

A New Civilization Emerges in Western Europe

11

Sometimes an individual life displays the

complexities of a larger society. Godric—ultimately, Saint Godric—was a 12th-century Englishman (Figure 11.1). His father was an ordinary farmer, but he early developed greater ambition. Godric started as a peddler and, according to his biographer, quickly learned how to turn a profit on cheap items. He was physically strong, and a hard worker—necessary qualities for a life of trade and travel. He soon turned to urban commerce, which was beginning to increase rapidly during the 1100s. He participated in seagoing trade with other parts of Britain and with the European continent, and clearly made a good living, acquiring a number of ships.



FIGURE 11.1 Having experienced many close calls with the weather during his years at sea, St. Godric was troubled on stormy nights for the rest of his life, thinking of the peril of sailors. He is best remembered for his extraordinary affinity for wild animals. He protected hunted animals and is said to have allowed snakes to warm themselves at his fire.

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

What were the main stages of change in western Europe, from the early postclassical centuries to 1450, and what were the characteristic western political forms in each main stage? p. 243

11.1

What were the main cultural issues that west European intellectuals grappled with during the postclassical centuries? p. 253

11.2

How did growing trade fit the basic social structure of western Europe? p. 257

11.3

What were the basic shifts in west European characteristics at the end of the postclassical period? Was the region declining? p. 260

11.4

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But he was not entirely at peace with himself. His biographer, a clergyman named Reginald of Durham, is eager to emphasize Godric's consistent Christianity. So he portrays him as content with a simple life even amid his riches, and quickly attracted to the saints and a life of God. He argues that Godric's sea voyages, undoubtedly risky, helped the future saint realize the importance of divine aid—and surely religion did often provide a sense of security to venturesome merchants. Finally, however, a purely material life did not seem sufficient.

Godric began visiting saints' shrines with increasing frequency. He began to be disturbed by the high living—feasting and drinking—of some of his merchant colleagues. He also found that some of them stole outright. He attempted to correct them but was rebuffed. Ashamed of his own materialism (and possibly of some misdeeds of his own), he went on a pilgrimage to Rome. After that, with his parents' blessing, he decided to give himself entirely to a religious life. He sold all of his goods, gave the proceeds to the poor, and spent the rest of his life wandering as a religious hermit.

Few Europeans lived lives as polarized as that of Godric, but many, particularly in growing cities, felt some tension between commercial change and religious commitment. Could someone interested in making money keep a primary devotion to God? Some, as Godric discovered, would choose commerce. Others opted for religion. Still others worked for some combination. While few made Godric's dramatic ultimate choice, many merchants gave abundantly to the splendid churches of the cities, and not a few made deathbed renunciations of their commercial pasts. ■

The postclassical period was a great age of faith in western Europe, and Christianity provided the most obvious unifying factor in the new geography of western European civilization. Christian missionary efforts led most western Europeans to convert from polytheistic faiths in the initial postclassical centuries. But there were other key developments as well, including Europe's growing participation in trade and in wider interregional contacts. Not surprisingly, it was not always easy, even for individuals, to put the pieces together.

The postclassical period in western Europe began with the fall of the Roman Empire and lasted until the 15th century. The period is known as the **Middle Ages** in European history (the adjective form is *medieval*). The period featured gradual recovery from the shock of Rome's collapse. At the same time, the forms of civilization spread northward, beyond the Roman orbit, covering the whole of western Europe. Key characteristics of western European civilization emerged from these dynamic processes.

Medieval western Europe participated in the network of expanding contacts among major societies in Asia, Europe, and parts of Africa. New tools introduced by invaders from Asia, including a new kind of plow, helped spur medieval agriculture from the 10th century onward. New crops from Africa, including new varieties of wheat, increased food production. The revival of trade in the Mediterranean, bringing contacts with the Arabs, yielded other technological gains, such as the first European paper factory. Medieval culture was at least as powerfully shaped by connections with the wider world. By the 11th and 12th centuries, contact with the Byzantines and the Arabs had taught Western scholars new lessons in mathematics, science, and philosophy. The medieval West unquestionably took more from the emerging world network than it contributed, but it was also challenged by its international position to seek new world roles.

Middle Ages The period in western European history from the decline and fall of the Roman Empire until the 15th century.

500 C.E.	800 C.E.	1000 C.E.	1150 C.E.	1300 C.E.	1450 C.E.
500–900 Recovery period after Rome's fall; Christian missionaries work in northern Europe 732 Franks defeat Muslims in France	800–814 Charlemagne's empire 900–1000 Spread of new plows; use of horses in agriculture and transport 962 Germanic kings revive Roman empire	1018 Beginning of Christian reconquest of Spain 1066 Norman conquest of England, strong feudal monarchy 1070–1141 Peter Abelard 1073–1085 Gregory VII, reform pope 1096–1270 Crusades	1150–1300 Gothic style spreads 1180 University of Paris 1200–1274 Thomas Aquinas and flowering of scholasticism 1215 Magna Carta 1226–1270 Louis IX of France 1265 First English parliament	1303 Seizure of papacy by French king 1338–1453 Hundred Years' War 1348–1380 Black Death (bubonic plague)	1469 Formation of single Spanish monarchy

STAGES OF POSTCLASSICAL DEVELOPMENT

11.1

What were the main stages of change in western Europe, from the early postclassical centuries to 1450, and what were the characteristic western political forms in each main stage?

From about 550 c.e. until about 900, western Europe suffered from a number of problems. Rome continued to serve as the center of the growing Catholic church, in turn the most powerful institution in the West. But Italy was divided politically. Spain, another key region of the Roman Empire in the West, lay in the hands of the Muslims through much of the Middle Ages. A vibrant intellectual and economic life was focused there, and it would have an important influence on western developments later on, but it was for the time being out of the western mainstream. The center of the postclassical West lay in France, the Low Countries, and southern and western Germany, with England increasingly drawn in—areas where civilization, as a form of human organization, was new.

Frequent invasions reflected and prolonged the West's weakness, making it difficult to develop durable government or economic forms. Raids by the seagoing **Vikings** from Scandinavia periodically disrupted life from Ireland to Sicily. With weak states and little more than subsistence agriculture, it was small wonder that intellectual activity declined. The few who could read and write were concentrated in the hierarchy and the monasteries of the Catholic church, where they kept learning alive. But they could do little more than copy older manuscripts, including those of the great Christian thinkers of the later Roman Empire. By their own admission, they could not understand much of the philosophy involved, and they often apologized for their inability to write good Latin. Western Europe was still shaped by elements of the Roman heritage, but the connection was disrupted.

The Manorial System: Obligations and Allegiances

Between Rome's fall and the 10th century, effective political organization was largely local, although Germanic kings ruled some territories, such as a portion of what is France today. **Manorialism** was the system of economic and political relations between landlords and their peasant laborers. Understanding manorialism is a vital step in assessing social structures in many open cultural societies.

In European manorialism, most people were **serfs**, living on self-sufficient agricultural estates called manors. Serfs were agricultural workers who received some protection, including the administration of justice, from the landlords; in return, they were obligated to turn over part of their goods and to remain on the land. The manorial system had originated in the later Roman Empire. It was strengthened by the decline of trade and the lack of larger political structures. Serfs needed the military forces the landlords could muster for their security. Without much market economy to stimulate production and specialization, these same landlords used the serfs' produce and labor to support their own modest establishments.

Postclassical western Europe was hard hit by the Roman collapse. However, after about 900, agriculture and trade revived, while political development advanced under the influence of feudalism and the Catholic church.

Vikings Seagoing Scandinavian raiders from Sweden, Denmark, and Norway who disrupted coastal areas of western Europe from the 8th to the 11th centuries.



Watch the **Video** on **MyHistoryLab**: Vikings (Aberth)

manorialism System that described economic and political relations between landlords and their peasant laborers during the Middle Ages; involved a hierarchy of reciprocal obligations that exchanged labor or rents for access to land.

serfs Peasant agricultural laborers within the manorial system of the Middle Ages.



Read the **Document** on **MyHistoryLab**: On Feudal Obligations, "Mutual Duties of Vassals and Lords" (1020) Fulbert of Chartres

moldboard Heavy plow introduced in northern Europe during the Middle Ages; permitted deeper cultivation of heavier soils; a technological innovation of the medieval agricultural system.

three-field system System of agricultural cultivation by 9th century in western Europe; included one-third in spring grains, one-third fallow.

Life for most serfs was difficult. Agricultural equipment was limited, and production was low. The available plows, copied from Mediterranean models, were too light to work the heavy soils of France and Germany effectively. In the 9th century a better plow, the **moldboard** (a curved iron plate), was introduced that allowed deeper turning of the soil. Most Western peasants early in the postclassical period also left half their land uncultivated each year to restore nutrients. This again limited productivity, although by the 9th century a new **three-field system** improved the situation. Here, only a third of the land was left unplanted each year, to regain fertility.

The obligations of the manorial system bore as heavily on most serfs as did the technological limitations. Serfs had to give their lord part of their crops in return for grazing their animals on his land or milling their grain. They also provided many days of labor repairing the lord's castle or working the lands under his control. Serfs were not slaves: They could not be bought or sold, and they retained essential ownership of their houses and lands as long as they kept up with their obligations. They could also pass their property rights on through inheritance. Nevertheless, life remained hard, particularly in the early postclassical centuries. Some serfs escaped landlord control, creating a host of wanderers who added to the disorder of the early Middle Ages.

The Church: Political and Spiritual Power

Clovis Early Frankish king; converted Franks to Christianity c. 496; allowed establishment of Frankish kingdom.

During the centuries of recovery after the Roman empire's collapse in the 6th century, the Catholic church was the only extensive example of solid organization. Here was a crucial contrast with the state's dominance over religion in the Byzantine empire. In theory, and to an extent in fact, the church copied the government of the Roman empire to administer Christendom. The pope in Rome was

the top authority. Regional churches were headed by bishops, who were supposed to owe allegiance to the church's central authority; bishops, in turn, appointed and to some degree supervised local priests. The popes did not always appoint the bishops, for monarchs and local lords often claimed this right, but they did send directives and receive information. The popes also regulated doctrine, beating back several heresies that threatened a unified Christian faith. Moreover, they sponsored extensive missionary activity. Papal missionaries converted the English to Christianity. They brought the religion to northern and eastern Germany, beyond the borders of the previous Roman empire, and, by the 10th century, to Scandinavia. They were active in the border regions of eastern Europe, sometimes competing directly with Orthodox missionaries.

The interest of early Germanic kings in Christianity was a sign of the political as well as spiritual power of the church. A warrior chieftain, **Clovis**, converted to Christianity about 496 c.e. to gain greater prestige over local rivals, who were still pagan. This authority, in turn, gave him a vague dominion over the Franks, a Germanic tribe located in much of what is France today. Conversion of this sort also strengthened beliefs by Western religious leaders, particularly the popes, that they had a legitimate authority separate from and superior to the political sphere. As Figure 11.2 suggests, religious commitments continued to expand to many people.

The church also developed an important chain of monasteries during the centuries immediately after Rome's fall. Western monasteries helped discipline the intense spirituality felt by some individual Christians, people who wanted to devote themselves to prayer and religious discipline and escape the limits of ordinary material life. The most important set of monastic rules was developed by Benedict of Nursia (in Italy) in the 6th century; the spread of Benedictine monasteries promoted Christian unity in western Europe. Monasteries also served ordinary people as examples of a holy life, adding to the spiritual focus that formed part of the fabric of medieval society. Many monasteries helped improve the cultivation of the land at a time when agricultural techniques were at a low ebb. Monasteries also provided some education and promoted literacy.

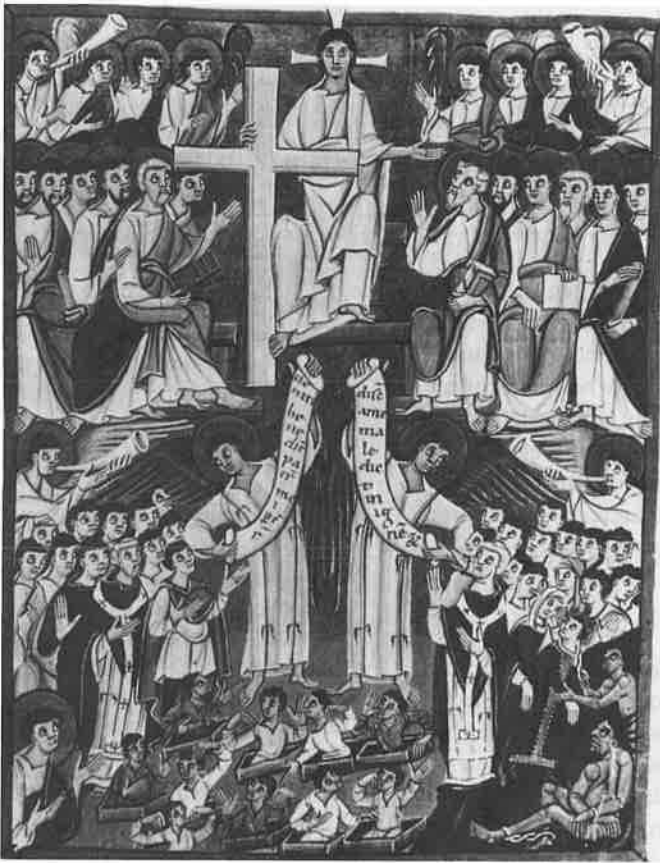


FIGURE 11.2 *Last Judgment: Apocalypse of Reichenau*. This picture was part of materials to be read in religious services in the 11th century in Germany. At the bottom, the dead are rising from their tombs for the Last Judgment, summoned by angels escorted by the winds. The picture illustrates the goals Christians were urged to make paramount, focusing on life after death.

VISUALIZING THE PAST

Peasant Labor

THIS SCENE, FROM AN ILLUMINATED (ILLUSTRATED) manuscript of the 15th century, shows peasant labor and tools in France, near a stylized great palace.

QUESTIONS

- What kind of social and gender structure does the picture suggest?
- What kinds of tools were used in farming, and how productive would they be?
- The picture should be compared to earlier medieval representations, such as the representation of Charlemagne's coronation: What were the trends in medieval artistic styles, in terms of dealing with human figures and nature?




Peasants at labor.

Charlemagne and His Successors

One significant development occurred during the early postclassical centuries in the more strictly political sphere. The royal house of the Franks grew in strength during the 8th century. A new family, the **Carolingians**, took over this monarchy, which was based in northern France, Belgium, and western Germany. One founder of the Carolingian line, **Charles Martel**, or “Charles the Hammer,” was responsible for defeating the Muslims in the battle of Tours in 732, although his victory had more to do with Arab exhaustion and an overextended invasion force than Carolingian strength. This defeat helped confine the Muslims to Spain and, along with the Byzantine defeat of the Arabs in the same period, preserved Europe for Christianity.

A later Carolingian ruler in this same royal line, Charles the Great, or **Charlemagne**, established a substantial empire in France and Germany around the year 800 (see Map 11.1). Briefly, it looked as if a new Roman empire might revive in the West; indeed, Charlemagne's successors in Germany continued to use the title of emperor (see Figure 11.3). Charlemagne helped to restore some church-based education in western Europe, and the level of intellectual activity began a slow recovery, in part because of these efforts. When Charlemagne died in 814, however, this empire did not long survive him. Rather, it was split into three portions as inheritance for his three grandsons: the outlines of modern France, Germany, and a middle strip consisting of the Low Countries, Switzerland, and

 Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Description of Cluny

Carolingians Royal house of Franks after 8th century until their replacement in 10th century.

Charles Martel (686–741) Carolingian monarch of Franks; responsible for defeating Muslims in battle of Tours in 732; ended Muslim threat to western Europe.

Charlemagne [SHAR-luh-mayn] Charles the Great; Carolingian monarch who established substantial empire in France and Germany c. 800.



MAP 11.1 Charlemagne's Empire and Successor States Charlemagne gathered a wide section of western Europe under his sway, but the empire was divided among his three grandsons after his death.

northern Italy (Map 11.1). Several of Charlemagne's successors, with nicknames such as "the Bald" and "the Fat," were not great leaders even in their regional kingdoms.

From this point onward, the essential political history of western Europe consisted of the gradual emergence of regional monarchies; a durable empire proved impossible, given competing loyalties and the absence of a strong bureaucracy. The regional decentralization and frequent warfare contrasted with political patterns in China, the Arab caliphate, and the Byzantine Empire. Western Europe proved to have strong cultural unity, initially centered in Catholic Christianity, but with pronounced political divisions. No single language united this civilization, any more than did a single government. Intellectuals and the church officials used Latin, but during the Middle Ages separate spoken languages evolved, usually merging Germanic and Latin elements. These separate languages, such as French and English, in turn helped form the basis of halting national identities when political and cultural boundaries roughly coincided, which is what began to happen in key cases after the 9th century.

The royal houses of several lands gained new visibility soon after Charlemagne's empire split. At first, the rulers who reigned over Germany and northern Italy were in the strongest position. It was they who claimed the title *emperor*, beginning around the 10th century. Later they called themselves **Holy Roman emperors**, merging Christian and classical claims. By this time, however, their rule had become increasingly hollow, precisely because they relied too much on their imperial claims and did not build a solid monarchy from regional foundations. Local lords often went

Holy Roman emperors Emperors in northern Italy and Germany following split of Charlemagne's empire; claimed title of emperor c. 10th century; failed to develop centralized monarchy in Germany.

their own way in Germany, while Italy was marked by the emergence of vibrant city states. For most of western Europe, however, the future lay elsewhere, with the rise of monarchies in individual states—states that ultimately would become nations.

New Economic and Urban Vigor

By 900, a series of developments began to introduce new sources of strength into Western society that ultimately had clear political and cultural repercussions. New agricultural techniques developed from contacts with eastern Europe and with Asian raiders into central Europe. The new moldboard plow and the three-field system were crucial gains; so was a new horse collar that allowed horses to be yoked without choking. The use of horse collars and stirrups also confirmed the military dominance of the lords, who monopolized fighting on horseback. The European nobility became defined by land ownership and military power. But better plows helped the ordinary people by allowing deeper working of heavy soil and the opening of new land. Monasteries also promoted better agricultural methods (in contrast to the less worldly orientation of monks in eastern Europe). During the 10th century, Viking raids began to taper off, partly because regional governments became stronger (sometimes when the Vikings themselves took over, as in the French province of Normandy) and partly because the Vikings, now Christianized, began to settle down. Greater regional political stability and improved agriculture promoted population growth, an important fact of Western history from the 10th through the 13th centuries.

Population growth encouraged further economic innovation. More people created new markets. There was a wedge here for growing trade, which in turn encouraged towns to expand, another source of demand. Landlords and serfs alike began to look to lands that had not previously been converted to agriculture. Whole regions, such as northeastern Germany, became colonized by eager farmers, and new centers sprang up throughout settled regions such as France. To woo labor to the new farms, landlords typically had to loosen the bonds of serfdom and require less outright labor service, sometimes simply charging a money rent. Harsh serfdom still existed, but most serfs gained greater independence, and some free peasants emerged. Contacts with other countries brought knowledge of new crops, such as durum wheat (from north Africa), the vital ingredient for pasta, and alfalfa (from Persia). The pace of economic life created a less rigid social structure, and more commercial, market-oriented economic motives began to coexist with earlier military and Christian ideals.

