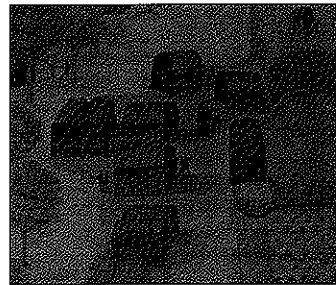


# People in Motion

The Atlantic World to 1590



The First Americans p. 4

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**“Your Magnificence must know that herein they are so inhuman that they outdo every custom (even) of beasts; for they eat all their enemies whom they kill or capture ... and are libidinous beyond measure.”**

PIERO SODERINI,  
attributed to Amerigo Vespucci, 1497

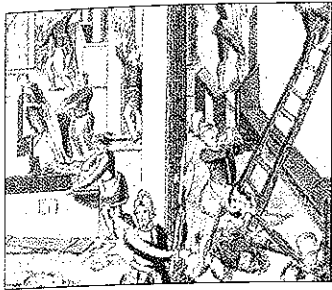
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To the people who had lived in the Americas for millennia, the idea that theirs was a “New World” would have seemed strange. Scientists continue to debate when the first people arrived in the Americas from Asia, but estimates range from between forty thousand and fourteen thousand years ago. In the millennia that followed, the peoples of the Americas fanned out and established a range of societies.

Yet to the Europeans who arrived in the Americas toward the end of the fifteenth century, America was indeed a “brave new world,” as William Shakespeare wrote, inhabited by exotic plants, animals, and peoples. In images and words Europeans portrayed

this extraordinary land in the most fantastic terms. Some accounts spoke of America as an Eden-like earthly paradise inhabited by good-natured, but primitive, peoples. Others emphasized themes like those featured in this engraving, *Amerigo Vespucci Awakens a Sleeping America*. Vespucci, an Italian-Spanish navigator from whose first name the New World came to be called the Americas, gazes upon a naked native woman rising from her hammock. Her nudity symbolizes the wild sexuality Europeans believed characterized the native inhabitants of the Americas. The cannibals behind her, devouring human flesh, represent savagery, a second prominent element of the European vision of the New World. Neither vision of the Americas was accurate, but both would greatly complicate Europeans’ understanding of the American civilizations they encountered, leading to a legacy of violence, exploitation, and conquest.

The European arrival in the Americas was part of a process of exploration and colonization pursued primarily by Portugal, Spain, France, and England. This impulse was driven both by a hunger for riches as well as by profound changes in European society, religion, economics, and politics brought on by the Renaissance and Reformation. Africa was eventually drawn into this vast trading network encompassing the entire Atlantic world. Colonization almost always involved the severe exploitation of native peoples, including dispossession of land and coerced labor. Eventually Europeans turned to the international slave trade and the labor of enslaved Africans to draw the wealth from the mines and fields of the New World.



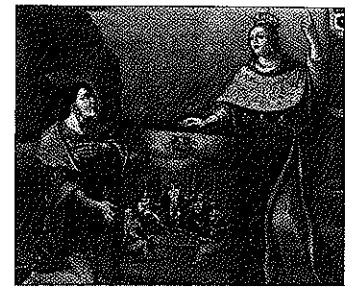
European Civilization in Turmoil p. 10



Columbus and the Columbian Exchange p. 16



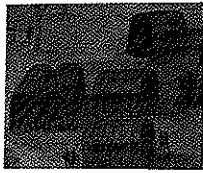
West African Worlds p. 21



European Colonization of the Atlantic World p. 25



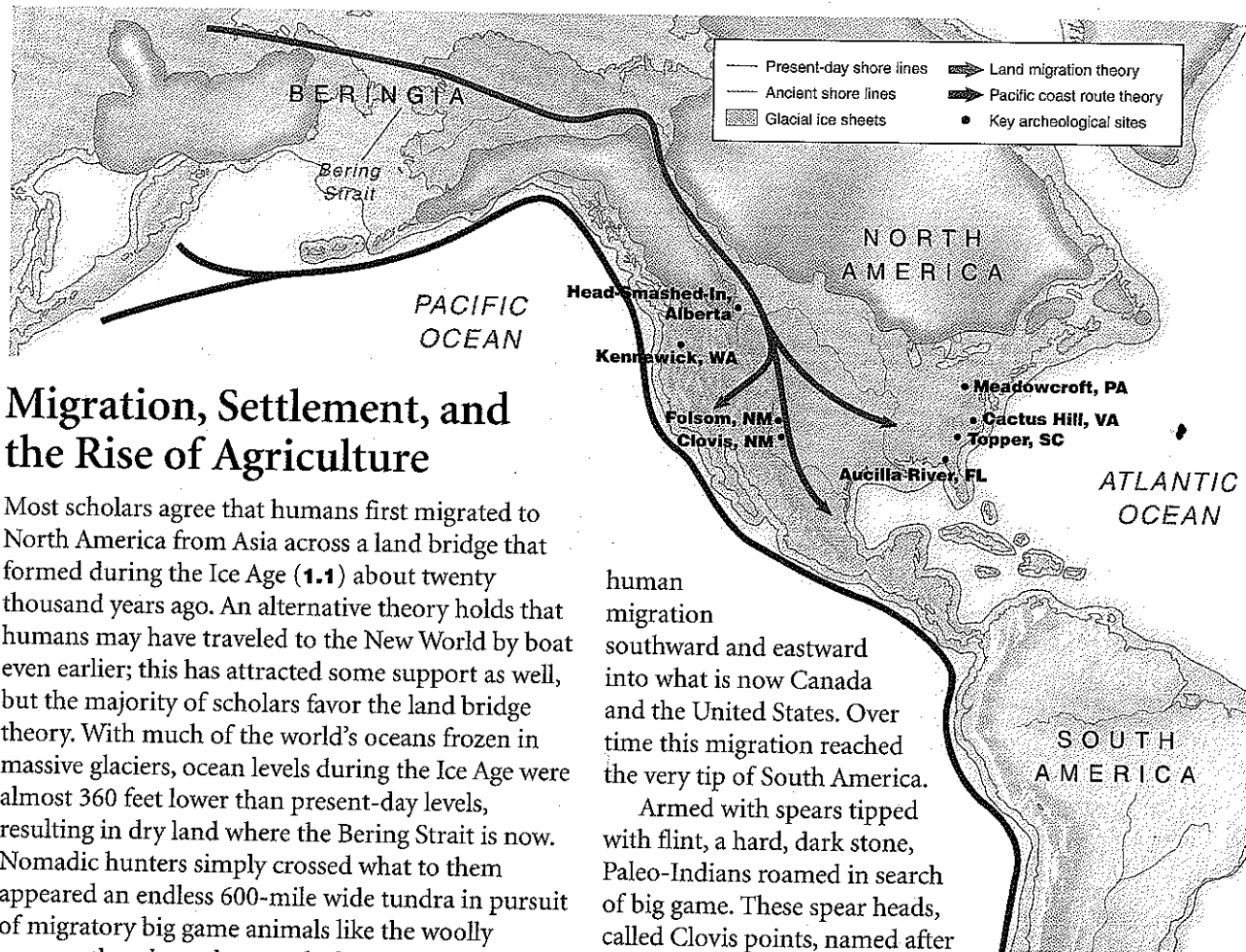
# The First Americans



In one sense America *was* the New World—or at least a newer one in terms of human habitation. The oldest traces of human life have been found in Africa, where the earliest human fossil remains date to more than 100,000 years ago. In contrast the oldest human fossils found in North America are roughly 14,000 years old, far more recent than those found in Europe, Asia, or Australia. The ancient inhabitants of America, **Paleo-Indians**, were an Ice Age people who survived largely by hunting big game and to a lesser extent by collecting edible plants and fishing. Within a few thousand years of their arrival in America from Asia, they had fanned out across the Americas.

## 1.1 Migration from Asia to America

Most scholars believe the first inhabitants of America migrated from Asia across the Bering Strait by way of the land bridge that once connected Asia and North America.



## Migration, Settlement, and the Rise of Agriculture

Most scholars agree that humans first migrated to North America from Asia across a land bridge that formed during the Ice Age (1.1) about twenty thousand years ago. An alternative theory holds that humans may have traveled to the New World by boat even earlier; this has attracted some support as well, but the majority of scholars favor the land bridge theory. With much of the world's oceans frozen in massive glaciers, ocean levels during the Ice Age were almost 360 feet lower than present-day levels, resulting in dry land where the Bering Strait is now. Nomadic hunters simply crossed what to them appeared an endless 600-mile wide tundra in pursuit of migratory big game animals like the woolly mammoths—huge, long-tusked members of the elephant family that provided furs for warm clothing and ample stocks of meat.

Temperatures slowly warmed as the Ice Age passed, causing the great glaciers to melt and sea levels to rise. Sometime between 11,000 and 12,000 BCE, the rising waters covered the Bering Strait land bridge, cutting off migration from Asia. But the recession of the glaciers also opened the way for

human migration southward and eastward into what is now Canada and the United States. Over time this migration reached the very tip of South America.

Armed with spears tipped with flint, a hard, dark stone, Paleo-Indians roamed in search of big game. These spear heads, called Clovis points, named after the New Mexico town in which scientists first discovered them, were one of the Stone Age tools used by the ancient inhabitants of America. Clovis point arrowheads like those shown in (1.2) were lashed to poles to make simple spears. Paleo-Indians also used other simple stone tools such as stone axes and scrapers for hunting and preparing meat, a variety of bone tools such as antler harpoons for fishing, and bone needles for sewing hides. These

ancient peoples generally hunted in small bands of perhaps twenty to thirty people in cooperative kin groups. Hunting parties pursued a wide range of prey, including the woolly mammoth. They also hunted the oversized ancestors of many modern species, such as beaver, bison, caribou, and forerunners of the camel. Hunting, gathering, and other activities among Stone Age peoples were probably divided along gender lines. Men hunted and fished, while women reared children, gathered nuts and berries, and made clothing.

Many of the mammals that Paleo-Indians hunted, including mammoths, forerunners of camels, and primitive horses, eventually became extinct (the Spanish reintroduced modern horses from Europe into the Americas thousands of years later). Three competing scientific theories exist to account for the mass extinctions of large mammals in the Americas. Some scientists believe overhunting led to the demise of the large mammals. Others argue that dramatic climate change—the rising temperatures that accompanied the passing of the Ice Age—killed off certain animals that were unable to adapt to the new warmer environments. The most recent explanation for the mass extinctions focuses on diseases that may have been brought to the New World by humans and the animals that accompanied them, most notably dogs and possibly rats. Whatever the cause of the mass extinctions, the decline in large game eventually led Paleo-Indians to search for new food sources and develop new modes of providing food and other necessities.

Approximately nine thousand years ago, a period known as the **Archaic Era** began. Lasting approximately six thousand years, it ushered in significant social changes that began with increased efforts by native peoples to shape the environment to enhance food production. At first these efforts were quite primitive. Archaic Era Indians, for example, used fire to burn away forest underbrush to provide better habitats for smaller mammals such as deer, which they hunted. They also relied increasingly on gathering nuts and berries and, in some cases,

harvesting shellfish from lakes, streams, or coastal waters. The gendered division of labor found in Stone Age societies persisted into the Archaic Era: women cared for children and did much of the gathering and preparing of food while men hunted and fished.

Some Archaic Era Indians even took the first steps toward agriculture. At first they encouraged the growth of edible plants, such as sunflowers and wild onions, by simply weeding out inedible plants around them. Over time Archaic Era Indians learned how to collect and plant seeds and

developed basic ideas about irrigation. These primitive cultivation techniques led to increased food supplies and diminished reliance on hunting.

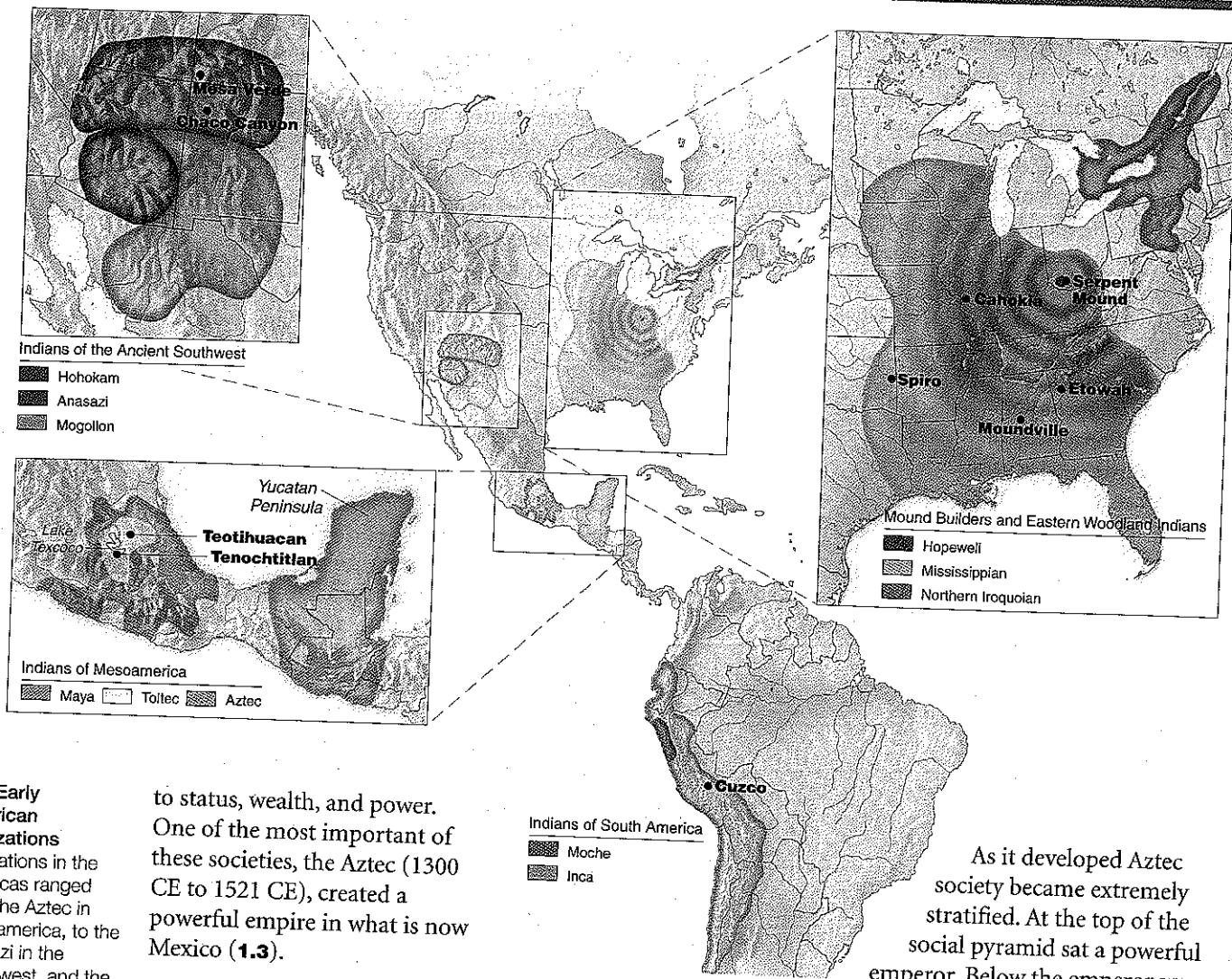
By about 5,000 BCE fixed agricultural settlements appeared in what is now Mexico. There native people learned how to grow maize (corn), squash, and beans, leading to the development of food surpluses and consequently large increases in population. Planting, tending, and defending crops necessitated the

creation of larger permanent settlements, leading to urbanization, the creation of towns and cities. Increased food surpluses allowed the ancient peoples of the Americas to devote more resources to a variety of cultural, artistic, and engineering projects. The combination of agriculture, urbanism, and increasing social complexity set the foundation for the emergence of the first great civilizations of the southern region of North America, an area stretching from modern Mexico to Nicaragua known as Mesoamerica.

