

Origins of Maya Civilization

Background

- People came to Western Hemisphere about 12,000 years ago across Bering Strait.
 - ▲ Ice age created land bridge.
- Date disputed
 - ▲ Some think was earlier, to account for evidence of people in Central and South America.

Paleo-Indian, or Paleolithic

- Earliest period called Paleo-Indian period (Paleolithic in Europe, Africa).
- People lived by hunting big game
 - ▲ Woolly mammoths, giant bison.
- Followed herds of mammoth as far south as Central America.

Archaic Period

- As ice age ended, large game became extinct.
- Forced humans to change way of life dramatically.
- Switched to hunting smaller game and placing more emphasis on gathering plant foods.

Transition to Cultivation

- Gradually, cultivation of plant foods and domestication of animals developed during Archaic period.
- Crucial change in human way of life that made increased population, complexity in social life possible.
- "Three Sisters" of Americas: maize, beans, and squash.

Mesoamerican Time sequence

- Preclassic (2000 B.C. to A.D. 250).
 - ▲ Time of first civilizations in Mesoamerica:
 - ↗ Olmec
 - ↗ Valley of Mexico
 - ↗ Valley of Oaxaca.

Mesoamerican Time Sequence

- Classic period (A.D. 250 – 900)
 - 3 eras: early, late, and terminal
- Civilizations expanded in Mesoamerica and South America.
- States formed in many places
 - ▲ Large populations
 - ▲ FT craft specialization
 - ▲ Social class structures & elites
 - ▲ Armies and enforced authority.

Mesoamerican Time Sequence

- Postclassic period – A.D. 900 – 1500)
 - ▲ Change in centers of complex city development.
 - ▲ Maya centers in Yucatan dominant
 - ▲ Also expansion of Toltec, Mexico (Aztec), and, in South America, Inca.

Roots of Maya Civilization

- Time periods can be misleading
 - ▲ Change occurs gradually, and boundaries not precise.
 - ▲ Time periods assigned based on analysis of available evidence, but change with new discoveries.

Maya Terminology

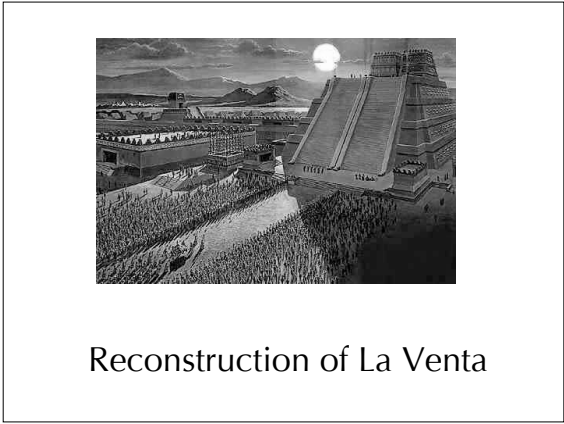
- “Classic period” terminology usually assumes that this was the “best” period for a civilization.
- Not necessarily true for Maya, as other areas developed during Postclassic, and some areas had already developed complex states during Preclassic.

Preclassic Period (2000 B.C. to A.D. 250)

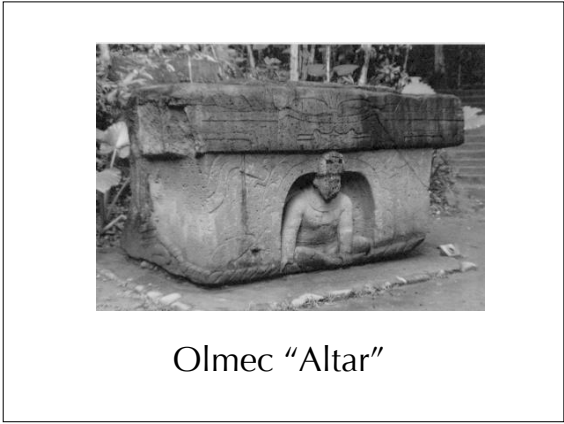
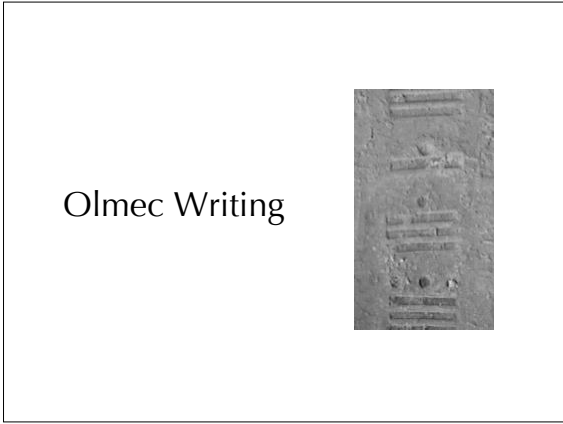
- First evidence of permanent villages.
- Pacific Coast, Gulf Coast regions: early evidence of village life.
- Inland areas: settled during Middle Preclassic.
- Olmec civilization to the north arose during Early and Middle Preclassic.

