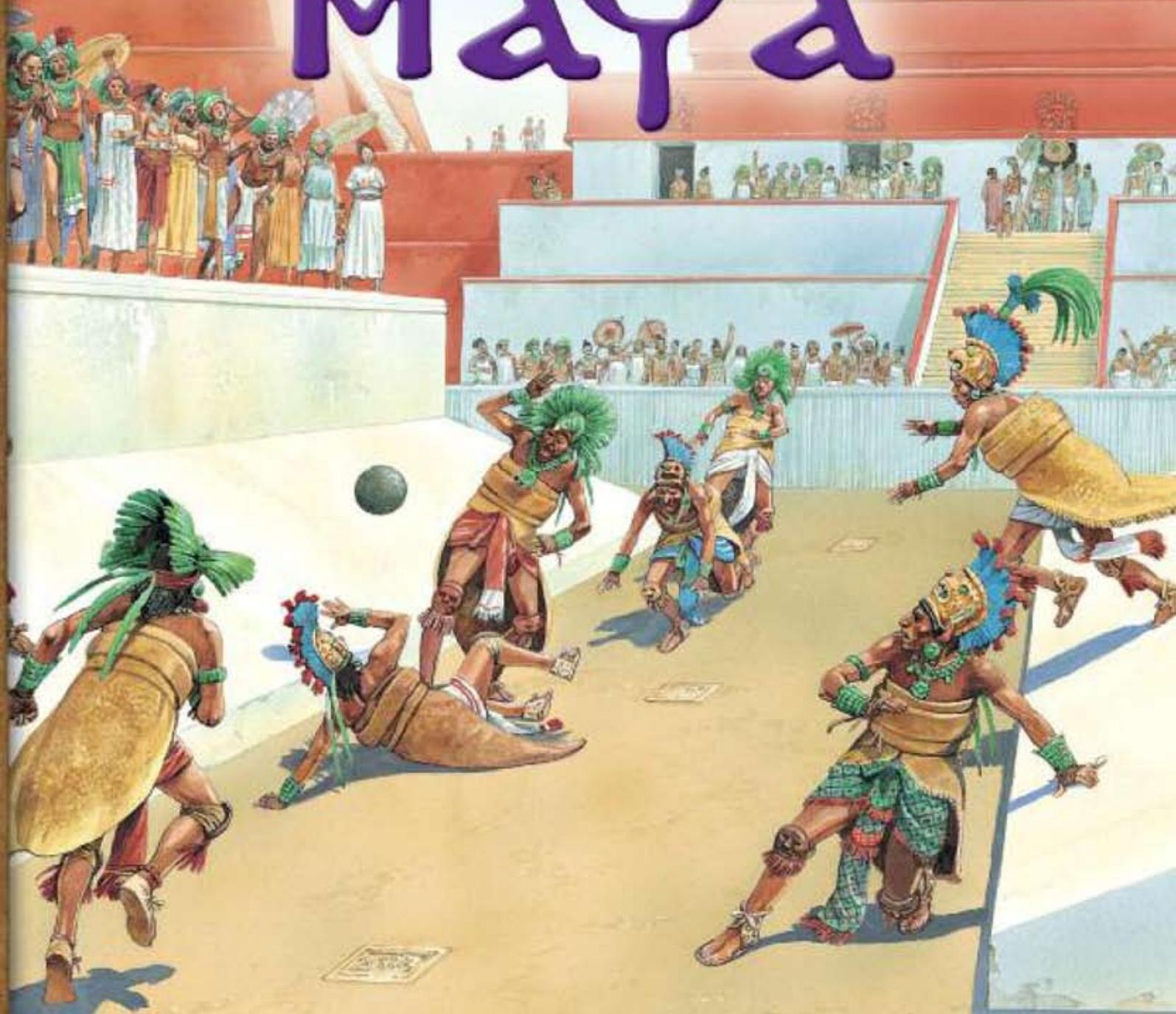


The story of the

# LOST CITY

OF THE

# MAYYA



*The story of the*  
LOST CITY OF THE  
MAYA



*illustrated by*  
Peter Scott

 Orpheus

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Look out for the boy with his pet parrot. He appears in all of the illustrations. More often than not, he cannot resist stealing something!



## THE LAND OF THE MAYA

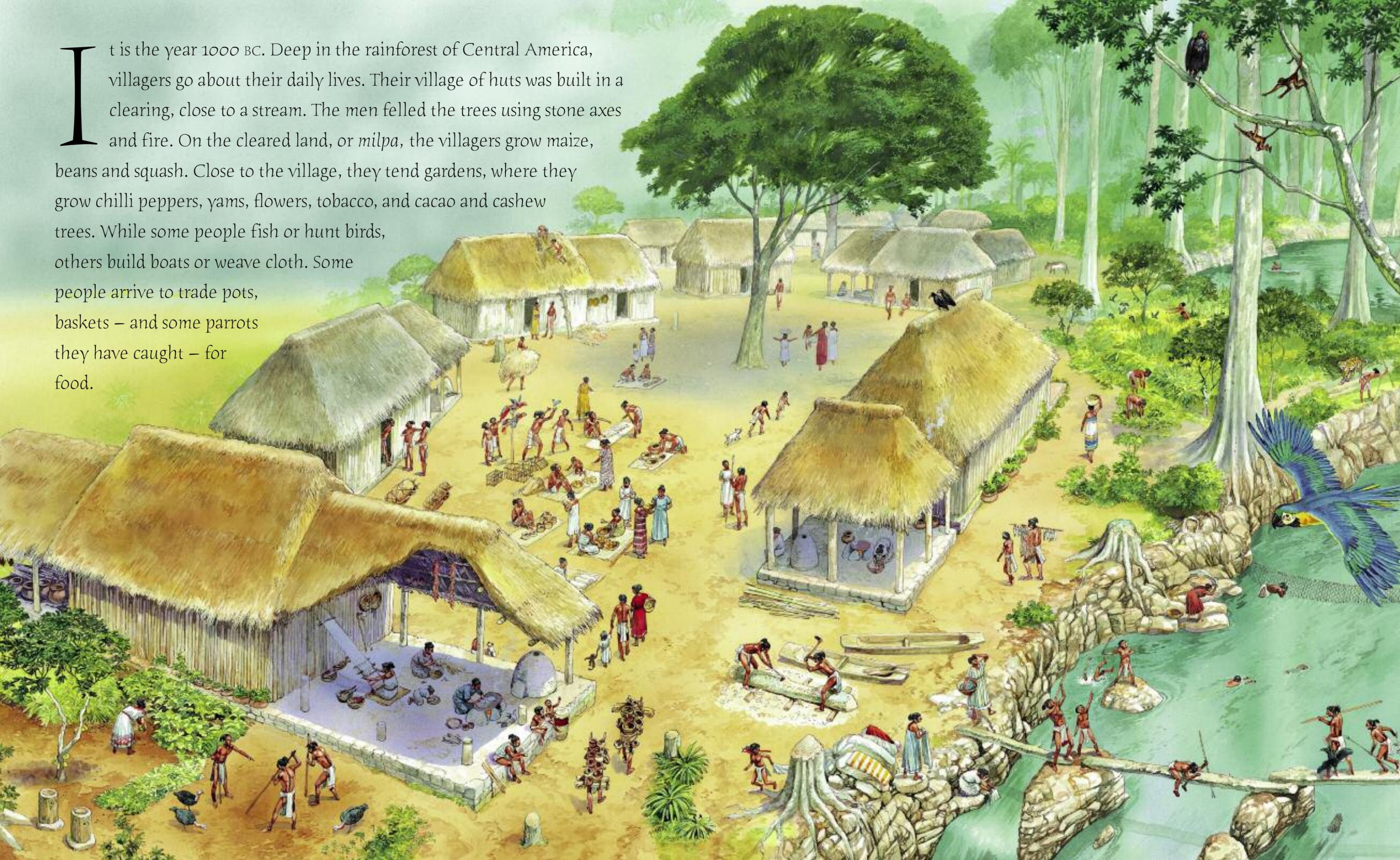
At about the same time as the Romans were ruling supreme in Europe, far across the Atlantic Ocean in the Yucatán Peninsula of Central America, another great civilization was emerging: that of the Maya. In the period 300 BC to AD 250, the Maya people founded cities in the tropical rainforests. They devised a system of writing and invented an elaborate

