



Maya, Aztec, and Inca Civilizations

Reader

Sapa Inca



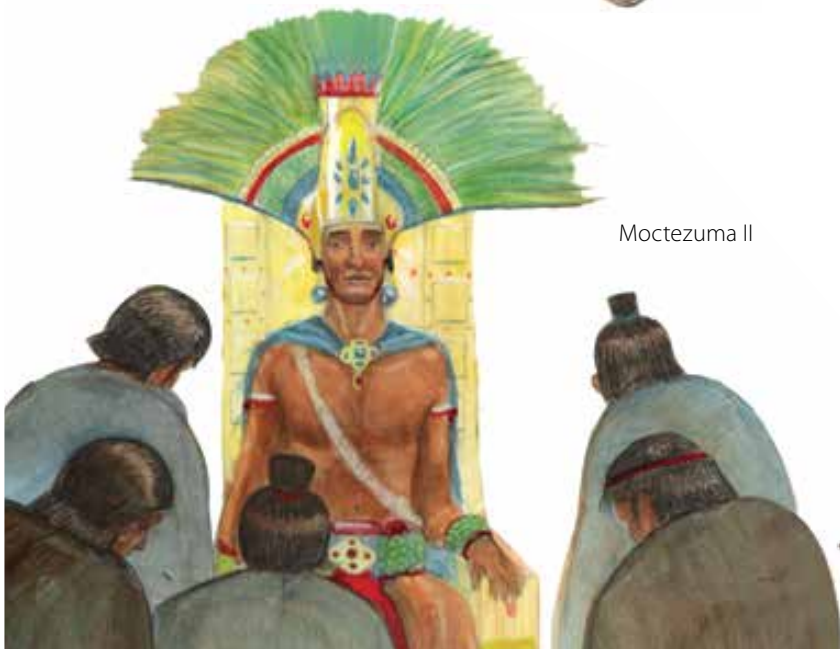
Maya pyramids



Aztec warrior



Moctezuma II



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Maya, Aztec, and Inca Civilizations

Reader



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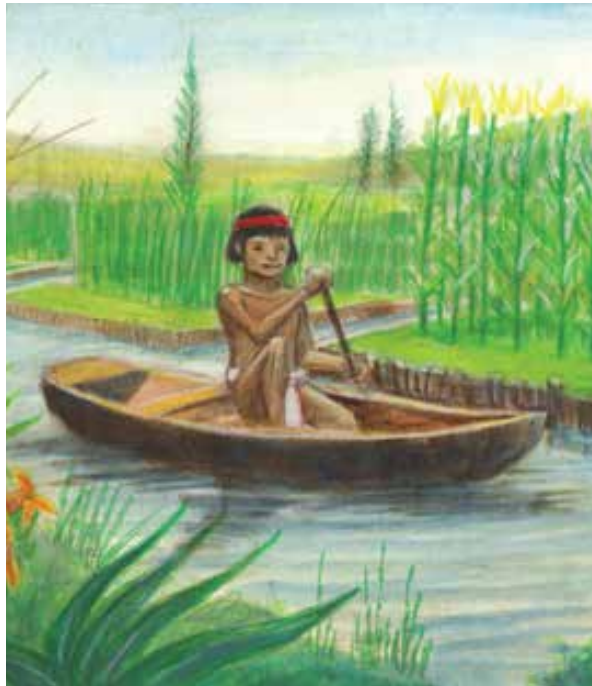
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Maya, Aztec and Inca Civilizations Reader

Core Knowledge Sequence History and Geography 5

Chapter 1

The Maya: Rainforest Civilization

The Vanishing Civilization Do you like mysteries? Try this one: More than a thousand years ago, a great civilization of American Indian peoples built cities across **Mesoamerica**—an area today that is made up of parts of Mexico and Central America. They built stone temples and pyramids that rose far above the forest treetops.

The Big Question

What do the ruins of the Maya tell you about the importance of religion to their civilization?

Vocabulary

Mesoamerica, n. a historical region that includes what are today the central and southern parts of Mexico and the northern parts of Central America

The Maya, one group of native peoples, discovered important mathematical ideas. They also studied the movements of the stars. Using this knowledge, the Maya made a calendar almost as accurate as the one we use today. Then, after hundreds of years of growth, many key elements of

Maya civilization disappeared. The people abandoned their once-thriving cities. This great urban society and many of

NORTH AMERICA



The Aztec

The Maya

Atlantic Ocean

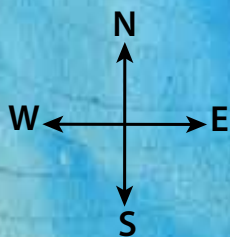
CENTRAL AMERICA

SOUTH AMERICA

Pacific Ocean



The Inca



In the centuries before Europeans came to the Americas, great civilizations thrived in present-day Mexico, Central-America, and South America. These included the Maya, Aztec, and Inca.

its traditions were mysteriously transformed, although Mayan-speaking people continue in this part of Mesoamerica to the present.

This may sound like the plot of a science-fiction movie, but it isn't. In fact, it is a short history of the **Maya** (/mah*yuh/), one of the first great **civilizations** of the Americas that flourished between 200 and 900 CE.

Ruins in the Rain Forest

In 1839, two American explorers heard stories of mysterious ruins in the rain forests of Central America. Curious, they set out to see for themselves. The two men first explored

Vocabulary

architecture, n. the style and construction of a building

the remains of the city of Copán (/koh*pahn/) in the present-day country of

Honduras. From the **architecture**, it was clear the ruins had been left by an ancient and advanced civilization. The two Americans continued their journey, exploring many other ruins. Then, they returned to the United States and wrote a best-selling book

Vocabulary

Maya, n. a group of peoples who have inhabited a region that includes parts of present-day Mexico and Central America from thousands of years ago to the present. Before the arrival of Europeans, Maya cities and civilization thrived in rainforest locations between about 200 and 900 CE.

civilization, n. a society, or group of people, with similar religious beliefs, customs, language, and form of government



Archaeologists still study the remarkable Maya.

about their findings. Their tales and drawings inspired worldwide interest in the history of the Maya.

Since the mid-1800s, **archaeologists** and other experts have continued to study these remarkable people. Recent breakthroughs in research have revealed just how much the Maya accomplished. Let's take a closer look at what we know about them and what still remains a mystery.

At its peak, the Maya civilization included a large group of **city-states** that were allied with, fought, and conquered each other. These cities were located on the Yucatán Peninsula in what is today southeastern Mexico and the countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize. Archaeologists believe that Maya civilization reached its greatest extent between about 200 and 900 CE.

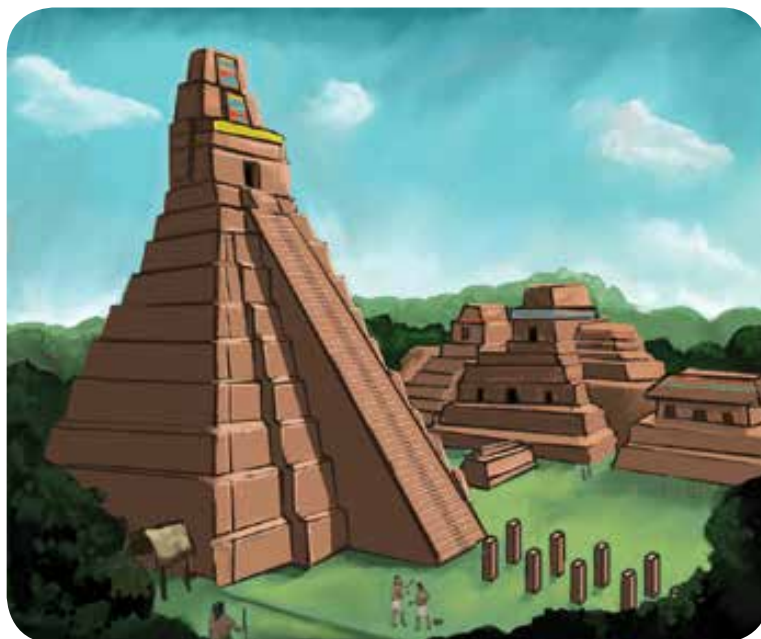
The largest buildings in Maya cities were pyramids that also served as **temples**.

Vocabulary

archaeologist, n. an expert in the study of ancient people and the objects from their time period that remain, generally including stones and bones, and pottery

city-state, n. a city that is an independent political state with its own ruling government

temple, n. a building with a religious use or meaning



Maya pyramids were grand monuments that reached toward the sky.

These structures served religious purposes. From their size, it is clear that religion was a key part of Maya life. Maya pyramids rose high above the surrounding treetops. Maya pyramids were some of the tallest structures in the Americas until 1902. That year, the twenty-two-story Flatiron Building was constructed in New York City.

Mysterious Writing

Archaeologists found **hieroglyphs** (/hie*roe*glifs/) carved into Maya buildings and monuments. The Temple of the Hieroglyphic Stairway stands in Copán. A climb up this staircase is a journey back in time. Each of the sixty-three steps has a story to tell. Carved symbols called glyphs name all of the rulers of Copán. The glyphs also explain their military victories. The American explorers who visited this site in 1839 marveled over these carvings. They could not, however, figure out what the symbols meant. For a long time, neither could any other experts.

Hieroglyphs are like a code. You must crack the code to read the messages. Mayan hieroglyphs are complicated and include

Vocabulary

hieroglyph, n. a picture or symbol representing an idea, an object, a syllable, or a sound



The Mayan hieroglyphs were carved into each step of this stairway.

more than eight hundred symbols. It wasn't until the 1960s that archaeologists began to crack the code with early computers. Since then, we have learned a great deal about the ancient Maya.

Breath on a Mirror

We have learned that daily life for the Maya revolved around family, farming, and service to the gods. No person or group took any important action without consulting the gods. Priests decided which days were best for planting a field, starting a war, or building a hut. The Maya believed the gods were much wiser than humans.

According to Maya legend, the first people could see everything. The creator gods decided that this gave people too much power. So the gods decided to limit human sight and power. The Maya sacred book, the *Popol Vuh*, explains that the gods purposely clouded human understanding. As a result, a human's view of the world is unclear. The *Popol Vuh* explains that human understanding is "like breath on a mirror."

Serious Play

Breaking the hieroglyph code also helped archaeologists understand how the Maya spent some of their time. A specific kind of ball court can be found in many Maya cities. Archaeologists were puzzled about these courts, which varied in size. Some were the size of volleyball courts. Others were larger than football fields.

Archaeologists now think the Maya played a game called *pok-ta-pok* in these courts. They believe the goal of *pok-ta-pok* was to drive a solid rubber ball to a specific place on the opponents' side

of the court. The balls were heavy. Also, players were not allowed to use their hands or feet! Experts think players may have had to use hips, elbows, knees, or other body parts to score a goal.

The court at the Maya site of Chichén Itzá (/chee*chen/eet*sah/) is still visible today. This court had stone rings, and a team could win the game by driving the hard rubber ball through the ring on the other team's side of the court. If you use your imagination, you can picture what a *pok-ta-pok* game might have looked like.

Imagine big, strong *pok-ta-pok* players stepping out onto the court. They wear leather helmets and pads to protect themselves. You can also see that they are worried. They know that the stakes are high. *Pok-ta-pok* is a game with religious meaning. The Maya think of it as a battle between good and evil. The only way to find out who's good and who's evil is to see who wins the game.

Hundreds of spectators have gathered. They see the game as meaningful for their world and as a way of honoring the gods.

