

Foundations of World Civilization: Notes 20  
**Another literate world: Mesoamerica**  
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- The New World was 100% independent from the Old World
    - The only generally accepted evidence of transatlantic contact is a small Viking settlement on the Canadian coast
      - far too late to have had any affect on the rise of New World civilizations
    - Despite many attempts to show transpacific contacts (such as between Japan and the New World) outside of the Arctic, none has ever stood up to scrutiny
    - So why does it matter that the New World is so separate from the Old?
      - Because recognizable civilizations emerged in the New World, too
      - This shows that humans did similar things in creating “civilization” entirely independently
      - There may be some regularities to this process
      - Maybe something universal about humans
  - Society got complex in the New World a little later than in the Old World.
    - first stirrings of the Olmec: 1400-1000 BCE
    - compare to
      - Late Uruk period 3400-3100 BCE (1700-2000 years earlier)
      - Egyptian unification around 3100 (1700 years earlier)
      - Second half of Early Indus period (origins of Harappan civilization), say 3000 BCE (1600 years earlier)
      - China: Erh-li-t’ou (Hsia dynasty?) 2100-1800 BCE (700 years before Initial Olmec starts); Shang Dynasty: 1700-1100 BCE (starts 300 years earlier, but later Shang overlaps with Initial Olmec)
    - why did the New World start with complex society later?
  - Diamond:
    - poorer options for agriculture and animal domestication
      - maize (corn) was great, but took a long time to evolve from its wild predecessors, unlike wheat, barley, etc. which were naturally very productive
    - smaller area means fewer people
      - Diamond thinks that this in itself slows innovation and change: fewer minds at work
    - north-south orientation and barriers to travel slowed diffusion
      - slower diffusion of ideas, he says, means fewer ideas being combined, causing slower innovation
  - coincidence? (that is, some region had to be earlier, and some region later)
  - on the other hand, they are not *that* much later (700 to 2000 years or so)
    - compared to 10,000 years since the end of the Ice Age
    - or about 100,000 years of modern *Homo sapiens*
    - we could see this as being remarkably close to simultaneous
- Mesoamerican subsistence base
  - farmed beans, maize (corn), and squash
    - plus chili peppers, gourds, avocados, peanuts, tomatoes, etc.

- few domesticated animals
  - just dogs and turkeys
- Olmec (1400-300 BCE)
  - earliest known Mesoamerican culture with ceremonial centers
    - first examples of styles of mounds and plazas and stone carving that reappeared in many of the complex cultures that followed
  - Setting
    - Coastal lowlands, now tropical jungle
    - But in Olmec times (say, 1000 BCE),
      - There was a coastal plain 12 to 20 km wide, crossed by rivers
      - as in Mesopotamia and the Indus...
    - So subsistence probably included a combination of
      - swidden (slash and burn)
      - more intensive cultivation near rivers with casual, natural irrigation and flooding
      - swamp reclamation using raised fields
      - river fishing
  - Initial Olmec 1400-1000 BCE
    - Rise of site of San Lorenzo around 1200 BCE
      - a ceremonial center with few residents, but massive landscape architecture
      - a naturally elevated area, modified with extensive artificial filling and leveling, unknown exactly why
        - ridges were cut down and depressions between them filled
        - immense expenditure of labor to haul dirt around
      - low platforms of sand and clay, some defining courtyards between them
      - over 50 stone monuments, some very large, were placed on the plateau, mounds, etc.
        - many were the famous, massive basalt “Olmec heads”
          - 3 to 9 feet tall
          - some over 20 tons
          - the basalt boulders had to be hauled in from some 60 miles away
            - implies large work crews, probably hundreds of workers to move such a boulder
          - might be portraits of specific rulers
        - also “thrones” or “altars” with flat tops and figures carved in the front
        - also other sculptures, including “were-jaguars” that seem to be humans with some jaguar features
          - maybe shamans?
      - two rows of artificial ponds (totaling 20 ponds) with drains and fountains, possibly with stone sculptures standing around them...
        - main “drain” composed of over 30 tons of basalt!
        - carved basalt is extreme overkill for any practical purpose of agriculture or drainage
        - part of the “drain” system flowed into a stone basin shaped like a bird... certainly a ceremonial, not practical, construction
      - total population under 1000 people
        - i.e. a ceremonial center, with most people living in rural areas around it

