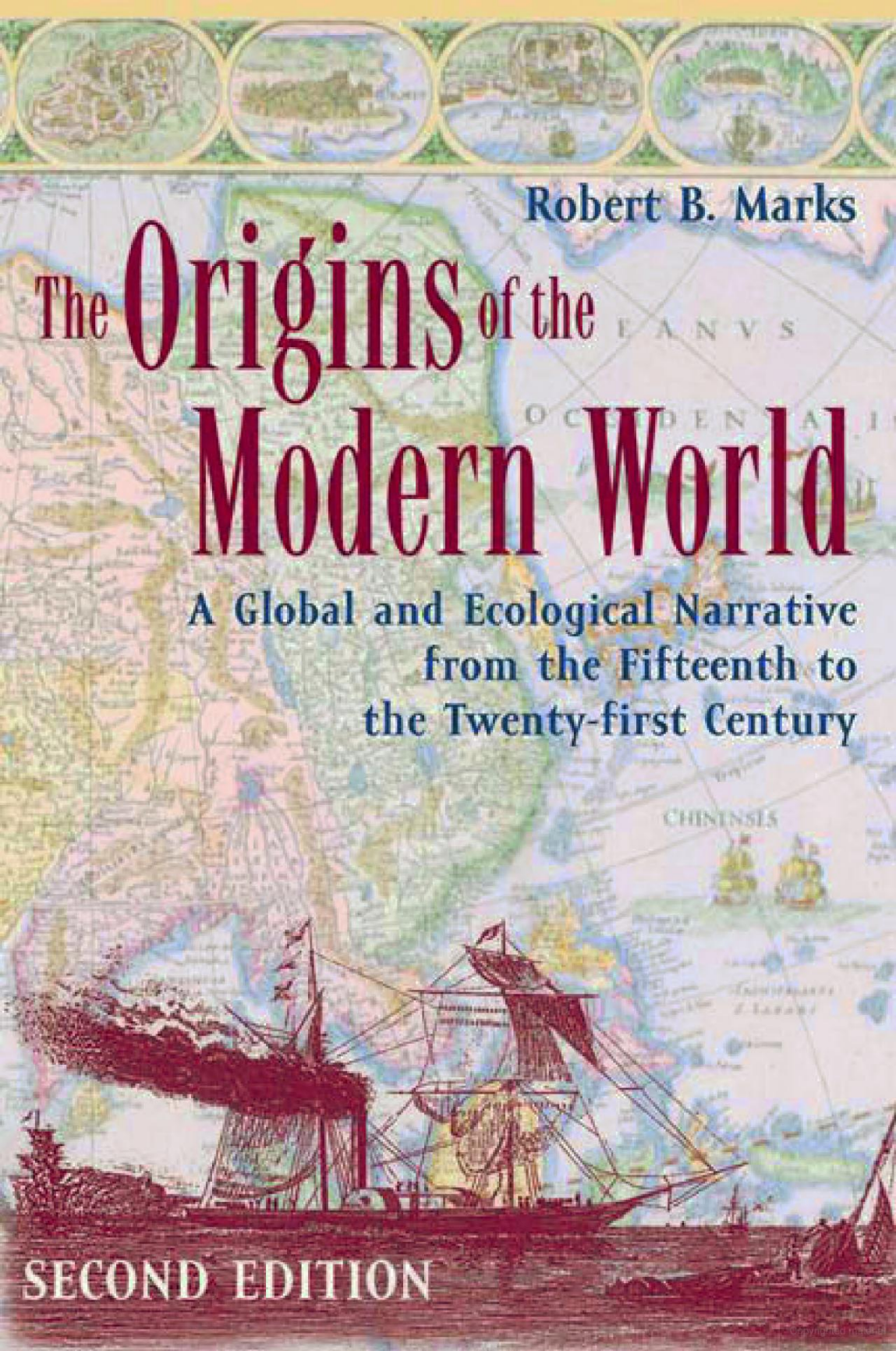
Robert B. Marks
The Origins of the Modern World
A Global and Ecological Narrative from the Fifteenth to the Twenty-first Century
SECOND EDITION

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Map 1.1 reprinted from Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 34.

Figure 3.1 reprinted from Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, A.D. 990–1990* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 176–177.

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Preface

September 11, 2001. Although the details of how and why nineteen hijackers of four U.S. domestic flights slammed them into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., may never be known, the events raise profound issues about the nature of the world we live in. Americans are searching not just for answers to who is responsible for killing nearly 3,000 people, but for how and why they could hate the United States that much. Osama bin Laden, leader of al Qaeda, the organization that stands accused of masterminding and financing those acts, has evinced a deep hatred for the modern world and a desire to resurrect a Muslim empire reminiscent of its eighth-century glory.

Is this the beginning of the "clash of civilizations" that some have been predicting? As this book will make clear, I think not. The reason is that the basic elements of the modern world are not "civilizations," but rather nation–states and global capitalism. To be sure, the modern West (the United States included) has benefited immensely from a world organized along the lines of nation–state and industrial capitalism, while others (including many in the Islamic world) have not. How and why that particular way of organizing the world came to be is the subject of this book, although it was written before the events of September 11. Thus, I do not specifically address the attacks in the body of the text, but I do believe my arguments are highly relevant to helping us place those events into a broader historical context. At the end of the conclusion I have appended an afterword where I reflect more on the events of September 11 and how the material in this book helps to frame an interpretation of what they might mean.

Like the modern world, this book has its origins. At the 1998 Pacific Centuries conference at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California, sev-

eral of us were discussing over lunch issues that had been raised at the various panels. Among those at the table were Andre Gunder Frank and Kenneth Pomeranz, two scholars whose new work has profoundly influenced me and this book. Gunder lamented the fact that it often takes decades for the results of new research to get transmitted from scholars to students, and thought that it would be a great idea for someone to make these new ideas accessible to a wider audience, college students and the educated public alike. I concurred, but quickly put the project out of mind because I already had another research project on my agenda.

However, I also teach an introduction to world history with colleagues at Whittier College, and we have been working to incorporate this new scholarship into our course. When my sabbatical began in the summer of 2000, I was still thinking about the questions we had faced in teaching that course and decided to spend a few months composing a brief narrative of the origins of the modern world for use in that class. Those months became a year, and that project became this book.

When college students take an introductory U.S. or European history course, most already know the broad outlines of the story. Not so with students taking an introduction to modern world history. If they come to class with any background knowledge at all about "the history of the world," it usually includes a variant of what Europeans had done in the past five hundred years. The problem is that the result of work by scholars like Frank and Pomeranz demands a wholly new approach—a new narrative—one that is not centered on Europeans. Additionally, I have found in over two decades of teaching Asian history that it is a good idea to provide students with a brief overview in the first two weeks of class so they have a framework within which to place all the new material they are learning. That is what I thought our students in world history needed too, and that is what I started to write: a narrative of the making of the modern world incorporating the results of new (and somewhat iconoclastic) scholarship.

The resulting book is brief. But that does not mean that it is easy or simplistic. In fact, this book covers some very contested terrain: virtually every sentence here can be debated (and probably will be). I have no intention of providing a "balanced" story, one that spends an equal amount of time (or ink) on anything and everything. Rather, this book offers to readers the narrative of the origins of the modern world that I have put together for myself and that I present to my students.

That does not mean that I do not owe immense debts of gratitude to other people from whom I have learned, and continue to learn. I have already men-

Preface to the Second Edition

In response to requests from colleagues and teachers of world history, this edition contains a new chapter that takes the narrative of the modern world through the twentieth century and into the early twenty-first century. The first five chapters remain much the same as the original edition, but for minor grammatical and factual corrections and the addition of a few footnotes. The conclusion to the first edition continues to be available at the book's website: http://www.rowman.com/isbn/0742554198.

The first edition ended in 1900 both because I felt that the main features of the modern world had come into being by then, and because of the difficulties and challenges of doing contemporary history. The closer to the present we get, the less sure we can be of the narrative because the story is not yet over—we do not yet have the historical perspective to know what is really important and how the story ends. Indeed, that makes the task of composing a brief narrative of the twentieth century exceedingly difficult, for themes and events that seem important to some observers necessarily had to be left out.

Nonetheless, there are questions that students are curious about and that were not completely obvious from a storyline that ended in 1900. American students, in particular, were interested in understanding the history of how and why the United States emerged as a world power in the twentieth century, and how it came to be the sole superpower by the end of twentieth century. This edition addresses that question by arguing that the rise of the United States as global hegemon was contingent upon other developments—it was not inevitable.

But that is not the whole, or perhaps even most important, part of the story of the twentieth century, for the resurgence of Asia toward the end of the twentieth century cautions us against assuming the permanence or even

longevity of U.S. dominance. More importantly, though, those political and economic markers of the significance of the twentieth century may well recede into insignificance when compared with the vastly changed relationship of humans to the environment that was wrought in the twentieth century—what I call the "Great Departure"—and that is part of this expanded narrative as well.

Helping me think through the twentieth century were my students in Whittier College's history department senior seminar. The issue they wrestled with in the spring of 2005 was whether or not the twentieth century represented a major continuity with, or a significant change from, past patterns. Joyce Kaufman once again offered companionship, support, and love, in addition to reading and critiquing chapter 6 and the conclusion. At Rowman & Littlefield, Susan McEachern and series editor Mark Selden both helped me shape and sharpen my thinking about the twentieth century. Finally, at Whittier College support form the Richard and Billie Deihl Endowed Professorship gave me time to write and to travel to China. As always, the interpretations and whatever errors of fact or omission remain mine.

INTRODUCTION

The Rise of the West?

July 20–22, 2001; *Genoa, Italy*. Leaders of the major industrial countries in the world—known as the Group of Seven, or G7—met in July 2001 in this Mediterranean seaport city to discuss the world economy. The G7 stated that "sustained economic growth worldwide requires a renewed commitment to [global] free trade. . . . Opening markets globally and strengthening the World Trade Organization (WTO) as the bedrock of multilateral trading is . . . an economic imperative."[1] The G7 meeting, like the 1999 WTO meeting in Seattle, attracted thousands of people opposed to both the meeting and its objectives. Indeed, during those three days in July, 100,000 protestors against "globalization" came to Genoa, most to hold countermeetings to point out inequities in the global economy, but thousands also marched, considerable numbers trashed stores and sparred with police, hundreds were arrested, and one was killed.

We start this brief history of the origins of the modern world with a recent event because the G7 meetings—which have been going on for the past twenty-five years and will continue into the foreseeable future—reveal much about the nature of the world we live in and raise some very interesting historical questions about how our globalized world came to be the way it is. Let us take first the description of the G7 as "major industrialized countries." This statement points to the fact that the world today is composed of sovereign political units called "countries," and that those G7 countries are industrialized. Indeed, the G7 countries account for two-thirds of all the world's economic output and wealth. By implication, the rest of the world is poorer and less, if at all, industrialized. The world is thus divided between those parts that are industrialized and those that are not or are trying to become industrialized.

When placed in a broad historical context, this G7 fact is exceptionally

interesting and raises profound questions. Just 200 years ago, two other countries—India and China—accounted for two-thirds of the world's economic output, and they are not European. In the space of just 200 years, the world has seen a great reversal of fortune: where once Asians held most of the economic cards, today it is primarily Western countries and Japan. The first question centers around how this happened. How did industry and European-style countries called nation–states—rather than highly developed agrarian empires like China and India—come to define our world?

Second, among the issues on the G7 agenda was what, if anything, to do about the growing gap between the richest and the poorest parts of the world, the latter located mostly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Like industry, nation–states, and Western dominance, this gap, too, has appeared within the past 200 years. How and why large parts of the world and its people have been condemned to increasing poverty is also an important question addressed here, as is the question of whether some parts of the world got rich only at the expense of others becoming poorer.

Third, industry has conferred great power on the G7 countries, so great that their leaders can meet to set the rules for how the world economy works. Of course, this is one of the prime causes of the protests against the G7, the WTO, and other financial institutions (such as the International Monetary Fund [IMF]). Protestors are in effect asking, "How come you get to decide the rules?" and demanding that other global arrangements be made.[2] Nonetheless, the leaders of the industrial world do make the rules, a power that is exercised in part to ensure the continuing wealth and power of the industrialized world. Although this power is exercised mostly through global trade and financial institutions such as the WTO and the IMF, it is backed by substantial military power, sometimes wielded unilaterally by G7 nations (such as the United States) but also by alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). When placed in a global historical perspective, this power is exceptionally interesting, for Westerners have not had this power for very long.

