Early Civilizations of Latin America

European Impact on the Aztec & Inca Civilizations
Aztecs arrived in the Valley of Mexico in 1100s (central Mexico, including present day Mexico City).

They wandered about looking for a home site until 1325.

Aztecs finally settled on an island in the middle of Lake Texcoco.

• They built a magnificent city called Tenochtitlan (now Mexico City).
Diorama of Tenochtitlan

This is a replication of what the capital city looked like during the height of the Aztec Empire.
Tenochtitlan

• This was the Aztec’s capital.
• It was created in the center of a lake!

• They built floating islands called “chinampas” by piling rich earth from the bottom of the lake onto rafts made of wood.
  • Roots of plants grew down to bottom, anchoring the rafts.
Tenochtitlan
In the 1400s, Aztec warriors began conquering other people.

They made them pay taxes; noble Aztecs grew rich.

Aztecs had an emperor; the nobles and priests helped the emperor—all were very wealthy.

Not everyone was rich—most people were farmers.
Aztec Warriors

• Aztec warriors were held in a very high place in society.

• If a boy wanted to enter the army at 17, he would be able to move up the ranks based on the number of prisoners he captured. This normally resulted in rewards for the warrior.

• There were groups in the army...the two largest and most well-known were the Jaguars and the Eagles. The men in these groups wore uniforms that resembled the animal name.

• Warriors were also given land as a reward. This was important because he could have more honor in society as a land-owner.
Eagle Warrior Sculpture
Gold bell in the form of an eagle warrior.
Only the ruler could wear these particular feathers in his headdress. This bird is called a quetzal.

This is a jaguar statue that is very similar to the jaguar costumes worn by the Jaguar Warriors.
Clothing

• Commoners wore plain, loose-fitting clothes typically made from cotton.

• Wealthier citizens wore bright colored clothes and jewels. They often wore headdresses to symbolize status. Even the wealthy had different levels and some wore more elaborate clothes than others.
Aztec Snake Mask - The British Museum, London

Statuette of Mictlantecuhtli in the Museo de Antropología in Xalapa, Mexico, 2001. Cute little lord of the underworld. Looks a bit like an alien. Fear him!
Men’s Work

• The Aztec were very involved in agriculture.

• They used chinampas (man-made floating islands) to grow crops of vegetables, flowers, grasses, and medicinal plants.

• They also hunted and fished.
The Aztec women spent the day taking care of the children, cooking, knitting, and doing housework.
Women’s Work
Doctors developed 1,000s of medicines from plants.

Astronomers predicted movements of the planets; designed an accurate calendar!

Priests kept extensive records using hieroglyphics.

Schooling - Boys studied either religion or military skills; girls learned cloth spinning and cooking.
Aztec Sun Stone (Calendar)
Aztec Golden “Ear Flares”
Mosaic Mask Inlaid with Turquoise
How did the Aztecs discipline children?

Some punishments included making them inhale smoke, holding them over fire in which spicy peppers were thrown, and puncturing their skin with thorns!

Maybe that’s what made the warriors so tough!
Aztec Discipline
Cities were religious centers; they worshipped their gods in pyramid-shaped temples.

Sacrifice was an important part of the religious ceremonies (meant to honor the gods).

**Polytheistic** (worshipped many gods): Sun, Death, Maize, Rulers, Rain, etc.
Aztec Temple
This is a stone statue of **Quetzalcoatl**, the plumed serpent god who according to Aztec stories helped create humans. The story goes that he had to go to the underworld to retrieve the bones of the dead humans, but he tripped when leaving and the bones scattered into pieces. This is why humans are all different sizes.
Aztec Religion: Quetzalcoatl helped create humans while other gods realized in order to create a world, they must all sacrifice themselves to keep the weak sun alive. In return, humans needed to be sacrificed to the gods (sun). The afterlife of someone is based on how they died.
• Instead of tearing down old temples, Aztec would just keep adding levels to the existing one.
• This one was built over 6 times!
• Rooms for sacrificing are at the top.
Aztec Temple
The bath was an important part of daily life—not only to be cleaned, but also to be religiously purified.

Most homes had a steam room attached to living quarters.

Other religious ceremonies included human sacrifices:
- usually children or prisoners of war
- felt that human hearts and blood strengthened the gods
Aztec human sacrifice was on a greater scale than anywhere or any time in human history.
Your Task: Write a short personal response as if you were a specific object from history. Your response should include both emotional and physical feelings of the object. Imagine you are the thing!

Your Response Must:
- Be at least a paragraph in length.
- Describe the purpose and function of the object.
- Describe how the object might feel or what it might be thinking.
- Mention the Aztec civilization

Choose:
Chinampas, Temple, Calendar, OR do you have a better idea???
I am a chinampa of the Aztec civilization. Every day I float on a lake and keep the city whole. I hate staying in place while I let plants grow through my face. Farmers come to harvest crops, only for me to feel the painful sting of having plants ripped off of me. Every time someone steps on me, I feel as if I will sink. This is another pain that I must face.
I am the hat on the head of the highest priest in all of the Aztec race. Pretty much every week I have to witness the sacrificing of little innocent children, animals, and prisoners. I hate hearing the dreadful screams, cries, and pleas of the sacrifices. And then, eeeeeeKKK!! I see a cherry red organ in my owner’s hand, rapidly dripping blood. After that, I hear the thumpity-thump of the sacrifice’s head rolling down each narrow stair step of the enormous temple. I myself am filled with grief. I think I am going to perch myself on top of one of the women that have to work in the house all day. At least I know the only thing they are killing is dinner…