



## EARLY CULTURES

### 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 are known for creating giant stone heads that were carved and sculpted from basalt, a kind of volcanic rock. These great heads can weigh upwards of 30 tons. The Smithsonian Institution owns a cast of one of these Olmec heads. The Olmec not only used basalt, but also jade to carve and sculpt images such as the Olmec pendant that can be seen in this exhibition.

The oldest known center of this great civilization was San Lorenzo, which was later destroyed and replaced with La Venta. The Olmec, like many of the subsequent Mesoamerican civilizations worshipped many deities, making them one of the earliest polytheistic cultures of the region.

La Venta Monument, Matthew Stirling, 1940 Photograph by Richard H. Stewart M.V. Stirling Collection, National Anthropological Archives National Museum of Natural History

### SPOTLIGHT ON THE SMITHSONIAN

### The Smithsonian-Olmec Connection

Matthew Stirling, an archaeologist and Smithsonian Institution researcher made one of the greatest historical discoveries of the region by proving the existence of the Olmec culture. Stirling was born in 1896 in Salinas, California and studied anthropology at the University of California. He began working as the Assistant Ethnology curator for the Institution and in 1938 participated in an expedition to Mexico that uncovered many fascinating artifacts and facts about the Olmec civilization. As part of the Smithsonian/National Geographic team he was able to excavate three sites at La Venta in Tabasco, San Lorenzo and Tres Zapotes in Veracruz.

Overall, Stirling is credited with unearthing the Olmec civilization and establishing it as the first pre-Columbian civilization in Mesoamerica.



Nahua jaguar mask, circa 1975 Guerrero, Mexico Wood, paint, hide, hair, tusks, glass eyes National Museum of the American Indian

### THE NAHUA JAGUAR MASK

Nahua jaguar mask, circa 1975 Guerrero, Mexico Wood, paint, hide, hair, tusks, glass eyes National Museum of the American Indian

In arid parts of Mexico, rainfall is all-important, and Nahua communities conduct annual ceremonies to bring the rains. These ceremonies sometimes include a symbolic fight by men wearing jaguar masks.

### ACTIVITY:

For more information on Day of the Dead activities and how to build your own Day of the Dead altar, please visit our website at [www.latino.si.edu](http://www.latino.si.edu).

### The Nahua

**WHO:** They are a Native American people of central and eastern Mexico.

**LANGUAGE:** Náhuatl is the most common indigenous language of the region

**MOST NOTABLE GROUP:** While other Nahua groups remained separate, the Mexica-Aztec established the powerful Aztec Empire throughout central and southern Mexico.

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

**THE NAHUA TODAY:** Currently, the Nahua people can be found in the valley of Mexico and are the largest native group in the country. Their way of life blends both native and Western traditions, as can be seen in their religious festivals.

### Day of the Dead

**WHEN:** 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 create ofrendas, or altars with food, drink, breads, and sweets, among other things, that are left for the dead to enjoy. In addition, the altars 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 Náhuatl name, *campesúchil* (flower of the dead).

**INTERESTING FACT** In some cases, Day of the Dead ceremonies are organized and led by the Catholic Church, combining both Catholic and Native American elements. Day of the Dead coincides with the Roman Catholic All Saint's Day.

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## CLOSER LOOK: RELIGION AND FESTIVALS: THE NAHUA AND MEXICA-AZTEC PEOPLE

### The Mexica-Aztec

**WHO WERE THEY?** The Mexica absorbed neighboring tribes and allies to establish the Aztec Empire in central Mexico.

**WHERE WERE THEY?** They originally settled in the area around Lake Texcoco and came to dominate most of central Mexico.

**THE AZTEC LEGEND:** When the Aztec migrated into the area surrounding Lake Texcoco, a prophecy told them to settle where they encountered an eagle eating a serpent on the top of a cactus. This image became the national emblem of Mexico after its independence from Spain in 1821.

**WHEN:** The Aztec Empire dated from about 1325 AD to about 1521 AD when the Spanish took over the land.

**WHAT WAS THEIR CAPITAL?** The center of trade and military power was Tenochtitlán. This city was also one of the largest in the world during this time period. Mexico City is built on the ruins of this great city.



Donald Hubert, photographer, Smithsonian Institution, Department of Anthropology collections, Catalogue #A208095.

### AZTEC BAS RELIEF CHALCHIUTLICUE

(She of the Jade Skirt) Mexica (Aztec), AD 1450-1521 Tenochtitlán (Mexico City) Basalt National Museum of Natural History, Department of Anthropology

Chalchiutlicue, goddess of the earth's waters, was consort of the rain god Tlaloc. Four images of Tlaloc's helpers, holding water pitchers and lightning rattles, are carved on the reverse.