The growth of towns reflected the new vigor of western Europe's agriculture. In parts of Italy and the Low Countries, where trade and urban manufacturing were especially brisk, urban populations soared to almost 20 percent of the total by the 13th century. Overall, the townspeople made up about 5 percent of the West's population—a significant figure, although still below the often 15 percent levels of the advanced Asian civilizations. Few European cities approached a population level of 100,000 people (in contrast, China had 52 larger cities), but the rise of modest regional centers was an important development. Literacy spread in the urban atmosphere, spurring the popular languages; professional entertainers introduced new songs as well as dazzling tricks such as fire-eating and bear-baiting; urban interests spurred new forms of religious life, including city-based monastic orders dedicated to teaching or hospital work. Merchant activity and craft production expanded.



Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Life of Charlemagne (early 9th c.) Einhard



FIGURE 11.3 The pope's coronation of the emperor Charlemagne was a vital precedent for the idea that church approval was essential for a legitimate state in western Europe. In fact, however, Charlemagne's power greatly exceeded the pope's. (Coronation of Charlemagne at St. Peter's by Pope Leo III. *Grandes Chroniques de France*, fol. 106r. Musee Goya, Castres, France. Giraudon/Art Resource, NY.)



Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Medieval Town: Customs of the Town of Chester, England 1085

Europe's economic and urban surge helped feed formal cultural life, which had already gained somewhat under Charlemagne's encouragement. By the 9th and 10th centuries, schools began to form around important cathedrals, training children who were destined for church careers. By the 11th century, there was enough demand for educated personnel to sustain the first universities. Italy offered universities to train students in medicine and law; the legal faculties profited from a growing revival in knowledge of Roman law, and medicine benefited from new learning imported from the Arabs and from revived Greek and Hellenistic science. By the 12th century, a more characteristic university was forming in Paris. It specialized in training clergy, with theology as the culminating subject but with faculties in other subjects as well. The Parisian example inspired universities in England (Oxford and Cambridge), Germany, and elsewhere. Solid educational institutions, although destined for only a small minority of Europe's population, supported increasingly diverse and sophisticated efforts in philosophy and theology. At the same time, medieval art and architecture reached a new high point, spurred by the same prosperity.

Feudal Monarchies and Political Advances

Prosperity also promoted political change, influenced by structures established in more unstable times. From the 6th century onward, the key political and military relationships in western Europe had evolved in a system called feudalism. Feudal relationships linked military elites, mostly landlords, who could afford the horses and iron weaponry necessary to fight. Greater lords provided protection and aid to lesser lords, called **vassals**; vassals in turn owed their lords military service, some goods or payments, and advice. Early feudalism after Rome's fall was very local; many landlords had armed bands of five or ten local vassals, easily converted into raiding parties. But feudal relationships could be extended to cover larger regions and even whole kingdoms. Charlemagne's empire boosted this more stable version of feudalism. He could not afford to pay his own bureaucracy, so he rewarded most of his military leaders with estates, which they quickly converted into family property in return for pledges of loyalty and service. Many German duchies were created by powerful lords with their own armies of vassals, ostensibly deferring to the Holy Roman emperor. On the whole, European feudalism inhibited the development of strong central states, but it also gradually reduced purely local warfare.

Furthermore, kings could use feudalism to build their own power. Kings of France began to win growing authority, from the 10th century onward, under the Capetian royal family. At first they mainly exploited their position as regional feudal lords in the area around Paris. They controlled many serf-stocked manors directly, and they held most other local landlords as vassals. More attentive administration of this regional base produced better revenues and armies. The kings also formed feudal links with great lords in other parts of France, often through marriage alliances, gradually bringing more territory under their control. They experimented with the beginnings of bureaucratic administration by separating their personal accounts from government accounts, thus developing a small degree of specialization among the officials who served them. Later Capetian kings sent out officials to aid in regional administration.

The growth of a strong feudal monarchy in France took several centuries. By the early 14th century, the process of cautious centralization had gone so far in France that a king could claim rights to make the church pay taxes (an issue that caused great conflict). The king could mint money and employ some professional soldiers apart from the feudal armies that still did most of the fighting.

Feudal monarchy in England was introduced more abruptly. The Duke of Normandy, of Viking descent, who had already built a strong feudal domain in his French province, invaded England in 1066. The duke, now known as **William the Conqueror**, extended his tight feudal system to his new kingdom. He tied the great lords of England to his royal court by bonds of loyalty, giving them estates in return for their military service. But he also used some royal officials, called sheriffs, to help supervise the administration of justice throughout the kingdom. In essence, he and his successors merged feudal principles with a slightly more centralized approach, including more standardized national law codes issued by the royal court.

The growth of feudal monarchy unknowingly duplicated measures taken much earlier in other societies, such as China. Developing an explicit bureaucracy, with some specialized functions, and sending emissaries to outlying provinces are examples. In Europe, kings often chose urban business or professional people to staff their fledgling bureaucracies, because unlike the feudal nobles, they would be loyal to the ruler who appointed them. Government functions expanded modestly, as kings tried to tax subjects directly and hire a small professional army to supplement feudal forces.

vassals Members of the military elite who received land or a benefice from a feudal lord in return for military service and loyalty.

William the Conqueror Invaded England from Normandy in 1066; extended tight feudal system to England; established administrative system based on sheriffs; established centralized monarchy.

Limited Government

Stronger monarchies did not develop evenly throughout Europe. The West remained politically divided and diverse. Germany and Italy, although nominally controlled by the Holy Roman emperor, were actually split into regional states run by feudal lords and city-states. The pope directly ruled the territory of central Italy. The Low Countries, a vigorous trade and manufacturing region, remained divided into regional units. Equally important were the limitations over the most successful feudal monarchies. Political centralization remained far short of Chinese levels. The power of the church continued to limit political claims, for the state was not supposed to intrude on matters of faith except in carrying out decisions of the popes or bishops.

Feudalism created a second limitation, for aristocrats still had a powerful independent voice and often their own military forces. The growth of the monarchy cut into aristocratic power, but this led to new statements of the limits of kings. In 1215, the unpopular English King John faced opposition to his taxation measures from an alliance of nobles, townspeople, and church officials. Defeated in his war with France and then forced down by the leading English lords, John was compelled to sign the Great Charter, or **Magna Carta**, which confirmed feudal rights against monarchical claims. John promised to observe restraint in his dealings with the nobles and the church, agreeing, for example, not to institute new taxes without the lords' permission or to appoint bishops without the church's permission. The Magna Carta showed how feudalism could generate claims of rights against the power of a king.

Late in the 13th century, this same feudal balance led to the creation of **parliaments** as bodies representing not individual voters but privileged groups such as the nobles and the church. (Even earlier, in 1000, the regional kingdom of Catalonia created a parliament.) The first full English parliament convened in 1265, with the House of Lords representing the nobles and the church hierarchy, and the Commons made up of elected representatives from wealthy citizens of the towns. As with the Magna Carta, the parliament institutionalized the feudal principle that monarchs should consult with their vassals. In particular, parliaments gained the right to rule on any proposed changes in taxation; through this power, they could also advise the crown on other policy issues. Although the parliamentary tradition became strongest in England, similar institutions arose in France, Spain, Scandinavia, and several of the regional governments in Germany. Here too, parliaments represented the key **three estates**: church, nobles, and urban leaders. They were not widely elected.

Feudal limited government was not modern limited government. People had rights according to the estate into which they were born; nobles transmitted membership in their estate to their children. There was no general concept of citizenship and certainly no democracy. Still, by creating the medieval version of representative institutions, Western feudal monarchy produced the beginnings of a distinctive political tradition. This tradition differed from the political results of Japanese feudalism, which emphasized group loyalty more than checks on central power.

Even with feudal checks, European monarchs developed more capacity for central administration during the later Middle Ages (see Map 11.2). The results clearly were uneven and by Asian standards still woefully limited. European rulers also continued to see war as a key purpose. Local battles gave way to larger wars, such as the conflicts between the proud rulers of France and England. In the 14th century, a long battle began—the **Hundred Years' War**, between the national monarchies of France and England—over territories the English king controlled in France and over feudal rights versus the emerging claims of national states.

The West's Expansionist Impulse

During the period of political development and economic advance, western Europe began to show its muscle beyond its initial postclassical borders (Map 11.2). Population growth spurred the expansionist impulse, as did the memory of Rome's lost greatness and the righteous zeal provided by Christianity. Germanic knights and agricultural settlers poured into sparsely settled areas in what is now eastern Germany and Poland, changing the population balance and clearing large areas of forest. A different kind of expansionist surge occurred in Spain. Small Christian states remained in northern Spain by the 10th century, and they gradually began to attack the Muslim government that held most of the peninsula. The "reconquest" escalated by the 11th century, as Christian forces, swelled by feudal warriors from various areas, pushed into central Spain, conquering the great Muslim center of Toledo. Full expulsion of Muslim rulers occurred only at the end of the Middle Ages in 1492, but the trend

Magna Carta Great Charter issued by King John of England in 1215; confirmed feudal rights against monarchical claims; represented principle of mutual limits and obligations between rulers and feudal aristocracy.

 Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: The Magna Carta, 1215

parliaments Bodies representing privileged groups; institutionalized feudal principle that rulers should consult with their vassals; found in England, Spain, Germany, and France.

three estates The three social groups considered most powerful in Western countries: church, nobles, and urban leaders.

Hundred Years' War Conflict between England and France from 1337 to 1453; fought over lands England possessed in France and feudal rights versus the emerging claims of national states.



MAP 11.2 Western Europe Toward the End of the Middle Ages, c. 1360 c.e. Near the end of the postclassical period, strong monarchies had consolidated their holdings, and boundaries between states were coming into sharper focus.

Urban II Called for First Crusade in 1095; appealed to Christians to mount military assault to free the Holy Land from the Muslims.

toward Jerusalem, winning it from the Turkish armies that held the area by that time. For almost a century, western knights ruled the “kingdom of Jerusalem,” losing it to a great Muslim general, Saladin, during the 12th century.

of the Christian offensive was clear even earlier. During the 15th century, regional Spanish monarchies fused through the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella, which provided the political muscle to complete the Christian “reconquista.”

At Europe’s other extreme, Viking voyagers had pushed out into the northern Atlantic, establishing settlements in Iceland. By the 11th century, other voyages had pushed to Greenland and the Hudson Bay area in what is now Canada, where short-lived outposts were created. By the 13th century, Spanish and Italian seafarers entered the Atlantic from the Mediterranean, although without much initial result except several lost expeditions.

The most dramatic expansionist move involved the great Crusades against the Muslim control of the Holy Land. Pope **Urban II** called for the First Crusade in 1095, appealing to the piety of the West’s rulers and common people. Crusaders were promised full forgiveness of sins if they died in battle, ensuring their entry to heaven, which obviously enhanced the religious motivations involved. The idea of attacking Islam had great appeal, as Figure 11.4 suggests. The attraction of winning spoils from the rich Arab lands added to the inducement, as did the thirst for excitement among the West’s feudal warriors. Internal wars were declining in Europe, and the military values of feudalism sought outlets elsewhere. Three great armies, with tens of thousands of crusaders from various parts of the West, assembled in Constantinople in 1097, much to the distress of the Byzantine government. The Western crusaders moved

DOCUMENT

European Travel: A Monk Visits Jerusalem

WILLIBALD, AN ENGLISH MONK, JOURNEYED TO Jerusalem between 721 and 727 c.e. His account was written down by a German nun.

In Syria

Willibald’s party had now grown to eight in number, and they became an object of suspicion to the Muslims, who, seeing that they were strangers, seized them and threw them into prison, because they knew not of what country they were, and supposed them to be spies. They carried them as prisoners before a certain rich old man, that he might examine them; and

he inquired whence they came and the object of their mission; whereupon they related to him the true cause of their journey. The old man replied, “I have often seen men of the parts of the earth whence these come, traveling hither; they seek no harm, but desire to fulfil their law.” And upon that they went to the palace, to obtain leave to proceed to Jerusalem.

While they were in prison it happened, by a manifest intervention of Devine Providence, that a merchant residing there was desirous, as an act of charity, and for the salvation of his soul, to purchase their deliverance, that they might pursue

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their way, but he was not allowed to carry his generous design into effect; nevertheless he sent them daily their meals, and on Wednesdays and Saturdays sent his son to them in prison, who took them out to the bath, and brought them back again. And on Sunday he took them to church through the market, that they might see the shops, and whatever they seemed to take a liking to he afterwards bought for them at his own expense. The townsmen used then to come there to look at them, because they were young and handsome, and clad in good garments.

Then, while they were still remaining in prison, a man, who was a native of Spain, came and spoke with them, and inquired earnestly who they were and from whence they came, and they told him the object of their pilgrimage. This Spaniard had a brother in the king's palace, who was chamberlain to the king of the Muslims. . . . When [Willibald and the Spaniard] came before the king, and told him the case, he asked whence the prisoners came. And they said, "These men come from the west country, where the sun sets; and we know of no land beyond them, but water only." And the king replied, "Why ought we to punish them? they have not sinned against us: – give them leave, and let them go." And even the fine of four deniers, which the other prisoners had to pay, was remitted to them

JERUSALEM AND BETHLEHEM

On their arrival at Jerusalem, they first visited the spot where the holy cross was found, where there is now a church which is

called the Place of Calvary, and which was formerly outside of Jerusalem; but when St. Helena found the cross, the place was taken into the circuit of the city. Three wooden crosses stand in this place, on the outside of the wall of the church, in memory of our Lord's cross and of those of the other persons crucified at the same time.

He next came to the place where the angel appeared to the shepherds, and thence to Bethlehem, where our Lord was born, distant seven miles from Jerusalem.

[Later, heading home they] reached Constantinople. Here repose in one altar the three saints, Andres, Timothy, and Luke the evangelist; and the sepulcher of John Chrysostome is before the altar where the priest stands when he performs mass. Willibald remained there two years, and was lodged in the church, so that he might behold daily where the saints reposed.

QUESTIONS

- What relationships between Christians and Muslims does this passage suggest, for the postclassical period?
- Why would a Spaniard play a special role in Willibald's Middle Eastern experience?
- What were Willibald's motives for travel?
- What kind of larger results did this sort of travel have, in post-classical world history?



Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Fulcher of Chartres, The First Crusade (1100s c.E.)



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FIGURE 11.4 This imaginary duel between the noble Christian champion King Richard of England and the Muslim leader Saladin clearly shows the difference between "good guys" and "bad guys." Although many actual crusaders respected Saladin as a skilled military leader, in Europe he was condemned as an infidel.

Several later Crusades attempted to win back the Holy Land, but many later efforts turned toward other goals or toward pure farce. The Third Crusade at the end of the 12th century led to the death of the German emperor and the imprisonment of the English king, although it did produce a brief truce with Saladin that facilitated Christian pilgrims' visits to Jerusalem. The Fourth Crusade was manipulated by merchants in Venice, who turned it into an attack on their commercial rivals in Constantinople.

The Crusades did not demonstrate a new western superiority in the wider world, despite brief successes. In the Middle East, they generated only a passing episode. But in expressing a combination of religious zeal and growing commercial and military vigor on the part of the knights and merchants who organized the largest efforts, the Crusades unquestionably showed the aggressive spirit of the western Middle Ages at their height. They also helped expose the West to new cultural and economic influences from the Middle East, where European invaders were impressed by urban standards of living. This was a major spur to further change, including a greater thirst for goods, like spices, available only through international trade. Simply visiting the thriving urban center of Constantinople during the Crusades could open European eyes to new possibilities. One crusader exclaimed, "Oh, what a great and beautiful city is Constantinople! How many churches and palaces it contains, fashioned with wonderful skill! Their tradesmen at all times bring by boat all the necessities of man."

Religious Reform and Evolution

As medieval society developed, the Catholic church went through several periods of decline and renewal. At times, church officials and the leading monastic groups became preoccupied with their land holdings and their political interests. The church was a wealthy institution; it was tempting for many priests and monks to behave like ordinary feudal lords in pursuit of greater worldly power. Several reform movements fought this secularism, such as the 13th-century flowering that created orders such as the Franciscans, devoted to poverty and service in Europe's bustling cities. Saint Clare of Assisi (1194–1253) exemplified this new spirit of purity and dedication to the church (Figure 11.5). She was deeply influenced by Saint Francis, also from Assisi, who had converted to a life of piety and preaching in 1205 and who founded a new monastic order. Clare refused to marry, as her parents wanted, but rather founded a women's Franciscan order (later known as the Order of Saint Clare, or the Poor Clares) with Francis's backing. Like many women in Europe, Clare found in monasticism a vital means of personal expression. In 1958 Pope Pius XII declared her the patron saint of television, for during her last illness she miraculously heard and saw on the wall of her room a Christmas mass being performed on the other side of Assisi.

In addition to monastic leaders, reform-minded popes, such as **Gregory VII** (r. 1073–1085), tried to purify the church and free it from interference by feudal lords. One technique was insistence on the particularly holy character of the priesthood. Reformers stipulated that all priests remain unmarried, to separate the priesthood from the ordinary world of the flesh. Gregory also tried to free the church from any trace of state control. He quarreled vigorously with Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV over the practice of state appointment, or **investiture**, of bishops in Germany. Ultimately, by excommunicating the emperor from the church, Gregory won his point. The emperor appealed to the pope for forgiveness on his knees in the snow of a northern Italian winter, and the investiture controversy ended, apparently in the church's favor. Gregory and several later popes made clear their beliefs that the church not only was to be free from state interference but was superior to the state in its function as a direct channel of God's word. While governments still influenced religious affairs, a network of church courts developed to rule on matters of religious law and to bring heretics to trial and occasionally to execution. This was the origin of recurrent Western beliefs in church–state separation.

The High Middle Ages

The postclassical version of Western civilization reached its high mark in the 12th and 13th centuries. Fed by the growing dynamism of western Europe's population, agriculture, and cities, the High Middle Ages were characterized by a series of creative tensions. Feudal

Gregory VII Pope during the 11th century who attempted to free church from interference of feudal lords; quarreled with Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV over practice of lay investiture.

investiture Practice of state appointment of bishops; Pope Gregory VII attempted to ban the practice of lay investiture, leading to war with Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV.



FIGURE 11.5 On the night of March 20, 1212, the Count of Sasso-Rosso's 18-year-old daughter, Clare, stole away from her father's house to dedicate herself to a life of poverty and holiness. She resisted all attempts by her father to bring her home and by the church to persuade her to accept some income as a guarantee against starvation for her order, which depended entirely on the begging of local friars for its daily bread. Clare was named abbess of a convent just three years later, and she never again left its grounds. Her sisters, her mother, and an aunt followed her into the order. She was canonized Saint Clare of Assisi in 1255.

THINKING HISTORICALLY

Western Civilization

IN RECENT YEARS, HISTORIANS HAVE BEEN critically examining the term “Western civilization,” which is sometimes (wrongly) taken as self-evident.

The concept of “the West” or “western civilization” was actively used in the 20th-century cold war with the Soviet Union, yet it is hard to define. We have seen that the classical Mediterranean world did not directly identify a “Western” civilization, and this classical heritage was used most selectively by postclassical western Europe. Further, the consistent absence of political unity in western Europe complicates any definition of common structures.

Western Europeans could not have identified Western civilization in the postclassical period, but they would have recognized the concept of Christendom, along with some difference between their version of this religion and that of eastern Europe.

