

The background features a dark blue gradient with a subtle pattern of white stars. Overlaid on this are several white circular elements: a large scale on the left with markings from 140 to 260, and several smaller circles with arrows indicating clockwise or counter-clockwise rotation. The main title is centered in a large, white, sans-serif font.

EARLY AMERICAN SOCIETIES

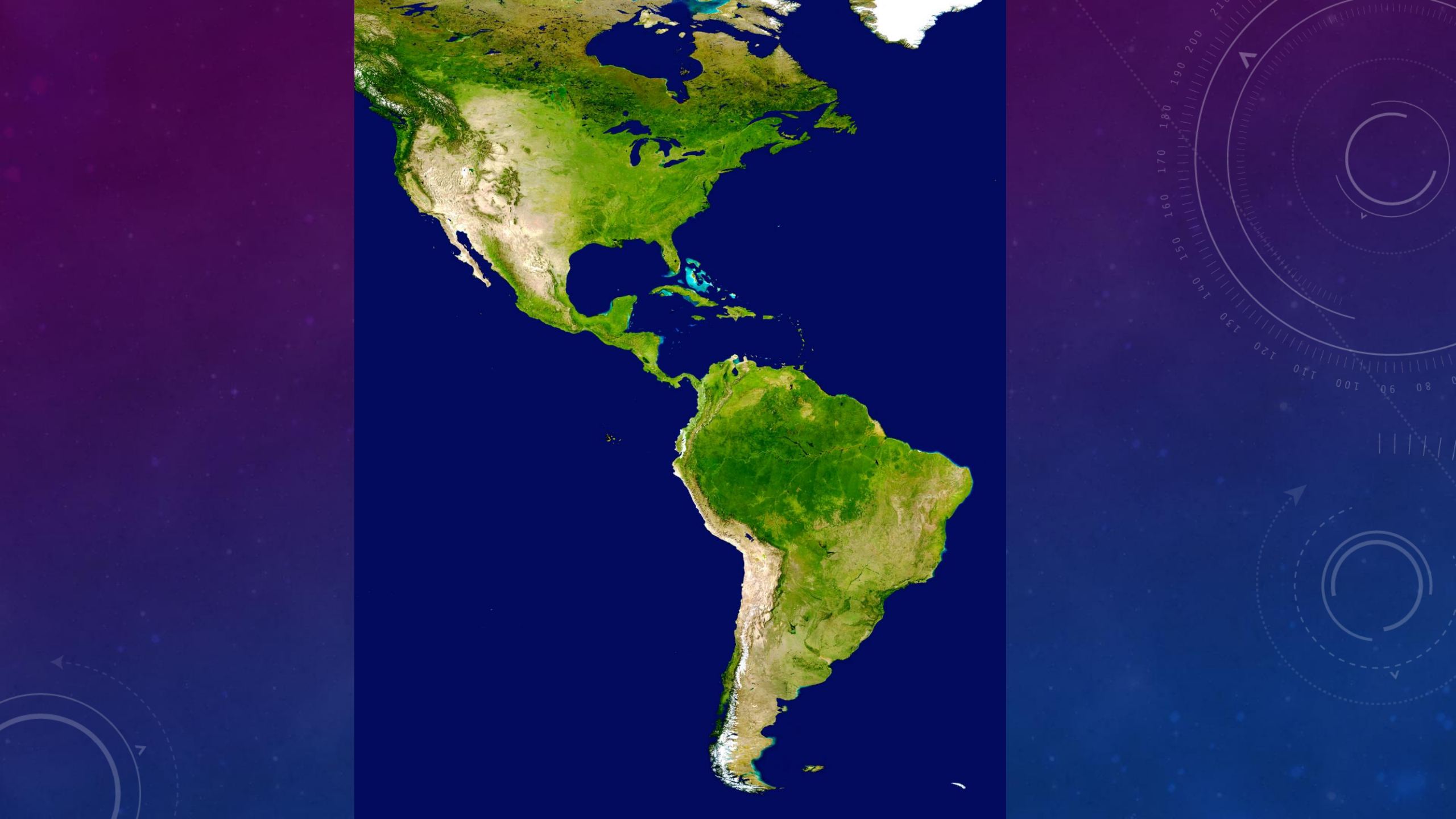
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD

