The Colonizer's Model of the World

Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History

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THE GUILFORD PRESS
New York / London

Acknowledgments

Many people contributed in many important ways to the writing of this book. Peter Taylor and Wilbur Zelinsky gave me great encouragement and wise counsel (not always heeded) during the years that I have been struggling with the issues and ideas discussed here. Among many others who contributed immensely to the book, and are happily given credit for many of the ideas it contains (the good ideas, not the errors), I wish particularly to mention Abdul Alkalimat, Samir Amin, William Denevan, Loida Figueroa, Andre Gunder Frank, William Loren Katz, José López, Kent Mathewson, Antonio Ríos-Bustamante, América Sorrentini de Blaut, and Ben Wisner. Over the years many other people have set me to thinking about the problems discussed in the book and have shown me the answers to some of these problems. Among these friends, teachers, and students, I would like to mention Chao-li Chi, Ghazi Falah, Fred Hardy, Fred Kniffen, Juan Mari Brás, Francis Mark, Sidney Mintz, Ng Hong, Doris Pizarro, Randolph Rawlins, Anselme Rémy, Waldo Rodríguez, Digna Sánchez, Howard Stanton, David Stea, and Lakshman Yapa. Peter Wissoker and Anna Brackett edited the book with patience and skill. A number of paragraphs in Chapters 3 and 4 and one in Chapter 2 are taken from an article in *Political Geography* (Blaut 1992b), and are reproduced here with the kind permission of the publisher of that journal, Butterworth-Heinemann.

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CHAPTER 1

History Inside Out

THE ARGUMENT

The purpose of this book is to undermine one of the most powerful beliefs of our time concerning world history and world geography. This belief is the notion that European civilization—"The West"—has had some unique historical advantage, some special quality of race or culture or environment or mind or spirit, which gives this human community a permanent superiority over all other communities, at all times in history and down to the present.

The belief is both historical and geographical. Europeans are seen as the "makers of history." Europe eternally advances, progresses, modernizes. The rest of the world advances more sluggishly, or stagnates: it is "traditional society." Therefore, the world has a permanent geographical center and a permanent periphery: an Inside and an Outside. Inside leads, Outside lags. Inside innovates, Outside imitates.

This belief is *diffusionism*, or more precisely *Eurocentric diffusionism*. It is a theory about the way cultural processes tend to move over the surface of the world as a whole. They tend to flow out of the European sector and toward the non-European sector. This is the natural, normal, logical, and ethical flow of culture, of innovation, of human causality. Europe, eternally, is Inside. Non-Europe is Outside. Europe is the source of most diffusions; non-Europe is the recipient.[1]

Diffusionism lies at the very root of historical and geographical scholarship. Some parts of the belief have been questioned in recent years, but its most fundamental tenets remain unchallenged, and so the belief as a whole has not been uprooted or very much weakened by modern scholarship.

The most important tenet of diffusionism is the theory of "the

CHAPTER 3

Before 1492

In this chapter and the following one I will argue three broad propositions.

1. Prior to 1492, the progress toward modernization and capitalism which was taking place in parts of Europe was also taking place in parts of Asia and Africa. The basic process was hemispheric in scale. It was a process of change out of a precapitalist, agrarian form of class-structured society and toward a primitive form of capitalism. There was nothing teleological about this process; it was not some sort of evolutionary striving toward a foreordained goal, capitalist society. Merely, I argue, whatever happened in Europe *also* happened in other parts of the Eastern Hemisphere. I will use the word "feudalism" to describe the class-structured agrarian societies of Africa and Asia as well as Europe (and will give my reasons for using this word in this way). The later, emerging formation I will call "protocapitalism." In 1492, it is likely that more than half of each continent in the Eastern Hemisphere was basically dominated by a feudal social formation. Protocapitalist centers were rising in various parts of all three continents, and were interconnected in a single web or network, stretching from western Europe to southern Africa to eastern Asia.

2. This hemisphere-wide system began to break apart shortly after 1492, because of the wealth and power acquired by Europeans in America. America was conquered by Europeans, not by Asians or Africans, because of Europe's location on the globe, not because of any European superiority in level or rate of development or "potential" for development.

3. The massive flow of wealth into Europe from colonial accumulation in America and later in Asia and Africa was the one basic force that explains the fact that Europe became transformed rapidly into a capitalist society, and the complementary fact that Asian and African protocapitalist centers began to decline first in relative and then in absolute importance. Development began in Europe and underdevelopment began elsewhere. Many processes internal to Europe were important causes of change, of development, in that continent, but the one basic process, which ignited and then continuously fueled the transformation, was the wealth from colonialism.

The first proposition is the topic of the present chapter; the second and third are the topics of Chapter 4.

I will not and cannot demonstrate the truth of these propositions. I will simply present a substantial amount of evidence that supports them, and will show that the propositions fit in with other known facts in a coherent theory—a theory that, I suggest, makes sense. That is as far toward "demonstration of truth" as I can go, given the evidence of which I have knowledge and the amount of detailed argumentation that can be squeezed into this chapter. Some parts of this argument (such as the pre-1492 development of Africa) will theorize well beyond the available evidence, because, in my view, the facts needed to confirm or disconfirm these parts of the argument have not yet been obtained, have not yet been sought with sufficient diligence by diffusionist scholarship. For the most part, however, the theorizing will be grounded in strong empirical evidence. In addition to this evidence, there is the weight of evidence presented in the last chapter *against* various opposing theories, those that *deny* the importance of non-Europe before and after 1492. This has given us, so to speak, a level playing field for considering the issues to be discussed below.

MEDIEVAL LANDSCAPES

Before 1492, the various civilizations of Asia, Africa, and Europe were very different from one another in many ways, but they were very like one another in other ways. I believe that the ways in which they were different did not have significance for cultural evolution.[1] In Chapter 2 I outlined various theories that claim that particular differences between Europe and other civilizations *do* explain the unique rise of Europe, and I tried to show that these theories are unconvincing. In the following discussion I will deal with some parts of culture that clearly are crucial for cultural evolution, and I will try to show that the patterns found in medieval Europe were *not* significantly different from the patterns found in other civilizations. I will argue that modes of production, class structures, systems of spatial exchange, and urbanization were broadly similar across

many civilizations, were evolving in much the same way, and to some extent were parts of a common hemisphere-wide process.

During the century or so preceding 1492, most of humanity lived in class-stratified agricultural societies. The great majority of people in these societies were peasant farmers, producing their own subsistence and forced to deliver a significant share of their output (or labor, or cash income) to an elite, or ruling class, a class that usually held claim to the land and almost always held both formal and real power over the peasants. What I have described here is a mode of production, that is, a complex of traits including material resources such as land, material culture (tools and the like), labor employed in production and distribution, social rules governing access to material resources and distribution of the output, and some related traits. For medieval Europe this mode of production is called "feudal." It is part of a larger concept, "feudal society." One of the important features of European feudal society was the nature of states and political power. Another was the culture of the landlord class, with its titles, its chivalry, and the rest. A third was the importance, in some regions and epochs, of serfdom. But underlying (or at any rate accompanying) these features was the general fact of feudalism as a mode of production, a landlord–peasant, class-stratified, agricultural society in which the landlord class was fed by surplus extracted (always with some degree of force) from peasant producers. This mode of production, with variations, was also a basic feature of almost all of the other class-stratified agricultural societies of the Eastern Hemisphere.[2] I will therefore use the term "feudal mode of production" for all such societies.

