The earliest civilizations of the Americas emerged in the jungle lowlands of southeastern Mexico and in the rugged Andean highlands of Peru. As the map to the right indicates, the Olmec and Chavín civilizations were only the first of a number of advanced cultures that arose in the early Americas. Use the map to answer the questions.

1. Where were the Olmec and Chavín civilizations located?
2. What early city in Mexico was not part of Olmec culture?
3. Why is it likely that the Nazca and Moche civilizations were aware of each other?
4. How were geographic conditions different for the Olmec and Chavín peoples?

For more information about early Mesoamerican civilizations . . .

CLASSZONE.COM
1200 B.C. Olmec civilization emerges in southeast Mexico.

900 B.C. Chavin culture arises in Peru.

500 B.C. Zapotes build Monte Albán.

200 B.C. Nazca civilization arises in southern Peru.

A.D. 100 Moche culture emerges.
Interact with History

You live in ancient North America, where most people must hunt for their food. Along with several members of your group, you have been hunting the mastodon for days. The giant beast is a challenging but rewarding prey. While the animal stands more than 14 feet high and weighs more than a ton, it will provide much meat, as well as hides for clothing and shelter.

Suddenly in the clearing you spot the massive creature. Aside from spears, your only weapons are some crude tools and your superior intelligence.

How would you kill a mastodon?

As the group determines its strategy, its members seek protection behind boulders and loose rocks.

Your group carries several shovels for digging holes.

EXAMINING the ISSUES

• How might the group use the shovels to trap the mastodon?

• Aside from spears and tools, what else could be used as a weapon against the animal?

As a class, discuss these questions. In your discussion, consider how this situation speaks to the difficulties of life in a hunter-gatherer society.

As you read about the growth of civilizations in the Americas, notice how the old hunting and gathering way of life dramatically changed with the development of agriculture.
Hunters and Farmers in the Americas

Setting the Stage

While civilizations were developing in Africa, Asia, and Europe, they were also emerging in the Americas. Human settlement in the Americas is relatively recent compared to that in other parts of the world. However, it followed a similar pattern. At first the ancient people of the Americas survived mainly by hunting. Over time, they developed farming methods that ensured a more reliable supply of food. This in turn led to the growth of the first civilizations in the Americas.

The Earliest Americans

The American continents include North and South America. They are connected and span two hemispheres, from the frigid Arctic Circle in the north to the icy waters around Antarctica in the south. Although this land mass narrows greatly around modern-day Panama, it stretches unbroken for more than 10,000 miles. This large and rugged land is isolated from the rest of the world by vast oceans. Yet, at one time, thousands of years ago, the Americas were connected by a land bridge to Asia. Most experts believe that the first people came to the Americas from Asia over this land bridge. The land bridge is known as Beringia.

Peopling the Americas

The first Americans arrived sometime toward the end of the last Ice Age, which lasted from roughly 1.6 million to 10,000 B.C. During this period huge sheets of moving ice, called glaciers, spread southward from the Arctic Circle. They covered large portions of North America. The buildup of glaciers locked up huge amounts of the earth’s water. It lowered sea levels and created a land corridor between Asia and Alaska across what is now the Bering Strait.

Herds of wild animals from Siberia, including the mastodon, migrated across the flat, treeless plains of the Beringia land bridge. Gradually, Siberian hunters followed these animals into North America. They most likely were unaware that they were entering a new continent. These migrants became the first Americans.

Thomas Canby, a writer for National Geographic magazine, spent a year with archaeologists as they searched for ancient burial sites throughout the Americas. From his experience, Canby envisioned the type of world that might have greeted the first Americans:

A Voice About the Past

What a wild world it was! To see it properly, we must board a time machine and travel back into the Ice Age. The northern half of North America has vanished, buried beneath ice sheets two miles thick. Stretching south to Kentucky, they buckle the earth’s crust with their weight. . . . Animals grow oversize. . . . Elephant-eating jaguars stand tall as lions, beavers grow as big as bears, South American sloths as tall as giraffes. With arctic cold pushing so far southward, walrus bask on Virginia beaches, and musk-oxen graze from Maryland to California.