The first definition of this civilization was primarily religious, although artistic forms associated with religion also figured in this definition. Regional cultures varied, of course, and there was no linguistic unity, but cultural developments in one area—for example, the creation of universities, which started in Italy—surfaced elsewhere fairly quickly. Supplementing culture were some reasonably common social structures—like manors and guilds—and trade patterns that increasingly joined northern and much of southern Europe. The resulting civilization was by no means as coherent as Chinese civilization; many of its members detested each other, like the English and French, who were often in conflict and sometimes engaged in name-calling (the English were “les goddams,” because they swore so much, and the

Defining Western civilization is also complicated . . . because Western leaders copied so much from other societies.

French were “frogs” because of what they ate). Until very recently, Europeans thought in terms of distinctive national histories, not European ones. But it is possible to define some common features that differed from those of neighboring civilizations. Even as the civilization began to change, late in the postclassical period, it preserved some common directions. Debate continues about the balance between the Western and more purely national features.

Defining Western civilization is also complicated in the postclassical period because Western leaders copied so much from other societies. They eagerly learned of new technologies from Asia. They benefited from Arab mathematics and philosophy, and they imitated Muslim commercial law on how to treat tradespeople from outside the locality. But even in imitating, most Europeans were keenly conscious of

their distinctiveness as Christians. They sometimes resented the societies they copied from. Toward the end of the Middle Ages, as Europeans began to seek a new role in the world at large, the openness to imitation also began to decline, as part of the further definition of a Western or European identity.

QUESTIONS

- Was there a Western civilization before the postclassical period? What were the defining features of Western civilization by the end of the postclassical period?
- How does the definition of Western civilization today compare to that of the postclassical period?

political structures, derived from local and personal allegiances, were balanced by emerging central monarchies. The unquestionable authority of the church and the cultural dominance of Christianity jostled with the intellectual vitality and diversity that formed part of university life. A social order and economy, based primarily on agriculture and the labor of serfs, now had to come to terms with important cities, merchants, and some new opportunities even for ordinary farmers.

WESTERN CULTURE IN THE POSTCLASSICAL ERA

11.2

What were the main cultural issues that West European intellectuals grappled with during the postclassical centuries?

During the centuries before about 1000, a small number of clergy continued the efforts of preserving and interpreting past wisdom, particularly the writings of church fathers such as Augustine, but also the work of some non-Christian Latin authors. During Charlemagne’s time, a favorite

Christian culture dominated European philosophy and art, but it generated both change and some conflict.

practice was to gather quotations from ancient writers around key subjects. Interest in classical principles of rhetoric, particularly logic, reflected the concern for coherent organization; Aristotle, known to the Middle Ages as *the* philosopher, was valued because of his clear exposition of rational thought.

Theology: Assimilating Faith and Reason

From 1000 onward, a series of outstanding clerics advanced the logical exposition of philosophy and theology to new levels. They stressed the importance of absolute faith in God's word, but they believed that human reason could move toward an understanding of some aspects of religion and the natural order as well. Thus, according to several theologians, it was possible to prove the existence of God. Fascination with logic led some intellectuals to a certain zeal in pointing out inconsistencies in past wisdom, even in the writings of the church fathers. In the 12th century, **Peter Abelard** in Paris wrote a treatise called *Yes and No* in which he showed several logical contradictions in established interpretations of doctrine. Although Abelard protested his faith, saying, "I would not be an Aristotle if this were to part me from Christ," he clearly took an impish delight in suggesting skepticism. Here was a fascinating case of an individual's role in history. Abelard was clearly working in an established logical tradition, but his personality helped move the tradition to a new critical level. At the same time, his defiant attitudes may have drawn more attack than a softer approach would have done, which had consequences too.

The logical-rationalist current in western philosophy was hardly unopposed. A powerful monk, **Bernard of Clairvaux**, successfully challenged Abelard. Bernard, an intellectual of a different sort, stressed the importance of mystical union with God, attainable even on this earth in brief blissful glimpses, rather than rationalist endeavor. Bernard believed that reason was dangerous and that God's truth must be received through faith alone.

The debates over how and whether to combine the classical Mediterranean philosophical and scientific tradition with revealed religious faith reflected the earlier debates among Arab intellectuals during the 10th and 11th centuries. Both Christianity and Islam relied heavily on faith in a revealed word, through the Bible or Qur'an, respectively, but some intellectuals in both cultures strained to include other approaches.

Combining rational philosophy and Christian faith was the dominant intellectual theme in the postclassical West, showing the need to come to terms with both Christian and classical heritages, and with Middle Eastern learning as well. This combination of rational philosophy and Christian faith also posed formidable and fascinating problems. By the 12th century, the zeal for this kind of knowledge produced several distinctive results. It explained the intellectual vitality of most of the emerging universities, where students flocked to hear the latest debates by leading theologians. Higher education certainly benefited students through resulting job opportunities; for example, trained lawyers could hope for advancement in the growing bureaucracies of church or state. In contrast to China's institutions, however, the new universities were not directly tied into a single bureaucratic system, and the excitement they engendered during the Middle Ages was not just opportunistic. A large number of students, from the whole of western Europe, sought out the mixture of spiritual and rational understanding that leading thinkers were trying to work out.

The postclassical intellectual drive also motivated a growing interest in knowledge newly imported from the classical past and from the Arab world, and this knowledge fed the highest achievements of medieval learning. By the 12th century, Western scholars were reading vast amounts of material translated from Greek in centers in the Byzantine Empire, Italy, and Muslim Spain. They gained familiarity with the bulk of ancient Greek and Hellenistic philosophy and science. They also read translations of Arab and Jewish learning, particularly the works in which Middle Eastern scholars had wrestled with the problems of mixing human reasoning with truths gained by faith.

With much fuller knowledge of Aristotelian and Hellenistic science, plus the work of Arab rationalists such as Ibn-Rushd (IH-buhn RUSHT) (known in the West as Averroës (uh-VEHR-oh-eez)), Western philosopher-theologians in the 13th century proceeded to the final great synthesis of medieval learning. The leading figure was **Thomas Aquinas**, the Italian-born monk who taught at the University of Paris. Aquinas maintained the basic belief that faith came first, but he greatly expanded the scope given to reason. Through reason alone, humans could know much of the natural order,

Abelard, Peter (1079–1142) Author of *Yes and No*; university scholar who applied logic to problems of theology; demonstrated logical contradictions within established doctrine.

Bernard of Clairvaux [klehr-VOH] (1090–1153) Emphasized role of faith in preference to logic; stressed importance of mystical union with God; successfully challenged Abelard and had him driven from the universities.



Read the Document on **MyHistoryLab**: Professor Abelard Confronts Bernard of Clairvaux, c. 1140

Aquinas, Thomas [Thomas ah-KWY-nuhs] (1225–1274) Creator of one of the great syntheses of medieval learning; taught at University of Paris; author of several *Summas*; believed that through reason it was possible to know much about natural order, moral law, and nature of God.

moral law, and the nature of God. Aquinas had complete confidence that all essential knowledge could be organized coherently, and he produced a host of *Summas*, or highest works, that used careful logic to eliminate all possible objections to truth as revealed by reason and faith. Essentially, this work restated in Christian terms the Greek efforts to seek a rationality in nature that would correspond to the rational capacities of the human mind. To be sure, a few philosophers carried the interest in logic to absurd degrees. After the 13th century, **scholasticism**—as the dominant medieval philosophical approach was called because of its base in the schools—sometimes degenerated into silly debates such as the one about how many angels could dance on the head of a pin. But at its height, and particularly with Aquinas, scholasticism demonstrated an unusual confidence in the logical orderliness of knowledge and in human ability to know.

Medieval philosophy did not encourage a great deal of new scientific work. The emphasis on mastering past learning and organizing it logically could lead to overemphasis on previous discoveries rather than empirical research. Thus, university-trained doctors stressed memorization of Galen, the Hellenistic authority, rather than systematic practical experience. Toward the end of the 13th century, a current of practical science developed. In Oxford, members of the clergy, such as Roger Bacon, did experimental work with optics, pursuing research done earlier by Muslim scholars. An important by-product of this interest was the invention of eyeglasses. During the 14th and 15th centuries, experimenters also advanced knowledge in chemistry and astronomy. This early work set the stage for the flourishing of Western science.

scholasticism Dominant medieval philosophical approach; so called because of its base in the schools or universities; based on use of logic to resolve theological problems.

Popular Religion

Far less is known about popular beliefs than about formal intellectual life in the Middle Ages. Christian devotion undoubtedly ran deep and may well have increased with time among many ordinary people. At least in the early medieval centuries, many people diligently followed Christian rituals yet seemed unaware of how many of their actions might contradict Christian morality. For example, Raoul de Cambrai, hero of a French epic written down in the late 12th century but orally transmitted earlier, sets fire to a convent filled with nuns, then asks a servant to bring him some food. The servant berates him for burning the convent, then reminds him that it is Lent, a time of fasting and repentance before Easter. Raoul denies that his deed was unjust, for the nuns deserved it for insulting his knights, but admits that he had forgotten Lent and goes off to distract himself from his hunger by playing chess.

Regardless of whether day-to-day morality improved, popular means of expressing religious devotion expanded over time. The rise of cities saw the formation of lay groups to develop spirituality and express their love of God. The content of popular belief evolved as well. Enthusiasm for the veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus, expanded by the 12th century, showing a desire to stress the merciful side of Christianity, rather than the supposed sternness of God the Father, and new hopes for assistance in gaining salvation. The worship of various saints showed a similar desire for intermediaries between humanity and God. At the same time, ordinary people continued to believe in various magical rituals, and they celebrated essentially pagan festivals, which often involved much dancing and merriment. They blended their version of Christianity with great earthiness and spontaneity, some of which was conveyed by late medieval authors such as English writer Geoffrey Chaucer.

Religious Themes in Art and Literature

Religious art was another cultural area in which the medieval West came to excel, as was the case in other societies where religious enthusiasm ran strong, such as the Islamic Middle East or Hindu India. Like philosophy, medieval art and architecture were intended to serve the glory of God. Western painters used religious subjects almost exclusively. Painting mainly on wooden panels, artists in most parts of western Europe depicted Christ's birth and suffering and the lives of the saints, using stiff, stylized figures. By the 14th and 15th centuries, artists improved their ability to render natural scenes realistically and portrayed a host of images of medieval life as backdrops to their religious subjects. Stained-glass designs and scenes for churches were another important artistic expression.

Gothic An architectural style that developed during the Middle Ages in western Europe; featured pointed arches and flying buttresses as external supports on main walls.

Medieval architecture initially followed Roman models, particularly in church building, using a rectangular, or Romanesque, style sometimes surmounted by domes. During the 11th century, however, a new style took hold that was far more original, although it benefited from knowledge of Muslim design plus advances in structural engineering in the West itself. **Gothic** architects built soaring church spires and tall arched windows, as Figure 11.6 illustrates. Although their work focused on creating churches and great cathedrals, some civic buildings and palaces also picked up the Gothic motif. It is not far-fetched to see the Gothic style as representative of western postclassical culture more generally. Its spiritual orientation showed in the towers cast up to the heavens. It built also on growing technical skills and deep popular devotion, expressed in the money collected to build the huge monuments and the patient labor needed for construction that often lasted many decades. The originality of Gothic styles reflected the growing Western ability to find suitable new means of expression, just as use of Gothic styles in the later Western world showed the ongoing power of medieval models.

Medieval literature and music reflected strong religious interests. Most Latin writing dealt with points of philosophy, law, or political theory. However, alongside writing in Latin came the development of a growing literature in the spoken languages, or vernaculars, of western Europe. The pattern was not unlike that of India a few centuries earlier after the fall of the Gupta empire, when Sanskrit served as a scholarly language but increasing power was given to popular languages such as Hindi. Vernacular literature helped develop separate European languages and focused largely on secular themes. Several oral sagas, dealing with the deeds of great knights and mythic figures in the past, were written down. From this tradition came the first known writing in early English, *Beowulf*, and in French, *The Song of Roland*. Late in the Middle Ages, a number of writers created adventure stories, comic tales, and poetry in the vernacular tongues, such as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Much of their work, and also plays written for performance in the growing cities, reflected the tension between Christian values and a desire to portray the richness and coarseness of life on earth. Chaucer's narrative shows a fascination with bawdy behavior, a willingness to poke fun at the hypocrisy of many Christians, and an ability to capture some of the tragedies of human existence. In France, a long poem called *The Romance of the Rose* used vivid sexual imagery, and the poet Villon wrote, in largely secular terms, of the terror and poignancy of death.

Also using vernacular language, a series of courtly poets, or troubadours, based particularly in southern France in the 14th century, wrote hymns to the love that could flourish between men and women. Although their verses stressed platonic devotion rather than sexual love and paid homage to courtly ceremonies and polite behavior, their concern with love was the first sign of a new valuation of this emotional experience in the Western tradition.

In sum, medieval intellectual and artistic life created a host of important themes. Religion was the centerpiece, but it did not preclude a growing range of interests, from science to romantic poetry. Medieval culture was a rich intellectual achievement in its own right. It also set in motion a series of developments—in rationalist philosophy, science, artistic representations of nature, and vernacular literature—that would be building blocks for later Western thought and art.



FIGURE 11.6 The cathedral of Notre-Dame (Our Lady) at Amiens, France, is a grand example of gothic architecture, which flourished during the later Middle Ages in western Europe. The cathedral, which dwarfs the surrounding buildings, was built between 1220 and 1402 and was the tallest building in Europe at the time of its completion.

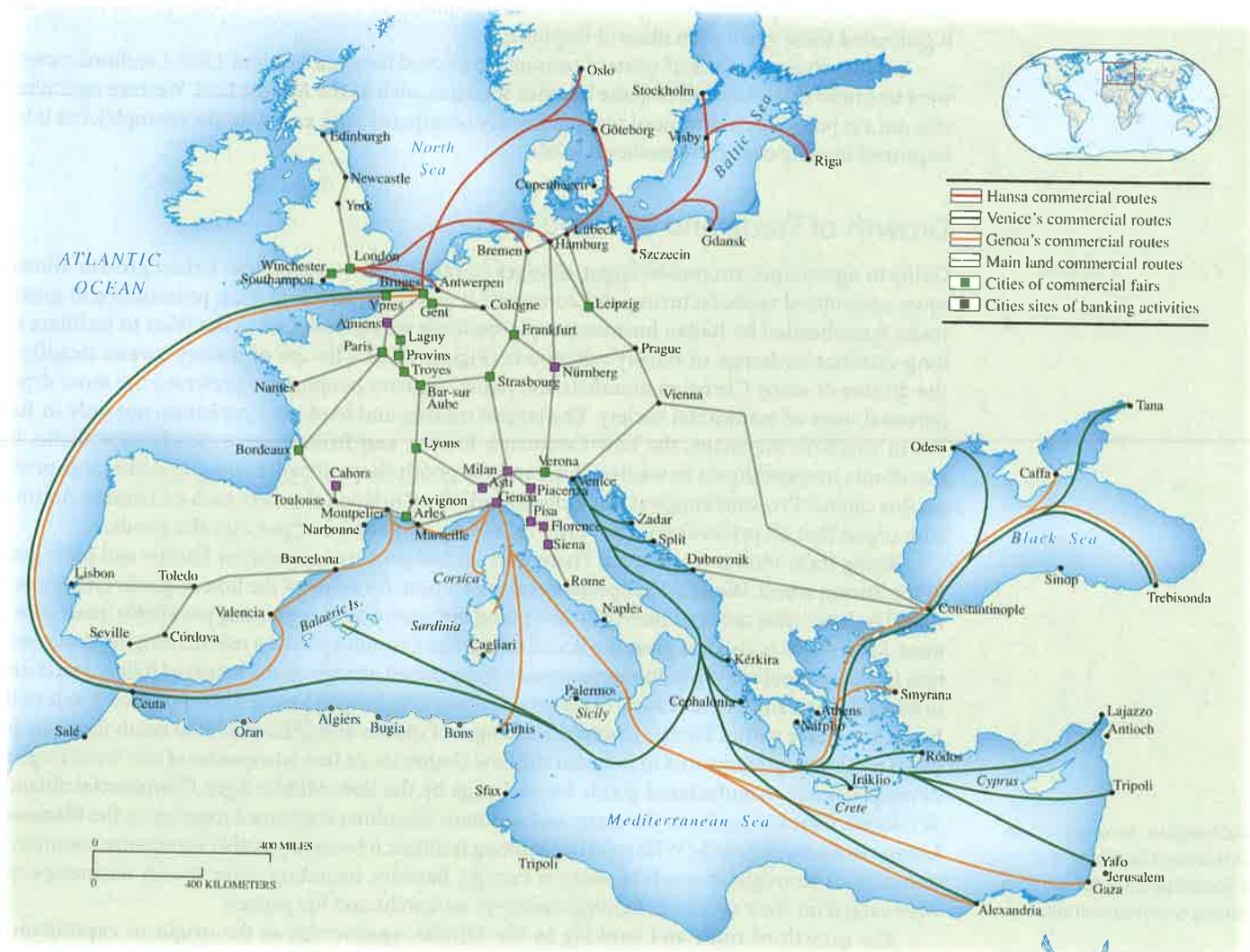
CHANGING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FORMS IN THE POSTCLASSICAL CENTURIES

11.3 How did growing trade fit the basic social structure of western Europe?

Although culture provided the most obvious cement for Western society during the Middle Ages, economic activity and social structure also developed common features. Here too, the postclassical West demonstrated impressive powers of innovation, for classical patterns had little hold. As trade revived by the 10th century, the West became a common commercial zone. Most regions produced primarily for local consumption, as was true in agricultural societies generally. But Italian merchants actively sought cloth manufactured in the Low Countries (present-day Belgium and the Netherlands), and merchants in many areas traded for wool produced in England or timber supplies and furs brought from Scandinavia and the Baltic lands. Great ports and trading fairs, particularly in the Low Countries and northern France, served as centers for Western exchange as well as markets for a few exotic products such as spices brought in from other civilizations (Map 11.3).

Western Europe also saw a clear expansion in productive capacity during much of the postclassical period, with gains in agriculture supporting some growth in urban manufacturing. Their achievements here did not rival those of east Asia, where the production gains and social consequences were more

While merchant capitalism gained ground in western Europe, other economic values predominated.



MAP 11.3 Leading Trade Routes Within Western and Central Europe and to the Mediterranean

substantial, but they did contribute important changes including a growing capacity to participate in transregional trade.

New Strains in Rural Life

The improvements in agriculture after 900 C.E. brought important new ingredients to rural life. Some peasants were able to shake off the most severe constraints of manorialism, becoming almost free farmers with only a few obligations to their landlords, although rigid manorialism remained in place in many areas. Noble landlords still served mainly military functions, for ownership of a horse and armor were prerequisites for fighting until the end of the medieval period. Although most nobles shunned the taint of commerce—like aristocrats in many societies, they found too much money-grubbing demeaning—they did use trade to improve their standard of living and adopt more polished habits. The courtly literature of the late Middle Ages reflected this new style of life.

As many lords sought improved conditions, they were often tempted to press their serfs to pay higher rents and taxes, even as serfs were gaining a new sense of freedom and control over their own land. From the late Middle Ages until the 19th century, this tension produced a recurrent series of peasant–landlord battles in Western society. Peasants sought what they viewed as their natural and traditional right to the land, free and clear. They talked of Christian equality, turning such phrases as “When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then a gentleman?” A more complex economy clearly brought new social strains, similar to the recurrent wave of popular unrest in China or the rural uprisings in the Middle East, where religion helped prompt egalitarian sentiments as well. The gap between lord and peasant was the crucial social inequality in Europe, but it was open to change and it generated some egalitarian ideas in response.

