

# HIS 101 Topic 27-Towns © December 28, 1999

Raymond J. Jirran

## **A. Introduction**

Understanding civilization within a chronological framework is essential for a recognition of both how to identify Western civilization and how to identify one's own ability to participate in that civilization. Such is the principal goal of this course. Such understanding requires a knowledge of technological input. The course goal for this topic is **to evaluate the impact of technology upon civilization** according to a criteria of the people, places, and times involved and the degree of certitude warranted.

## **B. Trade**

European trade closed down to its all-time low about the year 800. The first area to reopen was the Mediterranean Sea, where European trade had been impeded since the Ninth Century. The Normans and Italians broke this obstruction in the Eleventh Century. After the year 1000, trade increased. In the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, the crusades helped increase the trade even more.

Fairs grew up which became meeting places for merchants from Italy and northern Europe. Fairs were geographically located mid-way between origin and destination, in a manner of speaking, in the middle of nowhere. For three centuries, the Eleventh, Twelfth, and Thirteenth, these fairs were the most important European places of economic exchange in a monetary function sense. Chambers<sup>1</sup> seems to refer to the market in a commodity sense. The technology of monetary exchange applies to the monetary function sense; the technology of goods applies to the commodity sense.

The fair differed from the market, which was distinctly local and held about once a week to allow the peasants to dispose of surplus goods from the manor and to obtain manufactured goods from the town. The fair was a much more important and elaborate event, held only seasonally or annually in special sections of each European country. Regular laws governing the region were set aside by a special commercial code called the "law merchant" with a special court.

## **C. Towns**

Trade brought towns. To understand the importance of the revival of town life, remember that the urban civilization of the Romans had practically disappeared. The population of Rome declined from a maximum of about one million to less than fifty thousand.<sup>2</sup> To offer a sense of the times, scholars estimate between 20,000 and 50,000 Jews were present in Rome during the First Century A.D.<sup>3</sup> Generally speaking, town life in Western Europe between 500 and 1000 A.D. was almost extinct. But from 1000 to 1200 the town became an invaluable agency in the growth of trade, art, and thought.

The medieval town differed from the ancient town in that the medieval town produced proportionately more. Ancient towns were primarily consumers, rather than producers. Among the items of trade in the mid-Eleventh Century were Flemish slaves in Britain. Shortly thereafter, the Flemish economic miracle would take off and Flanders would lead Europe into modern times.<sup>4</sup>

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## **D. Culture**

### 1. Technology

According to Chambers, in the Ninth Century, western Europeans perfected three major inventions bearing on agriculture: (a) the modern horse collar, whereby the weight was borne on the shoulders rather than the neck; (b) the tandem harness, which utilized the strength of several horses (see the earlier version on page 186 of the seventh edition of Chambers);<sup>5</sup> (c) horse shoes which provided better traction and protection.<sup>6</sup> Some say these inventions did for the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries what the steam engine did for the Nineteenth Century.

### 2. Finance

The first big development came with the reappearance of money as a common means of exchange. With the coming of the crusades, the participants had to raise money quickly in order to purchase the necessary traveling equipment. Funds also had to be taken to the Holy Lands for suppliers there. The nobles, therefore, sold or mortgaged their lands for immediate cash.

Money also became more in demand at the fairs. The large quantity of coin which began to circulate showed that money had been hoarded rather than lost in the uncertain centuries following the end of the Roman Empire. In the Thirteenth Century, silver coins were replaced in international trade by gold ones, especially by the florin from Florence and the ducat from Venice. Primitive forms of banking and credit began to reappear.

## **E. Conclusion**

The "Map 10.1 Europe, ca. 1250" on page 333 in the seventh edition makes a good check for locating: Black Sea; Bologna; England; Flanders; Holy Roman Empire; France; Mediterranean Sea; Paris; Rome; Scotland; Florence; Venice; Avignon, and Aquitaine. Note that the Baltic Sea is not labeled. By studying and thinking about the Introduction, Trade, Towns, and Culture students have been able to evaluate the impact of technology upon civilization and prepare a comment for the Internet.

