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# THE PENGUIN HISTORY OF LATIN AMERICA

PENGUIN BOOKS

region he called California, after a mythical land of warrior women featured in *Las sergas de Esplandián* ('The Exploits of Esplandián'), a best-selling romance of chivalry of the period, and southwards to the kingdoms of the Maya and thence into Honduras.

In 1524 two of Cortés's captains led expeditions into Central America. Cristóbal de Olid went to Honduras but tried to lay claim to the territory for himself, angering Cortés by making a deal with his old enemy Velázquez, the governor of Cuba. Cortés set off to punish Olid and found himself on a terrible march through swamps and jungles. As it turned out, Olid had been murdered by the time Cortés arrived in Honduras. In fact, the expedition proved to be entirely futile – no new kingdoms of gold were found and Cortés stained his reputation by ordering the death of the captive Aztec emperor, Cuauhtemoc, on suspicion of stirring the Indian soldiers on the expedition to mutiny. Central America was to disappoint the hopes of its first conquerors. Cortés's other captain, Pedro de Alvarado, spent the next ten years in the conquest of Guatemala and El Salvador without coming across anything to rival the riches of the Aztec empire. Pushing down into Nicaragua, he encountered other Spanish expeditions sent up from the isthmus by the rapacious governor of Panama, Pedrarias Dávila.

## *The Conquest of Peru*

Since killing Balboa, Pedrarias Dávila had found nothing to compare with the fruits of Cortés's conquest, despite his brutal scouring of the southern parts of Central America, a region once optimistically known as Castilla del Oro – Golden Castile. However, news of the Spanish success in Mexico had convinced him that he should concentrate on Nicaragua, where the prospects seemed better than in the south, which had so far yielded not much more than fanciful reports of a land of gold called Birú or Peru. Even so, two veterans of the Indies, Francisco Pizarro and Diego de Almagro, obtained permission from Dávila to search for Peru. A first attempt in 1524 proved discouraging, but a second expedition in 1527 reached the city of Tumbes (north-west Peru), and brought back items of gold and silver and other evidence of an advanced civilization. On the strength of these findings, Pizarro went to Spain in 1528 to obtain a *capitulación* or licence from the Crown entitling him to conquer and settle Peru independently of Pedrarias Dávila. When he returned to Panama, Pizarro brought with him a large number of fellow Extremadurans, including his four half-brothers. His partner Almagro had been recruiting men in Panama in preparation for the



conquest, and another partner, the priest Hernando de Luque, was responsible for raising capital for the venture from wealthy investors.

Francisco Pizarro and Diego de Almagro were established figures in the colony of Panama, owning profitable estates and rights to Indian tribute, but they were also hardened conquistadors with an extraordinary appetite for adventure: when they set off to conquer Peru, they were both in their fifties, an advanced age for the time. Pizarro had first arrived in the Indies in 1502 and had taken part in several expeditions of conquest. From Hispaniola he had gone to the mainland with Diego de Ojeda in 1509; then he had crossed the isthmus under Núñez de Balboa on the expedition which discovered the Pacific Ocean in 1513; some years later he went over to Pedrarias Dávila and conspired in Balboa's arrest, after which he received land and Indians from the new governor of Panama. Unlike Hernán Cortés, Pizarro was no gentleman: a former swineherd, he was born out of wedlock and remained uneducated and quite possibly illiterate. Almagro was no better: he was a foundling from Castile who had come to the Indies as a fugitive from justice and had managed to climb his way up to a position of lordship over Indians on the isthmus – such were the opportunities for advancement in the treacherous world of Panamanian politics under Pedrarias Dávila.

Although they had been partners in other ventures, the *capitulación* of conquest that Pizarro brought back from Spain disappointed Almagro; he resented the fact that Pizarro had been granted the title of Governor and Captain-General of Peru, while he had only been promised the much less lucrative governorship of the city of Tumbes. Another potential source of friction was Pizarro's reliance upon his half-brothers and friends from Extremadura, who formed a clique within the expeditionary force. Almagro's resentment subsided, but circumstances would later cause it to flare up into open hostility.

