THE OXFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA

OF

MESOAMERICAN CULTURES

THE CIVILIZATIONS OF MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA

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VOLUME 1

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
2001

has led some *municipios* to diminish radically the number of *cargo* positions to be filled.

Today, the obligatory use of Spanish in Mexico, in negotiating community matters with state and federal authorities, has placed great importance on bilingualism and literacy. Moreover, recognition of the value of experience in both Mexican cities and in the United States, as well as the power that accrues to individuals who send regular remittances in support of family and municipal enterprises, has led to the creation of semiofficial advisory councils of young and middle-aged men who continue to reside outside the community or have done so in the recent past. Such councils, variously known as *la mesa de los jovenes* or *los caracterizados*, reflect a radical shift in power from older men respected for their links with tradition to younger men who are more sophisticated, and presumably more effective, in dealing with the world beyond the *municipio*. Today, as in the past, women in most Chinantec communities tend not to participate in formal political activities, but they enjoy high social status and are not submissive to men.

In the later twentieth century, alliances between various Chinantec *municipios* were formed to protect their respective communal forests from foreign exploitation or to challenge such federal resettlement policies as those related to construction of the Cerro de Oro Dam. Significant numbers of expatriates from highland Chinantec *municipios*, who reside in the United States, collaborate politically and socially with like-minded Mixe, Mixtec, and Zapotec expatriates in organized efforts intended to protect the civil and political rights of their home communities.

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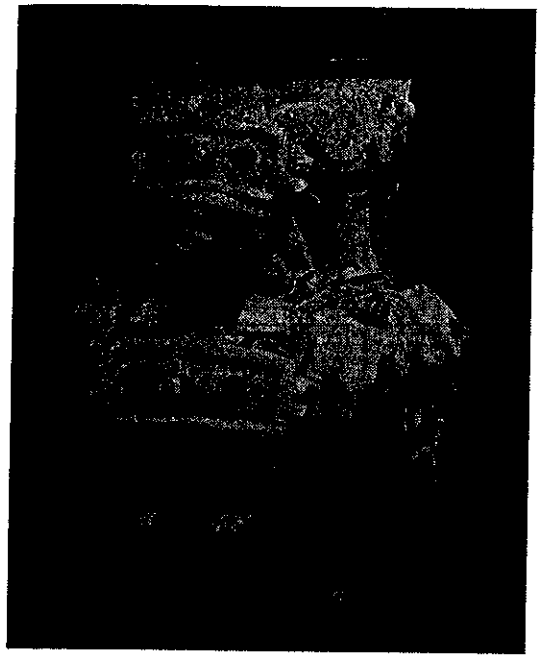
CHOLULA, one of the key religious centers of ancient Mexico, is located in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley, on the outskirts of the modern capital of Puebla. It is near the base of snow-covered volcanoes that include the periodically active Popocatépetl ("smoking mountain"). The city is surrounded by some of the most fertile agricultural land of central Mexico. Dependable rains between May and September are supplemented by runoff from the mountains during the dry season, and perennial streams converged near ancient Cholula to form a marshy lake. The alluvial subsoil has a high clay content that was used to produce high-quality ceramics, including the renowned Cholula polychrome of the Postclassic period.

Cholula played a fundamental role in determining cultural practices throughout the central highlands. As an important market center, merchants from Postclassic Cholula traded exotic goods throughout Mesoamerica in exchange for beautifully crafted pottery and textiles decorated in the Mixteca-Puebla style. Cholula was also the site of one of the architectural wonders of the Americas, the Great Pyramid Tlachihualtépetl ("man-made mountain"), the largest and oldest continuously used structure in the New World.



