

AP World History/UConn ECE Modern Western Traditions
Summer Assignment

Overview: You will write a two-page response paper in which you evaluate the idea that, before the year 1500, “Asia was the world.”

Sources:

- Gordan, Stewart, *When Asia Was the World*, Da Capo Press, 2007.
- Sterns, Peter, “The Spread of Islam,” *Cultures in Motion*, Yale University Press, 2001.

Expectations: Based on the two articles, address the following four points:

- Why do some historians argue that, before 1500, “Asia was the world”?
- Support your explanation with **multiple** references/quotes from **both** sources.
- Explain how each quote/reference demonstrates that “Asia was the world.”
- Do you think this idea about Asia is accurate or exaggerated? Explain your reasoning.

Format:

- Typed in a Google Doc, then turned in to Google Classroom.
- Two pages, double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins.
- Identify quotes/references from the sources in parentheses (author and page number)

Due: Wednesday, September 15. Late papers will lose points.

Questions: Feel free to contact me (blanker@csdnb.org)

6. The Spread of Islam

from "Cultures in Motion"
by Peter Sterns
Yale University Press, 2001

One of the great cultural contact experiences in world history involved the spread of Islam, from its initial base in the Arabian peninsula and the Middle East to a host of areas in Africa, Asia, and Europe. Islam appealed to people in a variety of societies and cultures, bringing important changes as a result of contact while often in some respects merging with the established local belief systems.

Muslims compelled new cultural contacts from about 700 CE onward as a result of conquests, far-reaching trade, and, increasingly, missionary activity. The geographical dimensions of the Muslim world were pretty well established by 1450 CE—the end of the postclassical period—though a few key later chapters would be written in Africa, southern Asia, and southeastern Europe. Islam's spread was gradual though amazingly rapid given the extensive geography and diverse regions involved.

Two primary patterns were involved. In some cases, Islam spread to other cultures

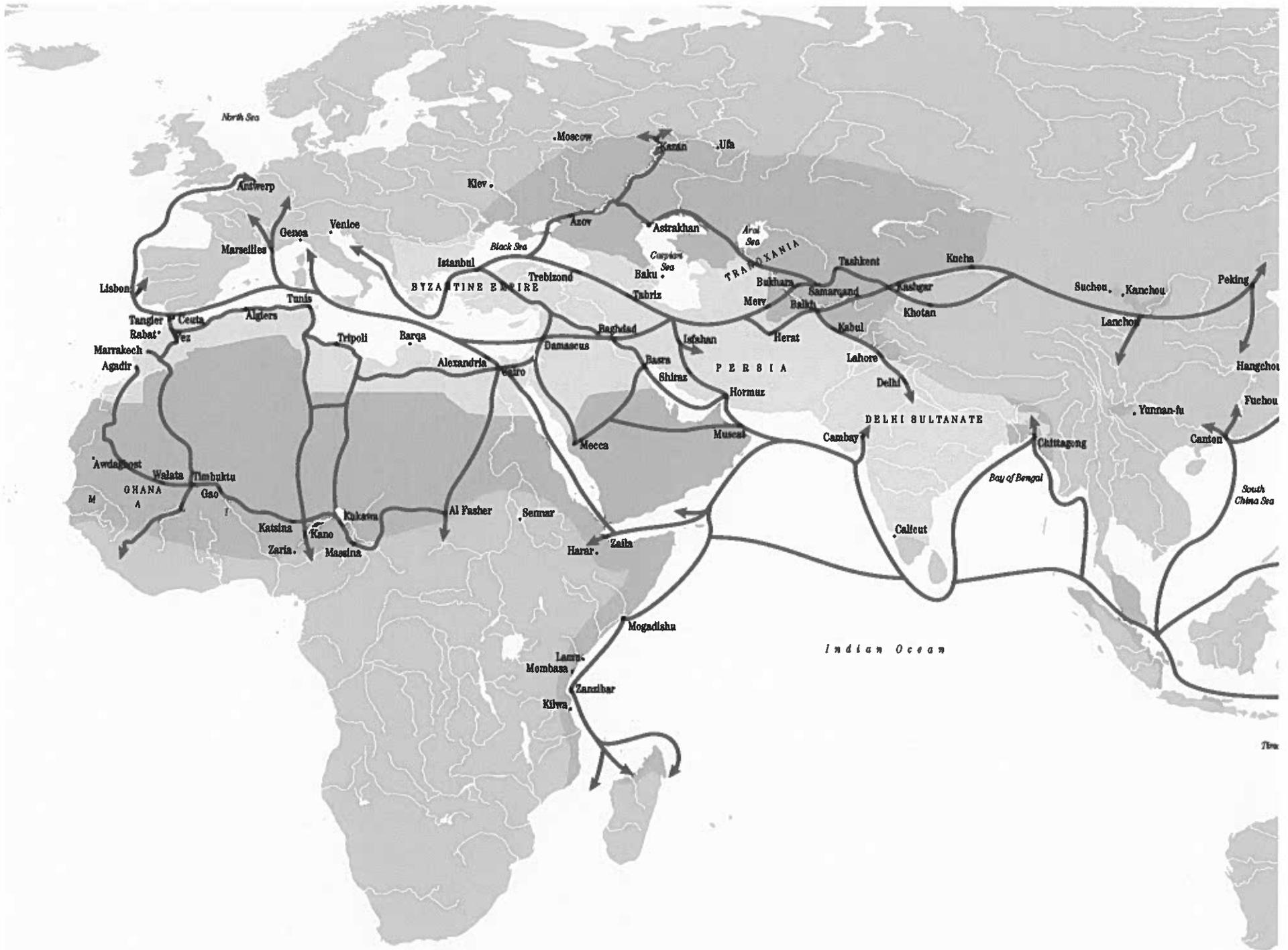
in a context of military conquest, even though the religion was tolerant of other beliefs. Muslims rarely forced people to convert to their religion, often preferring to levy a special tax on minority communities instead. The famous jihad, or holy war described by the prophet Muhammad, was mainly used for defense of the faith, not forced conversion, though there were exceptions. But the success of Muslim armies could create a context in which other people found it prudent to convert, or in which they were attracted to the religion simply because of its manifest power and triumph. In other instances, Islam spread through more spontaneous conversions as people learned of it through trade and missionary activity. The religion was clearly attractive, with an explicit set of beliefs about what to do and what not to do in order to win access to heaven and avoid a lamentable eternity in hell. It appealed to lower-class groups because of its commitment to charity and spiritual equality; it also legitimated merchant activity more than did most belief systems at the time, and so could attract traders. The

Extent of the Islamic World by 1500 CE

 *Lands conquered by Islamic military force*

 *Lands where Islam was spread by Sufi missionaries and traders*

 *Trade routes*



cultural and political achievements of Islam drew people eager to advance their societies in a variety of ways, including religious ones.

