

PART

Retrospective

I From Hunting and Gathering to Civilizations, 2.5 million–1000 B.C.E.: Origins

Contacts and Their Limits

No regular pattern of contacts among the major population centers developed during the long early phases of human history. Even at the end of the period of the river valley civilizations, no such pattern existed. To be sure, separate developments did not prevent many similar features. In broad outline, early civilizations developed many of the same functions, as they introduced formal governments, writing systems, and significant cities. Agriculture generated similar tendencies to establish patriarchal family structures, but these similarities occurred spontaneously, the result of similar needs, not because they learned extensively from one another. And of course the specifics varied considerably—the system of government and the gender relations in Egypt, for example, differed from those in Mesopotamia.

Three kinds of contacts did exist during the early phases of human history. Their results were significant, though they were somewhat sporadic. First, local or long-distance trade could bring knowledge of new developments or products. People in one region could learn about innovations in the region next door. Local exchanges of products or symbolic gifts—the latter designed to help keep the peace—served as conduits. Through this kind of interaction, diffusion occurred. This was the mechanism through which knowledge of agriculture gradually spread from the areas where it was first developed to neighboring regions, and ultimately over whole subcontinents. Knowledge of new technologies, like metalwork, spread the same way. So did knowledge

of new foodstuffs: some crops original to southeast Asia, for example, reached Africa by 1000 C.E. and became staples.

This kind of diffusion was the most important contact in early human history. We do not always know the precise processes involved. For example, an Indian Ocean trade system existed by 1000 C.E., involving timber and perfumes; this led to a southeast Asian migration to the island of Madagascar. But we know almost nothing about the specifics of the system. It is also true that some trade contacts, like the Phoenician voyages to southern England to get tin, did not seem to produce wider diffusion of products or technologies.

A second kind of contact resulted from migration and invasion. We have seen that this combination occurred frequently in the Middle East, leading to changes in language but also the spread of new technologies. The wheel was almost certainly invented in central Asia, then brought by a migrant group to the Middle East. Migrations and invasions could be extremely disruptive, as when the Indo-Europeans moved into India, doing great violence to local populations. But they could also bring new knowledge to immigrants and local populations alike.

A third kind of contact involved direct trade, diplomatic relations, and military activity between two major early civilization centers. While Mesopotamia and Egypt developed separately for the most part, there were periods of invasion from one direction or another, some trade, and some cultural exchange. Tablets have been found, for example, whose text was written in

both cuneiform and hieroglyphics, showing a need for direct translations. Egyptians and Mesopotamians both interacted with parts of Greece, including the island of Crete, which was therefore able to borrow from both societies. Some trade (though no military contact) probably occurred between Mesopotamia and the Indus valley. Early civilizations in China and the Americas were more fully isolated.

Contacts brought fundamental changes to the people involved, even in these early periods. Diffusion, particularly, was responsible for basic shifts in economic and therefore social systems. Most contact was sporadic, however, and did not lead to elaborate exchanges of religious or scientific ideas or political institutions. Here, the emphasis on separate patterns of development remains valid. ■

PART

II

Retrospective

The Classical Period, 1000 B.C.E.–500 C.E.: Uniting Large Regions

Contacts and Their Limits

In contrast to the early river valley civilizations, which had no regular interregional exchange system (save possibly in the Indian Ocean), reasonably systematic contacts developed during the classical period linking China to India, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean. Some goods were shipped along sea routes in the Indian Ocean, reaching as far as Egypt via the Red Sea. Important overland routes—the routes historians have labeled collectively as the Silk Road—brought goods from western China through central Asia to the Middle East and Mediterranean. Important systems connected south Indian merchants and some Hindu and Buddhist missionaries to various parts of southeast Asia. Ethiopians in northeastern Africa traded actively with both the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

In 70 C.E. in southern Italy, Mount Vesuvius erupted, burying neighboring Roman cities, including Pompeii. Almost 2000 years later archaeologists, excavating the ruins of Pompeii, found an ivory carving of a woman made at Taxila in what is now northwestern Pakistan. This find confirmed the importance of trade links between Rome and south Asia. Taxila had been part of the Hellenistic orbit established by Alexander the Great, and exchanges with the Mediterranean continued thereafter. Roman merchants visited India directly, seeking trading opportunities. Taxila was also a major center along the Silk Road, serving as a link not only to the Mediterranean but also to east and southeast Asia. The activity along trade routes gave many elites an active taste for goods, like silk, produced in distant places.

