Part I The Rise of Early Modern Empires, c.1350–1650

CHAPTER **1**

Empire: The Emergence of Early Modern States and Empires in Eurasia and Africa

The world of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was shaped by "modern" empires that spanned the globe or dominated great regions of it. Emerging from industrial societies such as Britain, the United States, France, Japan, the Soviet Union, and more briefly Germany and Italy, these states were constructed and maintained by vast armies and navies with military superiority over the peoples they conquered. Their empires were sustained by enormous industrial economies whose managers and profiteers benefited from empire. They were justified by contemporary ideologies of race, technology, and religion that proclaimed a duty to dominate and to "civilize" other peoples.

These empires have often been studied as part of a "new" imperialism that resulted from great transformations in the nineteenth century. They are described as the products of the changes wrought by modernity upon Europe: industrialization, new sciences and scientific racialism, liberalism. In future chapters, we will explore exactly these connections. However, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century empires were, in fact, rooted in long-term trends that connected them to earlier eras of history and to the history not just of Europe but of the entire world. Perhaps most significantly, the empires of our recent past faced remarkably similar challenges to those of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. These empires of the *early modern period*—as it is often termed—also struggled to centralize power in the hands of the state, to convince merchants and the general populace of the metropole to support their policies of imperialism, and to find ways to rule the culturally, spiritually, and economically diverse people of their empires and to bind them together.

Can we connect the technologies and strategies of these early modern empires with those of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century empires? Geographically, the imperial cores of the two periods do not match up. The largest empires of the early modern period were centered in Asia and North Africa: the Mongol state, Ming China, Tīmūrid (Mughal) India and Central Asia, and the Ottoman Empire. The only comparable European empires were those of the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs and Portugal. The great imperial centers of the modern era in northern Europe, Japan, and the United States were either politically fragmented or politically peripheral in this earlier period. The longest direct geographical continuity that existed was the Russian

state centered upon Muscovy, which expanded almost unceasingly from the fifteenth to the twentieth century.

Yet as the first four chapters of this book will show, the early modern era was a period of increasing globalization and the building of economic and intellectual connections between regions of the world. This rising interconnectedness made it possible for states like England (later Britain) to begin to learn techniques of colonial rule from established powers like the Mughals. The migration of peoples and expanding trade gradually enriched established states like France and built new nations like the United States. The flow of technologies spread military expertise and equipment to regions like Japan where they could become tools of empire.

In this chapter, we explore the rise of early modern empires in Eurasia and North Africa during the period 1380–1650. We suggest that a number of large, cohesive imperial states emerged during this period—partially as a result of a sharing of ideas and technologies, which itself was made possible by the Eurasian system created by the Mongol Empire. We then go on to explore several ideas about the ways in which these empires came into being and operated: the rise of gunpowder military economies, the emergence of alliances between different sectors of society, and the development of unique but interestingly interconnected cultures of imperialism. This leaves for chapter 2 the larger issues of early modern imperial interaction and colonialism. Alone, however, these chapters do not give a global picture. Thus in chapters 3 and 4 we expand our scope to include the Americas, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Polynesian Pacific: early modern imperial systems that themselves grew from earlier Eurasian and North African roots.

## THE EMERGENCE OF THE EARLY MODERN STATE SYSTEM

Beginning in the late fourteenth century, a rush of empire-building washed across the world. The largest of these empires blossomed first in Eurasia: the Iberian Peninsula (Portugal and Spain), eastern Europe (Russia and the Austrian Habsburgs), Central Asia (the Ottoman and Tīmūrid Empires), and China. Together with a constellation of smaller states, their emergence reversed a period of political and economic fragmentation following the Black Death of the 1340s–1380s and the collapse of the Mongol Empire. Within a century, for the first time in human history, they began to connect all of the world's continents in commercial, intellectual, and biological ties. Although each empire was unique, and each emerged in the context of distinctive local events, nevertheless their expansion reflected similar attempts to control the resurgent inter-continental commerce of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and to mobilize new technologies and equipment.

These great Eurasian empires were merely the largest manifestations of a trend of state-building that stretched across Eurasia and parts of Africa from the end of the fourteenth century onward. At the beginning of the early modern period, for example, Europe possessed 500–600 co-existing polities. By the late nineteenth century, this number was reduced to 25. Across eastern Europe and Central Asia in the same timeframe, Russia swallowed 30 independent states and khanates. In mainland South-East Asia, 22 independent states that existed in 1350 were reduced to 3 by 1823.[1] Similar consolidations took place in South Asia, where large states like Vijayanagar and especially the Mughal Empire rapidly overcame fragmented princedoms. On Eurasia's southern fringe, the Ottoman Empire came to span three continents, fusing together South-West Asia, the Balkans, and North Africa. Nearby, the Horn of Africa was consolidated in the hands of a few large states of which the most expansive was Abyssinia (Ethiopia). Gradually,

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[1] Victor Lieberman, "Transcending East-West Dichotomies: State and Culture Formation in Six Ostensibly Disparate Areas," *Modern Asian Studies*, 31 (1997), 463–546.
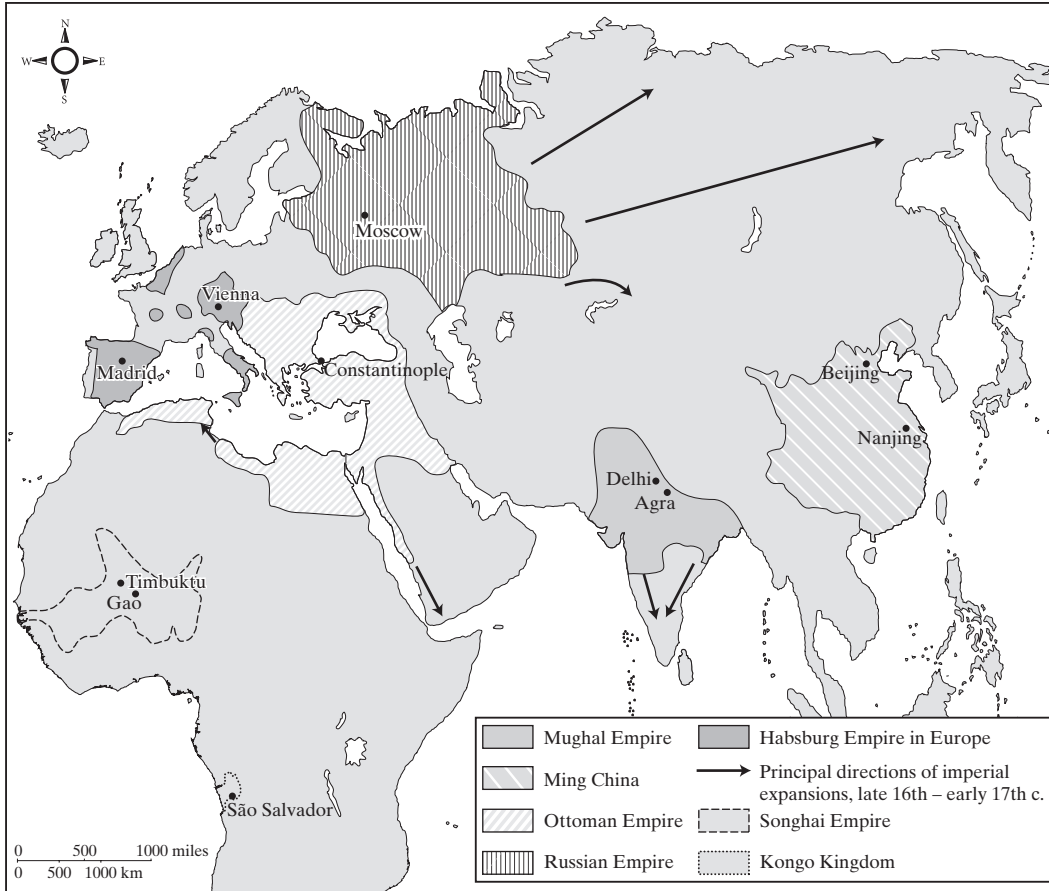
Early Modern Empires of Eurasia and North Africa, c. 1550

the process was extended to areas beyond the older Eurasian trading zone to new regions of sub-Saharan Africa. There, however, the independent consolidation of large states was overtaken by the extension of European maritime empires and especially by the effects of the Atlantic slave trade. In the Americas, the large states and independent communities that had formed a political and commercial network of their own were overcome by European armies, settlers, and diseases after 1492.