Thomas Canby, “The Search for the First Americans”

Terms & Names

- Beringia
- Ice Age
- maize

Main Idea

Although isolated, the first Americans developed in ways similar to the other earliest humans.

Why It Matters Now

The Americas’ first inhabitants developed the basis for American civilizations to come.
No one knows for sure when the first Americans arrived. Some scholars contend that the migration across the land bridge began as early as 40,000 B.C. Others argue it occurred as late as 12,000 B.C. For years, many researchers have regarded the discovery of spearheads dating back to 9500 B.C. near Clovis, New Mexico, to be the earliest evidence of humankind in the Americas.

However, recent discoveries of possible pre-Clovis sites have challenged this theory. One such discovery was made at Monte Verde, Chile, near the southern tip of the Americas. Researchers there have found evidence of human life dating back to 10,500 B.C. Underneath this site—a sandy bank near a creek—archaeologists discovered pieces of animal hide and various tools. They also found a preserved chunk of mastodon meat and a child's single footprint. The evidence at Monte Verde suggests
that the first Americans arrived well before the Clovis era. To reach southern Chile at such an early date, experts believe, humans would have had to cross the land bridge at least 20,000 years ago.

They also could have come by boat. Most experts believe the earliest Americans traveled by foot across the land bridge. However, some scholars think they also may have paddled from Asia to the Pacific Coast in small boats.

Hunters and Gatherers Questions remain about how and when the first Americans arrived. What appears more certain—from the discovery of chiseled spearheads and charred bones at ancient sites—is that the earliest Americans lived as hunters. Perhaps their most challenging and rewarding prey was the mastodon. Weighing more than a ton, this animal provided meat, hide, and bones for making food, clothing, shelters, and tools.

Eventually, large animals like the mastodon became extinct. Hunters soon turned to smaller prey, such as deer and rabbits, for their survival. They also fished and gathered edible plants and fruits. Because they were hunters, the earliest Americans found it necessary to move regularly in search of food. Whenever they did settle in one place for a short time, prehistoric Americans lived in caves or temporary shelters in the open air.

With the end of the Ice Age, around 12,000 to 10,000 years ago, came the end of land travel across Beringia. As the great glaciers melted, sea levels rose. The ancient land bridge disappeared under the Bering Strait. By this time, however, humans inhabited most regions of the Americas. Wherever they roamed, from the grassy plains of the modern-day United States to the steamy tropical forests of Central America, the first Americans adapted to the variety of environments they inhabited. In doing so, they carved out unique ways of life.

Agriculture Prompts a New Way of Life Gradually, the earliest Americans became more familiar with plant foods. They began to experiment with simple methods of farming. Their efforts at planting and harvesting eventually led to the birth of agriculture. This in turn dramatically changed their way of life.

The Development of Farming Around 7000 B.C., a revolution quietly began in what is now central Mexico. There, people began to rely more on wild edible plants, raising some of them from seeds. By 5000 B.C. many had begun to grow these preferred plants. They included squashes, gourds, beans, avocados, and chilies. By 3400 B.C., these early farmers grew maize, or corn. Maize soon became the most important crop. This highly nourishing crop flourished in the tropical climate of Mexico. There, a family of three could raise enough corn in four months to feed themselves for up to two years.

Gradually, people settled in permanent villages in the Tehuacan (TAY-wuh-KAHN) Valley, south of present-day Mexico City. There, they raised corn and other crops. Eventually the techniques of agriculture spread over most of North and South America. However, it is believed that people in some areas, such as Peru and eastern North America, may have discovered the secrets of cultivating local edible plants independently.
Digging Up the Past

It is mainly through the work of archaeologists and paleontologists that we know as much as we do about ancient America, as well as the other ancient lands of the world. Archaeology is the study of prehistoric human cultures. Paleontology is the study of ancient animals and plants. Both are sciences, requiring specialized skills and techniques. The men and women in both fields must show patience, precision, and a careful touch. Their job is to extract from the earth the fragile fossils and artifacts of the past.

Below is a dig at the La Brea tar pits, in what is now downtown Los Angeles. There, paleontologists found the remains of numerous prehistoric animals. They included saber-toothed tigers, mammoths, bison, and birds.

