

Marion P Thomas Charter High School

History Department

World History



World History Summer 2026 Assignment

WHO'S AN AUTHORITY?

Purpose

Before you learn more about the authority claim tester, gain a better understanding of what authority means, how it's used, and how its meaning can change over time.

Process

1. Complete the sentence below.

"An authority is someone who...."

2. Who are some people you consider to be authorities? List as many examples as you can think of.

3. Read the following scenarios and think about the authority you might turn to in each situation. Be prepared to share and explain your answers.

Scenario	Authority
You have a cough that won't go away.	
You're writing a research paper on ancient Egypt.	
You want to learn more about the upcoming elections.	
You want to learn how to cook your favorite food.	
You want advice for which colleges to apply to.	

4. Authority comes in all shapes and sizes. Authority can be **earned** based on merit, such as licensure or education (doctors, teachers, aestheticians, electricians, lawyers, and so on). Authority can also be **granted** based on popularity or how closely we know—and therefore trust—someone. Look at the authorities you listed in the right-hand column above, and put an **E** next to the authorities you think have earned their authority, and a **G** next to those you think have been granted their authority.

CLAIM TESTING AUTHORITY

Purpose

Understanding how and why we decide someone is an authority on a topic is a crucial skill, not just in history, but in our everyday assessment of claims. Dig into a historical debate about the voyages of Zheng He, a fourteenth-century sailor for the Ming Dynasty of China who led seven expeditions in the Indian Ocean, to consider what to do when authorities disagree.

Key information

Authority can be **earned** based on merit, such as licensure or education (doctors, teachers, aestheticians, electricians, lawyers, and so on). Authority can also be **granted** based on popularity or how closely we know—and therefore trust—someone.

Process

1. Review the credentials and theories of the two scholars, and then respond to the questions that follow.

Barbara Bennett Peterson	Tansen Sen
<p>Credentials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Emeritus professor of history at the University of Hawaii ● PhD in history from the University of Hawaii ● Former professor of history at Oregon State University and adjunct faculty at Portland State University ● Senior Fulbright Scholar to Japan (1967) and China (1988–1989) ● Nominated for the Pulitzer Prize seven times ● Winner of numerous book awards including the Dartmouth Medal ● Publications: 20+ papers, 22 books 	<p>Credentials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Professor of history and director of the Center for Global Asia at NYU Shanghai; associate professor of history at New York University ● PhD in history from the University of Pennsylvania ● Recipient of numerous grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Philosophical Society, the Japan Foundation, and others ● Founding head of the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Center in Singapore

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Served on the governing board of Nalanda University ● Publications: 20+ papers, 6 books
<p>Theory</p> <p>In Peterson’s article “The Ming Voyages of Cheng Ho (Zheng He),” published in 1994, she acknowledges that Zheng He’s voyages throughout the Indian Ocean might have seemed intimidating to the people he came upon; however, she also states that “these expeditions had no intention of military conquest by force; rather they desired the expansion of the Middle Kingdom [China] by friendly trade and alliance.” Peterson admits that there were times when Zheng He had to intervene in local affairs such as “removing an unlawful usurper who had murdered the former king, a vassal of China,” but the overall mission was to establish “peaceful trade.”</p>	<p>Theory</p> <p>In Sen’s article “The Impact of Zheng He’s Expeditions on Indian Ocean Interactions,” published in 2016, he argues that Zheng He’s expeditions in the Indian Ocean on behalf of the Ming Dynasty emperor were militaristic and sometimes violent in nature and resulted in the Ming Dynasty exerting control over the Indian Ocean from “coastal China to eastern Africa.” Sen cites evidence that Zheng He and his crew of thousands of Chinese sailors interfered in local disputes, waged wars against chieftains who were deemed unfavorable to China, and installed officials who were willing to pay tribute to the Ming emperor.</p>

2. Circle the credentials you think are most important based on the proposed theories of each scholar.

3. Is one of these people more credible in their field than the other? Why or why not?

4. Is it hard to choose between the theories described above? Why or why not?

5. What more would you need to know to determine whom to believe?

6. Which other claim testers would be helpful to use in determining what to believe?

7. How can two authorities on this topic have such different views of the same events? In other words, what does it mean to have a competing narrative in history class?

