

A vibrant, high-angle photograph of a tropical jungle. A river flows through the center of the frame, surrounded by dense, green vegetation. In the background, a waterfall is visible on a steep, forested hillside. The overall scene is misty and atmospheric.

Cities & Empires

Great Civilizations of Mexico, Central America, and South America

- In a nutshell: Before the Europeans arrived, great civilizations developed.
 - Mexico, Central America, South America (aka Mesoamerica)
 - Specific groups: Olmec, Maya, Aztec, and Inca
 - Their empires covered hundreds of square miles, included millions of people, and lasted for several centuries.
 - They built grand cities in forests and on mountains
 - They created spectacular works of art, made advanced tools, methods to track time, counting, and writing.

The Olmec



Olmec Civilization

- earliest civilizations Americas
- Along Gulf of Mexico
- Olmec= “people of the rubber country”
 - rubber trees in the area



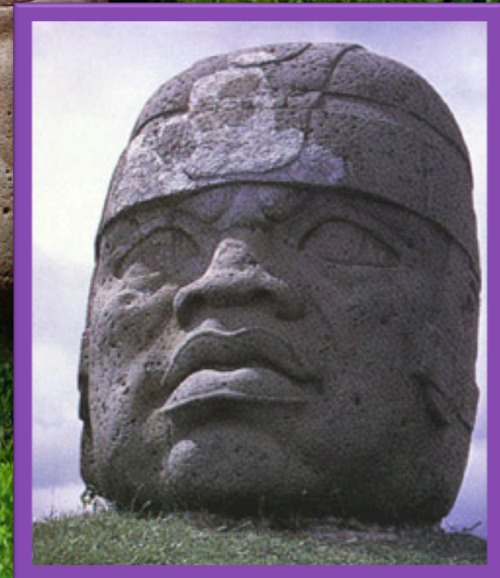


- Archaeologists—uncovered 4 Olmec settlements
- La Venta: largest city
 - Stone heads found largest 24 tons



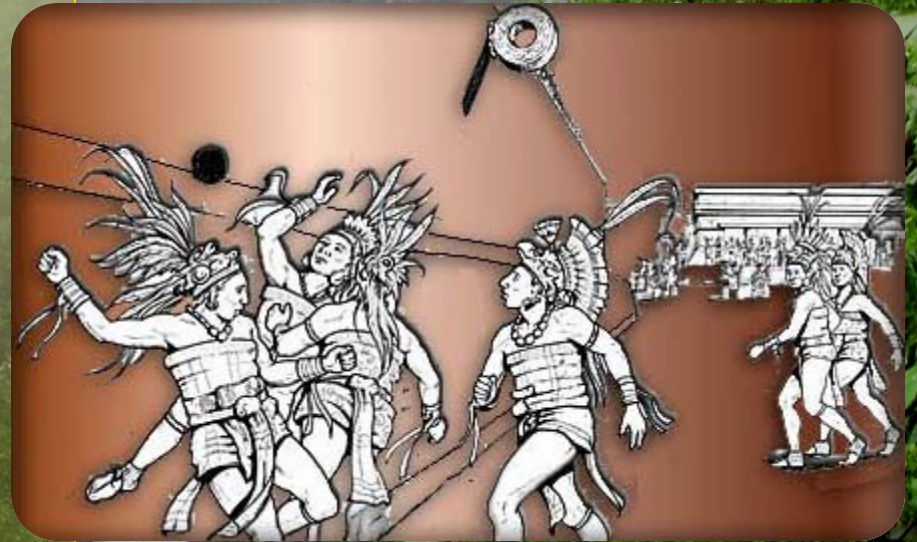
What the Artifacts tell us...

