Chapter 9

The World in 1450: Changing Balance of World Power

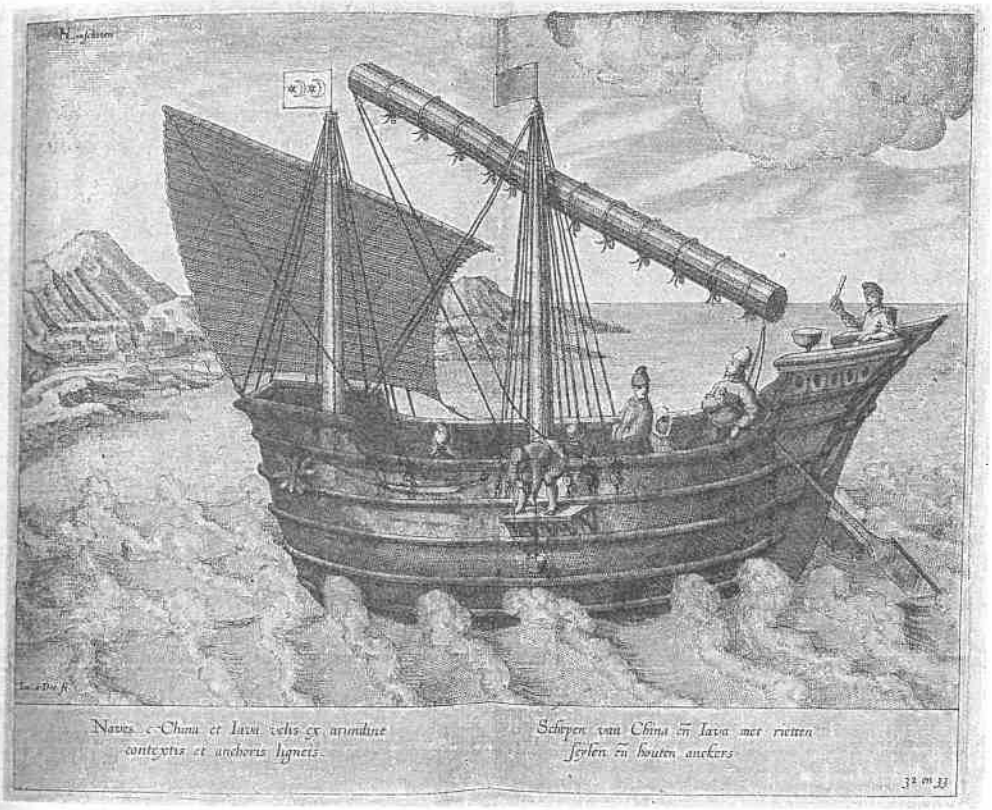


Figure 9.1

Chinese junk, from a late sixteenth-century Dutch print.

A Chinese Junk, illustration from 'Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, His Discourse of Voyages into the East and West Indies', 1579-92 (engraving), Doetechum, Johannes Baptista van, the Younger (c.1560-1630)/Private Collection/ Bridgeman Images

Contents and Learning Objectives

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

9.1 Key Changes in the Middle East
What were the most important changes occurring in the Middle East by 1450?

9.2 The Structure of Transregional Trade
What caused the Chinese decision to abandon major expeditions?

9.3 The Rise of the West
What are the main issues in explaining new outreach from Western Europe? What are the principal interpretations?

9.4 Outside the World Network
How did patterns in the Americas and Polynesia reflect their isolation from main transregional trade networks?

THE COMPASS IS A SIMPLE ENOUGH device—something you can make yourself with an iron needle and a magnet. Yet it was also a revolutionary device, allowing sailors (and now, airplane pilots) to maintain a sense of direction no matter how dark, stormy, foggy, or unfamiliar the environment.

Although there has been debate about the origins of the compass, the instrument was clearly developed first by the Chinese. Chinese scientists may have had some knowledge of magnetic principles as early as the first century. Actual compasses may have been developed during the Tang dynasty. They undoubtedly originated from the discovery of naturally magnetized iron, or lodestone, that could then be used to fashion a needle that would point north. Some believe that the Chinese first used compasses in the practice of *feng shui*, a set of design principles by which people can align their living quarters with the forces of nature.

Compasses for navigation had been introduced by 1100. They were part of a growing Chinese effort to make contact with sources of spices and teas in Southeast Asia. Prior to that point, Chinese seagoing had been confined to coastlines, but now it became much more venturesome (Figure 9.1). Wide-ranging Chinese expeditions introduced the compass to seafarers throughout the Indian Ocean, including Arab merchants, by the twelfth century. Europeans are first known to have used the compass in 1187. Europeans may have invented the compass separately, but it is far more likely that they learned about its use as a result of contacts with Arabs or Asians.

The compass was fundamental to ambitious seagoing expeditions, like the great Chinese voyages through the Indian Ocean. Along with observation of the sun and stars, the compass would provide the guidance for Columbus's travels to the Americas. Even before this it began to change the shape of world history by facilitating dramatic new contacts and exchanges. By the thirteenth century, various seagoing peoples—Malaysians, for example, as well as Europeans—were introducing improvements in the compass, making it easier to read and more stable at sea. Italian navigators introduced the compass card, which involved placing the needle over a set of indicators. Knowledge of the compass reached Scandinavia by 1300, a further step in the long process of dissemination.

In 1400 the world was undergoing a profound transition. While there are a number of elements involved, the decline of the Mongols was a key spur. Because the rise and consolidation of the Mongol Empire had produced such profound effects in Asia and Europe, its gradual retreat inevitably had huge consequences.

This chapter highlights the main changes taking shape by the early fifteenth century. The principal focus is the shifting balance among civilizations in Asia, Africa, and Europe and how these power shifts changed the nature of international contact.

This period of transition began with the decline of Arab strength—symbolized by the fall of the last Arab caliphate in 1258—and the disruptions that Mongol incursions caused elsewhere in Asia and Eastern Europe. These developments created new opportunities in the Afro-Eurasian network that had been established during the previous centuries, initially under Arab sponsorship. Various candidates emerged to take a new international leadership role once the Mongol Empire faded, including, for a short time, Ming China. The Chinese expeditions showed the importance transregional

contacts had acquired. The end of the expeditions, however, opened the way for new alignments. Within the Middle East itself, Arab and then Mongol decline created new opportunities for Turkish conquerors and migrants. In 1453 the Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople, effectively completing the destruction of the Byzantine Empire and creating a new Islamic political power. The Ottomans quickly established control around much of the Black Sea, including the Balkans, and began to push southward into Arab lands.

While the Ottomans would play some role in transregional trade, the most dynamic new contender for leadership ultimately proved to be Western Europe; the conditions that propelled Western civilization into this new position around 1400 form the second key theme of this chapter. The West was not yet a major power; it did not replace the Arabs or Chinese as international leaders quickly or easily. The first stages of the rise of the West were accompanied by important changes in Western civilization itself, which were beginning to take shape by 1400. At this point, Italy, Spain, and Portugal took the lead in Western European outreach, a lead that they would hold for about two centuries.

It is also vital to note changes in societies outside the international network, in the Americas and Polynesia. New difficulties in the great American empires, in particular, would reduce their ability to respond to the challenge of contact with Europeans after 1492.

Focusing on new frameworks for international contacts, this chapter inevitably deals with the question of why individual societies reacted differently to key forces. Comparison is essential. Western Europe's response, for example, should be compared to reactions at the same time in regions like Japan or sub-Saharan Africa.

Amid variations and great change, the transitions around 1450 highlighted one important continuity as well: the importance of the level of contacts that had developed through the formation of the transcontinental network. A variety of societies in Africa, Asia, and Europe depended on far-flung trade relations, and when one exchange network collapsed—as with the decline in travel security overland when the Mongol empires faded—another system quickly moved into place. Not only trade, but continued exchanges of technology and ideas, continued to mark Afro-Eurasian relationships during the fifteenth century.