Believing that he was divinely inspired, the prophet Muhammad, born in about 570 CE, generated the basic tenets of the newest world religion. The context for Islam involved the surge of Arab peoples, originally a nomadic group on the fringes of Mediterranean civilization that became increasingly active in trade and formulated a well-established culture, including a writing system. The collapse of the Roman Empire had left a welter of small states in the eastern Mediterranean, along with a confusing mixture of religions, including Judaism and Christianity. Muhammad sought to reorganize Arab culture but also to offer a religion that would build on and perfect Jewish and Christian thinking. Islam was a rigorous monotheistic system, offering a clear statement of duties that would help assure salvation. The Qur'an, the holy book that Muhammad composed under the inspiration of Allah, provided detailed regulations for many aspects of life, including family life. Muslim principles urged rulers to defend the religion above all, though their political goals were often unfulfilled; Islam came to depend on a mixture of state support and the activities of scholars and legal philosophers who interpreted doctrine and law on a local basis and administered a system of religious courts.

Islam had begun to spread rapidly among the Arabs by the time of Muhammad's death in 632 CE. This growth helped galvanize Arabs to a surge of conquest, and armies quickly spread through the Middle East, including Persia, though the Byzantine Empire long held out amid reduced Asian territory. North Africa was another early conquest. A loose central government, the caliphate, was established for this West Asian-North African heartland by Muhammad's successors; it lasted until the thirteenth century. Arabs for a time sought to reserve Islam for their people alone, while tolerating local religions; but many people in the conquered regions sought access, some of them adopting Arab language and culture in the process. Conquests by Muslim Arabs gradually turned into a more general spread of Islam in its Middle Eastern-North African heartland and beyond.

The Middle East had long been a center of trade with Asia, Africa, and Europe alike. Arab and Muslim gains spurred further efforts toward achieving additional wealth, which were aided by Islam's approval of merchant activity leavened by charity. Muslim traders spread well beyond the caliphate, and they left new cultural contacts in their wake.

Finally, changes in Islam itself galvanized even more active and extensive spiritual leadership. After about 900 CE a movement

called Sufism took hold. The movement emerged gradually and was fully defined only in about 1200 CE. Sufi leaders worried about the luxury and secular interests of the later caliphs, and also the diverse intellectual life that had developed as Islam interacted with Greek scientific heritage and various literary movements. They wanted a stricter focus on religion and a more intense piety. Interestingly, Sufi leaders, who initially flourished among outlying peoples like the Turks, borrowed some ideas from the Christian monastic movement and from Buddhism. Some Sufi leaders emphasized works of charity, but others offered a highly emotional religion complete with intense rituals. Characteristically, Sufi leaders sought to spread the beliefs of Islam to new regions. Their enthusiasm and the example of their holy devotion helped to persuade many people, as they showed how to bridge the gap between Allah and ordinary mortals.

From its base in the Middle East-North Africa, Islam gained adherents in several parts of southern Europe; in sub-Saharan Africa; in central Asia, including western China; in India; and in southeast Asia. The dates and patterns of growth varied in each case. In explaining how Islam caught on, a crucial variable involves the balance between conquest versus trade and spiritual example. Another division, when Islam spread mainly by persuasion, involves relationships between elites and masses of the

receiving areas. In some cases elites and ruling classes converted first, attracted by the religion but also by its praise for merchants and its political success; elites then disseminated the religion further. In other cases, conversion began among ordinary people, as when Sufi leaders interacted with peasant villages.

Inevitably, as Islam surged into areas of different traditional beliefs and styles, cultural amalgamations occurred. Some areas received the religion fully, including its associated artistic styles, such as the architecture of the mosques and the rich decoration of a religion that tried to forbid representations of people and animals. Other areas, however, accepted the religion but not some of the specifics concerning art or family life. A variety of patterns of syncretism, or cultural blending, occurred. Finally, some areas saw the development of an important Muslim minority along with resistance by the majority culture. Tracing the geography of Islam means exploring these various and important results.

Islam and Europe

The rise of Islam created fear and hatred in Christian Europe, which quickly identified a powerful and indeed long superior rival. European crusades, called in the late eleventh century, sought to win back the

Holy Land from the Muslims, though they were only briefly successful. Hostility to Islam has remained a major theme in European history to the present day. For their part, Muslims often scorned European backwardness and crudeness, and when Europe became more powerful, they often pointedly avoided opportunities for imitation and interaction.