Thus, to understand our world we have to understand not just how nation–states ("countries" in the G7 statement) and industry came to shape the modern world, but how and why those European ways of organizing the world came to dominate the globe. Explanations abound, but for most of the past two centuries, the predominant explanation in the West, the United States included, has been "the rise of the West." As we will see, recent research has shown that that explanation is no longer persuasive, but because it is probably the one most readers may be familiar with, I will take some time exploring it and pointing out its flaws.

The Rise of the West

The concept of the rise of the West provides both a rationale and a storyline that purports to explain not just the modern world, but why it is defined by primarily European features. The idea behind it is fairly simple and began to emerge shortly after the Spanish conquest of the Americas, during the Italian Renaissance of the sixteenth century. Europeans were quite astounded to see hundreds of Spanish conquistadors vanquish huge and very wealthy American civilizations, in particular the Aztecs and the Incas. Being ignorant of the germ theory of diseases and the cause of the "Great Dying" in Mexico, where nearly 90 percent of the central Mexican population of thirty million succumbed to European diseases such as smallpox and influenza, Europeans first attributed their superiority to their Christian religion. Later, during the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they attributed their superiority to a Greek heritage of secular, rationalistic, and scientific thought.

In the late 1700s this storyline continues: both the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution of 1789 reinforced the awareness in European minds not just that Europeans were different from the rest of the world, but also that Europeans were "progressing" rapidly while the rest of the world appeared to be stagnating, that Europeans were somehow exceptional—better, even—than the rest. Nineteenth-century European historians, impressed with what many considered to be the universal appeal of the ideals of the French Revolution—*egalité*, *liberté*, *fraternité* (equality, liberty, and brotherhood)—looked back to the ancient Greeks, their institutions of democracy and republics, and their rationalistic bent toward understanding the natural world in scientific, not religious, terms. In this early telling of the "rise of the West," the story is somewhat like a relay race, with the ideas of democracy that arose in Greece passed off to the Romans, who dropped the baton (the fall of the Roman Empire followed by the so-called Dark Ages), but Christianity was then on the scene to pick it up and run with it, creating a distinctive European culture during feudal times. The ancient Greek heritage was rediscovered in the Renaissance ("renewal"), elaborated during the Enlightenment, and ultimately fulfilled in the French and American revolutions and "the rise of the West."

If the West was "rising" during the eighteenth century, during the nineteenth its ascent was completed. As the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was just beginning, the classical British political economists—Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, and David Ricardo—developed another strand to be woven into the story of the rise of the West: the ideas of capitalist development as "progress," the West as "progressive," and Asia (and by

scholars working in a Marxist tradition who have pointed to the subsequent European colonialism, slavery, and exploitation of colonies in the Americas and Asia as the primary explanations for the rise of the West. Many non-Marxists have contested the idea that Europe's rise was a result of the exploitation of others,[6] an inconvenient and awkward fact if true, and instead have turned their attention to those aspects of European culture that predate European colonialism, beginning with the Spanish conquest of the New World.

To avoid the possible embarrassment of attributing the rise of the West to its colonial ventures, and not its inherent virtues, much post–World War II scholarship on the origins of the rise of the West has looked farther back in European history, in some cases as far back as the Middle Ages in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, or yet earlier to the ancient Greeks, for factors that could only be attributed to Europe's own exceptional development. Factors that have been identified, in addition to the cultural values discussed by Weber, include environmental ones (temperate climates promote hard work, or poor soils stimulate agricultural innovation), technological ones (plows, stirrups, or reading glasses), political–military ones (feudalism leading to absolute monarchs and then nation–states and the evolving technology of war), demographic ones (small families promote capital accumulation), and in the minds of several historians, combinations of all or some of these.[7]

The implication of this body of scholarship is that Europe possessed some unique characteristics that allowed it—and only it—to modernize first, and hence gave it the moral authority and the power to diffuse "modernity" around the globe where cultural, political, or economic "obstacles" prevented modern development from occurring indigenously. Hence, this storyline purports to explain, justify, and defend the rise of the West to global dominance. Just how wrongheaded this theory is will become clearer as the industrial superiority of much of Asia to that of Europe, at least prior to about 1750, is revealed in the course of this book.

Before turning to the question of why all this matters, let me first say a few words about geographic units used in this book. In the paragraph above, I mentioned a comparison between "Asia" and "Europe," implying both that these units are comparable, and that they have some kind of unity that distinguishes each one from the other. That assumption is problematic, mostly for Asia, because of the immense variety of societies it includes, ranging from China and Japan in East Asia, through the nomadic peoples of Central Asia, to India in the south, and the Muslim West Asia (Middle East). Even Europe has little coherence if it is taken to include everything from Portugal to Russia. Moreover, until very late in our story (at least until 1850 or so), Asia contained about two-thirds of the world's population and was larger than Europe in virtually every re-

spect. To that extent, Europe and Asia were not comparable. Furthermore, one of the most important points I make in this book is that understanding the origins of the modern world requires taking a global view, first of how the vast continent of Eurasia, coupled with Africa, interrelated, and then after 1500, how the New World fit into the story. Finally, even the geographic terms "China," "India," and "England" or "France" conceal much variation within their borders—different peoples, many languages or dialects, and vast differences in wealth and power. Nevertheless, I will use these geographic terms to begin locating the story, but readers should be aware that generalizations based on large geographic units will not be true at all times and places within the places named, and that in reality what was truly comparable occurred in *parts* of China, *parts* of England or the Netherlands, and *parts* of India.

Readers may be wondering why the issue of the rise of the West matters. Indeed, why even study history? The brief response is because our understandings of the past—who we are, where we came from, why we are here—inform our definitions of who we are in the present and have real implications and applicability for actions taken by us or in our name to shape the future. The ideas developed by the story of the rise of the West to explain the nature of the world we live in, especially the values of marketplace capitalism and democratic institutions, are thought to have originated uniquely within Western civilization, yet to have universal applicability—to be "good," not just for the West, but for everybody. Following that assumption, the solution to virtually all problems in the world today, at least according to U.S. and European political leaders (e.g., the G7), is the adoption of free markets.[8] Thus, to Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, to the communist leaders of China, to the leaders of Mexico, Nigeria, and Indonesia, Western leaders have said that the answer to any and all problems they face is "More democracy and free markets." The idea is that the institutions and values that supposedly propelled the rise of the West are universal, and can—indeed, must—be adopted throughout the world. That is a political agenda.

But what if this way of looking at the making of the modern world—the rise of the West and the spread of its system on the basis of its supposed cultural superiority to the rest of the world—is wrong? That is the possibility raised by a new body of scholarship, especially over the past twenty years.

No longer do all historians picture the world as merely a continuation of universal and necessary trends that began centuries ago in Europe. What many are seeing instead is a world in which population, industry, and agricultural productivity were centered in Asia until 1750 or 1800. The European world of industrial capitalism and nation–states is thus both quite recent and a reversal—for how long, though, remains the big question—of long-standing

historical trends favoring Asia. Europeans may have painted a picture of the rise of the West over this original one, but the patterns of Asian strength and economic vitality are beginning to show through once again. Artists call this concept of one painting showing through an original painting or parts of it *pentimento*. As this book intends to show, the more we look at the world and its past through a new light, the pictures painted in our minds by the rise of the West will reveal another, and rather different pattern, underlying. To see it, though, we will have to begin shedding our Eurocentric perspectives.[9]

Eurocentrism

One critic has said that the idea that "the West has some unique historical advantage, some special quality of race or culture or environment or mind or spirit, which gave this human community a permanent superiority over all other communities" is a myth—the myth of Eurocentrism.[10] Another has seen Eurocentrism as an ideology, or a distortion of the truth, used by the West to mask its global dominance,[11] and still another deems it a "theoretical model," one explanation among several for how the world works.[12] In this section, we will examine two aspects of what critics call Eurocentrism: first, what it is; and second, the extent to which it can be seen as wrong, a myth, an ideology, a theory, or a master narrative.

The essence of Eurocentrism, according to the critics, is not merely that it views history from a European point of view (the "centrism" part)—it is not just one of many ethnocentric views of the world. A merely ethnocentric perspective recognizes that there are many different peoples and cultures in the world, but that mine is better *because* it arises from my people and culture. They are mine, better, and not yours. Eurocentrism also emphasizes the superiority of Western culture—all that is good, progressive, and innovative starts only in Europe—but it also sees that package as having universal applicability: it is not peculiar and limited to Europe, but has spread to encompass the globe by the twentieth century.

Going a bit deeper, critics say, Eurocentric views of the world see Europe as being the only active shaper of world history, its "fountainhead" if you will. Europe acts; the rest of the world responds. Europe has "agency"; the rest of the world is passive. Europe makes history; the rest of the world has none until it is brought into contact with Europe. Europe is the center; the rest of the world is its periphery. Europeans alone are capable of initiating change or modernization; the rest of the world is not.

On a deeper level yet, according to critics, Eurocentrism is not just a belief in the past or present superiority of Europe, but is "a matter of . . . scholar-

ship"[13] (i.e., of established "fact"). It is not a "bias," but a way of establishing what is true and what is false. To that extent, Eurocentrism is a way of knowing that establishes the criteria for what its practitioners deem to be "the facts." It is thus a *paradigm*, a set of assumptions about how the world works, that generates questions that can then be answered by ferreting out "the facts."[14]

Finally, Eurocentric ideas about the world and how it came to be the way it is are deeply held by Americans. Indeed, American history is often presented as the pinnacle, the purest and best expression, of Western civilization. European and even world history are most often presented from a Eurocentric point of view, whether or not students or faculty recognize it. Mostly, it is assumed to be "true." The situation is like that faced by Keanu Reeves in the movie *The Matrix*, or Jim Carrey in *The Truman Show*. Those on the inside really do not have an independent way of knowing whether they are inside a matrix or an encapsulated TV stage unless they can get a look at it from the outside. Collecting more facts would not suffice, since all the facts on the inside tend to confirm the reality, the truth, of the matrix one is in. Some facts that are collected might not fit, but mostly those are simply discarded or ignored as being anomalous—accidents, if you will. The same is true of Eurocentrism. If Eurocentric ideas, if the rise of the West, are wrong, how would we know it? The way to know is by getting outside of that way of explaining how the world came to be the way it is and thinking about other ways of understanding the big changes that have shaped our world.

Readers may sense a paradox here. On the one hand, I started by pointing out that key features of the modern world are European in origin, and that I think an historical approach can explain how and why industry, the nation–state, and the gap between the wealthy and the poor define our world. On the other hand, I have just rejected the usual Eurocentric explanations of the origins of the modern world. How can there be a non-Eurocentric explanation of a world that has European features? In short, we can do that by broadening the storyline to include parts of the world that have thus far been excluded or overlooked—we can begin and end the story elsewhere.[15] When we do that, we will see that only a new, global storyline—one not centered on Europe—will suffice to explain the origins of the modern world.

Stories and Historical Narratives

For historians, constructing a narrative—a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end—is central to how we know what we know, how we determine what is true about the past.[16] The rise of the West is a story—to be sure, a story

at the core of Eurocentrism—that provides the criteria for selecting what is and what is not relevant to that story. But because the rise of the West informs all the other historical scholarship mentioned above, it is more than just another story or narrative; it is a "master narrative," "a grand schema for organizing the interpretation and writing of history," "sweeping stories about origins," as historians Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob put it.[17]

So the only way to determine if the rise of the West is wrong is to construct an alternative narrative of how the world came to be the way it is: we have to get outside of the rise-of-the-West matrix. Doing so will accomplish three things. First, it will provide an independent way to tell which parts, if any, of the rise-of-the-West paradigm can be kept and which need to be rejected. Second, it will help readers to critically examine their own assumptions about how the world works. And third, it will raise the more general issue of how we know what we know about the world and its history. That is the task of this brief history. In the remainder of this introduction, I want to sketch out the elements of that alternative narrative.

