

# Traditions of Lost Treasures of the Incas

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**U**ROCO, Peru, June 7.—Have you ever heard of Uroco? It is a little mud town on the railroad between Cuzco and Lake Titicaca. It is more than two miles above the sea, high up in the Andes and not far from Lake Uroco, in which are said to be buried treasures of the Incas worth many millions. When the Spaniards under Pizarro had killed the Inca king Atahualpa they marched upon Cuzco. The Indians knew their greed for the precious metals, and they took most of their treasures from the capital city and secretly buried them. According to tradition, they threw millions of dollars' worth of gold into this lake, and with other things the great golden chain that ran around their main plaza. This plaza remained intact until a few years ago. It was about 500 feet long and several hundred feet wide, so that the length of the chain was probably between 1,000 and 2,000 feet. The chain was pure gold, wrought into links about a foot long and its large around as the wrist of a man. The links were so heavy that a man could not lift more than one of them at a time, and it is said that hundreds of Indians were required to carry the chain. They took it into the lake, and there it is supposed to lie to this day, although many have searched for it in vain. The treasure hunters have dived into the water and clawed over the mud near the shore. They have also dragged the lake with grappling hooks, but in places it is exceedingly deep, and so far the treasure had not been discovered. At one time a syndicate was organized to drain the lake. This syndicate had a capital of \$5,000,000 and its plan was to tunnel the mountainside. But the rock was too tough and the enterprise was abandoned.



Lake Titicaca.



The Lord of the Earthquakes

**Once Wealthy Tribe.**  
The treasurers of the Incas were not confined to Cuzco. I have heard stories of buried hoards all along the Andes from Panama to Lake Titicaca. They had vast quantities of gold and silver in Quito, and at Cerro de Pasco I found a party of Americans and British who were prospecting for one of these hoards. They have already spent thousands of dollars and are sinking more every day. While I was before the vault of the Cuzco cathedral I was shown a golden box weighing thirty-six pounds made of the plates that were torn from the Inca Temple of the Sun, and was told that that cathedral was largely built by Inca gold.

I understand that the treasures of gold that were stored on the holy islands of the sun and moon were thrown into Lake Titicaca, and I hear other traditions of the vast amounts of gold and silver the Spaniards failed to get. That which they obtained was greater than the wealth of Croesus. The amount taken from the temples of Cuzco alone is said to have been worth more than \$90,000,000, and a part of this went to Cajamarca to free the Inca emperor who had come in friendship. He was treacherously imprisoned by Pizarro. He was carried to Cajamarca in a litter of massive gold covered with a cloth embroidered with plumes of tropical birds. This cloth was studded with gold and silver plates. Atahualpa's hair was decorated with gold. He had on a golden crown, and around his neck was a collar of emeralds.

**Gave Room Full of Gold.**  
At the start Pizarro treated Atahualpa well, but a little later on charged him with treachery, and put him in a prison about fourteen feet square. The Inca king took a stone and scratched a mark on the wall as high as he could reach, telling Pizarro that he would fill the room to that height with gold if he could only be free. This proposition was accepted, and gold was brought in from all parts of the empire. It was melted down by the Indians under the direction of the Spaniards. When the prison room was filled to above the mark made by Atahualpa, he was released. But he was still kept under surveillance, and a little later was accused of plotting against the Spaniards. He was given a mock trial, and was condemned to be burned, his execution being brought about lastly by Friar Valverde, who was afterward made bishop of Cuzco.

**Cathedral is Gorgeous.**  
I have already described the cathedral of Cuzco. All told it is perhaps more gorgeous than was Coricancha, the Inca temple of the Sun. It is a vast museum of gold carvings and beautiful paintings. One of its treasures is a life-sized figure of the Christ fastened to a wooden cross by great nails of solid gold. The figure is decorated with jewels and the pedestal or car upon which the cross stands is plated with silver and incrustated with diamonds.

**Precious Metal Galore.**  
Opposite the entrance to the temple was a mighty plate of solid gold, heavily incrustated with emeralds and precious stones. This represented a human face surrounded with rays. It was the image of the sun whom the Incas worshiped, and used gold in doing so. They considered that metal sacred to the sun, and often referred to it as the tears of that heavenly body. On both sides of the image were the embalmed bodies of the Incas of the past, each seated on a chair of solid gold.

