



Glossary

agency The ability of person to choose to act in one way, given the possibility of alternative forms of action. Not all action is agency, and not all agency is consciously strategic.

agent A person exercising *agency*, including both strategic action and the active reproduction of *structure*.

aggrandizers *Agents* who aggressively pursue fame and fortune through culturally acceptable means within the constraints of an *egalitarian* society.

agricultural intensification Actions taken to increase the productivity of farming. In Mesoamerica, these include construction of terraces, raised fields, and irrigation systems, as well as changes in the means of clearing land for planting and the cycle of land use.

almanac Text tracing a pattern of dates and associating those dates with astronomical events, often providing guidelines for ritual practices.

altepetl Word in Nahuatl, the language of the people who dominated the Aztec state, used to designate a *city*. Composed of the words for water and mountain.

ancestors Those predecessors from whom living people trace their descent. In Mesoamerica, ancestors continued to influence the actions of their living descendants.

arboriculture The cultivation of trees, which may be brought into domestication through this process.

archaeoastronomy The study of the astronomical knowledge and practices of past societies through the physical remains they left behind, including observatory buildings, buildings and monuments aligned with astronomical phenomena, and texts recording astronomical data.

axis mundi Literally 'world axis,' a term that refers to the idea held by many ancient peoples that there was a central point in the universe that linked different levels of creation. In Mesoamerica, this center was associated with the color green, the central hearth, and the *Old Fire God*.

- bajo** Literally 'low,' a term used in Maya archaeology for low basins where water collects during the rainy season in the Central Maya lowlands. Some Maya specialists argue that bajos were sites of *agricultural intensification*.
- ballcourt** A special architectural complex arranged to facilitate playing a variety of games using a native rubber ball. Ballcourts are found in the southwest United States and the West Indies, in addition to Mesoamerica. The defining features of a ballcourt are a long alley bordered by at least two long buildings, with a building on at least one end optional. The long side buildings, called 'ranges,' have complex architectural profiles on the side facing the ballcourt alley. These inner profiles are usually symmetric, mirror images of each other, combining horizontal benches and sloping surfaces off which the rubber ball could be played.
- barrio** From a Spanish word for neighborhood, a term used especially at Teotihuacan for different areas within a site where it is believed people shared a similar way of life and may have been members of distinctive social groups like the later Aztec *calpolli*.
- bone isotope** Chemical elements incorporated in living bone through normal processes of growth occur in different forms, or isotopes. Study of proportions of different isotopes of some elements provides information about ancient human diet. In particular, carbon isotopes are studied to understand what forms of plants were eaten, nitrogen isotopes are informative about the sources of protein, both from plants and animals, and strontium isotopes help differentiate protein derived from different environments.
- cacique** Leader or chief of an indigenous society.
- calpolli** Word in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, for a social group composed of a number of families. Spanish sources describe the calpolli of the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, as having occupational specializations, sharing land rights, and worshipping common deities. The extent to which similar organization was found outside Tenochtitlan and other cities is debated.
- cardinal directions** The main world directions, north, south, east, and west. While Mesoamerican people divided space into four cardinal directions, they based these divisions on the course of the sun, not magnetic orientation to north. From a solar perspective, east was the primary direction, and appears at the top of Mesoamerican maps. In addition, rather than conceiving of the four directions as points, Mesoamerican people represented them as lines, together forming a rectangular space.
- catchment area** The area around a *settlement* from which it draws the natural resources, including plants and animals, used for everyday survival.
- celt** A stone object, usually polished, often made of *greenstone*, shaped like a long oval. The basic shape is that of an axe or adze blade.
- censer** Any of a variety of vessels, most made of pottery, used to burn various kinds of materials to form scented smoke as part of rituals. Teotihuacan's theater-type censers were made by attaching individual ceramic appliqués to a framework surrounding a central figure, on one side of the chimney through which smoke would rise from the censer body. Other figural censers were created by modeling a

hollow figure that sat on the lid of the vessel. Among the substances burned in censers were tree resins (copal), rubber, and paper.

