5.3 Ancient Mexico and Mesoamerica :: Pyramids & Sacrifice

1) Mesoamerica (middle America) people
   - **Olmec** - made up of sub-groups:
     - Teotihuacanos
     - Zapotecs
     - Mayans

2) Ancient **Olmecs** followed by **Zapotecs**
   - Ancient Olmecs and Zapotecs :: ritual, sacrifice, violence, hierarchy, renewal, violent contests in which loser was executed
   - San Lorenzo (ancient Olmecs) from about 1500-1200 BCE. *Left the Giant Carved Heads*
   - La Venta (ancient Olmecs) from about 900-400 BCE. *Giant Carved Heads, Radial Pyramids, and Ball Courts* (losers executed)
   - Monte Alban (Zapotecs) from 500 BCE - 500 CE - ruins on mountaintop showing radial pyramid, ball courts, celestial arrangements, ritual sacrifice

3) **Teotihuacanos**
   - **Teotihuacan** - city that spans 100 BCE - 200 CE. The most powerful and primal of their cities. Theocratic, hierarchical, sacrificial, violent…
   - **axis mundi** - long wide N-S avenue called the **Avenue of the Dead** (Miccaotli)
   - **Pyramid of the Moon** - one end of the axis (most important pyramid)
   - **Pyramid of the Sun** - cross axis (although larger pyramid oriented to sunset on the Summer Solstice). Pyramid of the Sun built over a massive cavern (origin of the earth) and oriented to the sun. Larger in base than Khufu’s Pyramid but half the height.

   Demonstrates a basic understanding of the Teotihuacano understanding of place in the universe.

4) Building techniques of stepped pyramids of Mesoamerica
   - Talud-Tablero (study diagrams posted). Flat stones lock in the next course. Talud is the battered portion. Tablero is the platform portion that’s locked-in with rubble and a type of concrete.

5) **Mayans**
   - Petén Region (Guatemala) - Major cities that fought each other: **Tikal** and **Calakmul**
   - About 100 BCE **Mayans** develop hydraulics, irrigation, canals, irrigation, terraces
   - Mayan population less dense than other Olmec cultures
   - Major rebuilding of Tikal in 695 CE due to defeat of Calakmul
   - Tikal’s pyramids tall, layered in stacks, *thought of as mountains*

   Top ornamental piece called the **rootcomb**
- **Palenque** (pal-EN-que) king Pakal demurs to Tikal for political reasons
  - Palenque’s palace and Pakal’s tomb demonstrated corbeled vaults, and corbeled groin vaults, as well as carved **orthostats** telling narratives of their culture
- **Petén Region** declines about 900 CE

6) Last *Mayans* shift to *Uxmal* and *Chichen Itza* out on the Yucatan Penninsula (Mexico)
- Ultimately last Mayan city abandoned **950 CE**
- **Most accurate pre-modern calender**
- At Chichen Itza :: tall **radial pyramid**, sophisticated **observatory**, **Temple of Warriors** (Group of 1000 columns)