The high clay content of the subsoil around Cholula was used to produce such high-quality ceramics as this polychrome vessel found in Chamber 3 of the Great Temple of Tenochtitlan. (Height: 13 inches.) *Courtesy of Museo del Templo Mayor, México, D.F.*

Research at Cholula has focused on the ceremonial center, with excavations on the surface, the interior, and around the base of the Great Pyramid. Archaeologists have cut 8 kilometers (5 miles) of tunnels into the pyramid, which exposed four major construction phases that had been built up during some fifteen hundred years. Limited explorations have also been conducted in the urban zone of the ancient city. In addition to the archaeological research, Cholula was the subject of numerous ethnohistorical accounts about the Postclassic and the Early Colonial-period occupations. In combination, the sources relate a twenty-five-hundred-year history of the religious center.

The earliest evidence for occupation at Cholula dates to at least 1000 BCE, when a village flourished near the lakeshore. Scattered artifacts from this initial settlement have been found covering an area of about 2 square kilometers. Decorated kaolin-slipped pottery and baked clay figurines indicate participation in a pan-Mesoamerican ideology that has often been identified with the Olmec of the southern Gulf Coast.

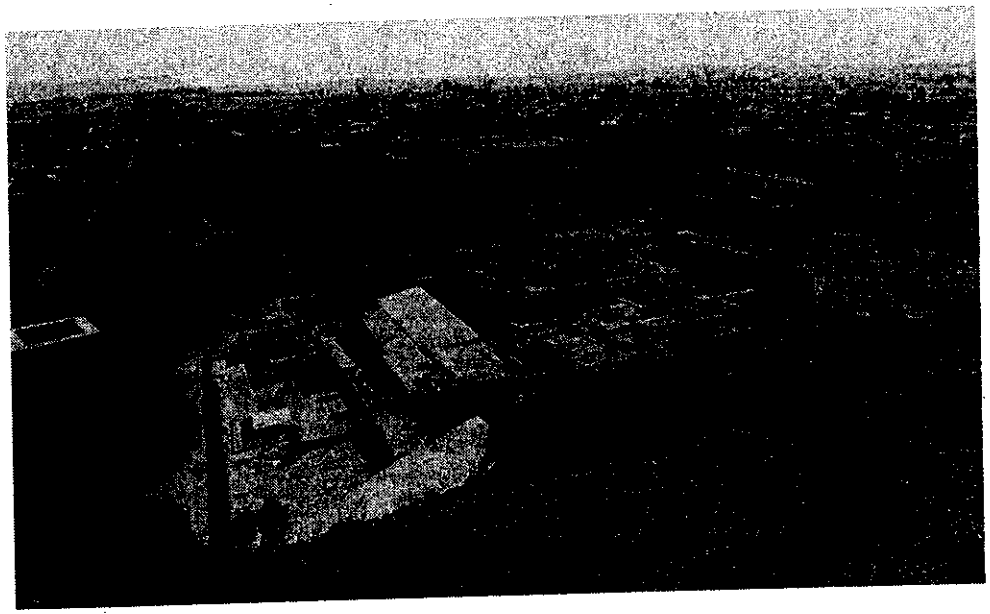
The Late Formative (Preclassic) period remains of 500 to 1 BCE consist primarily of diagnostic ceramics in the construction fill of the pyramid mounds. Several contemporaneous sites in the Cholula region (such as Coronango, Coapan, and Acatepec) indicate that Formative-era Cholula was but one of a number of similar centers at approximately the same level of political complexity. This situation changed dramatically by the end of the Late Formative period, however, when Cholula emerged as a regional center, as indicated by the construction of the initial stages of the Great Pyramid and the abandonment of contemporaneous sites within the immediate vicinity.

The earliest stage of the Great Pyramid was probably built toward the end of the Late Formative period. It measured 120 meters (400 feet) on a side and 17 meters (55 feet) high, with *talud-tablero* architecture on its façades. Two elements of the Great Pyramid provide insight into why Cholula developed as a great center while other sites in the vicinity were abandoned. First, the Great Pyramid was built over a spring, which was perceived as a portal linking the mortal world with the supernatural underworld. A cosmological principle incorporated into the layout of the Great Pyramid was its orientation, with the east–west axis aligned at 24 to 26 degrees to the north of west; this orientation corresponds to the position of the setting sun at the summer solstice, and suggests a solar significance for religious practices centered there.

