

America's original civilisations

The Olmecs emerged on Mexico's Gulf coast from around 1200BC and spread from centres such as Tres Zapotes and La Venta. In the Oaxaca valley they were superseded by the Zapotecs c600BC, and to the east, the first Maya city states began to grow. There was fierce rivalry between cities such as Tikal, El Mirador and Palenque. By cAD400, the multi-ethnic metropolis of Teotihuacan dominated the highlands. The Maya began to decline from cAD700, their culture eventually merging with the northern Toltecs. It wasn't until the mid-1400s that the Aztecs expanded their empire from their capital Tenochtitlan, which succumbed to Spanish invasion in 1519.

Andean culture (see opposite page) began with early farming cultures c3500BC. Rich fishing resources underpinned developments along the Pacific coast. The Chavín culture flourished in the Andes from 900BC until c200BC, when their influence was eclipsed by the Moche to the north and the Nazca to the south. But around AD700, the highland Wari rose to power - sharing a similar culture with that of the thriving city of Tiwanaku on Lake Titicaca. Their influence waned around AD800. From its capital Cuzco, the Inca empire then later spread to encompass Peru, much of Bolivia, Argentina and Chile to the south, and Ecuador and parts of Colombia to the north. **DH**