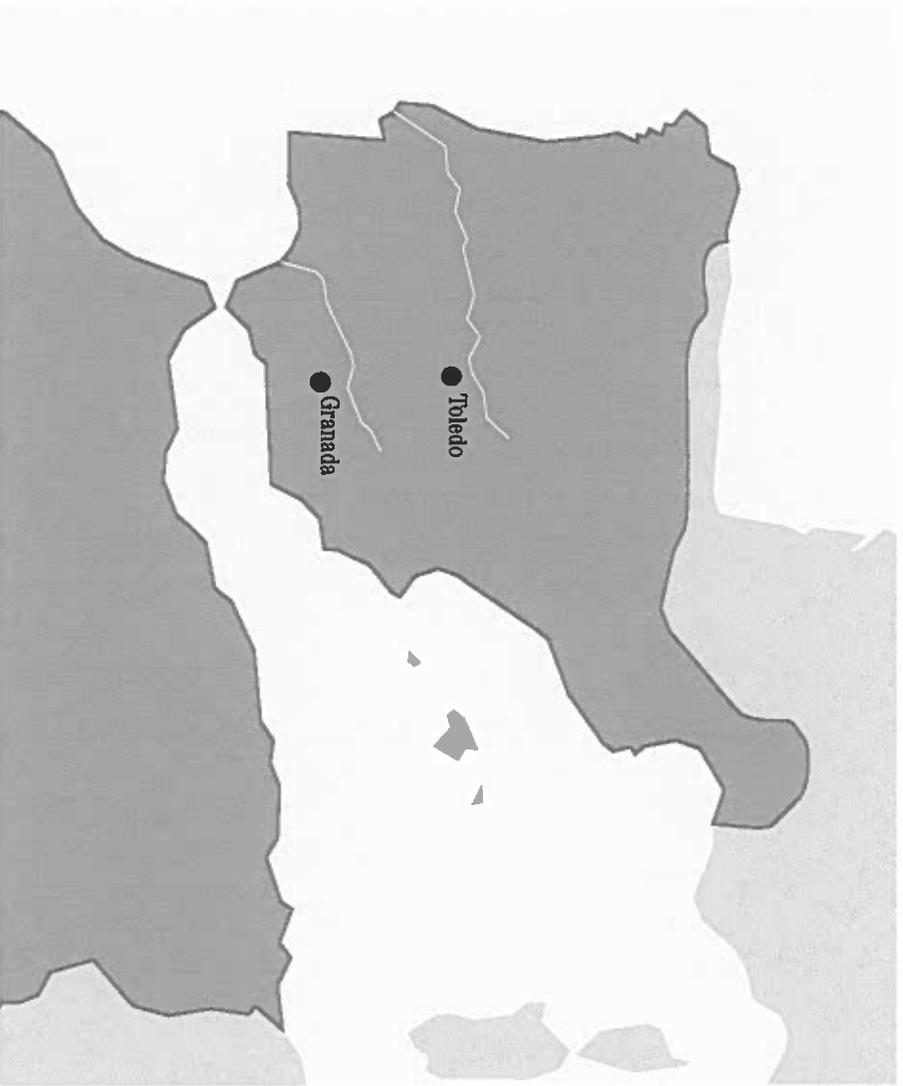
But significant contacts occurred. Muslims made two separate sweeps into Europe, the first of which created an important cultural fusion, vital to European and even American history later on, and the second of which created a durable pocket of Muslims still active today.

The Arab conquests in Spain followed from their rapid sweep through North Africa in the seventh century. Conquests of Spain were complete, save for a Christian remnant in the northeast, by 732 CE. Frankish armies defeated the Muslims in France, blocking further gains; and a brief hold over Sicily and other Italian islands was pushed back by Christian invaders. But the Muslim period in Spain and Portugal had vital consequences. Muslim rulers developed an elaborate political and cultural framework while largely tolerating Christian subjects. A number of Spaniards converted under the influence of conquest and Muslim success. Muslim artistic styles long influenced Spanish architecture and decoration, even

after Islam itself had been pushed out. Music, including the guitar, an Arab instrument, merged traditions as well—and from Spain the new styles would later spread to the Americas. Centers of learning, like Toledo, drew scholars from all over Europe, eager to take advantage of Muslim and Jewish science and philosophy; the result helped spur change and development in European intellectual life.

Amid all this fruitful interaction, Christian warriors from northern Spain mounted a steady counterattack, gradually winning back territory from the tenth century onward. The strength of Christianity and, ironically, limited trade opportunities in backward Europe prevented the spread of Muslim influence, and the retreat was inexcusable, particularly as Arab political consolidation in the Middle East and Africa broke down, leaving the rulers in Spain isolated. In 1492 CE the last remaining pocket, in Granada, was expelled by the forces of the now-united Spanish monarchy of Ferdinand and Isabella.

At this very time, however, the second Muslim entry into Europe was occurring, in the Balkans. Ottoman Turks systematically conquered this region in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and ruled it for several centuries. Their dominance created a significant Muslim minority, though there were few forced conversions. Muslim immigration



Islam in Spain and France (8th century CE)

from the Middle East plus the activities of Sufi preachers brought many voluntary conversions—as did the higher tax on non-Muslims, particularly in Bosnia. By the mid-sixteenth century, Muslims formed about 20 percent of the population. But trade was limited, and commitments to Christianity remained strong. When the Ottoman Empire began to decline in the seventeenth century, gradually losing territory, the conversion process ceased. A large Muslim minority remained, however, amid frequent hostilities with Christian groups that broke out anew in the late twentieth century. Here, as usual, traditional cultures merged with Islam's influence, creating, for example, the distinctive Bulgarian choral and dance styles applied to Christian and folk themes.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Islam reached Africa south of the Sahara in two ways. Important interactions occurred during the postclassical period, though only a minority of Africans converted (except in North Africa, which religiously merged with the Middle East). But the religious contacts were nonetheless important. They set the basis for much more extensive conversions from the late eighteenth century onward, when missionary efforts and religious wars conducted by fervent Muslims began to spread the religion to ordinary people. By

the late twentieth century about 40 percent of all sub-Saharan Africans were Muslim.

Initial contacts in West Africa focused on the Sudanic kingdoms, headed at first by Ghana. These contacts had some distinctive features. Trade with Muslim North Africa developed quickly, across the Sahara Desert, by camel and horseback. The trade was vital to Ghana for tax revenues and supply of horses. The king of Ghana also hired Arab Muslims to keep records, because they had writing and bureaucratic experience. But contacts also facilitated raids by Muslims from the north, often encouraged by local Islamic groups.

The kingdom of Mali, which flourished after Ghana collapsed in about 1200, regularized interactions with Muslims. Rulers like Sundiata more systematically utilized Muslim bureaucrats and converted to Islam as a gesture of goodwill toward the North African trading partners. A king of Mali, Mansa Musa, made a famous pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324, dazzling Arabs with his lavish supply of gold. Mansa Musa also organized a center of Muslim scholarship in the city of Timbuktu, and Muslim architecture spread widely. This remained, however, a compromise contact. There was little effort to convert ordinary people, though Sufi missionaries fanned out in the common pattern, with gradual results; their efforts were lim-

ited by the lack of towns south of the Sudanic kingdoms and by disease. In the Sudanic region itself, kings continued to portray themselves as divine, in the West African tradition, despite the contradictions with Islamic faith. And even among the Muslim elite, customs such as giving a relatively prominent place to women persisted, which profoundly shocked Arab visitors, who were otherwise impressed with the culture and political organization they saw around them. Islamic punishments, such as cutting off the hands of thieves, were also rejected as too brutal.