### FIND THE AZTEC LEGEND

As you go through the exhibition, see if you can locate this image. HINT...there are several places where this image appears.

**THE EMPIRE:** The Aztecs dominated their neighbors through military force and would absorb them into the empire by demanding constant tributes from their subjects. These conquered people resented the Aztecs and were quick to join the Spanish conquest.

**WHO WERE THE FIRST AND LAST EMPERORS OF THE AZTEC?** The first Emperor was Itzcoatl, while the last was Cuauhtémoc. The first Emperor to greet the Spanish upon Hernan Cortes' arrival was Moctezuma.

**AZTEC RELIGION:** The Aztecs, similar to other early civilizations of the region were polytheistic and worshipped several gods, many of them connected to nature. They worshipped the gods of Earth, Rain, and the Sun. One of their notable gods, Quetzalcoatl, the plumed serpent and one of the gods of creation was worshipped throughout Mesoamerica and the American Southwest. The Aztecs held the belief that the gods needed to be appeased, at times through human sacrifice. The image below is Chalchiutlicue, the goddess of Earth's water.

In history, the arts, and popular culture, Mexico is at the heart of the Americas. An ancient cradle of American agriculture, literature and technology, the cities of Mexico were the first to make Europeans marvel. Covered for its territory and its natural and human resources, Mexico has been at the center of political and military contests that long predate the Spanish conquest of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Objects, images and sounds from Mexico's diverse peoples and landscapes permeate the collections of the Smithsonian Institution. Over time and across borders, Mexico—whether seen through the prism of U.S. military history or contemporary indigenous arts—has become a land with many meanings. Mexican Treasures of the Smithsonian<sup>®</sup> showcases collections from across the institution that illustrates Mexico as a place of human, scientific and historical wonder.

## Welcome to Mexican Treasures of the Smithsonian

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE OLMEC:

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

THE AZTEC IN THE NEWS TODAY:

Read about recent Aztec Empire discoveries in this following CNN article: Aztec Pyramid Ruins Found in Mexico City. <http://www.cnn.com/2007/TECH/science/08/02/mexico.pyramid.reut/index.html>

# MISSIONS

## Who Established the Missions

The Spanish tried to colonize much of the Americas with the help of missionaries such as the Franciscan monks, who established missions throughout New Spain.

### WHY?

The purpose of the missions was to convert the Native American peoples to Catholicism and integrate them into the Spanish economy. The missions tried to dominate every aspect of the native people's lives and were met with resistance from the indigenous communities.

### WHERE?

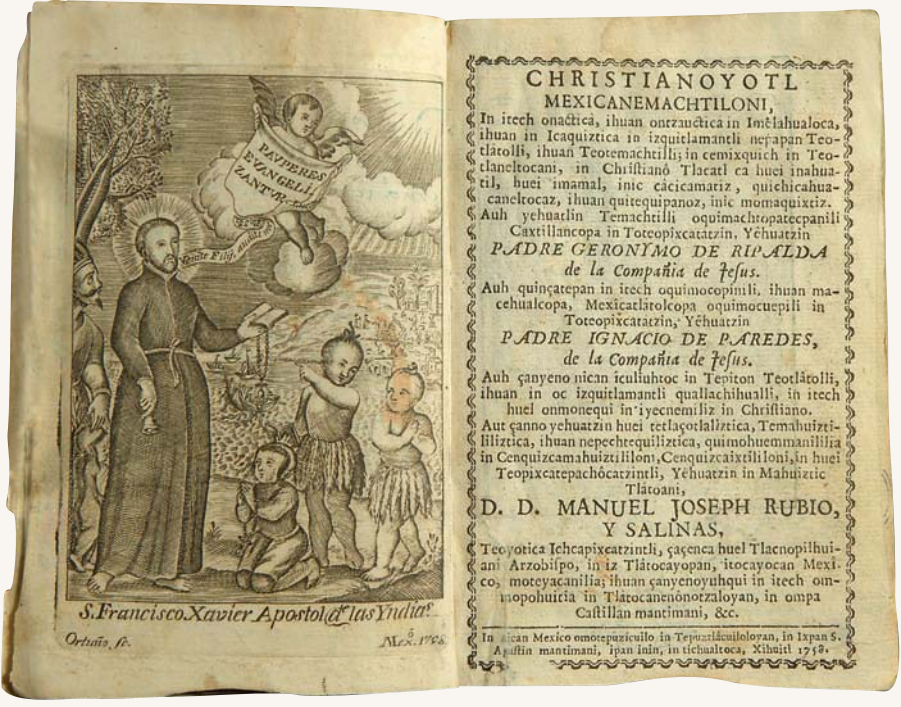
Missions were established throughout present day southwestern United States and California, all of which were part of New Spain.