calendar. They produced wall paintings and carvings, and built huge temple-pyramids and palaces. Although they had no wheeled vehicles, they built tracks through the forest.

This is the story of a Maya city, how it began, was lost, and then found again.



It is the year 1000 BC. Deep in the rainforest of Central America, villagers go about their daily lives. Their village of huts was built in a clearing, close to a stream. The men felled the trees using stone axes and fire. On the cleared land, or *milpa*, the villagers grow maize, beans and squash. Close to the village, they tend gardens, where they grow chilli peppers, yams, flowers, tobacco, and cacao and cashew trees. While some people fish or hunt birds, others build boats or weave cloth. Some people arrive to trade pots, baskets – and some parrots they have caught – for food.

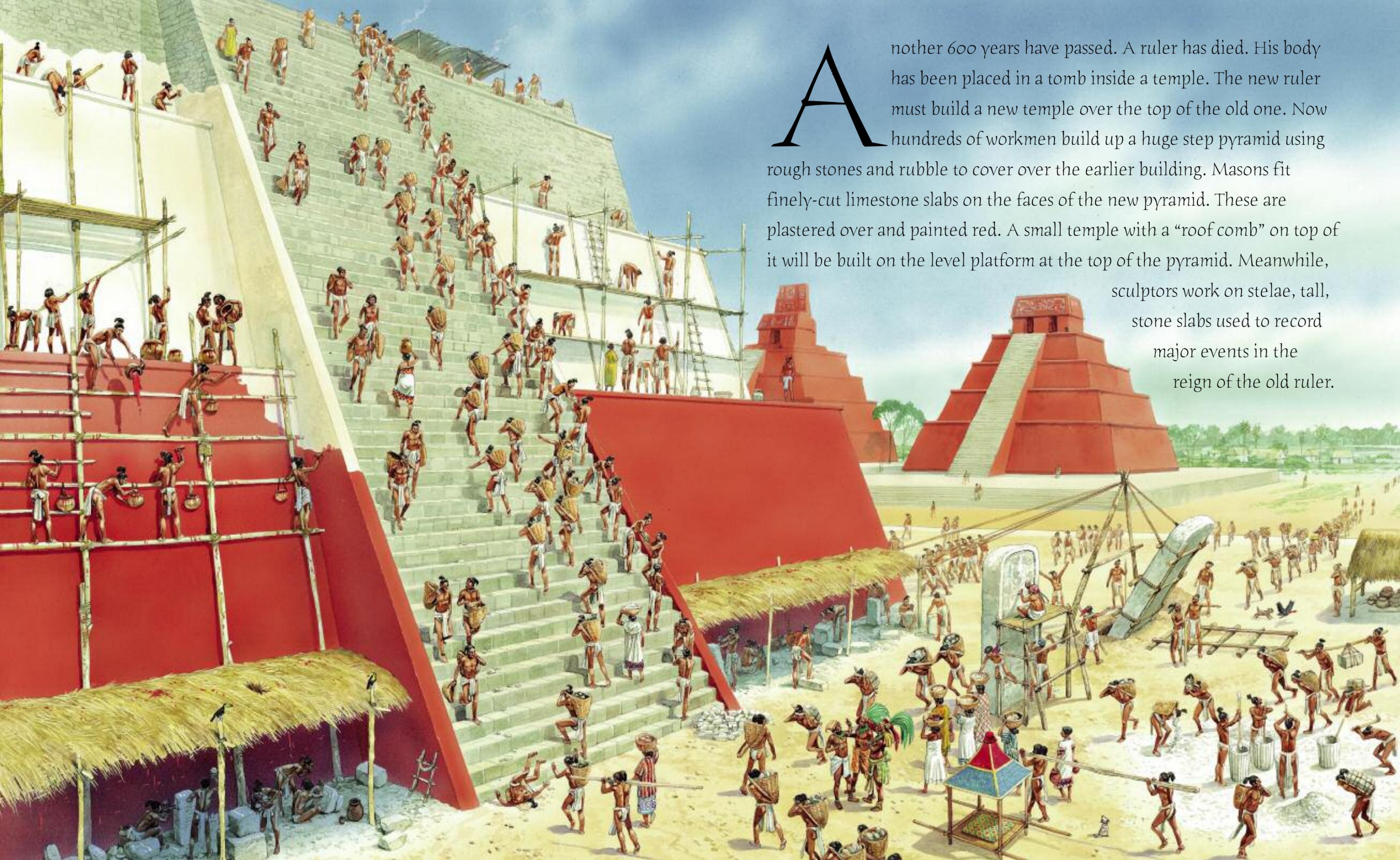


A thousand years later, the tiny village is dwarfed by the grand new city that has grown up beside it. The Maya people have cleared a large area of forest, drained swamps and constructed large stone buildings. The buildings and the open spaces between them (the “plazas”) stand on stone platforms to avoid flooding.

The heavy rain that falls every day on the plazas in the city drains away into reservoirs.

The city is home to a ruler. He claims his power from the gods, for whom the great temple-pyramids are built. Priests, architects, craftsmen and labourers have all come to live in the city, and traders supply them with food and goods.