Where To Dig?
How do researchers know where to dig in the first place? One way is by using an instrument called a soil-resistivity meter. This device transmits electric currents into the soil and registers any abnormalities in the currents—usually caused by buried objects.

Connecting to History
Analyzing Issues What things are paleontologists concerned with during a dig?

Connect to Today
Creating a Database Read an account of a dig at a prehistoric site. Then create a database of information about what researchers found.

Diggers use a sieve to shake free tiny fossils that may be lodged in soil.

Unearthed remains must be covered for protection from the sun and rain.

A digger uses a jackhammer-type instrument to loosen the extremely hard dried tar.

Using such tools as picks and brushes, workers clear away soil without damaging the animal remains.

Tools of the Trade
The most commonly used tool on the site is a bricklayer’s trowel (far left). Workers use the durable instrument for a variety of tasks, including digging and scraping. To recover fragile remains, diggers must use delicate, tiny tools, such as dental picks (left).
Over the next several centuries, farming methods became increasingly advanced. In central Mexico, for example, native farmers created small islands in swamps and shallow lakes by stacking layers of vegetation, dirt, and mud. They then planted crops on top of the island soil. The surrounding water provided continuous irrigation. These floating gardens, known as chinampas, were very productive, yielding up to three harvests a year.

**Farming Brings Great Change**

“[The] . . . transition from a foraging to a farming way of life,” noted American scientist Bruce Smith, “was a major turning point in the long evolutionary history of our species.” Indeed, in the Americas as in other regions of the world, agriculture brought great and lasting change to peoples’ way of life.

The cultivation of corn and other crops provided a more reliable and expanding food supply. This encouraged population growth and the establishment of large, settled communities. As the population grew, and as farming became more efficient and productive, more people turned their attention to nonagricultural pursuits. They developed specialized skills in arts and crafts, building trades, and other fields.

Differences between social classes—between rich and poor, ruler and subject—began to emerge. With the development of agriculture, society became more complex and sophisticated. The stage was set for the rise of more advanced civilizations.
The story of developed civilizations in the Americas begins in a region archaeologists and historians refer to as Mesoamerica. This area stretches south from central Mexico to the northern reaches of modern-day Honduras. It was here, more than 3,000 years ago, that the first complex societies in the Americas arose.

Mesoamerica’s Mother Culture

Mesoamerica’s first known civilization builders were a people known as the Olmec. They began carving out a thriving society around 1200 B.C. in the humid jungles of southern Mexico. The Olmec influenced neighboring groups, as well as the later civilizations of the region. Thus, they often are called Mesoamerica’s “mother culture.”

The Rise of Olmec Civilization

Around 1860, a worker clearing a field in the hot coastal plain of southeastern Mexico uncovered an extraordinary stone sculpture. It stood five feet tall and weighed an estimated eight tons. The sculpture was of an enormous head, wearing a headpiece that resembled a football helmet. The head was carved in a strikingly realistic style, with thick lips, a flat nose, and large oval eyes. (See History Through Art on page 219.) Archaeologists had never seen anything like it in the Americas.

This head, along with others that were discovered later, was a remnant of the Olmec civilization. The Olmec flourished from 1200 B.C. to 400 B.C. They lived along the Gulf Coast of Mexico, in the modern-day Mexican states of Veracruz and Tabasco.

On the surface, the Gulf Coast seemed an unlikely site for a high culture to take root. The region was hot and humid and covered with swamps and jungle. In some places, giant trees formed a thick cover that prevented most sunlight from reaching the ground. Up to 100 inches of rain fell every year. The rainfall swelled rivers and caused severe flooding.

However, the region also had certain advantages. There were abundant deposits of salt and tar, as well as fine clay used in making pottery. There was also wood and rubber from the rain forest. The hills to the north provided hard stone from which the Olmec could make tools and monuments. The rivers that laced the region provided a ready means of transport. Perhaps most important, the flood plains of these rivers provided fertile land for farming.

The Olmec used their abundant resources to build thriving communities. The oldest site, San Lorenzo, dates back to around 1150 B.C. Here, and at other sites, archaeologists uncovered important clues that offered a glimpse into the Olmec world.

