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# UNIT 14 LATIN AMERICA

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## 14.1 INTRODUCTION

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The American continent came in touch with the Europeans around the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The discovery followed the spree of conquests of different regions and European colonies were established. Very little was known about the history, polity and society of these regions. It was believed that the history of the region cannot be traced to early civilizations as in case of Asia and Europe.

Later on archaeological excavations and researches have shown the existence of human habitation which is more than 10000 years old. It has also come to light that from around 2500 BC to the first century AD a number of cultures flourished in the region. Many of these grew into civilizations of substantial size. Because of constraints of space it is not possible to go into the details of all the civilizations that existed in the region through the ages. We have chosen three important civilizations as representative of Latin America. These are Mayas and Aztecs in Central America and the Inkas in the Andes in South America.

There are other civilizations also whose remains have been found in both these places. But we chose these ones for the following reason. First of all the Maya and the Inkas are the most extensively studied ones so far. And in cultural representation of Latin American life mostly these are invoked. The Aztecs have been chosen, as they were the ones whose destruction has been witnessed by the colonial powers of Europe. These are the civilizations about which extensive literature exists in European languages and mostly in English.

We will first discuss the Maya, the earliest known great civilization of the region. Mayan settlements, their polity and society would be analyzed in detail. Why and how this mighty civilization collapsed will also be discussed. An

account of Incas would follow the Mayas. The organization of polity and economic life of Incas will be explored. A brief account of their religious practices would also be provided. In the third section of the unit we will discuss the Aztecs, the civilization that flourished in the region of Mexico. While discussing Aztecs we will touch upon the organization of polity, economic activities and religious life.

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## 14.2 THE MAYA CIVILIZATION

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The Maya civilization flourished between 500B.C. and 1000A.D. (Classical period: 300-900 A.D.). The region where this civilization nestled includes modern Guatemala, Belize, southeastern Mexico, and the western parts of Honduras and El Salvador. The Maya Civilization did not present itself as an empire or unified political entity, but was a cultural unit of scattered urban and rural centres, both small and big, though many of the centres were related or rather connected with causeways. Also, the political influence of some of the large centres was evident from the use of their emblem glyphs (symbol in sculptured characters) on the monuments at smaller centres. The administrative structure also suggests that some centres were subordinate to larger city-states. At certain stage, four huge primary regional centres were emerging, each with its own emblem glyph and ruling dynasty. These were Tikal, Calakmul, Copan, and Palenque. In fact, throughout their history the Maya centres recognized only four centres as paramount, each representing one of the cardinal directions. Their monumental architecture, fine art, hieroglyph or writing, astronomy and calendar make them one of the most sophisticated civilizations of the world.

### 14.2.1 Settlements and Architecture

Cities and ceremonial centres are found almost in all Maya settlements and the number of remains of huge structures are staggering. The layout of the cities was somewhat as follows; the central ceremonial court, surrounded by a large plaza where markets were held, then were arrayed the houses of chiefs, priests, and other functionaries, and further away from these were the houses of the common people. There were other structures also from small plazas to enormous reservoirs, broad causeways, ball courts, and smaller monuments. In the highland Maya settlements there were *cenotes* (pits or wells) for procuring usable water.

The use of lime mortar and corbelled arch, was the distinguishing characteristic of the Maya architecture. In the corbelled arch, the stones are so placed that each projects a little beyond the one below it; eventually the walls meet and a vault is created. To support this type of arch, a weight mass was necessary. As a result of this a comb like design developed into the roof. This also because an overhanging to act as cantilever to the vaulting. Maya architectural façades, thus had lavish and intricate designs. Besides the spectacular Pyramids the Mayas also constructed ball courts, gateways, sweat/steam baths, vaulted bridges and raised platforms where plays were performed.

Uaxactun (A.D.328) was one of the oldest, though not one of the most elaborate instances, of the cities of the Maya. This city represents the general character of Maya Civilization. The principal temple pyramid, although only 27 feet high, is interesting since it shows the evolution of the pyramid form, which in the nearby Tikal was to reach a height of over 200 feet. The wide stairway

was ornamented by stucco-masks some of which were even 8 feet high. In a series of isometric drawings the evolution of the temple complex can be seen. The first structure was a raised stone platform on which rested a wooden house. In the next stage of development, three identical temples were built with similar stairways and decorated roof-crests facing each other. There is evidence of a high priest, buried in the plaza; the floor level was raised to contain his tomb and a similar temple, presumably above the grave, was added. Slowly with the passage of years and evolution of techniques, the temple developed into a complex of buildings.

At Tikal, around first century A.D. three large platforms and two smaller ones were built on the North Acropolis. The large platforms, whose earth and rubble cores were faced with stucco, were about 4 to 4.5 metres high. Their stairways were decorated with painted stucco-masks, probably representing supernatural jaguars. Similar stucco masks were used to ornament the facades of the platforms at Cerros and at other sites. Monumental buildings were also constructed during the Late formative phase at El Mirador, Lamanai, Cuello, and Alter de Sacrificios in Peten, and at Dzibilchaltun in the northern Yucatan.

