

Urban Geography

Field Note Straddling the Wall

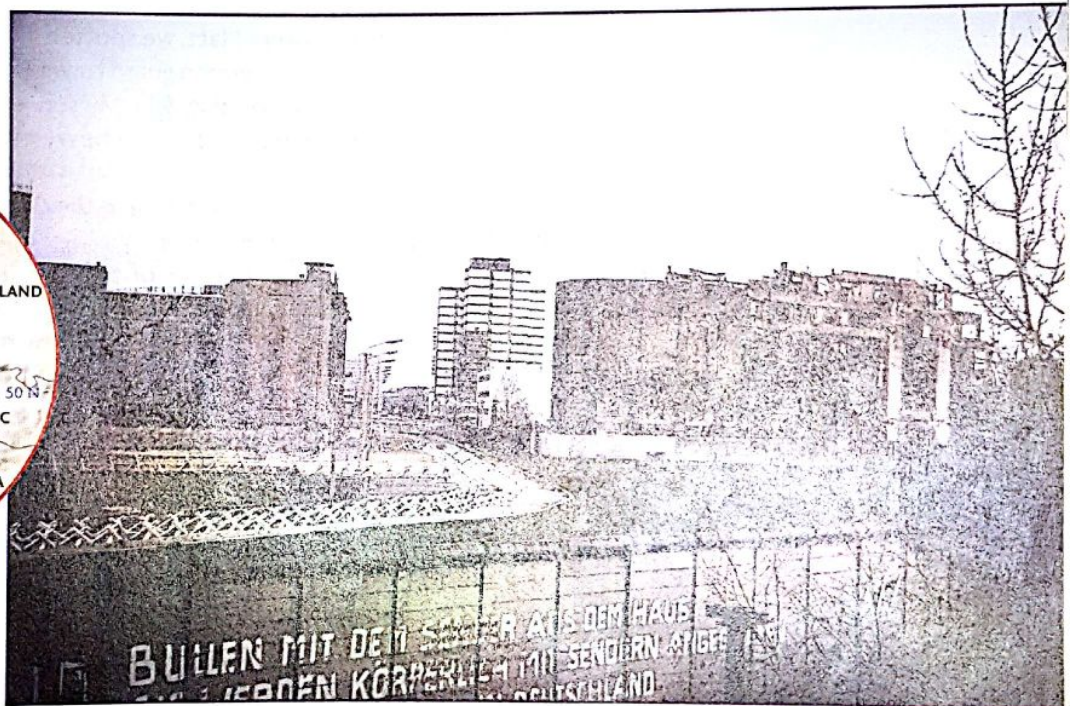


Figure 9.1

West Berlin, West Germany. The Berlin Wall as it stood when the city was divided. This photo was taken in West Berlin, looking across the wall to East Berlin. © Alexander B. Murphy.

As a child, I stood in West Berlin, facing the Berlin Wall. I looked at the gray wall and gray city of East Berlin (Fig. 9.1) and turned around to see the more vibrant city of West Berlin. Why, I wondered, why is this city divided this way? Why is the East German government working so hard to keep their citizens in East Berlin? My mother interrupted my thought, saying, "Look! Look at the guards. Their guns are pointing EAST!" The East German guards along the wall were watching the East Germans to make sure they did not escape to the West.

In 1989, the people of East Berlin and West Berlin took control of the streets, the guard towers, and the wall itself. Berliners occupied the buffer spaces that had divided East Berlin and West Berlin and they stood on the wall. The guards stood

down. As hundreds of millions of people throughout Europe and the rest of the world watched the events unfold live on television, they knew the people who occupied these previously forbidden spaces were not only crushing the wall, but were fundamentally changing the space and the city, starting it down the path of reunification. No one knew what reunification would feel like or look like, and certainly no one knew with any certainty what problems would manifest themselves as a result of reunification, but everyone knew on that fateful night in December that Berlin had fundamentally changed.

In the summer 2001, I took my own children to the place in Berlin where I had stood with my parents 40 years earlier. Instead of looking at the guards, my family looked for the wall. We tried to find traces of the old wall. Along the relict boundary (one that no longer functions) between the cities, we could see differences in architecture, differences in streets, and even a few remnants of the wall itself. It was a difficult task, as seemingly everything was under construction. New buildings had sprung up, city planners were changing street patterns, and cars were traveling freely across what used to be a fervently defended boundary.

Walking past Potsdamer Platz, we spotted a remnant of the old order that no one could miss: an old East German guard tower looming over a cultural landscape being remade before our eyes (Fig. 9.2). My son was the first to point out that on the street next to the guard tower was a heavy machine, helping to re-create and recast the cultural landscape of Berlin.

Berlin is no longer a divided city, and the German government is altering the cultural landscape and the urban morphology of the city to prove it. The **urban morphology** of a city is the layout of the city, its physical form and structure. When Berlin was divided, a study of its urban morphology showed how many roads ended at checkpoints, how buffers of little development traced the outline of the wall, and how each city had its own focal point where the roads led to particular buildings that were larger than others. The urban morphology of Berlin today reveals how street patterns have changed, how new buildings stand astride the old wall, and how the layout of the eastern and western parts of the cities reflects their different histories.

Urban geographers use concepts such as urban morphology to study cities. Urban geographers also study how states build and rebuild cities, and work to understand the interlinkages between political geography and urban geography.

Figure 9.2

Berlin, Germany. An East German guard tower stands among old buildings torn down to make room for new construction in the Potsdamer Platz area of Berlin. © Alexander B. Murphy.



When West Germany and East Germany reunified in 1990, Germans debated the choice of a new capital. Many favored Bonn, which served as the capital of West Germany and is located near the country's western border—symbolizing Germany's prominence in Western Europe. Many others preferred a return to Berlin, which had served as the capital since Bismarck united the country and formed the first German state in 1870. Still other Germans wanted to put the past and both cities behind them; they argued for a totally new choice, such as Hanover, near the center of the country. In the end, the German government selected Berlin and began a giant construction program to transform Berlin, to symbolize a new era.

In this chapter, we trace the evolution of urbanization in geographic context, identify the factors that influenced the location and growth of cities, investigate the internal structure of cities in various cultural settings, and examine the way cities are organized and how they function. Finally, we study how people make cities and the roles cities play in globalization.

Key Questions For Chapter 9

1. When and why did people start living in cities?
2. Where are cities located and why?
3. How are cities organized, and how do they function?
4. How do people make cities?
5. What role do cities play in globalization?

WHEN AND WHY DID PEOPLE START LIVING IN CITIES?

