

The Columbian Exchange (Overview)

When Christopher Columbus arrived in the West Indies late in the 15th century, he brought more than ships. His arrival, and those of the explorers who followed him, heralded a historic exchange between the cultures of the Western Hemisphere and those of the Eastern Hemisphere—which until then had had essentially no contact for millions of years. Each hemisphere had developed unique peoples, plants, animals, diseases, and cultures. In introducing each hemisphere to the other, the Columbian Exchange transformed the lives of people at both ends of the journey, then and forever after.

What's on the Menu?

The agricultural exchange between Europe and the Americas introduced both sides to plants and foods they had never seen before. Many of those foods, like tomatoes in Italy, now form cornerstones of cultural cuisine. Other foods or plant products to travel east from the Americas included cacao (chocolate), potatoes, corn, sweet potatoes, squash, strawberries, quinine (for treating malaria), and various flowers. Such foods as sugar, tea, and coffee made the trip west toward the Americas. Grains like wheat and rice, various fruits including oranges and grapes, and such vegetables as lettuce and radishes also broadened the American diet. In time, Europeans also brought vegetation to America—flowers and grasses as well as more destructive weeds. In addition to expanding diets, the edible exchange led to trading and economic patterns, including the growth of slavery, which supported sugar and tobacco production.

What About the Animals?



Most of the animal transfers in the Columbian Exchange traveled westward toward the Americas. Horses, pigs, sheep, goats, cattle, and rats had dramatic effects on the Native American populations. In particular, horses brought hunting and movement opportunities to Native Americans, while pigs—which proliferated vigorously—provided a regular source of meat. On the negative side, pigs destroyed a lot of local vegetation and animal life. Rats, of course, were also less useful and largely spread diseases that killed existing small animals. Europeans also encountered some animals they hadn't seen before, for example, the buffalo and rattlesnake. Again, beyond the actual exchange of animals, the interaction brought cultural change to the Americas. Hunting on horseback helped to spread Native American populations westward, for example.

People and Their Baggage

Columbus and those who followed him brought people to the Americas—Europeans of all kinds and later African slaves to fill the plantation system's labor needs. With the early arrivals came diseases unheard of in the Western Hemisphere. Smallpox alone killed an estimated 50-90% of existing populations. In the other direction, at least one disease—syphilis—traveled to Europe and did tremendous damage in the years to follow.

Europeans also brought their religion (primarily Catholicism in the Columbian period), their weapons, and their iron tools. Those all changed the lives of Native Americans dramatically: religion affected cultural practices and belief systems, guns subdued populations and later advanced hunting techniques, and tools transformed agricultural practices. Unlike the plant and animal exchanges, the people exchange clearly favored Europe and left the Americas tremendously vulnerable to the exploitation that followed.

The Columbian Exchange: Discussion

1. How should educators and historians present Christopher Columbus to future generations of Americans?
2. What foods or plants brought to America by the Columbian exchange do you think play the biggest role today in the U.S. diet and economy?
3. Do you think Christopher Columbus should be blamed for the havoc Europeans wreaked on native populations?

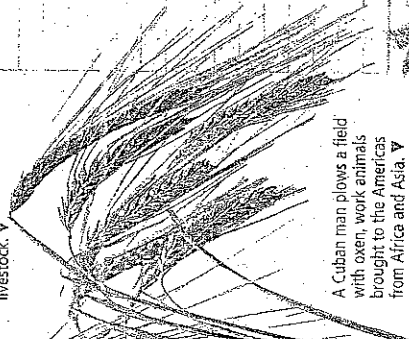
Transforming the World: The Columbian Exchange

Christopher Columbus's landing in the Americas in 1492, and his later voyages, revolutionized the world. European ships—heading both to and from the Americas—carried animals, food plants, and diseases that transformed lives and ways of life around the world. Hundreds of years after the Columbian Exchange began, the patterns of people's lives still reflect the influence of those early European voyages of exploration.

Barley, a grain cultivated by the ancient Egyptians, is widely used in the Americas to feed livestock. ▽

From the Western Hemisphere

- Corn
- Potatoes
- Sweet potatoes
- Beans
- Peanuts
- Squash
- Pumpkins
- Chili peppers
- Turkeys
- Pineapples
- Tomatoes
- Cocoa
- Cassava/Manioc
- Silver
- Quinine
- Sunflowers



A Cuban man plows a field with oxen, work animals brought to the Americas from Africa and Asia. ▽

Originally from India, chickens and their eggs shaped diets worldwide—adding nutrition that boosted population growth. ▽



Native to Asia, goats provide milk and wool to people throughout both hemispheres.

