

# Ancient Civilizations

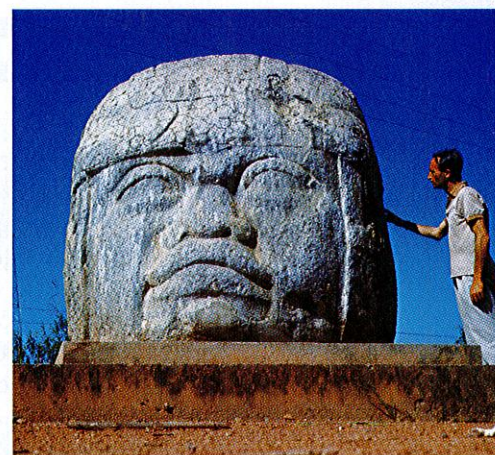


**3.01** Identify ways in which people of selected areas in South America and Europe have used, altered, and adapted to their environments in order to meet their needs, and evaluate the impact of their actions on the development of cultures and regions.

**8.03** Identify major discoveries, innovations, and inventions, and assess their influence on societies past and present.

## Connecting to Your World

How do you think the stone head pictured here was made? An ancient civilization in Latin America carved these heads about 3,000 years ago. What do you think of when you hear the word *pyramid*? Most likely, you think of the pyramids built about 4,500 years ago by the ancient Egyptians. Did you know that ancient civilizations in Latin America, such as the Maya, constructed these huge structures too? As you read this section, you will find out more about the Maya and other early civilizations that thrived in what is now Latin America.



**Olmec Head** The Olmec carved these large heads from a stone called basalt.

## The Olmec and the Maya

**KEY QUESTION** How were the Olmec and Mayan civilizations alike?

The first known civilization to develop in Latin America were the **Olmec**. They lived along the Gulf Coast of what is now southern Mexico about 3,200 years ago. Another civilization, the **Maya**, developed in the highlands and flatlands of what is now the Yucatán Peninsula, Guatemala, and northern Belize. Archaeological evidence shows that these two cultures built well-laid-out cities and complex civilizations. They were farmers, artists, and architects.

### The Tikal Pyramid

The Maya built this pyramid in the rain forest of what is now Guatemala.





**The Olmec, a Cultural Hearth** The Olmec were traders and skilled farmers. As farming began to thrive, the Olmec could count on a steady food supply. Having enough food led to a larger population and allowed the Olmec to focus on tasks other than farming. An adequate food supply also led to the growth of cities.

Olmec cities included plazas, housing areas, and ceremonial centers. Their oldest known city is San Lorenzo. The Olmec are known for their huge stone sculptures of heads. Some sculptures show a half-human, half-animal **jaguar**, the Olmec's chief god.

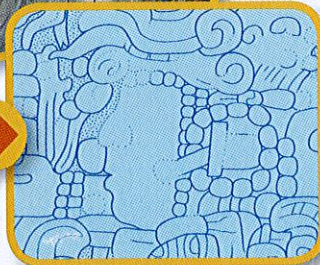
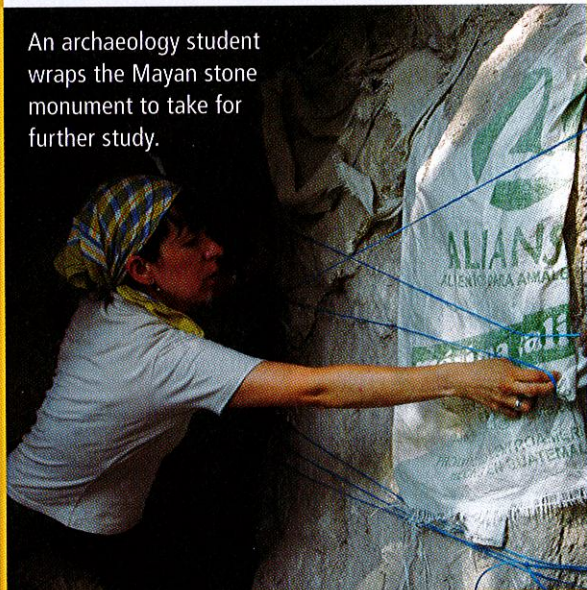
The Olmec began to abandon their cities beginning around 600 B.C. for unknown reasons. However, historians consider the Olmec civilization a **cultural hearth**, the place of origin of a major **culture**. The Olmec culture shaped other cultures in the region, particularly the Maya.

