

# THE AMERICAS ON THE EVE OF INVASION



# REVIEW : THE OLMECS

## ■ Olmecs: “The Mother Culture”

- Earliest center, on the coast of Mexico Gulf, 1200 B.C.E.

## ■ Olmec society

- Authoritarian in nature
- Colossal human heads - possibly likenesses of rulers
- Rulers' power as shown in construction of huge pyramids

## ■ Trade in jade and obsidian

## ■ Decline and fall of Olmec society

- The cause remains a mystery
- Olmecs systematically destroyed their ceremonial centers
- Most likely, civil conflict ruined their society
- By 400 B.C.E., other societies eclipsed the Olmecs

## ■ Influence of Olmec traditions

- Maize, ceremonial centers were common to later societies
- Other legacies: Calendar, rituals of human sacrifice, ballgame
- Olmecs did not leave written records



# MAYA (300-900CE)

- Yucatan peninsula; South of Teotihuacan
- Built on the Olmec civilizations
- Shared a common culture, but not united politically
- Independent City-States;
  - Competition over resources
  - Dynastic Ambition
    - Marriage was a political tool
  - Rulers were theocratic
- Agricultural-slash and burn
  - Maize and beans; irrigation
  - terraced hillsides
  - Cacao beans were currency
- Art
  - Bas-relief; typically utilitarian
  - Carved altars
  - Pyramids
- No wheels or metal tools