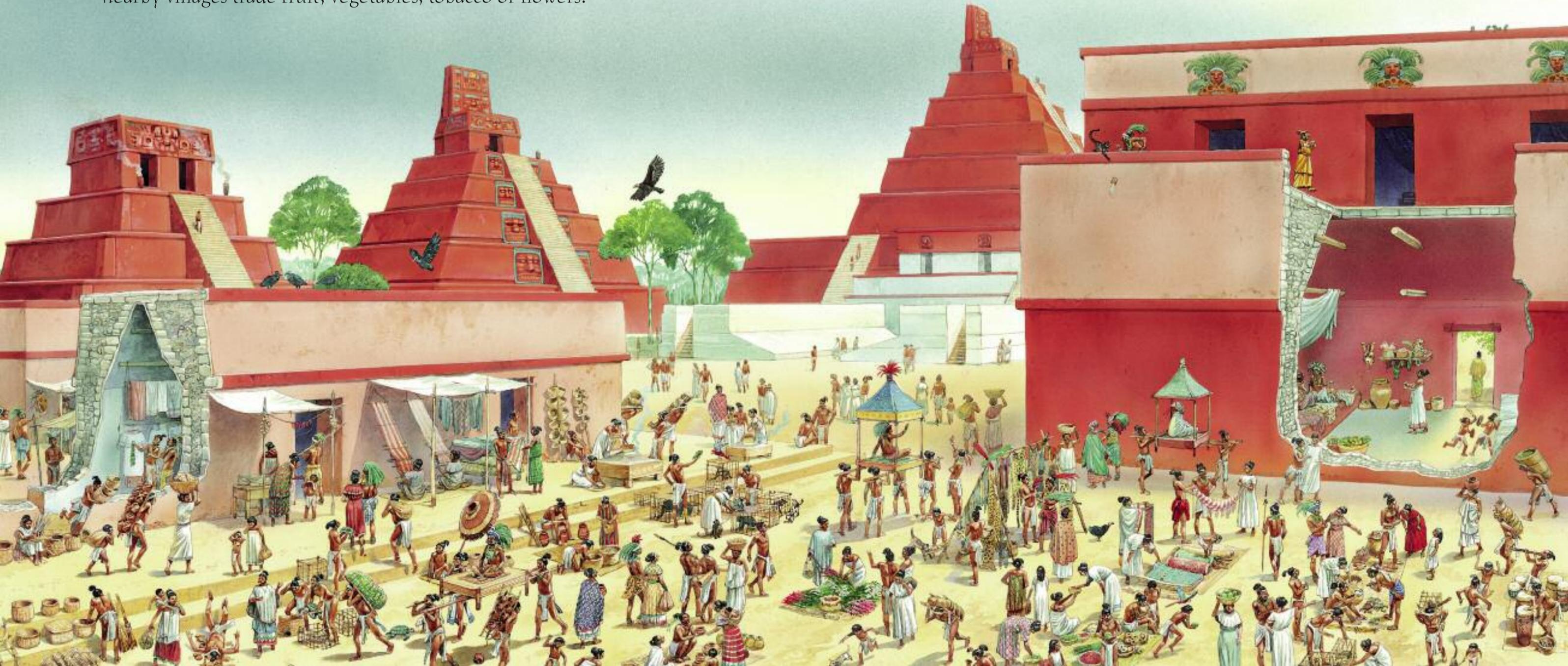




Another 600 years have passed. A ruler has died. His body has been placed in a tomb inside a temple. The new ruler must build a new temple over the top of the old one. Now hundreds of workmen build up a huge step pyramid using rough stones and rubble to cover over the earlier building. Masons fit finely-cut limestone slabs on the faces of the new pyramid. These are plastered over and painted red. A small temple with a “roof comb” on top of it will be built on the level platform at the top of the pyramid. Meanwhile, sculptors work on stelae, tall, stone slabs used to record major events in the reign of the old ruler.

A few years later, it is market day in the Maya city. In one of the plazas, outside a noble family's palace, traders set up their stalls. There is a dazzling variety of goods. Hunters offer skins of deer, puma, jaguar and crocodile, and carcasses of armadillo, iguana and other forest animals. There are also pet monkeys and birds in cages. Fishermen bring dried fish, live turtles, shellfish and crabs, while people from nearby villages trade fruit, vegetables, tobacco or flowers.

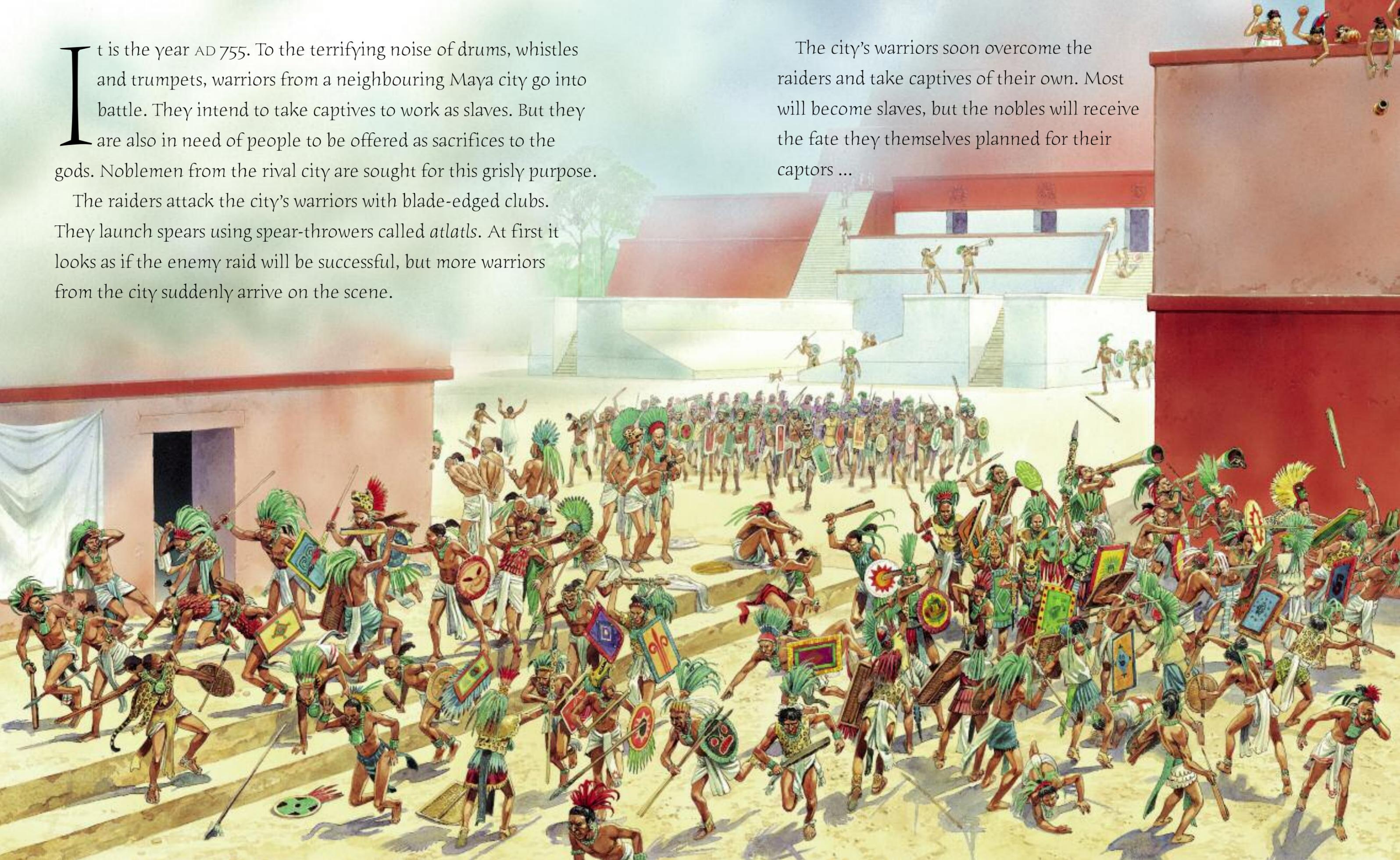
Textiles, musical instruments, toys, blades, candles and tools are all on sale. Instead of money, people use cacao beans to buy goods. These same beans are used to make drinking chocolate. Carried about in litters, nobles live luxurious lives in their spacious palaces adorned with colourful fabrics.