(2500 BCE TO 400 BCE)

HUMANS IN THE AMERICAS

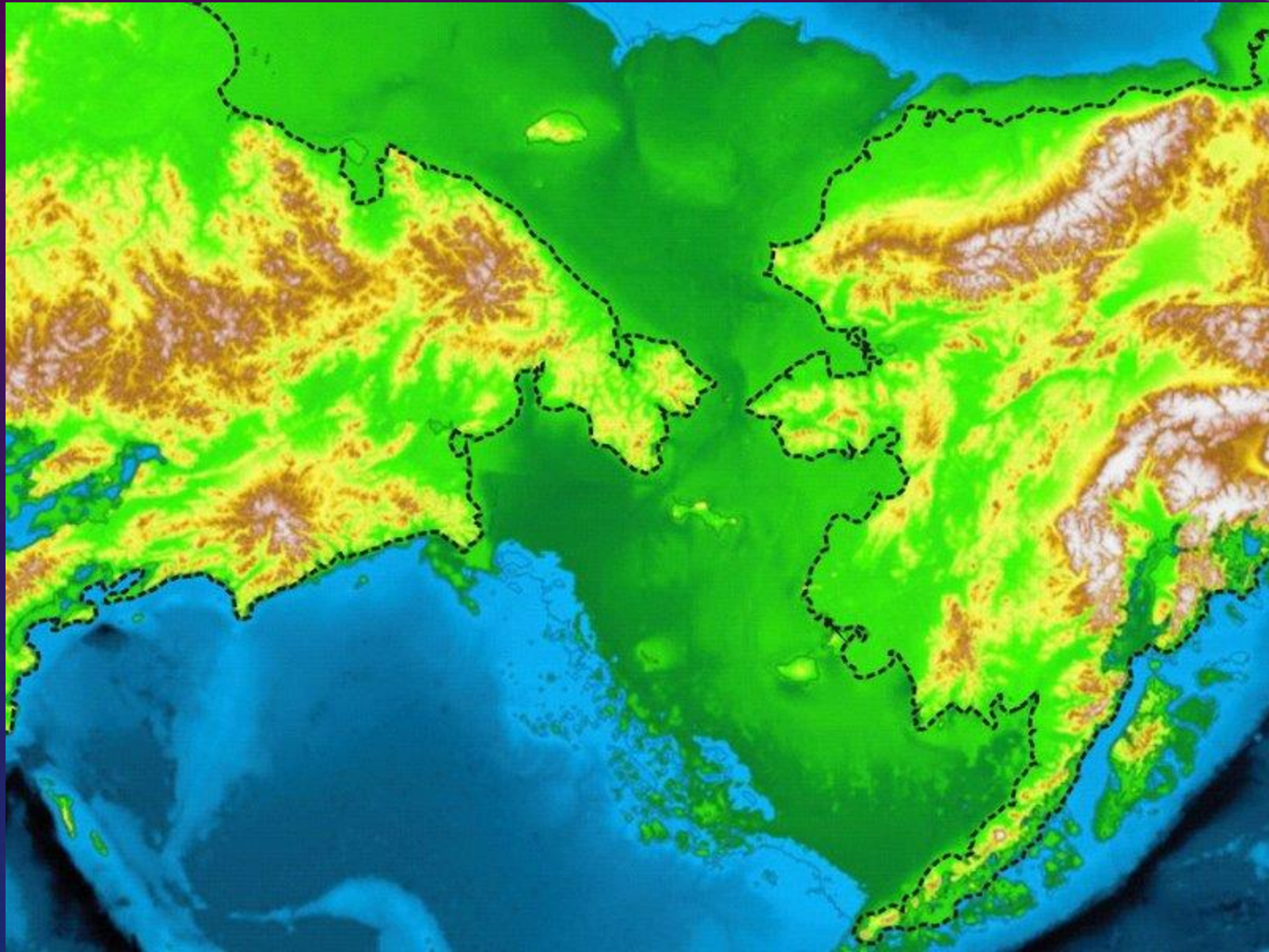
GEOGRAPHY, MIGRATION, AND SETTLEMENT





MIGRATION TO THE AMERICAS

- Humans moved into the Americas some time between **30 kya and 12 kya**— date is controversial
 - Two predominant migration theories:
 - **Land Bridge Theory**— associated with path through **Beringia** into an ice-free corridor in west-central North America
 - **Costal Migration Theory**— human migration along the coast, resulting in a loss of artifacts due to rising seas
 - Possible **trans-Pacific migration** through Polynesia to South America
 - Terms: Native Americans, First Peoples, Amerindians, Indians





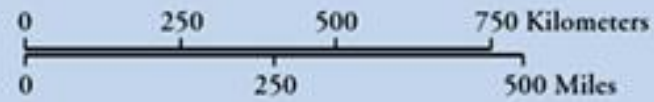
MESOAMERICA AND THE FIRST CITIES

OLMECS, SWAMPS, AND SACRIFICE.





- Olmec heartland
- Approximate limits of High Mesoamerican culture
- Aztec empire 1519
- Mayan civilization
- Mayan center

