

## Chapter 2

# The Global System around 1200 C.E.: Diverse Cultures and Growing Contacts



**Figure 2.1**

Arab traders made the most of seasonal winds, sailing dhows like this one to Africa and Asia in winter and returning home during the summer months.

World History Archive/Alamy Stock Photo



## Contents and Learning Objectives

*After reading each section, you should be able to answer these questions:*

### **2.1 China and Central Asia**

Why were relations between China and the neighboring regions of Central and Eastern Asia so important around 1200?

### **2.2 The Islamic Heartlands**

What were the strengths and weaknesses of the Abbasid caliphate in the Middle East and North Africa?

### 2.3 South and Southeast Asia in the Early Centuries of Muslim Expansion

How did Islam combine with existing regional patterns in South and Southeast Asia by 1200?

### 2.4 Trade, Empires, and Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa

Why are the centuries around 1200 viewed as a pivotal time in the history of sub-Saharan Africa?

### 2.5 Europe, East and West

How did European political structures compare to those of China and the Middle East around 1200?

### 2.6 The Western Hemisphere

What were the main features of the two principal zones of civilization in the Americas?

Arguably the most remarkable feature of the human experience in the centuries on either side of 1200 C.E. was the intensification of contacts among different societies and cultures within each of the Eastern and Western hemispheres. Though camel caravans, nomadic migrations, and military campaigns contributed significantly to intercultural exchanges, small ships, most commonly known as dhows, were responsible for the most sustained and beneficial connections from Morocco to Malaya. Compared to the great junks of China, or even many of the less imposing trading ships in the Indian Ocean, dhows were rather small vessels. They normally had one or two masts with large, triangular lateen sails, with pointed bows and square sterns (Figure 2.1). Their slender shape gave dhows a considerable advantage over most other ships in speed and maneuverability, but it was the configuration of their sails that made them one of the most popular and enduring of the world's ships. Their triangular sails meant that they could tack against the wind, which square-rigged ships could not. Those who sailed dhows in the Indian Ocean and adjacent waterways followed a seasonal pattern set by the direction of the monsoon winds that alternated between flows to the sea or land according to the time of the year.

Plying the seas from the Mediterranean along the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea and across the Indian Ocean from East Africa to the edge of the Pacific, dhows carried cargoes ranging from bulk goods, such as rice and timber, to expensive commodities, from opium and tea to ivory and fine silk or cotton garments. Although their relatively shallow hulls meant that dhows could not match junks or bulkier merchant ships in cargo capacity, they could frequent harbors too constricted or shallow for larger ships.

With the spread of Islam from West Africa to the Middle East and across the Indian Ocean, dhows became the main bearers of Muslim commerce. And along with merchants and their trade goods, many of the same ships conveyed Sufis—Muslim holy men—seeking new converts to regions as far-flung as India, Java, Malaya, and the Philippine Islands. In contrast to the expansion of early Muslim empires, which was largely due to Arab armies traveling overland, by 1200 C.E. mass conversions of conquered peoples were usually attained by the peaceful efforts of Sufis and other spiritual leaders. Some of

these missionaries of Islam traveled by caravan into Central Asia and across the Sahara. But those seeking conversions on the extensive shores of the Middle Eastern heartlands or throughout the Indian Ocean, where the largest Muslim populations have been concentrated for well over a millennium, traversed the seas in sturdy dhows—bringing with them other aspects of Muslim culture, from law to technology. Perhaps a majority of the faithful also made the pilgrimage to Mecca in dhows or comparable small vessels.

Despite their speed and dexterity, dhows did not make great warships, either before or after gunpowder was introduced into sea warfare. They were too small to provide a suitable firing platform for regular cannon, and they could not carry enough soldiers to grapple, board, and overwhelm the crews of enemy ships. Like most of the ships that sailed the seas of the Middle East, East Africa, and Asia, dhows were built for trade and not for war. Ships designed for peaceful exchanges served the peoples of the Indian Ocean and adjoining seas well into the last years of the fifteenth century. Only later, with the arrival of well-armed Portuguese fleets after 1498, did it become clear that the dhows could not hold back the expansionist Christian seafarers and warriors.

By the year 1200 c.e., the distribution of different human populations and their social and cultural systems was quite well established across most of the inhabited world. Over the centuries, more highly stratified societies were able to exert control of ever-greater territories and subjects. The stability, prosperity, and endurance of each civilization depended on each society's capacity for technological innovation, waging war, and generating both state revenues and adequate living conditions for their subjects. These needs required some combination of internal commercial networks and trading contacts with other empires and kingdoms and nomadic peoples. There were, of course, important regional differences that determined the fate of both civilizations and areas occupied by different types of migratory peoples. But at the outset a number of cross-cultural themes can be identified that provide cohesion for the more detailed coverage that follows of the often-disparate histories of the states and societies that dominated global history even into the present day. Most of the civilizations that were particularly important in the centuries leading up to and right after 1200 c.e. were in crisis—and some, in fact, were in irrevocable decline. Very often the challenges to these core regions of human development were the result of surges in the migrations and incursions of nomadic herding or hunter-gatherer peoples, such as the Mongols, Bantus, and Aztecs. At times their violent incursions contributed significantly to the fall of existing empires; in other cases dynastic decline opened up fertile regions for plunder or settlement. Despite (or in some instances because of) the disruptions that characterized this era of transitions, contacts and exchanges between different regions expanded and intensified, particularly across Eurasia, but also in the Americas and in sub-Saharan Africa. Cross-cultural trade, nomadic invasions, and the spread of religions can be seen as manifestations of an incipient process of *globalism* in the centuries after 1200 that laid the foundations for full-fledged globalization in the industrial age a half millennium later.

In the centuries prior to 1200 c.e. two imperial dynasties had attained the most extensive territorial control and interregional influence among the centralized states in the vast Eurasian landmass. On the eastern edge the Song Empire in China was the most recent of a long succession of imperial states in the core regions of one of humanity's earliest centers of civilization. The Abbasid Empire that straddled the strategic center where the European and Asian continents converged had been founded earlier but had risen to power as the champion of Islam. Both were epicenters for the diffusion

1000–1200 C.E. General Events	1000–1200 C.E. Specific Events
Ongoing spread of Islam in South Asia	<b>1018</b> Beginning of the Christian reconquest of Iberia
Ghana Empire at height of its power	<b>1019</b> First dynasty of the Kingdom of Rus
Polynesian voyages in the Pacific	<b>1054</b> Schism between Latin and Orthodox churches
Last phase of Bantu migrations in Africa	<b>1050s</b> Block printing invented in China
Beginnings of the decline of the Byzantine Empire	<b>1055</b> Seljuk Turks take over the Abbasid caliphate
Spread of gothic style in Western Europe	<b>1066</b> Normans conquer England
	<b>1096–1099</b> First Christian Crusades in Palestine
	<b>1100</b> Invention of gunpowder in China
	<b>1119</b> Chinese initiate the use of compasses for sea navigation
	<b>1150</b> Fall of Toltec capital at Tula and collapse of their empire
	<b>1185</b> Founding of Kamakura shogunate marks beginning of Warlord Era in Japan

of religious ideologies, technology, modes of bureaucratic organization, commercial exchange, and cultural creativity. Both also faced major challenges from within and from nomadic adversaries beyond their periodically contested boundaries. Though neither survived these external onslaughts, both profoundly shaped the fractious successor empires and kingdoms that built on their achievements and ushered in the early modern era in global history.

## 2.1 China and Central Asia

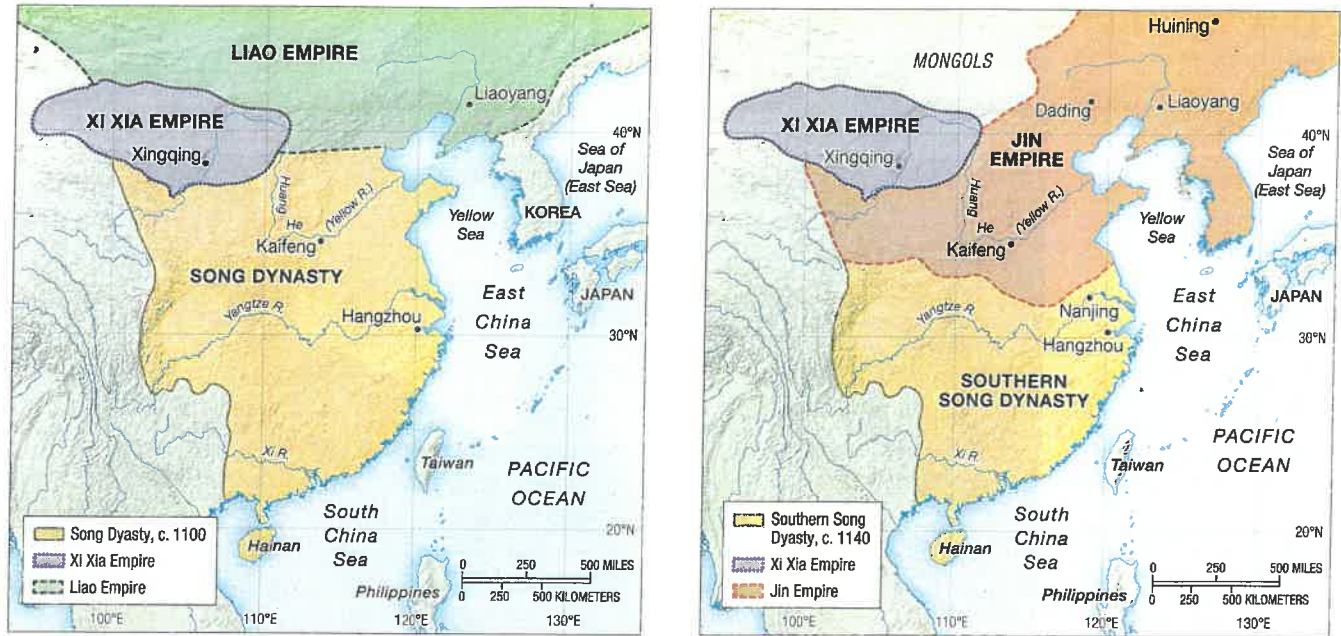
**Why were relations between China and the neighboring regions of Central and Eastern Asia so important around 1200?**

### Song dynasty

Chinese dynasty (960–1279) that witnessed major cultural developments and an expansion of trade and manufacturing.

