

## Chapter 6:

### ***Chapter Introduction***

Olmec head is eight feet tall and weighs twenty-four tons

- Portrays a composite leader/deity figure wearing the headgear of a sacred ballplayer
  - Plump lips and flat nose
  - Carved without metal tools

The Western hemisphere exhibits a range of cultures and physical environments, from the Inuit Eskimos of northern Canada to the sophisticated city builders of Central America.

From the deserts of the American Southwest to the jungles of Amazon basin

Native Americans (Amerindians) – Ancestors of the numerous Native American peoples found throughout the western hemisphere today.

Beringia – A land mass in the region of the Bering Strait over which ancestral Native Americans migrated to the Western hemisphere c. 30,000 – 10,000 B.C.E.

- Natives made their way south through an opening in the glacial sheets and by small boats along the Pacific into what is now North, Central, and South America

Three to Four Waves

1. First (Amerindian) group came from northeast Asia; spread from Canada to South America
2. Second group came from Central Asia; some settled in Western Canada, others (Navajo and Apaches went to American Southwest)
3. Last group came from Northeast Asia and went to Canada and Alaska (Inuits)

### ***6-1 Paleoindian Period in the Americas***

Once south of the glaciers, the earliest ancestral Native Americans arrived in North America whose climate was considerably cooler and moister than it is today. Here they found a world of abundant plant and wild animal life.

- Megafauna such as woolly mammoth and giant sloth, and giant bison existed during this period when Natives inhabited the land
- Grasslands of the Bison Belt covered North America

Clovis Culture – The earliest Native American “culture” known to archaeologists (9,500 – 8,900 B.C.E.)

- Largely based on hunting very large game

- Large and deeply notched leaf shaped spearheads to hunt large mammals like Woolly mammoth and giant Bison

Paleoindians (pre-agrarian) – In Native American history, a period when American Indians used Clovis spearheads to hunt large mammals

- Smaller stone implements of spearheads were used for smaller mammals and other instruments to prepare food, skinning, and tanning hides

Paleoindians in Central and South America did not generally hunt large game. Discoveries show a surprising diversity of lifestyles to the south of Rio Grande River.

### ***6-1a North Americas Archaic Period***

In the centuries that followed 9000 B.C.E., the climate became progressively drier, and the megafauna soon disappeared

- Hunters turned increasingly to bison, elk, and deer as their prey
  - Fluted Folsom points replaced the larger Clovis spearheads

Wherever archaeologists have discovered Folsom cultural sites, alongside these missile (for example, spear, dart, and arrow) heads they have discovered hammer stones, used for breaking bones from which marrow was extracted; stone scrapers that were used to remove hair from hides; and cutting tools and bone eye needles for preparing hides as clothing and containers. As these missile heads grew smaller, the Folsom hunters attached them to the tips of spear throwers called atlatls.

Atlatls – Throwing stick used in place of a bow propelling a dart at high velocity (spearthrowers)

Hammer stones – used to break bones for marrow

The Climate continued to change and the Folsom period faded away also

- Conditions became drier and warmer and desert conditions eventually replaced grasslands

Archaic Period – In Native American History the period (8,000 – 2,000 B.C.E.) when gathering slowly replaced large-game (megafauna) hunting.

- People were forced to rely on gathering wild plants as their primary source of food.
- Hunting and gathering and fishing remained the best choices in much of North America

Little is known about social organization in this period

- Probably small, isolated, highly mobile family groups
- Separation of these human communities led to cultural and language differences

## ***6-1b Early Woodland Societies***

Between 1,000 B.C.E. – 1,000 C.E. Native American societies East of the Mississippi River emerged from the Archaic period and improvised novel forms of livelihood that gave rise to the Neolithic revolution north of the Rio Grande River.

Woodland Societies – A collection of closely related Native American civilizations that thrived east of the Miss. River

- Early Woodland Period (1,000 – 200 B.C.E.)
  - Gradual cultivation of wild plants as a supplement to hunting and gathering
    - Meant nomadic lifeways yielded to permanent villages
- Late Woodland Period (200 B.C.E. – 1,000 C.E.)
  - Adena Culture – One of the Native American Woodland civilization that thrived
    - Located in current Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, New York, and West Virginia
    - Distinguished for their burial practices and pottery styles
    - Either cremated or buried their dead, unlike other Woodland civilizations at the time
    - Did not include pottery in their funerals like other Woodland people
    - Relied on deer, elk, bear, woodchuck, beaver, porcupine, grouse, and turkey
    - Learned how to cultivate squash, pumpkin, sunflowers, and goosefoot
  - Adapted bow and arrow in place of atlatl

## ***6-2 The Agricultural Revolution in the Americas***

In the New World, ever-drier conditions between c. 9500 and 6000 B.C.E. fostered a gradual transition from hunting and gathering to food production.

