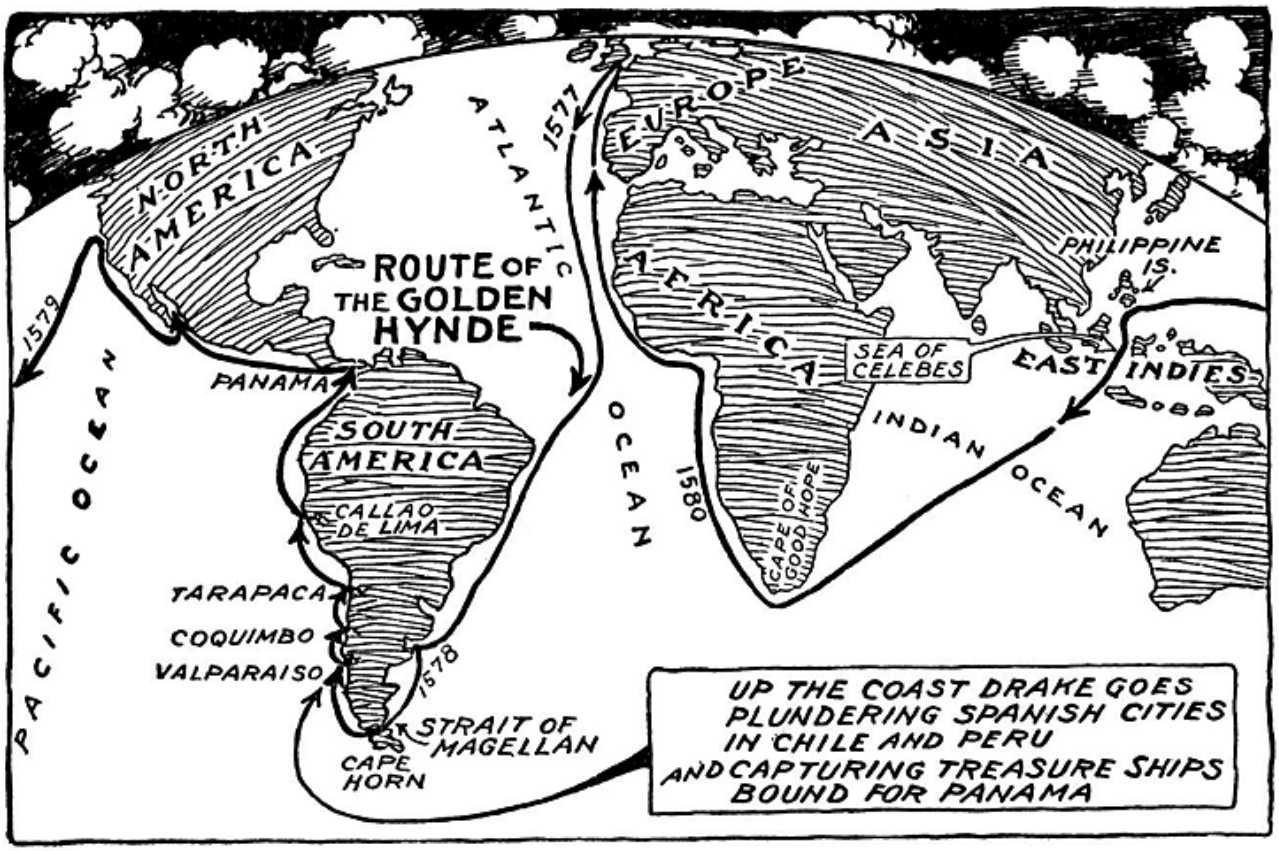
World History
Global Interactions (1200–1650), The First Global Age (1450–1770)
Second Edition

by Jonathan D. Kantrowitz



Class Pack ISBN: 978-0-7827-2321-2 • Student Book ISBN: 978-0-7827-2320-5

Queue, Inc. • 80 Hathaway Drive, Stratford, CT 06615
(800) 232-2224 • Fax: (800) 775-2729 • www.qworkbooks.com