The **Song dynasty**, and its equally impressive predecessor, the Tang, had both built on the foundations of earlier Chinese kingdoms and empires that over the previous millennium had surpassed all other early civilizations in the range and sophistication of their accomplishments in virtually every major aspect of human endeavor (Map 2.1). The basis of China's success was its core regions' wheat, millet, and wet-rice agriculture, which gave it the capacity to support increasing levels of population growth and a proliferation of cities that remain unrivaled to the present day. China's unparalleled agricultural productivity also made for sufficient surplus to support bureaucracies that excelled in size, complexity, and professional training beyond any that developed in the pre-modern era. Varying numbers of officials—often referred to as *mandarins* but more accurately called *scholar-gentry*—were appointed on the basis of elite family connections. But the great majority before and after 1200 gained their positions and promotions in the administrative hierarchy by passing rigorous civil service exams. Literacy was, of course, an essential prerequisite for success and advancement. But given the difficulty of mastering all of the thousands of ideographic characters (rather than an alphabet) in written Chinese, considerable schooling was essential. This meant that the great majority of government officials, even

Map 2.1 SONG DYNASTY



**China in the Song and Southern Song Dynastic Periods** A comparison of the territory controlled during the two phases of the Song dynasty clearly indicates both the growing power and pressure of nomadic peoples from the north and the weakened state of the Song rulers of China.

at the lowest levels, were drawn from established, well-educated families. In small numbers, peasants or merchants who were patronized by local notables could win positions in the bureaucracy. Both the scholar-gentry's training and its links to the broader populace enhanced the capacity of the government to intervene in the lives of even the widely dispersed village population.

In addition to staffing the imperial bureaucracy, the scholar-gentry were the source of virtually all of China's vast and distinguished philosophical, religious, literary, and artistic accomplishments. Foundational among these were the writings of Confucius, his disciples, and numerous commentators over the millennium before 1200 C.E. Classic Confucian works influenced virtually all aspects of human endeavor and interaction, including the obligations of government officials, day-to-day interactions at all social levels, artistic and artisan production, and age- and male-dominated inter-familial relations. Chinese intellectuals, most famously Xunzi, authored writings on war and the military that guided the empires' commanders through more than two millennia and have become classics worldwide in the modern era. Chinese sages also propagated a second major and more religious philosophical system, Daoism, which stressed individual propriety and celebrated nature in ways that presaged contemporary environmental concerns. Though Buddhism originated in India, the Chinese scholar-gentry had also embraced varied strains of the religion over the millennium before 1200 C.E., and popular strains of the religion had spread extensively among the merchant, artisan, and peasant classes.

Chinese officials also excelled at designing and overseeing the construction of massive irrigation systems, water mills, graceful and enduring bridges, and broad canals and roadways that linked the rapidly expanding imperial domains more effectively than any premodern imperial regime, with the possible exception of the Roman and Inca empires at their height. Drawing on the labor of tens of thousands of artisans and peasants, imperial bureaucrats also directed the building of the Great Wall (Figure 2.2). Straddling

Figure 2.2

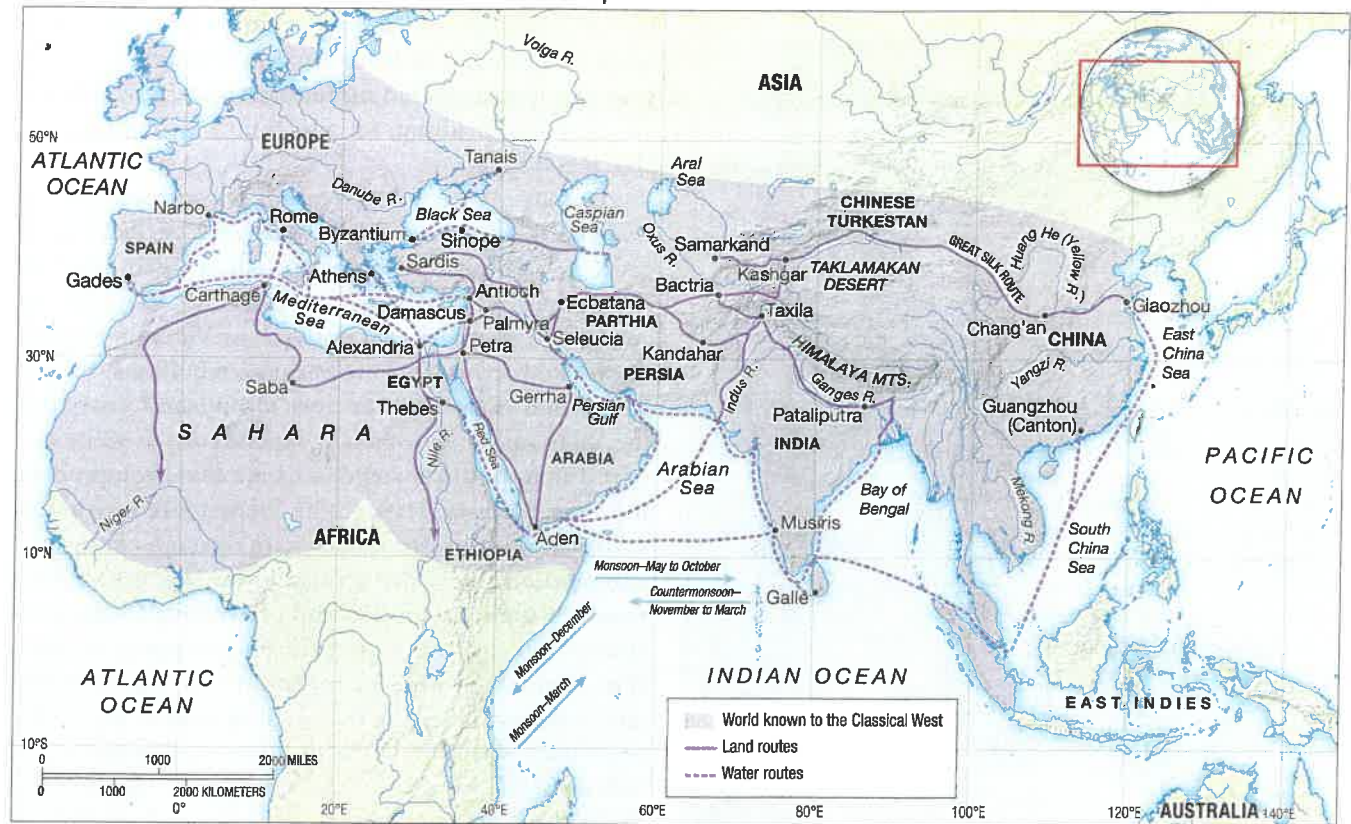


When kept in good repair and supplied with sufficient numbers of soldiers, the high walls and broad battlements of what would become the northern wall were a formidable obstacle for nomads who sought to invade China. The impressive barrier was made by joining and extending several walls that had been built by regional kingdoms in North China and later improved on when they were conquered by the Qin dynasty.

Nancy McKenna/Science Source

mountains and gorges, the wall was not only the largest architectural complex built prior to the Industrial Revolution, but a major source of protection against raids by neighboring nomadic peoples.

Over the two and half millennia before 1200 C.E., the cumulative inventions and discoveries of Chinese engineers and artisans had also secured their homeland's enduring status as one of the wealthiest and the leading technological civilization on earth. Chinese scholar-gentry and artisans (and remarkably, in some cases, ingenious peasants) were the first to devise and mass-produce—among other key inventions—horse collars, wheelbarrows, kites, silk textiles, paper, porcelain, compasses, gunpowder, moveable type for printing, and sternpost rudders for steering ships. Chinese scientists and medical practitioners also contributed acupuncture and the seismograph, charted the planets and stars, and devised a calendar divided into 365.5 days. China's technological advances, large mercantile classes, and extensive market networks, as well as foreign demand for its silk, tea, fine porcelain, and other products, made it one of the key nodes of the far-flung Eurasian commercial networks. These were centered overland on the appropriately designated Silk Road through Central Asia and across the sea-lanes from Japan and mainland Southeast Asia to the myriad islands of the present-day Indonesian archipelago (Map 2.2). China's advanced material culture also meant that it consistently enjoyed a trade surplus with the other centers in the trading networks, most famously with the Roman Empire at its height in the early centuries C.E.

**Map 2.2** TRADE ROUTES AT THE END OF THE CLASSICAL ERA

Despite the heights of civilized achievement that the Chinese had achieved in virtually all fields of human endeavor, by the twelfth century C.E. the Song dynasty was clearly in decline. The ruling classes were enmeshed in struggles for succession that led in turn to the widespread social strife and economic disruptions that had accompanied the decline of Chinese dynasties since ancient times. Although the Song era had been a time of innovation, artistic production, and urban sophistication, its military, which was subordinated to Confucian officials, was no longer able to ward off the incursions of nomadic peoples who threatened China from the north. As early as the mid-eleventh century, **Tangut** tribes had established a small kingdom in the vicinity of the Great Wall. By the middle of the following century the **Jurchens** had built a rival empire across most of North China and Korea that forced the rump Song dynasty to abandon the traditional Chinese core areas along the Yellow River and retreat to the Yangzi basin in the south. By the mid-thirteenth century, even that refuge for the dynasty and Confucian order were imperiled by the invasions and conquests of the Mongols.