It is the year AD 755. To the terrifying noise of drums, whistles and trumpets, warriors from a neighbouring Maya city go into battle. They intend to take captives to work as slaves. But they are also in need of people to be offered as sacrifices to the gods. Noblemen from the rival city are sought for this grisly purpose.

The raiders attack the city's warriors with blade-edged clubs. They launch spears using spear-throwers called *atlatls*. At first it looks as if the enemy raid will be successful, but more warriors from the city suddenly arrive on the scene.

The city's warriors soon overcome the raiders and take captives of their own. Most will become slaves, but the nobles will receive the fate they themselves planned for their captors ...



**A**t the top of one of the city's great temple-pyramids, the ruler and his priests prepare for an important ceremony. For the Maya, human sacrifice is a sacred event. They believe that sacrifice is like a payment to the gods. In return, they will receive rain, a good harvest and victory in war.

The noble captives, stripped of their fine clothes, are led up the pyramid steps. To the sounds of trumpets and drums, the ruler performs a kind of dance. The captives beg for mercy. Meanwhile, some women perform a ceremony in which they offer their own blood to the gods. One of them pierces her tongue, then passes a rope of thorns through it.

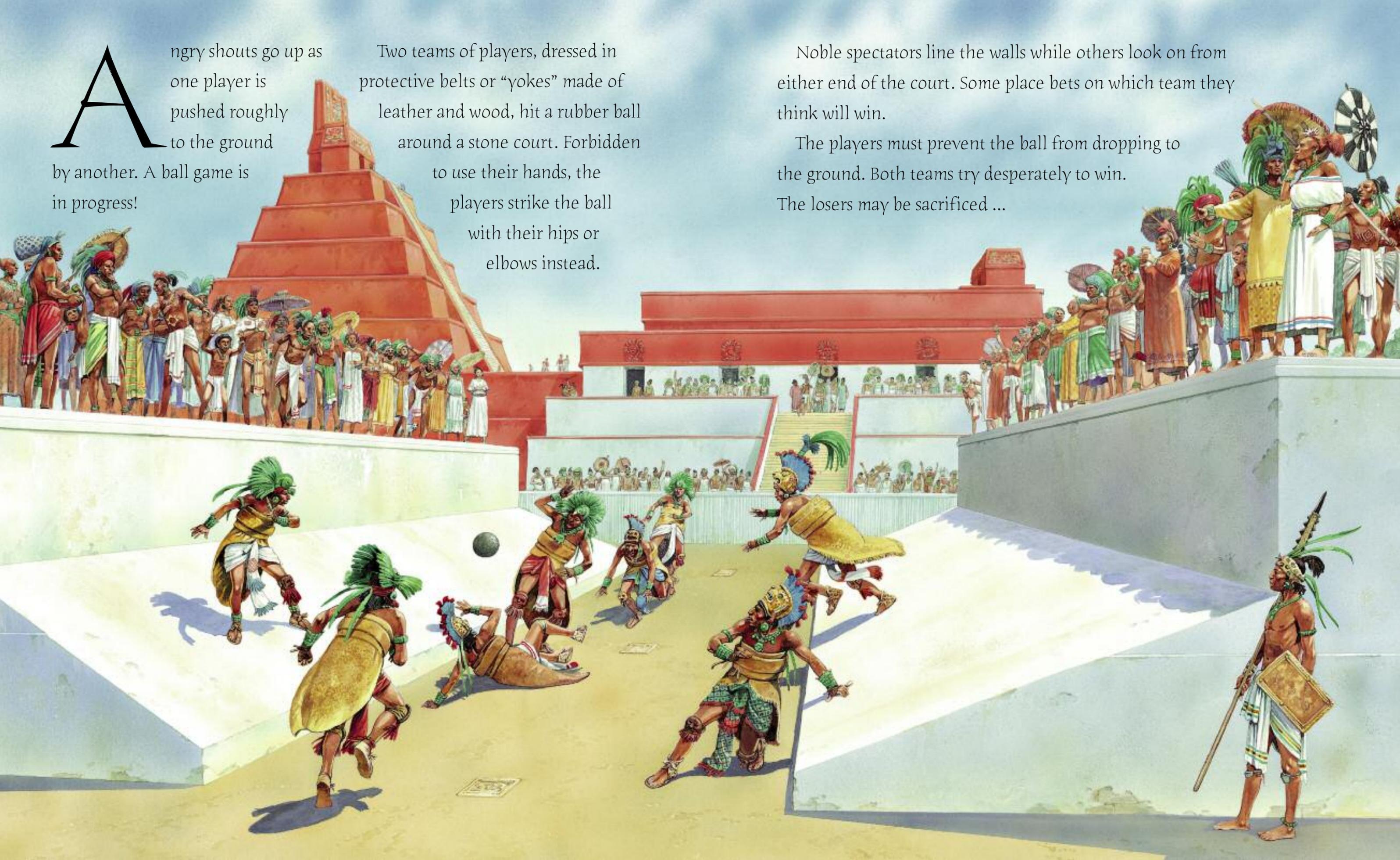


**A**ngry shouts go up as one player is pushed roughly to the ground by another. A ball game is in progress!

Two teams of players, dressed in protective belts or “yokes” made of leather and wood, hit a rubber ball around a stone court. Forbidden to use their hands, the players strike the ball with their hips or elbows instead.