1250 C.E.	1300 C.E.	1350 C.E.	1400 C.E.	1450 C.E.
1258 Mongol conquest of Baghdad; fall of Abbasid caliphate **c. 1266–1337** Life of Giotto **1275–1292** Marco Polo in China **1290–1317** Famines in Europe **1291** First Italian expedition seeks route to Indies	**1304–1374** Life of Petrarch; development of Italian Renaissance **1320s** Spread of bubonic plague (Black Death) in Gobi desert **1320s** First European use of cannon in warfare **1330s** Black Death reaches China **1347** Black Death reaches Sicily **1348** Peak of Black Death in Middle East **1348–1375** Black Death spreads in Europe and Russia	**1368** Mongols expelled from China; Ming dynasty	**1400** End of Polynesian migrations **1405–1433** Chinese trading expeditions **1439** Portugal takes over Azores; increasing expeditions into Atlantic and along Northwest African coast	**1453** Ottomans capture Constantinople, fall of Byzantine Empire **1469** Union of Aragon and Castile; rise of Spanish monarchy

9.1 Key Changes in the Middle East

What were the most important changes occurring in the Middle East by 1450?

The new world order that was beginning to emerge by 1400 first involved major reshuffling in the Middle East and North Africa. Developments occurred in various aspects of society, and some of them are not easy to explain.

Culture shifted, along with politics, in this crucial region. An earlier tension in philosophy and the arts yielded to the predominance of the Islamic faith. The new piety associated with the rising Sufi movement, discussed in Chapter 5, contributed to a new religious emphasis. In literature, attention to secular themes, such as the joys of feasting and hunting, gave way to more strictly religious ideas. The same shift occurred in philosophy, with new attacks on the idea of combining faith with reason. Thus Al-Ghazali, in a book revealingly titled *The Destruction of the Philosophers*, claimed to use Aristotle's logic to show that it was impossible to discover religious truth by human reason. Many Sufi scholars wrote excitedly of their mystical contacts with God and the stages of their religious passion. Islamic science continued, but its role diminished.

Changes in society and the economy were as telling as the shifts in politics and intellectual life. As the authority of the caliphate declined, landlords seized power over the peasantry. As a result, from about 1100 onward, Middle Eastern peasants increasingly lost their freedom, becoming serfs on large estates, providing the labor and produce landlords sought. This loss was not the peasants' alone, for agricultural productivity suffered as a result. Landlords turned to sucking what they could from their estates rather than trying to develop a more vital agriculture. Tax revenues declined, and Arab and other Middle Eastern traders began to lose ground. Few Arab coins have been found in Europe dating from later than 1100. European merchants began to control their own turf and challenge the Arabs in other parts of the Mediterranean, gaining increasing initiative in this vital trading area.

Arab decline was gradual and incomplete. The reduced dynamism in trade did not take the Arabs out of major world markets, for example. Indeed, Middle Eastern commerce rebounded somewhat by 1400.

Finally, the political fragmentation of the Arab world did not produce prolonged confusion in the Middle East or in the religion of Islam. The emerging Ottoman Turkish state soon mastered many of the lands of the old caliphate as well as the Byzantine corner, expanding into Southeastern Europe. The new empire gave renewed vitality to Islamic politics, and it would soon be joined by two other Islamic empires, in Persia and India. (See Chapter 15 for the development of the Ottoman Empire.) It is important to realize that the empire was far more powerful, politically and militarily, than the caliphate had been for many centuries. It was thus more challenging to rivals in neighboring civilizations such as Western Europe or Russia.

9.2 The Structure of Transregional Trade

What caused the Chinese decision to abandon major expeditions?

Even the rise of the Ottoman Empire would not restore the full international vigor that the Islamic caliphate had wielded had at the height of its powers. The empire did not become the sole hub of an international network, as the caliphate had been a few centuries before. By the fifteenth century, merchants from many societies were competing for roles in transregional trade. In the Mediterranean, Europe, and particularly Italy, merchants were increasingly active. In the Indian Ocean, merchants from India and Southeast Asia, most of them Muslims, rivaled Arab activity.

The big issue in the fifteenth century, however, involved the aftermath of the Mongol era. For 150 years, the interlocking Mongol states had facilitated overland trade between

China, the Middle East, and Europe. Essentially, this Mongol system had replaced earlier Arab leadership in facilitating transregional trade. But the Mongol defeat in China, late in the fourteenth century, and new pressure on Mongol rulers in Russia and elsewhere unraveled this system. Overland travel became more difficult and dangerous without Mongol political protection. Trade and its motivations did not diminish in importance, but inevitably new emphasis focused on seagoing routes, particularly in the Indian Ocean. Two societies, first China and then Europe, sought to take advantage of the opportunities involved.

9.2.1 Chinese Outreach and Reconsideration

For a brief time China asserted new leadership in international trade. This activity reflected earlier gains in Chinese shipping, and China's long-standing focus on manufacturing for export. Rebellions in China drove out the deeply resented Mongol overlords in 1368. A rebel leader from a peasant family, Zhu Yuanzhang (joo wan-jang), seized the Mongol capital of Beijing and proclaimed a new Ming—meaning "brilliant"—dynasty that was to last until 1644. The dynasty began with a burst of unusual expansionism. The initial Ming rulers pressed to secure the borders of the Middle Kingdom. This meant pushing the Mongols far to the north, to the plains of what is now Mongolia. It meant reestablishing influence over neighboring governments and winning tribute payments from states in Korea, Vietnam, and Tibet, reviving much of the East Asian regional structure set up by the Tang dynasty. Far more unusual was a new policy, adopted soon after 1400, of mounting huge, state-sponsored trading expeditions to Southern Asia and beyond.

A first fleet sailed in 1405 to India, with 62 ships carrying 28,000 men. Later voyages reached the Middle East and the eastern coast of Africa, bringing chinaware and copper coinage in exchange for local goods. Chinese shipping at its height consisted of 2,700 coastal vessels, 400 armed naval ships, and at least as many long-distance ships. Nine great treasure ships, the most sophisticated in the world at the time, explored the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea, establishing trade connections but also seeking tribute payments all along the way.

Between 1405 and their termination in 1433, these expeditions were commanded by the admiral **Zheng He**. A Muslim from Western China, Zheng He was well suited to deal with Muslims in Southeast Asia on the Indian Ocean trade route. Zheng He was also a eunuch, castrated for service at the royal court. China's Ming emperors retained a large harem of wives to ensure succession, and eunuchs were needed to guard them without threat of sexual rivalry; many gained bureaucratic powers well beyond this service. Zheng He's expeditions usually hugged the coastline, but he had an improved compass and excellent maps as well as huge vessels that contained ample supplies—even gardens—as well as goods for trade. His fleets must have impressed, even terrified, the local rulers around the Indian Ocean, many of whom paid tribute to the emperor. For even though Zheng He brought gifts, he also had well-armed troops on his expeditions. Several missions visited China from the Middle East and Africa. From Africa also came ostriches, zebras, and giraffes for the imperial zoo; the latter became the unicorns of Chinese fable. But Zheng He was resented by the Confucian bureaucrats, who refused even to write much about him in their chronicles.

Zheng He
[jehng huh] Chinese Muslim admiral who commanded a series of Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, and Red Sea trade expeditions under third Ming emperor, Yunglo, between 1405 and 1433.

