

MAKING HISTORY: WORLD HISTORY 750 - 1750



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Making History: World History 750 - 1750



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This text was compiled on 09/12/2026

Program Page



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Accessibility Statement

Accessibility

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1. **Template check.** The project coordinator and instructional designers checked the first chapter for accessibility as a model to ensure later chapters meet accessibility standards.
2. **Progress checks.** The manuscript was checked at approximately 40%, 60%, and 80% completion to catch and correct accessibility issues in production.
3. **Specialist review.** Once the manuscript was complete, an accessibility expert conducted an accessibility check.
4. **Remediation.** The author and the project manager who conducted the earlier progress checks worked together to remediate the issues identified by the accessibility expert.
5. **Final check.** The resource underwent another full check by the accessibility expert before the book was deemed ready for publication.

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This statement was last updated August 2026

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About the Book

Making History

In her study on colonialism and gender, scholar Irene Silverblatt explains that creating historical knowledge also involves – either inadvertently or deliberately – “history denying.” What does she mean by this? Silverblatt argues that versions of the past (history) are always politicized – whether we want to acknowledge that fact or not. She rightly asserts that multiple versions of a past event exist. Certain versions function to reinforce and uphold prevailing beliefs that benefit the individuals overseeing institutions of power. Other versions directly challenge the traditional ideas and the existing power structures.

History as a body of knowledge must be understood within Silverblatt’s framework. History, if carved and sliced like a surgeon performing surgery, can be crafted to deny, silence, or omit certain perspectives and experiences and produce a narrow understanding of the past. When the omissions are deliberate, they are often meant to reinforce the prevailing ideas that benefit those who hold positions of power. However, when all voices and experiences are considered while studying the past, it provides us with a more complete and thorough understanding through which we can develop the most informed and accurate meaning of the historical moment.

While Silverblatt’s commentary on history might not be that revolutionary to some, it is important to keep in mind because there are still individuals and institutions that benefit from “history denying.” Whenever people can be convinced that only one version of the past exists, it limits our understanding of a more honest and authentic history. One way to think about this idea is by looking at memorials honoring Christopher Columbus in places like Argentina. The people who devoted time and money to build statues of Columbus operated within a historical narrative that was Eurocentric: a perspective that prioritized the experiences of peoples and cultures on the European continent as the primary version of history.

Statues honoring the explorer were motivated in part by the belief that he had discovered something new. But, new for whom? The Americas were unknown to the Europeans just as Europeans were unknown to the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, yet only one hemisphere was given the label “the New World.” By denying the concept of “new” to the Americas, it created only one perspective about the encounter: that Europeans had “discovered” something “new.” Therefore, Eurocentrism served as a historical force that led to the creation of statues and holidays celebrating Christopher Columbus. They were initiated and developed by those who benefited from framing his contribution to history as having “discovered” something “new.”

However, if we do not deny the history of those who were colonized by European powers and take into account their perspective and experiences, then a more complete picture and understanding of Columbus comes into focus. The Indigenous Peoples throughout North, Central, and South America who were exploited, terrorized, and slaughtered might not find anything to celebrate, honor, or memorialize in Columbus. He was a violent and brutal invader, and their experiences present a counter narrative to the Eurocentric narrative that silenced the voices of Indigenous Peoples in order to create Columbus as a hero.

This text will attempt to bring forth histories that do not always align with more traditional, or Eurocentric, versions of the past. This does not imply that the history of Europe and its peoples are not important. Quite the contrary! European history is vital to understanding world history, but so are the histories of the peoples and regions from other parts of the world. Therefore, the text will have a more thematic narrative than a chronological one since the intent is to understand not only the prevailing narratives about world history, but also the counter narratives that do not always align and reinforce perspectives of the powerful. Although this text is meant to present a much more diverse narrative, it has limitations. Trying to bring forth the varied experiences of different cultures and different regions from around the world throughout history will inevitably create gaps in the story, and will unfortunately require that some stories are left out in the pursuit of a succinct and consumable text for a survey-level course.

So, just as we can understand how and why statues of Christopher Columbus went up in places all throughout the Americas, we can also recognize the motivation of those who tore them down. Making good history is to not deny certain voices from the past because they make us “uncomfortable” or challenge an inherited understanding about the past. Making good history requires us to face all the perspectives of those involved and affected by the historical moments we seek to understand as a means to make sense of who we are and how our world looks today.

About the Author

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1: EUROPE AFTER ROME

Overview

The medieval period in Europe spans approximately a one-thousand-year period from 500 to 1500 CE. The era begins around the time that the Roman Empire collapsed in Western Europe and it ends around the time time that the race to colonize the Americas in the Western Hemisphere began. A lot happened in that thousand years that transformed the European continent, and this chapter looks at the early developments that established the political, social, and religious foundations upon which the trajectory of European history would be pushed.

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1.1: The Byzantine Empire

Overview

This section explores the strategic importance of Byzantium, emphasizing its role as a trade and military hub during Late Antiquity. It highlights the Eastern Roman Empire's resilience through strong governance and Roman identity, which allowed it to thrive amid cultural shifts and external threats.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain how and why the political focus of the Roman Empire shifted eastward during Late Antiquity
- Explain the collapse of Roman authority in the West, including the role of Germanic migrations and invasions

The Legacy of the Roman Empire on the Making of the West

The political and religious fragmentation within the Roman Empire led to two cities claiming to be the true capital of the empire and heirs to the empire's history and legacy. Those in the western part of the empire saw Rome and Catholicism as the "true empire," while those in Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey) believed that Orthodox Christianity and the eastern part of the empire represented its most authentic form.

The labels "East" and "West" have geographic significance for historians who have used them to describe the literal fragmenting of the Roman Empire after barbarian tribes invaded and conquered the city of Rome. The empire continued after Rome was sacked, and Constantinople in the East remained as a capital of the empire. People living in the city believed they were continuing the tradition and legacy of the Roman Empire and saw themselves as Romans despite the fact that scholars eventually labeled the Eastern Roman Empire the "Byzantine Empire" as a way to identify the specific area and period of history they were writing about. Therefore, when modern-day scholars write about the Byzantine Empire as a way to effectively communicate about a time and place, it also does not accurately reflect how the people living in the Eastern Roman Empire saw and understood themselves. This is an example of how present-day scholarship can inadvertently complicate the past in the pursuit to create categories of historical knowledge to study and understand. The actual events in history that divided the empire and the efforts by scholars to simplify the study of the past has contributed to the intellectual framework in which people have come to use the labels "East" and "West" in a way to describe more than just a geographic divide on the European continent.

Over time, the labels used to understand the long and complicated series of events that led to the disintegration of the Roman Empire imbued "East" and "West" with new political meaning. The labels have evolved over time to become explanatory concepts meant to describe broader cultural and historical differences of not only regions in Europe, but within the history of the world as well. While these concepts will have direct ties to the legacy of the Roman Empire in this course, their meaning absorbed the politics of the Cold War era that divided the world into an "East" and "West" in the 20th century. This text begins with this focus because it will represent an overarching theme across the textbooks for this period of world history and the period that follows.

Constantinople and the Roman East

From the third through the seventh centuries CE, the cultures of the Roman Empire transformed in profound and fundamental ways. The rise of Christianity marked a seminal moment, and from the time of the Emperor Constantine in the fourth century, the government advocated for monotheism, the worship of one God to the exclusion of others. With a Christian government and a new capital at Constantinople in the eastern Mediterranean, the Byzantine Empire developed in some ways independent from the old Roman state. At the same time, the fracturing of the Roman Empire's government led to various new regional alliances and rivalries. Germanic kingdoms flourished in the West, while the Byzantines attempted to maintain order among the burgeoning Christian population within their borders.

The Roman Empire's eastward shift epitomized the major cultural changes occurring during this period. Because of these shifts,

Late Antiquity has been characterized as a transitional period between the ancient and medieval worlds that occurred from roughly 150 to 750 CE. On the one hand, Late Antique culture remained influenced by the classical past, with the maintenance of certain ancient institutional values. While still calling themselves “Romans,” the Byzantines simultaneously attempted to maintain Christian orthodoxy. On the other hand, the appearance of new religious identities and the breakdown of the Roman Empire, especially in the west led to conflicts among different regional and cultural groups. The empire’s borders were in constant flux, and its territory slowly diminished as numerous powers vied for regional dominance.

Constantine and Christianity

During his reign, Constantine attributed his victory over Maxentius to the Christian God. According to the emperor’s official biographer Eusebius, Constantine had seen an image of the labarum, the Greek symbols of “Chi” and “Rho” that make up the first letters of “Christ,” in the sky that commanded him, “By this sign, conquer.” Whether this was a message specifically designed to appeal to the empire’s Christian populace is disputed, but Constantine showed clear Christian sympathies although he himself did not convert to the new faith until on his deathbed. From early in his reign, however, he sent out a carefully balanced message aimed to please Christians and traditional polytheists alike. For example, the design and inscription of the Arch of Constantine in Rome express a new synthesis of Roman tradition with Christianity that balanced the empire’s competing interests. The arch contains images from existing Roman monuments, while the inscription regarding a divine being is deliberately ambiguous. To further celebrate his rule, Constantine refounded the city of Byzantium (modern-day Istanbul) as Constantinople in 330 CE, and it eventually became the new imperial capital. The city’s location in the empire’s more prosperous east was advantageous for its proximity to trade routes and to the sites of many Roman military campaigns.

Though not initially intended to replace Rome, Constantinople (“city of Constantine”) was formally dedicated as a city in 330 CE, and the emperor Constantine was celebrated with various monuments. On the day of the dedication, Constantine erected a porphyry column with a statue of himself as Apollo on top. He collected other pieces of art from across the empire to decorate the newly christened city, including the Serpent Column from Delphi, an Augustan victory monument from Nicopolis, and an Egyptian obelisk. These represented Constantine’s attempt to mark the city as both the continuation and culmination of Roman history to that point, giving legitimacy to Constantinople and to his reign.

East Rome Power and Identity

Why was it that the Roman Empire in the west had fallen into political fragmentation while in the east it remained rich, powerful, and united? There are a few major reasons: First, Constantinople itself played a major role in the power and wealth of the east. Whereas Rome’s territory had shrunk steadily over the years, especially after the sacking of the city of Rome itself in 410 and the move of the western imperial government to the Italian city of Ravenna (which was more easily defensible), Constantinople had grown to somewhere around 500,000 residents. That can be compared to the capital of the Gothic kingdom of Gaul, Toulouse, which had 15,000 (which was a large city by the standards of the time for western Europe!) Not only was Constantinople seemingly impregnable to invaders, but its population of proud Romans repeatedly massacred barbarians who tried to seize power, and they deposed unpopular emperors who tried they perceived as trying to rule as military tyrants rather than true emperors possessing sufficient Roman “virtue.”

The East had long been the richest part of the empire, and because of its efficient bureaucracy and tax-collecting systems, much more wealth flowed into the imperial coffers in the east than it did in the west. Each year, the imperial government in Constantinople brought in roughly 270,000 pounds of gold in tax revenue, as compared to about 20,000 in the west. This made vastly better-equipped, trained, and provisioned armies possible in the east. Furthermore, the west was still dominated by various families of unbelievably rich Roman elites who undermined the power, authority, and financial solvency of the western imperial government by refusing to sacrifice their own prerogatives in the name of a stronger united empire; in the east, while nobles were certainly rich and powerful, they were nowhere near as powerful as their western counterparts.



Figure 1.1.1: A map showcasing the evolution of the territory of the Byzantine Empire from 395 to 1262. (CC BY 4.0; Shuaaa2 via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). Detailed Description of Figure 1.1.1.

There is another factor to consider, one that is more difficult to pin down than the amount of tax revenue or the existence of Constantinople's walls. Simply put, Roman identity - the degree to which social elites, soldiers, and possibly regular citizens considered themselves "Roman" and remained loyal to the Empire - seems to have been stronger in the east than the west. This might be explained by the reverse of the "vicious cycle" of defeat and vulnerability described in the last chapter regarding the west. In the east, the strength of the capital, the success of the armies, and the allegiance of elites to Rome as an idea encouraged the continued strength of Roman identity. Even if poor farmers still had little to thank the Roman state for in their daily lives, their farms were intact and local leaders were still Roman, not Gothic or Frankish or Vandal.

Lastly, the east enjoyed a simple stroke of good luck in the threats it faced from outside of the borders: the barbarians went west and Persia did not launch major invasions. The initial Gothic uprising that sparked the beginning of the end for the west was in the Balkans, but the Goths were then convinced to go west (in part because Constantinople could afford to pay them tribute in exchange for not attacking them). Subsequent invasions from Central Europe were directed at the west. Even though the Huns were from the steppes of Central Asia, they established their (short-lived) empire in the west. Eastern Roman armies had to repulse threats and maintain the borders, but they did not face the overwhelming odds of their western Roman counterparts. Finally, despite Persia's overall strength and coherence, there was a lull in Persian militarism that lasted through the entire fifth century.

A major factor in the success of Orthodox conversion among the Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe was the splendor of Constantinople itself. Numerous accounts survive of the sheer impact Constantinople's size, prosperity, and beauty had on visitors. Constantinople was simply the largest, richest, and most glorious city in Europe and the Mediterranean region at the time. It enjoyed a cash economy, impregnable defensive fortifications, and abundant food thanks to the availability of Anatolian grain and fish from the Aegean Sea. Silkworms were smuggled out of China in roughly 550, at which point Constantinople became the heart of a European silk industry, an imperial monopoly which generated tremendous wealth. The entire economy was regulated by the imperial government through a system of guilds, which helped ensure steady tax revenues.

Meanwhile, in Constantinople, the emperor held absolute authority. A complex and formal ranking system of nobles and courtiers, clothed in garments dyed specific colors to denote their respective ranks, separated the person of the emperor from supplicants and ambassadors. This was not just self-indulgence on the part of the emperors, of showing off for the sake of feeling important; this was part of the symbolism of power, of reaching out to a largely illiterate population with visible displays of authority.

The imperial bureaucracy held enormous power in Byzantium. Provincial elites would send their sons to Constantinople to study and obtain positions. Bribery was rife and nepotism was as common as talent in gaining positions; there was even an official list of maximum bribes that was published by the government itself(!) That said, the bureaucracy was somewhat like the ancient Egyptian class of scribes, men who maintained coherence and order within the government even when individual emperors were incompetent or palace intrigue rendered an emperor unable to focus on governance.

The imperial office controlled the minting of coins, still the standard currency as far away as France and England because the

coins were reliably weighted and backed by the imperial government. The emperor's office also controlled imperial monopolies on key industries like silk, which were hugely lucrative. It was illegal to try to compete with the imperial silk industry, so enormous profits were directed straight into the royal treasury.

Constantinople had as many as a million people in the late eighth century (as compared to no more than 15,000 in any "city" in western Europe), but there were also many other rich cities within its empire. As a whole, Byzantium traded its high-quality finished goods to western Europe in return for raw materials like ore and foodstuffs. Despite its wars with its neighbors to the east and south, Byzantium also had major trade links with the Arab states.

1.2: Europe after Rome

Overview

This section explores the evolution of medieval society in post-Roman Europe, emphasizing the impact of Germanic peoples and the church's role in cultural blending. It traces the rise and decline of the Carolingian Empire, highlighting the emergence of feudalism as a response to internal and external pressures, including Viking incursions. The Normans' expansion and their enduring influence across Europe are also examined, prompting reflection on their legacy in modern society.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Analyze the foundations of medieval society that emerged in the post-Roman world
- Identify the impact Vikings had on the direction of Western Europe
- Define feudalism in Western Europe

Europe After the Roman Empire

There was no exact date when the Roman Empire “fell” in the west, and the eastern half of the empire did not collapse until the fifteenth century. In fact, the Germanic peoples who settled in the former Roman Empire were not hostile to its culture, so in some places, Roman culture lasted longer than Roman political authority. Latin remained the language of the educated, for example, and Germanic peoples gradually adopted the Latin alphabet for their own languages, including English. Traditionally, though, the end of the empire is fixed at 476, when a German general named Odoacer deposed the emperor Romulus Augustulus and established himself not as a Roman emperor but as King of Italy. Even that date may be arbitrary, but by the late fifth century, traditional Roman authority had ceased to be the basis of political power in much of western Europe.

Of all the regions in the post-Roman world, western Europe experienced arguably the most dramatic change. Its political order fragmented under Germanic warlords empowered mainly by their ability to provide loot for their followers. In this world of soldiers, the Roman church, directed by the pope, worked to secure military assistance from kings and convert various groups to Christianity. The church's goal was to ensure that its vision of Christian beliefs and practices eclipsed those of other sects such as the Arians, Christians who questioned the Roman church's basic tenet that Jesus was divine. The merging of these two antithetical cultures—the religious and the military—helped prepare the ground for a new civilization in Europe that we call the medieval culture, which emerged between the end of Rome and the rise of the modern world.

German Successor States

The Germanic peoples who brought down Rome contributed to the recreation of an empire in Western Europe. The Franks emerged as the Germanic tribe that formed an alliance with the Catholic Church to create the Carolingian Empire that faced similar challenges as Rome when internal conflict and external invasions undercut its hegemony. What replaced Roman political authority was the authority of the successor kingdoms. The Germanic peoples and the Roman population they conquered were able to create a new society by blending cultural traditions—a process called *acculturation*—in three ways. First, conversion to Christianity helped reduce differences between the two groups. Second, the Christian Church and the Roman aristocracy offered a useful example of bureaucratic organization and diplomacy that the successor kingdoms adopted. Finally, the erosion of Roman society enabled a new society to emerge in the Middle Ages. Although other Germanic kingdoms existed, those established by the Franks, Ostrogoths, and Visigoths demonstrate these three forms of acculturation most vividly.



Figure 1.2.1: Europe, North Africa and the Near East after the end of the Western Roman Empire in 476 CE. (CC BY 4.0; Guriezous via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 1.2.1.

“German” was the term Romans used for all the peoples beyond their northern borders, and for them, it was interchangeable with “barbarian,” meaning not Romanized, although there was a great deal of cultural exchange between the two groups. The relationship between the term “German” and the peoples to whom it has been applied is complex. Some of those who invaded the Roman Empire did not speak a Germanic language at all, such as the Huns and Avars. There were few rigid ethnic boundaries between the groups, and the armies of any leader often included warriors from other groups.

The Germanic peoples generally did not read or write and instead transmitted information and traditions orally. Famous tales that eventually found their way into written form, such as the *Song of Hildebrand* and the *Song of the Nibelung*, had their beginnings as spoken epics. Oral culture celebrating warriors facing their fate on the battlefield and scornful queens plotting revenge reflected real possibilities in this society.

Across nearly all Germanic societies, warfare was an important tool for building social prestige. There were no formal hierarchies, so advancement was possible for any willing to serve a powerful chieftain or king. In return, leaders promised loot and the chance to do great deeds. A king who could not ensure material or social resources would lose followers and could not expect to be obeyed. While gold and glory motivated fighters and kings alike, Germanic law and custom tried to limit the destructive cycles of violence by instituting a “blood price” or *vergild*, under which the injured were compensated according to their social status. These laws tell us much about Germanic society. Chieftains and men of fighting age carried a higher blood price than older men, for example, and women of childbearing age were valued more than older women.

Women were often responsible for running the household and doing the bulk of the farming work, especially when men were called to fight or travel. Men might hunt, but their contributions were often the spoils of war, including enslaved people captured in battle who then worked in the household. Germanic society was fully patriarchal, and tribes like the Alemanni beat women whose clothes were deemed immodest (showing the leg above the knee). Germans were also often polygynous; men might have multiple wives at once and be able to divorce at will, while women’s options were severely limited.

The Franks

The most successful Germanic kingdom was that of the Franks. Clovis I, a member of the Merovingian dynasty, founded the kingdom in the early sixth century and offers a striking contrast to Theodoric, the First Germanic King of Italy. Ruthless and violent, Clovis was nevertheless a cunning leader who saw the advantages of diplomacy and the support of the Catholic Church and who was tolerant of religious differences until his conversion from paganism to the Nicene Christianity of the Catholic Church instead of the Arian Christianity that was more popular among the Germanic elites. He also worked with Gallo-Roman aristocrats and clergy to strengthen the administration of his kingdom and ensure that Roman institutions continued where they could. Shortly before his death, he convened the first council of Catholic bishops at Orleans, whose proclamations were binding on both the Gallo-Roman population and the Germanic Franks. In this case, religion helped unite the two groups.

Over time, the Merovingian rulers fell to violent infighting, leaving their sons or nephews as young and often ineffective successors. A chief source of conflict was the practice of partible inheritance, whereby each son received an equal share of his father's estate. Estates thus became smaller with each successive generation unless new lands were conquered, often by being taken from siblings, in-laws, or cousins. Kings without land and resources to offer as reward lost the ability to attract fighters. Real power lay with the aristocrats, and eventually a new dynasty called the Carolingians took control of the Frankish kingdom. With the support of the pope, Pépin le Bref (Pippin the Short) became the first Carolingian king of the Franks, deposing his Merovingian rival. In return, he confirmed a grant of lands in Italy to the pope. This grant, known as the Donation of Pepin, provided the legal basis for the establishment of the Papal States and helped ensure that the papacy, the set of administrative structures associated with the government of the Catholic Church, was not just a religious institution but also a territorial power.

Their alliance with the popes allowed the Carolingian rulers to work independently of the Byzantine Empire, which became an important factor in their desire to conquer new territory and revive the idea of empire. It also indicates that even in the chaotic period after the collapse of Roman authority, diplomacy, religious movements, conflict, and opportunity still connected the Mediterranean world and western Europe.

Pépin's son Charles, known as Charlemagne ("Charles the Great"), was the most influential ruler in the early European Middle Ages and one of its best-known figures. Charlemagne was fortunate, as his father had been, in that he did not need to fight his siblings for control of the kingdom. He was tall and energetic and had a profound belief in his role as a Christian ruler, with a will to conquer others and convert them to Catholic Christianity. He campaigned nearly every year of his reign, conquering land and subjugating peoples across central Europe. He reorganized his government and attempted to revive learning, reform the church, and extend his influence beyond his own realm. His vast empire eventually extended from modern France to Germany, northern Italy, and parts of northern Spain and central Europe, uniting western Europe for the first time since the collapse of Roman authority. On Christmas Day in the year 800, Charlemagne was crowned Emperor of the Romans by Pope Leo III. This coronation angered Byzantine rulers and set the stage for conflict between east and west in their quest for prestige and territory. It also enabled both cooperation and conflict between popes and emperors, because each saw an advantage in working together to fight mutual enemies.

Intellectuals and monks flocked to Charlemagne's court, where they put their talents to use copying the classical works of ancient Greek and Roman authors and serving in the emperor's administration. One of the most important of these scholars was Alcuin of York, an Anglo-Saxon who perfected the Carolingian minuscule script. This standard form of handwriting was clearer and easier to read than earlier Roman and Merovingian forms. Carolingian scholars also popularized punctuation marks, like the sentence-ending period. These innovations made it easier for people to learn Latin and contributed to the revival of classical education.

Charlemagne was also a globally minded ruler. He corresponded with the Byzantine rulers, received gifts from the Abbasid Caliph, and facilitated the trade of enslaved people taken on his eastern frontier with Al-Andalus (modern Spain).

The Collapse of the Carolingian Empire and the Rise of Feudal Society

Charlemagne's empire did not last. The emperor was succeeded by his son Louis the Pious, who continued the revival of learning and was deeply involved in church reform. Members of the church's hierarchy, like the monk Benedict of Aniane, believed that both spiritual and administrative matters had declined, so Louis gave Benedict authority to reform all monasteries in the Frankish empire by promoting the strict observance of rules about what monks could eat and when and how they should work and pray. Carolingian reformers took inspiration from the monks of Ireland, who brought with them both their ascetic style of religious practice and their handsomely copied books of classical literature. The reform of the monasteries thus helped to preserve Carolingian cultural developments and classical learning.

Louis's religious and intellectual projects were influential, but the weaknesses of the Carolingian state worked against him. He was not viewed as the imposing warrior his father had been, so soldiers looked elsewhere for glory and loot. And his sons, impatient to rule, rebelled against him in his lifetime. They eventually forced him to abdicate, and under the principle of partible inheritance, in 843 they divided the empire among them in an agreement called the Treaty of Verdun.

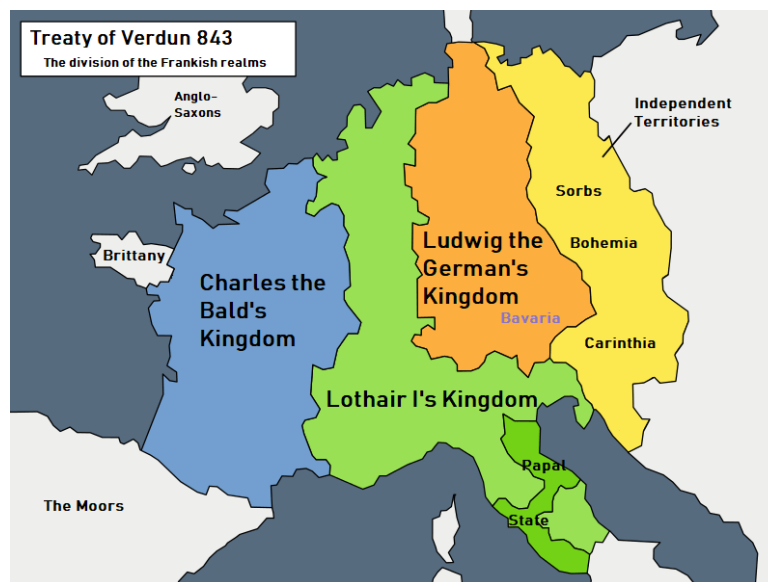


Figure 1.2.2: Map of the Treaty of Verdun in 843 showing the division of the Frankish realms into the kingdoms of Charles the Bald, Lothair I, and Ludwig the German. (CC BY 4.0 ; Great Politburo via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 1.2.2.

The Frankish empire became three territories: the Kingdom of the West Franks (west of the Rhine River), the Kingdom of the East Franks (east of the Rhine), and a middle region called Lotharingia that included Italy. None of Louis's sons found the settlement acceptable, and their need for more land to reward their supporters ensured further conflict. When they died, their own sons faced diminished holdings, and an ever-increasing need to wage war ensured that the stability of the kingdoms weakened. Thus, Charlemagne and Louis's efforts to resurrect the Roman Empire as a Christian state guided by Germanic leaders crumbled.

These internal problems were worsened by external ones, especially new invaders emboldened by the collapse of Carolingian strength. From the east came nomadic warriors, the Magyars, a non-Germanic people who migrated from the steppes of Central Asia. At the end of the ninth century, they settled in what is today Hungary, and from there they launched devastating raids for plunder into Germany. Only in 955 did the German king Otto the Great manage to break the power of the Magyars at the Battle of Lechfeld. From the south, the fragmentation of Islamic political unity led petty rulers to raid the now-weakened coasts of Christian Europe. North African dynasties like the Aghlabids pushed into Sicily in the ninth century, and by 846, Islamic raiders had sacked churches on the outskirts of Rome.

In the ashes of the Carolingian world, medieval Europe embraced a social system called feudalism that emerged from the basic need for security and was defined by unequal relationships. Looking to protect their territories and their peasants, lords began to grant lands to fighters as their *fiefs*, whose produce the warriors could enjoy so long as they served the lord. For their part, fighters became *vassals* of the lord, sworn to perform service in exchange for the land. This service was chiefly military in nature, but it could also include other obligations like advising the lord and attending his court when called. Bishops and monasteries behaved the same way; abbots and abbesses could be lords who were owed service and also owed service to greater lords.

While feudalism was not a political system, warriors owed service to lords who owed service to the king, who in theory was the largest landowner in the kingdom and the guarantor of rights and privileges. For example, the late Carolingian king Charles the Simple granted the Duchy of Normandy to the Viking leader Rollo, so long as Rollo protected northern France from other Vikings. However, the need to placate their feudal lords ensured that kings gave away lands and privileges, often weakening them and driving them to look for ways to maximize their resources. They might consider advantageous marriages, for example, in which women were expected to bring a dowry of property or money. In other cases, crushing rebellious vassals was a way of taking back needed land.

On their fiefs, the warriors oversaw the work of agricultural laborers. Some laborers might own their own land and be self-directed, but most in western Europe were unfree, servile laborers called serfs who were tied to the land. They were not enslaved and could not be bought or sold, but they occupied the lowest rung of the social ladder, could be physically abused by the lord, were forced to provide labor and goods for the lord, and rarely had any rights a lord was obligated to acknowledge. All these limitations existed despite the serfs' being the largest class of people in European society at the time.

The lord was theoretically required to protect the serfs, resolve their disputes, and administer their work. Serfs owed their lord a set number of days of service a year (these were many) and could not leave the land, marry, or undertake other work without

the lord's permission. Under manorialism or the manor system, named for the manor house occupied by the lord, serfs (or other varieties of servile, unfree workers) were brought together into villages where their labor could be cooperative. They tended both their own and their lord's land, sharing draft animals and farm implements to undertake the planting and harvesting of crops. Women tended smaller livestock and vegetable gardens near their homes. Although cities on the coast often maintained commercial or networking ties with each other, society in western Europe became overwhelmingly rural, and production was largely at the subsistence level. People produced what they were going to consume, and surplus went to the lord in the form of various taxes as well as to the church as a mandatory tax, usually 10 percent, called the *tithe*.

This system of social obligations and ties between the serfs and their lords, and the lords and the kings, framed the economic and political world of the Middle Ages. By the tenth century, the old Roman Empire was largely forgotten by the general population, while medieval kings and nobles had reimagined and transformed the idea of the Roman Empire to serve and legitimize their own purposes. A new society began to emerge based on a combination of Roman, Christian, and Germanic traditions.

The Vikings

Perhaps more famous today than the Magyars and Islamic raiders were the Norse who raided northern Europe from Scandinavia, called the Vikings. The peoples of Scandinavia, who spoke Germanic languages, had a culture similar to that of the Germanic peoples who settled in the Roman Empire. For example, Scandinavians were polytheistic, worshipping gods like Odin and Freyja who were similar to earlier Germanic deities like Wodan and Frigg. The aristocracy practiced polygyny (having many wives), and local chieftains rewarded their followers with lands and gifts. The growth of the population in the eighth century and the relative lack of arable land in the region compelled groups of Scandinavians to travel in search of plunder. Some went eastward, using their shallow-draught ships (ships that could navigate rivers), and made trading connections along the Dnieper River, establishing settlements at Kiev that eventually became one of the first Russian states. They reached Constantinople, and some served as the personal bodyguard to the Byzantine ruler. These Vikings were known as Varangians, and they settled in eastern Europe. Although violent, they were also traders, interested in paving the way for new settlements and connections beyond western Europe.

In the west, the arrival of the Norse raiders was less benign. They attacked in small groups that could travel far upriver and surprise settlements, destroy them, and be gone before resistance could be organized. They specifically targeted churches and monasteries, not only for their loot but also because they lacked defenses. Vikings destroyed the monastery of Lindisfarne in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria, which had been a celebrated center of learning. Their reputation for ferocity may have been exaggerated by clerical authors, but the sudden nature of the violent raids, and the inability of Frankish or Anglo-Saxon armies to defeat them, instilled fear in the population of western Europe.

Eventually, the Norse raiders began to settle in regions rather than just raid them. In 865, a substantial army of Vikings invaded Britain and destroyed most of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms except for Wessex. In 911, they settled in northern France, establishing the duchy of Normandy. By the end of the tenth century, Vikings had also established settlements throughout the British Isles, including Ireland and Scotland, farther west in Iceland and Greenland, and even (though briefly) in North America. Not just raiders, they promoted trade throughout northern Europe and beyond, extending their trading routes to the Byzantine Empire and the Abbasid Caliphate. Like the earlier Germanic peoples, they eventually converted to Christianity, and their kings began to build more centralized kingdoms that enabled them to curb the violence of the raiders. Their conversion did not mean a wholesale abandonment of their existing culture and tradition. Early Scandinavian churches were decorated with images of heroes and villains from Norse mythology. This overlap of tradition and innovation reflects the persistence of cultural exchange between Germanic peoples and Greek and Roman cultures that created the foundation for medieval society.

Ted Ed: How the Normans Changed the History of Europe

Video Length: 5 minutes and 20 seconds.

Context: In the year 1066, 7,000 Norman infantry and knights sailed in warships across the English Channel. Their target: England, home to more than a million people. Around the same period of time, other groups of Normans were setting forth all across Europe. Who were these warriors, and how did they leave their mark so far and wide? Mark Robinson shares a brief history of the Normans.

This is a supplement video to the textbook information about Normans who invaded Europe and left a lasting impact.

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

[View this YouTube Video online](#)



Reflection

What do you think? Where can you find Norman influence today?

1.3: Medieval Christianity and Monasticism

Overview

This section discusses the interplay of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in medieval Spain, emphasizing the church's role in conversion and preservation of knowledge within a multicultural context under the Umayyad Caliphate.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the role of religion in medieval European culture and society
- Discuss the establishment of Muslim rule in western Europe and the religiously diverse society in Spain

Christianity and Society in Medieval Europe

Christianity continued to flourish throughout Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire in West. The Catholic Church remained an influential force among the new empires that emerged on the continent. The Church's power structure presented rewards and challenges to the emperors who desired the Church's backing that would validate their claim to the throne, but resented the power of the pope undermining their rule

While Christianity had developed in an atmosphere of antagonism to the Roman state, by the fifth century, the church had become the preserver of classical Greek and Roman law, literature, and philosophical ideas. Language and cultural differences existed between the eastern and western churches, and in the eighth century, their political and theological ties became strained. One dispute was over the use of images in Christian worship, which the popes supported but some emperors rejected. The popes had also been building up an argument for their supremacy over the church, based partly in scripture and partly in tradition. Early medieval popes like Leo I laid the groundwork for the power of the Bishops of Rome, a power the eastern churches largely rejected or ignored. Once they had made an alliance with the Frankish kings, however, the popes looked to western Europe for the church's future.

The papacy was not the only church institution in Europe; local traditions and needs shaped a variety of Christian beliefs and practices in the early Middle Ages. There were three ways in which the church helped transform the old Roman world into the new. First, the institutional church, often under the guidance of the popes, worked to convert the Germanic peoples to Christianity. Second, it helped to preserve the classical tradition. Finally, it worked with the new rulers to help legitimize their rule and Christianize their populations.

Monasticism

Missionary work was undertaken by men and women devoted to Christian beliefs and intent on incorporating new peoples into the society of Christian nations. Pope Gregory (also known as Gregory the Great) commissioned monks from Italy, led by Augustine of Canterbury, to convert the Anglo-Saxons. (Monks are men who do not marry, often live in community with each other, and devote their lives to serving God. Their female counterparts are called nuns.) The laity (nonclergy) often engaged in missionary work, and the wives of kings were especially influential in promoting widespread conversion to Christianity. Contemporaries noted the success of Clothilde's persuasion in the conversion of her husband King Clovis, and Bertha, the wife of King Ethelbert of Kent, likewise encouraged her husband to convert. Both supported the efforts of the missionary (and later bishop) Augustine of Canterbury. Missionaries often worked closely with Christian rulers, whose conversion could be critical in expanding the frontiers of Catholic Christianity.

Monasticism (the way monks live and their communal institutions) had developed in the Mediterranean world and flourished in western Europe among religious men and women. The most influential monastic leader was Benedict of Nursia, who composed a guidebook or "rule" for monastic life that stressed moderation, a balance between prayer and useful work, the self-sufficiency of communities, and enough education for monks to copy out books in Latin. Many communities were "double monasteries,"

containing a community of men operating under an abbot and a community of women and often operating under the regulation of an abbess. Monasticism gave women a role in society that was not based on their relationship to a father or husband, and some women enjoyed considerable influence as abbesses. Rade Gund was a Frankish queen who fled the court when her husband murdered her brother. She became famous as the founder and abbess of the Monastery of the Holy Cross in Poitiers and was widely venerated as a saint after her death. Women like Rade Gund found religious life preferable to the intrigue of the court and the whims of a violent husband.

Monastic communities were often critical to the preservation of learning in the post-Roman world. There, monks copied out books by hand to foster the work of missionaries and preserve knowledge they thought was useful from the ancient world. Monasteries also served as refuges in times of crisis and could become valued centers of administration and nodes in communications networks. They were often the only place for the training of priests to serve newly converted peoples. While bishops were the undisputed authorities, especially the bishop of Rome (the pope), monasticism was equally crucial for both missionary work and the development of a Christian population.

Finally, Christianity helped legitimize new rulers. Germanic kings could better integrate themselves with their Roman population once they converted to the Catholic Christianity their subjects practiced. Bishops could serve as administrators, and monasteries were places of education for the new elite. One issue raised by the career of Charlemagne, though, was the relationship between rulers and the papacy. Leo III had crowned Charlemagne, and clergy often performed an anointing ceremony when a king was invested with the symbols of office.

Aside from the rivalry between the eastern and western churches, an important non-Christian religion was present in the form of Judaism, which was given latitude by the Romans on account of its antiquity. With the collapse of Rome and the growing dominion of Catholic Christianity, however, Jewish communities faced new challenges as clergy and kings instituted restrictions on their behavior and practices. Christians often viewed Jewish people as outsiders no matter how long they may have lived in a given area. The mistaken belief that Jewish people were to blame for the death of Jesus led to rumors that they wanted to harm Christians. In some cases, as in Visigothic Spain, Jewish residents faced the threat of either converting to Christianity or being expelled from the kingdom. Hostility was never uniform, however, and kings like Louis the Pious granted Jewish people considerable freedoms. Rulers might also feel compelled to protect Jewish communities because of their connections, especially trade connections, to other communities across the Mediterranean. Still, the position of Jewish communities in the Middle Ages was often precarious.

The Iberian Peninsula and the World of Al-Andalus

Like the Ostrogoths, Visigoth rulers attempted to emulate Roman institutions in Spain by creating written law codes, but their relationship with their Hispano-Roman subjects was largely uneasy, and unlike Theodoric and Clovis, they tended to remain apart from them. The Visigoths were Arian Christians who tolerated their non-Arian subjects, but the need to better integrate themselves with the population eventually compelled King Recared to convert to Catholicism and gain the support of the church. In 711, however, the armies of the Umayyad Caliphate crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and overran the kingdom.

The Umayyad armies that invaded Spain never succeeded in controlling the entire peninsula, just as the Visigoths had not. Christian kingdoms persisted in the north, though they were weak and often fought with each other. Another reason was that non-Arab soldiers, like the North African Amazigh (Berbers), always felt shortchanged when Arab leaders divided the spoils of conquest. This ethnic and regional conflict played an important role in the collapse of the Umayyad dynasty, but it also led an offshoot of it to take root in Spain.

The Muslims called the region Al-Andalus, and it was governed by members of the Umayyad dynasty who had fled the collapse of their power when the Abbasid dynasty overthrew them. Abd al-Rahman I, fleeing the destruction of his family in Syria, capitalized on the discontent felt by non-Arab soldiers following the conquest of Spain. With their help, he was able to build alliances and defeat his enemies to become the ruler of Al-Andalus. He established his capital at the city of Cordoba and began to form a new society, based on Islamic law and dedicated to expanding into Christian territory. Abd al-Rahman and his successors created a remarkable community that was multi religious and multiethnic and that sustained diplomatic and commercial ties throughout the Mediterranean world and beyond, a testament to the global context of the early Middle Ages. Soon Cordoba rivaled Constantinople and Baghdad as a center of trade, learning, and the arts. Connections to North Africa and the Middle East ensured the revival of trade and, consequently, the revival of urban life.

Many Christians there, whether they converted or not, adopted Islamic culture by speaking Arabic, dressing as their Amazigh and Arab rulers did, and adopting their practices. For this reason, they were called “Mozarabs.” In some ways, this period, in which Christians, Muslims, and Jewish people lived and worked in proximity, is a good example of medieval toleration, but violence by

the dominant group, as in the conflict between Arians and Catholics, was always possible.

The caliphs established schools of Islamic jurisprudence and hired scholars and linguists to help administer the kingdom. These scholars scoured Spain for older Greek and Latin manuscripts to translate. Jewish and Christian scholars also found the caliphate a place of learning, and a flowering of Jewish religious thought and poetry developed. Under Islamic law, Christians and Jewish people were considered “protected.” This meant that because they also believed in one God, they could not be compelled to convert so long as they did not challenge the beliefs of Muslims. Some historians have viewed this period of toleration, now called *convivencia* (“living together”), as a particular example of coexistence and nonviolent interaction among people of different faiths. The antagonism of the Christian kingdoms in the north, however, and the growth of zealous Islamic leaders in North Africa show that once again, while toleration was always possible, it depended on the presence of willing leaders for whom peace was desirable. When conflict between Christians and Muslims was exacerbated, religious tensions could make toleration less desirable. Islamic dynasties and Christian rulers who found religious identity a source of inspiration for warriors, for instance, whittled away at *convivencia*.

Despite the ongoing toleration that rulers of one faith could show to subjects of another, conflicts between rulers of different faiths persisted. The Islamic rulers of Al-Andalus succeeded in disrupting the Christian kingdoms in the north of the peninsula until the eleventh century. For example, in the 990s, the powerful general al-Mansur sacked Barcelona on the eastern coast and Leon in the northwest, both important centers of Christian political power. Despite its successes in the north, however, the Caliphate of Cordoba collapsed due to infighting after the death of al-Mansur, and regional aristocrats broke up the unity of Al-Andalus, creating smaller successor states that often fought as much against each other (and in alliance with Christian fighters) as against Christian kingdoms. The conflicts in the eleventh century were still largely about knights, fast-moving heavily armored soldiers on horseback, winning plunder and fame, but the stage was set for wars of cultural conquest and the struggle for religious supremacy. The destruction of the Christian states in Spain had gained the attention of the popes, and this helped shape the church’s promotion of a religiously sanctioned fight against Islam.

1.4: Chapter Themes to Discuss

Core Themes for Reflection and Discussion

This page offers different themes that appear throughout the sections in this chapter. The themes are meant to provide a framework in which discussion questions can be developed to inspire further exploration of the topics covered.

1. The historical developments that influenced the meanings of "east" and "west."
2. The post-Roman Empire "identities" in Europe.
3. The role of Christianity in shaping power in Europe.
4. Issues of class and gender in European developments.

1.5: Alternative Text Descriptions

Figure 1.1.1 The Byzantine Empire and the Making of "the West"

Historical map titled "Territories of the Eastern Roman Empire, 395–1262." The map shows the Mediterranean region and traces how the Eastern Roman, or Byzantine, Empire changed in size over time. The map includes labeled boundary lines and territory groupings explained in the legend. These represent:

- the boundary of the empire in 555
- the boundary of the empire from 395 to 533
- the territory held after the reconquest of Constantinople in 1261
- the territory held at the death of Basil II in 1025
- the territory held until 638 or 642
- the territory conquered by Justinian from 534 to 555

The empire from 395 to 533 includes much of the eastern Mediterranean world, including the Balkans, Asia Minor, parts of the Levant, and Egypt. Constantinople is marked near the straits between Europe and Asia.

By 555, the empire had expanded westward under Justinian. The map shows imperial control extending into Italy, North Africa, southern Spain, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, and other Mediterranean islands. Several reconquered areas are labeled with dates including AD 534, AD 535, AD 553, AD 554, and AD 555, marking stages of reconquest.

The map also shows major territorial losses. Areas to the east and south are labeled "Lost AD 638" and "Lost AD 642," indicating the loss of much of the Levant, Egypt, and nearby regions in the seventh century.

A much smaller later territory is shown around Constantinople, parts of Greece, and western Asia Minor, representing the territory held after the reconquest of Constantinople in 1261.

Figure 1.2.1 Europe at the Fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 AD

Historical map titled "Europe at the Fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 AD." The map shows Europe, the Mediterranean, North Africa, and parts of western Asia at the time the Western Roman Empire ended.

The eastern portion of the Roman world remains labeled Eastern Roman Empire, covering the Balkans, Greece, Asia Minor, and the eastern Mediterranean, including Egypt and the Levant. The Sassanid Empire appears farther east.

Former western Roman territories are divided among several named kingdoms and groups. On the Italian peninsula, the map labels the Kingdom of Odoacer. To the northeast of Italy are the Kingdom of the Ostrogoths, the Heruli, and the Kingdom of the Gepids. In central and western Europe, the map labels the Franks, Burgundians, Alamanni, Saxons, Thuringians, and Langobards. In Gaul, a separate area is labeled the Realm of Syagrius.

In the Iberian Peninsula, most territory is labeled Kingdom of the Visigoths, while the northwest is labeled Kingdom of the Suebi. In the British Isles, the map labels Britons, Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Scots, and Picts.

North Africa includes the Kingdom of the Vandals. Farther east and north of the Black Sea, the map labels additional peoples including the Slavs, Alans, Huns, Crimean Goths, and Baltic peoples.

The legend identifies broad categories shown on the map:

- lands of the Western Roman Empire up to 476
- territories associated with Germanic peoples
- territories associated with Celtic peoples
- locations of Frankish victories
- locations of Ostrogothic victories

The map also includes several city labels, such as Constantinople, Rome, Ravenna, Milan, Carthage, Alexandria, Antioch, Paris, Lyon, and Cologne.

Figure 1.2.2 Lands divided by the Treaty of Verdun

Map titled “Treaty of Verdun 843: The division of the Frankish realms.” The map shows how the Frankish Empire was divided into three main kingdoms in western and central Europe after the Treaty of Verdun in 843.

On the western side of the map is Charles the Bald’s Kingdom. This territory covers much of what is now western France and extends from the Atlantic coast inland.

In the center is Lothair I’s Kingdom. This territory forms a long north-to-south band stretching from the North Sea region through central Europe and into northern and central Italy. It includes access to the Mediterranean and contains the area labeled Papal State in Italy.

On the eastern side is Ludwig the German’s Kingdom. This territory occupies much of the lands east of the central kingdom and corresponds broadly to eastern Frankish lands.

To the east of Ludwig the German’s Kingdom, the map labels additional neighboring regions and peoples, including Sorbs, Bohemia, and Carinthia. The area beyond them is labeled Independent Territories.

Other surrounding regions are also named. Across the channel to the northwest are the Anglo-Saxons. On the western peninsula is Brittany. To the southwest, outside the Frankish realms, the map labels The Moors.

1.6: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials to Enhance the Chapter

These materials are provided to help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction. Some resources are openly licensed, while others may require institutional access or individual review before use in class.

Web Resources

These websites may help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction.

- [World History Encyclopedia](#) – Provides overviews of important people, places, and events throughout history. This resource can be useful for finding concise, expert-informed background information.
- [Fordham University Internet History Sourcebooks Project](#) – Provides translated, transcribed, and digitized primary sources. This resource can support source-based instruction, though instructors should review links carefully because some materials may be incomplete or less suitable for classroom use.

Articles

These articles provide additional scholarly context for this chapter. Access may depend on your institution's JSTOR subscription.

- Mayr-Harting, Henry. "Charlemagne, the Saxons, and the Imperial Coronation of 800." *The English Historical Review* 111, no. 444 (1996): 1113–1133. [Access article in JSTOR](#)

Videos

These videos can be used to explore a specific topic in the chapter in more detail and as an entry to further discussion on chapter topics.

- [TED-Ed: Six Myths About the Middle Ages](#)
Length: 4 minutes, 48 seconds
Explores six common misconceptions about the Middle Ages and explains what life in medieval times was actually like. This video may be useful as a short introduction or discussion starter.

2: RELIGION AND POWER IN ASIA

Overview

In the seventh century, a new religion emerged and quickly spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula and into Asia and Africa. Islam shaped the trajectory of World History as it came to define the culture and political structures wherever it spread. The polytheistic religions of Hinduism and Buddhism continued to influence regions throughout Asia, and dynastic China continued to experience periods of prosperity and challenges throughout the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries.

[2.1: The Rise of Islam](#)

[2.2: Eastern Asia](#)

[2.3: Southern Asia](#)

[2.4: Chapter Themes to Discuss](#)

[2.5: Alternative Text Description](#)

[2.6: Teacher Resources](#)

2.1: The Rise of Islam

Overview

This section discusses the origins of Islam in 7th-century Arabia under Muhammad, highlighting its monotheistic roots and practices such as the Five Pillars. It explores the Abbasid period, noted for its inclusive ideology and cultural exchange, with Baghdad emerging as a key intellectual center. The Abbasid Translation Movement preserved ancient texts and advanced education, despite early literacy challenges.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the origins of Islam, the role of the Prophet Muhammad, and its basic tenets
- Explain why and how Islam spread beyond the Arabian Peninsula
- Explain what led to a divide in the faith in which the Sunni and the Shia sects emerged

The Origins of the Islamic Faith

Islam formed in the seventh century and rapidly spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula and eventually into Northern Africa. The religion was the third monotheistic faith to form out of the region, and although it shares prophets with Judaism and Christianity, the faith posed a threat to Christianity's hegemonic presence in Northern Africa and Europe, and religious wars would be fought among the Christians and Muslims throughout the medieval period.

While the conflict between the Byzantines and the Sasanians raged at the beginning of the seventh century, western Arabia began to take center stage in the creation of a new world religion deeply influenced by the environment, people, and cultures of the late antique Middle East. That religion was Islam, a word meaning “submission [to the one God].” Islam is a monotheistic faith that shares many features with both Judaism and Christianity, while at the same time having many features that were uniquely Arabian and that eventually brought the culture and traditions of the Arabian Peninsula to great prominence.

At the center of the founding of Islam are the city of Mecca, the worship of one God—Allah—and the leadership of the prophets. Even to Muslims today, Allah is not considered to be a god separate from the God of Judaism and Christianity; *Allah* is simply the Arabic word meaning “the one God.” In fact, Christians who live in the Middle East and speak Arabic today refer to the God of the Christian Bible by using the word “Allah” in their own worship. Belief in the one God and the message of the Islamic prophet Muhammad is the first and most important of the “Five Pillars of Islam,” known as the *shahada*, the profession of faith. To embrace Islam as their religion, adherents must recognize the creed that “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of God.” Muhammad, as recognized by Muslims, was the final prophet in a long list with whom the one God had communicated throughout history, including figures such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Muhammad was a divinely chosen man who is not, nor ever has been, worshipped as a God or as a relative of God himself.

Tenets of Islam

Many of the other pillars of Islam also have features in common with other world religions such as ritual fasting, charity, and daily prayer. For Muslims, these acts are specified as daily prayer while facing the direction of the holy mosque in the city of Mecca; almsgiving, the donation of money and goods to the community and people in need; fasting (if able) during Ramadan (the holy month during which the Muslim scripture of the Quran was first revealed to Muhammad); and participating at least once (if able) in the pilgrimage to Mecca—the hajj—to relive important moments in the life of Abraham and his family's arrival in Arabia and to circle the house of God, the Kaaba, in prayer.

Muslims have believed throughout their history that Islam and its holy writings are not a new faith created in the seventh century. Instead, the faith that Muhammad brought to the Arabs in the early 600s was merely a corrective to the monotheistic religions that had come before. From the perspective of most Muslims, Islam is the same faith as Judaism and Christianity, with adherents

of all three traditions worshipping the same God and recognizing divine intercession in humanity through the leadership of the prophets. Muslims also recognize the holy scriptures of Judaism and Christianity as having been given to humans by God but then corrupted over time. Islam thus sees itself as a purer form of these faiths and directly connected to both. The shared history and lineage of the three run through the prophet Abraham, whom all list as an ancestor. Many modern scholars of religion thus refer to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as the Abrahamic faiths.

For all the influence that other monotheistic worship in the region may have had on the formation of Islam in the seventh century, however, the faith has many features we might consider uniquely Arab or Arabian. First, of course, is the setting itself. While the land that is modern Israel and Palestine played a central role in the narratives of Judaism and Christianity, much of the story of the formation of Islam as a distinct religion is found in western Arabia, a region of the peninsula known as the Hijaz. Its holiest sites lie in this region, and the life of its founder was spent almost entirely there.

The faith is firmly connected to Arabic, a semitic language indigenous to the region, especially in its holiest scriptures and also in cultural features like the survival of Arabic poetry as a means of recording the past. The tribal structure of pre-Islamic Arabian society also defined the first several decades of the religion and the states it inspired, which included a social hierarchy that made it nearly impossible to convert to Islam for the better part of the first century of the faith unless an individual was first embraced as a member of an Arab tribe. In this way, conversion was connected to the old ways of the Arabs, which did not require a convert to be of a particular ethnicity or bloodline but did require the adoption of the cultural traditions and markers of the Arabian tribal society. For these earliest adherents of the faith, it seems likely that they felt the one God had chosen the western Arabian peoples and their traditions for special recognition, and embracing these features was a prerequisite for being among the “chosen” people. But more influential than anything, perhaps, was the Muslims’ belief in the leadership and message of the man whom God chose as his final prophet, an Arab of the early seventh century from the Hijaz of western Arabia.

The Islamic Prophet Muhammad

Muslim tradition tells us that Muhammad was a merchant from a prominent Arab tribe called Quraysh in the Hijaz region. Born in the city of Mecca, he spent his early life engaged in the trade that passed along the north–south trade routes through his city, a hub that had become a waystation and a good place to conduct business. The tribe of Quraysh dominated leadership and trade in the region in large part because its members were the protectors of the sacred Kaaba, which in this period, we are told, had become a house of idol worship, a center of polytheism among the Arabs. Long-distance trade of luxury goods could be risky because of raiding that occurred along trade routes, and the Kaaba had become a sanctuary where fighting was prohibited, making it a safe place to conduct business. The Quraysh were enriched as the stewards of this important sanctuary and had a keen interest in protecting its role in society.

According to Muslim belief, in the year 610 the middle-aged Muhammad, who had traveled to a cave just outside Mecca for contemplation, received contact from God through the intermediary of the angel Gabriel (Jabrīl in Arabic). Muhammad was told to recite the first revelations of a scripture that became the Muslim holy book, the Quran. He returned home amazed and surprised by what he had experienced. As a well-traveled and successful trader in the region, he had much to lose from undertaking a religious mission with a novel message. For one thing, a new religion would threaten the balance of power within his Arab tribe by plainly rejecting the polytheism that many in the community practiced and the financial benefits that came with the Kaaba. However, Muhammad essentially abandoned a financially stable and comfortable life as a merchant to embrace what he believed was required by God: becoming a preacher and working to save the souls of his family and kin from a coming day of judgment.

In 622, Muhammad’s twelfth year of prophecy, his community fled persecution and increasing aggression by the polytheist Meccans. They were invited to join another community of Arabs in a city called Yathrib, later known as Medina, “the city” or more specifically “the prophet’s city.” There they were welcomed among other Arab tribes, including some practicing Judaism. This *hijra*, meaning “emigration,” was a watershed moment for Muhammad’s early community. At a low ebb and without any certainty of survival, Islam now changed from a small religion mostly confined to Mecca to a larger community united by Muhammad that solidified its place in world history. The *hijra* holds such importance in the history of Islam that the Islamic lunar calendar counts 622 CE as its first year. (Dates in the Muslim calendar, used by many around the world today, are often labeled in English with AH, for “After the Hijra.”)

Solidifying the Faith

In Medina, the previously polytheist Arabs, Jewish Arabs, and Muhammad’s *ummah* formed an alliance for their common defense. Muhammad served first as an arbiter of disputes between the tribes and, soon after, as the city’s de facto leader. Under his guidance, the community devised the Constitution of Medina as a means to solidify the agreement between the tribes and

their mutual responsibility to protect their city and its people from outside attack. Later Muslim rulers saw the constitution as a blueprint for the creation of a religious society that tolerated those of other faiths while supporting the worship of the one God, mutual defense for the community, and Muhammad's leadership.

The constitution stated that “the believers and Muslims of [the tribe of] Quraysh and Medina and those who join them . . . form one *ummah* to the exclusion of others.” It goes on to explain that the Jewish Arabs of the tribe of Banu Awf “are secure from the believers [the Muslims]. The Jews have their religion and the Muslims have theirs.” The phrases most commonly used in the constitution to describe Muhammad's followers are “Muslims” (“those who have submitted to God”) and “believers” (*al-Mu'minin*). For this reason, some historians have described the earliest *ummah* as a “community of believers” that was open to most monotheists. In these earliest decades of Islam, Muhammad's new community had much in common with the monotheistic Jewish people and Christians, and we find little evidence of the distinctive Muslim identity that formed over the next several centuries.

The even-handed approach to members of this new *ummah* was critical to the ultimate success of Muhammad and his community. Much of the last ten years of Muhammad's life was spent with this new Muslim community in Medina, engaged in conflict with their former brethren in Mecca. Fighting between the two sides was fierce, and there were also tensions within Medina and the early *ummah* as Muhammad's followers grew in number and prominence at the expense of other Arabs in the city, in particular, the Jewish contingent. Many on both sides were related by blood even if their religious beliefs had altered. Muhammad's community continued to grow and win more supporters until, on the eve of battle outside Mecca in 630, his former tribe of Quraysh surrendered, and the population of the city converted to Islam. Muhammad and his followers were then able to return to Mecca, where he entered the holy sanctuary of the Kaaba, now filled with the polytheist idols worshipped by the Arabs, and smashed them all, echoing a famous story about the biblical prophet Abraham. From the perspective of Muslims, the original house of Abraham, which had always been dedicated to the worship of the one God, was now cleansed.

The Expansion of the Islamic State

Arab tribes had come together for a common cause in the pre-Islamic period, such as a war against another tribe or recognition of the strength of a chieftain. But once that cause had been accomplished or that chieftain had died, the confederacy typically disbanded, its purpose fulfilled. In the wake of Muhammad's death, at least some Arab tribes likewise believed the community's purpose had been completed. His accomplishment in bringing people together under the banner of Islam was not one the surviving leaders of the community intended to be temporary, however.

There were urgent questions about the leadership of the community, and immediate disagreements about it as well. Thus, as Muhammad was dying, two primary claimants for leadership emerged: Abu Bakr, his closest friend and confidant who was the leading candidate, and his son-in-law Ali ibn Abi Talib. Ali, related to the Prophet by blood and marriage, was comparatively young in a society that saw leadership in its elders, although later it was claimed he had been chosen by Muhammad as his heir and successor. Abu Bakr, in contrast, was one of the elders of the community, well respected and popularly chosen. Both had been among the first to convert to Islam.

Tensions arose after Muhammad's death not just over leadership and inheritance, but also over whether the alliance was ever intended to last beyond its founder. Some Arab tribes left to return to their homes, while others may have believed they could discard their commitment to the worship of the one God and membership in this confederation. From the perspective of the Muslims, however, this was apostasy, and a conflict known as the Ridda Wars then began in an attempt to force these Arab tribes to continue to honor their agreements with the Muslims. The Ridda Wars also appear to have been expansionist, bringing into the fold, whether by treaty or force, Arab tribes that had never been aligned with Muhammad's community during his lifetime. This effort was the first step of a wider movement called the Arab-Islamic or Arab-Muslim conquests, and by 633 the entirety of Arabia had been brought under the control of this first Islamic state.

Abu Bakr did not live long after Muhammad, and the conquest movement did not stop with his leadership, nor with uniting just the Arab tribes under the banner of Islam. The new state's expansionist desire seems to have existed from the outset, and the Arab-Muslim armies turned their attention northward to the old empires of Sasanian Persia and Byzantium. They were likely inspired by the richness of these lands, where they knew resources were more plentiful and luxury trade goods regularly traveled. But there were other factors, too. The Arab-Muslims may have felt emboldened by their successes in Arabia, seeing them as recognition of God's favor and of their destiny to rule the world.

The crucial early years of Islamic expansion were overseen by the first four caliphs, a group of rulers who came to be called the “rightly guided” or Rashidun. These four figures—Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and the originally overlooked son-in-law of Muhammad, Ali—ruled between 632 and 661, a period when much Byzantine and Persian territory was conquered, and the

message of Islam spread throughout a predominantly Christian Middle East and Zoroastrian Persia. While the Byzantines and the Persians had employed the Arabian Ghassanids and Lakhmids to guard their borders and serve in their wars, the arrival of the Arab-Muslim armies was unlike anything either empire had seen before.

Islamic Expansion

The Arab-Muslim armies began their invasion with the provinces of Iraq and Syria before moving eastward into the Iranian plateau and westward into Egypt. On all fronts, the first decades of the conflict proved extraordinarily successful for the conquerors. Shortly after winning several skirmishes and capturing the Syrian city of Damascus, the Arab-Muslims bested the Byzantine army at the Battle of Yarmuk in 636. Unable to defend the remaining cities of the region, the Byzantines then abandoned Greater Syria, consisting of what are today Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria. The Arab-Muslim armies continued northward and westward, laying siege to and capturing the Egyptian port city of Alexandria in 641. Many other Byzantine provinces soon followed. In Iraq, the armies of Persia lost to the Arab-Muslims at the Battle of Qadisiyya, bringing an end to any sustained resistance by the Persians.

The Muslims developed a legal classification for the Jewish people, Christians, and Zoroastrians who lived under their rule. They referred to them as *ahl al-kitab*, or People of the Book, which recognized them as monotheists who had received a revealed scripture from God in the past, and who were worthy of protection by the Islamic state so long as they paid taxes and submitted to Muslim rule. For many, this situation was an improvement on their earlier lives. Under Byzantine rule, for instance, those who did not follow the official Orthodox Christian religion of the empire were often discriminated against. Even profession Christians who disagreed with church teachings could be barred from holding certain jobs, charged extra taxes, and otherwise be badly treated as heretics. For Jewish populations, the situation had often been even harsher. Many had been unable to openly practice their faith or gather outside the synagogue. While they were not officially monotheists and were not seen as having a revealed scripture, Zoroastrians under the Muslims were still treated as People of the Book, likely for pragmatic reasons owing to their noble status in Persian society.



Figure 2.1.1: A map showcasing the evolution of the territory of the Islamic Caliphates from 630s to 820s. (CC BY 4.0; Dr. Sami Salamah via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 2.1.1.

The Abbasid Caliphate

The last decades of Umayyad rule were defined by factionalism and infighting. Arab tribes vied for power and influence, while non-Arab converts to Islam became increasingly frustrated over being marginalized, especially in the far east of the empire. There, in the province of Khurasan, Arab-Muslims had settled after the conquests, often intermarrying with the Indigenous Persians. By the mid-eighth century, several generations of these mixed-ethnicity Muslims had come to feel disenfranchised in the region, and Khurasan became a hotbed of revolutionary activity. Many who were frustrated with Umayyad rule and ready for a change met to imagine a more open Islamic community, one in which all ethnicities could enjoy the full benefits of Islamic society, and marginalized groups like the supporters of the fourth caliph Ali and his family would have more opportunity.

This revolutionary group championed the right of the family of Muhammad to hold the position of caliph. Its members supported the claims of the descendants of Ibn Abbas, a first cousin of Muhammad, and thus came to be known as the Abbasids. In 749, after several years of growing dissatisfaction, they rose in rebellion against the Umayyads, overthrowing Islam's first dynasty within a year and establishing themselves as the new rulers of the Middle East. Abbasids claimed the title of caliph from the year 750 through to the early sixteenth century, although the power they sought waxed and waned over time.

Shortly after coming to power, the Abbasids of the eighth century reoriented the focus of the Islamic world, pulling it away from Arabia and closer to the East by founding their new capital, Baghdad, in central Iraq. Especially with the prominence of Khurasan and the Islamic East in the rise of the Abbasids, shifting the capital city closer to the East also made a great deal of sense. Baghdad was a planned city intended to take advantage of the immense wealth and talent the Islamic state had accumulated over almost a century and a half of conquest and consolidation under the Umayyads. It was built on the banks of the Tigris River in Mesopotamia, a land that had supported some of the earliest human civilizations because of its remarkable fertility. As the Abbasid state grew wealthier and more powerful, Baghdad became a prominent center of trade and culture, and the city sprawled outward along the banks of the river and into the fertile farmland that surrounded it.

Islamic Knowledge and Culture

The society the early Abbasids created was one of the great marvels of the Middle Ages, and the growth of Baghdad and its courtly culture played a major part in that achievement. But as central as Baghdad was to the advancement and success of the Abbasids, so too were the people who made up their cosmopolitan empire. The early Abbasids strongly supported learning, especially in their capital, and fostered what is now called the Abbasid Translation Movement, or the Greco-Arabic Translation Movement. Few people were literate at this time, but it was an especially important moment in world history thanks to new technology and opportunities that improved access to education and literacy more generally. Especially important was the introduction of Chinese papermaking techniques into the Middle East. These methods allowed for the creation of significantly less expensive books, and the Abbasids' patronage of scholarly work proved the catalyst for an explosion of medieval learning.

The Abbasids sought to preserve the knowledge of past societies by translating the works of the ancient world into Arabic, especially from Greek and Persian, as the Islamic world transitioned from an oral to a writerly society during the ninth century. Writing and scholarly research were not always well funded in the premodern world, so wealthy patrons, including the caliph himself, provided financial support to scholars capable of completing this work. As a result, the Abbasid elite were able to attract the best and brightest to participate, and a culture of learning grew among the upper echelons of society and especially in Baghdad. Scholars were often native speakers of Greek and Syriac who were generally non-Muslim. The Abbasids' support of this multicultural and multiethnic community ultimately increased the number of works produced in Arabic during the first centuries of their rule, while at the same time providing exceptional educational opportunities as Islamic schools called *madrasas* were founded and grew.

The achievements of the translation movement were considerable, preserving many incredibly important astrological, geographic, mathematical, medical, and other scientific and philosophical texts in Arabic at a time when non-Arabic copies had become increasingly rare. These texts included seminal works by the Greek thinkers Aristotle, Dioscorides, Galen, Hippocrates, and Ptolemy that were given advanced study in the Muslim world when their popularity and even availability were extremely limited in the rest of the Mediterranean.

Stability and Division within the Abbasid Period

The early Abbasid period brought stability to the Islamic world, but it was not permanent. Although there had been contention within the Islamic *ummah* from the very beginning, it was during the Abbasid rule that more distinct sects formed, based on doctrinal differences and questions about the leadership of the community that traced back to the first century of Islamic history.

The catalyst for the formation of denominations within Islam was a growing divide between the groups now known as the Sunni and the Shia (sometimes written as *Shi'ite*), the two primary "umbrella sects" within Islam. The Sunni take their name from the *sunna* or customs of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. Adherents follow a canonized, common form of the hadith (sayings and stories about the life of Muhammad) and interpretation of the Quran, although different schools of law exist that provide variable interpretation and guidance to the religious faithful. Today the largest group of Muslims around the world, the Sunni also came to be identified as those who accepted the decision, following Muhammad's death, that the first leader of the community would be his father-in-law Abu Bakr rather than his son-in-law Ali. The Shia derive their name from the Arabic phrase *Shiat Ali* or "the followers of Ali," who eventually became the fourth caliph. They began as those who believed in the claim by Ali and the Prophet's family that Ali should have been designated the new leader of the Muslim community following Muhammad's death.

Tensions between the two groups continued to escalate through the first Islamic civil war, fought between the caliph Ali and the Umayyad ruler Mu'awiya, and escalated with the massacre of a large portion of Muhammad's family, including his grandson Husayn ibn Ali, at Karbala as the second Islamic civil war was beginning. The commemoration of these events in the early Islamic period remains a major feature of Shia Islam. The Shia came to revere the family of the Prophet, seeing in them a role beyond providing a new caliph. They believe members of Muhammad's family transmit divine knowledge, charisma, and authority, and they afford certain of them the title of imam, signifying the religious leader of the community of Muslims. At the center of this focus on the Prophet's family in the faith's earliest century was the lineage of Muhammad through his daughter Fatima, the wife of Ali, and her children, who included Husayn. As time passed, however, and as Islam became increasingly more patriarchal in the Abbasid period, the emphasis shifted to the male members of Muhammad's family and their lineage through Ali specifically.