Cities are centers of political power and industrial might, higher education and technological innovation, artistic achievement and medical advances. They are the great markets, centers of specialization and interaction, sources of news and information, suppliers of services, and providers of sports and entertainment. Cities are the anchors of modern culture; urban systems and their spokes form the structural skeleton of society. A **city** is a conglomeration of people and buildings clustered together to serve as a center of politics, culture, and economics.

Virtually everywhere in the world, people are moving from the countryside to urbanized areas, to towns, cities, and suburbs. Globally, more people live in towns and cities than in rural areas, making the global population predominantly **urban**, a term we use to describe the buildup of the central city and the suburban realm—the city and the surrounding environs connected to the city. An urban place is distinctively nonrural and nonagricultural. The move of people from rural to urban areas reflects the changing global economy and the increasing

ease of movement in our globalized world. Urbanization is happening everywhere; however, the distribution of urbanization across the globe is not even (Fig. 9.3). In Western Europe, the United States, Canada, and Japan, four out of five people live in cities or towns. In India and China, the figure is closer to three out of ten.

In the modern world, urbanization can happen quite quickly. A rural area or a small town can be quickly transformed into a major metropolitan area. During the later part of the twentieth century, the Chinese government announced a major economic development project in Guangdong, a province in southern China (Fig. 9.4). The Chinese government established a special economic zone (SEZ) in Guangdong Province, and business and industry mushroomed. The small fishing village of Shenzhen in Guangdong Province is adjacent to Hong Kong. Hundreds of industries moved from Hong Kong to Shenzhen to take advantage of lower labor costs. The small fishing village of Shenzhen experienced extraordinary growth as its population, rushing to the area to find work, swelled

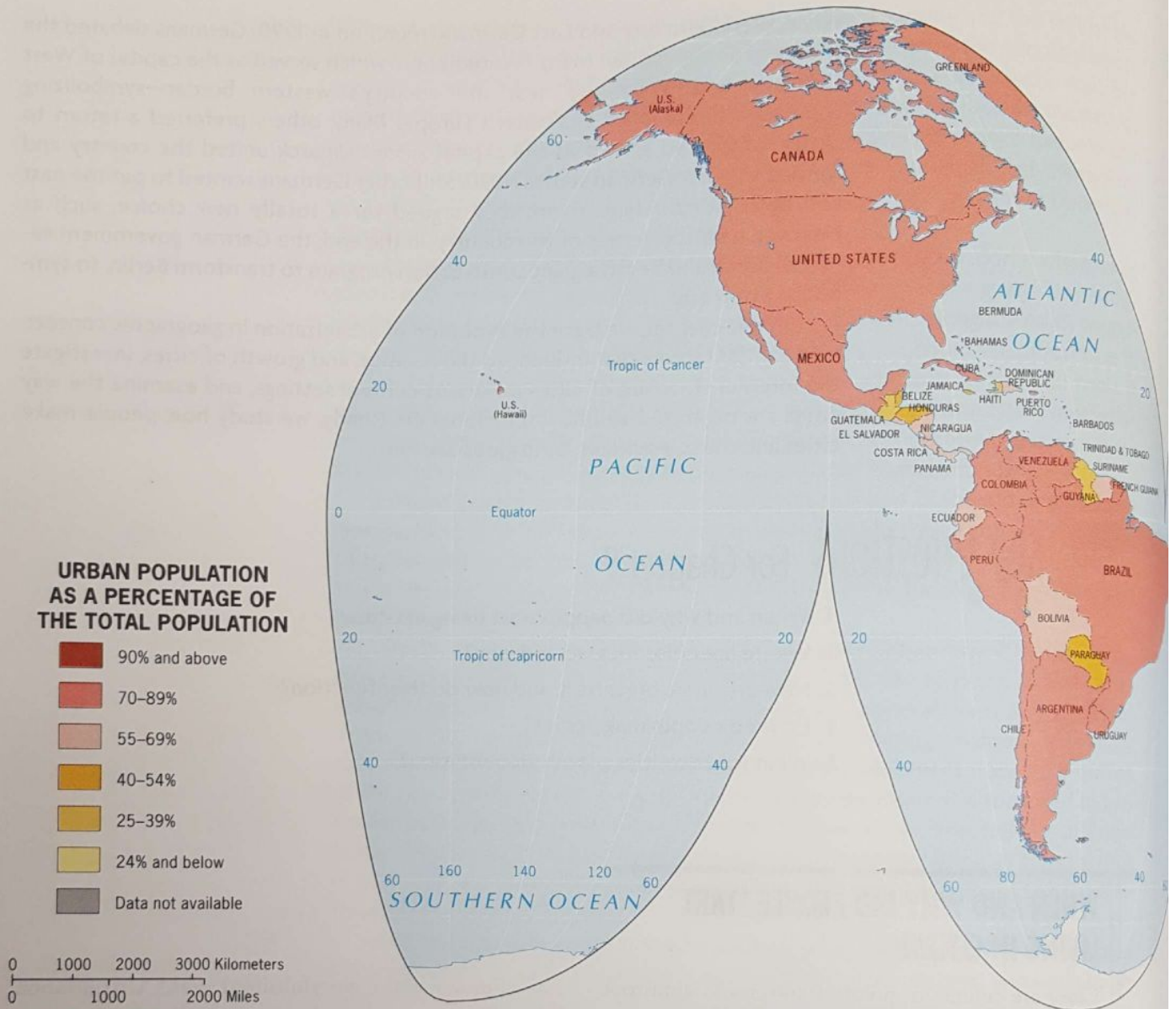


Figure 9.3
Urban Population as a Percentage of the Total Population, by State. Data from: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2003.

from 20,000 to 3.1 million in just three decades. Shenzhen was quickly transformed: skyscrapers now tower where thatch houses, rice paddies, and duck ponds once stood (Fig. 9.5).

The urbanization that can happen so quickly today took thousands of years to develop originally; indeed, the rise of the city is a very recent phenomenon in human history. Human communities have existed for over 100,000 years, but more than 90,000 years passed before people began to cluster in towns. Archaeological evidence indicates that people established the first cities about 8000 years ago. However, only in the last 200 years did cities begin to resemble their modern size and structure.

The Hearths of Urbanization

Before people could live in cities, they had to switch from hunting and gathering to agriculture. After agriculture began between 10,000 and 12,000 years ago, people became more sedentary, staying in one place to tend their fields. People clustered in small agricultural villages and towns, living there year round.