There is no question that the course of world history might have been changed dramatically had the Chinese thrust continued, for the tiny European expeditions that began to creep down the western coast of Africa at about the same time would have been no match for this combination of merchant and military organization. Indeed, historians wonder if one expedition might have rounded Africa to at least glimpse the Atlantic. But China's emperors called the expeditions to a halt in 1433. The bureaucrats had long opposed the new trade policy, out of rivalry with other officials such as Zheng He, but there were deeper reasons as well. The costs seemed unacceptable, given the continuing expenses of the campaigns against the Mongols and a further commitment to build a more massive protective wall in

the north, while also establishing a luxurious new capital city in Beijing. A young emperor also wanted to differentiate his policies from those of his predecessor. So the expeditions ground to an abrupt halt. This was a crucial shift. It reflected a preference for traditional expenditures rather than distant foreign involvements. Chinese merchant activity continued to be extensive in Southeast Asia. Chinese trading groups established permanent settlements in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia, where they added to the cultural diversity of the area and maintained a disproportionate role in local and regional trading activities into the twentieth century. And manufacturing levels remained high. Nonetheless, China's chance to become a dominant world trading power was lost, at least for several centuries.

One result, today, is an interesting challenge to interpretation. To Western eyes, accustomed to judging a society's dynamism by its ability to reach out and gain new territories or trade positions, China's decision may seem hard to understand—the precursor to decline. But to the Chinese, it was the ambitious expeditionary flurry that was unusual, not its end. China's leaders were suspicious of any policy that would unduly elevate commercial activity as opposed to rule by the scholar-gentry. Ming emperors consolidated their rule over the empire's vast territory. Internal economic development continued as well, with no need for foreign products save for goods from Southeast Asia. Moreover, Chinese products continued to be highly valued in the world market. Industry expanded, with growth in the production of textiles and porcelain; ongoing trade with Southeast Asia enriched the port cities; agricultural production and population increased. The end of the expeditions had no immediate downsides for China itself.

The shift in Chinese policy unintentionally cleared the way for another, in most ways less organized, civilization to work toward a new international position. With the Arabs in partial eclipse and with China retreating from its brief initiative, hesitant Western expansionism, ventured before 1400, began to take on new significance. Within a century, Western explorers and traders had launched an attempt to seize international trading dominance and had expanded the international network to include parts of the Americas for the first time.

9.3 The Rise of the West

What are the main issues in explaining new outreach from Western Europe? What are the principal interpretations?

The West's gradual emergence into larger world contacts during the fifteenth century was surprising in many respects. Western expansion had numerous causes, and it must be seen as a result of growing problems as well as new strengths.

Westerners remained awed by the powerful bureaucracies and opulent treasuries of empires in the traditional civilization centers such as Constantinople. Furthermore, the West was changing in some painful ways. Key features of medieval culture and society were being questioned by 1400. The church, which had long been one of the organizing institutions of Western civilization, was under new attack. Medieval philosophy had passed its creative phase. Warrior aristocrats, long a key leadership group in feudal society, softened their style of life, preferring court rituals and jousting tournaments and adopting military armor so cumbersome that real fighting was difficult.

Even more strikingly, the lives and economic activities of ordinary Europeans were in disarray. This was a time of crisis, and Europe's expanding world role could not reverse the fundamental challenges to its internal economic and demographic structure. Europeans began to suffer from recurrent famine after 1300 because population outstripped the food supply and no new food production techniques were discovered. Famine reduced disease resistance, making Europe more vulnerable to the bubonic plagues that spread from Asia. Bubonic plague, or Black Death, surfaced in various parts of Asia in the fourteenth century. In China it reduced the population by nearly 30 percent by 1400. Following trade routes, it then spread into India and the Middle East, causing thousands of deaths per day

in the larger cities. The plague's worst European impact occurred between 1348 and 1375, by which time 30 million people, one-third of Europe's population, died. As we have seen, the resulting economic dislocation produced bitter strikes and peasant uprisings.

9.3.1 Sources of Dynamism: Medieval Vitality

How, in this context, could the West be poised for a new global role? The answer to that question is complex. A number of different interpretations deserve attention, although some might be blended. First, several key advances that had taken shape in European society were not really reversed by the troubles of the decades around 1400. For example, the strengthening of feudal monarchy provided more effective national or regional governments for much of the West. The Hundred Years' War between Britain and France stimulated innovations in military organization, including nonaristocratic soldiers recruited and paid directly by the royal government, that enhanced central political power. Strong regional monarchies took hold in parts of Spain and in Portugal as Christian leaders drove back the Muslim rulers of this region. The growth of cities and urban economies continued to spur the commercial side of Western society. Even the church had made its peace with such key principles of capitalism as profit-seeking. Technology continued to advance, particularly in ironwork—used for bells and weapons—and timekeeping.

In short, explaining the new Western vigor involves an understanding that some of the gains the West achieved during the previous centuries continued even as certain traditional forms wavered.

9.3.2 Imitation and Commercial Problems

Two additional factors affected Western Europe's international position, one a clear plus, the other a growing problem. New opportunities for imitation were an obvious advantage. The Mongol state established in Asia and Eastern Europe in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries provided new access to Asian knowledge and technology. Political stability and an openness to foreign visitors by the great khans helped Westerners learn of Asian technologies, ranging from printing to the compass and explosive powder. Western Europe had ideal access in the Mongol period. It was not disrupted by the Mongols, as Eastern Europe and so many parts of Asia were, but it was in active contact, unlike sub-Saharan Africa. Internal European warfare and merchant zeal made Western Europe an eager learner, for the Asian technologies promised to respond to both military and commercial needs.

The second international factor was the intensification of European deficiencies in the existing world market and international arena. From the Crusades onward, Western elites

Visualizing the Past

Population Trends

Percentages of Total World Population

Continents	Years				
	1000	1700	1800	1900	1975
Europe	12.2	19.6	19.7	24.0	16.3
Asia	62.9	67.6	69.3	59.8	59.2
Africa	11.2	10.0	7.8	6.8	9.9
Americas	13.4	2.1	2.7	8.9	14.0
Oceania	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.6

SOURCE: Based on Wrong, Dennis H. Population and Society, 4th Edition. New York: Random House, Inc., 1977.

Review Question:

1. These population charts show relationships in population size, and comparative trends in population size, among the major inhabited regions of the world. Population pressure did not drive European expansion in the fifteenth century, because the population was falling temporarily, but there were longer-term trends, from the year 1000, that might have encouraged the expansionist effort. The chart allows comparison, showing what regions experienced the greatest changes in population levels between 1000 and 1800. What might have caused

these changes? Finally, the chart extends comparisons into the later twentieth century.

2. Reading population statistics provides vital information, but it also raises questions, including ones about causation, which numbers alone cannot answer. What other data would be most helpful to put these figures in appropriate world history contexts? Which figures are more revealing: absolute numbers or percentages? Why?

Population Levels (Millions)

Continents	Years				
	1000	1700	1800	1900	1975
Europe	36	120	180	390	635
Asia (includes Middle East)	185	415	625	970	2300
Africa	33	61	70	110	385
Americas	39	13	24	145	545
Oceania (includes Australia)	1.5	2.25	2.5	6.75	23
Totals	294.5	611.25	901.5	1621.75	3888

NOTE: Earlier figures are only estimates; they are fairly accurate indicators of relative size.

SOURCE: Based on Wrong, Dennis H. Population and Society, 4th Edition. New York: Random House, Inc., 1977.

had become used to increasing consumption of Asian luxury products, including spices such as cinnamon and nutmeg, silks, sugar, perfumes, and jewels. In exchange for the luxury items, Europeans mainly had cruder goods to offer: wool, tin, copper, honey, and salt. The value of European exports almost never equaled the value of what was imported from Asia. The resulting unfavorable balance of trade had to be made up in gold, but Western Europe had only a limited gold supply. By 1400, the constant drain to Asia was creating a gold famine that threatened the whole European economy with collapse. Furthermore, there were legitimate concerns about a new Muslim threat. The Ottoman Empire was taking shape, and Europeans began to fear a new Muslim surge. Even before this, the Muslim capture of the last crusader stronghold (the city of Acre in the Middle East) in 1291 gave Muslim traders, particularly Egyptians, new opportunities to act as intermediaries in the Asian trade, for there were no Western-controlled ports left in the Eastern Mediterranean. One response to this was a series of conquests by the city-state of Venice along the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea. A more important response was to begin exploring alternative routes to Asia that would bypass the Middle East and the feared and hated Muslim realms.

