CHAPTER 1

Before 1200: Patterns in World History

CONNECTING PAST AND PRESENT

In September of 2009, Kong Dejun returned to China from her home in Great Britain. The occasion was a birthday celebration for her ancient ancestor Kong Fuzi, or Confucius, born 2,560 years earlier. Together with some 10,000 other people—descendants, scholars, government officials, and foreign representatives—Kong Dejun attended ceremonies at the Confucian Temple in Qufu, the hometown of China's famous sage. "I was touched to see my ancestor being revered by people from different countries and nations," she said.[1] What made this celebration remarkable was that it took place in a country still ruled by the Communist Party, which had long devoted enormous efforts to discrediting Confucius and his teachings. In the communist outlook, Confucianism was associated with class inequality, patriarchy, feudalism, superstition, and all things old and backward. But the country's ancient teacher and philosopher had apparently outlasted modern communism. Since the 1990s the Communist Party has claimed Confucius as a national treasure and has established over 300 Confucian Institutes to study his writings. He appears in TV shows and movies, and many anxious parents offer prayers at Confucian temples when their children are taking the national college entrance exams. Buddhism and Daoism (DOW-i'zm) have also experienced something of a revival in China, as thousands of temples, destroyed during the heyday of communism, have been repaired and reopened. Christianity too has grown rapidly in China since the 1970s. ■

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What clues does this image provide about the Islamic practice of pilgrimage?

Here are reminders, in a Chinese context, of the continuing appeal of cultural traditions forged long ago. Those ancient traditions and the civilizations in which they were born provide a link between the world of 1200–1450 and all that came before it. This chapter seeks to ease us into the stream of world history after 1200 by looking briefly at several major turning points in the human story that preceded 1200. These

include the transition to agriculture, the rise of distinctive societies called civilizations, the making of the major cultural or religious traditions that accompanied those civilizations, and the broad patterns of interaction among the peoples of the ancient world.

From the Paleolithic Era to the Age of Agriculture

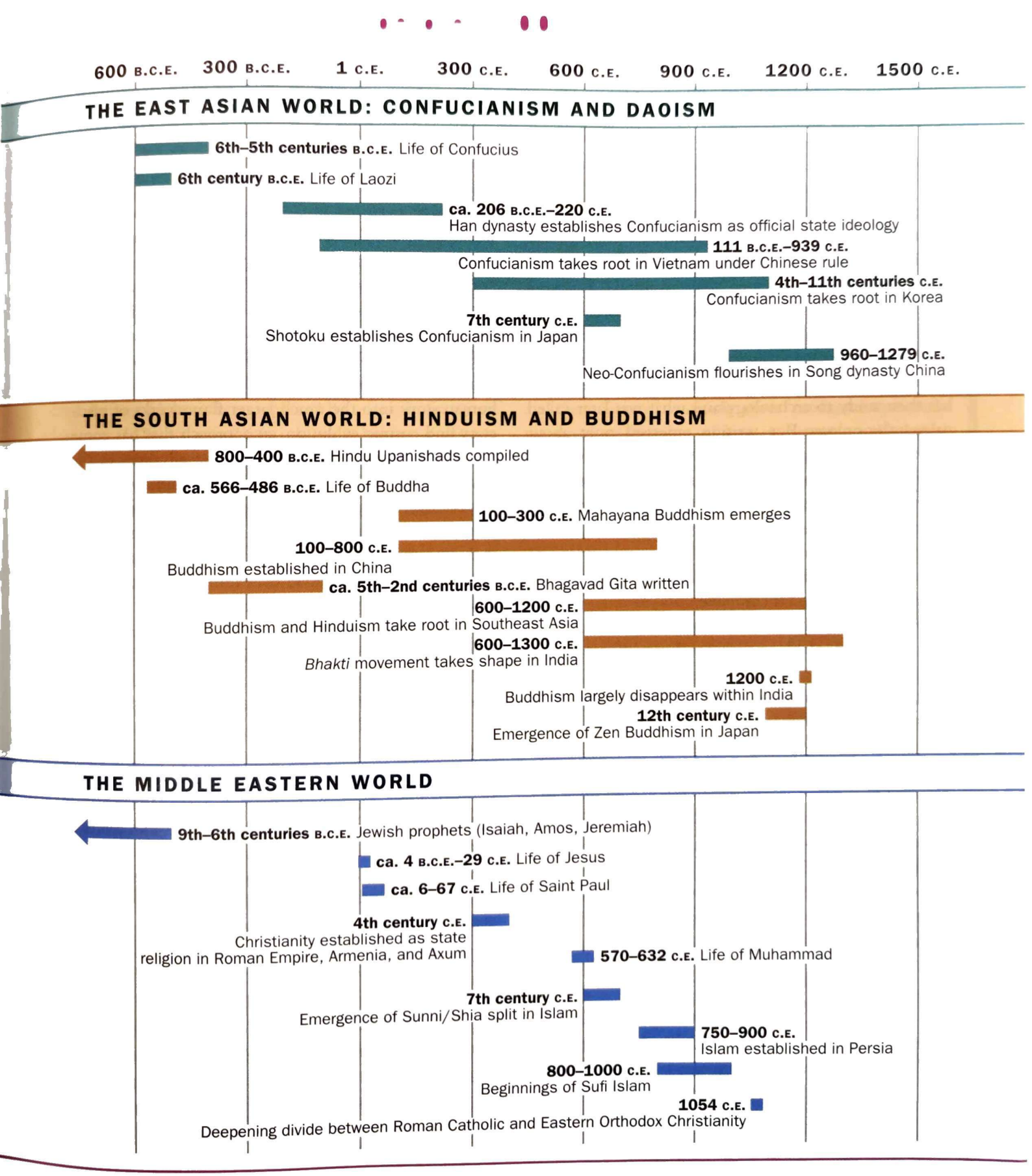
Finding the Main Point: In what ways did the Agricultural Revolution transform human life?

Homo sapiens, human beings essentially similar to ourselves, first emerged around 350,000 to 260,000 years ago, most likely in the highlands of East Africa. Then, somewhere between 100,000 and 60,000 years ago, our species began a remarkable migration out of Africa that, over tens of thousands of years, led to the "peopling" of almost every inhabitable landmass on the planet. While critical to the success of humankind, from the viewpoint of the many species of plants and animals that were affected, it was a process of violent colonization. The last phase of that epic journey came to an end around 1200 C.E., when the first humans occupied what is now New Zealand. By then, every major landmass, except Antarctica, had acquired a human presence.

With the exception of those who settled the islands of Pacific Oceania, all of this grand process had been undertaken by people practicing a gathering and hunting way of life and assisted only by stone tools. Thus human history begins with what scholars call the **Paleolithic era** or the Old Stone Age, which represents over 95 percent of the time that humans have occupied the planet (see Controversies: Debating the Timescales of History, page 12). During these many centuries and millennia, humankind sustained itself by foraging: gathering wild foods, scavenging dead animals, hunting live animals, and fishing.

In their long journeys across the earth, Paleolithic people created a multitude of separate and distinct societies, each with its own history, culture, language, identity, stories, and rituals. Some were small, nomadic, and egalitarian societies, organized as bands of perhaps twenty-five to fifty people in which all relationships were intensely personal and normally understood in terms of kinship. Others lived in permanent settlements with somewhat larger populations that generated clear differences of wealth and status among their people. A few of these gathering and hunting societies practiced slavery or constructed large-scale monuments. Cultural creativity was much in evidence, reflected in numerous technological innovations (bone needles, sickles, baskets, nets, and pottery, for example), in sophisticated oral traditions such as the Dreamtime stories of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, and in remarkable cave paintings and sculptures found in many places around the world.

What followed was the most fundamental transformation in all of human history, the transition to an agricultural economy. Between 10,000 and 2000 B.C.E. (12,000 to 4,000 years ago), this momentous process unfolded separately in fifteen to twenty


600 B.C.E.
300 B.C.E.
1 C.E.
300 C.E.
600 C.E.
900 C.E.
1200 C.E.
1500 C.E.
THE EAST ASIAN WORLD: CONFUCIANISM AND DAOISM
6th–5th centuries B.C.E. Life of Confucius
6th century B.C.E. Life of Laozi
ca. 206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.
Han dynasty establishes Confucianism as official state ideology
111 B.C.E.–939 C.E.
Confucianism takes root in Vietnam under Chinese rule
4th–11th centuries C.E.
Confucianism takes root in Korea
7th century C.E.
Shotoku establishes Confucianism in Japan
960–1279 C.E.
Neo-Confucianism flourishes in Song dynasty China
THE SOUTH ASIAN WORLD: HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM
800–400 B.C.E. Hindu Upanishads compiled
ca. 566–486 B.C.E. Life of Buddha
100–300 C.E. Mahayana Buddhism emerges
100–800 C.E.
Buddhism established in China
ca. 5th–2nd centuries B.C.E. Bhagavad Gita written
600–1200 C.E.
Buddhism and Hinduism take root in Southeast Asia
600–1300 C.E.
Bhakti movement takes shape in India
1200 C.E.
Buddhism largely disappears within India
12th century C.E.
Emergence of Zen Buddhism in Japan
THE MIDDLE EASTERN WORLD
9th–6th centuries B.C.E. Jewish prophets (Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah)
ca. 4 B.C.E.–29 C.E. Life of Jesus
ca. 6–67 C.E. Life of Saint Paul
4th century C.E.
Christianity established as state religion in Roman Empire, Armenia, and Axum
570–632 C.E. Life of Muhammad
7th century C.E.
Emergence of Sunni/Shia split in Islam
750–900 C.E.
Islam established in Persia
800–1000 C.E.
Beginnings of Sufi Islam
1054 C.E.
Deepening divide between Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christianity

CONTROVERSIES Debating the Timescales of History

So when does history begin? And does it matter? If "history" refers to the story of humankind, professional historians until recently were largely in agreement that history began with writing, for as one book published in 1898 put it, "No documents, no history."[2] While humans clearly existed before writing—for hundreds of thousands of years, in fact—historians viewed their pasts as almost completely unrecoverable from the few physical remains that survived. They described these earlier peoples as prehistoric or "before history" and left their study to archeology and what was later called paleoanthropology. But writing emerged only about 5,500 years ago, and even then was limited to a few places. Furthermore, until the last several centuries writing was confined largely to elites, who wrote primarily about "the wars they fought, the literature they wrote, and the gods they worshipped."[3] Thus an understanding of the human journey based only on written records was massively skewed and incomplete.

From the mid-twentieth century onward, increasingly accurate and affordable scientific techniques—including radio-carbon dating, DNA testing, and advances in linguistics and archeology—allowed scholars to date artifacts and the movements of human populations that occurred tens or even hundreds of thousands of years ago. A much clearer understanding of early human history emerged as scholars were able to trace chronologically such crucial developments as the spread of our species across the planet and the dissemination of bronze-working technologies. The world before writing no longer seemed so unrecoverable, and many scholars—historians, archeologists, and others—broadened the definition of "history" to incorporate peoples of the distant past who had left no written record. While large gaps in our knowledge persisted, the new techniques opened up windows into the past that had been mostly shut before.

Even as historians debated the extent to which the "prehistory" of our species should or could be incorporated into historical accounts, a related question emerged about how—or whether—to locate all of human history within some greater context. Over the past several decades, some historians have begun to integrate the human story into the much larger frameworks of planetary and cosmic evolution, an approach that has come to be called "big history." Remarkable advances in the natural sciences—astronomy, geology, and evolutionary biology—suggest that the cosmos as a whole has a history, as do the stars, the solar system, the planets, including the earth, and life itself. They have a history because they have changed over time, for change is the fundamental feature of all historical accounts.

