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| **SSWH8 Describe the diverse characteristics of societies in Central and South America.** |
| 1. **Explain the rise and fall of the Mayan, Aztec, and Inca Empires.** |
| **Mayan-** |

* **Mayan Civilization** emerged out of the cultural footprint left by the Olmec Civilization.
* Maize cultivation led to the development of villages that grew into urban centers around 800 BCE. Mayan civilization fully emerged by 250 CE.
* While the Mayan shared a common culture they never achieved political unity, instead approximately 40 independent city-states dominated the **region from Southern Mexico to Honduras**.
* The Mayan classical age lasted from about 250 CE to 900 CE.
* The Mayan Civilization decline began around 800 CE when many of the urban centers were abandoned.
* The reasons for the Mayan decline are unclear. Scholars suggest that possible causes could include volcanic activity, excessive warfare, disease, overpopulation, or soil exhaustion.
* As Mayan culture faded in 800 CE

**Aztec-**

* The Aztecs migrated into the **valley of Mexico** where they struggled to integrate themselves among the urban agricultural societies surrounding Lake Texcoco in the heart of the valley of Mexico.
* In their early years in the valley, the Aztecs worked as farm laborers and mercenaries for their more powerful neighbors.
* With time their strength grew and they founded twin capitals, Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco, on a small island in Lake Texcoco in 1325.
* Around the same time the older tribal organization of leadership gave way to a monarchical system borrowed from neighboring societies.
* This consolidation of leadership allowed the Aztecs to start the process of imperial conquests which began with agricultural lands around Lake Texcoco.
* Once the Aztec capitals were economically secure, they formed an alliance with two powerful city-states located on the shores of the lake and began the process of building a vast tribute empire.

**The development of this empire was motivated by several factors.**

* Like earlier civilizations of Mesoamerica, the Aztec religion required regular human sacrifice with the preferred victims being prisoners of war.
* This need for sacrificial victims led to almost constant wars during which Aztecs would capture warriors from neighboring regions to deliver to the priests of Tenochtitlan for sacrifice.
* Another motivation was the fact that political power and social status was based on the success of these campaigns. Aztec emperors were compelled by tradition to legitimize their rule with successful wars of conquest.
* While much of the Aztec nobility was hereditary, commoners and nobles alike could earn social promotion by successfully securing captives in battle.
* Finally, these wars served an economic function by building a vast tribute empire that subsidized the cities of Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco.
* Subject people within the vast Aztec empire were required to send the capitals regular payments of maize, beans, cotton cloth, jade, gold and sacrificial victims.
* **In 1502 Montezuma II became the emperor of the Aztecs**. By this point, the tribute demands that the Aztecs placed on their subjects was breeding resentment and instability.
* Montezuma instituted reforms to try and quell the unrest but this came too late.
* **In 1519 Hernán Cortés arrived on the coast of Mexico with 600 conquistados.**
* Shortly after arrival Cortés met La Malinche, a native woman who served as his translator.
* With La Malinche’s help, the Spanish learned of both the vast wealth in the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan and the widespread anger among the Aztec subjects.
* Cortés was able to use this anger to establish alliances with native armies as he marched toward the Aztec capital.
* **Cortés entered Tenochtitlan in 1521**, claiming that he came in peace.
* Once in the city, the Spanish took Montezuma hostage and began looting the palace.
* The Aztecs and their remaining allies were initially able to drive the Spanish from the city but their success was short lived.
* The Spanish had several advantages that proved insurmountable to the Aztecs.
* Native allies gave the Spanish a numeric advantage.
* Smallpox, spread by the Spanish, devastated the densely populated cities of the valley of Mexico.
* Steel weapons, horses, war dogs, guns, and armor also proved helpful to the Spanish in their defeat of the Aztecs.
* **In August of 1521 the Spanish ended the Aztec Empire**.

**The Incan Empire -**

* In the early 1400s, the Inca were one of several competing military powers in the **southern highlands of Peru**.
* In this early stage of their history, the Inca were organized into chiefdoms based on kinship groups.
* In about 1430 Wiraqocha Inka began to consolidate his power over these groups and established a hereditary monarchical system of government centered in Cuzco.
* Once firmly in power, Wiraqocha Inka began a period of imperial conquest that lasted until about 1525.
* Early conquests by the Inca may have been motivated by drought or military threats from rival states to the west or south.
* Over time, the motivation shifted to the desire to capture booty and eventually territory.
* Pre-Incan civilizations of the Andean Region learned early on how to exploit the microclimates that range from the coast to the mountain valleys to the rainforests of the interior.
* Incan imperial ambition was driven by the desire to take control of enough territory to allow the exploitation of all of these microclimates. The system of political legitimacy that justified the power of Incan emperors also motivated imperial conquest.
* By 1525 the Inca built a vast empire bound together by a professional army and elaborate bureaucracy that managed affairs by dividing the empire into four parts and eight districts all unified by an extensive network of roads, storehouses, garrisons, and frontier forts.
* Machu Picchu's history is a matter of debate but some historians believe that it was the royal estate of Wiraqocha Inka.
* Smallpox arrived in the Andean region well before the Spanish in 1520s.
* The disease caused political turmoil when it killed the emperor and led to a civil war.
* When the war ended, Atahulpa became emperor but his hold on power remained weak.
* **In 1530 Francisco Pizarro arrived with 180 Spanish Conquistadors**.
* He was able to use the political instability to his advantage and captured Atahulpa.
* **Pizarro and his men executed Atahulpa** which caused even greater political instability in the empire and allowed the Spanish to take the city of Cuzco in 1533.
* **By 1536, the Spanish defeated the last Incan rebellion and took control of the Inca’s empire**.

**Standard -SSWH8 Describe the diverse characteristics of societies in Central and South America.**

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

* **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 or 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.
* 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.
* 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.
* 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.
* The Incan state used an elaborate labor tax system called the Mit’a.
* 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.
* 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 import 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.
* 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 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.
* 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.