Agricultural villages were relatively small in size and in population. Everyone living in an **agricultural village** was involved in agriculture, and the people lived at near-subsistence levels, producing just enough to get by. The dwellings in ancient agricultural villages were about the



same size and contained about the same number of possessions, reflecting the egalitarian nature (sharing of goods in common among the people) of the societies living in these early villages. The populations were permanent, reflected in the dwelling units where people moved rocks in, built permanent structures, and laid out floors made of plaster. Egalitarian societies persisted long after agriculture began.

Scholars are fairly certain that these descriptors accurately depict the agricultural villages in the first agricultural hearth, the area of Southwest Asia called the Fertile Crescent. Additional archaeological evidence portrays agricultural villages in the later hearths of agricultural in-

novation, the Indus River Valley and Mesoamerica, as also fitting these descriptors. When people establish cities, however, these descriptors become inaccurate. In cities, people generate personal material wealth, trade over long distances, live in stratified classes that are usually reflected in the housing, and engage in a diversity of economic activities—not just agriculture.

Two components enable the formation of cities: **agricultural surplus** and **social stratification**. Archaeologists, anthropologists, and geographers have studied the remains and records of the first cities, creating numerous theories as to how cities came about. Most agree that some series of events led to the formation of an agricultural



Figure 9.4
Hong Kong and Shenzhen, China. © H. J. de Blij, P. O. Muller, and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

surplus and a leadership class; which came first varies by theory. The series of events spurring these two components also varies by theory. One theory maintains that advances in technology such as irrigation generated an agricultural surplus, and a leadership class formed to control the surplus and the technology that produced it. Another theory says that a king or priest-king centralized political power and then demanded more labor to generate an agricultural surplus, which would help him or her retain political power.

Regardless of how the leadership class was established, we do know that once established, it helped generate the surplus and controlled its distribution. The link between the surplus and the leadership class is clear in early cities, where the home of the leaders was often positioned closely to the grain storage. The **leadership class**, or urban elite, consisted of a group of decision makers and organizers who controlled the resources, and often the lives, of others. The urban elite controlled the food supply, including its production, storage, and distribution. Generating a surplus of agriculture enabled some people

to devote their efforts to pursuits besides agriculture. The urban elite, for instance, did not work the fields. Rather, they devoted time to other pursuits such as religion and philosophy. Out of such pursuits came the concepts of writing and recordkeeping. Writing made possible the codification of laws and the preservation of traditions. The urban elite defended themselves by constructing walls on the outskirts of the city. However, the leadership class collected taxes and tribute from people they controlled beyond the city walls.

Some cities grew out of agricultural villages, and others grew in places previously unoccupied by sedentary people. The innovation of the city is called the **first urban revolution**, and it occurred independently in five separate hearths, a case of independent invention¹ (Fig. 9.6). In each of these places, people began to live in cities without the city diffusing to them first. In each of

¹Some scholars argue that there are fewer than five hearths and attribute more urbanization to diffusion. Even in those cases, any place defined as a hearth would be a case of independent invention.

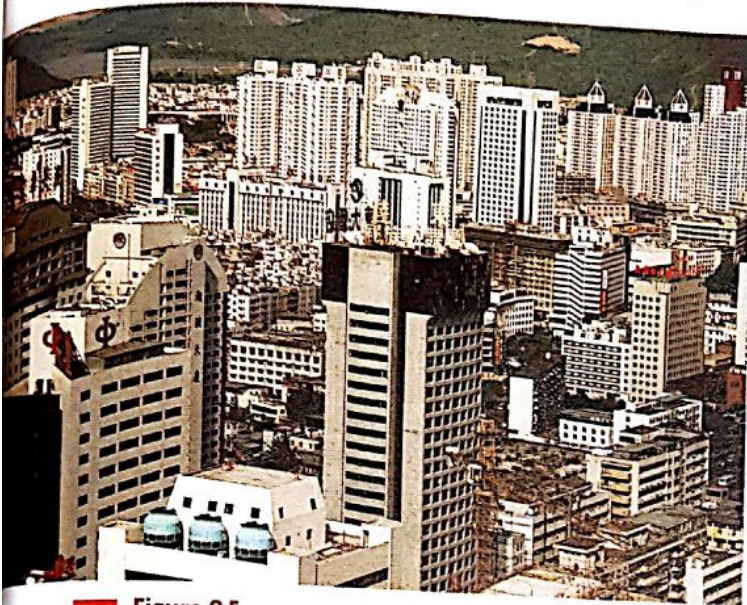


Figure 9.5

Shenzhen, China. Shenzhen changed from a fishing village to a major metropolitan area in just 25 years. Everything you see in this photograph is less than 25 years old; all of this stands where duck ponds and paddies lay less than three decades ago.
© H. J. de Blij.

the urbanization hearths, something triggered the establishment of a leadership class and an agricultural surplus. People became engaged in economic activities beyond agriculture, including specialty crafts, the military, trade, and government.

Not surprisingly, the five urban hearths are tied closely to the hearths of agriculture. The first hearth of agriculture, the Fertile Crescent, is the first place we see cities, in about 3500 BCE. This urban hearth is called **Mesopotamia**, referring to the region of great cities (such as Ur and Babylon) located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Studies of the cultural landscape and urban morphology of Mesopotamian cities have found signs of social inequality in the varying sizes and ornamentation of houses. Urban elite erected palaces, protected themselves with walls, and employed countless artisans to beautify their spaces. They also established a priest-king class and developed a religious-political ideology to support the priest-kings. Rulers in the cities were both priests and kings, and they levied taxes and demanded tribute from the harvest brought by the agricultural laborers.