### 2.1.1 In China's Shadow: Korea, Vietnam, and Japan

Over the centuries before 1200 C.E., China had influenced in major ways the development of neighboring centers of stratified, complex society (Map 2.3). Chinese armies had periodically occupied portions of Korea, and for several centuries Chinese peasants had settled in the northern regions of the peninsula. Tributary alliances with their powerful neighbors to the north helped to solidify the rule of several Korean

#### Tangut

Rulers of Xi Xia kingdom of Northwest China; one of the regional kingdoms during the period of the southern Song; conquered by Mongols in 1226.

#### Jurchens

[YUHR-chehns] Founders of the Jin kingdom that succeeded the Liao in Northern China; annexed most of the Yellow River basin and forced Song to flee to the south.

**Map 2.3** KEY CENTERS OF CIVILIZATION IN EAST ASIA IN THE FIRST MILLENNIUM C.E.

dynasties that drew upon China for a wide range of imports, from the structure of their bureaucracies and the layout of their palace complexes to an array of technologies and tea. The Koreans also improved on some Chinese inventions, including fine ceramics, in which they excelled, and printing, for which they fashioned moveable metal type.

In a steady push to extend their control of the vast riverine lands to the south that were perfect for rice growing, Chinese conquests pushed slash-and-burn hill peoples into present-day Laos and Thailand, and conquered the northern portions of Vietnam centered on the Red River. Despite periodic rebellions, the Chinese ruled Nam-Viet for over a thousand years until the Vietnamese won their independence in 939 C.E., in part due to political strife in China that brought down the Tang dynasty. Though the Vietnamese resisted full assimilation into Chinese culture through centuries of subjugation, they also gained enduring strength as a result of the transfer of more productive Chinese rice strains and cultivation practices, bureaucratic organization, variants of Buddhism, and military organization and weaponry. Despite their willingness to adopt these and other aspects of Chinese culture and social organization, at the local level the Vietnamese retained their distinct language (and their superb poetic traditions), the stronger position of women in society, and their (often disguised) allegiance to village and regional leaders.

A strong sense of ethnic identity also proved critical to their ability, once free, to expand their independent state to the south at the expense of the Khmers and other Southeast Asian peoples who had built their civilizations heavily on the basis of imports from Indian civilization to the west.

The third major beneficiary of major influences emanating from China was Japan, a country that by 1200 C.E. had emerged as a regional trading and military power in its own right. As has been the case through their entire history, the Japanese borrowed selectively and were wary of imports that might displace key elements of their own distinct culture. Central among these were the **Shinto** religion, the Japanese spoken language (the written script imported from China was simplified, and a distinctive Japanese script soon developed), elaborate notions of polite behavior and ceremonial practices, and a military-dominated social hierarchy. At the same time, the Japanese adopted Confucian legal codes and court ceremonies. Over time the patriarchal Chinese family ideals reduced the influence of Japanese women in both in the household and in the society beyond. But this process took centuries, during which elite women in particular stood out as the central figures in Japanese literature. Though the elite, especially the warrior component, favored the Chan or Zen strains of Buddhism imported from China, they infused them with Shinto's heightened veneration for the natural world, stylistic simplicity, and discipline, which were readily adopted by the warrior elite. In notable instances they also outdid the Chinese in the size and beauty of their temples, as well as forging a distinct literary tradition, which yielded the country's first novels, along with poetry that rivaled that of China and Vietnam.

### Shinto

Religion of early Japanese culture; devotees worshipped numerous gods and spirits associated with the natural world; offers of food and prayers are made to gods and nature spirits.

## 2.2 The Islamic Heartlands

**What were the strengths and weaknesses of the Abbasid caliphate in the Middle East and North Africa?**

Far to the west of China midway across the Eurasian landmass, the Abbasid caliphate had been in decline long before 1200 C.E. In the eighth century, the Abbasid had overthrown the Umayyad dynasty, which had earlier claimed the leadership of the Islamic community following the death of the prophet Muhammad and several of his disciples. Assuming both political and religious authority, the Abbasid caliphs became the ultimate authority for the majority of the Muslim faithful. Within a century the dynasty had built an empire from North Africa to present-day Afghanistan that encompassed many of the major centers of civilization since ancient times, including the Fertile Crescent and Egypt (Map 2.4). From the outset, Abbasid conquests sputtered out in the regions on the edges of their sprawling empire. A refugee prince of Umayyad dynasty established the first of several Muslim kingdoms in the southern regions of the Iberian Peninsula in Europe, and in just under two decades a break-away kingdom was founded in present-day Algeria. Most vexing to Abbasid rulers was their armies' failures to conquer Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire that had emerged in Southeastern Europe and Asia Minor from the ruins of the late Roman Empire.

Despite threats from many sides, including Christian crusaders from Western Europe, and deep divisions among their polyglot subject peoples, the Abbasid caliphs were able to remain at least the nominal rulers of a fractious empire for nearly

### Abbasid

[uh bas id, ab uh sid] Dynasty that succeeded the Umayyads as caliphs within Islam.

**Map 2.4 EMERGENCE OF THE ABBASID DYNASTY**

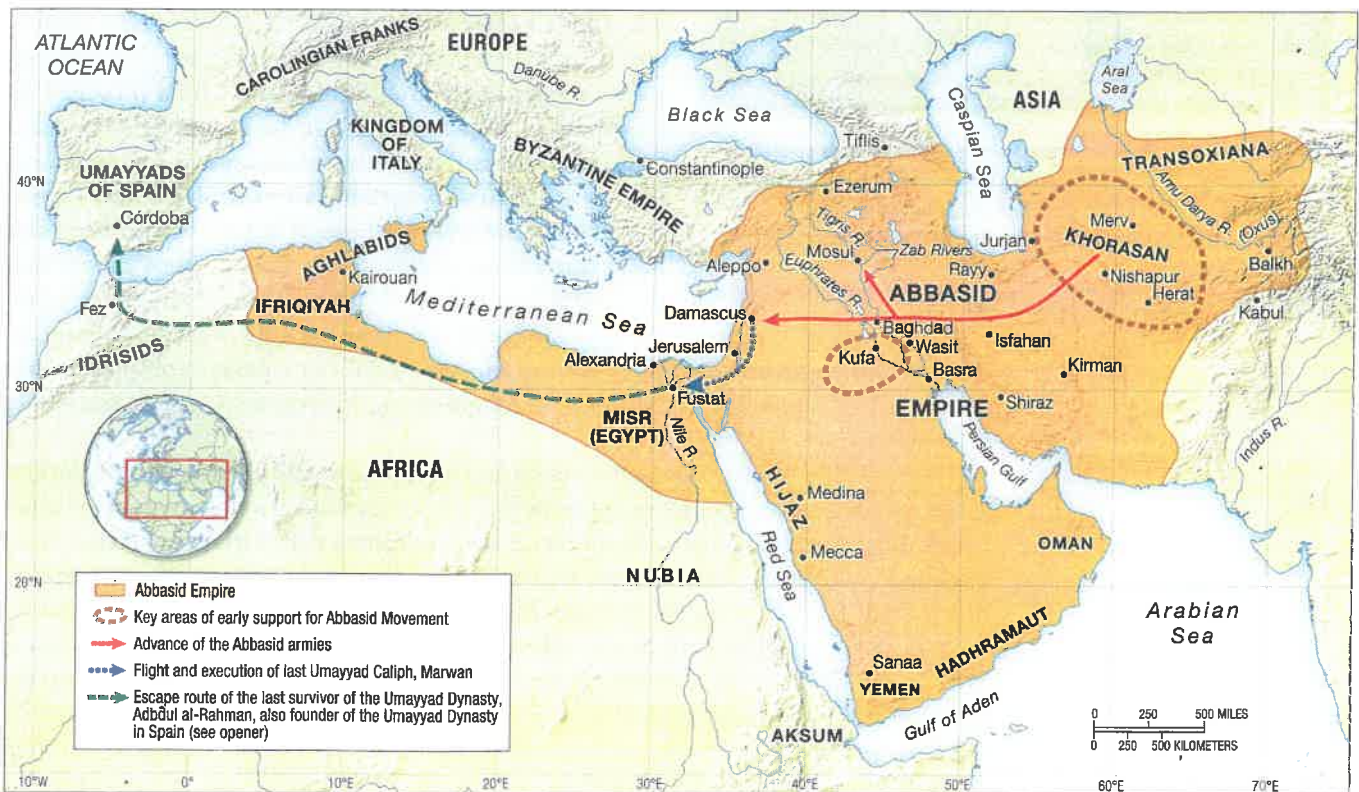


Figure 2.3



This fifteenth-century Persian miniature of a group of Arab scientists testing and working with a wide variety of navigational instruments conveys a strong sense of the premium placed on scientific investigation in the Muslim world in the Abbasid age and in the centuries thereafter.

Sonia Halliday Photo Library/Alamy Stock Photo

five centuries. Ironically, invasions by first Buyid Muslims from Persia—and a century later, Seljuk Turkish converts to Islam—were critical to the prolongation of the dynasty. Divisions within the ruling and majority Muslim community were for the most part held in check, while the “peoples of the book” (the Bible, hence Christians and Jews) were generally tolerated and contributed in major ways to the prosperity and creativity that made for what is widely considered the golden age of Islamic civilization. The Abbasid capital at Baghdad and numerous other urban centers were key destinations of merchants traveling overland across the Silk Roads and Muslim kingdoms beyond the Sahara, as well as seafaring traders from India, China, and Southeast Asia. Arab traders, artisans, and merchants—Muslim, Jewish, and Christian often in collaboration—manufactured and marketed textiles, rugs, and tapestries that were in high demand from Venice to China. Muslim holy men and merchants from various parts of the empire spread the teachings of Muhammad west across Africa, deep into Central Asia, and overseas to India and present-day Malaya and Indonesia.