Table of Contents

The rise of Mesoamerican Empires: Aztec and Incan Empires Before 1500

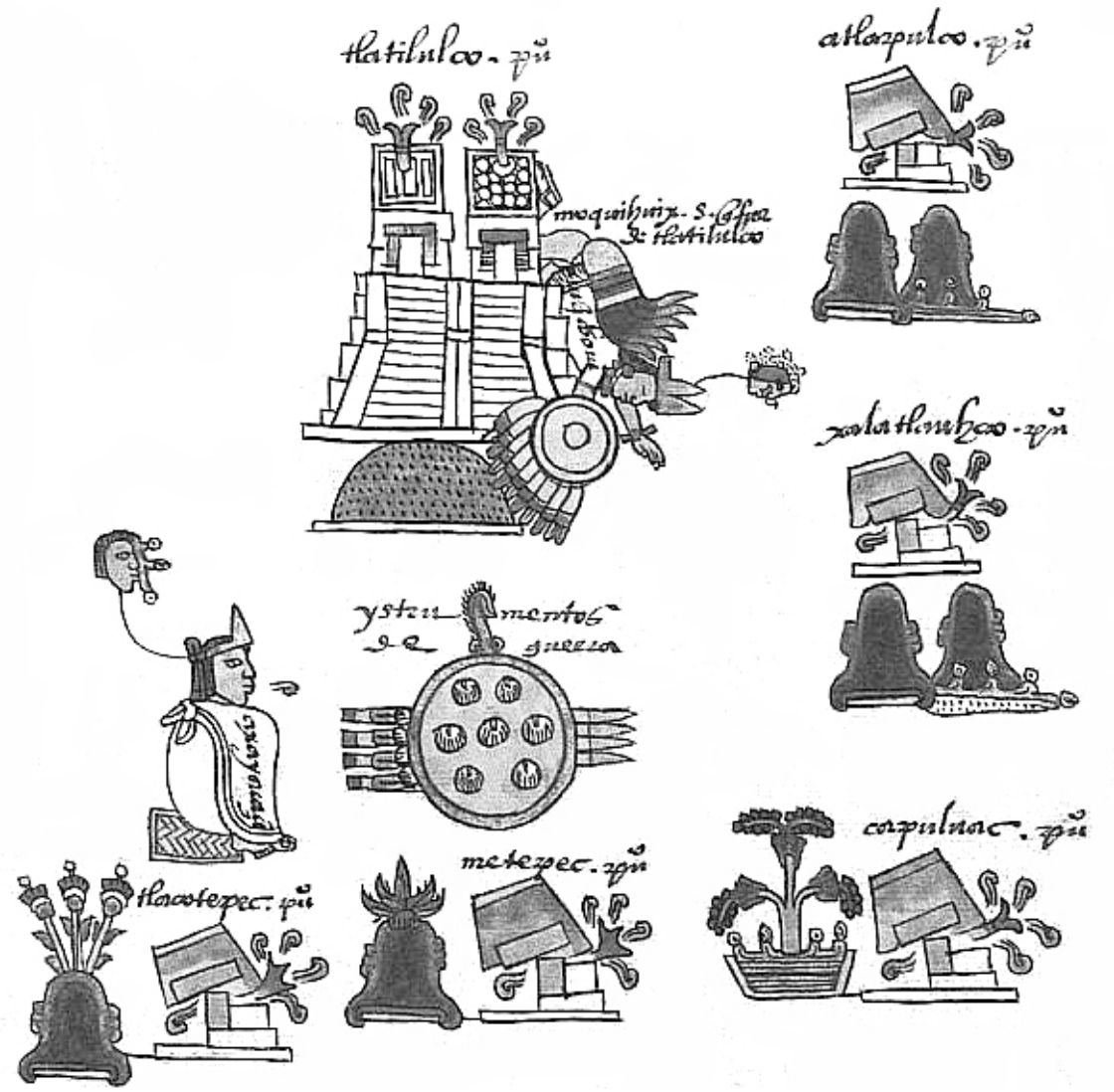
The Aztec Empire

Throughout its long history of human habitation, the Valley of Mexico drew people from Mesoamerica who were attracted by its abundant sources of water, easy communication, and plentiful game and vegetation. The valley was a corridor through which many migrating groups passed and sometimes settled. During the pre-Columbian era, the valley was in constant turmoil except when central authority and political hegemony existed.