Central Place Theory An approach to understanding why people live in particular spatial arrangements, based on the assumption that settlements are located to maximize such values as transportation efficiency. Applied in Mesoamerican archaeology to *settlement pattern* distributions to infer what values were most important to the people living in the sites.

ceramic sequence A set of identified types of pottery vessels, based on excavation of deposits whose sequence in time is known, that are differentiated from each other by changes in decoration, details of shape, the mixture of clay and other materials, or other visible signs of difference.

ceremonial center Concept developed in Mesoamerican archaeology in the first half of the twentieth century to describe settlements understood as sites of periodic use for ritual by populations believed to live elsewhere, primarily in small, scattered villages. Contemporary Mesoamerican archaeology suggests the idea that Mesoamerican cities are unusual because they are dominated by temples and open spaces for ritual performance, rather than being organized around a core of economic and governmental buildings.

Chicomoztoc In Aztec historical and mythical tradition, the cave where the ancestors of the peoples of the Valley of Mexico emerged onto the earth.

chiefdom The anthropological label for societies in which authority to rule is inherited, but there is relatively little class differentiation. Sometimes seen as a stage through which societies passed, following *egalitarian* society and preceding *state* society, characterized as *rank society*.

chinampa Fields constructed in shallow-water areas by digging soil from one area, creating canals, and placing it in another location, until the ground surface is above water.

Cipactli Aztec term for the crocodilian earth monster.

circumscription The concept that the area available for exploitation by a society might be limited by the presence of other societies or natural barriers, leading to pressure for changes in social organization to deal with rising population, environmental degradation, and other problems assumed to develop automatically over time.

city A central place distinguished within a region by hosting the widest possible range of activities, including craft production, economic exchanges, and religious practices. Cities are usually sites where otherwise unrelated social groups live together, managing their interactions through marketplaces, guilds, and other institutions. While cities are often assumed to require large populations, what is large will vary from one historical situation to another.

city-state A society centered around a single city, where that city is simultaneously the seat of government.

class In social theory, a term for social *status* differentiation typical of *states*, where classes are ranked, but within any class, there is no guarantee that individuals can be ranked relative to each other. Contrasts with *rank*.

Cocijo Oaxacan deity associated with storms and lightning.

- codex, codices** The term codex has been applied to manuscripts of various formats and materials produced both before and after the Spanish Conquest. Prehispanic codices were produced by folding a long sheet of bark paper or animal skin into a fan-like arrangement, coated with a thin layer of lime stucco, and painted in multiple colors, especially black and red.
- commoner** A person who was not considered to be a member of a *noble* family in the two-class system that was general in Mesoamerica. Words for commoners in Mesoamerican languages often identified them as agricultural workers.
- community** Used both for people in a bounded group, with a perception of social identity, of common interests, and of 'belonging,' and also for the place housing these people. Communities exist above the level of kin groups and subsume and cross-cut them.
- compositional analysis** The application of chemical and physical science methods to archaeological objects to determine what elements made up the raw material used. Compositional analyses can provide a 'fingerprint' of objects made from the same raw materials. When the original raw material is not altered too much, compositional analysis can match a group of objects to a source of raw materials. In Mesoamerica, compositional analysis has been used on pottery, *greenstone*, and *obsidian*.
- compound** Term used to label a group of buildings and their associated open working spaces that were the location of residence of a social group.
- core-blade, prismatic** A particular technology for producing stone tools, especially from *obsidian*, that is characterized by preparation of a lump of stone so that pressure applied to a flat side (the platform) releases a series of long blades that are triangular or five-sided prisms in cross-section.
- cosmogony** The actions through which the world was created.
- cosmogram** A representation of the entire universe through symbolic shorthand or artistic metaphor.
- cosmology** A set of beliefs about the structure of the material and immaterial world, its creation, and the place of humans and other beings in it.
- Coyolxauhqui** Aztec female deity, the older sister of *Huitzilopochtli*, who kills and decapitates her.
- crocodilian** Any of a group of reptiles inhabiting the rivers of Mesoamerica that resemble the crocodile. These include alligators and caimans.
- cultural ecology** Study of the relation of people to their environment.
- cultural evolution** The idea that societies pass through a series of stages, often represented as inevitable or at least tightly constrained, through which the centralization of governmental power, the intensification of agriculture and craft production, and the development of differences in status, wealth, and class identity all take form over time.
- cultural history** An approach typical of archaeology beginning in the first half of the twentieth century in which the goal of research was to understand the sequence of events at a particular place over time.
- culture** Distinctive practices by a group of people, usually living in proximity, and their descendants over time. Sometimes considered the sum total of all the

