

Geography and Early Cultures



**CHAPTER
EVENTS**

**c. 12,000–
10,000 BC**
The first people
arrive in the
Americas.

c. 3500 BC
Maize is
domesticated
in Mesoamerica.

c. 1200 BC
The Olmec
civilization
begins in
Mesoamerica.

c. AD 200
The Maya
begin building
large cities in
the Americas.

c. AD 900
The Maya
Classic Age
ends.

**WORLD
EVENTS**

c. 5000 BC
Irrigation is used
in Mesopotamia
and Egypt.

c. 3000 BC
Egyptians begin
to write using
hieroglyphics.

c. 500 BC
Athens develops
the world's first
democracy.

AD 476
The Roman
Empire falls.

12,000 BC

3000 BC

2000 BC

1000 BC

BC 1 AD

AD 1000



Chapter 15 Timeline

Geography of the Americas

- **The Americas are made up of two continents, North America and South America. These continents have a wide range of landforms.**
- **The first people of the Americas were hunter-gatherers. They depended on the geography of the land to find food.**

The Americas: Physical Map



Mesoamerica

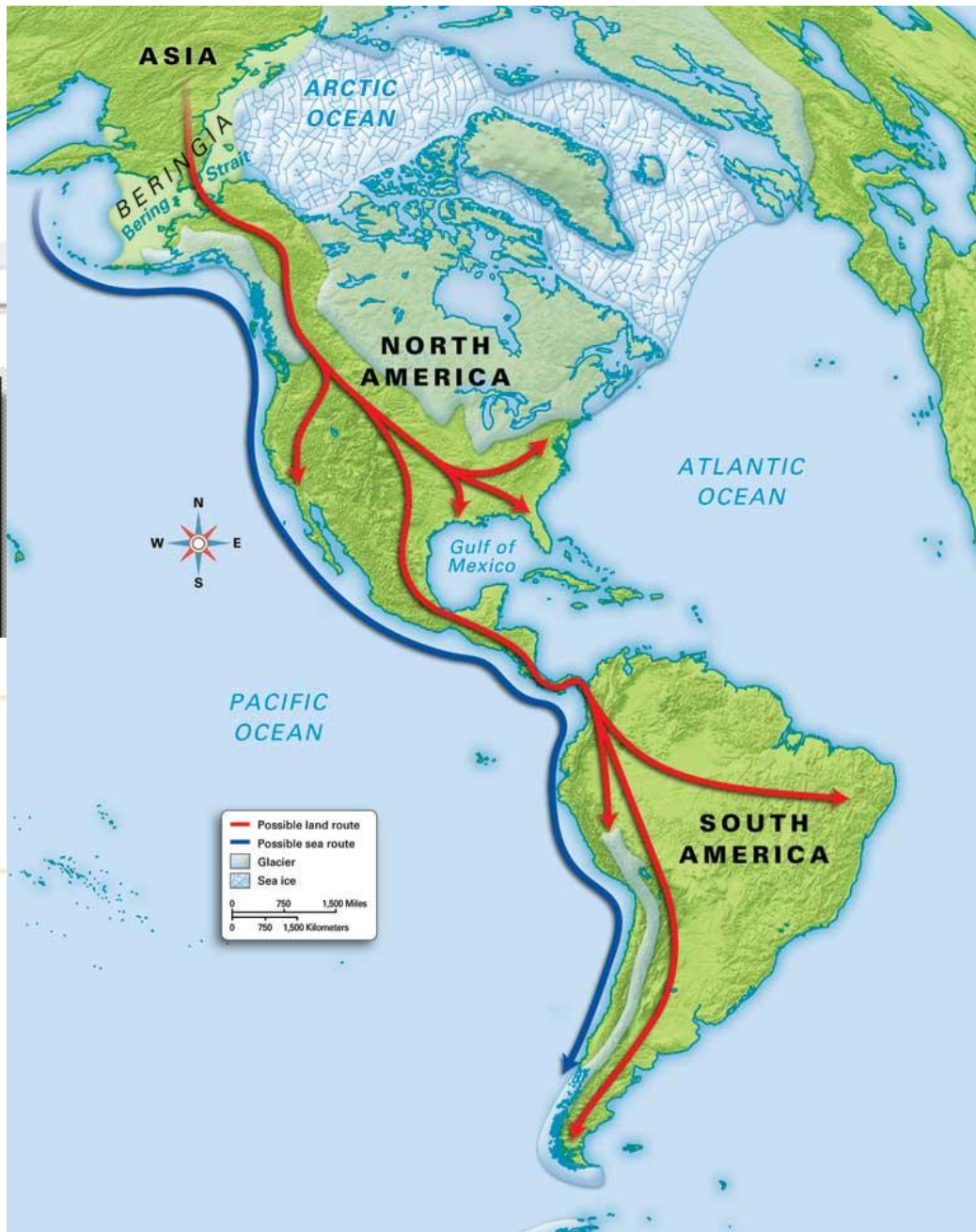
- **Historians call the cultural region in the southern part of North America Mesoamerica. Mesoamerica extended from the middle of modern-day Mexico south to Central America.**
- **The region's many rain forests and rivers created fertile farmland. The first farmers in the Americas domesticated plants there.**