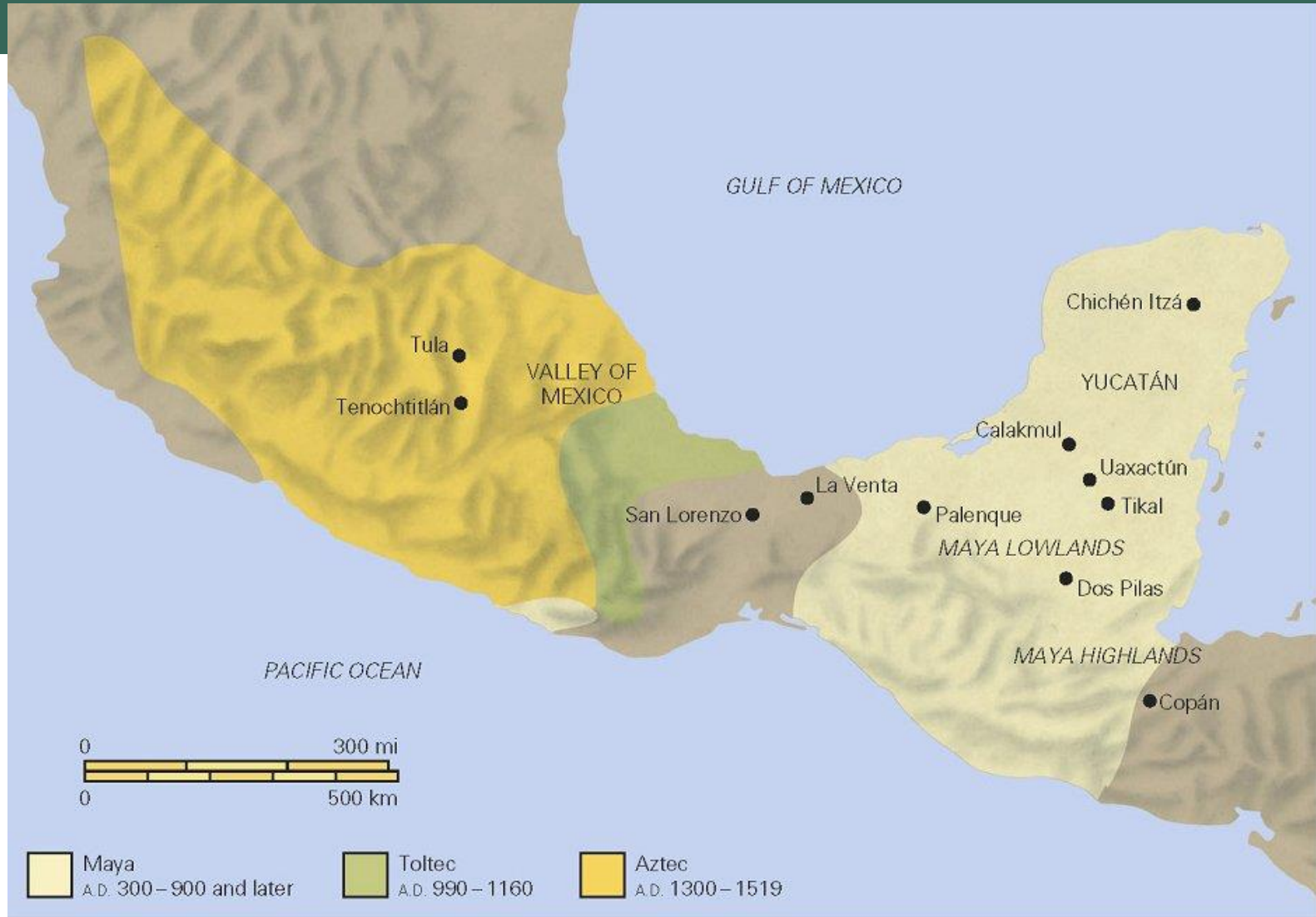
# MAYANS

- Polytheistic
  - Ritualistic bloodletting
  - Mayans were motivated militarily to get captives rather than land
- Women
  - Some traced through bilateral lineages
  - Were healers and shamans
- Large cities and traded with one another
- Calendar, math, writing
  - Used the concept of zero
  - Hieroglyphics
- Ended around 900...why? What are the common theories?

# TOLTECS

- Enter the Toltecs (nomads) around 900CE
  - Borrowed from a group called the Teotihuacan
  - They settled in Central Mexico
  - Created a large empire which extended to the Yucatan
    - Did this through conquest!
  - Ruled by 2 chieftains
  - May have traded with Indians in the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys
  - Declined around 1150-destroyed by nomadic invaders

# CENTRAL MEXICO REGION



# AZTECS (1400-1521 CE)

- Last great Mesoamerican culture before the Europeans arrived
- In the valley of Mexico around a chain of lakes
  - Along the shores of Lake Texcoco
- City-states led by a Speaker
  - Great Speaker in Tenochtitlan-like an emperor; from a royal family/bloodline
- By 1400's they were the dominate regional power
- Rulers were selected by aristocracy-proved themselves via military campaign
- Some social mobility, but not into aristocracy
  - Social stratification; women had domestic duties and were weavers; could inherit property and pass it along to their heirs
  - Spent many hours grinding maize (no beasts of burden to do it for them)
- Commoners-monogamous; nobility=polygamous
- Tribute system paid by conquered people
  - What did they pay with?



# AZTECS



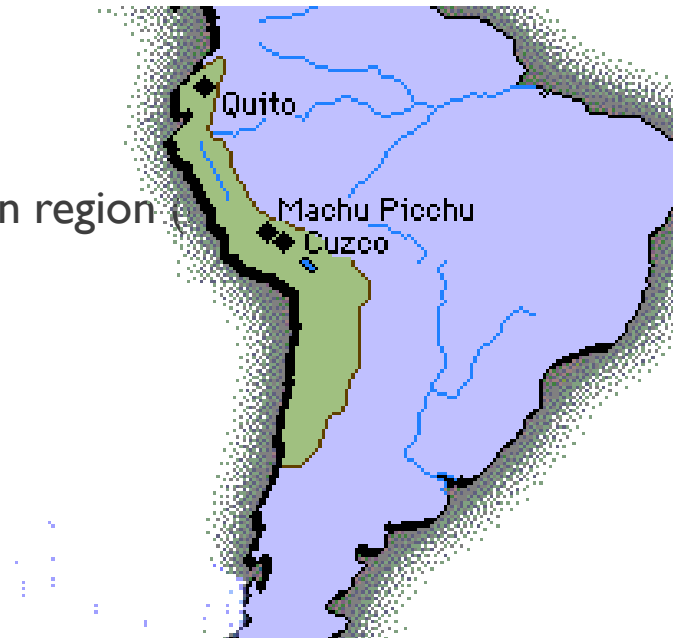
- Cacao beans were currency, gold, and cotton
- Merchant life
  - Wealthy but not elite
- Agricultural Community
- Built Chinampas for agriculture; ample production
- Tenochtitlan-capital (150,000+) by 1500 CE
  - Central Mexico=20 million (shows their control)
- Spoke/wrote Nahuatl
- Polytheistic/Human sacrifice
  - Sun god
  - 1,000 each year...was political as well as religious
    - Meant to please the sun god; but also to keep the ppl in line/instill fear
- 1500's The Spanish arrive
  - Hernan Cortez
    - Neighbors who were tired of the Aztec brutality and tribute helped the Spanish