8. Based on the information provided about Barbara Bennett Peterson and Tansen Sen, write a claim about which authority you choose to believe and why.

Communities in Afro-Eurasia, c.1200-1450

By Trevor Getz

Scales and types of communities



Building with walls in the Chinese city of Kaifeng.

People in small groups don't need many rules or institutions to govern themselves. But when we get into groups larger than 150 people, we need some sort of organization. Social structures and rules enable us to trust people we don't know.

Human societies have developed many methods to organize themselves. Some similar strategies appear throughout history, but there were also lots of differences.

Bureaucracy: An organized group of government officials who make decisions

based on rules and procedures

If you looked around the world in 1200, you'd have seen lots of different community organizations:

- **Small communities** governed by elders related by ancestry;
- **Chieftaincy**, in which an individual had the power to make decisions over a community;
- **Kingdoms** with highly established **bureaucracies**, often closely tied to religion. The ruler may have inherited the throne, been selected from wealthy or powerful families, or even been elected;
- **City-states** focused on trade, often ruled by assemblies of merchants;
- **Confederations**—alliances of several states—often arose in regions where collective security was important;
- **Empires**, with a core community or state conquering and ruling others.

And there were probably many more types. Each would have been suited to the needs of a certain community.

The state

State: An organized community living under a unified political system

Most of these types of communities can be called **states**, which is the term we use to describe a country. The state is an organized community living under a unified political

system. States are about organized government, but they are also about the land and people they rule. How did geography shape state formation?

“ HOW DID GEOGRAPHY SHAPE STATE FORMATION? ”

States usually claim to control a territory with boundaries, although there are some examples of states that moved around. The people running a state claim authority over a group of people. The state makes laws and administers justice, often using a military or police force. States also collect resources and redistribute them, usually unequally.

Patterns of Afro-Eurasian states, c. 1200

By 1200, states could be found in many parts of *Afro-Eurasia*: Africa, Europe, and Asia.

Dar al-Islam: An Arabic phrase meaning, “The House of Islam”; it refers to the parts of the world where Muslims are in the majority and the rulers practice Islam

The states tended to fall along a fertile belt of land, where lots of food could be grown. This fertile land stretched from the Mediterranean coasts of Africa and Europe to China and Southeast Asia. At the heart of the Mediterranean

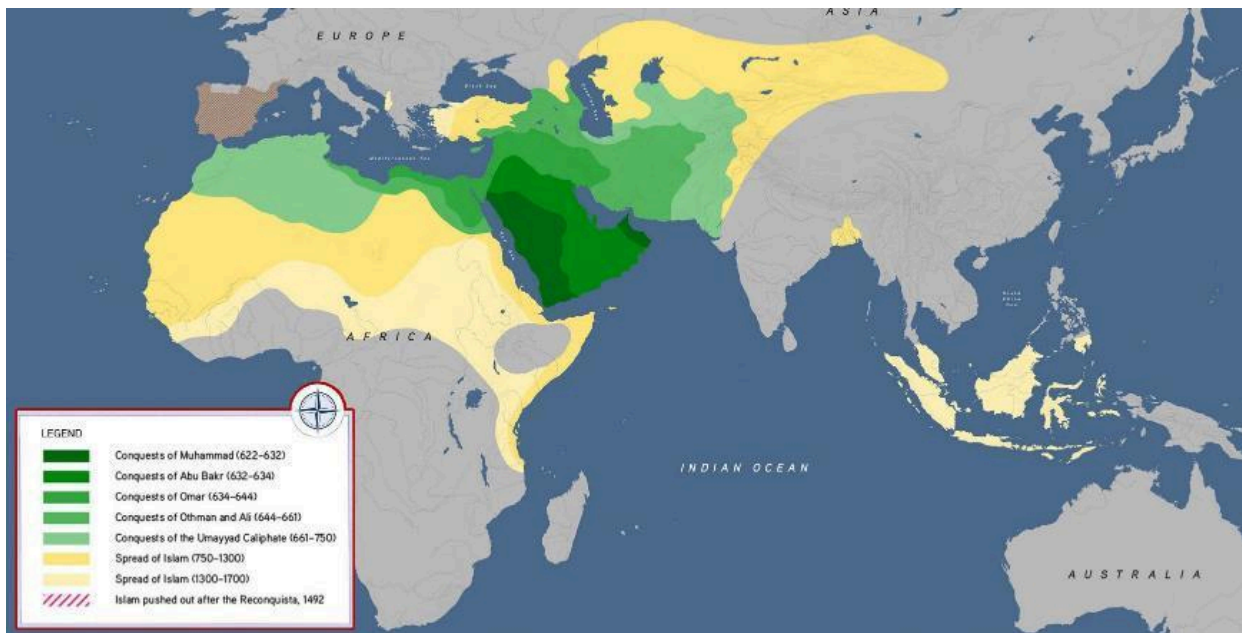
region was the Islamic World, or ***Dar al-Islam***. In 1200, the Islamic World was centered on the Abbasid Caliphate, headquartered in Baghdad.