NORTH AMERICA

Alfalfa
Oregano

SOUTH AMERICA

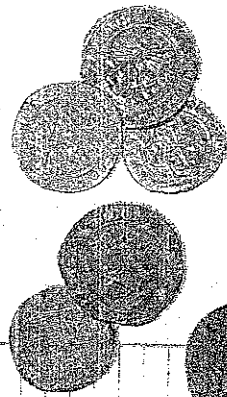
EUROPE

The bark of a South American tree yields quinine, a medicine used to treat malaria. Quinine has benefited millions of people in the southern Eastern Hemisphere who are at high risk for malaria.

AFRICA

From the Eastern Hemisphere

- Wheat
- Sugar
- Bananas
- Rice
- Oats
- Barley
- Rye
- Grapes
- Coffee
- Horses
- Pigs
- Cows, Oxen
- Goats
- Chickens
- Smallpox
- Typhus



Silver and gold for coins like these were mined in the Americas. Shipped across the ocean, they brought wealth and power to European nations. ▽



Sunflowers, native to the American Great Plains, thrive in chilly northern Europe and Asia. Ukraine, Russia, and China press sunflower seeds for cooking oil.

Peanuts have become an important staple crop in western Africa, where they add protein to soups and stews or are pressed into cooking oil.

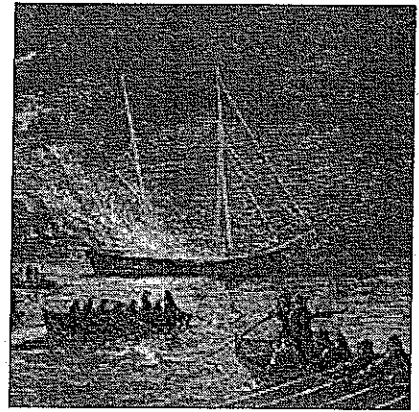
Thinking Critically

1. Analyze Visuals Explain the importance of one Western Hemisphere item to a person in the Eastern Hemisphere.
2. Draw Inferences Choose an item from one of the lists. Explain how the history of the hemisphere it traveled to might be different if the Columbian Exchange had not happened.

An African woman harvests corn, one of the world's most widely grown food plants.

Mercantilism, 1754-1776 (Overview)

In the 17th and 18th centuries, many European nations believed that the world's wealth was limited and finite. Whatever one nation gained, another nation lost. To ensure their own share of the pie, those nations pursued an economic policy called mercantilism. Because England followed mercantilism, this policy profoundly affected the American colonies in the years preceding independence.



Go for the Gold!

The cornerstone of mercantilism held that a nation's supply of gold and silver reflected its wealth and economic strength. In addition, gold enabled nations to acquire military arms. Nations worked in many ways to increase their gold and silver stores, but foreign trade became the key avenue. By exporting more goods than they imported, mercantile nations could demand the difference in gold, a principal international currency of the times.

Colonial Strategy

Trading nations like England saw their colonies as useful players in the mercantile game. England looked to its colonies for raw materials that could be obtained at low cost. In addition, colonies became markets for England's exports. Through mercantilism, England forged the early strengths and weaknesses of the young American economy.