The most advanced societies in Mesoamerica included the Olmecs (1500 BCE to about 400 BCE), Maya (peaked in 300 BCE–900 CE), and Toltecs (800 CE–1200 CE). These complex societies developed written languages, systems of mathematics, sophisticated irrigation techniques, and monumental architecture. They also experienced increased social stratification, the division of a society into classes of people ranked from low to high according



**1.2 Clovis Point**  
The range of tools available to Paleo-Indians was limited, but included stone tools, such as arrowheads, axes, scrapers, and bone needles and harpoons. Clovis point arrowheads were attached to spears for hunting.



**1.3 Early American Civilizations**  
 Civilizations in the Americas ranged from the Aztec in Mesoamerica, to the Anasazi in the Southwest, and the Mound builders of the Midwest.

to status, wealth, and power. One of the most important of these societies, the Aztec (1300 CE to 1521 CE), created a powerful empire in what is now Mexico (1.3).

**The Aztec**

The rise of the immensely powerful Aztec Confederacy transformed Mesoamerica. By the time the Spanish arrived in the early sixteenth century, the Aztecs controlled a vast empire of between ten and twenty million people. The Aztec Empire's capital, the great city of Tenochtitlán, was built on an island in Lake Texcoco in 1325 on the site of today's Mexico City. Causeways connected the city to the mainland and an elaborate system of dams controlled the water level of the lake, while aqueducts carried fresh water to the city. A sophisticated system of floating gardens produced food to feed the large urban population, which swelled to almost three hundred thousand over the next two centuries. The central plaza of the Aztec capitol was dominated by pyramid-like temples that towered over the landscape, reaching a height of close to 200 feet.

As it developed Aztec society became extremely stratified. At the top of the social pyramid sat a powerful emperor. Below the emperor was a class of nobles, a priestly class, a warrior class, and an administrative class who collected taxes and tributes. The foundation of this vast pyramid was comprised of merchants, artisans, and farmers. At the very bottom were slaves. Some were Aztec-born and became slaves temporarily as punishment for crime. Prisoners of war also added to the slave population, and human chattel was provided as part of tax debts owed to the Aztec Empire by its many conquered peoples.

Gender roles were sharply defined among the Aztec. Women helped men tend the fields but were primarily responsible for child rearing, cooking, weaving cloth, and shopping in the markets. Although the priests were invariably men, Aztec religion accorded women an important role in the family, including making religious offerings to the gods.

Trade and commerce were crucial to the Aztec economy. In the smaller towns daily markets provided a wide array of goods, but these markets

What role did commerce play in Aztec culture?

were miniscule compared to the great open-air market in Tenochtitlán. Countless foods, textiles, ceramics, and other goods were available for trade, illustrating the richness and complexity of the Aztec economy.

The Aztecs were a war-like society. Conquered peoples were forced to pay tribute in the form of textiles, agricultural products, precious stones, and ceramics, and even provide slaves for human sacrifices. Some estimates put the number of sacrificial victims at ten thousand per year. For the Aztecs human sacrifice was a central religious ritual necessary to appease the gods, especially the gods of rain and war.

## Mound Builders and Pueblo Dwellers

Urban settlements also appeared in several other regions of North America (1.3). One group, the mound-building societies, created monumental earthen burial mounds as part of their religious practices. Some two thousand years ago, the Adena of what is now southern Ohio built The Great Serpent Mound. Still visible, it resembles a giant snake. Excavations of this and other mound-building society sites have unearthed a host of artifacts used for religious purposes and personal adornment. We can also conclude that these inland people acquired the conch shells and shark teeth found at their sites from other cultures, as part of a trade network that extended all the way to the Atlantic coast.

The most complex mound-building society, the Mississippian, developed in the Mississippi Valley (1.3). The central city of this civilization, Cahokia, arose in what is now southern Illinois near St. Louis. Cahokia developed a stratified society with a chief at the top, followed by an elite class and a lower class who provided labor for agriculture and building projects. At its height about a thousand years ago, Cahokia's population ranged somewhere between

twenty thousand and forty thousand. The city was protected by a huge wooden palisade and featured at its center a massive terraced earthwork mound that covered 16 acres and rose over 100 feet above the ground. Capping this mound was a wooden temple

that would have been among the tallest human-made structures in the Americas, exceeded only by the pyramids of Mesoamerica. Several other Mississippian communities developed in present-day Alabama, Georgia, and Oklahoma.

In the American

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**“Begin with the dealers in gold, silver, precious stones, feathers, mantles, and embroidered goods. ... But why waste so many words in recounting what they sell in their great market? If I describe everything in detail I shall never be finished.”**

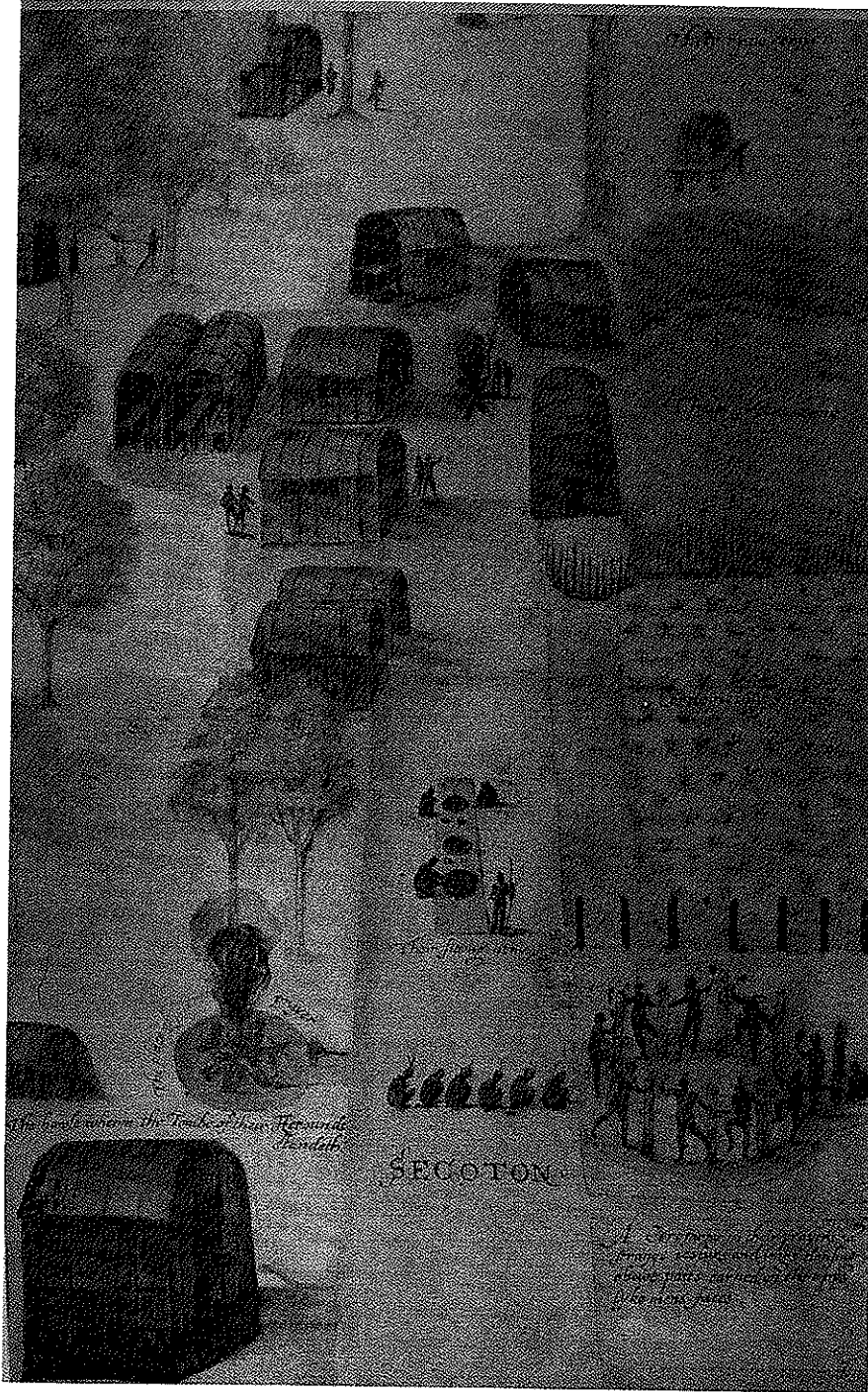
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Spaniard BERNAL DIAZ DEL CASTILLO,  
Spanish historian of the conquest of Mexico, 1568

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Southwest, the Anasazi peoples created another complex civilization marked by a sophisticated urban culture that included a series of towns interconnected by roads (1.3). To survive in the arid climate of the Southwest, the Anasazi developed impressive engineering skills that they used to build their cities and construct complex irrigation systems to supply water for drinking and agriculture. Using adobe (clay) bricks, they built large dwellings later known by their Spanish name, *pueblos*. At the city of Chaco Canyon in what is now northwestern New Mexico, the Anasazi built Pueblo Bonito. This dwelling contained as many as 650 rooms, including forty kivas, or circular rooms intended for religious ceremonies. Until the development of modern apartment buildings in the late nineteenth century, this was the largest human dwelling in world history.

In addition to their architectural and engineering expertise, the Anasazi also developed skills in making pottery and textiles, some of which they used in a vast trade network that stretched hundreds of miles to the south. The most valuable commodity they traded was turquoise, a bright blue-green stone used to make jewelry. In exchange for it the Anasazi acquired prized luxuries such as sea shells from as far away as the Gulf of California to the west and carved images and feathers from Mesoamerica.



**1.4 John White's Painting of Secoton**

John White's painting of the Eastern Woodlands Indian village of Secoton includes images of wigwams, the Algonquian word for "dwelling place." (Europeans sometimes described these dwellings as longhouses.)

## Eastern Woodlands Indian Societies

A very different type of society developed in a region encompassing what is now the Eastern United States and Canada. In contrast to the native societies of the

Southwest and Mesoamerica, Eastern Woodlands societies were neither highly urban nor stratified. Organized into individual tribes, these Eastern Woodlands Indian peoples lived as hunters and gatherers as well as agriculturalists. Most spoke a dialect of one of two major Indian languages, Iroquois and Algonquian.

Instead of living in urban settlements, Eastern Woodland Indians moved with the seasons to take advantage of different food sources, tracking animals in forest regions or fishing in lakes, streams, and rivers. Consequently as this painting, one of the earliest European views of an actual Indian village (1.4), shows, their villages were composed of wood and bark structures that were easily disassembled and reassembled to make seasonal movement possible. Dwelling in small villages rather than settled urban areas, Eastern Woodlands Indians avoided many of the sanitation problems and disease outbreaks that periodically afflicted urbanized societies such as Tenochtitlán and Cahokia.

The complex religious life of Eastern Woodlands Indians embraced the concept of a supreme being, the great Manitou, but also included animism, or the belief that everything in nature possessed a spirit that had to be acknowledged and respected. Rather than seeking to own land and subdue the world around them in the manner of European societies, Eastern Woodlands Indians sought to inhabit the land and to live in dynamic harmony with it. These beliefs, however, did not keep them from actively altering or managing their environments to their advantage. Indians adopted a number of strategies such as controlled burning of brush, a technique that encouraged the growth of habitats for the deer they hunted. This type of strategy contrasted with the approach of

European agriculture, which used clear cutting to make land available for farming.

Compared with the more urban societies of the Southwest and Mesoamerica, the tribal societies of the Eastern seaboard had a relatively egalitarian political and social structure. Apart from the chief and a religious figure known as a shaman, most members of a tribe enjoyed a rough equality. While many indigenous societies in the Americas, particularly the more hierarchical ones of

Mesoamerica, were patrilineal, with inheritance and decision making residing in the male line, some Eastern Woodlands societies were matrilineal, tracing descent and determining inheritance from ancestors on the female side. In some tribes women enjoyed significant roles in tribal governance. When captives were taken in war, for example, the decision to either adopt or execute them was often made by women. Nonetheless Woodland Indians divided labor along gender lines, with women consigned to the fields, planting beans, corn, and squash, while men tracked and hunted animals for food, hides, and pelts.

Eastern Woodland Indians were more communal than individualistic in outlook. Although trade was important and individuals might own some goods,

**“They are not delighted in baubles, but in useful things. ... I have observed that they will not be troubled with superfluous commodities.”**

THOMAS MORTON,  
English lawyer, 1637

accumulating material wealth was not an important goal, as it was in the more stratified Mesoamerican societies. Individual tribes controlled territory, but the notion of owning land as private property was alien to most of these tribal societies.

Warfare among many Eastern Woodlands tribes was intermittent but common. They often fought over control of tribal territory or hunting rights. Warfare typically consisted of skirmishes between rival war parties, a style of combat that usually kept casualties low. Casualties suffered in war, however, might trigger further military actions, or “mourning wars,” intended to replenish the population reduced by fighting. In such a war some prisoners taken captive might be tortured and killed, while others deemed suitable were adopted by the tribe.

The persistent warfare among tribes led to the creation of the powerful Iroquois League of Five Nations, an organization that sought to reduce conflict among its members: the Seneca, Mohawk, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Oneida nations. Women played a significant role in the governance of the

league. Female elders from each of the individual nations selected the men who formed the league’s Great Council, a body that met to discuss matters of common concern, especially war and peace.

## American Societies on the Eve of European Contact

American Indian societies were socially and culturally diverse, ranging from the highly stratified and urban Aztec in Mesoamerica to the relatively egalitarian hunter-farmer Iroquois in the Northeast. The peoples of the Americas spoke a host of different languages, developed a spectrum of distinctive religious traditions, and created different political models to govern themselves.

These societies shared many characteristics among themselves and with peoples in other parts of the world. Like their Asian and European contemporaries, the societies of the Americas were premodern, with limited scientific knowledge and widespread belief in magic. Most people worked the land, struggling to provide the basics needed to support life. Except for the privileged few, life was hard, sometimes brutal, and short.

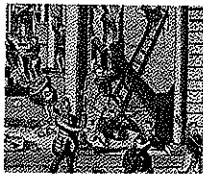
In the Andes Mountains of South America, alpaca and llamas were domesticated, providing wool or food and, in the case of the llama, serving as a pack animal. But in contrast to Africa, Asia, or Europe, in North America and Mesoamerica there were no large domesticated animals, such as horses (extinct after the Paleo-Indian period), cattle, or camels. Without such animals the people of these regions lacked the kind of mobility and power that horses afforded Europeans and Asians and that camels provided for Africans.