The deities whose representations were carved on the stucco masks and who were worshipped in the temples on the platforms, “may have been claimed as ancestors by the chiefly lineages. The rich burials found within Tikal’s North Acropolis hint at this sort of special relationship between deities and rulers.”

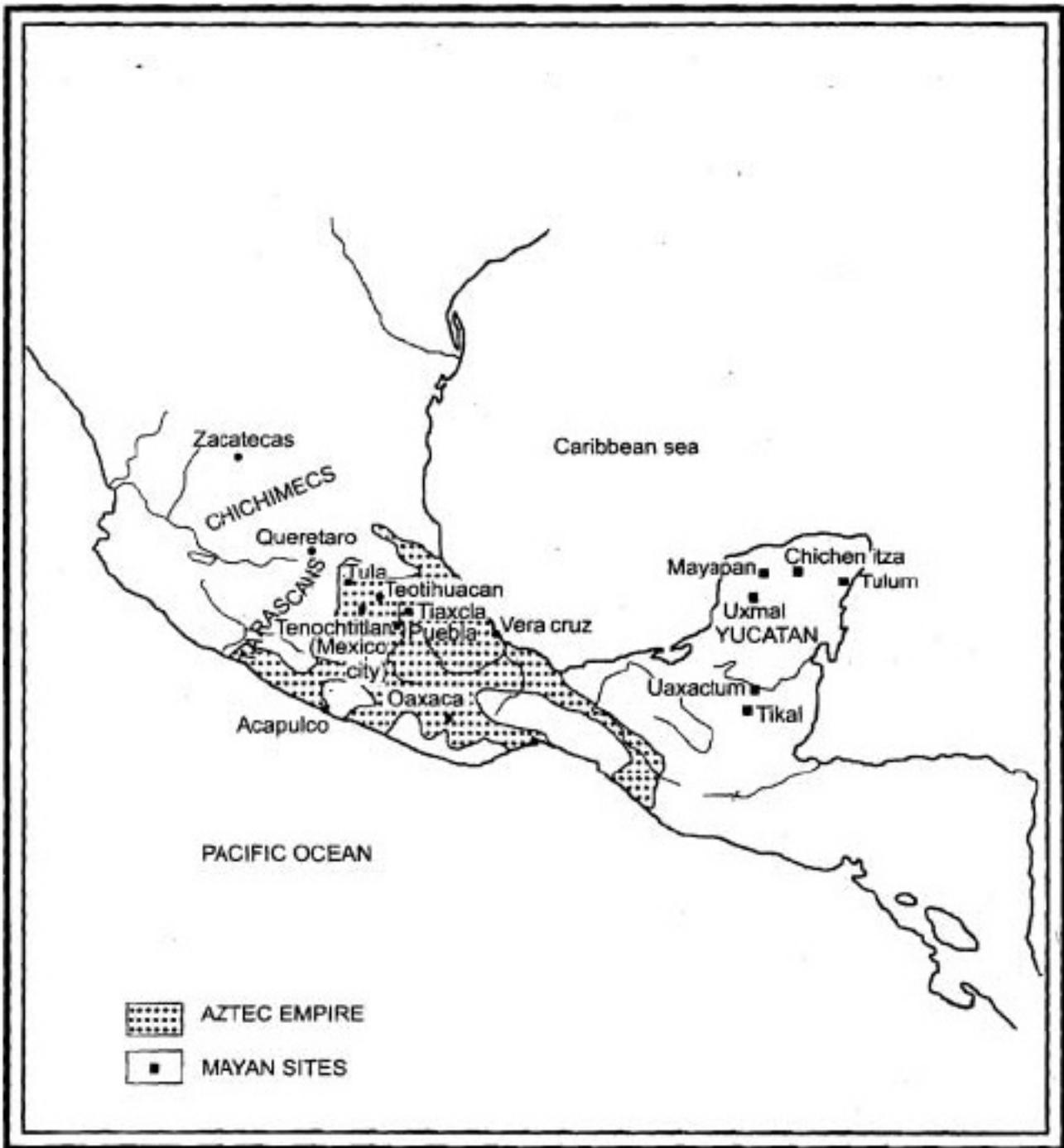
Besides the monumental structures that the Mayas built, they had simple native houses for the peasants and other plebians, called the *na*. It was a type of house where the material used was wood for the wall and palm leaf for thatch.

The Mayas had a system of raised causeways or a road system called *scabe* or *scabeob*. These used to connect ancient cities of the Maya. The straight causeways even traversed jungles and swamps. The height of these causeways varied from 2 to 4 feet, the width from 15 to 33 feet and the length from 600 feet to 60 to 70 miles at a stretch. These roadways or causeways were ceremonial, economic and administrative in function. Pilgrims, who had a ‘right of asylum’, must have walked along these causeways from the hinterland to the elite/ceremonial/urban centres carrying offerings, tributes, as also goods for trade. The causeways did not only connect the hinterland with the centre but also connected different many centres.