Tariff and Regulation

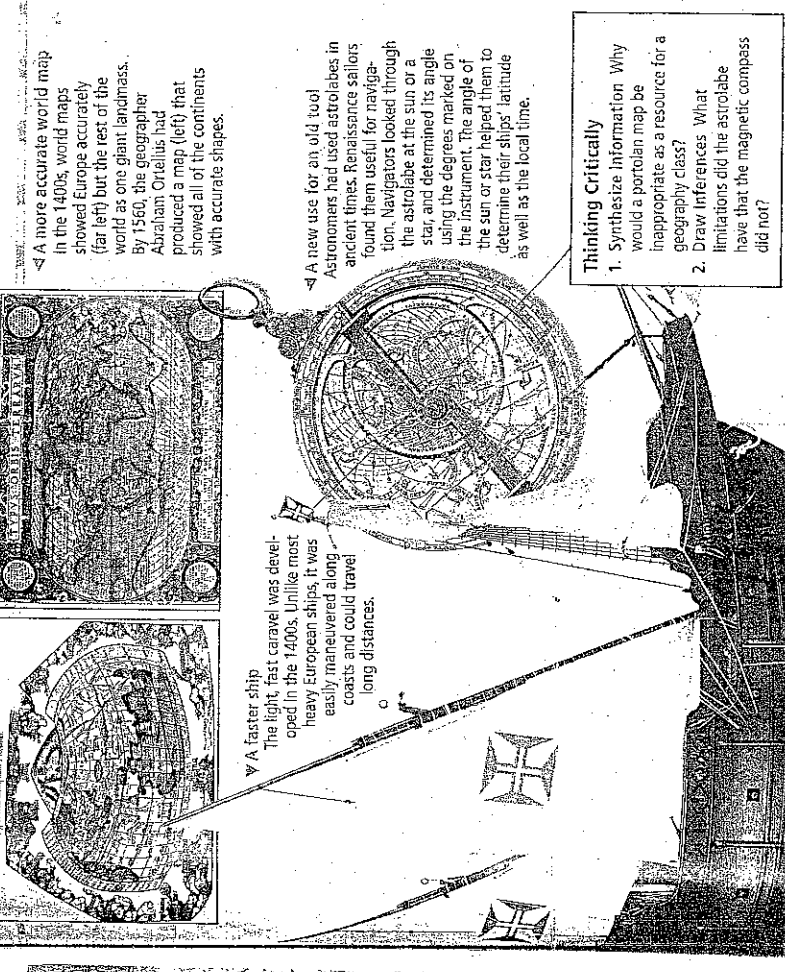
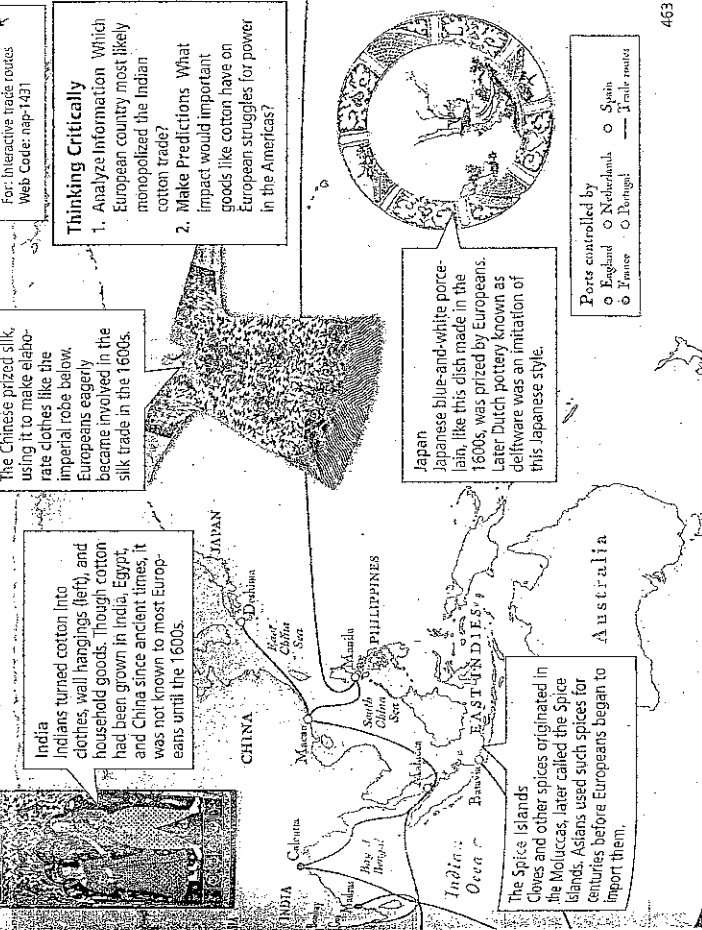
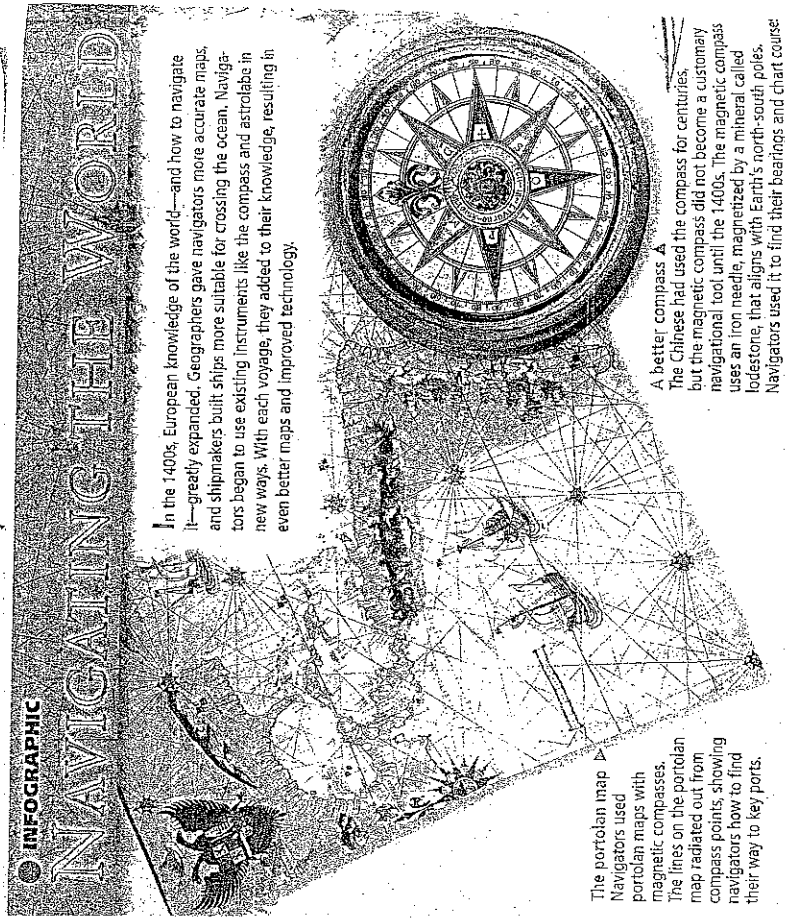
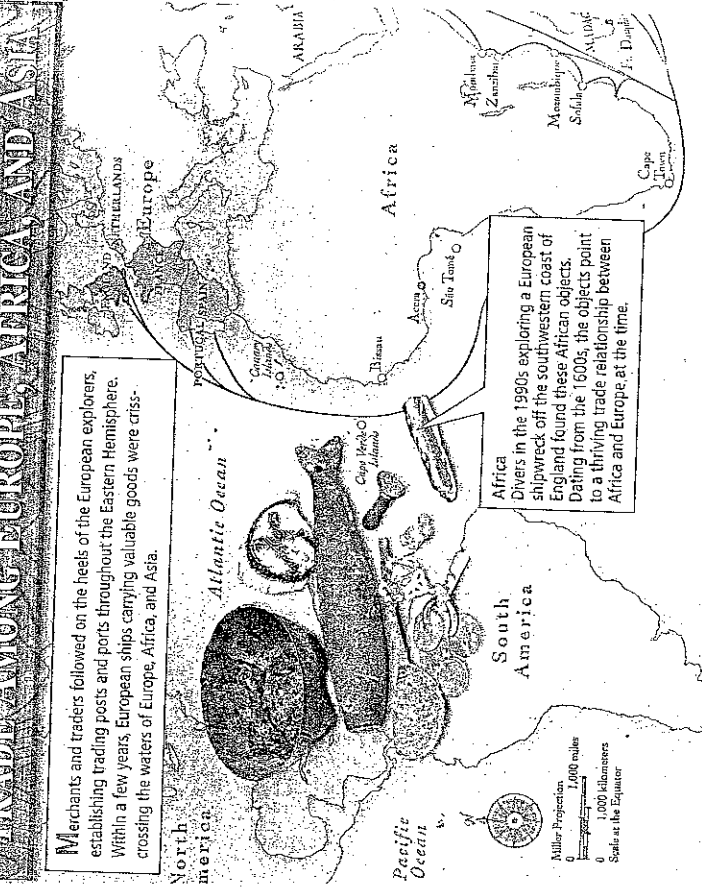
Beginning with the first of the Navigation Acts in 1660, laws passed during the 17th and 18th centuries tightened England's control of the American economy and trade. For example, by requiring the colonies to trade within the British empire, England limited any trade competition that its colonies might present. Laws against manufacturing also forced the colonies to import manufactured goods from the mother country. Products manufactured elsewhere were routed through England, and shipping was limited to English or colonial carriers.

