

Chapter

1

THE WORLDS OF 1300

In 1271, Marco Polo (1254–1324), the son of an enterprising Venetian merchant, set out with his father and uncle on a journey to East Asia. Making their way along the fabled silk route across Central Asia, the Polos arrived in Xanadu, the capital of the Mongol empire, after a three-and-a-half year journey. There they remained for more than two decades. When they returned to their home in Venice in 1295, fellow townsmen greeted them with astonishment, so sure were they that the Polos had perished years before. So, too, Marco Polo's published account of his travels generated an incredulous reaction. Some of his European readers considered his tales of Eastern wonders to be mere fantasy, yet others found their appetites for Asian splendor whetted by Polo's descriptions.

A half-century after Polo commenced his travels, the Moroccan-born scholar Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn Battuta (1304–1369) embarked on a journey of his own. Then just twenty-one, Ibn Battuta vowed to visit the whole of the Islamic world without traveling the same road twice. It was an ambitious assignment, for Islam's domain extended from one end of the Eurasian land mass to the other and far into Africa as well. On his journey, Ibn Battuta eventually covered some 75,000 miles and traveled through West and East Africa, across the interior of Asia, and beyond the realm of Islam to China



(see Map 1-1). Along his way, he claimed to have met at least sixty rulers, and in his book he recorded the names of more than 2,000 persons whom he knew personally.

Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta, as the best-known travelers in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, provide a wealth of information on the well-traversed lands of Africa, Europe, and Asia. What they and other travelers observed was the extreme diversity that characterized the peoples living in Eurasia, where numerous ethnicities, many political formations, and varied religious faiths and practices prevailed. In addition, they observed that the vast majority of people lived deeply localized lives, the primary goal of which was to obtain the basic necessities of everyday living. Yet, they were also aware that these very same societies, however local their orientations, welcomed and even encouraged contact, trade, and cultural exchange over long distances and between regions. In fact, they wrote most eloquently about the way in which the four major cultural systems of the Eurasian land mass—Christian, Muslim, Indian, and Chinese—each struggled to articulate definitions of themselves. Interestingly, if Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo had been able to travel in the “unknown” worlds, the African hinterlands, the Americas, and Oceania, they would have witnessed to varying degrees similar phenomena and challenges. In this chapter, we present a snapshot of the world in 1300—a period in which the world remained highly diverse and localized but was slowly becoming more unified within societies and more interconnected across regions.

CONTACT AND ISOLATION

→ *To what degree were the worlds of 1300 integrated?*

The balance between close contact and isolation among the world’s peoples in 1300 was weighted decisively toward isolation. Yet, contacts were on the increase. As the world’s popula-

tion rose to unprecedented levels, peoples pushed out in all directions in search of new lands to cultivate and new products to trade and consume. These expansionist tendencies led political leaders, long-distance merchants, and clerics to challenge local orientations and to plan for tighter integration of these diverse societies with each other.

FRAGMENTED WORLDS

Ruling elites sought to expand their political, economic, and cultural boundaries but had to contend with populations rooted in their local activities. Indeed, across Eurasia and Africa and through all of the world’s inhabited zones, most people consumed locally cultivated foods, resided in dwellings made from local materials, grew crops, herded livestock, spun cotton, and traded commodities with one another as men and women had done for centuries. Most of the world’s residents rarely moved beyond or even looked beyond the localities in which they had been born. This was true for agriculturalists, who predominated around the globe, but whose work generally kept them tied to particular pieces of land. It was also the case for nomadic groups, whose migrations took them on wider circuits, but who lived as well in locales that were largely sealed off from outside influences.

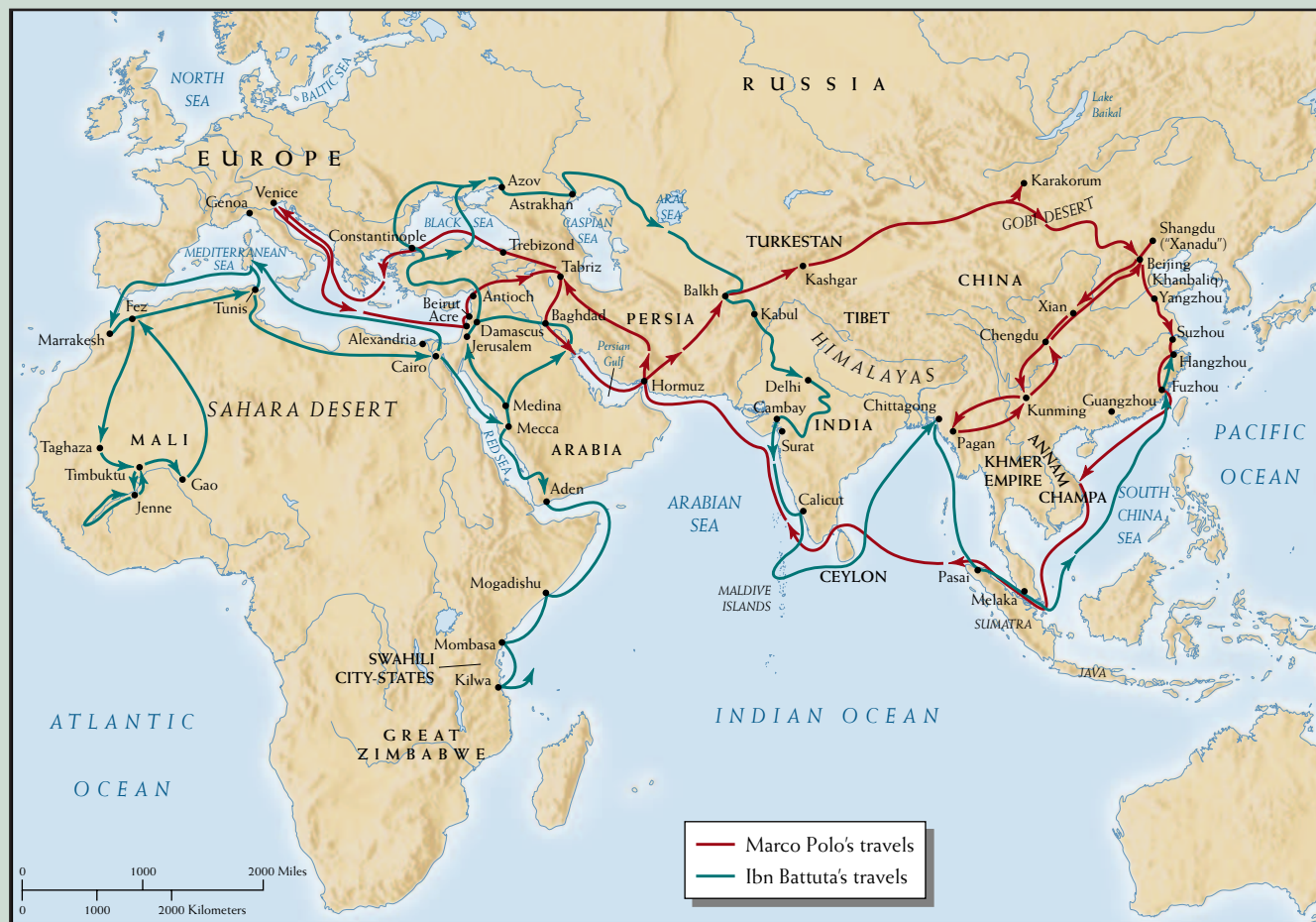
The vast majority of the globe’s 400 to 500 million inhabitants lived in a world of limited horizons and endured short, hard existences. In the time of Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta, life expectancies averaged only about thirty years, in part because so many died during childbirth or in the first five years of life. Most homes were sparsely furnished and were often too hot or too cold, too wet or too dark. Diets, when sufficient, were monotonous, and in times of occasional famine, they were not even that.

Not everyone struggled equally or lived so locally, however. In some places favored by nature and human ingenuity, vital resources were more abundant. Nonetheless, in almost all places, those resources were distributed unequally. Some ate tastier food, wore more opulent garments, and lodged in less spartan surroundings. Those better off consisted mostly of landowning

Focus Questions THE WORLDS OF 1300

- *To what degree were the worlds of 1300 integrated?*
- *What factors contributed to the cultural unity of the “worlds apart”?*
- *What were the defining characteristics of each major Eurasian world?*
- *How did the Middle Kingdom influence neighboring societies?*
- *How did the Mongol empire further integrate Eurasia?*

→ To what degree were the worlds of 1300 integrated?



MAP 1-1 JOURNEYS OF MARCO POLO AND IBN BATTUTA

What do the long-distance travels of Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries respectively tell us about movement across the Eurasian continent at this time? Why was so much more of Marco Polo's route over land and most of Ibn Battuta's travel by sea? Why did Marco Polo not touch the African continent while Ibn Battuta crossed the Sahara?

nobility, nomadic chieftains, and entrepreneurial merchants. Combined, they took a large proportion of the goods produced within their society, and they had far greater access to imported goods and ideas.

The four large-scale and geographically separate cultural regions of Eurasia (the Islamic world, India, China, and Christendom) had overarching and enduring institutions and cultural values. Yet, even within each of these regions, great diversity and local orientations prevailed. In the four great cultural regions of Eurasia, no single language

or set of ruling and religious practices held sway. Everywhere travelers went, they saw peoples separated by ethnicity and fighting for competing ruling houses and religions. Across these great territorial expanses, political formations and ruling practices ran the gamut from empires, to kingdoms, to states, to tribal governments. Some societies were more militaristic than others, perennially plagued by incessant internal warfare or under a constant need to conquer new lands.

Indeed, the same element of extreme localism and diversity existed in worlds either completely unknown or largely separated

Everywhere travelers went, they saw peoples separated by ethnicity and fighting for competing ruling houses and religions.

Global Connections & Disconnections

TRADE AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY ON THE MALABAR COAST

Malabar is a narrow strip of about 360 square miles of land squeezed between the Arabian Sea on the west coast of the Indian subcontinent and the mountain chain called the Western Ghats. The Ghats serve as a barrier broken by passes leading to the southwestern and southeastern parts of the subcontinent. This geography forced the Malabar coast to always look outward to the sea. As a result, its population acquired an extraordinary diversity over the centuries. The name “Malabar” itself was given by the Arab sailors who began docking on the coast as traders in the seventh century.

By the 1300s, Malabar society was a melting pot of cultures. The Hindus formed the majority, but they, too, were internally differentiated. While the privileged groups consisted of Nambudiri Brahmans and a warrior group called the Nayars, the vast majority were the Ezhavas. Followed by the Hindus were the Christians, whose presence in Malabar, according to legend, dates back to the first century, when St. Thomas is said to have landed on the coast and preached the gospel. Whatever the truth of these legends, records establish the Christian presence by the end of the second century. During the next few centuries, Christians from Persia and Mesopotamia sought refuge here, giving rise to the group called Syrian Christians. A small number of Jews from Yemen and Babylon established an enclave in Malabar before the Christian era, and in the first century they were joined by other Jews who were fleeing from the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. The evidence for the first Muslim settlement on the coast dates to the ninth century, after which their presence all along the coast grew with the rising importance of Malabar in the Indian Ocean trade. The Muslims consisted of two groups: the *Pardeshis* (foreigners), and the *Mappillas* (those from the local population who had become Muslims through marriage and conversion).

Calicut was the most important port city on the Malabar

coast. Its rise was due to the eleventh-century ascendance of the Zamorin, the “Ocean King,” who, with Arab help, emerged as the dominant ruler over the territory and encouraged overseas trade and traders. Located at the source of pepper production, Calicut served as the hub of the spice trade. Ships set sail each year from Aden, Jiddah, and Hormuz toward the Indian subcontinent. Many came to Calicut, where they bought pepper and exchanged Western goods for the spices carried by traders who came to the port from the South China Sea and Melaka. Shops and warehouses dominated the coastline, and the port city attracted merchants from Arabia, Persia, Egypt, Southeast Asia, and China. Some lived there temporarily, while others settled permanently. The visitors to Calicut spoke glowingly of the integrity of traders, the organization of trade, and the security provided by the Zamorin.

When Ibn Battuta visited Malabar in 1342, he was impressed with the prosperity and prestige of Muslim merchants, particularly that of the *Pardeshis*. Although these merchants enjoyed the support of the Malabar rulers, they refrained from using their political influence to proselytize. Over time, many Arab merchants made Malabar their home, mixed with the local population, lost contact with the Arabic language, dress, and names, and adopted local social customs. Conversion to Islam occurred largely among the Hindus of lower ranks—those who worked as mariners and fishermen and who provided services on ships. Through these gradual processes, Islam was Indianized. The Christians, too, shared the local cultural milieu, incorporating the social distinctions and practices of Malabar. The Hindus, who were dominant in the agrarian economy, received patronage from the Zamorin who, mindful of the economic value of trade, also protected the Muslims. In the diverse world that maritime trade had built in Malabar, religious and cultural differences flourished without discord.

➤ *What factors contributed to the cultural unity of the “worlds apart”?*

from the Eurasian land mass—the African heartland, the Americas, and Oceania. Around the globe, rulers and elites faced the challenge of forging the bonds that would create a common identity among diverse peoples.

CONTACT AND TRADE ROUTES

The exploits of Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta suggest that a few men and women, mainly long-distance merchants and scholars, routinely traversed immense distances. These merchants and scholars used and strengthened existing trade routes between regions and fostered contacts across cultural boundaries. Their journeys revealed a Eurasian world linked from the Mediterranean in the west to China in the east. Along the trade routes, merchants, travelers, commodities, and ideas circulated freely through great port cities such as Surat and Calicut along the Malabar coast in India, and Zanzibar and Kilwa in East Africa, and Genoa, Venice, and Alexandria along the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

Certain population groups were especially important in linking the major cultures. Many of these peoples lived in between the larger worlds in areas known as borderlands. Peoples of the borderlands did not live in isolation from the larger cultures. Quite the opposite, they were frequently visited by missionaries, settlers, and warriors from afar. In many respects, trade across the borderlands helped keep the borders of the major cultures open and blurred the sharp differences between cultural zones. These borderlands were characterized by the absence of centralized control and by the extreme ethnic and linguistic diversity of their peoples. For instance, Turkish nomads organized and led caravans across Central Asia, linking China and the Mediterranean basin. Here again, great inland cities like Baghdad in present-day Iraq and Damascus in Syria featured expansive markets and fairs, where wealthier people could come and purchase silk from China, textiles from India, spices from Southeast Asia, slaves and ivory from Africa, and fruits from Greece. Moreover, borderlands could also include island peoples. For example, Indonesians welcomed to their cities traders from around the world who were in search of spices and other exotic goods from across Eurasia.

Population pressures could lead to more interactions among peoples. Facing limited or dwindling resources, warriors burst out of their home bases to conquer and occupy new areas of the world. Chief among these during the thirteenth century were the Mongols, who emerged from the Asian north, sweeping south and west to conquer much of Eurasia. Notwithstanding

their terrible destructiveness, the Mongols ended up deepening the connections among the peoples of Eurasia.

New and improved forms of transportation aided in increasing interactions. The domestication of the camel was vital for expanding commercial connections throughout the arid portions of the Middle East and bringing North Africa into contact with West Africa across the Sahara Desert. Shipping was the other key form of transportation. With varying degrees of success, oceanic trading was becoming more prominent during this period. The Chinese successfully navigated the oceanic waters of East Asia on board junks, which were ships capable of holding a fair amount of trade cargo. Likewise, Islamic traders successfully controlled the shorelines of the Indian coast through the use of land-based fortresses and ever-improving navigational devices for their ships.

Some governments and rulers were more encouraging than others in terms of trade and cross-cultural exchange. The Han dynasty in China encouraged trade with its neighbors to the west so that its people would have access to

horses, alfalfa, grapes, sesame, coriander, and walnuts. Likewise, first the Greeks, then the Romans, and later the Venetians and the Genoese traders looked eastward in search of silk, pottery, paper, peaches, apricots, and spices. Elsewhere, the historical records now reveal that the nomadic peoples of the Asian steppe, the native communities in the Americas, and the island communities of Oceania were developing their own substantial trading networks and promoting cultural exchange. By 1300, the world's societies were becoming more familiar with one another.

WORLDS APART

➤ *What factors contributed to the cultural unity of the “worlds apart”?*

At the end of the Ice Age, the Bering Sea submerged the land bridge that had connected North Asia and North America, thereby isolating the Americas from the Eurasian land mass. Accordingly, for more than 10,000 years, the Western Hemisphere stood on its own. So did the continent of Australia and the islands of the Pacific.

In the thirteenth century, the peoples of the Americas and Oceania knew themselves and their homelands by thousands of different names. They spoke approximately 2,000 distinct

These merchants and scholars used and strengthened trade routes between regions and fostered contacts across cultural boundaries.

languages, and even neighboring groups had difficulty understanding one another's words. Yet, for all their local differences, each community called itself by a word meaning "the people" and believed that the place where it lived was the center of the world.