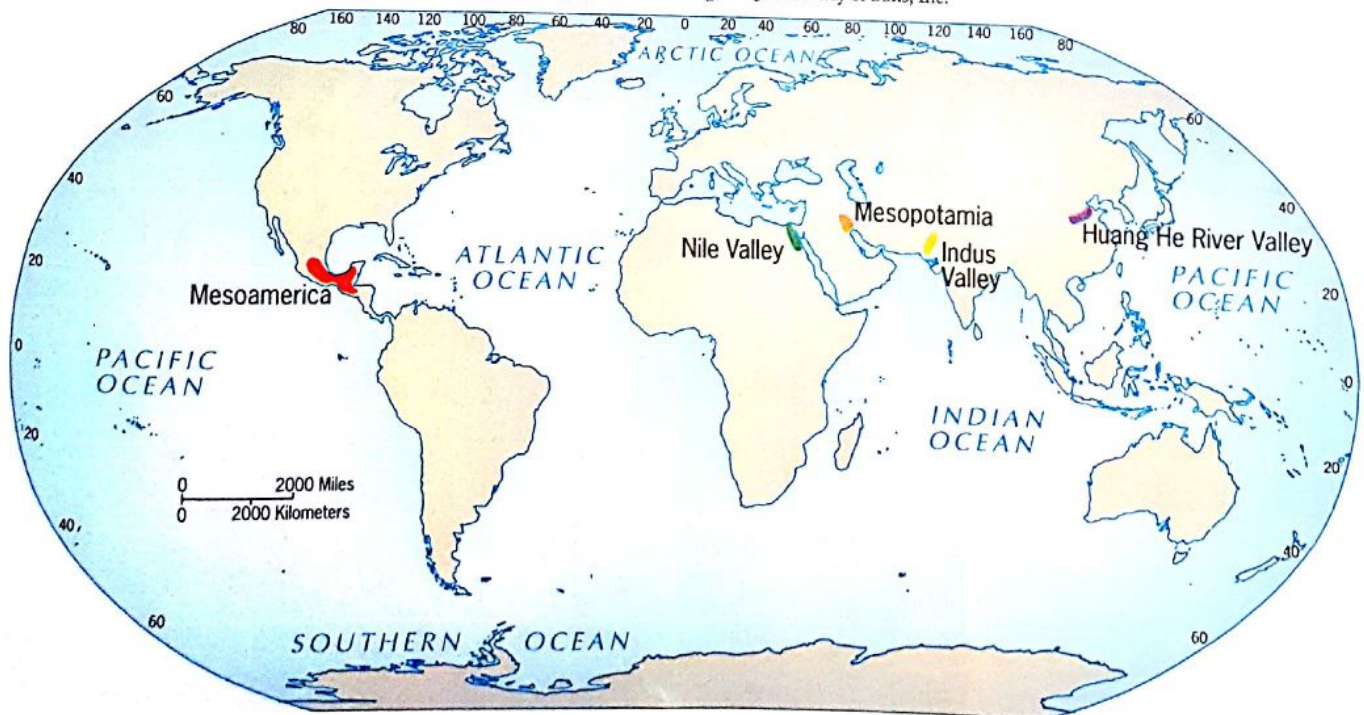
Archaeologists, often teaming up with anthropologists and geographers, have learned much about the ways ancient Mesopotamian cities functioned by studying the urban morphology of the cities. The ancient Mesopotamian city was usually protected by a mud wall surrounding the entire community, or sometimes a cluster of temples and shrines at its center. Temples dominated the urban landscape, not only because they were the largest structures in town but also because they were built on artificial mounds often over 100 feet (30 meters) high.

In Mesopotamia, priests and other authorities resided in substantial buildings, many of which might be called

Figure 9.6

Five hearths of Urbanization.

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palaces. Ordinary citizens lived in mud-walled houses packed closely together and separated only by narrow lanes. Lining the narrow lanes, craftspeople set up their workshops. The poorest inhabitants lived in tiny huts, often with mud-smearred reed walls, on the outskirts of the city. The leadership class held slaves in prison-like accommodations, sometimes outside the city wall.

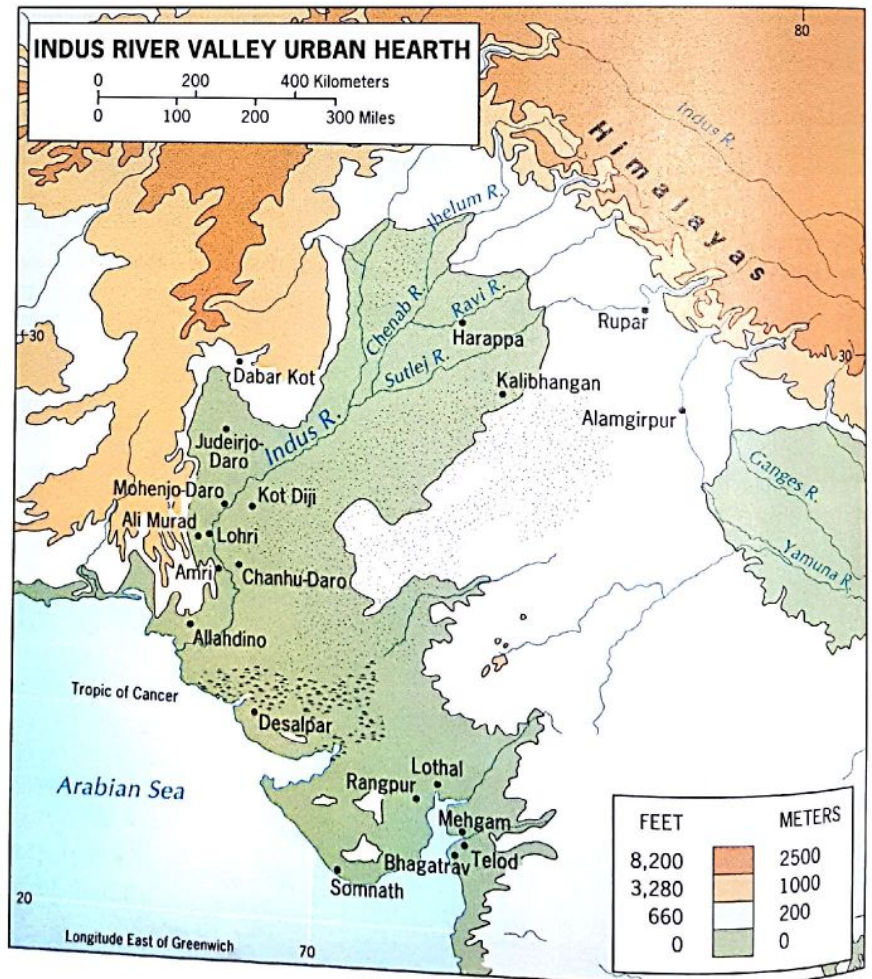
Lacking waste-disposal or sewage facilities, ancient cities were far from sanitary. Mesopotamians threw their garbage and refuse into the streets and other open spaces, and in some places layers of this waste accumulated to a depth of several yards. As a result, disease was found to be a major reason why the populations of ancient cities remained small. Although many died from the unsanitary conditions, archaeologists have been able to sift through the garbage for clues to life in the ancient city.