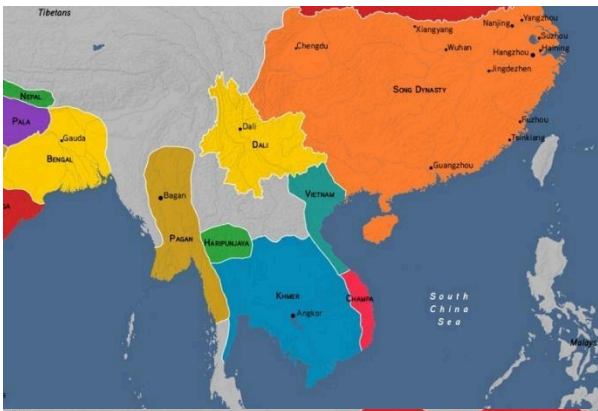
Once, the Abbasids had ruled a great empire from Baghdad, covering almost the whole Islamic World in a vast state tied together by a shared religion and laws. The Islamic World flourished. Trade crisscrossed this region, creating wealth. By 1200, *Dar al-Islam* had fractured, and rival Muslim states arose. Yet Islam as a faith continued. In West Africa, largely Muslim states developed in Takrur and Ghana. States in this region remained relatively small until Mali emerged as an empire in the fourteenth century.

A man in present-day Mali reads a Quran from the fourteenth century. Libraries in Timbuktu and around Mali hold many such collections of manuscripts, dating back to as early as the eleventh century. These manuscripts are written in Arabic and provide details on Islam, trade, law, and history in West Africa.

To the east of the Abbasids was South Asia, including today's Pakistan and India. Around 1200, much of northern India was ruled by an Islamic ruler known as the Sultan of Delhi. Sultans conquered vast regions of northern India. However, the Delhi Sultans had many local rivals who ruled small states. Most kingdoms were multi-ethnic and contained many religions.



A map of Dar al-Islam between 622 and 1700 CE. Despite the fact that there was no centralized authority by the 1200, Islam itself continued to expand, and more and more states became Muslim-ruled. Notice how many territories were (in yellow) were incorporated after 750. [Explore full map here.](#)



Some large states also flourished in Southeast Asia. The biggest of these was the Angkor Empire. Southeast Asian states were kingdoms ruled by kings and sultans who organized strong armies and had close ties to religious organizations. States facilitated trade with neighbors. Yet many parts of Southeast Asia were organized into smaller communities, governed by chieftains or elders.



To the north and east was China, the largest and most populous state in the world in 1200. It was ruled by the Song Dynasty emperors, who used two strategies to govern the vast territory. The first strategy was a bureaucracy, or class of professional scholar-administrators.

The second strategy was to support a balance between agriculture and trade. Feeding a vast empire was difficult, and the Song Emperors were concerned about peasant farmers' ability to grow food (especially rice). This was an era of enormous growth in Chinese cities. As the cities grew, feeding the people living in them became harder and harder.

Song Dynasty China and neighboring states, early thirteenth century. [Explore full map here.](#)

China was so powerful and wealthy that many of its neighbors adopted elements of Chinese culture. This included Japan, the Korean kingdom, and many Southeast Asian states.



