

Chapter 6: Early Societies in the Americas and Oceania

Overview

The cultures of the Americas and Oceania developed in relative isolation to the other early complex societies. Nevertheless, they too developed an agricultural base sufficient to support growing populations, specialized labor, political institutions, diverse societies, and long-distance trading networks. Less is known of these cultures than those in other parts of the world primarily because either writing systems did not develop or written documents perished or were destroyed. The fragments of writing and archeological findings indicate that these societies were complex and developed rich cultural traditions.

The early societies in the Americas:

- Built elaborate ceremonial centers that reflected both a complex religion and a powerful political authority
- Left a rich artistic legacy that included pottery, sculpture, metalwork, and painting
- Developed sophisticated knowledge of astronomy and mathematics

The early societies of Oceania:

- Saw the gradual dissemination of agricultural technology spread by Austronesian seafarers who traded and settled throughout the Pacific
- Formed a well-integrated society known as Lapita that stretched from New Guinea to Tonga

Chapter Outline

I. Early societies of Mesoamerica

- A. The Olmecs
 1. Migration to Mesoamerica
 - a. Large wave of humans traveled from Siberia to Alaska around 13,000 B.C.E.
 - b. By 9500 B.C.E., humans reached the southernmost part of South America
 - c. As hunting became difficult, agriculture began (7500 B.C.E.)
 2. Early agriculture: beans, squashes, chilies; later, maize became the staple (5000 B.C.E.)
 - a. Agricultural villages appeared after 3000 B.C.E.
 - b. No large domesticated animals, no wheeled vehicles
 3. Ceremonial centers by the end of the second millennium B.C.E.
 4. Olmecs, the "rubber people," lived near the Gulf of Mexico (1200 B.C.E.)
 - a. Elaborate complexes built
 - b. The colossal human heads--possibly likenesses of rulers
 - c. Rulers' power shown in construction of huge pyramids
 - d. Trade in jade and obsidian
 - e. Decline of Olmecs: systematically destroyed ceremonial centers by 400 B.C.E.
 5. Influence of Olmec: maize, ceremonial centers, calendar, human sacrifice, ball game
- B. Heirs of the Olmecs: the Maya
 1. The Maya lived in the highlands of Guatemala
 - a. Besides maize, they also cultivated cotton and cacao
 - b. Tikal was the most important Maya political center, 300 to 900 C.E.
 - c. Maya warfare: warriors had prestige; captives were slaves or victims
 - d. Chichén Itzá, power by the ninth century; loose empire in Yucatan
 - e. Maya decline began in 800 C.E.; many Mayans deserted their cities
- C. Maya society and religion
 1. Maya society was hierarchical
 - a. Kings, priests, and hereditary nobility at the top
 - b. Merchants were from the ruling class; they served also as ambassadors
 - c. Professional architects and artisans were important
 - d. Peasants and slaves were majority of population
 2. The Maya calendar had both solar and ritual years interwoven
 3. Maya writing was ideographic and syllabic; only four books survive
 4. Religious thought

- a. Popol Vuh, a Maya creation myth, taught that gods created humans out of maize and water
 - b. Gods maintained agricultural cycles in exchange for honors and sacrifices
 - c. Bloodletting rituals honored gods for rains
 - 5. The Maya ball game: sporting, gambling, and religious significance
- D. Heirs of the Olmecs: Teotihuacan
 - 1. The city of Teotihuacan in the highlands of Mexico
 - a. Colossal pyramids of sun and moon
 - b. High point between 400 and 600 C.E.; two hundred thousand inhabitants
 - c. Paintings and murals reflect the importance of priests
 - 2. Teotihuacan society
 - a. Rulers and priests dominated society
 - b. Two-thirds of the city inhabitants worked in fields during daytime
 - c. Artisans were famous for their obsidian tools and orange pottery
 - d. Professional merchants traded extensively throughout Mesoamerica
 - e. No sign of military organization or conquest
 - 3. Cultural traditions: ball game, calendar, writing, sacrifices
 - 4. Decline of Teotihuacan from about 650 C.E.; was sacked and destroyed mid-eighth century

II. Early societies of South America

- A. Early Andean society and the Chavín cult
 - 1. Early migration to Peru and Bolivia region
 - a. By 12,000 B.C.E. hunting and gathering peoples reached South America
 - b. By 8000 B.C.E. they began to experiment with agriculture
 - c. Complex societies appeared in central Andean region after 1000 B.C.E.
 - d. Andean societies were located in modern-day Peru and Bolivia
 - 2. Early agriculture in South America
 - a. Main crops: beans, peanuts, sweet potatoes, cotton
 - b. Fishing supplemented agricultural harvests
 - c. By 1800 B.C.E. the people produced pottery, built temples and pyramids
 - 3. The Chavín Cult, from about 900 to 300 B.C.E.
 - a. Complexity of Andean society increases during Chavín
 - b. Devised techniques of producing cotton textiles and fishing nets
 - c. Discovered gold, silver, and copper metallurgy
 - d. Cities began to appear shortly after Chavín cult
 - e. Early Andeans did not make use of writing
- B. Early Andean states: Mochica (300-700 C.E.) in northern Peru
 - 1. Irrigation, trade, military, no writing
 - 2. Artistic legacy: painting on pottery, ceramics

III. Early societies of Oceania

- A. Early societies in Australia and New Guinea
 - 1. Human migrants arrived in Australia and New Guinea at least sixty thousand years ago
 - a. By the mid-centuries of the first millennium C.E., human communities in all habitable islands of the Pacific Ocean
 - b. About ten thousand years ago, rising seas separated Australia and New Guinea
 - c. Australia: hunting and gathering until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries C.E.
 - d. New Guinea: Turned to agriculture about 3000 B.C.E.
 - 2. Austronesian peoples from southeast Asia were seafarers to New Guinea, 3000 B.C.E.
 - 3. Early agriculture in New Guinea: root crops and herding animals
- B. The peopling of the Pacific Islands
 - 1. Austronesian migration to Polynesia
 - a. Outrigger canoes enabled them to sail safely
 - b. Agriculture and domesticated animals
 - 2. Austronesian migrations to Micronesia and Madagascar
 - 3. Lapita Society from New Guinea to Tonga (1500-500 B.C.E.)

- a. Agricultural villages
- b. Pottery with geometric designs
- c. Networks of trade/communication: pottery, obsidian, shells, tools traded
- d. After 500 B.C.E. trade network declined; cultures developed independently
- e. Hierarchical chiefdoms; tension led to migration
- f. Divine or semi divine chiefs: led public rituals, oversaw irrigation