THE AMERICAS

Warfare and trade broke down the apartness of peoples by bringing neighboring groups together. In combat between North American peoples, men battled fiercely, but bloodshed was usually limited. Warriors rarely attempted frontal assaults against fortified positions. Costs were too high, especially since early American societies valued symbolic demonstrations of bravery above the conquest of territories or the obliteration of enemies. Men fought less to inflict casualties than to take captives. These prisoners were brought back to home villages, where women often decided whether captives should be executed to console mourners who had lost loved ones in battle or adopted in the place of those loved ones. Trade, too, could unite separate peoples, particularly since many groups conceived of the exchange of goods as a transfer of friendship-making gifts.

EMERGING EMPIRES Trade could also take the form of tribute to powerful rulers. By the thirteenth century, various parts of the Americas saw the emergence and expansion of empires. One of the largest and wealthiest of these emerging empires, that of the Incas, arose in the valleys of the Andes. In Andean valleys, as in other parts of the world, agricultural surpluses provided the foundation for a large-scale political organization. To the north, in the valley of Mexico, an even more impressive imperial power was rising. Here, the stimulus to expansion came from Nahuatl-speaking invaders from farther north—first the Toltecs, then the Chichimec, and finally the Mexicas, the name by which the Aztecs referred to themselves. As the Mexicas settled in the valley of Mexico, they gave up their dependence on hunting and began to cultivate crops. To enhance agricultural production, the Mexicas constructed an impressive irrigation system during the early fourteenth century. Although harvests were sufficient to feed a large and growing population, the Mexicas also had to get many products and staples from neighbors. The valley of Mexico lacked some important goods, like cotton, necessary for clothing, and firewood, necessary for fuel. Needing to meet crucial demand, the Mexicas began to exert their power over neighboring peoples and towns, exacting tribute and engaging in trade with more distant regions. Large numbers of merchants (called *pochteca*) marched out of the Mexica cities bearing sacks of goods for exchange

with neighbors. Mainly men, but also women, created a vast trading network that spread to the arid lands of the north (now the southwestern United States) and as far south as the isthmus (now Panama). Trade and tribute contributed to a vibrant and colorful market life in the valley of Mexico, where goods were bartered and swapped among commoners and local potentates alike.

TRADE AND SOCIETY In the course of the fourteenth century, through trade and tribute-taking, the Mexicas became a richer and more urbanized society. Founded in 1325, Tenochtitlán started as a hamlet of mud huts built on an island, but it evolved into a major metropolis. Its markets attracted throngs of visitors from near and far, all milling about in their regional dress and speaking in dialects and tongues from around Mesoamerica.

The extent of market networks and cross-cultural interaction in Mesoamerica was limited compared to Eurasia.

The extent of market networks and cross-cultural interaction was, however, limited compared to Eurasia. Mesoamericans had no domesticated beasts of burden. Nor did they possess wheeled transportation. Accordingly, the load of cargoes and the distances they

could be hauled were restricted by what Mexica merchants could carry on their backs. Because they could haul only so many goods, the *pochteca* never emerged as powerful and wealthy members of the local society, though they lived one social notch above agrarian and artisanal commoners.

Trade goods, especially as displayed in dress and diet, helped to mark out local and regional social hierarchies. By drawing in the enormous wealth of Mesoamerica, the Mexicas gained access to precious metals, stones, shells, feathers, all manner of exotic commodities that became signs of their wealth to their neighbors. Mexica rulers made a habit of inviting neighboring nobles to their festivities. At these events, the rulers draped themselves in ornaments from all the corners of Mesoamerica. The jewelry and finery also served as adornments to mark internal social hierarchies, with a special code regulating who could wear what. Only nobles, for example, were permitted to wear gold earrings, jade, and turquoise, fancy plugs inserted into their pierced lips, and fine robes. Commoners wore coarse clothes of burlap-like fibers and rabbit furs, and could only wear obsidian earplugs as jewelry. Although there were women merchants, farmers, and healers, the fundamental place of women was in the family as wives and mothers. Mothers ran the household, instructing their daughters in the domestic skills of grinding maize, preparing meals, spinning, and the fine art of weaving. At the very bottom of the social ladder were slaves, fallen to this status either through impoverishment or by being captured in war. Working as domestics and cultivators, the slaves could also have families and even own other slaves.

→ *What factors contributed to the cultural unity of the “worlds apart”?*

MEXICA BELIEFS What kept this hierarchically organized society together was a shared view of the world. Like other peoples of this era, the Mexicas balanced observations of natural cycles with a faith in supernatural forces. They believed that the universe was prone to unceasing cycles of disasters that would eventually end in an apocalypse. Such an unstable cosmos exposed mortals to repeated creations and destructions. The cyclical and apocalyptic view of the cosmos shaped the daily understanding of time and Mexica religion. A powerful priesthood monitored the relationship between the people and their deities, and balanced fatalism with a faith that the gods could be honored through rituals.

The Aztec empire was a theocracy, a political regime in which the gods’ emissaries enjoyed great powers and authority. In overseeing the activities of Mexica subjects, the priesthood punished wayward Mexicas and selected victims for public sacrifice to the gods. Captives faced execution because the Mexicas believed that the great god of the sun required human hearts to keep on burning and blood to replace that given by the gods to moisten the earth through rain. To fulfill this obligation, Mexica priests escorted captured warriors up the temple steps and tore out their hearts, offering their lives and blood as a sacrifice to the sun god. Allegedly, between 20,000 and 80,000 men, women, and children were slaughtered in a single ceremony in 1487, with the four-person-wide line of those who would be killed stretching for over two miles. In this marathon of bloodshedding, knife-wielding priests collapsed from exhaustion and had to be replaced by fresh executioners.

Faith governed every aspect of ordinary life. The Mexicas filled daily life with constant small gestures of obedience and sacrifice. Food was a constant preoccupation, and women were especially entrusted with treating it with proper respect. *Chinampas* (floating gardens) were used to grow crops, and the state developed an irrigation system of canals and aqueducts to enable cultivators to produce even more. Maize, above all, was an essential crop, and was given special treatment. Before cooking the kernels, women handled them with care, breathing and whispering gently into their open palms, before dropping the maize into cooking pots. These daily reminders of Mexica indebtedness to the gods were intended to ensure that the gods kept them well supplied with food.

At schools boys and girls did not learn to read and write or train for vocations. Instead, they were taught the songs, poetry, and rituals of a militaristic culture. Men of noble birth received intensive training in military skills and were showered with wealth, land, and honors for success in battle. Hope for a good

afterlife depended less on how people lived than on how they died—and dying in war was the most noble activity of all.

The need for ever more blood and human offerings, coupled with the Mexicas’ demand for staples and precious commodities from other peoples, compelled leaders to match commerce with conquest. For this, the Mexicas would have to create a more formal political organization. In so doing, the Mexicas founded an Aztec empire, whose fall, as we shall see in Chapter 3, reverberated around the globe.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Traveling to Africa south of the Sahara was well within the reach of the great world travelers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Ibn Battuta was known to have made several trips to Islamic Africa, for example. From earliest times, traders crossed the Sahara Desert and sailed from the east coast of Africa to Asian ports. Christian and especially Islamic influences filtered through the continent. And as in the Americas, a diverse collection of peoples, languages, belief systems, and governing institutions had developed in sub-Saharan Africa by 1300. Indeed, the term “Africa” was unknown to sub-Saharan peoples. It came from outside, originating among the Ancient Romans, who used it at first to refer to the Carthaginian empire in North Africa. Later the Romans expanded its meaning

“The Aztec World.” In the centuries leading up to 1500, the most powerful empire of the Americas emerged in the Central Valley of Mexico. It relied on extensive agriculture, trade, and tribute—and engaged in constant warfare with neighboring states. This image, taken from a mural by the Mexican painter Diego Rivera, celebrates the accomplishments and portrays the violence of the Aztec empire. Rivera and other Mexican writers and artists invoked a great pre-European past as a foundation for Mexican nationalism.



to encompass all the lands south of the Mediterranean Sea. But this unifying term meant nothing to Africans, who were divided into numerous small worlds (see Map 1-2).

Although Africa south of the Sahara had been the cradle of human life, its environment and climate impeded human settlements as dense as those in North Africa or in Eurasian societies. Moreover, the Sahara Desert limited the contacts between its inhabitants and those living to the north. Most of the continent suffered from poor soils, an erratic climate, and a profuse insect and disease environment. One of these insects, the tsetse fly, carried the disease known as “sleeping sickness,” which also killed animals, and thus kept domesticated animals out of the rain forests of Africa. Another insect, the anopheles mosquito, spread malaria among humans. Large cities, in contrast to sprawling village settlements, were unusual, with a handful of spectacular exceptions—Timbuktu in the West African Sahel region or the settlements of the Yoruba (in present-day Nigeria).

FOREST DWELLERS Geography and climate thus played decisive roles in the lives of Africans. Those who lived in the tropical rain forests raised different crops, had different political institutions, and worshipped different gods from those who lived in the high grasslands, often called the savannah. The tropical rain forests of western and central Africa, for example, featured small, relatively autonomous agricultural communities. For those accustomed to the climate, the rain forests offered inhabitants many advantages. They provided a huge variety of flora, especially trees, exuberant vegetation, and mighty rivers as sources of food and easy means of communication. As long as the inhabitants took care of their forests and did not alter the environment by stripping it of its trees, rain forests ensured a reasonable and varied standard of life.

For forest dwellers, the extended household—based on the family that included adopted members, protected clients, and slaves—was the basic institution. Households came together, usually in a voluntary way, to establish village settlements, and these village settlements, in turn, were linked together, through their household heads in district bodies. Since the household was the core building unit, its head was supposed to be an individual of demonstrated wisdom, leadership, and boundless energy. This individual, often called the “big man,” was also expected to attract as many followers as possible. He did so by providing protection to clients, marrying numerous women, and siring many offspring, thereby adding to the size, wealth, and political power of his group. But these activities put big men in competition with one another. Rivalries were often intense and revolved around who could attract the largest crowd of followers and who could have the greatest number of children, slaves, and protected clients. The successful household—judged primarily by size—could acquire rights over larger and larger segments of land and accumulate supplies of grain and other forms of wealth.

Gender made for important differences among forest-dwelling people. In agricultural work, men cleared the soil and

prepared it for planting. Because these farming communities practiced a form of shifting cultivation that required a large portion of land to be left fallow—sometimes ten times as much as was sown—clearing exerted heavy demands on the adult male population. Women, together with children of both sexes, weeded the fields. All came together for the harvesting. In addition, the division of labor sometimes varied according to crops. In the tropical rain forests of West Africa, for example, yams, which were the essential element in the diet and regarded as the most prestigious crop, belonged to men; the lesser crops were the produce of women. So, too, in trading, men dominated long-distance exchange, which was more lucrative than short-distance trading, which was the domain of women.

Men subordinated women by taking many wives, managing the cultivation of the most prestigious crops, and controlling the most lucrative trading. Nonetheless, women were able to create their own political organizations. Although these were subordinate to those of men, women’s organizations were able to rally opposition to men, challenging those who exploited women in ways that exceeded the norms of the community. Moreover, “big women” did appear from time to time, and in some African societies, “queen mothers” and wives of influential men exercised considerable authority.

Like most people around the globe in the thirteenth century, Africans believed that supernatural forces and other-than-human spirits wielded enormous control over human affairs. Beliefs in witches, witchcraft, and sorcery were widespread. Africans assumed as well that behind the natural world was an active and interventionist assortment of good and bad gods, and that above these deities was likely to be a high god, perhaps the creator of the universe, perhaps even the ancestor of the mythical founder of the whole community. Ancestors were an important part of this spirit world, too. To please the ancestral spirits, who were thought capable of wreaking havoc if angered, descendants made regular ritual offerings at family shrines.

PEOPLES OF EAST, WEST, AND SOUTH AFRICA Beyond the rain forests, in the highlands of Ethiopia, the savannah lands of West Africa, the coastal areas of East Africa, and the high grasslands of southern Africa, dynastic empires emerged, ruling over large populations and extensive territories. Long-distance trade brought these polities into contact with Eurasia. African traders supplied markets in North Africa and Asia with gold, ivory, copper, and slaves. For the West African kingdoms, this commerce involved increasingly trafficked caravan routes to and from North Africa.

Along these trading routes came religious emissaries as well, whose presence contributed to the cultural unity upon which empire-building rested. In the highlands of Ethiopia, Christianity played the decisive role. Having originated in the Middle East, Christianity spread to Egypt—which by the year 400 was probably 90 percent Christian—and from Egypt southward to Ethiopia and the Sudan. The spread of Christianity and



MAP 1-2 MAJOR STATES AND TRADING ROUTES IN AFRICA, 1300S

Does this map help in discovering the factors that led to the spread of Islam from the Middle East and North Africa to sub-Saharan Africa? Who would have been the likely agents for carrying out conversions in sub-Saharan Africa? What were the major commodities that tied sub-Saharan Africa to the outside world? Why did the major kingdoms of West Africa arise where they did?

its importance in Africa paled, however, next to the inroads made by Islam. In their universalist aspirations, Muslims endeavored to turn what in Arabic was called *bilad al-Sudan* (the land of the blacks) into an Islamic province. Already in the eighth century, Muslim settlements appeared along the East African coast. By the thirteenth century, a distinct Muslim culture in Africa combined the unifying force of Islam, the benefits of Indian Ocean trade, and a Bantu language (while adapting numerous Arab words). It linked the entire coast of East Africa, from Somalia in the north to the Zambezi River in the south, to the larger commercial system of the Indian Ocean. Major Swahili settlements grew up along the East African coast, such as Mogadishu, Kilwa, Pemba, and the island of Zanzibar, where African and Arab merchants congregated to trade ivory and slaves for textiles and other items.

In numerous places, Muslim traders penetrated where Islam did not. For example, the Islamic religion did not spread below the Zambezi River, but that region was nonetheless integrated into the Indian Ocean commercial network. It was in the Zambezi Valley in the years immediately after 1300 that the Kingdom of Great Zimbabwe arose. Its prosperity rested on the mining and export of gold, which the Shona-speaking inhabitants of the area exchanged for such luxury goods as silks from far-off China and highly glazed Persian earthenwares.

Both Muslim traders and Islamic missionaries spread as well into the high grass, savannah lands of West Africa. Here the kingdom of Ghana flourished from the eighth to the eleventh centuries (in present-day Mauritania). Ghana derived its wealth by acting as a go-between for trade in gold, salt, and slaves from sub-Saharan West Africa to the Arab world on the other side of the desert. After Ghana crumbled, no West African state equaled its geographical expanse, military strength, and prosperity until the thirteenth century, when the empire of Mali was consolidated. The pioneer of the Malian state was a warrior-king, Sundiata (ruled 1240–1255), who in the middle of the thirteenth century succeeded in uniting the many village groups of the Malinke peoples.

With Islam providing a common faith and language (Arabic) for its bureaucrats and merchants, the Mali empire continued to expand after Sundiata's death. By the fourteenth century, the territorial claims of his successors reached from the valley of Senegal in the west to the Middle Niger River basin in the east, more than 1,000 miles away; from north to south, Mali connected the edge of the Sahara Desert to the tropical rain forests. Its population numbered in the millions. Mali controlled the headwaters of the Niger River and a vast trading area in West Africa, which enabled its merchants to sell gold, slaves, textiles, and other goods to the peoples of North Africa. One of its rulers,



Muslims in West Africa. The great mosque of Jenne in West Africa, which demonstrates the intensity of the Islamic faith in parts of Africa far removed from the traditional Islamic centers.



Mansa Musa. The ruler of Mali was Mansa Musa, portrayed by a cartographer from the island of Majorca in 1375 and shown holding a large piece of gold. The image reveals just how widespread was the reputation of wealth that the kingdom of Mali enjoyed in the fourteenth century.

Mansa Musa (ruled 1312–1337), made clear his commitment to Islam through an elaborate pilgrimage to the holy cities of the Arabian peninsula. His stopover in Cairo on his way to Mecca actually destabilized Cairo's economy, as he spent so much gold there that it decreased in value.

Like the Americas, sub-Saharan Africa in the thirteenth century possessed a few large empires along with hundreds of polities of much smaller scale. The daily existence of most sub-Saharan Africans was affected only a little more than that of the peoples of the Americas by developments on other continents, and most Africans knew little of the outside world. Still, the penetration of Christianity and especially Islam underscored the growing connections between Africa and Eurasia.

THE FOUR MAJOR CULTURAL AREAS OF EURASIA

→ *What were the defining characteristics of each major Eurasian world?*

Describing the four major cultural zones of the Eurasian land mass is a daunting assignment. One could easily draw up a checklist of critical aspects for each culture. What were the major beliefs and value systems of each? How did each organize its polities and economies? What were the relations between men and women? But such a checklist would force each culture into predetermined and externally chosen designations. More

useful is to identify those characteristics that each of the cultures used to represent itself to its inhabitants and to the outside world. What was it that produced a sense of being Muslim to dwellers within the Islamic world? What made Christendom different from other parts of the world? Why did the people living in China regard themselves as subjects of “the Middle Kingdom”? Finally, how did the mix of peoples and traditions in India produce a conspicuous cultural mosaic?