Map of Europe in 1200 CE. [Explore full map here.](#)

Centralized: Under the control of one unified authority

Chinese merchants engaged in the trading system of the Indian Ocean. This linked China with places as far away as East Africa. City-states traded goods from the interior of Africa in exchange for luxuries like silk and spice. This East-African region of merchants and city-states is called the Swahili Coast. Most cities were independently governed, often by a council of merchants but sometimes by a ruling family.

These merchant states had little control over the interior, where larger states were forming. Most produced gold and other minerals for the Indian Ocean market. One of the most powerful of these interior states was Great Zimbabwe. Many of these central and southern African states had relatively weak kings. Their main role was to negotiate among powerful families and clans. For this reason, we often call these states *confederations*. The confederation was a political model that was widely followed throughout central and southern Africa by people who shared Bantu culture.

Far to the north, Europe was politically fragmented. There were a few large **centralized** kingdoms, lots of small states, and some city-states. There were also remote regions

where small communities were led by local elders or chieftains. Local nobles had significant power, even in large states like the Holy Roman Empire. Religious leaders like the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Pope had influence over large regions, but they were disunified. There were also many religious minorities.

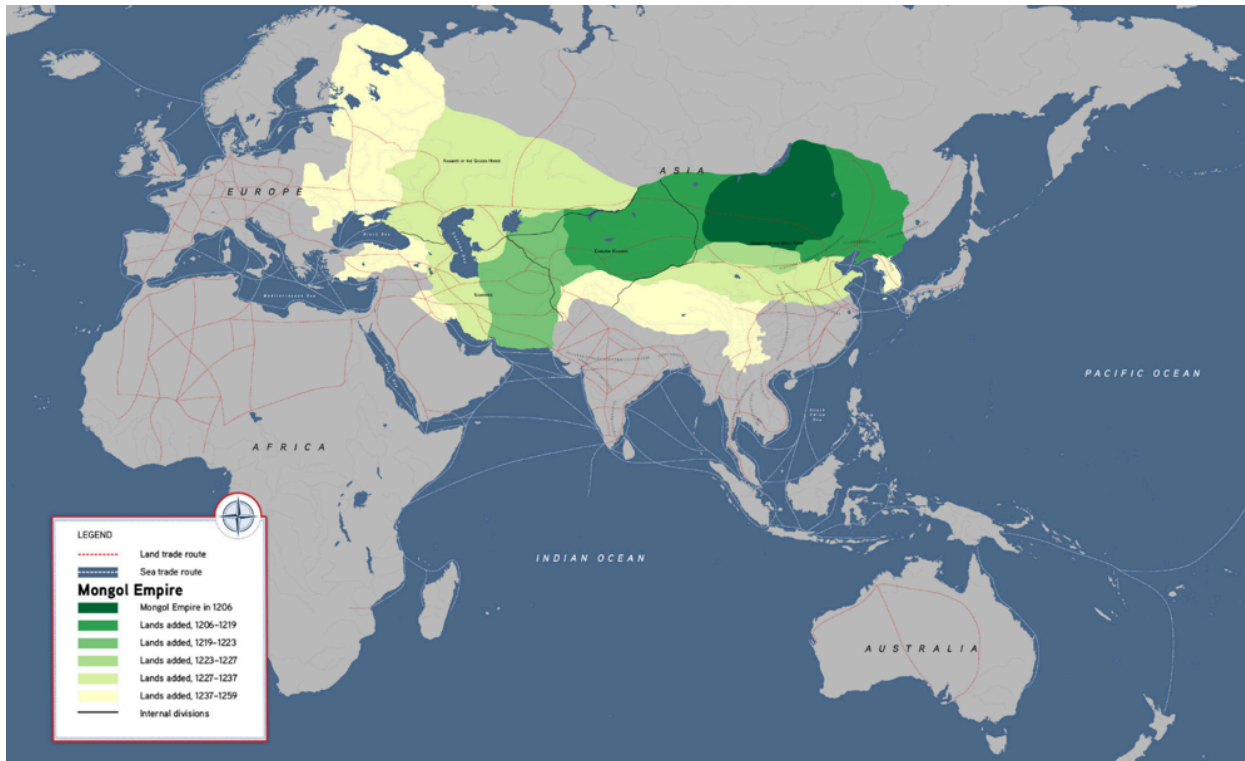
The Mongols and after

“ **THE MONGOLS CREATED THE LARGEST LAND-BASED EMPIRE IN HISTORY - ON HORSEBACK**

The Mongol empire arose around 1200, disrupting many states and communities. The Mongols created the largest land-based empire in history – on horseback. The Mongols were an alliance of people from the steppes of Eurasia.