Olmec Society

At San Lorenzo archaeologists discovered earthen mounds, courtyards, and pyramids. Set among these earthworks were large stone monuments. They included columns, altars, and more colossal, sculpted heads, which may have represented particular Olmec rulers. These giant monuments weigh as much as 44 tons. Researchers are left to wonder how the Olmec moved them to various centers of
worship. Some scholars suspect that Olmec workers moved these sculptures over land on rolling logs to the river banks. From there, they rafted the monuments along numerous waterways to various sites.

The organization needed for such an undertaking is one reason scholars think San Lorenzo was home to a small ruling class of priests and nobles. These rulers may have commanded a much larger group of peasant farmers living in the surrounding country.

To the east of San Lorenzo, another significant Olmec site, La Venta, rose around 900 B.C. Here, researchers discovered a 100-foot-high mound of earth and clay. This structure may have served as the tomb of a great Olmec ruler. Known as the Great Pyramid, the mound also may have been the center of the Olmec religion. Based on other artifacts found at sites like La Venta, experts believe the Olmec prayed to a variety of nature gods.

**Jaguar Worship** Most of all they probably worshiped the jaguar spirit. Numerous Olmec sculptures and carvings depict a half-human, half-jaguar creature. Some scholars believe that the jaguar represented a powerful rain god. Others contend that there were several jaguar gods, representing such vital things as the earth, fertility, and maize. As anthropologist Peter Furst points out, the jaguar was central to Olmec religion:

> A VOICE ABOUT THE PAST
> You can almost call the Olmec the people of the jaguar. In tropical America, jaguars were the shamans [medicine men] of the animal world, the alter ego [other identity] of the shaman. They are the most powerful predators. That’s why in Olmec art you get these combinations of jaguars and humans.
> PETER FURST, quoted in “New Light on the Olmec”

**Trade and Commerce** Archaeologists once believed that sites such as La Venta were ceremonial centers where important rituals were performed but few people lived. In recent years, however, experts have begun to revise that view. According to Mexican archaeologist Rebecca González, “La Venta was not just an empty ceremonial spot visited by Olmec priests and nobles, but a prosperous community of fishers, farmers, traders, and specialists, such as the artisans and the sculptors.”

Indeed, the Olmec appear to have been a prosperous people who directed a large trading network throughout Mesoamerica. Olmec goods traveled as far as Mexico City to the north and Honduras to the south. In addition, raw materials—including iron ore and various stones—reached San Lorenzo from faraway regions. This trade network helped boost the Olmec economy and spread Olmec influence to other parts of Mesoamerica.

**CONNECT to TODAY**

**Jaguar Worship** Some descendants of the Olmec and other Mesoamerican peoples still practice jaguar worship. In the spring, villagers in Acatlan, Mexico, put on jaguar masks and draw blood in mock combat. They do this in the hope that the jaguar will shed its own blood, in the form of rain, to water the fields. In another ritual, shown here, a boy becomes a jaguar dancer to bring rain.
Decline of the Olmec  For reasons that are not fully understood, Olmec civilization eventually collapsed. Scholars believe San Lorenzo was destroyed around 900 B.C. La Venta may have fallen sometime around 400 B.C. Some experts speculate that outside invaders caused the destruction. Others believe the Olmec may have destroyed their own monuments upon the death of their rulers.

Because the Olmec apparently left no written records, scholars may never know the full truth. Nevertheless, Olmec artifacts continue to offer up tantalizing clues about this first known Mesoamerican civilization.

Zapotec Civilization Arises

By the time Olmec civilization had collapsed, another people—the Zapotec—were developing an advanced society to the southwest, in what is now the Mexican state of Oaxaca (wuh-HAH-kah). Though they showed traces of Olmec influence, the Zapotec built a unique civilization. This ancient group dominated Oaxaca for more than a thousand years.

Peoples of the Oaxaca Valley  Oaxaca is a rugged region of mountains and valleys in southern Mexico. In the center of the state, three valleys meet to form a large open area known as the Oaxaca Valley. (See map on page 217.) Though much of Oaxaca is hot and dry, this valley has fertile soil, a mild climate, and enough rainfall to support agriculture. As a result, various peoples have made the Oaxaca Valley their home, including the ancient Zapotec.

