

Ancient Mexico and Central America

by Susan Toby Evans

CONTENTS

PREFACE 11

PART I MESOAMERICA,
MIDDLE AMERICA,
AND ITS PEOPLES 15

CHAPTER 1 ANCIENT MESOAMERICA,
THE CIVILIZATION AND ITS ANTECEDENTS 17

ANCIENT MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA IN GEOGRAPHICAL,
CULTURAL, AND GLOBAL CONTEXT 19

Mesoamerica and Middle America: Culture and
Geography 19 How Societal Complexity Develops 21
*SPECIAL FEATURE Cultural Evolution and Types of
Societies* 23 Culture History and Chronology 28

MIDDLE AMERICAN AND MESOAMERICAN CULTURE HISTORY 31

Middle America: Hunter-Foragers of the Paleoindian
and Archaic Periods 31 Mesoamerica: Villagers and
Urbanites of the Formative, Classic, and Postclassic
Periods 33 *SPECIAL FEATURE Religion and Creation* 34
New Spain: The Colonial Period 42 Mexico and
Central America: The Republican Period and the Rise
of Modern Archaeology 43

CHAPTER 2 ECOLOGY AND CULTURE:
MESOAMERICAN BEGINNINGS 45

MESOAMERICA'S MAJOR GEOPHYSICAL AND
BIOTIC FEATURES 45

Native Vegetation: Neotropical and Nearctic
Environments, Dry Lands and Wetlands 47 The Big
Divide: West of the Isthmus vs. Isthmus and East 48

Climate and Crops 49 This Cradle, Compared with Other Cradles 50

MESOAMERICANS AND CULTURAL ECOLOGY 50

Enculturing the Ecological Context 51 Ideology: What We Say We Do 52 Subsistence: What We Really Do 52 Sedentism and Its Consequences 53 Action and Agency: The Individual's Role 54 Cultural Evolution and What it is Not 54

CULTURAL REGIONS 55

Northern Arid Zone 55 Northwestern Frontier 56 West Mexico 56 Michoacán and the Bajío 56 Guerrero 57 Central Highlands 57 Gulf Lowlands, Northern and Central Regions 59 Southern Highlands 59 Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Pacific Coastal Plain and the Southern Gulf Lowlands 60 Chiapas and Guatemala Highlands 61 Maya Lowlands, North and South 61 Southeastern Mesoamerica 61 Intermediate Area 61

MESOAMERICA'S FIRST INHABITANTS: HUNTER-FORAGERS, TO 8000 BC 62

Asian Origins 64 *SPECIAL FEATURE Shamanism* 65 Paleolithic Periods 66 Big Game Hunters 67 Global Warming, Varied Toolkits and Mixed Strategies: The End of the Paleolithic Period and Beginning of the Archaic Period 70

CHAPTER 3 ARCHAIC FORAGERS, COLLECTORS, AND FARMERS (8000–2000 BC) 71

ARCHAIC TRANSFORMATIONS: CHANGES TOWARD DOMESTICATION OF PLANTS, AND SETTLED LIFE 73

Domestication of Plants and Sedentism, in the Dry Lands West of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec 74 Food, Sex, Demography, and Settled Life: The Laws We Live By 76 Early Archaic Band Society: Social Organization, Economic Organization, Political Control, Ideology 78 Seasonality and Scheduling 79 Early Archaic Foragers at Guilá Naquitz Cave, Valley of Oaxaca 79 *SPECIAL FEATURE Maguay* 80

FROM EARLY ARCHAIC TO MIDDLE ARCHAIC AND BEYOND 83

The Tehuacán Valley 83 Regionalization of Culture: "Traditions" of the Early Archaic Period 85 *SPECIAL FEATURE Tehuacán Valley Sequence* 86

THE MIDDLE ARCHAIC, c. 5500–3500 BC, AND LATE ARCHAIC, c. 3500–2000 BC 88

Maize Domestication 89 Other Middle Archaic Evidence, West of the Isthmus 91 A Note on the Term "Preceramic" 93 Middle and Late Archaic: Isthmus and East 94 Guerrero: Pacific Coast, Late Archaic 97 Y2K: the Archaic Ends, and the Formative Period Begins 97