This is a crucial undertaking. It not only enables us to understand the broader cultural patterns of the peoples of Eurasia, but it is essential to understanding the unfolding of the history of the modern world. It was, after all, these shared beliefs and institutions that the peoples of these cultural areas worked and reworked as new, more global connections impinged on their lives. As travelers like Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta recorded, the four great cultures on the Eurasian land mass met new challenges by applying quite distinctive value systems and different kinds of institutions. Islam and Christendom, for example, organized themselves for the spread of universal religious missions. By contrast, the Chinese valued a balanced and stable polity, while the dwellers on the Indian subcontinent, perhaps making a virtue of necessity, honored the great diversity of its people.

THE HOUSE OF ISLAM

The territory of the Islamic world stretched all the way from the southern part of Spain in the west to India and the borders of China in the east. It encompassed a land mass that at its widest points was more than 5,000 miles (nearly twice the length of the United States) from east to west and 3,000 miles from north to south. Within this vast expanse was immense geographic, ethnic, linguistic, and even religious diversity, but at the same time

a sense of common Islamic identity, of being part of *dar al-Islam* (the House of Islam) and the *umma* (the community of the faithful). Part of that shared identity rested on the belief that these boundaries needed to be extended even further.

Islam's early warrior leaders had gone from triumph to triumph. Beginning in the seventh century, their forces had swept out of the Arabian peninsula, and through military conquests, they had seized territories that had once belonged to the Byzantine and Sasanian empires that spanned North Africa and western Asia. Thus, unlike Christianity, which shared a similar missionary zeal to convert the whole world to its faith, Islam had no formative experience as a minority religion. Islam's converts did not struggle, as early Christians had, to achieve recognition against political oppressors.

By the thirteenth century, however, the memory of a unified Islamic state had faded. In the preceding centuries, while Islam had expanded, it had also become more diverse through the processes of conquest and conversion. Arabs dominated the first Islamic century, but over time they had to share power with other groups that had embraced Islam and now wanted to rule over Islamic territories. Fierce political rivalries, then, were the natural outgrowth of incorporating new territories, states, and peoples into the faith. These newer, distinct polities competed with each other in the quest to become the true successor state to a once-unified Islamic empire.

The core area of Islam, from North Africa to the Oxus River in Central Asia, contained the dominant ethnic and language groups of the Islamic world—Arabs, Persians, and Turks—as well as the main religious centers—Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, Baghdad, and Cairo (see Map 1-3). Beyond this core were the outlying Islamic zones of sub-Saharan Africa, parts of the Indian subcontinent, and gradually over time, the islands of Indonesia. These areas had their own religious centers and shrines, but they looked to the Arabian peninsula, Palestine, Syria, and Egypt as containing holy places more venerable than their own. And while much of the Islamic world had come under the authority of Muslim rulers through conquest, these outlying areas owed their conversion to Islam more to the energies of Muslim clerics and merchants than to the might of warriors.

THE MUSLIM FAITH In spite of the significant regional variations of the Islamic world, Islam, as an all-encompassing religion and way of life, stamped its unifying imprint on all of the lands and peoples of *dar al-Islam*. This solidarity stemmed first and foremost from the teachings of the faith's charismatic founder, Muhammad, who was born and died in Mecca (c. 570–632), the Arabian peninsula's leading commercial center at the time. Muhammad claimed to be the Prophet whom God (Allah) had chosen for his final and most definitive revelation to mankind. Allah's revelations, as recorded in Islam's holy book,

Islam became more diverse through the processes of conquest and conversion.

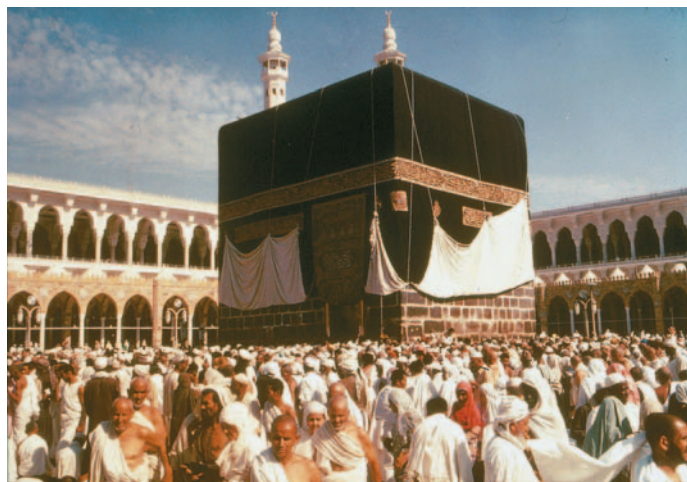
the *Quran* (often spelled *Koran*), were thought to be a full and sufficient guide to mankind, superior to the Jewish Torah and the Christian Bible, which Muhammad recognized to be divinely inspired works but not the final revelation. When the *Quran* proved to be silent on questions of pressing importance to believers, Muslims turned for guidance to the sayings (*hadith*) of the Prophet and his early converts. This body of knowledge, supplemented by the writings, opinions, and commentaries of Islamic jurists, constituted the law of Islam, known as the *sharia*, which regulated the spiritual and secular activities of Muslims

throughout the Islamic world. The *sharia*, the *Quran*, and the *hadith* were the core elements of Islam as a theology, a judicial system, and a way of life. They guided the behavior of the educated and the powerful—its *ulama* (scholarly class), rulers,

and merchants. But what made common people feel that they were Muslims were the mosque, the five pillars of Islamic faith and behavior, and the Sufi brotherhoods.

No structure better reflected the Muslim belief in an all-powerful, single God than the mosque. From the largest and most elaborate of these places of worship to the most humble, mosques communicated a message of religious equality, the centrality of the *Quran*, and Muhammad as God's emissary. Their features were the same throughout the Islamic world. Their austerity befitted a religion that had no official or formal priesthood, recognized no intermediaries between Allah and the believer, and permitted any individual to lead the faithful in prayer and speech. Contributing to this uniformity were the similar layouts of mosques. All featured the minaret, or tower, from which went out the call to prayer, and the *minbar*, the pulpit from which speakers broadcast religious messages. All also had a wall point-

Muslim Worship. The kaaba is a holy rock in the center of the square at Mecca around which worshippers congregate at the time of their pilgrimage to the city.



→ What were the defining characteristics of each major Eurasian world?



MAP 1-3 THE ISLAMIC WORLD AND TRADE, 1335

In the fourteenth century, Muslim traders dominated the commerce of the Indian Ocean. What Muslim states were they most likely to come from? Noting the trade winds of this area, plan a voyage that would take a merchant from East Africa to India and then on to China. During which months would he leave East Africa, and when would he be most likely to embark upon his return voyage? What Indian Ocean cities would have the most diverse merchant populations?

ing toward Mecca to which worshippers turned when praying. Muslim traders were able to find mosques, as well as co-religionists, throughout Eurasia and Africa.

All Muslims also accepted the faith's five pillars: (1) the belief in the affirmation that there is no God but Allah, (2) the duty to pray five times a day in certain prescribed ways, (3) the responsibility to offer alms in support of the less fortunate, (4) the obligation to fast during the month of Ramadan, with complete abstinence from food or drink during the daytime, and (5) the injunction to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in one's lifetime provided

The hajj to Mecca brought together Muslims from all over the Islamic world, enabling them to exchange ideas and commodities.

one had the resources and was physically able to make the journey. (Some scholars recognized a sixth pillar, an obligation to engage in *jihad*—struggle, if need be, holy war—to advance the cause of Islam.) The *hajj*, or pilgrimage, to Mecca had far-reaching intellectual and commercial consequences. It brought together Muslims from all over the Islamic world, enabling them to exchange ideas and commodities. These weighty obligations fell on rich and poor alike. As every Muslim carried them out and felt obliged to do so, the sense of commonality intensified among co-religionists.



Caravan of Pilgrims. Muslims traveled together to visit holy shrines. The most important of these pilgrimages was to the holy city of Mecca, which all believers were obligated to visit at least once in their lifetimes.

SUNNI-SHIITE SCHISM Despite the underlying unity of Islam, in religious matters, as well as politics, conflicts did arise in the world of Islam. The most divisive schism to occur in Islam evolved out of disputes over the political succession to Muhammad. The first caliphs, or rulers, of the Islamic community and successors to Muhammad were chosen by the most powerful Arab clans at the time. Yet, some members of the original Islamic community insisted that only the descendants of Ali (the Prophet's son-in-law and fourth caliph of the Islamic polity) were the rightful rulers of the Islamic world. The proponents of Ali's line began to call themselves Shiites to distinguish themselves from the majority Sunni community. Although

by the tenth century, the Shiites had elaborated certain legal and religious ideas that were different from those of the Sunni Muslims, the main difference between the Sunni and Shiite communities revolved around political leadership. The Sunnis accepted the political authority of their caliphs and sultans, many of whom traced descent from Muhammad, but who were not thought to have special religious inspiration. In contrast, in addition to insisting that the legitimate line of succession passed only through the family of Ali, Shiites asserted that the politico-religious descendants of Ali, called *imams*, had a specially inspired relationship to Allah that other religious figures did not possess. Shiite *imams* were thought to be capable of understanding and explaining the will of God to their followers in ways not given to other Muslims. Although the last of these *imams* had long ago disappeared, he was expected to return as the *mahdi* at the time of reckoning and bring salvation to his followers. In the meantime, the Shiite clergy were given the duty of explaining the righteous ways to the believers. Although there were substantial Shiite communities in Iraq, Iran, and northern India in the 1300s, only the Shiite Fatimid dynasty (rulers of Egypt from 969 to 1171) had yet established a strong and durable state.

Along with the divide between Sunnis and Shiites, conflicts emerged between orthodox and popular creeds within *dar al-Islam*. Ordinary people, as distinct from the educated and wealthy, embraced an emotional and mystical form of Islam, called Sufism. Sufis began to appear as individual mystics, stressing inner spirituality, as early as the eighth century. The most devout of these men and women sought an intimate communion with Allah. Although the established and orthodox Islamic scholars, known as *ulama*, attempted to block the appeal of Sufism, they could not. Sufism's emphasis on a religion of feeling and its skill at establishing brotherhoods of believers in places where people congregated to worship gave this form of Islam mass appeal. In their Sufi lodges, devotees gathered to engage in religious rituals and to carry out religious training that would enable them to achieve a closer relationship with God.

AGRICULTURE AND TRADE The Islamic world was overwhelmingly agricultural. Most Muslims lived in villages and drew their subsistence from working the land. Yet, working the soil earned them little prestige within the Islamic order. The *Quran* has few references to tillers of the soil, and the Islamic lands spawned no class of "gentlemen" farmers like those soon to emerge in Europe. Large landed estates existed, but landowners preferred to live in the cities and to use peasant farmers to do the cultivating. Agricultural implements were of a rudimentary nature, hardly different from those that had been in use for centuries. The main tool remained the simple wooden, wheel-less plough.

While Islam did not venerate cultivators of the soil, it held commerce and merchants in high regard. The prophet himself came from a mercantile family, and the *Quran* and *hadith* are both full of favorable comments on the occupation of merchant.

→ *What were the defining characteristics of each major Eurasian world?*

The geographical expanse and the diverse ecological zones of the Islamic world favored the long-distance traders who could exchange the produce of one locale for the products of another. As in Christian Europe, Muslims were prohibited from taking interest on loans, a practice designated as usury, but merchants found ways around these restrictions. To facilitate long-distance trade, merchants developed elaborate credit arrangements, created business partnerships, and established the equivalent of banking institutions.

Long-distance trade necessitated highly developed means of transportation, at which merchants in the Muslim world proved remarkably adept. Not surprisingly, some of the wealthiest cities of the Islamic world, notably Cairo and Baghdad, lay along rivers that linked them to oceangoing vessels. The Muslim world became expert at such transport through its use of lateen sails (triangular sails attached to masts that could be turned to catch the wind) and planks that were sewn (not nailed) together

to build the ships called dhows. For overland transportation across what was basically a hot and relatively arid part of the world, the camel was the essential beast of burden. Able to carry up to 1,200 pounds, to traverse long distances each day, and to go nearly three weeks without water, camels became critical to the trans-Saharan trade. No longer did traders have to rely on wheeled transport, or roads, or on less suitable beasts of burden for land trade. Once the camel had been domesticated, probably sometime in the first or second centuries, Egypt and North Africa were able to engage in a brisk trade with sub-Saharan West Africa. The huge caravans that left from the cities of North Africa and Egypt and were bound for West Africa might have as many as 5,000 camels and would be led by expert guides and defended by armed guards.

As centers of trade and culture, cities tied the Islamic world together. Although cities such as Granada in southern Spain, Fez in Morocco, Cairo in Egypt, Isfahan in Iran, and Delhi in

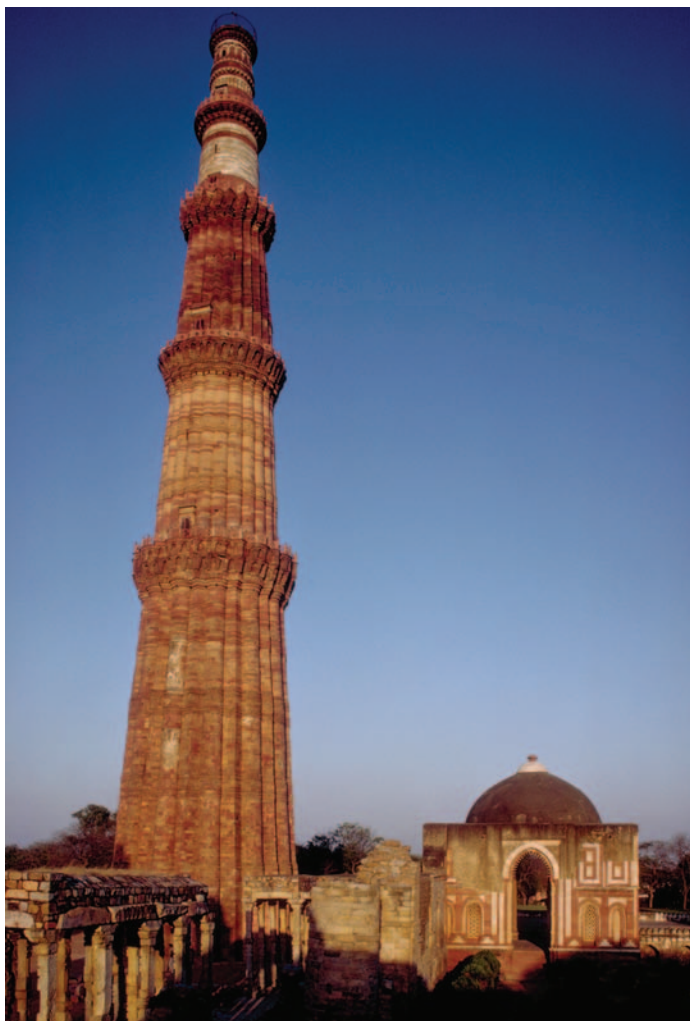
VIEWS OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD

Both Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo visited parts of the Islamic world and commented on the practice of Islam. As the following excerpt from his visit to the great Islamic kingdom of Mali in West Africa indicates, Ibn Battuta celebrated the spread of Islam into black Africa, but he also observed certain practices that did not fit well with his own understanding of Islam. Marco Polo traveled extensively through the Islamic world in his journey to and from China. His comments on Muslims contained a mixture of the good and the bad, but he certainly had a high regard for their commitment to their faith and their mercantile skills.

IBN BATTUTA ON MUSLIMS IN MALI Amongst their good qualities is the small amount of injustice amongst them, for of all people they are the furthest from it. Their sultan does not forgive anyone in any matter to do with injustice. Among these qualities there is also the prevalence of peace in their country; the traveler is not afraid in it nor is he who lives there in fear of the thief or of the robber by violence. . . . Amongst the bad things which they do—their serving women, slave women and little daughters appear before people naked, exposing their private parts. . . . Also among their bad customs is the way women will go into the presence of the sultan naked, without any covering, and the nakedness of the sultan's daughters—on the night of the twenty-seventh of Ramadan, I saw about a hundred slave girls coming out of his palace with food, with them were two of his daughters; they had full breasts and no clothes on.

MARCO POLO ON MUSLIMS IN PERSIA The Saracens [Muslims] of Tabriz [in Persia] are wicked and treacherous. The law which their prophet Mahomet [Muhammad] has given them lays down that any harm they may do to one who does not accept their law, and any appropriation of his goods, is no sin at all. And if they suffer death or injury at the hands of Christians, they are accounted martyrs. For this reason they would be great wrongdoers, if it were not for the government. And all the other Saracens in the world act on the same principle. When they are on the point of death, up comes their priest and asks whether they believe that Mahomet was the true messenger of God; if they answer, "Yes," then he tells them that they are saved.

