

## ***Flashing Cash: Celts, Mirrors, Money and Power In Olmec and Maya Civilizations***

### **David Freidel**

Mesoamericans at the time of the Spanish Conquest had marketplaces and used currencies in exchange transactions, including jade beads. Recent research strengthens arguments that marketplaces existed much earlier. The Olmec and related societies of the 12<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E used polished groundstone celts as currency to purchase maize and other commodities in a regional marketplace network. This presentation explores the prospect that Maya reflective jade celts, “flashing cash”, functioned as mirror portals conveying the animate soul force and intention of state actors: the maize god kings with their shamanic powers. Polished celts were not strictly money but functioned to effectively integrate kingdoms economically in the regional exchange network, reducing risk to agriculturalists committing to staple maize. The Olmec rulers from La Venta had a lot to do with the innovation and success of this system. They celebrated celt money with numerous deposits of polished celts, massive deposits of rough serpentine celts, and monumental stela depicting celts emblazoned with Maize Gods. The celts worked in exchange because, in addition to commodity value, they had qualities of credit money. Their transfer signaled participation in the network, obligation or indebtedness of the recipient of power conveyed by source rulers. The celts were, in the last analysis, portal openers, to both the supernatural world and the human world of regional commodity exchange.



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