

Chapter 4

Stellar Religion of the Pre-Incas

Far to the south of the Mayas, across the Isthmus and in a region much more rugged, were another people of high culture about whom we know still less. Let us consider the year 1531, in the magnificent city of Cuzco, high in the Andes, 500 miles inland from where the Pacific laps the South American shore. There the previous year Pizarro, the Spaniard, had landed, enticed the Inca king Atahualpa into his camp, slaughtered his retinue, and held him for ransom. The price of the king's liberty was a room full of gold. The treasures poured in, hundreds of llama trains were on their way laden with golden temple vessels. But the Spaniards grew impatient, strangled Atahualpa, and the llama trains turned back. Treasures which are still hunted but seldom found, were hidden in caves, buried in secret spots, thrown into the river; anywhere that would deprive the invaders of their spoil.

The Incas, themselves, were an invading ruling class, who after long struggle had gained dominion over a population of ten million. Like the ruling caste in other lands, they looked to the wisdom of the priests for guidance. These priests were custodians of the Stellar Wisdom gained from the Pre-Incas, the older superseded people who left distinctive relics and characteristic walls of stone that yet may be found in various places in the mountains.

The Stellar Wisdom held that gold was the metal of the sun, and that the sun was ruler of the king. Thus to the populace, as is taught in Japan today, the royal family was descended from the sun. As the sun is astrologically supreme, in the capital city, Cuzco, the most magnificent temple was dedicated to it. The roof was of precious woods plated with gold. A six-inch frieze of gold ran outside around the building. The doors opened to the east, and at the far end above the altar was a golden disc with human countenance shaped and graven to represent the sun, and studded with precious stones. It was so located that, at the equinoxes, the rays of the rising sun falling on its polished surface gave a reproduction in the temple of the brilliant source of light.

Around this central edifice where homage was paid to Inti, signifying both sun and light, were smaller astrological temples. Most important of these was one dedicated to the moon, consort of the sun. Instead of gold, its great disc was of silver. Its ornaments and decorations also were of this lunar metal. Still further bespeaking precise astrological knowledge, around the sacred city of the sun were placed twelve great stone columns, on each of which successively the sun was deemed to rest. Even the Incas, the ruling class, were privileged to gain only a portion of the Stellar Knowledge. A priesthood dedicated to the light, and having rigid requirements for initiation, were the custodians of this pre-Inca wisdom, and held many another precious secret.

Not too distant from the temple of the sun stood a magnificent structure which housed the temple virgins. They were highborn girls, selected for their beauty and dedicated to

temple service, and like the vestal virgins of ancient Rome, next to the king were the most sacred persons in the land.

This was the setting when the predatory conquistadors, having slain the Inca king, and thus instead of hastening, had turned back the flood of gold, marched into Cuzco. Each mailclad soldier ripped gold from the temple walls. The great disc of precious metal which served to mirror the equinoctial rising sun became the stake for which the soldiers brawled and gambled. Then, when each had gathered to himself such gold as he could reach, he grabbed a lovely treasure of the flesh. The virgins of the sun were roughly seized, were hunted when they fled, and made the prey of the bestial soldier crew. Not all, however, suffered such degrading fate. One hundred of them vanished, nor all the Spanish search could find a trace of them. They were there, they had gone; and for four hundred years that disappearance was a mystery.

Not only the knowledge of the stars and the spiritual teachings of the constellations, but many another precious secret, was in the custody of the Stellar Priests. Cuzco had not always been the empire's capital. Seven hundred years before, still earlier Peruvians had built a most amazing citadel. Finally abandoned in favor of Cuzco when certain perils had passed, for 200 years it had been forgotten to all except the Stellar Priests, who kept it in repair for secret refuge. It was to this white granite city, over secret trails, that the priests led the 100 fleeing virgins. They gained the 14,000 foot crest of the Continental Divide, and then, for some distance, descended the tropical Urubamba canyon toward the Amazon. Here was a city of 400 hewnstone houses. The temple was built of irregular, dissimilar, manyjoined stones of gigantic size fitted with preInca nicety. One block in it is 14 feet long and 8 feet high.

Machu Picchu, as the city is called, is an incredible place. It is built on a spur, with precipitous sides dropping 2,000 feet all around except for a narrow strip of rock connecting it with the main mountain range. Across this narrow strip was built a stone wall, by which soldiers could protect its only approach. It was the best spot in all the Andes from which to repel invasion. Built 700 years before the fleeing virgins reached its then deserted houses, outside the wall were small terraced gardens which gave food supply, and limited the old time population to about 9,000.

At the very apex of the place is a stone sun dial three feet in diameter, with a square hub a foot high in the center. This ancient astronomical instrument was called Intihuatana--Inti, meaning sun, and huatana, meaning tied--"The place where the sun is tied." Those who built the city and used this observatory were well versed in stellar lore.

Here, untouched by the outside world, the 100 fleeing temple virgins lived out the span of their lives. Their graves reveal the story. One by one, as the hand of age laid heavily upon them, they died, still inviolate virgins to the sun, leaving no issue. Those surviving performed the last rites until, after scores of years, the last one passed on, with none left to bury her. The Stellar Priests likewise lived out their span of years in this lost city of the mountains. And when they died, they too were gathered to their fathers, taking with them the knowledge of their caste, the priceless Stellar Wisdom.

Only by an archaeological accident was the city ever found. In 1911, nearly four hundred years after the virgins fled the embrace of the mailclad Spanish soldiers to be seen no more, Machu Picchu, the impregnable city of white granite houses where the sun is tied, was discovered by Professor Hiram Bingham of Yale.

