

Cities and Empires

Essential Question

How did the early civilizations of Mexico and Central America develop socially, politically, and economically?

Reading Guide

Content Vocabulary

civilization (p. 11) Quechua (p. 15)
 theocracy (p. 12) quipu (p. 15)
 hieroglyphics (p. 12) terrace (p. 15)

Academic Vocabulary

complex (p. 11) link (p. 13)

Key People and Events

Olmec (p. 11)

Maya (p. 11)

Aztec (p. 13)

Inca (p. 14)

Reading Strategy

Taking Notes As you read, summarize the accomplishments of the Olmec, Maya, and Aztec.



American Diary

Stories of "lost" cities led American explorer John Lloyd Stephens to southern Mexico in 1840. Stephens followed a steep mountain trail to a flat area covered with trees. Suddenly through openings in the trees, he "saw the front of a large building richly ornamented with . . . figures . . . curious and elegant." Stephens knew this palace had been built by a very advanced people.

—from *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatán*

The Maya built this great palace in the city of Palenque sometime during the A.D. 600s or 700s.

The Olmec, Maya, and Aztec

Main Idea The Olmec, Maya, and Aztec civilizations of Mexico and Central America flourished long before the arrival of Europeans.

History and You Do you use an electronic calendar to keep organized? Read to find out about the calendars and other accomplishments of early American civilizations.

Stephens had come across the ruins of Palenque (puh•LEHNG•kay), an early Maya city. Although it was small, Palenque was an extraordinary place. Its structures, carved from the gray granite of the mountaintop, were wonders of design and craftsmanship.

Long before the Europeans arrived in the early 1500s, several great **civilizations**, or highly developed societies, arose in what is now Mexico and Central America. These civilizations built enormous cities in thick jungles and on mountaintops that were hard to reach. They also developed **complex**, or highly detailed, systems for writing, counting, and tracking time.

Among the largest and most advanced of these early civilizations were the Olmec, the Maya, and the Aztec. Each of these civilizations spread out over hundreds of miles, included millions of people, and thrived for several centuries.

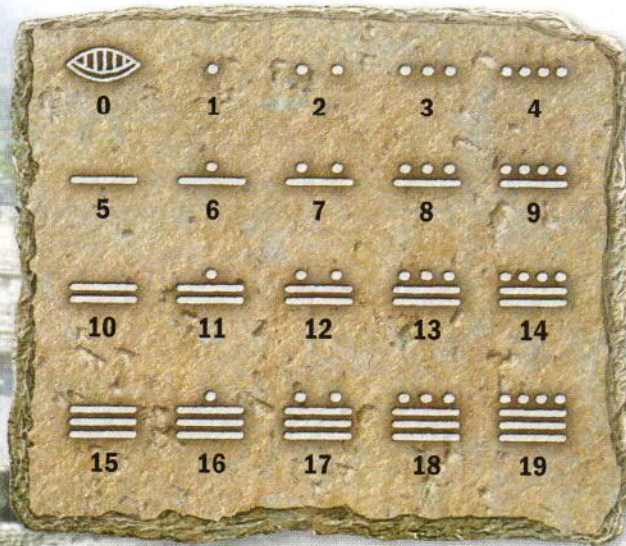
The Olmec

The **Olmec** flourished between 1500 B.C. and 300 B.C. along the Gulf Coast of what are now Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras. Olmec farmers produced enough food to sustain cities containing thousands of people. Olmec workers sculpted large stone monuments and built stone pavements and drainage systems. For reasons not fully understood, the Olmec civilization declined and then collapsed.

The Maya

The **Maya** built their civilization in the steamy rain forests of present-day Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize. They planted maize, beans, sweet potatoes, and other vegetables to feed their large population, which may have reached 2 million people.

By the Numbers Maya Mathematics



Number System The Maya used a system of dots and bars to represent their system of numbers. A dot represented a value of one, and a bar represented five. A shell-like figure stood for zero. To add two numbers together, the symbols for each number were combined to make a new single number.

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{—} \\ 5 \end{array} + \begin{array}{c} \cdot \\ \text{—} \\ 6 \end{array} = \begin{array}{c} \cdot \\ \text{—} \\ \text{—} \\ 11 \end{array}$$

Critical Thinking

Inferring What does a sophisticated counting system reveal about the interests of the Maya?

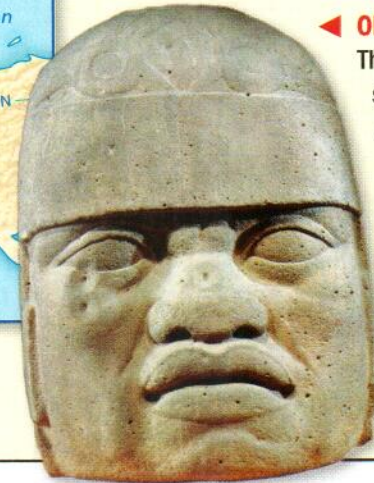


★ 1500 B.C.
Rise of
the Olmec

Olmec

◀ Olmec Artifact

This huge Olmec sculpture represents a helmeted ballplayer. The Olmec ball game could be quite dangerous, and members of the losing team were sometimes sacrificed.



