

Mexico



Fulbright-Hays Seminar
2008
By Galina Tchourilova



Map of Mexico



<http://usavisaservices.net/osc/images/map-mexico.jpg>

31 states of Mexico plus Federal District (Mexico City)



http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu/images/map_mexico.gif

- 2 million square km (the 5th largest country in the Americas)
- population: 109 million
- capital: Mexico City (population: 19 million)
- climate: temperate to tropical
- government: Federal Presidential Republic
- president: Felipe Calderon
- independence from Spain: September 16, 1810

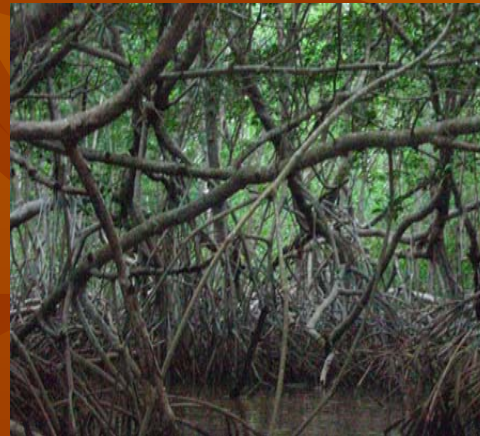


Topography and climate

- Two mountain ranges: Sierra Madre Oriental and Sierra Madre Occidental
- The Tropic of Cancer divides the country into temperate and tropical zones.
- Land north of the twenty-fourth parallel experiences cooler temperatures during the winter months.
- South of the twenty-fourth parallel, temperatures are fairly constant year round.
- This gives Mexico one of the most diverse weather systems in the world.



- 200,000 different species
- Mexico ranks first in biodiversity in reptiles (707 known species), second in mammals (438 species), fourth in amphibians (290 species), and fourth in flora (26,000 different species).
- Mexico is the second country in the world in ecosystems



Pre-Colombian period

Many great indigenous civilizations of the Americas had long faded by the time of the first permanent European arrivals.

Olmec (1500/1200 B.C.–400 B.C.) An early Mesoamerican civilization, artistically and technologically advanced. Created massive stone sculptures and large ceremonial structures.

Zapotec (600 B.C.–A.D. 400) Credited with developing one of the earliest writing systems.

Classic Maya (A.D. 250–900) One of the greatest civilizations of the New World. Excelled in astronomy, mathematics, architecture, and farming.

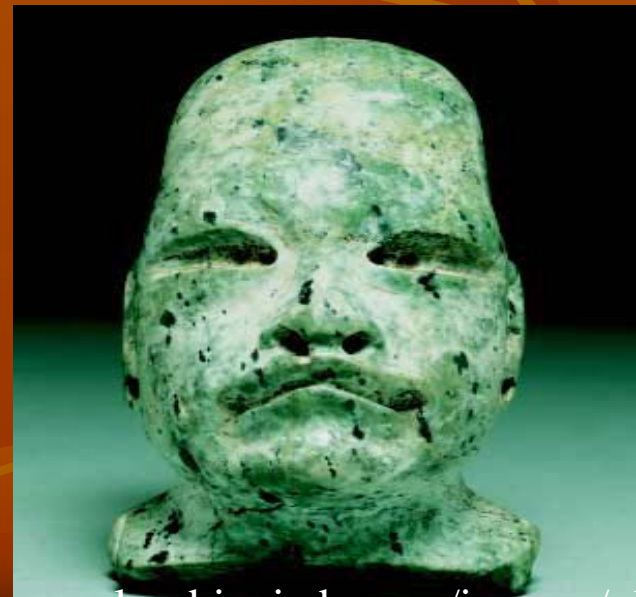
Toltec (A.D. 856–1200) Major military force with Tula as the capital.

Aztec (A.D. 1300–1521) A powerful military group, founded Tenochtitlán as their capital, created great stone sculptures, were destroyed by H. Cortés.



Preclassic/ Formative

- The first complex civilization to develop in Mesoamerica—the Olmec—inhabited the gulf coast region of Veracruz throughout the Preclassic period.
- The main sites of the Olmec include San Lorenzo, La Venta, and Tres Zapotes.
- Although specific dates vary, these sites were occupied from roughly 1200 to 400 B.C.



Early Classic

- The Classic period is marked by the rise and dominance of several polities.

Examples:

Teotihuacán in central Mexico and Tikal in Guatemala.

- Monte Alban in Oaxaca expanded and flourished during this period.