A second strand of Islam stretched down the East African coast, propelled by Arab traders in the Indian ocean. From Egypt, traders and missionaries worked directly southward, in the nation now known as the Sudan (different from the Sudanic kingdoms); beginning with the elite, widespread conversions occurred. Farther south, Swahili merchants—the word in Arabic means “coasters,” or people who work along the coasts—established a lively commerce between Indian ocean ports and interior villages. In the process they also brought Arabic language and Muslim religion and political ideas. Many traders intermarried with the African elite, as Islam began to provide cultural unity for upper classes all along the coast. Conversions were voluntary, but Islam represented high social status and the

kind of generalized religion useful to far-flung trade—a religion that local African cultures did not provide. Mosques and other literary and artistic expressions of Islam followed the shift in beliefs, and a mixed Arabic-African language, Swahili, emerged as well, ultimately providing a system of writing as well as facilitating oral communication. The intrusion of Portuguese power in this region in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries limited further growth, but when Portugal was expelled shortly before 1700 conversions resumed along the trade routes inland.

Central Asia

Central Asia was a vast territory of largely nomadic, herding peoples. It had produced a number of waves of invaders, from the Indo-Europeans to the Huns and Turks, that had affected a variety of regions. Central Asians had also made use of iron and produced key inventions, such as the stirrup, that in turn affected other societies. Buddhism had won some converts, but the area as a whole had remained remote, untouched by many of the currents of the surrounding civilizations.

Islam was the first outside religion to penetrate the region in a systematic fashion, beginning in the eighth century. Most of the re-

gion is Muslim today, including the republics that recently broke away from the Soviet Union. The spread of Islam in central Asia involved both of the dominant patterns of Muslim contact: force and persuasion. Arab conquest pressed into Iran and Azerbaijan in the seventh century, and further conquests occurred in Transoxania, the most settled part of the region, during the eighth century. But there the conquest stopped, and raids between Arabs and Turks ensued. In the ninth century, Muslim traders and then Sufi missionaries began to move out from scattered towns to the nomadic steppes, spreading Islam among the tribal groups. Turkish migrations from central Asia into the Middle East, beginning in the tenth century, further introduced Turks to Islam.

A final stage occurred during the Mongol invasions of central Asia and the Middle East in the thirteenth century. The Mongols were not Muslim, but their conquests brought new contacts between central Asia and the Middle East that in turn completed the conversion of the territory to Islam. In east central Asia, Muslim traders and Sufis made further contacts and conversions, bringing Islam to parts of present-day China such as East Turkmenistan.

As is common with intercultural contact, Islam did not totally alter the established cultures, which continued distinctive forms

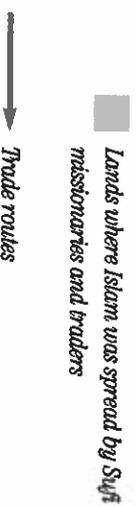
of art and music, a devotion to imaginative horsemanship, and a relatively high status for women. But conversion did bring change. A key question at the end of the twentieth century involves what kind of Islamic future this region, now free again, will decide to establish.

India

When Islam expanded in the Middle East and central Asia, India was dominated by the older religion of Hinduism. The two faiths differed greatly, as Muslims insisted on subjection to a single god and Hindus believed in a host of specific divinities. Rituals and social beliefs also conflicted. Not surprisingly, initial trading contacts and even successful Arab raids on Indian territory had little cultural impact. A few pockets of Muslims developed, but as small minorities. Hindus largely tolerated these groups. Changes in Hinduism, including more emotional rituals and use of popular languages rather than the scholarly Sanskrit, bolstered this religion's position.

As is common when two major cultures encounter each other, influences moved in both directions. Muslims learned about Indian science and mathematics, including the numbering system that passed to the Middle East (where it was later learned by Euro-

Extent of the Islamic World in Southeast Asia by 1500 CE



peans who erroneously called the numerals “Arabic”).

The situation changed in the eleventh century, with wider and more durable Muslim conquests in India (spearheaded by Turkish, not Arab, peoples). Turkish conquerors established a large, loosely organized state, the Delhi sultanate, and attacked many Hindu temples and shrines. The stage was set for wider confrontation and contact. Conversions to Islam were encouraged by the presence of a Muslim ruling class, but devout Sufi also poured in, hoping to convert the infidels and winning followers by personal example and merit. Muslim religious leaders also adapted to the cultural setting, using Hindu stories but with Muslim characters and building shrines on the sites of Hindu temples and thus appropriating existing sacred territory. Islam specifically attracted warriors and also people from the lowest castes, drawn by the promise of spiritual equality rather than the Hindu ideas of successive reincarnations. At the same time, a syncretic movement arose within Hinduism, the bhakti cult, that accepted monotheism and spiritual equality—which helped keep some of the lower castes away from Islam proper. Later, in the sixteenth century, when another Muslim empire formed, other Hindu groups developed a new religion from a mixture of Hindu and Muslim principles, notably the Sikhs, who

kept many Hindu beliefs but added greater militance.

