

12 The Worlds of the Fifteenth Century



Introduction

- In 2005, China celebrated the 600th anniversary of the initial launching of the country's great maritime expeditions in 1405.
 - Admiral Zheng He had commanded a fleet of over 300 ships carrying 27,000 people that sailed as far as the East African coast
 - Why is Columbus so much more remembered?
- The fifteenth century was a major turning point in world history.
 - Zheng He's voyages did not have world-historical consequences
 - Columbus's voyages did

Timeline

1345-1521	Aztec Empire in America
1368-1644	Ming dynasty in China
1370-1406	Conquests of Timur
15 th century	Spread of Islam in Southeast Asia Civil war among Japanese warlords Rise of Hindu state of Vijayanagara in southern India European Renaissance Flourishing of African states of Ethiopia, Kongo, Benin, Zimbabwe
1405-1433	Chinese maritime voyages
1420	Beginning of Portuguese exploration of West African coast
1438-1533	Inca Empire along the Andes
1453	Ottoman seizure of Constantinople
1464-1591	Songhay Empire in West Africa
1492	Christian reconquest of Spain from Muslims completed; Columbus's first trans-Atlantic voyage
1497-1520s	Portuguese entry into the Indian Ocean world
1501	Founding of Safavid Empire in Persia
1526	Founding of Mughal Empire in India

The Shapes of Human Communities



Major Developments around the World in the 15th Century

Region	Major Development
Central, East, and Southeast Asia	Ming dynasty China, 1368-1644 Conquests of Timur, 1370-1406 Zheng He's maritime voyages, 1405-1433 Spread of Islam into Southeast Asia Rise of Malacca Civil war among competing warlords in Japan
South Asia / India	Timur's invasion of India, 1398 Various Muslim sultanates in northern India Rise of Hindu states of Vijayanagar in southern India Founding of Mughal Empire, 1526
Middle East	Expansion of Ottoman Empire Ottoman seizure of Constantinople, 1453 Founding of Safavid Empire in Persia, 1501 Ottoman siege of Vienna, 1529
Christendom / Europe	European Renaissance Portuguese voyages of exploration along West African coast Completion of reconquest of Spain, ending Muslim control End of the Byzantine Empire, 1453 End of Mongol rule in Russia; reign of Ivan the Great, 1462-1505

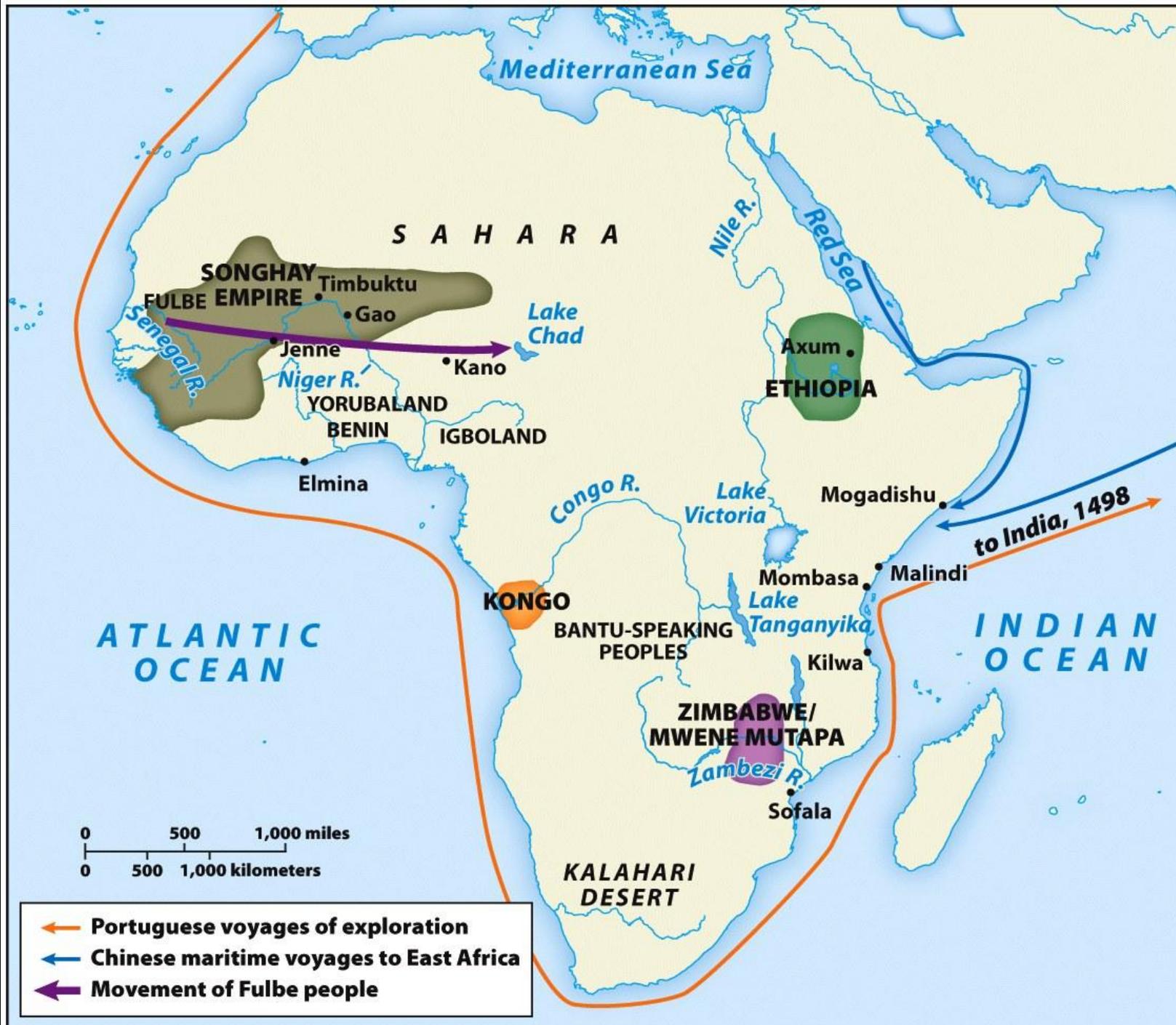
Major Developments around the World in the 15th Century continued