Besides the trade routes, two major episodes occurred that involved direct contact between different civilizations. Alexander the Great's conquests brought Greek culture into interaction with those of Persia and India, as well as with Egypt. We have seen that Indian artists imitated Greek styles in their own work. Greeks and Indians both gained new mathematical knowledge (though it is intriguing that the Greeks did not adopt Indian numbering which, later transmitted to Europe by the Arabs, proved much superior to Greek and Roman numbering systems). Indian missionaries to the Middle East, though failing to establish Buddhism, may have influenced ethical thought in the later Roman Empire and, through this, Christianity.

Interest in Asian goods also motivated Rome, though with less wide-ranging results. Once they controlled Egypt, the Romans established regular Indian Ocean expeditions from the Red Sea. A desire for more direct access to Indian spices and Chinese silks also helped motivate frequent wars with empires in Persia, though the Romans often fared badly and were unable to break through to the sources of the goods they valued. China, for its part, had established regular diplomatic relations with empires in Persia, largely to further direct trade. None of these interesting interactions, however, seems to have had significant results in terms of institutional or cultural exchange.

The second major contact, toward the end of the classical period, involved China's fascination with Indian Buddhism. Chinese knowledge of Buddhism initially spread as a result of Chi-

nese merchant ventures into India; later, religious students were sent directly. This was the only major case of successful outside influence on Chinese culture until very recent times.

These developments were exceedingly important. They also had serious limits. Interregional trade was certainly vital to some of the trading hubs in central Asia, such as Samarkand, but it had relatively little economic importance to societies like China. It was nothing compared to the growth of production in China's internal trade. There is no uncontested evidence that anyone traveled all the way from Rome to China, and Roman knowledge of China (as well as Chinese knowledge of Rome) was extremely hazy. There was trade, but no interaction between Chinese and Roman culture or technology. The two cases of direct exchange between civilizations described above are fascinating but they also stand out as unusual. And the lasting effects of the Hellenistic experience in northwestern India are questionable. Even in art, after


about two centuries, this influence seems to have disappeared, and stylistic differences once again became apparent.

So, while contacts advanced significantly in this period, the primary framework for the major societies remained internal. The classical civilizations developed largely separately. The most important kinds of contacts occurred *within* the civilizations, not among them: the careful, sometimes tense mixing of the northern Chinese with the people of the newer territories in the south; the partial extension of Greek culture to the western Mediterranean and portions of the Middle East and north Africa; the spread of Hinduism and the caste system southward on the Indian subcontinent. These contacts were vital to the formation of larger civilizational areas, which was a fundamental feature of the classical period. Clearly, far more energy went into this process than into interregional linkages at this stage in world history. ■

PART

III

The Postclassical Period, 500–1450: New Faith and New Commerce

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- Chapter 6 The First Global Civilization: The Rise and Spread of Islam
 - Chapter 7 Abbasid Decline and the Spread of Islamic Civilization to South and Southeast Asia
 - Chapter 8 African Civilizations and the Spread of Islam
 - Chapter 9 Civilization in Eastern Europe: Byzantium and Orthodox Europe
 - Chapter 10 A New Civilization Emerges in Western Europe
 - Chapter 11 The Americas on the Eve of Invasion
 - Chapter 12 Reunification and Renaissance in Chinese Civilization: The Era of the Tang and Song Dynasties
 - Chapter 13 The Spread of Chinese Civilization: Japan, Korea, and Vietnam
 - Chapter 14 The Last Great Nomadic Challenges: From Chinggis Khan to Timur
 - Chapter 15 The West and the Changing World Balance



