

Mesoamerica



"Mesoamerican Art & The "Horse" Controversy." *Lehis Library*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

The ancient cultures of Mesoamerica were similar to other cultures in parts of the world, yet still maintained their own unique cultural identity. The influence of these cultures can still be seen in Central and South America today.

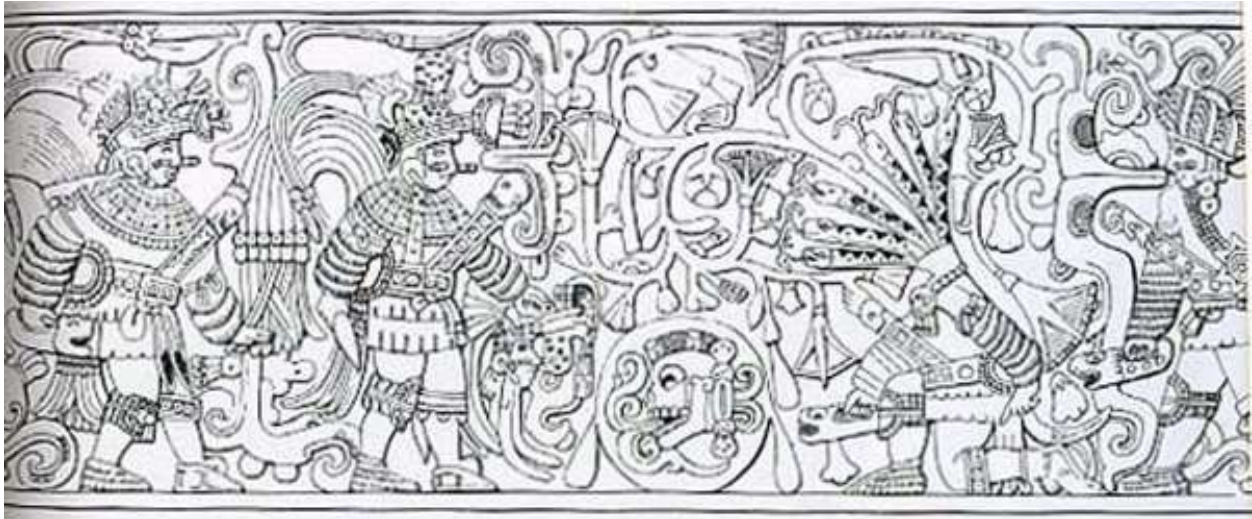
Geography

For more than 1100 years three separate, but similar civilizations flourished in Central and South America. These civilizations were the **Mayans**, **Aztec**, and **Incas**. Farming led to the growth of these civilizations. Growing corn and other crops created a change from hunter-gatherer societies to more complex, settled societies. All three civilizations were geographically isolated and left little culture behind, they were all advanced civilizations.



"Aztecs, Maya, and Inca." *History for Kids*. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 June 2014.

Question: Looking at the map above which of the Mesoamerican civilizations was the largest?



"Lecture 9." Lecture 9. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Mayas

The Mayas had an advanced network of **city-states**, ruled by a king and military force. The Mayas settled in the **Yucatan Peninsula**; where the geography of the area played a big role in the rise and decline of the civilization. The Mayas settled in an area called **Petén**, a flat region that was covered in forest and contained **swamps** and **sinkholes**. Usually these types of geographical features would not be desirable for sustaining a society but the Mayas realized that these structures could provide a continuous source of fresh water and that the land could be cleared for farming using the **slash and burn** technique. The slash and burn techniques consisted of cutting and burning off the vegetation in an area. This allowed the Maya to clear the rainforest.



Question: What is a city-state?

Question: Explain the slash and burn method of clearing land. Include why this was necessary.

The Maya kings were considered to be **gods** who descended from the sun and expected the people to serve them. Mayan engineering created extensive cities that included pyramids to honor the gods. The **step pyramids**, temples and ball courts at **Chichen Itza** and **Tikal** are still in existence today.



Aztecs, Maya, and Inca." *History for Kids*. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 June 2014.

Question: What type of architectural structure was found in both Mesoamerica and the eastern hemisphere?

Maya priests studied the heavens so they would know when to plant crops. They applied their knowledge for **astronomy** to create a **365 day calendar** and a **base-20 numbering system**. The Maya developed a system of writing like hieroglyphics to record numbers and dates of important festivals, planning, and harvest.



Maya Calendar

"Calendars Exhibit." *The Mayan Calendar*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

0	1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24

Number System



Writing system

"Mayan Writings - World History For Kids - By KidsPast.com." *Mayan Writings - World History For Kids - By KidsPast.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

"Numbers' & Numeral Systems' History and Curiosities (2)." *Numbers' History 2*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Question: Why did the Mayas study the stars?

By the year 500 AD, Maya civilization had reached its **Golden Age**. A Golden Age is a period when the empire is at its height or best. Two hundred years later the as the population reached its peak, one Maya city after another disappeared and the population disappeared. The cause of this decline is not known but many believe it was connected to food production, water supplies, or invasion.

Aztec



<http://www.mexicolore.co.uk/aztecs/home/heart-exhibition>

The Aztec established a powerful empire in the central valley of modern-day Mexico with a social hierarchy. The Aztecs settled in the area known as the **Valley of Mexico** and that today is **Mexico City**. The geographical features of this area included a high elevation of mountains, and a lake with swamplands. This central valley region is swampy.