The second hearth of urbanization is the **Nile River Valley**, dating back to 3200 BCE. Some scholars contend that this region is not a hearth, but rather a case of diffusion from Mesopotamia. Many argue that agriculture diffused to this region from the Fertile Crescent, but evidence supports the independent invention of urbanization in the Nile River Valley. At the very least, the interrela-

relationship between urbanization and irrigation in this region distinguishes it from other urban hearths. Unlike other early cities, the people of the Nile River Valley did not build walls around their cities. From early on, power along the river was concentrated in the hands of the people who controlled the irrigation systems. The absence of walls around individual cities reflects the singular control of the region. The singular control of the Nile River Valley is also reflected in the feats of architecture such as the great pyramids, tombs, and sphinx that were built by thousands of slaves.

The third urban hearth, dating to 2200 BCE, is the **Indus River Valley**, another place where agriculture likely diffused from the Fertile Crescent. Unable to decipher ancient Indus writing, scholars are puzzled by Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, the first cities of the Indus River Valley (Fig. 9.7). The intricate planning of the cities points to the existence of a leadership class, but the houses continued to be equal in size, with no palaces or monuments appearing in the cities. In addition, all the dwellings in the cities had access to the same infrastructure—including wastewater drains and carefully maintained stone-lined wells. The cities had thick walls, and the discovery of

Figure 9.7
Indus River Valley Urban Hearth.
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coins from as far away as the Mediterranean found at the gateways to these walls points to significant trade over long distances.

The fourth urban hearth arose around the confluence of the **Huang He** (Yellow) and **Wei** (Yangtzi) River Valleys of present-day China, dating to 1500 BCE. The Chinese purposefully planned their ancient cities to center on a vertical structure in the middle of the city and then built an inner wall around it. Within the inner wall, the people of this hearth typically placed temples and palaces for the leadership class. The urban elite of the Huang He and Wei region, like the urban elite of the Nile River Valley, demonstrated their power by building enormous, elaborate structures. Around 200 BCE, the Emperor Qin Xi Huang directed the building of the Great Wall of China. Like the Egyptians, he also had an elaborate mausoleum built for himself. An estimated 700,000 slaves worked for over 40 years to craft the intricate faces and weapons, horses, and chariots of an army of over 7000 terracotta warriors who stand guard over his burial place (Fig. 9.8).

Chronologically, the fifth urban hearth is **Mesoamerica**, dating to 200 BCE. The ancient cities of Mesoamerica were religious centers. The urban elite in Mesoamerica augmented their authority with priests, temples, and shrines. Many ancient cities were theocratic centers where rulers were deemed to have divine authority and were, in effect, god-kings. Examples include the great structures of Yucatan, Guatemala, and Honduras

built by the Maya Indians (including Tikal, Chichén-Itzá, Uxmal, and Copán in Fig. 9.9).

The Role of the Ancient City in Society

Ancient cities were not only centers of religion and power, but also served as economic centers. Cities were the chief marketplaces and bases from which wealthy merchants, land and livestock owners, and traders operated. As educational centers, residents of cities included teachers and philosophers. They also had handicraft industries that attracted the best craftspeople and inventors. In all of these roles, ancient cities were the anchors of culture and society, the focal points of power, authority, and change.

As the principal centers, crossroads, markets, places of authority, and religious headquarters, the earliest towns drew talent, trade, and travelers from far distances. Where else would metallurgy have developed? Where would a traveler, tradesman, priest, or pilgrim rest before continuing the journey? Towns had to have facilities that would not be found in farm villages: buildings to entertain visitors, package food, process raw materials, provide a place for worship, and house those who defended the town.

How large were the ancient cities? We have only estimates because it is impossible to judge from excavated ruins the dimensions of a city at its height or the number of people who might have occupied each residential unit. By modern standards, the ancient cities were not large.



Figure 9.8

Terracotta Warriors guarding the tomb of the Chinese Emperor Qin Xi Huang. An estimated 700,000 slaves worked for over 40 years, around 200 BCE, to craft more than 7000 terracotta warriors who stand guard over the emperor's tomb. © O Louis Mazzatenta, National Geographic.