While the political regimes of each state were unique, they were all characterized to varying degrees by three linked processes. The first was *centralization*, by which both power and authority tended to become consolidated under a single state authority, usually a ruling monarch or dynastic family and a royal or imperial court. The second was *rationalization*, by which authority and power in the state became increasingly subject to a permanent, organized bureaucracy at the center of the state. The third was *expansion*, by which states increased in size and in some cases developed imperial institutions and relationships.

The context in which these processes took place was the disintegration of the Mongol Empire.[2] From about 1220 to well into the late fourteenth century, the great bulk of Eurasia had come under the control of this single political entity. Only the fringes of the landmass—Europe, Japan, South and South-East Asia, and North Africa—had remained independent. The result of this unique unification had been a flowering of "cultural and artistic achievement" and long-distance trade.[3] These developments were catalyzed by the Mongol rulers' ability to safeguard overland trading routes and to provide relative

safety and stability across vast stretches of Eurasia.[4] Cities in a band across Eurasia and surrounding the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean and China seas—London, Bruges, Genoa, Venice, Constantinople, Cairo, Bukhara, Samarkand, Hormuz, Kilwa, Cambay, Calicut, Malacca, and Guangzhou—flourished in these conditions forming a vast "archipelago of towns."[5] Each city was a center of commerce and production, connected to surrounding agrarian regions and to long-distance trading partners by economic, political, and social links.

The causes of the mid-fourteenth-century collapse of this network are debated, but the very nature of its connectedness may have been one key culprit. Like a two-edged sword, the connections that enabled societies across the Old World to share wealth and innovations also made them dependent upon each other. The collapse of one prop of the system was bound to affect the others. In this context, a series of diseases, bad harvests, and political upheaval across the Mongol domains signaled the beginning of a commercial decline. Perhaps the most significant was the outbreak of epidemics that stretched far beyond the borders of the empire. The best known of these was the dreaded Black Death, which spread rapidly along both overland and maritime trade routes, devastating both commercial towns and the surrounding countryside from China across the vast expanse of Eurasia and North Africa to England.[6] The effects of the epidemic were exacerbated in some regions of Asia by a series of bad agricultural years.[7]

[2]Some scholars argue that commercial integration of Eurasia and North Africa goes back much further. See, for example, Andre Gunder Frank and Barry Gills, eds., *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
[3]This phrasing is taken from the influential modern pan-Eurasian work of Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 4.
[4]One of the best short treatments of the Mongols comes in the David P. Ringrose's superb survey of global interaction. Ringrose, *Expansion and Global Interaction, 1200–1700* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 2001), 5–24.
[5]Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*, vol. III, *The Wheels of Commerce* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 30.
[6]William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (New York: Anchor Books, 1976), 132–146. Admittedly, McNeill's work remains controversial and some scholars have suggested that contemporaneous plagues in various parts of the world may have been caused by a variety of epizootics.
[7]K.N. Chaudhuri, *Asia Before Europe: Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 246–268.

Moreover, Black Death may have come at a period of great vulnerability for the Old World economic network, as there is some evidence that parts of Eurasia were already experiencing a commercial downturn as early as the 1330s.[8]

The economic depression of the mid-fourteenth century was hard on many societies, but it was devastating to the Mongol leadership that relied heavily on income from trade to run their vast empire. In Asia, insurgents began to see this weakened condition as an opportunity to challenge their Mongol rulers, and these challenges form the context for the origins of four early modern empires: Ming Dynasty China and the Ottoman, Russian, and Mughal Empires.

China was in the early fourteenth century the head—if not the heart—of the Mongol state. Chinggis Khan had begun the assault on China in 1210, and his grandson Khubilai had defeated the last rulers of the Chinese Song Dynasty in a 12-year campaign that ended in 1279. Calling themselves the Yuan dynasty, Khubilai and his successors ruled China from approximately 1271 to 1368. Yet Yuan leadership began to decline as early as the 1330s, as factional intrigue weakened the central government and rebel movements emerged in the provinces.[9] The most significant of these movements was the Daoist Red Turban movement, whose leader Zhu Yuanzhang captured the Yuan capital at Beijing in 1368, took the title the *Hongwu Emperor*, and established the Ming dynasty, with authority over all of the core provinces of China.[10] This massive polity thus became the first of the major states to assert its independence from the Mongols.

The first half of the fourteenth century also witnessed a decline of Mongol power in South-West Asia (the Middle East). Here the most significant challenger was a small Turkic-speaking state ruled by the Bey Osman (Bey 1281–1299, Sultan 1299–1326), which had for decades paid tribute to the Mongol emperors. In 1299, Osman declared his (then still small) state independent from Mongol Rule, and it came afterward to be named in his honor the "Ottoman" state.[11] Osman and his successors rapidly claimed territory not only from the Mongols, but also from the Byzantine Empire to the west, from whom they acquired Greece, Bulgaria, Macedonia, southern Serbia, and in 1392, Albania.[12] They briefly lost ground again in the fourteenth century to the brilliant Mongol warrior-lord Tīmūr (known in the west as Tamerlane), but upon his death in 1405 his empire immediately contracted, enabling the Ottomans to re-establish themselves. By mid-century, Anatolia (modern Turkey) was reconquered and the Ottomans were able to advance again in Europe. The accession of Mehmed II (1451–1481) to the Sultanate opened a new period of expansion and the development of a truly imperial Ottoman state. The descendents of Tīmūr maintained hold only of Persia, until they were defeated in 1501 by an alliance of Persian religious and military figures led by a soldier who crowned himself Shah Ismāʿīl I (1501–1524). This Safavî (or Safavîiyya) state quickly became the Ottomans' main rival in the east.[13]

Arising to the east of Persia, the great Mughal Empire is most often associated with northern India. In fact, however, it too emerged out of the Tīmūrid upheavals of the late fourteenth century. The founder of the Mughal emperor, Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babur (hereafter known as Babur, 1526–1530), claimed descent both from Tīmūr and Chinggis Khan.[14]

[8]Frank and Gills, *The World System*, 179–180.
[9]F.W. Mote, *Imperial China 900–1800* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 518–528.
[10]Ibid., 563–564. See also the English or Chinese versions of *The Cambridge History of China*, vols. 7 and 8, *The Ming Dynasty*, edited by Denis C. Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[11]See Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300–1600* (London: Phoenix Press, 1994). First published 1973.
[12]Ringrose, *Expansion and Global Interaction*, 44.
[13]H.R. Roemer, "The Safavî Period," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6, *The Timurid and Safavî Periods*, edited by Peter Jackson and Laurence Lockhart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 190–193.
[14]John F. Richards, *The New Cambridge History of India*, vol. 5, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 9, 44–47.

Babur led his followers to northern India from Central Asia in the 1520s, and in 1526 he defeated the Muslim rulers of Delhi, the Lodi family. Gradually, they extended their sway over Afghan and Hindu rivals. Under Akbar (1556–1605), the Mughals occupied much of northern India including the rich and fertile region of Bengal. By the end of Akbar's reign, the Mughal state comprised a vast, multi-ethnic, and still expanding empire.

The Mughals, Ottomans, and Safavîs shared an Islamic identity with the Mongols, but a Christian successor to the Mongols also came into being in the western portion of their domain. The Slavic state of Russia began as the Grand Duchy of Muscovy, which for much of the thirteenth century was a leading tributary to the Mongol Khanate of the Golden Horde. As the power of the Mongol state waned in the fourteenth century, that of Muscovy increased, allowing the Grand Dukes to flex their muscles on the margins of the Khanate. In 1478, Grand Duke Ivan III conquered his once-powerful neighboring city-state of Novgorod.[15] By the mid-sixteenth century, allied to other former subjects of the Mongols, the Muscovite Russians were powerful enough to take on two Muslim-dominated Mongol successor states located to their east—the Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan. Kazan was conquered in 1552 and Astrakhan in 1556. The conquest of Kazan and Astrakhan decisively turned Russia into a truly multi-ethnic empire, under a self-proclaimed czar (emperor).[16] It also opened up the steppe lands of Central Asia and the sparsely populated reaches of Siberia to the expansion of the Russians, who were limited in the west by emerging European rivals.

These European peoples, located at the extreme western limit of Mongol strength, had never been conquered by them. In any case,

Europe's fragmented geography—its islands, peninsulas, and mountain chains—has throughout history made it difficult for any single state to rule the continent effectively. The exception was the Habsburg Empire, which at its height included Spain, the Low Countries, Burgundy, Austria, Bohemia, parts of Hungary, and positions in Italy and North Africa as well as a growing empire in the Americas. Yet even this vast domain proved too large to rule effectively. Its territories could not be effectively mobilized for unified action, it only gradually developed a unified state bureaucracy, and it dissolved quite quickly under pressure.

