

Mesoamerican civilization

Government



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In the civilization of the North and South America people, farming started later than the Afroeurasian. But the American civilization started on its own as opposed to the dependence of lending and borrowing of ideas from one community as was witnessed in the Afroeurasian civilization.

The argument about the Mesoamerican civilization has been as a result of singleculture(known as ‘ mother culture’), while others claim that it was through learning and copying from others that the civilization developed, i. e. ‘ sister culture’. The civilization arguments has to a larger extend been linked to the Olmec influence. This is because the Olmec has been considered as the earliest civilization groups in the Mesoamerica.

Hence some of its earliest civilization practices can only be found within the heartland of Olmec while others are beyond the heartland of Olmec. Some of the artifacts that are only found in the heartland of Olmec include colosal heads, earthen platform and monolith alters. There have also been cases where other Olmec style artifacts have been found in other different areas.

There are objects that have been considered to be of Olmec – traditions in areas that are out side the heartland of Olmec appearing together with the traditional objects of that place. For instance, at Las Socas, objects created in local tradition contain Olmec iconography (Reilly, p 371).

This indicates that the traditional of Olmec was flowing from the Olmec heartland towards other areas and not vice versa. In this case the argument of Olmec to be of the “ mother culture” arises. Michael D Doe is one of the proponents who argue that the Olmecs had a mother culture. “ There is now

little doubt that all later civilization ... whether Mexican or Maya, ultimately rest on an Olmec base," (Coe, 2002, pp 62).

Those advocating for 'sister culture' feel that the Olmec civilization took place simultaneously with the other places. The argument is based on the fact that Olmec was only among the earliest equal civilizers. Flannery and Marcus have argued that it is only through competitive interactive that civilization can take place. "It is adoptive autonomy and frequent competitive interaction of such chiefdoms that speed up evolution and eventually make useful technologies and sociopolitical strategies available to all regions", (Flannery & Marcus, 2000. pp. 33).

Therefore, looking at both the arguments of the mother culture and sister culture, it is not right to agree that the Olmecs civilization was a mother culture. For instance, according to Pool (N. d),

The Olmecs of San Lorenzo were only a handful of societies in the Americas that had achieved comparable degree of social and political integration by the end of the second millennium B. C. On the other hand, sociopolitical complexity varied among Olmec societies within the Gulf coast region, the intensity and effects of interaction with the Olmecs varied across Mesoamerica, and other Formative societies made significant contribution to the development of a distinctively Mesoamerican civilization tradition, (Pp 2).

The use of the term formative (preclassic) was developed by Gordon Willey and Philip Phillips (1955, 1958), "Where it indicated the village agricultural threshold and/or sedentary life..." (Pool, Pp. 8).

The formative period has various prehistoric historical changes taking place. Before 200 B. C. most of the inhabitants lived in small bands that were characterized by several mobility and their main activity being hunting and gathering. Then came the development of a lot of urban centers by 300 A. D. These urban centers came about because with time, the mobility was reduced and the group settled into larger groups and thus staying at one place for longer period than before.

The increased settlement was influenced by the fact that people have increased domestication of crops and had also indicated the storage facilities. “ In the initial formative period (2000-2500 B. C.)...The processes of domestication and sedentarization combined to foster the spread of settled farming villages over much of the area that was becoming Mesoamerica,” (Pool, pp. 8).

The early societies of America shared the hunting and gathering activities with the other societies across the borders. These behaviors changed among the communities, as they become more settled and avoided movements. This led to the emergence of social hierarchies, centralized governments, and various religious concepts. Their neighbours adopted the practices that emerged from one culture to another, including the Olmecs

Like all other complex societies of the America, the Olmecs also depended on this hunting & gathering, domestication of food and animal as well as fishing for their daily needs. These activities enabled them to build strong social and political hierarchies that integrated many other small communities.

Mesoamerican Religion

In pre classical periods of the Mesoamerican people religion developed due to the influence of the seasonal cycles, “ In their world -view, the development of the corn plant was one of the principle archetypes. Another intrinsically tied to the former was the archetype of the alternating powers of fire and water, derived from the division of the year into two seasons, then dry and rainy seasons”, (Obafemi & Olupona, 2004, Pp 199).