The First People Arrive

- No one is sure how people first arrived in the Americas.
- Some scientists believe they came from Asia some time before 12,000 BC, walking over a land bridge that crossed the Bering Strait. Other historians think the first Americans arrived by sea.
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Migration to the Americas

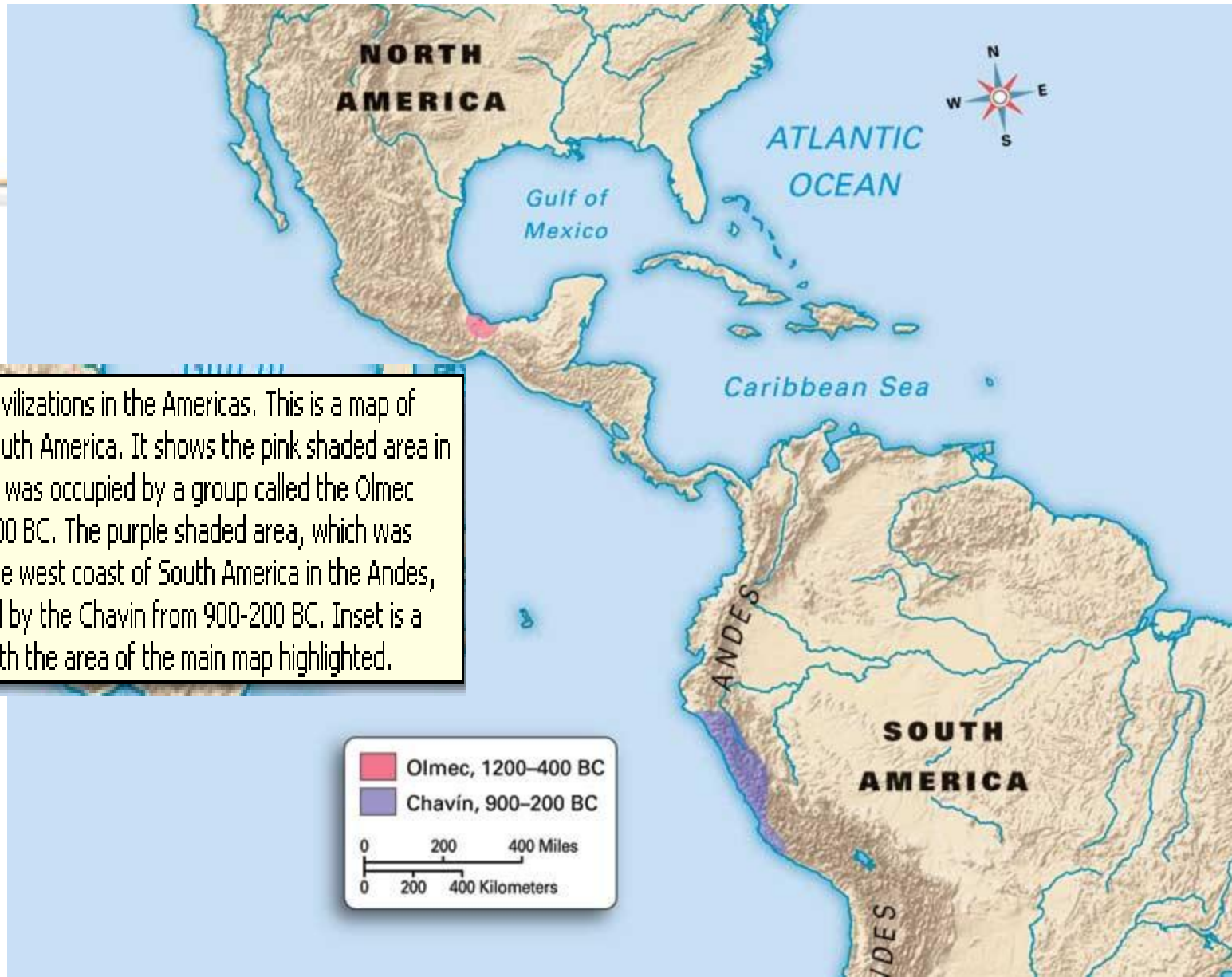
Map: Migration to the Americas. People came to the Americas from Asia. Those that came by land are indicated by red arrows from Asia, crossing the Bering Strait. They came south and branched off into North America and then they headed further south to South America. Some may have traveled along the Pacific coast by sea, indicated by blue arrows from Asia. Inset is a world map with the area of the main map highlighted.



