

“LOVED TO DEATH”
Episode 06 “Ancient Cities”
Final Timecoded Script

INTRO:

001 00:00:00:04 00:00:03:05

We all long for another time... another place

002 00:00:04:19 00:00:06:04

For wonder and excitement

003 00:00:06:17 00:00:08:18

Foreign lands and different cultures

004 00:00:09:21 00:00:11:21

But what happens when we go too far?

005 00:00:13:08 00:00:16:01

When our desire to escape becomes destructive

006 00:00:17:11 00:00:19:24

When we turn what we treasure most into ruin

007 00:00:21:17 00:00:24:09

When our love comes at the ultimate price

EPISODE 06:

008 00:00:35:09 00:00:37:20

Deep in the jungles of Central America

009 00:00:39:05 00:00:41:19

Hidden in the shadows of centuries of war

010 00:00:43:07 00:00:44:17

Forgotten by time

011 00:00:46:08 00:00:49:05

The remnants of ancient civilizations remain

012 00:00:50:14 00:00:54:07

Monuments to the greatness of a people now forever gone

013 00:00:56:05 00:00:58:12

Rediscovered by a new generation

014 00:00:59:19 00:01:01:03

Revered and admired

015 00:01:01:24 00:01:04:00

But even ruins can be destroyed

016 00:01:05:16 00:01:09:17

With every visit made shattering memories of generations passed

017 00:01:10:16 00:01:13:10

As the remnants of our past risks annihilation

018 00:01:16:24 00:01:19:07

As our admiration turns poisonous

019 00:01:20:18 00:01:22:15

And reverence turns fatal

020 00:01:37:06 00:01:47:03

Throughout Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and northern Costa Rica, the remains of ancient cultures have been preserved

021 00:01:47:19 00:01:50:11

Divided into three main civilizations

022 00:01:50:17 00:01:51:12

The Olmecs

023 00:01:51:21 00:01:52:13

The Mayans

024 00:01:52:20 00:01:53:19

And the Aztecs

025 00:01:54:07 00:01:57:11

With several additional smaller groups and city-states

026 00:01:58:11 00:02:01:17

The site divided chronologically into three phases

027 00:02:02:00 00:02:05:23

The Formative period between 4000 to 2000 years ago

028 00:02:06:16 00:02:10:11

The Classic period between 1800 and 1100 years ago

029 00:02:11:06 00:02:20:08

And the Post-classic period, starting 1100 years ago, effectively ending in the year 1519 with the Spanish conquest of Mesoamerica.

030 00:02:21:17 00:02:30:21

The Olmecs were the earliest of the major civilizations, inhabiting the southern gulf coast of present-day Mexico during the Early and Middle Formative period

031 00:02:31:14 00:02:36:15

Most widely known for their colossal stone heads, carved out of large basalt boulders

032 00:02:37:00 00:02:43:16

Varying in size between 5 to 11 feet tall, weighing between 6 to 50 metric tons

033 00:02:43:21 00:02:48:10

Believed to be the portraits of living or recently deceased rulers of the Olmecs

034 00:02:48:22 00:03:00:01

The Mayan civilization came next, inhabiting most of the area east and south of the Olmecs, covering all of the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico, present-day Belize and Guatemala

035 00:03:01:00 00:03:11:14

First coming into force parallel to the Olmecs 4000 years ago, but only flourishing into forming cities around 1300 years later and reaching their peak during the Classic period

036 00:03:12:11 00:03:16:08

Founding cities and settlements such as Chichen Itza

037 00:03:16:14 00:03:17:11

Copan

038 00:03:17:15 00:03:18:12

El Baul

039 00:03:18:17 00:03:19:14

Mayapan

040 00:03:19:18 00:03:20:13

Palenque

041 00:03:20:18 00:03:21:13

Tikal

042 00:03:21:18 00:03:22:08

Tulum

043 00:03:22:13 00:03:23:06

Uxmal

044 00:03:23:10 00:03:24:13

And Xcaret

045 00:03:24:19 00:03:30:08

Many of which being independent city states, forming complex networks of alliances

