

Pre-Columbian Empires of Mesoamerica

Background

- Started with agriculture revolution c. 8000 B.C.E.
 - o Beans, Chili Peppers, Squash, avocados
 - o c. 4000 B.C.E. began cultivation of Maize
 - Tomatoes followed a millennium later
 - o Domesticated animals
 - Turkeys, small barkless dogs
 - No draft animals

Olmecs

- “rubber people”
 - o Named after rubber trees that grew in area
 - Actual names unknown
- Equivalent to river valley civilizations of Asia and Africa
 - o “Mother Culture” of Mexico
 - Developed in modern state of Veracruz
 - o Arose around 1200 B.C.E.
- High Culture
 - o Jade
 - Had to be imported
 - o Drainage
 - No need for irrigation
 - o Calendars
 - o Temple pyramids
 - o Ball Games
 - o Olmec Heads
 - 10 ft tall
 - Possibly leaders with Jaguar lips
- Disappeared around 400 B.C.E.
 - o Statues defaced and buried
- Dark Age followed
 - o Around 100 B.C.E. Societies reorganized
 - Cities
 - Writing
 - Trade Networks



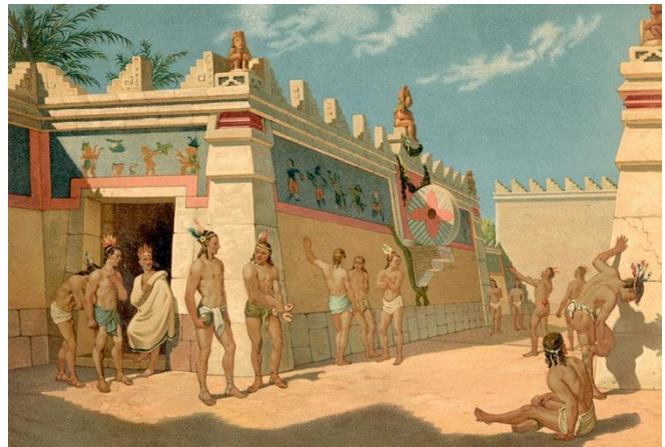
Maya

- Developed around 300 C.E.
 - o Areas of Southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador
 - o Around city of Teotihuacan
 - 300 – 900 C.E. built around 80 large ceremonial centers
 - Temples, pyramids, Temples
 - Some developed into cities
 - o Tikal
 - Developed around Temple of the Giant Jaguar
 - 154 feet tall
 - Large Plazas
 - 40,000 + inhabitants
 - Controlled surrounding population of 500,000
 - o Collection of City-States developed
 - Rivalries and wars between them

- Agriculture
 - Poor soil
 - Terrace Agriculture
 - Designed to trap silt
 - Maize, Cotton, Cacao
 - Cacao doubled as currency
- Religion
 - Jaguar Central
 - Dangerous Predator
- Society
 - Authoritarian Kings
 - Priests
 - Maintained Calendars, writing, astronomy, mathematics
 - Elaborate Calendar
 - Solar and Ceremonial calendars
 - Plotted Planetary movements
 - Could predict eclipses
 - Calculated length of year to within 17 seconds
 - Large scale Mathematics
 - Developed concept of 0
 - Writing
 - Idiographic
 - Similar to Chinese system
 - Symbols
 - Syllables
 - Wrote history, mythology, poems
 - Kept records
 - Wrote books
 - Made of paper
 - *Popil Vuh*
 - Performed Religious ceremonies
 - Bloodletting
 - Centered on war captives
 - Done in exchange for rain
 - Cut off fingers or body lacerations
 - Nobility
 - Hereditary
 - Land owners
 - Organized military forces
 - Merchants
 - Also acted as ambassadors
 - Traded luxury goods
 - Craftsmen
 - Architects
 - Artisans
 - Peasants
 - Farmers and laborers
 - Inter-tribal wars
 - Captives for war trophies
 - Used as slaves or sacrifices
 - High ranking captives especially suffered
 - Took over ceremonial centers



