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The First Americans

Lesson 2 Cities and Empires

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How do civilizations rise and fall?

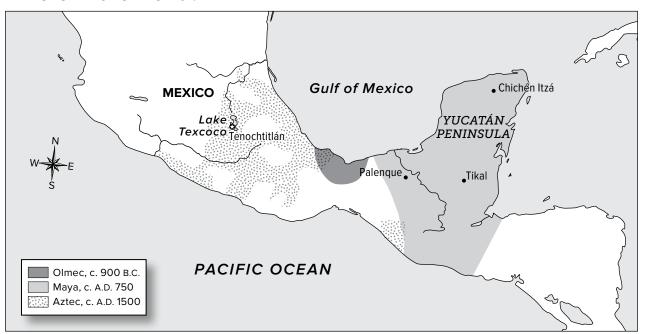
GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What civilizations in Mexico, Central America, and South America predated the arrival of Europeans?
- 2. Why were the Inca considered a highly developed culture?

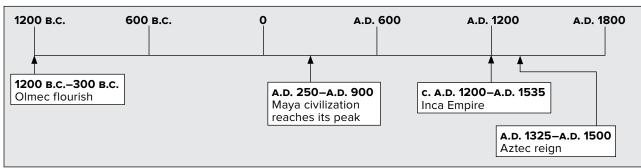
Terms to Know

civilization highly developed society **theocracy** a society ruled by religious leaders **hieroglyphic** a form of writing that uses symbols or pictures to represent things, ideas, and sounds terrace broad platform of land cut into a slope

Where in the world?



When did it happen?





The First Americans

Lesson 2 Cities and Empires, Continued

Great Civilizations of Mexico, Central America, and South America

Hundreds of years before European explorers arrived, there were great **civilizations** in Mexico, Central America, and South America. Each civilization controlled large areas and had millions of people. They built cities in forests and on mountains. They created great art and advanced tools. This included complex, or very detailed, ways to track time, count, and write.

The largest and most advanced civilizations were:

- the Olmec
- the Maya
- the Aztec
- the Inca.

The Olmec civilization flourished between 1200 B.C. and 300 B.C. They lived along the Gulf Coast in today's Mexico. The Olmec built stone houses, monuments, and drainage systems. Olmec farmers grew enough food to feed thousands. The Olmec civilization eventually died out. Why this happened is still a mystery.

The Maya came after the Olmec. Between A.D. 250 and A.D. 900, they lived in areas that now make up Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize. They built many large cities in the rain forests there. At one time, there may have been as many as 2 million Maya.

Maya civilization was a **theocracy.** This means it was ruled by religious leaders. Each Maya city had at least one stone pyramid, topped with a stone temple. This temple served as a center of religion and government.

The Maya believed the gods were visible in the stars, sun, and moon. Maya priests studied astronomy and advanced mathematics. They used their knowledge to predict eclipses and develop a 365-day calendar. To write, they used **hieroglyphics**. Hieroglyphics are symbols or pictures used to represent things, ideas, and sounds.

The Maya fed a large population with extensive farming. They grew maize, beans, squash, and other vegetables. They would trade their food crops at city markets for things like cotton cloth, pottery, deer meat, and salt. The Maya had many roads, but they did not have horses or the wheel. Traders carried goods—like jade statues, turquoise jewelry, and cacao beans (for making chocolate)—on their backs or by canoe up and down the east coast of Mexico.



Identifying

 List two facts about the great civilizations before the Europeans arrived.



Mark the Text

2. Draw a circle around the four most advanced civilizations.



3. Where did the Olmec live?



Mark the Text

4. Underline the definition of *theocracy*.



Listing

5. List two
accomplishments of
the Maya that were
based on their
knowledge of
astronomy and
advanced
mathematics.

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Lesson 2 Cities and Empires, Continued

1	Describing
6.	How did the Aztec know where to settle down?
~	Reading Check
7.	Name the capital city of the Aztec Empire, and describe its location.
(%	X Explaining
8.	How did the Aztec treat the people they conquered?
~	Making Connections
9.	How were the Inca like the Aztec?

Eventually the Maya civilization declined. No one knows why. One idea is that the soil grew weak and could not produce enough food for the population. Its once-great cities were nearly empty by 1200. The descendants of the Maya still live in Mexico and Central America.

Many centuries later, another great civilization arose in central Mexico—the Aztec. An Aztec legend said that a god would send them a sign to tell them where to build their permanent home. In 1325, a group of Aztec hunters saw that sign on an island in the middle of Lake Texcoco: an eagle with a snake in its beak sitting on a cactus.

The Aztec built their capital city on the island and called it Tenochtitlán. It was a wonder of construction. Workers dug soil from the bottom of the lake to build bridges between the city and the shore and to make fields for crops in the lake. Tenochtitlán became an important trade center. It was the largest city in the Americas and one of the largest in the world.

In the 1400s, the Aztec used their military to conquer many other groups. They forced conquered people to give them food and goods and to work as slaves. They also sacrificed prisoners of war to their gods to ensure rich harvests. Their empire was still strong when the Europeans came.

	Location	Accomplishments
Olmec	Gulf Coast of Mexico	Built stone houses, monuments, and drainage systems
		Grew crops to feed thousands
Maya	Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize	Could predict eclipses
		Developed 365-day calendar
		Wrote with hieroglyphics
		Grew crops to feed millions
Aztec	Central Mexico	Built Tenochtitlán
		Conquered large empire

The Great Inca Civilization

The largest early American empire developed in western South America—the Inca. Like the Aztec, the Inca had a powerful military and conquered many neighboring groups.

The First Americans

Lesson 2 Cities and Empires, Continued

All Inca men between 25 and 50 might have to serve in the army. They were skilled warriors and used weapons like clubs, spears, and slings. At its peak, the Inca empire stretched from Columbia to northern Argentina and Chile.

The Inca founded their capital city of Cuzco around 1200. Another important city was Machu Picchu, which may have been a place for religious ceremonies. Religion was a central part of Inca life. The Inca believed their emperor was a descendant of the sun god. They made beautiful jewelry and tributes for this god.

Farming was important to Inca life. In order to farm in their mountainous land, the Inca cut broad platforms called **terraces** into the slopes. They grew:

- maize
- chili peppers
- sauash
- cotton
- tomatoes
- potatoes
- peanuts

To connect the large empire, the Inca built more than 10,000 miles (16,093 km) of roads. These were built over mountains, across deserts, and through rain forests. The Inca, who spoke Quechua, used quipus for keeping records. Quipus were different colors of string knotted in special patterns.

Check for Understanding List four great early cultures of Mexico, Central America, and South America.
1
2
3
4
How were the Aztec and Inca civilizations similar? How were they different?

Reading Check

10. How did the Inca Empire grow so large?

▼ Visualize It

11. In the box, draw a diagram of the terraces the Inca built for their crops.



Mark the Text

12. Circle the name of the Inca language.

FOLDABLES

Foldable along the dotted line to cover Check for Understanding. On the anchor tab write Accomplishments.
Label the tabs Olmec, Maya, and Aztec. List two accomplishments for each group.