Such understandings have caused some to conclude that human history can be fully understood only if contextualized in the changing patterns of the cosmos. As the historian William McNeill has written, "Human beings, it appears, do indeed belong to the universe and share its unstable, evolving character . . . what happens among human beings and what happens among the stars looks to be part of a grand, evolving story."[4] Supporters of this view assert that big history "offers a powerful way of understanding the place of our own species, *Homo sapiens*, within the universe. By doing so it helps us to understand better what human history is all about."[5]

places spread across Asia, Africa, and the Americas alike. It meant the deliberate cultivation of particular plants as well as the taming and breeding of particular animals. Thus a new way of life gradually supplemented and eventually replaced the earlier practices of gathering and hunting in most parts of the world, so that by the early twenty-first century only minuscule groups of people followed that ancient way of living.

But the transition to agriculture took place over many centuries and millennia, hesitantly and experimentally, and in some places was temporarily reversed. Some gathering and hunting peoples deliberately rejected farming, even if they

But not all historians agree with this perspective. Some critics of "big history" argue that its almost unimaginable timescales, measured in billions or many millions of years, leave too little room for the human story, reducing it to insignificance. The types of problems or questions that have long occupied professional historians, such as the legacies of the Chinese warring states period or the Great Depression of the 1930s, are worthy of little more than a mention in big history timescales. Others complain that the careful reading and analysis of documents have been replaced by scientific forms of inquiry. Is "big history," they ask, really history at all?

Whatever one may think of these debates, big history represents the latest chapter in a remarkable rethinking of when world history begins. At the turn of the twentieth century few historians could conceive of history beginning more than 6,000 years ago, but by the early twenty-first century some began to argue that the human story finds its most appropriate place in a process that began over 13 billion years earlier.

Clearly the timescales of human history matter, because they shape the questions we ask and the techniques of inquiry that we employ. If we seek to understand the ups and downs of civilizations over the past five millennia, written records are essential. Without them, we would know little about the evolution of Buddhism, the rise and fall of empires, the Industrial Revolution, and much more. But if we want to know something of the process by which humans came to occupy almost every environmental niche on the earth, then written records are of little help, because almost all of that process took place long before writing was invented anywhere. So we must rely on DNA analysis, carbon dating, and linguistics.

Finally, when historians turn to the cosmic or "big history" timescale, they are motivated by still other concerns. For David Christian, one of the leading practitioners of "big history," that grand scale of things offers a "creation myth" for our times, a coherent and scientifically informed explanation of the origins and evolution of our universe and the place of humankind within it.[6] For those more philosophically or spiritually inclined, the "big history" outlook raises profound questions about the relationship of human history to the larger narrative of cosmic and planetary evolution. Does the human experiment represent the story of just one more species thrown up by the ceaseless transformations of the web of life on this planet? Or is human consciousness distinctive, representing perhaps the cosmos becoming aware of itself? In these perspectives the human story is solidly anchored within the unfolding of the universe the geological transformations of the planet, and the evolution of life on the earth.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How might your understanding of world history change if you subscribed to the idea that history began with writing, began with the emergence of our species, or began at the start of the universe?
2. In what specific ways have advancements in science affected how historians understand world history?

knew about it from their agricultural neighbors, preferring their freedom of movement over the necessary regimentation of growing crops. But in the long run of our history, agriculture triumphed, profoundly transforming human life all across the planet. Thus that process deserves to be called the **Agricultural Revolution**. It provided the foundation for much that followed: growing populations, settled farming villages, animal-borne diseases, an explosion of technological innovation, cities, states, empires, civilizations, writing, literature, and much more (see Snapshot: Continental Populations in World History, 400 B.C.E.–2017, page 14).

SNAPSHOT Continental Populations in World History, 400 B.C.E.–2017

Human numbers matter! This chart shows population variations among the major continental landmasses and their changes over long periods of time. (Note: Population figures for such early times are merely estimates and are often controversial among scholars. Percentages do not always total 100 percent due to rounding.)

	Eurasia	Africa	North America	Central/ South America	Australia/ Oceania	Total World
Area (in square miles and as percentage of world total)						
	21,049,000 (41%)	11,608,000 (22%)	9,365,000 (18%)	6,880,000 (13%)	2,968,000 (6%)	51,870,000
Population (in millions and as percentage of world total)						
400 B.C.E.	127 (83%)	17 (11%)	1 (0.7%)	7 (5%)	1 (0.7%)	153
10 C.E.	213 (85%)	26 (10%)	2 (0.8%)	10 (4%)	1 (0.4%)	252
200 C.E.	215 (84%)	30 (12%)	2 (0.8%)	9 (4%)	1 (0.4%)	257
600 C.E.	167 (80%)	24 (12%)	2 (1%)	14 (7%)	1 (0.5%)	208
1000 C.E.	195 (77%)	39 (15%)	2 (0.8%)	16 (6%)	1 (0.4%)	253
1500	329 (69%)	113 (24%)	4.5 (0.9%)	53 (11%)	3 (0.6%)	477
1750	646 (83%)	104 (13%)	3 (0.4%)	15 (1.9%)	3 (0.4%)	771
2017	5,246 (69.5%)	1,256 (16.6%)	361 (4.8%)	646 (8.6%)	40 (0.5%)	7,549

Source: Data for the population figures through 1750 are from Paul Adams et al., *Experiencing World History* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 334; data for the 2017 figures are from "World Population by Region," Worldometers, http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/#region. Accessed December 8, 2017.

The resources generated by the Agricultural Revolution opened up vast new possibilities for the construction of human societies, but they led to no single or common outcome. Rather, various distinct kinds of societies emerged as agriculture took hold, all of which have endured into modern times.

In areas where farming was difficult or impossible—arctic tundra, certain grasslands, and deserts—some people came to depend far more extensively on their domesticated animals, such as sheep, goats, cattle, horses, camels, or reindeer. Those animals could turn grass or waste products into meat, fiber, hides, and milk; they were useful for transport and warfare; and they could walk to market. People who depended on such animals—known as herders, nomads, or **pastoral societies**—emerged most

prominently in Central Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, the Sahara, and parts of eastern and southern Africa. What they had in common was mobility, for they moved seasonally as they followed the changing patterns of the vegetation that their animals needed to eat. Except for a few small pockets of the Andes where domesticated llamas and alpacas made pastoral life possible, no such societies emerged in the Americas because most animals able to be domesticated simply did not exist in the Western Hemisphere.

Contemporary Gathering and Hunting Peoples: The San of Southern Africa A very small number of gathering and hunting peoples have maintained their ancient way of life into the twenty-first century. Here two young men from the Jul'hoan !Kung San of southern Africa set a trap for small animals in 2009. (robertharding/Alamy)

The relationship between nomadic herders and their farming neighbors has been one of the enduring themes of Afro-Eurasian history. Frequently, it was a relationship of conflict, as pastoral peoples, unable to produce their own agricultural products, were attracted to the wealth and sophistication of agrarian societies and sought access to their richer grazing lands as well as their food crops and manufactured products. But not all was conflict between pastoral and farming peoples. The more peaceful exchange of technologies, ideas, products, and people between pastoral and agricultural societies also enriched and changed both sides. Much later, in the thirteenth century, this kind of relationship between pastoral and agricultural societies found a dramatic expression in the making of the Mongol Empire, described in Chapter 3.

Another kind of society to emerge from the Agricultural Revolution was that of permanently settled farming villages. Many such societies retained much of the social and gender equality of gathering and hunting communities, as they continued to live without kings, chiefs, bureaucrats, or aristocracies. Such village-based agricultural societies flourished well into the modern era in Eurasia, Africa, and the Americas, usually organizing themselves in terms of kinship groups or lineages, which incorporated large numbers of people well beyond the immediate or extended family. Some were linked into larger regional complexes through ties of culture and commerce. Given the frequent oppressiveness of organized political power in human history, agricultural village societies represent an intriguing alternative to the states, kingdoms, and empires so often highlighted in the historical record. They pioneered the human settlement of vast areas; adapted to a variety of environments; maintained a substantial degree of social and gender equality; created numerous cultural, artistic, and religious traditions; and interacted continuously with their neighbors.

In some places, agricultural village societies created inherited positions of power and privilege that introduced a more distinct element of inequality and political

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How does this image provide evidence for the gender roles that might have existed in Paleolithic societies?

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COMPARISON

What kinds of relationships developed between pastoral and agricultural peoples?

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COMPARISON

How did the various kinds of societies that emerged out of the Agricultural Revolution differ from one another?

authority. Sometimes called chiefs or "big men," these leaders could seldom use force to compel the obedience of their subjects. Instead, they relied on their generosity or gift giving, their ritual status, or their personal charisma to persuade their followers. Such societies emerged in all parts of the world, with the earliest ones appearing in the Tigris-Euphrates river valley (present-day Iraq) sometime after 6000 B.C.E. More recent societies of this kind have been much studied by anthropologists. They flourished everywhere in the Pacific islands, which had been colonized by agricultural Polynesian peoples. There, "chiefs" usually derived from a senior lineage, tracing their descent to the first son of an imagined ancestor. With both religious and secular functions, they led important rituals and ceremonies, organized the community for warfare, directed its economic life, and sought to resolve internal conflicts. They collected tribute from commoners in the form of food, manufactured goods, and raw materials. These items in turn were redistributed to warriors, craftsmen, religious specialists, and other subordinates, while rulers kept enough to maintain their prestigious positions and imposing lifestyle. In North America as well, a remarkable series of partially agricultural societies emerged between 200 B.C.E. and 1200 C.E. in the eastern woodlands, where an extensive array of large earthen mounds testifies to their organizational capacity. Thus these various kinds of agricultural or pastoral societies existed alongside their gathering and hunting neighbors for many thousands of years.

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Civilizations

Finding the Main Point: What is distinctive about civilizations compared to other forms of human society? How did particular civilizations differ from one another?

TEXTUALIZATION
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f civilizations?

Among the most significant outcomes of the Agricultural Revolution was yet another distinctive type of society that we know as civilization. The earliest civilizations emerged in Mesopotamia (what is now Iraq), in Egypt, and along the central coast of Peru between 3500 and 3000 B.C.E. At the time, these First Civilizations were small islands of innovation in a sea of people living in much older ways. But over the next 4,000 years, this way of living spread globally, taking hold all across the planet—in India and China; in Western, Central, and Southeast Asia; in various parts of Europe; in the highlands of Ethiopia, along the East African coast, and in the West African interior; in Mesoamerica; and in the Andes Mountains. Over many centuries, particular civilizations rose, expanded, changed, and sometimes collapsed and disappeared. But as a style of human life, civilization persisted and became a global phenomenon. By 1200, a considerable majority of humankind lived in one or another of these civilizations (see Map 1.1).

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What these civilizations shared was the size and concentration of their populations. Their largest settlements, which we know as cities, numbered initially in the tens of thousands of people and later the hundreds of thousands. As historians normally use the term, "civilization" refers to societies based in cities, even though

most people in those civilizations remained in the rural areas. Such cities served as political and administrative capitals; they functioned as cultural hubs, generating works of art, architecture, literature, ritual, and ceremony; they acted as marketplaces for both local and long-distance trade; and they housed major manufacturing enterprises. In the ancient Mesopotamian poem called the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, dating to about 2000 B.C.E., cities were places where the hustle and bustle of urban life meant that "even the great gods are kept from sleeping at night."[7]

Civilizations were the outcome of a highly productive agricultural economy, which could support substantial numbers of people who did not produce their own food. Thus an altogether new degree of occupational specialization emerged as scholars, merchants, priests, officials, scribes, soldiers, servants, entertainers, and artisans of all kinds appeared. All of these people were supported by the work of peasant farmers and herders, who represented the overwhelming majority of the population in all civilizations. Civilizations also generated impressive artistic, scientific, and technological innovations. Chinese civilization, for example, virtually invented bureaucracy and pioneered silk production, papermaking, printing, and gunpowder. Islamic civilization generated major advances in mathematics, medicine, astronomy, metallurgy, water management, and more. Later European movements, particularly the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions (1600–1900 C.E.), likewise reflected this innovative capacity of civilizations. And civilizations everywhere generated remarkable works of art and architecture that continue to awe and inspire us to this day. In addition, the written literatures of civilizations—poetry, stories, history, philosophy, sacred texts—have expressed distinctive outlooks on the world.