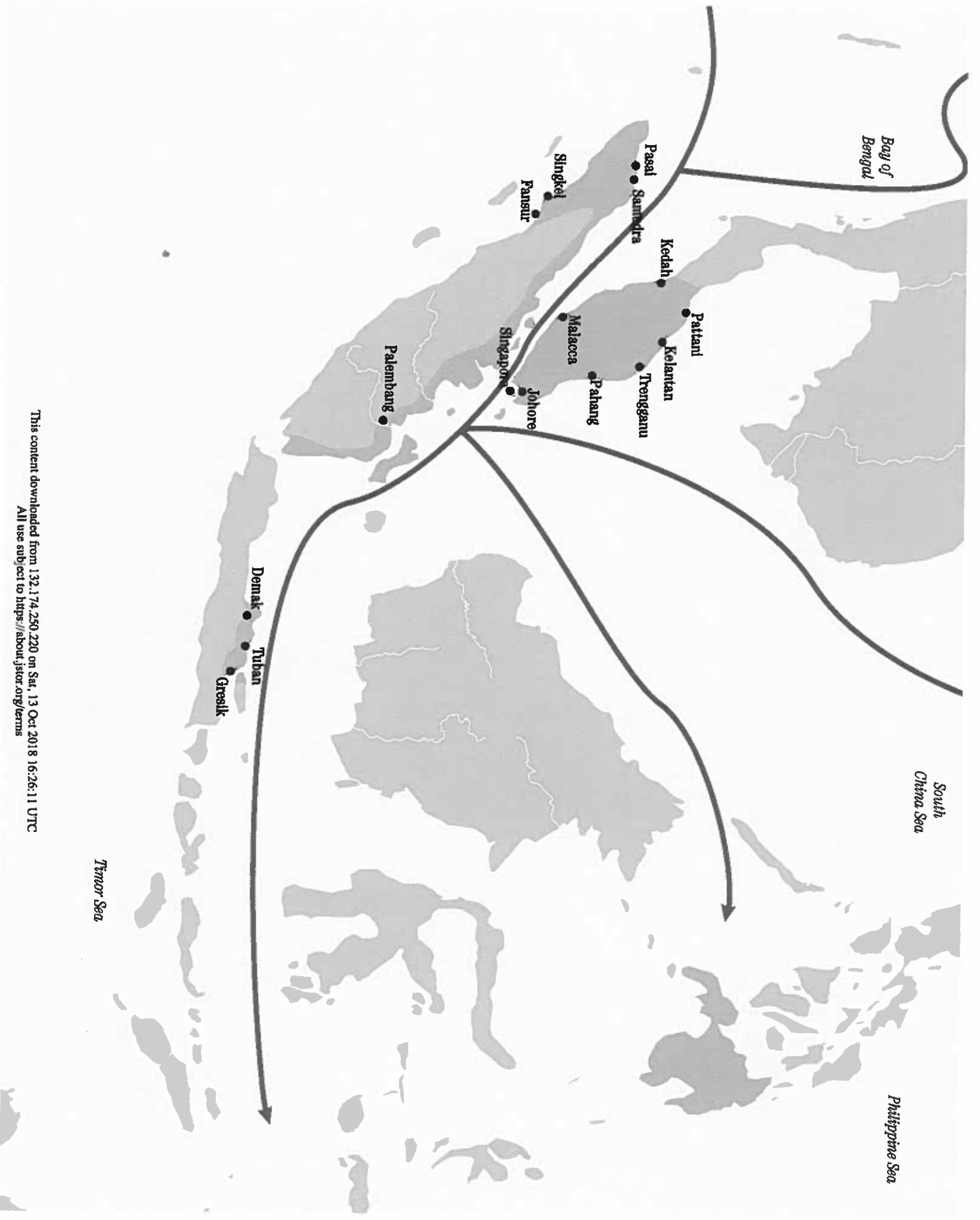
Overall, however, the main impact of Islam on India was the creation of an important religious minority in the northwest—closest to the Islamic heartland—but also in the northeast. Most Indians remained satisfied with their own religious culture, and there was no massive immigration of Muslims from other areas. Suspicion of Hindus by Muslim rulers such as those of the Delhi sultanate—who objected to Hindu sensuality and representations of women, which one Muslim writer claimed showed an “essential foulness” in the religion—actually increased loyalty to Hinduism in opposition. Hindu rebellions against Muslim rule, sometimes led by converts to Islam who then changed their minds, also occurred. The difficult relationship between Hinduism and Islam in India—sometimes exhibiting mutual tolerance, sometimes great hostility—continued into modern times, when it was exploited by British colonial rulers, and into the later twentieth century, when it generated tensions between Muslim Pakistan and predominantly Hindu India.

Southeast Asia

This was the last major region affected by Islam, which was introduced during the late

fourteenth century. Muslim trading ships from Arabia and particularly from India brought both Muslim merchants and Sufis to the Malay peninsula and the islands that now form Indonesia. Merchants established crucial contacts in the coastal towns, where they influenced the ruling classes. By the fifteenth century, most elites in these cities had been converted. From the coastal towns, Sufis traveled inland, setting up schools and preaching in each village. Islam appealed to inland peoples as a way of interacting with the coastal populations, in a period of expanding trade. By the sixteenth century Islam had become a dominant religion in the Indonesian islands, save for pockets of Hinduism and for isolated, polytheistic peoples in remote parts of the interior. It had won powerful influence on the Malay peninsula and in the southern part of the Philippines. Its spread was stopped only by the arrival of European naval and commercial superiority during the sixteenth century. Even so, it was not pushed back; Indonesia is the largest Muslim nation in the world today.

Islam in southeast Asia inevitably merged with regional cultural influences, including popular costumes, dances, and festivals—including brilliant shadow plays and other pre-Islamic staples based on Hindu epics. The Sufis tolerated large remnants of animist, Hindu, and Buddhist beliefs and rituals—



many of which orthodox scholars would have found contrary to Islamic doctrine. Social relations were governed by pre-Islamic law, and religious law was applied to very specific types of exchanges. Women retained a stronger position than in the Islamic Middle East, often participating actively in market activities. Islam added, in sum, to the mixed, creative culture that predominated in southeast Asia.

Suggested Readings

Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (New York, 1988); Francis Robinson, ed., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World* (New York, 1996). On special areas: Rene Braumann, *African Islam* (Washington, D.C., 1983); K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia Before Europe: Economy and Civilization of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (New York, 1990); Avril Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India* (Richmond, Surrey, Eng., 1993); Denis Sinor, ed., *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia* (New York, 1990).

When Asia Was the World

Stewart Gordon

Da Capo Press, 2007

Introduction

In the thousand years from 500 to 1500, Asia was an astonishing, connected, and creative place. It had the five largest cities in the world, all at the heart of great empires. A few, such as Delhi, Beijing, and Istanbul, remain major cities today. Others, such as Vijayanagara in southern India, exist only as ruins. It was in Asia that mathematicians invented zero and algebra. Astronomers there tracked the stars more accurately than ever before and invented the astrolabe for navigation. Poets and writers produced literature that still touches the heart. Philosophers generated systems of thinking and justice that influence us today. These works, as well as translations of Greek and Roman knowledge, formed the core of vast libraries.

Buddhism and Islam arose and spread along Asia's far-flung trade routes. So did luxury goods, such as silk, pearls, spices, medicines, glass, and simple things like rice and sugar. Asia produced money and credit that traders knew and accepted from the Middle East to China, and art that fills museums around the world today. The elegance and complexity of its architecture amazes travelers in our modern world.