When the game begins, the sound of the bouncing ball is added to the cheers. *Pok, pok, pok!* goes the hard rubber ball as it hits the ground and bounces off the walls of the court.

One player begins driving the ball up the court with his elbows, knees, and chest. Then, *whack!* Another player slams into him and knocks him to the ground. There is no whistle for a foul. In fact, there are very few rules in *pok-ta-pok*! The game continues until someone finally scores. The side that scores wins the game.

The winners of *pok-ta-pok* games were considered to be the "good" ones. Sometimes they were rewarded with clothing and jewelry.



Nearly every Maya city had at least one ball court.

But what do you think happened to the losers? Experts believe that at least in certain situations, some of them were offered as **sacrifices** to the gods.

Vocabulary

sacrifice, v. to give or to kill something for a religious purpose

Human sacrifice was a part of the Maya religion. Maya priests sought to please the gods by offering sacrifices atop the pyramids. No wonder the *pok-ta-pok* players looked worried as they walked onto the court!

Pok-ta-pok and human sacrifice are two parts of Maya life that we have learned about from Maya hieroglyphs. In the next chapter, you will learn more about the scientific achievements and daily life of the ancient Maya.

Chapter 2

Maya Science and Daily Life

Wisdom in the Sky The Maya believed that their gods gave them an unclear view of the world that was “like breath on a mirror.” But we also know that the Maya understood some things very well.

The Big Question

Why is the 365-day solar calendar employed by the Maya particularly impressive?



Their knowledge of **astronomy**, for example, was impressive. The Maya, of course, did not have telescopes, computers, or satellites. They didn't even have the wheel. All they had were their own eyes. Yet they were able to make very precise observations of the stars.

Maya Calendars

We all know that there are 365 days in a year, plus an extra day every fourth year, or **leap year**. These numbers are the result of years of study of the sun and the seasons. The Maya, working without scientific tools, calculated

Vocabulary

astronomy, n. the study of the stars, planets, and other features of outer space

leap year, n. a year that has 366 days, or one more than all other years, and occurs every four years






















Some priests were expert astronomers and charted the sky. They consulted the heavens to determine favorable days for planting and harvesting.

that there were 365.2420 days in a year. Modern astronomers used modern technology to measure the year at 365.2422 days!

The Maya created a solar calendar, or calendar based on the movement of the sun. This calendar is similar to our calendar, but there are some differences. We divide our year into twelve months. The Maya divided their year into eighteen months with names like *Pop* and *Zip*. A special five-day “month” completed the 365-day year.

Besides their 365-day solar calendar, Maya astronomers created another calendar called the Sacred Round. This calendar was 260 days long and was used to keep track of religious holidays and other important events.

Because the Maya had two calendars, each day had two names. One name came from the Sacred Round and the other from the solar calendar. This also meant that all Maya people had two birthdays.

 POP	 UO	 ZIP	 ZOTZ	 TZEC
 XUL	 YAXKIN	 MOL	 CHEN	 YAX
 ZAC	 CEH	 MAC	 KANKIN	 MUAN
 PAX	 KAYAB	 CUMHU	 uayeb	

One Maya calendar had eighteen months of twenty days, plus a special five-day month.

Astronomy at Work

We can see the results of Maya astronomy in the placement of their temples and pyramids. These structures were built so the sun would shine directly on key areas on certain days. In Chichén Itzá, for example, the sun of the spring and fall **equinoxes** casts the shadow of a serpent statue onto the pyramid steps. As the sun rises, the shadow slithers down the stairs.

Vocabulary

equinox, n. a day in which daytime and nighttime are about the same length, which happens twice every year

Inventing Zero

The Maya were also skilled at mathematics. They developed a system of number symbols. A dot stood for one. A bar stood for five. A shell stood for zero. We all know that zero can stand for “nothing.”



The massive pyramid at Chichén Itzá was built based on a precise knowledge of the movement of the sun and stars.

But when it comes to a system of numbers, zero means a lot! Think, for example, of the difference between the numbers twenty and two hundred. The Maya symbol for zero worked the same way ours does. In fact, the Maya were among the first people in the world to develop the concept of zero.

How They Lived

Most Maya people made their living as farmers. Their main crop was corn. One of their main foods was something you may have eaten—a flat bread called a *tortilla* (/tor*tee*uh/). Farmers also grew beans, squash, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, and pumpkins.

Maya farmers lived in one-room huts made out of mud and grass. Families lived in walled areas that had several huts. Men and boys did the farming. Women and girls took care of the house, cooked, and made clothing and pottery.

Every culture has practices that seem odd to other people. The Maya did two things that may seem a little strange to you. They considered crossed eyes to be beautiful. So mothers would hang something in front of a baby's nose to help the baby develop crossed eyes. The Maya also viewed a flat head as a symbol of beauty. They would strap a long board to the backs of newborn babies. As the babies' heads rested against the board, the board gradually flattened the back of the babies' soft skulls.

Coming of Age

Before age five, Maya children were cared for by parents and other relatives. At age five, they took on new responsibilities, such as



Maya farmers raised food for the people of their large cities. In the lowland areas, farmers created waterways to redirect and save water.

helping with farming and household chores. A boy had a white bead braided to his hair. A girl had a string tied to her waist with a red shell attached.

These symbols remained in place until the children reached the age of fourteen. At this point, an **initiation ceremony** was performed to mark their passage to adulthood. A **priest** would pick a day when the stars were favorable. Then the priest would cut the bead from the boy's hair. A girl's mother would cut the string from her daughter's waist. Then the parents would have a celebration with family members and neighbors.

Vocabulary

"initiation ceremony," (phrase), a special event to mark a person's entry into a certain group or status

priest, n. a person who has the training or authority to carry out religious ceremonies or rituals

After these ceremonies, boys moved into a house for unmarried men. There they would remain until they got married. Marriages were arranged. In the hard life of Maya farmers, marriages were not romantic affairs. They were more like business deals between families.

As with the initiation ceremonies, priests picked marriage dates. They checked with the stars and the gods to find a day that would bring good fortune. However, no Maya couple expected married life to bring only good fortune. The Maya believed that every aspect of life was controlled by the gods. Because some gods were good and some were bad, they expected life to include both joy and sorrow.



The Maya believed that the gods controlled all aspects of life, and they consulted the stars for guidance.

Where Did Everybody Go?

The ancient Maya were amazing people who built a great civilization. That fact alone is a reason to find them interesting. But one of the most fascinating questions about ancient Maya civilization (200–900 CE) is what happened to cause it to end.

Archaeologists believe that the Maya left their cities sometime between 800 and 900. It's possible this event happened over just a few decades. Until the 900s, the Maya kept careful historical records. They used their hieroglyphs to carve names and dates on pyramids and temples. Then in the 900s, the writing mysteriously stopped. The temples and pyramids began to fall into disrepair.

So what happened? Archaeologists have theories, but they can't find clear proof for any one of them.



The Maya built great cities. No one knows for sure why they were abandoned.

One theory holds that farmers rose up against the priests and nobles. But this raises another question: what happened to the farmers? There is no evidence of a new group of people replacing the old ones in power.

Some have guessed that disease wiped out the Maya population. But no mass burial grounds have been found. Archaeologists have found signs that some people in this area did die from diseases. Almost all of these deaths, however, seemed to have occurred after 1500, when the Spanish brought new diseases to the Americas. The Maya had been gone for years before that.

Did disaster strike the Maya? Did drought or heavy rainfall bring famine? Was there an earthquake? Did shifting trade routes affect the lowland Maya rulers and their settlements? Could invaders have toppled the civilization?

No one knows for sure. We only know that the once-great Maya cities were abandoned and swallowed up by the rain forest. The Maya scattered. But the people themselves did not disappear. Today, millions still speak languages related to ancient Mayan. These ancestors of the pyramid-builders have lived in villages, towns, and cities in southern Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras for centuries. They have a rich heritage, one that we are learning more about with each passing year.

Chapter 3

The Aztec: Empire Builders

The Eagle and the Cactus About three hundred years after the Maya abandoned their cities, another great civilization arose. They were the Aztec people, who lived in what is today central Mexico.

The Big Question

Why did the Aztec make human sacrifices?

Vocabulary

Aztec, n. a civilization that thrived in present-day central Mexico from 1325 to 1521 CE

nomadic, adj. moving around often in search of food; not settled in one place

According to legend, the **Aztec** were once a **nomadic** tribe. They wandered the land, setting up temporary homes here and there, fighting off attackers, and surviving on snakes and lizards. One day, the god of the sun spoke to the people. The god told the Aztec people to look for a sign—an eagle with a snake in its beak perched on a cactus. On the spot where the eagle perched, the Aztec were to build a great city.



In legend, the Aztec built their capital on the spot where they saw an eagle perched on a cactus while holding a snake in its beak.

The legend goes on to describe how the Aztec finally received the sign the god had told them about. The eagle appeared on a swampy island in Lake Texcoco (/tɛʃ*koʰ*koʰ/). On that day, the Aztec's wandering ended. They settled down and began building a city. The Aztec people called their new home Tenochtitlán (/tɛn*noʰ*teɪ*tlɑːn/), which means "the place of the prickly pear." Even today the eagle and serpent are shown on the flag of Mexico.

Conquering City-States

Whether or not the myth is true, we do know that the Aztec established Tenochtitlán by 1325. By the 1400s, the Aztec