A Mesopotamian Ziggurat Among the features of civilizations were monumental architectural structures. This massive ziggurat or temple to the Mesopotamian moon god Nanna was built around 2100 B.C.E. in the city of Ur. The solitary figure standing atop the staircase illustrates the size of this huge building. (© Richard Ashworth/Robert Harding)

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CONTEXTUALIZATION
How could monumental architecture reinforce a government's legitimacy?

AP® **EXAM TIP**
Societies' expectations for gender roles are an important theme throughout the course.

Civilizations and the Environment

Like all human communities, civilizations have been shaped by the environments in which they developed. It is no accident that many of the early civilizations, such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, Peru, India, and China, grew up in river valleys that offered rich possibilities for productive agriculture. The mountainous terrain of Greece favored the development of rival city-states rather than a single unified empire. The narrow bottleneck of Panama, largely covered by dense rain forests, inhibited contact between the civilizations of Mesoamerica and those of the Andes. And oceans long separated the Afro-Eurasian world from that of the Western Hemisphere.

AP® **EXAM TIP**
The relationship between humans and the environment is a key theme throughout the course.

Civilizations also left an imprint on their environment. The larger populations and intensive agriculture of civilizations had a far more substantial impact on the landscape than Paleolithic, pastoral, or agricultural village societies. By 2000 B.C.E. the rigorous irrigation that supported farming in southern Mesopotamia generated soils that turned white as salt accumulated. As a result, wheat was largely replaced by barley, which is far more tolerant of salty conditions. In many places the growth of civilizations was accompanied by extensive deforestation and soil erosion. Plato declared that the area around Athens had become "a mere relic of the original country. . . . All the rich soil has melted away, leaving a country of skin and bone."[8] As Chinese civilization expanded southward toward the Yangzi River valley after 200 C.E., that movement of people, accompanied by their intensive agriculture, set in motion a vast environmental transformation marked by the destruction of the old-growth forests that once covered much of the country and the retreat of the elephants that had inhabited those lands. Around 800 C.E., the Chinese official and writer Liu Zongyuan lamented the devastation that followed:

> A tumbled confusion of lumber as flames on the hillside crackle
> Not even the last remaining shrubs are safeguarded from destruction
> Where once mountain torrents leapt—nothing but rutted gullies.[9]

Something similar was happening in Europe as its civilization was expanding in the several centuries after 1000. Everywhere trees were felled at tremendous rates to clear agricultural land and to use as fuel or building material. By 1300, the forest cover of Europe had been reduced to about 20 percent of the land area. Far from lamenting this situation, one German abbot declared: "I believe that the forest . . . covers the land to no purpose and hold this to be an unbearable harm."[10]

As agricultural civilizations spread, farmers everywhere stamped the landscape with a human imprint as they drained swamps, leveled forests, terraced hillsides, and constructed cities, roads, irrigation ditches, and canals. Maya civilization in southern Mexico, for example, has been described as an "almost totally engineered landscape" that supported a flourishing agriculture and a very rapidly increasing and dense population by 750 C.E.[11] But that very success also undermined Maya civilization and contributed to its collapse by 900 C.E. Rapid population growth pushed total Maya numbers to perhaps 5 million or more and soon outstripped available resources, resulting in deforestation and the erosion of hillsides. Under such conditions, climate change in the form of prolonged droughts in the 800s may well have placed an unbearable strain on Maya society. It was not the first case, and would not be the last, in which the demographic and economic pressures from civilizations undermined the ecological foundation on which those civilizations rested.

Comparing Civilizations

While civilizations shared a number of common features, they were hardly carbon copies of one another. Some civilizations—Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Chinese, and Maya, for example — developed written languages and used them to record substantial bodies of literature; others, such as West African and the Andean civilizations in the Americas, did not. Furthermore, a number of early civilizations—in the Indus River valley in what is now Pakistan, along the Niger River in West Africa, and along the coast of Peru—show little sign of sharp class divisions, oppressive patriarchy, frequent warfare, or authoritarian state structures. Eventually, however, almost all civilizations came to embody these features. The ancient Hebrew prophet Samuel forewarned his people about what was coming if they chose the "way of the king":

> He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses. . . . He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves. . . . Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves.[12]

But even among those civilizations that followed the "way of the king," they differed sharply in how their societies were structured and stratified. Consider the difference between China and India. China gave the highest ranking to an elite bureaucracy of government officials, drawn largely from the landlord class and selected by their performance on a set of examinations. They were supported by a vast mass of peasant farmers who were required to pay taxes to the government and rent to their landlords. Although honored as the hardworking and productive backbone of the country by their social superiors, Chinese peasants were oppressed and exploited and periodically erupted in large-scale rebellions.

India's social organization shared certain broad features with that of China. In both civilizations, birth determined social status for most people; little social mobility was available for the vast majority; sharp distinctions and great inequalities characterized social life; and religious or cultural traditions defined these inequalities as natural, eternal, and ordained by the gods. But India's social system was distinctive. It gave priority to religious status and ritual purity, for the priestly caste known as Brahmins held the highest rank, whereas China elevated political officials to the most prominent of elite positions. The caste system divided Indian society into vast numbers of distinct social groups based on occupation and perceived ritual purity; China had fewer, but broader, categories of society—scholar-gentry, landlords, peasants, and merchants. Finally, India's caste society defined social groups far more rigidly than in China, forbidding members of different castes to marry or eat together. This meant even less opportunity for social mobility than in China, where

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Caste in India This 1947 photograph from *Life* magazine illustrates the "purity and pollution" thinking that has long been central to the ideology of caste. It shows a high-caste landowner carefully dropping wages wrapped in a leaf into the outstretched hands of his low-caste workers. By avoiding direct physical contact with them, he escapes ritual pollution. (Margaret Bourke-White/Getty Images)

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CLAIMS AND EVIDENCE IN SOURCES

How does this image show the distinctions created between castes?

the examination system offered a route to social promotion to a few among the common people.

At the bottom of the social hierarchy in all civilizations were enslaved or owned people, often debtors or prisoners of war, with few if any rights in the larger society. But the extent of slavery varied considerably. Persian, Chinese, Indian, and West African civilizations certainly practiced slavery, but it was not central to their societies. In Greek and Roman civilizations, however, it was. The Athens of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle was home to some 60,000 enslaved persons, about one-third of the total population. On an even larger scale, slavery was a defining element of Roman society. The Italian heartland of the Roman Empire contained some 2 to 3 million enslaved people, representing 33 to 40 percent of the population.

Patriarchy, or male dominance, was common to the social life of all civilizations, but it too varied from place to place and changed over time. (See Then and Now: Patriarchy, page 24.) Generally, patriarchies were less restrictive for women in the early years of a civilization's development and during times of upheaval, when established patterns of life were disrupted. Chinese patriarchy, for example, loosened somewhat, especially for elite women, when northern China was disrupted by the incursion of pastoral and nomadic peoples, whose women were far less restricted than those of China itself. Even within the small world of ancient Greek city-states, the patriarchy of a semidemocratic Athens was far more confining for women than in a highly militaristic Sparta, where women competed in sports with men, could divorce with ease, and owned substantial landed estates. However, elite women everywhere both enjoyed privileges and suffered the restrictions of seclusion in the home to a much greater extent than their lower-class counterparts, whose economic circumstances required them to operate in the larger social arena.

Finally, civilizations differed in the range and extent of their influence. Roman civilization dominated the Mediterranean basin for much of the millennium between 500 B.C.E. and 500 C.E. (see Map 1.2), while Chinese civilization has directly shaped the cultural history of much of eastern Asia and indirectly influenced economic life all across Eurasia for much longer. Between roughly 650 and 1450, Islamic civilization represented the most expansive, influential, and pervasive presence throughout the entire Afro-Eurasian world (see Map 2.3 in Chapter 2).

Map 1.2 The Roman Empire

At its height in the second century C.E., the Roman Empire incorporated the entire region surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, including the less developed region of Western Europe, the heartland of Greek civilization, and the ancient civilization of Egypt.

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CAUSATION

Based on Map 1.2, what geographic realities might have challenged the political unity of the Roman Empire?

Large-scale empires in West Africa, such as Mali and Songhay, as well as the huge Inca Empire in South America, also encompassed vast territories.

Other civilizations had a much more limited range in the world before 1450. The civilization of Axum (100–700 C.E.) was largely limited to what is now Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Swahili civilization (800–1500 C.E.), embodied in a set of competing city states, was restricted to the coastal region of eastern Africa. Maya civilization, flourishing between 250 and 900, was a phenomenon of southern Mexico and Central America. As Western European civilization crystallized after 1000 C.E., it too was a regional civilization with nothing like the reach of Chinese or Islamic civilizations. In the five centuries after 1450, however, Western Europe

AP EXAM TIP

Knowledge of maps throughout world history is critical. Be sure you know how to read maps and understand what they convey.

followed in the tradition of these more expansive civilizations, as it achieved genuinely global power and approached world domination by 1900.

Civilizations and Cultural Traditions

Finding the Main Point: What similarities and differences can you identify among the major religious traditions that emerged in the Afro-Eurasian world before 1200 C.E.?

Civilizations also differed in their cultural or religious traditions. These traditions provided a common identity for millions of individuals and for entire civilizations, even as divisions within them generated great social conflicts. Cultural traditions also made the inequalities of civilizations legitimate, providing moral justification for established elites and oppressive states. But religion was a doubled-edged sword, for it sometimes stimulated movements that challenged those in power. It also enabled millions of ordinary people to endure their sufferings, shaping the meanings that they attached to the world they inhabited and providing moral guidance for living a good life or making a good society. (See Working with Evidence: The "Good Life" in Asian Cultural Traditions, page 53.)

By 1200, the major cultural traditions of the Afro-Eurasian world had been long established. Hinduism and Buddhism; Confucianism and Daoism; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—all of them had taken shape in the centuries between 600 B.C.E. and 700 C.E. Since they will recur often in the chapters that follow, some attention to their origins and development is appropriate.

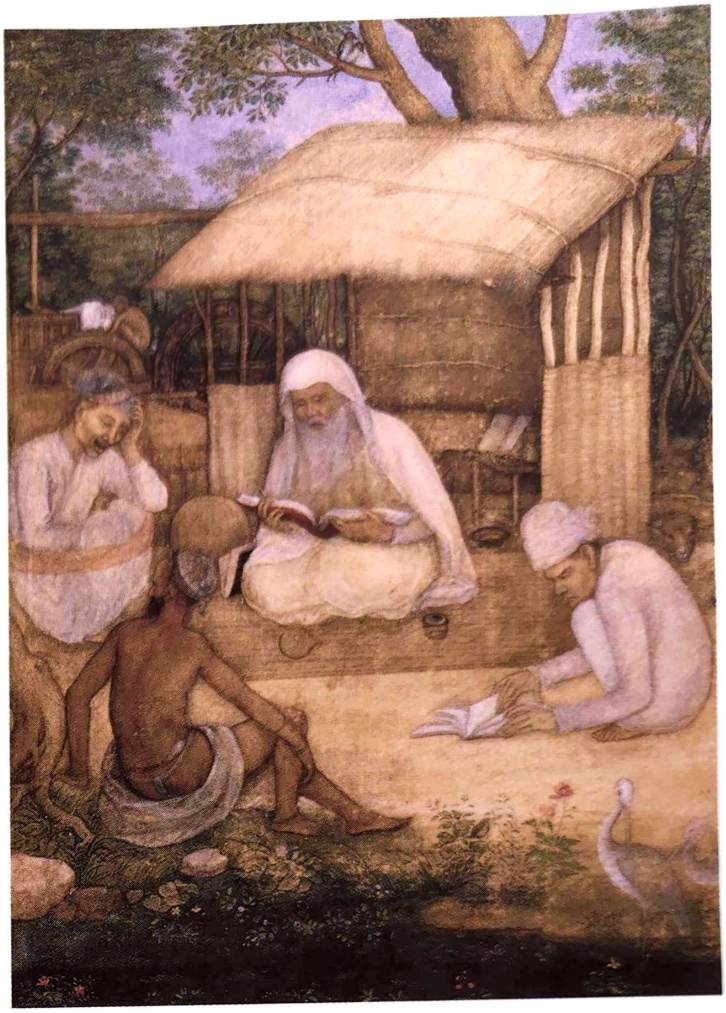
South Asian Cultural Traditions: Hinduism

Few cultures were as fundamentally religious as that of India, where sages and philosophers embraced the Divine and all things spiritual with enthusiasm and generated elaborate philosophical visions about the nature of ultimate reality. **Hinduism**, the oldest, largest, and most prominent religious tradition in India, had no historical founder, unlike Islam, Christianity, and another later Indian tradition, Buddhism. Instead it grew up over many centuries as an integral part of Indian civilization. Although it later spread into Southeast Asia, Hinduism was not a missionary religion seeking converts, but was, like Judaism, associated with a particular people and territory.