Others have used the term in this way but have encountered various important objections. Those scholars who insist that the peculiarly European features are, indeed, the evolutionary engines of change will naturally reject the description of other sorts of society as "feudal." Max Weber, for instance, thought that European feudal estates were unique and were crucial causes (or conditions) of progress. Those Marxists who consider serfdom to be a crucial feature in evolutionary terms would not want to use the term "feudalism" for societies that did not have serfdom (although many outside of Europe did).[3] Samir Amin rejects this broad usage of the term "feudalism," on the grounds that it tends to require of us that we use European feudalism as a model against which to measure other similar societies in other continents. Therefore, he prefers the term "tributary" to the term "feudal," arguing, correctly, that the various forms of surplus extraction in this mode of production (tax and rent; cash, labor, and product) can be assimilated to the concept of tribute paying.[4] My view is that Eurocentric historians do not have a copyright on the term "feudalism" and so it is not only valid but also in a sense just to use this

term for the mode of production wherever we observe it, in any continent and any social formation. There remain other objections. What of the small urbanized societies found here and there across the map during this period? We will come to this matter in a later section of the chapter. How should we describe societies that are very aberrant from the basic landlord–peasant model? What about class-stratified pastoral societies? What about the class-stratified societies in which there is kinship linkage between producing class and ruling class? These matters of definition are important and I will try to deal with them in the context of the discussion.

There are many unanswered questions about the origins and evolution both of agriculture and of the feudal mode of production. Until recently most scholars believed that agriculture, class stratification, and many other attributes of civilization had originated in the ancient Near and Middle East. (We discussed this in Chapter 1.) Given this set of propositions, combined with explicit and implicit beliefs about the cultural backwardness and unprogressiveness of Asians and Africans, it was almost axiomatic that the agricultural landscapes of feudal Europe must have attained a qualitatively higher level of development—or, alternatively, must have had greater potential for rapid change—than those of many parts, and perhaps all parts, of medieval Asia and Africa. It seemed logical to believe that agriculture as such was still in the process of diffusing outward in some peripheral parts of the hemisphere during that period. For instance, as we noted in Chapter 2, historians tended to believe that most of southern Africa was "preagricultural" even in early modern times. Scholars speculated, and legitimately so given the basic model, as to the dates when agriculture in general, and each form of domesticated plant and animal in particular, had first reached each peripheral region in the general diffusion process.

This model began to crumble fairly recently. Very early dates for the Agricultural (Neolithic) Revolution began to appear for parts of Southeast Asia, dates of perhaps 9,000 years ago (the generally accepted idea is that agriculture in the Middle East is 10–12,000 years old). Pottery seemed to be just about that old in northeastern Asia and Japan. Soon afterward, very early dates for agriculture emerged for India, New Guinea, and other regions.[5] Today, although the majority view still seems to be that agriculture first arose in the Middle East, very many scholars believe otherwise. Many argue for independent and perhaps simultaneous origins in the Middle East and Southeast Asia; some would add West Africa. But it is also possible that the Agricultural Revolution occurred everywhere more or less at once.[6] By this I mean that the complex of crops, animals, tools, and ideas was being developed in many societies simultaneously

(probably over a very long period), and each new trait tended to diffuse rapidly to those other parts of the hemisphere in which such a trait was a useful innovation, in an overall process that I call "criss-cross diffusion." This process gradually built up an agricultural landscape over a vast region of the hemisphere, extending (with unimportant gaps) across the entire swathe of tropical and midlatitude lands possessing moderately favorably climate and soil.[7]

In any event, it is now generally accepted that the diffusion of agriculture took place fairly long ago and by the Middle Ages agriculture had reached most of those regions in the Eastern Hemisphere in which environmental conditions are favorable for farming. Agriculture was still spreading at this time, but it could no longer be considered the Agricultural Revolution. Farming had been pushed poleward to a point not far short of its present latitudinal limits. In the Western Hemisphere the northern limit of maize in 1492 was not far south of the present limit of grain cultivation in central Canada. In both hemispheres almost all of the crops and livestock types that are important today had already been domesticated, although varietal improvement was still going on. As a generalization, it can be argued that each agricultural region had by this time selected for itself, from the long list of hemispheric domesticates, the combination of crops and stock best suited to its environmental conditions and cultures; most groups of related domesticated crop forms in any one part of the hemisphere were also known in many other parts.

One very dramatic bit of evidence in this matter was the swift spread of Western Hemisphere crops through the Eastern Hemisphere after 1492. This extremely rapid diffusion of maize, cassava, tobacco, sweet potato, white potato, and other crops, and the rapid way in which these domesticates became culturally important, shows how rapidly the diffusion of domesticates would occur when the process was one of the diffusion of previously unknown innovations: we can assume that most Eastern Hemisphere domesticates were no longer diffusing very rapidly. Where agriculture was spreading, it was taking place mainly in peripheral zones such as highlands, some forested regions, and remote islands, as a result mainly of social processes like migration, conquest, and land shortage.[8] In the years before 1492, agriculture was practiced, from southern Africa to northern Europe, northern Asia, southeastern Asia, and most regions of the Pacific Ocean, including Hawaii. For the most part, cultures we would describe as "nonagricultural" had chosen not to practice farming; they were not, therefore, "preagricultural."[9]

Probably the same holds true for the more complex forms of agricultural technology. The knowledge of irrigation, the plow, the use of fertilizers, complex rotations (including fallowless rotations), and other

features of intensive agriculture had probably diffused by this time to all those parts of the agricultural landscape where farmers found it desirable to use them, either to increase output, to reduce labor requirements, to meet the demand for surplus delivery, or for any cultural reason whatever.[10] I would take the argument even a step farther. Throughout most of this landscape the diffusion of significant innovations had gone so far that the productivity of human labor was hardly ever limited by lack of technical knowledge of a kind available to other farmers in some other part of the hemisphere.[11] But this is speculation.

Agricultural societies are not always class stratified. But there is abundant evidence that most agricultural regions across the hemisphere displayed, in this period, a combination of agriculture and the landlord–peasant system of stratification, thus a mode of production I label "feudal." This point will be contested on two grounds. One of the objections, commonly heard from (some) Marxists, argues that medieval non-European agricultural modes of production were somehow lacking in the potential for change that we associate with the European feudal mode. This argument (the "Asiatic mode of production," "Oriental despotism," etc.) was discussed sufficiently in Chapter 2.

The second difficulty is a matter of the spatial pattern. Where, on the map of the medieval Eastern Hemisphere, do we find class-stratified agricultural societies, and where do we find classless agricultural societies? The answer must be given in two parts. First, we know beyond dispute that the class-stratified mode was dominant in nearly all agricultural regions of Asia, with clear patterns of landlord–peasant conflict. Arguments tend to focus on Africa. But there is little doubt that the landlord–peasant exploitative relation was dominant in much of northeastern Africa (for example, Ethiopia), the Sudanic zone from the Atlantic east beyond Lake Chad, some parts of the Lake Region of East Africa, southeastern Africa around the Zimbabwe imperial zone, and part of coastal East Africa. It is now known, also, that many of the forest-zone and dry-forest-zone states of West and Central Africa (Akan, Yoruba, Congo, and so forth), displayed this mode of production or something very like it, and research on the historical geography of this large region has just, in essence, begun.[12] Therefore the map of the feudal mode of production in Africa is very extensive. Second, I would argue (following Samir Amin) that nearly all state-organized societies were class societies, that the medieval state functioned in a tight relationship to the exploitative process and ruling-class politics. More than half of medieval Africa, in terms of area and population, was state-organized and therefore, I reason, more or less class stratified. I conclude, from this very sketchy examination of the medieval spatial patterns of agriculture, technically

complex agriculture, and class, that the feudal mode of production dominated more than half of Africa, Europe, and Asia, and some parts of Oceania, in this period.

The ruling class in feudal societies is, almost everywhere, a landlord class, although the control of land by this class may take any of several legal forms. Some members of this class are bedecked with titles, but the distinction between nobility and gentry is not crucial in evolutionary terms and both forms (as well as others) were widespread across the hemisphere.[13] This class is, after all, self-perpetuating, and it may use inherited titles as a signal of class membership or it may use other devices to the same effect, or both. Indeed, membership in the nontitled gentry may, as in China at various times, improve a family's chances of retaining ruling-class status and wealth amid the changing winds of state politics. Nor is the distinction critical, in this context, between higher and lower grades of nobility, and between landlords and government officials (who likewise derive their wealth from land). As we discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, there is no substance to the traditional view that the European medieval landlord class somehow was closer to pure private land ownership than were the landlord classes of other places. Marx was wrong in accepting this traditional view, because he knew little about non-European class structures. Weber, likewise, was wrong in drawing a sharp distinction between the supposedly European pattern of seigneurial tenure, with land held firmly by the landlord under some sort of arrangement with higher-order lords and kings, and the "service tenures" which he thought to be characteristic of most other societies.