For centuries the Zapotec lived in scattered villages throughout the valley. By 1000 B.C., however, one site—San José Mogote—was emerging as the main power in the region. At this site, the Zapotec constructed stone platforms. They also built temples and began work on monumental sculptures. By 500 B.C. they also had developed early forms of hieroglyphic writing and a calendar system.

HISTORY THROUGH ART: Sculpture

A Legacy of Sculpture

More than 2,000 years after the Olmec’s collapse, the ancient society’s sculpture remains its most lasting legacy. From the colossal stone heads to the tiny jade figures, these carvings reveal the Olmec’s expert craftsmanship and commitment to detail. They also provide a glimpse of the values and beliefs of the Americas’ oldest known civilization.

Giant Altars

The Olmec carved a number of impressive altars. Like the one pictured to the right, they often depicted a priest or shaman emerging from the structure. In numerous altars, the priest cradles a child. Some scholars believe that this may have signified the importance of the notion of dynasty—with the child representing the heir to the throne—in Olmec society.
The Zapotec Flourish at Monte Albán  Around 500 B.C., Zapotec civilization took a major leap forward. High atop a mountain at the center of the Oaxaca Valley, the Zapotec built the first real urban center in the Americas: Monte Albán. This city, with its commanding view of the entire valley, grew and prospered over the next several centuries. By 200 B.C., Monte Albán was home to around 15,000 people. The city eventually would reach a peak population of 25,000.

From A.D. 250 to A.D. 700, Monte Albán was truly impressive. At the heart of the city was a giant plaza paved with stones. Towering pyramids, temples, and palaces, all made out of stone, surrounded this plaza. There was even a building that may have acted as an observatory for gazing at the stars. Nearby was a series of stone carvings of corpses. Their thick lips and flat noses show a clear influence of Olmec style.

For more than a thousand years the Zapotec controlled the Oaxaca Valley and the surrounding region. Sometime after A.D. 600, however, the Zapotec began to decline. Some scholars believe they may have suffered a loss of trade or other economic difficulties. As with the Olmec, the fall of Zapotec civilization remains a puzzle.

The Early Mesoamericans’ Legacy

Although both the Zapotec and Olmec civilizations eventually collapsed, each culture left its mark on the Mesoamerican civilizations that followed.

The Olmec Leave Their Mark The Olmec contributed much to later Mesoamerican civilizations. They influenced the powerful Maya, who will be discussed in Chapter 16. Olmec art styles, especially the use of the jaguar motif, can be seen in the pottery and sculpture of later peoples in the region. In addition, future Mesoamerican societies copied the Olmec pattern of urban design. Like the Olmec, later civilizations built cities by combining pyramids, plazas, and monumental sculpture.

Jade Figures

With little technology at their disposal, the Olmec mastered the difficult art of carving jade. Jade is a hard and tough but highly colorful stone. “The tough material was mastered as though it were a plastic,” one scholar said of the Olmec’s work. As shown here, the Olmec often carved jaguar figures out of jade. The jaguar-god was a powerful deity in Olmec society.

Colossal Heads

Perhaps the most recognizable Olmec sculptures are the giant stone heads. Researchers have uncovered more than a dozen Olmec heads. The largest one stands 11 feet tall. Some scholars say that the heads represent idolized warriors or ball players. However, most experts believe they depict individual rulers.

Connect to Today

Comparing  Consider the better-known sculptures and monuments in your country. What do they say about your civilization?
Daily Life

Working Hard For Water
Monte Albán's position upon a mountain top (depicted in this photograph of its ruins) added to its magnificence. But it also presented a daily problem for the city's residents: limited access to water.

Perched so high above the valley, Monte Albán had no natural waterways leading into the city. Scholars believe that city leaders may have organized citizens to carry drinking water up the mountain—as far as 1,500 feet—in jars.

The Olmec also left behind the notions of planned ceremonial centers, ritual ball games, and an elite ruling class. And while there is no clear evidence that the Olmec used a written language, their descendants or a related people carved out stone symbols that may have influenced later glyph writing.

Zapotec Contributions The Zapotec left behind their own legacy. It included a hieroglyphic language and a calendar system based on the movement of the sun. In addition, the Zapotec are noted as the Americas' first city builders. Monte Albán combined ceremonial grandeur with residential living space. This style influenced the development of future urban centers and became a hallmark of Mesoamerican civilizations.