In fact, "Hinduism" was never a single tradition at all, and the term itself derived from outsiders—Greeks, Muslims, and later the British—who sought to reduce the infinite variety of Indian cultural patterns into a recognizable system. From the inside, however, Hinduism contained a vast diversity of gods, spirits, beliefs, practices, rituals, and philosophies. This endlessly variegated Hinduism served to incorporate into Indian civilization the many diverse peoples who migrated into or invaded the South Asian peninsula over many centuries.

At one level, this emerging Hindu religious tradition was emphatically polytheistic, embracing a vast diversity of gods and goddesses, each of whom had various consorts and appeared in a variety of forms. A priestly caste known as Brahmins presided over the sacrifices, offerings, and rituals that these deities required. But at another more philosophical level, Indian thinkers argued for a more unified understanding of reality. This point of view found expression in the **Upanishads** (oo-PAHN-ee-shahds), a collection of sacred texts composed by largely anonymous thinkers between 800 and 400 B.C.E. These texts elaborated the idea of Brahman, the World Soul, the final and ultimate reality. Beyond the multiplicity of material objects and individual persons, and beyond even the various gods themselves, lay this primal unitary energy or divine reality infusing all things. This alone was real; the immense diversity of existence that human beings perceived with their senses was but an illusion. One contemporary Hindu monk summarized the essence of the Hindu outlook by saying, "there is no multiplicity."

The fundamental assertion of this philosophical Hinduism was that the individual human soul, or *atman*, was in fact a part of Brahman. The chief goal of humankind then lay in the effort to achieve union with Brahman, putting an end to our illusory perception of a separate existence. This was *moksha* (MOHK-shuh), or liberation, compared sometimes to a bubble in a glass of water breaking through the surface and becoming one with the surrounding atmosphere.



Hindu Ascetics In the final stage of life, Hinduism called for devotees, mostly but not always men, to leave ordinary ways of living and withdraw into the forests to seek spiritual liberation, or moksha. Here, in an illustration from an early-thirteenth-century Indian manuscript, a holy man explores a text with three male disciples in a secluded rural setting. (Musée des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet, Paris, France/© RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY)

Achieving this exalted state was held to involve many lifetimes, and the notion of *samsara*, or rebirth or reincarnation, became a central feature of Hindu thinking. Human souls migrated from body to body over many lifetimes, depending on the actions of individuals. This was the law of *karma*. Pure actions, appropriate to one's station in life, resulted in rebirth in a higher social position or caste. Thus the caste system of distinct and ranked groups, each with its own duties, became a measure of spiritual progress.

Various paths to this final release, appropriate for people of different temperaments, were spelled out in Hindu teachings. Some might achieve moksha through knowledge or study; others by doing their ordinary work without regard to consequences; still others through passionate devotion to some deity or through extended meditation practice. Such ideas became widely known throughout India—carried

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CLAIMS AND EVIDENCE IN SOURCES

What evidence can you find in this image to support the importance of asceticism in Hindu religious practices?

by Brahmin priests and wandering ascetics or holy men, who had withdrawn from ordinary life to pursue their spiritual development.

South Asian Cultural Traditions: Buddhism

About the same time as philosophical Hinduism was emerging, another movement took shape in South Asia that soon became a distinct and separate religious tradition—Buddhism. Unlike Hinduism, this new faith had a historical founder, **Siddhartha Gautama** (ca. 566–ca. 486 B.C.E.), a prince from a small kingdom in north India or southern Nepal. According to Buddhist tradition, the prince had enjoyed a sheltered and delightful youth until he encountered human suffering in the form of an old man, a sick person, and a corpse. Shattered by these revelations of aging, illness, and death, Siddhartha determined to find the cause of such sufferings and a remedy for them. And so, at the age of twenty-nine, the young prince left his luxurious life as well as his wife and child, shed his royal jewels, cut off his hair, and set off on a quest for enlightenment that ended with an indescribable experience of spiritual realization. Now he was the **Buddha**, the man who had awakened. For the next forty years, he taught what he had learned, setting in motion the cultural tradition of Buddhism.

To the Buddha, suffering or sorrow—experiencing life as imperfect, impermanent, and unsatisfactory—was the central and universal feature of human life. This kind of suffering derived from desire or craving for individual fulfillment, from attachment to that which inevitably changes, particularly to the notion of a core self or ego that is uniquely and solidly "me." He spelled out a cure for this "dis-ease" in his famous "eightfold path," which emphasized a modest and moral lifestyle, mental concentration practices, including meditation, and wisdom or understanding of reality as it is. Those who followed the Buddhist path most fully could expect to achieve enlightenment, or *nirvana*, an almost indescribable state in which individual identity would be "extinguished" along with all greed, hatred, and delusion. With the pain of unnecessary suffering finally ended, the enlightened person would experience an overwhelming serenity, even in the midst of difficulty, as well as an immense loving-kindness, or compassion, for all beings. It was a simple message, elaborated endlessly and in various forms by those who followed the Buddha.

Much of the Buddha's teaching reflected the Hindu traditions from which it sprang. The idea that ordinary life is an illusion, the concepts of karma and rebirth, the goal of overcoming the incessant demands of the ego, the practice of meditation, the hope for final release from the cycle of rebirth—all of these Hindu elements found their way into Buddhist teaching. In this respect, Buddhism was a simplified and more accessible version of Hinduism.

Other elements of Buddhist teaching, however, sharply challenged prevailing Hindu thinking. Rejecting the religious authority of the Brahmins, the Buddha ridiculed their rituals and sacrifices as irrelevant to the hard work of dealing with one's suffering. Nor was he much interested in abstract speculation about the creation of

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the world or the existence of God, for such questions, he declared, "are not useful in the quest for holiness; they do not lead to peace and to the direct knowledge of *nirvana*." Individuals had to take responsibility for their own spiritual development with no help from human authorities or supernatural beings. It was a path of intense self-effort, based on personal experience. The Buddha also challenged the inequalities of a Hindu-based caste system, arguing that neither caste position nor gender was a barrier to enlightenment. At least in principle, the possibility of "awakening" was available to all.

As Buddhism spread across the trade routes of Central Asia to China, Japan, and Southeast Asia, differences in understanding soon emerged. An early version of the new religion, known as **Theravada Buddhism** (Teaching of the Elders), portrayed the Buddha as an immensely wise teacher and model, but certainly not divine. The gods, though never completely denied, played little role in assisting believers in achieving enlightenment. But as the message of the Buddha gained a mass following and spread across much of Asia, some of its early features—rigorous and time-consuming meditation practice, a focus on monks and nuns withdrawn from ordinary life, the absence of accessible supernatural figures able to provide help and comfort—proved difficult for many converts. And so the religion adapted. A new form of the faith, **Mahayana Buddhism**, developed in the early centuries of the Common Era and offered greater accessibility, a spiritual path available to a much wider range of people beyond monks and ascetics, who were the core group in early Buddhism.

In most expressions of Mahayana Buddhism, enlightenment (or becoming a Buddha) was available to everyone; it was possible within the context of ordinary life, rather than a monastery; and it might occur within a single lifetime rather than over the course of many lives. While Buddhism had originally put a premium on spiritual wisdom or insight, Mahayana expressions of the faith emphasized compassion—the ability to feel the sorrows of other people as if they were one's own. This compassionate religious ideal found expression in the notion of bodhisattvas, fully enlightened beings who postponed their own final liberation in order to assist a suffering humanity. They were spiritual beings on their way to "Buddhahood." Furthermore, the historical Buddha himself became something of a god, and both earlier and future Buddhas were available to offer help. Elaborate descriptions and artistic representations of these

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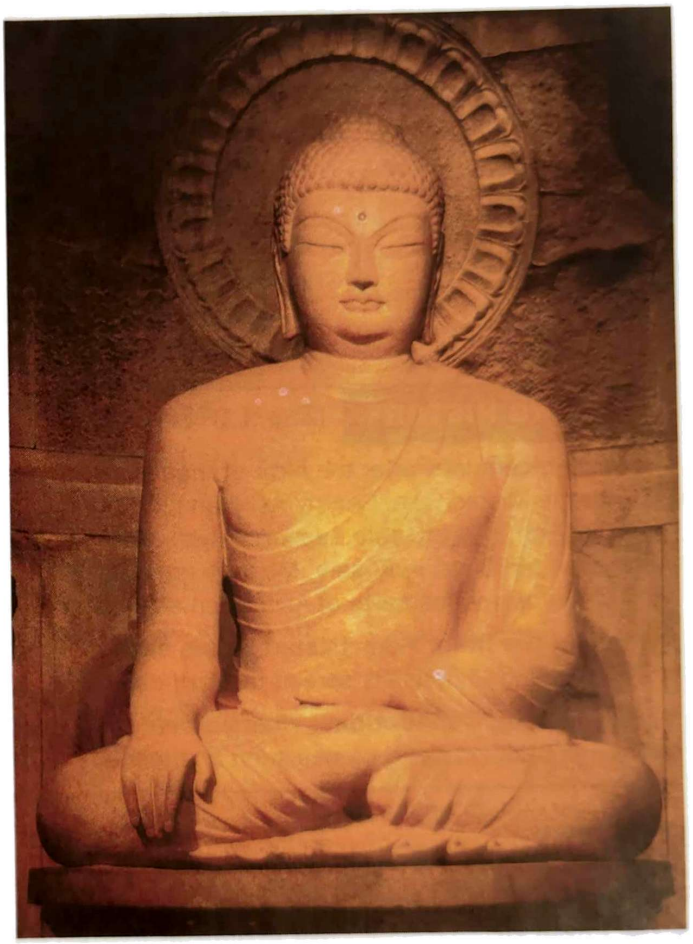
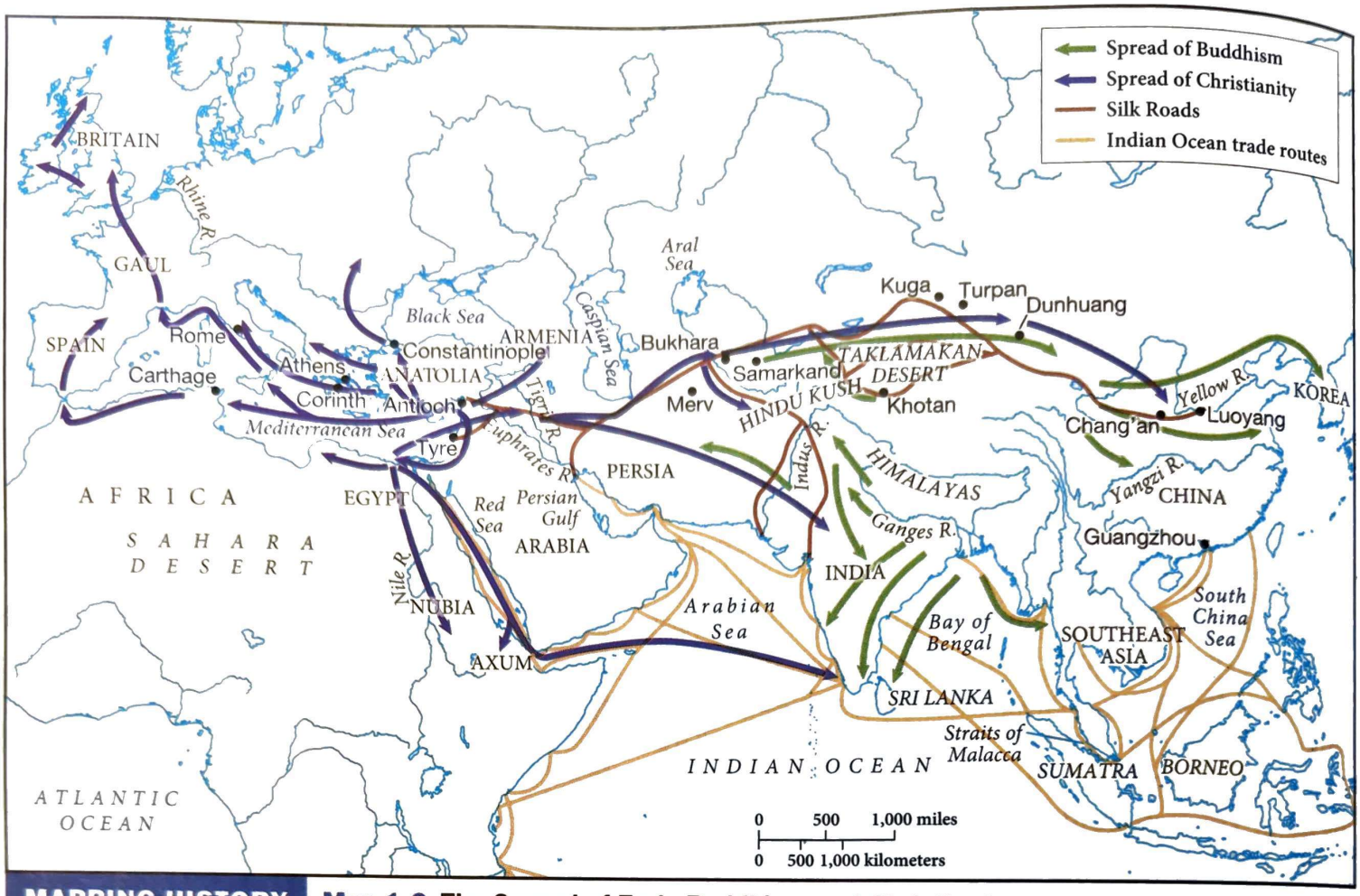
ARGUMENTATION