The distinction between hereditary and service tenures is very fuzzy. In Europe, service tenure was the typical form in strict terms (with grants conditional upon pledges of fealty, military support, etc.), but grants tended to become hereditary. Broadly, the same held true in other societies. Holders of fiefs or grants on service tenure might move from fief to fief (or hold a changing portfolio of fiefs), but the important point is that class membership permitted one to *hold* a fief, and to draw one's wealth from it (and its occupants), so long as one retained membership in the ruling class. In a crucial sense, property is private so long as an individual or kin group continues to hold valid control, and this was the case in many regions, in spite of periodic upheavals and replacements. But land can be called private in another sense, that of its value in a land market. But this implies a basically (or nearly) capitalist situation, found only in a few highly commercialized rural regions, European and non-European, before 1492.[14] The Chinese gentry, the Hindu fief-holders, even the Mughal *jagirdars* who had been granted fiefs on service tenure and quickly farmed them out, or converted them into private,

heritable property, all displayed the classic features of a feudal landlord class.[15] The European feudal-era landlord class was not more advanced, more ready (as it were) for capitalism and modernity, than the landlord classes in many other regions.

The so-called European manorial system is sometimes said to have been a distinguishing feature of feudalism, a peculiarly European giant step toward private ownership and large-scale labor use, something largely absent from non-European areas and critical in the evolution toward capitalism. Large estates were widespread across the hemisphere, but the special organizational form of demesne farming by unpaid peasant labor was found in fewer areas. The manorial system in the narrow sense of the term, including coordinated demesne farming with corvée labor in gangs as well as peasant holdings, and with some manufacture along with agricultural production on the manor, was found in several areas outside of Europe. It was important in China and in southern India.[16] But demesne farming was not dominant throughout Europe (it was uncommon in the Mediterranean zone), bore no resemblance to capitalist agriculture, and in any case had nearly died out in western Europe by the fourteenth century. Hence the relatively stronger development of this trait in Europe than most other regions (such as northern India) cannot account for the transition, much later, to capitalism in one area and not the others.

Related to this question is the old European misdefinition of Indian villages, unfortunately accepted by Marx, as closed, corporate entities (hence, for Marx, as survivals of primitive communal society). The medieval Indian village did indeed have corporate characteristics; it did have communal control of usufruct (though not, apparently, communal ownership); and it did display the tight combination of farming and handicrafts which Marx found to be highly significant and seemed, to him, to explain the cohesiveness of the village, its ability to remain unchanged in the face of external shocks from colonial capitalism, yet, by the same token, to resist social transformation. But European villages also retained certain corporate characteristics, perhaps even more pronounced than those of Hindu villages, where caste communities correlated very poorly with village settlement patterns.[17] In this matter we may be confronting the classic error of telescoping history, perceiving the breakup of the European village *after* the rise of capitalism, and assuming therefore that these villages had been dissolving as corporate entities many centuries earlier. Furthermore, communal land ownership was relatively unimportant in this period for both India and Europe; the villages normally held only delegated rights (including the right to common land), which could be and sometimes were violated by

landlords. The true owners of most of the productive land, holders of hereditary and transferrable estates, were, in both areas, the ruling class. Finally, the combination of agriculture and handicrafts was also present in European villages.[18] Apparently it dissolved well after 1492 with the rise of capitalism. In sum, although Indian feudalism was in no sense identical to the European variety (or varieties), it bore the same general characteristics as a mode of production and the same potential for evolution toward capitalism. This argument can probably be made also for many regions of Asia and Africa. The medieval European village seems not to have been very unusual among the array of village settlement and social forms across the hemisphere.

The producing class in feudalism consists, usually, of peasants, who farm the landlord's estate in household-scale units and provide labor, produce, or cash as rent. Serfdom is often thought to be the characteristic labor form of feudalism, on the European model.[19] Serfs of the basically European sort were indeed found here and there in Africa and Asia, although the specific history of enserfment in late-Roman Europe was unique and its legal form was rarely encountered elsewhere. What we find, rather, is a panorama of forms of unfree labor, that is, labor of peasants tied somehow to the landlord's estate, through all three continents.[20] On the other hand, some scholars (among them Brenner, a Marxist, and Baechler, a conservative) rather idealize the European peasant of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in western Europe and see in that person a freehold farmer, imbued with the entrepreneurial spirit and so forth.[21] This is again a telescoping of history. Those peasants were tenants, still tied to estates in manifold ways; not until later times, well after 1492, was there a strong emergence of an important freehold, capital-accumulating, kulak-style class, ready for rural capitalism. The European peasant was not particularly unusual. Peasants who were forced to give labor service, or product, or cash, as rent or tribute or tax (paid to the landlord), who were not free to move from the landlord's domain, and whose status was inherited by later generations, were found in many parts of medieval Asia and Africa as well as Europe.

There was a measure of interconnectedness among the feudal agricultural societies, enough to suggest that we should think of the whole hemisphere-wide zone of class-based agricultural societies not as separate social entities but as a single feudal landscape with regional variations that sometimes included sharp boundaries and sometimes did not. Clearly there was a great deal of criss-cross diffusion among these regions, as evidence, for instance, the commonality of agricultural techniques over large areas. (The claim made by some European historians,[22] that medieval European agriculture was unique in

technological level and thus somehow ignited progress toward capitalism, is invalid, as we discussed in Chapter 2. European agriculture shared most traits with other regions and was not uniquely advanced or peculiarly pregnant with social change.) It seems likely that the evolution of feudalism over much of the hemispheric landscape involved a steady deepening of the oppression on peasants, as more and more surplus was demanded, and the response by peasants included technological development and borrowing (diffusion), as well as migration toward peripheral regions and toward towns. At the same time, the ruling classes, as they exhausted the potential of their own subjects to increase surplus delivery, tried to conquer and exploit other communities of producers, to acquire external as well as internal fields of exploitation, and this also led to further interconnectedness of regions.[23] Yet, at the same time, feudal ruling class communities were united in webs of kinship, or bureaucracy, or caste, which sometimes extended over very large areas. We know that the neat parceling of societies into nation–states did not exist in those times, that language regions were ill-defined and language barriers of little significance, even that religious differences did not set up barriers to the movement of ideas, things, and people. Thus we should think of all (or most) feudal societies as sharing a common space, through which social forces and pressures diffused in all directions, over great distances, easily crossing the boundaries of states. Given this conception, it is not difficult to understand why the general evolution of feudalism as a mode of production was proceeding in about the same way over much of the hemisphere.

In the late Middle Ages there were signs of profound change in many agricultural regions of all three continents. There were indications of two sorts: signs of decay, or even imminent collapse, in the feudal system, and signs of change toward commercialized agriculture and toward rural capitalism. Throughout much of the hemisphere, the mode of production appears to have been in a state of decay, and we find increasing exactions, peasant revolts, migrations to agricultural frontiers and towns, intense warfare among ruling classes for access to producer populations, and more. By the fourteenth century, feudalism had entered a stage of crisis—although not of collapse—in Europe, but it appears that there were similar crises in parts of Asia and probably—as we will doubtless learn from further research—Africa.[24] In all three continents there was a movement of peasants to the towns, perhaps at roughly comparable rates. In no large region, European or non-European, could this have become a flood of rural–urban migrants, since urban population was still a small percentage of total population everywhere at the end of the fifteenth century. Still, it was an effect of crises in the rural areas. Whether these crises were

indications that the mode of production was truly near collapse, and this from internal contradictions, perhaps cannot as yet be decided, but in any case feudalism in Europe was no closer to its final demise, prior to 1492, than were the feudalisms of many extra-European regions.

At this point in the argument, a disclaimer and a speculation. I am not arguing that the landlord–peasant mode of production had somehow gone through its allotted historical span and was about to collapse, or to transform itself into capitalism. The question whether capitalism had its earliest growth in an urban setting or a rural setting is a very complex one indeed; I will discuss the matter further below but I do not propose any sort of general historical theory of causation. I will argue only that the transition, or decay, or whatever one wants to call it, was far from complete in 1492, and the wealth from America precipitated the rise of capitalism and, simultaneously, the final decay of the feudal mode of production in Europe.