Region	Major Developments
Africa	Songhay Empire in West Africa, 1464-1591 Kingdom of the Kongo in West Central Africa Expansion of Ethiopian state of East Africa Kingdom of Zimbabwe / Mwene Mutapa in southern Africa
The Americas / Western Hemisphere	Aztec Empire in Mesoamerica, 1345-1521 Inca Empire along the Andes, 1438-1533 Iroquois confederacy (New York state) “Complex” Paleolithic societies along west coast of North America
Pacific Oceania	Paleolithic persistence in Australia Chieftdoms and stratified societies on Pacific islands Yap as center of oceanic trading network with Guan and Palau



– Paleolithic Persistence

- gathering and hunting societies (Paleolithic peoples) still existed throughout all of Australia, much of Siberia, the arctic coastlands, and parts of Africa and the Americas
- they had changed over time, interacted with their neighbors
- example of Australian gatherers and hunters
 - some 250 separate groups
 - had assimilated outside technologies and ideas, e.g., outrigger canoes, fish hooks, netting techniques, artistic styles, rituals, mythological concepts
 - had not adopted agriculture
 - manipulated their environment through “firestick farming”
 - exchanged goods over hundreds of miles
 - developed sophisticated sculpture and rock painting
- northwest coast of North America developed very differently
 - abundant environment allowed development of a complex gathering and hunting culture
 - had permanent villages, economic specialization, hierarchies, chiefdoms, food storage
- elsewhere, farming had advanced and absorbed Paleolithic lands



– Agricultural Village Societies

- predominated in much of North America, in Africa south of the equator, in parts of the Amazon River basin and Southeast Asia
- their societies mostly avoided oppressive authority, class inequalities, and seclusion of women typical of other civilizations
- example of forested region in present-day southern Nigeria, where three different political patterns developed
 - Yoruba people created city-states, each ruled by a king (*oba*), many of whom were women and who performed both religious and political functions
 - kingdom of Benin: centralized territorial state ruled by a warrior king named Ewuare
 - Igbo peoples: dense population and trade, but purposely rejected kingship and state building
 - » relied on other institutions to maintain social cohesion
 - » system was made famous in Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*
 - Yoruba, Benin, and Igbo peoples traded among themselves and beyond
 - the region shared common artistic traditions
 - all shifted from matrilineal to patrilineal system

- in what is now central New York State, agricultural village societies underwent substantial change in the centuries before 1500
 - Iroquois speakers had become fully agricultural (maize and beans) by around 1300
 - population growth, emergence of distinct peoples
 - rise of warfare as key to male prestige (perhaps since women did the farming, so males were no longer needed for getting food)
 - warfare triggered the creation of the Iroquois confederation
 - » five Iroquois peoples made an agreement (the Great Law of Peace)
 - » a confederation council was created to adjudicate disputes
 - » the Iroquois League of Five Nations ended blood feuds and tribal conflicts; coordinated Iroquois relations with outsiders
 - some European colonists appreciated Iroquois values of social equality and personal freedom (even for women)
 - » descent was matrilineal
 - » married couples lived with the wife's family
 - » women controlled agriculture
 - » women selected and could depose officeholders