Teotihuacan



Late Classic

- The Late Classic period (A.D. 600 until A.D. 800/850 [varies]) a period of interregional competition among the numerous regional polities in the Maya area. Caracol, Copán, Palenque were important sites.
- In the Maya area, the Late Classic ended with the so-called “Maya collapse,” a transitional period of general depopulation of the southern lowlands and flourishing of centers in the northern lowlands.



Palenque



Terminal Classic

- Generally applied to the Maya area, the Terminal Classic roughly spans the time between A.D. 800/850 and A.D. 1000.
- It correlates the rise to prominence of Puuc settlements in the northern Maya lowlands. Major sites: Uxmal, Sayil, Labna, Kabah, and Oxkintok.
- Chichén Itzá was first settled during the Early/Late Classic transition, but rose to prominence during the Terminal Classic.
- During its apogee Chichén Itzá economically and politically dominated the northern lowlands.



Uxmal



Postclassic

- During the Postclassic period (beginning A.D. 900–1000, depending on area), the main Maya centers were located in the northern lowlands.
- In central Mexico it correlates with the rise of the Toltec at their capital, Tula.
- Latter portion of the Postclassic is associated with the rise of the Mexica and the Aztec empire.
- The Aztec politically dominated nearly all of central Mexico, the Gulf Coast, Mexico's southern Pacific Coast, Oaxaca, and Guerrero.



Maya Gods

- The ancient Mayans had a complex pantheon of deities whom they worshipped and offered human sacrifices.
- Rulers were believed to be descendants of the gods and their blood was the ideal sacrifice, either through personal bloodletting or the sacrifice of captives of royal blood.
- The Mayan vision of the universe is divided into multiple levels, above and below earth, positioned within the four directions of north, south, east and west.
- Many people connect the story of the Popol Vuh with a story of Extraterrestrial gods who came to earth and made man in their own image.
- As in all creation myths, religions, and prophecies, the gods promise to return one day.



Symbol of the Wind God



Yum Cimil, the Death God.



Feathered serpent, Quetzalcoatl.



Chac, the Rain God

- In the lowlands of the Yucatan Peninsula, ground water was scarce during the dry season.
- All the Mayan settlements were situated close to cenotes, natural water holes that allowed for survival in an inhospitable tropical climate.
- Water in the underground rivers seeped through the porous limestone walls, filling them with water.



This picture of the Sacred Cenote in Chichén Itzá (59 meter in diameter) was used for sacrifices to the water god. The excavation found 50 skeletons along with gold, jade and other artifacts.

Maya architecture

- The Maya temple-pyramids are one of the most impressive architectural achievements.
- They were built by platforms, each new platform smaller in size, giving the pyramid a stepped look.
- Outside was covered by a thick layer of stucco, often painted with bright colors.
- Many burial chambers of royalty were found in the lower platform.
- One of the Maya contributions is the corbel arch, which formed by projecting stone blocks out from each side until they almost met, forming a peak (it is weaker than a true, Roman arch).



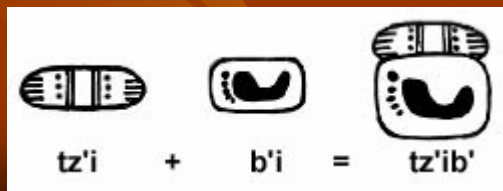
The ballgame

- The Mesoamerican ballgame was a sport with ritual associations played for over 3000 years by nearly all pre-Colombian peoples of Mesoamerica with different versions in different places.
- Over 1300 ballcourts have been found throughout Mesoamerica. They vary in size, but they all feature long narrow alleys, with side-walls against which the balls could bounce.
- In the most well-known version of the game, the players would strike the ball with their hips, although some versions allowed the use of forearms.
- The ball was made of solid rubber, and weighed up to 4 kg or more, with sizes that differed greatly.
- The game had important ritual aspects, and major formal ballgames would be held as ritual events, often featuring human sacrifice.



Maya writing system

- The Maya hieroglyphic writing is arguably one of the most visually striking writing systems of the world.
- The Mayan script is logosyllabic combining about 550 logograms (which represent whole words) and 150 syllabograms (which represent syllables). There were also about 100 glyphs representing place names and the names of gods. About 300 glyphs were commonly used.
- Examples of the script have been found carved in stone and written on bark, wood, jade, ceramics, and a few manuscripts.
- Many syllables can be represented by more than one glyph.
- The script was usually written in paired vertical columns reading from left to right and top to bottom in a zigzag pattern.



Maya languages

About 50 indigenous languages are spoken as their mother tongue by 7 million people in Mexico. These are the examples of some of them:

Tseltal

- Spisil winiketik te ya xbejk'ajik ta k'inalil ay jrerechotik, mayuk mach'a chukul ya xbejka, ya jnatik stojol te jpisiltik ay snopibal sok sbijil joltik, ja' me k'ux ya kaibatik ta jujun tul.