Source: *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa*, edited by Said Hamdun and Noel King (Princeton: Marcus Wiener Publishers, 1994), pp. 58–59, and *The Travels of Marco Polo*, translated and with an introduction by Ronald Latham (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1958) pp. 57–58.



Qutb Minar, or “Pillar of Victory.” This tall fluted tower is a minaret from which muezzins call the faithful to offer their prayers to God. It was erected in 1199 in Delhi by Sultan Qutb al-Din Aybak, founder of the Delhi Sultanate, as a symbol of the triumph of Islam in the Indian subcontinent.

northern India each had its own distinctive personality, the layout of the Muslim metropolis and the patterns of urban activity were similar wherever one went. The homes of the residents were relatively impermanent, made of sun-dried bricks, in contrast to the permanency of mosques, palaces, and other public buildings, which were constructed from oven-baked bricks and cut stones and designed to last through the years.

In the thirteenth century, Islam’s preeminent city was Cairo, which boasted a diverse population of nearly 500,000. It was ruled by foreign-born dynasts, known as Mamluks, many of whom had entered the Islamic world during the Turkish population movements into western Asia at an earlier date and had gone to Egypt to serve the ruling elite as military and bureaucratic slaves. From 1250 to 1517, they were able to dominate

the Nile River basin as a privileged, Turkish-speaking military and administrative elite that lived apart from the Arabic-speaking commoners. Cosmopolitan Cairo also included separate Christian, Jewish, and Greek quarters. Within these residential quarters, narrow, winding byways carved paths between two- and even three-story dwellings. These buildings typically jutted out over the alleys, nearly touching the upper stories of the homes on the other side of the street and providing those on the street with much-needed shade against a hot sun. Inside the homes, carpets, mattresses, hassocks, cushions, and pillows were common. Tables and chairs, however, were rare, for wood was in short supply and was mainly employed for the screens and shutters that kept houses cooler.

As befit a commercial center, Cairo had an abundance of markets, each one specializing in a particular commodity. Here were spices; there incense; further along, textiles, copperware, and foodstuffs. Shopping was meant to be a pleasurable diversion from humdrum city life. At times it could be an all-consuming activity, with buyers and sellers haggling for hours about prices as they drank cups of tea and coffee. Because shopping took time, market areas had numerous public eating places. Indeed, Cairo was said to have no fewer than 12,000 cooks to prepare its meals.

FAMILY LIFE In Cairo and the other great cities of *dar al-Islam*, as well as in hundreds of less notable villages, Islam’s bedrock was the patriarchal family. Across the world of Islam, men dominated over women, children, and slaves. Whether a household was rich or poor, located in the city or the countryside, husbands and fathers were expected to exercise power over their spouses and offspring. Islamic law permitted a man to have four wives. A husband in a poor household, however, could hardly afford to have more than one. Nor could he afford to seclude his wife or expect her to be veiled, for lower-class wives and children had to work in the fields alongside their menfolk. Men in the middling and upper classes, who had sufficient means, married multiple wives and shielded them from work outside the home. The wealthiest men also added numerous concubines to their harems.

Restrictions of the veil and the seclusion of women elevated the power of men, but they did not prevent women from having influence within the family. They acquired knowledge of the wider world through their veiled sorties into public places and their meetings with other females. In fact, the Islamic attitude toward gender relations was not exclusively patriarchal. True, as Islam spread outside of the Arabian peninsula in the seventh century, it absorbed the prevailing patriarchal views of the Persian and Christian worlds. Yet, Muhammad’s life and teachings had left an ambivalent perspective on the relations of men and women. Later commentators could cite examples that favored gender equality, even as other examples seemed to extol the dominant place of men. For example, Muhammad’s first wife, Khadijah, was an older, economically independent woman, who actually proposed marriage to the Prophet and to whom

→ *What were the defining characteristics of each major Eurasian world?*

he remained monogamous until her death at the age of sixty-five. On the other hand, after Khadijah died, Muhammad took additional wives, whom he required to be veiled and to live secluded from male company. Elements of gender equality could be found in the *Quran*. For one, it taught that Allah spoke directly to men and women. In regard to sexual reproduction, the *Quran* affirmed that the sexual fluids of men and women were of equal importance.

The world of Islam included numerous divisions: between men and women; between rich and poor; between defenders of orthodoxy and promoters of Sufism; between Sunnis and Shiites; between urban merchants, rural cultivators, and desert herders; between Arabic, Turkish, and Persian speakers. But these cracks did not undermine the foundations of unity within the House of Islam. Ultimately, these fractures paled next to the greater divide between those inside *dar al-Islam* and those outside of it. By the end of the thirteenth century, Muslims had achieved considerable success in extending the dominion of *dar al-Islam*, and many Muslims looked confidently to the day when the peoples of all known worlds would join in facing toward Mecca for their prayers to Allah, whom they believed to be the one supreme deity.

THE MOSAIC OF INDIA

One place where Islam made significant inroads was on the Indian subcontinent, though it did not erase the region's Hindu-Buddhist culture. Indeed, it was the mixing of cultures that was the most distinctive feature of the subcontinent. This mixture of ethnic and religious groups sometimes baffled outsiders, including those who lingered for a while. Ibn Battuta, for example, spent several decades as an official in the Delhi Sultanate. His writings reflected his appreciation for the subcontinent's opulence. Yet, he found this mosaic of cultures difficult to comprehend. And like the other Muslims who came as merchants, missionaries, and conquerors, Battuta had to adapt to the heterodox traditions of the subcontinent as much as he and other agents of Islam imposed their own ways.

Like so many other parts of the world in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the term we use to describe the subcontinent, "India," was not one that its inhabitants used. The origin of the word India went back to "Sindhu," the Sanskrit word for sea, and the name of the great river in the northwest of the subcontinent. The Persians transformed the initial "s" into "h," yielding the name Hindu. The term passed to the Greeks who

VIEW OF THE DELHI SULTANATE

Ibn Battuta spent many years serving as an Islamic judge or qadi in the court of the Delhi Sultanate. The following excerpt from Ibn Battuta's travels shows how important as a unifying force the Islamic religion and Islamic law were to trading networks such as those leading into and out of India.

On the next day we arrived at the royal residence of Dilhi [Delhi], the metropolis of the land of al-Hind, a vast and magnificent city, uniting beauty with strength. It is surrounded by a wall whose equal is not known in any country in the world, and is the largest city in India, nay rather the largest of all the cities of Islam in the East. . . . Then I went in and found the sultan [of Dilhi] on the terrace of the palace with his back leaning on the couch, the vizier Khwaja Jahan before him and the "great kin" Qabula standing there upright. When I saluted him the "great kin" said to me "Do homage, for the Master of the World has appointed you qadi of the royal city of Dilhi and has fixed your stipend at 12,000 dinars a year, and assigned to you villages to that amount, and commanded for you 12,000 dinars in cash, which you shall draw from the treasury tomorrow (if God will). . . . So

I did homage and when he had taken me by the hand and presented me before the Sultan, the Sultan said to me, "Do you think that the office of qadi of Dilhi is one of the minor functions; it is the highest function in our estimation." I understood what he said though I could not speak (in Persian) fluently, but the Sultan understood Arabic although he could not speak it fluently. . . . He replied, "I have appointed Baha al-Din al Multani and Kamal a-Din al-Bijanawri to be your substitutes; they will be guided by your advice and you will be the one who signs all the documents, for you are in the place of a son to us."

Source: *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, translated by H. A. R. Gibb, with revisions and notes from the Arab text edited by C. Defremery and B. R. Sanguinetti (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1958–1994), vol. 3, pp. 618, 747–48.

changed Hindu to Indus, from which the name India is derived. In the thirteenth century, however, the term “India” was neither commonly used nor did it signify a political or cultural unity. Instead, the subcontinent’s people lived in a number of different—and often warring—polities. Their diverse cultural heritage included the classical languages of Sanskrit and Tamil, in which the subcontinent’s elite recorded their thoughts on science, philosophy, and literature. But most people were unfamiliar with classical languages and continued to speak one of numerous, mutually incomprehensible vernaculars.

HINDUISM, THE CASTE SYSTEM, AND DIVERSITY

The subcontinent was home to a number of religions. Numerous belief systems and ritual practices, of which Hinduism was the most important, had flourished before the arrival of Islam. Hinduism, however, did not constitute a monolithic religion. Unlike Islam, which rested on one book, the *Quran*, and five pillars of faith, Hindu beliefs and practices derived from numerous texts and creeds. What united Hinduism was the ritual supremacy of the priestly caste of the Brahmins, and a society structured by a hierarchy of castes, subcastes, and outcastes.

The origin of the caste (a word derived from the Portuguese *casta*) system went back to the fourfold *varna* order established by the Vedas (the Book of Knowledge) around 600 B.C.E. The four *varna* orders consisted of Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants and artisans), and Shudras (peasants and laborers). A fifth category included those who were outside the fold altogether. Originally, *varna* functioned as a system of classifying people and organizing the division of labor. Over time, however, it became a rigid system of ranking social groups defined as *jati* (castes and subcastes), each belonging to one or another of the four great *varnas*.

The principles of purity and pollution determined caste hierarchy. The “purest” were the Brahmins who performed no physical labor. Others were ranked according to the graded scale of “pollution” entailed in their occupational tasks. If people from higher castes came into contact with those from lower castes, there were elaborate rituals to remove the taint and restore purity. Such a system of occupational classification resulted in unequal access to wealth, power, and prestige. The lowest and those deemed the most polluted were the outcastes whose very sight was considered to be polluting and who were forced to live apart from other castes in their own cluster of hamlets. These were the “untouchables.” They were often classified as scavengers and tanners, a ranking that made them fit only to work as landless laborers bound to their landed patrons by a variety of servile ties.

The Brahmin ideology of purity and pollution also functioned as a means of constituting and reinforcing the gender hi-

erarchy. Brahmin women could not aspire to the status of their male counterparts, for the texts considered women ineligible for Vedic studies. Yet, the caste ideology placed a premium on maintaining the purity of women. High-caste women were enjoined to refrain from physical labor. Like the wives of wealthy Muslims, they were expected to remain confined to the domestic sphere. If anything, the impulse to seclude Brahmin women from contact with strangers was even greater than in the Islamic world, for the Brahmins believed that isolation was essential to maintain the woman’s purity. By contrast, the women of peasant and laboring castes were considered polluted to begin with, and thus they were not prohibited from performing physical labor outside the home. As in many other parts of the world, the dominant ideology extolled women as mothers and wives, while the supreme position in the family belonged to the father-patriarch.

Learned Brahmins followed a path in which they studied and wrote religious and scientific commentaries in Sanskrit on the classic Hindu spiritual texts, like the *Upanishads*. Their writings and thinking formed the basis of Hindu spiritualism, and they developed an elaborate set of rituals around such deities as Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma, and others. While Brahmins emphasized esoteric knowledge and ritualistic practices, the people of the lower castes turned increasingly to popular cults for spiritual and secular inspiration. Adherents of these cults extolled divine love and believed that spiritual attainment was possible to ordinary mortals. The most popular cult—that of the god Krishna—inspired the composition of erotic poetry in Sanskrit and devotional songs about Krishna as a dark herdsman who formed playful and amorous relationships with adoring and indulgent milkmaids.

Popular cults challenged Brahmin authority, and Brahmins

responded by incorporating devotional forms into their creed. The temples, where Brahmins previously had preached an esoteric religion in Sanskrit, increasingly contained shrines for the worship of gods and goddesses. At the same time, they assimilated folk guardian spirits into the pantheon of

deities. These blendings were particularly evident in the large stone temples constructed during the thirteenth century in the southern part of the Indian subcontinent.

The extent to which Brahmins incorporated external elements distinguished their creed from Islam (and for that matter, from Christianity). In contrast to the missionaries of Islam and Christianity, whose ambition was to convert all outsiders completely to their faiths, Brahmin priests displayed more flexibility. Instead of confronting or condemning outsiders, they absorbed their deities and devotional forms of worship. In the process, Hinduism became a more diverse and more inclusive creed.

The incorporation of outside deities and worship also reflected the increasing diversity and cross-cultural mixing that

What united Hinduism was the ritual supremacy of the priestly caste of the Brahmins, and a society structured by a hierarchy of castes, subcastes, and outcastes.

→ *What were the defining characteristics of each major Eurasian world?*

characterized the subcontinent. Politically, that diversity followed from the absence of a single dominating empire from the seventh century onward. This left power in the hands of a number of more compact regional states, whose rulers secured their position by making land grants to powerful families and collecting tribute from them. In turn, grantees looked to bring their new lands into cultivation. To do this, they absorbed groups that had stood outside the *varnas* into the caste system and into the agricultural workforce.

The subcontinent's geographic location, which made it a pivot for trade across the Indian Ocean, contributed as well to its peculiar cultural mosaic. Merchants based in India exchanged the subcontinent's spices (especially pepper), sandalwood, perfumes, and textiles for silk from Egypt and China, slaves from Ethiopia, horses from Arabia and Persia, and most importantly, gold and silver from Mali to make jewelry and decorate temples and palaces. Arab and other Muslim merchants dominated the peninsula's long-distance trade, but Jewish, Chinese, and Hindu merchants also played significant roles in the Indian Ocean's commerce.

TURKISH INVASIONS Although Arab merchants were influential all over the subcontinent, it was Muslim Turkish peoples from Central Asia who carried out Islam's military penetration of the Indian peninsula in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Such invasions culminated in 1206, when Qutubuddin Aibak, a Turkish warrior of a Mamluk dynasty, conquered Delhi. Aibak then founded an independent sultanate with Delhi as its capital. The Delhi Sultanate eventually extended its political jurisdiction across the whole of northern India. Like other Turkish-speaking warrior bands, the dynasty permitted ambitious women to exercise power. Accordingly, Sultana Raziya became India's first Muslim woman ruler. She ascended the throne after her father's death in 1236, but her reign was brutally cut short in 1240, when she was murdered by Mamluk palace guards. Balban, the Mamluk leader who seized the throne, continued the expansion and consolidation of the sultanate, broadening the basis of his power by incorporating Indian-born Muslims into the ranks of the ruling nobility and subduing rebellious provincial governors.

The Muslim warriors and theologians of the Delhi Sultanate could not easily reconcile their Islamic faith with the diverse beliefs and practices of their newly conquered subjects. Calling the heterogeneous peoples of the subcontinent "Hindus" to distinguish them from Muslims, the rulers treated these communities as idolators. After all, unlike Muslims (or for that matter, Christians and Jews), the Hindus were not a people of the book. In the early years of the Delhi Sultanate, this condescension translated into a variety of discriminations. The sultanate, for example, restricted the higher levels of government office to

Muslims as a way to assert their political and cultural superiority. In addition, the Turkish nobility maintained a racial exclusivity that bred resentment among the Hindu upper classes. Hindu kings and nobles refused to accept this loss of power, exploiting every opportunity to regain their lost status. Brahmins also had reasons to resent the new order as their influence in the imperial court diminished; in addition, their share of land grants declined because the Turkish sultans patronized their

own theologians.

Yet, the gulf that Muslim rulers and theologians created between themselves and their subjects gave way with the passing of time. In part, the reconciliation owed to the conversion of significant numbers of Hindus to Islam. More important,

however, were the ways in which the conquerors changed and adapted. The Turkish nobility began to marry into indigenous families and to adopt local customs. In addition, Muslim rulers became more flexible, allowing non-Muslims to maintain their own laws so long as they did not conflict with the interests of the state. Nor did the Turkish sultans enforce the *sharia*, or take responsibility for the spiritual salvation of their Hindu subjects. They left Hindu temples and religious institutions in peace; only outside the sultanate's frontiers did they attack Hindu establishments.

Beyond accommodation, the interactions of Muslims and Hindus led to some unique cultural fusions. Theoretically, Islam did not recognize caste, yet a caste-like hierarchy developed among Muslims. In terms of religion, the fusing of traditions involved the incorporation of Islamic ceremonies into Hindu rituals. At the same time, Sufism, with its brotherhoods and emphasis on emotional religious rituals, became quite prominent on the subcontinent, in part because it absorbed elements of Hinduism and its local, devotional cults.

Thus did Muslim Turkish conquerors blend into the intricate Indian mosaic. To be sure, the establishment of Turkish rule on the subcontinent in the thirteenth century brought India into the Muslim world. Yet, at the same time that the subcontinent's importance in the Muslim world and the Indian Ocean trade grew, Islam adapted to the region's diverse traditions and unique institutions, becoming a distinctive cultural mixture of Indian and Islamic traditions. The development of this Indo-Islamic hybrid was a tribute as much to Islam's dynamism as to the strength of the subcontinent's cultures, of which Islam now formed a part.