In the Classic period, Cholula grew to approximately 4 square kilometers, with a population of about 10,000 to 15,000. Stage 2 of the Great Pyramid was probably built during this period. It measured 180 meters (600 feet) on a side and reached a height of 35 meters (115 feet). Its architectural style was unique, with each side consisting entirely of steps, thereby allowing access to the top from all directions.

The public architecture of Cholula proclaimed its distinctiveness from Teotihuacan, the great urban center in the Valley of Mexico, through its orientation and style, yet domestic material culture showed closer affiliation. Both pottery forms and surface treatment at the two sites were very similar, and clay figurines suggest that the two cities may have shared aspects of domestic religion. In addition, Cholula had direct access to green obsidian from the Cerro de las Navajas source, which has often been associated with Teotihuacan's economic network. In sum, residents of Classic Cholula may have shared elements of ethnic identity with Teotihuacanos even if state-level ideologies differed.

The Epiclassic period (700–900 CE) is a dynamic one in Central Mexico, with dramatic developments caused by the collapse of imperial Teotihuacan and the movement of various groups, including the Maya, to fill the resultant power vacuum. Polychrome murals at the nearby site of Cacaxtla indicate marriage alliances with ethnic groups from the southern Gulf Coast. [*See* Marriage Alliances.] Cholula may have been the Central Mexican hub for this highland–lowland interaction. In fact, an elite burial of a



The Patio of the Altars at Cholula. *Courtesy of Visual Resources Collection, The University of Texas at Austin. Ferguson Collection.*

Maya lord (with distinctive cranial deformation and pyrite and jade inlaid teeth) suggests that Maya elites may have lived in Cholula at the time.

Ethnohistorical accounts describe the arrival in Cholula of Olmeca-Xicallanca immigrants from the Gulf Coast, and how they defeated—literally "consumed"—the inhabitants who survived after the Classic period. Archaeological evidence from the Patio of the Carved Skulls indicates a less violent transition, however, as the material culture associated with a sequence of elite residential patios suggests a gradual blending of Classic and Postclassic traits.

Several lines of evidence indicate an important change in Cholula's religious orientation beginning in the Epiclassic period. A mural painted on a *tablero* of the Patio of the Altars depicts an elaborate polychrome feathered serpent. Stamp-bottom grater bowls feature numerous iconic referents to Quetzalcóatl, especially as Ehécatl the god of air or wind. Ethnohistorical accounts clearly identify Cholula as the cult center for Quetzalcóatl, and they describe Quetzalcóatl as a priest of the Olmeca-Xicallanca.

The Olmeca-Xicallanca added a third construction stage to the Great Pyramid (Stage 3) that then measured 350 meters (1,165 feet) on a side and 65 meters (215 feet) in height. The architectural facades of Stage 3 again used a Teotihuacan-like *talud-tablero* format, as a symbolic claim that Cholula was the legitimate inheritor of Teotihuacan's socioreligious legacy. Cholula, however, combined numerous other iconographic elements from Oaxaca, the Gulf Coast, and the Maya heartland, creating an artistic program that proclaimed a message of internationalism; the resulting symbolic system evolved into what has been labeled the Mixteca-Puebla stylistic tradition. Cholula polychrome pottery combines bright colors in codex-style designs that create a symbolically charged ware now synonymous with the Mixteca-Puebla horizon of the Postclassic, which began to appear as early as 900 CE.

The southern side of the Great Pyramid featured a large plaza, known as the Patio of the Altars, which received its name from monolithic altars of *tecalli* (onyx) that lie on opposite sides of the courtyard. On the eastern side, Altar 1 combines horizontal and vertical slabs that form a stela/altar group. While the western altar (Altar 2) does not have a corresponding stela, most likely a stela (Altar 3) now located at the base of the stairs leading to the Great Pyramid was originally part of a stela/altar group with Altar 2. All these monoliths are carved with a low-relief volute border, similar to carvings at El Tajín.