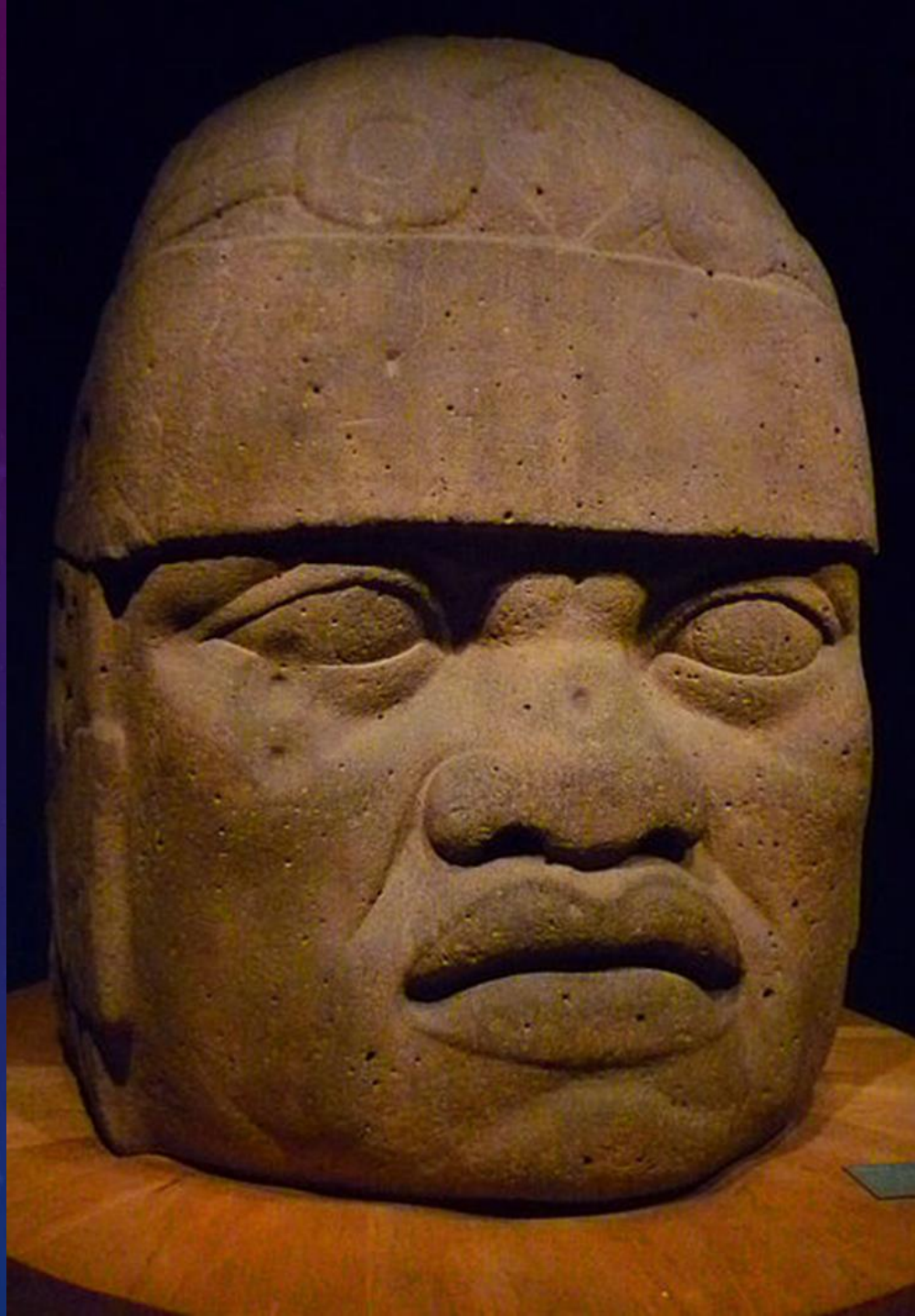


