

Commonalities and Variations: Africa and the Americas

500 B.C.E.–1200 C.E.

CHAPTER LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To make students aware of civilizations that evolved outside the more well-known civilizations of Eurasia/North Africa
- To explore the development of civilizations in Africa and the Americas
- To consider the factors that make civilizations develop in some regions but not in others
- To raise the possibility of complex civilizations without any recognizable centralized control

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. Opening Vignette

- A. American second-wave civilizations remain alive in the twenty-first century
 1. President of Bolivia Evo Morales participated in traditional Andean practices as part of his inauguration celebrations
- B. Second-wave civilizations aren't just Eurasian.
 1. the Americas: Maya and Tiwanaku
 2. Africa: Meroë, Axum, Niger River valley

3. those peoples without states also had histories

II. Continental Comparisons

- A. There are basic similarities in the development of human cultures everywhere.
 1. part of great process of human migration
 2. Agricultural Revolutions took place independently in several distinct areas
 3. resultant development of civilizations
- B. The world's population at the beginning of the Common Era was about 250 million people.
 1. unevenly distributed with over 80 percent in Eurasia
- C. There were important differences between civilizations in different regions.
 1. the Americas lacked nearly all animals suitable for domestication
 2. Africa imported previously domesticated sheep, goats, chickens, horses, camels
 3. metallurgy was less developed in the Americas
 4. writing
 - a. limited in the Americas to Mesoamerica; most highly developed among the Maya
 - b. in Africa, was confined to north and northeast

5. fewer and smaller classical civilizations in the Americas and Africa
6. Africa frequently interacted with Eurasia, while the Americas were completely cut off from both Eurasia and Africa
 - a. North Africa fully integrated into a Mediterranean zone of interaction
 - b. Arabia another important point of contact
 - c. East Africa integral part of Indian Ocean trading networks
- c. less Egyptian influence than earlier times
7. decline of Meroë after 100 C.E.
 - a. deforestation (too much wood used in iron industry)
 - b. conquest in 340s C.E. by Axum
 - c. penetration of Coptic Christianity; Christian dominance for 1,000 years
 - d. penetration of Islam after about 1300 C.E.

III. Civilizations of Africa

- A. Africa had no common cultural identity in the premodern era.
 1. great environmental variation within the continent
 2. enormous size of the continent
 3. most distinctive: Africa is the most tropical of world's supercontinents
 - a. climate means poorer soils and less productive agriculture
 - b. more disease-carrying insects and parasites
- B. Meroë: Continuing a Nile Valley Civilization
 1. Nubian civilization was almost as old as Egyptian civilization
 - a. constant interaction
 - b. remained a distinct civilization
 2. with decline of Egypt, Nubian civilization came to focus on Meroë
 3. ruled by an all-powerful sacred monarch (sometimes female)
 4. city of Meroë had craft specialization
 5. rural areas had combination of herding and farming
 - a. paid tribute to the ruler
 - b. farming was based on rainfall, not irrigation
 - c. therefore, population was less concentrated on the Nile, less directly controlled by the capital
 6. major long-distance trade was the source of much of wealth and military power
 - a. had contact with the Mediterranean
 - b. also traded to east and west by means of camel caravans
- C. Axum: The Making of a Christian Kingdom
 1. Axum was located in present-day Eritrea and northern Ethiopia
 2. kingdom's economic foundation was highly productive agriculture
 - a. plow-based farming (not reliant on hoe or digging stick like most of Africa)
 - b. high production of wheat, barley, millet, teff
 3. substantial state emerged by about 50 C.E.
 - a. stimulated by Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade (port of Adulis)
 - b. commerce taxes were major source of state revenue
 4. capital city Axum (in the interior) was center of monumental building
 - a. huge stone obelisks (probably marked royal graves)
 - b. town language was Geez, written in South Arabian-derived script
 - c. most of rural populace spoke Agaw
 - d. capital exerted loose control, mostly collection of tribute
 5. Christianity arrived in fourth century C.E.
 - a. King Ezana adopted Christianity about the time of Constantine
 - b. Coptic Christianity is still the religion of half the region
 6. fourth to sixth centuries C.E.: imperial expansion into Meroë and Yemen
 - a. reached gates of Mecca by 571 C.E.
 - b. decline followed
 - c. revival of state several centuries later, but further south
 7. both Meroë and Axum paralleled Eurasian developments and had direct contact with Mediterranean civilizations

D. Along the Niger River: Cities without States

1. major urbanization along the middle stretches of the Niger River between 300 B.C.E. and 900 C.E.
 - a. migration of peoples from the southern Sahara during long dry period
 - b. but no evidence of a state structure, either imperial or city-state
 - c. archeologists have not found evidence of despotic power, widespread war, or deep social inequality (like Indus Valley civilization)
2. cities like Jenne-jeno were clusters of economically specialized settlements
 - a. iron smithing was earliest and most prestigious occupation
 - b. villages of cotton weavers, potters, praise-singers (griots) grew around central towns
 - c. artisan communities became occupational castes
 - d. rural populace also specialized (fishing, rice cultivation, etc.)
3. middle Niger cities were stimulated by a network of West African commerce
4. large-scale states emerged in West Africa in the second millennium C.E.