046 00:03:30:18 00:03:34:15

The Mayans were distinct for their hieroglyphic writing system

047 00:03:34:24 00:03:38:15

Their extensive studies and observations of astronomy

048 00:03:38:21 00:03:40:04

And calendar systems

049 00:03:40:15 00:03:44:10

And for their advanced architecture of pyramids and temples

050 00:03:44:22 00:03:51:11

The Aztec Empire followed, the word "Aztec" itself being an umbrella term for several different peoples

051 00:03:52:07 00:03:56:21

Having spread throughout the Valley of Mexico, west of the Olmecs and the Mayans

052 00:03:57:09 00:03:59:02

Starting in the 6th century

053 00:03:59:12 00:04:04:21

The Aztec Empire initially denoting the Triple Alliance of three city states

054 00:04:05:00 00:04:07:21

Tenochtitlan, Texcoco and Tlacopan

055 00:04:08:17 00:04:11:23

Before Tenochtitlan eventually assumed power

056 00:04:12:09 00:04:18:19

Controlling most of Central Mexico up until the border of Guatemala with other cities being labelled provinces

057 00:04:19:04 00:04:21:13

Many of which remaining as cities today

058 00:04:21:20 00:04:25:05

Built on the foundations and ruins of the Aztec culture

059 00:04:25:19 00:04:27:20

Little of which remain to be seen

060 00:04:28:16 00:04:32:12

Other significant Mesoamerican sites include La Quemada

061 00:04:32:19 00:04:34:05

Tula de Allende

062 00:04:34:10 00:04:35:23

Guachimontones

063 00:04:36:04 00:04:37:13

Tzintzuntzan

064 00:04:37:17 00:04:39:01

Monte Alban

065 00:04:39:11 00:04:41:03

And Teotihuacan

066 00:04:41:14 00:04:44:23

Which is the single biggest Mesoamerican site discovered

067 00:04:45:15 00:04:48:13

Believed to have been a multicultural city state

068 00:04:49:12 00:05:00:16

Each of these sites significant historical relics, showcasing advanced ancient architecture and hieroglyphics detailing centuries of history of the indigenous peoples

069 00:05:01:13 00:05:06:21

Often featuring grand monuments and buildings designed solely for ritualistic purposes

070 00:05:07:10 00:05:09:04

Including religious sacrifice

071 00:05:10:02 00:05:16:21

The distinctive step pyramid structure, or ziggurat, seen as a way of bringing their creators closer to the heavens

072 00:05:17:10 00:05:23:06

Today, Mesoamerican ruins are in the top 5 reasons for tourist visits in much of Central America

073 00:05:23:17 00:05:29:09

With tourism in Mexico being particularly significant as one of the most visited countries in the world

074 00:05:30:00 00:05:33:09

Second only to the United States in all of the Americas

075 00:05:34:23 00:05:40:09

But as hundreds of thousands of tourists visit each of these ancient sites every year

076 00:05:41:11 00:05:45:12

So too, does the chances of their preservation drastically diminish

077 00:05:46:24 00:05:51:08

Threatened by pollution, decay, destruction and theft

078 00:05:52:20 00:05:55:21

Our very history is threatened by our curiosity

079 00:05:56:18 00:06:00:08

The ancient cities running the risk of becoming an ancient memory

080 00:06:12:15 00:06:20:04

The history of Mesoamerica starts with the earliest human settlements somewhere between 11 000 and 40 000 years ago

081 00:06:20:19 00:06:26:02

The ensuing Archaic era first saw the establishment of permanent villages and agriculture

082 00:06:26:07 00:06:35:04

But it would only be with the Formative Period that large-scale ceremonial architecture, writing language and individual city states first formed

083 00:06:35:24 00:06:39:09

With particularly the Olmec civilization flourishing

084 00:06:39:15 00:06:44:03

Alongside the minor civilizations of Zapotec and Teotihuacan

085 00:06:44:18 00:06:49:23

The Mayans soon emerged however as the dominant builder of monuments and organized cities

086 00:06:50:10 00:06:54:11

As the Olmec people began to dwindle until their disappearance

087 00:06:54:21 00:06:58:23

Opening a power vacuum for the city state of Teotihuacan

088 00:06:59:13 00:07:05:04

Which soon became the principal political and cultural force over the next 700 years

089 00:07:05:20 00:07:11:09

The entirety of Mesoamerican civilization centered around the ritual authority of their leaders