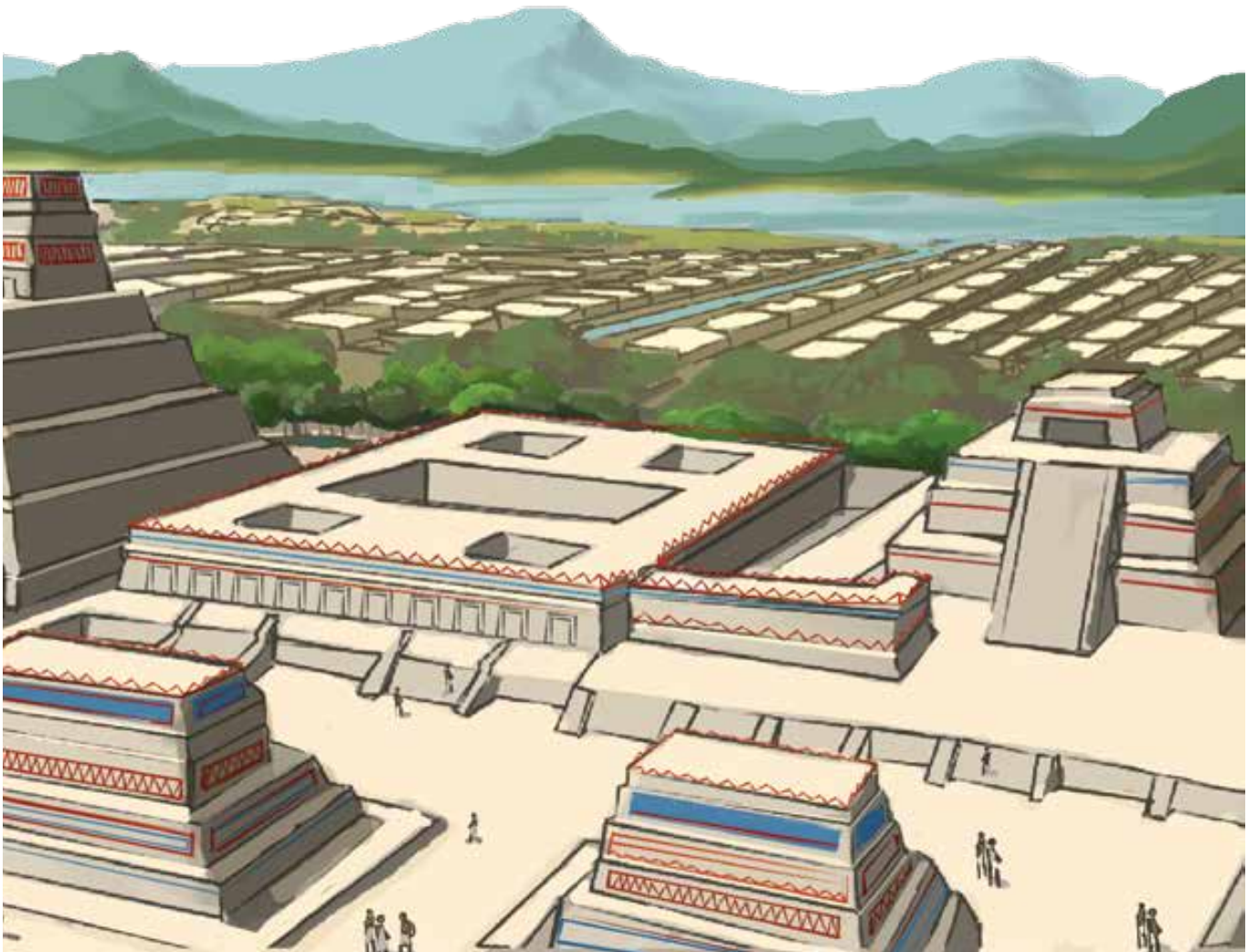


civilization had begun to expand. The Aztec proved to be fearsome warriors. One by one they conquered neighboring city-states and added them to their **empire**. By the early 1500s, the Aztec Empire included four hundred to five hundred city-states and controlled much of present-day Mexico. The Aztec **emperor** ruled more than five million people. Tenochtitlán alone probably had between 150,000 and 200,000 residents, making it one of the largest cities in the world at this time. No city in the United States would grow so large until the 1800s.

Vocabulary

empire, n. a group of countries or territories under the control of one government or one ruler

emperor, n. the ruler of an empire



The Aztec capital Tenochtitlán was one of the largest cities in the world.

The Aztec were well-known warriors. By conquering other people, they were able to gain wealth. Aztec warriors then forced conquered peoples to send their gold, silver, jade, and turquoise to Tenochtitlán. Those who had no valuables could send food, cloth, or other goods. People who lived by the ocean might also have to send seashells, fish, or turtles. Farmers might send corn, beans, peppers, squash, or fruit. Groups with access to specific environments might have to give animal skins and feathers. Craft-working communities might send pottery or blankets to Tenochtitlán.

The Legend of the Five Suns

Victorious Aztec warriors sent more than food and precious metals and stones back to Tenochtitlán. They also sent back soldiers captured in battle. The captured soldiers sometimes were used in an important religious ritual of the Aztec people: human sacrifice. To understand the importance of human sacrifice, we need to take a closer look at Aztec religion.

According to Aztec beliefs, life was uncertain. The one thing people could count on was that the world would one day come to a terrible, violent end. In fact, the Aztec believed that the world and the sun had been created and destroyed four times in the past. Under the first sun, a race of giants roamed the world. This world ended when a jaguar devoured the giants. The world under the second sun was swept away by a great wind. People under the

third sun died in the fire and ash of volcanoes. Those living under the fourth sun drowned in floods.

The Aztec of Tenochtitlán believed they were living under the fifth sun. But they believed that this sun would also someday die: “There will be earthquakes and hunger, and then our end shall come,” the priests said. The Aztec people believed these predictions. They planned their lives in response to them.

So the Aztec awaited their fate. But they did not simply accept it. They believed that each night, the sun god battled the forces of darkness. Each morning, the god had to find the strength to make the sun rise again. The Aztec believed they could help their god by offering human sacrifices in their temples.

The Aztec preferred to sacrifice someone other than their own friends and family. Most of their victims were foreign soldiers captured in war. Aztec priests believed that the heart was the most important thing to sacrifice. They preferred to offer up the strong heart of a soldier.

Religious Sacrifice

The Aztec held their sacrifices on top of pyramids not unlike those built by the Maya. A big drum sounded as attendants led the victims to the top. The priest killed the victim by removing his heart. The heart was then burned on an altar. The victim’s body was then allowed to tumble down the pyramid’s steps. The process was repeated for each victim.

The Aztec believed human sacrifices were necessary to keep the sun rising and moving across the sky. They could even point to events that seemed to prove that the sacrifices worked. Once, when a long drought threatened the Aztec corn harvest, priests offered a number of human sacrifices. A day or so later, rain came. To the Aztec, this was no coincidence. It was proof that the gifts of blood had saved the crop. Experiences like this convinced the Aztec of the power of human sacrifice. As a result, Aztec offerings to the gods were regular and generous.

Success at War

Priests and soldiers were key elements of Aztec life. Priests used human sacrifice to please the gods. Aztec soldiers held the empire together and provided the victims for the sacrifices.

As in many societies until recent times, Aztec people were born into a certain social class. Most people had relatively little chance to advance out of it. The army provided one opportunity for brave men to better themselves. Success in battle was rewarded with advancement and honor. The Aztec people believed there was no greater honor than to die in battle.

No doubt about it—the Aztec were fierce warriors. But their capabilities in warfare and skill at fighting helped create a rich empire and a remarkable civilization. Read on to learn more about the civilization that the Aztec built and their fabulous capital city of Tenochtitlán.



The Aztec were fierce warriors ready to go to battle against their neighbors at a moment's notice. This is an Eagle warrior dressed for battle.

Chapter 4

Tenochtitlán: City of Wonder

A Lakeside Paradise The first Europeans who came to America did not expect to find a great civilization. Imagine how surprised they must have been when they came upon the city of Tenochtitlán, with its towering pyramids and its population of perhaps two hundred thousand.

The Big Question

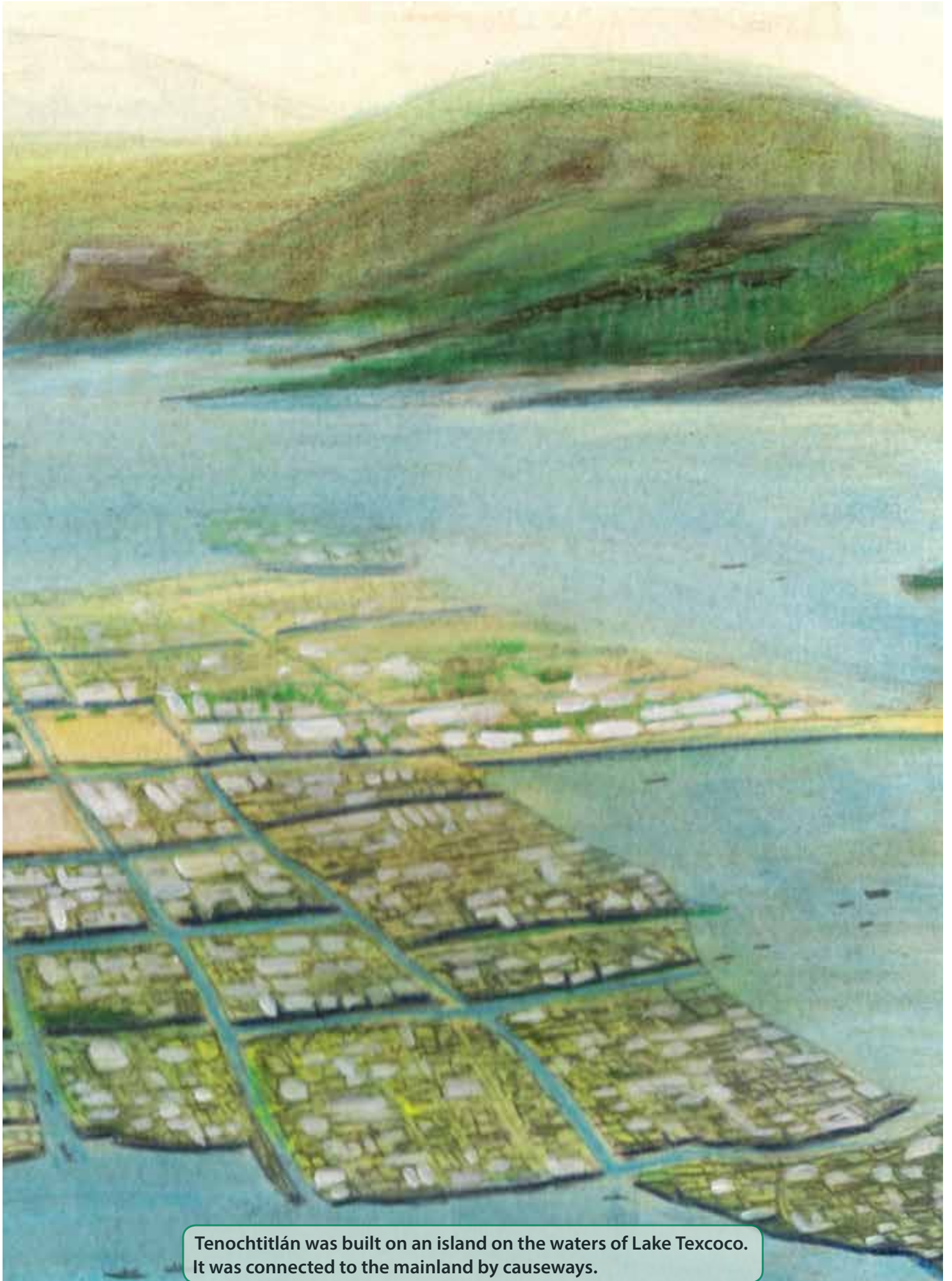
What does the description of Tenochtitlán reveal about the Aztec civilization?

Vocabulary

causeway, n. a raised road built over water to connect islands to a mainland

canal, n. a channel dug by people, used by boats or for irrigation

Tenochtitlán was more than the heart of a great civilization. It was unlike anything the Europeans had ever seen. The city was built on an island in the middle of a lake. Three wide **causeways** connected the city to the mainland. A network of **canals** linked different parts of the city. The Aztec traveled around their capital in canoes.



Tenochtitlán was built on an island on the waters of Lake Texcoco. It was connected to the mainland by causeways.

City Tour

Imagine that you have hopped into a canoe to tour Tenochtitlán as it was in the early 1500s. First, you see the “gardens” on raised beds built on Lake Texcoco. The Aztec created these gardens by digging up mud

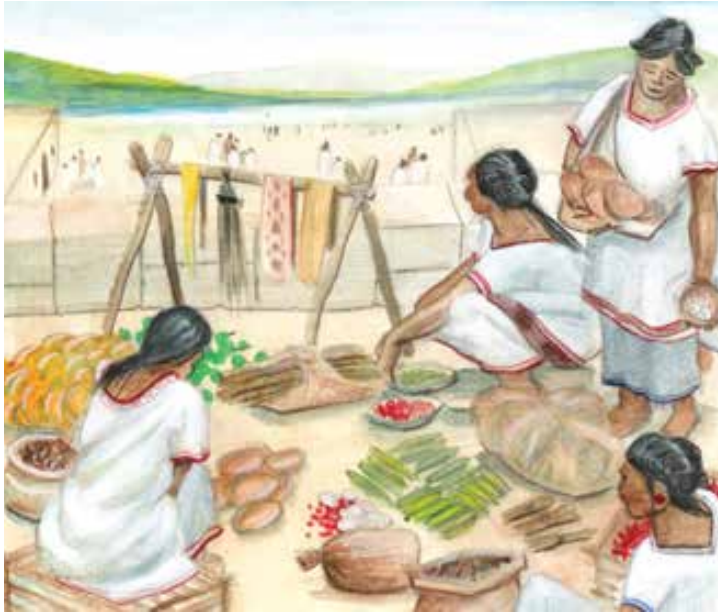


The gardens that surrounded Tenochtitlán appeared to be floating, but they were really built on the bottom of the shallow waters of Lake Texcoco.

from the bottom of the lake and piling it up in shallow areas. Then they shaped the piles into long narrow gardens. The gardens were surrounded by water, so they stayed moist. The Aztec also kept the soil fertile by scooping new mud onto the gardens every year. The rich soil was perfect for growing corn, squash, and beans.

