

Olmec and Maya Civilizations

The Olmec and the Maya were the earliest major Native American civilizations. Both developed in Middle America.

- The Olmec civilization developed along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico.
- The Olmec built large sculptures and were the first people in the Americas to build pyramids. Their art and religion influenced later cultures of Middle America, including the Maya.
- The Maya civilization developed east of the Olmec. It was one of the longest lasting civilizations in the Americas.
- The Maya used pictographs to record major events in their history on large stone sculptures. Many of these sculptures still stand today.

A

Giant carvings like this one were used in ceremonies at Olmec religious centers. The largest heads were up to 10 feet tall and weighed several tons.



Olmec Civilization
1200–400 B.C.

Middle American Civilizations, 1000 B.C.

- Olmec
- Maya
- Zapotec
- Trade route
- 🗿 Site of Olmec art
- 🌿 Wetland

0 100 200 miles
0 100 200 kilometers



Built elaborate limestone pyramids for religious ceremonies.



Developed accurate 365-day solar calendar.



Created an advanced pictographic writing system to record history.



Made many advances in astronomy, including predicting eclipses.

Maya Contributions, 250–950 A.D.



C The Maya produced many achievements in art, astronomy, and mathematics. Use this chart and the one on page 13 to compare Babylonian contributions with those of the Maya.

D Large limestone pyramids with temples at the top were built by the Maya for religious ceremonies. This pyramid is located in the Maya city of Tikal. Find Tikal on map E.



E During this time, Maya civilization flourished. Cities became centers of culture, and a vast trade network developed. Compare Maya territory on this map to Maya territory on map B.

Aztec Empire

The Aztec migrated from the north to a small island in the Valley of Mexico. They built one of the largest empires of Middle America.

- Religion dominated every part of Aztec life. The Aztec worshipped hundreds of gods and performed many kinds of religious ceremonies.
- The Aztec were fierce warriors. They waged war to expand their empire.
- The Spanish came to Mexico in 1519. They conquered the Aztec Empire in 1521 and destroyed its capital.



A The Aztec capital city, shown here, had many temples and public buildings for religious ceremonies. Look at map B. What is the name of the Aztec capital?



Area shown in map B

1 1325 Aztec settle on an island in Lake Texcoco.

2 1431 Three cities, called Triple Alliance, set up Aztec Empire.

3 Aztecs are often at war with their neighbors.

4 Officials from Tenochtitlan are sent to keep remote areas under Aztec control.

5 Easternmost point of Aztec control

Aztec Empire 1325-1519

- By 1440
- By 1519
- ★ Aztec capital

0 100 200 miles
0 100 200 kilometers

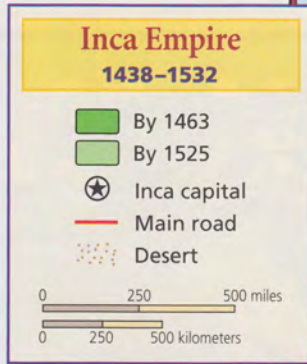
B The Aztec constantly fought with their neighbors in order to gain more territory and capture more people to sacrifice to their gods.

Inca Empire

Around the same time the Aztec were building their empire, the Inca developed a large empire in South America.

- The Inca built an empire that extended through the Andes Mountains and along the west coast.
- They were excellent architects and engineers and built a vast network of roads and bridges. These helped their strong central government control even the most remote parts of the empire.
- The Spanish came to South America in 1532. They killed the Inca Emperor and took over the Empire.

C Powerful emperors greatly expanded Inca territory in less than 100 years. By 1525 the empire stretched 2,600 miles.



AZTEC

Built large limestone pyramids for religious ceremonies.

Used pictographs to record history and myths.

Created floating gardens to grow food without using additional land areas.

INCA

Built enormous stone buildings with great precision.

Spread news throughout the Empire using a messenger system.

Connected the Empire using an extensive network of roads.

Aztec and Inca Contributions

D Use this chart and the one on page 71 to compare and contrast Aztec, Inca, and Maya contributions.



E The Inca city of Machu Picchu, whose ruins are shown here, was a fortress built on a mountaintop. It could be reached only by crossing a bridge. If enemies were near, the bridge could be removed.