As the Zapotec and Olmec flourished and then declined, civilizations were also taking shape in South America. Along the rough and mountainous terrain in what is now Peru, ancient peoples came together. There, they created more advanced and complex societies.

Section 2 Assessment

1. TERMS & NAMES
   Identify
   - Mesoamerica
   - Olmec
   - Zapotec
   - Monte Albán

2. TAKING NOTES
   Compare the Olmec and Zapotec cultures by using a Venn diagram similar to the one below.

   ![Venn Diagram](image)

   Olmec  Both  Zapotec

   Design another way to show this same information.

3. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS
   Why do you think the Olmec are called Mesoamerica's "mother culture"? Consider the Olmec's influence on later groups in the region.

   THINK ABOUT
   - architecture
   - religion
   - art

4. THEME ACTIVITY
   Cultural Interaction As a trader from a small Mesoamerican village, you have just returned from your first visit to the Olmec site at La Venta. Write a description of what you might tell your family about the wondrous things you saw in and around the site. Prepare to present the description orally to the class.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

E. Forming Opinions
   What do you consider to be the Olmec's and Zapotec's most important contributions to later cultures? Why?
Early Civilizations of the Andes

**MAIN IDEA**

Around the harsh terrain of the Andes Mountains in South America, various groups created flourishing civilizations.

**WHY IT MATTERS NOW**

Like the early Andean civilizations, people today must adapt to their environment in order to survive.

**SETTING THE STAGE**  While civilizations were emerging in Mesoamerica, advanced societies were also arising in South America. The early cultures of South America arose in difficult environs, namely the rugged terrain of the Andes Mountains. However, like the peoples of Mesoamerica, the early Andean cultures controlled their surroundings and created flourishing civilizations.

**Societies Grow in the Andes Region**

The Andes Mountains stretch some 4,000 miles down the western edge of South America, from Colombia in the north to Chile in the south. After the Himalayas in southern Asia, the Andes is the highest mountain range in the world. The Andes has a number of peaks over 20,000 feet in elevation. It was in the northern Andes region, in what is now Peru, that South America's first advanced civilizations emerged.

**Early Settlements Along the Coast**  Peru was a difficult place to launch a civilization. The Andes are steep and rocky, with generally poor soil. Ice and snow cover the highest elevations year-round. Overland travel often is difficult. The climate is also severe: hot and dry during the day, and often freezing at night.

Between the mountains and the Pacific Ocean lies a narrow coastal plain. Most of this plain is harsh desert where rain seldom falls. In some places, however, rivers cross the desert on their path from the mountains to the sea. It was in these river valleys that the first settlements occurred.

Between 3600 and 2500 B.C. people began to establish temporary villages along the Pacific coast. These first inhabitants were hunter-gatherers who relied on seafood and small game for their survival. Eventually, around 3000 B.C., these people began to farm. By 1800 B.C., a number of thriving communities existed along the coast.

**The Chavín Period**  The first influential civilization in South America arose not on the coast, however, but in the mountains. This culture, known as the Chavín (sha-VEEN), flourished from around 900 B.C. to 200 B.C. Archaeologists named the culture after a major ruin, Chavín de Huántar, in the northern highlands of Peru. This site is situated more than 10,000 feet above sea level. It features pyramids, plazas, and massive earthen mounds.

Chavín culture spread quickly across much of northern and central Peru. Archaeologists have found no evidence of political or economic organization within the culture. Thus, they conclude that the Chavín were primarily a religious civilization. According to this theory, Chavín de Huántar and other similar sites were important religious centers rather than outposts of a powerful empire. Nevertheless, the spread of Chavín art styles and religious images—as seen in stone carving, pottery, and textiles—demonstrates the powerful influence of this culture. Ancient Peruvians may have visited Chavín temples to pay their respects. They then carried ideas back to their communities. The Chavín are believed to...
have established certain patterns that helped unify Andean culture and lay the foundation for later civilizations in Peru. Thus, like the Olmec, the Chavín may have acted as a “mother culture.”