Aztec Home Life

As you glide toward the center of Tenochtitlán, you see Aztec men dressed in loincloths and cloaks. Women wear long skirts, blouses, and ponchos. You also see hundreds of one-room houses with thatched roofs and mud walls. Inside one, you meet a girl who is learning to weave from her mother. A few houses away, mothers and daughters are preparing for a wedding feast. During the wedding ceremony, the bride’s blouse will be tied to the groom’s cloak. This tying together is a symbol of the connection between a husband and wife.



The lives of Aztec women usually revolved around caring for the family.

Suburbs and Schools

You also visit an Aztec school. There, boys receive moral instruction—rules about the right and wrong way to behave. They also learn military drills. The boys practice with miniature weapons. They throw spears and carry special wooden clubs studded with sharp pieces of a natural glass-like rock.

A visit to a school for the sons of Aztec nobles turns out to be a hair-raising experience. You quickly realize that the teachers in this school are Aztec priests. You've had some tough teachers over the years. But you've never had one who painted his face black, did not wash his hair for religious reasons, and performed human sacrifices!

The priests train their students to become priests and **scribes**. Students study Aztec religion and astronomy and learn how to read and write Aztec hieroglyphs. They also

Vocabulary

scribe, n. a person whose job is copying written information

learn how to record information in a special kind of book called a **codex**. This is a long strip of tree bark that folds up like an accordion. The pages of the codex are covered with pictures and **pictograms**. The priest explains that the codices (/koh*duh*seez/) are used to keep lists of rulers, to record payments made by conquered people, and to keep track of religious holidays.



Aztec boys were raised from an early age to be skilled and fearsome warriors.

The Market

The next stop on your tour is the central market. Here, people trade cacao (chocolate) beans and cotton blankets for other items. The sound of thousands of Aztec people trading creates a ruckus that can be heard a mile away.

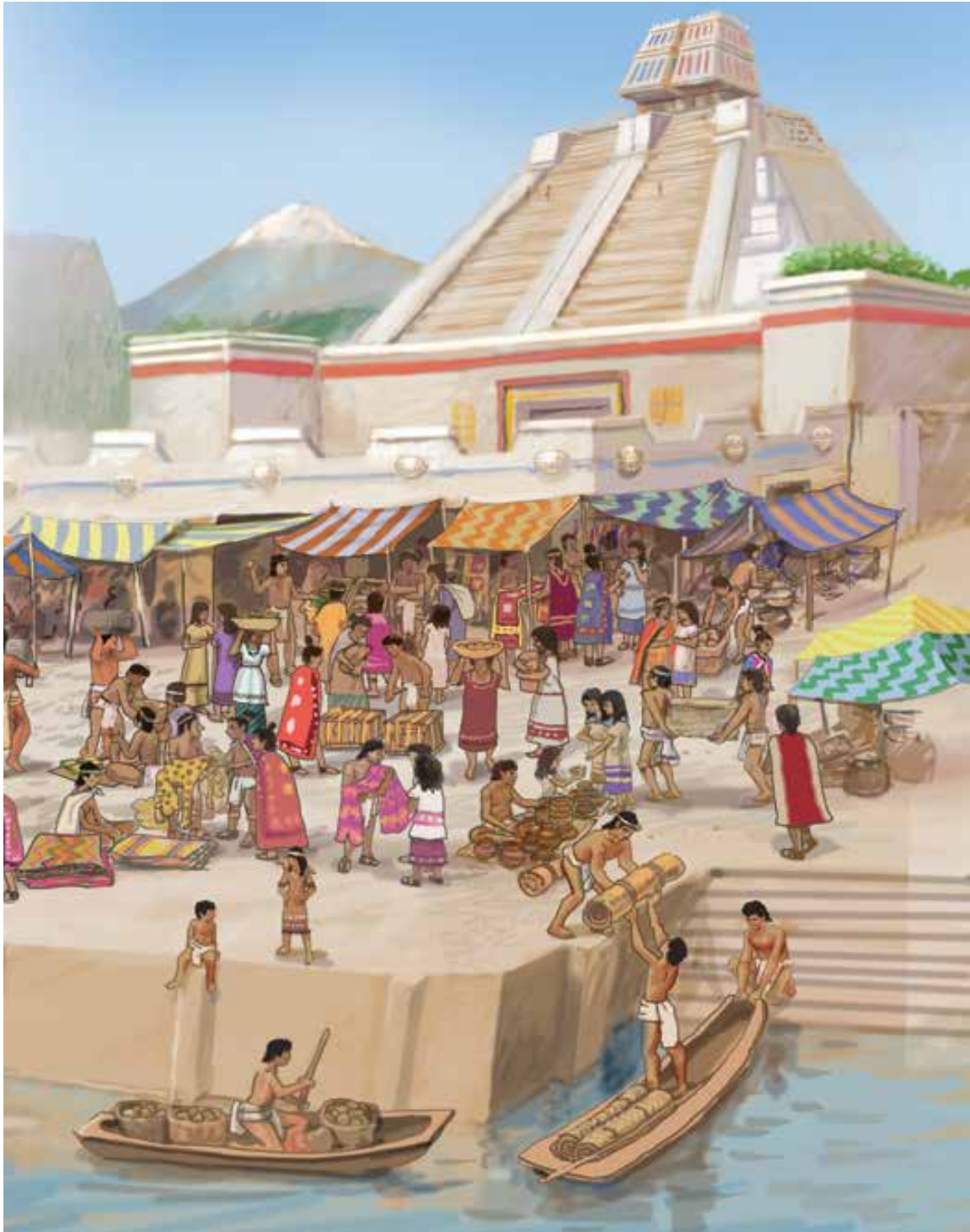
Vocabulary

codex, n. an ancient book with handwritten pages or parts

pictogram, n. a picture or drawing that stands for a word or phrase

In one corner of the market, a man is trading rabbits, deer, and small dogs that are bred for food. Across the way a woman displays pottery. You notice all sorts of other goods, including sandals, feathers, seashells, turkeys, wood, corn, bananas, pineapples, honeycombs, and fabrics.

One section of the market is set aside for trading enslaved people. Here you see human beings with wooden collars around their necks. Noblemen mill around, inspecting them.



Tenochtitlán had a thriving market where people traded goods from around the empire.

The Ceremonial Center

In the heart of the city is the ceremonial center. Here you find the largest temple in the city, the Great Temple. This massive pyramid is almost one hundred yards wide at its base. That's roughly the

length of a football field! It rises almost ninety feet in the air. The top steps are stained with the blood of human sacrifices. Surrounding the Great Temple are several smaller temples. Each of these is dedicated to a different god.

Not far from these religious buildings stands the palace of the Aztec emperor. You will have to admire the palace from the outside: commoners are not allowed to enter. The palace has hundreds of rooms and more than a thousand servants.

Moctezuma II

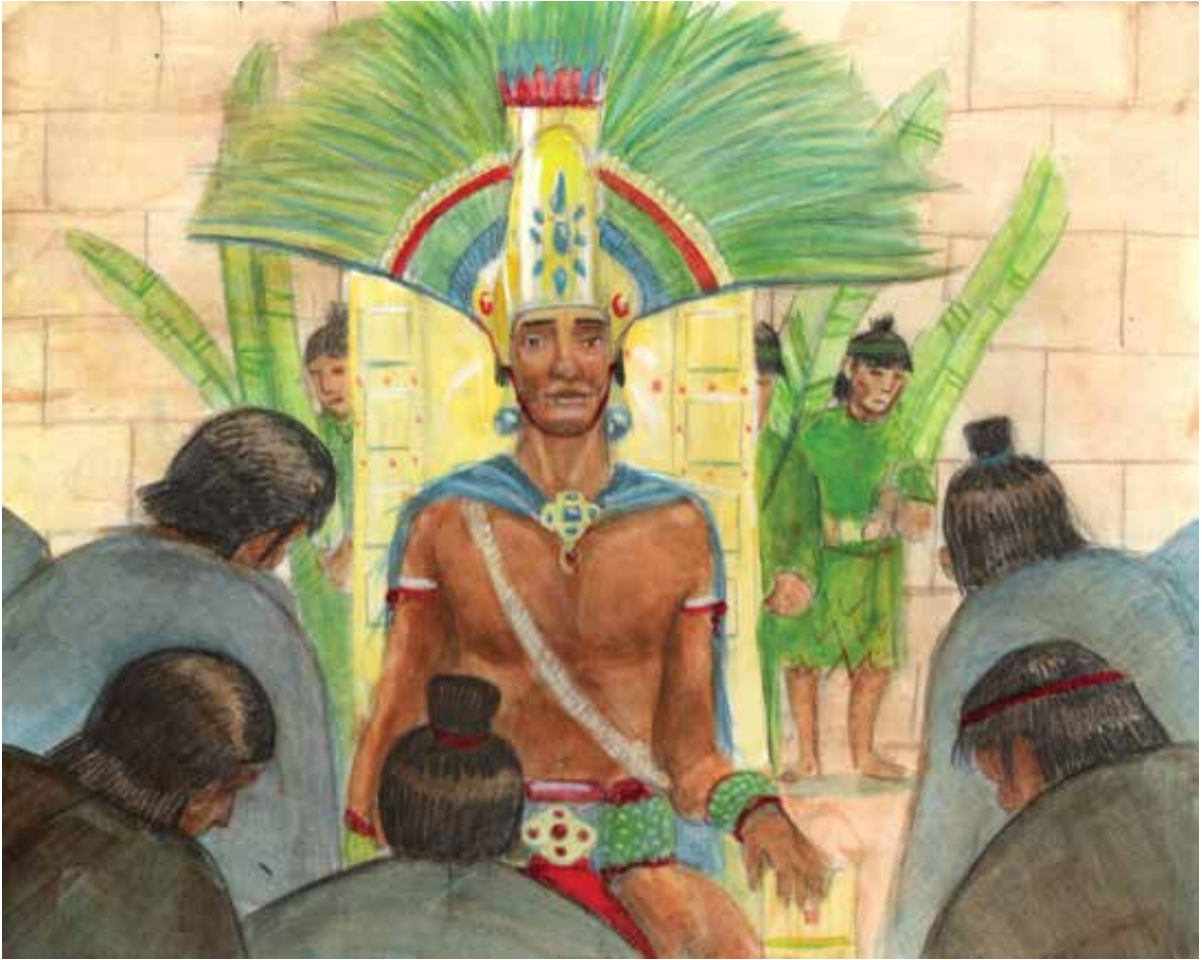
Moctezuma II (/mawk*te*soo*mah/) (sometimes written as *Montezuma*) was the Aztec emperor in the early 1500s. In the court of Moctezuma II, no one was allowed to look the emperor in the eye. When he entered the room, even the nobles threw themselves face down on the ground. When he left the palace, he was carried in a fancy **litter**. When Moctezuma wanted to walk, nobles laid mats on the ground so he would not dirty his golden sandals.

