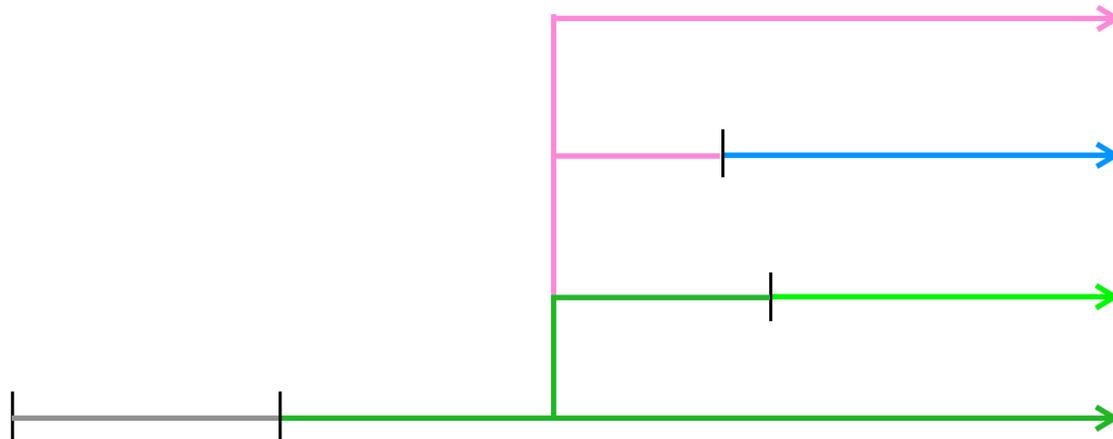


B. The Europe of Nations: The Core Element

1. If we separate the elements of Western civilization from the broader context and focus on these elements exclusively, then our representation can change to one like this, where the convergence has been omitted, and tick marks are used to highlight important moments that represent significant changes.



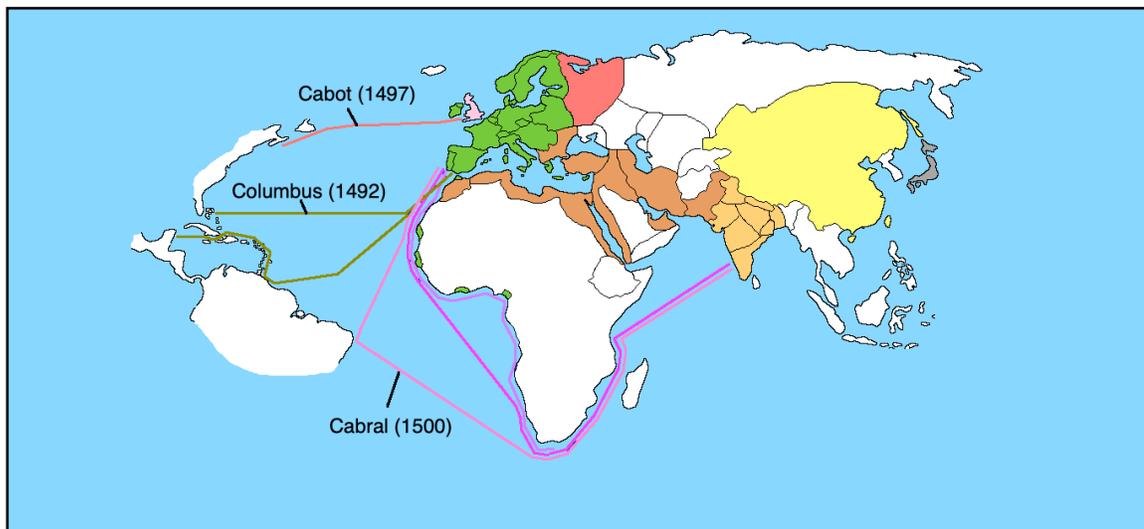
2. In this representation, it is clear that Europe plays the dominant role. It is the “trunk,” while the Anglosphere, America, and the Ibersphere are “branches,” and Greco-Roman civilization are the “roots” of the *family tree* of Western civilization.

