

# The Aztec Civilization



**Aztec Eagle Warrior**

# The Beginnings of an Empire

- The Aztecs began as a group of farmers from northern Mexico
  - They soon migrated into Central Mexico
- Created a city on an island of Lake Texcoco
- 1300s – Aztecs began to spread out by conquering others

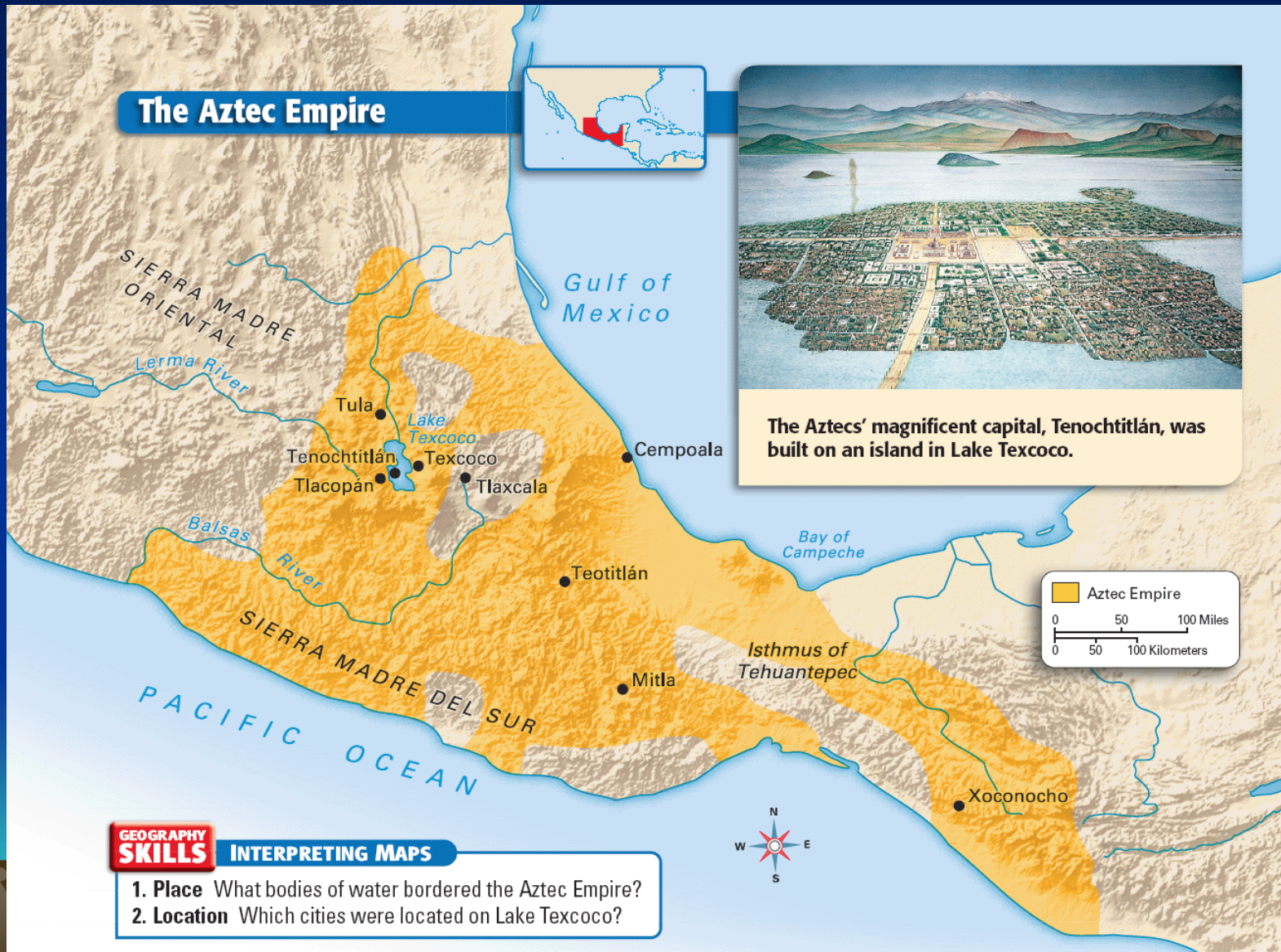


# Aztec Empire

## The Aztec Empire



The Aztecs' magnificent capital, Tenochtitlán, was built on an island in Lake Texcoco.



**GEOGRAPHY  
SKILLS**

### INTERPRETING MAPS

1. **Place** What bodies of water bordered the Aztec Empire?
2. **Location** Which cities were located on Lake Texcoco?