The Mayas also used the sea-route. The first things that Columbus encountered when he landed at Guanaja in 1502 were the Maya boats. At one island he saw and examined one “as long as a galley, 8 feet in breadth, rowed by 25 Indian paddlers,” and laden with commodities –cocoa, copper-bells, flint-edged swords, cotton cloth- brought from the mainland, twenty miles distant.

### 14.2.2 Polity and Society

The head of the Maya city-states were the “real men”, or the *halach uinic*. This office was neither elective nor selective. It was hereditary. The office descended from father to son. If the lord died, then it was the eldest son who succeeded him. However, if the sons of the chief were not fit to rule then, a brother or relative of the ruler became the chief. The *halach uinic* were both the spiritual and temporal authority of their city-states. Subordinate to him and chiefs of other cities, or in other words local governors under the *halach*



Map: 1 (Not to Scale)

*uinic*, were a set of officials who were known as *ahau* or more commonly *batabob*. The *batabobs* were, more than likely, related to the *halach uinic* by blood ties.

A *batabob* was responsible for the governance of his own resident city. He also had a retinue of deputies to assist him. Besides this there was a town council constituted of the chiefs of the various subdivisions of the town. Though nominally under the *batabob*, they could veto any move by the *batabob*. These councilors were called *ah cuch cabob*.

The *batabob* settled disputes, usually contract violations and land disputes. And when the priests made known their oracles ( prophecies or advice) as to when the people should sow, reap, or make merry, the *batabob* saw to it that the functions were carried out. In the time of war, although the *batabob* was the *de facto* head of the province, actual command was in the hands of a war captain, known as *nacom*, who was elected for three years. But at times of necessity the *batabob* also used to lead his army as against the Spaniards. The *batabobs* also collected tax and tribute.

The commoners used to carry the *batabob* in a litter (an Indian *palki*), wherever he used to go. They also used to serve him in many other ways. There were a great many people who made up a bureaucracy, which was quite exacting; governors, bailiffs, war captains, and down to the lowest, the *tupil*, or a constable. All these officials constituted the upper class and never paid any tax.

The commoners or the peasants used to serve the men of upper class in many ways. As labourers, both skilled and unskilled, they built the enormous plazas and pyramids; as skilled artisans they needed to cut and lay stones, to plaster, to carve and cast and as unskilled labourers they filled the ditch with mud and helped the skilled craftsmen in numerous ways. They were the primary producers also. The Maya agriculture was quite varied with innumerable kinds of crops, fruit bearing plants, dye producing plants etc., all of which needed different kinds of attention and labour, though maize was the primary crop. Beside maize, they planted beans, grew squash and pumpkin, sweet potato, sweet cassava, a kind of turnip.

Land and salt pits were communally owned. Individual community members were assigned plots of land to cultivate and grow food. Availability of water was a regular problem for the Maya in spite of the fact that the entire zone used to get high rainfall. Except the settlements, which were near rivers, availability of water was difficult. In the lowland settlements, the surface soil was thin and could not retain water, the rainwater used to seep into the subsoil, due to the porous limestone. Tikal repeatedly suffered droughts though it was in the wettest area. There the engineers had cemented an entire ravine of porous limestones near the plaza and had created a giant sized reservoir.

There was Chac, the rain god, who had to be propitiated (appeased) before the agricultural operations. There was also Yum Kaax or the corn god, who had to be worshipped. There was a ritual for every activity of planting, sowing and harvesting,. In one of the Maya codices it was stated, "This is the record of year-bears of the *unial*..." This was a weather forecasting based on the observations of the last year. "In the ninth month, Chen (moon), and the tenth Yax (Venus), planting was to be done during certain lucky days." The scribe-

priest or the *chilan*, used to guide the peasants on this, yet much of this was based on the observation of earth-bound man or the peasant, who related them to the priests. The priest in turn put it all down in glyph script so that it could be remembered. The high priest, called *Ahkin*, was also the teacher in Maya society. A Bonampak mural details the role (and power) of the High priest in the Maya society. He used to teach how to compute years, months, days, festivals and ceremonies, fateful days and seasons, in short, to read glyph and to interpret the almanac. But this was not taught to the men of the lower class. It was reserved for the nobles and the priests' sons.

The Maya peasants used to store food grains for rainy days. The lower section of the Maya society was also made to pay the tax or tribute. Maize was the first tax. Part of a farmer's surplus was turned over to the 'state' depositories. Then, as a form of work-service tax, the personal maize fields of priest and nobility were cultivated and harvested. Construction was also a part of personal tax. The houses of the upper classes were built by the common men at their own expense. The causeways were built as part of the work service; it was carried out by *corvee* (forced labour) by the clans that lived near the road. Working for the construction of Public building, was the principal labour tax. It is quite evident that enormous religious centres, temple cities, causeways, ball courts, etc. presupposed a complex social organization with mechanism to appropriate work/service and products. The nobles, priests, and civil and military officials lived on the tax-tribute of the man of the lower rungs of society. In addition a sizeable number of artisans, who decorated the temples, carved the stelae, were supported out of the accumulated surplus brought to the official storage chambers by the tax-paying Maya. Whether the necessity of labour made the Maya people to fight and capture slaves is not known. But they used to go into wars, capture slaves and employ them for various tasks as well as sacrifice some of them to propitiate their gods.

