest or significance date to the earlier years of the 20th Century. The book is easily accessible to the average reader with an interest in Native Americans, the Incas, anthropology, archaeology, political history, social history, Spain in the New World, and cultures in conflict.

Simply the best compilation of information on the Incas, written by one of the culture's most prolific researchers. It's very neutral, quite conscious of its limitations, yet information-dense and really rich in detail. I travelled in Peru while reading this book and made the trip even better, if such a thing is possible. While not necessary, I would recommend some familiarity with archaeology and anthropology to read this book. Only with some previous knowledge can the reader enjoy it to the fullest.

A scholarly work, but then I'm scholarly myself, so fine. This book refers to previous scholars' works and draws not always similar conclusions, but such is the way of archaeology and the study of ancient or defunct cultures. Later scholars have the benefit of the previous scholars' works to start out with, then they add new findings and conclusions. Neither of which those who went before had. I like learning about the Incas in great detail which I'd only known in general before.

I'm preparing to travel to Peru in a month so I bought this book to get myself acquainted with the Incas and the book didn't disappoint me. The authors do a very good job in presenting the Incas in a very interesting manner using terms that were easy to follow and understand. The part of the book that deals with their cult of the dead was very interesting and informative. Also it is very well explained how the Incas governed themselves and how they managed to form a very impressive empire despite the fact that it was formed by a lot of different tribes and peoples from the Andean Plateau. This book is a must for anyone who wants to understand and, very important, to enjoy reading about such an amazing culture.

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