I need first to introduce three additional concepts: those of historical contingency, of accident, and of conjuncture. We start with the idea of *contingency*. One very powerful implication of the storyline of the rise of the West, though it is seldom made explicit, is that the way the world turned out was the only way possible. Because of the historical advantages enjoyed by Europeans, possibly since the fall of the Roman Empire or even as far back as the Greeks or to European genetics, this interpretation implies that the rise of the West was *inevitable*. It might have taken some twists and turns, had some fits and starts, but sooner or later the West would rise above all other parts of the world.

Although we will also have to deal with the political, economic, and military dominance of Europe and its offshoots (e.g., the United States) for the past 200 years, there is no reason to think that that dominance was inevitable or, for that matter, that its dominance will continue. Indeed, it appears inevitable only because that storyline was centered on Europe. But once a broader, global perspective is adopted, the dominance of the West not only happens later in time, probably as late as 1750–1800 and perhaps not until the early nineteenth century, but it also becomes clearer that it was *contingent* on other developments that happened independently elsewhere in the world.

Most important, the economic engine driving global trade—and with it exchanges of ideas, new food crops, and manufactured goods—was in Asia. Probably as early as 1000 C.E., China's economic and population growth stimulated the entire Eurasian continent; another surge came after about 1400 and lasted until 1800 or so. Asia was the source of a huge demand for silver to keep the economies of China and India growing and also the world's greatest

pening in different parts of the world for reasons having to do with local circumstances that then became globally important.

Conjunctures can also occur within a given region when several otherwise independent developments reach critical points and interact with one another. For instance, the development of nation–states as the dominant form of political organization in Europe happened for reasons quite independent of those leading to industrialization. Nonetheless, when the two converged in the nineteenth century—came together to produce a conjuncture—a very powerful global force developed, particularly when the two provided the basis for military preeminence.

The attention we give to contingency, accident, and conjuncture means that our explanation of major developments in the making of the modern world will involve several causes, not just one. Monocausal explanations are too simple to take account of the complexity of people, societies, and historical change. We should thus not look for "the" cause of the Industrial Revolution, for it will not be there. Instead, we will find a complex of factors that go a long way toward explaining the Industrial Revolution. I say "a long way" because we have to leave open the possibility that as we learn more or as our perspective changes, we might see the shortcomings of the explanation offered here.

So the narrative in this book about how the modern world came to be—the world of industrial capitalism, a system of nation–states and interstate wars, and a growing gap between the richest and the poorest in our world—will be one that has contingency, accidents, and conjunctures. The world could have been a very different place. Until about 200 years ago, the most successful way people found to organize themselves and to promote the growth of their numbers was in large land-based empires in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas. But if not for a series of contingencies, accidents, and conjunctures, we might still be living in a world of agrarian empires.

Besides a plot, or a storyline, though, a narrative has a beginning, a middle, and an end, the choices of which significantly affect the story that is told. We have chosen to begin our story with how the modern world came to be around 1400. The reason for beginning around 1400 is that it predates the circumnavigation of the globe in the mid-1500s and hence allows us to examine the world and its dynamics prior to the first time a truly globally connected world became possible. The middle of the story revolves around the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in 1750–1800 with an explanation of why the most decisive events happened first in Britain and not elsewhere in the world. In the first edition of this book, the story ended around 1900 because that is when industrial

capitalism and nation-states became fully elaborated on a global scale. This edition continues the story through the twentieth century.

This narrative of world history also strives to be a *non-Eurocentric narrative*, that is, to provide an alternative to the storyline developed around the existing master narrative of the rise of the West. But does it matter? Why should we care about constructing a new, non-Eurocentric narrative of the making of the modern world? That question can be answered on a number of levels. First, the overall story of the rise of the West may be misleading or wrong in fundamental ways, even though parts of it may be correct. For example, one of the most powerful of recent answers to the question of what caused "the European miracle" concerns families and the number of children each family had. The argument goes something like this: After the Black Death of the mid-fourteenth century, various economic and environmental pressures prompted European families to marry late, thereby reducing family size. Fewer children meant farming families could begin to accumulate capital, thus sending Europe on its way to an "industrious revolution." "By delaying marriage," according to a recent history, "European peasants set a course that separated them from the rest of the world's inhabitants."[19]

Although it may be true that West European peasants did behave that way, thereby freeing themselves from "instinctive patterns of behavior" (i.e., unregulated childbearing) that supposedly condemned other peoples to overpopulation and poverty, it simply is not true that European peasants were unique in this behavior. A recent work on China shows that rural families there too—and probably for a lot longer—limited family size, although the methods used differed.[20] In this instance alone, one prop has been removed from underneath the claim of the uniqueness of Europeans and the reasons for their "rise." Indeed, scholars recently have shown that virtually every factor that its proponents have identified with the "European miracle" can be found in other parts of the world;[21] that is, they were *not* unique to Europe, and hence cannot be invoked to explain the rise of the West.

This narrative also is non-Eurocentric because much of it will be devoted to showing the ways in which other parts of the world were either more advanced or at least equivalent to the most developed parts of Europe, over many centuries, at least until about 1800. This book could not have been written without the vast amount of scholarship published in English on Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which provides the basis for a non-Eurocentric narrative. We are thus fortunate to no longer be dependent for our understanding of the world on the accident that most of what has been written in the past 200 years has been by and about Europeans exploring their own history. As one critic put it, until recently historians have been like the drunk

under the streetlight trying to find his lost car keys: when asked by a police officer why he was looking there, he said, "Because this is where the light is." Fortunately, scholars recently have begun to shine a lot of light on other parts of the world, so we do not have to fumble around in the dark. We now know enough about the rest of the world to question the master narrative of the rise of the West and to begin constructing another, non-Eurocentric narrative.

If the concept of the rise of the West cannot adequately explain why the West and its institutions became the dominant force in the world over the past 200 years, still less the sustained rise of East Asia over the past four decades,[22] then continued use of it does indeed perpetuate a mythology. Some mythologies may well be harmless, at least when they are recognized as such, as when we find Greek or Native American stories about the constellations charming. But when a mythology perpetuates the idea that one group of people is superior, has been for centuries if not millennia, and that all others are thus in various ways inferior, as the ideas inherent in the rise of the West do, then the mythology does violence to others and should be abandoned.

The Elements of a Non-Eurocentric Narrative

First, we have to take the entire world as our unit of analysis, rather than particular countries or even regions (e.g., "Europe," "East Asia").[23] We will have the opportunity to discuss developments in particular nations and empires, but always in a global context. For instance, we will see that while the Industrial Revolution started in Britain (and even there, in just a part), it was not because of English pluck, inventiveness, or politics, but rather because of global developments that included India, China, and the New World colonies. In other words, the Industrial Revolution was historically contingent on global forces.

However, taking a global perspective does not imply that the world has always been an interconnected one with a single center from which development and progress spread to less-developed regions. Instead, it makes much more sense to think of the world in 1400 as having been composed of several regional systems, or in other words to have been "polycentric,"[24] each with densely populated and industrially advanced cores supplied from their own peripheries. Although trade and cultural exchanges did mean that most of the world regions interacted, or overlapped, on the margins (with the exception of the regional systems in the Americas, which interacted with one another, but not until 1492 with Eurasia-Africa), what happened in these regions was more a result of dynamics specific to that place.

The assumptions that the world in 1400 was polycentric and large parts of Eurasia were broadly comparable in terms of levels of development help us

understand how a much more integrated world came about, and how and why Westerners ultimately came to dominate it. The implication of the Eurocentric model is that development and progress originated in Europe and spread outward from there to encompass the rest of the world: Europeans acted, and the rest of the world was passive or stagnant (until having to react to Europe).[25]

In this narrative, by contrast, we will see that China and India in particular play significant roles, and that we cannot understand how and why the world came to be the way it is without understanding developments in Asia. We will learn how and why China developed such a huge appetite for silver that it created a global demand, drawing silver from around the world to China and flooding the world market with Chinese manufactures. We will also investigate other commodities and their global supply and demand as well, especially for sugar, slaves (unfortunately human beings were commodities), and cotton textiles, all of which were first produced (and produced more efficiently) in parts of the world other than Europe.

This book will emphasize historical contingencies and conjunctures; China and India; and silver, sugar, slaves, and cotton as we develop a non-Eurocentric picture of how the world came to be the way it is.

Notes

1. "Statement of the Group of Seven Leaders," July 20, 2001 (www.usinfo.state.gov/admin/004/). The G7 countries are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Russia was invited to join the G7 in 1998, so now it is sometimes called the "G8," or the "G7 plus Russia."

2. See the Draft Program of the Genoa Public Forum (www.genoa-g8.org/gpf-eng.htm).

3. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1964), 64–65.

4. Philip D. Curtin has sensibly defined "modernization" as the drive to achieve high economic productivity and high consumption levels, regardless of cultural differences. *The World and the West: The European Challenge and the Overseas Response in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 110. However, post–World War II "modernization" theorists of the 1950s and 1960s developed a list of what it meant to be "modern" that looked very much like the United States.

5. The term is taken from a book by E. L. Jones, *The European Miracle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

6. Especially the British economic historian Patrick O'Brien. See his article "European Economic Development: The Contribution of the Periphery," *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., 35 (1982): 1–18.

7. As examples of these various theses, see David S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of*

Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998) and *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Lynn White, Jr., *Medieval Religion and Technology: Collected Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Alfred Crosby, *The Measure of Reality: Quantification and Western Society, 1250–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West 1500–1800*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

8. As U.S. President George W. Bush put it, international free trade is "a moral imperative" that will "build freedom in the world, progress in our hemisphere and enduring prosperity in the United States." Quoted in the *New York Times*, May 8, 2001, national edition, p. A7.

9. For a review of three recent books on this topic see David D. Buck, "Was It Pluck or Luck that Made the West Grow Rich?" *Journal of World History* (Fall 2000): 413–430.

10. J. M. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographic Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993), 1.

11. Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989), vii.

12. Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 32.

13. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World*, 8–9.

14. The idea of scientific paradigms and the exploration of the conditions under which they might change was first developed by Thomas Kuhn in a classic work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d enlarged ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). Kuhn's primary example was the Copernican revolution, that is, the change from a view of the solar system with the earth at the center (the view then supported by the Catholic Church), to one with the sun at the center. Although Kuhn discussed "paradigms" and paradigm shifts only with respect to science, the idea has been extended to the way social science works too.

15. Some might object that even this approach remains mired in Eurocentrism because of several unexamined assumptions about the very concepts being used, the objects being identified as in need of explanation, and even history as a method, all of which some claim are implicitly Eurocentric. For example, some have questioned whether states and industrial capitalism are really all that important to be explained, raising instead the possibility that other aspects of our world might be more important to explore, such as our very concepts of self, body, sexuality, place, causation, and story, and they have proposed new "postmodern" methodologies of "deconstruction" or "discourse communities" and their "privileged language," which confers "power," to explore them. This is an extremely complicated topic, but those wishing a sensible introduction might start with Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994).

16. Not all stories are "true." Some are invented by the author: they are fiction (like Goldilocks and the Three Bears, or the Harry Potter books). While both history and fiction develop stories, what distinguishes history from fiction is that historical facts are true. Historians have developed sophisticated tools and methods for writing historical narra-

CHAPTER ONE

The Material and Trading Worlds, circa 1400

We are born and raised under circumstances neither of our own choosing nor of our own making. In fact, the world we confront is composed of social, economic, political, and cultural *structures*. These large structures change very slowly, seldom as a result of conscious action on the part of a single person, and mostly only as a result of huge processes that are hardly detectable, by large and sustained social movements, or, as we will see, during historical conjunctures.

To understand the vast changes that accompanied the origins of the modern world, we thus need to start with some of the structures into which people in 1400 were born, lived, and died. Of course, we cannot possibly examine every facet of human life at that time, so we must be quite selective (especially to keep this history "brief," as I promised). What I have chosen to emphasize are but two of the major structural aspects of the world in 1400: first, the material and natural conditions under which most people lived, an overwhelmingly agricultural world, or what can be called "the biological old regime," and second, the trading networks that connected most of the Old World together. This chapter thus introduces two kinds of worlds, the material one in which most people lived quite restricted lives, and the trading, or commercial world, which brought the parts of the world into increasingly greater contact. To show how these are interrelated, the chapter concludes with an examination of the causes and consequences of the mid-fourteenth-century Black Death—one of the great catastrophes to befall human society—in western Europe and East Asia.

