Chapter 8

The Peoples and Civilizations of the Americas

OUTLINE

I. Introduction

What took place in the Americas had little connection to the civilizations of Eurasia and Africa, although there were some parallels. The timing of civilization development in the Americas was different due to American separation from other core regions. American civilizations lacked horses and cattle and relied on a completely different range of agricultural crops. Although American civilizations developed great empires, they did so with limited technology.

II. Origins of American Societies

A. Introduction

During the last Ice Age, peoples from Asia moved across a land bridge to the Americas. The expansion of the ice sheets lowered water levels in the oceans and made the migration possible. Hunters possibly followed game animals across the land bridge. About 10,000 years ago, increases in temperature melted the ice sheets and ended the period of migration. While these migrations took place from 20,000 B.C.E. to 8,000 B.C.E, some humans may have arrived as early as 40,000 B.C.E.

B. The Ancient Hunters

Early stone technology was limited to scrapers and crude knives. Hunting spear points appeared about 12,000 years ago. The warming of the climate coincided with the disappearance of the great mammals that had also migrated from Asia. Successful hunting techniques may account for the elimination of large animal species. Early migrants probably lived in small bands based on kinship with little social stratification or economic specialization.

C. American Diversity

The earliest migrants to the New World represented different genetic types, including Caucasoid, Australoid, and Mongoloid peoples. Despite genetic differences, genetic and physical similarities among American Indian populations indicate a high degree of common ancestry. Variations in language and culture can be attributed to adaptation and localization of settlement patterns.

D. The Question of Outside Contacts

Various cultural patterns and some biological origins have suggested contacts between the
Americas and Asia. Despite apparent similarities, there is no concrete evidence for contact prior to the 15th century. The cultural aspects of civilization (agriculture, the domestication of animals, weaving, ceramics, social stratification, urbanism, religious ideas, and a numerical system) were developed independently in the New World. Although independent development made American cultures durable, there were certain drawbacks. American cultures lacked the wheel, iron technology, and large mammals. Pastoralism was largely absent in the earliest American cultures. American peoples also lacked resistance to the diseases of Eurasia and Africa.

E. The Archaic Cultures

The earliest peoples in the Americas depended on hunting and gathering. Agriculture may have developed by 7000 B.C.E. in the Andes and by 5000 B.C.E. elsewhere. Initially, agricultural societies intermingled with intensive hunting and gathering groups. The most important crops were maize, potatoes, and manioc. Agricultural societies developed economic specialization and social stratification. The development of maize in central Mexico by 4000 B.C.E. led to population growth that, in turn, stimulated the development of new crops. Maize cultivation spread throughout North and South America. Maize introduction, even in areas where manioc and potatoes had previously been cultivated, resulted in population growth and more complex societies.

F. Types of American Indian Societies

Civilizations developed in two regions of the Americas - Mesoamerica and the Peruvian highlands. The entire region from central Mexico to Chile formed a continuous nucleus of developing civilizations called hearths. From these regions, the cultural features of American civilizations spread to neighboring groups. Distinctions among American groups were based on economic and political organization with adoption of sedentary agriculture as the key. Hunting and gathering groups continued to occupy large regions of the Americas. These groups existed in bands organized along lines of kinship with little formal political organization. Those groups that had made partial transitions to sedentary agriculture lived in larger groups organized in villages. Only among peoples who converted entirely to sedentary agriculture did the most complex societies develop. Social stratification and economic specialization were typical of the latter groups.

G. Chiefdoms and States

Chiefdom was a common form of social and political organization among the more sedentary peoples of the Americas. Chiefdoms were typified by a government of hereditary chieftains who ruled from central towns that paid tribute to the central administrators. Central towns often had a priestly class that organized rituals. Chiefdoms were socially stratified into groups of nobles, priests, and commoners. States may have emerged from these chiefdoms, although in many ways the two forms of political structure were similar.
III. Spread of Civilization in Mesoamerica

A. Introduction

The Olmec civilization was the foundation for the civilizations of Mesoamerica. The region was typified by geographical diversity that gave rise to various environments requiring different human adaptations. Environmental variations created different products and enhanced trade between regions. The transition to more complex societies began around 5000 B.C.E. in Mesoamerica. Pottery was first used around 2000 B.C.E. Sedentary villages based on agriculture first appeared in the region, roughly contemporary with the emergence of the Shang dynasty in China.