Beside working in the fields, weaving was one of the main occupation of the Maya. Both men and women were engaged in this. They used to carve and make baskets, rope, mat, and pots. Exchange of goods and trade with other people was a regular activity. But one of the most significant feature of Maya culture was the calendar and the hieroglyph. The Maya had three different calendars. The *haab* year was of 18 periods or months, of twenty days each, plus a terminal period of five days called *Uayeb* (the empty or unlucky days). The second was the *tzolkin*, a sacred calendar of 260 days. The third calendar was the "long count," which reckoned the number of days since the mythical beginning of the Maya era, which was dated 4Ahau 8Chamhu for reasons inexplicable till date (equivalent to B.C. 3111). In this calendar, 20 *kins* or days made a Maya month (*uinal*). 18 Uinals and 5 Uayeb made a *tun* (year) of 365 days. Next came the *katun*, a period of 7200 days or 20 years. And 52 years made a cycle of years. The nine known Maya time periods, such as days, months etc., had corresponding glyphs. Glyph actually was their language to record, which has so far not been completely deciphered. Only those glyphs, which pertain to calendars etc., have been somehow read.

### 14.2.3 Why and How did the Maya Civilization Collapse?

Around the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the Mayan construction of buildings seems to have stopped, marking the beginning of the collapse of the civilization. But how and why did it happen? There are many explanations offered by scholars

speculating on this question. Some scholars have argued that it was an epidemic such as malaria or yellow fever, or it might have been the social consequence of some calamity such as a drought or earthquake. Some others have suggested that the reason was an agricultural collapse, or peasant uprisings, or severing of trade routes, even an invasion by the Mexicans.

There was a demographic change during the Late Classic phase due to growth of population. Consequently there was a pressure on the limited agricultural resource of the region. There is some archeological evidence, of the Late Classic time, in the form of human skeletons of commoners mostly. The skeletons attest stunted growth, scurvy, anemia, and periodontal disease, suggesting malnutrition, which in turn, implies food shortages. To overcome the food shortage, the people might have intensified the use of the natural resources available as shortening of the interval of leaving land fallow or burning forest to clear land to extend cultivation. Such agricultural activities must have led, in the long run, to change in rain-fall pattern, fertility of the soil and so on. It is suggested that this caused agricultural exhaustion and ecological disaster. Thus leading to the decline of the civilization. But such explanation fails to answer the question as to why the growing population did not increase the kind of agriculture, which they used to practice. Why did they change over to a different and detrimental practice? Some other ways of looking at the agricultural crisis and the decline of the Mayas have to be found. This question becomes more important in the light of the recent archeological discoveries of the practice of a very intensive agriculture in this civilization.

Peasant rebellion being one of the causes of the decline of the Maya civilization has been largely derived from a reading of the Bonampak (a Maya site) murals (which apparently depicts captured peasant rebels) and the evidence of attacks on the monuments and consequent mutilation and destruction of those monuments, (which were symbols of the elite power and domination). This explanation has its protagonists and detractors. The detractors would say that Bonampak murals may be representing any captured commoners or nobles and not necessarily that of peasant rebels; and that the rebels could not be upsetting the demography of the place if they eliminated the nobles, who were a small fraction only. But the fact is that the elite centre did not constitute the Maya culture or civilization. It was only a part of the culture. And the rebel peasant did not intend to make difference in population figures but must have tried to reconstitute the social relationship. That is why we have flourishing villages even after the collapse of elite centres, as in Belize valley. The relation established between the finding of Fine paste pottery and Mexican invasion seems quite tenuous, if not untenable.

The decline and demise of the Maya civilization was no doubt a complex process. It involved the competition between different settlements over the control of trade routes of the west and war for the same. Rebellion from within can never be ruled out as various nobilities to remain in power used to extract immense amount of surplus from the peasants and producers. These exploited groups might have remained as disgruntled elements of the society. They were no more willing to bear the burden in the name of the divine and were ready to overthrow the system. Here one can ascribe a role for the Aztec or Mexicans, who came as merchants and traders and taking advantage of the situation started dominating over the centres and then controlling and displacing them as well.

The decline and demise, however cannot be put as a uniform story for all the settlements, certain variation between settlements might have existed.