How does this visual representation of the Buddha differ from the description of the prince in the beginning of this section? What could account for this difference?



The Buddha's Enlightenment Dating from the late eighth century in Korea, this monumental and beautifully proportioned sculpture portrays the Buddha at the moment of his enlightenment, symbolized by his right hand touching the earth. Seated on a lotus pedestal, this image of the Buddha also shows the *ushnisha*, the raised area at the top of his head, which represents his spiritual attainment, and the dot in the center of his forehead indicating wisdom.



MAPPING HISTORY **Map 1.3 The Spread of Early Buddhism and Christianity**

In the five centuries after the birth of Jesus, Christianity found converts from Spain to Northeast Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and India. In the Roman Empire, Axum, and Armenia, the new religion enjoyed state support as well. Subsequently, Christianity took root solidly in Europe and after 1000 C.E. in Russia. Meanwhile, Buddhism was spreading from its South Asian homeland to various parts of Asia, even as it was weakening in India itself.

Reading the Map: From its start on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, in which directions did Christianity spread the farthest?

AP Making Connections: What political or economic factors could facilitate the spread of a religious tradition like the ones seen on the map?

AP EXAM TIP

Be able to give examples of factors that attract people to particular belief systems or religious traditions.

supernatural beings, together with various levels of Heavens and Hells, transformed Buddhism into a popular religion of salvation. Furthermore, religious merit, leading to salvation, might now be earned by acts of piety and devotion, such as contributing to the support of a monastery, and that merit might be transferred to others. In many forms and variations, Mahayana Buddhism took root in Central Asia, China, Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere. Buddhism thus became the first major tradition to spread widely outside its homeland (see Map 1.3).

In Tibet, a distinctive form of Buddhism began to take shape during the seventh century C.E. This Tibetan Buddhism gave special authority to learned teachers,

known as Lamas, and emphasized an awareness of and preparation for death. Its many spiritual practices included multiple prostrations (repeatedly lying stretched out on the ground), visualizing or imagining various bodhisattvas or deities, complex meditations, ceremonies associated with numerous heavenly beings both peaceful and violent, and the frequent use of art and music. Incorporating various elements from native Tibetan traditions and from Hinduism, Tibetan Buddhism was expressed in a set of distinctive texts compiled during the fourteenth century. A section of these texts became famous in the West as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which vividly describes the various stages of transition from life to death to rebirth.

But by 1200 Buddhism had largely disappeared in India, the land of its birth, even as it was expanding in other parts of Asia. Its decline in India owed something to the mounting wealth of monasteries as the economic interests of leading Buddhist figures separated them from ordinary people. Hostility of the Brahmin priests and competition from Islam after 1000 C.E. also played a role. But the most important reason for the waning of Buddhism in India was the growth during the first millennium C.E. of a new kind of popular Hinduism.

That path took shape in what is known as the ***bhakti* movement**, which involved devotion to one or another of India's many gods and goddesses. Beginning in south India and moving northward between 600 and 1300 C.E., it featured the intense adoration of and identification with a particular deity through songs, prayers, and rituals. By far the most popular deities were Vishnu, the protector and preserver of creation who was associated with mercy and goodness, and Shiva, a god representing the Divine in its destructive aspect, but many others also had their followers. This form of Hindu expression sometimes pushed against the rigid caste and gender hierarchies of Indian society by inviting all to an adoration of the Divine. In a famous section of the long Indian epic *Mahabharata*, the Hindu deity Krishna declares that "those who take shelter in Me, though they be of lower birth—women, vaishyas [merchants] and shudras [workers]—can attain the supreme destination."

Bhakti practice was more accessible to ordinary people than the elaborate sacrifices of the Brahmins or the philosophical speculations of intellectuals. Through good deeds, simple living, and emotionally fulfilling rituals of devotion, individuals could find salvation without a complex institutional structure, orthodox doctrine, or prescribed meditation practices. Bhakti spirituality also had a rich poetic tradition that flourished especially in the centuries after 1200. One ninth-century poet illustrated the intense emotional impact of bhakti devotion:

> He [God] grabbed me lest I go astray/Wax before an unspent fire, mind melted, body trembled./I bowed, I wept, danced, and cried aloud/I sang, and I praised him. . . ./I left shame behind, took as an ornament the mockery of local folk.[18]

The proliferation of gods and goddesses, and of their bhakti followers, occasioned very little friction or serious religious conflict. "Hinduism," writes a leading

scholar, "is essentially tolerant, and would rather assimilate than rigidly exclude."[19] This capacity for assimilation extended to an already declining Buddhism, which for many people had become yet another religious tradition worshipping yet another god. The Buddha in fact was incorporated into the Hindu pantheon as the ninth incarnation of Vishnu.

Chinese Cultural Traditions: Confucianism

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At the far eastern end of the Eurasian continent, Chinese civilization gave birth to two major cultural traditions that have persisted into the modern era, Confucianism and Daoism. Compared to Hindu, Christian, and Islamic traditions, these Chinese outlooks were less overtly religious; were expressed in more philosophical, humanistic, or rational terms; and were oriented toward life in this world. They emerged in what the Chinese remember sadly as "the age of warring states" (ca. 500–221 B.C.E.), dreadful centuries of disorder and turmoil. At that time some Chinese thinkers began to consider how order might be restored, how the imagined tranquility of an earlier time could be realized again. From their reflections emerged the classical cultural traditions of Chinese civilization.

One of these traditions was derived from the thinking of Confucius (551–479 B.C.E.), a learned and ambitious aristocrat who believed that he had uncovered a path back to social and political harmony. He attracted a group of followers, who compiled his writings into a short book called *The Analects*, and later scholars elaborated and commented endlessly on his ideas, creating a body of thought known as **Confucianism**. By the time of the **Han dynasty**, around 200 B.C.E., those ideas became the official ideology of the Chinese state and remained so into the early twentieth century.

The Confucian answer to the problem of China's disorder was rooted not in force, law, and punishment, but in the power of moral behavior. For Confucius, human society consisted primarily of unequal relationships: the father and son; husband and wife; the older brother and younger brother; ruler and subject. If the superior party in each of these relationships behaved with sincerity, benevolence, and genuine concern for the other, then the inferior party would be motivated to respond with deference and obedience. Harmony would then prevail. In Confucian thinking, the family became a model for political life, a kind of miniature state. Filial piety, the honoring of one's ancestors and parents, was both valuable in itself and a training ground for the reverence due to the emperor and state officials.

For Confucius, the key to nurturing these moral qualities was education, particularly an immersion in language, literature, history, philosophy, and ethics, all applied to the practical problems of government. Ritual and ceremonies were also important, for they conveyed the rules of appropriate behavior in the many and varying circumstances of life. For the "superior person," or "gentleman" in Confucian terms, serious personal reflection and a willingness to strive continuously to perfect his moral character were essential.

Such ideas had a pervasive influence in Chinese life, as Confucianism became almost synonymous with Chinese elite culture. As China's bureaucracy took shape during and after the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.), Confucianism became the central element of the educational system, which prepared students for the examinations required to gain official positions. Thus generation after generation of China's male elite was steeped in the ideas and values of Confucianism.

Confucianism also placed great importance on history, for the ideal good society lay in the past. Those ideas also injected a certain meritocratic element into Chinese elite culture, for the great sage had emphasized that "superior men" and potential government officials were those of outstanding moral character and intellectual achievement, not simply those of aristocratic background. Usually only young men from wealthy families could afford the education necessary for passing examinations, but on occasion villagers could find the resources to sponsor one of their bright sons, potentially propelling him into the stratosphere of the Chinese elite while bringing honor and benefit to the village itself.

The Chinese Examination System The Chinese imperial government selected officials through an elaborate system of civil service exams. This Song dynasty painting shows candidates taking the highest level of these tests, known as the palace exams, at the imperial capital Kaifeng. Success opened the way to prestigious appointments at the top levels of the Chinese government. (Pictures from History/Bridgeman Images)

▲ AP®

CLAIMS AND EVIDENCE IN SOURCES

How could this image be used to support an argument that the Chinese examination system led to a more fluid social structure?

Confucian ideas were clearly used to legitimate the many inequalities of Chinese society, but they also established certain expectations for the superior parties in China's social hierarchy. Thus emperors should keep taxes low, administer justice, and provide for the material needs of the people. Those who failed to govern by these moral norms forfeited what the Chinese called the Mandate of Heaven, which granted legitimacy to the ruler. Under such conditions, natural disaster, famine, or rebellion followed, leading to political upheaval and a new dynasty. Likewise, at the level of the family, husbands should deal kindly with their wives and children, lest they provoke conflict and disharmony.

Finally, Confucianism marked Chinese elite culture by its secular, or nonreligious, character. Confucius did not deny the reality of gods and spirits. In fact, he advised people to participate in family and state rituals "as if the spirits were present," and he believed that the universe had a moral character with which human beings should align themselves. But the thrust of Confucian teaching was distinctly this-worldly and practical, concerned with human relationships, effective government, and social harmony. Members of the Chinese elite generally acknowledged that magic, the gods, and spirits were perhaps necessary for the lower orders of

society, but educated people, they argued, would find them of little help in striving for moral improvement and in establishing a harmonious society.

