

**The Cultures of Pre-Columbian America:  
Maya, Toltecs, Mississippians**

I. Periodization

- A. Preclassic — 2000 B.C. – A.D. 250
  - 1. Early — 2000 B.C. – 1000 B.C.
  - 2. Middle — 1000 B.C. – 300 B.C.
  - 3. Late — 300 B.C. – A.D. 250
    - a. Protoclassic — A.D. 100 – A.D. 250
- B. Classic — 250 – 900
  - 1. Early — 250 – 600
  - 2. Middle — 400 – 700 (influence of Teotihuacan)
  - 3. Late — 600 – 900
- C. Postclassic – 900 – 1519
  - 1. Early — 900 – 1200
  - 2. Late — 1200 – 1519

II. Some of More Prominent Indigenous Societies

A. Classic Maya — “A.D. 292–928”

- 1. Important Figures in 19th- and 20th-Century Mayan Studies
  - a. John Lloyd Stephens – expedition 1839–1842
  - b. Eric Thompson (1883–1975)
  - c. Giles Healey — discovered murals at Bonampak, 1946
  - d. Alberto Ruz — discovered tomb of Lord Pacal
  - e. Iurii Valentinovich Knorosov — linguist
  - f. Tatiana Proskuriakova (1909–1985)
  - g. William Fash
  - h. David Stuart — epigrapher
  - i. Arthur Demerest
  - j. Linda Schele — art historian
- 2. Agriculture based
  - a. Neolithic technology
  - b. poor soil, insects, dense forests
  - c. Blood sacrifice of elite to ensure success
- 3. Accomplishments
  - a. Extensive monumental architecture
  - b. Most advanced calendar until the 20th century
  - c. Complex writing system
    - (1) glyphs = combination of whole words and sounds
    - (2) meaning dependent on position
    - (3) similar to ancient Egyptian and cunieform
    - (4) codices destroyed by Diego de Landa in 1562

4. Over 50 city-states flourished (“pulsating galactic polities”)
  - a. El Mirador (150 B.C.–A.D. 50)
  - b. Tikal (last date: 879)
  - c. Copán (18 Rabbit [r. 695–738])(last date: 819)
  - d. Palenque (Pacal [Shield] (r. 615–683)(last date: 799)
  - e. Dos Pilos (last date: 761)
  - f. Caracol (last date: 859)

video: Time-Life, *Maya: The Blood of Kings* from “Lost Civilizations,” no. 2, 1995.

5. Theories of Mayan abandonment of cities
  - a. ecological devastation (Copán, El Mirador)
  - b. climate change
  - c. agricultural exhaustion
  - d. internal revolt
  - e. foreign invasion — the Putun
  - f. top heavy in non-food producers
  - g. devastating inter-city wars (Tikal, Palenque)
  - h. earthquakes
  - i. people lost faith; abandoned city elites

#### B. Post-Classic Maya — 928–1520

1. Chichen Itza
2. Tulum – occupied ca.1200 to 16<sup>th</sup> century
3. *Popul vuh* (ca. 1550)

#### C. Moche (200–750) — Sipán

1. gold, silver, copper artifacts
2. ceramics

#### D. Toltecs (1000–1200)

#### E. Cahokia (900–1400)

#### *Recommended Reading and Viewing:*

- Michael D. Cole, *Breaking the Maya Code*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1992 (book).
- Brian M. Fagan, *Kingdoms of Gold, Kingdoms of Jade: The Americas Before Columbus*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1991.
- William L. Fash, *Scribes, Warriors and Kings: The City of Copán and the Ancient Maya*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1991.
- Henderson, John S. *The World of the Ancient Maya*, 2nd ed., Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1997
- National Geographic Society, *Lost Kingdoms of the Maya*, 1992 (video).
- Time-Life, *The Fall of the Maya*, from “Archaeology,” 1992 (video)