

CHAPTER 6-EARLY SOCIETIES IN THE AMERICAS AND OCEANIA

Around 13,000 B.C.E. people migrated from Siberia to Alaska and by 9500 B.C.E. had spread to the southern part of South America. This hunter-gather group began to turn to agriculture around 7500 B.C.E. and villages began to appear about 3000 B.C.E.

The first major Mesoamerican society, the Olmecs, best known for sculptures of huge human heads, established ceremonial centers near the Gulf of Mexico around 1200 B.C.E. They introduced maize, the concept of human sacrifice, a calendar, and the “ballgame,” which was adopted by many of the Mesoamerica societies. Two of these societies, referred to as heirs of the Olmecs, were the Maya and the inhabitants of Teotihuacan. The Maya ruled what are now Guatemala and the Yucatan, establishing political centers at Tikal and Chichén Itzá. The Maya had a society structured around hereditary leaders, a very accurate calendar, a system of writing, and a religion focused on agriculture and fertility. They grew maize, cotton, and most importantly for many of us, cacao, from which we get chocolate. For reasons unknown in 900 B.C.E. the Maya,, like Mohenjo-Daro, deserted many of their cities. The city of Teotihuacan dominated the highlands of Mexico between 400 and 600 C.E. and at its peak was a city of 200,000 people. As with the Maya, this was a society dominated by hereditary rulers and a priest class. Also like the Maya, Teotihuacan society continued the Olmec ideas of the ballgame, the calendar, and human sacrifice. Unlike the Maya, however, Teotihuacan society was invaded by an unknown group in the 700s C.E and was destroyed.

As the hunter-gatherer peoples migrated south they settled in the area of Bolivia and Peru in about 12,000 B.C.E. By about 8000 B.C.E. they were settling down and growing beans, peanuts, sweet potatoes, cotton, and also supplementing their diet with fish from the Pacific. Based on all of these resources, complex societies began to develop as early as 1000 B.C.E. Beginning about 900 B.C.E. an Andean people called the Chavin began building cities in the area. One of the problems historians have when examining the Chavin is that they did not use writing; much of what we assume about their society is based on archeological evidence rather than on written records.

On the other side of the Pacific the early societies of Oceania developed, using seafaring and land bridges to reach Australia and New Guinea around 60,000 B.C.E.. Agriculture developed in New Guinea, brought by other seafaring peoples as early as 3000 B.C.E. It is not until the twentieth century C.E., however, that Australia experienced large-scale development of agriculture. In fact, some aborigines are still hunter-gatherers. In addition to these Austronesian peoples, others such as the Lapita, spread to different parts of Oceania, such as Madagascar, establishing trading societies with divine or semi-divine chiefs ruling clan-based societies.

Key Concept 1.1. Big Geography and the Peopling of the Earth

- I. Archeological evidence indicates that during the Paleolithic era, hunting-foraging bands of humans gradually migrated from their origin in East Africa to Eurasia, Australia and the Americas, adapting their technology and

cultures to new climate regions.

Key Concept 1.2. The Neolithic Revolution and Early Agricultural Societies

II. Agriculture and pastoralism began to transform human societies.

Key Concept 1.3. The Development and Interactions of Early Agricultural, Pastoral and Urban Societies

- I. Core and foundational civilizations developed in a variety of geographical and environmental settings where agriculture flourished.
- II. The first states emerged within core civilizations.
- III. Culture played a significant role in unifying states through laws, language, literature, religion, myths and monumental art.