THE DOMAIN OF CHRISTENDOM

At the western end of Eurasia at the furthest reaches of the Asian trade was Europe. No trader or traveler, however, would have used the term Europe to describe the northwestern part

The development of the Indo-Islamic hybrid was a tribute to Islam's dynamism and to the strength of the subcontinent's cultures.

of the Eurasian land mass. According to scholars, the name derives from the Assyrian-Phoenician word “ereb,” which means sunset; the name Asia from “asu,” which means sunrise. Thus, the terms Europe and Asia may refer to the movement of the sun, as viewed by someone on the Eurasian land mass. Whatever its etymological origins, however, Europe is an old word, but it was not in general usage in the thirteenth century. At that time, the area that would come to be called Europe was known as Christendom.

DIVISIONS WITHIN CHRISTENDOM Like the Islamic world, Christendom encompassed a vast territory and a large population. It stretched from Ireland and England in the west to Russia in the east (see Map 1-4). But even more fundamentally than in the Islamic world, the domain of Christianity was divided, most prominently between the Western Church, headed by the pope in Rome, and the Eastern Church, headed by the patriarch of Constantinople. This division arose after Emperor Constantine moved the capital of the Roman empire



→ *What were the defining characteristics of each major Eurasian world?*

from Rome to Constantinople in the fourth century. His successors refused to acknowledge the supremacy of the bishops of Rome in religious matters. Many peoples, such as the Serbs and Russians, were converted to Christianity by missionaries from Constantinople; other peoples, such as the Poles and Germans, were converted by emissaries from Rome. Thus, the Christian Church began to divide between east and west. In the west, the patriarch of Rome became the pope, a single religious authority under a single Christian Church. In the east, national churches formed, such as the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church, each with its own spiritual head who was not subordinated to the patriarch of Constantinople. And while both Eastern and Western Christianity adhered to the fundamental tenet of Jesus Christ's resurrection, their differences over doctrinal and liturgical issues kept Christendom a divided realm and led to charges from each side of the other's heresy.

Other cleavages prevented European unity. Within Christendom were many kingdoms, and indeed many non-Christians. There were Muslims (in southern France, Italy, Spain, and the Balkans), as well as Jews (in many places), while pagans lived on the Baltic Sea (in Lithuania) until the thirteenth century. Moreover, there were a bewildering number of mutually unintelligible languages and dialects spoken by the common people, who often did not speak the same languages as their rulers. Then, too, divisions between church and secular authorities went beyond mere words. While the pope served as the spiritual leader of Western Christen-

dom, many kings and princes vied for the title of this world's emperor. The medieval German princes, in particular, insisted that they were the rightful successors to the Romans, and they tried to extend the control of the Holy Roman empire (a collection of many smaller principalities) over all of Europe. But the popes resisted, and they managed to gain backing from French and Italian princes to stave off the Germans without becoming permanent vassals of their secular protectors. Thus, the church remained a (relatively) autonomous power, entangled in, but never subsumed by, the political conflicts between European states. Indeed, an important result of the rise of the papacy was the power that the church, through its clergy, was able to wield in the lives of the common people. The church claimed papal supremacy in religious matters, arguing that only the pope could define church doctrine and rule over its own affairs. Although church and state were believed to inhabit separate realms, one spiritual, the other secular, in reality, the Christian Church intruded on all aspects of life. In addition to preparing believers for the afterlife, the church held great estates, patronized the arts, and settled political disputes.

The church remained a (relatively) autonomous power, entangled in, but never subsumed by, the political conflicts between European states.

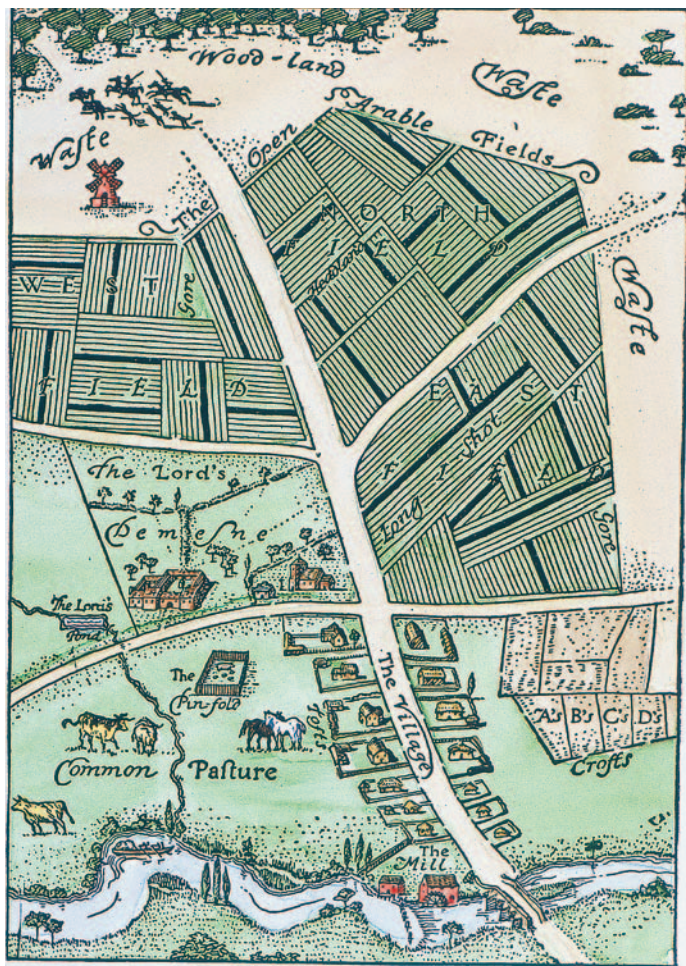
RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AND CHALLENGES As in the Islamic world, shared religious traditions fostered a degree of cohesion among the Christian inhabitants of Western Christendom. By the thirteenth century, the Western Church had won its battles against paganism. To be sure, magical practices and folk beliefs persisted in many places, but everyday life increasingly took on Christian rhythms. As parish priests arrived in communities previously without clergy, the church began to lay the foundations for a unified Christian culture. At the Fourth Lateran Council, held in Rome in 1215, the pope and bishops established a common creed to be memorized by all Christians and said at all masses. The council also certified seven sacraments (including baptism, communion, marriage, confession, and unction) over which the clergy officiated and in which laypersons were expected to participate. Through their control over these sacraments, deemed essential to living in a state of spiritual well-being, the Christian clergy enhanced their power. Moreover, as Christian learning—theological, legal, historical, and scientific—expanded, Latin, the language of the church, increasingly became the language of Christendom's elite. Although few common folk could read or write in Latin (or any language), the sense of a common Christian way was reinforced by the sharing of the liturgy and sacraments, the increasing frequency of pilgrimages, and the new familiarity with saints' lives and remains.

Women too shared in the liturgy and sacraments, and even made pilgrimages to the shrines of saints. Moreover, they could take orders and become nuns, but they could not be priests, celebrate mass, or move up in the male hierarchy. As "brides of Christ," nuns could escape poor marriage prospects, and perhaps learn to read and write. Some women did become powerful abbesses, mystics, and seers, but inevitably women with power—political, economic, or spiritual—were seen as dangerous threats to the cohesion of the church. The fear of the power of women caused communities to bring accusations against women as witches and to burn some of them at the stake.

The cohesion of the church was also threatened by unorthodox men and women, who emphasized individual piety and challenged the church hierarchy's monopoly on interpreting the word of God. In contrast to Islam, which permitted any believer to lead prayers, the Christian Church reserved that role to accredited priests. Moreover, the austerity of mosques stood in sharp contrast to increasingly elaborate Gothic cathedrals, in which the pulpit was meant for the clergy alone, and ritual and ceremony reinforced a hierarchical order. As for the Christian religious dissenters, their teachings did not travel much beyond their local areas, although their exemplary lives—and martyred deaths—would make them highly appealing to reformers of succeeding generations.

THE FEUDAL SYSTEM The absolute authority of the Western Church faced challenges from secular elites as well as religious dissenters. During the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries, Western Europe had been subjected to a series of assaults by Muslims, Vikings, and Hungarians (whom the Western Europeans referred to as “barbarians”). In these chaotic circumstances, a class of warriors, or knights, who were the king’s vassals, emerged as a powerful presence. Some knights grew rich, and their power differed little from that of the kings or princes who claimed to rule larger territories. Indeed, kings in this era, having no standing armies or elaborate bureaucracies, depended on knights to fight their battles. In exchange for military service, the kings could offer their vassals privileges, including the title to lands, the right to tax certain commodities, the right to create and exploit their own legal and economic systems, and the right to extract forced labor and fees from their peasants.

A European Manor. This diagram shows how land was divided on a typical European manor in feudal times. Note the small size of the plots, and the large areas owned by the lord but that could be used by all (e.g., the common pasture, wood lot, barn, and oven).



These privileged landholders thus became “lords,” with their own estates—of vastly different sizes—to govern. Under this system, called feudalism, lords governed not only lands, but also the people who were tied to those lands. In exchange for the lord’s protection and the right to farm some of his land, these peasants, or “serfs,” paid a series of fees, determined by custom, to the lord. Many were also forbidden to leave the estate or to marry without the lord’s permission. Thus, under feudalism, a set of reciprocal obligations developed across Europe: princes were obliged to offer privileges to local nobles, local nobles were obliged to provide armies or tribute to the princes, and peasants were obliged to do all the work. Yet, serfs were not slaves. They were generally tied to the land, but they could not be sold as if they were pieces of property, and they enjoyed some legal protections.

Feudalism was more fully developed and more enduring in some places than in others; it looked very different in England than it did in southern France or Bohemia. Already by the thirteenth century, labor shortages and the growth of cities made feudal obligations virtually impossible to enforce in France and England. At the same time, in Eastern Europe and Russia, feudalism was only just beginning. The effects of feudal organization, however, were similar across Europe. The doling out of land and privileges to feudal lords created a great number of local units with their own legal systems and often armies. The decentralization of power that was characteristic of Europe at this time would make the creation of unified states difficult, and the conquest of the continent as a whole an improbable, indeed, impossible venture. In regard to achieving centralized polities, Europe was similar to sub-Saharan Africa and India, but markedly different from China and parts of the Muslim Middle East, where monarchs had more success in overcoming the geographical and social barriers to political centralization.

Feudalism also left European society highly stratified between landowning noble families, commoners (who consisted of smaller landowners, merchants, and artisans), and peasants. Large landowners made up an aristocratic class, as they were allowed to pass on their privileges, titles, and land to their sons (rarely to their daughters). But birthright was not the only way to become part of the nobility. To enhance their wealth and power, kings and princes on rare occasions would bestow noble status on hard-working, extraordinary commoners. Nonetheless, upward mobility, especially the jump from commoner to noble, was the exception. Nearly unbridgeable gaps developed between nobles, commoners, and peasants during this period.

EVERYDAY LIFE Life for peasants on feudal estates, or manors, was rather bleak. Men spent the majority of their short lives engaged in farming. Women were responsible for domestic tasks, like cooking, cleaning, raising domestic animals, and brewing the family’s crucially important beer (a heavy brew, full of much-needed carbohydrates). Most knew little of the world beyond the manor. Although there was some inter-estate com-

→ *What were the defining characteristics of each major Eurasian world?*



Commoners in Feudal Europe. This painting by Jean Bourdichon is one in a series called *The Four States of Society*, consisting of four late-medieval images of commoners: a craftsman, a poor man, a wild man, and a bourgeois. This painting of the bourgeois is a portrait of a wealthy merchant and his family and shows off both their piety and their wealth.

merce for locally produced goods (for example, iron for tools), salt, fine cloth, horses, spices, gems, and perfume had to be purchased at trade fairs or from itinerant peddlers. Thus, unlike the world of Islam, which boasted a large number of commercial cities, the commerce of Christendom still generally occurred at seasonal fairs in smaller crossroads.

Rural peasants made up more than 90 percent of Christendom's population, but by 1300, towns also dotted the European landscape. The largest, Paris, Florence, and Milan, perhaps claimed 100,000 inhabitants. Many of those who populated these cities and the smaller towns were peasants

who had run away from their feudal lords. Custom decreed that those who had lived in a town for a year and a day were considered free from feudal obligations. Towns secured charters for themselves, which exempted them from many feudal obligations and guaranteed them political freedoms. It was

not, however, easy to survive in towns. The death rate generally exceeded the birthrate, and sanitary conditions were hideous. The unpaved streets served as rubbish and excrement dumps, as well as exercise grounds for pigs, dogs, donkeys, chickens, and rats.

Europe's townspeople engaged in a variety of occupations. The social hierarchy, here, too, was pronounced—though a bit more fluid than on the manors. The highest rung was occupied by the wealthiest merchants, resident aristocrats, and administrative officials (themselves usually aristocrats). Further down were smaller independent businessmen and artisans—tavern-keepers, small traders, bakers, and the like. Then came skilled craftsmen, or journeymen, who could sell their labor (as masons, cobblers, or skilled weavers) for a daily wage. Near the bottom of the heap were unskilled workers, itinerant peddlers, household servants, and the unemployed. As towns grew, they expanded their manufacturing, especially the production of wool—spinning, weaving, and dyeing. The trade in wool production fueled Europe's economic development.

Women could be found at all levels of the urban hierarchy, though their influence in economic and political matters was largely indirect. There were influential, learned women aristocrats, as well as women employed as wetnurses, midwives, or chambermaids. In Italy, France, and Flanders, "artisanal" women were employed as skilled weavers, but as the craft became more lucrative, male weavers increasingly occupied these positions. And, of course, women made up a significant proportion of the underclass—composed of beggars, orphans, widows, prostitutes, and the elderly or handicapped—individuals dependent on private charity in a world with few able to offer alms.

As in the world of Islam, European towns facilitated longer-distance trade, and they prospered where traders were most numerous and most active, on the Baltic, Flemish, and Italian coasts. In the north, lumber, fish, furs, and grain from Scandinavia and what is now northwestern Russia were shipped west, where they could be traded for high-quality woolen cloth made in Flanders (from English wool). More far-reaching trade networks radiated from the city of Venice, which imported spices, silks, porcelain, and luxury goods from the East. As some inhabitants of these towns, particularly in Italy, began to reap the profits of long-distance trade, they could afford a more luxurious lifestyle. By 1300, the consumption of sugar, spices, and books was rising steadily.

More far-reaching trade networks radiated from the city of Venice, which imported spices, silks, porcelain, and luxury goods from the East.

But for most Europeans, whether they resided in cities or on manors, life was short, luxuries were rare, and exposure to arts and sciences was quite limited. At least one of every six children died before his or her first birthday; one in four died before reaching age five. By and large, those who survived lived

in cramped, dark, smoky quarters; windows were impractical, as they let in little light, and much cold in winter. Few houses had chimneys, relying instead on chinks in the roof for ventilation. Most homes included little furniture, having perhaps a table, a few stools, a chest, and a bedstead. Clothing was equally spartan. As textile production was extremely arduous—one had to spin the thread, weave the cloth, then sew the pieces together—clothes were quite expensive. A linen undershirt cost, by one estimate, about three to four days of labor. Until the fourteenth century, buttons as fasteners were unknown, and clothes had to be draped, tied on, or pinned together with straight pins.

Mealtime did not bring much in the way of variation or enjoyment. Grains and legumes, which can be stored, comprised the backbone of ordinary diets; in season, one might also have fruits and vegetables, poultry, eggs, and fish, but often these were unaffordable. Children washed their supper down not with milk but with ale or wine.

Port Cities. In fourteenth-century Venice, shipping was a central part of economic and cultural life. Note here how prosperous merchants conduct business in the city center, while fantastic creatures inhabit nearby ports.



The few Europeans who did travel or listen to the crusaders' tales realized that Christendom's power and affluence paled next to that of the Islamic world, India, and especially China.

The aristocracy ate a more varied diet and had meat more regularly, which they liked highly seasoned. Nobles used spices not only to prevent or disguise spoilage but also as a way of distinguishing themselves from peasants, who could not afford such expensive goods. The extremely high cost of pepper, for example, put this spice out of the reach of all but the wealthiest members of society.

EXPANSION AND CONQUEST Divisions within Christendom did not impede its external expansion. Medieval European aristocrats ranged far afield in search of new territories to conquer. Pushing out the Slavs, Germanic knights conquered great swathes of land in eastern Europe; in the centuries prior to 1300, Norman warriors seized Welsh and Sicilian lands. The most important expansions were those resulting from a series of “crusades” to the Holy Land, the

first of which was launched in 1096 and the last concluded in the mid-fifteenth century. Urged to liberate Jerusalem from Muslim control by the pope, aristocrats as well as merchants and pilgrims also saw these long-distance campaigns as the means to seize estates and booty for themselves. Their travels did enrich many, as well as add to their prestige (and that of the church that sent them). Those who returned brought back eye-opening accounts of Muslim civilization. Those who stopped and set up estates along the way brought Christianity, and feudal forms, to new lands.