## CONNECT History to Today

### A Recent Maya Discovery

In 2005, archaeologists working in Guatemala at the site of an ancient Mayan city made an exciting discovery—a stone monument with the carving of a woman's face. The carving dates back to around the A.D. 500s, making it the earliest known likeness of a woman that the Maya carved in stone. This is significant because it suggests that women had important leadership roles in Mayan society early on in Mayan history.

An archaeology student wraps the Mayan stone monument to take for further study.



**The Maya, Masters of the City** The Maya lived in villages in southern Mexico and northern Central America as early as 1500 B.C. At the height of their civilization, around A.D. 250, the Maya built impressive cities with stone temples, pyramids, plazas, palaces, and ball courts. They were farmers and traders. Corn, beans, and squash were important crops. The Maya also traded salt, chocolate, and cotton with other cultures.

The Maya were advanced in their knowledge of science and technology. They created a 365-day calendar by watching the stars. The calendar identified events throughout the year, such as planting times and holidays. The Maya used a mathematical system based on the number 20 and were the first people to use the zero. They also developed **glyph** writing, carved symbols that stood for a syllable or a word.

In about A.D. 900, the Maya started abandoning their cities, like the Olmec had done earlier. The reasons remain unclear. However, descendants of the Maya still live in the region today.

### COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Explain how the Olmec and Mayan civilizations were alike and different.

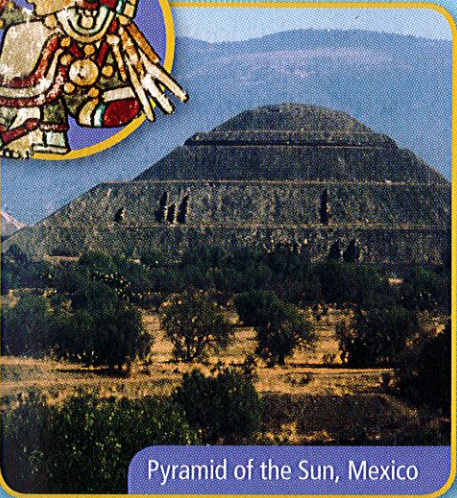
#### Stone Carving

The drawing (right) helps to more clearly see what is carved in part of the stone monument.

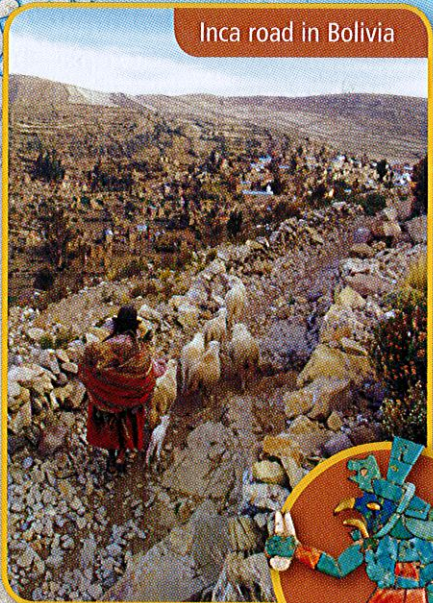


# Olmec, Maya, Aztec, and Inca





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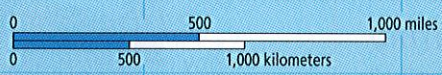


Pyramid of the Sun, Mexico



Inca road in Bolivia

-  Olmec 1200 B.C.–600 B.C.
-  Maya A.D. 250–A.D. 900
-  Aztec A.D. 1200–A.D. 1521
-  Inca A.D. 1438–A.D. 1533



## CONNECT Geography & History

### READING A THEMATIC MAP

Thematic maps focus on specific types of information. When reading this thematic map, use

- the title to find out what civilizations are featured in the map
- the key to identify what civilization the colors and symbols stand for

**Place** What civilization occupied the Yucatán Peninsula?