

Robert W. Strayer

**Ways of the World: A Brief Global
History with Sources**
Second Edition

Chapter 6

Commonalities and Variations: Africa and the
Americas (500 B.C.E.–1200 C.E.)

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The Maya Temple of the Great Jaguar in Tikal
Peter M. Wilson/Alamy
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1. Identify the building and describe it.

The Maya Temple of the Great Jaguar in Tikal stands in present-day Guatemala and was built in the eighth century. At approximately 144 feet tall, it served as the tomb for Tikal ruler Chan K'awill (682–734.) The temple has the shape of a steep pyramid that rises in nine larger steps and several hundred small ones for people. On top of the pyramid stands a temple with another four smaller steps in the roof pyramid. This roof on top features various carvings.

2. What was the explicit and implicit purpose of this building?

The temple's explicit purpose was to serve as the gravesite for Chan K'awill. During his lifetime, however, the temple widened the distance between those in the temple and those on the bottom. The steepness of the building made it physically dangerous for regular Mayans to move up, so in this way the structure accentuated hierarchy and status. Visible from far away, the temple and pyramid must have also served as a symbol of Chan K'awill's power.

I. Continental Comparisons

- A. Agricultural revolutions and complex societies**
- B. Uneven distribution of humans and domesticated animals**
- C. Variations in metallurgy and literacy**
- D. American isolation versus Africa in contact**

A. Agricultural revolutions and complex societies: The various disperse and almost simultaneous revolutions in agricultural production were central to the formation of complex societies around the world. This was a truly revolutionary transformation of human life.

B. Uneven distribution of humans and domesticated animals: While the Agricultural revolution was a fundamental change in the history of humanity and the planet, the uneven distribution of human communities and animals suitable for domestication towards Eurasia has led world historians to pay less attention to Africa and the Americas.

C. Variations in metallurgy and literacy: The less developed use of metal and writing systems has also led to a greater emphasis on Eurasia at the expense of pre-Columbian American and African history.

D. American isolation versus Africa in contact: There is an important distinction between the fact that the Americas were geographically isolated from the pre-historical migrations across an ice bridge until the Iberian voyages of discovery and Africa had centuries of contact via trans-Saharan and Swahili coast merchants.

II. Civilizations of Africa

A. Meroë: Continuing a Nile Valley Civilization

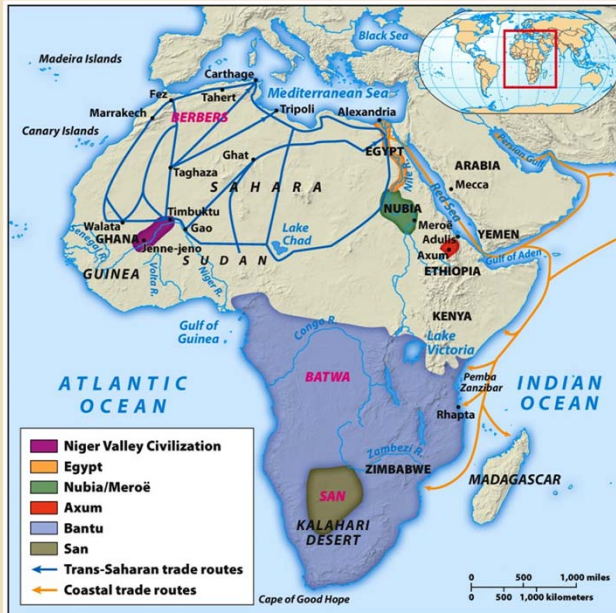
1. Egypt and Nubia
2. Kings and queens of Meroë
3. Agriculture and long-distance trade
4. Coptic for 1,000 years