CHAPTER 4 THE INITIAL FORMATIVE (c. 2000–1200 BC) 99

CULTURAL TRENDS OF THE FORMATIVE PERIOD 100

Precursors to the Olmecs 100 Recognizing Social Inequality in the Archaeological Record 101 Smoke and Mirrors 102 Mesoamerica's "New Stone Age" 103 *SPECIAL FEATURE Prismatic Blades* 105

ISTHMIAN REGION 107

The Rise of the Chiefdom 108 *SPECIAL FEATURE Yanomamo* 109 Chief as Office: Achievement and Ascription 110 Engendered Political Evolution 110 Mokaya of Mazatán 111 The Mokaya in Decline 114 Elsewhere Along the Isthmus in the Initial Formative 115 Language as a Chronological Marker 115 Language as an Ethnic Marker 116

HIGHLANDS WEST OF THE ISTHMUS 116

Earliest Highland Ceramics 118 *SPECIAL FEATURE Pottery Vessel Forms* 119 Ancestor Cults and Oaxaca in Tierras Largas Phase 122 Elsewhere in the Highlands: Basin of Mexico, Morelos, Tehuacán Valley 123 West Mexico 125 Initial Formative: The Mesoamerican Culture Area 125

PART 2 COMPLEX SOCIETIES OF THE FORMATIVE 127

CHAPTER 5 THE OLMECS: EARLY FORMATIVE (c. 1200–900/800 BC) 129

EARLY FORMATIVE AND INITIAL OLMEC 129

A Jade-Green World 129 *SPECIAL FEATURE Jade* 131
 Things That Move Cultures 132 East and South of the Pacific Coastal Plain 132 Southern Gulf Lowlands 133 The Olmecs: First Florescence of Mesoamerican Complex Culture 134

EARLY OLMECS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS 135

Subsistence in the Isthmus 135 Spiritually Charged Landscape 135 *SPECIAL FEATURE What is Civilisation?* 136 Colossal Heads and Buried Drains: Monumental Display at San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán 137 Other Nearby Olmec Sites: Potrero Nuevo and El Azuzul 140 El Manatí 141 *SPECIAL FEATURE Colossal Heads* 142 Themes and Modes in Olmec Art 144 Shamans and Transformation 144

HIGHLAND DEVELOPMENTS, WEST OF THE ISTHMUS 145

Settlement Patterns and Settlement Systems 145 Oaxaca: San José Phase (1150–850 BC) 145 Elsewhere in the Central Highlands: Puebla, Morelos, and the Basin of Mexico 150 Northern Arid Zone 154 West Mexico 154 Guerrero 156 Setting the Stage for the Middle Formative 158

CHAPTER 6 THE OLMECS: MIDDLE FORMATIVE (c. 900–600 BC) 159

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SOUTHWESTERN HIGHLANDS 159

Guerrero: Teopantecuanitlán and Cave Sites 159 Non-Portable Art from Guerrero 161 *SPECIAL FEATURE Jaguars* 163 Morelos: Chalcatzingo's Apogee 165 Basin of Mexico: Occupation at Tlatilco, Zacatenco,

and Cuicuilco 168 Puebla: The Amalucan Irrigation System 168 Tlaxcala 168 Gulf Lowlands North, North-central, and South-central 169 Valley of Oaxaca and the Mixteca Region 170

ISTHMUS AND EAST 172

The Pacific Coast of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and Adjacent Areas to the South 172 Olmec Influences 174 Intermediate Olmec and La Venta 174 Chiapas Highlands and Chiapa de Corzo 179 Guatemala Highlands 180 Maya Culture 180 The Southern Maya Lowlands 180 The Northern Maya Lowlands 182 The Maya of the Motagua 182 Southeastern Mesoamerica 182 The Intermediate Area: Caves of Eastern Honduras 184 Transition to the Post-Olmec Era 184

CHAPTER 7 MIDDLE TO LATE FORMATIVE CULTURES (c. 600/500–300 BC) 185

WEST OF THE ISTHMUS: RISE OF MONTE ALBÁN 187

The Valley of Oaxaca: San José Mogote, Eclipsed by Monte Albán 187 Monte Albán 189 *SPECIAL FEATURE Divinatory Almanac* 190 The New Shape of Maize: The Tortilla 191 Monte Albán's Neighborhoods and Early Monuments 192 Urbanism and Settlement Models 192 *SPECIAL FEATURE Exchange and Marketplace Systems* 194