Supplement

## **F. Introduction (continued)**

Modern prosperity requires capital for the development of infrastructure, such as running water. Flowing water and the elimination of disease do go together. The first part of this supplement will continue with a further comment on finance, followed by some comments on the technology of running water, and concluding with a consideration of disease.

## **G. Towns (continued)**

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The most famous fairs in all Europe were held in northeastern France at Champagne. See "Map 8.3 Medieval Trade Routes"<sup>7</sup> on page 253 in the seventh edition of Chambers and "Map 9.3 Medieval England, France, and Germany," on page 298.<sup>8</sup> The fair was of great value as a clearing house for ideas as well as goods and technology from all over Europe. The fairs helped break down the provincialism of the manor as well as the isolation of the town.

As political power became more centralized after 1300, the fairs declined in importance. At the same time more easterly routes, overland into south Germany, and more westerly routes, through the Strait of Gibraltar northward along the coast of Europe, began seriously diverting Mediterranean trade away from the former routes. More importantly, however, the Black Death, which began in 1347, along with other disasters, brought about a population decline which resulted in a general economic crisis. After the crisis was over, the newer routes had the advantage.

## **H. Finance (continued)**

The first bankers were in Italy where the all-important technique of "symbolic transfer" was invented. See Dante's Divine Comedy on pages 319, 345, and 347-349 in the seventh edition.<sup>9</sup> Through symbolic transfer, money was deposited in a bank for a receipt which could be cashed in any of the offices of the same bank. This method was very safe and therefore very useful during the crusades, when the Knights Templars arranged a system whereby crusaders could deposit money in their Parisian banks and cash their deposits in the Holy Land.

## **I. Running Water<sup>10</sup>**

When the Romans established cities in northern France after the Third Century, they accommodated the cities by diverting rivers to serve as moats. A good definition of a town during the Early Middle Ages, from 500-1000, is "a settlement whose inhabitants live primarily from commercial activity, not food production."<sup>11</sup> Towns in Northern Europe, from Dublin to Kiev were similar in type of location, street layout, house type, and manufacturing activities. Archaeological research is opening the way to non-written sources. During the Seventh Century there was a resurgence of towns. These towns grew during the Eighth and Ninth Centuries at the same time other towns arose.<sup>12</sup>

The difference between productivity between less and developed economies was not much, according to recent quantitative studies. Before the Eighteenth Century most of the West European economies had probably attained a per capital income not much different from that of the Roman Empire in the First Century A.D. Ancient Egypt, which was poorer, was an exception. By the late Twentieth Century more developed economies averaged about four times less developed economies.<sup>13</sup>

In the Ninth Century great attention was paid to fortifying the cities of the Parisian basin. On the lower Seine the moats preceded rather than followed the cities, as happened elsewhere. The moats around Paris served to harden the ground enough to support fortifications.<sup>14</sup> Thomas Nelson Community College is built on a swamp. When the college first opened, the water table was about three inches below the surface. Today that table is about three feet below the surface. In other words, the ground has hardened because of drainage.

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During the first medieval growth of towns, rulers diverted water into the cities in order to provide drainage for the hinterland. Mills required the running water which streams, running away from the towns, later provided. While the ancient Romans avoided marshes, the medievalists had good use for them. Artisans such as tanners and textile workers moved into the drained bogs to obtain the standing water required for their work. During the Twelfth Century the larger cities of the Parisian basin and Venice all had about the same ratio of land to waterway within their boundaries.

Current scholarship denies that the cities were seriously polluted before 1300. After that, however, a rainier climate and warfare incapacitated the urban canals and moats which had been draining the centers of the cities. During the Fourteenth Century, moats were widened for defensive purposes, thereby causing stagnant pools of water, rather than smooth run-off channels. Suburbs reverted to fetid swamps.