Tsotsil

- Skotol vinik o ants ta spejel balumile k'olem x-hayan i ko'ol ta sch'ulal i sderechoetik i, skotol k'ux-elan oyike oy srasonik y slekilalik, sventa skuxijik leknóo ta ju jun ju ju vo.

Yucatec (yukatek)

- Tuláakal wíinik ku síijil jáalk'ab yetel keet u tsiikul yetel Najmal Sijnalil, beytun xan na'ata'an sijnalil yetel no'oja'anil u tuukulo', k'a'abet u bisikuba bey láaktzilil yetel tuláakal u baatzile'.

Translation (of all the above texts)

- All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.
(Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

Maya calendar

The Maya actually invented 3 calendars.

The Sacred Count (tzolk'in) counted days. It had 20 day names and 13 numbers and was based on a cycle of 260 days.

The Haab was a solar calendar with 365 days and was based on the orbit of the earth around the sun. It had 18 months with 20 days per month. The 5 extra days made up a short month, these days were considered unlucky.

The "long count", is a continuous record of days from a zero date (beginning of the times) that correlates to Aug. 13, 3114 B.C. It calculates a cycle that last for 1,872,000 days. The end of this cycle corresponds to December 21, 2012.



<http://www.capitalbusinesscalendar.com/images/maya-calendar.jpg>

Mayan Math

- To carry out their calendar and astronomical calculations they developed a sophisticated mathematical system where units are written with dots and bars are used to represent five units.
- Because Maya used zeros, they were able to calculate large numbers.
- They discovered and used the zero as well as a vigesimal positioning system, similar to the decimal positioning system we use today.

0	1	2	3	4
	•	••	•••	••••
5	6	7	8	9
—	—•	—••	—•••	—••••
10	11	12	13	14
==	==•	==••	==•••	==••••
15	16	17	18	19
===	===•	===••	===•••	===••••
20	21	22	23	24
• 	•	•	•	•
25	26	27	28	29
• —	• —	• —••	• —•••	• —••••

Mystery of the Mayan calendar

The date December 21(in some sources the 23), 2012 A.D. (13.0.0.0.0 in the Long Count), represents an extremely close conjunction of the Winter Solstice Sun with the crossing point of the Galactic Equator (Equator of the Milky Way) and the Ecliptic (path of the Sun), what that the ancient Maya recognized as the Sacred Tree.

It will come to resolution at exactly 11:11 am GMT.

This date represents the end of the Maya calendar.



The voladores. Five costumed men recreate a ceremonial ritual first started by the Totonac Indians from Veracruz. The flyers begin by climbing the tall pole, then each of four of the men slip a foot into a loop at the end of a rope that is wound around the top of the pole. The fifth team member performs a special dance to each of the four cardinal directions, dancing upon the top of the pole while playing a flute. At the right moment, the four flyers release themselves from the small cap on the pole and fall to earth, circling around the pole in expanding circles as the rope unwinds, eventually touching ground.





<http://www.mna.inah.gob.mx>

The stucco head of a young Maya noble with a deformed skull. Found in the burial chamber of Lord Pakal in the Temple of the Inscriptions of Palenque.



Copyright: Colette M. Denham & Robert M. Schoch

<http://circularartimes.org/MSkl4.jpg>

One of the noteworthy aspects of many Maya representations is the elongated skull, the result of cranial deformation begun at an early age. For the Maya, this would be a practice reserved for noble children. Current research speculates that this technique dramatically increased the brain capacity.

Mayan dentistry

- The skills they developed for working on teeth were for ritual or religious purposes.
- The Mayas were skilled in the fabrication and placement of carved stone inlays in precisely prepared cavities in the front teeth.
- These inlays were made of various minerals, including jadeite, iron pyrites, hematite, turquoise, and quartz.



<http://www.jbschilling.com/mayateethw.jpg>

The teeth of this Mayan skull of the ninth century A.D. have numerous inlays of jade and turquoise. Also note how the upper front teeth have been filed, particularly the decorative front two teeth.

Food

- By roughly 6000 B.C, hunter-gatherers of Mesoamerica began to develop agricultural practices (cultivation of squash and chilies).
- The earliest example of maize comes from Oaxaca, 4000 B.C.
- Beans, tomato and squash all become common by 3500 B.C.
- Cotton, yucca and agave were exploited for fibers and textile materials.
- By 2000 B.C. corn is the staple crop in the region and would remain so up through modern times.
- Fruits (avocado, papaya, and guava) were important in the daily diet of Mesoamerican cultures.
- Some animals, including the duck, deer, dogs, and turkey were domesticated.
- Societies of this region did hunt certain wild species to complement their diet (deer, rabbit, birds and various types of insects).