Still, Europeans knew very little about the world beyond Christendom, and Mediterranean sailors feared passing beyond the “pillars of Hercules” (the rocks of Gibraltar) into the Atlantic Ocean. Maps were hardly more than schematic diagrams, with Jerusalem, appropriately, at the universe’s center. For many centuries, an otherworldly orientation sufficed—knowing the world seemed at best irrelevant with regard to things of real importance, at worst a threat to the church-centered social order and the soul. But the few who did travel or listen to the crusaders’ tales realized that Christendom’s power and affluence paled next to that of the Islamic world, India, and especially China.

THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

The destination that drew all of the world’s great travelers, including Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta, was China, known far and wide as a land of wealth and learning. Yet, in the thirteenth century, the term “China,” which probably was derived from a Sanskrit word, was not used by the approximately 100 million people who lived in what they considered the world’s *Zhongguo* or “Middle Kingdom.” Certainly, the sense of being at the cen-



VIEW OF EUROPEANS

One of the best and most representative Arab-Muslim accounts of Europeans was written in the twelfth century by the Arab notable and adversary of the European crusaders, Usamah ibn Munqidh. Although written a century before our world history discussion begins, it represented the common thinking of Arab Muslims about Europeans at the time of the European crusades. Especially noteworthy were the observations about relations between men and women, which seemed altogether too loose to the author.

When one comes to recount cases regarding the Franks [Europeans], he cannot but glorify Allah, exalted is he!, and sanctify him, for he sees them as animals possessing the virtues of courage and fighting but nothing else; just as animals have only the virtues of strength and carrying loads. I shall now give some instances of their doings and their curious mentality. . . . Everyone who is a fresh emigrant from the Frankish lands is ruder than those who have become acclimatized and have held long association with the Moslems [Muslims]. . . . The Franks are void of all zeal and jealousy.

One of them may be walking along with his wife. He meets another man who takes the wife by the hand and steps aside to converse with her while the husband is standing on one side waiting for his wife to conclude the conversation. If she lingers too long for him, he leaves her alone with the conversant and goes away.

Source: *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades: Memoirs of Usamah ibn Munqidh*, translated by Philip K. Hitti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) pp. 93–94, 159–70.

ter of the world aptly reflected the worldview of those who lived in the Middle Kingdom. True, for much of the thirteenth century, the Middle Kingdom was divided in two (see Map 1-5). In the north in the second decade of the twelfth century, the Han Chinese Song dynasty had been supplanted by invaders, the Jurchens, from what is now Manchuria. Adapting to deep-rooted patterns of rulership in the Middle Kingdom, the Jurchens established the Jin dynasty. For over a millennium, the institution of the dynasty, with its centralized bureaucratic structure and promotion of Confucian values sanctioned by the state, held the key to the coherence of the vast Chinese world. The Jin dynasty ruled over a population of 40 million until it was displaced by Mongol invaders from the north in the third decade of the thirteenth century. Meanwhile, in southern China, the Southern Song dynasty lasted until 1279, when its more than 70 million subjects also came under the rule of Mongol conquerors. Yet, in spite of political divisions and invasions, China's dynasties ruled over the richest of the thirteenth-century worlds.

EVERYDAY LIFE As in Eurasia's other larger cultural areas, the wealth of China depended first and foremost on the production of agricultural surpluses. As elsewhere, the majority of people in China worked the land. But unlike many peasants in Europe who were serfs, most Chinese cultivators could freely buy, sell, and bequeath the lands on which they toiled. Landownership and household farming were widespread. To be sure, economic fluctuations reduced a significant number of peo-

ple to tenant farming or to hired agricultural labor, but relatively open social mobility also raised tenants and hired workers to landowning status. Peasant women contributed not only to labor in the field, but they also engaged in commerce through the silk industry. The growth of trade and the urban demand for silk cloth enabled many women to raise silkworms and to spin silk yarn.

Everyday life for these cultivators was dictated less by distant dynastic emperors than by the calendar of the agricultural year. This calendar was characterized by a variety of suggestive names, such as grain rains or excited insects. The calendar also regulated the cycles of festivals and observances: the New Year; the Festival of the Clear and Bright, during which ancestral graves were visited; the Mid-Autumn Festival, when the family got together to observe the harvest moon; and many others. The temples of China's two major religions, Buddhism and Daoism, were often major attractions for the populace on such occasions. Buddhism had entered the country around the first century C.E. It extolled the life and teachings of the saintly Indian ascetic Siddhartha Gautama (c. 563–c. 483 B.C.E.), called the Buddha, or "the enlightened one," who had taught that people should strive for liberation from all suffering through righteous living. Daoism had first appeared in China more than fifteen hundred years earlier as a philosophical school that looked back to a golden age before the onset of civilization. Later it emerged as a religious movement with its own scriptures and liturgy. While ritual observances took place within the temples



MAP 1-5 THE JIN AND SOUTHERN SONG EMPIRES

The Southern Song empire was known for its cities, its thriving commerce, and its maritime trade. Note the number of major ports under the control of the Southern Song, and contrast that with the area under the control of the Jin. What challenges and opportunities did this division present? Note the boundaries of the original Song empire. Why was the Song dynasty driven south? Why did it take the Mongols decades longer to topple the Southern Song after defeating the Jin?

of these faiths, many celebrations occurred within the confines of the family and the home. Indeed, in China, as in other worlds, large and small, the family had long been the hub of economic and social organization.

Song elites attempted to assert greater control and impose more uniformity over the ritual life of the family by producing and distributing a number of written manuals. In these pam-

phlets, they identified the institution of marriage as the key to a well-ordered society. As in other realms, the Chinese regarded marriage as a connection between families rather than individuals. Elite Chinese were particularly meticulous in arranging marriages and performing the rituals associated with the union of families. Ideally, the elite bride and groom would not even have met before their marriage. Among the common folk, by

→ *What were the defining characteristics of each major Eurasian world?*

contrast, husband and wife would likely have met before their wedding, although their marriage, too, would almost surely be a union arranged by their parents. Similarly, while elite men might live up to the familial ideal of multiple secondary wives, assorted concubines, and numerous children, such a large family was beyond the means of most ordinary people.

COMMERCE AND CITIES Although most of its people labored on the land, Song China was also a highly complex commercial society. A vibrant mercantile sector fashioned links

among networks of urban centers. These ranged from small market towns, where farmers and peddlers hawked their wares, to some of the most magnificent cities in the world. The separation between the city and the countryside in the Chinese social landscape was never quite as stark as in medieval Europe. The combination in China of commercialization, urbanization, and industrialization was unprecedented in the world at the time. The key to China's robust economic development was an elaborate river transportation network. The large domestic market that owed its development to this highly developed

VIEWS OF CHINA

The Middle Kingdom (as the Chinese referred to their lands), or Cathay (as Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo often called China), was the favored destination of all travelers. No important traveler's account of the world would have been considered complete without a description of its fabled treasures and its powerful rulers. Consequently, the present-day reader cannot know for certain whether the descriptions offered by the travelers are eyewitness accounts or reports based on other people's impressions. Internal evidence would suggest that Ibn Battuta visited southern China but did not reach the court of the Yuan dynasty in Beijing, even though he reported on it. Marco Polo's descriptions have a greater ring of accuracy about them, but they, too, appear to have many embellishments. Nonetheless, the two men's accounts of the magnificent city of Hangzhou leave little doubt that it was the largest and wealthiest city in the world when these two saw it.

MARCO POLO ON HANGZHOU Then he [the traveler] reaches the splendid city of Kinsai [Hangzhou], whose name means "City of Heaven." It well merits a description because it is without doubt the finest and the most splendid city in the world. . . . First, then, it was stated that the city of Kinsai is about 100 miles in circumference, because its streets and watercourses are wide and spacious. Then there are marketplaces, which because of the multitudes that throng them must be very large and spacious. The layout of the city is as follows. On one side is a lake of fresh water, very clear. On the other is a huge river, which entering by many channels, diffused throughout the city, carries away all its filth and then flows into the lake from which it flows out towards the Ocean. This makes the air very wholesome. And through every part of the city it is possible to travel either by land or by these streams. The streets and the watercourses alike are very wide, so that carts and boats can readily pass along them to carry provisions for the inhabitants. There are said to be 12,000 bridges, mostly of stone, though some are of wood. Those over the main channels and the chief thoroughfare are

built with such lofty arches and so well designed that big ships can pass under them without a mast, and yet over them pass carts and horses; so well are the street-levels adjusted to the heights.

IBN BATTUTA ON HANGZHOU We sailed on the river in the same way, taking our morning meal in one village and our evening meal in another, until after seventeen days we reached the city of al-Khansa. . . . It is the biggest city I have seen on the face of the earth. It takes three days to cross it, the traveler journeying on and stopping [for the night] in the city. It is laid out as we have described in the Chinese style of building, everyone having his own orchard and house.

Source: *The Travels of Marco Polo*, translated and with an introduction by Ronald Latham (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1958) pp. 213–14, and *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, translated by H. A. R. Gibb, with revisions and notes from the Arab text edited by C. Defremery and B. R. Sanguinetti (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1958–1994), vol. 4, pp. 900–901.



Marco Polo in China. Marco Polo is welcomed at the court of Kubilai Khan.

internal river transportation and canal network also fostered an iron and steel industry and enabled Chinese merchants to obtain silk produced in the countryside that could be brought to the coast by river to be part of a brisk overseas trade. Also key was the use of paper money and woodblock printing to facilitate the dissemination of information.

Chinese towns and cities did not have their own charters, administrative institutions, or special privileges as did Europe's much smaller, yet rising cities. Administratively, urban centers were part of the counties and prefectures in which they were located, subject to the jurisdiction of the same imperial bureaucrats who administered the surrounding countryside. Again, in contrast to feudal Europe, China's people were free to come and go between cities and farms. Particularly during festivals, the towns came alive and filled with visitors buying and selling, or simply enjoying the fireworks, the theatrical displays, and the hustle and bustle of the crowd.

At the pinnacle of the urban networks were major cities such as the capital of the Southern Song empire, Hangzhou, which with a million plus inhabitants, was the world's largest metropolis. According to Marco Polo, Hangzhou was "without

doubt the finest and most splendid city in the world." It was a city of great wealth, ostentation, high culture, and a dazzling array of entertainment venues. It boasted a multitude of restaurants, hotels, taverns, and teahouses, where the rich and the powerful, merchants and officials alike, congregated and mingled. Teas or wines were served in cups of fine porcelain amid sumptuous décor and works by celebrated painters and calligraphers. In the arcades, singing girls, courtesans, and prostitutes invited passersby to patronize their establishments.

In Hangzhou, as in the world's other great cities, such luxuries were not available to all. In China, as elsewhere, diet and clothing marked social differences among the population. The fare of common people consisted of chicken, pork, offal, salted fish, and especially rice. To supply rice, of which the average Hangzhou resident consumed two pounds per day, barges arrived night and day at the city's riverbank markets. Meanwhile, better-off inhabitants feasted on more exotic food. In the great restaurants that catered to the wealthy, dishes such as shellfish cooked in rice wine, goose with apricots, lotus-seed soup, and fish cooked with plums were on the menu. On the streets, people of exalted rank wore long robes that reached down to the

→ *What were the defining characteristics of each major Eurasian world?*

ground. For ceremonial occasions, they donned special robes with embroidered symbolic designs, such as phoenixes or dragon-claws. The costumes of wealthy women included long dresses, or blouses that came down close to the knee, jackets with long or short sleeves, and skirts—all cut from fine silk. They would also sometimes throw a “head-cover” over their shoulders. Common people, by contrast, clothed themselves in trousers and other garb of coarse hempen cloth.

THE BUREAUCRATIC TRADITION Many of China’s wealthiest men owed their luxurious and comfortable lives to commercial enterprises, but most Chinese considered a career as an official the surest path to power and prestige. The bureaucratic route was officially open to males of almost any background, although members of the imperial household and their descendants were granted special access to the civil service examinations, which undermined the tradition of a meritocratic officialdom. Elaborate civil service examinations, requiring years of intensive study of the Chinese classics, provided entry at each level to the Chinese bureaucracy. Although in theory any person could sit and pass these exams, only those whose families could afford to fund long years of study could hope to have a member achieve success. The ideal of a bureaucracy open to anyone of merit was further compromised in the northern Jin empire, when the Jurchens excluded Han Chinese from the highest ranks of imperial service. Still, every effort was made to ensure that the examination process itself was rigorous, impartial, and free from corruption.

After spending years mastering the classical texts and surviving the grueling examination process, both anointed and potential members of the bureaucratic elite forged powerful bonds and a common identity among themselves. The dynasty placed them at the top of the social ladder; those who did well on the exams could marry well, earn a high income, and be honored with great prestige. In return, the bureaucrats were servants of the emperor, the “Son of Heaven.” They could be appointed to administer distant provinces and could be put in charge of military affairs. Their service gave them an empire-wide perspective on matters of the state. Administering localities in which the population often spoke a mosaic of dialects and knew little of the outside world, they brought a unifying element to diverse communities. In the Chinese world, the bureaucracy provided the critical glue that held the vast realm together, contributing greatly to the centralization of power under the emperor.

CONFUCIAN IDEALS Officially, Confucian ideals and practices inspired the code of operation of the bureaucracy. They were traced to a minor government official and teacher named Kong Qiu (551–479 B.C.E.), whose name was Latinized to

Confucius by westerners. Kong Qiu, who lived in a period of political turmoil, was concerned with how to restore a stable social order through good government. He preached that everyone must begin by cultivating individual virtue and benevolence through learning. At the top, the ruler should lead, as the legendary sage-kings did, by exemplary moral and ethical behavior. He also taught that virtue must be expressed outwardly through the correct performance of rites appropriate to the individual’s station, which differed according to context and was usually defined by age, gender, and status. Careful codification of rites anchored the moral and social order.

The Confucian ideals, however, were not always translated into practice. To the ruler, Confucian ideas formed a useful ideology to lend legitimacy to the dynasty. Thus did emperors promote an official cult of Kong Qiu. Temples were built in his honor and patronized by the elites throughout the realm. A hierarchical set of schools, headed by the Imperial Academy at the capital, was established to train loyal servants for the regime. In 1227, the Song Imperial Academy recognized a specific set of Confucian texts known collectively as the “Four Books.” But contrary to the hopes of emperors, the propagation of Confucian ideas did not always solidify their legitimacy. Some scholar-officials took their roles as guardians of Confucian tradition very

seriously, which meant they had the duty to maintain the proper moral or ethical order of society. If emperors failed to exemplify the ideals and to protect the realm’s virtue, scholar-officials could become vocal critics. Many outspoken officials paid with their lives for adopting this course.

Song women had no chance of a public career. Men dominated government, mercantile, and literary spheres. Since women could not sit for the vaunted civil service examinations, they could not become part of the Chinese bureaucracy. For elite women, life revolved around the home. Indeed, the Song period is usually associated with the spread of footbinding (a practice believed to have been embraced first by the elites) and also with the condemnation of remarriage of widows. Despite the promotion of chastity among some elites, however, widows often did remarry. Moreover, Song women enjoyed more property rights and control of their marital assets than did their counterparts in China in later periods. Women, for example, retained control over their dowries, even taking their assets with them to their second marriages. They had the full right to inherit their husbands’ property, and they were also given great latitude in selecting an heir.

Like other larger worlds, however, China was no monolith. Invasions, dynastic upheaval, and tensions between emperors and their officials introduced political instability. By 1300, both the Jin empire and the Southern Song empire would succumb to Mongol conquerors from the north—a people who in the

In the Chinese world, the bureaucracy provided the critical glue that held the vast realm together, contributing greatly to the centralization of power under the emperor.

view of the Chinese were “barbarians,” inferior in all ways save one, their success as warriors. Still, China’s riches were the envy of other worlds, and its impressive civilization awed visitors to the Middle Kingdom.

BORDERLANDS NEAR CHINA

→ *How did the Middle Kingdom influence neighboring societies?*

In the Chinese cosmology, the Middle Kingdom was the center of civilization. Those outside its boundaries were barbarians, arranged around China by means of the tributary system involving symbolic submission. Some of the neighboring peoples who paid tribute to the Chinese sought to reproduce the Chinese system, establishing their own tributary relations with others beside the Chinese while adopting Chinese cultural and political patterns internally. The Koreans to the north (whose land was known as Koryo) and the Vietnamese to the south (in Annam and Champa) attempted to reproduce Chinese models of domestic development and external relations. The people of the Indonesian archipelago in Southeast Asia served both as tributary and trading partners with the Chinese as silver, spices, silk, and other exotic goods changed hands between traders from across the Eurasian world. Another case of imitation could be found on the group of islands off the coast of China; the southern Chinese called these islands *jih-pen*, or Japan.

JAPAN

In the thirteenth century, Japan was a loose collection of domains ruled by powerful local lords, called *daimyo*, who had broad powers over peasants and commanded private armies of warriors, called *samurai*. They coexisted alongside a weak central government and an imperial family in a political system that had remarkable similarities with European feudalism. Geography partially accounted for this decentralization of power. Like the Italian peninsula, which is about the same size, the islands of Japan are mostly mountainous. Settlements congregated along coastal basins and in interior valleys that were largely isolated from one another.

