Colonial Latin America

TENTH EDITION

Mark A. Burkholder & Lyman L. Johnson

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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New York Oxford
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of
Oxford University Press in the UK and certain other countries.

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America.

For titles covered by Section 112 of the US Higher Education Opportunity Act, please visit www.oup.com/us/he for the latest information about pricing and alternate formats.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Burkholder, Mark A., 1943- author. | Johnson, Lyman L., author.
Title: Colonial Latin America / Mark A. Burkholder, University of Missouri-St. Louis; Lyman L. Johnson, University of North Carolina, Charlotte.
Description: Tenth edition. | New York ; Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2019. | Includes index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2017058684 (print) | LCCN 2017058970 (ebook) | ISBN 9780190642402
Subjects: LCSH: Latin America—History—To 1830.
Classification: LCC F1412 (ebook) | LCC F1412 .B96 2019 (print) | DDC 980/.01—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017058684

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Printed by Sheridan Books, Inc., United States of America

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PREFACE

Since the first edition of *Colonial Latin America* in 1990, numerous scholars have published valuable works on the colonial and early national periods. From them, we have drawn new material included in the tenth edition. Our debt to our colleagues' recent books can be found in the revised suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter.

New to This Edition

- Revised discussion of conquest and early settlement in Chapter 2. Revised slave trade estimates in Chapter 4. Improved and expanded discussion of labor and wages in Chapter 5.
- Revised examination of plantation slavery in Chapter 6.
- Improved and expanded discussion of *mayorazgos* and family life in Chapter 7.
- Improved discussion of rural and urban settings and daily life in Chapter 8.
- Updated suggested readings throughout the book.

We again call students' attention to the valuable five-volume reference work *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture*, edited by Barbara A. Tenenbaum, and to an important volume of bibliographical essays, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. XI, *Bibliographical Essays*, edited by Leslie Bethell. The periodicals listed in "A Note on Periodical Literature and Suggested Readings" after the Epilogue continue to enrich the study of colonial Latin America. We strongly recommend that student readers use these wonderful resources when they begin their research.

We remain grateful for the assistance of Kenneth J. Andrien and Allan J. Kuethe in revising and expanding our treatment of the early eighteenth century. For this edition Kendall Brown has helped guide additional revisions to our discussion of late colonial administrative reforms. In recent editions we have relied heavily on colleagues who have specialized knowledge. We are also very grateful

to Camilla Townsend and Susan Kellogg for improving our understanding of Mesoamerica and the era of conquest. Christon I. Archer and Jaime E. Rodríguez O. encouraged us to rethink the process of revolution and independence for the seventh edition. Marcela Echeverri provided a perceptive and constructive critique of several chapters, and we are grateful for her assistance. Karen Graubart and Peter Villella were very helpful in guiding our revision of the discussion of *limpieza de sangre* in Chapter 6. Alex Borucki generously assisted our efforts to modernize our estimates of the slave trade. We also thank colleagues and students who have used the book in classes and offered suggestions for improvement. We alone are responsible for the results.

We are indebted to the institutions and individuals that have supported our efforts by granting permission to use images from their collections. We are especially grateful to the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University, the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection of the University of Texas Libraries, the Denver Art Museum, and the Collection of Frederick and Jan Mayer of Denver, Colorado. Finally, we want to thank again Sue Johnson and Carol Burkholder for their unflagging support. With great appreciation and love we again dedicate this revision to them.

St. Louis, Missouri *M.A.B.*
Charlotte, North Carolina *L.L.J.*

Map 1 Topographical Map of Latin America.

CHAPTER 1

America, Iberia, and Africa Before the Conquest

CHRONOLOGY

c. 100 B.C.–A.D. 750	Emergence and prominence of Teotihuacan in Mesoamerica
250–900	Maya Classic period
718–1492	Christian Reconquest of Iberia from Muslims
c. 900–1540	Maya Postclassic period
c. 1325	Mexica begin to build Tenochtitlan
1415	Portuguese capture Ceuta in North Africa
1426–1521	Triple Alliance and Aztec Empire
c. 1438–1533	Inka Empire
1469	Marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabel of Castile
1492	Columbus's first voyage; fall of Granada; expulsion of Jews from "Spain"; first Castilian grammar published
1493	Papal donation; Columbus's second voyage (1493–96); "Columbian Exchange" begins with Spanish introduction of sugarcane, horses, cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, chickens, wheat, olive trees, and grapevines into Caribbean islands
1494	Treaty of Tordesillas
1500	Pedro Alvarez Cabral lands on Brazilian coast
1502	Nicolás de Ovando takes about 2,500 settlers, including Las Casas, to Española; Moctezuma II elected *tlatoani* of Mexica
1510–11	Diego de Velázquez conquers Cuba
1512	Laws of Burgos
1513	Blasco Núñez de Balboa crosses the Isthmus of Panama to Pacific

AMERINDIAN CIVILIZATIONS ON THE EVE OF EUROPEAN CONQUEST

The Western Hemisphere's history begins with the arrival of its first inhabitants. Most scholars agree that the hemisphere was settled in a series of migrations across the Bering Strait from Asia. There is less consensus about when these migrations took place. Hunting populations expanded rapidly along the west coast of the hemisphere

after 14,000 B.C. Some evidence suggests, however, that human populations may have been present in South America as early as 35,000 B.C. If this is verified by additional research, then some humans probably reached the hemisphere using small boats.

Regardless of the date of first arrivals, it took millennia to occupy the hemisphere. Societies in Mexico, Central America, and the Andean region had initiated the development of agriculture and complex political forms before 5000 B.C. On the other hand, the Caribbean Basin and the plains of southern South America were inhabited less

The main temple at Chichen Itza, near the modern city of Merida, Mexico. Chichen Itza was the major Postclassic-era Maya city.

than 2,000 years before Columbus's arrival. The hemisphere's indigenous population at the moment of contact in 1492 was probably between 35 million and 55 million.

Although the Aztecs and Inkas are the civilizations best known during the age of conquest, the inhabitants of these empires constituted only a minority of the total Amerindian population and resided in geographic areas that together represented only a small portion of Latin America's landscape. Aymara, Caribs, Chichimecas, Ge, Guaraní, Mapuche, Maya, Muisca, Otomí, Pueblo, Quibaya, Taíno, Tepaneca, Tupí, and Zapotec joined a host of other peoples and linguistic groups who inhabited the Americas; together they formed a human mosaic whose diverse characteristics greatly influenced the ways in which colonial Latin America developed.

By 1500 over 350 major tribal groups, 15 distinct cultural centers, and more than 160 linguistic stocks could be found in Latin America. Despite the variety suggested by these numbers, there were, essentially, three forms or levels of Indian culture. One was a largely nomadic group that relied on hunting, fishing, and gathering for subsistence; its members had changed little from the people who first made stone points in the New World in about 10,000 B.C. A second group was sedentary or semisedentary and depended primarily on agriculture for subsistence. Having developed technologies different from those of the nomadic peoples, its members benefited from the domestication of plants that had taken place after about 5000 B.C. The third group featured dense, sedentary populations, surplus

Inka ruin, Machu Picchu, Peru.

agricultural production, greater specialization of labor and social differentiation, and large-scale public construction projects. These complex civilizations were located only in Mesoamerica and western South America. The civilizations of Teotihuacan, Monte Albán, Tiwanaku, Chimú, and several Maya cultures were among its most important early examples.

Mesoamerica is the term employed to define a culturally unified geographic area that includes central and southern Mexico and most of Central America north of the Isthmus of Panama. Marked by great diversity of landscape and climate, Mesoamerica was the cradle of a series of advanced urbanized civilizations based on sedentary agriculture. Never more than a fraction of this large region was ever united politically. Instead, its inhabitants shared a cultural tradition that flourished most spectacularly in the hot country of the Gulf of Mexico coast with the Olmec civilization between 1200 and 400 B.C. While linguistic diversity and regional variations persisted, common cultural elements can be traced from this origin. They include polytheistic religions in which the deities had dual (male/female) natures, rulers who exercised both secular and religious roles, the use of warfare for obtaining sacrificial victims, and a belief that bloodletting was necessary for a society's survival and prosperity. The use of ritual as well as solar calendars, the construction of monumental architecture including pyramids, the employment of a numeric system that used twenty as its base, emphasis on a jaguar deity, and the ubiquity of ball courts in which a game using a solid rubber ball was played were additional characteristics of complex Mesoamerican societies. Long-distance trade involving both subsistence goods and artisanal products using obsidian, jade, shell, and feathers, among other items, facilitated cultural exchange in the absence of political integration. This rich cultural tradition influenced all later Mesoamerican civilizations, including the Maya and the Aztecs.

Following the decline of the Olmecs, the city of Teotihuacan (100 B.C.–A.D. 750) exercised enormous influence in the development and spread of Mesoamerican culture. Located about thirty miles northeast of modern Mexico City, Teotihuacan was the center of a commercial system that extended to the Gulf coast and into Central America. At its height its urban population reached 150,000, making it one of the world's largest cities at that time. One of the most important temples at Teotihuacan was devoted to the cult of the god Quetzalcoatl, or Feathered Serpent. Commonly represented as a snake covered with feathers, Quetzalcoatl was associated with fertility, the wind, and creation. Following Teotihuacan's decline in the eighth century, the Toltecs dominated central Mexico from their capital at Tula.

Although not clearly tied to Teotihuacan's decline in the eighth century, the Toltecs came to dominate central Mexico by the tenth century. The Toltecs used military power to extend their influence and manage complex tribute and trade relationships with dependencies. Tula was both an administrative and a religious center. It was constructed on a grand scale with colonnaded patios, raised platforms, and numerous temples. Many of the buildings were decorated with scenes suggesting warfare and human sacrifice.

In the Andean region, geographic conditions were even more demanding than in Mesoamerica. The development of complex civilizations after 1000 B.C. depended

Representations of Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent at Teotihuacan. Teotihuacan was the largest of the Classic-era cities in Mexico. In the background is the Temple of the Moon.

on the earlier evolution of social and economic strategies in response to changing environmental, demographic, and social conditions. Along the arid coastal plain and in the high valleys of the Andes, collective labor obligations made possible both intensive agriculture and long-distance trade. Irrigation projects, the draining of wetlands, large-scale terracing, and road construction all depended on collective labor obligations, called *mit'a* by the native population and later *mita* by the Spanish. The exchange of goods produced in the region's ecological niches (lowland maize, highland llama wool, and coca from the upper Amazon region, for example) enriched these societies and made possible the rise of cities and the growth of powerful states.

The chronology of state development and urbanization within the Andean region was generally similar to that in Mesoamerica. However, there was greater variation in cultural practices because of the unique environmental challenges posed by the arid coastal plain and high altitudes of the mountainous regions. Chavín was one of the most important early Andean civilizations. It dominated a populous region that included substantial portions of both the highlands and coastal plain of Peru between 900 and 250 B.C. Located at 10,300 feet in the eastern range of the Andes north of present-day Lima, its capital, Chavín de Huantar, was a commercial center that built upon a long tradition of urban development and monumental architecture initiated earlier on the Peruvian coast. The expansion of Chavín's power was probably related to the introduction of llamas from the highlands to the coastal lowlands. Llamas dramatically reduced the need for human carriers in trade since one driver could control as many as thirty animals, each carrying up to seventy pounds. Chavín exhibited all the distinguishing

characteristics found in later Andean civilizations. Its architecture featured large complexes of multilevel platforms topped by small residences for the elite and buildings used for ritual purposes. As in the urban centers of Mesoamerica, society was stratified from the ruler down. Fine textile production, gold jewelry, and polytheistic religion also characterized the Chavín civilization until its collapse. By the time that increased warfare disrupted long-distance trade and brought about the demise of Chavín, its material culture, statecraft, architecture, and urban planning had spread throughout the Andean region. The Moche, who dominated the north coastal region of Peru from A.D. 200 to 700, were heirs to many of Chavín's contributions.

In the highlands two powerful civilizations, Tiwanaku and Wari, developed after A.D. 500. Tiwanaku's expansion near Lake Titicaca in modern Bolivia rested on both enormous drainage projects that created raised fields and permitted intensive cultivation and the control of large herds of llamas. At the height of its power, Tiwanaku was the center of a large trade network that stretched to Chile in the south. Pack-trains of llamas connected the capital to dependent towns that organized the exchange of goods produced throughout the Andean region. Large buildings constructed of cut stone dominated the urban center of Tiwanaku. A hereditary elite able to control a substantial labor force ruled this highly stratified society. Wari, located near present-day Ayacucho, may have begun as a dependency of Tiwanaku, but it soon established an independent identity and expanded through warfare into the northern highlands as well as the coastal area once controlled by the Moche. The construction of roads as part of Wari's strategy for military control and communication was a legacy bequeathed to the Inkas who, like the Aztecs in central Mexico, held political dominance in the populous areas of the Andean region when Europeans first arrived.