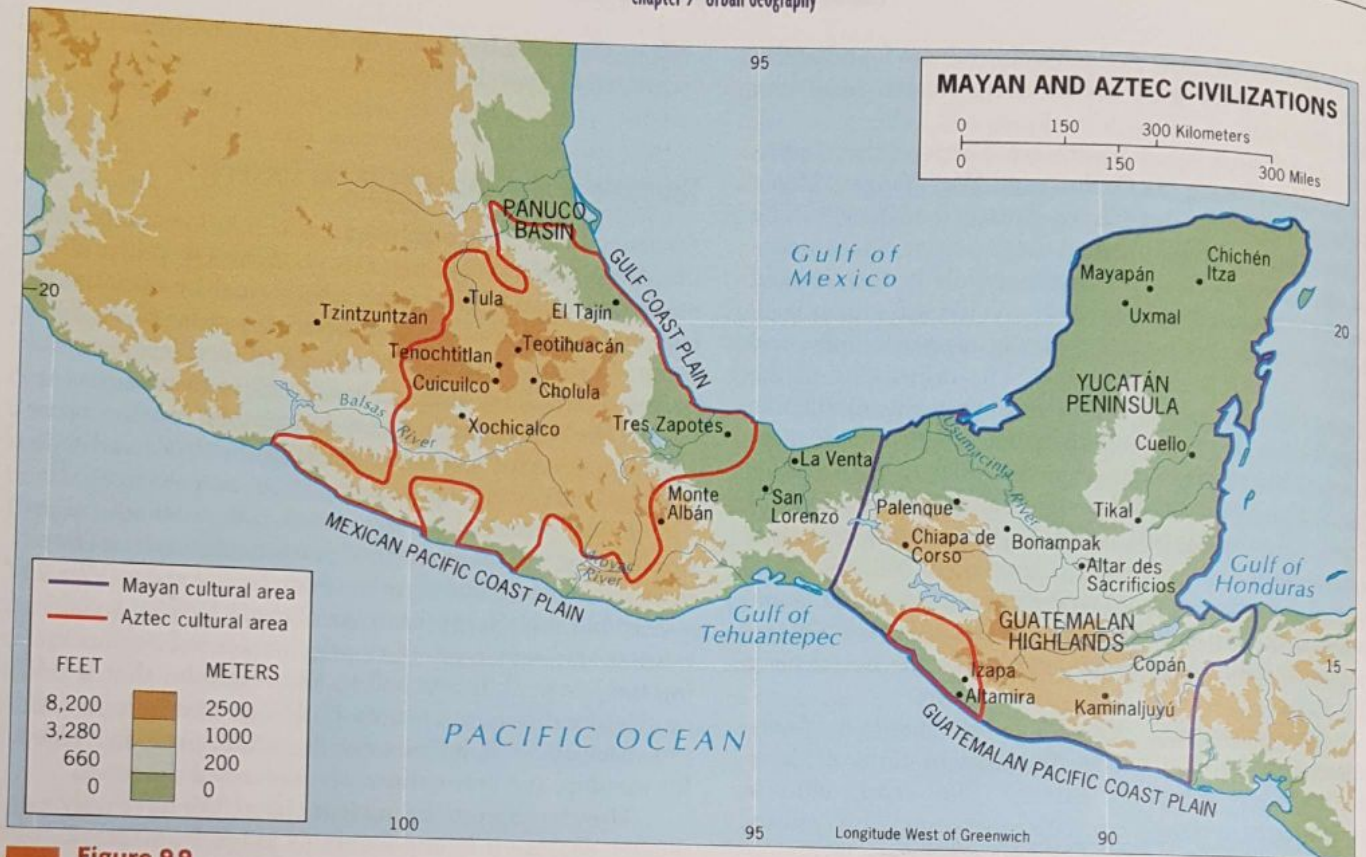


Figure 9.9
Mayan and Aztec Civilizations. © H. J. de Blij, A. B. Murphy, E. H. Fouberg, and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

The cities of Mesopotamia and the Nile Valley may have had between 10,000 and 15,000 inhabitants after nearly 2000 years of growth and development. That, scholars conclude, is about the maximum sustainable size based on existing systems of food production, gathering, distribution, and social organization. These urban places were geographical exceptions in an overwhelmingly rural society. The modern city we know today did not emerge until several thousand years later.

Diffusion of Urbanization

Urbanization diffused from Mesopotamia in several directions. Populations in Mesopotamia grew with the steady food supply and a sedentary lifestyle. People migrated out from the hearth, diffusing their knowledge of agriculture and urbanization. Diffusion from Mesopotamia happened early, even before agriculture developed independently in some other hearths. In fact, urbanization diffused to the Mediterranean from Mesopotamia (and perhaps the Nile River Valley) more than 3500 years ago, at about the same time cities were developing in the hearth of the Huang He and long before cities originated in Mesoamerica.

Greek Cities

More than 3500 years ago, the city of Knossos on the island of Crete was the cornerstone of a system of towns in the Minoan civilization. By 500 BCE, Greece had become one of the most highly urbanized areas on Earth. The urbanization of Ancient Greece ushered in a new stage in the evolution of cities. At its height, Ancient Greece encompassed a network of more than 500 cities and towns, not only on the mainland but also on the many Greek islands. Seafarers connected these urban places with trade routes and carried the notion of urban life throughout the Mediterranean region. Athens and Sparta, often vying with each other for power, soon became Greece's leading cities. Athens may have been the largest city in the world at the time, with an estimated 250,000 inhabitants.

With the hilly topography of Greece, the people had no need to build earthen mounds on which to perch temples; these were provided by nature. Every city had its **acropolis** (acro = highpoint, polis = city), on which the people built the most impressive structures—usually religious buildings. The Parthenon of Athens remains the most famous of all, surviving to this day despite nearly 2500 years of war, earth tremors, vandalism, and environmental impact (Fig. 9.10). Building this magnificent

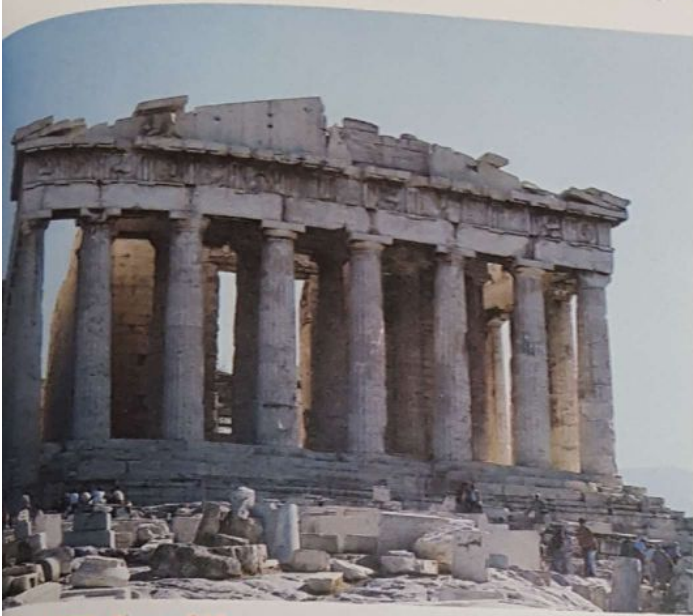


Figure 9.10

Athens, Greece. The rocky hilltop of Athens is home to the Acropolis (acro means high point). The Athens Acropolis is still crowned by the great Parthenon, standing after nearly 25 centuries. © H. J. de Blij.

columned structure, designed by the Athenian architect-engineer Phidias, began in 447 BCE, and its rows of tapering columns have inspired architects ever since.

Like the older Southwest Asian cities, Greece's cities also had public places. In the Southwest Asian towns these seem to have been rather cramped, crowded, and bustling with activity, but in Ancient Greece they were open, spacious squares, often in a low part of town with steps leading down to them (Fig. 9.11). On these steps the Greeks debated, lectured, judged each other, planned military campaigns, and socialized. As time went on, this public space called the *agora* (meaning market) also became the focus of commercial activity.

Greece's cities also had excellent theaters. The aristocracy attended plays and listened to philosophical discourses, but for many people life in a Greek city was miserable. Housing was no better than it had been in the Mesopotamian cities thousands of years earlier. Sanitation and health conditions were poor. And much of the grandeur designed by Greece's urban planners was the work of hundreds of thousands of slaves.