### FAMOUS CALIFORNIA MISSION:

Franciscan monk Junipero Serra established the mission of San Diego.

### HOW WERE THEY ORGANIZED?

Missions generally included a central patio which was surrounded by buildings. The church and other buildings including shops, storehouses, and living quarters circled around.



### SPANISH-NAHUATL CATECHISM

1758 Mexico National Museum of American History, Division of Home and Community Life, donated by Nicolas Leon

Catechisms are manuals that teach Catholic doctrine. This Catecismo Mexicano, composed in Spain in 1556, was the one most often used to aid in the conversion of Mexico's Indian communities. This 1758 edition was translated into Nahuatl, the Indian language of central Mexico, which is still spoken today. Catechisms were also translated into Otomi and Zapotec.

# 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 Incan Empire in South America. Following the encounter between the two worlds corn spread throughout much of Europe and began the process of domestication.

### CONNECTIONS BETWEEN NEW AND OLD:

Corn, or maize was so important, that the Aztecs had a god and goddess of corn. Chicomecóatl, the goddess of sustenance and corn was one of the most important goddesses in the agricultural society whose most important crop was corn.

### CHICOMEÓATL AND HER ROLE IN AZTEC SOCIETY

Chicomecóatl, the Corn Goddess, Mexico (Aztec), AD 1400-1521, Valley of Mexico Scoria, National Museum of the American Indian

## Corn Today

Corn is an important cash crop and one of the most grown throughout the world. It is the basis for most flat breads, including tortillas, and is also a key ingredient for popular foods such as, corn flakes, popcorn, and tamales. It continues to play an important agricultural and economic role in both Mexican and western societies. For example, tortillas are the second most popular bread in the United States according to The State of the Tortilla Industry Survey in 2002 conducted by Aspek Research. Tortillería's (tortilla factories) have become an essential part of this growing multi-billion dollar industry, as well as companies who produce related products, such as salsa.



**DID YOU KNOW**  
Since 1991, salsa has surpassed ketchup as the most consumed condiment in America.

**ACTIVITY:**  
**Explore** some of the daily uses of corn. Create a list of products that you consume regularly that have corn as an ingredient. **HINT...** think about breakfast foods, fast foods and special occasion foods. Now you can see how important corn and corn products are in our lives.

Research where corn is grown and explore how it has spread through time across the globe. Identify the locations on a map. Can you trace the migration of corn?

**Want to make your own tortillas?**  
Visit our website at [www.latino.si.edu](http://www.latino.si.edu) for an authentic recipe.

# MEXICO'S CULINARY TRADITIONS

## Chocolate

And a little morsel of chocolate... The word chocolate comes from the Náhuatl word *xocolatl*, meaning bitter water. Chocolate comes from the cacao tree that is native to the Americas. It is believed that chocolate has been in use since around 600 BC. Europeans first encountered hot chocolate in the 16th century, when the Aztecs presented the drink to the Spanish when they first arrived in Mexico. The Spanish then introduced the drink in Europe. The phenomenon spread and the beverage became known as Hot Chocolate. In Europe, chocolate became a desert food and was mixed with milk and sugar.

### WHAT IS THE TRADITIONAL MEXICAN HOT CHOCOLATE?

The traditional Mexican drink is a spicy, warm beverage that is mixed with a *molinillo*. Its main ingredients include condensed milk, vanilla, cinnamon, anise and other spices.

### WHAT IS A MOLINILLO?

A molinillo is a kitchen tool designed by the Spanish in the 1700's. Molinillo's were fit into a container. The handle was then rotated between the hands, which froths the chocolate.

**DID YOU KNOW**  
Hot Chocolate became the Spanish Kings' Official Drink in New Spain and Europe.

### TIES BETWEEN NEW AND OLD:

The botanical name for chocolate is Theobroma- which means food for the gods. In early times, chocolate was used in rituals by priests and noblemen and for the gods.

The cacao bean was of such importance that it was used as a form of currency.

### INTERESTING FACT

The Maya were actually the first to use cacao beans and hot chocolate. The Maya made the drink spicier by adding chilies

### NEW USES:

Chocolate is consumed in a variety of forms, as candy bars, ice cream, cookies and of course hot chocolate. It is now thought that chocolate has medicinal value, as well.