The last nomadic arrivals in the valley were the Mexica, more commonly known as the Aztec. Although recent linguistic and archaeological work suggests the Aztec may have come from northwest Mexico, their origins are obscure. According to legend, the Aztec came from Aztlán, a mythical place to the north of the Valley of Mexico around A.D. 1100. They were said to have made their way to the valley guided by the chirps of their sun and war god Huitzilopichtli (meaning "hummingbird on the left"). The inhabitants of the valley viewed the new arrivals with suspicion and tried to prevent their settlement.

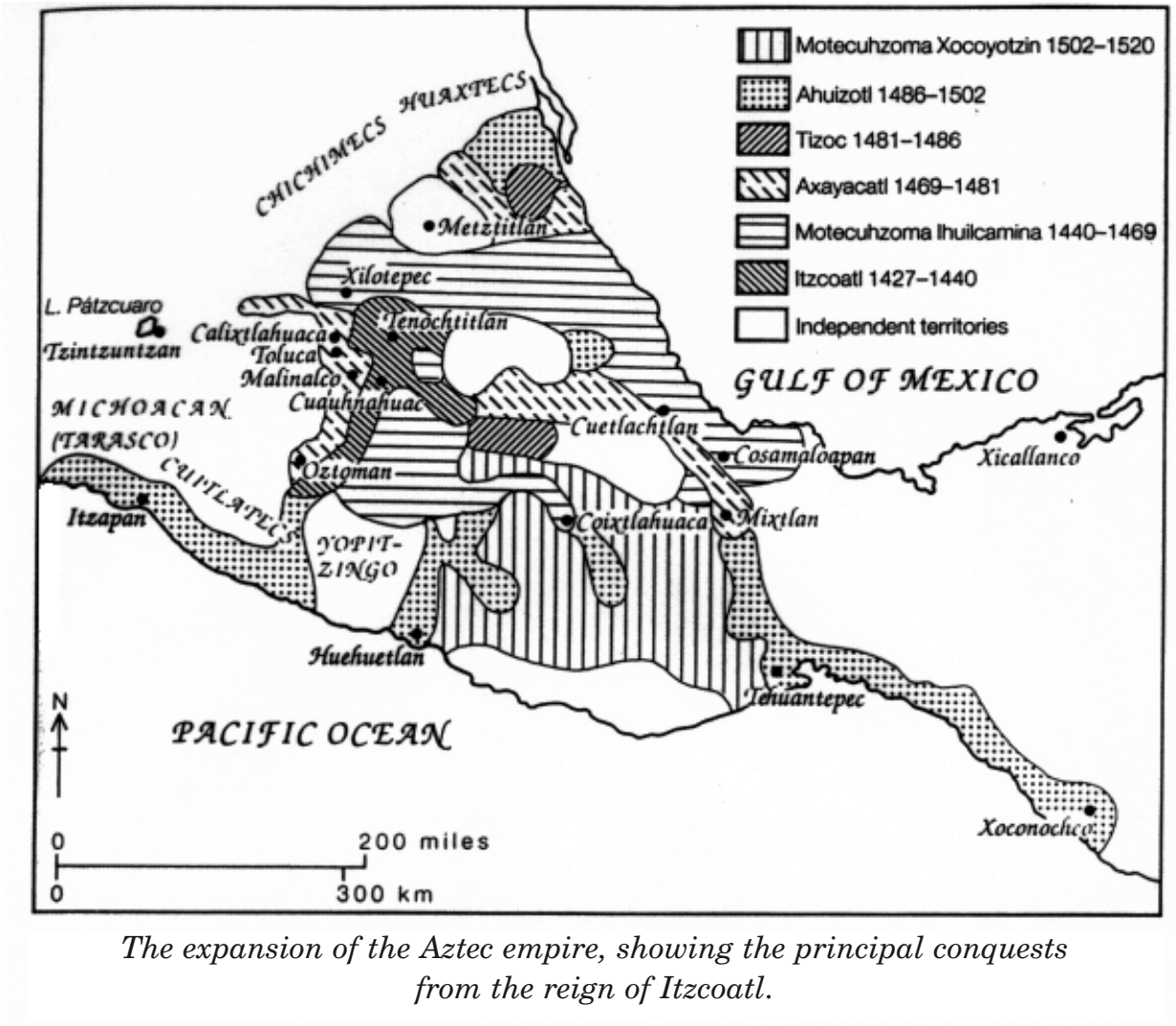
After much wandering and a few wars, in the early 1300s, the Aztec reached the marshy islands in Lago de Texcoco (site of present-day Mexico City). There they saw an eagle perching on a cactus tree and holding a snake in its beak (an image reproduced on the modern Mexican flag). According to Aztec legend, this was a sign indicating where they should build their new capital city. Tenochtitlán was eventually built on an island in Lago de Texcoco. It gradually became an important center in the area. Drinking water came from Chapultepec hill on the mainland, and causeways connected the island to the shores of the lake.