II. Civilizations of Africa

A. Meroë: Continuing a Nile Valley Civilization

1. Egypt and Nubia: The Nile provided sustained connection between Egypt and Nubia to the south for thousands of years. There is clear evidence of both cultures influencing each other. There were military campaigns between the two civilizations, with Nubia conquering Egypt at one point.
2. Kings and queens of Meroë: This southern city rose as a center of the Nubian state system with an all-powerful monarch heading the empire. There are at least ten cases of queens ruling or co-ruling Meroë. The state was not as centralized as Egypt because of geographical differences.
3. Agriculture and long-distance trade: While the Nile provided water for agriculture, there was also sufficient rainfall in the region. This meant that there was less of a demand for irrigation, which also meant that the state did not have to be as centralized. Rainfall also allowed for a much more geographically spread-out society than the Egyptians, who were so closely clustered to the Nile. The region benefited from its location as a key hub of trade either along the Nile to the north or east and west via camel caravans.
4. Coptic for 1,000 years: From the 300s to roughly 1300, the Coptic branch of Christianity dominated this civilization, using Greek as a language for worship and constructing churches in the Coptic or Byzantine style. Only

after 1300, as the state weakened and Arabs immigrated into the region, did the area become part of the greater Islamic world.



Map 6.1 Africa in the Second-Wave Era
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II. Civilizations of Africa

B. Axum: The Making of a Christian Kingdom

1. Plow agriculture and Indian Ocean trade
2. Monumental buildings and court culture
3. Conversion to Christianity and imperial expansion

II. Civilizations of Africa

B. Axum: The Making of a Christian Kingdom

1. Plow agriculture and Indian Ocean trade: Centered in the Horn of Africa, this region enjoyed unique conditions in Africa that were favorable to plowing (as opposed to using a digging stick elsewhere). This allowed people to grow a large supply of grain crops. Its location also made it an excellent center for maritime trade in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea as an exporter of products from the interior of Africa. Taxes on this trade made Axum a very wealthy state.
2. Monumental buildings and court culture: The capital city contained impressive architecture including huge stone obelisks as high as 100 feet. The Romans recognized Axum as a powerful empire along with Persia and their own.
3. Conversion to Christianity and imperial expansion: Trade routes to the north introduced Christianity to the kingdom about the same time that the Roman emperor Constantine converted. Despite the spread of Islam in the region, the mountains of Ethiopia remained predominately Christian. Today the area is about 60% Christian.

II. Civilizations of Africa

C. Along the Niger River: Cities without States

1. Urbanization without imperial or bureaucratic systems
2. Iron working and other specializations
3. Regional West African trade system

II. Civilizations of Africa

C. Along the Niger River: Cities without States

1. Urbanization without imperial or bureaucratic systems: Over the course of some five centuries, waves of migrants from the Sahara and Sahel settled around the Niger River in various cities. They brought various trades and herding practices with them. They did not develop state systems of either the imperial type or local city-state variety.
2. Iron working and other specializations: In lieu of a political hierarchy, social stratification did develop around skilled crafts with iron working being the most important.
3. Regional West African trade system: As the cities often lacked various raw materials and commodities, increasingly long trade networks developed, linking the various cities with producers of minerals, agricultural goods, and other commodities.



Terra-cotta Statue from Jenne-jeno
Werner Forman/Art Resource, NY
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1. Where does this statue come from, and how old is it?

This terracotta statue comes from the Niger Valley region in the interior of northwest Africa. It was probably made some time during the twelfth century.

2. Describe the statue. What does it represent?

The statue shows two human figures—male and female—sitting together. The female figure is sitting on her knees, her hands on her thighs. She is positioned between the pulled-up knees of the male figure sitting behind her, and his hands are resting on her shoulders. The chins of both figures are exaggerated, and so are their noses, lips, and eyes. This couple illustrates a common theme in African thought—that the roles of men and women are separate but complementary.

3. What might have made this artistic expression of African thought so important at the time this statue was made?

North Africa witnessed the rapid expansion of Islam in the twelfth century, and this statue may have been an expression of pride in indigenous traditions and resistance to foreign religious dogmas.

III. Civilizations of Mesoamerica

A. The Maya: Writing and Warfare

1. As early as 2000 B.C.E.
2. Urban centers, mathematics, and astronomy
3. Engineered agriculture
4. Competing city-states
5. A century of collapse after 840 B.C.E.