The Earliest People

- The earliest people were hunter-gatherers. These people survived on wild buffalo and other animals, as well as fruits, nuts, and wild grains.
- They moved frequently, depending upon where food was most plentiful. Some people eventually settled along the coastal areas, fishing and planting different types of seeds to see which would grow best.
- This changed early American life.

Early Civilizations in the Americas



Map: Early Civilizations in the Americas. This is a map of North and South America. It shows the pink shaded area in Mesoamerica was occupied by a group called the Olmec from 1200-400 BC. The purple shaded area, which was located on the west coast of South America in the Andes, was occupied by the Chavín from 900-200 BC. Inset is a world map with the area of the main map highlighted.

■ Olmec, 1200–400 BC

■ Chavín, 900–200 BC

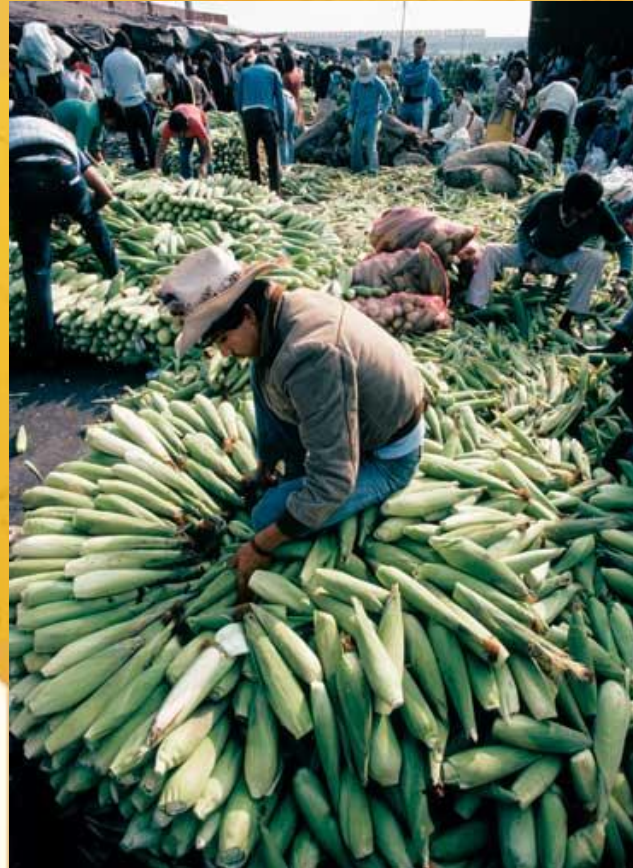
0 200 400 Miles

0 200 400 Kilometers

Farming and Settlement

- **The experiments with seeds led to farming.**
- **This allowed people to live in one place permanently. The first farming settlements were in Mesoamerica.**
- **By 3500 BC Mesoamericans were growing maize, or corn. Later they learned to grow squash and beans.**

Maize



- A man sits on a stack of maize, or corn, in Mexico City.
- In the early Americas, maize was most widely grown among large urban populations.

Population

- **As in other areas of the world, once people settled, towns and cities were created.**
- **The population grew and societies began to develop religion, art, and trade opportunities.**



The Olmec

- **Historians believe that the Olmec were the first Mesoamericans to live in villages.**
- **Some Olmec lived in bigger towns, which were the centers of government and religion.**
- **They built pyramids and huge stone sculptures of their rulers and gods. They developed a large trading network.**

- **Archaeological evidence suggests the Olmec may have created the first written language in the Americas and designed a calendar.**
- **Later civilizations that traded with the Olmec were influenced by Olmec culture. Other civilizations developed in South America around farming. The methods for growing maize spread throughout South and North America.**
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