In the medieval period, the divide between the Sunni and Shia was not complete. The issue of succession following Muhammad's death was not irreconcilable, and the Sunni respected the family of the Islamic prophet Muhammad even if they did not see an automatic or exclusive right to rule through Ali's bloodline. Many early Shia supported the Abbasids' claim to leadership because the Abbasids required the caliph to be a member of the Prophet's family, but Ali's kin were eventually overlooked in the line of succession. As rivalry grew between these early Shia and the Abbasids, it seems likely that the Shia then articulated that the authority of the imam specifically passed through the family of the Prophet through Ali, and not through anyone less closely related to him—likely to support their own claims to rule.

The role of the caliph as a leader in the Islamic world also began to change dramatically in the Middle Ages. This shift was due not just to the Shia conception of the imam. Rather, as the Abbasids came to power, a religious clerical class also arose within Islam. Known as the *ulama* (literally “the scholars”), they came to hold an increasingly important role as the interpreters of Islamic law within non-Shia, Sunni Islam during the Abbasid period.

2.2: Eastern Asia

Overview

This section covers the emergence and spread of Buddhism around 563 BCE, contrasting it with Brahmanist values, and charts its influence in East Asia, particularly during the Sui and Tang dynasties. It discusses Sui achievements like the Grand Canal and their eventual decline.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Discuss religious practices in East Asia
- Describe the rise and fall of the Sui and Tang dynasties in China
- Describe the cultural influence of China on the states of Korea and Japan

Buddhism

According to Buddhist tradition, around 563 BCE, the son of a royal family living near India's eastern border with Nepal and sometimes known as Siddhartha or Gautama abandoned a life of luxury in his family's palace after experiencing an awakening, upon which he embarked on a spiritual journey that lasted the rest of his life. He came to be called the Buddha, meaning "enlightened," because his teachings offered an alternative to the then-dominant Brahmanist values.

Buddhism explores the depths of human suffering, desire, envy, decadence, and death, offering adherents a way out of an eternal cycle of misery if they adopt the Four Noble Truths leading to the Eightfold Path. The Four Noble Truths acknowledge that pain and disappointment are an unavoidable part of life and that by focusing on spiritual matters via the Eightfold Path, pain and suffering can be overcome. By adopting Buddha's teachings about how to think, speak, and act with respect for all life, and many other practices, followers eventually arrive at an enlightened salvation called *nirvana*. Nirvana is a state of ultimate peace found in the extinction of all desire and transcendence of the person's very being. Without nirvana, upon death the soul is reincarnated into a new life that will again run the gamut of suffering, misery, and the search for enlightenment.

The teachings of Buddha and his followers issued a direct challenge to the status quo in ancient India. In his time, Buddha relished criticizing the Brahmins, questioning their authority and their dependence on ritualism. Continued generations of teachers, missionaries, and lay Buddhists used his teachings to assail the Brahmanist-based caste system. Female Buddhists were attracted by ideas promoting the opportunity for women to achieve enlightenment on an equal basis with men.

Buddhism attracted the patronage of elites, who elevated it into Asia's most influential source of inspiration for monumental architecture and high art. Buddhism made inroads across all of Asia, coming to be adopted by millions in China, Korea, Thailand, Japan, and many other communities in Southeast Asia.

Sui China

Following the collapse of the Han Empire in 220 CE, three states ruled over China: the Wei in the north, the Wu in the south, and the Shu in the west. A temporary reunification occurred under the Western Jin dynasty from 265 to 316, but from 316 to 589 China was again divided, this time into north and south. Along the Silk Roads, merchants established monasteries, convents, and shrines, bringing Buddhist traditions into China. Many Chinese traders therefore adopted Buddhism, particularly under the Sui dynasty.

A Mongol general from northern China, Yang Jian, was an affirmed Buddhist. His military abilities allowed him to gain such fame that he was able to create a marriage alliance between one of his daughters and a northern prince. With growing power, at the death of the ruler, he claimed the role of regent to his grandson before later deposing him. Yang then made himself the first emperor of the new Sui dynasty in 581 and adopted the name Wen. Emperor Wen gained his soldiers' allegiance by granting them

lands acquired through conquest, a years-long process that reunified most of the old Han lands. To consolidate his control over the empire, Emperor Wen created a powerful centralized government, with loyal bureaucrats appointed to rule its many territories. To eliminate the risk that these powerful regional administrators could amass followers into a rebellious army, Wen periodically moved them to different territories, forcing them to build new networks from scratch.

Emperor Wen was succeeded by his son Yang Guang. Like his father before him, Emperor Yang Di, as Yang was known, was ambitious and grandiose. During his reign, he continued his father's practice of building large public works through forced labor, completing the Grand Canal in 609 to connect Luoyang in central China with Hangzhou in the south. The canal made the movement of foodstuffs and supplies between north and south possible on an unimaginable scale. From the south, with its warmer and wetter climate, came rice; from the drier and cooler north came crops such as wheat and millet. A crucial step in the economic integration of overland trade was taken when the canal was connected to the Sui capital and eastern terminus of the Silk Roads in Chang'an, finally extending all the way north to Beijing. Construction of this arm of the canal took seven years and required as many as five million workers, sometimes including entire populations conscripted to labor on the project. An early form of a police force supervised, enforcing corporal punishment on anyone refusing to work.

The Grand Canal was essential to the economic and administrative integration of the newly reunified Chinese empire under the Sui. The canal made it easier for goods to be transported and provided increased revenue by allowing the government to tax the products being shipped. It also greatly improved communication and the effectiveness of the government, as officials were able to travel quickly between north and south and to send communication more easily across the Chinese interior. The canal was also a vital tool of Sui foreign policy, allowing Chinese armies from the north to travel to the borders of Korea, from which Yang Di launched his futile campaigns of conquest.

In the end, and despite the great benefits of the Grand Canal, its construction overextended the Sui. Enormously costly in labor and materiel, the waterway became a great source of grievance among the Chinese people, millions of whom were forced to work on it and neglect their families and farms. The situation was worsened by the combined effects of a natural disaster—the Yellow River flooded the North China plain and triggered famine throughout the countryside—and military defeat—the Sui invasion of Korea was repelled in 612. Undaunted, Yang Di pushed ahead with a second invasion campaign, stopping only when the exhausted military revolted. The emperor was assassinated in a period of turmoil in the region before Li Yuan, a provincial governor, acceded to the throne and announced the founding of the Tang dynasty in 618.

Tang China

The Tang Empire, which lasted until 907, emerged just as Islam exploded out of Arabia and swept across North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula and into central Asia. Like the great Islamic empires that thrived during this period, the Tang promoted a cosmopolitan culture, a character greatly enhanced by wider international developments. In 674, for example, the advancing tide of Arab armies from the west forced members of the Sasanian royal family to flee to the safety of the Tang court at Chang'an, at the eastern terminus of the Silk Roads. This event inspired whole communities of merchants to move from Sasanian Persia to the Chinese capital, bringing all manner of exotic products and luxury goods, from silver artwork to Arab, Persian, and central Asian musical forms and dance.

It did not take long for the Tang elite to develop a taste for these items, creating an impressive industry of Persian-Arab-inspired goods and services to meet the growing demand. As a taste for Persian-Arab culture spread, trade relations between the Tang and India blossomed, bringing everything from mathematics to new sciences and medicines to China. These different cultural streams met in Tang China's major cities, which soon generated a diverse international culture greatly enhanced by the presence of merchant communities of Jewish people, Christians, Zoroastrians, peoples of the major Indian traditions, and a sizable minority of Muslims.



Figure 2.2.1: A map showing the Tang Dynasty, circa 700 CE. (CC BY 4.0; Ian Kiu via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 2.2.1

For much of its duration, Tang China was the most powerful empire in existence, and among its priorities was completing the consolidation and expansion begun under the Sui. To this end, the Tang embarked on a series of military campaigns into central Asia. Their large professional army was organized around a core of aristocratic cavalry of some seven million troops who routinely clashed with the mounted nomads of the Inner Asian Steppe, and an immense peasant infantry several million strong and garrisoned in the interior. By the 750s, Tang frontier units increasingly relied on pastoral nomadic peoples from the steppes, such as the Uyghurs, Turkish-speaking peoples who constituted the empire's most potent military force. Over time, Tang forces pushed into Manchuria (the area immediately north of the Korean Peninsula), Vietnam, and Tibet. At its height in the late ninth century, the Tang army controlled more than four million square miles of territory, an area roughly the size of the entire Islamic world during the same period.

The Tang achieved several early foreign policy successes, including reestablishing Chinese rule over Korea in 668, resulting in a tributary relationship with the peninsula's Silla dynasty. The Tang also opened diplomatic relations with Japan, which proved so effective that in 645 Japan embarked on its "Great Reform"—an all-encompassing adoption of Tang culture, including its imperial institutions (which the Silla also adopted), Confucian bureaucracy, and Buddhism.

The spread of Tang culture was greatly enhanced by several major innovations in China, including the world's first block-printing process, which proved opportune for printing Buddhist scriptures. Like the Sui, the Tang embraced and promoted Buddhism, the scriptures of which were usually hand-copied by scribes and disseminated among students. The scarcity of these works meant that most commoners and even many elites had no access to them. China's artisans, however, devised a way to carve the mirror-image of a text into a block of wood, add ink, and then press the block onto paper. Scriptures and other forms of writing now became more accessible, spreading ideas from the elites to the masses. Block-printing remained the major method of transferring images onto paper until the end of the nineteenth century.

Tang Religion and Culture

Buddhism was important not only under the Sui. The Tang period witnessed the rapid growth of two forms of Mahayana Buddhism in particular: Pure Land, which had originated much earlier in India and had found adherents in China since the fifth century, and Chan, which developed during the fifth and sixth centuries but became popular under the Tang. Pure Land Buddhism was a school of popular devotion to Amida (or Amitabha), the Buddha of the "pure land" or the uncorrupt plane of existence believers anticipated reaching on their rebirth. Like the Hindu *bhakti* sects in India, Pure Land Buddhists held that to achieve salvation it was necessary not to study sacred texts but rather to engage in practices accessible to everyone, especially by invoking Amida's name.

Chan Buddhism, like Pure Land, deemphasized scriptural study but rejected the notion of personal devotion to a savior. Instead, Chan Buddhism, known more popularly by its Japanese name Zen, stressed the disciplined practice of meditation and following the example of a Chan master, who underwent great hardships performing humble tasks and wrestling with paradoxical questions,

to achieve enlightenment. Chan Buddhism was austere and monastic in character, whereas Pure Land was the more popular form observed by lay people.

Buddhism's popularity became a flashpoint for violence in Tang China, however. In the mid-ninth century, the Tang Empire cracked down on what it perceived as the threat that hundreds of thousands of Buddhist monks and nuns posed to its Confucian and Daoist leaders, who argued that Buddhism represented an alien influence on the state. Although this prompted the active suppression of Buddhist monasteries and the confiscation of their wealth, it was not enough. Blatant persecution unfolded under Emperor Wuzong, resulting in the destruction of some forty thousand temples and shrines, the closure of more than four thousand monasteries, and the forced secularization of hundreds of thousands of Buddhist monks and nuns. Culturally, the state moved to expunge the impact of Buddhism by reviving classical prose styles and the teachings of Confucius and his followers.

The Tang period also produced a great deal of poetry, much of it influenced by the prevalent religious and philosophical traditions. For example, in the eighth century the poets Wang Wei, Li Bai (Li Bo), and Du Fu were influenced by Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, respectively, and many people could recite their poems from memory. Along the Silk Roads during this period, poetry spread along with China's religious and philosophical traditions, first to Korea and from there to Japan. Neither area had a written script of its own yet, so admirers learned the poets' works in Chinese.

Entrance into the Tang bureaucracy was based on passage of a merit-based exam administered every three years. This civil service exam, the first fully written such exam in history, had been developed from the Sui dynasty and tested sophisticated literary skills and knowledge of Confucian and Daoist classics. In theory it was open to all; in practice, however, until the late Tang period, women, the sons of merchants, and those who could not afford a classical education were excluded. Most laborers were also excluded because of their circumstances, as they could not take time away from their fields to study. In the end, people became government officials thanks to their literary achievements or the influence of their prestigious families.

Tang China also witnessed contradictory trends in personal behavior and relations between the sexes. In 665, Emperor Gaozong, infirm and sickly, handed power to his second wife, Wu Zetian. Following Gaozong's death in 683, Wu ruled as empress dowager and regent for her son, though she held all the real power of the state. A devout Buddhist, she declared Buddhism the state religion, ordered scholars to write biographies of famous women, and in 690 took the extraordinary step of founding her own dynasty, the Wu Zhou (not to be confused with the much earlier Zhou dynasty). Three years later, Wu assumed the Buddhist title "Divine Empress Who Rules the Universe." Although she was an intelligent and competent ruler, the founding of her own dynasty and the adoption of imperial titles felt to many like usurpation. Resistance soon followed, prompting her abdication and the restoration of the Tang dynasty.

Wu's reign was remarkable in China's male-dominated society. Still, the Tang Empire has been described as a "golden age" for women in China, perhaps because lingering contact with the nomadic peoples of the north and their relatively egalitarian society encouraged a somewhat similar view among the Chinese. As evidence of the increased prominence of women, historians also point to a flourishing culture of poetry written by courtesans, the careers of Empress Wu and her daughter-in-law Empress Wei, and the practice of using diplomatic marriages of Tang daughters to prominent foreign officials to forge political alliances. However, sumptuary laws dictated what women could and could not wear, elite men kept concubines, and the Tang legal system considered women property.

The Tang Empire reached its zenith in the early eighth century. By mid-century, however, internal and external challenges had set in motion the empire's terminal decline. Externally, the Tang were defeated at the Battle of Talas River in 751. There, Tang forces were beaten by the combined Turkic and Arab armies of the Abbasid Caliphate, which was expanding the frontiers of the Islamic empire deep into central Asia after overthrowing the Umayyads. Internally, China faced revolts in Korea, Yunnan (in extreme southern China), and Manchuria, which distracted and weakened the state.

Then, in 755, the Tang Empire was rocked by the massive An Lushan rebellion. Some 150,000 frontier troops led by the Tang commander An Lushan revolted against Emperor Xuanzong and the decadent court at Chang'an. It took eight years for the Tang to crush the rebellion, by the end of which China was both militarily and economically exhausted. The empire carried on in an enfeebled state, but over the ensuing decades, Chang'an ceded much military and civil authority to provincial warlords. In 906, following additional civil wars, the Tang dynasty collapsed, leading to a period of disunity until the Song rose to dominance in 960.

Korea

It was during this Three Kingdoms period that cultural influences such as Buddhism were being spread along the Silk Roads. One of the Chinese dynasties to succeed the Han, the Jin, sent Buddhist missionaries into Goguryeo in 372. Many elites soon

converted, and the kingdoms of Baekje and Silla followed suit. Other cultural innovations that influenced the three kingdoms were Confucian teachings and Chinese writing; Chinese became the official governmental language. The three kingdoms soon fell to quarreling among themselves, however. The southern two allied against Goguryeo in 550, though their victory was delayed for quite some time.

When the Sui reunified China in 589, they also sought to regain control of Korea, finding themselves in conflict with Goguryeo but repeatedly defeated. In 612, for example, when the Sui attacked with 300,000 soldiers, only 2,700 were reported to have survived. This and other failed attempts to conquer Korea weakened the Sui and were among the key reasons for the dynasty's collapse and replacement by the Tang in 618.

The second Tang emperor, Taizong, also attacked Goguryeo and was likewise defeated. The Tang therefore allied with the Kingdom of Silla in their bid to dominate the peninsula. Together they defeated Baekje in 660, and then Goguryeo in 668. By 668, Silla was the sole remaining kingdom in Korea. In exchange for victory, however, Korea was now a tributary state of the Tang, although it extended only as far as the city of Pyongyang.

The new capital of Silla was located at Geumseong. Basing their city on the Tang capital of Chang'an, the Silla built many Confucian schools, and many Koreans traveled to China to acquire a solid Confucian education and learn more about Buddhism. The ideas of Confucianism and Buddhism slowly influenced and altered Korean culture. For example, Korea had been relatively matrilineal, with the husband joining the wife's family after marriage. But thanks to the influence of Confucianism and its patriarchal traditions, the opposite now began to occur.

The Koreans did not adopt Chinese values wholesale. Although they accepted aspects of China's examination system for filling the state bureaucracy based on merit, for instance, aristocratic control remained strong. High aristocrats were often given entire villages to govern and directly chose the local governing officers, and many of these nobles did what they could to protect their indigenous identities. And although China had few enslaved people, Korea had many.

In 780, an uprising occurred in which the king of Silla was killed. This event marked the beginning of the kingdom's decline, and a number of additional revolts occurred over the following century. A general named Wang Geon overthrew the kingdom in 935 and established the Goryeo dynasty (from which modern Korea derives its name). The new capital was located where the city of Kaesong now stands, and its administration was based largely on the former Tang governmental system; examination systems and Confucian education increased in importance. To guard against northern nomadic invaders, the Goryeo dynasty built a wall just south of the Yalu River, based on China's Great Wall.

The new Korean state persisted for some two centuries until a military coup in 1170. Although the Goryeo dynasty remained on the throne, successor kings were figureheads; the army generals held real power and maintained a powerful hold on the military establishment. In the early thirteenth century, however, the Korean capital in Kaesong was besieged by the Mongols, and in 1231 the government was forced to flee southward. The Mongols overran the state itself in 1258, bringing this formative period of Korean history to an end.

Japan

During the Kofun period of the late third to sixth centuries, the arrival of Buddhism in Japan coincided with the rule of the Yamato clan, a group said to have descended from the goddess Amaterasu. The Yamato began to dominate the island of Honshu, one of the four large islands of Japan where another aristocratic clan, the Nakatomi, supervised the court's religious ceremonies at the imperial palace. The indigenous religion of Japan, Shintoism, held that many gods and spirits must be revered and honored, such as the spirits of trees, rocks, mountains, streams, and former rulers and chieftains. Amaterasu, for example, was the Shinto goddess of the sun. The Nakatomi clan, along with the Mononobe clan, opposed any religion, particularly foreign, that might threaten the dominance of tradition. However, the Soga clan chose to support Buddhism, in opposition to the other two clans.

In the seventh century, the ruler of Japan was Empress Suiko, the daughter of a Soga mother who came to power in 593 after the assassination of her brother King Sushun. For the next three decades, she ruled with her nephew and adviser, Prince Shotoku. In 594, early in her rule, Buddhism became a state religion. This was not the end of Shintoism, but it began a parallel system that continued to the present. In short, by the end of the sixth century, both Shintoism and Buddhism were influencing the cultural makeup of Japan.

In keeping with the ancient East Asian tradition of embracing and borrowing from Chinese culture, the Soga rulers of Japan, like the Koreans in the sixth century, sent envoys to China. These envoys brought back Confucianism, which soon became a

way to govern based on principles of appropriate and ethical behavior, as happened in China and Korea. An unusual feature of government in Japan at this time, however, was the adoption of a cap-rank system, which marked an official's rank by the color of cap worn; purple was the most prestigious.

In 604, Prince Shotoku wrote a statement of seventeen articles of government, sometimes referred to as Japan's first constitution. The state was then under great stress, divided among semiautonomous clan-based units. Not surprisingly, the constitution emphasized the Chinese Confucian precepts of a unified state ruled by one sovereign, the meritocratic rather than hereditary system of civil service, and the rights and obligations of the rulers and the ruled.

The Soga clan came to a violent end in 645, marking the rise of the Nakatomi family and the Fujiwara clan. Agitation and civil war persisted until 672, when King Temmu and Jito, his wife and later successor, came to the throne and initiated the Taika Reforms. Seeking to adopt the centralization instituted by the Tang, who came to power in China in 618 CE, Temmu and Jito started to build a capital at Fujiwara-kyo in 694. When it burned down a few years later, they built another at Nara to resemble the Tang capital of Chang'an, inaugurating the Nara period in Japanese history, which lasted until 794. Other reforms included a system of taxation, conscription, and labor service that came to be known as the Taihoo Code (701). An administrative and penal code system based on that of Tang China was established in 718.

After the death of Emperor Shomu in the mid-750s, conflict characterized the remainder of the century. In 794, Emperor Kammu moved his capital about twenty miles north to Heian-kyo, the site of today's Kyoto, ending the Nara period. Heian-kyo remained the capital of Japan until 1868. This larger city symbolized Japan's increasing power over all the major islands, with the exception of the northern island of Hokkaido. Emperor Kammu took his Fujiwara patron with him to the new capital. Throughout the ninth century, Fujiwara advisers became increasingly powerful at the expense of the emperors, many serving as regents and even as emperors themselves.

Gender roles became more rigidly defined during this period, and many non-elites were officially categorized as peasant, artisan, or merchant. Even the system of writing changed. Chinese script had been the traditional writing style, particularly among scholars. However, many words in Japanese were pronounced differently than Chinese writing allowed. Thus a new script called kana began to develop, to more accurately depict the way the words were pronounced in Japanese.

The most famous work written in kana is *The Tale of Genji*, the story of the romantic escapades of Hikaru Genji, a fictional emperor's son. Genji is removed from the line of succession for political reasons, and now a commoner, he decides to pursue a career as an imperial officer. Along the way, he has various romantic entanglements, secret love affairs that produce offspring believed to be the emperor's, and something like a midlife crisis, a reflection of the Buddhist belief in the transience of life. Widely considered the world's first novel, *Genji* was composed in the eleventh century by Murasaki Shikibu, a noblewoman and lady-in-waiting in the Heian Court. It skillfully portrays the forms of entertainment, manner of dress, daily routines, and moral code of the Heian nobility at the height of the Fujiwara clan's power. While the facts surrounding much of Murasaki's life and the composition of her magnum opus are not known, what is not disputed is *Genji's* critically important place in the literary canon of world literature, with the work often considered one of the world's oldest complete novels and a master class of Japanese literature. What is also not in dispute is that the work was composed by a woman from a powerful family at a time when the role of women around the world was still secondary to their male counterparts. It leaves us to wonder how much powerful and influential literature could have been composed by other women should they have been given the opportunity and resources that Murasaki was able to leverage during her career.

2.3: Southern Asia

Overview

This section outlines the evolution of South Asia's religious and political landscape, highlighting the rise of Hinduism, the influence of the caste system, and the spread of Buddhism amidst cultural exchanges. The emergence of Islamic states through invasions, particularly by Mahmud of Ghazni and Muhammad of Ghur, led to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. This period fostered political integration and cultural diversity, though Buddhism declined.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Discuss religious and social practices in South Asia
- Identify important political developments in South Asia

Hinduism

The polytheistic (belief in many gods) religion of Hinduism took hold in Southern Asia around 1500 BCE. It influenced the rise of Buddhism, and had a profound impact on the evolution of Indian society. The Hindu religion evolved to become the dominant religion of the Indian subcontinent likely because it was a belief system with broader appeal than Buddhism. Originating in the period following the Vedic Age (c. 1500–500 BCE) and evolving over centuries, Hinduism developed from much older traditions, especially those of the Aryan peoples who arrived in India beginning in the third millennium BCE. One particularly distinctive facet of Hindu tradition that originated among these peoples was the Indian caste system. At its origin, the caste system was limited, and all of society was organized into four categories known as *varnas*. The four major *varnas* were Brahman (priests), Kshatriya (warriors), Vaishya (merchants and farmers), and Shudra (servile people). In these early days of the system, a person's *varna* was determined by their profession but also their dharma—their adherence to proper behaviors for their caste as stipulated by cosmic law, including avoiding contact with lower castes—and the karma they accrued by virtue of their dharma.

Karma worked both ways: A believer's failure to follow their dharma resulted in negative residue, whereas faithful obedience resulted in positive residue. At the personal level, the incentive behind amassing karma was *samsara*, the continuance of the soul after death and the soul's transformation. The more positive karma someone built up, the greater the chances of being reincarnated in a higher *varna* in the next life—with the ultimate goal being the attainment of *moksha*, or release from the karmic cycle and the achievement of a complete understanding of the world. If too much bad karma accumulated, on the other hand, the opposite occurred: reincarnation at a lower *varna*.

Yet the ramifications of the caste system went far beyond the personal. Nothing less than the continued existence of the universe was at stake. Adherence to dharma helped ensure the universe remained in balance, while failure to do so risked chaos and destruction. A rigidly hierarchical system of social segregation maintained this belief system. However, the *varna* communities created by the caste system also provided social support to their members and a vital stabilizing element in an Indian society otherwise rocked by political upheaval, foreign invasion, and war.

Faith and Culture in Southern Asia

Throughout the decline of the independent principalities of northern India and, ultimately, the conquest of the Delhi Sultanate, the north slowly became increasingly Muslim, while the south retained Hindu cultural beliefs and ideas. By the thirteenth century, Buddhism had diminished as a popular form of worship in India and Hinduism had evolved from a religion in which only priests offered sacrifices to one in which a wider array of people could actively participate. With this change came increased personal devotion to the individual gods, including Vishnu and Shiva. Each village usually had a temple in which they were enshrined and worshipped, and various incarnations of the gods developed from these numerous local beliefs. For example, Krishna was an incarnation of Vishnu. Eventually, Vishnu and Shiva came to have consort wives, and their powers could not be activated except through union. Thus, many female deities also came to be worshipped. In contrast, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and

Confucianism all feature male-centered systems.

The basic social unit of Indian society and the focus of life was the extended family, which included parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and in-laws. Most peasant families lived in villages and worked as farmers. Farming was more important than cattle raising for several reasons, not least the prohibition against eating cows. Hindus believe these animals to be sacred but also used them as draft animals on farms. Their manure helped fertilize crops, and their milk was a sustaining element of the Hindu diet. Key crops were rice, millet, wheat, barley, lentils, and peas. The extended family's large web of relationships tended to encourage cooperation for the betterment of the community. Villages were usually walled, with gates that were shut at night after the farmers returned from the fields.

Although this was a politically chaotic period, new ideas and belief systems spread and many cultural and technological advances occurred. Improvements in shipbuilding and textile manufacturing stimulated coastal trade, for example, especially in Southeast Asia. Paradoxically, many such developments were the result of the same forces that destabilized India's politics, for the continual invasions and migrations of foreigners in the north cross-fertilized the region's cultural base, producing new ideas and practical innovations. The diffusion of ideas was enhanced by India's annual monsoon winds, which lengthened maritime traders' exposure to Indian society and culture by preventing those who arrived in summer from returning home until the winter monsoon season.

One of the most influential and enduring effects of trade was the spread of Buddhism, which began to take hold elsewhere as it competed with, and in some ways reshaped, Hinduism. Many Southeast Asian regions adopted it, from what is now Thailand up to the Mekong Delta in Vietnam and down to Java. By the first century BCE, there were two branches of Buddhism: Theravada ("the path of the elders," the oldest extant form of Buddhism) and Mahayana ("the greater vehicle"). Mahayana, the larger branch, spread along the great trade routes of Asia into the borderlands of the Parthian Empire, eventually reaching China, Korea, and Japan, where it was gradually infused with local ideas. Theravada Buddhism established itself in Sri Lanka, southern India, and parts of Southeast Asia. Unlike Hinduism, Buddhism did not emphasize the caste system and in many instances opposed it, thus strengthening its influence abroad. It therefore appealed to lower-caste individuals as well. Nonetheless, Hinduism influenced many monarchies, particularly through the concept of dharma. Sanskrit, the written language of India, also spread to many southeast Asian courts, cementing the broad influence of Indian culture.

South Asia in the Early Middle Ages

India, usually referred to as South Asia, shares the Asian subcontinent, culture, and history with several countries in the modern period, including Pakistan and Bangladesh. Before the Middle Ages, two powerful religious and philosophical traditions emerged there, Hinduism and Buddhism, the latter spreading by traveling merchants via the Silk Roads, both overland and overseas.

In the fourth century BCE, Alexander the Great, his army, and his people came to what is today Afghanistan and the region of the Hindu Kush. Although they did not remain there, for the next three centuries this Hellenistic Seleucid kingdom continued to trade with India and spread Greek ideas. The arrival of Alexander's army in the region was a crucial step in the process of bringing the Afro-Eurasian world closer together. Long-distance travel in this period was still arduous and undertaken primarily by merchants, but important cultural shifts were beginning. Although Alexander's death shortly after his Indian campaigns meant that neither he nor his successors came to rule over this part of the world, disparate and previously separate cultures and peoples began sharing material goods, technologies, and ideas in ways that only continued as the centuries passed. This change was accelerated by the rise of the Mauryan Empire, the first major kingdom to dominate the Asian subcontinent. The Mauryan Empire was founded by Chandragupta Maurya in 322 BCE and lasted until around 185 BCE. During that time, the region saw great intellectual developments, such as the implementation of place value in numbers and the addition of zero to the numbering system, while long-distance trade continued to expand and widen the spread of these new ideas and concepts.

The Fracturing of India

While India experienced a time of unity and great success during the Mauryan age, the subcontinent again broke into separate kingdoms following invasions by the White Huns, which fatally weakened the empire. One of the more stable regimes to emerge in this period was the northern kingdom of Thanesar, under its Buddhist ruler Harsha Vardhana, whose reign lasted from 606 to 647 CE. We know a great deal about Harsha thanks to contemporary accounts by the Indian poet Bana and the Chinese Buddhist monk Xuan Zang. According to both, Buddhism had penetrated the region surrounding Thanesar to a considerable degree, despite the Guptas' earlier favoring of Hinduism. It was also clear, though, that Buddhism had declined as a result of Gupta neglect because its monasteries throughout India were in a state of disrepair. Still, Xuan Zang found Harsha's kingdom well run, wealthy, and justly administered. As far as the monk was concerned, Thanesar was a model state. It did not outlive its king by many years, however. Soon after Harsha's death, the Arab advance that began in the early part of his reign had become a wave that, in the early eighth

century, swept across northern India.

In the early seventh century, the new religion of Islam had begun to expand, encompassing Arabia and soon spreading even farther. By 659, Muslim forces were advancing eastward and clashed with the rulers of Sindh in modern-day Pakistan; by the early eighth century, armies of the Umayyad Islamic state had conquered the region. Under increasing pressure from foreign invaders, India splintered into rival principalities ruled by independent rajas, or princes. These kingdoms, which extended from the Indus River valley in northwestern India to the Ganges River in the northeast, flourished for a time. However, long centuries of fending off invasions by Islamized Turkic warlords from central Asia had taken their toll.

The career of Mahmud of Ghazna is a good example of these developments. The son of a Turkic mamluk, or military slave, who ruled from 998 to 1030, Mahmud was intent on developing his region as an important Islamic state and launched dozens of campaigns against the princes of northern India from his base in Afghanistan. The onslaught was quite successful, for by the twelfth century, the Muslim Ghaznavid dynasty ruled an area that stretched from the Aral Sea in the north to Lahore in the east and encompassed the vital Silk Roads conduit of Khurasan in the southwest. The Muslim advance did not end with the establishment of the Ghaznavid state, however. Wars raged across northern India, and by the end of the twelfth century, the remaining independent Indian princes had become fatally weakened. Vulnerable to conquest, the kingdoms of the rajas collapsed.

In the twelfth century, a new line of Turkic invaders arose in present-day Afghanistan, led by Muhammad of Ghur (Ghur was an especially important town in the region). A Persian ruler subject to the Ghaznavids, Muhammad declared his independence from Ghazna and conquered most of the lands of his former lords. In 1192, his forces defeated an army of some 100,000 Rajputs, considered Hindu India's most ferocious warriors, in one of the most violent engagements of his increasingly bloody career. The crowning achievement of Muhammad's campaigns was establishing a Muslim state at Delhi, deep in the heart of northern India. It endured as the Delhi Sultanate for more than three centuries (1206–1526), during which time it was the center of Islamic India.

Thus, through a series of invasions over the course of some five hundred years, Arab and then Turkic invaders made their way into northern India, bringing Islam and stimulating political integration in the process. Because the minority Muslim rulers did not enforce cultural homogeneity, the invasions also strengthened the cultural diversity that was already a hallmark of Indian social order. For example, the Islamic rulers of the sultanate gave Hindu subjects the status of *dhimmis*, which protected their rights as non-Muslims, although they still had to pay the special tax, the *jizya*, placed on non-believers. The sultans of Delhi often employed Hindu laborers on construction projects such as the building of mosques, which led Muslims to integrate certain forms of Hindu symbolism and motifs such as trees and plant life into the structures. In the fourteenth century, Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq expanded and even encouraged Hindu religious freedom, himself participating in Holi, the annual celebration of spring, while he allowed Hindu pilgrimages to the Ganges River, Hinduism's holiest site.

Faith and Identity in Southern Asia

Before the arrival of Islam in South Asia, Hinduism was the dominant religion in the subcontinent. The result of a synthesis of beliefs that occurred after the Vedic period of Ancient India (c. 1500–500 BCE) and a response to Buddhism's commercial and urban influence, Hinduism developed a philosophy and belief system more widely accessible to the rural and agrarian peoples of India. An elaborate universe of Hindu deities was also established that included divinities from other religions, widening Hinduism's accessibility and appeal. Perhaps most importantly, Hinduism stressed personal devotion to a particular deity to obtain a truly individualized religious experience.

The Muslim Turks who arrived in India in the twelfth century recognized the Hindus as a protected people, allowing them to practice their own religious traditions and govern individual territories so long as they paid taxes and tribute. Buddhists, however, were not given the same measures of religious freedom, although it is not clear why. They were forced to flee or be executed, and many went to areas of Southeast Asia, Nepal, or Tibet, where Buddhism remains a major religion today. Over time, in the northern areas of the Indian subcontinent, which include modern Pakistan and Bangladesh, many Hindus converted to Islam, which then became the majority religion of the region. In the Vijayanagar Empire in southern India, on the other hand, far fewer conversions took place, perhaps due to its distance from the centers of Islam.

In 1221, the province of Khurasan, which had invaded the Punjab in the tenth century, was itself invaded by the Mongols from China, led by Chinggis Khan (often referred to as “Genghis Khan” in the West). The Mongols then turned their attention to the Delhi Sultanate, which managed to successfully weather an attempted Mongol invasion in 1222. Over the next several decades, northern India experienced a series of invasions accompanying renewed Mongol expansion. Although most were repelled, countless Muslims were displaced and resettled on sultanate lands deeper in the subcontinent's interior.

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2.4: Chapter Themes to Discuss

Core Themes for Reflection and Discussion

This page offers different themes that appear throughout the sections in this chapter. The themes are meant to provide a framework in which discussion questions can be developed to inspire further exploration of the topics covered.

1. The political and religious influence Islam had on the Middle East and beyond.
2. The similarities and differences to the role religion plays in the construction of Medieval empires.
3. The cultural exchange that evolves through economic trade.

2.5: Alternative Text Description

Figure 2.1.1: Early Muslim Conquests, 630s–820s

Historical map showing the expansion of Muslim rule across southern Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia from the 630s to the 820s. The map extends from the Iberian Peninsula in the west across North Africa, the eastern Mediterranean, the Arabian Peninsula, Mesopotamia, Persia, and into Central Asia. Major bodies of water shown include the Atlantic Ocean, Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, Caspian Sea, Red Sea, and Persian Gulf.

Different colors represent territories incorporated during successive periods of conquest. The map shows the Islamic state beginning under Muhammad (632) in the Arabian Peninsula, including Hejaz, Yamama, Bahrayn, Yemen, Hadrhamawt, and Oman. Conquests under Abu Bakr (632–634) added Syria and Iraq. Conquests under Umar (634–644) added Egypt, Cyrenaica (Barqa), Jibal, Fars, Kerman, Sijistan, and Khurasan. Under Uthman (644–656), expansion included the Maghreb, Iberia in the Caucasus region, and Jurjan. Under Mu'awiya I (661–680), territories added included Tripolitania, Kavar, Makran, and Sind. Under Abd al-Malik (685–705), expansion reached Ifriqiya, Arminiya, and Tabaristan. Under al-Walid I (705–714), Muslim rule expanded into Hispania (al-Andalus) in the Iberian Peninsula and into Central Asia, including Transoxiana, Tukharistan, Ferghana, and Khwarazm. Smaller frontier expansions under Sulayman (715–717), Umar II (717–720), and Hisham (724–743) are shown along the Byzantine and Caucasus frontiers, including Cilicia and neighboring regions.

The Byzantine Empire remains centered in Anatolia and southeastern Europe and is shown separately from the expanding Muslim territories. Other labeled neighboring peoples and states include the Franks, Lombards, Khazars, Bulgars, Magyars, Berbers, Makuria, and Axum. Islands labeled include Sardinia, Sicily, Crete, and Cyprus.

The map demonstrates the rapid territorial growth of the early Islamic caliphates from a base in Arabia to an empire stretching west to al-Andalus in present-day Spain and east to Central Asia and the Indus region. The color-coded regions show that this expansion occurred in distinct phases under successive rulers rather than as a single event.

Figure 2.2.1: A map showing the Tang Dynasty

Map labeled “**700 CE Tang Dynasty.**” It shows East and Central Asia with the territory of the **Tang Dynasty** highlighted as a large contiguous region covering much of eastern China and extending westward into parts of Central Asia.

The Tang Dynasty territory includes most of eastern China, reaches south toward the northern edge of mainland Southeast Asia, and extends west across inland Asia. Its core area lies east of the **Tibetan Empire** and south of groups labeled **Eastern Göktürks**, **Western Göktürks**, **Uighur**, and **Mongol tribes**.

Several neighboring regions and peoples are labeled around the Tang realm:

- **Kyrgyz** to the north and northwest
- **Western Göktürks** and **Eastern Göktürks** to the north and northwest
- **Uighur** and **Mongol tribes** to the north
- **Khitans** to the northeast
- **Tibetan Empire** to the southwest
- **Kashmir** farther west
- **Pyu** to the south
- **Chenla** and **Champa** in mainland Southeast Asia to the south and southeast

2.6: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials to Enhance the Chapter

These materials are provided to help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction. Some resources are openly licensed, while others may require institutional access or individual review before use in class.

Web Resources

These websites may help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction.

- [World History Encyclopedia](#) – Provides overviews of important people, places, and events throughout history. This resource can be useful for finding concise, expert-informed background information.
- [Fordham University Internet History Sourcebooks Project](#) – Provides translated, transcribed, and digitized primary sources. This resource can support source-based instruction, though instructors should review links carefully because some materials may be incomplete or less suitable for classroom use.

Articles

These articles provide additional scholarly context for this chapter. Access may depend on your institution's JSTOR subscription.

- Liebl, Vernie. "The Caliphate." *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 3 (2009): 373–91. [Access article in JSTOR](#)

Videos

These videos can be used to explore a specific topic in the chapter in more detail and as an entry to further discussion on chapter topics.

- [TED-Ed: A day in the life of a teenager in medieval Baghdad](#)

Length: 4 minutes, 45 seconds

It is 791 CE. As the morning sun shines on the Golden Gate Palace, brother and sister Hisham and Asma prepare for the journey of a lifetime: the hajj, a holy pilgrimage to Mecca. They intend to travel with the big hajj caravan, but a last-minute mishap threatens to undo months of careful planning. Birte Kristiansen and Petra Sijpesteijn detail a day in the life of siblings in medieval Baghdad.

3: POWER AND STRUGGLE IN AFRICA

Overview

The African continent experienced extremes in its political and religious developments during the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries. Most of Africa remained relatively isolated from outside influence after the fall of the Roman Empire in Western Europe. The trajectory of Northern Africa was affected by the spread of Islam into the region while the rest of Africa continued to see its political systems shaped by the peoples of their regions.

[3.1: African Empires](#)

[3.2: Islam Arrives in Africa](#)

[3.3: African Kingdoms and Trade](#)

[3.4: Chapter Themes to Discuss](#)

[3.5: Alternative Text Descriptions](#)

[3.6: Teacher Resources](#)

3.1: African Empires

Overview

This section explores the emergence and evolution of significant African civilizations shaped by geography and trade. It highlights the Sahara's role in human migration, the Sahel as a transitional area, and the Niger River's support for West African kingdoms like Ghana and Mali. The narrative covers the rise of Great Zimbabwe from the Leopard's Kopje culture, emphasizing its trade and governance.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Discuss the uniqueness of West African civilization in the premodern world
- Explain the source of wealth and power held by Ghana and Mali

African Geography, Migrations, and Settlement

North of the Sahara is a thin strip of forest and scrubland hugging the southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Like other parts of the Mediterranean world, it has a relatively mild climate with sufficient rainfall, wet winters, and dry summers. For this reason, the arable land there is suitable for growing grains like wheat and barley, originally domesticated in the Fertile Crescent and disseminated around the sea over thousands of years. Likewise, this northern African region has had a long history of cultural contact with other Mediterranean cultures like the Greeks, Phoenicians, and Romans. As a result, the cultural practices, religions, and languages of the larger Mediterranean world have had, and continue to have, a huge impact on this region.

South of the Sahara is the Sahel, a semiarid belt of land that separates the desert in the north from the savanna in the south. The Sahel is a transitional zone that stretches some 3,300 miles across the continent. The farther south, the longer is the rainy season (four months on average), the more temperate is the climate, and the greater is the abundance of pasturage and forage plants for livestock (especially cattle and sheep), including grasses, thorny shrubs, and baobab trees. The word *Sahel* is derived from the Arabic *sahil*, meaning “shore.” This is a reference to the view held by many that the Sahara was a vast sea of sand that could be navigated only with great difficulty.

The Sahara's extremely dry conditions are hostile to both plants and animals, so only small-scale human settlements are possible. These are clustered around the desert's oases, which amount to a fraction of a percentage of its total landmass. During the Middle Ages, these oases were crucial hubs connecting trade routes across the desert, nowhere more so than in West Africa, where medieval kingdoms competed for control over markets and the movement of goods across the region.

During the medieval period, the Sahara provided powerful West African kingdoms with a vital commodity: salt. Almost completely unobtainable in the inland regions south of the Sahara, salt was mined from sites such as Taghaza and transported in enormous slabs on the backs of camels in caravans that crossed the desert to West African villages and beyond. Salt became the second most prized good traded across the Sahara—the first being gold. Indeed, salt was such a valuable commodity that the king of Ghana stored it in the royal treasury alongside gold nuggets.

The southern frontier of the Sahel is marked by the transition to grasslands and tropical woodlands of the savanna. While the Sahara is dry and arid, the savanna is more temperate and wetter, carpeted with grasses and studded by scattered trees. At its extreme end near the West African rainforests stretching from modern-day Sierra Leone to Ghana, the savanna can see as much as forty-eight inches of rain per year (the rainy season lasts from May to October), which is similar to the average annual rainfall of New York City in the United States. Alongside a greater abundance of vegetation, the savanna is also home to a wider range of wildlife, including cattle, antelope, and giraffes. Endowed with a hospitable environment, climate, and geography, the plains of the savanna have historically been the region with the greatest concentration of human settlement in Africa.

Winding through the savanna and Sahel regions of West Africa is the Niger River. Along its fertile banks, people have grown staple crops like sorghum, African rice, and millet for hundreds of years. Approximately 2,500 miles in length, the Niger is West

Africa's longest river. It was critical to the development of medieval West African kingdoms, both for its ability to sustain intensive agriculture and as a crucial transport conduit for goods and commodities. It was in the areas drained by the Niger River where West Africa's great empires emerged, profiting from the flows of salt from the north and gold from the south. In this way, these empires grew fabulously wealthy.

To the south of the savanna lies the tropical rainforest, Africa's third major environment alongside the desert and the savanna. Relative to the Sahara, the African rainforest covers a far smaller geographic footprint: some two million square miles, or roughly 10 percent of the continent's total landmass. Nevertheless, the rainforest is rich in biodiversity, including pygmy hippopotamuses, giant forest hogs, canopy monkeys, and chimpanzees, as well as thousands of species of plants. In West Africa, dense stretches of rainforest can be found in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire. In this area, the Bantu initially encountered the Nok people, from whom they acquired the metallurgical knowledge that enabled them to move into and later emerge from the equatorial rainforest between 500 and 1000 CE. The gradual dispersal of the Bantu throughout much of southern Africa followed.

Bantu speakers had been migrating from this area possibly since as early as 3000 BCE. But with the adoption of ironworking technology from the Nok, these ironworking farmers were able to travel throughout much of the eastern, western, and southeastern regions of the subcontinent. Their Iron Age economy was dominated by farming, mostly of sorghum and millet, with some livestock including cattle, pigs, and chickens, although animal husbandry tended to be secondary to farming. Because the regions into which they moved were only thinly populated by roving bands of hunter-gatherers, the Bantu were able to choose the most suitable land for farming. Early Iron Age Bantu settlements tended to be small, typically consisting of a dozen or so round houses encircling a livestock pen of cattle or goats. Larger settlements (sometimes in the range of several hectares) could be found in regions such as Natal, favored by large Bantu kinship groups because of the combination of rich biodiversity and sparse population. Settlements were placed close to iron ore and wood for the smelting of carbon steel. The early Iron Age Bantu economy necessarily focused on self-sufficiency with little potential for trade, although some small-scale trade did take place, particularly of sought-after commodities like copper and salt in regions of the Congo and Tanzania.

Until about the eighth century CE, the Bantu developed and exploited the resources of the more favorable areas and adapted the local environments. Throughout, they remained a stateless society organized along kinship lines. Women tended crops, prepared food, and minded the smaller children, while men tended livestock, hunted for meat and for animal skins for clothing, and engaged in trade with other villages. Women leaders were the exception; archaeological evidence of male dominance is considerable. Authority was decentralized in any case, with no rigidly hierarchical power structure to exercise central authority.

From the tenth century, relatively powerful Bantu kingdoms began to appear in the savanna to the south of the Central African rainforest, and in the plateau between the Zambezi and Limpopo Rivers in the interior of southern Africa. Their large settlements displaced the region's earlier inhabitants. This revolution in the ancient African political landscape was the combined result of the introduction of Neolithic cultivation and animal husbandry on the one hand, and the adoption of Iron Age technologies, tools, and weapons on the other. The succession of medieval Bantu kingdoms that emerged dominated these regions economically, politically, and culturally.

Migrating originally from West Africa, the Bantu would have recognized much of the geography and climate of southern Africa: there is desert, such as the Kalahari and Namib in southwest Africa, and vast savanna. Entire regions of the modern countries of Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, and Mozambique are blanketed by grassland, as is a large area that extends from southern Mozambique into northeastern South Africa. Both the vegetation and wildlife of the southern African savanna resemble that of West Africa in many ways. The southern African climate also has much in common with that of West Africa, encompassing everything from semiarid to temperate zones, with each experiencing varying amounts of rain. Broadly speaking, the eastern area of the region (including Mozambique and eastern South Africa) is wetter than the western area. The west is sapped of moisture, in part by the Atlantic Ocean's cold Benguela Current. The resulting dryness of western South Africa was a key factor in the development of the Kalahari and Namib Deserts.

Great Zimbabwe, Ghana, and Mali

For nearly seven hundred years, medieval empires and kingdoms dominated the economies and politics of West Africa and southern Africa. The wealth of these states and thus their power came from their control of trade in commodities such as gold, ivory, salt, silk, horses, and enslaved people. In West Africa, the empires of Ghana and Mali moved these goods along a sprawling network of trade that stretched across North Africa, eastward into Ethiopia, and southward as far as the grassland savanna, connecting West Africa to the Mediterranean world, Europe, the Near East, southwest Asia, and beyond. In southern Africa, Mapungubwe and then Great Zimbabwe consolidated their control over local and regional trade and connected their economies with the coastal civilization of the Swahili peoples through a network of waterways that included the Limpopo and Zambezi Rivers. In so doing, they linked the southern African interior with the distant and overlapping nodes of oceanic commerce that connected

East Africa with Asia and Arabia.

As the settlements around the Limpopo River grew, so too did the need to manage the basin's resources and govern the affairs of the people there. As a result, centralized systems of governance emerged among the Bantu peoples in the region, particularly in the Iron Age culture of Leopard's Kopje in Zimbabwe. This cattle-keeping culture, whose name derived from the site where it was identified (*kopje* means "small hill"), dominated the area for nearly two centuries, but by the thirteenth century, it had given way to an even larger and more complex state, Great Zimbabwe

Great Zimbabwe

Great Zimbabwe was founded by the Shona, an Iron Age Bantu-speaking people who first migrated to southern Africa around the second century CE. As at Leopard's Kopje and Mapungubwe, the first settlers were livestock-herders drawn to the location by its abundant natural resources and location on the southwestern edge of the Zimbabwean plateau. Here, amid temperate grasslands ideal for seasonal grazing, the Shona found ample supplies of timber for firewood and for building, as well as well-watered fertile soil for cultivation. There is some evidence that they had domesticated goat, sheep, and cattle as early as the third century. The Shona were not the first inhabitants of the region; that distinction belongs to the small bands of hunter-gatherers who stalked game and foraged the plain in the centuries before the Bantu speakers' arrival. Despite having superior iron technology, the Shona were unable to completely dislodge these hunter-gatherers, resulting in tension and conflict that persist to the modern era.

The five hundred years between the fourth and ninth centuries witnessed the development of Bantu communities that farmed the valley and mined and worked iron. They lived in reed thatch or mud houses and represent the earliest Iron Age settlers in the area so far identified by archaeologists. During this period, the Shona manufactured simple pottery and produced leather for clothing, jewelry from copper and gold, and weapons and farming tools from iron. Many of these goods they traded with members of coastal settlements for commodities like salt, glass beads, and seashells. By the eleventh century, the society of the Zimbabwean plateau was thriving, and drystone buildings—that is, buildings constructed using interlocking stones rather than mortar—began to emerge. The people had established a prosperous mixed farming economy, engaging in animal husbandry and hunting the region's abundant game.

Above all, trade was the most important factor in Great Zimbabwe's wealth and power. Situated at the head of the Sabi River valley, the capital was ideally positioned for exploiting the long-distance commerce between the goldfields of the western plateau and Sofala, a Swahili center that connected Zimbabwean trade goods to the island of Kilwa. Zimbabwean gold made Kilwa the wealthiest of all the Swahili city-states. In exchange for gold, copper, and ivory, Swahili merchants bartered such exotic luxury goods as Chinese Ming porcelain and carved faience (ceramicware) from Persia at the markets and fairs established on the Zimbabwean plateau.

Construction of major stone buildings began sometime in the eleventh century and continued for about three hundred years. These stone structures are the most famous ancient ruins in southern Africa. The oldest is the Hill Complex. Located on a natural rise approximately 260 feet high, this citadel likely provided the Shona people with a space to perform rituals and find safety in uncertain times; however, the exact purpose of the site is still a matter of debate. Some scholars have suggested it functioned as a religious site for ancestor worship, while others have suggested it was a burial ground for chiefs or possibly even the site of a royal palace. Whatever its intended purpose, the site is an impressive one, and its prominence certainly ties it to some important aspect of Zimbabwean culture.

The ruins of Great Zimbabwe have impressed visitors for centuries. The Great Enclosure at the heart of the civilization dates from the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries and is still partially intact today, a massive elliptical building with drystone walls thirty-five feet high and as much as seventeen feet thick. Located in the area of the valley below the Hill Complex, it is the largest ancient monument in Africa south of the Sahara. Upon seeing the ruins, the sixteenth-century Portuguese explorer Vicente Pegado wrote, "Among the gold mines of the inland plains between the Limpopo and Zambezi rivers there is a fortress built of stones of marvelous size, and there appears to be no mortar joining them [. . .] This edifice is almost surrounded by hills, upon which are others resembling it in the fashioning of stone and the absence of mortar, and one of them is a tower more than twelve fathoms high. The native of the country call these edifices Symbae, which according to their language signifies court."

The Kingdom of Mapungubwe

The precise relationship between them remains controversial, but Mapungubwe, which flourished between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, is often considered the initial stage in the development of Great Zimbabwe. It has been called southern Africa's first state. The origins of Mapungubwe date to around the tenth century with a cattle-keeping culture known as Leopard's Kopje. In a region of relatively high rainfall near present-day Bulawayo in Zimbabwe, the people of Leopard's Kopje developed

a complex mixed economy of livestock-keeping and herding and agriculture. Like other kingdoms in southern Africa, theirs produced ample food and a surplus they traded for other goods. A unique feature of their farming was a method of terracing the hillsides on the southern slopes of the large sandstone plateau to prevent soil erosion. One such site was Mapela Hill, where during the twelfth century extensive hillside terracing featured dry stone-walling (without mortar) for housing, defense, and cultivation.

Archeological investigation of the region has revealed the presence of large cattle herds from around the ninth century. Because cattle were the traditional source of wealth and political power in southern Africa, the finding is suggestive of the influence the people of Leopard's Kopje could exercise. In the tenth century, the economy underwent several important changes, including significant growth in the number of cattle, the development of cotton cultivation and weaving (as indicated by the discovery of spindles), and the introduction of gold mining. The western plateau was rich in gold-bearing rock and was worked intensively by later Iron Age miners. Narrow shafts were sunk deep into the ground, following the course of seams some ninety feet down. The rock was cracked by alternating use of fire and water and broken out with iron wedges.

Although little is known about the organization and control of this mining work, it is probable that it was largely forced labor. The mining of gold led to a flourishing production of goods for local consumption by elites as well as trade farther afield. A unique type of gold ornamentation found at Mapungubwe (and elsewhere only at Great Zimbabwe) is beaten gold sheets. Decorated with geometric patterns, the sheets seem to have been used to cover wooden pieces, although these have long since rotted away. Other gold objects found at the site include beads, bangle bracelets, and animal figurines.

Despite its setting in the southern African interior, Mapungubwe engaged in long-distance trade. Large finds of ivory splinters and animal hides indicate these were being stockpiled for trade (elephants were plentiful in the region). The most probable route for trade was up the Limpopo River to the coastal areas toward Sofala, one of the southernmost regions of the Swahili coast. Other finds, including glass beads from India and fragments of brightly colored India cloth and Chinese celadon (green-glazed) pottery, support this connection with the Swahili coast and its seaborne trade with Arabia, China, and East Asia. While it is possible that Mapungubwe was a terminus for this type of international trade, it was certainly a hub for interregional trade in southern Africa.

Because the Mapungubwean people left no written record, scholars rely on the physical remains of the site to glean hints of its social structure. Mapungubwe is thought to be the first class-based social system in southern Africa, with sharp distinctions between wealthy rulers and their subjects. Commoners lived in mud and thatch dwellings in low-lying areas, district leaders occupied small hilltops on the outskirts of the capital, and the chief or king resided with his court in a stone enclosure at the capital atop Mapungubwe Hill, an imposing structure some 98 feet high and 328 feet in length. The royal wives lived in separate dwellings removed from the king, and the entire royal complex was surrounded by a wooden palisade.

Mapungubwe fell into terminal decline around the end of the thirteenth century. The precise cause is a matter of speculation, though evidence suggests that the region was subject to a dramatic period of climate change at this time that led to a series of intense droughts. As weather patterns changed and rainfall became less predictable, it caused the land to dry and lose fertility. Pasturage used for livestock dwindled, and the surrounding agricultural farmland, which had once supported a large population, shrank. The failure of crops meant that the once-abundant farms could no longer support the same number of inhabitants, leading to overpopulation and resource scarcity. Around the turn of the fourteenth century, the center of medieval southern African civilization shifted northward where a new polity emerged: Great Zimbabwe. In Bantu, *Zimbabwe* (*dzimba dzamabwe*) means "stone buildings," a telltale marker of the debt the Zimbabweans owed to their southern Mapungubwean neighbors, who had a tradition of building in stone.

The Ghana Empire

By the turn of the ninth century, in the north of the African continent, Arab rulers in Morocco were minting gold coins called dinars on behalf of the Islamic Caliphate. The official currency of the Muslim world since the end of the seventh century, the dinar was an important link connecting the sprawling Arab empire then centered on Baghdad. The gold used to mint those coins in Morocco came from a kingdom south of the Sahara known as Ghana, a realm the Arab governor of Morocco attempted and failed to conquer (and not to be confused with the modern nation-state of Ghana).

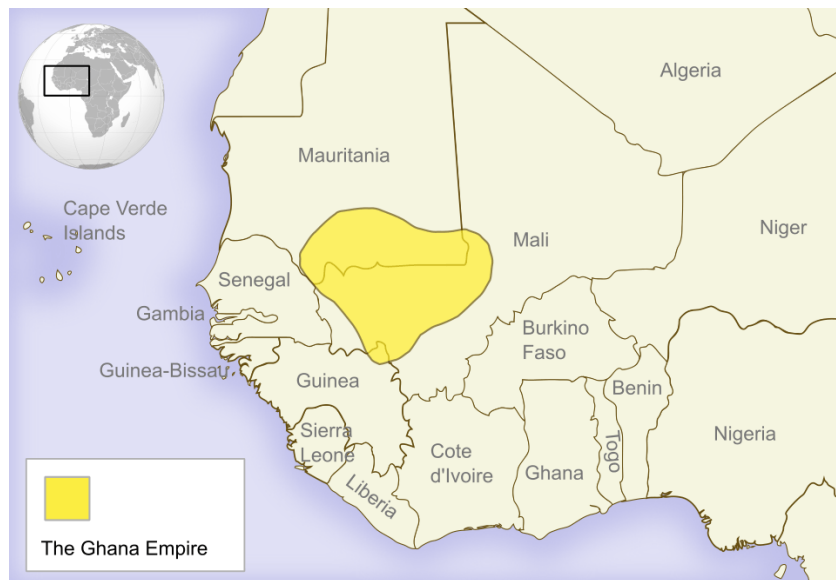


Figure 3.1.1: Map locating the Ghana Empire in the western Sahel, with surrounding modern West African countries shown for regional context. (CC BY 4.0; Amitchell125 via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 3.1.1.

The Ghana Empire dominated the region between western Mali and southeastern Mauritania from the sixth to the thirteenth centuries. Although ancient trade-based societies had existed in the region for some time by enriching themselves on the area's lucrative salt and gold, the introduction of the Arabian camel by the Romans between the third and fifth centuries CE, and the consequent regularization of trade between Morocco and the Niger River, allowed larger political entities to emerge. Until then, the development of farming and ironworking technology had supported West African clan-based societies in small, simple villages. Sometime around the fifth century, however, a group of chiefdoms in the Sahel grassland south of the Sahara formed a loosely knit empire—that is, the empire or kingdom of Ghana.

Although the origins of the Ghana Empire are shrouded in mystery, one theory holds that it was founded by Soninke speakers from Senegal who referred to their kingdom as Wagadu (Ghana, the name by which it was known to outsiders, was one of the titles of its king). Soninke oral tradition tells us that the kingdom was founded by Diabe Cisse, a powerful figure whose father Dinga, a nomadic mystic, was said to have conquered a female water genie. Dinga subsequently wed the genie's daughters. Sons resulted from the union of these women and Dinga, and their descendants established important Soninke families. Cisse's arrival as a son of Dinga, an outsider, marked a turning point in the history of the region, that had previously been subject to the destabilizing effects of nomadic raids.

With the drying out of the Sahara, the Sanhaja people of southern Morocco pressed deeper into the Sahel in their search for water and seasonal grazing land. During drought years, their migrations took the form of violent raids on settled agricultural communities, including those of the Soninke. In response, Soninke cavalry commanders turned to Cisse; tradition holds that Cisse unified the Soninke in a loose federation to combat the raiders and to expand the kingdom.

The early growth of Ghana was a slow process of conquering independent chiefdoms and kingdoms and then absorbing them into the empire. At the empire's core were four central provinces established by Diabe Cisse when he first unified the Soninke. Conquered vassal chiefdoms and kingdoms occupied the periphery of the kingdom. Some of these vassal states operated fairly independently of the central administration and paid only a small amount of tribute; other states were controlled to some extent by the capital. As the kingdom expanded, so too did its military. When Ghana reached the apex of its power in the early eleventh century CE, its king had some 200,000 soldiers at his command.

The Soninke response to nomadic raiders was only one factor that may have stimulated unification during the early period of Ghanaian history. Historians believe Ghana's position with regard to trade was another. Ghana grew powerful, and its kings became wealthy on the strength of the trans-Saharan trade, which the Soninke were ideally placed to exploit. Situated in the western Sahel, they stood halfway between the desert—the principal source of salt—and the territory of Bambuk—where goldfields were located along the upper reaches of the Senegal River. Initially, the Soninke had exchanged their gold surplus for salt harvested by the Taghaza people of the Sahara, but soon cross-desert traffic by camel allowed North Africans access to West African gold. As the trans-Saharan demand for gold increased, the Soninke were able to act as intermediaries, passing Saharan salt to the gold producers of the savanna woodland to their south.

Despite stories that celebrate Ghana as a “land of gold,” its kings’ control over the Bambuk goldfields was tenuous. Located far to the south, the goldfields were beyond Ghiyaru, the kingdom’s southernmost trading post. The chief of the nearest village had local authority over the mining area, and while Ghanaian rulers were able to enforce a strict monopoly on gold nuggets above an ounce in weight, the difficulties of digging mine shafts up to sixty feet deep and transporting the gold to the capital at Koumbi Saleh (southern Mauritania today), which could take upward of eighteen days, made Ghanaian dominance precarious. Yet the empire’s wealth was legendary, and its reputation spread throughout North Africa and into Europe and reached Muslim scholars as far away as Baghdad.

Ghanaian wealth derived from other commodities as well, including copper (on which the king levied a hefty custom duty) and captives. Many captives were often prisoners of war. Others had been seized in enslavement raids. In the twelfth century, the Moroccan geographer al-Idrisi, recounted a Ghanaian slave raid on a region named Lamlam: “The people of . . . Ghana make excursion in Lamlam bringing natives into captivity, transporting them to their own country and selling them to merchants.” Al-Idrisi’s observations were confirmed by his contemporary, al-Zuhri. Scholars have estimated that during the height of the Ghana Empire, some five thousand captives were transported across the Sahara to slave markets in North Africa every year.

During the eleventh century, the Ghanaians’ tolerance with their northern neighbors was sorely tested, however. While the rulers welcomed Muslim traders, radical reformist Islamic sects in Morocco threatened their peace and prosperity. Early in the century, the kingdom had expanded to take over the Islamic town of Awdaghost, an oasis north of the capital. At about the same time, a militant Islamic Almoravid movement emerged among the Sanhaja people of the southern Sahara, and soon established an empire centered on Morocco. In 1055, they captured Awdaghost, and in the ensuing religious strife and sectarian warfare, the Soninke Ghanaians converted to Islam. The wider destruction caused by violence had so weakened Ghana’s trading links that by the end of the twelfth century, it had lost its dominant position over the region’s trade. Having been thoroughly Islamized, Ghana began to produce Muslim scholars, lawyers, and Quran readers of some repute, many traveling to Islamic Spain to study or going on pilgrimage to Mecca.

The eleventh and twelfth centuries were a transitional time in the history of the kingdoms of West Africa. As Ghana expanded and was in turn conquered, new goldfields were opened at Bure in the woodland savanna south of Bambuk, well beyond Ghana’s commercial reach. Itinerant Soninke traders transported the gold from Bure to the Middle Niger region on new trans-Saharan trade routes east of Awdaghost that bypassed the Ghanaian capital and shifted the caravans of North Africa to Oualata (Walata). These changes provided the southern Soninke and Malinke chiefdoms the chance to assert their independence. In the early 1200s, the southern Soninke chiefdom of Sosso took over most of former Ghana as well as the Malinke people. This set the stage for a struggle for Malinke independence against the Sosso, which ultimately led to the creation of the Sudanese kingdom of Mali.

The Mali Empire

The kingdom of Sosso benefited the most from the dissolution of the Ghana Empire, a process furthered by the collapse of the Islamic Almoravid state in present-day Morocco in the mid-twelfth century. Yet the Sosso Kingdom was short-lived; it was defeated by Sundiata Keita in 1235. Five years later, Prince Sundiata (also spelled Sunjata) captured Koumbi Saleh, laying the foundation for the great Mali Empire, the largest and richest that medieval Africa had yet seen.

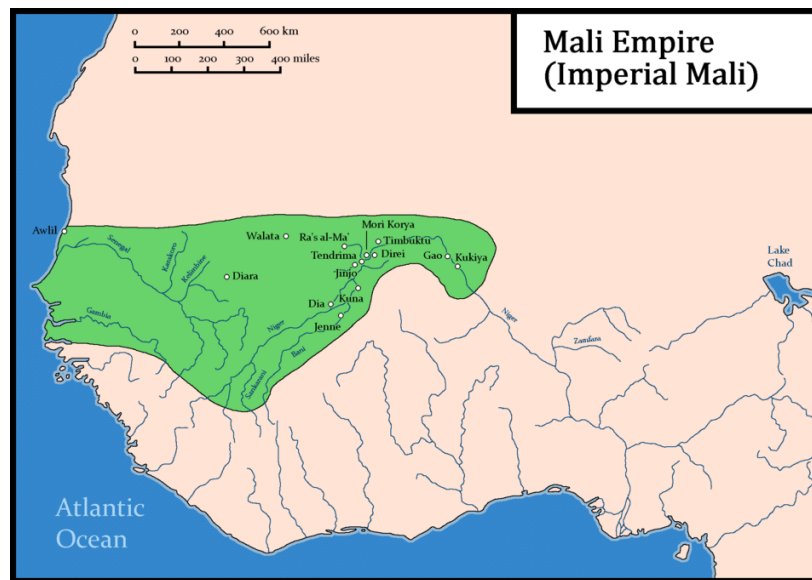


Figure 3.1.2: Map of the Mali Empire in West Africa, highlighting its territory along major river systems and trade centers including Timbuktu, Jenne, and Gao. (CC BY 4.0 ; HetmanTheResearcher via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 3.1.2.

In the twelfth century, the main source of gold in West Africa had shifted from Bambuk to Bure, located to the southeast in the savanna country. This shift not only ended Ghanaian control over trans-Saharan trade, it also brought new groups into the great Sudanese trading network of West Africa, notably the southern Soninke and Malinke-speakers of the savanna. The Sosso, a branch of the southern Soninke, were the first to take full advantage of these changed circumstances. Sometime around 1200, they broke away from Ghana and established a successor state under Soumaoro, their sorcerer-king. During its brief existence, their Sosso Kingdom earned a grim reputation for violence by raiding and conquering neighboring kingdoms, killing their rulers, and seizing tribute. During the 1220s, the Sosso army made raids on the Malinke-speaking Mande people to the south and then attacked the northern Soninke of Ghana, sacking their capital in about 1224.

In response to the incursions against the Mande, Prince Sundiata of the Keita clan, a survivor of one of Soumaoro's raids, rallied several of the region's small Mande kingdoms and united them against the invaders. The exploits of Sundiata Keita, a near-mythical figure in the Mande oral tradition, have been passed down by generations of bards. Beginning around 1235, Sundiata set about consolidating his control over the heartland of the Mande people, a region centered on the upper reaches of the Senegal and Niger Rivers. He then moved to expand the kingdom of Mali by taking control of all the Soninke peoples recently conquered by the Sosso. Their territory comprised much of the former kingdom of Ghana and its nominally independent vassal states, including Mema and Wagadu. These newly conquered territories were often administered indirectly, leaving friendly puppet regimes in place to do the bidding of the Malian monarch (a political strategy that bred resentment among certain of the Malian vassal states, including Takkur and Songhai).