- many of the heads and other monuments had complicated histories
  - they were intentionally mutilated and buried
  - some were dug up and reset in new locations
  - even later buried again
  - sometimes altars were re-carved into heads
  - timing and motivation for all this is debated
    - at the end of each ruler’s reign?
    - or later, desecrating or restoring the memory of a known past ruler?
- social stratification
  - implied by large earthworks and sculptures
  - also by heads, if they are portraits of specific individuals
  - but otherwise, little direct evidence
- warfare: little evidence for or against
  - although mutilation and burial of monuments may imply violence
- generally assumed to be a complex chiefdom society, in order to have been able to make the monuments and build San Lorenzo
- Intermediate Olmec 1000-650 BCE
  - the site of La Venta supplanted San Lorenzo as the major center
    - reaching its maximum size about 900 to about 450 BCE
  - La Venta
    - similar concept to San Lorenzo
    - mounds, courts, with lots of clay floors and rebuilding
    - ponds, drains
    - basalt heads and “altars”
    - plus a “pyramid” mound 30 m high (98 feet)
      - square based (the picture shows its eroded modern shape)
    - plus big offering pits filled with serpentine block “pavements”
      - mosaic of 485 carefully cut serpentine blocks 5 X 6 m (16 X 20 feet) forming a stylized jaguar mask design
      - laid on top of 28 layers of rough serpentine blocks neatly arranged in a clay matrix
      - a total mass of about 1000 tons of imported stone!
        - equivalent to the weight of several hundred large pickup trucks...
      - also small offering caches of jade figures and celts, beads, etc.
- Terminal Olmec 650-300 BCE
  - several large tombs with stone walls were built for important people
    - unfortunately, virtually no goods were found inside
  - Finally, the entire site of La Venta was covered with a thick layer of red clay and abandoned
- “Olmec” writing
  - While Olmec-ish, the few examples are all too late to really be “Olmec” (which conventionally ends around 300 BCE)
    - we know because the inscriptions include calendar dates in the same system that the Maya used up to the time of Spanish conquest

- we can read these dates
- the first “long count” dates
  - Slab at Chiapa de Corzo: 8 December 36 BCE
  - Stela C, Tres Zapotes: 3 September 32 BCE
  - Tuxtla Statuette: 14 March 162 CE, with unreadable glyphs
- Generalizations and explanations about the Olmec
  - Ceremonial centers without urban component
  - No high status residences known (although they might just not have been preserved)
  - high status burials only appeared very late
  - No administrative or centralized storage features
  - yet the monumental constructions imply an elite
  - long-distance trade for obsidian, jade, magnetite (a lustrous mineral used to make “mirrors”), etc.
    - implies an elite who could organize trade to get obsidian and exotic luxuries
  - clear specialization (ceramics, jade carving, monuments)
    - specialists making such nice goods were probably supported by an elite
      - but probably not very many of them
  - Destruction, burial, resetting of monuments suggests conflict, maybe competing groups
  - Probably several competing chiefdoms
    - centered at San Lorenzo, La Venta, Tres Zapotes, maybe others
- The textbook entirely ignores the Zapotecs of Oaxaca (central highlands of Mexico)
  - actually the first urban settlements
  - probably the first writing
  - but for sheer lack of time, I will follow the textbook’s lead and not deal with them
- Teotihuacán (later than the Olmecs, contemporary with the Maya)
  - located in a side valley of the basin of Mexico
    - which is a highland valley, near Mexico city
    - surrounded by high mountains, including active volcanoes
    - somewhat hot, scrubby environment
    - so irrigation is necessary to ensure a crop
    - but for the times we are looking at, this was small-scale, family or village level irrigation
  - by 250 BCE, numerous large settlements with 2000-4000 people
    - with ceremonial platform mounds up to 5 meters (16 feet) high
  - Patlachique Period 250 BCE-75 CE
    - the Olmec were gone by this point
    - two clearly preeminent centers developed
      - Cuicuilco
        - hard to be sure, but estimated over 400 hectares
        - population estimated up to 20,000 people
        - several very large mounds, may also have been smaller ones
          - largest is 20 m (65 feet) high, 80 m (260 feet) diameter
          - the mounds were oval, not rectangular