American societies on the eve of contact with Europeans were distinctive in another way. While African and Asian societies had developed considerable trade with Europe, the peoples of the Americas had remained largely cut off from contact with other parts of the world for thousands of years. This isolation had prevented their exposure to a host of diseases. By the time of the first contact between Europe and America in the late 1400s, the inhabitants of Asia, Africa, and Europe, long exposed to a common pool of diseases because of their extensive trade contacts, had developed immunity to many virulent pathogens. In their relative isolation, however, the indigenous societies of the Americas were highly susceptible to the microbial invaders introduced by Europeans.

Driven  
by cultural  
territorial  
expansion  
Iroquois



# European Civilization in Turmoil



As the Aztec Empire was reaching the height of its power at the close of the fifteenth century, European society was in the midst of a profound transformation. This period of cultural, intellectual, scientific, and commercial flourishing is known as the Renaissance. The revival of interest in classical languages, including Greek and Latin, not only led to renewed interest in the civilizations of Greece and Rome but also Renaissance thinkers re-examined the early history of the church and its teachings. Reformers drawing on these traditions and reacting to the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church challenged the authority of the church. The rise of a new strain of Christian thought, Protestantism, led to creation of a host of new Protestant religious sects. Amidst this tumult powerful monarchs across Europe forged new nation-states out of the relatively weak decentralized governments of Europe. Modern nations such as England, France, and Spain were born in this era. State building required money, and these monarchs were eager to increase the wealth and power of their nations, a desire that ultimately led to the movement for colonization and exploration of Africa and the Americas.

## The Allure of the East and the Challenge of Islam

The leading European powers' decision to explore, conquer, and exploit lands in the Atlantic world was facilitated by a host of economic, technological, and cultural changes. Contact with Asia led to major changes in taste and patterns of consumption during the early modern period, the time spanning the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries. Europeans looked beyond their borders, particularly to China and the Far East, for sugar and spices to enrich their bland foods and for luxury goods, especially exotic textiles such as silk, to enliven their fashions. These commodities, not native to Europe, had to be obtained from Asia.

All of the overland trade routes to the East plied by Western traders were in territory controlled by Muslims, adherents of **Islam**, a monotheistic faith shaped by the teachings of the prophet Muhammad. Since its emergence in the seventh century Middle East, Muslim influence spread, stretching from Europe to Africa and parts of Asia. Europeans came to resent the economic power of Muslim nations who controlled the lucrative trade routes to the East.

European antagonism toward the Muslim world also sprang from an intense religious animosity. For almost three hundred years, Christian Europe had waged a holy war against Islam, launching Crusades to regain control of Jerusalem, the holy city of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Closer to Europe, Islam's

influence in Europe was most pronounced in the Ottoman Empire, whose power eventually spread throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and Baltic Regions.

## Trade, Commerce, and Urbanization

Among the important changes in Europe during this period were the dramatic growth of the economy and its expansion. The Black Death (1347–1352 CE), an epidemic plague, wiped out about half of Europe's population. In the centuries following the Black Death, Europe's population began to expand slowly, eventually recouping and surpassing the size it had attained before the epidemic. The economies of Europe likewise recovered after the Black Death. At the dawn of the fifteenth century, the Italian city-states, most especially Venice, dominated trade and finance, particularly trade with the East. In part, Venice's dominance resulted from its proximity to the lucrative eastern trade routes. Italy also dominated textile production as Florence emerged as Europe's leading producer of woolen cloth. Slowly the economic center of Europe shifted eastward. By about 1500 Antwerp had become the leading commercial center of Europe but was soon surpassed by Amsterdam.

As trade and commerce expanded, Europeans developed new financial practices and services that facilitated continued economic growth. New

accounting methods helped merchants keep track of inventories and profits and losses, and marine insurance reduced the risks of maritime trade. At the same time a more elaborate banking system helped finance trade. The growth of deposit banking, a system in which merchants could deposit funds with bankers and then draw on written checks instead of presenting cash for payment of goods, greatly bolstered trade and commerce. All these developments made economic ventures more secure and encouraged investment, some of which was directed toward overseas trade and exploration. Together the new commercial and financial practices were key elements in the growth of capitalism. Simply put, **capitalism** is an economic system in which a market economy, geared toward the maximization of profit, determines the prices of goods and services. This new, profit-driven capitalist ethos slowly transformed European life beginning in the fifteenth century.

Capitalism transformed rural Europe as well. European culture had always viewed nature as something to be tamed and exploited (see *Competing Visions: European and Huron Views of Nature*, page 12.) Rather than simply produce food for themselves, the new capitalist ethos led some farmers to seek the maximum yield from their land and plant crops that would fetch a higher price at market. In other cases landowners simply evicted farmers from their lands so that they could graze sheep on the land and produce wool that would be turned into cloth. This latter change in agriculture effectively forced many to leave the countryside and seek new employment in towns and cities.

The combination of migration from the countryside and commercial development led to greater urbanization in Europe. In the two centuries after the Black Death, the population of London increased from 50,000 to more than 200,000. Outside of London, England's changes were less dramatic, but no less significant. Populations in port cities such as Bristol, regional market towns such as Cambridge, and the new manufacturing centers in the cloth trade such as Manchester mushroomed.

Economic growth was also spurred by technological improvements and new inventions. The printing press transformed the way knowledge was produced and disseminated. While a scribe hand-copying a book onto parchment might turn out two or three books a year, the typical print run of a book produced on paper by a printing press was between a hundred and a thousand. Printed books not only made it easier to preserve knowledge already acquired but also facilitated advances in science and geographic exploration by making it easier to collect, organize, and analyze information. Printed texts and engraved images also whet the appetites of Europeans for exploration by making accounts of exotic places such as India and China more accessible. Marco Polo's (1254?–1324) influential text, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, circulated widely in manuscript form for more than a century before a printed edition appeared in 1477.

Printing created an entire new industry for the production, dissemination, and sale of books. The new technology also transformed visual culture, making it possible to create cheap images. The new technique of engraving, shown here (1.5), was a multistep process. On the right a skilled craftsman gouges out an image on a copper plate. In the center the plates are inked and then wiped clean. On the left the final stages in the engraving process are demonstrated, including the giant press used to create the final image.

### 1.5 Copper Engraving

This detailed engraving shows the many steps used to make an engraving, from the artist's hand to the final drying of the printed page.

[Source: Hans Collaert, "Sculptura in Aes". The workshop of an engraver (Sculptura in Aes), plate 19 from "Nova Reperta", Netherlandish, c. 1600. Engraving. After Stradanus (Jan van der Straet), 10 5/8" x 7 7/8". The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art]



# Competing Visions

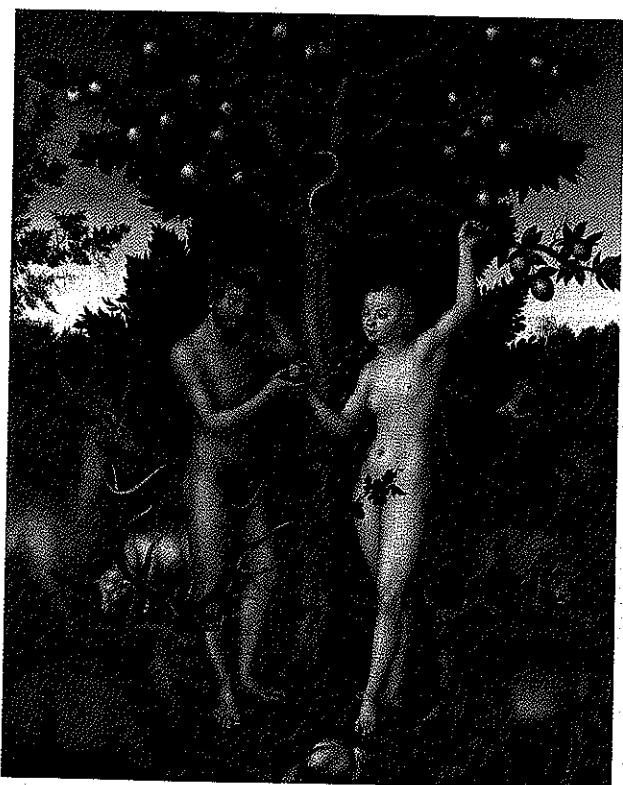
## EUROPEAN AND HURON VIEWS OF NATURE

European capitalism was built on several deeply rooted beliefs in Western culture, including the notion of private property and the belief that nature existed as a resource for man to tame and exploit. The differences between European and Eastern Woodlands Indian culture are clearly visible in the starkly different attitudes of each culture toward the natural world. Following a mandate laid down in the biblical Book of Genesis, Europeans believed that they had a god-given right to rule over nature. The Huron, an Eastern Woodlands Indian tribe from Canada, approached nature in a radically different way that reflected their animist belief that all living things had spiritual power. What ecological consequences flowed from the Huron view of nature? How might this view have shaped the European impression of Indians? What ecological consequences follow from the Western view?

**In Genesis God gave man complete control over nature. According to this view humanity was not simply enjoined to “subdue nature” but to make sure that the “fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth.”**

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

King James Bible, Genesis 1:28 (1611)



Lucas Cranach, *Adam and Eve*

**One of the best sources for understanding Indian views of nature can be found in the writings of Jesuit missionaries, a Catholic order active in the French colonization of Canada. In this selection a Jesuit recounts his exchange with a Huron Indian about the proper treatment of animal bones, which had to be treated with respect to avoid angering the animal spirits that might take offense and make hunting more difficult for the Huron.**

As to the Beaver which has been taken in a trap, it is best to throw its bones into a river. It is remarkable how they gather and collect these bones, and preserve them with so much care, that you would say their game would be lost if they violated their superstitions. As I was laughing at them, and telling them that Beavers do not know what is done with their bones, they answered me, “Thou dost not know how to take Beavers, and thou wishest to talk about it.” Before the Beaver was entirely dead, they told me, its soul comes to make the round of the Cabin of him who has killed it, and looks very carefully to see what is done with its bones; if they are given to the dogs, the other Beavers would be apprised of it and therefore they would make themselves hard to capture. (*Paul le Jeune*, 1633)

*The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610–1791* (1896–1901) 6: 211.



John White, *Indians Fishing*

How does this painting of Adam and Eve reflect European views of nature?

## Renaissance and Reformation

A revival of interest in the culture of Greek and Roman antiquity, focused first in Italy, spread across Europe at the end of the fifteenth century. This rebirth of classical learning, the Renaissance, transformed the way Europeans thought about art, architecture, science, and political philosophy. The most significant change was the shift from theology, the primary subject of scholarly concern throughout the preceding centuries of the Middle Ages, to the classical subjects of the liberal arts, including poetry, history, and philosophy. Much like the ancient Greeks, Renaissance scholars emphasized the human capacity for self-improvement and exalted the beauty of the human body in painting and sculpture. For these scholars, known as **humanists**, humans were the masters of their world and obligated to study it. These Renaissance values, in particular the spirit of exploration, would soon inspire explorers to seek out new lands and trade routes.

In contrast to medieval Europe, with its cloistered monasteries where monks prayed and copied texts for their own libraries, the Renaissance placed a high value on public art, architecture, and philosophical thought aimed at civilizing humanity. Civic humanism, the new philosophy of the Renaissance, encouraged artists and philosophers to participate in public life, especially in cities, which replaced monasteries as the ideal place to encourage learning and glorify God.

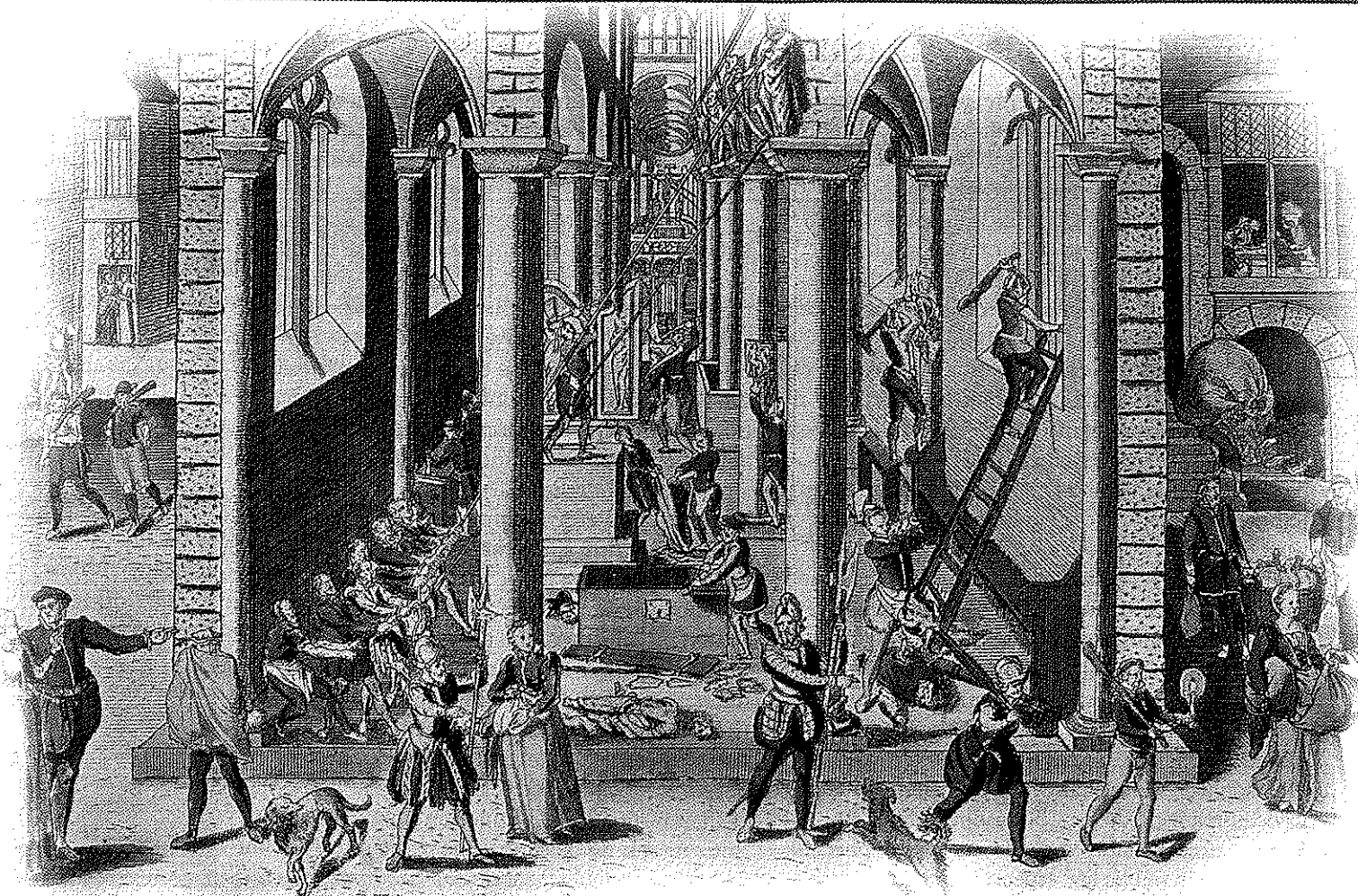
Renaissance ideas inspired several religious figures to call for reforms in the Roman Catholic Church. The most intense criticism was aimed at the sale of indulgences. In essence money donated to the Church could buy forgiveness for sin. In 1517 a young German monk named Martin Luther attacked the sale of indulgences and other key elements of Catholic doctrine and practice. Luther eventually developed a new theological alternative to Catholicism. Rejecting the Catholic Church's focus on good works as the key to achieving salvation, Luther argued that only faith could bring salvation. Luther also argued that ordinary people did not need to depend on the clergy to gain access to God's word; they could and should read the Bible themselves. Luther translated the Bible to German, and the newly invented printing press made it widely accessible. Anyone who could read could now receive the word of God in his or her own home. Luther championed the idea of the priesthood of all true believers—the notion that everyone could experience salvation directly. Priests would continue

to preach the word of God, but Luther would dispense with the Catholic rituals of confession, penance, and absolution. Luther also felt there was no need for monasticism. The place for the committed Christian was in this world, not cloistered away in a monastery.