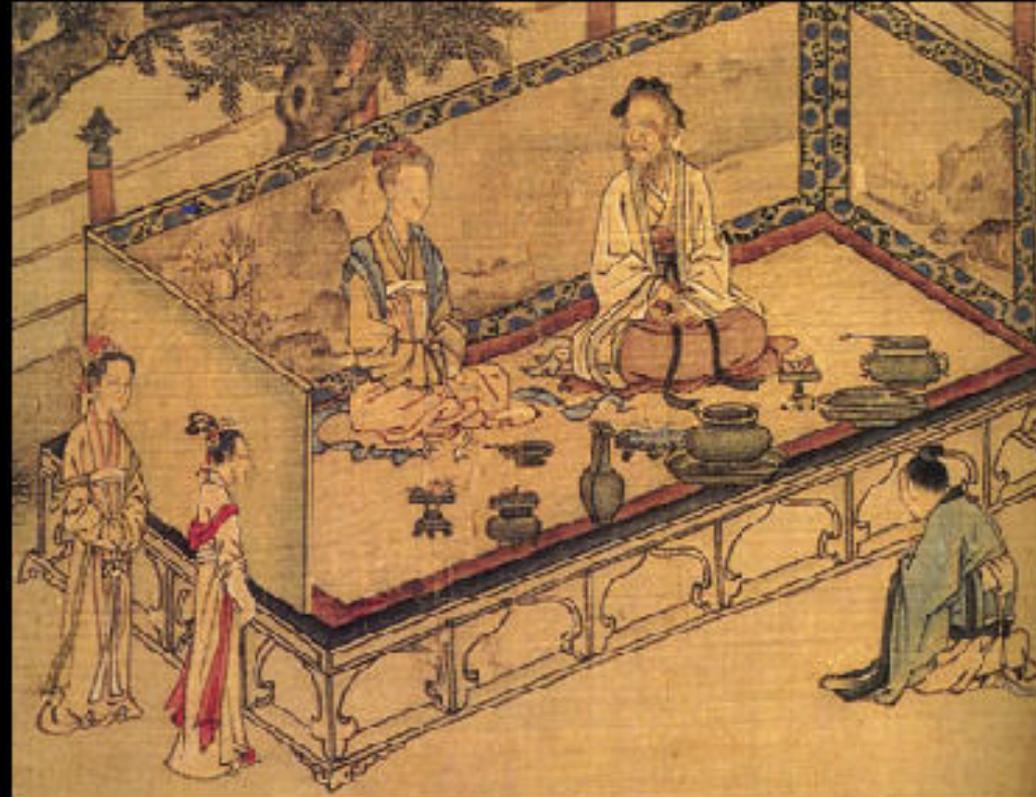
– Herding Peoples

- Turkic warrior Timur (Tamerlane) tried to restore the Mongol Empire ca. 1400
 - his army devastated Russia, Persia, and India
 - Timur died in 1405, while preparing invasion of China
 - his successors kept control of the area between Persia and Afghanistan for a century
 - Timur's conquest was the last great military success of Central Asian nomads
- in the following centuries, the steppe nomads' homeland was swallowed up in expanding Russian and Chinese empires
- African pastoralists remained independent from established empires for several centuries longer (until late nineteenth century)
- example of the Fulbe (West Africa's largest pastoral society)
 - gradual eastward migration after 1000 c.e.
 - usually lived in small communities among agriculturalists
 - gradually adopted Islam
 - some moved to towns and became noted religious leaders
 - series of jihads in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries created new states ruled by the Fulbe

Civilizations of the Fifteenth Century: Comparing China and Europe



Marchandise se dit couramment
maintenir sans fraude & sans
usure car autrement ce n'est
pas marchandise mes est deceuon faulce





– Ming Dynasty China

- China had been badly disrupted by Mongol rule and the plague
- recovery under the Ming dynasty (1368–1644)
 - effort to eliminate all signs of foreign rule
 - promotion of Confucian learning
 - Emperor Yongle (r. 1402–1422) sponsored an 11,000-volume *Encyclopedia* summarizing all the wisdom of the past
- reestablished the civil service examination system
- created a highly centralized government
 - great power was given to court eunuchs
 - state restored land to cultivation, constructed waterworks, planted perhaps a billion trees
 - was perhaps the best-governed and most prosperous civilization of the fifteenth century

- maritime ventures
 - Chinese sailors and traders had become important in the South China Sea and in Southeast Asian ports in the eleventh century
 - Emperor Yongle commissioned a massive fleet; launched in 1405
 - » twenty-eight years of maritime expeditions
 - » Admiral Zheng He tried to enroll distant peoples in the Chinese tribute system
 - » dozens of rulers took part
 - » no intention of conquering new territories, establishing Chinese settlements, or spreading culture
 - Chinese government abruptly stopped the voyages in 1433
 - » many had regarded them as waste of resources
 - » and saw voyages as project of hated court eunuchs
 - Chinese merchants and craftsmen continued to settle and trade in Japan, Philippines, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia, but without government support

