

# CIVILIZATIONS IN THE AMERICAS

## THE MAYA

Maya city-states flourished between 300 and 900 AD in the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico and northern Central America. The Maya improved on the achievements of the Olmecs to create the most advanced native civilization of the Americas. They used hieroglyphics to write on stone and in books made of bark. They created fine arts, a calendar of 365-1/4 days, and impressive pyramid-shaped temples in large cities. The Maya also practiced human sacrifice, and they played a ball game that ended with the deaths of the losers. Apparently, the Maya were too successful. It appears they overpopulated their land, depleting it of natural resources, which led to their decline.

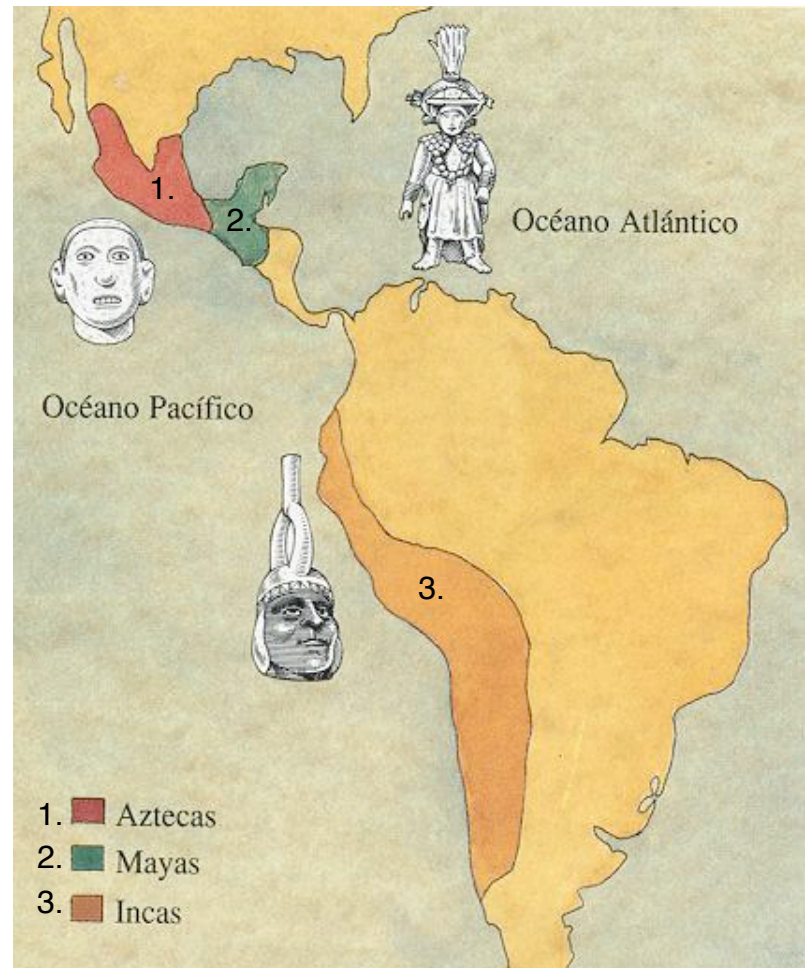
## AZTECS

The Aztecs were a fierce and warlike people of central and southern Mexico who controlled their subjects through fear and military force. Their polytheistic religion practiced human sacrifice on a scale unknown elsewhere in history. The Aztecs built their capital on swampy marshland in what is now Mexico City. Floating gardens provided the city's food. When Europeans first saw the capital, they were amazed to find an island city of 150,000 people connected to the mainland by four great highways, bridges and aqueducts. The city had a hundred-foot-high temple and a marketplace that attracted 60,000 people a day.

## INCAS

The Inca civilization was centered in present day Peru, but it grew to include most of the Pacific coast of South America between the Andes Mountains and the ocean. Inca agriculture was based on irrigation; farmers developed stepped terraces for growing crops on steep hillsides. The 3,000 mile-long Inca Empire was linked by the most extensive road system since the Roman Empire. Way stations built on main roads provided travelers with places to stay at the end of each day's journey. The Incas did not have writing as we know it; they kept accurate numerical records on knotted strings called quipu (KEE-pu).

People living in the Americas had no way of knowing their long separation from Eurasia was about to end with consequences they could hardly imagine.



1. Plot these three civilizations on your map.

2. Write a one sentence summary for each civilization.

2. Based on these summaries, how would you summarize the impact that trade and travel had on these civilizations prior to, and after European discovery of the Americas?