I speculate as follows: Given our overall model of an extremely rapid criss-cross diffusion of the cultural traits of agriculture (crops, stock, tools, water-management systems, etc.), and given the parallel conception of tight and intricate interlacing among class-organized agricultural societies in the medieval Eastern Hemisphere, one would expect that the general growth and evolution of the class-stratified agricultural form of society would proceed in a relatively *even* manner from one region to the next, as traits diffused, as social pressures were transmitted in space by migration, conquest, and the like, as ruling-class alliances proliferated, and so on. Perhaps the evolution of this feudal mode of production was everywhere conditioned by one common social fact: the steady and unrelenting demand of the landlord class and its allies (merchants, nobility, etc.) for more and more wealth, a demand that translated into constant pressure on peasants to increase production so that they could increase delivery of surplus. I view this as a long-term secular trend that led to specific responses in the peasant sector, including technological development, criss-cross diffusion of technology, assarting and pioneering, peasant revolts, rural–urban migration, participation in ruling-class military adventures, and more. I speculate, then, that these mechanisms evened out the social tensions that were created in many places by the increasing ruling-class demand for delivery of surplus. This would allow us to argue that, if the mode of production was in decay or in crisis in one part of the hemisphere, very likely the same was the case in many other parts of the hemisphere. In a word: the mode of production rose and then ebbed on a hemispheric scale, and what was happening in Europe in 1492 was also happening in Africa and Asia.

But why would we expect the feudal mode of production to decay or

decline? This is the final point of speculation. We cannot assert simply that feudalism is a "stage" of evolution, and must eventually give way to the next, higher "stage" of evolution (capitalism), as some mechanistic Marxists argue. Nor can we accept the conservative form of this argument, which sees feudalism giving way to a higher and more "modern" form of society (capitalism) as a result of humanity's inevitable forward progress, social, intellectual, and moral. Nor can we invoke a Malthusian force of inevitably heightening population pressure (a thesis which was shown to be false in Chapter 2, on grounds mainly that human cultures always control their demographic behavior, more or less rationally). I would propose the following explanatory model. There are two essential facts about this form of society: first, the fact of family-scale farming as a way of life; second, the fact of a landlord class extracting, or trying to extract, an ever-increasing absolute surplus from farmers. Peasant farmers respond to this pressure in many ways, as we noted above. They certainly try to increase their population so long as each additional human being in the community can produce the requisite surplus, that is, contribute labor which yields more production than is needed for consumption by the incremental member of the community and for that individual's contribution to surplus delivery. Certainly they try to add additional land for cultivation, and sometimes try to move to another location, seeking agricultural or other land. But mainly they *intensify*. That is, they increase agricultural productivity by continuously experimenting with new crop varieties, new tools, new techniques, and they are ever on the alert for news about innovations that have been tried successfully elsewhere—in the next village, the next valley, the next island.

The process of technological improvement has no limit, but a point will be reached when the *rate* of increase in labor productivity declines, generation by generation, century by century. Doubtless the rate was at its highest during the period when many new crops and stock types were being domesticated at a rapid rate, and when the main tools, and iron, were being brought into the system. By the Middle Ages, the rate of improvement overall would have declined to a level insufficient to permit farmers to meet the landlords' incremental demands for surplus. If we set aside some of the alternative responses, such as pioneering and rural–urban migration, which must have been available in some regions but not in others, we are left with the following situation: a general crisis in the feudal mode of production.

Now this discussion has been grounded in one assumption: that improvements in agricultural production are taking place through innovations mainly on the farm itself. This is largely the case for family-scale farming in medieval and premedieval times. Of course,

production is also improved by importing water and nutrients into the farm through irrigation or drainage. And always there is some off-the-farm sale or other exchange of products, and sale or exchange of products from the farm for inputs like fertilizer, seed, and labor. So the individual peasant farm, or family farm, is a relatively but not absolutely self-contained microgeographic system. We know very well, and farmers in those days also knew very well, that the best strategy for engineering a dramatic increase in production from a microgeographic system like the peasant farm is to integrate it more fully into a larger, macrogeographic system. Mainly this involves increasing the input of water and fertility elements, like lime and manure, and changing the pattern of crops and stock from one which must primarily feed the farm family to one which can involve some specialization in products that are saleable and that are well-suited to the ecological conditions of the farm. (This would commonly mean some specialization in one or a few food products, which are both sold and consumed, or specialization in an industrial product, like cotton.) When, today, we speak of the "agricultural revolution" of recent centuries, we are describing a revolution at this macrogeographic level: modern family farms import huge amounts of fertility; they import (purchase) many tools, pesticides, and like elements which are produced elsewhere; they use substantial amounts of nonfamily labor; and they specialize in ways that (sometimes) involve ecological optimization. This list pretty much exhausts the revolutionary changes that occurred prior to the present century, and it suggests that internal, microgeographic improvements—which never ceased to take place—played a secondary role at this stage in the development of agriculture.

For these macrogeographic improvements to take place there must be a high level of *commercialization* of farming, because moving things into and out of the farm microsystem (or at any rate the village microsystem) is mainly a process of buying and selling. It would seem to follow that a general crisis of the feudal mode of production would have one of two possible outcomes. One of these is a relatively smooth transition to an economy in which there is massive off-the-farm cash demand for farm products and supply of purchasable inputs, along with cash payment of rent (or payment on shares to a landlord who then markets the share for cash). This scenario takes place in a landscape in which there is a large nonagricultural population, hence a landscape that is either urbanizing or participating in major long-distance trade. Stated differently: the crisis can be met if commercialization and urbanization are taking place. Alternatively, there can be revolutionary changes of another sort: peasant revolts, either mild (such as withholding of rent) or violent, major cultural transformation in social, political, or religious life, or something

else equally revolutionary. Perhaps both alternatives must occur in some combination for the crisis to be resolved. I conclude that the rather clear pattern in which feudal contradictions intensify, as a result of increasing demands for surplus and decreasing ability of farm families to increase the level of surplus, must lead to a revolutionary change of some sort. Most of the changes that I have mentioned did, in fact, occur in Europe in the late Middle Ages and involved the overthrow of feudalism as a political and social system and its replacement by the modern system after the model of England's "Glorious Revolution." But I am *not* arguing that this rural set of processes *explains* the rise of capitalism. Certainly it *contributed* to the rise of capitalism, and specifically to the processes of increasing urbanization and increasing long-distance commodity movements which characterized the late Middle Ages throughout the hemisphere, processes which I label "protocapitalist," and which we discuss in the following section of this chapter.

PROTOCAPITALISM IN ASIA, AFRICA, AND EUROPE

I use the word "protocapitalism" not to introduce a technical term but to avoid the problem of defining another term, "capitalism." Obviously, the kind of economic system that we ordinarily think of as capitalist did not exist in the Middle Ages; we are dealing with its forebear, which (as I will argue) exhibited most of the basic traits of capitalism, but on a spatially and socially small scale, and generally within, or on the edge of, a much larger, dominant economic system associated with the feudal mode of production. Protocapitalism, therefore, is incipient capitalism, or near-capitalism, or adolescent capitalism. It is the system as it existed prior to the two revolutionary transformations which brought modern capitalism into existence. The first of these was the political transformation which is usually, and conventionally, called "the bourgeois revolution" or "bourgeois revolutions"—the creation of large polities that were dominated, not by the feudal landlord class, but by an elite of townsmen (burghers, bourgeoisie) and their entrepreneurial allies in the countryside. The most famous example, and in a way the defining case, was Britain's "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, and I will use the date 1688 as the symbol or token for the political triumph of capitalism. The second transformation was, of course, the Industrial Revolution, which did not really begin in a big way until the last quarter of the eighteenth century. In Chapter 4 we will examine the role played by colonialism and non-Europe in both of these transformations.

