

Chapter 11 Notes – *Peoples and Civilizations of the Americas, 600 – 1500*

Chapter Thesis: The early civilizations of the Mesoamerican region (from Mexico to northern Central America) constantly competed for resources and power in their largely agricultural societies that differed widely in culture, political institutions, and technology according to the environment they existed in.

- I. *Classic-Era Culture and Society in Mesoamerica, 200 – 900:* During the classic era of the Mesoamerican region, great steps were made in architectural design, agriculture, and technology that were founded upon the politics and religions of early Olmec centers.
 - Despite being diverse in politics and language, Mesoamerican societies were united in their material culture and religious practices
 - Since the Olmec and other earlier civilizations, new governmental organizations had been established and agricultural productivity, astronomy, and mathematics advanced greatly
 - Cities of the classic period were founded around structures of religious importance, such as pyramids and raised platforms
- A. Teotihuacan: Teotihuacan was a civilization that existed in the classical period of Mesoamerica where religion's influence was seen in architecture as well as their cultural life, with a ruling elite that migrated smaller villages to the urban core to increase the productivity of agriculture and to support the growing population.
 - A significant classic-period civilization just northeast of modern-day Mexico City
 - Religion played a role in architecture: city planning was based on their relative location to mountains and the stars; pyramids were constructed to the Sun and the Moon; practiced human sacrifice similarly to the Olmec before them
 - Urban population increased rapidly because of volcanic disruptions and city elite forcing farmers to migrate to the larger cities, making available more labor resources to maintain terraces and **chinampas**, which were artificial islands that could produce crops year-round
 - Power was not concentrated to one ruler but elite and aristocracy held influence in religion and politics
 - Decline came about from mismanagement and violent class conflict
- B. The Maya: The Mayan civilization spanned south of Teotihuacan and founded large city-states guided by many religious rituals. From Mayan culture, we have a 365-day calendar and important astronomical discoveries.
 - Civilization around Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and southern Mexico with poor soil and a tropical climate

- High population of Maya civilization required intensive agriculture: drained swamps and used elevated fields and irrigation to improve yields
- City-states of the Maya cropped up in many places during the classical period
- Decorative styles with religious motifs were used in monuments dedicated to gods, celebrated warfare with rituals of torture and sacrifice
- Women in Maya civilization participated in rituals and sometimes ruled, although society was clearly patrilineal; they were seen as key to managing the household and family life
- Maya contributed a calendar system based on astronomical findings, mathematics with concept of zero and place holders, and language
- Classic era of Mesoamerica declined around 800-900 because of disruptions to the agriculturalist economy from warfare and environmental factors

II. *The Post-Classic Period in Mesoamerica, 900 – 1500*: Although the distinction between the classical and post-classical periods of Mesoamerica are convoluted because of no single reason for the fall of Mayan city-states and Teotihuacan, it is evident from the history of this time period that population, agricultural activity, and warfare increased.

- A. The Toltecs: Although many things about the Toltecs are unknown, modern archaeology tells us that they were a militaristic civilization that spread their influence across Mesoamerica.
- Origins of the Toltecs are unclear, but perspective from Aztecs show a very powerful, albeit somewhat inaccurate view of the civilization, similarly to Greeks and Romans
 - We do know that Toltecs were a state heavily emphasizing its military and extended its influence this way throughout Mesoamerica
 - Power struggles resulted in a sharp decline and collapse of their city of Tula
- B. The Aztecs: The Aztecs were a people who arose following the decline of the Toltecs and grew increasingly due to their political alliances and military campaigns. Women were held in higher regards in Aztec society, having distinguishing and complementing roles with the men. Social structure was based off of war also, and the elite were in the warrior class. They designed a tribute system to allow them to have the resources to feed their population.

III. *Northern Peoples*: As the spread of cultivated crops (namely maize, beans, and squash) spread throughout Mesoamerica and Indian America, complex societies arose, such as the Anasazi, who had a political structure based on kinship.

- A. Southwestern Desert Cultures: The Anasazi people refer to a number of separate cultures within the deserts around the modern-day Four Corners, and they were characterized by impressive architecture and organization to feed their entire regional population.
- B. Mound Builders: The Hopewell and Mississippian Cultures: Hopewell culture spread throughout Mississippi and the Ohio River Valley and was organized as a

chiefdom, which means that large populations were governed by a leader of both religious and state responsibilities.

IV. *Andean Civilizations, 200 – 1500*: In the Andes, early Amerindian peoples adapted to the unlikely Andes Mountains ecosystem and developed advanced societies despite the harsh environment.

- A. Cultural Response to Environmental Challenge: Innovations by cultures in the Andean region, including an accurate calendar, dispersed farming, and hillside terraces allowed them to support their clan (ayllu) of people with a consistent supply of food.
- B. Moche: In northern Peru, the Moche developed efficient politics and adapted culture to completely influence their region. Subjecting people to agricultural work and utilizing native animals to transport goods, the Moche created a civilization characteristic of many others that were also advanced at the time.
- C. Tiwanaku and Wari: The Tiwanaku was a civilization distinguished by its large-scale architecture and stratified social structure with a dynastic rule by the elite. The Wari shared many elements from the Tiwanaku but they had a distinct cultural style evident in ceramic remains.
- D. The Inca: The Inca developed a massive empire that stretched from Chile across the Andes into Argentina, and used Andean innovations of the time to take advantage of their environment. Chiefs of ayllus also functioned as the working government.