- Teotihuacán
  - Patlachique style sherds found over 8 square kilometers (800 hectares)
  - population estimated over 20,000
  - large mounds, but details are unknown because they are covered by later constructions
  - already had specialized obsidian workshops, indicating full-time specialists producing for trade
- Note how different these are from the Olmec centers
  - Olmecs: ceremonial architecture, but rural population
  - Teotihuacán: huge urban sites with ceremonial architecture at the core, more like Mesopotamia
- each the center of a cluster of smaller settlements
  - Apparently they were capitals of two major polities (states?)
- this coexistence of major centers did not last long, maybe only 150 years
  - late in the Patlachique period, a volcanic eruption covered much of Cuicuilco's farmland with lava and ash, probably weakening it irreparably
  - a few centuries later, a second lava flow covered the rest of the farmland and the site itself
    - leaving just the tall mounds sticking up out of a 5 meter deep lava flow
    - and leaving Teotihuacán as the uncontested single enormous urban center in the Basin of Mexico
- Tzacualli Period 75 CE-175 CE
  - Beginning of the heyday of Teotihuacán
  - Enormous development at Teotihuacán
    - Pyramid of the Sun built
      - base is similar in size to the Great Pyramid of Khufu (Cheops) at Giza, but only half as high
        - 225 meters (731 feet) on each side
        - slightly over 70 meters (228 feet) high
        - 1.175 million cubic meters of fill (rubble and adobes)
      - stone stairway up the front
      - wood and thatch temple on top
      - built on top of a modified natural lava tube 6 m below the surface, 100 m long, ending in a 4-lobed chamber
        - Olmec-like stone channels suggest that water was piped into it
        - for some kind of ritual probably having to do with the earth and fertility
    - Pyramid of the Moon started (finished in next period)
      - similar but slightly smaller
      - with an early high status burial right in the center of it
  - Main grid plan of city, with crossing main streets, was established in the Tzacualli period
    - Major “north-south” avenue called the “Street of the Dead”
    - lined with temple complexes and high-status residences
    - they even straightened the San Juan river to run along the grid-plan streets

- enormous size
  - 20 square kilometers
  - population estimated around 80,000 people
- Middle Horizon 175 -750 CE
  - the huge city of Teotihuacán was surrounded by tiny villages and small towns
    - city population reached 125,000, possibly up to 200,000 people
    - a huge disparity between wealthy city people and poor rural people
    - because all services, markets, etc. were in the city
    - rural people have to travel to the city for any service, sale, etc.
  - they built more big ceremonial structures
  - but also the “Great Compound”
    - apparently a huge marketplace
    - indicates massive commercial activity
  - the urban population lived in large, walled “apartment compounds”
    - apparently occupied by multiple families
    - central patio with family-size “temples”
    - surrounded by smaller courtyards with blocks of rooms
      - possibly occupied by related families
      - some show the same craft specialization in several of the different family apartments
    - many decorated with painted murals
  - neighborhoods by craft specialty or ethnicity
    - numerous adjacent “apartment blocks” with the same kind of craft workshops
    - or adjacent “apartment blocks” with the same foreign style of pottery, suggesting several ethnic barrios
      - best known is the Oaxaca barrio
      - pottery, burial practices, etc. directly from Oaxaca (Monte Albán) tradition
      - remained an ethnic "island" within the city of Teotihuacán for generations, even centuries
      - emissaries? traders? purpose unknown
  - craft production
    - at least 1/3 of the residents were non-agricultural specialists
    - some 600 distinct craft workshops identified
    - obsidian working is particularly well documented
    - similar craft workshop patterns are suspected for
      - pottery
      - jade, slate, basalt
      - basketry, featherwork, leatherwork
      - shell ornaments
    - very little craft production of any kind was done outside the city
  - rituals may have included cannibalism
    - some rather bloodthirsty artwork
    - and burned, cracked human bone may indicate offerings or consumption
  - Teotihuacán expanded outward and established distant outposts:

- Kaminaljuyu
  - now under modern Guatemala City
  - an early highland Maya site
  - Teotihuacán style buildings in one area, apparently welcomed peacefully
  - elite burials with Teotihuacán ceramics and other goods
  - located near a major obsidian source
  - huge numbers of Teotihuacán funerary vessels and incense burners are found in surrounding regions
    - maybe these are what they traded for the obsidian
- Maticapan
  - in Veracruz (Olmec area)
- Monte Albán (Oaxaca)
  - Some carvings in the Main Plaza show Teotihuacán visitors
  - Pottery, architecture, and murals in a tomb all show Teotihuacán motifs
  - and the Oaxaca barrio at Teotihuacán indicates that the contact went in both directions
- generalizations on Teotihuacán
  - Teotihuacán was not only a civic/ceremonial center, but also an urban and commercial center
  - larger area of direct political control than any contemporary center
  - probably the most important ritual center in Mesoamerica, as well
  - possibility of a writing system suggested by some wall paintings; a respectable theory but not proven yet
- Collapse of Teotihuacán about 600 CE
  - decline and signs of trouble
    - Near the end of the Middle Horizon, Kaminaljuyu had lost contacts with Teotihuacán
    - around the end of the Middle Horizon, wall murals started to show a lot more armed figures
    - the Ciudadela (the ritual and administrative compound on the Street of the Dead) was modified to make it more closed and defensible just before the end of the Middle Horizon
  - collapse
    - at the end of the period, population suddenly collapsed to just 25,000, a decline of 80% (from 125,000)
    - evidence of major fires, especially along the Street of the Dead
    - also in the temples of residential compounds
    - excavators think the fires were intentionally set to “ritually destroy” the city
- Who did it and why?
  - invaders?
  - protesting citizens?
  - an internal factional fight?
  - due to population outgrowing agricultural production in the vicinity?
- Lowland Maya
  - later than the Olmecs, contemporary with Teotihuacán

- main region is the Yucatan peninsula
  - relatively flat limestone plain with some slight rolling hills
  - covered by tropical rainforest in the west, scrubrier to the northeast tip of the peninsula
- Late Preclassic Period 300 BCE-250 CE
  - after the Olmec had collapsed
  - entire Maya lowlands were occupied by farmers
  - the main features of Maya civilization were established by around 1 CE
    - polychrome pottery made by specialists
    - jade jewelry
    - carved stelae and altars
    - elaborate stone architecture
    - causeways (elevated roads)
    - ball game
    - writing on bark paper
      - religious/cosmological purposes (books)
      - political propaganda (stelae)
    - calendar system modified from the one used by the Olmec
      - 260 day and 365 day cyclical calendars
      - combination returns to starting point every 52 years
      - occasion for rebuilding monuments, ceremonies, etc.
  - population grew, maybe tripled in this period
    - rough estimate of 2 to 5 million people in eastern lowlands by 100 BCE
  - Several (or numerous) town-sized centers with several thousand inhabitants each
  - public architecture
    - lots of ceremonial mounds built at this time
      - At Tikal, one Late Preclassic pyramid (5C-54) had 40,000 cubic meters of fill, and others were similar
        - over 30 m (100 feet) high
        - sides 80 m long at base (260 feet)
        - four stairways flanked by huge stucco masks
      - broad plazas, unrestricted access, small buildings on high platforms
        - suggests a few people performing rituals in a high place visible to a large crowd
    - perimeter ditches
      - large ditch surrounding a 37-ha portion of Los Cerros, Belize
        - implies a large labor force
        - maybe for defense, or to mark a boundary
      - causeways: elevated roads, often absolutely straight
        - go into some sites through entrances in the surrounding ditches (seven at Becan)
    - divine kingship
      - bloodletting ceremonies
      - legitimization through ancestry and exploits shown on stelae
    - Writing system
      - appeared as early as 250 - 300 BCE? (Late Preclassic)

- but most of the examples we have are later
- about 70-90% of Maya writing can be read
- it is mostly about legitimizing kinship, alliances, conquests, and other political propaganda
- Maya writing was used on
  - vessels
    - indicating the owner
    - the vessel's use or contents
    - explaining stories shown in pictures
  - codices
    - screen-fold books of bark paper, covered with jaguar skin
    - only four survive
    - these are mostly “almanacs” of astronomical and calendrical information
      - but the vast numbers that were burned by the Spanish may have contained many other subjects
      - codices buried with the dead can be identified, but are not well enough preserved to be readable
  - stelae: stone monuments
    - record dynastic events in lives of real rulers and nobles
      - births and deaths
      - marriages
        - especially strategic marriages to women from other lineages and cities
      - ascension to the throne
      - treaties and conquests
      - rituals done by rulers on calendrically important dates
    - most emphasize ruler's kinship ties or other claims to legitimacy
- NOT used for tribute or economic transactions, but kingship and politics
  - suggests that the state was not so involved in direct taxation or redistribution
- stratification
  - burials with clear variation in grave goods
    - including stingray spines
    - shells
    - jade ornaments and beads
    - pottery in special forms only for burials
  - some burials in “public” settings, inside monumental architecture
    - murals on tomb walls
  - implied stratification in occupational specialization
    - potters, stonecutters, painters, stucco sculptors, etc.
- possible competition and warfare near the end of the period (“terminal Preclassic” or “protoclassic”)
  - some centers were abandoned (El Mirador, for example)
  - others flourished
  - no obvious reasons: maybe political