Other Andean Civilizations Flourish

Around the time Chavín culture declined, other civilizations were emerging in Peru. First the Nazca and then the Moche (MO•chay) built advanced societies that flourished for centuries in the Andes region.

Nazca Achievements  The Nazca culture flourished along the southern coast of Peru from around 200 B.C. to A.D. 600. This area is extremely dry. The Nazca developed extensive irrigation systems, including underground canals, that allowed them to farm the land. The Nazca are known for their beautiful textiles and pottery. Both feature images of animals and mythological beings.

They are even more famous, however, for an extraordinary but puzzling set of creations known as the Nazca Lines. On a large, rock-strewn plain, the Nazca made huge drawings by scraping away stones to reveal the lighter soil underneath. The drawings depict various plants and animals, including a monkey, birds, and other creatures. These drawings are so huge, however, that they can be seen only from the air. Scientists believe that the Nazca made these drawings for their gods.

Moche Culture  Meanwhile, on the northern coast of Peru, another civilization was reaching great heights. This was the Moche culture, which lasted from about A.D. 100 to A.D. 700. The Moche took advantage of the rivers that flowed from the Andes Mountains. They built impressive irrigation systems to water their wide range of...
crops, which included corn, beans, potatoes, squash, and peanuts. According to Peruvian archaeologist Walter Alva, the Moche enjoyed a variety of foods:

**A VOICE ABOUT THE PAST**

The Moche enjoyed a diet rich in protein and probably better balanced than that of many modern Peruvians. Fish from the nearby Pacific were eaten fresh or sun dried. They ate Muscovy ducks and guinea pigs. To drink, there was potent chicha, a cloudy beverage fermented from corn that had been ground and boiled. Deer, now rare, were abundant. . . . Crayfish in irrigation ditches supplemented seafood from the coast.

**WALTER ALVA, “Richest Unlooted Tomb of a Moche Lord”**

Moche tombs uncovered in the recent past have revealed a civilization with enormous wealth. Archaeologists have found beautiful jewelry crafted from gold, silver, and semiprecious stones. The Moche were also brilliant ceramic artists. They created pottery that depicted scenes from everyday life. Moche pots show doctors healing patients, women weaving cloth, and musicians playing instruments. They also show fierce soldiers armed with spears, leading enemy captives. Although the Moche never developed a written language, their pottery provides a wealth of detail about Moche life.

Nevertheless, many questions about the Moche remain. Experts still do not fully understand Moche religious beliefs. Nor do they know why the Moche fell. Like many early cultures of the Americas, the Moche remain something of a mystery.

Unlike the lands you will read about in the next chapter—which were unified by the spread of Islam—the Americas would remain a patchwork of separate civilizations until the early 16th century. Around that time the Europeans would begin to arrive and bring dramatic and lasting changes to the American continents.
Chapter 9 Assessment

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

**SECTION 1 (pages 211–215)**

**Hunters and Farmers in the Americas**

11. How do archaeologists know that the first Americans lived as hunters?
12. Why was corn such an important food crop to the people of Mexico and Central America?
13. What were the main differences between hunter-gatherer societies and those based primarily on agriculture?

**SECTION 2 (pages 216–220)**

**Early Mesoamerican Civilizations**

14. Where did the Olmec, the Americas’ first known civilization, arise?
15. How did the Olmec’s location contribute to the development of their civilization?
16. How did the Olmec influence the Zapotec civilization?
17. How do archaeologists know that the Zapotec city of Monte Albán was more than just a ceremonial center?

**SECTION 3 (pages 221–223)**

**Early Civilizations of the Andes**

18. In what ways did the Chavín influence other peoples of the Andes region?
19. What do scholars believe the Nazca Lines represented?
20. How were the Nazca and Moche able to develop productive farmland?

**GRTERMS & NAMES**

Briefly explain the importance of each of the following to the early peoples and civilizations of the Americas.