When forming alliances against the Sosso, Sundiata convinced the other Malinke kings to surrender their title, *mansa*, to him. He thus became the sole *mansa*, the religious and secular leader of all the Malinke people. In a few short years, he had built up a vast realm. Its imperial capital was advantageously situated at Niani, in the southern savanna country of the upper Niger valley near the goldfields of Bure. Within Sundiata's lifetime, the Mali Empire extended from the forested margins of the southwest through the grassland savanna country of the Malinke and southern Soninke to the Sahel of former Ghana.

Awdaghost, the one-time trade center at the western extreme of trans-Saharan trade, remained in the hands of nomads, and its role was taken by the more easterly commercial center of Oualata, now the main southern desert port for trade traversing the Sahara. The kings of Mali were less interested in conquering the various small kingdoms and chiefdoms of the grasslands than in taking the Sahelian trading towns that linked the regional economy to the vast trans-Saharan trade. These towns were key prizes and included Oualata, Gao, Timbuktu, and Djenné.

Control of the towns and the trade routes they connected was one of several components in Mali's diverse economy, which included access to the Bure goldfields and the agriculturally rich rural areas, particularly those around Niani in the south of the country. Unlike in Ghana, rainfall in Mali, located in the southern savanna, was more abundant, and the farmers of Mali had no difficulty growing enough food to sustain the population. Different areas of the empire specialized in different crops. For example, sorghum and millet grew on the savannah, and rice flourished in the Gambia valley and around the upper Niger floodplain.

Meanwhile, the more northerly and drier Sahelian grasslands specialized in the grazing of camels, sheep, and goats.

Control over the gold-producing towns could present challenges for Mali's rulers. When a king conquered a region and attempted to spread Islam, the gold producers who refused to convert ceased mining operations, thereby threatening the Malian gold supply. This posed a serious risk to the imperial economy, so Malian rulers allowed gold areas to remain quasi-independent vassal states. Mali's gold trade was bolstered by events taking place elsewhere in the world. European kingdoms were again producing gold coins as the medieval economy improved. To meet the new demand, merchants from southern Europe sought to buy gold from their counterparts in North Africa. At the same time, new southerly trade routes were opened into the goldfields of the Akan forest (in present-day Ghana), from which sellers brought gold to the settlements of the Middle Niger. These developments to the north and south of Mali allowed the trans-Saharan gold trade to attain its greatest heights in the fourteenth century.

The pilgrimage of Mansa Musa to Egypt and Mecca in 1324–1325 represents the golden age of the Mali Empire. Mansa Musa, the most famous of the Malian kings and reputed to be fabulously wealthy, arrived in Cairo at the head of a huge caravan that accounts tell us included sixty thousand soldiers, five hundred captives, and a hundred camel-loads of gold. Received with great respect by the sultan of Egypt as a fellow Muslim, Mansa Musa spent lavishly, giving away so many gifts that the value of gold in Cairo fell and did not recover for twelve years.

3.2: Islam Arrives in Africa

Overview

This section covers the expansive spread of Islam and Christianity in Africa from the seventh century onwards. It highlights Islam's dominance over Christianity after its initial establishment in North Africa, the growth of Christianity in regions like Ethiopia, and the role of key figures. The text details the rise of Islamic states through trade and conquests, particularly in West Africa with Mali under Mansa Musa, fostering an Islamic identity and education.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Discuss how Christianity and Islam arrived and spread throughout western Africa

Christianity's Influence Before Islam

By the start of the seventh century, Christianity seemed firmly entrenched across Egypt and the Maghreb. But by the end of that century, the situation had changed dramatically as the religion of Islam swept across the region. Founded in the early seventh century, within a few decades, Islam had gathered armies that consolidated control of the Arabian Peninsula and the region of the Levant and established a bridgehead in Byzantine Egypt from which to launch the conquest of North Africa. As Muslim conquerors advanced across the region, they established settlements that eventually developed into the towns and cities that would house the officials of the Islamic Caliphate, the area ruled over by the leader of the Islamic state, the caliph.

Within a hundred years, three distinctive forms of Christian monasticism had emerged in northeast Africa. Many isolated hermits continued to dwell in northern Egypt. In southern and northwestern Egypt, however, religiously devout men and women preferred to live a communal existence. Monks in southern Egypt gathered together as bands of “brothers” who lived together and shared their daily work. Another type of monasticism emerged in northwestern Egypt. West of the Nile delta monasteries were more hierarchical in structure. At the head of the monastery was a man known as the abbot (“father”). Around him he gathered other men willing to live according to his directions and his teachings. Religious women also chose to engage in the monastic lifestyle. Like men, some chose to live in communities of the faithful, where they sometimes assumed leadership roles. Others, like Amma (Mother) Sarah, preferred a more solitary existence. According to legend, for sixty years Amma Sarah lived a severely ascetic existence in a small dwelling beside a river, probably the Nile, at which she never looked because she was so focused on the state of her soul that little else held interest for her. The way of life pioneered by the devout men and women of North Africa would be imitated by Christians in Europe and elsewhere.

Christianity quickly spread beyond Egypt southward to Ethiopia. The eventual rise of the Christian Kingdom of Aksum was due in large part to the efforts of the missionary Frumentius. Shipwrecked on the Eritrean coast, Frumentius was brought to the royal court and in the role of tutor converted King Ezana, then a devout polytheist. Following his baptism, Ezana sent Frumentius to Alexandria to ask that the head of the Christian Church in Egypt name a bishop for Ethiopia. The bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius, duly appointed Frumentius, who assumed the name “Selama.” It was likely Bishop Selama who founded Ethiopia’s first Christian monastery.

It was also from Egypt that Christianity spread westward in the second and third centuries along the North African coast to the Maghreb, the region of northwest Africa stretching from modern-day Morocco to Libya and encompassing a vast tract of the Sahara. One of the places in this region where Christianity appears to have flourished was Carthage. Like Christians in Egypt, the community in Carthage was also sometimes subject to Roman persecution during the third century. Most of the evidence we have of this community comes to us in the form of martyr stories. One such story, passed down through a diary, tells of the life of Perpetua, a young Christian mother imprisoned along with her infant and her pregnant servant Felicitas, who gave birth while in prison. Perpetua and Felicitas were executed with other Christians in the arena at Carthage.

To avoid a similar fate, many Christians in North Africa chose to renounce their faith openly while still practicing it in safety. Often the Roman authorities would be satisfied if church leaders simply handed over their scriptures. While this practice seemed

preferable to execution for some Christians, others found the refusal to accept martyrdom for their faith an inexcusable offense. Once the persecutions ceased in 313 with the Edict of Milan, which granted religious toleration to Christianity throughout the Roman Empire, many in North Africa refused to recognize those who had renounced their faith as leaders. They further held that any sacramental acts performed by these leaders after they had renounced the faith were invalid, including baptisms, weddings, and even the consecration of clergy. This caused a huge rift in the North African Christian community that became known as the Donatist controversy, named after a Carthaginian bishop named Donatus who led the movement. The problem grew to such proportions that Emperor Constantine had to intervene. Yet even after Donatus was exiled to Gaul (modern France) in 347, the controversy in North Africa continued.

Islam Arrives in Africa

In 661, the Umayya family of Mecca assumed control of the caliphate and combined the previous conquests into a functioning state with a capital at Damascus in Syria. Under their rule, the position of caliph changed from being a family member or close associate of the prophet Muhammad into a dynastic, heritable position passed from father to son. The Umayyad dynasty extended the reach of the caliphate through military conquest until it encompassed all of North Africa's Mediterranean coast. With Egypt as its launching pad, the Muslim conquest of Byzantine-controlled territories in the Maghreb region of North Africa proceeded in three stages between 642 and 709.

The earliest Arab accounts of the conquest date from some two hundred years later and are not very detailed, although they serve as the basis of our understanding of these events. After Egypt was conquered, the Muslim advance across North Africa stalled because of the thousand-plus miles of desert between the Nile delta and the Byzantine province of Africa centered on Carthage (in modern day Tunisia). But by 647, tens of thousands of Muslim soldiers had begun their march into the Maghreb. That same year, they engaged with and defeated the forces of the Byzantine governor at Tripolitania (in modern-day Libya).

By 665, a second invasion of North Africa was underway. Once again, an army of tens of thousands of Arab soldiers marched from Egypt, this time determined to take Carthage. Reinforced later by forty thousand soldiers from Damascus, the Islamic advance established a beachhead at Kairouan in modern-day Tunisia. Kairouan, which became the capital of the Islamic province of Ifriqiya, was the center of Islamic operations that plunged Arab armies into the heart of North Africa, including Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria. After prolonged campaigns against indigenous tribes and the forces of the Byzantine provincial government, Carthage finally fell to a third Arab invasion in 698.

After taking Carthage, Arab armies continued their sweep across North Africa. Along the way, their numbers were swelled by African soldiers. Many were forced to join the Arabs while others volunteered, hoping to share in the spoils that would result from a planned invasion of Spain, which took place in 711. That year, armies of the Umayyad Caliphate sailed across the Strait of Gibraltar and invaded the Iberian Peninsula. A few years later, Islamic forces had occupied all the major towns in the peninsula and advanced as far north as Narbonne, France. In less than a century, Islam went from being a novel religious movement centered on the Arabian Peninsula to an empire that stretched from Iraq in the east to the Atlantic coast of North Africa in the west. Despite its spectacular success, however, the Umayyad dynasty was unable to hold onto power and fell to revolution in 750. That year, the Abbasid family from Mecca seized control of the Islamic Caliphate and relocated its capital from Damascus to Baghdad, where it would remain for five centuries.

The Islamic military conquest of North Africa might have ended in the eighth century, but the spread of Islam did not. Islam was diffused throughout West, East, and sub-Saharan Africa primarily by merchants, traders, scholars, and missionaries. Muslim Berbers (Amazigh) carried the ideas of Islam from North Africa along the many trans-Saharan trade routes they used. In this way, the ideas of the religion penetrated the arid desert and reached West African trading towns like Gao and Koumbi Saleh, the capital of the Ghana Empire. Over time and through increased exposure, some ruling sub-Saharan African elites began to adopt it, and in some cases, they blended it with their traditional beliefs. Although the Ghanaian kings themselves did not convert, they recognized the importance of the Muslim-led trans-Saharan trade to their economy and so tolerated Islam. In acknowledgment of this fact, they allocated a second town of their capital to Muslim merchants and traders. This district took on a distinct Islamic character, a fact borne out by the presence of mosques within it.

The Consolidation of Muslim Rule

By the eleventh century, the broader Islamic world extended across North Africa and the western Sahara into Ghana in the western Sudan. However, even by this late date, Islam had made only a limited impact in West Africa, and many Amazigh groups tended to mingle both Islamic traditions and native African religious practices. Some more orthodox Muslims in the region found this less than satisfactory and sought to rectify the problem. What emerged were reformist Islamic kingdoms in West Africa. The

earliest was the Almoravid state, which arose in the eleventh century. Centered in Morocco and led by a radical Islamic scholar, the Almoravid state grew rapidly through Islamic fervor and military conquests. By the 1070s, the Almoravids controlled a vast portion of West Africa from the Mediterranean coast of Morocco to the edges of the Ghana Empire. In the process, many groups in these areas were more thoroughly Islamized. In this period, Islam truly began to expand among the people of Ghana.

By the middle of the twelfth century, the religious enthusiasm of the early Almoravid conquests had largely died down. The descendants of the early founders preferred the peace and luxuries of settled life in Morocco to jihad (literally “struggle” on behalf of Islam, which sometimes meant war). This situation was unsettling to some of the Amazigh, who then launched a successful war of religious reform against the Almoravids and established their own reformist West African kingdom, the Almohad Kingdom. The empire forged by the Almohad Caliphate was short-lived, however, and by the thirteenth century, it had been fatally weakened by internal rebellions.

As the geopolitical configuration of the West African kingdoms changed, the center of the regional economy shifted away from Ghana. By the thirteenth century, the kingdom of Mali had become the dominant political and economic force in the region. Unlike the rulers of Ghana, the Malian elite—including the *mansa* or king—converted to Islam. Mansa Musa, perhaps the most famous ruler of Mali, drew the attention of observers from Arabia to Spain when he went on pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324–1325. Renowned for the wealth of his kingdom, Mansa Musa distributed so much gold during a stopover in Cairo that the Egyptian economy suffered high inflation for more than a decade according to some reports. On his return to Mali, Mansa Musa brought with him Muslim scholars, architects, and books, all of which helped deepen the Islamic character of Mali. At Timbuktu, for example, the Djinguereber Mosque was built, and schools and universities specializing in the study of the Quran were established, cementing that city’s growing international status as a place of Islamic scholarship and learning.

By the end of the fourteenth century, West African rulers from Mali to Hausaland (present-day Nigeria) had adopted Islam and completed the Islamic encirclement of sub-Saharan Africa. Islam also spread throughout East Africa, although its progress there was checked by entrenched Christianity among the kingdoms of Nubia and the Ethiopian Kingdom of Aksum. By the 1200s, however, such resistance had been severely weakened, and many Christian kingdoms had become Muslim. An important exception was the Kingdom of Abyssinia, the Christian successor state of Aksum and Zagwe. Farther east, in the African Horn, the Muslim sultanates of Ajuran and eventually Adal rose.

Faith and Commerce in Africa

Islam faced less competition farther south. In the eighth century, Muslim traders from Arabia and Egypt began to settle in towns and trading centers along the Swahili coast, the part of eastern Africa that stretches along the Indian Ocean. By this time, it was home to countless settled Bantu communities, many of which prospered thanks to their role in connecting regional and burgeoning international trade. The Arab incomers intermingled and mixed with the Bantu peoples, creating a unique blended language and culture in an urban, trade-based society.

By the tenth century, the Swahili coast was acknowledged as an important commercial center. Writing in 915, the Arab traveler al-Masudi described the area’s vigorous trade, which included exports of everything from ambergris and ivory to gold and leopard skins and such imports as stone bowls, Islamic pottery, and glass vessels. By the 1200s, a distinct Swahili civilization had emerged, speaking a distinct Arabic-Bantu dialect, oriented toward the sea rather than the African interior, dominated by independent city-states that specialized in trade, and Islamic in faith. This Swahili language and culture had a powerful influence in the towns of the east African coast. Yet despite Islam’s success along the coast during the medieval period, it made virtually no impact on the peoples deeper in the East African interior until many centuries later.

The spread of monotheistic belief systems like Christianity and Islam throughout Africa proceeded along many fronts, including military conquest, commercial exchange, and cultural diffusion. At no time was the process straightforward and uncomplicated, and conquerors and merchants alike confronted unique challenges. While people adopted these religions for different reasons, whether a firm belief in a better afterlife or the tangible commercial benefits that accompanied conversion, the medieval period of African history nevertheless witnessed a revolution in the nature of belief. This is not to say that ancient African belief systems were eradicated. Indeed, while Christian missionaries and Muslim teachers had little respect for traditional religious practice in Africa, the adoption of Christianity or Islam was often the product of adaptation to the traditional practices and rituals of African peoples.

The Africanization of these faiths was largely circumstantial, of course. For example, whereas Christianity emphasized monogamy, Islam allowed a man to take several wives. Thus, Islam would find a more receptive audience among African societies that already practiced polygamous marriages, which were otherwise forbidden in the Christian tradition. The cross-pollination of religious tradition helped to perpetuate ancient African belief systems in both rural and urban communities. Indeed, the Africanization of

Islam among the peoples of the Swahili coast produced a distinctive form of the faith, one that included ancestor worship and the appeasing of spirits, as well as the development of unique grave-marking habits and the placement of traditional offerings in mosques.

3.3: African Kingdoms and Trade

Overview

This section discusses the emergence of the Swahili Coast as a key trade hub after the decline of the Kingdom of Aksum. It highlights the role of improved shipbuilding, Islamic caliphates, and changing trade routes. Bantu migrants contributed language and ironworking, fostering coastal communities engaged in trade.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain how geography and climate contributed to the growth of trade along the Swahili coast
- Identify the major commodities traded along the Swahili coast

The Swahili Coast and Indian Ocean Trade

Following the decline of the Kingdom of Aksum, the Indian Ocean trade shifted in part to the East African states. Factors that helped elevate the role of maritime trade in this region included improved shipbuilding, the rise of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates, the decline of the Tang dynasty—which disrupted overland trade—and even environmental changes such as desertification that made some areas of Africa uninhabitable.

While the Kingdom of Aksum was in decline, the internal migration of Bantu peoples was making its way from Africa's northwest to its east and southeast. The Bantu brought their language, their cultural traditions, and especially the technology of ironmongering. Many began settling in coastal communities in East Africa, where they displaced or mixed with the Khoisan and other indigenous African peoples, particularly on the coasts of modern Tanzania and Kenya. They also traveled south, establishing many fishing and trading villages. These exported ivory, hides, quartz, and gems in return for cotton, glass, jewelry, and other items the Bantu people were unable to make themselves. Port towns such as Shang and Manda began growing into major port centers. Soon Arab merchants began living among the Bantu peoples to participate in the newly developing trade.

Islam and the Shaping of Eastern African Culture

Yemeni traders began arriving along the coast in East Africa in the eighth century and settled in such important areas as Mogadishu (in modern-day Somalia) and the island of Zanzibar. Some of the earliest of these traders were the Kharijites, dissidents from Arabia who held very different opinions from the mainstream on the role of the caliph and the centralization of Muslim society. Many settled in Oman; there and in eastern Africa they developed complex networks of exchange with merchant families and villages and towns along the coast. Over time, the Muslim traders married into these families, mixing cultures and languages, particularly those of Arabs, Persians, and the Bantu-speakers of East Africa, and produced the Swahili (from the Arabic for “of the coast”) civilization.

Thanks to expanding trade with the Muslim world, coastal African traders and port cities from Mogadishu in the north to Sofala in the south adapted to long-distance trade and to Islamic civilization. This adaptation shaped what is known as the Swahili coast, a region of the East African coast dotted by dozens of city-states such as Zanzibar that date from the Middle Ages and served as centers of exchange, particularly of luxury goods.

After 1050, a new wave of Muslim immigrants arrived from the Iranian capital city of Shiraz and pushed many of the previous settlers farther south along the coast. They retained their Islamic cultural heritage and adopted much of the Bantu language, adding Arabic words and creating the language of Kiswahili, which is today a main language of modern Tanzania. The newcomers were eager to trace their Persian heritage as a means of legitimating themselves in the eyes of the peoples of the area, to which end some even claimed descent from the prophet Muhammad himself. In time, these Shirazi Muslims came to dominate trade along the coast, such as at Mombasa, Malinda, Lamu, and Sofala. Many chose to move onto the islands of the coast, particularly Pemba, Mafia, and Zanzibar. Those who dominated trade and claimed descent from the Middle East were known as patricians.

Muslim City-States

About forty new Muslim towns formed, many of them city-states independently ruled by their own sultans. A council of other patricians often served as advisors or sometimes simply ran the town without a sultan. In either case they formed an elite, hereditary merchant class, speaking Arabic or Kiswahili and trading with Africans in the interior for such items as ivory, furs, and gold. Gold came from Sofala, the southernmost settled point at that time, and was shipped to the northern part of the Swahili coast, where it was traded to the city-states and from there to the Indian Ocean trade network. The merchants of the city-state of Kilwa sought to bypass intermediaries and purchase gold directly. They therefore established the trading colony of Sofala in the region of the same name. Mostly due to its domination of the gold trade, Kilwa became the most important of the Swahili towns, although Zanzibar proved nearly as powerful. For periods in the fourteenth century, in fact, Kilwa ruled over many other towns.

The development of the Swahili city-states also had the effect of connecting the interior of central southern Africa with the wider trade of the Indian Ocean basin. Merchants from city-states such as Sofala, for example, traveled up the Zambezi and Limpopo Rivers to the great fairs that took place on the Zimbabwean plateau, a region dominated by the Bantu peoples of Great Zimbabwe. There they exchanged shells, ceramics, and coins from the East African coast for such high-value luxury goods as gold and ivory. Archaeologists have found everything from ancient Indian coins to fourteenth-century Longquan Chinese ceramics in the region of the Zimbabwean plateau, testifying to the reach of Swahili-borne oceanic trade in the African interior.

3.4: Chapter Themes to Discuss

Core Themes for Reflection and Discussion

This page offers different themes that appear throughout the sections in this chapter. The themes are meant to provide a framework in which discussion questions can be developed to inspire further exploration of the topics covered.

1. The similarities and differences between the political and religious developments in Northern Africa and Central and Southern Africa.
2. The similarities and differences between African empires and empires throughout history.
3. Issues of class and gender in developments in Africa.

3.5: Alternative Text Descriptions

Figure 3.1.1 Map of the Ghana Empire in West Africa

This image is a regional map of West Africa showing the location of the Ghana Empire. A highlighted area in the western Sahel marks the empire's approximate territory, spanning parts of present-day southeastern Mauritania, western Mali, and a small area near the border region above Guinea and Senegal. Surrounding countries labeled on the map include Mauritania, Mali, Senegal, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Algeria. A legend identifies the highlighted area as The Ghana Empire, and an inset globe shows the region's location in Africa.

Figure 3.1.2 Map of the Mali Empire (Imperial Mali)

This image is a regional map of West Africa titled **Mali Empire (Imperial Mali)**. A highlighted region stretches across the western Sahel from the Atlantic coast inland along the Niger River system, showing the empire's territorial extent. A scale bar at the top indicates distance in kilometers and miles. Several rivers are shown within the empire, including the Senegal River in the west and the Niger River and its tributaries in the central and eastern portions of the highlighted area.

The Senegal River flows toward the Atlantic coast near Awlil on the western edge of the map. Farther east, the Niger River forms the empire's main transportation and settlement corridor. Jenne lies on the inland Niger delta in the south-central part of the empire. Moving northeast along the Niger are Dia, Kuna, Jinjo, Tendirma, and Timbuktu. Timbuktu is located near a bend in the Niger River in the northeastern portion of the empire. Gao and Kukiya lie farther east along the Niger River beyond Timbuktu. Walata is located north of the Niger River in the central-western part of the empire, while Walil is situated near the Atlantic coast on the empire's northwestern edge. The highlighted territory is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the southwest and west. Lake Chad appears far to the east, outside the empire's boundaries. The map emphasizes the Mali Empire's control of territory connected by the Senegal and Niger river systems, with major settlements concentrated along the Niger River corridor.

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3.6: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials to Enhance the Course

These materials are provided to help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction. Some resources are openly licensed, while others may require institutional access or individual review before use in class.

Web Resources

These websites may help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction.

- [World History Encyclopedia](#) – Provides overviews of important people, places, and events throughout history. This resource can be useful for finding concise, expert-informed background information.
- [Fordham University Internet History Sourcebooks Project](#) – Provides translated, transcribed, and digitized primary sources. This resource can support source-based instruction, though instructors should review links carefully because some materials may be incomplete or less suitable for classroom use.

Videos

These videos can be used to explore a specific topic in the chapter in more detail and as an entry to further discussion on chapter topics.

- [TED-Ed: Mansa Musa, One of the Wealthiest People Who Ever Lived](#)
Length: 3 minutes, 54 seconds
Mansa Musa, the 14th century African king of the Mali Empire, is said to have amassed a fortune that possibly made him one of the wealthiest people who ever lived. Jessica Smith tells the story of how Mansa Musa literally put his empire – and himself – on the map.

4: TRADE AND STRIFE IN EUROPE, AFRICA, AND ASIA

Overview

Conflict arose between the Muslim and Christian worlds as Europeans and Muslims battled over territorial control throughout Europe and Africa, and most importantly, over Jerusalem: a site of significant importance to both religions. A series of Crusades launched by Christians in Europe against Islam were major events that shaped the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Europe and the Middle East. The twelfth through the fifteenth centuries also saw the arrival of the deadliest pandemic in World History. The Bubonic Plague (also known as the "Black Death") wrecked havoc on populations throughout Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. The plague altered the trajectory of history, contributing to the rise and fall of empires and traditional systems throughout feudal Europe.

[4.1: Crusades and Plague](#)

[4.2: Medieval Islam and Trade](#)

[4.3: The Mongul Empire](#)

[4.4: Chapter Themes to Discuss](#)

[4.5: Alternative Text Descriptions](#)

[4.6: Teacher Resources](#)

4.1: Crusades and Plague

Overview

This section explores the significance of Jerusalem to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which fueled the Crusades' religious motivations and pilgrimage desires. It details the organization and outcomes of the First and Third Crusades, the failures of the Second, and the role of leaders like Saladin, while addressing the impact of the Crusades on Christian-Muslim relations.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the centrality of the city of Jerusalem to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
- Explain how the crusading movement developed after the First Crusade
- Identify the origins and characteristics of the bubonic plague
- Describe the response to the Black Death in Europe

The Crusades

In Christian Europe, reforms within the Roman Church (among other things) emphasized the earthly life of Jesus. Therefore, the idea of being able to see and touch the physical land where he walked filled the imaginations of both the clergy and the laity. The image of heaven as a “heavenly Jerusalem” in the writing of monks and nuns heightened the common desire to see the earthly Jerusalem. Reports that the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim had destroyed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 1009 had outraged Christians, even though his son permitted its rebuilding. It is no coincidence, then, that the term medieval people most often associated with the crusading movement (before the term “crusade” was coined) was pilgrimage, or more specifically, armed pilgrimage.

Imagine a world in which medicine was utterly defenseless against a disease that could kill within hours. Vaccines and antibiotics had not yet been discovered, nor was the existence of germs and their role in contagion understood. While treatments existed, their efficacy was limited, and medical knowledge was unequally understood across regions and within class structures. At times, the defenses against illness were prayers (sometimes connected to pilgrimage), divination, the protective aromas of flowers and spices, and for the select few who could afford to flee heavily populated areas, retreat to the countryside. Such was the world of the Mediterranean basin and Afro-Eurasia in the middle of the fourteenth century when the bubonic plague ravaged central Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe.

Mecca, in the Arabian Peninsula, is the holiest city in Islam and the site of the annual pilgrimage called the *hajj*. The Al-Aqsa Mosque, built on the old Temple Mount in Jerusalem, is the third holiest site in the faith, and it is believed to be mentioned several times in the Quran as “the furthest shrine.” Muhammad is said to have made a special journey to be able to pray in Jerusalem and to be allowed to glimpse God before he continued his mission to convert others to Islam. Another shrine, called the Dome of the Rock, was also built near the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which is associated with Muhammad’s journey and with the biblical Abraham, an important figure to Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike. Jerusalem, then, was a city unlike others in its spiritual appeal to people of different faiths.

Historians have categorized the different crusades and given them numbers for convenience and to distinguish between various developments within the crusading movement. The Crusades were rarely well organized, however, and one of the challenges they all faced was trying to move people from one end of Europe to the other. For example, during the First Crusade, the followers of Peter the Hermit arrived in Constantinople before the official crusading army given sanction by the Pope. They did not wait for other groups to arrive and were ferried over to Anatolia (the Asian part of today’s Turkey) by Alexios, the Byzantine Emperor. The Turks destroyed this army, and very few survived to return to Constantinople. Later crusaders understood that gathering intelligence in Constantinople was crucial to avoiding Peter’s fate.

The First Crusade

The bulk of the First Crusade was directed by powerful aristocrats whose armies were better organized and prepared to fight than Peter's, even if most of its participants were not the most senior nobles of Western society. Emperor Alexios promised them aid in exchange for the return of Byzantine territory held by Muslims, which most initially agreed to. The crusaders crossed Anatolia and, after laying a bloody siege with little help from the Byzantines, took control of the port of Antioch, an ancient seat of Christianity in the Holy Land. After their victory, they felt Alexios was undeserving of either the city or their fidelity. The city was thus given to a Norman crusader who had no intention of delivering it to Alexios, straining the relationships between the crusaders and the Byzantine Empire.

The First Crusade finally reached Jerusalem in the summer of 1099. Before attacking the city, the crusaders fasted and walked around its walls as penitents, an act that shows the blending of pilgrimage with armed conflict. The crusaders then took the city, and in an act that shocked Muslims and Christians alike, they massacred the Muslim and Jewish inhabitants. The crusading armies then took other important cities in the area, and to secure their control they established the four Crusader States: the County of Edessa, the Principality of Antioch, the County of Tripoli, and the Kingdom of Jerusalem. These Crusader States were also called Outremer (literally “overseas”) by the French, and they claimed Jerusalem as their capital. Of all the Crusades, this was the only one that accomplished its objective.

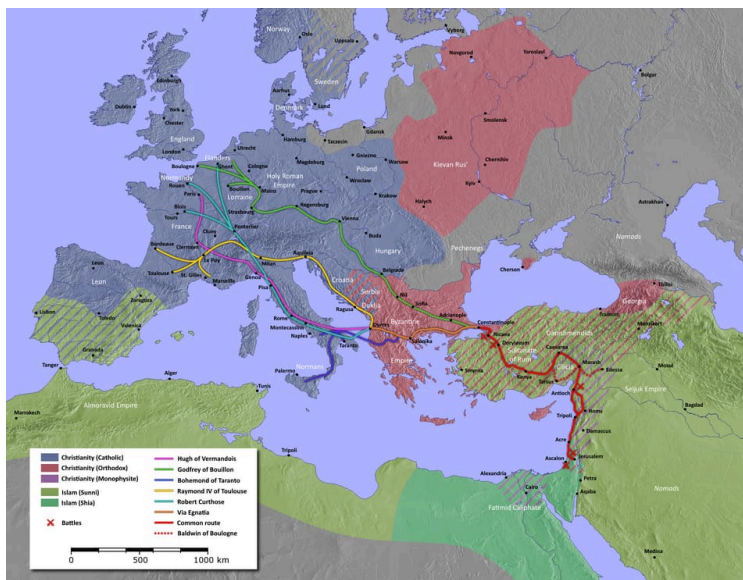


Figure 4.1.1: A map of the various routes taken by Christians in Europe to Jerusalem during the First Crusade. (CC BY 4.0; Miki Filigranski via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). Detailed Description of Figure 4.1.1.

Despite the surprising success of the First Crusade, Outremer suffered some critical problems from the beginning. The crusaders had alienated the Byzantine Empire by not returning to it important cities like Antioch or lands in the Middle East as they had promised. The European aristocrats and knights were eager to acquire lands for themselves, which meant they often fought with each other even when faced with a common enemy. And while there was always at least a trickle of warriors who made it to Outremer, the elite remained in desperate need of soldiers to defend their new territories.

The Muslims' confusion about the nature and goals of the crusaders, as well as internal conflicts among them, initially dampened their political and military response. The Muslims adapted quickly, however, especially the Seljuks who prevented many of the newly arriving knights from ever reaching Outremer. A Turkic aristocrat named Imad al-Din Zengi began to cultivate the image of a holy warrior opposing the crusaders. While he spent most of his career ruthlessly scheming against other Muslim rulers, he managed to take the city of Edessa, in the northernmost of the Crusader States. He was praised as a defender of Islam, but he was assassinated before he could continue his campaign against the crusaders. The loss of Edessa posed a serious threat to the remaining Crusader States, however, and prompted the pope to call the Second Crusade.

The Second Crusade

The Second Crusade, from 1147 to 1149, was heralded by a new generation of preachers like Bernard of Clairvaux who inspired believers to “take up the cross.” Bernard also wrote the rules for the Knights Templar, one of the new crusading orders, religious

orders of monks devoted to protecting Christian pilgrims and fighting to support Outremer. This crusade was led by powerful rulers, including King Louis VII of France and King Conrad III of Germany. In spite of this pedigree the armies of the Second Crusade were defeated in Anatolia in separate battles, and few soldiers reached the Holy Land. The kings accomplished very little, and many blamed the Byzantine emperor, who had learned to be distrustful of European armies. Bernard of Clairvaux was humiliated and apologized to the pope, claiming the sins of the crusaders had caused the defeat. It was a disaster that seemed as complete as the First Crusade had looked miraculous.

After this loss, the situation for Outremer only became more dire. Imad al-Din Zengi's successors were well liked, even by crusaders, and they strove to unite the Muslim princes to drive out the crusaders. The most famous of these successors was Salah al-Din, or Saladin in the Christian world. He was known for being humane, fair-minded, and, in Christians terms, chivalrous. He expanded his territory from Syria into Egypt and founded a new dynasty called the Ayyubids from the ashes of the Shia Fatimid Caliphate. He also took up his religious calling to wage jihad against the crusaders. In 1187, after years of gathering allies and eroding the military power of Outremer, he destroyed the crusaders at the Battle of the Horns of Hattin (in today's Israel). Within months, Jerusalem fell to Saladin.

The Third Crusade

The Christians' response was the Third Crusade (1189–1192). This crusade was prompted both by the fear that Outremer was about to be wiped off the map and by the desire to retake Jerusalem. Kings from England, the Holy Roman Empire, and France as well as other powerful princes answered the call. When they arrived in the last remaining Christian outposts in the Middle East, they quickly fell to squabbling with each other and the aristocracy of Outremer. As a result, the Christians were able to conquer the island of Cyprus and the coastline of the Holy Land but were unable to move farther inland. Eventually, Richard I of England, known in popular stories as Richard the Lionhearted, negotiated a treaty with Saladin that left Jerusalem under Muslim control but allowed Christian pilgrims to freely visit the city (a status quo that had largely been the rule before the crusades began). Both Saladin and Richard were praised as examples of chivalric virtue in Europe and heroes of their respective religions. But this was one of the last successes the crusaders were to have in the Holy Land.

Experiencing the Crusades

Despite the relatively brief existence of the Crusader States, they offered an example of Christians, Muslims, and Jewish people living and working together in a Christian kingdom surrounded by hostile states. Initially, however, the ignorance and religious bigotry of the crusaders led them to expel populations of Muslims or Jewish people from holy sites or places of strategic importance. In several cases, they perpetrated violent expulsions, killing civilians.

European Catholics also found in the conquered areas native Christian populations with a variety of different creeds. In most cases, these Christians were permitted to stay, but eventually, conflict over religious authority developed as Catholic bishops were named (by the pope or by the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem) as heads of communities with few Catholics. The Christians of the Middle East had also been acculturated by centuries of association with Orthodox Christianity centered on Constantinople and also of living under Muslim rule, which meant the Christianity of the east looked very different from that practiced in Western Europe. In some communities, Christians spoke Arabic, dressed like their Muslim neighbors, and worshipped in ways different from those of Catholics in Europe. The Greek Orthodox Byzantines were unhappy with the establishment of a well-organized religious rival in the Holy Land. Many native communities distrusted the crusaders not because they were of a different religion but because they arrived with brutality and did not share the cultural practices of the area.

Despite the initial violence by crusaders that scarred and scattered some Jewish and Muslim communities, policies of toleration and protection emerged. These had less to do with the crusaders' growing familiarity with the religious and ethnic groups in Outremer and more to do with the lack of settlers from Europe. Lords needed workers, and if they could not be had, then native communities had to be preserved, not brutalized. Even when Europeans began to adopt local cultural habits and grew familiar with Islamic practices, distrust of the unfamiliar remained common on all sides. The Islamic poet and warrior Usama ibn Munqidh, for example, could count Christians among his friends, but he admonished his readers never to trust the "Franks," or the newly arrived crusaders, whose ignorance he highlighted in his writing.

The crusaders organized their government in feudal terms, but the native populations never became serfs owing service to their lords. Instead, they paid their taxes in cash or in goods. This form of payment was based on existing practices, and in many ways, the crusaders left rural agricultural production unchanged. Christian landlords used forms of taxation and village administration similar to those their Muslim predecessors had, and they relied on Muslim scribes and interpreters given the diversity of the people and languages in the region. Islamic and Jewish communities maintained their own schools and legal institutions. Despite

the earlier violence and ongoing religious and ethnic tensions, the desire for trade and prosperity helped ease some of the tensions between the crusaders and native communities.

The lack of settlers from Europe ensured that the number of soldiers in Outremer was small. This was why the church promoted the crusading orders, and why the crusaders built imposing fortresses and castles, like the famous Krak des Chevaliers in Syria, that could be defended by a relatively small number of soldiers. Some European families, especially aristocrats with a family connection, went on sending crusaders, such as the dukes of Burgundy who continued to support the crusading movement. Many crusaders wrote letters to loved ones describing the military engagements in which they had taken part, often using provocative language to cast Muslims in a negative light. Often their expectation was that they would return home, and many pilgrims and crusaders did so rather than settling in the Holy Land.

The Modern Crusade?

As part of the secularization of society that occurred with industrialization and the rise of the nation-state, most modern Western cultures reject the idea of warfare for religious regions. Romanticized images of the Crusades persist in movies like *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005) and in video games like Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed*.

The rhetoric of holy war, and the memory of it in Islamic and Christian communities, also persist in modern political discourse in many Western countries, but in different contexts. As the medieval scholar Matthew Gabriele has argued, after 9/11, the concept was revived in the United States to describe its conflict with terrorism. "The consensus of American opinion now holds that, in the minds of Al Qaeda and other 'radical Islamists,' the attacks were part of a religious war, a cosmic, Manichean struggle that would only end with complete and utter victory of one side over another."¹

Gabriele argues that use of the term "holy war" is complicated because of all the assumptions that go with it, especially the way it "omits the messiness of everyday life in the spaces in which Muslims and Christians lived side-by-side in the medieval world—tensions, violence, and coexistence captured by Ibn Jubayr, Usama ibn Munqidh, and the Templar of Tyre among many others." A study of the Crusades, then, must take into account the lived history of religious toleration in the Middle Ages as well as the points of conflict.

The Origins and Spread of the Bubonic Plague

The bubonic plague, the most common variant of the disease caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*, raises egg-shaped swellings known as buboes near an afflicted person's lymph nodes in the groin, underarm, and upper neck areas. Other symptoms include fever, nausea, vomiting, aching joints, and general malaise. For the vast majority in the Middle Ages, death generally occurred within three days. The bubonic plague pandemic, which had far-reaching economic, political, social, and cultural effects throughout Afro-Eurasia, came to be known as the Black Death. This name, inspired by the blackened tissue the disease caused on the body, also came to express the fear and awe brought by a disease with a mortality rate ranging from 30 to 80 percent. That is significantly higher than the deadliest smallpox, influenza, and polio pandemics of the modern era. Although in its bubonic form the plague could not be spread from human to human, the rat flea became a major plague vector, an organism that spreads plague from one organism to another.

The black rat was one of the most capable animal hosts for the plague-carrying fleas. It was highly susceptible to the disease itself and an especially inconspicuous stowaway on trade caravans and merchant ships. Cases of bubonic plague proliferated as rats spread through the international shipping and trade routes of the Silk Roads and the Mediterranean Sea, where they colonized crowded dwellings in towns and cities. The spread of the plague only increased owing to the increased movement of people. First it was the Mongol armies, traveling over enormous distances and unintentionally bringing small mammalian stowaways among their foodstuffs. Then, owing to the Mongols' protection of merchants and others traveling great distances during the Pax Mongolica, the disease spread further and in new directions. Finally, those forced to leave their homes for survival amid famine and environmental change created yet another pathway for the disease to spread.

Plague-bearing fleas generally preferred to feed on small rodents such as rats and marmots, but when their rodent hosts succumbed to the plague, they secured their next meal from the nearest human. Two even deadlier variants of the disease eventually emerged during the fourteenth century: pneumonic and septicemic. The pneumonic form directly infected the lungs and was spread from person to person by coughing, with a mortality rate of 95 to 100 percent. The septicemic variant, which resulted from plague bacteria circulating directly into the bloodstream, was invariably fatal and, according to contemporary observers, seemed to kill within hours of the first onset of symptoms. While historians had surmised for many decades that the plague had spread in primarily one form (bubonic) and in one direction (east to west), new evidence increasingly suggests there was a far greater diversity of spread.

Although in many regions where it struck the plague was eventually understood to be contagious, at first the means of transmission were not recognized. Some saw the epidemic as a divine punishment from God, and others speculated that it was caused by a rare conjunction of planets creating noxious atmospheric conditions on Earth. Others blamed foreign travelers, minority religious communities, or vagrants. The desperation incited by the plague's relentless assault often led to scapegoating of marginalized populations, particularly in Europe.

Many historians have focused almost exclusively on the Black Death's impact on Europe, assuming that other regions were only minimally affected. The Americas and Australia were, indeed, entirely spared due to their geographic isolation. Other areas such as the Indian subcontinent experienced relatively mild outbreaks. However, we now know that the disease's spread affected much of Asia, the Middle East, Europe, North Africa, and possibly some regions of sub-Saharan Africa in what are now Ghana, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Ethiopia. And new scientific techniques such as genetic testing are strongly suggesting that the plague developed far earlier than modern historians had believed. In its most well-documented form, it ultimately spread along international sea and land trade routes in the 1340s and by 1409 had reached port cities of the Indian Ocean trade network in East Africa. Wherever it went, the Black Death left a trail of demographic destruction and long-term damage to social and economic networks, compounded by the combined effects of drastic climate changes, rebellions, and crop failures that preceded it in many parts of Afro-Eurasia in the early 1300s.

The Black Death in Europe

As the plague began wreaking havoc in the Mamluk Sultanate, it was also making its way to the ports of Europe via Silk Roads trade caravans and merchant ships sailing the Black Sea in 1346–1347. After striking the Mongol-controlled cities of Astrakhan and Sarai (in present-day Russia), when bales of flea-infested marmot fur were unloaded, the plague then traveled down the River Don, where it reached the city of Caffa (present-day Feodosiya, Ukraine), a center of trade on the Crimean Peninsula.

The plague's entry point into Europe, Caffa was also the site of a Mongol siege targeting Genoese traders who had taken refuge in the city. Gabriele de Mussis, an Italian notary clerk who witnessed the siege, wrote a gruesome account of the Mongols' efforts to launch plague-ridden corpses into the city. Although its reliability is difficult to establish, the story nevertheless demonstrates that even though the role of microbes was not yet known, dead bodies were believed to be sources of contagion. But the plague was most likely spread to Caffa by flea-infested rats independent of the Mongol siege. Caffa had long served as an important administrative center of Genoese trade, and its port was a major hub of merchant activity.

From Caffa, the plague made its way to Italy in the summer of 1347, when plague-bearing rats boarded ships headed across the Black Sea, through the Dardanelles, and onward to the ports of Messina and Genoa. From there, the disease was carried to the port of Marseilles and spread into the European interior along rivers, paths, and roads, leaving perhaps as many as twenty-four million dead, roughly 30 percent of the continent's population at the time.

The plague's arrival in Europe occurred after a period of economic contraction following a series of famines and crop failures earlier in the fourteenth century. In the early 1300s, a rising population and a relative decline in agricultural productivity had created an economic crisis and falling standards of living for all but the most privileged elites. For the vast majority of people living at the lower end of the economic spectrum, falling wages led to limited resources, poorer diets, and widespread malnourishment. Well before the plague's arrival in the 1340s, the European population was reeling from years of economic decline and poor nutrition, which may have weakened immune systems and made some people more vulnerable to attacks of infectious disease.

In addition to the demographic and economic impacts of the Black Death, modes of artistic and literary expression were significantly transformed in response to the plague's devastation. In the visual arts, the fears engendered by the omnipresence of death and decay initiated a new emphasis on realism that grappled with themes of salvation and mortality. Macabre representations of deathbed scenes and dancing skeletons became especially prominent reminders of the inevitability of death and fears of hell and damnation. Although the visual iconography of death reflected the collective cultural trauma associated with the plague, it also served as a potent reminder to celebrate life in the face of it.

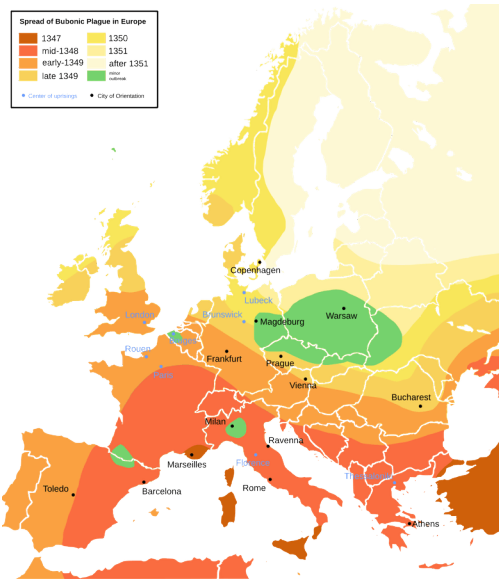


Figure 4.1.2: The spread of the Bubonic Plague across the European continent. (CC BY 4.0; Andy85719 via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 4.1.2.

Although the Christian Church remained a bastion of spiritual solace for many during the Black Death, social responses to the plague in medieval Europe ranged from increased piety to hedonism to resigned acceptance of inevitable death. Those who could afford to do so fled the crowded urban centers, but most did not have this luxury. Medieval European cities remained hotbeds of infection despite the efforts of some Italian cities to impose quarantine and travel restrictions. Some cities even closed markets and prohibited gatherings for funerals; others required the removal of the infected to plague hospitals. Lacking a germ theory of contagion, however, medical practitioners were unable to fully explain or remedy the plague, although centuries of early scientific observations led many to attempt the techniques and approaches that had served in outbreaks of other diseases. Failing to fully grasp how and why the disease was spreading, however, many of the devout turned to the clergy, who were also dying in record numbers, mostly because of their efforts to care for the sick. But they too were unable to prevent the plague's relentless toll.

Although some blamed the plague on earthquakes, astrological forces, or poisonous fog, most people in Christian Europe agreed it was a sign of God's displeasure. In some towns, the belief that communities had to be purged of "morally contaminating people" such as prostitutes and beggars also led to the scapegoating of Jewish people, who were falsely accused of causing the plague by poisoning wells. Regardless of the fact that their communities also suffered from the plague, Jewish people faced widespread persecution, escalating in several cities to full-blown massacres. Driven by the fire-and-brimstone dogmatism of late medieval Christianity, those who led the persecution of marginalized populations sought to placate God by building churches, developing cults to plague saints like Saint Roche, and hunting heretics and outsiders they believed had provoked divine displeasure.

The desperation and zealotry that inspired some responses to the plague in medieval Europe are perhaps best seen in the appearance of flagellants, people who believed that by publicly flogging themselves, they could atone for the sins of humanity and mitigate divine retribution. After this idea originated in Italy and took root in Germany, the flagellants traveled from town to town, reciting penitential verses and lashing themselves with leather whips until they drew blood. They were usually welcomed by townspeople who hoped they could bring an end to the plague epidemic. Occasionally, their rhetoric took an anti-Semitic turn, accusing the Jewish people of causing the plague to annihilate Christendom. The flagellants were active through much of Europe in the early years of the plague pandemic and may have even spread the disease through their contaminated blood. As a result of their increasingly radical orientation, however, by 1349 flagellants had been officially condemned by Pope Clement VI. Nevertheless, the inability of the church hierarchy to fully control this popular movement has caused some historians to argue that the church may have been losing some of its authority in the face of its inability to stop the plague.

The plague left each region it affected with long-term economic and demographic consequences, including widespread depopulation and cyclic outbreaks of the disease in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Old systems of belief came into question, and ancient social hierarchies shifted to accommodate the significant population losses that followed the plague. Peasants, laborers, and those at the lower end of the socioeconomic hierarchy tended to experience the greatest mortality, but for those who survived, pronounced labor shortages led to the demise of some industries and more favorable working conditions in others. The disadvantaged began to question whether social elites really did enjoy God's privilege, as the social hierarchy generally preached, since they too succumbed to the plague and failed to care for those to whom they bore responsibility.

After the plague had run its course by the 1350s, it recurred in cyclical fashion several times during the second half of the fourteenth century. It was never fully eradicated, though subsequent waves were not as deadly as the initial outbreak, with the exception of the Great Plague of London in the 1660s and an especially virulent outbreak that began in China in 1894. Outbreaks have occurred more recently in parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, but surveillance, preventive measures, early diagnosis, and treatment with antibiotics remain the most effective approaches to preventing its spread.

4.2: Medieval Islam and Trade

Overview

This section covers the significance of trade networks in the spread of Islam, particularly through maritime and overland routes, influencing regions like Indonesia. It highlights the rise of the Fatimid Caliphate and the Seljuk Empire's expansion, emphasizing cultural patronage and trade despite internal conflicts. Additionally, it discusses trans-Saharan and Silk Road trade transformations facilitated by key intermediaries and commodities.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the main trade routes across the Sahara in the sixteenth century
- Analyze the ways in which Islam facilitated the development of trans-Saharan trade
- Discuss the trade in goods, technology, and ideas that occurred along the Silk Roads
- Describe gunpowder weaponry and its effect on early modern society

Muslim Caliphates and Trade

Trade networks were critical to the spread of Islam, as seen in the wake of Muslim raiders entering the Sindh area of northwest India in the early eighth century. Maritime networks centered on the Indian Ocean also played a large role in this expansion. From India and through both the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, Muslim sailors began to dominate much of the Malabar Coast of western India and the Swahili coast of eastern Africa, becoming fixtures in the lucrative Indian Ocean trade all the way to China and beyond. The influence of Muslim traders throughout the region went far beyond commercial exchange, however. One of the most significant results of this trade-based diffusion of Islamic culture in South and East Asia was the emergence of powerful states in the area of what is today Indonesia, which has the world's largest Muslim population today.

The Fatimid Caliphate

Observing the challenges the Abbasids faced on the eastern frontier, and the success of the Umayyad Caliphate in Spain, the early tenth-century Shia leader Abu Muhammad Abdullah declared himself the proper leader of the Shia and successor to Muhammad's son-in-law Ali. Not all Shia agreed; Abdullah's claims to be descended from Ali were questionable. His leadership and charisma, however, along with the support of dedicated Amazigh soldiers, helped him establish the first and only Shia caliphate in North Africa in 910, which challenged the political power of the Abbasids and their religious influence.

The state Abu Muhammad Abdullah established is called the Fatimid Caliphate because his dynasty claimed descent through Ali's wife and the Islamic prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatima. The Fatimid caliphs also claimed to be imams, Shia with spiritual authority over Muslims, based on either their hereditary descent from Ali or their manifestation of God's will on earth. In 969, the Fatimids conquered Egypt, which became the center of a powerful state that controlled most of North Africa. Then they began to threaten the Abbasid heartland by taking Syria and parts of the Arabian Peninsula, and controlling the holy city of Mecca.

The Seljuk Empire

The devolution of Abbasid authority under the Fatimids and the Umayyads at Cordoba is striking because both dynasties had rival claimants to the title of caliph, and the Fatimids established a state that threatened Sunni Islam. This breakdown of central authority was not limited to distant regions, however. By the late ninth century, the Abbasids permitted, or were forced to accept, the establishment of emirs within their territory. A dynasty called the Samanids controlled the regions of eastern Persia called Khorasan and Transoxiana, and the Buyid dynasty took control of Abbasid territories in Persia and Mesopotamia in the early tenth century. Although they did not claim the title of caliph for themselves, they paid only minimal homage to the Abbasid state and forced its rulers to recognize their independent authority. The dynasty that benefited most from this chaos was an outside group called the Seljuks.

The Seljuk Turks were a branch of the Oghuz Turks, a confederation of Turkic clans. These seminomadic clans could form larger confederations or leave them at will, a type of organization much like that of the Mongols. The Oghuz had migrated from central Asia after surviving conflicts with other Turkic confederations in the eighth century and displacing various pastoral groups. Like many steppe peoples, they practiced a polytheistic religion, with a hierarchy of gods and spirits headed by Tengri the sky god. Specialists called shamans were believed to possess powers to negotiate for favor and fortune with these deities.

The initial contact between the Oghuz and the world of Islam was not peaceful. Raids between the two became the source of enslaved men who served the Abbasids as mamluks. The Seljuk dynasty is named for the clan leader Saljuq, who moved south from the Oghuz state in the tenth century and came into contact, often violent, with other Turkic peoples and Abbasid emirs. The leaders of the Seljuks converted to Islam, a development that may have been a source of conflict with the Oghuz but drew them into the orbit of the Abbasids. Under leaders like Tughril, they began to establish their own state within and beyond the Abbasid domains in the eleventh century. They drove off other Turkic peoples in Afghanistan, pushing them toward India. They fought successfully against the Byzantine Empire and some of its client states, especially the Kingdom of Georgia. Under Alp Arslan, they seized Anatolia from the Byzantines and posed an existential threat to Constantinople. By the middle of the eleventh century, the Seljuks had created an empire through conquest that extended from India to the Mediterranean.

The Seljuk leaders did not take the title of caliph from the Abbasids but instead adopted the name sultan, meaning “the authority.” Because they were new converts to Islam who were not Arabs and had no connection to the family of Muhammad, the title of caliph seemed out of their reach. They acknowledged the position of the caliph, but real authority was in their own hands. Eager to show their zeal by fighting against Christians and Shia Fatimids, the Seljuks now controlled the heart of the Islamic civilization, and considerable Byzantine territory.

The map shows the peak of the Seljuk's territorial control. The darkest shaded area reveals the extent of the empire, with the lighter areas showing where raids were mounted to solidify the region. Present-day Turkey is (formerly part of the Byzantine Empire) is lined to represent the period in which the Byzantine Empire paid tribute to the Seljuks.



Figure 4.2.1: Map showing the core Seljuk Empire, eastern territories under Seljuk control or influence in Central Asia, and the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum centered on Konya. Major cities from Anatolia to Central Asia are identified. (CC BY 4.0; Ktrinko via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). [Detailed Description of Figure 4.2.1.](#)

The Seljuks built their legitimacy by defending Sunni Islam and investing in cultural and artistic projects. They built mosques and supported the work of religious scholars and missionaries. The famous philosopher al-Ghazali served in the courts of Seljuk sultans. Despite his opposition to the way Ibn Sina (known in the West as Avicenna) had applied Greek logic to matters of faith, he nevertheless worked in natural sciences and mathematics. Like the Abbasids before them, the Seljuks patronized the arts and built mosques, madrasas, and palaces. They supported the work of scholars like the mathematician and poet Omar Khayyam. Like the earlier Arab conquerors, they also adopted Persian as a literary language and embraced urban living.

They participated in the exchange of culture, and the promotion of Islamic cultural institutions revolved around the courts of the aristocracy, mosques, and madrasas. The Seljuks also stand out as promoters of the caravansaries, inns along the trade routes that had long offered a safe place to stay for those traveling long distances.

Strict Sunnis, the sultans pushed back the Shia Fatimids and took control of Jerusalem and eventually Mecca. While they were still generally tolerant of other religions like Judaism and Christianity, they ensured that Sunni Islam was dominant by insisting on regular payments from non-Muslim communities and by refusing to permit Shia in high offices. The Seljuks' success in fighting against Christian states fueled claims of religious oppression in western Europe.

In many ways, the arrival of the Turkic peoples and their conversion to Islam helped to revive the fortunes of Sunni Islam and the fight against Christian states. Despite the victories of leaders like Alp Arslan, however, by the end of the eleventh century, conflicts over the succession were taking their toll. Members of the dynasty began to fight each other and break the empire into smaller states. One of the most important successor states was established in Anatolia, near the Byzantine Empire, and was called the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum, a name that reflects the region's past as part of the Roman and then the Byzantine Empires.

The infighting among the Seljuks, their conflict with the Fatimids, and the rival caliphate in Spain fragmented the Islamic world. Attempts by the Abbasids to take effective control of their empire led to more complications for Seljuk rule. Fatimid power was threatened by internal instability when the caliphs incorporated Turkic cavalry, alienating traditional Amazigh cavalry. The Islamic world continued to produce brilliant scholars and poets who engaged with Persian, ancient Greek, and Indian ideas. Politically, however, the Islamic kingdoms were divided and weak. This fragmentation enabled Christians from western Europe to establish their own colonies in the Islamic world by means of the Crusades.

Saharan Trade Routes

Camel caravans from North Africa began trekking across the Sahara Desert in antiquity (the period Before the Common Era, or BCE). The trade reached a peak during the ninth to the fifteenth centuries of the Common Era (CE), when lines of thousands of camels traveled a web-like network of trade routes that spanned the whole of North and West Africa. They moved a variety of goods, including copper, salt, ivory, enslaved people, textiles, and gold, northward from sub-Saharan West Africa to the Mediterranean coast, eastward to the Horn of Africa and Egypt, and southward into the Sahel, the semiarid region between the Sahara Desert and the Sudanian savanna to the south.

Long before the trans-Saharan trade route's golden age, commerce in the Sahara was relatively localized and consisted of the exchange of agricultural products like rice, sorghum, and millet for the products of new technologies such as iron goods or rare commodities such as salt. These early inter- and intraregional exchanges were made possible by pack animals like mules, horses, and donkeys, but trade was limited because these animals were biologically ill-suited for the extremes of the Saharan environment. When the Romans conquered North Africa in the second century BCE, they introduced the camel, which was already a beast of burden in Egypt. Capable of lasting days without water and having feet and eyelashes adapted for travel in sandy environments, camels enabled the people of North Africa to carry on regular long-distance trade across the Sahara for the first time beginning in the eighth century CE. The camel saddle, invented by the Tuareg people of North Africa, enabled camels to be ridden, which furthered their usefulness to trans-Saharan trade. The introduction of the date palm also helped make systematic long-distance trade possible. The fruit of the date palm is high in sugar, a natural preservative, and when dried it provided a high-calorie, easily transportable food supply to fortify traders on long journeys.

Trans-Saharan trade was also critically dependent on highly paid nomadic North African Berber (Amazigh)¹ intermediaries and the string of oasis towns that connected distant parts of the network in an otherwise unforgiving landscape. Oasis towns provided traveling merchants with places to rest, water their animals, and acquire provisions for the next leg of their journey. They served the same function as the caravanserais, inns for travelers that existed throughout the Islamic world, including along the Silk Roads in Asia, in the Middle East, and in Egypt and Morocco. The Imazighen's skills as caravan leaders and go-betweens facilitated the movement of everything from gold ingots to ostrich feathers across thousands of square miles of desert. Yet Amazigh traders were responsible for much more than the movement of goods and commodities. They were also devout believers in Islam who spread Islamic culture, law, custom, and tradition and helped to fuse a network of local and regional trade routes into a truly continent-spanning enterprise.

A principal commodity exchanged during this early stage of trade was salt, which acted as a sort of currency. Not only is salt necessary to human and animal life, but it also helps to preserve foods, an important concern of people in an age before refrigeration technology existed. Communities on the edges of the desert acted as intermediaries in this trade, trading salt to forest tribes to the south that had access to goldfields. Only over time were other highly valuable trading goods introduced, such as gold and copper, which were then passed across the desert from tropical West Africa to the far reaches of the North African coast and beyond.

Trade across the Sahara gradually intensified between the fifth and seventh centuries CE, and in the eighth and ninth centuries, a series of main links became established. These developments were made possible primarily as the result of two important

changes. First, the Ghana Empire of West Africa emerged as the earliest large-scale political entity in the region, and second, the Islamic conquest of North Africa led to the rise of Muslim states and a general cultural unification of the region. Combined, these developments brought people with shared interests and similar characteristics together in conditions that enabled them to consolidate and expand their economic interests, particularly as demand increased for gold from the Sudan.

As trade grew, Arab merchants in Morocco and in Islamic states in North Africa began to buy sub-Saharan gold. By the eleventh century, the gold trade was so successful that it was influencing commerce and society in the Mediterranean. For the first time, West African gold was used to mint European coins. This growth in the market for gold spurred the expansion of new links in the trans-Saharan trade route and resulted in the opening of a major trade artery between the towns of Sijilmasa, north of the Sahara, and Awdaghost to the south.

One of the greatest early Sudanic empires, the powerful states that emerged in the region of West Africa south of the Sahara Desert, was Mali. Mali brought together the key components that had contributed to the earlier expansion of trans-Saharan trade. On the one hand, its rulers were Muslim, and the fact that they shared the same religion with many trans-Saharan traders strengthened the ties between these groups. On the other hand, these rulers exerted direct control over the goldfields at Bure. The vitally important trade centers of Timbuktu and Gao were part of the empire, as were the trading centers of Awdaghost, Oualata (Walata), and Tadmekka. Although both gold and salt remained the principal commodities of exchange, other commodities such as textiles, enslaved people, ivory, precious stones, and shea butter (a vegetable fat from the shea tree nut) were also regular exports.

During the ninth to fifteenth centuries, caravans routinely plied the sands of the Sahara, moving goods from distant West Africa to Egypt and centers of trade in North Africa, and from there onward, either across the Mediterranean to southern Europe or overland by way of the Sinai Peninsula to the region of the Levant in the Near East (modern Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel). From there, West African commodities could arrive at one of the land-based western terminals of the Silk Roads in such trade centers as the coastal city of Tyre in Lebanon, and farther inland, at Aleppo in Syria. Africa at this time was a key player in the vast commercial enterprise that laid the foundation for the first global economies.

Travel and Exchange along the Silk Roads

By the first century BCE, China had become firmly established as the eastern end of the Silk Roads, with Rome as the western end. The Romans also traveled by sea to secure the goods that came through the ports of western India, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf, as well as trading through key centers in Syria such as the great caravan cities of Petra and Palmyra, the Nabatean city famed as the main entry point for Chinese silk and eastern incense. In exchange for such goods, the Roman provinces of North Africa traded Roman glassware, wool, gold, and silver through intermediaries in the Middle East and central Asia and even into India.

Before they reached the Romans, trade goods from the east were largely in the hands of the Kushan Empire. The Yuezhi confederacy in Bactria had unified to form this empire, trading with both China and the Indian subcontinent and providing a conduit between the two, particularly from the city of Taxila. The Kushan Empire managed to stabilize the trading routes connecting the Parthian western leg of the road with that of the central Asian steppes, spreading its control halfway down the Indian subcontinent in the process and ideally positioning itself to handle trade between India, China, and the Mediterranean.

By the third century CE, many empires using the Silk Roads had begun to decline, including the Romans, the Kushans, the Parthians, and the Han. The Kushans and Parthians were replaced by the Sasanids in Persia, who also annexed the northern portion of the Kushan Empire. The Gupta soon controlled the southern portion of India. The Mediterranean world was changing too; the Silk Roads' new trade destination was the surviving Eastern Roman Empire, known as the Byzantine Empire from the late fifth century onward, following the fall of Roman dominance in western Europe. These new players continued and extended the trade network.

Long-distance trade during the early and later Middle Ages was fraught. The Silk Roads were not a four-thousand-mile-long superhighway outfitted to bridge eastern and western markets from Rome to China but rather a series of interconnected roads, many ill maintained, that were built up over time and eventually linked dozens of oasis towns and market cities such as Palmyra in the west and Bactria in the east. It is most useful to imagine it as a network of "legs" on a journey, along which merchants and traders traveled via caravan with their wares, pausing to rest at caravansaries along the way. Goods changed hands many times over these long distances, being exchanged between merchants who each traveled only part of the "road," and their price increased the farther they went from their origin.

Buddhism arrived in China sometime during the period known as the Six Dynasties (220–589 CE). Monks traveling the Silk Roads

between northern India and Afghanistan brought its universalizing message of a lifestyle open to all and offering salvation to any willing to listen, and they found a receptive audience among countless merchants traveling between China and central Asia. Over time, Buddhist monks established themselves in small communities and set up monasteries at a string of oases the length of the Taklamakan Desert—a chain that ran all the way to the Great Wall in northern China. At one of these, Yungang, weary travelers were greeted by five huge Buddhas carved from the cliffs and surrounded by tens of thousands of statues representing Buddhist deities and patrons. This great religious complex offered not only an opportunity to rest and recover but also an entry point to the Chinese market.

Many legs of the Silk Roads were perilous in the extreme. For example, upon departing Chang'an, the Tang capital and eastern terminus of the network, travelers almost immediately confronted the Gobi, the largest desert in Asia. Its terrain is compacted and rocky and thus ideal for long-distance travel by camel, but the lack of water necessitated the establishment of caravansaries, usually about a day apart along the road connecting China to the central Asian interior. To geographic and environmental hazards, travelers could add warring tribes and roving bandits and thieves. A menace since the beginning of the Silk Roads, robbers targeted the convoys of precious cargoes as they headed across open and unprotected terrain. While small armies and groups of archers accompanied some larger and better-funded caravans, and caravans sometimes merged into “super-caravans” for safety, these were the exceptions, not the rule. Most travelers undertook a caravan journey at great risk to themselves and the goods they carried.



Figure 4.2.2: Silk Road trade map showing major routes, commercial centers, stopovers, and regional goods across Eurasia around 1200 CE. (CC BY 4.0; Gabriel Moss via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 4.2.2.

Despite its dangers, however, the overland route was more appealing for many than the alternative, a hazardous and costly voyage across the sea. Pirates lurking in coastal waters harassed ships on the Maritime Silk Roads, and shifting weather and poorly charted waters posed enormous challenges to even the sturdiest vessels and hardiest merchants. The loss of a ship to a sudden storm or shallow reef (as happened repeatedly at the Gelasa Strait in Indonesia) could mean not only the deaths of crew and passengers but also the ruin of the merchants whose goods were sunk. To most merchants and traders, the risks posed by seaborne trade, not to mention the cost of hiring a ship and its crew, made it the less appealing of the two Silk Road routes open to them. As land empires such as the Sasanian Persians’ realm in central Asia grew more stable, the overland route became even more attractive.

The Sasanian Persians were able to provide a great deal of security, allowing for more peaceful and effective trading. Much of their power in fact relied on and was derived from this trade. The Sasanian Empire was soon displaced by the Islamic Umayyad Caliphate, however, which came to control trade and produce textiles and other goods of its own to sell along the route, although demand for Chinese silks continued. In 750, the Umayyads in turn were overthrown by the Abbasids (749–1258), a new Islamic dynasty that sought to expand eastward from the Middle East even as the Tang dynasty drove westward from China. The Abbasids moved their capital to Baghdad, along the Tigris River in what is modern-day Iraq. This change streamlined their dominance of the Silk Roads, letting them use the Persian Gulf to effectively bypass the Red Sea, which was the seaborne trade route closest to the former Umayyad capital in Syria.

Despite their ambitions, the Abbasids’ eastward expansion was halted in 751 when a combined Arab-Tibetan army met Tang

forces in the Battle of Talas River near the town of Atlakh. Initially a stalemate, the battle turned in favor of the Abbasids when Turkic forces that were allied with the Tang switched allegiances and joined the Abbasids. Although the Abbasids were victorious, the engagement marked the end of expansion for both empires.

Throughout the rise and fall of these empires and others, control of trade routes, particularly the Silk Roads, was paramount. For example, people from the central Asian steppes exchanged hides, wool, and livestock (especially horses) for Chinese manufactured goods such as lacquerware, silk, floss, paper, porcelain, and iron tools. These goods and commodities were then traded for similar items along the way, eventually reaching buyers as far away as the Sanhaja tribes of West Africa and the Egyptians and Ethiopians in East Africa. The Silk Roads were never as vital to the Chinese economy, however, as they were to the others. The domestic Chinese economy was large enough to meet all the needs of the state and its people without imports, frustrating European powers intent on breaking into the Chinese economy well into the modern period. At the same time, there was great desire for Chinese goods by western peoples, meaning that the balance of power in trade was almost always skewed in favor of East Asia.

The silk that gave the Silk Roads their name may have originally come from China, but it was not long before many other states began raising silkworms and processing the silk thread from their cocoons into luxurious cloth. The Byzantines, legend has it, acquired silkworms clandestinely in the sixth century when Christian monks visiting China spirited some cocoons away in hollowed-out walking sticks. Much of the labor of producing silk fell to women, who grew the mulberry trees needed to feed the silkworms, unraveled the cocoons, and wove the threads into textiles. They were vital to the trade that led to Chinese dominance of the luxury goods market that the Silk Roads were so famous for. The men were responsible for the upkeep of the tree farms and the sale and exchange of the finished products. Many rural and even urban areas survived by producing silk cloth in this way, like the cottage industries that thrived later in Europe.