The Maya

Building in part upon the rich legacy of the Olmec culture, the Maya developed an impressive civilization in present-day Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, southern Mexico, and Yucatan. Although sharing many cultural similarities, the Maya were separated by linguistic differences and organized into numerous city-states. Because no Maya center was ever powerful enough to impose a unified political structure, the long period from around A.D. 200 to the arrival of the Spaniards was characterized by the struggle of rival kingdoms for regional domination.

Given the difficulties imposed by fragile soils, dense forest, and a tropical climate characterized by periods of drought and heavy rains, Maya cultural and architectural achievements were remarkable. The development of effective agricultural technologies increased productivity and led to population growth and urbanization. During the Classic era (A.D. 250–900), the largest Maya cities had populations in excess of 50,000.

From earliest times, Maya agriculturalists used slash-and-burn or "swidden" cultivation in which small trees and brush were cut down and then burned. Although this form of cultivation produced high yields in initial years, it quickly used up the soil's nutrients. Falling yields forced farmers to move to new fields

and begin the cycle again. The high urban population levels of the Classic period, therefore, required more intensive agriculture as well. Wherever possible, local rulers organized their lineages or clans in large-scale projects to drain swamps and low-lying river banks to create elevated fields near urban centers. The construction of trenches to drain surplus water yielded rich soils that the workers then heaped up to create wetland fields. In areas with long dry seasons, the Maya constructed irrigation canals and reservoirs. Terraces built on mountainsides caught rainwater runoff and permitted additional cultivation. Household gardens further augmented food supplies with condiments and fruits that supplemented the dietary staples of maize (corn), beans, and squash. The Maya also managed nearby forests to promote the growth of useful trees and shrubs as well as the conservation of deer and other animals that provided dietary protein.

In the late Preclassic period, the increased agricultural production that followed these innovations helped make possible the development of large cities like El Mirador. During the Classic period, Maya city-states proliferated in an era of dramatic urbanization. One of the largest of the Classic-period cities was Tikal, in modern Guatemala, which had a population of more than 50,000 and controlled a network of dependent cities and towns. Smaller city-states had fewer than 20,000 inhabitants. Each independent city served as the religious and political center for the subordinated agricultural population dispersed among the *milpas* (maize fields) of the countryside.

Classic-era cities had dense central precincts visually dominated by monumental architecture. Large cities boasted numerous high pyramids topped by enclosed sanctuaries, ceremonial platforms, and elaborately decorated elite palaces built on elevated platforms or on constructed mounds. Pyramids also served as burial locations for rulers and other members of the elite. The largest and most impressive buildings were located around open plazas that provided the ceremonial center for public life. Even small towns had at least one such plaza dominated by one or more pyramids and elite residences.

Impressive public rituals held in Maya cities attracted both full-time urban residents and the rural population from the surrounding countryside. While the smaller dependent communities provided an elaborate ritual life, the capital of every Maya city-state sustained a dense schedule of impressive ceremonies led by its royal family and powerful nobles. These ritual performances were carefully staged on elevated platforms and pyramids that drew the viewers' attention heavenward. The combination of richly decorated architecture, complex ritual, and splendid costumes served to awe the masses and legitimize the authority of ruler and nobility. Because there were no clear boundaries between political and religious functions, divination, sacrifice, astronomy, and hieroglyphic writing were the domain of rulers, their consorts, and other members of the hereditary elite.

Scenes of ritual life depicted on ceramics and wall paintings clearly indicate the Maya's love of decoration. Sculpture and stucco decorations painted in fine designs and bright colors covered nearly all public buildings. Religious allegories, the genealogies of rulers, and important historical events were familiar motifs.

The Nunnery complex at the Classic-era Maya site of Uxmal.

Artisans also erected beautifully carved altars and stone monoliths (stelae) near major temples. Throughout their pre-Columbian existence, the Maya constructed this rich architectural and artistic legacy with the limited technology present in Mesoamerica. The Maya did not develop metallurgy until late in the Classic era and used it only to produce jewelry and decorations for the elite. In the Postclassic period, the Maya initiated the use of copper axes in agriculture. Artisans and their numerous male and female assistants cut and fitted the stones used for palaces, pyramids, and housing aided only by levers and stone tools. Each new wave of urban construction represented the mobilization and organization of thousands of laborers by the elite. Thus, the urban building boom of the Classic period reflected the growing ability of rulers to appropriate the labor of their subjects more than the application of new or improved technologies.

The ancient Maya traced their ancestry through both male and female lines, but family lineage was patrilineal. Maya families were large, and multiple generations commonly lived in a single residence or compound. In each generation a single male, usually the eldest, held authority within the family. Related families were, in turn, organized in hierarchical lineages or clans with one family and its male head granted preeminence.

By the Classic period, Maya society was rigidly hierarchical. Hereditary lords and a middling group of skilled artisans and scribes were separated by a deep social chasm from the farmers of the countryside. To justify their elevated position, the elite claimed to be the patrilineal descendants of the original warlords who had initiated the development of urban life. Most commonly, kings were selected by primogeniture from the ruling family; on at least two occasions during the Classic

period, however, women ruled Maya city-states. Other elite families provided men who led military units in battle, administered dependent towns, collected taxes, and supervised market activities. Although literacy was very limited, writing was important to religious and political life. As a result, scribes held an elevated position in Maya society, and some may have come from noble families.

In the Classic period and earlier, rulers and other members of the elite, assisted by shamans (diviners and curers who communicated with the spirit world), served both priestly and political functions. They decorated their bodies with paint and tattoos and wore elaborate costumes of textiles, animal skins, and feathers to project secular power and divine sanction. Kings communicated directly with the supernatural residents of the other worlds and with deified royal ancestors through bloodletting rituals and hallucinogenic trances. Scenes of rulers and their consorts drawing blood from tongues, lips, ears, and even genitals survive on frescos and painted pottery. For the Maya, blood sacrifice was essential to the very survival of the world. The blood of the most exalted members of the society was, therefore, the greatest gift to the gods.

In the Postclassic period, the boundary between political and religious authority remained blurred, although there is some evidence that a priestly class distinguishable from the political elite had come into existence. Priests, like other members of the elite, inherited their exalted status and were not celibate. They provided divinations and prophecies, often induced by hallucinogens, and kept the genealogies of the lineages. They and the rulers directed the human sacrifices required by the gods. Finally, priests provided the society's intellectual class and were, therefore, responsible for conserving the skills of reading and writing, for pursuing astronomical knowledge, and for maintaining the Maya calendars.

Although some merchants and artisans may have been related to the ruling lineages, these two occupations occupied an intermediate status between the lords and commoners. From the Preclassic period, the Maya maintained complex trade relationships over long distances. Both basic subsistence goods and luxury items were available in markets scheduled to meet on set days in the Maya calendar. Each kingdom, indeed each village and household, used these markets to acquire products not produced locally. As a result, a great deal of specialization was present by the Classic period. Maya exchanged jade, cacao (chocolate beans used both to produce a beverage consumed by the elite and as money), cotton textiles, ceramics, salt, feathers, and foods, especially game and honey taken from the forest. Merchants could acquire significant wealth and the wealthiest lived in large multiple-family compounds. Some scholars believe that by the Postclassic period rulers forced merchants to pay tribute and prohibited them from dressing in the garments of the nobility.

A specialized class of urban craftsmen produced the beautiful jewelry, ceramics, murals, and architecture of the Maya. Their skills were essential for the creation and maintenance of both public buildings and ritual life, and, as a result, they enjoyed a higher status than rural commoners. Although the evidence is ambiguous, certain families who trained children to follow their parents' careers probably

monopolized the craft skills. Some crafts may also have had a regional basis, with weavers concentrated in cotton-growing areas and the craftsmen who fashioned tools and weapons from obsidian (volcanic glass) located near the source of their raw materials. Most clearly, the largest and wealthiest cities had the largest concentration of accomplished craftsmen.

The vast majority of the Maya were born into lower-status families and devoted their lives to agriculture. These commoners inherited their land rights through their lineage. Members of lineages were obligated to help family members in shared agricultural tasks as well as to provide labor and tribute to the elite. Female commoners played a central role in the household economy, maintaining essential garden plots, weaving, and managing family life. By the end of the Classic period a large group of commoners labored on the private estates of the nobility. Below this group were the slaves. Slaves were commoners taken captive in war or criminals; once enslaved, the status could become hereditary unless the slave were ransomed by his family.

Warfare was central to Maya life and infused with religious meaning and elaborate ritual. Battle scenes and the depiction of the torture and sacrifice of captives were frequent decorative themes. Since military movements were easier and little agricultural labor was required, the hot and dry spring season was the season of armed conflict. Maya military forces usually fought to secure captives rather than territory, although during the Classic period Tikal and other powerful kingdoms initiated wars of conquest against their neighbors.

Days of fasting, a sacred ritual to enlist the support of the gods, and rites of purification led by the king and high-ranking nobles preceded battle. A king and his nobles donned elaborate war regalia and carefully painted their faces in preparation. Armies also included large numbers of commoners, but these levies had little formal training and employed inferior weapons. Typically, the victorious side ritually sacrificed elite captives. Surviving murals and ceramic paintings show kings and other nobles stripped of their rich garments and compelled to kneel at the feet of their rivals or forced to endure torture. Most wars, however, were inconclusive, and seldom was a ruling lineage overturned or territory lost as the result of battlefield defeat.

Building on the Olmec legacy, the Maya made important contributions to the development of the Mesoamerican calendar. They also developed both mathematics and writing. The complexity of their calendric system reflected the Maya concern with time and the cosmos. Each day was identified by three separate dating systems. As was true throughout Mesoamerica, two calendars tracked the ritual cycle (260 days divided into 13 months of 20 days) and a solar calendar (365 days divided into 18 months of 20 days, with 5 unfavorable days at the end of the year). The Maya believed the concurrence of these two calendars every fifty-two years to be especially ominous. Uniquely among Mesoamerican peoples, the Maya also maintained a continuous "long count" calendar that began at creation, an event they dated at 3114 B.C. These accurate calendric systems and the astronomical observations upon which they were based depended on Maya contributions to

mathematics and writing. Their system of mathematics included the concepts of the zero and place value but had limited notational signs.

The Maya were almost unique among pre-Columbian cultures in the Americas in producing a written literature that has survived to the modern era. Employing a form of hieroglyphic inscription that signified whole words or concepts as well as phonetic cues or syllables, Maya scribes most commonly wrote about public life, religious belief, and the genealogies and biographies of rulers and their ancestors. Only four of these books of bark paper or deerskin still exist. However, other elements of the Maya literary and historical legacy remain inscribed on ceramics, jade, shell, bone, stone columns, and monumental buildings of the urban centers.

The destruction or abandonment of many major urban centers between A.D. 800 and 900 brought the Maya Classic period to a close. There were probably several interrelated causes for this catastrophe, but no scholarly consensus exists. The destruction in about A.D. 750 of Teotihuacan, the important central Mexican commercial center tied to the Maya region, disrupted long-distance trade and thus might have undermined the legitimacy of Maya rulers. More likely, growing population pressure, especially among the elite, led to environmental degradation and falling agricultural productivity. This environmental crisis, in turn, might have led to social unrest and increased levels of warfare as desperate elites sought to increase the tributes of agriculturalists or to acquire additional agricultural land through conquest. Some scholars have suggested that climatic change contributed to the collapse, but evidence supporting this theory is slight. Regardless of the disputed causes, there is agreement that by A.D. 900 the Maya had begun to enter a new era, the Postclassic.

Archaeology has revealed evidence of cultural ties between the Toltecs of central Mexico and the Maya of the Yucatan during the early Postclassic period, but the character of this relationship is in dispute. Chichen Itza, the most impressive Postclassic Maya center, shared both architectural elements and a symbolic vocabulary with the Toltec capital of Tula. Among these shared characteristics was a *tzompantli*, a low platform decorated with carvings of human heads. Bas-relief carvings of jaguars, vultures holding human hearts, and images of the rain god Tlaloc were also found at both cities. Other key architectural elements of Chichen Itza appear to have central Mexican antecedents as well. The Temple of Warriors, a stepped platform surmounted by columns, was embellished with a *chacmool,* a characteristic Toltec sculpture of a figure holding a bowl on his stomach to receive sacrifices. Finally, while Maya cities had ball courts from early days, Chichen Itza's largest court was constructed and decorated in the style of the Toltecs.

Sixteenth-century histories written by Spanish priests suggest that the Toltecs conquered the Maya of the Yucatan. Based on native informants, these histories claim that the Toltec invasion was led by the prince Topiltzin, who had been forced to leave Tula by a rival warrior faction associated with the god Tezcatlipoca. Defeated by the powerful magic of his adversary, Topiltzin, called Kukulkan by the Maya, and his followers migrated to the east and established a new capital at Chichen Itza after defeating the Maya.