The Habsburg Empire was formed largely through marriage, and it's worth briefly listing the weddings that built their dominion. The Habsburgs were descendents on the male side of a leading German aristocratic family, the Dukes of Austria. In the fifteenth century, members of the Habsburg family were regularly elected Holy Roman emperors, although this latter title gave them little real additional authority or power outside of their ancestral lines. Their horizons became greatly widened by the wedding of Maximilian Habsburg (Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, 1486–1519) to Mary, heiress of Burgundy, in 1477. This added to his ancestral domains not only the territory of Burgundy in eastern France, but also Mary's family possessions in the Netherlands. A second wedding— that of Maximilian's son Philip the Handsome to Joan of Aragon-Castile—doubled the size of the Habsburg inheritance. As the heir to Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, Joan gave Philip claim to Spain as well as territories in Italy and the Americas. Maximilian also arranged a double wedding for himself and for his daughter that sealed an alliance with the rulers of Bohemia and Hungary (Vladislav Jagellon) and of Poland-Lithuania (Sigismund Jagellon) in 1515.[17] Following the death of

[15] Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, translated by Alfred Clayton (Harlow: Longman Press, 2001), 14–16.
[16] Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500–1800* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 105–110. See also Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 14–22.

[17] Victor S. Mamatey, *Rise of the Habsburg Empire 1526–1815* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 1–7.

Vladislav while fighting the Ottomans at the battle of Mohács in 1526, Bohemia became a Habsburg domain, while Hungary was partitioned between the Habsburgs, Ottomans, and an independent Transylvania.

Upon Maximilian I's death, therefore, his grandson Charles was not only elected Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (1519–1556), but also inherited an enormous domain stretching across much of Europe. Yet he almost immediately recognized that his inheritance was too vast for one individual to rule. Choosing to focus on Spain and its dependents, Charles therefore turned the administration of the eastern territories including the Austrian hereditary lands over to his brother Ferdinand in 1521. In 1555, Charles abdicated as Holy Roman Emperor in Ferdinand's favor (1555–1564) and, in the following year, turned the Spanish division of the Empire over to his son Philip II (King of Spain, 1556–1598). The Habsburg domains were now permanently divided, although the two branches of the family remained intertwined and allied.

Philip II inherited the throne of an increasingly wealthy, largely unified Spain with extensive colonies in the Americas (discussed in chapters 3 and 4) as well as in the Philippines and with dominion over the Netherlands. It was at this point that the Habsburg Empire in Spain transformed itself into a Spanish Empire. In the years prior to the Habsburg marriages, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain had forged from their domains both a Spanish identity and a unified Spain, largely through wars with the Muslim rulers of southern Spain known as the **reconquista** (or reconquest).[18] The dual monarchs also sponsored overseas adventures such as that of Christopher Columbus. Ferdinand and Isabella were succeeded by the Habsburg Charles V, child of Philip the Handsome and their daughter Joan. Yet throughout his reign, Charles saw Spain as merely one of his domains, and visited it only intermittently.[19] His son Philip,

by contrast, recognized Spain as the center of his empire, and its overseas colonies as an imperial periphery.

The reconquista produced not one but two great early modern maritime empires. Spain shared the Iberian Peninsula with Portugal, as well as with several Islamic states, and their histories are intertwined with each other. In the late medieval period, the peninsula was a zone of intense intermingling and interaction between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Yet relations were not always friendly, and the two Christian states of Spain and Portugal became unified largely out of a struggle to evict their Islamic rivals. The smaller, more westerly Portuguese state coalesced earlier than the larger Spanish state, and by around 1250 it was virtually territorially complete. Thus in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the task of the Portuguese monarchs was not to expand the state within the peninsula but to subdue alternate power centers—the nobility, the church, and the military orders. All of these remained useful tools, as we will see, but had to be subverted to the monarch's authority. This task was largely completed by 1410.[20] For the remainder of the modern period, Portugal under its kings would be an expansionist independent state, except for a brief period of unification with Spain between 1580 and 1640.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Portugal and Spain took the energy that had built them into powerful states and turned it outward. Neither had neighboring territory, but both had Atlantic coastlines and access to favorable ocean currents. Thus, both states turned their attention to Atlantic Islands such as the Canaries. Portuguese monarchs Dom João II (1481–1495) and Dom Manuel I (1496–1521) sponsored commercial expeditions along the West African coast and the establishment of fortified positions meant to dominate the gold trade with West Africa, of which the most important was São Jorge da Mina, built in

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[18] Henry Kamen, *Empire: How Spain Became a World Power 1492–1763* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 16–17.
[19] Ibid., 49–67.

[20] See Sanjay Subrahmanyan, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History* (Harlow: Longman, 1993), 30–36.

1482 on what came to be known as the Gold Coast.[21] Successive voyages brought Portuguese expeditions further down the coast, culminating in Bartholomeu Dias's "doubling," or passing and returning, of the Cape of Good Hope in southern Africa. By 1498, a squadron under the command of Vasco da Gama entered the Indian Ocean, connecting the Iberian states to the vast Indian Ocean trading zone.[22] A second wing of Iberian overseas acquisition brought sailors flying Spanish and Portuguese flags across the Atlantic to the Americas, a story told in chapters 3 and 4.

The great empires of the early modern era were in constant interaction with other, smaller emerging states. In North Africa, for example, Spain, Portugal, and the Ottomans interacted with a variety of local Muslim authorities. Some, like the Barbarossa brothers Arrudj and Khayruddin, accepted Ottoman suzerainty in return for aid against the Spanish. In this way, the areas comprising coastal Libya, Algeria, and Tunisia were brought informally into the Ottoman **tributary** system.[23] In Morocco, on the other hand, the Sa'ādi family managed to play the Ottomans, Spanish, and Portuguese against each other and in this way to build an independent state.[24] In North-East Africa, the development of the independent Christian Ethiopian (Abyssinian) state similarly put it in a position to preserve its independence from the Ottomans by seeking an alliance with Portugal in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In Asia as well, small and medium-sized states gradually coalesced in the early modern period. The unification of Japan was one significant example. Split by feuding factions of feudal lords, or daimyo, Japan lacked anyone who could claim to represent a centralized authority until 1615, when Tokugawa Ieyesu eliminated his final

rival for the position of *shogun*, or state warlord, in 1614.[25] In South-East Asia, a small number of cohesive states emerged in the fifteenth century linked economically to China. These included both trading city-states such as Melaka and Aceh and larger agglomerations such as Burma, Siam, and Vietnam. While China was economically intertwined with South-East Asia, it interfered militarily with its southern neighbors only twice—intervening in Vietnamese (Annamese) politics in 1406–1427 and in Burma in the mid-1440s.[26] It was following the Chinese withdrawal after 1427 that the local Le dynasty established itself as the rulers of Vietnam.

Vietnam and other emerging South-East Asian states rapidly built commercial links to South Asia trading partners. These included not only the Mughal Empire but also a number of emerging states at the tip of the Indian sub-continent such as the Hindu state of Vijayanagar. These in turn were linked to maritime towns such as Hormuz and Aden on the Arabian Peninsula, to the emerging Ottoman Empire, and to a string of East African city-states that shared a set of cultural and linguistic attributes that we now know as Swahili. These Swahili polities—including the important port-cities of Mogadishu, Malindi, Sofala, and Mombasa—were connected to resource-rich states of the African interior. Several of them experienced significant population expansion in the fifteenth century, as Indian Ocean trade revived.[27]

Between the east coast of Africa and South-East Asia, the Indian Ocean formed a vast and multi-national maritime zone of exchange—the richest in the world—with the Mughal Empire as its central pivot. Chinese merchants participated as well. In the first part of the fourteenth century,

[21] John Vogt, *Portuguese Rule on the Gold Coast 1469–1682* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979), 21–34.
[22] J.H. Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 131–148. First printed 1963.
[23] "Algeria, Tunisia and Libya: the Ottomans and Their Heirs," in *UNESCO General History of Africa*, vol. 5, *Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), abridged edition, 120–134.
[24] "Morocco," in *Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, 104–119.