B. The Olmec Mystery

Olmec civilization appeared suddenly around 1200 B.C.E. without much evidence of gradual development. The Olmecs possessed irrigation systems, monumental architecture, calendrical and writing systems, religion, and urbanism. The earliest Olmec sites were located in the tropical forests of the Gulf coast of eastern Mexico, but Olmec culture spread inland to the highlands. Maize cultivation provided the basis for a state ruled by a hereditary elite dependent on the maintenance of organized religious ceremonialism. Olmec culture seems to have influenced other developing centers of civilization, such as the Zapotecs of Oaxaca and the Mayas of the Yucatan. Olmec art and symbols appear in many places in Mesoamerica, but it is difficult to interpret the significance of their distribution.

C. The Classic Era of Mesoamerican Civilization

Between 150 C.E. and 900 C.E., the classic period in Mesoamerica followed the Olmec era. The two main centers of development were in the high valley of central Mexico and the tropical lowlands of the Yucatan and Guatemala. In central Mexico, an important ceremonial center developed in the city of Teotihuacan. Surrounded by irrigated agricultural systems, Teotihuacan seems to have been able to command huge numbers of workers to support the massive monumental structures and the elite of the city. There is evidence for economic specialization and social stratification. The rulers of Teotihuacan were probably able to extract tribute from a wide region extending as far south as Guatemala. The lack of martial artwork in the city of Teotihuacan has led to the assumption that the city was able to establish a long period of peace.

At approximately the same time that Teotihuacan dominated the central Mexican highlands, Mayan civilization was developing in southern Mexico and Central America. Mayan culture included monumental architecture, a written language, calendrical and mathematical systems, religion, social stratification, and economic specialization. The political structure of the Mayans was based on city-states. To support themselves, Mayan religious centers depended on elaborate irrigation systems and intensive cultivation. Mayan cities varied in size but all included monumental architecture devoted to religious ceremonialism. Two of the great Maya accomplishments were the creation of a sophisticated system of mathematics used, in part, to create a calendar based on recurring cycles and the development of a writing system. Mayan writing was used in both religion and more secular records. Mayan religion featured a complex cosmology of 13 heavens and nine underworlds. The religion was dualistic with good and evil, male and female, and night and day all balanced. Inscriptions on public stelae are historical records of individual dynasties and records of the constant warfare between city-states. Priests and scribes assisted powerful rulers in the administration of the city-states. Mayan rituals included mutilation and human sacrifice. Although there were artisans who lived in the cities, the
majority of the population consisted of peasant farmers. Captives in war were enslaved. Family structure among the Maya was patrilineal, although elite women retained some rights.

D. Classic Collapse

Between 700 C.E. and 900 C.E., the classical civilizations of Mesoamerica began to collapse. Nomadic peoples from northern Mexico destroyed Teotihuacan around 650 C.E. The Zapotec civilization based on Monte Albán went into slow decline at the same time. By 900 C.E., most Maya centers had been abandoned. Constant war between Mayan city-states may have led to collapse. It has also been proposed that the intensive system of agriculture on which the Maya depended could no longer support the Mayan population. Cultural achievements of the classic period were not maintained in the aftermath of the collapse, although some Mayan cities continued to flourish with considerable influence from the highlands. After 1000 C.E., the Toltecs assumed control over the region of central Mexico. From their capital at Tula, the Toltecs established a military empire based on classical cultural foundations. The Toltec empire collapsed around 1200 C.E.

IV. The Peoples to the North

A. Introduction

In the Mississippi basin and in the American southwest, complex societies emerged based on sedentary agriculture.

B. The Mound Builders

The valleys of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers supported the development of sedentary agricultural societies. This culture featured the construction of large earthen mounds used for defense and for burials. These mound builders appear to have traded with other regions of North America, and their culture may have spread along trade routes to regions of New York and Maryland. The Hopewell culture arose around 200 C.E. in Ohio. The Hopewell people were also mound builders who established networks of trade. The Hopewell culture declined by 500 C.E. Mississippian culture was also based on mound building and flourished between 800 C.E. and 1300 C.E. It is possible, although not known, that the Mississippian culture was a centralized chiefdom. Its ruler may have governed a society divided into four classes. Mississippian culture was more heavily dependent on sedentary agriculture than its two antecedents. Mesoamerican civilizations may have influenced the Mississippians.