As was the case in China, flourishing trade and manufacturing provided the resources and impetus for major contributions to global science and mathematics. These included the basic concepts of trigonometry, new objective experiments, methods for classifying and studying all categories of material substances, improvements on astronomical tables, and superior maps that were in great demand in Europe and China (Figure 2.3). Hospitals in Baghdad and Cairo were models for those in urban centers from the Mediterranean to Yangchow. Jewish and Muslim collaboration in Baghdad, Egypt, and above all Arab-ruled Spain led to the recovery and Latin translation of major texts from ancient Greece that proved influential in Christian Europe’s intellectual revival in the centuries on either side of 1200. Muslim arch-

itects and engineers designed soaring mosques, elaborate palace complexes, and fortifications, some of which influenced religious and fortress architecture from Italy to England.

Remarkably, many of the innovations and advances in Middle Eastern culture and society in the Abbasid era came in the period when the political system was slowly disintegrating. Local notables presided over their fiefdoms with little interference from Baghdad; mercenary slave soldiers rioted in the towns, and peasants rose in rebellion in the countryside; sectarian tensions precipitated communal clashes; and nomadic incursions reduced the caliphs to captive puppets of Persian and Turkish overlords. Within two decades of 1200, the incursions of Mongols (nomadic herding peoples) from Central Asia would signal the final stages of the empire’s decline (see Chapter 3). Capturing compliant cities and sacking those that resisted, the Mongols chipped away at the empire’s eastern frontiers, and by 1258 had reached the once-formidable walls of Baghdad. Soon thereafter the invaders captured the city, deposed the caliph, and put an end to the Abbasid dynasty that for centuries had been the center of the Islamic world.

## 2.3 South and Southeast Asia in the Early Centuries of Muslim Expansion

**How did Islam combine with existing regional patterns in South and Southeast Asia by 1200?**

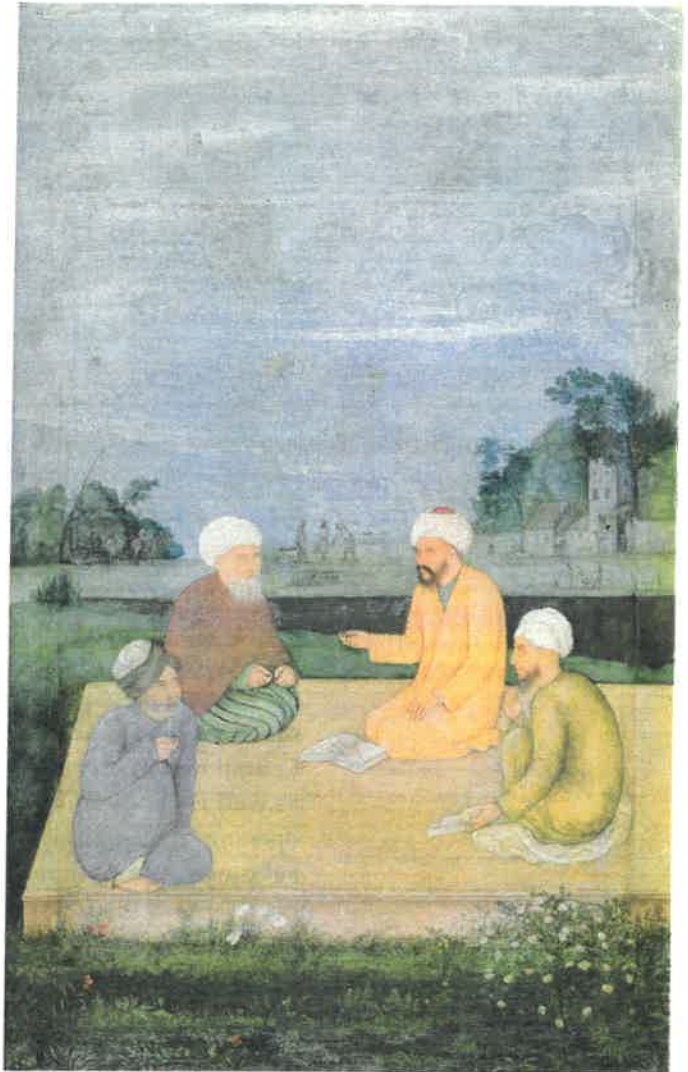
Even before the Abbasid era, and then steadily in the centuries of the caliphate that followed, first warriors and merchants, and later mystics from the Middle East, spread the Islamic faith to the Indian subcontinent in the south and the Maghrib and Sahel regions north of the Sahara in Africa (Map 2.5). Early invasions in the eighth century from what would become the western provinces of the Abbasid dynasty led to the conquest of parts of the Indian subcontinent, mainly the Indus valley in the northwest, where Harappa had formed one of the first centers of civilization (Figure 2.4). The Muslim overlords, who were a small minority in the areas captured, realized that collaboration was essential for control over the advanced level of the societies they encountered in the subcontinent. As they had from the time of the prophet Muhammad with regard to Jewish and Christian communities, the conquerors declared that the adherents of the two foremost Indian religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, were “people of the book.” Consequently, they ruled through the indigenous non-Muslim elites who were willing to cooperate, left the long-established mercantile networks in place, and made few attempts to forcibly convert the peasant majority.

### 2.3.1 South Asia

The early Muslim conquests were not extended until several centuries later. In fact, Muslim rule in Sind (western India) actually retreated until the arrival at the end of the tenth century of the armies of a Turkish slave-dynasty that had emerged in Afghanistan. The failure of India’s rajas and princes to combine in resistance to these renewed incursions opened the way for the Muslim recovery of territories lost in Sind. From their bases in the northwest, the Turkish leaders launched the conquest of the fertile plains along the Ganges River that for millennia had formed the core of many of the powerful Hindu and Buddhist dynasties in the subcontinent. Within decades of the new round of incursions, a Muslim sultanate had been established in Delhi that extended from Sind in the west to Bengal in the east and deep into Central India.

As Islamic control over the Hindu core regions spread and was bolstered by the migration of Muslim merchants, camp followers and peasants, as well as by often quite extensive conversions of Buddhists and low-caste groups, communal frictions increased. Even high-caste Hindus who took positions in the bureaucracy or armies of the Delhi sultanate remained aloof from their overlords, whom many saw as polluting outcasts of an upstart religion. Hindu defensiveness was also exacerbated by the

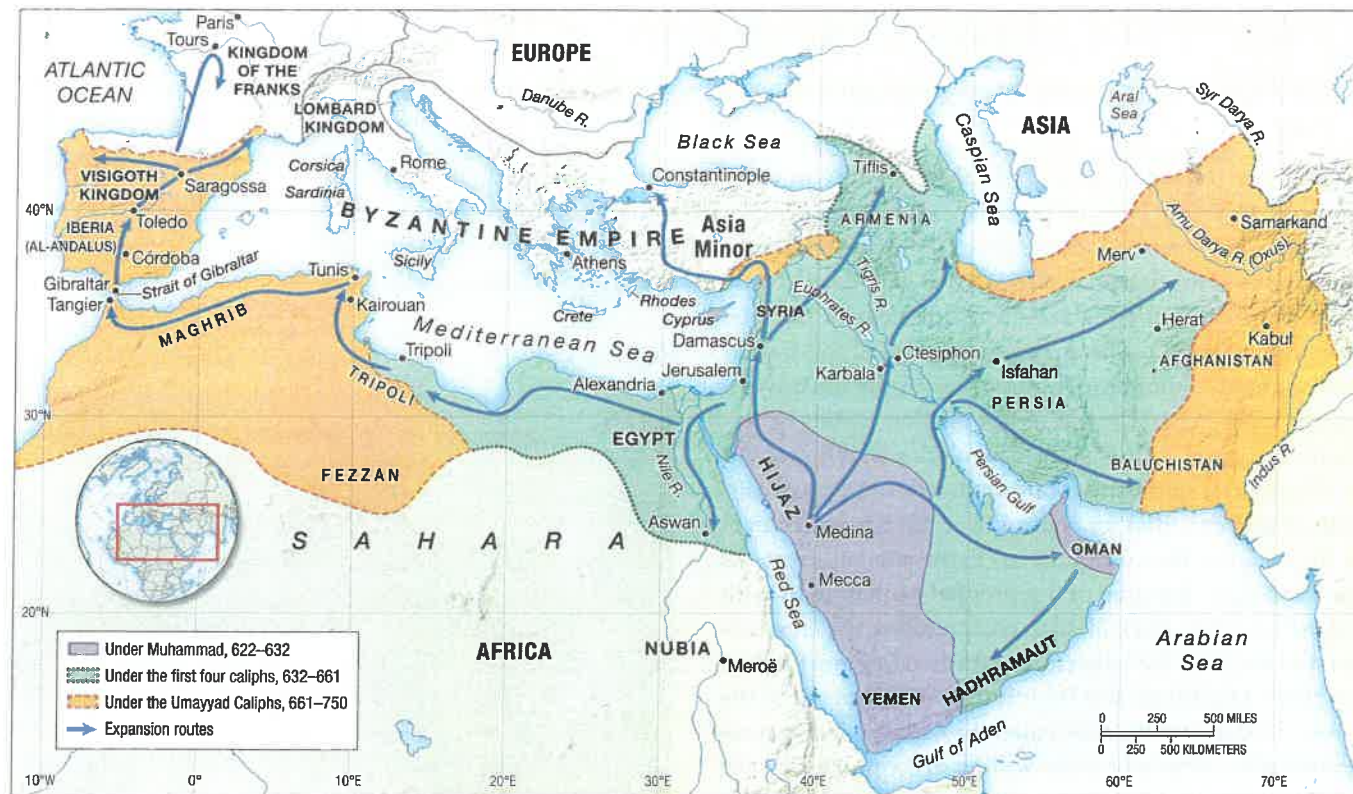
**Figure 2.4**



The subtlety and depth attained by Muslim civilizations in the far-flung regions in which they were found is illustrated by this seventeenth-century watercolor painting titled *A Discourse between Muslim Sages*. The meditative figures, with scholarly books before them, surrounded by grass and trees, display the commitment to learning and the refined aesthetic sense that were cultivated by members of the elite classes throughout the Islamic world.