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## 14.3 THE INKAS

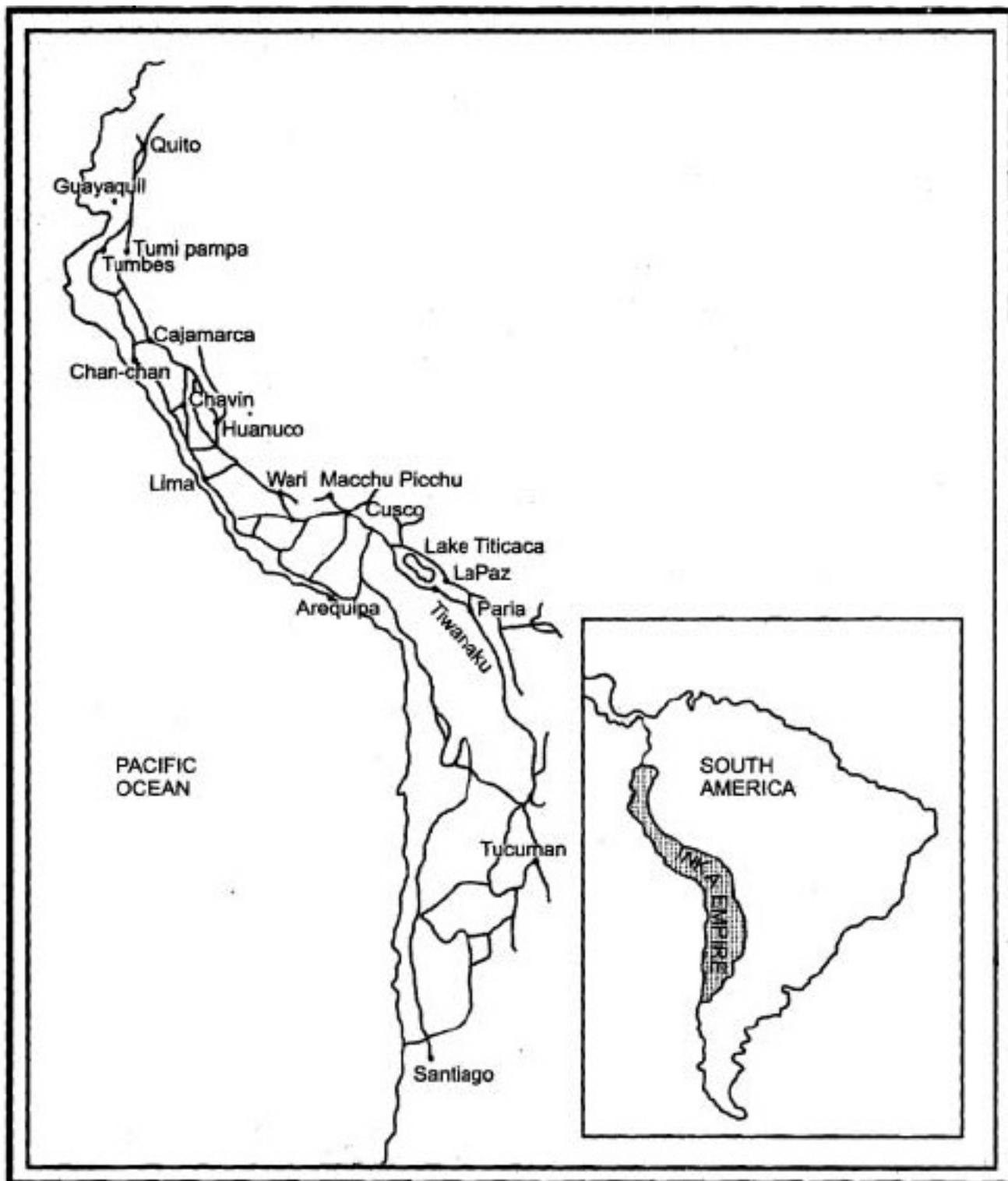
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The Inka (or Inca) civilization territorially spread over parts of modern Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina, or the central Andean highlands, and for a substantial part of their history they were under a single Inca state called Tawantinsuyu, between 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. The Inka civilization or more correctly, the Inka Empire had dominated over other lesser pre-Inkan societies and settlements from 13<sup>th</sup> Century till the coming of the Spanish Conquistadors in 1532 AD. The Incas of Cusco had dominated over various 'ethnic' communities in the entire region. The ethnic communities had tension and conflict among themselves, which was probably advantageous to the Spanish conquistadors (Spanish conquerors of Peru & Mexico). The pre-Inkan communities, who were settled agriculturists were the Chavin, Mochica, Nazca, Paraca, and Chimu amongst others. Don Francisco Cusichaq, lord of Xauxa, the earliest colonial capital had testified that he "regretted having opened the country to the Europeans."

### 14.3.1 Organization of Polity

The consolidation of the Inca power occurred between 13<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (AD). The Incas united a vast territory with an extensive network of paved roads radiating outward from their central city of Cuzco. This, of course, happened during the 15<sup>th</sup> century when Cusco, "changed from being the nucleus of a local polity to being a major urban centre, capital of the Tawantinsuyu described by the Europeans. It was not only the administrative headquarters of the Inka realm but also a ceremonial centre, where a hundred pieces of fine cloth were sacrificed daily and scores of priests fasted while watching the movements of the sun from their palace-observatories." The roads measured more than 20,000 kilometres in length and facilitated the movement of troops and officials, luxury and exotic goods, and transmission of information as well. This network of roads also facilitated control of the many ethnic groups, which constituted the Tawantinsuyu. Many of the roads existed prior to Inka supremacy and were only maintained and used by the Tawantinsuyu. In mountain terrains the roads were cut out of bedrock; particularly steep slopes were traversed by means of stone steps or zigzags. Wherever the highways had to be carried across wide rivers, suspension bridges were built with cables made by braiding twigs and vines and were strung between stone towers on either bank of the river. These bridges were maintained by particular villages responsible for reweaving, on a regular basis. Relay runners were stationed along the roads, at intervals of a kilometre or so, who memorized and transmitted government messages. The Inka expansion was achieved, it has been suggested, by "absorbing whole political entities, not separate villages or valleys. The local lords were fitted into a system of 'indirect rule'; it was they who enforced and administered the new order, which may have seemed novel since its ideology claimed no more than a projection onto a wider screen of patterns of existing authority."