In December 1530 Pizarro set sail from Panama with the main expeditionary force, consisting of about 180 men and 27 horses; Almagro was to follow once he had recruited more Spaniards. On reaching the coast of Ecuador, Pizarro landed his troops and set off for Tumbes, a long march that was plagued by setbacks, disease and Indian attacks. When finally they reached Tumbes, the Spaniards learned that the great empire of the Incas, which they hoped to conquer, was in complete turmoil, having been torn apart by a dynastic war of succession caused by the death of the emperor Huayna Capac from smallpox (the mysterious disease had swept down from Mexico and was now ravaging the population of the central Andes).

The succession was being disputed by Huayna Capac's son, Huascar, and his half-brother, Atahuallpa, who had raised a rebellion in the northern

provinces near Ecuador. At the time of Pizarro's arrival Atahuallpa had emerged as the victor and was making his way south to the sacred city of Cuzco, the centre of the Inca world, where his troops were holding Huascar prisoner. Pizarro learned that Atahuallpa was at the time encamped not far from Cajamarca, a city which had been abandoned by most of its inhabitants during the civil war.

Freshly reinforced from Panama, Pizarro decided to seek out Atahuallpa and, as Cortés had done with Montezuma, to take the Inca hostage. As had occurred in Mexico, the Indians kept the Spaniards under surveillance as they made their way to Cajamarca, but, again for reasons which are not clear, the native emperor forbore to destroy an invasion force numbering a mere 60 horsemen and some 100 foot-soldiers. In November 1532, nearly two years after he had left Panama, Pizarro reached Cajamarca and installed himself in the city. He then sent a party of Spaniards to invite Atahuallpa to a meeting. The Spanish emissaries sought to impress the Inca with a display of horsemanship, a ploy which appeared to succeed since the horse was completely alien to the Indians. Atahuallpa agreed to come to Cajamarca the following day, but, in the event, appeared in the evening, having been informed by his spies that the Spaniards unsaddled their horses at night and were therefore more vulnerable to attack.

As the sun declined on the evening of Saturday 16 November 1532, Atahuallpa entered the empty square of Cajamarca on a magnificent litter borne by 80 nobles and escorted by 6,000 men; thousands of warriors in full battle order had been drawn up on a plain outside the city awaiting further orders. For his part, Pizarro had hidden his hundred-odd men in the vacant buildings surrounding the square, where they had been waiting for hours in terrified apprehension. Atahuallpa was perplexed by the absence of the Spaniards and took it as a sign of fear at the strength of his army. But then the priest Vicente de Valverde appeared in the square accompanied by only a native interpreter, and commenced to recite the Requirement, a formal request that the heathen submit to the authority of the Pope and the king of Spain and permit the teaching of the Christian religion. Rejection of the Requirement was considered sufficient grounds for declaring a 'just war' on behalf of the Spanish Crown. Atahuallpa, who had never before set eyes on a book, took Valverde's breviary and examined it with curiosity before tossing it to the ground. Valverde then turned away and cried out to the concealed Spaniards that the Inca had repudiated the word of God. Upon an agreed signal Pizarro's men launched their attack: cannon and guns opened fire on the crowded square, horsemen charged out of the buildings and Pizarro tried to drag Atahuallpa from his litter – which he managed to do



only after the Inca's bearers had all been cut down by the Spaniards while fiercely resisting the assault on their emperor. The Spanish horsemen and soldiers chased the panic-stricken Indians out of the city, and then turned on the Inca army waiting on the plain outside Cajamarca; between 6,000 and 7,000 Indians lost their lives, and many more were wounded.

Francisco Pizarro had pulled off an astonishing *coup de main*: in one evening he had seized control of an empire, for the rule of the Inca emperor, whose authority was believed to be divine, was absolute and unquestioned. Like Montezuma before him, Atahuallpa had utterly misjudged the Spaniards; he had found it impossible to conceive that so puny a force could presume to attack an empire which he himself had only just won after a bloody civil war. Out of curiosity he had allowed them to reach Cajamarca, and he later admitted that his intention had been to capture Pizarro and kill or enslave his men. What had spared the Spaniards this fate was their ruthlessness in catching the Inca by surprise.