In addition to his critique of church doctrine, Luther urged Christian monarchs to take up the cause of religious reform and reject the authority of the Pope. His attack on the worldly power of the Roman Catholic Church appealed to some European rulers eager to strengthen their power and weaken the Pope's. Luther was summarily excommunicated from the Church, but his calls for reform had wide appeal. His supporters, known as Protestants, began a movement for religious reform that would be known as the **Reformation**.

Protestantism spread across Europe and found an especially receptive home in Switzerland. In Geneva, a French-speaking city in Switzerland, the French Protestant reformer John Calvin (1509–1564) articulated a new variant of Protestantism with a different theological emphasis from Luther's version. Calvin's theology stressed the doctrine of predestination, the notion that God had destined some people to salvation and some to damnation prior to their birth. Another important innovation in his thinking was his belief that the true church was not embodied in any official church organization, including the Roman Catholic Church, but rather in a group of the "elect," or those chosen by God for salvation. According to this ideal the elect could continue to act as a reformed church even if they had no physical place of worship or formal ministry to serve their spiritual needs. With the Bible and personal faith, argued Calvin, Protestants could constitute a true church wherever they lived, including, eventually, a wilderness like America.

Calvinists in Switzerland took their critique of Catholic worship a step further than Lutherans, literally becoming iconoclasts, or image breakers. They took the biblical injunction to avoid "graven," or carved images literally and set about to purify churches from such unholy Catholic trappings. Decrying them as sacrilegious and a form of idolatry, Calvinists smashed the stained glass windows and religious carvings that adorned many churches. One Catholic nun, described a Protestant rampage in Geneva in these terms: "Like enraged wolves, they destroyed those fine images with great axes, and hammers, especially going after the blessed crucifix, and the image of Our Lady [Mary]." This contemporary image of one such rampage shows



### 1.6 Protestants Stripping a Church of Images

This image literally depicts Calvinist iconoclasm, the destruction of "graven" images such as religious statues and stained glass windows.

Protestants pulling down sculptures and smashing stained glass windows (1.6). Once purged of all such Catholic images, religious worship, Calvinists believed, could focus on the words of the Bible alone.

## New Monarchs and the Rise of the Nation-State

By the end of the fifteenth century, the kingdoms of France, England, and Spain had evolved into sovereign nation-states. Powerful monarchs consolidated their power, eliminated rivals to their thrones, created administrative bureaucracies to rule, and built larger, more effective armies. Paying for these required huge sums of money, and if they could not raise what they needed at home, some monarchs began to look abroad. Territorial expansion and exploration of new regions, they reasoned, would increase both trade and revenues.

In England Henry VII established the House of Tudor as the ruling family of England. His son, Henry VIII, solidified and expanded the power of the monarchy, incorporating Wales in 1536 and soon after proclaiming himself king of Ireland and Scotland. Henry's VIII most important accomplishment as King of England was his break with Rome when the Pope refused to dissolve his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. After failing to obtain a divorce, Henry declared himself head of his own independent English church. He rejected the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, confiscated all the church's lands and properties in his realm, and then sold them for a handsome profit. The intensity of Henry's anti-Catholic feeling (and his particular hostility to the Pope) is evident in this portrait painted by an unknown artist in 1570 (1.7). Henry VIII lies in bed, pointing to his future successor Edward VI. The Pope collapses in the foreground and two monks flee the scene, while a monastery is sacked in the background.

Perhaps the most ambitious of the new monarchies was Spain's, created by the marriage

of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile. Ferdinand and Isabella followed a strategy common to all the new monarchs: They reduced the power of the nobility and strengthened their own control over the military. They also boosted crown revenue by raising taxes and making tax collection more efficient.

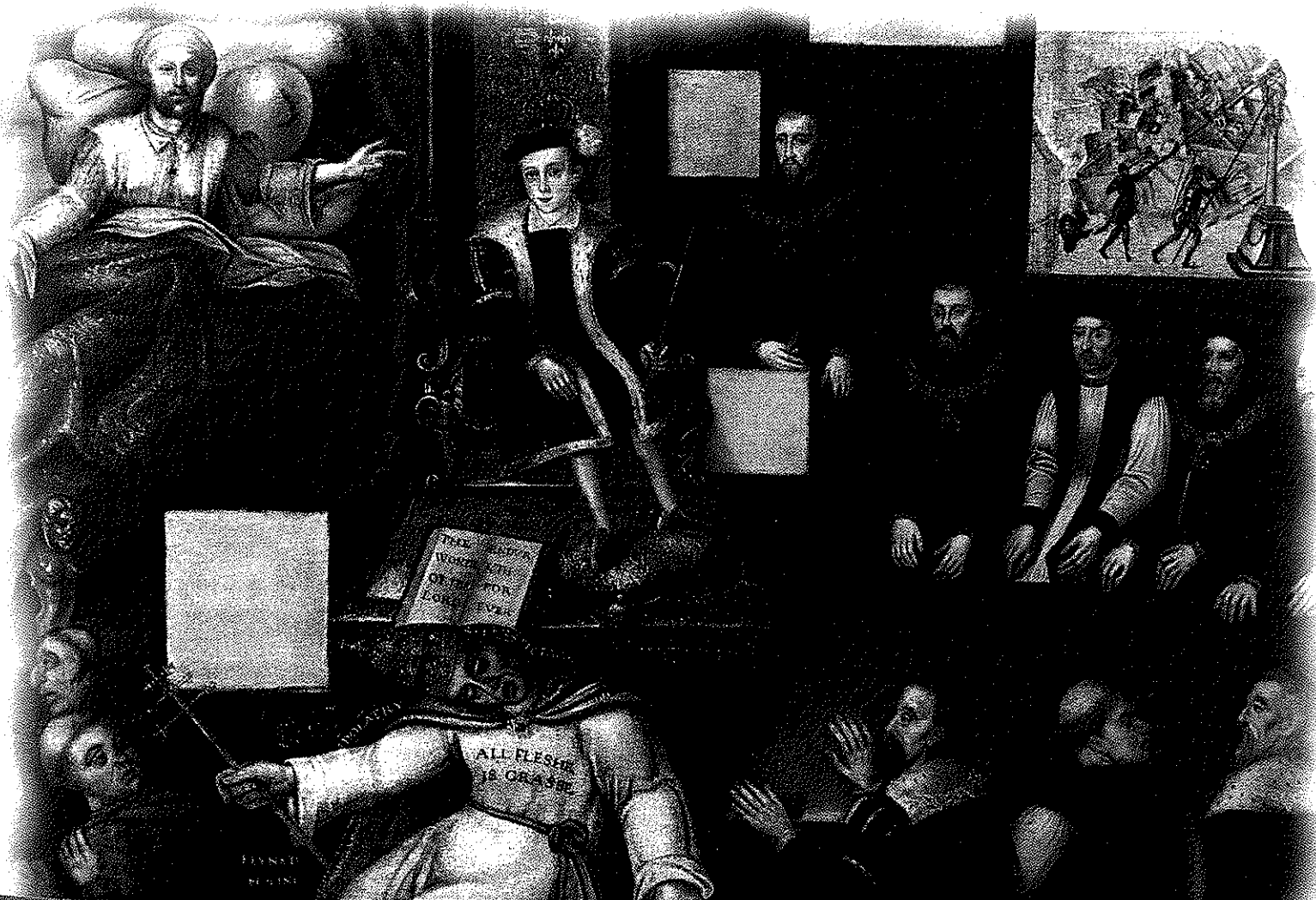
As part of their effort to transform Spain into a world power, Ferdinand and Isabella sought to strengthen the power of the Roman Catholic Church and ally its interests with the state. In 1481 the Spanish monarchy sought the Pope's approval for an office of **Spanish Inquisition**, a religious tribunal charged with finding and punishing heresy, or unorthodox beliefs among Christians, and for eliminating non-Christians, most notably Muslims and Jews, from Spain. Thousands of suspected

heretics were arrested, tortured, and imprisoned. Hundreds were executed. Eventually in 1492 the government ordered all Jews, except those who converted to Christianity, expelled from Spain. That same year Ferdinand and Isabella achieved another goal in their effort to strengthen Church and state by conquering Granada in what is now southern Spain, the last remaining stronghold of Islamic culture within Spain.

The expulsion of the Moors, the Muslim people of Granada, in 1492 was the final phase of this *reconquista* ("re-conquest"). Spain's holy war united state and Church in a single purpose. This partnership between a militant clergy and an equally aggressive military would serve Spain well when its attention moved beyond its European borders to the wider Atlantic world.

### 1.7 Henry VIII and Edward the VI against the Pope

In this unfinished painting England's Henry VIII passes on his authority to Edward VI, including his role as head of the new Church of England. In the upper right English Protestant iconoclasts attack a monastery. At the bottom of the image the Pope collapses and monks flee from the "worde of the Lorde."



How was the English Reformation different than the Continental Reformation?

# Columbus and the Columbian Exchange



Buoyed by the conquest of Granada in 1492, Queen Isabella agreed to outfit a small expedition to find a quicker route to Asia. The expedition's leader, Italian sailor Christopher Columbus, was an experienced mariner who had worked in the Portuguese seagoing trade to Africa and the Atlantic islands. Familiar with Marco Polo's written accounts of China, Columbus believed he could find a faster and more direct route to Asia than traveling around the tip of Africa by simply crossing the Atlantic. He first asked the King of Portugal to fund the voyage, but the king's advisors warned Columbus that he had greatly underestimated the circumference of the Earth and would certainly perish long before he reached Asia. Undeterred Columbus turned to Queen Isabella, who consented.

## Columbus Encounters the "Indians"

After sailing for thirty-three days, Columbus reached the Caribbean islands, most likely the Bahamas. Mistakenly convinced that he had arrived in India, he called the native peoples "Indians." Columbus claimed all the lands he visited for Spain. Concluding that the native people were savages, he believed that they were "fit to be ordered about, and made to work, plant, and do everything else that may be needed, and build towns and be taught our customs." Returning

earlier, establishing small fishing outposts in what is now Newfoundland, Canada. Nevertheless Columbus's voyage to the Americas brought the two worlds together in ways that earlier Viking ventures had not. Europe's printing presses would make accounts of his voyage widely available, providing a model for later explorers, conquerors, and settlers. Columbus's voyage also began one of the most complex ecological changes in modern history. The worlds on both sides of the Atlantic were suddenly reconnected, a development that would have far-reaching biological consequences for Europe, Africa, and America.

Modern scholars have described the biological encounter between the two sides of the Atlantic as the **Columbian Exchange**, a name that acknowledges the crucial role that Columbus played in instigating this transformation. This

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**"As soon as I arrived in the Indies, in the first island which I found, I took by force some of them, in order that they might learn and give me information."**

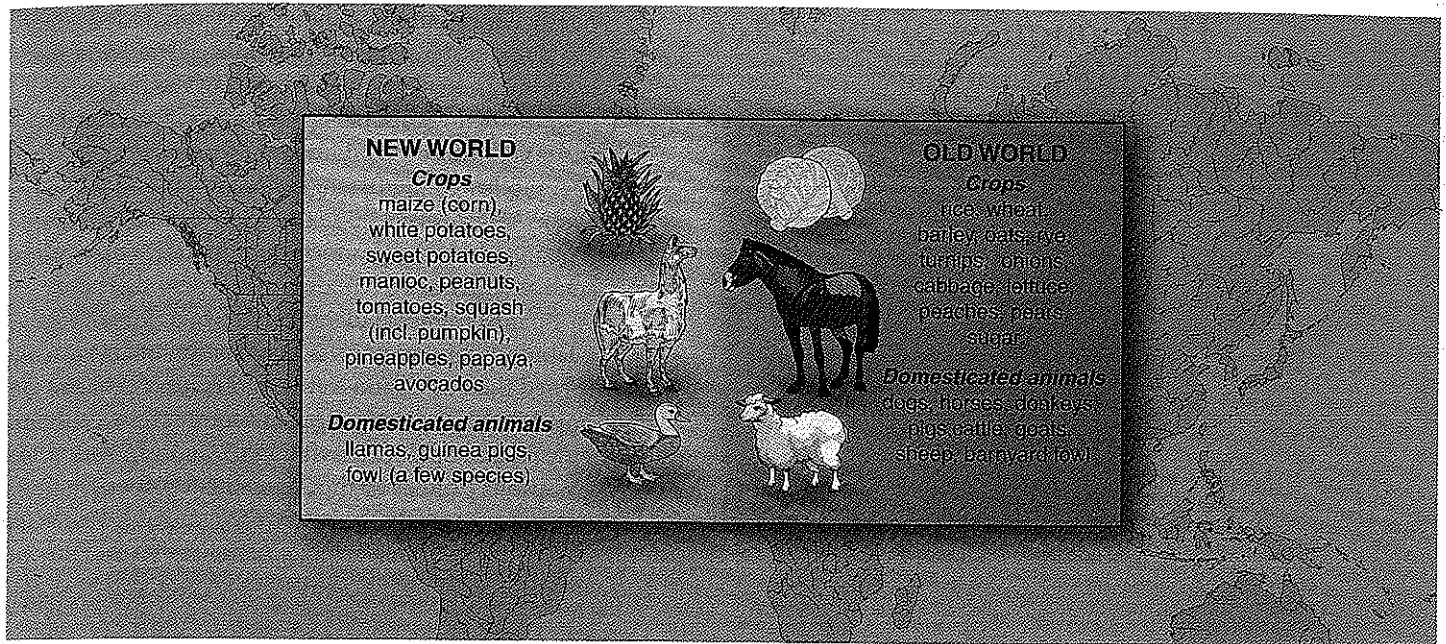
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, 1493

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to Spain with captive Indians, exotic plants, and some gold, Columbus was greeted as a hero and secured funding for additional voyages of exploration.

Columbus was not the first European to cross the Atlantic, nor was he the first to create a small European outpost in America. The Vikings had sailed from Iceland almost four hundred years

exchange involved a range of foods, animals, and diseases (1.8). Moving from the Americas to Europe by way of Columbus and the Europeans who followed him were a host of foods now closely identified with European cuisine. Before Columbus Italian cuisine had no tomatoes, Irish food no potatoes, and Switzerland no chocolate. Moving



### 1.8 Columbian Exchange

This chart shows the most important crops and animals involved in the Columbian exchange. A host of pathogens, mostly of Old World origin, were also part of the Columbian Exchange.

in the other direction were animals, including the horse, long extinct in the Americas but reintroduced by the Spanish.