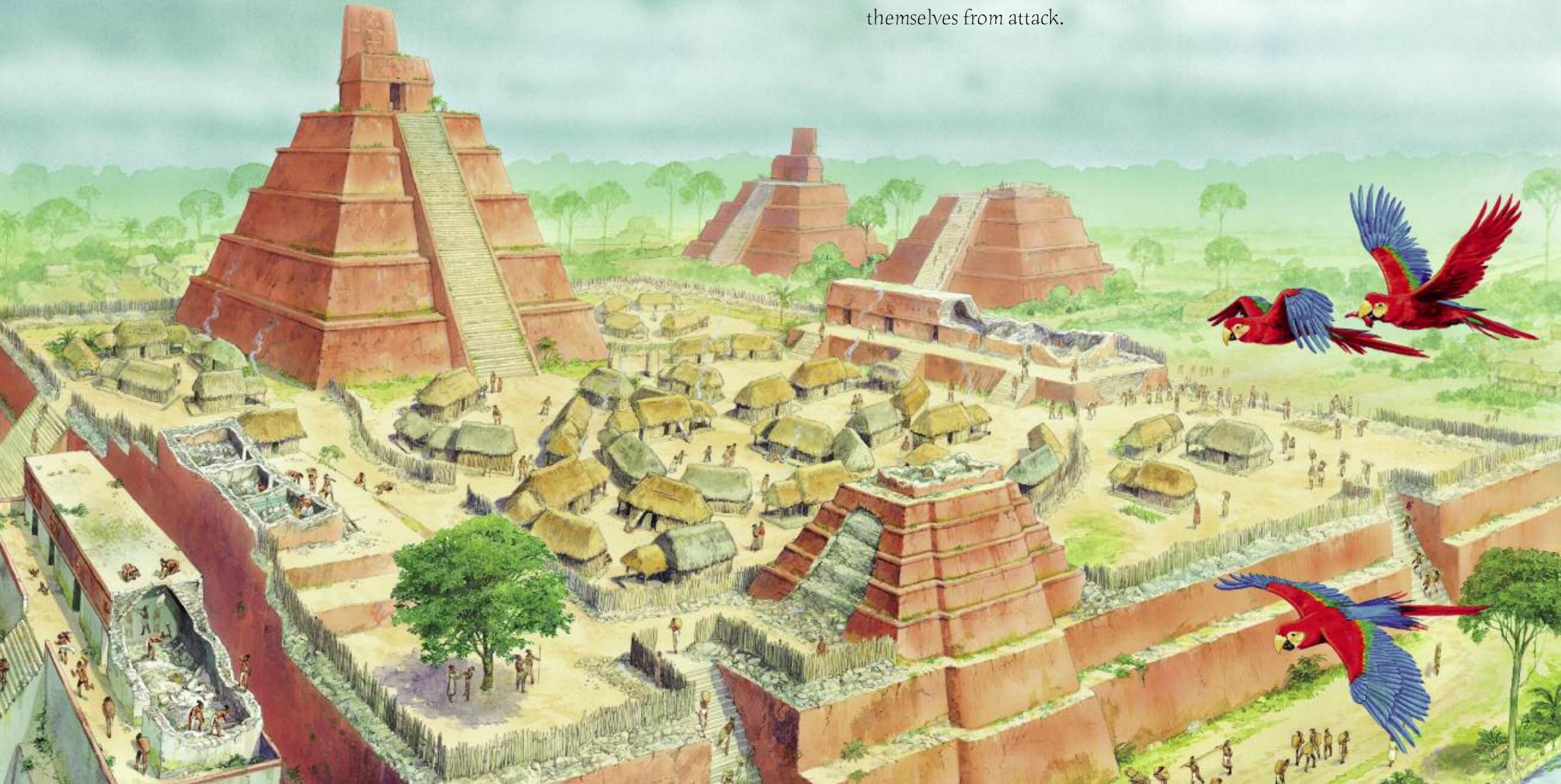
Noble spectators line the walls while others look on from either end of the court. Some place bets on which team they think will win.

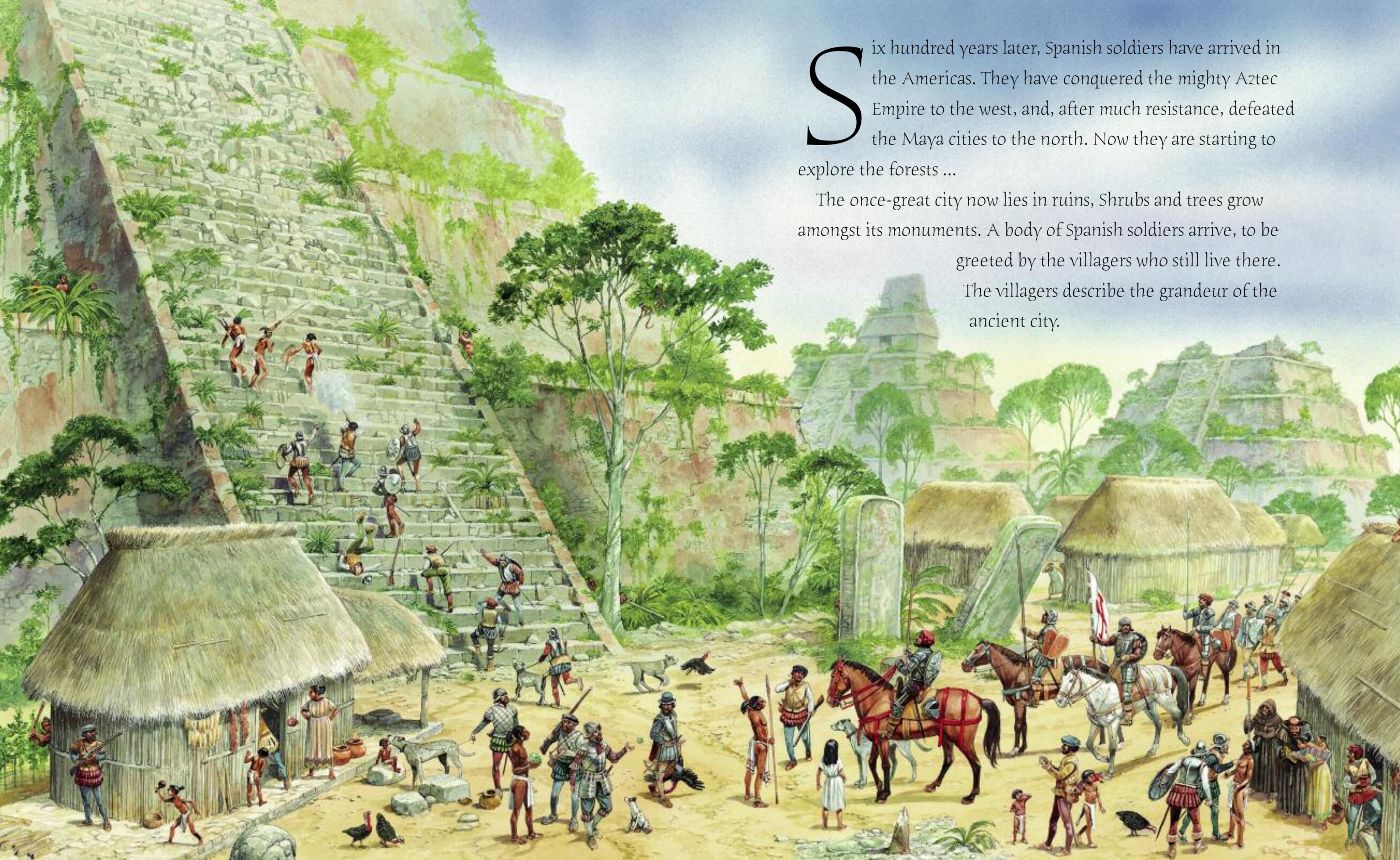
The players must prevent the ball from dropping to the ground. Both teams try desperately to win. The losers may be sacrificed ...



**I**t is now the year AD 910. The great city has fallen on hard times. There is no ruler. Priests no longer perform ceremonies on the temple-pyramids. The magnificent palaces, once lived in by nobles, have fallen to ruin, their treasures and finery vanished.