IV. Civilizations of Mesoamerica

A. There was a lack of interaction with other major cultures, including with other cultures in the Americas.

1. development without large domesticated animals or ironworking
2. important civilizations developed in Mesoamerica and the Andes long before Aztec and Inca empires
3. extraordinary diversity of Mesoamerican civilizations
 - a. shared an intensive agricultural technology
 - b. shared economies based on market exchange
 - c. similar religions
 - d. frequent interaction

B. The Maya: Writing and Warfare

1. Maya ceremonial centers developed as early as 2000 B.C.E. in present-day Guatemala and Yucatan
 2. Maya civilization most well-known cultural achievements: 250–900 C.E.
 - a. development of advanced mathematical system
 - b. elaborate calendars
 - c. creation of most elaborate writing system in the Americas
 - d. large amount of monumental architecture (temples, pyramids, palaces, public plazas)
 3. Maya economy
 - a. agriculture had large-scale human engineering (swamp drainage, terracing, water management system)
 - b. supported a substantial elite and artisan class
 4. political system of city-states and regional kingdoms was highly fragmented
 - a. frequent warfare; capture and sacrifice of prisoners
 - b. densely populated urban and ceremonial centers
 - c. no city-state ever succeeded in creating a unified empire
 5. rapid collapse in the century after a long-term drought began in 840 C.E.
 - a. population dropped by at least 85 percent
 - b. elements of Maya culture survived, but not the great cities
 - c. reasons posited for the collapse:
 - i. extremely rapid population growth after 600 C.E. outstripped resources
 - ii. political disunity and rivalry prevented a coordinated response to climatic catastrophe
 - iii. warfare became more frequent
- C. Teotihuacán: The Americas' Greatest City
1. city was begun ca. 150 B.C.E.

2. by 550 C.E., population was 100,000–200,000
3. much about Teotihuacán is unknown
4. city was centrally planned on a gridlike pattern
5. specialized artisans
6. little evidence of rulers or of tradition of public inscriptions
7. deep influence on Mesoamerica, especially in 300–600 C.E.
 - a. directly administered perhaps 10,000 square miles
 - b. influence of Teotihuacán armies spread as far as Mayan lands
 - c. apparently also had diplomatic connections with other areas
 - d. trade
 - e. copying of Teotihuacán art and architecture
8. mysterious collapse ca. 650 C.E.
9. Aztecs named the place Teotihuacán: “city of the gods”

V. Civilizations of the Andes

- A. The rich marine environment possessed an endless supply of seabirds and fish.
 1. most well-known civilization of the region was the Incas
 2. central Peruvian coast was home to one of the First Civilizations: Norte Chico
 3. from 1000 B.C.E.–1000 C.E. civilizations rose and passed away
- B. Chavín: A Pan-Andean Religious Movement
 1. numerous ceremonial centers uncovered, dating to 2000–1000 B.C.E.
 2. ca. 900 B.C.E., Chavín de Huántar became focus of a religious movement
 - a. Chavín de Huántar was well located along trade routes
 - b. elaborate temple complex
 - c. beliefs apparently drew on both desert region and rain forests
 - d. probably used hallucinogenic San Pedro cactus
 3. widespread imitation across Peru and beyond
 4. did not become an empire
- C. Moche: A Civilization of the Coast
 1. flourished between about 100 and 800 C.E. along 250 miles of Peru’s north coast
 2. agriculture based on complex irrigation system
 3. also relied on fishing
 4. rule by warrior-priests
 - a. some lived on top of huge pyramids
 - b. rituals mediated between humans and gods
 - c. use of hallucinogenic drugs
 - d. human sacrifice
 - e. rulers had elaborate burials
 5. superb craftsmanship of elite objects
 6. ecological disruption in sixth century C.E. undermined the civilization
- D. Wari and Tiwanaku: Empires of the Interior
 1. states flourished between 400 and 1000 C.E. in Andean highlands
 2. centered on large urban capitals
 - a. monumental architecture
 - b. populations in the tens of thousands
 3. empires included lower elevations of eastern and western Andean slopes and the highlands
 - a. linked by caravan trade
 - b. influence of capital city as cultural and religious center also tied together
 - c. cultural influence spread beyond the state
 4. Wari used terraced agriculture, Tiwanaku raised field systems
 5. Wari cities built to common plan and linked by highways suggests tighter political control
 6. little overt conflict or warfare between
 - a. despite border apparently did not mingle much
 7. both collapse around 1000 C.E.
 - a. series of smaller kingdoms after
 - b. Inca drew on earlier states to build empire