Social Change and the Adoption of Gunpowder

Societies like those of the Turks and the Mongols had originally gained power as a result of their prowess as mounted warriors. Turkish fighters, whether Janissaries or mamluks, were renowned for their archery and equestrian abilities. The Mongols also awed their opponents with their skills as archers and riders. In the tenth century, however, the invention of gunpowder transformed the manner in which these societies and others made war.

The first recorded use of gunpowder in battle occurred in China in 919. Scholars believe gunpowder was invented as a by-product of experiments conducted by Chinese alchemists, a group of people who pursued ways to turn ordinary metals into gold. A painting from Dunhuang in western China depicts a figure holding a tube from which flames are issuing forth. In 1126, a Chinese army was described as using similar tubes made of bamboo to fire projectiles at their opponents. Only six years later, another Chinese army made use of a bamboo cannon on wheels to destroy the walls of a city to which they had laid siege. By the thirteenth century, the Chinese were forging cannons from bronze.

Gunpowder and guns, along with the knowledge of how to manufacture them, spread westward from China with invading Mongol armies. This was not entirely new technology, however. The Arabs of this region already knew how to create flammable substances using petroleum, and the Byzantines employed a substance made from naphtha, called “Greek fire,” to set enemy ships alight. Arab texts of the thirteenth century contain numerous recipes for gunpowder and descriptions of rockets and other weapons that made use of it. The Mongols employed gunpowder and incendiary devices when laying siege to cities but did not adopt guns for fighting on horseback. The Arabs and Turks did, however. At the Battle of Ain Jalut in 1260, the mamluk forces that successfully fought off a Mongol army and prevented it from conquering Egypt were armed with an early type of cannon.

Europeans probably first encountered early versions of firearms in Russia, where the Mongols had introduced Chinese technology. Western Europeans discovered recipes for gunpowder in Arabic texts brought back from the Crusades or, in the case of Spain, introduced by the Muslims who established kingdoms there from the eighth through the fifteenth centuries. By the fifteenth century, numerous European countries had begun to use gunpowder and guns in battle. Some of the earliest weapons employed exploding gunpowder to fire arrows. By the thirteenth century, European and Ottoman armies were using early cannons called bombards to destroy the walls of cities and fortresses.

The use of early firearms, cannons, and gunpowder transformed the ways in which wars were fought and also changed the societies that adopted this technology. On the battlefield, explosions could not only kill soldiers but also panic horses ridden by mounted warriors and thwart cavalry charges. Before the adoption of bombards and cannon, sieges of cities could drag on interminably; some lasted for years. So long as the people within the city walls had food and water, they would not surrender. Bombards and cannon allowed armies to breach stone walls, however; even a modest opening gave enemy attackers the opportunity to enter the city and do battle with the forces within. It was the use of cannon that finally allowed the Ottomans to

destroy the walls of Constantinople and bring an end to the Byzantine Empire in 1453. Earlier attempts to defeat the city had failed because armies could not break through the walls and were unable to carry on a prolonged siege that could reduce the Byzantines to starvation. The ability to destroy fortifications helped rulers assert power both in battle and at home. Nobles found it difficult to challenge the power of rulers whose cannon could destroy their castles.

The use of cannon also changed the nature of military defenses. To give added strength to city or fortress walls, earthen banks were built up inside them. Fortresses and city defenses were designed in the shape of stars so guns could be aimed in all directions, preventing an enemy from bringing artillery within reach of the walls. Engineers who knew how to build or destroy the new styles of fortress were in high demand. Paying for their expertise and for cannon, gunpowder, and cannon balls was expensive; rulers in societies that adopted guns taxed peasants heavily to pay for this new style of warfare.

The nature of armies changed as well. Before the invention of gunpowder, cavalry were the most effective troops a commander could place in the field. Mounted warriors could attack and escape much faster than soldiers on foot, and they could reach down from horseback to deliver fatal blows to infantry or trample them underfoot. Guns deprived the cavalry of these advantages because they could kill riders and their mounts before they came within striking distance of opponents on the ground.

The development of handheld guns for individual soldiers lagged behind improvements in large artillery pieces like cannon. Early firearms were heavy and difficult to carry and maneuver. An arquebus, one of the earliest guns, had to be propped up on pieces of wood to be fired because it was too heavy to hold easily. Early firearms were also unreliable, inaccurate, and slow to load. A skilled archer like a mamluk soldier could fire several arrows in the time it took to reload a gun. Indeed, even after firearms were introduced, many armies still relied on infantry armed with bows and arrows. The Ottomans, for example, used peasant soldiers called *azebs* who carried bows and arrows, sabers, and sometimes halberds (weapons that combined a spear and an axe). *Azebs* bore the brunt of the enemy's frontal attack before moving to the side and allowing cannon and Janissaries with guns, who had been stationed behind them, to fire at the oncoming foe.

The adoption of firearms like the arquebus required the development of new military tactics to enable them to be used effectively in battle. For example, military commanders adapted the technique of volley fire, which had been used by archers and crossbow fighters, to the use of firearms. Because early guns like the arquebus were so inaccurate and took so long to reload, a row of soldiers was trained to fire and then immediately move to the rear behind other rows of troops who, in turn, stepped to the front, fired, and then moved back. The soldiers in the rear had time to reload their guns as others fired their volleys. To help soldiers remember the complex series of steps to be followed in loading their guns, the Ming general Qi Jiguang composed a song listing them in turn.

In most societies, male members of the nobility, often the only ones who could afford to purchase and pay for the upkeep of horses, had formed the core of the fighting forces. Their role as society's defenders helped to justify the exalted position their class occupied. When handheld guns became common, armed peasant infantrymen supplanted the mounted elite. The loss of their warrior role often marked the beginning of the decline in the power of the aristocracy, and the loss of privileges that other social classes had not shared.

As societies adopted the use of guns, some states developed a decisive advantage over others. Rulers who had access to metal to forge guns and the chemicals to make gunpowder were better able to impose their will on societies that did not. As the cost of handheld guns decreased, rulers such as Matthias I of Hungary created corps of armed infantry. Matthias armed approximately one-quarter of his foot soldiers with arquebuses in the fifteenth century. Countries with centralized governments and well-developed bureaucracies that were able to effectively tax their populations had the money to pay for these developments and found it easier to locate and recruit soldiers into the army. States with these advantages grew even more powerful.

Gunpowder thus helped to develop centralized states in Europe. These changes did not happen everywhere, though. States like the Ottoman Empire and Ming China already possessed centralized governments before they adopted gunpowder technology, and the use of firearms did not have a significant impact on the position of their nobility. In the Ottoman Empire, the non-noble Janissaries had formed the core of the Ottoman military before the widespread adoption of gunpowder and remained an elite force afterward. For the military portion of the Janissary corps, the adoption of gunpowder weapons combined with their intense training from a young age made them a formidable fighting force indeed, especially when using weapons that were not simple to use effectively. In Japan, the daimyo elite and their samurai vassals retained their privileged position in society until the nineteenth century, hundreds of years after the Japanese adopted guns. The arrival of guns brought change to a society, but not all societies responded in the same way.

Ted Ed: The Rise and Fall of the Medieval Islamic Empire

Video Length: 5 minutes and 5 seconds.

Context: In the 7th century CE, the prophet Muhammad united the people of the Arabian Peninsula through the formation of Islam. Over the next 30 years, caliphs conquered vast areas beyond Arabia, including their mighty neighbors the Persians and Byzantines. But an empire this vast was at risk of conflict and fracture. Petra Sijpesteijn and Birte Kristiansen detail the rise and fall of the Islamic Empire.

This is a supplement video to the textbook information about Islam during the medieval period.

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

[View this YouTube Video online](#)



Reflection

What accomplishments and setbacks did Muslims experience during the medieval period?

4.3: The Mongul Empire

Overview

This section covers the rise and fragmentation of the Mongol Empire, initiated by Chinggis Khan's conquests and later struggles between Kublai Khan and Ariq Boke, resulting in separate khanates. While Kublai established the Yuan dynasty, internal conflicts, economic issues, and military setbacks led to its decline.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the new civilization Chinggis Khan created for the Mongols
- Identify the obstacles the Mongols faced in their efforts to unify and expand their empire
- Describe how Islam spread in South and Southeast Asia

Mongol Expansion and Fragmentation

The Silk Roads made up one of the greatest trade routes in world history, linking east and west in a vast interlocking network that reached its heyday between the fifth and eighth centuries. It had begun to form a few hundred years before, when the Chinese Han dynasty sought to placate and control the great Xiongnu nomadic peoples to the north by trading with them, and with other nomadic peoples such as the Yuezhi in Bactria (modern-day Afghanistan). The Silk Roads eventually connected China, central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and even the Mediterranean basin, facilitating the exchange of goods such as silk and spices, technologies such as papermaking, and cultural traditions and religions such as Buddhism and Islam.

The Conquest Movement of Chinggis Khan

Chinggis Khan, or “World Leader,” had truly been born to rule according to a vision he is held to have had. His vision was twofold. On one hand, Chinggis wanted to end the constant strife and warfare that characterized life on the steppe. Despite being a practitioner of violence and warfare, he also wanted to promote the peaceful acquisition of goods. He spent the rest of his life forcefully promoting those objectives, regardless of whether others desired them, with a bloody ruthlessness that seems at odds with those very same goals.

The *yassa* (the Mongol legal code) and the social-military organization put in place by Chinggis Khan removed many sources of strife from the Mongol Empire. But they also prohibited traditional activities, such as raiding other clans, that had led to social mobility. Chinggis Khan believed that without new sources of wealth and glory, people might grow restless and reject the peace he tried to create. His life experience had given him no concept of settled economic development or ways to redirect his people's energy to that goal. From the time as a younger up and coming warrior when he joined Ong Khan's (an early ruler of a smaller Mongol confederation also known as Toghrul) attack on the Tatars and saw the luxuries acquired from the Jin and the Song, Chinggis knew settled peoples were a source of wealth ripe for the Mongol Empire to take, and for him as their leader to distribute. In his eyes, conquering these peoples or intimidating them into giving tribute was the next logical step.

As word spread of Chinggis Khan's coronation as khan some warriors in the settled kingdoms between the steppe and Song China left to join the Mongol Empire. The Kara-Khitans (a dynasty of mixed settled and nomadic culture), assuming resistance would not go well, offered tribute to Chinggis Khan. After a coup in 1210, the new Xi Xia ruler accepted tributary status on terms similar to those of the Kara-Khitans.

The Jin, however, were another matter. In 1210, a new Jin emperor demanded Chinggis Khan submit to him and send tribute, so Chinggis marched his smaller but superior army south to invade. A master at exploiting his opponents' weaknesses, he realized that his linguistic cousins, the Khitans, resented the rule of the Jurchen Jin dynasty, so he portrayed his army as a liberating force for them. With their army swelling with Jin defectors, the Mongols were able to lay siege to Zhongdu, the Jin capital, and eventually seize the starving city. Chinggis Khan ordered the city thoroughly looted, tens of thousands enslaved, and untold numbers of

others massacred.

Once the spoils from Zhongdu had been gathered, Chinggis Khan and his army headed back to the steppe, leaving the campaign against the Jin mostly in the hands of his Khitan allies. Forces loyal to Chinggis Khan continued to subdue the Yellow River basin and expanded north into the Jurchen homeland, even venturing to the Korean Peninsula. By 1223, these areas were pacified and providing tribute to the Mongol Empire and its allies who occupied them. Ironically, this vast amount of looted goods forced the nomadic ruler Chinggis Khan to build permanent structures on the steppe, a warehouse complex to hold war booty so it could be preserved and distributed or traded over time.

The Kara-Khitan kingdom caught Chinggis Khan's attention in 1213 when the son of the Naiman leader he had defeated a decade earlier took control. The Kara-Khitan were already not meeting tribute expectations, and now a once-defeated rival led them. The Mongols quickly triumphed over the Kara-Khitan and absorbed them into the empire. Mongol conquests were wide, however, and not limited to China and the East as their armies moved westward and likely seemed an unstoppable force to many.

The vast amount of wealth seized from the Jin fundamentally changed the mindset of the Mongol leadership, which demanded ever more goods, food, grazing lands, and raw materials. These new needs prompted Chinggis Khan to seek trading and raiding opportunities farther west. The absorption of the Kara-Khitan into the Mongol Empire had provided a direct border with the Islamic world through Khwarazm, a realm stretching from Persia through central Asia. Around 1218, Chinggis Khan sent a caravan of a few hundred of his Muslim subjects to the leader of Khwarazm, Allah al-Din Muhammad, with a letter requesting the establishment of trade relations and a great many valuable goods to show what he could offer.

Before the caravan reached the Khwarazmian ruler, however, his governor of Otrar confiscated the goods and killed the traders. In a grave miscalculation, Allah al-Din Muhammad then killed most of the emissaries Chinggis Khan sent to demand compensation, returning only a couple of them, disfigured. This did not just mean war to Chinggis Khan; it meant a war of revenge of the utmost brutality. This included the decimation of the cities of Herat, Merv, and Nishapur, which for centuries had been three of the most important and prominent cities of the eastern Islamic world. By 1223, Allah al-Din Muhammad had been killed while fleeing Mongol troops on an island in the Caspian Sea. Chinggis Khan divided the Khwarazmian state up to be administered by his sons and generals.

Reconnaissance for launching surprise attacks against Khwarazm brought the Mongols into unfamiliar territory. To the south, they discovered India's Delhi Sultanate in one of its rare periods of unity and growth. These Muslims were not part of the Khwarazmian realm, however, so attacking them would have been an unnecessary distraction. Seeking a route to surprise the Khwarazmians from the north, two of Chinggis's most trusted generals, Jebe and Subutai, had crossed through the Georgian Kingdom, then the onto lands of the Rus, Slavic ancestors of modern Russians and Ukrainians who had ruled the lands east of Hungary and Poland. They quickly annihilated the Khwarazmian and Rus forces, forcing both groups to become tributaries to Chinggis Khan.



Figure 4.3.1: A map showing the territory of the Mongol Empire with routes taken by the Mongols to invade various regions in Asia. (CC BY 4.0; Los Angeles County Museum of Art via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). [Detailed Description of Figure 4.3.1.](#)

The Last Gasp of Mongol Expansion

It took until 1251 for majority support to coalesce around Chinggis Khan's grandson Mongke. While Mongke successfully expanded Mongol domains, his reign would mark the end of continued conquest while also signaling the end of a united Mongol Empire.

Blending the best elements of Chinggis Khan and his son Ogedei, Mongke was poised to re-create the greatness of unified Mongol rule. He stabilized the empire, ordering a census to assess not just taxes but also the natural and human resources of his domains. To increase the empire's wealth and dissipate potential restless energy that might be turned on him, he undertook multidirectional expansion. His brother Hulagu Khan was asked to subdue the Islamic world, while another brother, Kublai Khan, was sent to Song China.

Hulagu was enormously successful; like his grandfather in northern China, he exploited existing conflicts, which included resentment by the minority Shia Muslims against the Sunni caliph. Combining this strategy with the Mongols' usual offer to spare from destruction those who would acknowledge Mongol rule and submit tribute without struggle, Hulagu was able to gain control of much of the caliph's lands, especially Shia areas. By late 1257, his forces had surrounded Baghdad, and the city fell in early 1258, its physical defenses undermined. Tens, possibly hundreds, of thousands were massacred, and the caliph himself was killed.

Meanwhile, Kublai was also successful, conquering areas of Tibet and southwestern China. During the campaign, he began to favor Tibetan Buddhism, although not to the point of dismissing or persecuting other faiths. Mongke then moved him to administer the former Jin areas that were conquered by his grandfather, while Mongke himself, seeing the Song's vulnerability, launched a broader attack against them in 1256. In 1259, as reports reached Mongke that Kublai was establishing a power base in northern China, he ordered Kublai to join him in the war against the Song, probably also wanting to keep close watch over him.

Before Kublai could reach him, however, Mongke died, likely from dysentery. His cousin Ariq Boke, another of Chinggis Khan's grandsons and the one who had been left to administer the Mongol homeland, declared himself the new khan of the Mongol Empire ahead of a *kurultai* (the Mongol assembly that elected a khan). Upon hearing this, Kublai, who was returning for the *kurultai*, also declared himself the new khan. While Kublai would prove a powerful and capable ruler, much had begun to change since the days of Chinggis, and the stage was set for the end of a unified Mongol Empire and a single khan who dominated the entirety of the territories they had conquered. Continued success in conquest had been a major factor in keeping rivals from unnecessarily challenging the rule of the chosen great khan or devolving his power. With this period of expansion over, these rivals were presented with new opportunities to claim more power for themselves, especially with the size and diversity of the empire the Mongols now ruled.

The last *kurultai* of the Mongol Empire failed and led to the permanent splitting of the realm. Hulagu stood with his brother Kublai. The Golden Horde (the name given to the northwestern most lands of the empire), now led by Batu's younger brother Berke, supported Ariq Boke. This left Orghina, sister-in-law to Hulagu and granddaughter of Chinggis Khan, in a position to choose which of her cousins would rule the Mongol Empire. Orghina, acting as regent for her son who was too young to assume a leadership role, chose neutrality, endorsing neither claimant. The fact that she was making this decision, not advising a man who would make the choice, shows the strides women had made under the *yassa*. Kublai ultimately prevailed, since his bonds with the army conquering China and his resource-rich power base in the northeast left him well situated to repulse Ariq Boke's attacks. In 1264, Ariq Boke rode to Kublai's capital and surrendered. He died under house arrest a couple of years later, probably having been poisoned.

Hulagu recognized Kublai as the great khan, calling himself *il-khan* (lesser khan) and his realm the Il-Khanate. He and his successors pursued their own policies independently, however, and Kublai's hold on the Chagatai Khanate (the name given to lands in Central Asia) remained only as strong as the armies he devoted to enforcing it. The Golden Horde was well out of his reach. From this point on, the parts of the once-united Mongol Empire were administered separately and evolved differently. Historians refer to them as khanates—the Khanate of the Golden Horde, Il-Khanate, Chagatai Khanate, and the Khanate of the Great Khan—to distinguish them from the prior period of unity.

While the ascension of Mongke Khan in 1251 gave hope for the realization of a Mongol Empire overseeing Eurasian trade, it proved only a temporary rebirth, since a lust for power consumed Chinggis Khan's grandsons. The rulers of three of the four khanates—the Chagatai Khanate, the Khanate of the Golden Horde, and the Il-Khanate—eventually converted to Islam along with many of their people, but having a common religion did not keep them from fighting one another. By the mid-fourteenth century, two khanates had completely fragmented. Sporadic efforts were made to expand against the Delhi Sultanate but failed. Kublai conquered China and established the Yuan dynasty, also known as the Great Khanate of Yuan China, in the 1270s. However, in the fourteenth century, China too was dealing with serious internal divisions.

Islam and the Mongols

While the lands of the Eurasian Steppe were always a place of great religious heterogeneity, Islam was the faith of many of the nomadic people living there. Except in the Slavic areas of the Golden Horde, the lands west of the Volga River, the endorsement of the ruling Mongol elite added to the attractions of Islam, leading the majority of the population to convert. The other faiths were relegated to small, scattered communities.

By spreading throughout much of western and southern Asia over the centuries since its founding, Islam had often influenced—and been influenced by—local cultures. This exchange could lead to the formation of unique sects of the faith. One such set of beliefs was Sufism, a strain of Islam that emphasized asceticism and meditation as the path to a level of divine understanding that brought a rapturous feeling of love for God. Sufism played an important role in the Islamification of the Mongols and other peoples of the Inner Asian Steppe. While Sufis often sought to live lives of spiritual and moral perfection, their ultimate belief was that God was best worshipped through deep thought and reflection. Living a life strictly adhering to Quranic law was not an end in itself but a means to remove distractions so that the intense contemplation necessary to know God at the level they sought could occur.

Sufis were instructed in the movement's practices by spiritual guides and often formed communities. The disruptions of the Mongol conquests caused many of these communities to scatter into the steppe, where they intermingled with people of the Mongol Empire, and where Sufi spiritual guides seemed similar to the shamans Mongols knew as the guardians of worship of Tengri. The Sufi emphasis on a mystical path of meditation and reflection also allowed Mongols to continue to live under the *yassa* and accept Sufi teachings and practices. As Muslims and Mongols interacted and formed families, Sufism made the conversion to Islam seem more of an evolution and less of a dramatic change.

The Fate of Hulagu's Il-Khanate

Hulagu Khan had to balance several conflicts once civil war broke out after the death of Mongke Khan in 1259. The most serious threat was war with the Golden Horde, led by Batu's younger brother Berke. A convert to Islam, Berke had become deeply disturbed by Hulagu's destruction of Baghdad and the murder of the caliph. There were also disputes about whether Hulagu or the Horde should receive tribute from areas on which Hulagu had reimposed stability. Not surprisingly, Hulagu and Berke ended up on different sides of the civil war to succeed Mongke. Their conflict lasted nearly four years, until both men died in 1265, and their successors moved on to other pursuits.

For decades, the leaders of the Il-Khanate remained in frequent but intermittent conflict with the Golden Horde and the Mamluks of Egypt, who were sometimes joined by the Seljuks operating out of Anatolia and the Chaghatai khans. Repulsing these attacks consumed most of the Il-Khanate's efforts and resources, a situation compounded by periodic bouts of civil war over succession and making further expansion out of the question. The Il-Khans constantly struggled to hold the Tigris-Euphrates basin, leaving the Nile delta and lands holy to the Abrahamic religions in the Levant forever beyond their grasp.

Most of the population of the Il-Khanate had become Muslim centuries before. The need to concentrate on defense led the Il-Khans to leave most of the work of government in the hands of the religious scholars called the *ulama*, reinforcing traditional Islamic law and custom. Ghazan Khan, who ruled from 1295 to 1304, firmly favored Islam. His brother Oljaitu (who took the Muslim name Khodabandeh) promoted Shia Islam, further entrenching its presence in what is today eastern Iraq and Iran. Despite this, conflict with its Muslim neighbors continued as the Il-Khanate sought to take more resources for itself at their expense.

Overall, the economy was slow to recover from the devastation of Hulagu's attack, especially with frequent warfare continuing to destroy the irrigation and urban infrastructure. There were chronic labor shortages in the first generations after Hulagu's conquest because of wide-scale murder, enslavement, and relocation, as well as substantial emigration to neighboring Islamic lands. Ghazan's reign laid the groundwork for a generation of prosperity and cultural flowering relative to the tumultuous periods before and after. This prosperity was centered east of Baghdad and the Tigris-Euphrates basin, around Maragha and Tabriz in modern Iran. The Il-Khanate rulers tried to live up to Chinggis and Ogedei Khan's dream of a world united in trade by negotiating trade deals, most famously with Venice and Genoa on the Italian Peninsula. They were also able to maintain secure trade with Mongolian China. This prosperity, however, was not enough to overcome the peril of succession struggles. After the son of Ghazan died without an heir in 1335, the Il-Khanate fell into a civil war from which it never emerged. While several men claimed to be *il-khan* in subsequent years, none exercised control over more than a fraction of the lands Hulagu had conquered.

The Golden Horde

The areas the Golden Horde ruled, northwest Asia and the lands of the Rus, were less economically developed. People had a greater diversity of lifestyles and less centralized authority than imposed by the Il-Khans, and they were able to avoid splintering into civil war until outside factors intervened more than a generation after the Il-Khanate fell.

Batu and Berke, the foundational leaders of the Horde, established a capital for the storage of tribute as their grandfather had done, but they mainly roamed with their armies, raiding neighbors or defending against attacks. The people conquered by the Golden Horde varied from Turkish peoples like the Kipchaks, seminomads similar to the Mongols, to settled Slavic peasants in small urban centers. The Mongols ruled over the Turks indirectly, allowing local leaders to enforce the *yassa*, collect taxes, and conscript labor and soldiers. Mongol officials in the capital received and distributed tribute and heard appeals of local decisions. Similarly, The Rus and other Slavic peoples were ruled indirectly with the Mongols appointing or removing local Rus princes at their discretion.

While Berke was the first Mongol ruler and khan of the Golden Horde to embrace Islam, not all his successors were Muslim. Islam continued to gain adherents among the Horde's Mongols, however. In 1313, Uzbeg made Islam the official religion of the Golden Horde, but he did not remove the *yassa's* tax exemption for other religions. Uzbeg's promotion of Islam undoubtedly strengthened the Islamic community throughout the Golden Horde's lands.

At the same time, the Horde's rule strengthened the Orthodox Christian church in its Slavic regions. The church came to represent Rus national identity as people turned to Christianity to distinguish themselves from, and perhaps subversively resist, the Mongols. The tax and service exemptions the *yassa* gave religious institutions and those running them surpassed those the church received from Rus nobles. Church-owned land expanded under the Horde, whether because of donations to help the church provide increasing amounts of spiritual solace and identity, or because of fraud that enabled elites to live free of Mongol taxation and obligation by donating their land and then becoming the church officials in charge of the donation. By the collapse of Mongol rule in the late fifteenth century, the Russian Orthodox church's holdings had grown to about one-third of the arable land in the areas formerly ruled by Rus nobles.

The Golden Horde both benefited from and contributed to the prosperity brought about by the Pax Mongolica. Direct European trade was under their control. Whether an import to the Mongol world in the east was produced by the Rus or brought from the continent by Italian merchants, it almost certainly entered through the Golden Horde, which had the first opportunity to buy it. The *yam* (a kind of Mongol postal system) that facilitated the movement of goods throughout the empire was maintained for hundreds of years after Mongol rule had dissipated.

The troubled Chagatai Khanate lay in the middle of Mongol lands. Conflict with the other Mongol Khanates and Kublai's Yuan dynasty was inevitable. At various times, separately or in combination with each other, the other Mongol states supported usurpers against the Chagatai Khans. While most had no long-term success, they kept the khanate in turmoil until it splintered into small states in the mid-fourteenth century. In addition to fighting other Mongols, some Chagatai Khans raided and on a couple of occasions tried to conquer the Delhi Sultanate. These efforts proved futile and weakened the regime, inviting more challenges and instability.

The most important long-term impact of the Chagatai Khanate was its solidification of Islam's hold over western central Asia. Central Asia had always been a place of religious diversity, given that merchants of different faiths traversed its trade routes. It was a major factor in spreading Buddhism from India and Islam beyond the borders of the caliphate. Asian versions of Christianity, different from the Catholic and Orthodox traditions in Europe, thrived there as well. The last ruler to have governed the unified Chagatai Khanate, Tarmashirin, instituted policies that favored the displacement of other faiths by Islam and replaced the *yassa* with the more restrictive sharia, or Islamic religious law. While this change provoked resentment among the non-Muslim populations, Islamic law continued to be in force in lands given to the Chagatai after that khanate collapsed into small states that were in constant conflict.

Yuan China

In Yuan China, even as Kublai Khan was lining up forces against Ariq Boke, he demanded the Song emperor recognize him as the Son of Heaven in exchange for autonomy over the Han Chinese people. Not unexpectedly, the Song Son of Heaven declined to submit to vassalage under a man he considered a barbarian, and war broke out. Eventually, Kublai's forces were victorious, prompting him to declare that the Mandate of Heaven had shifted to him, and the Yuan dynasty was proclaimed. As might be expected for the champion of Mongols adapting to a settled lifestyle, Kublai set up a capital city close to the old Jin capital of Zhongdu, both part of modern Beijing. China proved very difficult to govern, however; by the 1330s, the Yuan dynasty was in

decline.

The Conquest of Song China

Although Kublai attempted to subdue the Song while fighting Ariq Boke, he did not begin serious efforts to conquer them until 1265. It took over a dozen years, but by 1279, the Song military was broken and its royal family dead or in hiding.

The Mongols, with allied peoples from north China and other parts of the steppe, dominated the Song on land. The Song military never developed good cavalry, perhaps hoping their fiery and explosive weapons would intimidate enemy horses and render their opponent's cavalry useless. Retreating to the cities was not an option, because the Mongols were extremely adept at siege warfare. One area in which the Mongols were almost completely inexperienced, however, was naval warfare. The long and expansive river systems in southern China posed serious obstacles to the Mongols' ability to completely conquer the Song.

Through the 1270s, the Song still tried to function as a working, mobile government, moving up and down river systems until finally pushed out to sea, whereupon they moved from port to port with a huge fleet of ships. A combination of the geography of the region, previous developments in hydraulic and irrigation technology, and Song seafaring skills allowed them to resist the arrival of the Mongols for many years. Tens of thousands of civilians loyal to the Song traveled with them. In a great irony of history, the increasingly settled Yuan Mongols had turned the Song into aquatic seminomads. The Mongols adapted to naval warfare by relying on loyal non-Mongol experts. They controlled the labor of skilled craftspeople who built warships and had sailors who could maneuver them.

In the year 1279, many Song loyalists, approximately 250,000 people in over a thousand ocean-capable boats, anchored off a remote bay near modern Yamen, China. There they began building a capital and prepared for a last stand, hoping that if they won, their victory would rally the Chinese to revolt against the Mongols. Mongol forces secured the land behind the Song ships, leaving them dependent on only the supplies they had on board. Within a few days, the Songs' supply of fresh water ran out. Weakened by dehydration, they were no match for the Mongols. As a few ships fell to Mongol boarding parties, morale among the Song collapsed, and most of them committed suicide by jumping into the sea. China was united again for the first time in more than three hundred years, not by a Han Chinese Son of Heaven, but by the Mongol Kublai Khan.

Politics, Economy, and Society in Yuan China

Although retaining some Song policies such as the rotation of officeholders, the Yuan dynasty operated very differently from the way earlier Chinese dynasties had done. Kublai Khan's most drastic change was to replace the Confucian system of class distinctions based on economic function with one based on ethnicity. At the top of the Yuan class structure were Mongols, followed by non-Chinese people, who were Europeans or previous steppe inhabitants like the Jurchen, Tangut, and Khitan. The bottom two classes were Chinese people: those of Han ethnicity who had been ruled by the Jin in the north, and the remaining Song Chinese who lived in the south. Mongols could not marry people from these bottom two classes. Everyone's place in this new class system was noted in census records for each family, along with each head of household's occupation, which was sometimes assigned if a shortage of certain types of labor occurred.

Adopting the Khitan idea of ruling different types of people differently, the Yuan dynasty had separate types of administration for its varied peoples. Even though an increasing number of Mongols were literate, including Kublai who was the first Mongol great khan to read, the mandarin written exam system fell into disuse. Mongols were subject to the *yassa*, as were the next two classes, who were ruled over by administrators appointed by the chief local Mongol administrator or the emperor himself. The Song Chinese, who were at the bottom of the four-class system, were governed by two administrators, one a Chinese person and one a Mongol or non-Chinese person. Both were imperial appointees. The Chinese administrator was under the supervision of and responsible to his counterpart. People in all these positions were rotated periodically, so they could not build up a power base.

Some non-Chinese administrators over the Song had not intended to work in the Yuan government. They came seeking some favor, often the right to trade, in exchange for which the emperors required them to perform administrative tasks. Literate Europeans came to know of the riches of Yuan China through one of these bureaucrats, Marco Polo, a young merchant, and member of a Venetian trade caravan who, along with several of his family members, ended up spending almost twenty-five years in Mongol lands and who wrote a popular account of the merchants' experiences. While the Polos were the most famous of these hostage bureaucrats, serving for about twenty years, most were Muslim traders from other parts of the Mongol Empire. Regardless of how well they did their jobs, such bureaucrats were not likely to bond with the population and create a power base from which to challenge imperial authority.

Following Kublai's death in 1294, his system's flaws became apparent. In 1315, his great-grandson Buyantu reinstated the mandarin exam system, which now reflected the dual nature of the administration. Non-Chinese people took different (and shorter) exams than the Chinese people, and between 25 and 50 percent of those who passed had to be non-Chinese people. The effect of this quota was magnified because Song Chinese people made up more than 90 percent of the population, according to Yuan censuses. Between the differences in the exams and the quota system, it was much easier for Mongols and non-Chinese to pass than for Chinese.

Although travelers like Marco Polo, and to a lesser degree the North African Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta, wrote of the impressive wealth of Yuan China, economic growth had at best stagnated, thanks to a decline in consumer purchasing power caused by inflation and heavy taxation. The use of paper currency was a major contributor to inflation. While paper money was theoretically convertible to metal or silk, the Yuan government issued much more of it than it had metal or silk to redeem it with. Kublai decreed that currency must be used in transactions with the government, thus ensuring that paper money featured in at least some economic activity. This meant the population could not escape increasing inflation, however, as successive Yuan governments issued more paper currency to pay their bills and forced the population to obtain such money to pay their taxes. As more paper money entered the system without objects of value to back it up, ever more of it was required to purchase the same amount of goods and labor.

The increasing taxes that partly resulted from inflation were pumped back into the economy through narrow and unproductive sectors, draining wealth from the rest of the economy. The Yuan spent lavishly on grandiose but failed military ventures that bankrupted the government. These were mainly Kublai's projects. Kublai twice tried to conquer what is now Vietnam, and in even more costly ventures, he attempted complex sea invasions, two of Japan and one of Java. There were also periods of chaos and instability because of succession struggles. After Kublai's appointed successor and grandson died in 1307, seven emperors reigned over the next twenty-six years. Resentment, especially among the Song population, seethed beneath the surface as government extraction of resources increased and inflation eroded the standard of living. As if all that was not challenge enough for the Yuan, in 1331 people outside the capital in the Hebei area began to sicken and die in large numbers. Within three years, 90 percent of that area's population was dead from a strange new illness, later known as the Black Death. The Mongol Yuan government, like many of its people, did not survive long.

Religion and Trade in South and Southeast Asia

The growth of Islam gave Muslims a considerable role in world trade, particularly along the Silk Roads and in the Indian Ocean. By the middle of the eighth century, Islam had moved into northern India, and when the Abbasids overthrew the Umayyad dynasty and then moved their capital from Damascus to Baghdad, they established what became one of the most important cities along the Silk Roads and a location that allowed them to dominate the growing Indian Ocean trade.

This new capital was situated along the Tigris River, a vital trade conduit to the Persian Gulf and to the Indian Ocean beyond. In the ninth century, the city of Siraf on the Persian Gulf coast was regularly sending ships to China and back and became one of the most important trading ports of this period. However, Siraf's hold on trade weakened when an earthquake struck and damaged it in 997. Other regions stepped in, including Hormuz, Omar, and particularly Qeis, an island city in the Persian Gulf. Arab expansion into the Indian Ocean trade initially filtered through these ports, but it eventually expanded along the African coast as well.

The Muslim presence in northwest India was also an important link in the chain of Indian Ocean trade. Muslim raiders invaded India in the eighth century and came through Khurasan and Ghazni in the late tenth and eleventh centuries and many of the local inhabitants converted to Islam. In Gujarat, just south of the Sindh region, the Hindu Chalukya dynasty still controlled much of the Indian Ocean trade through their key city of Khambhat. However, by the end of the twelfth century, their power was waning. When the Turkic peoples from present-day Afghanistan began to rule the area of Delhi independently as the Delhi Sultanate in 1206, this region slowly came under their influence.

Generations of incursions from Persian dynasties into South Asia meant that Persian influence deeply affected the region. That Persian influence can still be seen today in the language of Urdu in modern-day Pakistan, which combines Hindu and Persian elements. One portion of the Delhi Sultanate was Gujarat, which the sultan Ala al-Din annexed in 1304 after years of ransacking Gujarati cities. When the central Asian warlord Timur (also called Tamerlane in the West) sacked and captured Delhi at the end of the century, Gujarat split off from the weakened state to become an independent Muslim sultanate under the Tughluq dynasty. The Tughluqs set about subduing the region's Hindu Rajput chieftains and building a navy at Diu, strategically located along important trade routes between the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. Thus, much of the Indian Ocean trade in northwest India fell into the hands of this Islamic state.

From the decline of the Guptas to the rise of powerful northern Muslim sultanates such as Gujarat, peninsular India was home

to the Hindu Chola kingdom, a maritime trade empire. With its vassal states including parts of the modern-day Maldives and Sri Lanka in the south, Chola dominated trade in the nearby portion of the Indian Ocean from about 970 to 1300. Crucially important to its dominance was control of the Palk Strait between Sri Lanka and southern India. The strait acted as a choke point where vessels had to stop to pay taxes, usually a portion of their cargo. Many of these vessels were known as *dhow*s and carried twelve to twenty-four sailors.

Secondary trading also occurred, in which authorized middle merchants conducted exchanges between these larger ships and smaller port cities, a system known as cabotage. In the eleventh century, the Chola were trying to extend and consolidate their control over regional trade. To this end, Rajendra I, the “Victor of the Ganges” (1019–1021), sailed up east India’s Coromandel coast and seized ports with the goal of deepening commercial ties with China, where trade in items such as ivory and glassware were common.

The Chola enjoyed an artistic, architectural, and literary flowering during the tenth and eleventh centuries. This “Imperial Golden Age” saw an explosion in the construction of monumental temples, like the one at Thanjavur on the southeastern coast, in the so-called Chola style—identifiable by such elements as high surrounding walls and stepped, pyramidal towers. Many of these sites housed intricately ornamented bronze statues of deities commissioned by the rulers, signifying their prominence, wealth, and devoutness. The golden age of the Chola is also known as the greatest epoch in South Indian literary tradition. One notable work of this tradition is the *Ramavataram*, a twelfth century Tamil epic written by the poet Kambar that was based on the *Ramayana*, the Sanskrit epic that told of the exploits of Prince Rama. All o

Their golden age would not have been possible had the Chola not controlled trade through the Palk Strait, which generated enormous revenues. The monopolization of choke points was essential to anyone wishing to profit from maritime trade, as the founders of the Srivijaya Empire discovered with their command of the Malacca Strait. Traders sailing from the eastern Indian Ocean to Southeast Asia had to travel through this strait, between today’s Sumatra in the Indonesian archipelago and Malaysia. From around 650, Srivijaya profited by managing and taxing the lucrative trade that passed through the strait.

During its early history, Srivijaya was highly influenced by both Buddhist and Hindu traders coming from India. For example, in the Srivijaya capital of Palembang in southern Sumatra stands a magnificent Buddha statue dating from the seventh or eighth century. Sculpted in the highly ornate and detailed Amaravati style still popular in contemporary India and named after the southeastern region where it originally developed, this work attests to the role of trade in spreading art, culture, and ideology. Hindu shrines and temples that still stand also show the depth to which Hinduism penetrated Srivijayan culture and society during this formative period.

By the tenth century, Srivijaya controlled all trade between the Indian Ocean and China. Alarmed by the exorbitant taxes on trade and the threat of piracy the Srivijaya posed, however, the Cholas sent a maritime expedition against them in 1025, crushing their major ports including Palembang and reducing Srivijaya’s power and influence for a time. Although Srivijaya managed to recover somewhat, its grip on maritime trade soon weakened permanently. By the thirteenth century, it had largely been displaced by the port of Malacca, which came to dominate a region that included modern-day Singapore.

The thirteenth century marks a time of considerable Islamic expansion into Southeast Asia; the Acehnese peoples on the northern tip of Sumatra were the first to embrace the religion. Many merchants in particular converted to Islam, which ensured the safe movement of their goods and protections against loss, especially in the states on the northeast coast of Sumatra such as Perlak and Aru, followed by Pasai in the north, and Malacca, the new maritime center. A further stream of Islamization came with Sufi missionaries. Sufism, a branch of Sunni Islam, blended Islam with local religious traditions, encouraging non-merchants to convert. Over time, Islam came to dominate much of the Malay Peninsula as well as Sumatra and, particularly in the fifteenth century, northern Java.

Hinduism, like Islam, grew in Southeast Asia during the later Middle Ages. In the twelfth century, for example, construction began on the great temple complex of Angkor Wat in Cambodia. Dedicated to Vishnu, Angkor Wat was meant to serve as the state temple, funerary complex, and capital city of the reigning monarch Suryavarman II. Hindu motifs decorated the exterior of the structure in bas relief form, featuring images of the gods and scenes from the epic Indian poem *Mahabharata*, while the temple’s five towers were meant to represent Mount Meru, the dwelling place of the gods in Hindu religion. By the end of the twelfth century, however, the complex had been transformed into a Buddhist center of worship.

Ted Ed: What Makes the Great Wall of China so Extraordinary

Video Length: 4 minutes and 29 seconds.

Context: The Great Wall of China is a 13,000-mile dragon of earth and stone that winds its way through the countryside of China. As it turns out, the wall's history is almost as long and serpentine as its structure. Megan Campisi and Pen-Pen Chen detail the building and subsequent decay of this massive, impressive wall.

This is a supplement video to the textbook information.

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

[View this YouTube Video online](#)



Reflection

The Great Wall underwent various uses throughout Chinese history. What can we learn about the political moments in China by looking at each phase of the wall's use and purpose to China?

4.4: Chapter Themes to Discuss

Core Themes for Reflection and Discussion

This page offers different themes that appear throughout the sections in this chapter. The themes are meant to provide a framework in which discussion questions can be developed to inspire further exploration of the topics covered.

1. The relationship between trade routes and the spread of disease.
2. Religion's role in creating social cohesion and division.
3. The similarities and differences for the reasons why empires rise and fall throughout history.
4. Issues of class and gender in the economic developments during the Medieval period.

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4.5: Alternative Text Descriptions

Figure 4.1.1 Map of the First Crusade Routes

Historical map showing the routes taken by the leaders of the First Crusade from western Europe to Jerusalem between 1096 and 1099. The map covers Europe, the Byzantine Empire, Anatolia, the Levant, North Africa, and western Asia. The crusading armies traveled separately across Europe but converged at Constantinople before crossing Anatolian territory and continuing toward Jerusalem.

Hugh of Vermandois departed from northern France near Boulogne and traveled southeast through the Rhineland and central Europe, then crossed the Balkans to Constantinople. Godfrey of Bouillon began in the region of Bouillon in present-day Belgium, moved east through Cologne, Mainz, Regensburg, Vienna, Belgrade, and Sofia, and arrived at Constantinople from the northwest. Bohemond of Taranto started in southern Italy at Taranto, crossed the Adriatic Sea to the Balkans, traveled east through Byzantine territory, and reached Constantinople from the west. Raymond IV of Toulouse departed from southern France near Toulouse and Saint-Gilles, crossed northern Italy through Milan and Aquileia, continued southeast through the Balkans, and arrived at Constantinople. Robert Curthose departed from Normandy in northern France, traveled through central France and northern Italy, passed through Rome and southern Italy, crossed by sea to Byzantine territory, and continued to Constantinople.

The map also identifies the Via Egnatia, the major east-west road across the Balkans. This route runs from the Adriatic coast through Thessaloniki and onward to Constantinople and was used by several crusading contingents. A common crusader route is shown beginning at Constantinople, crossing the Bosphorus into Anatolia, and proceeding through Nicaea and Dorylaeum before turning southeast through Seljuk territory toward Antioch.

After reaching Anatolia, most crusader forces followed the same general path. From Nicaea the route continued to Dorylaeum, then southeast through central Anatolia near Iconium (Konya), Caesarea, and the Cilician region. The route then reached Antioch on the Orontes River in northern Syria. From Antioch the crusaders marched south along the eastern Mediterranean coast through Tripoli, Acre, and other coastal settlements before arriving at Jerusalem.

Baldwin of Boulogne followed a separate route after the crusaders entered Anatolia. Instead of continuing directly with the main army toward Antioch, Baldwin turned east from central Anatolia through Marash and Edessa in Upper Mesopotamia. After establishing control in Edessa, Baldwin later traveled south to rejoin the broader crusading effort in the Levant.

The map marks major battles and key destinations along these routes, including Nicaea, Dorylaeum, Antioch, Acre, Ascalon, and Jerusalem. Surrounding political regions include the Byzantine Empire in southeastern Europe and western Anatolia, the Seljuk Empire across much of Anatolia and western Asia, and the Fatimid Caliphate centered in Egypt and extending into parts of the Levant. The map's main purpose is to show how multiple crusading armies originating across western Europe converged at Constantinople, crossed Anatolia, captured Antioch, and ultimately reached Jerusalem, while Baldwin of Boulogne followed a distinct eastern route through Edessa.

Figure 4.1.2 The spread of the Bubonic Plague across the European continent

This image is a thematic map of Europe showing the concentration and spread of the bubonic plague across the European continent.

The legend divides Europe into eight colored regions representing the chronological spread of the plague; where it started and the extent of its spread beyond the cities identified in the map key as "City of Orientation." The key also identifies cities where there were major uprisings that resulted from the instability caused by the plague.

The darkest shaded areas represent the earliest spread of the plague that appeared in 1347. The colors lighten in shade across subsequent years of the plague's spread across the continent in mid-1348, early-1349, late-1349, 1350, 1351, after 1351. The map includes a green-shaded region with no year attributed to it but identifying where the plague was minor in its outbreak.

The darkest region representing the plague's arrival in Europe in 1347 identifies Marseilles, France as the city of orientation and

the area immediately around the city is colored to represent where the plague spread. The Italian islands of Corse and Sardegna, and present-day Turkey are also in the same shade as the regions where the plague appeared in 1347.

The region where the plague spread by mid-1348 includes eastern Spain, southern France, the far southwest corner of Germany, Switzerland, the far western section of Austria, Italy, the southwestern tip of Slovenia, western Croatia, southern Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, southern Serbia, Albania, Macedonia, southern Bulgaria, Greece, the very northwestern tip of Turkey, and the Crimean Peninsula. The cities of orientation identified in this region are Barcelona, Rome, Ravenna, and Athens.

The region where the plague spread by early-1349 includes southern England, Belgium, southern Netherlands, southwest Germany, Austria, the far northeastern section of Italy, the far southwestern section of the Czech Republic, southwestern Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, northern Bosnia-Herzegovina, northern Serbia, northern Bulgaria, southern Romania, Ukraine and Russia around the Black Sea. Cities of orientation in this region include Toledo and Frankfurt.

The region where the plague spread by late-1349 includes southern Ireland, mid-England, northern Netherlands, Denmark, the southern tip of Norway, mid-Germany, far northeastern Austria, mid-Czech Republic, western Slovakia, northeastern Hungary, mid-Romania, Moldova, and southern Ukraine and Russia. Cities of orientation in this region include Prague, Vienna, and Bucharest.

The region where the plague spread by 1350 includes northwestern Ireland, Northern Ireland, northern-England and Scotland, Norway, western Sweden, northern Germany, eastern Slovakia, northern Romania, mid-south Ukraine and Russia. Cities of orientation in this region include Copenhagen.

The region where the plague spread by 1351 includes northern Poland, southern Lithuania, the very southwest tip of Latvia, southern Belarus, northwest Ukraine, and mid-Russia. There are no cities of orientation identified in this region.

The region where the plague spread after 1351 includes eastern Sweden, Finland, northern Russia, Estonia, Latvia, and northern Belarus. There are no cities of orientation identified in this region.

There are also regions throughout the continent that are labeled as "minor outbreak" regions where the plague did not reach levels of outbreak as other regions. These areas include the border between Spain and France, northwestern Belgium, an area around the city of Milan in Italy, northeastern Germany, most of Poland, northern Czech Republic and Slovakia, western Ukraine, and the very southwest tip of Belarus. The cities of orientation in these regions include Milan, Magdeburg, and Warsaw.

The map includes cities that were centers of uprisings, and they include London, Paris, Rouen, Bruges, Lübeck, Brunswick, Florence, and Thessaloniki.

The map's main purpose is to show how and where the plague spread across Europe with the locations of major cities and centers of uprising, showing that the earliest appearance of the plague happened along coastal regions before spreading inland, which supports the claims that the plague arrived on ships coming into port cities.

Figure 4.2.1 Map of the Seljuk Empire and Major Cities

This image is a historical map titled **"Seljuk Empire and Major Cities"** showing the geographic extent of Seljuk rule across the Middle East and Central Asia.

The empire is represented by a large brown-shaded area stretching from Anatolia in the west, across Mesopotamia and Iran, to Central Asia in the east. A lighter brown-shaded region extends beyond the main empire in Central Asia, indicating areas of Seljuk influence or territories associated with the eastern extent of the empire. A striped area in central Anatolia highlights a separate Seljuk-controlled region around Konya.

The Seljuk Empire extends westward into Anatolia near the eastern Mediterranean, southward into Mesopotamia and parts of the Persian Gulf region, eastward across the Iranian Plateau, and into Central Asia near the Aral Sea and the Oxus River region. The empire includes territory surrounding the Caspian Sea and reaches toward present-day Afghanistan and Turkmenistan.

Major cities shown within the Seljuk realm include Konya in Anatolia; Tiflis, Manzikert, Tabriz, and Maragha in the northwest near the Caucasus region; Baghdad in Mesopotamia; Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, and Nishapur across Iran; and Herat, Zaranj, Balkh, Merv, Bukhara, Samarkand, and Urgench in the eastern and northeastern portions of the empire. Baghdad lies west of Tehran and Isfahan in the Tigris-Euphrates region. Isfahan occupies a central position within the empire, while Shiraz lies farther south. Nishapur, Herat, Balkh, Merv, Bukhara, Samarkand, and Urgench form an eastward chain of major cities across Khorasan and Central Asia.

Several important neighboring cities are also labeled outside the empire, including Damascus and Jerusalem to the southwest in the Levant, and Mecca and Aden on the Arabian Peninsula to the south.

The map's main purpose is to show the broad territorial extent of the Seljuk Empire and the distribution of its major administrative, commercial, and cultural centers from Anatolia through Iran and into Central Asia.

Figure 4.2.2 Map of Silk Road Trade, circa 1200 CE

This image is a historical trade map titled “**Silk Road Trade (c. 1200 CE)**” showing the network of overland trade routes linking the Mediterranean world, the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, and East Asia.

The Silk Road is depicted as a series of connected routes rather than a single road, stretching from the eastern Mediterranean across Persia and Central Asia to northern China, with branches extending south into India and east toward Korea and Japan.

The western end of the network begins near Constantinople on the Bosphorus and passes through major commercial centers, including Aleppo and Baghdad. From Mesopotamia, the routes continue east across Persia through cities such as Merv and Nishapur before reaching the caravan cities of Bactra, Bukhara, and Samarkand in Central Asia. Several branches cross the mountain and desert regions of Central Asia and converge near Kashgar, an important crossroads on the western edge of China.

East of Kashgar, the routes continue along both northern and southern paths around the Taklamakan Desert through trade centers including Kucha, Turfan, Hami, and Dunhuang. The routes then enter China and reach major urban centers including Chang'an, Luoyang, Nanjing, and Hangzhou. Maritime and regional connections extend farther east to Korea and to Nara in Japan.

A southern branch of the Silk Road extends from Central Asia across the Hindu Kush and around the Himalayan Mountains into northern India. This route connects with the Ganges River region and trade centers such as Benares. The map emphasizes that India was connected to the wider Silk Road system through routes carrying luxury goods and regional products.

The map identifies major economic and administrative centers along the trade network, including Constantinople, Baghdad, Bukhara, Samarkand, Kashgar, Chang'an, Luoyang, Nanjing, and Hangzhou. Smaller stopover settlements are shown between these cities, illustrating the chain of caravan stops that enabled long-distance trade across deserts, mountains, and steppe regions.

The map also associates specific commodities with their regions of origin. Silk and porcelain originate in China, particularly around Hangzhou and other eastern Chinese centers. Jade is associated with regions of western China and Central Asia. Spices, perfumes, and fabrics are linked to India. Incense is associated with Arabia. Furs originate in Siberia to the north. These goods were transported across the interconnected trade routes to markets thousands of miles from their points of production.

Major geographic features influencing trade include the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, Caspian Sea, Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, South China Sea, and Indian Ocean, as well as the Gobi Desert and the Himalayan Mountains.

The map's main purpose is to show how the Silk Road connected distant regions through a network of trade routes, commercial centers, stopovers, and exchanged commodities extending from the Mediterranean world to East Asia around 1200 CE.

Figure 4.3.1 Map of the Mongol Empire and Major Invasion Routes

This image is a historical map titled “**The Mongol Empire**” showing the territorial extent of Mongol rule across Eurasia and the major directions of Mongol expansion.

The empire stretches from eastern Europe and the Black Sea region across Central Asia to China and the Pacific coast. The map divides the empire into several major political units: the **Golden Horde** in the northwestern steppe region, extending across parts of present-day Russia and Kazakhstan; the **Chagadai Khanate** in Central Asia; the **Ilkhanate** in Persia and Mesopotamia; and the **Empire of the Great Khan (Yuan Dynasty)** in Mongolia and China.

Major Mongol expansion under Genghis Khan began from the Mongol homeland around **Kharakhorum** in Mongolia. From this center, invasion routes spread westward across Central Asia through the regions of **Bukhara**, **Samarkand**, **Balkh**, **Merv**, **Herat**, and **Nishapur**. The routes continued into Persia and Mesopotamia, reaching major cities including **Tabriz**, **Maragha**, and **Baghdad**. Another route extended southward from Central Asia toward Afghanistan and the northern Indian frontier.

Later Mongol invasions expanded beyond the territories conquered by Genghis Khan. One major route moved westward across

the Eurasian steppe into the lands of the Golden Horde and toward eastern Europe. Another route extended southwest from the Ilkhanate into Syria and the eastern Mediterranean, reaching the vicinity of **Damascus**. Additional campaigns spread east and southeast through China from the Mongol heartland. These routes connect Kharakhorum with major centers of the Yuan Dynasty, including **Shangdu** and **Dadu (Beijing)**, and continue toward eastern and southern China.

Cities shown within the Mongol realm include **Kharakhorum**, **Shangdu**, and **Dadu (Beijing)** in the east; **Bukhara**, **Samarkand**, **Balkh**, **Merv**, and **Herat** in Central Asia; and **Nishapur**, **Tabriz**, **Maragha**, **Isfahan**, **Shiraz**, and **Baghdad** in the western regions of the empire.

The map also labels neighboring cities outside or along the margins of Mongol control, including **Konya** in Anatolia, **Damascus** and **Cairo** in the Middle East, and **Medina** and **Mecca** on the Arabian Peninsula.

The map's main purpose is to show how Mongol rule grew from a homeland in Mongolia into a vast interconnected empire spanning much of Eurasia, and how successive waves of conquest spread west into Central Asia, Persia, the Middle East, and eastern Europe while also extending across China under the Yuan Dynasty.

4.6: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials to Enhance the Course

These materials are provided to help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction. Some resources are openly licensed, while others may require institutional access or individual review before use in class.

Web Resources

These websites may help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction.

- [World History Encyclopedia](#) – Provides overviews of important people, places, and events throughout history. This resource can be useful for finding concise, expert-informed background information.
- [Fordham University Internet History Sourcebooks Project](#) – Provides translated, transcribed, and digitized primary sources. This resource can support source-based instruction, though instructors should review links carefully because some materials may be incomplete or less suitable for classroom use.

Articles

These articles provide additional scholarly context for this chapter. Access may depend on your institution's JSTOR subscription.

- CHEVEDDEN, PAUL E. "The Islamic View and the Christian View of the Crusades: A New Synthesis." *History* 93, no. 2 (310) (2008): 181–200. [Access article in JSTOR](#)
- Ling, Wang. "On the Invention and Use of Gunpowder and Firearms in China." *Isis* 37, no. 3/4 (1947): 160–78. [Access article in JSTOR](#)

Videos

These videos can be used to explore a specific topic in the chapter in more detail and as an entry to further discussion on chapter topics.

- [TED-Ed: The past, present, and future of the bubonic plague](#)
Length: 4 minutes, 12 seconds
The bubonic plague, which killed around 1/5 of the world's population in the 14th century, is still around today -- but it now claims only a few thousand lives each year. How did that number shrink so drastically? Sharon N. DeWitte investigates the causes and effects of the black death and explains how knowing this information can help us prepare for any future outbreaks of the disease.
- [TED-Ed: Why plague doctors wore beaked masks](#)
Length: 5 minutes, 32 seconds
Explore the history of the European plague doctor, and find out where their iconic outfit of a beaked mask and robe came from.
- [TED-Ed: The rise and fall of the Mongol Empire](#)
Length: 5 minutes
It was the largest contiguous land empire in history— stretching from Korea to Ukraine, and from Siberia to southern China. And was forged on the open plains. In the 12th century, the East Asian steppe was home to scattered groups of nomads who, by 1206, would be united under the innovative leadership of a man named Temujin. Anne F. Broadbridge details the rise and fall of the Mongol Empire.

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5: THE AMERICAS BEFORE 1492

Overview

The diverse peoples living in the Western Hemisphere had distinct political, religious, and economic systems that reflected the regions in which they settled and roamed. They carved out unique societies that revealed how they understood themselves, the world around them, and the others they encountered. Reconstructing the authentic histories of these peoples presents certain challenges, but the devoted work of historians over the years has enhanced our understanding of the varied histories of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas.

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5.1: North American Civilizations

Overview

This section examines the pre-Columbian civilizations of the Americas, focusing on the Maya and Inca empires, diverse cultures, and the emergence of complex societies from 8000 BCE. It highlights the Hopewell tradition, emphasizing ceremonial mound-building and trade networks.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify patterns of early migration to the Americas
- Describe the expansion of pre-Columbian civilizations
- Identify key features of the Anasazi and Mississippian traditions in North America

Settling the Americas and the Rise of Early Civilizations

The stunning ruins of Machu Picchu, situated in the Andes Mountains between two sharp peaks almost eight thousand feet above sea level, continue to attract visitors from around the world. Once a palace and royal retreat for the conquering Inca ruler Pachacuti Yupanqui, the complex was begun in the mid-fifteenth century CE and remained occupied until shortly after the Spanish arrived in the following century. Under Pachacuti Yupanqui, from their Andean home city of Cuzco, the Inca extended their control and built a large empire in Peru. Later rulers continued this expansion, bringing much of western South America under their rule. While the Inca Empire was impressive and politically, religiously, and technologically sophisticated, it was merely the last of many Andean civilizations and cultures stretching back thousands of years. Indeed, these South American civilizations were part of an even larger number of cultures, empires, and architectural traditions that spanned the entire Western Hemisphere and were built by the descendants of migrants who reached the Americas several thousand years ago.

Settling the Continent

The groups that settled along the resource-rich Pacific Northwest of North America developed into complex hunter-gatherer societies keenly adapted to the abundant marine life in the region. They likely migrated into the area by following caribou, which they hunted. Once they settled in the densely forested region, they learned to survive on beaver, elk, seals, birds, sea lions, and salmon and a great many other fish species.

Salmon were an important resource. When they migrated upstream in the fall to spawn, they were so numerous they could be easily captured with traps, crude dams, or spears. They were then eaten immediately or dried to preserve the food for later. Halibut was another important fish species the peoples of the Pacific Northwest made into a staple of their diets.

The landscape also provided a great many resources for tools. From bone, the hunter-gatherer peoples designed harpoons useful for hunting large marine mammals like whales. They polished the rocks from the region into woodworking tools and used them to carve dugout canoes from the available trees. They also perfected a sophisticated woodcarving technique for producing art, created special bone and wood fishhooks, and used certain types of tree bark to create cloth and baskets.

Because of the great abundance of resources along the Pacific Northwest coast, the groups that settled there could accumulate wealth far more easily than many other hunter-gatherer societies. We know they developed complex societies in which wealth and social status were connected. Evidence from the few discovered burial sites dating to around 2000 BCE supports the suggestion that wealth contributed to social differentiation even then. In the burial sites of the very wealthy, for example, archaeologists have found carved tools made of antler and other objects made from shells. As time went on, the graves of the wealthy came to include even more objects indicating their higher social status. There is also evidence of high population density in some areas, made possible by the large supply of food resources and the ability to accumulate and store them.

Within the expansive Great Plains region in the center of the North American continent, settlers hunted large bison herds that grazed on the short grasses growing there. Unlike the animals hunted by the Clovis people, the bison were able to adapt to the warming climate conditions and flourished in the plains. The groups that followed and lived off them practiced a seminomadic lifestyle requiring relatively few belongings (dogs were the only pack animals available until the introduction of horses in the 16th century); thus, their culture had far less social stratification than existed in the Pacific Northwest. Hunting bison was dangerous and required keeping a distance in order to not startle the animals or allow them to grow reflexively fearful of human presence. We know from archaeological sites in central Canada, Texas, Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado that as long ago as 8000 BCE, hunters used a strategy of driving herds of bison over cliffs to their death. Once the animals had been killed or immobilized in this way, sometimes by the hundreds, the hunters could carefully process the carcasses for their meat, bones, and hides. Other strategies included cornering the bison herds in a way that allowed the hunters to approach them with spears.

In addition to bison, the plains peoples also hunted antelope, deer, and small animals like rabbits and birds. Hunting birds sometimes required the use of bird decoys designed with feathers to allow hunters to approach and make the kill. The hides of some animals, especially soft ones like rabbit, could be used for clothing when stitched together with plant materials. Edible plants included various types of seeds, berries, nuts, acorns, and tubers like yampa and biscuit-root, which could be unearthed with digging sticks. People carried and stored these foods in coiled baskets made of plants or bags made of leather.

To the east of the Great Plains lie the wetter and lush Eastern Woodlands, extending from the Mississippi River basin to the Atlantic coast. The groups that lived there found a great variety of plants and animals to feed on and exploit. The many rivers and lakes of the region provided fresh water that encouraged settlement along their shores. The same was the case with the oxbow lakes, U-shaped pools created as river courses stabilized in the warmer conditions. These locations also served as excellent hunting and fishing grounds for catfish, deer, birds, rabbits, and many others. Edible plants included nuts from oak, chestnut, and beech trees. Near coastal areas, there was access to saltwater marine life.

Not only was there less need for mobility here, so that settlements could be sustained, but populations also began to rise around 6500 BCE, and people constructed large earthworks in what would become Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Florida. The oldest discovered, Watson Brake in northern Louisiana, dates from around 3900 BCE and includes several human-made earth mounds as high as twenty-five feet and set in a circular formation. Archaeologists believe the site was likely used by hunter-gatherers on a seasonal basis. While no burial remains have been found there, large cemeteries from the period have been discovered in many other woodland locations including Illinois and Tennessee. Some sites include the remains of more than a hundred individuals, some with personal items like weapons and art. They are evidence of not only rising populations but also an increasingly sedentary lifestyle.

To the south and west of the Eastern Woodlands, the climate is much more arid and less green. This desert scrubland extends down the center of Mexico to the tip of the Central Mexican Plateau. South of there, in the region often described as Mesoamerica, the environment is warmer, greener, and wetter. The formerly large-game-hunting peoples settled there after around 8000 BCE as the game disappeared and the bison followed the retreating grassland north. Evidence of Archaic peoples in this area has been found in several coastal sites along the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean, as well as in the Tehuacán Valley south of modern Mexico City. They lived largely in small groups and hunted and gathered over large areas. During the dry season, they relied mostly on wild game like lizards, snakes, and insects, and edible plants like the agave. During the rainy season, they ate avocados, nuts, various types of fruit, and small game, like rabbits.

Beginning around 8000 BCE, some groups of hunter-gatherers began periodically occupying a site known as El Riego Cave in the Tehuacán Valley. Excavations there have uncovered numerous stone tools, woven baskets and blankets, and even elaborate burial sites. These burials suggest the existence of a complex spiritual practice. Other evidence in the Tehuacán Valley indicates that by around 5000 BCE, the settlers' earlier reliance on wild game had given way to a more plant-based diet that included beans, squash, maize (corn), and bottle gourds. By 2600 BCE, the gathering of wild plants had waned considerably as groups adopted agricultural practices, cultivating maize, beans, and squash.

The Andes Mountains run along the western side of South America, rising to more than twenty-two thousand feet in some areas and punctuated by arid deserts and dozens of rivers. It is unclear when the first humans reached South America. At the Monte Verde site in Chile, archaeologists excavating a peat bog recovered remnants of shelters, butchered animal remains, and even scraps of clothing made from hides. Testing dates these to about 12,000 BCE, well *before* the arrival of Clovis culture in the north. It is unclear exactly what this information means, and it leaves the story of how the Americas were populated incomplete. But whenever they came, the first hunter-gatherers who arrived appear to have spread quickly down the continent, likely because its unique geography encouraged north-south rather than east-west migration.

North American Civilizations

The earliest complex sedentary societies in North America began to emerge in the Ohio River valley around 1000 BCE, at the start of the Formative period, when mound-building cultures with large populations in the Eastern Woodlands became more common. The mound-building culture of the Ohio River valley area is often referred to as the Adena, after a mound excavated in 1901 in Ross County, Ohio. This and the hundreds of others discovered in the area were burial sites. They started small, with the burial of one or two important people, but grew over time as more were buried and more earth was used to cover them. Some of the mounds had a large circular ditch surrounding them and logs lining the interior. Evidence of postholes indicates that structures once stood there as well, suggesting the locations may have been meeting or ceremonial spots. The bodies of the dead themselves were often decorated with red ochre and other pigments. Grave objects included jewelry, weapons, stone tools, marine shells, and pipes for smoking kinnikinnick (a mixture of leaves and bark) and perhaps tobacco.

Communities of mound builders in the valley remained small at first, sometimes erecting no more than a couple of structures. The mounds themselves were also relatively small when compared with those of later cultures like the Hopewell tradition, a civilization that emerged around 200 BCE and eventually spread across the Eastern Woodlands through a common network of trade routes. Named for a large earthwork complex occupying 130 acres in today's Ohio, the Hopewell tradition emerged around 200 BCE and is one of the most impressive of many of this period in the Woodlands. The site encloses thirty-eight different mounds within a large earthen D-shaped rectangle. The largest are three conjoined mounds; before centuries of erosion occurred, together they measured about five hundred feet wide and thirty feet high. Large platforms once supported wooden structures and were likely used for ritual purposes.

Another Hopewell site located near Newark, Ohio, is equally impressive, with earthen enclosures, mounds, and an observation circle all organized to align with the movement of the moon and likely used to predict lunar eclipses and other seasonal events. Building such mounds with the available technology would have been a labor-intensive task and indicates the culture responsible was highly organized.

The mound complexes were used for ceremonial purposes and do not appear to have been the site of urban settlements. Instead, most people of the Hopewell culture lived in small dispersed communities consisting of only a few extended families. They employed both hunter-gatherer strategies and the cultivation of domesticated plants like sunflowers and bottle gourds. Neighboring groups likely came together to participate in hunting, gathering, and religious events at their ceremonial sites. Religious traditions included the veneration of ancestors, such as those buried in the mounds.

Different communities from the wider area buried their dead leaders in the same mounds, likely as a way to establish symbolic connections across kin groups. Evidence from sites like the one at Newark suggests that ceremonies for burial and veneration were probably connected to seasonal changes and important astronomical observations. The items deposited in the mounds included a number of artistic depictions of animals like beavers, bears, dogs, cats, and even supernatural mixtures of these. These likely had symbolic importance for the individual kin groups and were connected to both their religious practices and specific ancestral ceremonies.

Politically, the settlements of the Hopewell tradition were decentralized and mostly egalitarian. The leadership structure of individual kin groups may have revolved around shamans or shamanistic practices, but it does not appear that there were any powerful rulers. There were, however, some divisions of labor based on specialization, including healers, clan leaders, and those who possessed certain spiritual qualities necessary for interpreting astronomical signs, preparing burials, and preserving important religious traditions. Ceremonial objects made of copper, bone, stone, and wood and shaped into bird claws and totem animals aided shamanistic figures in their duties and were often buried with them. Items within the mounds also provide evidence of extensive long-distance trading. Those discovered in the Ohio River valley include copper from Lake Superior, quartz from Arkansas, mica from the Appalachian region, marine shells from the Gulf coast, and obsidian from as far away as the Rocky Mountains. Trade in these objects was carried out by individuals moving along rivers or the networks of village paths.

