

# 16

## The Acceleration of Global Contact

1450–1600

### CHAPTER PREVIEW

#### The Afro-Eurasian Trade World

- What was the Afro-Eurasian trade world prior to the era of European exploration?

#### The European Voyages of Discovery

- How and why did Europeans undertake ambitious voyages of expansion?

#### Conquest and Settlement

- What was the impact of Iberian conquest and settlement on the peoples and ecologies of the Americas?

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- How was the era of global contact shaped by new commodities, commercial empires, and forced migrations?

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- How did new encounters shape cultural attitudes and beliefs in Europe and the rest of the world?

### BEFORE 1500 EUROPEANS WERE RELATIVELY MARGINAL PLAYERS

in a centuries-old trading system centered on the Indian Ocean that linked Africa, Asia, and Europe. In this vibrant Afro-Eurasian trading world, Arab, Persian, Indian, African, and Chinese merchants competed for trade in spices, silks, and other goods. A century later, by 1550, the Portuguese search for better access to African gold and Asian trade goods had led to a new overseas empire in the Indian Ocean, and Spanish explorers had accidentally discovered the Western Hemisphere. Through violent conquest, the Iberian powers established large-scale colonies in the Americas, and northern European powers soon followed their example. The era of European

expansion had begun, creating new political systems and forms of economic exchange as well as cultural assimilation, conversion, and resistance. This age of encounters laid the foundations for the modern world.

## The Afro-Eurasian Trade World

**What was the Afro-Eurasian trade world prior to the era of European exploration?**

During the Middle Ages, a type of world economy, known as the Afro-Eurasian trade world, linked the products, people, and ideas of Africa, Europe, and Asia. This trade world was centered on the Indian Ocean, where monsoon winds generated seasonal rhythms of travel. Over time, Indian Ocean trade was facilitated by the spread of Islam, which provided a common legal system, language, and faith, and also by the economic growth and political unification of China. Italian merchants served as middlemen who brought Eastern luxury goods to western Europe.

### The Trade World of the Indian Ocean

Covering 20 percent of the earth's total ocean area, the Indian Ocean is the globe's third-largest waterway (after the Pacific and Atlantic). Moderate and predictable monsoon winds blow from the northeast between November and January; rougher winds blow from the south and southwest between April and August. By following the alternating directions of the monsoons, sailors profited from constantly favorable winds to maximize the speed of travel. In the fifteenth century, Arab navigator Ibn Majid published a book listing well-known trade routes in the Indian Ocean and the times of year when travel to and from different port cities was possible.

From the seventh through the fourteenth centuries, the volume and integration of Indian Ocean trade steadily increased, encouraged by two factors: the spread of Islam through much of the Indian Ocean world and the political unification and economic growth of China. Starting in the mid-seventh century, and eventually favored by the political stability and cultural unity of the Abbasid caliphate, Muslim Arab and Persian merchants expanded along the coast of East Africa and across the Indian Ocean to western India. A few centuries later, economic growth under the Song Dynasties (960–1279) enabled the Chinese to enter the Indian Ocean trade. Then, in the following Mongol era (1279–1368), Mongol emperors safeguarded the Silk Road overland trade routes through Central Asia and strengthened China's connections to the Indian Ocean world. The Venetian merchant Marco Polo's tales of his travels from 1271 to 1295 praised the splendors of the khan's court and the city of Hangzhou, which he described as "the finest and noblest in the world" in which "the number and wealth of the merchants, and the amount of goods that passed through their hands, was so enormous that no man could form a just estimate thereof."<sup>1</sup>

After the Mongols fell to the Ming Dynasty in 1368, China entered a new period of agricultural and commercial expansion, population growth, and urbanization (see "Ming China" in Chapter 21). The Ming emperor dispatched Admiral Zheng He (JEHNG HUH) on a remarkable series of naval expeditions that traveled the oceanic web as far as Aden in the Red Sea. From 1405 to 1433, each of his seven expeditions



**MAP 16.1 The Fifteenth-Century Afro-Eurasian Trading World**

After a period of decline following the Black Death and the Mongol invasions, trade revived in the fifteenth century. Muslim merchants dominated trade, linking ports in East Africa and the Red Sea with those in India and the Malay Archipelago. The Chinese admiral Zheng He followed the most important Indian Ocean trade routes on his voyages (1405–1433), hoping to impose Ming dominance of trade and tribute.

involved hundreds of ships and more than twenty thousand men. After the deaths of Zheng He and the emperor, the voyages ceased, but Chinese overseas traders continued vigorous activity in the South China Sea and throughout the Indian Ocean.

Shaped by monsoon patterns, Indian Ocean trade moved through three overlapping geographic circuits. The western zone, dominated by Arab traders, linked the east coast of Africa and the Arabian peninsula to the southwestern Malabar coast of India. The opposite extreme was a predominantly Chinese trade zone focused on the South China Sea that linked China to the busy trading posts of Southeast Asia (Map 16.1). The central zone of Indian Ocean trade linked the Indian subcontinent, and in particular the southeastern Coromandel coast, to Southeast Asia across the Bay of Bengal. Muslim Arab and Persian merchants who circumnavigated India on their way to trade in the South China Sea established trading posts along the southern coasts of east and west India, and cities such as Calicut and Quilon became thriving commercial centers. India was also an important contributor of goods to the

world trading system. Most of the world's pepper was grown in India, and Indian cotton and silk textiles, mainly from the Gujarat region, were highly prized.

### Peoples and Cultures of Southeast Asia

Just as environmental factors dictated the rhythms of Indian Ocean trade, they also shaped common ways of life and culture in Southeast Asia, a vast region composed of the northern mainland and a series of archipelagoes to the south and east. Since at least the first millennium B.C.E., the peoples of Southeast Asia have engaged in waterborne commerce. With trade came settlers from the Malay Peninsula (the southern extremity of the Asian continent), India, and China, resulting in the widespread adoption of Hinduism and Buddhism as well as forms of monarchical rule influenced by these religious traditions.

Water brought trade, settlers, and culture; it also played a central role in the production of food. Cultivated in irrigated terraces, rice formed the staple food of the diet. The long coastlines and many rivers provided plentiful fish, crabs, and shrimp, and fishing served as the chief male occupation. With mountainous uplands and low-lying coastal plains and river basins, the region harbored rich biodiversity, allowing Southeast Asians to domesticate a large variety of fruits and other crops. Indigenous crops that were to play a key role in global trade included cloves, nutmeg, and sugarcane.

In comparison to India, China, or Europe after the Black Death, Southeast Asia was sparsely populated. People were concentrated in low-lying port cities and in areas of intense rice cultivation, which became political centers. The forested uplands were only loosely affiliated to state authority. Another way Southeast Asia differed from India, China, and Europe was the higher status of women, which was associated with their primary role in planting and harvesting rice. At marriage, which typically occurred around age twenty, the groom paid the bride a sum of money called **bride wealth**, which remained under her control. This practice was in sharp contrast to the Chinese, Indian, and European dowry, which came under the husband's control. Property was administered jointly, and family lineage was traced through both the maternal and paternal lines. All children, regardless of gender, inherited equally.

Respect for women carried over to the commercial sphere. Women participated in business as partners and independent entrepreneurs. When Portuguese and Dutch men settled in the region and married local women, their wives continued to play important roles in trade and commerce.

In contrast to most parts of the world other than Africa, Southeast Asian peoples also had an accepting attitude toward premarital sexual activity. Divorce carried no social stigma and was easily attainable by either partner if a pair proved incompatible.

### Muslim Influences and African Trade

From its capital in Baghdad, the Abbasid caliphate (750–1258) controlled an enormous region reaching from Spain to the western borders of China, including the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, the two major waterways linking the Indian Ocean trade world to the Mediterranean. The political stability endowed by the caliphate, along with the shared language of Arabic and the common legal system and culture of Islam, fostered economic prosperity and peaceful commercial relations.

On the east coast of Africa, Muslim traders established Swahili-speaking city-states that engaged directly in the Indian Ocean trade, exchanging ivory, rhinoceros horn, tortoise shells, and slaves for textiles, spices, cowrie shells, porcelain, and other goods. Cities such as Kilwa, Malindi, and Mogadishu were famed for their prosperity. From these bases and from ports like Aden on the Red Sea and Hormuz on the Persian Gulf, Arab, Persian, and Jewish traders traveled even farther across the trade routes of the Indian Ocean to China and Southeast Asia.

After the Abbasids fell to the Mongols, the Mamluk rulers of Egypt proclaimed a new caliphate. Until its defeat by the Ottomans in 1517, the Mamluk empire was one of the most powerful polities on the continent. Its capital, Cairo, was a center of Islamic learning and religious authority as well as a major hub for goods moving between the Indian Ocean trade world and the Mediterranean.