0 200 400 miles
0 200 400 kilometers



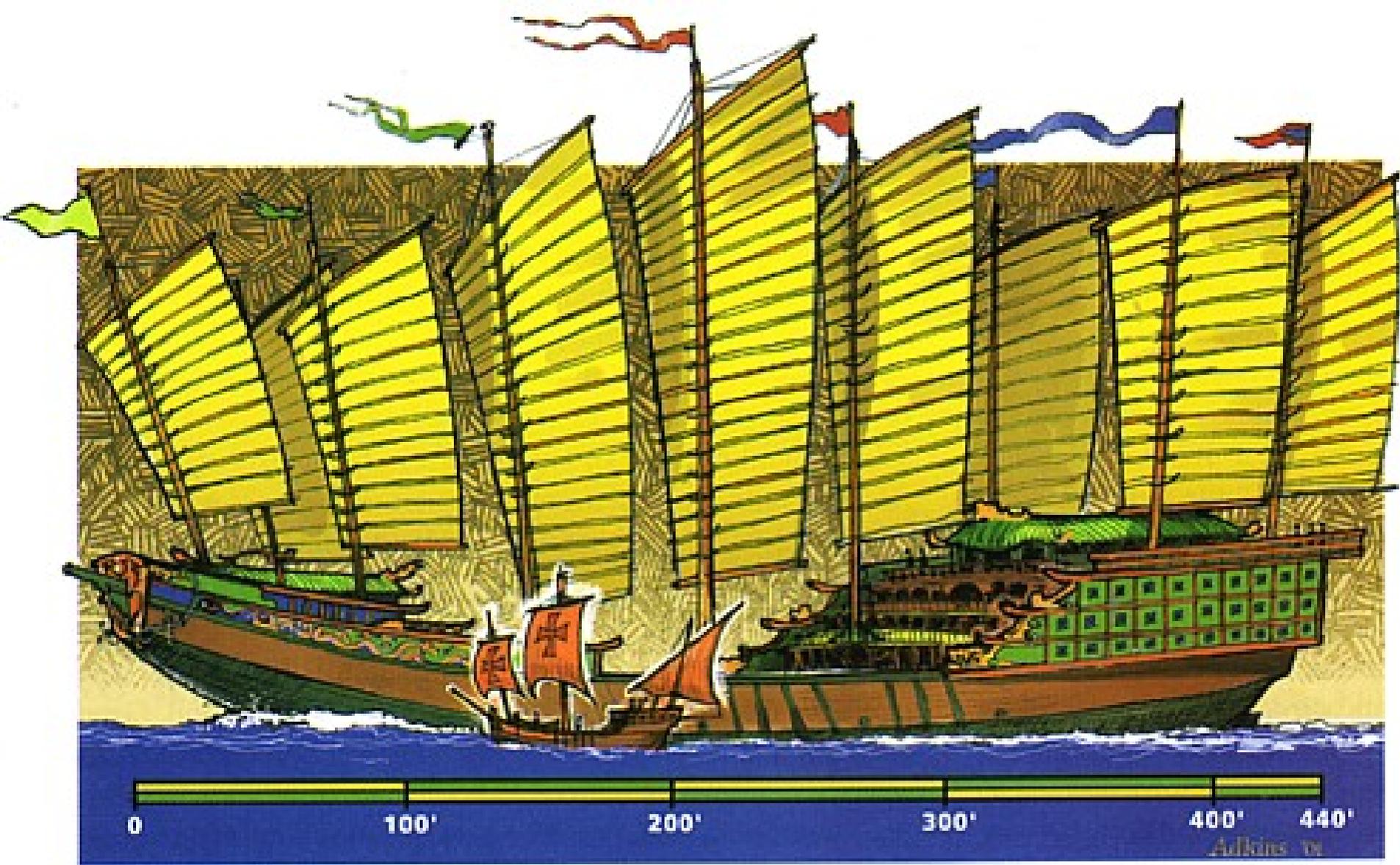
– European Comparisons: State Building and Cultural Renewal

- a similar process of demographic recovery, consolidation, cultural flowering, and European expansion took place in Western Europe
- European population began to rise again ca. 1450
- state building, but fragmented, with many independent and competitive states
 - much of state building was driven by the needs of war, e.g., England and France in the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453)

- the Renaissance: reclamation of classical Greek traditions
 - began in the commercial cities of Italy ca. 1350–1500
 - “returning to the sources” as a cultural standard to imitate
 - turn to greater naturalism in art (e.g., Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo)
 - “humanist” scholars explored secular topics in addition to religious matters
 - » Niccolò Machiavelli’s (1469–1527) *The Prince* laid out plans for political success
 - » greater interest in the individual and in accurate depiction of the world
 - » challenge to the otherworldliness of Christian culture

– European Comparisons: Maritime Voyaging

- Portuguese voyages of discovery began in 1415
- 1492: Columbus reached the Americas
- 1497–1498: Vasco da Gama sailed around Africa to India
- European voyages were very small compared to Chinese ones
- unlike the Chinese voyages, Europeans were seeking wealth, converts, allies in Crusades against Islam
- Europeans used violence to carve out empires
- Chinese voyages ended; European ones kept escalating
 - no overarching political authority in Europe to end the voyages
 - rivalry between states encouraged more exploration
 - much of European elite interested in overseas expansion
 - China had everything it needed; Europeans wanted the greater riches of the East
 - China's food production could expand internally; European system expanded by acquiring new lands



Zheng He's treasure ship v. Columbus' *Santa Maria*

Key Moments in European Maritime Voyaging

Portuguese seize Ceuta in Morocco	1415
Prince Henry the Navigator launches Portuguese exploration of the West African coast	1420
Portuguese settle the Azores	1430s
Chinese fleets withdrawn from Indian Ocean	1433
Portuguese reach the Senegal River; beginning of Atlantic slave trade	1440s
Portuguese contact with Kongo; royal family converts to Christianity	1480s
Sugar production begins in Atlantic islands (Canaries, São Tomé)	1480s
Establishment of trading station at Elmina (in present-day Ghana)	1480s
First transatlantic voyage of Columbus	1492
John Cabot sails across North Atlantic to North America	1496
Vasco da Gama enters Indian Ocean and reaches India	1497-1498
Portuguese attacks on various Swahili cities; establishment of Fort Jesus at Mombasa; Portuguese contacts with Christian Ethiopia	1497-1520s
Magellan's voyage to Asia via the Americas; first circumnavigation of the globe	1520-1523