From the Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, purchased with funds provided by Mr. and Mrs. Allan C. Balch (M.85.2.3)/Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Map 2.5 THE SPREAD OF ISLAM



**The Expansion of Islamic Civilization, 622–750** Whether by land or sea, Islamic civilization expanded by both conquest and trade, while the Muslim faith was spread mainly peacefully along ancient trading routes, often by Sufi holy men.

fact that the followers of the Islamic religion proved a good deal more impervious to gradual absorption into the highly eclectic, far less dogmatic Hindu religion than to earlier sectarian alternatives, including Buddhism.

Despite these predictable tensions, and in some cases communal clashes, Muslim rule brought a unified polity and contributed to more social cohesion in North and Central India. Over time, Muslims adopted Indian practices, such as earlier marriages, as well as foods and styles of dress. Sufi saints and Hindu holy men also provided openings for accommodation between the followers of both religions by adding to the subcontinent's sublime traditions of philosophy, poetry, and sacred music, which were regularly popularized because they were increasingly composed in India's varied regional languages. Abbasid scientists and scholars welcomed their counterparts from Hindu India, who shared their pivotal scientific discoveries—at that point matched only by those of the ancient Greeks—and their advanced mathematics, including their numbering system. The latter, still known as "Arabic numerals," was transferred by the Arabs to the Christian West and in the following centuries became the standard worldwide.

### 2.3.2 Southeast Asia

Muslim political dominance also increased both overland and sea-borne trade between the subcontinent and the Abbasid dynasty. From the early 1200s onward, these mercantile linkages contributed significantly to the spread of the Islamic religion to

Malaya and across the islands of Southeast Asia. By the end of the thirteenth century the relative stability of the Delhi sultanate, along with the mountain barriers that separated the core regions of India from Central Asia, would prove critical in deterring the seemingly invincible Mongol armies from invading India. Unfortunately, after the Mongol threat receded in early decades of the following century, a second wave of nomadic conquests, led by **Timur-i Lang** (or, more popularly, Tamerlane) spread across Central and West Asia, and this time extended to Northern India. In 1398 Timur's forces defeated the ruler of the Delhi sultanate and proceeded to destroy the city and slaughter tens of thousands of its inhabitants. For more than a century after the fall of Delhi, the Indian subcontinent was divided among warring kingdoms that often pitted Hindu against Muslim rulers. It would not be united under a powerful ruler until the arrival of another leader from Central Asia, Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire, who was descended from both Mongol khans and the Turkic conqueror, Timur.

### Timur-i Lang

Also known as Tamerlane; leader of Turkic nomads; beginning in 1360s from base at Samarkand, launched a series of attacks in Persia, the Fertile Crescent, India, and Southern Russia; his empire disintegrated after his death in 1405.

## Thinking Historically

### The Issue of Tolerance

Well before 1200, contacts among different regions and simply the diversity of beliefs within major regions had raised important issues around what, today, would be called tolerance. Classical China, for example, had generated both Confucian philosophy and Daoism. Some Confucianists disliked Daoism because of its otherworldly focus, but since most Daoists professed loyalty to the emperor, the two systems coexisted fairly peacefully. Some individuals, in fact, combined the belief systems. Confucianists ultimately had a greater problem with Buddhism, after a few centuries of coexistence when Buddhism arrived from India. Buddhists seemed unreliable politically, and although they were never eliminated, they ultimately faced considerable hostility from the Chinese state.

Many polytheists proved surprisingly flexible when they encountered different gods and goddesses from another region. Both Greeks and Romans often simply added some additional divinities to their own list—though they could be viciously intolerant of people who did not show proper respects to their own gods. The Roman Empire, usually tolerant, occasionally cracked down on sects that seemed too excitable. Roman rulers also worried about Jews and Christians, who did not seem fully loyal to the state (many Christians, for example, long refused to serve in the Roman army), but persecution was not constant, even before the later emperors directly adopted Christianity.

The rise of missionary religions inevitably complicated the tolerance picture, for each of the religions—including Buddhism—claimed to be the final truth, applicable to all peoples. In fact, however, Buddhists were often fairly flexible,

interacting with other regional religions like Shinto in Japan. Islam, quite intolerant of polytheism, which was seen as an offense to God, normally tolerated Jewish and Christian minorities in the Middle East, simply restricting their religious outreach and imposing an extra tax. Muslim Spain, in fact, became a center for constructive interactions among Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Muslim policies varied somewhat as Islam penetrated India, but normally considerable tolerance was extended to the Hindu majority.

Christianity, once it won state support from the later Roman Empire onward, was typically less flexible. Defense of doctrinal purity seemed particularly important to Christian leaders. In Europe, this led to periodic attacks on Jewish and Muslim minorities and also outright war against deviant versions of Christianity itself—dubbed heresies.

Formal concepts of tolerance had not surfaced widely in any region by 1200. Different patterns of accommodation and conflict resulted. The issues involved would continue to affect world history—and indeed, continue to affect global interactions even today.

### Review Questions:

1. Why did Muslim policy normally differentiate between polytheists and religions such as Christianity and Judaism?
2. Why did the Romans not typically attempt to enforce a single belief system?
3. What principles guided Chinese policy toward different religious groups?

## 2.4 Trade, Empires, and Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa

**Why are the centuries around 1200 viewed as a pivotal time in the history of sub-Saharan Africa?**

Similar to the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia, Muslim traders were pivotal to the introduction of the religion and culture along the east coast of Africa and on the other side of the continent to the Sahel grasslands that stretch across Western Africa between the sparsely populated Sahara to the north and the rainforest regions along the southern coast. The vast distances traversed and the sheer number of regions engaged in the intercontinental trade underscore the degree to which intercultural connections between Africa, the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia had advanced by 1200 C.E. Similar linkages and circulation of goods and peoples along the Silk Roads from East Asia to the Mediterranean, as well as the camel caravan trade across the Sahara from North to West Africa, suggests that, if not yet global, human connectivity had become trans-hemispheric on the Afro-Eurasian half of the planet.

### 2.4.1 East Africa

By 1200 C.E. a string of prosperous Muslim-dominated trading centers had developed down the east coast of Africa, which the Arabs referred to as the **Zenj** region. Most of the commerce of the cities was with ports and merchants sailing down from the nearby Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf, as well as the west and east coasts of India. But by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries goods were also exchanged with regions as distant as Malaya and China. The major products that the coastal cities bought or swapped for imported goods from across maritime Asia included gold, ivory, precious stones, and slaves, which were initially acquired by trading with the Bantu peoples in the interior of East and Central Africa.

The layout and often imposing architecture of the coastal towns, as well as the customs of their Muslim elite and merchant cultures, were strongly influenced by Islamic precedents drawn from various cities in the sprawling Abbasid dynasty. The rulers and city officials drew on Islamic imperial ceremonies and legal codes to enhance their legitimacy, even though the majority population in most of the towns was not Muslim. But all of the towns and their inhabitants shared a common language, Swahili (literally, coastal), which was a mix of Arabic and the most widespread language in sub-Saharan Africa, Bantu. The blending of Arab and African influences was also apparent in coexisting patriarchal and matriarchal familial arrangements, which favored the former for Muslim elites and the latter spread among the Bantu majority of the population.

### 2.4.2 The Maghrib and West Africa

In contrast to the chain of trading towns that had come to define Africa's eastern coast, by 1200 C.E. the western interior on the other side of the continent was dominated by a succession of land empires. But similar to the commercial hubs of the Zenj coast, the principal cities in the Savanna zone in the west were also major market centers. The earliest of the expansive savanna states, Ghana, emerged by the end of the third century C.E. Over several centuries that followed, Ghana came to dominate the long-standing trade across the fabled trans-Saharan routes that were oriented to oases critical to the survival of those daring to travel through the harsh desert environment. Ghana and its rival kingdoms in the savanna zone exchanged gold obtained in the rainforest zone in the south for salt and dates that were main trade items of merchant caravans that crossed the Sahara. Inevitably, commercial contacts made for the introduction into the region of the

#### Zenj

[zehnj] Arabic term for the east African coast.

**Figure 2.5**

The fabled wood and beaten clay walls of Djenné, one of the major Islamic trading towns in Sudanic West Africa

Bert de Ruiter/Alamy Stock Photo

Islamic religion and culture from Egypt, and especially the kingdoms of the **Maghrib**, the mountainous region along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. By the late eighth century, the peoples of the Maghrib had successfully ended the political control of the Abbasid regime.

As had been the case in East Africa, Ghana and its competing kingdoms, as well as the Mali Empire that was built by the leaders of a rival ethnic group and reached the height of its wealth and power in the decades before and after 1200 c.e., were shaped by a blend of Islamic and indigenous African influences. The notion of its rulers as divine, for example, was indigenous; its court rituals and elite religion were Muslim. Mali's "Lion Prince" **Sundiata**, who ruled in the middle decades of the thirteenth century, was made a legendary figure by the songs of court *griots*, or storytellers, and especially by the account of the famous Muslim traveler **Ibn Battuta** of his journeys across most of the Islamic world and beyond. Battuta also had high praise for the security and well-being exhibited by the polyglot peoples of Sundiata's realm, and the skills of its craftsmen, especially the blacksmiths, who were highly valued in sub-Saharan African cultures. As in most Islamic settings soaring architecture was a major preoccupation (Figure 2.5), and mosques were focal structures in urban centers and large towns across the savanna zone.