[25] George Sansom, *A History of Japan 1334–1615* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 397–406.
[26] Jung-pang Lo, "Policy Formulation and Decision-Making on Issues Respecting Peace and War," in *Chinese Government in Ming Times*, edited by Charles O. Hucker (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 41–72.
[27] See Derek Nurse and Thomas Spear, *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800–1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 80–98.

the great maritime cities of the Indian Ocean from Melaka to Mombasa were visited by the vast Chinese fleets of the Muslim eunuch-admiral Zheng He. These great convoys ended in 1433, yet less ostentatious but equally significant commercial networks continued to tie the entire region together in annual trade circuits.[28] The Ottomans, too, participated in this trade following Sultan Selim I's (1512–1520) 1516 conquest of Egypt. Ottoman control over this strategic link between east and west helped to drive the Portuguese toward an alternate route into the Indian Ocean around the southern tip of Africa. The wealth of the Indies was a major attraction for Europeans, and the Portuguese were only the first of a number of states to support voyages of exploration and piracy that aimed to possess at least part of it. Portuguese and Spanish expeditions were rapidly followed by others mounted by French, British, and multinational groups.[29]

The parallel developments of large empires and centralizing states in many parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe in this period should not obscure differences among them. Some of the states described earlier were vast agrarian empires with powerful landed gentry and religious or scholarly elites. Others were small, principally commercial, and dominated by merchant elites. Some were built and maintained largely through conquest, others more through dynastic marriage, religious and national identity-building, and alliance. Yet beneath these differences was a shared history that can be highlighted by investigating the origins, forms, mechanisms, and functions of the state across this vast region of the early modern world. Within this shared history we can locate the development of modern imperialism, empires, and colonialism. This is the task

to which we now turn, by considering three inter-linked sets of analyses proposed by scholars to explain the emergence of these new large states and empires.

A GUNPOWDER REVOLUTION?

The principal theory advanced to explain this sudden efflorescence is called the *gunpowder revolution*. Wrapping technology, economy, and culture together, this theory begins by positing that Eurasian and some African societies in the early modern period jointly participated in the recovery of local, inter-regional, and long-distance trade following the subsidence of the mid-fourteenth-century depression. This resurgence in trade facilitated the spread of new transportation and military technologies—particularly firearms, but also ship-building and navigation techniques. Together, these trends intensified the power and authority of those rulers who could afford to participate in the expensive technological arms race, and allowed them to enhance their power especially with respect to feudal lords, community leaders, and nomadic peoples. The resulting decrease in the number of viable militaries was a critical factor in the development of early modern states. In order to maintain these costly armies and navies, however, states had to compete to control and to tax greater shares of global production and commerce. What this meant was that states that wanted to maintain their power had to continue to expand. To do this, governments created alliances with merchants, which then competed with rival state-merchant alliances to control natural resources, commercial entrepots, and production centers. Such increased competition in turn drove the need for larger and more expensive weapons and armies. It was partly this search for new sources of income and trade routes that led to the "voyages of exploration" that established connections among previously separated regions of the world.

The centralized governments that evolved through this process shared certain characteristics to varying degrees. These included the use of gunpowder technologies, the mobilization of

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[28] For a primary account of one of Zheng He's voyages, see Ma Huan, *Ying-Yai Sheng-Lan* [The overall survey of the ocean's shores], edited by Feng Ch'eng Chun and J.V.G. Mills (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1970), 179–180. For more on Indian Ocean commerce in this era, see Andre Gunder Frank, *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
[29] A venerable work on the subject is Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

religious and secular heritage in a search for **legitimacy,** and the development of alliances with merchants and religious leaderships as well as landed elites. In many states, these trends helped to create fledgling cultures of imperialism. From some of these states emerged true empires. In most of these empires, some types of modern colonialism emerged.

In 1983, the pioneering world historian William McNeill put together a unified theory that proposed that the development of gunpowder and firearms was the key factor leading to the formation of early modern world empires.[30] Gunpowder was probably discovered or invented only once in world history, by tenth-century Chinese alchemists. During the Song dynasty, weapons were developed that made use of this gunpowder, including "fire arrows" and cylinders that spewed perforated iron balls. The Mongol Yuan emperors further elaborated these weapons and built the first guns probably around 1288. The spread of gunpowder technology from China was facilitated by the vast Mongol hegemony.[31] There is evidence that Arab armies were making use of gunpowder-filled rockets and fireworks around 1240 and of Syrian "fire lances" around 1280. The earliest European recipes for making gunpowder appeared around the same time.[32] Unlike gunpowder, the cannon may have been developed in several places independently. The earliest Chinese cannon dates to about 1332. In Europe, a type of cannon was used to defend Florence in 1326, and later at the Hundred Years War Battle of Crécy in 1346. However, the cannon remained largely underpowered until the early fifteenth century. The debut of truly powerful cannon occurred at the 1451–1453 Ottoman siege of Constantinople, where the Sultan Mehmed II commissioned a Hungarian metallurgist to cast enormous firearms capable of blasting down the walls of that great city.[33]

Aside from turning the tide of some set-piece sieges, however, this evidence does not make it clear why cannon, and later personal firearms, had such a decisive effect in world history. After all, early firearms were enormous, liable to explode and kill their operators, and in the case of muskets were often less powerful than existing bow-and-arrow technology. Yet the rapid spread and utilization of gunpowder technology suggests that it was indeed significant. McNeill proposes that this might have been because gunpowder weapons—and especially cannon—reversed the power balance between monarchs and local authorities in many regions of Eurasia and Africa.

In the late medieval period across most of Eurasia and North Africa, the balance of power and authority generally resided in the relationship between rulers and land-owning elites. These landowners, who can perhaps be titled *feudal* or aristocratic classes, held a great deal of power largely because of their military contribution and strength. Often, they held sway over large areas from fortified castles that were difficult to destroy. These aristocrats used proceeds from their land to arm themselves heavily and to equip and maintain entourages of skilled cavalrymen (knights, samurai, *sipahis*) and footmen. The introduction of the cannon, however, shattered the power of these elites. In the first place, cannon were specifically designed to destroy fortifications such as castles, thus eliminating their only real advantage over the larger forces of the monarch. In the second place, cannon were so expensive that most landowners could not afford them. This gave certain authorities—usually monarchs and central governments—a monopoly on the new weapon. The introduction of personal firearms also contributed to the weakening of these local authorities. States could equip peasant armies, or professionals, with muskets. Although the musket was not in early years as effective as

[30]William H. McNeill, *Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society Since 1000 A.D.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). See also by the same author, *The Age of Gunpowder Empires, 1450–1800* (Washington, DC: American Historical Association, 1989).
[31]Jack Kelly, *Gunpowder: Alchemy, Bombards, and Pyrotechnics* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 2–15.
[32]Ibid., 22–25.

[33]One eyewitness account is Nicolo Barbaro, *Diary of the Siege of Constantinople 1453*, translated by John Melville-Jones (New York: Exposition Press, 1969).

the bow, it was easy to learn to use and therefore gave the state the ability to arm a force of ama-teurs to fight the experienced henchmen of the landed elites.

The result was threefold. First, the new wea-pons shifted the balance of power (and conse-quently the ability to tax populations) from local to central authorities, thus enabling state central-ization and rationalization. Second, they in-creased the power of the first states in the region to adopt this technology against surrounding states and nomadic/pastoral peoples, thus facili-tating the integration of states noted in this period. Finally, the new technology increased the financial needs of the state, thus leading to com-petition for resources and for control of inter-regional commerce.[34]

These effects can be seen in every region to which gunpowder technology spread in the early modern world, but especially among the great early modern empires. As we have seen, the Ottoman Empire first used firearms to great effect. Although the cannon that destroyed the walls of Constantinople were designed by a Hungarian, the Ottoman Sultans subsequently sponsored an indigenous bronze cannon industry controlled by the state alone. Equally signifi-cantly, Sultan Murad I (1359–1389) financed a state army manned largely by slaves that served as a counterpoint to aristocratic power. By the mid-fifteenth century, this force, known as the Janissary Corps, was largely armed with muskets. Throughout much of the sixteenth century, Ottoman military engineers, artillerymen, and musketeers were feared from Europe to East Asia, while Ottoman galleys controlled much of the Mediterranean and, periodically, the western Indian Ocean as well.[35]

Similarly, the founding of the Mughal Empire by Babur rested on his effective use of muskets and cannon against the cavalry of his nemesis the Sultan of Delhi at the 1526 Battle of Panipat. Yet his successor, Humayun (1530–1556) was almost undone by the rulers of Gujarat who possessed a large army of cannon and Turkish and Portuguese gunners. Partly as a result, the great Emperor Akbar undertook a campaign of military innovation and reorganization that included developing a centralized army, an over-arching system of military ranks, and a prohibition against the possession of artillery by any force other than that of the emperor. His large, profes-sional army enabled him to conquer most of cen-tral India. Most assessments suggest, however, that military technology stagnated and finally declined under the rule of Shah Jahan (1628–1658).[36]

The Russian ascendance over the successor Khanates in Central Asia depended in part on its transition from a cavalry-centered, feudal society into a musket-and-cannon centralized power. The first steps were taken by Ivan III (1462–1505) and Vasilii III (1505–1533). In 1571, Russian cannon defended Moscow from the besieging army of the Khanate of Crimea and marked the inability of Central Asian rulers to take fortified cities armed with gunpowder weapons. In 1532, a second inva-sion turned back when it encountered Russian units defending the Oka River with arquebus (early muskets) and cannon.[37] Nevertheless, the Russian military forces remained dominated until the seventeenth century by middle-class cavalry armed with edged weapons and bows, many of whom were soldiers given land in the newly con-quered territories in return for service.[38]

In many regions of Eurasia and Africa, sev-eral competing gunpowder-armed states arose simultaneously. This was true, for example, in continental South-East Asia, where Burma, Siam,

[34]McNeill, *The Age of Gunpowder Empires*, 1, 8, 10, 27–28, 34, 38, 39. See also Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 3, *The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 17. First published 1961.
[35]John F. Guilmartin, Jr., "The Military Revolution: Origins and First Tests Abroad," in *The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe*, edited by Clifford Rogers (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 300–305.