This chapter also introduces key concepts that will be used throughout the

book. Most of this chapter focuses on the material world, in particular the size of the human population and the economic, social, and environmental conditions under which most people lived. The concepts that will be introduced in this chapter include the rise of *civilization* and the *agricultural revolution*, the relationships between towns or *cities* and the countryside, between *ruling elites* and *peasants*, also called *agriculturalists* or *villagers*, between civilizations and *nomads*, and between people and the *environment*. Taken together, these relationships constitute the *biological old regime*, the working out of which is examined in the Black Death of the mid-fourteenth century.

We will also examine the *world system* as it existed around 1400. Today, there is much talk about—and demonstrations against—the benefits and dangers of *globalization*. In this context, many people apparently consider globalization to be a new phenomenon, whether or not they think its impact on the whole is beneficial or harmful. However, if there is anything I hope readers will take away from reading this book, it is that "globalization" is hardly new: it has been unfolding for a very long time. Key concepts in this chapter will include *polycentric* (to describe a world system with many centers), and *core* and *periphery*, whether applied to a single or a polycentric world system.

Another major point about the fifteenth-century world is that most of its people—regardless of where they lived, their civilization, or even their various folk customs—shared a basically similar material world. The reason is that people had to eat, and after the agricultural revolution 5,000–8,000 years ago, the way most people have obtained their living has been from agriculture. To be sure, whether the main crop was wheat, rye, or rice mattered, but all of the agriculturists faced similar challenges in dealing with nature, the ruling elites, and one another. For this reason, much of this chapter will deal with the social, economic, and political structures essential to understanding the world from about 1400 to 1800. The following chapters take up the story of what happened after 1400; in this chapter we establish a baseline in terms of material life against which changes in the world can be assessed.

The Biological Old Regime

The number of people on earth is an important indicator of the relative success humans have had in creating the material conditions under which the human population can either increase or decline. Of course, there are tremendous variations in time and place of population dynamics, and we will consider some of them here. As a first approximation, though, we can start with simple global totals.

The Weight of Numbers

Here we look at the weight of numbers[1] to get an overall picture. Today, there are just over 6 billion people on earth. Six hundred years ago, in 1400, humankind was just 6 percent of that, or about 350 million people, slightly more than the current population of the United States of 280 million. By 1800, the population had more than doubled to 720–750 million.[2] Moreover, in that 400-year period from 1400 to 1800, as much as 80 percent of that population were peasants, people who lived on the land and were the direct producers of food for themselves and the rest of the population. The world was overwhelmingly rural, and the availability of land to produce food was a constant constraint on the number of people alive at any given moment. For most of that period, the population rose and fell in great waves lasting for centuries, even if the very long-term trend was very slightly upward and the declines came sharply and swiftly. In very broad terms, we can see three great waves of population increase and decrease over the past one thousand years. Beginning about 900–1000 C.E. (probably simultaneously in China and Europe), the population rose until about 1300, crashing precipitously around 1350 as a result of the Black Death. Another period of increase began about 1400 and lasted until a mid-seventeenth century decline. The third advance, beginning around 1700, has yet to halt, although population experts expect it to by about 2100.

Climate Change

It now appears that climate change was a general cause of the premodern population increases around the world. Given the interest in the past twenty years in our current problem of global warming, historians and meteorologists have reconstructed past climates and have indeed found significant changes in temperatures and rainfall.[3] The connections between climate change and human population dynamics are complex, but the major linkage, especially in a world where 80–90 percent of the population made their living from the land, has to do with food production. Variations in temperature, radiation, and rainfall affect all growing things, trees as well as wheat or rice. Better climatic conditions improved harvests, while harvest failures could spell disaster. Long-term cooling trends could thus seriously shrink the food supply and hence the ability of the society to sustain a given population, leading to population declines. On the other hand, generally warming conditions could mean larger harvests and a growing human population.[4] As we will see, though, climatic changes count less for population growth in the period since 1700 when New World resources and industrialization began to ease prior constraints on population growth.

Population Density and Civilization

The 350 million people living in 1400 were not uniformly distributed across the face of the earth, but rather clustered in a very few pockets of much higher density. Indeed, of the 60 million square miles of dry land on earth, most people lived on just 4.25 million square miles, or barely 7 percent of the dry land. The reason, of course, is that that land was the most suitable for agriculture, the rest being covered by swamp, steppe, desert, or ice.

Moreover, those densely populated regions of earth corresponded to just fifteen highly developed civilizations, the most notable being (from east to west) Japan, Korea, China, Indonesia, Indochina, India, the Islamic West Asia, Europe (both Mediterranean and West), Aztec, and Inca. Astoundingly, nearly all of the 350 million people alive in 1400 lived in a handful of civilizations occupying a very small proportion of the earth's surface. Even more astoundingly, that still holds true today: 70 percent of the world's six billion people live on those same 4.25 million square miles.[5]

The densest concentrations of human population were (and still are, for the most part) on the Eurasian continent: China in the east, Europe in the west, and India in the south, with the populations of China and Europe about equal over large periods of historical time. So large are those three populations relative to the rest of the world that China alone represented 25–40 percent of the world's population (the latter percentage attained in the 1700s), Europe was 25 percent, and India was perhaps 20 percent. In other words, those three centers alone accounted for about 70 percent of the population of the world in 1400, increasing to perhaps 80 percent by 1800. Those amazing figures go a long way toward explaining why what happened in China, India, and Europe plays such an important role in this book.

The fifteen densely populated and highly developed civilizations shared several features, the most important of which was the relationship between those who lived in the countryside producing the food supply and those living in the cities consuming surpluses from that food production, even though the elites in the cities may have devised different means by which to ensure that food produced in the countryside made its way to the cities. This extractive relationship between town and countryside has a long history, going back to the Neolithic, or agricultural, revolution of 5,000–8,000 B.C.E.

The Agricultural Revolution

About 10,000 years ago, first in the part of the world aptly called the "Fertile Crescent" (currently Iraq), people learned how to grow their own food and to raise their own animals, thereby increasing the amount of food available. This change, from a hunting-and-gathering society to a sedentary agricultural

Nomads

The agriculturally based civilizations occupied the best land for agriculture throughout the Eurasian continent. The great grassland known as the steppe, stretching east to west across the continent, as well as the deserts and swamps, while not amenable to agriculture because of too little (or too much) water, were not uninhabited. On the steppe especially, groups of people obtained their living from the land by hunting and gathering and following their herds.[9] For these nomads, mobility on horses was a way of life, taking their herds of horse, sheep, cattle, and goats wherever the grass was green. Their way of life was not completely self-sufficient, for they needed things that the cities produced—salt, pots and pans, textiles, other manufactured goods—trading in return horses, meat, honey, or other products they could gather and that people in the cities prized. Civilizations and nomads across the Eurasian continent thus had a symbiotic relationship—they depended on each other.

The relations between the two groups were for the most part peaceful, but the nomads could constitute fearsome fighting forces. As hunters, they were expert horsemen and archers. And when climate changes desiccated their grazing lands and threatened their food supplies, they were not averse to raiding the food supplies stored by the civilizations, whether they were cities or empires. Of course, ruling elites of civilizations had armies—and a duty—to protect the food supplies from raiding nomads. To those within the centers of the civilization, these nomads appeared to be the opposite of civilized: they had no cities, were crude and illiterate, and probably superstitious as well. In short, they were "barbarians." And when the civilizations themselves weakened, for various reasons, they became susceptible not just to nomadic raids, but to invasion, destruction, or conquest, all of which happened. Notable examples include the fall of the Roman and Han Chinese empires (300–600 C.E.; not discussed in this book) and, as we will see shortly, the Mongol invasions of China and Europe in the thirteenth century. Of course, when the centers of "civilization" weakened, rulers sometimes incorporated nomadic warriors into their frontier armies, further weakening the civilization and opening it to conquest from within by partially acculturated nomads.

Nomads were not the only ones to challenge the civilizations. In the forests, swamps, brush, and mountains there were other groups, who, unlike the nomads, were often quite self-sufficient and could obtain everything they needed from their environment. They did come into contact with the forces of civilization though, especially during periods of population growth when peasant farmers or the empire sought new land to accommodate the larger population. The Chinese, for example, had a long history of contact with

these kinds of peoples, and in fact had come to classify them into two groups: the "cooked," those willing to accept some of the trappings of Chinese civilization, and the "raw," those who were not.[10]

Wildlife

Even though most of the weight of the world's population lived in just a few highly developed islands of civilization, the intervening expanses were inhabited by differently organized people to be sure, but people nonetheless. Indeed, by 1400 humans had migrated through or to virtually every place on the globe. Of course the hunters and nomads who lived in the vast spaces outside the densely populated civilizations were very few and far between, leaving much room for wildlife of all kinds. Three examples will suffice.

Wolves roamed throughout most of Europe, as can be attested by *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. But even more grimly, when human populations declined or hard winters made food precious for both humans and wolves, packs of wolves could—and would—enter the cities, as they did in Paris in 1420 and 1438, and even as late as the 1700s when the French went on a campaign to annihilate the species there "as they did in England six hundred years ago," according to a contemporary writing about 1779.[11] In China, tigers at one time inhabited most of the region and periodically attacked Chinese villages and cities, carrying away piglets and babies alike when humans disrupted their ecosystem by cutting away the forests that provided them with their favored game, deer or wild boar. Tigers remained so plentiful in Manchuria that the emperor's hunting expedition could bag sixty in one day, in addition to a thousand stags, and reports of tiger attacks on south China villages continued until 1800.[12] The greatest natural bounty, though, was in the New World, particularly North America, where the first European visitors described "unbelievable" numbers and sizes of fish, birds, deer, bear, and trees.[13]

Thus from 1400 to 1750, when the human population increased from 350 to 720 million, there was still plenty of room for wildlife of all kinds. Nonetheless, the relationship between the two populations clearly was inverse: the more people, the less wildlife, especially as those in the "civilizations" developed a desire for wearing furs (in China, Europe, and North America) or eating exotic fish and fowl. Great hunting expeditions to kill whales, tigers, bison, beavers, homing pigeons, sharks, fox—the list goes on—for their hides, their meat, their various other body parts, started then and continue to this day, except for those species already extinct or, in some parts of the world, protected.

The expansion of the human population on earth thus meant less land and hence habitat available for other species. Although we depend on the envi-

ronment for our survival, our species has been willing to sacrifice others for our *Lebensraum*.[14] Sometimes the end for other species has come like a rifle shot, with the species wiped out without altering the rest of the physical environment, as when the wolves were eliminated from England, France, or Wisconsin, or bison from the Great Plains, leaving the forest or the plains intact—impoverished, but intact. At other times, the end for a species comes as a holocaust, where expanding human populations have burned and slashed entire ecosystems to turn them into agricultural fields, as happened to the south China tiger. However, with each of the great human population declines in the mid-fourteenth and then in the mid-seventeenth centuries, wildlife populations reestablished themselves and once again expanded. But since the mid-1700s, the human population of the world has steadily increased, putting pressure on all remaining wildlife.

Population Growth and Land

Population growth and decline each brought certain benefits and difficulties to a society. On the one hand, and as with any living organism, an increase in human numbers is an indication of our success in obtaining greater food energy from the ecosystem. Higher populations and greater densities made possible civilizations, cities, education, and trade, as well as a growing awareness and understanding of the human and natural worlds. Population growth thus can accompany improving conditions and rising standards of living for most people, at least up to a certain point, where the limits of land availability and the ability to feed the growing population were reached. In those instances, the human population could overshoot the capacity of the land to feed them, leading to deteriorating living conditions and greater susceptibility to death from disease and famine. As the population fell back, a better balance between the numbers to be fed and the amount of land available to feed them was reestablished.