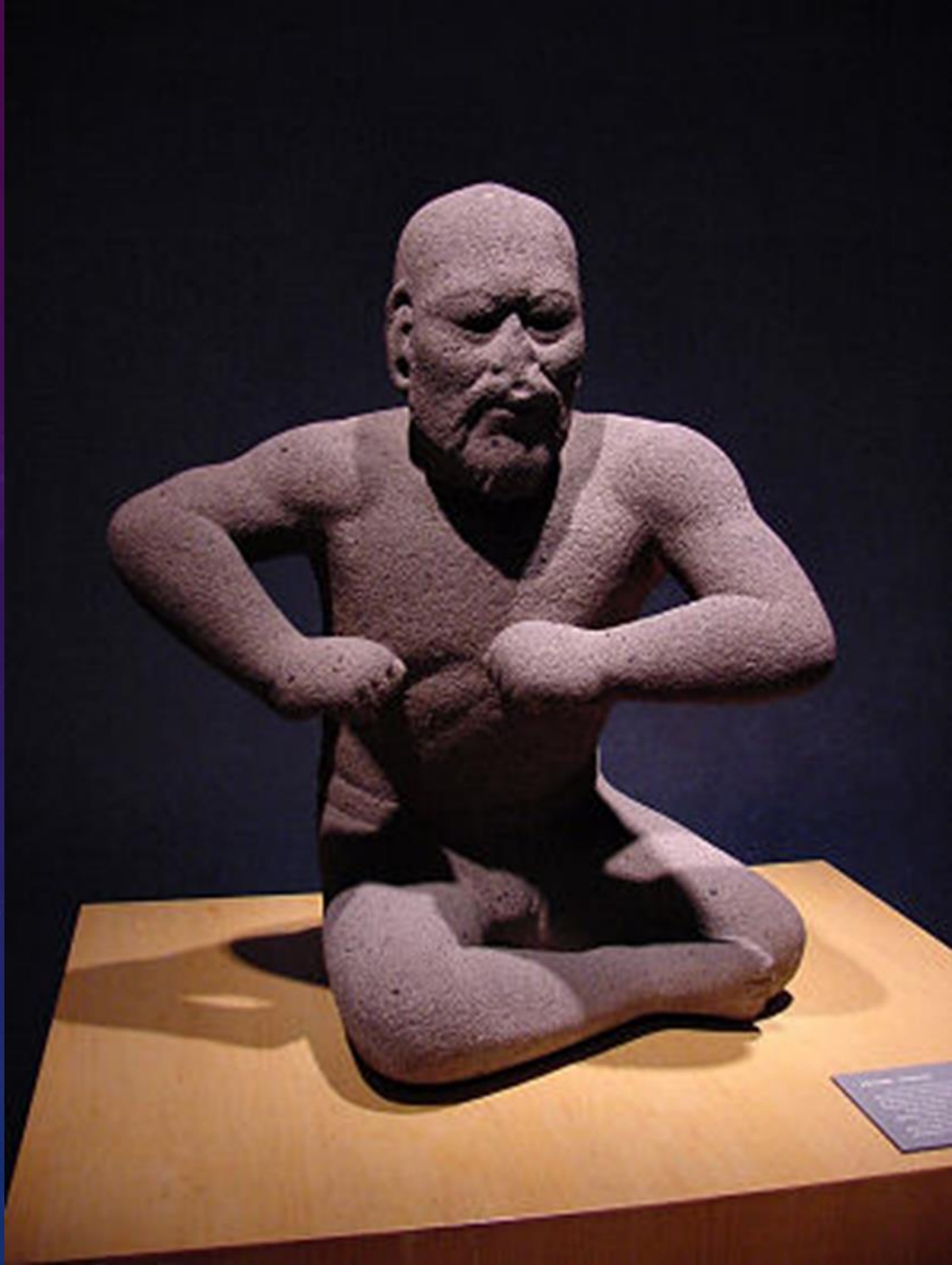
OLMEC (CA. 1200 BCE TO 400 BCE)