The European conquistadors had found that there were several ethnic groups spread all over. At Huallaga, in today's central Peru, the Europeans found a Chupaychu community as big as containing 4000 households in the Inka's



Map: 2 (not to scale)  
The Inka Empire

decimal system of accounting. There were smaller ones also of only 200 ‘fires’ with their separate coca-leaf gardens. The local lords remained responsible to the royal officers of the Inkas, for 10, 50, 100, 200, 1000, ‘fires’ or households. [The *mitmaq* (see below) could be a variant of this multi-ethnic settlement.]

Although generally left alone to govern the region, the local lord’s son was required to be sent to Cusco, the Inka capital. There they were educated at the court in the Quechua language of the Inka. [The language of the Inka was referred to as Quechua by the Europeans. The speakers of this language though refer to it as *runa simi*, ‘tounge of the people.’ Aymara and its dialect as Kauki, were also extensively used languages in this region.]

Royal functionaries were placed along the roads at administrative centres and used to inspect and oversee the subject provincial lords and their territories. These functionaries used to summarily punish the local lords or subordinate rulers if they used to find them guilty of: i) disobedience of any royal inspector, ii) rebellion, iii) not depositing dues, iv) engaging his people in personal service, v) or engaging them in works which hindered performance of their own duties, or for other similar offences. The local lords were removed from their offices and their able sons or brothers or other near relatives were appointed in their place. In case of rebellion the local lord and his kin were all executed. The local lords were not always from the local ethnic communities. They could be any royal kin, or when they ran out of kin, some promoted loyal inhabitant from neighbouring villages were appointed as local governors and were known as *allikaq*.

The local lords and their communities provided labour services as well as military services to the Inkas at Cusco according to the principle of *mit’a*. According to this principle each commoner and community was obliged to devote some of his time and energy for the works of the state. The communities mobilized both men and women for public works on rotation, *allyu* by *allyu*, one ethnic group after another. For military services they used to bring their own arms and weapons. Some communities, such as the Chimu who were a coastal community, were sending artisans and women to Cusco but were not expected to do military services, probably because they were unfit for battles at high altitudes. Also certain other ethnic groups as the Aymaras, stated that they were warriors only, of a superior nature, and therefore, cited precedence when they were exempt from other tributes, taxes, any other services or public works. Public works included such acts as construction of buildings, attending ritual ceremonies and paying tribute, or giving personal services as herding, or serving as *mit’a* at the court at Cusco, or working as masons and weavers of cloth, or carpenters or quarrying and farming. It may have included working as dancers and clowns in the court as well. The Inka armies were rewarded with *cicha* (corn-beer) and clothes.

### 14.3.2 Economic Life

Historians also suspect that the long military services from certain communities might have had adverse consequence on their agricultural practice, which were quite labour intensive. They used to grow many varieties of tubers (as potatoes and sweet-potatoes), the *Kinuwa* (a high altitude grain with high content of protein), the *Tarwi* (a fodder plant with long tapering spikes of varying colours of Lupin family which is rich in fats), the thirst-quenching coca-leaf. Maize

was, it appears, the staple crop, in most parts of the Inka territories. They fed their populace using advanced agricultural techniques, including terrace cultivation, crop rotation, and irrigation. It is quite amazing that, “In many regions, the canal systems, terraces and ridged fields made it possible to cultivate at least 35% more land than at present. Whether this discrepancy is due to social, technological, economic, or environmental factors is a question, which has puzzled the archeologist”. *Ayllu*, supposed to be a lineage, owned the land for all its members. There was no individual landholding in Quechua or Inka. At this stage of our knowledge of the Inkas, we are not sure how this social unit held people of different classes together. The *ayllu* also held the herds of the community.

The Andean topography had very little land in the first place. The climate was, as it is now also, that of extremes; the day temperature of blistering heat contrasts sharply with the freezing cold nights, the difference of temperature between day and night being 25-30 degree Celsius. Pastures were/are widely dispersed. The dry lands of the coastal belt needed irrigation facilities. But the Andean or Inka peasant had overcome all these disadvantages and harnessed these to their own benefit. They used to process and preserve vegetables and all edible flesh by freezing in the night and drying out in the sun the next day. These frozen foods were known as *ch'unu* and *charki*, and possibly by many more names. These were not only preserved for long durations but were also easy to transport. Similarly the need of water for the desert plantations on the coast, was fulfilled by irrigation canals from the Andean glaciers. Many a times these irrigation canals were the cause of tension between the highlanders and the coastal people. The highlanders were in such a position that they could easily cut and divert these canals, stopping supply of water to the coastal people.