**Story of Lost Treasure.**  
Another story of lost treasure relates to a Cuzco white man of Spanish descent whom the Lord blessed with numerous children. It is the custom here that a godfather shall look after and provide for his godchild, and so, as this man was poor, he tried to add to his resources by getting a corps of good godfathers. So as the infants came one after another he named each in honor of one of the distinguished citizens of the town. The citizens, however, did not respond and the man grew poorer and poorer. At last he had had nine babies, each of whom had been given a rich godfather, but there was no help forthcoming. The father swore that he would leave the rich and choose as the patron of his next child the first man he met on the street after his birth. In due time the stock came again, and the man, rushing out, saw a poor Indian driving a caravan of llamas into the town. He stopped him and told him he wanted him to be godfather to his child. The Indian objected, saying that he was poor and not fit to be godfather to a white child. The man then told of his vow and finally persuaded the Indian to accept the position.

**Wood Turns Out Gold.**  
In due time the baby was baptized and the Indian appeared at the ceremony as his godfather. He kissed his godson as he left the church and the next day came back into Cuzco with a score of

plates tacked to the heads of mummies and on skulls.

The building of the great granite cathedral in Cuzco, which stands on the plaza near the ancient site of one of the Inca palaces, was brought about by the discovery of an Inca treasure. Its origin is in a miraculous dream of the bishop, and inside each was found a great bag of gold in nuggets and dust. In the meantime the Indian had disappeared and could not be found. The man took the gold and built two large houses on the street called Triumph. If you do not believe this story come to Cuzco, and the people will show you the street and point out the houses.

**Searched and Found.**  
Another treasure story is the tale of an Indian woman 100 years old. It relates to a great hoard of gold that was hidden in the Andes by one of the chiefs, who was murdered before he came back to Cuzco. This treasure has long been searched for in vain by both foreigners and Peruvians. Not long ago this old Indian woman, being about to die, sent word to a hacendado of Spanish descent for whom she had worked, asking him to hasten to her. He reached her hut in the mountains just in time to get her last message. This was that her maternal grandmother, who had died eighty years before, had given her a word that would indicate where this treasure lay. The word was an Indian one and it meant the Lake of Two Stones. The old woman was questioned, but she would tell nothing more. That night she died. The story went forth and the whole country was searched by treasure hunters, all seeking for the Lake of Two Stones. At last a narrow valley was discovered containing a lake in which there were two tall rocks rising high over the water. The investigators drained the lake. They dug down under a platform of masonry, covering a chamber in which the treasure was found. The secret was kept from the officials for fear of confiscation. And so no one knows just how much gold was discovered, but it was of such value that it made all of those who participated in the division rich.

**Some More Gold.**  
Another of those Inca traditions relates to a cave in a mountain called Pillechan, near Cuenca in Ecuador. This cave contains a mighty treasure of gold, but its entrance is closed by a giant of granite, under whose arm is a hole which is open only once a year and that on Good Friday. Then, and then only, the giant raises his arm and the man who can be there at that time can crawl in under it and get an immense treasure of gold. As the story goes, the gold is in piles so labeled that only one pile is to be taken at a time. If one man takes only the assigned quantity he will get away safely. But if he is greedy and takes more, he will be squeezed to death by the arm of the giant as he goes out. This is the belief held by the Indians. Many superstitious people have looked for that cave, but so far neither the cave nor the giant has been discovered.

A fairly well authenticated tradition refers to an Inca named Ruminaguá, who is said to have carried away the gold and silver of Quito and buried them. These treasures were taken from the palaces of Atahualpa and from the temples and convents of the virgins of the sun at that place. It is said that some of the gold was started to Cajamarca in order that it might aid in freeing Atahualpa, but that Ruminaguá feared the treachery of the Spaniards and buried the gold on the way. This story came to the Spaniards, and Sebastian de Benalcázar, one of the subordinate officers under Pizarro, took 200 men and started for Quito, searching along the path of Ruminaguá, but finding nothing.

In the meantime Ruminaguá had dug

llamas, loaded with wood. He took this wood to the father of his godchild, saying that he had brought what he could and that he must accept the wood as a gift. The man was thanked and the wood was duly stored away in the court of the house. Some time after that the bundles of sticks and roots were opened, and inside each was found a great bag of gold in nuggets and dust. In the meantime the Indian had disappeared and could not be found. The man took the gold and built two large houses on the street called Triumph. If you do not believe this story come to Cuzco, and the people will show you the street and point out the houses.

