

Student Handout #4: Era 3 Societies around the World

As you read about four different societies below, think about your claims related to empires from Student Handout #3. What are important features for empires? Look for evidence that these features were there, or not, in each of these societies. You will have to decide if these societies were empires based upon the evidence in the articles.

Read about each society first, and then go back with your Turn and Talk partner, re-read the paragraphs, and use the graphic organizer on Student Handout #5 to analyze these societies.

The Olmec:

The earliest **state government** in North or South America was the Olmec, who formed their state about **1200 BCE**. This is about the time of the **Mycenaean kingdoms** in Greece, or the **Third Intermediate Period** in Egypt, or the **Assyrians** in West Asia. The Olmec (OHL-meck) lived between **North America** and **South America**, in Central America (what is now the southern part of Mexico).

This was good land for farming, with a big river bringing plenty of water, and people had recently begun to farm **corn** and **beans** there, about **2000 BCE**. Probably once people began to farm they had more kids, and there got to be a lot more people living in Central America than there had been before. As they got more crowded, they formed into villages, and then into towns, and then into cities, and soon some men emerged as their leaders, and they had formed a **state**.

The earliest Olmec city was at San Lorenzo Tenochtitlan (not to be confused with Tenochtitlan of the Aztec Empire), near the Gulf Coast, in the foothills of the Tuxtla Mountains. It was built around 1150 **BCE**. The Olmec rulers got their people to build groups of big stone temples at Tenochtitlan and in several other places nearby. People used these temples to worship the Olmec gods, but they also used them (like **Sumerian ziggurats**) to store food and generally as government buildings. Very recent discoveries show that the Olmec used writing to record their thoughts on slabs of stone (like our gravestones).

The Olmec traded with other people all over Mesoamerica. Archaeologists find evidence of this in Olmec pottery all over Central America and Mexico, and pottery from other people who lived nearby is also found in Olmec cities. Probably the Olmecs also traded tar, or bitumen - sticky black oily stuff like asphalt that you can use to patch boats and seal up roofs. Some of the trade was probably on boats that travelled up and down the rivers, and some of it was overland, carried by traders walking from city to city.

Around **900 BCE**, after three hundred years, the Olmec pretty much abandoned their main city at Tenochtitlan and moved their government to another city, which is now called La Venta. Archaeologists have different theories about why this may have happened. Possibly this was because of changes in the weather at this time, or it may have been because the river changed its course and the people moved to be near the new riverbed. Or, some people think it could have been because of a civil war or invasions.

The Olmec state continued to rule Central America for another five hundred years after this move, but by **400 BCE** the Olmec seem to have lost control of this area. Nobody knows how this happened, or why. As they lost control, new groups like the **Maya** and the **Zapotec** gradually developed their own societies and power in the area.

Adapted from: *Olmecs*. Kidipede. History for Kids. 11 April 2013
<<http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/southamerica/before1500/history/olmec.htm>>.

The Moche

The Moche were a society that developed around **100 CE** along the Pacific coast of South America, in what is now northern Peru. The Moche kingdom was mainly based on farming **corn** and beans, like the **Maya** at the same time. There were big complicated **irrigation** systems all over the area controlled by the Moche. Nobody knows exactly what the government of the Moche looked like - it may have been an **empire**, or it may have been a bunch of independent **city-states** united by having the same language and culture, like **classical Greece just a little earlier**.

The Moche built an adobe pyramid called the Huaca del Sol, and another pyramid nearby called the Huaca de la Luna. These had stone carvings and painted murals. There are many other Moche towns as well.

The Moche continued to control much of modern Peru until about 600-800 **CE**, when their society seems to have collapsed. This collapse may have been caused by climate change about this time

Adapted from *The Moche*. Kidipede. History for Kids. 11 April 2013
<<http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/southamerica/before1500/history/moche.htm>>.

The Bantu

West African people in Nigeria were smelting **iron** by around **300 BCE**. Nobody knows for sure whether people in West Africa invented this process themselves, or learned about it from **North African** blacksmiths, although scholars agree that iron technology did develop in Africa independent of its discovery in Asia.

Around this same time, some West African people, perhaps from a little further east in modern Cameroon, were beginning to leave West Africa and travel east, across the African **grasslands** south of the Sahara Desert, and south-east through the **rain forests**. They probably didn't all leave at once, but in small groups, now and then, moving gradually through eastern and then southern Africa. These travellers are generally called the Bantu, which means "people" in their languages. The Bantu's iron weapons may have helped them to force their way into the communities they met.

By **400 CE** these Bantu people had reached South Africa, where they began to marry some of the **Khoikhoi and the San people**. Some people in South Africa began **farming** or keeping **sheep** or **cattle** around this time; others, who wanted to remain **hunters** and **gatherers**, were forced off the best agricultural land and into the deserts.

But many Bantu people also stayed in West Africa. For instance, there was a powerful kingdom at Djenne-Djeno, in modern Mali, far up the Niger River in West Africa, around **250 BCE**. By **300 CE**, the men and women of Djenne-Djeno were trading along the Niger River with other West African communities to get **iron** and good stone to make grindstones. By **500 CE**, there were about 20,000 people living in Djenne-Djeno, more than in most **European towns** of that time. There were also smaller towns around the main town. They kept on working **iron**, and by now were also working **copper**, which came more than 1000 kilometers (about 600 miles) to get to Djenne-Djeno. They sold their **pottery** up and down the Niger River as far as 750 kilometers (450 miles) away.

Adapted from: *West Africa for Kids*. History for Kids. 11 April 2013
<<http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/africa/history/bantu.htm>>.

The Lapita People



Lapita culture, cultural complex of what were presumably the original human settlers of Melanesia, much of Polynesia, and parts of Micronesia, and dating between 1600 and 500 BCE. It is named for a type of fired pottery that was first extensively investigated at the site of Lapita in New Caledonia.

The Lapita people were originally from Taiwan and other regions of East Asia. They were highly mobile seaborne explorers and colonists who had established themselves on the Bismarck Archipelago (northeast of New Guinea) by 2000 BCE. Beginning about 1600 BCE they spread to the Solomon Islands; they had reached Fiji, Tonga, and the rest of western [Polynesia](#) by 1000 BCE; and they had dispersed to [Micronesia](#) by 500 BCE.



The [Lapita](#) people are known principally on the basis of the remains of their fired pottery, which consists of beakers, cooking pots, and bowls. Many of the pottery shards that have been found are decorated with geometric designs made by stamping the unfired clay with a toothlike implement. A few shards with figurative designs have also been found. Lapita pottery has been found from New Guinea eastward to Samoa. Fishhooks, pieces of obsidian and chert flakes, and beads and rings made of shells are the other principal artifacts of the Lapita culture.

The Lapita appear to have been skilled sailors and navigators who subsisted largely, but not entirely, by fishing along the coasts of the islands on which they lived. They may also have practiced domestic agriculture and animal husbandry to a limited extent, although the evidence for this remains fragmentary.

The Lapita lived in villages of stilt-legged houses and earth-ovens, made distinctive pottery, fished and exploited marine and aquacultural resources, raised domestic chickens, pigs and dogs, and grew fruit- and nut-bearing trees.

Sources:

Lapita Culture. Encyclopedia Britannica. 11 April 2013 <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/330302/Lapita-culture>>.

"*Lapita* Cultural Complex – First Settlers of the Pacific Islands." About.com. Archaeology. 11 April 2013 <<http://archaeology.about.com/od/Items/a/lapita.htm>>.