[36]Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 42–43, 57, 60, 68, 80, 142–143.
[37]Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier*, 19–21.
[38]Richard Hellie, "Warfare, Changing Military Technology, and the Evolution of Muscovite Society," in *Tools of Hegemony*, edited by John Lynn (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 75–99.

and Vietnam used personal firearms and cannon to subdue surrounding states and to resist Chinese incursions and later Portuguese interventions. Island states such as Melaka and Aceh also proved themselves capable of developing sophisticated cannon and gun-wielding ships.[39] This was also true in Europe, where the brief period of dramatic cannon superiority over masonry came to an end rather rapidly in the late fifteenth century with the development of the *trace italienne*, a new form of fortification resistant to cannon. This innovation helped to halt the consolidation of Europe and facilitated a balance of power among many, mid-sized states. It halted the development of a truly hegemonic Habsburg Empire based on Spain and Austria in the sixteenth century and resulted in an era of almost constant warfare that included the struggles of the eastern Habsburgs against the Ottomans, the Spanish–French wars, the revolt of the Netherlands, and the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648). This competitive environment spurred further, even more costly military developments that culminated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in large and professional standing armies, new types of military organization, heavier financial burdens, and thus higher levels of taxation, as well as more brutal and lengthy wars.[40]

Equally significant was the effect of this sustained burst of military diffusion and innovation on western European maritime technology. Before the early modern period, the principal naval vessel of competing states in both the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean was the oardriven galley. Indeed, even in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, galleys retained some advantages over sail-driven ships because of their maneuverability in coastal areas. However, the galley had several key disadvantages. Its large crew made it difficult to operate over long distances, cargo space was small, and perhaps most importantly the ranks of oars made it difficult to carry large numbers of cannon.[41] Before the fifteenth century, however, it faced little competition from sail-driven ship designs. From China to England, most sailing ships were smaller and more fragile than large galleys and could not stream against the wind. This situation was transformed, however, between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries through a complex and long process of diffusion and innovation. First, ship-building techniques using strong internal frames were developed in the western Mediterranean. These formed the base for a new sail configuration that mixed Arab lateen (or triangular) rigging with Breton square rigging. This arrangement allowed the new ship—called the *caravel*—to travel both fast and against the wind.[42] By the early sixteenth century, these caravels were mounting small numbers of guns in rear-pointing gunrooms. Although useful for bombarding ports such as the Swahili cities of East Africa, these were initially of limited use in gunbattles. Only after 1545 were long rows of broadside-mounted cannon introduced in England, where cheaper iron cannon were also replacing brass guns. The combination vastly increased shipboard firepower.[43] These types of innovations, which spread gradually around maritime Europe, slowly led to European domination of the seas. There is a great deal of scholarship, however, that suggests that for the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the naval gap between Europe and other regions should not be overstated.[44]

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[39] Lieberman, "Transcending East-West Dichotomies," 516–517; and A. Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 220–226.

[40] This is the heart of Michael Robert's famous assertion of a sixteenth- and seventeenth-century military revolution that effectively propelled European military organization and technology to the global forefront. However, one of his critics, Geoffrey Parker, argues that it was based on the fifteenth-century developments. Clifford Rogers, ed., *The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).

[41] Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance*, 56, 120.

[42] Ibid., 57–65; and N.A.M. Rodger, "Guns and Sails in the First Phase of English Colonization, 1500–1650," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. I, *The Origins of Empire*, edited by Nicholas Canny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 80–81.

[43] Rodger, "Guns and Sails," 85–91.

[44] P.J. Marshall, "Western Arms in Maritime Asia in the Early Phases of Expansion," *Modern Asian Studies*, 14 (1980), 13–28; and John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 40–42.

One of the great mysteries of the gunpowder empire theory is why the Ming emperors of China, the home of gunpowder, largely chose not to equip their armies with muskets and the new types of cannon. The answer certainly isn't a lack of ability. Zheng He's fifteenth-century vast fleets of enormous ships, which towered over the Portuguese caravels of later centuries, were equipped with firearms.[45] Moreover Japan, China's neighbor, developed an advanced musket industry in the 1560s. Indeed, it was the effective use of these weapons by Nobunaga and the Tokugawa's descendants that led to the island's unification.[46] Under Hideyoshi, Japan even turned these weapons against the Choson (Korean) state. Significantly, however, the musket-equipped Japanese armies failed to defeat the Choson and Ming forces that came to their aid. Such evidence, which suggests that firearms were not in all cases decisive, makes the Ming Emperor's decisions more understandable.

In fact, the search for some type of exceptional "otherness" in Ming China, popular though it is among western academics, is a misguided one. Simply put, the types of battles that were of most concern to the Ming emperors—fought against mobile nomadic armies—rendered heavy cannon useless. Ming weaponry was, in fact, sufficient for their needs, although in the long run sitting out the next stages of the gunpowder revolution would prove to be a mistake. A similar situation existed in much of Africa, where, for example, Portuguese firearms proved useless in the dense forests of Angola against bow and spear-wielding forces.[47]

SECTORAL ALLIANCES

For those states that did adopt them, however, the new weapons were not cheap—a fact that leads us to a second set of analyses concerning the rise of large states and empires—in this case combining politics, economics, and culture. Simply put, the expense of all of this new technology and the expertise needed to operate it made it necessary for sovereign rulers to turn to other segments in society who could help pay these costs. These allies could also assist the state in developing bureaucracies and in ruling new populations. Both the financial and the logistical requirements of maintaining the empire thus facilitated the formation of partnerships between the state on one hand, and merchants and religious authorities on the other. Moreover, existing land-owning elites also often remained an important part of the equation. In short, rulers turned to these groups in search of money. In return, each group demanded certain concessions, often asking to have a say in the making of laws. Political scientists describe the resulting collaboration between governments on the one hand and financial, religious, and military elites on the other as an alliance of several sectors.[48]

Nowhere was the relationship between imperial ruler and sectors of society more complex than in the Mughal state under Akbar. The Tīmūrid Emperor was backed up by a sophisticated set of institutions that centralized power in his hands. The most obvious were the class of military commanders, or **Mansabdari**, who owed allegiance to the emperor. This multi-ethnic martial aristocracy included Iranians, Central Asians, and Indians; Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims. The mansabdari were ranked according to importance, and some of the most significant had personal relationships with the emperor as disciples in a royal cult that transcended religion, ethnicity, and family identity.[49] The emperor and his military officials alike were sustained by a system of

[45] Kuei-Sheng Chang, "The Maritime Scene in China at the Dawn of Great European Discoveries," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 94 (1974), 347–359.

[46] Conrad Totman, *A History of Japan* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 205–209.

[47] John K. Thornton, "The Art of War in Angola, 1575–1680," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30 (1988), 360–378.

[48] These have been remarked upon in early modern Europe frequently, but existed elsewhere to similar degrees. David B. Abernethy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Overseas Empires, 1415–1980* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 35–38, 61–63.

[49] J.F. Richards, "Formulation of Imperial Authority Under Akbar and Jahangir," in *The Mughal State 1526–1750*, edited by Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyan (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 21–22, 151–153.

landed gentry, or **zamindari**, who held title to both vast and in some cases quite tiny cultivated lands.[50] Many of the mansabdari and zamindari invested heavily in both internal and long-distance commerce, and by the seventeenth century a type of royal trade in which the state invested in commerce also developed.[51] At the same time, Akbar relied for both religious and legal advice upon Sufi Muslim leaders from Central Asia and India. He sponsored orthodox Muslim orders, but at the same time was generally tolerant of the variety of faiths within his state.[52] This brought Akbar into conflict with *ulamâ*, or religious magistrates, and his successors would eventually abandon this broad-mindedness.

