Historians have a skilled eye for taking small bits and pieces of information and unraveling the mysteries of the past; this can lead to underwhelming discoveries that prove a theory –or in some cases, can completely shatter our expectations and build an image completely different from what was anticipated. Sometimes we ask ourselves “what if”, and daydream of how various events could have altered the course of history. This leads us into the question, “If the Spanish confronted both the Mexica and the Incan Empires under the same circumstances, in the same numbers, and at the same time, which would be easier to conquer?”

To argue this question in an effective manner, we need to break the question into several smaller, more precise pieces. Noting that the definition of conquer from the Mariam Webster Dictionary is “To take control of an area through the use of force”, we will discuss the military conquering of the area, but we must also discuss nuances such as cultural, religious, political, and economic changes that will be necessary to carry a new territory to a successful future.

Conquering the Incans and the Mexica militarily would seem difficult from one aspect, but at the same time very easy from another. Since the Spanish were alien to both empires, they did not know what to expect and could easily be blindsided by the various war tactics that were used in Europe. As we discussed in class, the Spanish were more or less barbaric. When they fought, their intent was to kill and weaken the defense. The Spaniards also had significantly more advanced weapons than what either empire had available. The Incans and Mexica had mostly soft metal and stone tools while the Spanish had more advance steel tools that could overpower any of the weapons available in South America. Another benefit for the Europeans was the armor that they used and the horses they had available. Neither empire had horses, nor were they prepared to fight against this type of an opponent.

When discussing the difficulty of overpowering the Mexica, the weaponry disadvantage shouldn’t have had that much of a difference, right? I would argue that though their weapons were inferior to the Spanish, they had numbers on their side and absolutely could overwhelm the alien visitors, now would it be enough? I still don’t believe so. The reason behind this goes back to the purpose of fighting. The Mexica don’t fight just to kill; as we discussed previously, they fought for religious and personal gain. This means that the Mexica preferred to take live prisoners and use them for ritualistic sacrifice, slave labor, and to raise their rankings in society. This method of fighting takes much more man power and time which would leave them more vulnerable than the Incas. Though the Inca also fought for religious purpose, they were rapidly expanding and were well versed in defeating various opponents. Also, due to the sheer size of their empire, not only did they have numbers on their side similar to the Mexica, but the high altitude in which it was situated would hold back the Spanish invaders and their horses as they were not acclimated to this environment; This alone would create a slower pace and delay any strong and fast attacks –to a degree. All in all, from a military conquering view, I believe the Incans would be much more resilient than the Mexica due to their numbers, the size of the empire, and the location (altitude).

After both of the empires have been forced into submission militarily, it is necessary to mould the culture into what the conquerors live by. The Incan culture would be very difficult to change due to the massive amount of land that it spanned, and the fact that they were very proud people in the sense that they believed that they were above everyone else from a technological and societal standpoint, plus they believed that they were more or less invincible. This would have been a contributing factor in the ease they were conquered, but it makes it difficult to change this mindset when it has been engrained in your every fiber since birth. It is also worth noting that the Incas had a very advanced messenger system, allowing them to be highly interconnected. By destroying this link, you more or less shut down the empires ability to function on a higher level and make changing the civilization simpler as it can be done one section at a time. The biggest flaw that the Incan empire contained was the lack of a formal writing system. Due to the lack of a written language, only highly trained specialists were able to read their version of documentation, called a Quipo. These could have potentially contained innumerable amounts of information, but the lack of common knowledge of their workings prevented them from being useful to the general population. This is also the same for religious documentation, or lack thereof. For the Spanish to change their society, they would have to do nothing more than remove the skilled individuals from existence and the formal documents are now rendered useless losing not only the societal data but also any religious history and documentation. From this point on, it is just a matter of waiting for memorized details of the society to fade away as you introduce your new ideals. The Mexica on the other hand are many levels more difficult to alter. They had a formal writing and pictorial system in which much of the society could decipher. In order to break their culture you would have to destroy this written documentation which was scribed into stone in many cases. This can be hidden, duplicated across several locations, and also memorized to preserve the information making it time consuming to completely erase so society can be “reprogrammed”. I believe from a cultural and religious perspective the Mexica are far more robust and would take longer to conquer in this manner.

Last but not least, economically and politically the Mexica and Inca are very similar in many aspects, but distinctly different in other ways. From a political standpoint, neither culture was popular with the surrounding civilizations, and in fact were so disliked we discussed the fact that Indians actually joined forces with the Spanish in some cases and fought against the empires! This rally helped give the Spanish a head up over the natives when conquering their lands. I believe that the Incas would have been more prone to this though due to the vast amount of land that they fought for and gained control over. The Mexica were more of a densely populated society over a more secluded area building their city in waterways while the Inca conquered vast arrays of land. From this view I believe the Inca gained a wider dislike in the region and would have more external pressure to change politically than the Mexica would have had. Again, going back to the lack of a system of writing, I also believe the political system would crumble faster with key individuals removed.

Economically I believe the Incas were once again comparatively more vulnerable to turmoil. If the Quipo were destroyed or the people capable of reading them killed, their method of tracking economic data is essentially wiped off the face of the earth. In addition, when the messenger system is interrupted the economy will also falter as people will be more or less stranded without government direction. At this point, the Spanish would be able to step in and act as a governing power –if they had the right leader-- and rescue the land from political and economic turmoil. On the flip side, the Mexica have a semi-permanent writing system to document the various political and environmental happenings. You would have to either destroy or alter these scriptures to modify society in any significant manner.

In the end, even though I favor the Inca in many ways such as technology and the closeness of its people, I truly believe their society relies too heavily on the status quo being intact in order to operate in the long run. They may have numbers and location on their side for a military attack perspective, but once the empire falls, the delicate balance rests in the hands of the conqueror due to the lack of a writing system and the layout of the government. The Mexica may be far superior from the information sustainability perspective, and though they surround themselves with water, I believe they would be more vulnerable to fatal attack, but far more robust with being able to preserve their culture making them more time consuming and difficult to conquer and mould in the long run.