- Becan, central Yucatan, built a massive defensive ditch and wall
  - 19 ha enclosed by a ditch 5 m deep, 10 m wide (16 x 32 feet), with an embankment on the inside, forming a 12 m high barrier (39 feet)
  - would have had a wooden palisade on top!
- Early Classic Period 250-500 CE
  - Teotihuacán, in central Mexico, had grown to be a huge, powerful city
    - it had an outpost or colony at Kaminaljuyu, in the Maya highlands
    - At Tikal, a stela was erected with Teotihuacán warriors flanking the ruler Curl Nose on a stela commemorating his taking power
      - suggested that Curl Nose was a Teotihuacáno who took over or married into control of Tikal
        - he would have been either from Teotihuacán, or from its outpost at Kaminaljuyu
      - local Tikal pottery started to have some Teotihuacán motifs
      - they built a new pyramid in a central location at Tikal in a hybrid Maya-Teotihuacán style
    - and at many sites, high-status people were buried with Teotihuacán goods, especially green obsidian
  - settlements
    - concentrations of house platforms
    - with stone or perishable walled structures on top, hard plaster floors kept clean
    - cities got to be large (several tens of thousands, at least, in Early Classic)
      - but much lower density than Teotihuacán
      - house groups had space for kitchen gardens or orchards right around them
  - nature of rule
    - rulers had to work to maintain legitimacy
    - murals show violence and chaos associated with accession of rulers
    - many monuments and building complexes were built in flurries of activity lasting only decades
    - there is apparently a lot of propaganda in these monuments
      - rulers sought legitimacy
      - but may not have kept it for long
    - monumental architecture at this point still is open and ritual-oriented
      - suggesting that show and religion had a lot to do with kingship
      - later public buildings became more restricted and “administrative”
        - suggesting that later Maya kings had more governmental duties and secular power
  - generalizations
    - the Maya lowlands were never dominated by one center; always numerous important, competing centers
    - frequent abandonments, realignments, conquests: rule was unstable
    - so it isn’t surprising that there is lots of evidence of warfare in stelae and murals
      - bragging of taking captives
- Late Classic Period (600 CE - 810 CE)
  - Teotihuacán was in decline and collapse by the beginning of the Late Classic

- the Maya population grew dramatically
- they built many more, and much bigger, public buildings than ever, at many sites
  - huge expenditures of labor
- while they still built temples, construction of "palaces" overwhelmed them
  - completely different design, with long, narrow halls or series of rooms, opening out through many doors on the long side, often onto a wide staircase
  - thought to be high-status residences (although there are no kitchens detectable) and/or administrative buildings
  - suggesting increasing administrative activities, and a growing upper class of at least partially secular leaders
- ceramic styles (fashions?) changed rapidly and dramatically
  - in contrast to the three centuries of virtually unchanging Early Classic ceramic style
  - suggesting a growing, competitive economy
- lots of fine craft goods were produced in the cities
  - some may have been for export, trying to take advantage of the power vacuum and demand left by the collapse of Teotihuacán
- warfare became more common in murals and sculpture, often with bound prisoners wearing the insignia of high rank
  - steps at Dos Pilas record military conquests
- kings continued to reinforce their legitimacy through ritual and propaganda
  - Yaxchilan lintel, 700-725 CE
    - Lady Xoc draws blood to sanctify the birth of a son by another wife to King Shield Jaguar, age 63
  - Palenque
    - Panel in the Temple of the Sun: secular imagery of military dominance
    - but also the long texts in the Temple of the Inscriptions
      - about the rituals that King Pacal did to honor the gods at the end of each 20-year k'atun period
        - the text you read for today
      - other panels in the same temple describe mythical events that happened on the same calendar days as did his birth and other important life events
        - showing that his life was a repetition of past mythical events, thus sanctioned by the gods
      - Pacal was one of the few, maybe only, Maya kings to be buried in a specially-constructed pyramid
        - showing his wealth and power
- Terminal Classic Period (810 CE - 910)
  - It was typical for Maya cities to erect a monument celebrating the end of each 20-year calendrical period called a *katun*
  - the erection of these monuments peaked in 790 CE, with 19 cities so far known to have dedicated one
  - in 810 CE, 12 cities set up stelae
  - in 830 CE, 3 did