Although Greece was not a hearth of urbanization, the Greek city had global, rather than regional, impact. Urbanization diffused from Greece to the Roman Empire. Roman urbanization and urban culture diffused through Western Europe. The city declined in Europe for a time after the fall of the Roman Empire, but Europeans eventually carried Western concepts of city life around the world through colonialism and capitalism. From Washington, D.C. to Canberra, Australia, the

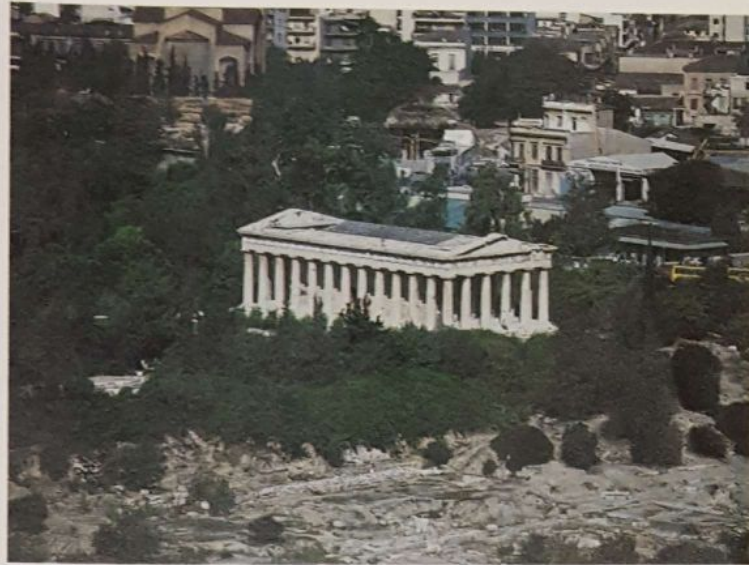


Figure 9.11

Athens, Greece. Looking down from the Acropolis, you can see the agora, the ancient trade and market area, which is surrounded by new urban buildings. © H. J. de Blij.

urban landscape shows the imprints of Greco-Roman urban culture.

Roman Cities

The great majority of Greece's cities and towns were located near the Mediterranean Sea, linking peninsulas and islands. When the Romans succeeded the Greeks (and Etruscans) as rulers of the region, their empire incorporated not only the Mediterranean shores but also a large part of interior Europe and North Africa (Fig. 9.12). The Roman urban system was the largest yet—much larger than Greece's domain. The capital, Rome, served as the apex of a hierarchy of settlements ranging from small villages to large cities. The Romans linked these places with an extensive transportation network that included hundreds of miles of roads, well-established sea routes, and trading ports along the roads, sea, and rivers. Roman regional planners displayed a remarkable capacity for choosing the site of cities, for identifying suitable locales for settlements. The site of a city is its absolute location, often chosen for the best trade location, the best defensive location, or an important religious location.

Romans were greatly influenced by the Greeks, as is evident in Roman mythology and visible in the cultural landscape and urban morphology of Roman cities. Greeks planned their colonial cities in a rectangular grid pattern, and Romans adopted this plan wherever surface conditions



Figure 9.12

Roman Empire c. 117 CE. The Romans established a system of cities linked by a network of land and sea routes. Many of the Roman cities have grown into modern metropolises. © H. J. de Blij, A. B. Murphy, E. H. Fouberg, and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

made it possible. Romans took the Greek acropolis and agora and combined them into one zone, the **Forum**, the focal point of Roman public life (Fig. 9.13). In Rome, the forum includes the world's first great stadium, the Colosseum, which was a much grander version of the Greek theater. Before crowds of thousands of onlookers, Roman gladiators fought each other or killed wild animals imported from Africa in the Colosseum. After Christianity diffused to Rome, but before the Roman Empire adopted Christianity, Romans even forced Christians into the Colosseum where hungry lions attacked and ate them. All Roman cities of any size had an arena like the Colosseum where competitions, war games, ceremonies, and other public events took place.

Throughout the Roman Empire, cities were places of cultural contrasts. What still stands in ruins in many places around the Mediterranean are monumental buildings, impressive villas, spacious avenues, ingenious aque-

ducts and baths, and sewage systems built of stone and pipe (Fig. 9.14). What we can no longer see in the ruins of the empire are the thousands of slaves who built these structures (estimates are between one-third and two-thirds of the population of the empire was enslaved) and the wretchedly poor who were crammed into overcrowded tenements and lived in filth. The city of the Roman Empire, like the city of today, was home to both rich and poor and reflected both the greatest achievements and the worst failings of civilization.

Urban Growth after Greece and Rome

After the Roman Empire fell in 495 CE, Europe entered an era historians called the Middle Ages, which spans from about 500 to 1300. During most of this period in Europe, little urban growth occurred, and in some parts

Field Note

“There can be few spaces of greater significance to the development of Western Civilization than the Roman Forum. This was the nerve center of a vast empire that transformed the face of western Europe, southwestern Asia, and northern Africa. It was also the place where the decisions were made that carried forward Greek ideas about governance, art, urban design, and technology. The very organization of space found in the Roman Forum is still with us: rectilinear street patterns; distinct buildings for legislative, executive, and judicial functions; and public spaces adorned with statues and fountains.”