By the Fourteenth Century beavers had virtually disappeared from Europe. During the Thirteenth Century the Cistercian monks and the Teutonic Knights sought and gained privileges for hunting beaver in Poland and Prussia. Those in charge of land drainage regarded beaver dams a nuisance.<sup>15</sup>

Mills which were destroyed in the wars were not rebuilt. The shift from medieval to modern in textiles was a shift from woolen cloth to vegetable fiber cloth. The new cotton cloth was manufactured in a zone of marshes and man-made canals surrounding the early modern cities.

Beginning in the Eighteenth Century minerals other than those found in organic putrefaction were used to alter substances and the former urban water network was no longer useful. Moats and conduits were filled in and ramparts torn down. In this way the urban "age of water" was divided into two periods at 1300. From 950 to 1300 running water provided the energy for the technology used in urban crafts. From 1300 to 1800 urban chemical activities were based on the principle of slow maceration of organic matter in stagnant water. The approach described here does not work as well in the Netherlands and in England as it does in the Parisian basin.

## ***J. Disease***

Those participating in trade, whether as merchants or money traders or caravan members were vulnerable to the plague. When the Mongols invaded Europe at this time, they seem to have become infected with the plague, from which they never recovered. For three thousand years prior to the Black Death, steppe peoples had invaded the south on a regular basis, the nomads against the farmers. By the Sixteenth Century, the drift of population on the western steppe had reversed itself, so that the farmers were now invading the grasslands.<sup>16</sup>

From the Black Death until the death of Saint Vincent de Paul in 1660 epidemics ravaged the cities. After the mid-Seventeenth Century those epidemics either tapered off into the status of childhood diseases or became less geographically pervasive.<sup>17</sup> By the end of the Seventeenth Century, both plague and malaria had ended in northern European, setting the stage for the era of

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Eighteenth Century expansion. The new problems concerned food supply, water supply, and waste disposal, problems still unsolved.

The plague is still recorded in Norfolk, Virginia in the first half of the Nineteenth Century.<sup>18</sup> Cholera is mentioned as possibly present in Philadelphia during the same time.<sup>19</sup> The professor suspects that the plague and cholera may be more dormant than dead, able to return under suitable conditions. Cholera is mentioned again in the December 29, 1999 edition of Topic Thirty-five, Exploration at G. Human Health, 7. Disease.

In other words, insofar as Western civilization is concerned, between 1300 and 1500 the exchange of diseases brought about the invasion of the Europeans throughout Europe and the later invasion of Europeans elsewhere, domesticated disease itself. Human herds of a half million people throughout the globe changed the nature of epidemics. By spreading their diseases, the civilized peoples of the world wiped out those less exposed to diseases. Immune systems have protected large human groupings up until now, with the invasion of the AIDS epidemic.

If the parasite wiped out the human population on which it depended, the parasite itself passed out of existence. Those micro-organisms which survived, did so without destroying the populations in any absolute sense. Children could be vulnerable and were replaceable, thus the so-called childhood diseases.

Scientists are pointing out that the globe is in the initial stages of another pandemic, stemming from AIDS. Since the propagation of AIDS depends on private behavior involving sexual and drug-related activity, direct access to information needed to limit such behavior is practically impossible to obtain. Mathematical models, however, can work backwards, from observation of the disease, to the behavior which must be causing that disease.<sup>20</sup>

The disease, first noted in Africa, may have been slowly incubating there for more than two hundred years, before it became common enough to be identified in the early 1980s. Mathematical models indicate that the virus makes many different models of itself. As long as the immune system can keep up, symptoms do not appear. This averages ten years in adults.<sup>21</sup>

Not everyone is equally liable to get AIDS. The main way in which AIDS is propagated is through sexual contact. This means that AIDS propagates first within those groups most sexually active. After that, AIDS propagates among those having indirect contact with the first group. This means that early education of young teens would be helpful in containing the spread of AIDS. The longer risky activity continues, the more damaging the disease becomes.<sup>22</sup>

While zidovudine (AZT) is undoubtedly good for the individual in that AZT prolongs life, AZT is not good for the community in that that individual thereby continues to spread the disease. In 1992 there were 350,000 reported cases of AIDS world-wide. Scientists estimate that another ninety percent of the cases are not reported. While the majority of reported cases are in the Western world, and most of those are in the United States, the balance of reported cases will be in Africa, India, and Southeast Asia.<sup>23</sup>