They began their conquest between 1218 and 1294. This region had mobile peoples, rather than

settled states and territories. The Mongols conquered most of the Islamic world, China, and all of Central Asia. Then, the Mongols were defeated in Southeast Asia, Africa, Europe, and Japan.



Approximate extent of the Mongol Empire, showing the internal divisions of its four parts—the Golden Horde, Chagatai, Khanate of the Great Khan (later known as Yuan), and Ilkhanate. [Explore full map here.](#)

In the 1250s and 1260s, the Mongol Empire split into four parts to more easily govern. However, these parts maintained a close relationship with each other.

The Mongols created a unified political system in the middle of Afro-Eurasia. Mongol political innovations— road systems, forms of diplomacy, and ways of using money—carried over when the empire split. The structures of Mongol rule helped new large states rise in these areas even after the Mongol system collapsed. The Mongol years are an important period in Afro- Eurasian history.

State and Religion in Afro-Eurasia, c.1200–1450

By Trevor Getz

State and religion

Government and religion have both played a big part in human societies throughout most of history. While they might seem to have very different roles, they have usually been quite closely connected. Religious figures were often among the most learned and skilled people in society. Many worked as advisors to rulers and as government officials. Rulers frequently provided money and support to religious institutions like churches and temples. Sometimes, rulers were seen as religious leaders themselves. Often, they claimed to have the support of God or the gods. At other times, of course, religious leaders and state rulers clashed with each other. All of these kinds of relationships existed in the period c. 1200–1450 CE. Let's look at some examples.



Angkor Wat temple complex in Cambodia, the largest religious structure in the world, is an example of the changing relationship between religion and state. Originally built as a Hindu temple by the Khmer Empire, the rulers eventually became Buddhist, changing the religion of the temple as well.

The Islamic world



View of the Ka'aba and surrounding buildings in Mecca. For many centuries, religion and

Caliphate: The community a caliph ruled. Political rule were intertwined in the Caliphate.

Religion can be a source of support as well as a threat to rule it.

Political Rule: A group of people with their own particular set of beliefs and practices, especially within or separated from a larger religious group.

The relationship between state and religion was often very strong in the Islamic world. Between the seventh and tenth centuries, the area in which Islam was practiced was like a single state. It was known as the **Caliphate**. By 1200, however, there was no longer a single unified Islamic sphere. Islam had spread across a much larger area, stretching from West Africa to parts of Southeast Asia. Political authority was now divided among lots of different states.¹

Islam also wasn't a single religious faith in this period. Most Muslims were members of the Sunni **sect**. Muslims living in Persia were often members of the Shi'a sect. These two sects often disagreed about who should govern and how to interpret religious texts. Across the Islamic world, Muslim thinkers and scholars served as *qadi*, or judges. They helped sultans and other rulers keep order within society.

In return, the rulers funded Islamic schools and temples.

However, Islamic thought could also inspire some to oppose the state. One Islamic religious movement, known as Sufism, emphasized personal spiritual experience. It stressed equality and brotherhood rather than obedience to authorities. Many Muslim rulers saw the growing Sufi movement as a threat. They began cracking down on Sufis in their territories.