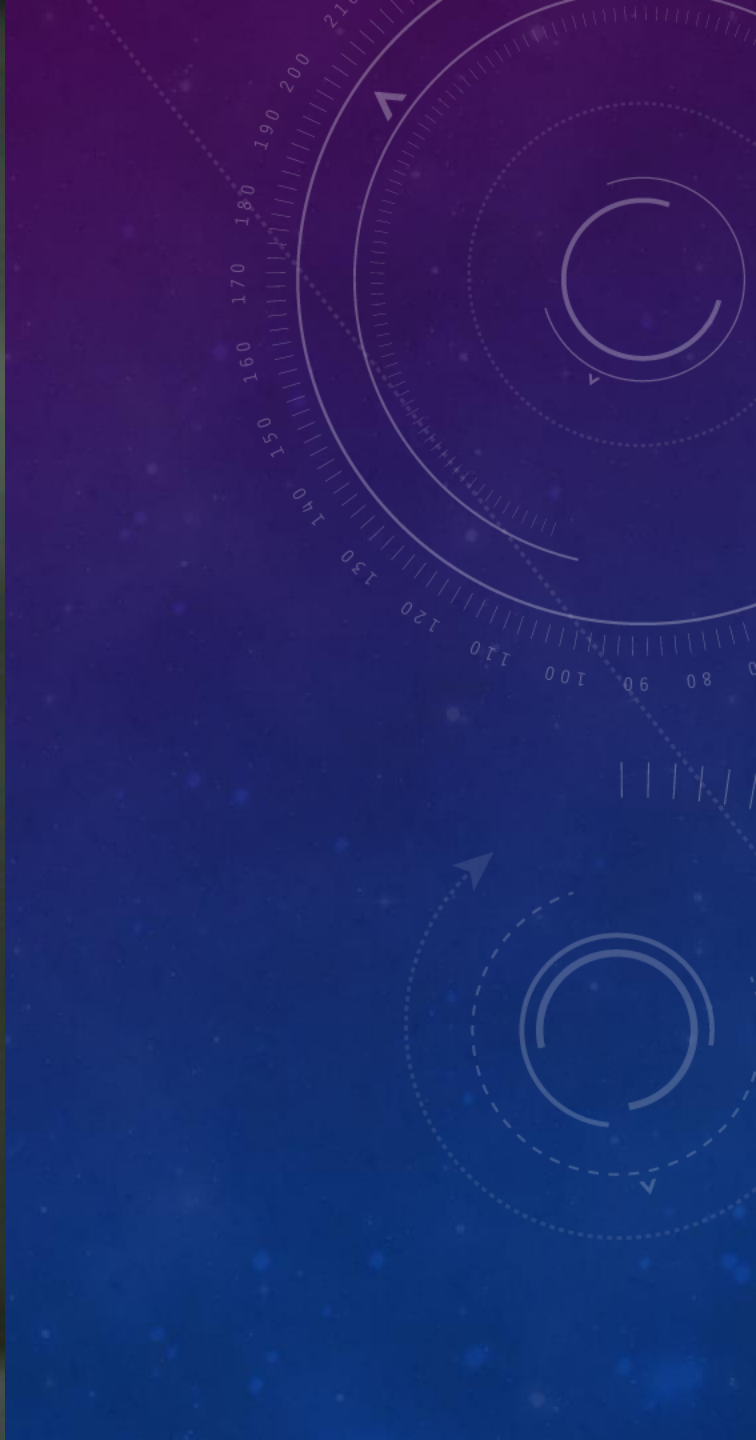
- Located on the **coast of the Gulf of Mexico**, near modern-day Veracruz
 - Evidence of early agriculture (maize and beans) and supplemental gathering (palm nuts, seafood)
 - **NO DRAFT ANIMALS. NONE.** ☹️
 - Farming on top of **raised earth platforms** in swampy areas
- Wealth of food allowed for the development of the **first cities in the Americas** (San Lorenzo and La Venta)
 - Cities contain **mound structures**, a possible **ballcourt**, and a **palace** structure
 - Cities were “**destination cities**,” with most of the population living outside
 - Purpose of cities: religious ritual, governance, and trade