ELSEWHERE IN THE HIGHLANDS AND WEST MEXICO 196

The Basin of Mexico 196 West Mexico 197 *SPECIAL FEATURE Central Place Models* 198

LAST YEARS OF THE OLMECS IN THE ISTHMUS AND EAST 200

Terminal Olmec Period, 600–300 BC 200 The Southern Pacific Coast: Izapa and Its Style 200 Guatemala Highlands: Kaminaljuyú 202 Chiapas Interior Plateau 202 Maya Lowlands, South and Central 203 Maya Lowlands, North 204 Trends to Watch 204

CHAPTER 8 THE EMERGENCE OF STATES IN THE LATE FORMATIVE (300 BC–AD 1) 205

Social stratification 206 Pottery Style Zones and Elite Long-distance Exchange 207

PROTO-STATES IN THE HIGHLANDS WEST OF THE ISTHMUS 209

Basin of Mexico: Teotihuacan and Cuicuilco 209
Cuicuilco and the Old God of Fire 210 Teotihuacan and the Sanctity of Flowing Water 211 West Mexican Funerary Complexes: Shaft Tombs and Chupícuaro 212 Elsewhere in the Central Highlands 214 *SPECIAL FEATURE Best Friends* 215 Cuicatlán Cañada 218 The Mixteca 219 Monte Albán 220 Monte Negro 221

ISTHMUS AND EAST 221

Gulf Lowlands, South-central and South 222 Chiapas Interior Plateau 222 *SPECIAL FEATURE Calendrics* 223 South Coast of the Isthmus, and Pacific Coastal Plain 224 Southeastern Mesoamerica: Chalchuapa and Its Trading Partners 226 Guatemala Highlands 227 Maya Lowlands 228

CHAPTER 9 THE TERMINAL FORMATIVE

(AD 1–300) 235

EARLY MAYA CENTERS 236

Maya Lowlands of the Yucatán Peninsula 236 Terminal Formative Period Events in the Maya Lowlands 236 Río Bec: Early Fortifications 237 Northern Maya Lowlands 238 Southeast Mesoamerica 238 Guatemala Highlands 239 The Isthmus and Early Writing 239

WEST OF THE ISTHMUS 240

Guerrero 244 West Mexico: Shaft-Tomb Cultures and the Teuchitlán Tradition 245 West Mexican Architectural Models 248 The Teuchitlán Tradition 248 Northwestern Frontier and Northern Arid Zone 249 Central Highlands Surrounding the Basin of Mexico 249 The Northern Gulf Region 252

TEOTIHUACAN, THE PLACE WHERE TIME BEGAN 253

The Magic of Location: Place of the Gods 255 The Magic of Location: Place of the Food and Tools 258

PART 3 CULTURES OF THE EARLY CLASSIC

261

CHAPTER 10 TEOTIHUACAN AND ITS INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE (AD 250/300–600) 263

What Happened in the Classic 263

TEOTIHUACAN: PYRAMIDS AND PALACES 264

The Evolution of Teotihuacan's Plan 265 Three Teotihuacan Palaces 266 The Apartment Compounds: Social Strata Within and Among the Residences 271 How the End Began 275 What Caused the Uprising? 276 Teotihuacan's Political Economy: Selling an Ideological Package 280

TEOTIHUACAN PRESENCE WEST OF THE ISTHMUS 281

Teotihuacan's Influence Elsewhere in the Central Highlands, to the North and West 281 Teotihuacan and the Bajío and Northwestern Frontier 282 West Mexico 283 Michoacán, Guerrero, Morelos 283 Mixteca, Oaxaca 284 Puebla and Tlaxcala 288 Gulf Lowlands 289 Teotihuacan's Important Partners South of the Isthmus 290

CHAPTER 11 THE MAYA IN THE EARLY CLASSIC (AD 250–600) 291

MAYA LOWLANDS 293

The Petén Region and Maya Politics 293 Kings of Calendrics: Time and Early Classic Maya Rulers 295 Tikal as an Early Classic Maya Center 297 The Usumacinta Region 300 Calakmul and the Northern Maya Lowlands 302 Maya of the Motagua: Copán and Quirigua 303 *SPECIAL FEATURE Maya Writing* 304