Vocabulary

litter, n. a chair attached to two beams and carried on the shoulders of several people

reign, n. a period of time in which a king or queen rules

Moctezuma was a powerful leader. But during his **reign**, some disturbing things were happening. There was a drought. A comet appeared in the sky. Lightning struck one of the temples in Tenochtitlán. Fantastic rumors began to spread. Some people said that a ghostly woman was walking the streets of the capital at night. She wailed, "My children, we must flee far away from this city!"



Moctezuma II ruled the Aztec Empire at the height of its great power.

The Aztec believed the world might end at any moment.

Moctezuma and his priests worried that the strange events might be a warning from the gods. They feared that the end of the world might be near.

As it turned out, a form of doomsday was coming, but it was not coming from the gods. It was coming from across the Atlantic Ocean. Spanish soldiers were sailing from Europe in search of riches and glory. In the final chapter, you will learn what the arrival of these pale-skinned men meant for the mighty Aztec Empire.

Chapter 5

The Inca: Lords of the Mountains

Here Comes the Sun It is the year 1500. You are standing along a road in South America in a crowd of people. You seem to be at some kind of parade. You look down the road and see a gleaming, golden litter carried on the shoulders of several men. Inside the litter is a man wearing furs and golden jewelry.

The Big Question

Why were llamas so important to the Inca?

As the litter gets closer, the people around you go down on their knees and touch their foreheads to the ground. You are the only one

Vocabulary

Inca, n. a civilization that thrived from 1438 to 1532 on the western coast of South America, including most of modern-day Peru and parts of Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina

still standing. Suddenly you notice several people yelling at you. An angry soldier is running at you with a raised club. You begin to run. With a start, you wake up and realize you were having a dream.

It's a good thing you woke up. The people in your dream were bowing because the Sapa Inca, the king of the **Inca** people, was approaching.



The Sapa Inca was the ruler of the vast Inca Empire, which stretched over two thousand miles of the South American coast.

The Inca believed that the Sapa Inca was the son of Inti, the sun god. No one was allowed to look at this powerful king—and you were staring right at him! If you had not woken up, your dream would have had a terrifying ending: you would almost certainly have been killed by the soldiers for being so disrespectful to the son of the sun.



The Empire of the Sun

Who were the Inca? They were people who built a great civilization on the western coast of South America. The first Inca people lived in the area around Cuzco in modern-day Peru. In the early 1400s, these people began conquering neighboring lands and extending their empire. By the time the Spanish **conquistadors** (/kahn*kees*tuh*dorz/) arrived in the 1530s, the Inca Empire was the largest in the Americas—larger even than the Aztec Empire had been.

Inca soldiers helped to conquer a huge empire in a short period of time.

Vocabulary

conquistador, n.
the Spanish word for conqueror

The Sapa Inca ruled over more than twelve million people. His territory stretched for more than two thousand miles along the Pacific Coast. The empire covered an area so large that most of modern-day Peru and parts of Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina would lie inside its borders.

This is a region of great **geographical diversity**. Arid plains stretch along the western coastline. This region is so dry that not even a cactus can grow. Farther east, the twin ranges of the snow-capped Andes Mountains rise toward the skies. Between the ranges lies a high **plateau**. Land here is sizzling hot by day and freezing by night. East of the Andes are thick forests where heavy rains feed the mighty Amazon River. All these lands were ruled by the Sapa Inca.

Vocabulary

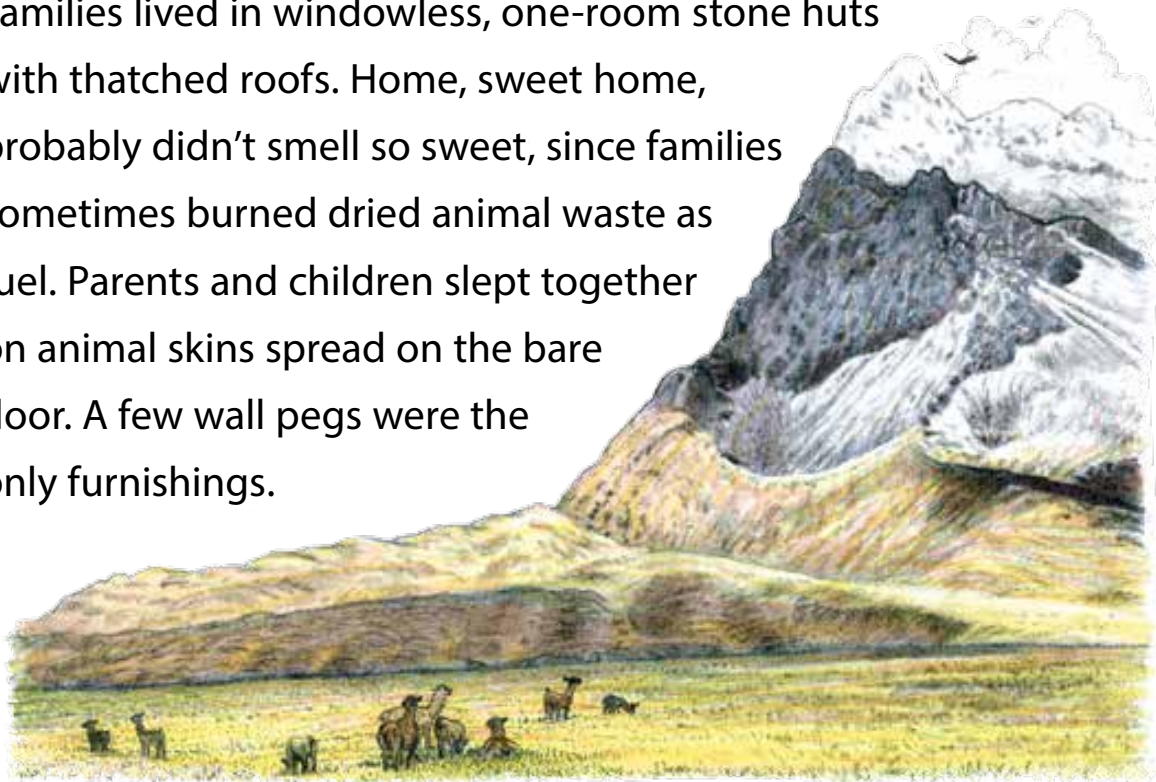
“geographical diversity,” (phrase), the presence of many different kinds of landforms, waterways, or other geographic features in a region

plateau, n. a large area of high, flat ground

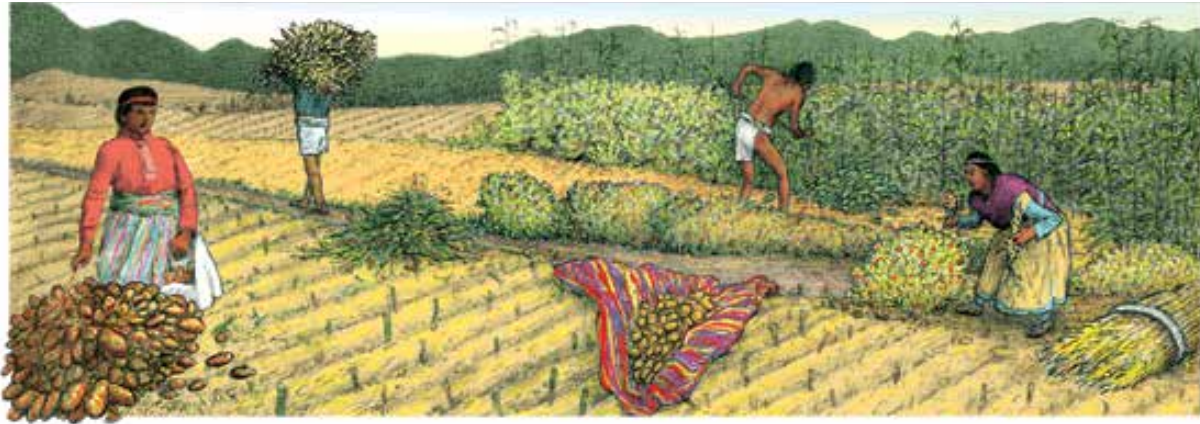
clan, n. a group of families

Inca Life

The Inca people were organized into **clans**, or groups. Every Inca family was part of a clan, and each clan farmed a piece of land. Families lived in windowless, one-room stone huts with thatched roofs. Home, sweet home, probably didn't smell so sweet, since families sometimes burned dried animal waste as fuel. Parents and children slept together on animal skins spread on the bare floor. A few wall pegs were the only furnishings.



The Inca Empire included a wide range of different geographic regions and features.



Inca farmers used ingenious methods to farm in the challenging environment of the Andes Mountains.

Boys followed their fathers' trades. Girls copied their mothers'. Most Inca were farmers. They grew corn, squash, tomatoes, peanuts, cotton, and more than a hundred varieties of potatoes. The potato was the main crop for the Inca. It grew well even at high altitudes on the slopes of the Andes Mountains.

Inca farmers also raised livestock. This included guinea pigs, **alpacas**, and **llamas**. The guinea pigs were raised for food. The alpacas were a source of wool. The Inca used llamas for all sorts of things, but especially as pack animals.

The llama is truly an amazing animal. It is a smaller cousin of the camel. A llama stands about four feet high at the shoulder and weighs about 250 pounds. Like its camel cousin, the llama has great strength and endurance. Llamas can carry loads up to 125 pounds for fifteen to twenty miles a day. They will eat just about anything and can go long periods without drinking. Llamas are also gentle animals. But if they are mistreated or overloaded, they

Vocabulary

alpaca, n. a South American mammal valued for its long, woolly coat

llama, n. a South American mammal valued for its endurance and for its woolly coat and meat

will let you know it. A llama may simply sit down and refuse to move. An unhappy llama may hiss and spit to make its point. Llama spit is not just wet and nasty. It can include hard pellets of food, which can cause pain if they hit you.



The llama is a useful animal that served the Inca people mainly as a pack animal.

The Inca used llamas to transport goods. They also used the llama's wool for cloth, its hide for rugs and coats, its waste for fuel and fertilizer, and its meat for food. When a llama died, the Inca cut the meat into strips and dried it in the sun. They called these strips *charqui* (/chahr*kee/). This is the source of our own word for dried meat, *jerky*.

Inca women were skilled weavers. They made clothing from the cotton they grew and from the wool of their llamas and alpacas.

For the Good of the Empire

Inca families worked for themselves. In addition, they were required to spend part of their time working for the Sapa Inca and the empire.

Farmers raised crops for themselves and also for the empire. Inca men also had to donate time by working on construction projects, building roads, or serving in the military.



The Inca used cotton and wool from llamas and alpacas to make their clothing.

The Inca people understood that their labor was necessary to maintain the empire and to help protect them and their families. As a result, they worked willingly. The Sapa Inca and the priests used only a small part of the goods produced. The rest were stored in warehouses and given to those who were too old or too sick to work. When crops failed



Every Inca subject was required to spend part of his or her time working for the emperor.

and times were hard, food and goods were given to the working people, too. This system ensured that no one went hungry.

The rule of the Sapa Inca was absolute. Many government officials traveled throughout the empire to make sure his laws were obeyed. One of those officials was known as *He-Who-Sees-Everything*. He-Who-Sees-Everything was responsible for visiting Inca villages and making them pay their taxes. Oddly enough, he also served as a matchmaker.