West Africa also played an important role in world trade. In the fifteenth century the western part of the Sudan region and the Akan (AH-kahn) peoples living near present-day Ghana were major suppliers of gold. Transported across the Sahara by camel caravans, the gold was sold in ports along the Mediterranean. Inland nations that sat astride the north-south caravan routes grew wealthy from this trade. In the mid-thirteenth century the kingdom of Mali became an important player in the overland trade route, gaining prestige from its ruler Mansa Musa's fabulous pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324–1325. Desire to gain direct access to African gold motivated the initial Portuguese incursions into Africa.



**Mansa Musa** This detail from the *Catalan Atlas* of 1375, a world map created for the Catalan king, depicts a king of Mali, Mansa Musa, who was legendary for his wealth in gold. European desires for direct access to the trade in sub-Saharan gold helped inspire Portuguese exploration of the west coast of Africa in the fifteenth century. (From *The Catalan Atlas*, 1375, by Abraham Cresques/Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France/Getty images)

## Genoese and Venetian Middlemen

In the late Middle Ages, the Italian city-states of Venice and Genoa controlled European trade with the East. In 1304 Venice established formal relations with the Mamluk sultan, allowing Venetian merchants to purchase goods in Cairo for re-export throughout Europe. Venetians funded these purchases through trade in European woolen cloth and metal goods, as well as through shipping and trade in firearms and slaves.

Venice's ancient trading rival was Genoa. By 1270 Genoa dominated the northern route to Asia through the Black Sea. From then until the fourteenth century the Genoese expanded their trade routes as far as Persia and the Far East. In the fifteenth century, with Venice claiming victory in the spice trade, the Genoese shifted focus

from trade to finance and from the Black Sea to the western Mediterranean. When Spanish and Portuguese voyages began to explore the western Atlantic, Genoese merchants, navigators, and financiers provided their skills and capital to the Iberian monarchs.

A major element of Italian trade was slavery. Merchants purchased slaves in the Balkans and the Black Sea region. After the loss of the Black Sea trade routes to the Ottomans, the Genoese sought new supplies of slaves in the West, eventually seizing or buying and selling the Guanches (indigenous peoples from the Canary Islands), Muslim prisoners and Jewish refugees from Spain, and, by the early 1500s, both sub-Saharan and Berber Africans. With the growth of Spanish colonies in the New World, Genoese and Venetian merchants became important players in the Atlantic slave trade.

## The European Voyages of Discovery

### How and why did Europeans undertake ambitious voyages of expansion?

Europe was by no means isolated before the voyages of exploration and the “discovery” of the New World. Italian merchants traded actively for West African gold and Indian Ocean luxury goods, but trade through intermediaries was slow and expensive. In the first decades of the fifteenth century, new European players entered the scene with novel technology, eager to spread Christianity and to find direct access to trade. First Portuguese and then Spanish expeditions undertook long-distance voyages that helped create the modern world, with immense consequences for their own continent and the rest of the planet.

### Causes of European Expansion

European expansion had multiple causes. The first was economic. By the middle of the fifteenth century Europe was experiencing a revival of population and economic activity after the lows of the Black Death. This revival created renewed demand for luxuries, especially spices, from the East. Introduced by the Crusaders in the twelfth century, spices such as pepper, nutmeg, cinnamon, and cloves added variety to the monotonous European diet and were also used as incense for religious rituals and as perfumes, medicines, and dyes in daily life. Like other imported luxury goods, they demonstrated the wealth and sophistication of the social elite.

Religious fervor and the crusading spirit were the second important catalyst for expansion. Just seven months separated Isabella and Ferdinand's conquest of the emirate of Granada, the last Muslim state on the Iberian Peninsula, and Columbus's departure across the Atlantic. Overseas exploration thus transferred the militaristic religious fervor of the *reconquista* (reconquest) to new territories. With conquest, Iberians brought the attitudes and administrative practices developed during the *reconquista* to the New World. **Conquistadors** (kohn-KEES-tuh-dorz) (Spanish for “conqueror”) fully expected to be rewarded with land, titles, and power over conquered peoples, just as the leaders of the *reconquista* had been.

Competition among European powers for the prestige and profit of overseas exploration was a third factor encouraging the steady stream of expeditions that

began in the late fifteenth century. Once the profits from Portuguese expansion became evident, first the Spanish and then other European powers vied for direct access to global trade. This competition enabled merchants to gain legal authorization and financial support for their expeditions.

The small number of Europeans who could read provided a rapt audience for tales of fantastic places and unknown peoples. One of the most popular books of the time was the fourteenth-century text *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, which purported to be a firsthand account of the author's travels in the Middle East, India, and China.

### Technology and the Rise of Exploration

In the quest to open new trade routes, the Portuguese were pioneers in seeking technological improvements in shipbuilding, weaponry, and navigation. Medieval European seagoing vessels consisted of single-masted sailing ships or galleys propelled by oars. Though adequate for short journeys that hugged the shoreline, such vessels were incapable of long-distance journeys or high-volume trade. In the fifteenth century the Portuguese developed the **caravel**, a two- or three-masted sailing ship. Its multiple sails and sternpost rudder made the caravel a more maneuverable vessel that required fewer crewmen to operate. The Portuguese were also the first to fit their ships with cannon, a key military advantage.

This period also saw great strides in cartography. Around 1410 a Latin translation reintroduced western Europeans to **Ptolemy's Geography**. Written in the second century, the work synthesized the geographical knowledge of the classical world. It represented a major improvement over medieval cartography because it depicted the world as round and introduced latitude and longitude markings, but it also contained significant errors. Unaware of the Americas, Ptolemy showed the world as much smaller than it is, so that Asia appeared not very much to the west of Europe.

Navigational aids also improved. Originating in China, the magnetic compass was brought to the West in the late Middle Ages. By using the compass to determine their direction and estimate their speed of travel, mariners could track the course of a ship's voyage. In the late fifteenth century, Portuguese scholars devised a new technique of "celestial reckoning" that involved using the astrolabe, an instrument invented by the ancient Greeks, to determine the position of the stars. Commissioned by Portuguese king John II, a group of astronomers in the 1480s showed that mariners could determine their latitude at sea by using a specially designed astrolabe to determine the altitude of the polestar or the sun, and by consulting tables of these bodies' movements. This was a crucial step forward in maritime navigational techniques.

Much of the new technology that Europeans used on their voyages was borrowed from the East. Gunpowder, the compass, and the sternpost rudder were Chinese inventions. The triangular lateen sail, which allowed caravels to tack against the wind, was a product of the Indian Ocean trade world. Advances in cartography and navigation also drew on rich traditions of Jewish and Arab mathematical and astronomical learning. In exploring new territories, European sailors thus called on techniques and knowledge developed over centuries in China, the Muslim world, and trading centers along the Indian Ocean.



**Portuguese Mariner's Bronze Astrolabe, 1555** Between 1500 and 1635 over nine hundred ships sailed from Portugal to ports on the Indian Ocean, in annual fleets composed of five to ten ships. Portuguese sailors used astrolabes, such as the bronze example shown here, to accurately plot their position. (Granger)

## The Portuguese in Africa and Asia

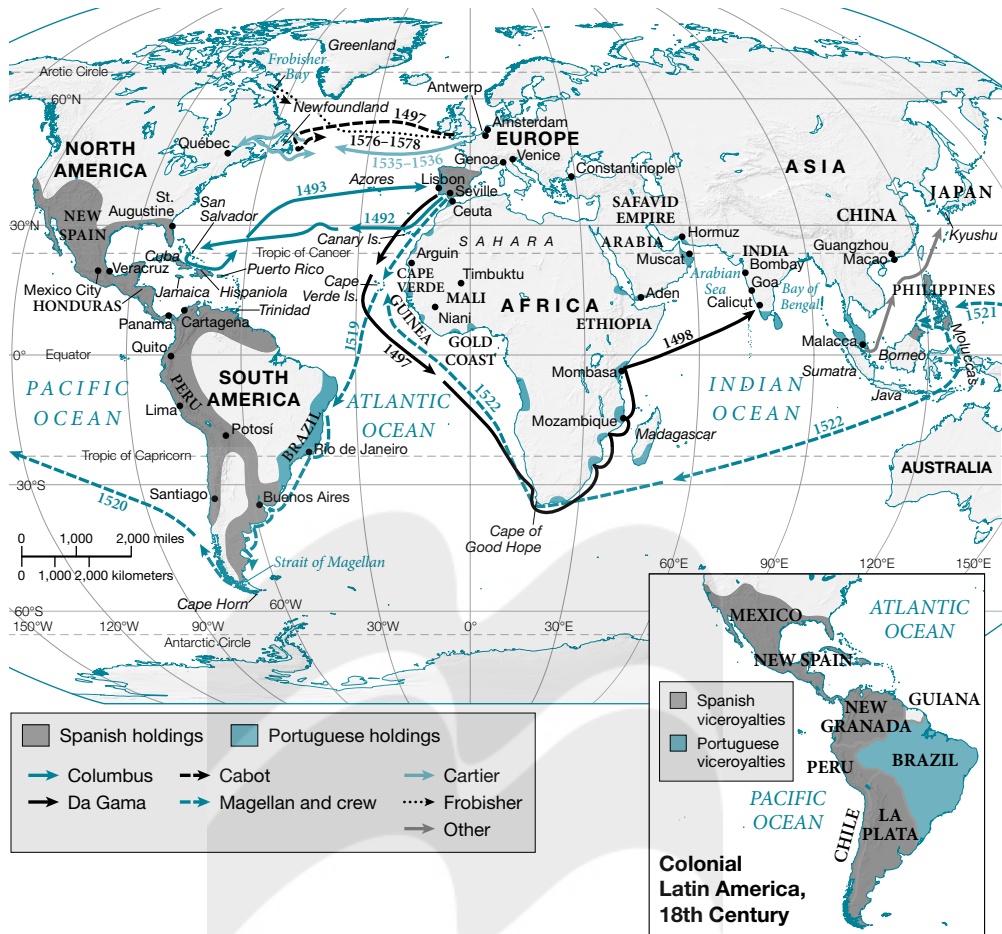
Established during the reconquista in the mid-thirteenth century, the kingdom of Portugal had a long Atlantic coastline that favored maritime activity. By the end of the thirteenth century Portuguese merchants were trading fish, salt, and wine to ports in northern England and the Mediterranean. Nature favored the Portuguese: winds blowing along their coast offered passage to Africa, its Atlantic islands, and, ultimately, Brazil. Once they had mastered the secret to sailing against the wind to return to Europe (by sailing farther west to catch winds from the southwest), they were poised to pioneer Atlantic exploration.