090 00:07:11:21 00:07:15:07

Rather than practical control over trade or food distribution

091 00:07:15:23 00:07:23:09

With ever-increasing systemic problems of in-fighting and poor management, the Mayan kingdoms collapsed around 1100 years ago

092 00:07:24:06 00:07:30:04

Only partially recovering in the highlands, with most cities being abandoned due to warfare and strife

093 00:07:31:08 00:07:34:18

In favor of more easily defensible hilltop locations

094 00:07:37:02 00:07:43:13

The void left by the lowland Mayans soon filled by the many ethnic groups collectively known as Aztecs

095 00:07:45:03 00:07:49:01

Consisting mainly of the Mexica tribe and the Nahuatl peoples

096 00:07:50:11 00:07:54:00

Forming many smaller cities all along Lake Texcoco

097 00:07:54:16 00:07:57:16

Alongside Teotihuacan and other tribes

098 00:07:58:02 00:08:02:03

Engaged in frequent power struggles and minor conflicts for centuries

099 00:08:03:11 00:08:06:10

While still developing their own unified culture

100 00:08:08:07 00:08:11:21

Forming the basis of what was to become the Aztec Empire

101 00:08:13:04 00:08:17:03

Which came to dominate the valley of Mexico for the next 100 years

102 00:08:18:11 00:08:24:00

The first rulers drastically reforming the unified Aztec culture in the process

103 00:08:24:22 00:08:29:17

With massive book burnings and systematic destruction of deviant culture

104 00:08:30:17 00:08:38:18

With ritual warfare being established from religious beliefs that the sun rising and setting necessitated blood letting and war

105 00:08:40:08 00:08:48:04

This state lasted until the Spanish conquest of Central America, led by Hernando Cortes, starting in 1519

106 00:08:48:17 00:08:54:11

Destroying the city of Tenochtitlan, and murdering the Aztec leader, Montezuma II

107 00:08:56:08 00:09:01:06

Leading to the installation of a chain of puppet rulers under the dominion of Spain

108 00:09:03:04 00:09:09:07

Breaking up the strict social stratification and forcibly merging the remaining towns and villages

109 00:09:10:13 00:09:16:11

Cortes then dispatched other conquistadors to conquer the remaining Mayan city states

110 00:09:17:00 00:09:21:14

Demanding gold and loyalty as tribute or face the destruction of their homes

111 00:09:23:09 00:09:31:16

The eventual total collapse of Aztec and Mayan civilizations attributed also to the introduction of smallpox and other diseases

112 00:09:32:23 00:09:38:11

Decimating the Aztec population by over 80 percent over the next 60 years

113 00:09:42:03 00:09:49:17

After the fall of the indigenous peoples, the Spanish installed themselves as the dominant colonial rulers, enforcing Catholicism

114 00:09:52:02 00:09:56:22

And introducing state-sponsored discrimination against the indigenous peoples

115 00:09:58:05 00:10:03:03

A tradition that continued past the independence of the region in 1821

116 00:10:04:02 00:10:07:15

As the local culture remained predominantly Spanish influenced

117 00:10:09:16 00:10:14:10

During the following centuries, the region as a whole has been plagued with civil war

118 00:10:16:23 00:10:25:04

Starting with the separation of Nicaragua from what was then known as the United Provinces of Central America in 1838

119 00:10:27:10 00:10:32:11

The region as a whole becoming a haven for tourists worldwide since the colonial era

120 00:10:34:04 00:10:39:16

Only expanding in the years since, reaching its first true peak following World War II

121 00:10:40:13 00:10:45:00

With the support of foreign governments such as the United States and Soviet Union

122 00:10:45:23 00:10:49:00

Boosting local economies in an effort to gain their support

123 00:10:50:20 00:10:55:04

As well as the fast emerging drug trade emanating from South America

124 00:10:57:15 00:11:06:01

With global interest for all things Aztec and Mayan soon following as part of a sudden influx in archaeological research in the area

125 00:11:06:10 00:11:11:08

Previously inaccessible sites being excavated and put on public display

126 00:11:11:20 00:11:17:13

As many countries throughout Central America rediscovered pride in their ancestral heritage

127 00:11:17:23 00:11:24:14

Though many archaeological sites throughout the region remain either buried under centuries of jungle overgrowth