Recent archaeology has confirmed cultural parallels between the Maya and the Toltecs, but the direction of cultural exchange remains unclear. It is even possible that changes in Maya iconography and architecture reflected the impact of cultural intermediaries. The Putun Maya from the Tabasco region on the Gulf of Mexico coast had deep and sustained relationships with the Maya of Yucatan and the Toltecs. Culturally and linguistically distinct, the Putun Maya lived on the northwestern periphery of Classic-era Maya civilization. They had strong trade and political connections with central Mexico and spread elements of Toltec cultural practice. As their influence expanded, they established themselves at Chichen Itza. It is also possible that a small number of Toltec mercenaries reinforced this expansion and contributed to the transmission of central Mexican cultural characteristics.

Chichen Itza was governed by a council or, perhaps, a multiple kingship form of government. The city's rulers exercised economic and political influence over a wide area, imposing tribute requirements on weaker neighbors by military expansion. Although the reasons are not yet clear, it is known that Chichen Itza experienced significant population loss after A.D. 1100 and was conquered militarily around A.D. 1221. Following this catastrophe, the city retained a small population and may have remained a religious pilgrimage site.

By the end of the thirteenth century, a successor people, the Itza, had come to exercise political and economic authority across much of Yucatan. The origin of the Itza is unclear. As their name suggests, they claimed to be the people of Chichen Itza. Their elite claimed descent from the Toltecs and were linguistically distinct from the region's original population. It seems more likely that they were related in some way to the Putun Maya.

The Itza eventually probably established the important city of Mayapan, but many Maya groups remained independent. At its peak, Mayapan had a population of approximately 15,000. The size of the city's population and the quality of its construction were far inferior to that of either the major Classic centers, like Tikal, or Postclassic Chichen Itza. Unlike the major Classic period cities that had served as centers for agricultural and craft production and as markets, Mayapan served as the capital of a regional confederation that compelled defeated peoples to pay tribute. This oppressive economic system probably provoked the warfare and rebellion that led to the end of Itza domination and the destruction of Mayapan about A.D. 1450. The Itza persisted, despite these reversals, continuing an independent existence in the Peten region of Guatemala until defeated by a Spanish military force in 1697.

From the fall of Mayapan until the arrival of the Spanish in the sixteenth century, the Maya returned to the pattern of dispersed political authority. During this final period, towns of modest size, some with no more than 500 inhabitants, exercised control over a more dispersed and more rural population than had been the case in earlier eras. The cycles of expansion and collapse experienced by Chichen Itza imitated in many ways the rise and fall of important Maya centers during the Classic period. Although no powerful central authority existed in Maya regions when the Spanish arrived, Maya peoples retained their vitality and sustained essential elements of the cultural legacy inherited from their ancestors.

The Aztec

When the Spaniards reached central Mexico in 1519, the state created by the Mexica and their Nahuatl-speaking allies—now commonly referred to jointly as the Aztec—was at the height of its power. Only the swiftness of their defeat exceeded the rapidity with which the Aztec had risen to prominence. For the century before the arrival of Cortés, they were unquestionably the most powerful political force in Mesoamerica.

Among the numerous nomadic and warlike peoples who pushed south toward central Mexico in the wake of the Toltec state's collapse were the Mexica, one of many aggressive invading bands from the north that contemporary Nahuatl speakers referred to as Chichimec. Ultimately the most powerful, the Mexica adopted elements of the political and social forms they found among the advanced urbanized agriculturalists. After 1246 this emerging Chichimec elite forged a dynastic link with the surviving Toltec aristocracy of Culhuacan. This infusion of the northern invaders invigorated the culture of central Mexico and eventually led to a new period of political dynamism. The civilization that resulted from this cultural exchange, however, was more militaristic and violent than that of its predecessors.

The Mexica became important participants in the conflicts of the Valley of Mexico while the city of Atzcapotzalco was the dominant political power. Valued for their military prowess and despised for their cultural backwardness, Mexica warriors served as mercenaries. They initially received permission to settle in Chapultepec, now a beautiful park in Mexico City, but jealous and fearful neighbors drove them out. With the acquiescence of their Tepanec overlords in Atzcapotzalco, the Mexica then moved to a small island in the middle of Lake Texcoco where they could more easily defend themselves from attack. Here in 1325 or soon afterward they began to build their capital of Tenochtitlan. Despite their improved reputation, they continued for nearly a century as part-time warriors and tributaries of Atzcapotzalco.

By 1376 the Aztec were politically, socially, and economically organized like their neighbors as *altepetl*, complex regional ethnic states, each with a hereditary ruler, market, and temple dedicated to a patron deity. *Altepetl* were, in turn, typically made up of four or more *calpulli*, which also had their own subrulers, deities, and temples. These subdivisions originally may have been kinship based, but by the fourteenth century they functioned primarily to distribute land among their members and to collect and distribute tribute. The ethnic group called the Mexica had only two *altepetl*—the dominant Tenochca and the less powerful Tlatelolca.

The Mexica's first king (*tlatoani*), Acamapichtli, claimed descent from the Toltec dynasty of Tula. After a period of consolidation, the new state undertook an ambitious and successful campaign of military expansion. Under Itzcoatl, the ruler from 1426 to 1440, the Mexica allied with two other city-states, Texcoco and Tlacopan, located on the shores of Lake Texcoco. In a surprise attack the Triple Alliance conquered the city of Atzcapotzalco in 1428 and consolidated control over much of the valley. During the rule of Moctezuma I (Motecuhzoma in Nahuatl) from 1440 to 1468, the Mexica gained ascendancy over their two allies, pushed

outward from the valley, and established control over much of central Mexico. Following an interlude of weaker, less effective rulers, serious expansion resumed during the reign of Ahuitzotl from 1486 to 1502, and Aztec armies conquered parts of Oaxaca, Guatemala, and the Gulf coast. By the early sixteenth century, few pockets of unconquered peoples, principally the Tarascans of Michoacán and the Tlaxcalans of Puebla, remained in central Mexico.

When Moctezuma II took the throne in 1502, he inherited a society that in less than a century had risen from obscurity to political hegemony over a vast region. Tenochtitlan had a population of several hundred thousand persons, many of them immigrants, and the whole Valley of Mexico was home to perhaps 1.5 million. Social transformation accompanied this rapid expansion of political control and demographic growth. Before installing their first *tlatoani*, Mexica society had a relatively egalitarian structure based within the *calpulli*. *Calpulli* leaders, in addition to managing land administration and tribute responsibilities, supervised the instruction of the young, organized religious rituals, and provided military forces when called upon. Mexica *calpulli* resident in Tenochtitlan were primarily associated with artisan production rather than agriculture. The ability of a *calpulli* to redistribute land held jointly by its members was more important to rural and semirural areas than to urban centers. There also were noteworthy differences in wealth, prestige, and power within and among *calpulli*. The *calpulli*'s leader, however—most typically elected from the same family—handled the local judicial and administrative affairs with the advice of a council of elders.

After the Triple Alliance conquered Atzcapotzalco—the critical event in the evolution of the Mexica and the Aztec Empire—Itzcoatl removed the right of selecting future rulers from the *calpulli* and *altepetl* councils and gave it to his closest advisers, the newly established "Council of Four" from which his successors would be selected. The power and independence of the ruler continued to expand as triumphant armies added land and tribute to the royal coffers. In the late fifteenth century, the ruler also served as high priest: Moctezuma II took the final step by associating his person with Huitzilopochtli, the Mexica's most important deity.

Among the Aztec in general was a hereditary class of nobles called the *pipiltin*, who received a share of the lands and tribute from the conquered areas, the amount apparently related to their administrative position and rank. They staffed the highest military positions, the civil bureaucracy, and the priesthood. Their sons went to schools to prepare them for careers of service to the state. Noblemen had one principal wife and numerous concubines. This polygyny resulted in a disproportionate growth in the number of nobles and helped promote military expansion and political alliances through intermarriage.

Except for those in Tenochtitlan itself, the *macehualtin*—commoners who owned land or who lived in urban *calpulli*—benefited comparatively little from conquest. Instead, as the backbone of the agricultural labor force, they remained subject to work demands by the state and the nobility as well as to military service. Moreover, the advent of a powerful hereditary nobility reduced the commoners' ability to influence political decisions. Although a few *macehualtin* advanced in

society by means of success on the battlefield, service in the priesthood, or marriage, the potential for upward social mobility was much diminished after the initial period of imperial expansion.

At the base of Aztec society were the vanquished commoners and slaves. *Mayeques* were commoners whose *calpulli* had lost their lands in war and thus had to work for their conquerors. They formed perhaps as many as one third of the population in some places by the early sixteenth century, whereas slaves were only a small handful except in wealthy urban centers like Tenochtitlan, where the Mexica often received them as tribute. In addition, judges punished certain criminal acts by enslaving the offender; prisoners of war could also be enslaved. And adults in periods of great hardship voluntarily gave up their freedom to ensure themselves food, housing, and clothes. But even though slaves were regarded as property, their children did not inherit this status.

Tenochtitlan became a city of specialists that included numerous craftsmen—goldsmiths, jewelers, and feather workers—who ranked above other *macehualtin*. Adjoining the city was Tlatelolco, home to a specialized group of merchants, the *pochteca*. Rich and powerful, they tried unsuccessfully to wrest control from the ruler Axayacatl in 1473, thereby losing many of their privileges until Moctezuma II restored all except their exemption from tribute. The *pochteca* handled long-distance trade, even with areas outside Aztec control. Not only did they play an important economic role, but they also provided information to the emperor about unconquered peoples and restive subjects. Despite their aid to and benefits from Aztec expansion, the *pochteca* were excluded from high-ranking administrative and political positions.

Mexica women were excluded from nearly all high public offices and power, although they fulfilled a variety of roles in a society that differentiated clearly between men's and women's activities. At least one public office in each *altepetl*, however, was reserved for a woman who organized and regulated women's activities. Except for a few priestesses, Mexica women typically married men approved if not selected by their parents. Marriage was a social bond that marked reaching full adulthood, but it could also serve a political purpose as the Aztec used the institution to cement political alliances. Once married, Mexica women's household responsibilities included preparation of maize for tortillas, tamales, and gruel and cooking, cleaning, child care, spinning and weaving cloth, and embroidery. They also offered prayers within the household, a reminder that their household duties were important and even sacred. Outside the house they taught; served as priestesses in the temples; sold fine chocolate, herbs, feathers, and other goods; delivered babies; served as curers and physicians; worked as professional weavers and embroiderers; and held supervisory positions in the markets. Prevented from participating in the long-distance commercial expeditions of the *pochteca*, women often controlled warehoused goods and determined the supplies and prices of goods in the markets of Tenochtitlan. While status as a noblewoman or commoner affected the extent of their participation in these activities—noblewomen relying on servants for many tasks but participating actively in child rearing, weaving, and caring

for household shrines—nearly all women contributed to a family's economic well-being. Their significant contributions in enabling their households to meet labor, tribute, and religious obligations help to explain the attraction of polygyny to Mexica men. When their husbands were on military campaigns, moreover, wives bore full responsibility for ensuring the continued well-being of their households. Given their economic activities, it was fitting that they owned any property they brought to a marriage and could inherit property and pass it on to their heirs.

The gap between the hereditary aristocracy and the commoners grew during the fifteenth century. The dominant *pipiltin* subjected the rest of society to an increasingly harsh regime. A purportedly growing problem with drunkenness may have been one result of commoners' inability to adjust to the new social and economic realities. At the same time, many nobles lost power relative to that of the ruler and his court.

The economy of Mesoamerica as a whole rested on agriculture, with most of the people engaged in the cultivation and harvest of maize, beans, squash, chilies, and a variety of garden vegetables. Because the political and population center of the Aztec state, Tenochtitlan, was located on an island and thus controlled very limited agricultural land, tribute and trade necessarily became the basis of their economy. As the empire expanded, the Aztec forced defeated peoples to send tribute to Tenochtitlan. Because there were no domesticated beasts of burden in Mesoamerica, food could not be sent efficiently over long distances. Valuable goods like cotton cloth, animal skins, brightly colored feathers, jade, precious metals, obsidian, and dyes flowed into the city in an expanding volume of tribute as Aztec armies pushed the empire's borders outward. The *pochteca* supplemented the flow of tribute goods through their trade with subordinated as well as independent states. However, they were prohibited from trading in tribute items. Access to these valuable commodities and scarce raw materials gave Tenochtitlan's craftsmen an important advantage over competing craftsmen in other central Mexican polities. The city's island location provided another competitive advantage as well, for it allowed Tenochtitlan's merchants to distribute many of their goods by canoe to the densely settled communities that lined the shores of the huge lake. By the end of the fifteenth century, Tenochtitlan dominated a regional commercial system in which its merchants exchanged manufactured goods for the foods and specialized products of its neighbors.

The biggest market in central Mexico, in Tlatelolco, daily served tens of thousands of buyers and sellers. The stalls were in neat rows, with foodstuffs dominating the market. Jewelry, feathers, and precious stones were in one row, slaves in another, and cooking utensils and building materials in still another. There was no monetary system, but cacao beans used in a chocolate beverage and cotton cloth were often used to equalize the value of bartered goods.