THE OVERVIEW: THE WORLD MAP CHANGES

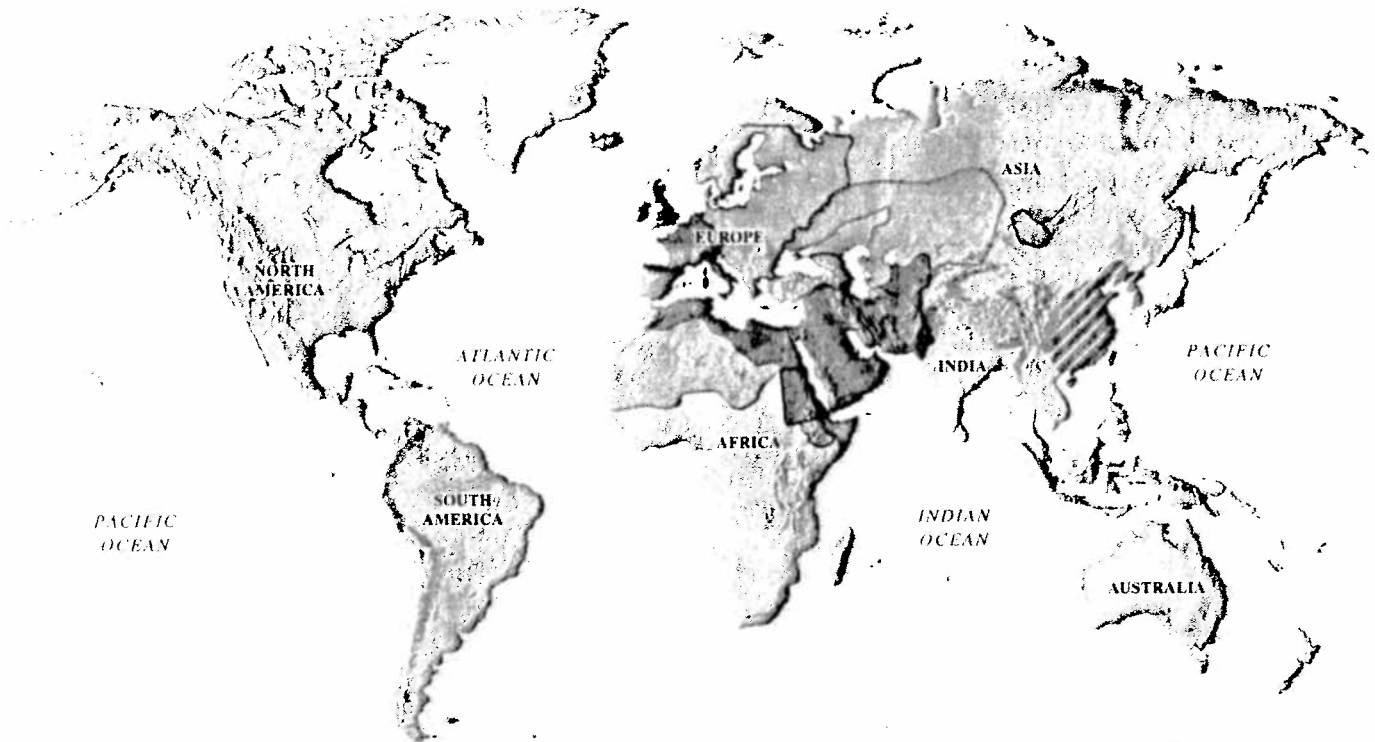
The big changes in the period 500–1450 did not involve political boundaries. They involved the spread of the major world religions—Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam—across political and cultural borders and the development of new, more regular systems of trade that connected much of Asia, Africa, and Europe.

In some ways, an age characterized by faith and trade may seem contradictory. Indeed, many religious leaders looked down on merchants as likely to be seduced from a life of piety by the lure of wealth. But in fact the spread of trade often helped disseminate religion, and confidence in a divine order helped merchants to take risks.