On the whole, the lives of western peasants improved between 900 and 1300. Landlord controls were less tight than they had become in other societies, such as the Middle East. Western agriculture was not yet particularly advanced technologically (compared with east Asia, for example), but it had improved notably over early medieval levels.

Growth of Trade and Banking

Gains in agriculture promoted larger changes in medieval economic life. Urban growth allowed more specialized manufacturing and commercial activities, which in turn promoted still greater trade. Spearheaded by Italian businesspeople, banking was introduced to the West to facilitate the long-distance exchange of money and goods (Figure 11.7). The use of money spread steadily, to the dismay of many Christian moralists and many ordinary people who preferred the more direct, personal ways of traditional society. The largest trading and banking operations, not only in Italy but in southern Germany, the Low Countries, France, and Britain, were clearly capitalistic. Big merchants invested funds in trading ships and the goods they carried, hoping to make large profits on this capital. Profitmaking was not judged kindly by Christian thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas, who urged that all prices should be “just,” reflecting only the labor put into the goods.

Rising trade took several forms. There were exchanges between western Europe and other parts of the known world. Wealthy Europeans developed a taste for some of the luxury goods and spices of Asia. The latter were not used merely to flavor food but were vital in preserving perishable items such as meat. Spice extracts also had great medicinal value. The Crusades played a role in bringing these products to wider attention. A Mediterranean trade redeveloped, mainly in the hands of Italian merchants, in which European cloth and some other products were exchanged for the more polished goods of the East. Commerce within Europe involved exchanges of timber and grain from the north for cloth and metal products manufactured in Italy and the Low Countries. At first an exporter of raw wool, England developed some manufactured goods for exchange by the later Middle Ages. Commercial alliances developed. Cities in northern Germany and southern Scandinavia grouped together in the **Hanseatic League** to encourage trade. With growing banking facilities, it became possible to organize commercial transactions throughout much of western Europe. Bankers, including many Jewish businesspeople, were valued for their service in lending money to monarchs and the papacy.

The growth of trade and banking in the Middle Ages served as the origin of **capitalism** in Western civilization. The greater Italian and German bankers, the long-distance merchants of the Hanseatic cities, were clearly capitalistic in their willingness to invest in trading ventures with the expectation of profit. Given the dangers of trade by land and sea, the risks in these investments were

Hanseatic League An organization of cities in northern Germany and southern Scandinavia for the purpose of establishing a commercial alliance.

capitalism Economic system based on profit-seeking, private ownership, and investment.

substantial, but profits of 100 percent or more were possible. In many cities, such as London, groups of powerful merchants banded together to invest in international trade, each buying shares in the venture and profiting or losing accordingly.

Individual merchants could amass—and lose—great fortunes. Jacques Coeur (JAHK KUR) (c. 1395–1456), one of Europe’s most extraordinary merchants, demonstrated the opportunities and risks of new forms of trade. Son of a furrier, he married the daughter of a royal official and served as a tax official until he was caught minting coins with less valuable metals. He then founded a trading company that competed with Italians and Spaniards in dealing with the Middle East. He visited Damascus to buy spices, setting up a regular trade in rugs, Chinese silk, and Indonesian spices and sugar. He also became financial advisor and supplier to the French king and was ennobled. With the largest fleet ever owned by a French subject, Coeur surrounded himself with splendor, even arranging with the pope for his 16-year-old son to become an archbishop. But he had enemies, many of them nobles in debt to him, and they turned the king against him. Tortured, he admitted to various crimes, including supplying weapons to Muslims. His property was confiscated, but adventurer to the last, he died on a Greek island while serving in a papal fleet against the Turks.

By world standards this was not a totally unprecedented merchant spirit. European traders were still less venturesome and less wealthy than some of their Muslim counterparts. Nor was Western society as tolerant of merchants as Muslim or Indian societies were. Yet Western commercial endeavors clearly were growing. Because Western governments were weak, with few economic functions, merchants had a freer hand than in many other civilizations. Many of the growing cities were ruled by commercial leagues. Monarchs liked to encourage the cities as a counterbalance to the power of the landed aristocracy, and in the later Middle Ages and beyond, traders and kings typically were allied. However, aside from taxing merchants and using them as sources of loans, royal governments did not interfere much with trading activities. Merchants even developed their own codes of commercial law, administered by city courts. Thus, the rising merchant class was staking out an unusually powerful and independent role in European society.

Capitalism was not yet typical of the Western economy, even aside from the moral qualms fostered by the Christian tradition. Most peasants and landlords had not become enmeshed in the market system. In the cities, the dominant economic ethic stressed group protection, not profitmaking. The characteristic institution was not the international trading firm but the merchant or artisan guild. **Guilds** grouped people in the same business or trade in a single city, sometimes with loose links to similar guilds in other cities. These organizations were new in western Europe, although they resembled guilds in various parts of Asia but with greater independence from the state. They stressed security and mutual control. Merchant guilds thus attempted to give all members a share in any endeavor. If a ship pulled in loaded with wool, the clothiers’ guild of the city insisted that all members participate in the purchase so that no one member would monopolize the profits.

Artisan guilds were made up of the people in the cities who actually made cloth, bread, jewelry, or furniture. These guilds tried to limit their membership so that all members would have work. They regulated apprenticeships to guarantee good training but also to ensure that no member would employ too many apprentices and so gain undue wealth. They discouraged new methods because security and a rough equality, not maximum individual profit, were the goals; here was their alternative to the capitalistic approach. Guilds also tried to guarantee quality so that consumers would not have to worry about shoddy quality on the part of some unscrupulous profit-seeker. Guilds played an important political and social role in the cities, giving their members recognized status and often a voice in city government. Their statutes were in turn upheld by municipal law and often backed by the royal government as well.

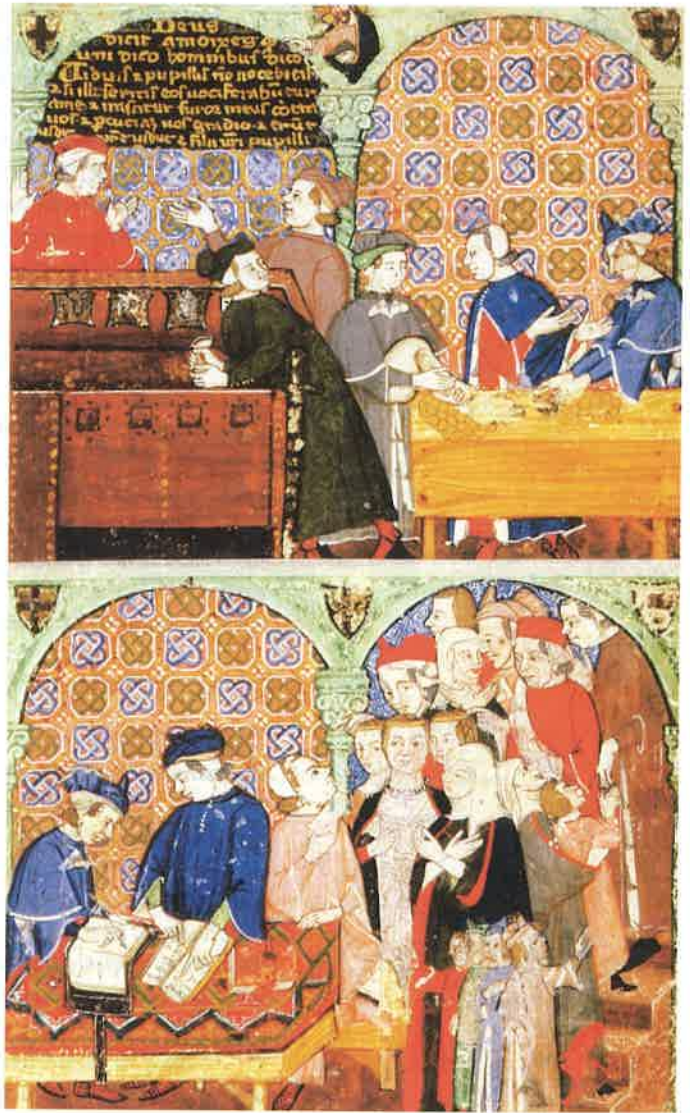


FIGURE 11.7 This 14th-century miniature shows views of a banking house. People might keep money in banks, seek loans, or arrange transactions with merchants in faraway centers of trade.

guilds Sworn associations of people in the same business or craft in a single city; stressed security and mutual control; limited membership, regulated apprenticeship, guaranteed good workmanship; often established franchise within cities.

Despite the traditionalism of the guilds, manufacturing and commercial methods improved in medieval Europe, although the region still lagged well behind Asia in ironmaking and textile manufacture. In a few areas, such as clockmaking—which involved both sophisticated technology and a concern for precise time initially linked to the schedule of church services—European artisans led the world. Furthermore, some manufacturing spilled beyond the bounds of guild control. Particularly in the Low Countries and parts of Italy, groups of manufacturing workers were employed by capitalists to produce for a wide market. Their techniques were simple, and they worked in their own homes, often alternating manufacturing labor with agriculture. Their work was guided not by the motives of the guilds but by the inducements of merchant capitalists, who provided them with raw materials and then paid them for their production.

Thus, by the later Middle Ages, western Europe's economy and society embraced many contradictory groups and principles. Commercial and capitalist elements jostled against the slower pace of economic life in the countryside and even against the dominant group protectionism of most urban guilds. Most people remained peasants, but a minority had escaped to the cities, where they found more excitement, along with increased danger and higher rates of disease. Medieval tradition held that a serf who managed to live in the city for a year and a day became a free person. A few prosperous capitalists flourished, but most people operated according to very different economic values, directed toward group welfare rather than individual profit. This was neither a static society nor an early model of a modern commercial society. It had its own flavor and its own tensions—the fruit of several centuries of economic and social change.

Limited Sphere for Women

The increasing complexity of medieval social and economic life may have had one final effect, which is familiar from patterns in other agricultural societies: new limits on the conditions of women. Women's work remained vital in most families. The Christian emphasis on the equality of all souls and the practical importance of women's monastic groups in providing an alternative to marriage continued to have distinctive effects on women's lives in Western society. The veneration of Mary and other female religious figures gave women real cultural prestige, counterbalancing the biblical emphasis on Eve as the source of human sin. In some respects, women in the West had higher status than their sisters under Islam: They were less segregated in religious services (although they could not lead them) and were less confined to the household. Still, women's voice in the family may have declined in the Middle Ages.

Urban women often played important roles in local commerce and even operated some craft guilds, but they found themselves increasingly hemmed in by male-dominated organizations. In contrast to Islam, women were not assured of property rights. By the late Middle Ages, a literature arose that stressed women's roles as the assistants and comforters to men, listing supplemental household tasks and docile virtues as women's distinctive sphere. Patriarchal structures seemed to be taking deeper root.

THE DECLINE OF THE MEDIEVAL SYNTHESIS

Key characteristics of western Europe began to shift after 1300, with new problems of overpopulation and disease.

11.4

What were the basic shifts in west European characteristics at the end of the postclassical period? Was the region declining?

A major war engulfed France and England during the 14th and 15th centuries, and this proved to be both symptom and cause of larger difficulties. The Hundred Years' War, which sputtered into the mid-15th century, lasted even longer than its name and initially went very badly for France—a sign of new weakness in the French monarchy. As the war dragged on, kings reduced their reliance on the prancing forces of the nobility in favor of paid armies of their own. New military methods challenged the key monopoly of the feudal lords, as ordinary paid archers learned how to unseat armored knights with powerful bows and arrows and with crossbows (Figure 11.8). The war ended with a French victory, sparked in part by the heroic leadership of the inspired peasant woman Joan of Arc, but both its devastation and the antifeudal innovations it encouraged suggested a time of change.

Concurrently, from about 1300 onward, key sources of Western vitality threatened to disappear. Medieval agriculture could no longer keep pace with population growth: The readily available new lands had been used up, and there were no major new technological gains to compensate. The result included severe famines and a decline in population levels until the end of the century. A devastating series of plagues that persisted for several centuries, beginning with the **Black Death** in 1348, further reduced Europe's population (Figure 11.9). Plague came from Asia and the Middle East, due to trade contacts, but the results were devastating. New social disputes arose, heightening some of the tensions noted earlier between peasants and landlords, artisans and their employees. Not until the 16th century would the West begin to work out a new social structure.

The West's economy did not go into a tailspin. In some respects, as in manufacturing and mining technology, progress may even have accelerated. The 150 to 200 years after 1300 form in Western history a transition period in which the features of the Middle Ages began to blur while new problems and developments began to take center stage. Western civilization was not in a spiral of decline, but the postclassical version of this civilization was.

Signs of Strain

The decline of medieval society involved increasing challenges to several typical medieval institutions. During the 14th century, the ruling class of medieval society, the land-owning aristocracy, began to show signs of confusion. It had long staked its claim to power on its control of land and its military prowess, but its skill in warfare was now open to question. The growth of professional armies and new weaponry such as cannon and gunpowder made traditional fighting methods, including fortified castles, increasingly irrelevant. The aristocracy did not simply disappear, however. Rather, the nobility chose to emphasize a rich ceremonial style of life, featuring tournaments in which military expertise could be turned into competitive games. The idea of chivalry—carefully controlled, polite behavior, including behavior toward women—gained ground. The upper class became more cultivated. We have seen similar transformations in the earlier Chinese and Muslim aristocracy. Yet at this transitional point in Europe, some of the elaborate ceremonies of chivalry seemed rather hollow, even a bit silly—a sign that medieval values were losing hold without being replaced by a new set of purposes.

Another key area involved decisive shifts in the balance between church and state that had characterized medieval life. For several decades in the aftermath of the taxation disputes in the early 14th century, French kings wielded great influence on the papacy, which they relocated from Rome to Avignon, a town surrounded by French territory. Then rival claimants to the papacy confused the issue further. Ultimately, a single pope was returned to Rome, but the church was clearly weakened. Moreover, the church began to lose some of its grip on western religious life. Church leaders were so preoccupied with their political involvement that they tended to neglect the spiritual side. Religion was not declining; indeed, signs of intense popular piety continued to blossom, and new religious groups formed in the towns. But devotion became partially separated from the institution of the church. One result, again beginning in the 14th century, was a series of popular heresies, with leaders in places such as England and Bohemia (the present-day Czech Republic) preaching against the hierarchical apparatus of the church in favor of direct popular experience of God. Another result was an important new series of mystics, many of them women, who claimed direct, highly emotional contacts with God.

A third area in which medievalism faded was the breakdown of the intellectual and even artistic synthesis. After the work of Aquinas, church officials became less tolerant of intellectual daring, and they even declared some of Aquinas's writings heretical. The earlier blend of rationalism and religion no longer seemed feasible. Ultimately, this turned some thinkers away from religion, but this daring



FIGURE 11.8 The Siege of Paris, pictured here, took place in 1465, after the French nobility rose up against King Louis XI, whose treatment of them had left them angry and ambitious to reestablish their independence from the Crown. Calling themselves the League of Public Good, they marched on Paris, but the fighting there was indecisive and gave Louis the chance to regroup. The uprising was ended by treaty two months later. This incident was a revealing clash between feudal values and new royal ambition.

Black Death Plague that struck Europe in 14th century; significantly reduced Europe's population; affected social structure.



View the **Clouser Look** on **MyHistoryLab**: Black Death: A Burial Scene



FIGURE 11.9 This painting shows survivors at Tournai placing plague victims in coffins before mass burial. The Black Death, which killed up to a quarter of the population of Europe in just 20 years, devastated medieval society.

development took time. In art, growing interest in realistic portrayals of nature, although fruitful, suggested the beginnings of a shift away from medieval artistic standards. Religious figures became less stylized as painters grew more interested in human features for their own sake. The various constraints on forms of postclassical culture prompted many Western intellectuals to look for different emphases. In Italy most clearly, new kinds of literature and art took shape that differed from the styles and subjects of the postclassical centuries.

The Postclassical West and Its Heritage

Medieval Europe had several faces. The term *Middle Ages* implies a lull between the glories of Rome and the glitter of more modern Europe. There is some truth to this, for medieval Europe did grapple with backwardness and vulnerability.

But the Middle Ages were also a period of growing dynamism. Particularly after 900 c.e., gains in population, trade and cities, and intellectual activity created a vigorous period in European history. Key developments set a tone that would last even after the specifically medieval centuries had ended. Universities and Gothic art (often intertwined, as in the many American campuses that revived the

Gothic style for their buildings) were an enduring legacy to Western society. Distinctive ideas about government, building on Christian and feudal traditions, constituted another medieval contribution.

The medieval period was also a special moment in the relationship between Europe and the regions around it. Opportunities to advance by imitation were particularly striking, from technology to science to trade and consumption. Even the medieval university may have had Arab origins in the higher schools of the Muslim world. Europe was able to develop new contacts, but it did not reach the technological or urban levels of the leading Asian societies.

Medieval Europe warrants a particular comparison with other areas in which civilization was partially new during the postclassical period and where change and imitation proceeded rapidly. Divided political rule in Europe resembled conditions in west Africa and Japan (the only other feudal society in the period). The imitation process can be compared among Europe, Africa, Japan, and Russia. But the Crusades revealed a distinctive expansionist spirit in Europe that also warrants attention, suggesting a more aggressive interest in the wider world than the other emerging societies were demonstrating.

Global Connections and Critical Themes

MEDIEVAL EUROPE AND THE WORLD

During the Middle Ages, western Europe developed something of a love-hate relationship with the world around it. In the early Middle Ages, Europe seemed at the mercy of invasions, from the Vikings in the north or various nomadic groups pushing in from central Asia. European leaders were also keenly aware of the power of Islam, which controlled most of the Mediterranean, including Spain. Most Europeans saw Islam as a dangerously false religion and an obvious threat.

At the same time, there was much to be learned from this wider world. During the Middle Ages, Europeans actively copied a host of features from Islam, from law to science and art. They

imported products and technologies from Asia. This process of imitation accelerated during the centuries of Mongol control, when European traders and travelers eagerly pushed into eastern Asia. A key question for Europe at the end of the Middle Ages involved how to gain greater control over the benefits that came from world contacts, while reducing the sense of threat. Partly through weakness, partly because of the advantages that Europeans learned from contact, the new civilization developed active growing sense of global awareness. Europe itself did not, however, become a major attraction for people in other societies, except for some of the raiders who helped keep the region off balance during the early part of the period. Neither European manufacturing nor culture was widely appealing, outside the region itself.

Further Readings

For the Middle Ages generally, Joseph Strayer's *Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (1982) is a fine survey. More recent works include Judith Bennett, *Medieval Europe: A Short History* (2010); Charles H. Parker and Jerry H. Bentley, eds., *Between the Middle Ages and Modernity: Individual and Community in the Early Modern World* (2007); Eric H. Mielants, *The Origins of Capitalism and the "Rise of the West"* (2007); and David Power, ed., *The Central Middle Ages: Europe 950–1320* (2006). Key topics are covered in Peter Reid, *Medieval Warfare: Triumph and Domination in the Wars of the Middle Ages* (2007); Huw Pryce and John Watts, eds., *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages* (2007); Isabel Davis, *Writing Masculinity in the Later Middle Ages* (2007); R. S. Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950–1350* (1976); and C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (1984). National histories are important for the period, particularly on political life; see J. W. Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus: Foundations of French Royal Power in the Middle Ages* (1986); G. Barraclough, *The Origins of Modern Germany* (1984); Michael Alexander, *Medievalism: The Middle Ages in Modern England* (2007); and Christopher Dyer, *An Age of Transition?: Economy and Society in*

England in the Later Middle Ages (2005). R. Barlett, *The Making of Medieval Europe* (1992), suggests that Western civilization was the product of cross-cultural fertilization.