- practices of a group, and at other times taken to refer only to those practices that are shared. Always conceived of as distinguishing a group of people from other, similar groups.
- descent** Relationships recognized as kinship over time, linking living people to their *ancestors*.
- domestic** Concerned with the *household*.
- dynasty** A series of rulers over time who claim to be related through kinship.
- ear spoils** Ornaments inserted through a hole pierced in the lobe of the ear during childhood, gradually widened to allow insertion of a tube held in place only by the weight of beads hanging from it. Made of various stones and pottery.
- egalitarian** Term for a society in which *status* differences are not assumed to be inherent and inherited, but are the products of individual action during life, and are subject to change or different valuation in different settings. Sometimes treated as a stage of *cultural evolution*.
- elite** see *noble*
- empire** A form of political organization in which one state has power over other states, often as a result of conquest. In Mesoamerica, the Aztecs are the only society generally conceded to have formed an empire, and some specialists debate whether the term should be applied to them.
- equinox** Days in the spring and fall when the sun reaches the midpoint of its apparent seasonal movement on the eastern and western horizons, marking the turn of the seasons. At this point in the year, the day and night are of equal length.
- ethnoarchaeology** The study of living people by archaeologists, or for the purpose of illuminating understanding of archaeological remains.
- Feathered Serpent** A supernatural being present in multiple versions across Mesoamerica, the Feathered Serpent is particularly prominent at Teotihuacan.
- figurine** A small three-dimensional representation of a human being, animal, or building, often modeled in clay, sometimes carved of stone, bone, shell, or wood.
- Fine Orange** A set of pottery types produced in the western Maya lowlands near the end of the Classic period and extending into the beginning of the Postclassic period.
- glyph, hieroglyph** Term for individual signs used in writing systems.
- Great Goddess** The central image in much of the mural art of Teotihuacan, a figure giving rise to water, plants, and precious things.
- Great Tradition** The concept that *cities* were sites of development of cultural practices and beliefs distinct from, and more encompassing than, those of surrounding villages.
- greenstone** Term used to label the green stones, including *jade* and *serpentine*, preferred for ornaments and ritual tools by Mesoamerican people. Emphasizes selection for color which appears more typical than selection for mineral type.
- headdress** The ornaments worn on the head by Mesoamerican people, sometimes mounted on a supporting structure, at other times forming freestanding helmets or hats.