The North American Southwest

Far to the west of the mound-building cultures, a very different cultural tradition formed in the arid landscape of the Southwest. Here, people began experimenting with maize varieties as early as the third millennium BCE. By that time, some groups in the region had begun planting maize in small plots along riverbanks and using it to supplement their hunter-gatherer existence. Exactly how maize reached the American Southwest from southern Mexico is not clear, but there must have been some sporadic contact between cultivators in the south and hunter-gatherer adopters farther north. However, for many centuries after maize was introduced into the Southwest, its cultivation remained limited to one small part of a lifestyle firmly rooted in hunting and gathering. It is possible that the arid conditions of the region necessitated greater mobility and thus made the advantages of

maize cultivation less obvious.

Some of the earliest evidence of maize cultivation in the area dates from about 2250 BCE and comes from what is now northwestern New Mexico. By around 1200 BCE, groups in the Las Capas area, by the Santa Cruz River near modern Tucson, Arizona, had developed a sophisticated irrigation system for cultivating maize. The people at Las Capas built a network of canals that directed water from the river into their fields. Around this agricultural base, they constructed oval-shaped homes and pits for roasting the maize they grew. Over time, the homes became more elaborate and were organized in rings around courtyards. But even here the cultivation of maize remained only a small part of a largely hunter-gatherer lifestyle, which included gathering goosefoot and piñons as well as hunting rabbits, bison, and deer.

By around 500 BCE, the cultivation of beans was adding to the growing diversity of foods consumed in the Southwest. This change helped to encourage more dependence on maize since, nutritionally speaking, these two foods are complementary—beans are a source of lysine, a necessary amino acid that maize lacks. Growing beans with maize also increases the nitrogen in the soil and preserves its fertility for longer periods. However, even after the introduction of beans, settled and solidly agricultural communities in the Southwest did not begin to emerge until around 200 CE. Once they did, the region entered a transformational period that resulted in the development of the Anasazi or Ancestral Pueblo societies.

The Emergence of Distinct North American Societies

After many centuries of cultivating maize to supplement their hunter-gatherer lifestyle, around 500 BCE, groups in the American Southwest began to establish permanent villages supported by farming. Over the next few centuries, settled villages with permanent homes supplied with large storage pits for maize proliferated across the region. The agricultural peoples of these villages are often subdivided into three major cultural groups: the Mogollon tradition in the south, the Hohokam tradition in the west, and the Anasazi or Ancestral Pueblo tradition in the north. They were in contact with each other and shared a number of similarities. Their early settlements consisted of a number of oval and circular pit houses, partly underground and built of wooden poles covered in dried mud. These could be ventilated by rooftop openings accessible by internal ladders. Such homes were especially well suited to the sun-drenched environment and provided a cool escape from the hot outside temperatures. They also efficiently preserved heat during winter, when conditions could get exceedingly cold.

Settlements varied in size from a handful of homes to as many as sixty. The design of the dwellings and the complexity of the settlements varied as well, with both generally increasing over time. By around 700, for example, large ceremonial meeting-house structures called *kivas* had become common in the central and northern areas. These were likely the local centers of religious ceremonies and civic life. In the centuries after 700, the settlements evolved into larger collections of multiroom structures built of dried adobe clay and stone. By 900, similar permanent settlements dotted the larger southwestern landscape, including in modern New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Texas, and the Mexican state of Chihuahua.

The Pueblo Bonito

Some of the most impressive settlements that remain include Pueblo Bonito in New Mexico, Cliff Palace in Colorado, and Casas Grandes in Chihuahua. Pueblo Bonito in Chaco Canyon began to expand into the large masonry settlement visible in its ruins today around 800, when its residents abandoned their pit houses for the larger pueblo-style rooms. Pueblo architecture used stone or wooden frames covered in adobe clay. The houses and other buildings made in this way tended to have flat roofs that could be used as terraces.

At Pueblo Bonito, the houses were organized in a U-shape around the old pits from the pit houses, which were then used as *kivas*. This settlement reached its peak around 1000, which may have meant a modest population of about one hundred people, though its six hundred pueblo rooms could have housed as many as one thousand. In addition to being an important agricultural settlement, Pueblo Bonito was a major ceremonial center and likely attracted groups from the surrounding area for significant events. Some residents were clearly of particular importance, as indicated by the 130 burial sites and associated objects discovered there.

In addition to Pueblo Bonito, at least seventy other communities of varying sizes were scattered across the larger Chaco Canyon area. The total population of these settlements may have included as many as 5,500 people. Connections between them are suggested by shared pottery and architectural styles, and by the network of roads that pass through some settlements while radiating outward from the canyon like spokes on a wheel.

A long period of drought after 1130 led the residents of Chaco Canyon and Pueblo Bonito to abandon their settlements for other areas that promised sustenance. By about 1200, the old settlements were empty. Some eighty miles to the north in Mesa

Verde, conditions were wetter and natural resources more plentiful, and groups there built a number of impressive cliffside dwellings. Construction of one of the largest settlements, today called Cliff Palace, began around 1190. Archaeologists believe this settlement was made as a defensive measure when competition for scarce resources was becoming more intense. Similar cliffside settlements were built in other places in the region for the same reason. Cliff Palace had twenty-three kivas and 220 rooms made of sandstone, mortar, and wood. They extend up the side of the cliff, some towering twenty-six feet tall. Like Pueblo Bonito, Cliff Palace also likely had a population of about one hundred people. And for just over a century, the settlement prospered, until expanding drought conditions forced the residents to abandon it and the many other Mesa Verde settlements around 1300.

Because of its adobe design, Casas Grandes bears a superficial resemblance to some Anasazi communities. But the site actually has more in common with the Mesoamerican civilizations far to its south. For example, there are no kivas at Casas Grandes, but there are ruins of a large I-shaped Mesoamerican-style ball court. Among the valuable trading goods produced at Casas Grandes were colorful macaw feathers commonly used in Anasazi rituals. These indicate that trading networks existed between Casas Grandes and the Anasazi to their north. By the start of the fifteenth century, however, Casas Grandes was entering a period of decline; by the end of the century, it had been abandoned.

The Eastern Woodlands

Around the same time that settled agricultural communities were becoming common in the Southwest, the Eastern Woodlands region was going through its own cultural transformations. On the former site of the Adena and Hopewell traditions, a new mound-building culture called the Mississippian tradition began to emerge around 700. This large and sophisticated culture constructed some of the biggest and most impressive of all the ceremonial mounds in the region.

The Mississippian tradition was apparently sparked by the adoption of maize agriculture from much farther south. Maize may have arrived in the Eastern Woodlands as early as 800 and was adopted by groups already accustomed to farming edible plants like sunflowers and bottle gourds. By 1000, its cultivation had become common throughout the region, even among groups that had not used agricultural techniques before. Bean cultivation was also spreading around the Eastern Woodlands, and at about the same time, people in the area began to use the bow and arrow, especially for hunting small animals like birds.

Combined, these changes brought about a major cultural shift in the Eastern Woodlands marked by the appearance of large settled agricultural communities and the spread of common cultural, architectural, and technological practices. A number of settlements arose throughout the Mississippi River valley and as far away as Georgia and Florida. Most were small chiefdoms built around one or just a few earthen mounds. Occasionally, smaller settlements were grouped into larger chiefdoms, and in a few important places, the settlements were exceptionally large, with populations in the thousands. Archaeological discoveries reveal that these settlements communicated and traded with each other, maintaining large trading networks that linked their many urban centers. Artifacts have been found many hundreds of miles from the site of their manufacture, and common architectural and artistic details suggest that cultural ideas too were disseminated far and wide.

The Mississippian site at Cahokia near modern St. Louis is possibly the most elaborate and important site researched thus far. Earlier settlements nearby were smaller and date to about 600. But around 1050, the large urban center of Cahokia began to emerge, reaching its peak about 1250 before experiencing a gradual decline. At its height, Cahokia and its surrounding settlements covered nearly four square miles, had a population as large as sixteen thousand people, and included well over one hundred different mounds. At the center was a network of large mounds organized around a 100-foot-tall temple mound, built in stages with a wooden structure at its summit and a large staircase leading up from the surrounding plaza. Wood and thatch houses of various sizes radiated out from the central plaza and into the surrounding maize fields. Around the central complex of mounds and the homes of the elite was a large defensive wall, with watchtowers spaced at intervals around it.

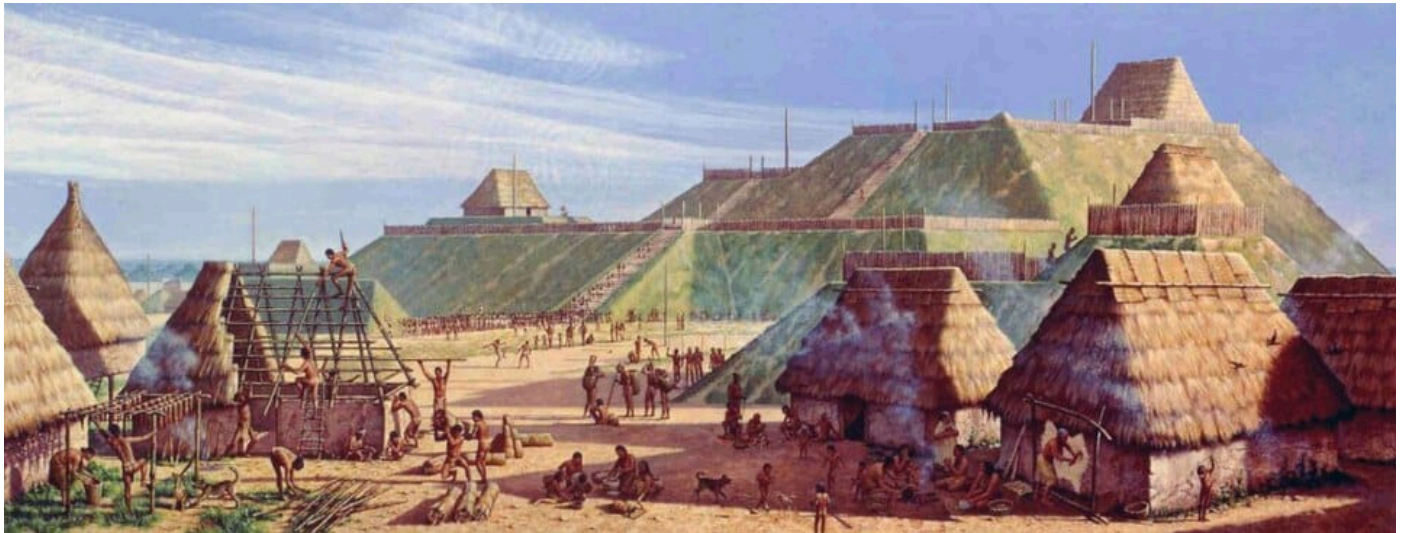


Figure 5.1.1: An artist depiction of the Cahokia mounds. (CC BY 4.0; Michael Hampshire via Wikimedia Commons). [Detailed Description of Figure 5.1.1.](#)

Other mounds at Cahokia served as burial mounds and platforms for ritual performances. Some of the rituals included human sacrifice, not unlike those common in Mesoamerica. One of the excavated mounds at the site contained the remains of several dozen sacrificial victims. At the base of this mound, archaeologists found the remains of two men, one buried face down, one face up. The man facing up had been placed on a bed of more than twenty thousand shells arranged in the shape of a large bird, suggesting that he was a particularly important person. Among the items buried with this “birdman” were hundreds of arrowheads, copper pieces, and a number of stones, elements of a ritual ball game called *chunkey* that may have had the same significance for the Mississippians as the rubber ball game had for Mesoamerican civilizations.

The “birdman’s” identity is not clear, but whether a leader, a shaman, or even an important warrior, he appears to have been a member of Cahokia’s elite. Cahokia and other large Mississippian settlements had a distinct nobility with access to luxury goods and a surplus of food produced by a large population of commoners who did agricultural work. Sites like Cahokia likely derived their power from their ability to exact tribute from surrounding groups, and from their control of long-distance trade routes that brought exotic items such as marine shells, rare stones, copper goods, and the feathers of colorful birds from distant lands.

Despite Cahokia’s obvious power, the settlement was relatively short-lived. By 1250, it had entered a period of decline, and ultimately it was abandoned. This did not mark the end of the Mississippian tradition itself, however. Sites like Moundville in Alabama, Etowah in Georgia, and many others bloomed in the wake of Cahokia’s demise. However, by about 1375, these large chiefdoms had begun to collapse as well. As the larger Mississippian tradition declined, so too did the long-distance trade routes. The people who had once lived at the large settlements became more dispersed across the Eastern Woodlands, leading to the emergence of a number of new groups. By the time the first Spanish explorers arrived in 1539, Cahokia was long gone. But from the records the Spanish kept, we know there were still a number of smaller chiefdoms scattered across the Eastern Woodlands. These were clearly different from the earlier Mississippian chiefdoms, but they still displayed many of the cultural traditions that had arisen centuries before.

5.2: Central American Civilizations

Overview

This section covers Mesoamerican history, starting with the Olmec civilization around 1200 BCE, recognized for their monumental architecture and cultural influences. It then discusses the Teotihuacanos' impact on the Maya, highlighting urban development and cultural exchanges. Key Maya achievements are noted, alongside their decline around 900 CE.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe how civilizations in the Americas adapted to their environments
- Discuss the contributions of the Olmec civilization to culture and religion in Mesoamerica
- Describe the expansion of pre-Columbian civilizations
- Identify key features of the Aztec civilization

The Olmec

By the year 1200 BCE, farming had become well established across southern Mexico, especially in the gulf lowland areas where there was sufficient water for irrigation. The many societies there were not exclusively agricultural; they continued to rely on hunting and gathering to supplement their diets. One of them, the Olmec culture, emerged around this time as Mesoamerica's first complex civilization with its own monumental architecture.

The start of the Olmec civilization, at a site known as San Lorenzo in the modern Mexican state of Veracruz, stretches back to about 1350 BCE and the construction of a large earthen platform rising some 164 feet above the flat landscape. Upon this platform, the Olmec built ceremonial and other structures, water reservoirs, a system of drains, numerous stone works of art, and a number of massive sculpted stone heads. One of the structures has become known as "the red palace" because of the red ochre pigment on the floor and walls. It was likely a residence for the elite and included large stone columns and aqueducts. The massive stone heads and other sculptures, some weighing as much as fifty tons, were carved from volcanic basalt that came from as far as ninety miles away and was likely brought by raft for part of the way and on rollers over land.

Because little of the San Lorenzo site remains, we can only speculate about the organization of the Olmec civilization, but it is clear that their civilization shaped those that followed. For example, the great earthen platform and monumental sculptures shaped like step pyramids attest to a highly sophisticated culture, with a clearly defined elite that could control large labor forces. Relying on pottery fragments and population density estimates, scholars have concluded that most workers were probably free laborers working to accomplish larger goals. They likely lived well beyond the elevated center reserved for the elite, in villages surrounded by gardens and other agricultural zones where the Olmec grew maize, avocados, palm nuts, squash, tomatoes, beans, tropical fruits, and cacao for chocolate.

The stone heads themselves are remarkable. Seventeen have been found across all the Olmec sites; some stand eleven feet tall. All are generally similar in form and style, depicting men's faces with large lips and noses with flared nostrils, but they were likely intended to be realistic portraits of rulers of the sites where they were discovered. Upon their heads are helmets of various styles, some with coverings for the ears. Given the effort required to transport the stone and carve the heads, these works were likely intended to emphasize the power of the rulers, both to the Olmec people and to outsiders.

Evidence of possible vandalism on some of the heads has led some scholars to suspect an invasion occurred in the tenth century BCE, with desecration of the images as a result. Others, however, believe this is evidence of reworking that was never completed. We may never know for sure, but we do know that during the tenth century BCE, San Lorenzo declined in importance. At the same time, another Olmec site rose in significance, some fifty miles to the northeast at La Venta.

La Venta was built around 1200 BCE on a high ridge above the Palma River less than ten miles from the Gulf of Mexico. By 900 BCE, it had become the dominant Olmec city in the region. At its height, La Venta covered almost five hundred acres and may

have supported as many as eighteen thousand people. Its central monuments included several large earthen mounds, plazas, a possible sports arena, several tombs, and numerous stone heads and other sculptures. The complexity of this urban complex reflects a major development in Mesoamerican civilizational and architectural design. It was likely built as a sacred site, with its temples and other complexes organized on a north-south axis believed to enhance the rulers' authority by connecting them to supernatural environments. This style of urban design was later adopted by other Mesoamerican civilizations like the Maya.

Olmec art depicts numerous deities, such as a dragon god, a bird god, a fish god, and many fertility deities like a maize god and water gods. The Olmec also clearly recognized many types of supernatural mixed beings, like a feathered serpent and the were-jaguar, a cross between a jaguar and a human. These artistic images imply that the Olmec had a sophisticated pantheon of gods who controlled the universe and expected certain rituals be performed, perhaps by Olmec leaders themselves, who may have functioned as shamans empowered to communicate with the spirit world. The rituals were performed in the temples and plazas of the sacred cities like La Venta and San Lorenzo, as well as in sacred natural sites like caves and mountaintops.

Other rituals were connected to a type of ball game played in a special court with balls made from the abundant natural rubber of the region. Sports contests often existed to bring communities together, to allow men to show prowess and strength in times of peace, and to entertain. It is also likely that in times of heightened spiritual need, such contests could take on greater meaning and might have been choreographed to play out supernatural narratives and perhaps connect people to the gods. Like some later civilizations, the Olmec also saw bloodletting as a link to the spirit world. Blood sports may have been used to create pathways to understanding the will of their gods.

The Olmec were clearly in contact with other groups around southern Mexico and Central America. There is evidence of a robust trade in pottery and valued materials like obsidian, magnetite, and shells, likely carried out by merchants traveling across the larger region. Over time, this trade exposed other Mesoamerican cultures to Olmec ideas about religion, art, architecture, and governance. Some scholars thus conclude that Olmec civilization was a “mother culture” for later large and sophisticated Mesoamerican states. Cultural similarities exist among these, such as ritual ball games, deities, and calendar systems. Olmec-style artifacts have also been found at sites as far away as what are now western Mexico and El Salvador. Like much related to the Olmec, however, the extent of their influence is a question we may never answer with certainty. By the time this civilization disappeared around 400 BCE, a number of other Mesoamerican cultures were emerging.

The Zapotec civilization appeared in the valleys of Oaxaca in western Mexico beginning around 500 BCE, with the construction of the regional capital known today as Monte Albán. Set on a flattened mountaintop overlooking the larger region, Monte Albán likely had a population of about five thousand by around 400 BCE and as many as twenty-five thousand by around 700 CE. As it grew over the centuries, so too did its stone temples and other complexes. The city exerted influence on the hundreds of much smaller communities scattered across the Oaxaca Valley. The region was highly suitable to maize cultivation, thus allowing for larger populations and monumental architecture. From the defensive walls created around their settlements, it seems the Zapotec lived in a world where warfare was especially common. Monte Albán itself was likely selected for defensive reasons.

The structures built at Monte Albán after 300 CE reflect the influence of another major Mesoamerican civilization about thirty miles northeast of Mexico City. The massive city of Teotihuacán dominated trade in obsidian, salt, cotton, cacao, and marine shells across southern Mexico and greatly influenced cultures like that of the Zapotec. The origins of the Teotihuacán settlement date to about 400 BCE, but major building at the site did not begin until centuries later. By 300, the growing city had a population of about 100,000, making it one of the largest cities in the world at the time. It exercised enormous cultural and military influence across large portions of Mesoamerica until it declined in the sixth and seventh centuries CE.

The Teotihuacanos built numerous stone temples and other structures organized around a north-south passageway known as the Avenue of the Dead. The largest temples are known as the Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon. Both are multitiered stone structures, 197 and 141 feet tall, respectively. The site also includes a large royal residence known as the Citadel, which includes the elaborate Temple of Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent. Elite military leaders and others lived in large apartment compounds decorated with colorful artwork depicting priests, gods, or warriors. The remaining population was spread across the roughly ten thousand square miles that surrounded the city and produced trade goods as well as agricultural products.

The size of Teotihuacán denotes its wealth and regional influence at its height. This wealth came from trading in crafts, agricultural products, obsidian tools, cloth, ceramics, and artwork. The many preserved frescos and murals show the city's rulers dressed in elaborate clothing, including iridescent quetzal bird feathers from as far away as Guatemala, testifying to Teotihuacán's long reach. To influence areas so far away, the city wielded power through its control of trade and use of military force and diplomacy. Sculptures at Monte Albán show Teotihuacano diplomats meeting with the Zapotec elite, reflecting mostly peaceful contact between the two civilizations. Evidence from Maya sites also demonstrates that the Teotihuacanos commonly intervened in Maya affairs deep in Central America, sometimes militarily. They may even have orchestrated a coup in the powerful Maya city of Tikal in 378.

The Maya

While Maya civilization was clearly influenced by the Teotihuacanos beginning in the fourth century CE, evidence of urban development and rapid population growth in the Maya heartland of Central America dates to before 600 BCE. Village life may go back much further, but in any case, by 600 BCE, the lowlands of Central America were full of small villages, each showing evidence of sophisticated pottery, architecture, irrigation techniques, and religious traditions. By 250 BCE, a handful of powerful Maya city-states had emerged. The major cities of this Early Classic period (250–600 CE) include Tikal, Calakmul, El Mirador, and a few others.

El Mirador was a dominant city before 150 CE, with a population of about 100,000 at its height. But Tikal and Calakmul were equally impressive. All had numerous large pyramid-like structures creating an impressive skyline across the spaces cleared of jungle. Most of the major cities were built next to large, shallow lakes, since access to water for drinking and irrigation was important in the lowlands, where rainfall was often insufficient. The tropical soil in the area is also insufficiently fertile, and the Maya developed a style of slash-and-burn agriculture to raise maize, squash, beans, and cacao for the growing urban populations in these cities.

The Maya were certainly influenced by Olmec civilization, though likely not directly. For example, some examples of Maya art include Olmec-derived features like the were-jaguar. The Maya also played a ritual ball game based on the earlier Olmec variety. Another possible Olmec influence was the Maya calendar. This consisted of two different parts—the 260-day Sacred Round calendar and the 365-day Vague Year calendar—that functioned together to create a 52-year cycle for measuring time and tying the dates for ceremonies to important mythological events performed by the gods.

The era of Maya greatness begins with the Classic period, starting around 250 CE and lasting until about 900. During this time, urbanization in the Maya world expanded greatly, with approximately forty different city-states emerging in different areas. Some of the most powerful were older sites like Tikal and Calakmul, along with newer locations like Palenque, Copan, Yaxchilan, and Piedras Negras. Each had its own rulers, referred to as “divine lords.” These powerful chieftains exercised their authority over the city-state through their control over religious rituals and ceremonies, the construction of temples, and especially wars they waged with other Maya city-states. Such wars were common for weakening rivals and keeping neighbors in line, and they may even have served important ritual purposes. They also allowed for the exacting of tribute from subdued enemies in the form of animal products, salt, textiles, artwork, and agricultural goods like cacao and maize. Tribute could be paid through labor as well, when defeated enemies supplied workers for the victorious city-state. Only rarely did rulers seek to control conquered city-states, however. These generally remained independent, though they all shared many cultural attributes.

At the heart of Maya religious practices was the veneration of family ancestors, who were considered bridges between heaven and earth. Homes had shrines for performing ritual bloodletting and prayers directed to the ancestors, and deceased family members were typically interred beneath the floor. Indeed, the large stone temples themselves were in some ways grander versions of these family shrines, usually with large tombs within them, and deceased kings were effectively ancestors for the entire city-state. Ritual practices were tied to the complicated Maya calendar, and gods could act in certain ways depending on the time of year and the location of certain heavenly bodies. Shamans and priests guided rituals like bloodletting, which allowed for communication with the ancestors by releasing a sacred essence in the blood called *chu'ulel*. The same principle applied to the human sacrifice of war captives and especially captured rival leaders.

While we can only speculate about how the Olmec played their ritual ball game, we know more about the Maya and later versions. The intention was to reenact aspects of Maya mythology, and the game held a significant place in religious practice. Two teams of four wore ritual protective padding and passed the ball to each other without using hands or feet on long I-shaped courts flanked by sloping walls. The object appeared to be to move the ball through a stone ring without letting it hit the ground. As the use of padding indicates, the game could be quite dangerous; the ball was solid rubber and could weigh more than seven pounds. But the true danger came at the end, when losing team leaders or sometimes the entire losing team could expect to be sacrificed to fulfill the game's ritual purpose.

One of the reasons we know so much about the Maya is that, unlike some other Mesoamerican civilizations, they created a writing system that scholars have been able to decode and read. This system was phonetically based, with complex characters, and was far more developed than any other writing system discovered in Mesoamerica. It allowed the Maya to record their own history in stone monuments, including invaluable political histories, descriptions of rituals, propagandistic records of battles, and genealogies.



Figure 5.2.1: A map of the classical and post-classical sites of the Mayan civilization. (CC BY 4.0; Kmusser via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). Detailed Description of Figure 5.2.1.

Classical Maya civilization entered a period of decline in the ninth century CE and then deteriorated rapidly. Over a period of about a century, alliances broke down, conflicts became more common, the production of luxury goods slowed to a stop, and cities went from thriving urban centers to depopulated shells. The reason for this collapse has been a topic of debate among historians and archaeologists for many years, and much remains uncertain. Among the proposed causes are epidemic diseases, invasions, natural disasters, internal revolutions, and environmental degradation. Several of these may have been influential; it is unlikely there was a single cause.

For example, studies over the last few decades have pointed to the environmental problems created by demographic growth. This growth led to large-scale deforestation, which in turn produced soil erosion. Large populations that required high agricultural yields made Maya civilization more vulnerable to variations in climate or a string of bad harvests caused by crop disease. Such problems would have put enormous pressure on elites and commoners alike and contributed to disorder, war, and perhaps internal revolts. However it happened, by 900 CE the Classic period of Maya civilization had come to an end. But this was not the end of the Maya. In the Yucatán Peninsula, well north of the old centers of power, Maya civilization would experience a rebirth that extended into the sixteenth century and the arrival of the Spanish.

The Aztec

The early origins of the Aztecs are cloudy, partly because this culture did not have a fully developed writing system for chronicling its history. Instead, the Aztecs relied on artistic records and oral traditions passed from generation to generation. They also used codices, book-like records drawn on bark paper that combined both images and pictograms. Based on information from these sources, historians have been able to place Aztec origins within the context of the collapse of the Toltec civilization. Much of our information about the Aztecs was recorded by the Spanish after they arrived in the sixteenth century. This is problematic for historians because Spanish religious leaders and conquistadores destroyed Indigenous records, particularly those that seemed to have religious significance. Since the Europeans viewed the Indigenous people through their own worldview and transformed Mesoamerica politically and culturally, their written accounts are often an imperfect means for understanding this people. Only by carefully studying the records we have, including Spanish accounts and Aztec codices, have scholars been able to piece together the story the Aztecs told themselves and their subject peoples about their origins.

The word Aztec is derived from their mythical original home, Aztlan. According to the Aztecs' own origin story, they migrated from Aztlan centuries before their rise to greatness in the Valley of Mexico. This long period of wandering in search of a new home included a number of important events, such as battles, encounters with sorcerers, significant tribal divisions, and the birth of important gods like Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec war god. The story culminates in a dramatic clash on the shore of Lake Texcoco. There the Aztec migrants faced an alliance of rebels who sought their destruction. They survived only because Huitzilopochtli intervened by sending his priests to kill the leader of the enemy alliance and rip out his heart. Huitzilopochtli then instructed the

Aztec priests to throw the heart far into the lake. It landed on the island of Tenochtitlán and sprouted a cactus, on which an eagle holding a snake landed. This was where Huitzilopochtli said the Aztecs should settle and build their great city

The Toltec were an earlier Mesoamerican culture that filled the power vacuum created by the decline of Teotihuacán. From their capital at Tula, the Toltec dominated central Mexico between the tenth and twelfth centuries CE. When their civilization collapsed internally or was possibly conquered, a number of nomadic and warlike groups descended into the area, one of which appears to have been the Aztecs. A new period of cultural transformation and violent wars followed. The Aztecs clearly excelled in these military conflicts, likely acting as mercenaries. Ultimately, they were permitted to settle on a collection of islands within a large but shallow ancient lake called Lake Texcoco, one of five contiguous lakes that once spread across the Valley of Mexico.

The Aztecs began constructing their home city of Tenochtitlán among the islands within Lake Texcoco around 1325. During the following century, they survived by trading goods they could produce as well as continuing to serve as mercenaries for the surrounding powers. In this way, they accumulated wealth and supplied themselves with stone, which they used to transform their small island settlement into a large and architecturally sophisticated city. After acquiring some influence in the region, they formed an alliance with two neighboring city-states, Texcoco and Tlacopan. Then, in 1428, this Triple Alliance launched a surprise attack on the powerful city-state of Atzacapotzalco and made itself the dominant regional power. Over the next several decades, the Triple Alliance, with the Aztecs at its head, expanded its control of central Mexico to include Oaxaca in the west, parts of modern Guatemala in the south, and the areas bordering the Gulf of Mexico. By 1502, the newly crowned emperor of the Aztecs, Moctezuma II, was ruling an expansive empire from his capital city of Tenochtitlán.

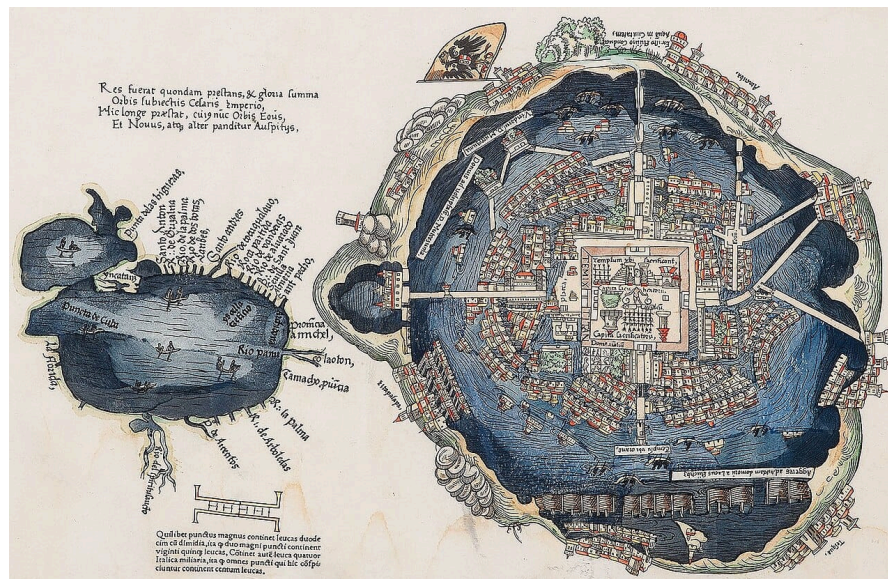


Figure 5.2.2: A European drawing depicting the city of Tenochtitlán. (CC BY 4.0 ;Friedrich Peypus via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).
Detailed Description of Figure 5.2.2.

At its height in the early 1500s, Tenochtitlán had a population of at least 200,000 people. It was a massive island city with large causeways that connected it to the shores of the lake. Some of the city's land had been made by human intervention, which included creating artificial agricultural islands called *chinampas* around the city that were crisscrossed by canals for irrigation and transportation. These chinampas produced food for the city's occupants. Toward the center of the island where the land was more firm were the homes of the city's occupants, made mostly of adobe with flat roofs and built around small courtyards. At the center of the island were large temples, a ball court, administration buildings, homes for the elite, and the palaces of the rulers. The most impressive of the temples was the Templo Mayor, which was expanded numerous times during its long history. By the early 1500s, it was a dual stepped pyramid standing about ninety feet tall. One side was dedicated to the city's patron Tlaloc, the god of rain. The other side was dedicated to Huitzilopochtli, the god of war. Priests climbed a long staircase to the temple to perform important state rituals.

One of the most important ceremonies performed at the Templo Mayor and other temples in Tenochtitlán was the ritual of human sacrifice. Like many Aztec traditions, this rite was widely practiced in Mesoamerica and had roots going back to the Olmec culture and likely earlier. Human sacrifices occurred on important days identified on the Aztec calendar and during the commemoration of new temples or the expansion of existing ones. Contemporary descriptions note that long lines of sacrificial victims were led

up the steps to the temple platform. There they were laid on a sacrificial stone, where their chests were opened with a sharp flint or obsidian knife and their hearts removed by the executioner. The bodies were then tossed down the steps of the temple.

These rituals were closely tied to Aztec cosmology and the people's understanding of their role in the universe. The gods were believed to participate in the practice of sacrifice and to have used it to create the world and perpetuate its existence. They often needed the assistance of human beings, who were created to serve and feed them through human sacrifice and other means. The sacrifices were thought to ensure that the sun stayed in the sky, the harvests continued to be bountiful, illnesses were kept at bay, and the military power of the Aztecs remained supreme.

Human sacrifice was also an important means of preserving and expanding the empire and keeping conquered territories in line, since sacrificial victims were often those captured in battle. Thus, the goal in warfare was often to seize the enemy alive. Aztec war had important ritual purposes too. In some instances, it could be highly theatrical and consisted of paired individuals fighting each other, rather than large armies. Young boys began training to serve in the Aztec military from an early age. They drilled regularly with javelins for throwing, leather-covered shields, and clubs fitted with obsidian blades. Until they were old enough and experienced enough to become warriors themselves, they worked in the service of veteran warriors.

The Aztec Empire also exacted tribute payments from its conquered territories. At its height, the empire consisted of thirty-eight provinces, each expected to submit specific tribute to the imperial capitals. Occasionally, regions that resisted incorporation into the empire were given harsh terms. More often, the type of tribute demanded was related to the location of the tribute state and the goods it typically produced. For example, the Gulf coast area was known for natural rubber production and was assessed a tribute payment of sixteen thousand rubber balls for use in the Aztec ball game. Locations much closer to the capitals commonly provided goods like food that were expensive to transport over long distances. Those much farther away might be expected to provide luxury goods the Aztec elite gave as gifts to important warriors. Typical tribute items included cloth, tools like knives and other weapons, craft goods of all types, and of course, food. Tribute items could also include laborers to work on larger imperial projects. The Aztec tribute system functioned much like a crude system of economic exchange. Goods of all types flowed into the centers of power and the hands of elites. But they also made their way to commoners, who benefited from the diversity of the items the system made available.

As a highly militarized society, Aztec culture prized perceived male virtues like bravery, strength, and fighting ability. Warriors were expected to sacrifice themselves to perpetuate the glory of the state. When they were successful in battle, they were adorned with rich cloth and celebrated by the masses. Aztec women operated within a more circumscribed world. They could not serve in the military or attain high positions within the state, yet they did not necessarily occupy a lower status than men. Rather, Aztec state culture emphasized the complementarity of women and men, with men expected to fill roles outside the home like farming and fighting and women responsible for domestic chores like cooking and weaving.

Aztec women thus often spent long hours grinding corn into meal and weaving clothing for the family. Their work could sometimes take them outside the home, such as to the markets where some gained considerable wealth as traders and served in leadership roles. As midwives and healers, women ensured that healthy children were born and that the sick were treated with medicines backed by centuries of knowledge about the medicinal properties of certain plants.

Aztec society was made up of a number of social tiers. At the bottom was a large number of enslaved people and commoners with no land. Above these were the commoners with land. Before the imperial expansion, landed commoners had some limited political power. However, within the imperial system they were relegated to providing food and service for the military. Above them were the many specialized craftspeople, merchants, and scribes. And above all commoners were the nobles, who used conspicuous displays of wealth to elevate themselves. They served in the most important military positions, on the courts, and in the priesthood.

The members of the Council of Four also came from the noble class. The council's primary task was to select the Aztec emperor, or *Huey Tlatoani*, from the ranks of the nobility. The emperor occupied a position far above everyone else in Aztec society. His coronation included elaborate rituals, processions, speeches, and performances, all meant to imbue him with enormous power. Even high-ranking nobles were obliged to lie face down in his presence.

The Aztec rulers had not always been so powerful or elevated so far above the masses. Their great authority and the ceremony of their office increased with the expansion of the empire. By the coronation of Moctezuma II in 1502, the office of emperor had reached its height, as had the empire. The expansion of the preceding decades had slowed, and demands for tribute and captives for ritual sacrifice were taking their toll and stirring resentment in many corners of the empire. It was into this context that the first Spanish explorers came. They were able to exploit the weaknesses in the empire and eventually bring about a new Spanish-centered order built on top of the old Aztec state.

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5.3: South American Civilizations

Overview

This section covers the early civilizations of South America, focusing on the Andes region's Chavín, Moche, Nazca, and Tiwanaku cultures, emphasizing their environmental adaptations, religious practices, and architectural achievements. It also details the origins and expansion of the Inca Empire, particularly under King Pachacuti, highlighting military conquests, the use of quipus for recordkeeping, and the significance of their road network.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify patterns of early migration to the Americas
- Describe the expansion of pre-Columbian civilizations
- Identify key features of the Inca civilization

Early Cultures and Civilizations in South America

The Andes Mountains were home to the earliest civilization in South America. The peoples who settled in the mountainous region and built a vibrant society that had a distinct outlook on the way the universe revealed balance in the world were eventually conquered by the Inca. The Inca Empire grew to become one of the most powerful empires in the Americas, but their time of dominance was short lived relative to the long timeline of history. The Spanish invasion collided head on with the Inca and transformed the region forever.

South of Mesoamerica and north of the Andes lies a dense tropical jungle that long prevented any regular communication or cultural transmission between the two areas. As a result, the early cultures and civilizations in South America developed in different ways and responded to different environmental factors. Neolithic settlements like Norte Chico in today's Peru had already emerged by 3000 BCE. However, in the centuries following this, others proliferated in the Northern Highlands as well. These include sites known today as Huaricoto, Galgada, and Kotosh, which were likely religious centers for offering sacrifices. There was also Sechin Alto, built along the desert coast after 2000 BCE. Then, around 1400 BCE, groups in the Southern Highlands area around Lake Titicaca (on the border between Peru and Bolivia) began growing in size after adopting agricultural practices. The construction of a large sunken court in this area around 1000 BCE indicates they had their own sophisticated ceremonial rituals.

The Chavín

Around 900 BCE, the Andes region experienced a transformation when a single society, often called the Chavín culture, expanded across the entire area, opening what archaeologists call the Early Horizon, or Formative, period. The Chavín culture is known for its distinctive pottery style, which spread throughout the entire region and depicted numerous people, deities, and animals in a flowing and balanced manner.

The name Chavín comes from Chavín de Huántar, possibly the culture's most important religious center. This site is more than ten thousand feet high in the Andes Mountains, to the east of the older Norte Chico settlements. Its dominant architectural feature was its large temple complex, which faced the rising sun and included a maze of tunnels snaking through. Deep within the tunnels was a large sculpture of possibly this culture's chief deity, called *El Lanzón* ("great lance") because of its long lance-like shape. The image of *El Lanzón* mixes both human and animal features, with flared wide nostrils, bared teeth, long fangs on either side of the mouth, and claws protruding from fingertips and toes. The temple was also decorated with many other sculptures of animals, human heads, and deities bearing the features of both, all probably intended to awe residents and visitors alike.

The inhabitants of Chavín de Huántar numbered about twenty-five hundred by 200 BCE as it slipped into decline. The site's importance lay in its role as a religious or ceremonial site, not as a population center. But by around 400 BCE, the Chavín religion and culture had spread far and wide across the Andes region. Whether these influences were transmitted by trade or warfare

is unclear. Eventually, however, they replaced other architectural and artistic styles and burial practices. Innovations in textile production and metalworking in gold, silver, and copper also proliferated around the region. Craftspeople in towns and villages produced textiles and metal objects, and traders moved them from place to place along improved routes and with the aid of llamas as pack animals.

Beginning around 200 BCE, the influence of Chavín cultural styles and religious symbols began to wane. This came at a time of increased regional warfare among many groups, evidenced by the increasing use of defensive features like walls around settlements. The broader Chavín-influenced region then fragmented into a number of regional cultures that grew to full-fledged civilizations like the Moche, Nazca, and Tiwanaku.

The Moche

The Moche civilization emerged in northern Peru and made major settlements with large pyramid-style architecture at Sipán, Moche, and Cerro Blanco. Its people were agriculturalists with a keen knowledge of irrigation technology, which they used to grow squash, beans, maize, and peppers. They were also a highly militaristic society; their art depicts warriors in hand-to-hand combat, scenes of torture, and other forms of physical violence. The Moche formed a politically organized state with a sophisticated administration system. Their cities and burial practices reflect a hierarchical organization, with powerful divine kings and families of nobles ruling from atop large pyramids. Below these two tiers was a class of many bureaucrats who helped manage the state. Near the bottom of the social order were the large numbers of workers, agricultural and otherwise, who lived in the many agricultural villages controlled by the elite.

The Nazca

Far to the south of the Moche, along the dry coast of southern Peru, were the Nazca, whose culture also emerged around 200 BCE. While the terrain there is parched, with rainfall virtually unknown in some areas, the rivers that carry water from the mountains provided the Nazca with sufficient water for irrigation. Unlike the Moche in their large cities, the Nazca people lived mostly in small villages. However, they maintained important ceremonial sites like Cahuachi, where villagers made pilgrimages and witnessed elaborate fertility and other rituals.

Politically, the Nazca may have adopted a type of confederation made up of a number of important families. Apart from many human-altered hills, called *huacas*, they also left behind hundreds of geoglyphs, large artistic representations imprinted in the dry desert ground. These are sometimes referred to as the Nazca Lines, and they can be either geometric patterns or images of animals like birds, fish, lizards, and cats. Some are as large as twelve hundred feet long and were created by clearing stones away from the desert floor to reveal the different-colored ground beneath.

Whereas the Nazca lived in the arid coastal desert, the Tiwanaku civilization thrived high in the mountains near Lake Titicaca. Like the Moche and Nazca societies, this culture emerged in the wake of the collapse of Chavín culture around 200 BCE. Beginning around 100 CE, it entered a period of sustained building at its key city of Tiwanaku. There, residents built two large stone structures topped by additional buildings and carved stone artwork. A signature feature of the structures at Tiwanaku is the many “trophy heads” that poke out from among the stone blocks. Noting the different facial features on each head, some scholars have concluded that they represent important ancestors of the Tiwanaku elite or possibly the gods of various conquered groups.

At its height, the city supported perhaps as many as forty thousand people and oversaw at least four smaller cities in the surrounding area. It may even have been the center of a type of imperial system, with colonies on both the Pacific coast and the eastern side of the Andes. To support Tiwanaku and the other related cities, the people irrigated massive fields with a network of canals to grow potatoes. They also raised domesticated llamas and used them as pack animals for long-distance trade.

Tiwanaku survived until about 1000 CE and may have declined as the water level in Lake Titicaca rose to flood its farmland. The other civilizations of this period—the Moche and the Nazca—had disappeared long before, between 500 and 600 CE, for reasons that likely included environmental transformations. Other Andean civilizations emerged in their wake, including the Wari of the highlands of southeastern Peru and the Chimor of coastal Peru. These later groups built upon the earlier cultures’ innovations in agriculture, art, manufacturing, and trade. While Wari declined around 800 CE, Chimor survived into the fifteenth century. It was only in the 1400s that Chimor was conquered by a new and expanding imperial system, the Inca.

The Inca Empire

At around the same time the Aztec Empire was expanding across Mesoamerica, an equally impressive new civilization was on the

rise in the Andes region of South America. Known today as the Inca, its cultural and technological roots extend back to the earlier Andean cultures of the Moche, Nazca, and Tiwanaku. The heart of what became the Inca Empire was the city of Cuzco, located more than eleven thousand feet above sea level in the central Andes and northwest of the shores of Lake Titicaca. But centuries before it became an imperial city, it was a relatively modest agricultural community where the predecessors of the Inca farmed potatoes and maize and raised llamas and guanacos.

According to one Andean tradition, the origin story of the Inca began with a great flood that displaced four brothers and their wives and sent them on a mission to find fertile land where they could settle. During the journey, one of the brothers acquired incredible and supernatural strength. Consumed with jealousy, the other brothers sealed him in a cave and left him to die. They continued on, somewhat remorseful, but on the outskirts of Cuzco, two were mysteriously turned to stone. This left only one brother, Ayar Manco, who reached Cuzco, dipped his golden cane into the ground, and founded the city.

The fantastical story of the Ayar brothers, with its descriptions of magic and supernatural events, is clearly partly fictional, and it is not the only origin myth about the Inca. However, it may preserve a kernel of truth about the early group that founded Cuzco, perhaps after some type of migration prompted by changes in climate. We may never fully know, but based on historical and archaeological evidence, we do know the people of Cuzco emerged as agricultural villagers by around 1000. Through both peaceful and violent means, they assumed a dominant position in the larger surrounding region. Over time, their numbers grew, and they became one of a number of small military powers in the Andean region, centered on the growing city of Cuzco. As master stonemasons, the Inca were capable of carefully carving stones so they fit tightly together. At its height in the early sixteenth century, Cuzco was an impressive stone city built high in the Andes.



Figure 5.3.1: Present day picture of the remains of the ancient Incan site Machu Picchu. (CC BY 4.0; Martin St-Amant via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). Detailed Description of Figure 5.3.1.

The leap to imperial expansion is explained by another Inca legend, this time telling of a military challenge from a rival group known as the Chanka and involving real historical figures. When the Chanka arrived at Cuzco, King Wiraqocha fled the city with his heir, leaving only a small group of nobles aligned with another son, Yupanki, to stand their ground. The defenders' act of courage inspired the creator god of the Inca to intervene by transforming the surrounding stones into warriors who helped Yupanki defeat the Chanka. In the aftermath of the victory, the story goes on, Yupanki assumed the additional title of Pachacuti, meaning "cataclysm." But the victory also led to an internal dispute between Pachacuti Yupanki and the reigning king, his father. This was ultimately resolved in Pachacuti Yupanki's favor, and he assumed control of Cuzco and the Inca, whereupon he began a series of wars of expansion that gave birth to the Inca Empire.

While this story was partly contrived, there is no doubt that Inca expansion did occur, and Pachacuti appears to have been a real leader. The empire's growth began in earnest around 1430 during his reign, and as king he oversaw the conquest of much of modern Peru. His successors, Thumpa and Wayna Qhapaq, further expanded the empire by adding territory far to the south in today's Chile and Argentina, to the east in the edges of the Amazon basin, and to the north in Ecuador and Colombia. These wars were costly in lives and material, but they were also important for sharpening the skills of the Inca military.

Inca warriors wore helmets and cloth armor, carried shields, and were equipped with weapons like clubs, spears, slings, and axes.

Typically, they could use their great numbers to overwhelm and awe the enemy into capitulation. If that failed, they rushed into the fray, often with little discipline but with great courageous resolve. Apart from the sheer power of numbers, the Inca military excelled in its ability to move swiftly along the empire's complicated highland road systems to surprise the enemy and put down any emerging rebellions.

The empire created through conquest was divided into four administrative regions controlled by close relatives of the emperor. Each region was then broken down into a number of provinces, organized generally along ethnic lines and ruled by an imperial governor selected from the Inca nobility. A great variety of crops were produced across the empire including potatoes, coca, cotton, and maize. Surpluses were held in large storehouses to feed the armies and provide sustenance in times of famine. The subjects of the empire were also expected to provide labor for the construction of roads, bridges, palaces, and religious structures and to serve as messengers, transport food to storehouses, or serve in the military. Certain members of each household submitted their labor tax while others stayed home to manage the family's affairs.

Inca Culture

Unlike the Maya, the Inca did not have a writing system that could be inked into a codex or carved in stone. But they did have an ingenious recordkeeping and communication system that relied on a portable device called a *quipu* ("kee-poo"), made of a great number of knotted strings. While many were destroyed by the Inca and later the Spanish, and much knowledge necessary to decipher them has been lost, surviving quipus have been carefully studied. They could record quantitative information like census and tax data, land allocations, the movements of armies, and astronomical observations. They also held qualitative information like ideas and possibly even poems. Different-colored strings and different types of knots that could be tied, untied, and retied made many thousands of combinations possible.

Apart from military violence and an organized imperial administration system, the Inca used religious symbolism to hold their empire together. A complex ritual calendar was overseen by religious experts whom the king and nobles regularly consulted before making political or military decisions. The Inca used human sacrifice in some rituals, but apparently not as readily as the Aztec of Mesoamerica. Among their most important deities was the sky god, who could manifest in a number of different forms such as the creator god Wiraqocha, the thunder god Illapa, and the sun god Inti. Inti was of particular importance because Inca rulers claimed direct descent from him. They constructed temples to Inti around the empire, encouraged his worship, and incorporated representations of conquered peoples into Inti's key temple in Cuzco. In this way, the Inca cemented stronger ties between their rulers and the large and diverse empire they had created.

One of the empire's most important features, and one that held its expansive territory together, were the many roads and bridges that laced through its vast domains. Unlike the Aztec Empire, which expanded across a far more topographically consistent landscape, the Inca Empire included large mountain ranges, canyons, deserts, and narrow coastal valleys. Travel and communication were difficult in this extreme landscape and necessitated a technologically sophisticated road and bridge system. While elements of the network predated the Inca, it was under Inca rule that the larger network was expanded and greatly improved. At the height of the empire, the system may have included as many as twenty-five thousand miles of roads. These roads were as diverse as the landscape itself, including straight passages across flat land, winding paths and staircases around and up mountains, and numerous canyon-spanning bridges made of rope, stone, and wood. On them the Inca armies traveled, and goods produced in the provinces made their way to the imperial storehouses.



Figure 5.3.2: A map of road network connecting major settlements across the Andes and Pacific coasts, with routes extending through present-day Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina. (CC BY 4.0; Manco Capac via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).
Detailed Description of Figure 5.3.2.

Like the Aztec Empire, the Inca Empire had just reached its height on the eve of the Spanish arrival in the early 1530s. Diseases brought by Europeans had already weakened it by then, even leading to the untimely death of Emperor Wayna Qhapaq in 1528. Just a few years later, the Spanish conqueror Francisco Pizarro reached Ecuador with his small army. There he found new Inca subjects eager to ally themselves with a possible enemy of the empire, while the Inca themselves were in the midst of a minor civil war over who would ascend the newly vacated throne. By 1532, the Spanish had entered the conflict and emerged masters of the empire, upon which they constructed their own system.

5.4: Chapter Themes to Discuss

Core Themes for Reflection and Discussion

This page offers different themes that appear throughout the sections in this chapter. The themes are meant to provide a framework in which discussion questions can be developed to inspire further exploration of the topics covered.

1. The similarities and differences of the various Indigenous societies throughout the Americas before 1492.
2. The various religious practices among the Indigenous Americans.
3. Issues of class and gender in Indigenous societies.

5.5: Alternative Text Descriptions

Figure 5.1.1 Illustration of a Mississippian Mound Settlement

This image is a reconstruction illustration of a large Indigenous settlement organized around several earthen platform mounds. The mounds rise above the surrounding structures and appear to support buildings or ceremonial spaces at the top. In the foreground and middle ground are thatched buildings, wooden construction frameworks, open plazas, and palisade fencing. The image highlights the scale, planning, and architectural complexity of the settlement, showing a built landscape with public, residential, and ceremonial spaces. The purpose of the image is to represent the layout and development of a Mississippian mound center.

Figure 5.2.1 Map of Major Maya Classic and Postclassic Sites

This image is a regional map of the Maya cultural area in Mesoamerica.

A bordered region outlines the area occupied by major Maya settlements, extending across the Yucatán Peninsula and into parts of present-day southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and western Honduras. The Maya area includes lowland regions in the north and east and higher, mountainous terrain in the south.

The map distinguishes between Classic-period and Postclassic-period Maya sites. Postclassic sites are concentrated in the northern Yucatán Peninsula and along the Caribbean coast. These include Dzibilchaltún, Uxmal, Chichén Itzá, Mayapán, Cobá, Tulum, Edzná, and Isla de Jaina. Chichén Itzá, Uxmal, and Mayapán are located in the northern interior of the peninsula, while Cobá and Tulum lie farther east near the Caribbean coast. Edzná is situated to the southwest of these northern centers.

Classic-period sites are distributed more broadly across the southern lowlands and highlands. Tikal and Calakmul are located in the central Maya lowlands, with Calakmul north of Tikal. Lamanai lies to the east in present-day Belize. Palenque, Pomoná, and Piedras Negras are located in the western Maya region near river systems connecting the interior lowlands. Bonampak and Toniná lie south of Palenque in the Chiapas highlands region. Farther south, Kaminaljuyú is located in the Guatemalan highlands. Quiriguá and Copán are situated in the southeastern Maya area, with Copán located farther east in present-day Honduras and Quiriguá to its northwest. Nim Li Punit lies between the central lowlands and the southeastern sites in present-day Belize.

The map shows that many of the largest Classic-period centers were concentrated in the southern lowlands and highlands, while many important Postclassic centers were concentrated in the northern Yucatán Peninsula.

The purpose of the map is to show the geographic distribution of major Maya sites and the shift in the locations of prominent centers between the Classic and Postclassic periods.

Figure 5.2.2 Early Map of Tenochtitlan

This image is an early map of **Tenochtitlan**, the Aztec capital, depicting the city as a densely populated island situated within a large lake.

The city occupies a roughly circular island at the center of the composition and is connected to the mainland by several broad causeways extending outward to the north, south, east, and west. These causeways cross the surrounding water and link the island to settlements and roads along the lake shore.

Within the island, canals and streets divide the city into numerous blocks filled with tightly packed buildings. The urban layout is organized around a large central ceremonial precinct located near the middle of the island. This central square contains the city's principal religious and administrative structures, including a large temple complex and other major buildings enclosed within a rectangular walled area. Broad avenues radiate outward from this center toward the causeways, creating a highly ordered plan.

The lake surrounding Tenochtitlan contains boats and canoe traffic, emphasizing the importance of water transportation. Additional settlements line the shores of the lake and are connected to the island city through the causeway network. The image also depicts dikes, bridges, and waterways that helped integrate the city with the surrounding region.

A smaller inset map on the left shows the broader lake basin in which Tenochtitlan was located. The inset identifies the position of the island city within the larger system of lakes and surrounding communities, illustrating that Tenochtitlan occupied a central location in the region rather than an isolated position.

The map's main purpose is to illustrate the distinctive setting of Tenochtitlan as a major urban center built on an island in Lake Texcoco, its system of causeways and canals, and the central ceremonial precinct that served as the political and religious heart of the city.

Figure 5.3.1 Machu Picchu

This image is a wide landscape view of Machu Picchu, showing stone terraces, stepped retaining walls, and the remains of stone buildings arranged along a narrow mountain ridge. The site occupies the foreground and middle ground, with agricultural terraces and clusters of ruins descending along steep slopes. Behind the site, tall green mountains rise sharply, partially covered by low clouds. The image emphasizes the high-altitude setting, the terraced construction, and the relationship between the archeological remains and the surrounding mountain environment. The purpose of the image is to show the scale, layout, and dramatic landscape setting of Machu Picchu.

Figure 5.3.2 Map of the Inca Empire Road System

This image is a map titled **"Map of the Inca Empire Road System"** showing the extensive transportation network that connected the Inca Empire along the Andes Mountains and the Pacific coast of western South America.

The map covers present-day Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, northern Chile, and northwestern Argentina. An inset map in the upper right shows the location of the road system along the western edge of South America.

The road network is organized around two major north-south routes. A primary mountain route follows the Andes from Quito in present-day Ecuador south through Cajamarca, Huánuco Pampa, Jauja, Cuzco, the Lake Titicaca region, Chuquiapu (La Paz), and onward into Bolivia and Argentina. A second primary route runs along the Pacific coast, connecting settlements such as Tumbes, Tucume, Lima, Pachacamac, Chala, Atico, Arequipa, Pica, Copiapo, and Santiago. Numerous connecting roads link the mountain and coastal routes, creating an integrated transportation network across diverse terrain.

The map distinguishes between ancient Inca cities, modern cities built on former Inca sites, and modern cities or towns. Inca cities shown include Huánuco Pampa, Jauja, Machu Picchu, Vilcas Huamán, Hatun Colla, Chucuito, Paría, Tilcara, Ranchillos, and other administrative and ceremonial centers. Modern cities built on Inca sites include Tomebamba (Cuenca), Cuzco, Chuquiapu (La Paz), and Santiago. Modern cities and towns shown along or near the network include Quito, Lima, Arequipa, Cochabamba, Salta, Mendoza, Copiapo, and several smaller settlements.

The road system extends from Quito and the northern frontier near Tumbes through the heart of the empire in Peru. Major routes converge near Cuzco, the imperial capital, which occupies a central position within the network. From Cuzco, roads spread northwest toward Machu Picchu and Huánuco Pampa, west toward the coast through Vilcas Huamán, southeast toward Lake Titicaca and Bolivia, and south into Chile and Argentina.

The map also shows modern national borders crossing the historic Inca transportation system, illustrating that the network connected regions that today belong to Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina.

The scale and density of the roads demonstrate the highly organized nature of Inca transportation and administration, with mountain roads, coastal roads, and connecting routes linking major population centers, agricultural regions, and administrative hubs across thousands of kilometers.

5.6: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials to Enhance the Course

These materials are provided to help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction. Some resources are openly licensed, while others may require institutional access or individual review before use in class.

Web Resources

These websites may help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction.

- [World History Encyclopedia](#) – Provides overviews of important people, places, and events throughout history. This resource can be useful for finding concise, expert-informed background information.
- [Fordham University Internet History Sourcebooks Project](#) – Provides translated, transcribed, and digitized primary sources. This resource can support source-based instruction, though instructors should review links carefully because some materials may be incomplete or less suitable for classroom use.

Articles

These articles provide additional scholarly context for this chapter. Access may depend on your institution's JSTOR subscription.

- Silverblatt, Irene. "Andean Women in the Inca Empire." *Feminist Studies* 4, no. 3 (1978): 37–61. [Access article in JSTOR](#)

Videos

These videos can be used to explore a specific topic in the chapter in more detail and as an entry to further discussion on chapter topics.

- [TED-Ed: How did Polynesian wayfinders navigate the Pacific Ocean?](#)
Length: 5 minutes, 31 seconds
Imagine setting sail from Hawaii in a canoe. Your target is a small island thousands of kilometers away in the middle of the Pacific Ocean — a body of water that covers more than 160 million square kilometers. For thousands of years, Polynesian navigators managed voyages like this without the help of modern navigational aids. How did they do it? Alan Tamayose and Shantell De Silva explain.
- [TED-Ed: The rise and fall of the Inca Empire](#)
Length: 5 minutes, 45 seconds
It was the western hemisphere's largest empire ever, with a population of nearly 10 million subjects. Yet within 100 years of its rise in the fifteenth century, the Inca Empire would be no more. What happened? Gordon McEwan details the rise and fall of the Inca Empire.

6: WORLDS COLLIDE

Overview

The year 1492 has profound significance in world history. The demand among European powers to find a trade route to Asia that avoided land routes that went through Muslim-controlled areas in the Middle East, voyagers eventually sailed west and came into contact with continents and peoples they had no idea existed before that time. The period of first contact among Indigenous Peoples of the Americas and the European explorers who gave way to conquerors profoundly transformed the trajectory of world history for people all over the world. The rise of colonialism in the Americas provided European powers with new wealth and control that led to the decimation of the Indigenous population throughout North, Central, and South America.

[6.1: Encounter and Conquest](#)

[6.2: Colonialism in the Americas](#)

[6.3: The Atlantic Slave Trade](#)

[6.4: Chapter Themes to Discuss](#)

[6.5: Alternative Text Descriptions](#)

[6.6: Teacher Resources](#)

6.1: Encounter and Conquest

Overview

This section explores the profound effects of the Middle Ages' innovations on European exploration, specifically during the 15th and 16th centuries. Key figures include Columbus, whose voyages, fueled by Spanish support, initiated colonization that often met with violence against Indigenous populations. The Treaty of Tordesillas and the Columbian Exchange are highlighted for their roles in reshaping both continents.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain how technological innovations in the fifteenth century made transatlantic journeys possible
- Discuss the motives for Spanish and Portuguese exploration in the Americas
- Analyze the impact of the Treaty of Tordesillas on the Atlantic World
- Describe the physical and cultural ramifications of the Columbian Exchange

The Rise of Maritime Nations

During the European Middle Ages, the Middle East and North Africa entered a golden age of learning. As Europeans increasingly made connections with peoples across the Mediterranean and in Central and East Asia, ideas from this golden age trickled back to them that influenced sailors, explorers, and shipbuilders. Then, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, innovators in navigation and exploration pushed Europeans to expand their trade networks across the globe and connect with new places and peoples. The most notable voyages of this period, known as the Age of Exploration, were the transatlantic voyages of Genoese explorer Christopher Columbus in the 1490s, underwritten by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain.

Christopher Columbus's 1492 voyage did not represent the first contact between European explorers and Indigenous peoples on the North American continent. Through archaeological and historical research, historians can now date that contact to nearly five hundred years before Columbus reached his first stop in the Caribbean.

In the early 1000s, Leif Erikson, a Viking explorer living in Greenland, heard from fellow explorer Bjarni Herjólfsson that another land lay only a few hundred miles to the west. In a journey during which he was blown off course, Erikson found a land to the west that he called Vinland, for the grapes that grew near its shores. He stayed there only through the winter, never making direct contact with the Indigenous peoples and returning to Greenland in the spring. His brother Thorvald was the first to make contact, which ended in violent conflict and the deaths of several Native Americans and Thorvald himself. In a third exploration, men and women of Erikson's family encountered the Indigenous people of Vinland again but maintained peace, creating a small but steady relationship with them based on trade.

The Viking explorers referred to these Indigenous peoples as Skraelings. Scholars are not sure which Indigenous group they belonged to, but twentieth-century archaeological digs in Nova Scotia have verified much of the information found in the Icelandic sagas of Vinland. In the 1960s, explorers Helge and Anne Ingstad discovered in Newfoundland, Canada, the buried ruins of a Viking camp from around the time of Erikson's explorations, in a place called L'Anse aux Meadows. This find definitively proved at last that the Norse had traveled to the Americas before Columbus. Over the years, it has been suggested that other people besides the Vikings also discovered the Americas before Columbus, including Irish monks, African sailors, and Chinese members of Admiral Zheng He's treasure fleet. There is no widely accepted proof of any of these voyages, however.

The settlements in Newfoundland never became permanent, likely because Indigenous groups developed an increasing hostility toward the often-violent Vikings. By the 1400s, the frontier colonies of Greenland populated by Norse peoples had also all but disappeared. But knowledge of a land farther west survived in the Norse sagas, and it is possible that it trickled across Europe into Italy and Spain and eventually into the mind of a young Christopher Columbus.

In the meantime, with the collapse of Constantinople and the fall of the Byzantine Empire to the Ottomans in 1453, many

Europeans felt a sense of doom. Not only had they lost a bastion of Christian power, but Muslims now controlled their tenuous overland connections to South and East Asia. As a result, they now had to go through Muslim intermediaries to purchase valuable spices such as cinnamon, pepper, cloves, and nutmeg that grew in only a few key locations. European nations, therefore, wanted to find an all-water passage to India and the chain of Indonesian islands known as the Spice Islands.

In the fifteenth century, Europe experienced a timely navigational revolution as a result of adopting new non-Western maritime technologies. In the first millennium CE, Arab sailors in the Middle East had created the lateen sail, a triangular sail that allowed ships to travel against the wind. The square European sail gave ships power, but the lateen sail increased their ability to maneuver. When Europeans combined the two kinds of sail on three-masted ships, they could navigate confidently in any direction. The sternpost rudder, created in China in the thirteenth century, also allowed for steering against the currents. For directional guidance, the ancient Greek astrolabe, which used constellations as a guide and enabled mariners to find their north-south position on the earth's surface, came to Europe after being refined in the Middle East. The magnetic compass also came to Europe in the fifteenth century, making its way from China where it was guiding ships by 1100 CE. The adoption of these inventions allowed Europeans to abandon their long-standing practice of navigating by sailing along a coastline. Now they could venture into the open ocean, beyond sight of land.

Portuguese Exploration

In the late 1400s, both Portugal and Spain were emerging from centuries of rule by North African Muslim states. Portugal had become an independent country by the twelfth century. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, it was a small country with poor soil. However, it did have one advantage—a geographical location that lent itself to exploration, specifically down the African coastline and across the Atlantic. Portugal also had plenty of coves and natural harbors suited for shipping, and speedy crosswinds and currents that gave it a shipping superhighway of sorts between northern and southern Europe. Various nearby islands such as the Azores also teemed with untapped fishing potential.

In the 1340s, King Afonso IV of Portugal raised public funds to build a commercial fleet that by the fifteenth century had transformed the nation into a maritime power. In 1341, the Portuguese sailed to the Canary Islands in the Atlantic. This was only the beginning of their exploration and conquest. In 1415, John I, grandson of Afonso IV, dispatched Portuguese forces to capture the city of Ceuta in Morocco. John hoped that control of a port on the North African coast would open that continent to both conquest and trade. To further cement his control of the region, he requested papal recognition of his efforts. In April 1418, Pope Martin V granted the Portuguese king the right to all African lands taken from Muslim rulers.

Under John's son Prince Henry, dubbed "the Navigator" by historians, Portuguese explorers claimed the Madeira Islands, the Azores, and the Cape Verde Islands off the coast of Africa. They also sailed down the western coast of Africa as far as today's Sierra Leone. Eventually, Portuguese expeditions reached the southern tip of Africa, and in 1488, Bartolomeu Dias, who had participated in the Battle of Ceuta, sailed around the Cape of Good Hope to reach the eastern side of the continent.

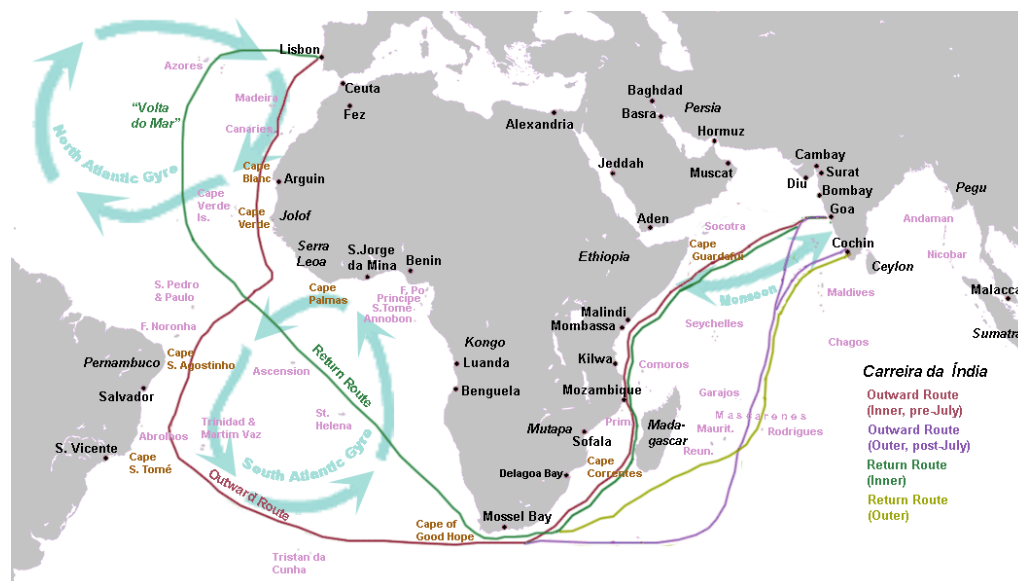


Figure 6.1.1.1: Historical map of the Carreira da Índia showing Portuguese maritime routes between Lisbon, Africa, and India. (CC BY 4.0; Walrasiad via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). [Detailed Description of Figure 6.1.1.](#)

The Portuguese were driven by both religious fervor and a desire for wealth. Since the Middle Ages, they, like other Europeans, had been intrigued by stories of a lost Christian kingdom somewhere in Africa or Asia, ruled by a legendary king named Prester John. By the 1400s, they had come to believe his lands were located in Africa, and their hope of forming an alliance with him to defeat the forces of Islam helped motivate their exploration there.