Social history has dominated much recent research on the period. See P. Ariès and G. Duby, eds., *A History of Private Life*, vol. 2 (1984) and Barbara Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (1986), for important orientation in this area. David Herlihy's *Medieval Households* (1985) is a vital contribution, as is J. Chapelot and R. Fossier's *The Village and House in the Middle Ages* (1985). Margaret Schaus, *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (2006) and J. Kirshner and S. F. Wemple, eds., *Women of the Medieval World* (1985), are good collections. On tensions in popular religion, see Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz, *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives* (2010); C. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (1982); and L. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (1978). A highly readable account of medieval life is E. Leroy Ladurie, *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error* (1979).

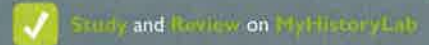
Several excellent studies take up the theme of technological change: J. Gimpel, *The Medieval Machine: The Industrial Revolution of the Middle Ages* (1977); Lynn White Jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (1962); and David Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks*

and *the Making of the Modern World* (1985). On environmental impact, see Roland Bechmann, *Trees and Man: The Forest in the Middle Ages* (1990).

On intellectual and artistic life, E. Gilson's *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (1954) is a brilliant sketch, and his *Reason and Revelation* (1956) focuses on key intellectual issues of the age. S. C. Ferruolo's *The Origins of the University* (1985)

and N. Pevsner's *An Outline of European Architecture* (1963) deal with other important features; see also H. Berman's *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (1983). On contacts, see Khalil Semaan, *Islam and the Medieval West: Aspects of Intercultural Relations* (1980). An intriguing classic, focused primarily on culture, is J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (1973).

On MyHistoryLab



Critical Thinking Questions

1. How do developments in European agricultural reflect the importance of new technology?
2. What were the main differences between early European capitalism and the economic ethic of the guilds?
3. How did the consequences of the Crusades compare to the initial causes?
4. What are the distinctive features of feudalism as a political system? How does the feudal system help explain patterns of political change in postclassical Europe?
5. Looking at both eastern and western Europe, what were some of the main reasons many additional people converted to Christianity in the postclassical period?
6. How did western Europe compare with sub-Saharan Africa as a participant in postclassical transregional trade? What were its comparative strengths and weaknesses?

12

The Americas on the Eve of Invasion

If you climbed the steep stairway to the temple at its summit and looked out from atop the great pyramid at its center, you could see that the splendid city of Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec Empire, rose from two islands in a large lake (Figure 12.1). All around its shores were densely settled towns and cities surrounded by cultivated fields. Canoes constantly traversed the lake and entered the city through a maze of canals, large crowds trod across the causeways that linked the city and its markets to the shores, and in some marshy areas, complex farming on “floating gardens” kept thousands of peasants at work. The Mexica or Tenocha people (sometimes called the Aztecs) who built the city considered it the “foundation of Heaven.” For them it was a sacred space as well as a thriving metropolis and the heart of their empire.

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

What were the main features of the Toltec and Aztec empires? p. 267 **12.1**

What were the principal strengths and constraints of the Aztec economy? p. 272 **12.2**

What were the principal causes of the expansion of the Inca empire? p. 276 **12.3**

What were the characteristic economic forms of American groups outside the two great imperial territories? p. 282 **12.4**



FIGURE 12.1 The great Aztec city-state of Tenochtitlan was established on an island in the midst of a large lake. Connected to the shores by causeways, supplied with fresh water by an aqueduct, it housed a population estimated to be over 150,000. Early Spanish observers compared its canals to Venice and were fascinated by its markets and gardens. To the Aztecs it was the center of political and spiritual power, or as they called it, “the foundation of heaven.”

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When the first Europeans saw Tenochtitlan in 1520, the city had a population of over 150,000 and covered about 5 square miles, making it as large as contemporary Seville or Paris. The first Europeans who saw it were amazed. Some of them compared the city and its canals to Venice. Hernán Cortés, the Spanish captain who first entered the city, reported “the stone masonry and the woodwork are equally good; they could not be bettered anywhere.” His companion, the foot soldier Bernal Díaz del Castillo, a man usually given to plain speech, could not hide his admiration:

Gazing on such wonderful sights, we did not know what to say, or whether what appeared before us was real, for on one side, on the land, there were great cities, and in the lake ever many more, and the lake was crowded with canoes, and in the causeway were many bridges at intervals, and in front of us stood the great city of Mexico.

Díaz del Castillo went on to describe the palaces and temples, the two-storied homes of the nobles, the stuccoed buildings hung with garlands of flowers, the smell of the cedar wood beams, the zoo, the aviary, the rooftop gardens, and the bustling markets filled with everything from chocolate to elaborate textiles and from parrot feathers to precious stones and slaves. The hum of the crowd in the great market, he said, could be heard miles away. Of course, there was much about the city that he did not understand, such as the fact that each city ward was controlled by a kin group that cared for its temples, shrines, and palaces. Later, he came to understand that the purpose of temples was for ceremonies of human sacrifice, which he found appalling, but his overall impression was one of admiration and wonder.

Tenochtitlan, clearly a great urban center, was the largest of about 50 such city-states that dotted central and southern Mexico. They were the heirs of the long development of civilization in the Americas, a process that seems to have taken place in relative isolation from the other centers of world history. ■

Indians Misnomer created by Columbus referring to indigenous peoples of New World; implies social and ethnic commonality among Native Americans that did not exist; still used to apply to Native Americans.

By 1500, the Americas were densely populated in many places by peoples long indigenous to the New World. These peoples were later called **Indians**. That term of course, is derived from a mistake Columbus made when he thought he had reached the Indies, what Europeans called India and the lands beyond, but the label is also misleading because it implies a common identity among the peoples of the Americas that did not exist until after the arrival of Europeans. *Indian* as a term to describe all the peoples of the Americas could have a meaning only when there were non-Indians from which to distinguish them. Still, the term has been used for so long—and is still in use by many Native Americans today—that we will continue to use it along with the term *Native Americans* to describe the early peoples of the Americas.

As should already be clear, there were many different peoples with a vast array of cultural achievements. The variety of cultural patterns and ways of life of pre-Columbian civilizations makes it impossible to discuss each in detail here, but we can focus on a few areas where major civilizations developed, based on earlier achievements. By concentrating on these regions, we can demonstrate the continuity of civilization in the Americas. This chapter examines in some detail Mesoamerica, especially central Mexico, and the Andean heartland. In both these areas great imperial states were in place when European expansion brought them into direct contact with the Old World. Discussed

900 C.E.	1150 C.E.	1300 C.E.	1450 C.E.
<p>900 End of intermediate horizon and decline of Tihuanaco and Huari</p> <p>900–1465 Chimor Empire based on Chan-Chan on north coast of Peru</p> <p>968 Tula established by Toltecs</p> <p>1000 Toltec conquest of Chichén Itzá and influence in Yucatan</p>	<p>1150 Fall of Tula, disintegration of Toltec Empire</p> <p>1200–1500 Mississippian culture flourishes</p>	<p>1325 Aztecs established in central Mexico; Tenochtitlan founded</p> <p>1350 Incas established in Cuzco area</p> <p>1434 Creation of triple alliance</p> <p>1434–1471 Great expansion under Inca Pachacuti</p> <p>1434–1472 Rule of Nezhuacoyotl at Texcoco</p> <p>1438 Incas dominate Cuzco and southern highlands</p> <p>1440–1469 Reign of Moctezuma I</p>	<p>1471–1493 Inca Topac Yupanqui increases areas under control</p> <p>1493–1527 Huayna Capac expands into Ecuador; his death results in civil war</p> <p>1502–1520 Reign of Moctezuma II</p>

in less detail are a few areas influenced by the centers of civilization—and some whose development seems to have been independent of them—to provide an overview of the Americas on the eve of invasion.

POSTCLASSIC MESOAMERICA, 1000–1500 C.E.

12.1 What were the main features of the Toltec and Aztec empires?

With the collapse of Teotihuacan (tay-oh-tee-wah-KAHN) in central Mexico and the abandonment of the classical Maya cities in the 8th century C.E., Mesoamerica experienced significant political and cultural change. In central Mexico, nomadic peoples from the north took advantage of the political vacuum to move into the richer lands. Among these peoples were the Toltecs, who established a capital at Tula about 968. **Toltec culture** adopted many features from the sedentary peoples and added a strongly militaristic ethic. This included the cult of sacrifice and war that is often portrayed in Toltec art. Later Mesoamerican peoples, such as the Aztecs, had some historical memory of the Toltecs and thought of them as the givers of civilization. However, the archeological record indicates that Toltec accomplishments often were fused or confused with those of Teotihuacan in the memory of the Toltecs' successors.

The Toltec Heritage

Among the legends that survived about the Toltecs were those of **Topiltzin**, a Toltec leader and apparently a priest dedicated to the god **Quetzalcoatl** (the Feathered Serpent) who later became confused with the god himself in the legends. Apparently, Topiltzin, a religious reformer, was involved in a struggle for priestly or political power with another faction. When he lost, Topiltzin and his followers went into exile, promising to return in the future to claim his throne on the same date, within the cyclical calendar system. Supposedly, Topiltzin and his followers sailed for Yucatan; there is much evidence of Toltec influence in that region. The legend of Topiltzin/Quetzalcoatl was well known to the Aztecs and may have influenced their response when the Europeans arrived.

The Toltecs created an empire that extended over much of central Mexico, and their influence spread from their capital, Tula, to areas as far away as Guatemala (Figure 12.2). About 1000 C.E., Chichén Itzá (chee-CHEHN-eet-she) in Yucatan was conquered by Toltec warriors, and it and several other cities were ruled for a long time by central Mexican dynasties or by Maya rulers under Toltec influence.

Toltec influence spread northward as well. Obsidian was mined in northern Mexico, and the Toltecs may have traded for turquoise in the American Southwest. It has been suggested that the great Anasazi adobe town at Chaco Canyon in New Mexico was abandoned when the Toltec empire fell and the trade in local turquoise ended.

The Toltecs and later the Aztecs were the chief civilizations that followed the fall of Teotihuacan and the abandonment of the classic Maya cities in the 8th century C.E. These new civilizations built on the accomplishments of their predecessors but rarely surpassed them except in political and military organization.

Toltec culture Succeeded Teotihuacan culture in central Mexico; strongly militaristic ethic including human sacrifice; influenced large territory after 1000 C.E.; declined after 1200 C.E.



View the **Closer Look** on **MyHistoryLab**: The Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacan

Topiltzin [toh-PEYEL-tzihn] Religious leader and reformer of the Toltecs in 10th century; dedicated to god Quetzalcoatl; after losing struggle for power, went into exile in the Yucatan peninsula.

Quetzalcoatl [keht-zahl-KOH-ah-tuhl] Toltec deity; Feathered Serpent; adopted by Aztecs as a major god.



FIGURE 12.2 Toltec political and cultural influence spread from its capital at Tula in northern Mexico to places as far south as Chichén Itzá in Yucatan. The colossal statues of warriors shown here served as columns that supported the roof of a great temple.

 View the **Closer Look** on **MyHistoryLab**: Cahokia

How far eastward Toltec influence spread is a matter of dispute. Was there contact between Mesoamerica and the elaborate culture and concentrated towns of the Hopewell peoples of the Ohio and Mississippi valleys? Scholars disagree. Eventually, in the lower Mississippi valley from about 700 C.E., elements of Hopewell culture seem to have been enriched by external contact, perhaps with Mexico. This Mississippian culture, which flourished between 1200 and 1500 C.E., was based on maize and bean agriculture that probably spread from Mexico. Towns, usually located along rivers, had stepped temples made of earth, and sometimes large burial mounds. Some of the burial sites include well-produced pottery and other goods, and some burials seem to have been accompanied by ritual executions or sacrifices of servants or wives. This indicates social stratification in the society. Cahokia, near East St. Louis, Illinois, covered 5 square miles and may have had more than 30,000 people in and around its center. Its largest earthen pyramid, now called Monk's Mound, covers 15 acres and is comparable in size to the largest pyramids of the classic period in Mexico. Many of these cultural features seem to suggest contact with Mesoamerica.

The Aztec Rise to Power

The Toltec empire lasted until about 1150, when it apparently was destroyed by

nomadic invaders from the north, who also seem to have sacked Tula about that time. The center of population and political power in central Mexico shifted to the valley of Mexico and especially to the shores of the large chain of lakes in that basin. These provided a rich aquatic environment. The shores of the lakes were dotted with settlements and towns and supported a dense population. Of the approximately 3000 square miles in the basin of the valley, about 400 square miles were under water. The lakes became the cultural heartland and population center of Mexico in the postclassic period. In the unstable world of post-Toltec Mesoamerica, various peoples and cities jockeyed for control of the lakes. The winners of this struggle, the Aztecs—or, as they called themselves, the *Mexica*—eventually built a great empire, but when they first emerged on the historical scene, they were the most unlikely candidates for power.

The Aztec rise to power and formation of an imperial state was as spectacular as it was rapid. According to some of their legends, the Mexica had once inhabited the central valley and had known agriculture and the “civilized” life but had lived in exile to the north in a place called Aztlán (AZT-lahn) (from whence we get the name *Aztec*). This may be an exaggeration by people who wanted to lay claim to a distinguished heritage. Other sources indicate that the Aztecs were simply one of the nomadic tribes that used the political anarchy, after the fall of the Toltecs, to penetrate the area of sedentary agricultural peoples. Like the ancient Egyptians, the Aztecs rewrote history to suit their purposes.

What seems clear is that the Aztecs were a group of about 10,000 people who migrated to the shores of Lake Texcoco (Map 12.1) in the central valley of Mexico around 1325. After the fall of the Toltec empire, the central valley was inhabited by a mixture of peoples: Chichimec migrants from the northwest and various groups of sedentary farmers. In this period, the area around the lake was dominated by several tribes or peoples organized into city-states. Much like medieval Europe, this

was a world of political maneuvers and state marriages, competing powers and shifting alliances. These political units claimed authority on the basis of their military power and their connections to Toltec culture. Many of these peoples spoke Nahuatl (NAH-wahl), the language the Toltecs had spoken. The Aztecs also spoke this language, a fact that made their rise to power and their eventual claims to legitimacy more acceptable.

An intrusive and militant group, the Aztecs were distrusted and disliked by the dominant powers of the area, but their fighting skills could be put to use, and this made them attractive as mercenaries or allies. For about a century the Aztecs wandered around the shores of the lake, being allowed to settle for a while and then driven out by more powerful neighbors.

In a period of warfare, the Aztecs had a reputation as tough warriors and fanatical followers of their gods, to whom they offered human sacrifices. This reputation made them both valued and feared. Their own legends held that their wanderings would end when they saw an eagle perched on a cactus with a serpent in its beak. Supposedly, this sign was seen on a marshy island in Lake Texcoco, and there, on that island and one nearby, the Mexica settled. The city of **Tenochtitlan** was founded about 1325.

From this secure base the Aztecs began to take a more active role in regional politics. Serving as mercenaries and then as allies brought prosperity to the Aztecs, especially to their ruler and the warrior nobles, who took lands and tribute from conquered towns. By 1428, the Aztecs had emerged as an independent power. In 1434, Tenochtitlan created an alliance with two other city-states that controlled much of the central plateau. In reality, Tenochtitlan and the Aztecs dominated their allies and controlled the major share of the tribute and lands taken.

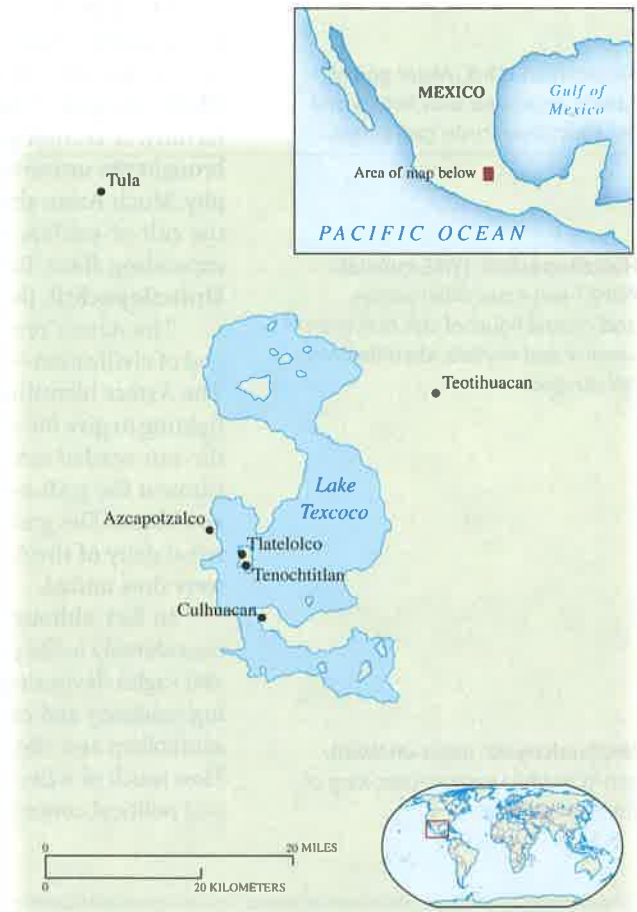
The Aztec Social Contract

Aztec domination extended from the Tarascan frontier about a hundred miles north of present-day Mexico City southward to the Maya area. Subject peoples were forced to pay tribute, surrender lands, and sometimes do military service for the growing Aztec empire.

Aztec society had changed in the process of expansion and conquest. From a loose association of clans, the Mexica had become a stratified society under the authority of a supreme ruler. The histories were rewritten and the Mexica were described as a people chosen to serve the gods. Human sacrifice, long a part of Mesoamerican religion, greatly expanded into an enormous cult in which the military class played a central role as suppliers of war captives to be used as sacrificial victims. A few territories were left unconquered so that periodic “flower wars” could be staged in which both sides could obtain captives for sacrifice. Whatever the religious motivations of this cult, the Aztec rulers manipulated it as an effective means of political terror. By the time of Moctezuma II, (1502–1520) the Aztec state was dominated by a king who represented civil power and served as a representative of the gods on earth. The cult of human sacrifice and conquest was united with the political power of the ruler and the nobility.

Religion and the Ideology of Conquest

Aztec religion incorporated many features that had long been part of the Mesoamerican belief system. Religion was a vast, uniting, and sometimes oppressive force in which little distinction was made between the world of the gods and the natural world. The traditional deities of Mesoamerica—the gods of rain, fire, water, corn, the sky, and the sun, many of whom had been worshiped as far back as the time of Teotihuacan—were venerated among the Aztecs. There were at least 128 major deities, but there seemed to be many more: As in popular Hinduism each deity had a male and female form, because a basic duality was recognized in all things. Moreover, gods might have different manifestations, somewhat like the avatars of the Hindu deities. Each god had at least five aspects, each associated with one of the cardinal directions and the center. Certain gods were thought to be the patrons of specific cities, ethnic groups, or occupations.



MAP 12.1 Central Mexico and Lake Texcoco An aquatic environment at the heart of the Aztec empire.

Tenochtitlan [teh-nahk-teet-LAHN]

Founded c. 1325 on marshy island in Lake Texcoco; became center of Aztec power; joined with Tlacopan and Texcoco in 1434 to form a triple alliance that controlled most of central plateau of Mesoamerica.