"Aztec Farming." *Aztec Farming*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Question: What geographic features made farming difficult for the Aztecs?

The swamp provided wild plants, fish, frogs and ducks to eat. Agriculture was the basis of the Aztec civilization. To expand their opportunities to farm, the Aztecs built floating gardens called **chinampas**, where they grew corn, avocados, beans, chili peppers, squash and tomatoes.



"Chinampa: Raised-bed Hydrological Agriculture." *Anthropogen*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

They built a capital city, **Tenochtitlan**, in the middle of a giant lake connected to the mainland by a **causeway** and **floating gardens**. The Aztecs were led by strong emperors who were considered descendants of the gods. The social hierarchy of the Aztecs included four classes: nobles, commoners, unskilled laborers, and enslaved people. The people sustained themselves with agriculture and trade.

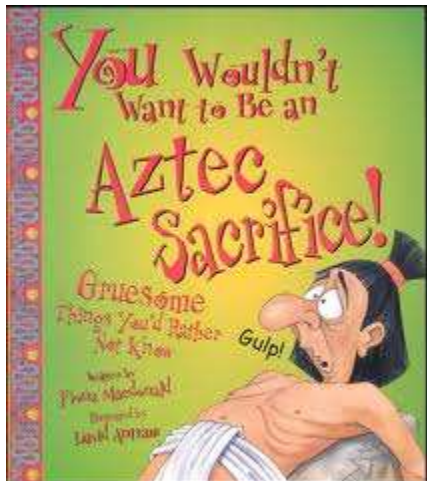


"World History (Mr. Brown)." *WH: Aztec Empire*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Question: Explain how the Aztecs farmed using chinampas?

Question: Looking at the picture of Tenochtitlan above, how would the causeways be a good defense tactic for the Aztecs?

They paid **tribute** (a gift given in respect or gratitude) to the gods and practiced **polytheism and human sacrifice**. Human sacrifice was considered an important tribute to the gods. The Great Temple in Tenochtitlan witnessed thousands of people sacrificed.



"You Wouldn't Want To Be An Aztec Sacrifice!" *You Wouldn't Want To Be An Aztec Sacrifice!* N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.



"Aztec Sacrifice." *Aztec Sacrifice*. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 June 2014.

Question: Why do you think the Aztecs paid tribute to the gods?

Question: What was an important tribute to the gods?

Question: List five reasons why you wouldn't want to be an Aztec sacrifice.

The Aztecs created a sacred calendar used for worship and a solar calendar for agricultural purposes.

The decline of the Aztec civilization came when Montezuma, the Aztec emperor, was defeated by the Spanish **conquistador, Hernan Cortez** in 1521 AD. Diseases such as **smallpox** and **measles** also decreased the population of the Aztecs because they had no natural immunities.



"In the Western World... and Australia." *In the Western World... and Australia* N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.



"Aztec - Google Search." *Aztec - Google Search*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Question: How could disease cause an empire to decline?

Question: Why do you think the Aztecs had no immunity to diseases from the Old World?

Inca



"Classic Inca Trail, The Most Famous of Peru Hiking Adventures." *Classic Inca Trail, The Most Famous of Peru Hiking Adventures*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

The Incas created a civilization high in the **Andes Mountains** of present day **Peru**. The empire expanded from Equator to northern Chile. Their empire was much larger than the Mayas or Aztecs.

Question: How is the Inca empire's location different from the Mayas and Aztecs?

The Incas ruled **by proxy**. The Incas had a very strong emperor who allowed local leaders to remain in power. The social structure of the Incas was not flexible. At the top of the social structure was the emperor who had absolute power. Next, was the royal family who were the **nobles** (the highest class in certain societies, especially those holding hereditary titles or offices). Each tribe had a tribal head; each clan in each tribe had a clan head. At the bottom of the social triangle were the common people. Each group cooperated with the other yet there was not opportunity to advance in society.



"Inca Government - Google Search." *Inca Government - Google Search*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Question: What does absolute power mean?

Farming was difficult in the Andes. The Incas like the other civilizations of Mesoamerica created terraced land to farm. They cultivated corn, potatoes and used llamas and alpacas for food and labor.

Question: Why did the Incas use terrace farming?

The Incas were skilled engineers and built massive forts with stone slabs so perfect that they did not require mortar. Building with stone is called masonry. An example of this is shown in the picture below of **Machu Picchu**, a special place built for the Inca Kings.



Machu Picchu



Masonry work

"Towers of Ilium." : *March 2012*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

They also built roads, tunnels, bridges, and aqueducts throughout the empire just like the Romans had done. The Incas contributed to the field of medicine and surgery. The Incas spoke **Quechua**; a spoken but not written language with they required all people they conquered to learn. Quecha is still spoken today among the natives of the Andes. Since they had no written language they kept records on various colored cords, or **quip**.



Question: What purpose did the quips have?

Question: List the achievements that were similar in the Roman and Inca civilization.

The Incas were polytheistic and their central god was the sun-god. Human sacrifices were routinely made to please the god (pay tribute). The Inca empire came to an end in 1530s when Francisco Pizarro convinced the Inca emperor, Atahualpa to meet with him. Pizarro kidnapped him and he tried to buy his freedom, but was executed in 1533.



"La Captura De Atahualpa." LA CAPTURA DE ATAHUALPA POR FRANCISCO PIZARRO HISTORIA DEL PERU ADONDE.COM. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Question: What other civilization declined in a similar manor as the Incas. Explain how.