The Aztec established a monarchy in 1376, naming Acamapichtli as their first king. By the early sixteenth century, Aztec domination reached into most of central and southern Mexico (with the exception of the Mayan areas in the southeast).



An Aztec conquest record from the Codex Mendoza showing place-name glyphs. The seated figure shown toward the bottom left is the Aztec king Axayacatl who ruled from ca. 1469 to 1481. The figures surrounding him are the place-name glyphs for towns he conquered and subordinated to the Aztec empire including a figure at the top center representing a larger town named Tlatilulco. Tlatilulco's lord Moquihuix was conquered by Axayacatl and is shown being thrown down from the main temple of his town, a symbol of total defeat.

Before the settlement at Tenochtitlán, Aztec society was quite simple in its organization and was composed of peasants, warriors, and priest-rulers. Afterward, and with a much larger population, there was an increasing division of labor and a more complex social structure. The emperor was selected according to merit from among the ruling dynasty. The nobility was composed of the high priests, the military, and political leaders. The merchant class lived apart in the city and had its own courts, guilds, and gods. Commoners, the largest segment of society, were farmers, artisans, and lower-level civil servants. The lowest rung of society was composed of conquered peoples brought to Tenochtitlán as slaves.



The expansion of the Aztec empire, showing the principal conquests from the reign of Itzcoatl.

The political structure of the Aztec empire was based on a loose coalition of city-states under the fiscal control of Tenochtitlán. The main objective of Aztec expansion was to exact tribute from conquered peoples. Tributes were in kind; cocoa, cotton, corn, feathers, precious metals and stones, shells, and jaguar skins were among those sent. The towns also had the obligation to provide soldiers and slaves and to recognize Aztec supremacy and the supremacy of the Aztec god Huitzilopichtli. Otherwise, towns were basically free to conduct their internal affairs. Aztec control was never fully consolidated—a fact that eventually became a major element in the fall of the empire.

The Inca Empire

The Incas of Cusco (Cuzco) originally represented one of these small and relatively minor ethnic groups, the Quechuas. Gradually, as early as the thirteenth century, they began to expand and incorporate their neighbors. Inca expansion was slow until about the middle of the fifteenth century, when the pace of conquest began to accelerate, particularly under the rule of the great emperor Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui (1438-71). Under his rule and that of his son, Topa Inca Yupanqui (1471-93), the

Incas came to control upwards of a third of South America, with a population of 9 to 16 million inhabitants under their rule. Pachacuti also promulgated a comprehensive code of laws to govern his far-flung empire, called Tawantinsuyu, while consolidating his absolute temporal and spiritual authority as the God of the Sun who ruled from a magnificently rebuilt Cusco.

Although displaying distinctly hierarchical and despotic features, Incan rule also exhibited an unusual measure of flexibility and paternalism. The basic local unit of society was the ayllu which were kinship groups who possessed collectively a specific, although often disconnected, territory. In the ayllu, grazing land was held in common. Arable land was parceled out to families in proportion to their size. Since self-sufficiency was the ideal of Andean society, family units claimed parcels of land in different ecological niches in the rugged Andean terrain. In this way, they achieved the ability to produce a wide variety of crops—such as maize, potatoes, and quinoa (a protein-rich grain)—at different altitudes for household consumption.