Civilizations of the Fifteenth Century: The Islamic World





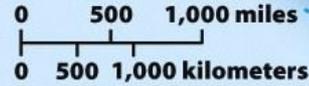
OTTOMAN EMPIRE

**SAFAVID
EMPIRE**

**MUGHAL
EMPIRE**

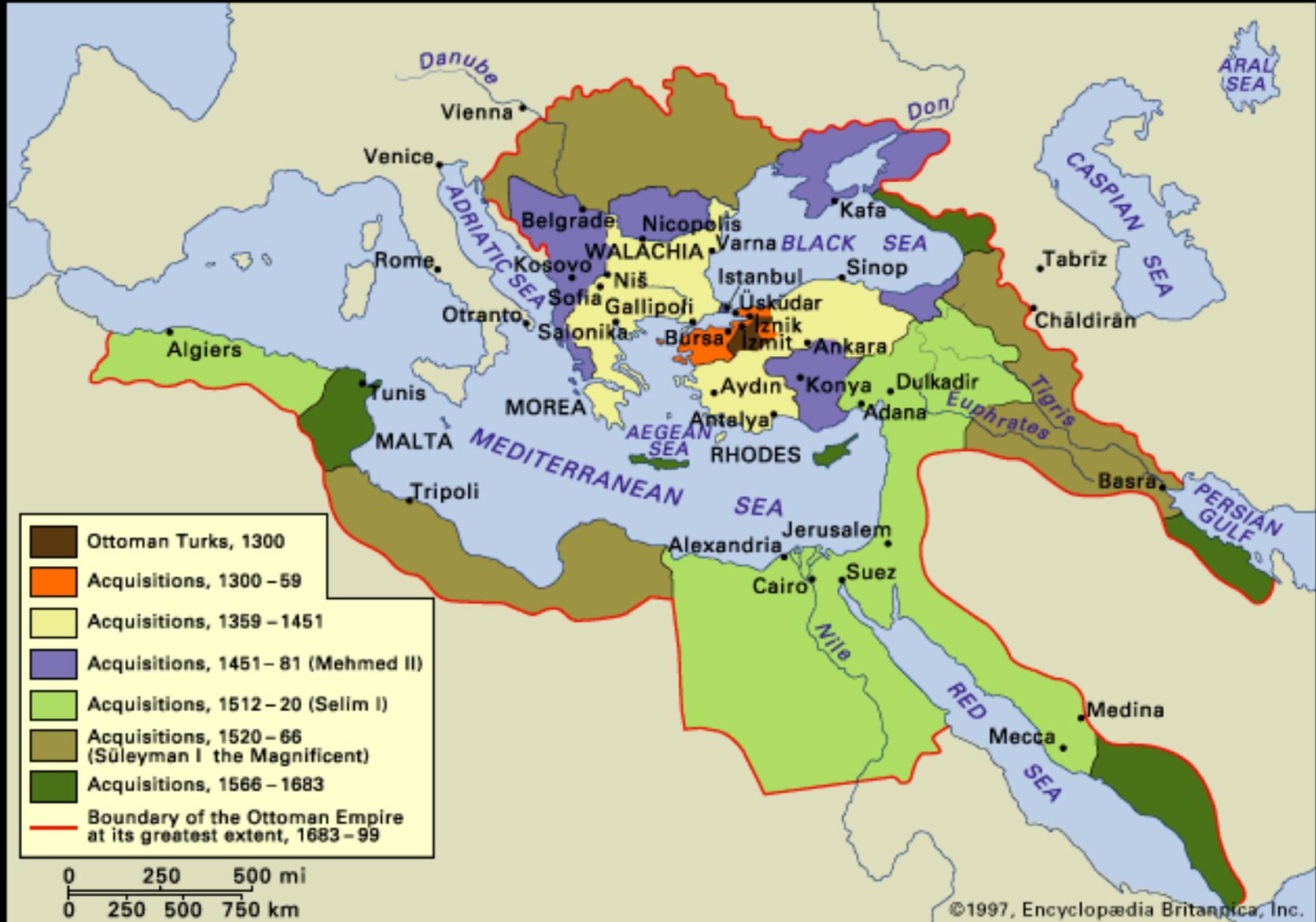
**SONGHAY
EMPIRE**

INDIAN OCEAN



- The long-fragmented Islamic world crystallized into four major states or empires.
 - process of conversion to Islam continued both within and beyond new states
- In the Islamic Heartland: The Ottoman and Safavid Empires
 - Ottoman Empire lasted from fourteenth to early twentieth century
 - huge territory: Anatolia, eastern Europe, much of Middle East, North African coast, lands around Black Sea
 - sultans claimed the title “caliph” and the legacy of the Abbasids
 - effort to bring new unity to the Islamic world