In sum: One explanation for Europe's new activity would emphasize the gains made in the later postclassical centuries, particularly in terms of urban and commercial growth, despite population setbacks. These gains could now be combined with new technologies learned from Asia—especially weaponry. The final ingredient was the realization that innovations were essential to meet balance-of-payment problems and concerns about reliance on Muslim traders.

This explanation may not be entirely adequate, and it certainly is not the explanation preferred by most European historians. They turn—sometimes exclusively—to another set of factors: cultural developments within Europe that would then spill outward.

Document

Bubonic Plague

The spread of the plague in the fourteenth century, affecting major parts of Asia, the Middle East and Egypt, and Europe, was one of the great devastations in world history. Muslim and Christian observers described the plague and reactions to it. Ibn al-Wardi was a Muslim scholar who died of the plague in 1349; Jean de Venette was a monk who died in 1368.

Ibn Al-Wardi

God is my security in every adversity. My sufficiency is in God alone. Is not God sufficient protection for His servant? Oh God, pray for our master, Muhammad, and give him peace. Save us for his sake from the attacks of the plague and give us shelter.

The plague frightened and killed. It began in the land of darkness. Oh, what a visitor! It has been current for fifteen years. China was not preserved from it nor could the strongest fortress hinder it. The plague afflicted the Indians of India. It weighted upon the Sind. It seized with its hand and ensnared even the lands of the Uzbeks. The plague destroyed mankind in Cairo. Its eye was cast upon Egypt, and behold, the people were wide-awake. It stilled all movement in Alexandria. The plague did its work like a silkworm....

Then, the plague turned to Upper Egypt. It, also, sent forth its storm to Barqah. The plague attacked Gaza, and it shook 'Asqalān severely. The plague oppressed Acre. The scourge came to Jerusalem and paid the *zakāt* [with the souls of men]. It overtook those people who fled to the al-'Aqsā Mosque, which stands beside the Dome of the Rock. If the door of mercy had not been opened, the end of the world would have occurred in a moment. It then hastened its pace and attacked the entire maritime plain. The plague trapped Sidon and descended unexpectedly upon Beirut, cunningly.

This plague is for the Muslims a martyrdom and a reward, and for the disbelievers a punishment and a rebuke. When the Muslim endures misfortune, then patience is his worship. It has been established by our Prophet: God bless him and give him peace, that the plague-stricken are martyrs. This noble tradition is true and assures martyrdom. And this secret should be pleasing to the true believer. If someone says it causes infection and destruction, say: God creates and recreates. If the liar disputes the matter of infection and tries to find an explanation, I say that the Prophet, on him be peace, said: who infected the first? If we acknowledge the plague's devastation of the people, it is the will of the Chosen Doer. So it happened again and again....

Among the benefits... is the removal of one's hopes and the improvement of his earthly works. It awakens men from their indifference for the provisioning of their final journey.

Nothing prevented us from running away from the plague except our devotion to the noble tradition. Come then, seek the aid of God Almighty for raising the plague, for He is the best helper. Oh God, we call You better than anyone did before. We call You to raise from us the pestilence and plague. We do not take refuge in its removal other than with You. We do not depend on our good health against the Plague but on you. We seek your protection, oh Lord of creation, from the blows of this stick.

SOURCE: Michael Dols. "Ibn Al-Wardi's Risalah Al-Naba 'An Al-Waba', A Translation of a Major Source for the History of the Black Death in the Middle East." *In Near Eastern Numisamatcs, Iconography, Epigraphy, and History: Studies in Honor of George C. Miles*. Edited by Dikran K. Kouymjian (Beruit: American University of Beirut, 1974), 443–445. Reprinted by permission of The American University of Beirut Press.

Jean de Venette

This sickness or pestilence was called an epidemic by the doctors. Nothing like the great numbers who died in the years 1348 and 1349 has been heard of or seen or read of in times past. This plague and disease came from *ymaginatione* or association and contagion, for if a well man visited the sick he only rarely avoided the risk of death. Wherefore in many towns timid priests withdrew, leaving the exercise of their ministry to such of the religious as were more daring.... A very great number of the saintly sisters of the Hôtel-Dieu who, not fearing to die, nursed the sick in all sweetness and humility, with no thought of honor, a number too often renewed by death, rest in peace with Christ, as we may piously believe.

Some said that this pestilence was caused by infection of the air and waters, since there was at this time no famine nor lack of food supplies, but on the contrary great abundance. As a result of this theory of infected water and air as the source of the plague the Jews were suddenly and violently charged with infecting wells and water and corrupting the air. The whole world rose up against them cruelly on this account. In Germany and other parts of the world where Jews lived, they were massacred and slaughtered by Christians, and many thousands were burned everywhere, indiscriminately....

But woe is me! the world was not changed for the better but for the worse.... For men were more avaricious and grasping than before, even though they had far greater possessions. They were more covetous and disturbed each other more frequently with suits, brawls, disputes and pleas. Nor by the mortality resulting from this terrible plague inflicted by God was peace between kings and lords established. And this fact was very remarkable. Although there was an abundance of all goods, yet everything was twice as dear, whether it were utensils, victuals, or merchandise, hired helpers or peasants and serfs, except for some hereditary domains which remained abundantly stocked with everything. Charity began to cool, and iniquity with ignorance and sin to abound, for few could be found in the good towns and castles who knew how or were willing to instruct children in the rudiments of grammar....

SOURCE: "From The Chronicle of Jean de Venette", translated by Jean Birdsall, edited by Richard A. Newhall. Copyright © 1953 Columbia University Press. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

Review Questions:

1. How did Christian and Muslim reactions compare?
2. Did the reactions suggest that the plague might have different results in the Middle East and in Europe?
3. How did the plague relate to other major developments toward the end of the postclassical period?

9.3.3 Secular Directions in the Italian Renaissance

Renaissance
[REHN-uh-sahns] Cultural and political movement in Western Europe; began in Italy c. 1400; rested on urban vitality and expanding commerce; featured literature and art with distinctly more secular priorities than those of the Middle Ages.

A further set of significant changes in Europe started in Italy, partly because cities were livelier and more independent in this region than in the north. In 1400, Italy was in the midst of the vital cultural and political movement known as the **Renaissance**, or rebirth—referring to revival of styles and themes from classical Greece and Rome. The early phases of the Renaissance stressed more secular subjects in literature and art. Religious art remained dominant but used more realistic portrayals of people and nature, and some nonreligious themes surfaced outright (Figure 9.2). The doings of human beings deserved attention for their own sake, in the Renaissance view, not merely as they reflected a divine plan. Artists and writers became more openly ambitious for personal reputation and glory. Italy also served as the center of initial Renaissance culture because it had more contact with Roman tradition than did the rest of Europe and because by the fourteenth century it led the West in banking and trade.

9.3.4 Renaissance Culture

Francesco Petrarch
[PEE-trahrk] (1304–1374) One of the major literary figures of the Western Renaissance; an Italian author and humanist.