In the early phases of Portuguese exploration, Prince Henry (1394–1460), a younger son of the king, played a leading role. A nineteenth-century scholar dubbed Henry “the Navigator” because of his support for Portuguese voyages of discovery. In 1415, Henry participated in Portugal’s conquest of the port of Ceuta (sa-OO-tah), a major outlet for West African gold. Inspired by this victory, in the 1420s, under Henry’s direction, the Portuguese began to settle the Atlantic islands of Madeira (ca. 1420) and the Azores (1427). In 1443 they founded their first African commercial settlement at Arguin on the West African coast.

By the time of Henry’s death in 1460, his support for exploration had resulted in thriving sugar plantations on the Atlantic islands, the first arrival of enslaved Africans in Portugal, and new access to African gold. These achievements, which heralded a new phase of European exploitation of non-European peoples, places, and goods, were fully approved by the Catholic Church. In 1454, Pope Nicholas V issued a bull reiterating the rights of the Portuguese Crown to conquer and enslave non-Christians and recognizing Portuguese possession of territories in West Africa.

To consolidate their position in west African trade, the Portuguese established fortified trading posts, called factories, on the gold-rich Guinea coast (Map 16.2). By 1500 Portugal controlled the flow of African gold to Europe. In contrast to the Spanish, who later conquered the Americas, the Portuguese did not establish large settlements in West Africa and were unable to transform the lives and religious beliefs of people beyond their coastal holdings. Instead they pursued easier and faster profits by seeking entry to existing trading systems. For the first century of their relations, African rulers were equal partners with the Portuguese, benefiting from their experienced armies and European vulnerability to tropical diseases.

In 1488 Bartholomew Diaz (ca. 1451–1500) rounded the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa (see Map 16.2), but poor conditions forced him to turn back. A decade later Vasco da Gama (ca. 1469–1524), commanding a fleet in search of a sea route to India, finally succeeded in rounding the Cape. With the help of a



### MAP 16.2 Overseas Exploration and Conquest in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

The voyages of discovery marked a dramatic new phase in the centuries-old migrations of European peoples. This map depicts the voyages of the most significant European explorers of the period.

local pilot with experience in Indian Ocean trade, da Gama reached the port of Calicut in India. He returned to Lisbon with spices and Indian cloth, thus proving it was possible to conduct direct trade with Asia. Thereafter, a Portuguese convoy set out for passage around the Cape every March.

Lisbon became the entrance port for Asian goods into Europe, but this was not accomplished without a fight. From 1500 to 1515 the Portuguese used a combination of bombardment and diplomatic treaties to establish trading factories at Goa, Malacca, Calicut, and Hormuz, thereby laying the foundation for a Portuguese trading empire. The acquisition of port cities and their trade routes brought riches to Portugal, but, as in Africa, the Portuguese had limited impact on the lives and religious faith of peoples beyond coastal holdings.

Spurred by Portuguese success in overseas trade, the Spanish had also begun the quest for empire. Theirs was to be a second, entirely different mode of expansion, leading to the conquest of existing empires, large-scale settlement, and the forced assimilation of huge indigenous populations.

### Spain's Voyages to the Americas

Christopher Columbus was not the first to cross the Atlantic. Ninth-century Vikings established short-lived settlements in Newfoundland, and it is probable that others made the voyage, either on purpose or accidentally, carried by westward currents off the coast of Africa. In the late fifteenth century, Portugal's control of trade via the eastern Cape route provided impetus for Christopher Columbus's attempt to find a westward route across the Atlantic to Asia.

A native of Genoa, Columbus was an experienced seaman and navigator, with close ties to Portuguese seafaring. He had worked as a mapmaker in Lisbon and spent time on Madeira, where his wife's father was a prominent sugar planter. He was familiar with *portolans*—written descriptions of the courses along which ships sailed—and the use of the compass for dead reckoning. (He carried an astrolabe on his first voyage, but did not use it for navigation.)

Columbus was also a deeply religious man. He had witnessed the Spanish conquest of Granada and shared fully in the religious fervor surrounding that event. Like most Europeans of his age, Columbus understood Christianity as a missionary religion that should carry the hope of salvation across the earth.

Columbus first appealed to the Portuguese Crown in 1483 to support a voyage to find a westward passage to the Indies. When they refused, he turned to Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, and finally won their backing in 1492. The monarchs agreed to make him viceroy over any territory he might discover and to give him one-tenth of its material rewards.

Columbus and his small fleet left Spain on August 3, 1492. Inspired by the stories of Mandeville and Marco Polo, Columbus dreamed of reaching the court of the Mongol emperor, the Great Khan, not realizing that the Mongols had fallen to the Ming Dynasty in 1368. Based on Ptolemy's *Geography* and other texts, he expected to pass the islands of Japan and then land on the east coast of China. On October 12 Columbus landed in the Bahamas, which he christened San Salvador and claimed for the Spanish Crown. In a letter to Ferdinand and Isabella on his return to Spain, Columbus described the natives as handsome, peaceful, and primitive. Believing he was somewhere off the east coast of Japan, in what he considered the Indies, he called them "Indians," a name that was later applied to all inhabitants of the Americas. Columbus concluded that they would make good slaves and could quickly be converted to Christianity.

Scholars have identified the inhabitants of the islands as the Taino (TIGH-noh) people. Columbus then sailed southwest, landing on Cuba on October 28. Deciding that he must be on the mainland of China near the city of Quinsay (now Hangzhou), he dispatched a small landing party to locate the city. The landing party found only small villages. This disappointment led Columbus to abandon his aim to meet the Great Khan and focus instead on finding gold or other resources. In early December he landed on an island, called Ayti by its Taino inhabitants, that he renamed Hispaniola.

The sight of Taino people on Hispaniola wearing gold ornaments suggested that gold was available in the region. In January, he headed back to Spain to report on his discovery.

On his second voyage, Columbus took control of Hispaniola and enslaved its indigenous peoples. On this and subsequent voyages, he brought settlers for the new Spanish territories, along with agricultural seed and livestock. However, Columbus's poor governing skills soon sparked revolt among the settlers on Hispaniola. He was forced to Spain, and a royal governor assumed control of the colony.

## Spain “Discovers” the Pacific

Columbus never realized the scope of his achievement: that he had found a vast continent unknown to Europeans, except for the fleeting Viking presence centuries earlier. The Florentine navigator Amerigo Vespucci (veh-SPOO-chee) (1454–1512) realized what Columbus had not. Writing about his own discoveries on the coast of modern-day Venezuela, Vespucci stated: “Those new regions which we found and explored with the fleet . . . we may rightly call a New World.” This letter was the first document to describe America as a continent separate from Asia. In recognition of Amerigo's bold claim, the continent was named for him.

Upon Columbus's return from the first voyage, Isabella and Ferdinand appealed to Spanish-born Pope Alexander VI for support in claiming the newly discovered territories. The pope proposed drawing an imaginary line down the Atlantic, giving Spain possession of all lands discovered to the west of the line and Portugal everything to the east. He enjoined both powers to carry the Christian faith to these newly discovered lands and peoples. The **Treaty of Tordesillas** (tor-duh-SEE-yuhs) negotiated between Spain and Portugal in 1494 retained the pope's idea but moved the line further west as a concession to the Portuguese. This arbitrary division worked in Portugal's favor when in 1500 an expedition led by Pedro Álvares Cabral, en route to India, landed on the coast of Brazil, which Cabral claimed as Portuguese territory. (Because the line was imagined to extend around the globe, it meant that the Philippine Islands would eventually end up in Spanish control.)