III. Civilizations of Mesoamerica

A. The Maya: Writing and Warfare

1. As early as 2000 B.C.E.: Starting as early as 2000 B.C.E., a common culture developed in Central America. After 1000 B.C.E., a number of cities arose, but the real flourishing of Mayan culture was between 250 and 900 C.E.
2. Urban centers, mathematics, and astronomy: The Maya had numerous cities with populations in the tens of thousands and impressive architecture such as massive pyramids. They developed sophisticated mathematics and recorded careful observations of the stars, planets, moon, and sun, allowing them to predict eclipses and other natural phenomenon. The Maya had the most developed writing system of the Americas.
3. Engineered agriculture: Their wealth stemmed from very productive agriculture, whose bounty came from a very carefully and extensively reshaped landscape with terraces, irrigation systems, and leveled tops.
4. Competing city-states: Their politics were not imperial as in Rome, Persia, or China, but organized by competing city-states as in Greece.
5. A century of collapse after 840 B.C.E.: Due to a collection of factors, including over-population, the outstripping of resources, prolonged drought, and warfare, the Maya saw a rapid and catastrophic collapse of their civilization.



Map 6.2 Civilizations of Mesoamerica
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III. Civilizations of Mesoamerica

B. Teotihuacán: The Americas' Greatest City

1. Planned, enormous, and still a mystery
2. 150 B.C.E.–650 C.E.
3. 100,000–200,000 inhabitants in 550 B.C.E.

III. Civilizations of Mesoamerica

B. Teotihuacán: The Americas' Greatest City

1. Planned, enormous, and still a mystery: This was a huge city north of the valley of Mexico. It seems to have been planned from the time of its construction, rather than developing organically and haphazardly over time. The scale and sophistication of the architecture was extremely impressive.
2. 150 B.C.E.–650 C.E.: It may have begun as early as 150 B.C.E. and reached its height around 550 C.E. before suddenly and mysteriously collapsing in 650 C.E.
3. 100,000–200,000 inhabitants in 550 B.C.E.: At its height, it was the sixth-largest city in the world.

IV. Civilizations of the Andes

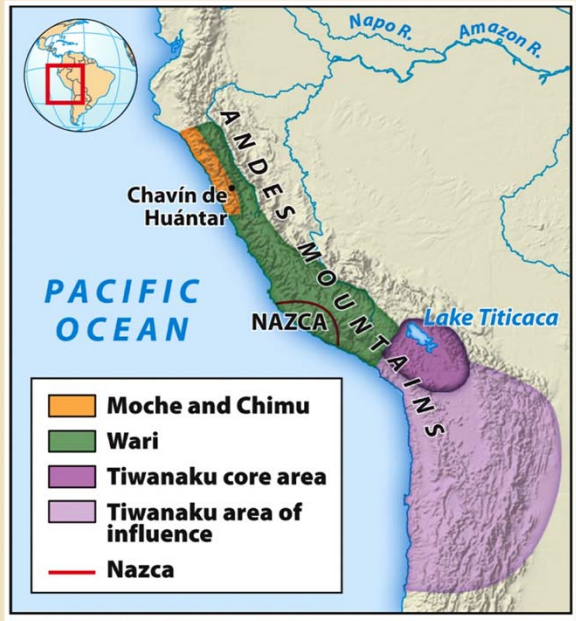
A. Chavin: A Pan-Andean Religious Movement

1. Temple complexes centered around a village
2. Village became a major religious center
3. Links to all directions via trade routes

IV. Civilizations of the Andes

A. Chavín: A Pan-Andean Religious Movement

1. Temple complexes centered around a village: Between 2000 and 1000 B.C.E., a number of ritual sites and temple complexes developed in the Andes. By 900 B.C.E., Chavín de Huántar became a focal point.
2. Village became a major religious center: Chavín de Huántar had a population of 2,000 to 3,000 by 750 B.C.E. with a distinct social hierarchy. The elite lived in stone homes, while the commoners had adobe homes. They built an elaborate and complex temple at this site.
3. Links to all directions via trade routes: Art work shows that the temple complex had connections to all directions in the high- and lowlands. Many animals from the lowlands were represented as gods and sacred figures.