C. The Desert Peoples

By 300 B.C.E., irrigated agriculture supported settled communities in the desert region of the American southwest. Early groups lived in pit houses, which later developed into full stone structures. The most famous of the early southwestern cultures was the Anasazi. As a means of defense, the Anasazi constructed large complexes of stone structures built into the sides of cliffs. Characteristic of these dwellings was the use of a circular pit for religious ceremonies. The Anasazi traded with the civilizations of Mesoamerica. A long period of drought in the late 13th century probably accounts for the decline of the Anasazi.
V. The Andean World

A. Introduction

Civilization in South America shared many traits with Mesoamerica. Chavín civilization was followed by a number of regional variations. After Chavín, a new civilization horizon centered on the upland states of Huari and Tihuanaco. The rapid rise from the Pacific coast of South America to the Andean highlands created numerous microregions, each with its own ecology. Andean population clustered on the more arid coastal regions or on the uplands between the two major chains of the Andes. To the east of the Andes lay the tropical rain forests in the basins of the Amazon and La Plata rivers. The establishment of irrigated systems of agriculture and roads required social complexity and political organization. Communities attempted to control a number of ecological zones from the coastal plain to the highlands in order to provide for varied resources. Successful control of various regions determined political organization, settlement, and growth.

B. Early Developments and the Rise of Chavín

Andean history is often divided between periods in which strictly regional cultures dominated and eras typified by more centralized state control over the entire area. Sedentary agricultural communities were established in the Andes between 3000 B.C.E. and 2000 B.C.E. Maize and pottery were introduced by 2700 B.C.E. Between 1800 B.C.E. and 1200 B.C.E., ceremonial centers featuring monumental architecture appeared on the coast and in the highlands. The most important of the centers was Chavín de Huantar in the highlands. The jaguar was a common motif in Chavín art. Chavín-style art was widely disseminated, a fact that suggests broad political control over the entire region. It is unknown whether Chavín culture was spread as a result of military conquest.

C. Regional Cultures and a New Horizon

The political unity imposed by Chavín was lost by 300 B.C.E. In its wake arose regional centers with indigenous cultures, such as those at Nazca and Moche. In the Mochica state (200 C.E. to 700 C.E.), monumental structures were constructed of brick. Moche expanded its control over the region by military conquest. The period of regional organization was brought to an end by the growth of two larger states, Tihuanaco and Huari. The religious symbols and artistic motifs associated with these two states were widely disseminated, possibly suggesting the creation of a second horizon. Tihuanaco extended its control over the southern Andes region, while Huari controlled the northern region. The period of dominance of these two states ended in the ninth century C.E., about the same time as the end of the classic period in Mesoamerica. The decline precipitated another round of regional development, as at Chimu on the coast.

D. Andean Lifeways

The control of various ecological niches located at different altitudes was the objective of states, families, and communities. Despite ethnic and linguistic variations, Andean communities were most often composed of kinship groups, or ayllus. Marriage was most often within the ayllu. Each kinship group assigned land and water rights to families within the kindred. Each ayllu was directed by a chief, or curaca. Labor and military conscription were based on ayllus. Related kinship groups could, on occasion, be bound together in larger political confederations. Much of Andean society was suffused with the concept of reciprocity; in return for labor and tribute, states were to manage public works projects for the benefit of the community. The principle of...
VI. Global Connections: American Civilizations and the World

Contact between Mesoamerica and the Andes led to parallels in cultural development and the chronology of the emergence of more complex political systems. Much of this was probably funneled through intermediate cultures in Central America. There were important differences. Peruvian cultures used metallurgy more fully than their Mesoamerican counterparts. The existence of the llama in the Andes allowed the development of a form of pastoralism there unknown in Mexico. Unlike the Maya, the cultures of the Andean highlands never developed a system of writing.
**TIMELINE**

*Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.*

- Beginning of first mound-building culture
- Plant domestication became widespread
- Beginning of Chavín civilization
- End of Tihuanaco civilization
- Beginning of Olmec civilization
- Beginning of Maya civilization

| 5000 B.C.E. |
| 1200 B.C.E. |
| 850 B.C.E. |
| 700 B.C.E. |
| 300 C.E. |
| 800 C.E. |

**TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS**

*The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one.*

- Archaic cultures
- Chiefdom
- Monte Alban
- Teotihuacan
- Toltecs
- Mississippian
- Kiva
- Solar cycle
- Moche
- Ayllu
- Maize
- Olmecs
- Zapotecs
- Maya
- Chimú
- Mound builders
- Puna
- Chavín
- Tihuanaco
- Curacas
- Manioc
- Land bridge
- Classic Period
- Long count
- Hopewell
- Anasazi
- Mantaú
- Nazca
- Huari
MAP EXERCISE

The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in the chapter. Locate the following places on the map.