### MAYA (CLASSIC PERIOD) VASE

(chocolate drinking vase), AD 550-850 Yucatan, Mexico Ceramic, paint National Museum of the American Indian



### ZAPOTEC OR MIXTEC MOLINILLO

(chocolate stirring stick), 1930-33 Oaxaca, Mexico Wood, ivory, brass National Museum of the American Indian



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON MAIZE PLEASE VISIT:  
Corn, Maize, Masa, Nixtamal: <http://www.gourmetsleuth.com/masanixtamal.htm>  
La Plaza de Cultura y Artes: Cocina Connection Tamales A Children's Guide  
[http://www.lapca.org/documents/TamalesBook\\_ver2.pdf](http://www.lapca.org/documents/TamalesBook_ver2.pdf) Latino Foodways section at [www.latino.si.edu](http://www.latino.si.edu)

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON CHOCOLATE VISIT:  
"Chocolate" Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2007: [http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia\\_761569428/Chocolate.html](http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761569428/Chocolate.html)  
Latino Foodways at [www.latino.si.edu](http://www.latino.si.edu)

# NEW BOUNDARIES



### SILAS CORNELL'S TERRESTRIAL GLOBE

"patented 1845" National Museum of American History, Division of Physical Sciences

This globe demonstrates the change of borders in 1848. When printing plates were made for the globe in 1846, they showed that Mexico extended north to Oregon. But when the globe was actually produced a few years later, instead of remaking the plates (an expensive process), the company changed the color overlay to indicate the new U.S. territory.

The Texas Revolution in 1834-1836 began the erosion of Mexico's northeastern territory. After, the United States and Mexico entered into war over Mexico's northern border; 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 Santa Ana, American diplomat John Slidell, and General Zachary Taylor.

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

This shift in borders created a convergence of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans that would influence and create a new culture in the United States and would bring about social, political, and cultural changes for generations to come.

# NATURAL HERITAGE

Mexico's natural heritage is extremely diverse and includes everything from minerals and fossils to insects and birds. The Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History holds an extensive collection of specimens that display the biodiversity of Mexico.



### MONARCH BUTTERFLY

*Danaus plexippus*  
Oaxaca  
National Museum of Natural History

### The Monarch Butterfly

The Monarch Butterfly displays the beauty of Mexico's natural heritage but also the natural connection between Mexico and the United States. The 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 lives and makes its natural habitat in Canada and the Great Lakes region of the U.S. Towards the end of the summer, it begins its journey to Central Mexico. This is its transnational winter migration. The butterflies that begin the migration do not complete it, as their life span is only about 4-5 weeks. They arrive in Michoacán, central Mexico on or around November 1st. The warm weather of central Mexico allows them to breed. In late March, 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 indigenous people that the butterflies are actually the spirits of dead children or of lost warriors.

The Monarch Butterfly Model Forest is an international forest that is dedicated to protect and conserve the butterfly's natural habitat in Mexico and includes the state of Michoacán and the state of Mexico.

# MONEY AND STAMPS

Pre-Columbian Mexico used a variety of different natural resources as currency for trading. Some of the objects used were both precious commodities and currency, such as the cacao bean and jade. With the Spanish conquest of Mexico, traditional European coin was introduced as the method of currency. Mexican currency has evolved through the times to reflect its history.

Much in the same way as currency, stamps have changed over time to represent Mexico both nationally and internationally. Mail has become a way to export your country's story, history and image to the world. Go through the exhibition and see the story of Mexico develop through its coins and stamps.

### AZTEC BIRD-MAN, 1934-35

National Postal Museum

### VOLCANOES

Airmail stamp: Parícutin volcano and church, 1956 National Postal Museum



### ACTIVITY:

#### Coin Activity

(may be done while visiting the exhibition)  
Trace Mexico's roots through the coin display in the exhibition. Think and answer some of the following questions: Do the coins tell a story? What or whose stories do they tell?

#### Stamp Activity

(must be done both while visiting the exhibition and after the visit)  
Using the stamps and coins in the exhibition, create a timeline of major events and people in Mexico's history (this may require additional research).

#### Extension Activities

(after visiting the exhibition)

- Think about currency in your own country. Trace your own country's currency history and think about some of the following questions. What do they depict? Do they tell your country's history?
- Think about the EURO. Whose story does it tell? Create a pros and cons list to developing a single currency. Think about the role and purpose of a country's currency while doing this activity.