Impact in America

As mercantile regulations put economic pressure on the colonists, they began to protest. In the 1760s and early 1770s, England and its American colonies danced toward their eventual standoff.

Mercantilism: Discussion

1. Like the mercantile policies of earlier centuries, today's trade tariffs respond to modern needs for national economic strength. How is it in a nation's interest to export more than it imports?
2. What role do you think mercantilism had in the colonial move toward revolution?
3. Should nations with close ties to one another—like the colonies and England—offer each other special trade privileges?

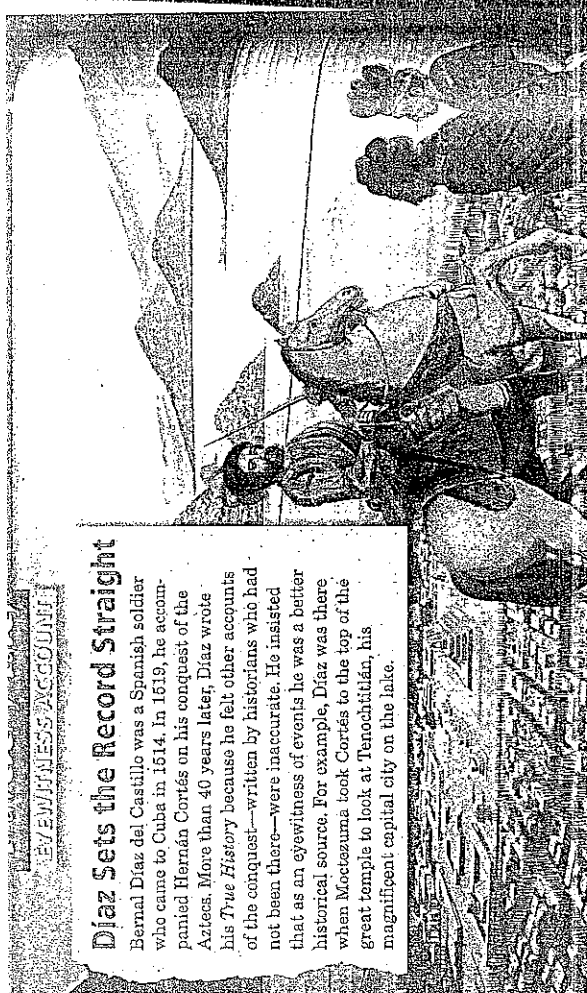


For: Interactive trade routes
Web Code: nap-1431

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Díaz Sets the Record Straight

Bernal Díaz del Castillo was a Spanish soldier who came to Cuba in 1514. In 1519, he accompanied Hernán Cortés on his conquest of the Aztecs. More than 40 years later, Díaz wrote his *True History* because he felt other accounts of the conquest—written by historians who had not been there—were inaccurate. He insisted that as an eyewitness of events he was a better historical source. For example, Díaz was there when Moctezuma took Cortés to the top of the great temple to look at Tenochtitlán, his magnificent capital city on the lake.



“When we saw so all those cities and villages built in the water, and other great towns on dry land, and that straight and level causeway leading toward [Tenochtitlán], we were astounded. These great towns and [pyramids] and buildings rising from the water, all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision... Indeed, some of our soldiers asked whether it was not all a dream.... It was all so wonderful that I do not know how to describe this first glimpse of things never heard of, seen or dreamed of before.”

“We turned back to the great market and the swarm of people buying and selling. The mere murmur of their voices was loud enough to be heard more than three miles away. Some of our soldiers who had been in many parts of the world, in Constantinople, in Rome, and all over Italy, said that they had never seen a market so well laid out, so large, so orderly, and so filled with people.”

—Bernal Díaz del Castillo
from *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*

Who Loses in a Trade War?

In the 1990s, a trade war over bananas broke out between the United States and the European Union. The European Union wanted to buy bananas from small banana growers in its former colonies in Africa and the Caribbean. The United States, wanting to assist large South and Central American banana growers, responded by heavily taxing common European imports. In 2001, an agreement was reached that ended the trade war. **Critical Thinking** *In a trade war, who are the winners and losers?*

Everyone Wins

“The discrimination of the current illegal system is eliminated because all applicants will be treated equally and each applicant gains market access in the same proportion... Dole believes that this system will benefit those banana exporters that invest in the jobs, people, countries and infrastructure that it takes to grow markets open trade and compete.”

