



CENTRAL HIGH PLATEAU

As tools and irrigation methods advanced, agriculture became a central part of the livelihood of nomadic groups in Mesoamerica. This led to food surpluses of important plants like maize which encouraged population growth and prompted the emergence of the first permanent settlements around 2300 BCE. This transition took root in the Central High Plateau region of Mexico where access to vital water sources, as well as diverse game for hunting and fishing, encouraged fixed settlement along the lake shores.

Dwellings made of straw, logs, and mud were grouped together in small villages around which various grana-





OLMEC

Out of the Central High Plateau arose the notable Olmec culture (1800- 200 BCE) in what is now the south of Veracruz and northern Tabasco regions along the Gulf coast of Mexico. This was considered to be the first civilization in ancient Mexico. By its peak in 700 BCE, urbanization, architectural, and technological innovations illustrate how developments in agriculture prompted an increasingly sophisticated culture that spread over a wide geography.

The Olmecs established well-planned city-temple complexes like La Venta (Tabasco), Tres Zapotes (Veracruz), and San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán (Veracruz). A priestly class emerged who governed activities related





CHUPÍCUARO

In the western region of the High Plateau, the Chupícuaro culture (800 BCE to 200 CE) established itself along the Lerma River and its tributaries in the modern state of Guanajuato, Mexico. Some groups of nomadic Chichimeca - a diverse group of hunter-gatherers who took advantage of this important water source and shed the nomadic lifestyle, developing agriculture and cultivating maize, beans, and chile.

They left a diverse array of pottery, often associated with fertility, as well as over ten pyramid temples. During this time, they exercised great influence over a vast territory extending throughout the modern day





TEOTIHUACAN, CACAXTLA/XOCITECATL, XOCHICALCO

The great city of Teotihuacan (100 CE- 750 CE) highlights the increasing urbanization and complexity of Mesoamerican civilizations. This prominent city, located just north of modern day Mexico City, had a population of more than 125,000 by 500 CE and was among the largest cities in the world at the time. It is no wonder that it was named "birthplace of the gods" and exercised power over the region.

The complex planning and architecture of the site reflected the increasingly structured cosmogony and ceremonial practices. Along with multi-floor residences housing multiple families, long avenues connected im-





MOCHICA - CHIMU

As agriculture prompted the emergence of settlements, cities, and empires in Mesoamerica, maize became a cornerstone of the agricultural societies of the Andean region of South America. Since its arrival to modern day Peru and Bolivia around 3,000 BCE, maize was widely grown and formed a fundamental part of the diet.

The Moche culture (100 - 800 CE), located in northern Peru, were renowned for their irrigation system based on canals which fertilized the arid terrain that sustained agriculture. The Chimú culture (1150- 1450) further expanded this into a large-scale irrigation system which was the basis for political and social organization throughout the region. They formed a loose confedera-





MEXICA

The Mexica civilization, commonly referred to as the Aztec empire, were another prominent civilization that arose, though much later than the Maya. The Mexica were the last of a series of Nahuatl-speaking peoples who moved from the north into the Valley of Mexico around the thirteenth century. Through a series of conquests, their capital of Tenochtitlán-- the now dry lake bed where Mexico City stands-- became part of a triple alliance of city-states which governed a vast expanse of central Mexico up until the time of the Spanish conquest in 1521. These city-states formed a hegemonic military confederation known for its violent conquest of other regions. Political power was divided between supreme rulers in the capital, military

PEOPLE OF MAIZE





MAYA

The Maya civilization was one of the most prominent and enduring Mesoamerican cultures. It spanned nearly two thousand five hundred years, emerging alongside agriculture around 2000 BCE and remaining a regional power up until 1697 CE with the Spanish conquest.

Maya cities like Chichén Itzá are known for their monumental architecture, but unlike other Mesoamerican cultures, their population centers were not cohesively linked into one empire. Instead, a variety of states and chiefdoms frequently competed with one another.

Their culture was highly hierarchical, with a divine king who derived power from the maize gods. A sociopolitical and military elite occupied administrative buildings

PEOPLE OF MAIZE





TOLTECS

The militaristic Toltecs (900-1150 CE) based in modern day Hidalgo, replaced Teotihuacán as the dominant city in the region and held influence over a vast portion of southern and central Mexico. Descending from groups of Chichimeca who settled in the region, the Toltecs constructed impressive cities such as Tula, a capital with up to thirty thousand residents, impressive monuments and temples, and dense housing units. Close similarities to the Mayan city of Chichén Itzá point to exchange between these two Mesoamerican empires. The Toltecs were known for their impressive maize productivity, and a drying climate was part of the reason for their downfall. They were greatly admired by the

PEOPLE OF MAIZE





INCA

The Inca civilization (around 1200-1572 CE) established the largest empire in all of Pre-Columbian America. The capital, Cusco, in modern day Peru, contained up to 300,000 residents at its peak and was a city of bureaucrats, guards, servant-slaves, and laborers brought in from conquered territories. The Inca dominated over a vast region extending down the Andean mountains and including large parts of modern Ecuador, Bolivia, northwest Argentina, north and central Chile, and a small part of Columbia.

The Inca empire was ruled like a modern federal system, with strong powers in Cusco and regional governments in the four sections of the empire communi-