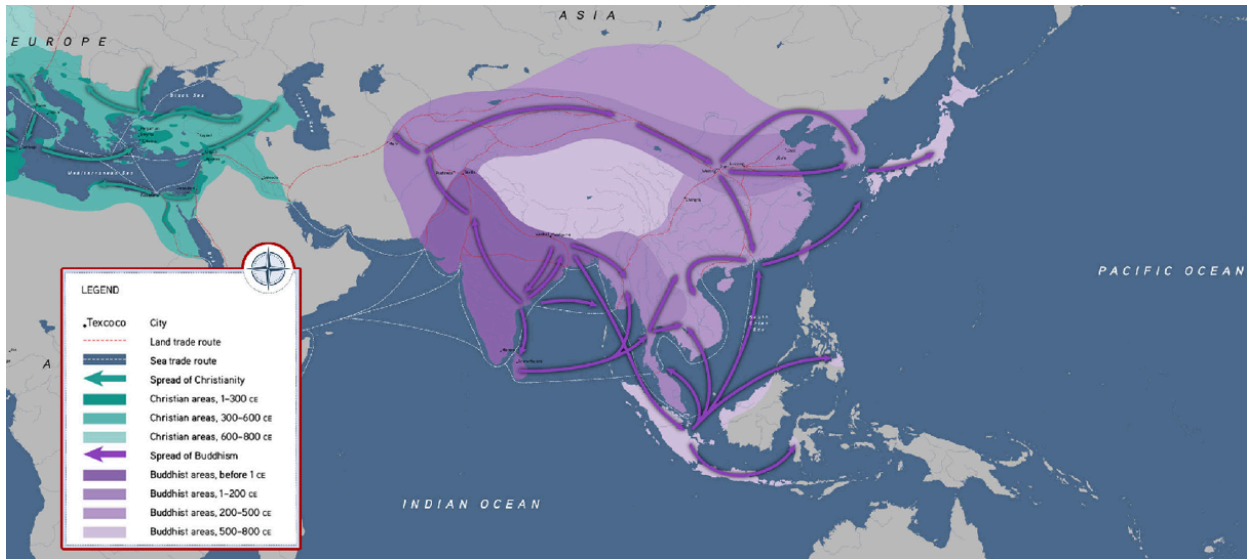
Religious pluralism in South and Southeast Asia

In the period c. 1200–1450 CE, Hinduism and Buddhism were two of the biggest religions in the world. Both emerged first in South Asia. Hinduism is a polytheistic faith, meaning that Hindus worship many gods rather than only one. Hinduism was based on older practices from northern India. It developed a powerful priestly class, the *brahmins*. Hinduism spread as far as Southeast Asia by about 200 CE.

Buddhism emerged in the sixth century BCE, in the same region and from the same set of older practices as Hinduism. However, Buddhists took a very different approach. Buddhism emphasized

¹ Rulers of later states like the Ottoman Empire claimed to be Caliphs—spiritual leaders of all Muslims—right up to the twentieth century. But they didn't really have that power or authority.

personal pathways to enlightenment, rather than gods and the authority of a priestly class. Buddhism spread rapidly into Southeast Asia and then to China, Korea, and Japan. Over time it took on many different forms.



Map showing the spread of Buddhism to 800 CE. [Explore full map here.](#)

In general, Hinduism proved to be a more useful religion for rulers in South Asia. In India, kings, or *Rajputs*, supported Hindu temples and religious orders. As a result, a strong alliance emerged between the priests (*brahmins*) and rulers. In Southeast Asia, meanwhile, many rulers became Buddhists, and set up a series of monasteries. Monks and nuns from these monasteries gained quite a bit of political influence.

The Chinese model

Religious pluralism: A society or system in which multiple religious beliefs and traditions coexist and are accepted



Students taking a civil-service exam, based on the work of Confucius, to become scholar-officials for the Song Dynasty.

China, similarly, was a region with a significant amount of **religious pluralism**. In China, Buddhism had become very important by the time of the Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE). It existed alongside Daoism, a belief system focused on nature. Neither of these two belief systems emphasized obedience to the state. That made them troublesome, as far as governments were concerned.

Rather than either of these religions, the Song Dynasty government promoted Confucianism. This thought system was based on the ideas of Confucius, a fifth century BCE thinker.

Confucius's ideas were collected in a book, called the Analects. The Analects emphasized the importance of loyalty and relationships based on social rank, including relationships between ruler and subject. It argued that these relationships reflected the relationship between Heaven and Earth.