The Ottoman state, as well, combined a potent mix of religious, land-owning, and commercial elites. At its heart was the feudal *timar* system, by which the Sultan granted rural land-holding rights to feudal knights, or **sipâhîs**, in return for military and administrative service. However, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Ottoman Empire was also a center of global commerce. Thus, the Ottomans specifically sponsored the development of commercial society, including welcoming Jews evicted from Christian Europe. Sultans such as Bayezid I (1389–1403) and Mehmed II used their control of important trade routes as a foreign relations tool. Internally, they carefully regulated the guilds, or *hirfet*, and also protected them from external threats.[53] Both Muslims and non-Muslims could be members of guilds, but despite this general tolerance the Sultan's identity as the champion of Sunnî Islam and supreme representative of Sharî'a law was central to his power and authority. The Ottoman ulamâ were more closely integrated into the state than in the Mughal Empire. Many served as *kâdîs* (religious magistrates who also served as the state's legal system) and were closely aligned

with the army.[54] Both institutions were seen as extensions of the Sultanate, and helped to enforce his will within the empire and without. This alliance gave a flavor of religious crusade to Ottoman expansions, both against the Shî'i Safavî and against Christian states. The complex motivations for Ottoman expansions thus often combined elements of military aspiration, pursuit of economic gain, and militant Islamic objectives. However, both the Ottoman emperors and the religious authorities were generally pragmatically broad-minded.[55] Non-Muslims were organized into special communities, or **millets**, and enjoyed tolerance in return for special duties.

Religion similarly played an important role in the development of Christian-dominated imperial states. This was particularly true of societies that bordered Muslim competitors, especially Russia, Spain, and Ethiopia. Russian imperialism contained a very strong sense of an Orthodox Christian mission, especially after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans.[56] After 1589, Russian czars even appointed their own independent patriarch of the Orthodox Church. Although this militant Christianity had to be tempered by the realities of ruling large numbers of Muslims, it remained an important aspect of Russian imperial rhetoric, and Orthodox priests remained among the most vocal proponents of expansionism. Other proponents included the sons of middle-class and aristocratic families seeking land of their own. In annexing Novgorod in 1470, Ivan III expropriated all of the land owned by local landlords and turned it over to these young men. In return, they committed themselves to serve in the military in times of war, and thus increased the Russian central government's ability to wage war and mobilize resources.[57] Commercial interests contributed to empire-building as well. As the Russians expanded into Siberia, family firms such as the Stroganovs set up vast

[50]S. Nural Hasan, "Zamindars under the Mughals," in Alam and Subrahmanyan, *The Mughal State*, 284–300.
[51]Alam and Subrahmanyan, *The Mughal State*, 26–28.
[52]Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 30–33, 34–36, 60, 153–158.
[53]M.A. Cook, ed., *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 207–218.

[54]Hodgson, *The Gunpowder Empires*, 101–109.
[55]Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*.
[56]Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier*, 2, 34, 103–104.
[57]Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 240.

economic networks and even employed Cossack mercenaries to defeat the Siberian Khanates. Imperial soldiers and forts soon followed.[58]

For the Catholic rulers of the Spanish and Austrian Habsburg empires, Islam was not the only religious foe—Protestantism too threatened the foundations of the Church *and* the state. To fund the fight against Protestant "heresy" and Muslim states at the same time required a complex balancing act. The Spanish crown controlled two of the most significant mercantile regions in the Low Countries (Spanish Netherlands) and in portions of Italy, but silver from the Americas was increasingly important as a source of income as well. The Castilian nobility could be counted upon to pay taxes regularly, but the Aragonese and other subjects could not. In the east, the German states of the Holy Roman Empire contributed little to the Austrian Habsburg emperors, who relied mostly on revenue from the wealthy provinces of Bohemia.[59] Both sets of Habsburg monarchs were closely affiliated with the Catholic Church, and their intolerance of Protestantism gradually increased during this period. Rudolf II of Austria (1576–1612) was militantly anti-Protestant and allied himself closely with the clergy in persecuting Protestants during and after the Thirty Years' War.[60] The Church's support was also a significant prop to royal authority in the continuing conflict against the Ottoman Empire in Hungary and elsewhere.

The consolidation of Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella and of the Portuguese state in the fifteenth century mobilized Church, landed gentry, and merchant-bankers, even while the sovereigns of both states sought to control these various groups. Spain's 1482–1492 conquest of the last Muslim state on the Iberian Peninsula, Granada, was funded by the Church as well as Italian and Jewish financiers.[61] Subsequently, the Castilian Cardinal Cisneros promised to turn over the income of his entire diocese to the King if he would invade Muslim Africa. Spanish aristocrats also supported the reconquista or elimination of Muslim states from the Iberian Peninsula, not only out of ideology but also as a way to acquire new tracts of land. Yet landowners, too, were important components of Iberian overseas expansion. Before 1492, the gradual acquisition of formerly Muslim territories had meant that new land had periodically become available to Spanish and Portuguese aristocrats and their sons. After the fall of Granada, however, this process came to an end, and new land became scarce. Thus, aristocrats—and especially second and third sons who stood to inherit little—looked to the overseas empire as a place to acquire lands and wealth.[62] This combination of Church, bankers (many of them foreign), militarized aristocrats, and a growing body of merchants became even more important as Spain and Portugal turned their attentions overseas. The Church also provided an ideology of the ongoing crusade against Islam and the duty of converting non-Christians overseas, while financiers helped fund state-sponsored voyages of exploration and conquest in hopes of high profits, and soldier-aristocrats of the reconquista quickly became *conquistadors.* At the center of these webs were the royal courts of Spain and Portugal, which developed and disseminated across their two states the sense of a royal prerogative and a Christian duty to create an empire.

The integration of state, Church, finance, and military was, in fact, never entirely completed in either Spain or Portugal. Religious orders—like the Jesuits—and knightly orders often pursued their own goals, as did the merchants who often competed with royal trading monopolies. Yet the sectoral alliances in Spain and Portugal were mutually supportive of an aggressive, outward looking set of policies emanating from the monarchies. Scholars have often compared this Iberian culture of exploration with that of Ming China,

[58] Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 34–35.
[59] Charles Ingrao, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1618–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 11–13; and Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 43–44.
[60] Ingrao, *The Habsburg Monarchy*, 36–38.

[61] Kamen, *Empire*, 15–18.
[62] Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance*, 20.

which seemed after 1430 to turn inward and even become isolationist. Thus, they have created the idea of a vibrant, innovative culture in the west and a stagnating culture in the east. In fact, the turn inward in China was a result only of government policies, rather than any cultural shift away from commerce. Even as the Ming emperors refused to sponsor overseas commercial and military endeavors, Chinese merchants continued to be as entrepreneurial as those of any other region. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Chinese merchant-family networks built strong and lasting ties with South-East Asia, Japan, the Philippines, and other regions. In South-East Asia, some even came to assume important political roles as key supporters of commercially oriented regimes. Around these family firms, communities of Chinese traders and migrants developed in states across the western Pacific, and as a result a China-centered economy continued to dominate the region. Thus, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century China was perhaps the greatest consumer of silver from the Spanish colonies in the Americas, and the producer of what were arguably the finest consumer goods in the world.[63]

Why then did the Ming emperors choose not to support these ventures with state resources? One compelling argument has to do with the special sectoral alliances that formed under the Ming emperors. China's exploding population and dynamic economic growth in this period is startling, but little of this money reached the Ming emperors, who were isolated from the increasingly commercial urban population of China by a powerful class of land-owning aristocrats and imperial bureaucrats that sought to maintain power by excluding the growing merchant class.[64] The power of the land-owning families was based largely upon their ability to address the government's need to feed and manage the largest, most populous of the early modern states largely from resources found within the state. As a result, not only were merchants' interests not strongly represented in the court, but those trading

overseas were especially sidelined. While this unique alignment may indeed highlight the differences between the expansionist policies of Spain and the internally concentrated policies of the post-1433 Ming emperors, these differences merely reflect the manner in which two early modern states responded to different local realities. For China, these included the fact that the Ming dynasty ruled a territory that was already perhaps as large as was manageable using early modern technology, whose internal trade was larger than that of Europe as a whole, and that was culturally and historically cohesive. Such considerations are evidenced by Ming decisions not to intervene in neighboring states or actively support Chinese merchant communities overseas.[65]

The Ming example, while unique, demonstrates that the formation of sectoral alliances was a shared strategy of empire-building states across Eurasia in this period, and not one unique only to Europe. These alliances were significant not only in strengthening the state, but also because they gave different groups within society the ability to shape the ways in which empires expanded and functioned in this period.

