The Olmec Legacy

The Olmec civilization dates back to 1200-400 BC. It is believed that the Olmec influenced and formed the basis of every other Mesoamerican civilization onwards. They primarily lived in the central coast and southern regions of Mexico in present-day Tabasco and Veracruz.

Characteristics of the Olmec

The Olmec is known for creating giant stone heads that were carved and sculpted from local volcanic rock. These great heads can weigh upwards of 30 tons. The Olmec also created great heads that can be seen in this exhibition.

EARLY CULTURES

Visit the Smithsonian Olmec Legacy at: http://www.nmnh.si.edu/test/anthro/sol/

SPOTLIGHT ON THE SMITHSONIAN

The oldest known center of this great civilization was La Venta, which was later destroyed and replaced with La Venta. The Olmec, like many of the subsequent Mesoamerican civilizations worshiped many deities, making their own version of the pantheon polytheistic cultures of the region.

The Olmec was a great civilization that flourished from about 1200 BC to 200 AD. They were known for their stone sculptures, including the Olmec head, which is one of the most famous images of this civilization.

The Smithsonian-Olmec Connection

Matthew Stirling, an anthropologist at the Smithsonian Institution, researched the site of La Venta, one of the most significant archaeological sites of the Olmec civilization. Stirling's work has contributed significantly to our understanding of this ancient culture.

The Nahua people migrated to the valley of Mexico around the 11th Century AD.

Day of the Dead

Where: Celebrated on November 1st and 2nd of every year throughout most of Mexico and Latin America.

What is it? It is a celebration that honors the spirits of loved ones or important people who have passed. The belief is that the dead return to their loved ones at this time of year. Families cross thresholds, or altars with food, drinks, bread, and sweets, among other things, that are left for the dead to enjoy. In addition, the alters are decorated with candles, pictures, candy skulls, and papel picado, a kind of paper decoration, as well as with marigolds. These are known by the Nahua name, compascatl (flower of the dead).

The Nahua Jaguar Mask


Interesting Fact

In some cases, Day of the Dead festivities are organized and led by the Catholic Church, combining both Catholic and Nahua American traditions. Day of the Dead celebrations with the Nahua Catholic All Saints’ Day.

THE NAHUA AND MEXICA-AZTEC PEOPLE

The Nahua, like many of the subsequent Mesoamerican civilizations, were quick to join the Spanish conquest. They originally settled in the area around Lake Texcoco and came to dominate most of central Mexico.

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When: Celebrated on November 1st and 2nd of every year throughout most of Mexico and Latin America.

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FAMOUS CALIFORNIA MISSION: Father Junipero Serra established the mission of San Diego.

NEW WORLD FOODS:

Corn (Maize)
And a kernel of corn history... Wild corn is native to southern Mexico and was an essential part of the diet of early civilizations. The crop spread throughout the Americas and reached the Inca Empire in South America. Following the encounter between the two worlds corn spread throughout much of Europe and began the process of domestication.

Chicomecóatl, and Her Role
In Mexico, Mexico City served as the capital of the Aztec Empire, ruled by Moctezuma II, the ruler who met the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés. Chicomecóatl, the Aztec goddess of sustenance and agriculture, was a key figure in the Aztec empire.

Chocolate
And a little kernel of chocolate... The world chocolate comes from the Náhuatl word xocolatl, meaning bitter water. Chocolate comes from the cocoa tree that is native to the Americas. It is believed that chocolate has been used in an important agricultural and economic role in both Mexican and Western societies. For example, the cocoa beans are one of the most important commodities in the agricultural system where their importance lasts in cocoa beans.

MEXICO'S CULINARY TRADITIONS

Natural Heritage

MONEY AND STAMPS

NEW BOUNDARIES

The Texas Revolution in 1836-1836 began the erosion of Mexico's southwestern territory. Mexico and the United States and Mexico entered into war over Mexico's southern borders. The country's territory would see a dramatic reduction in size.

The war saw the emergence of political and military leaders such as President Polk, Mexican General Antonio López de Santa Anna, American Admiral John Slidell, and General Zachary Taylor.

After the decisive Battle of Chapultepec, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo officially determined the boundary of the United States and Mexico. Mexico lost most of its territories as the United States, such as New Mexico, Utah, and California.

This shift in boundary created a convergence of Mexican and American cultures that would influence and continue to shape the character and culture of generations to come.

The Monarch Butterfly
The Monarch Butterfly displays the beauty of Mexico's natural heritage but also shows the natural connection between Mexico and the United States. This butterfly has a short life span but travels a great distance. Its migration begins at the end of the summer. During the warm, summer months, the Monarch Butterfly flies and resides in its natural habitats in Canada and the Great Lakes region of the United States. Towards the end of the summer, its journey begins to cross into Central Mexico. This is an extraordinary migration of butterflies that begins the regrowth that do not complete it, as their life span is only about 4 weeks. They arrive in Michoacán, central Mexico, around November 1st. The warm weather of central Mexico allows them to breed in late months; they make the return journey north.

INTERESTING FACT
The day in which the butterflies arrive in Mexico is known as Day of the Dead. There is an interesting connection between the butterflies and the Day of the Dead. It is believed by some Mexican indigenous people that butterflies are actually the souls of loved ones who died. Along with the butterflies, the Monarch Butterfly Memorial Forest is an international project designed to protect the butterflies' natural habitat and includes the states of Michoacán and the state of Mexico.

Chicomecóatl, the goddess of sustenance and agriculture, was a key figure in the Aztec empire. Chicomecóatl, the Aztec goddess of sustenance and agriculture, was a key figure in the Aztec empire.

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CHICOMECÓATL AND HER ROLE
Chicomecóatl, the Aztec goddess of sustenance and corn was one of the most important goddesses in the agricultural society whose importance lasts in cocoa beans.

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