In all three continents we find relatively small rural regions (they were generally hinterlands of major port cities) along with a few highly commercialized agricultural and mining regions, which were clearly being penetrated by capitalism—were protocapitalist—in the period just prior to 1492. Among these were Flanders, southeastern England, northern Italy, sugar-planting regions of Morocco, the Nile valley, the Gold Coast, Kilwa, Sofala (and hypothetically part of Zimbabwe), Malabar, Coromandel, Bengal, northern Java, and south-coastal China. Land was owned by commerce-minded landlords or by urban protocapitalists.[25] Rents were generally paid in cash except in those areas, like Fukien, where more money profit could be extracted by landlords if they collected the farm produce and sold it themselves.[26] Agricultural production was organized in various ways, ranging from peasant-scale farming to plantations, and very significant quantities of a number of agricultural products were grown, sold, and exported: rice, cotton, sugar, pepper, etc. Industrial production was spreading out into the countryside in all three continents: the early putting-out system was actually de-urbanizing industry in northwestern Europe, as the control by guilds became loosened; probably the same was occurring in parts of Asia and Africa (where merchant and artisan guilds were also well developed and strong in the Middle Ages).[27] Over a much broader area, commodity production had fully penetrated the agricultural economy, and it is extremely doubtful whether west European peasant agriculture was more highly commercialized than that of many parts of China and India, as well as some other extra-European regions. Probably we can assume that level of urbanization is a good comparative indicator of level of agricultural commercialization for this period, since it must represent the main off-the-farm demand for agricultural products. By this measure, Chinese and Indian agriculture would have been more highly commercialized than European agriculture, because a larger percentage of total population was urban in those regions.

Cities dotted the landscape from northern Europe to southern Africa to eastern Asia. Some of these cities were seats of power for major feudal societies. Others were socially and geographically marginal to these societies, and were usually to be found along sea coasts, where they had mainly an interstitial relationship to the larger feudal societies, moving and trading goods among them and producing manufactured commodities for them. Probably it would be incorrect to speak of two distinct classes of urban place, internal and marginal (or peripheral), because many variations and gradations existed, and also because the internal, seat-of-power cities were in many cases also major centers for intersocietal trade and for nonagricultural production. Nevertheless, we can distinguish a special group of cities that were strongly oriented toward manufacturing and trade, were more or less marginal to powerful feudal states (some were within these states; some were small city-dominated states or even city–states), and were heavily engaged in long-distance maritime trade. Cities of this sort stretched around all of the coasts of western Europe, the Mediterranean, East Africa, and South, Southeast, and East Asia. In these cities the mode of production could probably be best described as incipient capitalism, protocapitalism—certainly it was not feudalism—with wageworkers being, apparently, the largest working-class sector, merchants, merchant–landlords, or merchant–manufacturers the ruling class, and economic activity a mixture of trade (movement of commodities, banking, and so on), manufacture (both large- and small-scale), and commercial agriculture.

Some of these mercantile–maritime cities were quite small, others quite large, but it appears that most of them were at roughly the same level in the development of protocapitalist institutions, classes, and technology. This is not surprising since they were intimately connected to one another in a tight network of trade, along which ideas, techniques, goods, and people flowed in all directions, in constant criss-cross diffusion.[28] (For example: Malacca, when the Portuguese first arrived, was trading with the Mediterranean, Inner Asia, East Africa, the Middle East, India, China, and probably Japan as well as all of Southeast Asia. The chronicler Tomé Pires assures us that, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, 84 different languages are spoken in that city, and, boosting its importance for the Portuguese, asserts that "whoever is lord of Malacca has his hand on the throat of Venice."[29] A second example from a much earlier period: the Tenasserim port of Kalah, in the tenth century, was trading with China and Arabia. According to Ibn al-Faqih, the parrots of Kalah talked in Persian, Arabic, Chinese, Indian, and Greek.[30])

The network of mercantile–maritime centers stretched, like a string of pearls, from the Baltic to the eastern Mediterranean, and from there southward to Sofala (or beyond—the history of East and southern Africa is still buried in colonial slumber) and eastward to Japan. The network also extended inland in all three continents, but the mercantile–maritime cities and oceanic routes were eventually of greater evolutionary importance in the rise of capitalism than were the inland centers. This was true for two (main) reasons.

First, foreign trade was the most peripheral of protocapitalist activities; it was literally beyond the reach of the law. (Inland cities that bordered on deserts would also have had this peripheral quality to some extent.) Thus, a protocapitalist port city could move products to and from any other oceanic port without having to pass through state-organized

territories, and thereby avoid paying tolls, being forced to buy and sell goods to foreign merchants at intermediate trading centers, or perhaps even being denied permission to enter a state. It is worth noting, in this regard, that a substantial part of the high cost of Asian spices in European markets before 1492 resulted from the fact that shipments coming from India via overland routes ordinarily had to be passed from merchant to merchant at several trading points enroute, with profit taken at each intermediate market. The cheapness of Asian spices carried by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century therefore reflected, to a considerable extent, the fact that the spices could be on-loaded at an Asian port, and then transported direct to a European port with no intermediate transactions; perhaps this factor was more important than the generally lower cost of sea transport over land transport (a factor that is often overemphasized).

Second, long-distance commodity movement by sea, involving as it did the transport of vital staples as well as luxuries, was, among protocapitalist activities of the late Middle Ages, perhaps the closest we get to industrial capitalism in the urban economy of that time. It involved not merely an exchange of commodities but the production of many commodities including ships, and incorporated sophisticated technology, a large work force, complex transactions, and massive capital accumulation. This matter brings us back, inescapably, to the problem of defining "protocapitalism."

There is a widespread tendency, often encountered among Marxists but by no means confined to that school of thought, which argues the following position. Money, cash exchange, and trade have been going on for millennia but they do not signify capitalism or even the seeds of capitalism. This is so because capitalism is a matter of *production*, not *exchange*. "Real" capitalism requires the application of wage labor and the production of commodities. Exchange is merely buying and selling; it does not add value. For Marx, it produces wealth mainly as a result of unequal exchange (higher prices in one market than another, and the like), not as a result of labor input and the production of use-value.

From this model come a series of highly important theses. One is the argument that medieval European towns were not central to the rise of capitalism because their main activity was trade, exchange, not production. Therefore the rise of capitalism must have occurred, not in medieval towns but in medieval agriculture.[31] But a second thesis is more crucial for the issues discussed here. This is the argument that starts out by conceding that the great medieval trading cities and trading routes of Asia were much more impressive in scale than those of Europe and the Mediterranean, but this did not make them more significant for the rise

of capitalism—because it was production, not exchange (trade, commerce), that was the crucial process. No matter how highly developed the trading routes and cities of Asia were, Europe's feudal agricultural production (in this argument) was closer to capitalism than either the rural or urban production systems of non-Europe and it is *this* fact—the nature of European rural society as contrasted with non-European rural society—that is crucial in explaining why capitalism arose in Europe, not in Asia (or Africa). The fallacy regarding rural production was discussed previously. But equally fallacious is the idea that Asian (and African) port cities, mercantile–maritime centers, were somehow purely or largely concerned with exchange, with "commerce." Here there are in fact three errors. First, production involves not merely change of form but also change of place. It is metaphysical to argue that there is something ontologically distinctive about the process of shaping nature into a "thing," a commodity. When a farmer produces an agricultural "thing," he or she must not only grow it but also transport it from field to farmstead and then to market, and must also transport inputs of water or fertilizer or labor from outside the farm. Farm production, therefore, involves both change of form and change of place. An automobile assembly line is a process of change both of form and of place. Thus, overall, *spatial movement is part of production*. It has nothing whatever to do with the entirely distinct process by which commodities are purchased and sold. Indeed, the farmer's crop can be subject to exchange right on the farm as well as in an off-the-farm market. Therefore, the medieval activities involved in moving commodities over long distances were not, ontologically, "exchange"; they were *spatial transport*. They involved huge labor forces, massive capital investment, major technologies—of navigation, ship construction, banking and insurance, and more—and significant tonnages. They produced use-value at the destination from commodities that had none, or less, at the point of departure. In a word, what is called "medieval trade" was a complex process in which production and manufacture played as great a role as did exchange.