The maps included here show the surge of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam from their initial centers and the expansion of Afro-Eurasian trade around the

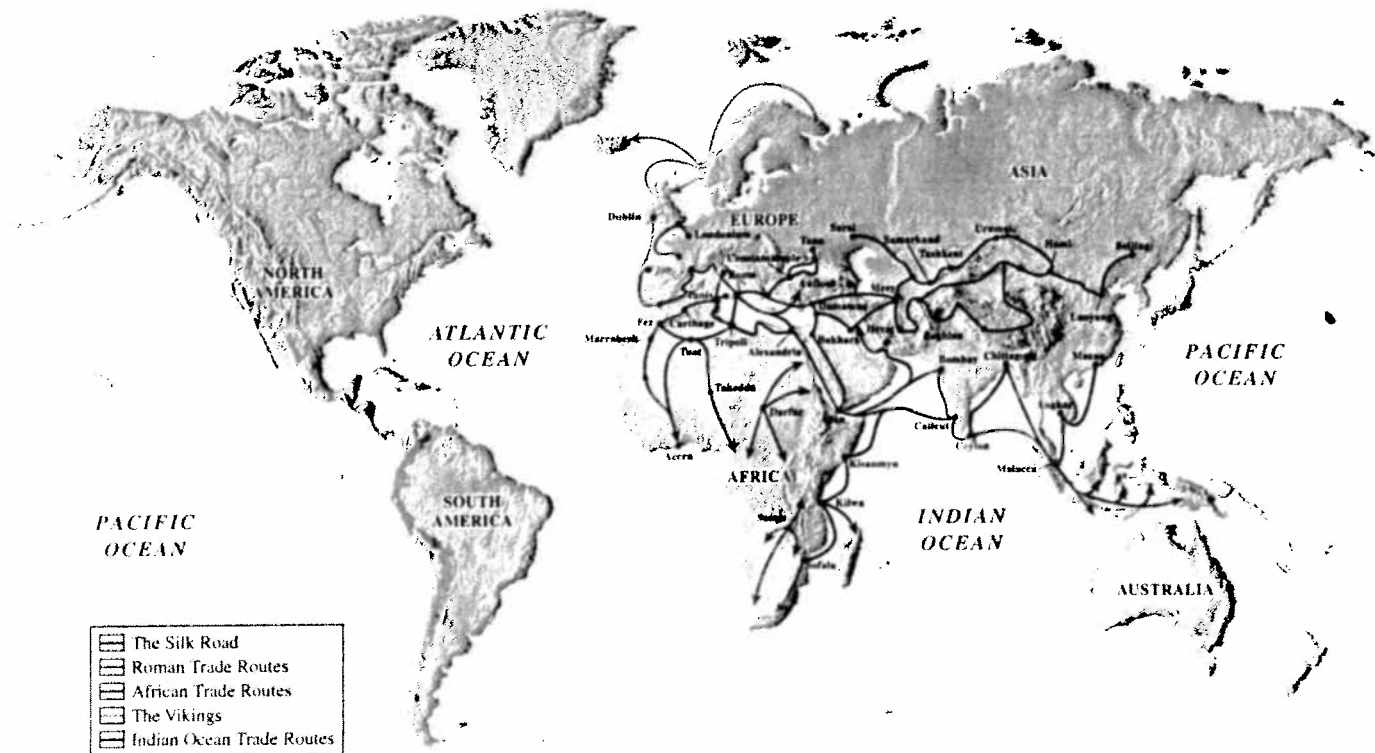
same period. While Buddhism and Christianity started well before this period, they gained new vigor as the classical empires collapsed. Islam, which spread most rapidly, was entirely new. All three religions involved active missionary efforts. All periodically benefited from government sponsorship and sometimes from military pressure as well. For example, conquerors might impose higher taxes on those they conquered who did not convert to the conquerors' religion, or they might forcibly expel "nonbelievers" from the territory. Through a combination of persuasion and pressure, many millions of people changed their beliefs about the world around them and about the goals of life. The religious beliefs they adopted during the postclassical period established the dominant religious frameworks that still prevail in Asia, Europe, and parts of Africa today.

During the postclassical period, systematic international trade developed that went far beyond the



Christian in 750	Islamic in 750	Buddhism in 750	China 750-1450: Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism
Spread of Christianity to 1450	Spread of Islam to 1450	Spread of Buddhism to 1450	Korea 750-1450: Buddhism, Confucianism

Spread of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam to c. 1450



The Silk Road
Roman Trade Routes
African Trade Routes
The Vikings
Indian Ocean Trade Routes

Main Routes of Afro-Eurasian Trade, c. 1250

carrying capacity of the old Silk Road. The Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea were the hubs of this trade, which brought northwestern Europe, west Africa, Japan, and other regions into the existing east–west trade routes between China and Egypt. Gradually and tentatively, these connections among societies (rather than separate developments within societies) began to shape world history in important ways.