A growing human population requires additional food and energy supplies to support it, and given the agricultural technology available in 1400, those increases could come from but three sources: bringing more land under cultivation, increasing the labor inputs on a given plot of land (including selecting better seed), or increasing the amount of water or fertilizer. In China over the period from 1400 to 1800, for example, the population almost quadrupled from 85 to 320–350 million, the increase being sustained almost equally by increases in the land under cultivation and by more intensive tilling and fertilizing of the land already under the plow.[15]

Of course bringing new land under cultivation implied human migration to new lands, fighting and displacing the wildlife as necessary, and also bat-

tling the "uncivilized" people of the mountains, forests, and bush. Some migrations, though, were easier than others, especially if the new lands were sparsely populated and poorly defended or the migrating people had the military might of their empire backing them (as was the case in China). Some areas, though, were for all intents and purposes off limits; Europeans, for example, could not look too far east because the lands were already occupied by various strong nomadic peoples: Turks, Tartars, and Mongols all sent shivers of fear down the spines of most Europeans and Asians.

In summary, nearly all of the world's 350 million people living in 1400 were rural people producing food and raw materials for handicraft industries to sustain both themselves and a small ruling elite that took a portion of the harvest as taxes (to the state) and rent (to landowners). Peasant families often spun and wove textiles that they used both for themselves and traded in local markets for goods they themselves could not produce, and at times their textiles entered into some very long-distance trade circuits, as we will see shortly. With good climatic conditions and hence better harvests, peasant families might look to increase their size,[16] especially if additional land were available nearby, or if their government encouraged more distant migration and would protect them from the wolves or tigers and nomadic invaders. If the population grew too much or too fast, overshooting the ability of the land to support them, a couple of poor harvests could spell famine and increase susceptibility to epidemic disease, as happened in the early 1300s, and would happen once again in the late 1500s and early 1600s.

Epidemic disease, famine, war, and other disasters kept human life expectancy much shorter than it is today. In many of the richest and most advanced parts of the premodern world, from China and Japan in East Asia to England and Germany in Europe, life expectancies at birth were 30–40 years,[17] or half of what they are today for most of the developed world. Of course those life spans were short largely because infant and childhood mortality were high: women bore many children and were lucky if half survived to age fifteen. Once past the dangers of death from childhood disease, many people could expect to live into their sixties—under good agricultural conditions, that is.

Famine

Food shortages, dearth, and famine were an all-too-real part of life (and death) for most of the people living in 1400. It is of course all too easy to blame such disasters on "natural causes" alone. But in that time period 80–90 percent of the world was composed of one vast peasantry, rural people who produced the food and industrial raw materials for the society and who were obligated to

give up a certain amount of their harvest each and every year to agents of the state in the form of taxes and, unless they were in the small minority lucky enough to own their land free and clear, in the form of rent and labor services to the landowner.[18] Throughout much of the most densely populated part of Eurasia (that is, in China, Europe, and India), peasant families gave up as much as half of their harvest to the state and landlords.[19]

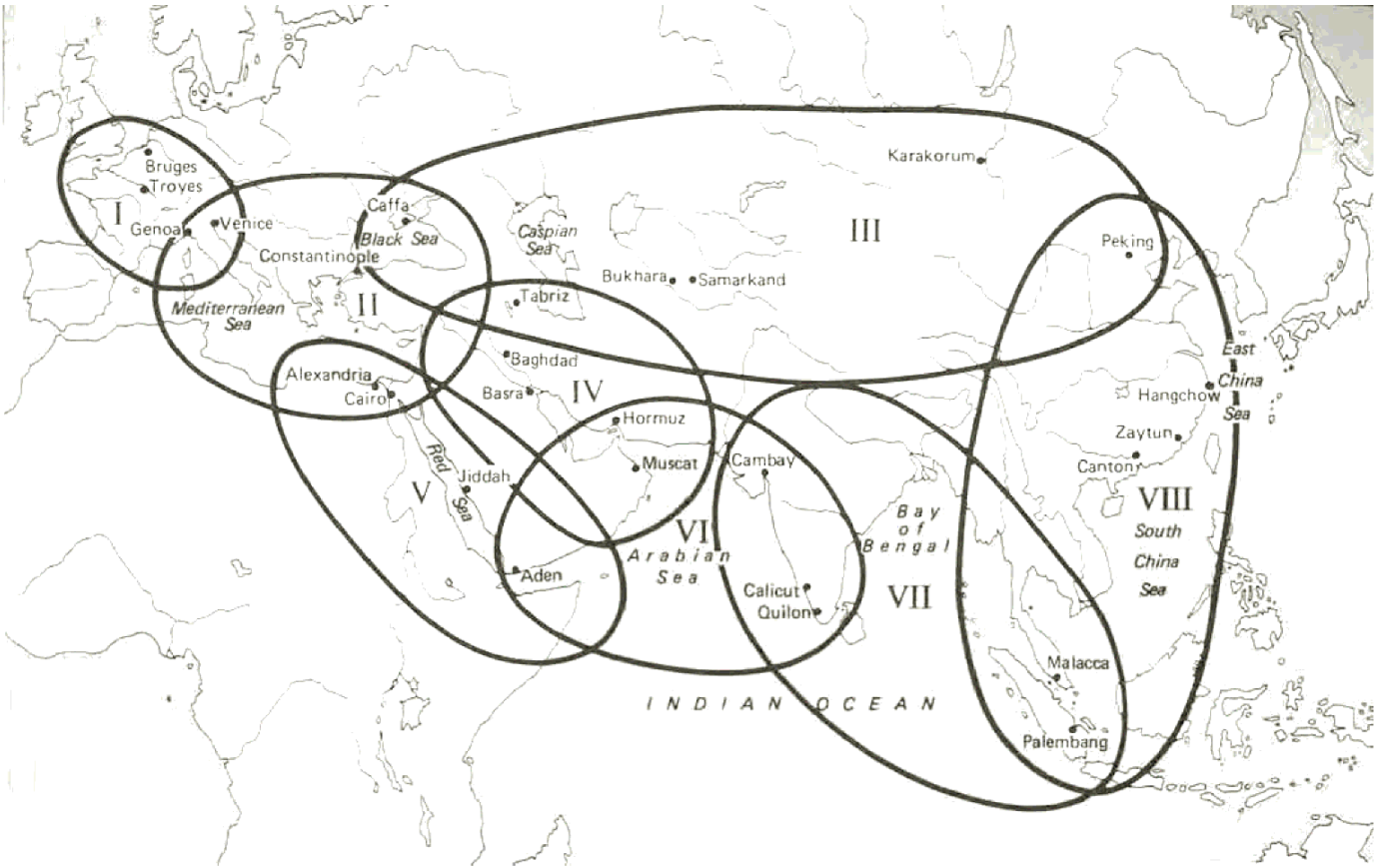
In good or improving times, peasant families might be able to make ends meet, providing for their own subsistence needs and also meeting their obligations to the tax man and rent collector, and to produce a surplus that might be sold in the market. But what about those times when the harvest fell short? A "good" government or a "good" landowner might recognize that to take their regular share would push the peasant family below *subsistence levels*, and thus would lower or cancel taxes and rents for that year. But if the government or landowners either could not or would not—if they had debts to pay others, for instance—then the squeeze would be on. Indeed, Japanese landowners in the eighteenth century said of peasants that they were like sesame seeds: the more you squeezed, the more you got.

So famine in peasant societies was not so much a "natural" as a "social" phenomenon.[20] This is important to understand because it is in this context especially that peasants developed concepts of their own about what rights they had in society, and under what conditions they could press them. The agrarian world that we have been considering thus was not made by the ruling elites, but came about as a result of the interactions, understandings, and agreements (both explicit and implicit) among state agents, landowners, and peasant producers.[21]

Peasant Revolt

Whether peasants would stand for circumstances that might cause famine or revolt against them depended in large measure on two factors. First, no matter how enraged peasants might be at cruel or life-threatening treatment by the state or landlords, if the government or lord had sufficient military force and was ready to use it—and the peasants knew that was the case—they might conclude that they had little choice but to endure, or flee, if they could. The second factor relates to the cohesiveness of peasant communities themselves. Even if force did not prevent them from acting, if the peasant community itself did not have the capacity for collective action, then they might just suffer in silence, and maybe even die over a long winter.[22]

Both conditions were met in sufficient times and places for peasant revolts and other forms of resistance to the established order to have been a major part of the dynamics of the old regime. In Japan from 1590 to 1871, for in-



Map 1.1. The Eight Circuits of the Thirteenth-Century World System

Source: Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 34.

1500 system a wholly new creation, or did it arise out of the elements of the preceding one? I tend toward the latter interpretation, as will become clearer in the next chapter.[27]

The other quite remarkable feature of the thirteenth-century world system is that it functioned without a central controlling or dominating force. To those who conceive of the modern world system as growing under the domination of a single state or group of states, the idea that a system could work without a controlling center is somewhat novel.[28] To be sure, each of the trade circuits did have a predominating group—the Italians in the European system, Arabs in the Middle Eastern circuit, and Chinese in the East Asian circuit—but no one of those controlled the whole system. Force thus was not used to keep goods flowing throughout the system, although rulers in various parts did offer protection to traders, caravans, or ships. Indeed, most of the rulers recognized that trade was valuable—especially when they could tax it—and hence encouraged and protected it, not wanting to kill the goose that was laying golden eggs by trying to seize by force the goods of traders from another part of the world.

The world in the fourteenth century thus was polycentric: it contained several regional systems, each with its own densely populated and wealthy "core," surrounded by a periphery that provided agricultural and industrial raw materials to the core, and most of which were loosely connected to one another through trade networks. Moreover, I will argue, the world remained polycentric until quite late in our story, around 1800, when Europeans put into place the elements necessary to colonize most of the globe, in the process creating a global system with a highly developed core and an underdeveloped periphery. Even then, some regions—especially parts of East Asia—remained highly resistant to being fully colonized. The importance of conceiving of the world as having been polycentric rather than dominated by a single center will become more evident as we proceed with this narrative. Suffice it to say here that a polycentric conception of the world will attune us to voices and actions coming from several parts of the world, and not just Europe. It is, in short, a crucial part of a non-Eurocentric narrative of world history.

Finally, the Afro-Eurasian system circa 1300 is called a "world system," not because it literally spanned the entire globe, but because it was greater than any one given part.[29] Indeed, for all practical purposes, it was a world system, for it involved all those parts of the world where people traded and thus did know something, no matter how little, about one another. Obviously not yet connected to the Afro-Eurasian trading system were the Americas and the empires arising independently there, or Australia and the Pacific Islands.

The method I have used to describe the world, focusing on the linkages

among the various regional systems, emphasizes the role of trade and merchants in forging those links. To be sure, the role of merchants and trade in creating the world system was important. As I will show in more detail in the next chapter, not only did trade allow different parts of the world to sell what they could best produce or gather, but merchants also served as conduits for cultural and technological exchange as well, with ideas, books, and ways of doing things carried in the minds of the merchants while their camels or ships carried their goods. Additionally, epidemic disease and death, soldiers and war also followed trade routes, as we can see by examining the world's experience with the Black Death in the mid-1300s, after which most Eurasians shared a common disease pool.

The Black Death: A Mid-Fourteenth Century Conjuncture

The mid- to late 1300s constituted a serious crisis in world history.[30] The collapse around 1350 of the Mongol empire, which had served as the glue holding much of Eurasia together, was part of that crisis, and so too were the ravages of the Black Death, a virulent epidemic disease also known as the bubonic plague, which killed tens of millions of people in the mid-1300s. The reasons why the Black Death occurred when and how it did are complex, as are its consequences. But we can begin to understand it by applying the conceptual tool of "conjuncture" discussed in the introduction.

The bubonic plague is a result of a bacillus, that is, a disease-producing bacterium (*Pasteurella pestis*), that was endemic among burrowing rodents in southwestern China. The bacteria can live within the rodent populations without being transmitted to humans, but if passed to humans through flea bites, within days it usually led to the death of the human host. People who lived near those infected rodent populations developed taboos to keep themselves at a safe distance from the flea- and bacteria-carrying rodents. Not so those ignorant strangers or newcomers to an infected region, for that is what happened in southwestern China in the 1330s. Mongol troops campaigning there apparently carried the fleas or an infected rodent into the more densely populated areas of China, setting off an epidemic in 1331 which, according to Chinese sources, in some places killed two-thirds of the population.