# INCAS

- In the Andes mountain region



# INCA

■ 1400-1540

■ Located in the valley of Cuzco

■ Cuzco was the capital

■ 6 million people; patriarchal

■ No written language (spoke Quechua); no wheel, did have a type of abacus to keep track of #'s

■ Used llamas to move objects

■ Oral stories/poems

■ Covered 3000 miles from N to S

■ Agriculture-grew a variety of crops

■ Terraced farming with extensive irrigation

■ Roads for trade within (not much outside trade) and military

■ 13,000 miles (w/tambos)

■ Kind to those they conquered (allowed them to keep their customs)

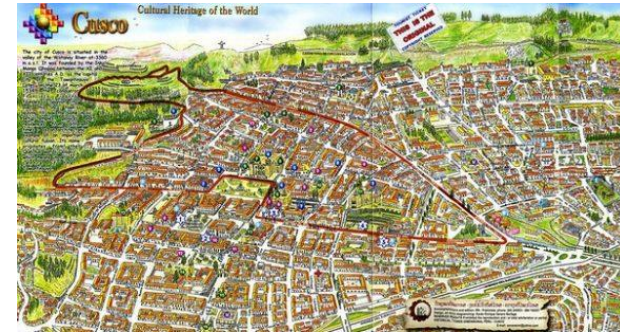
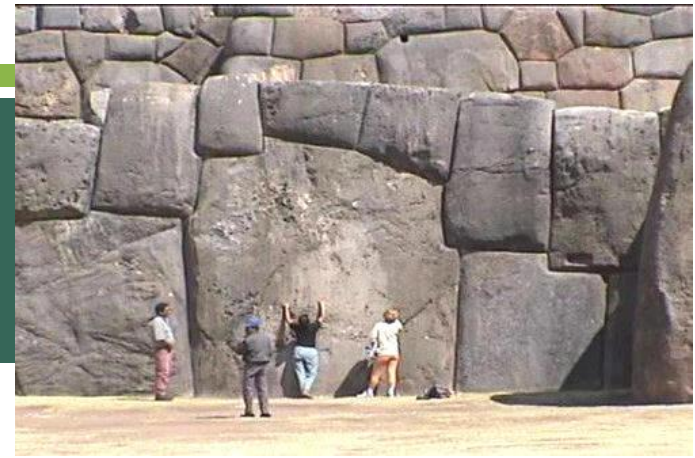
■ cut stones-no mortar

■ Women had property rights, but men were valued more for their military power



# INCAS

- Political leaders: descendants of sun god
  - Centralized government
  - Had a king
    - But let local rulers oversee their lands
      - Had to send heirs to live in Cuzco
- State claimed all resources and redistributed them
- Crime was low but punishment was strict
- Religion
  - Sun was most important
  - Temple of the Sun at Cuzco (capital) was the center of religion—population: 30,000; shape of a puma
  - Prayers and sacrifices (not near the human sacrifice as the Aztecs had though) also offered at shrines
  - Dead rulers are mummified and worshipped
  - Split-inheritance (power to successor, land and wealth to descendants-used to support the mummy for eternity)
- Decline in 1525
  - Civil war
  - Then the Spanish arrive (Pizzaro)



# MACHU PICCHU (DISCOVERED IN 1911)





# Andean Civilizations: Comparisons

- Unique partly due to their relative isolation to others and the natural environment
- Only beasts of burden were llamas and alpacas
- 1. No written language. Records kept on khipus (quipu)
- 2. Mit'a labor system – workers responsible for certain tasks each year; developed for public works



# Comparisons: Aztec and Inca

	Aztecs	Inca
Social	Distinctive classes with priests as elites Large middle class of merchants and traders	Distinctive classes with priests as elites No real merchant class; govt controlled trade
Cultural	Religion central to society Human sacrifice Elaborate calendar writing system	Religion central to society Human sacrifice but less central to rituals Quechua native language. No written language
Economic	Tenochtitlan – large city and suburbs Economy based on agriculture Trade important Chinampas	Economy based on agriculture Trade not important Terraced farming Extensive road system
Political	Powerful elite families chose leader Bureaucracy less elaborate Powerful military	The Inca god-king ruled with absolute power and help of large bureaucracy Powerful military