SOUTHEASTERN MESOAMERICA AND THE INTERMEDIATE AREA 307

The Gods Must be Angry: The Southern Coast and the Eruption of Ilopango 307 Elsewhere in Southeastern Mesoamerica 310 The Intermediate Area 310

ISTHMUS, COASTAL PLAIN, CHIAPAS, AND GUATEMALA HIGHLANDS 311

Maya Highlands 312 The Long Shadow of Teotihuacan 313 Looking Ahead: Mid-Classic Maya Upheavals 314

PART 4 LATE CLASSIC, CLASSIC COLLAPSE, AND EPICLASSIC 315

CHAPTER 12 THE LOWLAND MAYA: APOGEE AND COLLAPSE (AD 600–900) 317**LATE CLASSIC MAYA CULTURE** 319

Courtly Life at the Height of the Late Classic 324
SPECIAL FEATURE *Cosmetic Alterations* 325

MAYA OF THE SOUTHERN LOWLANDS 328

AD 600–700 329 Palenque and Pakal the Great 329 Yaxchilan 333 Calakmul in its Prime, Tikal Split in Two 333 AD 700–800 334 AD 800–900 339
SPECIAL FEATURE *Construction Costs* 340 Causes of Collapse at Copán and Elsewhere 343

ELSEWHERE AMONG THE MAYA 344

Southeastern Mesoamerica and the Intermediate Area 346 The Pacific Coast 347 The Guatemala and Chiapas Highlands 348 The End of the Classic Period in the Isthmus and East 348

CHAPTER 13 THE LATE CLASSIC AND EPICLASSIC IN THE WEST (AD 600–1000/1100) 349

SPECIAL FEATURE *What Was the Feathered Serpent?* 354

THE BASIN OF MEXICO AND REGIONS TO ITS NORTH AND WEST 356

Basin of Mexico 356 Coyotlatelco Pottery and Culture 357 Tula Region 358 The Bajío 358 Northwestern Frontier 359 West Mexico 361

GULF LOWLANDS 362

Northern Gulf Lowlands: The Huasteca 362 Central Gulf Lowlands 363 *SPECIAL FEATURE* *Metalworking* 364 South-central Gulf Lowlands 365 North-central Gulf Lowlands and El Tajín 366

PUEBLA, TLAXCALA, AND MORELOS 368

Eastern Puebla 368 Western Puebla, Tlaxcala, and Morelos 369 Morelos 371

MIXTEC REGIONS AND OAXACA 373

Oaxaca and Monte Albán 374 Further Developments 376

CHAPTER 14 THE MAYA IN THE TERMINAL CLASSIC AND EARLY POSTCLASSIC (AD 800–1200) 377**NORTHWESTERN YUCATÁN: THE PUUC REGION** 378

Kabah, Sayil, and Labna 379 Uxmal 380

NORTHEASTERN YUCATAN: COBÁ AND ITS REGION 384**VECTORS OF CHANGE: CHICHÉN ITZÁ AND THE PUTÚN MAYA** 385

Putún, Chontal, Itzá: Traders along the Gulf Coast 386 Chichén Itzá 388 *SPECIAL FEATURE* *Ball Courts and the Ball Game* 391

**SOUTHERN PACIFIC COAST AND SOUTHEASTERN
MESOAMERICA 396**

SPECIAL FEATURE *Inventing the Wheel in the Service of
the Gods* 397 Cihuatán and Santa María 398
Western Honduras 398

**CHAPTER 15 THE RISE OF TULA AND
OTHER EPICLASSIC TRANSFORMATIONS**

(AD 900–1200) 399

TULA AND TOLTEC CULTURE 400

Historical and Ecological Roots of Tula's Religion 402
The Northern and North-central Gulf Lowlands in
Toltec Times 402 Tula's Major Deities 403 *SPECIAL
FEATURE* *Female Deities* 404 Local and Long-distance
Economy 408 Toltec Influence upon West Mexico,
the Northwestern Frontier, and the Northern Arid
Zone 409 The Northern Arid Zone: Mesoamerica and
the Puebloan or "Great House" Cultures 411
Mesoamerican and Mississippian Cultures 412 Gods,
Heroes, and Antiheroes 413

TULA'S NEIGHBORING REGIONS 414

Michoacán, Toluca, Morelos 415 The Basin of Mexico
416

PUEBLA/TLAXCALA AND THE SOUTHWESTERN HIGHLANDS 416

Cholula and the Valley of Puebla 417 *SPECIAL
FEATURE* *Migrants and Origins* 418 Puebla, Tlaxcala,
Tehuacán, and Oaxaca 421 In Conclusion 422