An extensive mural from an early phase of the Patio of the Altars depicts ritual practice at the site. Known as the "Drunkards Mural" (*Bebedores*), more than a hundred people are represented in the act of drinking what is generally interpreted as fermented maguey sap (*pulque*). The figures are sprawled on what appear to be platforms of the Great Pyramid; some are shown with animal faces, as if they are in the process of transforming into their animal spirits.

Jutting out from a façade of Stage 3, a massive addition (Stage 3b) was built onto the western side of the Great Pyramid. It features a sculpted stone *tablero*, representing

an interlaced mat motif—a pan-Mesoamerican concept that indicated political authority. In front of the staircase is a large, rough-hewn stela with a rectangular hole cut through it; a horizontal slab at its base creates another stela/altar group. Stage 3b faces onto a broad plaza, across which is an unexplored mound known as Cerro Cocoyoc.

The fourth and final construction stage of the Great Pyramid was probably added during the Early Postclassic period, enlarging the mound to 400 meters (1,312 feet) on a side and engulfing some earlier structures, such as the Edificio Rojo. No finished surface to Stage 4 has been exposed by excavators, however, so it is unclear whether the new construction was ever completed or if facing (finishing) stones were stripped off for subsequent building projects. The possibility that construction was suddenly halted and/or that dressed stones were stripped off may be linked to evidence from the Patio of the Altars, where the massive stone stelae were thrown down and systematically smashed. That destruction probably corresponds to the arrival of Tolteca-Chichimeca immigrants from the Valley of Mexico, as described in their own origin myth, the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*. The Polychrome ceramics from the surface of the Great Pyramid date the abandonment to about 1200 CE.

A new ceremonial center to the northwest of the Great Pyramid was built by the Tolteca-Chichimeca, around their Pyramid of Quetzalcóatl. Ethnohistorical accounts describe the political and religious organization of Late Postclassic Cholula. The religious administration was led by two priests, the Aquiach and the Tlalchiach. Civil affairs were administered by a council of representatives from the six wards of the city. At that time, the city of Cholula measured about 8 square kilometers, with a population of 30,000 to 50,000. It remained an autonomous polity, independent from the contemporaneous Aztec Empire, and often in league with Tlaxcala and Huexotzinco against the Triple Alliance in the ritualized Flowery Wars. [*See* Triple Alliance.]

Cholula, as the cult center of Quetzalcóatl, played a key role in the religion, politics, and economy of central Mexico. Pilgrims from many parts of Mesoamerica visited the temple of Quetzalcóatl; the Spanish chroniclers compared Cholula to both Rome and Mecca, as a center of worship and pilgrimage. Nobles came to receive confirmation of their titles, and therefore the authority to rule. The temple complex probably included schools to train priests, as well as libraries to store religious and genealogical manuscripts. The *Codex Borgia* is one of several extant pictorial manuscripts that may have originated in Cholula. Another aspect of the god Quetzalcóatl was as the patron of the *pochteca*, the long-distance merchants who traveled throughout Mesoamerica, acquiring valuable and exotic goods that were then sold in Cholula's marketplace.

When the Spanish arrived in Central Mexico, Cholula was one of the largest and richest cites in Mesoamerica. Cortés and his soldiers were led to Cholula by their Tlaxcalan allies, and in one of the most horrifying events of the Conquest they ambushed and massacred the assembled nobility of the city. The Pyramid of Quetzalcóatl was torn down and replaced by the Cathedral of San Gabriel. Excavations in the courtyard of the cathedral have yielded more than 650 burials from the Cholula massacre, which offer tragic testimony.