In various forms Chinese Confucianism proved attractive to elites elsewhere in East Asia, such as Korea, Vietnam, and Japan. Those distinct civilizations drew heavily on the culture of their giant and highly prestigious neighbor. When an early Japanese state emerged in the seventh century C.E., its founder, Shotoku, issued the Seventeen Article Constitution, proclaiming the Japanese ruler a Chinese-style emperor and encouraging both Buddhism and Confucianism. In good Confucian fashion, that document emphasized the moral quality of rulers as a foundation for social harmony.

Chinese Cultural Traditions: Daoism

As Confucian thinking became generally known in China, a quite different school of thought also took shape. Known as **Daoism**, it was associated with the legendary figure Laozi, who, according to tradition, was a sixth-century-B.C.E. archivist. He is said to have penned a short poetic volume, the *Daodejing* (dau-duh-jing) (*The Way and Its Power*), before vanishing in the wilderness to the west of China on his water buffalo.

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In many ways, Daoist thinking ran counter to that of Confucius, who had emphasized the importance of education and earnest striving for moral improvement and good government. The Daoists ridiculed such efforts as artificial and useless, claiming that they generally made things worse. In the face of China's disorder and chaos, Daoists urged withdrawal into the world of nature and encouraged behavior that was spontaneous, individualistic, and natural. The central concept of Daoist thinking is *dao*, an elusive notion that refers to the way of nature, the underlying and unchanging principle that governs the endless transformation of all things. Whereas Confucius focused on the world of human relationships, the Daoists turned the spotlight on the immense realm of nature and its mysterious unfolding patterns in which the "ten thousand things" appeared, changed, and vanished. "Confucius roams within society," the Chinese have often said. "Laozi wanders beyond."

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Applied to human life, Daoism invited people to withdraw from the world of political and social activism, to disengage from the public life so important to Confucius, and to align themselves with the way of nature. It meant simplicity in living, small self-sufficient communities, limited government, and the abandonment of education and active efforts at self-improvement. "Give up learning," declares the *Daodejing*, "and put an end to your troubles."

e Yin Yang Symbol

Despite its various differences with the ideas of Confucianism, the Daoist perspective was widely regarded by elite Chinese as complementing rather than contradicting Confucian values. Such an outlook was facilitated by the ancient Chinese concept of *yin* (female) and *yang* (male), which expressed a belief in the unity or

complementarity of opposites. Thus a scholar-official might pursue the Confucian project of "government by goodness" during the day, but upon returning home in the evening or following his retirement, he might well behave in a more Daoist fashion—pursuing the simple life, reading Daoist philosophy, practicing meditation or breathing exercises, retreating to mountain settings, or enjoying painting, poetry, or calligraphy.

Daoism also shaped the culture of ordinary people as it became a part of Chinese popular religion. This kind of Daoism sought to tap the power of the dao for practical uses and came to include magic, fortune-telling, and the search for immortality. Sometimes it also provided an ideology for peasant uprisings, such as the Yellow Turban Rebellion (184–204 C.E.), which imagined a utopian society without the oppression of governments and landlords. In its many and varied forms, Daoism, like Confucianism, became an enduring element of the Chinese cultural tradition.

Chinese Landscape Painting Focused largely on mountains and water, Chinese landscape paintings were much influenced by the Daoist search for harmony with nature. Thus human figures and buildings were usually eclipsed by towering peaks, waterfalls, clouds, mists, and trees. This thirteenth-century ink-on-silk painting illustrates that sensibility. The poem at the top reads: "Night rains cleansed the capital's suburban farms, / Morning sun brightens the emperor's city; / People work happily in a good year, / Dancing and singing they cross a path in the field." (Art Collection 2/Alamy)

Middle Eastern Cultural Traditions: Judaism and Christianity

From the southeastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, now home to Israelis and Palestinians, through the lands of the Arabian Peninsula, emerged three religious traditions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—often known as Abrahamic faiths because all of them revered the biblical character called Abraham. Amid the proliferation of gods and spirits that had long characterized religious life throughout the ancient Middle East, Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike affirmed a distinctly monotheistic faith. This idea of a single supreme deity or Divine Presence, the sole source of all life and being, was a radical cultural innovation in the region. This monotheistic tradition began with Judaism and Jews, while its Christian and Muslim expressions created the possibility of a universal religion, open to all of humankind.

The earliest of these traditions to emerge was **Judaism**, born among one of the region's less numerous and, at the time, less politically significant peoples—the Hebrews, much later known also as Jews. Unlike the peoples of ancient Mesopotamia, India, Greece, Rome, and elsewhere—all of whom populated the invisible

realm with numerous gods and goddesses—Jews found in their God, whose name they were reluctant to pronounce because of its sacredness, a powerful and jealous deity, who demanded their exclusive loyalty. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me"—this was the first of the Ten Commandments.

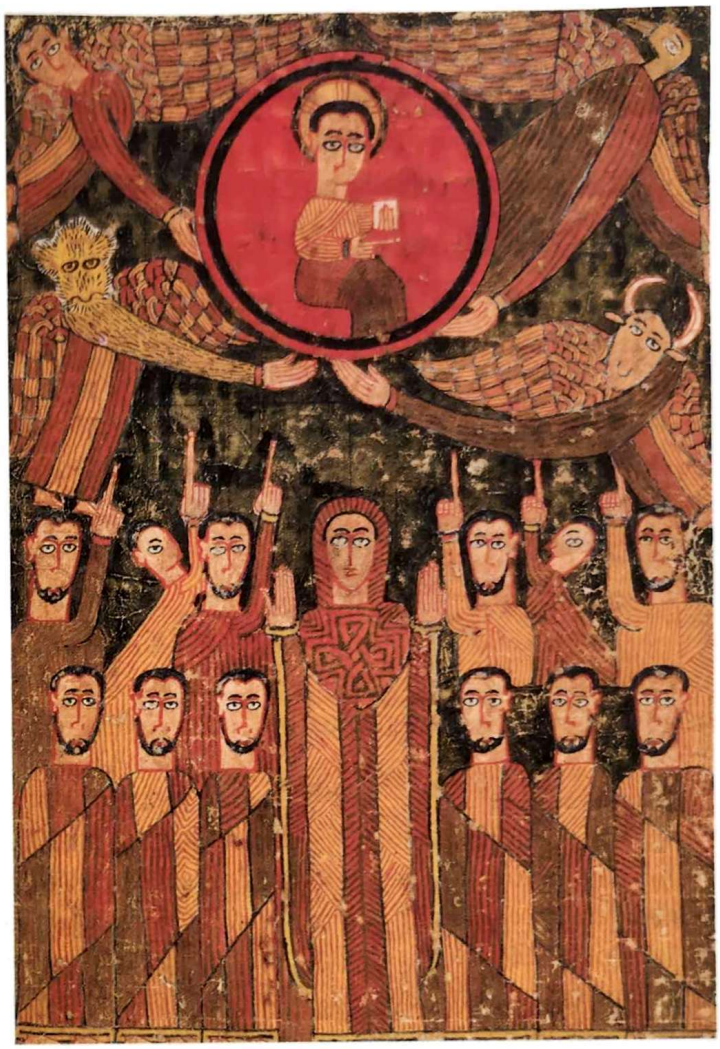
Over time, this God evolved into a lofty, transcendent deity of utter holiness and purity. But the Jews also experienced their God as a divine person, accessible and available to his people, not remote or far away. Furthermore, for some, he was transformed from a god of war, who ordered his people to "utterly destroy" the original inhabitants of the Promised Land, to a god of social justice and compassion for the poor and the marginalized, especially in the passionate pronouncements of Jewish prophets, such as Isaiah, Amos, and Jeremiah. Here was a distinctive conception of the Divine—singular, transcendent, personal, revealed in the natural order, engaged in history, and demanding social justice and moral righteousness above sacrifices and rituals. In terms of world history, the chief significance of Jewish religious thought lay in the foundation it provided for those later and far more widespread Abrahamic faiths of Christianity and Islam.

Christianity began in a distinctly Jewish cultural setting. In the remote province of Judaea, which was incorporated into the Roman Empire in 63 B.C.E., a young Jewish craftsman or builder called **Jesus of Nazareth** (ca. 4 B.C.E.–29 C.E.) began a brief career of teaching and healing before he got in trouble with local authorities and was executed. In one of history's most unlikely stories, the life and teachings of that obscure man, barely noted in the historical records of the time, became the basis of the world's most widely practiced religion.

In his short public life, Jesus was a "wisdom teacher," challenging the conventional values of his time, urging the renunciation of wealth and self-seeking, and emphasizing the supreme importance of love or compassion as the basis for a moral life. In his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his followers to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Jesus inherited from his Jewish tradition an intense devotion to a single personal deity with whom he was on intimate terms, referring to him as Abba ("father"). And he gained a reputation as a healer and miracle worker. Furthermore, Jesus' teachings had a sharp social and political edge, as he spoke clearly on behalf of the poor and the oppressed, directly criticized the hypocrisies of the powerful, and deliberately associated with lepers, adulterous women, and tax collectors, all of whom were regarded as "impure." His teachings galvanized many of his followers into a social movement that so antagonized and threatened both Jewish and Roman authorities that he was crucified as a political rebel.

Jesus had not intended to establish a new religion, but rather to revitalize his Jewish tradition. Nonetheless, Christianity soon emerged as a separate faith. Its transformation from a small Jewish sect to a world religion began with **Saint Paul** (ca. 6–67 C.E.), an early convert whose missionary journeys in the eastern Roman Empire led to the founding of small Christian communities that included non-Jews. The Good News of Jesus, Paul argued, was for everyone, Jews and non-Jews alike.

This inclusive message was one of the attractions of the new faith as it spread very gradually within the Roman Empire during the several centuries after Jesus's death. In the Roman world, the strangest and most offensive feature of the new faith was its exclusive monotheism and its antagonism to all other supernatural powers, particularly the cult of the emperors. Christians' denial of these other gods caused them to be tagged as "atheists" and was one reason behind the empire's intermittent persecution of Christians during the first three centuries of the Common Era (see the discussion of **Perpetua** in Zooming In: Perpetua, Christian Martyr, page 38). All of that ended with Emperor Constantine's conversion in the early fourth century C.E. and the proclamation of Christianity as the state religion in 380 C.E. About the same time the new faith also gained official status in Armenia, located in the south Caucasus region east of Turkey, and in Axum, an African state in what is now Ethiopia and Eritrea. In fact, during the first six centuries of the Christian era, most followers of Jesus lived in the Middle East and in northern and northeastern Africa, with small communities in India and China as well (see Map 1.3).



The Legacy of Axumite Christianity A distinctive form of Christianity in what is now Ethiopia began in the fourth century and endures to this day. This late-fourteenth- or early-fifteenth-century depiction of the ascension of Jesus, with his disciples pointing upwards, illustrates that legacy. (Rogers Fund, 1998 [1998.66]/The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, USA/Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Image source: Art Resource, NY)

As Christianity spread within the Roman Empire and beyond, it developed an elaborate hierarchical organization, with patriarchs, bishops, and priests—all men—replacing the house churches of the early years, in which women played a more prominent part. The emerging Christian movement was, however, anything but unified. Its immense geographic reach, accompanied by inevitable differences in language, culture, and political regime, ensured that a single focus for Christian belief and practice was difficult to achieve. Eventually, separate church organizations emerged in the eastern and western regions of the Roman Empire as well as in Egypt, Syria, Persia, Armenia, Ethiopia, and southern India, some of which were accompanied by sharp differences in doctrine. The bishop of Rome gradually emerged as the dominant leader, or pope, of the church in the western half of the empire, but his authority was sharply contested in the East. This division contributed to the later split between the Latin, or Roman Catholic, and the Greek, or Eastern Orthodox, branches of Christendom, a division that continues to the present. Thus by 1200 or so, the Christian world was not only geographically extensive but also politically and theologically very diverse and highly fragmented.