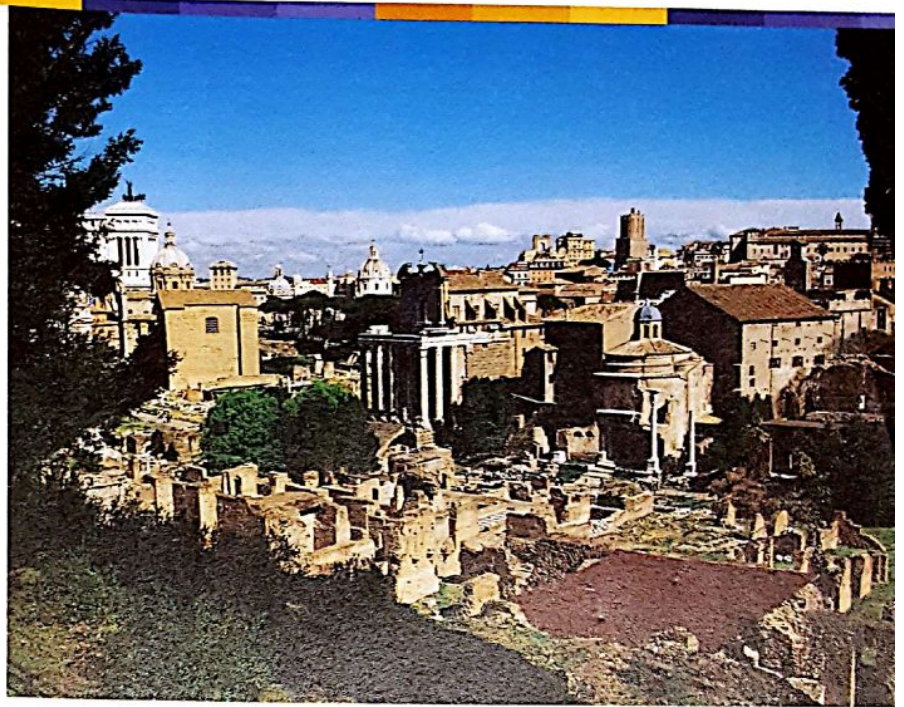


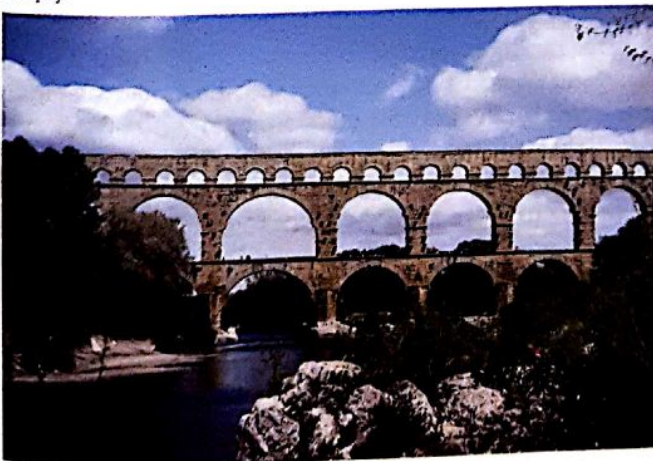
Figure 9.13
Rome, Italy. © Alexander B. Murphy.

of the continent, urbanism went into sharp decline. The urban growth that did take place during this time occurred on sites of oases and resting places along the Silk Route between Europe and Asia. Many of these places grew into towns, and some, such as Bukhara and Samarqand, became major cities. In Asia, Chinese styles of city-building diffused into Korea and Japan, with Seoul becoming a full-fledged city by 1200 and Kyoto,

Japan's historic capital, growing rapidly after the turn of the ninth century.

During Europe's Middle Ages, urbanization continued vigorously outside of Europe. In West Africa, trading cities developed along the southern margin of the Sahara. By 1350, Timbuktu (part of Mali today) was a major city—a seat of government, a university town, a market, and a religious center. The Americas also experienced significant urban growth during Europe's Middle Ages, especially within the Mayan and Aztec empires (Fig. 9.15). The largest pre-Columbian city in the Americas was in the Aztec Empire on the Mexican Plateau. The Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán had nearly 100,000 inhabitants when many European cities lay in ruins in the Middle Ages.

Figure 9.14
Nimes, France. Aqueducts outside of Nimes, France were built during the Roman Empire, about 2000 years ago. © Alexander B. Murphy.



Site and Situation during European Exploration

Early Eurasian urban areas extended in a crescent-shaped zone across Eurasia from England in the west to Japan in the east, including the cities of London, Paris, Venice, Constantinople (Istanbul today), and Tabriz, Samarqand, Kabul, Lahore, Amra, Jaunpur, Xian, Anyang, Kyoto and Osaka. Before European exploration, most cities in the world were sited in the interiors of continents, not just in Eurasia, but also in West Africa and indigenous America. Interior trade routes such as the Silk Route and the



Figure 9.15

Altun Ha, Belize. Between 300 and 900 CE, Altun Ha served as a thriving trade and distribution center for the Caribbean merchant canoe traffic. Some of the trails in Altun Ha led all the way to Teotihuacan. © H. J. de Blij.

caravan routes of West Africa sustained these inland cities and, in many cases, helped them prosper.

The relative importance of the interior trade routes changed, however, when European maritime exploration and overseas colonization ushered in an era of oceanic trade. With this shift, the situation of cities like Paris and Xian changed from being crucial in an interior trading route to being left out of an oceanic trade. The **situation** of a city is its relative location, its place in the region and world around it.

After European exploration took off during the 1400s, the dominance of interior cities declined. Other cities, sited on coasts, gained prominence as their situations changed. In Asia, coastal cities such as Bombay (now Mumbai, India), Madras (Chennai, India), Malacca (Malaysia), Batavia (Jakarta, Indonesia), and Tokyo (Japan) came to the fore. Exploration and oceanic trade refocused the situations of cities in West Africa as well. Before 1500, urbanization in West Africa was concentrated in a belt extending along the southern margin of the Sahara, including such cities as Timbuktu (Mali), Niani (Guinea), Gao (Mali), Zaria (Nigeria), Kano (Nigeria), and Maiduguri (Nigeria). Here, cross-desert caravan traffic met boat traffic on the River Niger (where “camel met canoe”), and people exchanged goods from northern deserts for goods from coastal forests. Maritime trade disrupted this pattern of trade: coastal ports became the leading markets and centers of power, and the African cities of the interior began a long decline.

Coastal cities remained crucial after exploration led to colonialism. During the colonial period key cities in in-

ternational trade networks included the coastal cities of Cape Town (South Africa), Lima-Callao (Peru), and New York City.

The trade networks European powers commanded (including the slave trade) brought unprecedented riches to Europe’s burgeoning medieval cities, such as Amsterdam (the Netherlands), London (England), Lisbon (Portugal), Liverpool (England), and Seville (Spain). Successful merchants built ornate mansions, patronized the arts, participated in city governance, and supported the reconstruction of city centers. As a result, cities that thrived during mercantilism took on similar properties whether it was Antwerp (Belgium), Copenhagen (Denmark), Lisbon (Portugal), or Genoa (Italy). A central square became the focus of the city, fronted by royal, religious, public, and private buildings evincing wealth and prosperity, power and influence (Fig. 9.16). Streets leading to these central squares formed arteries of commerce, and the beginnings of “downtowns” emerged.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European mercantile cities became the nodes of a widening network of national, regional, and global commerce. So wealthy and powerful were the merchants that, supported by their rulers, they were able to found and expand settlements in distant lands. Cities such as Dakar (Senegal), Lourenco Marques (now Maputo, Moçambique), and Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam) were endowed with the ornate trappings of the mercantile cities of Europe, including elaborately inlaid sidewalks, tree-lined avenues, and neo-gothic architecture.

The Second Urban Revolution

During the last decades of the eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution began in Great Britain. None of Europe’s cities was prepared for what lay ahead: an avalanche of changes that ripped the fabric of urban life. Around 1800, Western Europe was still overwhelmingly rural. As thousands migrated to the cities with industrialization, cities had to adapt to the mushrooming population, the proliferation of factories and supply facilities, the expansion of transport systems, and the construction of tenements for the growing labor force.

Before the second urban revolution could take place, a second revolution in agriculture was necessary. In order for people to move from the fields to the cities to work in manufacturing, food production had to increase. During the late seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century, Europeans invented a series of important improvements in agriculture, including the seed drill, hybrid seeds, and improved breeding practices for livestock. Freed from the fields, laborers were able to migrate to cities in hopes of a job. Manufacturers tapped into this