1. Beringia
2. Ice Age
3. maize
4. Mesoamerica
5. Olmec
6. Zapotec
7. Monte Albán
8. Chavín
9. Nazca
10. Moche

**Visual Summary**

**The Americas: A Separate World**

**The Earliest Americans**

- Hunted big game and later fished and gathered berries and plants
- Lived in small groups, as they had to move continually in search of food
- Eventually developed farming and settled down into large communities
- Developed various new skills, including arts and crafts, architecture, and social and political organization
- Gradually forged more complex societies

**Early South American Societies**

- The Chavín
  - Established powerful religious worship centers
  - Created influential artistic styles
- The Nazca and Moche
  - Developed extensive irrigation systems for farming
  - Crafted intricate ceramics and textiles and other decorative art

**Early Mesoamerican Societies**

- The Olmec
  - Designed and built pyramids, plazas, and monumental sculptures
  - Developed ceremonial centers, ritual ball games, and a ruling class
  - Directed a large trade network throughout Mesoamerica
- The Zapotec
  - Built a magnificent urban center at Monte Albán
  - Developed early forms of hieroglyphic writing and a calendar system

On page 210 you examined ways to kill the mastodon and discussed the difficulties of living in a hunter-gatherer society. Now that you have read the chapter, discuss why the early Americans moved from a hunting to a farming existence. In what ways was food gathering easier in an agricultural society?
CHAPTER ACTIVITIES

1. LIVING HISTORY: Unit Portfolio Project

Your unit portfolio project focuses on the growth and use of power and authority in ancient history. (See page 107.) For Chapter 9 you might use one of the following ideas to add to your portfolio.

• Write a piece of historical fiction about an early American in which you describe how the first ruler gained power or how some people got rich.

• With a partner, design and prepare a time capsule that members of one of the first civilizations might have created to preserve the memory of their powerful and successful society.

• Speculate about why the Olmec or another civilization declined. Then draw a picture showing a key aspect of that decline. Include a caption.

2. CONNECT TO TODAY: Cooperative Learning

One way that a culture’s influence spread was by direct contact between people. Members of advanced civilizations, especially traders, carried their influential ideas with them as they traveled. Today, cultural influence is still spread in a similar way.

Work with a team to create and role-play two distinct meetings. In the first meeting, a trader from an ancient American civilization shares ideas and descriptions of his or her society with a farmer from a distant settlement. In the second meeting, an American salesperson from today shares similar information with a farmer in a distant land.

• Decide exactly what information you want the person from each of the dominant cultures to pass on.

• Establish a set of specific questions that the curious farmers will ask in order to draw out information about each culture.

3. INTERPRETING A TIME LINE

Revisit the time line on pages 106–107. Look above the Chapter 9 time line. Write about three other events that are happening in the world at this time.

CRITICAL THINKING

1. STAGES TO CIVILIZATION

The early Americans’ way of life developed through several stages, starting with hunting. Use a sequence graphic like the one below to show the stages of this development up to and including the time of the first civilizations.

2. CHALLENGING LOCATIONS

What unique environmental challenges did the early Mesoamerican and South American peoples face as they built thriving civilizations?

3. EARLY WAYS OF LIFE

Would you rather have lived in a hunting society or a settled farming society? Explain your answer.

4. ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

In his article “The Chavin Cult,” historian Brian Fagan describes the mysterious shrine of Chavin de Huantar.

A VOICE ABOUT THE PAST

Its U-shaped temple opens east toward the nearby Mosna River and the rising sun. The sacred precinct faces away from the nearby prehistoric settlement, presenting a high, almost menacing, wall to the outside world. The entire effect is one of mystery and hidden power. . . . Worshippers entered the sacred precincts by a roundabout route, passing along the temple pyramid to the river, then up some low terraces that led into the heart of the shrine. Here they found themselves in a sacred landscape set against a backdrop of mountains. Ahead of them lay the hidden place where the axis of the world passed from the sky into the underworld, an oracle [a place for predicting the future] famous for miles around.

BRIAN FAGAN, quoted in The Peru Reader

• How might visitors have felt upon entering this shrine for the first time? Why?

• Do you think the mystery of this place helped spread the Chavin culture’s influence? Explain.

FOCUS ON GEOGRAPHY

Notice the location of the early Mesoamerican and South American civilizations.

• How many miles apart by land do they appear to be?

• What geographic factors would have made interaction between the two regions difficult?

Connect to History

Based on the map, why do you think it took so many thousands of years to travel from the land bridge in upper North America to the southern tip of South America?