With Atahuallpa as hostage, events began to move in Pizarro's favour. The Inca was still unaware of the ultimate intentions of the Spaniards: he thought it scarcely possible that they would actually want to rule his empire; more likely they were bandits who could be bought off with gold and later destroyed while trying to escape. Atahuallpa therefore ordered his generals not to attack the Spaniards, and instead offered them a huge ransom in pure gold, which Pizarro eagerly accepted with a solemn promise to release Atahuallpa once it had been collected. Atahuallpa also took care to consolidate his political position: he ordered the troops occupying Cuzco to execute his brother Huascar so as to prevent his defeated rival for the throne from taking advantage of his own captivity. For eight months the Spaniards waited with Atahuallpa for the ransom to arrive from Cuzco and other places. Word had been sent back to Panama for reinforcements; yet the dangers of waiting were obvious: the Spaniards were easy prey for Atahuallpa's victorious armies. In Cuzco there were 30,000 troops under the command of Quisquis; in Jauja, halfway between Cuzco and Cajamarca, there was an army of 35,000 under Chalcuchima; and in the north there was another powerful army under Rumiñavi guarding Quito – any one of these generals might decide to move against the tiny Spanish force holding the emperor. In the circumstances the Spaniards' only recourse was guile. Hernando Pizarro, on his return through Jauja from a foray in search of gold, persuaded Chalcuchima to pay a visit to his captive emperor; at Cajamarca this powerful Inca general was taken prisoner, and yet another blow was delivered to the structure of imperial power.

A further setback for Atahuallpa was the arrival of Diego de Almagro in

April 1533 at the head of a company of 150 conquistadors, all of them eager for booty. Finding himself still a captive after all the gold he had promised had been collected and melted down, Atahuallpa must have realized that only military force could rescue him. In fact, the Spaniards were in a quandary over what they should do with the emperor now that they had received their ransom. Rumours reached Pizarro that Rumiñavi's army was advancing from Quito, so he sent out a party of horsemen under Hernando de Soto to verify this information. However, even before De Soto had returned, Almagro and his followers were pressing Pizarro to kill Atahuallpa forthwith. Pizarro finally yielded, since he feared that the Inca might escape or be the cause of a general rebellion if he were taken with them on the long march to Cuzco. And so, the defenceless Atahuallpa was garrotted. It was a cruel and illegal act, regretted by many Spaniards in Peru, who believed the emperor should have been sent into exile instead, and it was subsequently criticized by the Spanish monarch himself, who was anxious to preserve Spain's moral and religious right to rule in the New World.

With Atahuallpa out of the way, the Spaniards prepared to march on Cuzco, the centre of the empire. Their forces were still very small, but circumstances had provided them with the opportunity to divide and conquer. The war of succession had exacerbated the political and tribal divisions in the empire, and Pizarro was able to play off one side against the other. His murder of Atahuallpa was welcomed by Huascar's branch of the Inca royal family, who began to collaborate with the Spaniards in the hope of regaining the throne they had lost to the usurper from Quito. Pizarro naturally seized this chance to present himself to the tribes loyal to Huascar as the restorer of the legitimate Inca line. He had one of Huascar's brothers, Tupac Huallpa, proclaimed emperor so that when the Spaniards arrived in Cuzco they would be seen as liberators come to expel the Quitan army of occupation commanded by Atahuallpa's general Quisquis.

The march from Cajamarca to Cuzco proved difficult: for the first time since their arrival in Peru the Spaniards had to engage Indian armies in open battle. Pizarro's political strategy collapsed when the puppet emperor Tupac Huallpa fell ill and died. Suspecting the captured Quitan general Chalcuchima of having poisoned Tupac Huallpa, Pizarro had him burnt alive for treason. Eventually, another brother of Huascar, the twenty-year-old Manco, was selected as the new puppet ruler. Finally, after a series of battles along the way, the Spaniards decisively defeated Quisquis's army in a bloody engagement in the mountains above Cuzco. On 15 November Pizarro led his men into the royal city of the Incas, where the Spanish conquerors were able to indulge their lust for gold by looting its abundant treasures.