Olmec

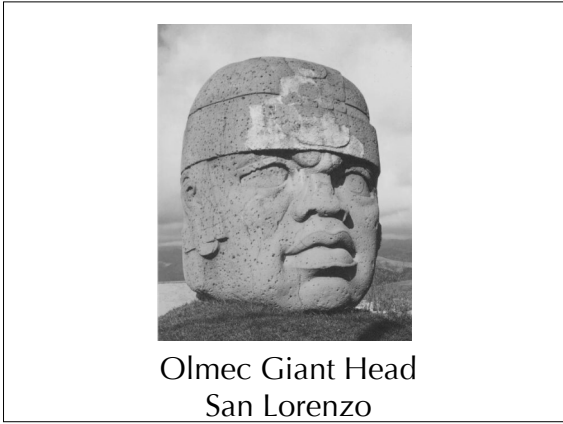
- 2 key sites of Olmec highly influential on Maya.
- By 1200 B.C., Olmec had theocratic chiefdom.
 - ▲ Chiefs with religious authority who performed rituals for public benefit.
- Architecture included large temples, monuments, sculptures.
- Symbols of elite status similar: jadeite, serpentine, magnetite.



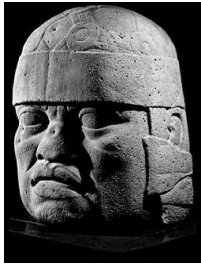
Reconstruction of La Venta



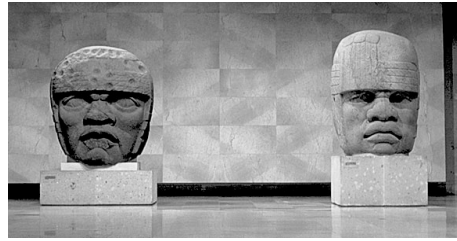
Olmec "Altar"



Olmec Giant Head
San Lorenzo

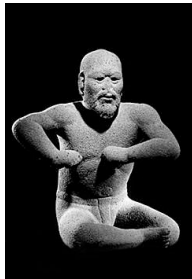


Olmec Heads



Olmec Heads
National Museum of Mexico

Olmec
Ballplayer



Olmec Sun Mask

Acrobat
Olmec



Olmec
Woman





Olmec Jaguar/Human Carvings

Olmec
Twins



Olmec Scene

Olmec-Maya Relations

- Maya areas probably had trade relationships with the Olmecs.
- Obsidian, cacao most likely products moving from Maya areas to Olmecs.
- Ideas pass along with trade, so this exchange probably significant in development of ideology among Maya.

Maya influence from Oaxaca

- Maya probably also influenced from the cultures in the Valley of Oaxaca, especially Monte Alban.
- Their rulers emphasized military authority and success in battle - - another concept that the Maya combined with their ideas of divine kingship.

Ecological Adaptations

- Diverse environment, many resources.
 - ▲ Ecology favored multiple adaptations.
 - ▲ Swidden agriculture – slash & burn.
 - ▲ Raised field agriculture.
 - ▲ Sea resources.
 - ▲ Mineral deposits for trade.

Temporal and Spatial Diversity

- Maya civilization was composed of many separate city-states, not unified whole.
- Cities at war with each other, in addition to trading with each other.
- Exchange of ideas, either way.

Uniform Elite Culture

- Despite political detachment, elite structure of Ahaob very uniform in Maya region.
- Iconography, symbols, art styles also very uniform in all Maya states.

Trade Networks

- Maya region had trade relations with many other areas
 - ▲ Pacific coast area traded with South America, Valley of Mexico, and beyond.
 - ▲ Northern areas traded with areas to north and west.
- Trade is a critical variable in stimulating art forms and complexity.

Warfare

- War between Maya states crucial part of Maya life.
 - ▲ Political, social, religious implications.
 - ▲ Warrior class needed for survival of the central authority in a state.

Ideology

- Development of a complex ideology held things together, against all odds.
- Principles:
 - ▲ Unity of 3 worlds (underworld, middleworld, starry heavens)
 - ▲ Ahau mediates 3 worlds, unites humans with supernaturals.
- Ideology most important stimulus for all art forms and architecture