Tlaloc [tlah-LOHK] Major god of Aztecs; associated with fertility and the agricultural cycle; god of rain.

Huitzilopochtli [WEE-tsoh-loh-POHKT-lee] Aztec tribal patron god; central figure of cult of human sacrifice and warfare; identified with old sun god.

Nezhualcoyotl [nehz-uh-WAHL-koh-YOH-tihl] Leading Aztec king of the 15th century.

The gods were supported by a round of yearly festivals and ceremonies that involved feasting and dancing along with penance and sacrifice. This complex array of deities can be organized into three major themes or cults. The first were the gods of fertility and the agricultural cycle, such as **Tlaloc**, the god of rain (called *Chac* by the Maya), and the gods and goddesses of water, maize, and fertility. A second group centered on the creator deities, the great gods and goddesses who had brought the universe into being. The story of their actions played a central role in Aztec cosmography. Much Aztec abstract and philosophical thought was devoted to the theme of creation. Finally, the cult of warfare and sacrifice built on the preexisting Mesoamerican traditions that had been expanding since Toltec times and, under the militaristic Aztec state, became the cult of the state. **Huitzilopochtli**, the Aztec tribal patron, became the central figure of this cult.

The Aztecs revered the great traditional deities—such as Tlaloc and Quetzalcoatl, the ancient god of civilization—so holy to the Toltecs, but their own tribal deity, Huitzilopochtli, was paramount. The Aztecs identified him with the old sun god, and they saw him as a warrior in the daytime sky fighting to give life and warmth to the world against the forces of the night. To carry out that struggle, the sun needed strength, and just as the gods had sacrificed themselves for humankind, the nourishment the gods needed most was that which was most precious: human life in the form of hearts and blood. The great temple of Tenochtitlan was dedicated to both Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc. The tribal deity of the Aztecs and the ancient agricultural god of the sedentary peoples of Mesoamerica were thus united.

In fact, although human sacrifice had long been a part of Mesoamerican religion, it expanded considerably in the postclassic period of militarism. Warrior cults and the militaristic images of jaguars and eagles devouring human hearts were characteristic of Toltec art. The Aztecs simply took an existing tendency and carried it further. Both the types and frequency of sacrifice increased, and a whole symbolism and ritual, which included ritual cannibalism, developed as part of the cult (Figure 12.3). How much of Aztec sacrifice was the result of religious conviction and how much was a tactic of terror and political control by the rulers and priests is still open to debate.

Beneath the surface of this polytheism, there was also a sense of spiritual unity. **Nezhualcoyotl**, the king of Texcoco, wrote hymns to the “lord of the close vicinity,” an invisible creative force that supported all the gods. Yet his conception of a kind of monotheism, much like that of Pharaoh Akhenaton in Egypt, appears to have been too abstract and never gained great popularity.

Although the bloody aspects of Aztec religion have gained much attention, we must also realize that the Aztecs concerned themselves with many of the same great religious and spiritual questions that have preoccupied other civilizations: Is there life after death? What is the meaning of life? What does it mean to live a good life? Do the gods really exist?

Nezhualcoyotl, whose poetry survived in oral form and was written down in the 16th century, wondered about life after death:

Do flowers go to the land of the dead?
In the Beyond, are we dead or do we
still live?
Where is the source of light, since that
which gives life hides itself?



FIGURE 12.3 Human sacrifice was practiced by many Mesoamerican peoples, but the Aztecs apparently expanded its practice for political and religious reasons. This image shows Aztec priests cutting out their victims' hearts and then rolling the bodies down the steps of the pyramid. (Ms. Magliabechiano: sacrificio umano azteco. Biblioteca Nazionale Firenze. Scala/Art Resource, NY.)

As in the Vedas of ancient India, he also wondered about the existence of the gods:

Are you real, are you fixed?
 Only You dominate all things
 The Giver of Life.
 Is this true?
 Perhaps, as they say, it is not true.

Aztec religious art and poetry are filled with images of flowers, birds, and song, all of which the Aztecs greatly admired, as well as human hearts and blood, the “precious water” needed to sustain the gods. This mixture of images makes the symbolism of Aztec religion difficult for modern observers to appreciate.

Aztec religion depended on a complex mythology that explained the birth and history of the gods and their relationship to peoples, and on a religious symbolism that infused all aspects of life. As we have seen, the Mesoamerican calendar system was religious, and many ceremonies coincided with particular points in the calendar cycle (Figure 12.4). Moreover, the Aztecs also believed in a cyclical view of history, and that the world had been destroyed four times before and would be destroyed again. Thus, there was a certain fatalism in Aztec thought and a premonition that eventually the sacrifices would be insufficient and the gods would again bring catastrophe.



FIGURE 12.4 This Aztec stone calendar is about 12 feet across and 4 feet thick, and it weighs about 24 tons. It was unearthed accidentally by construction crews in Mexico City in 1790.

Feeding the People: The Economy of the Empire

Feeding the great population of Tenochtitlan and the Aztec confederation in general depended on traditional forms of agriculture and on innovations developed by the Aztecs. Lands of conquered peoples often were appropriated, and food sometimes was demanded as tribute. In and around the lake, however, the Aztecs adopted an ingenious system of irrigated agriculture by building **chinampas** for agriculture. These were beds of aquatic weeds, mud, and earth that had been placed in frames made of cane and rooted to the lake floor. They formed artificial floating islands about 17 feet long and 100 to 330 feet wide. This narrow construction allowed the water to reach all the plants, and willow trees were also planted at intervals to give shade and help fix the roots. Much of the land of Tenochtitlan itself was chinampa in origin, and in the southern end of the lake, more than 20,000 acres of chinampas were constructed. The yield from chinampa agriculture was high: Four corn crops a year were possible. Apparently, this system of irrigated agriculture had been used in preclassical days, but a rise in the level of the lakes had made it impossible to continue. After 1200, however, lowering water levels once again stimulated chinampa construction, which the Aztecs carried out on a grand scale.

Production by the Aztec peasantry and tribute provided the basic foods. In each Aztec community, the local clan apportioned the lands, some of which were also set aside for support of the temples and the state. In addition, individual nobles might have private estates, which were worked by servants or slaves from conquered peoples. Each community had periodic markets—according to various cycles in the calendar system, such as every 5 and 13 days—in which a wide variety of goods were exchanged. Cacao beans and gold dust sometimes were used as currency, but much trade was done as barter. The great market at Tlatelolco (TLAT-ehl-UHL-koh) operated daily and was controlled by the special merchant class, or **pochteca**, which specialized in long-distance trade in luxury items such as plumes of tropical birds and cacao. The markets were highly regulated and under the control of inspectors and special judges. Despite the importance of markets, this was not a market economy as we usually understand it.

chinampas Beds of aquatic weeds, mud, and earth placed in frames made of cane and rooted in lakes to create “floating islands”; system of irrigated agriculture utilized by Aztecs.

pochteca [pahk-TEHK-uh] Special merchant class in Aztec society; specialized in long-distance trade in luxury items.

The state controlled the use and distribution of many commodities and redistributed the vast amounts of tribute received from subordinate peoples. Tribute levels were assigned according to whether the subject peoples had accepted Aztec rule or had fought against it. Those who surrendered paid less. Tribute payments, such as food, slaves, and sacrificial victims, served political and economic ends. More than 120,000 mantles of cotton cloth alone were collected as tribute each year and sent to Tenochtitlan. The Aztec state redistributed these goods. After the original conquests, it rewarded its nobility richly, and the commoners received far less.

AZTEC SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

Aztec society became more hierarchical as the empire grew and social classes with different functions developed, although the older organization based on clans and kinship groups never disappeared. Tribute was drawn from subject peoples, but Aztec society confronted technological barriers that made it difficult to maintain the large population of central Mexico.

12.2 What were the principal strengths and constraints of the Aztec economy?

Like all societies, Aztec society experienced changes over time. The Mexica were one of a number of peoples who spoke the Nahuatl language and occupied the region of central Mexico. From their humble origins as hunters and gatherers they emerged as a dominant power, and their rise created opportunities for some groups and a loss of status for others within their society. Eventually, they held sway over the 50 or so political units of the central valley of Mexico. Expansion by warfare privileged the warriors, and the religious basis for expansion made the priests and the cults of the temples a force in society. No ruler could govern without the support of these sectors of society, a support obtained and preserved by giving out rewards and benefits. But such policies transformed the nature of Aztec society.

A Widening Social Gulf

calpulli [kal-PUHL-lee] Clans in Aztec society, later expanded to include residential groups that distributed land and provided labor and warriors.

During their wanderings, the Aztecs had been divided into seven **calpulli**, or clans, a form of organization that they later expanded and adapted to their imperial position. The calpulli were no longer only kinship groups but also residential groupings, which might include neighbors, allies, and dependants. Much of Aztec local life was based on the calpulli, which performed important functions such as distributing land to heads of households, organizing labor gangs and military units in times of war, and maintaining a temple and school. Calpulli were governed by councils of family heads, but not all families were equal, nor were all calpulli of equal status.

The calpulli obviously had been the ancient and basic building block of Aztec society. In the origins of Aztec society every person, noble, and commoner had belonged to a calpulli but as Aztec power increased, the calpulli had been transformed, and other forms of social stratification had emerged. As the empire expanded, a class of nobility emerged, based on certain privileged families in the most distinguished calpulli. Originating from the lineages that headed calpulli and from marriages, military achievements, or service to the state, this group of nobles accumulated high offices, private lands, and other advantages. The most prominent families in the calpulli, those who had dominated leadership roles and formed a kind of local nobility, eventually were overshadowed by the military and administrative nobility of the Aztec state.

Although some commoners might be promoted to noble status, most nobles were born into the class. Nobles controlled the priesthood and the military leadership. In fact, the military was organized into various ranks based on experience and success in taking captives (Figure 12.5). Military virtues were linked to the cult of sacrifice and infused the whole society; they became the justification for the nobility's status. The "flowery death," or death while taking prisoners for the sacrificial knife, was the fitting end to a noble life and ensured eternity in the highest heaven—a reward also promised to women who died in childbirth. The military was highly ritualized. There were orders of warriors: The Jaguar and Eagle "Knights" and other groups each had a distinctive uniform and ritual and fought together as units. Banners, cloaks, and other insignia marked off the military ranks.

The social gulf that separated the nobility, or *pipiltin* from the commoners was widening as the empire grew. Egalitarian principles that may have existed in Aztec life disappeared, as happened among the warring Germanic tribes of early medieval Europe. Social distinctions were made apparent

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by the use of and restrictions on clothing, hairstyles, uniforms, and other symbols of rank. The imperial family became the most distinguished of the pipiltin families.

As the nobility broke free from their old *calpulli* and acquired private lands, a new class of workers almost like serfs was created to serve as laborers on these lands. Unlike the commoners attached to the land-controlling *calpulli*, these workers did not control land and worked at the will of others. Their status was low, but it was still above that of the slaves, who might have been war captives, criminals, or people who had sold themselves into bondage to escape hunger. Finally, there were other social groups. The scribes, artisans, and healers all were part of an intermediate group that was especially important in the larger cities. The long-distance merchants formed a sort of *calpulli* with their own patron gods, privileges, and internal divisions. They sometimes served as spies or agents for the Aztec military, but they were subject to restrictions that hindered their entry into or rivalry with the nobility.

It is possible to see an emerging conflict between the nobility and the commoners and to interpret this as a class struggle, but some specialists emphasize that to interpret Aztec society on that basis is to impose Western concepts on a different reality. Corporate bodies such as the *calpulli*, temple maintenance associations, and occupational groups cut across class and remained important in Aztec life. Competition between corporate groups often was more apparent and more violent than competition between social classes.

Overcoming Technological Constraints

Membership in society was thus defined by participation in various wider groups, such as the *calpulli* or a specific social class. It was also defined by gender roles. Aztec women assumed a variety of roles. Peasant women helped in the fields, but their primary domain was the household, where child-rearing and cooking took up much time. Above all, weaving skill was highly regarded. The responsibility for training young girls fell on the older women. Marriages often were arranged between lineages, and virginity at marriage was highly regarded for young women. Polygamy existed among the nobility, but the peasants were monogamous. Aztec women could inherit property and pass it to their heirs. The rights of Aztec women seem to have been fully recognized, but in political and social life their role, although complementary to that of men, remained subordinate.

The technology of the Americas limited social development in a variety of ways. Here we can see a significant difference between the lives of women in Mesoamerica and in the Mediterranean world. In the maize-based economies of Mesoamerica, women spent six hours a day grinding corn by hand on stone boards, or *metates*, to prepare the household's food. Although similar hand techniques were used in ancient Egypt, they were eventually replaced by animal- or water-powered mills that turned wheat into flour. The miller or baker of Rome or medieval Europe could do the work of hundreds of women. Maize was among the simplest and most productive cereals to grow but among the most time-consuming to prepare. Without the wheel or suitable animals for power, the Indian civilizations were unable to free women from the 30 to 40 hours a week that went into preparing the basic food.

Finally, we must consider the size of the population of the Aztec state. Estimates have varied widely, from as little as 1.5 million to more than 25 million, but there is considerable evidence that population density was high, resulting in a total population that was far greater than previously



FIGURE 12.5 In the militarized society of the Aztec empire, warriors were organized into regiments and groups distinguished by their uniforms. They gained rank and respect by capturing enemies for sacrifice. Note the symbolic gripping of the defeated captives' hair as a sign of military success.



Read the Document on
MyHistoryLab: The Midwife
Addresses the Woman Who Has
Died in Childbirth—Anonymous

DOCUMENT

Aztec Women and Men

IN THE MID-16TH CENTURY, BERNARDINO DE Sahagún, a Spanish missionary, prepared an extraordinary encyclopedia of Aztec culture. His purpose was to gather this information to learn the customs and beliefs of the Indians and their language in order to better convert them. Although Sahagún hated the Indian religion, he came to admire many aspects of their culture. His *Florentine Codex: The General History of the Things of New Spain* is one of the first ethnographies and a remarkable compendium of Aztec culture. Sahagún used many Indian informants to tell him about the days before the European arrival, and even though this work dates from the postconquest era, it contains much useful information about earlier Aztec life.

In the following excerpts, the proper behavior for people in different roles in Aztec society are described by the Aztecs themselves.

FATHER

One's father is the source of lineage. He is the sincere one. One's father is diligent, solicitous, compassionate, sympathetic, a careful administrator of his household. He rears, he teaches others, he advises, he admonishes one. He is exemplary; he leads a model life. He stores up for himself; he stores up for others. He cares for his assets; he saves for others. He is thrifty; he saves for the future, teaches thrift. He regulates, distributes with care, establishes order.

The bad father is incompassionate, negligent, unreliable. He is unfeeling . . . a shirker, a loafer, a sullen worker.

MOTHER

One's mother has children; she suckles them. Sincere, vigilant, agile, she is an energetic worker—diligent, watchful, solicitous, full of anxiety. She teaches people; she is attentive to them. She caresses, she serves others; she is apprehensive for their welfare; she is careful, thrifty—constantly at work.

The bad mother is evil, dull, stupid, sleepy, lazy. She is a squanderer, a petty thief, a deceiver, a fraud. Unreliable, she is one who loses things through neglect or anger, who heeds no one. She is disrespectful, inconsiderate, disregarding, careless. She shows the way to disobedience; she expounds nonconformity.

THE RULERS

The ruler is a shelter—fierce, revered, famous, esteemed, well-reputed, renowned.

The good ruler is a protector: one who carries his subjects in his arms, who unites them, who brings them together. He rules, he takes responsibilities, assumes burdens. He carries his subjects in his cape; he bears them in his arms. He governs; he is obeyed. To him as a shelter, as refuge, there is recourse. . . .

The bad ruler is a wild beast, a demon of the air, an ocelot, a wolf—infamous, avoided, detested as a respecter of nothing. He terrifies with his gaze; he makes the earth rumble; he implants; he spreads fear. He is wished dead.

THE NOBLE

The noble has a mother, a father. He resembles his parents. The good noble is obedient, cooperative, a follower of his parents' ways, a discreet worker; attentive, willing. He follows the ways of his parents; he resembles his father; he becomes his father's successor; he assumes his lot.

One of noble lineage is a follower of the exemplary life, a taker of the good example of others, a seeker, a follower of the exemplary life. He speaks eloquently; he is soft-spoken, virtuous, deserving of gratitude. He is noble of heart, gentle of word, discreet, well-reared, well-taught. He is moderate, energetic, inquiring, inquisitive. He scratches the earth with a thorn. He is one who fasts, who starves his entrails, who parches his lips. He provides nourishment to others. He sustains one, he serves food, he provides comfort. He is a concealer [of himself], a belittler of himself. He magnifies and praises others. He is a mourner for the dead, a doer of penances, a gracious speaker, devout, godly, desirable, wanted, memorable.

The bad noble is ungrateful and forgetful, a debaser, a disparager of things, contemptuous of others, arrogant, bragging. He creates disorder, glories over his lineage, extols his own virtues.

THE MATURE COMMON WOMAN

The good mature woman is candid. She is resolute, firm of heart, constant—not to be dismayed; brave like a man; vigorous, resolute, persevering—not one to falter. She is long-suffering; she accepts reprimands calmly—endures things like a man. She becomes firm—takes courage. She is intent. She gives of herself. She goes in humility. She exerts herself.

The bad woman is thin, tottering, weak—an inconstant companion, unfriendly. She annoys others, chagrins them, shames, oppresses one. She becomes impatient; she loses hope, becomes embarrassed—chagrined. Evil is her life; she lives in shame.

THE WEAVER OF DESIGNS

She concerns herself with using thread, works with thread. The good weaver of designs is skilled—a maker of varicolored capes, an outliner of designs, a blender of colors, a joiner of pieces, a matcher of pieces, a person of good memory. She does things dexterously. She weaves designs. She selects. She weaves tightly. She forms borders. She forms the neck. . . .

The bad weaver of designs is untrained—silly, foolish, unob-servant, unskilled of hand, ignorant, stupid. She tangles the thread, she harms her work—she spoils it.

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THE PHYSICIAN

The physician is a knower of herbs, of roots, of trees, of stones; she is experienced in these. She is one who conducts examinations; she is a woman of experience, of trust, of professional skill; a counselor.

The good physician is a restorer, a provider of health, a relaxer—one who makes people feel well, who envelops one in ashes. She cures people; she provides them health; she lances them; she bleeds them . . . pierces them with an obsidian lancet.

QUESTIONS

- In what ways do the expectations for men and women differ in Aztec society?
- To what extent do the roles for men and women in Aztec society differ from our own?
- Did the Aztecs value the same characteristics as our own and other historical societies?

suspected. Some historical demographers estimate that the population of central Mexico under Aztec control reached over 20 million, excluding the Maya areas. This underlines the extraordinary ability of the Aztec state to intimidate and control such vast numbers of people.

A Tribute Empire

Each city-state was ruled by a speaker chosen from the nobility. The Great Speaker, the ruler of Tenochtitlan, was first among supposed equals. He was in effect the emperor, with great private wealth and public power, and was increasingly considered a living god. His court was magnificent and surrounded with elaborate rituals. Those who approached him could not look him in the eye and were required to throw dirt upon their heads as a sign of humility. In theory he was elected, but his election was really a choice between siblings of the same royal family. The prime minister held a position of tremendous power and usually was a close relative of the ruler. There was a governing council; in theory, the rulers of the other cities in the alliance also had a say in government, but in reality most power was in the hands of the Aztec ruler and his chief advisor.