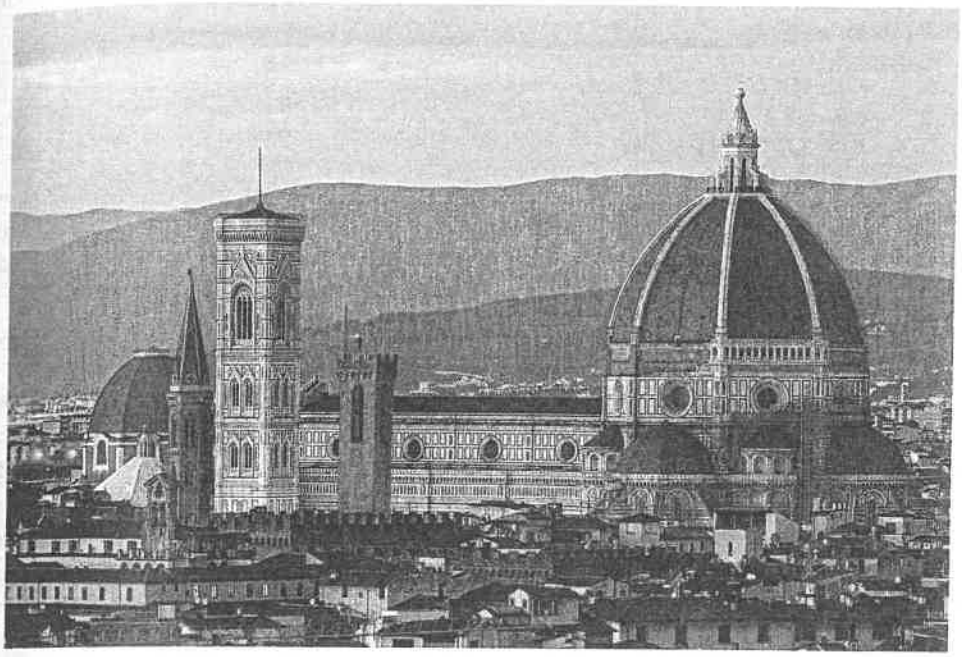
Although it had political and commercial roots in Italian cities, the Renaissance was first and foremost a cultural movement, launched in Florence and manifesting itself in literature and various arts (Figure 9.3). The Renaissance focused on a new interest in stylistic grace and a concern for practical ethics and codes of behavior for urban gentlemen. One leading fourteenth-century writer, **Francesco Petrarch**, not only took pride in his city and his age but explored the glories of personal achievement with new confidence.

Figure 9.2

Europe's new spirit amid old values. Dante, an Italian writer of the fourteenth century, holds a copy of his great work, the *Divine Comedy*, with both religious (souls tormented in hell) and Renaissance (the solid, classical-style urban buildings of the city of Florence) symbolism greeting him. The painting was designed by Domenico di Michelina for the cathedral of Florence in 1465.

Album/Alamy Stock Photo

Figure 9.3



Although the nave of Florence Cathedral was completed in the fourteenth century, it was not until the fifteenth century that architect Filippo Brunelleschi was able to solve the engineering challenge presented by the plan for the massive dome. In order to eliminate the need for temporary wooden scaffolding during construction, Brunelleschi used a skeleton of eight large ribs alternated with eight pairs of thinner ribs, all tied together by nine sets of horizontal ties, all of which would be able to support the workers as the dome was raised.

MasterLu/Fotolia

Innovation flourished in the visual arts and music as well. The subject matter of art moved toward nature and people, including cityscapes and portraits of the rich and powerful, whether the themes were religious or secular. Florentine painter Giotto (gee-YAW-toh) led the way, departing from medieval formalism and stiffness. While still a young apprentice to the painter Cimabue (chee-mah-BOO-eh), Giotto painted a fly on the nose of one of Cimabue's portrait subjects, and it was so realistic that Cimabue repeatedly tried to swat it off before going back to work on the canvas. Other painters, beginning later in the fourteenth century, started to introduce perspective while using new colors and other materials. In architecture, favor shifted away from the Gothic to a classicism derived from the styles of Greece and Rome. Vivid, realistic statues complemented the new palaces and public buildings.

The impact of the early Renaissance must not be exaggerated. It had little influence outside of Italy. Even in Italy, it focused on high culture, not popular culture, and on the arts; there was little initial interest in science. And although it built on distinctive political and economic forms, it was not a full break from medieval tendencies.

Nevertheless, these new cultural currents were an important innovation in Western history. The full ramifications of the Renaissance feed into the next period of both world and Western history (see Chapter 11). The movement was only getting started by 1400. However, the wide range of Italian commerce and shipping proved to be one of the building blocks of European outreach. By the fifteenth century, ships, particularly from the western Italian city of Genoa, which was less well placed than Venice for Eastern Mediterranean trade and the resultant links to Asia, were ready for new roles. Ambitious city-state governments encouraged new ventures, eager to collect more tax money and promote commerce as one of their explicit functions. A general "Renaissance spirit" could also spur innovation. Whereas people such as Petrarch

defined human ambition mainly in cultural terms, other urban and commercial leaders, including seafarers such as Christopher Columbus of Genoa, might apply some of the same confidence and desire for personal glory to different areas, such as exploration or conquest.

9.3.5 The Iberian Spirit of Religious Mission

Along with Italy, a key center for change by the fourteenth century was the Iberian Peninsula, where Christian military leaders had for several centuries been pressing back the boundaries of the Muslim state in Spain. Soon after 1400, major regional monarchies had been established in the provinces of **Castile and Aragon**, which would be united through royal marriage in 1469.

Castile and Aragon
Regional kingdoms of the Iberian peninsula; pressed reconquest of the peninsula from Muslims and ultimately united under the Spanish monarchy.

Even before the marriage between Ferdinand and Isabella, Spanish and Portuguese rulers had developed a vigorous military and religious agenda. They supported effective armies, including infantry and noble cavalry. And they believed that government had a mission to promote Christianity by converting or expelling Arabs and Jews and by maintaining doctrinal purity within the church. Close links between church and state, portrayed in art, provided revenues and officials for the royal government. In return, the government supported church courts in their efforts to enforce moral and doctrinal purity. Later in the fifteenth century, this interaction led to the reestablishment of the church-run courts of the Inquisition in Spain, designed to enforce religious orthodoxy. In other words, Spain and Portugal were developing effective new governments with a special sense of religious mission and religious support. These changes most directly promoted the West's expansion into wider world contacts.

9.3.6 The First Phases of Western Expansion

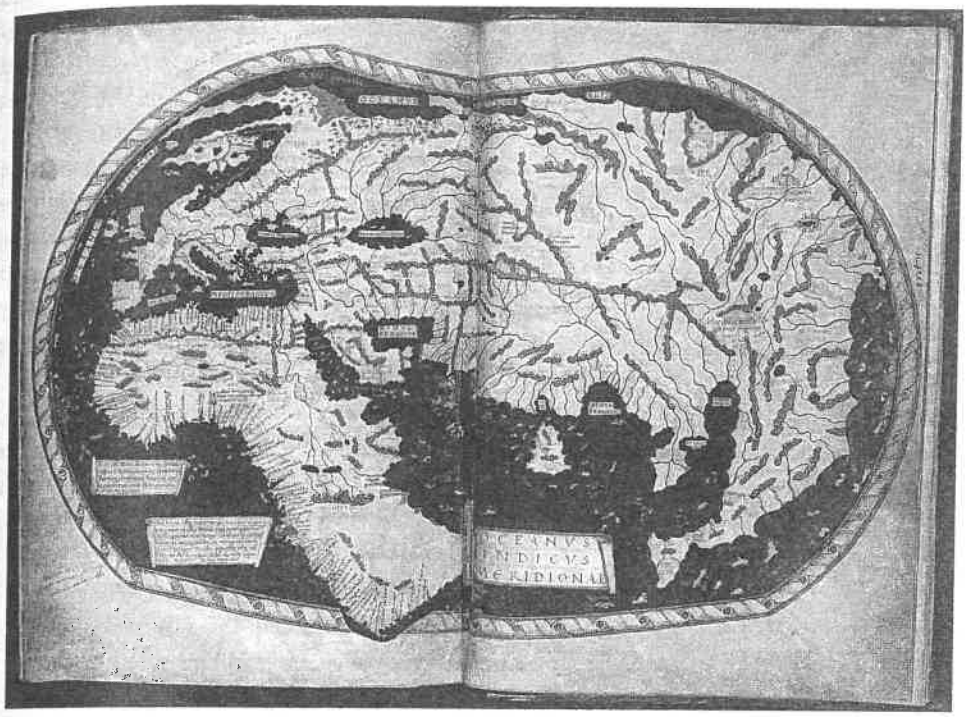
Vivaldis
Two Genoese brothers who attempted to find a western route to the "Indies"; disappeared in 1291; precursors of thrust into southern Atlantic.