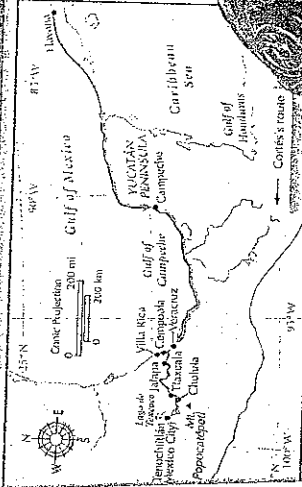
—Dole Food Company press release, 2001



The Less Powerful Lose

“St. Lucia continues to be concerned that the thrust towards allowing market forces to totally determine the scope, structure and outcomes of economic activity, is not being counterbalanced by mechanisms to fairly distribute welfare gains and to protect the more vulnerable, small states like Saint Lucia, from the consequences of market failure.”

—Earl Huntley, ambassador of Saint Lucia, in a statement to the UN, 2001



Hernán Cortés

Thinking Critically

1. Draw Inferences Why do you think Díaz included the opinions of “some of our soldiers”?
2. Make a Reasoned Judgment Do you agree with Díaz that the best historical accounts are written by people who participated in or witnessed the events? Explain your answer.



King Affonso I: *Letter to King John III of Portugal*

In 1490, the Portuguese converted the son of a Kongo king to Christianity and then helped him take his father's throne. The new king, born Nzinga Mbemba, was renamed Affonso. King Affonso soon realized that his relationship with Portugal had extremely negative consequences, as can be seen from his letter to King John III of Portugal in 1526. In this letter, the king of Kongo appeals to the king of Portugal to end the slave trade.

Sir, Your Highness of Portugal should know how our Kingdom is being lost in so many ways. This is caused by the excessive freedom given by your officials to the men and merchants who are allowed to come to this Kingdom to set up shops with goods and many things which have been prohibited by us. Many of our vassals, whom we had in obedience, do not comply¹ because they have the things in greater abundance than we ourselves. It was with these things that we had them content and subjected under our jurisdiction², so it is doing a great harm not only to the service of God, but to the security and peace of our Kingdoms and State as well.

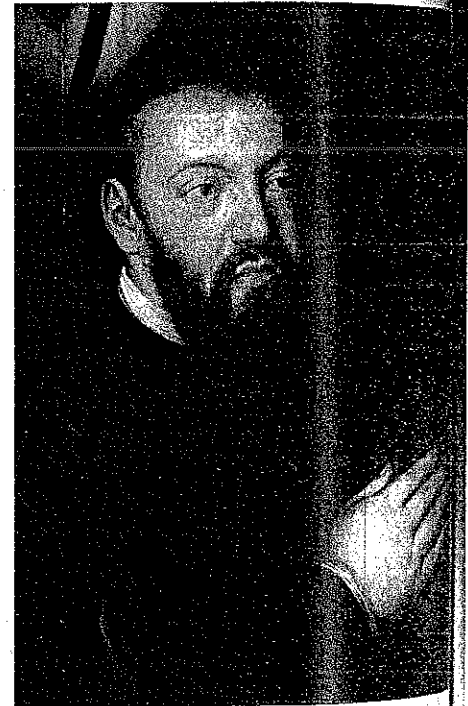
And we cannot reckon how great the damage is, since the mentioned merchants are taking every day our natives, sons of the land and the sons of our noblemen and vassals and our relatives. The thieves and men of bad conscience grab them wishing to have the things and wares of this Kingdom which they are ambitious of; they grab them and get them to be sold. And so great, Sir, is the corruption and licentiousness³ that our country is being completely depopulated, and your Highness should not agree with this nor accept it as in your service. And to avoid it we need from those your Kingdoms no more than some priests and a few people to teach in schools, and no other goods except wine and flour for the holy sacrament.

That is why we beg of Your Highness to help and assist us in this matter, commanding your factors⁴ that they should not send here either merchants or wares, because it is our will that in these kingdoms there should not be any trade of slaves nor outlet for them. Concerning what is referred to above, again we beg of Your Highness to agree with it otherwise we cannot remedy such an obvious damage.

1. **comply** (kum PLY) *v.* agree to a request
2. **jurisdiction** (joor is DIK shun) *n.* area of authority or power
3. **licentiousness** (ly SEN shus nis) *n.* lack of morality
4. **factors** (FAK turs) *n.* agents



▲ A Congolese brass and wood crucifix dating from the 1500s blends Christian and traditional African symbols.



▲ King John III of Portugal

Thinking Critically

1. **Identify Causes** What does King Affonso believe has caused his vassals to become disobedient?
2. **Analyze Information** What specifically does King Affonso say he still needs from the Portuguese?