# Valley of Mexico

c. 1519

- Brackish Water
- Fresh Water
- Marshes
- Chinampas
- Causeway



# The Aztecs Build an Empire

- **War was very important to the Aztecs**
  - Fierce fighters
  - Demanded tribute from those they conquered
  - Tribute – the conquered pay the conqueror
- **Tribute combined with trade made the Aztecs VERY rich**



# Tenochtitlan

- 1400s – Aztecs are the most powerful people in Mesoamerica
- **Capital city – Tenochtitlan**
  - **City built on an island**
- Population of over 200,000 at its height



# Tenochtitlan





# Tenochtitlan

## History Close-up

### Tenochtitlán

The Aztecs turned a swampy, uninhabited island into one of the largest and grandest cities in the world. The first Europeans to visit Tenochtitlán were amazed. At the time, the Aztec capital was about five times bigger than London.

The Great Temple stood at the heart of the city. On top of the temple were two shrines—a blue shrine for the rain god and a red shrine for the sun god.

Gold, silver, cloaks, and precious stones were among the many items sold at the market.

A network of canals linked different parts of the city.

Aztec farmers grew crops on "floating gardens" called *chinampas*.

**ANALYSIS SKILL**

**ANALYZING VISUALS**

What is the most important building in this picture? How can you tell?





# Tenochtitlan



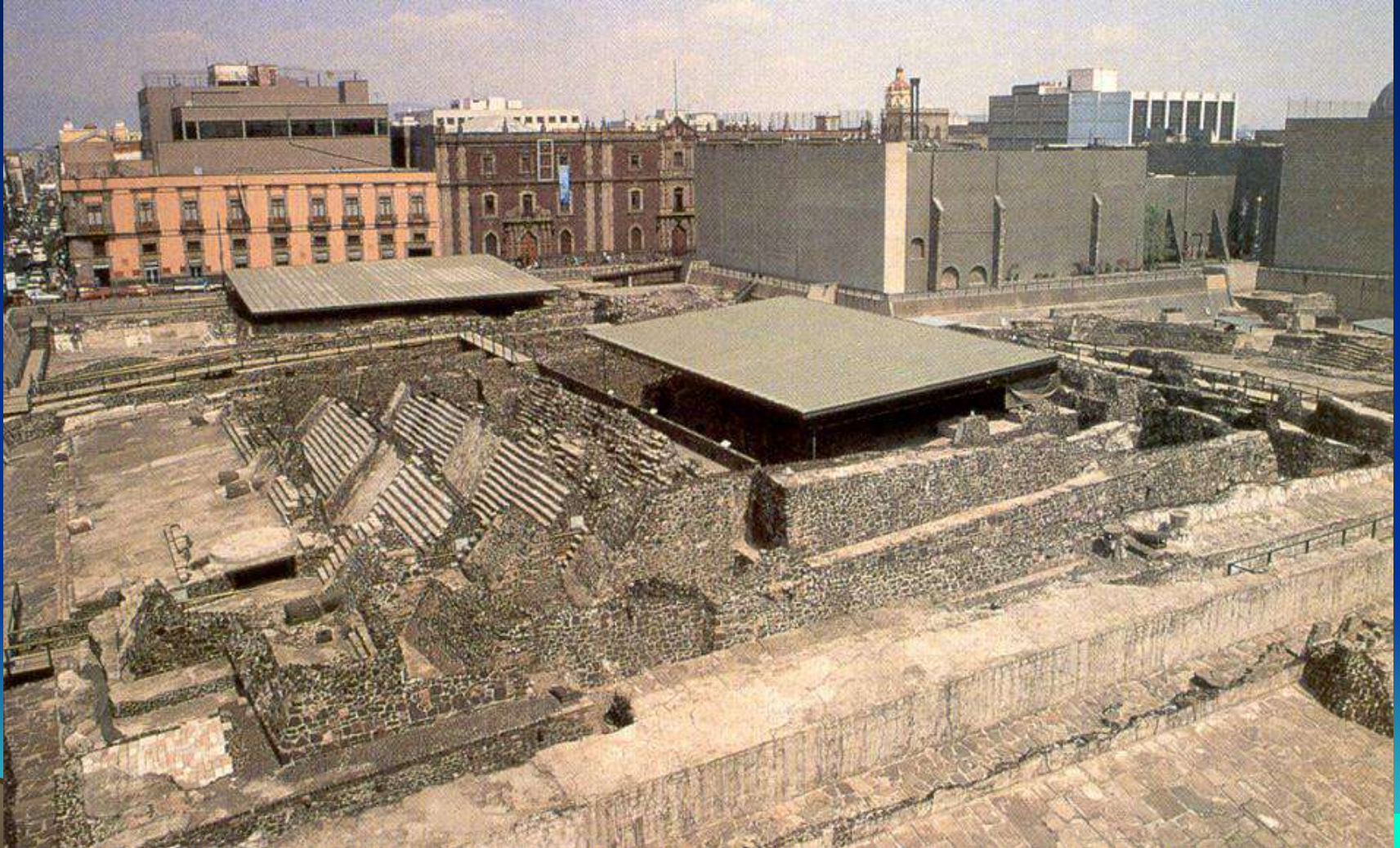


# Great Temple





# Great Temple





# Tenochtitlan

- Geographic challenges of an island city:
  - How do we get to and from the city from shore?
    - **Causeways connected island to lake shore**
    - **Causeways – raised roads over water or wet ground**
  - How do we farm on an island?
    - **The Aztecs piled soil on large rafts**
    - **Anchored rafts to trees standing in the water**
    - **Chinampas – Floating gardens**



