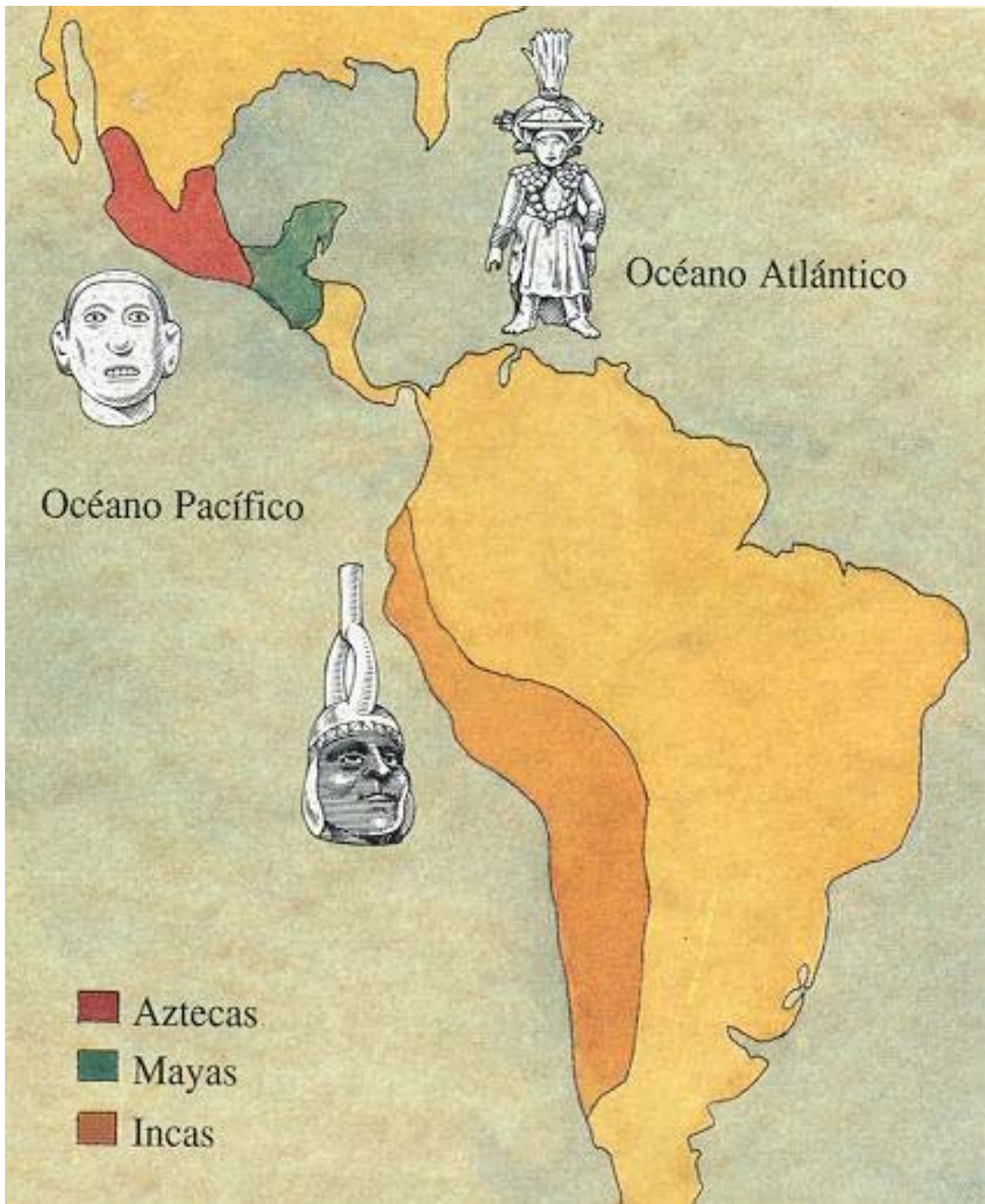


# Map of Mesoamerican Civilizations



# The Mayans



**Location:** The bulk of the empire was centered on the Yucatan Peninsula, where modern-day Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador are located.

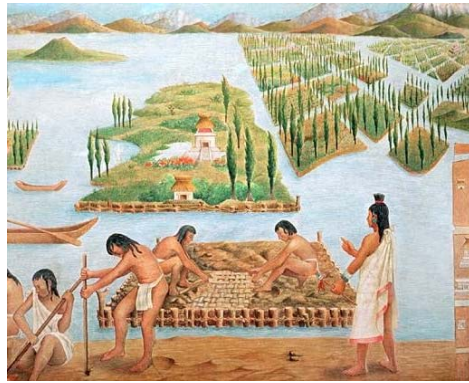
**Political Developments:** The Mayans were an indigenous Mesoamerican civilization that peaked from about 300- 900 CE. The majority of the empire was broken up into independent city-states that were run by kings. Most of the great stone cities they built were abandoned without explanation by 900 CE, however, and scholars have debated about what might have caused this dramatic decline ever since.

**Religious Developments:** Mayan culture was centered on their polytheistic religion and the hundreds of different gods they worshipped. They believed that pleasing the gods was the key to a pleasant afterlife. Temples and pyramids were built for human sacrifice, bloodletting practices, and worship rituals to honor their gods.

**Intellectual Developments:** The Mayans were excellent astronomers who charted the movement of the planets, moon, and sun in order to develop accurate calendars. They excelled at agriculture, pottery, and hieroglyph writing and left behind an astonishing amount of impressive architecture and symbolic artwork.