During the century of greatest Aztec expansion after 1426, a social and political transformation had taken place. The position and nature of the old *calpulli* clans had changed radically, and a newly powerful nobility with a deified and nearly absolute ruler had emerged. The ancient cult of military virtues had been elevated to a supreme position as the religion of the state, and the double purpose of securing tribute for the state and obtaining victims for *Huitzilopochtli* drove further Aztec conquests.

The empire was never integrated, and local rulers often stayed in place to act as tribute collectors for the Aztec overlords. In many ways the Aztec empire was simply an expansion of long-existing Mesoamerican concepts and institutions of government, and it was not unlike the subject city-states over which it gained control. These city-states, in turn, were often left unchanged if they recognized Aztec supremacy and met their obligations of labor and tribute. Tribute payments served both an economic and a political function, concentrating power and wealth in the Aztec capital. Archeologists at the recent excavations of the Great Temple beneath the center of Mexico City have been impressed by the large number of offerings and objects that came from the farthest ends of the empire and beyond. At the frontiers, neighboring states such as that of the Tarascans of Michoacan in West Central Mexico preserved their freedom, while within the empire enclaves of independent kingdoms such as Tlaxcala (*tlaks-KAHL-uh*) maintained a fierce opposition to the Aztecs. There were many revolts against Aztec rule or a particular tribute burden, which the Aztecs often put down ruthlessly.

In general, the Aztec system was a success because it aimed at exerting political domination and not necessarily direct administrative or territorial control. In the long run, however, the increasing social stresses created by the rise of the nobles and the system of terror and tribute imposed on subject peoples were internal weaknesses that contributed to the Aztec empire's collapse.

The Aztecs were a continuation of the long process of civilization in Mesoamerica. The civilizations of the classic era did not simply disappear in central Mexico or among the Maya in Yucatan and Central America, but they were reinterpreted and adapted to new political and social realities. When Europeans arrived in Mexico, they assumed that what they found was the culmination of Indian civilization, when in fact it was the militarized afterglow of earlier achievements.

TWANTINSUYU: WORLD OF THE INCAS

After about 1300 c.e., the Inca empire emerged in the highlands of Peru and eventually spread its control over the whole region by integrating many ethnic groups into an extensive imperial state.

12.3 What were the principal causes of the expansion of the Inca empire?

Almost at the same time that the Aztecs extended their control over much of Mesoamerica, a great imperial state was rising in the Andean highlands, and it eventually became an empire some 3000 miles in extent (Map 12.2). The Inca empire incorporated many aspects of previous Andean cultures but fused them together in new ways. With a genius for state organization and bureaucratic control over peoples of different cultures and languages, it achieved a level of integration and domination previously unknown in the Americas.

Throughout the Andean cultural hearth, after the breakup of the large “intermediate horizon” states of Tihuanaco and Huari (c. 550–1000 c.e.), several smaller regional states continued to exercise some power. Unlike the breakdown of power that took place in postclassic Mesoamerica, in the Andean zone many large states continued to be important. Some states in the Andean highlands on the broad open areas near Lake Titicaca and the states along rivers on the north coast, such as those in the Moche valley, remained centers of agricultural activity and population density. This was a period of war between rival local chiefdoms and small states and in some ways was an Andean parallel to the post-Toltec militaristic era in Mesoamerica. Of these states, the coastal kingdom of Chimor, centered on its capital of Chan-Chan, emerged as the most powerful. Between 900 and its conquest by the Incas in 1465, it gained control of most of the north coast of Peru.

Pachacuti [PACH-uh-KOO-tee] Ruler of Inca society from 1438 to 1471; launched a series of military campaigns that gave Incas control of the region from Cuzco to the shores of Lake Titicaca.

ayllus [EYEL-lehs] Households in Andean societies that recognized some form of kinship; traced descent from some common, sometimes mythical ancestor.

The Inca Rise to Power

While Chimor spread its control over 600 miles of the coast, in the southern Andean highlands, where there were few large urban areas, ethnic groups and small states struggled over the legacy of Tihuanaco.

Among these groups were several related Quechua-speaking clans, or **ayllus**, living near Cuzco, an area that had been under the influence of Huari but had not been particularly important. Their own legends stated that 10 related clans emerged from caves in the region and were taken to Cuzco by a mythical leader. Wherever their origins, by about 1350 c.e. they lived in and around Cuzco, and by 1438 they had defeated their hostile neighbors in the area. At this point under their ruler, or *inca*, **Pachacuti** (r. 1438–1471), they launched a series of military alliances and campaigns that brought them control of the whole area from Cuzco to the shores of Lake Titicaca.

Over the next 60 years, Inca armies were constantly on the march, extending control over a vast territory. Pachacuti’s son and successor, Topac Yupanqui (TOH-pak YUH-pan-KEE), conquered the northern coastal kingdom of Chimor by seizing its irrigation system, and he extended Inca control into the southern area of what is now Ecuador. At the other end of the empire, Inca armies reached the Maule River in Chile against stiff resistance from the Araucanian Indians. The next ruler, Huayna Capac (WEYE-nah kah-PAHK) (r. 1493–1527), consolidated these conquests and suppressed rebellions on the frontiers. By the time of his death, the Inca Empire—or, as they called it, **Twantinsuyu**—stretched from what is now Colombia to Chile and eastward across Lake Titicaca and Bolivia to northern Argentina. Between 9 and 13 million people of different ethnic backgrounds and languages came under Inca rule, a remarkable feat, given the extent of the empire and the technology available for transportation and communication.

Conquest and Religion

What impelled the Inca conquest and expansion? The usual desire for economic gain and political power that we have seen in other empires is one possible explanation, but there may be others more in keeping with Inca culture and ideology. The cult of the ancestors was extremely important in Inca belief. Deceased rulers were mummified and then treated as intermediaries



MAP 12.2 **Inca Expansion** Each ruler expanded the empire in a series of campaigns to increase wealth and political control.

VISUALIZING THE PAST

Archeological Evidence of Political Practices

THE INCA SYSTEM OF SPLIT INHERITANCE probably originated in the Chimú kingdom. Chimú king lists recorded 10 rulers' names. Excavations at Chan-Chan, the Chimú capital, have revealed 10 large walled structures. Archeologists believe that each of these palatial compounds was a different king's residence and that each became a mausoleum for his mummy upon his death.

QUESTIONS

- To what extent does such evidence indicate the composite nature of Inca culture?
- What are some of the possible problems of archeological interpretation?
- To what extent can material remains be used to explain or illustrate social phenomena?



Chan-Chan covered more than 2 square miles. It contained palace compounds, storehouses, residences, markets, and other structures.



City of Chan-Chan.

with the gods, paraded in public during festivals, offered food and gifts, and consulted on important matters by special oracles. From the Chimor kingdom the Incas adopted the practice of royal **split inheritance**, whereby all the political power and titles of the ruler went to his successor but all his palaces, wealth, land, and possessions remained in the hands of his male descendants, who used them to support the cult of the dead Inca's mummy for eternity. To ensure his own cult and place for eternity, each new Inca needed to secure land and wealth, and these normally came as part of new conquests. In effect, the greater the number of past rulers, the greater the number of royal courts to support, and the greater the demand for labor, lands, and tribute. This system created a self-perpetuating need for expansion, tied directly to ancestor worship and the cult of the royal mummies, as well as tensions between the various royal lineages. The cult of the dead weighed heavily on the living.

Twantinsuyu [twahn-tihn-SOO-yoo] Word for Inca empire; region from present-day Colombia to Chile and eastward to northern Argentina.

split inheritance Inca practice of descent; all titles and political power went to successor, but wealth and land remained in hands of male descendants for support of cult of dead Inca's mummy.

Temple of the Sun Inca religious center located at Cuzco; center of state religion; held mummies of past Incas.

tambos Way stations used by Incas as inns and storehouses; supply centers for Inca armies on the move; relay points for system of runners used to carry messages.

mita Labor extracted for lands assigned to the state and the religion; all communities were expected to contribute; an essential aspect of Inca imperial control.

Inca political and social life was infused with religious meaning. Like the Aztecs, the Incas held the sun to be the highest deity and considered the Inca to be the sun's representative on earth. The magnificent **Temple of the Sun** in Cuzco was the center of the state religion, and in its confines the mummies of the past Incas were kept. The cult of the sun was spread throughout the empire, but the Incas did not prohibit the worship of local gods.

Other deities were also worshiped as part of the state religion. Viracocha (vee-reh-KOH-chuh), a creator god, was a favorite of Inca Pachacuti and remained important. Popular belief was based on a profound animism that endowed many natural phenomena with spiritual power. Mountains, stones, rivers, caves, tombs, and temples were considered *huacas*, or holy shrines. At these places, prayers were offered and animals, goods, and humans were sacrificed. In the Cuzco area, imaginary lines running from the Temple of the Sun organized the huacas into groups for which certain ayllus took responsibility. The temples were served by many priests and women dedicated to preparing cloth and food for sacrifice. The temple priests were responsible mainly for the great festivals and celebrations and for the divinations on which state actions often depended.

The Techniques of Inca Imperial Rule

The Inca were able to control their vast empire by using techniques and practices that ensured cooperation or subordination. The empire was ruled by the Inca, who was considered almost a god. He ruled from his court at Cuzco, which was also the site of the major temple; the high priest usually was a close relative. Twantinsuyu was divided into four great provinces, each under a governor, and then divided again. The Incas developed a state bureaucracy in which almost all nobles played a role. Although some chroniclers spoke of a state organization based on decimal units of 10,000, 1000, 100, and smaller numbers of households to mobilize taxes and labor, recent research reveals that many local practices and variations were allowed to continue under Inca rule. Local rulers, or *curacas*, were allowed to maintain their positions and were given privileges by the Inca in return for their loyalty. The curacas were exempt from tribute obligations and usually received labor or produce from those under their control. For insurance, the sons of conquered chieftains were taken to Cuzco for their education.

The Incas intentionally spread the Quechua (KEHCH-uh-wah) language as a means of integrating the empire. The Incas also made extensive use of colonists. Sometimes Quechua-speakers from Cuzco were settled in a newly won area to provide an example and a garrison. On other occasions, the Incas moved a conquered population to a new home. Throughout the empire, a complex system of roads was built, with bridges and causeways when needed (Map 12.3). Along these roads, way stations, or **tambos**, were placed about a day's walk apart to serve as inns, storehouses, and supply centers for Inca armies on the move. Tambos also served as relay points for the system of runners who carried messages throughout the empire. The Inca probably maintained more than 10,000 tambos.

The Inca empire extracted land and labor from subject populations. Conquered peoples were enlisted in the Inca armies under Inca officers and were rewarded with goods from new conquests. Subject peoples received access to goods not previously available to them, and the Inca state undertook large building and irrigation projects that formerly would have been impossible. In return, the Incas demanded loyalty and tribute. The state claimed all resources and redistributed them. The Incas divided conquered areas into lands for the people, lands for the state, and lands for the sun—that is, for religion and the support of priests. Also, some nobles held private estates.

With few exceptions the Incas, unlike the Aztecs, did not demand tribute in kind but rather exacted labor on the lands assigned to the state and the religion. Communities were expected to take turns working on state and church lands and sometimes on building projects or in mining. These labor turns, or **mita**, were an essential aspect of Inca control. In addition, the Inca required women to weave high-quality cloth for the court and for religious



MAP 12.3 The Ancient Cities of Peru The Inca system of roads, with its series of tambos, linked major towns and cities and allowed rapid communication and troop movement.

THINKING HISTORICALLY

The “Troubling” Civilizations of the Americas

FROM THE FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE peoples of the Americas, European concepts and judgments about civilization, barbarism, morality, power, politics, and justice were constantly called into question. The American Indian societies had many religious ideas and practices that shocked Christian observers, and aspects of their social and familial arrangements clashed with European sensibilities. Those sensibilities often were influenced by religious and political considerations. Many of those who most condemned human sacrifice, polygamy, or the despotism of Indian rulers were also those who tried to justify European conquest and control, mass violence, and theft on a continental scale. Other European voices also were heard. Not long after the Spanish conquests in the 16th century, defenders of Indian rights came forward to argue that despite certain “unfortunate” habits, Indian civilization was no less to be admired than that of the ancient (and pagan) Romans and Greeks.

For Western civilization, evaluating and judging non-Western or past societies has always been a complex business that has mixed elements of morality, politics, religion, and self-perception along with the record of what is observed or considered to be reality. That complexity is probably just as true for Chinese, Persian, or any culture trying to understand another. Still, Western society seems to have been particularly troubled by the American civilizations, with their peculiar combination of Neolithic technology and imperial organization. At times this has led to abhorrence and rejection—as of Aztec sacrifice—but at other times it has led to a kind of utopian romanticism in which the accomplishments of the Indian past are used as a critique of the present and a political program for the future.

The existence of **Inca socialism** is a case in point. Some early Spanish authors portrayed Inca rule as despotic, but others saw it as a kind of utopia. Shortly after the conquest of Peru, Garcilaso de la Vega, the son of a Spaniard and an Indian noblewoman, wrote a glowing history of his mother’s people in which he presented an image of the Inca empire as a carefully organized system in which every community contributed to the whole, and the state regulated the distribution of resources on the basis of need and reciprocity. There was some truth in this view, but it ignored some aspects of exploitation as well. In the 20th century, Peruvian socialists, faced with underdevelopment and social inequality in their country, used this utopian view of Inca society as a possible model for their own future. Their interpretation and that of historians who later wrote of Inca socialism tended to ignore the hierarchy in the Inca empire and the fact that the state extracted labor and goods from the subject communities to support the

nobles, who held extensive power. The utopian view of the Incas was no less political than the despotic view. Perhaps the lesson here is that what we see in the past often depends on what we think about the present or what we want for the future.

But if Inca socialism and despotism have fascinated students of the past, Aztec religion has caught the imagination of historians and the general public. It causes us to ask how a civilization as advanced as this could engage in a practice so cruel and, to us, so morally reprehensible. Perhaps nothing challenges our appreciation of the American civilizations more than the extensive evidence of ritual torture and human sacrifice, which among the Aztecs reached staggering proportions. On some occasions

thousands of people were slain, usually by having their hearts ripped out.

First, we must put these practices in perspective. Cruelty and violence can be found in many cultures, and to a world that has seen genocide, mass killings, and atomic warfare, the Aztec practices are not so different from what our own age has seen. Certain customs

in many past civilizations and present cultures seem to us strange, cruel, and immoral. We find Aztec human sacrifice particularly abhorrent, but such practices also were found among the ancient Canaanites and the Celtic peoples, and the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac, although its message is against such sacrifice, reflects a practice known in the ancient Near East. Human sacrifice was practiced in pre-Christian Scandinavia and ancient India. Although by the time of Confucius human sacrifice of wives and retainers at the burial of a ruler was no longer practiced in China, the custom had been known. Sati, the Hindu ritual suicide of the widow on the funeral pyre of her husband, existed in India in the 19th century, although admittedly it may have been exaggerated by the British colonial authorities. The Aztecs certainly were not alone in taking human life as a religious rite. Whatever our moral judgments about such customs, it remains the historian’s responsibility to understand them in the context of their own culture and time.

How have historians tried to explain or understand Aztec human sacrifice? Some defenders of Aztec culture have seen it as a limited phenomenon, greatly exaggerated by the Spanish for political purposes. Many scholars have seen it as a religious act central to the Aztec belief that humans must sacrifice that which was most precious to them—life—to receive the sun, rain, and other blessings of the gods that make life possible. Others have viewed Aztec practice as the intentional manipulation and expansion of a widespread phenomenon that had long existed among many American peoples. In other words, the Aztec rulers, priests,

Perhaps nothing challenges our appreciation of the American civilizations more than the extensive evidence of ritual torture and human sacrifice.

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and nobility used the cult of war and large-scale human sacrifice for political purposes, to terrorize their neighbors and subdue the lower classes. Another possible explanation is demographic. If central Mexico was as densely populated as we believe, then the sacrifices may have been a kind of population control.

Other interpretations have been even more startling. Anthropologist Marvin Harris has suggested that Aztec sacrifice, accompanied by ritual cannibalism, was a response to a lack of protein. He argued that in the Old World, human sacrifice was replaced by animal sacrifice, but in Mesoamerica, which lacked cattle and sheep, that transformation never took place. Harris called the Aztec empire a “cannibal kingdom.” Other scholars have strongly objected to Harris’s interpretation of the evidence, which gave little attention to the ritual aspects of these acts. Still, human sacrifice shades all assessments of Aztec civilization.

These debates ultimately raise important questions about the role of moral judgments in historical analysis and the way in which our vision of the past is influenced by our own political, moral, ethical, and social programs. We cannot and perhaps should not abandon those programs, but we must always try to understand other times and other peoples in their own terms.

QUESTIONS

- What special features of Aztec civilization must be explained?
- Are they really distinctive?
- What explanations are most persuasive in terms of historical sensitivity and contemporary standards?
- What features of 21st-century society are similar to those of Aztec civilization and will later need to be explained?

Inca socialism A view created by Spanish authors to describe Inca society as a type of utopia; image of the Inca empire as a carefully organized system in which every community collectively contributed to the whole.

purposes. The Incas provided the wool, but each household was required to produce cloth. Woven cloth, a great Andean art form, had political and religious significance. Some women were taken as concubines for the Inca; others were selected as servants at the temples, the so-called Virgins of the Sun. In all this, the Inca had an overall imperial system but remained sensitive to local variations, so that its application accommodated regional and ethnic differences.

In theory, each community aimed at self-sufficiency and depended on the state for goods it could not acquire easily. The ayllus of each community controlled the land, and the vast majority of the men were peasants and herders. Women worked in the fields, wove cloth, and cared for the household (Figure 12.6). Roles and obligations were gender-specific and, at least in theory, equal and interdependent. Andean peoples recognized parallel descent, so that property rights within the ayllus and among the nobility passed in both the male and female lines. Women passed rights and property to daughters, men to sons. Whether in pre-Inca times women may have served as leaders of ayllus is open to question, but under the Incas this seems to have been uncommon. The Inca emphasis on military virtues reinforced the inequality of men and women.

The concept of close cooperation between men and women was also reflected in the Inca view of the cosmos. Gods and goddesses were worshiped by men and women, but women felt a particular affinity for the moon and the goddesses of the earth and corn: the fertility deities. The Inca queen, the Inca’s senior wife (usually also a sister of the Inca), was seen as a link to the moon. Queen and sister of the sun, she represented imperial authority to all women. But despite an ideology of gender equality, Inca practice created a gender hierarchy that paralleled the dominance of the Inca state over subject peoples. This fact is supported, and the power of the empire over local ethnic groups is demonstrated, by the Incas’ ability to select the most beautiful young women to serve the temples or be given to the Inca.

The integration of imperial policy with regional and ethnic diversity was a political achievement. Ethnic headmen were left in place, but over them were administrators drawn from the Inca nobility in Cuzco. Reciprocity and hierarchy continued to characterize Andean groups as they came under Inca rule; reciprocity between the state and the local community was simply an added level. The Inca state could provide roads, irrigation projects, and hard-to-get goods. For example, maize usually was grown on irrigated land and was particularly important as a ritual crop. State-sponsored irrigation added to its cultivation. The Inca state manipulated the idea of reciprocity to extract labor power, and it dealt harshly with resistance and revolt. In addition to the ayllu peasantry, there was also a class of people, the **yanas**, who were removed from their ayllus and served permanently as servants, artisans, or workers for the Inca or the nobility.