- Ottoman aggression toward Christian lands
 - fall of Constantinople in 1453
 - 1529 siege of Vienna
 - Europeans feared Turkish expansion
- Safavid Empire emerged in Persia from a Sufi religious order
 - empire was established shortly after 1500
 - imposed Shia Islam as the official religion of the state
- Sunni Ottoman Empire and Shia Safavid Empire fought periodically between 1534 and 1639



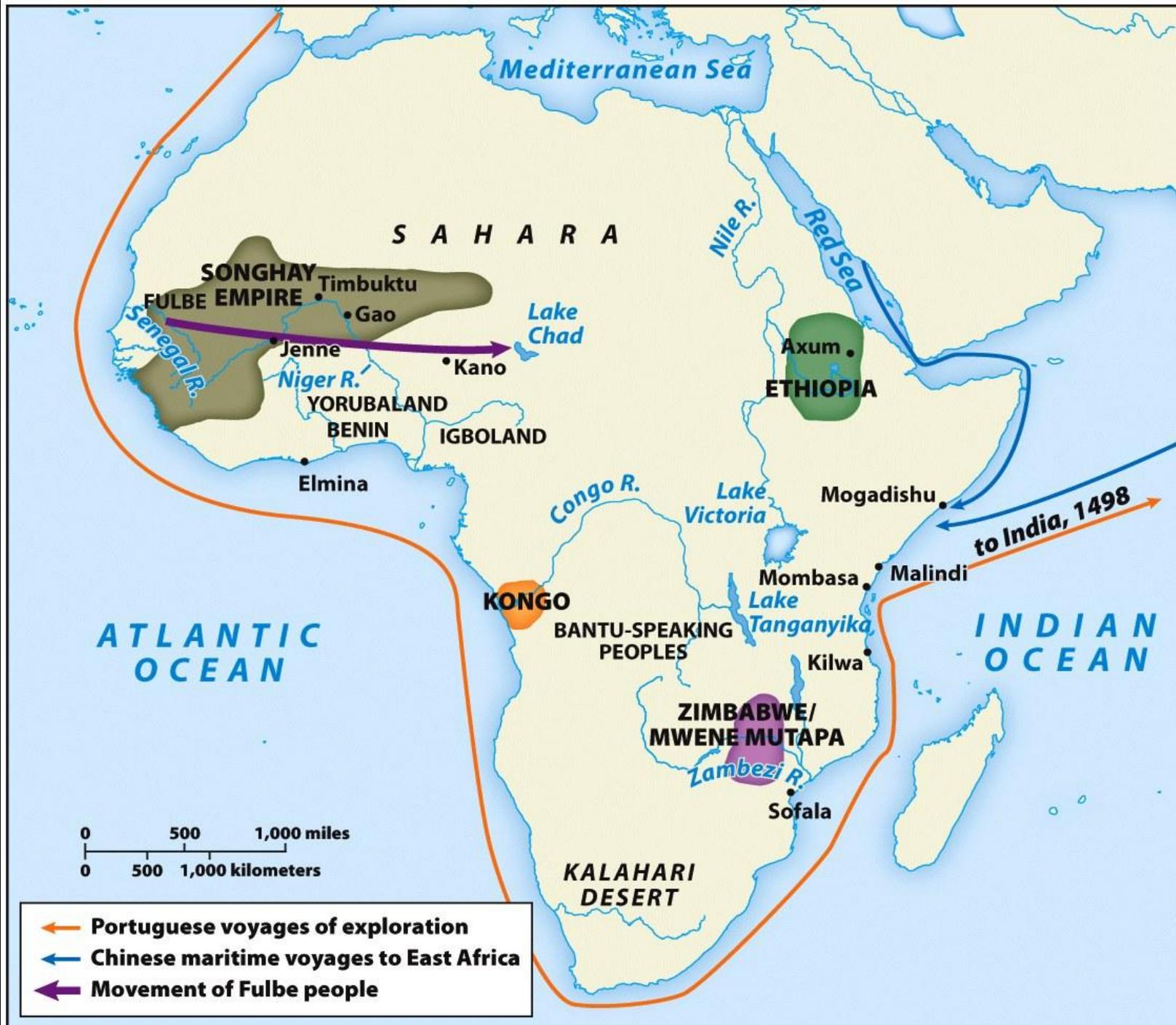
Ottoman Empire



Safavid Empire

– On the Frontiers of Islam: The Songhay and Mughal Empires

- Songhay Empire rose in West Africa in the second half of the fifteenth century
 - Islam was limited largely to urban elites
 - Sonni Ali (r. 1465–1492) followed Muslim practices, but was also regarded as a magician with an invisibility charm
 - Songhay Empire was a major center of Islamic learning/trade
- Mughal Empire in India was created by Turkic group that invaded India in 1526
 - over the sixteenth century, Mughals gained control of most of India
 - effort to create a partnership between Hindus and Muslims
 - Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagara continued to flourish in the south



-  Portuguese voyages of exploration
-  Chinese maritime voyages to East Africa
-  Movement of Fulbe people