The plague would have remained a Chinese dilemma and not such an important part of world history if several other unrelated things had not happened. First, a rodent host population in Europe had to grow and live among humans: that happened when, for whatever reasons, the black rat (*Mus rat-*

tus) took up residence in the attics and rafters of people's houses. Second, the European population had increased substantially from about 1000 C.E. on, with shortages of land and forest for fuel being notable by 1300. Then, the climate worsened, with winters becoming longer and harder and the growing season shorter, putting the population under severe stress. Circumstances were ripe in Europe for some kind of disaster: if it wasn't the plague, it might have been something else, maybe not at the same time or place, but surely the kindling had been laid and all that was needed to set it afire was a single spark. That it was the plague, and that it spread rapidly, was occasioned by three additional factors.

First, the Mongol empire spanned almost the entire Eurasian continent, and their communications system took advantage of a northerly route across the vast, treeless steppe where their horses could transmit messages very rapidly. Moreover, that steppe ecosystem harbored a certain burrowing rodent that lived in vast underground "cities" and was susceptible to the plague bacillus. Soon after the plague broke out in 1331 in China, Mongol riders heading west probably transmitted the plague to the rodents on the steppe, spreading it across Eurasia.

Second, Europeans had developed a regional trading network linked by the activities of Italian merchants from the city–states of Genoa and Venice. Still, the plague might not have spread to Europe had it not been for the third circumstance. The trading city of Caffa, located on the Black Sea, was the link between the trans-Eurasian trade routes: it was the western terminus for caravan trade from China and the eastern terminus for trade carried on Venetian and Genoese ships, both of which apparently docked at Caffa in December 1346. At the time, Caffa was being besieged by the forces of a Mongol prince, and the city might have fallen had not the plague broken out among the Mongol troops, killing most and forcing the prince's withdrawal. The plague might have stopped there had not fleas, rodents, or infected Italians climbed aboard their ships bound for home. When they reached there in December 1346, the plague was let loose in Europe, and it spread rapidly to other towns via the trade routes that had been established, especially the shipping routes. Not only did the black rats now living in European houses spread the plague to people; infected humans too could spread it directly to others by coughing. The plague raged across Europe. By 1350 it had spread all the way to Sweden and then that winter on to Moscow.

Like famine, the plague was not a purely "natural" phenomenon either, but instead required a host of circumstances to come together for it to have such a major impact on the world and its history. The population of Europe plum-

meted from 80 to 60 million in just a few years, while in China, the plague coupled with civil war in the 1350s and 1360s saw the population tumble from 120 million in 1200 to 85 million by 1393. Although few records exist to confirm it, the plague probably also decimated the Islamic world, India, and the nomadic Mongol peoples of the steppe as well.[31]

The death toll was high and it etched a permanent memory in the minds of the living. But despite the horror of corpses piled high in village lanes, carted off for burial, or set afire on rafts pulled out to sea, those living fifty years later in 1400 did have more and better land, more fuel, and more resources of all kinds, even if the tempo of trade among the various regions of the global trading system had slowed considerably. The story of the fourteenth-century Black Death thus not only illustrates the impact of epidemic disease on human populations and the course of world history; it also demonstrates the very early connectedness of world regions, in this case Europe and East Asia. Not only did commodities, people, and ideas ride the trade routes, so too did horrifying disease.

Conclusion: The Biological Old Regime

This balancing act of people fending off or dying from both macro- and microparasites—elites living off peasants, civilizations fighting off or losing to nomadic invaders, and germs multiplying inside of and then killing nomads and city dwellers alike—has been called our "biological ancien regime," or biological "old regime."[32] In this world—the world not just of 1400 but the world for millennia before and then afterward until well into the nineteenth century (as we will see in chapter 5)—the human population lived very much in the environment and had to be very mindful of the opportunities and limits it placed on human activity. As a result, the human population did not increase so much or so fast as to threaten the environmental basis for society, except in a few cases,[33] or until later developments shattered the biological old regime and opened up new possibilities, but that is a story for later in this book.

Agriculture not only provided the food for the entire society, but most of the raw materials for whatever industry there was, especially textiles for clothing. In China, silk and cotton reigned supreme; in India, cotton and silk; and in northwestern Europe, wool: the raw materials all coming from farms. Fuel for processing these materials, as well as for keeping warm, also came from forests. To this extent, the biological ancien regime was organic; that is, it depended on solar energy to grow crops for food and trees for fuel. The biological old regime thus was one that limited the range of possibilities for people and their history because virtually all human activity drew upon *renewable* sources of energy supplied on an annual basis by the sun.

9. Following G. W. Hewes, Braudel lists twenty-seven identifiable groups of hunter-gatherers, seventeen nomadic peoples, and an additional eighteen primitive agriculturists. *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 1, 56–60.

10. For a fascinating discussion of the "cooked" and the "raw" in the context of Chinese expansion into a frontier area, see John Shepherd, *Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier 1600–1800* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993).

11. Cited in Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 1, 66–67.

12. See Robert B. Marks, *Tigers, Rice, Silk, and Silt: Environment and Economy in Late Imperial South China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chap. 10.

13. William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

14. This German term was used by the Nazis after World War I to express their desire, fanned by a sense that the German population had expanded beyond the ability of the German territory to sustain it, to expand at their neighbors' expense. It seems an apt term to describe what humans in general have felt about expanding their territory at the expense of the natural world.

15. There is much scholarly debate on the size of China's population and its rate of growth from 1400 to 1850. The baseline was established by Ping-ti Ho in 1953 in *Studies on the Population of China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), followed by Dwight Perkins, *Agricultural Development in China* (Chicago: Aldine, 1968). Where G. William Skinner thinks the generally accepted figures for 1850 of about 420–450 million have to be reduced to about 380 million ("Sichuan's Population in the Nineteenth Century: Lessons from Disaggregated Data," *Late Imperial China* 8, no. 1 (1987): 1–80), F. W. Mote thinks the population in 1600–1650 and later was much larger than previously believed. See his *Imperial China 900–1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 743–747, 903–907.

16. The question of whether and how peasant farming families in Europe and elsewhere decided to limit their size is an important question that will be discussed more when we discuss the Industrial Revolution in chapter 5.

17. See Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 36–40.

18. In much of Europe, the Church "tithed" the peasants too, expecting one-tenth of their produce. Monasteries could be large landowners as well.

19. This circumstance coincided with the very origins of civilization and persisted for many years into the twentieth century. For a brief and readable history, see Ponting, *A Green History of the World*, esp. chap. 6.

20. For a full development of this argument, see Amaryta Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981). See also David Arnold, *Famine: Social Crisis and Historical Change* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

21. On the agency of peasants in the making of their own world, see James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990). A similarly interesting case was made about black slaves in North America by Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974).

22. There is a wonderful literature on peasants and peasant rebellion in agrarian societies. See James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press); Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); and Barrington Moore, *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Beacon Press, 1966).

23. The idea of macro- and microparasites is developed in William McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (New York: Anchor Books, 1976).

24. For the time being, this formulation excludes the Americas, southern Africa, and much of Oceania.

25. This description is based upon Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). A summary is available from the American Historical Association as a pamphlet, *The World System in the Thirteenth Century: Dead-End or Precursor?* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1994).

26. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 3 vols. (New York: Academic Press, 1974–1989).

27. Abu-Lughod and Wallerstein see the post-1500 world system as being something new, created by Europeans, and not related to the previous one.

28. The example of the Internet, though, should sensitize us even more to the possibility that huge, complex organizations can develop without any central control. To create a Web page, for example, one need not seek the permission of anyone, other than registering a domain name.

29. Immanuel Wallerstein describes the capitalist "world-system," with a hyphen, in *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974), 15. His use of the term "world-system" means specifically the world-system that he argues emerged first in Europe and then was spread by Europeans across the globe from 1492 on. Others use the term "world system" without a hyphen to indicate something similar, yet different, such as the "polycentric" world system I have been describing (i.e., one that was a "world" but not created, diffused, or necessarily controlled by Europeans).

30. This section is based primarily on McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, chap. iv.

31. Michael Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977).

32. The term is used both by Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 1, 70–72, and Ponting, *A Green History of the World*, chap. 12.

33. For examples, see Ponting, *A Green History of the World*, chaps. 1, 5, and 17.

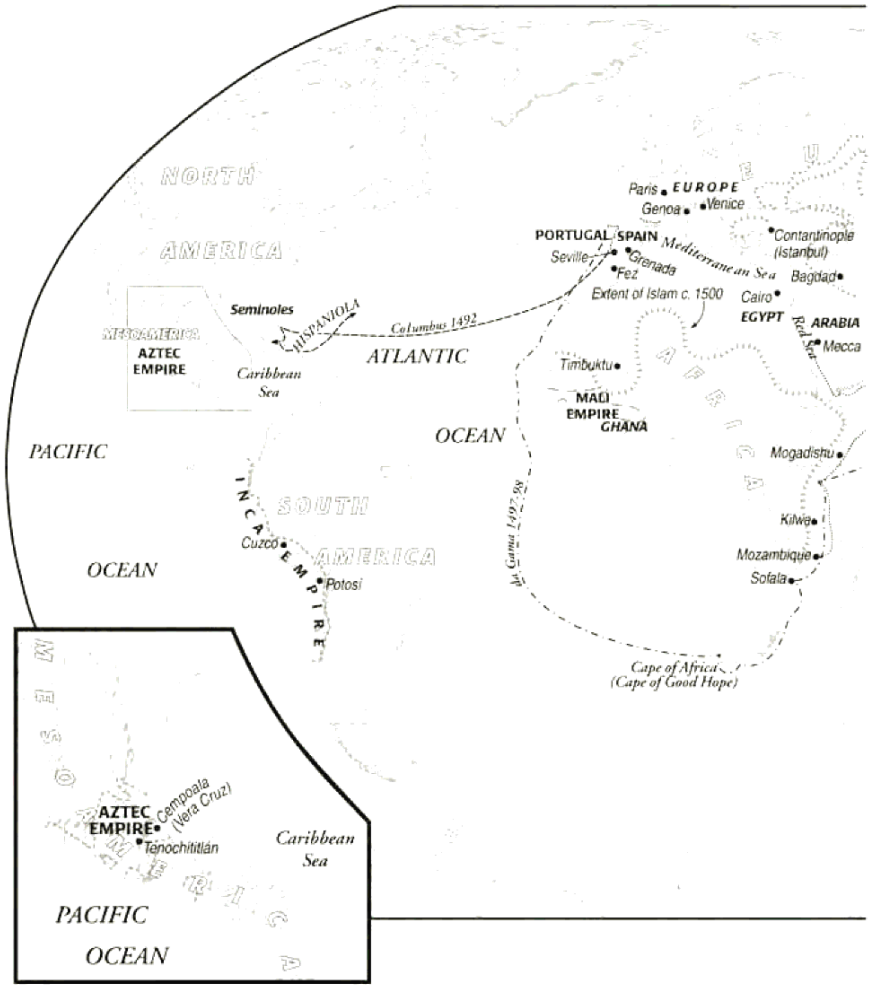
CHAPTER TWO

Starting with China

Historians agree that the voyages of Christopher Columbus across the Atlantic in 1492 and of Vasco da Gama around Africa's Cape of Good Hope into the Indian Ocean in 1498 constitute important developments in the emergence of the modern world. Indeed, they were. Where historians disagree is *how* important they were: Did they represent a new era? Did they really change all that much? Eurocentric interpretations tend to see them as major steps taken toward the inevitable rise of the West. Some, on the other hand (myself included), think it is important to place those voyages of discovery in a broader global context of the real structure of wealth and power in the world around 1500. From that perspective, the Indian Ocean can be seen as the most important crossroads for global exchanges of goods, ideas, and culture, with China, India, and the Islamic Near and Middle East meeting there as the major players, and Europe as a peripheral, marginal player trying desperately to gain access to the sources of wealth generated in Asia. Our story in this chapter thus starts in Asia, with China.

