

Lowland Mesoamerica



Timeline

- Village Farmers (ca. 7000-2000BCE)
- Preclassic: the Olmec (1500-500BCE)
- Preclassic Maya (pre-1000 BCE –200 CE)
- Classic Maya (200 – 900 CE)
- Post-classic Maya (900-1517)

Mesoamerican Agriculture

- Maize agriculture: experiments with wild teosinte, Valley of Mexico, 6000-4000BCE
- Long, slow process, combined with continued H-G
- Guila Naquitz, Tehuacan Valley as type sites: Highland Mesoamerica, not Lowland
- Took a much longer time to transition to full sedentism here; at least partial domestication preceded fully sedentary village life.
- Very early cross-ecosystem trade in foodstuffs

Regional Geography



Geography of the Lowlands



The Maya Preclassic

- Pre-1000 BCE –200 CE
- Built on an earlier village base that goes back to at least 2500 BCE
- “Fundamental elements”: agricultural intensification, long-distance trade, increasing social stratification, specialized crafts
- Earliest sites: Cuello, Nakbé, and El Mirador
- Early evidence for emergence of divine kingship among the Maya: iconography and monumentality
- Mound and pyramid-building: Tigre complex at El Mirador has pyramids 18 stories high

El Mirador



The Classic Mayan World

- Preclassic “collapse” saw abandonment of centers, but not of surrounding countryside, in late 1st, early 2nd centuries AD
- Classic Maya period dates 200-900 CE, (roughly overlapping with Roman empire, collapse, and early medieval Europe)
- Degree of political unification, role of internal conflict has been much debated, over past 50 years
- “Four capitals” sites: Tikal, Palenque, Calakmul, and Copan
- Cycles of rise, expansion on the margins, fission, and then decline at expense of others

Mayan Capitals



Mayan ethnicities



Mesoamerican trade map



Post-classic Mayan

- 900-1517 CE
- Collapse begins in southern lowlands, with continuity in the Yucatan
- Both external and internal conflict seem to have been factors
- More recent explanations focus on environmental factors, including soil depletion, drought
- In other areas, much smaller centers were built
- Late in Post-classic, these centers were beginning to expand territorially, again, especially in highlands, southern lowlands
- Chichen Itza, Uxmal, Mayapan

Chichen Itza



Temple of Kukulcan (Quetzalcoatl)

Cosmogony: the Popol Vuh



Fig 6. The Hero Twins, called to Xibalba to play ball.

<http://www.mayavase.com/tran/trans.html>

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popol_Vuh

Cosmology, ideology, and cultural continuity



Lacandon people, Yucatan



“Chichicastenango”, aka Xelahu

Deities as counter-ideology: Maximon



“Divine Kingship”, Redux: Tecun Uman as Christ figure as political symbol



Tecun Uman was the last Quiche Maya ruler, who was defeated in a battle by the Spanish.