128 00:11:25:13 00:11:28:16

Or hidden underneath Spanish colonial settlements

129 00:11:29:04 00:11:35:15

Many more have been opened up as popular tourist destinations with little restrictions posed against visitors

130 00:11:36:02 00:11:42:01

Local governments eager to overcome their appearance as politically unstable third world nations

131 00:11:43:07 00:11:47:11

Instead opting to actively advertise their historical legacy

132 00:11:49:10 00:11:53:18

But with it, they bring upon themselves the risk of destruction and exploitation

133 00:11:56:06 00:12:03:03

As government officials and organizations dedicated to preserving history, art and culture are slowly realizing

134 00:12:04:21 00:12:07:19

Worldwide exposure isn't always a good thing

135 00:12:19:12 00:12:29:15

The issues concerning the Ancient Cities are many, ranging from erosion and the ravages of time to deliberate sabotage and theft of ancient artifacts

136 00:12:30:06 00:12:34:19

Entire cities all but destroyed by the onslaught of looters

137 00:12:35:17 00:12:38:06

Whole buildings and monuments cut in half

138 00:12:38:13 00:12:42:02

Sold in pieces on the black market to wealthy foreigners

139 00:12:42:17 00:12:50:11

Over 1000 Mayan sites in the small region of Peten in Guatemala alone having been repeatedly looted over the years

140 00:12:51:04 00:12:57:17

With not only tourists but foreign museums and collectors being tricked into buying stolen goods

141 00:12:58:23 00:13:04:21

Hundreds of looters each year rummaging through tombs and temples to collect painted ceramics

142 00:13:05:05 00:13:10:06

Objects carved out of valuable stones such as jade, obsidian and onyx

143 00:13:11:07 00:13:21:13

Many children in particular reportedly employed as looters due to their small size and ability to access tombs through tunnels not large enough for adults to pass through

144 00:13:22:12 00:13:30:03

Street vendors and tourist shops around the area often selling replicas and genuine stolen artifacts side-by-side

145 00:13:31:00 00:13:35:21

Or engaging in backroom deal-making with wealthy visitors and collectors

146 00:13:36:21 00:13:42:07

Driven by poverty and greed and aided by widespread corruption throughout the region

147 00:13:42:24 00:13:46:10

Contributed to the vicious circle of high crime rates

148 00:13:46:22 00:13:48:21

Thwarting economical growth

149 00:13:49:08 00:13:51:04

Prompting higher crime rates

150 00:13:52:19 00:13:57:13

One quarter of the entire population reported as living under the poverty line

151 00:13:59:03 00:14:03:09

Many Central American countries having the highest crime rates in the world

152 00:14:04:03 00:14:08:09

Honduras having more homicides per capita than any other nation

153 00:14:09:07 00:14:15:20

While some individual townships of Mexico exceed even that as part of the ongoing drug wars

154 00:14:16:24 00:14:24:15

With cartels reportedly also engaging in smuggling artifacts as a profitable sideline to cocaine and marijuana trafficking

155 00:14:25:09 00:14:29:18

With allegations leveled against local governments having turned a blind eye

156 00:14:30:11 00:14:35:13

Particularly during the turbulent years during the 1960s and 1970s

157 00:14:35:24 00:14:44:02

Wherein many Central American countries came to be governed by military juntas supported by the illegal trade of drugs and artifacts

158 00:14:45:00 00:14:53:08

With prominent elements of western intelligence agencies having secretly supported the trade as a means of combating the influence of communism

159 00:14:55:19 00:15:04:16

While today, the threat of foreign interests also comes from foreign businesses seeking to profit from western tourists visiting the ancient ruins

160 00:15:05:03 00:15:12:07

Foreign-owned chains of supermarkets and stores built on the very grounds of sites such as Teotihuacan

161 00:15:12:15 00:15:16:23

Specifically intended to cater to foreign tourists visiting the site

162 00:15:17:13 00:15:23:03

The construction of which directly endangering possible undiscovered relics and artifacts

163 00:15:23:15 00:15:29:16

Priceless artifacts uncovered and trucked off to local dumps for unceremonious disposal

164 00:15:31:01 00:15:43:15

Despite significant protests, local governments seemingly interested only in expanding profit margins and reducing the rampant unemployment rates around what is now known as Riviera Maya