### 2.4.3 The Coastal Rainforest

In the coastal rainforest belt south of the savanna grasslands, a virulent disease environment, which included malaria and yellow fever, took a heavy toll in terms of human birth and mortality rates and limited the raising of horses and cattle. Nonetheless, in the early centuries c.e. large villages and a number of regional kingdoms eventually spread along the forested region and would ultimately extend into the grasslands and lake country to the east and south. In the same era several expansive states developed in the areas that comprise present-day Nigeria that were ruled by kings who claimed divine authority and maintained elaborate court complexes. The proliferation of settled communities that central control and organized defensive forces encouraged gave added impetus to the spread of agriculture. Farming in most areas was centered on root crops that thrived in the forest environment, and most stages of cultivation were entrusted to women. The introduction of iron plows beginning in the last centuries b.c.e. led to important male roles

#### Maghrib

[MAH-gribb] The Arabic name for Western North Africa.

#### Sundiata

The "Lion Prince"; a member of the Keita clan; created a unified state that became the Mali Empire; died about 1260.

#### griots

[grEE O, grEE ot] Professional oral historians who served as keepers of traditions and advisors to kings within the Mali Empire.

#### Ibn Battuta

(b. 1304) Arab traveler who described African societies and cultures in his travel records.

Figure 2.6



In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Ilé-Ifè artists worked in terra cotta as well as bronze and produced skilled individual portraits like this one.

The John R. Van Derlip Fund/Minneapolis Institute of Art

### Great Zimbabwe

Bantu Confederation of Shona-speaking peoples located between Zambezi and Limpopo rivers; developed after ninth century; featured royal courts built of stone; created centralized state by fifteenth century; king took title of Mwene Mutapa.

in the planting season. Iron also led to the deference and power given to blacksmiths, symbolized by the fact that they had their own god, Ogun, and that oaths were taken on their forges. Village and court blacksmiths, whose trades were customarily inherited by their offspring, forged an array of implements, ranging from plows to spearheads for hunting and war, as well as amulets and other emblems of royal authority.

Over the centuries on either side of 1200 C.E., the blacksmiths and other craftsmen of forest kingdoms made major and enduring contributions to all human artistic creativity. The first kingdom to excel in this regard, Ilé-Ifè, was built by the Yoruba people and thrived for several centuries but had declined by 1200 C.E. The second, Benin, developed by Edo-speakers, emerged as a regional power in the early decades at the turn of the thirteenth century. In both cases, court and local artisans worked in varying mediums from wood and terra cotta to ivory and bronze to sculpt masks and heads of kings and queens or depict warrior defenders (Figure 2.6). In later centuries European explorers admired their skills and collected their masks and sculptures. Beginning with their discovery by Pablo Picasso and his influential circle of artists in Paris at the turn of the twentieth century, these creations profoundly shaped an array of genres of creative expression, particularly painting and sculpture, from the early twentieth century onward.

## 2.4.4 The Great Bantu Migrations

In the centuries when the eastern portions of the rainforest zone were dominated by the Yoruba and Edo peoples, one of the great migrations in human history, which had begun nearly two millennia before 1200 C.E. and was still in progress, was transforming the demography, landscape, and history of Central Africa to the south and west. Tens of millions of Bantu-speaking agriculturists and herders pressed into Central Africa and down the western coastal regions in search of fertile land on which to plant crops and graze cattle. Often moving in sizable groups from clusters of villages or larger regions, the migrant streams either absorbed or triggered additional migrations on the part of the hunter-gatherer and herding peoples who had earlier occupied the grasslands, forests, and lake regions of central Africa. By 1200 C.E., Bantu migrants had settled extensively in what is today the nation of Zimbabwe and established a kingdom that was centered on an imposing walled complex, later dubbed **Great Zimbabwe**. In the following centuries the fortress city was abandoned, and when European explorers “discovered” it in the nineteenth century, they dismissed the possibility that African peoples had built it, surmising that it must have been an Arab settlement.

## 2.5 Europe, East and West

**How did European political structures compare to those of China and the Middle East around 1200?**

The Middle Eastern core of the Abbasid dynasty was flanked to the west by Asia Minor and the Balkans, both areas that had once been the heartlands of the rich and powerful Byzantine Empire (Map 2.6). Both the Abbasids and the Arab Umayyad dynasty before them had launched major military campaigns to bring these regions into the Islamic sphere. But they failed repeatedly in their attempts to capture the fabled capital of the empire at Constantinople. The massive triple walls of the city had repelled all adversaries for centuries, and the warships of the Byzantine fleet that were armed from the early 700s with flame-throwing “Greek fire” had foiled all would-be conquerors. Nonetheless,

**Map 2.6 THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE AND SURROUNDING REGIONS**

Islamic armies, particularly those of the Seljuk Turks, who had gained control of the Abbasid regime in the mid-eleventh century, had secured control over eastern Anatolia and staged periodic sieges of Constantinople.

### 2.5.1 Byzantium

As the location of its capital, Constantinople, which straddled the narrow waterway between Europe and Asia, suggests, the Byzantine Empire was well positioned to serve as a go-between of commercial hubs on all three continents in the Eastern Hemisphere. The competition and often collaboration among the polyglot mix of religions and ethnic backgrounds of the merchants clustered in Constantinople made for a pivotal and wealthy city and a well-funded dynasty. Byzantine traders ably served as intermediaries between Europe and the Islamic world, including the city-states along the coasts of Africa, the emerging state of Russia in the north, and, for high-end luxury goods, even China far to the east. Constantinople and other less prominent Byzantine towns were manufacturing centers for carpets, amphora storage vessels, incense, and textiles—including fine linens and especially exquisite silk fabrics. Urban consumers also relied on surplus artisan and agricultural commodity production within the empire that was supplemented by a steady flow of imports from across the transcontinental trading system.

Byzantium's territories and the trading routes that enriched them were regulated and defended by one of the largest and—in relation to the size of the empire and its population—most complex bureaucracies in human history. This excess of bureaucrats and departments made for a level of factionalism that elevated its intrigue-ridden secrecy, intense plotting, and intra-elite squabbles to legendary status that is reflected today in

**Figure 2.7**

This Roman work, depicting four emperors, was displayed in a public square in Constantinople to emphasize the Byzantine link to the Roman legacy. It was later seized by Venetian raiders and transferred there.

Stefano Politi Markovina/Alamy Stock Photo

the notion of a “byzantine” organizational structure in political or corporate organizations. Imperial succession was frequently contested; court factions vied for favor from emperors and their consorts, as well as courtiers who were in favor with the ruling dynasties. Corruption was rife, often blatant, and over time these political weaknesses played a major role in the decline of the empire, which was virtually bankrupt in the final decades before its demise. Interestingly, though criticism aside from periodic rebellions had to be guarded, the proclivity to intrigue is immortalized in an arresting sculpture from the fourth century C.E. that for centuries was in view in the capital (Figure 2.7). It depicts four tetrarchs or Roman emperors, with swords all too tellingly prominent, sharing secrets they clearly do not want potential rivals to hear.

In the early Christian centuries, the rulers and clergy of the Byzantine Empire acknowledged the primacy of the pope in Rome. In addition, scholars in what was to become the orthodox branch of the faith preserved and shared with their brethren in the Latin west both classical Greek philosophical writings and early Christian texts. Despite these exchanges, from the early centuries C.E. differences between Christians in the east and west multiplied—in ways that increasingly made compromise untenable for both sides. Religious rites and interpretations of scripture diverged steadily, especially after the western branch adopted a Latin Bible while the eastern retained the original Greek language version. Papal injunctions that were intended to loosen the Byzantine state’s control of the church in the east were resented and largely ignored, and the orthodox faction refused to renounce the option of marriage for their clergy in favor of the celibacy that was required of Roman Catholic priests.

Failure to reconcile these and other differences, such as what sort of bread ought to be used in communion services, led in 1054 to a schism in the Christian community between the Latin church centered on Rome and the Orthodox church headed by the Byzantine patriarch. Although

the schism ultimately weakened the empire, for a time it expanded its influence and trading networks. The sale of religious icons, which were central to the artistic creativity of the Orthodox empire, became a major cultural and economic link to Russia, Greece, and the parts of Balkans that opted for the eastern rather than the Latin version of Christianity. Byzantine architecture, famously embodied by the imposing scale of the dome and interior of the Hagia Sophia cathedral in Constantinople, was emulated in church design across Asia Minor, Southeastern Europe, Russia, and even Italy during the centuries the peninsula was part of the empire.

Over time, however, the break with Rome contributed to the decline of Byzantium, due to wars and loss of revenue from breakaway regions, and increasing mercantile competition from former subject cities, particularly Venice. In this regard, the year 1200 C.E. proved pivotal. In part to provide relief for the increasingly beleaguered Christian enclaves in Palestine, Pope Innocent III pressed the monarchs of France, England, and Germany to mount a Fourth Crusade. Seizing an opportunity to weaken their Byzantine trading rival, the Venetians pledged to finance the enterprise by sharing the bribes that

could be forcibly extracted from Constantinople if the crusaders took the land route to Jerusalem. When intimidation failed, the crusading forces sacked the Byzantine capital—looting, burning, and massacring thousands of the inhabitants. Perversely, the treasures from the city's citadel that were carried off included the statute of the tetrarchs that was later placed on a prominent pedestal on the façade of Saint Mark's Cathedral in Venice, which has long been considered one of the most impressive examples of the Byzantine style of architecture.