As early as 1291, two Italian brothers, the **Vivaldis** from Genoa, sailed with two galleys through the Straits of Gibraltar, seeking a western route to the "Indies," the spice-producing areas of South and Southeast Asia. They were never heard from again. Although they were precursors of a major western thrust into the southern Atlantic, it is not even entirely clear what they meant by the "Indies." Early in the fourteenth century, other explorers from Genoa rediscovered the Canary Islands, in the Atlantic, populated by a hunting and gathering people. These islands had been known vaguely since classical times but had never been explored by Europeans. Genoese sailors also visited the Madeiras and probably reached the more distant Azores by 1351. Soon after this, ships from Northeastern Spain, based in the port of Barcelona, sailed along the African coast as far south as present-day Sierra Leone.

Until 1430, technological barriers prevented further exploration for alternative routes. Without adequate navigation instruments, Europeans could not risk wider ventures into the Atlantic. They also needed better ships than the shallow-drafted, oar-propelled Mediterranean galleys. However, efforts were underway to develop an oceangoing sailing vessel. At the same time, the crucial navigational problems were met by the compass and the astrolabe, used to determine latitude at sea by reckoning from the stars. Contacts with Arab merchants and with the Chinese provided knowledge of these devices. European mapmaking, which improved steadily during the fourteenth century, was another key innovation. Because of these advances, as well as mistaken geographic assumptions shown on the map in Figure 9.4, Europeans were ready in the decades after 1400 to undertake voyages that were impossible just a century before. In 1498, the Portuguese explorer **Vasco da Gama** became the first European to reach India by sea, preparing for Portuguese entry into the Indian Ocean (Figure 9.5).

Vasco da Gama
Portuguese captain who sailed for India in 1497; established early Portuguese dominance in Indian Ocean.

Figure 9.4



Columbus is supposed to have had a copy of this world map in Spain. The map, dating from about 1489, shows the Old World as Europeans were increasingly coming to know it. Note how reachable India looked to Europeans using this map—although, of course, they had to go around Africa.

PBL Collection/Alamy Stock Photo

9.3.7 Colonial Patterns

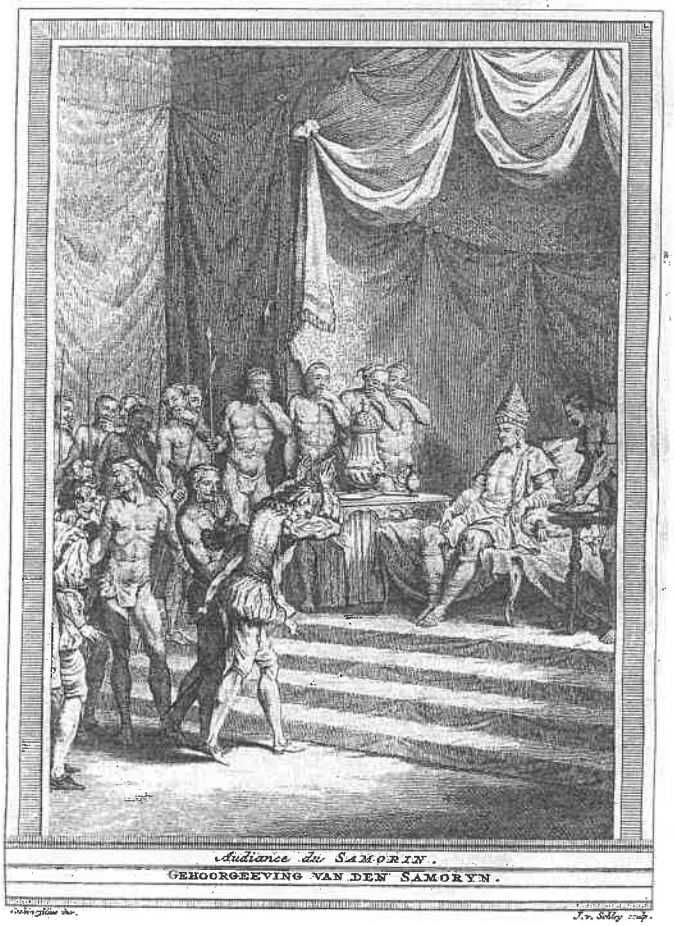
Even as these wider-ranging voyages began, westerners, led by the Spanish and Portuguese, had begun to take advantage of the new lands they had already discovered. A driving force behind both the further expeditions and the efforts to make already discovered areas economically profitable was Prince Henry of Portugal, known as **Henry the Navigator**. A student of astronomy and nautical science, Henry sponsored about a third of Portuguese voyages of exploration before his death in 1460. His mixture of motivations—scientific and intellectual curiosity, desire to spread the name of Christ to unfamiliar lands, and financial interest—reflected some of the key forces in late postclassical Europe.

Henry the Navigator
Portuguese prince responsible for the direction of a series of expeditions along the African coast in the fifteenth century; marked the beginning of Western European expansion.

Portugal by 1439 had taken control of the Azores and had granted land to colonists. Soon Spaniards and Portuguese had conquered and colonized the Madeiras and Canaries, bringing in Western plants, animals, weapons, and diseases. The result was something of a laboratory for the larger European colonialism that would soon take shape, particularly in the Americas. European colonists quickly set up large agricultural estates designed to produce cash crops that could be sold on the European market. First they introduced sugar, an item once imported from Asia but now available in growing quantities from Western-controlled sources. Ultimately, other crops such as cotton and tobacco were also introduced to the Atlantic islands. To produce these market crops, the new colonists brought in slaves from Northwestern Africa, mainly in Portuguese ships—the first examples of a new, commercial version of slavery and the first sign that Western expansion could have serious impact on other societies as well.

These developments around 1400 remained modest, even in their consequences for Africa. They illustrate mainly how quickly Western conquerors decided what to do with

Figure 9.5



This eighteenth-century engraving portrays Vasco da Gama's audience with the Indian ruler of Calicut in 1498. This image was made well after the fact. What kind of comparison does it suggest between European and Indian societies?

Universal Art Archive/Alamy Stock Photo

lands and peoples newly in their grasp. The ventures were successful enough to motivate more extensive probes into the southern Atlantic as soon as technology permitted. Indeed, voyages of exploration down the coast of Africa and across the Atlantic began to occur as the island colonies were being fully settled.

Finally, these early ventures summed up the swirl of forces that were beginning to reshape the West's role in the world: inferiorities and fears, particularly with regard to the Muslims; economic pressure from an inferior but eager position in world trade; and new energies of Renaissance merchants and Iberian rulers. In final analysis, what is the best combination of explanations for why Europe began to reach out in new ways?

9.4 Outside the World Network

How did patterns in the Americas and Polynesia reflect their isolation from main transregional trade networks?