The second error is the idea, very widely held today among historians, that the cities, the commodity movement, and the rest of the complex, was somehow a trivial process involving only the moving of a few luxury items to a tiny ruling class. In fact, most of the medieval seaborne trade was a matter of staple commodities, things like crude textiles, iron implements, rice, wheat, lumber, ships (which often were sailed from the place of construction to some other port where they were sold), and the like. But beyond that, the tonnage and value of products that would not be considered staples, things like pepper, sugar, finer textiles, pottery, and so forth, was, in and of itself, immensely important,

because the market for such products was very large: the medieval elites were by no means insignificant.

The third error is a failure to perceive how important industrial production was in these medieval cities and their hinterlands. Thus, I conclude that the medieval mercantile–maritime system was very much a nursery bed of capitalism, in Asia and Africa as well as Europe.

The protocapitalist port cities of Europe were not more highly developed than those of Africa and Asia in the fifteenth century. This holds true regardless of the kinds of criteria chosen as measures. European cities, first, were not larger in absolute or relative population. In fact, urbanization in Europe was probably less advanced than urbanization in China, India, the Arab region, and no doubt many other non-European areas. The urban population in early Ming China was perhaps 10% of the total population.[32] In the Vijayanagar Empire of southern India it must have been at least as high: the inland capital alone held about 3% of the population—comparable centers in Europe, such as Paris, may have had half that percentage—and the coastal port cities were both numerous and large.[33] Second, the development of the techniques of business was fully as advanced, fully as complex, and fully as wideflung in space among the merchants and bankers of Asia and Africa as among those of Europe. (Tomé Pires said of Gujarati businessmen in 1515: "They are men who understand merchandise; they are . . . properly steeped in the sound and harmony of it" and "those of our people who want to be clerks and factors ought to go there and learn, because the business of trade is a science."[34]) Third, the technical and material means of production seem to have been at about the same level of development in many mercantile–maritime centers of all three continents, allowing for differences in the volume of production and trade, the kinds of merchandise, and the like. Maritime techniques were also comparable across the hemisphere: though they differed from ocean to ocean, it cannot be said that ships of one ocean were technologically more advanced than those of the others.[35] Manufactures in port cities and other industrial centers of Europe, Africa, and Asia were also roughly comparable in gross scale and level of development.[36] Fourth, the urban class composition of Asian and African centers appears to have been similar to that of European centers: in all regions there existed a powerful class of protocapitalists and a wage-earning class of workers, with or without involvement also of other classes such as feudal landlords, slaves, and so on. And finally, the old European myth, codified by Weber—that European cities were somehow more free than non-European cities, which were under the tight control of the surrounding polity—is essentially an inheritance from classical Eurocentric diffusionism, which imagined that everything important in early Europe was imbued with freedom while everything important in Asia (not to mention Africa) was ground under a stultifying "Oriental despotism" until the Europeans arrived there and brought freedom. The so-called "free cities" of central Europe were hardly the norm and were not central to the rise of capitalism. The partial autonomy of many mercantile–maritime port cities of Europe, from Italy to the Baltic, was of course a reality, and usually reflected either the dominance by the city of a relatively small polity (often a city–state) or the gradual accommodation of feudal states to their urban sectors, allowing the latter considerable autonomy for reasons of profit or power. But all of this held true also in various parts of Africa and Asia. Small city–states were common around the shores of the Indian Ocean, in the Maghreb, and in Southeast Asia; also common were quasi-independent cities, giving loose allegiance to larger states. This point was discussed in the previous chapter.

The preceding discussion was not a theory of the rise of capitalism. My aim was simply to show that all of the theories that claim causal superiority for Europe on the basis of Asia and Africa's supposed lack of progressive urbanization or because extra-European urban processes were not important since urban processes in general were of minor importance compared to rural processes—European rural feudalism—are very unconvincing.

It is not an exaggeration to describe this entire network of mercantile–maritime cities as a single protocapitalist system.[37] The surrounding space of class-organized agricultural societies was, as I argued previously, made up of separate societies and polities in separate regions but was, nonetheless, integrated enough so that persistent criss-cross diffusion and other movements led to a degree of unity; perhaps even a degree of intercontinental equilibrium. The unity was very much more intense for the network of protocapitalist cities. The image I have in mind for this is a network of strings of electric lights of various sizes and colors illuminating a garden party. The current, so to speak, which flowed among those port cities consisted of human beings (sailors, workers, merchants, etc.), material things (commodities, ships, fertile seeds and cuttings of crops, musical instruments, and much more), and ideas—technological ideas, innovative social, economic, and religious ideas, and so on.

All of this is well known in qualitative terms but not fully so in terms of its intensity, its spatial extent, and, most critically, its *unity*. The entire system can be viewed as a single entity, so tightly integrated that there must have been rapid, almost instantaneous, criss-cross diffusion *throughout* the system of essentially every material or immaterial culture trait that is relevant to the economic and technical and ecological

progress of this form of society. I believe it is an error, built into our way of conceptualizing cultures and cultural differences, to believe that the very profound differences of culture among the various societies that comprised this system would, somehow, have been reflected in a lack of integration across cultural boundaries in matters concerning the technical–economic–ecological dimension of culture. (Recall our discussion above concerning the distinction between evolutionary and nonevolutionary or partly non-evolutionary aspects of culture, in the theoretical tradition of anthropologists like Steward.[38]) In those times, differences of language did not seem to interfere with the quest for profit among merchants and other participants in this system. (Recall the Greek-speaking parrots of Kalah, the 84 languages spoken in Malacca.) Nor were differences of religion any great impediment (as has been amply documented for Muslim–Christian–Jewish trade in the medieval Mediterranean[39]). Certainly there were limited social networks, membership in which was a matter of religion or nationality or even kinship. Abu-Lughod has shown that the pattern of connections and distinctions produced a set of eight overlapping social regions—she writes of "The Eight Circuits of the Thirteenth-Century World System"—although her data and argument are consistent with my present thesis that all regions were in fact subregions of one protocapitalist system.[40] State boundaries do not seem to have played an important inhibiting role in the flows across the system, except in certain fairly limited periods when either political conflict or specific imperial policies and practices did, indeed, disrupt trade through one or another political partition; the truly nationalistic forms of capitalist enterprise become important much later; in fact, after 1492.[41]

The network, or system, seems to have evolved over a period of several centuries, mainly from the tenth to the fifteenth. Without attributing cause, I would emphasize the fact that the period during which this system grew most rapidly in scale and intensity was the period during which the technology of oceangoing shipping increased explosively, in what may be thought of as a (or the) Spatial Revolution. In the Agricultural Revolution, we do not know whether the technical–ecological transformation was cause, or effect, or both, in relation to social transformation, although most scholars tend to treat agriculture as cause and social change as effect, rightly or wrongly. In the case of the medieval Spatial Revolution, it is most likely that the technological–ecological aspect was more a reflection of the economic and social processes associated with emergent protocapitalism and urban development than a cause of the latter. Nevertheless, the medieval Spatial Revolution was in one critical way a sequel to the Agricultural

Revolution: it intensified spatial flows much as the earlier revolution intensified *in situ* production. This is not to say that earlier boat technology and earlier long-distance sailing out of sight of land was insignificant: the question is one of intensity.

Perhaps, as a final speculation, we might think of the Spatial Revolution as part of a larger process which was responding to the maturation and decline of the feudal mode of production. Certainly it is true that increasing commodity demand by elites was a major stimulus, but it is also possible that the emerging crisis of feudalism—the decreasing rate at which an absolute increase in surplus could be extracted from peasant producers, and the resulting stresses and strains—had much to do with the rise of the intercontinental protocapitalist system. In any case, the dramatic long-distance voyages of discovery of the later Middle Ages, voyages by Chinese, Indians, Polynesians, Europeans, and others, should be conceptualized as moments in a genuine Spatial Revolution.