Christendom

Religious leaders and rulers also formed alliances in Christian Europe. This was especially true in the Byzantine Empire. Byzantine emperors and the religious leaders, or *patriarchs*, of the Orthodox Church generally worked quite closely together. They governed the empire together and spread the religion to neighboring peoples. Christian clergy also provided rulers with administrators.



Excommunication of Emperor Frederick II by Pope Innocent IV.

In Catholic Europe as well, rulers relied on priests and monks. Priests generally called upon people to obey their kings and princes, who were believed to rule with God's approval. The two leaderships also cooperated on religious wars, or crusades, directed against Muslims and other non-Christians.

However, there was also division within the Catholic world. The Catholic popes were political figures as well as religious leaders, and they often competed with powerful kings. Popes could charge taxes and raise armies of their own. They also had another powerful weapon. They could expel, or *excommunicate*, people from the Catholic Church. An excommunicated ruler faced the risk of rebellion from their faithful Catholic subjects. In the mid- thirteenth century,

the most powerful rulers of central Europe, the Holy Roman Emperors, fought with the pope for influence in that region. Emperor Frederick II was excommunicated by Pope Innocent IV in 1239. In return, Frederick expelled many priests from his territory.

In general, however, church and state had a cooperative relationship. Christianity was too important to the population, and priests too useful to rulers, for a permanent break to occur.

Bantu rulers and social healing

In sub-Saharan Africa outside of the Islamic world, rulers were also closely tied to belief systems. This was true throughout the Bantu-speaking world, the vast region of central, southern, and eastern Africa. Here, in most cases, there were no separate religious leaders. Instead, communities shared a common set of beliefs, focused on ancestors and spirits. Many Bantu-speaking states were confederations, or unions, made up of several communities. The rulers of these confederations used shared beliefs and practices to unify the different groups.



Noah's Ark, from Rashid-al Din's history of the world, the Jami' al-tawarikh, created for a Mongol Ilkhan. It is part of a global history meant to describe the Ilkhans as inheritors of all religious traditions.

The Mongols

The Mongols created a huge empire through conquest. Among the conquered peoples were Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, Jews, and followers of many other faiths. The Mongols' own ancestors were generally animists, who worshiped a number of different gods, spirits, and ancestors. But the Mongols quickly adapted to their new surroundings. In the center and south of the Mongol Empire, many converted to Islam, although they mixed the new faith with their own preexisting practices and traditions. In China and surrounding regions, many Mongol leaders adopted Buddhism. In the west, some Mongol leaders became Christians.

Mongol rulers, called Khans, generally allowed many different religions to coexist. They defended religious minorities and supported temples and churches of many different faiths. Some scholars have argued that this was necessary to keep the peace in a vast empire. Others see it as a form of insurance. In other words, Mongol rulers supported all faiths just in case one turned out to be the "true" religion.

COMMUNITIES AND RELIGION SYNTHESIS

Purpose

Synthesize what you read in the articles "[State and Religions in Afro-Eurasia](#)" and "[Communities in Afro-Eurasia](#)" to better understand how religion and community shaped life in Afro-Eurasia while also

practicing using the authority claim tester. This helps you think more critically about the past—and how we know what we know.

Process

1. Complete the chart by summarizing the main points of each article.

	"State and Religion in Afro-Eurasia"	"Communities in Afro-Eurasia"
Main idea		
Key details		
Example of state and religious influence		
Example of community interaction and exchange		

2. According to the articles, how did religion influence the way Afro-Eurasian states governed their people?

3. How did different communities in Afro-Eurasia interact with one another, and what factors contributed to these interactions?

4. Who are the authors or sources of these articles, and what makes them credible or authoritative on this topic?

5. How could you test the reliability of the claims made in these articles?

SUMMARIZE AND REFLECT

Summarizing what you've learned about communities in Afro-Eurasia c. 1200–1450 will help you evaluate your learning and determine the relative importance of the information you've analyzed.

Process

1. If you were to explain the relationship between state, religion, and community interactions in Afro-Eurasia to someone unfamiliar with the topic, how would you summarize it in two or three sentences?

2. What is one question you still have about this period or these topics?