**5 THE POSTCLASSIC
AND THE RISE OF
THE AZTECS**

PART

423

**CHAPTER 16 THE MIDDLE POSTCLASSIC
(1200s–1430) 425**

Middle Postclassic and Late Postclassic 426
Segmentary States of the Middle Postclassic Period 427

EAST OF THE ISTHMUS AND THE GULF LOWLANDS 429

Northern Maya Lowlands: Mayapan's Rise and Fall
430 Guatemala Highlands 432 Southern Pacific
Coastal Plain and Isthmus of Tehuantepec 432 Gulf
Lowlands and Southern Central Highlands 433

**WEST MEXICO: THE RISE OF THE TARASCANS OF
MICHOCÁN 434**

THE BASIN OF MEXICO 437

SPECIAL FEATURE *Being Born Aztec* 440 City-states and
Confederations of the Basin of Mexico 443 *SPECIAL
FEATURE* *Chinampas* 444 Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco, the
Atypical City-state of the Mexica 446

**CHAPTER 17 THE AZTECS: AN EMPIRE IS
BORN (1325–1440) 447**

BASIN OF MEXICO 448

Early Years of the Mexica at Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco
448 *SPECIAL FEATURE* *The Great Temple of the Aztecs*
452 The Acolhua Domain 455 *SPECIAL FEATURE*
Aztec Children and Childraising 456 The Mexica in
the 1420s: Preparing for Greatness 458 Crisis and
Conflict: The Tepanec War 458 Nezahualcoyotl and
the Consolidation of the Acolhua Domain 462 Social
Strata Among the Aztecs 463 The Process of Social
Stratification Among the Aztecs 467 Setting the Stage
for Empire 468

CHAPTER 18 THE AZTEC EMPIRE DEVELOPS (1440–1481) 469

THE REIGN OF MOTECUZOMA ILHUICAMINA, 1440–1469 469

The Tula Region and Its Environs 471 Late Postclassic Morelos 472 *SPECIAL FEATURE Adulthood, Sex, and Marriage* 474 Guerrero 478 1450s: Disasters and Development in the Basin of Mexico 478 Palaces and Government 480 A New Period of Aztec Expansion: East to the Gulf Lowlands 481 Gulf Lowlands, Central and North 481 *SPECIAL FEATURE Aztec Palaces* 482 The Mixteca and Oaxaca Under Aztec Rule 488

THE REIGN OF AXAYACATL, 1469–1481 491

Picking Fights in the Valley of Toluca in the 1470s 491 Palace Scandals and Death in the Basin of Mexico 492 The Tarascan Empire and Tzintzuntzan 493

CHAPTER 19 THE AZTEC EMPIRE AT ITS HEIGHT (1481–1519) 497

TIZOC, 1481–1486 497

Eagle Knights, Jaguar Knights 498

AHUITZOTL, 1486–1502 502

Rededication of the Templo Mayor: Human Sacrifice and Cannibalism 503 Aztec Conquests on the Pacific Coast of Guatemala and Chiapas 506 Hydrological Challenges to Tenochtitlan, and Ahuitzotl's Response 508

MOTECUZOMA XOCOYOTZIN, 1502–1520 511

The Intermediate Area as the Spaniards Found It 512 Southeastern Mesoamerica 513 Southeastern Maya of the Late Postclassic 514 Spaniards and Maya Along the Coast of Yucatán 515 Northern Maya Lowlands 517 The Southeastern Highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala 519 Along the Gulf Coast 521 Campeche + Tabasco = Acalán 521 South-central Gulf Lowlands 522

CHAPTER 20 THE CONQUEST OF MEXICO AND ITS AFTERMATH 525

THE SPANIARDS COLLECT ALLIES 525

Tlaxcala 526 *SPECIAL FEATURE Feasting* 528 Puebla 530

MOTECUZOMA, PRISONER OF FEAR 532

EARLY COLONIAL NEW SPAIN 540

World of Wonders 542 Indigenous Utopia: The Franciscan Perspective 546 The Living Past 549

REFERENCE MAPS

551

FURTHER READING AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

573

SOURCES OF ILLUSTRATIONS

588

INDEX

590