## 2.5.2 Russia and Eastern Europe

Even as the Byzantine Empire spiraled into decline, it remained a pivotal center for the transmission of political and social complexity and Orthodox Christianity. This proved especially true for Slavic peoples who migrated beginning in the fifth century C.E. from areas that today are parts of the Ukraine and Belarus. Ultimately the deepest and most lasting influence that Byzantium exerted as different Slavic groups settled down was on the regions that eventually became Russia far to the north. The forces that coalesced centuries earlier to give rise to Kievan Rus' dated from the sixth century C.E. Viking merchants from Scandinavia traveled up the rivers flowing into the Baltic Sea to trade for furs, beeswax, and slaves (the term for the latter originating from the designation for ethnic Slavs who were widely marketed in both the Christian and Muslim Mediterranean). Trade also developed with the Byzantine Empire, which along with the proselytization on the part of Christian missionaries gave rise in the ninth century to the founding of what became within a century an ethnically Russian-dominated kingdom centered on the city of Novgorod (Map 2.7). The gradual merging of majority Slavic population and the minority Scandinavians, who had initially dominated the region politically, led in turn to the enforced subjugation of rival Slavic tribes and the nomadic Kharzars, who had harassed Rus and warred with the Byzantines throughout the tenth century.

After the separation between the Latin and Orthodox churches in 1054, Byzantium became the model for the culture and political system of Kievan Rus'. Its most powerful ruler, Vladimir I, compelled his subjects to become Christians in the early eleventh century, and his successors became the protectors of Orthodox branch. These Russian rulers quite deliberately fashioned a greatly simplified Byzantine-style bureaucracy and legal system. The state-supported religious hierarchy of Rus' adopted the church architecture, incense-heavy rituals, and translations of Greek texts and chants copied in the Slavic Cyrillic alphabet. Though pagan practices survived at the popular level, and the Kievan state was somewhat more decentralized, Byzantine culture has persisted in major ways to the present in Russia and Greece as well as Bulgaria and Serbia in the Balkans. Other strains of the early Slavic migrants from what is today southwest Russia, including the Poles and Czechs, chose to adhere to the Roman Catholic Church. In roughly the same centuries that Russia developed, both the Poles and Czechs built kingdoms that rivaled Russia, but both were more politically involved with and culturally connected to Western Europe.

## 2.5.3 Western Europe

As Byzantium struggled to recover from the sack of Constantinople in the centuries after 1200, Western Europe appeared to have at last overcome the chronic instability, violence and destruction, and sociocultural degeneration that the fall of the Roman Empire and a seemingly endless succession of nomadic invasions had wrought in the middle centuries of the preceding millennium. The spread of Christianity provided a semblance of unity in a politically and ethnically fragmented continent. The Catholic religious orders and their monastic retreats served as repositories of classical Greek and Roman learning, which monks and scribes recovered, preserved, and disseminated. As the Cistercians' irrigation works at the Monasterio de Piedra in Spain exemplified, the ingenuity of the monks and

**Map 2.7** NORTHWESTERN RUSSIA, SCANDINAVIA, AND THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

**East European Kingdoms and Slavic Expansion c. 1000** Beginning around the fifth century C.E., the Slavs moved in all directions from their lands around the Pripet River in what is today Ukraine and Belarus. Their migrations took them from the Baltic Sea to the Oder River and down to the Adriatic and Aegean seas. The arrival of the Hungarians in the ninth and tenth centuries prevented the Slavs from unifying. The arrival of the Hungarians complicated the Slavic holdings, tending to separate Russians and Slavs in the Balkans. Still, the various Slavic peoples dominated a vast territory in Eastern Europe.

the artisans who assisted them foreshadowed Europe's eventual preeminence in technological innovation and scientific discovery. Popes and kings also drew on the threat posed by the spread of Islam in Asia Minor and across North Africa to unify Latin Christendom. From the eleventh century until late into the thirteenth century, papal decrees intermittently called for crusades to wrest Jerusalem and coastal Palestine from the Muslims. The pontiffs at Rome also sought to arbitrate disputes among the Christian monarchs, but as often as not they were drawn into the conflicts or found themselves captives of one or another of the adversaries.

The introduction of the stirrup in the sixth and seventh centuries C.E. into Western Europe, thanks to contacts with nomadic invaders from Central Asia who had earlier adopted them from China, transformed both European warfare and social structures. By

1200 c.e. the mainstay of virtually all of the major powers and lesser kingdoms across the continent were heavily armored, mounted knights. Stirrups not only steadied the knights' position in the saddle and freed their arms to wield weapons, but also made their much heavier bulk manageable for horses that were especially bred for size and strength. These changes made armed warriors so vital and expensive to maintain that they became the basic component of the medieval aristocracy, near the top of the social hierarchy extending from kings and clergy to the peasant masses. Militant religious orders, most prominently the Knights Templars, were among the most effective forces engaged in winning back the holy lands from Muslim control. They also established the earliest, and at the time by far the richest, banking system in Western Europe. The predominance of chivalric codes of behavior prescribed for the knighthood, which was initially borrowed from Islamic Iberia, spawned a heavily romanticized troubadour tradition that featured wandering minstrels, idealized women, and European poetry and sagas. Similar to human habitation in the rest of the world, the peoples of Western Europe were overwhelmingly rural and engaged in agriculture. As in other regions with centralized states, European peasants provided the sustenance on which comparatively small ruling elites as well as mercantile, religious, and urban-artisanal classes depended. Peasant populations were stratified in terms of their living standards, which were determined by their ties to the land they cultivated and ranged from relatively well-off freeholders (usually a tiny minority) to bonded serfs (the majority in most regions), seasonal laborers, and slaves (marginal in most locales). The extent to which government functionaries affected them in their daily lives varied widely by kingdom and area, but all peasant communities strove to limit outside contacts beyond essential commercial transactions, and most developed subterfuge strategies to resist tax collectors and state demands for forced labor.

In the centuries leading up to 1200 c.e., Europeans at all social levels increasingly benefitted from an agrarian revolution that resulted from greatly improved cultivation practices that produced steadily higher yields (Figure 2.8). The shift to a **three-field system**, with one field remaining fallow each year, enhanced the fallow field's fertility when planted in the next season. The introduction of steel plows and horse collars made for more efficient and less laborious plowing and richer, better aerated soil. These changes improved the transport of produce and other trade goods, as well as releasing some labor for other pursuits. They also led to incremental improvements in European diets that in the centuries to come would be greatly enhanced by foodstuffs from overseas, including the Americas.

The southern rim of Latin Christendom was in many ways the most advanced. Italian cities, most successfully Genoa and Venice, proved pivotal to Europe's development into one of the world's core regions of trade in the centuries leading up to and after 1200. Contrary to popular notions of total hostility between the Islamic and Christian worlds, commercial connections between them were substantial and lucrative. With the exception of luxury goods, such as fine glassware and textiles from Italy and the Low

### three-field system

System of agricultural cultivation by the ninth century in Western Europe; included one-third in spring grains, one-third fallow.

Figure 2.8



Medieval manuscript illustration with peasants, men and women planting and harvesting, and a castle in the distance

SuperStock/Alamy Stock Photo

Countries (present-day Belgium and the Netherlands), Western Europe provided mainly raw materials, coinage, and slaves in exchange for the finished products of the Byzantine and Islamic urban centers.

European cities paled in size and splendor compared to Constantinople and Baghdad, and especially the proliferation of cities in China. But on the southwestern fringe of Europe, a significantly more urbanized culture had flourished since the Iberian Peninsula's conquest in the initial stages of Islamic expansion in the seventh and eighth centuries. The superb architecture of the Great Mosque of Córdoba and the Alhambra in Granada graced cities where poetry, music, philosophy, and scientific inquiry thrived. Many of these pursuits were collaborative projects shared by Muslim, Christian, and Jewish savants who most famously recovered, translated, and wrote commentaries on many of Aristotle's writings. His writings, which had been lost to Europe since the fall of Rome, became available in Latin translations to Christian thinkers, and would be foundational to the Gothic revival that accelerated at the turn of the thirteenth century. Arabic translations also spread Aristotle's philosophical and scientific contributions across the Islamic world.

By the decades on either side of 1200, Northern European cities, particularly Paris, had begun to flourish in ways that matched those in Italy and Spain. France and Germany formed the core of the regions that contributed to what has been aptly designated a Gothic revival after the ethnicity of one of the migrant peoples who centuries earlier had been part of the influx of Germanic invaders into the crumbling Roman Empire. Paris was the largest and most celebrated of a succession of walled, cathedral-centered cities that also served as the nodes of a more general commercial, artistic, and intellectual revival in Northwest Europe. Its soaring main cathedral, Notre Dame, on which construction began in 1220 and took nearly two centuries to complete, provided a formidable symbol of the emerging political power and cultural predominance of the city and the French state during the reign of long reign of (Saint) Louis IX. The University of Paris, which had been founded several decades earlier, had already become the catalyst of **scholasticism**. **Thomas Aquinas**, the university's famed lecturer, became the focal figure in a cosmopolitan effort to apply ancient Greek learning to illuminate Christian teachings, update philosophical thinking, and develop logical principles on which to interpret the scriptures and understand the natural world. France on the whole flourished during Louis IX's reign. A reformer, Louis made major changes in the system of justice, including banning trials by ordeal and introducing the principle that those accused of crime were innocent until proven guilty. But he was also a man of his age: Louis persecuted those he viewed as heretics and led two crusades, neither of which reached the holy land. He died of dysentery in 1270.

### scholasticism

Dominant medieval philosophical approach; so called because of its base in the schools or universities; based on use of logic to resolve theological problems.

### Thomas Aquinas

[Thomas ah-KWY-nuhs] (1225–1274) Creator of one of the great syntheses of medieval learning; taught at University of Paris; author of several *Summas*; believed that through reason it was possible to know much about natural order, moral law, and the nature of God.

