

## Early Human Migrations to the Americas

Human migrations to the Americas and Oceania took place after humans established the eastern part of the world, but before the dawn of agriculture.

- These migrations took place during ice ages when glaciers locked up the world's water supply, and they crossed the temporary land bridges that linked the continents.
  - One bridge linked Siberia with Alaska.
- After the ice age, the water levels rose again, and once again America and Asia were separated by the Bering Strait.
- By 700 CE, humans had established life in almost every habitable part of the world.
- The first large wave of migration from Siberia to Alaska probably took place about 13,000 BCE
  - Some evidence indicates small groups of humans may have migrated to Alaska around 15000 BCE.
- By 9500 they had reached the southernmost part of South America, more than 17000 (10, 566 miles) from the Bering Strait.
- By 8000 to 7000 BCE, the people of Mesoamerica - the region from the central portion of modern Mexico to Honduras, and El Salvador - began to experiment with the cultivation of beans, chili peppers, avocados, squashes, and gourds.
  - By 4000 BCE, they discovered maize, which soon became a staple food.
  - Later, they added tomatoes
- Agricultural villages appeared soon after 3000 BCE, and by 2000 BCE, agriculture spread all through Mesoamerica.
- Mesoamericans domesticated turkeys and small, barkless dogs. Which they ate.

- Human laborers prepared fields for cultivation and human porters carried trade goods on their backs, as they were unable to domesticate animals to do these things for them.
  - They had no use for wheeled carts, as they had no animals to pull them.
- Towards the end of 2000 BCE, ceremonial centers with monumental pyramids, temples, and palaces arose alongside agricultural villages.
  - Priests and elites lived in these, as well as a few artisans to satisfy their needs.
  - People visited these places for ceremonies or markets, but most returned home afterward.

## **Olmecs**

- The earliest ceremonial center was located on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, near the modern city of Veracruz.
  - This place served as the operating center for the first complex society of the Americas, the Olmecs.
- The Olmecs started the first complex society in the Americas.
- Olmec means "the rubber people" and it derives from the rubber trees that flourish in the region they inhabit.
- Olmec cultural traditions influence all other Mesoamerican complex societies, until the arrival of Europeans in the 1600's.
- The first Olmec ceremonial center arose around 1200 BCE, in the town of San Lorenzo, and it was their capital for four hundred years.
  - Eventually, leadership passed on to the new ceremonial centers at La Venta (800-400 BCE) and Tres Lapotes (400 - 100 BCE).

- As there was heavy rainfall in that area, Olmec people didn't need to build irrigation systems. They, like the Harappan, build elaborate drainage systems to prevent flooding, some of which are still in use today.
- The Olmec society was authoritarian in nature.
  - It took thousands of people to construct their ceremonial centers, all of which featured temples, pyramids, alters, stone sculptures, and tombs for rulers.
  - Common people delivered a portion of their harvests to sustain the ruling class.
  - Common subject regularly labored for the elite class, building elaborate drainage systems, and alters, but also improving the artistic decoration of the capitals.
    - The most distinctive of Olmec artistic creations were the large human heads -- possibly in the likeness of their rulers -- that stand 3 meters (almost ten feet) tall, and weigh twenty tons.  
The largest of these sculptures would have required one thousand laborers.
  - Construction of the Le Venta pyramid required some eight hundred thousand man-days of labor.
- Olmec influence extended to most of the central and southern regions of modern Mexico, and beyond that into Guatemala and El Salvador.
  - Olmec influence was spread by military force.
- Puzzlingly, Olmecs systematically destroyed their own ceremonial centers.
- By 400 BCE, the Olmec society had fallen.

## **Maya**

- The oldest of Olmec heirs were the Mayans, whose society occupied southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador.
  - Permanent villages began to appear in 300 BCE.