Religious rituals overseen by a large and powerful priesthood ruled public life in Tenochtitlan. Mexica cosmology was sophisticated and complex. Polytheistic and highly ritualized, the deities included Quetzalcoatl, the culture god associated with Teotihuacan; Tezcatlipoca, the war god of the Toltecs; Tlaloc, the

ancient Mesoamerican rain god; and Tonatiuh, the warrior sun. The center of Aztec religious life, however, was the cult of Huitzilopochtli, a demanding tribal god that the Mexica had worshiped before making the long journey south to the Valley of Mexico. As the Mexica grew in might and wealth after 1428, the cult of Huitzilopochtli expanded as well. Soon the most important god of the pantheon, Huitzilopochtli absorbed qualities previously associated with other deities and continually required human sacrifices. Most important, the Mexica used this demanding god to justify their military expansion and the creation of a tribute empire. The imposition of this bloody cult accompanied each new conquest.

The Mexica believed that only the sacrifice of human hearts could provide the magical substance necessary for the sun to rise and the peoples of the world to survive. Although human sacrifice had been common in Mesoamerica for centuries, if not millennia, the Aztec practiced it on an unprecedented scale. Continued warfare and the provision of sacrificial victims to Huitzilopochtli to sustain the sun became sacred duties, and as the Mexica's power grew, bloody public sacrifices to other gods, such as the fertility deity Xipe Totec, were added to their religious practice. The Mexica's special mission justified and required conquest and tribute. This belief sustained continued commitment from noble and commoner warriors alike. Capturing enemies in battle brought tangible rewards, whereas perishing in battle or on an enemy's sacrificial stone secured an afterlife of luxury and pleasure.

War captives, criminals, slaves, and persons supplied by subject peoples as tribute fell victim to the obsidian sacrificial blade atop the great pyramids. After a victory ceremony, warriors often provided a ritual feast for friends and relatives, in which a small portion of the sacrificed captives' flesh was served as a pâté. But by the mid-fifteenth century Aztec military expansion had slowed and, with it, the supply of sacrificial victims. To solve this shortfall, the Aztec fought "Flower Wars" with their neighbors. Flower Wars were limited conflicts infused with ritual meaning that had occurred as early as the fourteenth century. After taking their prisoners to Tenochtitlan, the Mexica brought in aristocrats from Tlaxcala and other rival states to witness the sacrifices, which might include their own people. Seated in flower-covered boxes, the guests learned a political lesson that transcended the ceremony's religious content: Rebellion, deviance, and opposition to the Aztec state were extremely dangerous. Indeed, in 1487 the Mexica dedicated the new temple of Huitzilopochtli in Tenochtitlan by sacrificing more than 20,000 persons.

Although conquered *calpulli* and *altepetl* continued to worship their own deities, they were forced to accommodate the cult of Huitzilopochtli within their religious life. Some scholars suggest that images of important deities were taken to Tenochtitlan, where they were kept in a pantheon of captive deities. In short, the Aztec exploited their conquered peoples, giving—commoners at least—little in return. Not surprisingly, such exploitation fostered considerable hostility toward the Aztec in much of central Mexico.

The Aztec united their conquered territories through taxation and tribute rather than strong cultural or political institutions. Resident tribute collectors were the sinews of the empire and received tribute payments every eighty days. Often,

this tribute was in addition to what the commoners already paid their local rulers. Behind the tax collectors stood the army, the ultimate weapon to enforce the payment of taxes and to suppress dissension within the empire. The ruling families in conquered areas well knew that Aztec favor was indispensable to their survival, and in addition, cooperation brought them economic benefits and support for their continued rule. Although their children often married Aztec nobles—thus undermining traditional autonomy—these alliances strengthened family prestige.

While recognizing the human cost of their empire, one must also appreciate that the Aztec did accomplish much. They built magnificent temples, created a generally effective army, and developed an elaborate ideology that tied together warfare, human sacrifice, and religion. They also produced an elaborate cosmology and ritual practice that explained the workings of nature and satisfied spiritual needs. Intellectual life was closely associated with religion; therefore, the arts of music, dance, and writing had a sacred dimension. The construction and provisioning of Tenochtitlan, the development of extended commercial routes and large-scale markets, the creation of an effective educational and propaganda system, and the spread of Nahuatl as a common tongue throughout the region also were noteworthy achievements.

The Inka

The Inka created the largest indigenous empire in the Americas and developed the most sophisticated political and administrative structure found among native peoples. In the thirteenth century, the Inka were one of many competing military powers in the southern highlands of Peru. Then, in less than a century, they extended their empire, Tawantinsuyu, or "land of the four parts," from the Valley of Cuzco on to the northern border of what is now Ecuador and to the Maule River in Chile. The ruler Pachacuti (1438–71) was the prime architect of this territorial expansion and the Inka administrative structure. He first conquered the highland regions near Cuzco and, with his son and successor Topa Inka, pushed the empire's borders into the highlands of northern Peru. Topa Inka (1471–93) later conquered Chimor and extended Inka control over the vast coastal plain and the southern highlands. Huayna Capac (1493–1525) then made the final additions to the empire in successful campaigns against the peoples of present-day Ecuador.

From the beginning, Inka power was rooted in the efficient organization and administration of their resources. Indeed, their conquest and later control of distant regions depended more on their ability to organize and supply large fighting forces than on new military technology or tactical innovations. Relying on nobles for officers, the Inka used conscripted peasants for the bulk of the army, but they also employed mercenaries. After conquering a region, they conscripted its male population and advanced farther into historically hostile adjacent regions, promising the new subjects an opportunity to even old scores and gain the spoils of victory. Unlike the Aztec, Inka armies were not interested in taking prisoners, and thus death in battle was more common. But the Inka's frequent successes were a powerful lure in enlisting defeated peoples for participation in future conquests.

Portraits of the first Inka royal couple, Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo, painted in the late colonial period.

An excellent road system in the Andes and along the coast, the maintenance of a network of runners for communication over long distances, and a system of state-organized warehouses of clothing, food, and weapons facilitated Inka military readiness and political control. The empire had over 25,000 kilometers of road, much of it predating the Inka. Relay runners could carry messages from Lima to Cuzco in three days and from the capital to Quito in less than a week. In the absence of writing, they carried *khipus* (*quipus*), multicolored knotted strings that served as memory aids.

The omnipresent llamas gave the Inka both draft animals and a mobile meat supply. In addition, every district of the empire reserved some portion of its production—maize, potatoes, wool, cotton, or other goods—for hard times and for the Inka army and bureaucracy.

The Inka were superb organizers rather than great innovators; unlike the Mexica, they sought to centralize their empire around its capital in Cuzco. They divided it territorially into four major regions, eighty provinces, and more than twice that many districts, each with a number of kin groups that controlled land and other resources. At each level were officials who reported to superiors, the entire pyramidal system culminating in the Sapa Inka, or ruler. Such a system of communication also functioned as a chain of command emanating from the ruler. Close relatives of the Sapa Inka administered the four quarters, and other Inka nobles, the eighty provinces. Local and regional chieftains, or *kurakas*, headed the smaller units and formed the local political bases. The Inka generally used the existing political structures and established elite groups at the local level. Even when rebellion or insubordination forced changes in the administration, the Inka preferred to appoint officials drawn from the families of the deposed rulers.

The imperial social structure largely reflected pre-Inka social organization under a growing and more demanding hereditary nobility related to the Inka rulers. The basic social unit above the family was, again, the *ayllu*, a kin group that had a common ancestry and a hereditary chieftain or *kuraka* advised by village elders. *Ayllu* members worked on the same property, helped one another in a system of mutual obligation, and labored for their leaders, who provided reciprocal benefits in accord with long-standing Andean tradition. Individuals unattached to *ayllus* were known as *yanacona* and were employed by the Inka rulers to maintain themselves, favored nobles, deities, and the cult of royal mummies.

Ancestor worship and *huacas*—sacred items or places—were central to Andean life long before the Inka appeared. Each *ayllu* had its own deities and shrines supported by land farmed to provide sacrifices to them. On matters of import, the villagers consulted prominent ancestors—rulers, the founders of *ayllus*, and *kurakas*—whose mummies were carefully preserved in necropolises and brought out during ritual celebrations. The demands of ancestor and *huaca* worship were originally modest—periodic gifts of food, beverage, and textiles—and the preimperial *ayllus* had little difficulty in meeting them. But then Pachacuti introduced royal ancestor worship on a scale that had far-reaching consequences for the empire.

When a Sapa Inka died, his chosen heir, a son born to his principal wife, inherited the office and responsibilities of the ruler but not his father's wealth. The deceased Sapa Inka's other male descendants, the *panaca*, received his physical possessions as a trust to maintain his mummy and cult. This living court treated the dead ruler as though he were alive, a holy object tangibly linked to the Inka pantheon. Because the *panaca* continued to hold the Sapa Inka's personal possessions after his death, the share of the state's wealth devoted to the royal mummy cults increased. Consequently, new Inka rulers sought to secure their individual honor and reputation by expanding the empire's borders through conquest and thereby increasing revenues. This, in turn, created a well-endowed *panaca* that would continue to influence political life. The royal mummy cults and the system that sustained them, therefore, contributed in some way to the territorial expansion of the Inka. However, Inka military expansion had political and economic, as well as religious and cultural, origins.

Religion was central to the Inka's life. In its upper pantheon was a sky god of innumerable distinct aspects that Spanish chroniclers mistakenly considered to be independent deities. The three principal manifestations of this sky god were Viracocha, a creator god of ancient origin; Illapa, the god of thunder and weather; and Inti, the sun god. Because the Inka rulers claimed descent from one manifestation of Inti, he held the central place in the state's ancestor cult, providing the rulers with links to divinity and the Inka people with a sense of identity and, ultimately, confidence in a mission of expansion. The Inka transported the idols of their conquered peoples to Cuzco, where they were kept in the sun temple. In return, they spread Inti's cult as part of their conquest, constructing temples to him throughout the empire. Compared with that of central Mexico, the Inka's

priesthood was modest in size. Human sacrifice, moreover, was rare and designed to win the deities' goodwill rather than to maintain the universe. Instead, animals, food, fine textiles, and beverages were the usual sacrifices.

In most of their conquered lands, the Inka maintained the existing productive practices. The peoples of the Andes had long valued collective labor to farm, mine, weave, build, and maintain essential services; reciprocal rights and obligations and custom largely defined the nature of an individual's labor. Before the Inka arrived, the region's inhabitants had developed complex administrative and territorial structures to organize labor for irrigation and cultivation and to provide for the exchange of specialized goods across ecologically distinct zones. Called by some the "archipelago" pattern, the hamlet kinship groups, *ayllus*, placed settlers in distinct ecological zones to ensure their access to a range of products—maize, potatoes, cotton, llamas, and coca, among others. The expansion of the imperial bureaucracy, the requirements of the army, and the maintenance of the royal ancestor cults, however, meant that the state had to control any surplus production.

The Inka levied a rotational labor tax, the *mit'a*, on *ayllus* to secure workers for agricultural lands held by the state and its religious cults, as well as to engage them in the construction of roads, bridges, fortresses, temples, palaces, terraces, and irrigation projects. Terracing and irrigation brought previously uncultivated and, at times, marginal lands into production, usually to grow maize. Expanding on an earlier Andean practice, the Inkas sent groups of colonists from their homes to produce ecologically specialized products in conquered regions. These *mitmaq* also helped secure subject territories militarily.

The state stored the goods produced by labor taxation and specialized craftsmen in numerous regional warehouses. Administrators distributed these goods to state employees, to *mit'a* laborers as payment for their service, and to other persons as the need arose. Shared labor and economic redistribution existed in the Andes long before the rise of the Inka state; the Inka's innovation was to organize the resources over a much larger area and thus mitigate the effects of drought and other natural disasters. There was no form of money in the central Andean highlands, and private trading was limited to Peru's north and central coasts and Ecuador's highlands.

Inka advances in economic and political organization eroded local autonomy and social equality in the Andes; in fact, the imperial elite and the expanding state bureaucracy became almost completely cut off from the masses of agricultural workers and craftsmen. At the same time, the *kurakas* were increasingly separated from the Indian masses.

Inka cultural achievements were based upon those of earlier Andean civilizations. Their monumental architecture featured superb stone masonry, but the absence of arches and vaulting gave the buildings a squat appearance. Exquisite Inka textiles, ceramics, and silver and gold work also continued older traditions. Astronomical observation was a central concern of the priestly class, as in Mesoamerica. The Inka may have had three separate calendars recorded on *khipus*, but elements of both the Inka calendar and astronomical observations were lost after the conquest.

Likewise, the Mesoamerican glyphs and pictographs were clearly superior to the Inka's *khipus* for nonoral communication. In comparison with Mesoamerica, Inka achievement was most evident in political organization and the expansion of agricultural productivity through terracing and irrigation. In addition, the Inka contributed more to the peoples they defeated than did the Mexica. Increased agricultural production in parts of the highlands; the introduction of llamas, mainly in northern Peru; and the economic benefits of peace throughout the empire were among the Inka's most important contributions. Moreover, they attempted to centralize their empire through political organization, the use of religion and ideology, the adoption of the Quechua language, and the resettlement of peoples.