- Olmec region
- Teotihuacan
- Chavín region
- Maya region
- Zapotec region
- Tiahuanaco and Huari region

Are the regions in which civilization developed in Mesoamerica and the Andean region more like Greece or the river valley civilizations? How does this help to explain the political development of the Americas?
MAKING CONNECTIONS

The following questions are intended to emphasize important ideas within the chapter.

1. Compare and contrast the civilizations of the Americas with those of the Old World.
2. How did humans get to the Americas? Why did they migrate?
3. Discuss the origins of sedentary agriculture and the staple crops in the Americas.
4. What were the major civilizations of Mesoamerica? How were they similar?
5. What are the major cultures of North America outside of Mesoamerica?
6. What are the major cultures of the Andean region? How are they similar?
7. Explain the significance of ecological specificity in the Andean region.
8. What was the nature of Andean society?
9. Compare and contrast Andean and Mesoamerican civilizations.

PUTTING LARGER CONCEPTS TOGETHER

The following questions test your ability to summarize the major conclusions of the chapter.

1. What were the bases of civilization in the Americas? Consider political, social, and economic organization.
2. How did the civilizations of the Americas compare and contrast with the early civilizations of the Old World (the Middle Eastern civilizations, Harappa, Shang China)?
SELF-TEST OF FACTUAL INFORMATION

1. What was one of the major differences between the resources available in the Americas and those in Asia and the Mediterranean?
   a. American Indians domesticated plants with caloric output greater than those raised in Europe or Asia.
   b. American civilizations never developed the types of monumental architecture found in other civilizations.
   c. American civilizations had greater access to animal power than the civilizations of the Old World.
   d. Due to the difficult topography, American civilizations did not establish sedentary agriculture.

2. Which of the following was NOT a disadvantage for Americans when they eventually did come in contact with other civilizations?
   a. simple material culture poor in metallurgical and weapon-making skills
   b. lack of large mammals as a protein source and a power source
   c. isolation from diseases common to Europeans, thus lack of immunities
   d. failure to develop sophisticated political systems

3. Where was maize first domesticated in the Americas?
   a. Mesoamerica
   b. the South American lowlands and the Caribbean
   c. the Andean highlands
   d. the Mississippi River valley

4. What Mesoamerican civilization emerged on the coast of Mexico around 1200 B.C.E.?
   a. Olmecs
   b. Zapotecs
   c. Toltecs
   d. Aztecs

5. During what epoch in Mesoamerican chronology did the Olmec civilization develop?
   a. Archaic
   b. Preclassic
   c. Classic
   d. Postclassic

6. Monte Alban was the major ceremonial center of what culture?
   a. Zapotec
   b. Toltec
   c. Aztec
   d. Olmec
7. The Mayan long count was
   a. their mathematical system using a base of 12.
   b. their method of keeping score during the ritual ballgame.
   c. a dating system based on a fixed date of origin.
   d. their method of collecting tribute from their subjects.

8. The use of a kiva for religious ceremonies was typical of what culture?
   a. Hopewell
   b. Mississippian
   c. Anasazi
   d. Cahokia

9. How did the topography of the Andean region influence the development of civilization?
   a. The unsuitability of the Andean region for any form of agriculture limited the development of civilizations there.
   b. The existence of pastoral nomadism in the Andean region led to an impermanent population.
   c. The arid coastal valleys demanded irrigation, and this spurred population growth and social complexity, which led to the development of civilizations as in the early civilizations of Asia.
   d. The many flat plains provided ample opportunities for the widespread development of sedentary agricultural communities.

10. Unlike Mesoamerican civilizations, Chavín culture
    a. had large ceremonial centers for religious purposes.
    b. practiced agricultural irrigation.
    c. domesticated larger mammals for pastoralism.
    d. developed artistic motifs that were widely distributed.