- Mughal Empire in India was created by Turkic group that invaded India in 1526
 - over the sixteenth century, Mughals gained control of most of India
 - effort to create a partnership between Hindus and Muslims
 - Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagara continued to flourish in the south

Mughal Empire



- The age of these four great Muslim empires is sometimes called a “second flowering of Islam.”
 - new age of energy, prosperity, and cultural brilliance
 - spread of Islam to new areas, such as Southeast Asia
 - spread by traveling merchants, supported by Sufi holy men
 - rise of Malacca as a sign of the times—became a major Muslim port city in the fifteenth century
 - Malaccan Islam blended with Hindu/Buddhist traditions
 - was a center for Islamic learning



OTTOMAN EMPIRE

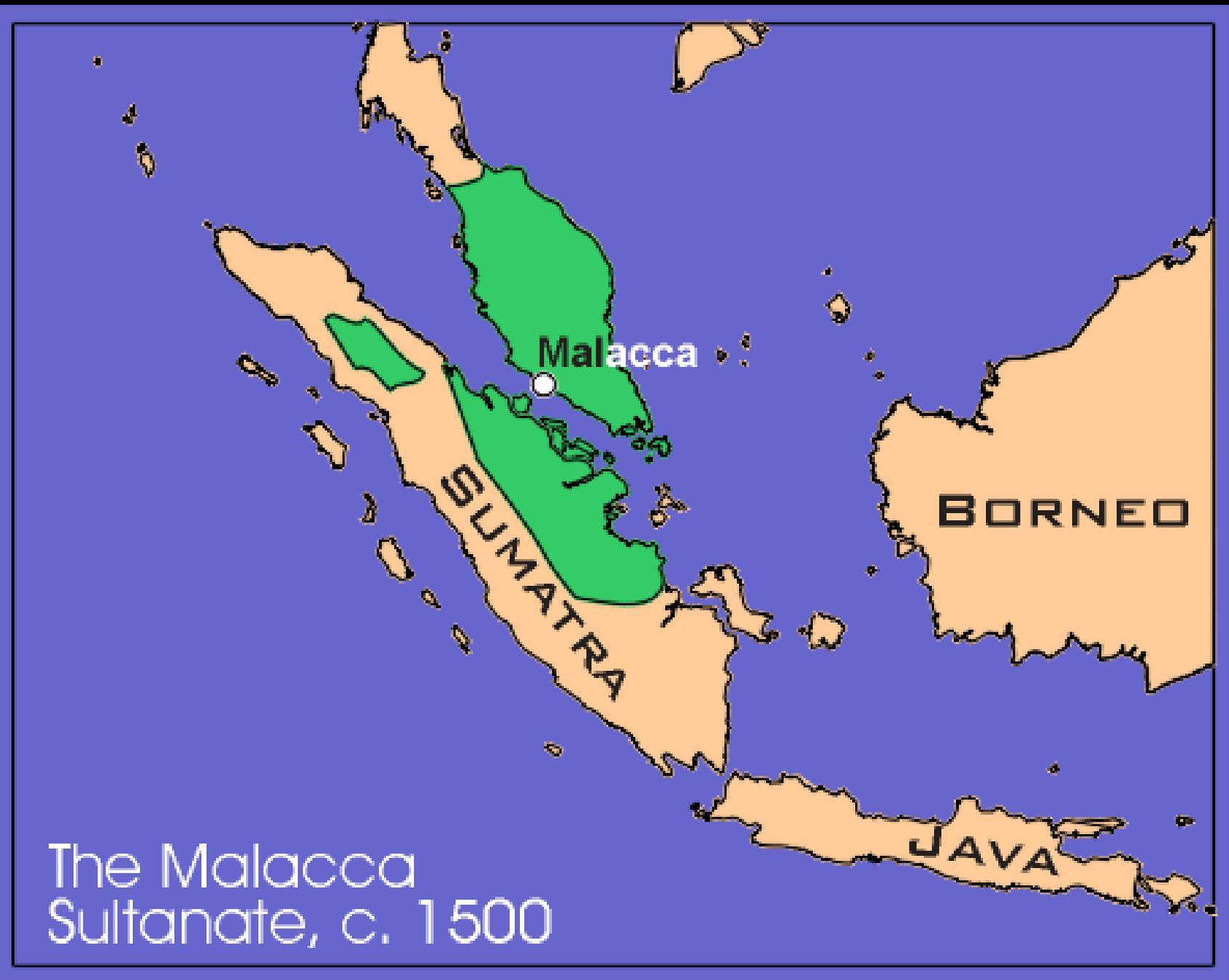
SAFAVID EMPIRE

MUGHAL EMPIRE

SONGHAY EMPIRE

INDIAN OCEAN

0 500 1,000 miles
0 500 1,000 kilometers



The Malacca Sultanate, c. 1500

Civilizations of the Fifteenth Century: The Americas

- Both the Aztec and the Inca empires were established by once-marginal peoples who took over and absorbed older cultures.
 - both empires were destroyed by the Spaniards and their diseases