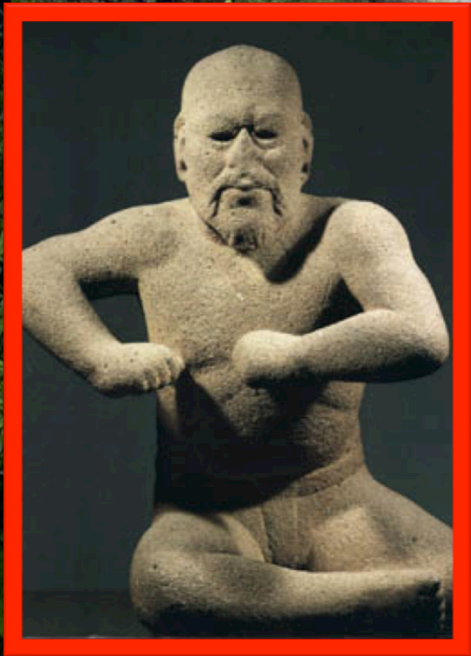
- Stone carvers and farmers
 - Grew food for thousands of people
- Polytheistic
 - gods of fire, rain, sun
 - Special altars for sacrifice
- Believed animals had special powers
 - Most powerful: jaguar



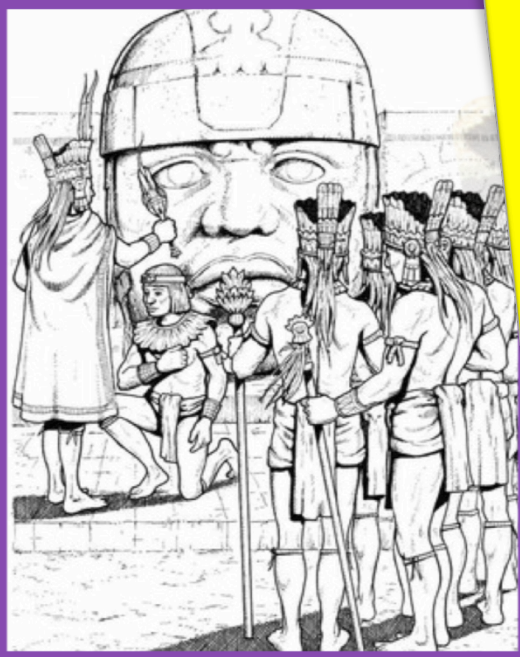
Entertainment

- Collected sap from rubber trees to make rubber balls
 - Used to play special games in open fields





- Eventually settlements were abandoned around 400 B.C.
 - Overuse of land???





Maya

- Reached its peak between 250 A.D. and 900 A.D.
 - Population around 2 million people
 - Built civilization in a rainforest of present day Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize
- Their society was ruled by powerful Mayan priests
 - Believed that gods were visible in the stars, sun, and moon.
- Their understanding of astronomy helped them predict eclipses
 - Developed 365 day calendar
- Used hieroglyphics to represent sounds, ideas, things

Maya

- Practiced human sacrifice to appease the gods.
- Eventually Mayan cities were deserted
 - Reason for this is a mystery
 - Over use of land???
 - Descendants still live in parts of Mexico and Central America today



Aztecs

- Centuries after the Maya the Aztec empire emerged
 - Hunters
- Island in Lake Texcoco; built Tenochtitlan (today this is Mexico City)
 - It was the largest city ever built; center for trade
 - They built large bridges that connected the island to the shore
- Human sacrifice
 - They believed this had to be done in order to please the gods and to ensure abundant harvests
 - Many prisoners of war would be sacrificed
- Europeans arrived when the Aztec Empire was still going strong.



Inca Civilization

- South America
 - Largest of all early civilizations
 - Cuzco; capital city
 - Their empire stretch from present day Colombia to Northern Argentina and Chile.
- Fearsome warriors
 - Men 25-50 years old could be drafted to serve in the army for up to 5 years.
 - Weapons: clubs, spears, spiked copper balls on ropes, and slings

Inca

- The Inca believed their emperor was a descendant of the sun god.
 - Made magnificent gold jewelry and ornaments for the sun god
 - Sacrificed people to the god
 - Built great cities such as Machu Picchu– which is hidden in the Andes Mountains
- Road system
 - Due to the vast territory they ruled the Inca built 10,000 miles of stone-paved roads
 - Roads ran through mountains, deserts, and forests.
- Eventually the Spanish will conquer the Inca.