**Cultural Developments:** They built major cities and large stone structures, including Tikal & Chichén Itzá. The structures of Chichén Itzá still stand in Yucatan, Mexico, and they offer a glimpse into the Maya's daily life. These structures include a ruler's residence, multiple temples to various gods, and a ball court for pok-a-tok, an early form of soccer.

# The Aztecs



**Location:** The Aztecs originated as a nomadic tribe in Central America. They eventually settled in Mexico, near present-day Mexico City.

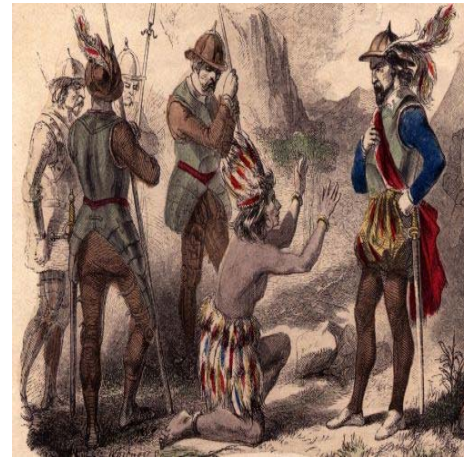
**Political Developments:** The empire flourished from 1200-1524 CE. The Aztec empire was made up of a series of city-states known as *altepetl*. Each *altepetl* was ruled by a supreme leader (*tlatoani*) and a supreme judge and administrator (*cihuacoatl*). The *tlatoani* was the ultimate owner of all land in his city-state, received tribute, led the military, resolved disputes, and served his city-state for life. The *tlatoani* of the capital city of Tenochtitlan served as the Emperor (*Huey Tlatoani*) of the Aztec empire. Although the emperor had absolute power and was believed to be a representative of the gods, he governed with the assistance of four advisors and one senior advisor who were elected by the nobility.

**Religious Developments:** The Aztec's polytheistic religion included rituals, religious practices and mythology that the Toltecs originally worshipped. Aztec life was centered around guidance they received from their gods- legend has it that the Aztecs were marching through the deserts of Mexico to find their new home when a vision appeared, telling them to look for an eagle clutching a snake in its talons, perched on a cactus. This would be a sign from the gods that they had found their new home. After wandering for many days, the Aztecs found the sign they were looking for in the middle of Lake Texcoco.

**Intellectual Developments:** The Aztecs built their major city, Tenochtitlan, in the middle of Lake Texcoco. The city was surrounded by floating islands called *chinampas*, where they grew their crops. Their economic activities were based mostly on agriculture and possessions they seized from the various groups that they conquered in war. The Aztecs developed an interconnected triple calendar system which followed celestial movements, provided a list of sacred dates, and gave each day a unique combination of a name and a number. In addition, both individual days and periods of days were given their own gods, highlighting the Aztec view that time and daily life was inseparable from their religious beliefs.

**Cultural Developments:** The Aztecs are probably best known for their exceptional warfare tactics, which helped them unify neighboring city-states and smaller tribal groups into their empire. Eventually, their culture evolved to include some of the traditions the groups they conquered had observed. The Aztecs were skilled at writing poetry, and used to pass down their poems verbally until collections of their poems were made after the Spanish conquest. They played various musical instruments, including the flute and drums, and carved sculptures in stone and wood. The Aztecs created a variety of beautiful pottery which had high demand in the Mesoamerican market. They also made jewelry with gold, silver, copper, jade and obsidian. Their most prized art was however feather-work, which was created by their artisans by weaving together brightly colored feathers to form cloaks, headdresses etc.

# The Incas



**Location:** The Inca lived in the Andes Mountains of modern-day Peru from 1400 to 1532 CE.

**Political Developments:** The Inca government was called the *Tawantinsuyu*. It was a monarchy ruled by a single leader called the *Sapa Inca*, or "sole ruler", who was the most powerful person in the land. The Empire was divided up into four quarters called "*suyu*"; at the center of the quarters was the capital city of Cuzco. The Incan empire had a strong central government, but a war between emperor Atahualpa and his brother weakened the empire severely. When the Europeans arrived in the New World, the empire could not defend itself. They were conquered by Francisco Pizarro in 1532 CE, and most of the Inca died from exposure to smallpox.

**Religious Developments:** Just like the Maya and Aztec, the Incas also worshipped many different gods, including a creator god named Viracocha and Apu Illapu, the rain god. Impressive shrines were built throughout the kingdom, including a massive Sun Temple in Cuzco that measured more than 1,200 feet in circumference. They also built major cities like Machu Picchu, which still exists today in Peru.

**Intellectual Developments:** Incan farmers modified their environment by cutting farming terraces into the steep mountainsides in order to grow crops. They developed the coca plant, used today in recipes for Coca-Cola, and complex road systems to move their crops from the terraces to markets. They were among the first civilizations to practice surgeries and mix herbal medicines. Histories, legends, and folklore were recorded in *quipus*, stringed knot necklaces whose patterns represented an alphabet and language.

**Cultural Developments:** The official language of the empire was Quechua, although hundreds of local languages and dialects of Quechua were spoken. Inca society was made up of *ayllus*, which were clans of families who lived and worked together. Each *ayllu* was supervised by a *curaca*, or chief. Though there was a strong influence from tribes they conquered, the Inca did create their own distinctive style which became a recognizable symbol of their dominance. Incan art includes highly polished metalwork and ceramics decorated in gold (described as the sweat of the sun), silver (the tears of the moon), and textiles, with the last being considered the most prestigious by the Incas themselves.