Diseases crossed the Atlantic as well. Europeans brought back a plague in the form of the sexually transmitted disease syphilis, which sailors probably first picked up in the Caribbean islands. Far more devastating were the diseases like smallpox brought to the New World. These diseases wreaked havoc on Indian societies, killing huge numbers of men, women, and children.

## European Technology in the Era of the Columbian Exchange

Columbus and the Europeans who led the exploration of the Atlantic world benefited from a number of technological changes developed in Europe in the fifteenth century. Improvements in map making and the introduction of navigational devices that allowed mariners to calculate latitude more accurately aided exploration, for example. Europeans borrowed technology from the Islamic

world and Asia to improve their ships. The Portuguese also made important strides in shipbuilding with the caravel, a vessel whose lateen (triangular) sails were better suited to catching wind than were those of traditional European ships.

Europeans enjoyed a clear technological and military advantage over the peoples of America, a disparity that would profoundly affect European interactions with the Aztec, and later with Eastern Woodlands Indian peoples. Foremost were the metallurgical techniques that allowed Europeans to forge iron weapons that were stronger than those of the Aztec. The domestication and breeding of horses allowed Europeans to support their armies by swift-moving cavalry. Through trade with China, Europeans had learned about gunpowder and developed powerful cannons and firearms such as the arquebus, a forerunner of the musket and rifle. Among the inventions depicted in this engraving, "Nova Reperta," ("New Discoveries") (1584), by artist Johannes Stradanus, are the compass, the mechanical clock, cannons and gun powder, and saddle with stirrups (1.9).

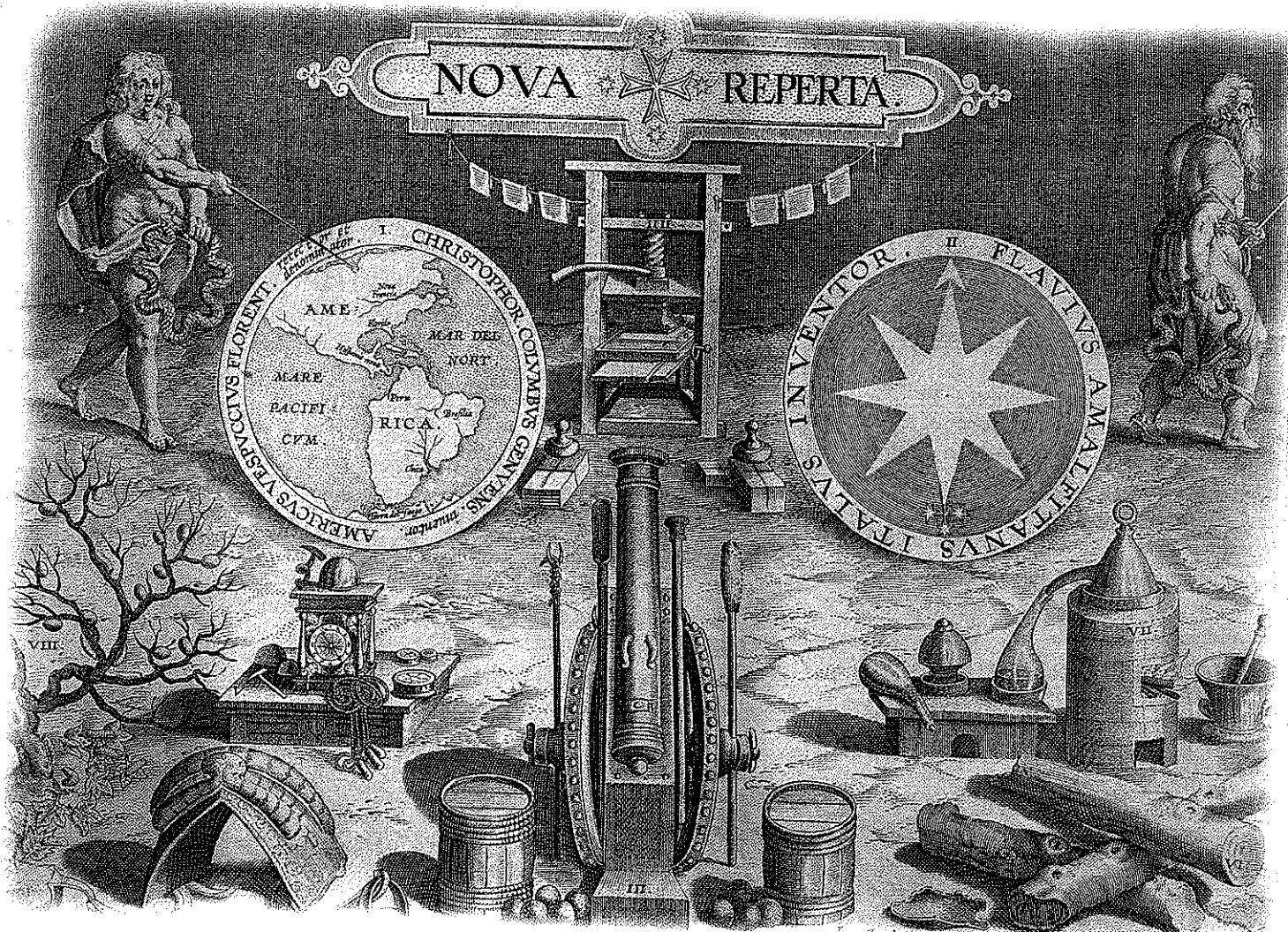


## The Conquest of the Aztec and Inca Empires

Columbus's successful voyage in 1492 was followed by waves of Spanish explorers and conquerors (*conquistadores* in Spanish), who soon seized control of the islands of the Caribbean. Following a pattern first established by the Portuguese on their Atlantic islands, the Spanish took the land from the Indian inhabitants, the Taino, Caribs, and Arawaks, and established colonies. Like the Portuguese they subjugated the Indians, forcing them to pan for gold or perform agricultural work such as planting, harvesting, and processing sugar. The harsh labor regime and the deadly diseases the Spanish brought

nearly wiped out these indigenous populations. On the island of Hispaniola (present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic), 95 percent of the native peoples died within twenty-five years. Faced with the loss of this indigenous labor force, the Spanish again followed the Portuguese example and turned to the African slave trade to supply the labor they demanded for the production of lucrative cash crops such as sugar.

Spanish *conquistadores*, lured by rumors of a fabulous empire possessing great wealth, eventually turned their attention to the mainland of what is now Mexico. In 1519, eager to acquire this wealth for himself and Spain, Hernán Cortés, a brash and ambitious protégé of the Spanish governor of



### 1.9 Nova Reperta

In this drawing of "new discoveries," the artist links the new scientific and technological discoveries with the exploration of the "New World." A printing press stands between a map of the Americas and a compass. The image is anchored by a cannon and casks of gunpowder, symbolic of European military technology.

What technological advances facilitated European expansionism?

Hispaniola, embarked on an expedition to find the famed capital of the Aztec Empire and conquer it. Landing on Mexico's southeast coast with over five hundred men and sixteen horses, he burned his ships, depriving his men of any opportunity to retreat. He forced his men to push forward to conquest or die in the attempt.

Although vastly outnumbered by the Aztecs, Cortés and his men held a number of military advantages. First they possessed horses, firearms, and steel weapons. Second they quickly gained allies among the peoples conquered by the Aztecs. After years of subjugation in which they were forced to provide the Aztecs with victims for human sacrifice, these exploited peoples now willingly sided with the Spanish (see *Images as History: Blood of the Gods: Aztec Human Sacrifice*, page 20). Finally the Spanish unknowingly carried with them a host of diseases, in particular the deadly smallpox virus, which infected and killed vast numbers of Aztecs. By 1521, just two years after his arrival, Cortés had subdued the once mighty Aztec Empire. A decade later a force of Spanish conquistadors led by Francisco Pizarro toppled a similarly powerful Inca empire in present-day Peru.

To many people of the Americas, who had never seen anything like firearms before, the Spanish *did* seem to have god-like power. The power of European firearms left an indelible impression on South American cultures. Created centuries after European contact, this Peruvian painting (1.10) shows an angel carrying an arquebus, the type of firearm used by the Spanish during their conquest of Central and South America.



**1.10 Heavenly Militia**

This South American painting done hundreds of years after the conquest shows an angel with an arquebus, a precursor of the modern rifle. The image shows the awesome power that Spanish weaponry had on the consciousness of the conquered peoples of Central and South America.

“[A]n epidemic broke out, a sickness of pustules. ...  
The disease brought great desolation; a great many died of it. ...  
The Mexica warriors were greatly weakened by it.”

BERNRDINO DE SAHAGÚN 1519

(Account of the defeat of the Aztecs published 1545)

# Images as History

## BLOOD OF THE GODS: AZTEC HUMAN SACRIFICE

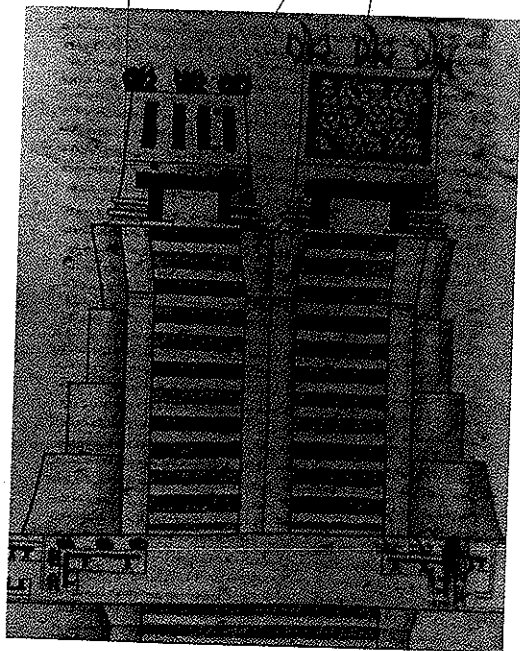
Aztec human sacrifice was a gruesome but highly public spectacle. Indeed the monumental pyramids that dominated the central Temple plaza of Tenochtitlán and other Aztec cities were designed to showcase this grisly ritual. The image here of the twin temples from the city of Texcoco, very similar in style to the main temples in Tenochtitlán, was drawn after the Spanish conquest of Mexico. Aztec artists' drawings such as this one provide important sources for understanding Aztec architecture and culture. The twin temples atop the pyramid were devoted to the rain god Tlaloc and the war god Huitzilopochtli. In front of the two temples at the top of the pyramid are the stone platforms used for human sacrifice. In the most elaborate version of this ghastly ritual, the sacrificial

victim was held down by four priests while another priest plunged a ceremonial dagger into his chest and extracted a beating heart, which was offered up to the gods.

Lurid images of human sacrifice have become inextricably linked with Aztec civilization. Their legacy as a brutal people was cultivated, in fact, by their Spanish conquerors who used Aztec human sacrifice as a justification for conquering and converting the Aztec to Christianity. Theodore de Bry's engraving of Aztec human sacrifice pictured here was widely reprinted in Europe and helped spread the image of Aztec barbarism. The artist's imaginary version of a ritual sacrifice atop a pyramid bears only slight resemblance to the reality. The pyramid in de Bry's picture looks more like a European tower than a Mesoamerican structure. The two temples of the rain god and war god are entirely fanciful. Nevertheless the image effectively conveyed the Spanish colonizers' view of Aztec culture as barbaric.

Stone platforms were used during the rituals of human sacrifice.

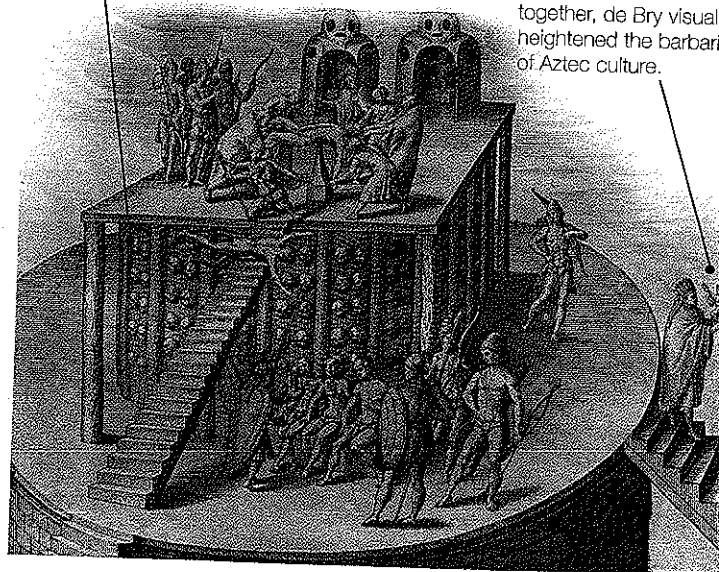
The roof of the rain god's temple on the left was painted with four bands, symbols of rain, while the war god's shrine on the right is composed of a skull rack featuring 240 carved skull images.



Aztec Pyramid and Skull Rack

The skull rack was specifically associated with the temple of the war god, not the rain god.

Aztec sacrifice did include children and infants, but this horrifying practice was separate from the central scene depicted in which an adult was sacrificed to the god of war. By graphically mingling the two scenes together, de Bry visually heightened the barbarism of Aztec culture.



de Bry Engraving of Aztec Sacrifice

Why did the Spanish stress the cruelty and barbarism of Aztec culture?

# West African Worlds



Africa, the world's second largest continent in terms of land mass, is home to some of the most ancient civilizations in the world. The range of societies in Africa in the sixteenth century rivaled those of the Americas in social complexity and cultural and religious diversity. Africa featured class-stratified urban civilizations alongside more simple egalitarian societies. Monotheistic faiths, including Christianity and Islam, flourished in parts of Africa, as did religions closer in principle to the animist beliefs of Eastern Woodlands Indians.

The North African states bordering on the Mediterranean had been trading with Europe since the days of the founding of the great ancient port city of Carthage (814 BCE). Africans possessed many commodities sought by Europeans, including salt, gold, ivory, and exotic woods. But the development of a direct sea route from Europe to West Africa in the fifteenth century greatly increased trade and contact between Europeans and Africans. The most profound consequence of the sea routes to West Africa was the development of the international slave trade, a process that changed virtually every society in the Atlantic world.

## West African Societies, Islam, and Trade

The civilizations of Africa south of the Saharan Desert, including those with Atlantic ports, were socially and culturally diverse. The powerful Songhai Empire (1370–1591) extended from the Atlantic inward to the Sudan. Primarily agricultural the empire included several urban centers and a highly organized military and administrative state bureaucracy. In the great Songhai city of Timbuktu, an Islamic university rivaled many European centers of learning.

Other peoples, such as the Igbos of West Africa, lived in smaller, highly autonomous villages. These simpler, more egalitarian societies were organized mainly around kinship, more like America's Eastern Woodlands Indians than the empires of Mesoamerica or the rising nation-states of Europe. Local rulers consulted with a council of elders before making decisions affecting the community. Societies such as the Igbos were matrilineal, while other African societies traced descent and organized inheritance through the paternal line.