165 00:15:44:03 00:15:51:05

The strip of land along the Gulf of Mexico featuring the densest concentration of Mesoamerican ruins

166 00:15:51:18 00:15:54:13

Once a downtrodden provincial area

167 00:15:54:21 00:15:58:20

It has over the past couple of decades become a boomtown for tourism

168 00:15:59:08 00:16:03:19

With locals flocking from surrounding areas to seek employment in the industry

169 00:16:04:07 00:16:07:24

Bringing with them not only many opportunistic criminal elements

170 00:16:08:10 00:16:13:15

But also political ambitions to attract more foreign currency with publicity stunts

171 00:16:13:24 00:16:21:04

Such as converting many of the once precious ancient cities and ruins into concert halls for popular western musicians

172 00:16:21:07 00:16:25:00

As well as expensive installations of light and sound shows

173 00:16:25:07 00:16:28:22

Causing structural damage both in installation and use

174 00:16:29:06 00:16:40:15

Or attempts at boosting other elements of tourism in the region, construction crews having deliberately flattened and destroyed Mayan temples to provide gravel to improve rural roads in Belize

175 00:16:40:21 00:16:44:22

Roads intended to improve tourism to new beaches and resorts

176 00:16:45:10 00:16:52:22

With additional construction of dams and highways throughout Central America directly affecting the stability of nearby ruins

177 00:16:53:07 00:17:03:12

Another significant threat comes from the environment itself, the humidity and heat of Central America already placing a toll on any ancient artifacts and structures

178 00:17:05:03 00:17:10:04

The jungle itself mercilessly covering most of the remaining cities and temples

179 00:17:12:09 00:17:17:00

Though those too are faced with ever worsening threats from multiple sources

180 00:17:18:04 00:17:21:19

Thousands of forest fires are deliberately set each year

181 00:17:22:12 00:17:25:11

Burning hundreds of thousands of acres of rainforest

182 00:17:26:12 00:17:28:18

As part of drug smuggling operations

183 00:17:29:11 00:17:30:13

Illegal logging

184 00:17:32:08 00:17:36:10

And slash-and-burn agriculture to create fields for crops

185 00:17:38:01 00:17:45:20

As well as cattle ranchers deliberately hiring arsonists to set parts of the rainforest ablaze to expand their cattle pastures

186 00:17:47:04 00:17:52:20

All to accommodate fast-food chains across the Americas sourcing beef from Central America

187 00:17:55:03 00:18:02:18

Crops and cattle constituting the main reason for the loss of over 75 percent of all tropical rainforest in Central America

188 00:18:04:06 00:18:09:07

Having far-reaching effects on both the natural ecosystem and the ancient ruins

189 00:18:11:21 00:18:17:02

The remaining rainforest estimated to have disappeared entirely in 50 years' time

190 00:18:28:00 00:18:32:11

The global climate change has also taken effect on the ruins of Mesoamerica

191 00:18:33:24 00:18:36:09

Acid rain being the biggest concern

192 00:18:37:09 00:18:43:03

Caused by pollutants from both the thousands of tourist buses passing through the area every year

193 00:18:44:00 00:18:48:05

Particularly those parked for hours in the archaeological sites themselves

194 00:18:48:22 00:18:52:14

With heavy exhaust fumes directly impacting stone structures

195 00:18:52:23 00:18:59:11

As well as oil refineries and uncapped oil wells largely fuelling tourist resorts and transportation

196 00:19:00:05 00:19:06:16

Oxides of nitrogen and sulfur as a byproduct of the burning of petroleum rising to the upper atmosphere

197 00:19:07:03 00:19:11:12

Reacting to sunlight and moisture to form sulfuric acid and nitric acid

198 00:19:12:03 00:19:15:00

Reportedly starting already in the 1970s

199 00:19:15:07 00:19:17:11

And continuously escalating in effect

200 00:19:17:24 00:19:22:20

With the rain not only causing immediate damage upon impact, but a lasting one

201 00:19:22:24 00:19:27:19

As the dry acidic particles settle into deep crevices and gaps in the stone

202 00:19:28:03 00:19:31:18

Covering areas in black scab of acid deposits

203 00:19:32:13 00:19:38:00

Making it increasingly vulnerable to water seepage and decay-inducing microorganisms