The Asian World, 500 – 1500

The Asian world, 500–1500 CE, was a place of great empires and large capital cities. In Southeast Asia were the kingdoms of Srivajaya, Pagan, Angkor, Champa, and Dai Viet. China went through dynastic changes but was strongly linked to the rest of Asia. India had empires as well—the Kushans, the sultanates, and the Mughals based at Delhi; the Cholas and Vijayanagara in the south. The Middle East had the Abbasid caliphate. Central Asia had Genghis Khan's empire, the largest the world has ever known, and it had the empire of Timur. The populations of these realms were in many cases larger than the whole of Western Europe. Asia was a vast world of contrast, from deserts to mountains, from monsoon rain forest to dry plains. It held a bewildering variety of cultures and languages, many local religions and varieties of Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism that spread across wide regions. But it was its networks that made the great Asian world unique. Bureaucrats, scholars, slaves, ideas, religions, and plants moved along its intersecting routes. Family ties stretched across thousands of miles. Traders found markets for products ranging from heavy recycled bronze to the most diaphanous silks.

To clarify this world, here is drawn on a single map the routes of the travelers featured in the various chapters. "Crossing Points" are cities that two or more travelers visited. The routes and networks connected a world that went from China across Central Asia, into India and the Middle East, North Africa, Spain, and portions of sub-Saharan Africa.

Empires and Cities

Asian empires tended to promote linkages and connections to other kingdoms in several ways. Often their own territories crossed "natural" ecological boundaries and brought together regions and societies in unexpected ways. The Kushans, the Afghans, and the Mughals established empires that successfully ruled both sides of the formidable Himalayas. The South Indian Chola kingdom built a navy and conquered the islands of Sri Lanka, Java, and Sumatra, politically tying together India and Southeast Asia. Genghis Khan ruled both the steppe and large areas of agricultural China. Administrative continuities generally promoted trade between ecologically different regions: the trade in horses from the steppe to the plains of India, in rice from south to

north China, in steel from Damascus to Afghanistan. The big states also produced widely used currencies, such as Chinese cash and silver dirhams, and established standards for normalizing local weights and measures. They also frequently organized postal systems for reliable communication. Abraham bin Yiju could send a letter from Mangalore and have it arrive in Cairo in slightly over a month. Ibn Battuta found that his letter of introduction went from the far western border of India to Delhi and back in less than two months.

Although the big capital cities—Delhi, Beijing, Baghdad, Vijayanagara—were impressive (and often many times the size of any European city of the time), the importance of medium-sized cities cannot be overemphasized. These empires, by and large, rose by the expansion of power of a regional family based in a medium-sized city, their regional capital. When empires fell, they generally devolved into regional successor states. The regional capitals usually not only survived, they thrived. Medium-sized cities thus remained long-term sources of demand, learning, and patronage, and in addition, they produced the bureaucrats necessary to run an empire.

Cities, large and small, needed basic food, fabric, fuel, and building materials. The elite of these cities attracted the more sophisticated trade goods of the Asian world. The Chinese urban elite generated an almost insatiable demand for ivory, both African and Southeast Asian, which found its way into religious statues, pens, fans, boxes, and the decoration of furniture. Their demand for the most aromatic incense in the world was filled by incense logs and bushes from Southeast Asia and India. The demand for elegant clothes and beautiful colors in population centers of the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia pushed discovery of and trade in new plant dyes.

The urban centers were also places of specialized manufacture that created trade opportunities and employment for these skills. Cities produced books, artwork, fine fabrics, sophisticated musical instruments, jewelry, and scientific instruments, all of which were in demand throughout the Asian world. Damascus developed steelmaking to such a high art and in such quantity that traders brought its products to all parts of the Asian world. Damascus blades were just as ubiquitous in Indonesia as they were in Babur's Central Asia. China produced prodigious quantities of ceramics that were traded across the Asian world, from the Philippines and Japan to the west coast of Africa.

Courtly and Political Culture

As places of elite culture, these cities and courts had many similarities. Across the great Asian world, kings used broadly similar symbols, including the umbrella, sunshade, fly whisk, drums, horns, and jeweled weapons. Ceremonies, such as honorific robing, were also similar. In the seventh century, a Buddhist king in Central Asia honored the pilgrim Xuanzang with ceremonial robes. Two hundred years later, Ibn Fadlan carried honorific robes from the Abbasid caliph of Baghdad and presented them to Almish on his ill-fated ambassadorial mission. Four centuries later, Ibn Battuta received honorific robes from kings across the Middle East, at Christian Constantinople, and in Muslim sub-Saharan Africa. A century later, Ma Huan recorded the diplomatic presentation of silk honorific robes to kings the Chinese fleet visited. In the sixteenth century in central Asia, Babur received robes from his powerful clan uncle. He later gave robes to his leaders after the victories at Kabul and Delhi. Similarly widespread was the presentation to honored guests of pan—betel nut wrapped in a special leaf, a pleasant substance to chew. The ceremony showed the largesse of the king, the honor demonstrated by the king's preparing it with his own hands, and the deference of public acceptance by the receiver. Kings from the Middle East to South China presented pan or robes, or both, to ambassadors, their own nobles, soldiers, guests, and their own family. The function of both ceremonies was to establish a relationship between the giver and the receiver in the presence of an approving audience.

The large empires also produced courtly cultures that became part of the practice of whole regions and local ethnicities. A Persianized culture, adopted by Afghan and Central Asian

conquerors of India, merged with local practice to become a common elite culture across much of India. The culture of the Chinese court gradually spread to become elite culture throughout Vietnam. A Burman culture spread from the court at the expense of local ethnicities. Across much of Asia, the political culture included common rewards and pleasures of courtly life. There was a common acceptance and understanding of the relationship between earthly pleasure and the pleasure of Paradise. One did not stand against the other. Among the travelers of this book, several were from the courtly class and indulged in the typical courtly pleasures. Babur had gardens built, named them, and enjoyed them immensely. He is quite open about his frequent use of alcohol and hashish, recounting their effects, and extolling the camaraderie of drinking parties. Both Ibn Battuta and Babur had slaves and concubines of both sexes. Fine fabrics were one of life's great pleasures in the Asian world. Both Babur and Ibn Battuta knew their fabrics and could name the origin of any particularly fine piece. Hunting with the king was another of the widely shared courtly pleasures. It was both a ceremony of noble solidarity and practice for war. Hunting figures prominently in Babur's memoir during periods of peace. The Central Asian notion of the king's table spread through the Middle East, Persia, and India. Nobles shared exotic foods and talk; some wrote books of recipes. Music and dance were the common entertainment. The pleasures of the noble life included patronage of intellectuals and artists, who produced books, poetry, painting, and calligraphy. Other common recreations were equally widely shared. Chess, for example, was played from Spain to China. The Persian ambassador to China at the time of Ma Huan was a great chess player and readily found opponents in Beijing.