The Portuguese also hoped to gain access to the wealth of Africa. As they moved southward along the continent's coast, they established citadels on land leased from local rulers, like the fortress of Elmina, located on the coast of present-day Ghana. From there, they bartered for gold, ivory, and enslaved people. The first shipment of enslaved Africans arrived in Portugal in 1441. To further its economic interests, Portugal also established relations with the African kingdoms of Benin and Kongo. Its connection to Kongo, in what is now Angola, was particularly close. Members of Kongo's ruling family and nobility converted to Roman Catholicism and adopted Portuguese names. Kongo became an important source of enslaved laborers, and its kings readily assisted the Portuguese in taking captives from enemy tribes. The Portuguese claim to the riches of African trade was affirmed in 1455 in the *Romanus Pontifex*, a papal decree issued by Pope Nicholas V that granted Portugal exclusive rights to trade in Africa south of Cape Bojador, on the coast of Morocco. The interests of the Africans who controlled these lands were not considered.

Spanish Exploration

Despite the *Romanus Pontifex*, the Spanish monarchs Isabella I of Castille and Ferdinand II of Aragon were not willing to allow Portugal to take the lead in establishing maritime trade with places outside Europe. By 1492, the final Muslim stronghold on the Iberian Peninsula had been defeated, and, no longer worried about the threat posed by the Muslim presence, Isabella and Ferdinand could turn to matters beyond the peninsula. In 1486, the Genoese navigator Christopher Columbus approached them with a request for funds for exploration. Columbus proposed that he could reach Asia by sailing westward across the Atlantic Ocean. Eager to find an all-water route to Asia to compete with the Portuguese, Isabella and Ferdinand agreed to his request. Like the Portuguese monarchs, they were also dedicated to spreading Christianity and combating the spread of Islam. Indeed, they regarded themselves as Europe's foremost defenders of Roman Catholicism.

On August 3, 1492, Columbus set sail from Spain with three ships. After stopping briefly in the Canary Islands, he set off again on September 6. Five weeks later, he reached the Bahamas, which he believed were a part of Southeast Asia called the Indies. From there, he sailed to Cuba and an island Columbus named Hispaniola (meaning "little Spain"), the island now divided between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Columbus made contact with the inhabitants of Hispaniola, whom he called "Indians." Some welcomed the Europeans, who attempted to learn whether the inhabitants had gold, but one group, perhaps mistrusting the newcomers, engaged them in battle.

Leaving behind a handful of men to found a settlement on Hispaniola, Columbus and his crew departed for Europe, taking with them some local Arawak people they had kidnapped. They arrived in Spain in 1493, with Columbus believing he had succeeded in reaching the Indies. He returned to the Americas three more times. On the third voyage, he explored the coast of Venezuela, which he was certain was part of the Asian mainland.

Soon, however, Europeans came to realize that the lands Columbus had found were new continents, which were then named the Americas after the Italian mapmaker Amerigo Vespucci, who accompanied later Spanish and Portuguese voyages to South America. This was the beginning of European colonialism in the Americas. Colonialism is a practice in which one group of people attempts to establish control over another, usually for purposes of economic exploitation. The lands in the Americas to which the Spanish, Portuguese, and other European nations laid claim in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were incorporated into the colonial empires these countries were beginning to build.

Columbus's expeditions did not produce the riches the Spanish monarchs had hoped for. Nevertheless, Spain's exploration of the new continents continued, led by conquistadors. Some of these explorers were nobles or had military training and had fought against the Muslims in Spain; others were landless and wished to improve their lot in life. One instrument by which the Spanish government compensated conquistadors was the *encomienda*, a hereditary grant that entitled the holder, called an *encomendero*, to the labor of a specified number of conquered people, or to a tribute of precious metals or agricultural produce. Although the Crown forbade the enslavement of Indigenous peoples, the *encomienda* system enabled their abuse at the hands of Spanish settlers who hoped to profit from their labor.

The great prizes the Spanish hoped to find were soon discovered in Mexico. In 1519, the conquistador Hernán Cortés landed at Potonchan on the Yucatán Peninsula and marched north to the interior of Mexico, where he encountered the powerful Aztec Empire. The wealth of the Aztecs and the sophistication of their capital city of Tenochtitlán dazzled the Spanish. At first the Aztec emperor Moctezuma II welcomed them and presented them with gifts. Cortés, however, took Moctezuma prisoner and used him

as a puppet to attempt to control his people. Conflict erupted in 1520 when the Spanish killed participants in an Aztec religious ritual, and the residents of Tenochtitlán attacked the conquistadors. In the chaos Moctezuma II was killed, possibly by his own people who felt he had betrayed them, and the Spanish, facing destruction, fled Tenochtitlán for the nearby city of Tlaxcala, a rival of Tenochtitlán.

Cortés and his Tlaxcalan allies returned to Tenochtitlán in May 1521. By this time, the Aztecs were beginning to suffer from infectious diseases brought by the Spanish. Smallpox was a likely culprit, but other diseases may have been spreading as well. (For example, evidence exists that an outbreak of salmonella in 1540 also took many Aztec lives.) Badly weakened, the Aztecs could not defeat Cortés and his Indigenous allies. After a siege of three months, Tenochtitlán fell to the Spanish, who began converting the Aztecs to Christianity. Although some Aztecs converted voluntarily, many were forced. Aztec temples were destroyed, and Catholic Churches were built on top of them. The Spanish renamed Tenochtitlán Mexico City, and it became the capital of the colony of New Spain. The colony eventually provided Spanish monarchs with the wealth they craved in the form of rich silver deposits.

Cortés's exploits in Mexico were soon matched by those of another Spanish adventurer, Francisco Pizarro, who conquered the Inca Empire in South America. In January 1530, Pizarro sailed from the Canary Islands on an expedition to conquer Peru, which he had heard was rich in precious metals. His conquest had been authorized in 1529 by Queen Isabella of Portugal, the wife of Holy Roman emperor Charles V, who was also king of Spain. The Inca ruler had recently died of smallpox, and rival heirs to the throne were at war. Pizarro took advantage of the chaos and the fact that the Inca forces had been depleted by years of fighting. In 1532, he captured Atahualpa, one of the parties in the civil war; the following year, the Spanish executed him, despite his promises to fill an entire room with gold and two with silver if Pizarro set him free. Pizarro then seized control of Cuzco, the Inca capital. Peru, which like Mexico had extensive silver deposits, was reduced to a Spanish colony.

The Inca did not passively accept Spanish rule. Under the leader Manco Inca, about 100,000 Incas lay siege to Cuzco in 1536. They lacked the gunpowder weapons of the Spanish, however, and could not drive the Europeans out. The Spanish divided the Inca Empire into four regions, each with a Spanish governor, and Pizarro was given the territory that corresponds to the modern country of Peru.

The Treaty of Tordesillas

Word of Columbus's discoveries on behalf of the Spanish alarmed and angered the Portuguese. Under the terms of the 1479 Treaty of Alcáçovas, Portugal had renounced any claim to the Spanish throne and granted Spain control of the Canary Islands. In exchange, Portugal received the coast of Guinea in Africa, which was rich in gold, and all islands in the Atlantic south of the Canaries. This included not only those territories Portugal already controlled (Madeira, the Azores, and Cape Verde) but also any that might be discovered in the future. In 1481, the pope also issued a decree that granted Portugal territories in the Atlantic.

Spain's claim to the Caribbean islands Columbus had explored thus seemed to violate both the treaty and the pope's decree. The Portuguese king announced his intention to send an armed fleet to take control of them. Unable to challenge Portugal's dominance at sea, Isabella and Ferdinand asked Pope Alexander VI to intercede. The pope, who was Spanish, decreed that all lands belonged to Spain that fell west of a line drawn one hundred leagues west of any of the Azores and Cape Verde Islands.

Portugal accordingly began negotiations with Spain, which consented to move the line dividing Spanish from Portuguese possessions farther to the west. The new line cut across the eastern bulge of the South American continent (now part of Brazil) but left the rest of the Americas to Spain. This agreement, the Treaty of Tordesillas, was signed in 1494 and endorsed in 1506 by a decree of Pope Julius II. Thus, when the explorer Pedro Álvares Cabral landed on the eastern coast of South America in 1500, he was able to claim it for Portugal.

The Columbian Exchange

The impact of Portuguese and Spanish exploration and settlement went far beyond the political and economic implications. The so-called Columbian Exchange began with the first contact between native peoples and Christopher Columbus in the Caribbean in 1492. This phrase refers to the back-and-forth flow of plants, animals, and diseases between the Eastern and Western Hemispheres. Far more than physical products were traded, however. Ideas, religious practices, enslaved peoples, and cultural traditions also crossed the Atlantic to reshape, blend, and sometimes destroy various civilizations in the process.

As part of the Columbian Exchange, Europeans introduced to the Americas the crops they were familiar with at home, including wheat; the *Vitis vinifera* species of grape; fruits such as pears, peaches, and many varieties of apples; and vegetables such as onions and garlic. The first two were especially important for the Spanish and Portuguese. Wheat was needed to make the

communion wafers that were a necessary part of the Roman Catholic mass, and European grapes were needed to make wine for the same ceremony. For the most part, Native Americans had little interest in adopting European foods, but the arrival of nonedible resources created an immediate impact. Metal cookware and metal weaponry gave great power to those who chose to adopt them.

European, Asian, and African societies also changed as new plant life was brought eastward across the Atlantic. Indigenous peoples in North America had relied on maize (corn) for thousands of years, and varieties of potatoes, including sweet potatoes, had long been staples among Indigenous peoples in South America. Along with these foods, tomatoes, chili peppers, vanilla, manioc, pineapples, and peanuts were introduced to and became culinary staples of nations in Europe, Africa, and Asia. Chocolate, which had been consumed in liquid form by the Aztec and the Maya, and tobacco, another product from the Americas, became especially popular in Europe.

The Cultural Divide

The world into which Columbus stepped in 1492 was just as complex, diverse, and dangerous as the one he left behind. In the Americas, empires rose and fell, people married and raised families, individuals sought to better their lives by moving and innovating. But key differences shaped the collisions to come. One of the most fundamental was the perception of human nature and human origins. For Europeans, the world, its history, and its progression were linear. Just as the Christian Bible described, in the beginning there was darkness. Then God created light along with the world, and one day that world would come to an end. This belief influenced Europeans' perception that time progressed in a straight line along which humans were always moving forward. All things had a beginning, a point or climax, and an ending.

But for many Indigenous peoples, the world was cyclical and infinite. The Aztecs, for example, believed that the world in which they lived was but the latest in a series of worlds that had been created and destroyed. Their world would continue to exist only so long as they fed the sun with the blood of sacrificial victims. In Indigenous concepts of the cosmos, no hard separations existed between humans and nature, or between spiritual and human realms. Many religious belief systems were animistic, meaning the spiritual world resided not just in humans but also in animals, plants, and even rocks. This belief was very different from monotheism, in which all spiritual power resided in one single divine being. Indigenous religions did not focus on sin or on the nature of good and evil. Instead, the spiritual world was a place full of power that humans could harness for either good or evil. Though their specific beliefs varied widely, Indigenous groups in the Western Hemisphere held these basic views about their existence and their relationship to others and to the world.

Like humans, animals, and plants, the earth possessed sacred power; therefore, it could not be owned. The concept of owning land seemed nonsensical to many Indigenous groups, and their corresponding lack of emphasis on private property was one reason Europeans sometimes found it easy to lay claim to lands inhabited by native peoples.

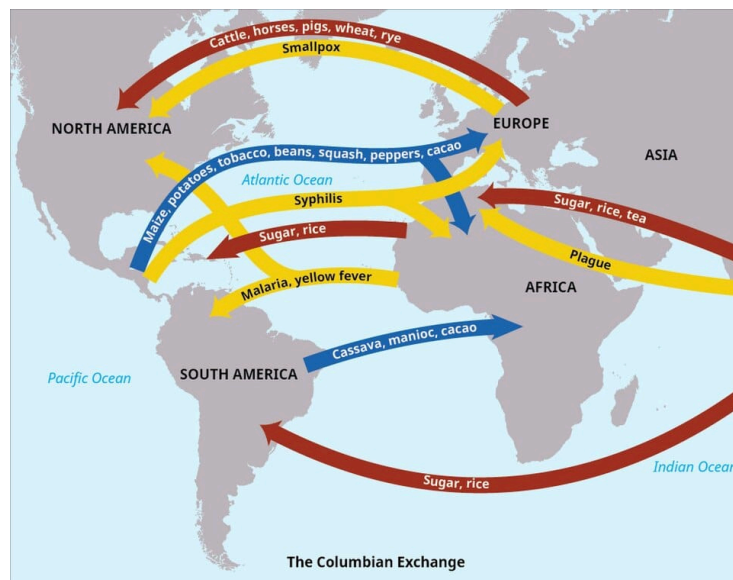


Figure 6.1.2: A map depicting the trade network between the Eastern and Western Hemispheres known as the Columbian Exchange. (CC BY 4.0; Mark Christensen via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 6.1.2.

Indigenous Americans also differed from Europeans of the 1400s in their approach to gender. While Indigenous women did complete some of the same tasks as European women, such as cooking, making clothing, and raising children, they also took part in activities that Europeans believed should be done by men and that in Europe usually were. For example, in many Indigenous societies, women were the principal farmers and built the family's dwelling. In many groups, women were revered as imbued with sacred powers to heal and to create. This power also gave them a strong voice in the leadership of their communities, and in some of these, women sat on tribal councils. Among the Iroquois of North America, for example, women often attended tribal councils to advise male clan representatives, and women chose the tribe's male leaders. Among the Wampanoag of southern New England, women could serve as tribal leaders.

In many tribes, individuals who did not accept the roles traditionally assigned to people of their sex had far more freedom to live as they desired than did such people in Europe. Women who wished to live as men and men who wished to live and dress as women did not necessarily face punishment or maltreatment as long as they contributed to society in other ways. For example, in some societies, women became hunters and warriors. In many societies, men who felt they had been born with the souls of women dressed as women, pursued women's occupations, and became the second or third wives of other men. Such men were often regarded as possessing great spiritual power and were treated with respect.

Disease and Depopulation

When Columbus arrived, the Indigenous population of the entire Western Hemisphere likely numbered around seventy-five million (compared to Europe's population of probably around seventy million), although historians' estimates vary greatly. Indigenous peoples made up more than six hundred groups or tribes in North America alone. Some, such as the Inuit and the Dene, were mostly hunter-gatherers in cold climates inhospitable to farming. Others farther south, such as the Puebloans and the Creek, farmed extensively, growing maize as the staple of their food economies. These groups often adopted political organizations practical for their environment. Hunter-gatherers such as the Apache lived as small bands of unified family units with a designated leader. Among township societies such as the Iroquois, groups of towns joined to form political confederacies. In the Aztec and Inca empires, large urban populations were ruled by monarchs.

Lack of exposure to European livestock or European diseases is not the sole reason the Indigenous peoples of the Americas died in such large numbers, however. Smallpox, typhus, measles, bubonic plague, influenza, salmonella, and other diseases took the lives of millions of people throughout the Americas because of the destruction wrought by Europeans. European settlers often allowed their livestock to roam loose, and these animals, especially hogs, wreaked havoc on the crops planted by Indigenous peoples. In places where the Spanish conducted slave raids, Indigenous people often went into hiding, refusing to venture out to farm, fish, or tend their fields for fear of being captured. The resulting malnutrition weakened their immune systems, making it harder for them to fight off infectious diseases, even those with which their bodies were familiar. In heavily settled, densely populated regions, infectious diseases spread rapidly. Bodies weakened by one disease easily succumbed to subsequent infections.

Other factors also contributed to depopulation across the Western continents. Groups intent on colonizing, such as the Spanish in New Spain, wanted to establish economies that exported wealth and materials to the home country. To that end, the infrastructure they built intentionally depleted local environments and deprived Indigenous peoples of the natural resources within their lands, including fertile soil, water, timber, and precious metals. When Indigenous populations did not accept these economic conditions, they were met with violence against themselves and their families.

Given violence, exile, enslavement, and a high death rate from disease, the original inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere experienced a cataclysm during the sixteenth century. They still resisted European incursions, however, beginning a centuries-long struggle with echoes in the present day. Within a few months of his exploring the Caribbean region, for example, Native leaders began directing Columbus to other islands, deflecting the negative consequences that followed the arrival of Europeans. Sometimes Indigenous groups chose violence to resist European violence.

Not all Indigenous peoples reacted with violence, however. During the often-brutal colonization of the Western Hemisphere, many systems of gender, religious beliefs, and societal organization that existed in the Americas did collapse, while others merged or changed, creating new hybrid societies across the American continents and the Caribbean islands. But many Indigenous groups chose to incorporate facets of European material culture, such as tools and weapons, into their own in ways that allowed for their survival. For example, the Comanche, a largely hunter-gatherer group, adopted the Spanish horses brought by the conquistadors. Within a few generations, the combination of horses and metal weaponry transformed the Comanche into an empire that negotiated as equals with the Spanish, the British, and the French.

Finally, not all Atlantic commerce and settlement flowed from east to west. Indigenous people also took advantage of the

Columbian Exchange and traveled to Europe seeking ways to help themselves and their people. By the seventeenth century, dozens of Indigenous negotiators had gone to Europe to appeal directly to the monarchs for aid and for military and economic benefits. Their efforts reveal the ways in which Indigenous groups all over the Atlantic World hoped to shape their future on their own terms.

6.2: Colonialism in the Americas

Overview

This section outlines the emergence of English colonial power in North America during the early seventeenth century, highlighting the distinct motivations of the Chesapeake colonies, focused on tobacco cultivation, and the New England Puritans, who sought religious freedom. It discusses the migration of Puritans, their establishment of communities like Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay, and internal dissent among them.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the similarities and differences among the colonies established by European powers.
- Describe the tensions that emerged between colonists and Native Peoples they encountered.

The New England and Chesapeake Colonies

At the start of the seventeenth century, the English had not established a permanent settlement in the Americas. Over the next century, however, they outpaced their rivals. The English encouraged emigration far more than the Spanish, French, or Dutch. They established nearly a dozen colonies, sending swarms of immigrants to populate the land. England had experienced a dramatic rise in population in the sixteenth century, and the colonies appeared a welcoming place for those who faced overcrowding and grinding poverty at home. Thousands of English migrants arrived in the Chesapeake Bay colonies of Virginia and Maryland to work in the tobacco fields. Another stream, this one of pious Puritan families, sought to live as they believed scripture demanded and established the Plymouth, Massachusetts Bay, New Haven, Connecticut, and Rhode Island colonies of New England.

Promoters of English colonization in North America, many of whom never ventured across the Atlantic, wrote about the bounty the English would find there. These boosters of colonization hoped to turn a profit—whether by importing raw resources or providing new markets for English goods—and spread Protestantism. The English migrants who actually made the journey, however, had different goals. In Chesapeake Bay, English migrants established Virginia and Maryland with a decidedly commercial orientation. Though the early Virginians at Jamestown hoped to find gold, they and the settlers in Maryland quickly discovered that growing tobacco was the only sure means of making money. Thousands of unmarried, unemployed, and impatient young Englishmen, along with a few Englishwomen, pinned their hopes for a better life on the tobacco fields of these two colonies.

A very different group of English men and women flocked to the cold climate and rocky soil of New England, spurred by religious motives. Many of the Puritans crossing the Atlantic were people who brought families and children. Often they were following their ministers in a migration “beyond the seas,” envisioning a new English Israel where reformed Protestantism would grow and thrive, providing a model for the rest of the Christian world and a counter to what they saw as the Catholic menace. While the English in Virginia and Maryland worked on expanding their profitable tobacco fields, the English in New England built towns focused on the church, where each congregation decided what was best for itself. The Congregational Church is the result of the Puritan enterprise in America. Many historians believe the fault lines separating what later became the North and South in the United States originated in the profound differences between the Chesapeake and New England colonies.

The source of those differences lay in England’s domestic problems. Increasingly in the early 1600s, the English state church—the Church of England, established in the 1530s—demanded conformity, or compliance with its practices, but Puritans pushed for greater reforms. By the 1620s, the Church of England began to see leading Puritan ministers and their followers as outlaws, a national security threat because of their opposition to its power. As the noose of conformity tightened around them, many Puritans decided to move to New England. By 1640, New England had a population of twenty-five thousand. Meanwhile, many loyal members of the Church of England, who ridiculed and mocked Puritans both at home and in New England, flocked to Virginia for economic opportunity.

The troubles in England escalated in the 1640s when civil war broke out, pitting Royalist supporters of King Charles I and the Church of England against Parliamentarians, the Puritan reformers and their supporters in Parliament. In 1649, the

Parliamentarians gained the upper hand and, in an unprecedented move, executed Charles I. In the 1650s, therefore, England became a republic, a state without a king. English colonists in America closely followed these events. Indeed, many Puritans left New England and returned home to take part in the struggle against the king and the national church. Other English men and women in the Chesapeake colonies and elsewhere in the English Atlantic World looked on in horror at the new order the Parliamentarians, led by the Puritan insurgents, appeared to unleash in England. The turmoil in England made the administration and imperial oversight of the Chesapeake and New England colonies difficult, and the two regions developed divergent cultures.

The Chesapeake colonies of Virginia and Maryland served a vital purpose in the developing seventeenth-century English empire by providing tobacco, a cash crop. However, the early history of Jamestown did not suggest the English outpost would survive. From the outset, its settlers struggled both with each other and with the native inhabitants, the powerful Powhatan, who controlled the area. Jealousies and infighting among the English destabilized the colony. One member, John Smith, took control and exercised near-dictatorial powers, which furthered aggravated the squabbling. The settlers' inability to grow their own food compounded this unstable situation. They were essentially employees of the Virginia Company of London, an English joint-stock company, in which investors provided the capital and assumed the risk in order to reap the profit, and they had to make a profit for their shareholders as well as for themselves. Most initially devoted themselves to finding gold and silver instead of finding ways to grow their own food.

Poor health, lack of food, and fighting with native peoples took the lives of many of the original Jamestown settlers. The winter of 1609–1610, which became known as “the starving time,” came close to annihilating the colony. By June 1610, the few remaining settlers had decided to abandon the area; only the last-minute arrival of a supply ship from England prevented another failed colonization effort. The supply ship brought new settlers, but only twelve hundred of the seventy-five hundred who came to Virginia between 1607 and 1624 survived.



Figure 6.2.1: A map first published in 1685 of the Chesapeake colonies of Maryland and Virginia. (CC BY 4.0; Christopher Browne via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). Detailed Description of Figure 6.2.1.

The Anglo-Powhatan Wars

By choosing to settle along the rivers on the banks of the Chesapeake, the English unknowingly placed themselves at the center of the Powhatan Empire, a powerful Algonquian confederacy of thirty native groups with perhaps as many as twenty-two thousand people. The territory of the equally impressive Susquehannock people also bordered English settlements at the north end of the Chesapeake Bay.

Tensions ran high between the English and the Powhatan, and near-constant war prevailed. The First Anglo-Powhatan War (1609–1614) resulted not only from the English colonists' intrusion onto Powhatan land, but also from their refusal to follow native protocol by giving gifts. English actions infuriated and insulted the Powhatan. In 1613, the settlers captured Pocahontas (also called Matoaka), the daughter of a Powhatan headman named Wahunsonacook, and gave her in marriage to Englishman John Rolfe. Their union, and her choice to remain with the English, helped quell the war in 1614. Pocahontas converted to Christianity, changing her name to Rebecca, and sailed with her husband and several other Powhatan to England where she was introduced to

King James I. Promoters of colonization publicized Pocahontas as an example of the good work of converting the Powhatan to Christianity.

Peace in Virginia did not last long. The Second Anglo-Powhatan War (1620s) broke out because of the expansion of the English settlement nearly one hundred miles into the interior, and because of the continued insults and friction caused by English activities. The Powhatan attacked in 1622 and succeeded in killing almost 350 English, about a third of the settlers. The English responded by annihilating every Powhatan village around Jamestown and from then on became even more intolerant. The Third Anglo-Powhatan War (1644–1646) began with a surprise attack in which the Powhatan killed around five hundred English colonists. However, their ultimate defeat in this conflict forced the Powhatan to acknowledge King Charles I as their sovereign. The Anglo-Powhatan Wars, spanning nearly forty years, illustrate the degree of native resistance that resulted from English intrusion into the Powhatan confederacy.

Puritan New England

The second major area to be colonized by the English in the first half of the seventeenth century, New England, differed markedly in its founding principles from the commercially oriented Chesapeake tobacco colonies. Settled largely by waves of Puritan families in the 1630s, New England had a religious orientation from the start. In England, reform-minded men and women had been calling for greater changes to the English national church since the 1580s. These reformers, who followed the teachings of John Calvin and other Protestant reformers, were called Puritans because of their insistence on “purifying” the Church of England of what they believed to be un-scriptural, especially Catholic elements that lingered in its institutions and practices.

Many who provided leadership in early New England were learned ministers who had studied at Cambridge or Oxford but who, because they had questioned the practices of the Church of England, had been deprived of careers by the king and his officials in an effort to silence all dissenting voices. Other Puritan leaders, such as the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop, came from the privileged class of English gentry. These well-to-do Puritans and many thousands more left their English homes not to establish a land of religious freedom, but to freely practice their own religion. Puritan New England offered them the opportunity to live as they believed the Bible demanded. In their “New” England, they set out to create a model of reformed Protestantism, a new English Israel.

The conflict generated by Puritanism had divided English society, because the Puritans demanded reforms that undermined the traditional festive culture. For example, they denounced popular pastimes like bear-baiting—letting dogs attack a chained bear—which were often conducted on Sundays when people had a few leisure hours. In the culture where William Shakespeare had produced his masterpieces, Puritans called for an end to the theater, censuring playhouses as places of decadence. Indeed, the Bible itself became part of the struggle between Puritans and James I, who headed the Church of England. Soon after ascending the throne, James commissioned a new version of the Bible in an effort to stifle Puritan reliance on the Geneva Bible, which followed the teachings of John Calvin and placed God’s authority above the monarch’s. The King James Version, published in 1611, instead emphasized the majesty of kings.

During the 1620s and 1630s, the conflict escalated to the point where the state church prohibited Puritan ministers from preaching. In the Church’s view, Puritans represented a national security threat, because their demands for cultural, social, and religious reforms undermined the king’s authority. Unwilling to conform to the Church of England, many Puritans found refuge in the New World. Yet those who emigrated to the Americas were not united. Some called for a complete break with the Church of England, while others remained committed to reforming the national church.

Plymouth: The First Puritan Colony

The first group of Puritans to make their way across the Atlantic was a small contingent known as the Pilgrims. Unlike other Puritans, they insisted on a complete separation from the Church of England and had first migrated to the Dutch Republic seeking religious freedom. Although they found they could worship without hindrance there, they grew concerned that they were losing their Englishness as they saw their children begin to learn the Dutch language and adopt Dutch ways. In addition, the English Pilgrims (and others in Europe) feared another attack on the Dutch Republic by Catholic Spain. Therefore, in 1620, they moved on to found the Plymouth Colony in present-day Massachusetts. The governor of Plymouth, William Bradford, was a Separatist, a proponent of complete separation from the English state church. Bradford and the other Pilgrim Separatists represented a major challenge to the prevailing vision of a unified English national church and empire. On board the *Mayflower*, which was bound for Virginia but landed on the tip of Cape Cod, Bradford and forty other adult men signed the Mayflower Compact, which presented a religious (rather than an economic) rationale for colonization. The compact expressed a community ideal of working together. When a larger exodus of Puritans established the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1630s, the Pilgrims at Plymouth welcomed

them and the two colonies cooperated with each other.

Different labor systems also distinguished early Puritan New England from the Chesapeake colonies. Puritans expected young people to work diligently at their calling, and all members of their large families, including children, did the bulk of the work necessary to run homes, farms, and businesses. Very few migrants came to New England as laborers; in fact, New England towns protected their disciplined homegrown workforce by refusing to allow outsiders in, assuring their sons and daughters of steady employment. New England's labor system produced remarkable results, notably a powerful maritime-based economy with scores of oceangoing ships and the crews necessary to sail them. New England mariners sailing New England-made ships transported Virginian tobacco and West Indian sugar throughout the Atlantic World.

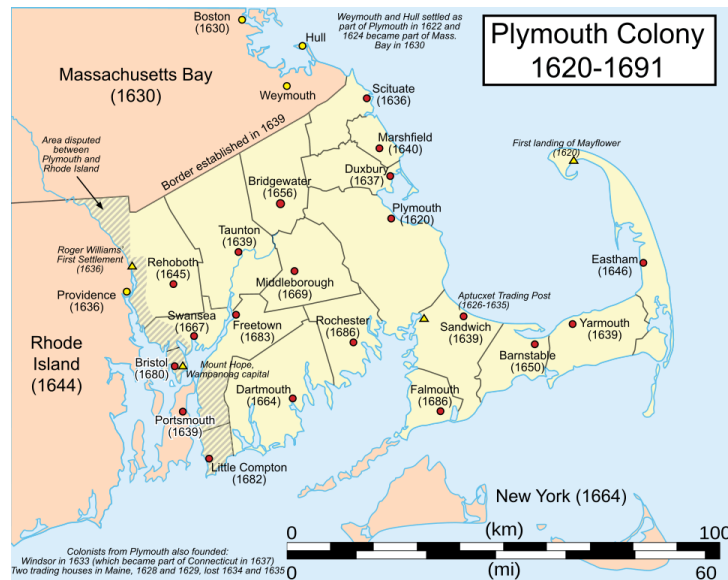


Figure 6.2.2: Historical map of Plymouth Colony, 1620–1691, showing town locations, borders, and nearby colonies. (CC BY 4.0; Christopher Browne via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). [Detailed Description of Figure 6.2.2.](#)

“A City upon a Hill”

A much larger group of English Puritans left England in the 1630s, establishing the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the New Haven Colony, the Connecticut Colony, and Rhode Island. Unlike the exodus of young males to the Chesapeake colonies, these migrants were families with young children and their university-trained ministers. Their aim, according to John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts Bay, was to create a model of reformed Protestantism—a “city upon a hill,” a new English Israel. The idea of a “city upon a hill” made clear the religious orientation of the New England settlement, and the charter of the Massachusetts Bay Colony stated as a goal that the colony’s people “may be soe religiously, peaceable, and civilly governed, as their good Life and orderlie Conversacon, maie wynn and incite the Natives of Country, to the Knowledg and Obedience of the onlie true God and Sauror of Mankinde, and the Christian Fayth.” To illustrate this, the seal of the Massachusetts Bay Company shows a half-naked Indian who entreats more of the English to “come over and help us.”

Puritan New England differed in many ways from both England and the rest of Europe. Protestants emphasized literacy so that everyone could read the Bible. This attitude was in stark contrast to that of Catholics, who refused to tolerate private ownership of Bibles in the vernacular. The Puritans, for their part, placed a special emphasis on reading scripture, and their commitment to literacy led to the establishment of the first printing press in English America in 1636. Four years later, in 1640, they published the first book in North America, the Bay Psalm Book. As Calvinists, Puritans adhered to the doctrine of predestination, whereby a few “elect” would be saved and all others damned. No one could be sure whether they were predestined for salvation, but through introspection, guided by scripture, Puritans hoped to find a glimmer of redemptive grace. Church membership was restricted to those Puritans who were willing to provide a conversion narrative telling how they came to understand their spiritual estate by hearing sermons and studying the Bible.

Although many people assume Puritans escaped England to establish religious freedom, they proved to be just as intolerant as the English state church. When dissenters, including Puritan minister Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, challenged Governor Winthrop in Massachusetts Bay in the 1630s, they were banished. Roger Williams questioned the Puritans’ taking of Indian land. Williams also argued for a complete separation from the Church of England, a position other Puritans in Massachusetts rejected,

as well as the idea that the state could not punish individuals for their beliefs. Although he did accept that nonbelievers were destined for eternal damnation, Williams did not think the state could compel true orthodoxy. Puritan authorities found him guilty of spreading dangerous ideas, but he went on to found Rhode Island as a colony that sheltered dissenting Puritans from their brethren in Massachusetts. In Rhode Island, Williams wrote favorably about native peoples, contrasting their virtues with Puritan New England's intolerance.

Anne Hutchinson also ran afoul of Puritan authorities for her criticism of the evolving religious practices in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In particular, she held that Puritan ministers in New England taught a shallow version of Protestantism emphasizing hierarchy and actions—a “covenant of works” rather than a “covenant of grace.” Literate Puritan women like Hutchinson presented a challenge to the male ministers' authority. Indeed, her major offense was her claim of direct religious revelation, a type of spiritual experience that negated the role of ministers. Because of Hutchinson's beliefs and her defiance of authority in the colony, especially that of Governor Winthrop, Puritan authorities tried and convicted her of holding false beliefs. In 1638, she was excommunicated and banished from the colony. She went to Rhode Island and later, in 1642, sought safety among the Dutch in New Netherland. The following year, Algonquian warriors killed Hutchinson and her family. In Massachusetts, Governor Winthrop noted her death as the righteous judgment of God against a heretic.



Figure 6.2.3: An artist rendition of the trial of Anne Hutchinson. (CC BY 4.0; Edwin Austin Abbey via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). [Detailed Description of Figure 6.2.3.](#)

Like many other Europeans, the Puritans believed in the supernatural. Every event appeared to be a sign of God's mercy or judgment, and people believed that witches allied themselves with the Devil to carry out evil deeds and deliberate harm such as the sickness or death of children, the loss of cattle, and other catastrophes. Hundreds were accused of witchcraft in Puritan New England, including townspeople whose habits or appearance bothered their neighbors or who appeared threatening for any reason. Women, seen as more susceptible to the Devil because of their supposedly weaker constitutions, made up the vast majority of suspects and those who were executed. The most notorious cases occurred in Salem Village in 1692. Many of the accusers who prosecuted the suspected witches had been traumatized by the Indian wars on the frontier and by unprecedented political and cultural changes in New England. Relying on their belief in witchcraft to help make sense of their changing world, Puritan authorities executed nineteen people and caused the deaths of several others.

Puritan Relations with Native Peoples

Like their Spanish and French Catholic rivals, English Puritans in America took steps to convert native peoples to their version of Christianity. John Eliot, the leading Puritan missionary in New England, urged natives in Massachusetts to live in “praying towns” established by English authorities for converted Indians, and to adopt the Puritan emphasis on the centrality of the Bible. In keeping with the Protestant emphasis on reading scripture, he translated the Bible into the local Algonquian language and published his work in 1663. Eliot hoped that as a result of his efforts, some of New England's native inhabitants would become preachers.

Tensions had existed from the beginning between the Puritans and the native people who controlled southern New England.

Relationships deteriorated as the Puritans continued to expand their settlements aggressively and as European ways increasingly disrupted native life. These strains led to King Philip's War (1675–1676), a massive regional conflict that was nearly successful in pushing the English out of New England.

When the Puritans began to arrive in the 1620s and 1630s, local Algonquian peoples had viewed them as potential allies in the conflicts already simmering between rival native groups. In 1621, the Wampanoag, led by Massasoit, concluded a peace treaty with the Pilgrims at Plymouth. In the 1630s, the Puritans in Massachusetts and Plymouth allied themselves with the Narragansett and Mohegan people against the Pequot, who had recently expanded their claims into southern New England. In May 1637, the Puritans attacked a large group of several hundred Pequot along the Mystic River in Connecticut. To the horror of their native allies, the Puritans massacred all but a handful of the men, women, and children they found.

By the mid-seventeenth century, the Puritans had pushed their way further into the interior of New England, establishing outposts along the Connecticut River Valley. There seemed no end to their expansion. Wampanoag leader Metacom or Metacomet, also known as King Philip among the English, was determined to stop the encroachment. The Wampanoag, along with the Nipmuck, Pocumtuck, and Narragansett, took up the hatchet to drive the English from the land. In the ensuing conflict, called King Philip's War, native forces succeeded in destroying half of the frontier Puritan towns; however, in the end, the English (aided by Mohegans and Christian Indians) prevailed and sold many captives into slavery in the West Indies. (The severed head of King Philip was publicly displayed in Plymouth.) The war also forever changed the English perception of native peoples; from then on, Puritan writers took great pains to vilify the natives as bloodthirsty savages. A new type of racial hatred became a defining feature of Indian-English relationships in the Northeast.

6.3: The Atlantic Slave Trade

Overview

This section covers the tobacco economy's development in the Chesapeake colonies, highlighting the transition from indentured servitude to racial slavery for economic and social stability. It examines the brutal nature of chattel slavery in the Americas compared to African practices, emphasizing the traumatic effects of the transatlantic slave trade.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify patterns of early migration to the Americas
- Describe the expansion of pre-Columbian civilizations
- Identify key features of the Anasazi and Mississippian traditions in North America

The Tobacco Economy and the Rise of Slavery

By the 1620s, Virginia had weathered the worst and gained a degree of permanence. Political stability came slowly, but by 1619, the fledgling colony was operating under the leadership of a governor, a council, and a House of Burgesses. Economic stability came from the lucrative cultivation of tobacco. Smoking tobacco was a long-standing practice among native peoples, and English and other European consumers soon adopted it. In 1614, the Virginia colony began exporting tobacco back to England, which earned it a sizable profit and saved the colony from ruin. A second tobacco colony, Maryland, was formed in 1634, when King Charles I granted its charter to the Calvert family for their loyal service to England. Cecilus Calvert, the second Lord Baltimore, conceived of Maryland as a refuge for English Catholics.

Growing tobacco proved very labor-intensive, and the Chesapeake colonists needed a steady workforce to do the hard work of clearing the land and caring for the tender young plants. The mature leaf of the plant then had to be cured (dried), which necessitated the construction of drying barns. Once cured, the tobacco had to be packaged in hogsheads (large wooden barrels) and loaded aboard ship, which also required considerable labor.

To meet these labor demands, early Virginians relied on indentured servants. An indenture is a labor contract that young, impoverished, and often illiterate Englishmen and occasionally Englishwomen signed in England, pledging to work for a number of years (usually between five and seven) growing tobacco in the Chesapeake colonies. In return, indentured servants received paid passage to America and food, clothing, and lodging. At the end of their indenture servants received "freedom dues," usually food and other provisions, including, in some cases, land provided by the colony. The promise of a new life in America was a strong attraction for members of England's underclass, who had few if any options at home. In the 1600s, some 100,000 indentured servants traveled to the Chesapeake Bay. Most were poor young men in their early twenties.

Life in the colonies proved harsh, however. Indentured servants could not marry, and they were subject to the will of the tobacco planters who bought their labor contracts. If they committed a crime or disobeyed their masters, they found their terms of service lengthened, often by several years. Female indentured servants faced special dangers in what was essentially a bachelor colony. Many were exploited by unscrupulous tobacco planters who seduced them with promises of marriage. These planters would then sell their pregnant servants to other tobacco planters to avoid the costs of raising a child.

Nonetheless, those indentured servants who completed their term of service often began new lives as tobacco planters. To entice even more migrants to the North American colonies, the Virginia Company also implemented the headright system, in which those who paid their own passage to Virginia received fifty acres plus an additional fifty for each servant or family member they brought with them. The headright system and the promise of a new life for servants acted as powerful incentives for English migrants to hazard the journey to the Americas even if many of them never obtained the land they were promised.



Figure 6.3.1: A conjectural painting of tobacco farming in Virginia, circa 1650. (CC BY 4.0; Sidney E. King via Wikimedia Commons). [Detailed Description of Figure 6.3.1.](#)

Slavery in the Chesapeake Bay Colonies

The transition from indentured servitude to slavery as the main labor source for some English colonies happened first in the West Indies. On the small island of Barbados, colonized in the 1620s, English planters first grew tobacco as their main export crop, but in the 1640s, they converted to sugarcane and began increasingly to rely on African slaves. In 1655, England wrestled control of Jamaica from the Spanish and quickly turned it into a lucrative sugar island, run on slave labor, for its expanding empire. While slavery was slower to take hold in the Chesapeake colonies, by the end of the seventeenth century, both Virginia and Maryland had also adopted chattel slavery—which legally defined Africans as property and not people—as the dominant form of labor to grow tobacco. Chesapeake colonists also enslaved native people.

When the first Africans arrived in Virginia in 1619, slavery—which did not exist in England—had not yet become an institution in colonial America. Many Africans worked as servants and, like their white counterparts, could acquire land of their own. Some Africans who converted to Christianity became free landowners with white servants. The change in the status of Africans in the Chesapeake to that of slaves occurred in the last decades of the seventeenth century.

Bacon's Rebellion, an uprising of both whites and blacks who believed that the Virginia government was impeding their access to land and wealth and seemed to do little to clear the land of Indians, hastened the transition to African slavery in the Chesapeake colonies. The rebellion takes its name from Nathaniel Bacon, a wealthy young Englishman who arrived in Virginia in 1674. Despite an early friendship with Virginia's royal governor, William Berkeley, Bacon found himself excluded from the governor's circle of influential friends and councilors. He wanted land on the Virginia frontier, but the governor, fearing war with neighboring Indian tribes, forbade further expansion. Bacon marshaled others, especially former indentured servants who believed the governor was limiting their economic opportunities and denying them the right to own tobacco farms. Bacon's followers believed Berkeley's frontier policy didn't protect English settlers enough. Worse still in their eyes, Governor Berkeley tried to keep peace in Virginia by signing treaties with various local native peoples. Bacon and his followers, who saw all Indians as an obstacle to their access to land, pursued a policy of extermination.

Tensions between the English and the native peoples in the Chesapeake colonies led to open conflict. In 1675, war broke out when Susquehannock warriors attacked settlements on Virginia's frontier, killing English planters and destroying English plantations, including one owned by Bacon. In 1676, Bacon and other Virginians attacked the Susquehannock without the governor's approval. When Berkeley ordered Bacon's arrest, Bacon led his followers to Jamestown, forced the governor to flee to the safety of Virginia's eastern shore, and then burned the city. The civil war known as Bacon's Rebellion, a vicious struggle between supporters of the governor and those who supported Bacon, ensued. Reports of the rebellion traveled back to England, leading Charles II to dispatch both royal troops and English commissioners to restore order in the tobacco colonies. By the end of 1676, Virginians loyal to the governor gained the upper hand, executing several leaders of the rebellion. Bacon escaped the hangman's noose, instead dying of dysentery. The rebellion fizzled in 1676, but Virginians remained divided as supporters of Bacon continued to harbor grievances over access to Indian land.

Bacon's Rebellion helped to catalyze the creation of a system of racial slavery in the Chesapeake colonies. At the time of the rebellion, indentured servants made up the majority of laborers in the region. Wealthy whites worried over the presence of this large class of laborers and the relative freedom they enjoyed, as well as the alliance that black and white servants had forged in the course of the rebellion. Replacing indentured servitude with black slavery diminished these risks, alleviating the reliance on white indentured servants, who were often dissatisfied and troublesome, and creating a caste of racially defined laborers whose movements were strictly controlled. It also lessened the possibility of further alliances between black and white workers. Racial slavery even served to heal some of the divisions between wealthy and poor whites, who could now unite as members of a "superior" racial group.

While colonial laws in the tobacco colonies had made slavery a legal institution before Bacon's Rebellion, new laws passed in the wake of the rebellion severely curtailed black freedom and laid the foundation for racial slavery. Virginia passed a law in 1680 prohibiting free blacks and slaves from bearing arms, banning blacks from congregating in large numbers, and establishing harsh punishments for slaves who assaulted Christians or attempted escape. Two years later, another Virginia law stipulated that all Africans brought to the colony would be slaves for life. Thus, the increasing reliance on slaves in the tobacco colonies—and the draconian laws instituted to control them—not only helped planters meet labor demands, but also served to assuage English fears of further uprisings and alleviate class tensions between rich and poor whites.

African and North American Slavery

The captives purchased by European ship captains were sold by other Africans. Europeans did not introduce slavery to Africa; it had existed there for centuries before the triangular trade began. It was different in important ways, however, from the slavery that awaited Africans on the other side of the Atlantic.

Slavery existed in numerous African societies, and there were many ways in which a person could become enslaved. In some societies, slavery served as punishment for a crime. In others, people could be enslaved or sell their children into slavery to pay a debt. In times of hardship like famine, parents might sell children to more prosperous people to earn money to support themselves and ensure their children would be fed. In many societies, enslaved people were taken as prisoners of war.

Africans enslaved people primarily to enlarge their households, the basic economic units of society. Families suffered if they did not have enough able-bodied people to work in the fields or tend to herds, and slavery provided a solution. Some enslaved Africans remained with the slaveholder their entire lives, but others expected to regain their freedom. Those enslaved to pay a debt, for example, gained their freedom once the debt had been settled. Even people enslaved for life could participate fully in the life of the household or community. They could marry; their spouse might be free, and their children would be. They might own property, including enslaved people of their own. They were often well respected in the community, especially if they possessed important knowledge or skills. Africans regarded slavery as an unfortunate fate that might befall anyone; being enslaved did not imply an inherent difference or inferiority. The life of an enslaved person was not comfortable or easy, but it was not often what we think of when we consider Atlantic plantation slavery.

Slavery in the Americas was different. It was chattel slavery, in which one person is owned by another as a piece of property like an inanimate object or livestock. The enslaved had no status or legal rights as persons. They could be bought, sold, inherited, or given to another. They had no right to control their own bodies or their own labor, and they could be compelled to do whatever the slaveholder wished. Their status could be passed on to their children; in all the European colonies in the Americas, the child of an enslaved woman was born enslaved. Although chattel slavery also existed in Africa, this was the only form of slavery that existed in the Americas.

For centuries, Africans had participated in the trans-Saharan slave trade, selling prisoners in North Africa and on the Swahili Coast to be transported to destinations in the Mediterranean or the Middle East. The arrival of Europeans willing to pay large sums changed the focus of the African slave trade, however. Africans now captured and enslaved large numbers of other Africans with the intent of selling them to Europeans for transportation across the Atlantic. Wars were launched against rival peoples solely for the purpose of taking captives, and slave traders led expeditions into the interior of the continent to kidnap people who lived far away. Africans were not safe in their own homes. In the eighteenth century, slave traders kidnapped young Olaudah Equiano (later an abolitionist) and his sister as they played at home; while their parents were gone, strangers climbed over a wall into the courtyard of their house and carried the children away. Some people were tricked and sold to European slave traders by their own relatives.

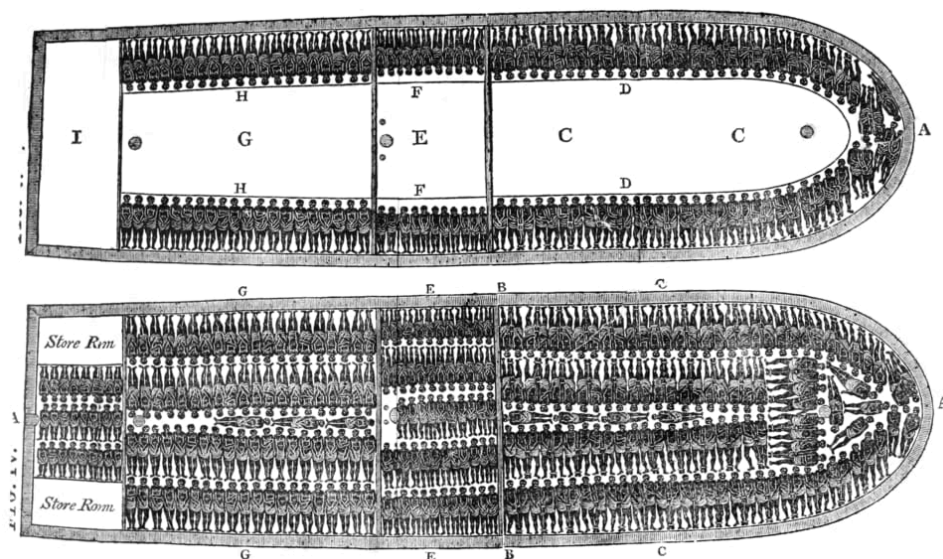


Figure 6.3.2: A drawing of the layout of the interior of a ship carrying Africans who would be sold into slavery. (CC BY 4.0; Great Britain House of Commons via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). [Detailed Description of Figure 6.3.2.](#)

Once captured, people were marched for days to one of the places on the coast where Europeans exchanged goods for human beings. Many died on the way. Slave traders commonly chained their captives together on the journey, and devices were sometimes fixed to captives' necks so that if they managed to escape, they would die of thirst because they could not lower their heads into streams to drink. Once they reached the coast, the traders stripped them naked and shaved their heads to keep them free of lice. The traders then greased their bodies with palm oil to make them look fit and healthy when buyers came.

A number of slave trading ports flourished on the western coast of Africa from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Among them were Ouidah (Whydah), Grand-Popo, Jaquim, and Porto-Novo in modern Benin; Badagry in Nigeria; and Little Popo in Togo. In these ports, English, Dutch, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Danish, and Swedish traders and sea captains bargained with African slave traders for their captives. Some African city-states and kingdoms became wealthy from the slave trade, and their rulers protested only if their own people were taken. King Afonso of Kongo told the king of Portugal that, out of a desire for European goods, the people of his own kingdom were capturing their fellow Kongolese and selling them to Portuguese traders. He did not denounce the slave trade but asked only that the Portuguese bring their captives to officials of Kongo to be sure they were not free Kongolese wrongfully seized. According to King Gezo of Benin, "The slave trade is the ruling principle of my people. It is the source and the glory of their wealth . . . the mother lulls the child to sleep with notes of triumph over an enemy reduced to slavery."

The transatlantic slave trade harmed those who remained in Africa as well as those who were taken. Families endured the emotional trauma of losing loved ones. Fear of falling prey to slave traders pervaded villages throughout West and Central Africa. Olaudah Equiano recalled that when adults in his village left for the fields, children stationed someone in a tree to keep watch for kidnappers while the others played.

The African economy suffered as well. Those most likely to be captured, men and women in the prime of life, had been contributing the greatest share of labor to their communities. When slave traders captured young adults, no one remained to care for children and the elderly, and fewer people were left to reproduce. According to one model, between 1750 and 1850 no population growth occurred south of the Sahara Desert and north of the Limpopo River as a result of the loss of people to the slave trade. To compensate for the disappearance of so many young men, who were the laborers most preferred by plantation owners, many African ethnic groups adopted polygyny, allowing men to take multiple wives. The loss of men also necessitated that women adopt traditionally male economic roles.

Desire for the goods Europeans traded for enslaved people also had devastating consequences for Africa. The importation of European textiles, according to some historians, spurred the industrialization of the European textile industry while harming African cloth producers, who could not compete on quantity or price. Weavers continued to produce goods for local markets, but no continent-wide market for African textiles ever had an opportunity to develop because Europeans already dominated the field. There were similar consequences for the African metal industry.

These effects have been long-lasting. One scholar has demonstrated that the areas from which the most enslaved people were

taken are today the poorest in Africa, though at the time of the slave trade they were among the most developed. They are also more prone to civil conflict today than other areas of the continent. Other studies have shown that people from ethnic groups most likely to have been subject to the slave trade are less likely to trust others than are people from less affected groups. This may be due at least in part to the slave trade's breaking down of the social and political structures intended to protect people.

The Economics of Slavery

Those who reached their final destination faced an existence as hellish as they had experienced on the Middle Passage – the name given to the roughly 80-day journey across the Atlantic Ocean from West Africa to the North America where merchants sold enslaved Africans whom they had trafficked. The labor to which they were put was backbreaking and never ending. Most of the crops grown by enslaved Africans in the Americas were labor intensive. At that time, tobacco seeds had to be planted by hand and the seedlings transplanted in the fields. At harvest time, workers stripped tobacco leaves from the plant, hung them to dry, and packed them in large barrels that they then rolled to the coast or a riverbank to be taken on board ship and transported to Europe.

Rice cultivation also required the transplanting of seedlings by hand. Enslaved people first cleared the undergrowth from swampland, built earthen dikes, and then flooded the cleared land with water. As they worked in the swampy waters, they were exposed to snakes and mosquitos carrying malaria and yellow fever.

Sugar, the most valuable crop grown by enslaved people, also required the most labor, and sugar plantations often contained hundreds of workers. With the exception of the very youngest and the very oldest, all of them toiled all day as part of large work gangs. The labor was grueling and dangerous. Sugar cane was densely planted, and undergrowth in the fields could hide snakes that bit workers. After fertilizing and weeding the cane, workers harvested it by cutting it close to the ground with machetes and then chopping it into smaller pieces to make it easier to remove from the fields. Machetes wielded in tired workers' sweaty hands often slashed legs and feet. Workers might bleed to death or die when wounds became infected. People who worked too slowly were beaten.

Laborers then transported the cut cane to a mill to be crushed by heavy rollers that often caught and mangled workers' hands. This had to be done very quickly, within twenty-four hours of cutting the cane, because the sap evaporated quickly. The workers boiled the crushed cane to extract a liquid that was clarified and crystalized into sugar, a process that required hours of standing next to roaring fires where workers were often scalded. To maximize profits, planters rotated production, so while sugar cane was growing in one field, it was being harvested in another. Because sugar cane rapidly depleted nutrients in the soil, laborers frequently also had to clear land for new fields. In addition to growing and processing sugar cane, enslaved people had to tend to the plantations' buildings and livestock and cut the wood needed to cook the cane sap.

Slaveholders spent little money on food for the enslaved people, so laborers spent additional time tending their own gardens, fishing, and foraging for wild foods. To give them energy and dull their pain, slaveholders often gave them shots of rum, a plentiful beverage on a sugar plantation.

Infectious disease, overwork, poor diet, and injuries claimed large numbers of lives. Because infant mortality among enslaved people in the Caribbean was rampant, the enslaved population was not self-reproducing, and slaveholders had to buy more people each year to maintain their labor force. Prices were high. A healthy young adult might cost as much as an average European could earn in a year's worth of labor. In 1684, planters in Santo Domingo (the Dominican Republic) paid six thousand pounds of sugar per enslaved African. Some 2,500 to 3,000 new captives were required each year. This differed substantially from the English North American mainland colonies where, because the work of growing and processing tobacco was less physically grueling, enslaved people did not die in such high numbers, and the population was able to grow through reproduction.

Despite the conditions in which they lived, enslaved people in the Americas managed to retain their dignity and humanity. Couples married and produced children, some of whom survived. They formed new kin networks, calling fellow laborers "brother" and "aunt" to replace the relatives from whom they had been taken. They created new religions with elements of various African practices and Christian elements learned from their enslavers. They combined foods brought from Africa with local ingredients to create new cuisines that reminded them of home. The influence of Africa persisted in the music, dance, and stories they created. Enslaved people also resisted the slaveholders' efforts to exploit them in numerous ways. They damaged tools, sabotaged machinery, and set fire to cane fields and barns full of sugar awaiting export to Europe. They ran away; in the mountains of Jamaica, runaways formed communities and lived in hiding. On several occasions, enslaved people rose up in armed rebellion, killing the slaveholders and overseers.

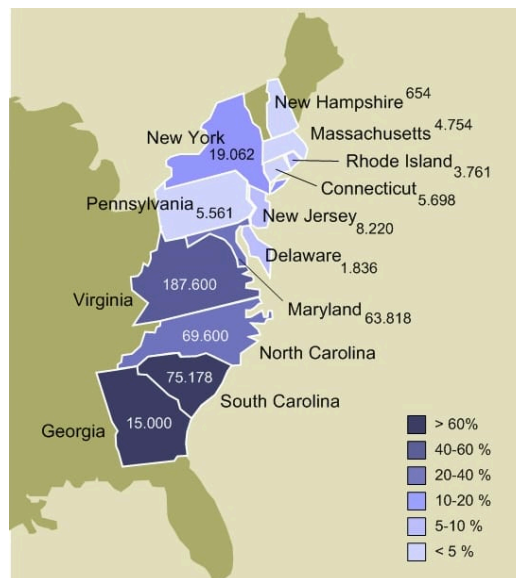


Figure 6.3.3: A map of the 13 North American colonies with the number of enslaved people per colony and the percentage of the population who were enslaved. (CC BY 4.0; Stilfeler via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 6.3.3.

Largely unmoved by the misery of enslaved Africans, Europeans possessed an insatiable appetite for sugar that only grew as time passed. In 1650, planters in Barbados alone shipped about five thousand tons of sugar to England. Fifty years later, that amount had doubled. As the demand for sugar grew, so did the demand for enslaved laborers. Between 1450 and 1600, approximately 2,500 enslaved Africans a year were purchased by Europeans; in the sixteenth century, most of these people were sent to Hispaniola, Cuba, Brazil, and Venezuela. Beginning in the seventeenth century, however, as England, France, the Netherlands, and Denmark established sugar plantations in the Caribbean, the number of enslaved Africans brought to the Americas rose to some 18,680 per year. In the eighteenth century, by which time thousands of sugar mills dotted the coast of Brazil and the Caribbean islands, 61,330 people traversed the Middle Passage each year. Forty-two percent were sent to labor in the Caribbean and 38 percent to Brazil. The British colonies of the North American mainland claimed only 4 to 5 percent of the total.

TED-Ed – The Atlantic Slave Trade: What too few textbooks told you.

Video Length: 5 minutes 38 seconds

Context: This video focuses specifically on the type of slavery that emerged in the 17th century, known as the Atlantic Slave Trade. Slavery has occurred in many forms throughout the world, but the Atlantic slave trade -- which forcibly brought more than 10 million Africans to the Americas -- stands out for both its global scale and its lasting legacy. Anthony Hazard discusses the historical, economic and personal impact of this massive historical injustice.

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

[View this YouTube Video online](#)



Reflection

1. How did African kings view the people they sold as slaves to Europeans?
2. How did the European demand for slaves alter how African kingdoms understood slavery?
3. What did many inland Africans believe about White people?
4. How did slavery in the Americas and Europe differ from the slavery practiced throughout Africa?

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6.4: Chapter Themes to Discuss

Core Themes for Reflection and Discussion

This page offers different themes that appear throughout the sections in this chapter. The themes are meant to provide a framework in which discussion questions can be developed to inspire further exploration of the topics covered.

1. The multifaceted narratives that emerged from the moment of encounter in 1492 and what it reveals about the relationship between Europeans and Indigenous Americans.
2. Issues of race, class, and gender in the construction of the colonial system throughout the Americas.

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6.5: Alternative Text Descriptions

Figure 6.1.1 Map of the Carreira da Índia Maritime Routes

This image is a historical map titled “**Carreira da Índia**” showing the Portuguese maritime routes that connected Lisbon with ports in Africa, the Indian Ocean, and India during the Age of Exploration.

The map emphasizes that voyages depended on seasonal winds, ocean currents, and different outbound and return routes. Four principal routes are shown.

The **inner outward route** departs from Lisbon and follows the Atlantic coast of Africa southward, passing near Arguin, Cape Verde, São Jorge da Mina, and other West African ports before continuing around the Cape of Good Hope. After rounding southern Africa, the route proceeds north along the east African coast through Mozambique and then crosses the Indian Ocean toward Goa on the west coast of India.

The **outer outward route** also begins in Lisbon but leaves the African coastline after reaching the South Atlantic. It follows the Portuguese *volta do mar*, a wide ocean arc that carries ships far into the Atlantic before turning east toward southern Africa. The route passes near islands such as Ascension and Tristan da Cunha, rounds the Cape of Good Hope, continues along the east African coast, and then crosses the Indian Ocean to western India, including Goa.

The **inner return route** departs from India, typically from Goa and nearby ports such as Cochin. It crosses the Arabian Sea to East Africa, passes near Mombasa and Mozambique, rounds the Cape of Good Hope, and then follows a broad northwestern arc through the South Atlantic before turning northeast toward Lisbon. This route takes advantage of prevailing ocean currents and winds in the Atlantic.

The **outer return route** leaves India by a more easterly path across the Indian Ocean, passing south of India and near island groups such as the Maldives, Chagos, and the Mascarene Islands. It then turns west toward Madagascar and southeastern Africa before rounding the Cape of Good Hope and proceeding northward through the Atlantic toward Portugal.

Major trading centers connected by these routes include Goa, Cochin, Bombay, Surat, Cambay, Diu, Hormuz, Muscat, Aden, Mombasa, Mozambique, Luanda, Benin, São Jorge da Mina, Arguin, and Lisbon. The routes linked Portugal with commercial networks in East Africa, Arabia, the Persian Gulf, India, and Southeast Asia, including Malacca.

Large arrows indicate the oceanic systems that shaped navigation. In the North Atlantic, ships used the circular current pattern known as the *Volta do Mar*, sailing westward into the open ocean before returning east toward Europe. In the South Atlantic, clockwise current and wind patterns carried vessels from Africa toward Brazil and back toward southern Africa. Across the Indian Ocean, seasonal monsoon winds are shown moving between East Africa, Arabia, and India. These winds reversed direction at different times of the year, allowing ships to time their voyages to cross the ocean efficiently.

The map's main purpose is to demonstrate that the Carreira da Índia was not a single route but a network of seasonally adjusted maritime pathways that relied on Atlantic currents, the *Volta do Mar* system, and Indian Ocean monsoon winds to connect Portugal with Africa and the markets of India and Asia.

Figure 6.1.2 Map of the Columbian Exchange

This image is a thematic map titled “**The Columbian Exchange**” showing the movement of crops, animals, and diseases among the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia after sustained contact between the Eastern and Western Hemispheres.

Several arrows show products moving from the Americas to Europe and beyond. From North America to Europe, the map shows the transfer of maize (corn), potatoes, tobacco, beans, squash, peppers, and cacao. From South America to Africa, the map shows the movement of cassava, manioc, and cacao. These American crops subsequently spread to other parts of Africa, Europe, and Asia, becoming important components of regional diets and economies.

Other arrows show products introduced into the Americas from Europe, Africa, and Asia. From Europe to North America, the map shows the introduction of cattle, horses, pigs, wheat, and rye. Sugar and rice were introduced from the Eastern Hemisphere to

the Americas, with one route directed toward the Caribbean and North America and another toward South America. The map also shows sugar, rice, and tea moving from Asia toward Europe, illustrating the broader global exchange of commodities.

Disease transmission is also shown. Smallpox traveled from Europe to North America. Syphilis is shown moving from the Americas toward Europe. Malaria and yellow fever moved from Africa to the Americas. Plague is shown moving from Asia toward Europe and Africa. These disease movements accompanied the exchange of people, animals, and goods and had major demographic consequences.

The map emphasizes that the Columbian Exchange was not a one-way transfer but a multidirectional process linking the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia. American crops such as maize, potatoes, cassava, and cacao spread eastward, while European and Asian livestock and crops such as cattle, horses, pigs, wheat, rye, sugar, rice, and tea spread westward to the Americas. At the same time, diseases circulated between continents, profoundly affecting populations throughout the Atlantic world and beyond.

Figure 6.2.1 Colonial Map of Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey

This image is an antique colonial map titled **“A New Map of Virginia, Maryland and the Improved Parts of Pennsylvania & New Jersey.”**

The map depicts the mid-Atlantic region of British North America and is centered on the Chesapeake Bay, whose many rivers and tributaries dominate the image. The Atlantic Ocean, labeled as “The Sea,” lies to the east.

Virginia occupies the southern portion of the map and extends from the Chesapeake Bay westward into the interior. Maryland is located directly north of Virginia and surrounds the upper Chesapeake Bay on both its eastern and western shores. Pennsylvania lies north of Maryland and extends westward beyond the Chesapeake watershed. To the northeast of Maryland and east of Pennsylvania are the colonies of West Jersey and East Jersey. East Jersey occupies the Atlantic coastline and lies east of West Jersey, while West Jersey is situated between Pennsylvania and East Jersey. Delaware Bay forms part of the eastern boundary between Pennsylvania and the Jersey colonies.

The Chesapeake Bay runs north to south through the center of the map and is fed by numerous major rivers, including the Potomac, Rappahannock, York, and James Rivers in Virginia, along with multiple tributaries in Maryland. These waterways create extensive inlets and navigable channels that connect many settlements to the bay and ultimately to the Atlantic Ocean.

Numerous colonial towns and settlements are shown throughout the region. Philadelphia appears in southeastern Pennsylvania near the Delaware River. Annapolis is located on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland. Smaller settlements are distributed along the major rivers and coastlines, reflecting the importance of water transportation in the colonial period.

County boundaries are shown throughout Maryland and Virginia, illustrating the internal political organization of the colonies. The map emphasizes the close relationship between settlement patterns and waterways, with many communities located along riverbanks, estuaries, and bays.

The purpose of the map is to show the geographic relationships among the colonies of Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, West Jersey, and East Jersey, highlighting their boundaries, settlements, and the extensive Chesapeake Bay and river system that connected them.

Figure 6.2.2 Map of Plymouth Colony, 1620–1691

This image is a historical map titled **“Plymouth Colony, 1620–1691.”**

It shows the extent of Plymouth Colony in southeastern New England, including present-day southeastern Massachusetts and Cape Cod. Plymouth Colony is bordered by Massachusetts Bay Colony (founded in 1630) to the north, Rhode Island (founded in 1644) to the west, and New York (founded in 1664) to the south across the water.

Plymouth Colony's principal settlement is Plymouth (founded in 1620), located on the western shore of Cape Cod Bay. Other towns shown include Scituate (founded in 1636) and Marshfield (founded in 1640) to the north of Plymouth; Duxbury (founded in 1637) immediately north of Plymouth; Bridgewater (founded in 1656), Taunton (founded in 1639), Middleborough (founded in 1669), Freetown (founded in 1683), Rochester (founded in 1686), and Rehoboth (founded in 1645) in the inland western portion of the

colony; Sandwich (founded in 1639), Barnstable (founded in 1650), Yarmouth (founded in 1639), and Eastham (founded in 1646) on Cape Cod; and Dartmouth (founded in 1664), Falmouth (founded in 1686), and Little Compton (founded in 1682) along the southern coast.

Several neighboring settlements outside Plymouth Colony are also identified. Boston (founded in 1630), Weymouth, and Hull are located in Massachusetts Bay Colony to the north. Providence (founded in 1636), Portsmouth (founded in 1639), Bristol (founded in 1680), and Swansea (founded in 1667) are located near the Plymouth-Rhode Island border to the west.

The map includes several historical annotations. A note near Weymouth and Hull states that **Weymouth and Hull, settled as part of Plymouth in 1622 and 1624, became part of Massachusetts Bay in 1630**. A diagonal boundary line is labeled **“Border established in 1639.”** A shaded area near the western boundary is labeled **“Area disputed between Plymouth and Rhode Island.”**

Additional historical sites are identified with notes. A marker at the tip of Cape Cod indicates the **first landing of the Mayflower (1620)**. Near Sandwich, a note identifies the **Aptucxet Trading Post (1626–1635)**. Near Providence, a note marks **Roger Williams' First Settlement (1636)**. Near Bristol, a note identifies **Mount Hope, Wampanoag capital**.

A note at the bottom of the map states that **colonists from Plymouth also founded Windsor in 1633, which became part of Connecticut in 1637, and settled Saybrook in 1634 and Connecticut in 1635**.

