

Civilizations of the Americas



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The engineers showed great cleverness and skill in supplying water for the crops, since only scattered sections of the land could grow corn. For this reason, they endeavored to increase its fertility as much as possible. " This was a quote from Garciasco de la Vega, a son of a Spanish explorer and an Incan princess, which described a method of farming in the Incan empire in 1539. The three most advanced civilizations were the Mayans, the Aztecs, and the Incas. All three civilizations made major accomplishments, all being added upon and used by other civilizations.

For example, the Mayans had created a calendar with three hundred sixty-five and a quarter days. The Incas had created terrace farming to create better and a larger amount of crops. All of these civilizations have impacted the world today. Mayans developed a complex calendar with hieroglyphics as depicted in Document Two. These glyphs were based on their writing system. Glyphs were symbols that showed events from the Mayan period. These glyphs often represented religious figures and historical events from the Mayan period (O. I).

The Mayan's calendar was the most accurate calendar of the known time because of the knowledge, and skill the Mayans possessed in astronomy (O. I). By using astronomy, the Mayans could calculate that there are three-hundred sixty-five and a quarter days in a year (O. I). Since the glyphs were on the most accurate calendar of the time the glyphs are known to be accurate. In 1519, Hernan Cortes arrived in the Aztec civilization and described the magnificence of the Aztec's capital, Tenochtitlan. Document Three contains an excerpt in which Cortes described how the markets were filled with as many as 60, 000 people.

The markets had all kinds of merchandise produced in the country including jewels of gold and silver, lead, brass, and food products. Tenochtitlan was the heart of the Aztecs and home to over 150,000 people (O. I). Tenochtitlan was considered the largest city of the known world (O. I). In this city, many goods from all over the empire were sold. Document Four contained a description given by Garciasco de la Vega about a system used for farming. The Incas had created unique systems of farming called irrigation. This method was used to get stream water to the dry lowlands.

Irrigation helped the Incas to produce mass amounts of crops such as corn, beans, and potatoes (O. I). This system also helped to increase the fertility of the land. With the combination of irrigation and terrace farming, the Incas could feed a population of 9 million (O. I). Modern scientists have studied Inca farming to improve crop production today (O. I). In Document 5, a map of the Incan road system was depicted. The Incan government created a network of roads around the Andes Mountains to unite people in the empire that live in the mountains.

These roads helped to get messages from one side of the empire to the other in a faster manner than it would to travel over land. These roads also helped for travel, the transportation of armies, and trade (O. I). Messengers called "chasqui" would run miles at a time to deliver messages to other regions of the empire (O. I). Pedro Cieza de Leon, a Spanish soldier, marveled over these systems of roads for travel of armies (O. I). In Document Six, an image of a farming technique called terrace farming that the Incas created. Incas used terrace farming to provide more farmland for their large population.

Terrace farming is a process where the Incas would carve terraces out of the steep mountainside (O. I). The mountains, where the Incas were located on, were nearly impossible to farm on due to the steep slopes and unfertile land (O. I). Terrace farming was needed to provide flat land to plant on and expose the fertile soil in the mountain (O. I). Along with producing more farmland, the Incas used fertilizer to produce more crops (O. I). The Aztecs, Mayans, and Incas had made multiple major accomplishments that have impacted our world today.

For example, the Mayans had created a calendar containing three-hundred sixty-five and a quarter days and became one of the most accurate calendars of the known world. The Incas had accomplished creating irrigation systems that are being studied and used today. Another prime example is how the Aztecs had the largest city of the known world, which was home to over 150,000 people with a variety of highly organized markets. How was it that these three civilizations came to contribute so many accomplishments without any influence from other civilizations such as the European, Roman, and Greek?