– The Aztec Empire

- The Mexica were a seminomadic people who migrated southward from northern Mexico
 - established themselves on an island in Lake Texcoco by 1325
 - built themselves up and established capital city of Tenochtitlán
- Triple Alliance (1428): Mexica and two other city-states united
 - launched a program of military conquest
 - conquered much of Mesoamerica in under a century
 - Aztec rulers claimed descent from earlier peoples
- Aztec Empire was a loosely structured, unstable conquest state
 - population of 5–6 million
 - conquered peoples paid regular tribute
 - Tenochtitlán had 150,000–200,000 people
 - » center for large-scale trade
 - local and long-distance trade on a vast scale
 - » professional merchants (*pochteca*) became rich

- trade included slaves, many intended for sacrifice
 - human sacrifice much more prominent in Aztec Empire than in earlier Mesoamerica
 - Tlacaehlel is credited with crystallizing ideology of state giving human sacrifice such importance
 - » the sun needs the life-giving force of human blood to help it fight the ever-encroaching darkness
 - » gods shed their blood to create humankind, so payback is fair
 - » Aztec Empire's purpose is to maintain the cosmic order by supplying blood for the gods
- created an important philosophical/poetic tradition focused on the fragility of human life



– The Inca Empire

- Quechua speakers established the Inca Empire along the length of the Andes
 - empire was 2,500 miles long
 - around 10 million subjects
- Inca Empire was more bureaucratic, centralized than the Aztecs
 - emperor was an absolute ruler regarded as divine
 - state theoretically owned all land and resources
 - around 80 provinces, each with an Inca governor
 - subjects grouped into hierarchical units of people (10, 50, 100, 500, etc.), at least in the central regions
 - inspectors checked up on provincial officials
 - population data was recorded on *quipus* (knotted cords)
 - massive resettlement program moved much of the population

- Incas attempted cultural integration
 - leaders of conquered peoples had to learn Quechua
 - sons were taken to Cuzco (the capital) for acculturation
 - subjects had to acknowledge major Inca deities
 - » but then could carry on their own religious traditions
 - » human sacrifice, but on much smaller scale than Aztecs
 - almost everyone had to perform labor service (*mita*) for the Inca state
 - » work on state farms, herding, mining, military service, state construction
 - » also production of goods for the state
 - most well known were the “chosen women”: removed from their homes and trained to make corn beer and cloth
 - » state provided elaborate feasts in return
 - the state played a large role in distribution of goods

– Both the Inca and Aztec civilizations practiced “gender parallelism.”

- women and men operated in “separate but equivalent spheres”
- parallel religious cults for women and men
- parallel hierarchies of female and male political officials (especially among Incas)
- women’s household tasks were not regarded as inferior
 - for Aztecs, sweeping was a powerful, sacred act
- still, men had top positions in political and religious life
- glorification of the military probably undermined gender parallelism
- Inca ruler and his wife governed jointly, were descended from sun and moon, respectively

Webs of Connection



- Large-scale political systems brought together culturally different people.
 - efforts to integrate diverse peoples, e.g., in Ottoman, Mughal, and Inca empires
- Religion both united and divided far-flung peoples.
 - common religious culture of Christendom, but divided into Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy
 - Buddhism linked people in China, Korea, Tibet, Japan, and parts of Southeast Asia
 - Islam was particularly good at bringing together its people
 - the annual hajj
 - yet conflict within the umma persisted
- Patterns of trade were very evident in the fifteenth century
 - trade was going on almost everywhere
 - the balance of Afro-Eurasian trade was changing
 - the Silk Road network was contracting
 - ocean trade in the west Atlantic/Indian Ocean picked up

A Preview of Coming
Attractions: Looking
Ahead to the Modern Era
(1500–2000)

- No fifteenth-century connections were truly global.
 - those came only with European expansion in the sixteenth century
 - 1500–2000: inextricable linking of the worlds of Afro-Eurasia, the Americas, and Pacific Oceania
- “Modern” human society emerged first in Europe in the nineteenth century and then throughout the world.
 - core feature: industrialization
 - accompanied by massive population increase
 - societies favored holders of urban wealth over rural landowning elites
 - states became more powerful and intrusive
 - opening up of public and political life to more of the population
 - self-conscious departure from tradition
 - the modernity revolution was as important as the Agricultural Revolution
 - introduced new divisions and conflicts, new economic inequalities
 - destruction of older patterns of human life

- The prominence of European peoples on the global stage grew over the last 500 years.
 - after 1500, Western Europe became the most innovative, prosperous, powerful, imitated part of the world
 - spread of European languages and Christian religion throughout the world
 - initiated the Scientific Revolution and the Industrial Revolution
 - origin of modern *-isms*: liberalism, nationalism, feminism, socialism
 - rest of the world was confronted by powerful, intrusive Europeans

Reflections: What If? Chance and Contingency in World History

- Might history have been shaped, at least at certain points, by coincidence, chance, or the decisions of a few?
 - What if Ogodei Khan hadn't died in 1241 and the Mongols had continued their advance into Europe?
 - What if China had continued maritime exploration after 1433?
 - What if the Ottomans had taken Vienna in 1529?