

ARCH 271: WORLD ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM

PRE-COLUMBIAN AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE 1000 BCE - 1000 CE

Pre-Columbian Americas show independent origins of civilizations largely in and around Mesoamerican and Andean sites. Mesoamerican civilizations formed by a number of cultures across many sites arising in various times but sharing many traditions and architectural practices. Despite the physical diversity of the cultural locations, there was an overall unity represented in social customs, religious systems, hieroglyphic writing, and the manner of art and architecture (the latter shown in cluster of towering pyramids and ritual platforms, and the courts for ball game rituals).

Early America.

Earliest evidence of human life in the Americas dates to c. 9500 BCE. By the first millennium BCE, the early American made great cultural advances, and over the next two thousand years, developed a series of remarkable civilizations in Middle America or Mesoamerica (modern Mexico) and in the region roughly equivalent to modern Peru. The important Mesoamerican sites were in central Mexico, including part of the Gulf of Mexico coast and the Oaxaca region, and the territories comprising the Yucatan peninsula, southern Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala. The Southern American sites of the Andean and Inca cultures are located in modern day Peru and Bolivia.

Principal Civilizations:

Olmec (1500 BCE-300 CE)
Maya (300 BCE-900 CE)
Teotihuacan (200 BCE-700 CE)
Aztec (1200-1500 CE)
Inca (1100-1532 CE)

Architectural Themes:

Sacred Geography: Architecture, visually and symbolically, echoed the shapes of the surrounding land and landscape: Tiered pyramids and open plazas repeat the mountains and basins in Mexico. Inca structures incorporate natural boulders and other formations of the Andean terrain.

Sacred Time: Architecture as calendrical instrument, used for marking and the ritual celebration of time. The orderly distribution of hundreds of small platforms along a roadway, as in Teotihuacan, determined by the eastern or Sun pyramid obeys relationship of a cosmic order, and the spatial arrangement reflects the rhythm of the universe.

Monumental Form: The major architectural forms dedicated to sacred uses were monumental in form. The structures did not contain much of an enclosed space, it was enough to mark out a space by solid masses, and to inscribe the space with lines and shapes [as in Egypt].

Principal Architectural Sites:

Teotihuacan (Teotihuacan culture)
Tikal (Maya)
Palenque (Maya)
Chichen Itza (Maya)
Tenochtitlan (Aztec site)
Machu Picchu (Inca)