Big Concepts

Along with, and partly because of, religious change, three Big Concepts help organize the understanding of the postclassical period. First, trans-regional communication and exchange networks expanded with important new routes added. Missionary activity and new seafaring technologies both contributed to this. Second, forms of state organization diversified, with centralized empires now juxtaposed to a variety of looser political structures. Third, several societies—headed by China—increased their productive capacity, with social consequences extending to the emergence of new urban centers and the experimentation with different forms of labor.

TRIGGERS FOR CHANGE

As its name indicates, the postclassical period followed the decline of the great classical empires. As areas that had previously been under the control of these empires experienced economic decline and increasing disorder, people turned toward religious faith for security, reassurance, and guidance.

A second effect of the decline of the classical empires was the collapse of established boundaries, which caused ambitious people to turn their attention to new areas. The fall of the Roman Empire, for example, opened up new opportunities in the eastern Mediterranean, most notably for the Arabs. When the Eastern Roman Empire (the Byzantine Empire) could not regain lost territories in the Mediterranean, it turned its attention to opportunities in Russia and eastern Europe. These reorientations encouraged missionary activity and trade alike.

Expanding trade encouraged the development of better ships and new navigational devices. This was another trigger for change as the postclassical period moved along. The Chinese invented the compass, and from the Middle East came better ship designs. Maps also improved as a result of wider trade. They in turn encouraged further travel. The same held true for new banking and commercial practices: long-distance credit arrangements, for example, facilitated international exchange.

THE BIG CHANGES

Religion and commerce were the engines of change in the postclassical period. Changes in their own right, they were the causes of many other changes. Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam were the religions that showed the greatest capacity to spread beyond the cultures in which they arose. Their spread created larger groups of people with broadly shared beliefs and religious institutions than ever before. This gener-

500 C.E.	600 C.E.	700 C.E.	800 C.E.	900 C.E.
527–565 Justinian, Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Emperor 570–632 Muhammad 589–618 Sui dynasty (China)	610–613 Origins of Islam 618–907 Tang dynasty (China) 634–750 Arab Invasions in Middle East; spread of Islam in North Africa 661–750 Ummayyad Caliphate 668 Korea becomes independent from China	711 First Islamic incursions into India 718 Byzantines defeat Arab attack on Constantinople 750 Abbasid caliphate founded 777 Independent Islamic kingdoms begin in North Africa	800–814 Charlemagne's Empire in western Europe c. 855 Russian kingdom around Kiev 864 Cyril and Methodius missionaries in eastern Europe 878 Last Japanese embassy to China	960–1127 Song dynasty (China) 968 Tula established by Toltecs (Mesoamerica) 980–1015 Christian [†] Conversion of Vladimir I of Russia

ated new opportunities for mutual intolerance—many Christians and Muslims, particularly, developed disdain for each other—but also examples of constructive tolerance. Under Islamic rule, Iberia or what is present day Spain and Portugal became a center of creative interaction among Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Religion also created new loyalties that could compete with other values, including political values, and political issues on the whole received less attention during this period than in the classical era.

While the spread of otherworldly religion generally was a major theme, it was obvious that during these centuries Islam developed a particular dynamism that affected more different cultures and peoples than the other religions. All major societies in Asia, Europe, and Africa reacted to the spread of missionary religions in this period, and all reacted to some extent to the power of Islam.

Religion, however, meant different things to different people, even within the same faith. The number of devoted religious communities and leaders increased, for example, with monastic movements in Buddhism and Christianity. Economic contributions to religious institutions sometimes outstripped tax payments to governments. But many people combined religion with other interests, including commercial life. And most peoples combined new religions with older values and artistic forms.

The development of regular trade created a coherent world network joining key parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe. The most sophisticated exchanges linked the more prosperous and urbanized societies of the

era. China, India, the Middle East and north Africa, and the Byzantine Empire traded manufactured goods of various sorts, mainly for elite customers interested in silks and porcelains. North-south trade routes linked sub-Saharan Africa, southeast Asia, Japan, northwestern Europe, and Russia to this commercial network. These areas provided less-processed goods, including gold and slaves.