- heterarchy** As an alternative to *hierarchy*, refers to situations in which there are multiple lines of authority associated with different practices, such as a religious hierarchy independent of a political hierarchy.
- hierarchy** A relationship in which one party has greater *power*, control, or *status* than another.
- hinterland** The area away from the central place or *city*, from which the central place draws resources.
- house, household** Label both for a group of people sharing most aspects of everyday life necessary to persist economically and reproduce socially, and for the physical structures in which these people live.
- household archaeology** The specialized study of evidence for the small-scale, day-to-day, face-to-face activities through which members of a site ensure their economic and social survival.
- Huehuetotl** Aztec Old Fire God, represented as elderly, seated deity supporting *censers* on his back, associated with the central world direction.
- Huitzilopochtli** Aztec sun deity, one of two deities honored at the main temple in Tenochtitlan. The specific patron of the Mexica, the dominant group in Aztec society.
- iconography** Representations believed to have highly stereotyped symbolic meaning that can be studied like a language, and the study of symbolic meaning embodied in such representations.
- ideology** As an aspect of *structure*, may justify or legitimate domination, although subordinates are able to see through and resist dominant ideologies to varying degrees.
- INAA** Instrumental neutron activation analysis, a form of *compositional analysis*.
- jade** A specific form of *greenstone* whose only known source identified to date is in the Motagua river valley in Guatemala.
- landscape** A term that embraces both the environment and human activities and settlements in the environment.
- landscape archaeology** The specialized study of human activity on a broad scale, with special attention to practices through which landscapes are perceived, altered, and reproduced.
- lineage** A specialized form of kinship group based on *descent* through a line of people, often people of one sex. A lineage joins people over time, binding *ancestors* and descendants.
- Long Count calendar** A specialized calendar that counted from a fixed beginning point and used place notation to create an infinitely expandable means of calculating and recording dates.
- microcosm** A small-scale version of the entire cosmos.
- military orders** Among the Aztec, men who remained as warriors full-time after their required service as youths formed permanent groups with distinctive costumes and identities, such as Eagle and Jaguar warriors.
- milpa** Cornfield specifically; more generally, an annually cultivated field.
- monolith** A large, single piece of stone.

- mounds** The remains of ancient buildings, collapsed and covered with accumulated dirt.
- New Fire** An annual ceremony among the Aztecs and probably other Mesoamerican people, when all existing fires were extinguished at midwinter and a new fire was kindled in a ritual.
- noble** With *commoners*, one of two strata in the fundamental two-class system characteristic of Mesoamerica. Nobles were often conceived of as different in origin or even in physical nature than commoners. *Descent* was of fundamental importance in noble identity.
- obsidian** Naturally formed volcanic glass used as the raw material for the cutting tools of Mesoamerican societies. Usually black, but Mesoamerican people also exploited green sources. *Compositional analysis* can identify tools from known obsidian sources.
- Old Fire God** Generalization of Aztec deity *Huehuetotl*.
- Omacatl** Aztec deity associated with drinking and feasts.
- palace** A residential building inhabited by *nobles*, especially rulers, often serving also as a governmental building.
- pedestrian survey** The practice of seeking archaeological sites by walking through fields systematically.
- Plumbate** A set of ceramic types made over a period beginning in the Late Classic and extending to the Early Postclassic, distinguished by a metallic orange or gray finish produced by unique chemistry of clays used. *Compositional analysis* confirms that the Pacific Coast of Guatemala was the center of production of these widely traded pottery types.
- political economy** The distribution of economic and cultural capital in a society and the kinds of social groups (alliance networks) that control these resources.
- polity** The unit of political organization of a society, such as a *city-state*.
- polygyny** The practice of men marrying multiple women.
- Popol Vuh** An early Colonial text written in the Quiche Maya language using the European alphabet, containing a description of *cosmology* and history of the rulers of the Quiche Maya state.
- power** The transformative capacity of an agent to achieve a desired outcome.
- practice theory** Social theories that attempt to join individual *agency* and *structure* in a single model, in which people reproduce the structures that limit their agency through their exercise of agency in the form of practices.
- primate center** A single *settlement* whose population size is of an order of magnitude larger than any others in its *hinterland*.
- private** Concerned with events and actions taking place outside of the public domain. Often equated with *domestic*.
- public** Sometimes means non-domestic, supra-household, or non-private, or restricted use. At other times signifies open to common view, common access, or shared use.
- public transcripts** Overt and public representations in writing, art, and architecture of the ideologies and cosmologies of society's dominant groups.