Years of warfare have resulted in defeat and loss of trade. Many people have abandoned the city. Now the workers, farmers and craftspeople live in their thatch huts clustered among the crumbling temples and palaces of the old city. They build wooden fences, called palisades, to defend themselves from attack.





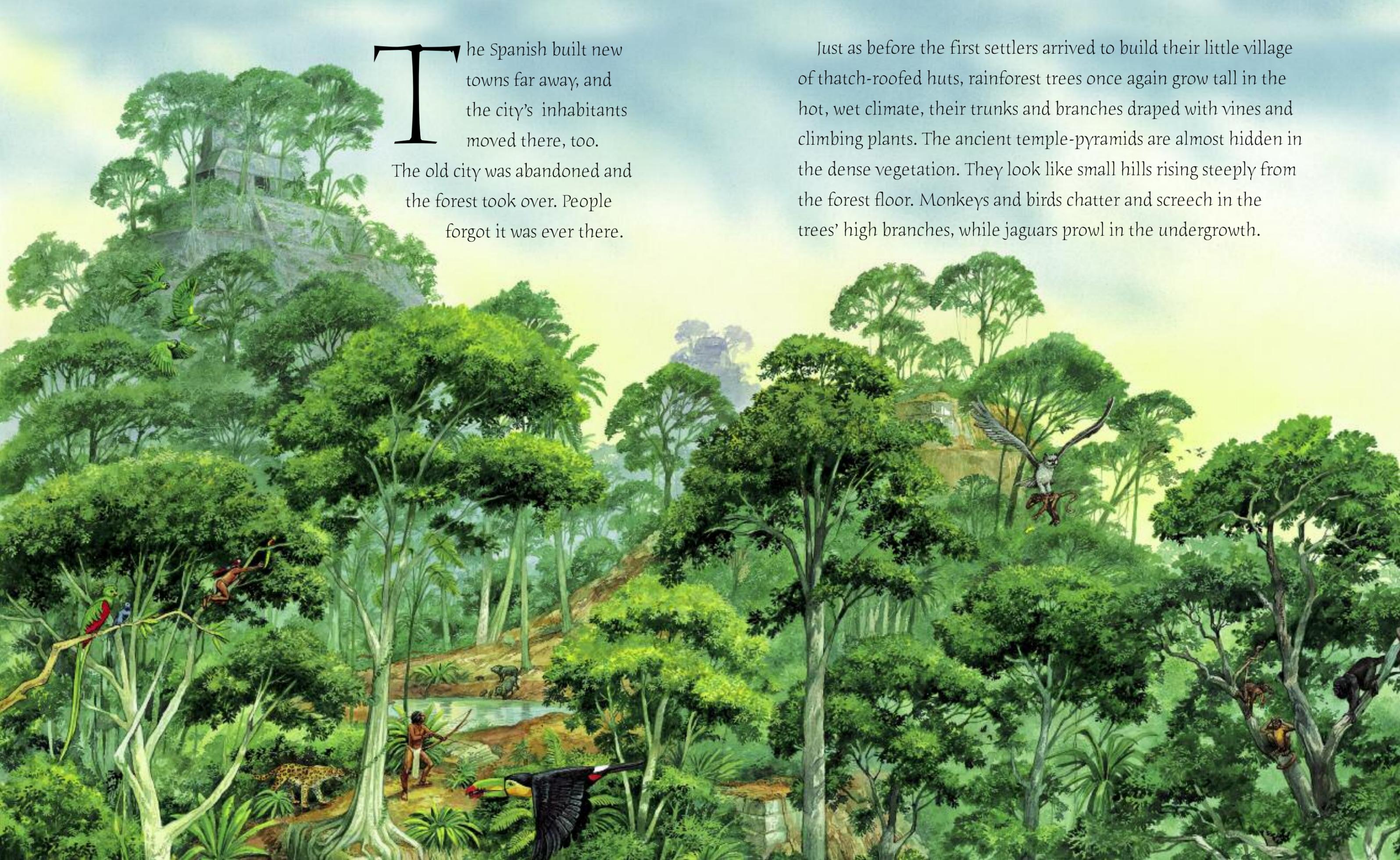
Six hundred years later, Spanish soldiers have arrived in the Americas. They have conquered the mighty Aztec Empire to the west, and, after much resistance, defeated the Maya cities to the north. Now they are starting to explore the forests ...

The once-great city now lies in ruins, Shrubs and trees grow amongst its monuments. A body of Spanish soldiers arrive, to be greeted by the villagers who still live there. The villagers describe the grandeur of the ancient city.

**T**he Spanish built new towns far away, and the city's inhabitants moved there, too.

The old city was abandoned and the forest took over. People forgot it was ever there.

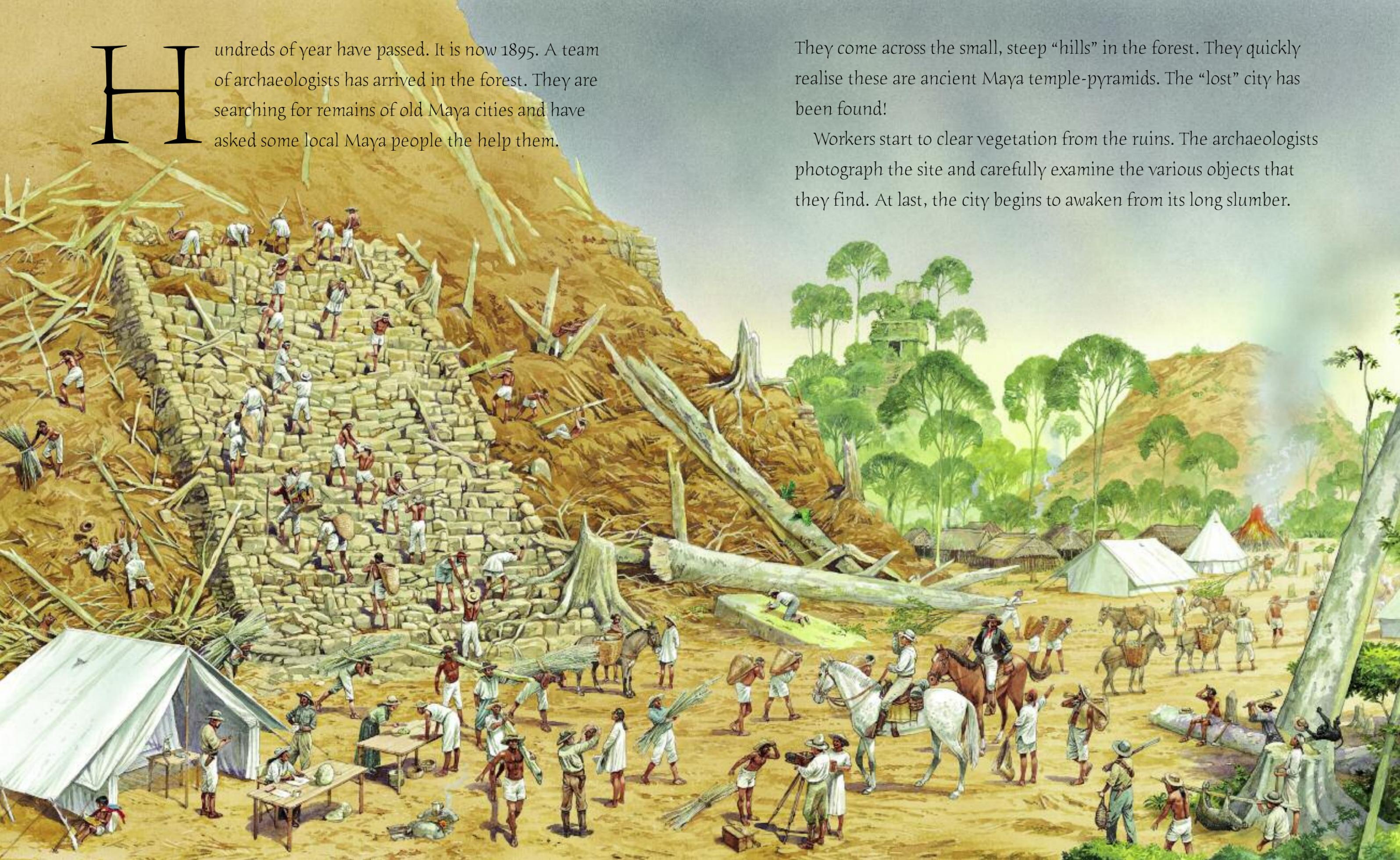
Just as before the first settlers arrived to build their little village of thatch-roofed huts, rainforest trees once again grow tall in the hot, wet climate, their trunks and branches draped with vines and climbing plants. The ancient temple-pyramids are almost hidden in the dense vegetation. They look like small hills rising steeply from the forest floor. Monkeys and birds chatter and screech in the trees' high branches, while jaguars prowl in the undergrowth.