The search for profits determined the direction of Spanish exploration. Because its revenue from Hispaniola and other Caribbean islands was insignificant compared to Portugal's enormous riches from the Asian spice trade, Spain renewed the search for a western passage to Asia. In 1519 Charles I of Spain (who was also Holy Roman emperor Charles V) commissioned Ferdinand Magellan (1480–1521) to find a direct sea route to Asia. Magellan sailed southwest across the Atlantic to Brazil, and eventually located the strait off the southern tip of South America that now bears his name (see Map 16.2). After passing through the strait into the Pacific Ocean in 1520, his fleet sailed north up the west coast of South America and then headed west into the Pacific.

Terrible storms, disease, starvation, and violence devastated the expedition. Magellan himself was killed in a skirmish in the Philippines, and only one of the five ships that began the expedition made it back to Spain. This ship returned home in 1522 with only eighteen men aboard, having traveled from the east by way of the Indian Ocean, the Cape of Good Hope, and the Atlantic. The voyage—the first to circumnavigate the globe—had taken close to three years.

Despite the losses, this voyage revolutionized Europeans' understanding of the world by demonstrating the vastness of the Pacific. The earth was clearly much larger than shown on Ptolemy's map. Magellan's expedition also forced Spain's rulers to rethink their plans for overseas commerce and territorial expansion. The westward passage to the Indies was too long and dangerous for commercial purposes. Thus Spain soon abandoned the attempt to oust Portugal from the Eastern spice trade and concentrated on exploiting its New World territories.

### Early Exploration by Northern European Powers

Shortly following Columbus's voyages, northern European nations entered the competition for a northwest passage to the Indies. In 1497 John Cabot (ca. 1450–1499), a Venetian merchant commissioned by the English Crown, landed on Newfoundland. The next year he returned and explored the New England coast. These forays proved futile, and at that time the English established no permanent colonies in the territories they explored.

News of the riches of Mexico and Peru later inspired the English to renew their efforts, this time in the extreme north. Between 1576 and 1578 Martin Frobisher (ca. 1535–1594) made three voyages in and around the Canadian bay that now bears his name. Frobisher brought a quantity of ore back to England, but it proved to be worthless.

Early French exploration of the Atlantic was equally frustrating. Between 1534 and 1541 Frenchman Jacques Cartier (1491–1557) made several voyages and explored the St. Lawrence River of Canada, searching for a passage to the wealth of Asia. When this hope proved vain, the French turned to a new source of profit within Canada itself: trade in beavers and other furs. As had the Portuguese in Asia, French traders bartered with local peoples whom they largely treated as autonomous and equal partners. French fishermen also competed with the Spanish and English for the schools of cod they found in the Atlantic waters around Newfoundland.

## Conquest and Settlement

**What was the impact of Iberian conquest and settlement on the peoples and states of the Americas?**

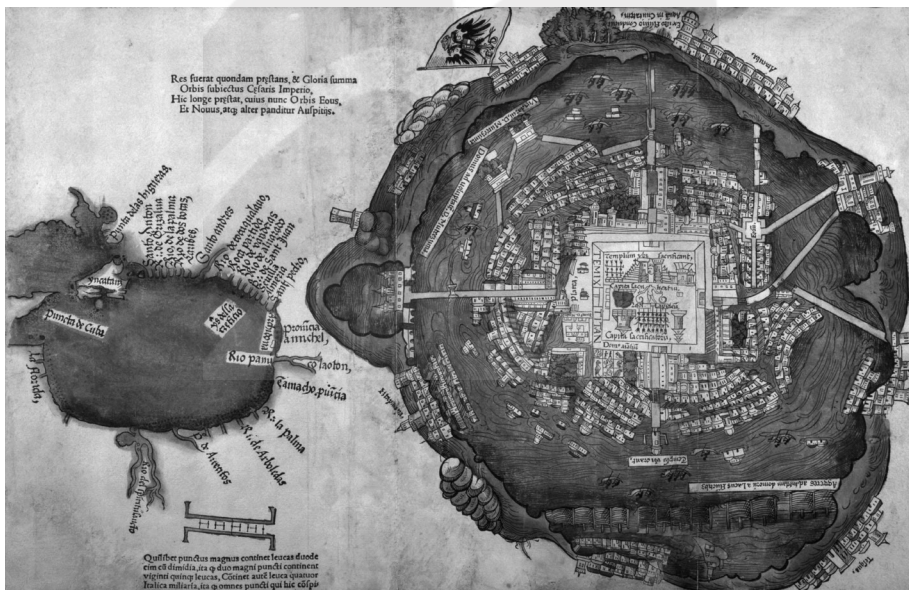
Before Columbus's arrival, the Americas were inhabited by thousands of groups of indigenous peoples with distinct languages and cultures. These groups ranged from hunter-gatherer tribes organized into tribal confederations to settled agriculturalists to large-scale empires containing large cities and towns. The best estimate is that the peoples of the Americas numbered between 50 and 65 million in 1492. These numbers were decimated, and the lives of survivors radically altered, by the arrival of Europeans.

### Spanish Conquest of the Aztec and Inca Empires

The first two decades after Columbus's arrival in the New World saw Spanish settlement of Hispaniola, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and other Caribbean islands. Based on rumors of a wealthy mainland civilization, the Spanish governor in Cuba sponsored expeditions to the Yucatán coast of the Gulf of Mexico, including one in 1519 under the command of Hernán Cortés (1485–1547), a Spanish nobleman with

considerable experience as an imperial administrator. Cortés and a party of several hundred Spaniards as well as enslaved Taino and African people landed on the Mexican coast on April 21, 1519. His camp soon received visits by delegations of Aztec leaders bearing gifts and news of their great emperor.

The **Aztec Empire**, formed in the early fifteenth century through an alliance of the Mexica people with other peoples in the Valley of Mexico, had expanded rapidly through conquest. At the time of the Spanish arrival, Moctezuma II (r. 1502–1520) ruled an empire of several million inhabitants from his capital at Tenochtitlan (tay-nawch-TEET-lahn), now Mexico City. The Aztec Empire was a highly organized state, with specialized law courts, advanced astronomy, mathematics, and engineering. Its cities featured urban plazas dominated by massive temple pyramids and with bustling markets selling jade, obsidian, and cacao supplied by regional trade networks. A hereditary nobility dominated the army, priesthood, and state bureaucracy and reaped the gains from the agricultural labor of the common people. The Aztec state practiced constant warfare against neighboring peoples to secure captives for religious sacrifices and laborers for agricultural and building projects. Once conquered, subject tribes paid continual tribute to the empire through their local chiefs.



**The Aztec Capital of Tenochtitlan** This woodcut map was published in 1524 along with Cortés's letters describing the conquest of the Aztecs. As it shows, Tenochtitlan occupied an island and was laid out in concentric circles. The administrative and religious buildings were at the heart of the city, which was surrounded by residential quarters. Cortés himself marveled at the city in his letters: "The city is as large as Seville or Cordoba. . . . There are bridges, very large, strong, and well constructed, so that, over many, ten horsemen can ride abreast. . . . The city has many squares where markets are held. . . . There is one square . . . where there are daily more than sixty thousand souls, buying and selling. In the service and manners of its people, their fashion of living was almost the same as in Spain, with just as much harmony and order." (Newberry Library, Chicago/Bridgeman Images)

The brutal nature of Aztec rule provided an opening for Cortés. Within weeks of his arrival, Cortés acquired translators who provided information on the empire and its weaknesses. In September 1519, after initial hostilities in which many Spaniards died, Cortés formed an alliance with Tlaxcala (tlah- SKAH- lah), an independent city-state that had successfully resisted incorporation into the Aztec Empire.

In October a combined Spanish-Tlaxcalan force marched to the city of Cholula, which had recently switched loyalties from Tlaxcala to the Aztec Empire, and massacred many thousands of inhabitants, including women and children. Impressed by this display of ruthless power, other groups joined Cortés's alliance against Aztec rule. In November 1519, these combined forces marched on Tenochtitlan.

Historians have long debated Moctezuma's response to the arrival of the Spanish. Despite the fact that Cortés was allied with his enemies, the emperor refrained from attacking the Spaniards and instead welcomed Cortés and approximately 250 Spanish followers into Tenochtitlan. Cortés later claimed that at this meeting the emperor, inspired by prophecies of the Spaniards' arrival, agreed to become a vassal of the Spanish king. Although impossible for historians to verify, Cortés and later Spanish colonists used this claim to legitimate violence against any who resisted their rule.