Much of the Japanese political system and higher culture was based upon Chinese models.

Much of the Japanese political system and higher culture was based upon Chinese models. In the sixth and seventh centuries, the most powerful clan had imported Buddhism, Confucianism, and the Chinese systems of writing and government. As in the Middle Kingdom to its west, the Japanese rulers then created an imperial officialdom, though they restricted the qualifying examination to children of the aristocracy. But central authority, in spite of its Chinese-style system of rule, never succeeded in undercutting the power of private estate holders. Many of the functions of central administration—taxing, policing, judging, building and maintaining public works—became matters of local jurisdiction under these landholding barons. The lines of subordination between the imperial court and the local lords were ambiguous.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

In 1300, one of the most important borderland areas lay to the south and east of India in the area now referred to as Southeast Asia and consisted of the Indochina mainland, the Malay Peninsula, and the islands of the Indonesian archipelago (see Map 1-6). Defined by its dense forests and ubiquitous waterways, the region, like the Indian subcontinent, was most notable for its diversity and its openness to outside influences. Its geography made the emergence of large unified empires founded along great rivers or vast plains difficult. The result in Southeast Asia, as on the Indian subcontinent, was the emergence of numerous political communities boasting different heritages. For example, the kingdom of Angkor (889–1431), located in the Mekong Delta, drew upon Indian political institutions and encouraged the circulation of Hindu and Buddhist religious ideas. Islam began to make its influence felt as early as the eighth century, although it did not become a political force until much later. Its agents for conversion were mainly merchants and scholars, and only later, after Islam had established itself as a political force, did it compel conversions in its military conquests. In Southeast Asia, as on the Indian subcontinent, Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic cultural systems vied against and mixed with one another. But Southeast Asia added Confucian and Chinese ideals to the political and cultural mix. These ideals were especially influential in Vietnam, where a Confucian political orthodoxy was entrenched.

Like India, Southeast Asia’s location made the region’s ports centers of trading networks that stretched from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean and beyond. The earliest traders took sugarcane, bananas, and yams to Africa. During the era of the Roman empire, merchants brought silk from China. Later traders transported spices—

→ How did the Middle Kingdom influence neighboring societies?



especially cloves, nutmeg, and mace, as well as cinnamon and pepper—directly from Southeast Asia. Cloves, nutmeg, and mace grew only on the smallest of islands in Maluku (the Moluccas), whose inhabitants kept the secret of the cultivation and preparation of these spices to themselves. Indian traders had visited Southeast Asia before the common era, exchanging Indian cloth, gold, and silver for spices, pearls, and aromatic wood. In later centuries, Muslim traders transported spices from Maluku to markets in the Arab world, from which they made their way to Italian, mostly Venetian, merchants and were sold throughout Europe. The largest external market for commodities from Southeast Asia was China. The growing in-

volvement of Chinese merchants, as they maneuvered their vessels around the Malay Peninsula, gave rise to new port cities, which assisted in the creation of new and often more centralized states in the region. Merchants and seamen would lodge in these ports, waiting for favorable monsoon winds to arise. As the trade between Southeast Asia and China flourished, Chinese merchants moved into the ports to commingle and even compete with Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim newcomers, as well as with the majority population, which had its own local beliefs and cultural systems. By 1300, Southeast Asia was an archipelago of overlapping religious communities and trading networks, and one of the world's great borderland regions.



VIEWS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

Southeast Asia was the true meeting place on the Eurasian land mass. Here, the cultures of Islam, India, and China were in a constant state of mixing. It was home to Gujarati traders, Jews from the Islamic lands, Arab and Persian merchants, and Chinese middlemen. The geographical location of its major island complexes (today's Indonesia and Malay Peninsula) made it the mandatory stopping-off place for sailors and traders either on their way to southern China or Japan or, heading in the opposite direction, to India and the Middle East. Thus, some of its cities, notably the city of Melaka, supported themselves on commerce alone, having no agricultural hinterland to feed their city dwellers. Both Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta passed through this area and agreed on the rare spices that were to be found there as well as its critical importance to traders.

MARCO POLO ON JAVA About 100 miles southeast of Bintan lies the island of Lesser Java. You may understand that it is not so little but what it extends to more than 2,000 miles in circumference. . . . The island abounds in treasure and in costly products, including aloe wood, brazil, ebony, spikenard, and many sorts of spice that never reach our country because of the length and perils of the way but are exported to Manzi and Cathay. . . . You must also know that the people of Ferlec [Periak in northern Sumatra] used all to be idolators, but owing to contact with Saracen [Muslim] merchants, who continually resort here in their ships, they have all been converted to the law of Mahomet [Muhammad].

IBN BATTUTA ON SUMATRA We left these peoples and after twenty-five days we reached the island of al-Jawa [Sumatra], from which Jawi incense takes its name. We saw it at a distance of half a day's sail. It is green and very well wooded with coconuts, aceca palms, cloves, and Indian aloes . . . mango, . . . orange, and camphor reeds. These people

buy and sell with little pieces of tin or unrefined Chinese gold. . . . I stayed in Sumatra with him [the Sultan] for fifteen days. After that I sought permission to travel for it was the season, since the voyage to China is not organized at any time. The Sultan prepared a junk for us, stocked it with provisions, and was most generous and kind, May God reward him! He sent one of his companions with us to be host to us on the junk. We sailed along his country for twenty-one nights. Then we reached Mul Jawa, which is the country of infidels. It extends for two months' travel. It has aromatics and good aloes of Qaqula and Qamara, both places being in the country. In the country of Sultan Al-Zahir in al-Jawa, there are only incense, camphor, some cloves, and some Indian aloes.

Source: *The Travels of Marco Polo*, translated and with an introduction by Ronald Latham (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1958) pp. 252–53, and *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, translated by H. A. R. Gibb, with revisions and notes from the Arab text edited by C. Defremery and B. R. Sanguinetti (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1958–1994), vol. 3, pp. 876–80.

MONGOL CONQUESTS AND CONNECTIONS

→ *How did the Mongol empire further integrate Eurasia?*

Not all the borderland areas were comprised of island pockets between the larger cultures. Sometimes borderlands could straddle large territorial expanses between major cultures. Such

was the case of the northern steppe between China and western Eurasia through which the overland trade routes passed. Located between the eastern and western flanks of Eurasia, the borderlands of the steppe harbored a particular nomadic culture. These borderland peoples of the north decisively shaped the histories of peoples within the borders of the Islamic world, China, the Indian subcontinent, and Europe.

The undulating steppe, which stretched from the Manchurian plain in the Far East to the Hungarian plain in Europe, was ideal for livestock herders. Living in tents and other temporary dwellings, steppe dwellers roamed with flocks of camels, horses, oxen, and sheep. Most nomads were master

→ *How did the Mongol empire further integrate Eurasia?*

horse riders who moved around with all their possessions with them; many became expert at archery and would periodically launch raids on agricultural peoples living in far-off cities, rural hinterlands, and the oases of Central Asia. It was against such raids that the Chinese, over many centuries, constructed the Great Wall.

THE COMING OF THE MONGOLS

With their swift horses and fierce fighting techniques, the borderland peoples of the steppe eventually conquered much of Eurasia. Of all the invasions launched from the steppe, that of the thirteenth-century Mongols was the most spectacular. Most significantly, their dramatic expansion and conquest served to bring the peoples of Eurasia closer together by facilitating trade and cultural exchange on a much larger scale. The Mongols' expansionist thrust began in 1206, when a cluster of tribes joined into a united force. A large gathering of clan

heads acclaimed one of those present as Chinggis (Genghis) Khan, or Supreme Ruler. Chinggis (c. 1155–1227) subsequently launched a series of conquests southward across the Great Wall of China, and westward through Central Asia to Afghanistan and Persia. The armies of his son and first successor reached both the Pacific Ocean and the Adriatic Sea. His grandsons founded dynasties in China, Persia, and on the southern Eurasian steppes east of Europe (see Map 1-7). Thus, a realm took shape that was more than 6,000 miles in width and that touched all four of Eurasia's larger worlds.

THE MONGOL PEOPLE Who were these conquerors of territories so much larger than their own? The Mongols were a combination of forest and prairie peoples. Residing in circular, felt-covered tents, which they shared with some of their animals, the Mongols lived by a combination of hunting and livestock herding. A mobile society, they changed campgrounds with the seasons, hunting game and herding livestock south in winter and north in summer. Life on the steppes was a constant struggle, which meant that only the strong survived. Their food, consisting primarily of animal products from their herds or from game they hunted, provided high levels of protein, which built up their muscle mass and added to their strength. Always on the march, the Mongols created a society that resembled a perpetual standing army. Their bands were organized into strictly disciplined military units led by commanders chosen for their skill. Mongol archers, using a heavy compound bow, made of sinew, wood, and horns, could fire an arrow more than 200 yards at full gallop with accuracy. Mongol horses were stocky, and capable of withstanding extreme cold. Their saddles had high

supports in front and back, enabling the warriors to ride and maneuver at high speeds. Iron stirrups permitted the riders to rise in their saddles to shoot their arrows without stopping. The Mongols were expert horsemen, who could remain in the saddle all day and night, even sleeping while their horses continued on the move. Each warrior kept many horses, enabling Mongol armies to travel as many as sixty or seventy miles per day. Between military campaigns, soldiers kept sharp by engaging in winter hunting.

Between and during their military campaigns, Mongol warriors took many wives. One Franciscan friar, sent in 1245 to the Mongols to baptize and spy on them, explained that every Mongol man “has as many wives as he can afford; some have a hundred, some fifty, some ten.” The missionary added that when

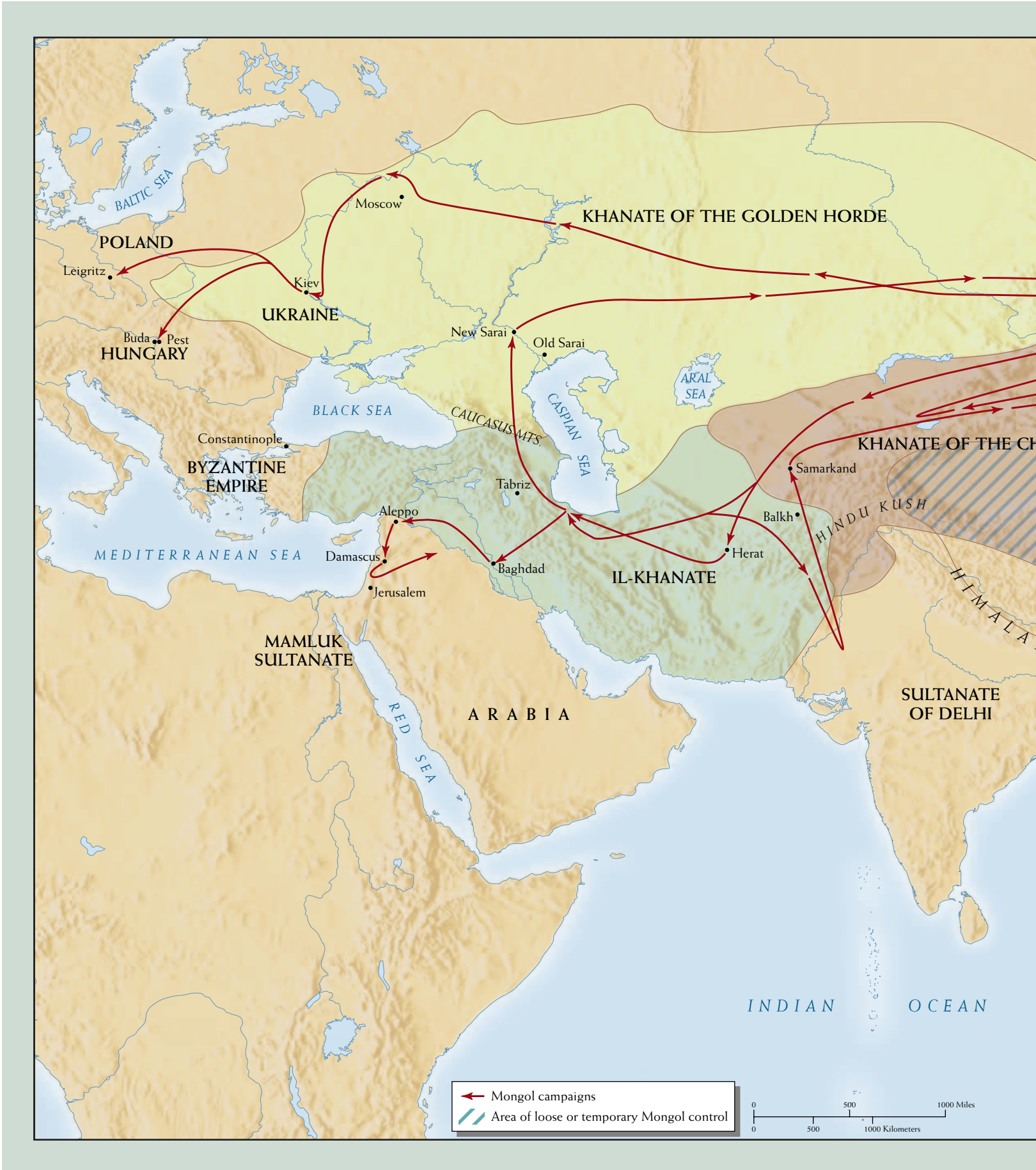
With their swift horses and fierce fighting techniques, the borderland peoples of the steppe eventually conquered much of Eurasia.

a Mongol died, his brother or uncle could marry his widow; a son could even marry his father's widow, provided the woman was his stepmother. Each wife had a separate tent, arranged in order of seniority. Women in Mongol society were responsible for childrearing as well as breeding and

birthing the livestock, and shearing, milking, and processing pelts for clothing. But women also took part in battles, riding horses into combat alongside their fathers, husbands, and brothers. And unlike almost any other women in thirteenth-century Europe or Asia, Mongol women had the right to own property and even to divorce their husbands.

MONGOL CONQUEST AND EMPIRE Mongol success rested on a combination of ruthlessness and cleverness. The Mongols made considerable use of espionage, identifying the discontented among their enemies and using bribes to turn them into “collaborators.” When they came up against fortified cities, they organized sieges, using flaming arrows and catapults. When sieges proved unsuccessful, they would fake a retreat, then suddenly return, catching their enemies off guard. Those who resisted the Mongols were usually annihilated, while those who submitted were offered a role in the ever-expanding Mongol empire. Each victory increased Mongol strength, bringing artisans, engineers, and astrologers, as well as new soldiers, slaves, and ever more wives. While warriors continued to take pride in their separate existence, they were drawn by conquest into the cultural life of Eurasia, and Buddhist, Islamic, and Christian ideas circulated within their communities.

What drove the Mongols to create one of the world's greatest empires? At least initially, Mongol conquests may have arisen from the nomads' need for grazing lands. Second, as the Mongols moved into new lands, they were able to increase their wealth massively by extracting taxes through their tributary system. Indeed, trade disputes spurred many of the Mongols' first expansions. Dependent on trade with settled peoples,





MAP 1-7 THE MONGOL EMPIRES, 1280

The Mongols understood their empire as a collection of conquered peoples, some of whom were nomadic tribes. What would be the best way to represent such a nonterritorial, mobile empire on a map? What appear to be the bases for the boundaries of the Mongol khanates? Do the boundary lines follow rivers, seas, and mountains, and to what extent do they take account of political units, like the old Chinese empire and the conquered Islamic states? What areas of great wealth fell under Mongol control? What wealthy areas remained beyond Mongol control?

especially for grain, but also for manufactured goods, including iron for tools, wagons, weapons, bridles, and stirrups, the first expansionist forays followed caravan routes. Here were opportunities to raid instead of trade.

Unlike many nomads, who disappeared after gathering plunder, Mongol raiders built a more permanent empire by incorporating conquered peoples and by absorbing some of their ways. They did this most directly through intermarriage. Chinggis began this process by scrutinizing newly conquered peoples, picking from them the best warriors, marrying them to Mongol women, and making them part of the Mongol armies. Before he died in 1227, he established that any succeeding Great Khan, as well as the heads of any major subsection of his lands, had to be his direct male descendant. Because succession involved a bloody conflict among all contenders to ensure strong leadership, it sometimes passed to a khan's eldest living brother, an ambiguity that could give rise to multiple claimants to the throne and deadly feuds. But despite the incorporation of many disparate peoples, and the Mongol aristocracy's partial assimilation into the cultures of the peoples they conquered, no one from a clan other than Chinggis's was recognized as ruler.

A thirteenth-century European visitor to the Mongol imperial capital at Karakorum in Mongolia was astounded that the entire encampment was smaller than the French village of St. Denis, while the Mongol imperial palace was said to be one-tenth the size of the St. Denis monastery. Mongol power derived not from permanent population centers (cities), however, but from the kinship loyalties and the extraordinary mobility of their society. In terms of population, Mongol armies, which grew to 200,000 men, were far larger than all but a handful of thirteenth-century cities. And like cities, Mongol armies took what they needed from the countryside. Indeed, by living off the land and helping themselves to everything they found, soldiers overcame problems of long-distance supply. Thus was a Mongol-speaking population, which probably numbered no more than 2 million in the thirteenth century, able to conquer much of Eurasia.