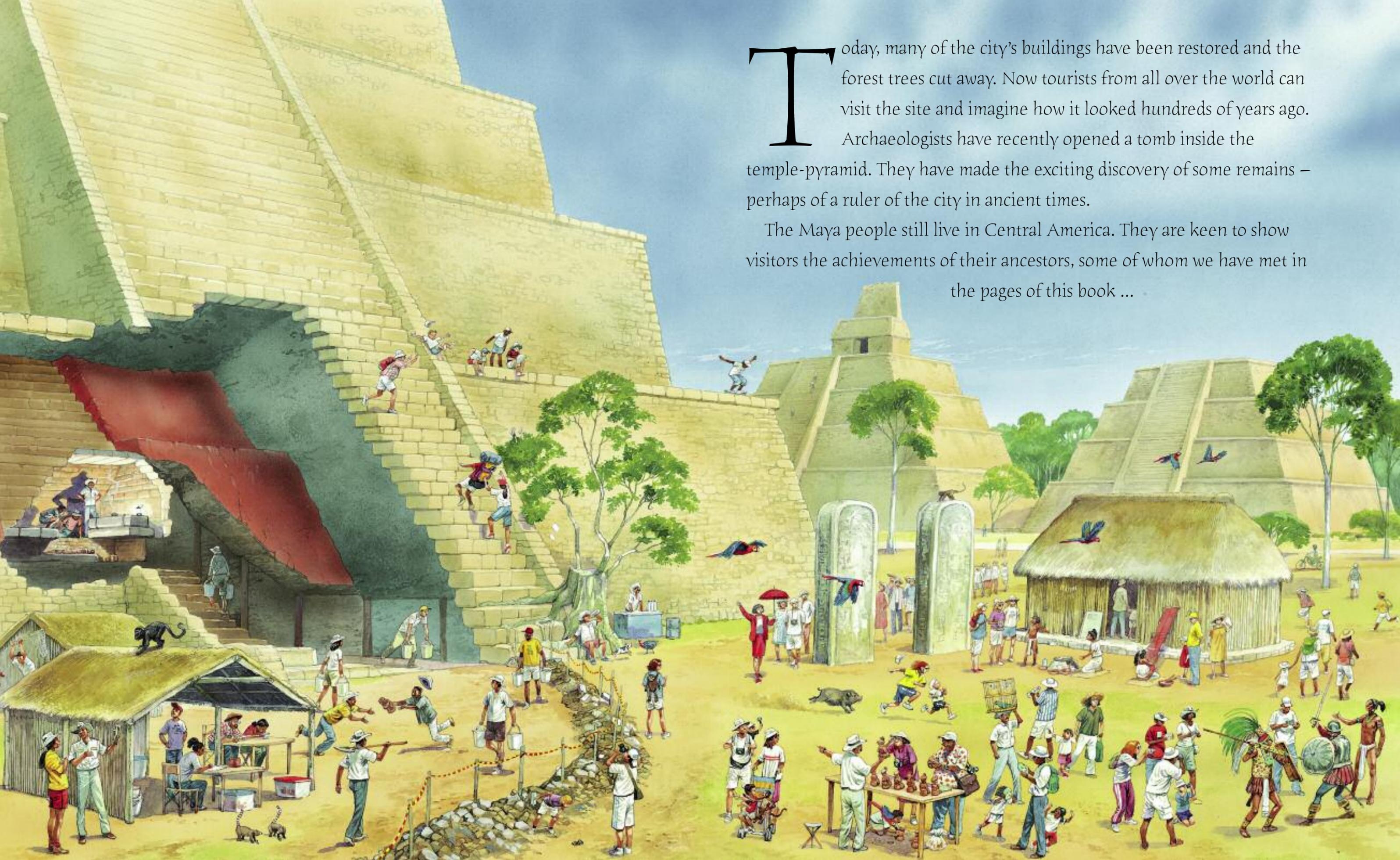


**H**undreds of year have passed. It is now 1895. A team of archaeologists has arrived in the forest. They are searching for remains of old Maya cities and have asked some local Maya people the help them.

They come across the small, steep “hills” in the forest. They quickly realise these are ancient Maya temple-pyramids. The “lost” city has been found!

Workers start to clear vegetation from the ruins. The archaeologists photograph the site and carefully examine the various objects that they find. At last, the city begins to awaken from its long slumber.





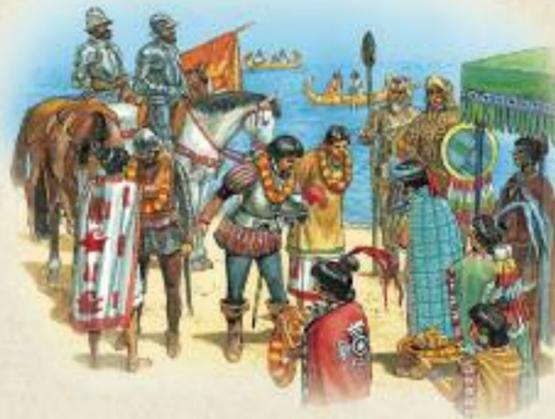
Today, many of the city's buildings have been restored and the forest trees cut away. Now tourists from all over the world can visit the site and imagine how it looked hundreds of years ago. Archaeologists have recently opened a tomb inside the temple-pyramid. They have made the exciting discovery of some remains – perhaps of a ruler of the city in ancient times.