After spending more than seven months in the city, in an ambiguous position that combined the status of honored guests, occupiers, and detainees, the Spanish seized Moctezuma as a hostage. During the ensuing attacks and counterattacks, Moctezuma was killed. The city's population rose up against the Spaniards, who fled with heavy losses. In May 1521 the Spanish-Tlaxcalan alliance assaulted Tenochtitlan a second time, leading an army of approximately one thousand Spanish and seventy-five thousand Mesoamerican warriors.<sup>2</sup>

The fall of the Aztec capital in late summer 1521 was hard-won and greatly facilitated by the effects of smallpox, which had devastated the besieged population of the city. After establishing a new capital in the ruins of Tenochtitlan, Cortés and other conquistadors began the systematic conquest of Mexico, a decades-long and brutal process.

More remarkable than the defeat of the Aztecs was the fall of the remote **Inca Empire** in Peru. Living in a settlement perched more than 9,800 feet above sea level, the Incas were not in contact with the Mesoamerican civilization of the Aztecs. In 1438, the hereditary ruler of the Incas had himself crowned emperor and embarked on a successful campaign of conquest. At its greatest extent, the empire extended to the frontier of present-day Ecuador and Colombia in the north and to present-day Chile in the south, an area containing some 16 million people and 350,000 square miles.

Ruled from the capital city of Cuzco (KOOS-ko), the empire was divided into four major regions, each region into provinces, and each province into districts. Officials at each level used the extensive network of roads to transmit information and orders. While the Aztecs used a system of glyphs for writing, the Incas had devised a complex system of colored and knotted cords, called *quipus*, for administrative bookkeeping.

By the time of the Spanish invasion, however, the Inca Empire had been weakened by a civil war over succession and an epidemic of disease, probably smallpox, spread through trade with groups in contact with Europeans. The Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro (ca. 1475–1541) landed on the northern coast of Peru on May 13, 1532, the very day the Inca leader Atahualpa (ah-tuh-WAHL-puh)

won control of the empire. As Pizarro advanced across the Andes toward Cuzco, Atahualpa was also heading there for his coronation.

Like Moctezuma in Mexico, Atahualpa sent envoys to greet the Spanish. His plan was to lure them into a trap, seize their horses and ablest men for his army, and execute the rest. With an army of some forty thousand men stationed nearby, Atahualpa seems to have felt he had little to fear. Instead the Spaniards ambushed and captured him, extorted an enormous ransom in gold, and then executed him on trumped-up charges in 1533. The Spanish then marched on to Cuzco, profiting, as with the Aztecs, from internal conflicts to form alliances with local peoples. When Cuzco fell in 1533, the Spanish plundered the empire's wealth in gold and silver.

As with the Aztec Empire, the fall of the imperial capital did not immediately end hostilities. Warfare between Spanish and Inca forces continued to the 1570s. During this period, civil war broke out among Spanish settlers vying for power.

For centuries students have wondered how it was possible for several hundred Spanish conquistadors to defeat powerful empires commanding large armies, vast wealth, and millions of inhabitants. This question is based on a mistaken understanding of the conquest as the quick work of Spaniards acting alone, ideas that were spread in the aftermath by the conquistadors themselves. Instead, historians now emphasize that the defeat of the Aztec and Inca Empires was a long process enabled by divisions within the empires, which produced many native allies willing to fight alongside the Spanish. Spanish steel swords, guns, horses, and dogs bestowed military advantages, but these tools of war were limited in number and effectiveness in the environmental conditions of the Americas. Perhaps the most important factor was the devastating impact of contagious diseases among the indigenous population, which swept through the Aztec and Inca Empires at the time of the conquest.

### Portuguese Brazil

Unlike Mesoamerica or the Andes, the territory of Brazil contained no urban empires but instead had roughly 2.5 million nomadic and settled people divided into small tribes and many different language groups. In 1500 the Portuguese Crown named Pedro Álvares Cabral commander of a fleet headed for the spice trade of the Indies. En route, the fleet sailed far to the west, claiming the coast where they accidentally landed for Portugal under the terms of the Treaty of Tordesillas. The Portuguese soon undertook a profitable trade with local people in brazilwood, a valued source of red dye, which inspired the name of the new colony.

In the 1520s Portuguese settlers brought sugarcane production to Brazil. They initially used enslaved indigenous laborers on sugar plantations, but the rapid decline in the indigenous population soon led to the use of forcibly transported Africans. In Brazil the Portuguese thus created a new form of colonization in the Americas: large plantations worked by enslaved people. This model of slave-worked sugar plantations would spread throughout the Caribbean in the seventeenth century.

### Colonial Administration

While early conquest and settlement were conducted largely by private initiatives, the Portuguese and Spanish governments soon assumed more direct control. Both Portugal and Spain required all merchandise from their American colonies to travel

through a single port, where it could be taxed and then transported elsewhere in Europe. They ruled conquered peoples through a combination of European and indigenous institutions and practices.

In 1482, King John II of Portugal established a royal trading house in Lisbon to handle gold and other goods being extracted from Africa. After the Portuguese expanded into the Indian Ocean spice trade, it was named the Casa da Índia (House of the Indies). Through the Casa, the Crown exercised a monopoly over the export of European goods and the import and distribution of spices and precious metals. It charged taxes on all other incoming goods. The Casa also established a viceroy in the Indian city of Goa to administer Portuguese trading posts and naval forces in Africa and Asia.

To secure the vast expanse of Brazil, in the 1530s the Portuguese implemented a distinctive system of rule called **captaincies**, in which hereditary grants of land were given to nobles and loyal officials who bore the costs of settling and administering their territories. Over time, the Crown secured greater power over the captaincies, appointing royal governors to act as administrators. The captaincy of Bahia was the site of the capital, Salvador, home to the governor general and other royal officials.

Spain adopted a similar system for overseas trade. In 1503 the Spanish granted the port of Seville a monopoly over all traffic to the New World and established the House of Trade to oversee economic matters. In 1523 Spain created the Royal and Supreme Council of the Indies, with authority over all colonial affairs subject to approval by the king.

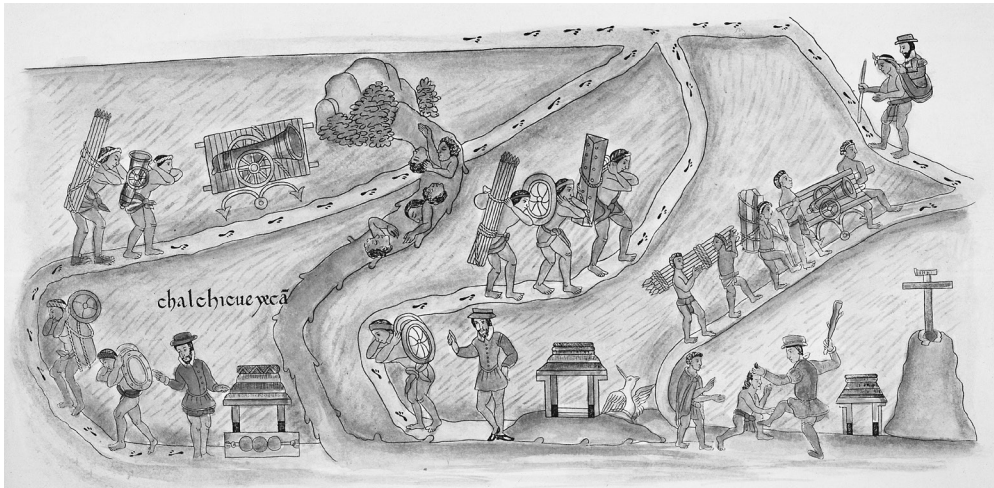
By the end of the sixteenth century the Spanish had successfully overcome most indigenous groups and expanded their territory throughout modern-day Mexico, the southwestern United States, and Central and South America. In Mesoamerica and the Andes, the Spanish had taken over the cities and tribute systems of the Aztecs and the Incas, leaving in place well-established cities and towns, but redirecting tribute payments toward the Crown. Through laws and regulations, the Spanish Crown strove to maintain two separate populations, a “Spanish Republic” and an “Indian Republic,” with distinct rights and duties for each group.

The Spanish Crown divided its New World possessions initially into two **viceroyalties**, or administrative divisions: New Spain, created in 1535; and Peru, created in 1542. In the eighteenth century two new viceroyalties, New Granada and La Plata, were created (see Map 16.2).

Within each territory, the viceroy, or imperial governor, exercised broad military and civil authority. The viceroy presided over the *audiencia* (ow-dee-EHN-see-ah), a board of judges that served as his advisory council and the highest judicial body. As in Spain, settlement in the Americas was centered on cities and towns. In each city, the municipal council, or *cabildo*, exercised local authority. Women were denied participation in public life, a familiar pattern from both Spain and precolonial indigenous society.

### Economic Exploitation of the Indigenous Population

From the first decades of settlement, the Spanish made use of the **encomienda system**, by which the Crown granted the conquerors the right to force groups of Native Americans to perform labor and to demand tribute from them in exchange



**Spanish Exploitation of Indigenous Labor** This image depicts Spanish conquistadors supervising indigenous laborers as they carry arms along the steep road from Veracruz to Tlaxcala in 1520. It was part of a larger painting, produced in the postconquest era and known as the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, that tells the story of the alliance between the Tlaxcala kingdom and the Spanish and their defeat of the Aztec Empire. (Sarin Images/Granger)

for providing food and shelter. The *encomiendas* (en-ko-me-EN-duhz) were also intended as a means to organize indigenous people for missionary work and Christian conversion. This system was first used in Hispaniola to work gold fields and then in Mexico for agricultural labor and, when silver was discovered in the 1540s, for silver mining.