Map 2 Major Amerindian Cultures.

The complexity of the Inka and Aztec empires and their cultural attainments were unparalleled in the Americas in 1500. Yet these high cultures shared a number of characteristics with the area's other indigenous peoples. All New World societies lacked iron and hard metal tools, with the exception of a small amount of bronze used by the Inka. Aside from llamas and their relatives in the Andes, there were no large domestic animals available for transport, food, or clothing. Humans transported goods without the benefit of wheeled vehicles, and religion and belief in the supernatural were widespread. Despite these commonalities, however, these various New World societies were marked more by their diversity of cultural, economic, and political achievements, a fact that profoundly affected the course of Iberian conquest and settlement.

THE IBERIAN WORLD IN THE LATE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

The Iberian Peninsula, where the conquistadors and settlers of the New World came from, is but a fraction of the size of the future Spanish and Portuguese empires in the Americas. Long a part of the Roman world, Iberia endured centuries of political dislocation following the Germanic invasions that began in the fifth century. The repeated failure to resolve the problem of monarchical succession and bitter conflicts among Christian sects rendered the Visigothic kingdom incapable of withstanding the Muslim invasion launched from North Africa in 711. Divided by differing regional, political, cultural, and linguistic identities, the Iberians carried to the New World attitudes formed during the Reconquest, nearly eight centuries of intermittent conflict with the Islamic civilizations that had dominated the peninsula. The Iberians' own social, cultural, and geographic diversity enabled the conquistadors to perceive, and to manipulate to their own benefit, a similar diversity in the loose collection of cultures that they encountered in Mesoamerica and the Andes.

With the exception of the Pyrenees Mountains, which form its northern boundary with France, Iberia is surrounded by water. The Mediterranean Sea on the east and south extends to the Straits of Gibraltar, the narrow expanse that separates the peninsula's southern tip from Africa by ten miles. The Atlantic Ocean and the Cantabrian Sea encircle the remainder of the peninsula. Just over 225,000 square miles in area, Iberia is slightly smaller than the states of Arizona and New Mexico combined. Its landscape is dominated by mountains whose mean altitude is higher than that in any western European country except Switzerland. Although flatlands can be found, mainly on the Portuguese coast, range after range breaks Iberia's terrain into a patchwork of distinct regions. Coupled with few navigable rivers, the mountains make transportation and communication difficult and obstruct political and economic integration. Although its northern and northwestern parts receive substantial rainfall, much of Iberia is dry. A Spanish proverb summarizes the weather of the great central tableland as "nine months of winter and three months of hell."

The Reconquest

The Reconquest created a cultural legacy that the conquistadors and settlers carried to the New World. Although Christians and Muslims struggled intermittently to control Iberia from about 718 to 1492, the most active years were between about 850 and 1250. During this time, Christian knights and settlers pushed south from their initial redoubt in the mountains of northern Spain. Although the Reconquest is often labeled a crusade, its religious zeal only complemented the more mundane and important objectives of securing additional grazing and agricultural land. Military action was most frequently a raid for booty, including slaves. But slowly and sporadically the Christians pushed the frontier south.

In 1147 Lisbon was recovered, and in 1179 the pope recognized Alfonso I of the House of Burgundy as the first monarch of the independent kingdom of Portugal. By the mid-thirteenth century the Portuguese had taken the southern coastal region known as the Algarve and expelled the Muslims from their territory. A change of dynasty in 1384 brought the House of Aviz to the throne, and during an almost fifty-year reign, the first monarch, John I, consolidated his position and set the stage for the creation of Portugal's overseas empire.

The Castilian seizure of Seville in 1248 reduced Islamic domination to the kingdom of Granada. Although subsequent Christian princes occasionally engaged the Muslims in battle, the final phase of the Reconquest did not begin until 1482. In that year Isabel and Ferdinand responded to a Muslim attack on a Christian town and launched a war that lasted until the city of Granada surrendered on January 2, 1492.

Royal families, valorous warriors, a militant Church, and military orders founded to spearhead the Christian advance reaped the initial rewards of land, booty, and tribute. Military prowess brought lordship over subject peoples and immediate economic gain; thus, serving a king in arms became the Iberian Christians' preferred route to wealth and honor. As the Reconquest progressed, Christian settlers entered the conquered frontier regions, often locating in former Muslim cities and villages. But with the consolidation of territorial gains, the pressure of a growing population for additional land renewed the cycle of military conflict.

The final triumph over the Muslims in Granada reinforced the booty mentality that the Iberian Christians had developed during the long Reconquest. Victorious Christians enslaved 15,000 Muslim inhabitants of Málaga alone. Nobles who had contributed to victory gained jurisdiction over areas with large Muslim populations. Commoners received land and in some cases ennoblement for their valor, through royal grants that again confirmed the importance of military service for social advancement. Conveniently, the Christians saw their triumph as evidence that their God actively supported their cause, a belief that they carried into battle against the native civilizations of the Americas.

Iberia in the Age of Ferdinand and Isabel

In the mid-fifteenth century, five independent kingdoms occupied Iberia. Portugal, whose boundaries approximated those of the modern country, had a

population of perhaps 1 million persons in the late fifteenth century. Thus, it was only slightly less populous than the Crown of Aragon, which held sway in the northeast and maintained long-standing territorial and commercial interests in the Mediterranean, including ties to Italy, Byzantium, and the east. Granada, the remaining Muslim stronghold located in the southeast, had some 500,000 persons; Navarre, a small kingdom in the western Pyrenees, had fewer than 200,000. At the center of the peninsula lay Castile, whose area was more than triple that of either Portugal or Aragon and whose population of perhaps 4.5 million persons was roughly four times as large. This geographic and demographic dominance increased even more when Castile conquered Granada in 1492 and annexed Navarre in 1512.

The most significant domestic event in Iberian history between the mid-fifteenth century and the fall of Granada was the marriage in 1469 of Isabel of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon. In 1468 Isabel had been reluctantly recognized by her half-brother Henry IV as the heir to Castile; such was the price of peace in his realm. Henry's reluctance can be traced to his wife's daughter Juana. Juana is also known to historians as La Beltraneja, after Beltrán de la Cueva, who was the queen's lover and—according to Isabel's supporters—Juana's father. Although the charge was probably baseless, Henry, a weak monarch, was cursed with the epithet "the Impotent," and Isabel made the most of her opportunity. Aided by a forged papal bull permitting her to marry a close relative, she wed Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Aragon. Isabel was clearly a woman of strong will, who had already rejected marriage to the widowed King Alfonso of Portugal and the French suitor Charles of Valois. Ferdinand of Aragon was the energetic and ambitious son of John II, who saw in Castile the resources necessary to combat French designs on his kingdom's border.

After Henry IV died in December 1474, Isabel declared herself the queen of Castile. In response, Juana claimed the throne in May 1475 with military support from Portugal and an anti-Aragonese faction at the court of Castile. The ensuing civil war ended in Isabel's victory in 1479. When his father died in the same year, Ferdinand became the king of Aragon, and the "union of the crowns" and a "double monarchy" became reality. For the following quarter-century, the "Catholic Kings"—as the couple were later dubbed by Pope Alexander VI—jointly ruled the largest and wealthiest area of Iberia.

The name *Spain* is often used to describe the realms of Isabel and Ferdinand, but the term erroneously implies a nonexistent unity. Both Castile and Aragon maintained separate economies, political institutions, monetary systems, customs barriers, and lifestyles. Even though the two monarchs worked together so closely that a chronicler recorded, for example, "the king and queen, on such and such a day, gave birth to a daughter," they never, as did their counterparts elsewhere in Europe, sought political unification of their kingdoms. Although their grandson Charles I (later Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire) inherited both crowns, the creation of a single Spanish polity awaited the abolition of the traditional rights (*fueros*) of the Crown of Aragon in the early eighteenth century.

Earlier, during the unhappy reign of Henry IV (1454–74), the most powerful noble families of Castile exerted a political influence that rivaled the Crown's. Henry accordingly attempted to strengthen his power in ways that anticipated actions by the Catholic Kings; he employed *corregidores*, royal agents assigned to major towns, to provide justice and secure compliance with the Crown's will. He also reorganized the Holy Brotherhood (Hermandad), a league of law officers hired by municipalities, and increased the appointment of university-educated officials. Henry's open-handed grants of land, jurisdictional rights, offices, and incomes in an effort to buy the loyalty of high aristocrats ultimately failed, however, and consequently Isabel inherited serious financial and political problems.

Isabel's victory over La Beltraneja enabled her to consolidate and extend her royal authority within Castile. Substantial military and political support from many powerful families during the civil war emphasized their importance as allies and the threat they posed if discontented. Consequently, the queen moved carefully to maintain their continued support. By confirming most of Henry's grants to them, she ensured the nobility's economic and social preeminence, but at the same time, she worked to curb their political strength.

The queen used a further reorganized Hermandad to end the anarchy plaguing Castile and bring peace to the countryside. Its agents captured malefactors and meted out justice. The imposition of royal justice restored order in rural areas, and the destruction of castles held by nobles who had sided with La Beltraneja was further evidence of the queen's intention to rule as well as reign. In 1480 the Catholic Kings resolved to increase the number of *corregidores* and to send them into all the major cities. As Henry IV had, they turned to men with a university education to staff many of the royal offices. Both Ferdinand and Isabel turned their personal attention to administering justice—the essence of kingship—and enlarging the judicial system to make it more accessible and effective. In addition, they reorganized the Council of Castile. The queen appointed to this supreme advisory, judicial, and administrative body university-educated jurists who were lower-ranking aristocrats or commoners rather than more illustrious nobles. Taken together, the monarchs' actions strengthened the Crown of Castile's authority and increased its ability to implement diplomatic, economic, fiscal, and religious policies.

The Portuguese monarchy in the late fifteenth century was heir to a tradition of strong centralized rule occasionally disrupted by high-ranking nobles eager to enhance their wealth and power. The unprecedented revenue resulting from the Crown's monopoly over trade with newly discovered lands, however, enabled John II (1481–95) to reassert the royal authority lost by his predecessor. John expanded the judicial system and increased the number of provincial administrators (*corregidores*). In addition, he executed for treason the Duke of Braganza, the richest and most influential noble in the realm, and enlarged the royal patrimony in the process. Centralization was again ascendant, although, as in Castile, the aristocracy retained social and economic dominance.

At the time of Spain's conquests in the Americas, blacks, like this drummer at the court of Emperor Charles V, were already a highly visible part of Spanish society.

Society

Society in Castile and Portugal shared many characteristics. Each kingdom recognized three estates—clergy, nobility, and commoners—and a number of corporate bodies with special legal privileges. Birth and family normally determined an individual's place in the social hierarchy. Ties created through godparentage and client–patron relationships also were important to both societies. Each kingdom contained Jews, Muslims, Italians and other foreigners, and black slaves, and neither had many professionals or merchants.

At the top of the Castilian and Portuguese social hierarchies were a few great families that bore titles of duke, marquis, or count. In Castile the greatest nobles controlled half of the kingdom's land, and in Portugal a similar group of about fifteen families also held noble titles, extensive lands, and economic power. Other titled nobles, often indistinguishable from the first in resources, formed a second tier of Castile's hierarchy. In Portugal some 2,000 nontitled nobles received land grants and incomes from the monarchy and constituted an upper-middle

nobility. Together these groups were at the apex of their respective social orders. From 1505 onward, high-ranking Castilian nobles could create entailed estates, or *mayorazgos*, which enabled the preservation of property in perpetuity and formed the basis for consolidating still larger estates through marriage.

The remainder of the nobility were knights known as *caballeros* (*cavaleiros*) or gentlemen, *hidalgos* (*fidalgos*). In Castile they used the honorific *don* and proudly displayed coats of arms. Their status exempted them from direct taxation and provided additional privileges denied to commoners. The *hidalgos'* economic resources varied considerably: The wealthiest in Castile were indistinguishable from the poorer titled nobles, whereas the poorer *hidalgos* possessed less than did well-to-do commoners. Commoners coveted nobility for both its social cachet and its privileges. Recognizing their desire for noble rank, Castilian monarchs gave and, from the 1520s, sold to them patents of nobility. Thus, in both Castile and Portugal a trickle of new families continuously entered the most privileged class in society.

Commoners accounted for over 90 percent of the Iberian population. Most engaged in agricultural or pastoral activities. Although many owned land, frequently it was just a garden plot. Most commoners worked a noble's land for remuneration that at best provided subsistence. A few commoners held professional positions, serving in the clergy, practicing law, or engaging in commerce. Not a bourgeoisie or true middle class, their highest ambition was ennoblement. Although few succeeded, some of the wealthiest did make the transition. Below them were artisans, themselves divided into guilds ranked by prestige, with silversmiths the most honored and cobblers the least.

Although few in number, successful foreign merchants and their descendants formed colonies in Iberia's commercial centers. For example, Genoa's commercial families had their largest Spanish colony in Seville. Their compatriots and other Italian merchants also resided in Lisbon and other Portuguese ports, from which they controlled the kingdom's long-distance trade. Although Iberian merchants were active in Burgos, Medina del Campo, Barcelona, Lisbon, Oporto, and other trading centers, the noble values of the Reconquest—valor and virtue, land, warfare, and religion—stigmatized trade as demeaning for aristocrats. It required the overseas expansion of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to modify this attitude.