Although the heartlands of the Inca empire had now fallen to Pizarro, the conquest was by no means complete. There remained the northern provinces of Quito (modern Ecuador), where Rumiñavi's army was based and towards which Quisquis's defeated troops were retreating. To the south the territories which today are Bolivia and Chile had yet to be penetrated. More important still, there were certain issues which needed to be clarified before Spanish power could be securely established in Peru. First, Manco Inca was still under the impression that Pizarro was an adventurer and not a conqueror; he nursed the ambition to rule over a restored empire once the Spaniards could be induced to depart. Secondly, Almagro and his men were growing resentful of the dominance of the Pizarro brothers, since they had not been given a share of Atahuallpa's golden ransom and their hunger for the rewards of conquest had yet to be properly satisfied. These unresolved matters would provoke further bloody wars and delay the pacification of Peru for some three decades.

The conquest of the northern provinces of Quito was undertaken by one of Pizarro's lieutenants, Sebastián de Benalcázar. This expedition, however, had to contend with a rival invasion led by one of the conquerors of Mexico, Pedro de Alvarado, who had proceeded unannounced from Guatemala in search of more riches to plunder. The two armies of conquistadors were poised to do battle with each other, but Alvarado finally agreed to be paid off in gold by Diego de Almagro, who had come up to reinforce Benalcázar. The campaign that followed was particularly hard and bloody; yet by the end of 1534 Benalcázar and Almagro had wrested the provinces of Quito from Atahuallpa's surviving generals and the military power of the Inca empire was comprehensively destroyed.

Meanwhile, Francisco Pizarro, now styling himself Governor of Peru, had been busy consolidating the Spanish presence in the central provinces. A Spanish municipality was established in Cuzco itself, but Cuzco was too far inland and too high up in the Andes to be of use to the Spaniards as a capital. Instead, Pizarro chose to build a new capital city near the coast, close to the mouth of the River Rimac. It was officially founded on 6 January 1535 and called the 'City of the Kings' to commemorate the Epiphany, the feast-day of the Three Kings, though it soon became known as Lima, a corruption of Rimac, the river by which it stood. Pizarro had chosen well, for in the conflict that was brewing with his partner Almagro, Lima would give him the advantage of being supplied directly by sea from Panama.

The bone of contention between Pizarro and Almagro was to be the city of Cuzco. In early 1535 the partners had received an order from Charles V granting Pizarro jurisdiction over the northern territories of the Inca empire,

while Almagro was to govern those of the south. Yet the royal decree did not make clear who should get the rich prize of Cuzco, which lay at the centre of the empire. The uncertainty produced tension between supporters of Pizarro and Almagro in the city itself; the quarrel was temporarily defused by Pizarro, who persuaded Almagro to lead an expedition of conquest into lands which are now part of Bolivia and Chile; these provinces were unquestionably under Almagro's jurisdiction and promised further riches. Accordingly, Almagro set off on a campaign which lasted two years and turned out to be a complete disaster. Despite inflicting great cruelty on the Indians and enduring horrible privations in crossing the freezing Andes and the torrid wastes of the Atacama desert, Almagro's expedition found little of value. On their return, empty-handed and forlorn, but possessed of a solidarity forged during that brutal episode, Almagro's 'men of Chile' would covet Cuzco more intensely than before, and they were now confirmed enemies of the Pizarro brothers.