## Visualizing the Past

### What Their Portraits Tell Us: Gatekeeper Elites and the Persistence of Civilizations

Some decades ago, a distinguished historian of pre-modern China called the scholar-gentry elite the gatekeepers of Chinese civilization. In his usage, *gatekeepers* are pivotal elite groups that have emerged in all civilizations and proved critical to their persistence over time. Although they usually shared power with other social groups and often did not rule in their own right, gatekeepers played vital roles in shaping the dominant social values and worldviews of most human

cultures. In everything from the positions they occupied to their manners and fashions in dress, gatekeepers defined the norms and served as role models for much of the rest of society. Some gatekeeper elites, such as the scholar-gentry in China and the brahmins in India, promoted norms and ideals in written treatises on good government or the proper social order. Other gatekeepers, such as the samurai of Japan and the Aztec warriors of Tenochtitlan, embodied these ideals in

their public personas and military enterprises, which at times were immortalized in songs, legends, and epics.

The illustrations shown here provide portraits of people belonging to gatekeeper elites from four of the civilizations we have considered in depth thus far. Because each of these portraits was produced by artists from the same society as the gatekeeper elite depicted here, we can assume that

the portraits capture the values, symbols of legitimacy, and demeanor that these people intended to project to the viewer. Carefully examine each of these portraits, paying special attention to clothing, poses adopted, objects included in the portraits, backgrounds selected, and activities depicted.

Compare each of the portraits to the others, and then answer the questions that follow.



A samurai warrior.

Bettmann/Contributor/Getty Images



Warrior ranks from the Aztec Empire.

The History Collection/Alamy Stock Photo



Bankers and merchants from Western Europe.

Album/Alamy Stock Photo



Chinese scholars enjoying their leisure time.

Gift of Mrs. Sheila Riddell, in memory of Sir Percival David, 1977/The Metropolitan Museum of Art

## Review Questions:

1. What do the dress, poses, and settings of each of these portraits tell you about the values, ideals, and worldviews that each gatekeeper elite group is intended to represent?
2. With which elite groups did they share power?
3. How did they legitimize their power and privileges, and to what degree is this reflected in the portraits?
4. What are comparable gatekeeper elite groups in the contemporary United States?

## 2.6 The Western Hemisphere

**What were the main features of the two principal zones of civilization in the Americas?**

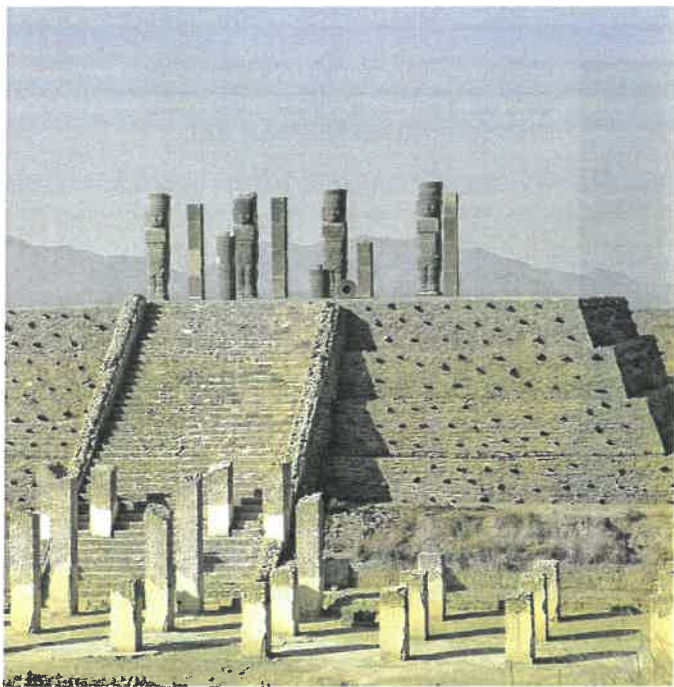
As late as the thirteenth century, two continents with extensive human habitation but separated from Eurasia and Africa by the Atlantic and Pacific oceans were still isolated. The Vikings, who had raided and later traded across the Baltic and North seas and up the rivers of Western Europe and Russia as well as along the Atlantic coast into the Mediterranean, had also traveled back and forth across the far north Atlantic. During the ninth and tenth centuries their highly navigable longboats had reached and established settlements in Iceland and Greenland. At the beginning of the eleventh century they reached Newfoundland, which they dubbed Winland ("windswept land" in Old Norse), on the northernmost shores of what is today North America. Though the small settlement they established is believed to have lasted several centuries, it is unlikely that there were extended contacts with even the hunter-gathering peoples who struggled to survive in the harsh environment.

The long absence of enduring connections between the continents meant that the peoples of the Americas, similar to those in the Pacific Islands, did not share the diseases, crops, inventions, and animal life that by 1200 had circulated widely across the Afro-Eurasian landmass. This meant that though there were important connections between Amerindian civilizations within each of the two continents, particularly among the peoples of areas that today include Central and Southern Mexico, Central America, and Northeastern South America, all of the inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere were extremely vulnerable to sustained incursions from across the Atlantic. But for nearly three more centuries after 1200 C.E., the outlooks and concerns of Amerindian peoples were local and regional, and they were understandably oblivious to the potential for the radical and often very devastating transformations the arrival of Europeans at the end of the fifteenth century would precipitate.

### Toltec

A culture that featured a strongly militaristic ethic, including human sacrifice; influenced large territory after 1000 C.E.; declined after 1200 C.E.

**Figure 2.9**



The archaeological site at Tula, the Toltec capital

A.A.M. Van der Heyden/Independent Picture Service/Alamy Stock Photo

By the thirteenth century, the expansive city-states that had developed sophisticated civilizations in the Americas had fallen or were in decline. As early as the fifth millennium B.C.E. the peoples of the Americas had begun to cultivate maize, beans, cotton, and potatoes, as well as to master craft skills for the production of pottery and textiles that enabled them as early as the second millennium B.C.E. to support substantial populations concentrated in cities that dominated their surrounding regions. Though a number of expansive polities emerged earlier, in the two millennia prior to 1200 C.E., major walled citadels developed as the centers of empires from the mound builders of Cahokia along the Mississippi and the clustered settlements of successive Maya pyramid builders in Central America to the Toltec capital at Tula in the high valley of Mexico, with its monumental pyramids, ball courts, and massive statues of warrior heroes (Figure 2.9). Though the Mayan city-states had declined centuries before, 1200 C.E. was a pivotal year for both Cahokia, which was gradually abandoned for reasons that are not yet known, and especially the Toltec Empire, which disintegrated due to the incursions of nomadic hunters and gatherers who captured and pillaged Tula.

Although it was nearly a century and a half before two new empires appeared in the first half of the

fourteenth century, the cultivating and craft skills that the Indians had mastered in the preceding millennia were preserved and refined by Indian communities across the two continents. The peoples along the great lakes in the center of the Mexican highlands developed sophisticated irrigation systems that included floating islands of aquatic plants and mud, which enabled them to produce an array of foods and non-edible plants for a multitude of uses from thatch for roofs to rope. They built massive stepped pyramids, drawing on those that survived at Tula as well as skills passed on by the descendants of the Toltec Empire. Both these prototypes and crafts contributed in major ways to the impressive design and scale of **Tenochtitlan**, the fabled Aztec capital with a population of well over 100,000 built in the first decades of the fourteenth century. Less than two centuries later the city of canals and bridges dazzled the Spanish Conquistadores before they eventually destroyed it and constructed a European-style metropolis on its ruins.

Far to the south in the mountainous region along the Pacific coast and centered on the present-day nations of Peru and Ecuador, the Quechua-speaking Incas built an empire that was roughly contemporaneous with that of the Aztecs. The equal of the Aztecs in their horticultural prowess, the Incas specialized in root crops, most famously the potato, which in the Spanish era became a major export and eventually a staple food over much of the world. Similar to the Aztecs, the Incas were great builders who were particularly adept at fitting together extremely large stones without cement to build city walls and dwellings. They were also the only Amerindian people to domesticate large mammals, both llamas and alpacas, which were deployed mainly as pack animals to transport goods over the hundreds of miles of roads that linked together their elongated empire. The Incas fashioned metal tools, as well as exquisite jewelry and sculptures of gold and silver. They stressed community identity and cooperation over individualism but also the obligations of the commoners to the ruling classes and emperor. A decade after the capture and destruction of Tenochtitlan, another band of Conquistadores captured the Incan ruler and began the subjugation of his empire.

### Tenochtitlan

[teh-nahk-teet-LAHN] Founded c. 1325 on marshy island in Lake Texcoco; became center of Aztec power; joined with Tlacopan and Texcoco in 1434 to form a triple alliance that controlled most of central plateau of Mesoamerica.

## Global Connections and Central Themes

### Civilizations on the Edge

Despite advances that would persist over the long term, the centuries leading up to 1200 C.E. were deeply troubling for a steadily growing majority of the world's human population that by this time lived in the centralized, stratified societies that we identify as civilizations. Increased trading and political contacts and material exchanges between states, empires, and cultural zones had expanded considerably. Nomadic invasions had declined, and the warfare that was so common in many agricultural societies had abated somewhat. Significant breakthroughs had occurred in the sciences, and there was a resurgence of creativity in the arts, architectural design, and literature. Nonetheless, by the early decades of the thirteenth century, threats to the existing order were apparent across the globe. In the Eastern Hemisphere, the unification of the Mongol nomads that extended to Turkic and other herding ethnic groups across central Asia posed a formidable challenge to sedentary

peoples from China to Central Europe. The decline of long-standing imperial dynasties from the Song in the east to the Abbasid and Byzantine in the west would render the core civilizations of the previous centuries vulnerable to invasion, widespread destruction, and ultimately dissolution beginning in the 1200s and extending well into the next century. In the Americas a similar transformation was underway due to the migration of the Aztecs and other hunter-gatherer peoples into the Central Valley of Mexico where Toltec civilization had recently collapsed. In the early 1300s the spread from Southern China and Central Asia of the Black Death, a particularly virulent strain of the bubonic plague, would ravage civilizations from Western Europe and the Mediterranean to the Middle East and China. These forces would have a major impact in the following centuries on the nature of political systems, intellectual inquiry, technological innovation, and agrarian productivity.