The civilizations that developed in Mexico and Central America rivaled those that grew in other parts of the world, such as Southwest Asia, North Africa, and China.

By A.D. 300, the Maya had built many large cities in the area. Each city had at least one stone pyramid. Some pyramids reached about 200 feet (61 m)—the height of a 20-story building. Steps ran up the pyramid sides to a temple on top.

The temples on top of the pyramids were religious and governmental centers. Here, priests performed rituals dedicated to the Maya gods. The Maya believed the gods controlled everything that happened on Earth. Because only priests knew the gods' wishes, the priests held great power in Maya society. Maya civilization was a **theocracy**, a society ruled by religious leaders.

Maya priests believed that the gods were visible in the stars, sun, and moon. They used their knowledge of astronomy to predict eclipses and to develop a 365-day calendar. Their desire to measure time increased their knowledge of mathematics. The Maya also developed a form of writing called **hieroglyphics**. Hieroglyphics uses symbols or pictures to represent things, ideas, and sounds.

Maya Transport and Trade

The Maya did not have wheeled vehicles or horses and carried goods overland on their backs. Maya traders traveled on a network of roads that were carved out of the jungle. Farmers brought maize and vegetables to outdoor markets in the cities and traded for cotton cloth, pottery, deer meat, and salt.

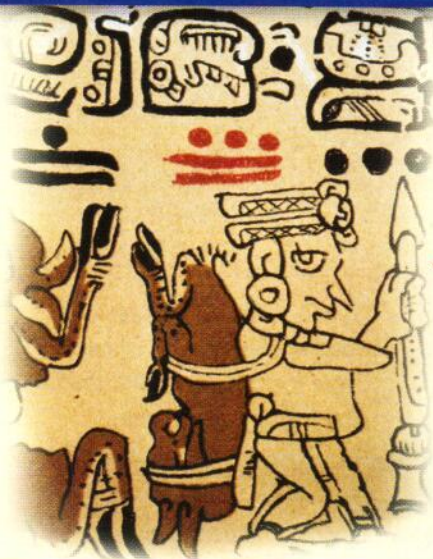
Maya traders also transported goods up and down Mexico's east coast. Their canoes carried jade statues, turquoise jewelry, cacao beans for making chocolate, and other goods to traders throughout a large area.

Decline of the Maya

Around A.D. 900, the Maya civilization in the lowlands began to decline. By 1100, the great cities were almost ghost towns. No one knows what caused the decline. Perhaps the soil became too exhausted by erosion and fire to produce enough food for the people.

History ONLINE

Student Web Activity Visit glencoe.com and complete the Chapter 1 Web Activity about the Maya.



◀ **Maya Writing** Maya hieroglyphic writing was the only true system of writing developed in the Americas before the 1400s.

Aztec Calendar The Aztec calendar stone used pictures to measure days and months. ▶



DBQ Document-Based Questions

Speculating Choose one of these pictures. Describe the image, and explain what you think was its purpose.

The Maya civilization collapsed, but descendants of the Maya still live in parts of Mexico and Central America today.

The Aztec

Centuries after the fall of the Maya, a group of hunters called the **Aztec** wandered through central Mexico, searching for a permanent home. In 1325 they came upon an island in Lake Texcoco (teh•KOH•koh), today part of Mexico City. There the Aztec saw a sign: an eagle with a snake in its beak sitting on a cactus. According to Aztec legend, this sign from their god meant their journey had ended and that this island was to be their home.

Tenochtitlán

On this island emerged Tenochtitlán (tay•NAWCH•teet•LAHN), one of the greatest cities in the Americas. Its construction was a miracle of engineering and human labor. Directed by priests and nobles, workers toiled day and night. They pulled soil from the bottom of the lake to make causeways, or bridges

of earth, **linking**—or connecting—the island and the shore. They filled parts of the lake with earth so they could grow crops.

In time the Aztec capital expanded to the mainland around the lake. At its height Tenochtitlán was the largest city in the Americas and one of the largest in the world. Tenochtitlán was also a center of trade, attracting thousands of merchants to its outdoor marketplaces.

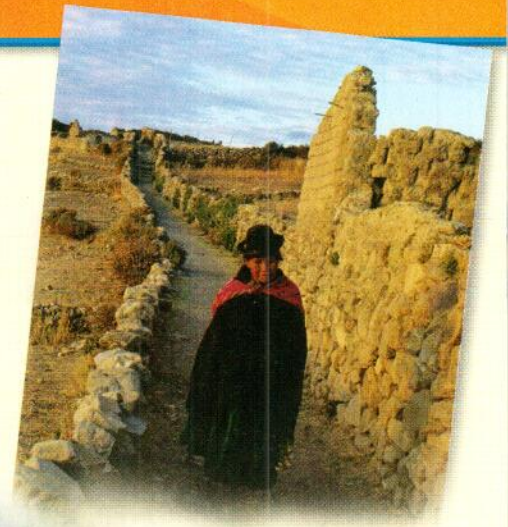
Aztec War and Religion

The Aztec civilization grew into a military empire. In the 1400s, the Aztec army marched through central and southern Mexico, conquering nearly all rival communities. Conquered people were forced to work as slaves in Aztec cities and villages.

