

Pizarro and the Conquest of Peru

day, although they were known to be in the town. Perhaps he was deliberately stalling; for with night approaching, the Spaniards' horses would be powerless.

Whatever the reason, Pizarro was frantic. His men, he knew, were exhausted from their journey and a sleepless night. Another such night would be too much even for them. In desperation, he sent word that all was ready and that he would be disappointed if Atahuallpa didn't come as promised. This was bitterly true, although what followed was a clever lie. He assured Atahuallpa that he could come without fear—not that such a brave warrior could be afraid. Even if Atahuallpa was suspicious, this challenge to his pride couldn't be ignored; he had to go.

Pizarro's messenger returned with better news than anyone expected. Not only would Atahuallpa keep his appointment, his warriors would stay outside Cajamarca. He'd come with only six thousand men, mostly orejones of the highest rank.

Inti, his Sun-god protector, was sinking behind the western mountains when the procession resumed. It was a breathtaking spectacle, the last the Inca would ever stage as an independent people. Although the meadows around Cajamarca swarmed with warriors, the royal party came unarmed. Leading the way were hundreds of servants in red and white robes, who examined every inch of roadway, removing loose pebbles and sweeping it clean with branches. If the road wasn't perfectly smooth, one of the Sapa Inca's litter bearers might fall, bringing bad luck. The Sapa Inca was so sacred that he must never touch the ground trod by common humanity.

Next came groups of dancers accompanied by musicians playing flutes, cymbals, drums, and conch-shell trumpets. Chorusers chanted Atahuallpa's praises: "Oh, great and very powerful Lord, Son of the Sun, only ruler, may all the earth obey you." As the procession drew nearer, the chanting grew louder, sending a thrill of terror through the jittery Spaniards. One of them recalled that it "sounded like the songs of hell."

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The procession streamed into the plaza through a single narrow gateway. Without a signal being given, the Indians moved to the right and left, forming a living corridor to the center of the plaza. The crowd fell silent as orejones with gold earplugs, gold bracelets, and gold plates on their chests came forward. Atahualpa followed on a litter richer than any throne of Europe. It was covered with gold and silver plates studded with precious stones. Eighty of the highest orejones in the land carried it slowly, so as not to jar its passenger. Others walked alongside, shielding him with parasols of red, blue, and green feathers.

Like a true Son of the Sun, Atahualpa glittered from head to toe. His short hair was covered with golden ornaments and he wore a collar of emeralds around his neck. His robe was of fine cloth embroidered with golden threads. On his right arm he carried a golden shield with an image of the sun. In his left hand he held a scepter of gold and silver, symbolic of the sun and moon. His sandals were of solid gold. Spaniards who managed to peep out of their hiding places could hardly believe their eyes.

When the litter reached the center of the plaza, Atahualpa ordered a halt. Looking around, he saw everywhere the faces of his adoring subjects. But the Spaniards were nowhere in sight.

"Where are they?" he called out. "Where are the strangers?"

Suddenly, as if by magic, the strangest person he'd ever seen stepped from a doorway. This was Friar Vincente de Valverde, and he belonged to the Order of Saint Dominic, which preached to the common people in Europe. He wore no armor like a soldier, but a black hood, a white robe tied at the waist with a cord, and leather sandals. As he walked toward the glittering assembly, he held before him a wooden crucifix. He had a vital role to play in the tragedy about to unfold. According to Spanish law, Pizarro couldn't attack the Indians without fair warning. Before using armed force, he had to ask them to surrender and become Christians peacefully. Only if they refused, could he attack. The friar was about to make that request.



Friar Valverde offers his illustration is from the first book on the subject collection of the New Y

Speaking through an interpreter, Valverde recited the history of the world from the Creation to the present. He told of the One True God, the Holy Trinity, and the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. He then explained how the Pope, God's deputy on earth, had ordered King Charles of Spain to conquer the peoples of the New World and convert them to Christianity. He ended by calling upon Atahualpa to abandon idol worship and surrender to the king's representative, Francisco Pizarro. If he gave in willingly, the Land of the Four Quarters would become part of the Spanish Empire, the mightiest and holiest on earth. "But if you refuse," Valverde added, "you must know that we will make merciless war upon you, that all your idols will be cast down, and that fire and sword and bloodshed will compel you, whether you wish it or not, to reject your false religion, to receive our Catholic faith, pay tribute to our Emperor, and surrender your kingdom to him."