# Chinampas





# Chinampas





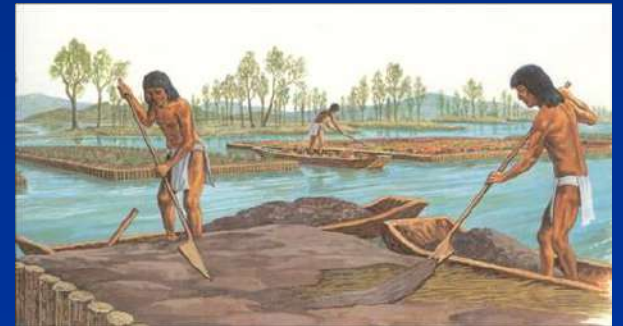
# Aztec Society

- **Aztec Emperor was the most important person in society**
  - Highest class
- **Nobles – 2<sup>nd</sup> Class**
  - In charge with the emperor
- **Warriors and priests – 3<sup>rd</sup> class**
  - Warriors – highly respected for their bravery
  - Priests – Kept calendars and in charge of religion

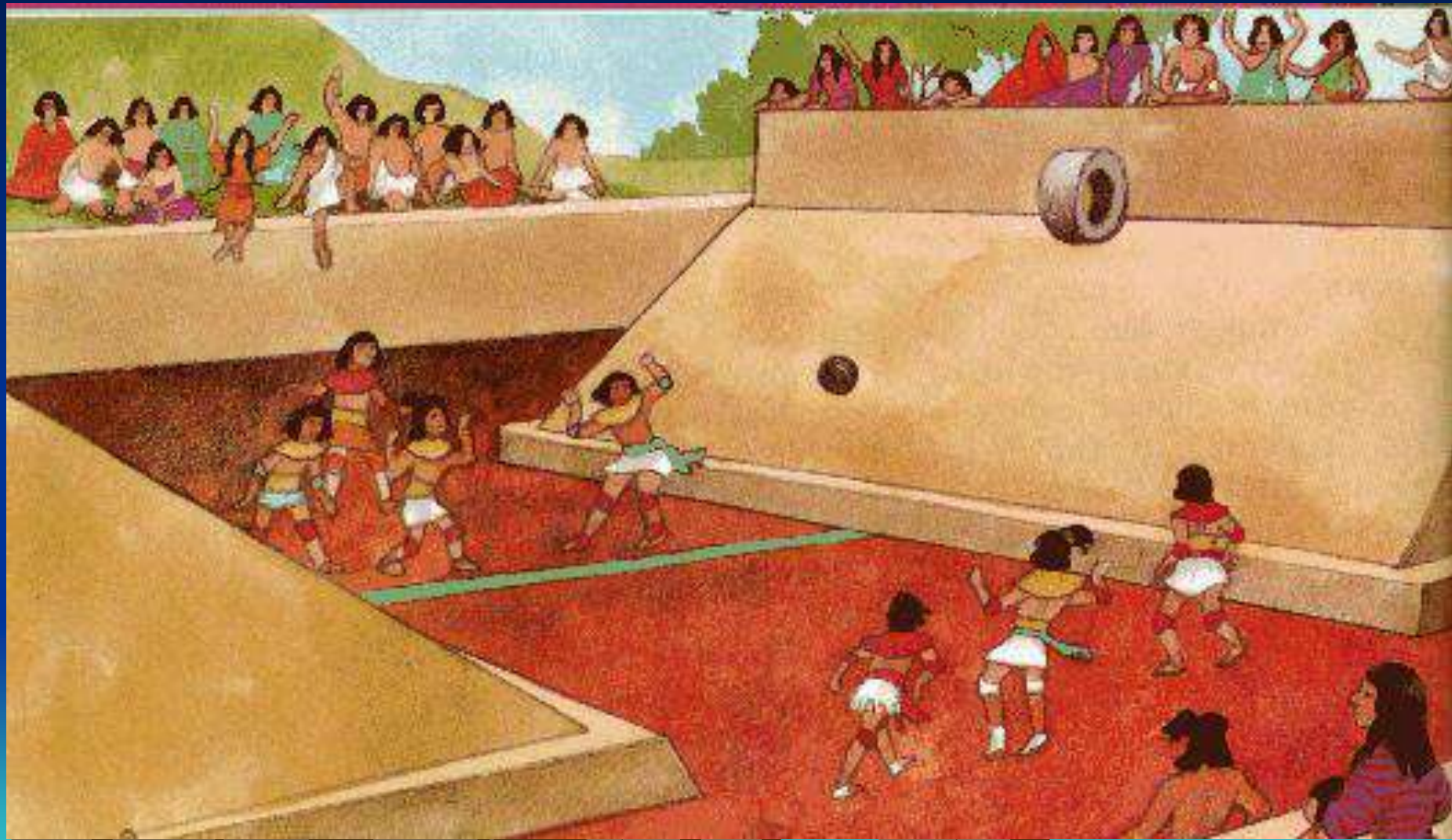


# Aztec Society

- **Merchants and Craftsmen – 4<sup>th</sup> Class**
  - Merchants = traders
  - Craftsmen made specific items for people
- **Farmers – 5<sup>th</sup> Class**
  - Majority of population
  - Did not own their own land
  - Upper classes demanded a lot from them
- **Slaves – Bottom - 6<sup>th</sup> Class**



# Tlachtli





# Tlachtli Hoop



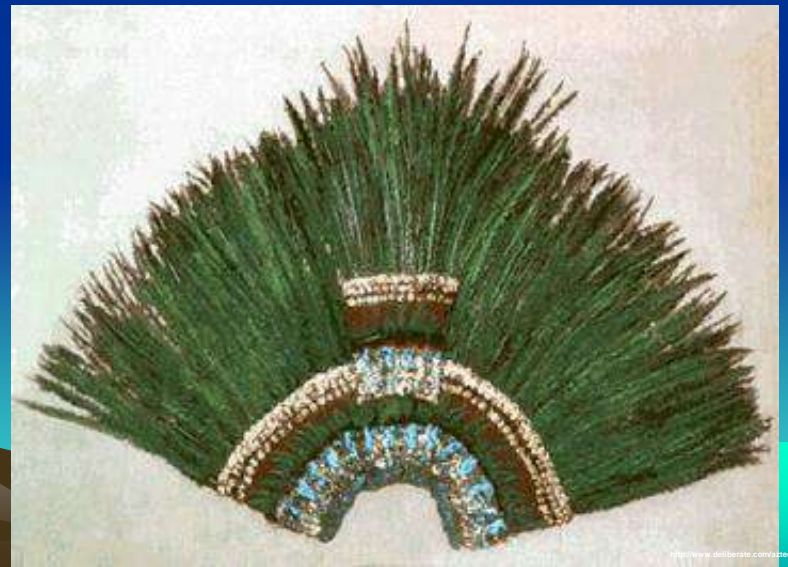
# Religion and Warfare

- **Aztecs were polytheistic**
- **Believed they had to please the gods**
  - Human sacrifices were necessary
  - Sacrificed as many as 10,000 a year
- **To make sure they had enough victims, they would often go to war to acquire more**



# Cultural Achievements

- **Aztecs greatly appreciated art and beauty**
  - **Stone pyramids and statues were built**
    - Decorated with gold and gemstones
  - **Used feathers and jewelry to make masks**