Map 6.3 Civilizations of the Andes
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IV. Civilizations of the Andes

B. Moche: A Civilization of the Coast

1. 250 miles of coast, 100–800 C.E.
2. Elite class of warrior-priests
3. Rich fisheries and river-fed irrigation
4. Fine craft skills
5. Fragile environment

IV. Civilizations of the Andes

B. Moche: A Civilization of the Coast

1. 250 miles of coast, 100–800 C.E.: thirteen river valleys made up this coastal population center.
2. Elite class of warrior-priests: These religious-military elites were very wealthy and presided over human sacrifices. Graves of elites from the period show much material wealth.
3. Rich fisheries and river-fed irrigation: The abundant sardines and other fish of this part of the Pacific provided a great source of food, and the rivers fed irrigation systems in what would be otherwise dry and barren lands. Guano from the coastal islands was used as fertilizer.
4. Fine craft skills: The metal-workers, potters, and weavers left artifacts showing sophisticated skills.
5. Fragile environment: The region is prone to earthquakes, droughts, and floods, and there was some sort of ecological crisis in the fifth century. By the eighth century, the Moche civilization had collapsed.



The Lord of Sipan
Kevin Schaffer/Corbis
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1. What does this picture show? Explain the layout of this site.

This is an archeological discovery on Peru's northern coast and shows the grave of a Moche ruler whom historians have called the "Lord of Sipan" because of the grave's proximity to the town of Sipan. At the center of this grave lies the Moche ruler in an oversized coffin. Placed around his coffin are four smaller caskets with barely decorated skeletons. Not visible in this picture are an additional three young women, a priest, a guard, and a dog that were also buried in this grave.

2. What does this grave tell us about the Moche civilization and its visions of the afterlife?

Clearly, societies in the Moche civilization adhered to strict hierarchies, bestowing to their lords supreme power that would explain the burial of nine more people along with the Lord of Sipan. The central position of his coffin and his rich decoration also highlight his supreme status in this burial site. Moche people must have had very concrete notions of life after death. Apart from the 10 bodies, there was an ample amount of food in the grave; the lumber exposed on both sides of the grave suggests that the burial site included some type of roof. The role of the different members of the burial group—a guard, a priest, a dog, three young women—suggests that the people who buried the Lord of Sipan expected his life to continue after death, and they wanted to ensure that he enjoyed all the privileges and the same status as in his lifetime.

3. How do you think the three young women got into the grave?

While it is fair to assume that all other members of this burial community were killed and made to "accompany" the Lord of Sipan, the three young women may very well have been human sacrifices and buried alive.

IV. Civilizations of the Andes

C. Wari and Tiwanaku: Empires of the Interior

1. 400–1000 C.E.
2. Highland centers with colonies in the lowlands
3. Distinctions between the two, yet little conflict
4. Collapse, but the basis for the late Inca

IV. Civilizations of the Andes

C. Wari and Tiwanaku: Empires of the Interior

1. 400–1000 C.E.: In the north and the south, these two civilizations developed out of ancient settlements. Both had large capitals with impressive monumental buildings.
2. Highland centers with colonies in the lowlands: These states did not control continuous bands of territory. Rather, the capital city set up colonies in the western and eastern lowlands, giving them access to distinct ecological zones.
3. Distinctions between the two, yet little conflict: The two civilizations developed different agricultural styles and state systems but there was little conflict along their 300-mile shared border. They shared related cultural and religious systems but spoke distinct languages.
4. Collapse, but the basis for the late Inca: While these states collapsed and broke into smaller kingdoms, the Inca would use their state system, highways, and styles of dress and art when they rose to power in the following centuries.