"Your emperor may be a great prince," said Atahualpa, shaking with rage. "I do not doubt it . . . and I am willing to hold him as my brother. As for the Pope of whom you speak, he must be mad to talk of giving away countries that do not belong to him." Then, pointing to the sun, he proclaimed his faith in the religion of his fathers. "Your own god, as you tell me, was put to death by the very men he created. My god still lives in the heavens."

It was Valverde's turn to be shocked. Never in his life had he heard anyone talk like this—and live. He wouldn't have been surprised had fire and brimstone poured from heaven to consume this wicked pagan. Back home, where the Dominicans supervised the Spanish Inquisition, hundreds were burned alive each year for differing with the Church. The burning ceremony was called an *auto-da-fé*, an "act of faith."

Atahualpa now asked by what right he made these outrageous demands. Valverde answered by holding up a Bible, which the Inca took into his hands.

He looked at it curiously, flipping the thin white leaves cov-

ered with black markings. If this Bible-huaca had any power, it should have spoken to him. But since all he heard was the swishing of paper, he threw it away, shouting, "This says nothing to me." The interpreter picked it up and returned it to Valverde, who ran toward the barracks.

"Come out! Come out, Christians!" he cried as he ran. "Come at these unfriendly dogs who reject the things of God. That chief has thrown on the ground the book of our sacred law." This was the moment the Spaniards had been waiting for. The Inca had rejected the Bible and now the Spaniards could attack with a clear conscience. Any bloodshed would be the fault of the Indians and not their own.

Pizarro stepped from a doorway and waved his white scarf. Instantly, falconets boomed and barrack doors flew open. As cannon balls whistled across the plaza, infantrymen spilled out of the barracks. The cavalry charged at top speed. The blare of trumpets mingled with bells and rattles attached to the horses' harness. Hooves pounded on the flagstones, striking sparks. Again and again, the Spanish war cry rose above the din: "Santiago! Santiago! Saint James and at them!"

No Spaniard then or since has dared call what followed a battle. It was a massacre pure and simple. The Indians had only cloth tunics and feather capes against the Spaniards' weapons. Cannon balls scythed through the crowd, leaving a trail of mangled bodies in their wake. Harquebus bullets and crossbow arrows struck home, sometimes killing two men at a time. Indians, unable to get out of the horses' way, were tossed about like rag dolls or crushed under iron-shod hooves. Those trying to flee were ridden down from behind and lifted off the ground with a lance point jutting through the chest.

The plaza became a slaughter pen made slippery by rivulets of blood. Early in the attack, hundreds had been killed near its narrow gateway. Their comrades were so terrified that they rushed the gateway, trying to climb over the bodies. But instead of escap-



Théodore de Bry's interpretation of the massacre at Cajamarca. Spaniards wielding halberds and swords and firing arquebuses butchered at least two thousand unarmed Indians in order to seize the Sapa Inca, Atahualpa.

ing, they formed huge mounds and suffocated each other. The wall of flesh blocked the escape route and prevented the warriors outside from coming to the rescue. In their panic, thousands pressed against the adobe wall until a fifteen-yard section collapsed under the weight of their bodies. The survivors then fled across the valley, spreading their panic and starting a stampede among the warriors. But the Spanish cavalry jumped the broken wall and galloped onto the plain. Driven wild with bloodlust, they kept after the Indians, shouting, "Do not let any escape!" and, "Spear them!" Hundreds were cut down as they ran.

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Meantime, Pizarro and his men were carving a path through Atahualpa's bodyguard. There was no panic here, only stubborn determination to protect their master at any cost. Unarmed men deliberately stepped between Atahualpa and sword blades dripping with blood. They came forward by the hundreds, clinging to the Spaniards' sword arms until struck down themselves. Although the royal litter tossed and swayed, the orejones kept it aloft. Many had their hands cut off, but supported it with their shoulders during the moments of life remaining to them.