The map's purpose is to show the growth and extent of Plymouth Colony between 1620 and 1691, its towns and settlements, its relationships with neighboring colonies, disputed boundary areas, and important historical sites associated with early colonial New England.

Figure 6.2.3 Historical Courtroom Illustration

This image is a historical courtroom illustration depicting the trial or examination of Anne Hutchinson. The scene takes place in a dimly lit interior room with a window along the right side and a table occupied by officials or questioners near the center. Anne Hutchinson stands prominently in the middle of the room, making her the central figure in the composition. She is positioned facing the seated officials at the table and is separated from the surrounding crowd, drawing attention to her role in the proceeding. Her upright stance places her at the visual center of the image, while most of the other figures are grouped around the edges of the room observing the event. Several seated and standing figures surround the table and line the walls, creating the impression of a formal hearing, trial, or official examination. Additional observers stand behind Anne Hutchinson and near the window. The table serves as a focal point for the officials conducting the proceeding, while Anne Hutchinson remains the primary subject of their attention. The image emphasizes Anne Hutchinson's central position within the hearing, the presence of colonial authorities and observers, and the formal, enclosed setting in which the proceeding takes place.

Figure 6.3.1 Colonial Tobacco Field Scene

This image is a historical painting showing a cultivated field of broad-leaf crops, likely tobacco, in a colonial coastal setting. The foreground is dominated by rows of large leafy plants. Behind the field are fenced enclosures, small wooden farm buildings, a wagon loaded with harvested material, livestock, and a shoreline or river with ships visible in the distance. The image's purpose is to represent plantation-style agriculture, harvest labor, and the connection between farming and maritime trade in a colonial economy.

Figure 6.3.2 Diagram of a Slave Ship Deck Plan

This image is a black-and-white technical-style diagram of a slave ship shown in two horizontal deck-plan views. Each view outlines the shape of the vessel and divides the interior into labeled compartments marked with letters. The upper diagram shows more open compartment divisions, while the lower diagram shows the same vessel filled with densely packed rows arranged across most of the available space. Store rooms are labeled at one end of the lower plan. The purpose of the image is to document the layout of the ship and the severe overcrowding used in the transatlantic slave trade.

Figure 6.3.3 Map of Enslaved Population Distribution in the American Colonies

This image is a thematic map showing the distribution of enslaved people in the British North American colonies. Each colony is shaded according to the percentage of its population that was enslaved, and a numeric label indicates the total number of enslaved people living in that colony. The colonies are shown with the following enslaved populations and percentage categories:

- New Hampshire: 654 enslaved people; less than 5% of the population enslaved.
- Massachusetts: 4,754 enslaved people; less than 5% of the population enslaved.
- Rhode Island: 3,761 enslaved people; 5% to 10% of the population enslaved.
- Connecticut: 5,698 enslaved people; less than 5% of the population enslaved.
- New York: 19,062 enslaved people; 10% to 20% of the population enslaved.
- New Jersey: 8,220 enslaved people; 5% to 10% of the population enslaved.
- Pennsylvania: 5,561 enslaved people; less than 5% of the population enslaved.
- Delaware: 1,836 enslaved people; 10% to 20% of the population enslaved.
- Maryland: 63,818 enslaved people; 20% to 40% of the population enslaved.
- Virginia: 187,600 enslaved people; 20% to 40% of the population enslaved.
- North Carolina: 69,600 enslaved people; 20% to 40% of the population enslaved.
- South Carolina: 75,178 enslaved people; 40% to 60% of the population enslaved.
- Georgia: 15,000 enslaved people; greater than 60% of the population enslaved.

The map shows that the largest enslaved populations were concentrated in the southern colonies, particularly Virginia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Maryland. The highest proportions of enslaved people relative to the total population were in Georgia and South Carolina, while New England colonies generally had both smaller enslaved populations and lower percentages of enslaved residents.

6.6: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials to Enhance the Course

These materials are provided to help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction. Some resources are openly licensed, while others may require institutional access or individual review before use in class.

Web Resources

These websites may help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction.

- [World History Encyclopedia](#) – Provides overviews of important people, places, and events throughout history. This resource can be useful for finding concise, expert-informed background information.
- [Fordham University Internet History Sourcebooks Project](#) – Provides translated, transcribed, and digitized primary sources. This resource can support source-based instruction, though instructors should review links carefully because some materials may be incomplete or less suitable for classroom use.

Articles

These articles provide additional scholarly context for this chapter. Access may depend on your institution's JSTOR subscription.

- Behar, Ruth. "Sex and Sin, Witchcraft and the Devil in Late-Colonial Mexico." *American Ethnologist* 14, no. 1 (1987): 34–54. [Access article in JSTOR](#)
- Ostler, Jeffrey, and Nancy Shoemaker. "Settler Colonialism in Early American History: Introduction." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2019): 361–68. [Access article in JSTOR](#)

Videos

These videos can be used to explore a specific topic in the chapter in more detail and as an entry to further discussion on chapter topics.

- [TED-Ed: How Magellan circumnavigated the globe](#)
Length: 5 minutes, 52 seconds
On September 6, 1522, the "Victoria" sailed into harbor in southern Spain. The battered vessel and its 18 sailors were all that remained of a fleet that had departed three years before. Yet her voyage was considered a success, for the "Victoria" had achieved something unprecedented – the first circumnavigation of the globe. Ewandro Magalhaes shares the story of Magellan's journey.
- [TED-Ed: History vs. Christopher Columbus](#)
Length: 5 minutes, 54 seconds
Many people in the United States and Latin America have grown up celebrating the anniversary of Christopher Columbus's voyage. But was he an intrepid explorer who brought two worlds together or a ruthless exploiter who brought colonialism and slavery? And did he even discover America at all? Alex Gendler puts Columbus on the stand in History vs. Christopher Columbus.
- [TED-Ed: Ugly History: The Spanish Inquisition](#)
Length: 5 minutes, 41 seconds
In 1478, Pope Sixtus IV issued a decree authorizing the Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, to root out heresy in the Spanish kingdoms. The inquisition quickly turned its attention to ridding the region of people who were not part of the Catholic Church— leading to more than 350 years of ethnic cleansing. Kayla Wolf digs into the persecution and brutality of the Spanish Inquisition.

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7: GLOBAL STRUGGLE FOR POWER

Overview

The world change forever after 1492, and the 250 years that followed led to intellectual, philosophical, and material changes that created the foundation upon which the modern world would emerge. The Protestant Reformation, scientific revolution, and expansion of colonialism throughout the world shaped the distinct trajectories that the different regions would continue to move along as the world grew more connected, and divided at the same time.

[7.1: Renaissance, Reformation, and Revolution](#)

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7.1: Renaissance, Reformation, and Revolution

Overview

This section outlines significant religious and cultural transformations in Europe from the late 15th to the 17th century. The Protestant Reformation, initiated by Martin Luther's critiques of Catholicism, led to various movements challenging Church authority. The English Reformation saw shifts in religious practices under different monarchs, while the Catholic Reformation responded with internal reforms.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the impact of the Renaissance on European culture and thought
- Explain the causes of the Protestant Reformation
- Discuss the spread of Protestantism in Europe and the wars of religion
- Describe the Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation
- Explain the significance of the Scientific Revolution

The Renaissance

The starting point with studying the Renaissance is just learning what the word means: rebirth. But what was being reborn? The answer is the culture and ideas of classical Europe, ancient Greece and Rome. Renaissance thinkers and artists very consciously made the claim that they were reviving long-lost traditions from the classical world in areas as diverse as scholarship, poetry, architecture, and sculpture. The feeling among most Renaissance thinkers and artists was that the ancient Greeks and Romans had achieved truly incredible things, things that had not been, and possibly could never be, surpassed. Much of the Renaissance began as an attempt to mimic or copy Greek and Roman art and scholarship (corresponding to one another in classical Latin, for example), but over the decades the more outstanding Renaissance thinkers struck out on new paths of their own - still inspired by the classics, but seeking to be creators in their own right as well.

Of the various themes of Renaissance thought, perhaps the most important was humanism, an ancient intellectual paradigm that emphasized both the beauty and the centrality of humankind in the universe. Humanists held that humankind was inherently rational, beautiful, and noble, rather than debased, wicked, or weak. They sought to celebrate the beauty of the human body in their art, of the human mind and human achievements in their scholarship, and of human society in the elegance of their architectural design. Humanism was, among other things, an optimistic attitude toward artistic and intellectual possibility that cited the achievements of the ancient world as proof that humankind was the crowning achievement of God's creation.

Renaissance humanism was the root of some very modern notions of individuality, along with some specific phenomena such as the idea that education ought to arrive at a well-rounded individual. The goal of education in the Renaissance was to realize as much of the human potential as possible with a robust education in diverse disciplines. This was a true, meaningful change over medieval forms of learning in that education's major purpose was no longer believed to be the clarification of religious questions or better intellectual support for religious orthodoxy; the point of education was to create a more competent and well-rounded person instead.

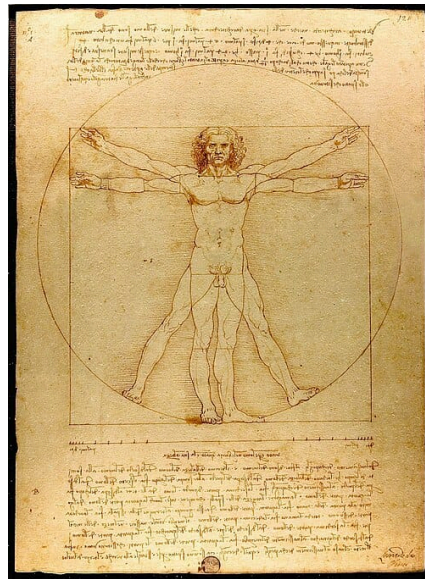


Figure 7.1.1: Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man. (CC BY 4.0; Leonardo da Vinci via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). Detailed description of Figure 7.1.1.

Along with the idea of a well-rounded individual, Renaissance thinkers championed the idea of Civic Humanism: one's moral and ethical standing was tied to devotion to one's city. This was a Greek and Roman concept that the great Renaissance thinker Petrarch championed in particular. Here, the Medici of Florence are the ultimate example: there was a tremendous effort on the part of the rich and powerful to invest in the city in the form of building projects and art. This was tied to the prestige of the family, of course, but it was also a heartfelt dedication to one's home, analogous to the present-day concept of patriotism.

Practically speaking, there was a shift in the practical business of education from medieval scholasticism, which focused on law, medicine, and theology, to disciplines related to business and politics. Renaissance learning was born in the cities of northern Italy because of the wealth of northern Italy. Princes and other elites wanted skilled bureaucrats to staff their merchant empires; they needed literate men with a knowledge of law and mathematics, even if they themselves were not merchants. City governments began educating children (girls and boys alike, at least in certain cities like Florence) directly, along with the role played by private tutors. These schools and tutors emphasized practical education: rhetoric, math, and history. Thus, one of the major effects of the Italian Renaissance was that this new form of education, usually referred to as "humanistic education" spread from Italy to the rest of Europe by the late fifteenth century. By the sixteenth century, a broad cross-section of European elites, including nobles, merchants, and priests, were educated in the humanistic tradition.

A "Renaissance man" (note that there *were* important female thinkers as well, but the term "Renaissance man" was used exclusively for men) was a man who cultivated classical virtues, which were not quite the same as Christian ones: understanding, benevolence, compassion, fortitude, judgment, eloquence, and honor, among others. Drawing from the work of thinkers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Virgil, Renaissance thinkers came to support the idea of a virtuous life that was not the same thing as a specifically *Christian* virtuous life. And, importantly, it was possible to become a good person simply through studying the classics – all of the major figures of the Renaissance were Christians, but they insisted that one's moral status could and should be shaped by emulation of the ancient virtues, combined with Christian piety. While the Renaissance case for the debasement of medieval culture was overstated – medieval intellectual life prospered during the High Middle Ages, there was definitely a distinct kind of intellectual courage and optimism that came out of the return to classical models over medieval ones during the Renaissance.

Origins of the Protestant Reformation

The Protestant Reformation began in 1517, but its seeds had been sown years earlier. Over the course of the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church had grown richer, and its higher clerical offices had become dominated by people who appeared to many to be motivated more by the desire for wealth and power than by spiritual concerns. Critics claimed that popes acted less like Christ's representatives on earth and more like secular princes, intervening in European political affairs and even commanding armies. Members of the clergy often lived lavishly in palatial surroundings and dressed themselves in silks and furs. Some had mistresses and illegitimate children, who were often given positions in the church. Wealthy families often purchased church offices for their members, and some men held bishoprics (areas under the authority of a bishop) in more than one place at a time by hiring other men to perform their offices. Secular rulers, kings, and princes jealous of the church's power sometimes vied with the pope for

control of the churches in their territory and welcomed opportunities to reject the church's authority.

In the second half of the fifteenth century, northern European scholars championed a form of humanism whose explicit goal was to make people better Christians. Northern Renaissance humanism, also called Christian humanism, stressed the study of the works of Greece and Rome together with the teachings of the early Christian fathers to improve the state of the human soul. The goal of learning was to awaken an inner sense of piety, and northern Renaissance humanists such as Desiderius Erasmus encouraged people to use Christian teachings as a guide to daily life. This inner transformation, they believed, was superior to engaging in such outer forms of religious devotion as going on pilgrimage or fasting at prescribed times of the year. By becoming better Christians, people would ultimately reform the church.

Discontent among some European Catholics and an interest in spiritual transformation in northern Europe set the stage for a German monk named Martin Luther to try to eliminate the questionable practices of the medieval Roman Catholic Church. Luther's actions began the Protestant Reformation.

In 1517, Luther, then a professor at the University of Wittenberg in Germany, became outraged when the Dominican friar Johann Tetzel began to sell indulgences in Wittenberg, authorized by Albert, archbishop of the city of Mainz. Indulgences were a way to reduce or even cancel the time after death during which people needed to suffer in purgatory to atone for their sins before reaching heaven. These rewards could be earned by performing actions of great religious merit, such as going on Crusade. However, the church also taught that the pope controlled a store of merit amassed by Jesus and the Christian saints, whose virtue was so great they had entered heaven with grace left over. The church could allot this "extra" virtue to someone else in the form of an indulgence.

Martin Luther was a German priest and monk who taught theology at the Catholic university in Wittenburg. He had long been obsessed with thoughts of achieving salvation and was horrified at the idea that sinners might believe they could enter heaven not through repentance or God's mercy but by paying for an indulgence. He drafted ninety-five arguments explaining why the sale of indulgences was wrong, and according to many historians, he then nailed the *Ninety-five Theses* to the door of the castle church at Wittenberg. He also distributed printed copies throughout Germany and sent a copy to Archbishop Albert, who passed it along to Rome.

Although Luther had probably merely wished to reform the practices of the church, such as ending the sale of indulgences, and not to spark a rebellion against the church, his actions were not seen that way. In 1518, he was summoned by church authorities to answer questions regarding the position he expressed in the *Ninety-five Theses*. At a meeting in the German city of Augsburg, Luther denied that the church had the power to distribute merits amassed by Jesus and the saints. His beliefs were officially condemned by Pope Leo X, and he was ordered to recant, which he refused to do. In 1521, he was excommunicated (excluded from participating in the life of the church).

The version of Christianity that developed from Luther's ideas, and that formed the basis for what became the Protestant faiths, differed from the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church in important ways. The Catholic Church taught that salvation was achieved through a combination of religious faith and good works. Buying an indulgence was regarded as a good work because the money went to the church. Luther taught that faith alone was sufficient for salvation and that humans were unable to work toward their own redemption, which depended entirely upon God. Furthermore, adherence to centuries' worth of Catholic tradition was not necessary to be a good Christian. Luther contended that scripture alone should be the source of Christian belief and practice. His followers thus abandoned many traditional Catholic practices, including clerical celibacy. Luther, married Katharina von Bora, a former nun, and began a family. Protestants also called for the abolition of religious orders of monks and nuns. A life in the clergy, which the Catholic Church had proclaimed the greatest of all callings, was considered no better than the pursuit of any other vocation in life. The printing press with movable type, developed in Europe during the Renaissance, aided Martin Luther in his efforts to spread his message, and thousands of copies of Luther's writings circulated throughout Europe.

Calvinists, Anabaptists, and Anglicans

Efforts to silence Martin Luther were unsuccessful, and the new form of Christianity called Protestantism spread throughout the German-speaking lands. By the end of the sixteenth century, it had become entrenched throughout western and central Europe as well. Often the new religion was welcomed by rulers as a reason to reject the pope's authority, and Luther called upon the German princes to do so.

The Catholic Holy Roman emperor Charles V (who was also Charles I of Spain) steadfastly opposed Protestantism. However, the 1555 Peace of Augsburg secured for rulers in the empire who were Lutheran (as Luther's followers were called) the right to establish Lutheranism as the official religion within their lands if they wished. A prince's subjects were obliged to support

the church he chose. Many rulers in northern Germany became Lutheran, but in Austria and Bavaria, in the southern part of the German-speaking lands, the Roman Catholic Church retained its power. No other religions were accommodated.

In Switzerland, the ideas of the reformation that Luther began were embraced by Ulrich (Huldrych) Zwingli in the city of Zurich. Zwingli, who had been a priest, called for radical changes, such as a rejection of the Catholic tenet of transubstantiation, which held that Jesus was physically present in the communion wine and wafer consecrated during every Mass. Even Martin Luther had not gone so far. Zwingli also preached against fasting in the period before major religious holidays and called for religious imagery to be removed from churches. He banned organs from churches, shut monasteries and convents, and had the Bible printed in German rather than Latin. Zwingli also called for an end to clerical celibacy and proclaimed that the Bible never referred to purgatory. He was killed in 1531 in a conflict between the Catholic and Protestant areas of Switzerland.

Among those inspired by Zwingli's ideas was Konrad Grebel, a Swiss merchant. Grebel was especially moved by Zwingli's claims that baptism, through which people were admitted into church membership, should be delayed until adulthood when a person is capable of making the choice to renounce sin. Finding Zwingli too slow in reforming the Christian community in Zurich, however, Grebel established his own religious movement in 1524, the Swiss Brethren.

The Swiss Brethren was one of several Anabaptist churches—churches rejecting infant baptism in favor of adult baptism—that were established in the sixteenth century, primarily in central Europe and the Low Countries. Because baptism was believed to remove the taint of original sin (the transgression of Adam and Eve), infant baptism was the norm among Catholics and most Protestants as well. Anabaptists, however, believed that only adults could meaningfully renounce sin and make a declaration of faith. Thus, only adults could make the conscious decision to become Christians. But since people could be baptized only once, anyone rebaptized as an adult was violating a tenet of the Catholic faith.

Other Anabaptist movements included the Hutterites, the Mennonites, and the Amish, which broke from the larger Mennonite movement in the seventeenth century. Besides believing in adult baptism, Anabaptist groups advocated the separation of church and state and tended to be pacifists. Because of their refusal to hold public office, serve in the army, or accept secular rulers' right to control religious affairs, Anabaptists were widely feared by most European rulers and were often subject to violent attacks.

Another center of Protestant thought was the city of Geneva in what is now Switzerland. The city's religious leader, John Calvin, had been raised a Catholic in France, but he became a Protestant either before or shortly after fleeing to Switzerland to escape persecution for his beliefs. His ideas were similar to those of Martin Luther, but they differed in one crucial respect. Calvin espoused a doctrine known as *predestination*, which held that God had predetermined which souls would be granted salvation upon death and which were destined for hell. No person could ever know for certain whether they were saved or damned, and there was nothing they could do to ensure salvation. Calvinists embraced the doctrine, and despite its denial of human agency, they strove to lead a rigidly moral lifestyle focused on hard work and piety, seeking, in their ability to live like people destined for heaven, reassurance that they had in fact been saved. They rejected dancing, public drunkenness, gambling, and obscene speech as ungodly and fit for punishment by a special tribunal called the Consistory. Calvinism spread rapidly outside Geneva and found adherents in the Netherlands who established the Dutch Reformed Church, in Scotland where the Presbyterian Church was formed, and in France where its adherents were called Huguenots.

Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and the Anabaptist leaders were true believers in the doctrines they espoused. The English Reformation, however, was of a different character. In England, reform was initially imposed from the top down, not by a committed convert but by a king looking for an expedient way to exchange one queen for another.

Until the moment he decided to remove himself from under the pope's authority, Henry VIII of England had a reputation as a devout Catholic and a critic of Luther. He was married to Catherine of Aragon, the daughter of the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella who were famous for defeating the Muslim kingdom of Granada and expelling Jewish and Muslim people from the Iberian Peninsula. Henry and Catherine's marriage had produced only one living child—a daughter, Mary. Although English law did not exclude women from inheriting the throne, Henry wanted to take no chances with the succession following his death and desired a son whose rule would go unchallenged.

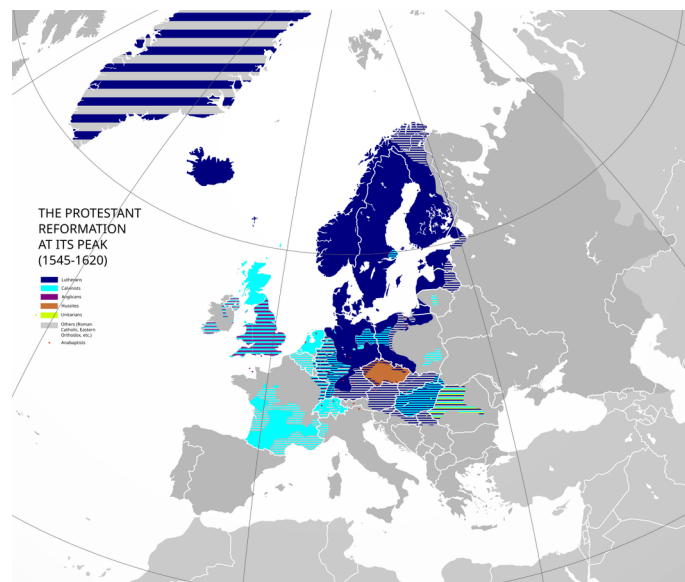


Figure 7.1.2: A map that shows the spread of Protestantism in its various forms at the high point of the Protestant Reformation. (CC BY 4.0 ; Ernio48 via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed description of Figure 7.1.2.

Accordingly, against Catherine's wishes, Henry sought an annulment of his marriage so he might marry Anne Boleyn, who he believed would give him sons. Unlike a divorce, which the Catholic Church did not permit, an annulment simply declared a marriage null and void on the grounds it had never been legitimate. Henry argued that, because Catherine had first been married to his late elder brother Arthur, Catholic Church law prohibiting the marriage of close relatives should never have allowed her and Henry to wed. When the pope refused to annul the marriage, Henry declared the English church no longer bound by the pope's authority. In 1534, Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy, establishing the Church of England with the English monarch as its head. The archbishop of Canterbury, the highest spiritual authority in the land, finally granted the annulment of Henry and Catherine's marriage. Henry had already quietly married Anne in time to see her give birth to a daughter, Elizabeth (later Elizabeth I).

Under Henry's leadership, the Church of England (also known as the Anglican Church) remained largely Catholic in terms of both doctrine and ritual. Henry closed England's monasteries, but his failure to purge the English Church of all elements of Roman Catholicism did not sit well with many Protestants. Upon Henry's death, his son Edward VI, whose mother Jane Seymour had been Henry's third wife, became king. Because Edward was still a minor, England was governed by regents who took steps to make the Anglican Church more Protestant, a move with which the young Edward agreed. Priests were allowed to marry. The practice of using rosary beads in prayer was denounced. Church processions were prohibited, and statues and stained-glass windows were removed from churches. The mass service was reformed, eliminating many Roman Catholic rituals, and the English-language *Book of Common Prayer*, published in 1549, laid out the new church service. Ministers who refused to use the *Book of Common Prayer* risked being removed from their positions and imprisoned.

The Catholic Reformation and the Wars of Religion

The leaders of the Catholic Church did not sit idly by as its members deserted it for new faiths. The Catholic Reformation, also called the Counter-Reformation, was the Catholic Church's effort to address Luther's challenges as well as to effect other necessary reforms. One means to do so was the 1545 Council of Trent. There, Europe's bishops and other clerics affirmed that both good works and faith were required for salvation and that both scripture (as interpreted by the church) and tradition were acceptable sources of authority. The council also affirmed the doctrine of transubstantiation. Aware of very real problems within the church, the council undertook a series of reforms as well. Indulgences were retained, but their sale was forbidden. The council prohibited church officials from appointing relatives to church offices, limited bishops to holding office in only one bishopric, and took steps to improve the education of Catholic clergy and curb their luxurious habits.

Another aspect of the Catholic Reformation was the creation of new religious orders. Founded by the Spanish noble Ignatius of Loyola, the Society of Jesus, also known as the Jesuits, assumed a number of tasks, chiefly the education of young Catholic men. They also undertook responsibility for the conversion of non-Christians to Roman Catholicism and for acting as advisers to the Catholic rulers of Europe. Unlike other religious orders, the Jesuits did not have a female branch. Instead, the Ursuline order of nuns, founded a few years before, undertook the education of young women.

Although the Catholic Reformation undoubtedly prevented the defection of many Catholics to Protestant churches, the new churches continued to gain adherents in many parts of Europe. At times, this was a peaceful process. At other times, wars erupted as devout Catholics did battle with equally devout Protestants to protect what both sides believed was the only true expression of Christian faith.

The transition from Catholicism to Protestantism in England was more peaceful than elsewhere. While Henry VIII's Catholic daughter Mary I, the child of Catherine of Aragon, occupied the throne following her brother Edward's death, Protestants were persecuted, and hundreds were executed as the queen tried to restore England to the Catholic Church. Mary died in 1558 before she could achieve this, however. Her younger half-sister, Elizabeth I, wished to govern an orderly, stable country, and while late in her reign she did persecute Catholics she felt posed a threat to her Protestant rule, she adopted a relatively moderate approach to religion during her early years on the throne.

Parliament's 1558 Act of Supremacy once again declared the Church of England separate from the Roman Catholic Church. The following year, the Act of Uniformity of 1559 brought back the *Book of Common Prayer* as the only legal form of worship in England. Some concessions were made, however, to those who did not wish to abandon Catholic ritual. The condemnation of the pope contained in an earlier version of the book was removed, and the communion ritual was described in a way that avoided making a clear statement about transubstantiation. Clergy could continue to wear traditional Catholic robes and ornaments.

During Elizabeth's reign, English Calvinists, known as Puritans, attempted unsuccessfully to move the Church of England even further from the doctrine and ritual of the Catholic Church. Many clergy in the English church were Puritans, and they objected to wearing Catholic robes during church services and making the sign of the cross during baptism. By the 1570s and 1580s, Puritans had also come to oppose the structure of the Church of England, in which the monarch was the head of the church. They believed churches should be independent and governed by groups of elected elders instead of a king or queen. Elizabeth was unwilling to change the manner in which the Church of England was governed, however. During the reign of her successor James I, Puritans who wished to separate from the Church of England (known as Separatists) began to depart England for places, including mainland Europe and North America, where they believed they would be able to establish ideal Christian communities. In the reign of Charles I, James's son, other Puritans also began to leave.

Outside England, the dispute over whether a kingdom should be Catholic or Protestant could be quite violent. In 1572 in France, warfare between Huguenots and Catholics culminated in the August 23 St. Bartholomew's Day massacre which involved the assassinations of prominent Huguenots who had come to Paris for a royal wedding. Peace was restored only when the Huguenot Henry IV succeeded to the throne of France, converted to Catholicism (the religion of the majority of French people), and issued the Edict of Nantes in 1598. The edict established Catholicism as the official religion of France but also granted Huguenots the right to worship as they chose.

In the Spanish Netherlands, Philip II of Spain, son and heir of Charles V, fought against Calvinist rebels. War raged from 1568 until a truce was signed in 1609. (After Philip's death in 1598, his son Philip III fought on after him.) Peace was restored, but the seven northern provinces established their independence from Spain as the United Provinces of the Netherlands. The Netherlands was not the only place in which Philip II, who regarded himself and Spain as defenders of Catholicism, fought to maintain the church's supremacy. In 1588, he launched a naval attack on England with the intent of restoring it to the Catholic Church and ending its support for Protestant rebels in the Spanish Netherlands. The invasion failed. The Spanish armada was famously outmaneuvered by the smaller, faster English ships, and as the remaining vessels started for home by sailing north around Scotland and Ireland, most were destroyed by a storm.

The wars of religion continued into the seventeenth century. From 1618 to 1648, the Thirty Years' War between Catholic and Protestant states raged in the Holy Roman Empire. As German Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists fought one another, other European countries entered the fray. Sweden, a Lutheran land, supported the Protestant German rulers, as did the United Provinces of the Netherlands. Denmark also entered the war in the hopes of gaining German territory to offset its losses to Sweden in recent conflicts. France joined in on the side of the Protestants, primarily in an effort to become the preeminent power in Europe. Despite the multinational nature of the combatants, battles were fought almost entirely within the German lands, whose people suffered as armies of mercenaries destroyed farms and villages. In the end, the German Protestants were victorious inside Germany but Catholic France had become the dominant country in western Europe. The Peace of Westphalia, which ended the war in 1648, established the independence of each of the entities, numbering nearly one thousand, that had made up the Holy Roman Empire.

The Scientific Revolution

The Scientific Revolution grew out of Renaissance humanism. Humanistic scholars by the late sixteenth century were increasingly

dissatisfied with some ancient authors, since those authors did not, in fact, explain everything. While ancient authors wrote about astronomy, for instance, they did not adequately explain the observed movements of the stars and planets. Likewise, with the explosion of new translations of classical works, it became clear that ancient scholars had actively debated and even rejected the teachings of figures like Aristotle. This suggested that it was legitimate to question even the most fundamental ancient ideas.

Even to scholars who respected and deferred to ancient authors, much of ancient astronomy was based on some fairly questionable speculations, like the idea that the Earth sits on top of a giant sea that occasionally sloshes around, causing earthquakes. Thus, the first major discoveries in the Revolution had to do with astronomy, as scholars started carrying out their own observations and advancing theories to explain what they saw happening in the heavens. This process is known as inductive reasoning: starting with disparate facts, then working toward a theory to explain them. It is the opposite of deductive reasoning, which starts with a known theory and then tries to prove that observations fit into it. The classic example of the latter was taking the idea that the Earth is the center of the universe as a given, then trying to force the observed movements of the heavenly bodies to make sense through elaborate explanations.

That being noted, deductive reasoning is still an important part of “real” science in that it allows for proofs: in mathematics, for instance, one can start with a known principle and then use it to prove more complex formulas. Mathematics itself played a key role in the Scientific Revolution, since many thinkers insisted that mathematics was part of a divine language that existed apart from, but was as nearly important as, the Bible itself. God had designed the universe in such a way that mathematics offered the possibility of real scientific certainty. The close relationship between math, physics, and engineering is obvious in the work of people like Da Vinci, Galileo, and Isaac Newton, all of whom combined an advanced understanding of mathematics and its practical applications.

However, it would be wrong to claim that the Scientific Revolution sparked a completely objective, recognizably “modern” form of science. What early-modern scientists hoped to do was understand the secrets of the universe. Isaac Newton was a scientist but also an alchemist, devoting considerable time and effort to trying to figure out how to “transmute” base metals like lead into gold. Likewise, many thinkers were intensely interested in the works of an ancient (and, as it turns out, fictional) philosopher and magician named Hermes Trismagistus, Hermes the “Thrice-Blessed,” who had supposedly discovered a series of magical formulas that explained the universe. There was a great deal of crossover between what we might think of as magic and spirituality on the one hand and “real” science on the other.

This is evident not only with Newton, but with other scientists of the era – many were astronomers *and* astrologers, just as many were mathematicians and engineers while also being alchemists. The point here is that, ultimately, even though it turns out that magic does not exist, the interest in discovery piqued by the idea of probing the universe’s secrets still led to genuine scientific discovery.

The major figure in codifying and popularizing the new empirical, inductive process was Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626), an English nobleman. Bacon is best remembered for “creating” the scientific method: advancing a hypothesis to explain observed data, but then trying to disprove the hypothesis rather than trying to force the facts to prove it. In this way, the best that could be hoped for was a highly likely, not-yet-disproven theory, rather than a flimsy, vulnerable theory that needed artificial defenses. Over time, the scientific method came to include a corollary requirement: the results of an experiment had to yield the same results consistently in order for a hypothesis to be considered viable.

Bacon took the radical step of breaking even with the Renaissance obsession with ancient scholarship by arguing that ancient knowledge of the natural world was all but worthless and that scholars in the present should instead reconstruct their knowledge of the world based on empirical observation. Bacon was a kind of prophet of the movement, not a scientist himself – he was fired as the Lord Chancellor of King James I after accepting bribes, and he died after catching a cold stuffing snow into a dead chicken as some kind of ill-conceived biological experiment. Regardless, he codified the new methodology and worldview of the Scientific Revolution itself.

Women in the Scientific Revolution

An often-overlooked facet of the Scientific Revolution was the participation of aristocratic women. Noblewomen were often the collaborators of their husbands or fathers – for example, it was a husband and wife team, the Lavoisiers, in France that invented the premises of modern chemistry in the eighteenth century. In some cases, such as the early entomologist Maria Sibylla Merian, women struck out on their own and conducted experiments and expeditions – Merian took a research trip to South America and did pioneering work on the life cycles of various insect species.



Figure 7.1.3: Portrait of Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717) in formal historical dress against a dark background. (CC BY 4.0; Jacob Marrel via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed description of Figure 7.1.3.

A few male theorists supported proto-feminist outlooks as well. The French scholar François Poulain de la Barre (1647-1725) concluded that empirical observation demonstrated that the custom of male dominance in European society was just that: a custom. Nothing about pregnancy or childbearing made women inherently unsuitable to participate in public life. De la Barre applied a similar argument to non-European peoples, arguing that there were only cosmetic differences between what would later be called “races.” His work was almost unprecedented in its egalitarian vision, anticipating the ideas of human universalism that only really came of age in the nineteenth century, and only became dominant views in the twentieth.

Despite the existence of highly-qualified and educated women scientists, informal rules banned them from joining scientific societies or holding university positions. In general, in one of the most obvious failures of the Scientific Revolution to overcome social prejudices was in the marked tendency of male scientists to use the new science to reinforce rather than overthrow sexist stereotypes. Anatomical drawings drew attention to the fact that women had wider hips than did men, which supposedly “destined” them for a primary function of childbearing. Likewise, they (inaccurately) depicted women as having smaller skulls, supposedly implying lower intelligence. In fields in which women had held very important social roles in the past, such as midwifery, male scientists and doctors increasingly pushed them to the side, insisting on a male-dominated “scientific” superiority of technique. In short, it proved easier to overthrow the entire vision of the universe than to upset sexual roles and stereotypes.

The Philosophical Impact of the Scientific Revolution

One of the effects of the scientific discoveries of the sixteenth century was a growing belief that the universe itself operated according to regular, predictable, “mechanical” laws that could be described through mathematics. This outlook lent itself to one in which God could be seen as a great scientist or clockmaker: the divine intelligence who created a perfect universe and then set it in motion. In this sense, then, the new scientific discoveries in no way undermined religious belief at the time, despite the fact that they contradicted certain specific passages of the Bible. This kind of religious outlook became known as *deism*, and its proponents deists, people who believed that God did not intervene in everyday life but instead simply set the universe in motion, then stepped back to watch.

Some thinkers, most notably the French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596 – 1650), tried to apply this new logical outlook to theology itself. Descartes tried to subject belief and doubt to a thorough logical critique, asking what he could be absolutely sure of as a philosophical starting-point. His conclusion was that the only thing he really knew was that he doubted, that there was something thinking and operating skeptically, which in turn implied that there was a thing, himself, capable of thought. This led to his famous statement “I think, therefore I am.” Descartes went on to follow a series of logical “proofs” from this existing, thinking being to “prove” that God Himself existed, as the original source of thought. This was a philosophical application not just of the new mechanical and mathematical outlook, but of deductive reasoning. Descartes, personally, embraced the view that God was a benevolent and reasonable power of creation, but one who did not lower Himself to meddle in the universe.

Perhaps the most important cultural change that emerged from the Revolution was the simple fact that science acquired growing cultural authority. The results of the new science were demonstrable; Galileo delighted onlookers by allowing them to use his telescope not just to look at the sky, but at buildings in Rome, thereby proving that his invention worked. The possibility that science could, and in fact already had, disproved claims made in the Bible laid the foundation for a whole new approach to knowledge that threatened a permanent break with a religiously-founded paradigm. In other words, scientific advances inadvertently led to the growth in skepticism about religion, sometimes up to and including outright atheism: the rejection of the very idea of the existence of God.

The most extreme figure in this regard was Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677), a Sephardic Jew who was born and raised in Amsterdam in the Netherlands. Spinoza took the insights of the era and applied them wholeheartedly to religion itself, arguing that the universe of natural, physical laws was synonymous with God, and that the very idea of a human-like God with a personality and intentions was superstitious, unprovable, and absurd. He was excommunicated from Judaism itself when he was only twenty-four but went on to continue publishing his works, in the process laying the groundwork for what were later known as “freethinkers” – people who may or may not have been actual atheists, but who certainly rejected the authority of holy writings and churches.

Spinoza's work was controversial enough that he was condemned as an atheist not only by the Jewish community, but by both the Catholic church and various Protestant churches as well. One of the things about his thought that infuriated practically everyone was that Spinoza claimed that there was no such thing as “spirit” or “the soul” – all of the universe was merely matter, and the only way to truly learn about its operation was to combine empirical experimentation with mathematics. This “materialism” as it was called at the time was so close to outright atheism as to be almost indistinguishable.

The other side of skepticism was a kind of cynical version of religious belief that dispensed with the emotional connection to God and reduced it to a simple act of spiritual insurance: the French mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623 – 1662), inventor of the field of probability, postulated “Pascal's Wager.” In the Wager, Pascal argued that either God does or does not exist, and each person can choose either to acknowledge Him or not. If He does exist, and one acknowledges Him, then one is saved. If He does exist, and one rejects Him, then one is damned. If He does not exist and one acknowledges Him, nothing happens, and if He does not exist and one does not acknowledge Him, nothing happens either. Thus, one might as well worship God in some way, since there is no negative fallout if He does not exist, but there is (i.e. an eternity of torment in hell) if He does.

Pascal applied an equally skeptical view to the existing governments of his day. He noted that “We see neither justice nor injustice which does not change its nature with change in climate. Three degrees of latitude reverse all jurisprudence; a meridian decides the truth. Fundamental laws change after a few years of possession...a strange justice that is bounded by a river! Truth on this side of the Pyrenees, error on the other side.” In other words, there was no fixed or eternal or God-given about royal decrees and laws; they were arbitrary customs enforced through the state.

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7.2: Political Developments in Asia

Overview

This section covers the emergence and governance of the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt, the consolidation and achievements of the Ming dynasty in China, and the rise of the Mughal Empire in India under Akbar, alongside his successors. It also discusses the Maratha Empire's formation and cultural advancements, as well as significant historical events in Southeast Asia, including European invasions and colonization efforts.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the unique political and social organization of the Mamluk Sultanate
- Describe Ming dynasty China in the fifteenth century and its responses to foreign influences
- Discuss the rise of the Maratha Empire

The Mamluk Sultanate

In the thirteenth century, a new state came into existence in Egypt and the Levant. Although it grew out of the existing Ayyubid Sultanate, the Mamluk Sultanate was unique among world societies in that it was administered and defended by educated, elite, formerly enslaved men. The Mamluk state grew so powerful that it was able to fend off the advances of the Mongols. At the opposite end of Asia, the Mongols also found themselves displaced by the Han Chinese of the Ming dynasty.

Many of the Islamic states formed in western Asia over the centuries relied upon a unique means of staffing their armies and administrations—the creation of a highly trained, foreign-born enslaved (or formerly enslaved) elite. Beginning in the ninth century in the Abbasid Caliphate, rulers purchased Turks from beyond the Oxus River in central Asia to serve as soldiers for the state. Enslaved adult men raised outside the state were loyal to their purchaser and not to the state itself, however, and thus they were more willing to revolt if they were not well treated. Briefly losing control of the state in the ninth century because of such uprisings was a lesson for Muslim rulers. Thereafter, they sought to enslave young boys who could be educated and trained within and by the state, ensuring they were more invested in the society they served as adults. Non-Muslim children were chosen because Islam forbade the enslaving of fellow Muslims.

Known as mamluks (from an Arabic word meaning “someone owned”), the boys were taken primarily from Turkic tribes in central Asia, as well as from the Caucasus and eastern Europe, and then converted to Islam and educated. Because they were freed upon completing their training, the rule against enslaving other Muslims was not violated. The largest part of their instruction consisted of training in riding, archery, and military tactics. Some were given a formal education in the bureaucracy, in a bid to develop smart and capable administrators for the state.

When the young men’s education was completed, they were set free in a special ceremony. They were then allowed to grow beards, marry, and establish their own households, into which they could introduce purchased mamluks of their own. They might, however, remain in the household of their former owner, the ruler to whom they were expected to remain loyal. In this way, the mamluks somewhat resembled the freed people of ancient Rome, who often retained ties to their former masters.

The relationship between mamluks and their masters was often conceived of as familial in nature, and mamluks often referred to one another as “brother” and to their master as “father.” When their training had ended, their “father” would find a place for them in the ruler’s service. Most mamluks found positions in the army, and from there they often went on to hold administrative positions. In the Ayyubid Sultanate, the mamluks eventually gained control over the government after deposing the sultan and proceeded to rule the state as the Mamluk Sultanate.

Slavery in Medieval Islam

In Mamluk Egypt, having been an enslaved soldier was often the path to the greatest success and standing in society. Important positions were given to mamluks, such as provincial governor and commander of the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca. The sultan himself was a mamluk. Appointed mamluks were regarded as more entitled to positions of power and authority than were a man's biological sons, and while Egyptian mamluks married and produced children, it was considered inappropriate if these offspring were awarded important roles in government when true mamluks were available. The mamluks were displeased when this happened, and it was they who usually determined who became the sultan.

Enslaved men occupied a similar position in the Ottoman Empire. Beginning in the fourteenth century, the Ottomans purchased enslaved people or used prisoners of war to fill the ranks of their armies. With their invasion of the Balkans, however, the Ottoman sultans soon turned to gathering Christian children from the European lands they occupied, in order to counter the power of the Turkish nobles who controlled the army and the state's administration.

In a system known as the *devshirme* ("gathering"), Ottoman agents recruited Christian boys as part of the tax imposed on their European subjects. Approximately every three to five years, agents of the sultan took boys, ideally aged between eight and ten, to serve the Ottoman state. They were taught to speak Turkish and brought to Istanbul where they were educated and made to convert to Islam. When they became adolescents, they were trained to become scribes, palace administrators, or soldiers. Those selected to serve in the palace at the end of their training often rose to occupy important positions, including Grand Vizier. In addition, many were awarded timars in exchange for their service and had the opportunity to become wealthy.

The majority of boys were trained as soldiers, some of whom became members of the elite infantry corps called the Janissaries (from the Turkish words *yeni cheri*, or "new soldier"). They accompanied the sultan into battle and served as his household guard. Like the mamluks, the Janissaries were expected to be loyal to their master, the Ottoman sultan. In fact, the sultans believed the Janissaries would prove more dependable than the noble vassals, because they were entirely dependent upon the sultans for their status and privileges, and because they had been cut off from the biological families to whom they might otherwise have owed their first loyalty. The risk of trusting in the Turkish nobility had become clear at the Battle of Ankara when Bayezid I's Turkish vassals fled, abandoning him to the Mongols.

The Janissaries held high status in Ottoman society. Although many parents protested the taking of their children and sometimes rebelled against the system, others who hoped to provide their sons with a means of advancing in society reportedly bribed Ottoman officials to select them. Some Muslim parents, whose sons were not subject to the *devshirme*, supposedly even lied about their religion to secure a spot for them in the sultan's service.

In 1249, Sultan as-Salih Ayyub died. His son replaced him but was assassinated by mamluks in 1250. As-Salih's widow, Shajur al-Durr, also ruled briefly, but she was soon deposed. The Ayyubid commander of the city of Aleppo in Syria initially challenged mamluk rule and took an army to Egypt to reclaim control of the state, prompting the mamluk commander Aybak, whom Shajur al-Durr had married to bolster her own claim to power, to place an Ayyubid royal child on the throne as a puppet ruler and his nominal "master." Following his defeat of the Ayyubid forces, Aybak deposed the child sultan and took power in his own right, permanently ending Ayyubid rule in Egypt and formally establishing the Mamluk Sultanate. When Aybak was assassinated in 1257, his teenage son took the throne, but true power in Egypt was wielded by another mamluk commander, Saif ad-Din Qutuz.

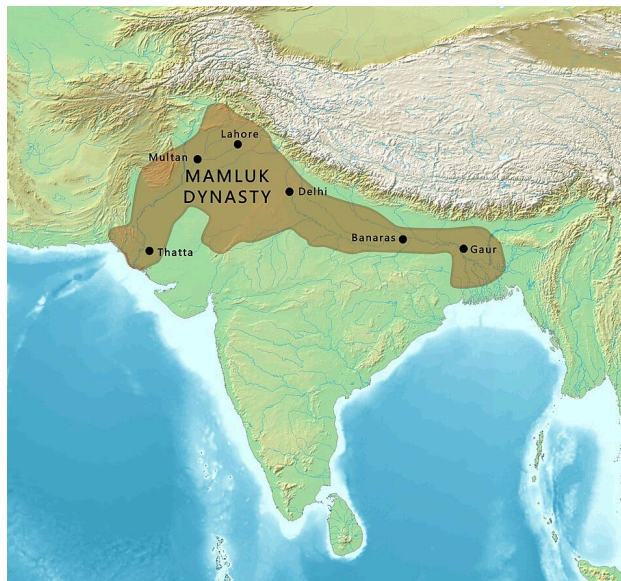


Figure 7.2.1: Historical map showing the extent of the Mamluk Dynasty and labeled cities in South Asia. (CC BY 4.0; Koba-chan via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 7.2.1.

Threats to Mamluk Stability

The new Mamluk Sultanate soon found its power tested by the arrival of invading Mongol forces. In 1258, Hulagu Khan attacked and destroyed Baghdad, the seat of the Abbasid Caliphate. His troops then took the city of Damascus, which lay within the territory claimed by the Mamluk Sultanate. Hulagu demanded that Qutuz surrender Egypt, but the sultan refused. In 1260, the Mongol and Mamluk armies clashed at the Battle of Ain Jalut, in what is today modern-day Israel, and the Mamluks were triumphant. This halted the Mongol advance in western Asia and prevented them from invading North Africa.

Qutuz did not live to relish the Mamluk victory over the Mongols, however. Shortly after his triumph at Ain Jalut, he was assassinated, and a rival mamluk commander, Baybars, claimed the throne as sultan. Baybars established the Bahri dynasty, named for the location in Cairo of the mamluk barracks from which he had come. The rulers of the Bahri dynasty were mamluks of primarily Turkish origin. Unlike members of most dynasties, they were not generally descendants of the founder. Two of Baybars' sons succeeded to the throne following his death, but they were quickly deposed by rival mamluk army factions. This was the case for most Mamluk sultans, who each ruled for an average of only seven years, and often much less.

Stability was a constant problem for the Mamluk Sultanate. Although it remained in control of Egypt and the Levant until it was defeated by the Ottomans in 1517, the sultans' rule was never secure. Sultans were routinely deposed—and often murdered—by rival claimants to the throne. Provincial administrators often rebelled against the authority of Cairo as well. The problem lay in the origin of the mamluks themselves. Having undergone rigorous training and the experience of enslavement, and having risen through the ranks based solely on their abilities, the mamluks were scornful of those who had not had a similarly harsh upbringing and won their position based on merit. Thus, when sultans attempted to establish their biological sons as their heirs, the army often regarded them as unworthy and refused to follow them. Furthermore, while mamluk soldiers were loyal to their masters, they did not feel similar loyalty to other commanders. When a sultan died or was deposed, his mamluks were not inclined to obey the person who took his place. The succession to the throne of the Mamluk Sultanate thus always remained uncertain as the army continued to assert its right to choose (and depose) the ruler. Mamluk history was marked by repeated attempts by individual commanders to seize power, and by the army's removal of “unworthy” rulers in favor of others.

Despite the fact that the line of succession always remained unclear, the Mamluk Sultanate was a force to be reckoned with, and its troops were successful at defeating their enemies. Beginning during the rule of Baybars, for example, the Mamluks gradually retaken control of the Christian Crusader States in the Levant, either razing their fortresses or converting them to Mamluk garrisons. The final Christian stronghold, Acre, fell in 1291. The Mamluks also defeated the Christian Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia and stopped an attempted Mongol invasion of Syria in 1313 before establishing a peace treaty with the Ilkhanate Mongols in Persia in 1322.

During the first century of Mamluk rule, the time of the Bahri dynasty, the empire flourished. Following the capture of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258 and the execution of Caliph al-Musta'sim, members of the Abbasid family sought refuge in Egypt. In

1261, Baybars proclaimed al-Mustansir, the nephew of al-Musta'sim, the new caliph. In return, al-Mustansir recognized Baybars's authority to rule over the lands once held by the Abbasids. Thus, while the Mamluk sultans never claimed the caliphate for themselves, they sought legitimacy for their rule through their role as protectors of the caliph.

Mamluk rulers were pious Muslims who protected pilgrims bound for the holy cities of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. They built mosques and madrasas, and Cairo grew into an important center of religious scholarship. Unwilling to risk the displeasure of Muslim judges, the mamluks supported all four major schools of Islamic law. They also built hospitals, primary schools, and public fountains to provide the poor with clean drinking water. Their championing of Islam and their building of charitable institutions provided them with an important connection to their non-Turkish subjects, who might otherwise have resented their rule.

The Decline of the Mamluk Sultanate

In the late fourteenth century, a new Mamluk dynasty came to power—the Burji, also named for the location of its mamluk barracks. The Burji sultans were mamluks of primarily Circassian and Georgian origin, unlike the Turks of the Bahri dynasty. The first Burji sultan, al-Zahir Barquq, assumed the throne in 1382. Almost immediately, plots emerged to remove him, one headed by the caliph who hoped to rule in his own right and another by Turkish tribes in Syria. Both attempts were defeated, but the peace did not last long. In 1399, 1434, and 1437, soldiers rioted in the streets of Cairo. Sometimes the riots began as conflicts between rival mamluk factions that spread to the streets and involved civilians. At other times, soldiers rioted when they had not been paid. In 1441, riots were sparked by food shortages and the perception that the grain trade, from which government officials profited, was inefficient and the prices unfair. Merchants' stores were plundered by angry mobs. In the second half of the fifteenth century, mamluk-initiated chaos erupted nearly every year as soldiers fought in the streets and attacked the homes of the wealthy and government officials. Even religious scholars were not safe.

Unable to maintain order in their own capital, Mamluk rulers also had to confront rebellions in more far-flung parts of their domain. The Mamluks had difficulty establishing control over Syrian Arabs and the nomadic and seminomadic Bedouin tribes of Upper Egypt. Bedouin rebels were punished severely; men were impaled or burned alive, while women and children were enslaved. The heads of rebels were placed on the gates of Cairo as a warning against future revolts. Syrian Arabs were punished less harshly because their assistance was needed to repel attacks by Mongols and the Ottomans.

Although they remained an elite class in Egypt until 1811, the Mamluks found their sovereignty over the region threatened when they lost control of Syria to the Ottomans in 1516. The Ottoman sultan Selim I then conquered Cairo in 1517. Rather than depose the Mamluks, however, the Ottomans allowed them to rule their old domains on their conquerors' behalf, though true power lay with the Ottomans in Istanbul.

Ming China and Its Neighbors

The ascendancy of the Turks and the decline of Mongol rule in western Asia in the thirteenth century were soon followed by the decline of Mongol dominance in East Asia as well. By the second half of the thirteenth century, China found itself beset by problems. The Yuan dynasty emperor Kublai Khan waged a series of expensive campaigns against the kingdoms of Burma (now Myanmar), Annam, and Champa in Southeast Asia, and Java in the Indian Ocean. Two attempts to invade Japan failed, and revolts against Mongol rule erupted.

One of these revolts was the Ispah Rebellion, which began in Quanzhou. A major port city in southeastern China's Fujian Province, Quanzhou was on the Maritime Silk Road, an ocean trading route that connected China to other trading ports in Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, India, the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa, and Egypt. Along this route, highly sought-after Chinese goods like porcelain and silk flowed westward to Europe, Africa, India, and western Asia.

Quanzhou had a population of more than two million, making it the largest port in China and likely in the world in the thirteenth century. Most of the population were foreign-born merchants from Arabia, Persia, India, Armenia, and other lands. The Muslims who lived in Quanzhou were among the many Arabs, Persians, and Turks from western and central Asia who had come to China to trade or to serve the Yuan government. Though they encouraged Muslims from elsewhere in Asia to settle in China, Yuan officials often discriminated against them, forbidding the butchering of animals according to Islamic law and interfering with Muslim marriage laws and efforts by the Muslim community to govern themselves. In 1357, Muslims in Quanzhou rose against the Mongols. The rebellion was not crushed until 1367.

Attempts to suppress such revolts, which continued after the death of Kublai, drained the treasury, as had Kublai's unsuccessful military campaigns. His successors often mismanaged the treasury and sometimes held the throne for only brief periods of time. By the first half of the fourteenth century, natural disasters were compounding the difficulties China already faced. Droughts and

floods led to food shortages and famines. Inflation and scarcity combined to raise the price of food beyond the reach of many peasants. Unusually cold weather worsened people's suffering, and from the 1330s through the 1350s, epidemics swept through various parts of the country, killing millions. Bandits roamed the countryside, and the army made little effort to hunt down the numerous outlaws who preyed on the populace.

A number of religious sects arose foretelling the end of days. One of these was the White Lotus, a sect of Buddhism that announced the coming of a new Buddha and thus a new age. Seizing on the White Lotus prophecy, a secret peasant society named the Red Turbans called for the overthrow of Mongol rule and the return of the Song dynasty. Armed rebellion broke out in 1351. In 1352, a young wandering Buddhist monk named Zhu Yuanzhang joined the Red Turbans and married the daughter of one of its leaders. In 1356, his forces captured the southern Chinese city of Nanjing. After eliminating his rivals within the Red Turbans, in 1368 Zhu defeated the last Yuan emperor, who then abandoned China. Zhu destroyed the Yuan palace in the capital of Dadu (Beijing), proclaimed himself emperor with the name of Hongwu, meaning vast and martial, and dubbed his new dynasty the Ming ("bright").

Hongwu began by enforcing his power and bolstering China's security as the Ming dynasty's first emperor. Although he tried to resolve social disparities by abolishing slavery and increasing taxes on the wealthy, the cost of his army put a significant strain on the Chinese economy. He was never able to fully bridge the gap between rich and poor, and his attempts to protect China from invasion and rebellion led to repressive domestic policies. Nevertheless, with the restoration of agricultural productivity and political stability, the early Ming era was a time of significant wealth and power for China.

Hongwu's reign was marked by efforts to consolidate his own power, to protect himself from attack, and to reassert and expand Chinese influence. He eliminated the office of chief minister so that he might govern without interference, established a force of secret police, and ordered the execution of thousands of people who he believed disagreed with his policies. He also acted swiftly to stamp out rebellions. A revolt by the Miao ethnic group in Hunan Province in the southwest was crushed. The Kingdom of Dali, where Mongol forces had taken refuge in what is now Yunnan Province in the southeast, was defeated and the region incorporated into China. In 1387, Ming forces invaded Manchuria in the northeast, where Mongols loyal to the Yuan dynasty had also established a foothold. To protect the borders in underpopulated areas, Hongwu made military service in these regions hereditary. He forced the mass relocation of peasants from the south to augment the population in parts of central and northern China that had been hard hit by crop failures and epidemics.

Hongwu's efforts to expand Chinese power continued under his successor, his son Zhu Di, known as the Yongle emperor. From 1406 to 1427, Chinese forces tried unsuccessfully to invade and subdue the kingdom of Vietnam, and to counter the continuing Mongol threat, the Great Wall of China was repaired and lengthened. In other ways, though, Zhu Di reversed his father's policies. Hongwu had wanted to isolate China from dangerous foreign influences and so had forbidden nearly all maritime trade. The Yongle emperor strove instead to establish relations with foreign lands in order to make their rulers aware of China's wealth and power. To this end, he dispatched Admiral Zheng He on seven naval expeditions between 1405 and 1433. Chinese fleets consisting of thousands of ships sailed to Southeast Asia, India, Arabia, and East Africa. Zheng He presented foreign rulers with gifts of porcelain, silk, and gold to impress upon them the splendor of the Ming dynasty, and he returned with tribute for the emperor in the form of ivory and exotic animals such as zebras and ostriches.

Zhu Di also established diplomatic relations with Shah Rukh, the son and heir of Timur who ruled in Central Asia as well as with rulers in the Philippines and the Indian Ocean. China had no direct contact with the Ottoman state, however. When he ascended the throne, Hongwu sent an announcement to the Byzantine emperor, who he believed was still in power in Constantinople. After this, however, there was no correspondence or direct contact between the two states for at least a century.

The Yongle emperor moved the capital of China from Nanjing to Beijing, in the center of which he began construction of the new Forbidden City, a walled compound consisting of palaces, temples, and gardens for use by the emperor and the members of his household. In 1420, he also ordered the building of an elaborate tomb north of Beijing, where other members of the dynasty also built final resting places for themselves. All these structures conveyed an image of China's power, wealth, and magnificence.

Despite their wealth and power, the Ming emperors could still find themselves helpless in the face of Mongol aggression. The Yongle emperor tried unsuccessfully to subdue the Oirats, the westernmost of the Mongol tribes, who lived in what is now western Mongolia and the Altai region of Siberia. In 1449, the Oirat leader Esen took the twenty-one-year-old Ming emperor Yingzong hostage after the Mongol army defeated a much larger Chinese military force at the Battle of Tumu Fortress. The Ming responded by demoting Yingzong to the rank of "retired emperor" and placed his younger half-brother on the throne instead.

Esen's efforts to return Yingzong to Beijing—after conveniently marrying the captive emperor to his daughter—failed, and Mongol efforts to take Beijing by force were repulsed. Yingzong remained a prisoner of the Oirat until a member of his court ransomed him and returned him to Beijing, where he was placed under house arrest in a palace in the Forbidden City by his half-brother,

who had no intention of giving up the throne. It was another seven years before Yingzong managed to unseat (and kill) his half-brother and reclaim his throne.

Yingzong was forced to confront Mongol forces again in 1461 when the Chinese general Cao Qin attempted a coup with the assistance of Mongol soldiers. The emperor was saved only when a timely downpour foiled efforts to burn the gates that blocked the rebels' entry to the Forbidden City.



Figure 7.2.2: The brown-shaded area indicates the territory of the Yuan Dynasty under Mongol rule, extending across most of eastern and central China. Black-and-red symbols mark the capitals of Beijing and Nanjing, while small red symbols indicate provincial capitals including Xi'an, Kaifeng, Jinan, Hangzhou, Guangzhou, and Chengdu. (CC BY 4.0; Michal Klajban via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). [Detailed Description of Figure 7.2.2.](#)

The Mughal Empire

Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur had always dreamed of founding a great empire. His father, the ruler of a small central Asian state named Fergana in what is now Uzbekistan, was a descendant of the famous ruler Timur. His mother came from the family of the Mongol leader Chinggis Khan. In 1494, at the age of eleven, Babur became ruler of Fergana following his father's unexpected death, and he set himself the task of gaining control of all the lands that had once fallen to his illustrious ancestor Timur. However, he was driven out of his ancestral lands by the rising power of the nomadic Uzbeks. In the face of military losses in 1504, he made a bold move. Striking out across the Hindu Kush mountains accompanied only by his family and two hundred fighting men, he conquered the city of Kabul in Afghanistan. Later, in 1526, following more failed attempts to recapture his Central Asian inheritance and using tactics he had learned from the Persians including the use of artillery, Babur defeated the much larger army of the Delhi Sultanate. This Muslim state had ruled in northern India with its capture he established the Mughal (the Persian pronunciation of Mongol) Empire.

Despite his fascination with his new land, Babur did not adopt Indian culture. Although he was intrigued by the subcontinent's animals, plants, and climate, he had little interest in its people or in the Hindu religion. He described the people of India as lacking both personal beauty and manners. He admired the land's wealth but strove to re-create for himself and his family a taste of his lost homeland by designing gardens in the Persian style. He remained firmly oriented toward central Asia and maintained a post road and waystations connecting the Mughal capital of Agra to Kabul. When he died, he was interred at Agra, but to honor his wishes, his body was later taken to Kabul for burial, which was as close as he could come to the beloved land of his youth.

When Babur died in 1530, his eldest son Humayun inherited Mughal India. Humayun's reign was not a successful one. After only ten years, he was forced to flee after being defeated in battle by Sher Shah Suri, the ruler of the Indian state of Bihar. Humayun sought refuge at the court of the Safavid Shah Tahmasp in Persia, where he became deeply immersed in Persian culture. In 1555, he returned to India and won back his throne, but his victory was short-lived. Only a few months after retaking the Indian city of Delhi, Humayun died after tripping on a steep staircase.

Humayun's fourteen-year-old son Akbar inherited the throne. Although he was illiterate, possibly because of severe dyslexia, Akbar

became the greatest of the Mughal emperors. Unlike his father and grandfather, who had remained oriented toward central Asia, Akbar embraced India. He actively sought to incorporate Indians, both Muslim and Hindu, into his kingdom. Although he was aggressive militarily and expanded the bounds of the Mughal Empire across the northern part of the subcontinent and into the central plains to the south, he allowed local rulers to retain control of their lands so long as they submitted to him.

Akbar Consolidates Power

To consolidate his hold on India, Akbar married the sisters and daughters of local rulers, both Muslim and Hindu. He did not force his Hindu wives to convert to Islam, and their marriage ceremonies included both Hindu and Muslim elements. Akbar, did, however, introduce to India an institution found elsewhere in the Muslim world: The women of the royal family were physically secluded in a harem. Women's separation from the men of the court did not mean they were not influential, and wives, mothers, and even nursemaids often played a role in important political decisions. Nevertheless, during Akbar's reign, efforts to remove women from public life also led to the disappearance of their names from official records, and the practice of segregating them spread from Mughal households to those of the Hindu ruling classes, who adopted the custom.

Although Hindus were undoubtedly influenced by Mughal customs, Akbar made no effort to enforce conformity to Islamic customs or to impose the Muslim religion on his subjects. In 1568, he abolished the *jizya*, a tax imposed on non-Muslims. He allowed new Hindu temples to be built, which had previously been prohibited, and provided several of them with money to support their activities. Sharia, the legal code of Islam, was applied only to Muslims, and a Hindu law code governed Hindus. Both Hindus and Muslims were welcomed into the army and Akbar's administration.

Akbar revolutionized his empire's bureaucratic apparatus. The realm was divided into provinces, and each province was assigned a governor, a chief judge, a military commander, and a financial administrator. Akbar appointed civil servants known as *mansabdars*. Promotion was based on effort: Acting in ways that displeased Akbar could result in demotion or transfer to a less desirable location. Each *mansabdar* was also responsible for recruiting cavalry to serve in the Mughal army.

Akbar ordered his empire to be surveyed and fields assessed to determine how much revenue they would yield. The *mansabdars* were then compensated for their labor with taxes collected on specific units of farmland. As they rose higher in rank, more land was assigned to them. These lands were also periodically reassigned, however, and upon a *mansabdar's* death, all his wealth reverted to Akbar. A *mansabdar's* son might be allowed to inherit his father's property, should the emperor choose. These policies ensured that those charged with administering the empire remained loyal to Akbar.

Not only did Akbar marry Hindu women and welcome Hindus into his administration, but he also proved tolerant of other religions and their adherents. He erected a hall to serve as a venue for religious debate. At first, only Muslim scholars took part, arguing matters of law and theology among themselves and answering questions Akbar posed. Soon, however, Akbar grew dissatisfied and came to regard some of their positions as too rigid. He then invited representatives of other religions to participate, including Portuguese Jesuit missionaries. Akbar found Christianity interesting, but he rejected the Jesuits' teachings regarding the divinity of Jesus and reportedly found their insistence on monogamous marriage amusing.

Akbar eventually abandoned all recognized religions, however, and created his own personal cult called Din-i Ilahi (the Divine Faith). This religion combined elements of many different faiths, and Akbar assumed a prominent role at its center. In 1579, he issued a decree proclaiming that all religious questions were to be decided by him. He was regarded by adherents of his cult as the agent of God who, in his role as representative of the divine, was bound to tolerate all religions. Akbar ceased performing the obligatory five prayers that Muslims must intone every day and began to worship "divine light." He also began the practice of appearing daily to his subjects on a balcony so they could view him, reminiscent of a Hindu practice in which worshippers receive blessings by viewing the image of a deity. All these changes greatly disturbed Muslims in Akbar's court.

For the most part, however, India prospered under Akbar. His conquests left much of the subcontinent united and peaceful. Although illiterate himself, he amassed a large library of books in many languages, employed large numbers of translators and scholars, and established schools for both Muslims and Hindus. Domestic and international trade flourished. Gold and silver flowed into India in exchange for textiles, spices, and precious gems. Handicraft industries boomed, and merchants grew wealthy. The peasants were heavily taxed to pay for the empire's bureaucracy, but they were excused from paying in full in times of drought or other natural disasters.

Among those who benefited from the prosperity of Akbar's reign were wealthy Mughal women, who reinvested in commerce the revenues derived from landed estates, gifts of the emperor and his predecessors to female relatives. They used the profits they earned to endow mosques, build shelters for travelers, support artists and poets, and fund charitable endeavors. They also used their wealth to give gifts to the emperor and court officials, one of the ways in which they attempted to influence the workings of

the Mughal government.

Akbar's Death

Akbar's successors could not equal his achievements. When he died in 1605, his son Jahangir assumed the throne. Jahangir wanted to outshine his father and employed a large studio of artists who portrayed him in countless images as superior to other rulers. The paintings produced in Jahangir's studio were influenced by European paintings, especially portraits, that were given to him by the English, with whom he had established a commercial relationship. Jahangir patronized Muslim scholars, who had been scandalized by Akbar's religious policies. But like his father, he established an imperial cult, and devotees claimed Jahangir appeared to them in dreams and could heal them. Also like Akbar, he welcomed people of many religions at his court and married both Muslim and Hindu women. Like his grandfather Humayun, Jahangir often drank heavily, which took a toll on his health. As he weakened physically, he allowed his favorite wife Nur Jahan, a Persian Muslim, to assume significant power in his government. She took part in public rituals, engaged in diplomacy, and issued imperial edicts. She also helped Jahangir choose a son to succeed him and arranged a marriage between this son, Shah Jahan, and her niece.

Following Jahangir's death, Shah Jahan assumed the throne in 1628. To impress his subjects and other rulers with his importance, he commissioned the building of the Peacock Throne, an elevated platform covered by a vault ornamented with gold, semiprecious stones, and peacock sculptures, and he embarked upon numerous building projects. The most beautiful of these was the Taj Mahal, a tomb erected in 1631 for Shah Jahan's favorite wife Mumtaz Mahal, who had died the previous year giving birth to their fourteenth child. The tomb, in the city of Agra, perfectly reflects the hybridized Indo-Islamic culture of the Mughal dynasty and is considered an exemplary work of Persianate architecture. It was built in a garden at one end of a reflecting pool and features a large dome surrounded by four free-standing minarets, towers from which the Muslim faithful are called to prayer. While tombs in that part of India were normally made of common materials such as sandstone, the Taj Mahal is covered in white marble in a style befitting the resting place of a Muslim holy man. It is embellished with semiprecious stones and bears verses in elegant calligraphy, chosen from the Quran by Shah Jahan himself.