Developments in the Americas and Polynesia were not affected by the new international exchange. During the next period of world history, these regions all were pulled into a new level of international contact, but a world balance sheet in 1400 must emphasize their separateness.

At the same time, several of the societies outside the international network were experiencing some new problems during the fifteenth century that would leave them vulnerable to outside interference thereafter. Such problems included new political strains in the leading American civilizations and a fragmentation of the principal island groups in Polynesian culture.

9.4.1 Political Issues in the Americas

As we discussed in Chapter 8, the Aztec and Inca empires ran into increasing difficulties not long after 1400. Aztec exploitation of subject peoples for gold, slaves, and religious sacrifices roused great resentment. What would have happened to the Aztec Empire if the Spaniards had not intervened after 1500 is not clear, but it is obvious that disunity created opportunities for outside intervention that might not have existed otherwise. The Inca system, although far less brutal than that of the Aztecs, provided ongoing tension between central leadership and local initiative. This complicated effective control of the vast expanse of the Inca domains. Here too, overextension made change likely by the 1500s—indeed, the empire was already receding somewhat—even without European intervention. At the same time, other cultures were developing in parts of the Americas that might well have been candidates for new political leadership, if American history had proceeded in isolation or if European intervention had been less sweeping.

9.4.2 Expansion, Migration, and Conquest in Polynesia

A second region that was later pulled into the expanding world network involved Polynesia. Here, as in the Americas, important changes took place during the postclassical era but with no relationship to developments in societies elsewhere in the world. The

key Polynesian themes from the seventh century to 1400 were expansion, spurts of migration, and conquests that implanted Polynesian culture well beyond the initial base in islands such as Tahiti, Samoa, and Fiji (Map 9.1).

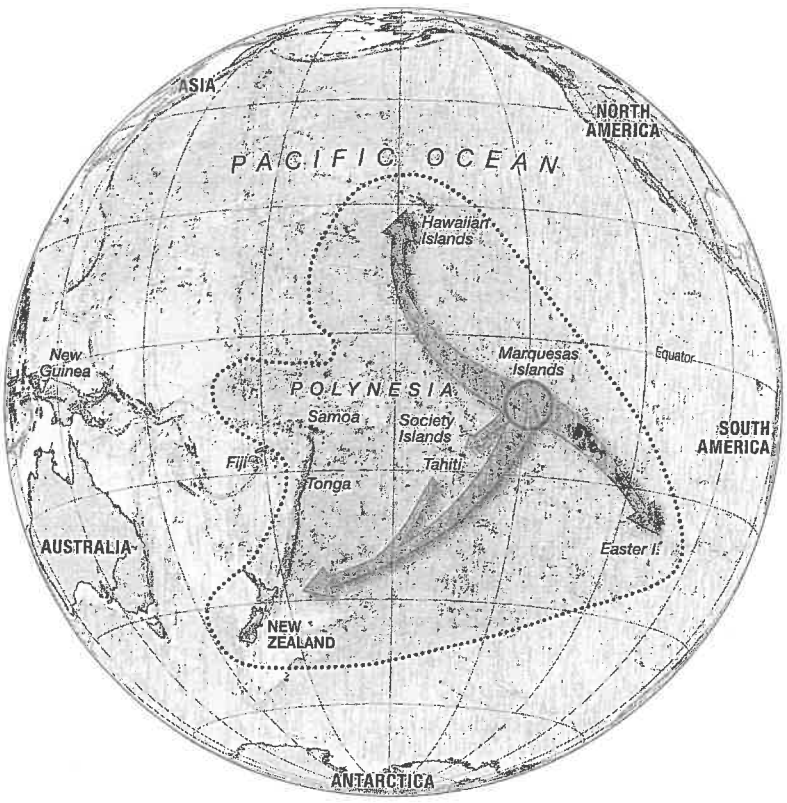
One channel of migration pointed northward to the islands of Hawaii. The first Polynesians reached these previously uninhabited islands before the seventh century, traveling in great war canoes. The canoes carried all that was needed to settle on new lands, including pigs. These were to wreak some havoc on native flora and fauna in Hawaii, but at the same time Hawaiians created a land use system incorporating coastal fisheries, mid-mountain vegetable crops, and highland hunting that supported a sustainable lifestyle for centuries.

From the seventh century until about 1300 or 1400, recurrent contacts remained between the Hawaiian Islands and the larger Society Islands group, allowing periodic new migration. But from about 1400 until the arrival of European explorers in 1778, Hawaiian society was cut off even from Polynesia.

Polynesians in Hawaii spread widely across the islands in agricultural clusters and fishing villages amid the volcanic mountains. Hawaiians were inventive in using local vegetation, weaving fabrics as well as making materials and fishing nets from grass. Politically, Hawaii was organized into regional kingdoms, which were highly warlike. Society was structured into a caste system with priests and nobles at the top, who reserved many lands for their exclusive use. Commoners were viewed almost as a separate people, barred from certain activities.

Thus, with a Neolithic agricultural technology and no use of metals, the Hawaiians created a complex culture on their islands. Without a written language, their legends and oral histories, tracing the genealogies of chiefly families back to the original war canoes, provided a shared set of stories and values.

Map 9.1 POLYNESIAN EXPANSION



Starting in the seventh century, the Polynesians expanded north and south of their starting point in the Society Islands.

9.4.3 Isolated Achievements by the Maori

Another group of Polynesians migrated thousands of miles to the southwest of the Society Islands, perhaps as early as the eighth century, when canoe or raft crews discovered the two large islands that today make up New Zealand. The original numbers of people were small but were supplemented over the centuries that followed by additional migrations from the Polynesian home islands. The Polynesians in New Zealand, called the Maori, successfully adapted to an environment considerably colder and harsher than that of the home islands. They developed the most elaborate of all Polynesian art and produced an expanding population that may have reached 200,000 people by the eighteenth century, primarily on the northern of the two islands. As in Hawaii, tribal military leaders and priests held great power in Maori society; each tribe also included a group of slaves drawn from prisoners of war and their descendants. All these achievements were accomplished in total isolation from the rest of the world and, particularly after 1400, amid substantial isolation of each major island grouping from the rest of the Polynesian complex. Polynesians would be the last of the major isolated cultures to encounter the

larger world currents brought forcefully by European explorers in the eighteenth century. When this encounter did come, it produced the same effects that it had in the Americas: vulnerability to disease, weakness in the face of superior weaponry and technology, and cultural disintegration.

Thinking Historically

The Problem of Ethnocentrism

Many cultures encourage an ethnocentric outlook, and the culture of the West is certainly one of them. Ethnocentrism creates problems in interpreting world history. The dictionary definition of *ethnocentrism* is "a habitual disposition to judge foreign peoples or groups by the standards and practices of one's own culture or ethnic group"—often finding them inferior. Most of us take pride in many of our own institutions and values, and it is tempting to move from this pride to a disapproval of other peoples when they clearly do not share our behaviors and beliefs. Many Americans have a difficult time understanding how other peoples have failed to establish the democratic political structure of our own country. Even liberals who pride themselves on a sophisticated appreciation of different habits in some areas may adopt an ethnocentric shock at the oppression (by current American standards) of women that is visible in certain societies today or in the past. Indeed, unless a person is almost totally alienated from his or her own society, some ethnocentric reactions are hard to avoid.

Nevertheless, unexamined ethnocentrism can be a barrier in dealing with world history. We will grasp other times and places better, and perhaps use our own values more intelligently, if we do not too readily dismiss cultures in which "objectionable" practices occur.

Controlling ethnocentrism does not mean abandoning all standards, as if any social behavior were as good as any other.

Ethnocentrism is not just an issue for modern Westerners. Civilized peoples in the past routinely accused outsiders of barbaric ways, as in the Islamic characterizations of the Mongols described in Chapter 3. But the current power of Western standards makes our own ethnocentric potential a real issue today in dealing with world history, as in the tendency to dismiss any people who did not exploit the latest available military technology as somehow inferior.