Buddhism and Islam

The great Asian world benefited from two major universalizing religions: Islam and Buddhism. Both addressed universal human needs and recruited on the basis of relatively simple personal commitment rather than ethnicity, region, language, or gender. Both required long-distance travel in pursuit of knowledge and training and built institutions that promoted and supported such travel. At the height of Buddhism, there was a chain of monasteries, rest houses, and sites of worship stretching across Central Asia, Afghanistan, India, Southeast Asia, China, Japan, and Korea. Islamic patronage eventually developed madrassas and rest houses that stretched from Spain across North Africa, through the Middle East, into both Central Asia and India, and certain cities of Southeast Asia and China. These institutions made it possible for believers to find shelter and worship with others thousands of miles from home. In both religions, building rest houses, establishing markets for traders, and planting trees for shade along roads were acts of religious merit.

Both religions offered legal systems that regulated relations within their communities. Both Sharia law and, to a lesser extent, Buddhist practice created far-flung communities that had the means to accommodate foreigners and settle disputes.

Both Islam and Buddhism provided the institutional framework for extraordinarily wide circulation and discussion of ideas. In the seventh century, Xuanzang debated much the same topics all along his journey from China across Central Asia and into South India. He would have found similar debates and the texts to support them all across Southeast Asia. Seven centuries later, Ibn Sina's books were discussed and criticized from Afghanistan to Spain.

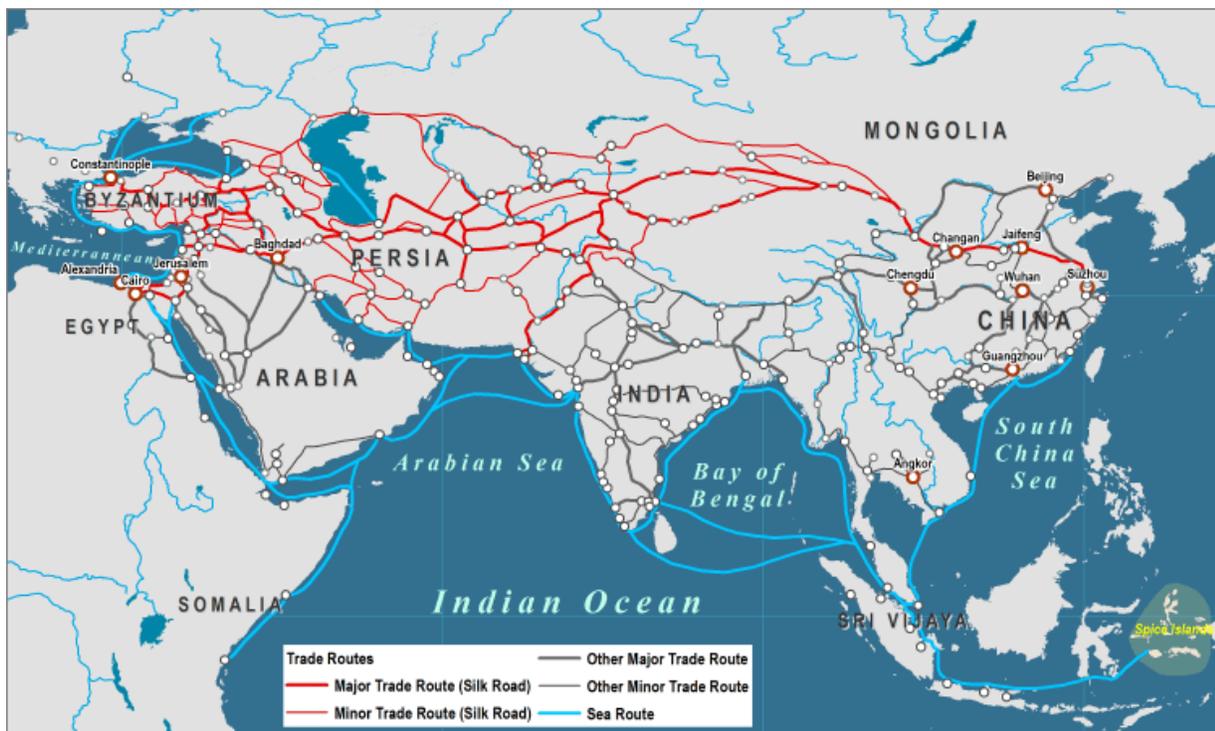
It was important that neither Islam nor Buddhism held the dominant position that Christianity did in Europe. More than Christianity ever did, Islam and Buddhism jostled for converts and competed with more local beliefs, large and small. For example, these two big religions vied with various sects of Brahmanic Hinduism in India, Zoroastrianism in Persia, local fertility and ancestral beliefs in Southeast Asia and Central Asia, and Confucianism and Daoism in China. This rich intellectual mix produced its share of factional wars, religious persecution, periodic

calls for orthodoxy, and the occasional local suppression of one belief system or another. Nevertheless, the competition produced profound and widespread questioning and discussion of the place of man in society and the cosmos. Many of the most innovative answers came at the intersections of various faiths.

Travel and Trade

Supporting institutions and similarities of courts and administrative practice made it relatively easy for men to move long distances in pursuit of position and employment. Ibn Battuta met jurists and religious teachers from Spain, Central Asia, and India, and even a friend of his father's from Morocco when he visited Mecca. Soldiers had equally widespread opportunities for employment. Babur considered disbanding his troops in Central Asia and migrating to find service with relatives in China, part of his complex web of family and friendship ties that stretched across much of the northern half of the Asian world. After the conquest of Delhi, Babur sent money to relatives in Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Traders moved most of all. Far-flung trading communities spread all across Asia: Gujaratis in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, Armenians through Central Asia, Chinese residents in Bengal, Arabs in Guangzhou. Most day-to-day activities, such as marriage, divorce, property ownership, and inheritance, were regulated within communities. Everywhere they settled, Jews operated within Jewish law and practice. Transgression meant ostracism and serious financial consequences. Abraham bin Yiju certainly learned the consequences of marrying a slave prostitute in Mangalore. Islamic traders, from Aden to Canton, operated under Sharia law, which had its own courts, judges, and rules of evidence.