Much of this is speculation beyond the empirical data. But we have important data about the parallels of development from one urban system to another, and from one trading region to another. We also have dramatic cases of almost instantaneous diffusion: for instance, the appearance of the cannon in the Mediterranean region and in China almost simultaneously; perhaps in the same decade.[42] For the argument of this book, the one crucial generalization is the following: It is not surprising that the processes that I have called protocapitalist were going on across the Eastern Hemisphere in the later Middle Ages. Africa, Asia, and Europe were about equally close to—or distant from—capitalism and modernity in 1492. After 1492, the pace of development quickened for Europe and slowed for Africa and Asia, because of the wealth brought to Europe from America.

NOTES

1. Concerning my use of the term "cultural evolution," see Chapter 1, note 14.

2. The discussion in this section of the chapter mainly deals with the Eastern Hemisphere. The Western Hemisphere will be discussed separately in Chapter 4.

3. See Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (1947).

4. Amin, *Unequal Development* (1976) and "Modes of Production: History and Unequal Development" (1985).

5. Kabaker, "A Radiocarbon Chronology Relevant to the Origins of Agriculture" (1977); Megaw, *Hunters, Gatherers and First Farmers Beyond Europe* (1977); Vishnu-Mittre, "Origin and History of Agriculture in the Indian Subcontinent" (1978). See the review in Blaut, "Diffusionism: A Uniformitarian Critique." (1987a).

6. Blaut, "Diffusionism" (1987a).

7. The assumption here is that agriculture itself was evolving because it was useful, but there is the corollary assumption that humanity realized this not just in one favored place but in many places and among many peoples. This should not be surprising, given the fact that agriculture is useful nearly everywhere today. But it is definitely contradictory to the assumptions of Eurocentric diffusionism.

8. Examples of this process include the eastward movement of the medieval agricultural frontier in the forests of eastern Europe and the reclaiming of swampland in Iraq. Cropland was being expanded in these and other ways in many regions. In addition, it seems certain that some societies that had not previously practiced agriculture were being pushed into smaller or less favorable regions and therefore were turning to agriculture as a means of increasing food production to meet the land shortage.

9. See R. Lee, "Art, Science, or Politics? The Crisis in Hunter-Gatherer Studies" (1992).

10. Water-control systems in farming, including irrigation, drainage, broad-based terracing, raised- or drained-field construction, and natural-levee adaptations are probably as old as agriculture itself, because (1) all farmers everywhere know the problem of moisture control (adding moisture when there is deficit; removing moisture when there is a surplus and a danger of root drowning); (2) all of these procedures are initially *small-scale* actions taken on an individual farm (recall our discussion in Chapter 2 of the fallacies of the "hydraulic theory"); and (3) there is direct archaeological evidence of very ancient (9,000-year-old) drainage systems in New Guinea (Golson, "No room at the top: Agricultural intensification in the New Guinea Highlands," 1977), and drained- or raised-field systems in tropical America (Denevan, "Hydraulic Agriculture in the American Tropics: Forms, Measures, and Recent Research," 1982). Thus we can infer the primitivity of irrigation and these other water-management systems: probably they are as old as the Neolithic, along with drainage and raised-field systems. All this shows that intensive technology had *already diffused* insofar as it was going to do so, and nonadoption reflected something other than lack of information. As we noted in Chapter 2, irrigation *systems* diffuse as a social process, associated with class society. Concerning the myth that the plow was not used in Africa, see Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (1973) and Onimode, *Imperialism and Underdevelopment in Nigeria* (1982). Note that plows are used in tropical agriculture very sparingly—mainly for some operations in rice paddies.

11. In classless societies, I speculate that the bundle of choices concerning crops, tools, field systems, labor input, and the like, led to roughly a common level of output per person, unaffected by differences in environmental quality over a great range of environments. In some areas very extensive systems like shifting cultivation would be used; in others, intensive systems, like wet-rice cultivation, would be used. But the productivity of labor in terms of product per hour input would tend to be about the same in this model for both intensive and extensive systems. This would hold true if two assumptions are accepted: (1) that rapid and thorough diffusion had taken place, and (2) that population was controlled by farming peoples so as to optimize the situation concerning output and leisure time. *None* of this would be true in a class society, where the constraints on technology and labor use are influenced profoundly by the demands and power of the ruling class.

12. See, for example, Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Polities in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (1982); Isichei, *A History of Nigeria* (1983); Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast 1545–1800* (1970); A. Smith, "The Early States of the Central Sudan" (1971); Usman, *The Transformation of Katsina (1400–1883)* (1981).

13. See Blaut, "Colonialism and the Rise of Capitalism" (1989). It is also true that in all these societies there were parallel high-status groups, clergy, bureaucrats, military people, and so on, but there seems not to have been any case of a large, clearly feudal society—I exclude a few cases of small urbanized power centers in dry, pastoral regions, and a few large cities—in which wealth and status was clearly divorced from land ownership and from the surplus extracted from peasants.

14. Apparently such private (saleable) ownership of agricultural land was found mainly near important urban areas, ports, mining areas, etc. See Rawski, *Agricultural Change and the Peasant Economy of South China* (1972); Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade: 1740—1800* (1967); Nicholas, "Town and Countryside: Social and Economic Tensions in 14th Century Flanders" (1967–1968); Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Polities in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (1982); Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast* (1970); Usman, *The Transformation of Katsina* (1981); Sherif, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar* (1987).

15. On the importance of hereditary fiefs and landed property in Asia, see, for example, Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (1973); Sharma, *Indian Feudalism, c. 300–1200* (1965); Fei Hsiao-tung, *China's Gentry* (1953); Fu and Li, *The Sprouts of Capitalistic Factors Within China's Feudal Society* (1956); Rawski, *Agricultural Change and the Peasant Economy of South China* (1972); Tung, *An Outline History of China* (1979); Liceria, "Emergence of Brahmanas as Landed Intermediaries in Karnataka, c. A.D. 1000–1300 (1974); Mahalingam, *Economic Life in the Vijayanagar Empire* (1951); Hasan, "The Position of the Zamindars in the Mughal Empire (1969); Raychaudhuri, "The Agrarian System of Mughal India" (1965); Yadava, "Secular Land Grants of the Post-Gupta Period and Some Aspects of the Growth of the Feudal Complex in Northern India" 1966). For Africa south of the Sahara (for which there is as yet only fragmentary evidence), see, for example, A. Smith, "The Early States of the Central Sudan" (1971); Mabogunji, "The Land and Peoples of West Africa" (1971); Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Polities in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (1982); Isichei, *A History of Nigeria* (1983); Onimode, *Imperialism and Underdevelopment in Nigeria* (1982); FRELIMO, *Historia de Mozambique* (1971); Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast (1970); and Usman, The Transformation of Katsina* (1981).

16. On the manorial system of China, see Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (1973). For India, see Gopal, "Quasi-Manorial Rights in Ancient India" (1963); Mahalingam, *Economic Life in the Vijayanagar Empire* (1951); Yadava, "Secular Land Grants of the Post-Gupta Period" (1966); Yadava, "Immobility and Subjugation of Indian Peasantry in Early Medieval Complex" (1974). Indian historians recognize important differences between the Indian and European forms of the manor, however. In early Indian feudalism manorial labor had some of the characteristics of serfs, some of wage laborers, and some of tenant farmers. Early Indian feudal estates also seem to have been less autarkic and insulated than the stereotypic European manor.

17. Marx's view is set forth in "The British rule in India" (1979). Irfan Habib, in part following Kosambi (both are Marxists), writes of "the *creation* of the traditional Indian village, closed and self-sufficient" (my emphasis) between 200 B.C. and 650 A.D., in a process involving "ruralization of crafts" and somewhat planned settlement of landless people in villages: Habib, in "The Social Distribution of Landed Property in Pre-British India" (1965).

18. On the unity of agriculture and handicraft industry in medieval European villages, see, for example, Sylvia Thrupp, "Medieval Industry 1000–1500" (1972).

19. Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (1947).

20. Serfdom was not characteristic of all parts of medieval Europe. On unfree labor in Asia and Africa, see, for example, Yadava, "Immobility and Subjugation of Indian Peasantry in Early Medieval Complex" (1974); Levitzion, "The Early States of the Western Sudan to 1500" (1972); Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (1973).