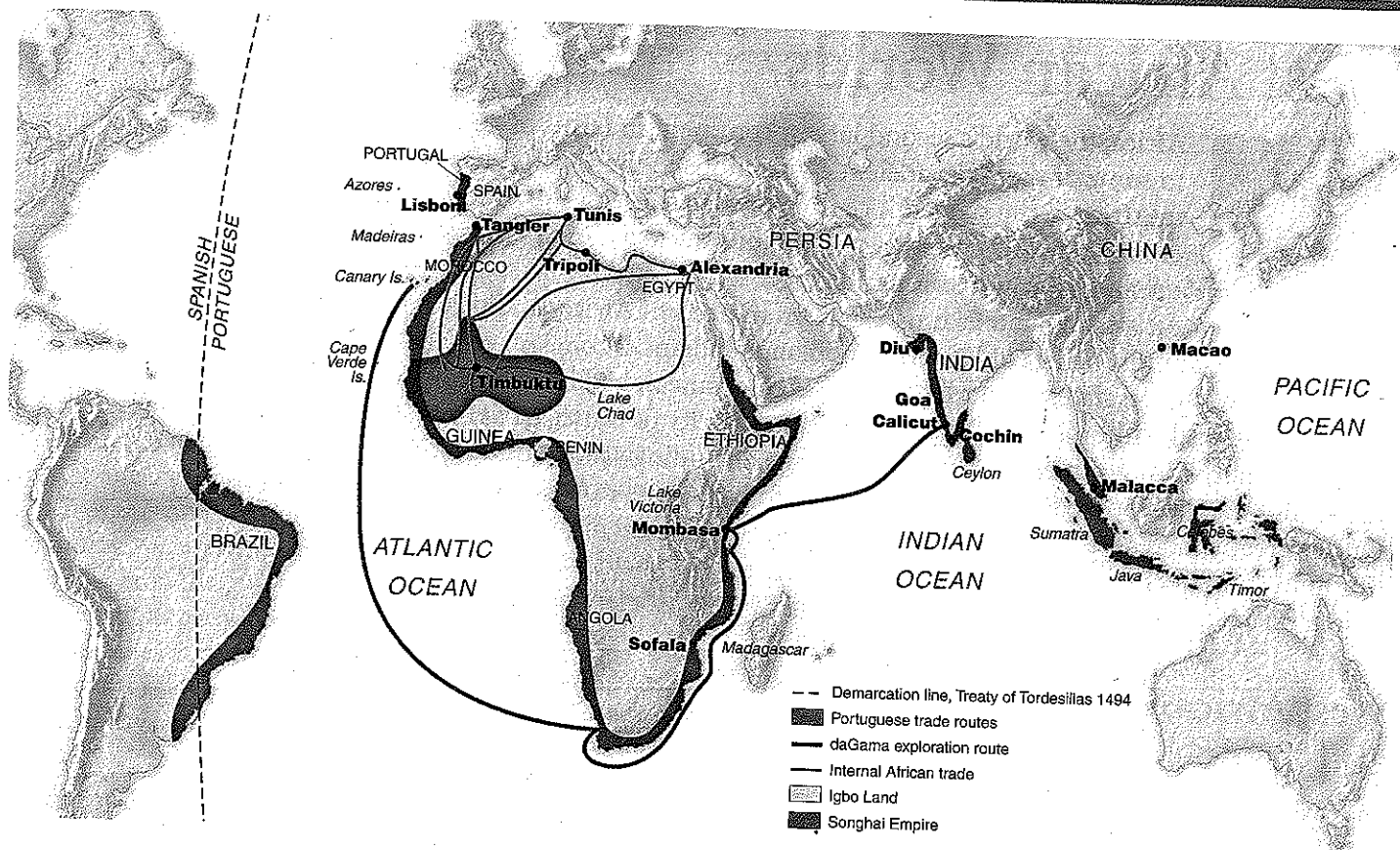
Before the seventh century most societies of West Africa practiced animist religions. These polytheistic faiths considered certain aspects of nature, such as the sun, wind, and animals, to be gods and spirits. Ancestor worship also played a prominent role in many West African religious traditions. But beginning in the mid-seventh century, the faith of Islam, first established in Arabia by Muhammad in

610 CE, began spreading via trade routes through northern, western, and eastern Africa. Over the centuries Islam became the dominant religion in these areas, especially in trading centers.

Trade played a key role in the economic life of both North and West Africa. Goods traded along these routes including salt, ivory, and precious metals. While salt was an essential ingredient for cooking and preserving food, the other items were sought after by artists and artisans who fashioned them into luxury goods such as jewelry. Before the end of the fifteenth century, these goods moved along an extensive network of caravan routes linking West Africa to the North African port cities of Tangier, Tunis, Tripoli, and Alexandria. But Portuguese exploration of the African coast in the late 1400s soon led to the development of direct trade between Europeans and Africans (1.11).

## The Portuguese-African Connection

Portugal took the lead in exploring the possibility of an Atlantic route to Asia, which provided Europe with spices and exotic fabrics such as silk. Prince Henry the Navigator (1394–1460), a member of the Portuguese royal family, used his wealth and power to encourage exploration of the West African coast. Even after his death Portugal continued to explore the West African coast, leading to Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama's successful voyage (1497–1499) around the Horn of Africa and



### 1.11 Internal African Trade Routes and Portuguese Trade with Africa

West African kingdoms were linked by several different inland trade routes to North Africa and the Mediterranean. The Portuguese traded with the Atlantic islands and the west coast of Africa.

subsequent arrival at the southwest coast of India (1.11). Portuguese traders established a lucrative trade with India and began to explore trading possibilities with Africa, seeking such prized goods as ivory and gold. After 1470 Portuguese trade with West Africa increased, and within a decade the Portuguese had established forts along the African coasts to facilitate further trading opportunities.

At approximately the same time that the Portuguese were exploring the African coast, they were embarking on an ambitious but ruthless plan of conquest and colonization in the Atlantic island groups of the Madeiras, Azores, Cape Verde, and the Canaries (1.11). By the 1450s these Atlantic outposts had been converted into sugar-producing plantation economies. The Portuguese conquered and enslaved the indigenous populations of the Canary Islands, the Guanche—a North African people who had settled the islands thousands of years earlier. The semitropical climate of the Canaries was ideal for sugar cultivation, and the Portuguese forced the Guanche to labor for them on large sugar plantations. The king of Portugal assured the Pope that enslavement was entirely justified because the Guanche were, in his words, “infidels and savages.”

The Portuguese experience on the Canaries foreshadowed European interactions with the peoples of the Americas.

The Portuguese soon encountered an unexpected problem in conquering and enslaving the indigenous population of the Canaries. With no previous exposure to the diseases carried by the Portuguese, thousands of Guanche people became ill and died. Unable to rely on an indigenous source of labor, the Portuguese turned to Africa for slaves to provide the back-breaking labor they demanded for cultivating, harvesting, and processing sugar.

## African Slavery

Slavery was widely practiced in Africa long before the arrival of the Portuguese. Rival tribes usually took slaves as spoils of war; but some prisoners attained privileged positions as petty officials, military leaders, and, in rare cases, political advisors to rulers. In Africa slavery was not always a permanent or hereditary condition, and slaves were sometimes absorbed into the societies that held them.

“[T]hey kidnap even noblemen, and the sons of noblemen, and our relatives, and take them to be sold to the white men who are in our Kingdoms ... and as soon as they are taken ... they are immediately ironed and branded with fire.”

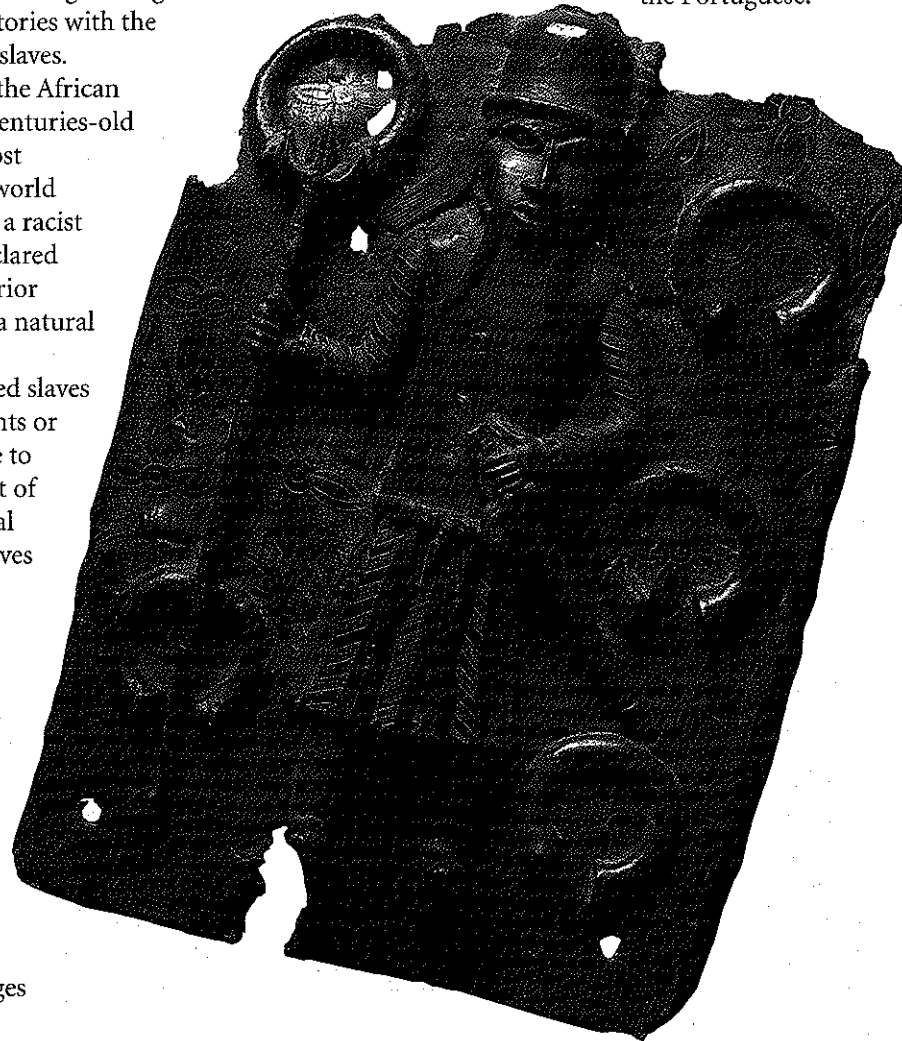
NZINGA MBEMBA (King Alfonso of the Kongo, Central Africa), 1526

Initially controlled by Islamic traders, the slave trade after 1600 came increasingly under European domination. The ever-rising demand for labor in the Americas, fueled by extraordinary profits from slave-based sugar plantations, prompted rival European powers to compete with one another for a share of this lucrative trade. As the value of slaves increased, Africans began organizing raiding parties into neighboring territories with the express purpose of obtaining slaves.

European involvement in the African slave trade transformed this centuries-old institution into one of the most exploitative labor systems in world history. Europeans developed a racist conception of slavery that declared people of dark skin to be inferior beings for whom slavery was a natural and proper condition. As a consequence Europeans treated slaves as property with few legal rights or protections. Masters were free to extract the maximum amount of labor from them with minimal regard for their humanity. Slaves taken by Europeans to the Americas were often worked literally to death in the sugar fields. Those who survived found that slavery in the New World was a permanent and hereditary condition. They and their descendants faced a lifetime of slavery with no hope of ever obtaining freedom.

Some African nations managed to fend off the ravages

of the slave trade. Benin, a well-organized nation-state ruled by a powerful monarch, traded slaves captured during war to the Portuguese in the fifteenth century but gradually withdrew from the slave trade (see *Choices and Consequences: Benin, Portugal, and the International Slave Trade*, page 24). Benin continued to trade with the Portuguese on its own terms. Among the goods sought by the Portuguese were pepper and ivory; the Benin sought bronze. Among the most visually impressive uses of this bronze were the finely crafted panels created for the walls of the royal palace. In the panel pictured here (1.12), a Portuguese soldier with a pike is surrounded by five “manilas,” the bronze bars that were among the most important trade goods brought by the Portuguese.



**1.12 Benin Bronze Panel**  
The artists of Benin were widely admired for their finely crafted bronze plaques and sculptures which decorated the walls of the royal palace. The panel depicts a Portuguese soldier and the bronze bars used as a common trade item. [Source: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria]

# Choices and Consequences

## BENIN, PORTUGAL, AND THE INTERNATIONAL SLAVE TRADE

By the end of the fifteenth century the Portuguese were transporting about 2,000 slaves a year from West Africa. The Portuguese took advantage of ethnic and tribal rivalries and the traditional African practice of taking captured opponents as slaves. Africans were eager to trade with the Portuguese who offered highly prized goods such as bronze, cloth, horses, and in limited cases, firearms. The Kingdom of Benin, one of the more powerful West-African kingdoms initially participated in this trade, but by 1516 the Oba (King) faced a momentous decision about continuing to participate in the slave trade.

### Choices

- 1 Continue to trade with the Portuguese, but refuse to have any dealings with the slave trade
- 2 Continue to trade with the Portuguese and participate fully in the expanding international slave trade
- 3 Continue to trade with the Portuguese, but severely restrict Benin's participation in the international slave trade

### Continuing Controversies

*What does the kingdom of Benin's experiences with the slave trade reveal about the nature of African slavery?*

Few scholars believe Benin's actions were motivated by humanitarian concerns about the evils of slavery, which the African kingdom continued to tolerate. Scholars disagree over Benin's motivation for ending its involvement in the slave trade. Some argue that Benin's economy required a large supply of labor, which meant it could ill afford to export slaves. Others argue that Benin's rulers wisely calculated that continued expansion and warfare would only weaken their power and lead to political instability.

### Decision

Benin's king continued to trade with the Portuguese but restricted the trade in male slaves, the most sought after slaves for heavy agricultural labor. Benin allowed women to be traded (eventually prohibiting this trade as well) and continued to tolerate slavery within its own kingdom.

### Consequences

In contrast to many other African kingdoms, Benin's decision allowed it to prosper and preserve its political autonomy far longer than many neighboring states. Benin obtained the benefits of trade by selling cloth instead of slaves. By refusing to become a major supplier of slaves Benin avoided the costly and potentially destabilizing warfare needed to obtain large numbers of slaves.



City of Benin

What theories account for Benin's ability to resist involvement in the international slave trade?