Trade facilitated the spread of technologies. A number of Chinese inventions, first paper (when Islamic troops captured some papermakers in western China), then printing and explosives spread to the Middle East and on to Europe. Early in the postclassical period, this exchange was very slow (though faster than in previous centuries), but it became more rapid as time went on. At the end of the postclassical period, key Chinese inventions like printing and explosives moved westward more swiftly. Ideas spread as well. Thanks to trade, Indian mathematics, including the numbering system, spread to the Middle East. Then Arab mathematics, blending earlier Greek and Indian achievements with Arab innovations, reached western Europe. The spread of disease accelerated as well. In the 14th century a new epidemic of bubonic plague—the “Black Death”—moved from China through the Middle East to Europe, killing up to a third of the population in many areas.

The international trade of the postclassical era was not what we think of as a world economy today. Fewer societies were involved, and the volume and range of trade were far lower. However, despite downsides like disease, the international exchange of the

1000 C.E.	1100 C.E.	1200 C.E.	1300 C.E.	1400 C.E.
1000 Ghana Empire at its height (West Africa)	c. 1100 Invention of explosive powder (China)	1200 Rise of empire of Mali (West Africa)	1320s Europeans first use cannon in war	1400 End of Polynesian expeditions
1054 Schism between Eastern and Western Christianity	1150 Disintegration of Toltec Empire	1206 Delhi sultanate in India	1320–1340 Bubonic plague breaks out in Gobi desert and spreads to other parts of Asia	1405–1433 Chinese trading expeditions
1055 Seljuk Turks control Abbasid caliphate	1150–1350 Spread of Gothic style; scholasticism in western Europe	1231–1392 Mongols rule Korea	1325 Rise of Aztec Empire (MesoAmerica)	1439 Portugal captures Azores Islands
1066 Norman conquest of England; rise of feudal monarchy in western Europe	1185–1333 Kamakura Shogunate (Japan)	1236 Capture of Baghdad by Mongols; end of Abbasid caliphate	1338–1453 Hundred Years' War in Europe	1453 Turks capture Constantinople; end of Byzantine Empire
1096–1099 First Christian Crusade to Palestine		1260 Death of Sundiata	1350 Rise of Incas (Andes)	1471–1493 Peak of Inca Empire
		1265 First English parliament	1392–1910 Yi dynasty (Korea)	
		1279–1368 Mongol Empire in China		
		1290s Islam begins to spread to southeast Asia		

postclassical era had major effects. Along with religion, trade opportunities and merchants' interests became themes that had to be dealt with by each major society in Afro-Eurasia.

THE TRANSCONTINENTAL NETWORK

We live today in a period of rapidly intensifying contacts among all the world's major societies, and the process is increasingly referred to as globalization. Globalization has many new features, starting with dramatic communications technologies like the Internet. We increasingly realize, however, that contemporary globalization was prepared by previous periods in which interactions among major regions expanded. The postclassical period marked a major separation between earlier eras, in which contacts among different regions were slow or occasional, into a situation in which trade, travel and exchange created significant new, often routinized, influences on the ways individual societies developed.

The key process involved a series of routes for trade and travel that formed a new transcontinental network. The term network sums up the real innovations in contacts among the societies of Africa, Asia, and Europe—accurately suggesting the seeds of the high level of interaction we experience today. Defining the relationship between the systems of interaction in the postclassical period and later patterns provides a key way to map the process of change in world history.

The transcontinental network itself compelled many societies in Afro-Eurasia to decide on how to organize their participation in trade and exchange, and how to take advantage of the opportunities involved. No society responded in exactly the same way—comparing responses is an obvious assignment in analyzing the postclassical period—and some societies changed their responses over time. The spread of world religions, which created huge new areas of shared faith, but also new divisions among the religions themselves, contributed to but also complicated the evolution of the transcontinental network.

CONTINUITY

Change, including the formation of the transcontinental network, inevitably affected different societies to different degrees. Continuities combined with change. Even though the classical empires had collapsed, the successes of classical civilization encouraged many people to maintain or revive classical forms. China eagerly revived the structures of its clas-

sical age, including the empire, the bureaucracy, and Confucianism. It was touched by Islam and Buddhism, but ultimately it limited the influence of outside religions. China was not a changeless society—its growing participation in interregional trade proved its capacity to take advantage of new opportunities—but continuity remained extremely important.