21. See Brenner and critics in Aston and Philpin, *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*(1988); Brenner, "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism." (1977); Baechler, "The Origins of Modernity: Caste and Feudality (India, Europe and Japan)." (1988). See comments on Brenner and Baechler in Chapter 2 above.

22. including Lynn White, Jr. in *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (1968); Michael Mann, "European Development: Approaching a Historical Explanation" (1988); Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolute State* (1974).

23. Blaut, *The National Question* (1987b), chap. 7.

24. For India, see, for example, A. Chicherov, "On the Multiplicity of Socio-Economic Structures in India in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century" (1976); I. Habib, "Problems of Marxist Historical Analysis" (1969); S. Gopal, Nobility and the Mercantile Community in India" (1972); Radhakamal Mukherjee, *The Economic History of India, 1600–1800* (1967); Ramkrishna Mukherjee, *The Rise and Fall of the East India Company* (1958); Jha, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism in India* (1963); Nurul Hasan, "The Silver Currency Output of the Mughal Empire and Prices in India During the 16th and 17th Centuries" (1969); Yadava, "Immobility and Subjugation of Indian Peasantry in Early Medieval Complex" (1974). For West Africa, see Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Polities in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (1982). For China, see Harrison, *The Communists and Chinese Peasant Rebellions* (1969); Parsons, *Peasant Rebellions in the Late Ming Dynasty* (1970); Fu and Li, *The Sprouts of Capitalistic Factors Within China's Feudal Society* (1956).

25. Appadorai, *Economic Conditions in Southern India* (1936); Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (1974); Nicholas, "Town and Countryside: Social and Economic Tensions in 14th Century Flanders" (1967–1968), pp. 458–485; Rawski, *Agricultural Change and the Peasant Economy of South China* (1972); T. Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel* (1962).

26. Rawski, *Agricultural Change and the Peasant Economy of South China* (1972).

27. See Appadorai, *Economic Conditions in Southern India* (1936); Gernet, *Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion* (1962); Habib, "Problems of Marxist Historical Analysis" (1969); Mahalingam, *Economic Life in the Vijayanagar Empire* (1951); K. Nilikanta Sastri, *A History of South India* (1966); Tung, *An Outline History of China* (1979); Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Polities in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (1982), Sherif, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar* (1987).

28. Blaut, "Where Was Capitalism Born?" (1976).

29. Pires, *The Suma Oriental* (1944 edition).

30. Pires, *The Suma Oriental* (1944); Di Meglio, "Arab Trade with Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula from the 8th to the 16th Century" (1970). The location of Kalah is tentatively placed in the Mergui region: see Wheatley, *The Golden Khersonese* (1961).

31. This thesis is central to the famous debate over the role of urbanization in the medieval rise of capitalism; in Marxist literature this view is associated with Maurice Dobb (who in fact presented it very cautiously), and its opposition—emphasis on the role of towns in the rise of capitalism—is associated with Paul Sweezy. See Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (1947), Sweezy, "A Critique" (1976). The thesis is also central to the debates over "dependency theory." For instance, Robert Brenner argues that towns and trade were essentially irrelevant precisely because the issue is production, not exchange, and Brenner believes (wrongly) that towns were not really important points of production in the medieval world. See Brenner, "The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism" (1985), pp. 38–39. Also see Chapter 2, note 172, above.

32. Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (1973).

33. Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (1973); Mahalingam, *Economic Life in the Vijayanagar Empire* (1951); Naqvi, *Urban Centres in Upper India, 1556–1803* (1968); Satish Chandra, "Commerce and Industry in the Medieval Period" (1964).

34. Pires, *The Suma Oriental* (1944). Also see K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean* (1985); Chan-Cheung, "The Smuggling Trade Between China and Southeast Asia During the Ming Dynasty (1967); Di Meglio, "Arab Trade with Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula from the 8th to the 16th Century" (1970); Elvin, "China as a Counterfactual" (1988); Gupta, *Industrial Structure of India During Medieval Period* (1970); I. Habib, "Usury in Medieval India" (1964); Jha, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism in India* (1963); Pires, *The Suma Oriental* (1944); Prakash, "Organization of Industrial Production in Urban Centres in India During the Seventeenth Century with Special Reference to Textiles" (1964); Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, 2nd ed. (1965); Jan Qaisar, "The Role of Brokers in Medieval India" (1974); Simkin, *The Traditional Trade of Asia* (1968); Toyoda, *History of Pre-Meiji Commerce in Japan* (1969); Udovitch, "Commercial Techniques in Early Medieval Islamic Trade" (1974).

35. Needham and collaborators, *Science and Civilization in China* (1954–1984), vol. 4, part 3; Lewis, "Maritime Skills in the Indian Ocean, 1368–1500" (1973); Lo, "China as a Sea Power" (1955); Ma Huan, *The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores* (1970); Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, 2nd ed. (1965).

36. S. Chaudhuri, "Textile Trade and Industry in Bengal Suba, 1650–1720" (1974); Elvin, "China as a Counterfactual" (1988); Gernet, *Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion* (1962); Jha, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism in India* (1963); Naqvi, *Urban Centres in Upper India, 1556–1803* (1968); Needham and collaborators, *Science and Civilization in China* (1965–1984); Jan Qaisar, "The Role of Brokers in Medieval India" (1974); Rodinson, "Le Marchand Musulman" (1974); Rodinson, *Islam and Capitalism* (1973); Bodo Wiethoff, *Die Chinesische Seeverbotspolitik und der Private Überseehandel von 1368 bis 1567* (1963); Yang, "Government Control of Urban Merchants in Traditional China" (1970).

37. I proposed this idea in Blaut, "Where Was Capitalism Born?" (1976). Janet Abu-Lughod's important book *Before European Hegemony: The World System* A.D. *1250–1350* (1989) is the first effort to show in precise detail how this system worked in the fourteenth century. Also see S. Chaudhuri, "Textile Trade and Industry in Bengal Suba" (1985); Simkin, *The Traditional Trade of Asia* (1968); Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale* (1974) and *Unequal Development* (1976).

38. Steward, *Theory of Culture Change: The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution* (1955). See note 1.

39. Braudel, *The Mediterranean* (1972); Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* (1967); Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic* (1973).

40. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (1989), fig. 1, p. 34. One of the eight regions is the nonmaritime circuit extending from China through Central Asia to the Black Sea.

41. Blaut, *The National Question* (1987b).

42. Needham and collaborators, *Science and Civilization in China* (1965–1984), Vol. 5, part 7; Needham, *Gunpowder as the Fourth Power, East and West* (1985).

CHAPTER 4

After 1492

EXPLAINING 1492

In 1492, as have seen, capitalism was slowly emerging in many parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe. In that year there would have been no reason whatever to predict that capitalism would triumph in Europe, and would triumph only two centuries later.

By "the triumph of capitalism" I mean, in the present context, the political revolution that transferred power from the old feudal landlord elite to the bourgeoisie (the burghers, the capital-accumulating new elite): the bourgeois revolution. This was really a revolutionary epoch, not a single brief event, but I will follow convention by dating it to 1688, the year of England's "Glorious Revolution." In that year (minor qualifications aside) the bourgeoisie definitively took power in England. This class already held power in Holland and in some small states of southern Europe, while in some other parts of Europe (like France) the bourgeoisie was vigorously "rising" in certain regions although the conflict with feudal polities had not yet been won at the level of state power. It should be emphasized that the capitalism that triumphed was not industrial capitalism. How this preindustrial capitalism should be conceptualized is a difficult question because it is something much larger than the "simple commodity production" and "merchant capital" of earlier times. But the Industrial Revolution did not really begin until a century later, in the late eighteenth century, and those who conceptualize the Industrial Revolution as simply a continuation of the bourgeois revolution are neglecting a large and important block of history, both inside and outside of Europe.

The explanation for the rise of capitalism to political power in Europe in the (symbolic) year 1688 requires an understanding of (1) the reasons Europeans, not Africans and Asians, reached and conquered America, and thus garnered the first fruits of colonialism; (2) the reasons the conquest was successful; (3) the direct and indirect effects of the sixteenth-century plunder of American resources and exploitation of