He-Who-Sees-Everything would arrive in an Inca village every few years. When he arrived, he ordered the villagers to gather so that he could take a **census**. The more people in the village, the more the village had to pay in taxes.

Vocabulary

census, n. a count of the number of people living in a certain area

Once the counting was over, He-Who-Sees-Everything asked unmarried women over a certain age to step forward. The official interviewed each young woman. If one was found especially worthy, she was sent to Cuzco to become one of the Sapa Inca's many wives.

Once these chosen few had been selected, He-Who-Sees-Everything called all the unmarried young men before him. He proceeded to pair off the young men and women. He could make dozens of marriages on the spot. No questions were asked. After all, He-Who-Sees-Everything was a servant of the Sapa Inca. The marriages he was arranging were for the good of the empire.

The Inca Empire lasted only from the beginning of its expansion in 1438 to the Spanish conquest in 1532. But it was a century of towering achievement. The Inca did not just conquer people. To keep their empire unified, they changed every place they conquered. Read on to find out how the Inca conquests changed the face of South America.

Chapter 6

Inca Engineering

The Royal Road It's one thing to conquer many lands. It's another thing to keep control of what you've conquered. Remember how the ancient Romans held their empire together? They built roads all across it.

The Big Question

How did the Inca use their engineering skills to manage and grow their empire?

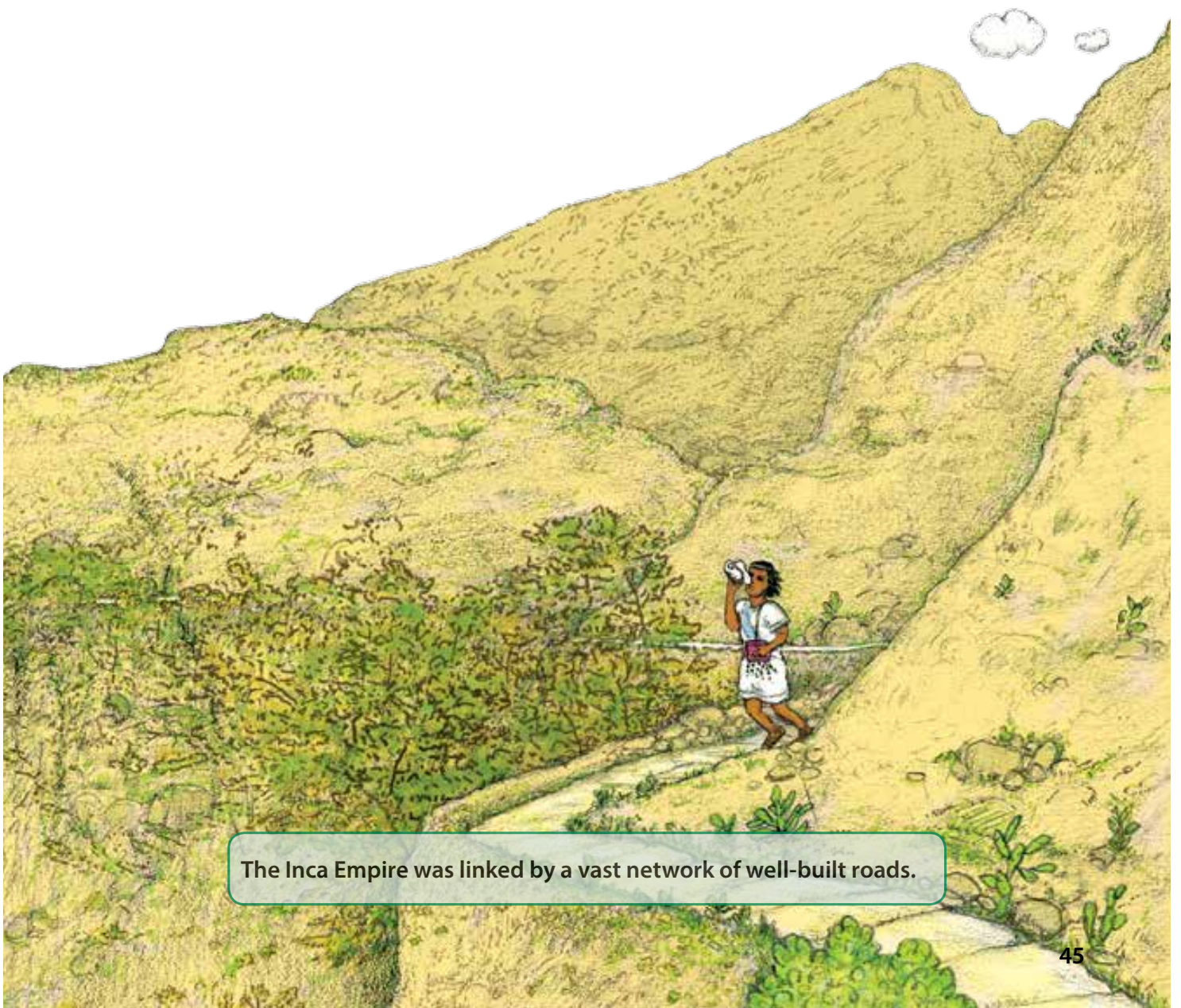


The roads made it possible for government **officials** to travel around the empire. Roads also encouraged trade. Most importantly, the roads allowed the army to travel quickly. This way, they could put down a rebellion or enforce the emperor's rule.

Vocabulary

official, n. a person who carries out a government duty

The Inca knew nothing of ancient Rome. But they too were great road builders. Their Royal Road stretched over two thousand miles. It ran from the northern end of the empire to the southern tip. It was the longest road in the world until the 1800s.



The Inca Empire was linked by a vast network of well-built roads.

The Royal Road was twenty-four feet wide in most places. Although it crossed mountains, valleys, deserts, and swamps, long stretches were straight as an arrow. Markers measured distances along the road. Trees shaded the road. A canal provided water for travelers. There were even roadside storehouses where travelers could get food at the end of the day.

Vocabulary

engineer, n.
someone who uses science and math to design useful objects or buildings

Parts of the Royal Road were made of packed dirt. Other parts were paved. Inca **engineers** fitted paving stones together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Modern builders use



Inca builders cut and assembled stone with great precision to build roads and other structures.

mortar, a cement-like material, to keep stones together. The Inca did not use any mortar. Instead, they cut stones so exactly that they fit together snugly.

The Royal Road shows the great skill of Inca builders. These builders had no earth-moving machinery. They did not have horses or oxen to pull wagons. They did not even have the wheel. Everything was done by hand. Yet the Inca were able to build roads so sturdy, not even heavy rains or flash floods could destroy them.

The Royal Road was the main Inca road, but there were others. At every valley, east-west roads crossed the Royal Road. The Royal Road was like the spine. The crossroads were like nerves branching out from it. This network of roads linked all parts of the empire together.

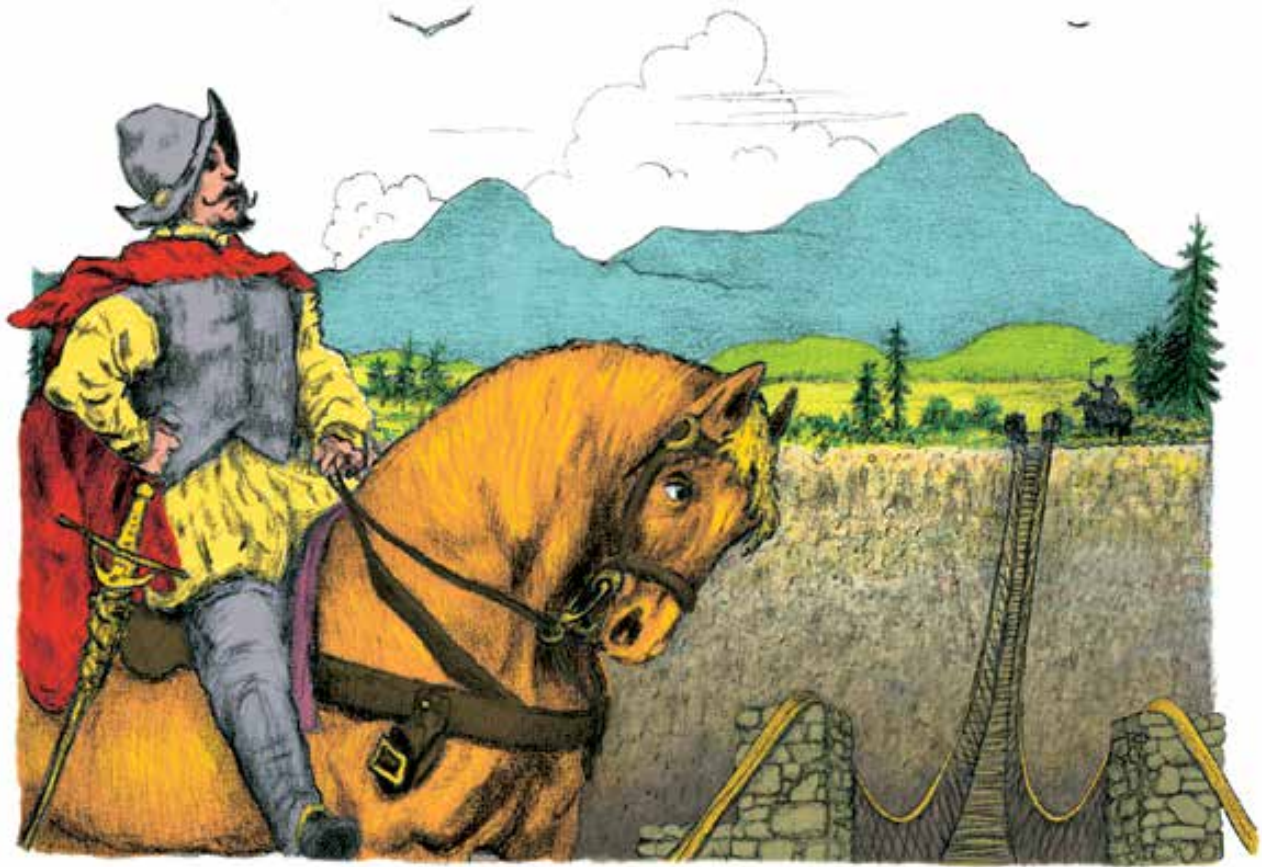
Bridges Built for the Centuries

To build roads through mountains and across streams, the Inca had to build lots of bridges. Like the roads, these bridges are marvels of engineering. A bridge built over the Apurimac (/ahp*uh*ree*mahk/) River in Peru is a fine example. It was built over a steep river gorge in 1350. It was a **suspension bridge**, held together by heavy strands of rope. The ropes were replaced every two years. This amazing bridge was in service from 1350 until 1890! For more than five hundred years, the bridge was maintained and used by the Inca.

Vocabulary

mortar, n. a material used in building that is soft at first but that then gets hard and rocklike

suspension bridge, n. a type of bridge in which the road or pathway hangs from ropes or cables that are attached to anchors or towers



The Inca were master bridge builders.

It was then used by the Spanish and finally by the people of Peru. It is one of the greatest achievements of the Inca engineers. It gained wider fame when it was featured in the classic novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, by American writer Thornton Wilder.

Mountain Staircases

The Inca also used their engineering know-how to help them farm in the Andes. Farming on a mountainside is challenging. The incline makes every task—plowing, planting, and harvesting—very difficult. In heavy downpours, water runs downhill and washes out crops.