**Spianard Misses Fine Chance.**  
There is a story told in Cuzco of an Indian girl who was in love with a Spaniard. The Spaniard had taken advantage of her affection, but he would not make her a proposal of marriage until she told him that she could make him the richest man in Peru. He thereupon promised to marry her if she would prove that she could do what she proposed, and at her request went with her one night into the mountains. There he was blindfolded and led through ravine after ravine until he finally came to a cave. Here the bandages were taken off his eyes and his sweetheart said: "Behold! There is the gold that I am ready to give you when we are married."

The Spaniard looked down and saw a great pile of golden bars and a collection of golden vessels curiously carved. It is supposed that they were from the treasures of Atahualpa. The greedy man attempted to seize some of the largest pieces nearest him, but the girl pulled him back, saying: "Those things are sacred until we are wedded, and if you attempt to touch any of them or take away any, my friends who are here at hand will certainly kill you."

The girl was so earnest the Spaniard grew angry. He threw down the gold and submitted again to be blindfolded. When he returned to Cuzco he informed the authorities and an order was issued for the arrest of the girl. The officers went to her hut, but they found that she and all the rest of the family had left for the mountains. And that was the last of the treasure.

**Records Are All Spanish.**  
There are records locally by the Spaniards describing several localities where they think some of these treasures may be found. One of these is in chapter V of the Detretero of Valverde. Valverde died in Spain, after having returned from the mountains of Llanacani in Ecuador. He was known to have gone many times into the mountains and to have brought out a great quantity of gold whose character showed it to be a part of the treasures of Atahualpa.

Upon leaving Valverde left directions giving the route to where the gold lay, and the King of Spain sent this description to Ambato, a town now on the railroad between the coast and Quito, and ordered the officers there to search for the treasure. I understand that the manuscript of the king's letter is still on record. I abbreviate the description: It tells the searcher for the treasure to stand on the mountain of Guapa, with his back to Ambato, and look to the east. From there he will see three mountains in the form of a triangle surrounding an artificial lake, into which the ancients, when they heard of the death of the Inca king, threw the gold they had prepared for his ransom. The Spaniards directions then show one just how to get there, and the dangers he is liable to incur on the way. By following them he will finally come into a bog filled with grains of gold that can be washed out in a stream nearby, and still farther on is a certain cave where was the furnace through which the Indians melted their ores. This is on the left-hand side of the mountain. The directions are quite intricate, and so far no one has yet found the treasure.

A Quichua, descendant of the slaves of the Incas

traps in the trails and made snares to destroy the enemy and their horses. He also set fire to Quito and killed the virgins of the sun before Benalcázar appeared. He then climbed to the high mountain behind the city, where he was finally taken by Benalcázar. He was tortured to death to make him tell where the golden hoard was secreted, but he showed no signs of weakness and the knowledge of the location of the treasure died with him.

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**A Case of Gratitude.**  
Returning again, to the treasures of Atahualpa, buried by Ruminaguá, there was an Indian boy named Catuna, the son of one of the Inca chiefs, who was with his father at the time of the hoard was secreted. This boy was injured in one of the battles and was supposed to be dead. He was taken up by one of the Spaniards, and he recovered. His injuries were so severe, however, that his features were distorted and he became hunchbacked. The Spaniard who adopted him, as it were, was a Captain Suarez. He taught him to read and write, and made him a Christian. He treated the Indian boy so well that he came to love him, and his heart was filled with gratitude.

Later on Suarez became unfortunate in his speculations, and his house was about to be sold by his creditors, when Catuna told him that if he would make a secret

vault under the residence and give him some instruments for gold melting he could find enough gold to pay off his debts. He also made his master promise not to say where the gold came from. Suarez agreed to this, and Catuna supplied so much treasure that he became a rich man. He gave a great deal to the church, and when he died in 1590 he made Catuna his heir.

**Heir Gives to Church.**  
After that Catuna gave very liberally to the church and he was known to have so much money that he was questioned as to the source whence he derived his great wealth. He answered that he had made a compact with the evil one, to whom he had sold his soul for this gold. This statement was credited, and the more easily because at that time the Indians were believed to have regular intercourse with the devil.

After Catuna's death his premises were searched and the vault was discovered. It contained a great quantity of gold in ingots and bars, and also in vessels of gold that evidently came from the Incas. The people, however, persisted in believing that the story of the pact with the devil was true, and, says Father Velasco, from whose letters this story comes, "the truth would have never been discovered if it had not been that Catuna's confessor, a Franciscan monk, had left a written account of the burial of Atahualpa's treasure, and his use of it, which had been confided to him."

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