While Almagro and his men were away, Gonzalo and Juan Pizarro were left in charge of Cuzco, but, in truth, their stewardship had proved a fiasco which was to put the entire Spanish conquest of the Inca empire in jeopardy. Few restraints had been placed on the greed of the numerous Spanish bounty-hunters who flocked to the holy city. As a result of so many abuses and outrages committed against the Indians, it became obvious to the puppet ruler, Manco Inca, that the rapacious Spaniards had no intention of quitting Peru. Already heavily censured by the Inca elders for his submissiveness, Manco decided in the autumn of 1535 to cease collaborating with the foreigners and to call for a rebellion to drive them out of his realms. By the spring of 1536 Manco had raised a formidable army and was laying siege to Cuzco, where there were only 190 Spaniards – though they were now led by the capable Hernando Pizarro, who had taken over from his irresponsible younger brothers. Another Inca army was besieging Lima, and there Francisco Pizarro, believing all would be lost, appealed for help to the Spaniards of Panama. As supplies and reinforcements came from all over the Spanish Indies, the siege of Lima was soon broken, but Cuzco remained in peril for nearly a year. The city was finally relieved when Almagro's 'men of Chile' returned from their expedition in April 1537 and forced Manco Inca to withdraw. Almagro then entered the exhausted city and arrested the Pizarro brothers before setting off for Lima to confront Francisco. The erstwhile partners failed to resolve their differences, and Peru, which had fallen to the Spaniards as a result of an internecine conflict among the Incas, was plunged into another civil war – this time between the Spanish conquerors themselves, who were unable to agree over the spoils of victory.



The war did not last long, though the bitterness of its legacy was extremely damaging to Spanish interests in Peru. After a number of skirmishes, Hernando Pizarro succeeded in reaching Cuzco, where he inflicted a heavy defeat on the Almagristas at the battle of Las Salinas on 26 April 1538. Diego de Almagro himself was taken prisoner, made to stand trial and, to the horror of many Spaniards, put to death by strangling. The Pizarros were now masters of Peru, but their hold on the conquered empire was precarious. They had to reckon, in the first instance, with a large faction of vengeful Almagristas now led by their murdered leader's half-caste son. Then there was the rebel Manco Inca, who was still at large raising Indian revolts which had to be put down with much bloodshed, thereby delaying the pacification of the country. To add to the turmoil, a stream of Spanish ruffians poured into Peru in search of Inca gold, only to turn into drifting malcontents when their hopes were disappointed. Finally, the Pizarros had to contend with the distaste felt by the Spanish monarch for the way in which Peru had been won on behalf of the Crown. Atahuallpa's death had caused enough disquiet, but now Almagro's execution provoked anger at the imperial court: when Hernando Pizarro came to Spain in 1539 bearing gifts of gold for the emperor, he was imprisoned and held in confinement for the next twenty-two years. For Francisco, the repercussions of Almagro's murder were to be fatal: on 26 June 1541 twenty Almagristas broke into his palace in Lima and hacked him to death. The assassins then proclaimed the young Diego de Almagro governor of Peru.

Once again, Spanish Peru slipped into civil war, but this time the Crown intervened directly to restore order. A royal official, Cristóbal Vaca de Castro, was sent out, and with an army of Pizarro supporters marched against the Almagristas, defeating them at the battle of Chupas on 16 September 1542. Even then the turmoil was not over: within two years the Spanish settlers in Peru rebelled against the viceroy, Blasco Núñez Vela, over his ham-fisted efforts to implement a new royal code regulating the relations between Spaniards and Indians. It was Gonzalo Pizarro who headed the rebellion, and he effectively became the ruler of Peru after Núñez Vela was killed in battle in 1546.

With the death of the viceroy, the surviving Pizarro brothers and their many followers among the Spanish settlers saw an opportunity to declare their independence from Spain by having Gonzalo proclaim himself king of Peru. In order to prevent this, in 1547 a royal army entered the country under the command of Pedro de la Gasca; he suspended the new code to placate the settlers, and then on 9 April 1548 engaged and defeated the Pizarristas at the battle of Sacsahuana outside Cuzco. With the execution of

Gonzalo for treason, the power of the Pizarros was at last broken; royal authority was vigorously asserted without direct challenge by a succession of able viceroys in the course of the 1550s and 1560s, more than twenty years after Francisco Pizarro and his band of warriors had first irrupted into the Inca empire.