Rise of fall of Tenochtitlán

Mexicas (Aztecs) came to an islet where they saw an eagle devouring a snake on a cactus (as was predicted by their god) and found a city in 1325.

Tenochtitlán was perfectly laid out, being divided in four corners (four directions of the universe).

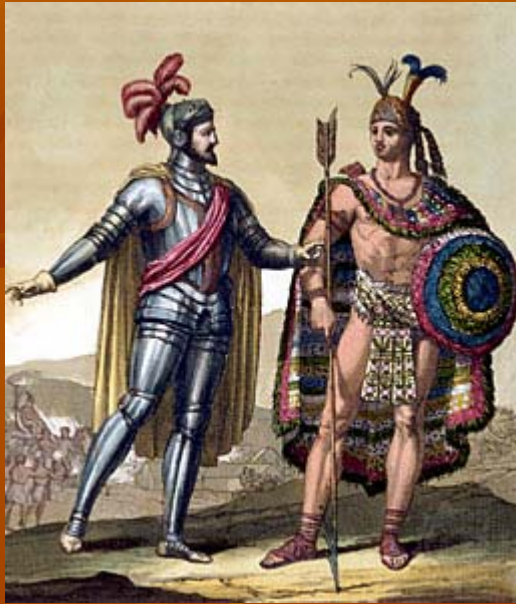
The city had many canals and streets, the fertile soil from the lake gave three harvests a year. By the time of Cortés's arrival it was larger than any city in Spain.



Diego Rivera: The Great City of Tenochtitlán, 1945, National Palace, Mexico City



Conquest (Spanish version)



Meeting of Cortés and Moctezuma II.

<http://cache.eb.com/eb/image?id=19358&rendTypeld=4>



The conquest of Tenochtitlán (1521).

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/kislak/images/kc0026s.jpg>

Conquest (Mexican version)



<http://www.ddbstock.com/jpeg4/spanishconquestofmexico003.JPG>



<http://www.davidmcculloch.com/RiveraMural1.jpg>

A very brief history of Mexico after the conquest

- Cortés defeats Moctezuma, destroys Tenochtitlán, builds Mexico City on the foundation of the Aztecs' temples, sets up the encomiendas (which give right of labor or tribute of the indigenous people). Conversion of indigenous people to Christianity.
- Nueva España includes most of the modern states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Utah, and Colorado.
- 1810: War of independence from Spain.
- Mexican Republic in 1824.
- From 1833: 22 years of political instability (presidency changed hands 36 times, 11 of these terms went to Santa Anna); Mexican-American war; Mexico ceded Texas, California, Utah, Colorado, and most of New Mexico and Arizona to the U.S.A.
- French Intervention (1861–1867): Mexico was deeply in debt; Napoleon III sends the troops to help put Maximilian of Hapsburg on the Mexican throne.
- Porfirio Diaz serves 6 consecutive terms (33 years). Develops industry, but bans any opposition and free press. Peasants lose their land, many resources went to foreign ownership.
- Mexican revolution (1910–1921): Emiliano Zapata launches the cry, ¡Tierra y Libertad!; violent civil war costs estimated 2 million lives and shatters the economy.
- Periods of national reconstruction follow by periods of unrest; recession caused by the oil boom; 1985 Mexico City earthquake (10,000 people killed).
- Zapatista uprising. In 1994 2,000 indigenous peasant rebels took over 4 towns in the southern state of Chiapas. They protested decades of discrimination. They retreated under a truce to a base in Chiapas jungle, and their leader, Subcomandante Marcos, became a folk hero. The latest negotiations didn't solve the problem.

Material interests convert politics into tourists' souvenirs (Zapatista toys)



History of Mexico (Diego Rivera)



Maya today



- Many Maya Indians still uphold various traditions and practices which relate back to earlier times
- Traditional Maya houses (adobe bricks or stones for walls, palm fronds for the roof)
- Traditional clothing (use of the backstrap loom, natural dyes)
- Traditional crafts (pottery) and foods (chili peppers, corn)
- Many groups still use the Mayan calendar to calculate the best time to plant and to harvest
- Many still use various dialects of the Mayan language
- Syncretism (despite the fact that majority consider themselves Catholic, many rituals are a mixture of ancient Maya practices and Christian traditions)



Regional costumes



90 % of Mexicans profess Catholicism



Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe

A manifestation of the Virgin Mary who appeared to an indigenous Mexican in 1531 on a hill near Mexico City.