V. Alternatives to Civilization: Bantu Africa

A. Cultural Encounters

1. Migrations spread a common Bantu culture
2. Bantu strengths: numbers, disease, and iron
3. Bantu impact on the Batwa
4. Impacts on the Bantu in East Africa

V. Alternatives to Civilization: Bantu Africa

A. Cultural Encounters

1. Migrations spread a common Bantu culture: Over many centuries, a slow migration of Bantu people out of present-day Nigeria and Cameroon spread a common language base, cultural patterns, farming, and iron-working technology. As land was plentiful and population was small, there was little need for large state systems.
2. Bantu strengths: numbers, disease, and iron: The Bantu overwhelmed existing gatherer-hunter societies with their demographic superiority (thanks to farming), their introduction of new diseases such as malaria, and the use of iron tools and weapons.
3. Bantu impact on the Batwa: The Batwa or pygmy people of Central Africa adapted to the arrival of the Bantus by becoming forest specialists who traded products from the jungle for Bantu goods. They adopted Bantu languages yet kept a non-agricultural way of life.
4. Impacts on the Bantu in East Africa: In East Africa, the Bantu's yams did not grow well, so they began to farm crops introduced from Southeast Asia, such as coconuts, sugar cane, and bananas.

V. Alternatives to Civilization: Bantu Africa

B. Society and Religion

1. Wide varieties of Bantu cultures developed, 500–1500
2. Less patriarchal gender systems
3. Ancestor or nature spirits rather than a Creator God
4. Localized not universal faiths and rituals

V. Alternatives to Civilization: Bantu Africa

B. Society and Religion

1. Wide varieties of Bantu cultures developed, 500–1500: As the Bantu migrations covered a large area over many centuries, in the millennium before the early modern era, a wide variety of cultural traditions, practices, and rituals developed.
2. Less patriarchal gender systems: It is a safe generalization to say that Bantu gender codes were less patriarchal than in other societies around the world. Gender parallelism rather than strict hierarchy was the main practice.
3. Ancestor or nature spirits rather than a Creator God: The various religious traditions did not focus on the role of a Creator God but rather on the impact of the spirits of ancestors or the natural world.
4. Localized not universal faiths and rituals: The Bantu did not develop a universal religious tradition with a single historic revelation but rather believed in constant communication with the spiritual world. These faiths were localized to specific geographical areas and communities.

VI. Alternatives to Civilization: North America

A. The Ancestral Pueblo: Pit Houses and Great Houses

1. Slow start to agriculture and settled society
2. Chaco Phenomenon, 860–1130 C.E.
3. Astronomy and art but then warfare and collapse

VI. Alternatives to Civilization: North America

A. The Ancestral Pueblo: Pit Houses and Great Houses

1. Slow start to agriculture and settled society: Mesoamerica introduced maize to North America. Due to the harsh climate, it took several centuries for a maize-based agricultural society to develop. Initially dwellings were smaller pit houses dug into the ground with a buffalo hide for shelter. Kivas, or ceremonial pits, were used for rituals and demonstrated the belief that humans came from the ground.
2. Chaco Phenomenon, 860–1130 C.E.: With settled agriculture, populations grew and larger settlements formed. These above-ground structures were known as pueblos. Around Chaco canyon, five pueblos formed and established a road system that may have been more symbolic or religious than practical, as they did not have the wheel or draft animals.
3. Astronomy and art but then warfare and collapse: There were a variety of sophisticated cultural achievements before an extended drought contributed to the Pueblo collapse.



Map 6.4 North America in the Second Wave Era
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Pueblo Bonito
Courtesy, Chaco Canyon National Historic Park
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VI. Alternatives to Civilization: North America

B. Peoples of the Eastern Woodlands: The Mound Builders

1. Independent agricultural revolution
2. Burial mounds of the Hopewell culture
3. Cahokia, 900–1250 C.E.
4. Social complexity but weaker cultural unity

VI. Alternatives to Civilization: North America

B. Peoples of the Eastern Woodlands: The Mound Builders

1. Independent agricultural revolution: The eastern woodlands of North America, especially around the Mississippi River valley, developed agriculture on their own but would later indirectly get maize and beans from Mesoamerica.
2. Burial mounds of the Hopewell culture: Archeologists have discovered massive earthworks that indicate a high level of social organization and wealth. The culture is called Hopewell after the name of an archeological site.
3. Cahokia, 900–1250 C.E.: Near present day St. Louis, Missouri, this settlement became the dominant center of the region. There was a massive terraced pyramid, a population of at least 10,000, and long-distance trade networks.
4. Social complexity but weaker cultural unity: While there was trade, social stratification, and large population centers, the linguistic divisions of the region did not allow the same cultural unity that characterized the Bantu world.