Traders operated for the most part with little interference from their host state, which often set only taxes and terms of trade. These were rarely onerous restrictions, for two reasons. Most kings needed taxes from trade, especially if much of the agricultural land was taken up by nobility. Also, every port and capital had competitors. Aden competed with Hormuz for the trade from India.

Kalikut competed with Cochin, Mangalore, Cannore, and half a dozen other ports for the spice trade of the Malabar Coast. If traders were dissatisfied, they moved individually or as a community to another port. Even the Portuguese could not stop this process. This limited state involvement meant that piracy was a continuing problem along the maritime routes, just as banditry was on the land routes. Certain areas, such as the northern half of the western coast of India, anywhere near Japan, and the Malacca Straits, were pirate havens for centuries.

Overall, there was an extraordinary openness to traders and whatever new goods and ideas they brought. Official Chinese ideology often disapproved of trade and made a virtue of tightly controlled ports and internal traders. This attitude did not stop the demand for ivory and incense, or the export of iron, silk, and ceramics, or an insatiable curiosity about foreign plants, ideas, and medicines. Advice manuals to kings, a common genre across the Asian world, suggested that the ruler take joy in the novel and in news from elsewhere. This advice is from an eleventh-century Persian manual:

“In the same measure that you are informed of affairs in the world generally and the doings of its princes, it is your duty to be acquainted with your own country and the conditions prevailing amongst your people and bodyguard.”

These books of advice to kings celebrated travel. They lauded the role of traders and made it an obligation of kings to welcome and protect them.

Trade mattered. The volume and variety of trade affected much of the population of the great Asian world. Tropical spices and medicines moved north to the plains of India, west into the Middle East, and east into China. These medicinal plants were not “discovered” by doctors in cities, much less by the traders who brought them. These spices and medicines were first discovered by the forest dwellers who experimented with their local profusion of plants. The great Asian world included not just traders and courts but reached deep into the forests of Southeast Asia, the hills above the Malabar Coast, and the pearl beds of Sri Lanka.

Trade served the spread of the universalizing religions. Ritual objects and books of both Buddhism and Islam came from specialized centers and moved along both water routes and caravan routes to Tibet, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and China.

Trade in the great Asian world included the exotic, the prosaic, and everything in between. At one extreme, a giraffe was somehow transported from Africa to the imperial court of China. At the other extreme, fish paste produced on the coast of Thailand and ordinary Chinese iron cooking pots were regular, profitable items traded to the islands of Southeast Asia. Rice, the most prosaic of foods in India, China, and Southeast Asia, became a high-status food across the steppe world. Every ship and every caravan carried a range of goods from the precious to the mundane.

Perhaps the most telling point in considering the importance and regularity of trade is that all across the Asian world, various peoples defined who they were with objects of trade as much as products of indigenous manufacture. The steppe was the perfect environment to raise horses, sheep, and cattle. As Babur observed, this natural advantage resulted in a trade of tens of thousands of horses each year to India, where horses did not breed well. For the nobility of India, the horse was a crucial symbol defining status. With the proceeds from the sale of horses, steppe people bought iron for horse trappings, elegant cloth for courtly robes, and steel for weapons, which in turn became defining features of their culture.

Innovation

There was a restless, even relentless, spirit of innovation common throughout the great Asian world. In politics, states experimented with bureaucracies and taxes. They developed currencies and defined new legal status for conquered peoples. From the Middle East to China, they produced advice manuals for kings. Kings eagerly awaited the return of ambassadorial missions so

they could consider the latest ceremonies of loyalty or innovations in military organization. States undertook major economic development projects, such as the irrigation of land for growing rice and road building that connected regions.

In warfare, kings from Egypt to China well understood the limits of armies based on ethnic or regional loyalty. They successfully experimented with slave armies, armies based on religion, and prisoners as soldiers. Genghis Khan broke up clan-based service and formed new mixed units with men from a variety of clans.

In science, until at least 1300 CE, the Middle East, India, and China were the major centers of innovation. Hundreds of new tropical plants arrived at courts. Some entered pharmacopoeias, where they were described and often drawn by medical writers such as Ibn Sina. Other new plants graced the royal table. Kings and nobles would often attempt to grow new varieties in their gardens. Babur boasted in his memoirs that he was the first to grow the Indian orange in Kabul. Whole new medical techniques were discovered, such as the development of inoculation in China.

In mathematics and astronomy, developments were extraordinary. Out of India came a commonly used numeric system. From India and the Middle East came algebra, a variety of geometries, including solutions to conic sections, and even a primitive form of calculus. Astronomical observatories were features of many courts.

In trade, the millennium was equally innovative. Traders not only brought promising plants to new environments but financed attempts at cultivation. Jewish traders brought sugarcane from India and began plantations along the Nile. Mango and pepper cultivation spread from India to Indonesia, where these plants became cash crops. Entrepreneurs first opened new markets, then made cheap local copies of expensive import items, such as Gujarati printed cotton cloth, Baghdad tiles, caliphate silver currency, Chinese ceramics, Damascus blades, and Chinese silk.

Self-Reflection

The Asian world noticed and commented on itself—a self-consciousness not yet typical of Europe. Especially in China and the Middle East, there was a flowering of biography and autobiography. In India, there were literally thousands of books written on how life was lived and how it should morally be lived. Poets reflected on the sorrows of love and the fleeting nature of beauty. Artists pictured their world and paid particular attention to the exotic. The giraffe brought to China is known both from descriptions and a painting. Histories and geographies abounded. The great Asian world was robust enough to survive most day-to-day or even century-to-century changes and disruptions. When Baghdad declined as a great city, trade shifted to the successor capitals: Rey, Balkh, Bukhara, and Ghazni. When Arab traders became Muslim, they built mosques along the trade routes and practiced their new religion. Different groups rose and fell as the dominant traders: Jews, Armenians, Gujaratis, Malays, Yemenis, Tamils, Arabs, and Chinese. Considering the millennium as a whole, there was more integration, more movement of knowledge and talented men, and more innovation at the end of the period than at the beginning.