It was a crucial link between Catholic and indigenous spirituality, and became the country's patron and the most powerful symbol of Mexican Catholicism.



Mexico City



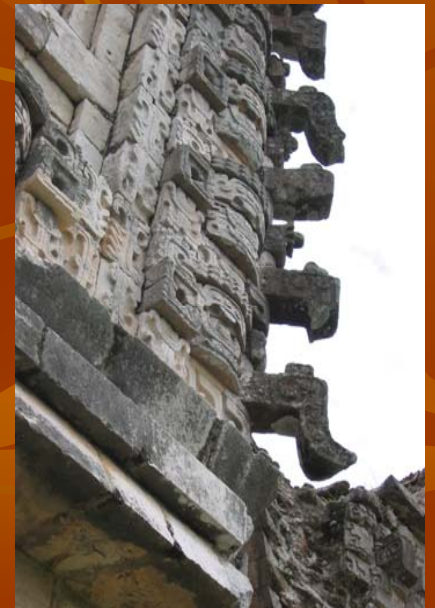
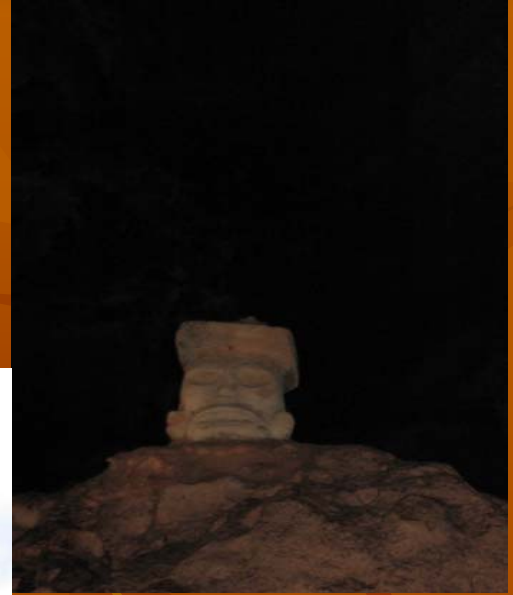
City of contrasts



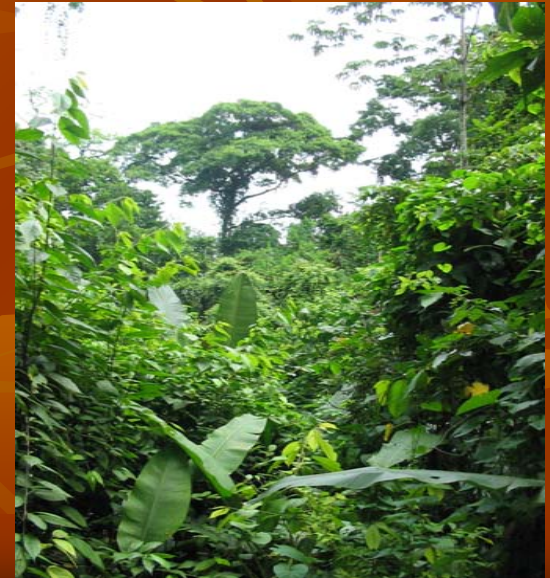
What is Mexico?



Fascinating history



Natural beauty



Rich flora and fauna



Traditions



Beautiful people



Mexico today



Bibliography

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Questions

1. What civilization occupied the Yucatan peninsula?
2. What was the most important crop for the Maya?
3. What is the particularity of Maya glyphs?
4. What is the mystery of the Maya calendar?
5. What was the most popular game of the Maya?
6. What was the capital of the Aztec Empire?
7. What Spanish explorer conquered what is now central and southern Mexico? His military triumphs led to 300 years of Spanish domination of Mexico and Central America.
8. What is the date of Mexico's independence from Spain?
9. Who served as president of Mexico 11 times? He often ruled as a dictator, but he was always overthrown.
10. What territories did Mexico lose as the result of the Mexican-American war?
11. Who ruled as emperor of Mexico from 1864 to 1867? His reign was part of French Emperor Napoleon III's attempt to gain possessions and influence in North America.
12. How long did the Mexican Revolution last?
13. Who was Diego Rivera?
14. What is the form of Mexican government?
15. Mexico consists of how many states?
16. What is the most practiced religion in Mexico?
17. Why was the apparition of the Virgin Mary to an indigenous peasant so important for the Mexican church?
18. Have the Maya today completely lost their ancestral traditions?
19. What is the population of Mexico City?
20. Add one more thing that you found out from this presentation that was not mentioned earlier.