China

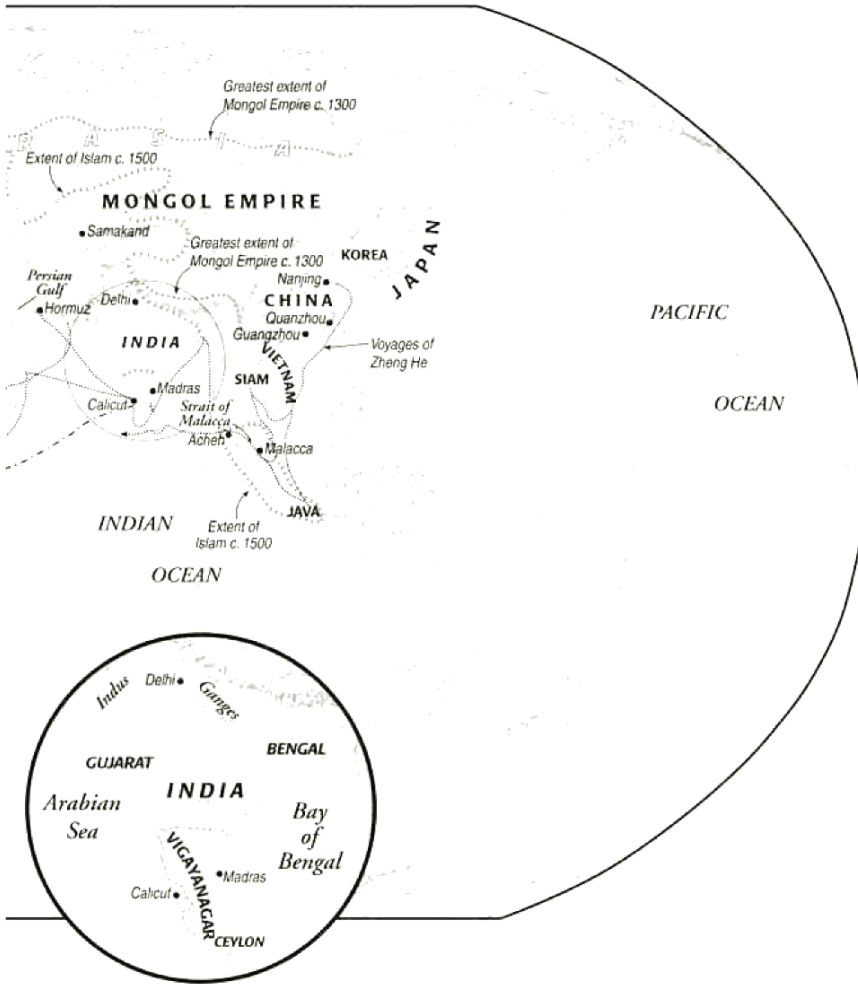
When the founding emperor of China's Ming dynasty (1368–1644) died in 1398, succeeding him to the throne was not one of his sons, but his grandson. The emperor had wanted his eldest son to succeed him, to establish a firm principle of primogeniture to be followed for the rest of the dynasty, but when that son died, the emperor anointed his eldest son's eldest son as heir to the throne. This decision did not sit well with the emperor's fifth son, the Prince of Yan, a man with impressive military credentials, who



Map 2.1. The World circa 1400–1500

waited only eighteen months after his father's death to begin unseating his nephew, now the emperor. In a civil war that lasted from late 1399 to mid-1402, the Prince of Yan destroyed his nephew's forces and captured the throne, but not without some ambiguity, for rumors abounded that the nephew had escaped the inferno that had burned down his palace.

As the new emperor, the Prince of Yan sought to extend China's power and influence in all directions. He campaigned to the north and northwest against the Mongols, trying to push China's previous rulers so far into the steppe that they would never again threaten China. As part of this policy, he



moved the capital from Nanjing ("Southern Capital") on the Yangzi River farther north to Beijing ("Northern Capital"), less than one hundred miles from the Great Wall and the last defense against Mongol invasions. He sent embassies far into Central Asia to secure the acknowledgment by those rulers of China's preeminence. He also intervened in affairs in Vietnam, hoping not just to put rulers favored by China on the throne, but actually to incorporate Annam, as northern Vietnam was then called, into the Chinese empire. In one of the greatest adventures in world history, he launched massive maritime expeditions into the Indian Ocean.

By 1435, it appeared that a powerful Chinese presence in the waters of the Indian Ocean was secure, opening a sea route linking the eastern and western parts of the Eurasian continent with trade circuits in India and in Africa, and placing much of the ocean-going trade in the world under Chinese eyes, if not control. Surprisingly, though, the seventh voyage was the last, and Chinese seaborne power declined so rapidly and thoroughly that by 1500 not only were there no Chinese warships in the Indian Ocean, but the Chinese navy had even ceased to exist in the waters off China's own shores.[4] Fortunately for Chinese merchants, the Indian Ocean was a mostly peaceful place to conduct trade, and they continued doing so, even after the withdrawal of the navy.

As we will see, China's withdrawal of the most powerful navy on earth from periodic patrols on and around the Indian Ocean turned out to be of immense importance for the course of world history. For now, though, we have to ask why the Chinese court abandoned the Indian Ocean. The short answer is that political struggles within China, struggles that had been going on for some time at the imperial court between those who wanted the voyages to continue and those who wanted China to apply its resources to the greater threat of the Mongols to the north, finally resolved themselves in favor of the latter when the emperor died in 1435. From that point forward, the Chinese state abandoned the seas, paid attention to how an agrarian economy could feed a growing population, and saw their main enemy as being the nomads roaming the steppe to the north. Rebuilding and lengthening the Great Wall became of greater importance to China's rulers than continuing the expensive voyages of the Treasure Ships.[5] The abandonment of a navy, though, did not mean that Chinese commercial voyages ended as well; quite the contrary, for the Indian Ocean was the world's most important crossroads of trade.

India and the Indian Ocean

The Mongols' overland trade route linking east and west on the Eurasian continent had not been the only, or even the most important, trade route. Where the collapse of the Mongol empire and the ravages of the Black Death may have been part of a wider mid-fourteenth-century crisis that affected much of Eurasia, there is little evidence of much of a slowdown in trading on the Indian Ocean. Indeed, the Indian Ocean had been, and would remain, not just a crucially important link in the global trading system, but a source of great wealth and access to luxuries, spices, and manufactured goods to any and all who could get their merchants, goods, or ships to the major trading cities on the Indian Ocean. The Chinese thus had not been wrong in seeing the importance of the Indian Ocean and wanting to send their ships there.

In fact, the Chinese excursion was but one episode in a longer history of the Indian Ocean, starting in about 650 with the expansion of the Islamic world and the establishment of the Tang dynasty in China, and ending around 1750 with the British colonization of India on the eve of the Industrial Revolution.[6] During those 1,100 years, the Indian Ocean arguably was the single most important crossroads of trade and generator of merchant wealth in the world, and for our purposes its history can be usefully subdivided into three periods.

From 650 to 1000, Arab traders and mariners carried goods and ideas all the way from the Islamic Near East to Southeast Asia and China, and back again. Arab traders spread their language and the Islamic religion throughout the region, from East Africa to Indonesia, providing a common language and culture for those who traveled there. In the ninth century, for instance, over 100,000 Arabs, Persians, and Jews had taken up residence in the south China city of Guangzhou, and the Islamic mosque built there served as a beacon for ships sailing into its port. In the second period, beginning around 1000 and lasting until 1500, Chinese merchants saw the profits to be made in the trade, and, with or without the support of their government, sailed into the Indian Ocean to compete with the Arabs.

The Chinese entrance into the Indian Ocean divided trade in the Indian Ocean into three overlapping trade circuits, determined largely by the pattern of monsoon winds and hence the opportunities for sailing. Arab traders were still important throughout the region, but they were not the only ones plying the waters of the Indian Ocean. In the western zone, from East Africa to the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the west coast of India, Arab traders were most active, although Indian merchants also participated in that trade. The central circuit from Ceylon to the Bay of Bengal and to Southeast Asia was dominated by Indian merchants, although Arabs and other Muslims were very active there too. The Chinese dominated the South China Sea trade circuit from China to Indonesia and the Strait of Malacca.

Within and among these three zones, great trading cities arose to handle the trade. In the western circuit, the ports of Aden, Hormuz, Cambay, Calicut, Mogadishu, and Kilwa (the latter two on the east coast of Africa) were the most important. Linking the eastern and middle circuits was Malacca, a trading port that arose in a strategic strait where the monsoon winds shifted, thereby making a convenient layover place for traders waiting for the next leg of their journey.[7] Nothing else accounts for the rise of this city, but the economic and strategic importance of Malacca was not lost on either the Chinese in the early 1400s or, a century later, the Portuguese. (See map 2.1.)

During the first two periods (spanning 650 to 1500), trade in the Indian Ocean seemed to have been self-regulating. No one political power domi-

nated, or tried to dominate, the trade linking those three zones; that was true even during the voyages of the Chinese Admiral Zheng He, for Arab and Indian merchants continued on with their activities unobstructed by the Chinese or shut out in favor of Chinese merchants. Another notable feature of the trade was that it was conducted largely without resort to force of arms. African dhows (traditional boats), Chinese junks, and Indian and Arab merchant ships all sailed without naval convoys from their native lands. None of the great ports of trade—Aden, Hormuz, Calicut, Puri, Acheh, or Malacca—were walled or fortified. The assumption in this wide-ranging trade seems to have been that force of arms was not needed to protect shipping or to enforce deals.

During the third period, from 1500 to 1750, all of this changed when first the Portuguese and then the Dutch, English, and French introduced "armed trading" into the Indian Ocean, forcing others already there to arm themselves in defense or to pay the intruders for protection (this topic will be taken up in more detail later in this chapter). Europeans literally tried to muscle in on the huge and profitable trade in the Indian Ocean, to control shipping lanes and port cities by force, and to monopolize, if they could, trade in commodities valued in Europe.[8] Despite the fact that Europeans introduced a new element into Indian Ocean trade, the trade was so great that they did not dominate it until the advent of steamships in the late 1800s enabled them to undercut trade carried by Arab, Indian, or Chinese ships.

Four great centers of civilization and economic power provided the impetus for the Indian Ocean trade: the Islamic Near and Middle East, Hindu India, China, and Indonesia, or the Spice Islands. To Malacca, the Chinese brought manufactured goods, in particular silk, porcelain, and iron- and copperwares, and in return took to China spices, other edibles, pearls, cotton goods, and silver. Indians brought cotton textiles and returned with spices. To the Middle East and East Africa, India exported cotton textiles, some of which found their way to West Africa, and other manufactured goods. From Africa and the Arabs, Indians received palm oil, cocoa, ground nuts, and precious metals. In general, agricultural and other raw or primary products of the ocean, forest, or mines, including silver and gold, flowed to China and India, while those two areas exported manufactured goods, especially textiles (cotton in India and silk in China).

The engines of this immense global trade were primarily China and India. In the fifteenth century, in the words of one historian:

> China was still the greatest economic power on earth. It had a population probably in excess of 100 million, a prodigiously productive agricultural sector, a vast and sophisticated trading network, and handicraft industries superior in just about every

way to anything known in other parts of Eurasia. After a visit to the great Central Asia political and commercial center of Samarkand early in the fifteenth century, for example, a European diplomat described the Chinese goods he found there as "the richest and most precious of all [imported into the city] . . . , for the craftsmen of [China] are reputed to be the most skillful by far beyond those of any other nation."[9]

As a great agrarian empire, China produced much of what it needed, although it did have to trade for horses, some raw materials, preciosities, and silver. Its rulers mostly saw foreign trade as useful if it could bring additional wealth to the state or satisfy consumer demand for black pepper (which had become an integral part of Chinese cuisine) or other exotic foods like edible bird's nests or sea slugs. The rulers of the Chinese empire found most of these imports to be nice, but saw the potential troubles caused by Chinese and foreign merchants to be large, so for most of the time China controlled foreign trade through its tribute trade system of official monopolies, in addition obtaining substantial revenues for the imperial treasury as a result. However, beginning in the early 1400s, China's new and growing demand for silver to keep the wheels of its domestic economy going could not be satisfied by domestic mines alone. Thus to obtain its silver, China had to engage in foreign trade, at first getting most of its silver from Japan, but then increasingly in the 1500s from Europeans, which we will explore in the next chapter.