AP® EXAM TIP

You should know the factors that led to divisions within major belief systems.

AP® EXAM TIP

Be ready to provide examples of how power was used to promote religion, and vice versa.

ZOOMING IN Perpetua, Christian Martyr

"The blood of the martyrs," declared the Christian writer Tertullian, "is the seed of the church." Few of those martyrs, whose stories so inspired the persecuted converts of the early Christian centuries, could match that of Perpetua, a young woman whose prison diary provides a highly personal account of her arrest and trial.[20]

Born in 181 C.E. in the North African city of Carthage, Perpetua hailed from an upper-class Roman family and was quite well educated, literate in Latin and probably Greek, and acquainted with Roman philosophical writings. By the time she entered the historical record at age twenty-two, she had given birth to a son, had lost her husband to either death or abandonment, and had recently begun to study Christianity, becoming part of a small but growing group of educated people who were turning toward the new faith. Coinciding with her conversion was a wave of persecutions ordered by the Roman emperor Septimus Severus, also of North African descent and a devotee of the Egyptian cult of Isis and Osiris. Severus sought to forbid new conversions rather than punish long-established Christians. In line with this policy, in 203 C.E., the hard-line governor of the region ordered the arrest of Perpetua along with four others—two free men and two enslaved people, including a woman named Felicitas who was eight months pregnant. Before she was taken to the prison, however, Perpetua decisively confirmed her commitment to Christianity by accepting baptism.

Once in the "dark hole" of the prison, Perpetua was terrified. It was crowded and stiflingly hot, and she was consumed with anxiety for her child. Several fellow Christians managed to bribe the prison guards to permit Perpetua to nurse her baby son. Reunited with her child, she found that "my prison had suddenly become a palace, so that I wanted to be there rather than anywhere else."

A few days later, Perpetua's deeply distressed non-Christian father arrived for a visit, hoping to persuade his only daughter to recant her faith and save her life and the family's honor. It was a heartbreaking encounter. "Daughter," he said, "have pity on my grey head. . . . Do not abandon me to be the reproach of men. Think of your brothers, think of your mother and your aunt, think of your child, who will not be able to live once you are gone. Give up your pride! You will destroy all of us!" Firm in her faith, Perpetua refused his entreaties, and she reported that "he left me in great sorrow."

On the day of her trial, with her distraught father in attendance, the governor Hilarianus also begged

Middle Eastern Cultural Traditions: Islam

The world historical significance of Islam, the third religion in the Abrahamic family of faiths, has been enormous. It thrust the previously marginal and largely nomadic Arabs into a central role in world history, for it was among them and in their language that the newest of the world's major religions was born during the seventh century C.E. Its emergence was accompanied by the rapid creation of a huge empire that stretched from Spain to India, but the religion of Islam reached beyond that empire, to both East and West Africa, to India, and to Central and Southeast Asia. Within the Arab Empire and beyond it, a new and innovative civilization took shape, drawing on Arab, Persian, Turkic, Greco-Roman, South Asian, and African cultures. It was known as the Dar al-Islam, the house or the abode of Islam.

Perpetua.

Perpetua to consider her family and renounce her faith by offering a sacrifice to the emperor. Again she refused and together with her four companions was "condemned to the beasts," a humiliating form of execution normally reserved for the lower classes. Although she was now permanently separated from her child, she wrote, "We returned to the prison in high spirits." During her last days in the prison, Perpetua and the others were treated "more humanely" and were allowed to visit with family and friends, as the head of the jail was himself a Christian.

But then, on the birthday of the emperor, this small band of Christians was marched to the amphitheater, "joyfully as though they were going to heaven," according to an eyewitness account. After the prisoners strenuously and successfully resisted dressing in the robes of pagan priests, the three men were sent into the arena to contend with a boar, a bear, and a leopard. Then it was the turn of the women, Perpetua and Felicitas, who had given birth only two days earlier. When a mad cow failed to kill them, a soldier was sent to finish the work. As he approached Perpetua, he apparently hesitated, but as an eyewitness account put it, "she took the trembling hand of the young gladiator and guided it to her throat." Appended to her diary was this comment from an unknown observer: "It was as though so great a woman, feared as she was by the unclean spirit, could not be dispatched unless she herself were willing."

QUESTIONS

How might a historian understand the actions and attitudes of Perpetua toward religion? How would modern-day scholars understand her experiences in the context of the era she lived in?

photo: Archbishop's Palace, Ravenna, Italy/Scala/Art Resource, NY

The Arabian Peninsula from which Islam emerged was a land of pastoral people, herders of sheep and camels, but it also contained some regions of settled agricultural communities and sophisticated commercial cities such as Mecca that were linked to long-distance trading routes. Religiously, these people recognized and venerated a variety of gods, goddesses, ancestors, and nature spirits. Arabia was located on the periphery of two established and rival civilizations of that time—the Byzantine Empire, heir to the Roman world, and the Sassanid Empire, heir to the imperial traditions of Persia. Many Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians lived among the Arabs, and their monotheistic ideas became widely known.

The catalyst for the emergence of Islam was a single individual, **Muhammad** Ibn Abdullah (570–632 C.E.), a trader from Mecca. A highly reflective man who

AP®

CAUSATION

Explain how Muhammad's profession as a merchant may have influenced the early years of Islam.

was deeply troubled by the corruption and social inequalities of Mecca, he often undertook periods of withdrawal and meditation in the arid mountains outside the city. There, Muhammad had a powerful, overwhelming religious experience that left him convinced, albeit reluctantly, that he was Allah's messenger to the Arabs, commissioned to bring to them a scripture in their own language. According to Muslim tradition, the revelations began in 610 and continued periodically over the next twenty-two years. Those revelations, recorded in the **Quran**, became the sacred scriptures of Islam, which to this day most Muslims regard as the very words of God and the core of their faith.

It was a revolutionary message that Muhammad conveyed. Religiously, it presented Allah, the Arabic word for God, as the sole divine being, the all-powerful Creator, thus challenging the highly polytheistic religion of the Arabs. In its exalted conception of Deity, Muhammad's revelations drew heavily on traditions of Jewish and Christian monotheism. As "the Messenger of God," Muhammad presented himself in the line of earlier prophets—Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and many others. He was the last, "the seal of the prophets," bearing God's final revelation to humankind. Islam was socially revolutionary as well. Over and over again the Quran denounced the prevailing social practices of an increasingly prosperous Mecca: the hoarding of wealth, the exploitation of the poor, the charging of high rates of interest on loans, corrupt business deals, the abuse of women, and the neglect of widows and orphans. Like the Jewish prophets of the Hebrew scriptures, the Quran demanded social justice and laid out a prescription for its implementation.

Finally, Islam was politically revolutionary because the Quran challenged the entire tribal and clan structure of Arab society, which was prone to war, feuding, and violence. The just and moral society of Islam was the **umma** (OOM-mah), the community of all believers, which replaced tribal, ethnic, or racial identities. In this community, women too had an honored and spiritually equal place. "The believers, men and women, are protectors of one another," declared the Quran. The umma, then, was to be a new and just community, bound by common belief rather than by territory, language, or tribe.

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Like Jesus, Muhammad was threatening to the established authorities in Mecca, and he was forced to leave. But unlike Jesus, he was in a position to resist, for there was no overwhelming force such as the Roman Empire to contend with. So he gathered an army, and by 630 C.E. he had largely unified Arabia under the banner of Islam. Thus Islam began its history as a new state, while Christianity was at odds with the Roman state for over three centuries.

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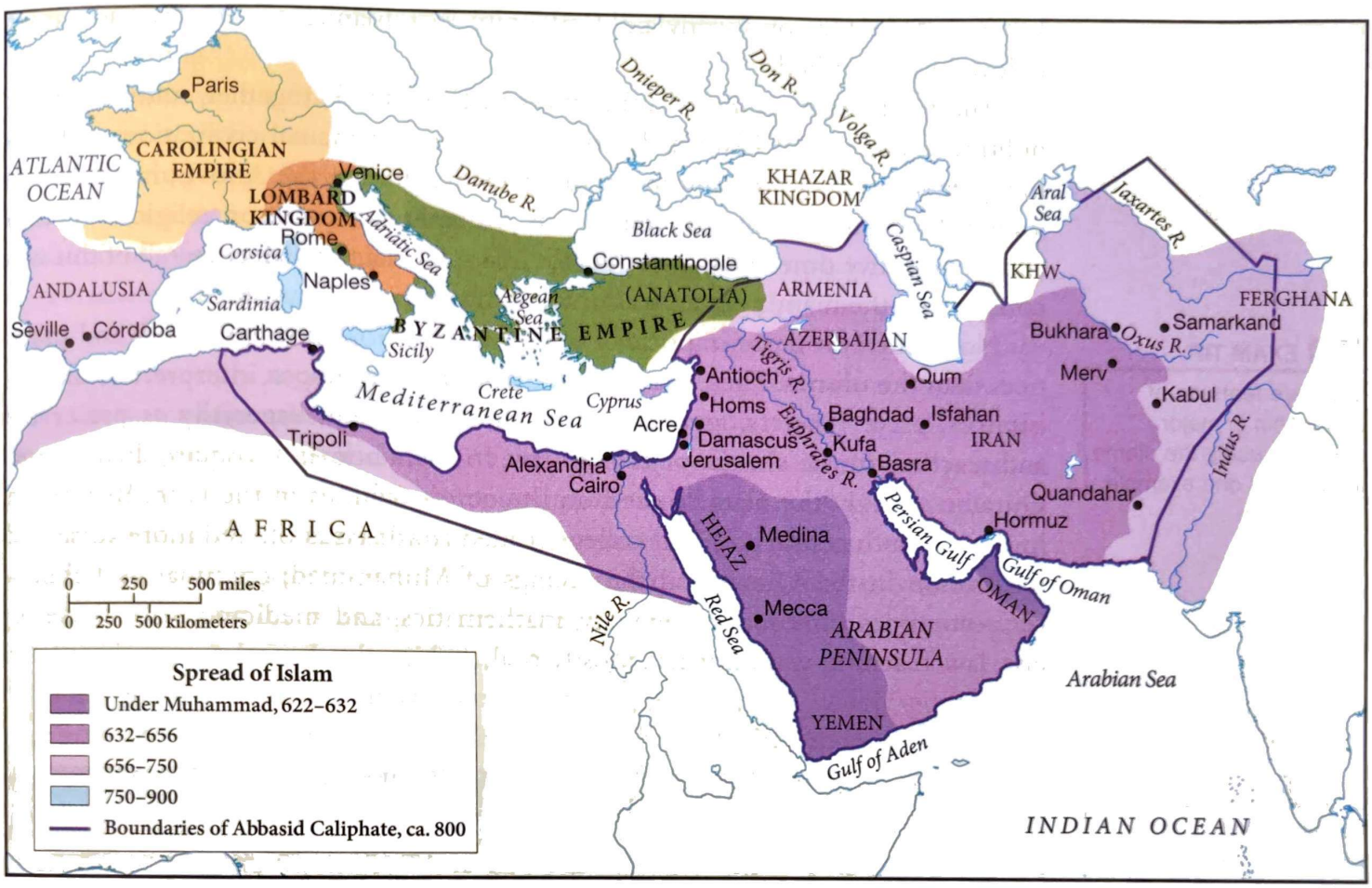
That state soon became a huge empire as Arab armies took the offensive after Muhammad's death in 632 C.E. (see Map 1.4). In many places, conversion to Islam soon followed. In Persia, for example, some 80 percent of the population had made a transition to a Muslim religious identity by 900, and Persian culture became highly prestigious and influential within the Islamic world. One of the early rulers of this Arab Empire observed: "The Persians ruled for a thousand years and did not



Map 1.4 The Arab Empire and the Initial Expansion of Islam, 622–900 C.E.
Far more so than with Buddhism or Christianity, the initial spread of Islam was both rapid and extensive. And unlike the other two world religions, Islam quickly gave rise to a huge empire, ruled by Muslim Arabs, that encompassed many of the older civilizations of the region.