C. The Age of Discovery

1. The reason why there are so many cultural blocks in the same “family” of cultures is that European civilization engaged in a unique effort to explore the world during the period known as the *Age of Discovery*.
2. The main goal of the explorers and their royal patrons during this time was to find an efficient trade route to Asia—China mainly, but also Japan and India—because of the notoriety of these cultures ever since the voyage of a young Italian merchant named Marco Polo.
3. Polo’s time in China in the service of the Chinese emperor was the material for a famous book that inspired many explorers, who imagined that sailing to Asia directly, rather than trading with Muslim merchants in the Middle East, would be extremely profitable. (The goal was to cut out the “middle man,” of which there were indeed many, who formed a chain between China and Europe, and who each took a percentage of the value of goods bought and sold along the way, thus raising the prices to exorbitant levels. Anyone who

could break that chain would be able to sell the same goods for much less, and still make huge amounts of money.)

4. The attempt to reach Asia by sea began with Portugal, under Prince Henry “the Navigator,” and proceeded slowly over decades. Indeed, the Portuguese had not yet succeeded in finding a route when Christopher Columbus proposed a different approach to the monarchs of Spain. Based on the ancient Greek sciences of geography and astronomy, Columbus proposed a westward route from Europe to Asia. As the world well knows, he was authorized to make the attempt in **1492**.
5. After the initial discovery of America by Columbus in **1492**, all the seafaring nations and were inspired to be the first to send explorers to actually reach Asia. (At the time, the exact nature of Columbus’s discovery was unclear. England, for one, sent an explorer named John Cabot in **1497**. Cabot sailed down the east coast of North America from Newfoundland to some undisclosed point, thus confirming there was a lot of land to be revealed.
6. Columbus himself returned four times to the “New World,” and learned of the land mass of South America, and the layout of central America, before his efforts were cut short by the impatient king and queen of Spain.
7. The evolving geographical understanding of Europeans about the Americas was capped off by the Portuguese explorer Pedro Alvares Cabral in **1500**, when he was blown off course as he rounded Africa, and found the land that is today Brazil (where Portuguese is spoken instead of Spanish as a result).
8. The collected efforts of these explorers can be seen on the following map, along with the Portuguese voyages around Africa that revealed the true extent of the main habitable continents of the world and would result in the spread of Western civilization.



The voyages of Columbus (1492), Cabot (1497), Cabral (1500) and others collectively revealed the scope of the “New World,” which European civilization would soon colonize.

D. The Europe of Nations

1. The European culture that engaged in all these efforts was a Europe of separate and competing nations.
2. It had arisen as a unique culture in **476 AD**, when various tribes brought down the Roman Empire, and began the long process of building a civilization of their own during the *Dark Ages*. The **Fall of Rome of 476 AD** is the reason why there is a Europe at all, but by itself it does not tell us enough about the character of Europe to be able to understand the eventual rise of modern Western civilization, which is so diverse.
3. One tribe, called the Franks, briefly managed to combine most of Europe into a single empire under its leader Charlemagne in **800 AD**, but the inheritance of his empire by three grandsons in **843 AD** resulted in wars between them and the break up of the core of Europe into a separate France and Germany, neither of which would ever be able to dominate the whole of Europe. Thus the **Failed Frankish Union of 800-43** resulted in Europe become a patchwork, rather than a unity.
4. While France and Germany were evolving into separate nations, the tribes that eventually formed Spain and Portugal were fighting an invasion of Europe by the Muslims which began in **711 AD**. These two nations fought a nearly 800-year war to reconquer Iberia from the invaders—a war known as the “Reconquista,” which profoundly shaped their culture. Only in **1492** did the Reconquista end—precisely the year when the crusading people of Spain learned of America thanks to Columbus, who was sent on his voyage because the monarchs were willing to allow it after having finally triumphed in the great work of their nation.
5. The elements mentioned above can be used to label the timeline as follows (which only the dates shown for the sake of economy/neatness):