Like the Maya, the Aztec organized their society around their religion. The Aztec believed that human sacrifices were necessary to keep the gods pleased and to ensure abundant harvests. They made sacrifices of thousands of prisoners of war.



Inca Roads The Inca Empire was divided into four provinces. To help control the distant areas of the empire, the Inca built a large network of roads, some of which still exist today. The army and the king's messengers could travel quickly along these roads. ▶



◀ **Traveling an Inca Road**
These ruins are of travelers' lodgings, or *tambo*, which were located along the roads throughout the empire.

Map Skill

Region In which modern-day countries was the Inca Empire located?

Maps in Motion See StudentWorks™ Plus or glencoe.com.

A Great City Remembered

The first Europeans to see the Aztec capital were awed by its splendor. In 1519 Hernán Cortés led 550 Spanish soldiers into Tenochtitlán. Cortés wrote:

PRIMARY SOURCE

“There are forty towers at the least, all of stout construction and very lofty. . . . The workmanship both in wood and stone could not be bettered anywhere.”

—Hernán Cortés, *Five Letters*

Bernal Díaz del Castillo, one of the soldiers, marveled at the “great stone towers and temples and buildings that rose straight up out of the water.” Tenochtitlán, he explained, was a city of water. Some of the Spanish soldiers thought that Tenochtitlán was more magnificent than Rome and the other great European capitals of the time.

✓ Reading Check **Describing** Why was Tenochtitlán important?

The Inca

Main Idea The Inca in South America developed a well-organized empire with a structured society.

History and You How do you keep track of your school records? Read to learn about the Inca's record-keeping system.

Another great American civilization developed in the western highlands of South America. The empire of the Inca was the largest of the early American civilizations.

Around 1200, the **Inca** people founded their capital city of Cuzco (KOOS•koh). In 1438 the Inca emperor named Pachacuti (PAH•chah•KOO•tee) came to the throne. Through conquest, Pachacuti and his son, Topa Inca, built a large empire. It stretched from north to south for more than 3,000 miles (4,828 km), from present-day Colombia to northern Argentina and Chile.

The Inca state was built on war, and the Inca army was powerful. All men between 25 and 50 years old could be drafted to serve in the army for up to five years. Their weapons included clubs, spears, and spiked copper balls on ropes. Using slings, Inca soldiers could throw stones 30 yards (27 m).

Residents of conquered areas who did not resist were allowed to participate in the growing empire's government. Those who resisted or rebelled were dealt with harshly. Many people preferred to accept the terms offered by the Inca rather than go to war with the powerful Inca armies.

Life in the Empire

At its height, the Inca Empire had a population of more than 9 million, including many conquered peoples. To control this large empire, the Inca built at least 10,000 miles (16,093 km) of stone-paved roads that ran over rugged mountains, across deserts, and through dense jungles. Rope bridges, made from grass, crossed deep canyons and rivers.

Runners carried messages to and from the emperor and linked, or connected, outposts

of the empire to Cuzco. The Inca language, **Quechua** (KEH•chuh•wuh), became the official language for the entire empire.

Although the Inca did not have a system of writing, they developed a system of record keeping with string called **quipus** (KEE•poos). Using various lengths and colors of string knotted in special patterns, the quipus were used to record information about resources such as grain supplies.

To farm their mountainous lands, the Inca cut **terraces**, or broad platforms, into steep slopes. They built stone walls on the terraces to hold the soil and plants in place. Inca farmers grew maize, squash, tomatoes, peanuts, chili peppers, cotton, and potatoes.

All Inca land belonged to the emperor, who was believed to be a descendant of the sun god. To please the sun god, the Inca made magnificent gold jewelry and temple ornaments. The Inca also built cities devoted to religious ceremonies, including Machu Picchu, a site hidden high up in the Andes.

Reading Check **Explaining** How did the Inca farm steep slopes?

Section 2 Review

History ONLINE
Study Central™ To review this section, go to glencoe.com.

Vocabulary

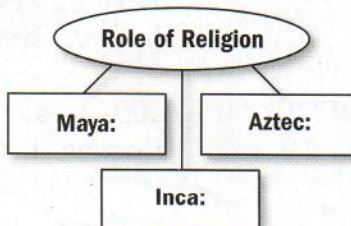
- Write a short paragraph in which you use all of the following vocabulary terms: *civilization, complex, theocracy, hieroglyphics, link, Quechua, quipu, terrace.*

Main Ideas

- Describing** Describe the development of Tenochtitlán, and explain why the first Europeans to view the city were amazed by it.
- Explaining** How did the Inca build and govern their vast empire?

Critical Thinking

- Making Inferences** How does trade help enrich a civilization? Provide examples in your answer.
- Categorizing** Use a diagram like the one below to describe the role of religion in these early American civilizations.



- Persuasive Writing** Create a poster encouraging tourists to visit the ruins of an early American civilization. Use the images and text to describe the people and history of your chosen site.

Answer the Essential Question

- How did the early civilizations of Mexico and Central America develop socially, politically, and economically?