Slaves constituted a small segment of society, although slavery had long been known in Iberia, as captives taken in the Reconquest fighting frequently were enslaved. But when Portuguese traders began importing slaves from Africa in 1441, they transformed the nature of slavery on the peninsula. By 1492 more than 35,000 black slaves had reached Portugal. Although some remained in servitude there, many were reexported. By the late fifteenth century, both Seville and Valencia in Spain had large slave populations and active slave markets. Most slaves worked as domestic servants or as unskilled laborers, and the association of dark skin with slavery had become firmly established before the settlement of the New World.

Although by the time of the Reconquest Iberia contained Christians, Muslims, and Jews, religious tolerance had disappeared by the early sixteenth century. Isabel and Ferdinand followed up the victory over the Muslim minority in 1492 by giving the Jews four months either to convert to Christianity or emigrate. Perhaps 80,000 of the 200,000 Jews in Castile and Aragon fled rather than give up their faith. But they took with them knowledge and skills that the kingdoms could ill afford to lose, although the remaining *conversos,* or New Christian converts, continued in their occupations as tax collectors, financiers, physicians, and the like. Spain's loss was Portugal's gain, as John II allowed the exiled Jews to enter his kingdom and remain for some months in return for monetary payments. After the prescribed period ended, the wealthiest Jews purchased permits allowing permanent residence. In 1497, however, John's successor Manuel I (1495–1521) ordered the conversion or expulsion of all Jews in Portugal. Some accepted baptism and remained, but others returned to Spain or emigrated to Holland and other countries. Those who remained in the peninsula became *conversos*.

As the final blow in creating religious homogeneity, Isabel and Ferdinand in 1502 ordered the expulsion or conversion of the remaining Muslims in Castile. Approximately 200,000 had already emigrated after the fall of Granada. But because the terms of the 1502 measure made exile tantamount to the confiscation of their property, nearly all the remaining Muslims accepted baptism. In Portugal Manuel I had ordered the small number of free Muslims to leave in 1497, thus establishing a single religion for his realm as well.

The expulsions imposed a superficial religious homogeneity, but the new converts still suffered discrimination because of their religious background and ancestry. "Old Christians" had viewed the *conversos* with suspicion for many years. Systematic discrimination against the "New Christians" in some jobs and in universities then began in mid-fifteenth-century Castile and continued for centuries. The sudden increase in the number of *conversos* in Portugal also created social and religious tensions that resulted in riots, pogroms, and an official discrimination policy forbidding New Christians to hold public offices, receive honors, or marry nobles.

Suspicion that the *conversos* were secretly practicing their former religion led Isabel in the 1470s and the Portuguese in 1547 to establish tribunals of the Inquisition to investigate the genuineness of the *conversos*' Christianity. Indeed, the Spanish Inquisition proved so effective in prosecuting converted Jews who secretly continued to observe their original faith that by 1500 it had largely met its initial goal of eliminating them.

Noble or commoner, wealthy or poor, Iberians preferred to reside in cities, towns, and villages rather than in widely scattered dwellings in the countryside. As the Christians moved south during the Reconquest, the monarchs chartered towns and granted privileges to entice occupation and settlement. Town councils were routinely established, and aldermen and officials, selected. Within Castile seventeen towns (eighteen after Granada was conquered) were represented in the *cortes*, or parliament.

Map 3 The Iberian Peninsula in the Mid- Fifteenth Century.

Cities, towns, and villages housed clerics, local officials, merchants, and artisans. Even nobles with rich estates normally spent much of the year in town houses. For the majority of the population—*labradores* who worked the small properties they owned or rented and wage-earning day laborers who worked in agriculture or pastoral activities—towns and villages were home. Most walked to fields in the adjoining countryside each workday and spent few nights away from home.

The settlement pattern of clustered residences fostered pride in the local region, the town, and adjacent rural lands that fell within its jurisdiction. Kinship ties supplemented by bonds created through godparentage resulted in tight extended family groups that were the primary social units, with political and economic overtones. Individuals tended to maintain a strong allegiance to their native region as well as to their families. Local residents regarded outsiders with suspicion; it required years of residence and the development of social and economic ties for an outsider to enter the local society.

Economy

In the late fifteenth century, only Seville, Granada, Toledo, and Lisbon had populations in excess of 30,000 persons. Thus numerous smaller communities provided many of the cultural activities and social and economic opportunities without which Iberians considered civilization nonexistent and living conditions intolerable. Urban centers were the locus of local economic exchange and social contact.

Agricultural and pastoral activities were the foundation of the Iberian economies. Although the yield was low, grain production on the Castilian plateau was ample enough in good years to permit exporting a surplus to the poorer regions of Galicia, Asturias, and Vizcaya to the west and north. In lean years, however, even Castile had to import grain from abroad, and beginning in 1502 the Crown started to fix the maximum price of grain. Portugal was chronically short of wheat and other cereals, and by 1500 imports of grain were commonplace. In contrast, Andalusia exported grain, first to Aragon and later to the New World. Olive orchards and vineyards completed the traditional triad of Mediterranean agriculture in Spain. In Portugal, wine, fruit, cork, olive oil, salt, and fish were the major products.

High-quality wool from merino sheep dominated Castile's exports in the mid-fifteenth century and continued to do so for many years. Vast numbers of sheep held by members of the *mesta,* or sheep owner's guild, migrated annually from summer pastures in Aragon to winter forage in Andalusia and Extremadura. Great aristocrats, monasteries, and small private owners sent their sheep on the great walks that traversed Castile, but even more sheep stayed home. Although restrictions prohibited owners from letting their sheep wander through planted lands, the immense size of the flocks necessarily reduced the amount of land available for agriculture. The pattern of exporting raw materials (wool) and importing finished goods (textiles) was firmly established before Henry IV's reign. Castile lacked a solid industrial base on the eve of empire and failed to develop one in the next three centuries.

Engaging in substantial foreign trade joined northern Castilians with merchants of Barcelona, Seville, and Lisbon in an international mercantile system. The Portuguese, long involved in international trade, in the second half of the fifteenth century were exporting slaves, gold, ivory, and sugar brought from Africa and the Madeira Islands as well as salt and other domestic products in exchange for finished goods. With important bases in Seville and Lisbon, Genoese financiers and merchants were an influential foreign presence in Iberian commercial circles.

The Castilian Crown employed a plethora of taxes and tariffs, but the principal source of revenue during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabel was the *alcabala*, a sales tax frequently farmed out to city councils for collection. Although the amount of regular revenue increased more than tenfold during their reign, it was never enough to support the court, the army, and Ferdinand's foreign ventures. Consequently the Crown resorted to borrowing, a recourse that ultimately had disastrous results for the succeeding Habsburg monarchs. The revenue of the Portuguese Crown also rose in the late fifteenth century, but similarly its expenses repeatedly exceeded its normal tax income.

The Iberian world of the late fifteenth century remained fragmented politically but had become substantially stronger through the union of the crowns of Castile and Aragon and the conquest of Granada. In addition, the forced conversion or exile of non-Christians, the Inquisition's activities against suspected heretics, and the imposition of royal justice had brought a unity to Castile that rivaled that achieved earlier in Portugal. The centralization of royal authority had increased in both kingdoms. The Iberian population was expanding as it continued to recover from the ravages of the fourteenth-century Black Death. The African trade and early exploitation of the Atlantic islands was benefiting Portugal. And with technological advances in sailing vessels and sailors' increased confidence in their ability to undertake lengthy voyages, the way was opened for the great era of exploration.

ATLANTIC AFRICA IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

First Contacts with Europe

Western Europe and West Africa were situated at the far western boundary of the rich medieval trade routes that distributed the products of the Eastern Hemisphere. As these commercial links increased in importance at the beginning of the fifteenth century, the economic power of the Islamic Middle East grew relative to both regions. By the mid-sixteenth century Portugal's direct entry into both African and Asian trades and Spanish and Portuguese exploration, conquest, and settlement in the Western Hemisphere had transformed these global economic and commercial arrangements. In contrast to the direct colonial rule and substantial European immigration imposed by the Iberians on their American colonies, however, most peoples of Africa remained outside of direct European domination into the nineteenth century.

The Portuguese capture of Ceuta across the Strait of Gibraltar in 1415 opened the era of exploration, trade, conquest, and settlement for the Iberian kingdoms. The arrival of the Portuguese on the Atlantic coast of sub-Saharan Africa in the fifteenth century, and the later appearance of other Europeans, initiated what would ultimately become broad changes in the region. Prince Henry, the energetic, ambitious, and wealthy younger son of John I of Portugal (1385–1433), promoted the exploration of the West African coast—earning from later generations but not contemporaries the nickname "the Navigator," despite his personally having sailed no farther than Morocco. Progress accelerated after 1434 when an expedition finally rounded Africa's fearsome Cape Bojador on the coast of the modern territory of Western Sahara.

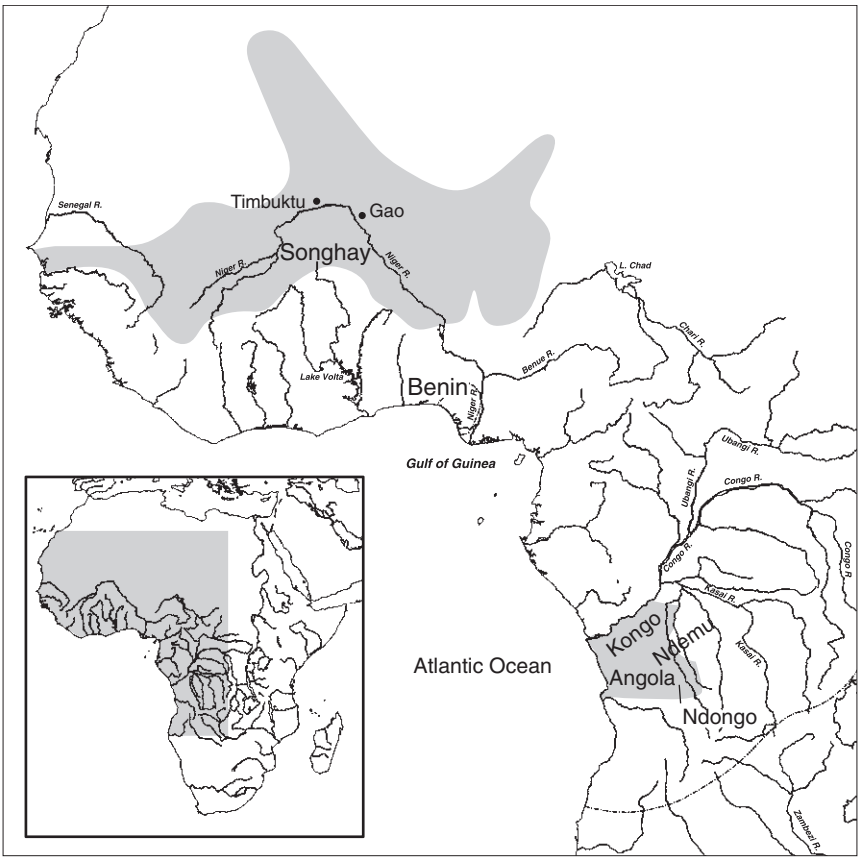
By the late fifteenth century, Portuguese ships had visited Atlantic Africa and, with the permission of native rulers, established a small number of fortified trading posts. These vulnerable commercial outposts would remain the most common form of European presence for more than three centuries. These fortress warehouses were erected at São Jorge da Mina (Elmina) in 1482 and at

other coastal sites, and Portuguese reliance on them reflected several realities. First, with the important exception of the Atlantic islands, the Portuguese generally sought quick profits from trade, avoiding the more expensive and difficult alternative of colonization and the direct control of economic resources in the African interior. Second, while larger and faster vessels armed with cannons gave the Portuguese a clear military advantage in coastal waters and estuaries, native peoples along the West African coast had considerable experience with iron and steel weapons as well as the use of cavalry in combat and were formidable military opponents. As West African states gained firearms through trade, the ability of the Portuguese and other Europeans to impose their will was further reduced. Consequently, the Portuguese could control the sea, but African kingdoms controlled the land, and native merchants, as a result, largely determined the terms of trade.

And finally, the effects of deadly local diseases, notably malaria, yellow fever, and gastrointestinal maladies, retarded any ambitions of the Portuguese or other Europeans to penetrate permanently the interior of Africa. Contemporary accounts suggest that disease killed approximately half of new European arrivals to the West African tropics within a year and another quarter within the second year. A voyage in 1588 to what the English merchants called the "great city of Benin" to purchase pepper and ivory ended in near disaster when a local fever attacked the ship's crew. In little more than a week, the fever took the lives of the captain, mate, and so many crew members that the survivors could barely pull up the anchor.

When Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1488, a sea route to India and its spices was open at last. The lure of direct maritime trade with Asia reduced even more the willingness of the Portuguese court to allocate significant resources to controlling the West African coast. They, therefore, sought to find profits within existing markets and trade routes. The richest gold mines were distant from the coast, and West African gold had long been one of the most important products traded north across the Sahara Desert. Portuguese merchants soon gained access to this profitable commodity through coastal intermediaries. They also began to trade European goods for slaves, purchasing and exporting about 2,200 slaves annually from all of Africa between 1480 and 1499. The Atlantic slave trade eventually came to dominate relations between Africa and Europe. For at least a hundred years after first contacts, however, the Portuguese and other important European coastal traders bought and sold relatively small numbers of slaves. In this era, European merchants purchased a range of African goods, including cloth, salt, gold, iron, and copper. They also paid local taxes and generally accepted restrictions imposed by African rulers.

West Africa and West Central Africa, vast regions extending from the Senegal River to the southern reaches of Angola, were home to hundreds if not thousands of ethnic groups often separated by language and other cultural differences. Here, numerous rulers of states of varied size competed for power and wealth. A large number of languages and even more dialects formed three principal linguistic zones: Upper Guinea, Lower Guinea, and West Central Africa. As in



Map 4 West and West Central Africa in the Early Sixteenth Century.

contemporary Iberia, the local and regional identities—for example, Bambara, Hausa, Jolof, Mandingo, and other ethnicities—dominated. Few fifteenth-century Iberians described themselves as "Europeans" and, similarly, the subjects of West African or West Central African polities were very unlikely to consider themselves "Africans."

West Africa

Throughout the fourteenth century, the empire of Mali was the preeminent power in the interior of West Africa. Mande speakers dominated this empire centered in the lower Gambia and Senegal River areas. The royal court and most merchants were Muslims, but much of the countryside remained outside this faith. The empire's wealth was displayed spectacularly in ruler Mansa Musa's pilgrimage to Mecca. Along his route, which passed through Cairo and other powerful Muslim cities, he distributed so much gold that he drove down the price of this precious

metal for years. Ibn Battuta, who visited Mali from North Africa, provided a favorable if somewhat biased account in the 1350s:

> The negroes possess some admirable qualities. They are seldom unjust, and have greater abhorrence of injustice than any other people. Their sultan (the Mansa) shows no mercy to anyone guilty of the least act of it. There is complete security in the country. Neither travellor [*sic*] nor inhabitant in it has anything to fear from robbers or men of violence.[1]

Despite this wealth, Mali declined and eventually fell to the expanding Songhay empire by the middle of the fifteenth century.

Songhay's capital was Gao, but it also controlled the ancient center of learning at Timbuktu. During the reigns of Sunni Ali (d. 1492) and Askiya Muhammad (d. 1538), Songhay conquered the weakened Mali empire and revived the rich trade routes across the Sahara Desert. As in Mali, the Songhay rulers in this period of rapid expansion needed to fuse the interests of a largely Muslim merchant class, crucial to the court, and a vast rural population tied to the kings in older royal rites and traditional religious practices. The political structures of Songhay were more centralized than those of Mali, with most conquered rulers replaced by royal appointees. Renowned for its learning and crafts and the success of its merchants, the Songhay empire had been created militarily, and Askiya Muhammad, its most ambitious conqueror, gained the throne as a usurper whose power rested on the loyalty of the army.

Although gold remained a crucial trade item, Songhay's currency was salt or cowries, mollusk shells used as currency. In addition to gold, the empire's most important trade items were cloth, food, kola nuts, and slaves. Successful military campaigns enlarged the slave population, and these slaves allowed the empire to increase agricultural production. Visitors were impressed by the intellectual life of the capital Gao and Timbuktu, a manufacturing and commercial center that became the major center of Islamic scholarship in the region. One visitor commented on the city's commercial importance: "Here are many shops of craftsmen, especially those who weave linen and cotton cloth. To this place [Berber] merchants bring cloth from Europe. . . . The inhabitants are exceedingly rich." Another noted, "In Timbuktu there are numerous judges, doctors and clerics, all receiving good salaries from the king. . . . There is a big demand for books in manuscript, imported from Barbary. More profit is made from the book trade than from any [other] line of business."[2]

In the late fifteenth century, numerous small states divided the West African coast. Among them was the kingdom of Benin, located inland from the Niger River Delta. King (Oba) Ewuare established Benin's commercial and political power in the mid-fifteenth century. This expansion of Benin's political and economic influence reduced the authority of other rulers and chiefs. Benin City, the capital, was large and prosperous, as early European visitors universally testified. Women in Benin produced beautiful cotton cloth, and the kingdom's metal goods were traded throughout West Africa. Its merchants also controlled the regional trade in ivory and pepper. Even after the establishment of the Atlantic slave trade, cloth remained Benin's most important export.

The royal palace of the *oba* or king of Benin was adorned with brass plaques that told the story of court life. This plaque presents the figure of a nobleman wearing court regalia.

Following the first contacts with the Portuguese, the *oba* sent an emissary to Portugal to learn about these strangers. This ambassador returned with rich gifts, some Christian missionaries, and a new group of Portuguese merchants. The *oba* certainly recognized that European firearms could prove useful in his wars and perhaps thought the missionaries might also strengthen his power. By 1570 trade continued, but Christian missionaries had failed to convert the *oba* and his court.

Political and economic disruptions arising from the growing European presence on the coast and, more important, the pressures of the expanding Atlantic slave trade during the eighteenth century would contribute to the eventual decline of Benin.

West Central Africa

To the southeast, the kingdom of Kongo, with its capital of Mbanza Kongo, dominated a broad region that included numerous linguistically related Bantu ethnic groups. Kongo was a great regional power that faced few local threats to its political ambitions when the Portuguese appeared in 1483. Kongo's ruler, the *manikongo,* controlled numerous tributary states and direct dependencies through a bureaucracy made up mostly of kinsmen. At the end of the fifteenth century, the kingdom's population of nearly 2.5 million lived in towns whose officials and merchants administered regional political life, collected taxes, and organized commerce. Its economy relied on an important metallurgical sector as well as on highly productive agriculture. The elites perceived the political benefits that relations with the Portuguese might bring. These included desired trade goods, prestige, and enhanced spiritual power. As in Benin, Kongo had a coherent, non-Islamic religious tradition. Nonetheless, contact with the Portuguese led the *manikongo* and his court to explore Christianity. Experimentation culminated in 1491 with the baptism of the royal heir, Nzinga Mbemba. As Afonso I, he became the *manikongo* in 1507 and ruled as a Christian until the 1540s. With the encouragement of the *manikongo* and his court, Portuguese missionaries pursued conversion across the kingdom and sent many sons of important families to Portugal for instruction in the faith. Many came back fluent in Portuguese as well. Despite this success in inserting Christianity into an African kingdom, Christianity never completely replaced native religious traditions in Kongo; instead, the two religious practices melded to produce a unique local Christianity. The need for Portuguese allies is an important explanation for the Kongo elites' willingness to sanction the sale of slaves. Nonetheless, as the Portuguese presence grew and Christianity spread, the Kongo royal court began to lose power relative both to the increasingly aggressive and confident Portuguese and to the kingdom's distant tributaries that now saw the chance to assert their own power.

Central to Kongo's decline was the growing importance of the region's slave trade that connected the kingdom to the Portuguese colony of Brazil with its rapidly expanding sugar sector. Although the Kongo royal court's interests initially benefited by using some Portuguese auxiliaries in military campaigns, the predictable result was a dramatic increase in the volume of the slave trade. Warfare became a continuous part of the region's political life as armies made up of Portuguese soldiers and much more numerous native allies campaigned relentlessly. Each campaign and every victory added to the volume of the slave trade, for Kongo's elite required war captives to exchange with the Portuguese for the goods and missionaries that helped support their political power. By the early sixteenth century, Kongo kings had begun to complain of the destructiveness of the slave trade to the Portuguese authorities, even appealing directly to the pope on

numerous occasions. But it was too late: The authority of the *manikongo* and the power of the capital declined while the slave trade roiled the interior and provoked constant warfare. By the end of the sixteenth century, no African state had been more affected by the arrival of Europeans than Kongo, and nowhere else in Africa had the slave trade become more important.

In these regions of intense contact with Europeans, especially the Portuguese, African peoples incorporated elements of European culture, technology, and belief. Scholars refer to these regions as Atlantic Creole cultures. In the Kongo, for example, evangelization by Portuguese priests and African converts spread Christian belief and practice to areas outside direct control by colonial administrators. The Portuguese recruited large numbers of native military allies who, in turn, adopted European tactics, weapons, and hierarchies. At the same time the Kongo elite as well as rulers of other African allies of the Portuguese sought access to language, religious instruction, and material goods as ways of strengthening their authority and status.

The Kongo and Angola, areas where Portuguese presence was most intense, were centers of Atlantic Creole culture, but the Ndongo and Matamba, more distant from Portuguese settlement, participated in these cultural exchanges as well. This meant that a large number of slaves carried to the New World had experience with important elements of European culture, including Christian belief, language, aesthetics, and material culture, before entering the colonial orbit. Once in the colonies, these prior experiences and adaptations facilitated the rapid development of a slave community.

Slavery was well established in most of Atlantic Africa centuries before Portugal's seizure of Ceuta. Wealth rested heavily on the possession of slaves across the large empires of West Africa as well as in Benin and other kingdoms. Most slaves were taken in wars and came from distinct ethnic groups with their own religious traditions. Rulers and other slave owners used this human property as administrators, soldiers, concubines, domestic labor, field labor, miners, artisans, and in a host of other occupations. Slave owners in sub-Saharan Africa also employed their chattel in a variety of occupations. Slave laborers, for example, produced agricultural products, including millet, cotton, wheat, and rice. In the western Sudan, slaves labored in gold mines and, in some desert sites, worked in salt works. Slave owners used, sold, or traded the products of slave labor, and rulers taxed people rather than land, which was held collectively rather than as private property. In the fifteenth century, war, raiding, and kidnapping in sub-Saharan regions enabled slavers to send annually an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 victims to Islamic regions of North Africa and the Middle East via routes along the East African coast and the Red Sea, and especially across the Sahara Desert.

The Slave Trade

The Atlantic slave trade expanded during the initial century of contacts between Africans and Europeans and would continue to do so for more than 300 years. When Portuguese mariners and merchants reached West Africa, they had initially

focused on the gold trade, for the scarce, precious metal was the basis for Europe's monetary system and crucial to the growth of markets and long-distance commercial operations. Salt, pepper, ivory, and cloth also proved profitable. Building upon an existing slave trade brought additional profits.

A low ratio of people to land in much of West Africa made control over labor a key to wealth. Coupled with extensive political fragmentation that resulted in ample potential slaves located within traveling distance, this low ratio goes far to explain the development of slavery in sub-Saharan Africa. Slaves were a part of both Mali and Songhay trade and had become important to the West African regional economy as well by the time the Portuguese arrived. Backed by private investors, Portuguese merchants moved slowly down the Atlantic coast of Africa with trading goods that included textiles; copper and brass wristlets and basins; horses, saddles, bridles, and other tack; iron bars; and cowries. As the fifteenth century progressed, the importance of slaves in this trade increased. By the 1450s, fifteen slaves were traded for one horse, suggesting the expected value of slave labor. Central to this slow expansion was the use of slaves in the labor force of southern Iberia and increasingly in the sugar plantations of the Azores and São Tomé. The rapid expansion of sugar agriculture in Brazil would usher in a new era in the slave trade.

The slave trade with the Portuguese, and later with other Europeans, was initially constrained along the West African coast by the decisions of local political authorities. Slavery had an important place in the Islamic world, but rulers' restrictions on who could be enslaved limited the scale of the trade. The result was that slaves flowed only slowly from the states of the interior to the coast and the Atlantic trade. Similarly, Benin controlled the growth in slave exports, even prohibiting the export of male slaves for centuries. Nevertheless, Benin utilized slaves in its own economy and allowed Europeans to import slaves into the kingdom from other African regions as an ongoing part of their trade. Although local rulers were eventually unable to control the mounting flow of slaves crossing the Atlantic, there is no doubt that the Portuguese lacked the military power to overcome their objections during the century that followed first contacts.

Despite the pervasiveness of slavery across the region and despite slavery's economic and cultural importance prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, the historic place of slavery in Africa was essentially different from the form of slavery later developed by Europeans in their American colonies. First and foremost, the Atlantic slave trade extracted a volume of slaves never previously witnessed in Africa. As this trade matured, numbers spiraled upward until reaching their peak in the eighteenth century. Second, the distance that the trade carried its victims also necessarily altered the meaning of slavery, tearing families, ethnicities, and even polities apart by forcefully removing men and women from their native regions, cultures, languages, and religions and relocating them to the distant Americas. Finally, the Atlantic slave trade worsened the status of slaves relative to African customs, reducing legal protections and increasing the power of owners over their slaves.