Members of the Inca nobility were greatly privileged, and those related to the Inca himself held the highest positions. The nobility were all drawn from the 10 royal ayllus. In addition, the residents of Cuzco were given noble status to enable them to serve in high bureaucratic posts. The nobles were distinguished by dress and custom. Only they were entitled to wear the large ear

yanas A class of people within Inca society removed from their ayllus to serve permanently as servants, artisans, or workers for the Inca or the Inca nobility.

spools that enlarged the ears and caused the Spaniards to later call them *orejones*, or “big ears.” Noticeably absent in most of the Inca empire was a distinct merchant class. Unlike in Mesoamerica, where long-distance trade was so important, the Incas’ emphasis on self-sufficiency and state regulation of production and surplus limited trade. Only in the northern areas of the empire, in the chiefdoms of Ecuador, the last region brought under Inca control, did a specialized class of traders exist.

The Inca imperial system, which controlled an area of almost 3000 miles, was a stunning achievement of statecraft, but like all other empires it lasted only as long as it could control its subject populations and its own mechanisms of government. A system of royal multiple marriages as a way of forging alliances created rival claimants for power and the possibility of civil war. That is exactly what happened in the 1520s, just before the Europeans arrived. When the Spanish first arrived in Peru, they saw an empire weakened by civil strife.

Inca Cultural Achievements

The Incas drew on the artistic traditions of their Andean predecessors and the skills of subject peoples. Beautiful pottery and cloth were produced in specialized workshops. Inca metalworking was among the most advanced in the Americas, and Inca artisans worked gold and silver with great skill. The Incas also used copper and some bronze for weapons and tools. Like the Mesoamerican peoples, the Incas made no practical use of the wheel, but unlike them, they had no system of writing. However, the Incas did use a system of knotted strings, or **quipu**, to record numerical and perhaps other information. It worked like an abacus, and with it the Incas took censuses and kept financial records. The Incas had a passion for numerical order, and the population was divided into decimal units from which population, military enlistment, and work details could be calculated. The existence of so many traits associated with civilization in the Old World combined with the absence of a system of writing among the Incas illustrates the variations of human development and the dangers of becoming too attached to certain cultural characteristics or features in defining civilizations.

The Incas’ genius was best displayed in their land and water management, extensive road system, statecraft, and architecture and public buildings. They developed ingenious agricultural terraces on the steep slopes of the Andes, using a complex technology of irrigation to water their crops. The empire was linked together by almost 2500 miles of roads, many of which included rope suspension bridges over mountain gorges and rivers. Inca stonecutting was remarkably accurate; the best buildings were built of large fitted stones without the use of mortar. Some of these buildings were immense. These structures, the large agricultural terraces and irrigation projects, and the extensive system of roads were among the Incas’ greatest achievements, displaying their technical ability as well as their ability to mobilize large amounts of labor.

Comparing Incas and Aztecs

The Inca and the Aztec cultures were based on a long development of civilization that preceded them. Although in some areas of artistic and intellectual achievement earlier peoples had surpassed their accomplishments, both cultures represented the success of imperial and military organization. Both empires were based on intensive agriculture organized by a state that accumulated surplus production and then controlled the circulation of goods and their redistribution to groups or social classes, although the well-developed merchant class of Mesoamerica was mostly absent in the Inca realm. In both states, older kinship-based institutions, the *ayllu* and the *calpulli*, were transformed by the emergence of a social hierarchy in which the nobility was increasingly predominant. In both areas, these nobles also were the personnel of the state, so that the state organization was almost an image of society.



FIGURE 12.6 This Inca sculpture, made of gold, portrays one of the *mamaconas*, or “chosen women,” who served as concubines to the Inca emperors. The wool of her cloak is woven in a classic Inca design.

quipu [KEE-poo] System of knotted strings utilized by the Incas in place of a writing system; could contain numerical and other types of information for censuses and financial records.



View the **Closer Look** on **MyHistoryLab**: Machu Picchu

Although the Incas tried to create an overarching political state and to integrate their empire as a unit (the Aztecs did less in this regard), both empires recognized local ethnic groups and political leaders and allowed variation from one group or region to another as long as Inca or Aztec sovereignty was recognized and tribute paid. Both the Aztecs and the Incas, like the Spaniards who followed them, found that their military power was less effective against nomadic peoples who lived on their frontiers. Essentially, the empires were created by the conquest of sedentary agricultural peoples and the extraction of tribute and labor from them.

We cannot overlook the great differences between Mesoamerica and the Andean region in terms of climate and geography or the differences between the Inca and Aztec civilizations. Trade and markets were far more developed in the Aztec empire and earlier in Mesoamerica in general than in the Andean world. There were differences in metallurgy, writing systems, and social definition and hierarchy. But within the context of world civilizations, it is probably best to view these two empires and the cultural areas they represent as variations of similar patterns and processes, of which sedentary agriculture is the most important. Basic similarities underlying the variations can also be seen in systems of belief and cosmology and in social structure. Whether similar origins, direct or indirect contact between the areas, or parallel development in Mesoamerica and the Andean area explains the similarity is unknown. But the American Indian civilizations shared much with each other; that factor and their isolation from external cultural and biological influences gave them their peculiar character and their vulnerability. At the same time, their ability to survive the shock of conquest and contribute to the formation of societies after conquest demonstrates much of their strength. Long after the Aztec and Inca empires had ceased to exist, the peoples of the Andes and Mexico continued to draw on these cultural traditions.

The civilizations of Mesoamerica and the Andes, were high points of a Native American cultural achievement. However, the Americas continued to be occupied by a variety of peoples who lived in different ways, ranging from highly complex sedentary agricultural empires to simple kin-based bands of hunters and gatherers.

THE OTHER PEOPLES OF THE AMERICAS

12.4

What were the characteristic economic forms of American groups outside the two great imperial territories?

Rather than seeing a division between “primitive” and “civilized” peoples in the Americas, it is more useful to consider gradations of material culture and social complexity. Groups such as the Incas had many things in common with the tribal peoples of the Amazon basin, such as the division into clans or halves—that is, a division of villages or communities into two major groupings with mutually agreed-upon roles and obligations. Moreover, as we have seen, the diversity of ancient America forces us to reconsider ideas of human development based on Old World examples. Social complexity, for example, was not necessarily dependent on agriculture. In the Americas, some groups of fishers and hunters and gatherers, such as the peoples of the northwest coast of the United States and British Columbia, developed complex hierarchical societies. For those who see control of water for agriculture as the starting point for political authority and the state, such societies as the Pimas of Colorado and some of the chiefdoms of South America, who practiced irrigated agriculture but did not develop states, also provide exceptions to theories based on Old World evidence. Finally, archaeological finds in the Amazon now suggest that pottery and agriculture may have developed there even before it did in the Andean region.

How Many People?

A major issue that has fascinated students of the Americas for centuries is the question of population size. For years after the European conquests, many observers discounted the early descriptions of large and dense Indian populations as the exaggeration of conquerors and missionaries who wanted to make their own exploits seem more impressive. In the early 20th century, the most repeated estimate of Native American population about 1492 was 8.4 million (4 million in Mexico, 2 million in Peru, and 2.4 million in the rest of the hemisphere). Since that time, new archeological discoveries, a better understanding of the impact of disease on indigenous populations, new historical and demographic studies, and improved estimates of agricultural techniques and productivity have led to major revisions. Estimates still vary widely, and some have gone as high as 112 million at the time of contact. Most scholars agree that Mesoamerica and the Andes supported the largest populations. Table 12.1 summarizes one of the most careful estimates, which places the total figure at more than 67 million,

although a Native American demographer has increased this figure to 72 million. Other scholars are still unconvinced by these estimates.

These figures should be considered in a global context. In 1500, the population of the rest of the world was probably about 500 million, of which China and India each had 75 to 150 million people and Europe had 60 to 70 million, a figure roughly equivalent to the population of the Americas (Table 12.2). If the modern estimates are valid, the peoples of the Americas clearly made up a major segment of humanity.

Differing Cultural Patterns

Although it is impossible to summarize the variety of cultural patterns and lifeways that existed in the Americas on the eve of contact with Europeans, we can describe the major patterns outside the main civilization areas. Northern South America and part of Central America were an intermediate area that shared many features with the Andes and some with Mesoamerica and perhaps served as a point of cultural and material exchange between the two regions. In fact, with the exception of monumental architecture, the intermediate zone chieftainships resembled the sedentary agriculture states in many ways.

Similar kinds of chieftainships based on sedentary agriculture were found elsewhere in the Americas. There is strong evidence of large chieftainships along the Amazon, where the rich aquatic environment supported complex and perhaps hierarchical societies. The island Arawaks or Tainos encountered by Columbus on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola were farmers organized in a hierarchical society and divided into chiefdoms. These Indian chiefdom-level societies strongly resemble the societies of Polynesia. On the bigger Caribbean islands, such as Hispaniola and Puerto Rico, chieftainships ruled over dense populations, which lived primarily on the root crop called manioc.

Agriculture was spread widely throughout the Americas by 1500. Some peoples, such as those of the eastern North American woodlands and the coast of Brazil, combined agriculture with hunting and fishing. Techniques such as slash-and-burn farming led to the periodic movement of villages when production declined. Social organization in these societies often remained without strong class divisions, craft specializations, or the demographic density of people who practiced permanent, intensive agriculture. Unlike Europe, Asia, and Africa, the Americas lacked nomadic herders. However, throughout the Americas, from Tierra del Fuego to the Canadian forests, some people lived in small, mobile, kin-based groups of hunters and gatherers. Their material culture was simple and their societies were more egalitarian.

Nowhere is Native American diversity more apparent than in North America. In that vast continent, by 1500, perhaps as many as 200 languages were spoken, and a variety of cultures reflected Indian adaptation to different ecological situations. By that time, most concentrated towns of the Mississippian mound-builder cultures had been abandoned, and only a few groups in southeastern North America still maintained the social hierarchy and religious ideas of those earlier cultures. In the Southwest, descendants of the Anasazi and other cliff dwellers had taken up residence in the adobe pueblos mostly along the Rio Grande (Figure 12.7), where they practiced terracing and irrigation to support their agriculture. Their rich religious life, their artistic ceramic and weaving traditions, and their agricultural base reflected their own historical traditions.

Elsewhere in North America, most groups were hunters and gatherers or, like the Iroquois of the northeast or the Natchez of the southeast, combined those activities with some agriculture. Sometimes an environment was so rich that complex social organization and artistic specialization could develop without an agricultural base. This was the case among the Indians of the northwest coast, who depended on the rich resources of the sea. In other cases, technology was a limiting factor. The tough prairie grasses could not be farmed easily without metal plows, nor could the buffalo be hunted effectively before Europeans introduced the horse. Thus, the Great Plains were only sparsely occupied.

TABLE 12.1 Population Estimate for the Western Hemisphere, 1492

Area	Population (thousands)
North America	4,400
Mexico	21,400
Central America	5,650
Caribbean	5,850
Andes	11,500
Lowland South America	18,500
Total	67,300

SOURCES: William M. Deneven, *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492* (1976), 289–292; John D. Durand, "Historical Estimates of World Population," *Population and Development Review* 3 (1957): 253–296; Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival* (1987).

TABLE 12.2 World Population, c. 1500

Area	Population (thousands)
China	100,000–150,000
Indian subcontinent	75,000–150,000
Southwest Asia	20,000–30,000
Japan	15,000–20,000
Rest of Asia (except Russia)	15,000–30,000
Europe (except Russia)	60,000–70,000
Russia (USSR)	10,000–18,000
Northern Africa	6,000–12,000
Rest of Africa	30,000–60,000
Oceania	1,000–2,000
Americas	57,000–72,000
Total	389,000–614,000

SOURCES: William M. Deneven, *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492* (1976), 289–292; John D. Durand, "Historical Estimates of World Population," *Population and Development Review* 3 (1957): 253–296; Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival* (1987).



View the Map on
MyHistoryLab: Pre-Columbian
Societies of the Americas



Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, "Indians of the Rio Grande"



FIGURE 12.7 Taos Pueblo, in the foothills of what is now New Mexico. The pueblos of the Rio Grande Valley were based on agriculture and the concentration of population in urban areas. This reflected a number of the traditions of the older Native American cultures of the southwestern United States.

Finally, we should note that although there was great variation among the Indian cultures, some aspects stood in contrast to contemporary societies in Europe and Asia. With the exception of the state systems of Mesoamerica and the Andes, most Indian societies were strongly kin-based. Communal action and ownership of resources, such as land and hunting grounds, were emphasized, and material wealth often was disregarded or placed in a ritual or religious context. It was not that these societies were necessarily egalitarian but rather that ranking usually was not based on wealth. Although often subordinate, women in some societies held important political and social roles and usually played a central role in crop production. Indians tended to view themselves as part of the ecological system and not in control of it, balancing their hunting or farming with existing resources. These attitudes stood in marked contrast to those of many contemporary European and Asian civilizations.

American Diversity in World Context

By the end of the 15th century, two great imperial systems had risen to dominate the two major centers of civilization in Mesoamerica and the Andes. Both empires were built on the achievements of their predecessors, and both reflected a militaristic phase in their area's development. These empires proved to be fragile, weakened by internal strains and the conflicts that any imperial system creates but also limited by their technological inferiority.

The Aztec and Inca empires were one end of a continuum of cultures that went from the most simple to the most complex. The Americas contained a broad range of societies, from great civilizations with millions of people to small bands of hunters. In many of these societies, religion played a dominant role in defining the relationship between people and their environment and between the individual and society. How these societies would have developed and what course the American civilizations might have taken in continued isolation remain interesting and unanswerable questions. The first European observers were simultaneously shocked by the "primitive" tribespeople and astounded by the wealth and accomplishments of civilizations such as that of the Aztecs. Europeans generally saw the Indians as curiously backward. In comparison with Europe and Asia, the Americas did seem strange—more like ancient Babylon or Egypt than contemporary China or Europe—except that without the wheel, large domesticated animals, the plow, and to a large extent metal tools and written languages, even that comparison is misleading. The isolation of the Americas had remained important in physical and cultural terms, but that isolation came to an end in 1492, with disastrous results.

Global Connections

THE AMERICAS AND THE WORLD

Conditions in the Americas before 1492 reveal the importance of global connections in Afro-Eurasia and the absence of such connections in the Americas. American isolation from effective global connections is exhibited by the absence of key technologies, like ironworking and the wheel, that would have been easily transmitted had contacts been available. American isolation shows in the absence of the standard range of domesticated animals. It would show, tragically, in the absence

of any immunity to some of the common contagious diseases of Afro-Eurasia.

The absence of several features that had become normal in Afro-Eurasia must be stated carefully. It should not detract from the impressive economic, cultural, and political achievements of the key American Indian civilizations, including their ability (particularly in Mesoamerica) to sustain dense populations. It should not obscure the heritage of these societies to later patterns in the Americas. The comparative distinctions that resulted from lack of wider contact would count only when the Americas were forced into new global connections after 1492—but then they mattered greatly.

Further Readings

Charles C. Mann, *1491* (2005) provides a well-written overview of many aspects of Native American cultures and accomplishments. Mary Miller, *Art of Mesoamerica: From Olmec to Aztec* (2006) surveys evidence from archaeology and art history. Friedrich Katz's *The Ancient Civilizations of the Americas*, 2nd revised ed. (1997), provides the best overall survey that compares Mesoamerica and Peru. It traces the rise of civilization in both areas. Michael Coe et al., *Atlas of Ancient America* (1986), include excellent maps, illustrations, and an intelligent and comprehensive text.

The literature on the Aztecs continues to grow rapidly. Bernardino de Sahagún's *Florentine Codex: The General History of the Things of New Spain*, ed. and trans. Charles Dibble and Arthur J. O. Anderson, 12 vols. (1950–1968), is a fundamental source that most scholars still use as a starting point. Good overviews are provided by Frances Berdan's *The Aztecs of Central Mexico: An Imperial Society*, 2nd ed. (2005) and Michael E. Smith, *The Aztecs* (2012). Miguel Leon-Portilla's *Fifteen Aztec Poets* (1992) deals with religion and philosophy in a sympathetic way while David Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers* (1990) tries to integrate archaeology into an understanding of the Mesoamerican cosmology. Elizabeth Boone, *Stories in Red and Black: Pictorial Histories of the Aztecs and Mixtecs* (2000) discusses with writing systems while Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare* (1988), examines their military organization, and Inga Clendinnen, *The Cost of Courage in Aztec Society* (2010), provides thoughtful essays on their philosophy of war. Susan D. Gillespie, *The Aztec Kings* (1989), views Aztec history in terms of myth. Manuel Aguilar-Moreno, *Handbook to Life in the Aztec World* (2006), is a useful encyclopedia on many aspects of Aztec culture.

On Peru, a good overview through solid scholarly articles is provided in Richard W. Keatinge, ed., *Peruvian Prehistory* (1988). The article on Inca archeology by Craig Morris is especially helpful. Also useful is Michael Moseley, *The Incas and Their Ancestors* (1992). Art and archeology are the focus of Rebecca Stone Miller,

Art of the Andes from Chavín to Inca (1995). María Rostoworowski de Diez Canseco, *History of the Inca Realm* (1996), integrates historical and archeological sources, while Juan de Betanzos, *Narrative of the Incas* (1996), makes a classic available to modern readers. Terence D'altroy, *The Incas* (2002), integrates anthropology and archaeology. John Murra's classic *The Economic Organization of the Inca State* (1980) has influenced much thinking about the Incas. J. Hyslop's *The Inca Road System* (1984) examines the building and function of the road network. The work of Gary Urton, *The History of a Myth: Pacariqtambo and the Origin of the Inka* (1990), and Frank Salomon, *The Code Keepers* (2004), on the quipus show how ethnohistory is deepening our understanding of Inca society. Interesting social history is now being done. Irene Silverblatt's *Moon, Sun, and Witches: Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca and Colonial Peru* (1987) is a controversial book on the position of women before, during, and after the Inca rise to power. Brian S. Bauer, *The Development of the Inca State* (1996), offers a new interpretation of government and rule.

In Geoffrey W. Conrad and Arthur A. Demerest's *Religion and Empire: The Dynamics of Aztec and Inca Expansionism* (1984), two archeologists compare the political systems of the two empires and the motivations for expansion. The authors find more similarities than differences. On the native peoples who lived north of Mesoamerica there is an extensive literature. Colin G. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count* (2003), provides an excellent and up-to-date overview while Linda Cordell, *Ancient Pueblo Peoples* (1994), and George Miner, *The Moundbuilders: Ancient Peoples of Eastern North America* (2004), provide more detail. Carroll L. Riley, *Becoming Aztlan: Mesoamerican Influence in the Greater Southwest, AD 1200–1500* (2005) weighs the evidence on the possible ties between Mesoamerica and the Anasazi and other groups. Timothy R. Pauketat, *Cahokia. Ancient America's Great City on the Mississippi* (2009), is a good starting point on Mississippian cultures that suggests inspiration from Mesoamerica. Finally, on the question of the populations of the Americas, see Noble D. Cook, *Born to Die* (1998), which tries to establish the populations when post-1492 contact took place.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the Aztec empire?
2. What were the main similarities and differences between the Aztec and Inca empires?
3. What are the key issues involved in trying to understand Aztec religious practices?
4. What were the most important differences between Central American and Andean civilizations; and the major societies of Africa, Asia and Europe during the postclassical period?