THE SEARCH FOR LEGITIMACY

The third set of arguments about the connected nature of these early modern states and empires is that they all had to seek ways to get their populations to acknowledge the **legitimacy**—or right to rule—of their ruling families and elites. Armies of soldiers, bureaucrats, and merchant fleets were the most obvious agents of the imperial state, but they could not alone convince the general populace of the legitimacy of the state. Thus beneath them, empires mobilized intellectual, historical, and religious claims of sovereignty and legitimacy aimed at their own people, at potential challengers, and at competing states. Most often, these claims represented popular ideologies adapted to the service of the state. Because of the multi-sectoral alliance structure of gunpowder

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[63] Mote, *Imperial China*, 717–721.
[64] Ringrose, *Expansion and Global Interaction*, 168–172.

[65] An interesting study on this topic is Lo, "Policy Formulation and Decision-Making."

states, these ideologies usually incorporated elements that could serve the interests of important commercial, religious, and sometimes land-owning elites, as well as the monarch and his court. In the case of the great empires of the early modern world, they were also linked to worldviews that had expansionist or outward-looking components and that amounted essentially to *cultures of imperialism*.

Portugal is an excellent example of the development of this type of culture. In their struggle to dominate powerful political, military, and religious groups and to defeat the Muslim Almoravids in southern Portugal, the Portuguese kings had in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries developed a crusading ideology. This sense of a religious duty bound the nobility to the king and also increased the sovereign's popularity. Therefore, rather than abandoning the crusading ideology following the expulsion of the Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula, Dom Manuel I developed it into a form of royal messianism, through which he came to believe that he had been chosen to liberate Jerusalem. His strategy for achieving this goal was the unification of European and Ethiopian Christians, which helps to explain both his support for expeditions to the east and the aid Portugal gave to Ethiopia in its struggle against Muslim rivals. However, Manuel's religious goals by no means conflicted with Portugal's commercial objectives: the struggle against the Egyptian Mamlûks and later the Ottomans not only reflected Portugal's sense of a religious duty but at the same time helped to establish a Portuguese monopoly of the pepper and spice trade from Asia to Europe by blocking an alternate trade route through Egypt to Venice. Both Portuguese and foreign merchants at Manuel's court lobbied for state funds to be committed to eastward exploration and overseas expansion, and Manuel's support for these ventures marks their ascendance over land-owning aristocrats.[66]

Portugal was not the only state to incorporate Christianity into its sense of an imperial mission. Spanish identity, too, was bound up in the reconquista and the subsequent expulsion of Jews and Muslims, and later in the struggle of Philip II against both Protestantism and rebellion in the Netherlands. The Austrian Habsburgs, as well, used their status as champions of the Catholic Church both to promote their struggle against the Ottomans and to justify their suppression of regional autonomy and local authorities in Bohemia and Hungary during the Thirty Years' War.[67] The Habsburgs also employed a second claim to legitimacy—their designation as Holy Roman emperors. Although the Holy Roman Empire was entirely dysfunctional after the fifteenth century, and although its German states were in effect wholly autonomous, the Habsburgs' claim to the title asserted their right to rule as heirs to the Roman emperors.

Russian imperial identity, too, asserted the czar's position as defender of the Church and heir to the Roman emperors. The title *czar* itself is a derivation of the Roman title Emperor, or *Caesar*, and its assumption by Ivan IV (1530–1584) in 1547 indicated the maturity of the Russian sense of an imperial mission. Although Ivan II had also called himself czar, few foreign rulers of his day had recognized the title and Vasilii III had abandoned it. By reclaiming the title czar, Ivan IV declared his sole *imperium* over Russia. By proclaiming it without the Pope's explicit consent, he declared his independence from the Pope and laid his claim to the position of defender of Christianity. His coronation also asserted his right to rule all of the lands of the Khanate of the Golden Horde. His subsequent invasion of Kazan and Astrakhan backed his grandiose coronation with actions, but the Christian identity of the imperial mission necessitated that the Muslim population of his empire be ruled as subjects, rather than citizens.[68]

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[66] Subrahmanyan, *The Portuguese Empire*, 49–51; and Luís Filipe Thomaz, "Factions, Interests, and Messianism: The Politics of Portuguese Expansion in the East, 1500–1521," *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 28 (1991), 98–109.

[67] Many of the Spanish and the Austrian Habsburg monarchs clearly took this role very seriously. Mamatey, *Rise of the Habsburg Empire*, 8, 38–57.

[68] Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier*, 34, 40, 103–104; and Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 14.

were outside of the Eurasian and North African zone of state-building. Nevertheless, this does not mean that states and empires did not develop and exist in these regions during this period. In subsequent chapters, for example, we will explore the large states of the fourteenth-century meso-America and the Andean zone of South Africa. But it is appropriate here to discuss whether sub-Saharan Africa had empires during this period.

We have already seen that much of coastal Africa was very much part of the story of reviving global trade in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Swahili city-states, Senegambians, Ethiopians, the peoples of the Gold Coast and even regions further south traded and otherwise interacted with Ottoman, Portuguese, and Mughal subjects as well as each other. However, because of the obstacle of the vast Sahara desert and because of distance, wind patterns, and ecological differences events within Africa tended to dominate the ways in which states formed in these regions.

In most contemporary world history textbooks, it has become common to label a number of early modern African states as empires. These include the West African states of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai along with Central Africa polities such as Luba, Lunda, and Kongo and of course Ethiopia. There are numerous reasons why this has happened. In the first place, later rulers of these areas claimed descent from early emperors. Similarly, early North African and European explorers and missionaries often applied to the states they encountered titles such as "kingdom," "empire," and "caliphate" in an attempt to understand them in familiar language. Lastly, modern scholars of Africa seeking to reverse the idea of the continent as "backward" and "tribal" have often endorsed these titles. Yet are they correct? Did empires in fact exist in sub-Saharan Africa in the early modern period?

Certainly, numerous states existed in Africa south of the Sahara during this time. Yet African historian John Thornton has pointed out that most of them were relatively small.[73] Simply put, most of sub-Saharan Africa did not experience the

same trends of centralization and expansion as Eurasia and North Africa during this period. This does not prove, however, that there were no early modern sub-Saharan African empires. In fact, we have plenty of evidence of several very large states in the West African region just south of the Sahara after 1250 including Mali and Songhai, both of which may have controlled up to 1 million square kilometers. While not as large as the Ottoman Empire at its height (4 million square kilometers) or the Mughal state (almost 2 million square kilometers), these are nevertheless sizable states. Similarly, large states existed south of the vast Congo rain forests including after 1390 Kongo, which figures heavily in the story of Portuguese expansion discussed in the next chapter.

Were these large states in fact empires? Size alone cannot prove anything. In going back to our definition of empire used in this book, we must look at questions of authority and control, of differentiation between metropolitan citizens and subjects, and of networks of exchange between metropole and periphery. Thornton, for example, would probably argue that most sub-Saharan African states in this period were more like confederations—alliances of small states tied together—than empires.[74] In this section, we will explore whether the title *empire* applied well to the three most likely candidates in this region and period—Mali, Songhai, and Kongo.

It makes sense to begin with the state Thornton knows the most about: Kongo. This long-lived state on the west coast of Central Africa seems to have formed around 1390 and to have existed at least until the late seventeenth century, when it fragmented under both external and internal pressures.[75] There is a debate about the origins of the state that is important to our understanding of its configuration. We have no written sources from this area for the late fourteenth century, and most local oral sources suggest that its leaders were descendants of invaders who had conquered the peasants who made up

[73] Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 103–104.

[74] Ibid., 9.
[75] Another state later formed in about the same region, but in a different configuration and under different leadership.

most of the rural population. This story has been used to explain the dualism of Kongolese society, which in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries seems to have been split into a rural peasantry and an urban nobility in the capital of São Salvadore who lived off the peasants' surplus as well as luxury goods produced by slaves on plantations around the capital city.[76] Yet Thornton doubts this explanation. Instead, he argues, this division obscures the origins of the Kongolese state as a confederation. Although later kings seem to have sponsored stories of earlier military prowess as a means of legitimizing their rule, there is evidence in these stories that the urban nobility of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were descended from many lineages (families) who were rulers of multiple small states that fused by marriage with the rulers of Kongo.[77] Only some peripheral provinces seem to have been added by conquest, and many of these remained nominally independent so long as they paid an annual tribute.