Controlling ethnocentrism does not mean abandoning all standards, as if any social behavior were as good as any other. It does involve a certain open-mindedness and sophistication. Reducing distracting levels of ethnocentrism can be aided by some specific procedures. It is important to realize that few cultures behave irrationally over long periods of time. They may differ from our taste, but their patterns respond to valid causes and problems. Our own values are not without complexity. We sometimes believe things about our own society that are not as true as we want, or in judging other societies, we forget about drawbacks in our own surroundings. Perspective on our own habits, including awareness of how other cultures might judge us, helps us restrain our ethnocentrism.

However, ethnocentrism may become a particularly strong impulse in dealing with some of the changes in world history taking shape around 1400. The West was gaining strength. Because many Americans identify with Western civilization, it is tempting to downplay some of the subtleties and disadvantages of this process or to exaggerate the extent to which the West began to organize world history more generally.

The balance of power among civilizations was beginning to shift around 1400, and it is legitimate—not simply ethnocentric—to note that the West's rise was one of the leading features of this change. It is unnecessary to ignore the many other patterns continuing or emerging—including new vigor in several other societies—or to gloss over the very mixed motives and results that the West's rise entailed. The rise of the West was not just "good." It did not result simply from a triumph of progressive values. It did depend heavily on new uses of force. At the same time, avoiding ethnocentric impulses in evaluating this crucial transition period in world history does not require a systematically anti-Western approach. Balance and perspective are essential—which is easy to say, but not always easy to achieve.

Review Questions:

1. Why can ethnocentrism complicate interpretations of world history?
2. How can one balance disapproval and understanding in dealing with practices such as female infanticide?
3. What are some non-ethnocentric ways to interpret initial European expansion?

9.4.4 Adding up the Changes

It is tempting to see some sort of master plan in the various changes that began to occur around 1400. People who emphasize an ethnocentric approach to world history, stressing some inherent superiorities in Western values, might be tempted to simplify the factors involved. However, a series of complex coincidences provides a more accurate explanation, as in other cases in which the framework of world history changed substantially—though it is true that reactions to the decline of the Mongols did activate a number of changes. Independent developments in the Americas and elsewhere figured in, as did crucial policy decisions in places such as China. Each of the separate steps can be explained, but their combination was partly accidental.

Several elements of the world history transition deserve particular attention. Technology played a role, as opportunities to copy Asian developments were supplemented by European initiative, particularly in gunnery and ship design. The role of individuals, such as Prince Henry, must be compared with the impact of more general forces, such as Europe's international trade woes.

The overall result of change affected even societies where existing patterns persisted. Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, was not experiencing great political or cultural shifts around 1400. Regional kingdoms fluctuated: The empire of Mali fell to regional rivals, but another Muslim kingdom, Songhay, soon arose in its stead, flourishing between 1464 and 1591. African political and religious themes persisted for several centuries, but the context for African history was shifting. The decline of the Arabs reduced the vitality of Africa's key traditional contact with the international network, although African merchants remained comfortable in dealing with North Africa and the Middle East. In contrast to the Europeans, Africans had no exchange with the Mongols. Even as Africa enjoyed substantial continuity, its power balance with Western Europe was beginning to alter, and this became a source of further change.

Global Connections and Central Themes

1450 and the World

The first half of the fifteenth century saw both change and continuity in the contacts that affected so many societies in Asia, Africa, and Europe. Change came in the procession of societies that served as active agents for contacts. Muslim traders and missionaries from the Middle East continued to be active, particularly in the Indian Ocean and in dealing with Africa. But the period of Mongol consolidation had introduced a new set of contacts, many of them land-based and involving Asia and Europe. Mongol overlords turned out to be delighted to encounter different ideas and to use officials from many different places and cultures. Mongol decline returned attention to sea-based contacts, particularly in the Indian Ocean. This was where, for a brief time, China took its unusually active stance. The Mongol era left other impacts as well: Japan, proud of its avoidance of Mongol occupation in contrast to China, began to think in terms of greater self-sufficiency, with less reliance on imitation and elaborate contacts with China. Russian leaders, initially around Moscow, began to gain greater independence from Mongol control; their chief goal involved further expansions of territory, but they began to pay attention to other contacts as well. Overall, at a time of many regional changes, the defining relationship to the patterns of global contact was a vital one, and by 1450 it was in flux.

The key continuity involved the interest and dependence of many societies on interregional trade and other contacts. African merchants and leaders continued to rely heavily on interactions with the Middle East. Western Europe's involvement in contacts was intensifying. Southeast Asia was increasingly drawn in, not only to trade but also to Muslim missionary efforts. The Middle East, India, and China continued to welcome the availability of goods and merchant activities beyond their own borders, even though their regional economies remained robust. The diverse advantages of Afro-Eurasian contacts were widely realized, even amid changes in trade routes and regional initiatives.

Developments in the decades around the mid-fifteenth century both reflected and intensified the transcontinental network. The level of intercontinental connections developed in the postclassical period allowed increasingly rapid

imitation in areas like technology. This gave once-backward societies, like Western Europe, a chance to accelerate their economic and military development. The networks also brought sufficient advantages, in access to luxury consumer goods, that the decline of one trade system—for example, the overland Mongol routes once the Mongol holdings began to shrink—quickly brought forward other societies eager to develop an alternative framework—the Chinese, then the Europeans. This process, from the Mongols onward, quickened the pace of contact, from ambitious travelers like Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo, to imaginative merchants and explorers. The stage was set for the next phase in the globalization process, in which the whole world would, for the first time, be directly involved.

Further Readings

On the Chinese expeditions: Edward Dreyer, *Zheng He, China and the Oceans in the Early Ming, 1405–1433* (2007); Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne, 1405–33* (1996).

An important, highly readable interpretation of the West's rise in a world context is C. Cipolla, *Guns, Sails, and Empires: Technological Innovation and the Early Phases of European Expansion, 1400–1700* (1985). See also John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (2004); and K. Ciggaar and M. Metcalf, eds., *East and West in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean* (2006). An important interpretation of new Western interests is S. W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985).

On the Black Death and economic dislocation, see M. W. Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East* (1977); W. H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (1976); and the very readable B. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (1979). A provocative study of relevant Western outlook is P. Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death* (1981).

J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (1973), deals with the decline of medieval forms in Europe. See also Gerald MacLean, ed., *Re-Orienting the Renaissance: Cultural Exchanges with the East* (2005). On the Renaissance, Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (2011); Gary Fergusan, *Queer (re)readings of the French Renaissance* (2008); Guido Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love: Sex, Self, and Society in the Italian Renaissance* (2007); Manfredo Tafuri, *Interpreting the Renaissance: Princes, Cities, Architects* (2006); John Jeffries Martin, ed., *The Renaissance: Italy and Abroad* (2003); and Richard Mackenney, *Renaissances: The Cultures of Italy c. 1300–c. 1600* (2005). On Spain, see F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World*, 2 vols. (1978); and E. Paris, *The End of Days* (1995), on Spanish Jews and the Inquisition. On expansion in general, see Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change* (1993).

An excellent overview of the period is Janet L. Abu-Lughod's *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (1989).

Critical Thinking Questions

1. What were the consequences of the fall of the Byzantine Empire? Was this a short-term or long-term change in world history?
2. What was new about Renaissance culture? Is it possible to use a cultural change of this sort to explain innovations in trade and exploration?
3. What caused the main differences between developments in West Africa and those in Western Europe during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries?
4. Should China have maintained its commitment to great expeditions? Is this a valid historical question?
5. What distinctive features of Polynesian society reflected lack of contact with other major centers?