The Middle East underwent great change as a result of the rise of Islam, but it also maintained continuities. Hellenistic science interacted with Islam, leading to important philosophical discussions of the relationship between science and faith. Earlier practices, such as the veiling of women in the cities, were revived. Although Islam opposed the enslavement of fellow Muslims, slavery continued to be a major component of social and labor systems over much of Afro-Eurasia. This marked a revival of traditions of the Greek and Roman world.

Continuities also showed in the blending of traditional forms with the missionary religions. Christian architecture had long used Greco-Roman styles. Buddhism adapted to Chinese values, for example, by placing more emphasis on the family loyalties of women. But no systematic changes in social structures or even political forms occurred during the postclassical centuries. The expansion of a merchant class affected social structure, but landlords remained dominant in most societies and peasants made up the bulk of the population. In key areas slavery or (in India) the caste system also maintained or revived older social institutions. Large political units developed in a few places, but outside of China polities were mainly loosely organized.

Finally, major areas were not part of the system shaped by world religions and interregional trade. Most notably, the Americas and Pacific Oceania, though scenes of significant developments, operated on separate dynamics and had few if any contacts with the rest of the world.

IMPACT ON DAILY LIFE: WOMEN

The postclassical period saw an intriguing tension that affected conditions for women in many parts of Afro-Eurasia. On the one hand, the major religions all insisted that women were spiritually equal to men—that they had souls or shared in the divine essence. This was a huge innovation. And religious change was not a matter of ideals alone. Buddhist leaders in Japan argued for women's importance. Islam established new rights for women, including property ownership. Buddhism and Christianity both established religious communities for

women, giving them not only new forms of expression but also new leadership roles. As these religions spread, many women gained new positions and modes of expression through religious life. On the other hand, the condition of women also deteriorated during this period. Many scholars have argued that growing trade and urban prosperity reduced women's role in political and economic life and created conditions in which upper-class women were treated as ornaments. So, although religion helped women, it may also have distracted them from other issues: as they found spiritual solace, trade may have contributed to new gender inequalities.

Other changes were less favorable to women. Foot-binding—the clearest attempt to make women more purely ornamental—spread in China. In India the practice of sati, in which some widows threw themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres to demonstrate their grief, developed during this period. As Islamic society matured in the Middle East, women were increasingly secluded, and excluded from active roles in public life. But in other Islamic societies, especially in Africa, this was less true. At the same time, most historians conclude that the condition of women in western Europe had deteriorated by the later postclassical period, as judged, for example, by their greater exclusion from most skilled urban crafts. Thus, the postclassical period was an important one in women's history. New religions were important to many women, but new customs also limited opportunities for women to a greater degree than in the classical era. In much of the world, at least the vestiges of these limitations survive to the present day.

TRENDS AND SOCIETIES IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

Chapters 6 and 7 examine the surge of Islam, first in the Middle East and then in other parts of Asia. Chapter 8 describes the expansion of trade and civilization in sub-Saharan Africa, which had various facets, but the link to Islam and the Islamic trading system was crucial. Two dynamics developed in Europe; each had contacts (both creative and hostile) with Islam and certainly with interregional trade. In eastern Europe, as detailed in Chapter 9, Byzantine culture took root, while a newer society emerged in western Europe, as described in Chapter 10. Chapter 11 describes the major cultures that developed in the Americas and the contacts among them. Chapters 12 and 13 address developments in China and the expansion of Chinese influence in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam—key parts of the network of interregional trade.

The last two centuries of the postclassical period, as Arab power declined, saw important new developments. Chapter 14 describes the Mongol conquests in the 13th and 14th centuries that, for a time, revolutionized the political map of Asia and parts of Europe, accelerating and redefining interregional trade and other exchanges. The decline of the Mongols, and the end of a brief Chinese experiment in leading world trade, left the world poised for further innovation. Chapter 15 describes a transitional moment and the complex factors that would alter world balance yet again. ■