VI. Alternatives to Civilization: Bantu Africa

- A. Movement of Bantu-speaking peoples into Africa south of equator

1. began around 3000 B.C.E. from southeastern Nigeria and the Cameroons
 2. over time, 400 distinct Bantu languages developed
 3. by the first century C.E., Bantu agriculturalists occupied forest regions of equatorial Africa; some had probably reached East African coast
 4. spread to most of eastern and southern Africa
 5. the movement wasn't a conquest or self-conscious migration
- B. Cultural Encounters**
1. Bantu-speaking peoples interacted with established societies
 2. most significant interaction: agricultural Bantu and gathering and hunting peoples
 3. Bantu advantages
 - a. numbers: agriculture supports more people
 - b. disease: Bantu brought new diseases to people with little immunity
 - c. iron
 - d. gathering and hunting peoples were largely displaced, absorbed, eliminated
 4. survival of a few gathering and hunting peoples
 - a. the Batwa (Pygmy) people became "forest specialists" and interacted with the Bantu
 5. Bantu culture changed because of encounter with different peoples
 - a. adopt new crops and animals in East Africa
 6. Bantu peoples spread their skills and culture through eastern and southern Africa
- C. Society and Religion**
1. creation of many distinct societies and cultures in 500–1500 C.E.
 - a. Kenya: decision making by kinship and age structures
 - b. Zimbabwe and Lake Victoria region: larger kingdoms
 - c. East African coast after 1000 C.E.: rival city-states
 - d. development depended on large number of factors
 2. many Bantu communities less patriarchal than urban civilizations
 3. religion placed less emphasis on a remote high god and more on ancestral or nature spirits
 - a. sacrifices (especially cattle) to access power of dead ancestors
 - b. power of charms was activated by proper rituals
 - c. widespread belief in witches
 - d. diviners could access world of the supernatural
 - e. based on the notion of "continuous revelation": new messages still come from the world beyond
 - f. no missionary impulse
- VII. Alternatives to Civilization: North America**
- A. "Semi-sedentary" peoples were established in the eastern woodlands of North America, Central America, the Caribbean islands, and the Amazon basin.**
- B. The Ancestral Pueblo: Pit Houses and Great Houses**
1. southwestern North America began maize cultivation in second millennium B.C.E.
 - a. only became the basis of settled agriculture ca. 600–800 C.E.
 - b. gradual adaptation of maize to desert environment
 2. establishment of permanent villages
 - a. pit houses in small settlements
 - b. by 900 C.E., many villages also had larger ceremonial structures (kivas)
 3. local trading networks, some long-distance exchange
 4. development of larger settlements (pueblos)
 - a. most spectacular was in Chaco canyon
 - b. largest "great house" or town (Pueblo Bonito) was five stories high with over 600 rooms
 - c. hundreds of roads radiated out from Chaco (were perhaps a sacred landscape)

5. elite included highly skilled astronomers
 6. Chaco was a center for turquoise production
 7. warfare increased with extended drought after 1130 C.E.
 8. great houses abandoned by 1200 C.E.
- C. Peoples of the Eastern Woodlands: The Mound Builders
1. Mississippi River valley: Agricultural Revolution by 2000 B.C.E.
 - a. but crops not productive enough for fully settled agriculture until later
 2. creation of societies marked by large earthen mounds
 - a. earliest built ca. 2000 B.C.E.
 - b. most elaborate of mound-building cultures (Hopewell culture) was established between 200 B.C.E. and 400 C.E.
 3. Hopewell: large burial mounds and geometric earthworks
 - a. many artifacts found in them—evidence of extensive trade
 - b. careful astronomical orientation
 4. Cahokia (near present-day St. Louis, Missouri) flourished between 900 and 1250 C.E.
 - a. introduction of maize agriculture allowed larger population
 - b. central mound: terraced pyramid of four levels
 - c. community of about 10,000 people
 - d. widespread trade network
 - e. apparently had stratified class system
 5. sixteenth-century Europeans encountered similar chiefdom among the Natchez in southwestern Mississippi
 - a. paramount chiefs (“Great Suns”) lived in luxury
 - b. clear social elite
 - c. but upper-class people were required to marry commoners
 - d. significant military capacity

VIII. Reflections: Deciding What’s Important: Balance in World History

- A. Teachers and writers of world history have to decide what to include.
- B. Several possible standards can be used in decision making:
 1. durability (which would make the Paleolithic section enormous)
 2. change
 3. population (Eurasia, with 80 percent of population, gets more space)
 4. influence (impact of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam)
 5. the historian’s location and audience
- C. Historians do not agree on the “proper” balance when teaching world civilizations.

CHAPTER QUESTIONS

Following are answer guidelines for the Big Picture Questions, Seeking the Main Point Question, Margin Review Questions, Portrait Question, and Documents and Visual Sources Feature Questions that appear in the textbook chapter. For your convenience, the questions and answer guidelines are also available in the Computerized Test Bank.

Big Picture Questions

1. “The particular cultures and societies of Africa and of the Americas discussed in this chapter developed largely in isolation.” What evidence would support this statement, and what might challenge it?
 - Evidence in support of this statement includes the complete physical separation and lack of contact between the African and American cultures and societies discussed in this chapter.
 - The geographic and cultural separation between Meroë and Axum on the one hand and the Niger Valley civilization on the other also provides support.
 - So too do the significant physical distances that separated Andean, North American, and Mesoamerican civilizations, along with the lack of sustained contact between these three regions.