The Maya people still live in Central America. They are keen to show visitors the achievements of their ancestors, some of whom we have met in the pages of this book ...

# AZTECS

When the Spanish first arrived in the Americas in the 16th century, the dominant power in Mexico was the Aztec Empire, founded by the Mexica people. They could be ruthless warriors and followed a cruel religion by which, in order to appease the gods and avert natural disasters, humans were sacrificed once a month. But the Mexica were also a civilized people with high standards in education, medicine and sanitation.

The Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, was situated on a swampy island in Lake Texcoco in 1325. Its temples were built in the shape of stepped pyramids. Around the city were “floating gardens”: islands used for growing crops.



Hernán Cortés, a Spanish adventurer, went in search of the fabulous Aztec Empire in 1519. Leading a small band of Spanish soldiers and a force of native warriors who opposed the Aztecs, he marched to the capital. Here (above) he was greeted by the Emperor Moctezuma.



After Aztec soldiers drove him from the city (left), he returned to capture it in 1521.



To help govern their vast territory, the Incas built a system of roads. Here, an official is being carried along in a litter (left). The roads were constructed with great skill. The builders often had to cut into the rockface or build steps. To cross gorges, they hung rope bridges. The building of terraces, which allowed steep slopes to be farmed, and stone walls, in which huge blocks were interlocked with great precision, showed the supreme craftsmanship of the native people.

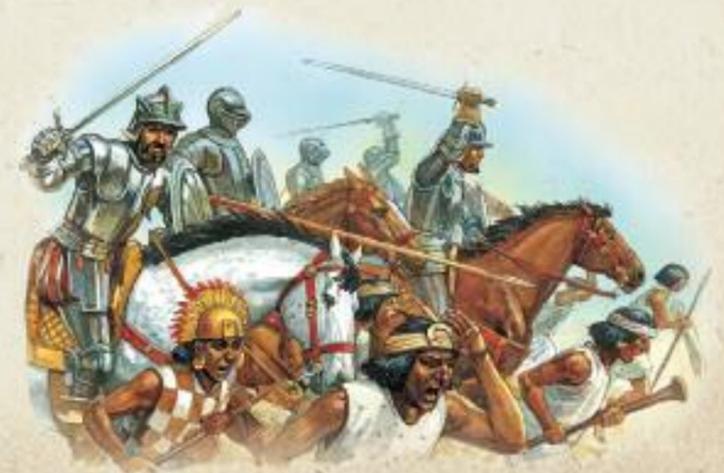
# INCAS

The greatest empire in South America before the Spanish arrived was that of the Incas. The Incas were originally chiefs of a small area in Peru around their capital, Cusco. Having fought and raided neighbouring villages, they had, by about 1200 AD, become the most powerful people in the region. By 1493, the Incas ruled over 10 million subjects in a 4000-kilometres stretch of the Andes Mountains.

A small band of Spanish soldiers under the command of Francisco Pizarro arrived in Inca territory in 1532. They found a land riven by civil war and ravaged by an epidemic of smallpox — a disease introduced to the Americas by the Spanish themselves only a few years earlier. They captured Cusco in November 1533.

The Inca emperors (right) claimed they were descended from the Sun, and that this gave them the right to rule over others.

Leading a force of just 177 men, Pizarro crossed the Andes to confront the Inca emperor Atahualpa and his army of 80,000 men in Cajamarca. With their horses and superior weaponry, the Spanish soldiers won the battle easily and captured Atahualpa (below).



# GLOSSARY

**Altar** In a Maya temple, a block used for making sacrifices on.

**Archaeologist** A person who studies human life in the past, using the evidence from finds buried in the ground.

**Atlatl** A piece of wood used as a spear-thrower, allowing hunters to propel spears with more force.

**Cacao** A tree grown for its beans, used by the Maya both for making drinking chocolate and as a form of money.



Maya astronomers had no telescopes, but they may have used observatories like this one (left) to make astronomical observations, including plotting the positions of the planet Venus, Sun and Moon.

**Civilization** A people who have developed laws, trade, arts, monuments and other aspects of a settled way of life.

**Conquistador** The Spanish word for “conqueror” and used to describe the Spaniards who conquered the Native American civilizations in the Americas.

**Glyph** A pictorial symbol used in Maya writing.

**Inscription** Writing carved in stone, clay, wood, metal or other materials.

**Jade** A hard, greenish stone used for making ornaments, including jewellery and carvings.

**Milpa** A plot of land cleared of forest and used for growing maize.



This is a stela and altar from the Maya site of Copán. The stela, 3.6 metres high, is one of several that relate the history of Copán and its rulers. The carving of a monster on the altar represents the Death God.



A carving of a woman weaving cloth.

**Obsidian** A volcanic glassy rock, usually dark-coloured. The Maya used it to make sharp knives and spear points.

**Palisade** A fence built from wooden stakes used to protect a settlement.

**Plaza** An open space between buildings.

**Quetzal** A blue-green bird of the Central American rainforest. Its tail-feathers were highly prized by the Maya.

**Rainforest** A forest where there is heavy rainfall all year round. In a tropical rainforest, such as in Maya lands, plants grow quickly.

**Roof comb** An extension built on top of a temple, decorated with painted carvings.

Using jade, a greenish stone, craftsmen produced fine objects, such as this mask.



## ARCHAEOLOGY

The ruins of many Maya cities were discovered in the 19th and 20th centuries. Archaeological digs are still going on. One of the most famous sites is Palenque. This tower (right) was part of a palace.



When a Maya ruler died, people believed he would travel through the underworld and rejoin the gods. He was buried with great ceremony along with riches, food and drink (left). The discovery of an intact tomb can provide many clues about the Maya civilization.

**Sacrifice** An offering made to the gods. The Maya sacrificed animals and even people.

**Squash** A plant of the cucumber family, producing large, hard-rinded fleshy fruits.

**Stela** An upright slab or stone with inscriptions carved on it.

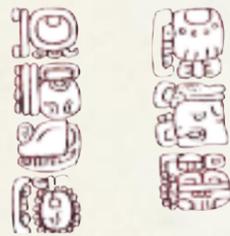
**Temple-pyramid** A stepped platform on top of which a temple or an altar was built.

Today, the Maya number more than 7 million people, living mostly in the countries of Guatemala, Belize and Mexico. In many areas, the Maya have kept their traditional ways of life and still speak Maya languages.



## WRITING AND MATHS

The Maya were the only native American people to have a complete writing system. They wrote using symbols called glyphs. Each glyph contained parts that stood for sounds or syllables. When these parts were combined they could stand for a word or an idea. These glyphs (above) are read as columns, top to bottom. They tell the story of the capture of “Jewelled Skull” by “Bird Jaguar” on a certain date.



The Maya wrote numbers differently to us. They used a dot symbol for one, a bar for five and a shell for nought. The lowest level had a value of one, with the next level above it a

value of 20 (so a dot or a bar in this upper level is multiplied by 20).