Nevertheless, it could be argued that Kongo had a metropole–periphery configuration, if a rather different one than most Eurasian empires. The metropole in this case was the capital, where almost the entirety of the nobility lived and which had an economic system based on slave labor. By contrast, the rural provinces largely produced food through communal or family-based labor systems. These provinces were ruled by nobles temporarily dispatched from the interior, whose main job was to collect food surpluses for the capital. The stability of the state was based on the fact that there was only really one prize for any power-seekers: the capital. Whoever controlled São Salvadore controlled the state. Indeed, arguably, the reason it finally broke up in the seventeenth century was that Portuguese trade helped to revive several provincial towns, which then became centers for dissidents to gather in

order to challenge the central authorities.[78] Based on the difference between the urban center and rural periphery of Kongo, the argument could be made that Kongo was a confederation that at some point turned into a sort of an empire.

Was this a common process in sub-Saharan Africa? Certain similarities seem to exist in the so-called Sahelian region just to the south of the Sahara Desert. There, a series of states succeeded one another beginning with Ghana (Wagadou), which emerged from a small base in the tenth century to control the important trading centers of the Niger bend for about a century, followed by Mali (c.1235–1550), which gradually ceded power to a rival to the east called Songhai (c.1390–1591). Both Ghana and later Songhai were apparently the victims of invasions from Morocco in 1054 and 1591, although neither of these resulted in a long occupation by North Africans.

Although typically now described as a sequence of empire, the situation in the Sahel seems to have been rather more complex. Unlike in much of Eurasia, populations in this part of Africa were relatively sparse, especially away from the river. As a result, control over land was less important than control over people. Less powerful groups often affiliated with their more powerful neighbors through negotiated relationships, through the payment of annual tributes, or sometimes through forced enslavement. Relationships among the more powerful were characterized by shifting patterns of extended family alliances and at times warfare. The object of this maneuvering was to control the gold and salt trade between North and West Africa and especially the trading centers of Timbuktu, Gao, and Jenné. Safe (or isolated) from the effects of the Mongols and the spread of gunpowder armies, these patterns provided continuity from the Ghana period into the era of Songhai ascendancy.

[76] John Thornton, "The Kingdom of Kongo, ca. 1390–1678: The Development of an African Social Formation," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 22 (1982), 326–329.
[77] John Thornton, "The Origins and Early History of the Kingdom of Kongo, c.1350–1550," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 34 (2001), 102, 104, 111.

[78] Much of this paragraph is based on Thornton, "The Kingdom of Kongo," 326–329, 338.

One example is that of the best-known Sahelian states: Mali. Conventional histories of this state depict it as an empire created by a Mande-speaking king named Mārī-Djāta or Sundiata (c.1235–1255), who was the creator of an empire that reached its height during the rule of the glorious and expansive Mansā (king) Mūsā I in the late fourteenth century. These Mansā and their successors ruled their vast empire, including the important trading from a capital called Mande Kaba (modern Kangaba), using imperial administrators to rule a core area that was culturally Mande and armies (*sofas*) to conquer non-Mande speakers and incorporate them into the empire.[79]

However, recent scholarship suggests that the Malian state was more of a confederation than a centralized empire. Jan Jansen, for example, has suggested that imperial Mali was really a "segmentary" society of relatively equal and allied extended families (*kafuw*) and that Mārī-Djāta was just a temporary war leader.[80] The "empire" was thus built by a core group of kafuw who were allied over long periods of time, and occasionally spun off groups who conquered outsiders and ruled them as essentially independent polities. Similarly, Kathryn L. Green suggests that Mande Kaba was not really an imperial capital or seat of an empire. Instead, the idea that it had been was introduced by much later rulers of a much-reduced Mali state to legitimize their own rule.[81]

Yet this formulation does not exclude the possibility of Mali being an "empire" of a somewhat decentralized sort. At least by the time of Mūsā I, there existed a Mande-speaking metropole of shared language and cultural values, whereas many non-Mande-speaking groups from the Gambia River area all the way east to the middle Niger River were ruled as subordinates by Mande-speaking elites who had trade and cultural ties to the core. The rebellion of some of these groups, including the inhabitants of Songhai, helped to fragment this large state in early sixteenth century.

The sixteenth-century Songhai, which succeeded Mali as the largest Sahelian state, similarly ruled many different groups including (as defined by their languages) Fube, Soninke, Tuareg, Dogo, Bambara, and Bozo. Equally importantly, like Mali they came to control the major trading center of Timbuktu. Under the rule of the Askia dynasty, the Songhai ruling class became increasingly Muslim, and Islam became a defining feature of citizenship. This essentially created a colonial underclass of "traditionalists," non-Muslims in the provinces who were not forced to convert but were nevertheless restricted from entering the ruling elite. Most Muslims were concentrated in Timbuktu and the 11 core provinces of the state, while further provinces that were mostly not Muslim were ruled by imperial governors.[82] Perhaps because of its economic importance and its Muslim majority, Timbuktu seems to have enjoyed an intermediate status with local administrators (kâdîs, as in the Ottoman Empire, but loyal to the local population more than the state) and imperial officers sharing power.[83]

Were these sub-Saharan African states actually empires? The difficulty in answering this question comes largely from the problems of applying a Eurasian term to African situations. As we discussed in the introduction, our understanding of "empire" is shaped by the western empires more familiar to us, many of which were much more centralized than these African states. Yet this does not necessarily mean that there were not

[79] The father of the study of this region using Arabic sources is Nehemia Levtzion. See especially Nehemia Levtzion, *Ancient Ghana and Mali* (London: Metheun and Co, 1973).
[80] Jan Jansen, "The Representation of Status in Mande: Did the Mali Empire Still Exist in the Nineteenth Century?" *History in Africa*, 23 (1996), 87–109; and "Polities and Political Discourse: Was Mande Already a Segmentary Society in the Middle Ages?" *History in Africa*, 23 (1996), 121–128.
[81] Kathryn L. Green, " 'Mande Kaba' the Capital of Mali: A Recent Invention," *History in Africa*, 18 (1991), 127–135.

[82] John O. Hunwick, "Songhay, Borno and the Hausa States, 1450–1600," *History of West Africa*, vol. I, 3rd ed., edited by J.F.A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 323–371.
[83] Michael A. Gomez, "Timbuktu Under Imperial Songhay: A Reconsideration of Autonomy," *Journal of African History*, 31 (1990), 5–24.

similar processes at play in both sets of states, which may be enough to convince us that the term *can* appropriately be applied to Songhai, Kongo, and/or Mali.

Conclusion

In Eurasia and North Africa, early modern empires were created out of the context of the economic revival of the early modern era. The wealth generated by this revival drove commercial rivalries, and new weapons technologies were adopted to fight these conflicts. However, only large, centralized states could afford to compete at this level, and thus commercial conflicts drove imperial expansion and interaction at several levels. The conquest of new territories increased the tax base, whether by acquiring taxable farmers or by gaining control of trade. In their drive to acquire these new territories, monarchs often sought funds from other sectors of their societies, and imperial expansion thus often came to serve *their* needs—whether economic, evangelical, or political. Finally, in order to maintain control over both powerful sectors of society and the general population, rulers devised ideologies and notions of a national mission that amounted to cultures of imperialism. This process differed somewhat but not entirely from other parts of the world such as sub-Saharan Africa, where distinctive processes were at work.

As we shall see in the next chapter, this process created a competitive environment that promoted imperialism on a global scale. It also ushered in exploitative systems of colonialism. The linking of Eurasia and North Africa with sub-Saharan Africa, the Americas, and Polynesia expanded and extended these trends. Together, these regions participated in the development of early modern forms of empires, imperialism, and colonialism that were analogous, but not identical, to those of later centuries.

Questions

1. Why did so many empires and large states form in Eurasia and North Africa in this period? What factors enabled or caused this transformation to happen? What was the role of commerce and technology?
2. Explain how strategies of centralization, rationalization, and expansion characterized the states in the Habsburg Empire, the Russian Empire, Ming China, Tīmūrid (Mughal) India and Central Asia, and the Ottoman Empire in this period.
3. Compare and contrast the operation of sectoral alliances in the Habsburg Empire, the Russian Empire, Ming China, Tīmūrid (Mughal) India and Central Asia, and the Ottoman Empire.
4. What tools, messages, and agents did the Portuguese kings, the Habsburg emperors, the Rurik and Romanov (Russian) czars, the Ming emperors of China, the Tīmūrid (Mughal) emperors, and the Ottoman sultans use to legitimize their rule in this period? What, if any, general conclusions can you draw from this?
5. Consider the information presented about Mali, Songhai, and Kongo. Given the definition used in this book, would you define these states as empires at their height? Why or why not?