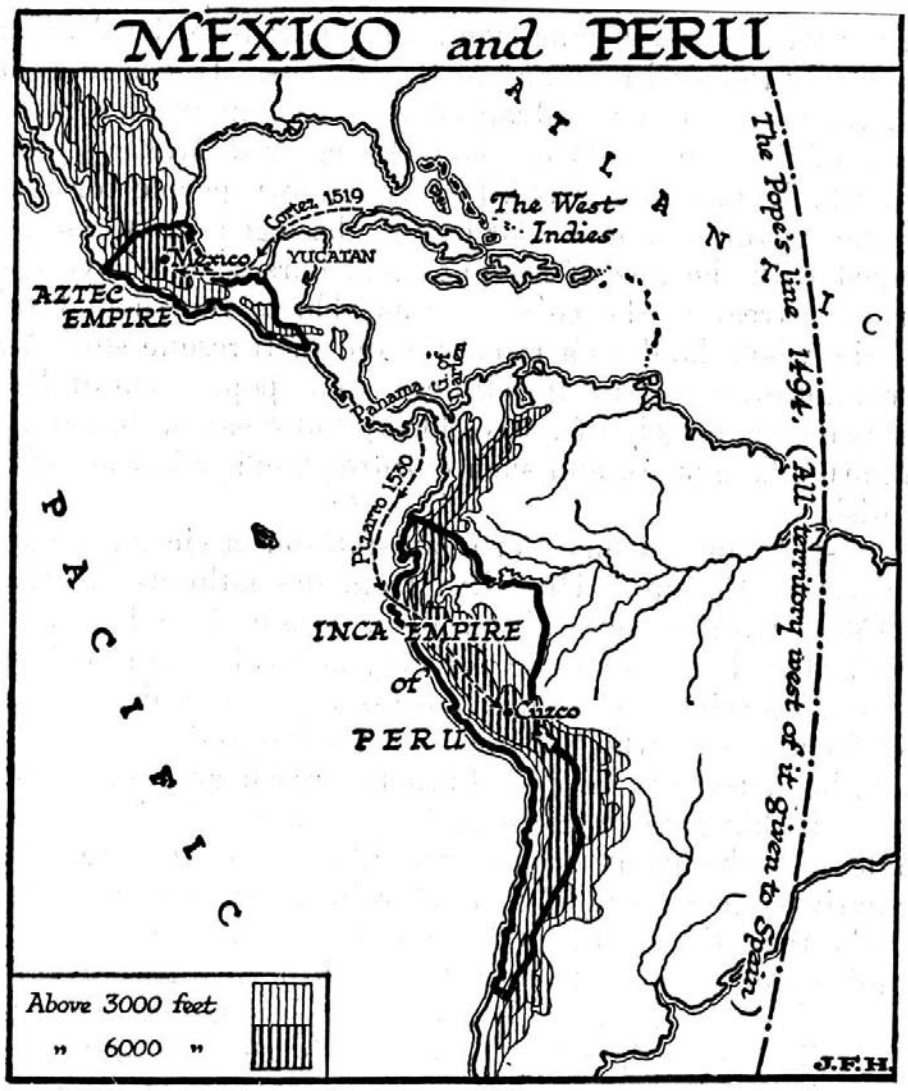
In Andean social relations each family head had the right to ask relations, allies, or neighbors for help in cultivating his plot. In return, he was obligated to offer them food and chicha (a fermented corn alcoholic beverage), and to help them on their own plots when asked. Mutual aid formed the ideological and material bedrock of all Andean social and productive relations. This system of reciprocal exchange existed at every level of Andean social organization: members of the ayllus, curacas (local lords) with their subordinate ayllus, and the Inca himself with all his subjects.

All Inca people collectively worked the lands of the Inca, who served as representative of the God of the Sun—the central god and religion of the empire. In return, they received food, as well as chicha and coca leaves (which were chewed and used for religious rites and for medicinal purposes); or they made cloth and clothing for tribute, using the Inca flocks; or they regularly performed service for public works, such as roads and buildings, or for military purposes that enabled the development of the state.

The Inca people also maintained the royal family and bureaucracy, centered in Cusco. In return for these services, the Inca allocated land and redistributed part of the tribute received—such as food, cloth, and clothes—to the communities, often in the form of welfare. Tribute was stored in centrally located warehouses to be dispensed during periods of shortages caused by famine, war, or natural disaster. The principles of reciprocity and redistribution, then, formed the organizing ideas that governed all relations in the Inca empire from community to state.

By the late fifteenth century and early sixteenth century, the Inca Empire had reached its maximum size. Such powerful states as the coastal Chimú Kingdom were defeated and incorporated into the empire, although the Chimús spoke a language, Yunga, that was entirely distinct from the Incas' Quechua. But as the limits of the

central Andean culture area were reached in present-day Chile and Argentina, as well as in the Amazon forests, the Incas encountered serious resistance, and those territories were never thoroughly subjugated.