  - **Wove colorful designs on their clothing**





# Cultural Achievements

- **Aztecs studied astronomy a lot**
  - **Created a calendar similar to the Mayans**
- Believed in education
- **Kept detailed written records about their history**
- Passed on stories with oral traditions



# Aztec Codex



# Cacao Plant in an Aztec Codex





# Aztec Calendar



# Cortes Conquers the Aztecs



- **1519 – Spanish conquistadors reach Mexico**
  - **Conquistador – Spanish conqueror**
- Looking for gold, land, and slaves
- **Led by Hernando Cortes**
- **Aztec Emperor Moctezuma II believed Cortes to be the god Quetzalcoatl**
  - Aztec legend: Quetzalcoatl will return in 1519
  - **Moctezuma II gives Cortes gifts**



# Cortes and Moctezuma





# Cortes Conquers the Aztecs

- Cortes was not satisfied with gifts
  - Takes Moctezuma II hostage
- Aztecs attacked the Spanish and drove them away
  - Moctezuma II is killed in battle



# Cortes Conquers the Aztecs

- **Cortes returns in 1520 with help from Indian tribes who dislike Aztecs**
  - Spanish had better armor, cannons, and horses
  - Aztecs had never seen horses before
    - Terrified them
  - Combined with diseases, Aztecs are weakened
- **1521 – Aztecs surrender; the Empire is over**



# Cortes Conquers the Aztecs