- Ball Game
 - Inherited from Olmecs
 - Ball made of heavy baked rubber
 - 2-8 players
 - Played by professionals
 - Spectators placed bets
 - Ceremonial
 - Marked treaties
 - Captives forced to play for their lives
- Chichén Itzá
 - Tried to create political unity
 - 800s C.E.
 - Incorporated captives into society
 - Built Empire
 - 9th to 11th Century
- Decline
 - People abandoned cities
 - Civil War
 - Foreign Invasion
 - Diminished crops
 - Cities re-claimed by Jungles



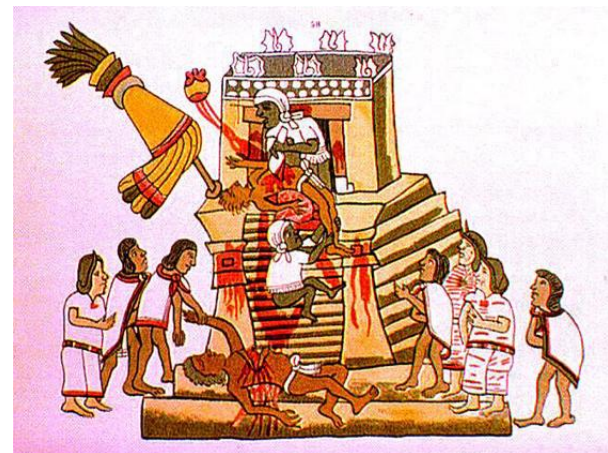
Toltec

- Filled power vacuum left by Mayans
- Established city of Tula at 968 C.E.
 - Survived until around 1150 C.E.
- Militaristic
 - Cult of sacrifice and war
 - Expanded from Central Mexico to Guatemala
 - Overthrew old Mayan areas
- Topiltzin
 - Removed from power and exiled to Yucatan
- Traders
 - Turquoise
 - Traded with American Southwest
 - May have traded with Mississippians
 - Similar traditions and crafts found
- Overthrown by nomadic raiders
 - Center of population shifted to coasts

Aztecs

- Called themselves the Mexica
 - Originally from central Mexico
 - Exiled North to city of Aztlan
 - Myth
 - Could have just been another nomadic people
 - Took advantage of Toltec political instability
 - Re-wrote history to meet needs
- Migrated to area of Lake Texcoco
 - c. 1325
 - only about 10,000 strong
 - Area inhabited by Chichimec and other Toltec ancestors
 - Organized into feudal city-states

- All spoke Nahuatl
 - Including Aztec
 - Aztec wandered area in search of area to settle
 - Snake and serpent mythology
 - Led by Huitzilopochtli
 - Hummingbird god
 - Militant
 - Reputation for fierce warriors
 - Fanatical devotion to gods
 - Offering human sacrifices
 - Built up out of strong base
 - Systems of alliances and tributes
 - Sole power by 1434 C.E.
- Social Contract
 - Conquered
 - Pay tribute
 - Levels assigned according to means of surrender
 - Forced to pay food, slaves, sacrificial victims
 - Surrender land
 - Render military service
 - People's role to serve the gods
 - Military central to supplying war captives
 - For sacrifices
 - "Flower wars"
 - King's role
 - Civil power
 - The gods' representative
 - Religion
 - Uniting factor
 - At least 128 deities
 - Sun, rain, sky, fire, corn, etc...
 - Patronage
 - Like Greeks
 - Occupations, cities, etc...
 - Ceremonies
 - Yearly festivals
 - Three major themes/cults
 - Fertility/agricultural cycle
 - Creators
 - Warfare
 - Sacrifices
 - Gods sacrificed for humans
 - Needed nourishment
 - Form of hearts and blood
- Agriculture/Economy
 - Chinampas
 - Artificial islands built on lake
 - More than 20,000 acres constructed
 - Could support 4 crops of corn a year
 - Semi-Feudalistic
 - Apportioned land for nobles or had private estates
 - Markets



- For excess
- Mostly barter
- Social Stratification
 - The Great Speaker
 - Emperor
 - Selected from sons of royal family
 - Prime Minister
 - Close relative
 - Tremendous power
 - Advisory council
 - Rulers of other cities in Alliance
 - Stayed in place and collected tribute for emperor
 - Left alone if they paid
 - In theory had say in government
 - Military
 - Political and religious role
 - Nobles
 - Mostly chosen from *calpulli*
 - Ancient building blocks of Aztec society