Salt, fish and edible algae were available at the coast. At very high altitude of Lake Titicaca, tuber was available as also animals which provided meat and wool. At the middle level maize was abundant, a crop which had some ceremonial importance also. Exchange used to take place between these different ecological tiers. But more interestingly, people from one tier used to go, or rather were sent, and settled at other tiers to produce and procure the products for themselves. These people were called colonists or *mitmaq*. Some historians, of course, maintain that *mitmaq* or *mitima* were loyal colonists brought by the Inkas to settle in newly acquired territories, whereas ethnic groups, who were likely to cause trouble were sent off to distant places.

The *mitmaq* could be as far as ‘a day’s walk’ from their native place or their kinsmen or more. Gradually, it seems, the distances increased to eight days’ walk, ten days’ walk and so on, indicating growth of complex mechanism for the colonist’s access to the product and also sociability, marriage of offspring and ceremonial participation at the nucleus. During the Inka times, when the communication system was better organized and it was safer, or in other words the hegemonic presence of the state was strongest, then one could find *mitmaqs* at a distance of 60 to 80 days’ walk from their ethnic communities. In the Inka census the *mitmaqs* were enumerated at their native place or nucleus.

These settlements of *mitmaqs* probably led to crafts specialization. Besides being ecologically specific, the settlement, for some historical reason, became artisan specific. There are evidence from Lupaqa of a village of potters and another village of metallurgists. During the Inca times, new functions had

been assigned to the mitmaq; near Huancane on the shore of Lake Titicaca, there was a manufacturing centre run by the state, a village where 'a thousand weavers' and 'a hundred potters' used to work. 'Chosen women' separated from their own ethnic surroundings were occupied in fulltime weaving which had a special place in the Inca political/ ritual life. During the Inka times again, the state used the mitmaq for military services to suppress rebellions and to expand the territorial boundaries. To guard the fortress of Colpagua, the mitmaqs had received the town of Guarapa, where people of their ethnicity produced and provided them with food. This is again an attestation of the sophistications of the Inka polity as the Inka state expanded both territorially and demographically. Earlier when the scale of operation was small, the state parceled out lands to various local governors or lords, who in turn got the land worked by the local community by rotation, lineage by lineage, as they had worked the fields of their lords or that of the temple. With the expansion of the Inka state, mitmaq were sent to ensure the Inka rule and revenue. This was affected through the old lords and therefore remained an 'indirect rule.' There was no tribute or tax to be paid, nothing was demanded of the peasants, which they themselves had grown or had stored.

### 14.3.3 Religion

It was not only in the matters of governance and collection of revenue that the old lords were retained by the Inka rulers. In the matters of religion too the local religious beliefs were respected, though the people of the acquired territory were asked to worship the Inka lords of nature as the Sun and the Mother Earth. The deity of the local community was taken to Cuzco, where it was placed either in the Temple of the Sun or in a special shrine and it was looked after by a priestly staff recruited from that province.

Human Sacrifices were part of rituals performed by the Inkas. They developed a calendar and a decimal number system. Yet they did not have money or probably did not feel its necessity. They also did not have wheel. Though they had no script or practice of writing, yet they kept records. They used to keep records in knotted strings called *quipu* or *kipu*. On pieces of cloths they even painted maps. Textiles, besides being used for clothing, had a ritual value also. In fact, a lot of burial cloth has also been discovered by archeologists. The corn-stores were a unique feature of the Inka architecture. In Huanaca Pampa, 480 buildings have been discovered which had a storage capacity of almost 40,000 cubic metres, where thousand of tons of potatoes, corn and other goods were kept. In the vast expanse of their territory the Incas used one language, Quechua, which symbolized the cultural unity of the civilization in spite of the varieties of ethnicity included in it.

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## 14.4 THE AZTECS

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This too, like the Maya, was a Central American civilization. It flourished between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century. The present region of Mexico was the area where this civilization flourished. It was a vast empire spread in around an area of 20000 square kilometers. The empire was divided into a number of provinces (38). Each of the provinces was ruled by a governor who ruled over the tribes in the region. It was the last indigenous civilization, before the Spanish colonized Mexico.

### 14.4.1 Settlements and Organization of Polity

The Aztecs supplanted the Toltecs around 1100 AD and established settlements which grew into a sophisticated polity in the Americas. It is said that the ultimate dominance of the Aztecs over the Toltecs lay not only in their intrepid, highly skilled society, but also in the Aztec's systematic, sacrificial method of dealing with the enemy. They were a conquering tribe who gradually extended their influence over the neighbouring tribes/settlements and people such as the Totonacs, Tabascans, Tlaxcalans and the Cholulans. These tribes used to pay 'taxes' to the Aztecs and follow their own forms of governance and worship their own deity. Still the Aztec tax-collectors with crooked staffs wearing richly coloured and embroidered cloaks would appear and ask them to provide victims for sacrifice at the temple of Huitzlopochtli (the Aztecs' deity). The 'taxes' or the tributes they paid to the Aztecs were in kind such as maize, fish, gold, jade and turquoises, birds and animals. Often they used to contribute by feeding the Aztec garrisons and providing land to Aztec nobles/officers.