The Mayan community of the Mesoamerica developed their religion because of the belief that there was a relationship that existed between the human being and the supernatural power. They nurtured and developed this belief to the extend of giving human sacrifices to the gods. High priests of the Mayan religion performed the human sacrifices. The key aspect of this religion was the great importance it gave to the agriculture and the timelessness of the harvests. “ The Mayan religious calendar Ezolkin comprised of only 200 days and two cycles each comprises of weeks pning 30 days and 20 days. Another calendar called tun comprised of 360 days and five added unlucky days”

The Mayan believed in the cycles of rains and to the harvest of the produce. They considered the agriculture product to be a gift from God. To the Mayans, human beings were supposed to be attuned to the cyclical changes so that they can obtain more benefits from them.

The offering of sacrifices, of both human and animal was meant to appease the gods. Songs and dances as well as competitions accompanied the sacrifices. There was no separation of civil and religious life. Therefore, the

kings acted as both rulers and principal intermediaries between human beings and gods. The other reason that was behind sacrifices was that, many gods needed human support which if was not forthcoming; they may weaken and eventually die.

Life after death was determined by the position that a person held before the demise. Therefore if a person held a high status position on earth, that position will still be held even after death. While those with lower positions held again the same positions.

About the universe, the Mayas believed that the universe would continue to be created and destroyed continuously. The cycle for the destruction would be taking place after a period of about 5000 years. The destruction and creation would be the exact duplicate of the previous one. They perceived the earth to be the back of the giant caiman that was floating in the pool, with the exposed part being flat with four comers. Above the earth, was the human with 13 levels (7 going up, and 6 going down), (http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761580499_2/Pre-Columbian_Religions.html). This was of the same oscillation as the rising setting of the sun.

The Maya gods and goddesses formed a family (pantheon), each having four color aspects. The religious followers believed in deities in heaven, but also having counterparts on earth and vice versa. The deities also comprised of counterparts of the opposite sex. “ For example the supreme celestial god Itzama, the aged patron of culture and learning. Kinich Ahau, the sun god, may have been a youthful aspect of Itzama in addition to being his son”, (http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761580499_2/Pre-Columbian_Religions.html).

<https://assignbuster.com/mesoamerican-civilization/>

Like the Mayan, the Aztec believed in the destruction and creation of the universe, but that had multiple differences. They believed to be living in the fifth and final universe, which they considered to be the fifth sun. In this case, they believed that there would be no sixth universe after the fifth destruction, and that there was escape or avoiding of this destruction but it could only have been delayed. The sun was considered to be a warrior that fought a continuous unending war against darkness. Therefore, as long as the sun was still fighting, the fifth universe could not be destroyed. To make sure that the sun continued with the fights, they offered blood through sacrifices. The sacrifices were especially of human who were war captives.

Befitting their central role as allies of the sun, the Aztecs thought they lived at the center of the universe. Their earth was divided into four quadrants, each with typical Mesoamerica color-direction symbolism, though the specific pairings of colors and directions were different from those of the Mayas. The four quarters met at the main temple (Templo Mayor) of Tenochtitlan the Aztec capital. This temple was also the point where supernatural forces from the heavens and the underworld came together. The heavens were composed of 13 ascending levels. The sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars traveled through the lower levels. The upper levels were the homes of winds, storms, colors, and remote gods. The underworld contained 9 levels, all descending, unpleasant, and dangerous, (<http://www.angelfire.com/realm/shades/nativeamericans/precolumbionrel4.htm>).

The pantheon of the gods and goddesses of the Aztec were more complex and performing different overlapping functions at different ceremonial functions. The gods were related to different practices. For instance, the

<https://assignbuster.com/mesoamerican-civilization/>

Tlaloc was the rain god. There were also the gods that were related to the agricultural produce and deities related to fertility.

Bibliography

Coe, M. D (2002): Mexico: from the Olmecs to the Aztecs, London, Thames and Hudson.

Flannery, K. & Marcus, J. (2000); A Formative Mexico Chiefdoms and the myth of the

Mother culture; a Journal of Anthropological Archeology, Vols. 19. Issues 1.

History of Religion Manna Religion Retrieved on 2nd Nov. 2007 from

<http://www.clearleadinc.com/site/religion.html>

Obafemi J. & Olupona K. (2004): Beyond Primitivism Indigenous Religious Traditions and

Modernity, Routledge, ISBN 041527 320X.

Pool A. Christopher (N. d): Olmec Archeology and Early Mesoamerica, Retrieved on 2nd Nov

2007 from http://assets.cambridge.org/97805217/88823/excerpt/9780521788823_excerpt.pdf

Reilly III, F. Kent, (N. d) “ Art, Cultures and Relationship in the Olmec world in Americans

Civilization of Mesoamerican: A Recorder, Blackwell publishing Ltd.

.

<https://assignbuster.com/mesoamerican-civilization/>