- in 889 CE, just one hundred years after the height of stela carving, the last monument with a Maya long count date was erected. There would never be another.
- in Tikal, from 700 to 830 CE, the bulk of the architecture visible today was built; in the following 70 years, a few minor platforms and benches were added to existing buildings, but not a single new one was constructed
- it appears that the entire city of Tikal was abandoned except for a small remnant population living in and around the palaces
  - for the first time, garbage piled up in and around the palaces
  - when buildings collapsed, they were not repaired, but people kept living next to the rubble
  - population is estimated to have fallen to 10% or less of what it had been less than a century before
  - the remaining people apparently continued to practice Maya religion, but forgot many of the details, resetting old stelae in ways that violate earlier systematic rules, sometimes with the writing upside-down
- by the end of the Terminal Classic, even the small remnant population was gone, and the Maya sites in the Peten returned to the jungle
- the timing and details varied from city to city, but they all succumbed eventually
- depopulation over 100 years need not require a massive die-off; it can be caused by reductions in birth rates
- why?
  - overpopulation put a strain on the farmland
    - overfarming with shorter fallow periods led to severe erosion, reducing output, and requiring even shorter fallows to keep producing...
  - an "arms race" in monument construction sucked up more and more labor that could have been used to produce food in more intensive regimes
    - some of the increased building might have been an attempt to satisfy the gods as things got worse - while instead putting an even greater strain on the lower class...
  - the difference between rich and poor got greater and greater, as the resources were getting scarcer, possibly leading to unrest
  - high population density and food scarcity would have made the society vulnerable to disease
  - rising militarism would have been encouraged by, and might have worsened, these trends
  - some people think many of the lowland Maya simply moved to the northern, drier part of the Yucatan Peninsula, which did indeed flourish in the Postclassic Period
    - or maybe these were just the only ones left, after the core collapsed...
  - the potential for a parallel to modern times is hard to ignore.
- Very briefly on the Toltecs and Mexica (Aztecs):
- Toltecs, capital at Tula (Tollan)
  - Tula rose to importance in the highlands just north of the Basin of Mexico around 800 CE, after collapse of Teotihuacán
    - but it never got as big
    - reached its peak between 960 and 1150 CE
    - at 40,000 - 60,000 people

- famous low mounds with stone columns showing ornately dressed warriors
- obsidian workshops, ground stone vessels, textile production, etc.
- ceramics and shell traded from west coast
- Toltec goods and representations in art spread throughout the central highlands, from coast to coast
- collapsed between 1100 - 1200 CE, correlating with the beginning of the global warm period
- leaving numerous competing smaller polities
- one of which succeeded and became the Mexica (Aztecs), claiming descent from the Toltecs
- Mexica (Aztecs), capital at Tenochtitlán (modern Mexico City)
  - according to their oral history, they were latecomers to the Basin of Mexico
  - originally served one of many small chiefdoms in the Basin as mercenaries
  - finally settled on a nearly worthless island in one of the Basin lakes, which they improved into a rich and productive city
    - probably around 1325 CE
  - using "chinampa" (raised field) agriculture
  - set up the "Triple Alliance" with Texcoco and Tlacopan around 1428
  - extracted tribute from people in a huge area, from coast to coast
    - using repeated military campaigns to maintain control and capture sacrificial victims
  - they made elaborate tribute demands on conquered groups, recorded on bark paper documents
    - gold, cacao, shells, jaguar skins, cloth, food, etc.
  - Tenochtitlán had 150,000 - 200,000 people by the time the Spanish arrived (1519)
  - market economy
    - pochteca: specialized traveling merchants
    - huge marketplace at Tenochtitlan, recorded by conquistadores
      - complete with judges and police
    - relatively standardized units of exchange
      - cacao beans (“when money grew on trees”)
      - quills of gold dust, etc.
- human sacrifice
  - seen and recorded by the *conquistadores*
  - although they may have had reason to exaggerate
  - the Mexica (Aztecs), like many Mesoamerican societies before them, clearly did sacrifice a lot of people
  - did they eat the victims?
    - a tougher question
    - probably yes, but only certain parts, in certain circumstances
    - most sacrifices did not apparently involve cannibalism