


SSWH8: Describe the Diverse characteristics of societies in Central and South America



Element B: Compare and contrast the Mayan, Aztec, and Incan societies, include: religion, culture, economics, politics, and technology.


RELIGION

- The Mayan, Aztec, and Incan civilizations were all polytheistic with an emphasis on the worship of the sun.
 - This focus on the worship of the sun led to the development of elaborate and quite accurate calendars in all three societies.
 - Faith in each of these civilizations required elaborate rituals that included sacrifice.
 - Human sacrifice was most common in the Aztec Empire, with thousands of prisoners of war, criminals, slaves, and people given in tribute sacrificed a year.
 - Human sacrifice was also common in the Mayan civilization but not done as frequently.
 - While human sacrifice did occur in the Incan Empire, it was uncommon.
 - Sacrifices of camelids and textiles were much more typical.
- Emperors in each of these civilizations fulfilled an important spiritual role.
 - In the Mayan and Aztec civilizations, emperors and other nobles were considered intermediaries to the gods.
 - Mayan emperors and priests participated in elaborate bloodletting rituals during which the faithful believed they were communicating with the gods.
 - In Incan society the emperors were considered descendants of the sun and therefore divine.
 - As a result, Incan emperors were revered in both life and death.



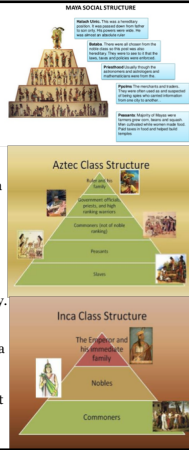
TECHNOLOGY

- All three civilizations also constructed monumental architecture in the name of faith.
 - The Mayan and Aztecs built tall pyramids that served as temples and the Inca utilized expert stone work to build elaborate temples in which the walls were covered in sheets of gold.



SOCIAL

- The Mayan, Aztec, and Incan societies were all highly stratified.
 - Each had a hereditary nobility that dominated the government.
 - In the Mayan and Aztec culture this stratification included ethnic Mayans and Aztecs with a substantial wealth gap between the elite and common peasants.
 - Social divisions between ethnic Inca were not as dramatic as the wealth from the empire was used to support a relatively comfortable life for the ethnic Inca living in Cuzco.
 - In this case, the non-Inca subject peoples of the empire made up the underclass of peasants.
 - In all three of these cultures, the basic unit of society was a family based clan.
 - In both the Incan and Aztec Empires the clan system was used by the state to allocate civic and military duty.
 - This system was particularly important in the Incan Empire.
 - The basic unit of the Incan society was the ayllu, a clan made up of a large group of people who claimed a common ancestor.
 - The ayllu members worked collectively to support the members and fulfill their duty to the state.



ECONOMICS

- Agriculture was the foundation of the economy for the Maya, Aztecs, and Inca.
 - All three depended heavily on the cultivation of maize, beans, and squash.
- The Andean region's many microclimates made the Incan economy much more diverse.
 - Potatoes and quinoa were staples in the Andes but not in Mesoamerica.
 - Pastoralism was also unique to the Inca.
 - In the high mountain valleys of the Andes the Inca and their subject peoples kept vast herds of llama and alpaca for meat, textiles and transport.
- Commercial trade was much more common in the Mayan and Aztec civilizations than in the Incan Empire. Several factors contributed to this difference.
 - Each ayllu in the Incan empire controlled territory in several different microclimates. Therefore, each family group was largely self-sufficient making commercial trade less important.
 - Also the Incan state used an elaborate labor tax system called the Mit'a.
 - This labor tax system assigned duties to each ayllu which included cultivating crops and producing manufactured goods for urban elite further reducing the need for commercial trade.
 - Both the Aztec and Mayan societies had a robust merchant class that transported luxury goods over great distances leading to thriving markets in each major city where merchants and common people bartered for a great variety of goods.



POLITICS

- While the Aztecs and Inca ruled a unified empire the Mayan civilization was divided into approximately 40 independent city-states that dominated the region from Southern Mexico to Honduras.
 - Some of the more powerful states exerted authority over smaller dependent states located nearby.
 - Each city-state was ruled by a hereditary monarch/priest who maintained power through faith and force.
- The polytheistic religion of the Maya required regular human sacrifices.
 - Prisoners of war were the preferred victims of these ritual sacrifices leading to almost constant warfare between neighboring Mayan city-states.
 - Success in these wars and bloodletting rituals cemented the king's power as he was seen as an intermediary between the people and the gods.
- Aztec emperors also had an important spiritual role that including leading wars for the capture of sacrificial victims.
 - These emperors were not hereditary however, instead they were selected from the noble families of the Aztec capitals by a council of aristocrats with whom they had to share power.



POLITICS

- ❑ Like the Maya, the Incan emperors were hereditary and their power was also justified by successful military campaigns and a connection to the gods.
 - Human sacrifice was far less common in the Incan civilization so the wars were principally about the accumulation of land and wealth.
- ❑ The Incan Empire's government was much more centralized than the other two civilizations.
 - The Aztec Empire utilized military force to extract tribute in the form of material goods from subject people.
 - While the Inca also extracted tribute, it was in the form of labor.
 - The Incan state took direct ownership of the land it conquered and utilized an elaborate labor tax system called the Mit'a to direct the labor of subject people to the service of the state.
 - This system required a much more centralized form of administration in the Incan lands.
 - The empire was divided into regions with local administrators that directed the hereditary leaders of the family clans or ayllus located within their region.



TECHNOLOGY

- ❑ The major technological advances of the Mayan, Aztec and Inca revolved around the cultivation of crops.
 - All three made major advances in selective breeding, calendar making, and irrigation.
- ❑ They also share major advances in stone architecture.
 - All three built monumental architecture out of stone with the Inca achieving an impressive level of refinement.
 - Incan stone cutters built walls out of perfectly cut stones that interlocked and were reinforced with bronze rings allowing the buildings to withstand the earthquakes that are common in the region.
- ❑ These civilizations also developed advanced systems of record keeping.
 - The Aztecs and Maya developed a written language that utilized hieroglyphics.
 - The Inca utilized a system of strings and knots called the quipu that allowed numeric record keeping.



TECHNOLOGY

- ❑ The Inca and Aztecs developed technologies to address the unique characteristics of their homes.
 - For the Inca this included an elaborate system of paved roads that included suspension bridges and advanced terracing techniques.
 - These roads and terraces facilitated the Inca's ability to exploit the many microclimates of their Andean home.
 - The Aztecs developed a complex system of dikes and aqueducts to manage water on their island home in Lake Texcoco.
 - Texcoco was a terminal lake with a high salt content.
 - Aztec engineers devised methods to control the salinity of the lake and allow the cultivation of crops on man made islands built around their capital.