In 1648, Shah Jahan moved the capital of the Mughal Empire from Agra to Delhi, where he embarked on another massive building project, the Red Fort. Inside this red sandstone fortress, palaces and administrative buildings were constructed, many of white marble or stucco polished or adorned with glazed tiles to resemble marble. Canals and Persian water wheels supplied the city with water, and a sewage system carried it away. Perfumed water flowed in channels through the city. Within the city walls, officials erected grand houses of their own. Mosques and gardens were built, many paid for by wealthy Mughal women. These building projects, while they greatly enhanced the beauty of Agra and Delhi, drained the treasury and led to increases in the tax burden of India's peasants.

The Rise of the Maratha Empire

Aurangzeb I, Shah Jahan's son, was the last of the exceptional Mughal rulers in India. In 1658, he seized control of the Mughal throne and set about attempting to conquer rulers of states on the Deccan Plateau in southcentral India. He also led an Islamic revival in the Mughal domains. A pious man who frequently stopped in the midst of battle to perform the required daily prayers, Aurangzeb sought to eliminate all non-Islamic practices from his court. He refused to hunt, which had been a traditional pastime of Mughal rulers, and did not listen to music, although members of his court continued to do so. He eliminated the debates of scholars of different religions that his predecessors had sponsored, as well as other practices such as weighing himself against an equivalent amount of gold on the anniversaries of his birth and coronation, because he considered it an inappropriate display of excess. Aurangzeb patronized Muslim scholars and had them compile a collection of Islamic law written in the Persian language.

A skilled commander in battle, Aurangzeb expanded the bounds of the Mughal state. However, he proved unable to easily incorporate non-Muslims into his empire. Although at times he gave money to Hindu temples as previous Mughal emperors had done, at other times he ordered the destruction of the temples of Hindus who resisted his rule. He also imposed a special tax on Hindu pilgrims and, eventually, a tax on all non-Muslims. Hindus who served in his administration did not have to pay this tax; nevertheless, they often received less compensation than did Muslim administrators. Muslim immigrants to India were also favored over Indian-born Hindus for important positions in Aurangzeb's administration.

Aurangzeb clashed with Sikhs in northern India. The religion of Sikhism, a monotheistic faith that combines elements of Hinduism and Islam, was established in the Punjab region of northwestern India in the fifteenth century. The Mughals persecuted the Sikhs, and Aurangzeb sought to control the succession of Sikh gurus, the community's religious and political leaders. His execution of the guru Tegh Bahadur inspired even greater resistance to Mughal authority.

Among the many Hindus who opposed Aurangzeb were the Marathas, a group from the western uplands of the Deccan Plateau.

Many Marathas had gained experience as soldiers in the armies of both the Muslim and Hindu rulers. The most powerful of their leaders, Shivaji, had acquired his military experience in this way. When he led his own armies into battle against Mughal forces, he proved a formidable opponent, defeating Aurangzeb's commanders time after time. Shivaji's success on the field of battle and the rich spoils that fell to his troops attracted many followers. In 1663, he defeated a much larger Mughal army after withstanding a siege for more than two years. Less than a year after this victory, Shivaji's forces invaded Gujarat and seized control of the port of Surat.

Aurangzeb attempted to make an ally of Shivaji, summoning him to the Mughal court in 1666 and awarding his son, who was still a child, a royal title. Shivaji was treated with contempt by his Mughal hosts, however, and following Aurangzeb's attempts to detain him, he escaped and resumed war against the Mughals. Eight years later, Shivaji had himself declared an emperor on par with Aurangzeb, in effect declaring his right to rule his own territory and placing himself in a position of authority above other Maratha leaders.

Shivaji sought to eliminate Mughal influence by making the local language of Marathi the vernacular of his court instead of Persian, the language of the Mughals. He ran his court according to Hindu tradition and replaced Persian political terminology with terms from Sanskrit, the sacred language of Hinduism. All educated Hindus were familiar with Sanskrit, unlike Marathi, which Hindus in other parts of India could not be expected to speak. Sanskrit served a function in Shivaji's kingdom similar to that served by Latin in medieval Europe or Chinese in East Asia: It was the language of the educated elite. Shivaji led processions to local Hindu holy sites and also patronized Sanskrit scholars. Despite his dedication to Hinduism, however, he gave money to Islamic institutions and did not discriminate against Muslims. When Aurangzeb imposed a tax on non-Muslims in the Mughal Empire, Shivaji wrote to inform him that he could not be a good Muslim if he did not understand that God had created all people, not only Muslims.

Beginning in 1674, Shivaji embarked on a campaign to subdue the southern and central parts of the Indian subcontinent and bring them under the control of the Maratha Empire. Although he died in 1680, the war between the Mughals and the Marathas continued. Years of fighting emptied Mughal coffers, and in 1705 Maratha armies gained control of the Gujarat coast. Stretched too thin, the Mughals began their retreat from Maratha territory.

As the Mughals grew weaker, the Marathas grew stronger. Over the course of the next twenty years, Maratha armies gained control of roughly one-third of India. The Maratha bid to dominate all of India was brought to a halt, however, when Ahmad Shah Durrani, the king of Afghanistan, marched eastward against both the Mughal and Maratha empires, seeking to expand his domain. As Indians and Afghans made war on one another, European colonizers steadily gained control of India.

The Rise of the Malacca Sultanate

When the remnants of the Srivijaya Empire on the island of Sumatra were destroyed by the Majapahit Empire in the thirteenth century, a refugee named Sang Nila Utama, who claimed to be a descendant of Alexander the Great, founded the Kingdom of Singapura on the island of Singapore. Singapura developed into a prosperous center of trade. However, its wealth led to attacks by both the Majapahit and the Ayutthaya Kingdom in Siam (now Thailand). In 1398, Singapura too was destroyed, and Parameswara, its last king and a prince of the Srivijaya Empire, fled with his followers. He made his way to a fishing village at the mouth of the Malacca River on the Malay Peninsula that belonged to a tribe called the Orang Laut ("sea people"). The Orang Laut had already given refuge to others fleeing from Majapahit, and a mixed population of Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims had taken up residence there. Parameswara, supposedly inspired by the courage of a small deer that did not fear his hunting dogs, decided this was the spot on which to build a new kingdom.

The city Parameswara and his followers founded in around 1400, called Malacca (Melaka), became a thriving trading port that grew to occupy both the northern coast of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula, on either side of the Malaccan Straits. The Orang Laut kept the seas in the area free of pirates, and Arab, Persian, Indian, and Chinese merchants came to do business. Many decided to stay. Parameswara married the daughter of an Indonesian Muslim ruler and converted to Islam, changing his name to Iskander (Persian for Alexander) and taking the title of sultan. This enabled Malacca to form close relationships with other Muslim states on Sumatra that traded with Gujarat. Through the Malaccan Straits flowed silks, spices, and porcelain, as well as Malaccan products such as tin that was mined to the north of the city. The Malaccans also planted orchards of sago palms, which provided an important foodstuff, a starchy ingredient of bread and noodles that was traded throughout the region.

Malacca also established relations with China's Ming dynasty, whose Admiral Zheng He visited Malacca six times during the voyages he undertook in the service of the Yongle emperor. When the growing power of Siam's Ayutthaya Kingdom threatened Malacca, Ming envoys let the Siamese know that Malacca was a vassal state of China and thus not to be interfered with. By the time the Ming dynasty had turned inward in the mid-fifteenth century and ceased to trouble itself with matters involving foreign

states, Malacca had grown strong enough to fend off Ayutthaya and repulsed two attacks made by that kingdom in 1446 and 1456. With Ayutthaya no longer a threat, the Sultanate of Malacca was free to spread its influence, and the religion of Islam, throughout Southeast Asia.

From Malacca, religious teachers, many of them Sufis, brought Islam across the Malay Peninsula, and people on nearby islands also became converts. The sultans of Malacca and other Muslim rulers paid generously for the construction of mosques and religious schools. By the early 1600s, Islam had become the dominant religion in the Indian Ocean, and only on the island of Bali was Hindu influence still substantial. On Java, the home of the Hindu-Buddhist Majapahit Empire, the adoption of Islam was marked by warfare between Muslims living on the coast and Hindus and animists (people who worship the supernatural power they believe exists in all things in the universe) in the interior. For the most part, however, conversion was peaceful. Merchants were especially eager to convert in order to connect themselves with the established network of merchants in India, Persia, Arabia, and Africa who followed the same faith. They could then also count on the protections of Islamic law. Sufi religious teachers were amenable to adapting Islam to local religious traditions, allowing people in some regions to continue worshipping nature spirits and permitting women to retain an active role in local commerce, as was common in Southeast Asia.

Malacca reached the height of its power in the late fifteenth century under the reigns of Sultan Mansur Shah and his son Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah. During this period, often thought of as “the golden age” of Malacca, Mansur Shah pursued an expansionist policy, adding the gold-rich state of Pahang on the east coast of the Malay Peninsula to his kingdom. The ruler of Majapahit, fearing Malacca’s strength, sought peace by marrying his daughter to Mansur Shah and conceding to him a number of Majapahit territories. States throughout the Malaysian archipelago acknowledged the ruler of Malacca as their overlord.

Assisting the sultans of Malacca to maintain control over the city were nine elite knights. Preeminent among them was Hang Tuah, who spoke multiple languages including Arabic, Persian, and Mandarin and was adept in the use of numerous weapons. It was his responsibility to guard the seas surrounding the Straits of Malacca and keep them free of pirates. Order was also maintained by the establishment of the office of *shahbandar*. Foreign traders were divided among four separate districts in the city, and each district was assigned an official known as the *shahbandar* to supervise them and collect taxes.

A legal code called the *Undang-Undang Melaka* (“law of Melaka”) governed conduct in the port. Influenced by Islamic law, it punished behavior such as robbery, adultery, and drunkenness. One of the most important parts of the legal code for merchants was the section on maritime law called the *Undang-Undang Laut Melaka*. This code governed everything from the behavior of sailors and traveling merchants toward the captain of the merchant vessel, to the order in which trade was to take place when the ship put into port (the captain was allowed to trade his goods first), to rules specifying how those who quarreled or stole other passengers’ property should be treated.

The Malaccan rulers’ ability to regulate the conduct of sailors and merchants both in their city and aboard their ships made the port a more desirable place in which to do business. Merchants need not fear that Malacca was a lawless place, as many ports were. The city quickly became the main port for trading Indian cloth and Chinese porcelain as well as goods such as spices from the Malay Archipelago. This growth in the wealth and prominence of Malacca helped make the fifteenth century a golden age.

The dominance of Malacca in the Indian Ocean trade spread the *Undang-Undang Melaka* throughout the islands of Indonesia. It also made the Malay language the premier language of trade throughout the coastal regions of Southeast Asia. In the fourteenth century, a special script for writing it was developed, based on Arabic script. In the fifteenth century, Malaysian literature, which had been transmitted only orally before, flourished, another characteristic of this golden age in the Malaccan Sultanate.

European Invasion of Pacific Islands

In 1519, with a fleet of five ships and a crew of two hundred seventy, Magellan departed from Spain. He crossed the Atlantic and sailed around the southern tip of South America, where the fleet spent the winter. On March 6, 1521, with their fresh water nearly exhausted after three months spent crossing the Pacific, they sighted Guam, and not long after, they made landfall in the Philippines. At the port of Sugbu on the island of Cebu, Magellan and the Spanish were welcomed by the ruler, Rajah Humabon, whose ancestor, a prince of the south India Chola dynasty, had come to the Philippines from Sumatra.

As other Portuguese had done, Magellan attempted to convert the people he encountered to Christianity. Humabon, his wives, and many of his subjects agreed. By converting, Humabon hoped to secure Magellan’s assistance in defeating Lapulapu, a rival ruler. Magellan consented to the plan, and at the Battle of Mactan on April 27, 1521, he was killed. Humabon, for unknown reasons, attacked Magellan’s remaining men. The survivors fled to the Moluccas and from there sailed home to Spain. Only eighteen men survived the voyage, and Spanish ships did not return to the Philippines until 1565, when they conquered Cebu. Then in 1570, the Spanish attacked the Muslim trading center of Maynila when one of its rulers refused to become an ally of Spain. The Filipinos

were defeated, and in 1571, the Spanish established the city of Manila, which became their capital in the East Indies.

Lapulapu, the indigenous leader who defied and defeated Ferdinand Magellan, has been a folk hero in the Philippines for hundreds of years, representing the spirit of the Filipino people and their unwillingness to be dictated to by non-Filipinos. He is referred to as Calí Pulaco in the 1614 poem “Que Dios le perdone” (“May God pardon him”) by Filipino poet Carlos Calao. Another spelling of his name, Kalipulaku, was used by the Filipino activist Mariano Ponce when he agitated for the Philippines’ independence from Spain in the nineteenth century. Lapulapu is also mentioned in the 1898 Declaration of Independence.

In the twentieth century, statues of him were erected in Manila, the capital of the Philippines, and on Mactan Island, the site of Magellan’s defeat. His image has appeared on Filipino currency, and he is shown in silhouette holding his weapons on the seal of the Philippine National Police. He is invoked in songs and has appeared as a character in films and television shows. Filipino Muslims have tried to claim him as a hero of Islam, even though he was most likely not Muslim. In 2017, Rodrigo Duterte, then president of the Philippines, proclaimed April 27, the anniversary of the Battle of Mactan, to be Lapulapu Day.



Figure 7.2.3: The stature of Lapulapu located at the Cebu Provincial Capitol. (CC BY 4.0; Bjeweld via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). [Detailed Description of Figure 7.2.3.](#)

In 1609, the Dutch East India Company attempted to establish a fortress in the Banda Islands, which is today part of Indonesia. The men sent to negotiate the agreement with the Bandanese were killed, however. In 1621, the Dutch returned and forced the inhabitants to sign a treaty. When the Bandanese violated the treaty’s terms, Dutch soldiers and Japanese mercenaries killed many of the community’s most important leaders and burned their villages. The surviving islanders were forced to cut down sago palm trees, a valuable source of food, and plant spice trees in their place.

The islands’ land was divided up and given to Dutch colonists, and enslaved Southeast Asians, European indentured servants, and convict laborers were set to work raising nutmeg, which was sold to the Dutch East India Company. The exception was Ambon Island, which the Dutch set aside to grow cloves. Clove trees on all other islands were destroyed, and anyone attempting to grow or sell cloves without permission was given the death penalty. To maintain a monopoly on the spices and thus keep prices high, the Dutch had already driven out English settlers attempting to colonize some of the outlying islands, and then, realizing they might be unable to control these islands, they destroyed all the nutmeg trees that grew there. In 1619, the Dutch also sent enslaved Bandanese to Java to build the Dutch settlement of Batavia (Jakarta).

The Dutch attempt to maintain their spice monopoly was destined to fail, however. Winds and seabirds spread seeds to other islands. Ships’ captains from other countries managed to return to Europe with holds filled with spices purchased from Southeast Asian kingdoms that had not fallen under the control of European powers. The English captain Sir Francis Drake, for example, purchased cloves from Sultan Babullah of Ternate. As ships grew larger, the volume of spices shipped to European ports increased, driving down prices and profits. The Dutch were not solely reliant on the spice trade, however, for they were able to take advantage of an opportunity not available to the Portuguese and Spanish, dedicated as they were to the propagation of Roman Catholicism. That opportunity was trade with Japan.

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7.3: Islam and Empire

Overview

This section covers the Ottoman Empire's rise and decline, highlighting its foundation by Turkic warriors, key events like the conquest of Constantinople, and military achievements under Suleiman I. It discusses social structures, like the Sultanate of Women and legal reforms, alongside challenges faced after defeats and European military advancements.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and the nations of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries
- Identify scientific and technological innovations of the Ottoman Empire
- Identify the factors that contributed to the rise of the Safavid Empire

The Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire was the foremost and longest-lived of the Islamic empires of the early modern world. It was formed by a small group of Turkic-speaking warriors assisted by Anatolian and Balkan Christian warlords and their followers at the end of the thirteenth century. For nearly seven hundred years, the Ottoman state lay at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa, ruling over a population diverse in ethnicity, language, and religion. In 1453, the Ottomans conquered Constantinople. A century later, the city, then called Istanbul, was one of the largest in the world, occupying a prize position on the Bosphorus, the sea passage between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, and facilitating trade between the Silk Roads and Europe. At its height under Sultan Suleiman I in the sixteenth century, the Ottoman military was the most technologically advanced in the Mediterranean world, threatening the gates of Vienna to the west, reaching the Persian Gulf to the east, and conquering Yemen and the Islamic holy cities of Mecca and Medina to the south. In the seventeenth century, as its enemies grew stronger, the empire became more inward-looking, focusing less on external expansion and more on resolving domestic affairs, professionalizing its bureaucracy, and conducting internal reforms.

Ottoman Culture and Society

The Ottoman state originated in the fertile plains of Anatolia (also known as Asia Minor, roughly modern-day Turkey), which lies between the Aegean Sea to its west, the Black Sea to its north, the Mediterranean Sea to its south, and the Zagros Mountains to its east. The lands of Anatolia were attractive to the nomadic Turkic peoples who lived in the semifertile Eurasian steppe, a band of grassland that runs from east to west between western China and Hungary. As the Turkic peoples extended their control over northern Iran in the tenth and eleventh centuries, a group of Turkic warriors established their own state, ruled by the Seljuk dynasty.

Over the next century and a half, this Seljuk state grew to control much of central and southern Anatolia. The Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century transformed the political landscape in Anatolia, however, and a number of small Turkic principalities emerged in the region in the wake of these disruptive invasions. The Turkic principality in the northeastern corner of Anatolia rose to prominence around 1300, under the leadership of Osman I. Osman raised an army and began to take territory from the neighboring Byzantines.

Osman's son Orhan continued the campaign upon his father's death, expanding the territory under his control to encompass much of northwestern Anatolia. The state Orhan established became the Ottoman Empire, named for his father Osman. By the fourteenth century, the Ottoman Empire had expanded into southeastern Europe, effectively surrounding the Byzantine city of Constantinople. In 1453, Ottoman armies marched into the city and made it the capital of their expanding realm. Over the next century, successive rulers expanded the empire deeper into Europe, down through Syria and Palestine, and across North Africa.



Figure 7.3.1: A painting depicting the Siege of Constantinople. (CC BY 4.0; Philippe de Mazerolles via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). [Detailed Description of Figure 7.3.1.](#)

Expansion, Revolutions, and Reform

At the height of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, the Muslim-controlled state exerted dominance over a vast expanse of territory that included not only Muslims but also many *dhimmis*: Christians, Jewish people, and others. For example, the Ottoman-controlled areas of the Balkans in southeastern Europe were not only much more densely populated than Anatolia but were also overwhelmingly Christian. The Christian populations in southeastern Europe were some of the oldest in the Christian world and unlikely to convert to Islam in any large numbers. This reality led the Ottomans to implement a system under which *dhimmis* were able to govern their own affairs according to their own religious laws. This became known as the millet system, a term that comes from the Arabic word *millah*, meaning nation.

Millets were organized around religious identity: Orthodox Christians comprised one millet under the Orthodox patriarch in Istanbul, Armenian Christians were a second, and Jewish people a third. Other groups, such as the Syriac-speaking Christians and the Coptic Christians of Egypt, were later given their own millets. Millets had their own courts to settle their affairs; a *dhimmi* would appear in a sharia court only if dealing with a Muslim in a legal or business matter, or with the state itself. The millet system was intended to give non-Muslims a degree of autonomy and the ability to conduct their affairs according to their own customs and norms.

Among the most striking measures imposed on Christian communities in the Balkans and Caucasus was the *devshirme* (“gathering”), the enslavement of youth for state and military service. Conceived as a form of taxation on the Christian territories of Ottoman-controlled Europe, this system gathered boys between eight and ten years of age from specified villages, converted them to Islam, and gave them an education designed to create an elite military force in the service of the sultan. They were selected for both their physical attributes and their intelligence. The training was harsh and emphasized discipline, endurance, and loyalty to the sultan. Some became part of an elite corps of soldiers known as the Janissaries (from the Turkish words *yeni cheri*, meaning “new soldier”). Janissaries were expected to serve as bodyguards to the sultan, to whom they were fiercely loyal and who paid them directly.

A small number of young men who demonstrated exceptional intellect were sent to the palace school to receive language and other training in preparation for becoming the empire’s trusted administrative elite. The idea was to create a self-perpetuating system of administrators and military leaders who had been raised by the Ottoman state, and whose loyalty was not to their families, whom (in theory) they never saw again, but to the sultan and the system of which they were a part. In this way, political infighting within the government could be avoided because personal identity, ethnicity, and religion were suppressed and nepotism eliminated. The *devshirme* system lasted until the late 1600s.

The Ottomans brought knowledge of horses, military organization, and statecraft to their early empire. They followed their Seljuk predecessors in holding Persian culture and style in high esteem. While Arabic was considered the language of learning and religion, Persian was often the language of poetry and literature, even in the otherwise Arabic-speaking court of the Abbasid

caliphs. The Ottoman Empire is often described as *Persianate*, meaning its culture, including visual art and architecture, was heavily influenced by that of Persia, but it was not Persian itself. Turkish was the language of administration and education; it was written in an adapted version of the Perso-Arabic script, and it incorporated numerous loan words from both Persian and Arabic. A parallel tradition of high poetry in Turkish called *divan* poetry also developed, which used the rhyme schemes and poetic meters of Persian poetry. In the seventeenth century, during the long conflict between the Ottomans and the Safavids in Iran, Turkish replaced Persian as a literary language, to emphasize the Turkish nature of the Ottoman state and distinguish its culture from that of its rival.

Most people in the Ottoman Empire could not read or write. As in most of the early modern world, primary education was considered the domain of religious institutions, not the state, although schools were often endowed by members of the sultan's family. Basic schools called *mekteps* taught young Muslims to recite the Quran, and each millet was allowed to coordinate education for its own children. Schools tended to provide education in the preferred local language, since Turkish was required only of those who interacted directly with the state. This is one of the main reasons that Turkish did not eventually replace local languages like Arabic, Bulgarian, Greek, and Serbo-Croatian-Bosnian, although in some places people who were not ethnically Turkish did speak only Turkish. Local languages like Bosnian also incorporated many loan words from Ottoman Turkish. Multilingualism was valued for trade and commerce and let European traders communicate easily with local agents and business partners. It also allowed new immigrant groups to retain their languages. For example, after Jewish people were expelled from Spain in 1492, many resettled in the Ottoman Empire, particularly in Izmir, Salonica, and Istanbul, where they continued to speak Judeo-Spanish (often called Ladino).

Education past the basic primary level was generally accessible mainly to the wealthy. Some boys from average and poor families managed to attend local schools, but most people needed their children to help with agricultural work or assist in their father's business. Boys from elite families went to private schools, and girls from similar families were educated at home by a private tutor. This was also the case among the millets. Millets provided schools for members of their community; a private school for Greek Christians opened in Istanbul in 1454, for example. The further education of exceptionally bright children from the lower classes might be sponsored by a wealthy local patron or landowner, often with the condition that the children go to work for the patron's business after finishing school.

Following the construction of a lavish palace complex in Istanbul in the early 1460s, important changes took place in the royal court and the Ottoman style of government. Over the next century, successive Ottoman sultans ruled less frequently from constantly moving military encampments—as had been their practice—and took up longer periods of residence at the new palace, later given the name Topkapı. One result of this change to a more stable home was the reentry of women into the public and political life of the Ottoman court, which had once been more usual in the Seljuk state.

After Sultan Bayezid I's wife had been captured and held hostage by the Central Asian ruler, Timur in the 1400s, it became the practice for sultans not to marry but to simply take concubines, women who did not have the same legal status as an official wife and whose chief purpose was to bear children for the sultan. Suleiman I defied this tradition to marry Hurrem, a young woman from Ruthenia (now western Ukraine) who had been captured and enslaved by Crimean Tatars. While a captive, Hurrem was eventually taken to Istanbul and purchased by Suleiman's mother as a gift for her son. As Hurrem Sultan, she became one of the most important and influential women in Ottoman history, setting a precedent for the powerful wives and chief concubines who followed her in what became known as the Sultanate of Women.

The wife or mother of the reigning sultan had unequalled power over the imperial family and frequently gained popularity by funding public monuments and buildings for use by the public, including soup kitchens, bath houses, fountains, and schools. Many of these were *vaqfs*, charitable endowments intended to help the poor or to serve religious purposes. Wealthy women (and men as well) often donated land or buildings along with funds to assist the public.

Outsiders who sought favor often wrote letters to or sent female relatives to plead their case with the sultan's wife or mother. She in turn might transform her popular influence into political power by conspiring with palace administrators like the palace's chief eunuch, becoming one of the most powerful people in the empire. The chief wife and the sultan's mother were often rivals for political prominence; clashes could occur between them and also with the sultan's chief (male) advisers at court. The Sultanate of Women lasted more than a century, ending in the late seventeenth century when a number of sultans died unexpectedly in a short period. The result was instability in the palace and a weakening of the interpersonal relationships between the imperial family and outside advisers upon whom the Sultanate of Women had relied.

Other than the sultan's mother or wife, women in the Ottoman Empire played no role in politics. They were active in other areas of life, however. Unlike European women before the nineteenth century, married and unmarried Ottoman women could buy, inherit, and own property and bequeath their wealth to others upon their death. They could borrow and lend money and sue to protect their rights in court. Marriages were usually arranged by parents, but at least in theory, women had to consent to the match and

could later obtain a divorce. Elite and middle-class women's time was occupied in raising their children and supervising their households. If they lived in towns or cities, they socialized with other women, often meeting them at bathhouses. On their rare ventures out in public, they wore veils as a sign of their status.

Women from the working class might manufacture goods in their homes and peddle them in the streets. Although they could invest in businesses, they were largely excluded from the official guild system, which admitted only male artisans. There were a number of female-dominated trades, however, such as nursing and dancing, and women often made a living doing laundry. They also belonged to the various Sufi orders. Of course, the lives of both Muslim and non-Muslim women differed depending on where in the Ottoman Empire they lived. The lives of peasant women were different from those of city dwellers, and besides caring for the home and children, they might assist their male relatives with chores on the farm.

The synthesis of the Ottoman Empire's diverse cultural base is perhaps most evident in its cuisine, which incorporated cooking styles and ingredients from places all over the world including Greece, Iran, the Balkans, the Arabian Peninsula, and central Asia. Following the discovery of the Americas, Ottoman cooks were among the first to incorporate ingredients from there, such as maize, peppers, tomatoes, and pumpkins, into their dishes. The Ottomans also likely introduced foods from elsewhere in Asia, like sesame, into the kitchens of the Middle East. Many dishes, such as rice pilafs from Egypt, Iran, and central Asia and Indian tandoori casseroles, were elegantly re-created for the imperial court in the kitchens of Topkapi Palace and then adopted in less extravagant versions by people throughout the empire. Food was an important symbol of power and generosity, and Topkapi could host up to four thousand people for a banquet. Each year, the sultan provided a lavish feast for the Janissary corps, the Ottoman Empire's most elite troops. At one point in the eighteenth century, ten thousand troops were fed at once.

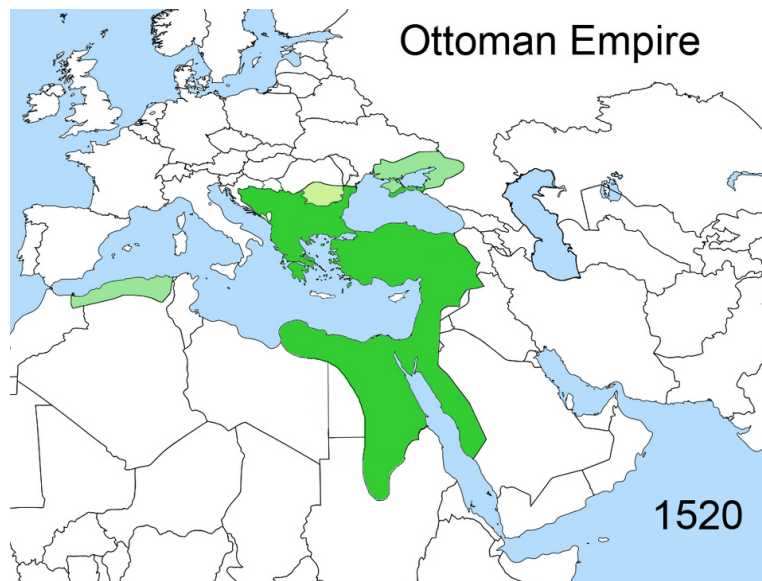


Figure 7.3.2: Historical map showing the Ottoman Empire's territorial extent in 1520. (CC BY 4.0; Αpyoc via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 7.3.2.

The Ottoman state's geographic position was an important advantage from its beginning well into the height of its power in the seventeenth century. The early empire was born on the dividing line between Europe and Asia and balanced between them for nearly its entire existence. The collapse of the Byzantine Empire allowed the Ottoman sultan to rule from a capital city situated between the two continents. After establishing his new capital in Istanbul, Mehmed II issued a call for citizens of the empire to come and settle there to restore its economic vitality. This was necessary because the city had experienced steady demographic decline over the previous few centuries. At first, Mehmed offered free housing to anyone who moved there voluntarily; later, he ordered thousands of Serbs, Armenians, Greeks, Jewish people, and Turks to settle in the city. Although he would not live to see it, within a century Istanbul was by far the largest city in Europe, with nearly a half million residents, and it dominated the land and sea trade between Europe and Asia.

Over the next century, the Ottoman Empire extended its influence into Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and North Africa. Under Ottoman control, the Egyptian Red Sea fleet battled the Portuguese for dominance in the Indian Ocean, sending troops and armaments to aid allied rulers in India and ships to the straits of Malacca. The Ottoman Empire is generally considered to have reached its pinnacle by the rise of Sultan Suleiman I in 1520. During his reign, Ottoman armies continued their Balkan expansion by conquering Serbia and Hungary, and in 1529 they laid siege to Vienna, then the seat of the Habsburg Empire.

Although Vienna was never conquered, the threat of military conquest by the Ottomans was a constant worry for the Habsburgs. Queen Elizabeth I of England, also a rival of the Habsburgs, sent an embassy and military advisers to Istanbul to propose an anti-Habsburg alliance. Despite the Ottoman alliance with England, the Ottoman's war with the Habsburgs quickly reached a stalemate, where it remained for several decades. Ottoman territorial expansion in North Africa found its farthest limit to the west in modern Algeria; to the east, it reached the shores of the Persian Gulf and established official borders with Safavid Iran. In Europe, Suleiman's strength and military dominance of the Mediterranean world, along with the splendor of his capital city and the riches flowing through the empire, earned him the title "the Magnificent."

To most Ottomans, however, Suleiman was known as "the lawgiver." Most Ottoman subjects were unaware of their legal rights until Suleiman's rule. Although Ottoman law was based on sharia, a certain amount of interpretation was required in matters such as criminal law, management of lands, and tax law. These laws were thus usually established by decree. Over the course of two and a half centuries, different parts of the empire were subject to decrees issued by many sultans, often substantially different from one another and sometimes contradictory. Suleiman reviewed the laws, ensured their compliance with Islamic principles, and issued a single unified law code for the empire that remained in force for three centuries. He also ordered the new law code to be publicized widely, so every Ottoman subject knew they had the right to have disputes heard in a court of law and judged fairly. These reforms won Suleiman wide acclaim and popularity as a ruler who cared about his people. Suleiman died in 1566 while commanding an expedition into Hungary. His death was kept secret for two months so as not to demoralize the troops; it was not until they returned to Istanbul that his death was made public in time for the coronation of his son as Selim II.

The period of Ottoman history after Suleiman's rule has often been described by historians as a time of slow decline, leading to the empire's disintegration beginning in the nineteenth century. This largely European interpretation attributes the ebbing of Ottoman power to two factors: the rise of European military might and Ottoman territorial overextension. In this view, the winds of change began to blow in 1571 when the Ottoman navy was destroyed in a naval battle at Lepanto in Greece by the Holy League—a confederation of the Spanish Empire, the Papal States, Venice, and Genoa, among others. The battle effectively ended Ottoman naval expansion into the western Mediterranean, as well as Ottoman enthusiasm for continuing its naval rivalry with Portugal, the Netherlands, and France in the Indian Ocean.

With this loss, the curtain was drawn back on the legend of Ottoman invincibility. European military technology caught up to and then surpassed Ottoman capabilities over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Ottoman territory was then gradually lost to European kingdoms, particularly in the western part of North Africa and in the Balkans. While the empire's land wars against the Habsburgs in Europe continued for another century, culminating in yet another failed siege of Vienna in 1683, it was also recognized at court that foreign wars were becoming more expensive but leading to far less economic and territorial gain.

From the north, the growing power of Russia became another threat. Beginning in the seventeenth century, Russian forces pushed south across the steppes toward Ottoman territory. Under Tsar Peter the Great, Russian armies temporarily captured the Ottoman-held territory of Azov in the Crimea along the Black Sea in 1696. In the late eighteenth century, Russia's expansion ramped up again, eventually leading it deep into Ottoman territory with control over the northern coast of the Black Sea. Often aided by Austria, Russia steadily undermined Ottoman control over the Balkans, and over the nineteenth century, its influence came to replace Ottoman sway in the region.

More recently, historians have refined this older interpretation of Ottoman decline. According to the newer view, the threats from Europe in the west and the Safavids in the east convinced the Ottoman rulers to try making their control over their core territory more efficient. They sent delegations to several countries in Europe and to Mughal India to observe local systems and make recommendations for improvements at home. Several European military advisers were brought to Istanbul to train soldiers, and Ottoman scientists and engineers were sent to European universities to learn more about engineering, history, and military modernization and the ways in which they could be applied at home. Although the Ottoman Empire had become weaker by the nineteenth century, these reforms nevertheless helped it to survive into the twentieth century.

Coffee drinking occupied a position in Ottoman life that was on par with—indeed, perhaps more important than—feasting, and the Ottomans first introduced it to Europe. The practice began in Arabia and spread to other places in the Islamic world. The first coffeehouses were established in the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, where they provided spaces for men to socialize, do business, and exchange news. Men of all social classes frequented coffeehouses, and men of little education could listen to literate men reading aloud from books, hear poets recite their newest works, and watch scholars engage in debates. Political discussions were common, and the Ottoman government often sent spies to listen for signs of dissent or potential rebellion. Talk of politics was especially frequent at coffeehouses favored by Janissaries. While many Muslim clerics had no objection to coffee because it was not forbidden by sharia, some clerics disapproved of it because of its stimulating qualities, and unsuccessful attempts to ban it were made in the sixteenth century. In the seventeenth century, Sultan Murad IV, fearful that rebellion might be plotted in coffeehouses, banned them, and citizens who persisted in drinking coffee risked being sentenced to death.

Many Muslim clerics and scholars also objected to the smoking of tobacco, which had been introduced from the Americas in the sixteenth century and become popular in the Ottoman Empire by the seventeenth century. They saw tobacco as an intoxicant that affected people in the way wine or coffee did, and also as bad for health. Some denounced it as a foreign practice introduced by European Christians for the purpose of harming Muslims. Tobacco was also damned by its association with the coffeehouse, where much smoking took place, and when Murad IV closed the coffeehouses, he also outlawed tobacco smoking with the death penalty for violators.

Science and Technology

As the Ottoman state grew in prestige and size, its sultans deliberately set out to become patrons of science and learning, following the examples set by the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs and other prominent Muslim leaders. The core of all education was religious; there was no separation between what today would be considered religious philosophy or doctrinal study and the “hard sciences” such as astronomy, chemistry, mathematics, and physics. On the contrary, scientific investigation was considered an act of devotion because of its exploration and discovery of the intricacies of the divinely created universe.

From the very beginning of the state, institutions of higher learning—*madrasas*—were established in major cities. Patronage of science, art, and culture reached a new level under Sultan Mehmed II. Mehmed founded the first institution of higher learning in the new capital, the Fatih complex, which included a hospital, public kitchens, a library, and schools. The Fatih hospital remained operational into the nineteenth century.

As Istanbul developed as the imperial capital, many other such institutions came to be established there. Another complex of charitable institutions, the first one designed and built in Istanbul by Mimar Sinan, the master architect and engineer of Armenian origin, was a teaching hospital endowed by Hurrem Sultan, the wife of Sultan Suleiman. It was also common for wealthy Jewish and Christian patrons to establish their own *vaqfs* to fund projects that benefited their communities, because these trusts were exempt from inheritance taxes. Teaching hospitals were considered important recipients of *vaqf* funds given that hospital care was provided free of charge.

The geographic diversity of the empire was an advantage to the development of medical science because it was now possible to compare the results of medical treatments and experiments in several different geographic and climate zones. For this reason, many important medical treatises of the day were written in the Ottoman Empire. The tradition of medical writing built upon the foundation established by such famous Muslim scholars and physicians as Ibn Sina, who composed *The Canon of Medicine* in the tenth century. The works produced by physicians who made their home in the Ottoman Empire included one of the first treatises dedicated to dentistry, written by the Spanish Jewish scholar Musa bin Hamun, who made his home in the Ottoman Empire after the Jewish people were expelled from Spain.

Among the great scientists of the Ottoman Empire was Taqi al-Din, who was invited by Sultan Murad III to build an observatory in Istanbul. Taqi al-Din’s method of calculating the coordinates of stars is said to have been better than those of Tycho Brahe and Nicolas Copernicus, noted astronomers working in northern Europe around the same time. Taqi al-Din also developed steam turbines and mechanical clocks and conducted research into the optical refraction of light. His work illustrates the way scientific discoveries transcended religious and national divisions; he himself had set out to improve on astronomical techniques devised by Ulugh Beg at Samarkand (in today’s Uzbekistan), and in turn his own research was consulted by Tycho Brahe in Denmark when Brahe was developing his ideas about astronomy. Taqi al-Din’s works were also collected by the Dutch mathematician Jacob Golius, who brought them to the library of Leiden University in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century.

The Rise of the Safavid Empire

To the east of the lands of the Ottomans, another Islamic empire emerged at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Based in Iran, the Safavid Empire at its height ruled over much of what is now Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Georgia, and Iraq, as well as parts of several neighboring countries including Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Like the Ottomans and Mughals, the Safavids developed a powerful military, ran a strong and well-organized central state, and fostered a climate in which artistic and intellectual culture flourished. The Safavids also introduced Shi’ism as the state religion at a time when Iran’s population was mostly Sunni, and in doing so they made Iran into the Shia majority nation that it remains today.

The Safavids began not as a political dynasty, but as the hereditary leaders of a Sufi order based in the city of Ardabil, located in today’s northwestern Iran. The order in Ardabil was founded in the thirteenth century by the Sufi master Zahed Gilani, and little is known about its beliefs and practices in its earliest stages. We do know that Zahed appointed his son-in-law and disciple Safi al-Din Ardabili to succeed him, which angered his family and some of his followers.

Safi al-Din renamed the order after himself—*Safaviyya*—and made a number of reforms that reshaped it from a local order to a religious movement that sought followers from around Iran and neighboring countries. While Safi al-Din's origins are lost to history, it is generally believed that he came from a family of Azeri-speaking Kurds, although even this is uncertain. (Azeri is a Turkic language.) The Safavid family later claimed that Safi al-Din was descended from the Prophet through Muhammad's daughter Fatima and son-in-law Ali ibn Abi Talib. This genealogy was most likely invented by court historians during the sixteenth-century reign of Shah Ismail I. However, several scholars went one step further and extended the family's history back to the biblical Adam.



Figure 7.3.3: Historical map showing the Safavid Empire, 1501–1736 AD, with labeled cities and regional boundaries under Shah Abbas I. (CC BY 4.0 ; Arab_Hafez via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 7.3.3.

Initially, like most of Iran's population, the Safavids were primarily Sunni Muslims. Like that of many Sufi orders, their ideology incorporated elements of both Sunni and Shia doctrines to proclaim a universal message and attract followers from both sects. However, Safi al-Din's great-grandson Junayd made several changes to the order's doctrine, adopting specifically Shia ideas. Junayd believed the Safavids should use their popular religious mandate to seek military and political power for themselves, and he found Shia doctrine more appropriate for his vision.

Junayd's son Haydar created a solid political and military framework by establishing a Safavid military order known as the Qizilbash, after their distinctive red hats (*qizil* means "red" in Azeri). Haydar declared a religious war against the Christian residents of the Caucasus, but in order to reach them, he had to pass through the territory of the Shirvanshahs, who were allied with his enemies. Although at first he was able to negotiate safe passage for his army, the Shirvanshahs, already uneasy about Haydar's growing power, used his eventual attack on one of their cities as an excuse to declare war on the Safavids. Haydar was killed in battle in 1488. His son Ali Mirza took his place, but within a few years his capital at Ardabil was conquered by his enemies. Ali Mirza was also killed, and his infant brother Ismail was sent into exile.

After being sheltered by allies, the twelve-year-old Ismail emerged from exile in 1499 claiming to be the *Mahdi* or messiah and began rallying the Qizilbash troops who had fought for his father and brother. They embarked on a military campaign, winning victory after victory until, in July 1501, Ismail entered the Shirvanshah capital of Tabriz and declared himself shah, or emperor, of all Iran. At the time, he governed only Azerbaijan and part of the Caucasus. By 1511, however, Ismail's troops had driven the Uzbeks across the Amu Darya River, establishing the eastern borders of modern Iran. The Safavids also staged incursions into eastern Anatolia; these triggered a conflict with the Ottoman Empire that continued for the length of the Safavids' reign. Not only had Ismail's forces occupied the empire's border cities, but he had begun recruiting for his army among the ethnic Turkish tribes of eastern Anatolia and encouraging the Shia Muslims in Ottoman lands to revolt against their Sunni rulers.

In response, the Ottoman sultan Bayezid II deported the Shi'ites of his empire from Anatolia to other regions where they would be unable to heed the Safavid call. As the Safavids continued to push westward into Ottoman territory, Bayezid's son Selim I responded by invading Iranian Azerbaijan, laying waste to Tabriz in 1514 and attempting to destroy the Qizilbash. The loss of his capital Tabriz to the enemy—and to a Sunni Muslim at that—was a huge blow to Shah Ismail's standing among his own armies, made worse by the fact that he had declared himself invincible based on his claimed semidivine ancestry.

After Ismail's death in 1524, ten years of internal strife followed as rival Qizilbash factions fought for dominance and the right to be regent to Ismail's ten-year-old heir Tahmasp. Tahmasp went on to become the longest-reigning Safavid shah. Disappointed by his experience navigating the rivalries within the Qizilbash, he began using enslaved Christians from Circassia and Georgia in the palace administration and civil services instead of members of the Qizilbash. Tahmasp faced several challenges at home and abroad, however. Although he successfully repelled an attempt by the Uzbeks to invade northeastern Iran, they remained a threat to the east, and war with the Ottomans flared up soon afterward when Suleiman's armies invaded Iran in the mid-1530s. Tahmasp's desire to fend off the Turkish threat led him to ally himself with a rising European power, the Habsburg Empire.

The Habsburg emperor Charles V, concerned by the Ottomans' progression toward Vienna, approached first Ismail and then Tahmasp about an alliance. By agreement, the Safavids would attack the Ottomans whenever the Ottomans attacked the Habsburgs to divide the Ottoman army between two fronts of battle and thereby weaken it. In 1536, the Ottomans formalized their own alliance with the king of France, an enemy of the Habsburgs, who sent a military adviser to counsel Sultan Suleiman about his war with Iran in 1547.

Two decades of warfare severely strained the Iranian economy, however, and Tahmasp sought peace with the Ottomans. Under the Peace of Amasya, concluded in 1555, Armenia and Georgia were divided between the two empires; the Ottomans gained control over Iraq and access to the Persian Gulf, while Iran's control over Azerbaijan was guaranteed. Tahmasp also moved his capital from Tabriz to Qazvin, closer to the Caspian Sea and at less risk of capture or siege by Ottoman forces. The two states finally laid down arms and declared a peace that lasted more than thirty years.

It did not last forever, however. The borders of Iran were secure at the end of Tahmasp's reign, but his son and grandson were ineffective leaders who failed to keep the Qizilbash rivalries from once again destabilizing the country, which led to yet more incursions by Ottoman and Uzbek forces. Tahmasp's grandson Abbas I, generally considered the strongest Safavid shah as well as one of the greatest rulers in Iranian history, found himself compelled to take up arms once again. During his reign, the Safavid state reached the height of its military, political, and economic power. Abbas I reformed the military and civil service and built a showpiece capital city, Isfahan, which remains one of the masterworks of Persian Islamic art and architecture.

By the time the seventeen-year-old Abbas was crowned shah in 1588, Iran was in chaos. After waging war against the Uzbeks, Abbas realized that fighting the Ottomans with the country in upheaval would be nearly impossible. As a result, he signed a peace treaty in 1590 that gave nearly half his territory, including the former capital of Tabriz, to the Ottomans. Abbas then returned to the issue his grandfather had taken up: taming the Qizilbash, whose disputes had plunged Iran into civil conflict that twice nearly brought the country to ruin. His grandfather had acquired over thirty thousand enslaved people employed as civil servants and palace administrators; turning to the Caucasus region again, Abbas decided to also create an enslaved soldier corps like the Ottoman Janissaries.

With his new army behind him, Abbas undertook to gain back the territories lost to the Uzbeks and Ottomans. The Safavid armies quickly reconquered Khorasan from the Uzbeks and moved on to Azerbaijan. The Ottomans sued for peace in 1612, relinquishing the Caucasus to the Iranians. An attempt to recapture the territory in 1618 resulted in a devastating loss for the Ottomans.

Despite near-constant war, during this time Iran reached new cultural and economic heights. In 1598, Abbas moved his capital from Qazvin to Isfahan in the central Iranian plateau, far from the constantly shifting borders with the Ottomans and Uzbeks and closer to the Persian Gulf and the newly arrived traders of the British and Dutch East India Companies. The city was built as a showpiece, with administrative buildings and public markets opening on the enormous Naqsh-e Jahan ("Exemplar of the world") Square.

The city center was unique. All levels of society could mix there, from members of the royal court whose pavilion overlooked the square, to the Shi'ite clergy whose mosque was at the square's southern end, to foreign dignitaries, members of the military, merchants, and commoners. A soup kitchen distributed free food to the needy, and occasionally the square was cleared for polo games, public ceremonies, and festivals. To populate his new capital, Abbas ordered several different populations to settle in it, including Armenians, Jewish people, Circassians, and other Caucasian peoples, many of whom had been displaced during his war against the Ottomans in their homelands. The cathedral Abbas ordered built for the Armenian Christians still serves that community in Isfahan today.

After Abbas's death, the Safavid state met another internal threat, this time from the Georgian kingdom of Kakheti. After Abbas had ordered the mass deportation of Georgians to central Iran, he sent Oghuz Turks (Turcomen) to settle the area; the local population that remained refused to allow them to do so, however, and staged a military rebellion. Although the Safavids were eventually able to reestablish authority, they never achieved their earlier level of control.

Iran also continued to face threats from outside. In the early eighteenth century under the reign of Tsar Peter the Great, Russia

began to encroach on the northern shores of the Caspian Sea and to compete for influence in the Caucasus. The armies of Peter the Great took the Caucasus in the Russo-Persian war of 1722–1723, while the Ottomans reoccupied northwestern Iran. The entry of European ships to the Indian Ocean trade cut off much of Iran's direct access to Africa and South Asia. Over the course of the 1730s, Nader Afshar, one of the Safavid vassals, established himself as a strong military ruler. He was able to reverse many of Iran's territorial losses to the Russians and Ottomans; however, he had no interest in sharing power. In 1736, Nader deposed the infant Abbas III and crowned himself shah, bringing the Safavid Empire to an end and establishing the short-lived Afsharid dynasty.

Safavid Government and Culture

During the Safavid period, Iran was ethnically quite diverse. Safi al-Din is believed to have come from a family of Kurds who spoke Azeri. As the Safavid order developed, its members intermarried with other Turkic groups such as the Turcomen, Lar, and Bakhtiyari, and with Georgian, Armenian, and Pontic Greek Christians within their lands and bordering territories. Through his mother, Shah Ismail I was descended from the Komnenos dynasty that once ruled the Byzantine Empire. He used Persian as the language of government and composed poetry in Azeri, contributing to its development as a literary language. The Qizilbash were largely Turcoman, another Turkic group with its own language. Various groups of Persian-speaking peoples lived in the Iranian plateau and were usually described as “Tajik.”

The Safavid shahs were wary of groups that sought to exert too much power over them and the government. One of the reasons the Qizilbash were eventually replaced as palace administrators, bureaucrats, and military elites is that they had occasionally used their collective power to render some of the weaker shahs mere figureheads. However, beneath the shah and the powerful elites, the Safavid hierarchy was unique for its time in being largely based on merit; worth and talent, not status or birth, were the keys to upward mobility. Even those in hereditary positions had to prove themselves capable or be replaced. This system brought the brightest and most talented into government service while preventing the development of an entrenched and unchecked aristocracy.

Shi'ism's rise created a new religious hierarchy in Iran. Given the sect's government sponsorship, the Shia *ulama* were often able to act as intermediaries between the people and the government. They formed an early alliance with merchants, for instance, establishing and administering *vaqfs* to protect the merchants' property and assets. Through this alliance many members of the *ulama* became landowners themselves, creating a religious aristocracy that gave them a level of political independence. When the Safavid state weakened in its later years, the *ulama* were able to step in and use their newly acquired wealth to benefit their communities and enhance their power. This strengthening of direct ties between the *ulama* and the people, and the separation of the religious establishment from the state, is believed to be one of the reasons Shi'ism long outlasted the Safavid era.

7.4: Chapter Themes to Discuss

Core Themes for Reflection and Discussion

This page offers different themes that appear throughout the sections in this chapter. The themes are meant to provide a framework in which discussion questions can be developed to inspire further exploration of the topics covered.

1. The challenge to traditional structures of power and authority in Europe.
2. The similarities and differences among the empires that emerged to dominant this era of history.
3. Issues of race, class, and gender in the continued developments throughout the world.

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7.5: Alternative Text Descriptions

Figure 7.1.1 Vitruvian Man

This image is Leonardo da Vinci's **Vitruvian Man**, a study of human body proportions.

The drawing shows an unclothed adult human figure positioned within both a circle and a square. The figure is depicted with two overlapping sets of arms and legs, creating the appearance of movement and demonstrating different proportional positions of the body. One set of arms extends horizontally from the shoulders, while the second set is raised diagonally upward. One set of legs stands together beneath the body, while the second set is spread apart.

The figure's navel is positioned at the center of the circle, and the outstretched arms and legs touch the circle's boundary. The square surrounds the body, with the feet resting near its lower edge and the horizontally extended arms reaching toward its sides.

The diagram illustrates the idea that the proportions of the human body can be related to geometric forms. Handwritten notes by Leonardo appear above and below the drawing, accompanying his study of ideal human proportions.

The purpose of the image is to demonstrate the relationship between human anatomy, proportion, and geometry through the placement of a human figure within a circle and a square.

Figure 7.1.2 Map of Protestant Reformation at Its Peak, 1545–1620

This image is a thematic map titled “**The Protestant Reformation at Its Peak (1545–1620)**” showing the geographic distribution of major Christian traditions across Europe.

Lutheran territories occupy most of northern Europe, including nearly all of Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden, and Denmark), Iceland, Finland, and much of northern Germany. Additional Lutheran areas extend into the Baltic region and parts of central Europe.

Calvinist territories are concentrated in western and central Europe. They include much of Scotland, portions of the Netherlands, parts of Switzerland, southwestern Germany, and several regions of France. Smaller Calvinist areas also appear in central and eastern Europe.

Anglican territories are located primarily in England. The map shows England as predominantly Anglican, distinguishing it from Calvinist Scotland and Catholic Ireland.

Hussite territories are centered in Bohemia, corresponding largely to the area of present-day Czechia in central Europe.

Unitarian territories are concentrated in Transylvania, in southeastern-central Europe, east of Hungary and west of the Black Sea.

Other Christian territories, including Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and related traditions, occupy much of southern Europe and parts of eastern Europe. These regions include most of Spain, Portugal, Italy, and large sections of the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean. Catholic territories also remain in parts of France, the Holy Roman Empire, Ireland, Poland, and Hungary.

Anabaptist communities are represented by a small number of isolated locations scattered across central Europe, particularly within regions of the Holy Roman Empire rather than in large continuous territories.

The map shows that Protestant traditions were strongest in northern and parts of central Europe. Lutheranism dominated Scandinavia and northern Germany; Calvinism was concentrated in Scotland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and parts of France and Germany; Anglicanism was centered in England; Hussitism remained concentrated in Bohemia; and Unitarianism was centered in Transylvania. Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions continued to dominate much of southern and eastern Europe.

Figure 7.1.3 Historical Portrait Painting

This image is a formal painted portrait showing a person from the chest upward against a dark, plain background.

The figure faces forward and wears a black cap adorned with a small decorative jewel. Curled hair is visible beneath the cap, framing the face.

The clothing is rich and carefully detailed. The figure wears a glossy black garment with wide sleeves and a finely textured surface that reflects light. Covering the shoulders is a large white lace collar or capelet made of delicate fabric, with embroidered floral and geometric patterns visible along the edges. The bright white collar contrasts sharply with the dark clothing, drawing attention to the upper body and face.

Several pieces of jewelry are prominently displayed. Large pearl drop earrings hang from both ears, and a double-strand pearl necklace encircles the neck. At the center of the collar is a decorative brooch or pendant suspended beneath a ribbon bow.

The pearls, lacework, and dark, expensive fabric emphasize wealth, status, and refinement. The portrait's composition focuses on the subject's appearance, attire, and jewelry rather than on any background setting.

The detailed rendering of the pearls, fine lace collar, and glossy black clothing reflects the importance of dress and material display in seventeenth-century portraiture.

Figure 7.2.1 Map of the Mamluk Dynasty in South Asia

This image is a historical map of the **Mamluk Dynasty** in South Asia.

A shaded region marks the territory controlled by the dynasty, extending across much of the northern Indian subcontinent. The territory stretches from the lower Indus River region in the west, across the Punjab and the Indo-Gangetic Plain, to Bengal in the east. To the north, the dynasty reaches the foothills of the Himalayas, while much of southern India remains outside the shaded area.

Several major cities within the dynasty are labeled. **Multan** and **Lahore** are located in the northwestern portion of the territory, in present-day Pakistan. Lahore lies northeast of Multan and closer to the Himalayan foothills. **Delhi**, the capital of the Mamluk Dynasty and a major political center, is located farther east in north-central India between Lahore and Banaras. **Banaras** (modern Varanasi) lies east of Delhi along the Ganges River plain. **Gaur**, in the easternmost part of the dynasty, is located in the Bengal region near the modern border area of India and Bangladesh. **Thatta** lies in the southwestern part of the territory near the Indus River delta and the Arabian Sea coast.

For modern reference, the dynasty's territory included areas associated with the present-day cities of **Lahore** and **Multan** in Pakistan; **Delhi** and **Varanasi (Banaras)** in India; and the historic region of **Gaur** near modern Bangladesh. The territory covered much of what is now eastern Pakistan and northern India, connecting the Indus River basin in the west with the Ganges River basin and Bengal in the east.

The map's purpose is to show the geographic extent of the Mamluk Dynasty, centered on Delhi, and to illustrate how its territory encompassed major population and trade centers across northern South Asia.

Figure 7.2.2 Map of China with Capitals and Provincial Capitals

This image is a historical map of Mongol-ruled China under the **Yuan Dynasty**.

The brown-shaded area marks the territory under Mongol control, extending across most of eastern and central China from the northern frontier near the Great Wall south to the South China Sea, and from the Pacific coast westward toward the borders of Tibet.

Two capitals are identified. **Beijing**, in the northeastern part of the empire near the northern frontier, serves as the primary capital. **Nanjing**, located farther south along the eastern coast, is shown as a secondary capital.

Provincial capitals are distributed throughout the empire. **Taiyuan**, **Jinan**, and **Kaifeng** lie in northern and north-central China.

Xi'an is located in the northwest interior. **Wuchang** and **Nanchang** are situated in central and southeastern China. Along the eastern and southern coast are **Hangzhou**, **Fuzhou**, and **Guangzhou**. In the southwest are **Chengdu**, **Guiyang**, **Guilin**, and **Yunnan**.

The map also labels neighboring regions outside the empire, including the Mongols and Jurchens to the north, Korea to the northeast, Tibet to the west, and Burma, Vietnam, and Laos to the south.

The purpose of the map is to show the extent of Mongol rule in China and the locations of its capitals and principal provincial administrative centers.

Figure 7.2.3 Night View of Outdoor Statue in Front of Lit Building

This image is a nighttime photograph of a large bronze statue depicting a standing figure holding a large curved sword.

The figure stands upright with feet set apart in a confident stance. One hand rests on the hip, while the other grips the sword, which points downward beside the body. The weapon has a broad, curved blade that extends nearly to the figure's feet.

The figure wears minimal clothing, consisting of a short skirt- or loincloth-like garment around the waist, leaving the chest, arms, and legs exposed. The body is portrayed with pronounced musculature, emphasizing physical strength. Long hair falls around the head and shoulders, and the face is framed by a full beard.

The statue's size, stance, and oversized weapon create an impression of power and military readiness. The image focuses on the figure's commanding pose, muscular physique, simple clothing, and distinctive curved sword.

Figure 7.3.1 Medieval Siege Illustration

This image is a medieval illustration of a siege on a fortified waterside city.

The city is enclosed by high stone walls and towers, while attacking forces approach both by land and from ships positioned along the waterfront. The scene is crowded with dozens of combatants engaged in fighting at multiple locations simultaneously.

Attackers climb ladders leaned against the city walls, attempting to scale the fortifications and enter the city. Several soldiers are shown partway up the ladders, while defenders at the top try to stop them. Defenders standing on the walls throw large stones down onto the climbing attackers. Other defenders use bows and crossbows to fire projectiles from elevated positions along the ramparts.

At ground level, soldiers gather near the base of the walls carrying shields and weapons while supporting the assault. Archers shoot upward toward the defenders, creating a dense exchange of arrows across the scene. One section of the image shows attackers advancing behind protective equipment, while others prepare additional ladders for the assault.

Along the waterfront, ships packed with soldiers have pulled alongside the city walls. Troops on board fire arrows toward the defenders, while others prepare to disembark. Defenders on the walls above the harbor respond with missiles and stones directed at the ships and the soldiers below.

Inside the city walls, additional defenders can be seen moving between towers, rooftops, and defensive positions.

The illustration emphasizes the complexity of medieval siege warfare, showing simultaneous attacks by land and water, the use of ladders to scale walls, archery exchanges, and defenders relying on elevated positions, stones, and other projectiles to repel the assault.

Figure 7.3.2 Map of the Ottoman Empire in 1520

This image is a political map titled "**Ottoman Empire**" showing the empire's extent in 1520.

The **dark green-shaded area** indicates the core territory of the Ottoman Empire. This area includes most of Anatolia (present-day Turkey), southeastern Europe including Greece and the Balkan region, the eastern Mediterranean coast, Egypt, and a large section of northeastern North Africa along the Nile River valley.

Several **lighter green-shaded areas** represent territories associated with or bordering the empire. One light green region lies north of the Black Sea in the Crimean Peninsula, indicating the Crimean Khanate, an Ottoman tributary state. Another light green region extends east of the Black Sea in the Caucasus area, between the Black and Caspian Seas. A third light green area appears in North Africa west of Egypt along the Mediterranean coast, corresponding to Ottoman-controlled or allied territory in present-day Libya.

The empire stretches from the borders of central Europe in the northwest to Egypt and the Red Sea in the south, and from the Adriatic and Aegean Seas in the west to the Caucasus and eastern Anatolia in the east.

The Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, Caspian Sea, Red Sea, and Persian Gulf are shown in light blue, helping define the empire's geographic position.

The map's purpose is to show both the core territory of the Ottoman Empire in 1520 and the neighboring tributary or associated regions connected to Ottoman influence.

Figure 7.3.3 Map of the Safavid Empire, 1501–1736 AD

This image is a political map titled “**Safavid Empire 1501–1736 (AD)**”.

The **blue-shaded area** indicates the territory of the Safavid Empire. It occupies much of present-day Iran, extending westward into parts of Mesopotamia and eastward into areas bordering Central Asia and Afghanistan. The empire stretches from the region around **Baghdad** in the west to **Herat** and **Balkh** in the east, and from the **Caucasus** region in the northwest to the **Persian Gulf** and southeastern Iran.

Major cities labeled within or near the empire include **Tabriz** and **Maragha** in the northwest; **Tehran**, **Isfahan**, and **Shiraz** in central and southern Iran; **Baghdad** to the west; and **Nishapur**, **Herat**, **Balkh**, **Kabul**, and **Zaranj** toward the eastern frontier. Beyond the empire's eastern borders are the cities of **Bukhara**, **Samarkand**, and **Urgench** in Central Asia.

Orange lines mark surrounding political boundaries and neighboring territories.

An inset locator map in the lower left shows the Safavid Empire's position within the broader Middle East and Central Asia. The inset highlights the empire as occupying the Iranian Plateau between the Ottoman territories to the west, Central Asia to the northeast, and the Indian subcontinent to the east, emphasizing its role as a geographic bridge between the Mediterranean world, Central Asia, and South Asia.

The map's purpose is to show the geographic extent of the Safavid Empire and the location of major cities within and around its territory.

7.6: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials to Enhance the Course

These materials are provided to help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction. Some resources are openly licensed, while others may require institutional access or individual review before use in class.

Web Resources

These websites may help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction.

- [World History Encyclopedia](#) – Provides overviews of important people, places, and events throughout history. This resource can be useful for finding concise, expert-informed background information.
- [Fordham University Internet History Sourcebooks Project](#) – Provides translated, transcribed, and digitized primary sources. This resource can support source-based instruction, though instructors should review links carefully because some materials may be incomplete or less suitable for classroom use.

Articles

These articles provide additional scholarly context for this chapter. Access may depend on your institution's JSTOR subscription.

- Dixon, C. Scott. "Martin Luther and the Reformation in Historical Thought, 1517–2017." *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 106, no. 424 (2017): 404–16. [Access article in JSTOR](#)
- Fleming, K. E. "Constantinople: From Christianity to Islam." *The Classical World* 97, no. 1 (2003): 69–78. [Access article in JSTOR](#)
- PIERSON, STACEY. "The Movement of Chinese Ceramics: Appropriation in Global History." *Journal of World History* 23, no. 1 (2012): 9–39. [Access article in JSTOR](#)

Videos

These videos can be used to explore a specific topic in the chapter in more detail and as an entry to further discussion on chapter topics.

- [TED-Ed: The rise of the Ottoman Empire](#)
Length: 5 minutes, 14 seconds
In the late 13th century, Osman I established a small principality sandwiched between a crumbling Byzantine Empire and a weakened Sultanate of the Seljuk of Rum, in what is now Turkey. In just a few generations, this territory had outmaneuvered more powerful neighbors to become the vast Ottoman Empire. What enabled its rapid rise? Mostafa Minawi details the early days of the Ottomans.
- [TED-Ed: The history of tea](#)
Length: 4 minutes, 57 seconds
Tea is the second most consumed beverage in the world after water — and from sugary Turkish Rize tea to salty Tibetan butter tea, there are almost as many ways of preparing the beverage as there are cultures on the globe. Where did this beverage originate, and how did it become so popular? Shunan Teng details tea's long history.

8: CONCLUSION

Final Reflections

Making History: World History, 750–1750 has explored a millennium of global connections, tracing how societies across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas developed through trade, cultural exchange, political expansion, and technological innovation. By 1750, these long-term processes had created an increasingly interconnected world shaped by both cooperation and conflict.

At the same time, this narrative reflects the challenges of “making history.” Not all voices and experiences are equally preserved, and some perspectives may be underrepresented or omitted. The idea of “history denying” reminds us to critically consider whose stories are told and whose are missing.

The evolving relationships between regions—including the legacy of earlier cultural divides and the transformative impact of global interactions after 1492—reshaped economic systems, belief systems, and power structures. These changes laid the foundation for the modern era.

As you review the global snapshot of 1750 and the supporting resources, consider how this period sets the stage for future developments—and how the study of history is an ongoing process of interpretation and inclusion.

[8.1: The World in 1750](#)

[8.2: Bibliography](#)

8.1: The World in 1750

Where do we go from here?

The chapters in this text covered a roughly one-thousand-year period of global events. While a significant number of regions, peoples, and developments appeared in the text throughout the chapters, it is not nearly as deep and thorough an understanding of everything that took place during this era.

The challenge to create a truly immersive textbook is a daunting task, and one that covers everything would be thousands of pages long! Therefore, to close out this textbook, it is important to return to the opening and Irene Silverblatt's concept of "history denying." There is a good chance that as you (the reader) read through the chapters of this textbook, you could identify something that was left out. Rest assured, that is not intentional, nor a deliberate attempt to engage in history denying. Giving voice to as many peoples throughout history as possible is vital to a thorough and nuanced understanding of the past.

The Shifting Borders Between East and West

One of the overarching themes introduced at the beginning of the textbook was the historical construction of the terms "east" and "west." They came to mean more than just directions on a map.

The book opens not long after that the Roman Empire underwent a divide between the eastern and western regions in which Rome had fallen and Constantinople continued to serve as the "capital of Rome." It was through that initial divide that the Romans living in the East in Constantinople conceived of themselves as the true Romans, and separated themselves from the West geographically, and in doing so, separated themselves culturally, and intellectually.

The initial east-west divide on the European continent shifted once Islam spread throughout the Middle East, Africa, and into the Iberian Peninsula. The Crusades presented another intellectual and cultural shift in the meaning of "east" and "west." Once Europeans embraced a common identity under Christianity, they reconnected with Rome and its important legacy to the one institution that survived the fall of Rome in the West: the Roman Catholic Church. Within the crusading mindset, European Christendom stood opposition to Islam, which was presented as a "threat" from the east that contributed to the construction of Europe as "the West" and the Middle East as "the East."

The Crusades reoriented the deeper political meanings behind the terms "east" and "west," and the labels underwent another transformative period in 1492 when Europeans encountered the peoples living in North, Central, and South America – the western hemisphere. The global divide between major continents presented a major intellectual shift in the political, cultural, and geographic meanings of "east" and "west." The eastern hemisphere was called the "Old World" by Europeans who centered themselves in the historical retelling of the encounters they made that they subsequently called "discoveries." Every region and person living throughout the western hemisphere were part of the "New World." These terms carried political meaning, and shaped how many people understood this historic development for centuries.

Once European powers began colonizing the Americas, they extended the political and cultural meanings of "the West" onto the land and peoples they sought to conquer and control. Therefore, European colonists conceived of themselves as living in a "new world" but retaining the ideas they believed made them unique and superior to the Indigenous Peoples they encountered and were suddenly living among.

This is where this textbook leaves off, but this period of history does not reveal the final major shift in the meanings of "east" and "west" within world history. That story takes place in the 19th and 20th centuries as industrialization's impact unleashed forces that altered societies all over the world. New ideas would arise about industrialized economies and the responsibility of the State in the economic systems that evolved out of industrialization, and those new ideas would inspire movements that would divided the world into two major political camps that redefined the terms "east" and "west." But, that story awaits in the next chapters of world history.

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8.2: Bibliography

Sources

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