India had three great textile manufacturing centers: Gujarat on the west coast, Madras in the south, and Bengal on the east. Cotton was spun and woven in artisan homes with material advanced to them by merchants who then collected the thread and cloth for dyeing and printing before being brought to market to sell. Most of this cotton cloth met internal Indian demand, but a considerable amount was produced for export. Some, as we have seen, was bound for Africa or China, but Indian textiles traded as far as Poland and the Mediterranean. To meet both domestic and foreign demand for their cotton textiles, Indians had created a whole manufacturing system from growing the cotton to finishing it. In turn, those Indians who participated in the textile industry had to look to the market to supply their food needs, further commercializing the Indian economy and increasing both production and productivity. Much like the Chinese economy, the Indian economy was highly developed and was the source of select but important manufactured goods for much of the Old World.

Unlike China, though, India at this time was not a unified empire and indeed had a history of both political disunity and unity imposed by outside conquerors. Although India looks like a "place" on a map because of its distinctive geography, it was never really politically unified until the mid-1500s, and then only tentatively because it broke apart again by the mid-1700s. The

center of Indian civilization was in the north, in particular the Indus River valley, an agriculturally rich area open to conquest by invaders coming through the Kyber Pass. The Huns did so first in the sixth century, leaving in their wake numerous weak, warring states.

In the eighth century, Arabs spreading the Islamic faith invaded north India and did so again at the end of the tenth century. At the end of the twelfth century, north India was invaded yet again, this time by Turkish Muslims who established a new kingdom, which lasted for two hundred years, the Delhi sultanate. Islam thus gained a stronghold in northwest India where Pakistan now sits, and mosques were built wherever the sultan's power extended. The Delhi sultanate lasted until 1398 when Timur the Lame invaded, ravaged northern India, and sacked Delhi. South India was never easily conquered; it had its own language (Tamil) and political history. Despite the political disunity, Hindu religious ideas spread south in the seventh and eighth centuries, and political leaders soon found Hinduism useful in ruling there too. Thus, not only was India politically divided, but a major religious divide between Muslims and Hindus had opened as well.

Because the rulers of most Indian states supported trade, political and religious disunity did not hinder economic activity, for as we have seen, there was much to be traded when the Chinese Admiral Zheng He began visiting Indian ports in the early 1400s. Muslim merchants, speaking Arabic, could trade easily within a linguistic sphere that spread from East Africa, to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, all the way to Acheh and Malacca, both of which had rulers who had converted to Islam in the thirteenth century. Muslims have played an important part in our story so far, and it is now time to explore the question of how Islam originated and spread so far from its point of origin on the Arabian peninsula.

Dar al-Islam, "The Abode of Islam"

In 1325 at the age of twenty-one, a young Muslim man by the name of Ibn Battuta left his home in Tangiers on the North African coast for his pilgrimage (*hajj*) to the holy city of Mecca. Traveling overland to Cairo, he visited Damascus and Medina before reaching Mecca in October 1326. But rather than returning home, Ibn Battuta decided to see more of the world, setting out on a twenty-nine-year journey of 73,000 miles (almost three times the distance around the world). He traveled to Iraq, Persia, down the east coast of Africa, across Anatolia (Turkey) and Central Asia, across the Indian Ocean with stops at the islands of Ceylon and the Maldives, to northern and southern India, probably to south China, back to North Africa and across the

The Ottomans blocked European access to the eastern Mediterranean and hence the trade circuits to China and the Indian Ocean, forcing Europeans to search for alternative routes to gain access to the riches of Asia.

Africa

Ibn Battuta's travels point out the extent and power of the Islamic empires in the early modern world, even into Africa. Indeed, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and East Africa all were part of dar al-Islam. When Ibn Battuta traveled in Africa, he was visiting not just places in "the abode of Islam," but highly developed civilizations with all that that included: productive agriculture, cities, ruling and subject classes, regional trading systems, and advanced mining industrial activity, including an iron industry. By 500 C.E. the social, economic, and cultural complex characteristic of highly civilized people had spread throughout Africa, and great empires soon arose, the largest of which was Ghana in West Africa. Situated at the juncture of three different ecosystems—the savanna, the tropical rainforest, and the Sahara desert—and therefore able to take advantage of the products from all, Ghana was the most strategically located state at the time of the Muslim arrival in North Africa. After the explosion of Islam across the Mediterranean in the seventh century, all of the African empires that traded north across the Sahara converted to Islam between the tenth and twelfth centuries C.E.[11]

After the kings of Ghana converted to Islam, their kingdom continued to expand. The kingdom of Ghana produced some gold itself, but the Muslims' demand for it proved sufficiently strong and the goods they brought to trade in sufficient demand in West Africa (cloth from India, horses, beads, mirrors, and, most important, salt, which was not locally available) that gold flowed into the capital of Ghana, Koumbi-Saleh, fueling an already thriving trade.

Even more extensive than Ghana was the Mali empire that replaced it. From the 1200s to the early 1400s, Mali controlled and taxed almost all the trade in West Africa, which was indeed substantial. Huge caravans of up to 25,000 camels stretching for miles across the desert brought gold and slaves out of Africa and Indian cotton textiles (among other goods) into Mali. The cities of Mali prospered, and not just the capital city of Niani. Commerce turned Timbuktu into a great center, attracting scholars, architects, poets, and astronomers to its university, and Muslim theologians came there to the more than one hundred schools established to study the Quran.

The height of Mali wealth and influence came during the reign of Mansa Musa (1312–1337), a Muslim who made the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324–1325 with such a huge procession and amount of gold it was said that

when he sojourned in Cairo he gave away so much gold to all whom he met that its value plummeted 25 percent. Most of the gold from Africa found its way first to Cairo, the great trading port linking Asia with the Mediterranean and northern Europe, and from there via trade to India and to the Italian city–states of Venice and Genoa, who then took it farther north into western Europe. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, access to African gold was crucial for Europeans: in the view of one scholar, it was "absolutely vital for the monetization of the Mediterranean economy and for the maintenance of its balance of payments with [India]."[12]

The other route Islam followed into Africa was along the maritime trade routes south from Cairo and the Red Sea along the east coast of Africa to the trading cities of Mogadishu, Malindi, Mombasa, Kilwa, and Sofala. Even during Greek and Roman times, ships had called at East African ports, so the arrival of Muslim traders was not a major change, except that in addition to goods, they brought Islam, and gradually the peoples of East Africa converted to Islam. These cities, though, were so cosmopolitan—traders coming from inland Africa, Arabs, Persians, South Asians, Malays from Indonesia, and even Chinese (some of whom may have stayed behind when Admiral Zheng He's ships departed)—that people intermarried, giving rise to a new coastal culture and language called Swahili, a dialect with strong Arabic influence. Like West Africa, East Africa was a great source of primary products for the world economy, in particular ivory, animal skins, gold, and slaves.

The existence of large empires in Africa, though, should not obscure the larger fact that political power throughout most of Africa was highly fragmented, with hundreds of "ministates"—territories with less than four hundred square miles and just 3,000–5,000 inhabitants—in West Africa alone. Medium-sized states may have been ten times as large, but there were fewer of them. Although there was much warfare between and among African states, there was not much pressure within African society for warring states to expand their territory at the expense of their neighbors. The reason, according to historian John Thornton, is that land was not considered private property, and land was not the basis of wealth in African society.[13] Rather, and in sharp contrast to China, India, or Europe, in Africa control of labor was the source of wealth. It is in this context that we must understand the institution of African slavery.

Slavery

Slaves were used in virtually every society discussed so far in this book: Europe, the Islamic empires, China, and India all had them. Mostly, slaves were used as domestic servants in the households of the wealthy and powerful, and

slave status had nothing to do with skin color. Indeed, one of the major sources of slaves was eastern Europe, especially the areas around the Black Sea inhabited by people called Slavs, giving us our word for slave. One of the major "commodities" that Venetian merchants traded to the Mamluk empire in Egypt in fact were these "Slavs," sold for spices and gold in the markets of Cairo. In short, there was a world market for slaves, and European and Muslim traders were eager to supply it.

Africans too kept slaves. Because land was not owned privately and hence was not a source of wealth and power, elite Africans (political heads and merchants mostly) owned labor, that is, slaves. This absence of private property in land made slavery pervasive in Africa. Slaves were used as domestics in households, for agricultural labor, as the mainstays of the armies of several states, and in commerce. Slaves were not necessarily given the most degrading or demanding work in the society, and mostly they were considered as "permanent children," albeit ones who could be inherited by one's real children. There was thus a huge indigenous market for slaves within Africa, many of whom were acquired in the wars between states.[14] In the centuries from 750 C.E. to 1500 C.E., scholars have estimated that as many as 10,000 Africans annually were enslaved, and that the total over those 750 years may have reached 5–10 million.[15] Of course, a major part of the story of African slavery is connected to Europe's Atlantic slave trade to the Americas, and that will be taken up in the next chapter.

Although there is much that is interesting and significant to know about Africa, for our purposes two things stand out. First, African people had constructed large and successful empires, extensive internal trading networks, and productive agriculture and industry, especially mining and refining, long before Europeans arrived on the scene in the fifteenth century. Second, Africa already was an integral part of the world system, supplying gold and slaves and purchasing in return manufactured goods, many of which originated in Asia, such as brightly colored cotton textiles from India and porcelain from China. Although Africa was not an engine propelling the global economy, unlike India or China, neither was Europe.

Europe and the Gunpowder Epic

Although I have used the terms "Europe" and "China" as if they were similar units of comparison, politically they were not at all alike. For most of its long imperial history, China was a huge empire ruled by a single sovereign, as large as the United States today and in 1400 with 85–100 million people. "Europe," on the other hand, is just a convenient shorthand to name the western-

most peninsula of the Eurasian continent. Though I have been using the term "Europe" as if there were some unity to it, the truth is that Europe in 1400 was divided among hundreds of political units, from city–states (like Venice or Genoa), to principalities, bishoprics, duchies, kingdoms, and even a Muslim caliphate on the Iberian peninsula, each suspicious of the others, most at war at one time or another with their neighbors, and all trying to build armies and navies for their own protection if not gain at the expense of another.

This system of fragmented sovereignty was a legacy of the breakup of the Roman Empire by the end of the sixth century and the spread of Islam in the eighth century. After the fall of Rome and the loss of access to Mediterranean trade, much of what we now call Europe had regressed into a rural protectionist mode, with a nobility resident in castles for protection against invaders and marauders, collecting dues from the peasantry tied to the land. Military force was used for protection against outsiders, against other untrustworthy nobles, against subordinates who wanted power, against serfs if they rebelled, and in the Crusades against the "Infidel," the Muslims who had taken the Holy Land. In this world, holding a piece of land (and the agricultural produce from its serfs) was the primary objective, and a castle was the main means of securing it.

With swords, knives, lances, pikes, and long- and crossbows being the most lethal weapons available to medieval Europeans, an area could be held by these stone-built castles high on hills overlooking fertile river valleys. By the eleventh century, the usefulness of these essentially defensive structures proved sufficiently effective that they proliferated throughout western Europe. For the next three centuries, defeat of an enemy meant capture of his castle, a feat that usually entailed lengthy sieges. What towns there were—and they were beginning to develop in various places—also built walls for protection, the most famous in northern and central Italy.

It was into this situation of almost constant warring, castles, and fortified towns that a new military technology was introduced in the late fourteenth century: cannons fired by gunpowder.[16] Exactly when cannons became available to Europeans for use in their wars is not clear, but the means by which they got there are. The Mongols not only transmitted the Black Death to Europe in 1347, but sometime in the preceding century Europeans learned about cannons from them too, for by 1327 we have pictorial evidence of an early European cannon.

Gunpowder and cannons had been invented by the Chinese in a process beginning around 1000 C.E. when Chinese sources describe "fire lances" and other weapons including bombs, rocket launchers, flame throwers, land mines, and poison smoke. Unfortunately for the Chinese, the Mongols