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Willingness to face the truth, in spite of political embarrassment, will serve to protect the West from what is expected in the developing world. The results of current sexual activity will occur between ten and twenty years from now. It has become very important to alert all concerned to the lethal risks of sexual and drug-related activity. Without effective drugs to combat AIDS, such is the only line of defense known today.<sup>24</sup> As far as the professor can tell, the so-called "drug cocktails" are too recent for historical comment.

What does this have to do with a lesson on the beginnings of towns in Western civilization? AIDS infects urban people first because urban people are the ones most likely to exhibit AIDS-risky behavior. Technology makes cities possible and the development of AIDS has become an important component in evaluating the impact of technology upon civilization. Technology has enabled the scientific world to identify the AIDS virus and may, yet, enable it to stop the developing pandemic.

In 1991 47,000 United States citizens died from AIDS, making AIDS their ninth leading cause of death. The cost of caring for AIDS patients was 5.8 billion dollars in 1991. In 1994 that figure is expected nearly to double.<sup>25</sup> In 1999 the professor did not have that figure.

## **K. Conclusion**

The incompatible inseparables at work here are those between faith and reason, value and fact, morality and science, each claiming to be the path to truth. The point is towns are functions of faith accepting fate and reason changing the way in which things are done; of morality placing disease at the feet of sin and science placing disease at the feet of uncleanness; of valuing the past in the face of contravening critical conditions. Towns resolved tensions based on the truths of what worked, rather than on the more esoteric truths of philosophy and theology.

In the battle between truth and politics, cities offered new truths which the politics of Western civilization did not suppress. Those truths led the way to new technologies which eventually opened the way for the advantages the West enjoys. That struggle continues, even in these lessons.

Comments on the Seventh Edition of Chambers, pages 0368-0370

In the opinion of the professor, Chambers is the most scholarly textbook on the market. Chambers well represents mainstream thinking in the history profession. The professor, however, disagrees in many significant ways with mainstream thinking. Some of these disagreements are set forth above and others in the following comments.

Page Column  
Paragraph  
Line

0369 1 2 3-4 "... Strasburg, Metz, Ghent, Liege, and Paris . . ."

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Ghent and Liege can be found on "Map 11.2 The Hanseatic League and the Goods it Traded in the Fourteenth Century" on page 360; Strasburg and Paris can be found on "Map 11.3 The Spread of Printing before 1500" on page 364. Metz can be found on neither map, but its location is identified at page 0364 immediately above.

0370 1-2

". . . for the Christian fathers had taught that neither the concept of private property nor social inequality had been intended by God."

The professor is very uncomfortable with this. "Thou shalt not steal" and "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods" seem to establish some right to private property, even in the eyes of the Church Fathers. What Chambers may properly mean here is that the Church has been on the wrong side of the French Revolution and democracy and on the wrong side of the way in which those favoring the French Revolution and democracy have portrayed history vis-a-vis those who have not favored the French Revolution and democracy. The professor favors the French Revolution. The professor is unaware of professional historians who do not favor the French Revolution and democracy.

## Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup>Chambers, fifth edition, page 297-299; sixth edition, 215-217; seventh edition, 252-.

<sup>2</sup>The professor thinks Rome at her ancient nadir had 50,000 people. But, for sure, the 30,000 of Chambers in an earlier edition is less than the 50,000 of the professor. In November 1984 Dr. Jirran offered ten points to the first student bringing in evidence to settle his difference here with Chambers. In November 1985 the ante was raised to twenty points; in August 1990 thirty points; 1991 forty points. At this point, in June 1992, the offer is for the maximum extra points available. Interested students should see Dr. Jirran before doing the research to ensure that someone else has not already pre-empted this project.

<sup>3</sup> H. J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960), pages 135-137 as cited in footnote 7 of Mark D. Nanos, "The Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience Addressed in Paul's Letter to the Romans," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (April 1999), page 285.