- Began independently in Peru and Mexico between 6,000 – 5,500 B.C.E.
  - Peruvian highlands were growing potatoes to trade for fishmeal from the Pacific Coast and fruit from the Amazon region
  - Northeast Mexico people began growing chili peppers and pumpkins to supplement their meager diet of small desert creatures
    - Domesticated beans and Maize
    - Maize Cultivation – Corn was cultivated as one of the staple foods of American Indian civilizations, along with beans and squash
      - Maize cultivation spread along trade routes that connected Mesoamerica (middle America)

Difficult terrain and relatively poor soils challenged farmers to develop innovative agricultural methods in both wet and arid zones.

- Instead of plowing with aid of oxen or cattle Native A. relied on planting sticks or foot hoes
- In swampy areas near lakes in central Mexico and around Lake Titicaca they created artificial islands by digging ditches to channel swamp water, then dredging and piling the muck in mounds as stores of new, nutrient-rich topsoil
- Complex irrigation system – a network of channels or tunnels that connect a source of water with farms
- Terracing in coastal Peru expanded the acreage available for horticulture

Peru as in other Mesoamerica people, pooled their food resources through trade, thereby ensuring balanced diets and food supplies adequate to feed larger populations that covered a wide area

- Andes freeze dried potato provided more energy per acre than any other crop
- Andean people raised guinea pigs and ate meat of llamas

Llamas – A woolly pack animal commonly found in the Andes Mountains of South America and in Argentina. Related to Camel but has no humps. In addition to transport, llamas provide meat, wool, and hides.

These levels of productivity and nutrition helped enable the development of the great civilizations of Mexico, Central America, and the Andes Mountains of South America.

By the end of the Archaic Period (2,000 B.C.E.) agriculture had been established from Mesoamerica to South America.

Neolithic food producers

- Developed new crafts: weaving, basketry, pottery
- Lived in settled villages with permanent building, pit houses
- Held periodic regional meetings

Pit House – A type of dwelling found in some Neolithic civilizations

- Early farmers dug oval or rectangular pits in the ground over which they erected walls and roofs form tree branches, twigs, bones, animal hides, and mud.

There were periodic regional meetings among villages for social, economic, or religious reasons.

- Meetings evolved into the great ceremonial center and trading hubs of the more complex societies

Olmec Civilization (Mesoamerica) – The earliest Amerindian civilization in Mexico (1,200 – 300 B.C.E.)

Chavin Civilization (South America) – The earliest and one of the most developed civilizations of the South American Andes mountains.

### ***6-3 Mesoamerica and the Olmec Civilization***

Mesoamerica (Middle America) extends from central Mexico to encompass all of modern Central America.

The Olmec and the Chavin were the first complex societies of regional significance in the Americas. Each of these cultures exerted influence through compelling religions that were disseminated by means of extensive trade networks.

The earliest complex Mesoamerican societies did not locate in river valleys (as in Eurasia) but on the tropical lowlands inland from the Gulf of Mexico and on the elevated plateaus of the Central Valley.

- The Olmec created the earliest known Mesoamerican civilization (1,200 – 300 B.C.E.) in what is now southeastern Mexico
  - Centered on ceremonial hubs that were initially built near the Gulf port of Veracruz
  - Cities were religious centers with pyramids, temples, palaces
  - Authoritarian theocratic government with religious elite
  - Traded rubber, pottery, ceramics for obsidian, jade, cacao beans
  - The elites created writing and numerical systems to keep records and, like previous agrarian civilizations we have studied, they developed highly accurate calendars to regulate the cycles of agriculture and religion.
  - A pervasive religious faith centering on the worship of ancient feline gods was the inspiration for much of their art and architecture
  - The jaguar—a species of great cat indigenous to the Americas—was particularly revered.

- The rulers conscripted skilled masons to erect fortified ritual centers with temples on raised earthen mounds, plazas, government halls, and ball courts for a sacred game.

Between 600 and 500 B.C.E., the importance of the Olmec culture began to decline, to be supplanted by the neighboring Mayas. Their writing and number systems, however, as well as their calendar, endured as tools adopted by succeeding Mesoamerican civilizations. The Olmec practices of ritual bloodletting and sacred ball games also continued throughout Mesoamerica