▲ AP®
CAUSATION
How might this map help to explain the rapid spread of Islam?

need us Arabs even for a day. We have been ruling them for one or two centuries and cannot do without them for an hour."[21]

But the idea of a unified Muslim community, so important to Muhammad, proved difficult to realize as conquest and conversion vastly enlarged the Islamic world. Political conflict over who should succeed Muhammad led to civil war and to an enduring division between what became known as the Sunni and Shia branches of Islam. It began as a purely political conflict but acquired over time a deeper significance. For much of early Islamic history, Shia Muslims saw themselves as the minority opposition within Islam. They felt that history had taken a wrong turn and that they were "the defenders of the oppressed, the critics and opponents of privilege and power," while the Sunnis were the advocates of the established order.[22] Other conflicts arose among Arab clans or factions, between Arabs and non-Arabs, and between privileged and wealthy rulers and their less fortunate

subjects. After 900 or so, any political unity that Islamic civilization had earlier enjoyed had vanished.

And yet, there was much that bound the Islamic world together, culturally if not politically. The rise of Islam had generated a transcontinental civilization, embracing at least parts of virtually every other civilization in the Afro-Eurasian hemisphere. The Quran, universal respect for Muhammad, common religious texts, a ritual prayer five times a day, and the required pilgrimage to Mecca—all of this was common to the many peoples of the Islamic world.

No group was more important in the transmission of those beliefs and practices than the **ulama**. These learned scholars served as judges, interpreters, administrators, prayer leaders, and reciters of the Quran, but especially as preservers and teachers of the **sharia** or Islamic law. In their homes, mosques, shrines, and Quranic schools, the ulama passed on the core teachings of the faith. Beginning in the eleventh century, formal colleges called **madrassas** offered more advanced instruction in the Quran and the sayings of Muhammad; grammar and rhetoric; sometimes philosophy, theology, mathematics, and medicine; and, above all else, law. Teaching was informal, mostly oral, and involved much memorization of

The Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem The Dome of the Rock was constructed on the site from which Muslims believe that Muhammad ascended into the presence of Allah during his Night Journey, referred to in the Quran. Centered on its great golden dome, it was the first large-scale building project in the Islamic world. Its placement on the Temple Mount in the heart of Jerusalem, a site that is also sacred to Jews and Christians, offers a physical reminder of the close relationship between these three monotheistic faiths. (Pictures from History/Andrew Shiva/Bridgeman Images)

texts. It was also largely conservative, seeking to preserve an established body of Islamic learning.

The ulama were an "international elite," and the system of education they created bound together an immense and diverse civilization. Common texts were shared widely across the world of Islam. Students and teachers alike traveled great distances in search of the most learned scholars. From Indonesia to West Africa, educated Muslims inhabited a widely shared tradition.

Paralleling the educational network of the ulama were the emerging religious orders of the Sufis, who had a quite different understanding of Islam, for they viewed the worldly success of Islamic civilization as a distraction and deviation from the purer spirituality of Muhammad's time. Emerging strongly by 1000, Sufis represented Islam's mystical dimension, in that they sought a direct and personal experience of the Divine. Through renunciation of the material world, meditation on the words of the Quran, chanting of the names of God, the use of music and dance, and the veneration of Muhammad and various "saints," adherents of **Sufism** pursued an interior life, seeking to tame the ego and achieve spiritual union with Allah.

This mystical tendency in Islamic practice, which became widely popular by the ninth and tenth centuries, was at times sharply critical of the more scholarly and legalistic practitioners of the sharia. To Sufis, establishment teachings about the law and correct behavior, while useful for daily living, did little to bring the believer into the presence of God. Furthermore, Sufis felt that many of the ulama had been compromised by their association with worldly and corrupt governments. Sufis therefore often charted their own course to God, implicitly challenging the religious authority of the ulama. For many centuries, roughly 1100 to 1800, Sufism was central to mainstream Islam, and many, perhaps most, Muslims affiliated with one or another Sufi organization, making use of its spiritual practices. Nonetheless, differences in emphasis about the essential meaning of Islam remained an element of tension and sometimes discord within the Muslim world.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Sufis began to organize in a variety of larger associations, some limited to particular regions and others with chapters throughout the Islamic world. Sufi orders were especially significant in the frontier regions of Islam because they followed conquering armies or traders into Central and Southeast Asia, India, Anatolia, parts of Africa, and elsewhere. Their devotional teachings, modest ways of living, and reputation for supernatural powers gained a hearing for the new faith. Their emphasis on personal experience of the Divine, rather than on the law, allowed the Sufis to accommodate elements of local belief and practice and encouraged the growth of a popular or blended Islam. The veneration of deceased Sufi "saints," or "friends of God," particularly at their tombs, created sacred spaces that enabled Islam to take root in many places despite its foreign origins. But that flexibility also often earned Sufi practitioners the enmity of the ulama, who were sharply critical of any deviations from the sharia.

Interactions and Encounters

Finding the Main Point: How did cultural and religious traditions spread across regions before 1200 C.E.?

Long before the globalized world of the twentieth century and well before the voyages of Columbus connected the Eastern and Western hemispheres, interactions across the boundaries of these civilizations and cultural traditions had transformed human societies, for better and for worse. Thus world history is less about what happened within particular civilizations or cultures than about the interactions and encounters among them. Focusing on cross-cultural connections counteracts a habit of thinking about particular peoples or civilizations as self-contained or isolated communities. To varying degrees, each of them was embedded in a network of relationships with both neighboring and more distant peoples. And broadly speaking, those cross-cultural connections grew more dense and complex over time. Various kinds of interactions and encounters had emerged long before 1200, many of which persisted and accelerated in the centuries that followed.

One setting in which culturally different societies encountered one another was that of empire, for those large states often incorporated a vast range of peoples and provided opportunity for communication and borrowing among them. Empires also served as arenas of exchange, as products, foods, ideas, religions, and disease circulated among the many peoples of imperial states. For example, various non-Roman cultural traditions—such as the cult of the Persian god Mithra or the compassionate Egyptian goddess Isis, and, most extensively, the Jewish-derived religion of Christianity—spread throughout the Roman Empire during the early centuries of the Common Era. In the tenth century and after, a state-sponsored adoption of Christianity occurred in the emerging Russian state, later leading to the eastern spread of Christianity across much of northern Asia in an expanding Russian Empire. An Arab Empire, expanding rapidly in the several centuries after the death of Muhammad in 632 C.E., encompassed all or part of Egyptian, Persian, Mesopotamian, Roman, and Indian civilizations. Both within and beyond that empire the new religion of Islam spread quite rapidly, generating a major cultural transformation across much of the Afro-Eurasian world.

Yet another mechanism for the interaction of distant peoples lay in commercial exchange. Premodern commerce moved along a chain of separate transactions in which goods traveled farther than individual merchants. Networks of exchange and communication extending all across the Afro-Eurasian world, and separately in parts of the Americas and Oceania as well, slowly came into being. Such long-distance trade was a powerful motor of historical change. It altered habits of consumption, changed the working lives of many people, enabled class distinctions, stimulated and sustained the creation of states, and fostered the diffusion of religion, technology, and disease.

The most famous of these early commercial networks is widely known as the **Silk Roads**, a reference to their most famous product. Beginning around 200 B.C.E., the Silk Road trading complex operated to varying degrees for over 1,500 years,

linking China and the Mediterranean world as well as many places in between. Paralleling the land-based routes of the Silk Roads and flourishing at roughly the same time were sea-based networks—the **Sea Roads**—that traversed the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, linking the diverse peoples living between southern China and East Africa. Yet another important pattern of long-distance trade—this one across the vast reaches of the Sahara in a series of **Sand Roads** (also called the trans-Saharan trade routes)—linked North Africa and the Mediterranean world with the land and peoples of interior West Africa. Finally, in the Americas, direct connections among various civilizations and cultures were less densely woven than in the Afro-Eurasian region. Nonetheless, scholars have discerned a variety of cultural and commercial linkages that operated throughout the Americas.[23] (See Chapter 3 for more on this topic.)

All of this exchange began well before 1200 and persisted well after it. The chapters that follow will continue the story of these diverse civilizations and societies, the movement of their cultural traditions, and their multiple interactions with one another.

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Religion and Historians

Finding the Main Point: What problems or tensions can arise when historians study the religious experiences of humans around the world?

Chapter 1 provides a big picture context for this AP® World History Modern course by looking at major turning points in the human journey before 1200. It reminds us that most of that story—perhaps 250,000 years—took place while humankind sustained itself with a gathering and hunting economy. But beginning around 12,000 years ago, the Agricultural Revolution created wholly new ways of living that gradually spread around the world. Then about 5,500 years ago, productive agricultural economies began to generate "civilizations" with their characteristic cities, states, and massive social and gender inequalities. Those civilizations subsequently gave rise to cultural traditions, often expressed in religious terms, that gave meaning and structure to the growing numbers of people living in them. However, historians' efforts to understand the cultural or religious dimension of human life have generated various tensions and misunderstandings between scholars and believers.

One of these tensions involves the question of change. Most religions present themselves as timeless revelations from the beyond that partake of eternity or at least reflect ancient practice. In the eyes of historians, however, the religious aspect of human life changes as much as any other. Buddhism became more conventionally religious, with an emphasis on the supernatural, as it evolved from Theravada to Mahayana forms. A male-dominated hierarchical Christian Church, with

its patriarchs, popes, bishops, priests, and state support, was very different from the small house churches that suffered persecution by imperial authorities in the early Christian centuries. Islam evolved both legalistic and more mystical practices. The implication—that religions are largely a human phenomenon—has been troublesome to some believers.

Historians, on the other hand, have sometimes been uncomfortable in the face of claims by believers that they have actually experienced a divine reality or that God or the gods have shaped human history. Certainly, modern scholars, dependent on evidence in this world, are in no position to validate or refute the spiritual claims of religious leaders and their many followers. But historians need to take those ideas seriously. Although we will never know precisely what happened to the Buddha as he sat in meditation in northern India or what transpired when Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, clearly those experiences changed the two men and motivated their subsequent actions. Millions of their followers have also acted on the basis of what they perceived to be a compelling encounter with an unseen realm. This interior dimension of human experience, though difficult to grasp with any precision and impossible to verify, has been a significant mover and shaper of the historical process.

Yet a third problem arises from debates within particular religious traditions about which group most accurately represents the "real" or authentic version of the faith. Historians usually refuse to take sides in such disputes. They simply notice with interest that most human cultural traditions generate conflicting views, some of which become the basis for serious conflict in societies. The differences between Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and later Protestant Christians, as well as between Sunni and Shia Muslims, illustrate the point.

Reconciling personal religious convictions with the perspectives of modern historical scholarship is no easy task. At the very least, all of us can appreciate the immense human effort that has gone into the making of cultural or religious traditions, and we can acknowledge their enormous significance in the unfolding of the human story.

These religious traditions have been used to justify the vast social inequalities and oppressive governments of human civilizations by persuading millions that their lot in life was fixed by ancient tradition or divine decree. But religions have also enabled human beings to find comfort and hope amid the multiple sufferings that attend human life. Furthermore, religions have often been critical of established social patterns and on occasion have stimulated reform and rebellion. Jewish prophets railed against the injustices of their societies; Jesus and Muhammad alike attacked elite corruption and hypocrisy. Both the Buddha and bhakti Hindus pushed back against the restrictions of India's caste system. And popular forms of Daoism inspired resistance and rebellion in a number of peasant-based upheavals in China. Finally, religious traditions have shaped the meanings that billions of people over thousands of years have attached to the world they inhabit. In doing so, they have guided much of humankind in its endless efforts to penetrate the mysteries of the world beyond and of the world within.