A 1512 Spanish law authorizing the use of *encomiendas* called for indigenous people to be treated fairly, but in practice the system led to terrible abuses, including overwork, beatings, and sexual violence. King Charles I responded to complaints in 1542 with the New Laws, which set limits on the authority of *encomienda* holders, including their ability to transmit their privileges to heirs. The New Laws recognized indigenous people who accepted Christianity and Spanish rule as free subjects of the Spanish Crown. The New Laws provoked a revolt in Peru among *encomienda* holders, and the laws were little enforced throughout Spanish territories. Nonetheless, the Crown gradually gained control over *encomiendas* in central areas of the empire and required indigenous people to pay tributes in cash, rather than in labor.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, in response to persistent abuses in the *encomiendas* and a growing shortage of indigenous workers, royal officials gradually established a new government-run system of forced labor, called *repartimiento* in New Spain and *mita* in Peru. Administrators assigned a certain percentage of the inhabitants of native communities to labor for a set period each year in public works, mining, agriculture, and other tasks.

Spanish systems for exploiting the labor of indigenous peoples were both a cause of and a response to the disastrous decline in their population that began soon after the arrival of Europeans. Some indigenous people died as a direct result of the

violence of conquest and the disruption of agriculture and trade caused by warfare. The most important cause of death, however, was infectious disease.

Colonial administrators responded to this population decline by forcibly combining dwindling indigenous communities into new settlements and imposing the rigors of the *encomienda* and the *repartimiento*. By the end of the sixteenth century the search for fresh sources of labor had given birth to the new tragedy of the Atlantic slave trade.

### Patterns of Settlement

The century after the discovery of silver in 1545 marked the high point of Iberian immigration to the Americas. Although the first migrants were men, soon whole families began to cross the Atlantic, and the European population began to increase through natural reproduction. By 1600 American-born Europeans, called *Creoles*, outnumbered immigrants.

Iberian settlement was predominantly urban in nature. Spaniards settled into the cities and towns of the former Aztec and Inca Empires as the native population dwindled through death and flight. They also established new cities in which settlers were quick to develop urban institutions familiar to them from Spain: city squares, churches, schools, and universities.

Despite the growing number of Europeans and the rapid decline of the indigenous population, Europeans remained a small minority of the total inhabitants of the Americas. Iberians had sexual relationships with native women, leading to the growth of a substantial population of mixed Iberian and Indian descent known as *mestizos* (meh-STEE-zohz). The large-scale arrival of enslaved Africans, starting in Brazil in the mid-sixteenth century, added new ethnic and racial dimensions to the population.

## The Era of Global Contact

**How was the era of global contact shaped by new commodities, commercial empires, and forced migrations?**

The centuries-old Afro-Eurasian trade world was forever changed by the European voyages of discovery and their aftermath. For the first time, a truly global economy emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it forged new links among far-flung peoples, cultures, and societies. The ancient civilizations of Europe, Africa, the Americas, and Asia confronted each other in new and rapidly evolving ways. Those confrontations often took the form of conquest, forced migration, and brutal exploitation. They also contributed to cultural exchange, ecological transformation, and new patterns of life.

### Population Loss and the Ecological Impacts of Contact

Contact between the Old and New Worlds had profound ecological ramifications. In particular, the travel of people and goods led to an exchange of animals, plants, and diseases, a complex process known as the **Columbian exchange**. Everywhere they settled, the Spanish and Portuguese brought and raised wheat. Grapes and olives

imported from Spain did well in parts of Peru and Chile. Perhaps the most significant introduction to the diet of Native Americans came via the meat and milk of the livestock that the early conquistadors brought with them, including cattle, sheep, and goats. The horse enabled both the Spanish conquerors and indigenous populations to travel faster and farther and to transport heavy loads more easily.

In turn, Europeans returned home with food crops that became central elements of their diet and eventually of many parts of the world. Crops originating in the Americas included tomatoes, squash, pumpkins, peppers, and many varieties of beans, as well as tobacco. One of the most important of such crops was maize (corn). By the late seventeenth century maize had become a staple in Spain, Portugal, southern France, and Italy, and in the eighteenth century it became one of the chief foods of southeastern Europe and southern China. Even more valuable was the nutritious white potato, which slowly spread from west to east, contributing everywhere to a rise in population.

While the exchange of foods was a great benefit to cultures across the world, the introduction of European pathogens to the New World had a disastrous impact on the native population. In Europe infectious diseases like smallpox, measles, and influenza—originally spread through contact with domestic animals—killed many people each year. Given the size of the population and the frequency of outbreaks, in most of Europe these diseases were experienced in childhood, and survivors carried immunity or resistance. Prior to contact with Europeans, indigenous peoples of the New World suffered from insect-borne diseases and some infectious ones, but their lack of domestic livestock spared them the host of highly infectious Old World diseases. The arrival of Europeans spread these microbes among a totally unprepared population, and they fell victim in vast numbers.

Overall, the indigenous population declined by as much as 90 percent or more, but with important regional variations. In general, densely populated urban centers were worse hit than rural areas, and tropical, low-lying regions suffered more than cooler, higher-altitude ones. The world after Columbus was thus profoundly transformed by disease as well as by trade and colonization.

## Sugar and Early Transatlantic Slavery

Throughout the Middle Ages, slavery was deeply entrenched in the Mediterranean. The constant warfare of the reconquista had supplied captive Muslims for domestic slavery in Iberia, but the success of these wars meant that the number of captives had greatly dwindled by the mid-fifteenth century.

As Portuguese explorers began their voyages along the western coast of Africa in the 1440s, one of the first commodities they sought was slaves. While the first slaves were simply seized by small raiding parties, Portuguese merchants soon found that it was easier and more profitable to trade with African leaders, who were accustomed to dealing in enslaved people captured through warfare with neighboring powers. In 1483 the Portuguese established an alliance with the kingdom of Kongo. The royal family eventually converted to Christianity, and Portuguese merchants intermarried with Kongolese women, creating a permanent Afro-Portuguese community. From 1490 to 1530 Portuguese traders brought between three hundred and two thousand enslaved Africans to Portugal each year.

In this stage of European expansion, the history of slavery became intertwined with the history of sugar. In the Middle Ages, sugarcane—native to the South Pacific—was brought to Mediterranean islands. Population increases and greater prosperity in the fifteenth century led to increasing demand for sugar. The establishment of sugar plantations on the Canary and Madeira Islands in the fifteenth century after Iberian colonization testifies to this demand.

Sugar was a particularly difficult crop to produce for profit, requiring constant, arduous labor. The invention of roller mills to crush the cane more efficiently meant that yields could be significantly augmented, but only if a sufficient labor force was found to supply the mills. Plantation owners solved their labor problem by forcing first native islanders and then transported Africans to perform the back-breaking work.

The transatlantic slave trade that would ultimately result in the forced transport of over 12 million people began in 1518, when Spanish king Charles I authorized traders to bring enslaved Africans to the Americas. The Portuguese brought the first enslaved people to Brazil around 1550. After its founding in 1621, the Dutch West India Company forcibly transported thousands of Africans to Brazil and the Caribbean, mostly to work on sugar plantations. In the late seventeenth century, with the chartering of the Royal African Company, the English entered the slave trade.

Before 1700, when slavers decided it was better business to improve conditions for the captives, some 20 percent of enslaved people died on the voyage across the Atlantic.<sup>3</sup> The most common cause of death was dysentery induced by poor-quality food and water, lack of sanitation, and intense crowding. On sugar plantations, death rates among enslaved people from illness and exhaustion were extremely high.

### Spanish Silver and Its Economic Effects

In 1545, at an altitude of fifteen thousand feet, the Spanish discovered an extraordinary source of silver at Potosí (poh-toh-SEE) (in present-day Bolivia) in unsettled territory captured from the Inca Empire. By 1550 Potosí yielded perhaps 60 percent of all the silver mined in the world. From Potosí and the mines at Zacatecas (za-kuh-TAY-kuhs) and Guanajuato (gwah-nah-HWAH-toh) in Mexico, huge quantities of precious metals poured forth.

Mining became the most important industry in the colonies. Millions of indigenous laborers suffered brutal conditions and death in the silver mines. Demand for new sources of labor for the mines also contributed to the intensification of the African slave trade. Profits for the Spanish Crown were immense. The Crown claimed the quinto, one-fifth of all precious metals mined in South America, which represented 25 percent of its total income. Between 1503 and 1650, 35 million pounds of silver and over 600,000 pounds of gold entered Seville's port.