It was useless. The Spaniards cut their way forward and, grabbing the edge of the litter, turned it over, tossing Atahualpa to the ground. As he fell, a soldier lunged at him with his sword. He would have been run through had Pizarro not taken the blow on his own hand. "Let no one wound the Indian upon pain of death," he shouted as he took him prisoner. In protecting the Sapa Inca, Pizarro became the only Spanish casualty.

The massacre of Cajamarca had taken less than an hour. During that time, the Spaniards killed between three and four thousand defenseless Indians. God, they believed, had allowed them to triumph against all odds. They were His warriors, crusaders in a holy war to rid the New World of paganism. Pedro Pizarro recorded that moment for posterity: "Then, night having come, all the Spaniards gathered together and gave thanks to our Lord for the mercies he had granted to them, and they were well content with having made prisoner the Lord [Atahualpa], because, had they not taken him so, the land would not have been won as it was won."

The Spaniards lost no time in gathering the fruits of victory. Pizarro had Atahualpa send word that the strangers would ride out of Cajamarca in the morning. Any Indian who did not carry a cross as a token of surrender would be killed where he stood.

Next morning, while the dead were being stripped of their valuables and buried, Hernando de Soto led thirty horsemen to the camp at the hot springs. As thousands of warriors looked on,

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each holding a tiny wooden cross, the Spaniards ransacked the camp. They brought back golden drinking vessels and statues, golden bracelets, necklaces, and earplugs. In addition, they brought droves of llamas to be slaughtered for food.

Yet Atahualpa's army still outnumbered his captors by hundreds to one. They could have attacked the Spaniards and tried to set the Sapa Inca free. At the very least they could have surrounded Cajamarca and let hunger do their work for them. Instead, they allowed themselves to be dispersed without a struggle. No warrior people ever gave up so easily.

Not that they were cowards. Far from it, as we've seen. Properly led, they and their ancestors had built an empire. Properly led! That was the key to their failure and to Pizarro's success. In a sense, the Land of the Four Quarters consisted of millions of hands directed by a single brain. The Inca had no idea of himself as a *citizen*, with rights as well as duties. Instead, he was a *subject*, existing only to obey and to serve the Sapa Inca. Always discouraged from thinking for himself, he was incapable of resistance at this moment of supreme crisis. Without the ruler's guidance, the people were confused, paralyzed, unable to show initiative. After Cajamarca, they didn't resist, because no one commanded them to do so. By seizing its head, Pizarro had seized the entire Inca Empire.

Pizarro treated his prisoner with respect, even kindness. He allowed Atahualpa's women and servants to move into his quarters in the palace of Cajamarca. Inside these quarters, the Sapa Inca's word was law. He was still waited on hand and foot, still drank chicha from the skulls of his enemies. Orejones still came to him barefoot, carrying token burdens on their shoulders. He still gave them orders, which were immediately obeyed. The only difference was that important matters had to be cleared with Pizarro, whose guards stood outside Atahualpa's door.

Atahualpa, meanwhile, studied the ways of his captors.

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Spanish officers taught him to play dice and chess, and soon he beat them at their own games. He was so intelligent that he could speak their language in twenty days. He even learned to read a little, which was more than the illiterate Pizarro could do. Atahualpa did this by asking a man to write down certain words, then asking another man to read them back to him in private.

Atahualpa quickly realized that the Spaniards craved gold above everything else. This puzzled him, as we'd be puzzled if invaders from Mars craved butterfly wings, beautiful though not valuable in themselves. Still he hoped to turn the Spaniards' greed to his own advantage.

One day he told Pizarro that he would give gold in return for his freedom.

"How much gold?" Pizarro asked.

Atahualpa replied that he'd cover the floor of the room they were standing in with the yellow metal. Pizarro frowned. Surely the Indian was joking, and he saw nothing funny where gold was concerned.



Question and answer. The Indian asks: "Is it this gold which you eat?" The Spaniard replies: "Yes. We eat this gold." The Indians, who valued gold only for its beauty, couldn't understand the Spaniards' lust for the yellow metal.