There remained, however, one last major obstacle to the pacification of Peru in the survival of the Indian resistance initiated by Manco Inca, who had led major uprisings in 1536–7 and 1538–9. Deep in the virtually impenetrable jungles covering the mountains around the Vilcabamba valley midway between Cuzco and Lima, Manco had set up an independent neo-Inca state, in which the ancestral religion and laws were revived; from here he continued to launch attacks and foment revolts against the Spaniards until 1545, when he was killed by treacherous Almagrista fugitives, to whom he had given refuge from the Pizarro brothers. His successor, Titu Cusi, was careful to maintain relations, albeit fairly strained at times, with the Spaniards – even to the extent of accepting baptism in 1568 and permitting Augustinian friars to enter Vilcabamba to preach Christianity to his subjects. But this attempt to establish a *modus vivendi* was condemned to failure: the Spaniards could not accept the existence of a neo-Inca statelet in the heart of their realms. It was the viceroy, Francisco de Toledo, who perceived the need to break Inca power altogether if Spain was ever to secure its authority over the Indians of the central Andes. At the same time, the Incas abandoned their policy of accommodation when Titu Cusi died in 1571 from a strange illness. The Indians believed that he had been poisoned by a member of the small circle of Spaniards at the Inca's court, and, in retaliation, the new Inca, Tupac Amaru, repudiated Christianity and had a Spanish missionary put to death by torture. Subsequent efforts by the Spanish authorities to re-establish diplomatic relations were cut short by the murder of a Spanish emissary to Vilcabamba. These outrages gave Viceroy Toledo a pretext to order the destruction of the neo-Inca state; in 1572 the jungle enclave was wiped out by Spanish forces and the last free Inca ruler, Tupac Amaru, was executed. However, the memory of Vilcabamba lived on in the submerged folk-culture of the Indians of the central Andes, and Tupac Amaru became a powerful symbol of independence; so much so that in the 1780s an Indian chieftain took the name Tupac Amaru and led a massive uprising against the whites of Peru.

Still, resistance had not been the only Inca response to the Spanish Conquest. The rebel Manco himself began his political life as a collaborator, a policy that his half-brother, Paullu, continued to pursue after Manco had decided to rebel. Convinced that the Spanish presence was a *fait accompli*, Paullu



rejected Manco's exhortations to join what he regarded as futile rebellion and decided instead to transfer his allegiance to the Spanish Crown. Considering the abrupt shifts of power that took place in the aftermath of the conquest, Paullu turned out to be immensely gifted in the arts of political survival, happily serving as puppet Inca under whichever set of Spaniards happened to be in charge of Peru, from Francisco Pizarro through Almagristas and Pizarristas to the first viceroys. Much of the Inca royal family and nobility followed Paullu's example, accepting the sovereignty of the king of Spain and receiving pensions and estates from the Crown as rewards for their loyalty.

## *Other Explorations and Conquests*

The conquest of Peru had proved a long, bloody and treacherous affair, in which many of the leading conquistadors lost their lives. But just as the conquest of Mexico had inspired further penetration of the American continent, so did the news of Atahuallpa's ransom spur other Spanish captains to set out in search of yet more kingdoms of gold. In the 1530s and 1540s the pace of exploration and conquest quickened once again. Interest centred initially on the areas north of the Inca empire – namely, modern Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela. One of Pizarro's captains, Sebastián de Benalcázar, followed up his conquest of the provinces of Quito in 1534 with an excursion into the territory of the Chibcha Indians, where he founded the Spanish settlements of Popayán (1536) and Cali (1537). As he approached Bogotá, the capital of the most powerful Chibcha kingdom, he encountered two other Spanish expeditions, both of which had penetrated the hinterland of Tierra Firme from different points on the Caribbean coast – one was led by Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, who had already conquered the Chibcha kingdom of Tunja, the other by Nikolaus Federmann, a German subject of Charles V. Drawn to the upland savannahs of Bogotá by rumours of gold and emeralds – deposits of gold had been found in 1533 by Pedro de Heredia's expedition to western Colombia – the three rival conquistadors decided to avoid an armed confrontation and abide by the arbitration of the Crown. Eventually, Benalcázar was appointed governor of this new frontier territory and the other two commanders withdrew.

But rumours persisted – rumours which Jiménez de Quesada among others evidently believed – that beyond the Andes, in the mysterious interior of the continent, there lay a land so rich in gold that its king covered himself in the precious dust once a year to bathe in a sacred lake. Though nothing ever