Colonial-period Cholula continued many of its pre-Columbian traditions, as the process of adapting to European rule was deflected in part by the construction of the city of Puebla de los Angeles 10 kilometers (6.5 miles) to the east. Even though Puebla usurped much of Cholula's political, religious, and economic importance, Cholula continued as a center of indigenous culture. The Great Pyramid, for example, which had been partly abandoned during the Late Postclassic period, reemerged as the focus of long-distance pilgrimages to the shrine of the Virgin of the Remedies, located at its summit. Thus, Cholula continues to the present day as one of the primary religious centers of Mexico. It is an important site for archaeological as well as ethnographic studies of traditional Mesoamerican culture.

[*See also* Art and Architecture, *article on* Pre-Hispanic Period.]

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CHONTAL. *See* Tequistlatec.

CHOROTEGA. *See* Manguean.

CHORTÍ. The Chortí Maya people live in eastern Guatemala and near the Honduras border, on both sides of the tributary that flows past the renowned archaeological site of Copán (in Honduras) to join the Motagua River near the archaeological site in Quirigua, once a satellite city of Copán. The present-day population lives mainly around the market towns of Camotan and Jocotan, on this tributary, and also around La Unión (to the north) and Olopa (to the south). The *ladino* (monolingual Spanish-speaking) population in this area is in the minority, concentrated in the river valley and on the lowest slopes, while the Chortí speakers (adolescents and adults are actually bilingual) live in the traditional Maya dispersed-settlement pattern on the higher and less fertile ground, mostly between 600 and 1200 meters (2,000 and 4,000 feet) elevation. Each family is separated from its neighbors by hundreds of meters. The Chortí practice swidden (slash-and-burn) agriculture, growing maize, beans, and squash in a patchwork of fields; one family's *milpas* (fields) may be widely separated by fallow and cultivated land that is used by others.

Many religious ceremonies, including curing ceremonies, are performed in or around a family's dwellings by the head of that family, sometimes with the assistance of part-time specialists. These religious and medical specialists practice for fees in money or in kind, in much the same way that others make craft items—sisal-fiber wares, rush mats, baskets, or pottery—for sale in markets.

The welfare of the community, and consequently much of its belief system and ritual, centers on the rains associated with the two annual passages of the intertropical front. The belief system has many Maya elements, overlaid and influenced by Roman Catholic and Spanish traditions. For example, the ancient Maya rain god Chac, usually depicted in Classic Maya art as wielding a stone axe, has become for purposes of public worship a syncretized San Miguel, who makes rain nowadays by chopping at clouds with his sword. Within the Chortí belief system, four or more beings—known as *ah patnaar* ("worker") or *tš'ahk*—perform this same function. Other members of the pantheon, such as the Kumiš, or culture-hero child, appear to be even less affected by European contact.

The Chortí language belongs to the Cholan subgroup, along with its extinct near-neighbor and relative Choltí, once spoken to the north of the Motagua Valley, and Chol and Chontal, still spoken in the states of Chiapas and Tabasco, Mexico. "Chortí" is not a name in current use among the people. Among Mayan languages, Chortí (and Choltí) have a distinctive fully ergative predication system, in which transitivity (transitive versus intransitive) and aspect (perfective versus imperfective) are the paramount category distinctions, and in which possessives and subjects of transitive predications are marked by the same prefixes, while subjects of all intransitives are marked differently. Chortí also has a well-developed system of derivational affixes marking the transitivity and modality of each predication.

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CHRISTIANITY. [*This entry comprises two articles. The first article presents an overview of the Roman Catholic beliefs and practices introduced to Mesoamerica and their reception and transformation by Mesoamerican cultures; the second article discusses the various denominational Evangelical Protestant beliefs and practices introduced into Mesoamerica. For related discussions, see* Baptism; Calendars and Calendrical Systems, *article on the* Christian Calendar; Churches and Cathedrals; Confession; God; Pilgrimage; Roman Catholic Church; *and* Saints.]

Catholicism

Mesoamerica, at the time of the Spanish conquest, was a region that had a highly developed religious worldview. The Mexica (Aztec), the Maya, and a host of other peoples