OLMECS: PRODUCTION

- Olmecs influenced territory in **southern and central Mexico**, all the way to Nicaragua
 - Trade goods included: **obsidian, jade**, serpentine, mica, **natural rubber**, pottery, feathers, and magnetite mirrors
- **Earthen step pyramids** (now mounds), planned cities along a north-south axis
 - At points on the axis, are there are four **MASSIVE stone heads**
- Fine, ground-stone production: obsidian, basalt, and jade







OLMEC: SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND GOVERNMENT

- Indications of a **highly stratified society**, with a strong division between the noble-priestly class and commoners
- Unclear whether Olmec cities were incorporated as a greater kingdom or empire
 - Possibly just **large, regional chiefdoms** with common cultural characteristics?
 - Cities were small: only **a few thousand people**
 - Possible **warfare** between cities? Evidence: ballcourts

OLMEC RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

- **Limited understanding of written sources** (if it is a system of writing at all)
 - Interpretations of iconography and Olmec cosmology draws from broader Mesoamerican traditions
- Intensely **polytheistic, fatalistic** society
 - Emphasis on **sacrifice and blood-letting**
- Strong suggestion of organized religious practice (mounds, burial practices)
- **Dualism**? Half-jaguar, half-man figures as a representation of the spirit world?





OLMECS: WAR, BLOOD, AND BALLGAMES

- The Olmecs, like many Mesoamerican peoples, seem to have participated in a sport referred to as “**the Mesoamerican ballgame**”
- Rules differ by region and time period, but:
 - Generally played with a large rubber ball on a stone court
 - Players hit the ball with their chest or hips— no hands, no kicking— trying to get the ball into a stone hoop or past a defender
 - There IS an element of **blood or human sacrifice** associated with the game
- Possible **substitution for warfare?**