The Inca had to find a way to grow crops on the slopes of the Andes. Their solution was to cut **terraces** into the sides of the mountains. The terraces created level fields that could be planted and harvested just like valley fields. The Inca also built irrigation systems. This allowed them to bring water to the terraced fields.

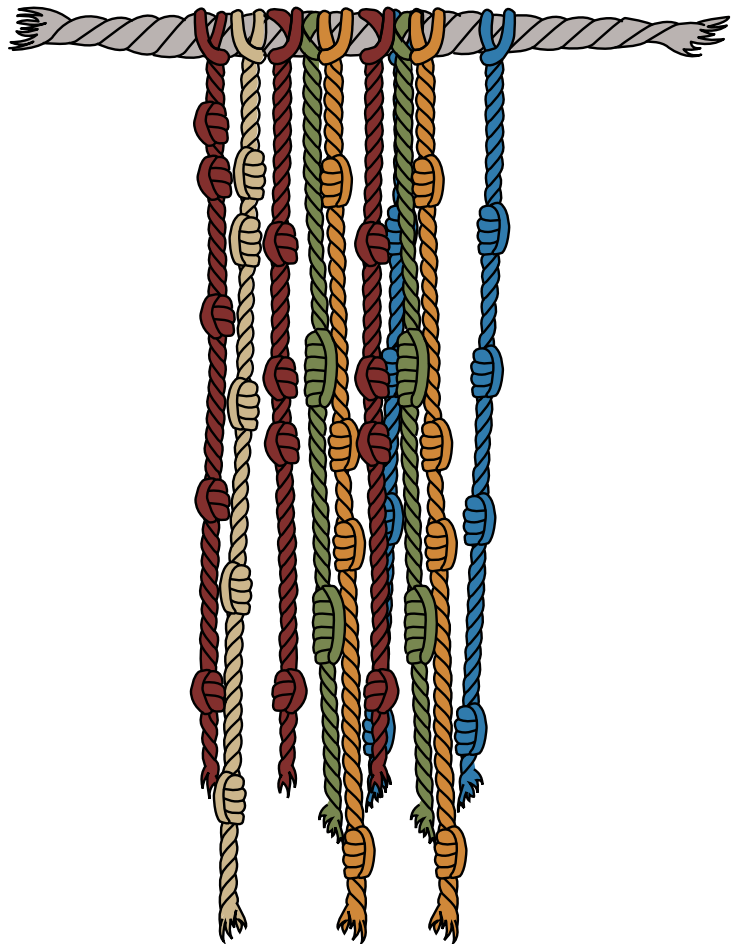
Vocabulary

terrace, n. a flat piece of land carved out of the side of a mountain or hill

Keeping It All Together

The Inca had an advanced road system, but they had no written language. How could they possibly run an empire of twelve million people that spanned the length of a continent without writing?

The Inca came up with some clever strategies. For instance, they invented a means for counting and record-keeping using a *quipu* (/kee*poo/). A quipu was a piece of string that had shorter strings of various colors dangling



The quipu allowed the Inca to carefully track and keep records of amounts of troops, food, and other goods moving through their vast empire.

from it. By tying knots in a certain pattern on a quipu, an official could record how many warriors were headed for a village or how much corn was in a storehouse.

The Inca also used messengers trained to run short distances to carry news. Since the Inca had no written language, these messengers did not carry a written note. Instead, a runner memorized his message and sprinted to a station, a mile or so away. There, the next runner would be waiting. Without slowing the pace, the second messenger ran alongside the first messenger to hear the message. Then the second messenger continued on.



Fast Inca runners were able to move messages quickly over the full length of the empire.

The system was fast! A message could travel 150 miles in a day. This meant news could travel all the way from Quito (/kee*toh/) to Cuzco in a little over a week. In the 1860s, the famous pony express riders of the American West were only able to cover about two hundred miles a day—and they rode on horseback!

City in the Clouds

Another marvel of Inca engineering is the famous city of Machu Picchu (/mah*choo/peek*choo/). Machu Picchu is a mountain fortress seven thousand feet above sea level, located about fifty miles northwest of Cuzco. It sits in a high valley, between two peaks of the Andes.

Today, visitors can stand in the center of Machu Picchu. From there, they can see the ruins of an open plaza, a temple, and a place where archaeologists discovered Inca skeletons. The surrounding hillside is terraced for farming.

Archaeologists estimate that Machu Picchu was built in the mid-1400s. For years it was a vacation spot for Inca emperors. Today it is the leading tourist attraction in Peru.

Machu Picchu is not an easy place to visit. Tourists now take a railroad partway up the mountain. Then they follow a steep, twisting road to the top. Energetic hikers can walk on an old Inca trail that climbs up the steep slopes of the Andes.



The ruins of Machu Picchu rest high in the Andes Mountains.

Expanding the Empire

Like the Aztec, the Inca built their empire by conquering other people. They also sacrificed human beings for religious purposes. However, human sacrifice seems to have been less widespread in the Inca Empire. The Inca focused more on turning conquered people into loyal subjects.

When conquered people were cooperative, the Sapa Inca made few changes. Inca architects and managers went to new regions. Their job was to oversee the building of roads and temples. The Inca taught their language to the local people. They also asked

them to worship the sun god Inti. The worship of local gods was allowed. Sometimes those gods were even made a part of the Inca religion.

If conquered people were uncooperative, the Sapa Inca moved swiftly. He shipped troublemakers from their homes to villages. There, they were surrounded by local Inca citizens. He also shipped loyal Inca citizens to live among the conquered people. In this way, the Sapa Inca was able to quickly build a large and unified empire. This empire would endure until the Spanish conquistadors made their fateful appearance.

Chapter 7

The End of Two Empires

The Question An Aztec poet once stood atop the Great Temple and boasted of the greatness of the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán. He asked, “Who could conquer Tenochtitlán? Who could shake the foundation of the heavens?” You are about to learn the chilling answer to those questions.

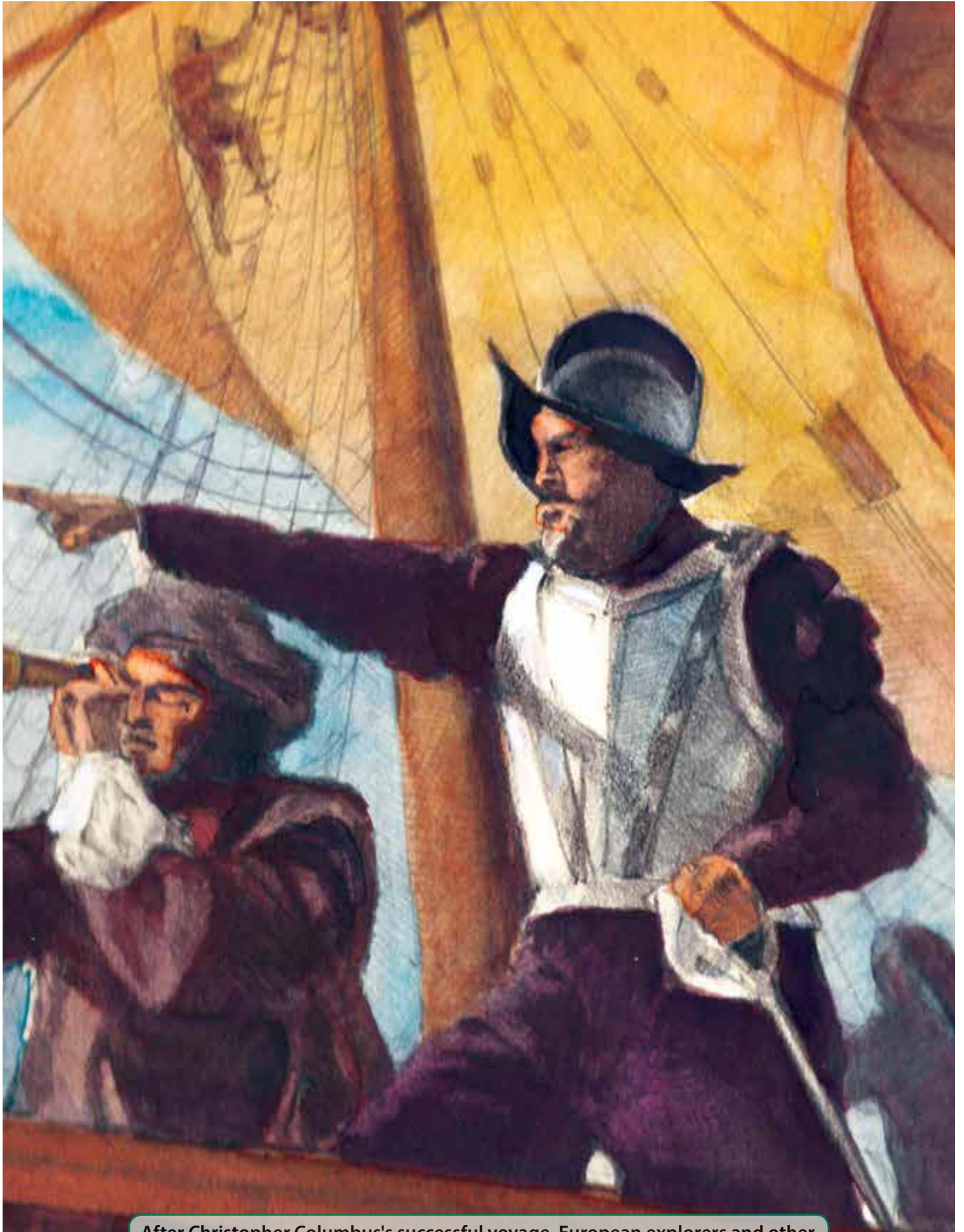
The Big Question

What were the factors that contributed to the end of the Aztec and Inca empires?

The Answer

In 1519 Aztec emperor Moctezuma II ruled a mighty empire. One day a messenger arrived in Tenochtitlán. He had walked all the way from the Gulf of Mexico with shocking news. “My lord,” the exhausted man told Moctezuma, “it was a mountain, and it floated on the water.”

What was the traveler talking about? The emperor’s men journeyed to the coast to find out for themselves. They returned with tales of white men with thick beards. Like the first messenger, they saw a “floating mountain.” They also saw other wonders, including “magic sticks” that belched smoke and “enormous dogs” with flat ears and long tongues.



After Christopher Columbus's successful voyage, European explorers and other fortune seekers soon followed. The Aztec had never before seen anything like the Spanish conquistadors and their great sailing ships.

The “floating mountain” was actually a Spanish ship. The “magic sticks” were cannons, and the “giant dogs” were horses. The Aztec had never seen horses or cannons, and they knew nothing of sailing ships or Spaniards. They could only guess who these strange beings might be.



Horses were another strange sight for the Aztec people.

Moctezuma remembered the troubling events of recent years. He guessed that the strangers might be gods come down to earth. To please them, the emperor sent golden robes and other gifts. When the Aztec messengers reached the coast, they presented these gifts to the leader of the Spanish **expedition**, Hernán Cortés (/er*nahn/kor*tez/).

Vocabulary

expedition, n. a special journey taken by a group that has a clear purpose or goal

Hernán Cortés

Cortés was a Spanish explorer. He had taken part in the conquest of Cuba a few years earlier. In 1519 he set sail from Cuba for Central America. Like other conquistadors, he hoped to spread the Catholic religion. He also hoped to get rich. Moctezuma’s gifts caught Cortés’s attention. He found a native woman, whom the Spanish called Marina, to serve as his translator and guide.

Then he set off with his men toward the Aztec capital.

