

Manco Capac and the Rod of Gold



*An Inca/Quechua Myth
retold by Lulu Delacre*

- 1 Long ago in ancient times, the Peruvian highlands were just craggy, bushy hills. The inhabitants of these lands were wild people who lived in small groups and hid in mountain caves. And like beasts, they ate grasses and roots and wild fruits. Sometimes they even ate human meat. They wore tree leaves and animal hides to cover themselves, or simply went naked.
- 2 One day, Father Sun took pity on these people who had no knowledge of farming or weaving. He sent his own son and daughter from the sky to help them learn the ways of the gods. They were to teach the people on earth how to work the land and live from the fruit of their labor; how to build dwellings and live in communities; and how to worship Father Sun and live by his law. With this command, he put his son and daughter in Lake Titicaca, and as a sign he gave them a thick golden rod about half the length of a man's arm. Then he spoke:
- 3 "Walk, my children, in any direction, and find a site for a city, and build it. Whenever you stop to eat or sleep, drive the rod into the ground. When you find a place where the rod disappears in just one push, there you shall build the new kingdom."
- 4 Before they parted he added, "When all the people have become your subjects, you must rule them wisely and justly, with pity, with mercy, and with tenderness. Treat them with as much compassion as a father would treat his beloved children. It is in this way you must imitate me. For it is I who bring warmth and light to the world, watching over it lovingly as I circle each day. I have sent you to the earth to save these people who live there as wild beasts. I therefore name you king and queen. You shall rule over all who will follow your guidance and your lawful government."
- 5 So it was and Father Sun left. Dressed as king and queen in regal garments and adorned with sumptuous earrings that would later become a sign of nobility among the Inca, the Sun's children began walking north. They traveled on foot for a long distance. Wherever they stopped to eat or sleep they would try to bury the rod in the ground, but without success. They continued their walk until they arrived in the Cuzco valley. In this rough land they stood, and the Sun's son tried to drive the rod into the ground once more. This time it went easily and disappeared into the earth.
- 6 The Sun's son became the first Inca king and he said to his queen: "This must be the valley decreed by our Father Sun to be settled to fulfill his command. So it is wise, my queen and sister, that now we each part in search of the people who will follow the

ways of our father and live according to his law. A temple dedicated to him shall be built in the heart of the city."

7 They both took different paths, spreading their father's word. The wild people awed by the Inca king and his queen's rich appearance, were tempted by their promises of an enlightened community and plenty of food to eat. Hence, many men, women, and children followed the king. An equal number followed the queen. The king and queen became their rulers, and as they walked toward the valley of Cuzco, the number of followers increased twofold and threefold.

8 As the royal couple witnessed this, they stopped and said: "We shall divide the workload among all of us." Some were sent for food, others to build huts and houses. In this way, the imperial city was built. The king's followers settled in Hanan Cozco, the high Cuzco. The queen's followers settled in Hurin Cozco, the lower Cuzco.

9 While the city was being built, the king taught the men how to plow and farm the land, how to sow the seed into the ground, how to cultivate plants in rows, and how to know which ones to eat. He taught them what kinds of tools to use, and how to build ditches to irrigate the fields. The Inca *rey*, the Inca king, taught the men all they needed to know, even how to make shoes.

10 The Inca *coya*, the Inca queen, busied herself by teaching all the women how to spin and knit cotton and wool and also how to make clothes for themselves, their husbands, and their children. She showed them the best way to cook and clean and do every domestic chore. With grace and good will, the Inca king taught the men while the Inca queen taught the women. From them, the people learned all that was necessary to live a good life.

11 The Inca king was called Manco Capac, and his queen was called Mama Ocllo Huaco. They were children of the Sun and the Moon, brother and sister, and the first royal couple of the great Inca empire from whom all other rulers would descend.