At the outset, the Incas shared with most of their ethnic neighbors the same basic technology: weaving, pottery, metallurgy, architecture, construction engineering, and irrigation agriculture. During their period of dominance, little was added to this inventory of skills, other than the size of the population they ruled and the degree and efficiency of control they attained. The latter, however, constituted a rather remarkable accomplishment, particularly because it was achieved without benefit of either the wheel or a formal system of writing. Instead of writing, the Incas used the intricate and highly accurate khipu (knot-tying) system of record-keeping. Imperial achievements were the more extraordinary considering the relative brevity of the period during which the empire was built (perhaps four generations) and the formidable geographic obstacles of the Andean landscape.

By the time that the Spaniards arrived in 1532, the empire extended some 1,860 kilometers along the Andean spine—north to southern Colombia and south to northern Chile, between the Pacific Ocean in the west and the Amazonian rain forest in the east. Some five years before the Spanish invasion, this vast empire was rocked by a civil war that, combined with diseases imported by the Spaniards, would ultimately weaken its ability to confront the European invaders. The premature death by measles of the reigning Sapa Inca, Huayna Cápac (1493-1524), opened the

way for a dynastic struggle between the emperor's two sons, Huáscar (from Cusco) and the illegitimate Atahualpa (from Quito), who each had inherited half the empire. After a five-year civil war (1528-32), Atahualpa (1532-33) emerged victorious and is said to have tortured and put to death more than 300 members of Huáscar's family. This divisive and debilitating internecine conflict left the Incas particularly vulnerable just as Francisco Pizarro and his small force of adventurers came marching up into the Sierra.

1. According to legend substantiated by linguistic and archaeological work, the Aztecs originally came from

   a. southeast Mexico, where the Mayans also lived.
   b. southwest Mexico, where the Mayans also lived.
   c. northern or northwest Mexico.
   d. the Valley of Mexico.

2. The capital city of the Aztecs was

   a. Tenochtitlán, built on an island in Lago de Texcoco.
   b. Chalpaltepec Hill, where drinking water came from.
   c. Aztlán, north of the Valley of Mexico.
   d. in the Mayan areas of southeast Mexico.

3. The Aztec emperor

   a. was chosen by the Aztec god Huitzilopichtli.
   b. was chosen by an eagle perched on a cactus tree holding a snake in its mouth.
   c. inherited his position.
   d. was chosen by merit from among the ruling dynasty.

4. Beneath the ruling dynasty, the highest level of Aztec society was

   a. the merchant class, who lived apart in the city and had its own courts, guilds, and gods.
   b. the nobility: high priests, military and political leaders.
   c. farmers, artisans, civil servants.
   d. slaves.

5. The Aztecs expanded their empire mainly to

   a. protect their borders from Iwasiz.
   b. bring more residents to their capital.
   c. obtain tribute, including cocoa, cotton, corn, feathers, precious metals and jaguar skins.
   d. exert strict control over the conduct of internal affairs of each conquered city in the empire.

6. The Inca empire grew rapidly under the rule of the great leader and lawgiver

   a. Tawantinsuyu.
   b. Quechas.
   c. Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui.
   d. Topa Inca Yupanqui.

7. The Inca emperors ruled through local lords, called

   a. ayllu.
   b. chicha.
   c. curacas.
   d. mitmag.

8. The mitmag system

   a. sent colonies of settlers to climatically different Andean territories in order to cultivate a variety of crops.
   b. required the Inca people to work the land.
   c. required the Inca people to make cloth and clothing.
   d. required the Inca people to work on public projects.

9. Incas used the original mitmag system to

   a. develop writing and the wheel.
   b. establish direct rule over diverse ethnic groups.
   c. store tribute in centrally located warehouses.
   d. establish permanent military garrisons along the Incan frontier.

10. Compare and contrast the organization of Aztec society to the Inca ayllus system, and to European feudalism. Use specific evidence from the text to support your answer.

11. Do you think the Incas could have resisted Pizarro and the Spanish if there had been no civil war? Why or why not? Use specific evidence from the text to support your answer.