As he journeyed west, Cortés marched through areas the Aztec had conquered. The people in these areas had been forced to pay tribute to the Aztec. They had also watched their young men dragged off to Tenochtitlán to be offered as sacrifices. Many of the conquered people Cortés met hoped the newcomers would help them get revenge on the Aztec.



Hernán Cortés came to the Americas with the goals of conquest and wealth.

Cortés the Conqueror

Moctezuma learned that Cortés was getting support from old enemies. He tried to talk Cortés out of coming to Tenochtitlán and even sent magicians to cast spells on the Spaniards. But Cortés and his men marched on. Moctezuma at last accepted that he could not stop the Spaniards. So he decided to welcome them as honored guests.

For a while, all was peaceful in Tenochtitlán. The Spaniards, however, grew nervous. They knew they were greatly outnumbered and that even their superior weapons could not keep them safe. They took Moctezuma hostage. In addition, they

demanded that the emperor order the Aztec to stop sacrificing to their gods. Moctezuma refused. A few weeks later, fighting broke out. The Spanish grew fearful that the Aztec priests were plotting against them. The Spaniards attacked and killed hundreds of priests during a **religious ceremony**.



After failing to stop Cortés from coming to Tenochtitlán, Moctezuma welcomed him as a guest.

The Aztec responded by trying to wipe out the Spanish. Many men were killed on both sides. Among the victims was Moctezuma himself. The Spaniards then fled Tenochtitlán.

The Spaniards rebuilt their army by enlisting more of the Aztec's old enemies. In 1521, Cortés and his allies surrounded the capital. With no supplies coming into Tenochtitlán, city residents began to starve. An outbreak of **smallpox** also swept through the city. This disease was carried by the conquistadors. The Aztec had no **immunities** against European diseases.

Vocabulary

"religious ceremony," (phrase), a special gathering or event that has a religious purpose or theme

smallpox, n. a serious disease that spreads from person to person and causes a fever and rash

immunity, n. a body's ability to remain free of illness even after being exposed to the cause of the illness

As a result, the diseases hit very hard and spread quickly. Warriors, commoners, and nobles alike died in the **epidemic**.

Vocabulary

epidemic, n. a situation in which a disease spreads to many people in an area or region

In May of 1521, Cortés organized a final bloody attack. Spanish forces, armed with guns and cannons and joined by thousands of native allies, advanced along the causeways. The Aztec fought bravely but were overwhelmed by their attackers. Meanwhile, the smallpox epidemic left thousands dead or dying in the streets. Others were too sick to fight. Tenochtitlán fell in August of 1521. The once-great city lay in ruins, and the mighty empire of the Aztec was defeated.

The End for the Inca

A few years later, a similar series of events unfolded in South America. One day, a messenger dropped to the ground before the Sapa Inca. He delivered startling news.

“A house!” he exclaimed. “It drifts on the sea along the coast!” He went on to speak of bearded ones with white skin. They were masters of lightning and thunder!

The Sapa Inca felt fear. There had been frightening signs in recent times. Violent earthquakes had split the ground. The sea had tossed gigantic waves ashore.

Not long after, the bearded ones disappeared in their “sea house.” But they left something behind—deadly diseases the natives had never had before. Those along the coast became sick first. Later,

travelers carried the diseases inland. The Inca people had no natural ability to fight off the European germs. They became very ill and died by the thousands.

When the Sapa Inca died, two of his sons claimed the throne. This led to a civil war. The fighting was as bloody as any the Inca people had ever waged. When the battles were over, the son named Atahualpa (/ah*tah*wahl*pah/) had won. Atahualpa would not rest easy on his throne, however. Before long, another message arrived from the coast. The bearded ones had returned!

Francisco Pizarro

The bearded strangers were Spanish conquistadors led by Francisco Pizarro. Pizarro had heard rumors of an empire in South America that was even richer than the Aztec Empire. In 1527, Pizarro led a group of about 160 men to find this empire. When Pizarro found Inca temples decorated with gold and silver, he figured he had found what he was looking for.

The Spaniards marched toward Cuzco. They traveled along the very roads that the Inca had built to unite their empire. Meanwhile, speedy Inca messengers told Atahualpa that the Spaniards were coming. The Sapa Inca did not



Francisco Pizarro hoped to find even greater riches in South America than Cortés found in Tenochtitlán.

take the Spaniards seriously, however. The signs from a few years earlier had been forgotten during the civil war. Also, the Inca had no contact with the Aztec. As a result, they had no way of knowing what had happened to their neighbors to the north. Besides, what could the mighty Sapa Inca, all-powerful son of the sun, have to fear from a small band of men?

When the Spaniards approached Atahualpa's camp near the town of Cajamarca (/kah*huh*mahr*kuh/), a meeting was arranged. Atahualpa agreed to meet Pizarro in the town square. It was here that Pizarro set an ambush. His soldiers hid inside buildings surrounding the square. Though well-armed, the Spaniards waited nervously. They knew they were greatly outnumbered.

"They approach!" Pizarro's lookout shouted. As Pizarro had requested, Atahualpa came as a friend. The Sapa Inca had left his warriors outside the city. He was marching into Cajamarca with six thousand unarmed nobles and attendants.

When the Sapa Inca reached the main square, a startling figure stepped from a doorway. A Spanish priest, dressed in a white robe and black hood, walked toward the Sapa Inca's group. Spanish laws forbade Pizarro from attacking without warning. Before using force, he had to ask the enemies to surrender and become Christians peacefully. So the priest urged Atahualpa to accept Christianity. The priest offered a Catholic prayer book to Atahualpa. The insulted ruler knocked the book to the ground.

This was the moment the Spaniards were waiting for. Pizarro had given the required warning. Now, he gave the signal for attack. The assault on the unarmed Inca was not a battle. It was a massacre!

Cannons fired. Steel swords slashed. Spaniards on horses charged around, cutting down the unarmed Inca. Less than an hour later, Atahualpa was a prisoner, and thousands of Inca people lay dead.

A Deadly Bargain

Atahualpa offered to pay a ransom for his release. The Sapa Inca placed his hand high on the wall of his prison room. "I will fill the room to this height with gold," he told Pizarro. "This I give in exchange for my freedom."

The Sapa Inca's orders went out. His subjects stripped temples of their gold. They emptied storehouses and gathered up gold that



Atahualpa paid a tremendous ransom in hopes of gaining his freedom from his Spanish captors.

would be worth tens of millions of dollars today. Once the Inca paid this fantastic ransom, Pizarro broke his promise. He charged Atahualpa with plotting against the Spaniards and had him executed.



The Sapa Inca's death was the beginning of the end for the Inca Empire.

Viracocha was the Inca god of creation. The Inca had their own deep religious beliefs and did not want to give them up.

The Inca were highly successful in battle. But they had been weakened by civil war, ravaged by deadly diseases, and upset by the loss of their leader. They were in no condition to oppose the Spaniards. By June of 1534, Pizarro had conquered Cuzco and Quito. A few years later, the Spanish conquest of the region was mostly complete.

In twenty years, the Spaniards had destroyed two mighty empires and set up a new empire of their own. The conquerors congratulated themselves for stopping human sacrifice and bringing Christianity to the Americas. However, their greed for gold and thirst for power also led to the destruction of two of the most amazing civilizations in history. The changes they had begun would lead to the deaths of millions of people.

Glossary

A

alpaca, n. a South American mammal valued for its long, woolly coat (40)

archaeologist, n. an expert in the study of ancient people and the objects from their time period that remain, generally including stones and bones, and pottery (5)

architecture, n. the style and construction of a building (4)

astronomy, n. the study of the stars, planets, and other features of outer space (11)

Aztec, n. a civilization that thrived in present-day central Mexico from 1325 to 1521 CE (20)

C

canal, n. a channel dug by people, used by boats or for irrigation (28)

causeway, n. a raised road built over water to connect islands to a mainland (28)

census, n. a count of the number of people living in a certain area (42)

city-state, n. a city that is an independent political state with its own ruling government (5)

civilization, n. a society, or group of people, with similar religious beliefs, customs, language, and form of government (4)

clan, n. a group of families (39)

codex, n. an ancient book with handwritten pages or parts (32)

conquistador, n. the Spanish word for conqueror (38)

E

emperor, n. the ruler of an empire (23)

empire, n. a group of countries or territories under the control of one government or one ruler (23)

engineer, n. someone who uses science and math to design useful objects or buildings (46)

epidemic, n. a situation in which a disease spreads to many people in an area or region (59)

equinox, n. a day in which daytime and nighttime are about the same length, which happens twice every year (13)

expedition, n. a special journey taken by a group that has a clear purpose or goal (56)

G

“geographical diversity,” (phrase), the presence of many different kinds of landforms, waterways, or other geographic features in a region (39)

H

hieroglyph, n. a picture or symbol representing an idea, an object, a syllable, or a sound (6)

I

immunity, n. a body’s ability to remain free of illness even after being exposed to the cause of the illness (58)

Inca, n. civilization that thrived from 1438 to 1532 on the western coast of South America, including most of modern-day Peru and parts of Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina (36)

“initiation ceremony,” (phrase), a special event to mark a person’s entry into a certain group or status (16)

L

leap year, n. a year that has 366 days, or one more than all other years, and occurs every four years (11)

litter, n. a chair attached to two beams and carried on the shoulders of several people (34)

llama, n. a South American mammal valued for its endurance and for its woolly coat and meat (40)

M

Maya, n. a group of peoples who have inhabited a region that includes parts of present-day Mexico and Central America from thousands of years ago to the present. Before the arrival of Europeans, Maya cities and civilization thrived in rainforest locations between about 200 and 900 CE. (4)

Mesoamerica, n. a historical region that includes what are today the central and southern parts of Mexico and the northern parts of Central America (2)

mortar, n. a material used in building that is soft at first but that then gets hard and rocklike (47)

N

nomadic, adj. moving around often in search of food; not settled in one place (20)

O

official, n. a person who carries out a government duty (45)

P

pictogram, n. a picture or drawing that stands for a word or phrase (32)

plateau, n. a large area of high, flat ground (39)

priest, n. a person who has the training or authority to carry out certain religious ceremonies or rituals (16)

R

reign, n. a period of time in which a king or queen rules (34)

“religious ceremony,” (phrase), a special gathering or event that has a religious purpose or theme (58)

S

sacrifice, v. to give or to kill something for a religious purpose (9)

scribe, n. a person whose job is copying written information (31)

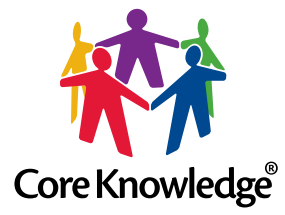
smallpox, n. a serious disease that spreads from person to person and causes a fever and rash (58)

suspension bridge, n. a type of bridge in which the road or pathway hangs from ropes or cables that are attached to anchors or towers (47)

T

temple, n. a building with a religious use or meaning (5)

terrace, n. a flat piece of land carved out of the side of a mountain or hill (49)



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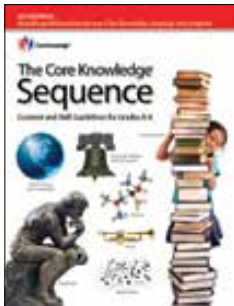
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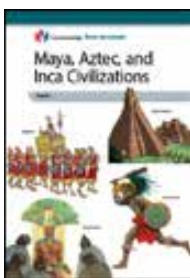
Maya, Aztec and Inca Civilizations

Core Knowledge Sequence History and Geography 5



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