Spain's immense profits from silver paid for the tremendous expansion of its empire and for the large armies that defended it. However, the easy flow of money had the unanticipated effect of dampening economic innovation. It also exacerbated the rising inflation Spain was already experiencing in the mid-sixteenth century due to population growth and stagnant production. Only after 1600, when the population declined, did prices slowly stabilize. Nevertheless, King Philip II and his successors

were forced to write off the state debt several times between 1550 and 1650, thereby undermining confidence in the government and further weakening the economy.

Philip II paid his armies and foreign debts with silver bullion, and thus Spanish inflation was transmitted to the rest of Europe. Between 1560 and 1600 prices in most parts of Europe doubled and in some cases quadrupled. Because money bought less, people who lived on fixed incomes, such as nobles, were badly hurt. Those who owed fixed sums of money, such as the middle class, prospered because in a time of rising prices, debts lessened in value each year. Food costs rose most sharply, and the poor fared worst of all.

In many ways, though, it was not Spain but China that controlled the world trade in silver. The Chinese demanded silver for their products and for the payment of imperial taxes. China was thus the main buyer of world silver, absorbing half the world's production. The silver market drove world trade, with New Spain and Japan acting as major sources of the supply of silver and China dominating demand. The world trade in silver is one of the best examples of the new global economy that emerged in this period.

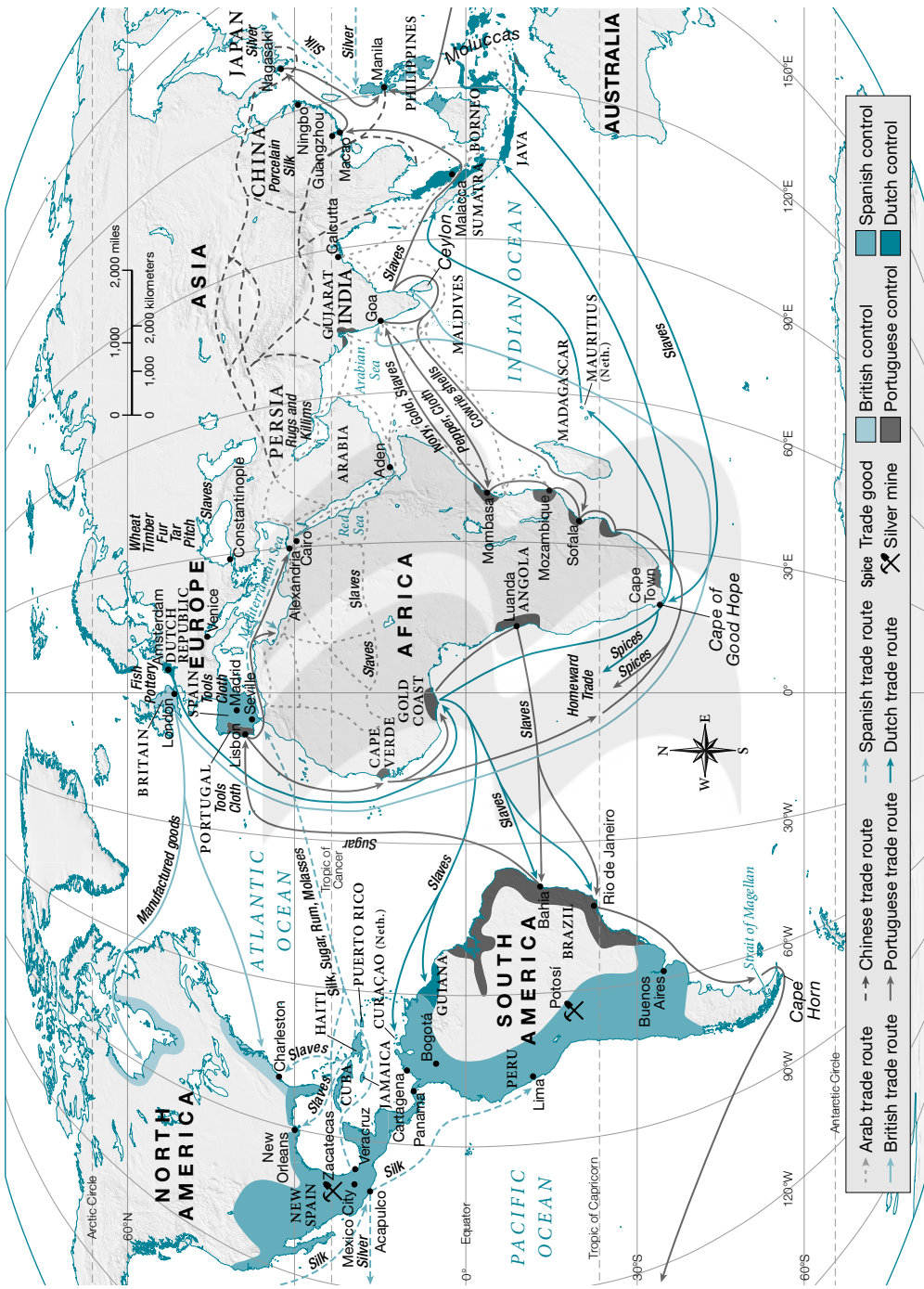
## The Birth of the Global Economy

With Europeans' discovery of the Americas and their exploration of the Pacific, the entire world was linked for the first time in history by oceanic trade. The opening of that trade brought into being three successive commercial empires: the Portuguese, the Spanish, and the Dutch.

In the sixteenth century the Portuguese controlled the sea route to India (Map 16.3). From their bases at Goa on the Arabian Sea and at Malacca on the Malay Peninsula, ships carried goods to the Portuguese settlement at Macao. From Macao Portuguese ships loaded with Chinese silks and porcelains sailed to Japan and the Philippines, where Chinese goods were exchanged for Spanish silver from New Spain. Throughout Asia the Portuguese traded in enslaved people, some of whom were brought all the way across the Pacific to Mexico. Returning to Portugal, they brought Asian spices that had been purchased with textiles produced in India and with gold and ivory from East Africa. From their colony in Brazil they shipped sugar produced by enslaved Africans whom they had forcibly transported across the Atlantic.

Coming to empire a few decades later than the Portuguese, the Spanish were determined to claim their place in world trade. The Spanish Empire in the New World was basically land based, but across the Pacific the Spaniards built a sea-borne empire centered at Manila in the Philippines. Established in 1571, the city of Manila served as the transpacific link between Spanish America and China. In Manila Spanish traders used silver from American mines to purchase Chinese silk for European markets.

In the seventeenth century the Dutch challenged the Spanish and Portuguese empires. The Dutch East India Company was founded in 1602 with the stated intention of capturing the spice trade from the Portuguese. Drawing on their commercial wealth and long experience in European trade, the Dutch emerged by the end of the century as the most powerful worldwide seaborne trading power (see "The Dutch Trading Empire" in Chapter 18).



## Changing Attitudes and Beliefs

### How did new encounters shape cultural attitudes and beliefs in Europe and the rest of the world?

The age of overseas expansion heightened Europeans' contacts with the rest of the world. These contacts gave birth to new ideas about the inherent superiority or inferiority of different groups of people, increasingly conceived as distinct "races." Religion constituted a crucial means of cultural contact, as European missionaries aimed to spread Christianity in both the New World and East Asia. The East-West contacts also led to exchanges of influential cultural and scientific ideas.

### Religious Conversion

Christian conversion was one of the most important justifications for European expansion. Jesuit missionaries were active in Japan and China in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, until authorities banned their teachings. The first missionaries to the New World accompanied Columbus on his second voyage, and more than 2,500 Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits, and other friars crossed the Atlantic in the following century. Colonial powers built convents, churches, and cathedrals for converted indigenous people and European settlers, and established religious courts to police correct beliefs and morals.

To stamp out old beliefs, colonial authorities destroyed shrines and objects of religious worship. They harshly persecuted men and women who continued to practice traditional spiritual rituals and imposed European Christian norms of family life, especially monogamous marriage, on indigenous people. While many resisted these efforts, over time a larger number accepted Christianity. It is estimated that missionaries had baptized between 4 and 9 million indigenous people in New Spain by the mid-1530s.<sup>4</sup>

Christian conversion was an ambiguous and complex process involving cultural exchanges that impacted both sides. Catholic friars were among the first Europeans to seek an understanding of native cultures and languages as part of their effort to render Christianity comprehensible to indigenous people. In Mexico they not only learned the Nahuatl language, but also taught it to non-Nahuatl-speaking groups to create a shared language for Christian teaching. In translating Christianity, missionaries, working in partnership with indigenous converts, adapted it to the symbols and ritual objects of pre-existing cultures and beliefs, thereby creating distinctive New World forms of Catholicism.

### < MAP 16.3 Seaborne Trading Empires in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

By the mid-seventeenth century trade linked all parts of the world except for Australia. Notice that trade in slaves was not confined to the Atlantic but involved almost all parts of the world.