Atlantic Africa and the Americas had many similarities in the fifteenth century, including numerous ethnic states, kingship, frequent wars, hierarchical social structures with strong kinship bonds, multiple religions with prominent priesthoods, indigenous slavery, a variety of languages and dialects, and sedentary agriculture. However, the consequences of contacts with Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries would be very different. Following the defeat of the Aztec and Inka, the Spaniards established direct rule in the Americas. Other than in the kingdom of Kongo, the Portuguese and other Europeans were unable to establish direct control over African peoples and depended upon the goodwill of local rulers to engage in trade until the nineteenth century. African political and military resources and the prevalence of malaria, yellow fever, and gastrointestinal ailments also slowed the advance of Europeans. With the passage of time, however, the balance of power shifted to Europeans, as measured in the growing volume of the slave trade. As a result of this cruel trade, Africa made important demographic and cultural contributions to colonial Latin America.

FIRST ENCOUNTERS IN THE NEW WORLD

First Encounters

Within this seafaring environment, an obscure Genoese seaman named Christopher Columbus appeared in Lisbon in 1476. Having already sailed in the Mediterranean and possibly to Iceland, he now joined the mariners most advanced in long-distance travel. He sailed with the Portuguese, married the daughter of one of Prince Henry's sea captains, and for a time lived in the Madeiras. A stubborn, brave man, Columbus believed that God had selected him to spread Christianity throughout the unconverted world and assumed that glory and wealth would crown his success. Unable to admit his own faults, he was loath to recognize his subordinates' virtues. Thus, despite being a capable seaman, Columbus would prove hopelessly unsuited for administrative responsibilities.

Portugal, England, and France rejected Columbus's appeals to support his scheme to reach the Indies by sailing west. His failure lay in both his demand for substantial personal rewards and an accurate scholarly appreciation that he was grossly underestimating the distance to Asia. Bartolomeu Dias's voyage further reduced Portugal's interest in the project.

Then Columbus's luck changed. Euphoric after defeating the Muslims and securing Granada, Isabel and Ferdinand agreed to support his enterprise, in the hope of great gains for God and Castile. Striking a bargain with the mariner, the monarchs granted him a patent of nobility, the offices of admiral of the ocean sea and viceroy and governor of the lands found, and a tenth of the gold, silver, spices, and other valuables obtained, in the event he was successful.

With three ships and fewer than ninety men, Columbus sailed first to the Canary Islands, confirmed as a Castilian possession in the Treaty of Alcaçovas but still not fully conquered or settled. He set forth again in early September with a

year's provisions. After sailing more than 3,000 nautical miles, the gamble paid off when on October 12, 1492, Columbus and his men sighted an island in the chain later named the Bahamas.

Further exploration revealed Española and Cuba, the two largest islands in the Greater Antilles. On Española Columbus found the gold he sought and a docile Arawak population. He lavished praise on the natives—"affectionate people and without covetousness. . . . [They] are always smiling"[3]—whom he dubbed "Indians" as a result of believing that he had reached Asia. The Arawaks, also called the Taíno, had a peaceful, sedentary, stratified society. They cultivated yucca, sweet potatoes, maize, beans, squash, and other plants and harvested fish, turtles, fowl, and other wildlife. Initially, the Arawaks shared their food with the Spaniards and, under their leaders' direction, provided voluntary labor as well. This proved especially valuable when the *Santa María* struck a reef and the dismantled wreck was used to build a fort at Navidad. Thirty-nine sailors remained there while the *Niña* and the *Pinta* returned to Spain in early 1493.

Columbus obtained enough gold through barter on Española to ensure a warm reception when he met Isabel in Barcelona in 1493. Although certain he had reached Asia as intended, Columbus found his sovereigns dubious but eager for dominion over whatever land he had reached. Following medieval custom and a more recent Portuguese precedent, they asked Pope Alexander VI, a protégé of Ferdinand, for title to the newly discovered territory in return for undertaking the Christianization of its inhabitants. The pope acceded and in a bull dated May 3, 1493, designated the lands as "islands and firm land" located in "the western parts of the Ocean Sea, toward the Indies," an identification that neither confirmed nor denied that the lands were Asiatic. A later bull gave Castile title to the lands west of a north–south demarcation line one hundred leagues west of Cape Verde and the Azores.

This papal donation limited Portugal's ambitions, thus causing John II to react strongly. Faced with the threat of war, in 1494 Castile signed the Treaty of Tordesillas. Under its terms Portugal received all lands east of a line of demarcation 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands. Lands west of the line would belong to Castile, thus giving Portugal title to a portion of the as-yet-undiscovered Brazil.

Columbus's voyage inaugurated a burst of exploration that quickly enlarged Europe's geographic knowledge of the New World and the winds and currents most favorable for sailing to and from it. The intrepid admiral led three more voyages, the last ending in 1504. During these same years, a Portuguese expedition headed by Vasco da Gama reached India by sea. In 1500 Pedro Alvares Cabral followed da Gama's instructions for reaching India by sailing far southwest of Africa to catch the best winds for rounding the Cape of Good Hope. Voyaging farther west than planned, he accidentally made contact with the Brazilian coast. This unexpected development proved the wisdom of John II's insistence on revising the papal donation, although for decades the economic benefits of the Brazilian landfall were modest. In 1501 a small fleet that included the Florentine Amerigo Vespucci sailed along the southern coast of Brazil. Numerous coasting expeditions also proceeded north and south from the Caribbean, but the hoped-for strait across the landmass

proved elusive. By the mid-1520s ships had coasted from Nova Scotia in the north to Tierra del Fuego in the south. Added to Magellan's voyage, the explorations provided a view of the world's geography that differed greatly from that of a century earlier. In addition, better knowledge of winds and currents reduced the normal travel time necessary to sail to and from the Old and the New Worlds.

Early Settlements

During the same years that exploration illuminated much of the New World's geography, the first confrontations between Spaniards and Indians took place on Española and the other islands of the Greater Antilles. The quarter-century of experience on the islands revealed problems that recurred over and over when the mainlands were conquered and settled. The different realities of the New World forced the modification of Castilian institutions. Accordingly, the years between 1492 and 1519 were a period of experimentation and capital accumulation that prepared the immigrants for the advance to the mainland.

Columbus reached the Caribbean islands expecting to trade with the inhabitants and to establish factories, or fortified trading stations. This focus on commerce rather than colonization was characteristic of the earlier Genoese and Portuguese expansion in Africa and the Atlantic islands. The Castilian tradition of colonization and settlement used in the Reconquest, however, quickly came to the fore. In late 1493 Columbus returned to Española with 1,500 men who included seamen, officials, and the first clerics to venture to the New World. The second voyage was organized to establish a permanent settlement, and so the men brought animals, seed, tools, and trading goods but no European women.

Most of the early immigrants to the islands were from Andalusia. Soon, however, men from Extremadura and the remainder of Castile joined them. Although their backgrounds varied, commoners predominated, and high-ranking noblemen were conspicuously missing. As a group the immigrants had left Spain in the hope of bettering their lot. Although some sought adventure and glory, most pursued the more mundane objective of wealth. Gold or other riches would open the way to social ascent and the trappings that signified the good life as Castilians viewed it: a large residence, horses, retainers and servants, a Spanish wife, and always the ability to offer hospitality to relatives and friends. To fulfill this dream, the settlers asserted control over native labor.

Spaniards who went to the New World expected the natives to work for them. Upon his return to Navidad in 1493, Columbus found that the excesses of the men left behind had resulted in the destruction of their small settlement. The men had physically abused the natives and seized their women; revenge had followed. This incident strained future relations between the Spaniards and the Arawaks, although Columbus did distinguish between "good" or friendly Indians and those who were hostile. But the Spaniards' pillage of foodstuffs during a famine in 1494 and repeated acts of violence eventually drove the natives into a hopeless rebellion. The victors subsequently began punitive expeditions, enslaving the natives and demanding tribute payments from the remaining population.

Columbus had organized his expeditions as a monopoly company. He promised salaries but, in fact, paid his men irregularly. Dissatisfied with their lot, perhaps half of the settlers on Española joined Francisco Roldán in a revolt against the authority of the Columbus family. When the admiral returned to the island on his third voyage in 1498, he found his brother Bartolomé's authority challenged. To establish peace, Columbus recognized the grants of Indians that his rivals had made to individual Spaniards.

These allocations, or *repartimientos*, assigned a chieftain and his people to an *encomendero*, as the recipient was known, to work whatever mines and properties he held. Because they guaranteed access to needed labor and gave the recipient high status, *repartimientos* were coveted by the early Spanish settlers. With modification, this basic institution for organizing labor followed the conquistadors to the American mainlands as *encomienda*, a term long associated with nobility and conquest and its rewards in Spain. It persisted as a major labor institution for decades in some regions and for centuries in others.

Both the *repartimiento* laborers and the enslaved Indians separated from their communities were forced to toil in the fields as well as in placer gold mines. Both forms of work produced hardships. The available gold was limited in quantity, and the streams quickly played out. Accustomed to producing only enough foodstuffs for their own subsistence, the natives proved unwilling or incapable of growing enough to feed the Spaniards as well. Food shortages, malnutrition, and death resulted. The Spaniards' disillusionment was so great that when Columbus offered them the chance to return to Iberia in 1498, 300 did so, each with an Indian slave.

Subjected to new, harsh working conditions and at times enslavement, abused by the Spaniards, their society disrupted, their diet altered, and the prospect for improvement nil, the native population of perhaps a half-million in 1492 quickly began to decline, and by the mid-sixteenth century the Arawaks of Española had virtually disappeared.

This disastrous depopulation occurred for a variety of reasons. Spanish rule had turned the idyllic paradise that Columbus had described into a living hell for the natives. Nearly everything the Spaniards did created havoc on the indigenous population, but the demands they placed on the food supply and the conditions under which they made the natives live and labor were the main causes of the decline. The Laws of Burgos (1512) and other legislation to improve the natives' working conditions and to halt the decline failed. Disease, perhaps swine flu, accompanied Columbus in 1493, although smallpox apparently did not arrive until 1518, by which time there were fewer than 30,000 natives still alive.

The Dominicans in particular protested the Spaniards' abuse of the indigenous population, and in 1511 Father Antonio Montesinos condemned the Spaniards for their abominable callousness and exploitation of the Indians. "Tell me," he queried in the famous sermon, "by what right or justice do you hold these Indians in such cruel and horrible slavery? By what right do you wage such detestable wars on these people who lived idly and peacefully in their own lands, where you have consumed infinite numbers of them with unheard-of murders and desolations?"[4]

Later, Bartolomé de las Casas (1474–1566), a former *encomendero* who had witnessed the devastation of the Caribbean islands, angrily excoriated, in an endless stream of publications, his compatriots' abuse of the natives and pushed the Crown toward reform.

Critics of the Spaniards' treatment of the Indians posed the fundamental question of Spain's right to conquer and rule in the New World. The response, duly furnished by learned scholars convened by King Ferdinand, was that the papacy could, as it had done in the bulls of 1493, confer dominion over the pagans to their Christian rulers, who then would have the responsibility to convert them. If they refused Christianity and allegiance to the Castilian Crown, the Spaniards could declare a "just war" on them. After 1512 Spaniards were required to read the *requerimiento* to natives before battle. The document stated: "We protest that the deaths and losses which shall accrue from this are your fault, and not that of their highnesses, or ours, or of these soldiers who came with us."

Although the Spaniards' devastation of the native cultures of Española and other islands is beyond dispute, equally apparent was the rapid appearance of Spanish institutions in the Caribbean. In August 1496 construction began on the city of Santo Domingo. Rebuilt in 1502 after a destructive hurricane, it quickly became the first true city in Spanish America. Modeled after Santa Fe, where Isabel and Ferdinand had based their troops during the siege of Granada, Santo Domingo was built on a gridiron pattern that would be the standard form for future Spanish cities in the Americas.

Spanish society in Española centered increasingly in Santo Domingo. Although the urban focus was prevalent in Spain, it became even more pronounced in the colonies. A city provided both stability for the Spaniards' lives and social relations and the amenities of civilization that the settlers tried to reproduce wherever they went. In addition, a municipality enjoyed the important right of communicating directly with the monarch. As the center of government, Santo Domingo housed the governor of the island and, after 1511, the first high court, or *audiencia*, in the Indies. A city council, or *cabildo* (sometimes called an *ayuntamiento*), made up of local citizens (*vecinos*) appeared immediately. A cathedral was constructed in the city, and a university, the first in the Americas, was founded by 1540. As Spaniards moved to other islands in the Caribbean and then to the mainland beyond, they immediately founded municipalities. Without exaggeration one can consider the municipality, and especially its largest variation, the city, as the base for Spanish life and rule in the Indies.

The Imposition of Royal Authority

Unrest and discontent among the settlers was revealed vividly in the Roldán revolt and Columbus's failure to prevent the mistreatment of the natives or to deliver the riches he had promised. After having had these complaints investigated, Isabel and Ferdinand relieved the admiral of his administrative responsibilities on Española. They also licensed expeditions to explore and trade in the Indies, and in August 1500 a royal governor, Francisco de Bobadilla, arrived on the island to find yet