The Aztecs established the twin towns of Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco on the western shore of lake Texoco in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century (in 1325 or 1345). (Tlatelolco was absorbed to Tenochtitlan around 1500.) And their ultimate domination of the region was signified by the rule of Moctezuma II (1502-20). This was the period of pinnacle of glory of the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan. Significant achievements of the Aztec civilizations included the establishment of a canal system, public buildings, and wide roads and causeways. The wealthy and vast capital of Tenochtitlan (on which today Mexico City stands) exemplified the accomplishments of the Aztecs.

Drawing on the surpluses of the conquered tribes the Aztecs built their capital Tenochtitlan into a wonderful city. The gigantic monuments and their grandeur, even in dilapidated conditions, attest this. This city grew on an island and extended into the lake Texoco by means of floating gardens and by pushing piles into the shallow water of the lake. It was connected to the mainland by three causeways, which were as wide as 30feet. It appears that many of the settlements were connected with their neighbouring settlements with causeways as Ixtapalapan and Coyoacan. Tenochtitlan was protected from flooding or any rise in the level of water in the lake by a concrete dyke across the lake Texoco. This dyke apparently divided the lake into two. There was an embankment also built to protect the city on the port end or the southern end. This was kept lit in the night by flaming braziers. The peasants from Anahuac used to visit this port in their canoes laden with various agricultural products as tributes. The city was getting drinking water from Chapultepec by two aqueducts, which reflects planning and sense of hygiene and health of the Aztecs. Besides the temples, which were huge structures, the elite used to live in stone houses, which were either red or whitewashed. And the plebeians, quarters were away from the centre of the city (which was the temple and market complex), and their houses were of mud and thatch.

### 14.4.2 Economic Activities

The Aztecs used cocoa beans, cotton cloaks, copper blades, small folded mantles, and quills filled with gold dust as standard units of value or money/currency in their commercial dealings. But the chief means of exchange was either barter or units of hours of works.

Tenochtitlan had a market complex, which was divided into many sections, each section was with its specialized merchandise. In the first section gold, silver and precious stones like jade from the country of the Zapotecs, and feathers & mosaics made from the feathers of birds by the Tarascans were sold. In the second chocolate and all kinds of spices; in the third cloth and all kinds of clothing material as well as slaves and animals; in the fourth foods such as corn, bean, tomatoes, *chiles*, seeds, salt, turkeys, deer meat, rabbits, hares, ducks, honey, vanilla, rubber, cochineal, beehives, pottery etc; so on and so forth. The market place actually was not only a place of exchanging material goods. It was also a place for social communication.

### 14.4.3 Religious Life

At the meeting place of the main three causeways was the temple enclosure, surrounded by an eight-foot wall, which was surmounted by snakes of carved stones. There were more than thirty temples in the enclosure and included ones dedicated to Huitzilopochtli the chief deity of the Aztecs and also to the chief deity of the Toltecs and other deities of the conquered tribes. Not only the deities of the conquered people were admitted into the Aztec pantheon but also the conquered people were allowed to retain their political system and social practices without any interference or imposition.

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## 14.5 SUMMARY

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In this Unit we discussed the Mayas, the Incas and the Aztecs, the three important civilizations that emerged in Latin America. You must have noticed that all three had some common features. Maize is one of the common crops of all the three is the staple food. Constructions of broad roads connecting importance centres of each of these civilizations is another common feature. All the three had well spread habitats with huge structures and buildings and monuments. (mostly in ruins now). Another striking common feature is the knowledge and use of calendars. However, all the three emerged at different periods of time. The Maya civilization was the earliest and survived the longest period of time. The Mayan settlements were widely spread with developed architectural style. They had network of raised roads built in a unique way connecting all the main centres and hinter land (with arterial roads). The polity was organized in a sort of city states ruled by hereditary officers. The society was stratified with peasantry at the lower strata and their surplus produce as the main source of state's revenue. This civilization declined after 900 A.D. There are various opinions about the causes of its down fall. It is difficult to ascribe a single factor for it.

Both Inkas and Aztecs were near contemporary and their fall was caused by the conquest of these regions by Europeans and they were subordinated. However, certain social features and language could survive even after long colonial rule. The Inkas had cusco as their principal city well connected with other parts of the empire with a defined system of administration and governance. The provincial lords provided the revenue and military services to the central authority. The Inkas practiced developed agricultural techniques with canals for irrigation. Large areas were cultivated with common land holdings. The Aztecs were mainly a warrior tribe. They realized taxes from the subjugated tribes. They established the city of Tenochtitlan as their Capital.

The city had separate residential areas for the ruling group and plebians. They had organized economic life with developed inland trade.

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## **14.6 EXERCISES**

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- 1) What in your opinion, was a remarkable feature of the Maya settlements?
- 2) How did the Inkas preserve their food?
- 3) What role did Mitmaq play in economic life of the Inkas?
- 4) Write a note on the Aztec civilization.