VII. Reflections: Deciding What's Important: Balance in World History

- A. What gets included in world history and what gets left out?**
- B. Duration? Population? Influence? Evidence?**
- C. Location of historian and audience?**
- D. No consensus on a proper balance**

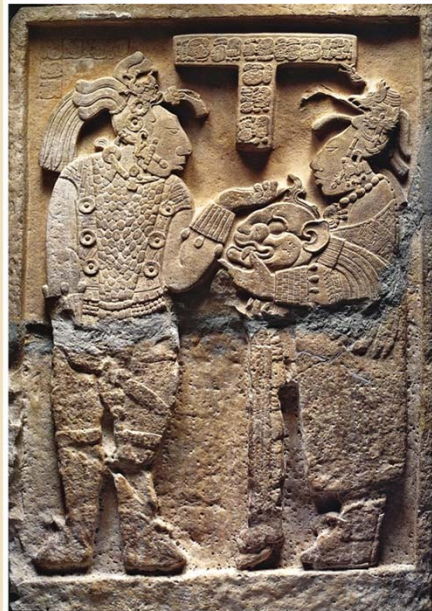
VII. Reflections: Deciding What's Important: Balance in World History

A. What gets included in world history and what gets left out? When teaching or writing about the world, something has to get cut. How do historians decide?

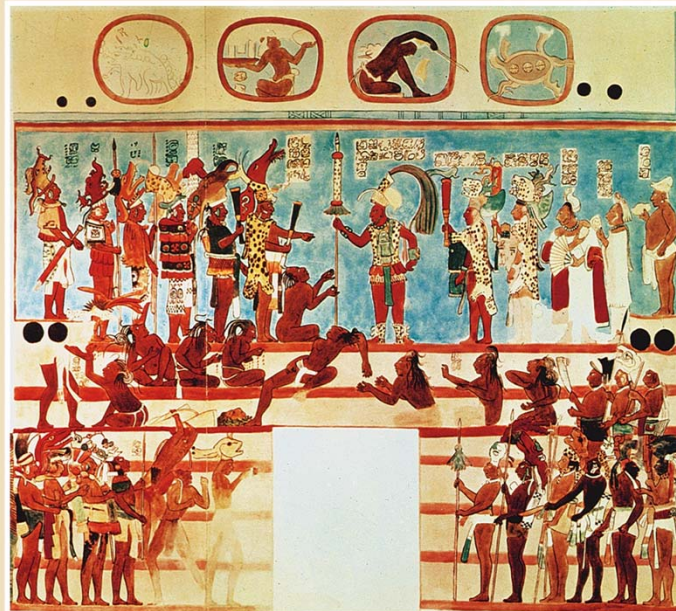
B. Duration? Population? Influence? Evidence? The length, size, and impact of a culture are all arguments for including or excluding a historical case.

C. Location of historian and audience? We must also recognize that where the historian and the audience are located matters. Ethiopian high school students would naturally have a curriculum that puts Ethiopia and then Africa at the center and then goes to the outside world, reversing the Eurocentric model.

D. No consensus on a proper balance: Historians have yet to end these debates or accept one set of clear and firm answers to these questions.



Visual Source 6.1 Shield Jaguar and Lady Xok: A Royal Couple of Yaxchilan
Enrique Franco Torillos
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Visual Source 6.2 The Presentation of Captives
Peabody Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA/The Bridgeman Art Library
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Visual Source 6.3 A Bloodletting Ritual
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Visual Source 6.4 The Ball Game
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