- pulque** An intoxicating beverage made by fermenting the hearts of the maguey plant.
- rank** In social theory, a term for social *status* differentiation typical of *chiefdoms*, where status is inheritable, and any two people can be placed in a relative ranking such that in theory the entire society forms a single rank series. Contrasts with *class*.
- rank society** A society typified by *rank* differences.
- rank-size rule** A means of arranging *settlements* in a hypothetical *hierarchy* based on their sizes.
- ritual almanac** see *almanac*
- roof comb** A form of ornament constructed on top of the roof of a building, especially temples in the Maya lowlands.
- sedentism** The quality of habitually living in one place.
- serpentine** A form of *greenstone*.
- settlement** The material traces of people's presence on the land.
- settlement pattern** The regularity observable in the placement of *settlements*, including relations to natural resources and the location of central places and *hinterlands*.
- shamanism** A form of ritual practice in which ritual specialists, through a variety of techniques including music, dance, and use of intoxicants, are able to cross boundaries between the world of everyday existence and other dimensions of the cosmos, often through the actions of a spirit capable of moving the waking body.
- skull rack** A platform built to support a framework of poles on which skulls of sacrificed captives were threaded and displayed.
- slash and burn** A technique for clearing land for agriculture, in which vegetation is cut and allowed to dry before being burned.
- solstice** Days in the winter and summer when the sun reaches the extreme southern and northern points of its apparent seasonal movement on the eastern and western horizons, marking the turn of the seasons. The shortest and longest days of the year.
- spindle whorl** A circular weight attached to a spindle to contribute to its rotation, critical to spinning fibers into thread.
- state** A social formation characterized by centrally administered government, and social *hierarchy*, often associated with the development of social classes, and usually tied to defined territories.
- status** Relative social standing. May be related to wealth or political power but can be, and often is, independent.
- stela, stelae** Two-sided, free-standing stone monuments placed in the open, public plazas of cities including those of the Gulf Coast of Mexico, Formative Central Mexico, Oaxaca, and the Maya lowlands.
- Storm God** Equivalent and predecessor at Teotihuacan of Aztec deity *Tlaloc*.
- stratification** The division of society into strata with differential *status* and, usually, wealth and *power*.
- structure, structuration** In social theory, structure is a term for those aspects of social existence that set limits to the exercise of *agency* and channel it into tradi-

- tional forms. Structure is produced and transformed by the actions or practices of social agents, whose exercise of agency is simultaneously structuration.
- swidden** A form of agricultural production that involves cultivating fields for some years and abandoning them when productivity declines, cultivating new fields.
- talud-tablero** A form of architecture characteristic of, although not invented by, Teotihuacan, giving a uniform and distinctive appearance to public buildings and domestic shrines at the site. Composed of two parts, a sloping lower surface (talud) supporting a rectangular framework that usually projects far beyond the sloping apron and may contain added designs (tablero).
- Tezcatlipoca** The most powerful and feared Aztec deity.
- Tlaloc** Aztec deity of rainfall and earthly fertility, one of two deities honored at the main temple in Tenochtitlan.
- tlatoani** The Nahuatl term for the highest governmental authority among the Aztecs, literally meaning 'speaker.'
- Tollan** Nahuatl name of the site, also called Tula, that played the role of legendary source of civilized practices for the Aztecs and many other Postclassic people. Used as part of place name of numerous Postclassic sites, notably Tula in the Mexican state of Hidalgo.
- Toltec** A person from *Tollan*.
- toponym** Place name
- Triple Alliance** According to Aztec traditional histories, a political alliance with two neighboring *city-states* critical to their consolidation of power in the Valley of Mexico.
- urbanism** Form of social life dominated by *cities*, particularly large ones.
- volcanic ash** Used as a material added to clay during ceramic production, a form of volcanic glass with a very small particle size that when welded together forms rocks such as volcanic tuff, ignimbrite, or rhyolite.
- wealth** Differential economic resources.