# European Colonization of the Atlantic World

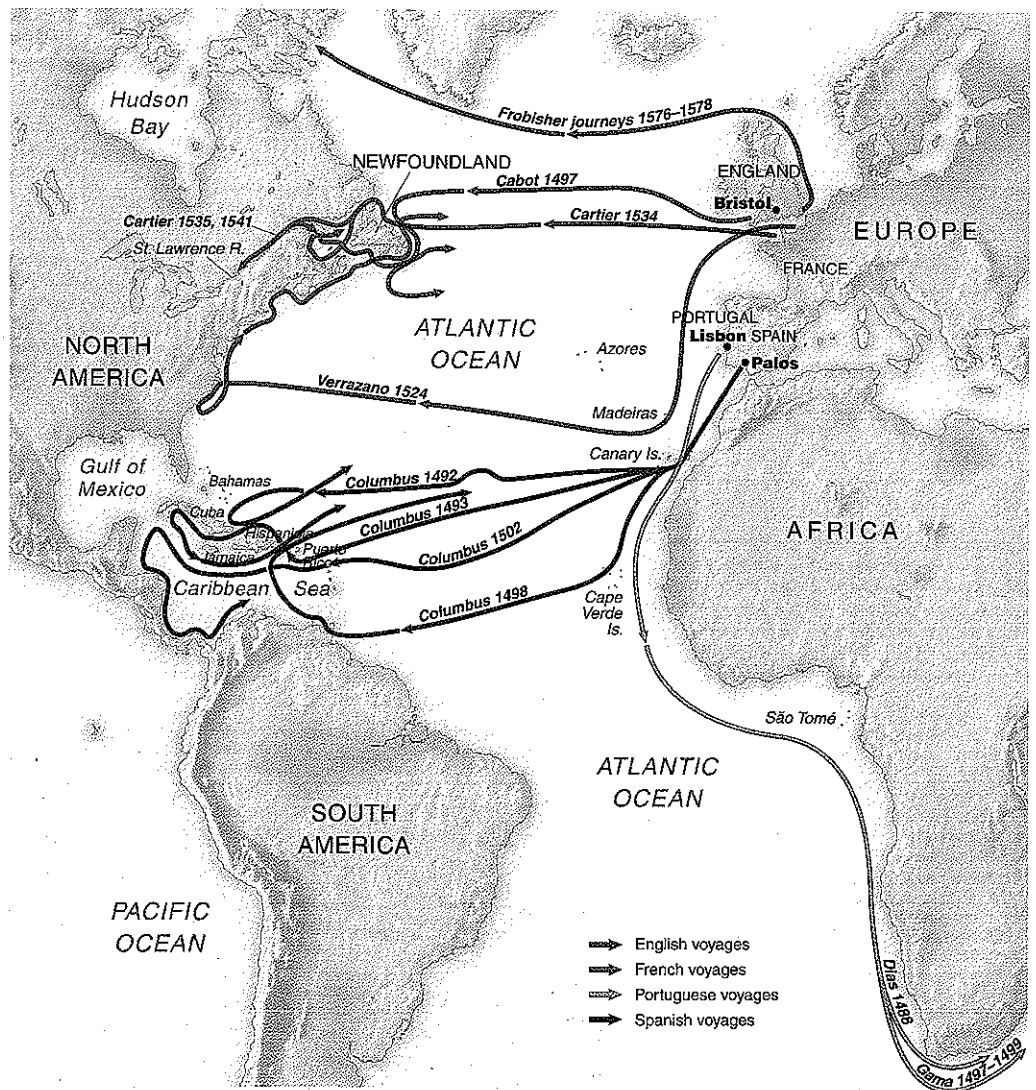


By the end of the sixteenth century, Portugal, Spain, and France had established permanent outposts in the Atlantic world, with England soon to follow. Each of these nations concentrated on a particular region of the Atlantic world (1.13). Portugal focused primarily on West Africa and Brazil, where trade in slaves and production of sugar generated enormous profits.

Spain's massive empire in the Atlantic extended from the tip of South America to the western regions of North America. The Spanish Empire's chief export was silver. Meanwhile France directed its attention northward toward Canada, where the fur trade produced a lucrative commodity for export. Finally England, a relative latecomer to colonization, established its first outposts on the east coast of North America, in present-day North Carolina and Virginia.

## The Black Legend and the Creation of New Spain

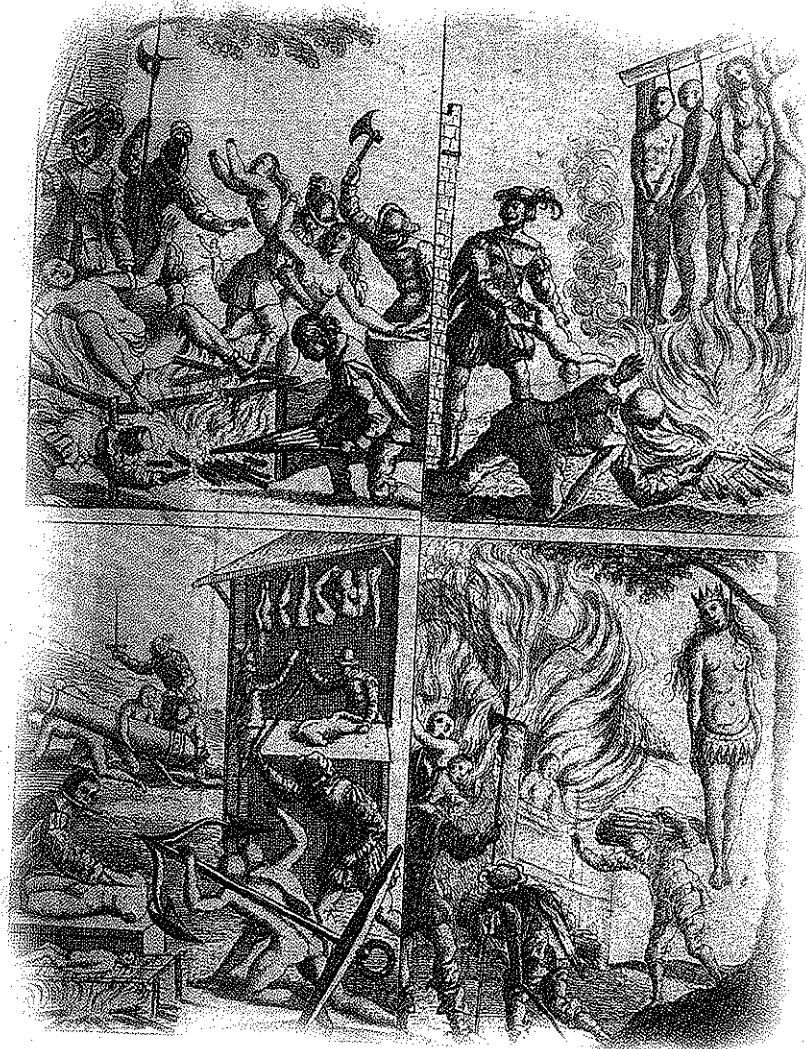
The Spanish had used images of Aztec human sacrifice to justify their conquest (see *Images as History: Blood of the Gods: Aztec Human Sacrifice*, page 20). Images and tales of Spanish brutality during the conquest of the Americas gave rise to the "Black Legend." This indictment of Spanish cruelty toward the native peoples of the Americas first appeared in the writings of the Spanish priest, Bartolomé de Las Casas. The new medium of print allowed copies of his scathing critique of Spanish colonialism to be distributed throughout Europe; his indictment of the Spanish was soon translated into French, Dutch, and English. In some cases these books contained gruesome wood-cut images such as those that appeared in the English edition, *The Tears of the Indians* (1656). The four scenes depicted on the front cover of the book, the "massacre and slaughter" of the Indian inhabitants of the Americas, are



**1.13 Major European Explorations of the Atlantic**

The European nations that explored the Atlantic took different arcs. The Portuguese turned toward Africa, the Spanish explored Central and South America, and the English and French focused on the North Atlantic.





**1.14** Title Page from the English Edition of Las Casas

The title page from the English translation of Las Casas's work, *The Tears of the Indians*, portrays Spanish cruelty toward Indians. The spread of these images gave credence to the "Black Legend" of Spanish conquest and violence.

described in Las Casas's narrative. The title page shows scenes of torture and punishment, including being hacked to death and burnt alive (1.14).

Within two decades the Spanish had conquered much of Central and South America. Inspired by tales of fabulously wealthy civilizations to the north, they launched several expeditions to explore the vast continent of North America. Hernando de Soto's expedition to Florida explored much of the southeastern United States in 1539. Another expedition in 1540, under the command of Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, traversed a huge swath of America from what is now Kansas to Colorado. Subsequent settlements in these regions greatly extended the Spanish Empire. Within a mere sixty years of conquering the Aztecs and Incas, Spain's North

American colonial empire extended from Santa Fe (present-day New Mexico) in the west, to San Augustine (present-day Florida) in the east, and then all the way south to the tip of South America—an area larger than ancient Rome's vast empire. The Spanish crown had taken an active role in colonizing these regions, and the government it created to rule its American empire reflected the investment of time, money, and resources. The empire was divided into a series of administrative units and was staffed by a large number of bureaucrats and administrative officials. Of crucial importance was Spain's board of trade, headquartered in the Spanish port city of Seville. It granted licenses for trade with Spain's colonies, enforced commercial laws, and collected customs and any revenues due the crown.

Along with the colonial government, the Roman Catholic Church exercised enormous power and influence in Spanish America. Spain granted the Church sizeable amounts of land and money, and priests and church officials enjoyed a privileged status. They also bore certain responsibilities such as establishing churches, schools, and hospitals, converting native people to the faith, and enforcing religious conformity by using the powers of the Inquisition.

The Spanish established a network of interconnected urban centers to aid them in the administration of the peoples and territories they conquered. In part this policy reflected the relatively high degree of urbanization the Spanish found among the civilizations of Mesoamerica and South America. However this model of organization also reflected Spanish values and interests, allowing them to project the power of the church and state in highly visible ways. By the close of the sixteenth century, there were 225 towns in Spanish America, all laid out according to Renaissance models of urban planning in a grid-like pattern. The grand central plazas in the larger towns and cities afforded both a place for commerce and a symbolic space for monumental civic and church architecture. This painting of the central plaza in Mexico City (1.15) captures the use of urban planning and monumental architecture to reinforce the power of the state and the church. The cathedral and the vice regent's (local governor) and archbishop's palaces tower over the central square, vivid reminders of the dominance of church and state.

Much of the economy of New Spain was based on a highly exploitive system of labor. Ensuring an adequate labor supply for the arduous task of

What does the architecture of the central Plaza of Mexico City tell us about Spain's approach to colonization?

mining and agricultural work became a top economic priority of Spanish colonial officials. Rather than enslave the inhabitants of Central and South America as they had done to the native peoples in the Caribbean islands, the Spanish developed a system of forced labor, the *encomienda*, that was only marginally less exploitive than slavery itself. The crown declared Indians "vassals" who owed their labor to noblemen who in turn were required to provide for the Indians' spiritual welfare. The system provided labor and in theory demonstrated the Spanish commitment to saving the souls of the Indians by converting them. In reality the system led to the brutal exploitation of Indians. Criticism of the system by religious reformers such as Las Casas, combined with high levels of mortality among the indigenous population, which easily succumbed to diseases brought by the Spanish,

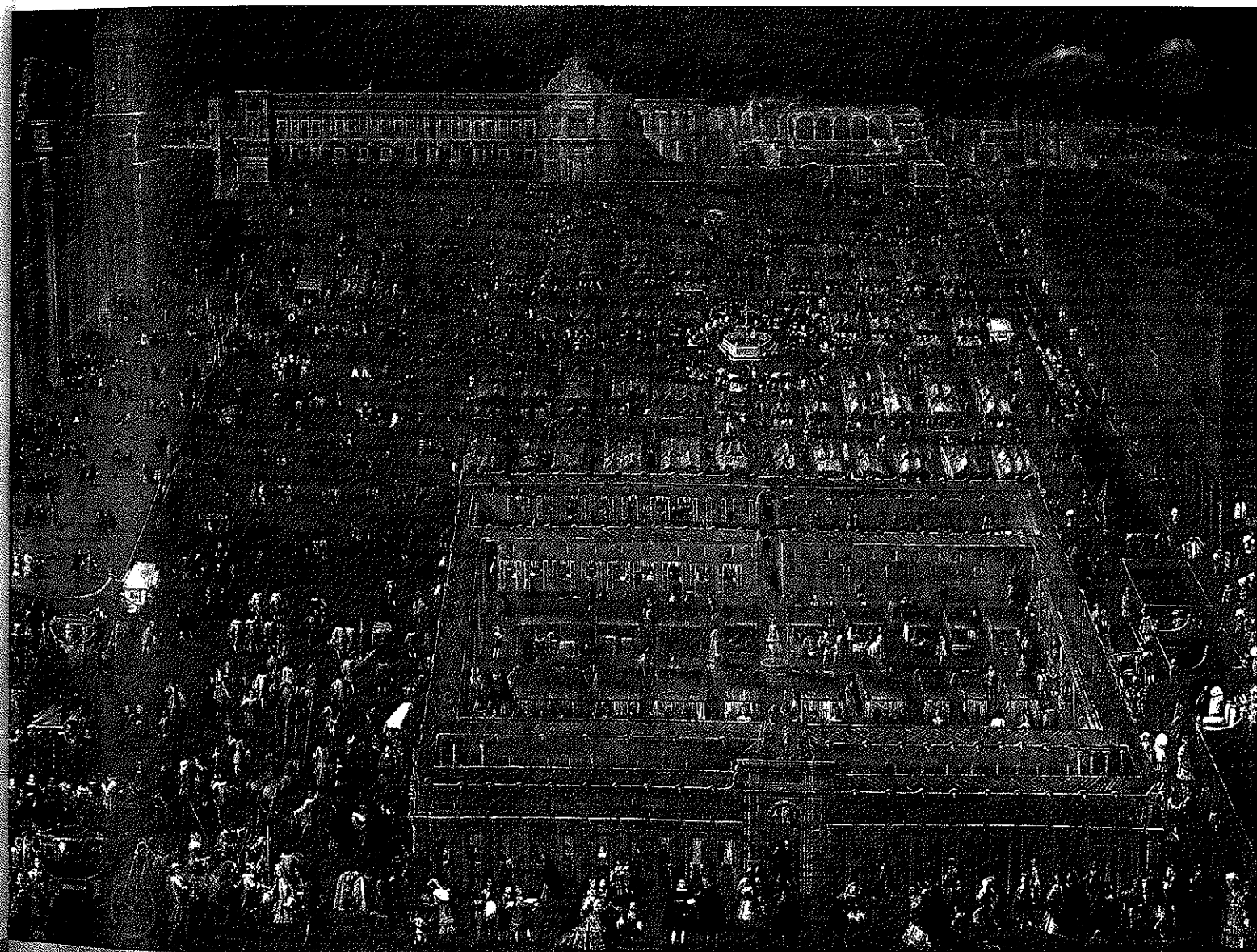
eventually led to the use of other types of labor, including conscript (enrolled by compulsion) labor, wage labor, and slavery.