204 00:19:39:00 00:19:42:12

Mayan sites like Palenque being the most exposed

205 00:19:42:21 00:19:48:22

Many of the buildings, pyramids and statues once covered in colorful paint being stripped bare

206 00:19:49:14 00:19:55:22

The paint flaking off by the handful and complex carved details and inscriptions even in stone corroding

207 00:19:56:14 00:19:58:08

By the acidity of the rainfall

208 00:19:58:20 00:20:01:04

Also threatening the rainforest itself

209 00:20:01:17 00:20:05:13

Running the risk of further disturbing a delicate ecosystem

210 00:20:06:04 00:20:10:20

Already pushed to the brink of endangerment by deforestation and construction

211 00:20:11:20 00:20:21:00

Meanwhile, Mexican officials have consistently denied the role of traffic pollution and oil refineries on the continued erosion of the ancient ruins

212 00:20:22:02 00:20:30:02

Claims which some attribute to powerful commercial interests as tourism remains one of the biggest industries in all of Central America

213 00:20:31:20 00:20:37:13

With the central oil company of Mexico being the number one earner of hard currency in the country

214 00:20:39:17 00:20:47:16

Ruins throughout Guatemala have however escaped the same level of damage by virtue of being largely inaccessible to tourists

215 00:20:49:04 00:20:52:24

The overarching vegetation even acting as a natural screen

216 00:20:53:18 00:20:56:13

Protecting the stone structures from acid rain

217 00:20:57:24 00:21:03:19

The most widespread and universal threat to the Mesoamerican cities remain vandalism, however

218 00:21:04:06 00:21:09:13

With many tourists and locals alike chipping away at relics and monuments for souvenirs

219 00:21:10:12 00:21:15:02

Carving their names into the stones and tagging age-old temples with graffiti

220 00:21:15:10 00:21:19:18

The carelessness of certain visitors having escalated to malicious acts

221 00:21:20:05 00:21:26:14

Failing to appreciate the historical and cultural significance of monuments made by the indigenous peoples

222 00:21:26:24 00:21:30:10

Ignoring their legacy and dismissing their importance

223 00:21:30:19 00:21:41:00

As after hundreds of years of deliberate oppression on the part of the Spanish colonial forces, the remaining indigenous peoples themselves have fallen almost entirely by the wayside

224 00:21:41:16 00:21:45:04

Having been reportedly politically marginalized and suppressed

225 00:21:45:14 00:21:50:02

To the point of not being recognized as ethnic groups or political factors

226 00:21:51:10 00:22:01:20

Their calls for preservation of their cultural legacy unheard to the point where little effort is still made to combat the issues plaguing the ancient ruins of their ancestors

227 00:22:02:10 00:22:10:22

Many instead having become modernized, profiting from tourism by exploiting their cultural history and selling handcrafts and souvenirs

228 00:22:11:05 00:22:21:01

The vast majority of indigenous peoples being found in rural and poor areas with little support from the local governments in keeping their culture and traditions alive

229 00:22:21:08 00:22:30:12

Though while the local powers that be may ostensibly be responsible for many of the issues, at the end of the day, they are responding to monetary interests

230 00:22:30:19 00:22:37:00

With tourism being the predominantly deciding factor in their treatment of their cultural and historical ancestry

231 00:22:37:09 00:22:40:03

As such, the onus is on us to make a difference

232 00:22:40:18 00:22:43:07

By promoting and practicing ecotourism

233 00:22:43:23 00:22:47:08

Limiting vandalism and the purchase of stolen artifacts

234 00:22:48:19 00:22:53:10

Reducing carbon emissions by choosing eco-friendly means of transportation

235 00:22:54:22 00:23:04:11

And introducing clear self-imposed standards, rules and regulations as to where the line of access to fragile monuments and ruins should be drawn

236 00:23:05:23 00:23:11:02

Refusing to feed into the blatant commercialization of a once proud heritage

237 00:23:12:07 00:23:15:24

And choosing to support the indigenous peoples that are still with us

238 00:23:16:20 00:23:18:02

Before it's too late

239 00:23:22:03 00:23:25:16

As we risk pushing the jungle itself into annihilation

240 00:23:27:23 00:23:30:15

And the remnants of our past into oblivion

241 00:23:33:05 00:23:34:06

Little by little

242 00:23:37:04 00:23:38:13

Loving it to death