- Kaminaljuya, located near modern Guatemala City, was the most prominent of Mayan villages. Some 12,000-15,000 people worked to build its temples.
  - During 400 CE, it fell under economic and political dominance of a larger city, Teotihuacan.
- Mayan cultivators raised cacao, corn, cotton.
- From 300 - 900 CE, Maya built more than eighty large ceremonial centers in lowlands.
- Tikal was the most important Mayan political center between 600-800 CE. The Temple of the Giant Jaguar was about 47 meters (157 feet) high.
  - Palenque and Chichen Itza were also sizable states.
- Mayan kingdoms fought amongst themselves constantly.
  - The purpose of Mayan battles was not to kill enemies, but to capture them in hand-to-hand combat on the battlefield.
  - Most captives became sacrifices to the gods or died as slaves.
- 900 CE -- Chichen Itza (located in the northern Yucatan peninsula) sought to establish a larger political framework.
  - Chichen Itza assimilated their captives into their own society.
- Between 900 - 1100 CE -- Chichen Itza established a loose empire.
- By 800 CE, many Maya people deserted their cities. Chichen Itza was the only society that continued to flourish.
  - Reasons for decline: internal dissension and civil war, failure of the system of water control leading to diminished harvests and demographic collapse, ecological problems caused by deforestation, the spread of disease, and natural disasters.
- Maya had a large ruling class of priests who maintained an elaborate calendar and transmitted knowledge of writing, astronomy, and math.
  - Hereditary nobility owned most of the land.

- Mayans had several distinct classes:
  - Priests and ruling elites.
  - Professional architects and sculptors (oversaw the building of larger monuments)
  - Artisans (produced cotton, tools, and textiles)
  - Slaves and peasants (physical labor)
- Mayans calculated the solar year at 365.242 days -- a scant seventeen seconds less than modern scientists have calculated.
  - Invented the concept of zero.
- The Mayan calendar interwove two kinds of a year:
  - a solar year of 365 days governed by the agricultural cycle.
  - a ritual year of 260 days governed by daily affairs by organizing time into 20 "months" of thirteen days each.
- It took 52 years for both of the calendars to work through all their possible combinations and to return to their respective starting points.
  - 18,980 combinations were possible.
- Mayan writing was only beginning to be deciphered in the 60's.
- When the Spanish arrived in the 1600's, they destroyed all books and written materials.
  - Only for original Mayan book survive.
- The Popol Vuh, a Maya creation myth taught that gods had created humans out of maize and water.
- Before sacrificing people to the gods, victims were lacerated or had the ends of their fingers cut off so as to allow the copious flow of blood.
- The Maya people played a ball game in which either two men or teams of two to four men were pitted against each other. The object was for players to score points by propelling a rubber ball through a ring or onto a marker without using their hands.

- High-ranking captives often engaged in forced public competition in which the stakes were their lives.
- Teotihuacan was the largest agricultural village by 500 BCE. It expanded rapidly after 200 BCE, and at the end of the millennium its population reached fifty thousand.
- By 100 CE, the most prominent landmarks -- the Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon -- dominated the skyline.
  - At its high point: 400 -600 CE, it was home to almost 200,000 people.
  - Paintings and murals suggest it was a theocracy.
- Apart from priests and rulers, Teotihuacan's population included cultivators, artisans, and merchants.
  - Perhaps as many as 2/3 of the population worked in the fields by day.
  - Artisans were known for their obsidian tools and orange pottery.
    - They sometimes marketed their goods themselves.
- There are no signs of military organization in Teotihuacan.
- They also played the creepy rubber ball game.
- All of their books were destroyed when the city declined.
- Mayan people performed bloodletting as a religious and political act.
  - According to Mayan priests, the world had been started by the blood of the gods, and it would please them and ensure bountiful harvests.
- After 650 CE, the city declined, and during the middle of 800 CE, invaders burned the city to the ground.

### **Migrations to South America - Chavin**

- By 12,000 BCE, hunting and gathering people made their way across the narrow isthmus of Central America and into South America.

- Beginning 8000 BCE, the region became warm and dry, and humans had to experiment with agriculture.
- Early Andean cultivation began about 2500 to 2000 BCE.
  - They cultivated peanuts, beans, sweet potatoes, and cotton.
- By 1800 BCE, the Andean region had begun to fashion distinctive styles of pottery and to build temples.
- Around 1000 BCE, a religion called the Chavin cult became enormously popular (900-800 BCE). There is no information about it, nor does even its name survive.
  - It is named after the modern town Chavin de Huantar.
  - Many large temples and elaborate works of art were accompanied the cult.
    - Devotees produced intricate stone carvings representing their deities with the features of human and wild animals such as jaguars, hawks, eagles, and snakes.
  - During the Chavin cult era, Andean society became more complex. Weavers devised ways of producing elaborate textiles, and artisans manufactured large, light strong fishnets from cotton string. Craftsman experimented with minerals, and discovered gold, silver, and copper metallurgy.
- The Chavin cult did not contribute to the establishment of public order or states.
- Andean states emerged when conquerors unified the individual valleys and organized them into societies.
- Andean states used violence to establish and keep order.
- Andean societies did not use writing.