## Fishing and Furs: France's North Atlantic Empire

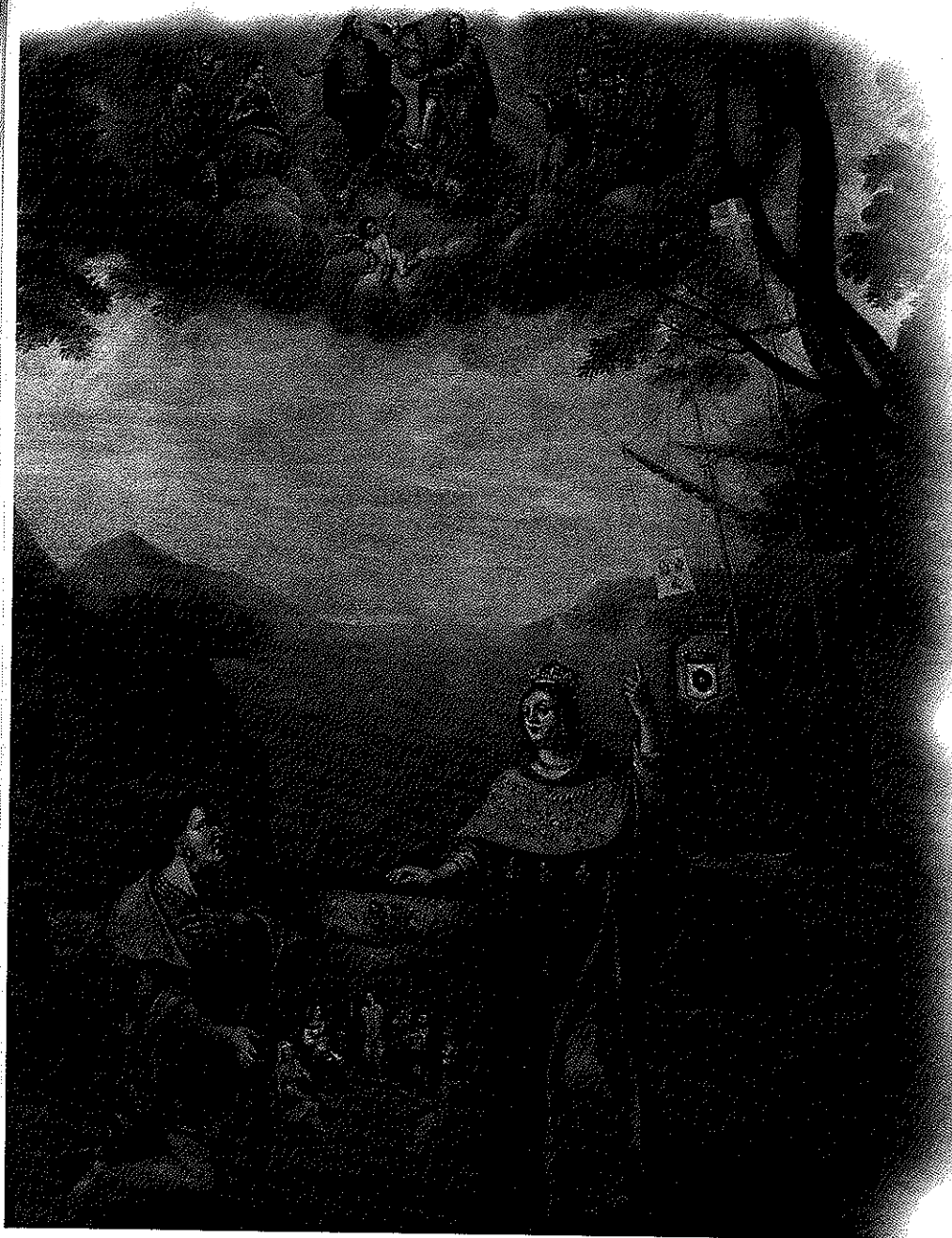
In 1493 the Pope had settled a colonial dispute between Spain and Portugal by dividing the Atlantic world between them, a decision later ratified by a treaty signed by both countries. France rejected the authority of the treaty and sent fleets to take advantage of the abundant cod fisheries in the waters off what is now Newfoundland. In 1524 France dispatched Giovanni da Verrazano, an Italian mariner working for the king of France, to find the so-called northwest passage that would allow travel

### 1.15 Central Square of Mexico City

Spanish urban planners sought to project imperial power onto the colonial landscape. In this painting of the town square in Mexico City, the buildings most closely identified with church and state tower over the central plaza. [Source: Cristobal de Villalpando (1639-1714), "Central Square of Mexico City," 1695 (oil on canvas), Corsham Court, Wiltshire. The Bridgeman Art Library, NY]



What types of labor systems were employed in the Spanish colonies?



**1.16 France**  
*Bringing the Faith to the Indians of New France*

In this allegory France, personified as a woman, presents a willing Indian convert with a religious painting while pointing toward the heavens where Jesus, also depicted in the painting, hovers over the scene.

through the Americas to Asia. Although he failed to find such a route, his mapping of the North American coast aroused the interest of the French monarch, who decided to commit additional resources for further exploration of North America. In the 1530s French explorer Jacques Cartier made a more extensive and detailed investigation of the North Atlantic, eventually traveling up the St. Lawrence River, where he encountered a group of Micmac Indians (an Algonquian-speaking Eastern Woodlands Indian nation). Their offer of furs in

exchange for European goods such as knives, kettles, and beads led the French to recognize the potential of furs as an ideal commodity. Furs could be sold to Europeans who valued their warmth and treated them as a high-status luxury commodity.

In 1604 the French established Port Royal in Nova Scotia and four years later founded the city of Quebec, now the capital of the province of Quebec, on the banks of the St. Lawrence River. Located at a strategic bend in the river, Quebec was well placed to allow the French to trade with the local Indians, who were skilled fur trappers. The beaver pelts traded to the French fetched a good price in the European markets.

The French encounter with Native Americans differed from that of the Spanish and Portuguese in three significant ways. First the relatively small size of the settlement in New France and the dependence of the French on Indians to provide furs necessitated maintaining good relations with local tribes. Second, the predominantly French male population intermarried with local Indians. Eventually the French government even encouraged intermarriage, believing it would lead to the gradual assimilation of the Indian population into the French culture of New France.

The French encounter with North American Indians differed in still a third way. The French were committed to converting the Indians to their Catholic faith, but rather than follow the Spanish example and transplant the hierarchical structures of the Church, including the

Inquisition, French Jesuits adopted a different strategy. They sent out missionaries to live among Indian populations and learn their languages and customs. The French Jesuits were just as eager as the Spanish to convert the Indians, but they recognized the need to understand the culture of those they wished to convert. The French also took advantage of religious art and images to help convert the Indians. The importance of images to this process is mirrored in this allegorical painting, *France Bringing the Faith to the Indians of New France* (1.16). France, represented as a woman, presents a painting to an

Indian who receives it gratefully. The Indian wears a cloak with a Fleur de Lys, the symbol of the French monarchy.

## English Expansion: Ireland and Virginia

Although England took advantage of the rich opportunities for fishing provided by the Atlantic Ocean, its exploration of the Americas was a relatively low priority for most of the sixteenth century. Three factors explain this lack of interest. First England faced less economic pressure to find export markets because its primary export—wool—was in high demand on the European continent. Second England faced a crisis of leadership after the death of Henry VIII in 1547. He was succeeded by his sickly ten-year-old son, Edward VI, who died only five years into his reign. Next came Henry's daughter Mary, who tried to reestablish Catholicism, a campaign that included the intense persecution of Protestants. Her reign was also short, since she died only five years after assuming the throne. Finally England was bogged down in a colonial venture closer to home, the subjugation of Ireland. While Spain easily conquered the Moors in Spain before moving on to Atlantic exploration, Irish resistance to English colonization tied up English resources for decades.

Yet even as England struggled to colonize Ireland, their experiences there provided them with a distinctive model for future colonial policy in the New World. While the Spanish set out to conquer and convert the inhabitants of the Americas, absorbing them into Spanish society as a subordinate class at the bottom of the social order, the English took a different approach. Rather than attempt to incorporate the Irish, the English expelled them from their land. They then repopulated the land with colonists from England and Scotland, creating **plantations**, or fortified outposts dedicated to producing agricultural products for export. Originally the term plantation simply meant any English settlement in a foreign land, but it later became synonymous with a distinctive slave-based labor system used in much of the Atlantic world.

One source of this policy can be traced to the deeply felt religious animosity between Protestants and Catholics. The English not only had little regard for the Catholic faith of the Irish but also they feared the Irish would support efforts to reimpose Catholicism on England and would assist Catholic

nations like France and Spain if they went to war against England. Expelling the Irish and transplanting loyal Protestant farmers from England and Scotland, therefore, promised to boost the English economy and secure control of a potentially troublesome neighboring island. This colonial model developed in Ireland—expulsion and plantation—would shape subsequent English experiments in colonization.

Economic pressures eventually impelled England to follow its European rivals and engage in the exploration and colonization of the Atlantic. Its profitable wool trade with the continent began to decline in the 1550s, prompting English merchants to seek new sources of trade and commercial opportunities. These merchants founded scores of new companies devoted to overseas trade with parts of Europe, Africa, and the Mediterranean.

England's entry into exploration and colonization was also helped when the crisis of the monarchy ended with the rise to the throne of another of Henry's daughters, Elizabeth. She succeeded "Bloody Queen Mary," as Protestants called her, in 1558 and quickly established herself as a strong leader determined to project English power overseas. She eagerly pursued an aggressive policy of expansion, challenging Spain's dominance in the Atlantic. A committed Protestant Elizabeth viewed Spanish power as a serious threat to her realm. Her religious convictions and foreign policy objectives eventually brought England into direct conflict with Spain.

England's support for Spain's enemies on the continent, including the Protestant Dutch, the continuing actions of English pirates, and English anti-Catholicism, finally drove King Philip of Spain to take decisive action. In 1588 Spain launched a mighty Armada, or fleet of warships, to invade England and destroy Europe's most powerful Protestant monarchy. The Spanish considered their ships invincible, but after storms greatly reduced their numbers they were routed by the smaller, faster ships of the English navy. The defeat of the Armada shifted the balance of power in the Atlantic dramatically, as England emerged as the major force in the Atlantic world. To commemorate the stunning defeat of Spain's Armada, Queen Elizabeth commissioned a portrait that symbolized England's rise to a position of power in the Atlantic world. In the painting Elizabeth's hand rests prominently on a globe, her fingers reaching out to cover the Atlantic



### 1.17 Elizabeth's Armada Portrait

In this portrait commemorating England's victory over the Spanish Armada, Queen Elizabeth's hand rests on the globe, reaching out to cover much of what is now North America. In the upper left the Spanish fleet sets out toward England, while in the upper right the defeated Spanish Armada flounders. [Source: George Gower (1540-96), "Elizabeth I, Armada Portrait", c. 1588 (oil on panel), Gower, George (1540-96) (attr. to) / Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire, UK / The Bridgeman Art Library]

world and North America (1.17). In the background the artist includes two scenes depicting the defeat of the Armada, a further reminder of England's power and supremacy of the navy.

Among the most ardent supporters of expanding England's role in the Atlantic world were former privateers. These were Englishmen who engaged in state-sanctioned piracy in the Atlantic against Spanish treasure fleets returning from South America. A number of them had grown rich and influential as a result of their successes. John Hawkins, for example, earned himself a fortune and an English knighthood for his daring seizures of Spanish ships. One of the most dashing of these buccaneers, Sir Walter Raleigh, had participated in the English conquest of Ireland and became a favorite of Queen Elizabeth. Raleigh sought support for a more ambitious plan of colonization in the lands north of Spanish America and south of French Canada. Queen Elizabeth bestowed her blessing on the enterprise, but not money. As a result Raleigh and the colonial ventures that followed had to turn to private capital to finance his plan.

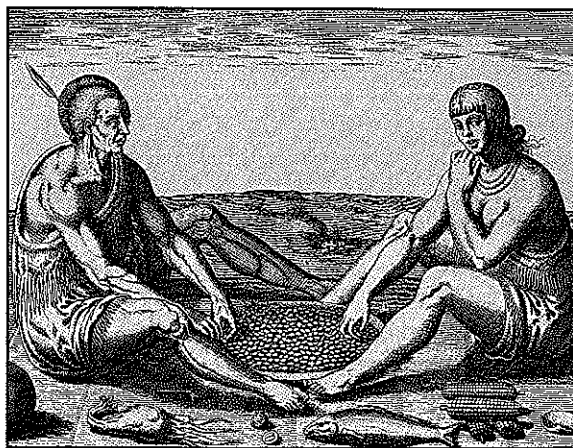
In contrast to France and Spain's state-financed model of exploration of colonization, England adopted a more capitalist model, with private investors forming companies and issuing stock to finance exploration and settlement. Having raised the funds to outfit a small expedition of two ships, Raleigh's expedition arrived in the outer banks regions of what is now North Carolina in July 1585. Naming the new settlement Virginia, in honor of Elizabeth, known widely as the "Virgin Queen," England had finally established its first colony in the New World. Unfortunately for Raleigh and the original colonists, the first colony at Roanoke (an Algonquian Indian name for shell money) ended in disaster. To begin with, although the location near the treacherous region of Cape Hatteras protected the settlement from possible Spanish raids, it also deterred passing ships from stopping, which made re-provisioning the colony difficult. Then conflict with local Indians erupted when the colonists accused the Indians of

stealing a silver cup. All the while relief for the colonists was delayed by the outbreak of war with Spain. The English navy required every available ship to repulse the Spanish Armada. When a ship finally arrived three years later, the new settlers found the colony deserted. All the residents had disappeared, leaving behind only one clue: the word "CROATOAN" carved into a door-post. The fate of the lost colony of Roanoke still remains a mystery, but scholars suspect that the term *croatan* was a vague reference to a Croatan Indian village some 50 miles south of the settlement which may have been the colonists' destination before they disappeared.

Although the first English attempt to create a fixed settlement was a dismal failure, the information gained by the colonists about the Algonquian tribes who inhabited North Carolina proved invaluable. The governor of the colony, John White, was an accomplished artist who captured scenes from Indian life in a vivid series of paintings (1.18).

Many of his images were popularized by the Flemish engraver Theodore de Bry, but often with notable alterations (1.19). Note how de Bry, in

What is the symbolic importance of the position of Queen Elizabeth's hand in the Armada portrait?



**1.18 and 1.19** John White Painting and Theodore de Bry's Engraving

John White's painting of an Algonquian Indian man and woman eating is one of the earliest efforts to realistically represent Indians. In his popular engraving of this image, Theodore de Bry changed the Indians' features and shifted their pose to reflect postures more familiar to Europeans.

addition to altering the poses of the Indians, gave the woman features considered more beautiful by Europeans and painted her looking seductively at the viewer. Such changes in the representation of

indigenous women fit the prevailing European notion that the New World was characterized by lust and promiscuity.

## Conclusion

The onset of European exploration and colonization of the Atlantic world in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries touched off a collision between the civilizations of the Americas, Africa, and Europe. The Americas had been inhabited for thousands of years before Columbus disembarked in the Caribbean in 1492 and claimed the territory for Spain. In the thousands of years before that encounter, a variety of civilizations had evolved in the Americas. Some rivaled the richest nations of Europe, while others more closely resembled the stateless societies of Africa. The mighty pyramids of the Aztec Empire would inspire awe in the first Europeans to gaze upon them, as would the remains of earlier civilizations such as the Mound Builders and Anasazi.

Columbus's voyages unleashed a process of political, economic, and biological encounter that radically transformed the lives of the peoples who inhabited Europe, Africa, and the Americas. The exchange of foods, animals,

plants, and diseases altered the lives of kings and simple farmers on both sides of the Atlantic. The European desire for riches led to the oppression, and in some cases enslavement, of indigenous peoples to work in mines and sugar fields. The decline in native populations that resulted from diseases and exploitation led European colonizers to turn to African slaves as a labor source.

Portugal and Spain took the lead in overseas expansion in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Indeed by the end of the sixteenth century, the Spanish Empire in the Americas had surpassed the ancient Roman Empire in size. Spain's unrivaled dominance in the Atlantic was dealt a serious setback when England destroyed the its mighty Armada in 1588. England, a relative latecomer in the race to control the Atlantic and its riches, soon turned its attention to exploration and colonization. Within a century England would surpass Spain as the pre-eminent power in the Atlantic world.