## European Debates About Indigenous Peoples

Iberian exploitation of the native population of the Americas began from the moment of Columbus's arrival in 1492. Denunciations of this abuse by Catholic missionaries, however, quickly followed, inspiring vociferous debates in both Europe and the colonies about the nature of indigenous peoples and how they should be treated. Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474–1566), a Dominican friar and former encomienda holder, was one of the earliest and most outspoken critics of the brutal treatment inflicted on indigenous peoples.

Mounting criticism in Spain led King Charles I to assemble a group of churchmen and lawyers to debate the issue in 1550 in the city of Valladolid. One side of the **Valladolid debate**, led by Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, argued that conquest and forcible conversion were both necessary and justified to save indigenous people from the horrors of human sacrifice and idolatry. To counter these arguments, Las Casas and his supporters depicted indigenous people as rational and innocent children, who deserved protection and tutelage.

While the debate did not end exploitation of indigenous people, the Crown did use it to justify limiting the rights of settlers and increasing legal protections for indigenous communities. In 1573, Philip II issued detailed laws regulating how new towns should be established and administered and how Spanish settlers should interact with indigenous populations. The impact of these laws can still be seen in Mexico's colonial towns, which are laid out as grids around a central plaza.

## New Ideas About Race

European conquest and settlement led to the emergence of new ideas about “race” as a form of human identity. In medieval Spain and Portugal, sharp distinctions were drawn between supposedly “pure-blooded” Christians, on the one hand, and Jews and conversos, people of Jewish origins who had converted to Christianity, on the other. In the fifteenth century, Iberian rulers issued discriminatory laws against conversos as well as against Muslims and their descendants. Feeling that conversion could not erase the taint of heretical belief, they came to see Christian faith as a type of inherited identity that was passed through the blood.

The idea of “purity of blood” changed when Iberians conquered the Americas. The colonial population included people of European, indigenous, and (after the introduction of the transatlantic slave trade) African descent. Spanish colonizers came to believe that the indigenous people of the Americas were free from the taint of unbelief because they had never been exposed to Christianity. Accordingly, the ideology of “purity of blood” they brought from Iberia could more easily incorporate indigenous populations; by contrast, Africans — viewed as having refused the message of Christ that was preached in the Old World — were seen as impure, as much on the grounds of religious difference as physical characteristics.

Despite later efforts by colonial officials to segregate Europeans, Native Americans, and people of African descent, racial mixing began as soon as the first conquistadors arrived in the Americas. A complex system of racial classification, known as

castas in Spanish America, emerged to refer to different proportions of European, indigenous, and African parentage. Spanish concerns about religious purity were thus transformed in the colonial context into concerns about racial bloodlines, with “pure” Spanish blood occupying the summit of the racial hierarchy and mixtures of European, indigenous and African descent ranked in descending order. These concerns put childbirth and reproduction at the center of anxieties about racial mixing, heightening scrutiny of women’s sexual activities.

All European colonies in the New World, including later French and English settlements, drew racial distinctions between Europeans, indigenous people, and those of African descent. With its immense slave-based plantation agriculture system, large indigenous population, and relatively low Portuguese immigration, Brazil developed a particularly complex racial and ethnic mosaic.

## Chapter Summary

Prior to Columbus’s voyages, centuries-old trade routes linked the peoples and products of Africa, Asia, and Europe. As the economy and population recovered from the Black Death, Europeans began to seek more direct and profitable access to the Afro-Eurasian trade world. Technological innovations, many borrowed from the East, enabled explorers to undertake ever more ambitious voyages.

In the aftermath of conquest, the Portuguese and Spanish established new forms of governance to dominate indigenous peoples and exploit their labor. The arrival of Europeans brought enormous population losses to native communities, primarily through the spread of infectious diseases. Disease was one element of the Columbian exchange, a complex transfer of germs, plants, and animals between the Old and New Worlds that helped create the first truly global economy. Tragically, a major component of global trade was the transatlantic slave trade, in which Europeans forcibly transported Africans to labor in the sugar plantations and silver mines of the New World. European nations vied for supremacy in global trade, with early Portuguese success in Asia being challenged first by the Spanish and then by the Dutch.

Increased contact with the outside world led Europeans to develop new ideas about cultural and racial differences. Debates occurred in Spain and its colonies over the treatment of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, and new ideas about racial inequality emerged. Religion was a key means of cultural contact, as European missionaries aimed to spread Christianity in the New World.

## NOTES

1. Marco Polo, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian: Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, vol. 2, trans. and ed. Colonel Sir Henry Yule (London: John Murray, 1903), pp. 185–186.
2. Thomas Benjamin, *The Atlantic World: Europeans, Africans, Indians and Their Shared History, 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 141.
3. Herbert S. Klein, “Profits and the Causes of Mortality,” in *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, ed. David Northrup (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1994), p. 116.
4. David Carrasco, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 208.

**MAKE CONNECTIONS LOOK AHEAD**

Just three years separated Martin Luther's attack on the Catholic Church in 1517 and Ferdinand Magellan's discovery of the Pacific Ocean in 1520. Within a few short years western Europeans' religious unity and notions of terrestrial geography were shattered. In the ensuing decades Europeans struggled to come to terms with religious differences between Protestants and Catholics at home and with the multitudes of new peoples and places they encountered abroad. While some Europeans were positively inspired by this new diversity, more often the result was suffering and violence. Europeans endured decades of religious civil war, and indigenous peoples overseas underwent massive population losses as a result of European warfare, disease, and exploitation. Religious leaders condoned the transatlantic slave trade that brought suffering and death to millions as well as the conquest of Native American land and the subjugation of indigenous people.

Even as the voyages of discovery introduced new forms of diversity to European culture, they also played a role in state centralization and consolidation. Henceforth, competition to gain overseas colonies became an integral part of European politics. While Spain's enormous profits from conquest ultimately led to a weakening of its power, over time the Netherlands, England, and France used profits from colonial trade to help build modernized, centralized states.

Two crucial consequences emerged from this era of expansion. The first was the creation of enduring contacts among five of the seven continents of the globe—Europe, Asia, Africa, North America, and South America. From the sixteenth century onward, the peoples of the world were increasingly entwined in new forms of economic, social, and cultural exchange. The second was the growth of European power. Europeans gradually asserted control over the Americas and over existing trade networks in Asia and Africa. Although China remained the world's most powerful economy until at least 1800, the beginnings of European dominance had emerged.

## Chapter 16 Review

### IDENTIFY KEY TERMS

Identify and explain the significance of each item below.

bride wealth (p. 386)	Inca Empire (p. 396)
conquistador (p. 388)	captaincies (p. 398)
caravel (p. 389)	viceroalties (p. 398)
Ptolemy's <i>Geography</i> (p. 389)	encomienda system (p. 398)
Treaty of Tordesillas (p. 393)	Columbian exchange (p. 400)
Aztec Empire (p. 395)	Valladolid debate (p. 406)

### REVIEW THE MAIN IDEAS

Answer the focus questions from each section of the chapter.

1. What was the Afro-Eurasian trade world prior to the era of European exploration? (p. 384)
2. How and why did Europeans undertake ambitious voyages of expansion? (p. 388)
3. What was the impact of Iberian conquest and settlement on the peoples and ecologies of the Americas? (p. 394)
4. How was the era of global contact shaped by new commodities, commercial empires, and forced migrations? (p. 400)
5. How did new encounters shape cultural attitudes and beliefs in Europe and the rest of the world? (p. 405)

### MAKE COMPARISONS AND CONNECTIONS

Analyze the larger developments and continuities within and across chapters.

1. If Europe was at the periphery of the global trading system prior to 1492, what role did Europeans play by the middle of the sixteenth century? What had changed? What had not?
2. How does the spread of Christianity in the aftermath of European conquest in the New World compare with the earlier spread of Christianity under the Roman Empire (Chapter 6) and the spread of Buddhism (Chapter 7) and Islam (Chapters 9, 10, 13)?
3. How did European expansion in the period covered in this chapter draw on earlier patterns of trade and migration in Africa (Chapter 10) and Asia (Chapters 12, 13)?
4. To what extent did the European voyages of expansion and conquest inaugurate an era of global history? Did this era represent the birth of "globalization"? Why or why not?

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1368–1644** • Ming Dynasty in China (Ch. 21)
- 1405–1433** • Zheng He's naval expeditions
- 1443** • Portuguese establish first African trading post at Arguin
- 1453** • Ottoman conquest of Constantinople (Ch. 17)
- ca. 1464–1591** • Songhai kingdom dominates the western Sudan (Ch. 20)
- 1467–1600** • Period of civil war in Japan (Ch. 21)
- 1492** • Columbus lands on San Salvador
- 1494** • Treaty of Tordesillas ratified
- 1518** • Atlantic slave trade begins
- 1519–1522** • Magellan's expedition circumnavigates the world
- 1521** • Cortés conquers Aztec Empire
- 1533** • Pizarro conquers Inca Empire
- 1556–1605** • Reign of Akbar in Mughal Empire (Ch. 17)
- 1571** • Spanish establish port of Manila in the Philippines
- 1602** • Dutch East India Company founded