Conquest, of course, was one thing; ruling was another. Not only were the conquerors few in number compared with the peoples they subjugated, but almost all of the Mongols were illiterate. They also lacked experience in governing complex settled societies. In China, for example, just 700,000 Mongols inhabited a realm whose total population was more than one hundred times larger and whose bureaucratic officialdom could communicate in writing in a common language.

Just as they incorporated foreigners in their armies, so they brought foreigners into the administration of conquered lands. To govern China, the Mongols imported Uighurs, Tibetans, Persians, and various Turkish peoples, playing off Christians against Muslims and appointing Chinese only to subordinate

posts. They also introduced Hungarian slaves, Venetian traders, Byzantine craftsmen, Islamic merchants, and Indian holy men, making the Mongol court a true microcosm of the known world (Persian was used as the international language). To facilitate communication, the Mongols established 10,000 postal relay stations that used 300,000 horses to disseminate directives and to keep them informed of developments (messengers traveled up to 250 miles in a single day, often sleeping in the saddle). Most impressive of all, the Mongols and their multinational advisers conducted censuses of all their subjects—not just in China, but throughout Central Asia, Persia, and the Slavic principalities. Enumerated subjects were then organized into military units and taxed.

In addition to the problems of conquest and administration, the Mongols faced the question of perpetuating their rule. Chinggis handled the matter of succession by dividing his possessions among his four sons. One son claimed the oases and trading cities of Central Asia, which after 1300 adopted Islam. Another son, in the steppe east of Europe, in Slavic Russia, established what eventually became known as the Golden Horde, whose leaders also converted to Islam around 1313. To the south, in Persia and Mesopotamia, which were

wealthier than the Slavic principalities, a grandson of Chinggis founded a dynasty, and took the title Il-khan (secondary khan). Around 1300, the Il-khan converted from Buddhism to Islam, changing his title to sultan.

Yet another grandson, Kubilai, completed the con-

quest of the grandest prize of all—China. Conquering both the Jin empire in the north and the Song empire in the south, Kubilai founded the Yuan empire in China. Moreover, he fought in a civil war with his brother, and when he won, he was named the Mongol Great Khan, or khan of khans. With China conquered, Kubilai moved the location of the Mongol court from the camping grounds at Karakorum to the site of present-day Beijing. Kubilai did not stop with the conquest of China, however. During his long reign as Great Khan (1260–1294), Kubilai and his Mongol-led armies also overran the Korean peninsula. And after a Korean scholar at the Mongol court spoke of the wealth on the Japanese islands, Kubilai twice dispatched formidable armies to subjugate Japan. Several unanticipated raging typhoons sank the Great Khan's armada, however, drowning tens of thousands of Mongol soldiers. To this day, the Japanese celebrate the “divine winds” (*kamikaze*) that saved their islands. (Nonetheless, the expenses incurred to ward off the two attempted Mongol invasions of Japan did lead to the collapse of the political order.) Nor did the Mongols enjoy markedly more success in establishing their authority over Southeast Asia. The area's reputation for spices and other forms of wealth attracted invading Mongol forces, but here, too, the sea and the dense tropical vegetation worked against the Mongol forces.

Just as the Mongols incorporated foreigners in their armies, so they brought foreigners into the administration of conquered lands.

THE MONGOL LEGACY

Impressive and merciless as it was, the Mongol empire never penetrated the heart of Christendom, and it collapsed in China and Persia within about a hundred years after it was established. It collapsed because it was overstretched and forced to rely on local bureaucrats to operate the instruments of administration. The Yuan state disappeared in China in the fourteenth century. The Il-khan's Mongol state, which ruled over the old Persian empire from Azerbaijan, broke up at just about the same time. Though their reign was short-lived, the Mongols left a legacy of frightful massacres. In some areas of settled life, such as northeastern Persia, the Mongols' destructive march obliterated whole societies. Still, the Mongols' legacy was not limited to blood and terror. Throughout Eurasia, the arrival of the Mongols also fostered commercial and cultural exchanges, as the Mongol rulers protected trade routes so that merchants, travelers, and diplomats could move about safely. Those connections outlasted Mongol rule and decisively shaped the subsequent course of world history.

China, which was perhaps the most important of the Mongol conquests, displayed well the paradoxical legacy of Mongol rule.

On the one hand, the Yuan dynasty that the Mongols established tried to repress some of the openness that had characterized Chinese society. Yuan laws divided China's population into a hierarchical order of Mongols, western and central Asians, northern Chinese, and southern Chinese, with legal

privileges being heaped on the first two groups. The top echelon of government offices was restricted to non-Chinese, and several decades of rule passed before the Mongols instituted a pale version of the civil service examination in 1315. The Yuan also classified their subjects by occupations, which were deemed hereditary. Needless to say, these innovations generated resentment and resistance among a Chinese population that had grown accustomed to more fluid possibilities.

Even as the Mongols closed some of the paths to wealth and well-being that had been available to the Chinese, the conquerors opened and enriched Chinese civilization in other ways. In China, the Mongols introduced many Persian, Islamic, and Byzantine influences that affected architecture, art, science, and medicine. The Yuan policy of benign tolerance for foreign creeds and consistent contacts with western Asia also brought elements from Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Islam into the Chinese mix. Above all, the policy made possible the further development of Buddhism and Daoism, the two most powerful religious forces of the country. Indeed, the Yuan directed a substantial portion of imperial patronage to support the Tibetan strand of Buddhist belief—Tibetan Lamaism. Taking advantage of their favored status, large numbers of Tibetan clergy flocked to China, with Hangzhou being the des-

tinuation of many. Yuan China also played host to Buddhist monks from Japan, who undertook the journey to establish contacts with the great masters of Chinese Chan (Zen) Buddhism.

Perhaps the Mongols' greatest impact was on the lands they began to conquer then abandoned: central and western Europe. Chinese innovations such as gunpowder and woodblock printing were carried west by released Christian slaves and merchants. For astute Muslim observers, such as the physician to the Il-khans, Rashid al-Din (1247–1318), who was born to Jewish parents, converted to Islam, and wrote a comprehensive history of the entire Mongol empire, the sophistication and wealth of the Orient, including China, was no revelation. But to Europeans such as Marco Polo, who visited and worked for the Mongol court in China, the East was a sensation.

By bringing Eurasian worlds under a more unified rule, the Mongols extended cross-cultural contacts and encouraged increased trade across longer distances. Because their armies eliminated rivals and other sources of power in their domains, the Mongols created a sort of peace that lowered the costs and risks of doing business. Merchants, using silver in Europe, gold in the Middle East, and copper in China, were able to establish partnerships and arrange for the shipment of goods to far-off

places. Shared credit systems and accounting techniques enabled merchants to organize the orderly transfers of riches in a far-flung, albeit narrow, network across Eurasia. Merchants and other travelers were given *paizi*, lockets with an epigraph in Uighur script, which warned would-be bandits that the

bearer had the official seal and thus the backing of the mighty Khan. In addition, the Mongols established many new, secure way stations along trade routes for caravans of merchants. These endured long after the Mongols had lost their place as rulers of much of Eurasia.

By bringing Eurasian worlds under a more unified rule, the Mongols extended cross-cultural contacts and encouraged increased trade across longer distances.

CONCLUSION

All thirteenth-century societies featured inequalities of various kinds. Within each of the time's many worlds, heredity, gender, age, learning, and wealth shaped who got more and who got less. For many people, these internal arrangements were all that mattered; local orientations left them with little if any knowledge of worlds other than their own. Such localism characterized the vast majority of people who lived during the thirteenth century, whether they resided in the Americas, Oceania, or sub-Saharan Africa, or in one of the four major cultural areas of Eurasia. Indeed, there were no true globalists during this time; no one who lived then was aware of the existence, much less the relative affluence, of all worlds.

Although no traveler crossed the Atlantic or Pacific, an increasing number ventured through the lands of Africa, Europe, and Asia. The two most famous of these thirteenth- and fourteenth-century travelers, Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta, encountered a world tied together by trade routes that crossed the Asian continent and the Indian Ocean and that often had as their ultimate destination the imperial court of the Great Khan in China.

These two men and similar, though less-celebrated travelers, observed worlds that were both highly localized and yet had culturally unifying features. Because of these unifying characteristics, long-distance travelers in the thirteenth and four-

teenth centuries could easily distinguish the House of Islam from the Middle Kingdom of China, or the mosaic of India, or the domain of Christianity. In the first, the life and teachings of Muhammad and the simplicity of a creed that affirmed that “there is no God but Allah” gave disparate peoples from widely different geographical areas a powerful sense of their Islamic identity. In the same fashion, an imperial structure, centered on an emperor and a bureaucratic scholarly class and based on filial values as enshrined in the Confucian classics, led to a Chinese identity. The Indian world embraced more diversity, with its many religious, ethnic, and linguistic traditions, but this very diversity and tolerance for different cultural patterns was the hallmark of the culture of the Indian subcontinent. Finally, in Christian Europe, people derived a sense of unity from a common religious tradition and a clerical language.

Three of the Eurasian worlds aspired to enlarged, indeed, universal recognition: the Islamic world, China, and Christian Europe. Of the three, the Muslims had spread furthest by 1300. From its holy cities in the Arabian peninsula, to which all adherents looked, Islam extended from East Asia to Western Europe and reached into sub-Saharan Africa as well. In contrast to Muslim elites, the Chinese ruling elements did not have a worldwide military or religious mission, but they nonetheless expected other peoples to acknowledge the superiority of Chinese ways, by bringing tribute and by copying the institutions of the Middle Kingdom. Chinese influence radiated through East Asia, into the Korean peninsula, the Japanese islands, and Southeast Asia. By contrast, the universalist vision of Christian Europe had achieved much less by 1300. Europe had experienced great internal colonization and settlement, and had seen the conversion of its northern pagan peoples to Christianity. But Christendom’s effort to reclaim the holy lands from Muslim overlords in the crusades had failed. Even within Europe itself, large numbers of Muslim peoples resisted the call for conversion.

At either end of Eurasia—in the difficult geographical and climatic circumstances of the Asian north and the sub-Saharan south—enormous territories were sparsely populated. From one of these areas, beyond the reach of the four major cultural worlds, emerged the Mongols, who swept south and west and conquered much of Eurasia. Notwithstanding their terrible destructiveness, the Mongols ended up deepening the connections between the peoples of Europe and Asia. Worlds that had been apart grew closer together, with conquest and trade establishing stronger connections between these regions.

Although death and destruction accompanied the Mongol conquests, their long-term effects were altogether more benign. The securing and expanding of long-distance trade routes and the fashioning of a *Pax Mongolica* across a large segment of the Eurasian land mass brought unprecedented prosperity and population expansion to the four great cultural domains of this part of the world. But prosperity and population growth were to prove short-lived as Eurasia encountered another of the unanticipated side effects of the Mongol conquests—the spread of the pandemic Black Death.

Chronology

889–1431	Kingdom of Angkor in Southeast Asia
1096–1270	Crusades to the Holy Land
1126	Jurchens establish Jin empire in China
1127–1279	Southern Song empire
1200	Rise of Sultanate of Kilwa in East Africa
1206	Mongol tribes unite under Chinggis Khan
1206–1290	Delhi Sultanate in India
1215	Fourth Lateran Council in Rome
1230	Consolidation of Mali empire in West Africa
1234	Fall of Jin dynasty to Mongols
1250	Mamluk dynasty established in Egypt
1258	Fall of Abbasid empire to Mongols
1265–1335	Il-khanate in Iraq and Persia
1271–1295	Marco Polo travels to East Asia
1271	Mongols found Yuan dynasty in China
1274	Mongols attempt to invade Japan
1279	End of Southern Song empire
1281	Second Mongol attempt to invade Japan
1300	Rise of Kingdom of Great Zimbabwe
1313	Last Mongol Il-khan converts to Islam
1324–1325	Mansa Musa makes pilgrimage to Mecca
1325–1369	Ibn Battuta travels the Islamic world
1325	Mexicas found Tenochtitlán
1333	Collapse of Kamakura political order in Japan



FURTHER READINGS

- Abu-Lughod, Janet, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (1989). A classic work offering a challenging, sweeping interpretation.
- Ahmed, Leila, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (1992). An admirable treatment of the place of women in the Islamic world.
- Bartlett, Robert, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950–1350* (1993). Describes how Europeans discovered their own continent, clearing its forests for agriculture and developing an identity.
- Bernhardt, Kathryn, *Women and Property in China, 960–1949* (1999). Traces the changes in the property rights of women through the centuries.
- Bethell, Leslie (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 1 (1984). General essays on what is called “pre-Columbian” history of native peoples of current Latin America.
- Bose, Sugata, and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia* (1998). Good for its attention to recent scholarship.
- Boyle, John Andrew, *The Mongol World Empire 1206–1370* (1977). A classic overview of the Mongol empire.
- Braudel, Fernand, *The Structures of Everyday Life: Civilization and Capitalism, Fifteenth–Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Sian Reynolds (1979). A pioneering work in the field of world history. This book is a good place to begin, although Braudel has written many others that are equally noteworthy.
- Bruhns, Karen Olsen, *Ancient South America* (1994). A comprehensive discussion of ancient South America.
- Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas* (1996). A comprehensive, three-volume synthesis of the history of Native Americans.
- Carr-Saunders, A. M., *World Population: Past Growth and Present Trends* (1936). A useful book to begin with when looking for information on the population of the world in modern times.
- Chattopadhyaya, B. D., *The Making of Early Medieval India* (1997). A series of excellent essays on the period.
- Clendinnen, Inga, *Aztecs: An Interpretation* (1991). Brilliantly reconstructs the culture of Tenochtitlán in the years before its conquest by the Spaniards.
- Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine, *African Women: A Modern History* (1997). An overview of the history of African women.
- Ebrey, Patricia Buckley, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (1993). An overview of the different aspects of women’s lives at a time of significant social changes in China that set the stage for 1300 and beyond.
- Frank, Andre Gunder, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (1998). A provocative and useful work that has informed the study of world history.
- Gernet, Jacques, *Daily Life in China: On the Eve of the Mongol Invasion, 1250–1276* (1962). Originally published in French in 1959, this remains an informative volume, particularly on the urban social landscape of thirteenth-century China.
- Hodgson, Marshall, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (1974). A useful, three-volume study of the Islamic world.
- Ilfie, John, *Africans: The History of a Continent* (1995). A good general history of Africa.
- Joseph, Alvin M., Jr. (ed.), *America in 1492: The World of the Indian Peoples before the Arrival of Columbus* (1993). A collection of excellent essays by leading scholars synthesizing what we know about the precolonial histories of the various regions of the Americas.
- Kosambi, D. D., *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (2nd rev. ed., 1985). A classic, Marxist history written for the general reader.
- Kulke, Herman, and Deitmar Rothermund, *A History of India* (1991). A work whose emphasis is on the pre-modern period.
- Lewis, Bernard, *The Middle East: Two Thousand Years of History from the Rise of Christianity to the Present Day* (1995). A book on the Middle East in general and the Islamic world specifically.
- Mass, Jeffrey P., *Antiquity and Anachronism in Japanese History* (1992). A collection of brilliant essays dissecting the modern myths projected back onto medieval Japan.
- McNeill, William, *The Rise of the West: History of the Human Community* (1963). A fine work by a pioneer in the study of world history.
- Miyasaki, Ichisada, *China’s Examination Hell: The Civil Service Examinations of Imperial China* (1976). A classic work, first published in Japanese in 1963.
- Mote, F. W., *Imperial China, 900–1800* (1999). A recent magisterial survey on politics and society over a wide span of Chinese history.
- Oliver, Roland, *The African Experience: Major Themes in African History from Earliest Times to the Present* (1991). A good general history of Africa.
- Robinson, Francis (ed.), *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World* (1996). A valuable work on the Islamic world.
- Rossabi, Morris (ed.), *China Among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, Tenth–Eighteenth Centuries* (1983). A superb work on the Mongols in China.
- Shaffer, Lynda Norene, *Maritime Southeast Asia to 1500* (1996). A useful study of the spices of Southeast Asia that drew so many Asian merchants into this region.
- Spuler, Bertold (ed.), *History of the Mongols* (1972). An excellent collection of translated thirteenth- and fourteenth-century travelers’ documents.
- Stein, Burton, *A History of India* (1998). A readable, general textbook, notable for its good coverage of the southern part of the Indian subcontinent.
- Thapar, Romila, *A History of India* (1965). Nearly forty years old, but a classic work on the pre-Mughal period.
- Wink, Andre, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World* (1990). An important work of interpretation that places the history of the subcontinent in the framework of the Islamic world.
- Wolpert, Stanley, *A New History of India* (4th ed., 1993). A good book for anecdotes on India.