Maya Inca Aztec Trade

The Olmecs are considered to be the oldest Mesoamerican traders. Largely, they traded rubber balls, and waterproof materials that were made of latex. The Maya began trading on the Yucatan sometime around 600 A.D. Over the next 300 years they developed an elaborate system of trade that was based on the seacoast. The center of Mayan trade was Cerros, Belize. Cerros could be reached by two rivers and it served as a junction for Caribbean trade routes. Also, the Mayans built towns and ports near naturally protected bays. The most popular trade items were salt, cotton, spices, feathers, and cacao. Archaeologists have discovered obsidian at Mayan excavations that has come from as far away as central Mexico, almost 900 miles away. Also, turquoise excavated from Los Cerrillos, New Mexico, has been uncovered in the Guatemalan low lands. We also know from excavations in Chaco Canyon and elsewhere, that the Mayans traded with the Anasazi in the United States Southwest. We know this because macaw feathers and pyrite mirrors have been excavated.

Mayan trade depended largely on salt. The largest salt beds were in the northern Yucatan. Salt was used extensively in the preservation of meats, and for its nutritional value. The Mayans exported 1,000's of tons by way of its seaport towns.

The Aztecs had their own merchant class of traders called the pochteca. Unlike the Maya, who depended largely on sea routes, the Aztecs used land routes for trade. Many Aztec traders worked as spies for the government. Aztec traders were frequently attacked by the Maya and by bandits. Their items were usually carried by human cargo haulers who were called tlameces. This men were trained to haul very heavy loads for long distances. Aztec traders primarily traded gold, copper and jade for items such as chocolate, vanilla, and rubber. By the time the Spaniards arrived almost everyone in Mesoamerica was speaking Nahuatl, which was the language of the Aztecs.

Historians believe that the Inca traded as far north as western Mexico. They base this on clothing styles, pottery, hairless dogs, and the fact that the Tarascan language is very similar to the Inca language of Quechua. This is a distance of almost 2,400 miles by sea. However, we know that some of these ocean going balsa rafts could carry up to 25 people.
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Answer using complete sentences

1. What did the Olmecs trade?

2. Why was Cerros, Belize the center of Maya trade?

3. What were some of the most popular trade items?

4. How do we know that the Maya traded with the Anasazi?

5. Why was salt so important?

6. What were that Aztec cargo haulers called?

7. How far north did the Inca trade and how do we know this?

8. Which language was primarily spoken when Cortes arrived?

9. Briefly describe the Aztec traders.

10. How big were the balsa rafts that were used the Inca and how far do historians believe they traveled?