<sup>4</sup>David Nicholas, "Of Poverty and Primacy: Demand, Liquidity, and the Flemish Economic Miracle, 1050-1200," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 96, No. 1 (February 1991), pages 29 and 40.

<sup>5</sup>On page 220 of the fifth edition of Chambers, a picture different from that on page 160 in the sixth edition; 186 in the seventh.

<sup>6</sup>The sixth edition of Chambers, page 159.

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<sup>7</sup>The fifth edition of Chambers, page 298; sixth edition page 216; in the seventh edition it is "Map 8.3" on page 253..

<sup>8</sup>Chambers, fifth edition, page 311; sixth edition, page 226; in the seventh edition it is "Map 9.3" on page 298.

<sup>9</sup> See *The Divine Comedy* on pages 344, 373 and 377 in the sixth edition; pages 319, 345, 347-349 in the seventh edition.

<sup>10</sup>This section is based on David Nicholas, review of Andre E. Guillerme, *The Age of Water: The Urban Environment in the North of France, A.D. 300-1800*. (Environmental History Series, number 9.) in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 95, No. 2 (April 1990), pages 505-506.

<sup>11</sup> Peter S. Wells, review of Helen Clarke and Bjorn Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking Age* in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 97, No. 3 (June 1992), page 829.

<sup>12</sup> Peter S. Wells, review of Helen Clarke and Bjorn Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking Age* in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 97, No. 3 (June 1992), page 828-829.

<sup>13</sup> John H. Coatsworth, "Presidential Address: Welfare," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 101, No. 1 (February 1996), page 5.

<sup>14</sup> This section is based on David Nicholas, review of Andre E. Guillerme, *The Age of Water: The Urban Environment in the North of France, A.D. 300-1800*. (Environmental History Series, number 9.) in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 95, No. 2 (April 1990), pages 505-506.

<sup>15</sup> Richard C. Hoffmann, "Economic Development and Aquatic Ecosystems in Medieval Europe," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 101, No. 3 (June 1996), page 666.

<sup>16</sup>William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (New York: Anchor Books, 1976), pages 170-171.

<sup>17</sup> Also see Karen Halttunen, "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 100, No. 4 (October 1995), pages 309.

<sup>18</sup> William Still, *The Underground Rail Road: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters, &c., Narrating the Hardships Hair-breadth Escapes and Death Struggles of the Slaves in their efforts for Freedom, as Related by themselves and others, or witnessed by the author; together with sketches of some of the largest stockholders, and most liberal aiders and advisers, of the Road* (Chicago: Ebony Classics: Johnson Publishing Company, Inc., 1970 (originally copyrighted in 1871 by William Still)), page 481-482

<sup>19</sup> William Still, *The Underground Rail Road: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters, &c., Narrating the Hardships Hair-breadth Escapes and Death Struggles of the Slaves in their efforts for Freedom, as Related by themselves and others, or witnessed by the author; together with sketches of some of the largest stockholders, and most liberal aiders and advisers, of the Road* (Chicago: Ebony Classics: Johnson Publishing Company, Inc., 1970 (originally copyrighted in 1871 by William Still)), pages 481-482.

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<sup>20</sup> Roy M. Anderson and Robert M. May, "Scientific American: Understanding the AIDS Pandemic, Mathematical models help to reveal how the AIDS virus infects individuals and communities. They sometimes produce results that upset simple intuition." Scientific American, Vol. 266, No. 5 (May 1992), pages 58-66.

<sup>21</sup> Roy M. Anderson and Robert M. May, "Scientific American: Understanding the AIDS Pandemic, Mathematical models help to reveal how the AIDS virus infects individuals and communities. They sometimes produce results that upset simple intuition." Scientific American, Vol. 266, No. 5 (May 1992), pages 58-66.

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<sup>25</sup> The Washington Post, "Statistics plot frustrating years of AIDS," Nation, Daily Press, Sunday, November 10, 1991, page A 12.